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Mental Models of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict²

Abstract: In order to investigate whether and to what extent criticism of Israel is due to anti-Semitic tendencies, it is not sufficient to correlate Israel critical statements with anti-Semitic attitudes. We rather need to reconstruct the mental models according to which the participants make their own meaning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to which they take a stance.

Based on the assumption that mental models have both, an emotional and a cognitive component, the present paper introduces a questionnaire which was designed in order to measure these components and a two-step process of data analysis by which the mental models can be reconstructed.

The results of a pilot study with German and Austrian participants speak for the validity of this methodological approach. In accordance with prior research, they also conform with the assumptions (1) that the formation of an interpretive frame requires a certain minimum of knowledge and/or familiarity with the issue of which the participants try to make meaning and (2) that also those participants who interpret the conflict according to a war frame believe in peace as the ultimate goal of war.

Although the study is not representative, it also gives some insight into how (mainly) young educated people in Germany and Austria relate themselves to the conflict: they support a conflict resolution through negotiation all over, they condemn Palestinian terror attacks throughout more strictly than Israeli military operations and the majority of them either sympathizes with Israel or holds a mental model which calls for peace to both sides' benefit. At the same time, however, the results of the study also indicate that Israel is losing the propaganda war for the hearts and minds of the German and Austrian public: The more the participants become familiar with the conflict, the more do they take a pro-Palestinian stance.

1. Introduction

Since the Gaza war, we can observe an increasing criticism of Israeli policy all over the Western world. The peace camp in Israel and within Jewish communities all over appreciates this development. But aren't they too enthusiastic? Are the critics of Israel really allies who support their concern?

Since the Gaza war, we can also observe an increase of anti-Semitic crimes. Many Jews in Israel and all over fear that the rising criticism of Israeli policy might just be the result of a revival of anti-Semitism. Also Germans and Austrians who have learned the lessons from their history share this fear. But aren't they idiosyncratic? Are the critics of Israel really anti-Semites?

The answer to these questions lies probably somewhere in between. Criticism of Israeli policy can be motivated by a multitude of factors which range from concern for the future of Israel via solidarity with the Palestinians to hatred of Jews. And as far as anti-Semitic attitudes play a role, they may either stand at the very beginning of Israel criticism which they use as a form of their expression, or they may stand at the end of a process, during which Israel criticism is transformed into enmification and finally distorted into anti-Semitism.

But where do the Israel critics really stand?

In order to answer questions like these, it is not sufficient to correlate Israel critical statements with anti-Semitic attitudes. We rather need to reconstruct the mental models according to which the participants make their own meaning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to which they take a stance.

Not until we have reconstructed these mental models, can we relate them to anti-Semitic attitudes and/or to the media coverage of the Israeli Palestinian conflict and investigate whether it is the facts that are reported which make people critical of Israel or whether it is the specific way, how the facts are framed by the media.

The present paper reports about the construction of a questionnaire which was designed in order to reconstruct these mental models and about the results of a pilot study in which it was tried out.

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2. Method

Mental conflict models have both, an emotional and a cognitive component. The emotional component is constituted by two factors:

- the concernment for the conflict, and
- the emotional ambivalence of its prospects.

The cognitive component is constituted by the frame according to which the conflict is interpreted and ranges

- from a peace frame to a war frame and
- from a neutral frame to a partial one.

In order to assess these components, we constructed three separate scales and applied a two-step procedure of Latent-Class-Analysis in order to identify typical response patterns that inform us about the participants' mental models of the conflict.

2.1 Concernment for the conflict

Concernment for the conflict refers to the participants' familiarity with and emotional closeness to the conflict, and was assessed by the following items:

1. How would you judge your knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
2. How deeply does the conflict affect you?
3. Which side do you feel more attached to?
4. Have you ever been in Israel?
5. Have you ever been in the Palestinian territories?
6. Have you ever had personal contact with Israelis?
7. Have you ever had personal contact with Palestinians?
8. Do you have Israeli friends, acquaintances or relatives?
9. Do you have Palestinian friends, acquaintances or relatives?

2.2 Emotional ambivalence

Emotional ambivalence refers to the fact, that the frames according to which the conflict is interpreted represent not only cognitive patterns, but are also emotionally bound in. And indeed in an ambivalent manner, for both frames promise security and simultaneously create insecurity as well.

- The War Frame offers security, because tried-and-true action patterns can be continued, but it also creates insecurity because it poses the threat of continued antagonism and violence.
- The Peace Frame also offers security, because it promises an end to violence, but at the same time it creates insecurity, because new behavioral patterns must be tried out whose effectiveness is still uncertain.

In our present research, the emotional ambivalence of the frames was assessed by eight items which are displayed in Table 1.

Participants responded to the items on a 5-point Likert scale "disagree completely – rather disagree – neither disagree nor agree – rather agree – agree completely", with "don't know" as an additional response category.

		For Israelis	For Palestinians
War frame	Offers security	With firm resolve and military strength, Israel's existence can be secured in the long term	Through persistent armed resistance a Palestinian state can be brought about by force
	Creates threat	As long as Israel tries to control the conflict by military means (alone), its population will be exposed to the constant threat of Palestinian violence	If the Palestinian leadership does not prevent the use of force, the Palestinians will not be allowed to found their own state
Peace frame	Offers security	The complete return of the occupied territories would make it possible for Israel to have an enduring peace with the Palestinians	A little more flexibility would make it possible for the Palestinians to have a lasting peace with Israel
	Creates threat	Returning to the borders of 1967 would represent a great security risk for Israel	A compromise with Israel would mean selling out Palestinian interests

Table 1,: Assessment of the emotional ambivalence

2.3 Positioning to the conflict

The frames according to which the participants interpret the conflict are not directly observable but can be inferred from the way how they position themselves to it. Building upon the works of Deutsch (1973) and Glasl (1992) and upon the typology of mental conflict models according to Kempf (2000), the "ideal" positioning patterns look like those in Table 2.

	Pro Israeli	Neutral	Pro Palestinian
War frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refutation of a peaceful conflict resolution Uncritical support of the Israeli policy / Criticism of the Palestinian Policy Delegitimation of the Palestinians Accentuation of the vital needs of the Israelis Justification of Israeli violence / Condemnation of Palestinian violence 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refutation of a peaceful conflict resolution Uncritical support of the Palestinian policy / Criticism of the Israeli policy Delegitimation of the Israelis Accentuation of the vital needs of the Palestinians Justification of Palestinian violence / Condemnation of Israeli violence
Peace frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call for a peaceful conflict resolution Criticism of both sides' policy Rejection of any party's delegitimation Accentuation of the vital needs of the Israelis Condemnation of violence on both sides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call for a peaceful conflict resolution Criticism of both sides' policy Rejection of any party's delegitimation Accentuation of the vital needs of both societies Condemnation of violence on both sides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call for a peaceful conflict resolution Criticism of both sides' policy Rejection of any party's delegitimation Accentuation of the vital needs of the Palestinians Condemnation of violence on both sides

Table 2, Typical positioning patterns as indicators of the frames according to which the conflict is interpreted

In order to operationalize these indicators, we constructed a questionnaire of fourteen statements to which the participants responded on the same 5-point Likert scale as described above.

Call for vs. refutation of a peaceful conflict resolution was assessed by the following three items:

1. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be found through negotiation.
2. The Palestinian leadership can only be made to recognize Israel by force of arms.
3. The Israeli government can only be forced to make concessions by using military force.

Since the societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1998) that provide the psychological infrastructure for coping with long-lasting, intractable conflicts include (among others) the belief in peace as the ultimate goal of war, the acceptance of the statement 1 and/or the refutation of statements 2 and 3 can as well be expected by participants who identify with one of the parties and interpret the conflict according to a war frame.

Nonetheless, we included them in our questionnaire for three reasons:

- First, in order to test Bar-Tal's assumption,

- second, in order to have additional indicators of whether the participants have formed a mental model of the conflict at all and
- third, in order to test Kempf's (2008) assumption according to which the formation of an interpretive frame requires a certain minimum of knowledge and/or familiarity of the issue of which the participants try to make meaning.

Accentuation of both sides' vital needs: A similar argument holds for the agreement with the statements which operationalize the accentuation of the vital needs of both societies:

4. A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must take account of the necessities of life of both populations.
5. All the participants should work for the Israelis to be able to look forward to a peaceful future free of fear.
6. All the participants should work for the Palestinians to be able to lead a peaceful, self-determined life.

