

research program

# PRIF Research Program

Version: January 2024



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# PRIF Research Program

by Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Version: January 2024

This document presents the research program of the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF). As a strategic framework document, it links PRIF's fundamental mission as a peace and conflict research institute, the current research agenda of the institute, and its core units, as well as its medium-term research objectives. In doing so, the research program serves to guide strategic planning and to ensure the coherence of research across PRIF's Research Departments (RDs), Research Groups, and collaborative initiatives.

This program is a "living document". It has no expiry date, but will be reviewed periodically, and revised and supplemented as needed. Previous PRIF research programs focused on an overarching theme for a limited period of time.<sup>1</sup> Unlike these earlier programs, this program is intentionally broader in scope. It responds to the growth PRIF has achieved and the thematic breadth it now has. As a document, it is more permanent in nature. That said, some elements of the document are less time-bound than others. The more permanent components include the general mission and the overall research agenda of PRIF that is outlined in Section 1, as well as the definition of the main topics and the structure of the Research Departments described in the introduction to Section 2. The respective research agendas of the Research Departments and Groups (Section 2), as well as the cross-cutting research areas (Section 3), respond more directly to current political developments and academic debates and must therefore evolve over time.

## 1. MISSION AND OVERALL AIMS

The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt is one of Europe's leading peace and conflict research institutes, and the largest of its kind in Germany. We analyze the causes and patterns of conflict from the global to the local level, attempts to build and sustain peace, and make practical recommendations on peace and conflict-related issues. We combine basic research with knowledge transfer for policy, the media, and society. To achieve this mission and as a member of the Leibniz Association, we are funded by the German federal government, the state of Hesse, and the city of Frankfurt, and also receive third-party funds. Basic research, both empirical and theoretical, is the foundation for all PRIF's activities. We define and pursue our research topics autonomously, in accordance with academic freedom. We use this independence to provide critical stimuli for academic and political debates at both the national and international level. We are dedicated to academic excellence, contribute to ongoing debates in leading academic journals, and apply peer review practices to all of our in-house publications. We take part in academic networks linking us to other leading research institutes and universities, and closely cooperate with the latter in research and teaching. Research at PRIF is interdisciplinary, as it draws on various academic disciplines, and transdisciplinary, because it engages with social problems and integrates the views and knowledge of practitioners into its academic work. Theoretically and methodologically, PRIF promotes and applies a diversity of approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous research programs have included "Antinomies of Democratic Peace" (2000–2011), "Just Peace Governance" (2011–2018), and "Coercion and Peace" (2018–2024). For more details, see: <https://www.prif.org/en/research/research-program>.

Research at PRIF takes an empirical-analytical approach and also examines normative issues primarily from an empirical perspective. This being said, as a peace research institute and as established by the institute's constitution, PRIF is committed to the overall aim to generate and disseminate knowledge that helps promote peaceful change, understood broadly as processes that combine "a reduction of violence, increasing social justice and political freedom in the international system as well as in individual societies"<sup>2</sup>. We do not see conflict as inherently problematic. On the contrary, controversies and disputes that involve (partially) incompatible claims are part and parcel of everyday life, from the local to the global level. Conflicts become problematic when they lead to violence, the exclusion and/or disenfranchisement of societal groups. Beyond this general normative orientation, however, PRIF deliberately refrains from establishing binding definitions of either peace or conflict, but allows individual researchers and research projects to work with those conceptions that are most suitable to addressing the respective research question at stake. In line with the Leibniz Association's motto "*theoria cum praxi*", PRIF emphasizes the dissemination of practically relevant findings to society at large. As part of our knowledge transfer strategy, we provide background information on current events and analysis for ministries, parties, NGOs, and corporations. We provide policy advice to actors from the political arena as well as civil society, contribute to media reports with our expertise, and organize public discussions on current issues. We conceive knowledge transfer as a dialogical exchange between science and society, which also engages with ideas and inspiration from society and integrates these into scientific work. PRIF aims to maximize the impact of both its academic work and policy advice, and continuously monitors the relevant metrics.

Research at PRIF stands for:

1. *Academic excellence.* The work of PRIF focuses on basic research promoting progress in scientific knowledge about peace-related issues. In this mission, PRIF collaborates with research partners from across the world, and fosters an inclusive working environment for its international staff.
2. *Interdisciplinarity.* At PRIF, researchers in the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences collaborate across disciplines on joint projects and cross-cutting issues. Our researchers develop joint perspectives across disciplinary boundaries and develop strategies to solve problems.
3. *Excellent training.* Training at PRIF prepares early-stage scholars for an academic career, but also for positions in politics, the civil service, industry, civil society, and international organizations. The institute is committed to a working environment in which diversity is valued, equal opportunities prevail, and work is compatible with family life.
4. *Theoria cum praxi.* In line with the motto of the Leibniz Association, PRIF aims to provide research-driven and nonpartisan policy advice and knowledge transfer. The institute follows the principle of knowledge transfer oriented toward dialogue with society and decision-makers.

