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## Elite murder and popular resistance: Evidence from post-World War II Poland

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WIDER Working Paper 2022/148

## **Elite murder and popular resistance**

Evidence from post-World War II Poland

Krzysztof Krakowski<sup>1</sup> and Max Schaub<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** Does repression of opposition elites prevent resistance against foreign-imposed regimes? On the one hand, elimination of elites can undermine the opposition's capacity for anti-regime resistance. Yet killing opposition elites deprives the new regime of useful human capital. Co-optation of elites becomes a tempting alternative. We examine this trade-off by studying the effects of elimination vis-à-vis survival of Polish elites during World War II. Our focus is on the Polish nobility, intellectuals, and (reserve) army officers. We exploit plausibly random variation in the officers' wartime deployment and subsequent imprisonment. While most officers in Nazi captivity survived, almost all those in Soviet captivity were murdered. We find that municipalities with more surviving elites saw *fewer* protests against the postwar Soviet-backed regime during the Solidarność-led uprising in the 1980s. Historical evidence suggests that surviving elites positively influenced local-level economic development, thereby reducing economic hardship and grievances against the regime.

**Key words:** elites, repression, war, World War II, Poland

**JEL classification:** D74, F51, H56

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# 1 Introduction

This paper studies the link between the repression of opposition elites and anti-regime resistance. An elite is ‘a distinct group within a society which enjoys privileged status and exercises decisive control over the organization of society’ (Amsden et al. 2012: 4). Despite the rich scholarship on state repression (e.g., Altiparmakis et al. 2022; Balcells et al. 2021; Gläsel and Paula 2020; Gohdes 2020; Hager and Krakowski 2022; Nalepa and Pop-Eleches 2022; Zhukov 2022), we still know little about the effects of repressing elites. Existing accounts mainly focus on the conditions under which elites are targeted (Esberg 2021; Xu 2021) but rarely consider consequences for the ruling regime (but see Bove and Rivera 2015; Martínez 2022). Especially the long-term effects of elite repression on regime survival are understudied (Peisakhin and Queralt 2022). The present study aims to fill this gap by providing evidence on the effects of eliminating opposition elites on subsequent support for a foreign-imposed regime. We study the case of Poland, where large numbers of elites were murdered during World War II (WWII), and where the Soviet-imposed communist regime was eventually brought down by mass protests. What was the role of the surviving elites in these dynamics?

Foreign-imposed regimes face a difficult choice regarding the elimination of opposition elites (Bove and Rivera 2015; Downes 2021). On the one hand, eliminating elites can strengthen their control by undermining the opposition’s capacity for anti-regime resistance. The loss of opposition leadership may constitute a fatal blow to opposition networks and their organizational capacities (Esberg 2021; Johnston 2012). Scholars of anti-regime resistance have long argued that these organizational capacities are fundamental for translating the underlying popular grievances into sustained anti-regime collective action (Davenport 2015; Sullivan 2016).

On the other hand, killing opposition elites deprives the foreign-imposed regime of potentially useful human capital that it could use to strengthen its own governance on the ground. A lot of elites are public servants whose work is crucial for the smooth functioning of the state administration (Escribá-Folch 2013; Martínez 2022). Elites—oftentimes perceived as local role models—may also help foreign-imposed authorities influence public attitudes and align popular sentiments with visions of the society and the state promoted by the regime (Dinas and Northmore-Ball 2020; Neundorf and Pop-Eleches 2020).

Does elite murder pay off from the perspective of a foreign-imposed regime? We address this question by drawing on previously untapped data on the repression and murder of Polish elites during WWII, perpetrated by the Nazi and Soviet occupiers. We collect data on the murder of (1) descendants of the historic Polish nobility; (2) intellectual elites (as defined by Nazi persecution lists); and (3) army (reserve) officers, many of whom often held elite positions during peacetime. With respect to the third category, we focus on an unlikely group of survivors of WWII elite repressions: Polish officers imprisoned in Nazi prisoner of war (POW) camps. Unlike officers in Soviet POW camps, who were systematically murdered, Nazi POWs survived. Deprived of wealth and status by the postwar Soviet-backed regime, surviving Polish elites, at least on paper, were in strong opposition to the foreign-imposed rule. Did they foster popular resistance against the new regime?

To estimate the effects of elimination vis-à-vis survival of Polish opposition elites, we compare localities where high numbers of the local elites were killed with those where most elite members survived. For causal identification, we rely on a natural experiment, focusing on the survival of (reserve) officers. Officers were often assigned to units far away from their place of origin; thus, the place where they served crucially determined whether they would end up in Nazi or Soviet captivity. During WWII, Poland was attacked from two sides, first by the Nazis in the west, and shortly later by the Soviets in the east. While those serving on the western front were almost exclusively captured by the Nazis, those fighting further east were captured by either advancing Nazi forces or the Soviet invaders. We show that

especially near the division line between the Nazis' and the Soviets' agreed-upon spheres of influence, which officers ended up in Nazi captivity and which in Soviet captivity was plausibly a product of chance. This allows us to use the share of Nazi prisoners among all POWs as an instrument for elite survival.

We find that for all our measures elite murder correlates with more anti-regime resistance. By contrast, using our instrument of elite survival, we show that greater shares of survivors lead to *lower* incidence of anti-regime protests. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the regime benefited from the surviving elites' role in improving governance and contributing to local-level development, thus reducing citizens' motivations to rebel (e.g. grievances related to poverty and shortages). We do not find evidence that the regime directly co-opted the surviving elites into its cadres or repressive apparatus.

We contribute to the literature on the social (e.g., Gilligan et al. 2014; Hager et al. 2019), political (e.g., Charnysh and Finkel 2017; Rozenas et al. 2017), and institutional (e.g., Balcells and Villamil 2022; Costalli et al. 2022) legacies of violence by focusing on the murder of a crucial social group rarely considered: local elites. We also speak to the literature on the role of elites in supporting or suppressing mass protests (e.g., Mattingly 2020; Robertson 2010) by studying a unique case—post-WWII Poland—where large numbers of the national elite were externally removed. Finally, we add to the literature on foreign-induced regime change (e.g., Downes 2021; Downes and Montén 2013; Ferwerda and Miller 2014). We show that even though co-opting opposition elites can be challenging for regimes installed by foreign actors, traditional elites, by supporting economic development, can nonetheless help stabilize such regimes.

## 2 Theory

Foreign-imposed regime change often fails to temper conflict between the occupier and the target (Downes and Montén 2013). A major problem for occupying regimes is military or civilian resistance (Downes 2021). This resistance is often orchestrated by the former members of the toppled regime's establishment. Does killing these opposition elites help foreign-imposed regimes avert dissent and hold onto power? The question comes down to a classic Machiavellian problem. In his seminal work, *The Prince*, Machiavelli (2009: 16) highlights difficulties in controlling societies that were previously ruled by 'barons . . . who hold their positions thanks to hereditary privilege'. These traditional elites have their own resources and subjects who recognize their authority and are naturally loyal to them. How should the new ruler deal with these elites?

Machiavelli offers two solutions: eliminate elites or let them go on living and working for the new regime (2009: 19). Empirical political science has yet to answer which of these strategies works best. The literature thus far has focused on repertoires, timing, and specific targets of elite repression. While authoritarian regimes have strong incentives to repress opposition elites (Bhasin and Gandhi 2013; Davenport 2007), the audience costs of targeting these highly visible figures are oftentimes prohibitive (see De Juan et al. 2022). As a result, some regimes exile elites, rather than assassinate or detain them (Esberg 2021). Other regimes undermine the elites' economic power or provoke discord between the elites and ordinary citizens (Albertus et al. 2018). Repression typically happens when the opposition elites' ability to oust foreign-imposed rulers is temporarily low (Sudduth 2017) or just after a failed coup attempt (Woldense 2022). Interestingly, first-generation elites are more likely to be targeted than their descendants, given that the former are embedded in broader elite networks (Goldring and Matthews 2021).

The ultimate goal of repressive techniques is the survival of the new regime. Even though new regimes can often be observed to repress old elites, theoretically it remains unclear whether they are always better off doing so, especially in the long run (Peisakhin and Queralt 2022). Would it be better for new regimes to try to co-opt the old elites, and use their social and human capital to the regime's advantage (see Lankina 2021)? Before we address this question empirically, we review possible consequences of elite murder for resistance. We begin by outlining mechanisms that link elite murder to lower resistance. Next, we propose alternative channels through which elite murder can backfire.

## **2.1 Elite murder prevents resistance**

Eliminating opposition elites can strengthen regimes by undermining the opposition's capacity to organize resistance. Scholars of anti-regime resistance have long argued that organizational capacities are fundamental for translating underlying popular grievances into sustained anti-regime collective action (Davenport 2015). In line with this thinking, Sullivan (2016) finds that the repression of the mobilizers of resistance reduces dissent, while repression of the mobilized increases it. Importantly, opposition elites play a central role in mobilizing dissent, which makes them a natural target of repression.

First, elites are a common instigator of popular protests. In Russia, for example, local elites, in collaboration with unions, are known to instigate protests to press for resources from the central government (Robertson 2010). A lack of leadership, by contrast, may undermine an opposition's ability to bring people to the streets (Esberg 2021; Johnston 2012). Opposition movements without established and respected leaders—a role that traditional elites are best positioned to fulfil—may lack the 'first movers' who would be able to precipitate discontent among the masses (Petersen 2001).

Second, anti-regime protests need a critical mass to morph into a movement that seriously threatens the regime and can force it to make concessions. Assembling this mass, however, requires material and network resources. Local elites are likely to have command over such resources (Oliver and Marwell 1988). The elites can enforce popular mobilization by using social pressure, social sanctions, or control over local resources (Deng and O'Brien 2013; Forrat 2018). To illustrate, the elites' position in social networks allows them to acquire better information about social compliance and more effectively sanction noncompliant behaviours during social upheavals (Atwell and Nathan 2022). Elites can pressure ordinary citizens to join anti-regime resistance campaigns and reduce the risk of defection, especially in the face of threats from the regime's repressive apparatus.

Throughout modern Polish history, local elites mobilized dissent against foreign occupiers, which underscores the plausibility of the previously mentioned mechanisms. Most importantly, Polish local elites orchestrated armed resistance in response to a series of events known as the 'partitions' of Poland that took place between 1772 and 1795. In that period, the Prussian, Austrian, and Russian empires repeatedly invaded Poland, which eventually led to the full occupation of the country. During the more than a century-long occupation, the Polish nobility mobilized two full-fledged insurgencies in 1830 and 1863, known as the November and January Uprisings.

## **2.2 Elite murder sparks resistance**

According to another set of logics, however, killing opposition elites may also backfire and generate grievances against repressive authorities (Pan and Siegel 2020). Simply put, the public is angered by a foreign-imposed regime that kills some well-known members of their communities (Esberg 2021). This effect is particularly common when there is unambiguous attribution of guilt for elite murder. The latter factor, however, makes it unlikely to apply to our case of wartime elite murder (details to follow). The next two logics seem more plausible in the case at hand.

First, a foreign-imposed ruler who eliminates traditional elites needs to hire new people to fill many important positions in the state apparatus (e.g., civil servants, executives, educators). Even if the new hires had appropriate qualifications to manage these strategic institutions efficiently (which is rarely the case, as we argue below), their appointment could still spark resentment. Resentment formation, in turn, is a major driver of mass resistance to a regime (Fukuyama 2018; Petersen 2001). Resentment is fostered when the new regime induces a downgrading in the status hierarchy of local populations. This happens when the new regime monopolizes the echelons of political power and packs the local administration and security forces with outsiders (Hager and Krakowski 2022; Petersen 2001). The more widespread and visible the occupier, the stronger the resentment. If, instead, traditional elites are retained in place, the change in status hierarchies may not be perceived as starkly unequal, and the potential for resistance is reduced. Petersen (2001) illustrates this process with the situation in Lithuania under Nazi rule during WWII. Overstretched as they were, the German occupiers extensively relied on Lithuanian administrators recruited from local elites. In their everyday experience, therefore, many Lithuanians did not encounter the occupiers very often and felt less challenged by them (Petersen 2001: 59). Had traditional elites been removed from positions of status, resentment—and therefore the motivation to take part in mass resistance—would have been greater.

Second, staffing the local administration with new people poses additional challenges for a new regime. Most importantly, eliminating opposition elites deprives the new rulers of potentially useful *human* capital that they could use to strengthen their own governance on the ground (Persson and Tabellini 2009). Elites can initiate reforms and create knowledge at the local level (Amsden et al. 2012). They have the capacity to direct resources to their areas of influence (Dell 2010; He and Rozenas 2022). Many elites are public servants, educators, and other professionals whose work is crucial to ensure the smooth functioning of the state administration and strategic industries (Escribá-Folch 2013). Established elites, by virtue of having held their elevated positions over generations, have command over traditional legitimacy in the sense of Weber (1978). Their typical central position in local social networks allows them to coordinate local efforts and effectively sanction defectors (Baldwin 2013). In short, elites can increase local productivity, diversification, and efficiency (Acemoglu et al. 2014). These factors, in turn, reduce objective reasons for citizens' dissatisfaction with the regime, such as poverty or shortages, thus lowering the risk of popular dissent.

