

Grief, unity, and resilience: Study examines the impact of memorial days in Israel

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A recent study at the Hebrew University examines the impact of

memorial days in Israel on national unity amidst political polarization.

The study led by Dr. Tamar Gur and team, under the guidance of Professor Eran Halperin from the Psychology Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, delves into the profound impact of memorial days on societal [cohesion](#) amidst rising affective polarization. The study, [published](#) in *Political Psychology*, reveals significant insights into the unifying effects of Holocaust Memorial Day on Israeli society.

The association between memorial days and national unity has long been acknowledged. In poignant speeches delivered during these commemorations, there's a resounding call for unity, underscoring a common identity and shared commitment to the memory of a collective history.

Against the backdrop of contemporary polarization, characterized by growing divides among groups with identical national identities, the need to strengthen these bonds of common identity is paramount.

The study examined the effects of memorial days on [emotional responses](#) and their potential role in mitigating affective polarization. Affective polarization, defined as the tendency to harbor negative attitudes and hostility towards supporters of opposing [political ideologies](#), poses a grave threat to societal cohesion and functionality.

The research included extensive surveys, gauging their feelings and attitudes before, during, and after the day of remembrance. The results showed that the prevalent sadness associated with the day significantly decreases affective polarization, which often manifests as distrust or hostility towards those with differing political or ideological views.

"Memorial days serve as a reminder of our shared humanity and collective responsibility towards preserving the memory of our past,"

remarked lead researcher, Dr. Gur, who wrote the study as part of her Ph.D.

"Our findings underscore the pivotal role of sadness in temporarily reducing affective polarization and safeguarding societal cohesion."

Despite its limitations, this research holds far-reaching implications. Sadness, though often deemed an unpleasant emotion, offers substantial personal and group advantages in specific contexts.

Memorial days exemplify how national groups can harness the power of sadness to bolster cohesion and preserve group integrity.

This profound impact on societal cohesion underscores the importance of collective memory in healing national wounds and building a resilient community. It highlights how remembrance and shared grief can serve as powerful catalysts for social solidarity, promoting a more harmonious coexistence among various social groups.

More information: Tamar Gur et al, A group that grieves together stays together: Examining the impact of Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel on affective polarization, *Political Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/pops.12956](https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12956)

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