

Stoic Leadership, Moral Virtue, and Grassroots Peace Orientation in Malaysia

Azrin Abdul Razak¹, Norsafriaman Abd. Rahman^{1*}, Sharfika Raime^{1,2}, Aervina Mison³, Paramjeet Singh Shutar Singh⁴

¹Faculty of Business, UNITAR International University, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia, ²Centre for Research and Graduate Studies, Asia Metropolitan University, 47600 Subang Jaya, Selangor, ³Faculty of Business and Management, QUEST International University, 30250 Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, ⁴Faculty of Business, Management and Accounting, Asia Metropolitan University, 47600 Subang Jaya, Selangor

*Corresponding Author Email: safriman@unitar.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i9/28876>

Published Date: 24 September 2026

Abstract

Contemporary discourse on peacebuilding and humanitarian governance has predominantly emphasised institutional arrangements, elite negotiations, and policy-driven interventions, often neglecting the ethical foundations embedded within everyday community life. Addressing this gap, this conceptual paper advances a people-centred perspective by proposing a framework that links perceived stoic leadership and moral virtue to grassroots peace orientation within Malaysia's plural society. The motivation for this research is inspired by the song "*Warisan*" (heritage) by Sudirman Arshad, particularly the lyric "*di sini lahirnya sebuah cinta*," (this is where love is born) which symbolically reflects compassion, shared responsibility, and collective belonging. This perspective reinforces the view that peace is cultivated through moral values enacted in daily social interactions, simultaneously emphasising "belonging and responsibility to community". Drawing on stoic leadership theory, virtue ethics, and civic engagement theory, this paper develops an integrated conceptual framework in which perceived stoic leadership (encompassing courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance) influences grassroots peace orientation through the mediating role of moral virtue. Grassroots peace orientation is conceptualised as an overarching construct that captures individuals' orientation towards social trust, intergroup harmony, humanitarian solidarity, and the rejection of violence. This conceptual paper contributes to the literature by bridging moral philosophy with leadership and peace studies, offering a theoretically grounded framework that extends peacebuilding discussion beyond institutional contexts to everyday civic life. Parallel with the philosophical essence of "*Warisan*", sustainable peace is conceptualised as emerging from shared moral commitment embedded within society.

Keywords: Grassroots Peace Orientation, Moral Virtue, Peacebuilding, Perceived Stoic Leadership, Plural Society

Introduction

For sustainable development and social stability as well as for human wellbeing, peace has long been recognised as one of the essential criteria (Souiai et al., 2026). Historically, diplomatic and institutional governance, conflict resolution and public policy were the main understandings of peacebuilding, and governments as well as international organisations were seen as the major actors which maintain peace (Shahnawaz et al., 2025). The emphasis on these macro-level approaches will always be useful, but more scholars are acknowledging that ordinary citizens contribute to the building of peace through social interactions, ethical behaviour and civic responsibility. According to this people-centred viewpoint, sustainable peace cannot only be brought through the intervention of the institutions but also by people themselves who show respect, compassion, justice and responsibility in their daily interactions with others (Singh & Singh, 2024).

This perspective is particularly relevant in Malaysia, a multicultural country with ethnic, religious and cultural diversities. After enjoying relative social stability for decades, Malaysia is reported to currently facing emerging challenges brought about by political polarisation, religious misunderstanding, false information, online hatred, and declining trust among people (Abdul Malib et al., 2025). Such developments indicate the importance of maintaining peace not only to stop a large-scale outbreak of war but also to strengthen good relationships between people in a community. The grassroots peace orientation is thus becoming more important as it indirectly implies that people are willing to advance social trust, humanitarian solidarity, intergroup harmony, and peaceful resolutions of differences. Such an orientation offers resilience via diversity encouragement and a repudiation of prejudice, discrimination as well as violence (Abdul Malib et al., 2025).

The need to nurture grassroot peace orientation is strongly associated with Malaysia's cultural heritage as demonstrated by the powerful message in the song "*Warisan*" ("heritage") by Sudirman Arshad (Arshad, 1982). The recovered lyric "*di sini lahirnya sebuah cinta*" ("this is where love is born") gives peace a symbolical meaning that peace emerges from compassion, sharing responsibility, and togetherness, not merely from regulatory or institutional authority. According to this school of thought, people who act morally and care for the well-being of others help create a peaceful society. In this respect, leadership and character can become important social assets that help to shape values, motivate behaviour and strengthen communities (Postuła, 2025). Stoic leadership, which is defined by courage, wisdom, justice and temperance, in combination with moral virtue can provide a promising theoretical lens through which to understand how ethical leadership can promote peace-oriented attitudes in diverse communities. Such an understanding is also seconded by scholar Asakaviciute et al. (2025) and Moreno-Monsalve et al. (2023).

Considering this, a conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework based on the Stoic Leadership Theory, Virtue Ethics and Civic Engagement Theory designed to explain how perceived stoic leadership influences grassroots peace orientation, with moral virtue mediating this influence. Through leadership studies, moral philosophy, and peacebuilding literature, the paper seeks to expand ongoing conversations beyond institutional and policy approaches to peacebuilding to consider the ethical foundations in everyday community life. In other words, it provides a theoretical framework that contributes to how moral leadership, and virtuous citizenship may bolster sustainable peace in Malaysia's plural society.

Problem Statement

Despite much existing scholarly work on peacebuilding (e.g., Blay et al., 2025; Qasaye, 2023), the discourse remains dominated by institutional, political and security concerns. Organisations aiming for sustainable peace primarily focus on conflict resolution, peace accords, diplomacy, humanitarian governance, and state interventions (Budiana, 2024). However, these measures have proven ineffective (International Crisis Group, 2026). Although these approaches have contributed significantly to the comprehension of peacebuilding, especially at national and international levels, less attention has been paid to the ways in which peace is created socially. The theorising is insufficient on the role of the average citizen in promoting peaceful co-existence through ethical behaviour, interpersonal trust and civic virtue. The significance of a people-centred peace orientation as the basis for peace seems to have been overlooked by the institutions.

