Past, Present, Future

Young Germans' Reflection on Peace

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X-Student Research Group: What Does Peace Mean to Us? Young Germans Reflect on Peace in a Post-Unification Society

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Research Context & Objectives

? The Problem

Peace remains a contested concept with multiple, often contradictory interpretations. What one person considers peace, another may view as oppression or instability.

Germany's unique historical context—division during the Cold War, reunification, and ongoing east-west dynamics—provides a rich terrain for studying how subjective peace perceptions form and vary.

⚑ Why Germany?

▸ Divided history (DDR/Federal Republic) creates natural experiment for studying political socialization effects

▸ Reunification provides unique case of peaceful (though challenging) integration

▸ Ongoing east-west disparities continue to shape social and political attitudes

☰ Research Objectives

1 Identify Distinct Viewpoints
Map the landscape of subjective peace definitions among German residents

2 Analyze Temporal Dimensions
Examine how historical memory, present experiences, and future aspirations shape peace conceptualizations

3 Methodological Contribution
Demonstrate Q-methodology's value for peace studies research

👥 Sample Overview

16	4	47
Participants	Factor Groups	Q-Statements

Q-Methodology Framework

💡 What is Q-Methodology?

Q-methodology is a systematic approach for studying subjectivity—opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives. Developed by William Stephenson in the 1930s, it enables researchers to identify distinct viewpoints within a population.

Unlike traditional surveys that seek consensus or aggregate opinions, Q-methodology treats divergent perspectives as equally valid and worthy of systematic study.

⭐ Key Advantages

✓ **Combines quantitative and qualitative:** Factor analysis reveals patterns; interpretation provides depth

✓ **Captures viewpoint diversity:** Identifies distinct perspectives rather than forcing consensus

✓ **Forces prioritization:** Constrained sorting reveals true beliefs vs. socially desirable responses

✓ **Ideal for contested concepts:** Perfect for studying complex, value-laden ideas like peace

⚙ How It Works

1 Q-Set Construction
Researchers compile diverse statements representing the full range of discourse on the topic

2 Q-Sorting
Participants rank-order statements from "most agree" to "most disagree" on a fixed grid

3 Factor Analysis
Statistical analysis identifies groups of participants with similar sorting patterns

4 Factor Interpretation
Researchers analyze each factor's characteristic statements to construct viewpoint narratives

Research Design: Q-Set & Interviews

The Q-Set: 47 Statements

The Q-set was designed to capture the full spectrum of peace discourse, covering multiple dimensions:

Negative Peace
Absence of violence, war, conflict

Positive Peace
Social justice, equality, human rights

Procedural Peace
Process, dialogue, compromise

Structural Peace
Institutions, stability, order

Personal Peace
Inner calm, daily experience

Global Peace
International relations, environment

Example Statements

"Peace means there is no any kind of violence"

"Human rights and peace are inseparable"

"Peace relies on the strong capacity of government institutions"

"Protecting the global environment is directly related to peace"

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted to elicit deeper understanding of participants' Q-sort choices and the reasoning behind their peace conceptualizations.

? Why These Extremes?

Participants explained their +5 (most agree) and –5 (most disagree) choices, revealing the core values underlying their peace definitions

