

# WHAT ROLE DOES PREJUDICE PLAY IN ETHNIC CONFLICT?

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■ **Abstract** The extensive literatures on prejudice and ethnic conflict exist largely in isolation from one another. This essay attempts to bridge the gap between the social-psychological study of prejudice and macropolitical explanations of ethnic conflict. We argue that social-psychological inquiry could be strengthened by cross-national field research. Macro-level investigation of ethnic conflict would profit from more systematic research design, particularly where authors seek to establish the influence of micro-level mechanisms, such as persuasion by the mass media.

## INTRODUCTION

For sheer size and scope, few social science literatures rival the corpus of work on the subject of prejudice. From their inception, the social sciences have been engaged in the investigation, and sometimes the justification, of intergroup differences. Long before survey research came into vogue as a social science enterprise, psychologists and sociologists conducted interviews to learn how various minority groups were perceived by others (Garth 1931, Keith 1931). Some of the earliest studies involving participant-observation and unobtrusive measurement techniques are classic studies of discrimination (La Piere 1934). The study of prejudice is one of the few topics that continues to spark vigorous discussion in such diverse disciplines as political science, anthropology, economics, and psychology. The anthropologist seeks to understand the cultural context in which group differences are perceived; the political scientist aims to understand how prejudices are formed and expressed within the polity; the economist considers how discriminatory market outcomes persist amid market pressures; the psychologist examines how prejudiced beliefs and feelings develop and the manner in which they are elicited.

To survey such an immense literature, even within the confines of a single discipline, is a daunting task. Political scientists approach the study of prejudice and discrimination from two very different vantage points. Behavioral research focuses on individual-level phenomena. Why do some people harbor negative

beliefs about certain groups? How do these beliefs develop over the course of the life-cycle? Under what conditions do these views manifest themselves in political opinions and behavior? In contrast to the behavioral approach, scholars who study the politics of ethnic violence focus on aggregate patterns. To what extent and in what ways do political entrepreneurs create and manipulate out-group prejudices? What is the role of the state in maintaining group hierarchies and ideologies of group difference? Under what conditions do these ideologies lead to violence or the disruption of the political system?

The divide between the behavioral and macropolitical literatures runs so deep that few reviews attempt to traverse it. Brubaker & Laitin (1998) and Williams (1994) consider the political, social, and economic bases for ethnic conflict and violence but say almost nothing about the specific role of prejudice. Conversely, Fiske (1998) and Krysan (2000), in their reviews of prejudice, discrimination, and political attitudes, say almost nothing about ethnic violence. The disjuncture between these two literatures provides the occasion for a different type of review, one that focuses on research questions that have languished owing to the methodological and disciplinary separation between behavioral and macropolitical scholarship.

The unanswered questions are many, but none is more important than the issue of whether and to what extent political elites create and mobilize prejudices so as to encourage activities ranging from petty discrimination to genocide. Both literatures, we argue, may be blamed for the lack of systematic inquiry on this point. The behavioral literature has tended to become a form of cognitive science that is increasingly detached from the behavioral outcomes that inspired the study of prejudice in the first place. Rarely do researchers in this literature attempt to link their attitudinal measures to conduct outside the laboratory, such as workplace discrimination, hate crime, or participation in exclusionary organizations. As the behavioral literature becomes more detached from political action, its conceptual debates wander away from issues central to macropolitical analyses of ethnic violence.

The macropolitics literature may be faulted as well. Studies of ethnic violence are often vague about the psychological processes that underlie individual action. When tracing the causes of genocide or ethnic civil war, scholars tend to refer obliquely to longstanding hatreds, nationalist ideologies, or animus generated by propaganda campaigns. Rarely do these studies attempt to measure these constructs or demonstrate individual-level relationships between attitudes and actions. Equally rare are systematic attempts to demonstrate that state communications or programs of indoctrination in fact create, amplify, or mobilize prejudice.

The synthesis we recommend involves refocusing behavioral studies on comparative political outcomes while encouraging macropolitical analysts to attend more to the micro-level mechanisms by which prejudices evolve and express themselves. This essay is organized as follows. We begin by describing certain core issues in the study of prejudice, particularly the responsiveness of prejudice to mass communication and other short-term influences. Next, we provide an overview of the main currents of research in both behavioral and macropolitical studies of

prejudice, arguing that they have diverged increasingly over time. The final section suggests ways to strengthen and unify these two literatures by making the systematic study of regional or temporal variation characteristic of behavioral research a more prominent feature of macropolitical inquiry.

## DEFINITIONS AND CORE ISSUES

### Ethnic Conflict and Ethnic Violence

"Ethnic conflict" refers to confrontation between members of two or more ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> It generally involves a public action of two or more people that articulates a distinctly ethnic or racial claim, expresses a grievance, or attacks members of another ethnic group or their property. The target of a conflict may be the state or state representatives, or it may be another ethnic population that is involved either symbolically or as participants in the confrontation. Ethnic conflict can take various forms, including (a) intrastate collective action such as demonstrations, protests, strikes, and communal rioting; (b) internal wars such as secessionism and irredentism, civil wars, and coups; or (c) interstate wars, terrorism, annexation, and genocide (see Brubaker & Laitin 1998; Olzak 1992, pp. 8–9; Williams 1994, p. 54).

