

Visions of Hate

Explaining Neo-Nazi Violence in the Russian Federation

Richard Arnold

The type of violence Russian skinheads use against any given ethnic minority corresponds to the “crimes” it has supposedly committed against the Russian people.

WHY do perpetrators of ethnic violence use particular forms of violence against minorities? How do they coordinate their activities? What is the importance of ethnicity in ethnic conflict? These questions are all important for a better understanding of ethnic violence and its causes. While many scholars have sought to explain why ethnic violence occurs and whom it benefits, less attention has been paid to the question of why ethnic violence takes different forms when perpetrated against different groups of victims.¹

There is good reason to believe that the form of violence is not random, and if so, that uncovering the reasons for this should yield valuable insights into the process of ethnic violence. Ethnic minorities do not express fear of violence in the abstract sense; rather, they fear particular forms of ethnic violence,² which suggests that the form the violence takes is not random. Further, although there are several theories purporting to explain the occurrence of violence, we lack an understanding of what the perpetrators are reacting to—their “visions of hate.”

The present study focuses on the Russian Federation, where skinheads have been carrying out violent attacks on ethnic minorities and human rights advocates almost daily. For example, in 2001 around a hundred skinheads launched an assault on the Tsaritsino market in Moscow, where many traders from the Caucasus work,³ and in 2004 skinheads shot and killed Nikolai Girenko, a researcher on racism, in his apartment. Russia is also a good case because skinheads have used each of the four different types of violence discussed here, while narrowing the focus to a single country controls for international causative factors. For all these reasons, the discussion in this

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Table 1

Forms of Violence and Their Axes

		Scale of violence/number of targets	
		Few	Many
Targets	Property	<i>Intimidate!</i> symbolic violence	<i>Leave!</i> riots/pogrom
	People	<i>Behave!</i> lynching	<i>Perish!</i> massacre

Note: For more on this typology and an elaboration of its reasoning, see Richard Arnold, "Thugs with Guns: Disaggregating 'Ethnic Violence' in the Russian Federation," *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 5 (2009): 641-64.

article concentrates on modern Russia, which means that the question now becomes one of why skinheads use different forms of ethnic violence.

The forms of ethnic violence the skinheads adopt against their victims differ because the skinheads hold various minority groups responsible for different kinds of "crimes" against the Russian people. The "punishment" the skinheads inflict is proportionate to the magnitude of the alleged offense. To study this phenomenon, I developed a typology of forms of ethnic violence. In the case of the Russian Federation, the best predictor of the form of violence is the ethnicity of the target group.

Forms of Ethnic Violence

Previous studies have identified numerous forms of ethnic violence, and many observers suggest that violence can be viewed as a communicative act. This view is adopted in the present discussion for three reasons: First, Charles Tilly argues for the fundamentally communicative functions of violence.⁴ Second, the oft-quoted description of war by Karl von Clausewitz implies communication—if war is the continuation of politics by other means, then the maxim may also be reversed. Third, past advocates of violence have stressed its communicative function. As Countess Waldeck put it, "Rumania says it with murder."⁵ Violence may be an inefficient way to communicate, but besides whatever else it does, this is a consequence.

Ethnic violence communicates four different "messages": intimidate, behave, leave, and perish. These messages represent an escalating progression of ways of rejecting the other, each more severe than the last. The literature categorizes violence along two axes: whether it has few or many targets, and whether it focuses on people or on property. This produces four kinds of violent action—symbolic violence, lynching, pogrom, and massacre—as

presented in Table 1 along with the messages they supposedly convey.

The term "symbolic violence" refers to violence that occurs in few places but targets the property of an ethnic group. A good example is graffiti or the desecration of cultural property. "Lynching" is a term applied to violence against the body that similarly focuses on few targets. Although it has connotations of hanging today, originally the term did not focus solely on murder but "referred to a variety of forms of punishment, including beating, whipping, tar and feathering, and, only occasionally, killing."⁶ Therefore, any physical assault on the body of an ethnic other would constitute a lynching. The term "pogrom" is a synonym for "riot" and refers to widespread violence against many items of property belonging to another ethnic group. The word itself is Russian and comes from the verb *gremet*, "to thunder," and the noun *grom*, "thunder." Thus the proposed meaning of the term is consistent with its etymology. Finally, "massacre" designates violence against the bodies of many ethnic targets. Consistent with the definition of lynching, the term applies to any violence against the bodies of minorities and not just killing.

Skinhead attacks in Russia have become more frequent since 2000. Yet monitoring this violence is difficult, because the Russian government keeps no publicly available statistics on the incidence of skinhead violence. To overcome this problem, I relied on *Bigotry Monitor*, the weekly English-language reports of the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (USCJ).⁷ This source combines reports of ethnic violence from other concerned human rights agencies, regional newspapers, and national sources into a single document that records persecution in Russia. I compiled all reports of ethnic violence for the years 2001–2008 in a database.

Although *Bigotry Monitor* records all instances of ethnic violence in Russia, not all recorded violence is perpetrated by skinheads. Therefore I removed cases of violence perpetrated by groups other than skinheads, such as government officials, neopagans, communists, and Orthodox militants. Where the perpetrators were not specifically identified, I coded them as skinheads because of their preponderance in the rest of the data. Reports of trials for such acts later confirmed this coding decision. I also removed all skinhead attacks against non-ethnic targets, such as anti-fascist operatives, from the database. This left 874 reported instances of violence that are divided into years in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that ethnic violence is on the rise in Russia. I coded these data in accordance with the typology. To impose a definition, I considered "few" targets to

Table 2

Incidence of Skinhead Violence, 2001–2008

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
N [Attacks]	37	117	75	96	132	128	140	149
Cumulative	37	154	229	325	457	585	725	874

Note: The data for 2008 must be considered incomplete, because violent incidents sometimes do not make their way onto *Bigotry Monitor* until as much as six months after they occur. These data include reports from the first three weeks of 2009 that mention violence in 2008, but they are not comprehensive.

be those where two persons or articles of property were targeted, and “many” to be three or more. Although this definition is imposed, the utility of doing so provides sufficient justification for the dichotomy. The division between people and property was somewhat easier to operationalize, with any assault on the body of an ethnic other constituting an assault on the body. Assaults not on the body were considered to be against the property of an ethnic group. Verbal speech acts were not considered violence. Using these guidelines, the data presented in Table 2 disperse into the pattern shown in Table 3.

