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### Peace uncertainty in public as a challenge for peace policy in the 21st Century

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Working Title: "I do not know how peace will be restored": Peace uncertainty in public as a challenge for peace policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Peace uncertainty in public as a challenge for peace policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Thinking about Peace during Global Crises

Peace is articulated consensually by politicians, policymakers, and ordinary citizens, explaining an ideal but, occasionally, a hard-to-reach outcome. However, the well-known peace and conflict researcher Johann Galtung (1969) states that the idea of peace should neither be an unattainable utopia nor a policy that can be put into immediate effect. It is difficult to be against peace, says Galtung (1969, p.167), which actually points out the problem of operationalizing the concept as an attitude object. In many of his scholarly works, Galtung insisted on the importance of discussing peace as the *absence of violence* (direct/episodic and/or indirect/structural violence), yet in today's world characterized by various interlinked global crises, thinking this postulate in reverse and reconsider the role of violence on the road to peace should also be reflected upon. As in the case of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine or Israel's war in Gaza and Lebanon, *peace* is seen as an achievement that can only be attained after escalating the war, violence, and a clear victory, whilst talking about peace, de-escalation or ceasefire at the peak of violence is equated with treason. Still, including violence in the operational definition of peace like Galtung and legitimizing the use of a certain amount of violence as one of the requirements for achieving peace (e.g., Smolenski, 2023) are quite different perspectives and show that the conceptualizations of peace can change according to context, content, time and culture, not only for the naïve representations of ordinary individuals and groups but also for the nation-states, policymakers, institutions and the for the normative frameworks.

The differences or fluctuations in meanings of peace can be explained by the contextuality of individual and group thinking. Still, the achievement of peace as a policy and the efforts of nation-states and supranational organizations to achieve it, is expected to depend on a more general, stable conceptualization, such as Immanuel Kant's well-known *perpetual peace*. Yet, it seems that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which has long been characterized by crises and uncertainties, is still far away from a Kantian perpetual peace, on which the United Nations was once founded, but is ultimately ineffective in maintaining international peace. In this article, we will take a route to reconsider and challenge the historical European notion of peace by focusing on the public attitudes toward war and peace in Ukraine, and will offer a framework for the reasons why ordinary people's beliefs toward peace should be taken as a central dynamic for reconsidering a long-desolated concept of peace, and for re-theorizing it.

Here, we will state how uncertainty, both as a situational factor and as a relational dynamic<sup>1</sup>, is relevant to citizens' beliefs about peace based on the empirical results of the ongoing Bielefeld Peace Study (BIEFrie).

### **Peace as a Contested Political Concept: Ephemerality of European Peace**

The history of humanity is, for the most part, defined and depicted by wars. The absence of wars, on the other hand, does not necessarily manifest a total disappearance of possible wars and violence but, more or less, a situation that can be described as control and security of the powerful, which is currently referred to as *negative peace*. The concept is closely related to the realist perspective in political science and international relations, where power is decisive in achieving or sustaining peace. This line of thought is supported by a specific approach to the state of nature (the situation of humanity before the states or their norms and regulations). The answers to the ancient question of the history of political theory, "what a good society is," have sometimes started by describing the violent state of nature of human beings, which, for example, according to Thomas Hobbes, can only be regulated by a powerful existence like a Leviathan, who is able to end the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of all against all. Peace can only be possible here when the sovereign authority provides safety and security.

Notwithstanding, Jean-Jacques Rousseau considers human nature to be innocent and peaceful and views war as an output of deficient institutions and states, which leads individuals to lose their capacity to coexist peacefully (Lu, 2021). Therefore, peace is only possible in idealized societies governed by social contracts that sweep the causes of war away. On this side of the story is the positive peace described by Johann Galtung, in which all forms of violence, including its structural - and therefore invisible - version, disappear and are replaced by a lasting social order based on justice and equality.