Another limitation deals with the idea of peace itself. Existing studies (e.g., Blay et al., 2025; Sab, 2023) often assessed peace level based on macro-level indicators such as political stability, conflict intensity, public safety, institutional performance, and the like. These indicators can be used for assessing peace condition of the nation, but they will not give any insights about the moral and behaviour orientations of the individuals who finally maintain peace in their daily life within their community. Despite being a crucial aspect of sustainable peace, there is relatively little conceptual and empirical literature on grassroots peace orientation (social trust, intergroup harmony, humanitarian solidarity and rejection of violence). The preventive strategies might be able or successfully built except the comprehension of peace value emergence concept has been grasped.

Another key gap refers to the low levels of leadership research inclusion in peacebuilding. Current research on leadership (Hoang et al., 2026; Onan et al., 2025; Reyes et al., 2026) has extensively studied transformational, servant, ethical, and authentic leadership in relation to organisational performance, employee well-being, innovation, and organisational commitment. Nevertheless, not much work has been done to understand how leadership contributes to peace-oriented attitudes beyond an organisational setting. Stoic leadership is an emerging area of scholarship that focuses on courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance (Hyland, 2024). These virtues are essentially in accordance with peaceful coexistence, ethical behaviour, and responsible citizenship. Generally, the contribution of stoic leadership to grassroots peace orientation remains scant.

Moreover, even though virtue ethics has for quite some time acknowledged moral virtue as a key ingredient of ethical behaviour (Raime & Abd. Rahman, 2026), peacebuilding literature does not fully account for this. Research (e.g., Baidya & Baidya, 2023; Palazzolo 2026; Saruhan, 2025) often gives primary importance to compassion, justice, honesty, forgiveness, responsibility as moral features that people desire. However, this research examines these virtues separately from leadership processes. Only a few studies have examined whether leadership fosters peace by developing moral virtue in people and communities. Knowledge of the psychological and ethical mechanisms through which leadership may make a difference to sustainable peace is limited. As such, the inclusion of moral virtue as an intervening construct gives a fuller account of how leadership could shape grassroots peace orientation through the cultivation of enduring ethical character.

In addition, few studies have presented a unified conceptual framework within the same study for Stoic Leadership Theory, Virtue Ethics, and Civic Engagement Theory. Despite a shared assumption that persons are morally responsible, capable of character development, and participatory members of society, these theoretical perspectives have come to have largely independent paths. The consolidation of these theories offers a chance to explain peacebuilding from a multidimensional approach fusing ethical leadership, moral character and civic responsibility. Hence, the authors believed that integrating this principle in the context of Malaysia's plural society, sustainable peace is contingent not only on the governance of institutions, but also on the willingness of diverse communities to practise tolerance, mutual respect and shared responsibility in their everyday lives.

Theoretical and conceptual gaps, if continue to exist, are likely to make peacebuilding remain heavily reliant on institutions and ignore the ethical capacities of individuals and communities to maintain peace from below. The objectives of strengthening social cohesion (unity); reducing prejudice; fostering humanitarian solidarity; and promoting responsible citizenship may be undermined. In a multicultural context such as Malaysia, the lack of grassroots peace orientation may lead to a decline in trust between individuals, increased polarisation, weakened community resilience and greater susceptibility to misinformation, intolerance and conflict (Noor, 2007; Temby, 2020). Thus, a need is felt for a people-centred conceptual framework, to explain how the perceived stoic leadership fosters grassroots peace orientation through the moral virtue. Such a framework not only fills important theoretical gaps but also provides a stronger basis for future empirical research and practical peacebuilding efforts oriented toward ethical leadership and stakeholder engagement.

Literature Review

Grassroots Peace Orientation

The grassroots peace orientation is defined as the capacity of individuals to support harmony, social trust, humanitarian concern, intergroup cooperation, and peaceful resolution of differences in everyday life. Grassroots peace orientation shifts the focus from institutional peacebuilding that focuses on official policies, diplomatic negotiations and formal conflict management towards citizens' attitudes, values and behaviours which are essential for building sustainable peace (Al Qurtuby, 2023). People who have a strong grassroots peace orientation tend to be against violence, appreciate diversity, empathise with others, and contribute to enhancing social cohesion in the community (Restorative Narratives Communities, 2023). In this way, peace is seen as the presence of mutual trust, respect, compassion, and shared responsibility in our everyday social relations, rather than merely an absence of conflict.

Sustainable peace can no longer be created by simply relying on its institutions. While it is accepted that governments, international organisations and policy frameworks can play some role in conflict prevention and resolution, the fact is that peaceful societies depend on individuals who act with tolerance, cooperation and civic responsibility on a continuous basis (Blay et al., 2025). Nevertheless, existing scholarship (e.g., Ikram & Boudraa, 2025; Taliep et al., 2026) continues to measure peace using macro-level indicators that include stability of governments, intensity of conflicts, effectiveness of governance or national security. While these indicators are useful for gauging the state of national peace, they are not great at giving an idea of how peaceful orientations develop among ordinary citizens at the local community

level. As a result, the conceptual framework of grassroots peace orientation remains underdeveloped despite its role in enhancing long-term social cohesion.

