



Brief report

What you wish for is not what you expect: Measuring hope for peace during intractable conflicts



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ABSTRACT

Protracted intergroup conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are often referred to as intractable. Intractable conflicts are termed as such, partly because group members mired in these disputes believe that the conflict is inherently irreconcilable. To better understand the nature of the perceived irreconcilability of intractable conflicts, Jewish-Israelis' hope for peace was surveyed capturing three interdependent but discrete components of hope: wish for peace, expectations that peace will materialize, and affective hopefulness. To operationalize peace, three definitions of peace, gradually refining from non-concrete to concrete, were offered to respondents ($N = 120$). Results reveal that expectations for peace among Jewish-Israelis are low but stable across the three definitions of peace while wishes for peace are higher, more dynamic and, for those with right-wing political orientation, highly dependent on the definition of peace provided. The more concrete the definition, the less rightists wish for peace. Further analysis shows that rightwing leaning respondents exhibit lower wishes for peace, even when the respondent is free to determine what peace might entail. By utilizing novel methods to detect nuances in the dynamics of hope and hopelessness, this study demonstrates that expectation for peace and wishes for peace function in distinct ways during protracted intergroup conflicts.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict illustrates the typical features of intractable ethnonational conflicts (Kelman, 1987; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). It is violent, persistent, and total in its impact on a multitude of areas such as economy, religion, and culture. A more subjective feature of the conflict is its perceived irreconcilability (Bar-Tal, 2007). Perceived irreconcilability is detrimental to conflict resolution because it lowers group members' motivation to strive for peace and, as such, serves to maintain the conflict (Pruitt, 1997). The persistence of the conflict will then feed back and reinforce the sense of hopelessness among group members. And so the cycle goes.

Palestinians' and Israelis' hopelessness regarding the likelihood of peace is demonstrated in public polls that show that about half of both Israelis and Palestinians believe that the conflict will never end (Telhami & Kull, 2013). A more recent study supports this finding by showing that Jewish-Israelis' hopes regarding the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations are very low (Rosler, Cohen-Chen, & Halperin, 2017). The rhetoric of Israeli rightwing leaders contributes to Jewish-Israelis' hopelessness. Benjamin Netanyahu's declaration that Israelis will have to live on their swords forever (Haaretz, Oct. 25, 2015), is a vivid example of a pessimistic outlook Israelis are urged to accept. The disbelief in the likelihood of peace is not only a sign of current times. Similar pessimism was expressed in 1976 by 59.1% of Jewish-Israelis who thought lasting peace is impossible (Stone, 1982). Yet, a study published in 2008 found that Jewish-Israelis' hope for peace is rather high (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Drori, 2008), and in a much earlier study Israelis' "hopes for peace with the Arabs" were so high they scored more than hopes for national prosperity and economic stability put together (Antonovsky & Arian, 1972).

These differences may be attributed to the idea that during protracted conflicts, levels of hope correspond to fluctuating political

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circumstances. For instance, hopes may rise in times of negotiations, when the likelihood of peace seems higher, and drop when conflict escalates. However, a closer look at the literature on hope for peace in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict reveals that one of the reasons for differing levels of hope among the studies is conceptual, namely, that hope was defined, operationalized, and reported in fundamentally different ways.

Hope

Hope is an effortful psychological task. It requires flexibility, creativity, and imagination (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005; Breznitz, 1986; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006). Webster's dictionary defines hope as a "desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment." However, colloquially, hope is often used to represent only *wishes*, as when one ends a conversation with "I hope you have a nice day." On other occasions, hope indicates only the levels of *expectation* to attain a goal, as when discovering interesting results increases one's "hopes" that the research will be published. Research on hope as a psychological construct identified both wish and expectation as two discrete, though interdependent, components of hope (Erickson, Post, & Paige, 1975; Staats, 1989; Stotland, 1969). Recently, Bury, Wenzel, and Woodyatt (2016) showed that hope is distinct from optimism such that optimism relies only on expectations while hope requires both expectations and a personal investment to attain the goal.

