INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq

e Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to an all-Christian soccer team or to a team mixed ms. The intervention improved behaviors toward Muslim peers: Christians with Muslim tean were more likely to vote for a Muslim (not on their team) to receive a sportsmanship award, register for a mixed team next season, and train with Muslims 6 months after the intervention. The intervent did not substantially affect behaviors in other social contexts, such as patronizing a restaurant in Muslim-dominated Mosul or attending a mixed social event, nor did it yield consistent effects on intergratitudes. Although contact can build tolerant behaviors toward peers within an intervention, building br social cohesion outside of it is more challenging. D

> and ocal Christian leaders and organizatic endorsed the leagues. This study thus serv as a proof of concept that near-optimal co-tact can build tolerant behaviors after viole conflict—at least toward those encounter conflict—at least toward those encountered in the intervention. The positive effects of contact among Christian study participants did not, however, generalize to Muslim stranand not, nowever, generalize to Muslim stran-gers, highlighting a potentially important lim-itation of contact after war.
>
> The "contact hypothesis" proposes that in-terpersonal contact across group lines can

> reduce prejudice if it is cooperative, places participants on equal footing, is endorsed by

communal authorities, and is characterized by a common goal (9). Causal evidence shows

n 10 June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (SISI) captured the Inqi city of Mosal. SISS officents enhanted the India enhanted the I have been migrating into Christian enclaves, leading Iraq's Christians to fear the dilution of their culture and identity (3), Christian-Muslim relations in northern Iraq continue to be marked by mutual distrust and social segregation. How can social cohesion between groups be

by mutual distrust and social segregation.

Howe can social cohesion between groups be exhalt afterward Intergroup social cohesion, patterns of cooperation among individuals from different social groups who live and work in close proximity (9), is considered key for good governance (9) and connomic development (9). However, countries recovering from war often between the contribution of the contribution

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imate to the outgroup, further temp

knowledge of intergroup contact. Contact is most effective if its effects can be generalized g ways (19). In response to this

sites (table S2 and fig. S5). Research staff in vited Christian teams in two northern Iraq

Methodological constraints also limit our

D in Iraq, which М D

(what I label "on-the-field out

team. A positive treatment effect on this ou come signifies reduced ingroup bias (17). See

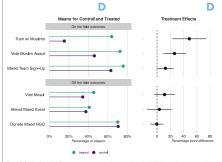


Fig. 1. Behavioral results. The intervention consistently improved on the field behavioral outcomes, with no table effects on off-the-field outcomes. The left panel shows covariate-adjusted mean outcomes for treated and control players, with covariates held at median or modal values. The right panel shows the difference between treated and control players, with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 1. Primary behavioral and attitudinal outcomes Behavioral outcomes

to 5 months postintervention)

5. Vote for Muslim player to receive sportsmanship prize (2 weeks to 5 months postinte

6. Register for mixed team in the future (2 weeks to 5 months postintervention)

Attitudinal indices (2 weeks to 5 months postintervention)

tal unity

11 Believe that Iraq would be a better society if Iraqis treated each other as Iraqis first

12 Believe that dividing Iraq into ethnic and religious groups is arbitrary

ris as neighbors

21 Comfortable with Shrife Shabak as neighbor

22 Comfortable with Suria Shabak as neighbor

23 Comfortable with Shrife Araba sneighbor

24 Comfortable with Suria Araba sneighbor

24 Comfortable with Suria Araba sneighbor

gift Muslims

ng Muslims

3.1 Believe that Shi'ite Shabak are responsible for Christian suffer

3.2 Relieve that Sunni Arabs are responsible for Christian sufferi

Mousa, Science 369, 866-870 (2020) 14 August 2020

RESEARCH | REPORT

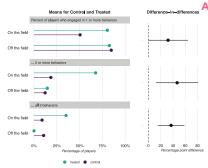


Fig. 2. On-the-field versus off-the-field behaviors. The intervention shifted the probability of engagin in at least one on-the-field behavior more than it shifted the probability of engaging in at least one of the-field behavior. The same was true of engaging in all sust two behaviors or all three. The left panel shows concrite-adjusted means for the control and treatment groups separately for on the-field and off-the-field ventiones. The right panel shows differences between on the-field treatment effects a off-the-field treatment effects (e.g., difference-in-differences), with 95% confidence intervals generated. using a block-bootstrapping approach (see the supplementary materials and methods).

1 of 5

Association website under study ID-ALBARITS

Figure 1 summarizes the behavioral results.

Looking first at tolerance on the field, treated
players were 13 percentage points more likely to report that they would not mind being assigned to a mixed team next season (P = 0.044),

26 percentage points more likely to wote for a
Muslim player (not on their team) to receive

percentage points more likely to train with
Muslims 6 months after the intervention ended

(P < 0.001). The training outcome does not
merely capture the inertia of continuing to
play with teammates: 15% of treated teams
recruited Muslim players from other teams
in the league or from the neighborhood Qualitative evidence described in the supplementary text provides further evidence of the
intervention's positive effects on mixed team,
including newly forged friendships.

