

Learning about Ethnic Discrimination from Different Information Sources*

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Abstract

We experimentally study whether public beliefs about ethnic discrimination, an emotionally loaded issue, are shifted more by information from experts or from ordinary people. We also examine whether people are inclined to choose the most influential sources. For this purpose, we combine, in a novel design, the random provision of information from different sources with endogenous information acquisition from the same sources. We find that individuals update their beliefs most in response to information from experts, namely researchers studying ethnic minorities and human resource managers. Exogenous adjustments in beliefs do not induce changes in attitudes to ethnic minorities. Consistent with the strength of belief updating, more individuals choose information from experts over information from ordinary people. This result suggests that, in the aggregate, people behave rationally as they favor a source that is perceived to be relatively accurate. The findings have implications for information dissemination policies.

Key words: ethnic discrimination, beliefs, information sources, experts

JEL Classification: C90, D83, J71

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