

**Moral Courage in Foreign Affairs: Analysing 100 Years of Political Thought and
Debate**

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Abstract

With increasing polarization of societies and threats to democracy, tools to maintain and strengthen democracy become more important. Moral courage might be one such tool, as it has been defined as the courage of citizens to stand up to defend democratic norms. Alternatively, it has been used to describe politicians who stand up for what they believe is right. In foreign policy, these two definitions of moral courage intersect. Clarifying the understanding of moral courage is crucial for efforts to use moral courage to strengthen democracy and civil society. In this study we explore the usage of moral courage within foreign policy thought and debate over the last 100 years. Analysing all articles published in the magazine Foreign Affairs we found three main themes around moral courage: politics, military politics, and society. Our results support the existence of two different understandings of moral courage as relating to politicians vs to regular citizens. The politics notion appears to be prevalent among the English-speaking world, whereas the society notion is more prevalent in relation to Germany. These systematic differences must be considered in the application of research on moral courage and in future research on the topic.

Keywords: moral courage; civil courage; foreign affairs; civil society; democracy

Societal norms of peacefulness, plurality, tolerance, and cooperation are central to maintaining social cohesion and a liberal democratic society. Ordinary citizens can play an important role in this by actively defending these norms in everyday interactions. Complementary, politicians are public actors who can encourage social cohesion, for example, by emphasising the importance of bipartisan politics and working to reduce extreme polarisation. Both, the actions of ordinary citizens and elected politicians are important and have been termed *moral courage* (Baumert et al., 2013; Kennedy, 1955; Schalk et al., 2023, 2024a, 2024b). When considering what counts as moral courage, previous research has suggested that individuals in different cultures may give more weight either to the actions of ordinary citizens or politicians. For example, the usage and understanding of moral courage in English speaking countries is focused on politicians, whereas the German translation as *Zivilcourage* emphasises actions by citizens (Schalk et al., 2023). These two notions are not necessarily exclusive. One area where the two may connect in interesting ways is the area of foreign policy. In foreign policy, on the one hand, individual actors (who may be politicians) are talking about or taking actions on a systemic policy level. On the other hand, such actions are often geared at promoting democracy or reducing (intergroup) conflict and violence and as such affect and involve ordinary citizens. Hence, foreign policy has to account for the behaviour, attitudes, and values of the societies of other countries as well as their own. We believe that a focused study on the usage of moral courage in a foreign policy context is of particular theoretical interest to further clarify the roles of politicians and ordinary citizens in regard to moral courage. Considering the intersection of the different notions of moral courage within foreign policy, studying moral courage in this specific domain of politics can provide new insights for understanding moral courage and its nuances.

Previous academic work on moral courage has focused on three main areas: Moral courage at the workplace in the context of ethical decision making (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007), moral courage among nurses to provide ethical care to patients (Numminen et al., 2017), and moral courage in everyday life as a reaction to norm violations (Osswald et al., 2010). However, recent work on public discourse in newspapers revealed that over the last 75 years

only one of these three areas was represented: moral courage in everyday life (Schalk et al., 2023). In addition, we found another, previously much less attended to, area of interest, with a large share of discourse focusing on politicians and public figures. In Germany, moral courage in post-WWII discussions has focused on the everyday lives of ordinary citizens, and encouragement of moral courage as part of public policy is widespread in politics, schools, and police campaigns (Gugel, 2004; “Zero Tolerance for Hate,” 2019; Polizeiliche Kriminalprävention der Länder und des Bundes, n.d.; Steinmeier, 2019). With the German understanding of moral courage linked to democratic values (Meyer, 2014), this has appeared as a promising tool to allow society to peacefully self-regulate and maintain social cohesion (Brandstätter & Jonas, 2012). In contrast, in English speaking countries, moral courage in public discourse appears to be neither used for actions of ordinary citizens, nor tied to upholding democratic values. Instead, moral courage was mainly related to politicians and other public figures (Schalk et al., 2023, 2024a). This focus on public figures may make the term moral courage less useful in encouraging everyday behaviours of people that could strengthen social cohesion. Moreover, with moral courage in the English language emphasising personal values that one should stand up for, more widespread moral courage could not only mean engagement for democracy and human rights, but also more violent and extreme ways of defending and introducing illiberal ideas, to the extent that politicians endorse anti-democratic values (Skitka, 2012).

