Sports, Camps, and House Systems: Lessons from Field Experiments in India

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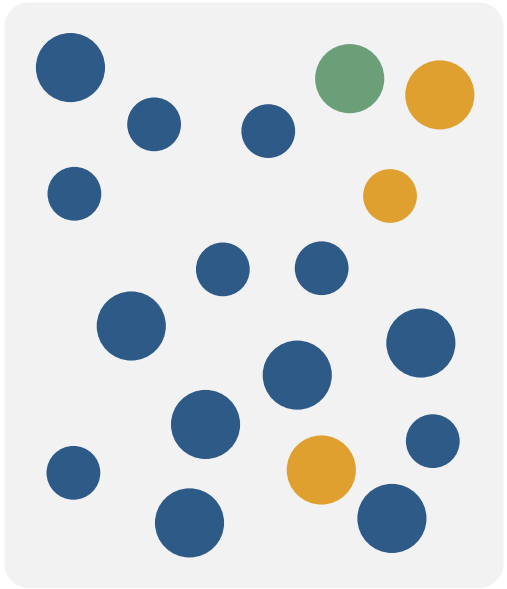


THE EXPERIMENTAL ECONOMIST'S APPROACH

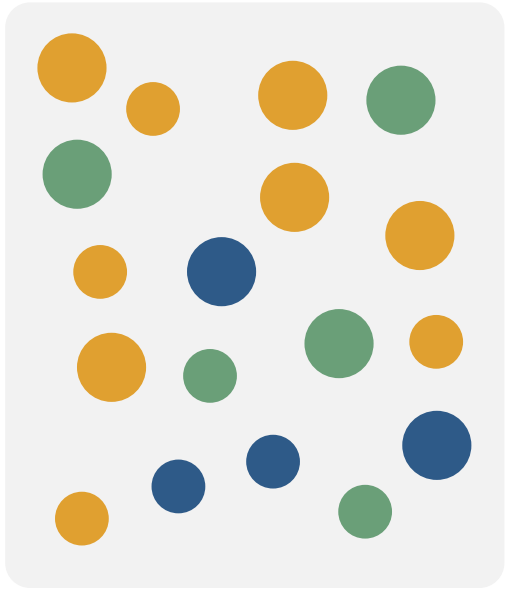
Why use a lottery?

If people choose

Join



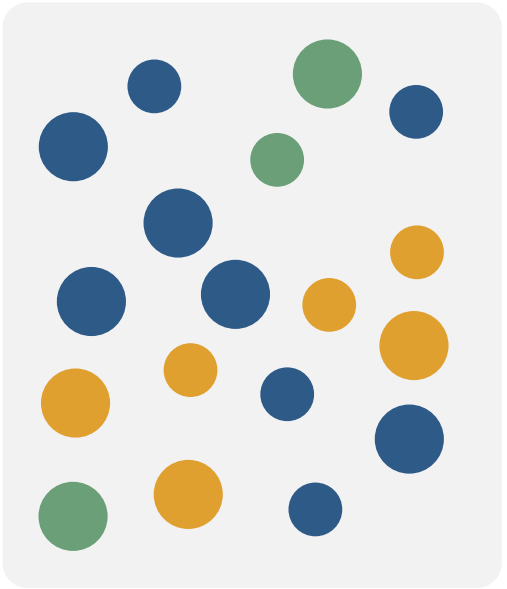
Don't join



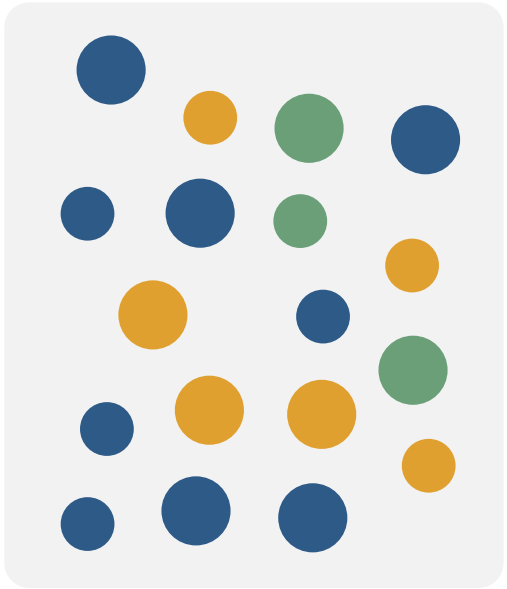
Groups differ from the start

If a lottery chooses

Treatment



Control



Groups alike from the start

THE EXPERIMENTAL ECONOMIST'S APPROACH

Choices speak louder than words

What people say

"Caste doesn't matter to me."

Costs nothing to say
Shaped by what sounds right

What people do



Costly to get wrong
Harder to fake

STUDY 1 · SPORTS

Cricket and caste

Can playing together reduce caste divides?

- 1,261 men, rural Uttar Pradesh
- Lottery for league places
- Mixed or same-caste teams
- Random opponents

Lowe (2021), *American Economic Review*



STUDY 1 · SPORTS

Leagues increase cross-caste behaviour

Mixed-caste teams vs. control group

- **Team choice:** 36% more other-caste picks
- **Cross-caste trade:** up 8 percentage points
- **Trust game:** no change



STUDY 2 · CAMPS

Camps and rituals

Can camps bring Hindu and Muslim boys together?

- 412 boys, West Bengal
- 12-day camps vs. control
- One camp with rituals, one without
- Followed up for a year

Ghosh, Kundu, Lowe and Nellis (2025), *Review of Economic Studies*



STUDY 2 · CAMPS

Camps create life-long intergroup friendships

Campers vs. control group, six weeks later

- **Willingness to interact:** 2× outgroup friends
  - Still 2× as many a year later
- **Social preferences:** less own-group bias
- **Attitudes:** no change
- **Well-being:** happier, less depressed
- **Rituals:** no average effect; helped majority



STUDY 3 · HOUSE SYSTEMS

School House Systems

Can a new shared identity weaken group divides?

- 176 schools, Tamil Nadu
- Half randomly get Houses
- Students split into 4 Houses
- Surveyed 20 months later

Ghosh, Lowe, Nellis, Sinha Ray and Varghese (2026), *Unpublished*



STUDY 3 · HOUSE SYSTEMS

A new identity forms, but the old ones remain

House schools vs. control schools

WHAT CHANGED

- Strong attachment to their House

WHAT DID NOT

- Attachment to caste and religion
- Who students befriend
- Caste and gender attitudes
- Well-being and bullying



ACROSS THE THREE STUDIES

Takeaways for policy-makers

- Where possible, randomize
- Where possible, measure high-stakes behaviours
- Where possible, mask the study purpose
- Aim for close and collaborative mixed-group interactions



