

What's in a Name in a War

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CERGE-EI

October 27, 2016

Abstract

We propose a novel empirical strategy for identifying and studying nationalism using name choices. We first show that having been given a first name that is synonymous with the leader(s) of the fascist Croatian state during World War II predicts volunteering for army service in the 1991-1995 Croatian war of independence and dying during the conflict. Next, we use the universe of Croatian birth certificates and the information about nationalism conveyed by first names to contrast the evolution of nationalism and its intergenerational transmission across locations affected by extreme war-related experiences. Our evidence suggests that in ex-Yugoslav Croatia, nationalism was on a continuous rise starting in the 1970s, that its rise was curbed in areas where concentration camps were located during WWII, and that nationalist fathers consider the nationalism-transmission trade-off between within-family and society-wide transmission channels suggested by Bisin and Verdier (2001).

JEL Codes: D64, D74, Z1

Keywords: Ustaše, Nationalism, Names, Intergenerational Transmission

Acknowledgements Jurajda is Research Fellow at IZA, Bonn. We would like to thank Orley Ashenfelter, Patrick Gaulé, Josip Glaurdić, Emir Kamenica, Jan Kmenta, Kateřina Králová, Nikolas Mittag, Vinko Muštra, Jan Zápál, and Krešimir Žigić for their valuable comments. Kovač would also like to thank the Croatian Ministry of Veterans and Ministry of Public Administration for access to the veteran database and birth certificate database, respectively.

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