# A New Appraisal-Based Framework Underlying Hope in Conflict Resolution

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## Abstract

Hope is a positive emotion that plays a pivotal role in intractable conflicts and conflict resolution processes by inducing conciliatory attitudes for peace. As a catalyser for conflict resolution, it is important to further understand hope in such contexts. In this article we present a novel framework for understanding hope in contexts of intergroup conflict. Utilizing appraisal theory of emotions and heavily relying on the implicit theories framework, we describe three targets upon which hope appraisals focus in intractable conflict—the conflict, the outgroup, and the ingroup. Next, we describe the importance of developing ways to experimentally induce hope, and utilize the appraisal-target framework to describe and classify existing and potential interventions for inducing hope in intractable conflict resolution.

## Keywords

appraisals, emotions in conflict, hope, intergroup relations

Emotions are flexible response sequences (Frijda, 1986; Scherer, 1984) elicited when an individual appraises a situation as offering either important challenges or opportunities (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). According to Lazarus (1999), emotions arise as a result of either the violation or facilitation of goals and involve a change in the intensity of mental state. While past research mostly focused on negative emotions, positive emotions have recently received more focus, due to the promise they hold for improving people's and societies' wellbeing (Fredrickson, 2002). Positive emotions are affective reactions to an event appraised by the individual as promoting or facilitating wellbeing and goals, leading to positive affect (Fredrickson, 2002). Positive emotions have positive implications for social resources (Sauter, McDonald, Gangi, & Messinger, 2014) and wellbeing (Fredrickson, 2002), both when experienced and when communicated to others.

When moving from interpersonal to the intergroup domain, positive emotions have received far less attention, although their importance has been noted (e.g., Halperin, Cohen-Chen, & Goldenberg, 2014; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; E. R. Smith & Mackie, 2008). In particular, when addressing extreme, violent, intractable conflicts (Azar, 1990; Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007), positive emotions are rare. Moreover, within intractable conflicts, there exists an inherent tension between emotions that "feel good" on the one hand, and emotions that serve to promote conflict resolution on the other. Emotions involving positive affect do not necessarily promote harmonious intergroup relations (such as pride, an ingroup-focused emotion elicited by legitimate advantage or accomplishment; Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002). On the other hand, other emotions are deemed positive since they induce conciliatory intergroup interactions, but involve negative affect for the individual in question (such as guilt, an emotion elicited when behavior deviates from perceivably acceptable norms; Wohl & Branscombe, 2011).

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Interestingly, one unique emotion that simultaneously involves experiencing positive affect while potentially promoting conciliatory attitudes, is hope. In this article we begin by defining hope in conflict resolution. Next, we present a novel framework for understanding hope in contexts of intergroup conflict, focusing on the appraisal targets underlying this emotion; the conflict, the outgroup, and the ingroup. Lastly, we discuss the role of hope in conflict resolution processes, and review work inducing hope in conflict within the appraisal framework.

## Hope in Conflict

Hope is a positive emotion that arises due to a cognitive process involving thought regarding a desired outcome in the future (Frijda, 1986; Snyder, 1994; Staats & Stassen, 1985; Stotland, 1969). Similar to work by Halperin and Gross (2011a) on hatred and anger, hope can become an underlying, long-term emotional sentiment, to which people are prone when experienced often and over time. However, in this article we refer mostly to the discrete emotion of hope, which focuses on a specific context and is triggered by a conflict-related event or new information.

Although hope is not a basic emotion (Averill, 1994), it has been suggested as pivotal for human survival (Stotland, 1969) and social progress, since it drives goal-directed behavior. The appraisal involved in hope is related to envisioning or imagining the future. The process is triggered by an event that leads to judgments assessing the probability of attaining a future goal, to which the person attaches importance (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990; C. A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Snyder, 2000; Staats & Stassen, 1985). If the future goal is desirable and the envisioned situation is perceived to be better than the current state (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974), it is followed by positive valence (Lazarus, 1999), namely, the occurrence of affective associations and positive feelings regarding the future goal (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Snyder, 2000; Stotland, 1969). Snyder (1995, 2000) adds agency (the ability to achieve the desired aim) as arising after the positive affective element (Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 1991), and includes it in his definition of hope as a cognitive motivational system. However, other approaches point to it as a purely affective process, extending hope to goals in which little control over the outcome is possible (Averill et al., 1990; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). This is especially appropriate within the context of intergroup conflict, in which major decisions and actions are ultimately made far away from involved societies and often literally out of their reach. Thus, a key and unique part of hope's underlying appraisal is a low perception of control (Bruininks & Malle, 2005; C. A. Smith, Tong, & Ellsworth, 2014; Tomaka & Blascovich, 1994).

