

Promoting Peace Amid Escalating Conflict: An Intergroup Contact Field Experiment in Nigeria - Abstract

Christopher Grady

March 21, 2019

1 Abstract

1.1 Abstract 3

Intergroup conflict is responsible for many of the worst displays of human nature. In this paper we test the ability of intergroup contact to contribute to peace between groups involved in violent conflict. Intergroup conflict is often characterized as a bargaining failure. Both groups would benefit from compromise, but negotiations break down and conflict ensues because neither group trusts the other to abide by their agreements. The proposed solutions are coercive institutions that prevent groups from defecting on bargained agreements. However, coercive power cannot reach many group conflicts. We propose intergroup contact as an alternative to coercive institutions. Coercive institutions substitute for intergroup trust, but intergroup contact can foster intergroup trust directly by creating situations in which groups can signal their trustworthiness. Intergroup trust allows groups to bargain even in the absence of coercive institutions. We test the ability of intergroup contact to promote peace between violently conflicting groups with a field experiment in Nigeria, where farmer and pastoralist communities are embroiled in a deadly conflict over land use. We find that the program increases intergroup trust and physical security. We do not find evidence for alternative mechanisms through which intergroup contact could reduce violence, such as reducing outgroup threat or expanding the conception of ingroup to include the former outgroup. These results suggest that intergroup trust via intergroup contact can serve as social institution that solves commitment problems and promotes peace between groups in conflict.