Estimating the Impact of the Hajj: 
Religion and Tolerance in Islam’s Global Gathering

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Abstract
We estimate the impact of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca on pilgrims by comparing successful and unsuccessful applicants to a lottery Pakistan uses to allocate Hajj visas. Pilgrim accounts stress that Hajj leads to a feeling of unity with fellow Muslims, but outsiders have sometimes feared that this could be accompanied by antipathy toward non-Muslims. We find that participation in the Hajj increases observance of global Islamic practices, such as prayer and fasting, and reduces participation in localized practices and beliefs, such as using amulets and dowry. It increases belief in equality and compromise among ethnic groups and Islamic sects, and leads to more favorable attitudes toward women, including greater acceptance of women receiving education and working. Increased unity within the Islamic world is not accompanied by antipathy toward non-Muslims. Hajjis have increased belief in peace and in equality and compromise among religions. The evidence suggests that these changes are more likely due to interaction with Hajjis from around the world and attendant awareness of diversity within Islam than to religious instruction or changes in the social role of pilgrims upon return.

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