"Pogroms, Networks, and Migration
The Jewish Migration from the Russian Empire To the United States 1881-1914"

Abstract

The migration of one and a half million Jews from the Russian Empire to the United States during the years 1881-1914 is commonly linked to the occurrence of pogroms, eruptions of anti-Jewish mob violence, that took place mainly in two waves in 1881-1882 and in 1903-1906. Although the common perception that pogroms were a major cause for Jewish migration is now questioned by historians, little quantitative evidence exists to support or refute it. I construct a new data set that matches hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants to their respective hometowns in the Russian Empire over the years 1900-1914, and trace the evolution of migration networks over the years 1861-1920 using incorporation records of 1,476 Jewish hometown-based associations in New York. Additionally, the locations of hundreds of pogroms that occurred during the two waves are identified. Mapping the pogroms, as well as the yearly migration flows from more than 200 districts provides a first close look into the geographic evolution of the Jewish migration and the way it was affected by pogroms. I find no evidence that migration in its earliest stages was caused by the 1881-1882 pogroms; instead, post-1881 migration was a continuation of a pre-existing spatial trend of nascent migration. The second wave of pogroms, however, increased the rate of migration from the afflicted districts by at least 10-20 percent, although the evidence on whether it changed the demographic composition of the migrants is inconclusive. Above all, there was a dominant pattern of convergence in rates of migration across districts. I interpret these findings as an indication that the time of the beginning and the intensification of Jewish migration were chiefly determined by spatial diffusion of chain-migration networks victims of the first wave of pogroms could not respond by migrating because they were not yet personally linked to previous migrants. This supports the diffusionist view of European migration patterns, relating the late arrival of mass migration from southern and eastern-Europe to slow spatial diffusion of migration networks.