Although it cannot be expected that any participants will bluntly reject these statements, partiality in favour of one of the parties may become visible through the degree of agreement with statements 5 and 6, however

Condemnation of the parties' violence was assessed by agreement with the statements

7. The Palestinian terror attacks against the Israeli population can be justified by nothing.
8. Israel's military operations against the Palestinians are exorbitant and unjustified.

Delegitimation of the opponent was assessed by agreement with the statements

9. The goal of the Palestinian leadership is the destruction of Israel.
10. The aim of the Israeli policy is the continued oppression and disenfranchisement of the Palestinians.

and/or disagreement with the statements

11. The Palestinians are conducting a legitimate war of liberation against the Israeli occupation.
12. The Israelis are conducting a legitimate defensive war against Palestinian terrorism.

Criticism of the parties' policy was assessed by agreement with the statements

13. The Palestinian leadership is not ready to make compromises and tries to impose its maximum aims without regard to losses.
14. Israel is intransigent and tries to maintain the existing conditions by the use of force.

Support of the parties' policy was operationalized by the refutation of the above named statements 9, 10, 13 and 14.

Justification of the parties' violence, finally, was operationalized by agreement with statements 11 and 12 and/or disagreement with statements 7 and 8.

2.4 Data analysis

In order to reconstruct the participants' mental models, a two-step procedure of Latent-Class-Analysis (LCA) was applied and the number of classes which provides an optimal description of the data was determined according to Akaike's (1987) information criterion (AIC).

- As a first step, (latent) classes of typical response patterns to each of the three scales "concernment for the conflict", "emotional ambivalence" and "positioning to the conflict" were identified.

In these analyses, missing data and "don't know" responses were treated as separate response categories of their own. For the subsequent computation of mean judgements within the groups, on the other hand, they were recoded as "neither disagree nor agree".

- As a second step, the participants' mental models were identified by means of a second order LCA into which the participants' class memberships were entered as variables.

2.5 Sample

Data collection took place about one year after the Gaza war, during November 2009 until February 2010. 68,5% of the data were collected in Germany and 31,5% in Austria.³ The total number of participants in the study was N = 553.

- The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 63 (M = 22,73; SD = 5,245).
- 64,7% of them were female, 35,3% were male.
- The great majority of the participants were students. 6,9% of the participants had completed vocational training, 9,9% had completed a vocational school, 11,0% had graduated from university and 0,9% had a doctor's diploma.
- 47,6% of the participants were Catholics, 25,5% Protestants, 1,4% Muslims and 0,7% were Jews. 4,4% belonged to another (mainly Christian⁴) religion and 20,4% belonged to no religion at all.
- 12,8% of the participants had a background in migration. About one third of the migrants came from the former Soviet Union.

3. Results

3.1 Concernment for the Conflict

LCA of the participants' concernment for the conflict identified 4 classes which are clearly ordered with respect to the participants' emotional closeness:

- Class 3 (20,2%): very little,
- Class 1 (40,5%): little,
- Class 2 (33,8%): moderate
- Class 4 (5,5%): relatively high.

The goodness-of-fit statistics of the LCA are displayed in Table 3.

No. of classes	LOG-LIKE	n(P)	df	AIC
1	-3359,30	27	194372	6772,60
2	-3060,17	55	194344	6230,34
3	-3018,67	83	194316	6203,34
4	-2944,04	111	194288	6110,08
5	-2926,28	139	194260	6130,56
Saturated model	-2495,01	194399		393788,02

Table 3, Participants' concernment for the conflict: goodness-of-fit statistics of the LCA.⁵

With increasing closeness, the share of participants who do not feel attached with either side declines (cf. Figure 1), the participants' attachment shifts towards the Israelis (cf. Figure 2), the participants feel more deeply affected by the conflict (cf. Figure 3), and they feel to be better informed about the conflict (cf. Figure 4). The greater their closeness is, the more often, they have visited Israel (cf. Figure 5) and/or the Palestinian territories (cf. Figure 6), the more of them have had personal contact with Israelis (cf. Figure 7) and/or with Palestinians (cf. Figure 8), and the more of them have Israeli (cf. Figure 9) and/or Palestinian friends, acquaintances or relatives (cf. Figure 10).

³ The author wishes to thank Gerhard Benetka for collecting the Austrian data and Claudia König and Irina Volf for their assistance in the German data collection.

⁴ The only exception were two Buddhist participants.

⁵ LOG-LIKE = logarithmic likelihood, n(P) = number of parameters, df= degrees f freedom.

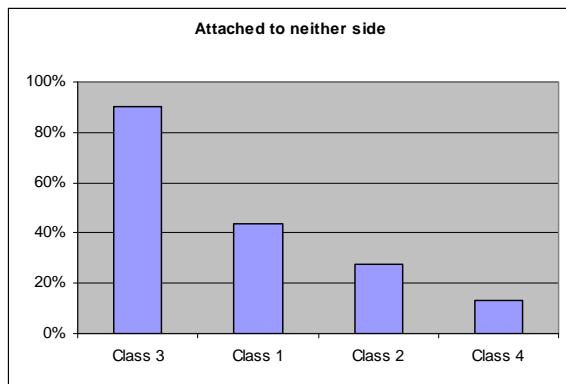


Figure 1, Attachment to neither side

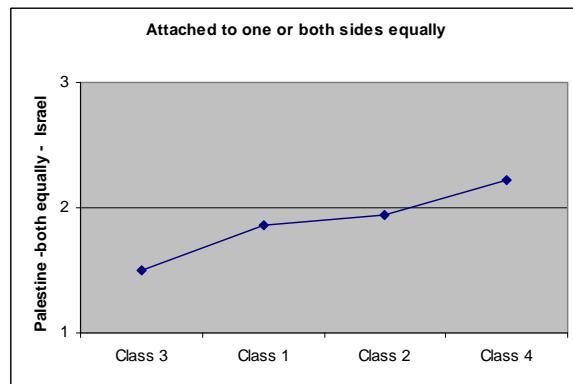


Figure 2, Attachment to one or both sides

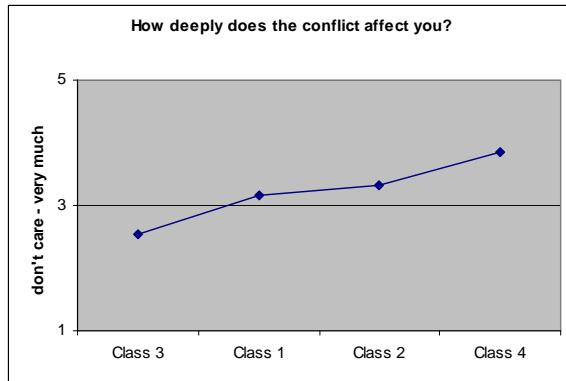


Figure 3, Affectedness

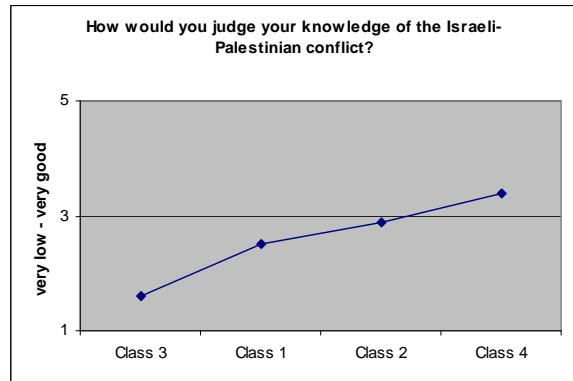


Figure 4, Knowledge

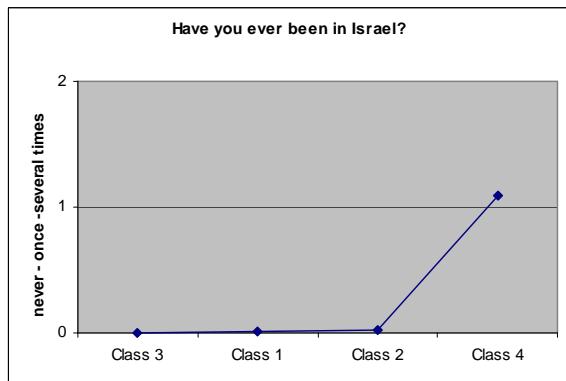


Figure 5, Visits to Israel



Figure 6, Visits to Palestinians territories



Figure 7, Personal contact with Israelis



Figure 8, Personal contact with Palestinians

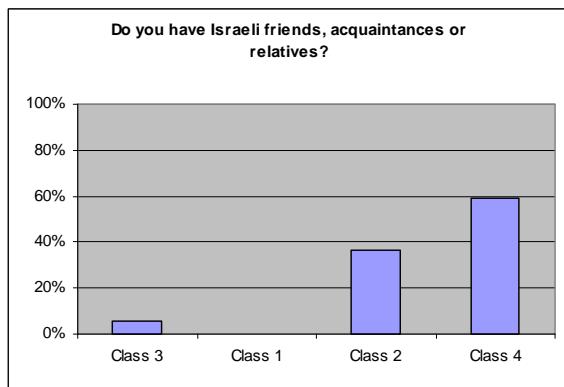


Figure 9, Israeli friends etc.