Moreover, killing opposition elites deprives the regime of useful *social* capital, that is, an important communication and influence channel that links the regime to the subjected population. Elites—oftentimes perceived as local role models—may help repressive authorities influence public attitudes and align popular sentiments with visions of the society promoted by the regime (Dinas and Northmore-Ball 2020; Martínez 2022). Many states have been shown to leverage organic social connections between local elites and citizens to persuade citizens to comply with unpopular policies such as taxation, family planning, and land reforms (Hassan et al. 2022; Mattingly 2016). Absent elite intervention, some of these unpopular policies could precipitate popular dissent (Nathan 2023).

A precondition for these dividends of using elites' human and social capital by the new ruler is successful co-optation of traditional elites. Unlikely as it may seem in many contexts, Ferwerda and Miller (2014) note that even ideologically very distant elites can be co-opted. Examples include US–Shia collaboration during the US occupation of Iraq (Cordesman and Davies 2008) and Social Democrats working together with Nazi occupiers in Denmark (Mazower 2009). More generally, local elites are typically averse to revolutions (Garfias and Sellars 2022; Moore 1966) and may prefer to resist foreign regimes in a covert fashion, if at all. Co-optation thus becomes a feasible option.

Consistent with this logic, the local elites of occupied Poland before WWI quickly abandoned the idea of orchestrating rebellion against the foreign rule and instead engaged in quiet, 'positivist work' aimed at improving the economic and cultural life of the Polish countryside. The noblemen founded schools and libraries that cultivated the Polish language. They also invested in new agricultural technologies,

which improved farming in the Polish countryside. Thanks to these initiatives, the elites contributed to improving the material and psychological well-being of the population, while opposing the foreign rulers politically (Łuczak 2020). These improvements, however, could have inadvertently reduced Polish people's grievances against the Prussian, Austrian, and Russian rulers, lowering their incentives to rebel.

Taken together, there are conflicting theoretical expectations as to whether elite murder prevents or sparks anti-regime resistance. To make headway in this direction, we study Poland, which during WWII saw a massive wave of repression against local elites. Poland offers micro-level data on protests and allows us to exploit a natural experiment of rare and unexpected elite survival amid widespread and comprehensive repression.

### 3 Historical background

This section provides a brief historical background for our case study. A more detailed account can be found in Section A2 of Appendix A. On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The event marked the beginning of WWII. The war spelled disaster for the Polish elites. Before the invasion, the Nazis had drawn up a detailed plan to destroy the Polish elite—a strategy that followed Hitler's deep conviction that 'only a nation whose upper levels are destroyed can be pushed into the ranks of slavery' (cited in Snyder 2010: 126).<sup>1</sup> The plan was carried out mainly by designated death squads, which were tasked with finding and systematically eliminating individuals recorded in the so-called *Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen* (Special Prosecution Book Poland) and related lists. These lists included Polish political leaders, industry heads, and intellectuals. In the first nine weeks of the occupation, 24,000 members of the Polish elite were murdered, a number that was to rise to an estimated 90,000 over the course of the occupation (Pakulski 2015: 52).<sup>2</sup>

The Nazi plan to murder the Polish elites was mirrored by the plans of the Soviet Union, which attacked Poland on 17 September 1939. The Soviets had agreed with Nazi Germany on their concurrent invasion of eastern Poland in the infamous Secret Protocol to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. The Soviets lacked the detailed lists of Polish elites that the Nazis had drawn up. Instead, they focused on officers in their captivity. Many of the officers were part of the traditional aristocratic elites in the country, and elite status was even more common among reserve officers, who were often medical professionals, lawyers, scientists, or university professors in their nonmilitary lives (Snyder 2010: 125). While the Soviets released regular soldiers, they kept officers captive—with the ultimate aim of eliminating them. This was achieved by means of mass executions. The most notorious massacres took place in Charków and Katyń, where a total of 22,000 imprisoned officers were shot. Most of the officers' families were deported to Siberia and other remote areas where many of them perished (Lebedeva 2000).

Pakulski (2015: 57) provides a summary of the German and Soviet assault on the Polish elite. By the end of the occupation, 70 per cent of senators, more than 60 per cent of public intellectuals and journalists, 58 per cent of barristers, 40–45 per cent of medical doctors, 40 per cent of professors, 33 per cent of teachers, 30 per cent of scientists, technicians, and academics, 28 per cent of priests, and 26 per cent of lawyers had been murdered. This compares to an 18–20 per cent fatality rate in the general Polish population.

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<sup>1</sup> The plan carried several code names, notably *Operation Tannenberg*, *Intelligenzaktion*, and *AB-Aktion*.

<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the war, the occupation assumed an increasingly genocidal (i.e. indiscriminate) character. Alongside the killing of 2.9 million Jewish Poles—almost the complete Jewish population of the country—2.8 million ethnic Poles were murdered (Materski et al. 2009).



While the destruction of the Polish elite was thorough, one unexpected place that provided shelter was German captivity as a POW. Germany was a signatory state of the 1927 Geneva Conventions on Prisoners of War and largely followed the rules prescribed by the convention, if only regarding captured officers.<sup>3</sup> Under the Geneva rules, officers were to be held separately, a rule implemented by Nazi Germany in the form of *Oflags* (officer camps). These camps were organized by the *Wehrmacht*, the regular German army, which had an interest in wanting their own captured officers to be treated with decency. In sharp contrast with the situation in Soviet captivity, conditions in German captivity were relatively humane, and mortality rates were low. Remarkably, even Polish officers of Jewish faith survived in German POW camps until the end of the war (Mędykowski 2018; Overmans 2005).

WWII ended in 1945 with the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Allied forces and the Soviet Union. Following the war, the victorious Soviet Union dominated the majority of central and eastern Europe. In Poland, it imposed a Marxist-Leninist government, called the Polish People's Republic. Unsurprisingly, the foreign-imposed regime change roused resistance among the former members of the toppled regime. Remnants of the Polish army tried to resist the Soviets towards the end of WWII, when it became clear that the Soviet army came not as liberators but as occupiers. Yet, after years of war and persecution by both Nazis and Soviet forces, the Polish armed resistance was weak and the insurgency never gained full steam (Applebaum 2012).

The rare survivors among the Polish nobility faced a grim new reality under the communists. The elites saw the communist regime as yet another hostile occupation orchestrated by Russia, with whom Poland had a long history of belligerent relations, including the previously mentioned partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795; the Polish–Soviet War of 1919–21; and the invasion of 1939 (Łuczak 2020). True to these fears, the communists quickly cracked down on the Polish elites, confiscating their landed properties. Initially, members of the nobility were not even allowed to reside in the provinces where they lived before the war. Children of former noblemen were not allowed to study at university. Yet the new Soviet-backed authorities quickly realized that the traditional Polish elites possessed valuable skills that were indispensable for governing a postwar Poland that was struck by multiple crises (for a similar situation in Russia, see Lankina 2021). Thus, very quickly, members of the traditional elites were re-allowed to become civil servants, work in state institutions, manage schools, and hold leadership positions in strategic industries. In many places, this strategy brought significant developmental dividends, alleviating economic hardships.

However, the structural problems of the centrally planned economy persisted. Life in communist Poland represented a constant struggle to make ends meet, and over the years Poles grew increasingly frustrated with the regime. Resistance against the malfunctioning command economy and new corrupt elites began in the mid-1950s (Kenney 1997). In the early 1980s, protests organized by workers of state firms—sparked by changes to quotas and prices—led to the creation of NSZZ Solidarność, the first independent trade union in post-WWII Poland. Solidarność created a broad, non-violent, anti-communist social movement, involving over nine million individuals.

The communist authorities attempted to counter the movement and declared martial law in 1981. The following years saw bitter fighting. The regime was ultimately forced to negotiate with the opposition and agreed to hold (semi-)free elections in 1989. A Solidarność-led coalition won by a large margin, paving the way to Poland's democratic transformation.

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<sup>3</sup> Regular soldiers, in contrast, were regularly stripped of their POW status and made to work in German agriculture and industry. While conditions were often harsh, the survival rates of these prisoners still compared favourably to those of other groups.

## 4 Methods

### 4.1 Population

Our unit of analysis is municipalities in post-WWII Poland. Following discussions at the Teheran Conference in 1943, Poland's borders were moved westwards after the war. The country lost large parts of its prewar eastern territories (today in Belarus and Ukraine, among others), while gaining former German territories in the west. Another complication results from the fact that the occupation regimes during WWII differed across municipalities. The current Polish territory thus includes three types of municipalities with respect to these variations. First are municipalities that during WWII were occupied by the Nazis but had belonged to Poland before WWII. Second are (a very few) municipalities that during WWII were occupied by the Soviets. These localities had experienced a much milder *general* repression of Polish elites, compared to territories occupied by the Nazis. Third are municipalities in present-day western Poland that were part of Nazi Germany. These municipalities have a very different history of statehood; after WWII they were settled by Poles displaced from former eastern regions, for example, Lwów, today's Lviv in western Ukraine (see Charnysh 2019). Our empirical strategy addresses these variations by using local-level fixed effects, as explained shortly.

### 4.2 Elite murder

We use three complementary measures of elite murder during WWII in Poland. The measures tap into repression of different segments of the Polish elites.

#### *Historic Polish nobility*

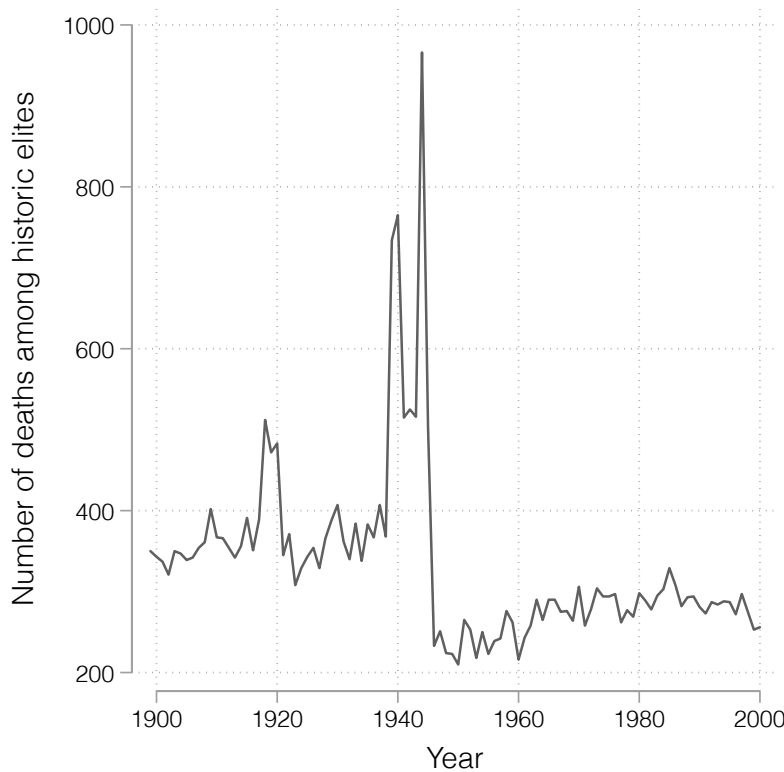
Our first measure of elite murder focuses on the descendants of parliamentarians of the *Sejm Wielki* who died during WWII. The *Sejm Wielki* was a parliament held in Warsaw between 1788 and 1792 that adopted the Constitution of 3 May 1791, the world's second oldest after that of the United States. The descendants of the *Sejm Wielki* parliamentarians are the clearest examples of traditional Polish elites. Historically, these elites come from *szlachta*, the noble estates in the realm in the Kingdom of Poland dating back to 1333. Originally linked to rural estates, throughout the centuries the Polish nobility evolved into two groups: *ziemianie* and *mieszczanie*. The former lived in rural areas and worked in agriculture, while the latter lived in cities and worked in trade and crafts. In many cases, *mieszczanie* were children of *ziemianie* who no longer wanted to live in the countryside. Both groups participated in the *Sejm Wielki*.

To reconstruct the genealogy of *Sejm Wielki* participants, we rely on data collected by Minakowski (2018). The data traces 143,538 descendants of *Sejm Wielki* parliamentarians from 1788 until today. For many parliamentarians and their descendants, the data includes information on the dates and places of their births and deaths. This information allows us to approximate the numbers of the historic Polish nobility who were alive just before WWII (1938) and the number of nobles killed during 1939–45.

