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The role of social connections in charitable fundraising: Evidence from a natural field experiment

The economics literature suggests that enhanced social connection can increase trust amongst agents, which can ultimately lead to more efficient economic outcomes, including increased provision of public goods. This study provides a test of whether social connectedness (proxied via agent similarities in race and gender) influences giving to a charitable fundraiser. Using data gathered from more than 2000 households approached in an actual door-to-door fundraising drive, we find limited evidence of the importance of such social connections. A robust result in the data, however, is that our minority solicitors, whether approaching a majority or minority household, are considerably less likely to obtain a contribution, and conditional on securing a contribution, gift size is lower than their majority counterparts receive.

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