

# Exposure to Violence, Ethos of Conflict, and Support for Compromise: Surveys in Israel, East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza

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## Abstract

Does ongoing exposure to political violence prompt subject groups to support or oppose compromise in situations of intractable conflict? If so, what is the mechanism underlying these processes? Political scholarship neither offers conclusive arguments nor sufficiently addresses individual-level forms of exposure to violence in the context of political conflict, particularly the factors mediating political outcomes. We address this by looking at the impact of exposure to political violence, psychological distress, perceived threat, and ethos of conflict on support for political compromise. A mediated model is hypothesized whereby exposure to political violence provokes support for the ethos of conflict and hinders support for compromise through perceived psychological distress and perceived national threat. We examined representative samples of two parties to the same conflict: Israelis ( $N = 781$ ) and Palestinians from Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank ( $N = 1,196$ ). The study's main conclusion is that ethos of conflict serves as a mediating variable in the

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relationship between exposure to violence and attitudes toward peaceful settlement of the conflict.

### **Keywords**

ethos of conflict, perceived threat, intergroup conflict, political violence, psychological distress, national threat, Israel, Palestine

Over the past decade, some forty countries have experienced armed conflict. Leitenberg (2006) documents the impact of conflict through casualties across the twentieth century: between 1955 and 2000, forty-one million lives (many civilians) were lost to conflict and political violence. A high percentage of people in conflict zones suffer from psychological distress. Despite this, in almost every society engaged in violent conflict, there is at least a segment that supports continuing the conflict (Bar-Tal 2013). The political consequences of ongoing exposure of civilians to violence and their views of the conflict is a vital challenge.

This discussion fits into conflict scholars' debate over whether institutions of violence and control prompt obedience *or* rebellion—the division is between studies of authoritarianism and conflict. We focus on the latter. Some scholars state increased violence diminishes upheaval by weakening opposition and convincing fence-sitters to eschew confrontation (Diamond 2002; McFaul 2002; Olson 1971; Ostrom 1998). Others posit the opposite linear relationship—violence encourages upheaval by creating conditions so unbearable that people believe only insurrection can work (Francisco 1996; Kalyvas 2006; Tullock 1971; Wood 2003; Longo, Canetti, and Hite-Rubin 2014).

This debate is relevant to *intractable* conflicts—persistent confrontations with violence, intensity, and durability (Bar-Tal 2013; Kriesberg 1993). In most such conflicts, civilians' constant exposure to violence, and the resultant risk of death or injury, has severe psychological, economic, social, and political implications. The loss of life and property damage leads to massive economic costs as society becomes responsible for compensating victims and preventing recurring physical violence through massive military expenditures (Lifshitz 1998). The potential political impact of this prolonged conflict exposure is not clearly understood—does exposure to political violence encourage civilians to embrace conciliatory policies to end violence or does it harden political attitudes, fomenting militancy against an adversary perceived as aggressive and brutal?

Some rationalistic scholars present expected utility calculations reflecting the approach that when the costs of conflict are perceived as sufficiently high, parties will seek political solutions that will promise lower costs than continuing the conflict (Zartman 1989; Zartman and Touval 1985). The conflict is “ripe” for resolution when the two parties perceive a stalemate and when the costs of continuing the

current level of violence are too high. Long-running violent conflicts are resistant to intervention, mediation, and negotiation processes (Ayres 2000; Coleman 2003; Graf, Kramer, and Nicolescou 2010). While the uncompromising position of parties involved may be attributed to the rational interests or values regarded as crucial to survival, their intransigence may be attributed to the cycle of violence characterizing intractable conflicts, with its many psychological implications (Bar-Tal 2013).

Numerous studies examined the psychological impact of personal exposure and proximity to political violence (Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon 2003; Galea et al. 2002; Shalev and Freedman 2005), others investigated the political consequences of this (Huddy et al. 2002; Skitka, Bauman, and Mullen 2004). Only a few studies addressed the relationships between psychological consequences of personal exposure to political outcomes (Bonanno and Jost 2006; Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, and Johnson 2006; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Lavi, Canetti, Sharvit, Bar-Tal, and Hobfoll 2012). Studies showed that exposure to political violence increases support for exclusionist policies (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Canetti et al. 2013; Hobfoll et al. 2006), support for belligerent policies (Gordon and Arian 2001; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede 2006; Skitka et al. 2006), and noncompromising attitudes (Kimhi and Shamai 2006; Solomon and Lavi 2005). This relationship between exposure to violence and intergroup attitudes was found in numerous conflict zones. In Northern Ireland, experiences of political violence increased public support for paramilitary groups and reduced support for the decommissioning of weapons (Hayes and McAllister 2001). In postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina, direct experiences of wartime violence were found to increase intergroup animosity (Hall 2013).

Conflict resolution and social psychology research suggests that psychological and sociocultural infrastructure that evolves during intractable conflict is important to explaining why individuals rarely endorse resolving these conflicts peacefully, regardless of the costs. Studies suggest that collective threat perceptions resulting from distress associated with prolonged exposure to violence create deprivation of basic needs and high levels of stress (Burton 1990; de Jong 2002; Milgram 1986; Staub 2011). To cope with the negative consequences of ongoing perceived threat, societies adopt conflict-supporting beliefs, giving them a meaningful picture of the conflict, reducing their sense of uncertainty and stress (Bar-Tal 2013; Hirschberger and Pyszczynski 2009). These “threat-buffering” beliefs of conflict provide a biased view of the conflict and the societies involved, becoming barriers to a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011).

We propose a sociopsychological approach for understanding the effects of exposure to violence on support for political compromise in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Israelis and Palestinians are exposed to stressors and their mental health ramifications (Canetti et al. 2014). This study emphasizes the conflict narrative as it is reflected in each population’s conflict-related ethos. By examining both populations simultaneously, we engage with these questions: What does looking at two sides of a conflict simultaneously teach us? How does the ongoing conflict affect the Palestinian and Israeli populations’ perception of the other?

We argue prolonged exposure to political violence elicits psychological distress, increasing chronic collective threat perceptions. Perceived collective threat invokes usage of conflict-supporting shared narratives, reducing support for compromise to end the conflict. We focus on the “ethos of conflict” as a set of shared conflict-supporting narratives, with an ideological structure, that decrease support for the peaceful resolution of intractable conflicts.

