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How to (Re)Build Human Rights Consciousness and Behavior in Postconflict Societies: An Integrative Literature Review and Framework for Past and Future Research

Bernhard Leidner and Mengyao Li
University of Massachusetts Amherst

The international community has developed multiple approaches to address large-scale human rights (HR) violations (e.g., genocide). In the current contribution, we first provide a review of different approaches to intergroup violence (AIVs), and explain how these approaches might re-establish HR consciousness and behavior in postconflict societies. We then integrate this literature with the HR literature and propose a framework to guide future research on the psychological underpinnings of different AIVs and their effects on HR. Informed by HR research, we argue for a multidimensional conception of HR consciousness (encompassing HR knowledge, endorsement, commitment, and restriction) and a distinction of internalized HR behavior versus HR compliance. These outcomes should be affected by an AIV through appraisals of the AIV (e.g., perceived fairness) and subsequent perceptions of ingroup and outgroup norms, perceptions of the outgroup, and emotions (e.g., anger). Further, appraisals should be affected largely by people’s group memberships and preexisting belief and attitudinal systems. Rather than providing an overall research program with a coherent and specific set of hypotheses, we provide a conceptual framework that clarifies what, according to AIV and HR literature, future research should focus on, and that can help to systematically take stock of past research.

Keywords: human rights violations, human rights consciousness, human rights behavior, intergroup violence, transitional justice

Protection against human rights (HR) violations constitutes one of the key challenges in the modern world. On the one hand, human rights have been codified into the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 and entered into force on March 23, 1976. These covenants establish legal and moral standards that provide a reference point for countries to uphold and protect human rights. Yet, despite these international agreements, many countries continue to violate human rights. Therefore, it is essential to develop strategies and frameworks to address human rights violations and promote human rights consciousness and behavior in postconflict societies.