



Arbeitseinheit
Politische Psychologie

Pathways to Peace in a Reality of War

36th Annual Conference of the German Peace Psychology Association

21-22 September 2026, [IKG Bielefeld](#) (Germany)

Conference Programme (updated)

Monday, 21 September 2026	
13:00-14:00	Registration & welcome coffee
14:00-14:15	Opening & welcome
14:15-15:15	Session 1. War, violence, and peace: individual and collective psychological processes
15:15-15:30	Coffee break
15:30-16:50	Session 2. Democracy, polarization, and intergroup relations
19:00	Conference dinner at the Nichtschwimmer , Arndstraße 6-8, 33602 Bielefeld (self-paid)

Tuesday, 22 September 2026	
9:00-10:15	Keynote lecture. Sabina Cehajic-Clancy , Pathways to Reconciliation: from individual-level processes to contextualized interventions
10:15-10:30	Coffee break
10:30-11:15	Gert Sommer-Award Lecture. Fiona Kazarovytska, Identity Protection and Collective (Non-)Remembrance
11:15-11:45	Honorary Mention. Carolin Schroeder, The Integration of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support into Transitional Justice Processes: The Case of Colombia
11:45-12:15	Honorary Mention. Christoph Hahn, Conflict Styles in the Middle East. How Are Interpersonal Conflict Styles Related to Attitudes Towards Political Conflict Resolution?
12:15-13:30	Lunch break
13:30-14:30	Session 3. Communication, political education, and peacebuilding
14:30-14:40	Coffee break
14:40-16:00	Session 4. Reconciliation, memory, and narratives
16:00-16:15	Closing & farewell



Session Overview

Monday, 21 September 2026	
14:15-15:15	<i>Session 1. War, violence, and peace: individual and collective psychological processes</i> • Klaus Boehnke, Hope for Peace and Fear of War: Here We Go Again? • Tamara Al Rawwad, Collective Trauma and Collective Grief in the Middle East: Psychological Pathways to Communal Resilience and Peacebuilding • Astrid Kause et al., People's Responses to Nuclear Weapons: Mapping Post-Cold War Psychological Research
15:30-16:50	<i>Session 2. Democracy, polarization, and intergroup relations</i> • Yarden Kedar & Naomi Shloush, Sowing the Seeds of Democracy and Peace: The First Choices Model for Early Childhood Education • Rasmus Möring & Isabel Thielmann, A Divided Moral Compass? Dispositional Resistance to Political Violence Across Partisan Groups • Katharina Küper & Aileen Oeberst, Limits of tolerance: The role of specifying boundaries in the measurement of Tolerance for Differences • Sarah Schwaderlapp, "Being German simply means not being German": National Identity Construction in Young German Adults with "Migration Background"
Tuesday, 22 September 2026	
13:30-14:30	<i>Session 3. Communication, political education, and peacebuilding</i> • Corinna Christmann, Escalating and De-escalating News Coverage of Flight Migration: Prospective Teachers' News Literacy as a Resource for Political Education • Maïke Niewerde et al., Past Perfect, Future Tense? Replication and Extension of Temporal Comparison Effects on System Justification in Germany • Miriam Albrecht & Markus Germar, How Moral Decisions and Moral Preferences Shape Social Perception
14:40-16:00	<i>Session 4. Reconciliation, memory, and narratives</i> • John Gilbert, The Veteran as a Hinge: Bridging Moral Injury and Reconciliation Psychology • Zachary Reyna, Inhabiting Disagreement: Storytelling and Agonistic Peace • Philipp Süssenbach & Jonas Rees, Standing Before Memory: Experiencing Memorials Moves Us to Engage with the Past • Leon Walter et al., Knowing the History, Missing the Point? Increased Antisemitism in Young Germans Following Different Ways of Engagement with the Holocaust



Abstracts

Session 1. War, violence, and peace: individual and collective psychological processes

Hope for Peace and Fear of War: Here We Go Again?