### *Psychological Distress, Perceived Threat, and Support for Compromise*

Involvement in intractable conflicts has severe negative psychological effects. Numerous studies show that prolonged exposure to political violence may lead to severe psychological distress, manifested as continuous emotional and physiological arousal including heightened anxiety, reduced sense of safety, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and a subjective sense of insecurity (Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon 2003; Canetti-Nisim, Ariely, and Halperin 2008; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Gallagher, Hamber, and Joy 2012; Rieder and Elbert 2013; Solomon and Lavi 2005). Psychological distress may affect bystanders, victims’ friends, or people aware of potential violence (Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon 2003; Hobfoll et al. 2006; Schuster et al. 2001).

Some scholars found distress to be associated with more favorable attitudes toward peace (Solomon and Lavi 2005); others demonstrated individuals may adopt hostile attitudes toward out-groups and support counteraggression as coping responses to violence-related distress (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Hobfoll et al. 2006; Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982).

Studies show psychological distress also plays an important role in facilitating perceptions of threat (Antonovsky 1987; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Kutz and Dekel 2006; Magwaza 1999; Solomon, Iancu, and Tyano 1997; Taylor 1983). The shattered assumptions approach (Janoff-Bulman 1992) argues traumatic events pose major challenges to individuals’ basic assumptions about the world as meaningful, predictable, and benign. It argues that psychological distress resulting from traumatic events is associated with a newly found perception of the world as malevolent and dangerous.

Perceived threat during conflict may be defined as the cognitive evaluation of the extent to which out-group members interfere with the achievement of individual or group goals (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009). However, social-psychological literature emphasizes the multidimensional character of perceived threat, pointing to the different nature of the various sources of threat—such as personal and collective threat. Although the first relates to personal fear of the effects of violence, the latter relates to the fear that violence poses a danger to the legitimacy, resources, or values of one’s nation (Hobfoll et al. 2008; Huddy et al. 2002). Perceptions of collective threat may override perceptions of personal threat due to the construction of “us” as victims and “them” as the objects of fear and hostility by the media and government (Fiske, Gilbert, and Lindzey 2010; Lavi and Bar-Tal 2015; Schlesinger 1991).

This context of threat promotes high favorable attitudes toward the in-group and increased animosity toward the rivals (Greenberg, Koole, and Pyszczynski 2004; Huddy et al. 2005) and even toward out-groups unrelated to the threat (Riek, Mania, and Gaertner 2006; Stephan, Renfro, and Davis 2008). Threat perceptions are among the most important predictors of intergroup prejudice and hostility (Esses et al. 2001; Jackson et al. 2001), exclusionism (Canetti-Nisim, Ariely, and Halperin 2008; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009), political intolerance (Quillian 1995), political xenophobia (Canetti-Nisim and Pedahzur 2003), militarism (Bonanno and Jost 2006), and support for an aggressive national security policy (Huddy et al. 2005). Threats to the nation have greater influence on sociopolitical attitudes than do threats to individuals (Huddy et al. 2002; Jacobson and Bar-Tal 1995). Studies show when personal vulnerability to conflict-related harm becomes salient, individuals respond to threat with decreased support for preemptive violence (Hirschberger and Pyszczynski 2009). Concerns about personal security may override the need to defend the collective; a sense of national threat may increase support for violence and reduce support for peace. Regarding Israel–Palestine, unlike threat to individuals, perceived national threat was found to be a barrier for compromise for peace (Maoz and McCauley 2005). Personal threat may explain rationalist theories' proposed link between high levels of violence to engendering support for compromise among civilian populations. Collective threat may explain the counterintuitive prevalence of increased societal support for militancy following exposure to political violence.

Why does distress, combined with resultant threat perceptions, decrease support for peaceful solutions to intergroup conflicts, even with rational considerations of economic, social, and psychological self-interest? Social psychology and conflict resolution research suggests conservative, militant orientations toward the conflict and the rival are a highly effective coping mechanism enabling society to survive this stressful, threatening period (Mitzen 2006; Brockner and Rubin 1985). This seemingly irrational orientation may be particularly functional during intractable conflict, as it enables society to cope with their constant feelings of distress. The next section discusses a specific sociopsychological infrastructure, the “ethos of conflict,” which serves as a useful coping mechanism for societies in conflict, yet impedes conflict resolution (Bar-Tal 2013).

### *Ethos of Conflict and Support for Compromise*

Studies in psychology indicate in times of stress and threat there is a strong need to reduce uncertainty by creating a comprehensible, coherent environment. Individuals strive to construct a coherent worldview that provides a meaningful picture of traumatic events (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson 1998). This process helps facilitate coping with its adverse psychological implications, particularly when exposure to such events is chronic or prolonged (Antonovsky 1987; Greenberg, Solomon, and Arndt 2008; Taylor 1983).

Some researchers propose not all ideologies are equally effective in buffering such aversive effects. It has been suggested that conservative, militant ideologies are most effective in facilitating coping with highly threatening situations (Altemeyer 1988; Doty, Peterson, and Winter 1991; Duckitt and Fisher 2003; Willer 2004). These findings are consistent with the basic premises of the uncertainty-threat model, which posits that the need to reduce uncertainty and threat is best served by embracing conservative ideologies that offer simple and rigid solutions to questions of security (Jost et al. 2003). Conservative political ideas are adopted because they provide comfort for those who are made anxious by change and instability (Jost et al. 2003), serving the function of defensive coping (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, and Johnson 2006). The shattered assumptions theory (Janoff-Bulman 1992) suggests the process of coping with distress resulting from traumatic experience that involves changing one's assumptive world to match the experience. Following a traumatic experience, people are likely to adopt militant, conservative worldviews corresponding to their newfound perception of the world as hostile and dangerous.

An identifiable conservative ideology has been found to be prevalent among societies involved in intractable, violent conflicts; society members develop a unique sociopsychological repertoire that allows them to view the conflict situation in a comprehensive, coherent, and meaningful way (Bar-Tal 2013; Lavi and Bar-Tal 2015). This reformed repertoire crystallizes into a well-organized system of societal beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that penetrates the institutions and communication channels of the society. A central element of this sociopsychological infrastructure is the *ethos of conflict*, defined as the configuration of central shared societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to the society and give meaning to the societal life under conditions of intractable conflict.

This conflict-supporting ethos comprises beliefs related to justness of goals, victimization, security, positive collective self-image, delegitimization of the opponent, patriotism, unity, and peace (Bar-Tal 2013; Bar-Tal et al. 2012). By adopting this ethos, in-group members are portrayed as patriotic, peace-loving victims of the adversary's violence—out-group members are portrayed as untrustworthy and inhumane.

