

The Cycle of Hate, and What We Can Do About It

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Abstract

Intergroup hate—both shaped by and shaping development processes—is spreading worldwide as hate speech becomes normalized, hate groups proliferate, and political discourse increasingly frames opponents as enemies rather than as partners in compromise. Drawing on historical, economic, political, and social-psychological research, this paper synthesizes 10 drivers of intergroup hate into four interlocking components: history, current context, call to arms, and justification of mistreatment. These components form a self-reinforcing cycle that escalates animosity and legitimizes harm, making hate difficult—but not impossible—to disrupt. The paper shows how the 10 drivers interact over

time and uses the cycle of hate framework to organize evidence from experiments and program evaluations aimed at reducing intergroup animosity. This evidence indicates that intergroup hate can be interrupted at multiple points through coordinated psychosocial, institutional, and economic interventions. By contrast, policies that neglect any of the four components—particularly elite and media mobilization—consistently underperform. Context sensitive, integrated, institutionally embedded strategies hold the greatest promise, including the potential to support inoculation and early-warning systems that detect and counter intergroup hate before it is politically mobilized.

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The Cycle of Hate, and What We Can Do About It

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Intergroup hate is pervasive and rapidly spreading. Hate speech, both online and offline, has become normalized, the number of hate groups has increased, acts of hate are more frequent and visible, and more leaders are rejecting common narratives of unity and turning to characterizations of their opponents as hateful (Kentmen-Cin, 2025; Negi, 2024; Saha et al., 2023).

The standard conceptual models of hate fail to capture the complex integration of factors that can explain hate's political ascendance. We synthesize a constellation of historical, political, and social-psychological factors that conjointly explain how intergroup hate is generated and maintained. Our explanatory model—the 10-Reason Cycle of Hate—brings together the dominant factors that contribute to intergroup hate and organizes them into four components. Vitaly, we show that the four components are mutually reinforcing, producing a cycle that tends toward escalation. We show how the 10 reasons bolster each other to fuel the Cycle of Hate, creating a feedback loop that can result in increasing prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, domination, violence, conflict, war and death. Once initiated, it is difficult, but we believe possible, to break. We conclude the paper by drawing on the Cycle of Hate analytic to organize and interpret the institutional and programmatic lessons emerging from recent experiments and evaluations that seek to bridge ingroup/outgroup identities and to mitigate hate. While each phase of the cycle contributes uniquely to the escalation of hate, the interventions reviewed show that this cycle can be interrupted at multiple points with a comprehensive strategy that includes social, institutional, and economic mechanisms that reinforce one another.

We harness a wide variety of evidence to show that intergroup divisions are not background conditions against which policy unfolds; they are part of the terrain on which development succeeds or fails. Ethnic, religious, caste, racial, and ideological boundaries shape how people interpret material change, how institutions are experienced, and how political authority is exercised. Programs that alter resources, opportunities, or representation inevitably intersect with these social cleavages, sometimes stabilizing relations across groups and sometimes sharpening them.

This paper starts from the premise that development action is never socially neutral. Material interventions, institutional reforms, and modes of engagement interact with local histories, identities, leadership incentives, and narratives of grievance in ways that can either constrain or amplify intergroup animosity. Whether a policy dampens tension or intensifies it depends not only on what it delivers, but on how its effects are distributed, perceived, and mobilized.

The relationship between material progress and intergroup hostility is therefore reciprocal. Collective animosity can undermine development by eroding trust, weakening institutions, and disrupting cooperation long before violence becomes visible. At the same time, processes

commonly associated with development—growth, structural transformation, redistribution, and state-building—can themselves activate or accelerate intergroup tensions when they generate uneven gains, symbolic losses, or perceived threats to status and identity. These dynamics are especially potent when economic or institutional change becomes legible through group-based comparisons rather than aggregate improvements.

Seen in this light, intergroup hate is not an external shock to development trajectories but a social process that can be entangled with them from the outset (Barron et al., 2025). Development efforts that overlook how economic change reshapes relationships between groups risk interacting with these processes in unintended ways, including reinforcing grievance and legitimizing exclusion. Understanding when and how this occurs requires moving beyond isolated drivers of prejudice or conflict toward a framework that captures how historical narratives, contemporary conditions, political mobilization, and moral justification become mutually reinforcing. The 10-Reason Cycle of Hate is offered as such a framework. It speaks directly to the ambitions of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which places peaceful, inclusive societies and effective institutions at the center of the global development agenda.

1. What Is Intergroup Hate?

Hate is often conceptualized as a heated emotion that arises naturally inside people, or as a thinking disorder grounded in rage (e.g., Gaylin, 2003; Sternberg, 2005). While these insights may capture important dimensions of hate, we suggest that hate is a much more complex – and distinctly social – phenomenon than what these models suggest. Hate results from the ways in which intergroup dynamics are embedded, learned, felt, and deployed in everyday life. It includes individual beliefs, attitudes, and actions that hurt others based on their group membership, as well as collective beliefs, actions, and norms, and systems, laws, and policies. It is, then, a product of factors that are human-made, human-fueled and human-mobilized (Esses et al., in press). Our approach thus aligns with recent conceptualizations of hate that include its affective, cognitive, and behavioral components, which consider both its extreme and more mundane forms, and which place importance on the role of intergroup dynamics (Sternberg, 2020). Thus, we propose that the following definition presents a more comprehensive understanding of hate:

Intergroup hate is animosity and mistreatment, or endorsement of mistreatment, of members of other groups that is seen as justified, necessary, and good.

We suggest that this definition is more robust than the narrower affective or cognitive distortion conceptualizations of hate. First, it foregrounds the diverse, intersecting, and everyday social

processes that create and sustain hate, in large measure by reifying a hard boundary between “us” and “them” and interpreting those differences as in conflict and competition. Second, it allows for the powerful role of leadership and the media in shaping how individuals think, feel, and act. Third, it integrates the vital role that justification plays in creating and sustaining intergroup hate.

Our conceptualization of intergroup hate as a complex social phenomenon that can only be fully understood holistically comes with methodological implications. The first methodological issue is that existing social science literature tends toward disciplinary silos. Psychologists often focus on the individual cognitive, emotional and motivational processes that create stereotypes, prejudice, and outgroup hate. In political science, researchers often study the mobilization of hate through propaganda by elites as well as how hate is expressed through outgroup violence (Kaufman, 2015). Sociologists examine the social processes underpinning recruitment into hate-based groups (Simi et al., 2024). Legal scholars focus on the “act” of hate, analyzing how to define hate speech and hate crimes to understand the application of the law (Sumner, 2004). In this context, hate is often defined by the documented motivation behind an action, such as hate speech. Economists have argued that when there is a market for hate, actors will fill it (Glaeser, 2005). Institutions, as well as the context of intergroup relations, can make hate more or less marketable. Recent experimental work in economics has focused on understanding the drivers of intergroup conflict and bridging relations across groups.

While each of these disciplinary insights is important, the mono-model of disciplinary inquiry is inadequate to the task of articulating and analyzing complex and multi-faceted phenomena like hate. For instance, discussions of hate as a hot emotion located in individual hearts and minds are disconnected from rational choice accounts of hate as a cold and calculated political tool used by elites, or from sociological accounts of how hate groups develop feelings of belonging among their members.

Our model integrates interdisciplinary social science insights. Arguably, disciplinary shifts in the kinds of evidentiary authority marshalled among the four components and the 10 steps demand more from our readers. Yet the result of our interdisciplinary approach is well worth the effort. We suggest it yields an integrative theoretical framework that is actionable and applicable to a broad, diverse set of cases, advancing what we know about the relationship between hate at the individual, social, and institutional levels and in so doing, creating a conceptual foundation for meaningful intervention: we want to move from theorization of hate to effectively addressing it.

2. The 10-Reason Cycle of Hate

There are 10 key reasons why members of one group may hate members of another group. We have arranged these reasons into a Cycle of Hate that includes four conceptually and empirically

grounded components: (a) History, (b) Current Context, (c) Call to Arms, and (d) Justification of Mistreatment (Figure 1). Together, these components comprise a self-reinforcing cycle, with each component bolstering the others. For example, our understanding of history influences how the current context is interpreted. A call to arms fostering an “us” and a “them” is most effective when the context and its historical location are “right,” while also reinforcing particular interpretations of the current context. Justifications of mistreatment are more easily accepted when history is weaponized and when leaders and media are serving to maintain and amplify hate. To bring us full circle, this typically results in the solidification of hate-filled histories, which in turn support the justification of mistreatment.

In the following section, we present the 10 reasons. Since our purpose here is only to introduce the 10-Reason Cycle of Hate, we leave for other occasions the detailed analysis of each reason. We cannot meaningfully address the important nuance of issues that crosscut some of or all the reasons, or the oscillating registers in which the reasons can appear. For present purposes, we constrain ourselves to identifying some of these important issues.

One important issue is that the Cycle occurs at various scales: micro, meso, and macro, e.g., Hamedani, M, et al, 2024). The examples we present (and the authorities that support them) frequently contemplate intergroup hate at the macro scale, but intergroup hate occurs also in micro and meso registers, and the Cycle applies to them just as fruitfully. Sometimes we have captured these distinctions expressly, for instance, having separated group history (Reason 1) from personal and family history (Reason 2). However, even where we have not built the fact of scales of application into a given component of the Cycle, the reasons can be operationalized at various scales. The Cycle also does not have a fixed or necessary starting point. Intergroup hate can begin at any component and the cycle can move in multiple directions.

