SCARS OF THE GESTAPO: REMEMBERANCE AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

SEBASTIÁN BAUER & FLORENCIA HNILO

INTRODUCTION
What can explain the heterogeneity of tastes for privacy across countries? We hypothesize that remembrance of an authoritarian regime affects privacy concerns, and we leverage Germany’s strong culture of Holocaust remembrance to test it. We construct two novel measures of privacy concerns and show that there is a strong causal link between the reminders of the past and privacy concerns today.

CHALLENGES
- Find a homogeneous measure of remembrance
- Privacy concerns are difficult to measure due to sample truncation (Tucker, 2022)
- Asking directly about privacy leads to the privacy paradox (Athey et al., 2017)

MEASURE OF REMEMBRANCE
Stolpersteine plaques on the sidewalk that signal the last free address of a victim of Nazi persecution

MEASURE OF PRIVACY CONCERNS
Blurred houses on an online imagery provider

LOCALIZED EFFECT: probability of blurring goes from 11% to 18% when first plaque is located within 10 meters of the house
Similar effect when analyzing the share of blurred houses per block
Smaller effect of estimated plaques seen at the workplace based on data and gravity equation from Ahlfeldt et al. (2015)

ENDOGENEITY PROBLEMS
- The plaques’ location might be endogenous
- The victims’ location might be endogenous

SOLUTIONS
1. Plaques only need authorization from the local government and from victims’ relatives, who usually live in the Americas or Israel
2. Berlin changed dramatically during the 20th century: not the same people living since 1930s
3. Balance test: once we control for victims’ location, the plaques are as good as random

RESULTS
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SUMMARY
- We use detailed street-level imagery information from Berlin to measure an origin for German privacy concerns
- We find a causal effect of memorials on privacy concerns
  - Stolpersteine + blurring: First non-truncated privacy concerns measure
  - Stolpersteine + time at consent form: Avoid privacy paradox
- More Stolpersteine at workplace & residency block leads to up to twice more blurred houses
- Localized effect: concentrated at Stolpersteine less than 10 meters away

REFERENCES