

Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies

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Key concepts, theories, and tools for understanding how societies manage conflict and build lasting peace.

1. What Is Peace and Conflict Studies?

Aspect	Definition
Peace Studies	Interdisciplinary field that examines the conditions, processes, and structures that foster <i>positive</i> peace (justice, equity, sustainable development).
Conflict Studies	Focuses on the <i>negative</i> dimension of peace—identifying the causes, dynamics, and consequences of violent and non-violent conflict.
Combined Scope	Analyzes why conflicts arise, how they evolve, and how they can be transformed or resolved to create durable peace.

Core Objectives

- Diagnose** the root causes of conflict (political, economic, social, cultural, environmental).
 - Explain** conflict dynamics (escalation, diffusion, transformation).
 - Design** and **evaluate** strategies for conflict prevention, management, and resolution.
 - Promote** structures that sustain *positive* peace (human rights, inclusive governance, sustainable development).
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2. Foundational Concepts

Concept	Meaning	Example
Negative Peace	Absence of direct violence.	Cease-fire after a civil war.
Positive Peace	Presence of social justice, equality, and institutions that prevent violence.	Inclusive political system that guarantees minority rights.
Conflict	A perceived incompatibility of interests, values, or goals between parties.	Territorial dispute between two states.

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Concept	Meaning	Example
Violence	The use of physical force or coercion that results in harm.	Armed clashes, terrorism, domestic abuse.
Non-violent Conflict	Struggles expressed through protests, strikes, civil disobedience.	Labor strike demanding better wages.
Structural Violence	Systemic harm caused by social structures (poverty, racism, gender inequality).	Lack of access to clean water in marginalized communities.
Human Security	Protection of individuals from chronic threats (food insecurity, disease) and sudden shocks (conflict, natural disasters).	Programs that combine health care with conflict-sensitive development.

3. Major Theoretical Approaches

Theory	Main Proponents	Core Idea	Typical Application
Realism	Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz	States act to maximize power; conflict is inevitable.	Analyzing great-power rivalry, security dilemmas.
Liberalism	Immanuel Kant, Robert Keohane	Cooperation possible through institutions, trade, democracy.	Studying peace-building via UN, EU integration.
Constructivism	Alexander Wendt	Identities, norms, and discourse shape state behavior.	Examining how peace norms evolve in post-conflict societies.
Marxist / Critical Theory	Karl Marx, C. Wright Mills	Conflict rooted in economic exploitation and class struggle.	Analyzing resource wars, neo-colonial dynamics.
Feminist Peace Theory	Cynthia Enloe, J. Ann Tickner	Gendered power relations shape conflict and peace processes.	Integrating women's participation in peace negotiations.
Human Needs Theory	John Burton, Johan Galtung	Unmet basic human needs (security, identity, recognition) drive conflict.	Designing conflict transformation programs that address needs.
Conflict Transformation	John Paul Lederach	Conflict is a social process; aim is to change relationships, structures, and discourses.	Long-term peacebuilding in post-war societies.

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Theory

Main Proponents

Core Idea

Typical Application