

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

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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

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Photo credit: Saad Al-Shah/Getty Images

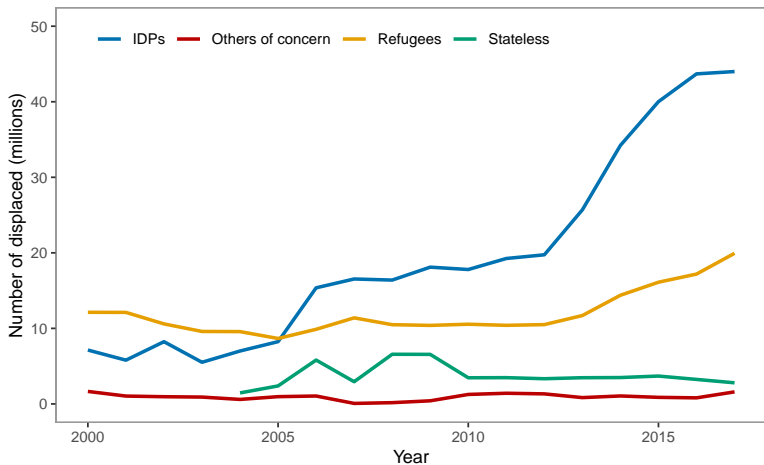
Press Release

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



Research Question

Can prolonged social contact reduce local residents' negative attitudes toward migrants (in this case, IDPs) in fragile and violent settings?

Literature



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

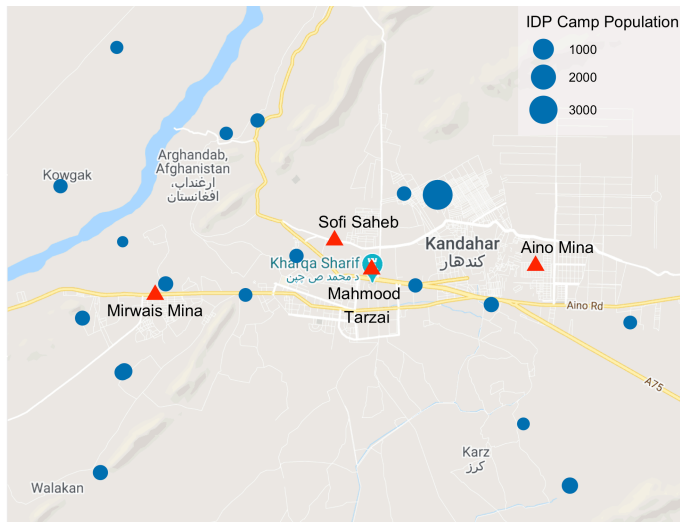
INVEST Program



Background on INVEST Intervention

- 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)

Location of Training Centers and IDP Camps



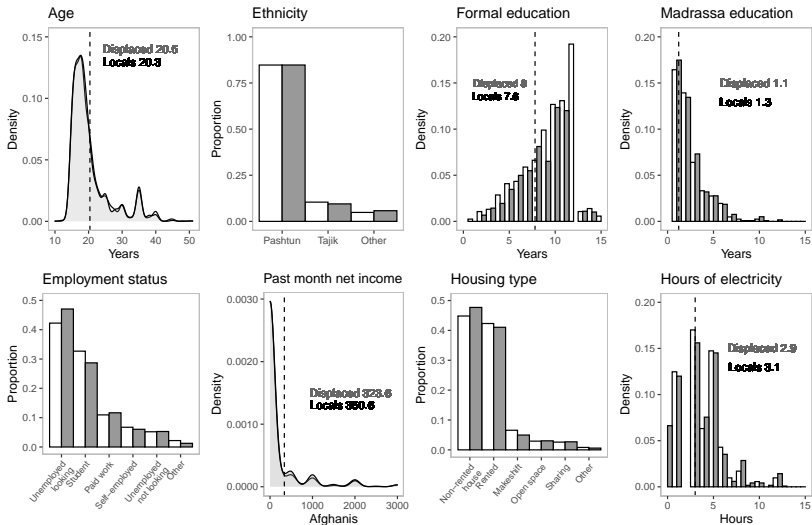
Source: IDMC Global Internal Displacement Database, Google basemap.