On the personal level, the conflict-supporting ethos provides meaning for reality and a sense of control. It plays an important role in coping with the psychological burden of an ongoing conflict (Lavi et al. 2012; Sharvit 2008). On the collective level, it provides a dominant orientation to conflict, creates a positive collective identity, binds members of society together, and gives meaning to societal life (McClosky and Zaller 1984). Its orientation strives to preserve the existing order—continuing the conflict, without the risk of dealing with the uncertainty that peacemaking requires (Bar-Tal et al. 2012). It is unsurprising that the ethos of conflict evolves in societies engaged in intractable conflicts. There are common themes of conflict-supporting ethos within societies involved in symmetrical and asymmetrical conflicts (Hadjipavlou [2007] describes leading conflict-supporting themes among Turkish and Greek communities in the Cyprus conflict). In Israel, studies

show that both societies, despite their differences, adhere to the themes of the ethos of conflict, which plays a major role in the way both sides view the possibility of peaceful conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, Halperin, and Oren 2010; Gayer 2012; Rouhana and Bar-Tal 1998).

These conflict-supporting beliefs become the prism through which society interprets reality, accumulates information, and creates their political attitudes (Bar-Tal 2013; Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011). Society exerts great efforts ensuring its members adhere to the dominant ethos by disseminating it through educational and cultural institutions, although alternative knowledge about possibilities of peacemaking is rejected or prevented from penetrating the social sphere (Bar-Tal, Oren, and Nets-Zehngut 2014; Kelman 2007).

Are these conflict-supporting societal beliefs (narratives) resistant to change? Bar-Tal (2013) argues societies involved in intractable conflicts tend to cling to their narratives about the causes of the threat, the conflict, the rival, and ways of coping with dangers posed by the rival. This “cognitive freezing” may be partly attributed to the effects of threat and distress on cognitive processing. They tend to cause risk avoidance, uncertainty, and novel situations (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011); increase the need for order, structure, and closure (Jost et al. 2003); and increase adherence to preexisting worldviews (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon 1986). By rejecting alternative views about the conflict or rival, these conflict-supporting beliefs justify the continuation of the conflict and reduce support for political compromise.

### *Israelis and Palestinians: Between Conflict and Compromise*

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is an intractable conflict: protracted, violent, total, and central, perceived as a zero sum, imposing high material and psychological demands on both sides. Continuous exposure to violence has led to heightened levels of distress and threat perception in both populations, as well as adherence to the ethos of conflict (Al-Krenawi, John, and Kanat-Maymon 2009; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Rouhana and Bar-Tal 1998; Solomon and Lavi 2005).

The basic contours of a two-state solution to resolve the conflict are acknowledged; however, significant factions of both publics object to compromise (Bar-Tal, Halperin, and Oren 2010; Maoz and McCauley 2005). The inability to resolve the conflict peacefully may be attributed largely to the sociopsychological barriers that underlie the disagreements and prevent their resolution (Bar-Tal and Halperin 2011). Years of exposure to violent conflict gave rise to the development of dominant conflict-supporting beliefs (ethos of conflict) in both societies, each accusing the other of responsibility for the continuation of the conflict and refusing a peaceful resolution (Rouhana and Bar-Tal 1998; Shamir and Shikaki 2010). Lavi et al. (2015) found that among Jews in Israel high adherence to ethos of conflict was directly related to higher levels of national threat, fear, and hatred. They showed among Jews and Palestinians, adherence to ethos seems to be unaffected by exposure to conflict-

related events and retains steady levels of threat perceptions and negative emotions. The latter result suggests that ethos of conflict has a protective function when examining outcomes of exposure to conflict-related events.

Despite mutual attempts to engage in peace-building initiatives, the ethos of conflict is dominant within both societies (Bar-Tal 2007; Bar-Tal, Halperin, and Oren 2010; Shamir and Shikaki 2010). The large number of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians who oppose making mutual concessions is a crucial factor impeding policy makers' ability to negotiate for peace (Peace Index 2012). It is crucial to examine the psychopolitical mechanisms underlying public opinion in this context.

*Explaining unwillingness to support compromise.* Drawing on the aforementioned claims and empirical evidence, we propose a model for predicting support for political compromise. We hypothesize that exposure to political violence will predict high levels of psychological distress, leading to high levels of perceived national threat. National threat will increase support for the ethos of conflict, which will predict decreased support for political compromise. This multimediator model examined two nationally representative samples of Israelis and of Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

Under our supervision, Israeli (Mahshov) and Palestinian (Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre [JMCC]) polling firms were hired to manage the data collection among nationally representative samples of Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza.<sup>1</sup> Enumerators were trained and supervised by the first author in collaboration with the polling firms, following similar protocols regarding answers given to participants and details of the study.

The samples largely represent the distribution of both adult populations. The Israeli sample was recruited through a random telephone survey. The response rate among eligible responders was 53 percent. The Palestinian sample was recruited via a stratified cluster random sampling strategy for Palestinian adults living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by local, same-gender interviewers. The response rate was 63 percent.

The relatively similar design of the surveys conducted in both populations allows examination of the trajectories leading to support for compromise in both societies in tandem. A total of 781 Jewish Israelis took part in this study, 51.60 percent were women ( $N = 403$ ), with ages ranging from 17 to 93 (mean age = 45.36, standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 17.25). A total of 1,196 Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem took part in this study, of whom 52 percent ( $N = 622$ ) were women, with ages ranging from 18 to 80 (mean age = 35.01,  $SD = 12.68$ ). The margin of error for the Israeli sample is up to  $\pm 3.51$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Relating to gender subgroups in the Israeli sample, each gender has a margin



of error of up to  $\pm 4.88$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level. The margin of error for the Palestinian sample is up to  $\pm 2.83$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Relating to gender subgroups in the Palestinian sample, each gender has a margin of error of up to  $\pm 3.93$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Both surveys were conducted in relatively static and calm periods of the conflict—following the violent Hamas takeover of Gaza (June 7–15, 2007) and prior to the onset of Operation Cast Lead (December 27, 2008, to January 18, 2009).

