Prolonged Social Contact Does Not Reshape Locals' Attitudes toward Migrants in Wartime Settings

Yang-Yang Zhou (UBC & Harvard) and **Jason Lyall** (Dartmouth)

Afghans Flee to Pakistan. An Uncertain Future Awaits.

Refugees have drawn an angry response from many in that country, leading to discrimination and efforts to force them to go back to Afghanistan.

By Zia ur-Rehman
Published Sept. 8, 2021   Updated Nov. 1, 2021

Photo credit: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images

IRC: Internal displacement in Afghanistan has soared by 73% since June

New York, NY, August 23, 2021 — In response to the latest figures showing the levels of internal displacement in **Afghanistan**, David Miliband, President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee, said,

"There is a double crisis facing Afghanistan right now: a visible crisis, of thousands of people trying to leave the country from Kabul. And an invisible crisis of millions of people across the country dependent on humanitarian aid, who cannot leave the country.

IDPs are the Largest Displacement Group
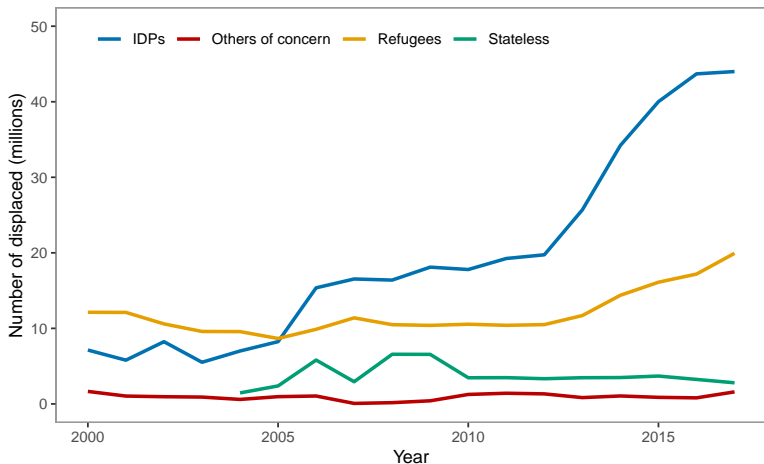
Data source: UNHCR population statistics database

Can prolonged social contact reduce local residents' negative attitudes toward internally displaced persons (IDPs) in fragile and violent settings?

Literature & Contributions

Intergroup Contact and Public Opinion on Migration

- Vast intergroup contact lit based on the original *contact hypothesis*: equal status, cooperation towards common goals, institutional support (Allport, 1954)

Intergroup Contact and Public Opinion on Migration

- Vast intergroup contact lit based on the original *contact hypothesis*: equal status, cooperation towards common goals, institutional support (Allport, 1954)

- Few experiments in the real-world, particularly non-Western contexts (Paluck, Green and Green, 2019; Lowe, 2021)

Intergroup Contact and Public Opinion on Migration

- Vast intergroup contact lit based on the original *contact hypothesis*: equal status, cooperation towards common goals, institutional support (Allport, 1954)

- Few experiments in the real-world, particularly non-Western contexts (Paluck, Green and Green, 2019; Lowe, 2021)

- Few RCTs in conflict settings: Nigeria (Scacco and Warren, 2018), Iraq (Mousa, 2020), Israel (Ditlmann and Samii, 2016; Weiss, 2021)

Intergroup Contact and Public Opinion on Migration

- Vast intergroup contact lit based on the original *contact hypothesis*: equal status, cooperation towards common goals, institutional support (Allport, 1954)

- Few experiments in the real-world, particularly non-Western contexts (Paluck, Green and Green, 2019; Lowe, 2021)

- Few RCTs in conflict settings: Nigeria (Scacco and Warren, 2018), Iraq (Mousa, 2020), Israel (Ditlmann and Samii, 2016; Weiss, 2021)

- Overlooked migration status as an out-group identity category (Finseraas and Kotsadam, 2017)

Intergroup Contact and Public Opinion on Migration

- Vast intergroup contact lit based on the original *contact hypothesis*: equal status, cooperation towards common goals, institutional support (Allport, 1954)

- Few experiments in the real-world, particularly non-Western contexts (Paluck, Green and Green, 2019; Lowe, 2021)

- Few RCTs in conflict settings: Nigeria (Scacco and Warren, 2018), Iraq (Mousa, 2020), Israel (Ditlmann and Samii, 2016; Weiss, 2021)

- Overlooked migration status as an out-group identity category (Finseraas and Kotsadam, 2017)