Although hope does not necessarily have a physical action tendency (Lazarus, 1999), it does have a cognitive manifestation of thinking and planning ways to achieve the goal in question (Stotland, 1969). Hope has been described as a vital coping resource (Lazarus, 1999), as it enhances the human experience and guides goal-directed behavior, and when combined with a sense of agency regarding those paths, becomes action to achieve those goals (Snyder, 2000). Empirical research has found that hope leads to cognitive flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Breznitz, 1986; Chang, 1998; Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994; Isen, 1990; Lazarus, 1991; Snyder et al., 1991). The state-related emotion of hope was found to improve both physical and psychological health (Cheavens, Michael, & Snyder, 2005), and has been pointed out as an important force in therapeutic psychological processes (Cooper, Darmody, & Dolan, 2003).

Specifically for contexts of intractable conflict, a crucial feature is these conflicts' characterization by involved parties as irresolvable, and the absence of hope regarding the possibility of resolving the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007). The aforementioned conceptualizations of hope involve intrapersonal or interpersonal contexts, meaning that the desired goals and the future envisioned is a personal one, dependent on individual attitudes, traits, and preferences. However, the context of an intractable conflict adds an additional, intergroup dimension (Iyer & Leach, 2008; Petersen, 2002). Experiencing hope for peace involves not only a better personal future, but also a desired future of security and harmony on behalf of other members of the group, and to some extent even in the name of members of the outgroup. Within such violent and prolonged contexts, multiple attempts to resolve the conflict have been thwarted time and time again. The ongoing, extremely negative situation induces the perception, held by individuals and bolstered by the group narrative, that nothing can be done to improve the situation (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2003). Since the perception of the conflict as irreconcilable leads to resignation and hopelessness, we assert that hope, derived from the belief that peace is desirable and possible, is vital in intractable conflicts. This view was also endorsed by Noor and colleagues (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Doosje, 2015), who argue that to consider reconciliation, groups in extreme conflicts must start deriving a vision of peace as feasible and desirable.

Indeed, as a pivotal emotion in processes of conflict resolution, hope must be further understood not only in terms of what it leads to, but also in terms of what inspires it in such grave situations as intergroup conflicts? We propose a new framework that expands the understanding of hope based on appraisal theory of emotions (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman & Smith, 2001). Specifically, we focus mainly (but not exclusively) on appraisals dealing with malleability and change. This approach utilizes the implicit theories framework (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995), beliefs regarding whether a particular construct is either malleable (an incremental belief) or fixed and unchanging (an entity belief). When examining hope appraisals in processes of conflict resolution and developing interventions to induce and regulate hope in conflict, one major question concerns the *target* of the emotion. While some of the appraisals of emotions such as anger and hatred (Halperin, 2008) are clearly targeted at the outgroup, appraisals leading to guilt for example focus on the actions of the ingroup. However, we argue that the target of the core appraisal from which hope stems is not as clear-cut. Rather, we suggest that the perception of the conflict as irresolvable pertains to three targets, all of

which are encompassed in the concept of conflict. One way to think about this is to ask why the conflict has not yet been resolved, and to think about the *source* of this irresolvability. In other words, who is assigned responsibility for the conflict's perpetuation? The answer may focus on the nature of the conflict itself as a separate entity; on the characteristics of the outgroup; or on the attitudes, motivations, and behavior of the ingroup. These three appraisal targets are not necessarily mutually exclusive or separate from one another, and may overlap and correspond with one another. Additionally, the distribution and focus on these targets can be dynamic over time, affecting one another based on added information or new events. Together, these perceptions result in an appraisal regarding the conflict and its ability to be resolved.