Within a plural society such as Malaysia, peaceful coexistence can only be achieved if there is ongoing interaction between various ethnic, religious and cultural communities (Abdullah, 2023; Ramli & Jamaludin, 2012). Though a long-standing theme in Malaysia, contemporary tensions arising from political polarisation, digital misinformation, declining trust in fellow citizens and identity-based issues are increasingly requiring peacebuilding strategies that go beyond institutional governance. Nevertheless, not much research looks at the ethics and leadership factors that create grassroots peace orientation in people. Researchers have largely worked on public policy, social integration or conflict management, which has not allowed for a greater theoretical understanding of how leadership, moral character and peace-oriented attitude interacts. As such, this conceptual paper argues that grassroots peace orientation is the key outcome through which sustainable peace can be understood from a people-centred perspective.

Stoic Leadership

The Stoics teach that people often confuse their longing for power with their sense of identity (Hyland, 2024). Effective leadership is a disciplined practice of a moral character rather than a show of authority or a play of influence (Heim et al., 2026). According to Zeno, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, leaders should always act according to reason. They should be determined, wise, just and temperate. When faced with uncertainty or adversity, these virtues enable leaders to keep their cool, do not lose their ethical consistency, and remain committed to serving the common good. Rather than seeking personal fame or power within the organisation, the stoic leader affects others through integrity, reasoned judgment, self-control, and sense of duty. According to contemporary studies on leadership (Hyland, 2024), the emerging perspective of stoic leadership turns the attention away from influence and towards character as the basis of effective leadership.

In the leadership literature, a lot of faith has been put in transformational, servant, authentic, ethical and similar kinds of leadership. All these leadership forms have a strong and empirical evidence backing them for having a positive impact on organisational effectiveness, employee engagement, trust, and psychological wellbeing (Hoang et al., 2026; Onan et al., 2025; Reyes et al., 2026). Although stoicism has received comparatively less attention than other philosophies, it is of growing interest today regarding ethical leadership, resilience, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making. Researchers who often explore the stoic principles from philosophy, psychology or personal robustness, rather few conceptualises the stoic leadership as organisational or sociological construct which could impact the social outcomes. Application of stoic leadership in peace-building research has been limited.

This limitation is important considering that the four principal stoic virtues which include courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance are related to peaceful coexistence and responsible citizenry. The moral virtue of courage allows one to stand by his or her morals and ethics even in the face of social pressure (Porter-O'Grady, 2026). Wisdom allows one to rationally judge what is fair and treat others accordingly (Zhang et al., 2022). Justice allows one to treat others fairly and with proper respect (Yuguero et al., 2025). Finally, temperance

allows one to control one's emotions and urge during conflict with others (Shahab & Adil, 2020).

Even though, these conceptual connections exist, empirical research has rarely examined stoic leadership outside an organisational context, particularly in the realm of community harmony and peacebuilding. This conceptual paper proposes stoic leadership as a higher-order formative construct of four virtues namely, courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance, seeking to show that leaders who consistently embody these virtues will cultivate a moral character which in turn encourages a grassroots peace orientation in Malaysia's plural society.

Moral Virtue (Mediator)

Moral virtue is a durable trait of a person that helps them in acting in accordance with the relation in terms of the ethical behaviour of man, the flourishing of man, and the common good (Eldridge, 2026). Moral virtue, which has its roots in Aristotelian ethics and continued to develop in subsequent traditions, emphasises that doing good is not merely a matter of obeying rules or being manipulated by external incentives, but is conditioned by the habitual practice of doing good. The way one sees a moral situation and reacts to it is the result of influences from his/her own virtues, influences like honesty, compassion, justice, courage, humility, integrity and responsibility. Throughout life, humans change, but they remain generally the same as they were at the beginning of their lives (Eldridge, 2026).

In modern literature, moral virtue is commonly linked with ethical leadership, prosocial behaviour, civic responsibility, organisational citizenship behaviour as well as social trust. Many peacebuilding scholars now agreed that sustainable peace goes beyond institutional arrangements because peaceful societies ultimately depend on citizens who cultivate empathy, respect, forgiveness, and care for others (Hwang, 2022). Despite this, most of the literature has examined moral virtue as either a by-product of moral education (e.g., the ethics of upbringing, and/or a particular ethical characteristic of a person, rather than the organisational or leadership processes through which virtues are constructed. Thus, it is often treated as a quality in itself, rather than a mechanism which links leadership and society.

Furthermore, despite an increasing awareness among leadership scholars of the importance of leaders as moral role models, very little research has explicitly examined moral virtue as the mediating process through which leadership influences grassroots peace orientation. The lack of knowledge limits understanding of how ethical leadership is translated into peaceful attitudes and behaviours in various communities. In this conceptual paper, the authors apply virtue ethics and civic engagement to argue that stoic leadership builds a grassroots peace orientation mainly because leaders that show consistent courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance encourage the internalisation of these virtues in the people. Consequently, ethical character helps influence sustainable peace at the level of the grassroots.

Underpinning Theories and Proposed Research Framework

Grounded in Stoic Leadership Theory (Vogt, 2024), Virtue Ethics (Aristotle, 2009), and Civic Engagement Theory (Ehrlich, 2000; Putnam, 2000), this conceptual paper suggests that perceived stoic leadership has a positive impact both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of moral virtue on grassroots peace orientation. In contrast to traditional leadership frameworks focusing on the organisation's performance, the proposed alternative

adopts an ethical and social concept of leadership. This can lead to peaceable communities through moral influence and character development.

The proposed framework conceptualises stoic leadership as a second-order formative construct consisting of four interrelated dimensions, namely courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance. The collection of these dimensions illustrates the moral traits that differentiate the Stoic leader from leadership theories obsessed with authority, performance or organisation. Courage allows leaders to stand firm on moral ground despite social pressure (Porter-O'Grady, 2026). An individual may not possess ideas, but he possesses the capacity to impart wisdom. Justice ensures fairness and impartiality and respect the dignity of all people (Yuguero et al., 2025). Temperance is having emotional control, modesty, and moderation in any disagreement with others (Shahab & Adil, 2020). When combined, these traits generate a type of leadership that stresses ethics and the common good.