A cursory analysis of the data shows that these different forms of violence were not distributed at random. Rather, certain forms of violence seemed to be used *characteristically* against different ethnic groups. Table 4, which further divides the data seen in Table 3 by ethnic group, clearly demonstrates that the forms of ethnic violence skinheads use against different groups depend on the ethnicity of the victims. While lynching is the form of violence most frequently used against Africans, Caucasians (i.e., immigrants from the Caucasus), Arabs, Asians, and Indians, Jews seem to be disproportionately targeted by symbolic violence. Similarly, although only twenty-one attacks on Roma (also called Gypsies) are recorded in the database, fully twelve of these took the form of massacre. Such a finding implies a coordinating role for the ethnicity of the target group.

Skinheads use *characteristic* forms of violence against members of ethnic minorities. Jews are most frequently attacked with symbolic violence, and Roma with massacre. Of all the groups skinheads target with lynching, Africans are clearly singled out for this kind of attack. This leaves just pogrom without a group to exemplify it. Although the absolute frequency of pogrom-style attacks on Caucasians is dwarfed by lynching, it is nevertheless true that skinheads target them more frequently with pogrom violence than any other group. For the sake of finding a representative group, I include Caucasians as

Table 3

Ethnic Violence by Type, 2001–2008

Year	Symbolic violence	Lynching	Pogrom	Massacre
2001	12	8	11	6
2002	38	49	18	12
2003	23	35	6	11
2004	21	53	8	13
2005	23	81	13	15
2006	21	73	14	20
2007	24	100	4	12
2008	17	117	5	10
Total	179	516	79	99

representatives of this style of attack. The question now becomes one of why skinheads attack these four groups in these particular modes.

Ethnicity and Forms of Violence

There are at least four theories that purport to explain the link between ethnicity and a particular form of ethnic violence. I derive a testable hypothesis from each theory and then test the hypotheses with a content analysis and against the responses of actual skinheads whom I interviewed. Both tests clearly demonstrate that whereas there is substantial support for the theory of ethnic criminality, the other hypotheses cannot offer the same insight.

Ethnic Criminality. In his theory of the deadly ethnic riot, Donald Horowitz specifies the role that rumor plays in mobilizing potential participants to commit crimes. Rumors, he says, “project onto the future victims of violence the very impulses entertained by those who will victimize them,” thus attributing responsibility for violence to the

Table 4

Ethnic Violence by Type and Ethnic Target, 2001-2008

	Symbolic violence	Lynching	Pogrom	Massacre
Jews	145	24	21	6
Africans	0	75	2	7
Caucasians	22	218	44	33
Roma	2	9	0	12
Arabs	0	32	0	8
Orientals	2	71	3	18
Indians	0	21	0	4
Hispanics	0	7	0	0

victim.⁸ This theory can be adapted to explain different forms of violence as the nature of the accusations also change. Not all crimes are equal, and the skinheads do their best to inflict a punishment that is proportional to the offense supposedly committed. The importance of the criterion of proportionality was noted by Nietzsche and lies at the bottom of the oft-quoted biblical dictum “an eye for eye.”⁹ This is the theory of ethnic criminality.

However, in order to make the theory more transportable, it is necessary to specify the axes that constitute crimes and so determine the proportionality of punishment. In most respects, this is identical to the 2 × 2 arrangement presented in Table 1, with one minor change. While the magnitude of the threat—to people or to property—could conceivably be ensconced in an accusation of criminality, the imminence of the threat could not. Therefore, in order to account for the imminence of the threat, crimes are divided between those that are abstract and those that are concrete. This means that Jews will be accused of abstract crimes against property, Africans of abstract crimes against people, Caucasians of concrete crimes against property, and Roma of concrete crimes against people. This theory is expressed in Hypothesis 1.

Cultural Difference. The second explanation casts ethnic violence as a response to mere difference and comes from the cultural difference theory of the Russian ethnographer Emil Payin. Here, it is the very fact that others are different that leads to conflict, because they are dehumanized and so treated in a manner that befits their description. This was one of the insights yielded by Hannah Arendt at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who described how the “keepers of secrets” sheltered ordinary Germans from actual conscious participation in the very genocide they

perpetrated.¹⁰ Skinheads use different forms of violence commensurate with the degree to which different ethnic groups are dehumanized.

Just as with the last theory, the observable implications of this theory need to be laid out. Since the typology of forms of violence in Table 1 contains the idea of severity and that different forms of violence are more severe than others, it is possible to establish a hierarchy of dehumanization. If this theory is correct, then it follows that the groups against whom the more severe forms of ethnic violence are used will be dehumanized to a greater extent than those that are persecuted using lesser forms of violence. Jews will be the least dehumanized, Africans and Caucasians equally so, and Roma will be the most dehumanized. This theory is expressed in Hypothesis 2.

Competition for Resources. The third posited explanation is the standard realist doctrine that ethnic violence comes about because of competition for scarce resources. This theory finds intellectual support in the theories of Stathis Kalyvas and of Fearon and Laitin, who all suggest that violence can be rationally explained in situations of civil war.¹¹ There is nothing specifically *ethnic* about ethnic violence, but the fact that many civil wars are fought around ethnic boundaries leads to the illusion that ethnicity must be important. Different forms of ethnic violence are a reaction to the magnitude of the economic threat posed.