These nuances raise interesting questions within the context of foreign policy as a specific domain of politics and public discourse. Foreign policy generally is concerned with the relationships of a nation with other nations and international organizations. It describes concrete political policies and laws that govern, for example, trade and foreign aid as well as the interactions government officials and diplomats have with other nations. Diplomacy, trade, and military actions are all manifestations of foreign policy. It can be used as tool to advance geopolitical interests and the influence of a nation, to form military and trade alliances, and to ultimately ensure the safety of the nation against threats from other nations. While the focus of foreign policy is on nations, the actors are the government officials and the

diplomats of a nation. Of particular relevance in the post-WWII political order, the spread of democratic values has been a major motivation in the foreign policy of Western countries for decades. After the fall of the iron curtain, in an increasingly multipolar world, questions of democracy and individual rights have become ever more important in foreign policy, as shown by an increase in the usage of the term democracy in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* especially after 1990. As such, politicians or countries may often claim some higher moral goal for their foreign policy and tap further into the concept of moral courage (Goldsmith & Posner, 2002; Homolar-Riechmann, 2009). These questions are also central to the definitions of moral courage and have influenced conversations about the relations of the USA, and other Western countries, with, for example, Russia and China. Public opinion, societal values, and morals can influence foreign policy, and the topic of moral courage has therefore been of at least implicit relevance for politicians and political analysts in foreign policy (Kertzer et al., 2014; Knecht & Weatherford, 2006; Risse-Kappen, 1991). Returning to the previously established different usages of moral courage focusing on either citizens or politicians, within a foreign policy context these discourses, if both are present, would work on two different levels: Politicians showing moral courage in official capacity, versus an encouragement of moral courage shown by ordinary citizens as either facilitating or encouraging a democratic norm within society. Consequently, foreign policy lies on the intersection between the two differing understandings of moral courage by encompassing both interpretations.

Foreign policy is an ever-evolving field that needs to adapt to the realities of the world. Thus, it is imperative to consider temporal developments in the understanding and usage of moral courage. The (political) world went through a highly transformative phase in the last 100 years with the emergence and fall of major political systems, former colonised states gaining independence, two world wars followed by the cold-war, and finally the fall of the iron curtain leading to a general restructuring of world politics through international institutions and increasing interdependence between states. Similarly, the contexts in which moral courage has been used and the interpretations of these actions may have changed as the political order and with it societies transformed. We can trace such changes and thinking

through archival research that allows us to reconstruct psychological concepts such as moral courage where it is not possible to access them through interviews or questionnaires (Jackson et al., 2022).

In this study we focus on one specific outlet which has been one of the key sources for discussing foreign policy from a US perspective. *Foreign Affairs* is an influential magazine on international relations and foreign policy founded in 1922 in New York, USA. Publications span 100 years since its inaugural issue in September 1922. This magazine is also of particular real-world significance, because the authors of *Foreign Affairs* include not only academics, thinkers, and journalists but also important politicians and diplomats like Presidents, Secretaries of State, and Ambassadors from all over the world. The archive of *Foreign Affairs* thus allows a deep dive into thoughts on politics and international affairs and can reveal greater insights into the understanding of moral courage in foreign policy over the last 100 years. These insights mainly apply to politics as they concern the United States, yet to the extent that the US has become the most powerful international player in international politics, this focus only strengthens the relevance of any insights gained.

We used a thematic analysis approach to explore the usage of moral courage specifically in an international politics context and tease apart the broader context as well as more detailed features of moral courage. We expect the usage of moral courage to mainly refer to politics, but as mentioned above we also expect to find some references to moral courage among ordinary citizens.

Methods

Data

The foreign policy magazine “*Foreign Affairs*” publishes analysis and commentary on foreign affairs since 1922. Among the authors are politicians, political leaders, journalists, political scientists, historians, and military leaders. We downloaded the entire archive of *Foreign Affairs* from the first publication in September 1922 until August 2022, resulting in 51,197 articles. To narrow down the articles to those that would allow us to explore the understanding of moral courage, we searched headlines and full texts of the articles for three

terms of interest. We searched for “moral courage” as the main term, for “civil courage” as the literal translation of the German concept of Zivilcourage, and for “moral cowardice” as the antonym of moral courage. The search resulted in 32 articles for moral courage, 2 articles for civil courage, and 1 article for moral cowardice. However, in one of the moral courage articles the term is only used in a quote from another article that is included here, hence this article is excluded from our analysis. Searches for different grammatical variants, such as morally courageous, returned no results. In total, our corpus for the analysis included 34 articles.

