

Pre-analysis plan for: Contact across religious groups and attitudes - Evidence from a field experiment in Myanmar

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Abstract

We are conducting a field experiment where we randomly assign individuals to a youth camp and randomly assign pairs within those camps. By comparing individuals assigned partners that are of the same religion with individuals assigned to people of other religious faiths we investigate whether close personal contact increases religious tolerance and inter-religious friendship. In this plan we pre-register some key decisions to follow once we receive the data.

Background

Myanmar is a country riddled with ethnic and religious conflicts. In this project we test whether close contact to other groups increases religious tolerance. In this plan we specify our main variables, specification, and tests. Deviations from the plan will be highlighted in the paper.

The Field Experiment

Our partner organization teaches freedom of religion at camps around Myanmar. In these camps youths (18-35 years old) of different backgrounds interact. There are four different camps in different regions of the country and the project is currently funded for four years. In the first year there is a sensitization in the different communities and the organization tries to make people of different backgrounds apply for the camp. The organization is Christian and has a clear Christian profile and the majority of the individuals in the areas are Buddhists. The organization is actively trying to have Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists at each camp and some other religious minorities will likely attend as well.

The organization is actively trying to get more applicants than there are places on the camps and the target number of applicants is at least the double of the places. In the first year, each camp is aiming at having 46 places and in the following years each camp is aiming at 50 places. During the application procedure, the organization collects data on religion, age, gender, and contact information (e-mail and mobile phone number).

The lists with all the eligible candidates from each region are sent to the research team and we then randomly assign places such that 46 individuals are offered a place this year and the rest (up until 60 individuals) are offered a place the year after. Baseline attitudes data is then collected using an online survey (see the survey in the Appendix 1).

A clear message from previous research is that contact will be most likely to reduce tensions if those in contact have equal status in the particular context, if they share common goals, if they are in a cooperative context, and if the contact takes place under some form of authority. There is also a tension between close personal contact with friendship potential and more shallow exposure. In order to increase friendship potential we put the individuals into groups of two that they will follow for the duration of the camp. In these teams of two they are

conducting activities together and we use two sessions of a fast friendship procedure to increase the probability of friendships emerging (see appendix 2 for a description of the questions).

In order to investigate the effects of close outgroup contact we randomly assign individuals to these teams so that around half are assigned an individual of their own group and half are assigned an individual from another group. Depending on which group is in majority in the different camps, this may include different types of exposure. In Mandalay, which is the only area where we have access to the application data at this point, it is the Buddhists that are in clear majority. We there assign half teams to be Buddhist only and half of the teams to be mixed. In this area, the exposure is therefore one of Buddhists to other groups. This may very well be different in other areas. In particular, as the organization is Christian it is likely that Christians may be a majority in other areas. For Mandalay we had the organization go out and try to find additional minority applicants. They found two additional minority individuals and these were offered a place this year for certain and will as such not be part of the randomization to years, but they are part of the pool that are randomized to individual Buddhists. Similar strategies will likely be used at other camps as well. At the last day of the camp we collect our second round of data for the ones attending the camp.

In October 2020 (before the 2020 camp) we collect the third wave of data for the individuals that attended the 2019 camp and the second wave of data for those assigned to the 2020 camp. If there are places left as people may no longer want to attend the camp we will fill up with individuals that can attend the 2020 camp and conduct the baseline survey with these individuals. Also for the 2020 camp we randomly assign individuals to groups of two in the same way. At the last day of the 2020 camp we conduct a follow up survey for all of those attending the camp. This whole procedure is then repeated for the following years 2021 and 2022 with the addition that the one year after camp follow up for the 2020 group is also collected before the 2021 camp.

Data and coding of main variables

Main dependent variable

Our primary outcome variable is *Religious tolerance*. This variable is an index created by adding the four following variables (with categories ranging from 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree) and dividing by four:

I would not mind marrying someone belonging to another religion

I would not mind if my brother or sister married someone belonging to another religion

I want my children to learn about different religions in school, not just the one they belong to

Citizenship in Myanmar should be based on religion (Reverse coded)

If there is a missing answer on any of the variables there will be a missing observation on *Religious tolerance*.