Peace has long been a critical issue in the history of political thought, inspiring today's international and supranational political institutions in their attempts to maintain international peace. Immanuel Kant's (1795/1970) idea of perpetual peace and his "Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose" is considered the theoretical ground behind the moral stances of the supranational United Nations and European Union. Instead of idealizing a single world state or a confederation, Kant's reformulation for long-lasting universal peace

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<sup>1</sup> Uncertainty is a multidimensional concept. It can be used as a concept describing the general situation and context in the world, or as a dynamic experienced by individuals or groups. For detailed information see (Zick & Sandal-Önal, 2023).

includes an argument for a universal rule of law that can be established to construct and maintain perpetual peace by a federation of independent states (Thorpe, 2019). Kant's perpetual peace is based on establishing a transcendental moral space for different people, but similar to Rousseau, he takes war as a dynamic between the states rather than individuals and, therefore, concludes that states are obliged to promote peace (Castro & Elorduy, 2014). The perpetual peace theorized here does not refer to a negative peace through a simple absence of war, but to a positive peace, in which all hostile intentions of the parties disappear (Fiala, 2023).

Now, years after Kant's perpetual peace and despite the existence of the supranational institutions with the missions of maintaining international peace, Europe and the world now witness war in different regions, in addition to the other ongoing global crises of climate, finance, or democracy. The supranational institutions that enable the interdependency of the nation-states were not successful in sustaining the idea of a global positive peace; all intellectual and political initiatives in this direction seem to be sacrificed to the interests of nation-states and the agendas of their political leaders. Unsurprisingly, worldviews considering violence and war as an extricable reality of human nature and legitimizing the global inequalities and injustices through this idea are becoming increasingly prevalent, mainly through the discourses of right-wing populism. Not only does this understanding of normalizing and trivializing violence and war undoubtedly rule out the possibility of positive peace, but it also directly opposes the ideal of democracy that underlies Rousseau's or Kant's ideas of long-lasting or perpetual peace. In fact, the point at which the idea of normalizing violence and war as part of human nature contradicts democracy is the assumption of peaceful coexistence inherent in democracy as an idea rather than the functioning of democracy. On the state level, it is also noteworthy to indicate that the relationship between democracy or democratization of all nation-states and perpetual peace has still been debated, and the impact of democracy is not stable (Gilady, 2017). However, since this association is related to the functioning of democracies rather than the public's belief in democracy, it may be more informative to look at the relationship between lasting peace and the belief in democracy at the individual level rather than states. So, the discussion of the relationship between the legitimization of violence for nation-state interests and the functioning of democracy at the macro level must necessarily be carried over to the context of the normalization of violence and its incorporation into everyday politics and belief in democracy at the individual level.

Therefore, when we consider Rousseau and Kant's presupposition that wars are only between states, not individuals, in the 21st Century, we should note that states, which must

always be legitimized by their citizens, must also take the attitudes and beliefs of individuals towards war or peace into account when making war decisions or formulating peace policies. From this perspective, it is also important to note here that the attitudes and beliefs about peace, about long-lasting and perpetual peace, may not only relate to interstate wars but also to different forms of violence, particularly the structural ones stemming from injustice and inequalities. In the following, we will therefore relate the question of the understanding of peace from the point of view of society members - or rather on an individual level - to the war against Russia in Ukraine, following the definitions of Clausewitz (2010), according to which war are an act of violence and another means of politics, i.e. an extreme form of political violence<sup>2</sup>.

### **War and Peace in Minds: Shared Uncertain Meanings in Uncertain Times**

Neither war nor peace are merely state policies, but these are also located in memories, shared meanings, and images in people's minds. States need to legitimize their reasons for war and peace before their citizens to justify their political actions and policies (Van der Linden & Licata, 2011). War divides the world into groups, and this became very obvious with respect to the war in Ukraine when Putin, in his speech two days before the invasion, branded the Ukrainian leadership as Nazis. In this process, of course, the use of propaganda and the politicized power of the media is one of the most frequently used methods of legitimization and may function strongly<sup>3</sup>. There are many factors that might influence public attitudes toward war and peace, such as values, beliefs, ideologies, memories, trust in institutions, and direct or indirect experiences, but especially in times of crises, the rising insecurities and uncertainties have impacts on how individuals perceive what war and peace means.

