

Assessing Risks of Genocide and Politicide

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In 1994, in response to a request by senior U.S. policy makers, the State Failure (now Political Instability) Task Force, hereafter simply the Task Force, was established to design and carry out a data-driven study of the preconditions of state failure, defined to include ethnic and revolutionary wars, adverse or disruptive regime transitions, and genocides and politicides. In 1998, in response to President's Clinton's policy initiative on genocide early warning and prevention, the author, a senior consultant with the Task Force, was asked to design and carry out a study that would use her own and other data sources to establish an empirically and theoretically grounded, data-based system for risk assessment and early warning of genocidal violence.

The following definition, developed by the author, is used to identify historical and future cases. Genocides and politicides are *the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents – or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities – that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group*. In genocides the victimized groups are defined by the perpetrators primarily in terms of their communal characteristics. In politicides, by contrast, groups are defined primarily in terms of their political opposition to the regime and dominant groups. The definition parallels those developed by other comparative researchers such as Helen Fein and Frank Chalk. The definition has been used to identify forty-one cases of genocide or politicide in the world since 1955. These cases are listed in table 8.1 and mapped in figure 8.1.

The results of this effort have been described in detail in various Task Force reports and academic journals. The structural model used in this analysis identifies six causal factors that jointly differentiate with reasonable accuracy (76%) the 36 serious civil conflicts that led to episodes of genocidal violence between 1955 and 2004 and 93 other cases of serious civil conflict that did not. Case-by-case inspection of false negatives and false positives suggests, first, that several false positives could easily have escalated into genocide or politicide, such as Mozambique in 1976, where widespread killings were carried out by Renamo rebels but did not target specific communal groups. Second, most of the false negatives are due to ambiguity about when to date the onset of genocide, or problems with the lag structure used to estimate the model. For example, the first genocide in Sudan was dated from 1956 (the beginning of the southern rebellion) but more accurately probably began in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Another is Chile 1973 (targeting of the left by the Pinochet regime), where the country was classified as a democracy (which it was at the end of 1972) because all model variables are measured one year prior to the onset of the episode. Accuracy increases to nearly 90% when such temporal inconsistencies in the data are taken into account.

The six factors in the genocide and politicide structural model are as follows:

- **prior genocides and politicides:** a dichotomous indicator of whether a genocide or politicide has occurred in the country since 1945;
- **political upheaval:** the magnitude of political upheaval (ethnic and revolutionary wars plus regime crises) in the country during the previous 15 years, excluding the magnitude of prior genocides;
- **ethnic character** of the ruling elite: a dichotomous indicator of whether the ruling elite represents a minority communal group, such as the Tigreandominated regime of Ethiopia;
- **ideological character of the ruling elite:** a belief system that identifies some overriding purpose or principle that justifies efforts to restrict, persecute, or eliminate certain categories of people;
- **type of regime:** autocratic regimes are more likely to engage in severe repression of oppositional groups;
- **trade openness** (export + imports as % of GDP): openness to trade indicates state and elite willingness to maintain the rule of law and fair practices in the economic sphere.

