

Generosity and Misperception between Refugees and Host Communities

Evidence from Economic Survey Experiments in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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1. Introduction

An increasing number of refugees are settled in camps in low- or middle-income countries. As the number of refugees and the length of residency increase, conflicts between refugees and host communities over natural resources, living spaces, and social exchanges become vital to understand for promoting harmony between them. We use an economic survey experiment conducted in and around Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh with refugees and hosts to explore intra-group prosocial behavior between refugees and host communities. First, we measure the generosity of refugees and hosts towards each other using a hypothetical dictator game. Second, we measure in-group perceptions by asking their beliefs about the generosity of their peers towards out-groups. Third, we measure intra-group perceptions by asking their beliefs about out-group participants' generosity toward themselves. Using these three measurements collected by refugees and hosts, we quantify intra-group prosocial attitudes and the existence of in- and intra-group misperceptions, which help better understand the tension between refugees and host communities.

2. Institutional Background

The Rohingya people are from Rakhine State in northern Myanmar. Although most of Myanmar's population is Buddhist, the Rohingya are predominantly Muslim. This religious difference has led them to be denied citizenship, excluded from census polls, and not officially recognized as one of the ethnic groups in the country. Since 1975, Rohingyas have been forcibly displaced to Bangladesh. The largest wave of refugees began in August 2017, with around 742,000 fleeing to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Currently, about one million Rohingyas live in 34 densely populated camps in Cox's Bazar (Figure 1).

3. Experimental Design and Implementation

We conducted a face-to-face interview survey in Cox's Bazar in 2024, where 430 Rohingyas and 252 host community members were randomly selected. We use an economic game experiment to elicit the three measurements mentioned above. As shown in Figure 2, the game has two versions for refugees and hosts, each with three questions. The first one, R1 for refugees and H1 for hosts, is a hypothetical dictator game. Participants were asked to assume they have 10 tree seedlings for planting and choose whether they would be willing to share five with hosts outside the camps (R1)

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or refugees inside the camps (H1). If they select yes, both parties receive five seedlings each. Otherwise, the participant keeps all 10 seedlings for their own use. The second question (R2 and H2) asks the participant's beliefs about their peers' decisions in the first question. The third question (R3 and H3) asks the participant's beliefs about out-group participants' decisions. In Figure 2, the color of the question indicates the role of the respondents, while the arrows show which question result to guess. For example, R3 appears in the refugees' survey and asks how many out of 100 hosts would choose to share. Each correctly guessed question (within 3 differences from the correct one) is rewarded with 100 BDT.

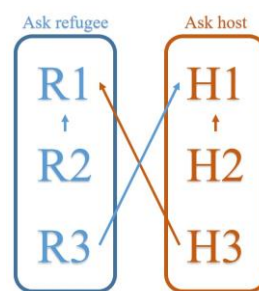
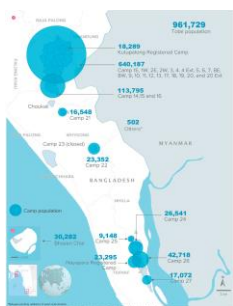


Figure 1 Location of Camps in Cox's Bazar Figure 2 Relationship between the questions

4. Results and Concluding Remarks

Figure 3 presents the average generous choice in red lines, the average perceptions in yellow lines, and the histograms of individual guesses in blue bars. Histograms show the heterogeneity of individuals' perceptions of willingness to share among refugees and hosts. Refugees tend to underestimate the generosity of their peers towards hosts. However, they somewhat overestimate the generosity of hosts towards themselves. Only 4% of the hosts are willing to share their tree seedlings with refugees. The hosts significantly underestimate the level of generosity of the refugees towards themselves. This indicates a widespread misunderstanding within the host community about refugees' relatively high level of kindness. The hosts fairly predict their lack of generosity towards refugees. We find that a significant portion of refugees are willing to share with hosts, whereas the hosts lack generosity toward refugees. This suggests aid toward the host communities is required to promote harmony between refugees and host communities.

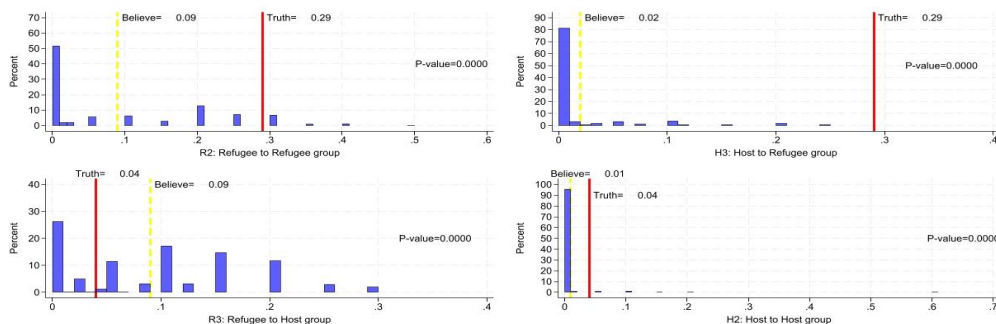


Figure 3 Misperception between refugee and host group