In sum, what makes research at PRIF stand out is the fact that it approaches long-standing as well as current societal challenges and political disputes through the lens of peace and conflict studies, that is, with a focus on the underlying dynamics of conflict and their implications for peace. Also, it does so based on both in-depth basic research and continuous, dialogical knowledge transfer.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.prif.org/en/about-us/constitution>

## 2. OVERALL RESEARCH AGENDA AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENTS

“There will always be conflicts in this world – social, political, and economic conflicts. We must ensure that these conflicts are handled rationally and with reason and that their resolution does not restrict people’s freedom.” It was with these words that the then Minister President of Hesse, Albert Osswald, presented the foundation deed for the *Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* on 30 October 1970.<sup>3</sup> Given the historical context in which PRIF was founded, armament dynamics, arms control, and disarmament have been among the institute’s core research topics from the very beginning – and they remain of crucial importance to this day. In the 1970s and 1980s, the focus on the East–West conflict was broadened to systematically include a focus on North–South relations and peace and conflict dynamics in what we refer to today as the Global South. With the end of the Cold War, PRIF started to devote more attention to international norms, regimes, and organizations, as well as to peacebuilding and democratization. Nevertheless, since the hope for an “end of history” soon proved to be in vain, the dynamics of armed conflict and organized violence have remained core topics throughout the decades. In fact, during the first two decades of the 21st century, the institute further expanded its agenda to study processes of polarization and radicalization as challenges to societal peace in the Global North as well.

Thus, PRIF has built up an extensive body of knowledge on key aspects that are critical to the state and future of peace in the world. These topics, which we continuously address, include: arms control and disarmament; international norms, regimes, and organizations; armed conflict and organized violence; military and nonmilitary interventions; peacebuilding and democratization; as well as nonviolent social conflict and societal peace. These topics are investigated in PRIF’s five Research Departments (RD), which are the main research units of the institute. They represent key research fields in peace and conflict studies, dealing with questions of international security (RD I), the role of international institutions (RD II), transnational politics (RD III), peace and conflict at the intrastate level (RD IV), as well as the interaction between political globalization and local lifeworlds (RD V).

The Research Departments also host smaller Research Groups. These groups pool the expertise and coordinate research on a specific topic. Currently, Research Groups deal with emerging technologies as well as biological and chemical weapons (RD I), public international law (RD II), terrorism and radicalization (RD III), regime competition (RD IV) and African intervention politics (RD V). In contrast to the RDs, which are the key administrative research units at PRIF, these groups are smaller and more flexible – they can be established, adjusted and dissolved more easily. While embedded in individual RDs, the groups can also include members from other departments. In addition, Research Groups and individual researchers can join forces in what we call cross-cutting research areas, which address ongoing political developments and academic debates, and facilitate collaboration across the Research Departments as well as with our national and international partners (see Section 3).

<b>RD I: International Security</b>	<b>RD II: International Institutions</b>	<b>RD III: Transnational Politics</b>	<b>RD IV: Intrastate Conflict</b>	<b>RD V: Global Junctions</b>
Research Group “Use and Control of Emerging Disruptive Technologies”  Research Group “Biological and Chemical Weapons Control”	Research Group “Public International Law”	Research Group “Terrorism”  Research Group “Radicalization”	Research Group “Regime Competition”	Research Group “African Intervention Politics”

3 Since 2023, PRIF has carried the name *PRIF – Leibniz-Institut für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* in German.

## 2.1 Research Department I: International Security

Research Department I focuses on peace and conflict at the international level. In particular, it examines how states strive for national and international security and analyzes the impact of their security policies on the international order. The focus is on the transformation of warfare, changing norms and rules of the military use of force, and the control and limitation of armaments. In addition to theory-oriented basic research, RD I has a long tradition of providing policy advice and a continuing interest in the practical issues of arms control, which is reflected in policy-related research and transfer projects.

The recent Russian-Ukrainian war has become a turning point in international politics and calls for a reorientation of security policy and a review of traditional strategic concepts. It is still unclear how much of the rules-based international system will survive, how the planned military buildup can be managed to avoid an arms race, and how Russia can be contained and ultimately reintegrated into a European security order. Against this background, RD I not only addresses current security developments and policy options, but also analyzes the fundamental problems beyond current events in order to develop concepts on how peace and security can be restored and guaranteed in the long term.

In particular, research in RD I addresses three general themes, which form the structure of the RD's work:

1. *Transformations of war*: Research in this thematic area explores technological, political, and normative change and how it affects the use of force in international conflicts.
2. *Security governance*: In this area, RD I analyzes policies which enhance security at various levels and in various issue areas, with a specific focus on policy innovation, such as feminist foreign policy, environmental security, and informal cooperation.
3. *Arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation*: In this thematic area, RD I examines how recent technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, affect military weaponry and how it can be controlled through arms control and export restrictions.

Research Department I hosts the research groups "Use and Control of Emerging Disruptive Technologies" and "Biological and Chemical Weapons Control". Furthermore, RD I participates in various national and international research networks. In particular, it is part of the EU Nonproliferation and Disarmament Consortium and a co-founder of the Arms Control Negotiation Academy (ACONA). It is also a member of the CBW network for a comprehensive reinforcement of norms against chemical and biological weapons.

