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Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction

Embedded within popular calls that the world will “never again” allow for genocide, there is an underlying assumption that learning from the past is necessary for atrocity prevention.¹ After all, the central purpose of the United Nations Genocide Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide created in the wake of the Holocaust remains the prevention of genocide, not simply prosecuting such horrors in their aftermath.² Genocide and other atrocity crimes take an extreme toll on humanity, resulting not only in mass death, displacement, and devastation, but also in the destruction of cultural heritage, social organization, language, and other features of identity.³ Driven by the critical imperative of preventing mass atrocities, policymakers and practitioners need more than just the best estimation of what strategies and measures will be effective. Enhancing this effectiveness—and ultimately saving lives from atrocity crimes—relies on a multi-stage process of collecting, distilling, analyzing, presenting, and utilizing evidence across a variety of prevention tools and strategies, looking both to the past and to the future.

This special issue is certainly not the first work to suggest that evidence-based approaches are necessary for effective genocide and atrocity prevention.⁴ National and international institutions have also stressed the importance of tracking and measuring success in their efforts to address atrocities.⁵ The field of genocide studies has benefitted from increasing

¹ The scope of this special issue includes contributions focused on preventing genocide and other mass atrocities, defined as large-scale, systematic violence against civilians, recognizing the interconnectedness of these phenomena in the literature and in reality. Each paper within this issue specifies the definitions most relevant to their work and case studies for the reader's consideration. Here, we refer to “atrocity prevention” meaning both the prevention of genocide and other mass atrocities. For more on the definition of mass atrocities, see Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016).

² United Nations, General Assembly Resolution 260, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, December 9, 1948 (UN Doc. A/RES/260(III)).

³ This expansive view of genocide's destructive capacities goes back to Raphael Lemkin's original concept of the term. For more, see Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphael Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

⁴ Alex J. Bellamy, and Ivan Šimonović, “Introduction: Towards Evidence Based Atrocity Prevention,” *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 3–4 (2021), 285–304; Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., *Preventing Mass Atrocities: Policies and Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Sheri P. Rosenberg et al., eds., *Reconstructing Atrocity Prevention*, 1st ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Serena K. Sharma and Jennifer M. Welsh, eds., *The Responsibility to Prevent: Overcoming the Challenges of Atrocity Prevention*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵ For example, United States Department of State, Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, “United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities,” *United States Department of State*, July 15, 2022, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/2022-united-states-strategy-to-anticipate-prevent-and-respond-to-atrocities/>.

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interdisciplinary collaboration and has grown in epistemological sophistication over the last few decades. Yet, obstacles remain for applying such knowledge during acute crises characterized by extreme human suffering, chaotic and evolving dynamics, and often acrimonious national and geopolitical tensions. How can these challenges be surmounted?

The contributors in this special issue have taken on the challenge of linking research, policy, and practice across a range of atrocity prevention decision-making processes and responses. At its core, this special issue identifies various tensions inherent in policy-relevant atrocity prevention work, while also suggesting ways to overcome them. For example, what tools of atrocity prevention have proven to be effective, and how do scholars measure their success? How can existing genocide prevention frameworks and norms, like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), function effectively in a world of growing geopolitical competition and atrocity perpetration by extraordinarily powerful states? How can researchers, who often lose on-the-ground access to their field sites when violence escalates, leverage networks and technologies to continue their data collection and policy guidance? How can evidence be incorporated into genocide prevention strategies at all stages—before, during, and after mass atrocities? What insights can be gleaned from case studies of mass atrocities and their accompanying responses to enhance evidence-based practice in the field?

Drawing from diverse disciplines, methodologies, and case studies, the contributors in this special issue have extracted insights of particular relevance for policymakers and practitioners. As vital partners for genocide and atrocity prevention, this special issue recognizes the importance and challenges inherent in practitioner and policymaker roles. These individuals are tasked with the seemingly impossible—halting complex mass atrocities in real-time, all around the world. By synthesizing current research and recommendations on genocide and atrocity prevention, this special issue provides a valuable roadmap for equipping such actors and moving the field forward through applied evidence-based approaches.