INVEST met Conditions for Contact Hypothesis

- 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 in Helmand for a year prior
- 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 insecurity and recruitment, police harassment, social exclusion, difficulties in accessing public services
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– 35-year old Pashtun migrant.

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“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.

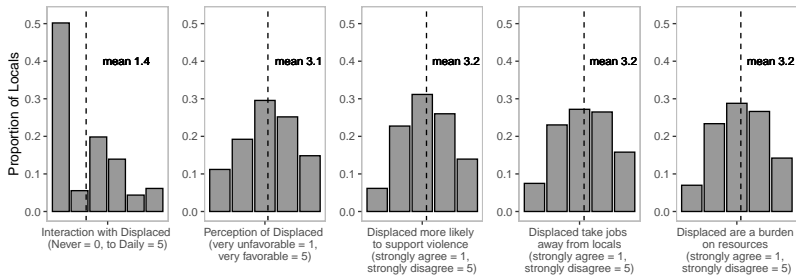
Measuring Negative Attitudes toward Migrants

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.

Attitudes at Baseline

Baseline Responses



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

Hypotheses

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

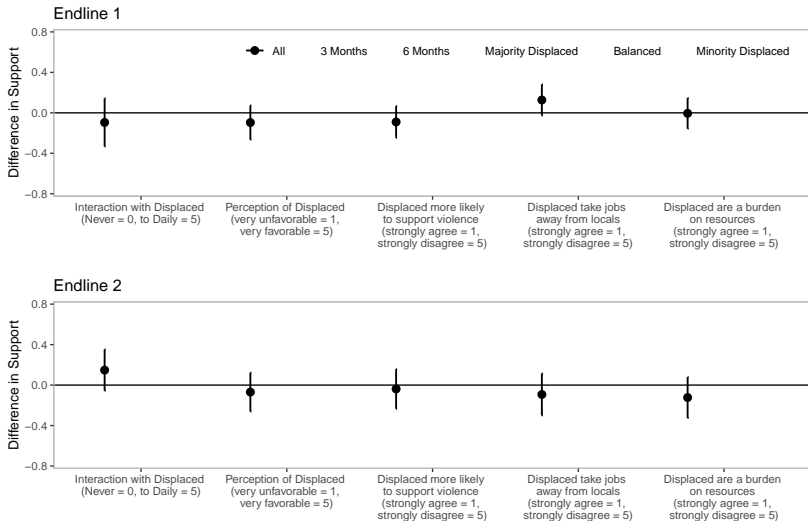
(H2): the positive effects should be greater for locals enrolled in six month courses (N = 488), compared to those in three month courses (N = 788) given the larger dosage;

(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).

