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Application for social programs: the role of local politics and caste networks in affirmative action in India

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Abstract

India has among the most extensive affirmative action programs in the world. Depending on the State, up to 50% of jobs in the public sector are reserved for members of low castes. However, recruitment is highly discretionary, making it hard for low castes without connections to access reserved jobs and thereby benefit from affirmative action. This paper studies how having a local elected leader from the same caste affects the probability of applying for reserved jobs. The identification strategy focuses on the political reservation system at the village level that determines the caste group of the local elected leader. Taking data from three States in South India, I find that households are more likely to apply when the local elected leader is from their caste group. The evidence suggests that the impact is driven by updated beliefs regarding the probability of a successful application.

India, affirmative action, caste, political reservations

JEL: I38, O12, P48

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