Secondary outcome variable

Our secondary outcome variable is *Mixed groups* which is the response to the following question (with categories ranging from 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree):

Groups that consist of people of the same religion work more efficiently than groups that consist of people with different religions (Reverse coded)

Strata

Individuals are randomly assigned within camp-years and we match the sample within a given camp with respect to the gender of the minorities. Hence we will always control for a set of strata variables: We will create dummy variable for being female (we will include “other” together with males as zero), and dummy variables for camp*year. We will also include a dummy variable for each different religion if we will use more than one religion to be exposed at any camp.

Controls and heterogeneity variables

With respect to control variables, which are also variables that can be used to explore heterogeneity we lay out a set of general principles. First of all, we will only use variables that are either collected at baseline (before the camps) or that are stable over time. To make the models fully saturated, we always partition the covariate space and add control variables as indicator variables rather than using their potential multi-valued codings (Athey and Imbens, 2017). If cells are too small, with less than 5 percent of the observations, adjacent cells are combined. When using the variables as interaction terms, and in balance tests, we will retain

the continuous coding of the variables, however. If we have missing values on control variables we will code the variables as zero and include dummy variables controlling for missing status so that we do not lose observations.

We create dummies for being a student and for being employed. For the multivalued variables listed here we follow the rule laid out above:

What year were you born?
Imagine a staircase with 10 steps where the poorest people are on the first step and the richest on the tenth step. Where would you put yourself on this staircase?
Where would you put your parents on this staircase?
Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?
Do you consider your mother to be a religious person?
Do you consider your father to be a religious person?

We create a variable, *Share of other friends*, that goes between 0 and 1 and divides the number given to the question of friends of other religions with the total number of friends. Values above 1 will be coded as missing. When adding this variable as a control we will partition it into dummy variables.

Variables used to test mechanisms

We will see if there is an effect on the perception of discrimination by using the questions:

All citizens from different ethnic communities in Myanmar are treated equally by the government

All citizens from different religious communities in Myanmar are treated equally by the government

Similarly, we will see if the perceptions of discrimination towards Muslims, but also Christians, is affected by using the answers to “*In your opinion, are these groups discriminated against in Myanmar?*”

We will use the four questions from the follow up survey to measure direct friendship and affection:

On a scale from 1-10, how much did you like the camp?

On a scale from 1-10, how much did you enjoy being together with your camp partner?

*On a scale from 1-10, how much do you feel that you got to know your camp partner?
Was your partner at the camp of the same religion as you? (Yes, no, do not know).*

In the year one follow up we will also see if there is an effect on the variable *share of other friends*.

We will use the other questions in the survey, such as trust and other attitudes to explore additional potential effects. Such results will not by themselves be used to argue for effects but may be used to highlight certain pathways.

Exploratory analyses

We will also try to create measures of actual behavior in the field by for instance recording attendance in organized social events and perhaps a canvassing experiment (e.g. where people can sign up on lists for a cause). These measures will be created by the researchers and the organizers together at a later stage. As we do not know at this stage what will be possible, the exact measures can not be pre-registered. As such, the analyses of these measures will have to be exploratory. If we conduct such analyses we hope that our baseline variables on protests and demonstrations may help us gain power.

Empirical strategy and main hypothesis

The research design is tailored to answer questions at the research frontier while at the same time giving as valuable answers as possible for the implementing partner. First we ask, “Does intense exposure to an outgroup member affect attitudes?” This is answered by comparing individuals assigned a teammate of another religion to individuals assigned a teammate of the same religion. This will give crucial input into *how* the camps should be organized to fulfill their aims. Durability of such effects are also examined by investigating differences also after one year.

