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War and Inequality: Bombing and the Social Contract in England

Leander Heldring (Northwestern University), James A. Robinson (U Chicago) and Parker Whitfill (U Chicago)

We examine the impact of the bombing of England during the second world war on wealth inequality. We use a full enumeration of wealth at death using probate records for England between 1930 and 1960. In a difference-in-differences framework, we find no evidence for a direct effect of bombing on inequality. We validate this result exploiting very detailed information of the location of Luftwaffe airfields and the maximum range of the German aircraft to show that places just close enough to France to be bombed have no differential change in inequality, relative to those that could not be bombed. However, we do find that places in England that were more intensively bombed have a higher vote share for the Labour Party in post-war elections. We argue that this supports an indirect channel such that those places that suffered more from wartime destruction were more likely to support government policies which were focused on reconstruction and compensating people via a new social contract