

Trust, Ethnic Diversity, and Personal Contact: Experimental Field Evidence

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Abstract

The consequences of ethnic diversity on trust are contested and given the importance of the question, there is a clear lack of answers based on research designs that allow for causal interpretation. We study the effects of close personal contact with minorities on both in-group and out-group trust by randomly assigning majority soldiers to small rooms and teams with or without ethnic minorities. Using an incentivized trust game, we replicate the results from previous studies that individuals coming from areas with a high share of immigrants trust immigrants less. On the other hand, random assignment to close personal contact with minorities increases trust. Furthermore, the negative relationship between shallow exposure and out-group trust is reversed for soldiers that are randomly assigned to close personal contact with minority soldiers. Hence, diversity does not necessarily reduce trust and integration with personal contact seems crucial.