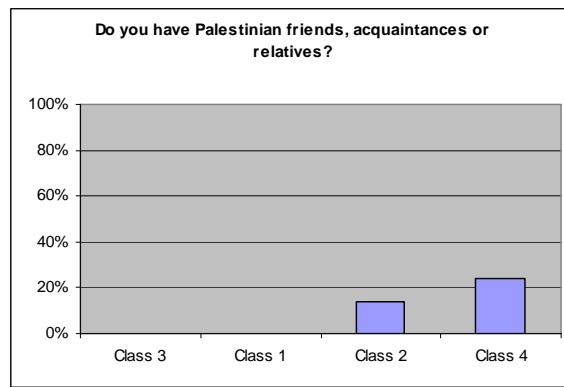


Figure 10, Palestinian friends, etc.

3.2 Emotional ambivalence

LCA of the emotional ambivalence scale identified 6 typical patterns which altogether, regard the perspectives of peace, as less threatening and offering more security for the Palestinians than for the Israelis, for whom peace is (in part) even regarded as a security risk. Also the status quo (war) is regarded as more threatening for the Israelis, but – on the other hand - it is estimated to violate the Palestinians' security interests even more than those of the Israelis. The goodness-of-fit statistics of the LCA are displayed in Table 4.

No. of classes	LOG-LIKE	n(P)	df	AIC
1	-6633,36	48	5764752	13362,72
2	-6217,59	97	5764703	12629,18
3	-6072,16	146	5764654	12436,32
4	-5968,23	195	5764605	12326,46
5	-5892,23	244	5764556	12272,46
6	-5817,95	293	5764507	12221,90
7	-5773,37	342	5764458	12230,74
Saturated model	-3410,73	5764800		11536421,46

Table 4, Participants' emotional ambivalence: goodness-of-fit statistics of the LCA.

One of these classes (class 6) is made up of a very small group of participants, who do not have any significant opinion whether war or peace creates threat or offers security for either of the parties (cf. Figure 11).

All the other classes agree that war does not offer security for the Palestinians and poses threat on the Israelis.

Among these, class 5 is characterized by rather weak judgements as well (cf. Figure 12).

- Although participants in this class have a significant opinion that war cannot offer security for Israel either,
- they are undecided whether war is threatening for the Palestinians as well, and what the prospectives of peace might be for either of the parties

Class 1 is characterized by rather distinct judgements without any ambivalence (cf. Figure 13)

- War is threatening for both parties
- and cannot offer security for either of them
- Peace offers security for both
- And poses no threat on either of them (particularly not on the Palestinians).

Class 2 shows a similar – though less distinct – pattern. Participants in this class, however, are more sceptical about the prospectives of peace for the Israelis.

- They doubt whether peace can offer security for Israel and
- they have no significant opinion whether it might pose threat on them

Class 4 is characterized by rather distinct judgements as well (cf. Figure 15).

- In contrast to class 1, however, participants in this class do not have a significant opinion what the prospectives of peace might be for the Israelis

Class 3, finally, shows a similar – though less distinct – pattern (cf. Figure 16). Participants in this class, however, also have no significant opinion

- whether war might offer security for Israel
- and whether peace might be threatening for the Palestinians

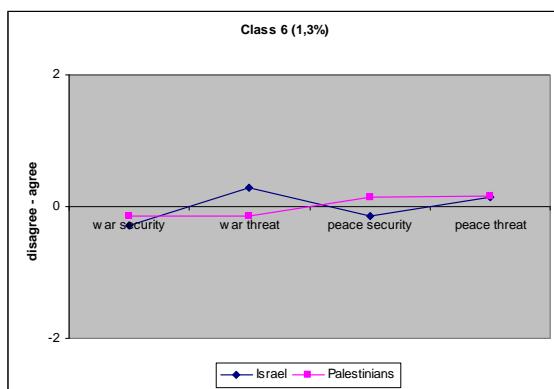


Figure 11, No significant opinion

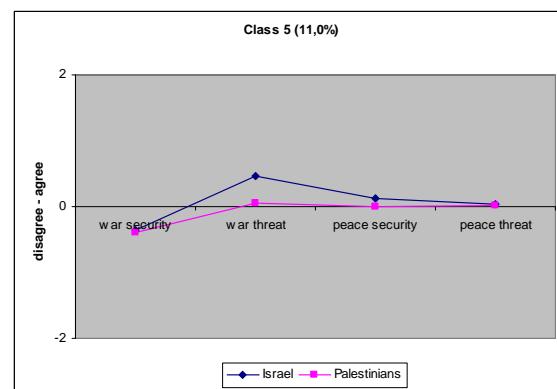


Figure 12, Rather weak judgements

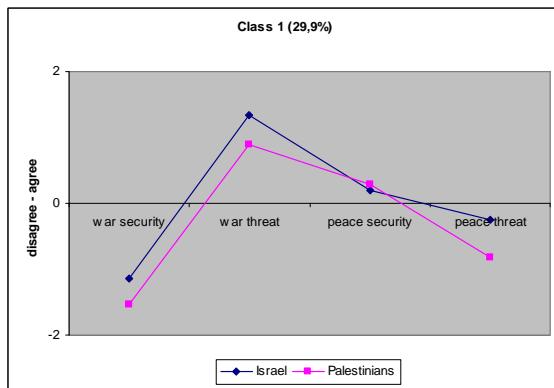


Figure 13, Distinct judgements, no ambivalence

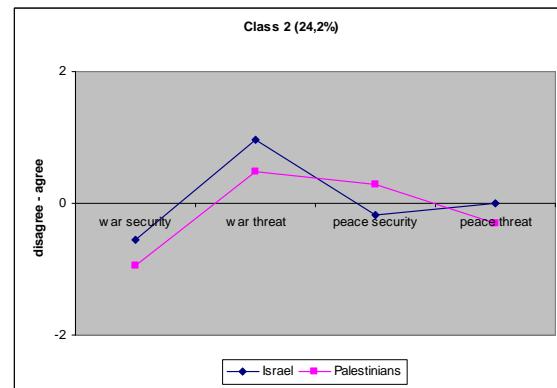


Figure 14, Less distinct judgements, more sceptical about the prospectives of peace for Israel

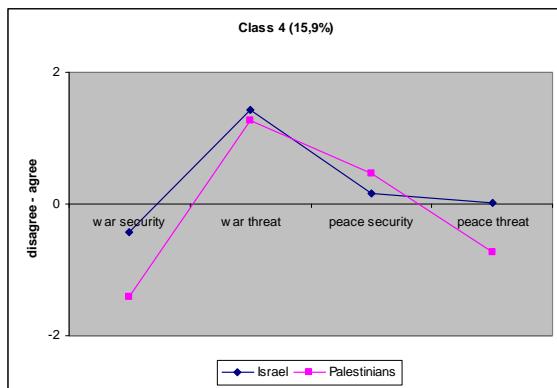


Figure 15, Distinct judgements, but no opinion about the prospectives of peace for Israel

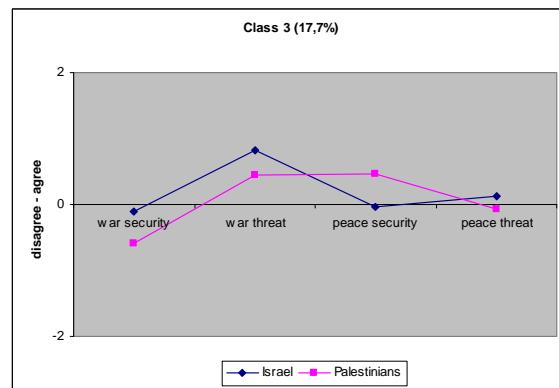


Figure 16, Less distinct judgements, no opinion about the prospectives of peace for Israel

3.3 Positioning to the conflict

LCA of the positioning scale identified 8 typical patterns, all of which support a conflict resolution through negotiation and condemn the Palestinian terror attacks more harshly than the Israeli military operations.