The observable implications of this theory are that ethnic groups against whom the most severe allegations are made will be accused of having the most negative effect on the Russian economy and the job prospects of ordinary Russians. On the other hand, those who are subject to the least severe allegations will suffer the least bad forms of violence. Therefore, Jews will be accused of minor economic harm, Africans of slightly more, and Caucasians and Roma of doing a great deal of economic harm to Russian society. This theory is articulated in Hypothesis 3.

Direct Incitement. The final theory is the theory of direct incitement. This stipulates that ethnic elites urge their followers to commit violence against ethnic others and to do so in different ways. This follows from the theory of Benjamin A. Valentino, who argues that small groups of thugs can do enormous damage, so all that is needed to explain ethnic violence is the motivation of the perpetrators.¹² This would lead to different forms of ethnic violence, because skinheads would obey any call to violence.

Moreover, because the skinhead subculture is more of

a movement than a concrete political organization, any such instruction that accounts for the systematic nature of attacks throughout the Russian Federation (a country twice the size of the United States and the largest on earth) would have to be transmitted through the media. What the media should show to vindicate this theory, then, is that readers are told to go and commit violence against ethnic minorities. The media will direct skinheads to commit symbolic violence against Jews, lynching against Africans, pogroms against Caucasians, and massacres against Roma. This is expressed in Hypothesis 4. All four hypotheses are listed in Table 5.

Media Coverage

The four hypotheses are evaluated using a content analysis of far-right materials and by analyzing interviews with skinhead participants in ethnic violence. These tests provide substantial support for the theory of ethnic criminality. I proceed by identifying the sample taken, specifying how the messages were coded, displaying the results of the content analysis, and engaging with the interview material.

For the purposes of this discussion, the universe of right-wing organizations is considered to include those described as such by the SOVA Center, the main non-governmental organization in Russia monitoring skinhead and far-right groups and sponsoring research on their activities.¹³ The SOVA Center is, therefore, the authority on far-right neo-Nazi groups in the Russian Federation. Alexander Verkhovsky, its head, provides a list of radical organizations on the Internet, with links to each of the organizations mentioned (if they have Web sites).¹⁴ These “radical organizations” are not only skinhead groups, but also include Russian nationalists, Orthodox nationalists and fundamentalists, political neopagans, skinheads, communists, anarchists, anti-globalists, and Islamic extremists. There are more than 120 different groups on the list in all categories. Such a well-populated list surely contains most of the influential radical groups on the Web.

I used Verkhovsky’s list to access the Web sites of specific skinhead gangs in order to gather materials for analysis. While the list does not include all of the skinhead gangs in Russia, it identifies the most accessible gangs, and there is no good reason to expect them to put out a different message to other gangs. Not only does this facilitate access to media that would otherwise be extremely difficult to locate and retain,¹⁵ but the skinhead movement in Russia uses the Internet for a variety of purposes,¹⁶ including recruiting members. Indeed, because inciting

Table 5

Hypotheses Explaining Correlation Between Ethnicity and Violence

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Far-right media accuse ethnic groups of crimes proportionate to violence used against them. |
| 2 | Far-right media dehumanize different ethnic groups to differing degrees. |
| 3 | Far-right media accuse different ethnic groups of harming Russian economy to differing degrees. |
| 4 | Far-right media direct skinheads to use different forms of violence against different ethnic groups. |

ethnic and religious hatred is banned under Article 282 of the Russian constitution, skinhead and extremist organizations often use Web sites that are either based in the United States (where they are protected by the First Amendment) or cheap to replace.

I took data from all of the available Web sites designated as “skinheads” by Verkhovsky, as well as some of those designated as “Russian nationalists.”¹⁷ The skinhead Web sites were sponsored by the Slavic Union, the United Slavic National-Socialist Forum, Russian Will, the National-Socialist Front, Combat-18 Russia, and Brangolf. Slavic Union is a youth organization led by Dmitrii Demushkin, and it has offices throughout the country. The United Slavic National-Socialist Forum and the National-Socialist Front are Internet meeting-places for neo-Nazis. Russian Will and Combat-18 are actual skinhead groups whose Web sites had not been hacked by the time I tried to use them. Brangolf is a semi-pagan organization that Verkhovsky designated as a skinhead group.

The groups designated as Russian nationalists on Verkhovsky’s list are those whose nationalism is tinged with the specter of racism. For example, the DPNI (Movement Against Illegal Immigration) was created in 2002 ostensibly to protest illegal immigration. However, the true nature of the organization can be seen in the facts that one of its slogans is the “14 words” of David Lane¹⁸ and that its leader (a former member of the Pamyat [Memory] organization) changed his name from Potkin to Belov, a word that comes from the Russian for “white.” I looked at a representative sample of articles and news from the DPNI and Russian National Unity (RNE). I also included three issues of the newspaper *Zavtra*,¹⁹ randomly chosen from between 2000 and 2008.

The second source drawn from the SOVA Center provides a check to the first and ensures a broad-ranging sample. I cataloged organizations that do not have a Web presence but are mentioned in SOVA print documents.

Table 6

Number of Articles Read, by Source

Source	N
Slavic Union Web site	1,484
United Slavic National Socialists' Web site	262
Russian Will Web site	5
National-Socialist Front Web site	8
Combat-18 Web site	74
Brangolf Web site	166
Movement Against Illegal Immigration Web site	3
Russian National Unity Web site	5
<i>Athenaeum</i>	88
<i>Nash vzglyad</i> (Our Opinion)	37
<i>Zavtra</i> (Tomorrow)	82
TOTAL	2,126

SOVA's annual reports mention skinhead groups and publications.²⁰ These were supplemented with the writings of affiliated Russian academics who, unlike the list of "Web radicals," focus exclusively on skinhead gangs.²¹ While many of the organizations mentioned in these sources are very small regional entities, some (principally magazines) have a national reach. Their national status indicates that they should be included in a comprehensive survey of skinhead media.