Evidence-Based Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention and the State of the Field

In recent decades, policymakers and practitioners set out to develop and deploy actionable frameworks for preventing atrocity crimes.⁶ This momentum has propelled the field forward in areas of applied research. With a variety of actors now engaged in atrocity prevention work, both the knowledge base and wealth of practical expertise has grown, tackling a variety of intricate issues linked to stopping atrocities. This special issue presents cutting-edge research from notable scholars in the field who not only present herein their original findings, but also share the policy and practice implications of such research. By focusing on “what works,” this special issue is aimed at supporting further study and effective prevention.

It is in this spirit of focusing on “what works” that we position our discussion of “evidence-based” approaches. Rather than proposing a rigid checklist to define what constitutes evidence, we suggest a broad, inclusive, and multidisciplinary definition. We note the variety of epistemological perspectives that now influence comparative genocide studies, recognizing the importance of global datasets that track atrocity onset and indicators, assessments from past case studies of successes and failures, after-action reviews that capture policymaker insights regarding the tools used to prevent specific cases of mass atrocities, ethnographic inquiries that provide essential cultural context, and a variety of other empirical tools that aim to collect, synthesize, and utilize relevant sources. We also affirm the role of qualitative, mixed methods, and humanistic inquiry approaches that adhere to rigorous disciplinary standards and that are often able to refine, challenge, or “fill in the gaps” of large-scale comparative or quantitative work.

⁶ For example, Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The American Academy for Diplomacy, and the United States Institute of Peace, 2008); United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention* (New York: United Nations, 2014), accessed August 5, 2024, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/about-us/Doc.3_Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20Crimes_EN.pdf.

Still, we acknowledge that many debates regarding “evidence” in the field of genocide studies—and in broader academic research conversations—are engaging deeper ontological tensions, rather than purely methodological or epistemological tensions. The articles in this special issue represent a small sliver of these varying approaches with all of their incumbent disciplinary variances across the humanities and social sciences, as we seek to broaden the conversation regarding what constitutes action-oriented atrocity prevention “evidence.” Rather than excluding lanes of possible inquiry and analysis, we suggest a generous interpretive approach that provides ample space to include perspectives often sidelined from knowledge production by power and access constraints. In this spirit, the articles in this special issue represent a range of disciplinary perspectives, methodologies, datasets, and measurement choices, all with a central commonality: considering the implications of their research and the evidence it uncovers for policy and practice work.

Like the intentionally broad conception of “evidence” in this special issue, we similarly did not limit what efforts or outcomes might fall into the category of “prevention” in order to capture ongoing debates and exploration over what constitutes this imperative. While armed intervention and surrounding norms like R2P⁷ remain a cornerstone of the prevention literature, the field has vastly expanded to consider other aspects of prevention. In particular, time-based frameworks have adapted public health approaches to describe atrocity prevention in phases like primary (upstream), secondary (midstream), and tertiary (downstream).⁸ Within this framework, armed intervention to mitigate civilian deaths is categorized as a midstream tool, aimed at crisis response. However, looking to upstream and downstream prevention, the field has broadened to include a much wider variety of tools—often taken from conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and rule of law spaces—and applied them to atrocity prevention.⁹

Thus, evidence-based approaches are not limited to the factors affecting the success of armed intervention in an atrocity context, but also include a range of tools that impact the likelihood of atrocity onset, intensification, or recurrence, and reduce risks. While this has resulted in a broadening of literature seen as applicable to genocide studies and prevention, it has also created a complicated web of definitions, assumptions, measurements, standards, and findings in need of synthesis (for more details on how these works are synthesized and understood, see the contribution in this issue from Donine et al.¹⁰). The authors in this special issue tackle the challenges of integrating knowledge from this diverse evidence base, while also providing novel insights to the effectiveness of tools across this extensive range that incorporate local views of their effectiveness (for example, see Whigham,¹¹ on memorialization as atrocity prevention).