## Tools

The 45-minute structured surveys were administered to both populations.<sup>2</sup> These surveys, which were translated and back-translated into Hebrew/Palestinian Arabic, were used in earlier research and found to have sound psychometric properties in both populations (Lavi, Canetti, Sharvit, Bar-Tal, and Hobfoll 2012). To acknowledge the subjective experiences and perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians and to account for the unique characteristics of each population, this study used similar, yet slightly different sets of questions on a few measures. To acknowledge the cognitive processes leading to inference of meaning from titles, sponsors, and other aspects of the research context (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996), we presented the survey as a social and political issues project sponsored by a US agency (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH]).<sup>3</sup>

## Predictor Variables

*Exposure to political violence* was assessed adopting the approach proposed by Lyall, Blair, and Imai (2013). Participants were asked to report their exposure to the type of political violence relevant to their cultural and social context. The time frame of exposure was set to the previous year to address events carrying high impact on the subject populations. Israelis were asked: “During the past year, have you experienced difficult events such as witnessing a terror or rocket attack, serious injury, death, or injury of a person close to you as a result of rockets (Qatyushas or Qasams) or terror attacks? If so, how many events have you experienced?” Answers ranged from 0 (no exposure) to 3 (3 or more exposures). Palestinians were asked, (1) “During the past year, have you experienced a death of a family member or a friend as a result of Israeli attacks?” (2) “During the past year, have you experienced an injury to yourself, a family member or a friend as a result of Israeli attacks?” and (3) “During the past year, have you witnessed Israeli attacks or been present at a site where there were injuries or fatalities.” Responses represented the number of events experienced, ranging from 0 (= no exposure) to 3 (3 or more exposures). Ratings on all three questions were summed to represent the total number of event experiences, so that the final exposure score in both samples ranged from 0 to 3 (= 3 or more exposures).

## Mediator Variables

*Psychological distress* was measured using the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom scale, interview format (Foa et al. 1993), used as a measure of trauma-related symptoms (Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon 2003; Hobfoll et al. 2006). The scale contains ten items assessing various symptoms based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (American Psychiatric Association 2000) criteria for determining PTSD. Respondents reported symptoms, occurring for at least a month, relating directly and indirectly to their exposure to political violence (being extremely alert or watchful; repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of Israeli/Palestinian attacks; and feeling irritable or having angry outbursts). Items were rated on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely), and score was composed by averaging responses to the raw items ( $\alpha = .85_{IL}$  and  $.78_{PA}$ ).

*Perceived threat* was assessed using a four-point Likert-type item, based on previous work on threats in times of war and conflict in the United States (Huddy et al. 2002; Kam and Kinder 2007) and in the Israeli–Palestinian context (Canetti-Nisim, Ariely, and Halperin 2008). It was adapted to the most pertinent current and future threats to Israelis and Palestinians and was also used previously (Canetti, et al. 2013). Israelis were asked, “How concerned are you about the possibility that Israel will face a large-scale attack by the Palestinians this year?” Palestinians were asked, “How concerned are you about the possibility of a large-scale military attack against the Palestinians, including aerial bombing, incursions into cities, etc?”

*Ethos of conflict* was assessed using an eight-item scale based on previous works (Bar-Tal et al. 2012; Gayer 2012) with items rated on a six-point Likert-type scale. The items represented five major ethos beliefs: justness of goals (“The exclusive right of the Jews/Palestinians over the Land of Israel results from its being their historic homeland”), victimization (“In spite of the Israeli/Palestinian wish for peace, the Arabs have forced Israel to fight over and over again/the Palestinians have been subject to continuous Israeli occupation and repeated forced eviction”), security (“In times of Palestinian/Israeli threats to Israel/Palestinians it is important to take significant military action, even if it means harming innocents on the opposing side”), militancy (“In times of Palestinian/Israeli threats to Israel/Palestinians, we must support the use of nuclear weapons”), and trust (“Palestinians/Israelis are untrustworthy”).<sup>4</sup> To overcome biases resulting from dissimilar quality and quantity, scales were standardized to Z scores ( $\alpha = .66_{IL}$  and  $.85_{PA}$ ).

## Dependent Variable

*Support for compromise* was assessed using items tapping potential compromises for peace in the Israeli–Palestinian context (Peace Index 2012). We used a four-item scale in the Israeli sample (“What is your opinion about a peace settlement with the Palestinians in return for going back to the 1967 borders with some border

adjustments?") and a two-item scale in the Palestinian sample ("What is your opinion about signing a peace agreement with Israel based on a two-state formula while forgoing return of the refugees into the state of Israel?"). Respondents rated their agreement to each statement on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly object) to 6 (strongly support). Higher scores represent greater support for compromise ( $\alpha = .82_{IL}$  and  $.80_{PA}$ ).

### Covariates

Demographic and political variables included participants' gender, marital status, age in years, education, religiosity (0 = not religious, 1 = traditional, 2 = religious, and 3 = very religious), income, and political orientation (Israeli Jews: 1 = extreme right, 2 = right, 3 = right-center, 4 = center, 5 = center-left, 6 = left, and 7 = extreme left; Palestinians: 0 = party other than Fatah and 1 = Fatah).<sup>5</sup>

### Data Analysis and Model Specification

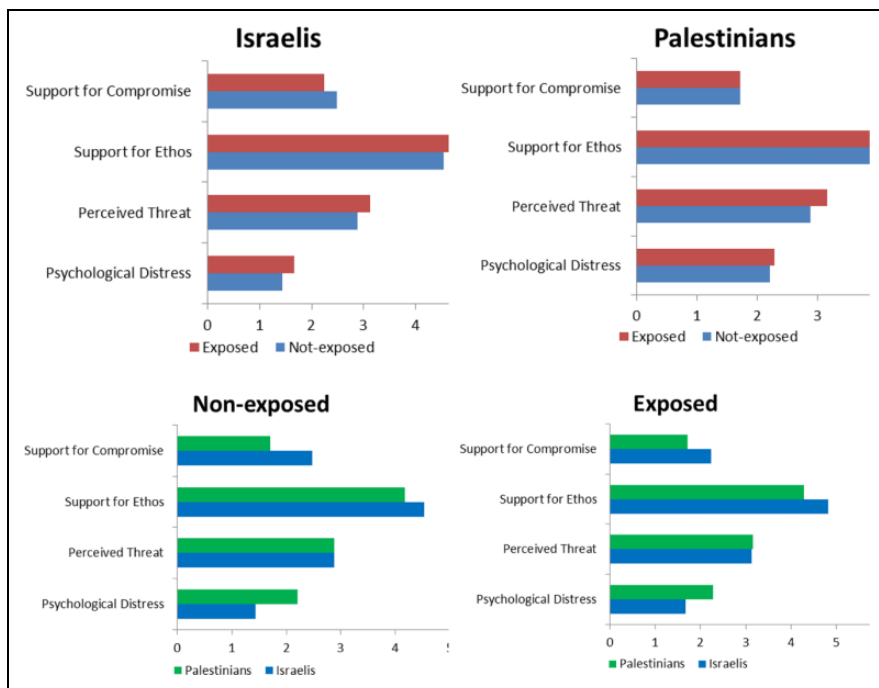
*Assessment of the mediation model.* Multigroup analysis allows testing for equivalencies across *different* groups, simultaneously, in one model. The invariance across groups tests the regression weights, variances, and errors across groups on the basis of analysis of covariance structures (Byrne 2004; Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996; Kline 2005). Using various fit indices allows a comparison of the fit of the hypothesized model to the actual data with the fit of alternative models to the same data. It allows for the validation of important aspects of the suggested model, such as mediation or direction of causality, by comparing them to their possible alternatives (inverse causality or direct relations instead of mediation). Seven control variables were entered: gender, income, age group, education, marital status and religiosity, and political orientation.