In terms of further developing its research agenda, RD I is currently expanding its interdisciplinary research on arms control by incorporating approaches from the natural and technical sciences. To support this, the two research groups (on emerging technologies and biological and chemical weapons) are in the process of systematically involving natural scientists.

## 2.2 Research Department II: International Institutions

Research Department II studies international institutions – organizations, regimes, and conventions. Institutions have an important function for international peace and security. They provide states and non-state actors with frameworks for cooperation and for the peaceful resolution of their conflicts, but they can also contribute to conflict and even the use of force.

International institutions have typically been viewed as stabilizing factors when it comes to peace. The increasing institutionalization of the international system after World War II and in the post-Cold War period is generally seen as having promoted the peaceful coexistence and cooperation of international state and non-state actors. More recently, however, many international institutions have entered a period of crisis. International organizations are losing relevance, international treaties are being abandoned, and international law is being reinterpreted, instrumentalized, and broken. RD II examines this crisis of international institutions and explores whether the crisis can also serve as an opportunity for reform, with the aim of enabling international institutions to address security, global health, and environmental crises without exacerbating conflict.

Research Department II's main research topics fall into three broad areas:

1. *Trust in and by institutions*: International institutions regulate international relations and aim to resolve international conflicts peacefully. International institutions are only able to fulfill these functions if individuals and organizations can trust that rules and orders will be respected by all or most actors. Contrary to what might be expected, international disputes in and around institutions can also strengthen and deepen this trust. This RD investigates the conditions under which this strengthening is likely to occur.
2. *Dissociation as a problem and opportunity for international politics*: After decades of ever-closer international integration and the broadening and deepening of international institutions, signs of economic and political disintegration and crises have become increasingly apparent in recent years. We investigate the causes and dynamics of dissociation processes in order to gain insights into how they can be managed in a way that promotes sustained peace.
3. *Norms, norm contestation, and legitimacy*: RD II analyzes processes of norm contestation vis-à-vis international institutions and their institutional reactions. Here, we focus on the legitimacy and legitimation strategies of international institutions. With multilateralism under pressure and international institutions facing increasing challenges to their legitimacy, we analyze the effects of legitimation strategies targeting different state and non-state actors. In this context, the RD also studies formal and informal forms of cooperation.

RD II hosts the research group "Public International Law". This group studies international legal instruments for establishing international peace and security, in particular (preventive) arms control and the institutions of collective security, as well as public international law applicable in armed conflicts. This includes the role of international law in fact-finding and information management. Furthermore, the group advances the theory of public international law – including its history and its sociology.

For the future research of RD II, a central challenge is the reconceptualization of multilateral relationships and organizations in the face of growing geopolitical tensions and diminishing trust. A particular focus in the aftermath of the Russian attack on Ukraine is the reorganization of European security in a global context, which is the topic of a new Research Group that RD II is in process of establishing (in cooperation with Goethe University Frankfurt). Beyond the field of international security, we are researching how political, economic, and social international relations will be shaped in the future so that common goals and interests can be pursued cooperatively, but at the same time avoiding the emergence of dependencies or asymmetries. This is a prerequisite for tackling global security, health, and environmental crises in a spirit of cooperation.

### 2.3 Research Department III: Transnational Politics

Research Department III studies the transnational dimension of peace and conflict. In contrast to RDs I and II, it thus focuses on phenomena that transcend nation-state boundaries and on actors who shape regional and global politics beyond the world of states.

Recent decades have been marked by processes of transnationalization. Climate change, migration, terrorism, global economic crises, and technological advances require responses that exceed the capacity and resources of the nation-state. Private, non-state actors have been accorded or taken more agency in governance. At the same time, global and transnational governance is in crisis due to the comeback of state-centered nationalist agendas and geopolitics. RD III explores the dynamics of these changes as well as their repercussions for the transnational realm with regard to peace and conflict, as well as the impact of transnational politics at the international and intrastate level.

Research Department III's main research topics cover three overarching themes:

1. *Transnational violent and nonviolent actors*: Since the end of the Cold War, intrastate armed conflict has gained importance and so have transnationally operating non-state actors, as well as transnational forms of political violence such as terrorism and intervention into civil war by both state and non-state actors. RD III investigates these dynamics of transnationalization and internationalization of intrastate violence. In addition, it analyzes the ways in which transnational actors disseminate ideologies and narratives, create and legitimize order, and provide governance.
2. *Coping with transnational radicalization dynamics and terrorism*: RD III investigates the patterns, trajectories, and tensions that characterize the ways in which state and non-state actors cope with phenomena of radicalization and respond to transnational terrorism. This includes the justification of these response strategies and the mutually escalating effects of radical milieus and intervention measures.
3. *Transnational epistemic communities and transnational governance*: Transnational scientific networks and interest groups play an important role in the production, justification, and critique of conflict and violence, as well as in preventing and countering such phenomena. Research in this area analyzes interpersonal relations in transnational civil society networks across diverse conflict parties, as well as practices of civil society networks in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Two Research Groups are hosted by RD III. The research group "Radicalization" investigates the causes and dynamics of radicalization processes, their effects on societies, as well as the strategies societies employ to cope with the challenges linked to radicalization. The research group "Terrorism" analyzes transnational discourses and ideas of order beyond the state, investigates (the effects of) transnationally organized practices and networks of terrorism and counterterrorism, with a focus on Jihadist groups.

