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

Christopher Grady, Rebecca Wolfe, Danjuma Dawop, and Lisa Inks

May 19, 2019

## Discussion

Take-away: Evidence that psychological intervention increased trust between conflicting groups. Group members feelings of physical security increased.

Not directly testing prejudice, not directly testing bargaining. More work to confirm effect, specify conditions and mechanisms.

Bridging formal theory and rationalist perspectives with psychological perspectives. Thinking about psychological implications on games like bargaining, prisoner’s dilemma/collective action problems, stag hunt, and trust/trust + reassurance games. How do psychological conditions like prejudice change preferences and behavior in these games?

Valuable to think bottom-up and top-down together. Some calls for more attention to bottom-up approaches (Autesserre 2016, 2017; Ditlmann, Samii, and Zeitzoff 2017; Safunu 2012).

Would this happen without NGO? Presence of outside group encouraging the interaction surely helps. But the situations that these programs exogenously introduce are often mimicked and inspired by real-life experiences of villages that did not descend into conflict. Notable in…[chris: I think cites are all in autesserre2017 foreign affairs. Stuff about Congo? Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves. ]. This program “randomly assigns” what those villages developed endogenously.

Cannot *only* be bottom-up. Context and policy matter, and elites and governments control policy and set the context.

Future: mechanisms and ways to scale up. Mechanisms could be many things. Ways to scale up: cannot have every group in conflict meet. Scale up with contact between key actors that could diffuse the positive effects of contact & change social norms. Media programs and observational/vicarious contact.

Some mechanisms of intergrop contact theory clearly will not function here. Reduced outgroup threat ((“Sullivan, Pierson, & Marcus, 1982; Gibson, 2006). If citizens perceive or experience threat from an out-group, they are more likely to be intolerant toward that group)”. Ingroup expands to include outgroup – no way. Empathy yes. Belief that working together will benefit us == yes.

Other Mechanisms: assist intergroup bargaining with opportunities for costly signaling, increased trust. Increase ingroup policing. Increase social norms against intergroup violence. Change interpsonal attitudes?

An important question is scaling intergroup contact to larger conflicts. Intergroup contact is unlikely to deter violence between groups involved in large-scale ethnic war where opposing armies commit atrocities, for example. It’s also unlikely to naturally occur between groups with limited contact to each other, or for people who consciously select out of intergroup contact situations.

An attempt to scale-up intergroup contact can use mechanisms of social or vicarious learning. Research shows that even *observing* interactions between a member of your group and a member of a disliked group can improve attitudes (Vezzali et al. 2014). Television and radio programs may thus provide intergroup contact between groups with limited exposure to each other (Eller et al. 2011). (**???**) used dramatic radio programs to influence attitudes and behaviors in a post-conflict setting to some effect, and a similar strategy could be used in a conflict setting. Future work should further investigate mechanisms through which grassroots strategies can be successful. Conditions under which different conflict resolution strategies are successful – when outside actors needed, when groups can be assisted in solving own conflict. Future work should also investigate “scaling up” grassroots interventions, especially those involving intergroup contact. Not every conflicting group can have contact with the other side. Contact between key actors that could diffuse the positive effects of contact & change social norms. And research shows that even *observing* interactions between a member of your group and a member of a disliked group can improve attitudes (Vezzali et al. 2014). Television and radio programs may thus provide intergroup contact between groups with limited exposure to each other (Eller et al. 2011).

Could be social desirability bias? Would indicate the program changed social norms – still valuable.

Could be survey acquescence bias – randomization exp “yes” up on all topics. But other “placebo” outcomes don’t go up.

More research needed about using intergroup contact to promote peace between people in conflict.

Autesserre, Severine. 2016. “The Responsibility to Protect in Congo: The Failure of Grassroots Prevention.” *International Peacekeeping* 23(1): 29–51.

———. 2017. “International Peacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness.” *International Studies Review* 19(1): 114–32.

Ditlmann, Ruth K, Cyrus Samii, and Thomas Zeitzoff. 2017. “Addressing Violent Intergroup Conflict from the Bottom up?” *Social Issues and Policy Review* 11(1): 38–77.

Eller, Anja et al. 2011. “Vicarious Intergroup Contact Effects: Applying Social-Cognitive Theory to Intergroup Contact Research.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 14(2): 255–74.

Safunu, Banchani John-Paul. 2012. “Do Grassroots Approaches and Mobilization for Development Contribute to Post-Conflict Peacebuilding? The Experience of Northern Ghana.” *Nairobi: Africa Leadership Center*.

Vezzali, Loris et al. 2014. “Improving Intergroup Relations with Extended and Vicarious Forms of Indirect Contact.” *European Review of Social Psychology* 25(1): 314–89.