♥ Emotional Responses

Interviewers probed emotional reactions to statements, uncovering fears, hopes, and anxieties related to peace and conflict
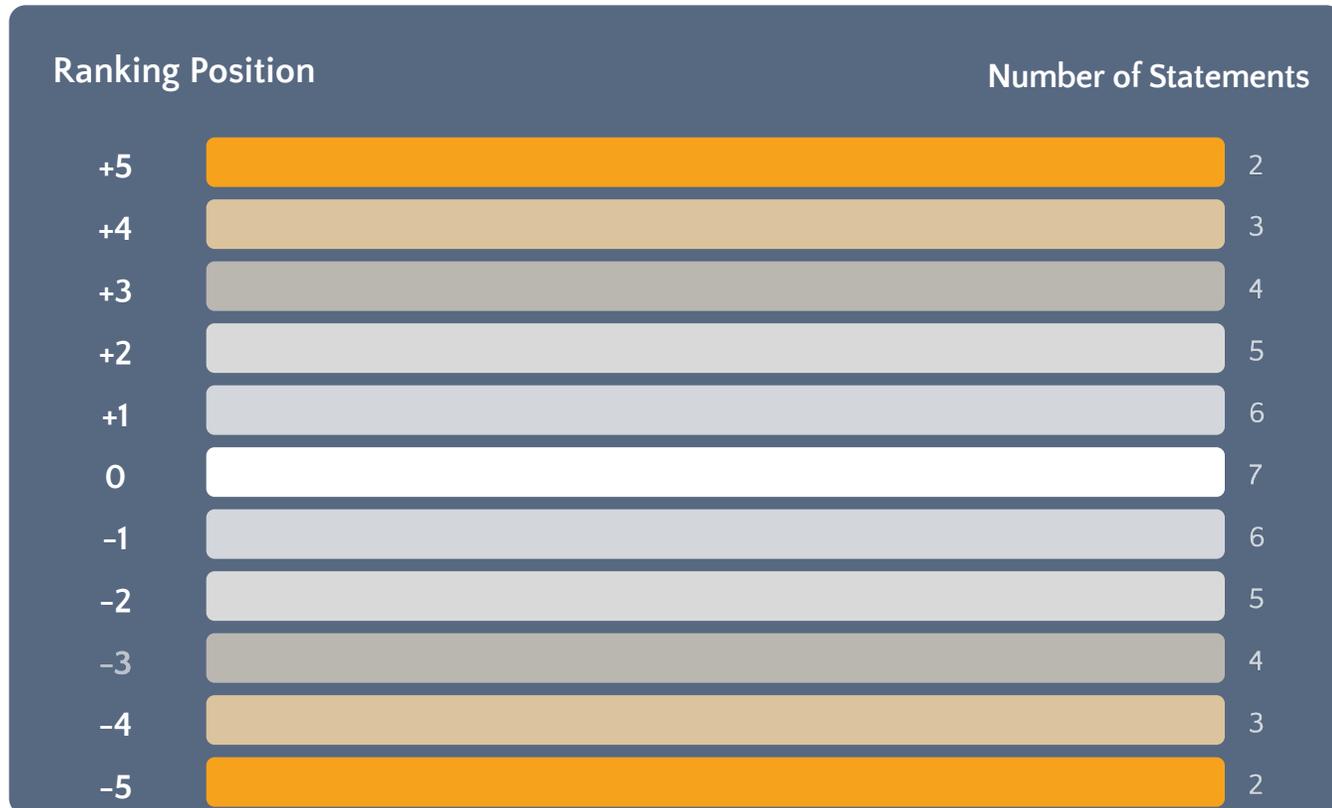
Personal Narratives

Participants shared stories connecting their peace views to past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations

The Q-Sort: Distribution Grid

ⓘ Forced-Choice Design

The Q-sort uses a *quasi-normal distribution grid* ranging from –5 (most disagree) to +5 (most agree). The constrained number of positions at each rank forces participants to prioritize statements, revealing their true beliefs rather than allowing neutral or socially desirable responses.

Ranking Position	Number of Statements
+5	2
+4	3
+3	4
+2	5
+1	6
0	7
–1	6
–2	5
–3	4
–4	3
–5	2

★ Why This Matters

1 **Reveals True Priorities:** Cannot place all statements in neutral middle; must make choices

2 **Distinguishes Intensity:** Separates strongly held beliefs from moderate agreement

3 **Creates Data Matrix:** Correlation matrix enables factor analysis to find viewpoint patterns

4 **Standardizes Comparison:** All participants use same grid, enabling statistical analysis

💡 Key Insight

The Q-sort transforms subjective opinions into **quantifiable data** while preserving the richness of individual perspectives. Each participant's sort becomes a profile that can be compared and clustered with others.

Factor Analysis: Four Distinct Viewpoints

1 **Equalist Humanist**   31.25%   5 participants

Peace centers on human rights, social justice, equality, and dignity. Participants emphasize inclusivity, opportunity for all, and the inseparability of human rights from peace. Reject revolutionary violence and sacrificial approaches.

2 **Idealist Pacifist**   31.25%   5 participants

Peace as absence of violence, inner calm, and harmonious relationships. Focus on personal experience of peace in daily life, family harmony, and emotional well-being. Skeptical of institutional and compromise-based approaches.

3 **Domestic Realist**   18.75%   3 participants

Peace as stability, order, and functioning institutions. Emphasize law and order, government capacity, and smooth state operation. View peace as maintained through strong institutions rather than individual attitudes or social movements.