In the future, RD III plans to address other transnational challenges to international and societal peace. In the nearer term, the RD plans to analyze the effects of transnational migration on religious pluralism and ensuing conflicts in receiving countries. In the long run, RD III intends to explore the repercussions of climate change, its governance and transnational mitigation and adaptation practices for peace and conflict, as well as the impact of transnational economic conflicts and inequality.



## 2.4 Research Department IV: Intrastate Conflict

Research Department IV examines peace and conflict at the intrastate level. Within the architecture of PRIF's Research Departments, RD IV is the department that studies how the organization, transformation, and exercise of political rule shapes the violent escalation or peaceful management of intrastate conflicts. This includes a focus on societal challenges to political rule as well as in external influences on intrastate conflict and political regimes. RD IV combines in-depth area expertise with an interest in global patterns and theory development. The overall aim is to identify the conditions for and possible ways of peacefully managing intrastate conflict.

Most armed conflicts, incidents of organized violence, and mass protests take place at the level of the nation-state and/or are related to the ways in which political regimes are organized and exercise political rule. Generally, the characteristics of states and political regimes are considered crucial when it comes to explaining patterns of political violence, the escalation of intrastate conflict, or the establishment and maintenance of intrastate peace. States and political regimes, however, must be understood as being embedded in societies as well as in international structures and processes. Hence, RD IV's research pays particular attention to state-society relations and to external interventions in domestic politics.

RD IV's main research topics fall into three broad areas:

1. *Causes, dynamics, and resolution of armed intrastate conflict*: RD IV's research in this area investigates the outbreak of civil wars, the durability of peace agreements, as well as challenges to post-conflict peacebuilding. The focus, here, is on the politics, e.g., regarding the management of ethnic power relations or the conflict-ridden political dynamics in war-to-peace transitions.
2. *Challenges to societal peace below the level of armed conflict*: In this area, RD IV studies the dynamics and causes of political violence, conflicts over political order, and contentious politics. Key themes are the interplay between repression and resistance, as well as social justice. Empirically, the focus is on intrastate violence against civilians (e.g., police violence, violence against civil society activists, repression) as well as on conflict-ridden political transformation processes.
3. *External interventions in intrastate conflicts*: Here, RD IV researches two important ways in which external actors intervene in nonviolent and violent intrastate conflicts, these being: international democracy promotion and humanitarian military interventions. In respect of the former, the focus is on contemporary challenges to, and the corresponding adaptations of, democracy promotion policies. Regarding the latter, RD IV studies the effects and conditions of interventions that explicitly aim at reducing physical harm to civilians.

Bringing together research on these three topics, RD IV aims, in particular, at generating new insights into the role of (changing) political regimes in intrastate peace and conflict by going beyond simple dichotomies (democracy versus autocracy) and systematically addressing states' societal and international embeddedness. Looking ahead, the department strives to better leverage its diverse methodological expertise in projects with multi-method designs and to increase international collaboration, in particular with partners from the Global South.

In terms of further developing its research agenda, RD IV aims at more systematic incorporation of the ways in which climate change and adaptation, as well as the ongoing transfor-

mation of the global order, are impacting intrastate conflict and political regimes. Focusing on the latter, RD IV has set up the research group “Regime Competition”. This group brings together PRIF research and expertise to study how political actors deal with the diversity of political regimes in an increasingly multipolar world and how this affects conflict dynamics and political orders at the global, regional, and national level. The group also benefits from PRIF’s participation in the research network External Democracy Promotion (EDP), which brings together around 20 scholars, from Germany and other European countries, who study the international policies and politics of democracy promotion. At the international level, RD IV is involved in the German-Colombian Peace Institute (Instituto CAPAZ), based in Bogotá.

## 2.5 Research Department V: Glocal Junctions

Research Department V focuses on analyzing the fault lines and frictions that emanate from political globalization processes, and studies pertinent conflict situations, observed from the perspective of local lifeworlds.

Today’s world is marked by increasingly entangled lifeworlds, knowledge stocks, discourses, and actors, across local, regional, and global spaces. With these entanglements come fragmentations, junctures, and disjunctures, which markedly shape political conflicts and their eventual transformation. The growing complexity makes it necessary to address the coproduction of conflict constellations on different scales as well as the ways in which they interact with each other and could be addressed to foster peace. While Research Departments I–IV obviously also study entangled conflicts of and in the globalized world, RD V prioritizes the analytical lens of the local everyday to understand how meaning is constituted and safeguarded under current world conditions. Rather than limiting us to small-scale research, this methodological approach is derived from the epistemic role of everyday experiences to inform political action, and finally aims to disentangle larger societal conflict figurations using the results of empirically grounded knowledge.