**Table 8.1: Countries Experiencing Episodes of
since 1955**

Country Dates Estimated Deaths

Afghanistan 4/78-4/92 1,800,000

Algeria 7/62-12/62 9,000-30,000

Angola I 11/75-11/94 500,000

Angola II 12/98-3/02 70,000-100,000

Argentina 3/76-12/80 9,000-20,000

Bosnia 5/92-11/95 225,000

Burma (Myanmar) 1/78-12/78 5,000

Burundi I 10/65-12/73 140,000

Burundi II 8/88-8/88 5,000-20,000

Burundi III 10/93-12/93 50,000

Cambodia 4/75-1/79 1,900,000- 3,500,000

Chile 9/73-12/76 5,000-10,000

China I 3/59-12/59 65,000

China II 5/66-3/75 400,000-850,000

D. R. Congo (Zaire) I 2/64-1/65 1,000-10,000

D. R. Congo (Zaire) II 3/77-12/79 3,000-4,000

Equatorial Guinea 3/69-8/79 50,000

El Salvador 1/80-12/89 40,000-60,000

Ethiopia 7/76-12/79 10,000

Guatemala 7/78-12/90 60,000-200,000

Indonesia I 10/65-7/66 500,000-1,000,000

Indonesia II 12/75-7/92 100,000-200,000

Iran 6/81-12/92 10,000-20,000

Iraq I 6/63-3/75 30,000-60,000

Iraq II 3/88-6/91 180,000

Nigeria 6/67-1/70 2,000,000

Pakistan I 3/71-12/71 1,000,000-3,000,000

Pakistan II 2/73-7/77 5,000-10,000

Philippines 9/72-6/76 60,000

Rwanda I 12/63-6/64 12,000-20,000

Rwanda II 4/94-7/94 500,000-1,000,000

Somalia 5/88-1/91 15,000-50,000

Sri Lanka 7/89-1/90 13,000-30,000

Sudan I 10/56-3/72 400,000-600,000

Sudan II 9/83-10/02 2,000,000

Sudan III 7/03-present 250,000

Syria 4/81-2/82 5,000-30,000

Uganda I 2/71-4/79 50,000-400,000

Uganda II 12/80-1/86 200,000-500,000

South Vietnam 1/65-4/75 400,000-500,000

Yugoslavia 2/98-6/99 10,000

More recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that one additional factor should be taken into account when assessing risks of future genocidal violence. If minorities are targeted for *severe political or economic discrimination*, the risks of future genocide or politicide against those groups increase. It also is important to recognize that, where central

political authority has collapsed or where contending groups make rival claims to state authority, any challenging group motivated by an exclusionary ideology may follow genocidal policies. They may target communal rivals, supporters of opposing groups, remnants of a prior regime, or a regime struggling to (re)establish central authority, as the Serbs did in Bosnia. These acts of violence resemble "terrorism" (see section 9 following), but if the intent is to destroy the target group in whole or part, they are genocide or politicide. Both of these additional factors, severe discrimination against groups and the promotion of exclusionary ideologies by challengers to state authority, have been taken into account in the new analysis that is summarized in the accompanying table (see table 8.2).¹

Table 8.2 lists all countries with serious armed conflicts, regime crises, or high vulnerability to crisis at the end of 2004. Although the model developed by the Task Force was used to identify relevant risk factors, the checklist approach employed to develop this table and the resulting risk assessments differ from the methods used and results reported by the Task Force. The seven risk factors for genocide are shown in summary form for each of these countries, and the countries are listed in descending order of numbers of risk factors present. Sudan, where genocide is underway in Darfur, tops the list along with Burma and Algeria. In Algeria the risks are heightened because of the Islam-inspired exclusionary ideology of armed militants. Burundi and Rwanda are other examples of high-risk countries in which the greatest threat comes from the exclusionary ideology of challenging groups – in these cases the anti-Tutsi ideology of armed Hutu militants. Near the bottom of the list are mostly-democratic countries such as Turkey, Colombia, and India which are challenged by armed conflicts but have few or – in the case of Thailand – none of the preconditions of genocide and politicide. Countries with four, five, or six risk factors need closest international scrutiny.

Risk Assessment, Early Warning, and Early Response. Whereas systematic risk assessment is better than what we had before, it is not enough to tell us more precisely WHEN genocidal violence is likely to begin. What high risk profiles tell us is that a country is in the latter stages of upheaval that may result in genocide or politicide. This alone should be enough to prompt preventive action. In other words it is then that less costly approaches, i.e. financial, humanitarian or rescue operations combined with subtle or not so subtle political pressures, could work to prevent onset or escalation of violence against vulnerable populations. To bridge the gap between risk assessment and the onset of genocidal violence, a pilot study, designed by the author, was developed to monitor on a daily basis countries identified at high risk. The theoretical underpinnings of this study were published in 1998 (see note 1 above). The theoretical base is extremely complex using 10 factors and triggers that are measured by observing political events. It requires tracking roughly 70 indicators.

1 Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, "Systematic Early Warning of Humanitarian Emergencies," *Journal of Peace Research* 35.5 (1998): 551-579. Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955," *American Political Science Review* 97.1 (2003): 57- 73. The Genocide/Politicide project Web site can be found at www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/genocide.

Table 8.2: Risks of Genocide and Politicide in Countries with Political Crises in Early 2005

RISK FACTORS

Country, Prior Genocide/ Upheaval, Minority Exclusionary, \ Type of Trade Possible (No. of risk politicides since Elite Ideology³ Regime Openness⁴ target groups⁵ factors)¹ 1988²

Sudan Yes: 1956-72, Very high No: Northern Yes: Islamist Autocracy Low Southerners; Nuba; (6 of 7) 1983-2001 majority dominates Darfur peoples

Burma Yes: 1978 High No: Burman Yes: Nationalist Autocracy Very low Kachin; Karen; Shan; (6 of 7) majority Chin; Arakanese Muslims; dominates democratic opposition

Algeria Yes: 1962 Very high No Yes: Secular Autocracy Medium Berbers; Islamists; (6 of 7) nationalists regime government supporters vs. Islamists

Burundi Yes: 1965-73, Very high Yes: Tutsis Regime No; Autocracy Medium Tutsis; supporters of (5 of 7) 1993, 1998 dominate Hutu militants Yes exiled Hutu militants

Rwanda Yes: 1963-64, High Yes: Tutsi Regime No; Autocracy Medium Tutsis; supporters of (5 of 7) 1994 dominate Hutu militants Yes exiled Hutu militants