Ten Reasons to Hate Others

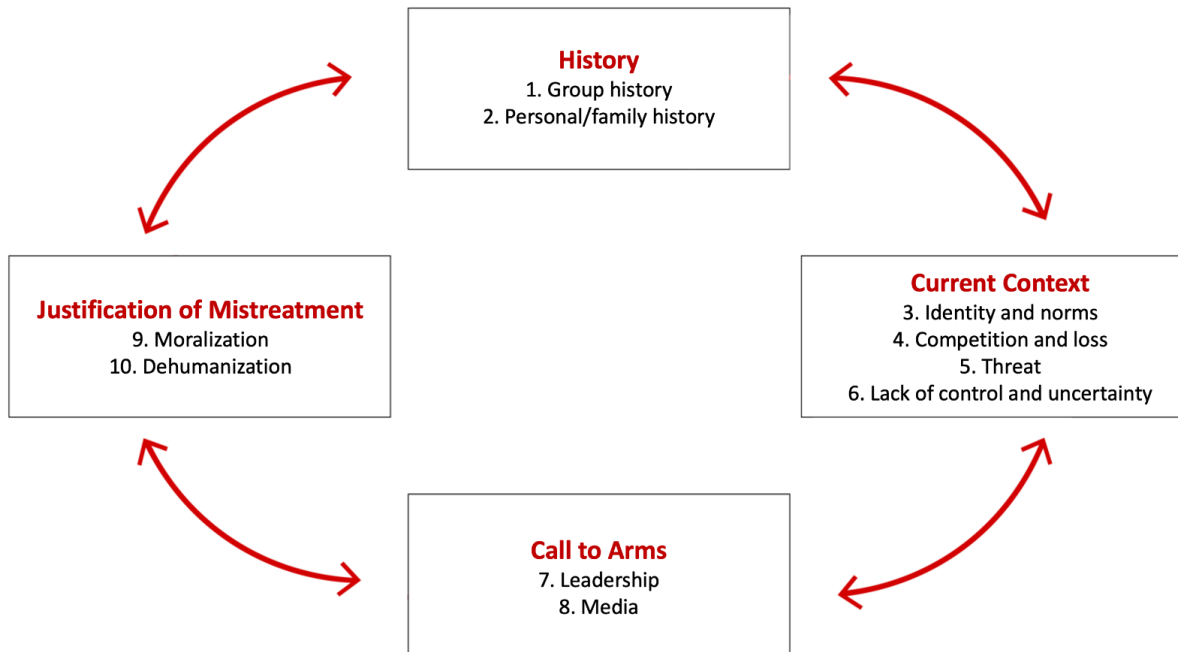


Figure 1: 10-Reason Cycle of Hate

A second key issue regards the paramount importance of local context. In presenting the Cycle as a general explanatory model of how intergroup hate is created and sustained, we mean for it to apply universally. However, we are keenly aware that the way it does so will vary widely across contexts and cultures, as well as across individuals. For instance, the discourse and practice of the call to arms vary widely between nations and even families. Similarly, some groups and some people are more or less prone to seeing the world as a competitive, zero-sum game (see, for example, Osborne et al., in press; Thomas & Markus, 2023). Likewise, the salience and forcefulness of history to the present is very much a function of contingent social forces.

A third consideration is the distinction between the power of perception and actual material conditions. With competition and loss (Reason 4), the experience of loss that serves as a basis for intergroup hate may be understood in terms of absolute material conditions, but often it consists in a sense of relative deprivation that hinges on perceptions or social constructions, rather than realities, of how other groups are faring. This reflects a related distinction between material power and symbolic power. Identity and Norms (Reason 3) relies heavily on symbolic power for its authority, as do many instances of threat (Reason 5). However, Lack of Control and Uncertainty (Reason 6) frequently hinges on the hard reality of material conditions.

A fourth consideration regards whether the forces marshalling intergroup hate are exercising power formally (as in executive, legislative, or judicial authorities) or informally (whether as governmentality or by informal actors, such as social media corporations or even individuals). The presence of the state is ubiquitous. While the state is not the moving force in every instance, all 10 reasons present frequent examples of state authority and state action.

2.1 History

We begin with **History**, an important component of the Cycle of Hate, with great potential to create and reinforce hate. History includes both group history—perceptions of how one’s group has interacted with others in the past—and personal history, including family stories. In both cases, socialization processes frame perceptions of, and prescribe behavior, including rules and norms, regarding one’s in-group and more critically, those seen as outgroup others. Indeed, history may be seen as the foundation on which hate is built, supporting and reinforcing the other components. Historical narratives often remind us of who to hate and why (Schori-Eyal et al., 2017).

Reason 1: Group History

Reason 1, group history, focuses attention on the shared beliefs, values, and understandings—the social representations—that groups hold about the world. They are organized around the social categories with which we identify and play a key role in shaping those identities and our sense of self (Elcheroth et al., 2011). These collective narratives help us make sense of where we come from, why we are here, and where we want to go (Sani et al., 2007). They also frequently highlight past grievances or conflicts (Hirschberger, 2018).

When a group’s narrative is rooted in collective victimhood—stemming from historical trauma or perceived social injustice—it significantly influences the group’s behavior. Such a framework justifies group actions, often fostering enduring hostility and distrust toward outgroups (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Shared narratives about other groups can appear to fade over time only to be re-triggered by contemporary divisive events. As an example, anti-Semitic pogroms in fourteenth century Germany are associated with anti-Semitic violence and Nazi support 600 years later (Voigtlander & Voth 2012). Greater slave-holding in regions of the Southern U.S. in the 1860s predicts White peoples’ antipathy toward Blacks in American counties today (Acharya et al., 2016). Narratives rooted in past victimhood can sustain a legacy that leads to diminished recognition of other groups’ suffering and increased intolerance and mistrust (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015), reinforcing both implicit and explicit norms of how “we” relate to “them.”

One critical institutional channel through which a legacy of hate is sustained is through socialization in schools (Brint, 2006). Textbooks that (re)frame histories, for example, to present

certain groups as aggressors or victims can have a lasting impact on how children understand group histories (Bradley, 2024). Studies have demonstrated how schools (and state institutions more broadly) reify ethnic identities and inculcate (different ideas of) national belonging (Darden & Gryzmala-Busse 2006). Pointing to the role of varying curricula, Lee (2023) shows how a Taiwanese curriculum reform that emphasized a less inclusive national identification prompted more exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants.

Reason 2: Personal/Family History

The larger historical context is critical in understanding intergroup hate, but many initial understandings and worldviews are shaped closer to home in Reason 2: personal/family history. Parents are a primary source of socialization and, in turn, transmitters of prejudicial attitudes (Rodríguez-García & Wagner, 2009). The socialization process emphasizes broad themes, such as ideal intergroup relations and the significance of group membership (Štambuk et al., 2020). Younger generations can adopt the beliefs of their parents by listening to their recollections of family history and observing parents' attitudes toward outgroups (Counihan et al., 2024). This process is key in shaping children's understanding of group identity and perceived victimhood, which negatively impacts their attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups (Taylor & McKeown, 2019).

Critically, however, children are not passive recipients of this process; they actively engage with what they hear and observe to make sense of their experiences (Reidy et al., 2015). A young person hearing an elder telling hateful jokes when the current context is providing different signals about appropriate social norms and behaviors may reject these hateful views. Social representations and collective narratives, then, help us interpret and navigate our circumstances, but for these interpretations to be meaningful, they must be relevant and salient in the current context.

2.2 Current Context

Group and personal/family histories are important in propelling the Cycle of Hate, but the **Current Context** provides specific meaning and direction. People often seek to understand their current difficulties and frustrations in relation to other groups, and in the process, they often activate and mobilize four interrelated reasons for outgroup hostilities: identities and norms, feelings of competition and loss, threat, and lack of control and uncertainty.

Reason 3: Identity and Norms

Identities and norms comprise Reason 3 in the Cycle of Hate. Identities derive in part from our collective and personal histories, but in the current context, they tell us who we are, what is good

and bad, and what has meaning and importance; they orient us in “moral space” (Taylor, 1989). These identities guide how we think, feel, and act and are associated with norms—shared expectations about appropriate behavior (Gelfand, 2019)—importantly including how to behave toward ingroups and outgroups. They are central to our attitudes toward and treatment of members of other groups, defining the groups we value, respect, and treat well and those whom we can “rightly” mistreat.

Identities are an ongoing dynamic of how we view ourselves (claimed identities) and how others view us (imposed identities). While for many, racial and ethnic identities are positive sources of belonging, meaning, and motivation, it is also the case that identities imposed by others, especially among minoritized communities, contain pejorative and negative stereotypes, with consequences for individual motivation and performance (Maalouf, 1996; Steele, 2010) as well as for health, wealth, and the quality of one’s schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces (Massey & Denton, 1996; Ridgeway & Markus, 2022). Abundant research demonstrates that protecting our ingroup identities can often, sometimes inadvertently, lead to norms of mistreatment of those seen to threaten our own identities (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). Of course, strong ingroup identity and ingroup love do not have to mean outgroup hate (Brewer, 1999). Yet when one’s group identity is set against an outgroup’s, they often go hand in hand. Threats to the very existence of groups with which we identify lead to an increased desire to engage in ingroup strengthening behaviors, to the exclusion of outgroups (Wohl et al., 2010).