## Appraisals About the Conflict

Coleman (2003) states that when destructive conflicts persist over time and resist attempts for resolution, they can appear to take on a life of their own. In other words, people involved in such conflicts often perceive the groups or parties themselves to have lost all control of the conflict, as it rages on out of sheer inertia. Thus, the situation itself may be seen as an entity separate from the parties that make up the conflict. In 2014, a third of Israelis stated that they do not see any chance for a viable agreement, and while 21% blamed the Palestinians for the stalemate, and 9% blamed the Israeli government, half of the respondents attributed the stalemate to the conflict itself, that simply cannot be resolved (Bagno-Moldavsky & Ben Meir, 2014). Such result was also found by Kudish and colleagues (Kudish, Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2015), who examined perceptions about the conflict's uniqueness. Here, perceptions about the conflict (rather than the groups involved) affected conciliatory attitudes. Most emotions in intergroup contexts are based on appraisals regarding the groups involved in the conflict. However, hope is unique because its appraisal refers to a positive change in certain circumstances in the future (Lazarus, 1999; Snyder, 1994, 2000; Staats & Stassen, 1985; Stotland, 1969).

Relatedly, the probability of attainment involved in the appraisal of hope is intermediate, unlike other positive emotions such as joy or happiness (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990) because it is not sure the goal in question will be achieved. A related differentiation is between hope and optimism. While optimism is a dispositional and ongoing confident belief that things will generally turn out positively, hope involves an inherent anxiety regarding a negative outcome in light of an event or new information (Lazarus, 1999), and concentrates on a specific goal in the future (Bryant & Cvengros, 2004). Lastly, hope is often experienced within negative situations and contexts (Nesse, 1999; Roseman et al., 1990) unlike joy, happiness, or pride, which are triggered by a positive event.

Thus, it is a belief regarding the context or situation of conflict that constructs the appraisal underlying hope. The mental representations involved in the appraisal of a possible and desired future may involve the groups, but it is, first and foremost, a representation of a situation or context. Recently it was found that instilling a general perception of conflicts (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, & Gross, 2014) and the world (Cohen-Chen, Crisp, & Halperin, 2015) as changing induced hope for peace specifically in the Israeli–Palestinian context without referring to the groups involved in the conflict.

## Appraisals About the Outgroup

Although appraisals regarding the conflict underlie the emotion of hope, the fact remains that the conflict is, at least to some extent, a function of the relations between two (or more) groups. In Israel, hope was found to be negatively associated with delegitimizing perceptions of the outgroup (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Drori, 2008). It stands to reason that when trying to envision peaceful relations in the future, people's imagination refers, at least partly, to the parties involved in the conflict. While the conflict may be seen as a context that is greater than the sum of its parts, the parts (i.e., the groups) still significantly matter in forming the perceptions and attitudes related to the conflict. The importance of maintaining a positive ingroup perception (Brewer, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) most often leads group members involved in conflicts to perceive the outgroup as responsible for the negative conflict situation (Bar-Tal, 2001). The outgroup is therefore perceived as the key component to the negative nature of the conflict. Thus, another appraisal underlying hope in conflict is targeted at the outgroup involved in the conflict. For example, outgroup expressions of hope induced ingroup hope for peace (Cohen-Chen, Crisp, & Halperin, in press; Leshem, Klar, & Flores, 2016). The outgroup in this case serves as a means to change the situation itself in the future, and a perception that the outgroup can change themselves and thus the conflict may lead to a possibility of peace. In line with the implicit theories framework (Dweck et al., 1995), if the current situation is negative because of the (perceived) negative nature or behavior of the outgroup, then a better future involves some improvement in the outgroup. And if one believes that something in the outgroup can improve, then the conflict can be resolved in the future.

## Appraisals About the Ingroup

In line with this approach, an additional target involved in the appraisal of hope for peace is the ingroup. In intergroup contexts, emotions whose appraisals focus on the ingroup include (among others) guilt (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Wohl & Branscombe, 2011) and pride (Leach et al., 2002). Although it is likely a less common or widespread perception, there are indeed group members who perceive their ingroup as responsible to some extent for the irresolvable nature of the conflict. Two subgroups are possible candidates for perceiving the ingroup as responsible for the conflict's irreconcilability. Interestingly, these groups reside on (possibly extreme) opposite sides of the political spectrum; Hawks and Doves. These categories pertain specifically to political ideologies regarding the conflict situation. Doves often perceive the ingroup as the strong side of the

conflict, which is primarily responsible for upholding the conflict. To them, the conflict is a result of the behavior and nature of the ingroup and its members, and changing the ingroup's behavior within the context of the conflict is a path to changing the very nature of the conflict itself. On the other hand, extreme Hawks may perceive the ingroup as the reason for the conflict's irresolvability, but for a different reason. In line with work on victimhood in intractable conflicts (Schori-Eyal, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2014), even group members belonging to the strong side can hold victimhood beliefs about the group, and may justify aggressive policies as self-defense or self-preservation. This leads to the perception of the ingroup as weak and lacking efficacy to change the conflict's outcome. Therefore, the reason or source of the conflict is the ingroup's inability to cope effectively with threats.

