

Research Statement

I am an applied economist who uses history as a laboratory to study questions of labor economics and political economy using microeconomic methods. My research focuses on two core themes: (1) the impacts of labor market disruptions, and (2) the drivers of societal change and political emancipation.

Dissertation

Worker Displacement and Labor Market Success: Evidence from Forced Labor Conscription during WWII In my job market paper, I investigate how disruptions of a person's working life impacts their long-term labor market success, focusing on the previously understudied disruption caused by forced labor conscription, which remains relevant today. Forced labor can cause lasting harm through psychological and physical trauma, and disrupts skill acquisition and relevant work experience, leading to lower productivity.

I study the setting of forced labor in Germany during World War II, and exploit the quasi-random conscription of Dutch civilians based on birth dates in a Regression Discontinuity Design. Using Dutch microlevel census data from 1971, I find that this temporary displacement negatively affects a person's labor market success by lowering their education, income and probability of being employed. Adding archival records of forced workers, I show that the negative effects are particularly pronounced when facing harsher conditions while in Germany. However, the negative impact of displacement is mitigated for those who were forced to work in sectors similar to those in the Netherlands, reducing the loss of relevant labor market experience.

My paper contributes to the literature on labor market disruptions (see e.g. Angrist, 1990; Braun and Stuhler, 2023; Huttunen et al., 2011; Schwank, 2024) by focusing on a understudied form of disruption and by exploiting the quasi-random distribution of forced workers into locations and sectors in Germany to show which aspects of the disruption affect labor market success. I also contribute to the literature on forced migration (see Becker, 2022 for a literature review) by studying a setting with a temporary displacement, circumventing issues of selection of return migration, and excluding that effects are driven by the ongoing exposure to conditions in the destination location. My results also speak to the literature on graduating in a recession (see e.g. Oreopoulos et al.,

2012; von Wachter, 2020) by showing that the a limited choice in the type of work at the early stages of a person’s career can have lasting effects on their productivity and labor market success.

Rewriting the Social Contract: Elite Response to Labor Unrest (with Erik Hornung and Noam Yuchtman) In this paper, we examine whether social conflict in the form of labor unrest changes autocratic elite’s willingness to share resources and power in the context of early 20th-century Prussia. We find that higher regional intensity of labor unrest led elites to reallocate resources by shifting local public spending towards education and health. We show that labor mobilization changed elites’ preferences for the adequate level of political participation: bourgeois support for a more inclusive franchise increased in response to labor unrest, and where unrest and bourgeois support coincide, politicians voted for franchise extension. To establish causality, we perform placebo checks and an instrumental variable approach using a shift-share instrumental variable that maps industry-specific international commodity price changes to Prussian regions, depending on their exposure to this industry. We contribute to the understanding of social movements as a driver in shaping policy outcomes (see e.g. Archibong et al., 2022; Ellman and Wantchekon, 2000) by showing that protesters have an impact even in autocratic settings where they are disenfranchised. Our paper relates to the literature on franchise extension under a threat of revolution (see e.g. Acemoglu and Robinson, 2000; Aidt and Franck, 2015), where we contribute by examining a broader set of elite responses in a setting with high revolutionary threat.

Missing Men and Women’s Fight for the Vote (with Barbara Boelmann) We study whether power vacuums lead to the formation of social movements and the political emancipation of marginalized groups. Specifically, we examine the impact of male absence during World War I on the female suffrage movement in Germany. Using exogenous variation in the drafting probability arising from regional differences in recruitment responsibility, we show that more missing men led to a higher probability of women organizing in local suffragette clubs. This absence also led to increased female employment, especially in male-dominated sectors. It also translated into increased female political participation after the war. We contribute to the literature on voting rights extensions (see Hanlon, 2022 for a literature review) by focusing on the empowerment disenfranchised groups themselves. We thereby also contribute to the literature on social movements (see e.g. Burszty

et al., 2021; García-Jimeno et al., 2022), where we also add by extending the analysis to the take-up of newly gained rights after a movement is successful.

Ongoing and future work

Forced Melting Pot: The Impact of Exposure to Foreigners on Long-Term Economic Relations (with Ann-Kristin Becker) In this ongoing project, we investigate whether exposure to foreigners is a driving force in changing the willingness for cooperation between nationalities, thereby shaping international economic ties. We study this question in the context of forced labor in Germany during WWII, where foreign workers from different countries were quasi-randomly assigned across German counties. First results suggest that German counties with a greater presence of foreign workers are more likely to have post-war political and economic ties with those workers' home countries. With this project, we contribute to the literature on the effects of social interactions on economic relations by showing that contact with foreigners, even under involuntary conditions, can foster collaboration (see e.g. Battiston, 2018; Corno et al., 2022; Schindler and Westcott, 2021).

Worker Displacement and Preferences In future research, I plan to investigate how disruptions influence societal change. I plan to study how the disruption of forced labor affected norms, attitudes towards society, and political preferences. I also plan to study how the forced labor conscription affected the children of former forced workers, focusing on inter-generational effects of such a disruption.

Outlook In my future research, I aim to further explore how labor market disruptions and societal upheavals shape individual preferences, labor market trajectories, societal norms, and political institutions. By integrating insights from economic history, labor economics, and political economy, I plan to better understand the conditions that drive societal change.

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