When the World Becomes Unstable: Identity Disintegration, wellbeing and the power of Paradox Mindset

A two-study field investigation linking war-related displacement and polarization to identity disintegration and how paradox mindset buffers its effect on wellbeing



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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

61 Active armed conflicts in 2024 - highest since WWII (Davies et al., 2025)

1/6 Of the global population lives in conflict-affected regions (Hoppen et al., 2021)

45% Of U.S. employees experienced political disagreements at work (WEF, 2025)

#1 Global risk: Armed conflict — World Economic Forum Global Risks Report (2025)



IDENTITY DISINTEGRATION

A lack of coherence and continuity among multiple identities (Syed & McLean, 2016)



PARADOX MINDSET

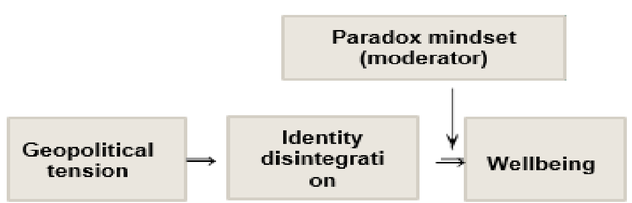
The capacity to accept contradictions and feel comfortable, even energized, by their coexistence, enabling a both/and orientation (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018)



WELLBEING

Positive psychological functioning, including autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989)

RESERCH MODEL



Moderated mediation- PROCESS Model 14 (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020)

HYPOTHESES

- **H1** Geopolitical tension → higher identity disintegration
- **H2** Identity disintegration → lower wellbeing
- **H3** Paradox mindset moderates the negative ID → wellbeing link
- **H4** Paradox mindset moderates the full indirect path

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

① **Identity Theory**

Introduces identity disintegration as a distinct mechanism, a structural transformation in the self–identity relationship

② **Paradox Theory**

Extends paradox mindset to intrapersonal identity theory. Identifies boundary conditions: PM is most protective when identity anchoring is most weakened

③ **Geopolitical Research**

Field evidence linking armed conflict to systematic erosion of the self, Links geopolitical tension, identity disintegration, and wellbeing

④ **Organizational Practice**

Shows paradox mindset can be cultivated through structured dialogue

1 NATURAL FIELD STUDY — War-Related Displacement

N = 165 · Israel 2023–2025 · Displaced vs. non-displaced people

METHOD

Online panel (Midgam) during 2023–2025-armed conflict.
48% internally displaced, 69.9% Israel-Gaza border, 30.4% Israel-Lebanon border.
Avg. 175 days displaced.



HYPOTHESES TESTED

- **H1** Displacement → higher identity disintegration
- **H2** Identity disintegration → lower wellbeing
- **H3** Paradox mindset moderates the ID → wellbeing link
- **H4** Paradox mindset moderates the indirect path

RESULTS

H1 ✓ Displacement → higher Identity disintegration
(β = .46, p < .001; R^2 = .22)

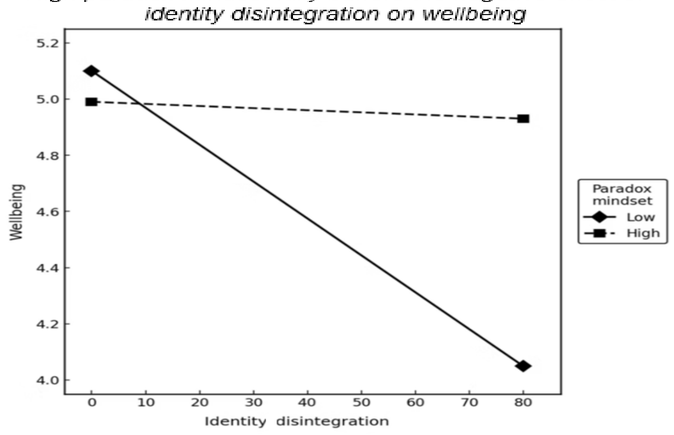
H2 ✓ Identity disintegration → lower Wellbeing
(β = −.31, p < .001)