- Two of the latent classes (10,07%) endorse peace, but are too little familiar with the conflict to have a clear opinion about it (50-68% no response or „don't know“).
- Three of them (31,84%) interpret the conflict within a more or less neutral peace frame with relatively strong uncertainty (20-25% no response or „don't know“).
- Two of them (51,11%) follow a pro-Palestinian peace frame and are rather sure of their evaluations (max. 3% no response or „don't know“); and
- a rather small group (7%) which is rather sure of its evaluations as well (3,4% no response or „don't know“) interprets the conflict according to a pro-Israeli war frame.

The goodness-of-fit statistics of the LCA are displayed in Table 5.

No. of classes	LOG-LIKE	n(P)	df	AIC
1	-11085,26	84	6,78E+11	22338,52
2	-10374,51	169	6,78E+11	21087,02
3	-10069,66	254	6,78E+11	20647,32
4	-9830,46	339	6,78E+11	20338,92
5	-9673,03	424	6,78E+11	20194,06
6	-9487,20	509	6,78E+11	19992,40
7	-9389,14	594	6,78E+11	19966,28
8	-9303,28	679	6,78E+11	19964,56
9	-9255,27	764	6,78E+11	20038,54
Saturated model	-3474,71	6,78223E+11		1,36E+12

Table 5, Participants positioning to the conflict: goodness-of-fit statistics of the LCA.

3.3.1 Endorsement of peace, but too little familiarity with the conflict

No distinct frame, no partisanship (cf. Figure 17)

- Solution through negotiation is supported
- Need to force the Israelis is rejected
- Legitimateness of the Israeli war of defense is rejected

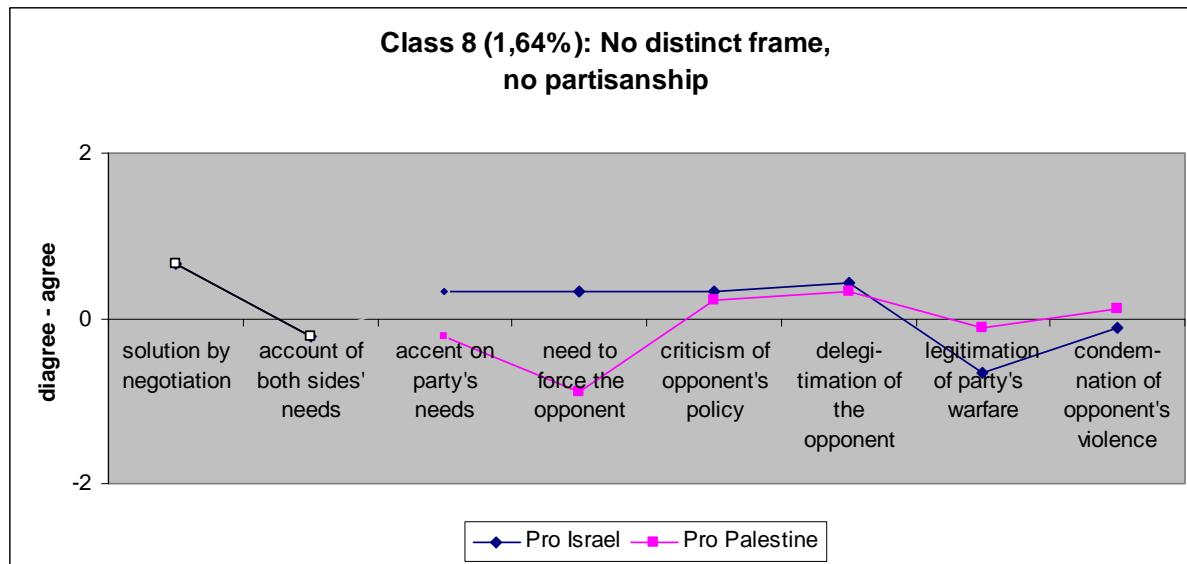


Figure 17, No distinct frame, no partisanship

No distinct frame, condemnation of Palestinian but not of Israeli violence (cf. Figure 18)

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- Both sides' vital needs are accentuated
- Both sides' need to force their opponent is rejected
- (Only) Palestinian violence is condemned

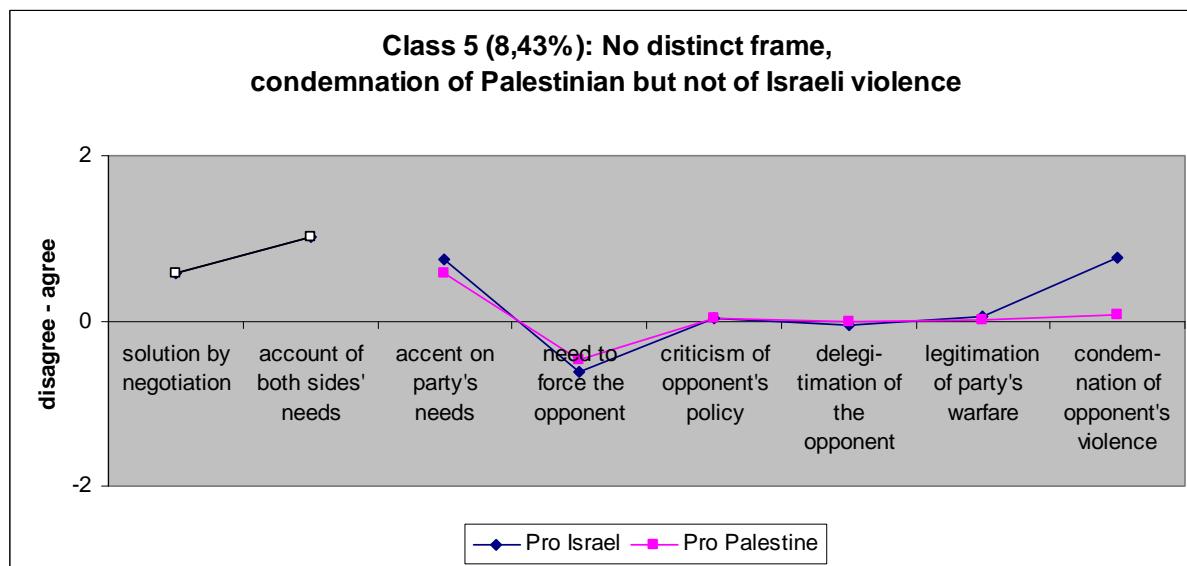


Figure 18, No distinct frame, condemnation of Palestinian but not of Israeli violence

3.3.2 More or less neutral peace frames with relatively strong uncertainty

Neutral peace frame (cf. Figure 19)

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- Both sides' vital needs are accentuated
- Both sides' need to force their opponent is rejected and both side's policy is criticised
- Legitimeness of both sides' warfare is rejected

- Both sides' violence is condemned, particularly Palestinian violence,
- but delegitimation of the Palestinians is rejected, nonetheless

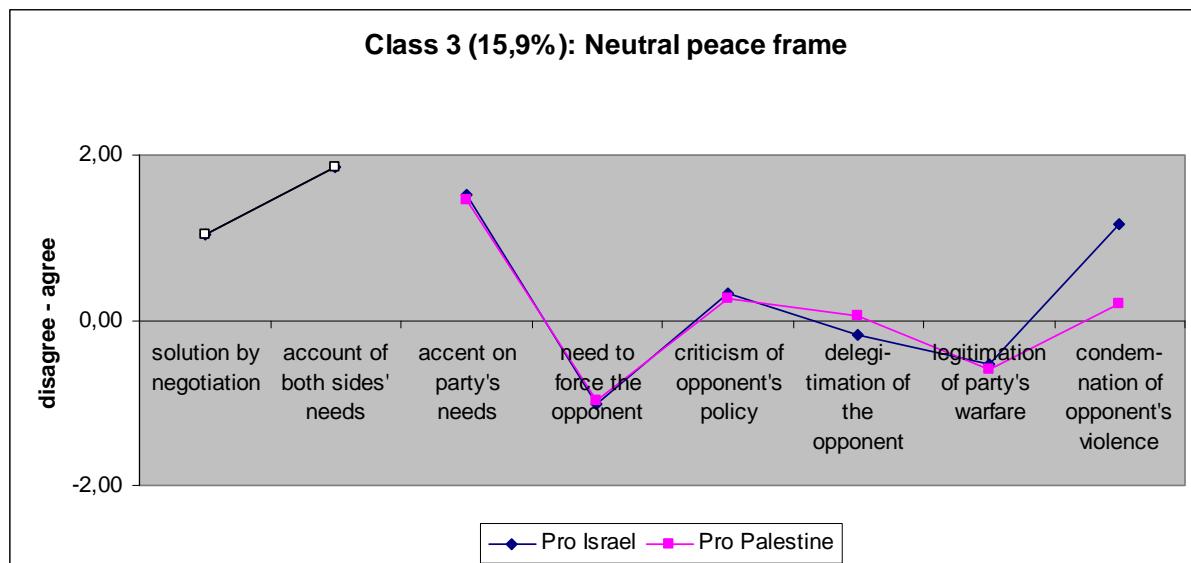


Figure 19: Neutral peace frame

Neutral peace frame, more determined but less critical (cf. Figure 20)