I purchased a sample of these materials from a far-right bookshop in central Moscow.²² The bookshop sold mainly Russian literature but also racist literature from around the world. Many of the magazines presented a more academic and "scientific" basis for racism that does not violate Article 282 but still adds considerably to the skinhead worldview. Only magazines mentioned in SOVA reports were considered influential enough to be included in the universe of cases. This included the *Athenaeum* and *Our Opinion* in the sample. The importance to the racist movement of the *Athenaeum* can be seen in the fact that it organized the Moscow Conference "The Future of a White World" (attended by prominent international racists such as David Duke, former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan) in 2006. This sampling strategy utilized the knowledge of the leading research institute on skinheads to define the universe of far-right publications. Magazines available in the bookshop but not mentioned in a SOVA report were not used.

The texts analyzed in the sources sampled depended very much on the form of media used. On the skinhead Web sites, I looked for news, on the assumption that the news changes most frequently and is therefore the place where stereotypes are ingrained as part of the skinhead worldview. Where news reports were not available, I took the most popular Web logs indicated by the number of hits made on that link. Where neither of these was available, I simply took articles on ideology selected at random. I repeated this selection process with Russian nationalist Web sites. All sources used are considered to have been simple "articles." In total I read 2,126 articles of varying lengths, not all of which contained references to ethnic groups. These sources are listed in Table 6.

Length poses a methodological problem when aligning such a disparate assortment. Sources were often of different lengths, with some articles being many times the length of individual news posts. When completing the analysis, however, I attributed equal weight to each of the sources taken. The reason for this coding decision comes from two conditions: the consistency of each of the pieces and the dictates of the theory. First, the articles and news postings were internally consistent, meaning that they did not contradict claims made earlier within themselves. Second, the theory implies that the important image that comes from the unit of analysis is the stereotype, and if the text is internally consistent as to the nature of the accusations made against other ethnic groups, then one mention performs the same work as many.

I coded articles in a binary fashion based on whether the specified element was present or not. Only articles that mentioned ethnic groups by name were considered, on the assumption that for stereotypes to be meaningful, the group itself must be mentioned. Similarly, in respect to the crimes of which an ethnic group was accused, I coded whether media used dehumanizing language to describe them, whether they were depicted as an economic threat, and whether skinheads were directly instructed to go out and commit violence against minorities. I did not consider ethnonyms ("kike," "nigger") examples of dehumanizing language. These coding guidelines made it possible to test all the hypotheses stated in Table 2.

Some cases did not fit into the categories specified. In all, seventy-six articles mentioned an ethnic minority but could not be coded according to the scheme provided. These were mostly factual reports taken from mainstream Russian newspapers or frivolous items. For example, there were a few articles about Holocaust denial²³ and a joke calling for Africans to jump from a plane.²⁴ Not including such material in the content analysis makes

The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

Adopted by the State Duma on May 24, 1996

Adopted by the Federation Council on June 5, 1996

Federal Law No. 64-FZ of June 13, 1996 on the Enforcement of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation

Part II: Special

Section X: Crimes Against State Power

Chapter 29. Crimes Against the Fundamentals of the Constitutional System and State Security

Article 282. Incitement of National, Racial, or Religious Enmity

1. Actions aimed at the incitement of national, racial, or religious enmity, abasement of human dignity, and also propaganda of the exceptionality, superiority, or inferiority of individuals by reason of their attitude to religion, national, or racial affiliation, if these acts have been committed in public or with the use of mass media, shall be punishable by a fine in the amount of 500 to 800 minimum wages, or in the amount of the wage or salary, or any other income of the convicted person for a period of five to eight months, or by restraint of liberty for a term of up to three years, or by deprivation of liberty for a term of two to four years.

2. The same acts committed:

- a) with the use of violence or with the threat of its use;
- b) by a person through his official position;
- c) by an organized group, shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term of three to five years.

for a more stringent test. Therefore, it was better to omit them from the coded material. Rough guidelines are given in Table 7.

The results of the coding of the articles are presented in Table 8. Overall, 584 articles mentioned ethnicities. The other 1,542 articles in the samples did not mention ethnic others at all but were instead calls to organize, jokes, notices about rock concerts, or other matters that did not mention ethnicity. Similarly, there were articles that focused on ethnic groups not under scrutiny. Indeed, ninety articles of the 584 total concerned with ethnicity did not explicitly mention Jews, Africans, Caucasians, or Roma, leaving 494 articles to code.

Of the 494 articles concerned with these four groups, ninety-nine either reported the activities of ethnic organizations or did not contain information that fit into the categories. This left 395 articles for scrutiny. In forty-two cases, ethnic groups were accused of more than one crime, and fifteen articles mentioned more than one ethnic group. Table 8 shows how these 452 cases dispersed. Crimes are broken down into a focus on abstract property, abstract people, concrete property, and concrete people. The

proportion of all criminal accusations of a certain type is given as a percentage of all crimes of which an ethnic group is accused following the raw number. The predicted highest values are highlighted with bold type.

Table 8 demonstrates that there is a predominant association of ethnic groups with criminal activities in the far-right media. This is particularly evident in the case of Jews and Caucasians, where the number of accusations of criminality to all other negative references is 104:27 and 176:72 respectively. Similarly, almost every mention of Roma by these media depicted them as connected with some form of criminality. It was even true of Africans, a very small population group in Russia. One of the articles claimed that “criminality is nationality,” implying that certain crimes are characteristic of certain groups—exactly what the theory predicts.²⁵ The evidence thus clearly supports the hypothesis that ethnic groups are stereotyped through accusations of criminal behavior, and in showing this it warrants a further explanation of theorized causal links.

