Promoting Peace Amidst Group Conflict: An Intergroup Contact Field Experiment in Nigeria - Theory

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1 Theory

1.1 Intergroup Conflict as a Bargaining Problem

Intergroup conflict is most often conceptualized as a bargaining problem (Fearon 1994b; Powell 2006), and most solutions to reducing intergroup conflict strive to help the groups overcome those bargaining problems [Di Salvatore and Ruggeri (2017); chris: this cite is just for peacekeeping/intervention]. Intergroup conflict is a bargaining problem because both groups want some resource – land, power, etc – but cannot reach an agreement about how to distribute that resource peacefully. Because fighting is costly, the groups are better off reaching a bargained compromise and not fighting. However, two bargaining problems prevent this: information problems and commitment problems. To successfully bargain, the groups need (1) accurate information about each other's strengths and preferences, and/or (2) the assurance that each side will abide by its agreements.

An *information problem* arises because neither group possesses accurate information about the other, and both groups have an incentive to deceive the other in order to achieve an advantageous bargaining outcome. Groups have an incentive to portray themselves as stronger, more willing to fight, and less willing to make concessions than they truly are (Fearon 1995). This causes bargaining failures because neither group knows what agreements the other side is willing to accept or what their side should receive from bargaining. A *comittment problem* arises because neither group can credibly commit to honor bargained agreements if bargaining power shifts in the future. If bargaining power shifts, one side will have an incentive to renege on the status quo agreement to achieve a better agreement. Neither group can commit to honor agreements made today when both groups know that bargaining power may shift tomorrow.[1] Without the ability to commit to agreements, bargaining will not be successful.

Groups in conflict overcome these bargaining problems in several ways. Groups can overcome information problems through fighting, as they learn about each others capacity and willingness to fight (Smith and Stam 2003). Groups can also overcome information problems through mediation. An interested third party mediator with no stake in the conflict can provide accurate information to both sides, helping each side reach a bargain (Beber 2012; Kydd 2006; Ott 1972) Even if groups overcome information problems, commitment problems could prevent groups from reaching an agreement. The

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[1] Power between the groups can shift due to factors that affect each group's preferences and capabilities. Internally, one group may grow in power or size, one group may disarm before the other, the groups may have factions that reject the agreement, the groups may change leaders, or group members attitudes may change for other reasons. Externally, the groups may gain or lose de facto or de jure state support, other external actors may switch allegiances, or some other shock may change each group's power relative to the other [Fearon (2004); Reed et al. (2016); chris: need to cite and add more]. Anything that will change group power in the future can cause commitment problems in the present.

main way that groups overcome commitment problems is through strong third parties that add large costs to reneging on agreements (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fearon 1998; Powell 2006). Though each group may have an incentive to defect on its agreement if bargaining power changes in a vacuum, the groups have no incentive to defect if a strong third party is capable of and willing to punish defection from bargained agreements. With a third party punishing defection, the groups can bargain in good faith knowing that the other will abide by its word.

If we know how to resolve intergroup conflict, why does conflict persist? International mediation and intervention are dogged by two issues of motivation. First, mediators are often motivated for peace. This motivation implies that mediator's provide information that is biased towards encouraging the groups to negotiate a peace agreement. This means that peace-biased mediators do not solve information problems. For mediators to reduce information problems, groups engaged in bargaining must believe that mediators provide accurate, unbiased information. Since both groups know that mediators are biased towards peace, mediators may not help groups achieve peace (Fey and Ramsay 2010; Kydd 2006; Smith and Stam 2003). This same argument prevents mediators who are biased for or against disputants from solving information problems (Kydd 2006).[2]

Second, international actors may lack the motivation to mediate or to intervene into the conflict, even if one group reneges on its agreement. Intervention is costly and many international actors either cannot credibly commit to intervene into many conflicts or have no interest in intervening into many conflicts (Beber 2012; Fey and Ramsay 2010; Kydd 2006). This lack of motivation is especially relevant for intergroup conflict between groups within a state. Most international actors and strong third parties lack an incentive to intervene into intrastate intergroup conflicts, and these disputes tend to take place within states that lack the capacity to compel both sides themselves. Since intervention is costly, strong third parties have an incentive to intervene only *after* fighting escalates, so intervention will generally not be used to prevent conflict from escalating or to reduce the persistent, smaller-scale violence that plague many countries. Where external actors are motivated to intervene, intervention is a short-term peace solution and its effects do not endure with the departure of the external actor (Beardsley 2008; Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti 2013; Weinstein 2005). Once the external actor leaves, the groups' commitment problem returns: with no one to punish defection, the groups have no reason to trust each other.