The term ethnic violence refers to "violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is integral rather than incidental to that violence, that is in which the violence is meaningfully oriented in some way to the different ethnicity of the target" (Brubaker & Laitin 1998, p. 428).<sup>2</sup>

### Prejudice and Attitude Change

Prejudice is conventionally defined as hostility toward groups predicated on false, simplistic, overgeneralized, or unconscious beliefs. Allport's (1954, p. 9)

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<sup>1</sup>"Ethnicity" or "ethnic identity" is a social boundary that partitions a group of people on the basis of ascriptive characteristics, such as language, religion, phenotypical markers, dress, custom, culture, or historical experiences. Members of ethnic groups often attribute these commonalities to birth and blood and describe their ethnic affiliation in terms of kinship or familial ties. "Race" is a specific instance of ethnicity in which membership is based on what are assumed to be inherited phenotypical characteristics (see Horowitz 1985, ch. 2; Barth 1969, Introduction; Olzak 1992).

<sup>2</sup>"Ethnic competition" is an ethnically based struggle between individuals or groups over scarce resources. It differs from ethnic conflict in two key ways. First, it is impersonal, in that the competing individuals or groups are not necessarily in direct communication or contact with one another. Second, it generally takes place under rules, which are designed to limit the damage that competitors can inflict on each other (Olzak 1992, pp. 24–31; Williams 1994, p. 54).

often-cited definition holds that “Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group.” Note that by these definitions, ethnic violence and prejudice need not intersect. Ethnic violence may arise from, say, economic competition rather than animus rooted in faulty generalization (see Blumer 1958). Whether prejudice is in fact implicated in ethnic violence is an interesting and open empirical question.

## Etiology of Prejudice

This perspective naturally leads to an investigation of where prejudice originates. A longstanding and still vigorous line of argument traces it to mass communication. A small sampling of these arguments shows their range, even within the topic of anti-black prejudice in the United States. The racial prejudices of antebellum whites were shaped by pro-slavery narratives of racial uprisings (Menand 2001); racist literature and the immensely popular film *Birth of a Nation* diffused beliefs about racial hierarchy (Wade 1987); race-baiting propaganda by Southern planter interests prevented the formation of a class-based coalition of poor blacks and whites (Cox 1948); the media’s portrayal of poor people as disproportionately black altered whites’ beliefs about who is needy and undercut their support for the welfare state (Gilens 1999); the specter of black criminality raised by the notorious Willie Horton ad run by the Bush campaign during 1988 turned white opinion against a liberal presidential candidate (Mendelberg 2001). Many of the recent behavioral works on visual priming of racial attitudes during political commercials or news coverage (Gilliam & Iyengar 2000) grow out of a tradition of tracing political conduct to mass communication.

Although behavioral studies such as those of Gilens (1999) and Mendelberg (2001) demonstrate a link between media messages and specific policy views or voting intentions, studies have rarely demonstrated a link between propaganda and general attitudes. Attitudes are typically defined as enduring evaluative orientations toward certain stimuli (Jahoda & Warren 1966). One may, for example, harbor a favorable or hostile attitude toward Jews that is elicited when one is presented with a picture of a Jewish star, a song from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, or anything else that calls Jews to mind. One indication that enduring evaluative predispositions exist comes from studies of preconscious exposure to attitude objects. Showing a white subject a picture of a black person’s face changes the speed with which the subject draws a connection between two positively valenced objects (Dasgupta et al. 2000). Another indication is that attitudes are sometimes very slow to change, even when circumstances have caused them to become outdated (Sears & Funk 1999). The claim that mass communication shapes the salience of particular policy concerns is politically important, but much less so than the more forceful claim that communication creates or strengthens attitudes.

## Conceptualization and Measurement of Prejudice

Many spirited debates among students of prejudice revolve around the conceptualization and measurement of these attitudes. At the broadest level are conceptualizations that treat attitudes as manifestations of personality types or the underlying drives that give rise to personality configurations. The most famous construct of this type is authoritarianism (Adorno 1950, Altemeyer 1981). Developed originally from extensive interviews with and psychometric assessments of former Nazis, this theoretical perspective attracted enormous attention during the 1950s and waned thereafter, but recently returned to prominence through the work of Altemeyer (1981). In brief, this theory contends that individuals with authoritarian tendencies harbor a deep ambivalence toward authority as a result of their harsh treatment at the hands of loved authority figures during childhood. They resolve this ambivalence by venerating those above them in the social hierarchy while suppressing those below, over whom they have authority. Other personality constructs thought to contribute to prejudiced attitudes include tough-mindedness (Eysenck 1954) and closed-mindedness (Rokeach 1960). In each instance, prejudice is treated as a by-product of the way that people with certain personality types negotiate their environment.

At a somewhat lower level of generality are conceptualizations that focus on certain attitude syndromes. Ethnocentrism (Levine & Campbell 1972) manifests itself in a complex of attitudes including positive identification with one's own group (see Brewer 1999) and xenophobia expressed in varying degrees to outside groups. Social dominance orientations (Sidanius & Pratto 1999) describe the extent to which a person endorses social hierarchies. In both instances, prejudices directed at specific groups are treated as manifestations of more basic psychological orientations.

