

Born Again: Experimental Evidence on the Economic and Social Impacts of Religious Renewal

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Abstract

Pentecostal-Evangelical Christianity is one of the fastest-growing religious movements in the world, with more than 600 million adherents and much of its expansion concentrated in the Global South. This paper provides experimental evidence on the economic and social effects of religious renewal. Partnering with a Pentecostal-Evangelical church in Uganda, we randomize the church's main outreach activity to encourage new membership. Those induced to join become more religiously engaged. On average, they also expand their business networks and increase their earnings, consistent with the congregation functioning as an economic platform. The platform logic suggests larger gains for those entering with thinner networks. In line with this implication, women, whose economic networks tend to be thinner, experience substantial gains in business connections, business activity, employment, and earnings. Men experience no comparable economic gains; joining instead strengthens their beliefs in work as worship and in faith as a route to material success. The same institution thus functions as an economic platform for women, while primarily reshaping beliefs and non-market behavior for men.

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