Another dominant frame that has shaped the atrocity prevention field is the dichotomy between risk and resilience. A robust body of genocide studies research since the field’s inception has focused on identifying the risk factors of atrocity onset to aid early warning and

⁷ Alex J. Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect: The Global Effort to End Mass Atrocities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

⁸ James Waller, *Confronting Evil: Engaging Our Responsibility to Prevent Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ See Bridget Moix, “Turning Atrocity Prevention Inside-Out: Community-Based Approaches to Preventing, Protecting, and Recovering from Mass Violence,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 9, no. 3 (2016), 59–69, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.9.3.1313>; Peace Direct, “Atrocity Prevention and Peacebuilding: Key Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation Convened by Peace Direct,” *Peace Direct*, 2017, accessed May 4, 2024, https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Atrocity-Prevention-Report_PD-2.pdf.

¹⁰ Tallan Donine et al., “Lessons Learned: Overcoming Obstacles to Inference and Synthesis in Atrocity Prevention Research,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 17–36, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1956>.

¹¹ Kerry E. Whigham, “More than Memory: Can Memory Spaces Really Prevent Mass Atrocities?,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 37–53, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1954>.

prevention efforts.¹² In this special issue, we include contributions about enhancing the methodologies for such forecasting (see Nyseth Nzitatira et al.¹³), as well as articles about specific tools for measuring and monitoring risk factors, including novel applications of geospatial imagery (see Calvet-Martínez¹⁴) and dangerous speech (see Buerger and Benesch¹⁵). This research has contributed to problem-oriented approaches to atrocity prevention, namely, identifying the risks within a particular context and deploying measures to resolve those factors. Counterbalancing the focus on risk, some scholars instead examine sources of resilience, or those positive factors that indicate available strengths and resources that decrease the likelihood of atrocities within a context. Important work on structural atrocity prevention¹⁶ has facilitated a shift in thinking about resilience, and several articles in this special issue frame their research questions around these areas to highlight understudied aspects of prevention (see Mayersen¹⁷; see also Ayhan¹⁸).

A final frame that helps to categorize and conceptualize atrocity prevention efforts is actor-focused. When considering evidence-based approaches, addressing specific actors—including their power and positionality to affect change—provides critical insights relating to effectiveness. Much of the literature in genocide studies focuses on international and state actors with a special emphasis on the United Nations system and its role in atrocity prevention through humanitarian intervention, preventive diplomacy, and other means.¹⁹ This special issue includes articles tackling some of the challenges that the international system faces with constraining state perpetrators and effectively preventing atrocities in multilateral forums (see D’Alessandra²⁰; see also Levinger²¹). However, a turn toward local approaches and bottom-up efforts at preventing genocide and mass atrocities has recently swept the field.²² Contributions to this special issue address field-based methodologies for shaping transitional justice, early

¹² For summaries of the literature on predicting mass atrocities, see Ernesto Verdeja, “Predicting Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 9, no. 3 (2016), 13–32, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.9.3.1314>; Deborah Mayersen, “Predicting Genocide and Mass Killing,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 1 (2021), 81–104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1818478>.

¹³ Nyseth Nzitatira et al., “Leveraging a Multi-Method Approach to Improve Mass Atrocity Forecasting,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 54–83, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1951>.

¹⁴ Elisenda Calvet-Martínez, “The Use of Geospatial Imagery in Myanmar for Mass Atrocity Prevention,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 96–111, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1958>.

¹⁵ Catherine Buerger and Susan Benesch, “Lessons Dangerous Speech as an Atrocity Early Warning Indicator: Measuring Changing Conflict Dynamics,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 84–95, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1955>.

¹⁶ For example, Stephen McLoughlin, *The Structural Prevention of Mass Atrocities: Understanding Risk and Resilience* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁷ Deborah Mayersen, “Promoting Resilience to Genocide: An Evidence-Based Approach,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 112–129, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1947>.

¹⁸ Tutku Ayhan, “Failing to End Genocide: Structural Factors, Triggers, and Ineffective Responses,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 130–150, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1960>.

¹⁹ Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect*.

²⁰ Federica D’Alessandra, “Conceptualizing Great Power Perpetrators,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 151–189, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1949>.

²¹ Matthew Levinger, “Revivifying the Responsibility to Protect: Strengthening the Normative Consensus for Atrocity Prevention,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 190–211, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1962>.