## Prejudice, Racism, and Issues of Validity

In recent decades, the use of the term prejudice has receded, and expressions of prejudice are increasingly described using the unfortunate terminology of racism—"old-fashioned" racism, aversive racism (see Dovidio 2001), or, most prominently, symbolic or new racism (Sears 1988). We think this unfortunate because racism is ordinarily understood as a doctrine rather than a description of a psychological orientation. Just as doctrines such as liberalism and conservatism may bear only an incidental connection to the policy views held by ordinary voters (Converse 1964), racist ideologies as expressed by their proponents are neither explicitly endorsed nor strongly reflected in the views of all but a small segment of the public. The noun equivalent to "people who are prejudiced" is "racist," which implies a much stronger set of beliefs. Problematic though prejudice may be in societies throughout the world, it would be difficult to name a polity in which appreciable segments of the mass public nowadays subscribe to classic racist doctrines of hierarchy, destiny, and revenge. Although Converse (1964) intimated that racial attitudes are

more structured and enduring than other political orientations of Americans, his penetrating analysis showing the disjuncture between ideological doctrines and the equivocal liberalism-conservatism expressed by the public applies as well to racist doctrines.<sup>3</sup>

## How Malleable is Prejudice?

Regardless of one's preferences regarding the terms racism and prejudice, and regardless of which syndrome of prejudiced attitudes one chooses to consider, the fact remains that the empirical link between mass communications and attitudes toward out-groups remains uncertain. The modern literature on propaganda, which arose in response to Josef Goebbels' extraordinary efforts to convey Nazi ideology to the German masses during Hitler's reign, was singularly unsuccessful in its initial attempts to demonstrate the influence of propaganda. The brilliant studies of World War II propaganda films by Hovland et al. (1949), which still stand as the most compelling field experiments ever conducted in this area, found propaganda to have negligible effects. Allied films designed to justify the war effort imparted information to soldiers but did little to change their opinions about the war or more basic attitudes such as patriotism. These findings eventually led to Hovland's (1959) famous "minimal effects" thesis, in which he argued that the causative influence of propaganda is typically overstated. When the message conveyed through propaganda is clear, often repeated, and reinforced by people in one's small-group environment, mass communication may prompt political action—but these conditions are seldom met in practice.

This argument, coupled with theories about the difficulty of achieving the conditions necessary for reducing prejudice through equal-status contact between groups (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1998), led social scientists to explain the origins of prejudice with reference to long-term causes. One of the most important recurrent themes in the literature on prejudice is that invidious distinctions between groups are learned early in childhood and persist with great tenacity during an individual's life (Sears 1988). By this account, the cause of ameliorating prejudice progresses one funeral at a time.

Somewhere between the two positions is the view that a person's prejudices change gradually over time. Those who have tracked racial attitudes in the United

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<sup>3</sup>The problem is particularly acute in the case of symbolic racism, the subject of extensive debate dating back to the 1970s (Sears et al. 1979, Sniderman & Tetlock 1985). Unlike old-fashioned racism, which asserts the biological inferiority of non-Aryan stock, symbolic racism holds that racial/ethnic minorities violate norms of self-reliance and deserve no remedial attention from government (e.g., affirmative action). Symbolic racism finds expression in a less clearly identifiable doctrine or social movement. One can readily imagine setting up a criterion group of certified racists to validate a psychological inventory of this type of prejudice; indeed, the author of *The Authoritarian Personality* made a gesture in precisely this direction (see also Green et al. 1999). But what is the criterion group for symbolic racism, and what social movement do they populate?

States (Hyman & Sheatsley 1964, Schuman et al. 1985) have found that public opinion evolved rapidly from the 1940s to the 1970s, with all generational cohorts moving away from the view that whites should have priority on public conveyances or when applying for jobs. Schuman et al. also point out, however, that policy views regarding whether and how government should reduce racial inequality remain ambivalent over time, and it is this disjuncture between declining support for segregation and stable lukewarm attitudes toward remedial policies that opened the door to symbolic racism theories. Old-fashioned race prejudice died out, but anti-black affect continued to be expressed through opposition to special favors for minorities.

In recent years, the minimal-effects thesis has come under increasing attack from political scientists studying the media, reopening the question of whether prejudices can be manipulated in the short term. In a series of influential experiments using newscasts and political advertising, Iyengar, Kinder, and their colleagues have demonstrated that even if news stories do not change policy views on particular topics, they do increase the political salience of those topics; moreover, the tone of political advertisements may influence a person's inclination to vote (Iyengar et al. 1982, Iyengar & Kinder 1987, Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995). Gilliam & Iyengar (2000) show that exposure to local television news, with its customary focus on nonwhite perpetrators of crime, increases whites' support for punitive anti-crime policies (see also Mendelberg 1997).

Moreover, in an important departure from the usual findings, which show only priming or issue-specific effects, Gilliam & Iyengar (2000) contend that exposure to crime stories about nonwhite perpetrators increases the prevalence of negative attitudes about nonwhites among whites. Note that the television news is far from a government-sanctioned outlet for propaganda. The newsreaders, for example, do not editorialize on or even mention the perpetrator's race.

The detached stance of newsreaders is important to consider in light of more nuanced theories about the conditions that make messages more persuasive. The important work of Zaller (1992), which builds on that of Converse (1962) and McGuire (1968), distinguishes between contested and uncontested messages. Zaller argues that mass communication has special influence when endorsed by leaders from across the political spectrum (see also Brody & Shapiro 1991 on rally-round-the-flag effects). Myrdal's (1944, pp. 1372–73) account of pre-World War II news coverage of African-Americans, particularly in the South, suggests that it overwhelmingly portrayed this group in a negative light. And during ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, Rwanda, and Southeast Asia, which we discuss below, governments monopolized the airwaves and filled them with stridently nationalist propaganda that played on the listeners' acute sense of fear and uncertainty. If uncontested messages have special force, this propaganda may explain how populations may be mobilized to carry out genocide.

However, one may wonder whether a monopoly of airtime amounts to a monopoly of discourse. The famous Asch (1958) experiment, which demonstrated how individuals succumb to the pressure to conform to the views expressed by others,

also shows that this pressure dissipates when the monopoly of public opinion is broken by even a single dissenter. Many narratives of ethnic violence emphasize the steady drumbeat of government propaganda that preceded it, but the literature on agricultural societies challenges the notion that the general population accepts whatever state authorities tell it (Scott 1985). As we point out below, narrative accounts of ethnic violence seldom look closely or systematically at small-group environments (e.g., families, workplaces) to gauge the extent to which government messages are endorsed or dissent expressed.