According to appraisal theory, the emotion of hope is evoked when the situation is appraised as moderately uncertain and a desire to change the situation is present (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Strongly wishing to better one's situation and assessing this change as possible, but not likely, is then followed by affective hope manifested in a positive change in one's mental state (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp, & Gross, 2014; Lazarus, 1999). Using appraisal theory as the theoretical framework, affective hope will thus be defined as the outcome of appraised expectations (the cognitive component of hope) and wishes (the motivational component of hope) (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). In sum, hope requires both wishes and expectations to attain a goal which together elicit the affective component of hope. Moving the discussion on hope from the individual level to the context of intergroup conflict necessitates us to understand how hope (or lack thereof) functions on the societal level.

Societal beliefs and collective emotions during intractable conflicts

The continuous persistence of violence and hostility during intractable conflicts generates constant threat and anxiety amongst group members (Canetti, Elad-Strenger, Lavi, Guy, & Bar-Tal, 2015). To cope with this psychological burden, societies develop an inventory of societal beliefs that provide explanations and meaning under conditions of violence and uncertainty (Bar-Tal, 2007). One of the societal beliefs shared by group members embroiled in intractable conflicts is the belief that the conflict is innately irresolvable (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). The perceived irreconcilability of the conflict stems from its extreme protraction but also functions as a coping mechanism as it grants a comforting sense of certainty and predictability (Cohen, 2005; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011; Zartman, 2005).

In addition, societies entrapped in intractable conflict tend to share particular emotions that are provoked by the challenging reality of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007; Peterson, 2002). Over the course of the conflict, these emotions are disseminated to group members as socially sanctioned emotions that group members should feel towards the ingroup (e.g. pride), the outgroup (e.g. hate), and the conflict (e.g. hopelessness) (Halperin et al., 2008; Schori-Eyal, Tagar, Saguy, & Halperin, 2015; Staub, 2005). In intractable conflicts, shared emotions may evolve into group-level emotions due to the high identification of group members with their ethnic or national group (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). Collective emotions can have a powerful impact on a host of intergroup behaviors (Pettigrew, 1997; Talaska, Fiske, & Chaiken, 2008). For example, collectively experienced negative emotions, such as hatred, can provoke violent behaviors towards the outgroup (Sternberg, 2005; Yanay, 2002). Positive collective emotions such as hope may elicit constructive behaviors like support for peacebuilding (Leshem, 2016), concession making (Cohen-Chen, Crisp, & Halperin, 2015) and collective action (Greenaway, Cichocka, van Veelen, Liki, & Branscombe, 2016).

During intractable conflicts, the lack of hope for peace functions both as a societal belief and as a collective emotion. Indeed, because of its centrality to peace, there has been considerable scholarly interest to explore hope during intractable conflicts, particularly in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (e.g. Antonovsky & Arian, 1972; Dowty, 2006; Halperin et al., 2008; Leshem, Klar, & Flores, 2016; Rosler et al., 2017; Sagy & Adwan, 2006; Stone, 1982). Yet, some studies reported participants' hope for peace but measured only participants' expectation for resolution, not the intensity of their wishes to attain it (assuming, perhaps, that the wish for peace is obvious or invariant). Some studies asked participants to report their "hopes for peace" but were de facto, gauging only wishes for peace, while in other studies it is unclear if respondents were expressing their wishes for peace, their assessment of its feasibility or both.¹ As noted, appraisal theory proposes that hope requires a wish and an expectation to elicit affective hope. Therefore, operationalizing hope based on wishes, expectation and elicited emotions should rectify the confusion about hope's measurements and generate a more comprehensive account of hope for peace during intractable intergroup conflicts.

Methods

A representative sample of Jewish-Israelis ($N = 120$) completed an online survey that gauged their hopes for peace on the three components mentioned above: wish, expectation, and affective hope.² Based on the mixed results found in the literature on hope during

¹ A tentative explanation for this confusion is that in English, Hebrew and Arabic, hope can mean "wish", "expect" or both.

² The study was conducted as part of a larger experimental study designed to explore hope instilling strategies.

intractable conflicts, it was anticipated that the three components will be correlated but will differ in intensity and dynamics. More specifically, it was hypothesized that expectations for peace and affective hope would be low (see: Rosler et al., 2017; Stone, 1982) but wishes for peace will be significantly higher (see: Antonovsky & Arian, 1972; Halperin et al., 2008). It was also hypothesized that rightwing political orientation would predict lower hopes for peace on all components (see also: Halperin et al., 2008; Leshem et al., 2016). Peace was operationalized using a novel gradual peace scale. The scale includes three definitions of peace gradually refining in terms of concreteness and detail, with the first definition being flexible and adaptable and the last definition being more concrete and specific. However, all three definitions were worded generically to encompass many possible solutions to the conflict. This design provides two features essential to the exploration of participants' attitudes towards peace: nuance and generalizability.