Rather than rely on third parties to mediate or punish defection, groups in conflict can achieve peace by building mutual trust. Reputations for trustworthiness are how groups overcome bargaining problems in the absence of formal enforcement mechanisms (Kydd 2000, Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti (2013); Ostrom 2000; Ostrom and Walker 2003).[3] Mutual trust overcomes bargaining problems because

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[2]Whether mediation is benefited from biased or unbiased information is still a matter of debate. Some scholars believe bias improves mediation. The primary mechanisms proposed are that biased mediators are more likely to have relevant private information (Savun 2008) and that a biased mediator who tells his *favored* group to compromise will be heeded (Kydd 2003; Svensson 2009). We tend to side with Beber (2012), Rauchhaus (2006), Crescenzi et al. (2011), and Kydd (2006) and believe that unbiased mediation improves mediation outcomes. Kydd (2006) and Beber (2012) provide compelling theoretical arguments: effective mediators must be both unbiased and motivated, but that motivation and bias often overlap. We are also amenable to the argument of Fey and Ramsay (2010) that mediator success actually has less to do with information provision and more with agenda setting, offering carrots/threatening sticks, and serving as a back channel.

[3]Reputations based on previous behavior work because each group wants to be known as a trustworthy partner. As a trustworthy partner, they are likely to (1) attract other trustworthy partners, and (2) elicit trusting behavior from partners. Though defecting may be beneficial in one specific instance, getting a reputation for defection harms a group's ability to achieve agreements in the future. By relying on reputation and the knowledge that groups desire good reputations, groups can coordinate in the absence of a strong third party. The reputation argument is generally mobilized for contexts in which many groups observe the behavior of each other group. Because there are many potential partners in the future, a good

information and commitment problems are both, at their heart, problems of trust. For information problems, groups do not trust the information they get from the other side. For commitment problems, groups do not trust the other side to abide by its agreements. Cultivating a reputation as a trustworthy partner in previous interactions gives a bargaining partner confidence that you are trustworthy in the present interaction.

However, groups in conflict are unlikely to build trusting relationships. Intergroup conflict fuels and is fueled by intergroup animosity, and animosity makes peace difficult to attain (Allport 1954; Sherif 1958). Groups in conflict dehumanize the outgroup (Bandura 1999; Haslam and Loughnan 2014; Leyens et al. 2007; Opotow 1990), view the outgroup as innately immoral (Brewer 1999, 435; Parker and Janoff-Bulman 2013; Weisel and Böhm 2015), do not naturally feel empathy for outgroup members (Gutsell and Inzlicht 2010), are unlikely to forgive outgroup transgression (Tam et al. 2007), and believe outgroup members to be untrustworthy and dishonest (Eidelson and Eidelson 2003; LeVine and Campbell 1972). With this set of attitudes, outgroups are unlikely to develop reputations as trustworthy partners, even if both groups prefer mutual cooperation to war. The groups are trapped in a mutually-defecting Prisoner's Dilemma.

1.2 How Intergroup Animosity Perpetuates Conflict

Pre-existing intergroup animosity prevents peaceful resolution of conflict in multiple ways. First, and most obviously, animosity directly exacerbates bargaining problems . Mutual distrust creates information and commitment problems. Animosity also changes the payoff that each group receives from peace and war through non-material rewards and costs, called internal evaluations (Ostrom and Walker 2003). Second, animosity biases perceptions of ingroup and outgroup behavior and preferences. These biases increase the likelihood that each group misperceives the other side's intentions and prevents groups from developing reputations for trustworthiness.

Intergroup animosity prevents peace by directly exacerbating bargaining problems. First, information and commitment problems are more likely to occur because groups are less likely to trust information they receive from the other side or any peace commitment they get from the other side. Second, animosity may change each groups preferences for peace and war. Individual group members might receive psychological benefits from "beating" the other side and from social differentiation with the outgroup (Wood 2000). Many groups define "us" by positive differences with a "them", and an individual can derive self-esteem from positively comparing their group identity to a rival group (Brewer 1999; Tajfel 1981). When group members derive self-esteem from feeling superior to an outgroup, group members may reject actions that recognize the outgroup as equals and rhetoric about group similarity due to cognitive dissonance. With these internal evaluations of peace and war, any outcome in which the other side achieves *any* utility could be viewed as a loss. Groups that see the other side as immoral may even receive some internal benefit from *harming* the outgroup (Weisel and Böhm 2015).