Reason 4: Competition and Loss

Competition and loss, one of the most common and compelling reasons to hate, is Reason 4. Groups often compete for resources, and when people perceive these resources as limited or scarce, hate can arise or increase. Competition can involve a struggle over tangible resources, such as money and jobs, or more symbolic issues, such as cultural dominance and the desire for a positive and distinct group identity. Although the perception of either type of competition can initiate a variety of reactions, research has found that the two types of competition often work in tandem (Esses et al., 2010). The perception of struggle over symbolic issues can lead to competition over material resources and vice versa. Similarly, this competition can be understood not just in terms of relative gains but also perceptions that one’s group is falling behind (Cramer, 2016).

The sense of relative deprivation—a judgment that one or one’s ingroup is disadvantaged compared to a relevant outgroup—is part of this process (Pettigrew, 2016). Relative deprivation theory has played a critical role in explaining people’s frustrations with their subjective understanding of their social, cultural, historical, and economic positions in the world (Power et al., 2020). Critically, their group’s disadvantageous position is seen as unjust, leading those experiencing relative deprivation to blame others for their perceived disadvantage. Likewise, a

sense of relative gratification—the perception of being better off than others—can also contribute to negative outgroup attitudes because despite their advantaged position, people can feel that their higher status is threatened or insecure, prompting fear and hostility toward those they see as endangering their status (Mols & Jetten, 2017).

Reason 5: Threat

While perceptions of competition in the current context play a critical role in sparking tensions between groups, threat, Reason 5 in the Cycle of Hate, is equally damaging for group relations and often co-occurs with competition and loss. Intergroup threat may include both realistic threats like those to life, security, or resources or more symbolic threats to values, culture, ideology, and identity (Martínez et al., 2022; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Both realistic and symbolic threats may be products of history and lead to intergroup hate. For example, anti-Indigenous bias in the United States, rooted in settler colonialism, has included both realistic threat, leading to attempts to eradicate Indigenous people, as well as symbolic threat, leading to attempts to erase Indigenous culture (Chamberlin & Fryberg, in press).

At times, symbolic threats are stronger predictors of intergroup hate than are realistic threats (Martínez et al., 2022). Symbolic threats challenge core beliefs and identities central to a group's self-concept and worldview. These threats go beyond group interests, striking at the essence of “who we are” and making them especially powerful in provoking hostility.

Reason 6: Lack of Control and Uncertainty

When the world seems to be changing in ways that seem frightening, perceptions of competition, loss, and threat are often accompanied by Reason 6 in the Cycle of Hate: feeling a lack of control and uncertainty. When individuals feel a lack of personal control, they may respond by emphasizing their membership in a relevant social category to reestablish control (Fritsche et al., 2013). This group identification can boost well-being by improving the perception of having control over one's life (Greenaway et al., 2015) but also harbors the potential to increase ethnocentric tendencies and, at times, outgroup derogation (Fritsche et al., 2013).

Heightened uncertainty, often found in difficult life conditions, can also drive individuals to seek groups that are rigidly structured and have closed boundaries. According to a review by Hogg (2021), membership in some groups is especially useful in reducing uncertainty, particularly groups with well-defined, prescriptive identities that are relatively clear and widely agreed upon. A heightened group identity can minimize feelings of uncertainty and lack of control, boosting well-being and fostering ingroup cohesion (Fritsche et al., 2013; Fritsche et al., 2011). At the same time when people restore control through group identities, they often seek strong leaders, a clear hierarchy, tighter norms, more stability and strong ingroup/outgroup boundaries. One result

can be ingroups that close ranks, resulting in more prejudice and outgroup derogation (Hogg, 2007; Kay & Jost, 2003). In some cases, this means that uncertainty can lead people to embrace extreme and radical actions aimed at eliminating threats to the group and preserving its boundaries (Choi & Hogg, 2020). It can also be accompanied by conspiracy theories and narratives of victimhood, and a desire for leaders who show populist, autocratic, and toxic tendencies (Hogg, 2021). This interplay underscores how hate can manifest as a defensive reaction that may then be mobilized for power and gain.

2.3 Call to Arms

History and the current context can be used by the powerful to promote particular interpretations to engage and enrage individuals so that the Cycle of Hate is mutually reinforced and propagated—in a **Call to Arms**. Although the collective force of a group can be mobilized to benefit society, it can also be unleashed in destructive ways (Reicher et al., 2019). In this component of the Cycle of Hate, we focus on two factors that can mobilize intergroup hate: leadership and media.

Reason 7: Leadership

Leaders often propel the Cycle of Hate. In particular, they can spark the initial Call to Arms, influencing how people make sense of their experiences. Leaders may promote outgroup hostility, often weaponizing history, to gain more authority and influence over the ingroup. According to Reicher (2012), there are at least four ways for leaders to stoke hate and diminish the outgroup to gain authority and influence: (a) present an outside threat to prove that the leader is there to protect the ingroup's interests; (b) accuse their rivals of not protecting the ingroup, thus undermining the opposition's ability to lead; (c) demand unity to demobilize potential movements against their authority; and (d) establish and enforce group norms, values, and goals to create a sense of unity among the ingroup members through shared opposition to an outgroup. Leaders who mobilize hostility toward outgroups can cause significant harm, including increased societal polarization, erosion of democratic norms, and justification of discrimination (Elchereth & Reicher, 2017).

The mobilization of group divisions by political elites is not inevitable, of course, but depends on strategic incentives. For example, Posner (2004) compares the Chewa–Tumbuka relationship across the border between Malawi and Zambia, showing that while the cultural differences between the groups are identical, they become politically salient only in Malawi, where both groups are large enough to serve as viable political constituencies. In Zambia, where the same groups are numerically smaller relative to the national political landscape, these cleavages remain politically irrelevant. When leaders are incentivized to promote hatred, myriad evidence suggests they are successful. For example, exclusionary political rallies have been found to

increase the probability that a Black driver is stopped by police officers (Grosjean et al., 2023). The exclusionary rhetoric of political elites can increase anti-immigrant sentiment in the aftermath of an influx of immigration (Alrababa'h et al., 2024), and shift social norms in the direction of xenophobic behavior (Bursztyn et al., 2020).

Reason 8: Media

Media—Reason 8—can add fuel to the fire, further amplifying leaders' messages by broadcasting their speeches, associating outgroups with negative content, and circulating hateful messages to those most likely to accept them. The media, whether reporting on leaders' actions or in structuring the flow of information more generally, serves as a window to the world, shaping people's understanding of sociopolitical issues, especially where they lack direct experience.

Media coverage of events and groups can thus influence public perception and incite hostility between groups, contributing to intergroup conflict (Müller & Schwarz, 2023). Studies show that negative media messages — such as portraying immigrants as enemies or Black people as criminals — significantly influence how majority group members perceive minority groups (Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Esses et al., 2013). Other research documents how hateful propaganda in radio, film and television, can promote intergroup hate (Ahmed et al., 2025; Ang, 2023; Esposito et al., 2023) and genocidal violence (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014) and breed support for fascism and genocidal parties (Adena et al., 2015; Wang, 2021).

Emotionally and morally charged content—whether in leaders' messages or in the frames the media employs—can shape antisocial norms while also grabbing attention and spreading quickly on social media (Brady et al., 2020). Content that evokes strong emotions is more likely to attract attention (Yiend, 2010) and to be shared (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Moreover, this is particularly true for moralized (Brady et al., 2017) and negative messages (Kohout et al., 2023).

2.4 Justification of Mistreatment

History, Current Context, and a Call to Arms provide the foundations for the fourth mutually constituting and reinforcing component in the Cycle of Hate: the **Justification of Mistreatment**. When we define intergroup hatred as animosity and mistreatment, or endorsement of mistreatment, of members of other groups that are seen as justified, necessary, and good, we need to define what “justified, necessary, and good” mean. This is captured by the final two reasons: moralization and dehumanization. We hate because we are right in our beliefs, while “they” do not deserve our empathy. These justifications may both result from the Call to Arms and feed into it, resulting in mutual reinforcement.

Reason 9: Moralization

The moralization of hate, Reason 9, has a key function in the justification of mistreatment, since framing hostility as a defense of moral values can validate discrimination, dehumanization, and lead the way to hate. Violence and extreme behavior are often intrinsically linked to moral values, perceptions of moral violations, and feelings of moral obligation. A substantial body of research supports this hypothesis, demonstrating that extreme actions are often morally motivated so that harming others is seen as the right thing to do (Fiske & Rai, 2014).

Moralization fuels—and is used to justify—hostility and mistreatment of others. Individuals may come to perceive harmful behaviors as necessary mechanisms to regulate social relations, with outgroups blamed for perceived moral transgressions (Fiske & Rai, 2014). This moralization not only justifies the mistreatment of other groups but is a strategy that leaders often use in their call to arms.

Reason 10: Dehumanization

Diminished empathy and justified hostility can lead to Reason 10 in the Cycle of Hate: dehumanization. This process desensitizes people to the plight of others and works to deny their humanness, whether by portraying them as animals or as objects (Goff et al., 2008; Haslam & Landry, in press). Dehumanization plays a crucial role in reducing the moral and emotional barriers to mistreatment, making it easier for individuals to endorse or participate in harmful actions against those deemed morally reprehensible.