The advantages of standard error of the mean make it a highly suitable procedure for the assessment of complex models. To examine the invariance *or* variance of political outcomes among the two conflict-exposed groups, we calculated maximum likelihood estimates for all models. These were evaluated by (1) fit measures,  $\chi^2$  and degrees of freedom, normed fit index, Tucker–Lewis index, and comparative fit index in combination with root mean square error of approximation and independent component analysis (Boomsma 2000) and (2) comparisons of nested models (Bollen 1989) based on  $\chi^2$  differences for restricted and unrestricted models.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Table A2 presents descriptive statistics for all research variables among Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Participants in both samples reported a relatively low level of exposure to conflict-related violence, with 88 percent of the Israeli and 36 percent of the



**Figure 1.** Variables means by group and exposure.

Palestinian respondents reporting no exposure during the year preceding the survey. Independent samples *t* tests revealed that Palestinians reported higher levels of exposure to violence compared to Israelis. Palestinians also reported higher levels of psychological distress and perceived threat. The independent samples *t* tests revealed that Israeli respondents report higher support for ethos of conflict compared to Palestinians. Israelis report higher levels of support for compromise. Chi-square tests of independence reveal significant differences between Israelis and Palestinians on all control variables excepting gender.

**Exposed versus Non-Exposed Israelis and Palestinians**

A comparison of the means of the study variables between groups and between exposed and nonexposed Jewish–Israelis and Palestinians from East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza is presented in Table A3 and Figure 1. For both groups, exposed civilians report significantly higher levels of distress, threat, and ethos, suggesting that exposure has no direct effect on peace policy attitudes. Regardless of level of exposure, Israelis score higher on compromise and ethos; Palestinians score higher on psychological distress.

Table 1 presents the bivariate correlations between all assessed variables assessed. Seen in Table 1, most zero-order correlations among the key variables assessed were significant (at  $p < .001$ ) and demonstrate the central role played by ethos of conflict in predicting support for compromise. Among Israelis and Palestinians, exposure is significantly and positively related to distress ( $r = .16, p < .001, r = .08, p < .01$ , respectively), distress to perceived threat ( $r = .12, p < .01, r = .17, p < .001$ , respectively), and perceived threat to ethos ( $r = .14, p < .001, r = .10, p < .001$ , respectively). Support for ethos and compromise are strongly and significantly related among Israelis and Palestinians ( $r = -.48, p < .001, r = -.20, p < .001$ ). As the correlation between support for ethos and compromise was found to be higher in the Israeli sample, the correlations between ethos of conflict and support for compromise items are displayed in Figure 2; the correlations are higher in the Israeli sample, except for the first item (“The exclusive right of the Jews/Palestinians over the Land of Israel results from its being their historic homeland”).

### Hypotheses Testing

The hypothesized model was assessed by constructing path analysis for the Israeli and Palestinian groups. A *default model* and a *parsimonious model* were tested using a bootstrapping procedure with maximum likelihood estimation, 1,000 samples, and bias-corrected 95 percent confidence intervals (CIs; Preacher and Hayes 2008). In both models, all parameters were allowed to differ between the two groups.

We assessed the *default model*, which included all possible paths, including all nonmediated relations. Exposure to political conflict was the exogenous variable, willingness to compromise was the dependent endogenous variable, and psychological distress, perceived threat, and ethos of conflict were estimated as potential mediators in this linkage. All covariates were entered into the equation to assess their paths to all study variables.

Shown in Table 2, the default model shows excellent fit to the data. The model reveals an indirect effect of exposure on support for compromise, via distress, threat, and ethos. As shown in Figure 3, in both groups, personal exposure was significantly and positively related to psychological distress, which was in turn positively related to perceived threat. These threat perceptions were positively associated to ethos adherence, which was in turn negatively related to support for compromise.

An examination of the indirect effects revealed the following results: the indirect effect of exposure on threat  $\beta = .02$ , standard error [ $SE$ ] = .008, CI = .006 to .04,  $p < .01$  for Israelis and  $\beta = .01$ ,  $SE = .005$ , CI = .004 to .02,  $p < .01$  for Palestinians; the indirect effect of distress on ethos was  $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = .007$ , CI = .006 to .03,  $p < .01$  for Israelis and  $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = .006$ , CI = .008 to .03,  $p < .01$  for Palestinians; and the indirect effect of threat on support for compromise was  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $SE = .01$ , CI =  $-.07$  to  $-.02$ ,  $p < .01$  for Israelis and  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = .007$ , CI =  $-.04$  to  $-.009$ ,  $p < .01$  for Palestinians.