Research in this department addresses three overarching fields, in particular:

1. *Political subjectification and conflict in glocal everyday life*: Political subjectification is shaped in and through social conflict experienced in everyday life. However, these conflicts are anything but local, they are rooted in processes of globalization, urbanization and commodification of spaces, transnational migration, regional economic dependencies, as well as the circulation of localized political ideas influence the ways in which individuals and social groups perceive their possibilities for political agency, security and peace. Research in this field reconstructs the multiple ways in which a wide range of actors, with their specific positions and practices, responds to this set of forces by applying multisite in-depth research, with the aim of understanding the conditions for (social) peace.
2. *Glocally entangled memory culture politics*: Globalized discourses and representations of genocide and the role they play in local-level memory practices and reconciliation politics, as well as in foreign relations, are an example of glocally entangled memory culture politics. The issue has gained momentum in the course of postcolonialism: critical postcolonial studies disseminated global conceptions of the violence of colonial intrusion, the transformations it produced, and their long-term effects. In this vein, RD V studies the interplay of political and legal arenas, foregrounding questions around the current implications of the violence of the past.

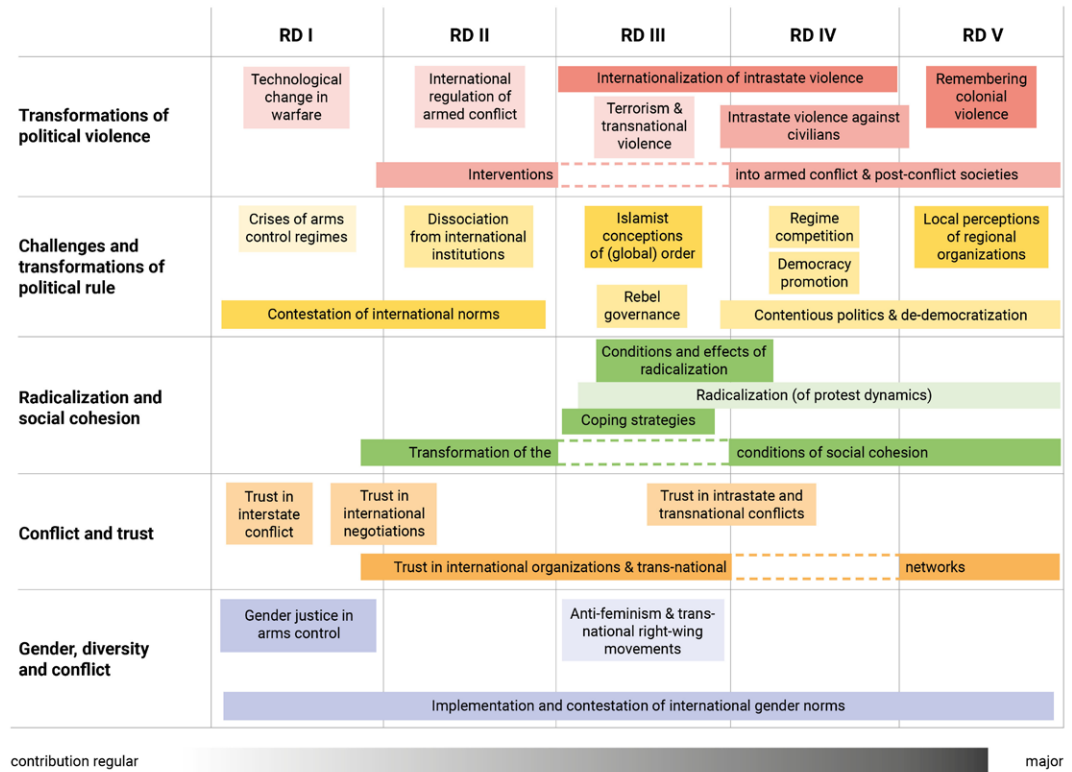
3. *Local figurations of international politics*: International politics assume distinct shapes in varying social arenas. There is no uniform effect of, for example, the political decision to reduce global carbon emissions or the enforcement of international political norms, instead there is a whole host of subjective types of involvement, individual as well as collective, from among different stakeholders on different scales. Aiming to understand the conflict lines that emerge from international politics in the fields affected, RD V conducts intensive qualitative research that examines the repercussions of politics with a global impact for local arenas.

RD V hosts the research group “African Intervention Politics”, which is part of the third research field. The projects in this group study peace and security-related activities conducted by African regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the African Union (AU) from a bottom-up perspective that focuses on the politics of the interventions in question.

In the future, RD V plans to broaden its ongoing research by following processes of social polarization in the context of the continuing socio-ecological transformation. In order to extend the coproduction of knowledge with partners from the Global South, collaborative research will explicitly explore to what extent colonial hierarchies continue to shape research practices and outcomes and how such historical legacies can be overcome. In terms of its conceptual contributions to PRIF’s program, RD V aims, in particular, to showcase the value of grounded research based on practice theory.

