

Do Urban Parks Promote Racial Diversity in Social Interactions? Evidence from New York City*

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Abstract

While policymakers and urban planners often praise public space for promoting racial diversity, empirically it remains unclear whether these places play a role in creating diverse social environments for the city's residents. Focusing on parks in New York City as the exemplar of modern public space, I estimate the causal relationship between access to parks and individually experienced diversity. To do so, I introduce a measure of racial diversity that captures one's level of exposure to diverse others in places visited on a daily basis,¹ utilizing a novel dataset featuring individual GPS tracking data for more than 60 thousand Twitter users in the New York metro area. My empirical strategy relies on obtaining a time-varying measure of access to parks that incorporates information about ongoing construction and repair works across the city. The results show that additional 10 acres of parkland within the 5km radius from home increase one's experienced diversity by about 1 p.p. (or 5% of the standard deviation). I also provide evidence to suggest that park accessibility affects the diversity of white and black residents differently: the effect appears to be more pronounced for whites than blacks, suggesting that parks in majority-white neighborhoods are able to attract a broader range of visitors compared to the local parks in black neighborhoods.

JEL Classification: J15, Q26, L83, R23

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¹Similar diversity measures were introduced in [Athey, Ferguson, Gentzkow, and Schmidt \(2020\)](#) and [Xu, Belyi, Santi, and Ratti \(2019\)](#).