Informed by virtue ethics, the framework further suggests that stoic leadership is a grassroots peace orientation by cultivating moral virtue. Individuals witnessing leaders acting consistently in accordance with normative ethical values of courage, wisdom, justice and temperance are likely to develop these same qualities. This would heighten compassion, integrity, responsibility, fairness, and concern for the wellbeing of others. One said that leaders that lost sight of the origins of moral virtue led in a decline in people's disposition towards peaceful coexistence (Qadeer & Ali Mian, 2025). In lieu of this, the authors deemed that individuals do not act peacefully simply because they have to, rather, they do so because peace is an intact component of their ethics and moral values.

Ultimately, the Civic Engagement Theory argues that morally virtuous individuals are more likely to demonstrate grassroots peace orientation through routine (everyday) civic behaviour (Jurs et al., 2021). Such an orientation is reflected in greater social trust, inter-group harmony, human solidarity, willingness to cooperate with others, and rejection of violence for resolving conflict. As a result, grassroots peace is pictured as an outcome at the grassroots level which emerges from ethical leadership and virtuous citizenship rather than institutional intervention.

Hypothesis Development

Stoic Leadership and Grassroots Peace Orientation

Stoic leadership, in theory, is supposed to help build peace at the grassroots level because leaders who act with courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance set an ethical example for how people ought to interact peacefully. Courage lets leaders stick to their values, even when others disagree or apply pressure, whereas wisdom helps them make decisions that are rational and fair-minded. Justice means treating people with fairness and respect and avoiding bias, and temperance helps leaders keep their emotions in check during conflicts or heated discussions (Porter-O'Grady, 2026; Zhang et al. 2022; Yuguero et al. 2025; Shahab & Adil, 2020). These four Stoic traits together could promote respect, cooperation, trust, and the ability to settle disagreements peacefully among community members. Accordingly, this matches the wider idea that stoic leadership is based not only on authority but on moral character, reason, self-control, and a sense of responsibility (Hyland, 2024). For this reason, it is reasonable to expect that people who perceive stoic leadership in action will be more

focused on peaceful coexistence within their local communities. Hence, H1 is proposed as below:

H1: Perceived stoic leadership has a significant positive relationship with grassroots peace orientation.

Stoic Leadership and Moral Virtue

The relationship between perceived stoic leadership and moral virtue is grounded primarily in Stoic Leadership Theory and Virtue Ethics. Stoic leadership emphasises the consistent enactment of courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance as fundamental qualities of ethical leadership. Leaders who demonstrate these virtues may serve as moral role models, thereby encouraging individuals to recognise, internalise, and practise similar ethical qualities in their own conduct. This reasoning is consistent with the virtue ethics perspective, which views moral character as being developed through the habitual practice of virtuous behaviour rather than through compliance with rules alone. The existing literature in the manuscript similarly suggests that leaders who consistently demonstrate ethical values can contribute to the development of moral character among others. Accordingly, perceived stoic leadership is expected to strengthen moral virtue among individuals who observe and interact with such leadership.

What links stoic leadership and moral virtue mostly comes from Stoic Leadership Theory and Virtue Ethics. This paragraph argues that stoic leadership is about practising virtues. Instead of just talking about ethics, stoic leadership stresses practising courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance as basic elements of ethical leadership. If a leader genuinely lives out these virtues, they might inspire people around them to recognise and develop similar traits in themselves, which is the main point here. This can be reflected from the perspective of an leadership in an organisation, with the cultivation of soft skills, including interpersonal skills, adaptability, and tolerance, can foster citizen's ability to collaborate effectively, actively participate in national development initiatives, and contribute positively to the success of a country's leadership and governance (Razak et al., 2023). This approach goes along with virtue ethics, where a person's moral character grows through the habit of being virtuous each day, rather than just following a list of rules. Research discussed in the same manuscript also supports the idea that leaders who consistently act ethically can help others build their own moral character. Hence, it follows that seeing stoic leaders should lead to stronger moral virtue in people who have that exposure. Thus, H2 is proposed as below:

H2: Stoic leadership has a significant positive relationship with moral virtue.

Moral Virtue and Grassroots Peace Orientation

It is not only stoic leadership that matters as moral virtue on its own should also support grassroots peace orientation. This paragraph argues that moral virtue supports peace. Living peacefully with others means people must put their ethical values into practice in their daily behaviour. Moral virtues like compassion, responsibility, justice, integrity, and respect push people to think about other people's needs, work together across differences, and respond to arguments without violence or hostility. The idea fits Civic Engagement Theory well, since that theory connects being morally responsible to getting involved in the community in positive ways (Jurs et al. 2021). What this suggests is that actions like building trust, creating harmony between groups, showing humanitarian values, cooperating, and rejecting violence are all tied to moral virtue. That is why individuals who show more moral virtue are expected

to be more supportive of peaceful living in their communities. Therefore, H3 is proposed as below:

H3: Moral virtue has a significant positive relationship with grassroots peace orientation.

The Mediating Role of Moral Virtue

A specific detail worth considering is how the proposed model sees moral virtue as a key mechanism connecting stoic leadership with grassroots peace orientation. People do not just copy what leaders do. A more important process happens because they internalise these virtues and show them in how they interact with others. Traits like courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance are believed to lead to other important moral qualities, such as compassion, fairness, and concern for others. This somewhat ethical development can then produce trust, cooperation, harmony, solidarity, and a rejection of violence among community members. Or more accurately, moral virtue acts as a connecting path in the overall relationship. Since this research is conceptual, these theoretical links between stoic leadership, moral virtue, and grassroots peace orientation ought to be tested with actual data in the future. Nevertheless, for this research, H4 is proposed as below:

H4: Moral virtue mediates the relationship between stoic leadership and grassroots peace orientation.