Sampling and participants

Sampled panelists (42.5% females, ages 18–81, $M_{age} = 42.9$, $SD = 14.8$) completed the survey in return for monetary compensation (~0.9 USD). Quota sampling was used to obtain a representative sample of the adult Jewish-Israeli population in terms of political affiliation. For example, 25.8% of respondents supported the incumbent “Likud” party (compared to 23.4% in the population), and 19.2% supported the second largest party, “HaMahane HaZion” (18.7% in the population). The distribution of education and religious observance also reflected the distribution in the population (Arian & Keissar-Sugarmen, 2012) though the sample tended to be slightly more secular. Overall, with some qualifications, extrapolations can be made from this sample to the Jewish-Israeli population.

Measures

Wish and expectation

Two separate gradual peace scales gauged the intensity of participants' wish for peace and their expectations that peace will materialize. Each scale contained the same three definitions phrased to incorporate a broad range of possible solutions that may come across respondents' minds. The three definitions were constructed in a gradual form, starting with a very non-concrete definition of peace (“Peace as you define and understand it”), continuing with a more concrete definition (“Achieving a mutually agreed upon accord that ensures the interests of both peoples”) and ending with a more specific, internationally accepted description of peace between Israelis and Palestinians (“Achieving a mutually agreed upon accord ensuring independence and freedom for Palestinians and security and safety for Israelis”). In practical terms, the items are similar because peace typically means addressing the interests of parties in dispute, and that these interests, in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, are widely accepted to mean independence for Palestinians and security for Israelis. However, the definitions differ in their potential of being psychologically taxing for the participants. The least concrete definition, “Peace as you define it,” does not mention the “Other” and so has little potential to evoke defensive reactions (de Zavala, Federico, Cislak, & Sigger, 2008). The moderately concrete definition, “Peace that ensures interests of both peoples,” carries some psychological burden as it acknowledges the existence of a rival group, while the most concrete definition explicitly mentions the rivals (Palestinians) and their interests (independence and freedom) and so might be highly taxing for Jewish-Israelis. Note that none of the definitions imply that Israel compromises its interest (scale provided in the supplementary material).

Participants were requested to mark the extent that they “wish the following definitions to materialize” (0 = *no wish at all*, 5 = *wish very much*) and the extent that they “expect the following definitions to materialize” (0 = *no expectation at all*, 5 = *expect very much*). To eliminate order effect, the order of the blocks was randomized such that half of the participants answered the wish items first and half answered the expectation items first. Collapsing each scale, two indices (ranging 0–5) were devised to determine participants' overall wish for peace ($\alpha = 0.85$) and expectations for peace ($\alpha = 0.88$).³

Affective hope

One item (“When I imagine future relations between Israelis and Palestinians I feel...”) gauged participants' self-reported affective hope for peace. Participants marked their answers on a six-point scale ranging from “*very hopeless*” to “*very hopeful*.” Higher scores indicate higher levels of affective hope.

Political orientation

Finally, self-reported political orientation (1 = *extreme right*, 7 = *extreme left*) was collected at the end of the survey. Overall, 57.5% identified as rightists (moderate to extreme), 17.5% as leftists (moderate to extreme) and 25% identified as centrists. Similar distributions were found in recent studies (e.g. Hameiri, Sharvit, Bar-Tal, Shahar, & Halperin, 2016).

Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations amongst the main variables.

