

# A large-scale test of the link between intergroup contact and support for social change

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**Guided by the early findings of social scientists, practitioners have long advocated for greater contact between groups to reduce prejudice and increase social cohesion. Recent work, however, suggests that intergroup contact can undermine support for social change towards greater equality, especially among disadvantaged group members. Using a large and heterogeneous dataset (12,997 individuals from 69 countries), we demonstrate that intergroup contact and support for social change towards greater equality are positively associated among members of advantaged groups (ethnic majorities and cis-heterosexuals) but negatively associated among disadvantaged groups (ethnic minorities and sexual and gender minorities). Specification-curve analysis revealed important variation in the size—and at times, direction—of correlations, depending on how contact and support for social change were measured. This allowed us to identify one type of support for change—willingness to work in solidarity— that is positively associated with intergroup contact among both advantaged and disadvantaged group members.**

Since initial efforts towards racial desegregation in the United States, social scientists<sup>1</sup>, policymakers and civic leaders supporting racial desegregation<sup>2</sup> have advocated for bringing advantaged and disadvantaged group members together for contact with each other in an effort to foster improved relations and greater intergroup equality. Evidence gathered over several decades shows that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and increase social

cohesion across group divides<sup>3,4</sup>. A new line of thinking, however, suggests that contact can have an unintended effect: greater perceptions of intergroup harmony may undermine people's willingness to demand and advocate for greater equality and social justice, especially among members of disadvantaged groups<sup>5–8</sup>. Given the importance of these divergent trends for public policy, comprehensive and rigorous tests are needed to elucidate when contact may be

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All steps of the specification-curve analysis can be reproduced with the Master\_Script.R and the underlying Functions.R script.

**Reporting Summary.** Further information on research design is available in the Nature Research Reporting Summary linked to this article.

### Data availability

Data underlying the analyses reported in the paper have been deposited on the Open Science Framework under the following link: <https://osf.io/wgdhb/>.

### Code availability

R code and scripts to reproduce the analyses presented in the manuscript can be found on the Open Science Framework at: <https://osf.io/8rcz9/>.

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### Author contributions

T.H. and J.U. conceived the primary idea. T.H., J.U., M.Bernardino, D.V. and R.G. conceptualized the project and acquired the seed money. T.H., J.U., M.Bernardino, D.V., N.S., C.V., S.S., E.P.V., L.R.T., R.G., R.D., D.A., H.S., J.Z. and A.A. were involved in research design/instrument construction. T.H., J.U., M.Bernardino and D.V. wrote the draft of preregistration. T.H. and J.U. coordinated the project. T.H., J.U., M.Bernardino, N.S., C.L., D.V., S.S., L.R.T., E.P.V., R.G., R.K.D., D.A., H.P.S., M.Brancovic, S.W., J.Z., M.P., A.L.A., I.Z., A.P., N.A.L., M.S., A.G., H.O., M.Bilewicz, A.K., O.K., S.O., E.M., M.N., P.G., J.P., R.B., M.J., E.O., O.B., D.C.B., J.C., M.D., L.D., A.H.L., K.K. and L.M.U. were involved in data collection. T.H. and S.S. undertook data preparation. A.G., J.U., T.H. and S.S. conducted data analysis. T.H. and J.U., supported by S.S., prepared the draft manuscript. C.V., N.S., L.R.T., E.P.V., M.Bernadino, D.V., R.D., S.W., H.S., M.P., M.Brancovic, R.G. and D.A., supported by A.K., E.M., J.Z., I.Z., N.L., M.N., J.P., M.S., A.A., M.Bilewicz, R.B., P.G., S.O., O.B. and E.O., revised the manuscript. L.R.T. did the final editing.

### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

### Additional information

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