**Table 1.** Bivariate Correlations among the Study Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1. Exposure to conflict	—												
2. Psychological distress	.16***	—											
3. Perceived threat	.08**	.12**	—										
4. Support for ethos	.07	.06	.14***	—									
5. Support for compromise	.08**	-.06	.10***	—									
6. Gender	-.04	.01	-.08*	.48***	—								
7. Political orientation (left/Fatah)	.01	.04	-.06	-.20***	-.05	—							
8. Age	-.04	.12**	.05	-.05	-.05	-.05	—						
9. Marital status	-.16***	.07*	.08**	-.06	-.05	-.05	.05	—					
10. Education	-.10**	-.11**	-.06	.54***	.08**	.08**	.05	.13**	—				
11. Religiosity	.03	.09**	.00	-.11***	.17***	.06	.06*	-.08**	.18**	—			
12. Income level	-.11**	.12**	-.03	.02	.06*	.06	-.01	-.08**	.35***	.21***	—		
	.03	.05	.03	-.09**	.04	.04	.04	-.02	.42***	.21***	.25***	—	
	.01	-.12**	-.01	—	.12**	-.01	.12**	-.03	.18***	.18***	.28***	.11***	—
	-.11***	-.11**	-.08**	.14***	-.03	-.07*	-.05	-.24***	-.17***	—			
	.07	.02	.01	.20***	—	-.08*	—	—	.05	-.01	—		
	.06*	.08**	-.05	-.03	.26***	-.13***	.25***	.24***	-.02	.09**	—		
	.02	-.12**	.01	-.08*	.21***	-.09*	.09**	-.07*	.21***	.25***	-.14***	—	
	-.05	-.10**	-.06	-.07*	.14***	-.09*	.07	-.06	.21***	.28***	.11***	—	
					.04	-.01	-.08**	.03	-.02				

Note. First row = Israeli Jews and second row = Palestinians.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed significance).

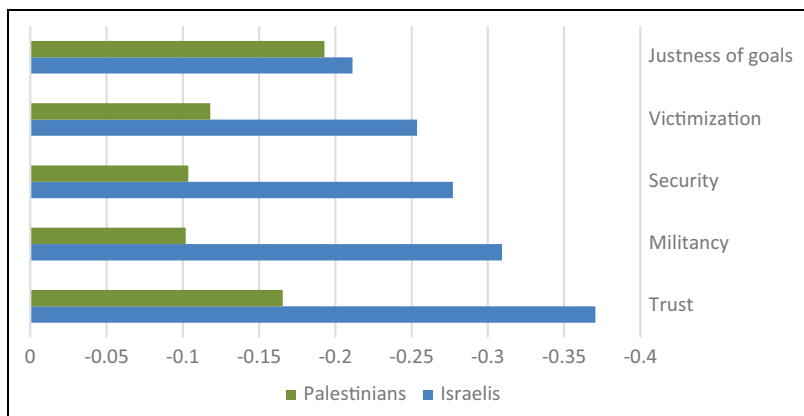


Figure 2. Correlations between *ethos* items and *support for compromise*.

Table 2. Fit Indices; Model Comparison.

Model	Fit indices							
	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	IFI	NFI	RMSEA
Default model	18.13	12	.11	1.51	.99	.99	.99	.02
Parsimonious model	96.11	63	<.01	1.52	.98	.98	.94	.02
Model comparison	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	p					
Parsimonious vs. default	77.98	51	<.01					

Note. N Israeli Jews = 562 and N Palestinians = 1,139. CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; NFI = normed fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

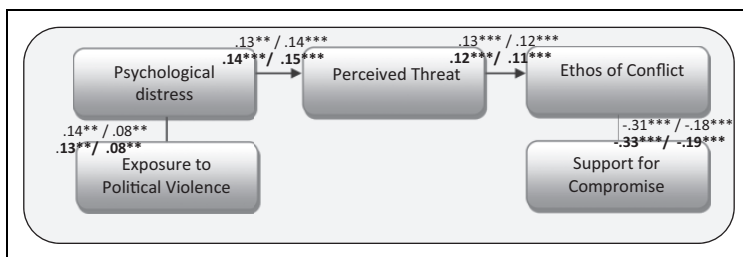
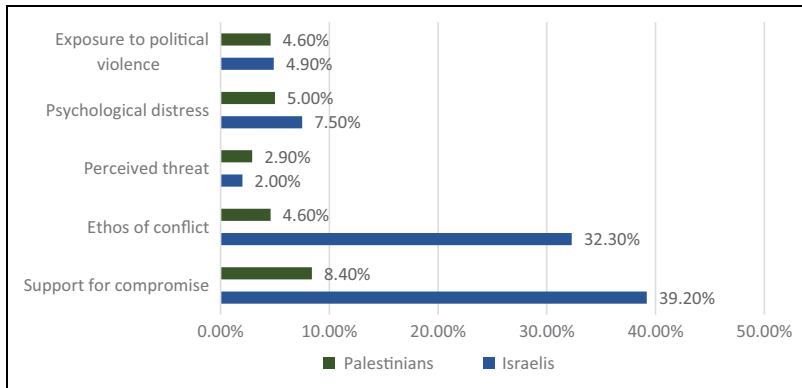


Figure 3. Study model and path analysis.

In this model, all nonmediated paths were insignificant, excluding four paths: psychological distress → support for compromise (Israelis:  $\beta = .08, p < .05$ ), exposure → perceived threat (Palestinians:  $\beta = .13, p < .01$ ), exposure → support for ethos (Palestinians:  $\beta = .06, p < .05$ ), and psychological distress → support for ethos (Palestinians:  $\beta = -.07, p < .05$ ).



**Figure 4.** Explained variance of study variables.

These paths were rather weak and were subsequently trimmed, along with all insignificant paths, to create the *parsimonious model*. This model matches the hypothesized model in full, with only the significant paths estimated (with the four exceptions mentioned previously). Seen in Table 2, the *parsimonious model*, which includes only mediated paths, shows excellent fit to the data. Following tests and comparisons, the *Parsimonious model* can be regarded as the final model that adequately represents the data.

An examination of the indirect effects revealed similar results to the ones obtained using the default model: the indirect effect of exposure on threat  $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = .008$ ,  $CI = .006$  to  $.04$ ,  $p < .01$  for Israelis and  $\beta = .01$ ,  $SE = .005$ ,  $CI = .005$  to  $.03$ ,  $p < .01$  for Palestinians; the indirect effect of distress on ethos was  $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = .006$ ,  $CI = .006$  to  $.03$ ,  $p < .01$  for Israelis and  $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = .006$ ,  $CI = .007$  to  $.03$ ,  $p < .01$  for Palestinians; and the indirect effect of threat on support for compromise was  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $CI = -.07$  to  $-.02$ ,  $p < .01$  for Israelis and  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = .007$ ,  $CI = -.04$  to  $-.009$ ,  $p < .01$  for Palestinians.