We use this information in combination with the elites' place of birth to create a *municipality-level* measure of elite murder. Many of the elites maintained close links with localities they came from, typically because they managed large family estates there and employed local people. The place of birth thus indicates where the elite exercised the strongest influence on the population, both economically and politically. The variable counts how many members of the historic Polish nobility from each municipality died during WWII. We use the log of the number of assassinated elites +1 (*Deaths Historic Nobility*). To illustrate the toll that the concerted elite murder by both the Nazis and the Soviets took on the historic nobility, Figure 1 plots the number of deaths among the *Sejm Wielki* descendants over the course of the twentieth century. The devastation of WWII is clearly visible by the strong increase in the number of

deaths between 1939 and 1945, during which about half of the generation of the *Sejm Wielki* descendants was lost.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1: Deaths among the Polish historic elites during the twentieth century



Note: the figure shows the number of deaths by year among the descendants of the members of the *Sejm Wielki* (Great Sejm) over the course of the twentieth century.

Source: authors' compilation based on data from Minakowski (2018).

### *Intellectual elites*

Our second measure of elite assassinations during WWII comes from the so-called *Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen* (Special Prosecution Book Poland; see example in Figure A2). The *Sonderfahndungsbuch* was prepared by Nazi authorities before the onset of WWII and identified more than 61,000 Polish intellectual elites who were supposed to be executed upon their identification following the invasion. These elites included activists, intelligentsia, scholars, actors, and former officers, among others. The historic sources suggest that almost all individuals whose names appeared on the lists were executed during the war (Dąbrowa-Kostka 1983).

To facilitate the identification of targets, the lists indicated the place of residence at the time of WWII. Due to this information, we are able to calculate the number of intellectual elites targeted and plausibly assassinated in each municipality. Analogous to our other measures, we use the log of the number of assassinated elites from the *Sonderfahndungsbuch* + 1 (*Deaths Intellectual Elites*) as our second measure of elite murder.

<sup>4</sup> The increase in deaths around 1920 can be linked to the Polish–Soviet War (1919–21).

### *(Reserve) officers*

Our third measure of elite murder focuses on Polish (reserve) army officers assassinated during WWII. Many officers held elite positions in their civilian lives. Among them were doctors, scientists with various specialities, lawyers, artists, and teachers. Their assassinations were thus likely to trigger the mechanisms we hypothesized might link elite repression to resistance.

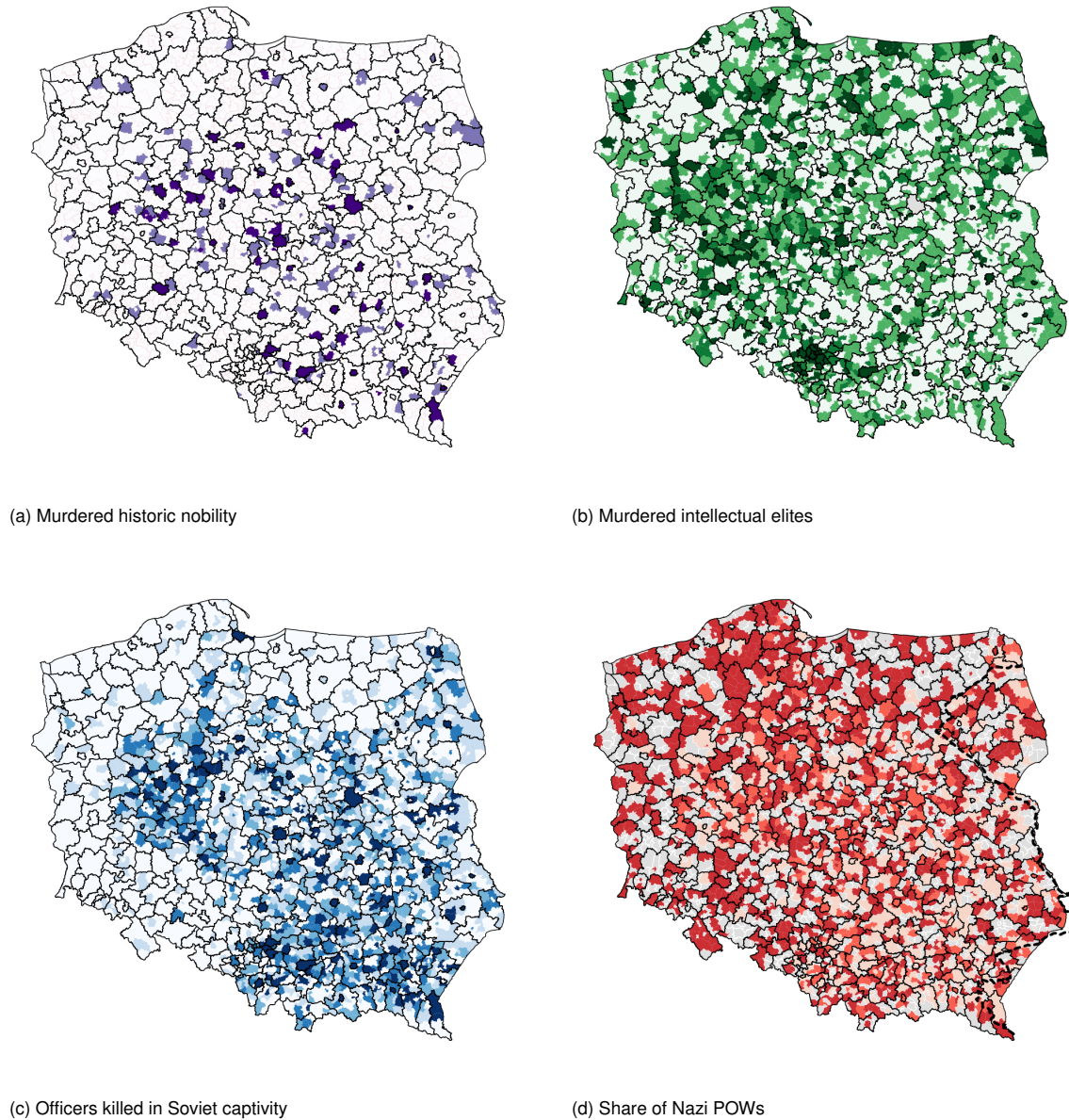
To collect data on Polish officers murdered during WWII, we use the *Księgi Cmentarne* (the Graveyard Book), published by Polska Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, a state institution in charge of the preservation of sites of wartime persecution, which lists Polish officers captured and assassinated in Katyń and Charków Soviet POW camps. In total, the book identifies 7,323 assassinated officers.<sup>5</sup> They represent about 52 per cent of the entire universe of Polish officers who had ended up in Soviet prisons during WWII. According to Minakowski (2018), 14,109 Polish officers were captured by the Soviet army during WWII. A large number of the officers who are not included in our data were POWs held in the Twer camp. Importantly, unlike Katyń and Charków camps, Twer camp hosted officers who were *not* part of the Polish traditional elites. Minakowski (2018) shows that 13.1 per cent and 12.2 per cent of officers in Katyń and Charków, respectively, belonged to the historic Polish elites, while only 0.02 per cent of officers in Twer did.

To connect the data with municipalities, we use information about the place of birth of every officer. This information allows us to estimate how many local Polish elites were lost due to wartime repression in each municipality (*gmina*). Simply put, the more officers from a given municipality who ended up in Soviet camps, the greater was the destruction of local elites. Based on this logic, we create a municipal-level count of officers from a given locality assassinated in the Soviet POW camps (*Deaths Soviet POW*) and again use the  $\log + 1$  of this number as our third indicator of elite murder. See Figure 2.

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<sup>5</sup> The Soviet Union did not kill all Polish officers held in captivity. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Soviet authorities reestablished diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile and committed to releasing some Polish prisoners of war held in Soviet camps. The released prisoners—most of whom were rank-and-file soldiers and not officers—were subsequently granted amnesty and allowed to leave the Soviet territory. They formed a military force, known as ‘Anders’ Army’ (named after its general, Władysław Anders) that later returned in Europe to fight under British command in 1943. The majority of soldiers serving in this army did not return to Poland after WWII, settling in Western Europe, principally Britain.

Figure 2: Measures of elite murder and survival



Note: the figure illustrates the different measures of elite murder/survival used in this study. Figure 2a shows the numbers and birthplaces of members of the historical Polish nobility killed between 1939 and 1945. Figure 2b depicts the frequency of entries in the *Sonderfahndungsbuch* listing intellectual elites to be murdered in a given municipality. Figure 2c shows the numbers of officers captured by the Soviets and their places of birth. Finally, Figure 2d shows the share of Polish officers imprisoned by the Nazis out of all Polish officers and their places of birth; the dashed line is the Molotov–Ribbentrop line. In all cases, darker shadings represent larger numbers/shares. Areas without data are shaded grey, and the black lines outline the administrative borders of provinces (*powiat*).

Source: authors' compilation. This map was created using QGIS (version 3.22.13). GIS shapefiles were downloaded from the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography (Główny Urząd Geodezji i Kartografii) at:

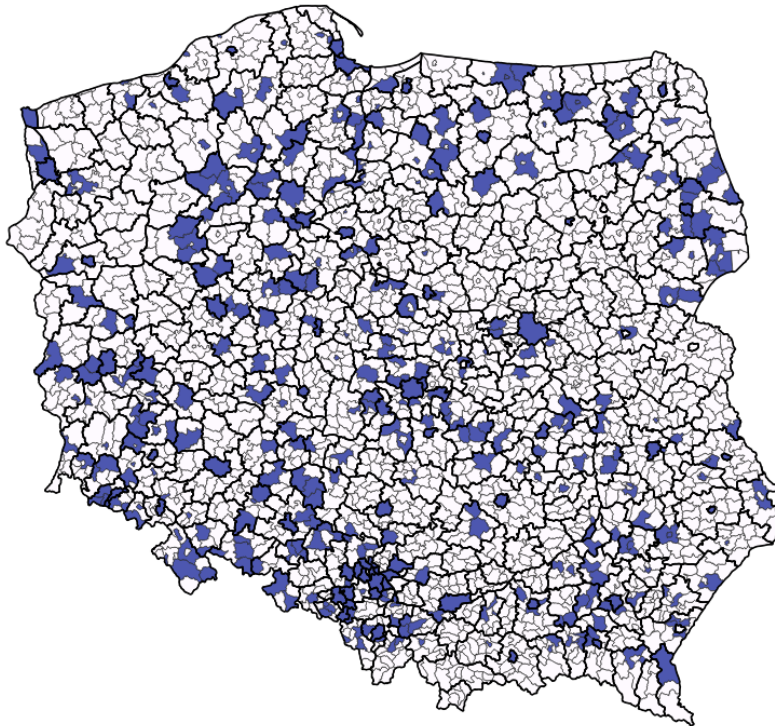
<https://www.gov.pl/web/gugik/dane-udostepniane-bez-platnie-do-pobrania-z-serwisu-wwwgeoportalgovpl>.

### 4.3 Anti-regime resistance

We measure anti-regime resistance in postwar Poland by geo-coding all *Solidarność* strikes from 1980 to 1981 (see Hager and Krakowski 2022). *Solidarność* strikes represented the most serious challenge to the Soviet-backed authorities in post-WWII Poland. They took place in both cities and the countryside, morphing into a broader opposition movement. Our data on the strikes comes from archives of *Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy (NSZZ) Solidarność*, which chronicle all strike events. We

identified 1,729 strikes organized by a variety of actors adhering to the broader Solidarność movement. The resulting variable, *Resistance*, indicates the number of strikes per municipality from 1980 to 1981. Figure 3 shows the geographical distribution of protests.

Figure 3: Solidarność strikes



Note: the figure plots the incidence of Solidarność strikes by municipalities (*gmina*). Blue shading indicates that at least one strike took place in a given municipality between 1980 and 1981. The black lines outline administrative borders of provinces (*powiat*).

Source: authors' compilation, supplemented with data from Hager and Krakowski (2022). This map was created using QGIS (version 3.22.13). GIS shapefiles were downloaded from the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography (Główny Urząd Geodezji i Kartografii) at:

<https://www.gov.pl/web/gugik/dane-udostepniane-bez-platnie-do-pobrania-z-serwisu-wwwgeoportalgovpl>.

The purposes of the 1980–81 strikes were manifold. In some places, protesters demanded higher wages and improvements in work security. Elsewhere, they demanded early elections and insisted on the introduction of the five-day workweek ('*strajk o wolne soboty*'). Some protesters also requested that key Communist Party members be removed from office. Most of the recorded strikes were organized by *Międzyzakładowe Komitety Strajkowe* (Inter-Company Strike Committees). These committees gathered employees of various companies in the mining, transportation, automobile, metallurgical, chemical, agricultural, and construction sectors, to name a few. Employees of universities also participated in the strikes, as did members of religious associations and workers of the state retail chain *Spółem*. The population of protesters was thus highly heterogeneous.