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- Both sides' vital needs are accentuated
- Though both sides' need to force their opponent is rejected, their policy is not criticised, however.
- Legitimacy of both sides' warfare is rejected
- Both sides' violence is condemned, particularly Palestinian violence,
- but delegitimation of the Palestinians is rejected nonetheless

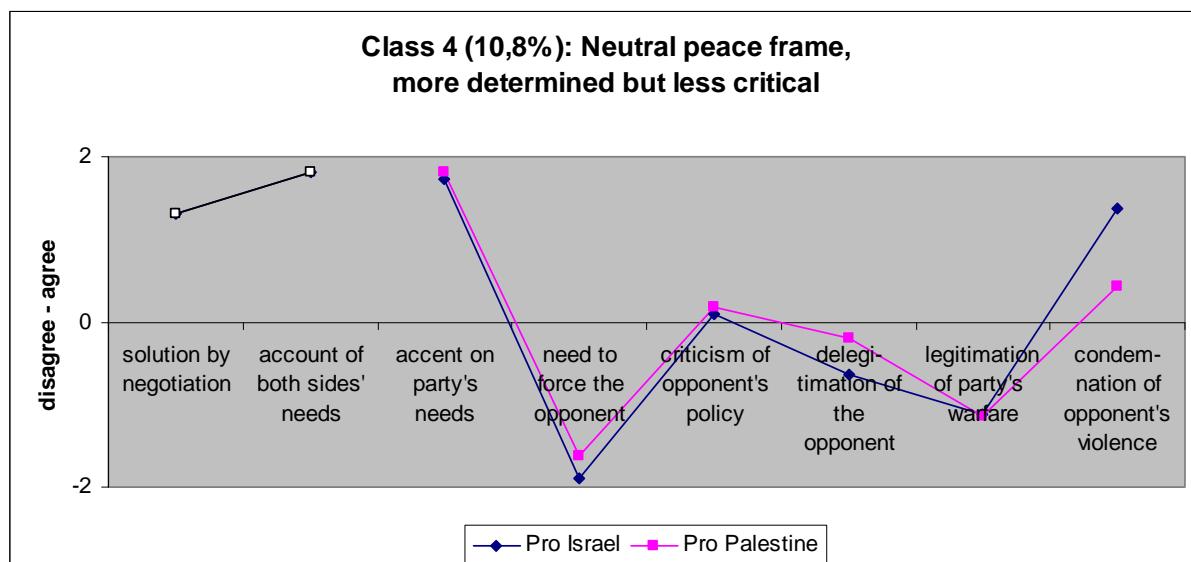


Figure 20, Neutral peace frame, more determined but less critical

Peace frame, critical of Israel (cf. Figure 21)

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- Both sides' vital needs are accentuated
- Both sides' need to force their opponent is rejected
- Though only Palestinian (but not Israeli) violence is condemned,
 - Only the Israeli policy is criticised
 - Only the Israelis are delegitimised
 - Only the legitimacy of Israeli warfare is rejected

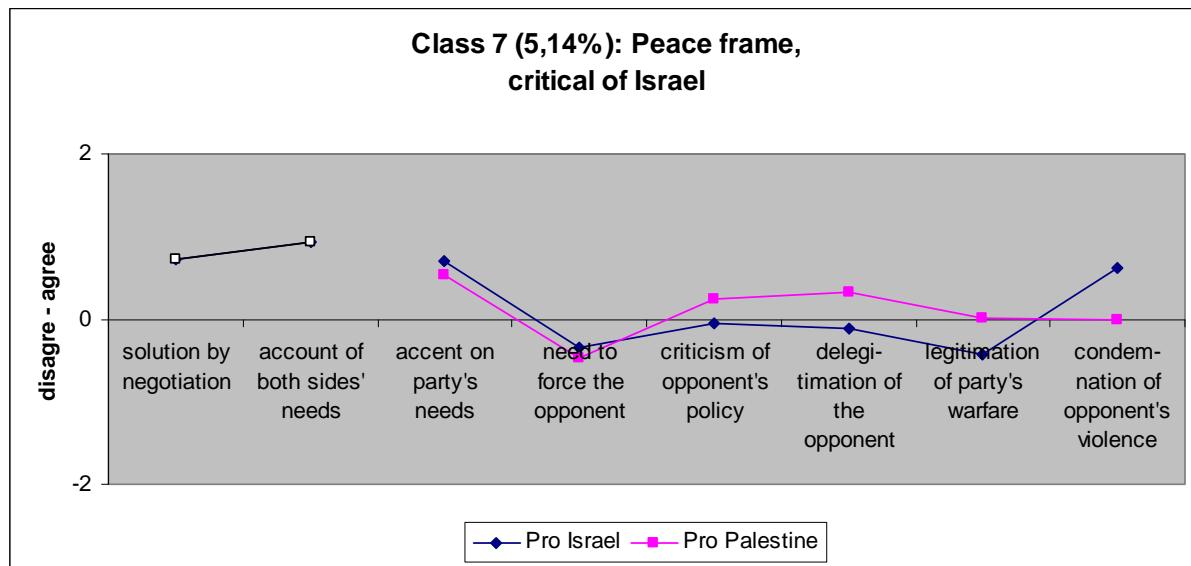


Figure 21, Peace frame, critical of Israel

3.3.3. Pro-Palestinian Peace Frames*Peace frame, pro Palestinian (cf. Figure 22)*

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- Both sides' vital needs are accentuated
- Both sides' need to force their opponent is rejected and both side's policy is criticised
- Legitimacy of both sides' warfare is rejected
- Both sides' violence is condemned
- However: only the Palestinians are defended against delegitimation

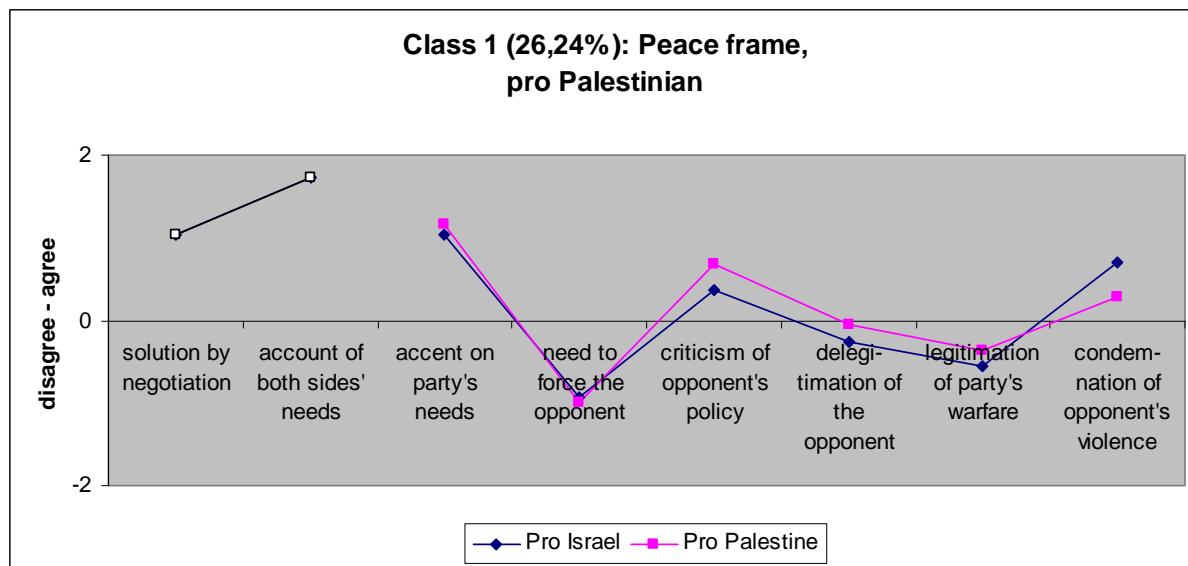


Figure 22, Peace frame, pro Palestinian

Peace frame, enemy image of Israel (cf. Figure 23)

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- and both sides' (particularly Palestinian) violence is condemned. However:
- Palestinians' vital needs are accentuated more strongly than those of the Israelis
- Israel's need to force the opponent and the legitimacy of Israel's warfare are rejected more strongly than that of the Palestinians
- Only the Israeli policy is criticised and there is a tendency to delegitimise Israel,
- while the Palestinians are defended against delegitimation.