Shown in Figure 4, the explained variance of the key variables indicates that the explanatory and demographic variables account for a larger segment of the variance in the Israeli group.<sup>6</sup> Excluding exposure (explained by demographics) and threat (explained mainly by psychological distress), explained variance is higher in the Israeli model, where differences between Israelis and Palestinians are particularly salient for ethos and compromise attitudes.

## Discussion

Using nationally representative samples of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians in East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza, this study yielded findings consistent with the hypothesized model, in which exposure to political violence affects support for



political compromise through psychological distress, national threat, and support for the ethos of conflict.

Supporting our hypothesis (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009), exposure to political violence was found to be conducive to higher levels of psychological distress. Psychological distress predicted increased national threat perceptions in both samples. This is consistent with the results of previous studies indicating that distress is a key factor in facilitating threat perceptions in the context of prolonged exposure to political violence (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Janoff-Bulman 1992; Kutz and Dekel 2006). Although both Palestinian and Israeli civilians exposed to political violence are at heightened risk of PTSD and major depression, two commonly occurring mental disorders following exposure to political violence which negatively affect conflict resolution, Palestinians had higher rates of psychological distress (Canetti et al. 2014).

Largely engendered by distress and threat, ethos of conflict plays an important role in predicting peace and war attitudes. These findings are consistent with previous research linking perceived threat and adherence to conservative ideologies (Hirschberger and Ein-Dor 2006; Huddy et al. 2002). These findings were obtained even when controlling for political orientation, indicating that support for ethos of conflict is not synonymous with conservative/right-wing voting preferences. The latter indicates self-categorization, which is affected by various personal considerations. The former reflects adherence to conservative ideology, a wide worldview that gives meaning and organizes experiences and the provided information (Bar-Tal et al. 2012). These ideological beliefs are particularly suitable to address group-based threat, given the considerable emphasis put in public discourse on the national consequences of political violence in periods of war and armed conflict (Bonikowski 2008; Schildkraut 2002).

The final model did not include nonmediated paths, providing strong evidence to the hypothesized causal chain leading from exposure to violence to support for compromise. Our findings suggest that individuals who are exposed to political violence may be less supportive of political compromise, particularly because perceptions of threat resulting from psychological distress invoke conflict-supporting beliefs that function as “threat buffers.” Ethos of conflict may reduce stress and threat perceptions by fostering determination and a sense of control that assists in making postevent coping decisions (Bar-Tal 2013; Jost and Hunyady 2002; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). When exposed to violent events, those high on ethos may believe that they are a part of a nation successfully coping with hardships for centuries, with the stamina to continue the conflict (Oren and Bar-Tal 2014).

Although these findings bear potentially important implications for the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and beyond, studying the two rivals simultaneously has some limitations. As we were primarily interested in the subjective experiences and perceptions of each population, slightly different sets of questions on some of the key

variables were used. While they allow to better account for each group's unique characteristics, such differences may potentially reduce the study's internal validity. Future studies are encouraged to use surveys that are more similar on key measures, and to field these surveys simultaneously, to overcome possible confounding effects of measurement time.

Future studies should examine the role of other types of threat perceptions. Examining the different response patterns to symbolic and realistic threats (Berinsky, Crenshaw, and Mendelberg 2004; Duckitt 2003; Legge 1996), on both the personal and collective level, may shed more light on the relationship between threat perceptions and intergroup relations.

It is likely that exposure to political violence is underreported in both samples, particularly in the Israeli sample, as Israeli respondents were only asked one question and the survey was conducted over telephone (the Palestinian sample was interviewed face-to-face). There is evidence that decomposition (i.e., asking via multiple separate questions) improves recall (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000) and that telephone interviews tend to be faster-paced and lead people to underreport (Groves et al. 2009). If there is bias, it would not weaken the results since a relationship was found in the Israeli sample even with potential underreporting. Other limitations include reliance on self-report measures and its cross-sectional design. Although a causal relationship between exposure to violence and its psychological and political consequences is quite difficult to establish in the context of real-life intractable conflicts, future studies are encouraged to examine the key measures used in this study so that the antecedents precede the consequents in time.

The mediation model examined in this study goes far toward explaining the violent nonconciliatory policies often supported by populations suffering from the threat and fear of violence in times of conflict. The proposed model was examined using large, nationally representative samples of two populations in the midst of intractable conflict, lending high external validity to this study.

Examining two populations simultaneously allows for testing whether the argument that individual violence exposure prompts opposition to compromise holds across national, religious, or political contexts (Canetti, Rapaport, Wayne, and Hobfoll 2013). This survey was applied to two different groups: Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews. These two populations share some similarities. Both Israelis and Palestinians have been exposed to ongoing violence carrying long-term effects. In terms of political context, both struggle with internal intergroup conflict and deep political and social clefs. However, the two groups differ in many important respects. Despite glimpses of democratic practice in Palestine (e.g., 2006 elections in Palestine), it would not be accurate to refer to it as a democracy—neither electoral nor procedural. While Palestinians suffer from Israeli control and repression, Israelis enjoy a wide range of civil freedoms and liberties. The two groups differ on numerous sociodemographic factors,

particularly religiosity level, education level, and income. Despite these differences, our model showed excellent fit to the data in both populations.

By identifying possible mediators of support for political compromise among rival subject groups, this study contributes to an understanding of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and implies ways in which decision makers, opinion leaders, and educators can design interventions aimed at encouraging rival groups to embrace more peaceful attitudes toward the conflict and return to the negotiation table, both in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and beyond. We find that exposure to violence makes subject populations less likely to support peace due to heightened psychological distress combined with threat perceptions, both leading to higher adherence to conflict-supporting beliefs.

This suggests that any movement toward conflict resolution must take into account the sociopsychological barriers that characterize the societies involved in the conflict. As postexposure distress can be reduced through treatment, development of effective risk communication strategies, and public mental health interventions (Hobfoll et al. 2007), these findings warrant rethinking intervention policies, which may facilitate more favorable views of future compromise. The findings of this study suggest that introducing more flexible and inclusive attitudes, as well as encouraging people to acquire new information about possible solutions to the conflict, may lead to a reevaluation of conflict-related beliefs, and consequently increase support for peacemaking.

