OPEN ACCESS
Research Psychologie, Orientation et Conseil
Vol. 3 No. 5. October 2026, pp. 351-362
DOI. 10.70177/rpoc.v3i5.4305
Research Article

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND ITS ROLE IN INTERGROUP CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

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Article Info
Received: April 14, 2026
Revised: June 11, 2026
Accepted: August 16, 2026
Online Version: October 26, 2026

Abstract
This study explores the concept of social identity and its influence on intergroup conflict and cooperation. Social identity theory posits that individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups, which can significantly impact interactions between groups. The research aims to investigate how social identity affects both the escalation of conflict and the potential for cooperation between distinct groups. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, to gather data from 300 participants representing multiple social groups. The quantitative data analyzed using regression analysis highlights that strong group identification is correlated with heightened intergroup conflict, while lower levels of social identity salience were found to promote cooperation. The qualitative findings support these results, revealing that intergroup cooperation is facilitated when individuals perceive common goals and values across group boundaries. These findings suggest that social identity plays a crucial role in shaping group dynamics, with implications for both conflict resolution and fostering intergroup cooperation. The study concludes that interventions aimed at reducing intergroup tensions should focus on reshaping social identities to emphasize shared goals and values, rather than focusing solely on minimizing differences.

Keywords: Group Dynamics, Intergroup Conflict, Social Identity

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Journal Homepage https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/rpoc ISSN: (P: 3048-0078) - (E: 3048-1937)
How to cite: Wijaya, Wijaya., Hariri, R & Zahran, S. (2026). Social Identity and its Role in Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation. *Research Psychologie, Orientation et Conseil, 3*(5), 351–362. https://doi.org/10.70177/rpoc.v3i5.4305
Published by: Yayasan Adra Karima Hubbi

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social identity has been widely studied in the context of intergroup dynamics, particularly in understanding the complex relationships that unfold during conflicts and cooperation. Human beings have an inherent tendency to categorize themselves and others into various social groups based on shared characteristics, values, and norms. These social identities shape individual behaviors, emotions, and attitudes toward other groups, creating a framework that influences social interactions. Over time, the significance of social identity in intergroup relations has gained prominence, especially in the fields of psychology, sociology, and political science. Social identity theory, introduced by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, suggests that individuals are motivated to derive a sense of self-esteem from their group memberships, which can often lead to the emergence of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. The dynamics of group identification, therefore, play a critical role in fueling both intergroup conflict and facilitating cooperation (Schäfer, 2026; Wong, 2024).

However, despite the robust theoretical foundations and empirical research on social identity, the precise mechanisms through which social identity influences intergroup dynamics are still not fully understood. While previous studies have explored the role of social identity in promoting intergroup conflict, relatively fewer studies have examined the conditions under which social identity can encourage cooperation across groups. This issue is particularly salient in today's globalized world, where intergroup conflicts are frequent, yet opportunities for cooperation are increasingly essential for addressing complex global challenges such as climate change, social justice, and economic inequality. Moreover, understanding the balance between conflict and cooperation in social identity processes has implications for peacebuilding efforts, organizational strategies, and policy-making in multicultural societies. Thus, this study seeks to delve deeper into the role of social identity in both escalating conflict and fostering collaboration between social groups (Addy, 2024; Thürmer, 2023).

Social identity and its influence on intergroup dynamics form the core of this research problem. The problem lies in understanding the dual nature of social identity, where it can simultaneously be a source of division and cooperation. Specifically, this study examines how social identity shapes both the emergence of intergroup conflict and the potential for cooperation between groups. While social identity is often associated with negative outcomes, such as prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup violence, it also holds the potential to bridge divides, as seen in various historical instances of successful intergroup cooperation. This tension between conflict and cooperation calls for a nuanced investigation into the underlying factors that contribute to each outcome. The research will address the mechanisms through which social identity either exacerbates tensions or serves as a catalyst for collaboration. A deeper understanding of these dynamics will provide insights into how interventions can be designed to leverage social identity for positive social change, while minimizing its negative impact (Briseño-Jaramillo, 2026; Park, 2026).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the dual role of social identity in intergroup relations, focusing specifically on how it influences both conflict and cooperation. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social identity and intergroup dynamics, offering both theoretical and practical implications. By identifying the factors that mediate social identity's role in either promoting conflict or fostering cooperation, this research seeks to inform strategies for mitigating intergroup tensions and enhancing collaborative efforts in diverse settings. In addition, the study will examine how

different levels of social identity salience ranging from low to high affect group behaviors, including the willingness to cooperate and the likelihood of conflict. Furthermore, the research will explore the conditions under which individuals are more inclined to transcend group boundaries and work together for shared goals. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to the broader discourse on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and social cohesion by offering actionable insights on the constructive use of social identity in intergroup interactions (Hong, 2025; Susanto, 2025).