## Inducing Hope in Conflict Resolution

Understanding the appraisals underlying hope advances knowledge about hope and establishes the causal role of hope as promoting peace and intergroup relations (Halevy, Kreps, Weisel, & Goldenberg, 2015). More importantly, addressing hope appraisals can be used to develop applicable interventions to promote and foster attitudes and actions promoting conflict resolution. Lack of hope has been found to result in resignation (Sallfors, Fasth, & Hallberg, 2002; Stotland, 1969), which, when translated into behavior, can become apathy, indifference, and unwillingness to bring about change. Thus, the feeling of futility regarding the impossibility of achieving peace further feeds into the intractability of the conflict by draining individuals and societies of hope (Coleman et al., 2007). As hope promotes creative thinking and conceiving new paths to achieving conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 2001), it has the power to motivate people involved in conflict to take peace-promoting steps. Those who believe attempts to achieve peace are fruitless will indeed not act. However, those who believe such efforts can indeed change the course of the future are more inclined to walk the path of conflict resolution.

Previous correlational indications demonstrate that hope is indeed associated with conciliatory and peaceful attitudes in conflict. In Northern Ireland, hope was found to be positively associated with a lower desire to retaliate, and a higher inclination to forgive the outgroup (Moeschberger, Dixon, Niens, & Cairns, 2005). In Rwanda, messages of hope were described as potentially effective throughout the recovery and reconciliation process since their future focus both inspires and empowers (Lala et al., 2014). Another study found that the long-term sentiment of hope for peace was positively associated with a higher inclination to acquire information supporting a peace proposal presented to participants (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat, & Bar-Tal, 2014). In a study conducted during another round of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, Halperin and Gross (2011b) found hope to be positively associated with willingness to provide humanitarian aid to Palestinian citizens. A recent article (Rosler, Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, in press) found that hope sentiment, rather than empathy, is associated with willingness to make compromises in times of conflict resolution.

Taken together, the literature seem to point toward hope as playing an important role in promoting attitudes for conflict resolution. Thus, examining the targets involved in hope appraisals serves not only to broaden understanding about the emotion itself, but can serve as an empirically grounded starting point for the development of interventions aimed at inducing hope in intractable conflicts. This appraisal-based approach can inform those who wish to regulate hope in order to promote attitudes for peace.

## Interventions Addressing Hope Appraisals About the Conflict

Hope derives from imagining a situation that is better and different from the current state. Thus, in order to change an appraisal associated with situations improving in the future, interventions must focus on the *situation* itself. In the case of intractable conflict, which is often perceived as an entity of its own, changing the perception of the conflict from irresolvable to solvable can induce hope. A number of interventions have utilized this approach. In one such article (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014), we hypothesized that the belief that peace is possible derives from the belief that conflicts in general can change. To this end, we turned to the well-established implicit theories (e.g., Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Dweck et al., 1995). Past research has shown that people who hold an incremental belief about individuals or groups in general are less prone to make stereotypic judgments (Levy, Stroessner, & Dwe, 1998; Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001; Rydell, Hugenberg, Ray, & Mackie, 2007). These previous studies have indicated that changing a general perception can lead people to change their point of view regarding their specific situation—such as attributing the characteristic of malleability to a specific conflict—thus indirectly changing political attitudes towards it (Halperin, Gross, & Dweck, 2014). Findings demonstrated that instilling a belief that conflicts in general are malleable induced hope regarding the specific context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which further led to increased support for concession-making (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, et al., 2014).

Based on these findings, an ensuing line of research developed the broader hypothesis that a general belief in a dynamic and ever-changing world would induce hope for peace, leading to increased support for peaceful compromises (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015). Five studies, including observational, correlational, and experimental methodologies, demonstrated that inducing a general perception of the world as ever-changing and dynamic (vs. static; Cohen-Chen et al., 2015, Studies 3, 4; Study 5, control condition) leads to greater support for concession-making in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Crucially, this effect was mediated by individuals' heightened experience of hope for peace. Thus, even though the manipulations did not refer to the conflict, the outgroup, or conflicts in

general, the intervention increased support for concrete concessions through hope for peace.