As the articles are under copyright by Foreign Affairs we provide our dataset without the full text articles, but these can be retrieved from Foreign Affairs following the links in the data set (<https://osf.io/mnshg/>).

Analysis

We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyse the articles for common themes in their use of the respective terms of interest. As these articles usually cover big ideas and events and the use of moral courage, civil courage, and moral cowardice is limited to a single idea or point within the article, codes for the thematic analysis were only created for the parts of the articles that provided direct context for the use of the target terms.

In the first step the first author familiarised themselves with the data by reading the articles. The first author used the paragraphs around the target terms to create codes for how they were used. These codes were subsequently sorted into themes that capture the main ideas. Themes were created as the first author looked through the codes and the themes were refined throughout the analysis. While we did not use a list of pre-defined themes and worked inductively, we were aware of possible topics that were found in a previous study (Schalk et al., 2023). The final codes and themes were reviewed and discussed by all authors and changes were made to capture as much detail as possible concerning the context and features of moral courage in Foreign Affairs.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

A first observation and important result is the relative frequency of the term. Previous work suggested that politics and military are the most common topics for the use of moral courage in newspapers in general, yet, in the foreign politics magazine *Foreign Affairs* only about 0.07% of articles mention moral courage or the closely related terms civil courage and moral cowardice. To provide some background, articles that mention generic politics or potentially related terms are more frequent, e.g., war (31.65%), society (11.32%), democracy (10.87%), citizen/citizens (10.78%), moral/morality (6.49%), courage (1.58%), collective action (0.52%), social cohesion (0.24%), civil disobedience (0.17%). This indicates that moral courage is not a very common term in this context. Considering the frequency in comparison with other potentially relevant but infrequent terms like social cohesion or civil disobedience, moral courage is still less common. This is of some theoretical interest because, for example, civil disobedience is conceptually related to moral courage (Schwan, 2004), yet the focus on the social element appears overall more frequent than individual actions like moral courage.

Concerning the keywords that *Foreign Affairs* assigned to each article, among the 34 articles we found 66 different keywords with the most common ones being “United States” ($n = 11$), “U.S. Foreign Policy” ($n = 7$), “War & Military Strategy” ($n = 5$), and “Europe” ($n = 5$).

Focusing on the usage of the terms over time (Figure 1), the absolute number of articles per decade follows no linear trend ($B = 0.48$, 95% CI [-2.23, 3.18], $p = .695$) but regression analysis revealed a quadratic trend for articles mentioning a term related to moral courage ($B = 2.90$, 95% CI [0.20, 5.60], $p = .038$). In the overall regression model of time on the total number of articles, the decade explained about 44% of the total variance in the number of articles ($R^2 = .44$, $F(2,8) = 3.15$, $p = .098$) but the overall model was not statistically significant, likely due to the low sample size and coarse temporal resolution. We found neither a linear nor a quadratic trend in the regression of time on the percent of articles published each decade that include either of the target terms ($R^2 = .15$, $F(2,8) = 0.72$, $p = .517$). The absolute number of articles decreased until about the 1970s and then increased again until today. This might

suggest that moral courage lost in importance over time and had a resurgence more recently. On the other hand, considering the percentage of all articles in a given decade we find no such trend, suggesting that the absolute number may increase or decrease depending on the general number of articles Foreign Affairs publishes.