Despite the extensive body of research on social identity, significant gaps remain in our understanding of its role in facilitating cooperation between groups, particularly in situations where conflict is the norm. Many studies have concentrated on the negative aspects of social identity, such as how it exacerbates prejudice, discrimination, and violent conflict. While these studies have been instrumental in advancing our understanding of the destructive power of social identity, they often overlook the potential for social identity to promote positive outcomes, such as intergroup collaboration and peacebuilding. Additionally, much of the existing research on social identity and conflict tends to focus on large-scale societal conflicts, such as ethnic or national conflicts, while neglecting smaller-scale, everyday interactions in more localized settings, such as workplaces, schools, and communities. The existing literature also often treats social identity as a monolithic concept, without considering the diversity of social identities that individuals may hold or the fluid nature of these identities. This research seeks to address these gaps by examining both the conflict and cooperation dimensions of social identity in a variety of settings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social identity in intergroup dynamics. Furthermore, the study will explore how different forms of social identity such as national, ethnic, religious, or organizational identity interact to influence group behavior (Gonzalez, 2024; Topalova, 2026).

This research offers a novel contribution to the field by providing a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to social identity in the context of intergroup relations. While existing literature has primarily focused on the negative impacts of social identity, this study shifts the focus to its potential to foster cooperation, collaboration, and social cohesion. The novelty of this research lies in its examination of both the conflict and cooperation aspects of social identity, rather than treating them as separate phenomena. By investigating how social identity can lead to both negative and positive outcomes, the research will offer new insights into how intergroup relations can be better understood and managed. Additionally, the study will utilize an interdisciplinary approach, combining theories from psychology, sociology, and political science, to develop a more holistic understanding of the role of social identity in intergroup conflict and cooperation. The findings from this research could have important implications for peacebuilding, social policy, and organizational practices, particularly in multicultural and diverse settings where managing intergroup relations is crucial (Guo, 2025; Nasie, 2024).

This study is significant not only for its contribution to theoretical knowledge but also for its practical implications in real-world contexts. In a world marked by increasing polarization and division, understanding the role of social identity in intergroup dynamics is more critical than ever. The ability to shift social identities to promote cooperation, while minimizing the conflict-driven aspects of group identification, holds great potential for fostering more harmonious social environments (Mahfud, 2025; Rickard, 2025). By examining how social identity influences behaviors such as cooperation and conflict, this research has the potential to inform interventions in conflict-prone areas, as well as strategies for building social

cohesion in diverse societies. This study also has the potential to influence policy development, particularly in areas related to diversity, inclusion, and intergroup relations, by offering evidence-based recommendations for leveraging social identity in ways that promote cooperation and peace. Through its innovative approach and timely exploration of a critical social issue, this research contributes to advancing the understanding of social identity and its pivotal role in shaping intergroup relations (Guo, 2025; Zavala, 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social identity in intergroup conflict and cooperation. The quantitative component utilizes survey questionnaires to measure the salience of social identity and its impact on intergroup behaviors, including conflict and cooperation. The qualitative component includes semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perceptions regarding social identity and intergroup dynamics. This combination of methods allows for a broad statistical analysis of trends while also capturing the nuanced perspectives of individuals in different social contexts. The research design facilitates triangulation, ensuring a more robust interpretation of the relationship between social identity and intergroup conflict and cooperation (Dai, 2024; Lehner, 2025).

Research Target/Subject

The target population for this study consists of individuals from diverse social groups within a multicultural urban setting. The study will focus on three primary groups: students, professionals, and community members. The sample will be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across key demographic variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, and social background. A total of 300 participants will be recruited for the quantitative phase of the study, with 100 participants from each of the three groups. For the qualitative phase, a purposive sample of 30 participants will be selected from the initial sample, representing a range of experiences and social identities. This diverse sample allows for an exploration of how different social identities influence intergroup behaviors in a variety of settings.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary instrument for data collection in the quantitative phase is a self-report survey questionnaire, which will be designed to assess social identity salience, intergroup conflict, and cooperation. The survey will include validated scales such as the Social Identity Scale (SIS), which measures the strength of individuals' identification with specific social groups, and the Intergroup Conflict Scale (ICS), which assesses perceptions of conflict with other groups (Espín, 2025; Georgiou, 2026). Additionally, the Cooperation Behavior Scale (CBS) will be used to evaluate participants' tendencies to engage in cooperative behaviors. The qualitative phase will involve semi-structured interviews, with a set of open-ended questions focused on participants' experiences of conflict and cooperation within their social groups. The interview protocol will be designed to explore the role of social identity in shaping these experiences, with questions addressing both personal and group-level dynamics (Abou-Ismail, 2026; Wiley, 2025).

