

# MURCIR Debriefs



## The 66th ISA Conference - Chicago

*As one of the most prominent and largest academic events in the world, the 66th ISA Conference brought together academics and experts from around the globe to share their insights and present their research findings on various topics within the field of international relations. In this debrief, MURCIR Debrief presents the reflections of Gonca Oğuz Gök, offering valuable perspectives garnered from this esteemed gathering.*

### Gonca Oğuz Gök, Marmara University

This year the ISA 2025 Conference took place in Chicago, USA. We had the opportunity to listen to a wide range of theoretical methodological approaches and new research in panels on Environment, Security, Gender, International Organizations, International Political Economy, Global Governance, Norms, International Law, Global International Relations and many other topics. One of the topics addressed in the panels was the question of how formal and informal organizations are expanding not only in terms of membership but also in terms of their missions. In this sense, we have seen that new measurement criteria such as the institutional power composite index are being developed to measure the “power” of states in various international organizations. Moreover the relations between formal and informal organizations and the different dynamics of the rise of informality and the elements that shape the relations of formal organizations such as the EU with informal organizations were tried to be discussed. The panels also discussed how gender norms are embedded in various regional organizations and agreements. We listened to studies that tried to measure the role of non-state actors in the diffusion of gender norms. We also discussed how gender equality and structural transformation commitments are included in the African Free Trade Area Agreement, and how this role of women remains invisible in the informal sector, which accounts for 70% of intra-African trade.



We discussed the importance of terminologies and the fact that the concept of women's “empowerment” can have the opposite effect when it is not evaluated in its context. The importance of mixed methods in which qualitative and quantitative methods are studied together was also evaluated.

We listened with interest to methods of collecting information based on art performance and dance. The discussions on how formal and informal organizations are “expanding” in global governance on the one hand, and how global governance is “shrinking” on the other, were mind-opening. One of the concepts that came to the fore here was “multi-stakeholder governance”. The roles of flexible structures and interactions involving many different actors in the new order were discussed. The discussions on how the New Global Governance no longer aims at interest maximization but risk minimization, which points to a very different world, order and governance from the 1990s, were seminal. We had the opportunity to reflect on the implications of this on the new global governance by listening to the discussions that approaches based on risks and risk calculations reduce the bonds and solidarity between societies and actors, just like in bureaucratic institutions. It gave us the opportunity to listen to and discuss as much as possible many scholars and academic studies, both old and new, with very good panels and round table discussions, both conceptually and methodologically.

### **Gül Mescioğlu Gür, American University**

#### *Navigating Scholarship Amid Political Uncertainty*

Attending the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention in San Francisco this year was both intellectually enriching and emotionally complex. As someone deeply involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the ISA has always provided a space for critical engagement, collaborative learning, and community building. This year, however, the backdrop of significant political shifts in the U.S. — including the suspension of foreign aid programs, the dissolution of USAID, and the deeply disappointing closure of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) in February — added an overwhelming emotional weight to the usual excitement of the convention.

The peace section reception, typically one of my favorite ISA events, was still a highlight. It was energizing to reconnect with colleagues, celebrate new work in the field, and witness the continued vitality of peace studies. But conversations this year were colored by a shared sense of frustration and concern. Scholars expressed fear about the declining institutional support for international development and peace research.



Some attendees reflected on how these developments mirrored broader trends of political polarization and anti-intellectualism, while others noted the immediate impact: a number of colleagues, especially those working in or alongside U.S.-funded projects, were unable to attend ISA due to travel funding freezes. Despite this, my professional engagements at the conference were rewarding. I chaired the panel “Perspectives on Victims in Processes of Reconciliation and Transitional Justice”, which brought together rich, critical analyses of victimhood, justice, and memory in post-conflict settings.

The discussion was vibrant and underscored the importance of centering marginalized voices in transitional justice frameworks. It was a meaningful experience to facilitate such an engaged scholarly dialogue.

I also had the opportunity to present two papers. The first, co-authored with Dr. Fadil Ersozer, was titled “Timing Negotiations in the Cyprus Conflict: Ripeness, Readiness, and Rottenness Theories.” We revisited classical theories of negotiation timing, critically engaging with their applicability to Cyprus’s unique conflict dynamics. The second paper, co-authored with Dr. Alexander Cromwell, “Peace Education: A Complementary Peacebuilding Tool or a Placebo?”, interrogated the assumed effectiveness of peace education initiatives. It was gratifying to receive thoughtful feedback on both projects, which will inform our ongoing revisions and future research.

Beyond the panels and presentations, the best part of ISA remains the sense of academic community. There is something deeply motivating about running into familiar faces, catching up with old friends, and meeting new collaborators — all in a different city each year. San Francisco added its own charm, and the city’s diverse backdrop offered a striking contrast to the seriousness of our discussions.

Despite the policy setbacks and political turbulence, this year’s ISA reaffirmed why this scholarly community matters. In times when peacebuilding efforts are under threat, spaces like ISA become even more vital — as platforms for critical dialogue, intellectual resilience, and mutual support. While many of us left with heavy hearts, we also carried a renewed sense of responsibility to advocate for the values our field represents.

As I reflect on ISA 2025, I am reminded that peace scholarship does not operate in a vacuum. It is shaped by, and responds to, the ebbs and flows of global political will. And in moments of institutional collapse or governmental retreat, it is our collective networks, conversations, and collaborations that sustain the field. I am grateful to be part of this community and look forward to how we will continue pushing forward — together.