Immigration, Ethnic Diversity and Public Goods Provisioning in Local Communities

A significant body of literature suggests that immigration undermines voluntary contributions to public goods because it leads to ethnic diversity, which erodes social trust. I posit that the effects of immigration and ethnic diversity on public good provisioning are dissimilar and, that the effect of immigration swamps the effect of ethnic diversity. Additionally, the fundamental consequence of social trust consists in reducing transaction costs of institutional processes, so that we should expect the undermining effect of immigration to become apparent only when notable gains can be made from minimizing the costs of public good provision. To examine these hypotheses, I use a mixed-method research design to study public goods management in a dozen Ugandan communities with varying levels of both immigration and ethnic diversity. Specifically, I analyze community-level attempts at collective action that involve substantially different costs, that is, contributing to toilet construction and participating in litter cleanup programs.

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