Putting Conflict Experience and Science to Work for Peace

ANNUAL REPORT
2019/2020
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Dear friends,

Since 1992, Beyond Conflict has believed in the power of shared experience — the belief that people can learn from the experience of others — as a powerful tool to help leaders around the world facilitate peaceful change and navigate some of the most difficult conflicts and transitions of the past three decades. In dozens of countries, from South Africa to Northern Ireland, the shared experience model of conflict resolution helped open pathways to peace talks, transitions to democracy, and national reconciliation in the aftermath of division and repression. Yet, after decades of partnership with communities around the world, we recognized that something was missing in our approach and understanding of conflict. Despite sizable human, political, and financial resources devoted to resolving conflict and promoting peace, violence and division remained a deeply troubling reality.

Over the past decade, Beyond Conflict has explored the fields of brain and behavioral science and we now pair our decades of experience in conflict resolution and reconciliation with a groundbreaking approach that brings insights from science to some of the biggest challenges we face. Our team of peacebuilders and social psychologists is propelling this field by generating new research, developing policy recommendations and new evidence based interventions, and convening a series of events for practitioners, policymakers, scientists, journalists, and the general public.

I am proud of our team for their resilience and flexibility in an unprecedented year. As a result of their commitment, Beyond Conflict is a respected voice on polarization in the United States, providing critical recommendations and insights into the psychology of division to the public and the many organizations working to bridge our divides across the nation. Today, displaced populations in the Middle East can access a proven method for community mental health, using storytelling and neurobiology education to help them address the effects of forced displacement and conflict. In West Africa, we developed and tested a mass communication intervention with over 40 million Nigerians to stop violent conflict between Christians and Muslims that we hope will become a global model for reducing inter-religious and communal violence.

Looking back at the last year, I am in awe of the boundaries we pushed and the new paths we carved working with and for communities dealing with the consequences of conflict, division and displacement. In the following pages, you will read about our efforts to bring evidence-based solutions to many of society’s most vexing problems, including polarization, trauma in displaced populations, dehumanization, and the ongoing and painful reality of systemic racism.

We will all remember 2020 as a year of unforeseen challenges, but most importantly, for Beyond Conflict it was a year of advancement and real-world impact. With your continued support, we will continue to seize every opportunity to build a world of durable peace built on dignity, equity, and inclusion.

Sincerely,

Tim Phillips
ABOUT US

Bringing Conflict Resolution and Science Together to work for peace

Previous attempts to understand and address the causes and consequences of conflict do not take into account the actual operation of the human brain, even though it is the primary driver of our behavior. Beyond Conflict is the leading organization combining fresh insights from brain and behavioral science with experience in conflict resolution to create strategies that reduce conflict and promote peace in the United States and abroad.

Beyond Conflict uses its multidisciplinary expertise and long experience to diagnose the drivers of conflict and division. After generating new research, our team of experts develops and deploys scalable interventions aimed at creating lasting and measurable impact. For over a year, we primarily focused on the mental health of migrants and refugees, measuring toxic polarization, understanding racial biases and reducing dehumanization.

Beyond Conflict Activities Around the World

UNITED STATES    NIGERIA    TUNISIA    LEBANON    SYRIA    JORDAN
Our Unique Approach

Previous attempts to understand and address the causes and consequences of conflict do not take into account how the human brain functions even though it is the primary driver of our behavior. Current paradigms discount or ignore the unconscious biases present in the brain, offering only partial or incorrect explanations about how and why we act.

Beyond Conflict combines 29 years of experience in conflict prevention, resolution, and reconciliation with the latest cognitive and behavioral science. Our multidisciplinary team addresses the urgent need to better understand how humans by applying a variation of the scientific method to develop interventions that consider and measure the mechanisms that drive human behavior, including conflict.