4 **Pragmatic Globalist**   18.75%   3 participants

Peace as global concern requiring active effort and sacrifice. Willing to make personal sacrifices for peace, view it as a greater goal beyond national boundaries. Emphasize social justice and daily experience of peace.

F1 Factor 1: The Equalist Humanist Perspective

⚖️ Core Definition

Peace centers on human rights, social justice, equality, and dignity.

This viewpoint emphasizes that true peace cannot exist without fundamental rights and fair treatment for all members of society.

👥 **5 Participants:** OOJI (0.858), 5LHG (0.707), 1YWK (0.664), O8P5 (0.653), LKO5 (0.592)

🏷️ **Key Labels:** Fairness, Dignity, Human Rights, Equality, Inclusivity

➖ Strongly Disagree (-5)

"A fierce revolution or conflicts against authority"

"I am willing to make sacrifices for the sake of peace"

"Social stability under cold war or high political control"

💬 Participant Voices

"The more common ground, the more unitedness"

"It's important to value other opinions and talk to each other"

"Global warming and deforestation disrupt peace"

➕ Strongly Agree (+5)

"Human rights and peace are inseparable"

"Peace means everyone has opportunity to pursue"

"Inclusivity (of women, youth, civil society) in peace-processes"

❤️ Emotional Tone

Hopeful yet worried about current climate; **confident** about improvement through dialogue and inclusivity

F2 Factor 2: The Idealist Pacifist Perspective

🕊 Core Definition

Peace as absence of violence, inner calm, and harmonious relationships. This viewpoint emphasizes personal experience of peace in daily life, emotional well-being, and the importance of family and intimate relationships.

👥 5 Participants: 5DB4 (0.776), KQV7 (0.626), G4XF (0.599), TVJ5 (–0.513*), TO4J (0.424)

🏷 Key Labels: Equal Rights, Freedom of Choice, Living Without Fear

⊖ Strongly Disagree (-5)

"Efforts to maintain peace also include compromise and concessions"

"Peace relies on the strong capacity of government institutions"

"Peace is a value in itself, synonymous with freedom"

💬 Participant Voices

"Peace means living without fear"

"To live with less hate and instead lead a more peaceful life"

"The freedom to do what you want without having to ask anyone for permission"

⊕ Strongly Agree (+5)

"Peace means there is no any kind of violence"

"Peace is an inner state of calm and contentment"

"Peace is an experience that should be felt by people in their daily"

♥ Emotional Tone

Fearful yet hopeful; trying to look on the bright side despite awareness of hate crimes, wars, and racism

F3

Factor 3: The Domestic Realist Perspective

▦ Core Definition

Peace as stability, order, and functioning institutions. This viewpoint emphasizes the role of strong government capacity, law and order, and smooth state operation in maintaining peaceful society. Skeptical of individualistic or idealistic approaches.

👥 3 Participants: YYCG (0.751), XRYX (-0.730*), KWT0 (0.622)

🏷 Key Labels: Compromise, Safety, Stability, Disagreements Are Natural

⊕ Strongly Agree (+5)

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by..."

"Maintaining law and order is crucial for a peaceful society"

"Peace relies on the strong capacity of government institutions"

⊖ Strongly Disagree (-5)

"Peace is a value in itself, synonymous with freedom"

"Peace is a state of mind, an attitude toward humanity"

"Peace is not the end of conflict, but rather a process of"

❞ Participant Voices

"Disagreements are natural"

"Peace means the operation of a state runs smoothly"

"Unrest often arises due to hate, extremism or intense political conflict"

♥ Emotional Tone

Confident and diplomatic; positive despite awareness of issues. View peace as achievable through proper institutional functioning

F4

Factor 4: The Pragmatic Globalist Perspective

🌐 Core Definition

Peace as global concern requiring active effort and sacrifice. This viewpoint emphasizes that peace is a greater goal beyond national boundaries, requiring social justice and willingness to make personal sacrifices for the collective good.

👥 3 Participants: 49DM (0.747), 7J87 (0.670), ARNG (0.501)

🏷 Key Labels: Social Justice, Sacrifice, Global Perspective, Process

⊖ Strongly Disagree (-5)

"Peace means that everyone has the opportunity to pursue and"

"Peace is not just about human beings, it also relates to living in"

"Peace means harmony and happiness among family members"

💬 Participant Voices

"I am willing to make sacrifices for the sake of peace among my"

"For a more lasting peace in the whole world (other regions and"

"Peace sometimes requires a certain amount of sacrifice"

⊕ Strongly Agree (+5)

"True and lasting peace requires social justice and fairness"

"Peace is an experience that should be felt by people in their daily"

"The peace I pursue is a greater goal, signifying the whole world"

♥ Emotional Tone

Committed and purposeful; willing to take action and make personal sacrifices for the greater goal of global peace

Why Past, Present, and Future Matter
Historical References in Peace Narratives

DDR Memories

References to the German Democratic Republic (DDR) appear frequently, often with complex, ambivalent sentiments.

