

Bridging the Gap and Widening the Divide

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Abstract : This paper explores whether ethnic identity in Zimbabwe leads to discriminatory behaviour and the degree to which a norm-based intervention can shift this discriminatory behaviour. Social Identity Theory suggests that group identity can lead to favouritism towards the in-group and discriminatory behaviour towards the out-group. Agents yield higher utility from maintaining positive self-esteem by confirming with group behaviour. This paper focuses on the two majority ethnic groups in Zimbabwe - the Ndebele and Shona. Racial identities are synonymous with the language spoken. Zimbabwe's history highlights how identity formation took place. As following independence, political parties became recognised as either Ndebele or Shona-speaking. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the degree to which norm-based nudge can alter behaviour. This paper uses experimental methods to analyse discriminatory behaviour between two naturally occurring ethnic groups in Zimbabwe. In addition, we investigate if social norm-based interventions can shift discriminatory behaviour to understand if the divide between these two identity groups can be further divided or healed. Participants are randomly assigned into three groups to receive information regarding a social norm. We compare the effect of a proscriptive social norm-based intervention, stating what shouldn't be done and prescriptive social norms as interventions, stating what should be done. Specifically, participants are either shown the socially appropriate (Heal) norm, the socially inappropriateness (Divide) norm regarding interethnic marriages or no norm-based intervention. Following the random assignment into intervention groups, participants take part in the Trust Game. We conjecture that discrimination will shift in accordance with the prevailing social norm. Instead, we find evidence of interethnic discriminatory behaviour. We also find that trust increases when interacting with Ndebele, Shona and Zimbabwean participants following the Heal intervention. However, if the participant is Shona, the Heal intervention decreases trust toward in-groups and Zimbabwean co-players. On the other hand, if the participant is Shona, the Divide treatment significantly increases trust toward Ndebele participants. In summary, we find evidence that norm-based interventions significantly change behaviour. However, the prescriptive norm-based intervention (Heal) decreases trust toward the in-group, out-group and national identity group if the participant is Shona - therefore having an adverse effect. In contrast, the proscriptive Divide treatment increases trust if the participant is Shona towards Ndebele co-players. We conclude that norm-based interventions have a 'rebound' effect by altering behaviour in the opposite direction.

Keywords : discrimination, social identity, social norm-based intervention, zimbabwe

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