- In terms of policy, billions of dollars are spent on vocational training to reduce violence in wartime settings

Intergroup Contact and Public Opinion on Migration

- Vast intergroup contact lit based on the original *contact hypothesis*: equal status, cooperation towards common goals, institutional support (Allport, 1954)

- Few experiments in the real-world, particularly non-Western contexts (Paluck, Green and Green, 2019; Lowe, 2021)

- Few RCTs in conflict settings: Nigeria (Scacco and Warren, 2018), Iraq (Mousa, 2020), Israel (Ditlmann and Samii, 2016; Weiss, 2021)

- Overlooked migration status as an out-group identity category (Finseraas and Kotsadam, 2017)

- In terms of policy, billions of dollars are spent on vocational training to reduce violence in wartime settings

- Draw on a large lit on prejudice (reduction) towards migrants (e.g. Adida, Lo and Platas, 2018; Choi, Poertner and Sambanis, 2019; Alrababa'h et al., 2021; Kalla and Broockman, 2020)

INVEST Program

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

- 2,597 participants (women and men), randomized into taking vocational courses OR waitlist

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

- 2,597 participants (women and men), randomized into taking vocational courses OR waitlist

- 49% Kandaharis and 51% were IDPs (not tokenized)

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

- 2,597 participants (women and men), randomized into taking vocational courses OR waitlist

- 49% Kandaharis and 51% were IDPs (not tokenized)

- Courses lasted 3 or 6 months; met for 6 hrs/day, 5 days/week (360 or 720 total hours)

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

- 2,597 participants (women and men), randomized into taking vocational courses OR waitlist

- 49% Kandaharis and 51% were IDPs (not tokenized)

- Courses lasted 3 or 6 months; met for 6 hrs/day, 5 days/week (360 or 720 total hours)

- Class composition naturally ranged from 34.3% to 66.3% migrants.

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

- 2,597 participants (women and men), randomized into taking vocational courses OR waitlist

- 49% Kandaharis and 51% were IDPs (not tokenized)

- Courses lasted 3 or 6 months; met for 6 hrs/day, 5 days/week (360 or 720 total hours)

- Class composition naturally ranged from 34.3% to 66.3% migrants.

- Post-program focus groups: participants highly satisfied with the courses (78.5% compliance)

INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- Afghanistan has one of the largest IDP populations: 1.35 million during our study, 125K in Kandahar

- 2015/6 Program by Mercy Corps designed to reduce unemployment, not improve attitudes toward migrants: naturalistic, external validity, minimize self-selection and reporting bias

- 2,597 participants (women and men), randomized into taking vocational courses OR waitlist

- 49% Kandaharis and 51% were IDPs (not tokenized)

- Courses lasted 3 or 6 months; met for 6 hrs/day, 5 days/week (360 or 720 total hours)

- Class composition naturally ranged from 34.3% to 66.3% migrants.

- Post-program focus groups: participants highly satisfied with the courses (78.5% compliance)

- Instructors reported that there was no class segregation, small classes where they worked together

Locals and IDPs have Similar Characteristics
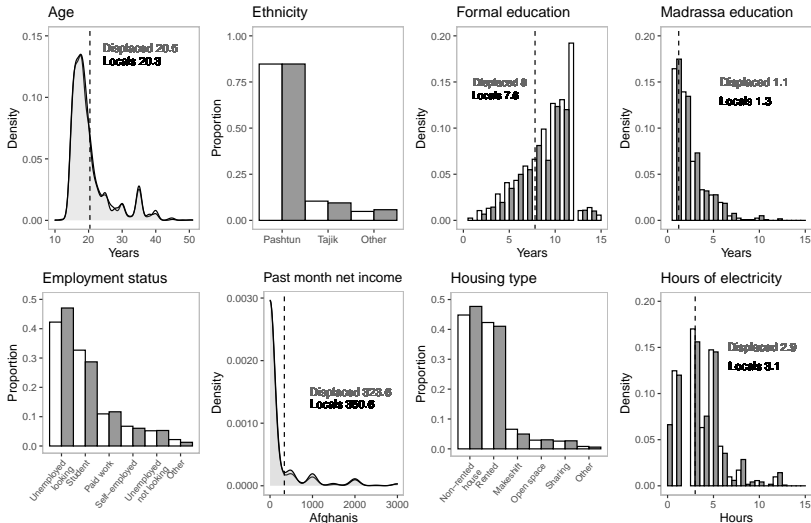
Research Ethics Considerations

