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 barriers to bargaining [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 than fighting. However, two problems prevent successful bargaining: information problems and commitment problems (Fearon 1995). Groups are less likely to successfully bargain without (1) accurate information about each other's strengths and preferences, and/or (2) assurance that each side will abide by its agreements.

An *information problem* arises when neither group possesses accurate information about the other. In this situation, both groups have an incentive to deceive the other 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 *commitment problem* arises when neither group can credibly commit to honor bargained agreements. For example, if bargaining power shifts after the agreement, one side will have an incentive to renege on the status quo agreement to achieve a better agreement. This causes bargaining failures because neither group will commit to agreements today that they believe will be broken tomorrow. Without the ability to commit to agreements, bargaining will not be successful.[chris: maybe revise this paragraph so the second part (commitment problems) is structurally parallel to the first part (information problems).]

Groups in conflict overcome information and commitment problems in two main ways. The first way is through third-parties. Third parties can solve information problems by mediating disputes, providing accurate information to both sides (Kydd 2006). Third parties can also solve commitment problems by intervening to punish defection from agreements. Though each group may have an incentive to defect on an agreement after it is made, the groups have less incentive to defect if a strong third party is capable of and willing to punish defection from bargained agreements (Fearon 1995).

The second way groups solve information and commitment problems is through reputations for trustworthiness (Kydd 2000). Reputations for trustworthiness are how groups bargain in the absence of formal enforcement mechanisms like third parties (Ostrom and Walker 2003). Reputations encourage bargaining because future bargaining depends on groups trusting each other to abide by agreements,

and groups with reputations for defection are unlikely to attract other trustworthy partners or elicit trusting behavior from partners (Kydd 2000; Ostrom and Walker 2003). Cultivating a reputation as a trustworthy partner in previous interactions gives a bargaining partner confidence that you are trustworthy in the present interaction.[1]

1.2 The Persistence of Intergroup Conflict

If we know how to resolve intergroup conflict, why does conflict persist? First, it is not possible for third parties to mediate or intervene into every conflict. Sometimes no third party is willing or able to become involved (Fey and Ramsay 2010, 530), and sometimes the conflict is too decentralized for a third party to effectively mediate or intervene. This situation is common for internal conflicts in weak states, where conflicts are diffuse and the state lacks the capacity to mediate or intervene into the conflict. Second, third party mediation and intervention are not effective in all contexts (Autesserre 2017; Beardsley 2008; Beber 2012; Weinstein 2005).

Where third parties cannot effectively intervene, conflicting groups could negotiate based on reputation, but groups in conflict are unlikely to have reputations that assist with bargaining. 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). These psychological mechanisms introduce significant friction in the ability of groups to build trusting relationships and significantly restrain opportunities through which trust could be built.

These psychological mechanisms prevents peaceful resolution of conflict in two main ways. First, they bias each group's perception of the other side's behavior and preferences. Second, they increase the costs of cooperation and the benefits of defection. These two psychological mechanisms decrease the likelihood that the two sides bargain successfully. These mechanisms prevent each side from accurately interpreting the other side's signals, create and reinforce negative outgroup stereotypes, and limit the number of agreements that each side prefers to fighting.

Group members interpret the behavior of ingroup and outgroup members differently. More belligerent and threatening behavior. Groups over-generalize negative behaviors of outgroup members as representative of the entire outgroup and under-generalize positive behaviors as exceptional to the outgroup (Hewstone 1990) These biases produces low trust, belief that other side owes your side something/other side has committed transgressions whereas your side is defensive.

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

[1] The reputation argument is generally mobilized for contexts in which many groups observe the behavior of many other groups. In those contexts a good reputation assists in obtaining *other* cooperative partners. In our case, there are two main sides forming perceptions about the reputation of each other. In this context, a good reputation assists in obtaining cooperative behavior in the future from the same partner. This two player context is similar to Kydd (2000).

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, @rohner2013war). 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 (1980) shows, perceived untrustworthy behavior by one side often begets a cycle of mistrust.

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, @brewer1999ingroupOutgroup).

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.

Compounding these problems, reputations for trustworthiness are also hampered by a lack of opportunities for groups to observe each others behavior and update perceptions of the outgroup's trustworthiness. 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, providing fewer opportunities for updating. This means that the main opportunity to observe outgroup behavior and learn their reputation is the ingroup's own interactions with the outgroup. For groups in conflict, these opportunities are likely rare and almost always adversarial.

For groups in conflict, the costs of cooperation and the benefits of defection are high. When forming preferences for fighting or bargaining, groups in conflict are not strictly weighing the material costs and benefits of conflict versus peace. Their preferences are affected by psychological and social punishments and rewards/evaluations. The social and psychological consequences add costs to cooperating with the outgroup and add benefits to defecting from agreements with the outgroup.