## Interventions Addressing Hope Appraisals About the Outgroup

As previously stated, although hope derives from perceptions regarding the conflict, the parties involved are a significant part in forming perceptions and attitudes related to the conflict. Therefore, changing perceptions about the future behavior of the outgroup can serve as an avenue to changing perceptions about the future of the conflict as a whole. Previous work has changed appraisals about the outgroup in order to regulate intergroup emotions, such as hatred (Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross, & Dweck, 2011) and intergroup anxiety (Halperin, Crisp, Husnu, Dweck, & Gross, 2012). In both cases, using the implicit theories framework (Dweck et al., 1995), instilling the belief that groups in general are malleable reduced these negative emotions towards the outgroup, leading to more positive intergroup attitudes. An example for inducing hope by changing appraisals about the outgroup demonstrated that exposure to internal criticism within the outgroup increased hope regarding the future of the conflict by depicting the outgroup as open minded and a possible future partner. Israelis who heard Palestinians criticizing their own society were more hopeful about future relations with Palestinians, and were, as a consequence, more open to the outgroup narrative (Saguy & Halperin, 2014). This would require trust in the outgroup as an underlying condition or requirement to intergroup harmony (Noor et al., 2015). Lastly, the role of hope has been examined not only when experienced, but when observed in the outgroup as well. Here, when outgroup support for peace was low, expressions of hope made by the outgroup induced hope for peace and willingness to compromise in the ingroup (Cohen-Chen et al., in press).

## Interventions Addressing Hope Appraisals About the Ingroup

The last aforementioned target of appraisals underlying hope in intergroup conflict is the ingroup. One example of an intervention addressing perceptions about the ingroup to regulate intergroup emotions in conflict showed that offering people the opportunity to affirm their own positive self-image enabled group-based guilt, further inducing support for reparations to the outgroup (Čehajić, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011). As far as we know, no studies have used interventions to address appraisals about the ingroup to regulate the emotion of hope. Interestingly, differences were found between people with varying political orientations in terms of their inclination to experience hope. In a 2014 article (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat, et al., 2014) we found correlational evidence that the long-term sentiment of hope is associated with Dovish political orientation, while the sentiment of fear is associated with Hawkish political ideology. These were further associated with different patterns of information processing.

However, in the aforementioned research inducing hope, we did not find an interaction with political orientation (even though the samples leaned to the right in many cases). This strengthens our assertion that while Doves may have a natural tendency towards hope, it is possible to induce hope among rightists as well using such indirect interventions. While changing appraisals about the conflict and the outgroup is efficacious when dealing with most audiences involved in intractable conflict, we believe there is still merit in developing interventions aimed at two small but substantial groups within the context of conflict. Whether they see the ingroup as victimized and weak (Right) or the strong perpetrator of the conflict (Left), the conflict's irresolvability is perceived to derive from the ingroup's actions (or lack thereof), behavior, or nature. Therefore, interventions that aim to change perceptions about the future of an intractable conflict should consider addressing beliefs and attitudes regarding the ingroup's ability or willingness to promote peace.

In conclusion, we offer a novel framework for understanding hope in intractable conflicts, based on appraisal theory of emotions. Here we describe three targets upon which hope appraisals focus in intractable conflict—the conflict, the outgroup, and the ingroup. These three targets underlie the appraisal of the conflict as either resolvable (inspiring hope) or irreconcilable (prompting hopelessness). This framework enables scholars to better understand and study both the effects of hope in intractable intergroup conflicts and the underlying mechanisms leading to this critical emotion. More importantly, this framework can serve to translate research into practical, applicable interventions that induce hope in dire and extreme intergroup contexts. For example, a workshop motivating left wingers may choose to use interventions addressing ingroup-focused appraisals, while a seminar for center-left public opinion leaders may choose to focus on conflict- and outgroup-focused appraisals to induce hope efficaciously, paving the way to science-based interventions for peace and intergroup harmony. Thus, based on the context and the target audience, practitioners seeking to promote conflict resolution can develop methods addressing either specific appraisal targets or combinations of these appraisal targets.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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