- Vulnerable population experiencing ongoing conflict and unemployment

- Mercy Corps fielded the program a year prior to our study

- Informed consent was obtained for all surveys, no deception used

- Organized safe travel and paid transportation to and from the VTCs

- Conducted focus groups and interviews to probe for any negative experiences, instances of discrimination

IDPs in Kandahar

Discrimination Faced by IDPs in Kandahar

Fears about Taliban recruitment, police harassment, social exclusion, difficulties in accessing public services
(Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018; Lakhani and Amiri, 2020)

Discrimination Faced by IDPs in Kandahar

Fears about Taliban recruitment, police harassment, social exclusion, difficulties in accessing public services
(Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018; Lakhani and Amiri, 2020)

"A member of my extended family was a victim of a robbery—criminals attacked him, beating him, and robbed money from his small business. Without local connections (he is an IDP), he was not able to get help from the police to complain."
– 35-year old Pashtun migrant.

"Migrants face miserable conditions… belief among locals that migrants had saturated the job market and taken the jobs of Kandaharis."
– Training Center Director, December 2016.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses

(H1): treated locals will report (a) more positive views of IDPs (b) more interactions with IDPs in general outside of the program;

(H2): the positive effects should be greater for locals enrolled in six month courses (N = 488), compared to those in three month courses (N = 788) given the larger dosage;

(H3): those in more balanced classes (N = 559) should see larger and longer effects, because the two groups are on equal footing;

(H4): younger (less than age 20) participants (N = 816) will have larger and longer positive effects compared to older participants (N = 466).

Measuring Negative Attitudes toward Migrants

Survey Questions for Locals

1. Thinking about the past six months, approximately how much interaction did you have with IDPs in your community (outside of the INVEST program)?

2. In general, what kind of effect do you feel that IDPs have on your community?

3. Some people believe that these IDPs... But others disagree.

   a) are more likely to support violence than local residents of Kandahar.

   b) will take employment away from native residents of Kandahar.

   c) will become a burden on government resources by requiring welfare assistance.
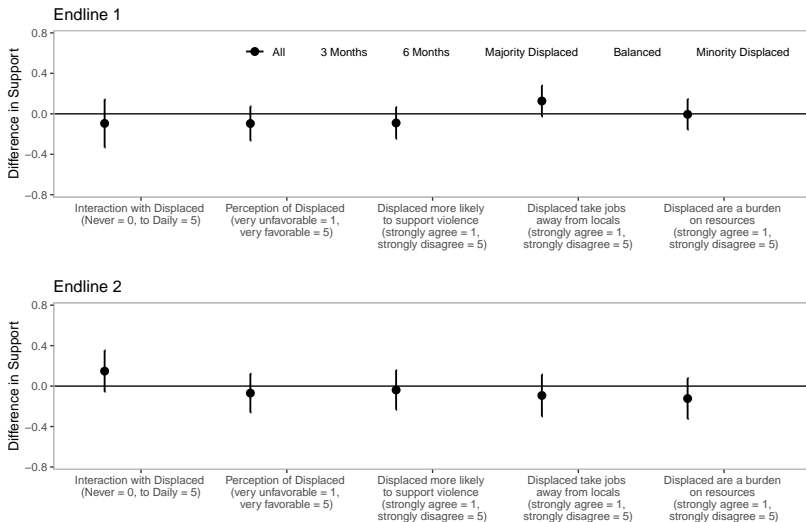
Outcomes at Baseline

Baseline Responses
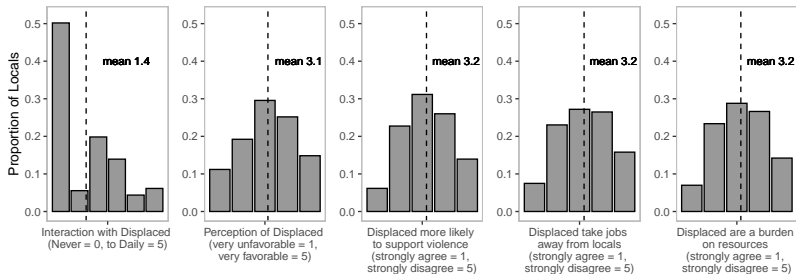
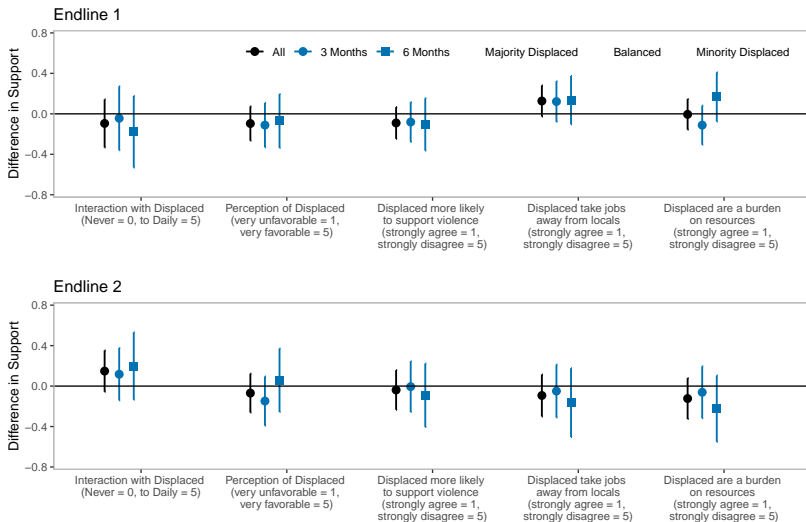For each question, right-most (left-most) bar indicates more inclusive (more exclusionary) response.

