

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES: A FIELD EXPERIMENT IN THE US

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Abstract

We examine whether racial discrimination exists in access to public services in the U.S.. We carry out an email correspondence study in which we pose simple queries to more than 19,000 local public service providers. We find that emails from putatively black senders are almost 4 percentage points less likely to receive an answer compared to emails signed with a white-sounding name. Moreover, responses to queries coming from black names are less likely to have a cordial tone. Further tests suggest that the differential in the likelihood of answering is due to animus towards blacks rather than inferring socioeconomic status from race. Finally, we show that attitudes towards the government among blacks are more negative in states with higher discrimination. (JEL: D73, H41, J15)

The editor in charge of this paper was M. Daniele Paserman.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank the Editor Daniele Paserman and three anonymous referees for very constructive comments. We also thank Matthew Blackwell, Raj Chetty, Rajeev Dehejia, Stefano DellaVigna, Uri Gneezy, Jonathan Guryan, Nathaniel Hilger, Guillermina Jasso, Gary King, Peter Kuhn, Uwe Sunde and Adam Szeidl for useful discussions. We also thank participants of seminars at IZA, Central European University, Temple, Köln, Newcastle, Surrey, Innsbruck, Verona, Rotterdam, and participants of the 2015 Society for Government Economists Conference, the Workshop on the Economics of Discrimination in Naples, the 2016 Royal Economic Society Conference, the 39th NBER Summer Institute, the 33rd European Association of Law and Economics for their comments. We thank Kerwin Kofi Charles and Jonathan Guryan for kindly providing us with their data. This project has received ethical approval from the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA) in Bonn, Germany, and from the University of Southampton.

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