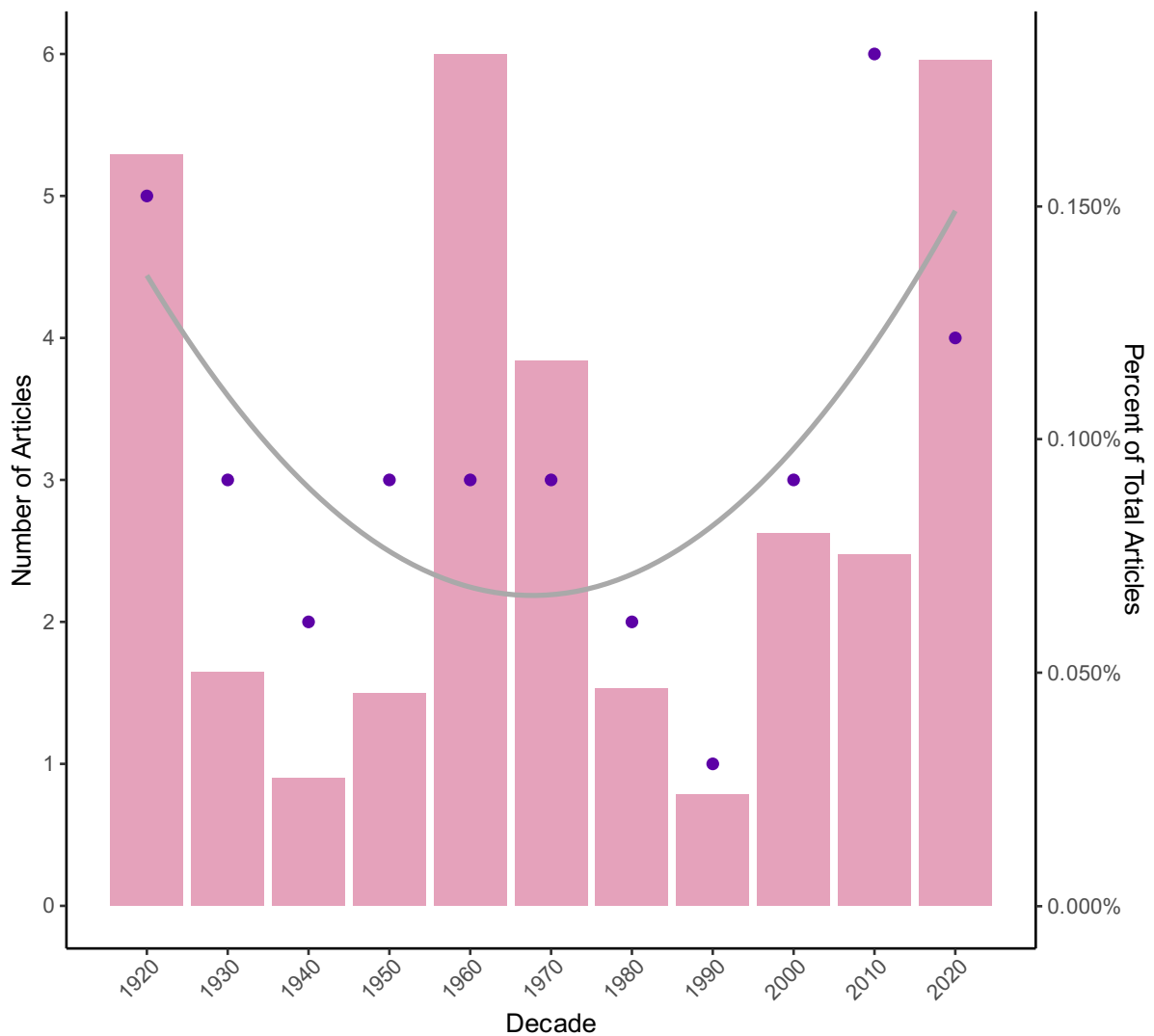


Figure 1 Frequency of articles mentioning moral courage, civil courage, or moral cowardice across decades

Decades include the year indicated plus the following nine years. Points represent the absolute frequency over time; bars represent the percent of the total articles published during that decade; the quadratic regression line is the trend for absolute number of articles.

The authors of the articles came from 8 different countries: 23 from the USA, 3 from the UK, 2 from France and Germany, respectively, and 1 each from Canada, Ireland, South

Africa, and Sweden. Each contributor was an author of a single article, suggesting that there were no author-specific preferences. The authors' backgrounds included political scientists, journalists, politicians and diplomats, and military officers.

Thematic Analysis

We identified nine themes in our corpus that described the context in which moral courage, civil courage, and moral cowardice were used. Three of these (politics, military politics, society) comprised the main themes and described the broad topic in which they were used, and each article can be categorised in either of these three themes. Six sub-themes described more detailed topical features. Not all articles were categorised into the sub-themes. Table 1 shows an overview of all themes. We further categorised the articles based on features relating to whom or what moral courage was ascribed to, and the type of action related to moral courage. Figure 2 visualizes the relations between these specific features and the main themes. Lastly, we examined whether articles described moral courage as something that is present or that is needed or desired.