²² See Moix, *Turning Atrocity Prevention Inside-Out*.

warning, and other prevention efforts around local consultations and expertise (see Birjandian²³; see also Hook and Wise²⁴).

To guide the conversation ahead, we have organized the articles in this special issue to reflect the diverse efforts that fall under the umbrella of atrocity prevention. These articles intersect with and build upon each of the field's various approaches, including:

- I. Evaluating Prevention Tools
- II. Atrocity Risk Forecasting, Early Warning, and Monitoring
- III. Resilience and Structural Prevention
- IV. International Atrocity Prevention
- V. Empowering Local Actors in Atrocity Prevention

Taken together, the articles compiled here represent a cross-section of the genocide studies and atrocity prevention field. Despite the differences represented, each article grapples with questions of how to obtain and utilize evidence to enhance prevention in its various forms, across a multitude of contexts and actors. This special issue is centered on such concepts, frameworks, methodologies, and tools, seeking to initiate a conversation on the state of the field and envision the future of evidence-based atrocity prevention work.

I. Evidence-Based Approaches to Evaluating Prevention Tools

An important development in recent genocide scholarship involve efforts to build the evidence base by evaluating the effectiveness of tools deployed to prevent, mitigate, or end atrocities. The field has identified numerous atrocity prevention tools of various types, including political (e.g., condemnations, naming-and-shaming, diplomacy), economic (e.g., sanctions, trade embargoes, aid conditionality), military (e.g., lethal aid, armed intervention), and social-cultural (e.g., dialogues, peacebuilding, memorialization).²⁵ Many of these tools guide policymakers and practitioner efforts to respond to genocide or its risk factors to deter perpetrators or save lives during crises. While many of these tools operate with underlying theories of change, the field has only begun to assess the effectiveness of these tools, asking: Do such tools do what is expected of them? How effective are they, and what variables condition their effects?

Tallan Donine, Daniel Solomon, and Lawrence Woocher, from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), reflect on a systematic review of over three decades of atrocity prevention research regarding “lessons learned” for policy and practice. In particular, they identify some of the inferential obstacles that researchers face, including not observing the counterfactual, selection bias, and the limited availability of non-public information. To address these obstacles, they survey several research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, including comparisons between “most-similar” cases, simulated modeling, experimental designs, multivariate regression methods of observational datasets, instrumental-variable designs, and in-depth case studies including process tracing. After taking stock of the existing literature on evidence and atrocity prevention, Donine, Solomon, and Woocher suggest recommendations for drawing the field toward greater synthesis and effective collaboration, namely by developing a common ontology, situating new studies within existing bodies of knowledge, and increasing transparency and standardization in reporting of data. The comprehensive effort of this study to assess the state of the evidence base in atrocity prevention

²³ Saghar Shahidi Birjandian. “Contextualized Transitional Justice Policy Development in Uganda: Differentiating between Normativity Types in Evidence-Based Problem Analysis,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 212–245, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1964>.

²⁴ Kristina Hook and Jamie D. Wise. “Bridging the Atrocity Prevention Gap between the International and the Local: Lessons Learned from Meso-Level Leadership in Ukraine and Syria,” in “Evidence-Based Approaches to Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities,” eds. Jamie D. Wise and Kristina Hook, special issue, *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 18, no. 1 (2024), 246–279, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.18.1.1957>.

²⁵ For an overview, see Waller, *Confronting Evil*; see also Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide*.

provides a helpful blueprint for researchers aiming to increase the sophistication and effectiveness of methods used in the field.

Next, the special issue features a widespread research effort to collect evidence about one particular atrocity prevention tool—memorialization. Kerry Whigham draws from three years of research into more than 400 memory sites around the world to assess their impact on atrocity prevention. Utilizing a combination of surveys, in-depth interviews, and field observations at physical memory sites, Whigham proposes a framework for evaluating the prevention potential of memory spaces. In particular, Whigham suggests that the impact of memory spaces should not be thought of only in terms of individual attitudinal changes among visitors, but must also include the community-wide impacts of memorials in reducing common atrocity risk factors and building resilience. Providing case studies of several small-scale, local memory initiatives, Whigham illustrates how such sites can build resilience against atrocities, especially when they address extant risk factors within a particular context and when programming and/or exhibitions directly respond to such risks. In doing so, this article presents novel ways for measuring and assessing the impact of memorial sites based on long-standing assumptions in the field that such sites affect atrocity prevention. This wide-ranging data collection and analysis effort further showcases how the field is moving towards evidence-based approaches to understanding atrocities.