An extensive body of research has shown how advantaged groups often dehumanize disadvantaged groups to legitimize the power structure. For example, in terms of animalistic dehumanization, immigrants and refugees may be described in dehumanizing language, as swarms and parasites who carry disease and will overwhelm the receiving country (Esses et al., 2021). They can be cast as objects as when Asian Americans are portrayed as machines who do not experience emotions (Huo et al., in press). In both cases, dehumanization allows and justifies the mistreatment of these groups; after all, they are not quite human and thus they do not deserve human treatment. When this occurs, the scope of justice narrows and only certain groups of people are seen as deserving of considerations of justice and fair treatment (Opatow, 2022). For those outside our scope of justice, we have no moral obligation to support their well-being. Such moral distancing facilitates neglect, as well as acts of violence and discrimination without guilt (Belavadi et al., 2020).

The process of dehumanization is pivotal in eroding empathy and moral barriers, making it easier to justify harmful actions against outgroups and oppose corrective measures. Ultimately, these dynamics reinforce the Cycle of Hate, leading to the normalization and justification of

discriminatory policies, embedding mistreatment into our legal systems, and becoming a part of our histories and cultural structures.

3. Breaking the Cycle of Hate: A Review of Promising Interventions

Across diverse societies, policy makers face the challenge of governing populations marked by ethnic, religious, caste, and ideological divisions. Intergroup prejudice and animosity, when left unaddressed, threaten not only social cohesion but also economic performance, democratic stability, and human security. As demographic change, migration, and polarization continue to reshape societies, the imperative to reduce intergroup hate grows more urgent. Our Cycle of Hate points to key intervention points where we believe that the cycle can be interrupted.

Using a wide array of theories and methods, research provides evidence that intergroup hate is not inevitable and that durable intergroup tolerance can be built. At this stage of theoretical and empirical synthesis, we propose that just as meteorologists build early warning systems to detect hurricanes before they make landfall, it is now possible to build early warning systems to detect hate before it erupts into the justification of hate and violence against an outgroup. Robust programs of research in various disciplines have identified many of the warning signs. Hate, like a hurricane, does not appear out of nowhere. Instead, it builds in fairly systematic ways over time; it is human-made, human-fueled, and human-mobilized. With the right types of data, trusted messengers, and response plans sensitive to history and local, political and cultural contexts, we may be able to see hate coming and act before it becomes destructive.

In this section, we review some of the most promising interventions drawn from economics, political science and psychology.

3.1 History: Reshaping Collective Memory

The Cycle of Hate often begins in the past: historical narratives of “us” versus “them” in conflict which are passed down from generation to generation, continuing a collective memory that justifies intergroup hate. Possible policy responses include reshaping historical narratives, correcting present-day misperceptions, and using education to combat parent-to-child socialization toward outgroup hate.

Key sites for the forging of **group histories** are educational institutions. There is growing evidence that education in general, without specifically targeting discriminatory attitudes, promotes tolerance. Rohner and Saia (2020) find that the 1970s construction of primary schools in Indonesia reduced violent conflict, while Kuipers et al. (2025) find that Indian districts as-if-randomly assigned to receive large investments in primary education are less likely to report experiencing intergroup conflict. These studies suggest that for countries far from universal

primary and secondary enrollment, a straightforward policy to reduce intergroup animosity could be to invest in broad-based and inclusive education.

An extensive theoretical and qualitative scholarship emphasizes the empowering potential of instructional practices and content that reduce hate. In the classroom, studies show the positive effects of discussion and deliberation. For example, while Siow (2025) finds no effect of a compulsory civic education class on ethnic tolerance in Singapore and in survey data across 24 countries, he does find some positive effects in more open classrooms. Likewise, Miklikowska et al. (2022) find that young people exposed to more frequent political discussions in school express lower prejudice toward immigrants in England, Sweden, and Germany. Important studies have also shown that schools can purposefully and systematically instill a set of values. Educational curricula that center more inclusive histories, as well as exposure to more inclusive framing and messaging, hold potential to undermine the cycle of hate (Isaac-Savage & Merriweather, 2021). For example, in India, Charnysh et al. (2015) found that exposure to national symbols (such as the national flag and map), likely by evoking a secular historical narrative, prompted Hindus to engage in more pro-social behavior toward Muslims.

Historical narratives are also (re)shaped by, and manifest in various forms of popular culture, including movies and memorials. Explicitly and actively promoting more inclusive historical narratives in popular culture and commemorations could prevent hate from taking hold. One approach, following the adage that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana, 1905) is through commemorations of past injustices. Indeed, students who visited the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Chile showed increased support for democratic institutions and restorative justice policies, regardless of their prior ideological beliefs (Balcells et al., 2022). In contrast, a school trip to a Holocaust museum in Germany increased support for civil liberties and historical knowledge, but decreased religious tolerance (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). In addition to the mixed results, a potential snag in scaling such a policy, for instance through state curricula that build in visits to such museums, is the political divide in the use of such institutions and in perceptions of the importance of looking at the past more generally (Ramos-Toro & Voytas, 2024).

Building on the logic of commemoration, and taking it further, countries have also experimented with a more direct confrontation of recent histories of hate through Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. TRCs are built on the idea that publicly acknowledging harm and enabling dialogue between victims and perpetrators can restore trust and rebuild social capital (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2010), but the evidence on their impact in reducing hatred is mixed. A randomized study of Sierra Leone’s TRC process by Cilliers et al. (2016) found that participation increased forgiveness and civic engagement, but only at the expense of increasing psychological harm to the victims exposed to their own or others’ traumatic experiences. These findings raise difficult questions about the emotional costs of this kind of confrontation of the (recent) past. A

further, related difficulty regards the risk of backlash against victims by denialists (Carleton, 2021).

Interventions that target **family or personal histories** have received much less empirical focus, though some research examines how focusing on family history promotes more openness to others, especially in the context of immigration. For example, Dinas et al. (2021) provide evidence from Greece and Germany that reminding individuals of the histories of the forced relocation of their own ancestors reduces opposition to present-day migration. Feigenbaum et al. (2025) found that American members of Congress descended from immigrant parents or grandparents support more permissive immigration legislation and are less likely to speak negatively about immigrants in speeches before Congress because they tie their personal histories and identities to immigration.

In sum, interventions designed to reshape historical memory hold considerable potential but are not without their limits, including critically the question of from whose viewpoint history is being written.

3.2 Current Context: Promoting Shared Identities and Cooperation and Reducing Competition, Loss, Threat and Uncertainty

The Current Context component of the Cycle of Hate emphasizes four more reasons to hate: identities and norms, competition and loss, threat, and a lack of control and uncertainty. It exemplifies how the reasons to hate are mutually constituting. When it comes to breaking the Cycle of Hate, these reasons need to be considered in concert. As revealed in decades of research, fostering shared identities and promoting intergroup contact and cooperation can be successful but only to the extent that it does not fuel competition and loss, threat and a lack of control and uncertainty. Achieving a sense of linked fate and building interdependence across groups is necessary to break the cycle of hate, but these efforts are complex, dynamic and likely never finished.

Nurturing a Common Group Identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014) is a robust and widely replicated antidote to the intergroup antipathy that often derives from history and continues to organize contemporary social interaction. The basic premise of the Common Group Identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014) is that if members of two or more groups can come to see themselves as part of a superordinate group, their animosity toward each other will be reduced. Promoting a meaningful, shared “we” or a common group identity has the power to reduce some forms of attitudinal and behavioral bias, and these effects are mediated by the interdependence between identity groups that is afforded by a superordinate identity (Dovidio et al., 1998; Gaertner, et al., 1999).

Numerous studies document efforts to foster meaningful common ingroup **identities** across the globe. For example, Yoruba adults showed more positive orientations toward members of other tribes (Edos and Igbos) and more intentions for social change when their shared Nigerian identity was more salient (Cocco et al., 2024). Some of these positive effects have even been found for groups with very long histories of intergroup conflict including Serbs and Bosniaks, and Jewish Americans and Israelis and Palestinian Muslims (e.g., Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2023; Kelman, 2018). Policy interventions that focus on what groups have in common including common goals, then, provide the potential to counter intergroup conflict, or even prevent it from taking hold.

Emphasizing shared historical roots can have similar effects. Given the importance of personal and family histories, focusing on *shared* history can facilitate a common ingroup identity. For example, the acknowledgement of shared Abrahamic roots was related to more positive attitudes toward each other and increased support for peacemaking among American and Israeli Jewish people and Palestinian Muslim people in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Kunst et al., 2019). Many types of gatherings that foster a common group identity and involve synchronized singing, dancing, prayer or pilgrimages (e.g., the Hajj) can further promote identity solidarity, and positive attitudes across diverse ethnic groups (e.g., Clingsmith et al., 2009; Paez et al., 2015).

The second most widely studied strategy for reducing intergroup hate is structured intergroup contact. Allport (1954) in *The Nature of Prejudice* theorized four conditions that were optimal for reducing intergroup conflict: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law, and/or customs and norms. Rarely do experimental studies meet all four conditions, yet decades of research demonstrate that when individuals from different groups interact under one or more of these conditions, prejudice can be reduced (for a meta-analysis, see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000).