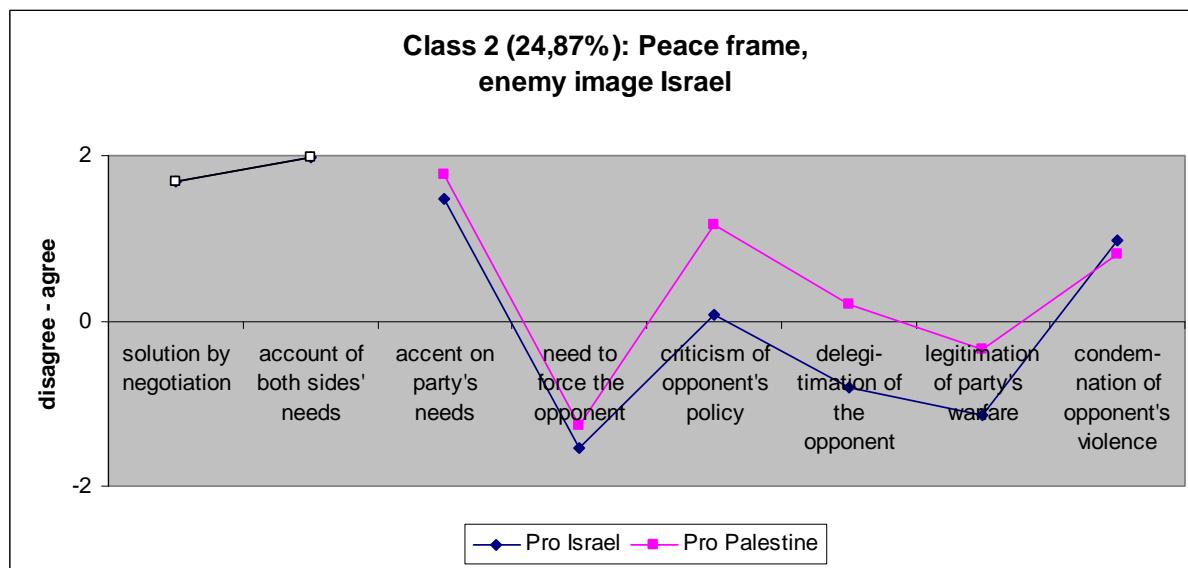


Figure 23, Peace frame, enemy image of Israel

3.3.4 Pro-Israeli war frame (cf. Figure 24)

- Solution through negotiation is supported and should account to both sides' needs
- However: the Israelis' vital needs are accentuated more strongly
- Palestinians need to force the opponent is rejected more strongly than Israel's
- While Palestinian policy is criticised, Israel's policy is defended
- While the Palestinians are delegitimised, Israel is defended against delegitimation
- While the legitimacy of Palestinian warfare is denied, Israels warfare is justified
- While Palestinian violence is condemned Israeli violence is excused

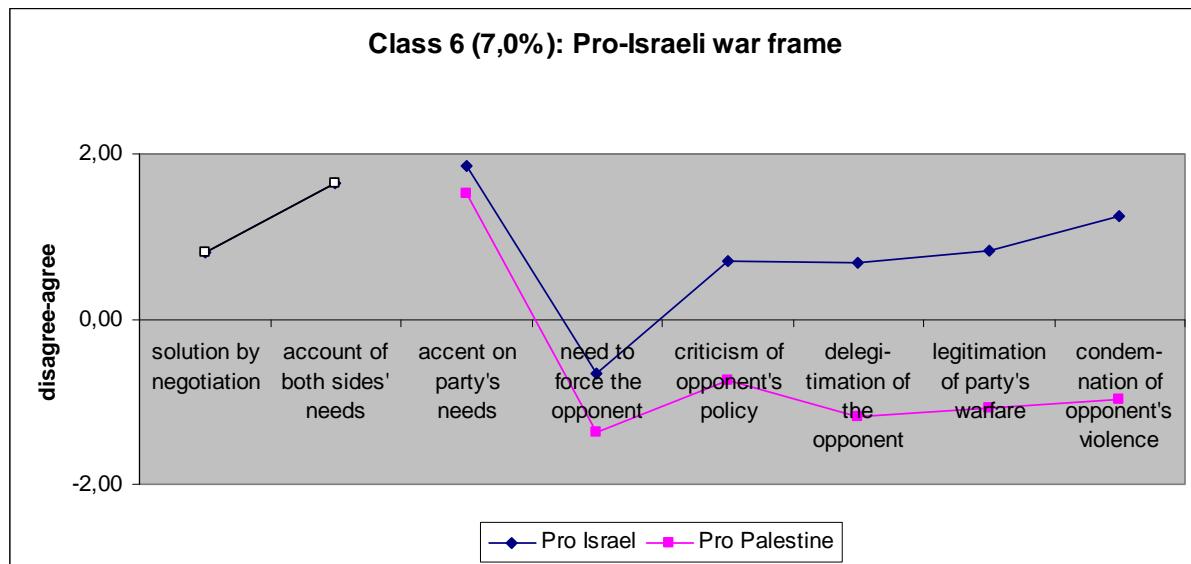


Figure 24, Pro-Israeli war frame

3.4 Mental models of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Second order LCA identified 5 groups of participants that can again be ordered with respect to the participants' emotional closeness to the conflict. With increasing emotional closeness, the distinctness of the participants' opinion regarding the prospects of war and peace increases as well and the mental models according to which the participants interpret the conflict change

- from sympathy for Israel (Class 4: 11,68%)
- to understanding for Israeli concerns about peace (Class 2: 21,94%)
- to a pro-Palestinian perspective in favour of peace (Class 3: 20,68%)
- to a peace perspective to the benefit of both sides (Class 1: 35,94%)
- and, finally, to a polarization between peace and the perpetuation of the status quo (Class 5: 9,76)

The goodness-of-fit statistics of the second order LCA are displayed in Table 6.

No. of classes	LOG-LIKE	n(P)	df	AIC
1	-2589,22	15	176	5208,44
2	-2429,21	31	160	4920,42
3	-2385,66	47	144	4865,32
4	-2348,81	63	128	4823,62
5	-2320,41	79	112	4798,82
6	-2308,51	95	96	4807,02
Saturated model	-2264,14	191		4910,28

Table 6, Goodness of fit statistics of the second order LCA

3.4.1 Sympathy for Israel

Though the Participants in this group are quite unfamiliar with the conflict and do not have a distinct frame according to which they could take a stance, they display some empathy for Israel's concerns about peace and believe that both, war and peace is more risky for Israel than for the Palestinians.

In this group (cf. Figure 25), most of the participants show very little emotional closeness to the conflict (EmoClass 3: 72,3%) and the distinctness of their opinion regarding the prospects of war and peace is mostly (AmbiClass 5: 72,1%) low as well. The prospects of war and peace are seen as follows:

- For Palestinians: War might perhaps create threat (AmBiClasses 1-4: 27,8%) and offers *no* security (AmBiClasses 1-5: 99,9%). Peace might perhaps create *no* threat (AmBiClasses 1-2, 4: 25,8%) and might perhaps offer security (AmBiClasses 1-4: 27,8%).
- For Israelis: War creates threat (AmBiClasses 1-5: 99,9%) and offers *no* security (AmBiClasses 1-2, 4-5: 97,9%). Peace does not promise to create *no* threat (AmBiClass 1: 2,4%) and does not promise to offer security (AmBiClass 1: 2,4%); peace might perhaps be even a security risk (AmBiClass 2: 23,4%).