H3 ✓ Paradox mindset buffered the disintegration–wellbeing link; effect absent at high PM

H4 ✓ Moderated mediation
Index = .22, 95% CI [.021, .39]

MODERATION RESULT

High paradox mindset fully buffers the negative effect of identity disintegration on wellbeing



*Low PM: b = −.018***, 95% CI [−.025, −.012]*
High PM: b = −.005 n.s., 95% CI [−.012, .002]

"…I'm not going to go back to being who I used to be. Instead, I need to come to terms with who I am today. So yes, I changed… Politically, religiously, even in terms of gender "

"My identity is one of 'both-and-and,' not 'either-or"

2 LONGITUDINAL FIELD EXPERIMENT — Polarization context

N = 102 · 3 time points (T1 → T2 → T3) · structured dialogue

METHOD

University context during intense polarization (judicial reform). Undergraduates (85% women, Mage = 25).

Groups of 10–15 spanning opposing political, religious & ethnic identities- two facilitators with opposing views

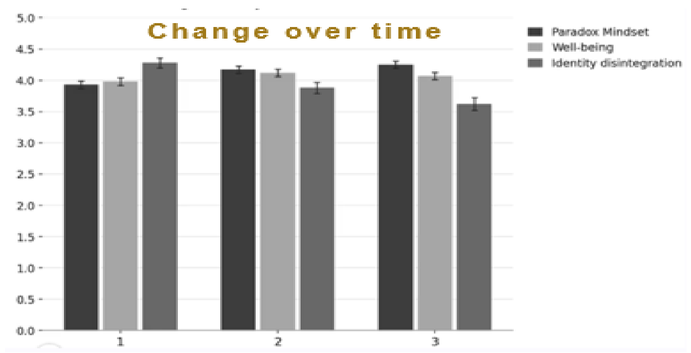
Data collected at 3 points in time:





INTERVENTION DESIGN

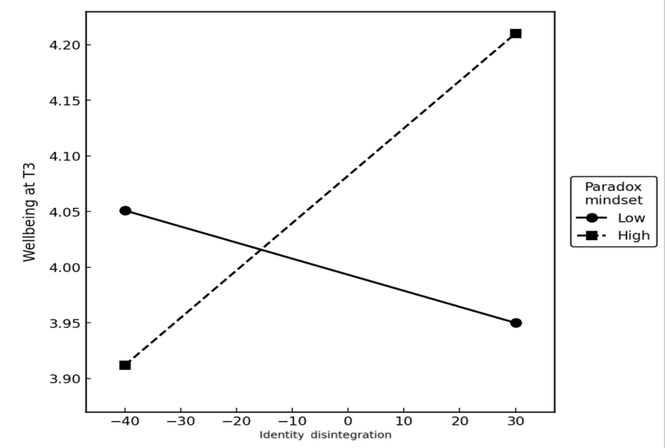
1. Intentionally heterogeneous groups- equal numbers supporting/opposing the reform; diverse ethnic, gender & religious backgrounds
2. Two facilitators with opposing views trained in paradox mindset workshop; validated opposing perspectives simultaneously
3. Three guiding questions: personal impact of reform · hopes for the future · actions supporting coexistence
4. Goal: cultivate comfort with contradiction



*Paradox mindset: T1=3.90 → T2=4.16 → T3=4.24; F(2,57)=11.69***
Wellbeing: T1=3.97 → T2=4.12 → T3=4.05; F(2,57)=4.13**
Identity disintegration: T1=42.8 → T2=38.5 → T3=35.9
(decreasing over time)

MODERATION RESULT

Higher paradox mindset at T2 buffered the negative effect of identity disintegration on wellbeing at T3



Interaction: (b = .003, 95% CI [.0001, .006]).
Identity disintegration:
significantly related to improvement in wellbeing over time at high levels of PM (b = −.0046, 95% CI 0001., 0093.]),
but not low PM (b = −.0014, 95% CI [−.0054, .0026]).