Klaus Boehnke (Constructor University)

Findings from a longitudinal study of 242 German adolescents (now in their 50s) are reported, with data collected in 1985 and then 11 times at 3 ½-year intervals in 1988/9, 1992, 1995/6, 1999, 2002/3, 2006, 2009/10, 2013, 2016/7, 2020, and 2023/4. The study followed life trajectories from the arms race during the Cold War, the First Gulf War, the wars in former Yugoslavia, 9/11, the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, the 2015 refugee crisis induced by the Syrian civil war, and the war in Ukraine, to name just a few important events. How has the omnipresence of war affected the hopes and fears of study participants? Has it influenced their well-being and their active pursuit of a world in peace? Participants' first-mentioned fears of war oscillated between 52% in 1985 and 21% around the turn of the millennium, then dropped to an all-time low of 3% in 2006, before rising back to 21% after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Self-reported happiness is lower when fear of war is higher, whereas political activism is higher when fear of war is also high. The presentation concludes by discussing the policy relevance of these findings.

Collective Trauma and Collective Grief in the Middle East: Psychological Pathways to Communal Resilience and Peacebuilding

Tamara Al Rawwad (German Jordanian University)

Communities across the Middle East and the Arab world have endured decades of war, displacement, political violence, and chronic instability. These conditions produce both collective trauma—a shared sense of threat, rupture, and insecurity—and collective grief, which reflects communal mourning over repeated losses of life, homeland, and future expectations. Although related, these constructs operate differently and shape distinct emotional and social pathways. This study is grounded in Collective Trauma Theory (Erikson), which conceptualizes trauma as a disruption to the social fabric, and Emotional Climate Theory (Bar-Tal), which explains how societies develop shared emotional atmospheres that influence intergroup relations and peacebuilding.



This cross-sectional survey collected 160 responses from participants across multiple Middle Eastern countries. The instrument included closed-ended items assessing collective trauma, collective grief, and communal emotional climates, alongside open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate on experiences not fully captured by structured items. These narrative responses provided deeper insight without constituting a full mixed-methods design.

Findings show that collective trauma is primarily associated with fear, mistrust, and heightened sensitivity to threat, often reinforcing polarization and inhibiting reconciliation. In contrast, collective grief functions as a communal mourning process that can strengthen solidarity, shared identity, and meaning-making, yet may also sustain narratives of injustice that complicate peace efforts. Three pathways emerged as central to peacebuilding: (1) communal coping practices supporting resilience; (2) collective meaning-making shaping narratives of loss, justice, and agency; and (3) intergroup emotional climates influencing reconciliation and conflict transformation. Open-ended responses highlighted regional variations in displacement histories and cultural mourning practices.

By distinguishing collective trauma from collective grief, this study contributes to peace psychology by clarifying how different shared emotional processes shape communal resilience and pathways to peace. Findings underscore the need for peacebuilding approaches that address both structural conditions and the distinct collective emotional landscapes present in conflict-affected societies.

People's Responses to Nuclear Weapons: Mapping Post-Cold War Psychological Research

Astrid Kause (Leuphana University Lüneburg), Helen Fischer, Zia Mian, & Susan Fiske (Peace) psychologists have a long tradition of studying peoples' responses to nuclear weapons. Now again, nuclear weapon threats are increasing and may be comparable to levels not seen since the worst periods of the Cold War. More than 3 decades have passed since the last major reviews of people's responses to nuclear weapons. We thus aimed to understand how psychologists and researchers from related fields have empirically studied responses to nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War. We systematically mapped articles reporting on people's responses. A search in Web of Science and Scopus identified 18,505 hits. Screening resulted in 256 suitable articles. We assessed (a) publication patterns, including



how many articles focused on responses to nuclear weapons, when those articles were published, and in which field; (b) the research community, namely author collaborations and focal journals; (c) research themes, as indicated by cocitation networks and theoretical backgrounds; and (d) the validity, generalizability, and replicability of empirical findings, as indicated by adequate samples and validated measures. We found renewed interest in the field but not yet a coherent research community and only some evidence for its evolution from occasional, scattered, one-off studies toward a coherent and coordinated scholarly field. I will discuss whether and how psychologists may - again – engage with nuclear weapons.