Along with psychological benefits, group members may receive social benefits for strong anti-outgroup stances and social sanctioning for cooperative behavior. The utility a group members gets for attitudes and behaviors depends largely on how those attitudes and behaviors are received by their ingroup (Wood 2000). If group members perceive outgroup animosity as socially desirable, they may profess attitudes and engage in behaviors that signal outgroup animosity. These social *benefits* also entail reciprocal social *costs* that constrain the actions of group members and group leaders. Individuals who cooperate with the outgroup, as opposed to taking a hard stance against the other side's perceived

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reputation has high payoff in the form of many potential cooperative partners in the future. In our case, there are two main sides forming perceptions about the reputation of each other. This closely mimics repeating prisoner's dilemma interactions as shown in Axelrod (1980a) and Axelrod (1980b).

transgressions, might be accused of betraying the outgroup for cooperating (Dreu 2010). Individuals in these groups might not engage in ingroup policing, a strong, costly signal to the other side that your group will uphold its peace agreements (Fearon and Laitin 1996). While cooperation and ingroup policing might be punished, aggressive actions may be seen as righteous self-defense of the ingroup and rewarded.

Leaders are also constrained by animosity among their group. Groups are known to punish leaders for cooperating or compromising with the outgroup (Fearon 1994a), so the set of peace agreements available to the leader of one group is likely unacceptable to the other.. Leaders of hostile groups also cannot credibly commit to keep their group members in check, as some subgroups may feel confident enough to disobey agreements made by group leaders. Due to increased (1) likelihood of information and commitment problems, (2) internal psychological evaluations that favor competition over cooperation, and (3) social sanctioning for group members and leaders perceived as betraying the ingroup, animosity reduces the likelihood of successful bargaining and makes violent conflict more likely.

Animosity also sabotages peace in indirect, pernicious ways. Indirectly, intergroup animosity biases interpretations of ingroup and outgroup behavior and prevents accurate perceptions about the attitudes and preferences of the outgroup. Ingroups will perceive their own belligerent actions as defensive and justified, and are more likely to perceive outgroup actions as aggressive, negatively motivated, and unjustified (Amir 1969; Hewstone 1990; Hunter, Stringer, and Watson 1991 chris: also cite confirmation bias, anchoring bias). The perceived negative behavior may be seen as *defining* the group, whereas any perceived positive behavior may be seen as the *exception* to the group (Allison and Messick 1985; Pettigrew 1979). Even positive intergroup interactions may be re-interpreted as negative to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962; Gubler 2013; Paolini, Harwood, and Rubin 2010). Interpreting interactions negatively saps the power of each group to reassure the other with costly signals of willingness to cooperate in future interactions (Kydd 2000, Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti (2013)). It also adds to information problems as groups will hold inaccurate views about each other's willingness to cooperate and likelihood of upholding agreements. As Axelrod (1980a) shows, perceived untrustworthy behavior by one side often begets a cycle of mistrust.

The indirect effect of animosity on intergroup bargaining poses a major obstacle to groups overcoming bargaining problems through trustworthy reputations. Groups tend to ascribe negative traits to the outgroup, and also tend to remember negative events that corroborate their negative beliefs (Brewer 1991; Klein and Kunda 1992; Tajfel 1981, Brewer (1999)). Groups in conflict are given many events to justify their negative perceptions. Initial negative perceptions, and the biased interpretations they beget, make it very difficult for a group to develop a positive reputation with a group they are in conflict with, even when both groups are motivated to end the conflict. This bias likely pushes each group's perception of the other side's willingness to make peace further from their true willingness to make peace and so reputations hinder, rather than aid, intergroup bargaining processes.

Reputations for trustworthiness are also hampered by a lack of opportunities for groups to observe each others behavior and to learn the outgroup's reputation. Compounding that problem, few of the outgroup's interactions will be with groups that are relevant for predicting the outgroup's behavior towards the ingroup. This means that the main opportunity to observe outgroup behavior and learn their reputation is your own interactions with the outgroup. For groups in conflict, these opportunities are likely rare and almost always adversarial.

1.3 Intergroup Contact to Increase Trust and Reduce Conflict (How to Increase Trust and Why it Can Work)

The problems of negative intergroup attitudes suggests that improving those attitudes could lead to peace-promoting behaviors and reduce conflict. One approach to improving intergroup attitudes comes from intergroup contact theory. Intergroup contact theory hypothesizes that interactions in which group members cooperate to achieve shared goals will improve intergroup relations. Improving relations – especially improving trust – can help groups overcome bargaining problems and reduce the likelihood of violence.