By the numbers

5,000 new people have signed up to receive updates from Beyond Conflict

Over 75 events

4 new team members
The Field Guide for Barefoot Psychology
Making Trauma Recovery Accessible to Vulnerable Communities Worldwide

Approximately 68.5 million people are displaced worldwide as a result of conflict and disaster. The experiences of conflict, trauma and forced displacement put refugees and migrants at a higher risk of facing mental health challenges while too often facing the stigma associated with discussing mental health illness and seeking care. These populations have few resources to address the emotional and psychological burdens they carry as a result of displacement, trauma, and conflict.

Beyond Conflict created *The Field Guide for Barefoot Psychology* to address the need for easily scalable, cost-effective and culturally sensitive mental health interventions in humanitarian settings. *The Guide*, a book and online platform, tells the story of two Syrian siblings living through forced migration and uses vignettes of their lives to explain otherwise abstract scientific concepts. It walks readers and viewers through an educational and practical process that includes psychoeducation, self-assessment and replicable self-care exercises to increase resilience and capacity to address mental health challenges at an individual and community level.

Kafa Ahmed and Zaad Alkhair, Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan. Photo by Ana Eira, Beyond Conflict.
Highlights

- A randomized control trial showed that The Guide improved mental health stigma, Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and emotion regulation in a group of 160 participants living in Za’atari in northern Jordan, the world’s largest Syrian refugee camp.

- In partnership with Edraak, a massive open online course (MOOC) platform that is an initiative of the Queen Rania Foundation of Jordan, our team transformed The Guide into an online course.
  
  - 14,648 people across the Middle East and North Africa registered to participate in the MOOC’s first edition.
  
  - Those who completed the online course showed a significant decrease in mental health stigma. Women, in particular, seemed to show the most marked decrease.

Following the encouraging Randomized Control Trial results, our team is currently creating new versions of The Guide to be deployed in Central America.

Dehumanization — the process of perceiving other people as less than human — removes the moral prohibition against violence, genocide and systemic discrimination, thereby enabling them to occur. Many groups and individuals — ranging from Black Lives Matter to the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide — recognize dehumanization as a critical factor to be addressed. Still, they have limited evidence-based tools to detect, disrupt and prevent its harmful consequences.

Beyond Conflict partnered with Peace Initiatives Network, a Nigerian peace-building organization, to convene a workshop with local peacebuilders, media professionals and researchers to address the extreme violence taking place between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Together, we co-designed a dehumanization-detection tool (a survey instrument) and a strategic communication intervention to counter dehumanization and support for violence in the country.

Our team worked with Equal Access International to translate the outputs from this workshop into a radio program that would resonate with the local audience. Through a randomized control trial, we found that the radio show reduced support for violence and animosity among Christians and Muslims in Kaduna — a hot spot for violence in Nigeria’s Middle Belt. This included reducing blatant dehumanization and the perception of the other group as a threat.

Leveraging the positive findings of the radio program, we scaled up to a mass communication channel. In partnership with a Nigerian TV channel, we incorporated these findings into a new storyline of an award-winning TV series watched by 40 million people. A research study using a randomized control trial took place alongside each episode to evaluate the impact of our storyline on improving inter-religious attitudes. The initial results are extremely promising and will be published in fall 2021.
Highlights

• Released a policy brief for practitioners and policymakers that advances understanding of dehumanization and suggests applications for violence prevention.

• Designed a dehumanization-detection toolkit and a radio program that reduced dehumanization, threat perceptions and support for inter-religious violence.

• Measured impact of media interventions through two randomized control trials.

• Published a media training manual for Nigerian peacebuilders, sharing how to launch successful communication campaigns through traditional and social media.

• Trained over 100 heads of peacebuilding NGOs in Nigeria on our key research insights and how to use media to address dehumanizing rhetoric in their communities.
America's Divided Mind
Understanding the psychology of polarization

Existing measures of polarization, such as polls and voting patterns, don’t accurately capture its psychological underpinnings. Using insights from the psychological sciences, Beyond Conflict measured how much Democrats and Republicans dislike, dehumanize and disagree with each other. Our research found a consistent pattern: There is a wide gap between perception and reality. Americans incorrectly believe that members of the other party dehumanize, dislike and disagree with them about twice as much as they actually do. In short, we believe we’re more polarized than we really are—and that exaggeration can drive us even further apart.