Session 2. Democracy, polarization, and intergroup relations

Sowing the Seeds of Democracy and Peace: The First Choices Model for Early Childhood Education

Yarden Kedar (Beit Berl Academic College) & Naomi Shloush

In a period marked by democratic erosion, polarization, displacement, and persistent violence, peace and democracy education must begin as early as possible, before exclusionary attitudes and passive civic habits become firmly established. The early years have a profound influence on children's later social, emotional, and moral development, making early childhood a particularly important period for cultivating the values and skills associated with peace and democracy. Young children can also become powerful agents of change within their families, as demonstrated, for example, by their ability to encourage parents to adopt more environmentally sustainable practices.

First Choices is an early-childhood educational initiative designed to introduce children aged 5-8 to foundational democratic and peace-promoting values through short, humorous animated stories based on everyday situations. The stories address fairness, empathy, respect, cooperation, perspective-taking, active listening, collaborative problem-solving, and peaceful conflict resolution. Each story presents a situation requiring a meaningful decision. An accompanying interactive game asks children to actively choose among several possible actions and explore the consequences of each choice. Children thus become participants rather than passive viewers, practicing how to recognize unfairness, consider multiple perspectives, cooperate across differences, and respond constructively to conflict.



The project will initially use Israel as a case study. Tensions between political right and left, secular and religious communities, Arab and Jewish citizens, and other social groups provide an urgent context for examining early democratic and peace education. Materials will be developed and tested in Arabic, English, and Hebrew with children, parents, and educators from diverse communities.

An initial AI-generated demonstration video is available online. Two additional pilot videos are currently in production. Following evaluation and field study in kindergartens and afterschool programs across Israel, the project aims to develop a multilingual platform that can be culturally adapted and disseminated internationally.

A Divided Moral Compass? Dispositional Resistance to Political Violence Across Partisan Groups

Rasmus Möring (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law) & Isabel Thielmann

High-profile assassinations, such as the killing of the right-wing US podcaster Charlie Kirk in September 2025, spark societal debate, with some expressing support for this act of political violence. Such attitudes may be shaped by perceptions of societal benefit, personality traits, and partisanship. Typically, perceiving an action as beneficial for society predicts support for it - but does this hold when the action involves extreme violence, and if so, under what conditions? Our preregistered study (N = 691, US quota sample balanced for gender, age, and party affiliation) investigated this question just three weeks after Kirk's assassination. Participants indicated their (lack of) support for his killing, their perceptions of its societal impact, completed the HEXACO personality inventory, and reported their political orientation.

Results show that perceiving greater societal benefit from Kirk's death was associated with higher support for his killing. However, Honesty-Humility - the personality trait most strongly linked to prosocial behavior - moderated this effect: Higher Honesty-Humility scores weakened the relationship between perceived benefit and support, with highly prosocial individuals opposing the assassination regardless of its perceived utility. Exploratorily, this buffering effect was most pronounced among outgroup participants (left-leaning individuals in this case).



These findings highlight how prosocial traits can act as psychological buffers against the support for political violence, even when such violence is perceived as socially beneficial. On a broader level, the results of this study suggest that situational variables (like perceptions of societal benefits) as well as individual dispositions and group membership build a complex interplay when investigating political violence.

Limits of tolerance: The role of specifying boundaries in the measurement of Tolerance for Differences

Katharina Küper (University of Potsdam) & Aileen Oeberst

In times of polarization and intergroup tensions, tolerance for disagreements and differences can be seen as a cornerstone of peaceful pluralistic societies. Yet there are different understandings of tolerance. They range from tolerance despite disapproval (e.g., Simon et al., 2019) to general warmth and openness towards otherness (e.g., Verkuyten & Kollar, 2021). Despite these differences, tolerance conceptualisations generally assume that tolerance has socially defined limits, such as not tolerating violence (Forst, 2017). However, tolerance scales often do not specify these boundaries in their instructions. In a pilot study, approximately one third of the participants reported thinking about violence or law violations when responding to a tolerance questionnaire, and these participants also indicated lower tolerance scores. This preliminary finding raises the possibility that without explicit boundaries, responses might partly capture reactions that lie beyond the intended scope of tolerance. Our study examines whether making these boundaries explicit affects responses to the Tolerance for Differences Scale (Hjerm et al., 2020). This scale conceptualizes tolerance for differences as a three-dimensional value orientation comprising acceptance, respect, and appreciation (Hjerm et al., 2020), thereby integrating different understandings of tolerance.

