

**Researchers**

Travis Baseler  
University of Rochester

Thomas Ginn  
Center for Global Development

Helidah Ogude-Chambert  
University of Oxford

Olivia Woldemikael  
Harvard University

Robert Hakiza  
Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID)

**Can Redistribution Change Policy Views?  
Aid and Attitudes Toward Refugees in Uganda\***

Travis Baseler      Thomas Ginn      Robert Hakiza  
Helidah Ogude-Chambert      Olivia Woldemikael

June 2023

**Abstract**

Many public policies create (perceived) winners and losers, but there is little evidence on whether redistribution can support new political economy equilibria that raise aggregate welfare. We study a Ugandan policy that redistributes 30% of foreign aid for refugees to Ugandans while allowing refugees to work and move freely. We randomly distribute cash grants labeled as aid shared from the refugee response and find that they substantially increase support for policies facilitating refugees' integration. Sharing information about public goods funded by the refugee response has smaller, though still significant, effects. Impacts persist for at least two years and appear to work through changing beliefs about the economic effects of refugees. We find minimal impacts of intergroup contact, implemented as business mentorship by an experienced refugee. Overall, our results suggest that economic interventions can shape policy views when the connection between the policy and the compensation is salient.

**Keywords:** Refugees, Immigration, Political Economy of Aid, Post-Conflict, Welfare  
**JEL Codes:** D74, D83, I18, O12

\*Baseler: University of Rochester, [travis.baseler@rochester.edu](mailto:travis.baseler@rochester.edu); Ginn: Center for Global Development, [tginn@cgd.org](mailto:tginn@cgd.org); Hakiza: Young African Refugees for Integral Development, [robert@yarid.org](mailto:robert@yarid.org); Ogude-Chambert: University of Oxford, [helidah.ogude@rothson.ox.ac.uk](mailto:helidah.ogude@rothson.ox.ac.uk); Woldemikael: Harvard University, [woldemikael@harvard.edu](mailto:woldemikael@harvard.edu). We appreciate comments from David Atkin, Samuel Bazzi, Aron Chaudhry, Michael Clements, Kevin Donovan, Pascaline Dupas, Dave Evans, Marcel Fakhoury, Fred Finan, Andre Georgan, Jens Hainmueller, Rebecca Hornik, Roncio Lareaga, Francesco Lisciani, Mashail Malik, Melanie Moran, Pia Raffer, Justin Sandefur, Julia Smithey, Walter Stolagross, Marco Tabellini, Jeremy Weinstein, Marc Witte, and seminar participants at Stanford, Harvard, CE Dexes, WGAPE, IIBREAD, the Joint Data Center, MIEDC, NOVAfrica, and APSA. We are grateful to the staff at YARID; the International Research Consortium, especially Dr. Daniel Kihonka Musoke, Aifah Nakiterende, and Dr. Daniel Senjovu; and Leleack Mubakazi Jerry at OneYouth OneHeart Initiative. We thank Lipeng Chen, Hyejin Lim, and Anshu Shriv for outstanding research assistance, and Christopher Walder for excellent field assistance. We are grateful for funding for this project that was provided by the Council N. Hilton Foundation, the IKEA Foundation, Stanford University, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), awarded through Innovations for Poverty Action's Peace & Recovery Program, and the UK Government, awarded through the "Building the Evidence on Protracted Forced Displacement" program managed by the World Bank Group (WBG) and established in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This work does not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government, FCDO, the WBG, UNHCR, or any of the authors' affiliations or funders. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Stanford University (#44743), Harvard University (IRB19-2041), the University of Rochester (#4896), the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (NS 3014), and the Midway Uganda Research Ethics Committee (0504-2019). The AEA RCT registration number is 3229. An earlier version was entitled "Can Aid Change Attitudes Toward Refugees? Experimental Evidence From Uganda."

# Can Aid Change Attitudes toward Refugees? Experimental Evidence from Microentrepreneurs in Urban Uganda

Many public policies create (perceived) winners and losers, but there is little evidence on whether redistribution can support new political economy equilibria that raise aggregate

welfare. We study a Ugandan policy that redistributes 30% of foreign aid for refugees to Ugandans while allowing refugees to work and move freely. We randomly distribute cash grants labeled as aid shared from the refugee response and find that they substantially increase support for policies facilitating refugees' integration. Sharing information about public goods funded by the refugee response has smaller, though still significant, effects. Impacts persist for at least two years and appear to work through changing beliefs about the economic effects of refugees. We find minimal impacts of intergroup contact, implemented as business mentorship by an experienced refugee. Overall, our results suggest that economic interventions can shape policy views when the connection between the policy and the compensation is salient.

June 01, 2023