Creating Coexistence: Intergroup Contact and Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq

Refugees, Migration and Forced Displacement Seminar
Event time: 09/29/20
Luce Hall, Room 203
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Can intergroup contact build social cohesion after war? Salma Mousa answers this question by randomly assigning Iraqi Christians displaced by ISIS either to an all-Christian soccer team or to a team mixed with Muslims. She finds persistent changes to behaviors toward Muslim peers: Christians with Muslim teammates are more likely to sign up for a mixed soccer team in the future (12 pp., p < 0.08), vote for a Muslim player (not on their team) to receive a sportsmanship award (16 pp., p < 0.01), and train with Muslims six months after the intervention ends (34 pp., p < 0.01). Players on mixed teams are also more likely to believe that coexistence is possible (0.63 SDs., p < 0.01). These results seem to be driven by changing norms around social contact as well as a positive experience, with top-performing teams being more likely to patronize a restaurant in Muslim-dominated Mosul. Contact was less effective, however, at shifting generalized tolerance toward Muslim strangers. These findings point to the potential for meaningful social contact to build coexistence after conflict — even if underlying prejudice remains unchanged. Salma Mousa is a graduate fellow at the Immigration Policy Lab and will be graduating as a PhD at Stanford University’s Political Science department in June 2020. She will then start a post-doctoral fellowship in September 2020, jointly at the Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, and the Immigration Policy Lab, both at Stanford. As an Egyptian raised in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Canada, social cohesion has fascinated Mousa as a concept, process, and outcome. Her work has been supported by the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), the Program on Governance and Local Development, and Stanford’s Immigration Policy Lab, McCoy Center for Ethics in Society, Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society, Center on International Conflict and Negotiation, Freeman Spogli Institute, Abbasi Program on Islamic Studies, and King Center on Global Development.

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