II. Evidence-Based Approaches to Atrocity Risk Forecasting, Early Warning, and Monitoring

Another growing body of evidence within the genocide studies and atrocity prevention literature regards atrocity risk forecasting, early warning, and monitoring to mobilize preventive action. This builds on decades of research attempting to look across historical cases of mass atrocities to identify common antecedents or determinants.²⁶ Much of the contemporary atrocity prevention agenda relies on the assumption that prediction is the necessary first step for intervention to prevent genocide and mass atrocities.²⁷ Throughout the years, predictive models have increased in their sophistication and accuracy, though they continue to be refined. At the same time, many scholars continue to study the nuances of specific early warning indicators (e.g. dangerous speech) and tools for monitoring atrocity hotspots (e.g. geospatial imagery) which can help provide real-time evidence to support policymaker and practitioner decision-making.

Hollie Nyseth Nzitaira, Trey Billing, and Eric W. Schoon provide a novel multi-methods approach to atrocity forecasting that increases the effectiveness of predictive models. Specifically, they have integrated case-oriented and quantitative methods to provide a more robust, holistic assessment of the risk of mass atrocities. The model first relies on configurational analysis to identify the combinations of factors that are consistently associated with the absence of mass atrocities, building on existing literature on resilience against mass atrocities. Then, they utilize two forms of quantitative analysis—event history analyses and random forests—for the presence of mass atrocities to produce a list of at-risk countries with an above 97 percent accuracy rate. This model provides an innovative way forward in the design of risk assessments on a global scale and overcomes some of the pitfalls of the quantitative versus qualitative debate by leveraging the strengths of each methodological approach.

While global risk assessments can be an extremely valuable tool for policymakers and practitioners to focus preventive efforts, these must be supplemented by more granular analyses of the local risk factors within context. Cathy Buerger and Susan Benesch from the Dangerous Speech Project provide an example of how dangerous speech can be utilized as an indicator of mass atrocity risk within local contexts. They describe how dangerous speech can be an indicator of normative shifts within a particular social context, raising the acceptability and likelihood of identity-based violence. Buerger and Benesch suggest that staff at embassies and international organizations receive training on how to recognize and respond to dangerous speech to mitigate

²⁶ See Verdeja, *Predicting Genocide and Mass Atrocities*; Mayersen, *Predicting Genocide and Mass Killing*.

²⁷ For example, Albright and Cohen, *Preventing Genocide*.

highly localized risks. Along this vein, they outline five hallmarks of dangerous speech, including dehumanization, accusation in a mirror, threats to group integrity or purity, assertions of attacks against women and children, and questioning in-group loyalty. They point particularly to the importance of social media as a platform for recognizing and identifying dangerous speech. This framework promotes evidence-based atrocity prevention that links local actors to international actors and leverages technological tools to assist in prevention.

Also leaning into the potential of cutting-edge technology to prevent atrocities, Elisenda Calvet-Martínez examines how geospatial imagery can assist atrocity prevention efforts through the case study of Myanmar. Calvet-Martínez reviews how such information technology has already been used by various human rights actors, governments, and NGOs for documentation and accountability. However, she goes further to argue that geospatial imagery can provide access to critical real-time data relating to mass atrocities. Geospatial imagery can enhance policymaker and practitioner capacity to coordinate humanitarian responses, as well as collect evidence of human rights violations for future prosecutions. Relying on the case of Myanmar, Calvet-Martínez argues that geospatial technology can be used to monitor the implementation of international agreements and the return of refugees. Though the use of such technology can be expensive and require special expertise, it allows for monitoring in at-risk areas to occur without directly violating territorial sovereignty. Together with the other contributions, this study helps illustrate the evolving sophistication of risk forecasting, early warning, and monitoring to improve atrocity prevention across the stages of early planning to acute crisis response.

