Types of Contact: A Field Experiment on Collaborative and Adversarial Caste Integration

Abstract

Integration is one policy response to tackle prejudice between groups, but little is known about how the type of integration might moderate its impact. This paper estimates the effects of two types of intergroup contact: collaborative and adversarial. I recruited 1,261 young Indian men from different castes, and randomly assigned them to either participate in month-long cricket leagues or to serve as a control group. Players faced variation in collaborative contact, through random assignment to same-caste or mixed-caste teams, and adversarial contact, through random assignment of opponents. I find that collaborative contact reduces prejudice, while adversarial contact generally does not, and can even have negative effects. First, collaborative contact increases post-league cross-caste friendships, whereas adversarial contact reduces them. These opposite effects remain when excluding friendships with those directly interacted with (teammates and opponents), suggesting that participants are changing their minds about the caste group, not just the individuals they met. Second, collaborative contact reduces caste favoritism in voting for players to go on a field trip by up to 33%. Third, collaborative contact increases efficiency: by increasing the quality of teammates chosen for a future match, and by increasing cross-caste trade by 11 percentage points in an exercise with cross-caste gains from trade. Adversarial contact has no impact on either. Together these findings suggest that the economic effects of integration depend on the type of contact.