In a between-subjects experimental design, participants receive either neutral instructions or instructions specifying that they should evaluate differences that do not involve violence or law violations. We examine whether this manipulation affects (a) mean scores on the total scale and its subscales, (b) measurement invariance of the three-factor structure across conditions, (c) reliability of the scale, and (d) associations with conceptually related constructs (e.g., group-focused enmity, political orientation, intergroup contact).



The presentation outlines the background, and design of an ongoing study and invites discussion of potential implications for the valid assessment of tolerance and directions for future research.

“Being German simply means not being German”: National Identity Construction in Young German Adults with “Migration Background”

Sarah Schwaderlapp (London School of Economics and Political Science)

In Germany, the current political context promotes an essentialist and ethnic understanding of Germanness. Using a social representation approach, this study seeks to explore how this socio-cultural and political context affects individuals with “migration background” in their sense of Germanness. Thus, it addresses the following question: How do young adults with “migration background” in Germany construct their German national identity in the current political context? I conducted and analyzed 21 in-depth interviews using thematic analysis and elements of multivoicedness analysis. The results speak to a three-fold process of identity construction: First, participants (de-)legitimized their Germanness in comparison to “true” and superficial criteria of Germanness. This demonstrated the ubiquity of an ethnic understanding of Germanness. Further, the battle for recognition showed that participants construct their identity dependent on recognition by the other, leading to a sense of unquestioned or unattainable Germanness, which was driven by the current political context. Lastly, participants displayed agency in resisting exclusionist understandings of Germanness by redefining it. Overall, the findings reveal a “Hierarchy of Belonging” within German society which captures how individuals differ in the extent to which they feel their German national identity is accessible to them. In conclusion, the heterogenous experiences of how Germans with “migration background” construct their identity speaks to how the term reproduces an essentialist understanding of Germanness while illegitimately homogenizing diverse experiences.



Session 3. Communication, political education, and peacebuilding

Escalating and De-escalating News Coverage of Flight Migration: Prospective Teachers' News Literacy as a Resource for Political Education

Corinna Christmann (University of Salzburg)

News media play a central role in constructing public understandings of flight migration, conflict, responsibility, and solidarity. Depending on how actors, causes, and possible responses are represented, reporting may intensify conflict and polarization or contribute to (de-)escalation. This study examines, first, to what extent prospective teachers of politics and history identify escalating reporting in Austrian and German newspaper articles on flight migration and, second, which pedagogical and didactic considerations they develop to promote central aims of political education, particularly the recognition of global interconnections and students' capacity for political judgement. Three sub-studies were conducted. First, Austrian and German newspaper articles published between August 2019 and January 2020 were examined using latent class analysis to identify underlying reporting patterns. Peace journalism was operationalized as an analytical category, enabling a systematic assessment of whether the reporting was conflict-escalating or conflict-de-escalating. Second, typical articles representing the identified reporting styles in their pure form were analysed through the text-interpretive method of socio-psychological reconstruction to identify omitted, distorted, or decontextualized information. Third, prospective teachers' emotional and cognitive positionings toward these representative articles, as well as their human-rights orientations and pedagogical reasoning, were surveyed and analysed using latent class analysis. Four reporting styles were identified—detached, pragmatic, admonitory, and technocratic—which differ in their forms and degrees of escalation and de-escalation. Across these styles, key dimensions of flight migration, including responsibility for the causes of flight, compliance with human rights, and European and global solidarity, remain underrepresented. The survey yielded four positioning styles. The fourth style, the “critically and emotionally questioning media and social analysts,” indicates connections between emotional involvement, news literacy, human-rights orientation, and constructive pedagogical reasoning. Respondents belonging to this style use controversial reporting as a starting point for teaching that promotes critical media analysis, global contextualization, and political judgement. The findings conceptualize news literacy as a critical, emotionally reflective, and human-rights-based competence for political education.