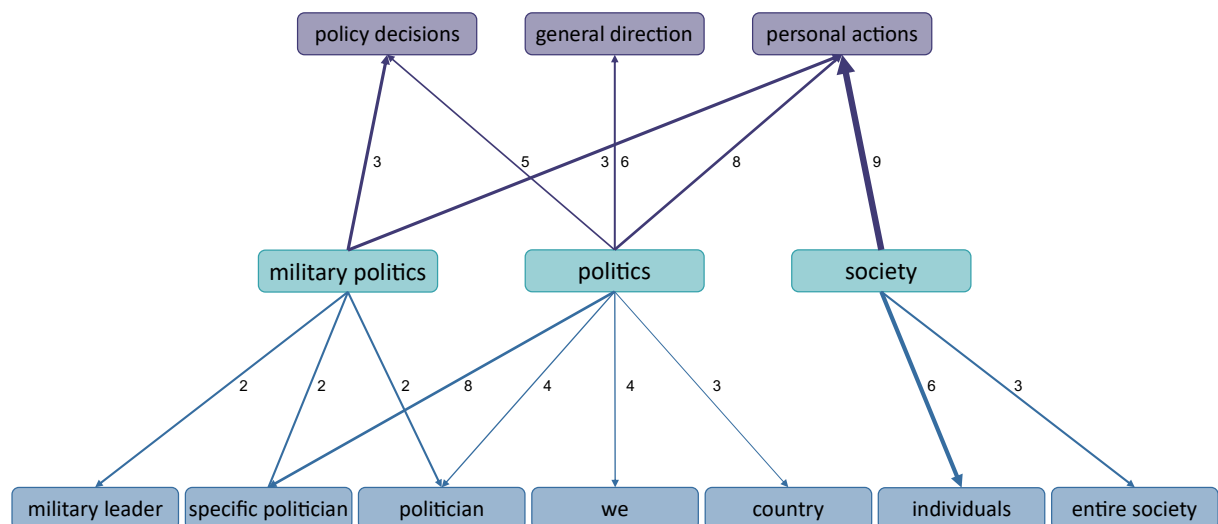


Figure 2 Main themes and associations with specific features

Main themes in the center, detailed actions related to moral courage at the top, actors related to moral courage at the bottom. Arrow thickness is based on percentage of articles of the respective main theme in the sub-category. Numbers to the right of the respective line represent the absolute number of articles from that main theme in the sub-category.

Table 1 Overview over all themes and subthemes with examples from the data

Theme	Description	Example	<i>n</i>
Main Themes			
politics	articles referenced political actors	Meanwhile, we think that if the statesmen of the world had the moral courage to tackle in a realistic way the "few fundamental problems" mentioned by Signor Grandi, an obstruction like that of the intergovernmental debts could be removed presently from the path to world recovery.	19
society	articles referenced actors from the society	[Apocalyptic rhetoric in the United States] has sought to remind [citizens] of their founding values and to give them the moral courage to act on those ideals together.	9
military politics	articles referenced political actors in the military context	Our naval and military establishments are maintained on a wasteful scale, largely because we do not distinguish between the effective and the ineffective. The vice of the circle is explained by ignorance or lack of moral courage being its centre.	6
Sub-Themes			
characterization	articles referenced character traits	There must be more persons equipped by mentality, civic conscience and moral courage [...]	5
consequences	articles referenced the consequences of behaviour	[...] a partner who shared the same opinion and who had the moral courage to face unpopularity at home [...]	3
World War II rescuers	articles referenced the actions of people who rescued persecuted people during WWII	Most people, for example, would distinguish between a Nazi officer in a concentration camp and a shopkeeper who displayed moral cowardice by pretending not to see what was happening.	3
mistakes	articles referenced admittance of past mistakes	If wisdom in government eludes us, perhaps courage could substitute - the moral courage to terminate mistakes.	2
personal values	articles referenced acting on personal values	With extraordinary moral courage generals Botha and Smuts took the field, in honorable fulfilment of their promises of allegiance [...]	2
uncompromising	articles referenced being uncompromising	Today's nationalists hail U.S. President Ronald Reagan's "moral courage" in confronting the Soviet Union, cast him as the epitome of U.S. resolve [...]	2