## 5 Results

We analyse the relationship between the elimination of opposition elites and anti-regime protests by estimating a series of the following linear models:

$$Resistance_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \cdot Elite\ Murder_i + X_i + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $Resistance_i$  is our outcome of interest, measured as the log of the number of strikes in a locality  $i + 1$ . The variable  $Elite\ Murder_i$  is operationalized in three ways, as anticipated in the measurement section.

In Model 1, we use the log of the number of assassinated historic Polish nobility from a municipality during WWII. The model controls for the overall size of the local Polish nobility before WWII. In Model 2, elite murder is measured by the log of the number of intellectual elites from a municipality listed in the *Sonderfahndungsbuch*. Model 3 uses the log of the number of army officers from a municipality assassinated in the Soviet POW camps as the independent variable. The model controls for the overall size of the officer population from the municipality at the time of WWII. We construct the latter variable by using information on the sum of officers imprisoned by either the Soviets or the Nazis (see details on the latter measurement below). All model control for the log of the population size in 1938 (constructed based on historical estimates provided in Klein Goldewijk et al. (2017) and included in the vector of control variables  $X_i$ ) and include province (*powiat*) fixed effects ( $\gamma_i$ ).

Table 1 shows the results of our analysis. We find that greater numbers of elite murders in a municipality correlate with *higher* incidences of anti-regime protests. Put differently, municipalities with the highest number of Solidarność strikes are characterized by *greater* elite losses. According to our models, a 10 per cent increase in elite murder led to an increase of 1.8–3.3 per cent in the frequency of local protests (depending on the measure of elite murder we focus on). The evidence thus suggests that by eliminating elites, the Soviets did not quell future dissent but instead sparked more resistance.

Table 1: Elite murder and resistance

	(1) Protests, logged	(2) Protests, logged	(3) Protests, logged
Deaths historic nobility, logged	0.178** (0.071)		
Historic nobility in 1938, logged	0.108*** (0.038)		
Deaths intellectual elites, logged		0.176*** (0.034)	
Deaths soviet POW, logged			0.334*** (0.050)
POW, logged			0.148*** (0.040)
Population in 1938, logged	0.267*** (0.030)	0.275*** (0.030)	0.203*** (0.029)
<i>N</i>	2,411	2,411	2,411
FE	Province	Province	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown in parentheses \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Source: authors' calculations.

In Appendix B1 we probe the robustness of these findings in three ways. First, we restrict our sample to municipalities that were part of Poland before WWII (in 1931). Second, we restrict the sample to smaller municipalities with population size below 20,000 inhabitants. Third, we control for GIS (geographic information system) coordinates to account for the potential presence of geographical confounders (e.g. the west–east divide). The findings are robustly confirmed.

## 6 A natural experiment: unexpected elite survival

Our findings so far show a strong and robust correlation between our various measures of elite murder and higher levels of anti-regime resistance in postwar Poland. The evidence is consistent with the hypothesized backlash of elite murder. To address the causality of these correlations, we exploit a natural experiment that constrained the communist regime's ability to murder some Polish elites: namely, army officers captured and taken as POWs by the Nazis. We focus on the unexpected survival of these few Polish elites. Importantly, the officers would have been assassinated had it not been for the particular history of their imprisonment.



During wartime operations in 1939–41, many Polish officers were imprisoned in Soviet POW camps and subsequently assassinated. Others, however, were imprisoned by the Nazis. Many of the latter survived the war: the German *Wehrmacht* (unlike the SS or *Einsatzgruppen*) mostly respected the 1927 Geneva Conventions on Prisoners of War regarding Polish officers, and refrained from deliberately harming them in captivity (Overmans 2005). Second, when the Soviet army liberated Polish officers from Nazi POW camps in 1944–45 (and could have killed them on the spot), they found it politically too costly to assassinate the surviving officers. In the end, the officers had proved to be ‘the enemy of their enemy’, and thus a supposed Soviet ally. The officers thus escaped the reach of widespread elite repression.

Why had some officers ended up in the Nazi POW camps rather than in Soviet ones? Before the war, the Nazis and the Soviets had secretly agreed to divide the territory of Poland along the Molotov–Ribbentrop line (see Figure 4). Territories west of the line were to be conquered by Nazi Germany. Territories to the east were to be occupied by the Soviets. As a result, Polish officers who operated in army units positioned west of the line mainly faced the Nazis, thus running the risk of Nazi captivity. By contrast, officers whose units were positioned to the east of the line mainly risked Soviet imprisonment.

Figure 4: Poland during the twentieth century



Note: the figure shows the current borders between Poland and its neighbouring countries, and its pre-WWII extent. The solid lines are current international borders, the dashed line indicates the Molotov–Ribbentrop line, the area shaded in blue shows Poland in 1931, and the area shaded in brown is Upper Silesia.

Source: authors' compilation. This map was created using QGIS (version 3.22.13). GIS shapefiles were downloaded from MPIDR and CGG (2012).

It is important to note that given the chaotic and unexpected development of the war, the position of Polish army units with respect to the line and the subsequent imprisonment of Polish officers by the Soviet or Nazi armies was random. For one, the Polish army did not know how their enemies divided areas of influence. They could not have predicted the position of the secret Molotov–Ribbentrop line, given that the line deviated from any previous demarcation arrangements affecting Poland, such as the Curzon Line, which had been proposed by the then-British foreign secretary George Curzon during the



Polish–Soviet War as a possible armistice line. The Polish army thus found itself caught between two enemies that forced them to retreat towards the Molotov–Ribbentrop line from both sides. At this point, the officers had little influence over where and against whom they fought. Moreover, they could not have known whether surrendering to the Nazis or the Soviets would result in a more or less favourable outcome. We thus expect no selection into captivity that would eventually ensure greater survival.

## 6.1 Measurement

We measure the rare survival of Polish elites imprisoned in Nazi POW camps by relying on data from *Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych* (CMJW; Central Museum of Prisoners of War) in Opole, Poland. The CMJW archives include transportation lists from *Offizierslager* (known as *Oflag*)—a type of POW camp for officers captured by the Nazis during WWII. Using the CMJW resources we accessed the transportation lists from 34 *Oflag* camps out of the 37 camps that existed in Poland during WWII. The data includes more than 6,000 scans of the type shown in Figure A1 in Appendix A. We manually transcribed data from 50 per cent of these documents (randomly selected), identifying 8,137 captured officers.<sup>6</sup> Based on the digitized data, we estimate that the total number of Polish officers in Nazi captivity was about 17,708 (accounting for the absence of information from three *Oflag* camps). Our data thus covers about 46 per cent of all Polish officers in Nazi captivity during WWII. While we do not know what happened to every officer in the Nazi camps, available information suggests that the majority of them survived the war and remained living in Poland (Giziński and Szutowicz 2013).

We aggregate these data on the municipality level, creating a count of officers from a given municipality captured by the Nazis. We interpret this variable as the number of local elites who could have been killed during the war (as officers in Soviet captivity were) but survived. We then calculate the share of Nazi POWs out of all POWs (including officers captured by Nazi and Soviet forces) as an indicator of plausibly exogenous variation in local elite survival. In the resulting variable, *Share Nazi POW*, larger values indicate greater survival rates of Polish opposition elites, while lower scores indicate more murders of local elites.

Figure 2d shows considerable variation in the spatial distribution of elimination vis-à-vis survival of Polish elites across municipalities. The officers from the northwest areas of Poland were more likely to end up in Nazi camps, compared to officers from the southeast areas. Yet the elites in multiple areas in central Poland were more evenly distributed between Nazi and Soviet POW camps. If we inspect this variation at a more local level—the province—we find that the elimination vis-à-vis survival patterns cannot be easily explained by geography (see Figure A3).

## 6.2 Exogeneity tests

Was the survival of Polish elites in Nazi captivity truly exogenous with respect to the outcomes of interest? We address this question in two ways. First, we show that the elite survival variable is *not* correlated with the other two measures of elite murder based on information about the assassinations of the historic Polish nobility and the intellectual elites targeted by the Nazis. The latter elite assassinations were clearly selective. Any correlations between these variables and our indicator of elite survival would cast doubt on the exogeneity of the latter measure. Encouragingly, the variables are not correlated with the share of Nazi POWs, but they are correlated with each other (Table B1).

Second, we show that prewar covariates cannot predict the share of surviving officers during WWII. We use 1931 census data, which is the only prewar information that we can disaggregate at the very local level. We explore correlations between the share of Nazi POWs and the following socioeconomic

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the poor quality of scans, the hand-coding was extremely time-consuming. Considering this logistical constraint, we decided to transcribe a random half of the available material rather than all the records.

variables: population density (a proxy for urbanization), number of inhabitants per housing unit (a proxy for wealth), and proportion of nonnative Polish speakers (a measure of cultural diversity). None of these variables correlates significantly with the share of Nazi POWs (column 1 of Table B2). Using data from Charnysh (2015), we also show that our elite survival measure is uncorrelated with prewar religious diversity (notably the proportion of Jews, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics), literacy, employment in agriculture, and share of urban population (column 2 of Table B2).

### 6.3 Results

Column 1 of Table 2 shows the results of our new analysis. We find that higher shares of Polish officers from a municipality who survived Nazi imprisonment are associated with a *lower* incidence of anti-regime protests. Municipalities with the strongest Solidarność resistance had suffered the *greatest* elite losses, as measured by the proportion of Polish officers executed in Soviet POW camps during WWII. In sum, our evidence underscores the causality of our previous findings, suggesting that killing elites, rather than curbing resistance, makes anti-regime protests more likely.

Table 2: Elite survival and resistance

	(1) Protests, logged	(2) Protests, logged	(3) Protests, logged	(4) Protests, logged	(5) Protests, logged
Share Nazi POW	−0.075** (0.029)				
Share Nazi POW (100-km)		−0.082** (0.033)			
Share Nazi POW (150-km)			−0.071** (0.031)		
Share Nazi POW (200-km)				−0.078*** (0.030)	
Share Nazi POW (excl. KOP)					−0.284*** (0.060)
POW, logged	0.540*** (0.041)	0.590*** (0.047)	0.585*** (0.045)	0.577*** (0.045)	0.779*** (0.065)
Population in 1938, logged	0.270*** (0.040)	0.338*** (0.049)	0.310*** (0.046)	0.302*** (0.045)	0.312*** (0.061)
<i>N</i>	1,728	1,350	1,435	1,472	1,025
FE	Province	Province	Province	Province	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown in parentheses \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Source: authors' calculations.

This result is robust to different measurement strategies. Our conclusions are unaltered if we weight our counts of officer POWs by the probability of their identifiability. Note that we identified 52 per cent of Polish officers captured by the Soviets and 46 per cent of Polish officers captured by the Nazis. To address this discrepancy in the identifiability of officers with different histories of wartime imprisonment, we weight the respective estimates by 1.92 in the case of Soviet captives and 2.17 in the case of Nazi captives. The weighted variable produces the same results as our main estimates (see Table B6).

In Appendix B2 we discuss two concerns regarding possible selection into specific types of captivity, as captured by our elite survival measure. The first is about the fact that less-qualified officers could have fought in the eastern theatre of war against the Soviet army. The second concerns possible selection effects with regard to one regiment, the *Korpus Obrony Pogranicza* (the Border Protection Corps, KOP). We address these concerns by: (1) recalculating the elite survival variable with a focus on officers captured in the proximity of the Molotov–Ribbentrop line (within 100/150/200 km bandwidth; columns 2–4 of Table 2); and (2) removing officers who served in the KOP regiment from our survival measure (column 5). The results remain unchanged.

## 7 Mechanisms

Thus far we have demonstrated a robust negative relationship between opposition elite survival and anti-regime protest. We now turn to examine mechanisms that could explain our finding. We do so by relying on a case study of one Polish region, Upper Silesia (see the brown-shaded area in Figure 4). Unlike the rest of Poland, Upper Silesia features remarkably detailed and disaggregated data on the dynamics of communist repression. We rely on data assembled by Hager and Krakowski (2022) that includes information on the communist regime’s surveillance networks as well as several developmental outcomes in the years preceding the *Solidarność* strikes (1975–79).

### 7.1 Repression and outrage

Why did elite murder backfire, leading to more anti-regime resistance in the long run? Most straightforwardly, the observed pattern could be an artefact of the communist regime’s allocation of repressive resources. Perhaps the regime invested more resources in monitoring areas where it knew opposition elites persisted. The intensified surveillance, in turn, would have made it difficult for the local population to organize protests, explaining lower resistance in places with surviving opposition elites. Yet, using data on local investments in surveillance apparatus from Hager and Krakowski (2022), we do not find evidence for this mechanism. Municipalities with higher shares of surviving elites, as captured by our POW-based measure, were not more heavily surveilled, neither in the immediate aftermath of WWII nor in the 1970s and 1980s (Table B7).