### 3. CROSS-CUTTING RESEARCH AREAS

In addition to the topics and research areas that are continuously addressed by PRIF and the individual Research Departments (outlined in Section 2), research at PRIF also responds to ongoing political developments and academic debates by addressing questions and themes in the context of cross-cutting research areas. Besides tackling issues that have been identified as particularly topical, these cross-cutting research areas also serve to integrate research across PRIF’s individual Research Departments and to further collaboration with academic partners at the local, regional, national, and international level. These research areas do not constitute an additional set of organizational units and are quite diverse in terms of their degree and forms of coordination. Some of the following research areas are embedded in broader, third-party funded collaborative projects and, therefore, have their own institutional structure. Others, bring researchers, research projects, and research findings at PRIF together in a more flexible and ad hoc manner by using the institute’s established bodies and formats (such as the Research Groups, the meetings of the Research Council, the PRIF Colloquium or the institute’s annual conferences).



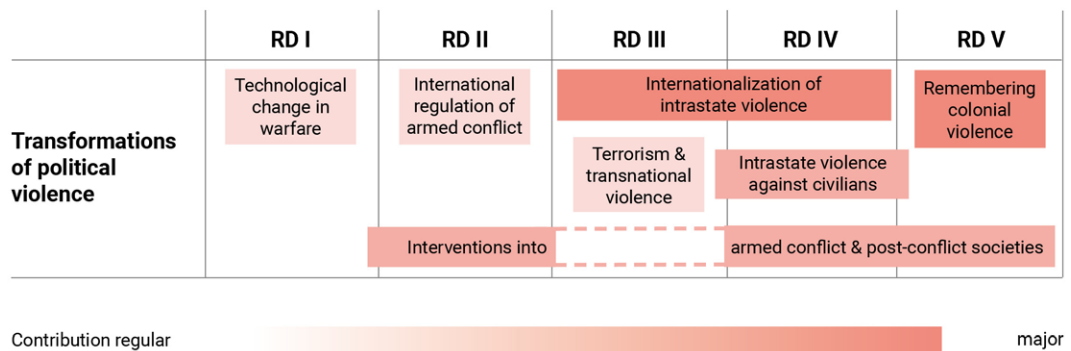
### 3.1 Transformations of political violence

In contrast to the widespread optimism of the early 1990s, current trends and debates do not suggest that the world is moving toward overcoming political violence. Since around the turn of the century, violent conflicts have increased in intensity, while globalization and technological change are enabling new forms of state and non-state violence. Overall, current developments point to transformations that challenge existing norms and practices of containing political violence.

The research conducted by PRIF examines these developments with the aim of identifying their consequences for intra-societal and international peace and developing strategies to contain political violence in these changing conditions. In organizational terms, this research is conducted primarily in the context of the regional research center “Transformations of Political Violence” (TraCe), which involves PRIF (as the central coordinator and research institution) as well as four Hessian universities (Goethe University Frankfurt, Justus Liebig University Giessen, Philipps-Universität Marburg, and the Technical University of Darmstadt). In line with the structure of TraCe, research at PRIF focuses on three thematic areas: (1) Forms of Change and Continuity of Political Violence; (2) Institutions for Prevention and Legitimization of Political Violence; and (3) Interpretations and Commemoration of Political Violence.

In terms of research topics, this cross-cutting research area brings together PRIF research on various types of political violence. With regard to armed conflict, this concerns studies on current trends in warfare, including a focus on changes in military technology, as well as on the causes and forms of military force (RD I); the institutionalization and legal regulation of armed law of war, e.g., in international humanitarian law (RD II); and the internationalization of intrastate violence (RD II, III, IV). Regarding the last of these three issues, we also

analyze international interventions (peacebuilding operations, so-called humanitarian military interventions, and counterterrorism interventions) that respond to intrastate violence but also use violent means themselves (RD I, II, III, IV, V). Transformations of violence are also analyzed with a focus on transnational actors, including terrorist groups, as well as states that use violence against civilians (RD III, IV). When it comes to the interpretations of violence, one area of focus at PRIF is on the ways in which past instances of violence (here: use and testing of nuclear weapons, colonial genocides) are remembered and addressed (RD I, V). These diverse research activities are brought together and coordinated through the institutional structure of TraCe as well as the different collaborative formats established in this context (e.g., TraCe research colloquia, workshops, and annual conferences).



### 3.2 Challenges and transformations of political rule

The ways in which political rule is organized at the global, regional, and national level are currently facing a series of challenges and transformations. In both the academic and the political sphere, observers have drawn attention to a crisis of the liberal world order as well as of individual international organizations such as the UN at the global or the EU at the regional level. Simultaneously, the scholarship on democratic backsliding or autocratization implies serious challenges to and transformations of the political order at the national level. Given the key role played by both international institutions and state-level political regimes in the violent escalation or peaceful management of conflict, these trends are of immediate relevance for peace and conflict studies.

The overarching theme that unites PRIF research in this area is the ongoing transition to a pluralistic, multipolar, and possibly post-liberal world order. In this context, norm contestation at all levels is both omnipresent and arguably a key driver of political change. Drawing on studies conducted in the context of the institute's research programs on the "Antinomies of Democratic Peace", "Just Peace Governance", and "Coercion and Peace", our research analyzes the legitimation and contestation of, as well as change in political orders at the global, regional, national, and subnational level. This focus includes the international dimension of political transformations at the national level, e.g., in the form of military and nonmilitary international interventions.