Past Perfect, Future Tense? Replication and Extension of Temporal Comparison Effects on System Justification in Germany

Maike Niewerde (Universität Bielefeld), Leon Walter & Jonas Rees

The context-dependency of system justification processes has been a central topic in political psychology. Replicating and extending prior findings from the U.S. in Germany, we experimentally manipulated temporal comparisons by asking 605 German participants in an online survey to evaluate system justification either considering the past, the future or no temporal reference point. Results indicated that past comparisons reversed the positive association between conservatism and system justification, whereas no significant association emerged when participants compared the present to the future. More progressive participants evaluated the past as a clear downward comparison relative to the present. We further identified collective nostalgia as a key factor when looking at temporal comparisons, which was negatively associated with system justification in present and in contrast to the past.

These findings suggest that political ideology shapes how people use temporal comparisons when evaluating the current social system. Our findings confirm that temporal comparisons can attenuate or reverse the association between conservatism and system justification, but they also highlight collective nostalgia as a key factor in shaping these evaluations. Understanding how temporal comparisons shape system justification may help explain why different groups perceive the same societal system as more or less legitimate or fair, offering a perspective on how temporal framing may contribute to tensions within democratic societies.

How Moral Decisions and Moral Preferences Shape Social Perception

Miriam Albrecht (University of Hildesheim) & Markus Germar

Moral decisions and judgments are ubiquitous in every day personal, social and political life. They serve as reflections of personal values but also as social cues that shape how individuals perceive one another. Moral dilemmas pose one especially critical and relevant cluster of moral decisions. Prior research has shown that people draw systematic inferences from others' responses to moral dilemmas, often judging utilitarian decision-makers as more competent but less moral and warm, while viewing deontologists as more trustworthy and communal. However, these findings focus primarily on a binary contrast between utilitarian



and deontological reasoning in the context of warmth/communion and competence/agency. The present study addressed these limitations by examining social perceptions across three moral preference types: deontological, utilitarian, and the less-studied minimalist position, looking at agency, communion and at beliefs. It further investigated how this perception is shaped by people's own moral preference.

Using linear mixed-effects models, the results showed that utilitarian targets were perceived as more agentic than deontological targets, whereas both utilitarian and minimalist targets were perceived as more liberal than deontological targets. For communion, no overall differences between target conditions emerged when participants' own moral preferences were taken into account. Evidence for a moderating role of moral preference similarity was found for communion and beliefs, but not for agency. Across both communion and beliefs, these similarity effects primarily weakened or strengthened the target effects rather than completely reversing them.

The study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of social perception in moral dilemmas and of when and how individuals' own moral preferences influence these perceptions. These insights can inform future research.

Session 4. Reconciliation, memory, and narratives

The Veteran as a Hinge: Bridging Moral Injury and Reconciliation Psychology

John Gilbert (Touro University Berlin)

Moral injury and reconciliation psychology have developed in parallel. Moral injury research is clinically rich but tends to bracket the political and collective contexts in which morally injurious acts occur; reconciliation research is politically rich but often gives less attention to the psychological costs borne by individuals who enact, witness, or become implicated in collective violence.

This conceptual paper proposes the veteran as a hinge between these literatures. Veterans experiencing perpetration-based moral injury are simultaneously individual sufferers and participants in institutions that enact state-sanctioned violence. Across levels of analysis, the two literatures describe related defensive processes: avoidance, self-condemnation, and withdrawal at the individual level; moral disengagement, competitive victimhood, and denial at the collective level. The paper argues that societal responses to veterans can function as



forms of collective acknowledgment, or its refusal, and shape whether morally injurious experience is integrated or privatized.

Two societal scripts may foreclose acknowledgment. A heroic script suppresses moral ambivalence by rendering military service primarily through honor and sacrifice. A post-heroic script distances itself from militarized language but may leave moral ambiguities unspoken, depriving veterans of a public vocabulary through which to articulate them. Germany's emerging construction of veteran recognition, amid the Zeitenwende and the establishment of a National Veterans' Day, offers an instructive case: a society negotiating new forms of military recognition against historically fraught narratives of war, responsibility, and remembrance.

The paper closes with implications for peace psychology, particularly for acknowledgment, responsibility, and post-conflict repair, alongside a research agenda and two practical propositions: reconciliation interventions may require clinical components, while moral injury treatment may require collective and political ones. The argument is developed partly from the author's position as a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer working in veteran services within German academia, a vantage point treated as part of the analysis rather than as evidence.