One reason why propaganda may lack influence is that government and its spokespeople often lack credibility. Research on persuasion emphasizes that messages are discounted when the speaker seems to have an interest in persuading the listener; disinterested speakers are generally more influential. On the other hand, it may be that the messages put out by the central government gain credibility when endorsed and echoed by local leaders, who in the case of Rwanda played an integral role in carrying out genocide.

## Disentangling Communication's Effects from its Causes

The startling fact remains that more than half a century after the Hovland et al. (1949) experiments on propaganda, scarcely any research demonstrates rigorously that such government-sponsored campaigns advocating interethnic violence actually influence the attitudes and conduct of those exposed to them. Although this lack of evidence does not mean that no such relationship exists, it is possible that propaganda is used in much the same way as campaign advertising, not so much to persuade as to signal the government's position to its potential supporters. If leaders sense widespread ethnic tension among large segments of the population, they have an incentive to express these concerns in ways that encourage public support.

A similar argument may be made with respect to the interparty politics that lie beneath the surface of government action. One of the central themes in the propaganda campaigns used in Nazi Germany, Rwanda, and Serbia is that the enemy must be destroyed before they destroy those native to the country. This message not only identifies and demonizes an external enemy but also warns that any dissent from government policies is part of a plot to collaborate with that enemy. Thus, even if propaganda does nothing to augment ethnic prejudices, it might still be in the interest of the regime, which seeks to defend its grip on power against other factions.

## Paradox of Collective Action

One peculiar feature of mass participation in ethnic violence is that it seems to fly in the face of the collective-action problem (Olson 1965), which is that individuals in large groups shirk political action and shift its costs onto others on the grounds that their own participation will not unilaterally determine the outcome of a group effort. If this is true, why would Serbians volunteer for dangerous and unpleasant military service? Why would Hutu participate day after day in the slaughter of



their Tutsi neighbors? One possibility is coercion by the state, which in the case of Rwanda terrorized local leaders who refused to carry out the ruling party's genocidal policies. In this context, propaganda may serve to remind citizens not only of what the state demands of them but also of the state's determination to let no one stand in its path. A related possibility is that even in the absence of outright coercion, people often defer to authority (Milgram 1974), at least in the short run. Finally, individuals might participate in ethnic violence in anticipation of extracting resources from the victims. Plunder and rape are recurrent themes in accounts of Serbian and Rwandan massacres (Glenny 1996, pp. 203–9; Gourevitch 1998, pp. 114–15).

Often, however, it is difficult to trace specific acts of ethnic violence to any discernible "selective incentive," be it coercion or material reward. In such cases, it is tempting to speak of psychic selective benefits of participation resulting from feelings of solidarity with others, stature within one's peer group, or the intrinsic satisfaction of expressing one's prejudiced convictions (Chong 1991). The latter is often used by narrators of ethnic violence to explain acts of gratuitous violence, particularly among those who believe themselves to be throwing off the shackles of a repressive out-group. The expressive dimension of violence is not inconsistent with Horowitz's (1985, 2001) and Kalyvas's (1999) important observation that what may appear to be pell-mell violence is often highly structured, with assailants taking pains to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate targets. The satisfaction of expressing one's animus toward an out-group in part requires that the victims be selected with care.

In sum, the phenomenon of ethnic violence and the politics within which it occurs seem to call out for an assessment of how the state enjoins the support and participation of the public. Yet basic questions about the public's motivation and the state's role in fostering public support remain unanswered. In the next section, we describe how the behavioral literature on prejudice has drifted away from these questions and, indeed, from real-world settings more generally. This trend, unfortunately, diminishes the prominence of social-psychological explanations in the literature on ethnic violence. The net effect is a psychological literature that has tenuous connections to explanations of real-world ethnic conflict and an ethnic-conflict literature that is unstructured by research questions arising from the behavioral literature on prejudice.

## TRENDS IN BEHAVIORAL STUDIES OF PREJUDICE

Behavioral studies may be grouped into four broad categories: ecological studies, field experiments, laboratory experiments, and survey analysis.

### Ecological Studies

Ecological studies grow out of the tradition established by Hovland & Sears (1940). These authors showed that lynchings rose during periods of retrenchment in cotton prices, a fact that supported their theory that whites expressed the frustrations

associated with economic downturn by “displacing” their aggression against a vulnerable out-group, African-Americans. Although this literature has from time to time examined the relationship between economic conditions and hate crime (Green et al. 1998a), between authoritarianism and support for punitive policies (Doty et al. 1991), and between other aggregate phenomena related to prejudice (Green et al. 1998b, Krueger & Pischke 1997), it remains small.

## Field Experiments

Somewhat larger but less vigorous of late is the literature on field experiments. The 1970s saw a range of “unobtrusive” studies (reviewed in Crosby et al. 1980) that measured prejudice by observing subjects’ conduct rather than asking them survey questions. In several field experiments, intergroup contact in schools and other locations was randomly manipulated in an effort to study its effects on racial prejudice (Aronson et al. 1978, DeVries et al. 1978; see Brewer & Miller 1988, Pettigrew 1998). After 1980, these experimental efforts largely subsided, although “audit studies,” in which individuals with identical characteristics but different skin colors attempt to secure loans, buy cars, or obtain jobs, remain a common technique used to establish the prevalence of discrimination (e.g., Yinger 1995). Unfortunately, audit studies rarely assess the link between prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behavior, leaving open the question of whether discrimination results from ethnic hostility or from the incentive systems in which bank loan officers or car dealers work. (For an attempt to blend audit research and laboratory experimentation, see Hodson et al. 2002.)