In terms of topics, research throughout the Research Departments addresses the contestation of international norms and its consequences for both international institutions and the political order at the state level, with emphasis being placed on the crises of arms control regimes, liberal intervention norms, and international gender norms (RD I), the dissociation from international institutions (RD II), Islamist conceptions of (global) order (RD III), the dynamics of regime competition and challenges to international democracy promotion (RD

IV), as well as local perceptions of regional organizations and their intervention practices (RD V). In addition, research on contentious politics, shrinking civic spaces, and de-democratization (RD IV and V), as well as on rebel governance (RD III) addresses the challenges to and transformations of political rule within states. In addition to established formats at PRIF (such as the PRIF Colloquium), the Research Groups “Regime Competition” and “African Intervention Politics” facilitate exchange between these different lines of research and help create synergies.

	RD I	RD II	RD III	RD IV	RD V
<b>Challenges and transformations of political rule</b>	Crises of arms control regimes	Dissociation from international institutions	Islamist conceptions of (global) order	Regime competition	Local perceptions of regional organizations
			Rebel governance	Democracy promotion	
	Contestation of international norms			Contentious politics & de-democratization	

Contribution regular

major

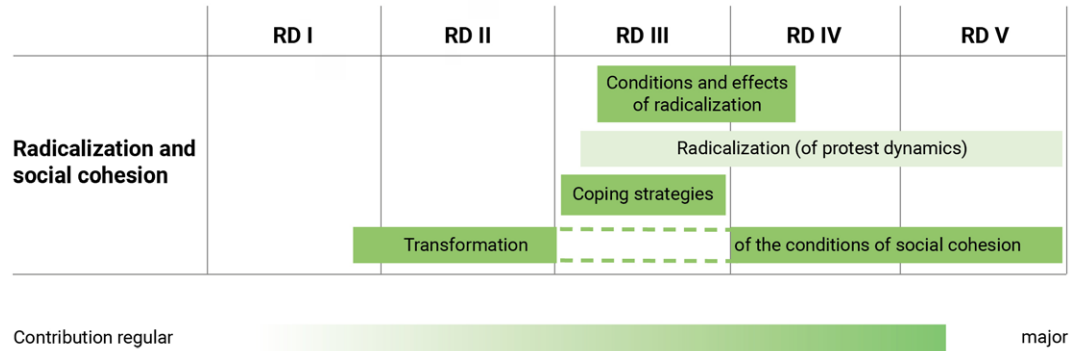
### 3.3 Radicalization and social cohesion

In recent years, the dynamics of radicalization and polarization in society have received increasing attention, both in academic debates and in the political realm. Three interrelated processes have triggered this. First, the years since 9/11 have seen new dynamics of violent terrorist attacks and changes in security policy; the involvement of foreign fighters in the causes and atrocities of the Islamic State in the 2010s; and the rise of far-right political violence. Second, the confluence of crises discourses from the new millennium onward (financial and sovereign debt crisis, migration, COVID-19, environmental change, the war in Ukraine, as well as the energy crisis) has given rise to debates on the polarization of society and threats to democracy. Third, technological transformations, such as communication on social platforms, are profoundly changing the ways in which information is distributed, news is consumed, and individuals and groups mobilize and radicalize. The desire to understand and explain these processes is the driving force behind an increasingly dense network of researchers and research projects at PRIF.

In terms of research topics, we investigate the causes and dynamics of radicalization and mobilization processes as well as their interlinkages with societal dynamics. These interlinkages include the social conditions for and effects of radicalization on wider social dynamics – as well as the role that social media play in these interlinkages (RD III); the transformation of the conditions of social cohesion in the moderate political center of societies (RD II and V); the protest dynamics that challenge established categories and blur the boundaries between legitimate forms of protest and threats to democracy (RD III, IV and V); as well as the strategies employed by state and civil-society actors to prevent and counter extremism (RD III).

This cross-cutting research area bundles a variety of different initiatives, ranging from Research Groups and individual research projects to smaller formats such as the organization of conferences and the transfer of knowledge to the political sphere and civil society. These activities are jointly coordinated by the Research Groups “Radicalization” and “Terrorism”, which work closely with various projects on religious and political radicalization

and violence conducted throughout the institute, in particular in RD V. The two Research Groups also have joint formats to exchange the knowledge produced in this area. Research in this area also benefits from PRIF’s involvement in the many initiatives of the Research Institute Social Cohesion, a multidisciplinary network of more than 100 researchers operating throughout Germany, which is funded by the federal government.



