ENEMY WITHIN THE GATES

THE LONG-RUN EFFECTS OF STALIN’S ETHNIC PURGES

The many episodes of violence over the past century have meanwhile generated a research base that addresses unilateral violence wherein the perpetrator is one’s hostile government. A number of fascinating studies have been produced on this topic, for example, the long-term consequences of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Wang, 2019), anti-Semitic persistence in Germany (Voigtländer & Voth, 2012), and the Ukrainian famine of 1932 (Naumenko, 2019; Zhukov & Talibova, 2018). Economists and political scientists have also examined the long-term effects of state-directed forced relocations after World War II, such as the forced migrations of Poles or Czechs to the former Nazi territories of East Prussia (Becker, Grosfeld, Grosjean, Voigtländer, & Zhuravskaya, 2020) or the Sudetenland (Testa, 2021), preceded by the relocation of Germans to the newly formed Federal Republic (Braun & Kvasnicka, 2014). Despite interesting and innovative methodological advances in economics, it is still challenging to explain how long-run effects come about, why they persist for so long in the first place, and why they vary over space and time.

This paper aims to provide evidence on the mechanisms by investigating the ethnicization of Stalin’s Great Terror: Between 1937 and 1953, 2.8 million Soviet citizens of the same ethnic background as the hostile nations the Soviet Union was at war with or who were sympathetic with these nations, were forcefully removed from their homelands and relocated to Central Asia, Siberia or both (Polian, 2004, p. 125). They consisted of nine different ethnic groups and in each case the entire population was relocated on charges of collective treason. They consisted of Koreans from the Far East, Germans from European Russia, and Ukraine; Karachays, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Kabardians, Balkars and Meskhetian Turks from the Caucasus and, Tatars from the Crimea, who were now euphemistically labeled “special settlers”. Effective 1945, the Soviet leadership placed legal restrictions on their residency and movement in the host regions and mandated the NKVD to organize their labor arrangements. Due to continued escapes from their assigned settlements, the Soviet Government mandated their settlement in the host regions to be “forever”. Moreover, any free citizen helping fugitive settlers would face high prison terms and made their fate even darker as these minorities and their descendants were now condemned to second-class citizenship and internal exile in Kazakhstan and Siberia until the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Zemskov, 2005, p. 160). The fate of five ethnicities should change after Stalin’s death in 1953, when Khrushchev initiated a process of reinstating social and political rights as well as state-administrative and territorial status. The other four, the largest group, remained in exile and continuously suffered repression and second-class treatment, until the Soviet Union disintegrated.

I seek to examine whether labor market, educational, and policy choices in the regions of the Soviet Union differed where deported ethnic groups remained in permanent exile from those where certain ethnic groups were rehabilitated and allowed to return. I argue that the influx of non-rehabilitated led to an understratification of the local population in the host regions now enabling them to fill higher skilled positions, that are also accompanied by an increase in tertiary and secondary education. I also assume, that the descendants of the permanently displaced would identify much more strongly with their ethnic group and would therefore be more politically active. Accordingly, I expect an increase in
political opposition. To do so, I draw on both population and special settler statistics as well protest and riot data and exploit the temporal difference in the rehabilitation process. I further divide the deportation campaigns into a distinct pre- and a post-treatment period, whereas the former defines the period until the expulsion of the settlers in 1939(1937) and the latter the period after 1953, i.e., the year when the settler regime reached its zenith. Differences in the exposure, that separated regions in European Russia, where campaigns began after the German attack on Poland, from regions in the Far East, where Koreans were deported as early as in 1937 are accounted for. As all regions are exposed to the same “communist” institutional environment, estimation problems arising from different post-Soviet political trajectories and population movements are ruled out. Methodologically, I use spatial (IV-)regression techniques, that allow me to account for the economic geography of the Soviet Union and the institutional and financial interrelations between its regions and republics.

Compared to the existing literature, I test the prominent hypothesis of Botticini and Eckstein (2005) and Becker et al. (2020) that uprooting leads to increased investment in human capital. My project not only analyzes the long-term effects of a population collapse in the origin regions, as Acemoglu, Hassan, and Robinson (2011) do for the Holocaust, but contrasts their findings with the long-term effects of an artificial change of the social fabric in the host regions of Central Asia and Siberia. My study therefore facilitates the economic research on a largely neglected area and extends the understanding on the long-run effects of unilateral strategic aggression against civilians. Methodologically, while many studies using spatial regression techniques consider only one type of these spatial lags, alternative specifications are rarely tested against each other. To advance this line of research, I test different model specifications against each other that include different types of spatial lags.

My results confirm that caution should be exercised when using forced migration to study long-term effects, as results are subject to a post-estimation bias. The results confirm the hypothesis, that locals’ post-deportation push into higher-skilled position, with the overwhelming effect to be curbed by the rigidity of the local labor market in the host regions. My results also show a rapid recovery in the origin regions already in the short run. As regards the political behavior, regions that have experienced a history of ethnic deportation have consistently lower levels of secession protest behavior 50 years later. These results suggest two mechanisms: On the one hand, origin regions may have understood the “double message” that came from the Soviet leadership with the deportations. On the other hand, “special settlers” in host regions were deliberately kept small along various socioeconomic dimensions and consequently had the most to lose in the late Soviet Union. These results are extremely interesting and require further research on the mechanisms.
REFERENCES:


Polian, P. M. (2004). *Against their will: the history and geography of forced migrations in the USSR / by Pavel Polian*. Budapest [u.a.]: CEU Press.