The majority of participants in this group (79%; PositionClass 5 = 77,4%, PositionClass 8 = 1,6%) endorse peace and condemn Palestinian violence, but are too little familiar with the conflict to have a distinct frame according to which they could take a stance

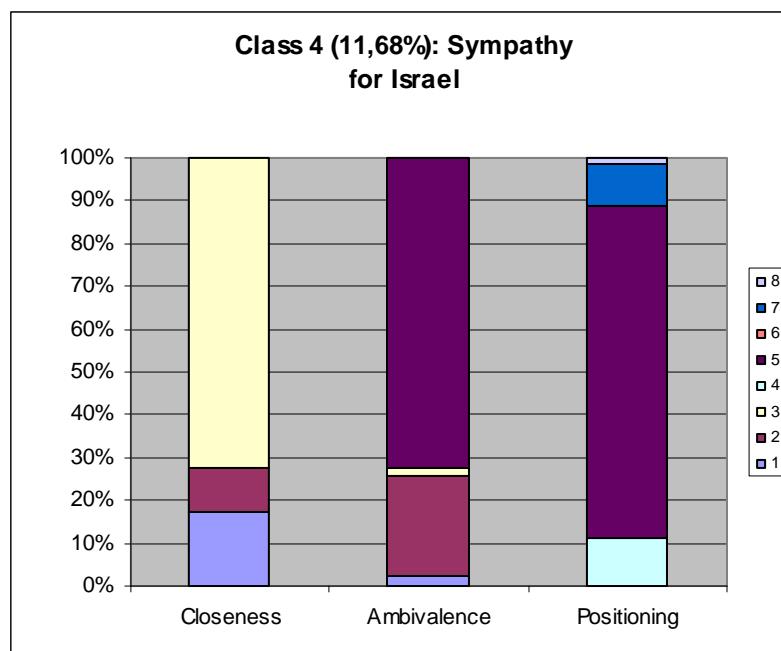


Figure 25, Sympathy for Israel

3.4.2 Understanding for Israeli concerns about peace

On the basis of a (slightly) increased familiarity with the conflict, the participants in this group interpret it according to a neutral peace frame and show increased empathy for Israel's concerns about peace.

In this group (cf. Figure 26) the participants show only slightly more emotional closeness to the conflict (very little, EmoClass 3 = 38,4%; little, EmoClass 1 = 39,6%) and the distinctness of their opinion regarding the prospects of war and peace is mostly medium (AmbiClass 2+3 = 66,1%). The prospects of war and peace are seen as follows:

- For Palestinians: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-4: 88,4%) and offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-5: 99,9%). Peace creates probably *no* threat (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4: 77,9%) and offers security (AmbiClasses 1-4: 88,4%).
- For Israelis: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-5: 99,9%) and offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4-5: 89,4%). Peace does not promise to create *no* threat (AmbiClass 1: 13,7%) and does not promise to offer security (AmbiClass 1: 13,7%); peace is probably even a security risk (AmbiClass 2: 55,6%).

Nearly all of the participants in this group (96,4%) interpret the conflict according to a neutral peace frame (PositionClass 3 = 66,5%; PositionClass 4 = 29,9%).

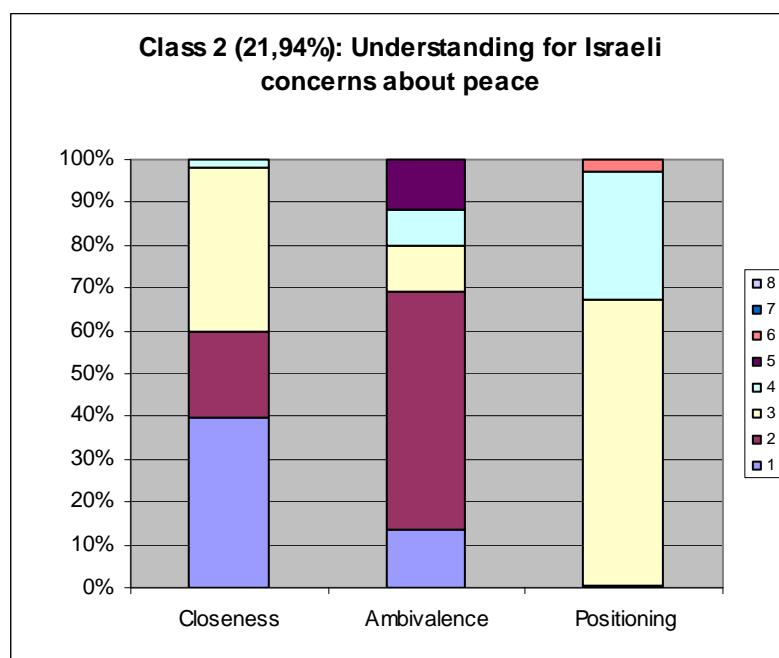


Figure 26, Understanding for Israeli concerns about peace

3.4.3 Pro-Palestinian perspective in favour of peace

As the (still small) familiarity with the conflict is further increased, the participants in this group become less convinced about the threat which the war poses on Israel, their empathy for Israel's concerns about peace is reduced again and the peace frame according to which they interpret the conflict becomes biased in favour of the Palestinians.

In this group (cf. Figure 27) the participants' emotional closeness to the conflict ranges from very little (EmoClass 3 = 30,7%) via little (EmoClass 1 = 31,4%) to moderate (EmoClass 2 = 33,8%) and the distinctness of their opinion regarding the prospects of war and peace is mostly medium (AmbiClass 2+3 = 76,1%). The prospects of war and peace are seen as follows:

- For Palestinians: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-4: 93,8%) and War offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-5: 93,8%). Peace might perhaps create *no* threat (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4: 39,9%) and offers security (AmbiClasses 1-4: 93,8%).
- For Israelis: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-5: 93,8%) and might perhaps offer *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4-5: 39,9%). Peace does not promise to create *no* threat (AmbiClass 1: 17,7%) and

does not promise to offer security (AmbiClass 1: 17,7%); peace might perhaps even be a security risk (AmbiClass 2: 22,2%).

The great majority of participants in this group (87,4%) interpret the conflict according to a peace frame, which is either pro Palestinian (PositionClass 1: 68,3%) or critical of Israel (PositionClass 7: 19,1%).

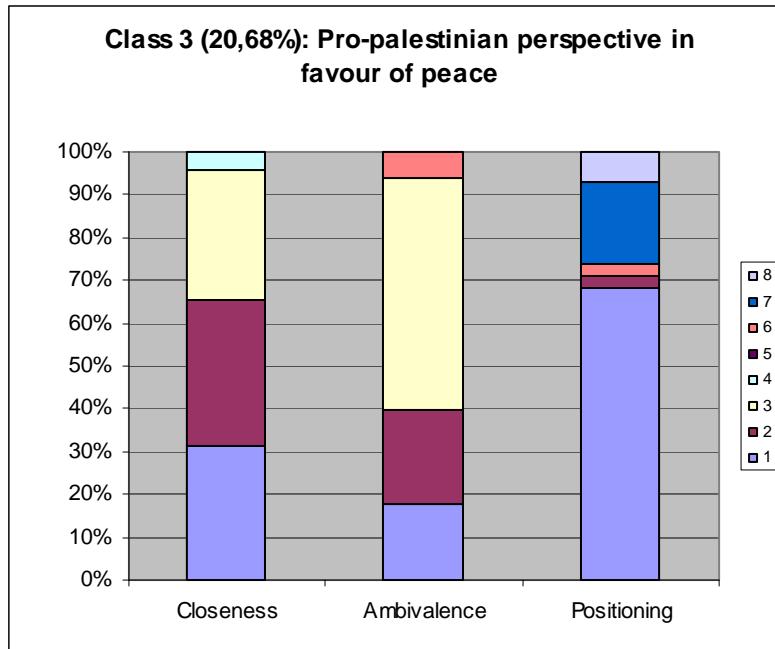


Figure 27,_Pro-Palestinian perspective in favour of peace

3.4.4 Peace perspective to the benefit of both sides

With further increasing familiarity with the conflict, the participants in this group believe that peace would offer security and create no threat for both of the parties. Empathy for Israel's concerns about peace gets lost and Israel is seen as the main obstacle to peace. The Pro-palestinian bias increases and an enemy image arises.

