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Impact of Affirmative Action in Higher Education for the Other Backward Classes in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper measures the impact of quota-based affirmative action in higher education (HE) in India for Other Backward Classes (OBC), implemented from 2008. Since the immediate impact would be felt by OBCs who were eligible to go to college at the time of the implementation, we compare the differences in participation in HE by the younger (18-23 years) and the older (24-29 years) age groups within eligible OBCs, with similar differences in the general caste population. The same double difference is also compared across states with different histories of affirmative action to ascertain if there are regional variations in the impact of the policy, with the expectation that the impact would be higher in regions with no history of affirmative action. Our results from the Difference in Difference (DD) estimates based on National Sample Survey data for 2011-12 do not show a positive impact of the policy on the participation of OBCs. In fact, the impact seems to be negative in all regions, though statistically insignificant, except the East which lacks the long history of affirmative action. A comparison of the East without a long history of affirmative action with the South having a long history of such policy, using triple difference method, produces positive treatment effects, but the estimate loses statistical significance once we control for observable covariates. Our results suggest that the generalized nation-wide policy of this kind may not be relevant for issues which are more regional in nature. (JEL Codes: H75, I23, I24, I25, I28, J15, O15).

KEYWORDS Higher education; affirmative action; caste; reservations; India