Ethiopia Yes: 1976-97 High Yes: Tigreans No Autocracy Medium Gambella peoples; (5 of 7) dominate supporters of Oromo; Somali secessionists

D. R. Congo Yes: 1964-65, High Yes: narrow No No effective Medium Hutus; Tutsis; political (4 of 7) 1977 coalition of regime and ethnic opponents Kabila supporters of Kabila regime

Uganda Yes: 1972-79, High No No Autocracy Low Supporters of Lords (4 of 7) 1980-86 Resistance Army

Afghanistan Yes: 1978-89 Very high No: coalition Regime No; Partial Very low Supporters of Karzai (4 of 7) Taliban Yes democracy regime

Pakistan Yes: 1971, Medium No: Punjabi Regime No; Autocracy Medium Ahmadis; Hindus; (4 of 7) 1973-77 majority dominates Islamists Yes Sindhis; Shi'a; Christians

China Yes: 1950-51, Medium No Yes: Marxist Autocracy Medium Uighers; Tibetans; (4 of 7) 1959, 1956-75 Falun Gong; Christians

Angola Yes: Very high No: coalition No Autocracy Very high Supporters of UNITA; (4 of 7) 1975-2001 Cabindans

Sri Lanka Yes: 1989-90 High No: Sinhalese Regime No; Tamil Partial High Sri Lankan Tamils (4 of 7) majority dominates separatists Yes democracy

Nigeria Yes: 1967-69 Low No: Muslim Regime No; Partial High Ijaw and other Delta (3 of 7) majority dominates Islamists yes democracy peoples; Christians in North

Somalia Yes: 1988-91 Very high No: clan No No effective No data Issaq in Somaliland; (3 of 7) rivalries Regime clan rivals in south

Nepal No High No Regime No; Autocracy Medium Supporters of Maoist (3 of 7) Maoists Yes insurgents

Iraq Yes: 1961-75, High No: coalition Regime No; Transitional (no data) Supporters of U.S. (3 of 7) 1988-91 in formation Sunni Islamists yes presence; Shi'a; Kurds

Saudi Arabia No Low No Yes: Wahabism Autocracy Medium Shi'a (3 of 7)

Israel No Very high No Yes: Ethno- Democracy High Palestinians; (3 of 7) nationalism Arab Israelis

Indonesia Yes: 1965-66, Medium No: Javanese No Partial High Papuans; Acehnese; (2 of 7) 1975-92 dominate democracy Chinese; Christians

Ivory Coast No Medium No: southern Yes: Ivoirian Partial High Muslim northerners; (2 of 7) majority dominates identity democracy immigrants from Volta

Russia Yes: mid-late Low No No Partial Medium Chechens (2 of 7) 1940s democracy

Turkey No Low No Yes: Secular Democracy Medium Supporters of (2 of 7) nationalism separatist Kurds

Yemen No Low No Regime No; Autocracy High Supporters of Jihadist (2 of 7) Jihadists Yes insurgents

Colombia No Very high No No Democracy Medium Peasants in FARC- (1 of 7) controlled areas

India No Medium No No Democracy Low Muslims; Christians (1 of 7)

Thailand No Low No No Democracy Very high Supporters of Muslim (0 of 7) insurgents

Footnotes for Table 8.2 :

1 Prepared by Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, February 2005. Countries are listed according to their number of risk factors. One additional risk factor is added based on more recent analyses: officially-sanctioned discrimination against one or more minority groups. Such groups are named in bold under Possible Target Groups. Indicators of the risk factors were originally compiled for the U.S. Government's State Failure (now Political Instability) Task Force. The table has been updated using year 2003 information except that Trade Openness values are for 2002. Bold italic entries are highrisk conditions. The table includes all countries with serious armed conflicts, regime crises, or high vulnerability to crisis at the end of 2004, as identified by Monty G. Marshall based on analyses elsewhere in this report and listed in

Appendix table 11.1

2 Categories used for upheaval scores: low = 1- 9, medium = 10-20, high = 21-34, very high = 35-60 **3** Exclusionary ideology is present if either the regime (governing elite) or a challenging elite is motivated by such an ideology. This is a modification of the risk analysis included in Harff, "No Lessons Learned."

4 Categories used for trade openness scores: very low, 20 or less; low, 21-40; medium, 41-70; high, 71-100; and very high, greater than 100. Countries with low scores on this variable but high levels of international political engagement aimed at stabilizing internal conflicts are recoded medium, signifying low risk. This adjustment has been made for Burundi, Rwanda, and Pakistan.

5 Possible victim groups are identified based on country-specific information compiled by the authors. Groups in bold are subject to officially sanctioned political or economic discrimination according to 2003 data coded by the Minorities at Risk project at the University of Maryland. If any such group is identified, it is counted as a seventh risk factor.