

5th Political Science & Political economy Conference Titles and Abstracts

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When Do the Advantaged See the Disadvantages of Others? A QuasiExperimental Study of National Service

Abstract: Are there mechanisms by which the advantaged can see the perspective of the disadvantaged? If advantaged individuals have prolonged engagement with disadvantaged populations and confront issues of inequality through national service, do they see the world more through the lens of the poor? We explore this question by examining Teach For America (TFA), as TFA is a prominent national service program that integrates top college graduates into low-income communities for two years and employs a selection model that allows for causal inference. A regression discontinuity approach utilizing an original survey of over 32,000 TFA applicants and TFA's selection data for the 2007-2015 application cycles reveals that extended intergroup contact in a service context causes advantaged Americans to adopt beliefs that are closer to those of disadvantaged Americans. These findings have broad implications for our understanding of the impact of intergroup contact on perceptions of social justice and prejudice reduction.

