The political consequences of gentrification: evidence from the 2011 London riots

Lecture by

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ABSTRACT | Gentrification is one of the most challenging and contentious issues faced by the world's major cities. We examine one of its most salient political consequences: its effect on social unrest. We develop a theoretical argument that links local gentrification to participation in social unrest, and examine its validity with reference to the 2011 London riots. To deal with the endogenous nature of gentrification we use an instrumental variable strategy that exploits exogenous variation in the fraction of each neighborhood that was destroyed during the Blitz. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that gentrification promotes unrest, we find that it reduced participation in the 2011 London riots by both changing the social composition of gentrifying neighborhoods and making the original residents who remain less likely to riot. Our findings are consistent with qualitative evidence from the UK and the US, and highlight the impact that urban geography can have on social order.