Keeping these in mind, shortly after the emergence of Russia's aggression war against Ukraine, we launched the Bielefeld Peace Study (BIEFrie) to understand German public perceptions and attitudes towards war narratives, peace, and Germany's role in this war. Here, we also paid particular attention to whether the German public is experiencing uncertainty linked to attitudes about peace and war and questioned how this uncertainty frames their support for military versus peaceful political actions of the German government or EU.

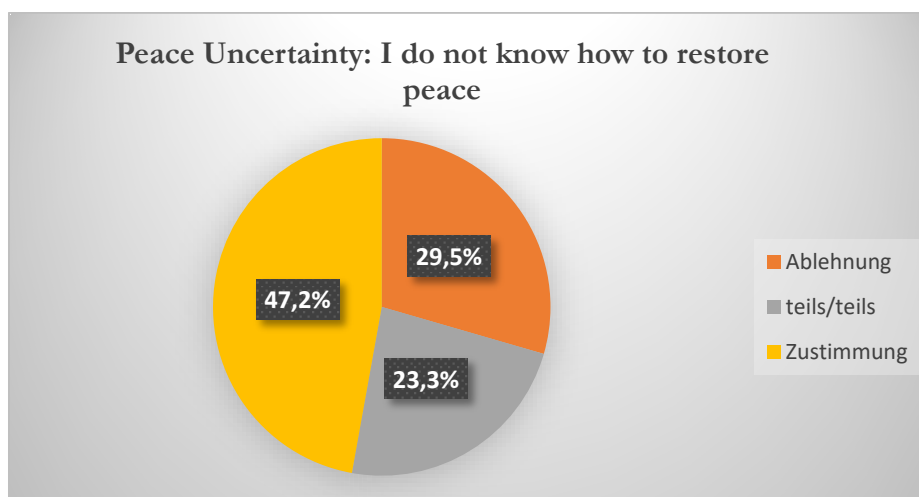
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<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of democratic theory and peace policy, it should be noted that attitudes and convictions towards a lasting and perpetual peace also result from other forms of violence, in particular structural violence arising from inequalities.

<sup>3</sup> see Krishnarajan & Tolstrup (2023) for the influence Putin regime created on the Russian public

Uncertainty<sup>4</sup> is a key concept in defining the times of global, interconnected crises where people do not know the outcomes or likelihoods of what the future may bring. These circumstances are accompanied mainly by policymakers' attempts to make legitimate and quick decision-making while individuals and groups experience uncertainties in different facets like relational/affective characterized by worries about an uncertain future or epistemological/cognitive standing for lack of knowledge or information on certain issues (Zick & Sandal-Önal, 2023). In the BIEFrie study, we both inquired about the emotional uncertainties of individuals regarding their feelings toward an uncertain future and epistemological uncertainties measuring their knowledge about the reasons for the war and peace.

The study was launched on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022, with an online survey. The sample is not representative but is based on convenience sampling<sup>5</sup>. The net sample comprises 1,048 participants with an average age of 44 years; mainly university graduates (74.5 %) from the middle or lower middle class. While the majority pessimistically reported that they do not foresee a possibility for peace in the Ukrainian war (66.4%), more than 75% stated that they are unsure about what the future looks like, together with emotional expressions of anxiety and helplessness when thinking about the future. The epistemic uncertainty about peace was also quite evident in our study, where the majority reported that they did not know how to restore peace (Figure 1).



<sup>4</sup> In the survey, the German word “unsicherheit” has been used. We refer here to the more appropriate English term uncertainty, which encompasses uncertainty and insecurity, whereby uncertainty includes insecurity, but also refers to a state that cannot simply be equated with insecurity (Zick & Sandal-Önal, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> The study was conducted with own funds and also served to develop reliable measurement instruments that could later be used in a representative study. The aim was not to make representative statements, but rather to test instruments that could be used to test the correlations and relationships between explanatory factors or models for explaining attitudes to peace and war and to conduct evidence-based discussions.