Some of the strongest evidence comes from studies of contact that seek to reduce **competition** and instead foster common goals through sports. In war-torn Sri Lanka, for example, participating in ethnically mixed sports teams led to the development of a more inclusive social identity and a reduction in prejudice (Schulenkorf, 2010). Randomly mixing Christian and Muslim teammates in Iraq improved attitudes toward teammates but few generalized “off-the-field” effects (Mousa, 2020). Randomly assigning players to mixed-caste or same-caste cricket teams in India had large positive effects on willingness to play with outgroup members in the future and increased cross-caste friendships and trade (Lowe, 2025). A meta-analysis of 41 such experiments (Lowe, 2025) finds, however, that the positive effects of contact are small and often apply only to outgroup members with whom people interacted, without generalizing to outgroup strangers. Some other studies find mixed effects or even backlash and increased discrimination following intergroup contact, depending on the form of contact (e.g., Scacco & Warren 2018). More intensive and extended intergroup contact may be particularly likely to promote

cooperation and coordination among groups (Zhou et al., 2019). Ghosh (2025) found, for example, that Hindu-Muslim contact in a factory in India had more positive effects on attitudes when it involved high-dependency production tasks, in which Hindus and Muslims must work closely, coordinating their efforts.

The most difficult but perhaps the most important of the Allportian conditions to achieve is ensuring the equal status of the interacting group members. Greene et al. (2025) find that online cross-partisan interaction has more persistent positive effects when that contact is under equal, rather than unequal, status. Mousa and Yang (2025) also probed the equal status condition, using data from the World War II natural experiment of quasi-random assignment of men to racially segregated versus integrated recreational facilities (equal status), and to military units with ingroup versus outgroup lieutenants (unequal status). They found that equal-status contact, but not unequal-status contact, improved the intergroup attitudes of Black troops (though they had limited effects on White soldiers). The positive effects of intergroup contact are therefore likely to be relatively small and temporary without attention to the fact that status differences will always matter (Ridgeway, 2019). Addressing status inequality among and between groups will require continual analysis of the sources and legitimacy of inequality and, in many cases, will require coordinated action at the micro, meso and macro levels of a context to justify or mitigate it (Hamedani, G. et al., 2024; Wright & Lubensky, 2009).

Decades of research in schools and organizations (e.g., Aronson et al., 1978; DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1989) as well experiments in social psychology and behavioral economics (Balliet & van Lange, 2013) confirm that tasks and social arrangements that require intergroup cooperation and result in mutual success can reduce the powerful feelings of relative deprivation, social rejection, retaliation and the conflict that arises from actual and perceived competition. Achieving this interdependence requires framing conflict as “our shared problem” and a sense that “we sink or swim together”, joint decision-making, joint problem-solving, and obvious joint pay-offs (e.g., Ury et al., 1991).

Ongoing research programs across the social science disciplines are examining how to reliably turn competitors into collaborators and promote durable interdependence among them (Halperin, 2016). Multiple factors at the individual, interactional, institutional as well as ideological level require consideration. These include narratives that allow a reappraisal of the conflict situation, encourage empathy and perspective-giving and taking (Broockman & Kalla, 2016), and encourage a shift from “us” versus “them” to a common “we” (Druckman, 2022; Walsh et al., 2022). Mitigating the perception and experience of **competition and loss** will also require the simultaneous implementation of goal and task structures that promote and reinforce this interdependence.

Economic theorists have long emphasized the particular importance of mutual material interest in reducing antipathy and hostility. Montesquieu's observation that commerce fosters peace (1748) or Adam Smith's (1776) description of the civilizing function of markets and economic interdependence as a mechanism for promoting social harmony are early examples of how shared markets, employment relationships, and business ventures have the potential to align incentives across identity groups, reduce zero-sum thinking, and embed individuals in repeated, cooperative interactions that make conflict more costly (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

Economic linkages can also keep political elites from mobilizing intergroup conflict. For example, India's medieval ports were less likely to have Hindu-Muslim riots in the 1800s and 1900s because these medieval trading ports had strong interethnic complementarities, due to Muslim advantages in Indian Ocean shipping, leading to institutional mechanisms that support interethnic exchange. The positive effects on conflict appear to have persisted, long after Muslims lost their trading advantage to Europeans (Jha, 2013). An analysis of interstate trading relationships since 1950 suggests this interdependence among nations might partially explain the large drop in interstate wars in this period (Jackson & Nei, 2015).

Building on this logic, Jha and Shayo (2019) demonstrate that participation in financial markets offers another route to common economic interests and a reconsideration of the costs of conflict. They randomly assigned Palestinian and Israeli financial assets to voters and incentivized them to actively trade in the stock market over seven weeks but provided no other political information. This treatment shifted the votes of both groups toward political parties more supportive of peace. Other studies suggest that just exposure and proximity to markets with their norms of impersonal exchange can shape values and foster civic values and generalized trust (Henrich 2020) and make it more likely to conditionally cooperate (Rustagi, 2024).

While robust literature supports the value of economic interdependence in fostering cohesion, other studies reveal that it can also have the opposite effect. A powerful empirical yet still underappreciated insight is that economic development even when it is a net positive and induces economic growth often creates actual and/or perceived "winners" and "losers". These cases suggest that any policy focused on reducing hate and relying on economic cooperation must always be accompanied by attention to ethnic and political identities, threat perception, as well as the sense or actuality of relative deprivation and inequality. In addition, Rohner (2023) warns that material interdependence without 'Voice' (political participation) and 'Security' (rule of law) can breed resentment. Drawing on theoretical models and cross-national data, he argues that economic collaboration may stabilize intergroup peace only when paired with inclusive governance and institutional accountability. The intergroup contact literature suggests a focus on shared economic goals, but also attention to individual and collective goals for recognition, respect and dignity. Settings where one group dominates decision-making or captures disproportionate benefits, trade and labor integration are reliably likely to reinforce group

hierarchies and inflame latent grievances. Policy makers must therefore approach economic interdependence as a necessary but insufficient condition for intergroup peace. Its success hinges on fair design, inclusive governance, and continuous monitoring.

To the extent that structured intergroup contact, cooperation and interdependence is desirable, a separate policy question is how to institutionalize and scale it. One seemingly natural route to scale intergroup contact is through state schooling. Taking advantage of a policy change in India that required elite private schools to offer free places to poor students, Rao (2019) found large positive effects of exposure to poor children on willingness to interact and generosity. On the other hand, studies of school integration in the US find less support for long-term reductions in intergroup hate (Carrell et al., 2013; Kaplan et al., 2025), perhaps because the school environments did not successfully foster inclusion and allowed students to self-segregate. Additional policies, such as assigning students to mixed race study groups, may be required to ensure that the students' interaction involves shared goals, equal status and cooperation.

Housing arrangement can also be used to tackle residential segregation and scale intergroup contact. Bursztyn et al. (2024) find positive effects of the long-term presence of outgroups in US counties. They made use of the staggered arrival of migrants from different countries, and variation over time in which US destinations were attractive and found that the presence of Arab ancestry residents reduced both explicit and implicit prejudice toward Arab-Muslims among the native-born population. Yet another possible avenue for embedding contact is through interactions with public institutions. In Israeli hospitals, Weiss (2021) made use of the fact that Jewish patients are “as-if” randomly assigned to receive care from Jewish or Arab doctors. Brief contact with an Arab doctor reduced Jewish patients' exclusionary preferences toward Arabs and increased their optimism about peace.

In conflict-affected or divided societies especially, economic aid structured around community-driven reconstruction (CDR) can reduce intergroup animosity and rebuild trust (Samii, 2023), yet these arrangements can also foster resentment and lead to hateful behavior, especially coupled with perceptions of inequality or exclusion. Development interventions in these settings need to meet basic needs but also to restructure relationships: creating inclusive civic spaces, fostering local accountability, and shifting incentives away from violence by raising its opportunity cost. Yet, as growing evidence shows, the success of such programs hinges on how aid is delivered: its ability to create an implementation “sandwich” between the higher state and bottom-up activists, fairness, inclusiveness, perceived legitimacy, responsiveness to local needs, and ability to avoid entrenching inequalities or provoking backlash (Mansuri and Rao 2012). When they are not carefully adapted to local political conditions, participatory development programs may inadvertently trigger sabotage or elite backlash (Beath et al., 2025; Lyall et al., 2020).

Another mitigation strategy is to ensure that interventions that seek to promote intergroup contact and shared identities promote a **sense of control** among those affected by such policies. Those who experience a strong sense of control can report well-being even with fewer material resources (Lachman & Weaver, 1997). In one example of the prosocial consequences of feelings of control, people who felt a sense of control (personally or as a society) reported less hostility toward immigrants (Harell et al., 2017). Control also moderates the effect of perceived threat on intergroup animosity. In both survey and experimental research, Greenaway et al., (2013) showed that when people feel in control of their lives, threat has a reduced impact on negative attitudes toward members of other groups, even when that sense of control is not in the context of the threat.

3.3 Call to Arms: Positive Leadership and Alternative Media Narratives

The mobilization of group divisions by elites and the media is not inevitable. While both are frequently implicated in cases of social division, they can also use their privileged positions in public debate to reframe group conflict.

Leaders shape interpretations of the current context and can draw on aspects of this context to promote shared identity and cooperation. One emblematic example can be found in the leadership of Nelson Mandela and his appeals to common shared identity. He used the Rugby World Cup for the purpose of nation-building in South Africa (Carlin, 2008). To unite Blacks and Afrikaners, Mandela identified with the Springbok (a white Afrikaner symbol) and created a superordinate common identity, “a rainbow nation” composed of Black and White South Africans in competition with the “rest of the world” (Carlin, 2008). Other post-independence leaders across Africa have used football to foster a shared national identity (Dorman, 2019; Larmer & Lecocq, 2018). These are particularly good instances of the Common Ingroup Identity model by leaders because they interweave sports and nation—two powerful sources of identity for many people that, at least for some period of time, reduce ethnic salience and promote inter-ethnic trust.