The hypotheses are based on what was just argued and discussed. There are four (4) hypotheses connecting stoic leadership, moral virtue, and grassroots peace orientation. The first states that stoic leadership relates directly to grassroots peace orientation. The second argues that stoic leadership builds up moral virtue. Third, the claim is that moral virtue itself leads to grassroots peace orientation. The final hypothesis, placed last, claims that moral virtue mediates the relationship between stoic leadership and grassroots peace orientation. Together, these proposed relationships are shown in Figure 1.

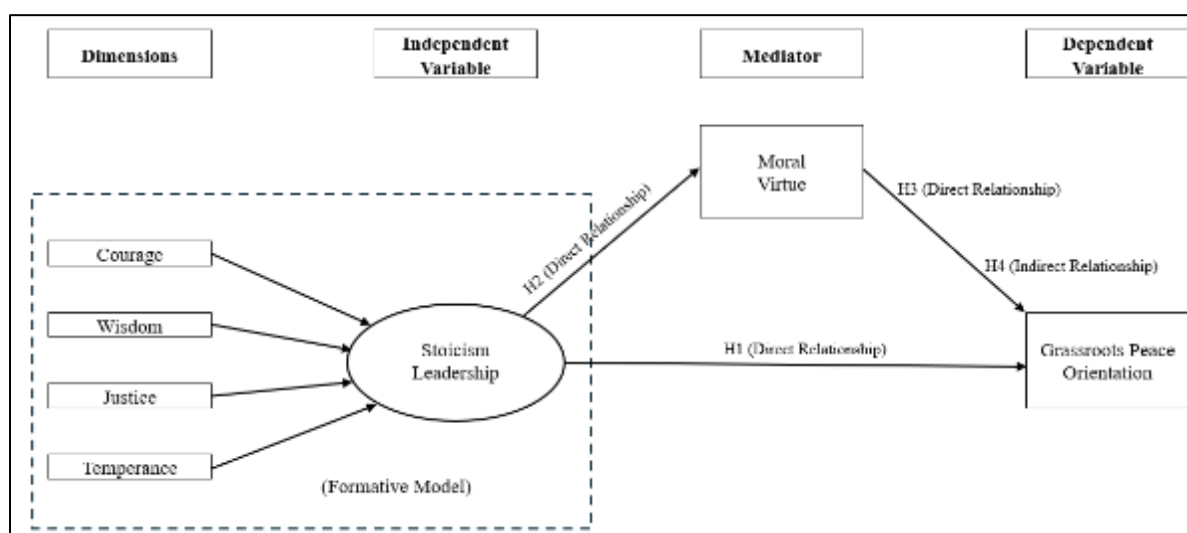


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Source: Aristotle, 2009; Ehrlich, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Vogt, 2024

The proposed conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1 indicates that stoic leadership has a direct influence on grassroots peace orientation and an indirect influence on grassroots peace orientation through moral virtue. The framework of this research expands current

literature on peacebuilding by drawing on three complementary theoretical lenses. Furthermore, it offers a people-centred explanation of how ethical leadership may assist in producing sustainable peace in Malaysia.

Proposed Research Methodology

The theoretical foundation framework that has been suggested in this paper would provide a basis for future empirical studies on the relationship of perceived stoic leadership, moral virtues, and grassroots peace orientation in a plural society like Malaysia. Future study could utilise a quantitative research design to empirically assess perceived stoic leadership impact on grassroots peace orientation as well as through moral virtue impact on grassroots peace orientation. This empirical testing would allow researchers to assess the applicability of the framework while deepening the contemporary understanding of ethical leadership and community-based peacebuilding.

The target population of subjects would be Malaysian adults from different ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds who take part in community, organisational, educational or civic activities. The subjects involved are very suitable for the study because grassroots peace orientation is essentially a societal construct that reflects the disposition of individuals towards society in terms of social trust, humanitarian concern, intergroup harmony and peaceful co-existence in the everyday life of community. In contrast with research on organisational leadership that studied employees working for the same institution, the present framework seeks to study how perceived leadership-related qualities impact peace-based attitudes within the multiracial societies of Malaysia. As such, the respondents may be made up of public sector, private sector, educational institutions, community organisations, non-governmental organisations and the local community to ensure wider representation of the Malaysian society.

The next empirical study may use a structured self-administered questionnaire using several established measurement scales adopted and adjusted to the Malaysian context. The results of the research on stoic leadership show that stoic leaders instil confidence and instil competence in followers. The measurement of moral virtue and peace orientation can be conducted, using adapted instruments derived from virtue ethics, leadership, and peacebuilding literature. Measurement instruments must be subjected to expert judgement to determine content validity (DeVellis, 2017). Furthermore, a pilot test is necessary to evaluate the clarity of the instruments and instrument reliability (Hair et al., 2022).

The proposed conceptual framework is appropriate for analysis through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) as the model contains higher-order formative construct and reflective latent constructs as well as a mediating relationship. The PLS-SEM method is flexible enough to evaluate complex theoretical models and the measurement and structural quality simultaneously. Items for the measurement model must be assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Afterward, the assessment of structural model can be performed through path coefficients, explanatory power, predictive relevance, effect sizes, and the mediating role of moral virtue in explaining the relationship of perceived stoics leadership and grassroots peace orientation.

