

Title: The incidence of affirmative action: Evidence from quotas in private schools in India

Speaker: Abhijeet Singh, Stockholm School of Economics

Area: Public Policy

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Abstract:

The incidence of redistributive policies is central to whether they meet their stated goals. We study this in the context of one of the world's largest affirmative action programs in schooling: a 25% quota in all Indian private schools for students from disadvantaged groups. We use lottery-based estimates to show that, although students admitted under the quota attend more expensive and preferred schools on average, the distribution of program benefits is very regressive. Program applicants are concentrated among more-educated and better-off households. Consequently, 7.4% of the program spending accrues to the bottom socioeconomic quintile, compared to 24.3% to the top quintile. In total, two-thirds of the per-child cost of a quota seat is inframarginal for school choice. We use rich survey data to show that low application rates for poorer children are not driven by preferences and beliefs. Instead, information constraints and application frictions appear to be key. Finally, we use a randomized intervention to confirm the importance of these frictions and further demonstrate that alleviating a single constraint (e.g., information) may not reduce regressive selection, even if it boosts application rates substantially. Our results demonstrate how constraints facing potential applicants can make redistributive policies regressive in practice. Appropriate policy interventions must consider the joint incidence of these constraints to reduce regressivity.

Speaker Profile:



Prof. Abhijeet Singh is an applied microeconomist at the [Stockholm School of Economics](#) and studies topics relating to the economics of education, child nutrition and public service delivery in developing countries.

He is affiliated with the [Jameel Poverty Action Lab \(JPAL\)](#), [CESifo Economics of Education Research Network](#) in Munich, the [Center for Global Development](#), the [Mistra Centre for Sustainable Markets \(MISUM\)](#) at SSE and the [Young Lives](#) study. Before moving to SSE, he was based at the Department of Economics at UCL. He received doctorate in Economics from the University of Oxford.

From October 2021, He serve as an Associate Editor at [The Economic Journal](#).

In November 2022, He was awarded an [ERC Starting Grant](#) from 2023-2028 for the project EDINCLUSION which will look at social inclusion in Indian private schools.

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