III. Evidence-Based Approaches to Resilience and Structural Prevention

Another critical development in the field involves emerging evidence surrounding resilience and structural prevention, concepts which are reshaping notions of atrocity prevention in both scholarship and practice. This special issue captures scholarship that reframes and reconceptualizes common notions to take the field in new directions and open new lines of inquiry. These questions arise from analyses of both contemporary and past case studies, which push the limits of preconceived ideas about how mass atrocities unfold. Specifically, they center on the necessity for structural prevention efforts aimed at promoting resilience and addressing embedded societal vulnerabilities to atrocity violence, rather than focusing narrowly on crisis response.

Deborah Mayersen challenges the field to shift from thinking exclusively about atrocity risk to considering resilience in equal measure when assessing factors relevant to prevention. Drawing from case studies of Bulgaria and Denmark during the Holocaust—in which the risk of genocide was identifiable, but in which genocide did not ultimately occur—Mayersen pilots a comparative methodology for isolating resilience factors. Within these cases, resilience factors included strong leadership from multiple sectors of society, strong and early condemnation of the perpetrator's actions, and the presence of discursive space allowing for the presentation of diverse perspectives within society. Mayersen illustrates how policymakers and practitioners cannot view risk factors in a vacuum, but must seek to understand how they are counterbalanced or restrained by resilience factors and take practical steps to augment resilience factors. This article provides a replicable methodology for research and practical insights for policymakers and practitioners addressing atrocity risks today.

Also broadening the field's views on prevention, Tutku Ayhan brings into question preconceptions about the timing of prevention, given the nature of the genocidal process, by asking why the world has failed to end ongoing genocides. Revisiting Raphael Lemkin's definition of cultural genocide, Ayhan argues that scholars need to consider how threats to a group's physical and cultural continuity may remain even if direct violence is reduced or perpetrators leave an area. Utilizing the case studies of two persecuted minorities—the Yazidi in Iraq and the Rohingya in Myanmar—Ayhan illustrates that inadequate responses at the national, regional, and international levels, combined with extant structural risks and trigger factors, have led to enduring genocidal violence. Ayhan's work challenges policymakers and practitioners to consider the long-term harms and enduring vulnerabilities that communities targeted by genocide often face, and to prioritize these pervasive threats as much as risks for the

outbreak of new genocides. These contributions use in-depth analysis of case studies of mass atrocities to extract new lessons learned that can push the field in productive directions.

IV. Evidence-Based Approaches to International Atrocity Prevention

A further major issue in the field of atrocity prevention is the effectiveness of existing systems and frameworks at the international level to address evolving atrocity risks. The following articles critically examine the structure and influence of the current international system as the macro-level context in which contemporary atrocity crimes are committed. Since the end of World War II and the historic creation of the United Nations, international norms, systems, and actors have been expected to play a key role in atrocity prevention. These articles revisit the international prevention agenda and infrastructure, proposing new frameworks of analysis and solutions to increase the efficacy of genocide and atrocity response. These issues will only gain relevance as early indications of heightened inter-state wars emerge.

Federica D'Alessandra coins the term "Great Power Perpetrators" (GPPs) to analyze how the actions of state members of the United Nations Security Council, like the Russian Federation, have increased failures in the larger international system to prevent atrocities and hold perpetrators accountable. Outlining the novel concept of GPPs through an exploration of the institutional, compulsory, structural, and productive forms of power utilized by these actors, D'Alessandra helps to reframe the field's perspectives on how to address atrocities perpetrated by super-powerful states, which are often undeterred and unrestrained by the existing system. D'Alessandra argues that by better understanding the sources of their power, policymakers and practitioners can increasingly leverage the multilateral system to undermine GPPs and prevent atrocities. With little indication of these dynamics abating, D'Alessandra's article provides an evidence-based framework to equip policymakers to face these shifts in the international system proactively.