A future empirical validation of the framework proposed will provide essential evidence for the relevance of Stoic Leadership Theory, Virtue Ethics, and Civic Engagement Theory in explaining grassroots peace orientation in Malaysia. Even more significantly, evidence-based findings will expand peacebuilding scholarship beyond institutional and policy-centred approaches to demonstrate how ethical leadership and moral character contribute to sustainable peace in everyday civic life. Evidence such as, this will be useful for policymakers, educators, community leaders, civil society organisations, and leadership development programmes that seek to enhance social cohesion and build a more peaceful and resilient Malaysian society.

Expected Outcomes

The conceptual framework suggested is anticipated to aid in enhancing the understanding of how ethical leadership creates grassroots peace orientation in Malaysia's plural society. Most of the peacebuilding research (e.g., Shahnawaz et al., 2025) concentrates on institutional governance, political negotiations, conflict management, and public policy interventions. However, this framework establishes sustainable peace as a people centred outcome produced through ethical leadership and moral character. By defining grassroots peace orientation as a disposition of social trust, intergroup harmony, humanitarian solidarity and rejection of violence, the framework includes the ethical values embedded in community life to broaden contemporary peacebuilding discourse beyond the institutional context. In other words, the proposed framework enhances the knowledge of peace studies by suggesting that in addition to functioning institutions, sustainable peace also relies upon the moral dispositions and civic responsibilities of ordinary citizens.

It is also envisaged that leadership will show peacebuilding through more than just relationship with interpersonal influence. Utilising Stoic Leadership Theory and Virtue Ethics, the framework implies that the impact of perceived stoic leadership goes beyond modeling ethical behaviour, but that it fosters the cultivation of moral virtue. Leaders who practice courage, wisdom, justice and temperance can expect their followers to produce compassion, integrity, responsibility, fairness and respect for others (Qadeer & Ali Mian, 2025). These foster attitudes and behaviour that are conducive to peace. This conceptual paper locates moral virtue as the ethical mechanism that links leadership and grassroots peace orientation. In this light, it is a more compelling explanation of how leadership may be converted into sustainable peace through character formation than behavioural influence.

Besides, the integration of Civic Engagement Theory other than the earlier mentioned theory is expected to enrich existing theoretical understanding of leadership, moral philosophy, and peacebuilding scholarship. Though the existing theoretical perspectives have brought great value to their respective fields individually, they have scarcely been brought together in an effort to explain the ethical underpinnings of grassroots peace. As such, the proposed framework provides a first link between ethical leadership and moral character, as well as civic responsibility. The authors enhance the leadership literature by showing that stoic leadership is not only relevant for organisational effectiveness but also for virtue ethics by showing how it could help with contemporary peacebuilding. Moreover, they contribute to the civic engagement scholarship by demonstrating how moral character stimulates active participation in sustaining peaceful communities.

In the end, it is hoped that the suggested framework can pave the way for future empirical research and peacebuilding in Malaysia. Studying the impact of perceived stoic leadership on the grassroots peace orientation directly or through moral virtue will result in empirical validation of the framework among communities in Malaysia. By emphasising ethical leadership and moral virtues as fundamental components of social cohesion, the framework may assist in matters of leadership development, educational programmes, community engagement or even peacebuilding intervention measures when put into practice. In the end, the suggested framework strengthens the understanding that sustainable peace is not merely maintained by institutions but is built daily through courageous, wise, just, tempered, and moral acts that enhance harmonious relationships in society.

Research Significance

This paper contributes theoretically, practically, and socially to the growing leadership literature arguing whether moral philosophy can contribute to peacebuilding. From a theoretical perspective, the paper makes a major contribution to peacebuilding scholarship by moving the dominant focus from institutional and policy-centred approaches to a people-centred perspective based on ethical leadership and moral character. There is existing peacebuilding literature (e.g., Shahnawaz et al., 2025) that focuses on conflict resolution, governance, diplomacy, and humanitarian intervention, as well as public policy to sustain peace. Though important, these views do not shed any light on how peace is built through the daily attitudes and behaviours of common people. The conceptualisation of grassroots peace orientation as an outcome determined by perceived stoic leadership and moral virtue, extends the contemporary discourse of peacebuilding while also showcasing the ethical foundations of sustainable peace at the community level. This responds to the growing call for peacebuilding strategies to be more holistic, which call for an integration of institutional mechanisms with individual moral agency as well as civic participation.

Further, the research expands the scope of Stoic Leadership Theory beyond organisational performance and managerial effectiveness, thereby contributing to leadership scholarship. Many contemporary leadership studies (e.g., Hoang et al., 2026; Onan et al., 2025; Reyes et al., 2026) have been examined through the lenses of transformational, servant, authentic and ethical leadership for employee outcomes. The consequent effect of stoic leadership on society as a whole has been studied comparatively less. This conceptual paper identifies stoic leadership as a higher-order construct consisting of courage, wisdom, justice and temperance grounded in the ethical character of leaders. Such leadership can have a positive influence not only on organisational behaviour but also on fostering peace, responsibility and social cohesion in communities.

The proposed framework can aid policymakers, educational institutions, community leaders, civil society organisations, youth development agencies, and providers of leadership training in their efforts to strengthen social cohesion within Malaysia's multicultural society. The framework proposes promoting ethical leadership and moral virtue as a long-term investment towards creating peace communities rather than relying too much on government response, legislation and conflict management. Leadership development programs can incorporate the stoic virtues of courage, wisdom, justice and temperance as must-have competencies for strengthening responsible decision-making, mutual respect and community resilience.

Similarly, schools can reinforce character education by promoting moral virtues that foster compassion, integrity, fairness, and responsible citizenship for future generations.