"DDR, more unitedness despite the hardships"
—Nostalgia for social cohesion despite material deprivation

"Division during and after the Wall"
—Awareness of ongoing social and economic divisions

"AFD wishing back for old times"
—Political mobilization of historical memory

Reunification Legacy

"Reunification and integration"
—Acknowledgment of ongoing process

"More effort to fully unite Germany socially and economically"
—Recognition that reunification remains incomplete

"How differences between east and west still prevail"
—Critical awareness of persistent disparities

Wartime Experiences

"Wartimes in Germany and other countries"
—Direct and intergenerational trauma

"(Grand–)Parents immigrated to Germany from Afghanistan"
—Family migration stories shaping peace views

Present Experiences of Peace

🏠 Personal Domains

Participants find peace in intimate, everyday contexts:

"Finds peace when with loved ones"

"Finds peace in their own community"

"Finds peace through simple routines"

"Finds peace within themselves"

"Keeping peace between family members"

⚠️ Social Concerns

Current threats to peace perception:

Hate & Extremism

Hate crimes, racism, far-right extremism (AFD)

Public Safety

Knife attacks in public spaces

Gender Inequality

Women's rights concerns

Political Climate

Current disputes, feeling "worried in today's climate"

🌿 Environmental

"Global warming and deforestation disrupt peace"

—Climate as peace issue

"Climate protection"

—Active concern for environmental peace

€ Economic

"Income inequality"

"Financial security"

"State support"

ℹ️ **Pattern:** Participants experience peace **personally and locally** (family, community, routines) while perceiving threats **socially and structurally** (extremism, inequality, climate). This creates tension between private peace and public concern.

Future Aspirations and Fears

★ Aspirations

Participants' visions for a more peaceful future emphasize social justice, inclusion, and structural change:

"More social justice and financial state support"

"More women in power"

"Decrease of racism and far-right extremism"

"Less hate, less hostility towards foreigners"

"More open, just and based on solidarity"

"More education"

ⓘ Fears

Concerns about trends that could undermine future peace:

Political Polarization
Growing divisions and erosion of democratic norms

Environmental Degradation
Climate change as threat multiplier

Social Cohesion Erosion
Loss of community bonds and mutual trust

Economic Instability
Inequality and financial insecurity

60%
Future-Oriented
Seeking improvement

30%
Present-Focused
Finding peace now

10%
Past-Oriented
Drawing on history

Key Findings & Theoretical Implications

Q Major Findings

1 Views

Four distinct peace viewpoints coexist in contemporary Germany, each with coherent internal logic and distinct priorities

2 Time

Peace conceptualizations are significantly shaped by historical memory, present experiences, and future aspirations

3 History

DDR and reunification references remain central to peace narratives, demonstrating ongoing relevance of division

4 Tensions

Participants find peace personally but perceive threats structurally, creating complex peace experiences

Theoretical Contributions

✓ Extends Peace Studies

Demonstrates subjective viewpoint diversity within a single national context, challenging universalist assumptions

✓ Validates Q-Methodology

Shows Q-method's value for peace research by revealing patterns invisible to traditional survey approaches

✓ Highlights Temporal Framing

Demonstrates importance of past/present/future in peace conceptualization, often overlooked in static definitions

✓ German Reunification Relevance

Shows ongoing significance of east-west dynamics for contemporary peace perceptions

Conclusion

Despite divergent definitions—ranging from **human rights and equality** to **inner calm and harmony** to **stability and order**—participants share common concerns about social justice, security, and the future.

Understanding these diverse peace perspectives is essential for building **inclusive peace-building strategies** that acknowledge rather than erase viewpoint differences.

The temporal dimensions revealed in this study—how past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations intertwine—highlight that peace is not a static condition but an ongoing, dynamic process shaped by memory, experience, and hope.

4
Distinct Viewpoints

3
Temporal Dimensions

1
Shared Goal: Peace

X-Student Research Group:

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