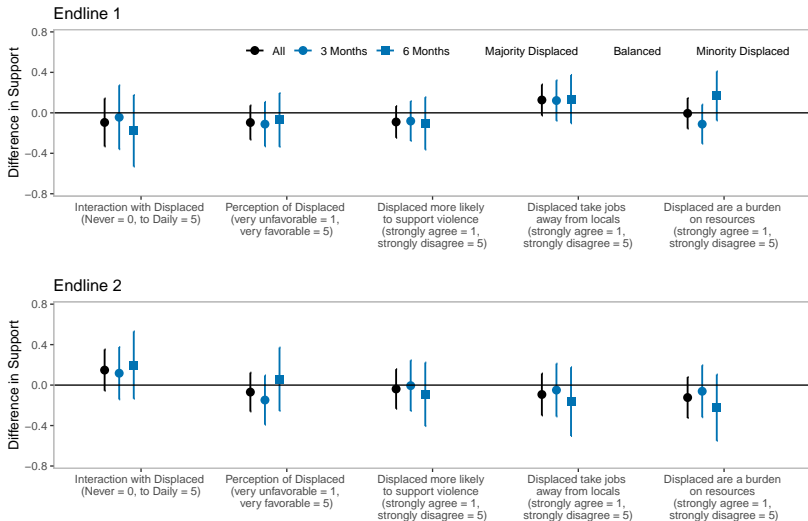
Results

Main Results and by Classroom Composition



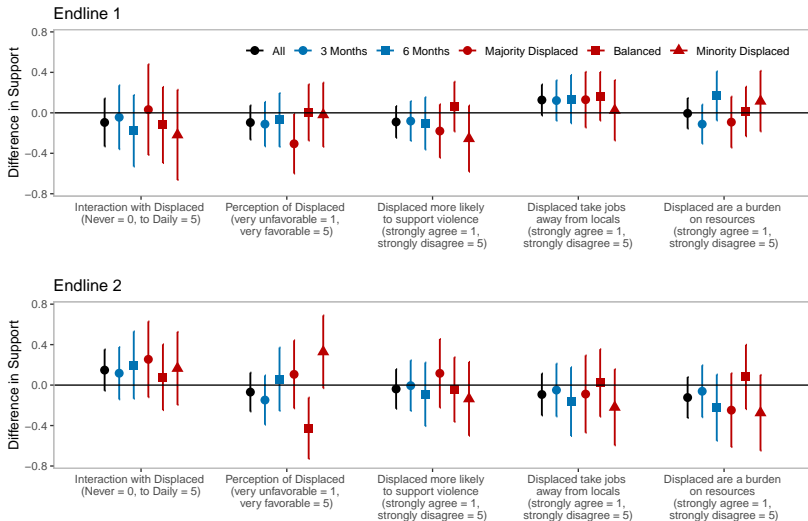
Positive (negative) values indicate more inclusive (more exclusionary) responses.

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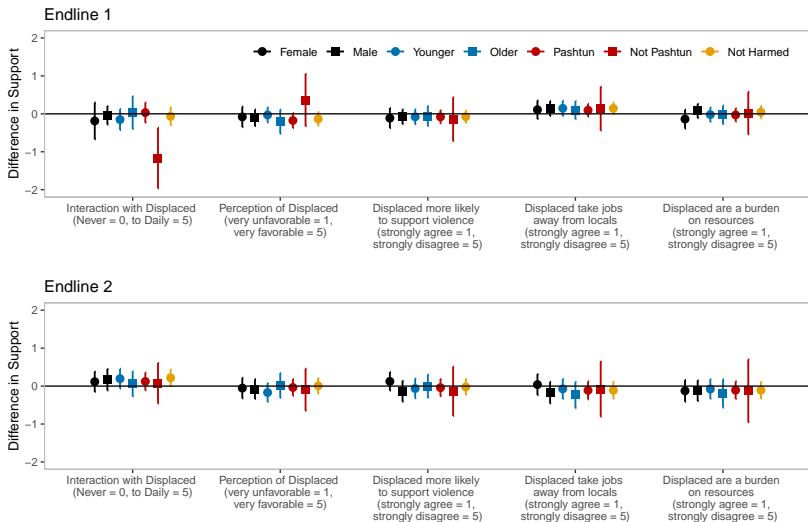
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Heterogeneous Results by Participant Demographics



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Explaining the Null

- Was the local-IDP cleavage not salient? Could they identify migrants in the classroom?



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Explaining the Null

- Was the local-IDP cleavage not salient? Could they identify migrants in the classroom?
- Was the program poorly designed or poorly received by participants?
- Did the program lack local, institutional support?
- Did it heighten economic competition between the two groups (i.e. backlash effect)?

Conclusion

What Next?

- Null effects overall, and by classroom composition, gender, age, ethnicity, prior exposure to harm
- 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 and taking (Adida, Lo and Platas, 2018; Kalla and Broockman, 2020)
- Interventions aimed at cognitive / psychological changes are not enough. Need structural changes (Enos, 2017; Paluck et al., 2020)

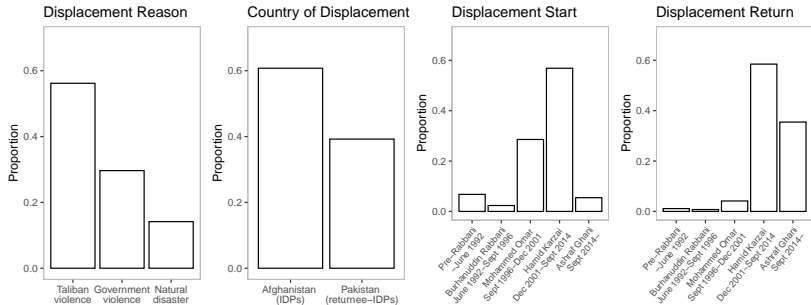


Thank you! Questions?

Photo credit: Communication Arts

Extra Slides

Displacement Backgrounds of IDPs







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