Intergroup contact theory posits several conditions necessary for intergroup contact to improve relations. Groups must cooperate with equal status to achieve shared goals with the support of elites. Intergroup contact under these conditions gives the ability give strong costly signals about a group's reputation and the "group type" as a conditional complier: we will honor our agreements if you honor yours. And about perceptual fairness/unbiasedness: we will interpret things you do fairly and we will interpret things we do fairly (i.e. we will not think everything we do is justified and everything you do is unjustified). When groups are in conflict, most incidental intergroup contact will be highly adversarial.

Groups need opportunity to signal trustworthiness and preferences for cooperation (Kydd 2000, Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti (2013)). Structured intergroup contact provides opportunities for these signals. When the contact is group-to-group, trustworthy behavior by the outgroup is immediately known by several ingroup members. The intergroup contact to focus on superordinate goals so the groups can see how intergroup cooperation benefits both sides materially (Sherif 1958). Sees how *both groups* have a self-interested incentive to cooperate with peace agreements.

Ingroup identification does not necessitate outgroup hate (Allport 1954; Brewer 1999; Halevy, Bornstein, and Sagiv 2008).

Could improve reputations/remove stereotypes. Increase perception of trustworthiness/intergroup trust. Contact gives opportunity for costly signals. Reputations will help groups overcome information and commitment problems. Groups trust information they get from the other group. Groups trust the other group to abide by agreements because they believe the other group is also motivated by peace.

Can give group members interactions that reduce perceptual biases. Can decrease prejudice and encourage ingroup policing. Decrease prejudice also allows leaders to credibly commit entire group to peace. Encourage ingroup policing. Create norms against prejudice and violence, or connect existing norms to the outgroup by humanizing the outgroup.

Could improve dispute resolution and reduce conflict over resources. Encourage sharing resources *or* separation of resources. Mediation training – help community leaders resolve disputes.

Could decrease threat, though in cases of active conflict this might exacerbate rather than solve conflict (information about reduced outgroup threat == higher chance of my group winning).

Could increase empathy. Seeing the other side's argument, seeing their motivations. Increase empathy/less prejudice helps interpret information in non-biased way. [Chris: cite literature on empathy making me interpret information about other people more accurately. Kertzer?]

Could expand ingroup/make group similarities salient. Seeing our two groups as one, seeing our incentives as aligned.

Groups work together to gain more material resources, improves us now, makes me think working together in the *future* would be good. Realistic Group Conflict Theory – resource competition causes

conflict, and intergroup relations improved when the groups work together to improve material status of both groups.

Can give group members the capacity to affect conflict.

As an alternative to top-down international intervention to reduce conflict, bottom-up peacebuilding programs can reduce conflict by focusing on both the immediate economic concerns contributing to conflict (superordinate goals?) and the psychological attitudes contributing to conflict. Bottom-up psychological reconciliation programs should work for the types of conflicts for which international intervention is rarely used and is unlikely to be successful. Persistent intergroup conflict that plagues many countries. Low-level conflict before it builds to large-scale conflict. There are XX conflicts of this type accounting for XX deaths each year.

1.4 Why Peacebuilding Could Fail

Yet peacebuilding generally, and intergroup contact specifically, may not work in contexts of ongoing violence. Many top-down attempts to solve bargaining problems with a strong external actor (through mediation and intervention) are ineffective while conflict is going on and only effective at maintaining peace once the formal conflict has ended. Likewise, psychological reconciliation may prevent resumption of conflict but requires conflict to already be resolved (Bar-Tal 2000). Active conflict produces many grievances and high prejudice; cognitive dissonance causes backlash for the most prejudiced people (Festinger 1962; Gubler 2011). Negative contact experiences reinforce negative stereotypes (Paolini, Harwood, and Rubin 2010). Motivated reasoning for attitudes towards others (Klein and Kunda 1992). If you don't want to like someone, you will find a reason not to. Many reasons contact may not work in this context.

Intergroup conflict is commitment problem solved by strong third party (Fearon 1994b; Powell 2006) and bottom-up programs do not provide a strong third party that can enforce commitments. Psychological reconciliation is not how we've thought of solving commitment problems between conflicting groups or improving reputations. Can psych reconciliation improve reputations in contexts of ongoing violence?

Underlying cause of conflict still present. Groups still engage in competition for resources, which breeds conflict (Campbell 1965; Sherif et al. 1988).

Few norms against prejudice, possibly group norms that support this particular intergroup prejudice. If intergroup contact works by activating "norms against prejudice", unlikely to work here.

Intergroup contact may only reduce prejudice from high-status group to low-status group.

Relative deprivation theory: the groups still see the other as responsible for ingroup deprivations.

1.5 Hypotheses
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