The research suggests that deep psychological and sociocultural forces cannot be disregarded in their function as barriers to the process of peacemaking. This model suggests that ongoing violence engenders more violence through a vicious circle of violence by increasing the psychological distress of the civilian population and magnifying threat perceptions, particularly collective threat, leading to increased support for the ethos of conflict, and consequently to decreased support for political compromise. Our research suggests that launching meaningful policies of peacemaking aimed at changing the psychological forces that promote uncompromising attitudes within the societies involved in the conflict may eventually bring about the desired outcomes. If opinion leaders wish to lead their societies to a peacemaking process, they must take the responsibility of imparting new beliefs that support peaceful conflict resolution, and frame the events of the conflict in a new way to change the destructive course of the adherence to the ethos of conflict. Signing agreements between policy makers may not suffice. These must be accompanied with dynamics of social and psychological change at the grass-roots level on both sides of the conflict—so that these agreements can be implemented successfully (Bar-Tal 2013). We strongly believe that the perspective presented here is of great importance for those who strive to bring societies in conflict one step closer to sustainable, enduring peace.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Ethos Items.

Israel
In spite of the Israeli wish for peace, the Arabs enforced Israel to fight over and over again. The exclusive right of the Jews over the Land of Israel results from its being their historic homeland.
In time of Palestinian threat on Israel, it is important to take significant military action, even if it means harming innocents on the opposing side.
In time of significant Palestinian threat on Israel, we should support unconventional warfare.
In times of existential threat to Israel, it is necessary that we overpower the enemy or destroy it. Only by using force you can achieve anything in the Middle East.
I don't believe in the peace intentions of the Palestinians.
Generally, the Palestinians cannot be trusted.
West Bank and Gaza
The Palestinians have an exclusive claim to the land of Palestine as it has been their homeland for generations.
Despite the Palestinian's desire for peace, they have been repeatedly subjected to occupation and forced exile by the Israelis.
I do not believe in the peaceful intentions of the Israelis.
In times of threat to the Palestinians, it is important to take significant military action, even if it means harming innocents on the opposing side.
In times of threat to the Palestinians, we should even support the use of weapons of mass destruction.
In times of threat to the Palestinians, it is necessary that we overpower the enemy or destroy it. Only by using force can you achieve anything in the Middle East.

**Table A2.** Descriptive Statistics of Variables, Comparison between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Variable	Israelis (N = 781)	Palestinians (N = 1,197)	$\chi^2$
	Percentage	Percentage	
Age			296.46*
18–22	10.6	5.5	
23–29	11.5	16.1	
30–39	17.7	24.1	
40–49	17.7	27.5	
50–59	19.0	19.8	
60+	23.5	7.0	

(continued)

**Table A2.** (continued)

Variable	Israelis (N = 781)		Palestinians (N = 1,197)		$\chi^2$
	Percentage		Percentage		
Gender					0.03
Male	48.4		48.0		
Female	51.6		52.0		
Education					943.17*
Less than high school	40.2		22.8		
High school	18.6		34.3		
More than high school	7.6		32.1		
College/university	33.6		10.8		
Marital status					1,054.83*
Single/divorced/widowed/separated	34.2		68.6		
Married	65.8		31.4		
Income level					625.94*
Below average	34.5		22.5		
Average	28.0		52.4		
Above average	37.5		25.0		
Religiosity					296.53*
Not religious	3.6		–		
Traditional	78.8		46.5		
Religious	12.2		46.9		
Very religious	5.4		6.6		
Political orientation					
Extreme right	5.9		–		
Right (parties other than Fatah)	31.3		61.6		
Right-center	22.4		–		
Center	22.8		–		
Center-left	10.5		–		
Left (Fatah)	6.1		38.4		
Extreme left	1.0		–		

Variable	Israelis (N = 781)		Palestinians (N = 1,197)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Exposure	.23	.71	1.08	1.01	–21.99
Perceived threat	2.91	.90	3.06	1.02	–3.31*
Psychological distress	1.47	.49	2.25	.59	–32.10*
Support for ethos	4.56	.97	4.24	.78	7.98*
Support for compromise	2.45	1.35	1.72	1.06	12.67*

\* $p < .001$ .

**Table A3.** Comparison between Exposed and Nonexposed Participants in Research variables.

Variable	Israelis			Palestinians		
	Not exposed, M (SD)	Exposed, M (SD)	t, p	Not exposed, M (SD)	Exposed, M (SD)	t, p
Psychological distress	1.44 (.47)	1.67 (.59)	-4.23***	2.21 (.59)	2.28 (.58)	-2.00*
Perceived threat	2.88 (.90)	3.13 (.88)	-2.40*	2.88 (1.05)	3.16 (.98)	-4.47***
Support for ethos	4.53 (.97)	4.82 (.85)	-2.93**	4.17 (.76)	4.28 (.77)	-2.43*
Support for compromise	2.48 (1.34)	2.24 (1.38)	1.61	1.71 (1.00)	1.72 (1.16)	-.16

Note: \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### Authors' Note

Data replication sets are available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0022002715569771>.

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### Notes

1. Mahshov: <http://www.mahshov.com/> and JMCC: <http://www.jmcc.org/fastfactspag.aspx?tname=101>.

2. The questionnaires were administered as part of an NIMH funded project conducted within representative samples of Israelis (March 18–May 08, 2008) and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (September 17–October 16, 2007). Additional measures were used (support for democratic values, political tolerance, authoritarianism, and depression) to the hypotheses tested here and are reported elsewhere (Canetti et al., 2009, 2010; Hobfoll et al., 2006) See <http://www.daphnacanetti.com/Exposure-to-Political-Violence-War-and-Terrorism-Surveys.html>.
3. Further information on exact wording and presentation of the questions can be obtained via the first author.
4. Total of five subscales where militancy is comprised of three items and trust two items. Also see Figures 2 and 4. For the list of items see Table A1.
5. The Palestinian political parties are drawn from the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council ballot and the candidates on the ballot for the 2005 presidential elections. Political Orientation among Palestinians represents voting for a secular-nonviolent party (Fatah) as a proxy for left-wing political views in Israel and voting for other parties as a proxy for right-wing political views in Israel. This dichotomy was a close representation of the left–right orientation. As a test of this proxy in the Israeli sample,  $\chi^2$  tests revealed that those voting for the Israeli left (the Labor Party) reported left-wing views more than voters to other parties ( $\chi^2 = 92.99, p < .001$ ).
6. Although national benchmarks were used and applied by the survey companies, the Israeli sample apparently has an overrepresentation of traditional religious Israelis. The models were rerun with weights assigned to Israeli participants, based on the Israeli Bureau of Statistic's census distribution of religiosity levels (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics 2009). Results of the weighted model were similar to the results from the unweighted sample.

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