Our participants also felt helpless due to their lack of knowledge about peace, where 48,2% stated that they feel helpless because they do not know how peace will come about. Peace uncertainty was relatively higher among SPD (46,7 %) and Green Party voters (53,4 %), among highly educated participants (47,1 %), and in the lower (50 %) and middle classes (50 %). A key question is what peace uncertainty means and how it influences support for political action and government policy in Germany during the war. Agreeing with the statement in Figure 1 does not necessarily mean that respondents have an idea of the definition of peace. However, they also have no knowledge of peacekeeping or reconciliation in the context of the war in Ukraine; this is crucial in light of the comments on the concept of peace. Those who are unsure about peace definitely do not foresee a possible peace in the near future (79.2%), and they also state that peace is currently not possible and should be fought for (37.2%). This is also reflected in the moods and attitudes of the Ukrainian public. They see little or no option for peace without a clear victory. Victory over the illegitimate warmonger is a prerequisite for minimal and cold or further peace, however, it is organized.

This attitude also reflects the attitude towards possible diplomatic solutions, which is closely linked to the public's trust in national and international bodies. In the BIEFrie study, a third (35%) of those 'unsure of peace' trust the Ukrainian government<sup>6</sup>. Almost or exactly one in two trusts NATO (44.6%), the European Union (49.6%), and the German government (53.1%). With regard to preferences for diplomatic solutions, however, no statistically significant correlations were found between peace uncertainty and support for diplomatic solution attempts by the German government. On the other hand, it is noticeable that peace uncertainty is weakly, but over randomly, related to higher support for military-political measures in the form of arms deliveries or military aid to Ukraine ( $r = .16$ ,  $N = 1,033$ ); in contrast, 'war insecure' respondents were less in favor of military measures (35.1 %). Further analyses show that people with a high level of peace uncertainty support military measures because they see Russia as a critical threat to Germany and Europe. They mostly agree with statements such as: "If Russia wins this war, the EU's self-image will change fundamentally" (59.1% in favor) or: "If Russia wins this war, no country in Europe will be safe from attack" (51.5% in favor). A similar result was reported in a study by Bolesta et al. (2023) where they

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<sup>6</sup> In the following, the response options "strongly agree" and "agree" are summarized to indicate agreement with the respective statements.



found that government support for military action during the Ukraine war was due to an increased perceived threat.

The results of our study clearly indicated that peace is perceived as a hard-to-reach goal, and being more uncertain about it brings more support to the military means rather than prioritizing diplomatic solutions or non-military interventions. For once more, this time in the public attitudes, the way toward peace passes through violence again, and it becomes difficult to use the *absence of violence* to define peace when even the articulation of peace has been disparaged until a decisive military victory of one side. However, it is obvious that wars framed by this zero-sum-game, which are expected to end with the decisive victory of one side and the defeat of the other, lead to sharpened "us vs. them," "friend vs. foe" patterns in the collective memories that nourish people's identities over time. Therefore, we can say that in defining peace and making it a policy, there is a need for conceptual frameworks that are free from the processes of war or violence.

It is precisely at this point that contemporary studies interpreting the peace theories of both Kant and Rousseau reveal why democracy, particularly the public support for democracy and endorsement of democratic values, is needed for sustainable and perpetual peace in the world. Gilady (2017) argues that the anti-globalization movements, as a reaction to the interdependence of nation-states and the decline in the support for democracy, have adverse effects on peace. The rise of nativism through signifying power politics and public framing of international relations through the continuous threat and enmity narratives as part of new populist discourses are factors that undoubtedly push societies away from both the ideal of perpetual, positive peace. An increasing public distrust of supranational institutions and bodies, particularly during and after global crises, is another implication that should be considered in understanding peace uncertainty and its relation to democracy. Arpino & Obydenkova (2020) indicate that the lowest trust in international institutions like the UN or EU is evident in the least democratic countries after global crises. While trying to shed light on their futures and navigate the crises and resulting uncertainties, the citizens tend to alleviate their insecurities by closing themselves into their native contexts and trivializing the peacekeeping missions of supranational and international institutions.

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