

Title: Creating Cohesive Communities: A Youth Camp Experiment in India

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Area: Economics

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Abstract:

Non-family-based institutions for socializing young people may play a vital role in creating close-knit, inclusive communities. We study the potential for youth camps---integrating rituals, sports, and civics training---to strengthen intergroup cohesion. We randomly assigned 412 Hindu and Muslim adolescent boys, from West Bengal, India, to 12-day camps featuring soccer, lectures and discussions on democracy and diversity, and other fun activities, or to a pure control arm. To isolate mechanisms, we cross-randomized collective rituals (such as singing the national anthem, wearing uniforms, chanting support during matches, and dancing synchronously), and the intensity of intergroup contact. We find that camps reduce ingroup bias, increase willingness to interact with outgroup members, and enhance psychological well-being. Different camp elements account for these positive effects. However, against expectations, rituals boosted well-being for the Hindu majority group but had no impact on intergroup relations, while intergroup contact backfired, particularly for the majority. Our findings demonstrate that inclusive youth camps may be a powerful tool for bridging deep social divides. But we also highlight the challenges in crafting optimal integrative camps that benefit all groups.

Speaker Profile:



Arkadev Ghosh is an Assistant Professor of Economics at Duke University. He obtained his PhD in 2022 from the University of British Columbia and was a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute on Behavior and Inequality from 2022-2023

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