Results
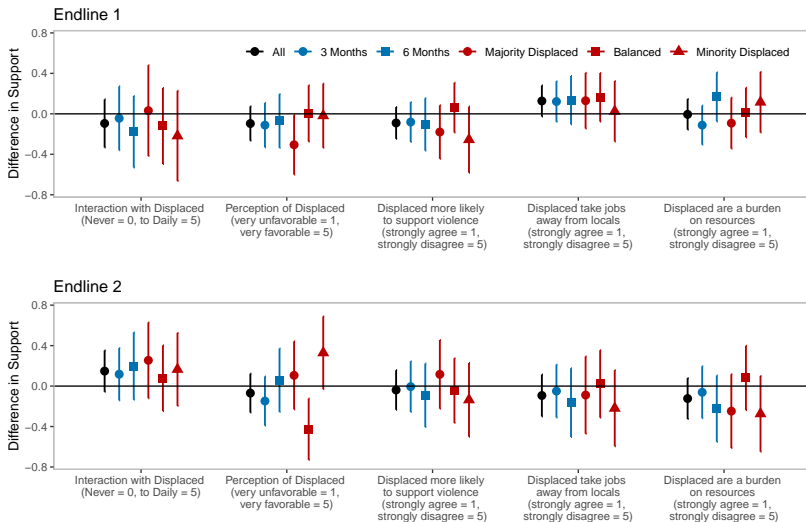
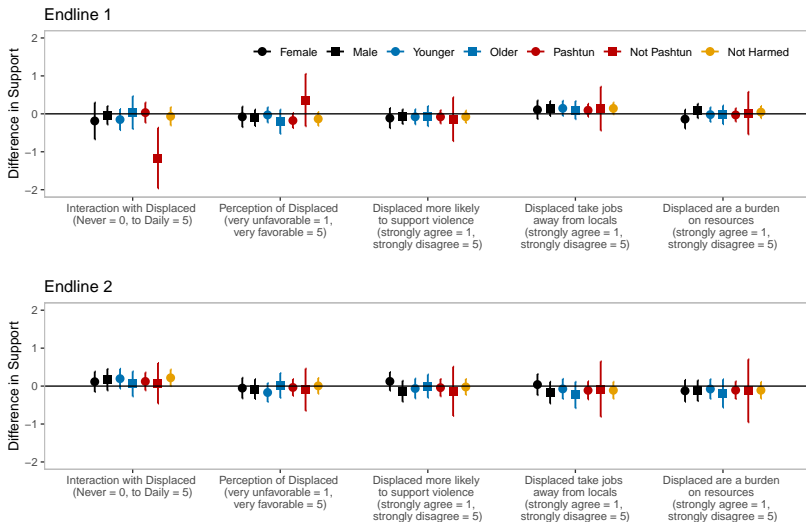# Main Results and by Classroom Composition

Positive (negative) values indicate more inclusive (more exclusionary) responses.

Main Results and by Classroom Composition

Positive (negative) values indicate more inclusive (more exclusionary) responses.

Main Results and by Classroom Composition

Positive (negative) values indicate more inclusive (more exclusionary) responses.

Heterogeneous Results by Participant Demographics

Positive (negative) values indicate more inclusive (more exclusionary) responses.

Conclusion

What Next?

- Null effects overall, and by classroom composition, gender, age, ethnicity, prior exposure to harm

- Heightened feelings of economic competition? Possible, but not likely.

- In line with Scacco and Warren (2018) and Mousa (2020): negative beliefs may be too difficult to budge in wartime.

