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Religion, Minority Status, and Trust: Evidence from a Field Experiment

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Highlights

- This paper reports the results from an artefactual field experiment conducted in Bangladesh and in West Bengal (India) to analyze the effect of multiple identities on trust behavior.
- These two regions are similar in terms of socio-economic characteristics, ethnicity and language but have different religious composition.
- Using this variation we examine whether identity based on religion or the relative status that it generates within the population affects trust and trustworthiness.
- Irrespective of religion, behavior is driven by relative status: in both locations individuals belonging to the minority group exhibit positive in-group bias in trust, while individuals belonging to the majority group show positive out-group bias in trustworthiness.
- The observed pattern of behavior can be explained by the heterogeneity in the intensity of association individuals have with their identity.

Abstract

This paper reports the results from a lab-in-the-field experiment conducted in Bangladesh and India that examines the influence of religion and relative status on trust and trustworthiness. We find that in both locations individuals with minority status, irrespective of their religion, exhibit positive in-group bias in trust, while individuals with majority status show positive out-group bias in trustworthiness. This suggests that behavior is not driven by religious identity *per se* but is highly influenced by the relative status it generates within the population. Within both groups, heterogeneity with respect to how strongly individuals associate with the group identity affects behavior.

Key words: Trust, Religion, Status, In-group and Out-group, Field Experiment, South Asia.

JEL Codes: C93, O12, D03.

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