The proposed framework having important societal implications supports Malaysia effort to strengthen national unity based on mutual understanding, social trust, and harmonious coexistence. Malaysia is a plural society, a society that is made up of many ethnic groups, religions and cultures. Given that Malaysia is a country with a diverse society, hence long-term stability of Malaysia depends on more than just effective institutions. It also depends on citizens who continually practice tolerance, empathy, cooperation and respect in their day-to-day lives. The philosophical inspiration derived from the lyric of Sudirman Arshad's song entitled Warisan, "*di sini lahirnya sebuah cinta*" (this is where love is born) strengthens the argument of this paper that a sustainable peace starts from a moral commitment and collective responsibility instead of an institution's authority. In this light, the proposed model adds to the growing peacebuilding literature that takes grasp of the fact that peace is also built by ethical leadership, virtuous citizenship, and everyday humanity that helps to strengthen the nation's social structure.

Conclusion

Traditionally, peacebuilding has been researched through lenses of institution, political, and policy-oriented approaches emphasising governance, diplomacy, and conflict mechanisms. Despite their importance for ensuring stability, these approaches do not fully explain the development and preservation of sustainable peace in society. The core proposition proposed by this conceptual paper is that lasting peace ultimately lies in the ethical qualities of persons and communities themselves, who invariably engage with compassion, justice, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Grassroots peace orientation constitutes, by extension, an important foundation of sustainable peace and not merely a by-product of effective institutional governance. With the use of Stoic Leadership Theory, Virtue Ethics and Civic Engagement Theory this paper recommends an integrated conceptual framework, whereby perceived stoic leadership has a direct and an indirect impact on grassroots peace orientation through the mediation of moral virtue.

The framework that is being proposed brings together literature on leadership studies moral philosophy and peacebuilding within one model. Furthermore, it frames grassroots peace orientation not just as an institutional outcome but also as an ethical and civic outcome. In other words, peace is made through the moral choices of individuals in their daily life. In spite of being a conceptual framework, it provides ample room for further empirical investigations regarding the link of the perceived stoic leadership, moral virtue and grassroots peace orientation in Malaysia. Subsequent studies may examine the model in other cultural, educational, organisational, and community settings, thus strengthening understandings of the ethical foundations of peaceful coexistence.

To summarise, in the end sustainable peace does not come to existence through government alone or exclusively through an official institution. Moral virtue is not innate to society in and of itself. It is engendered by leaders who display courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance, and by citizens at large who reflect the moral virtue of their communities. Warisan's philosophical spirit ensures that culture is not merely aesthetic but a real influence that could be unearthed. Peaceful societies are brought up by social and cultural man, not by a heroic

concept, or military force. When expressed with the lyric “*di sini lahirnya sebuah cinta*”, peace, which is sustainable, must be borne from, among other things, compassion, decent moral character and belonging to the society.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation UNITAR International University, for the financial support to publish this paper, Asia Metropolitan University, and QUEST International University for their support throughout the completion of this conceptual paper. The authors are also grateful to the expert reviewers and manuscript reviewers who dedicated their time and expertise to critically evaluate this work. Their constructive comments, insightful suggestions, and valuable feedback contributed significantly to improving the quality, clarity, and scholarly rigour of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The authors have no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

References

- Abdul Malib, M., Naimat, N., Ahmad Mustafa, M. S., Othman, Y., Mahat, I. R., & Md Shah, M. A. M. (2025). Beyond legal measures: Effective communication and governance responses to misinformation and fake news in Malaysia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(10), 1595–1604. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000135>
- Abdullah, A. (2023). *Peaceful coexistence through muhibbah in a plural society*. Cultural Impact. <https://www.culturalimpact.org/post/peaceful-coexistence-through-muhibbah-in-a-plural-society>
- Al Qurtuby, S. (2023, May 16). *Grassroots peacebuilding in Indonesia*. Peace News Network. <https://peacenews.com/grassroots-peacebuilding-in-indonesia/>
- Aristotle (2009). *The Nicomachean Ethics* (D. Ross, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original Work Published Ca. 350 B.C.E.)
- Arshad, S. (1982). *Warisan* [Song]. On ABADI. EMI Malaysia.
- Asakaviciute, V., Bareviciute, J., & Atkočiūnienė, Z. O. (2025). Leadership in Stoic philosophy: Virtues and communication. *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 36(3), 242–249. <https://doi.org/10.6001/fil-soc.2025.36.3.1>
- Baidya, M., & Baidya, A. (2023). *Importance of spiritual, moral and ethical values for the students of 21st century*. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 11(8), a1-a8.
- Blay, S., Barizah, N., & Rahmah, M. (2025). *The right to peace: ASEAN perspectives and prospects* (AICHR Thematic Study). ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). <https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/UPDATED-FINAL-2025-AICHR-TheRighttoPeace-Digital.pdf>
- Budiana, M. (2024). Conflict resolution and peace building in the international arena. *Journal of Student Collaboration Research*, 1(2), 16–35
- DeVellis, R. F. (2017). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Ehrlich, T. (2000). *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*. Oryx, Phoenix.