- Explore behavioral changes and cross-cutting identities

- Too subtle; may need explicit anti-prejudice programming: e.g. perspective-giving (Kalla and Broockman, 2020; Audette, Horowitz and Michelitch, 2020) and taking (Adida, Lo and Platas, 2018)

- Interventions aimed at cognitive / psychological changes are not enough. Need structural changes (Paluck et al., 2020).
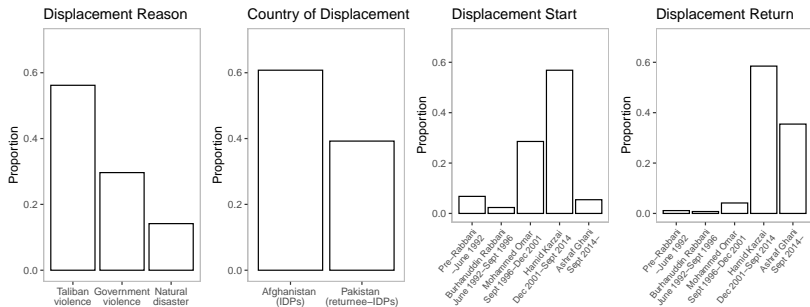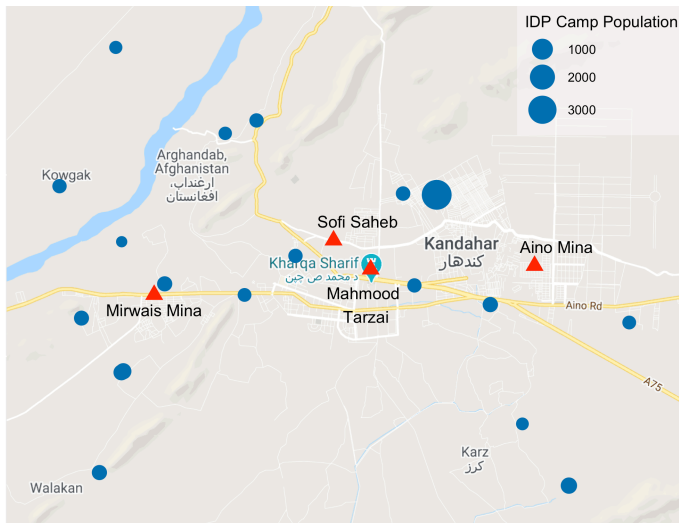
Thank you! Questions?

Photo credit: Communication Arts

Extra Slides

Displacement Backgrounds of IDPs

Location of Training Centers and IDP Camps

Source: IDMC Global Internal Displacement Database, Google basemap.

Adida, Claire, Adeline Lo and Melina Platas. 2018. "Perspective-taking can promote short-term inclusionary behavior toward Syrian refugees." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(38):9521–9526.

Allport, Gordon. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA.

Alrababa'h, Ala', Andrea Dillon, Scott Williamson, Jens Hainmueller, Dominik Hangartner and Jeremy Weinstein. 2021. "Attitudes toward migrants in a highly impacted economy: Evidence from the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan." *Comparative Political Studies* 54(1):33–76.

Audette, Nicole, Jeremy Horowitz and Kristin Michelitch. 2020. "Personal Narratives Reduce Negative Attitudes toward Refugees and Immigrant Outgroups: Evidence from Kenya.".

Choi, Donghyun Danny, Mathias Poertner and Nicholas Sambanis. 2019. "Parochialism, social norms, and discrimination against immigrants." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116(33):16274–16279.

Ditlmann, Ruth K and Cyrus Samii. 2016. "Can intergroup contact affect ingroup dynamics? Insights from a field study with Jewish and Arab-Palestinian youth in Israel." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 22(4):380.

Finseraas, Henning and Andreas Kotsadam. 2017. "Does personal contact with ethnic minorities affect anti-immigrant sentiments? Evidence from a field experiment." *European Journal of Political Research* 56(3):703–722.

Gaikwad, Nikhar and Gareth Nellis. 2017. "The Majority-Minority Divide in Attitudes toward Internal Migration: Evidence from Mumbai." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(2):456–472.

Kalla, Joshua L and David E Broockman. 2020. "Reducing exclusionary attitudes through interpersonal conversation: evidence from three field experiments." *American Political Science Review* 114(2):410–425.

Lakhani, Sadaf and Rahmatullah Amiri. 2020. Displacement and the Vulnerability to Mobilize for Violence: Evidence from Afghanistan. Technical report. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/pw_155-displacement_and_