Individual group members receive psychological benefits from social differentiation with the outgroup and from beating the outgroup (Turner, Brown, and Tajfel 1979; 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. 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 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 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.

Intergroup animosity prevents peace by directly exacerbating informtion and commitment 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.

1.3 Peacebuilding Interventions to Improve Intergroup Attitudes

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 (Allport 1954). Intergroup contact theory hypothesizes that intergroup relations can be improved through interactions in which group members (1) cooperate (2) with equal status (3) to achieve shared goals (4) with the support of elites.[2]. Improving relations – especially improving trust – can help groups overcome bargaining problems and reduce the likelihood of violence.

The effectiveness of intergroup contact has been demonstrated in a variety of contexts and using a variety of methodological approaches (Paluck, Green, and Green 2017; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Notably, intergroup contacted programs improved relations between white people and black people in the U.S. South Africa, and Norway (Burns, Corno, and La Ferrara 2015; Carrell, Hoekstra, and West 2015; Finseraas and Kotsadam 2017; Marmaros and Sacerdote 2006), Jews and Arabs (Ditlmann and Samii 2016; Yablon 2012), and Hindus and Muslims in India (Barnhardt 2009). In Nigeria, a recent study found that intergroup contact between Muslims and Christians decreased discrimination relative to a group that experienced *intragroup* contact, suggesting that intergroup contact can work by countering the adverse effects of ingroup-only experiences (Scacco and Warren 2018).

Intergroup contact is proposed to affect a myriad of intergroup attitudes. Here we focus on six: (1) increased trust, (2) reduced anxiety and threat, (3) reduced social distance (4) expansion of ingroup to include the former outgroup, and (5) perceptions of material benefit from cooperation.

Intergroup contact gives groups an opportunity to learn about each other and update opinions based on personal experience. This updating can increase trust and decrease feelings of threat and anxiety (Hewstone et al. 2006; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp 2008). Intergroup trust increases because contact gives groups the opportunity to signal trustworthiness and preferences for cooperation

[2]Under other conditions – incidental contact, intergroup competition, interactions in which one group has power over the other, elite disapproval of intergroup contact – the structure of the contact may *not* improve relations (Enos 2014; Forbes 1997).]

to the other group (Kydd 2000, @rohner2013war). Threat and anxiety reduce as familiarity with outgroup members increases. Feelings of threat and anxiety often arise from fear of the unknown, and through intergroup contact the two groups to get to know each other.

Intergroup contact can show the groups how their values and interests align, making the groups feel closer. The increased closeness can manifest as reduced social distance and even a new collective identification that includes both groups. Groups in conflict often use the outgroup to define the ingroup – the outgroup's _bad_ness helps define the ingroup's _good_ness (Allport 1954; Brewer 1999; Tajfel 1981). Contact can make salient many similarities between the groups, reducing feelings of social distance and even helping to craft a joint identity that encompasses both groups (Gaertner and Dovidio 2014).

Intergroup contact can also show the groups how their material status benefits from cooperation. Group animosity often arises due to the competition for resources that both groups claim or desire (Sherif 1958). Intergroup contact to achieve a goal that benefits both groups (1) alleviates material deprivation and (2) associates intergroup cooperation with positive material outcomes. By cooperating for joint benefit in the present groups can see how cooperative behavior in the future will benefit both groups.

Contact-based interventions can also assist third-party mediation or intervention. Helps mediation because the conflicting groups are more likely to update perceptions based on mediated information. Helps intervention because the groups are still able to commit to agreements without the threat of punishment.

2 References

Thoughts about trust

Ostrom and Walker (2003) ch.2 discusses how reciprocity, reputation, and trust help overcome selfish behavior that leads to pareto-inferior outcomes; players achieve self-enforcing equilibria by comitting themselves to punishing noncooperators to deter noncooperation; repeated games & uncertainty about player types increases cooperation; face to face interaction increases cooperation bcuz increases trust, also could add subjective value to payoff structure, gives group ID, reinforces normes, not because players realize optimal strategies and not from non-face-to-face promises. People seek to improve values they find important. People use heuristics; people use internal evaluations that add or subtract from objective payoffs (+ for feeling good, - for being a sucker); ch.12 discusses how trust is minimal in situations where reputations for trust cannot be established. (**???**) ch.3 gaming trust – concept of mutual trust: trust based on long-term interaction between two parties. Thick trust: diverse layers of interaction; interactions in one layer influence interactions in another; repeated relationships and 3rd party relationships. (**???**) talks about being trustworthy. (**???**) and costly signals of trustworthiness. Trust and Reciprocity 2003 ch.15 - knowledge of the other, repeated interactions, and strong possibility of future interactions predict trustworthy and trusting relationships.–>

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