Inhabiting Disagreement: Storytelling and Agonistic Peace

Zachary Reyna (Constructor University Bremen)

Storytelling is central to peacebuilding and conflict transformation, from Lederach's attention to memory, relationship, and restorying to Cobb's account of narrative as constitutive of conflict itself. Yet narrative and storytelling are not the same. Narrative can be analyzed as structure, discourse, or content; storytelling is an activity of telling, retelling, transmitting, contesting, and revising experience. What does attention to the activity of telling reveal that a focus on narrative can miss?

Drawing on nine months of participant observation and interviews at Ionia, a multigenerational intentional community on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, this paper examines storytelling amid prolonged disagreement, generational change, and institutional crisis. Crisis is especially revealing because shared spaces, responsibilities, memories, and inherited stories that normally recede into the background become contested and explicit. Rather than treating storytelling as a technique for resolving disagreement, the ethnography shows how



it can make unresolved conflict inhabitable over time. Through telling and retelling, contested events acquire enough form and distance to become shareable: they can be returned to from different positions, judged without being exhausted by one explanation, and carried into new circumstances. Yet stories can also harden into authoritative accounts that narrow what can be said or imagined.

Read with Lederach and Cobb, and through Hannah Arendt's and Walter Benjamin's accounts of storytelling as world-making, these practices show how conflict can be carried as experience without its meaning being fixed. Storytelling emerges as a practice of agonistic peace: not reconciliation through a single shared narrative, but giving conflicting experience enough common form to be lived with while leaving disagreement open. The paper argues that, in contexts of war and protracted conflict where memories, meanings, and relationships remain contested, peacebuilding depends in part on practices that make unresolved conflict inhabitable over time without forcing it into a single shared narrative.

Standing Before Memory: Experiencing Memorials Moves Us to Engage with the Past

Philipp Süssenbach (Fachhochschule des Mittelstands) & Jonas Rees

Experiencing a memorial can affect observers beyond making the events that are commemorated salient. The present research addresses this issue by surveying and comparing participants who were in the presence of a memorial to control participants who were not. In the presence of a memorial, participants reported greater personal relevance of the topics commemorated as well as greater behavioral intentions to engage with the past (N Study 1 = 142). This effect was not due to simply assuming to be in the presence of a memorial (N Study 2 = 149) and replicated (N Study 3 = 244). Our findings suggest that public memorials do not merely mark a place or event but influence observers to engage with the past and may affect future behavior. We discuss the role of contextual factors, individual differences, and emotional responses, highlighting the need for further research.

Knowing the History, Missing the Point? Increased Antisemitism in Young Germans Following Different Ways of Engagement with the Holocaust

Leon Walter (IKG, Bielefeld University), Michael Papendick, & Jonas Rees

Policymakers, educators and institutions in Germany place considerable trust in the assumption that engagement with the history of National Socialism (NS) and the Holocaust protects against antisemitism and other types of prejudice. However, this "immunization



hypothesis” has only rarely been tested empirically, and existing findings are mixed. Across two studies using representative German survey data from the Multidimensional Remembrance Monitor (MEMO) studies, we examined associations between engagement with NS and antisemitism, and whether these depend on age and the perceived voluntariness of that engagement. Study 1 (N = 3,000, data collected in 2024) showed that overall, self-reported engagement with NS was negatively associated with primary and secondary antisemitism. However, this association was moderated by age: it was negative only for participants above the age of 40 and reversed in direction for participants under 30. Perceived voluntariness of engagement overall and the most recent memorial-site visit also moderated the association of engagement and antisemitism, with more voluntary engagement showing stronger negative associations with antisemitism. Study 2 (N = 838, participants aged 16-25) assessed a representative sample of young people in Germany in 2021 and one year later in 2022. Whereas lower-threshold engagement with NS (watching films and documentaries, consuming online content) showed no associations with primary and secondary antisemitism, higher-threshold engagement (contemporary witness testimonies, exhibits, talks) since baseline predicted increases in both primary and secondary antisemitism. Additionally, visiting a former concentration camp during the follow-up year was likewise associated with increases in antisemitism, particularly among those without prior visit experience. Together, these findings challenge the immunization hypothesis especially for younger cohorts in Germany. That appears to be the case particularly for ways of engagement that are often imposed and institutionalized were associated with increases in antisemitism among young people.