Ethics | Experiments

Doing Political Research, Week 9

Assessment

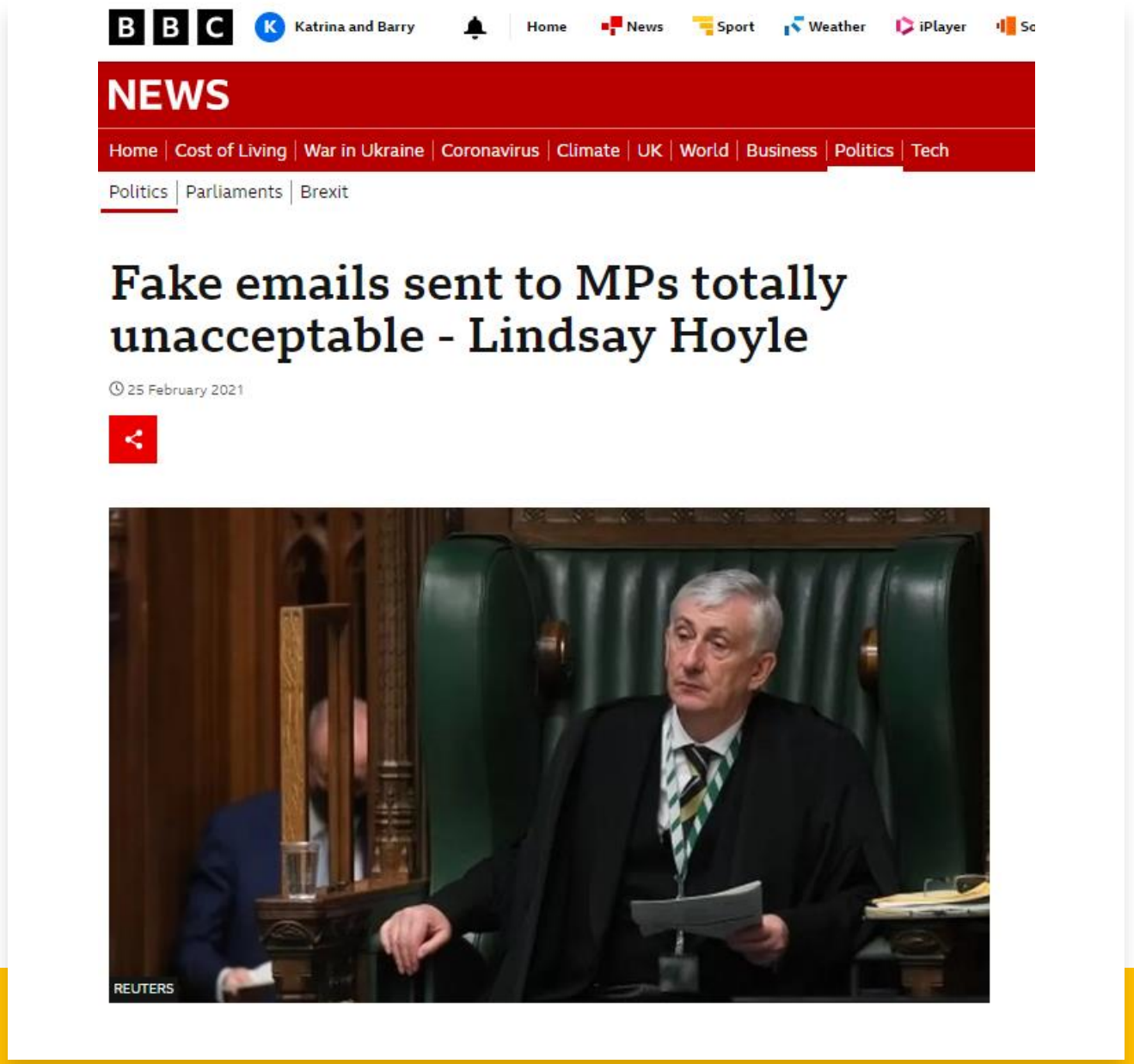
- Marks and feedback for critical review essay to be released next Monday
- Second Quiz to be released on Friday (deadline: Friday 15th December)
- Research Design: deadline on 8th January, full details on Moodle

Next Week: Research Design Workshop

- Bring along your ideas for the research design
- No formal presentation required, but be prepared to speak for a few minutes about your ideas
- Chance to get feedback at whatever stage you are

The Audit Experiment Scandal (Campbell and Bolet)

- Was this research ethical? Should this research project have been conducted? Why, or why not?
- Why did the project run into trouble?
- How could the project have been improved to have not caused such a scandal?



Research Ethics

- You are researching LGBT activism in Uganda against the death penalty for homosexuality
- You are considering these methods: interviews with LGBT activists, focus groups with LGBT people, an ethnography of protest events against the law
- What ethical issues do you need to consider?
- Would you be able to use all the methods? What specific ethical challenges might you face?

Designing a Political Research Experiment

- Choose a research question to investigate a political process or phenomenon and design an experimental study to answer it.
- What kind of experiment will you use: lab, field, survey or natural? What will be the treatment(s) and control conditions?
- How will you ensure randomisation of your treatment or intervention?
- What population will you seek to generalise your findings to?

Mousa

- What kind of experiment did Mousa conduct?
- Was the intervention suitable for testing the theory? How realistic was the setting and the intervention?
- How generalisable are the findings? To what population could the findings be generalised?
- How could the study have been improved? What other methods could have been used?

