Hate Crimes and Economic Status: Evidence from Castes in India
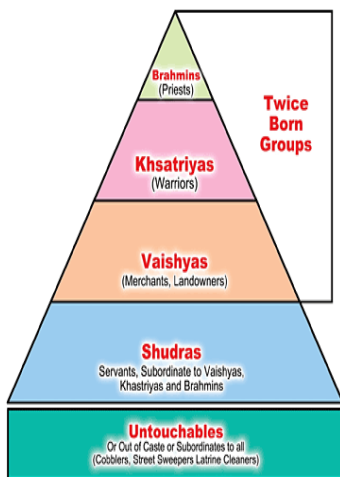
Smriti Sharma, Delhi School of Economics

Motivation and Objective

Former untouchable castes & tribal groups in India are subjected to caste-based atrocities by the upper castes.

Ample evidence suggests that upper castes use & justify violence as tools to ensure adherence to caste-based norms & traditions by lower castes.

Question: Are regional variations in the incidence of violence by the upper castes against the lower castes and tribes systematically linked to variations in relative group economic outcomes of lower castes and upper castes?

Caste System

Indigenous tribes face large-scale exclusion due to geographical isolation, primitive agricultural practices & distinct social customs.

Hypothesis: An increase in the ratio of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC and ST) expenditures to upper caste expenditures is positively correlated with the incidence of crimes committed by the upper castes against the lower castes.

Outcome Variables

o Crime data classified in a way such that the perpetrator belongs to a non-scheduled group and the victim to a scheduled group.

o District-level crime data for 2001-10 from the National Crime Records Bureau.

o Indian Penal Code (IPC) Crimes: murder, rape, kidnap, physical assault, robbery, arson, dacoity, other

o Special & Local Laws (SLL) Crimes: special enactments that safeguard interests of marginalized groups

o Crime rates defined per 1,00,000 SCST population.

Correlates

o District-level correlates computed from the National Sample Surveys of 1999-2000 & 2004-05.

o The primary variable is the logarithm of the ratio of expenditure (MPCE) of SCSTs to upper castes (measure of the relative economic position of both groups).

o Controls: average MPCE of the district, % of SCSTs in the population and its squared term, % of rural population, Gini, underemployment rate, % of population in different education categories, % of young males, and political competition.

o District fixed effects, time dummy; standard errors clustered at district level.

Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean (Std. Dev)
Total Crimes against SCST	430 (419)
IPC crimes against SCST	288 (351)
SLL Crimes against SCST	142 (176)
SCST total crime rate	99.8 (135.1)
SCST IPC crime rate	66.5 (107.1)
SCST SLL crime rate	33.3 (52.7)
SCST MPCE/Upper Caste MPCE	0.68 (0.16)
% SCST Population	29.8 (15.2)
N (number of districts)	830

Regression Results

	Total Crime Rate	IPC Crime Rate	SLL Crime Rate
Ln (SCST MPCE/UC MPCE)	0.304** (0.118)	0.355** (0.149)	0.298 (0.294)
Ln (MPCE)	-0.008 (0.283)	-0.378 (0.389)	0.413 (0.591)
% SCST Pop	-0.087*** (0.0096)	-0.1*** (0.011)	-0.08*** (0.022)
% SCST Pop squared	0.0007*** (0.0001)	0.0009*** (0.0001)	0.0006** (0.0003)

	Total Crime Rate	IPC Crime Rate	SLL Crime Rate
Ln (SCST MPCE)	0.138 (0.191)	-0.134 (0.309)	0.496 (0.474)
Ln (UC MPCE)	-0.341** (0.143)	-0.563*** (0.185)	-0.158 (0.341)
Ln (OBC MPCE)	-0.0393 (0.196)	0.112 (0.319)	-0.107 (0.454)
% SCST Pop	-0.091*** (0.009)	-0.097*** (0.0109)	-0.091*** (0.0251)
% SCST Pop squared	0.0008*** (0.0001)	0.0009*** (0.0001)	0.0008** (0.0003)

Summary of Findings

o One of the first analyses that studies the incidence of caste violence.

o The incidence of caste violence is positively correlated with the ratio of expenditures of SCs & STs to that of upper castes.

o Changes in relative material standards of living between groups lead to changes in violent crimes, especially those aimed at extracting some form of economic surplus from the victims.

o This is driven by changes in the upper castes' economic well-being and not that of the SCs & STs.

o Results are robust to the following: changes in the estimation method, alternative variable definition, dropping one state at a time, adding controls for general crime rate in district.

Contact information

Smriti Sharma
Department of Economics,
Delhi School of Economics.
smriti@econdse.org