Main Themes

The most common theme was politics and included articles that used moral courage in the context of politics, be it people involved in politics or political decision making. Four articles applied moral courage to politicians in general, and eight articles to specific, individually named, politicians. Further three articles referred to moral courage in relation to a country, e.g., one article (ID 5) suggested that “she [the UK] is no longer trying — as was the watchword on the eve of the war — to revive the old order of things in its entirety. Let us unreservedly admire this realism, this suppleness, this moral courage.” Four articles simply spoke of *we*, seemingly referring to the whole country and all its people as an entity that together needed to take a certain path. However, it is politicians or other people in a position of power that ultimately would have had to make a decision or act in a certain way. In one article (ID 2), for example, it said “But it is even more difficult to absorb the enormous debt of the state, for in addition to the moral courage we [the French] must have the indispensable resources and practice a policy of methodical repayments”. While referring to all French it is clear that the decision about repayments was one for politicians to make.

The more specific actions that these articles related to moral courage were split into three broad categories. Eight articles described personal actions or decisions that are related to political points, e.g., “We can have the moral courage, this time, to remind ourselves that major international violence is, in terms of the values of our civilization, a form of bankruptcy for us all” (ID 11). In six articles moral courage was used to describe a general political direction that was or should be taken, for example, one article (ID 17) stated “If wisdom in government eludes us, perhaps courage could substitute—the moral courage to terminate mistakes”. Lastly, five articles described concrete policy decisions, e.g., “renunciation of intelligence gathering would be an act of moral courage with untold beneficial international consequences” (ID 19). Regarding the presence for and need of moral courage the politics theme was very balanced with ten articles referring to moral courage as something that was present and nine as something that was needed or should have been shown.

The second most common main theme was society with nine articles. Moral courage

in the articles was applied to both individual citizens ($n = 6$) and society as a whole ($n = 3$). For example, one article described the actions of individuals who had saved Jews and other persecuted groups during WWII. Another article (ID 30) referred to the whole society, stating “[Apocalyptic rhetoric] has sought to remind [citizens] of their founding values and to give them the moral courage to act on those ideals together”. More concretely, all nine articles described personal actions and decisions within society. In comparison to the articles in the politics themes, these were not directly related to political points but to a more societal point. For example, one article (ID 18) stated “In the Soviet Union, the very fact that dissenters and human rights groups [...] are at all able to express their views and to pursue their activities [...] is in itself a sign of the changes that have occurred in Soviet society during the last two decades. While these signs of resilience, alertness, and moral courage may engender hope for a long-term evolutionary process implying some measure of democratization [...]”. However, these personal actions and decision were not for personal gain, but for the greater good of society and against autocratic regimes as described in the aforementioned excerpt, or for the help of other members of society, exemplified by the articles about Jew rescuers. Needing versus having or showing moral courage was balanced in the society theme with five articles describing moral courage as something that someone had or had shown and four articles describing moral courage as something that someone ought to have.

The third main theme, politics of military, featured moral courage in relation to the military. However, moral courage was never used to describe any kind of combat action or to refer to ordinary soldiers. Rather, in two articles moral courage was used in relation to politicians in general, in two articles in relation to a specific politician, and in two further articles in relation to military leaders. Although related to the military, the relative emphasis on politicians over military leaders is noteworthy. The actions described in the articles in this theme were split equally with three articles each referring to personal actions and policy decisions, respectively. One example for a personal action was that “generals sometimes display leadership and moral courage by refraining from firing a subordinate” (ID 28). In relation to a policy decision in the context of the military, one article discussed the “moral

courage President Joe Biden exercised in [rejecting the advice of his generals on military interventions]” (ID 32). References in the articles to needing or having/displaying moral courage were split equally with three articles mentioning each.

Sub-Themes

Figure 3 shows the relations between the main themes and sub-themes. The politics theme was connected to the most subthemes, covering all but WWII rescuers. The military politics theme was focused on the characterization of people and on dealing with mistakes, while the society theme only included the sub-themes of consequences and WWII rescuers. The overlap between military politics and military was larger compared to that between politics and society, indicating that society stands apart from the other two main themes. This is no surprise given that military politics focused on one particular subject of politics, the military, whereas the politics theme combined all other topics in politics.