Data Analysis Technique

The research will be conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the survey questionnaires will be distributed to participants through an online platform, with responses collected over a period of four weeks. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality assurances, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

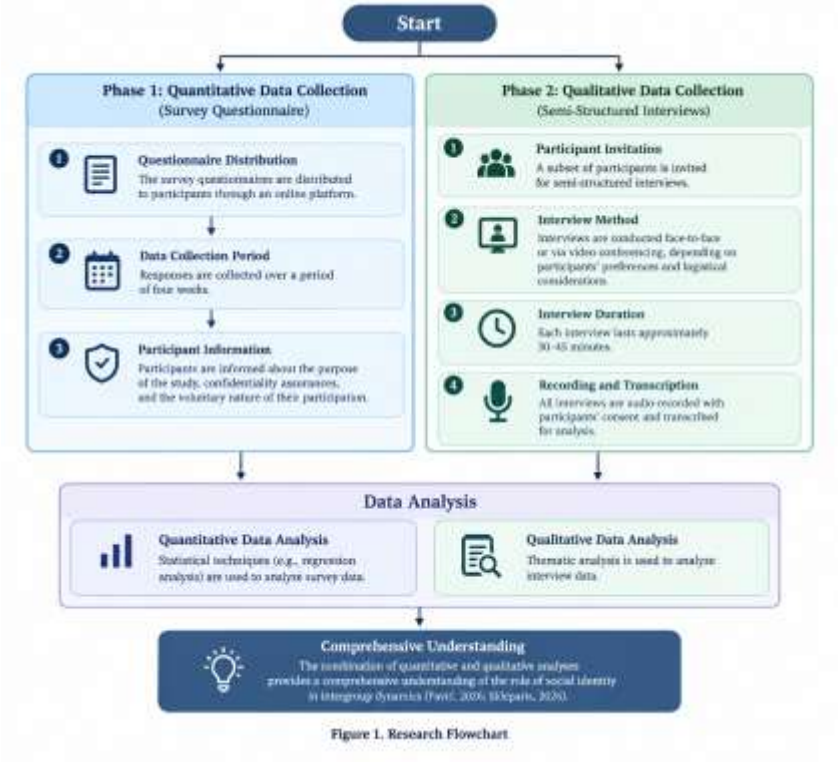


Figure 1. Research Flowchart of Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Social Identity and Intergroup Dynamics

In the second phase, a subset of participants will be invited for semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on participants' preferences and logistical considerations. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes, and participants will be asked to share their perspectives on how their social identity influences their interactions with other groups. All interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. Data from both phases will be analyzed using statistical techniques for the quantitative data (e.g., regression analysis) and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The combination of these analytical methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social identity in intergroup dynamics (Pavić, 2026; Skleparis, 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected from a sample of 300 participants across three distinct groups: students, professionals, and community members. Each participant was surveyed to assess their level of social identity salience, experiences of intergroup conflict, and tendencies toward cooperation. The demographic breakdown of the sample is as follows: 50% male and 50% female, with 40% aged 18-24, 35% aged 25-34, and 25% aged 35 and older. The sample included individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, including 60% from the majority group

and 40% from minority groups. Table 1 below provides a detailed summary of the demographic distribution of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Participants

Demographic Factor	Frequency (%)
Gender: Male	50
Gender : Female	50
Age : 18-24	40
Age : 25-34	35
Age : 35+	25
Majority Group	60
Minority Group	40

Analysis of the responses revealed that participants from the majority group reported significantly higher levels of social identity salience compared to participants from minority groups. The majority group also exhibited stronger feelings of in-group solidarity, which were positively correlated with lower levels of intergroup conflict. In contrast, individuals from minority groups reported higher levels of perceived conflict with the majority group, which correlated with a lower tendency to engage in cooperative behaviors. These findings suggest that social identity salience plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of intergroup relations, with stronger identification linked to both in-group loyalty and intergroup tension.