Affective hope was found to be low (1.52 on a 0–5 scale) with 77% feeling very hopeless, hopeless, or somewhat hopeless when they imagine the future of Palestinian-Israeli relationships. Expectations for peace are even lower (1.37, on a 0–5 scale) with 22% (the mode) assessing the likelihood of peace as naught, and only 4.2% indicating that peace is likely or very likely. In contrast, wish for

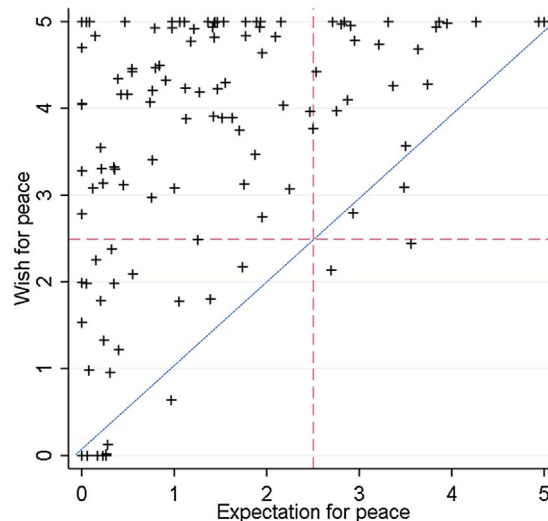
³ Factor analysis tested whether the six items loaded on two factors (Wish and Expectation) or more. Orthogonal Varimax rotation created two factors with eigenvalues above one, with the three “Wish” items loading well on one factor (above 0.72) and the three “Expect” items loading well on the other factor (above 0.67).

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	Range	1	2	3	4	5
1. Affective hope	1.52 (1.3)	0 to +5	1				
2. Wish	3.67 (1.47)	0 to +5	0.12	1			
3. Expectation	1.37 (1.25)	0 to +5	0.4***	0.44***	1		
4. Age	42.9 (14.8)	18 to 81	0.19*	−0.02	0.17†	1	
5. Gender (1 = female)	0.43		−0.06	−0.05	−0.07	0.02	1
6. Political Orientation (1 = extreme right)	3.37 (1.33)	1 to 7	0.17†	0.41***	0.45***	0.1	−0.01

Note: † $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

**Fig. 1.** Wishes and Expectations for Peace.

peace is relatively high (3.67, on a 0–5 scale) with 34% of respondents wishing “very much” that all three propositions will materialize.⁴ Political orientation correlates with both wishes ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and expectations for peace ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$), with leftists being more hopeful on both components, but only marginally with affective hope ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.06$).

Fig. 1 presents the distribution of wishes and expectations for peace. As can be seen, most observations fall in the upper left corner where wishes for peace are high, but expectations for peace are low. The rest of the observations are evenly distributed between the high-wishes high-expectations corner (upper right) and the low-wishes low-expectation corner (bottom left). The high-expectations low-wishes corner is almost empty, with only a handful of observations crossing the diagonal line for having higher expectations than wishes.

Of particular interest are Jewish-Israelis’ wishes and expectations on the gradual peace scale. Fig. 2 demonstrates that as the definition of peace becomes concrete, participants’ wish decreases, but their expectations remain stable. Wish for the non-concrete definition of peace ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.5$) was higher than the wish for the moderately concrete definition ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.6$, $t = 3.9$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.26$), which in turn was significantly higher than the wish for the most concrete definition ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.9$, $t = 3.6$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.25$). Participants’ declining wishes stand in contrast to their stable levels of expectations. In fact, the expectation for the most flexible definition of peace ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 1.5$) was not statistically different from the expectation for the most concrete definition ($M = 1.29$, $SD = 1.4$, $t = 1.42$, $p = 0.16$). The similar expectations may suggest that the definitions are acknowledged, at least to some extent, as analogous. As hypothesized, the results demonstrate that wishes and expectations, though correlated, differ in intensity and dynamics.

The role of political ideology

Collected demographic measures were entered as tentative predictors in multivariate regressions conducted for each component of hope. Results show that political orientation, but not age, gender, education or religious observance, predicts wish for peace ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$) and expectation for peace ($\beta = 0.4$, $p < 0.001$). As anticipated, all else equal, rightist have lower wishes and lower expectation for peace. Contrary to the hypothesis, affective hope was not predicted by any demographic variable. Because political orientation emerged as a strong predictor of hope, the gradual peace scale was separately examined for rightists ($N = 69$) and non-rightists ($N = 51$). Fig. 3a demonstrates that rightists’ wish significantly decreases as the definition becomes more concrete,

⁴ No order effect was detected on wish or expectation indicating that results were similar regardless of whether respondents answered the wish items first or last.