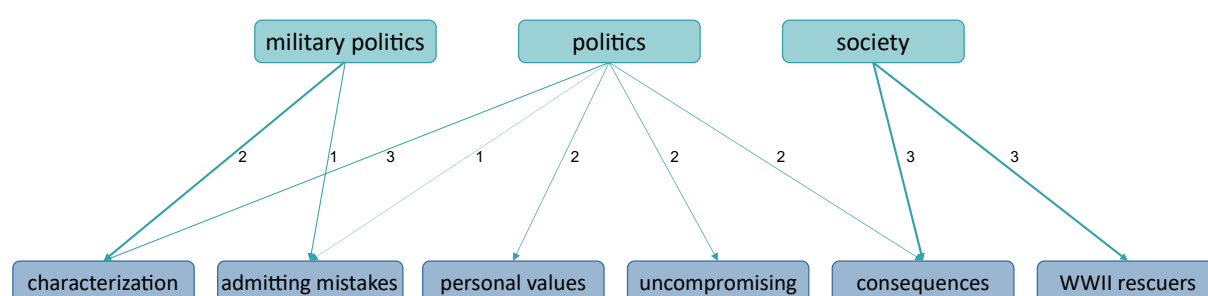


Figure 3 Overview of main themes and sub-themes

Main themes at the top, sub-themes at the bottom; not all articles were categorised into sub-themes. Arrow thickness is based on percentage of articles of the respective main theme in the sub-theme. Numbers are absolute articles of the respective main theme in the sub-theme.

Discussion

Our results illustrated the expected distinctive uses of moral courage within foreign policy. We found that moral courage is systematically thought of on two different levels, within politics and within societies. This is evident in the main themes, but also in the specific features of the usage of moral courage.

Of particular interest for theoretical discussions of moral courage is the distinction between the military and politics versus the society themes. In the majority of articles in the politics and military politics themes, the focal point of moral courage was either a specific (named) person or a distinct group like politicians. The sub-themes common to these main themes further emphasised the importance of a (public) individual in relation to moral courage. In contrast, the focus of the society theme was less on specific individuals or political actors, but on the society as a whole or on individuals in general without reference to them being, for example, politicians. On a political level it may help to build a well-functioning government and parliament that can safeguard human rights and democratic institutions. If anti-democratic sentiments are especially growing within society, though, any measures that politicians can take may fail to reach those having such sentiments. In this case it is important that society itself may counteract such efforts and confront those that disseminate hate and discrimination. This second level was reflected in the society theme in our corpus.

Cross-Cultural Differences

The distinction between the political and societal levels is mirrored in a study analysing newspaper articles (Schalk et al., 2023). In that study the authors showed this distinction to be especially noteworthy across different cultures, with the societal level being salient in a German newspaper, and the political level salient in UK and US newspapers. It is important to highlight that the term commonly used in German may imply different characteristics, even though the academic literature tends to use the German and English terms somewhat interchangeably (Schalk et al., 2024b). The background of the articles and authors in the present study indicate a similar distinction between the German understanding of moral courage and the English understanding. Noteworthy in this regard is that six out of nine articles in the society theme had some relationship to Germany. The author of one article was born in Germany, the authors of three other articles had worked and lived for extended periods of time in Germany, and two further articles from US authors concerned Germany during WWII. These articles used the target terms in a way that more closely reflects the German concept of *Zivilcourage*, which is often translated as moral courage. Moreover, when

specifically focusing on the term civil courage as the literal translation of the German term, in our corpus it has only been used in the context of society and by authors who have worked and lived in Germany for many years. Overall, articles in the society theme reflected the German understanding of the concept and the articles in the politics and military politics theme reflected the American and British understanding.

In addition, in the politics and military politics theme, no comments were made on whether everything that is part of someone's personal convictions qualifies as moral courage or if there are actions and causes that should not be considered as moral courage. Some researchers on moral courage in English-speaking contexts have argued that actions based on deeply held personal beliefs qualify as moral courage, even suggesting that terrorists may be showing moral courage with their actions (Press, 2018; Skitka, 2012). In contrast, in the society theme we found notions that reflected definitions of the concept of Zivilcourage, common in Germany, emphasising that Zivilcourage is non-violent and follows democratic principles (Meyer, 2014). In the society theme, moral courage was described as something inherent to a free, liberal society (ID 16), something that should not be applied to those who were part of the Nazi-Regime (ID 9), or that "does not come from penning angry polemics without regard for real-world consequences" (ID 26).