We will estimate the following regression:

$$Y_{it} = \beta Mixed_i + S_{i0} (+Y_{i0} + X_{i0}) + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where i indexes individuals and t indexes time. Y_{it} is the outcome of interest at time t (either 1=short follow up, 2=one year follow up, or later follow ups), *Mixed* is a dummy variable for being assigned a teammate of another religion, the vector S contains the strata variables (camp*year, female, and religion if there are several religions that are assigned to in group

teams and outgroup teams within any camp), Y_{i0} is the outcome as measured at baseline (partitioned into dummy variables if it is multivalued) and $\mathbf{X}_{i0}$ is a vector of baseline controls. These last two sets of variables are in parentheses as we do not have to include them. The controls will be added to see if we can increase precision. We will also see if we can improve precision in the estimates by picking optimal controls from the total list of controls using LASSO (Belloni et al. 2014; Ahrens et al. 2018).

Our main specification will be to investigate the short run effects with the strata variables but without other covariates as controls, unless there is imbalance across mixed and non-mixed. To test for balance we will regress our Mixed on the control variables described above both individually and together, while controlling for the Strata fixed effects $\mathbf{S}$ (camp*year, female, and religion). We will judge whether the randomization worked by conducting an F-test of whether the control variables jointly predict treatment status. We use robust standard errors in all estimations. Data will be pooled from all camps and all years.

We will use machine learning techniques to automate the search for heterogenous treatment effects. There are many different types of machine learning algorithms and we have decided to use causal honest random forests (R package grf, Wager and Athey 2018). As this field is moving rapidly, however, it is possible that there will be other techniques that are relevant for us once we start analyzing the data.

In addition to our main treatment specification we will also analyze the effects of the camps. In particular, we will ask “Does the camp have any measurable effects on attitudes and behavior?” This is answered by comparing changes attitudes of individuals assigned to camps in the same year to individuals assigned a camp next year, one year after the first year camp is finished. More precisely, we will estimate the following regression:

$$Y_{it} = \beta \text{Early}_i + \mathbf{S}_{i0} + Y_{i0} (+\mathbf{X}_{i0}) + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Where Early refers to being randomly assigned to the early camp. We will here only use the sample that is randomly assigned to the camps and the strata variables will include religion as there are different treatment probabilities across religions, in addition to female. We will pool data from the two different application rounds (where year 1 and 2 is in the first round and year 3 and 4 is in the second) and have a fixed effect for Application round included in the

strata variables. We will experiment with controls for baseline levels of the outcomes if we have them and with including X's to increase precision as above. The main specification is still the one without X's and we use robust standard errors.

Attrition

We will probably not manage to reach all the respondents initially sampled. We will check whether non-response is correlated with Mixed (and with Early). If there is a statistically significant difference in non-response between the randomly assigned groups (controlling for the **S** vectors), we will follow Kling, Liebman and Katz (2007)'s correction. We will obtain lower bounds of the treatment effect by replacing missing observations in the treatment (control) arms by the corresponding arm's mean value minus (plus) 0.05, 0.10 and 0.20 standard deviations of the control group. Upper bounds of the treatment effects will be constructed in a symmetrical way.

Sample size and power

We intend to have a total sample of around 780 individuals (46 from each camp in the first year and 50 in the three following years). If we manage to assign half of these to be of exposed religions we will have a sample of 390 potentially exposed individuals where half will be randomly exposed. Under such a scenario and without any controls we will have a minimum detectable effect of 0.29. If we only reach 350 individuals the MDE will be 0.3. For the effects of the camps regressions we will have more power but these are not our main specifications.

Archive

The pre-analysis plan is archived before any data is collected. We archive it at the registry for randomized controlled trials in economics held by The American Economic Association: <https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/> on October 29 2019. We will start data follow up data collection for one of the camps on November 30 2019.

References

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Appendix 1: The survey

Welcome to the camp survey!

This survey is part of a study into the attributes and attitudes of the future leaders of Myanmar, conducted by a research team from Norway. Your individual answers will be used for research purposes only and not shared with anyone outside the research team. We ask for personal information about you so that we can contact you about the camp at a later point. All information provided in this survey will be treated as confidential and no individual information will ever be shared or published. Your participation in the survey is voluntary. If there are any questions you don't want to answer you don't have to answer them. And you can stop participating in the survey at any time. If you decide later that you want your answers to be removed, all you have to do is reply to the email we sent and let us know.