The outrage mechanism is likewise implausible. The mechanism proposes that the local population was angered by the assassinations of their elites and sought revenge through protests against the perpetrators. Yet, for a long time, Polish citizens had not known that the Soviet regime was responsible for the murder of the Polish officers during WWII. They knew that the Nazis assassinated local elites during *Aktion Tannenberg*, *Intelligenzaktion*, *AB-Aktion*, and related campaigns. By contrast, the responsibility for the massacres of officers in Katyn remained relatively unclear until the mid-1990s, a long time after the height of the *Solidarność*-led protests. Even though information pointing to the Soviets’ responsibility for the massacres had filtered out in the mid-1940s, Soviet propaganda subsequently successfully managed to obscure the regime’s involvement (Wasilewski 2020). Resistance to the regime was therefore unlikely driven by moral outrage.<sup>7</sup>

### 7.2 Co-optation

In the theory section, we proposed another explanation. The Soviet-backed regime in postwar Poland might have co-opted surviving opposition elites (see, e.g., Escribá-Folch 2013; Martínez 2022). This co-optation could have taken two forms. First, the regime could have co-opted opposition elites by incorporating them into its repressive apparatus and party structures. Alternatively, the regime could have simply benefited from the human and social capital of surviving elites. This capital might have fostered local-level development, thus reducing societal grievances. In what follows, we call these mechanisms ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ co-optation channels. Again, we examine the mechanisms with data from Upper Silesia (wherever possible, supplemented with evidence from other parts of Poland).

#### *Direct co-optation*

To test the direct co-optation channel, we first investigate the leadership cadre of the Polish surveillance apparatus, known as *Urząd Bezpieczeństwa* (since 1956, *Służba Bezpieczeństwa*). We use data on secret police officers who operated in Upper Silesia from 1945 to 1989. To obtain this data, we digitized

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<sup>7</sup> We discuss five more alternative—but ultimately implausible—mechanisms in Section B3 of Appendix B.

archival records of the *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej* (Dubiański et al. 2009), which lists all secret police officers who operated in Upper Silesia throughout communist Poland (882 individuals in total).

We probe the direct co-optation mechanisms by analysing surnames of the secret police officers. We seek to establish how many of these surnames coincide with the surnames of Polish officers imprisoned by the Nazis during WWII. If Nazi POWs were indeed co-opted into the postwar regime's repressive apparatus, we should observe some correspondence between the Nazi POWs' surnames and the surnames of secret police officers. We are aware that some army officers had common names (e.g., Adamczyk or Kowalski). In these cases, the correspondence between the surnames of the secret police and army officers could be purely coincidental. To filter out this proportion of corresponding surnames, we use the surnames of Soviet POWs as a benchmark. All these officers had been executed during the war and thus could not be a part of the postwar secret police. Their surnames, however, allow us to estimate how many army officers' surnames may correspond to secret police officers' surnames simply by chance.

Analysing the surnames of Soviet POWs, we find that 12.6 per cent of their surnames coincide with the surnames of secret police officers. The analogous percentage is marginally (but insignificantly) lower in the case of the surnames of Nazi POWs: 11.7 per cent of surnames correspond to the surnames of secret police officers (see Figure B5). We thus find no evidence that opposition elites who survived WWII repressions were directly co-opted by the Soviet-backed regime into its repressive apparatus. Note that the elites we focus on—former army officers—were the most likely candidates to be incorporated into the regime's repressive apparatus, given their military experience.

The second piece of evidence that helps us rule-out the direct co-optation channel comes from a survey conducted by Treiman and Szelényi (1994) and collaborators in Poland in the early 1990s; Donald Treiman provided the original data to us. The survey, for which post-communist Polish elites were interviewed, included retrospective questions about the elites' involvement in the former regime—namely, their membership in the Communist Party. Throughout the Soviet sphere of influence, individuals who sought to join regime structures were required to join the Communist Party. However, in Table B8 we show that post-communist elites in municipalities with higher shares of surviving officers (Nazi POWs) *do not* report higher membership in the Communist Party than elites in municipalities where fewer survived. This result is not in line with the direct co-optation mechanism. Had surviving members of the opposition been incorporated into the Soviet-backed regime after WWII, we should observe more elites with a history of Communist Party membership in municipalities with more WWII elite survivors.

### *Indirect co-option*

An alternative version of the co-optation mechanism proposes that the post-WWII regime in Poland did not directly incorporate surviving opposition elites into its key structures (party cadres and repressive apparatus). Yet, the regime allowed the surviving elites to work in state institutions and strategic industries, using their knowledge to improve livelihoods at the local level. The areas that benefited from the surviving elite's human and social capital would thus have fewer reasons to rebel against the communist regime, given their comparatively better well-being.

We document the plausibility of this mechanism in two ways: quantitatively and qualitatively. First, using data for Upper Silesia, we show that municipalities with higher shares of surviving opposition elites had better economic outcomes in agriculture, education, and access to 'luxury' services in the years preceding the Solidarność-led strikes.<sup>8</sup> In column 1 of Table 3 we show that the elite survival variable correlates with greater productivity in agriculture in the 1970s, measured as production of grain, potatoes, cattle, pigs, milk, and eggs (measured in terms of Polish złoty and combined into a single index). The regression controls for the predicted output (according to the communist authorities' estimates), al-

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<sup>8</sup> All models control for prewar population size and geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude).

lowing us to capture the amount of ‘additional’ productivity linked to the presence of skilled opposition elites.

Table 3: Elite survival and mechanisms

	(1) Productivity in agriculture (z)	(2) Students per school (z)	(3) Restaurants, logged	(4) Protests (1947–49), logged	(5) Sabotage (1947–49), logged
Share Nazi POW	0.112* (0.065)	−0.894*** (0.292)	0.345 (0.248)	0.035 (0.072)	0.029 (0.057)
POW, logged	0.057 (0.084)	0.201 (0.368)	−0.384 (0.321)	0.254*** (0.094)	0.077 (0.074)
Population in 1938, logged	0.057 (0.087)	−0.050 (0.350)	2.604*** (0.315)	0.529*** (0.092)	0.442*** (0.072)
Productivity, planned (z)	0.958*** (0.030)				
N	170	128	170	170	170
FE	No	No	No	No	No
Controls	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.

Note: the table reports the coefficients of linear regressions of the indicated outcomes on our instrument for elite survival and controls. Note that municipalities without schools are dropped from the analysis in column 2. Standard errors shown in parentheses. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Source: authors’ calculations.

In column 2 we show that the greater shares of surviving opposition elites also correlate with a lower student-per-school ratio, indicating a better quality of public education in the municipalities with more surviving elites. In column 3 we show that higher shares of surviving opposition elites seem to be associated with more restaurants in a municipality, an indication of greater wealth at the local level, even though this last result is not statistically significant ( $p$ -value = 0.17).

The above evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that surviving elites contributed to local-level development and well-being. However, the positive effects of their work needed time. If the indirect co-optation channel is truly at play, we should *not* find the negative effects of elite survival on anti-regime resistance in the years immediately following the war. Simply put, the elites’ social and human capital needed time before it could bring developmental dividends, and thus make local people less motivated to rebel against the regime. We test this implication of our mechanism by relying on Hager and Krakowski (2022), who collected data on anti-communist resistance in 1947–49. As expected, we do not find that elite survival correlates with fewer protests or acts of sabotage in the immediate aftermath of WWII (columns 4–5 of Table 3).

Second, we qualitatively document the link between the presence of surviving opposition elites after WWII and local-level development. We do so by analysing 11 volumes of the *Ziemiańskie w XX Wieku* anthology that includes more than 3,000 biographies of Polish elites and their descendants in the twentieth century. We focus on the elites who survived the war and investigate their occupational situations in communist Poland, searching for evidence of their contributions to local-level development. Below, we present three illustrative cases that underscore the plausibility of the indirect co-optation mechanism.

The first case is a biography of Witold Czarnowski from Kały, one of the traditional Polish elites who survived the war. On 26 August 1939, Czarnowski was mobilized into the Polish army with an assignment to the Modlin regiment. During the battle of Kock on 6 October 1939 he was captured by the *Wehrmacht* and transported to the officer POW camp (*Oflag*) IIB in Arnswalde/Choszczno. Liberated towards the end of the war, Czarnowski returned to Żychlin County and settled 12 km away from his hometown. By profession, Czarnowski was a physician. In April 1945 he resumed his work in the local hospital. In the years that followed, he built a reputation as a highly respected physician. He regularly participated in training courses to remain up to date with the most recent medical practices.

Czarnowski's family members were likewise respected in the community. His wife worked as a hygienist in a local school. All their children obtained university degrees. Their daughter Krystyna became a renowned psychologist, while their daughter Barbara worked in a tuberculosis hospital, eventually becoming the head of the lung disease ward. Their son Jędrzej, in turn, specialized in agriculture and became the director of a large state-owned farm. He improved the local cattle-rearing system by relying on a closed cycle of a lowland black-and-white breed in herd selection. He also used concentrated feed to improve nutritional outcomes. The farm achieved exceptional productivity.

The second case comes from a biography of Jan Dunin-Brzeziński from Osieczany. Before the war, Dunin-Brzeziński studied agriculture in Switzerland. Imprisoned during the war by the Nazis, he returned to his estate shortly afterwards. He became the president of a local agricultural society. In Osieczany, Dunin-Brzeziński played a crucial role in organizing a voluntary fire brigade and served as its commander. He also helped build a local gymnasium and constantly supported extracurricular educational activities, such as scouting trips in the surrounding region. His military experience turned out to be pivotal in rebuilding the bridge over the Raba River, which was destroyed during wartime operations. Thanks to his social connections, Dunin-Brzeziński also managed to secure a loan in Warsaw to construct a local representative building. In wintertime, he organized committees to support the local poor.

The third case regards Antoni Milewski from Żurominek. Milewski was captured by the *Wehrmacht* in 1939 when he was a lieutenant of the Lancers' regiment. He was first detained in Hungary, and subsequently transferred to multiple *Oflags* in Germany and Poland. Despite his turbulent imprisonment history, Milewski survived the war and returned to his home area of Mława County. After the war, Milewski worked in the state-owned timber industry. He eventually became the director of Tartak Państwowy (the State Sawmill), after holding different managerial positions in the company's secretariat. Both the communist regime and anti-communist authorities after 1989 greatly appreciated Milewski's work. After his death in 1997, he was buried in the prestigious Powązki cemetery in Warsaw—a burial place typically reserved for the most distinguished members of Polish society, including renowned writers, painters, diplomats, and politicians.

## 8 Conclusion

This study examines whether murdering opposition elites prevents or sparks anti-regime resistance. We have studied this question in the context of resistance against the foreign-imposed communist regime in post-WWII Poland. Our evidence shows that killing Polish opposition elites hurt the Soviet-backed regime in the long run by making Solidarność-led protests more likely, which eventually led to the end of the regime. In turn, elite survival reduced postwar anti-regime protests in the localities these elites came from. To establish this fact, we compared localities that experienced the greatest elite losses to localities whose elites were spared from repression by ending up in Nazi captivity.

We have provided quantitative and qualitative evidence showing that the negative relationship between elite survival and anti-regime protest can be explained by the indirect co-optation mechanism. We find that surviving elites contributed to better governance in their municipalities and related local-level development. This process, in turn, attenuated the local population's grievances against the regime and reduced its motivation to take to the streets. Without meaning to, the elites facilitated the regime's survival by alleviating local hardships through efficient management of key public institutions and strategic industries. It is possible that the regime allowed opposition elites to fulfil these functions strategically. More plausibly, however, it did so in the absence of any viable alternatives (see Lankina 2021).

What are the long-term consequences of these patterns for Polish democracy and dissent? Albertus and Schouela (2022) find that social mobilization under a dictatorship increases support for democracy in the long run. The missing resistance in some areas with surviving traditional elites in Poland could thus imply that these places had missed an important process that would consolidate democratic support in the long run. Our supplementary evidence, however, does not support this implication. We find no correlations between the post-WWII elite survival and present-day support for the right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice, PiS) party that had been accused of undermining the rule of law nor between elite survival and participation in pro-democracy protests (*Komitet Obrony Demokracji* initiatives; see Table B9). The missing Solidarność resistance does not seem to affect subsequent support for democracy.

