Intergroup Contact Amidst Escalating Conflict - Introduction

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0.1 Introduction

Does intergroup contact reduce prejudice and conflict in contexts of intergroup violence? Direct intergroup contact interventions are often implemented to reduce real-world conflict between groups, and these real-world conflicts are defined by active violence and resource competition. Despite a plethora of research about intergroup contact and widespread use of intergroup contact in violent contexts, we have almost no evidence about the effects of intergroup contact in violent contexts or where economic imperatives push groups apart. Can intergroup contact overcome prejudice when the groups are engaged in active conflict over resources?

Decades of research demonstrate that intergroup contact *can* reduce group-level prejudice in a variety of contexts. Intergroup contact reduces prejudice towards different racial and ethnic groups groups (Burns, Corno, and La Ferrara 2015; Katz and Zalk 1978; Marmaros and Sacerdote 2006; Yablon 2012), different religious groups (Barnhardt 2009; Scacco and Warren 2016; Yablon 2012), women (Finseraas et al. 2016), people with physical disabilities (Krahé and Altwasser 2006), gay people (Grutzeck and Gidycz 1997), immigrants (Finseraas and Kotsadam 2017), and other groups (see Paluck, Green, and Green 2017, and @pettigrew2006meta for reviews). None of these studies, however, involve groups in active conflict or groups competing for resources; few of these studies involve adults beyond college age.

Active conflict and economic competition could prevent contact's positive effects, and may even cause contact to increase prejudice, because active conflict and economic competition give group members a material motivation for prejudice and hate. In an active conflict, the groups have materially damaged each other; in economic competition, one group's gain is the other group's loss. Both situations are common in conflicts worldwide, but scholars have yet to grapple with how these conditions affect intergroup contact or test intergroup contact in these contexts. Contact theory suggests that contact should work in these contexts, provided the contact itself is conducted under proper conditions. If the contact allows group members to (i) cooperate towards (ii) common goals in an (iii) equal status context with the (iv) support of authorities, contact should reduce prejudice. Even when the groups are currently in conflict and competition, contact should provide experiences that reduce stereotypes (Allport 1954; Gaertner and Dovidio 2014), reduce anxiety and uncertainty (Lee 2001; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp 2008; Paolini et al. 2004), and increase empathy (Broockman and Kalla 2016; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008) towards the outgroup.

But will contact effectively reduce prejudice when the wider social context promotes it? Other perspectives on intergroup prejudice, like realistic group conflict theory (Campbell 1965; M. Sherif et al. 1988) and psychological theories like motivated reasoning and cognitive dissonance, would not predict improved relations from intergroup contact in this context. Intergroup contact does not change the underlying causes of prejudice – competition over indivisible resources – or change the

resultant history of violence that feeds outgroup prejudice and whose justification requires outgroup prejudice. In these contexts, any intergroup contact may increase prejudice because group members may be motivated to interpret intergroup interactions negatively (Klein and Kunda 1992; Paolini, Harwood, and Rubin 2010), and the cognitive dissonance generated from even positive intergroup contact may cause a backlash effect that increases prejudice (Gubler and others 2011).

Farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria's Middlebelt is an ideal context to learn about the effect of intergroup contact on intergroup attitudes in a conflict environment. As Nigeria's population expands and arable land recedes, economic imperatives have pushed subsistence farmers and pastoralists into a deadly conflict. Though far more attention is paid towards Boko Haram in Nigeria's northeast, repercussions of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Nigeria's Middlebelt are just as significant. As a result of the conflict, Nigeria's Middlebelt, a mostly rural region considered Nigeria's breadbasket and home to nearly 100 vibrant peoples and cultures, has suffered an estimated 60,000 deaths (Jr. 2016), hundreds of thousands of internally displaced peoples (Daniel 2018; Group 2017), and $13 billion of lost economic productivity annually (McDougal et al. 2015), greatly stressing Nigeria's economic and social infrastructure. Farmer-pastoralist conflict plagues numerous sub-Saharan African countries, where 60% of the world's estimated 50-100 million pastoralists live (Omar 1992; Sheik-Mohamed and Velema 1999). As economic and climactic trends continue to decrease land availability, it's likely that farmer-pastoralist conflict will become an increasingly large problem in the world.

We conduct a field experiment with farmer and pastoralist communities in two Nigerian states to determine if intergroup contact effectively reduces prejudice between groups in conflict. We identified fifteen sites where farmer and pastoral groups had engaged in violent conflict within the previous 12 months. We then randomly assigned ten of fifteen conflict sites to receive a yearlong peacebuilding program based around intergroup contact, with the other five sites serving as the control group.[1] The program formed committees with equal numbers of farmers and pastoralists, including community leaders from both groups, and tasked them with constructing two infrastructure projects that would benefit both communities: (1) a borehole to increase access to potable water and (2) a project of their choosing, such as a primary health center, a school, or an expanded market building. These committees represented the four conditions that Allport (1954) theorized were necessary for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice: the two groups cooperated to achieve joint goals in an equal status context with the support of authorities.

This results of this field experiment demonstrate that intergroup contact can effectively reduce prejudice even in contexts of escalating intergroup violence and even when the groups' economic incentives oppose cooperation. Communities that received the ECPN program increased their intergroup contact, trust in the outgroup, and perceptions of physical security relative to the control group that received no program. The results also show that contact for a relatively small percentage of a group can affect attitudes of group members with no exogenous increase in contact with the outgroup. We observe the most positive changes from individuals directly involved in the intergroup committees, but we also observe smaller diffusion effects to group members who were not involved in the intergroup contact intervention.

In this article, we begin by reviewing the literature on intergroup prejudice, focusing on the theory of intergroup contact and highlighting conditions under which contact may be ineffective at reducing prejudice. We then discuss what farmer-pastoralist conflict can teach us about intergroup contact,

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[1]Based on the success of ECPN, Mercy Corps received further funding to implement the peacebuilding program in the control sites *after* the final evaluation of ECPN was completed. The control sites were not informed that they would receive a peacebuilding program during the evaluation.

describe our experimental intervention and two designs to evaluate the effect of the intervention, and present the results of the study. We conclude by connecting the implications of these findings to theories of group prejudice.

0.2 My Thoughts
- Better to be able to say a potential mechanism: Results suggest that the contact decreased threat/increased perceptions of benefit from cooperation/something
- Both violence + conflict over resources? Does that help by making this broad (union) or hurt by making it too narrow (intersection)
- Should I even discuss "RGCT" in this introduction?
- Should I discuss rational choice theories here or at all? What are some rational choice theories about conflict?
- Should I bring up the fact that we want peacebuilding interventions to affect people who don't directly participate (i.e. diffuse to non-participants)?
- Fast and loose with "reduce conflict vs prejudice"? Just make it prejudice?
- How to better distinguish the cause of conflict (scarce resources) and the consequences of the conflict (history of violence).

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