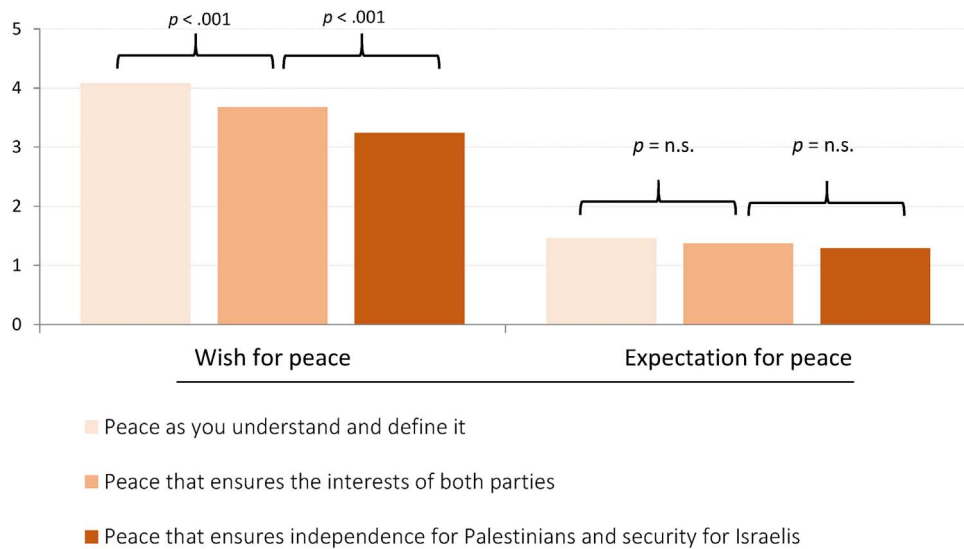


Fig. 2. Wishes and Expectations by definition.

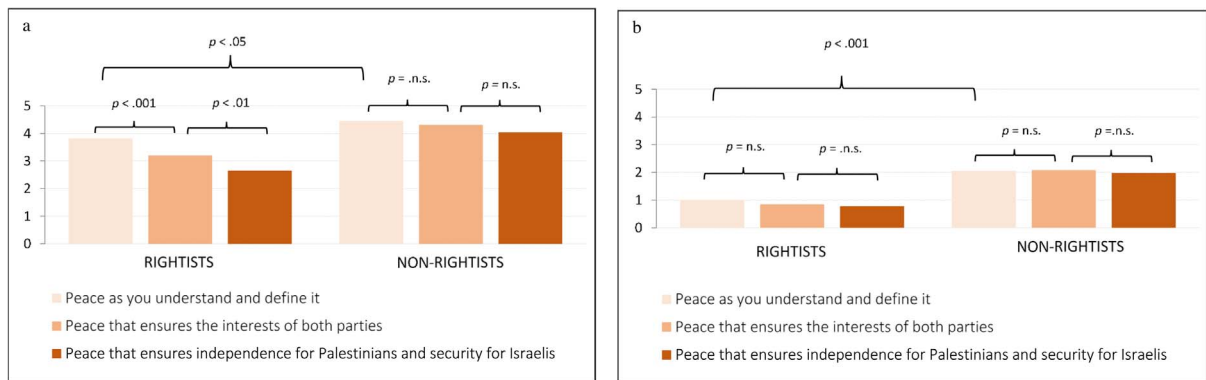


Fig. 3. (a) Wishes for Peace by Political Orientation. (b) Expectations for Peace by Political Orientation.

while non-rightists' wish for peace does not change across definitions. For rightists, wish for the non-concrete definition of peace ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.6$) was higher than the wish for the moderately concrete definition ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 1.7$, $t = 3.7$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.36$), which in turn was higher than the wish for the most concrete definition ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.8$, $t = 3$, $p = 0.003$, $d = 0.31$). For non-rightists, wish for the non-concrete definition ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.2$) was similar to the wish for the moderately concrete definition ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 1.2$, $t = 1.4$, $p = 0.18$), which in turn was similar to the wish for the most concrete definition ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.6$, $t = 2$, $p = 0.06$).⁵ The decline in the wish for peace observed in the entire sample was therefore caused primarily by rightists.