What does the case of Poland teach us about elite murder and popular resistance more broadly? The considerations that follow are necessarily tentative. We believe that our findings are particularly likely to generalize to cases in which a foreign-imposed regime faces opposition from *traditional* elites who possess human and social capital that the regime could rely on to improve local-level governance. Similar dividends of elite survival may not materialize in contexts where opposition elites are drawn from revolutionaries or corrupt officials (Albertus 2019; Talibova 2022). The latter elites may not possess knowledge and skills to alleviate local hardships and minimize grievances against the regime, even if they were allowed to work in important institutions and sectors of the economy. Future research should explore the applicability of our theory to these other contexts.

Though the setting we examine is unique, it shares many features with trends observed across the globe throughout centuries. The dilemma of how a foreign-imposed regime should deal with local opposition elites dates back to Ancient Greece, where the Spartans faced the dilemma after having conquered Athens and Thebes (Machiavelli 2009: 19). The English king Henry VIII also faced the opposition elites dilemma during his wars with France in the early fifteenth century (Machiavelli 2009: 17-18). And so did colonial powers in India and Africa in the nineteenth century (MacLean 2010; Verghese 2016), as well as Americans in post-WWII Japan (Tsurumi 2015). Add to that the countries under Soviet influence from 1945 on and Eastern Ukraine, currently occupied by Russia.

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## Appendix

### A Additional background information

#### A1 The Polish nobility and the peasantry

The nobility enjoyed large privileges throughout the modern Polish history. Between 1573 and 1764, they were the only estate that could participate in the parliament and elect kings. Each parliamentarian had the right to veto any legislation ('*liberum veto*'). The noblemen's relationship with peasants was characterized by exploitation and oppression, akin to the American slavery (Pobłocki 2021). Until 1846, Polish noblemen practically owned local peasants and arbitrarily ruled over their lives thanks to '*pańszczyzna*' (serfdom)—the system of feudal rent provided by peasants to the *szlachta* on account of the latter's ownership of the land. Despite this oppressive class system, many peasants revered the noblemen and rarely rebelled against the elites, even during the peak of the Polish 'slavery' times (Pobłocki 2021: 279–90). The story of Kazimierz Działyński is illustrative of reverence that noblemen enjoyed in their places of origin. When Działyński died in 1956 in Sopot, about 1,000 people from his hometown Gielbów travelled 545 km to attend his funeral.

#### A2 Historical background

The section provides historical background for our case study. First, we outline the demise of Polish elites during World War II (WWII), decimated by Nazi and Soviet repressions. Next, we discuss the establishment of the communist regime in postwar Poland and the resistance of Polish citizens that followed. We describe the communist regime's ambivalent relationship with traditional Polish elites who survived the war, and their role in the new state.

##### *WWII and Polish eliticide*

On September 1st, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The event marked the beginning of World War II. The war spelled disaster for the Polish elites. Before the invasion, the Nazis had drawn up detailed lists of political leaders, industry heads, and intellectuals to be persecuted and murdered. According to the Nazi leadership's plans (later formalized in the *Generalplan Ost* (General Plan/Strategy East)), Poland was to serve as additional Lebensraum for Germans. Polish natives were to be removed by deportation and murder or made servants. As a first step, the Polish elites were to be eliminated. The strategy of elite murder followed a deep conviction by Hitler that 'only a nation whose upper levels are destroyed can be pushed into the ranks of slavery' (cited in Snyder 2010: 126).

Before this plan could be turned into reality, Poland had to be defeated militarily. This role fell to the *Wehrmacht*, the German army, which had been brought in line with the Nazi regime, but maintained a degree of autonomy. The Polish army comprised about one million soldiers but was technologically disadvantaged compared to the *Wehrmacht*. The fierce fighting that ensued the invasion led to a series of defeats for the Polish during which about 65,000 soldiers were killed and 400,000 ended up in German captivity (Lebedeva 2000; Pakulski 2015).

Before the invasion, the Nazis and the Soviet Union had secretly agreed to divide up Poland in the infamous Secret Protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. In accordance with this agreement, two weeks into the war, on 17 September 1939, the Soviet forces invaded Poland from the east. By this point, the Polish army had already been largely defeated by German forces, so fighting was less intense.

However, about 250,000 soldiers who had retreated to eastern Poland from the advancing German troops were taken captives by the Soviet forces attacking in their rear.<sup>9</sup>

The defeat allowed the Nazis to move forward with their plan to destroy the Polish elite.<sup>10</sup> The plan was carried out mainly by *Einsatzgruppen* (designated death squads), who were tasked with finding and systematically eliminating individuals recorded in the so-called *Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen* (Special Prosecution Book Poland) and related lists. Occasional protest by *Wehrmacht* leaders against the persecution of civilians were brushed aside with the argument that the *Einsatzgruppen* had received their mandate directly from Himmler, Heydrich, and Hitler. In the first nine weeks of the occupation, 24,000 members of the Polish elite were murdered, a number that was to rise to an estimated 90,000 over the course of the occupation (Pakulski 2015: 52).<sup>11</sup>

The Nazi plan to murder the Polish elites was mirrored by the plans of the Soviet leadership. The Soviets lacked the detailed lists of Polish elites that the Germans had drawn up. Instead, they focused on officers in their captivity. Many of the officers were part of the traditional aristocratic elites in the country, and elite-status was even more common among reserve officers, who often were medical professionals, lawyers, scientists, or university professors in their non-military lives (Snyder 2010: 125). While the Soviets released regular soldiers, they kept officers captive—with the ultimate aim to eliminate them. This was achieved by means of mass executions. The most notorious massacres took place in Charków and Katyń, where a total of 22,000 imprisoned officers were shot. Most of the officers' families were deported Siberia and other remote areas where many of them perished (Lebedeva 2000). Pakulski (2015: 57) provides a summary of the German and Soviet assault on the Polish elite. By the end of the occupation, 70 per cent of Senators, over 60 per cent of public intellectuals and journalists, 58 per cent of barristers, 40–45 percent of medical doctors, 40 per cent of professors, 33 per cent of teachers, 30 per cent of scientists, technicians and academics, 28 per cent of priests, and 26 per cent of lawyers had been murdered. This compares to a 18–20 percent fatality rate in the general Polish population.

While the destruction of the Polish elite was thorough, one place that provided shelter was German captivity in the role of prisoner of war. The German Reich was a signatory state of the 1927 Geneva Conventions on Prisoners of War, and largely followed the rules prescribed by the convention, if only with regard to captured officers.<sup>12</sup> Under the Geneva rules, officers were to be held separately, a rule implemented by Nazi Germany in the form of *Oflags* (officer camps). These camps were organized by the *Wehrmacht*, who had an interest that their own captured officers were treated with decency. In sharp contrast with the situation in Soviet captivity, conditions in German captivity were relatively humane, and mortality rates low. Remarkably, even Polish officers of Jewish faith survived in German POW camps until the end of the war (Mędykowski 2018; Overmans 2005).

### *Post-WW2 regime and resistance*

The Molotov-Ribbentrop alliance between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union did not last long. On 22 June 1941, the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. Despite initial losses, the Soviets eventually withstood

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<sup>9</sup> A number of prisoners were later exchanged between German and Soviet forces, with around 40,000 Polish prisoners who hailed from western Poland and the German eastern territories turned over to the Germans, and about 15,000 individuals from eastern Poland being transferred into Soviet captivity (Lebedeva 2000: 31).

<sup>10</sup> The plan carried several code-names, notably *Operation Tannenberg*, *Intelligenzaktion*, and *AB-Aktion*.

<sup>11</sup> Over the course of the war, the occupation assumed an increasingly genocidal, i.e., indiscriminate, character. Alongside the killing of 2.9 million Jewish Poles—almost the complete Jewish population of the country—2.8 million ethnic Poles were murdered (Materski et al. 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Regular soldiers, in contrast, were regularly stripped of their prisoner-of-war status, and made to work in agriculture and industry. While conditions were often harsh, the survival rates of these prisoners still compared favorably to those of other groups.

the attacks. The Soviets' successful defense changed the overall course of the war. The Nazis were cornered to retreat and started losing territories in the east from 1943 on. These developments paved way to the Nazis' final defeat in 1945 and the Soviets' capture of the German capital, Berlin. Following WWII, the victorious Soviet Union dominated the majority of central and eastern Europe. In Poland, they imposed a Marxist-Leninist government, called the Polish People's Republic (henceforth, PPR). The PPR was a single party system in which the Polish United Workers' Party was the dominant political force. Unsurprisingly, the foreign-imposed regime-change roused resistance among the former members of the toppled regime. Remnants of the Polish army tried to resist the Soviets towards the end of WWII, when it became clear that the Soviet army came not as liberator, but occupier. Fortunately, from the Soviet's point of view, after years of war and persecution by both Nazis and Soviet forces, the Polish armed resistance was weak so that the insurgency never gained full steam (Applebaum 2012).

The rare survivors among the Polish nobility faced a grim new reality under the communists. The communist regime confiscated the elites' land properties. Initially, members of the nobility were not even allowed to reside in the provinces where they lived before the war. Children of former noblemen were not allowed to study. Yet the new Soviet-backed authorities quickly realized that the traditional Polish elites possessed valuable skills that were indispensable for governing a postwar Poland that was struck by multiple crises (for a similar situation in Russia, see Lankina 2021). Thus, very quickly, members of traditional elites were allowed again to become civil servants, work in state institutions, manage schools, and hold leadership positions in strategic industries. In many places, this strategy brought significant developmental dividends, alleviating economic hardships.

However, the structural problems of the centrally planned economy persisted. Life in the PPR represented a constant struggle to make ends meet, and over the years Poles grew increasingly frustrated with the regime. Resistance against the malfunctioning command economy and new corrupt elites began early (Kenney 1997). Large-scale protests began as early as the mid-1950s. Regular changes to production quotas meant that industrial workers saw their incomes dwindle. In 1956 workers in the city of Poznań organized a strike and demanded compensation. Within a few hours, up to 100,000 people joined the workers, turning the strike into a full-fledged uprising. Similar protests took place in 1970 when a sudden increase in food prices led citizens to rise against the regime in a number of coastal cities. Again, the regime reacted with brute force, killing dozens of protesters (Hager and Krakowski 2022).

In the early 1980s, protests organized by workers of state firms—sparked, again, by changes to quotas and prices—led to the creation of NSZZ Solidarność, the first independent trade union in post-WWII Poland. Solidarność created a broad, non-violent, anti-communist social movement, involving more than 9 million individuals. The PPR's authorities attempted to counter the movement and declared martial law in 1981. The following years saw bitter fights. The regime was ultimately forced to negotiate with the opposition and agreed to hold (semi-)free elections in 1989. A Solidarność-led coalition won by a large margin, paving the way to Poland's democratic transformation.



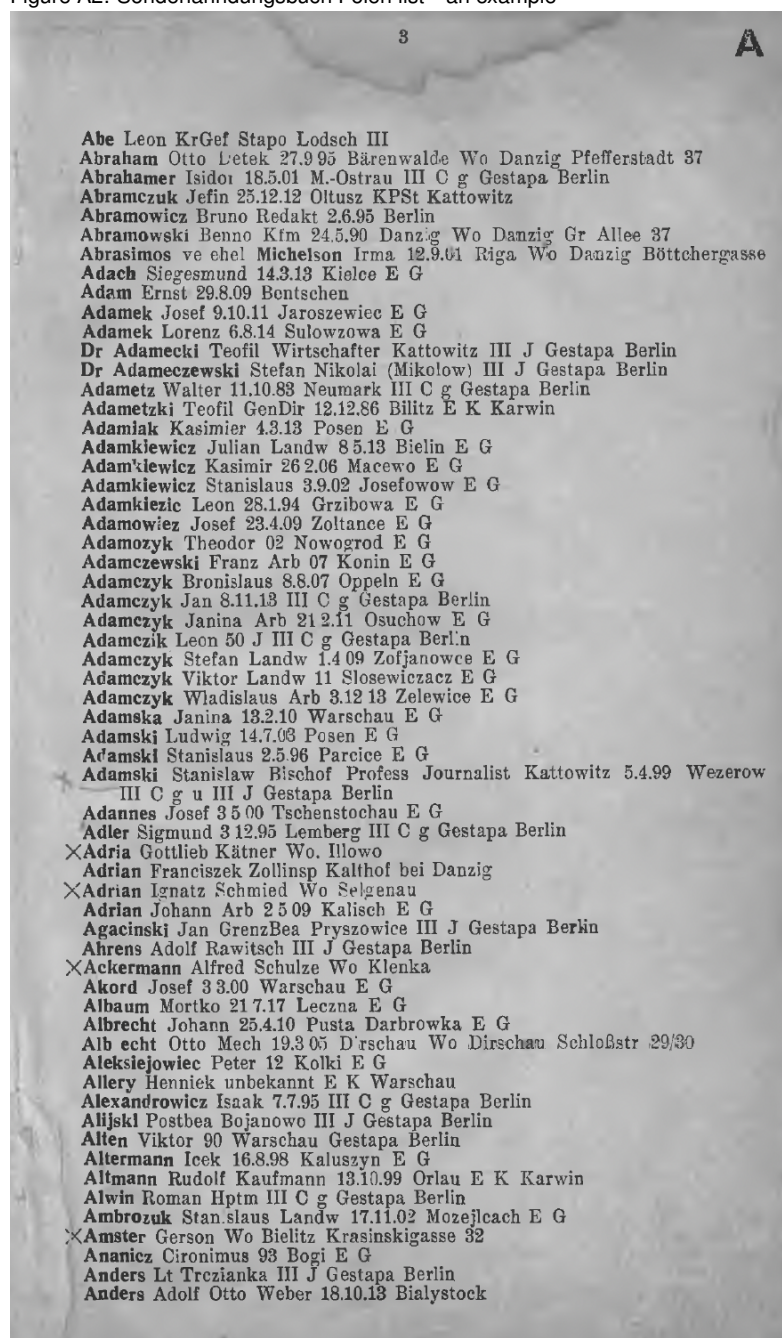
Figure A1: Oflag transportation lists—an example