There is only scant support for the dehumanizing rhetoric hypothesis in Table 8. To be sure, Africans were the

Table 7

Coding Guidelines and Examples

Classification	Guidelines	Examples
Crime	Criminal activity (coded according to imminence and nature of targets)	"Thieves," "Swindlers," "Murderers," "Zionist Occupation Government [ZOG]," "Gypsy death camp," "drug dealers"
Dehumanizing rhetoric	Allegations of primitiveness, comparison to animals	(photo): "Which one is the monkey?" "Caucasians are less intelligent"
Economics	Noncriminal behavior that is harmful to the country's economy	"They are stealing our jobs," "Armenians control the markets"
Direct inciting	Commands to execute a particular sentence, idolization of violence, photographs of violent acts	"Drive the Chernye from Kondropoga and other Russian cities," (photo): lynched black man

group most frequently referred to in this manner—19 percent of the time versus 6.1 percent for Jews, 6.4 percent for Caucasians, and 7.7 percent for Roma. Such dehumanizing rhetoric often compared Africans to monkeys or accused them of being "the lowest race." One picture on the Slavic Union Web site showed an African tribesman next to a monkey and asked, "Which one is the monkey?" Another featured a picture of President Barack Obama under the heading "A president from the zoo?" While such accusations may be hurtful to those at whom they are aimed, they do not constitute support for Hypothesis 2.

There was even less support for the realist hypothesis that the form of violence is a reaction to economics. At no point were Roma accused of doing harm to the economy, and Jews were only mentioned once in this respect. In fact, Jews were portrayed, if anything, as a benefit to the economy, as implied by a Russian Will article claiming, "China has achieved its economic success without the aid of the great Jew." Economic complaints were made against Caucasians and Africans, but these were dwarfed by the allegations of criminality. For both of these reasons, I find that the evidence does not support Hypothesis 3.

Finally, there is relatively consequential support for Hypothesis 4. Web sites featured many photographs and clips of violence against Africans and Caucasians. The NS Front Web site featured nine black-and-white photographs of hanging black corpses, presumably from the U.S. Deep South, and one of a black man who had been shot in the head. However, three arguments illustrate why this is not a sufficient explanation by itself. First, many of the articles incited a particular form of violence as a *response* to the criminality of ethnic groups and so, in fact, provide

support for Hypothesis 1.²⁶ Second, despite the Russian Will Web site showing images of Jews being lynched, the data showed that the characteristic form of violence against Jews was symbolic, not lynching. Third, violence against Roma was not instructed to be massacre. These arguments all suggest that ethnic violence is a response to allegations of criminality.

Furthermore, the specific character of the crimes of which ethnic groups are accused in Table 8 exactly matches the predictions of the theory of ethnic criminality in all cases except those of the Roma. It demonstrates that ethnic groups are accused of the particular kinds of crime predicted by the ethnic criminality theory in three of the four cases. The far-right media accused Jews of controlling the government and committing what in the United States would be called white-collar crimes. They accused Africans of being innately aggressive and posing a threat to white culture. Persons from the Caucasus region were depicted both as a concrete threat to the very bodies of whites (see the highly graphic photographs taken from the Slavic Union Web site at <http://muskingum.edu/~rarnold>) and as a tangible threat to their property. Finally, the message was also mixed regarding Roma, who were not mentioned very frequently but were described as a genuine threat to both property and people. Overall, the theory performs well in explaining violence.

Interviews with Skinheads

Interviews with a group of skinheads confirmed that they actually do "punish" ethnic others in a manner that in their view befits the "crime." I interviewed seventeen skinheads

Table 8

Breakdown of Allegations Against Ethnic Groups

Group	Crimes				All crimes	Dehumanizing rhetoric	Economics	Incitement
	1	2	3	4				
Jews	81 (77.1%)	14 (13.3%)	9 (8.6%)	1 (.95%)	105	8	1	18
Africans	7 (23.3%)	11 (36.7%)	8 (26.7%)	4 (13.3%)	30	14	4	20
Caucasians	41 (22.1%)	29 (15.7%)	68 (36.8%)	47 (25.4%)	185	16	14	42
Roma	2 (18.2%)	0 (0%)	6 (54.5%)	3 (27.3%)	11	1	0	2

using two different methods in 2006 and 2008. In 2006, I interviewed five skinheads in person, who are seen in the photos. Then, in 2008, I interviewed twelve subjects over the Internet. I decided to use the Internet to recruit subjects because skinheads are far from the easiest people to contact. They do not wear a uniform or have central offices,²⁷ so they are difficult to meet. Internet chat rooms offer an alternative way to contact them. There is also considerable risk involved in meeting with skinheads, an obvious disincentive to the in-person interview.²⁸ Finally, many skinhead gangs exist primarily as Web organizations, so it is natural to use the Internet for interviews. There are also substantial benefits from using the Internet for interviews: costs are substantially reduced; subjects can be contacted anonymously and may feel more comfortable answering questions from the comfort of their own homes; there is much less danger to the researcher; and any language difficulties the researcher has are likely to be mitigated because reading is easier than speaking. Indeed, I found subjects to be much more forthcoming over the Internet and direct in answering questions.

One obvious objection to this method is that there is no guarantee of the identity of subjects when interviews are purely Web-based. Someone who masquerades as a skinhead on-line could, in fact, be a child outside Russia who is playing a joke. However, these objections are based on flawed assumptions—apart from the actual location of subjects, there never is a guarantee that anything an in-person interviewee says is actually genuine. The ethnographic interviewer has to take the interview subject at face value or not at all. Further, many subjects had avatars that bore explicitly racist content that would take time and effort to design.²⁹ Those who were not serious or genuine about their convictions would not be likely to invest the time needed to create such avatars. I also included questions to test subjects' genuine adherence to the ideology, questioning them on things about which a skinhead would know: certain methods of attack, statements of ideology,

and particular violent events.³⁰ For these reasons, I do not consider this objection valid.

