

The power of commemorative policies: the effect of street names on knowledge, judgement, and attitudes

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Abstract

Naming streets and public spaces after prominent figures and national symbols following a cultural and political agenda is a widespread practice of governments throughout the world. We study whether these commemorative policies actually influence people. Street names are ubiquitous urban elements; subtle pieces of information embedded with cultural and political meanings to which individuals are exposed on a daily basis. Through in-person and online surveys, we find that respondents have much more knowledge about the figures commemorated in their streets and give more importance to them, compared to similarly relevant figures. We also find suggestive but inconclusive evidence about the influence of street names on gender and religious attitudes. These results have far-reaching implications for urban naming policies around the world as well as for debates about the efficacy of interventions conducive to socially desirable outcomes. They also inform how people acquire knowledge, form their opinions, and shape their attitudes.

Keywords: street names, urban policy, naming policy, identity, education, cognition

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The full current draft is available upon request