



THE ROAD TO SORROW

State Apologies and why they -and why they don't- happen

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH HERE

State apologies seem to be having a moment. They have become a tool for politicking that goes beyond the expression of remorse. It has been cited as crucial to the betterment of foreign relations and as a key foreign policy tool.

The author is looking to contribute to the understanding of the process of state apologies and contribute to the field of Geopolitics of Peace, a field that Megoran (2013) calls often ignored.

The main research question is to discover why State Apologies happen in some cases and they don't in others.

METHODOLOGY



The methodology chosen was Process Tracing through the development of case studies. The methodology combines qualitative and quantitative methods.

Sources were varied and wide. Historical archives, academic papers, newspaper reports and speeches from the leaders of the countries involved. A "Road to an Apology" model was created to follow through this Process Tracing.

CASE SELECTION



Three cases were selected: one with a complete apology cycle and two with an incomplete apology cycle. The complete apology cycle selected was the US involvement (and apology) in the Guatemalan Civil War and the incomplete apology cycle cases selected were the US involvement (and non-apology) in El Salvador's Civil War and the Turkey non-apology for the Armenian Genocide. The cases were selected because they offer different interpretation possibilities for the "Road to an Apology" and they involve similar-sized offending-victim country relationship.

SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION & HYPOTHESIS

By following a theoretical review and concept operationalization with a preliminary study of the cases, the following hypotheses were spearheaded:

- That for an apology to happen, there has to be a strong *pressure to act* that comes from both within the offending country and from the international community;
- That for an apology to happen, the victim country should be perceived as offering economic advantages for the future;
- That for an apology to happen, the gravity of the crimes has to be considered high and grave enough to merit one.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Through a careful process tracing of both cases, the following results were gathered:

Denial of the crime seems to be a default MO for states that commit crime. In Guatemala and El Salvador's cases, it involved outright turning a blind eye to the human rights abuses that the local military forces were perpetrating against the populations and the United States still continuing the military aid to these countries despite the fact that this had been declared illegal by Congress.

Through a combination of domestic and international pressure (but mostly domestic), the United States turned into a period of reckoning and recognizing the crimes. The pressure from the media, the opposing parties and scholars in general created the right moment for a Bill Clinton apology tour that saw the Guatemala apology happen and an incomplete statement of regret in the case of El Salvador.

Turkey, on the other hand, has lacked that internal pressure (apart from some small campaigns by intellectuals and lawyers) to apologize and sees the denial as part of their "psyche" and national pride. A 2015 expression of regret by Erdogan has been as far as the government has come but still denying the worst of the crimes—therefore ignoring the gravity of the events as a reason to apologize.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the revelations of the process tracing and case comparison, it can be summarized that for an apology to happen, the most important factor is a measure of domestic pressure into apologizing: by the government, by local institutions or by the media. How big the crime was, how big the economic opportunities are seem to be less relevant as long as there is a willingness to apologize.