A more serious objection might be that the pool of interview subjects is systematically biased because it includes only skinheads who operate on the Internet. Consequently, the researcher is likely to get wealthier and better-educated interview subjects than if conducting meetings face-to-face. Admittedly, this is a problem, especially as estimates of those using the Internet in Russia come up with only about 12.7 million in a country of 140 million.³¹ However, young people are disproportionately more likely to use the Internet than older people, and that is precisely the age group from which most skinheads come. Similarly, skinheads operate primarily on the Internet, with many practitioners of violence posting videos of attacks there.³² In an effort to try to ensure a fully representative sample, I also asked interview subjects for contacts who did not normally use the Internet.

The five in-person interviews conducted in 2006 were with three members of the organization Slavic Union (subjects A, B, and C) and two street skinheads (subjects D and E). In 2008, I contacted seven members of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI)³³ and five users of National Socialist (NS), the “forum for Russian terrorists.”³⁴ Of course, not everyone who holds Nazi views acts upon them, so in order to separate those who used violence from simple racists I asked the subjects if they had been involved in violence. While the in-person interviewees readily admitted their participation, Internet subjects expressed concern about admitting directly to any specific acts of violence over an anonymous medium, fearing I was in league with law enforcement. Therefore, I followed Timothy Frye's advice and worded the question so that denial was still possible, asking whether people “similar to themselves commit violence against ethnic minorities.”³⁵ This left me with eleven interview subjects who admitted to using violence: all five of those recruited in 2006, and six of those recruited in 2008.



In the upper- and lower-left photos, interview subject D displays his tattoos. Subject E shows his markings in the right-hand photos. (Photos by author)

After finding out whether “people like you” had committed ethnic violence, I asked the interview subjects to tell me how they felt about each of the four ethnic groups in my theory: Jews, Africans, Caucasians, and Roma. I deliberately began with open-ended questions to avoid the possibility of suggesting ideas. This ensured that the responses were in the subjects’ own words. An interview subject who offers up reasons without prompting is more likely to state the actual motives for action. To ensure that it was not left out, however, I then asked subjects directly about whether they considered the form of violence to be influenced by economics. This method attempted to minimize the impact of the researcher on the interview subject while still asking the questions that had to be asked.

The results of the interviews provide support for the theory of ethnic criminality, although other reasons were also mentioned. Most of the subjects provided some reason for why the forms of violence differed, with many

offering opportunity and the commitment of the skinheads doing the attacking as the key variables. One subject, using the screen name Ultra21, objected to the very premise of the questions, saying that he did not think “the form of violence has any significance.” However, the fact that most of the skinheads did not reject the question out of hand reinforces the initial assumption that something orders the use of violence against ethnic minorities. That this reason is the crime for which the ethnic group is held responsible is borne out in the reasons skinheads gave as a justification for violence and in their specific descriptions of Jews, Africans, Caucasians, and Roma.

Crime and punishment were the most frequently mentioned reasons for violence given in the open-ended responses. All subjects included the desire to punish criminal activity as a reason for attacking ethnic others. Most subjects agreed that violence was a punishment for crimes innate to particular ethnic groups. For instance,

the subject Hess told me that “nationality implies criminality,” and borntokill argued that “80 percent of crimes in Russia are committed by immigrants.” Ultra21 stated that attacks were only sanctioned if they came “from FEAR” of the ethnic minority. Einherjar went further, claiming that “violence is moral and justified when the question is the survival of our Race.” The open stating of such reasoning provides support for the theory of ethnic criminality.

Moreover, skinheads did not just accuse ethnic minorities of abstract criminality but of specific crimes. The subject Andrei told me that he hated the Jews because they controlled the government and media in Russia. He felt that the liberal agenda of the Russian government in the 1990s had been a result of Jewish hegemony. Other subjects agreed with this assessment, with subjects B and C calling the Jews “the main danger.” The subject Hess told me that drawing graffiti on Jewish memorials was a form of “national revelry” that “took vengeance on the Jews for the fall of the Reich.” Further, UznikSovesti endorsed the logic of proportionality when he said that skinheads attacked memorials “in order to desecrate them. Jewish memorials desecrate our land and should not be here.” Here is the proportional “punishment” of the Jewish “crime”: Jewish cultural property offends skinheads, so they offend it.

Interview subjects also suggested that the presence of Africans increased the frequency of certain crimes in their country. Subject D spoke of the innate aggressiveness of Africans and the inevitable involvement of (African) students at the Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow in “drug-dealing and prostitution.” As another example, UznikSovesti told me that the African presence in Russia was “infectious to whites.”³⁶ These responses were not prompted by questions about criminality, but they were open-ended: the skinheads could have talked about anything to do with Africans, but they chose to do so concerning claims of criminality that made skinhead violence seem defensive. This was brought out again by the subject Hess, who relayed a story to me of his seeing two African men who were trying to rape a Russian girl whom “nobody would help,” despite the fact that the attack took place in a busy area. Casting African immigrants in this manner implied that skinheads were the virtuous defenders of the community. Admittedly, the idea of proportionality was not directly referenced, but one may infer this idea from what was said.

There was a mixture of responses to questions concerning violence against Caucasians. Skinheads seemed generally to have no problem with Caucasians who re-

mained in their own ancestral lands, but they did not want them to come to Russia proper. Indeed, this theme was spelled out by subject D, who told me, “As I understand it, all the good people stay on their motherland and all the bad ones come here.” Once again, this idea references the notion that violence is a reciprocal affair. Interview subjects said that Caucasian immigrants sought control of property and were guilty, according to subjects B and C, of owning businesses—the “Georgian Diaspora runs gambling clubs, casinos, prostitution and deals drugs,” “Chechens bring illegal arms to Moscow,” “the Armenian Diaspora runs banking activities,” and the “Azerbaijanis and Dagestanis trade on the markets.” Other respondents expressed fear that the Caucasian “occupation” was too great, and subject A repeatedly told me that “10 percent of people in Moscow are now Azerbaijanis.” Caucasians multiplied “like flies” and made the Russians an “ethnic minority” in their own country.