- Eldridge, S. (2026). *Moral virtue*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/moral-virtue>
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Heim, I., Laker, B., & Tabaeifard, S. J. (2026). Responsible leadership: A systematic literature review, theoretical framework, and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 203, Article 115801. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115801>
- Hoang, Q. T. K., Tran, D. M., & Dinh, T. M. (2026). The impact of servant leadership and transformational leadership on employees' service recovery performance: A comparative analysis. *The Learning Organization*, 33(1), 155–174.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-10-2024-0326>
- Hwang, J. (2022). Building sustainable peace through environmental cooperation in the island of Ireland: Modelling transboundary conservation. *Irish Political Studies*, 37(4), 548–570.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2021.2011230>
- Hyland, M. (2024). *Stoicism for leaders: Navigating challenges with wisdom and virtue*. Neuron Coaching. <https://neuroncoaching.com/2024/02/19/stoicism-for-leaders-navigating-challenges-with-wisdom-and-virtue/>
- Ikram, M., & Boudraa, C. (2025). The role of quality governance in achieving sustainable development goals in North Africa: An integrated decision-support system. *Sustainable Operations and Computers*, 6, 198–216. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.susoc.2025.07.005>
- International Crisis Group. (2026, July 8). *Causes of peace in an era of hard power* (Crisis Group Special Briefing No. 14). International Crisis Group.
https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2026-07/b014-causes-of-peace-in-an-era-of-hard-power_0.pdf
- Jurs, P., Samusevica, A., Kulberga, I., & Rocane, M. (2021). *Youth civic engagement – Resource of social responsibility*. In *Proceedings of ICERI2021 Conference*, 9977–9984.
<https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2021.2261>
- Moreno-Monsalve, N., Delgado-Ortiz, M., Sanabria-Ospino, A., Pardo Ezcurra, T. T., Nicolás Rojas, Y. W., & Fajardo-Moreno, W. (2023). High-Performance Project Teams: Analysis from the Stoic Approach. *Sustainability*, 15(22). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152216095>
- Noor, N. M. (2007). Polarisation and inequality in Malaysia: The future of Malay-Chinese relations. *Intellectual Discourse*, 15(2), 191–204.
- Onan, G., Sürücü, L., Bekmezci, M., Dalmış, A. B., & Sunman, G. (2025). Relationships Between Positive Leadership Styles, Psychological Resilience, and Burnout: An Empirical Study Among Turkish Teachers. *Behavioral sciences*, 15(6).
<https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15060713>
- Palazzolo, C. (2026). After harm: The virtue of forgiveness in restorative justice. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/teo0000351>
- Porter-O'Grady, T. (2026). Moral courage in healthcare leadership: Standing firm when professional values are under siege. *Nurse Leader*, 24(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mnl.2025.102627>
- Postuła, A. (2025). Leadership, values and authority: What shapes a manager's work ethos and plays a key role in authority creation? *Central European Management Journal*, 33(1), 72–86. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CEMJ-02-2024-0044>

- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Touchstone Books/Simon & Schuster. <https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>
- Qadeer, A., & Ali Mian, S. (2025). Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and the Crisis of Ethical Leadership Today. *Advance Social Science Archive Journal*, 4(02), 538–544. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17368061>
- Qasaye, O. A. M. (2023). Conflict resolution and peacebuilding in international development. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 12(12), 333–338. <https://doi.org/10.21275/SR231203104158>
- Raime, S., & Abd Rahman, N. (2026). An Islamic Stewardship Perspective on Academic Quality in Private Universities. *Journal of Islamic Management Studies*, 9(1), 112–126.
- Ramli, M. A., & Jamaludin, M. A. (2012). Interaction of plural society in Malaysia: Diatribe or dialogue. *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 2(1), 53–57.
- Razak, A. A., Saaidin, M., Rohaizan, F. S., Govi, M. K. d/o, & Rao, V. s/o K. (2023). The Impacts of Employees' Job Performances in The Hotel Industry Post Pandemic in Kuala Lumpur. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences*, 13(5), 1579 – 1598. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i5/16858>
- Restorative Narratives Communities. (2023). *The power of grassroots approach to peacebuilding*. <https://www.rncommunities.org/blog/the-power-of-grassroot-approach-to-peacebuilding/>
- Reyes, J. P., Malabanan, M., & Monterroyo, C. B. (2026). A contemporary evidence synthesis of leadership styles and their impact on organizational performance: A systematic review. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 4(1), 38–45. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.707>
- Saruhan, M. S. (2025). Intersections of religion and ethics: A philosophical analysis within Islamic thought. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 28, 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.28.2025.337>
- Shahab, S. O., & Adil, A. (2020). Development and validation of Temperance Scale in Pakistan. *PsyCh Journal*, 9(6), 798–808. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.394>
- Shahnawaz, M., Naseem, I., Aamir, A., et al. (2025). Assessing the political and institutional determinants of international organizational effectiveness: Diplomatic mediation, peacebuilding, and human rights advocacy in the context of Pakistan. *Asian Review of Political Economy*, 4(19). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44216-025-00061-9>
- Singh, A., & Singh, V. (2024). The role of institutions in peace and justice for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 and societal sustainability. *Amazonia Investiga*, 13(80), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2024.80.08.1>
- Souiai, M., Alkhowar, H., Al-Obaidli, H., et al. (2026). Peace and inclusive governance in sustainable development: Strengthening institutions and environmental services. *Sustainable Development*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.71330>
- Taliep, N., Ismail, G., Suffla, S., Seedat, M., Swart, L. A., van Niekerk, A., & Bangdiwala, S. I. (2026). Comparing global and community indicators of safety and peace. *African journal of psychological assessment*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajopa.v8i0.200>
- Temby, Q. (2020). *Social media and polarization in the "New Malaysia"* (ISEAS Perspective No. 2020/21). ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/>

- Vogt, K. (2024). *Seneca*. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 ed.). Stanford University.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/seneca/>
- Yuguero, O., Ruiz-Trujillo, P., Esquerda, M., Terribas, N., & Aymerich, M. (2025). Applying the principle of justice in digital health. *NPJ digital medicine*, 8(1), 467.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41746-025-01877-8>
- Zhang, K., Shi, J., Wang, F., & Ferrari, M. (2022). Wisdom: Meaning, structure, types, arguments, and future concerns. *Current psychology*, 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02816-6>