In this group (cf. Figure 28) the participants show somewhat more emotional closeness to the conflict (little, EmoClass 1 = 52,1%; moderate, EmoClass 2 = 36,8%) and the distinctness of their opinion regarding the prospects of war and peace is mostly high (AmbiClass 1+4 = 81,6%). The prospects of war and peace are seen as follows:

- For Palestinians: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-4: 98,9) and offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-5: 100%). Peace creates *no* threat (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4: 91,7%) and offers security (AmbiClasses 1-4: 98,9%).
- For Israelis: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-5: 100%) and offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4-5: 92,9%). Peace probably creates *no* threat (AmbiClass 1: 67,5%) and probably offers security (AmbiClass 1: 67,5%). Peace does *not* impend to be a security risk (AmbiClass 2: 10,1%).

The great majority of participants in this group (89,3%) interprets the conflict according to a pro-Palestinian frame, which is either a pro-Palestinian peace frame (PositionClass 1: 34,4%) or a peace frame which is on the edge of a war frame and already displays an enemy image of Israel (PositionClass 2: 54,9%).

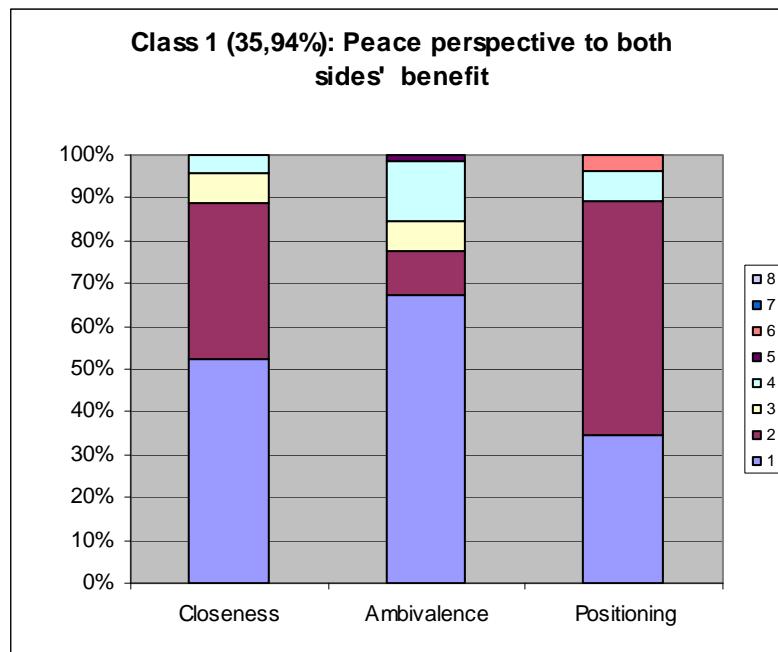


Figure 28, Peace perspective to both sides' benefit

3.4.5 Polarization between peace and the perpetuation of the status quo

In this group which is (relatively) most familiar with the conflict, the imponderability of peace for Israel polarizes the participants. They form an enemy image either of Israel or of the Palestinians and they expect of the enemy that he should bear the burdens – either of peace to the benefit of the Palestinians or of the perpetuation of the status quo.

In this group (cf. Figure 29) the participants' emotional closeness to the conflict is mostly moderate (EmoClass 2 = 61,7%) or relatively high (EmoClass 4 = 27,4%) and the distinctness their opinion regarding the prospects of war and peace is high as well (AmbiClass 1+4 = 79,5%). The prospects of war and peace are seen as follows:

- For Palestinians: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-4: 99,9%) and offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-5: 99,9%). Peace probably creates *no* threat (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4: 79,5%) and offers security (AmbiClasses 1-4: 99,9%).
- For Israelis: War creates threat (AmbiClasses 1-5: 99,9%) and probably offers *no* security (AmbiClasses 1-2, 4-5: 79,5%). Peace does not promise to create *no* threat (AmbiClass 1: 0,8%) and does not promise to offer security (AmbiClass 1: 0,8%); but nonetheless, peace is not a security risk either (AmbiClass 2: 0%).

The great majority of participants in this group (88,8%) is partisan for one or the other side in the conflict. They interpret the conflict either according to a pro-palestinian frame with a clear enemy image of Israel (PositionClass 2 = 45,7%) or according to a pro-Israeli war frame (43,1%).

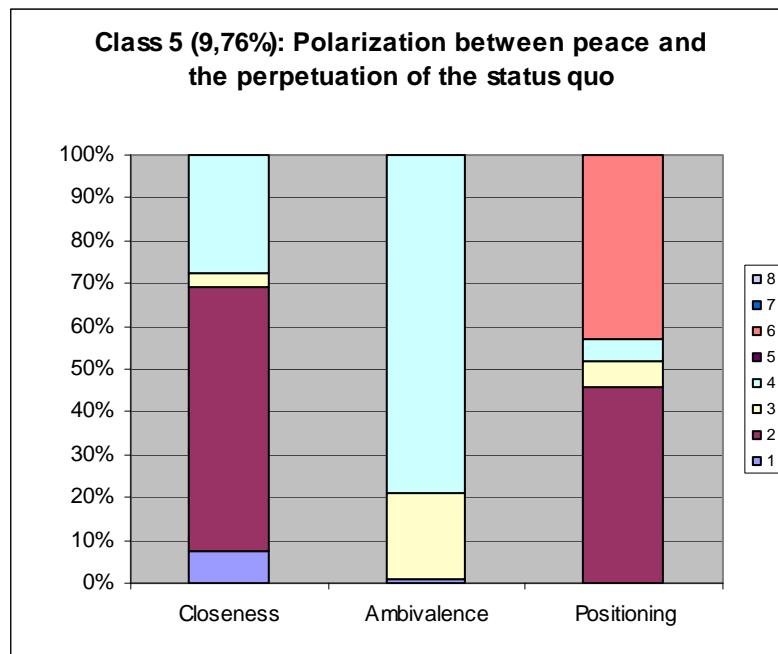


Figure 29, Perpetuation between peace and the perpetuation of the status quo

4. Discussion

Although we did not identify a clear cut pro-Palestinian war frame in our data, the results of our pilot study demonstrate that both, the scales that we constructed and the strategy of data analysis that we applied, are suitable instruments for reconstructing the mental models according to which the participants interpret the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The results of the study also support our assumptions, according to which

- also those participants who interpret the conflict according to a war frame believe in peace as the ultimate goal of war (cf. Bar-Tal, 1998), and
- the formation of an interpretive frame requires a certain minimum of knowledge and/or familiarity of the issue of which the participants try to make meaning (cf. Kempf, 2008).

Nonetheless, we will slightly modify the scales in our forthcoming representative field study. Since the positioning-items 2 and 3 were rejected throughout by all of the groups who had formed a mental model of the conflict, we will replace them by the weaker statements

- 2* The Palestinian leadership must be forced to recognize Israel, and
- 3* The Israeli government must be forced to make concessions to the Palestinians.

Although the present study is not a representative one, it also gives some insight into how (mainly) young educated people in Germany and Austria relate themselves to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Good news is that conflict resolution through negotiation is supported by the participants all over.

Second good news is that the participants still condemn Palestinian terror attacks throughout more strictly than Israeli military operations - even after the Gaza war which had made the public opinion quite critical of Israeli warfare.

Third good news which speaks against widespread anti-Semitic tendencies, is that those participants who are little familiar with the conflict show sympathy for Israel (2nd order LCA, class 4: 11.68%) and/or understanding for Israeli concerns about peace (2nd order LCA, class 2: 21.94%).

Fourth good news is that also those participants, who sympathise with the Palestinians (2nd order LCA, class 3: 20.68%), favour peace and do not interpret the conflict according to war frame.

Fifth good news is that the largest group of participants (2nd order LCA, class 1: 35.94%) holds a mental model which calls for peace to both sides' benefit.

Bad news is that the participants in this group show no empathy for Israel's concerns about peace and tend to form an enemy image of Israel.

Apart from a small minority of participants who show unconditional solidarity with Israel, the results of our study seem to indicate that Israel is losing the propaganda war for the hearts and minds of the German and Austrian public: The more the participants become familiar with the conflict, the more do they take a pro-Palestinian stance.

The questions

- whether and to what extent this process is due to the way how the German and Austrian media report about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,
- whether and to what extend anti-Semitic tendencies have survived in the German and Austrian public and now fuel this process, and
- whether and to what extend it brings about a revival of anti-Semitic attitudes,

cannot be answered with the present data. They will be in the focus of our forthcoming experiments and field studies, however.

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