- 1 -									- 2 -					
Stamm- angabe	Nr. der Ein- trags- karte	Name	Vorname	Geburts- tag	Geburts- ort	Her- kunft des Mannes	Beziehungs- name der Frau	Name und Wohnort der in Betracht kommenden Person	Eintrag	Truppennr. (in R. u. a.)	Wohnort Nr.	Ort und Tag der Gefangennahme	Bemerkungen, Verletzungen, Tod (Beerdigungsort)	Bemerkungen (z. B. Angabe von anderen Lagern, bei denen der Mann sich befindet)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Pole	141	Pietrzak	Josef	5.3.39	Opatów	Polen	Fujakow	Wojewoda Pietrzakowa Barnow nad Bug ul. Komarowa 11 m 6	Hauptmann I. R. 35. Funk	-	3.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	3.1.1940
Pole	142	Grodzicki	Johann	23.3.06.	Kraków	Polen	Kondole	Wojewoda Grodzicki Wien ul. Pilsudskiego 15.	Hauptmann Art. Rgt. 9	-	4.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	
Pole	143	Amster	Josef	18.3.04	Włocławek	Polen	Kowalski	Kristina Włocławek ul. ... m. 11.	Hauptmann 9. Art. Rgt.	-	3.9.39.	Konstanz polen	gesund	2.1.1940
Pole	144	Tyrawski	Stanisław	2.10.04.	Piotrków	Polen	Tyrawski	Wojewoda Tyrawski Lwow ul. ... m. 12	Hauptmann 1. Rgt. 9	-	4.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	
Pole	145	Wojciecki	Jan	23.7.04.	Włocławek	Polen	Wojciecki	Wojewoda Włocławek ul. ... m. 12	Hauptmann 9. Art. Rgt.	-	3.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	
Pole	146	Radwanski	Mieczysław	25.3.33.	Opatów	Polen	Radwanski	Wojewoda Radwanski Kreis Birschen Zomerellen	Hauptmann Feldrichter	-	4.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	
Pole	147	Tokarzewski	Tadeusz	25.1.09.	Włocławek	Polen	Tokarzewski	Wojewoda Tokarzewski ul. ... m. 12	Oberlt. I. R. 34.	-	3.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	
Pole	148	Smuszewski	Michał	3.6.07.	Włocławek	Polen	Smuszewski	Wojewoda Smuszewski Stacja dom kolejowy 41.	Oberlt. 9. Art. Rgt.	-	3.9.39.	Schweiz	gesund	

Note: example of a transportation lists for officers captured as prisoners of war by Nazi Germany.

Source: this and similar documents were made accessible to us courtesy of Central Museum of Prisoners of War (Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych) in Opole, Poland.

Figure A2: Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen list—an example

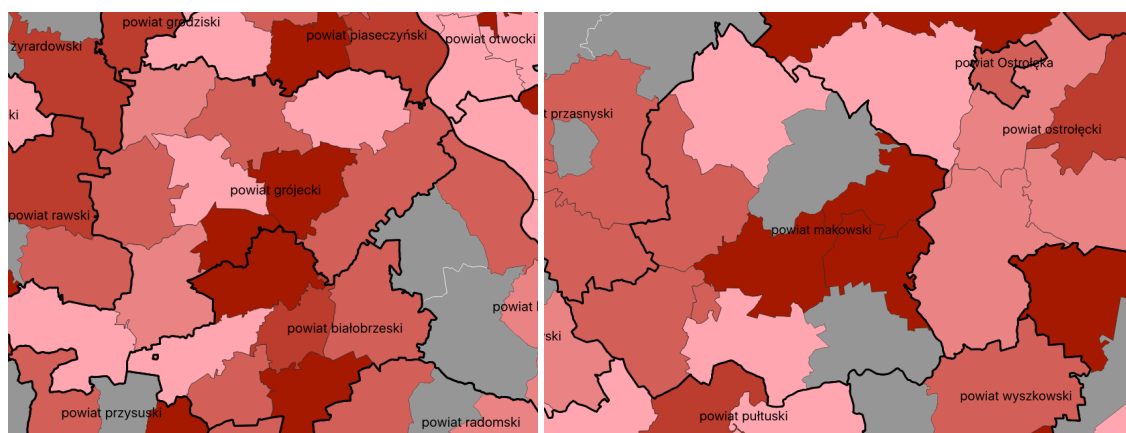


Note: screenshot of a page of the *Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen*, the source we used to geocode the murder of intellectual elites.

Source: the *Sonderfahndungsbuch* is made available online by the Silesian Digital Library (Śląska Biblioteka Cyfrowa) at: <https://sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/27260/edition/24330/sonderfahndungsbuch-polen?language=en>.



Figure A3: Shares of surviving elites (Nazi POW) within provinces—detail



Note: the figure plots the share of Polish officers imprisoned by the Nazi out of Polish officers imprisoned by both the Nazi and the Soviet by municipalities (*gmina*) in Grójecki (left) and Makowski (right) provinces (*powiat*). The areas marked with darker red color indicate higher shares of Nazi prisoners. The areas marked in grey indicate localities with no officer prisoners of war. The black lines outline administrative borders of provinces.

Source: authors' compilation. This map was created using QGIS (version 3.22.13). GIS shapefiles were downloaded from the Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography (Główny Urząd Geodezji i Kartografii) at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/gugik/dane-udostepniane-bez-platnie-do-pobrania-z-serwisu-wwwgeoportalgovpl>.

## B Additional analyses

Table B1: Correlations between different measures of elite murder

	(1) Share Nazi POW	(2) Share Nazi POW	(3) Deaths Soviet POW	(4) Deaths Soviet POW	(5) Deaths Historic Nobility	(6) Deaths Historic Nobility
Deaths Historic Nobility	0.014 (0.057)		0.313*** (0.036)			
Deaths Intellectual Elites		-0.036 (0.034)		0.170*** (0.020)	0.128*** (0.012)	0.136*** (0.015)
N	1728	1728	2411	2411	2411	1728
Sample	Restricted	Restricted	Full	Full	Full	Restricted

Note: the table reports correlations between different operationalizations of our outcome variables, as indicated. Restricted sample refers to the sample of municipalities with non-missing values on the Share Nazi POW variable. Standard errors shown below \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B2: Elite survival and pre-war covariates

	(1) Share Nazi POW	(2) Share Nazi POW
POW, logged	-0.039* (0.020)	-0.001 (0.019)
Population in 1931, logged	0.023 (0.021)	-0.029 (0.021)
Population density	0.405 (0.248)	
Houses per capita	9.723 (6.317)	
% Native Polish speakers	-0.001 (0.001)	
% Jews		-1.930 (1.338)
% Catholics		-0.944 (1.238)
% Greek Catholics		-0.863 (1.237)
% Orthodox		-0.984 (1.229)
% Evangelical		-0.885 (1.286)
% Urban		0.137 (0.107)
% Employed in agriculture		-0.121 (0.115)
% Literate		-0.624* (0.331)
N	162	167
FE	Voivodship	Voivodship

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated covariates measured in 1931. Standard errors shown below \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

## B1 Descriptive evidence: robustness

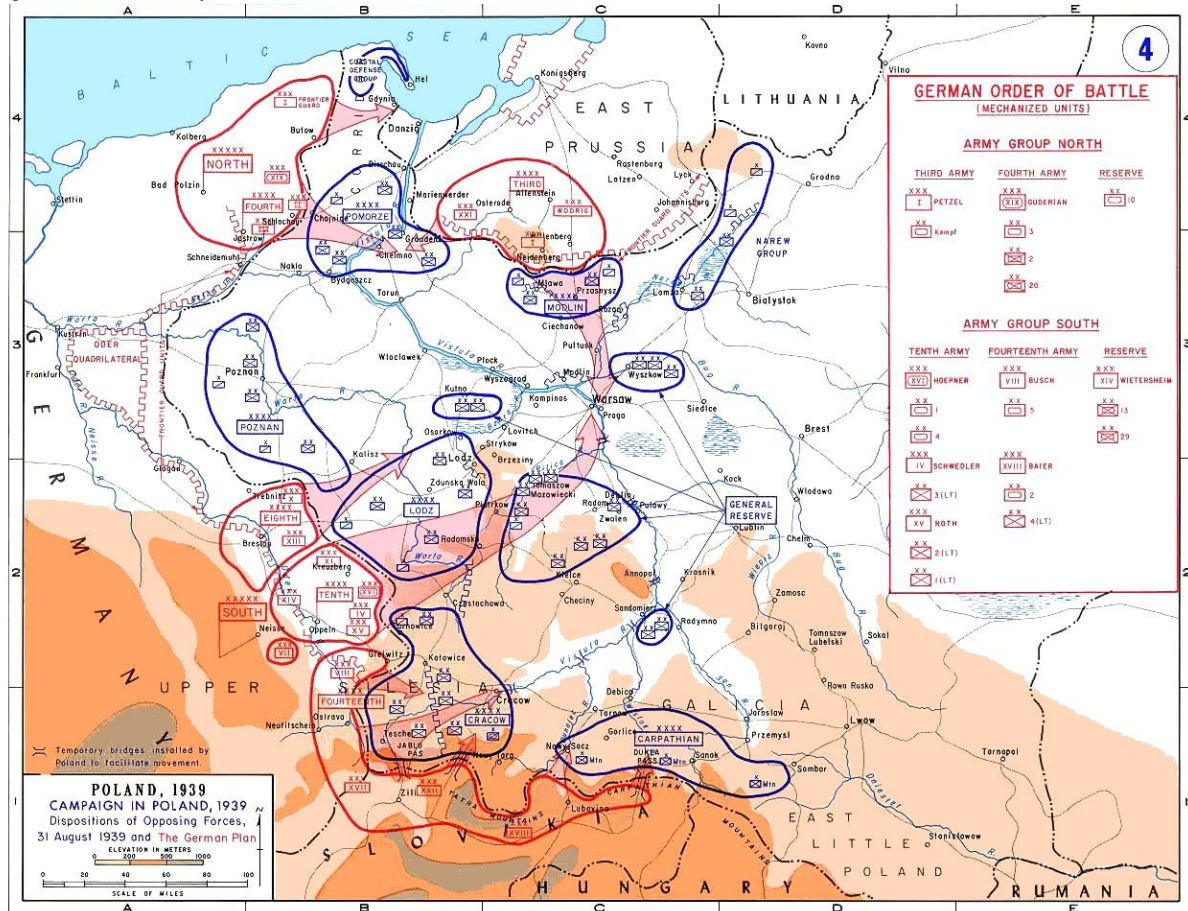
We probe the robustness of the above findings in three ways. First, we restrict our sample to municipalities that before WWII (in 1931) were part of Poland. After WWII, the newly acquired territories in western Poland were repopulated by people from eastern territories (Charnysh 2019). These new settlers had looser links to the local elites, and therefore could be less affected by their loss or survival after the war. Table B3 confirms our findings in the restricted sample. Second, we restrict the sample to municipalities with population size below 20,000 inhabitants. We do so because the potential impact of eliminating a handful of opposition elites may be rather limited in very large municipalities, such as Warsaw (capital), Gdańsk or Katowice, compared to smaller localities. Table B4 shows that our results are substantively unchanged in these analyses. Third, we use an alternative approach to account for potential presence of geographical confounders (e.g., the west–east divide). Instead of using province fixed effects, we include the geographic coordinates of the municipalities’ centroid (latitude and longitude) as control variables. This specification allows us to address a legitimate concern that province fixed effects considerably reduce variation in the elimination vis-à-vis survival of opposition elites due to relative homogeneity in elite murder within these tiny administrative areas. Again, the findings are firmly confirmed (Table B5).

