

5th Political Science & Political economy Conference Titles and Abstracts

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Family History and Attitudes Toward Outgroups: Evidence from the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Abstract: We examine how analogous thinking about family history affects outgroup bias. We provide evidence from Greece, a country that serves as an entry port to Europe for a large number of refugees and whose native population partly consists of descendants of ethnic Greeks who were forcibly relocated from Turkey in the early twentieth century. Combining historical and survey data with an experimental manipulation, we show that mentioning the parallels between past and present forced displacement leads to substantial increases in monetary donations and attitudinal measures of sympathy for refugees among respondents with forcibly displaced ancestors. This effect is also found among Greeks without a family history of forced migration, but only in places with a large historical concentration of Greek refugees from Turkey, where this historical experience is salient. Overall, our findings suggest that harnessing past experience can be an effective way of increasing empathy and reducing outgroup discrimination. Finally, we extend the evidence by looking at the case of German World War II expellees. We implement the same empirical design to examine how perceived recognition of in-group's refugee experience qualifies attitudes towards similar outgroups.