Another interesting finding is that the wish for the most flexible definition of peace "Peace as you define it" is significantly lower among rightists compared to non-rightists ($M_{\text{rightists}} = 3.81$, $SD = 1.6$, $M_{\text{non-rightists}} = 4.45$, $SD = 1.2$, $t = -2.35$, $p = 0.02$, $d = -0.44$). Put differently, even given complete control of what peace might mean, Jewish-Israeli rightists desire peace less than their centrist and leftist fellow citizens. In fact, 7.3% of rightists declared that they have no wish for peace even on this extremely flexible and adaptable definition. Interestingly, the low expectations for peace amongst rightists ($M = 0.88$ on a scale of 0–5) and the somewhat higher expectations for peace amongst non-rightists ($M = 2.01$) remain stable across definitions (Fig. 3b, full analysis provided in the supplementary material).

Discussion

Reaffirming theories on intractability, the study shows that Jewish-Israelis tend to believe that peace will not materialize and feel hopeless when envisioning the future of the region. These bleak findings fit the results of studies that examined Jewish-Israelis' hope

⁵ As expected, trends are even more apparent when comparing rightists to leftists.

for peace but were reporting only expectations or emotions (e.g. Rosler et al., 2017). The present study also shows that most Israelis still wish for peace, which is a necessary (though not sufficient) component for hope. This finding is in line with results from other studies that reported hopes but measured only wishes (e.g. Antonovsky & Arian, 1972).

As for the role of political orientation, results reveal that rightwing ideology predicts lower levels of expectations for peace, which resonates with the politics of skepticism promoted by contemporary right-wing politics in Israel (Navot, Rubin, & Ghanem, 2017). Revealingly, rightwing ideology also predicts lower wishes for peace. It could be postulated that some rightists expressed higher wishes for “Peace as you define it” because they envisioned something other than “the interest of both people” (perhaps the total capitulation of the Palestinians). However, extreme subjective interpretations, which are certainly possible in the political reality of protracted conflicts, are less suitable to explain rightists’ similar expectation scores across the definitions. The decrease in rightists’ wish across definition, may be more accurately explained by the increase in the psychological burden each definition carries with it. For example, it might be more taxing for rightists to declare that they wish for “Peace that ensures independence for Palestinians and security for Israelis” than to state that they wish for “Peace that ensures the interests of both parties” though in practical terms the definitions are similar. Non-rightists, on the other hand, may feel less burdened when acknowledging the Other’s presence and interests and hence exhibit similar wishes across definitions. Lastly, the study shows that even on the most flexible definition, rightists were less approving of peace as a desired outcome. This finding implies that a defining feature of rightwing ideology is not only skepticism about the possibility of peace but also lower desires to attain it. Results from this study contradict claims by right-wing leaders in Israel, like former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who reassured the UN General Assembly that in Israel “everyone wants peace.” (21st plenary meeting of the General Assembly, Sep. 28, 2010)

Conclusion and further directions

This paper offers a first attempt to capture hopes for peace by disentangling wishes, expectations, and emotions. Confirming findings by Bury et al. (2016) who examined hope in the context of sports tournaments, this study suggests that hope’s components should be measured separately to increase accuracy and nuance. Importantly, the paper demonstrates that in Israel, rightwing ideology and hopelessness concerning peace go hand in hand (see also Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat, & Bar-Tal, 2014). Further studies should explore the links between right-wing ideology and hopelessness in other intergroup conflicts. Other directions for improvement can be suggested. First, the definitions provided in the gradual peace scale enable the inclusion of various solution to the conflict. To increase applicability, future studies utilizing the gradual peace scale should include additional items that gauge wish and expectations on specific issues. Second, this paper reveals only half of the full story of hope in Palestine-Israel. To capture a complete account of hope for peace, it is imperative to administer the study in the Palestinian society while accounting for power asymmetries and cultural differences that may influence the meaning making of hope in each society (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990; Biton & Salomon, 2006). Measuring hope for peace in time intervals is another way to advance the current research. A longitudinal approach will reveal if wishes, expectation, and affective hope are influenced by the dynamical nature of intergroup conflicts. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study offers evidence about hope’s function during intergroup conflicts and provides a model that can be applied in a wide variety of conflict settings and context.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.06.005>.

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