

# How We Identify Genocide

## An 8 Step Approach



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One of the tasks of the Lemkin Institute is to identify evidence and patterns of genocide as early on as possible in a conflict or within an ongoing structural dynamic of violence. The Lemkin Institute seeks in particular to raise red flags of genocide at precisely the moment when it may be inconvenient for states and large human rights organizations to do so. The purpose of these identifications is to inform parties to a conflict, including external actors, of the possibility of a genocidal dynamic. We work with everyone who wishes to work with us to reduce harm. We believe that identifying genocidal dynamics early on is important to domestic and international responses, helping to ensure that they are crafted with optimal chances of success. We go through a series of stages in developing our analyses, which we briefly outline below. All of our analyses are based on the most current information and literature in genocide studies and prevention. **If you feel your group is facing genocide and other threats to its identity, please be in touch with us at [info@lemkininstitute.com](mailto:info@lemkininstitute.com).**

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### Is there evidence of identity-based violence?

Is a certain identity group being targeted in a discriminatory fashion with physical, symbolic, cultural, economic, or environmental violence? This targeting can include speech acts by state actors, political parties, and social formations and movements, as well as policies, laws, publications, and online harassment in addition to direct physical violence. Has the group itself identified discriminatory attacks? Does the group feel its existence is threatened?



2

### Is there evidence of a formal plan, of life force atrocity, or of other atrocities highly correlated with genocide?

Is there evidence of a state plan or policy of group destruction? Are members of an identity group being targeted with cruel inversion or desecration rituals that instrumentalize communal and familial bonds? Are children, pregnant women, and the elderly being targeted? Are either men or women being targeted en masse for murder or rape? Are intellectuals, religious figures, and communal leaders being targeted? Are identity symbols and institutions being targeted? Are cemeteries being targeted?

3

### Is the group prevented from organizing and expressing itself as a group?

Are people being prevented from meeting, organizing, being educated, speaking certain languages, voting, working, or exercising other rights based on their identity? Is an identity being denied or prevented from legal recognition? Are people having their citizenship revoked or being denaturalized due to their identity? Are peoples' homes and land being taken due to their identity?



4

### Does the pattern conform to one of our Ten Patterns of Genocide?

Does the violence and persecution meet the criteria of one or more of our Ten Patterns of Genocide? Which ones? What other historical or contemporary cases also express those patterns? Are there historical, ideological and/or political relationships between these cases?

5

### What is the historical context?

Has this society experienced similar episodes of mass atrocity or deprivation of identity in the past, whether against this group or against other groups? Has this group held power or has it been historically marginalized? Was this group indigenous to the region before the current powerholders or is this group accused of being non-indigenous? Have members of this group committed gross violations of human rights in the past? Have members of this group been associated (whether in fact or myth or a combination of both) with external forces or other powers that are now deemed illegitimate? Is this group associated with opposition politics or armed insurrection?



6

### Who are the perpetrators?

Are the perpetrators threatened elites? Are they members of a state armed force or paramilitary formation, or are they non-state actors? Do they have an identifiable ideology that situates the targeted group or groups as cosmic enemies or obstacles to perpetrator existence? Do the perpetrators have motives to erase the targeted group or groups that are highly correlated with genocide (i.e. settler colonial aims, resource extraction)? What have perpetrators said? What do we know about chains of command? What do we know about training? How are they funded and where are they getting weapons? Is there evidence of a policy or set of orders to target specific groups? Has the identified leadership made speeches, decrees, or other forms of expression that frame the conflict in genocidal terms?

7

### What is the global political context?

Who supports the perpetrators? Who is advocating that this is genocide? Who is advocating that it is not? Are there vested interests in this being deemed "genocide" in order to justify intervention, occupation, genocide? Are there vested interests in this not being deemed "genocide" to hide complicity or profit from the outcome? Where is evidence coming from? What is the most reliable evidence we have? Do we have independent verification?



8

### How can we be helpful?

When we make a decision about nomenclature, we seek to place our statement in the context of our wider work in genocide prevention and peacebuilding. We keep our statements short and emphasize the most important points, especially those we feel risk being overlooked. We then determine a number of other projects to complement this initial step, including online microcourses, reports, podcasts, and so forth.