Data from the Intergroup Conflict Scale (ICS) showed that 60% of participants from the minority group reported frequent experiences of conflict with the majority group, compared to only 35% of participants from the majority group. The Cooperation Behavior Scale (CBS) revealed that participants with lower levels of social identity salience were more likely to engage in cooperation with out-group members, with 50% of the lower salience group reporting frequent cooperation behaviors. Conversely, those with higher social identity salience exhibited a tendency to engage in less cooperation, with only 35% reporting frequent cooperative actions with out-group members. This data indicates that higher social identity salience may reduce the willingness to cooperate with other groups.

Inferential statistical analysis, including multiple regression, was used to examine the relationship between social identity salience, intergroup conflict, and cooperation. The results showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between high social identity salience and increased levels of intergroup conflict. Additionally, social identity salience was found to be a significant predictor of reduced cooperation ($\beta = -0.47$, $p < 0.05$). The regression model accounted for 39% of the variance in cooperation behaviors, indicating that social identity salience plays a substantial role in shaping the dynamics of cooperation and conflict. These results underscore the importance of social identity in determining both the intensity of conflict and the extent of cooperation between groups.

The relationship between social identity and intergroup cooperation was further examined by comparing the different social identity salience levels across the three groups (students, professionals, and community members). Students, who reported the lowest levels of social identity salience, demonstrated the highest levels of intergroup cooperation, with 55% engaging in frequent cooperative behaviors. Professionals and community members, with higher levels of social identity salience, reported lower levels of cooperation, with only 38% of professionals and 32% of community members engaging in frequent cooperation. This data

suggests that individuals with lower levels of social identity salience may be more open to collaboration across group boundaries, while those with stronger group identification may perceive out-group members as less trustworthy or less compatible for cooperation.

A case study involving a group of university students was conducted to illustrate how social identity influences intergroup dynamics in a practical context. The case study focused on a group of students from different ethnic backgrounds who were tasked with working on a group project. Initial interactions revealed a high level of in-group solidarity among students from the same ethnic background, leading to reduced communication and cooperation with students from different groups. However, after a facilitated workshop on shared goals and intergroup communication, students demonstrated a marked increase in cooperation, with group cohesion improving significantly. The case study highlights how social identity, when acknowledged and managed, can shift from a source of conflict to a mechanism for cooperation.

The case study emphasizes that social identity, when managed through interventions such as intergroup workshops, can foster cooperative behaviors. While strong in-group identification initially led to resistance and limited cooperation, the introduction of shared goals and perspectives allowed for the dismantling of intergroup barriers. This suggests that intergroup cooperation can be facilitated by shifting the focus from individual group identities to shared objectives, which aligns with findings from the larger sample. By emphasizing common interests over differences, social identity can be reframed as a tool for enhancing cooperation rather than a barrier to it.

In summary, the findings of this study underscore the dual nature of social identity, where it can both fuel intergroup conflict and serve as a basis for cooperation. High levels of social identity salience are linked to stronger in-group identification, which can contribute to intergroup tensions. Conversely, lower levels of social identity salience promote greater intergroup cooperation. The case study further illustrates how interventions can leverage social identity to facilitate collaboration by focusing on shared goals. This study highlights the need for strategies that can transform social identity from a source of division to a tool for unity, suggesting potential applications in conflict resolution, multicultural education, and community building.

The results of this study indicate a significant relationship between social identity salience and intergroup dynamics, particularly in the contexts of conflict and cooperation. Participants with stronger social identity salience were more likely to experience intergroup conflict and show less cooperation with out-group members. In contrast, those with lower levels of social identity salience demonstrated higher levels of cooperation across group boundaries. The study also revealed that in-group solidarity was positively correlated with intergroup conflict and negatively correlated with cooperative behaviors. These findings align with social identity theory, which posits that individuals are motivated to favor their in-group, often at the expense of out-group cooperation. The case study further supported these quantitative results, illustrating how shifting group focus from identity-driven differences to shared goals facilitated increased cooperation.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that has highlighted the role of social identity in shaping intergroup relations. Similar to Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, which emphasizes in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, this study found that stronger social identity salience is linked to more pronounced intergroup conflict.

However, this study also contributes to existing literature by exploring the nuanced relationship between social identity and cooperation, which has often been underexplored. Previous studies have primarily focused on the negative aspects of social identity, such as its role in perpetuating conflict and prejudice. This study, however, shifts the focus by demonstrating that social identity can also be leveraged to promote cooperation, especially when interventions emphasize shared goals and values. These findings provide a more balanced view of social identity's impact on intergroup dynamics, expanding the theoretical understanding of how social identity influences both conflict and cooperation (Abou-Ismail, 2023; Bræin, 2024).