## Laboratory Experiments

A large and increasing number of laboratory studies examine the causes and expression of prejudice within controlled environments. A large body of research examines subjects’ proclivity to form group identities and discriminate against out-groups (Brewer 1999). These works call to mind Blumer’s (1958) argument that individual-level prejudice is of secondary importance; what matters, from the standpoint of understanding the perpetuation of hierarchies, is each group’s sense of social position in relation to the others. In some sense, many of the key social-psychological experiments, such as those by Haney et al. (1973) or Milgram (1974), may be read as implicit critiques of the prejudice literature, as they suggest that organizational roles and obedience may be sufficient to produce violence against out-groups even in the absence of hostility (see Arendt 1963).

A more recent line of laboratory research explores the distinction between conscious and unconscious prejudices. A rapidly growing list of studies attempts to show that individuals’ reactions to subliminal racial primes reflect attitudes that are beyond their awareness and control (Fazio et al. 1995), although some individuals who harbor negative stereotypes seem able to monitor their views and make conscious decisions to override them (Devine 1989, Devine et al. 2002). Some studies purport to show a link between implicit prejudice and social behavior (Dovidio

et al. 2002), but it is unclear whether unconscious attitudes manifest themselves in political conduct. For that matter, it is unclear what small-group laboratory studies imply about real-world manifestations of prejudice (Sears 1986). Given the artificiality of the laboratory setting and the practice of experimenting on undergraduate subjects, it is troubling that laboratory research has largely supplanted field experimentation in social psychology.

## Survey Analysis

The other dominant research method in the study of prejudice is survey analysis. This enormous literature may be grouped into three categories. The smallest category comprises surveys that track opinion before, during, and after a political event in an effort to gauge its effects on public opinion. For example, Sears & Allen (1984) and Taylor (1986) tracked opinion prior to and immediately after the implementation of court-ordered school desegregation. When panel data are used to track respondents over time, this type of study is analogous to a before-after experiment. Unfortunately, relatively few studies fall into this category, and of these, only a handful attempt to predict behavior other than voting for a particular candidate (see Green & Cowden 1992).

The second category encompasses correlational studies that attempt to measure one or more dimensions of prejudice and relate them to some type of policy or candidate preference. Some of the more noteworthy examples of this type of study are Sears et al.'s (1979, 1980) attempts to show that racial attitudes, but not measures of economic self-interest, predict preferences toward policies such as affirmative action or school desegregation and Bobo's (1988) analysis suggesting that the collective interests of whites predict their policy stances even if their individual self-interests do not (see also Ignatiev 1995). Many of the essays in this category constitute measurement exercises of one form or another. Katz & Hass (1988), for example, argue that positive attitudes toward blacks are empirically distinct from negative attitudes, a claim that Green & Citrin (1994) reject as a measurement artifact. Sniderman & Tetlock (1986) critique the conceptual and empirical validity of symbolic racism, which Sears & Kinder (1985) and Kinder & Sanders (1996) defend. This category properly includes as well surveys that use depth interviews rather than standardized questionnaires (e.g., Wellman 1993).

The final category consists of survey experiments, in which respondents are randomly assigned to treatment groups, each of which is presented with a somewhat different questionnaire. By randomly manipulating the content, context, and order of the questions, researchers seek to uncover both the prevalence and structure of prejudice. For example, Kuklinski et al. (1997) employ a clever list experiment to detect racial grievances among the public in a way that avoids the problem of extracting truthful answers from respondents who might otherwise conceal their prejudiced attitudes. The authors present two groups of respondents with different lists of possible grievances and ask them to simply report the number of items on the list that they find objectionable. The two lists are identical except that the

second list also contains a racial grievance. By comparing the average number of grievances reported by the two groups, Kuklinski et al. gauge the level of prejudice in the population. Other examples of experimental survey methodology in this area may be found in the works of Sniderman & Piazza (1993), Sniderman & Carmines (1997), Hurwitz & Peffley (1998), and Kinder & Sanders (1990).

Although survey experiments have attracted a great deal of interest among prejudice researchers, they have been confined to relatively narrow questions about how public opinion responds in the short term to various manipulations in questionnaire content. Survey experiments, like surveys more generally, have seldom been used to study behavioral outcomes. An important exception is Glaser (2002), which shows that racially charged voting on school-bond referenda can be influenced by the way that ballot choices are presented to voters. Of course, this correspondence is not altogether surprising, since voting is similar in many respects to expressing a preference on a survey, and public-opinion research can be expected to provide useful insights into the factors that shape, for example, ethnic voting. Less certain is what surveys, randomized or not, tell us about more costly and ongoing behaviors, such as taking up arms against another ethnic group.

## ETHNIC CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

The literature on ethnic conflict and violence is large and diffuse, ranging across a variety of geographic regions and historical eras. Recent years have witnessed important attempts to integrate the large corpus of studies of particular conflicts (Horowitz 1985), to create and analyze comparative data bases (Sambanis 2000), and to bring theoretical coherence to a vast and methodologically disparate literature (Fearon & Laitin 1996). Currently, theoretical perspectives on ethnic violence fall into three categories (see discussions in Jones-Luong 2002,<sup>4</sup> Varshney 2002).