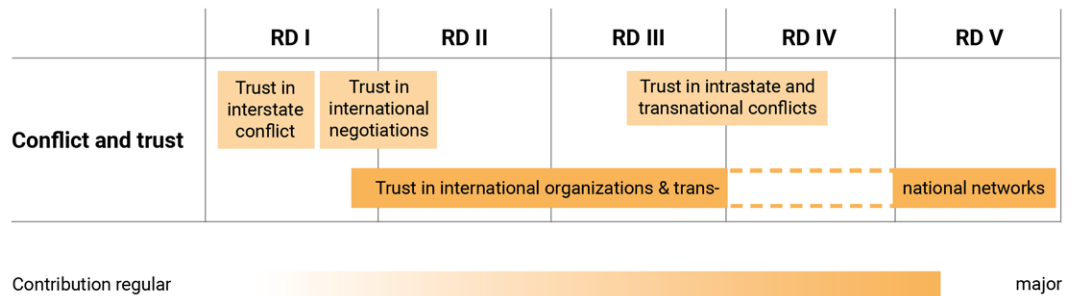
### 3.4 Conflict and trust

Trust is generally considered a crucial element of peaceful social relations. Trust is seen as providing individuals and societies with the certainty that disputes will not escalate, that the respective counterpart will abide by rules, that institutions will safeguard against transgressions, and that the social world as a whole will remain stable. This makes the question of how and under what conditions trust is being formed and sustained a crucial question for peace and conflict studies. It becomes particularly pressing in times when trust is said to be eroding almost across the board: from trust between states in international relations to trust in political institutions at the nation-state level to trust between social groups and individuals at the societal level.

In the joint interdisciplinary research initiative “ConTrust: Trust in Conflict – Political Life under Conditions of Uncertainty”, which is currently funded by the state of Hesse, Goethe University Frankfurt and PRIF have set out to study the relationship between trust and conflict. The specific focus is on the ways in which trust is built in and through conflict. In line with an important tradition in sociological conflict theory (Lewis Coser, Georg Simmel), the aim is to empirically study and theoretically capture the ways in and the conditions under which conflict has positive effects on trust. The empirical research conducted at PRIF in this context focuses on the trust–conflict nexus in international security policy, international organizations, civil wars, contentious politics, and transnational political networks.

Research topics range from the role of trust in “classic” security-related conflicts (war, interstate violence) and their resolution (pacification, negotiation, legalization, disarmament) (RD I, II), to trust during intrastate and transnational conflicts (RD III, IV), to the role of trust – and betrayal – in international organizations and transnational networks (RD II, III, V). Here, PRIF thus adopts one theoretical approach to address a range of different topics, all of which aim to tackle a common research puzzle. In addition to the coordination within the broader ConTrust initiative, trust-related research at PRIF is brought together both in established formats (e.g., PRIF Colloquium) and the more specific “ConTrust lunch sessions”. As will be discussed below (Section 4.3), PRIF pursues the strategic mid-term objective to significantly expand collaborative research in this area by applying – jointly with Goethe

University – for a Cluster of Excellence in the context of the German government’s Excellence Strategy.



### 3.5 Gender, diversity, and conflict

Gender research provides important findings for peace and conflict relations. According to quantitative studies, societies tend to be more peaceful if a variety of gender roles and identities are socially acknowledged. With an increasing number of states designing a feminist foreign policy, the cross-cutting research area “Gender, diversity, and conflict” is also increasingly relevant for policymaking and its findings are valuable for the provision of policy advice. Feminist peace research at PRIF is understood as intersectional and diverse. In addition to the category of gender as a social construction, the focus also incorporates other identity categories, such as ethnicity, race, age, and sexual orientation, and the multi-dimensional power relations that constitute them.

Current research at PRIF in this area looks at the role of gender before, during, and after wars and violent conflicts, taking postcolonial and anticolonial perspectives into account. It seeks to understand how violence during war and conflict relate to and possibly change gender roles and identities. For example, in situations of war and conflict, women may become agents, certain forms of masculinity may be sought, and LGBTIQ may become victims. Our research also looks at global gender norms, such as in the context of the UN Security Council’s “Women, Peace, Security” (WPS) agenda, and at the processes and challenges of implementing these norms at the national level (RD I). Across the Research Departments, PRIF’s research on WPS has benefited from collaboration with several visiting researchers with unique perspectives and country expertise, such as on Ukraine, China, Kosovo, and Kenya. In arms control, the issue of gender justice in existing and emerging norms is also an important research topic (RD I, Research Group “Public International Law” in RD II). However, such gender-related norms cannot be taken for granted. This is emphasized by the various forms of antifeminism and “gender backlash” that aim to systematically question and revise gender-sensitive human rights. Such dynamics are, for instance, analyzed in the context of peacebuilding (RD I) as well as with a focus on antifeminism and transnational right-wing movements (Research Group “Radicalization” in RD III).

At PRIF, gender, diversity, and conflict is a relatively new cross-cutting research area and not yet a full-fledged program. In order to further communication and expand research on this important topic, a group of interested researchers holds regular meetings on gender-related aspects. The Feminist Peace Research blog series (on the PRIF Blog), which discusses gender- and diversity-related issues in the thematic fields of foreign and security policy, peacebuilding, human rights, displacement, and migration, also makes the feminist perspectives studied by PRIF visible to the broader public. In further developing



these cross-cutting areas, PRIF aims at more fully including intersectional and postcolonial approaches in order to illuminate the interlinked production of different identity categories and associated power relations. In addition, further research is planned that will concentrate on the role of essentialized gender identities, masculinities and forms of violence, radicalization, and terrorism.

	RD I	RD II	RD III	RD IV	RD V
<b>Gender, diversity and conflict</b>	Gender justice in arms control		Anti-feminism & transnational right-wing movements		
	Implementation and contestation of international gender norms				

Contribution regular



major

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