

CONFERENCE

Intergroup Norms after Violent Conflict: Insights from Research and Practice

19 September 2025 - 20 September 2025

**University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Political Science,
Skenderija 72, 71000 Sarajevo**

This Conference brings together researchers and practitioners who study, design, and/or implement interventions to improve interethnic norms after violent conflict and who seek to understand the origins and effects of intergroup norms. Social norms, or “shared understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted, or forbidden,”^[1] offer a conceptual lens for understanding patterns of behavior across diverse fields of research and disciplines. Intergroup norms are particularly important after episodes of violent conflict. In many post-war settings, although peace agreements have brought a halt to physical violence, intergroup norms frequently inhibit intergroup contact and cooperation, perpetuate intergroup polarization, and limit the prospects for peacebuilding. Practitioners have thus identified changing social norms as a key strategy for preventing violence.^[2] Yet many interventions to foster contact and cooperation among members of hostile groups lead to limited and ephemeral improvements; shifting underlying social norms is an enduring and critical challenge.

This Conference innovatively explores the patterns, causes, and consequences of intergroup norms after violent conflict by fostering exchanges between scholars and practitioners who study and implement interventions to affect intergroup norms in diverse contexts.

In the wake of “ethnic” violence and war, what factors affect intergroup norms of interaction, and what are the consequences of these intergroup norms?

How do norms of intergroup interaction emerge, and why do they change or remain durable over time?

What are the political, social, and economic characteristics of localities where intergroup norms of contact, cooperation, and toleration are more likely to emerge and interventions to promote such norms are more successful?

Which individual-level or societal-level interventions most effectively change intergroup norms?

When do electoral and political institutions provide stable foundations for inculcating norms of power-sharing among competing ethnic groups?

Who should establish intergroup norms in post-conflict settings in areas of contested state legitimacy?

How do intergroup norms affect outcomes such as intergroup discrimination, economic and social cooperation, and the likelihood of violence, and how can these norms be transformed in the interest of intergroup toleration, social cohesion, and peacebuilding?

This Conference will cover themes related to intergroup norms after violent conflict at different levels of analysis: the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Panels will focus on theoretical insights into the causes and consequences of intergroup norms, the conditions under which elites construct norms of cooperation and toleration, the role of peacebuilding networks and civil society groups in working with influential actors to improve intergroup norms, and the influence of macro-level national and international actors and institutions on intergroup norms after violent conflict. Each panel will include a mix of scholars and practitioners.

^[1] Elinor Ostrom. "Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 137-158.

^[2] See, for example, the World Health Organization's report, *Changing Cultural and Social Norms that Support Violence* (2010).

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Friday 19 September

1:00-1:30 pm Welcome Address

[Melani Cammett](#) (Harvard University)
[Richard English](#) (Queen's University Belfast)

1:30-3:00 pm Panel 1: The micro-level: Improving intergroup norms in practice

Which types of interventions have been most successful in shifting intergroup norms of contact, cooperation, and toleration? What are the limits of existing interventions? What is the state of the art of research on interventions to improve intergroup norms? How do practitioners with experience designing and implementing such programs view them? Do interventions to shift intergroup norms yield different results among elites versus ordinary citizens?

Panelists:

[Mina Cikara](#) (Harvard University)
[Sabina Cehajic Clancy](#) (Stockholm University)
[Sohad Murrar](#) (University of Illinois Chicago)
[Vicente Valentim](#) (IE University)
Moderator: [Evren Balta](#) (Özyeğin University)

3:00–3:30 pm Coffee break

3:30-5:00 pm Panel 2: The meso-level: Elites as norm entrepreneurs?

The prospects for improving intergroup norms after violent conflict depend on factors beyond individual-level psychological factors or dyadic relations between different groups of people in their local communities. Local elites play a key role in shaping intergroup norms and the success of intergroup interventions. Under what conditions do elites foster cooperative or antagonistic intergroup norms? What kinds of elites – cultural, economic, political, etc. – have been associated with greater openness toward improving intergroup norms and engaging in peacebuilding initiatives?

Panelists:

[Kristen Kao](#) (Gothenburg University)
[Craig Larkin](#) (King's College)
[Rebecca Littman](#) (University of Illinois Chicago)
[David Romney](#) (Brigham Young University)
[Denisa Sarajlic](#) (Director, SKRIPTA)
Moderator: [Damir Kapidžić](#) (University of Sarajevo)

7:00 pm Dinner: Location TBA

Saturday 20 September

9:00-10:30 am **Panel 3: The meso-level: Disrupting intergroup equilibria from the bottom up**

If intergroup norms tend to be persistent over time and elites often have incentives to perpetuate intergroup conflict, how can would-be peacebuilders disrupt these intergroup equilibria? How can peacebuilders compel elites to play a more constructive role? Can bottom-up pressure push local elites to foster norms of toleration, and if so, when, why, and how? Grassroots mobilization to shift intergroup norms can take distinct forms, whether premised on informal networks, formal civil society organizations, or generational change in societal leadership. Under what conditions can networks of peacebuilders create movements to shift social norms and engage potential veto players effectively? Likewise, what types of civil society movements and organizations have been effective at shifting social norms and lobbying elites to support peacebuilding initiatives?

Panelists:

[Marko Kljajić](#) (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

[Louise Mallinder](#) (Queen's University in Belfast)

[Pepi Pandiloski](#) (Harvard University)

[Timothy Phillips](#) (Beyond Conflict)

[Velma Šarić](#) (Post-Conflict Research Center)

Moderator: [Kieran McEvoy](#) (Queen's University in Belfast)

10:30-10:45 am **Coffee Break**

10:45-12:15pm **Panel 4: The macro-level: National and international actors**

Interventions to improve intergroup norms after violent conflict operate in larger political contexts, which are shaped in important ways by electoral and political institutions and the rhetoric and actions of national politicians and political parties. Similarly, international actors, particularly major donor governments and international organizations, influence the design and implementation of these interventions. Under what conditions do national-level institutions and elites create intergroup norms of toleration and cooperation that facilitate peacebuilding? What kinds of incentives and interventions can international actors deploy to induce support from national-level politicians, who often have incentives to perpetuate antagonistic intergroup relations?

Panelists:

[Laia Balcells](#) (Georgetown University)

[Guy Priver](#) (Harvard University)

[Steven Rosenzweig](#) (Boston University)

Dzenana Sabic Hamidovic (Independent Scholar)

Moderator: [Hansong Li](#) (American University)

12:15-1:15 pm Key Takeaways and Conclusions (working lunch)

[Melani Cammett](#) (Harvard University)

[Richard English](#) (Queen's University Belfast)

1:30 pm Tour of Sarajevo (optional)

8:00 pm Dinner: Location TBA

This event is sponsored by:

The Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice
(Queen's University Belfast)

The Weatherhead Research Cluster on Identity Politics, Weatherhead Center for
International Affairs (Harvard University)

Faculty of Political Science (University of Sarajevo)

With support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York