### Theoretical Perspectives

**PRIMORDIALIST THEORIES** Primordialist theories contend that ethnic and racial identities are fundamental and immutable, arising from congruities of blood, speech, and custom. Human beings do not actively choose their ethnic identities. Rather, they inherit them when born into communities that speak certain languages, practice particular religions, and follow specific social customs. People are bound to their kinsman “*ipso facto*”; as a result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself” (Geertz 1963, pp. 109–10). This “natural—some would say spiritual—affinity” serves as the basis for ethnic and racial conflict. Political mobilization along ethnic

<sup>4</sup>Jones-Luong P. 2002. The Soviet legacy in Central Asia: explaining the origins of regional ethno-political cleavages. Chapter in unpublished manuscript.

and racial lines occurs when people mobilize to defend, sustain, or propagate their own kinship group, culture, and way of life. The implication of this perspective is that ethnic conflict is inevitable; it is the "natural outlet" for primordial attachments (see Eller & Coughlan 1993, Grosby 1994, Van den Berghe 1995).

**INSTRUMENTALIST THEORIES** In sharp contrast to primordialist theories, instrumentalist theories portray ethnic identification and ethnic conflict as the result of rational decision making. Ethnic identities, according to this view, are strategically chosen. Although ethnic groups may exhibit common social, religious, or linguistic traits, the bond between group members is not natural or given. Rather, it is a malleable and fluid bond based on common interest. Individuals choose to associate with an ethnic group because they believe that they will somehow benefit from doing so.

By extension, instrumentalists view ethnic conflict as the product of the individual pursuit of private interests. Individuals choose to take part in ethnically based political movements in order to acquire material or political goods. A prominent variant of this argument concerns the role of political elites or "ethnic entrepreneurs" in ethnic mobilization. These entrepreneurs capitalize on differences between groups, such as language, physical appearance, or religion, in order to establish ethnically based political movements aimed at increasing the economic and political well-being of their group or region. They do so by making individuals aware of the connection between private interest and political action (see Barth 1969; Bates 1983; Waters 1990; Hardin 1992, 1995; Fearon & Laitin 1996).

**CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORIES** Constructivists see ethnic identities and ethnic conflict as the product of concrete historical processes. Ethnic identities, according to constructivists, are not social givens but are produced through processes of socialization and acculturation. Neither primordial ties nor common interest hold ethnic groups together. Rather, ethnic groups are social constructs generated and maintained by specific historical processes such as the distribution of official identity cards. Although ethnic identities are actually produced by historical processes, they are not necessarily perceived in this way. Over time, ethnic identities gain widespread social acceptance. Individuals come to perceive ethnic identities as immutable social facts and have difficulty separating their personal identities from those of the groups to which they belong.

A particular understanding of ethnic conflict and ethnic mobilization stems from this conceptualization of ethnicity. Unlike primordialists and instrumentalists, who continually refer to emotions or strategic calculations, constructivists concentrate on external processes in explaining the politicization of ethnic identities. They devote particular attention to the external forces that increase or decrease the likelihood of ethnic mobilization. These often include general historical processes such as modernization, decolonization, the structuring of colonial states, and the weakening of central political institutions (see Vail 1989, Comaroff & Comaroff 1992, Ignatieff 1994, Wilmer 1997).

## Application of Theory to Studies of Ethnic Violence

One of the leading themes of this literature is the debate over the relative significance of short-, medium-, and long-term causes. Do ethnic conflicts arise from primordial group attachments, which in turn arise from the cultural or phenotypic distinctiveness of groups and the social boundaries that separate them? Do ethnic conflicts instead reflect the ways that states and group ideologues have historically categorized groups and characterized group differences? Or do they reflect the strategic behavior of elites, who use nationalist appeals and ethnic violence as a means of consolidating power or pursuing ideological objectives?

For any given ethnic conflict, one finds proponents of each of these interpretations. Consider, for example, analyses of the Rwandan genocide. Journalists and policy makers, in particular, tend to emphasize the longstanding hatreds between Hutu and Tutsi. This journalistic comparison of the conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda illustrates this type of narrative (Michaels 1994, p. 56):

Local people call their country “the Burundi cocktail.” Its volatile ethnic mixture seems ready to explode at any time. Rwanda’s next-door neighbor to the south is virtually a mirror image of that devastated country, threatened by the same passionate hatreds. As in Rwanda, Burundi’s dense population is divided between two tribes, 85% Hutu and 15% Tutsi. As in Rwanda, Belgian colonialization hoisted the status of the Tutsi, who after independence slowly lost power to the majority Hutu. And as in Rwanda, the potential for ethnic violence has risen to the surface in the political vacuum left by the assassination of the Presidents of both countries last April. Now “every Hutu goes to sleep afraid he will be killed by a Tutsi,” says Sicaire Ndikeymana, a taxi driver in Bujumbura, the capital. “Every Tutsi goes to sleep afraid he will be killed by a Hutu.”

By contrast, the constructivist accounts offered by Mamdani (2001) and others emphasize the medium-term origins of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict, noting that colonial powers hardened the boundaries between these two formerly fluid groups and supplied an ideology stressing the racial superiority of the putatively “Hamitic” Tutsi. The hierarchy created by colonial rulers inevitably caused the Hutu majority to resent the arrogant Tutsi “foreigners” in their midst. Notice that these arguments about the primordial or socially constructed origins of ethnic conflict are broadly analogous to the behavioral argument that prejudices are formed early in life and transmitted by parental and peer influences.