The depth of the divide between perceived and actual levels of enmity is correlated with outcomes that are harmful to American democracy, including support for actions that benefit one’s political party at the expense of the country; lower levels of trust in the country’s civic institutions, such as the Supreme Court and Congress; and a growing discomfort with, and isolation from, members of the other party, such as having a member of the other party serve as your doctor or your child's teacher.

Our goal is to use psychological insights to develop strategies that enable individuals, institutions, and leaders to address the increasing threat of toxic polarization.

In 2020, Beyond Conflict lost Emile Bruneau, a friend, a colleague, and mentor who showed us how science can transform the way we address conflict and reconciliation. Our research on polarization would have not been possible without Emile. Find out more about his legacy here.
Highlights

- Released a report on the psychological underpinnings of toxic polarization in the United States.
- Shared research findings with over 650 people working in the counterpolarization and bridge-building space that later incorporated these insights into their work on the ground.
- Featured research findings in over 30 national and international news outlets.
- Recognized by leading experts and journalists as a thought leader in the field of the psychology of polarization. Find the latest articles featuring our work here.

AMERICA’S DIVIDED MIND
Understanding the Psychology That Drives Us Apart

Humans gravitate towards groups because they provide security and identity. Humans are social animals. Our ability to form groups enables us to survive—it offers protection, resources, and meaning in a chaotic world.

Our brains are on the lookout for threats to the group. But in a polarized environment, we tend to blow them out of proportion. As a defense mechanism, we often assume our own group has good intentions, and the other side must be malicious. This leads to exaggerated and hostile beliefs about members of other groups.

Our brain uses shortcuts to decide who’s in our group. We use shared values, stories, symbols, and language as signs of group belonging. They become particularly meaningful to us not just for their content, but as powerful indicators of identity.

Once we view society primarily through this “Us vs. Them” lens it can make compromise and cooperation extremely difficult.

Once we consider the other side as an enemy, it induces a range of negative perceptions about them and their beliefs. We see them primarily as a threat.

Going Deeper on Polarized Psychology

Charts originally published in America’s Divided Mind report

PERCEIVED IMMIGRATION POSITIONS

![](chart1.png)

ACTUAL IMMIGRATION POSITIONS

![](chart2.png)

PERCEIVED GUN CONTROL POSITIONS

![](chart3.png)

ACTUAL GUN CONTROL POSITIONS

![](chart4.png)
Preempting Racism
Preventing Race-Based Preferences From Developing in Early Childhood

Human beings are not born racist; rather, they learn to be racist. Studies have shown that race-based preferences emerge between 3 and 5 years old, yet little work has been undertaken in behavioral and social science to investigate how individual, social and environmental variables influence the development of these preferences.

Beyond Conflict partnered with researchers at Developed psychology labs at Yale, UPenn, and New York University to launch multiple longitudinal studies to measure the racial attitudes of hundreds of children from across the country using a novel online lab designed to collect data from children.

The preliminary results of the longitudinal studies and pilot interventions show:

- The ideal age range to intervene to preempt the development of racial biases is between 4 and 8-years-old.

- Children who view interracial friendships as socially accepted show lower levels of racial biases, and this is especially true when they view interracial friendships as being valued by their parents.

- Children’s understanding of the structural barriers that racial minority groups face in today’s society plays a nuanced role in their developing racial biases.

These findings reveal an opportunity to generate scalable interventions with the potential to preempt race-based preferences. Our team is testing several intervention programs to identify and refine promising ways to preempt the emergence of racial bias in young children. These interventions are designed to be scalable, with an easy translation to parents and educators to ensure maximum impact and benefit.

Successful interventions could lead to targeted campaigns to counter the development of racial biases in young children. This framework can be extended to explore what causes other types of discrimination, including on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender and age.
Highlights

- Produced manuscript detailing research findings and submitted for publication in *Developmental Psychology* journal.