Implications for Theory and Practice

Our findings have implications for research and theory of moral courage. We studied one particular context that bridges both individual and collective interests and actions. Previous research in psychology has focused on actions by individuals. Most experimental studies have employed vignettes or behavioural experiments that included situations such as theft (Baumert et al., 2013), harassment (Brandstätter et al., 2016) or racism (Goodwin et al., 2020). These experiments are reflected in the society theme we found in our data. However, the majority of articles in our corpus are concerned with standing up for your own opinions within politics. This raises two issues. One, it is not clear to what degree the behaviour studied in those previous experiments is cross-culturally applicable. Factors such as cultural values or historic experiences may affect to what degree bystanders intervene in different scenarios. Few

studies have included non-German speaking participants. Brandstätter and colleagues (2016) used a German and a Dutch sample, and Goodwin et al. (2020) and Kutlaca et al. (2020) used American participants but did not investigate bystander intervention in the face of consequences for the intervening person, which is a distinguishing factor of the German connotation of Zivilcourage (Greitemeyer et al., 2006). Our findings suggest more research is needed specifically to evaluate the cross-cultural applicability of moral courage given that there appears to be no universal understanding of the term.

The second issue is directly connected to this and concerns the connection between research and the real world. If our research shall have an impact in real life, it is important to consider lay peoples understanding of the world. Lay people in Germany can distinguish Zivilcourage from helping behaviour (Greitemeyer et al., 2006) and generally Zivilcourage is an accessible concept in the German society. Moral courage, however, is used differently in the English language and as such may not be an appropriate term to communicate knowledge about this type of helping behaviour or enact policies aimed at increasing societal self-regulation related to small-scale violence or discrimination. Some German authors have instead used the term civil courage for this type of behaviour, a literal translation of the German term, and much closer in meaning to the type of behaviour Zivilcourage describes (Greitemeyer et al., 2007; Schwan, 2004). It emphasises the role of civil institutions and civilians, providing a clear distinction to courage shown for personal reasons and by people in a specific role, e.g., politicians.

Such a distinction can also be useful in discussions on foreign policy to meaningfully separate the actions of politician and diplomats and those of citizens. As an example, if a foreign policy aim is to encourage politicians in a foreign country to show more courage and not vote with an autocrat but advocate for democratic values, this would be quite differently achieved than trying to encourage citizens to develop the courage to stand up for democratic principles and human rights.

Limitations

Our analysis is limited by analysing one specific publication. It is, however, the most influential and widely read magazine on foreign policy and thus provides a good indication of the general themes and thought in foreign policy over the last 100 years. It is also noteworthy that this is the preferred outlet for foreign heads of state and politicians to discuss and broadcast major foreign policy events or changes (e.g., Scholz, 2022). We considered the location and life circumstances of authors in our analysis, where necessary and appropriate. Future studies should look at foreign policy publications from other countries, especially Germany given the central status that the concept may have played in German politics and discourse, e.g. around the Nazi-Regime and the GDR (Schwan, 2004), to confirm the reliability of some of our findings.

Conclusion

In summary, we found three main themes in articles in Foreign Affairs connected to moral courage: (1) politics, (2) military politics, and (3) society. These themes show two main applications of the term moral courage, the courage of politicians in executing their office, and the courage of citizens as part of the society. These differences run along a divide of authors being connected to Germany to some degree and authors having no connection to Germany, with those with a connection mainly using moral courage to describe the actions of citizens in society. This mirrors previous findings (Schalk et al., 2023) and suggests a meaningful differentiation of the usage of moral courage with implications for theory and research, as well as practice. These systematic differences could be made visible by conceptually separating the two constructs moral courage and Zivilcourage and, for example, using the term civil courage where the courage of citizens to defend democratic values is discussed, and the term moral courage when we speak about leadership and the defence of personal values. Next steps in this line of research should focus on the distinctions people make in regard to the different types of behaviour that have been associated with moral courage, as well as potential ways to encourage and train moral courage in these different domains, including foreign policy.

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