Short-term strategic maneuvering by elites is emphasized in many accounts of the events leading up to the Rwandan genocide. Both Gourevitch (1998) and Des Forges (1999) note that the Hutu leader Habyarimana consolidated power and outflanked his Hutu competitors by pursuing an increasingly strident anti-Tutsi program. Although vulnerable to charges of incompetence and corruption, his regime proved adept at using the simmering border war with Tutsi-led insurgents as a pretext for suppressing opposition. In the months leading up to the genocide,

government radio messages became increasingly shrill and bellicose, eventually calling for a self-defensive genocide: "You cockroaches must know you are made of flesh. We won't let you kill. We will kill you" (quoted in Gourevitch 1998, p. 114).

Parallel arguments arise in the analysis of other ethnic conflicts, with most authors using primordialist interpretations as a foil for arguments that emphasize short-term influences. For example, Bennett's (1996, p. viii) account of the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia downplays the role of ancient hatreds, emphasizing instead the "very modern nationalist hysteria which was deliberately generated in the media . . . Yugoslavia's disintegration is largely a testimony to the power of the media in the modern world." Woodward's (1995, p. 335) analysis of this process places less emphasis on the role of the media than on the progression of events; in her view, the escalation of violence resulted from an interaction between nationalist sentiments and feelings of extreme insecurity in an environment where competing nationalist factions produced a power vacuum. Cigar (1995) ascribes the genocide of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina to a "rational policy" whereby the Serbian elite fomented intergroup conflict in order to consolidate power and expand Serbian influence over the region. Silber & Little (1995) blame Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic himself, whose nationalist appeals propelled him to power by mobilizing the Serbian public while undercutting his Serbian political adversaries.

Whether one believes that short-term maneuvers by elites are foreordained by ancient hatreds or instead represent contingent acts that reflect the immediate strategic circumstances, the mechanisms by which a government's program of "ethnic cleansing" are actually carried out by individuals remain mysterious. In the case of the Rwandan or Balkan genocides, it is unclear how much mass support existed for these efforts or how the level of support changed over time. Were the participants taught to fear and despise the opposition, or did the government's blandishments make salient and mobilize longstanding hatreds? Or did mass participation reflect a strategic decision to obey orders, thereby relieving the assailants of moral responsibility and fear of state reprisal?

In part, this gap reflects an inherent historiographic bias in accounts that emphasize elite maneuvering over the harder-to-measure dynamics in mass opinion and behavior. Since survey data are often nonexistent, it may be necessary to turn to other indicators, such as regional and temporal patterns of defection from the army (Bearman 1991, Levi 1997), party membership (Brustein 1996), or other administrative records that might provide an indirect measure of regime support. Occasionally, analysts have gathered retrospective accounts of participants and victims (Straus 2002), but seldom are these accounts gathered according to a systematic sampling procedure that attends to regional or temporal variation.

The focus on elite politics and broad-gauged historical trends reflects not only the availability of data but also the disjuncture between this literature and the behavioral study of prejudice. The bibliographic references of most studies are almost entirely innocent of social psychology. It is not just that key works go uncited; there is little indication that the analysis of ethnic violence is inspired

or informed by the behavioral literature. Even Brubaker & Laitin (1998), who devote special attention to instrumental theories and asymmetries of information among elites, do not address the question of how the collective-action problem is overcome in this form of mass political action.

In part, this oversight reflects a tendency to analyze political events rather than the micro-level processes that underlie them. One typical example of the genre is Bew et al. (1995), which, in discussing the roots of Catholic mobilization in Northern Ireland's ethnic violence, refers to alienation and the structural factors that give rise to it but does not analyze individual-level processes. Even accounts of this crisis that rely on depth interviews and eyewitness reports (Bell 1993, White 1993) make no systematic attempts to measure prejudice, gauge the ways in which it varies spatially or over time, or relate this variation to patterns of violence.

The absence of systematic psychological inquiry from the study of ethnic violence is particularly striking given the importance of fear in the etiology of ethnic violence. For example, one common strand linking the Nazi murder of Jews, Serbian murder of Muslims, and Hutu murder of Tutsi was the apparently widespread belief that the two parties in each conflict were locked in mortal combat that could end only in the expulsion or elimination of one side. In the case of Rwanda, this fear was amplified both by the massacre of Hutu by Tutsi in neighboring Burundi and by the ongoing border war between Hutu and Tutsi forces. The role of fear in undercutting tolerance has been debated extensively in behavioral research (Stouffer 1955, Rogin 1967, Sullivan et al. 1982), but it does appear that a public perception of crisis encourages public support of extreme state actions and emboldens officeholders who might otherwise shy away from such policies.

Similarly, ethnic violence often occurs within the special psychological environment created by the breakdown of state authority. The disappearance of conventional political authority gives license to mob violence and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty that is itself terrorizing.

The wholesale extermination of Tutsis got underway. . . . Following the militia's example, Hutus young and old rose to the task. Neighbors hacked neighbors to death in their homes, and colleagues hacked colleagues to death in their workplaces. Doctors killed their patients and schoolteachers killed their pupils. Within days, the Tutsi populations of many villages were all but eliminated. . . . Throughout Rwanda, mass rape and looting accompanied the slaughter. Drunken militia bands...were bused from massacre to massacre. (Gourevitch 1998, pp. 114–15)

Indeed, even in situations where state authority remains intact throughout much of the country, the strategic withdrawal of political authority from a given region may unleash a torrent of ethnic violence (see Van Dyke 1996). Again a parallel literature exists in psychology on the momentum that unpunished lawlessness accumulates. Zimbardo's (1969) famous illustration of how an abandoned car becomes the object of increasingly destructive acts of vandalism presaged the "broken windows" literature in criminology (Wilson & Kelling 1982), which suggests that criminals



look for signs that the state has ceded its authority over a particular target area. Presumably, the ebb and flow of authority in the context of ethnic unrest provides a useful laboratory for understanding the dynamics of fear and violence. A similar point may be made with respect to other social-psychological processes, such as conformity to social norms, obedience to authority, or the gradual breakdown of inhibitions in the wake of deviant behavior.