INTERGROUP RELATIONS

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

Salma Mousa

Can intergroup contact build social cohesion after war? I randomly assigned Iraqi Christians displaced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to an all-Christian soccer team or to a team mixed with Muslims. The intervention improved behaviors toward Muslim peers: Christians with Muslim teammates 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 intervention 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 intergroup attitudes. Although contact can build tolerant behaviors toward peers within an intervention, building broader social cohesion outside of it is more challenging.

On 10 June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) captured the Iraqi city of Mosul. ISIS's offensive culminated in a genocide against Yezidis, Christians, Shi'a, and other minorities, displacing ~100,000 Christians to Iraqi Kurdistan overnight (*1*). Many Christians believe that their Muslim neighbors were complicit in these raids. These suspicions have discouraged Christians from returning to liberated areas, fueled support for self-defense militias, and heightened the potential for reprisal killings and future conflict (*2*). At the same time, Muslim communities from neighboring villages 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 rebuilt after war? Intergroup social cohesion, patterns of cooperation among individuals from different social groups who live and work in close proximity (*4*), is considered key for good governance (*5*) and economic development (*6*). However, countries recovering from war often backslide into violence and instability despite heavy international investment in state-building and peacekeeping (*7*). Sustainable peace requires a combination of policy interventions, such as power-sharing arrangements, and grassroots initiatives that aim to improve interactions between individuals (*8*). Meaningful intergroup contact represents one such grassroots approach.

Here, I provide causal evidence on whether meaningful contact between groups can build social cohesion after war. Using a field experiment among Iraqis displaced by ISIS, I randomly assigned amateur Christian soccer players to an all-Christian team or to a team mixed with three Muslims for a 2-month league. The leagues largely met the conditions considered key for activating successful intergroup contact: Teammates had to cooperate to achieve their shared goal, players were subject to the equalizing effect of team sports, and local Christian leaders and organizations endorsed the leagues. This study thus serves as a proof of concept that near-optimal contact can build tolerant behaviors after violent conflict—at least toward those encountered in the intervention. The positive effects of contact among Christian study participants did not, however, generalize to Muslim strangers, highlighting a potentially important limitation of contact after war.

The "contact hypothesis" proposes that interpersonal 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 that such contact reduces prejudice in several nonconflict settings by highlighting commonalities, forging friendships, lowering intergroup anxiety, and inducing empathy (*10*–*12*). On the other hand, wordless physical exposure has been found to exacerbate prejudice (*13*–*16*), and competitive contact has a similarly negative effect (*17*). These findings suggest that meaningful (positive and cooperative) contact might hold the potential to rebuild tolerance, at least in times of peace.

Should we expect contact to be similarly effective in conflict settings? Only a handful of contact studies involve groups in conflict (*18*, *19*), in part because contact is more likely to be negative in these settings, which disproportionately shapes prejudice (*20*). The evidence we do have indicates that studies of ethnic prejudice generate "substantially weaker effects" relative to interventions aimed at reducing prejudice toward other stigmatized groups such as the elderly or the disabled, suggesting that the cleavages common to war are particularly rigid. Relatedly, ethnic violence solidifies group identities, ethnic prejudices, and anxieties around being physically proximate to the outgroup, further tempering expectations around the impacts of contact after war (*21*–*27*).

Methodological constraints also limit our knowledge of intergroup contact. Contact is most effective if its effects can be generalized to an entire outgroup rather than just to individuals encountered in an intervention (*28*). However, most contact studies determine the generalization of contact effects using self-reported attitudes measured immediately after the intervention (*29*). Policy-makers have subsequently questioned whether contact can change actual behaviors toward the outgroup in lasting ways (*29*). In response to this concern, I tested the generalization hypothesis using real-world behaviors.

Despite the differences between Christians and Muslims in northern Iraq, amateur soccer is popular among both groups. Scholars and policy-makers consider cross-cutting civic associations such as amateur sports clubs to be engines for social capital (*30*–*33*). Intergroup sports in particular exemplify the "positive, energetic, community events…centered on nonpolitical issues" (*34*) that facilitate the "sustained, meaningful interaction with members of different groups" recommended by policy-makers to integrate communities affected by ISIS (*35*).

Leveraging the social potential of team sports, the experiment comprised four soccer leagues spread across two waves and study sites (table S2 and fig. S5). Research staff invited Christian teams in two northern Iraqi cities to participate. Forty-two of the ~46 teams in the area were recruited on a first come, first served basis, resulting in a sample size that varied between 183 and 459 Christian players depending on the outcome (see the supplementary materials and methods). Captains were told that a local Christian community organization was working with a United States–based university to offer a soccer league for displaced people and to research their experiences. Participants were told that community-building was one of the leagues' aims and, as such, each team would be allocated an additional three players who may or may not be Christian in an effort to include diverse groups. Treated teams received additional Muslim players drawn from local Muslim teams, whereas control teams received fellow Christians. Christian and Muslim added players were indistinguishable in baseline skill (table S6), and league guidelines ensured that they played roughly the same number of minutes per game (see the supplementary text). A total of 91.8% of contacted participants were retained until the end of the study, whereas the remainder dropped out before treatment assignments were made or because of injuries sustained during games. Because Muslims were only

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