Another case of leadership promoting a shared national identity is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Türkiye. Assouad (2025) tracks Atatürk’s visits across the country where he attempted to spread his nation-building policies – policies that attempted to build a national identity from a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Ottoman Empire. Assouad’s key finding is that Atatürk’s visits led to an increase in the adoption of first names in Pure Turkish, the new language created to promote a common national identity. Drawing on other evidence, she argues that these effects come not from Atatürk’s charisma, but rather from his influence on local elites, who helped institutionalize his policies.

Gaucher et al. (2018) used a longitudinal design to examine the effect of Justin Trudeau's positive rhetoric on perceptions of refugees to Canada. Using three waves of national survey data (four months pre-election, three months post-election, and eight months post-election) that cover a period of positive and inclusive language by Trudeau and his party, they found significant increases in positive views of refugees from before to after the election won by the Trudeau government, with these positive views maintained several months later. These effects were most evident for Canadians prone to supporting the sociopolitical system, consistent with the authors' attributions of these effects to the Prime Minister's and government's positive portrayals.

Leadership, of course, can happen locally and within institutions. One example is provided by Dippel and Hebllich (2021). Leaders in the German revolutions of 1848–49 known as the “Forty-Eighters,” were expelled to the US, where they subsequently settled. Dippel and Hebllich find that Forty-Eighters later became influential in the campaign against slavery: their presence in a town increased Union Army (anti-slavery) enlistment by two-thirds, and that pro-civil rights NAACP chapters were later more likely to be established in such towns. They offer some evidence for several channels of influence: through local newspapers, involvement in local clubs, as charismatic orators, and by leading by example – by enlisting in the Union Army themselves.

Grassroots leadership can even be successfully thrust on individuals. Paluck et al. (2016) ran a field experiment in which randomly selected students in treated schools were entrusted to take a stance against conflict. The treatment reduced schools' disciplinary reports of conflict by 25%, and these effects were larger when more of the entrusted students were “social referents” – those that other students pay the most attention to (see also Alan & Kubilay, 2025). Leaders on a small scale can thus shape norms and reduce intergroup hatred.

These findings reinforce the Cycle of Hate's emphasis on elite signaling in the escalation phase, yet they provide little evidence of what conditions encourage leaders to maintain intergroup peace, and to suppress intergroup violence rather than stoke it for political gain. Leaders can also decide whether cultural differences are weaponized or ignored and this hinges on their utility to elites in pursuit of political power. Institutional interventions to change incentives for leaders have received limited scholarly attention.

Yet other institutional interventions can potentially reduce intergroup hatred through political representation rather than political discourse. Arguably the most-studied policy is that of electoral quotas for disadvantaged groups. Much of this evidence comes from India, where caste- and gender-based electoral quotas are common, and often “quasi-random,” in ways that can approximate experiments (George et al., 2024). The evidence suggests that quotas have proven somewhat successful in shifting beliefs about outgroups as leaders, although quotas rarely shift intergroup attitudes more generally (e.g., Beaman et al., 2009; Bhavnani, 2009; Chauchard, 2014; Paluck, 2009). One explanation for limited effects of caste-based quotas is that, while

these quotas ensure descriptive representation, they fail to give real voice to minority groups. When minority-centered political parties, and not just politicians that belong to minority groups, are elected, there is some evidence that this can reduce outgroup violence and intergroup conflict (e.g., Aneja & Ritadhi 2022; Nellis et al., 2016). Political parties then have some power to redirect intergroup tensions.

The same can be said of the **media**. Media can provide exposure—what is sometimes called “parasocial contact”—to outgroups as well as spread messages of shared identity. Alrababa’h et al. (2021), for example, studied the curious case of Mohamed Salah: the star of Liverpool Football Club, and an openly devout Muslim. After Salah joined Liverpool, hate crimes in Liverpool dropped by 16%, and Liverpool fans became considerably less likely to post anti-Muslim tweets, relative to fans of other clubs, suggesting indirect exposure to minority group members through the media can reduce prejudice.

In Rwanda, where radio stoked ethnic hatred in 1994, radio was later used for opposite ends. In a year-long field experiment, Paluck (2009) studied the effects of a radio soap opera with intergroup relations-related messaging—stories that paralleled the story of the genocide, though without explicit reference to ethnicity, and with characters that join together across community lines to speak out against the violence. The key finding was that the intergroup relations related radio show positively influenced descriptive and prescriptive social norms (e.g., whether intermarriage should happen), and behavior (e.g., willingness to speak up when someone is doing something with which they disagree), but not relevant personal beliefs, compared to a group that received a generic radio program about health. Blouin and Mukand (2019) built on Paluck’s work by studying the role of the state-owned Radio Rwanda in reshaping interethnic relations after the genocide. This radio channel was used explicitly by the Kagame government to build Rwandan national identity—indeed, the authors found that Radio Rwanda was over five times more likely than private radio to have positive references to national identity. They make use of Rwanda’s mountainous topography to identify the effects of Radio Rwanda: some villages have better radio signals than others, due to the topographical variation. Exposure to the radio had strong positive effects: it reduced the salience of ethnic identity, increased willingness to work together with non-co-ethnic partners and increased interethnic trust.

In other settings, visual media has been used as an effective tool against prejudice. Duquenois and Zeng (2024) explored the impact of the children’s TV program Sesame Street, a popular show launched in 1969 in the US. Sesame Street was designed intentionally to educate children, and to highlight a diverse and egalitarian US. Its setting mimicked a typical African American neighborhood of New York, and Black actors were cast as role models and leaders. Among children aged 2 to 5 with access to the show, over half watched it. The authors explored the effects of viewing Sesame Street as a child on outcomes as an adult, making use of variation in (i) a person’s age when Sesame Street first aired, and (ii) television coverage in a person’s

county of residence. Sesame Street was found to reduce White individuals' implicit bias against Black individuals, although there were no effects on explicit bias. Cole et al. (2008) similarly reviewed research on Sesame Street's localized co-productions in conflict zones (e.g., Israel-West Bank and Gaza, Kosovo, Northern Ireland) and found that exposure fostered more positive intergroup attitudes, empathy, and cooperative behavior among young children. The paper argues that these effects arise because the program models inclusive norms through relatable characters and storylines, demonstrating how media designed for children can promote peacebuilding and social cohesion in divided societies.

Armand et al. (2024) analyzed the 1946 radio series *The Adventures of Superman*, whose "Operation Intolerance" episodes denounced racism and the Ku Klux Klan. Using historical radio-signal data, they compared U.S. counties that could receive the broadcasts with those that could not, linking exposure to later survey and county-level outcomes. Areas with greater exposure showed lower KKK activity, more civil-rights organizing, and more tolerant racial attitudes decades later. The authors concluded that even short-lived, entertainment-based media can have long-term effects on prejudice and civic norms, demonstrating the enduring potential of popular culture to counter intolerance. Duquenois and Zeng (2024) and Armand et al. (2024) demonstrate the remarkable scalability of this form of mass media intervention—millions of children watched these two shows.

While Sesame Street and *The Adventures of Superman* use fictional narrative to engender tolerance, Siddique et al. (2025) explore the humanizing role of a documentary film in Bangladesh (we might expect entirely different effects of fact versus fiction, although no research that we know of directly tests this conjecture). They worked with filmmakers to make a film that described the lives of the ethnic minority Santal population. They then screened the film with ethnic majority Bengalis—randomly selecting some villages to be treated and others to watch a placebo documentary film. The intervention increased pro-sociality of the majority toward the minority and somewhat reduced police complaints.

The evidence suggests a powerful (and scalable) role for mass media in reducing intergroup hatred, though much of what we know revolves around radio and television. The development of new information technologies has drastically changed the media environment. The internet is dominated by a very few platforms that operate on the basis of an 'attention economy' (Davenport & Beck, 2001). That is, income is a function of the number of clicks made by users and hence a priority is put on capturing and keeping people's attention through the use of emotional and extreme material. This incentivizes polarization, the dissemination of fear and progressive radicalization of material. At the same time it disincentivizes any regard for accuracy and truth (Lewandowsky et al., 2023), and social media's algorithms tend to limit exposure to counter-attitudinal opinions (Aridor et al., 2024; Levy, 2021; Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). A recent study found that reranking posts reflecting partisan animosity on X (the most widely used

social media platform for political discourse in the U.S.) to change the level of exposure to this content significantly influenced affective polarization: increased exposure led to colder feelings toward the outgroup, whereas decreased exposure led to warmer feelings (Piccardi et al., 2025).

To counteract polarization short of changing the level of exposure, inoculation is required. Inoculation has two elements. The first is alerting people to the fact that others are out to manipulate them—in the present case, to create hate against specific targets—and to think about who a message comes from and why they are sending it. The second is to alert them to the means by which messages induce hatred (a process termed ‘pre-bunking’ – see Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden, 2021). Inoculation techniques have been widely studied over many years and shown to be effective (for a meta-analysis, see Banas & Rains, 2010). Of course, whatever the overall effectiveness of inoculation, to be viable in a particular domain means tailoring the general process to the specific techniques used in that domain. That is, to inoculate against hate we must educate people about the way hate is produced.

