

Policy Objective

The study aims to establish the causal effect of receiving an additional line of the previous year's matriculation rate on the likelihood of accepting, completing, starting the job, and returning a second year. The study also identified marginal subgroups to test whether social information has larger effects among those subgroups.

Behavioral Insight

The theory of social comparison indicates that people care about what others do relative to what they do, so people's behavior may change in response to knowing what others did. In this study, adding a piece of social information affect the subjects' behaviors.

Background

Recently, some behavioral research teams stated that policymakers could apply inexpensive, subtle interventions to shape behaviors. For example, such interventions have persistently affected high-stakes decisions like retirement savings and insurance plan choices. When a subtle, in-expensive intervention like providing social information can persistently impact people's high-stakes decisions, policymakers may explore its application in other policy contexts to nudge the public's reactions to a policy.

Methods

The study randomly assigned admits into treatment and control groups (RCT). Subjects in the control group received a standard TFA admission letter. In contrast, subjects in the treatment group received the same letter with an additional line indicating a high percentage of applicants who decided to join the corps last year. The study also introduced three marginal subgroups for their analysis: the *Disappointing Assignment* sub-group, the *Moderately Aligned* subgroup, and the *Not Certain*. Each subgroup has a compensation group. Treatment effects can be shown separately by the average likelihood of working for TFA over time across subjects in all waves.

Results

For the entire population, the research shows that the social information treatment increases the likelihood that admitted applicants are still in TFA by between 1.5 and 3.1 percentage points during its 5 milestones. For all subgroups, adding one sentence to the offer letter significantly increases the likelihood that the individual joins TFA, larger than the treatment effects for the entire population, and the effect persists over one year later. The *Disappointing Assignment* subgroup increased the likelihood of working for TFA by 3.2 to 4.5 percentage points. The *Moderately Aligned* subgroup increased the likelihood of working for TFA by 3.6 to 5.2 percentage points. The *Not Certain* subgroup increased the likelihood of working for TFA by 2.7 to 3.8 percentage points. The treatment did not measurably affect the three compensation groups of the three margin subgroups above.

Conclusion

Adding one line of social information to a TFA admission letter increases the likelihood that admitted applicants accept the offer to spend two years working as a teacher in an underperforming public school. Additionally, the treatment effects were particularly large in subgroups expected to find a larger mass at the margin. The study shows that subtle interventions like providing social information can have a profound and persistent effect on a high-stakes decision. It can be a policy tool, especially where the stakes are high, and the decision-makers have sufficient time and resources to consider the choice carefully.