Note that there are no right or wrong answers and how you answer will not affect whether you can participate in the camp or not.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Are you willing to start answering our questions?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Some questions about you

What is your participation number (as given in the sms or email)?

Please fill in your e-mail address

What is your phone number?

Are you interested in participating in the camp in the future, in the event that the camp is fully booked this year?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

What year were you born?

What is your gender?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

What is your relationship status

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Engaged
- ☐ Single
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Other

How many years of formal education you have received?

Are you currently employed?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you currently a student?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many years of schooling (monastic, public, private) has your father had?

How many years of schooling (monastic, public, private) has your mother had?

Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not a very religious person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	A very religious person

Do you consider your mother to be a religious person?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not a very religious person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	A very religious person

Do you consider your father to be a religious person?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not a very religious person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	A very religious person

Imagine a staircase with 10 steps where the poorest people are on the first step and the richest on the tenth step. Where would you put yourself on this staircase?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Poorest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Richest

Where would you put your parents on this staircase?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Poorest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Richest

How many people do you consider as close friends?

How many of your close friends do not share your religious faith?

Do you disagree or agree?

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements.

I would not mind marrying someone belonging to another religion

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

I would not mind if my brother or sister married someone belonging to another religion

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

Groups that consist of people of the same religion work more efficiently than groups that consist of people with different religions

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

It is important for me that my neighbors belong to the same religion as I do

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

People that are not religious or that belong to another another religion should not need to practice Buddhism in school

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

I want my children to learn about different religions in school, not just the one they belong to

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

People who belong to other religions are probably just as moral and good as those who belong to mine

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

All citizens from different ethnic communities in Myanmar are treated equally by the government

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

All citizens from different religious communities in Myanmar are treated equally by the government

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

Citizenship in Myanmar should be based on religion

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly agree

Other questions

How much do you trust..

Mark only one oval per row.

	Trust completely	Trust somewhat	Do not trust very much	Do not trust at all
Your family	☐	☐	☐	☐
People in your neighborhood	☐	☐	☐	☐
People you know personally	☐	☐	☐	☐
People you meet for the first time	☐	☐	☐	☐
People of another religion	☐	☐	☐	☐

In your opinion, are these groups discriminated against in Myanmar?

Mark only one oval per row.

	To a large extent	Somewhat	Not at all
Women	☐	☐	☐
Men	☐	☐	☐
Muslims	☐	☐	☐
Christians	☐	☐	☐
Buddhists	☐	☐	☐
Other religious groups	☐	☐	☐
Ethnic minorities	☐	☐	☐
People with disabilities	☐	☐	☐

Do you want to add any group that is not on this list that is discriminated against to a large extent?

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Most people can be trusted
- ☐ You need to be very careful

Why, in your opinion, are there people in this country who live in need? Here are two opinions: Which comes closest to your view?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ People are poor because of laziness and lack of will power
- ☐ People are poor because of things they can not control themselves

To whom do you feel closer: a person of your country who is not of your religion, or a person of your religion who is not of your country?

Thinking about the relations between citizens of different religions in Myanmar, how do you think the relationship will develop in the future?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ May get better
- ☐ Will stay the same
- ☐ May get worse

How interested would you say you are in politics?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very interested	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Not at all interested

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you personally, have never, once, or more than once done any of these things during the past year.

Mark only one oval per row.

	Never	Once	More than once
Got together with others to raise an issue or sign a petition	☐	☐	☐
Attended a demonstration or protest march	☐	☐	☐

If you have any additional thoughts or comments on the survey, please give them below

The follow up survey reduces the questions in section 2 (“Some questions about you”) and adds the following questions in a new section:

On a scale from 1-10, how much did you like the camp?

On a scale from 1-10, how much did you enjoy being together with your camp partner?

On a scale from 1-10, how much do you feel that you got to know your camp partner?

