Forced migration, staying minorities, and new societies: Evidence from post-war Czechoslovakia*

Jakub Grossmann† Štěpán Jurajda‡ Felix Roesel§

January 26, 2021

Abstract

Forced migration traumatizes millions displaced from their homes, but little is known about the few who manage to stay and become a minority in a new society. We study the case of German stayers in Sudetenland, a region from which Czechoslovakia expelled ethnic Germans after World War Two. The unexpected presence of the US Army in parts of 1945 Czechoslovakia resulted in more anti-fascist Germans avoiding displacement compared to regions liberated by the Red Army. We study the long-run impacts of this local variation in the presence of left-leaning stayers and find that Communist party support and local party cell frequencies, as well as far-left values and social policies are more pronounced today where anti-fascist Germans stayed in larger numbers. Our findings also suggest that political identity supplanted German ethnic identity among anti-fascist stayers. The German staying minority shaped the political identity of newly formed local societies after ethnic cleansing by providing the ‘small seed’ of political development.

JEL-Classification: J15, F22, D72, D74, N34

Keywords: Forced migration, displacement, ethnic cleansing, stayers, minorities, identity, Communist party, Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland

*We thank Davide Cantoni, James Fenske, Christian Ochsner, Sebastian Ottinger, Andreas Steinmayr, Patrick Testa, Marcel Thum, Joanna Tyrowicz, Hans-Joachim Voth, Ekaterina Zhuravskaya, and the participants of the 3rd UZH Workshop on Political Economy and Development in Zurich (2020), the German Economic Association in Cologne (2020), the European Economic Association meeting (2020), the Conference of the Political Economy of Democracy and Dictatorship (2021), and seminars at ZEW Mannheim for their helpful comments. Jonathan Old and Remo Nitschke provided outstanding research assistance. Roesel gratefully acknowledges funding by the German Research Foundation (DFG grant number 400857762), while Grossmann and Jurajda gratefully acknowledge support by the Volkswagen Foundation (project “The Rise of Populist Parties in Europe”). The maps used in this research are in part based on EuroGeographics for administrative boundaries.

†CERGE-EI, a joint workplace of Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education, Charles University and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Politických veznu 7, P.O. Box 882, 111 21 Prague 1, Czech Republic.

‡Corresponding author. ifo Institute Dresden, CESifo, and Technische Universität Dresden, Einsteinstrasse 3, 01069 Dresden, Germany, roesel@ifo.de, +49 351 26476-28.