Moving to generalized tolerance off the field
estimated effects were smaller and not statisti-

estimated effects were smaller and not statisti-cally distinguishable from zero. Treated players were not detectably more likely to attend a mixed social event or to patronize a Muslim-owned restaurant in Mosul up to 4 months after the intervention ended. Conditional on attending the social event, treated players brought their wives at almost identical rates as control players (fig. S6). Moreover, neither self-reported comfort in mixed neighborhoods nor trust in Muslims to receive a cash transfer on one's behalf improved, further suggesting little change with regard toward Muslim stran-

on one's behalf uniproved, nurther suggesting little change with regard toward Muslim strangers (fig. 86).

Exploratory analyses revealed two factors that may have amplified the behavioral effects of contact. First, the treatment improved gendered of the contact of the contac

ment electron the hadrona unity index of 0.82standard deviations (P < 0.001), driven by an item reflecting the view that ethnic and reli-gious divisions are arbitrary (fig. S6). Relative to the other indices, the national unity index RESEARCH | REPORT

mostly captures abstract attitudes rather than beliefs about specific outgroups. I found a similar pattern in an exploratory analysis of local residents (n = 121): Exposure to the leagues correlated with a stronger belief in the arbitrariness of group-based divisions, pointing to potential spillover effects among fans (table S11). Among all main analyses, the effects on on-the-field behaviors and the national unity index 👊

players were consistently more likely to en-gage in on-the-field behaviors (however mea-sured) relative to control players, whereas the two groups engaged in off-the-field behavi at similar rates. The intervention's added bo for on-the-field outcomes relative to off-the field outcomes is estimated at ~30 percentage points or more $(P \le 0.05)$.

those that involve competition or take place in the aftermath of war, are likely to involve Proxying for aggression using yellow and red cards, I did not find evidence of increased hostility among those on all-Christian teams Table S12 demonstrates that the prevalence of cards did not differ across match types Matches that brought together all-Christian teams with mixed teams were not more hos-tile than matches between two treated or two control teams. Moreover, I did not detect differences in the number of cards based on

control teams. Moreover, I did not detect differences in the number of cards based on the referee's religious identity (table S13). I also ruled out backlash effects among control participants and Muslim players. Analyzing changes in attitudes once time, neither control participants nor Muslim players became more prejudiced (figs. S12 and S13). These analyses suggest that competitive contact does not alleviate them either. Ongoing civil wars in the Middle East and Africa, persistent sectarianism across the Arab world, and a death of policies aimed at reintegrating communities this by ISIS in particular have reinvisconted the question of how to

ular have reinvigorated the question of how to build social cohesion in the wake of violence. Despite the potential of intergroup contact, we know little about whether it can build lasting, real-world behavioral change, especially after war. This study provides causal evidence re-garding both of these questions. I found that Christians assigned to compete on a soccer team with Muslim teammates were more

Christians assigned to compete on a soccer team with Muslim teammates were more likely to engage in tolerant behaviors toward Muslim peers accountered in the intervention up to 6 months after the intervention up to 6 months after the intervention up to 6 months after the intervention up to 6 months approximated in of come at the cost of exacerbating prejudice among the control group, as has been found in other studies of Muslim-Christian contact (2). One control group, as has been found in other studies of Muslim-Christian contact (2). The control generalized between the control generalized between the control generalized between the control for cooperative contact (44). The quality of con tact is particularly important in these settings (45, 46). In this vein, the data suggest that those on successful teams were able to unlock improved behaviors toward outgroup strang-ers, further indicating that an exceptionally positive experience may be needed to overturn the negative experiences instilled by war and pointing to a fruitful avenue for future work (41). Postconflict settings could also exacerbate the role of minority status, which is known to dilute contact effects (47, 48). Christians remain a targeted minority in Iraq, poten-

remain a targeted minority in Iraq, poten-tally making generalization of positive effects more difficult relative to members of advan-taged groups.

Behaviors toward known contacts versus strangers also differ in costliness, shedding light on this pattern of results. Driving to Mosul entalis ligher psychological (e.g., inter-group auxiety) and economic (e.g., time and hol) costs relative to measure such as voting for a peer to receive an award, for instance, possibly decreasing the sensitivity of this class results of the properties of the control of the casier to shift relative to self-exported attitudes, a pattern echoed in other prepidies reduction studies, especially among victims of conflict (21, 45, 49).

Even if contact effects do not generalize to the entire outgroup, strengthening ties

Even if contact effects do not generalize to the entire outgroup, strengthening ties between peers could still build resilience and prevent future conflict. I found descriptive evidence of tolerant social norms among local residents most exposed to the leagues, pointing

to the potential for spillover effects. Future work should explore the extent to which localized cohesion can shield these communities from future shocks to tolerance, such as a resurgence in ethnic violence or prejudicial a resugence in etime voience or preguencia rhetoric by political entrepreneurs. Providing causal answers to these questions can inform the hundreds of millions of dollars allotted by the U.S. Agency for International Devel-opment (USAID) for civil society, conflict mitigation, and peace stabilization activities in 2020 (50) and the billions of dollars spent globally on peacebuilding programs (51).

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