- Participated in this study 1,500 children from 46 different states and Washington, D.C., have participated in this study.

- Tested the effectiveness of different versions of a *Parent's Guide to Race*, produced by the research team, with over 116 families participating in this experiment.

Community Partners

- *embracerace*

- *WE STORIES*

- *story starters*
Integration of neuroscience and mental health is critical to moving the peacebuilding and conflict resolution field forward. Fortunately, Beyond Conflict is “beyond cutting edge” on these issues and is leading the sector to effectively integrate this knowledge into practical conflict prevention and resolution programs. They are the experts and the first place I go.

Elizabeth Hume, Acting President and CEO at the Alliance for Peacebuilding

At 14 years old, I left behind my childhood home, adult siblings and friends, which introduced a whirlwind of emotions that I had never before felt, couldn’t name and didn’t know how to process. Why did I feel constant pressure in my chest? Where did it come from, and why didn’t it go away when I was safe? I found the answers in science, coming to me in the shape of The Field Guide for Barefoot Psychology created by Beyond Conflict. My body was showing me signs. Behind every feeling or behavior, there was a scientific explanation, and an exercise, I could do to help me manage it.

Zaad Alkhair, Facilitator of The Field Guide for Barefoot Psychology

Over the past two years, I’ve worked with Beyond Conflict to address and reduce dehumanization and support for violence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Together we convened media, peacebuilders and researchers to help us produce a mass media intervention to change false perceptions between religious groups. At the end of 2020, we trained 100 peace builders spread across Nigeria on how to use traditional and social media to highlight the role of dangerous speech, specifically dehumanizing rhetoric, in normalizing violence and systemic discrimination against a group of people. Through our work, I believe we are encouraging people across religions to interact more, perceive each other more positively and reject violence.

Michael Sodipo, Founder and Project Coordinator of Peace Initiative Network
FINANCIALS

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position
As of June 30, 2020

ASSETS

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<th>Asset</th>
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<td>Contributions Receivable</td>
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LIABILITIES AND NET ASSET

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Payables &amp; Accrued Costs</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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HOW WE SPENT EACH DOLLAR

- Programs: $2,440K (14%)
- Administration: $404K (3%)
- Fundraising: $79K (83%)

$2.92M

$2,440K Programs
$404K Administration
$79K Fundraising
WITH THE SUPPORT OF

Anika Huq
Bart Owens
Bhim Dhingra
Bonnie Goldmacher
Carl Marci
Catherine and Daniel Phillips
Cheryl Eagan-Donovan
Christine Blackadar
Cumming’s Foundation
Danette Kong
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Todd Waters
Twilio.org Impact Fund
U.S. Department of State
Victoria Moreno
Vivian Khedari
WEND Ventures

To support our work please go to beyondconflictint.org/donate
I couldn't be more excited to join such a talented team with an established record of designing unique, creative approaches to making the world a better place for peace, social justice, and productive collaboration to take root.

Josh Martin, Executive Director

Our Team

Staff

Founder & CEO
Tim Philips

Executive Director
Josh Martin

Director of Development
Jennifer Colletti

Director of Finance
Peter T. Brown

Finance and Operations Analyst
Alex Gulakos

Program Directors
Michael Niconchuk
Michelle Barsa

Communications Lead
Ana Eira

International Peacebuilding
Program Manager
Karen Bernstein

Decoding Dehumanization
Lead Researcher
Rebecca Littman

Postdoctoral Innovation Lab Fellows
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Michael T. Rizzo
Samantha Moore-Berg

Senior Advisor
Marjorie Rhodes

Program Advisor
Vivian Khedari Depierro

Research Fellow
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Innovation Lab Doctoral Fellow
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Senior Science and Technology Advisor
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Beyond Conflict Fellows
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Alex Levy-Vene
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Jan Urban, Czech Republic

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Václav Havel, Czech Republic
Maurice Hayes, Northern Ireland
Nelson Mandela, South Africa
Shimon Peres, Israel
José Zalaquett, Chile
Putting conflict experience and science to work for peace