Finally, although several studies take pains to analyze mass communications, such as official government programming or the editorials of leading newspapers, seldom is there an effort to link the timing of these communications to shifts in mass opinion or violent conduct. And, as noted above, there is no direct micro-level evidence that exposure to these messages changes attitudes or measurably increases individuals' propensity to act violently or in support of violence by the regime.

In sum, the ethnic-violence literature has yet to explore systematically the micro-foundations of mass involvement, particularly in light of the usual impediments to mass participation in political action. This oversight has impeded the theoretical development of the literature. Analyses of ethnic violence and genocide that emphasize the role of strategic manipulation by elites are generally vague about psychological and small-group mechanisms by which mass compliance is achieved. This literature tells us why elites might be motivated to precipitate ethnic violence but not why they find it in their interests to carry out such a program given the vagaries of implementation.

## **PREJUDICE AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE: THE POTENTIAL FOR SYNTHESIS**

Both the literature on ethnic violence and that on the social psychology of prejudice have important strengths. Works on ethnic violence provide gripping accounts of how ordinary politics sidles into the extraordinary—how through a series of small steps regimes embark on campaigns of routinized mass slaughter. These accounts suggest many provocative hypotheses about how demonization of out-groups allows demagogues to consolidate power against their in-group rivals and how historical memories are manufactured and made salient by political entrepreneurs. For its part, the prejudice literature is resolutely systematic in its approach, carefully debating each nuance of measurement and conceptualization. The behavioral literature on prejudice offers clear accounts of what the independent and dependent variables are in a given study, what hypotheses are being tested, and what kinds of statistical criteria will be used to assess them.

Yet both literatures are in certain respects intellectually and methodologically myopic. The prejudice literature focuses to an extraordinary degree on the narrow politics of the United States, often from the even narrower perspective of college undergraduates. Extraordinary political action, such as hate crime or support for extreme movements, is seldom studied directly (see Green et al. 2001). Indeed,

with the exception of electoral support, the same may be said for political action more generally. The behavioral literature on prejudice has told us more about ambient levels of prejudice (variously defined) than about the conditions under which prejudice manifests itself in violence.

One can readily imagine a synthesis of the two approaches that could benefit both. The study of ethnic violence in the field would lend external validity to psychological scholarship that has increasingly focused on the structure of thought rather than on the links between thought and action. By the same token, the integration of psychological research methods into the study of ethnic violence would encourage more systematic evaluation of causal hypotheses.

A few examples illustrate what forms this fusion might take. At present, scholarship on ethnic violence tends not to investigate research questions that capitalize on regional or temporal variation in economic, political, or social circumstances. It is said, for example, that the extraordinary swiftness of the Rwandan genocide (remarkable even by Nazi standards) reflects the extensiveness of the multilayered administrative state (Des Forges 1999). If true, one should observe different rates of bloodshed among villages within Rwanda with varying degrees of administrative capacity. Similarly, it is argued that government radio broadcasts spurred assailants to action. Were there significant regional variations in reception of government broadcasts or exposure to competing communications from other sources? If so, were these variations related to rates of rank-and-file participation in bloodshed?

One barrier to the systematic analysis of cross-regional or cross-temporal variation is simply the lack of data. This problem, it should be noted, is not confined to developing countries. The anti-immigrant violence that followed German unification largely escaped systematic measurement (see Krueger & Pischke 1997), despite plentiful social science expertise nearby. The same may be said for the paucity of individual-level data, especially panel data that track respondents over time. Rarely have social scientists endeavored to observe a set of people as their life circumstances change radically because of unfolding events (Jennings & Niemi 1981, McFalls 1995) and never to our knowledge in the context of ethnic violence. When scholars in this area have used individual-level data, they have tended to rely on retrospective accounts or participant interviews; neither of these is inherently unreliable, but the absence of sampling procedures or methods for cross-validation raises concerns about whether these data can support unbiased inference. Whether the collection of reliable ecological or individual data represents an insurmountable hurdle in the study of ethnic violence's micro-foundations remains unclear. It appears that this type of research design, which links variation in preconditions to variation in behavioral outcomes, has rarely structured inquiry on the topic of ethnic violence.

This argument should not be taken to imply that the narratives that focus primarily on elite politics are unimportant. Rather the point is that aspects of ethnic violence that could inform broader questions about collective action and other kindred topics of interest to students of political behavior and social science have eluded systematic inquiry. Some scholars have made important initial steps toward

systematic data collection. Giuliano (2000), for instance, in her discussion of Tatarstan ethnic mobilization, moves toward analyzing the individual psychological processes that underlie ethnic conflict. She argues that “ethnic group preferences do not preexist in some essential latent form prepared for mobilization in support of nationalist programs.” Instead, she says, “voters’ preferences are constructed through multilayered interactions among politicians’ framing of issues, the competitive rhetorics of parties, and voters’ preexisting beliefs” (Giuliano 2000, p. 299). Although Giuliano uses qualitative historical evidence, as opposed to survey data, she treats ethnic-group preferences as an object of analysis rather than taking them as given. The next step in this line of research is to approach the study of ethnic violence with an eye toward linking it to temporal or spatial variation in social-psychological circumstances.

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## ERRATA

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