The logic of reciprocity, of repayment of this violation, was a deep theme in the responses of each of the interview subjects. For example, UznikSovesti claimed that the reason for skinhead pogroms was because “[Caucasians and Central Asians] trade low-quality goods and disturb the Russian trade.” Using violence would force Caucasians out of the marketplace and, hopefully, back to their motherlands. Not all subjects agreed that attacking their livelihoods was the best way to force them out, however. For instance, the subject called Whitegods told me that “even to kill every tenth person causes them all to leave. If [skinheads] kill someone, then it causes [Caucasians] to lose heart and leave.” What is particularly interesting here is the ordering of the goals: It was necessary to make Caucasians leave, but if they would not leave, they would be killed. The goal was to prevent crimes from being committed on Russian soil.

The last group I asked skinhead interview subjects about was the Roma, and my findings provide strong support for the theory of ethnic criminality. Subject D articulated the notion of permanent criminality to justify massacres of Roma, saying, “If you cannot solve the problem it means that you simply have to kill the man.” The nature of this threat, moreover, was existential. Subject B claimed that Roma had throughout history “stolen children,” and so “killing them is our right.” This sentiment was replicated by an accusation of Roma forcing Russians onto “their” drugs. Subject B recounted a story about how “Roma went to a discotheque and injected someone with heroin in order to get them hooked.” Roma did not simply deal drugs but actively recruited drug addicts and so were an immediate threat to the health of the

body politic. Because they presented such an immediate danger, the most severe forms of violence against them were sanctioned.

Conversely, Hypothesis 2 (dehumanizing rhetoric) received only limited support from the interviews, with skinheads only occasionally using dehumanizing terms to describe ethnic others. For example, Einherjar claimed that whites were naturally smarter than Africans, who were “stupid, ugly monkeys.” Similarly, the interview subject UznikSovesti described ethnic minorities as “untermensches,” and Hess claimed that they were “destroying the purity of nations, and the culture of [our] nation.” Subject C laughed at the thought of Africans dancing the “Tumboo-Umboo.” Subject D went so far as to say that his soul was “stressed” by the sight of nonwhites. However, subject D’s comment aside, such malign evaluations (excluding crimes) were used more in descriptive terms than as a justification of skinhead attacks. While subjects mentioned dehumanizing images in the interviews, ultimately they do not support the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 (economic damage) received a mixed response from the skinhead interviews. Hess claimed, “Caucasian salesmen are destroying our economy. They don’t pay taxes. The quality of their merchandise is bad and they defraud Russian customers.” On the other hand, Whitegods was convinced that “there are no economic reasons [for conflict]. On the contrary, more workers come from white countries.” What really illustrated the inability of the economics hypothesis to explain the forms of violence was that whereas subjects mentioned Jews and Caucasians in this manner, not once did they connect Africans or Roma (other than crimes) to threatening the economic life of the country. For this reason, Hypothesis 3 did not find support in the responses of interview subjects.

The final hypothesis (direct incitement), was the most difficult to test using the interview technique. Few people will proudly admit to doing something because they were ordered to do so, but they will normally offer some justification. However, one good example of this was with subject D, subject A, and Whitegods, who all insisted that white people had become the minority in a white country, so violence against ethnic minorities was legitimate. There was no reason given aside from the assertion that Russia was historically a white country. The far more common response, however, was the same as in the content analysis when subjects expressed an imperative to commit violence against ethnic others, but justified it with the idea of crime. For example, Einherjar told me he hated Jews the most because they “committed more crimes against my race.” Thus the evidence does not support Hypothesis 4.

The interviews with skinhead participants in violence thus provide substantial evidence for the theory of ethnic criminality. They provide substantially less evidence for the theories of dehumanizing rhetoric, economic advantage, and direct incitement. Each theory that predicted a certain kind of allegation being made against an ethnic group was supported by evidence. Admittedly, these patterns were stronger for some groups than for others, but for now the theory has survived another important test.

Conclusion

Skinheads use different forms of ethnic violence against different ethnic minorities because they hold them responsible for different crimes. The condition of proportionality means that skinheads do not feel justified in using more or less severe forms of violence. This theory passed two important tests: a content analysis of skinhead literature and a series of interviews with actual skinheads. The theory has several implications. First, the trope of criminality has enormous potential in mobilizing people to commit violence. Similarly, it suggests that participants in ethnic violence coordinate their attacks based on their comprehension of the other. Finally, it suggests that there is nothing inherently “ethnic” about ethnic violence. This may seem inconsistent with the argument presented here, but if stereotypes motivate violence, then they could apply to any social group and not just ethnic groups. This theory warrants further investigation, especially application to new cases to see how well it travels.

Notes

1. See, e.g., Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); James Fearon and David Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 715–35; V.P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Random House, 1996); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); idem, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Emil Payin, “The Disintegration of the Empire and the Fate of the ‘Imperial Minority,’” in *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, ed. Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich, and Emil Payin (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 21–36; idem, “Xenophobia and Ethnopolitical Extremism in Post-Soviet Russia: Dynamics and Growth Factors” *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 5 (2007): 895–911; Roger Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Conflict, and Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997); and Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killings and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

2. For example, a newspaper in Kaliningrad oblast asked in 2003 whether pogroms targeting the Jewish community were imminent. *Bigotry Monitor* 3, no. 30 (2003), available on the Web site of the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union: <http://ucsj.org>.

3. See *Bigotry Monitor* 1, no. 17 (2001) for more details.

4. Tilly, *Politics of Collective Violence*, chap. 2.

5. Cited in Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 1.

6. Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. xxiii.

7. *Bigotry Monitor*, edited by Charles Fenyvesi, is a weekly human rights newsletter on anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and religious persecution in the former communist world and Western Europe, available at <http://ucsj.org/bigotry-monitor>.

8. Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 75–77.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 63.

10. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1994).

11. See Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, and Fearon and Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation.” For a more pragmatic argument, see Barry Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” in *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, ed. E. Brown (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 103–21.

12. Valentino, *Final Solutions*.

13. See, for example, Shnirelman’s book on “racial war on the streets of Russian cities” (“*Chistilshchiki Moskovskikh ulits*”: *Skinheads, SMI, i obshchestvennoe mnenie* [Cleaners of Russian Streets: Skinheads, the Mass Media, and Public Opinion] [Moscow: Academia, 2007]).

14. For more details, see “Radicals on the Net in Russia,” www.averh.narod.ru/extr.html.

15. I consider, for example, the fact that after the first trip to Russia, the researcher had to transport officially banned books, such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, back to the United States. If he had been caught in possession of such literature at an airport in Russia, not only would it have been seized, but also the inevitable subsequent questioning would undoubtedly have not been pleasant.

16. See G. Kozhevnikova, *Russkii Natsionalizm: ideologiya i nastroyeniye* (Russian Nationalism: Ideology and Sentiment) (Moscow: SOVA, 2006), p. 82, where she mentions attempts by neo-Nazi hackers to take down the Web sites of human rights organizations. She also documents the propaganda functions of skinhead forums, blogs, and Web sites and the attempts by the Russian government to bring the Internet under control.

17. Those that were not available had presumably been taken down either by government officials or by members of the youth organization Anti-FA (anti-fa[cism]).

18. The fourteen words in English are: “We Must Secure the Existence of Our People and a Future for White Children.” The DPNI will often leave this slogan in its English form and, indeed, sells T-shirts bearing it in English. The Russian translation, “My dolzhny sokhranit samo sushchestvovanie nashogo naroda, radi budushchego belzykh detei,” does not appear very often, and this further underlines the international nature of the movement.

19. This was listed by Verkhovsky as a nationalist extremist organization and therefore included in the sample of right-wing organizations. Aleksandr Verkhovsky, “Radicals on the Net in Russia” (January 2006 and March 2008), available at www.averh.narod.ru/extr.html

20. SOVA annual reports from 2004, 2005, and 2006, www.sova-center.ru.

21. Shnirelman, “*Chistilshchiki Moskovskikh ulits*.”

22. In the corner of the Mayanovsky Building, next to the infamous Lubyanka, is a shop selling far-right racist literature. I visited it to purchase materials in both 2006 and 2007.

23. See, for example, the report on the Slavic Union Web site (February 8, 2007) about the conference denying the reality of the Holocaust in Tehran. Similarly, there was a news posting on December 21, 2006, about the trial of the prominent Holocaust denier David Irving.

24. See Slavic Union’s Web site posting for September 27, 2006.

25. Slavic Union posting for April 29, 2007.

26. For example, the United Slavic National-Socialist Forum Weblog on April 15, 2008, argued that because the Chernye (a derogatory term for people from the Caucasus and Central Asia) are armed bandits, they should be forced into ghettos.

27. Even Slavic Union is not really a central skinhead organization but one among many gangs. Although I had gained the trust of a member of the governing council, it proved difficult to contact actual members, most of whom did not want the publicity.

28. Two anecdotes from my research experience come to mind: The first took place in 2006, when I met two skinheads for an interview in Moscow. Because all the cafes were jammed, the subjects felt unable to talk freely, so we held the interview in their car, which was parked nearby. This placed the researcher at considerable risk of harm, as they could have driven off at any moment. The second incident was in 2008, when I was trying to find interviews through e-mail. I contacted Combat-18: Russia and asked for an interview. They looked at the interview questions and said they would participate but asked for €1,000 to do so. As it was obviously unethical to pay (let alone to finance terrorism!) I refused politely. Upon receipt of my answer, they began sending me death threats. This was not a problem on e-mail, but might have led to a very ugly experience if the e-mail had been asking for a face-to-face meeting.

29. One avatar that comes to mind is a gory video of a door swinging open and an African-American man being shot.

30. I asked them to tell me what a “white wagon” is, what happened at Kondropoga and Tsaritsino, and what the fourteen words of David Lane are. “White wagon” is a tactic used by skinheads: they board a particular train car at a station, guard the doors, and beat up all the non-white passengers. Kondropoga was the scene of a communal race riot in 2006, and Tsaritsino is a market where a pogrom took place in 2002. For the “14 words of David Lane,” see n. 18.

31. Mikhail Khmelev, “All of Russia Will Have Internet and Phone Access,” www.spacemart.com/reports/All_Of_Russia_Will_Have_Internet_And_Phone_Access_999.html.

32. See, for example, *Bigotry Monitor* 8, no. 2 (2008), which reports that two neo-Nazi youth in Novosibirsk beat a Turkish man to death with baseball bats and posted a mobile phone recording of the attack on the Internet. The video was instrumental in convicting the youths.

33. See www.dpni.org. The names the users gave themselves are interesting as well and further make the case for the validity of this method: Andriocha Dmitrovskii, DrSoulburner, Kamerad, Melissa, Strayer, Ultra21, and Whiteright. While some of these user-names are clearly nonaggressive, others are blatantly aggressive and racist.

34. See <http://ns-wp.cc>. The names the users gave themselves are interesting as well and further make the case for the validity of this method: Whitegods, UznikSovesti, Einherjar, Hess, and borntokill. Nearly all of these usernames have a connotation of white supremacy and so provide epistemological assurance that I talked to the right people.

35. Frye used this technique to ask survey respondents about “sensitive topics like bribery and private protection” when investigating the business climate in Russia. See Timothy Frye, “Private Protection in Russia and Poland,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 3 (2002): 572–78.

36. He also used the same idiom to refer to the Roma in Russia, again suggesting that the two groups offer ontologically similar positions in the psyche of the Russian skinheads.

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