Also re-examining atrocity prevention at the international level, Matthew Levinger proposes revivifying the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). First, Levinger explores how the effectiveness of a norm can be measured, drawing from the literature on norm diffusion and norm fragmentation as a way of situating the challenges to R2P today. Then, Levinger reviews the evidence of R2P's successes and failures by examining each of the Pillars within the norm. Relying on his own experience working with practitioners to prevent mass atrocities, Levinger argues that R2P's "Pillar 2," which focuses on providing support to states such that they can better protect their civilians, should be strengthened, and "Pillar 3," which encompasses international action to end atrocities, should be reframed as a way of revivifying the R2P norm. The insights from these articles can assist policymakers and practitioners in breaking free from the cynicism surrounding R2P and the United Nations' ability to prevent atrocities by suggesting new ways to approach civilian protection challenges.

V. Evidence-Based Approaches to Empowering Local Actors in Atrocity Prevention

This special issue also addresses the trend in localizing atrocity prevention efforts by examining how consultations and engagement with grassroots and meso-level actors can improve evidence-based practice in the field. Local expertise can shape atrocity prevention at all stages, including before, during, and after mass atrocities. In particular, local experts can be the vanguard for raising the alarm about atrocity risks on-the-ground, and local communities can be the designers, implementers, and beneficiaries of transitional justice processes after mass atrocities. Given the need for context-based assessment and evaluation to improve evidence-based practice, these articles advocate for, and showcase methods for, eliciting local participation in atrocity prevention.

Saghar Shahidi-Birjandian establishes the crucial role of differentiating between normativity-types in generating evidence-based guidance for transitional justice interventions. Drawing from extensive fieldwork including participant observations and interviews within focal communities, Birjandian identifies conflicting priorities between Uganda's National Transitional Justice Policy and the preferences of participants for transitional justice. Birjandian

critiques the negative implications of universalized normative narratives of transitional justice, which often predetermine the problems, responses, and goals of such programs devoid of empirical realities. To address this issue, Birjandian suggests using normativity shaped by empirical evidence of societal dynamics and the views of affected communities to create theoretical and conceptual space for evidence-based guidance to inform context-sensitive policy development. Recommendations emerging from this research include abandoning assumptions about the problems of transitional justice and genocide and mass atrocity prevention, shaping research models for problem analysis using evidence-based normativity, and disseminating findings in ways that reinforce pluralism.

Kristina Hook and Jamie D. Wise explore meso-level approaches to atrocity prevention that incorporate a wider array of local expertise to support early warning and transitional justice efforts and thereby enhance effectiveness. They examine atrocity risk early warning in Ukraine, where prescient local expertise at the meso-level failed to influence broader international responses, reconstructing how earlier calls to recognize atrocity risks were sidelined. By juxtaposing atrocity prevention early warning models and primary interview data from Ukraine (2015-2019), this analysis demonstrates the valuable insight that local experts have and the specific hurdles they face in getting their voices heard. Second, Hook and Wise explore how local efforts at justice-seeking in Syria have attempted to fill accountability gaps left behind by failures at higher levels. Drawing from interviews with Syrians (2018), they explore the tensions and challenges that emerge in the production of transitional justice, especially pertaining to harmonizing international and local agendas, conceptualizing local stakeholders, and eliciting and balancing diverse justice preferences from actors on-the-ground. In conclusion, Hook and Wise present a framework and recommendations developed around learning and listening to meso-level expertise as a priority for enhancing effectiveness in atrocity prevention.

Conclusions and Next Steps for the Field

The depth and breadth of the contributions within this special issue represent a significant step towards improving evidence-based approaches to genocide and mass atrocity prevention. Broadly speaking, evidence-based approaches hinge on the ability to collect, synthesize, and utilize the collective body of “lessons learned” to inform urgent, time-sensitive decision-making, whether that be driving forward the atrocity prevention research agenda or shaping policy. Evidence-based approaches necessitate identifying, examining, and testing as appropriate, the underlying assumptions behind causal claims and grounding future decision-making in rigorous findings. We observe that the amount and quality of evidence in the field cannot be adequately recognized without taking a broad view of diverse research questions, methods, disciplines, and tools. By representing a multidisciplinary cross-section of the field, the articles herein capture many of the contemporary challenges and debates around genocide and mass atrocity prevention, with valuable insights for building consensus and deeper knowledge among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners.