## B2 Natural experiment: robustness

Below, we address two legitimate concerns regarding possible selection into specific type of captivity, as captured by our elite survival measure. First, less qualified officers could have fought in the eastern theater of war against the Soviet army. In the end, the Polish army prioritized the task of repelling Nazi forces in the west, possibly positioning their best regiments there (see Figure B4). If officers in the west were indeed more qualified, Soviet captives would on average be militarily less capable than Nazi captives, which could have implications for the future elites’ capacity to mobilize anti-communist protests. To address this concern, we recalculate the elite survival variable by focusing on officers captured in the proximity of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line (within 100/150/200-km bandwidth). These officers were captured in the final phase of the 1939 resistance, and were most likely drawn from deep military reserves. They should therefore be more comparable across the type of imprisonment. Encouragingly, we find that restricting our sample to officers captured around the Molotov-Ribbentrop line does not alter our conclusions (columns 2–4 of Table 2).

Second, historical evidence suggests that one Polish regiment that participated in 1939 resistance, *Korpus Obrony Pogranicza* (Frontier Defense Corps; later KOP after Polish acronym), had had some of its best officers relocated to other regiments during the war. Importantly, this regiment stationed in eastern Poland and its soldiers had mainly ended up in Soviet captivity. Before this happened, however, the KOP unit had seen their most experienced officers transferred to the western front, where some of them became Nazi POW. These transfers arguably made the remaining officers serving in the KOP unit less comparable to Nazi POW than Soviet POW from other regiments. For one, they were militarily less experienced, which again could have implications for the future elites’ capacity to mobilize anti-communist protests. We address the problem by creating another version of our elite survival variables in which we remove officers who served in the KOP regiment. Encouragingly, eliminating the KOP officers from our measure does not change our results (column 5 of Table 2).

Figure B4: Polish army units at the outset of WWII



Note: the blue circles indicate the position of the Polish armies involved in September 1939 resistance.

Source: the map is made available to us courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History.

Table B3: Elite murder and resistance (municipalities of pre-war Poland in 1931)

	(1) Protets, logged	(2) Protets, logged	(3) Protets, logged
Deaths Historic Nobility, logged	0.246*** (0.071)		
Historic Nobility in 1938, logged	0.077** (0.039)		
Deaths Intellectual Elites, logged		0.216*** (0.037)	
Deaths Soviet POW, logged			0.292*** (0.052)
POW, logged			0.193*** (0.044)
Population in 1938, logged	0.269*** (0.035)	0.277*** (0.034)	0.172*** (0.033)
N	1793	1793	1793
FE	Province	Province	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below  
 \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B4: Elite murder and resistance (municipalities with population below 20,000 residents in 1938)

	(1) Protets, logged	(2) Protets, logged	(3) Protets, logged
Deaths Historic Nobility, logged	0.198*** (0.068)		
Historic Nobility in 1938, logged	0.089** (0.036)		
Deaths Intellectual Elites, logged		0.181*** (0.033)	
Deaths Soviet POW, logged			0.321*** (0.049)
POW, logged			0.101*** (0.039)
Population in 1938, logged	0.170*** (0.032)	0.176*** (0.031)	0.128*** (0.031)
N	2205	2205	2205
FE	Province	Province	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below  
 \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B5: Elite murder and resistance (GIS controls)

	(1) Protets, logged	(2) Protets, logged	(3) Protets, logged
Deaths Historic Nobilty, logged	0.562*** (0.074)		
Historic Nobilty in 1938, logged	0.068* (0.039)		
Deaths Intellectual Elites, logged		0.427*** (0.033)	
Deaths Soviet POW, logged			0.428*** (0.057)
POW, logged			0.098** (0.046)
Population in 1938, logged	0.547*** (0.030)	0.511*** (0.030)	0.501*** (0.030)
N	2477	2477	2477
FE	No	No	No
Controls	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below  
\*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B6: Elite survival and resistance (weighted survival indicator)

	(1) Protests, logged
Share Nazi POW (weighted)	-0.077*** (0.029)
POW, logged	0.543*** (0.041)
Population in 1938, logged	0.270*** (0.040)
N	1728
FE	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B7: Elite survival and surveillance

	(1) Surveillance (1945-86)	(2) Surveillance (1975-86)
Share Nazi POW	0.063 (0.089)	0.007 (0.050)
POW, logged	0.313*** (0.115)	0.209*** (0.064)
Population in 1938, logged	0.875*** (0.113)	0.273*** (0.063)
N	170	170
FE	No	No
Controls	Lat. & long.	Lat. & long.

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B8: Elite survival and cooptation into the Communist Party

	(1) Communist Party member
Share Nazi POW	-0.031 (0.029)
POW, logged	0.077*** (0.028)
Age	-0.006*** (0.000)
Male	0.119*** (0.014)
Population in 1938, logged	0.009 (0.029)
N	2519
FE	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.

Table B9: Elite survival and long-term support for democracy

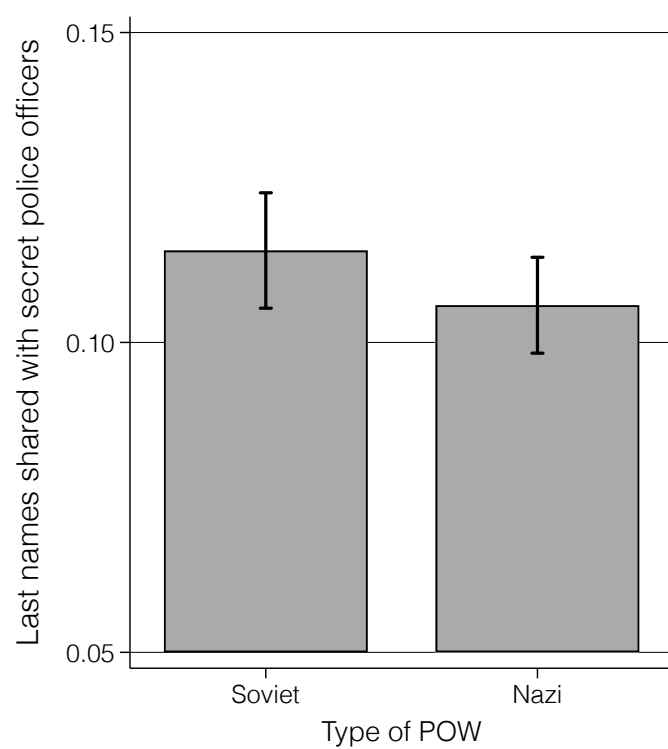
	(1) Pro-Democracy Protests (2015-18), logged	(2) Law and Justice support (2019)	(3) Law and Justice support (2020)
Share Nazi POW	0.002 (0.012)	0.002 (0.005)	0.000 (0.005)
POW, logged	0.052*** (0.017)	-0.072*** (0.007)	-0.076*** (0.007)
Population in 1938, logged	0.066*** (0.016)	-0.034*** (0.007)	-0.038*** (0.007)
N	1728	1728	1728
FE	Province	Province	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcomes on the indicated variables. Law and Justice (PiS, Polish acronym) support refers to the results of the 2019 parliamentary election (column 2) and the 2020 presidential election (column 3), measuring the percentage of voters that supported PiS in a given municipality. In both election, the Law and Justice party won. Standard errors shown below \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations. Data on pro-democracy protests comes from the list of *Komitet Obrony Demokracji* archival events, retrieved from: <https://ruchkod.pl/>.



Figure B5: Nazi and Soviet POW and secret police officers in post-WWII Poland



Note: the figure plots the proportions of corresponding surnames of Polish officers in Nazi and Soviet captivity during WWII and secret police officers in post-WWII Poland (1945-89).

Source: authors' elaboration.

### B3 Alternative explanations

In what follows, we discuss five additional explanations our finding. First, the observed differences in postwar anti-regime resistance could stem from the prosocial effects of exposure to violence. Some studies have found that individuals exposed to violence participate in politics at higher rates (Blattman 2009). Perhaps, residents of municipalities with more assassinations of the local elites became more willing to participate in politics in general, simply because they had been exposed to these extreme forms of violence against other members of their communities. And, Solidarność-led strikes offered a convenient venue to express their urge for political participation. To examine this mechanism, we study turnout in the first free and competitive election after the communist rule in Poland.<sup>13</sup> We do not find that individuals in municipalities with higher shares of surviving elites participate in politics at higher rates, as measured by electoral turnout (see column 1 of Table B10). This result is thus not in accord with the above explanation.

Second, the preservation of vested interests by surviving Polish elites could be another possible explanation of our findings. The elites are typically associated with maintaining the conservative social order in their areas of influence. Therefore, municipalities with more surviving elites might simply be more conservative. Predominantly working-class Solidarność, in turn, could have found it harder to mobilize citizens for anti-regime protests in these more conservative localities (see Heyns and Bialecki 1991). We evaluate this channel by measuring vote share for conservative parties in a post-communist election when restitution of property was debated, that is in 1997.<sup>14</sup> We focus on the vote share for Unia Wolności, a party that most strongly advocated for the restitution of property and thus supported the maintenance of the very conservative social order. Again, we do not find that municipalities with higher shares of surviving elites supported Unia Wolności more strongly (see column 2 of Table B10). This result is not in line with the above explanation.

Third, lower levels of protests in localities with greater shares of surviving elites could also be related to the elites' trauma linked to wartime experiences. Note that our measure of elite survival relies on the elite army officers who survived Nazi POW camps. Perhaps, the experience of Nazi captivity triggered a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among these officers (see Kijewski and Freitag 2018). The PTSD syndrome, in turn, could have lead to the officers' withdrawal from the public life and their related unwillingness to participate in or organize protests. While we cannot test this conjecture quantitatively, we find it highly unlikely given the qualitative evidence on elites' postwar biographies (see Section 7.2). Contrary to the PTSD implications, many of the surviving elites actively participated in the civic life on their communities, supporting community initiatives and managing important social institutions.

Fourth, perhaps survivors from Nazi camps simply supported the Soviet occupation because their experiences with the Nazis would have made them weary of another German invasion. If this were the case, the Soviet occupation could have been seen as a form of security against the revival of German oppression by the elite survivors. These elites would thus have had no reason to rebel against the communist regime. On the contrary, over time, they could have developed pro-Soviet views and indoctrinate their fellow citizens along those lines. We rule out this explanation on three grounds. First, Nazi Germany had been overwhelmingly defeated in the war. The country's east had been turned into a Soviet satellite state (the German Democratic Republic), and the western part (the Federal Republic of Germany) had developed a distinctively non-militaristic culture and was contained by the United States and other former western allies. Germany was thus hardly seen as a real danger after WWII. Second, the explanation

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<sup>13</sup> During PPR, elections were not free and many citizens voted because of coercion. Besides, there is almost no variation in voting, with all localities allegedly supporting the Communist Party at the 95%+ level. The elections immediately after 1989, in turn, were not competitive, with the communist successor party emerging as a dominant force (plausibly, thanks to the more established party structures; see Grzymala-Busse 2006).

<sup>14</sup> The 1990s electoral data was used in Zarycki and Nowak (2000) and kindly shared with us by Tomasz Zarycki.

is inconsistent with our correlational finding which shows that the murder of Polish elites in Soviet POW camps also correlates with more resistance. Finally, historical accounts suggest that the Soviet regime was hardly less harmful to the Polish society than the Nazi regime (Gross 1988), especially so from the perspective of the elites of Polish society. After all, Poland had been repeatedly at war with Russia and the Soviet Union, the last time prior to WWII during the Polish-Soviet War 1919–1921, which cost many Polish elites their lives (see Figure 1 in the main text). It is thus hard to imagine that the Polish elites saw the Soviet occupation as the lesser of two evils.

Fifth and last, the survival of elites could have reduced the number of protests if the Polish elites were ‘a snobbish, selfish and lazy estate’ that had ‘sold’ their country to foreign powers in the eighteenth century, as communist propaganda used to portray the elites (Łuczak 2020: 62). However, in contrast to these negative portrayals of Polish elites, Łuczak (2020: 62) forcefully argues that in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was often wealthy aristocrats who were the precursors of innovative and modernizing activities in Poland. The evidence we provide in Table 3, where we find that municipalities with higher shares of surviving opposition elites had better economic outcomes in agriculture, education, and access to ‘luxury’ services, is rather in accord with the positive image of the Polish elites. We thus find the above mechanism ultimately implausible.

Table B10: Elite survival and the 1997 election

	(1) Turnout (1997)	(2) Unia Wolności support (1997)
Share Nazi POW	0.323 (0.431)	0.235 (0.297)
POW, logged	3.488*** (0.601)	3.339*** (0.414)
Population in 1938, logged	-0.350 (0.587)	0.792* (0.405)
N	1728	1728
FE	Province	Province

Note: the table reports coefficients of linear regressions of the outcome on the indicated variables. Standard errors shown below \*p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01.

Source: authors' calculations.