3.4 Justification of Mistreatment: Countering dehumanization and moralization through humanization, empathy and moral expansion

Attempts to counteract the effects of **dehumanization** have in several different ways used strategies to appeal to a common human identity. In two studies, Bilgen et al. (2024) used subtle and direct priming manipulations to encourage a sense of oneness with all humanity and the global human community. They found that these manipulations led to an increased sense of oneness with refugees, which in turn led to a higher willingness to donate to both Syrian and Ukrainian refugees. Also using priming manipulations, but in this case priming shared human experiences, in three studies Motyl et al. (2011) attempted to counteract the effects of mortality salience on negativity toward other groups and intergroup conflict. By priming individuals to think of human experiences shared by people from diverse cultures, they were able to increase perceptions of the similarity of different groups. These perceptions of increased similarity in turn improved attitudes toward other groups and increased support for international peace-making.

Denying human values to members of other groups has been described as a means of dehumanizing others (Sagiv & Schwarz, 2022). One might then expect that attributing shared human values to members of other groups would serve to humanize them. Research by Wolf et al. (2021) provides some support for this proposition. They demonstrated that expressed and experimentally manipulated perceptions of similarity on openness and conservation values led to more favorable views of various types of immigrants, but this did not hold for perceived similarity on self-transcendence and self-enhancement values. The Gaucher et al. (2018) study described earlier may also be seen as a field study of the humanization of refugees. Indeed, the measures used to assess views of refugees that were tracked over time included Fiske et al.’s (2002) measures of competence and warmth, which have been described as relevant to

humanization. Justin Trudeau's warm welcome of Syrian refugees and description of them as future Canadians being welcomed home served to increase their humanization, with effects maintained several months later.

Other strategies for humanizing outgroups have focused on perspective taking and empathy. Two recent papers study intensive perspective-taking interventions. Alan et al. (2021) studied the effects of a perspective-taking curriculum in Turkish elementary schools that had experienced an influx of Syrian refugees. They developed a curriculum that aims to train children's skills in understanding each other's perspectives, and in correctly inferring the goals and needs of others. The intervention reduced peer violence and ethnic segregation in classrooms. Mousa et al. (2025) showed similarly encouraging effects of empathy education in Lebanon, again in a context of Syrian refugee presence. They designed the experiment in a way that allowed them to compare the effects of empathy education with those of intergroup contact. Interestingly, in this case, empathy education reduced prejudice, while intergroup contact did not.

New technology, like virtual reality, may also be used to support perspective-taking. Andries et al. (2025) studied such an intervention: *Carney Arena*, a museum-based virtual reality experience in which participants are placed in the shoes of an unauthorized migrant crossing the US Southern border. Among other elements, participants don a virtual reality set, in which they play the role of an unauthorized migrant, ending with apprehension by border patrol. If a participant walks "through" another migrant, they hear that migrant's heartbeat. Participants randomly assigned to answer attitudinal questions after the experience, rather than before, showed a marked improvement in pro-migrant attitudes. Going further, the researchers showed that the effects are larger if treated participants received additional information about migrants before, rather than after, the virtual reality experience because the empathic response to the experience was activated by the information, which made the migrants more relatable to the participant.

While these studies consider fairly intensive perspective-taking and empathy interventions, a series of papers have experimented with online, lighter-touch approaches that may be scalable. Simonovits et al. (2018) used an online perspective-taking game to target anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary. The immediate effect of the game was to improve attitudes toward Roma, and these effects persisted one month later. Adida et al. (2018) randomly assigned a perspective-taking exercise to American citizens where participants wrote answers to questions while imagining themselves in the role of a refugee. Participants who took part in the perspective-taking exercise were subsequently more likely to write an anonymous letter in support of refugees to the US President. Chatruc and Roza (2024) compared two types of online perspective-taking interventions in the same experiment: Colombian natives either watched a video documentary about Venezuelan forced migration, played a game in which they took the perspective of a Venezuelan forced migrant, or served as a control group. Both treatments improved pro-sociality

and attitudes toward Venezuelan migrants, but perhaps surprisingly, the video was much more effective per minute of a participant's attention.

Further evidence on the mechanisms of empathy comes from a series of interpersonal canvassing experiments. Kalla and Broockman (2020) conducted three field experiments involving the non-judgmental exchange of narratives, in which canvassers shared narratives about immigrants they knew, and asked participants to share their own related experiences. In the first experiment, persuasive arguments alone did not shift attitudes, but adding the non-judgmental exchange of narratives reduced exclusionary attitudes for at least four months. The second and third experiments demonstrated similar positive effects even when the narrative-exchange happened through showing a video or through an over-the-phone conversation. Kalla and Broockman (2023) built on these findings by teasing apart three approaches to narrative-exchange conversations: those which focus on analogic perspective-taking (participants recalling a similar situation from their own experience), versus vicarious perspective-giving (participants recounting the experiences of an outgroup member) versus perspective-getting (participants hearing about the experiences of an outgroup member). The perspective-getting approach appeared to be the most effective.

Expanding the boundaries of moral inclusion may also hold some promise for counteracting the **moral justification** for mistreatment of outgroups. By expanding the circle of those to whom moral principles of just treatment should be applied, animosity toward and mistreatment of other groups may be reduced. In several studies, Costello, Hodson and their colleagues (Bastian et al., 2012; Costello & Hodson, 2010; Dhont et al., 2019) framed the similarities between humans and animals in different ways to determine the impact on moral concern for members of human outgroups. They found that comparing animals to humans expanded moral concern for outgroups, whereas comparing humans to animals did not. Feeling moral concern included empathy and feeling like intervening or taking a moral stand on behalf of members of other groups if they were treated unfairly or badly.

Though these strategies of humanization and moral expansion show promise, they can backfire when groups are made to feel that they are responsible for the mistreatment of other groups. For example, Esses et al. (2017) discuss how groups who see themselves as responsible for mistreating another group may engage in further dehumanization to protect their own group image. Greenaway et al. (2012) show that when perpetrator groups are induced to think of their victims as fellow humans, they show an increased expectation of forgiveness, reduced remorse for their wrong-doing, and reduced empathy for their victims. And finally, from the victims' perspective, appealing to a common humanity with perpetrators can increase forgiveness of perpetrators, but reduce intentions to engage in collective action on behalf of their own group (Greenaway et al., 2011).

4. Conclusion and Policy Implications

We argue that intergroup hate is not an episodic pathology that flares up only in moments of crisis, nor is it reducible to individual prejudice or elite manipulation alone. Rather, hate is best understood as a self-reinforcing social process—a cycle composed of 10 interdependent nodes that link history, contemporary context, mobilization, and justification. Crucially, this Cycle of Hate has no fixed starting point. It can be triggered by historical narratives, by shocks in the present, by opportunistic leadership, or by justificatory moral frames—and once activated, it can escalate rapidly through feedback loops that amplify grievance, fear, and violence.

Understanding this cyclical, mutually reinforcing structure is essential for policy makers and scholars who seek not merely to respond to hate after it erupts, but to anticipate, diagnose, and prevent it.

For development institutions, the most important implication of this framework is that hate and development are deeply entangled. The relationship runs in both directions.

On one side, the consequences of hate for development are stark. When the cycle culminates in conflict and violence, years—sometimes decades—of development gains can be erased. Growth collapses, infrastructure is destroyed, trust evaporates, and human well-being deteriorates sharply. The losses are not only economic. Social capital, institutional legitimacy, and the everyday fabric of cooperation that underpins markets and governance are also damaged, often in ways that are difficult to rebuild. From this perspective, intergroup hate is not merely a “social” problem sitting outside the remit of development policy; it is a core development risk directly linked to SDG goal 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive institutions, and an enabling condition for sustained progress across the development agenda.

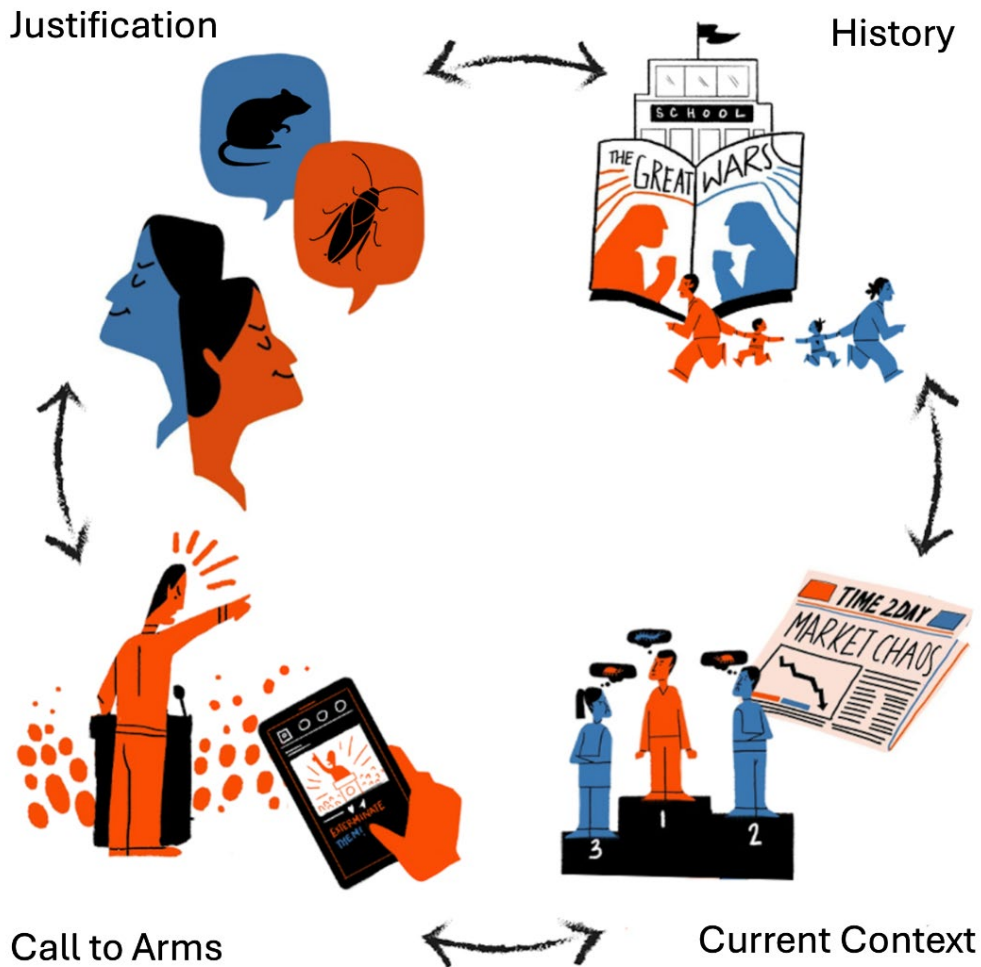
4.1 Hate and Development: A Two-Way Causal Relationship

