PREVENTING CRISIS: IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING CAUSES OF GENOCIDE IN UNSTABLE STATES

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Genocide is a crime which the world deems unforgivable, yet it occurs again and again while the world watches. Therefore, identifying and understanding the causes of genocide can provide a starting point to genocide prevention and preemption. In this paper, I hypothesize that the presence of common causal patterns, including economic collapse, severe in-group/out-group tensions, and political destabilization signify the growing potentiality of genocide in a fragile state. My methodology consists of a comparative analysis of the economic, social, and political environments in 1900s Armenia, 1990s Rwanda, and the American South in the 1870s. Through researching Armenia and Rwanda as case studies, as well as the Reconstruction-era American South as a counter-case, I comparatively analyzed the factors that led to genocide in Armenia and Rwanda and the lack thereof in the Reconstruction South. Similar economic, social, and political hardships were found in each case, but some key differences separated the Reconstruction South from Armenia and Rwanda. The extremist groups from Armenia and Rwanda both operated publicly and were legitimized by their respective states, while the violent extremist Ku Klux Klan operated covertly and did not act on behalf of the overarching United States government. Ultimately, I found significant evidence that economic collapse, severe in-group/out-group tensions, and political destabilization do contribute to genocide, but these factors must be present in conjunction with state-sponsored and/or state-legitimated violent extremist groups. These findings may have significant implications on international foreign policy, including how nations interact with fragile, genocide-prone states in the future. The world cannot afford another refugee crisis, and preventing genocide before it happens through recognition of destabilizing economic, social, and political conditions could save millions of lives.