Was your partner at the camp of the same religion as you? (yes, no, do not know)

Appendix 2: The fast friend procedure

Set 1 from Aron et al. (1997)

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take 4 minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?
13. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
14. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
16. What do you value most in a friendship?
17. What is your most treasured memory?
18. What is your most terrible memory?
19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
20. What does friendship mean to you?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
22. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of 5 items.
23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?
25. Make 3 true "we" statements each. For instance "We are both in this room feeling . . ."
26. Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share . . ."
27. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
28. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
29. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
31. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
32. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
36. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

Set 2 from Page-Gould et al (2008)

- 1) Do your close friends tend to be older or younger than you?
 - 2) Does living as if you control your own destiny lead to a more powerful life?
 - 3) If you could choose the sex and physical appearance of your soon-to-be-born child, would you do it?
 - 4) What would your ideal or perfect life be like?
 - 5) How many times a day do you look at yourself in the mirror?
 - 6) Would you be willing to have horrible nightmares for a year if you would be rewarded with extraordinary wealth?
 - 7) What sorts of things would you do if you could be as outgoing and uninhibited as you wished?
 - 8) What important decision in your professional life have you based largely upon your intuitive feelings? What about in your personal life?
 - 9) While on a trip to another city, your spouse (or lover) meets and spends a night w/ an exciting stranger. Given they will never meet again, and you will not otherwise learn of the incident, would you want your partner to tell you about it?
 - 10) Do you judge others by higher or lower standards than you judge yourself? Why?
 - 11) How do you feel when people like you because they think you are someone you are not?
 - 12) How many children do you hope to have? Do you know what you will name them? If yes, what?
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- 13) If your friends and acquaintances were willing to bluntly and honestly tell you what they thought of you, would you want them to?
 - 14) Would you be content with a marriage of the highest quality in all respects but one - it completely lacked sex?
 - 15) What are you looking for when you converse with people? What kinds of things do you usually discuss? Are there things that would be more interesting to you?
 - 16) If you could take a one-month trip anywhere in the world and money were not a consideration, where would you go and what would you do?
 - 17) How much do you tend to examine your actions and motives to find out more about yourself?
 - 18) What was your most enjoyable dream? Your worst nightmare?
 - 19) Whom do you admire most? In what way does that person inspire you?
 - 20) When you are with your friends, do your interactions include much touching - for example, hugging, kissing, roughhousing, or rubbing backs? Would you like to have more of this?
 - 21) If you could choose the manner of your death, what would it be?
 - 22) Can you envision how you are likely to look back upon the things you are doing today? If so, how much do you try to live now as you think you will one day wish you had lived?
 - 23) What do you like the best about your life?
Least?
 - 24) What would make you feel most betrayed by your mate - indifference? Dishonesty? Infidelity?
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- 25) Do you have any specific long-term goals? What is one and how do you plan on reaching it?
 - 26) Do you ever feel nervous about hanging out with other people, even your close friends?
 - 27) Do you find it so hard to say "no" that you regularly do favors you do not want to do? If so, why?
 - 28) What things are too personal to discuss with others?
 - 29) Have you ever disliked someone for being luckier or more successful than you?
 - 30) Who is the most important person in your life? What could you do to improve the relationship? Will you ever do it?
 - 31) Do you believe our life is predetermined by fate or is solely a consequence of the choices we make (or both)?
Explain why
 - 32) If you were guaranteed honest responses to any three questions, who would you question and what would you ask?
 - 33) Would you risk your life for someone close to you out of feelings of obligation or out of feelings of love? What if the person asked you not to risk your life?
 - 34) In terms of their relative unpleasantness, how would you rank the following: a nude stroll in public; being spat upon by a crowd of people; being arrested for shoplifting; begging for money at an airport?
 - 35) If you were happily married, and then met someone you felt was certain to always bring you deeply passionate, intoxicating love, would you leave your spouse? What if you had kids?
 - 36) Do you believe in any sort of God? If not, do you think you might still pray if you were in a life-threatening situation?