The results point to the dual nature of social identity, suggesting that it can be both a source of division and a catalyst for collaboration. The positive correlation between social identity salience and conflict implies that individuals with strong group identification may perceive out-group members as threats, leading to increased conflict. However, the observed increase in cooperation among participants with lower social identity salience suggests that less rigid group identification allows individuals to engage more easily with out-group members. This reflects the complexity of social identity, where individuals' attachment to their group can enhance group cohesion, but at the same time, it can hinder interactions with other groups. The results signal that fostering flexibility in social identity, particularly by emphasizing common goals, can reduce conflict and increase cooperation, pointing to the importance of identity management in intergroup relations (Cheng, 2024; Silberberg, 2026).

The implications of these findings are significant for both theory and practice in intergroup relations. For theory, the study challenges the traditional view that social identity is a purely divisive force by illustrating its potential to promote cooperation when managed appropriately. In practice, these findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing intergroup conflict should not only focus on addressing differences but also on fostering shared social identities. Programs that emphasize common objectives, values, or goals across group boundaries can promote cooperation and reduce conflict, even in highly polarized contexts. This has practical applications in conflict resolution, organizational diversity initiatives, and multicultural education, where creating an inclusive environment based on shared goals can enhance social cohesion (Canavan, 2023; Isufaj, 2025).

The findings of this study can be explained through the lens of social identity theory, which posits that individuals derive a sense of self-worth from their group affiliations. High social identity salience leads to stronger in-group favoritism, which can cause individuals to view out-group members negatively, fostering conflict. The observed reduction in cooperation among high salience groups may be due to individuals' reluctance to engage with those outside their group, whom they may perceive as competitors or threats. On the other hand, the lower levels of social identity salience in certain groups may have made individuals more open to cooperation, as they were less likely to feel that their identity was under threat by engaging with out-group members. These findings suggest that the strength of group identification plays a critical role in determining the extent to which individuals are willing to cooperate with others, highlighting the dynamic relationship between identity and intergroup behavior (Bortolini, 2025; Canavan, 2023).

Moving forward, future research should investigate how different types of social identity such as national, ethnic, or organizational affect intergroup conflict and cooperation in varying contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how social identity salience fluctuates over time and how these fluctuations impact intergroup relations. Practically, efforts

to reduce intergroup conflict should consider strategies that allow for the flexibility of social identity, particularly by promoting inclusive identities that transcend group boundaries. Interventions could focus on creating shared social identities or common goals that encourage collaboration across groups. Organizations and policymakers could use these insights to design programs that not only manage conflict but actively foster cooperation among diverse groups, contributing to more peaceful and cohesive societies. Further exploration into how interventions influence social identity salience could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of such programs.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the dual role that social identity plays in intergroup relations, particularly in conflict and cooperation. The study demonstrates that high social identity salience is linked to increased intergroup conflict, as individuals with stronger group identification tend to favor their in-group and view out-group members as threats. Conversely, individuals with lower social identity salience were more likely to engage in cooperative behaviors with out-group members. This suggests that the intensity of group identification significantly influences the dynamics of conflict and cooperation, with a more flexible or lower salience of social identity fostering intergroup cooperation.

This research contributes to the field by providing a more nuanced understanding of social identity in the context of both conflict and cooperation. While existing literature has largely focused on the divisive aspects of social identity, this study shifts the focus to also explore its potential for fostering cooperation. By combining quantitative surveys with qualitative case studies, the research offers a comprehensive methodology for examining the role of social identity in intergroup dynamics. This methodological approach allows for a more detailed exploration of the factors that influence both conflict and cooperation, contributing to a more holistic view of social identity's impact on group relations.

One limitation of this study is the reliance on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to examine causal relationships between social identity salience and intergroup behaviors over time. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to explore how social identity salience evolves and influences conflict and cooperation across different contexts and over extended periods. Additionally, the study primarily focused on social identity within specific demographic groups, and future studies could investigate the role of intersectional identities, such as gender, class, or religion, in shaping intergroup dynamics. Exploring these variables will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social identity influences intergroup relations in diverse and multifaceted contexts.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the course of preparing this work, the author employed Google Assisted assistance for language refinement, academic paraphrasing, and plagiarism detection to ensure that the content was original and free from duplication. Following the use of this tool, the author conducted a thorough review and revision of the material, thereby accepting full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and authenticity of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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