In considering the contributions of this special issue together, we would like to reflect on a few remaining questions worth investigating to advance genocide studies and atrocity prevention. First, while major strides have been made to produce evidence that informs atrocity prevention decision-making and responses, there is still much that we do not know and evidence that remains to be collected and analyzed for the benefit of prevention work. Continuing to assess new case studies, prevention tools, research questions, methodologies, and lenses of interpretation—as the articles in this special issue have illustrated—is at the core of augmenting this evidence base. Further, enlisting the knowledge and expertise of various disciplines like political science, peace studies, sociology, anthropology, history, and economics has helped to fill in many knowledge gaps and shows the power of cross-disciplinary collaboration. While the field draws many strengths as an interdisciplinary body of knowledge, challenges remain with bringing empirical findings and insights together when relevant data are derived from diverse sources and use different—potentially contradictory—frames and definitions. As the field continues to grow, scholars must ponder: How can the field continue to

leverage the strengths of various disciplines without becoming so diffuse that core atrocity prevention concepts become incomprehensible? As interdisciplinary research teams that increasingly include non-traditional experts (e.g., computer scientists) and local experts from a diverse range of fields become more common, how can novel findings be effectively communicated and shared to build up collective scholarship? How can the field continue to collaborate across disciplines and share knowledge to support evidence-based policy and practice? We hope that this special issue is the beginning of further efforts to answer these pressing questions.

Second, neither scientific institutions nor processes of knowledge production are immune to power differentials. Thus, while systematic knowledge production is vital for theory-building in genocide studies *and* in ensuring that at-risk communities receive properly vetted interventions, these realities exist in tension with considerations of power and knowledge gatekeeping. Specifically, definitions of “evidence-based” rooted in exclusively quantitative approaches may collapse contextual nuance or over-emphasize Western-dominated assumptions that can narrow perceptions of those deemed “experts.” Especially in the fraught, politically-charged contexts of unfolding mass atrocities, local actors and impacted citizens may propose ideas and interventions that are inconvenient for international policymakers, practitioners, and others to implement. Overly narrow ideas of what constitutes “evidence” that do not capture diverse and contextualized ways of knowing, may incentivize and even foster international actors’ tendencies to ignore the knowledge of local actors, even when they raise valid and important concerns. How can such tensions be navigated, and what roles should genocide scholars play in avoiding unethical and inequitable outcomes? How do definitions of evidence and methods of evidence collection need to be continually assessed and refined through dialogue with affected communities? The various contributions in this special issue grapple with these tensions and remind us of the broad sources of evidence in the field.

Finally, although academic debates over ontological assumptions about the nature, dynamics, and prevention of genocide are important to the field, the lack of political will to address mass atrocities in a timely and robust manner remains a primary challenge to effective atrocity prevention. Despite advances in gathering and synthesizing the evidence base, it would be inaccurate to assume that better knowledge, data, or theories will automatically result in more effective atrocity prevention. Putting this knowledge to use in the most effective time and place for civilian protection continues to require political will. Further, when moments of political will do emerge, bridging the gap between research, policy, and practice poses practical challenges, spanning relationship-building (knowing whom to contact), logistics of communication (knowing how to contact), and areas of expertise (knowing what questions should be directed where). These challenges are well-known to all areas of scientific inquiry on policy-relevant subjects, yet are worth continually revisiting given the urgency, unique challenges, and ethical implications associated with atrocity prevention work. How can policymakers and practitioners better access, interpret, and deploy evidence-based approaches on the ground? What obstacles stand between knowing what the evidence indicates is the most effective means of prevention and what is actually feasible within a particular context or given extant political interests? How can the different timelines associated with evidence production and policy decision-making be reconciled? In these articles, authors have explicitly highlighted the implications of their research for policymakers and practitioners, encouraging such applied scholarship.

Given the urgency and high stakes of atrocity prevention work, leveraging the full range of tools, actors, and possibilities for prevention is needed. Forging connections and avenues for information-sharing between scholars, policymakers, and practitioners are also essential to that end. We hope this special issue will inspire continued debate and inquiry over evidence-based approaches and their practical implications to support effective genocide and atrocity prevention.

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