But causality also runs the other way. Development processes themselves can ignite the cycle of hate when growth is unevenly distributed across identity groups, or when policies systematically favor one group over another—whether intentionally or inadvertently. Economic expansion that produces visible winners and losers along ethnic, religious, caste, or regional lines can fuel perceptions of relative deprivation, threat, and loss. These perceptions, even when only loosely connected to objective conditions, can become the raw material for political mobilization and moralized grievance. As earlier work has shown, development assistance that ignores these dynamics can inadvertently contribute to violence rather than mitigate it (e.g., Uvin, 1998). In this sense, hate is not external to development; it is centrally interlinked with development trajectories themselves.

The Cycle of Hate framework thus invites a rethinking of development practice. Growth, jobs, poverty reduction, inequality, and environmental sustainability remain essential goals—but they

are not sufficient. Development policy must also grapple explicitly with social relationships, identity boundaries, and the ways in which economic change reshapes intergroup relations.

Figure 2: Illustration of Cycle of Hate



4.2 Policy Implication 1: The Cycle of Hate as a Diagnostic Tool

The first major policy implication is that the Cycle of Hate can serve as a diagnostic framework for policy making.

Rather than treating hate, polarization, and violence as exogenous shocks, policy makers can use the cycle to ask systematic questions: Which nodes are most salient in this context? Where are the points of vulnerability? Which historical narratives are being activated? How are current economic or political changes interacting with identity, threat, and uncertainty? Are leaders or media amplifying these dynamics? And how are moralization and dehumanization beginning to take hold?

Answering these questions requires much more than standard economic analysis. It demands deep contextual knowledge—historical, political, psychological and sociocultural—and close engagement with local actors. The same economic intervention can have very different effects depending on how it intersects with local histories and identity structures. A policy that reduces poverty on average may still intensify intergroup animosity if its benefits are perceived to accrue disproportionately to one group.

Seen this way, the Cycle of Hate also points toward the possibility of early warning systems. Just as meteorologists track multiple indicators to anticipate hurricanes before they make landfall, development institutions can monitor warning signs across the 10 nodes: shifts in historical narratives, rising perceptions of threat, changes in elite rhetoric, the spread of dehumanizing language, or the erosion of institutional trust. Hate does not appear out of nowhere. It builds gradually, often predictably, and is therefore potentially detectable before it erupts into large-scale violence.

Critically, this diagnostic lens applies at multiple levels. At the macro level, national growth strategies, fiscal policies, and constitutional arrangements may reshape intergroup relations. At the meso level, institutions such as schools, local governments, and markets can either bridge or harden group boundaries. At the micro level, everyday experiences of loss, humiliation, or uncertainty can feed into broader narratives of grievance. Effective diagnosis requires attention across all three.

4.2 Policy Implication 2: Designing Development Interventions That Do No Harm

A second implication follows directly from this diagnostic approach: development interventions must be designed with explicit attention to distribution across groups, not just aggregate outcomes.

Policies that prioritize growth while ignoring how gains are distributed risk triggering the cycle in contexts where identity boundaries are salient. Even well-intentioned programs—whether infrastructure investments, social protection schemes, or market reforms—can inflame resentment if they are perceived as exclusionary or captured by particular groups. The Cycle of Hate framework underscores that perceptions matter as much as realities. Relative deprivation,

symbolic threat, and loss of status can be as potent as material deprivation in mobilizing hostility.

This does not imply risk aversion or paralysis. Rather, it calls for careful design, transparent communication, and continuous monitoring. Distributional analysis should be disaggregated by relevant social identities. Participatory processes should be structured to ensure meaningful voice rather than token consultation. And feedback mechanisms should allow policies to be adapted as social dynamics evolve.

4.3 Policy Implication 3: Fostering “We-ness” through Institutions, Not One-Off Projects

The third implication concerns how to break the cycle once it is underway. The evidence reviewed in this paper points to the importance of fostering “we-ness”: cooperation, shared identity, common history, and economic collaboration across groups. But it also cautions against simplistic or short-term approaches.

Intergroup contact, economic cooperation, and shared civic projects can reduce animosity—but only under specific conditions. Contact that reinforces hierarchy, competition, or humiliation can backfire. Economic collaboration that generates profits without voice or accountability can deepen resentment. And symbolic appeals to unity that are not backed by institutional change are unlikely to endure.

What emerges instead is the importance of institutionalized spaces for cooperation. Deliberative forums, self-help groups, local democratic bodies, and political arrangements that ensure representation can create repeated interactions across groups, build trust over time, and normalize cooperation. Comparative experiences—from federal and consensus-oriented systems (Linder & Mueller 2021, Palmer & Knight 2022) to local democratic experiments (George et al., 2024)—suggest that durable inclusion depends less on ad hoc projects and more on institutional architectures that make cooperation routine rather than exceptional.

This insight has particular relevance for post-conflict and fragile settings. Community-driven reconstruction and participatory development can help rebuild trust and social capital, but only when they are aligned with local political realities and embedded within a supportive state framework. Short-term projects that bypass local institutions or ignore elite incentives risk provoking backlash or entrenching inequalities. Effective approaches often require a “sandwich” strategy: bottom-up collective action supported and protected by higher-level state institutions (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). Change in these contexts is necessarily long-term, uncertain, and iterative—requiring learning by doing rather than rigid blueprints (Andrews et al., 2017).

4.4. Policy Implication 4: The Central Role of the State

Across all these domains, the role of the state is central and unavoidable. States are not neutral bystanders in the Cycle of Hate. They often play a decisive role in creating the conditions for hate—through exclusionary laws, biased public goods provision, selective enforcement, or the politicization of identity. At the same time, states possess unique capacities to make the cycle less salient.

Through constitutional arrangements, education systems, media regulations, and systems of political representation, states shape histories, identities, and norms. They can either reward leaders who mobilize division or constrain them through institutional checks. They can either allow dehumanizing narratives to flourish or actively promote inclusive ones. For development institutions, this underscores the importance of engaging with the state not only as a partner in service delivery, but as a key actor in shaping intergroup relations.

The state also matters in the political commitment it demonstrates to mitigate the Cycle of Hate and the effect this has on policy implementation. If development institutions push policies that are not taken seriously by the implementing state, it can increase the risk of conflict, and—conversely—well-implemented programs can substantially reduce it (Moscona, 2025).

4.5 Rethinking What “Success” Means in Development

Together, these implications point to a broader reframing of development itself. Success cannot be measured solely in terms of growth rates, poverty headcounts, or improvements in infrastructure. Nor can social cohesion be treated as a secondary outcome that will emerge automatically once material conditions improve.

Instead, development policy must take seriously the idea that social relationships are a core development outcome. How people relate to one another across lines of difference—whether they see others as partners, competitors, or enemies—fundamentally shapes economic performance, political stability, and human well-being. Ignoring these dynamics risks not only policy failure, but active harm.

Concluding Reflections

The Cycle of Hate framework offers neither a simple solution nor a universal formula. What it provides instead is an optic, a way of seeing—a structured lens that integrates insights from economics, political science, psychology, sociology, and history into a coherent account of how hate is produced, sustained, and potentially disrupted.

For policy makers, its value lies in shifting attention from reactive crisis management to preventive, context-sensitive action. For scholars, it highlights the limits of disciplinary silos and the need for integrative approaches that link micro-level mechanisms to macro-level outcomes. And for development institutions, it underscores a sobering but hopeful message: hate is human-

made, human-fueled, and human-mobilized—but precisely for these reasons, it is also human-changeable.

Breaking the cycle is difficult. It requires long-term commitment, political courage, and institutional innovation. It demands humility about what external actors can achieve, and respect for local knowledge and agency. But the alternative—continuing to pursue development while neglecting the social processes that bind or divide societies—is far more costly. If development is ultimately about expanding human well-being, then confronting the Cycle of Hate is not peripheral to that mission. It is central to it.

While each phase of the cycle contributes uniquely to the escalation of hate, the interventions reviewed above show that the cycle can be interrupted at multiple points. A comprehensive strategy requires embedding social, institutional, and economic mechanisms that reinforce one another. Only through integrated, context-sensitive designs can we build durable intergroup cooperation and prevent the political capture of division.

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