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Gender differences in support for direct and indirect political aggression in the context of protracted conflict

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Abstract

The relationship between gender and political aggression is hotly debated and the empirical evidence is often mixed. While many surveys find a gender gap, with women less supportive of politically motivated aggression and violence than men, numerous case studies point to women's active involvement in political violence and refute the association of women with peacefulness. This article argues that the gender–aggression relation depends upon (1) the *type of political aggression* under study (i.e. *direct vs. indirect* political aggression), and (2) contextual factors, notably the salience of a protracted conflict. Using original datasets representing Israeli Jews (N = 3,126) we found that in the context of protracted conflict, gender has a unique effect on support for indirect forms of political aggression, over and above other central predictors of political aggression (i.e. political orientation and threat perceptions), such that women are actually *more* supportive of politically motivated social distancing and exclusion of out-groups in conflict as compared to men. Women and men, however, do not differ in their support for direct, politically motivated, violent acts against government officials. Results also shed light on potential mechanisms underlying these differences (and lack thereof), in the context of protracted conflict. The findings cast further doubt on the stereotype of 'peaceful women' and point to the need for policymakers concerned with conflict resolution to address context-related factors when considering the gender-based differences in political aggression.

Keywords

exclusion, gender, group-based emotions, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, political aggression, social distancing, threat perception

Women's roles in political aggression and violence have, since the time of *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, been characterized as peace-seeking, while men are often seen as war-mongering. Indeed, politically motivated aggressive acts by women are often seen as an aberration and somehow more troubling and unexpected (Alison, 2004; Brown, 2011; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). However,

growing popular and scholarly attention to women's active involvement in various forms of violent conflict has sparked a debate about the presence and magnitude

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of gender differences¹ in support for political aggression and violence.²

Many new studies examining women's role as agents of political violence have helped dispel the earlier essentialist assumption about women's status as either passive victims or peace-promoters in contexts of intranational and international conflict. They show instead that women participate in various ways in political violence (for just a few examples: Alison, 2007; Eager, 2008; McDermott, 2015; Bloom, 2012; Parashar, 2014; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Cunningham, 2003; Gonzalez-Perez, 2008; Henshaw, 2016; Gentry, 2012; Thomas & Bond, 2015). Indeed, women also often create and maintain the social and economic networks that facilitate and support political violence (Aolain, Haynes & Cahn, 2011; Cragin & Daly, 2009; McEvoy, 2009; Parkinson, 2013).

Yet, there is also an extensive empirical literature that argues that both in active participation in political violence and in support for the use of force in domestic and foreign policy, there exists a gender gap. Men are more involved, numerically, than women as participants in political violence, and women tend to be less supportive of policies advocating the use of violence (Pratto, Stallworth & Sidanius, 1997; Wilcox, Hewitt & Allsop, 1996). Further, studies addressing aggression in general (not only in the political realm) have shown that men and women express aggression differently, such that men are more physically aggressive while women may find other non-physical outlets for aggression (Card et al., 2008; McDermott, 2015). What, then, is the relationship between gender and political aggression?

This article examines the role of gender in predicting support for different forms of political aggression using two original datasets representing Israeli Jews ($N = 3,126$). We offer three important theoretical

suggestions that could help subsequent studies further disentangle the question of gender and political aggression. First, we argue that national and regional context matters. Much of the public opinion literature that has identified a gender gap – with women being more 'pacifist' or 'peaceful' than men – has drawn on data from the USA and Europe (Conover & Sapiro, 1993; Eichenberg, 2007; Golan, 2015). In the Middle East and in other regions, local contextual factors, and in particular the salience of protracted conflicts, have been found to have a significant role in shaping attitudes towards political aggression (Canetti et al., 2009). The first goal of this research is, therefore, to examine the gender gap in support for political aggression in the context of exposure to violent, protracted intergroup conflict. Second, we propose a more nuanced conceptualization of political aggression which highlights that different kinds of political aggression may associate differently with gender. Most of the existing literature focuses on one of two main forms of political aggression: some studies focus on *direct political aggression*, which is conceptualized as support for the use of force (or threat thereof) against political actors (i.e. individuals and institutions representing the state and its bodies) in an attempt to change a political situation or attain political goals (Feierabend, Feierabend & Gurr, 1972). Other studies focus on exclusion and social distancing of minorities or political out-groups that are perceived as posing a symbolic or realistic threat to the in-group. Inspired by literature on interpersonal aggression, we term this form of aggression *indirect political aggression* (Feshbach, 1969). Lastly, we examine potential mechanisms that may shed light on the relationship between gender and political aggression in the context of protracted conflict. The current research thus adds important evidence to the critical literature that has questioned the stereotype of 'peaceful women' and also contributes to the vast feminist literature on gender and political conflict by offering insight into a significant and less explored pattern of women's involvement as important agents in conflict.

Gender and direct political aggression

Women's active involvement in various forms of violent conflict has challenged the widespread stereotype of aggressive men and pacifist women. However, women still participate in smaller numbers than men in combative roles or as perpetrators of political aggression (Goldstein, 2003; Hudson et al., 2009). Moreover, a vast number of public opinion surveys show that women tend to be less supportive than men of policies

¹ We use the term 'gender' here because the political behavior literature we address refers to the 'gender gap' as the conventional term to describe differences between men and women. Of course, what we measure in this article are really differences between people who self-identify as 'male' or 'female', rather than gender differences in the sense of socially constructed masculinity and femininity (Harteveld et al., 2015).

² Psychologists define aggression as 'behavior directed toward another individual, carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm'. Violence, on the other hand, is defined as 'physical aggression at the extremely high end of the aggression continuum'. Psychologists often assert that all violence is aggression, but not all aggression is violence (Anderson & Huesmann, 2003: 298). Building on this view, we see political violence as part of a spectrum of political aggression.

advocating the use of force in political contexts, particularly on issues related to military interventions and capital punishment, even when controlling for demographic factors and political partisanship (Fite, Genest & Wilcox, 1990; Haider-Markel & Vieux, 2008; Nincic & Nincic, 2002; Regan & Paskeviciute, 2003; Togeby, 1994).

These findings resonate with consistent findings in psychological studies with regard to the gender gap in interpersonal aggression, according to which men are more likely than women to engage in physically and verbally aggressive behaviors (Etxebarria et al., 2003; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Psychological scholarship has offered several explanations for these gender differences in aggression. These include human evolutionary history (for a review, see Buss & Shackelford, 1997), hormonal differences (Mazur & Booth, 1998; Mehta & Beer, 2010), social sanction models (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Underwood, 2003; Verona et al., 2007; Hirschberger et al., 2002), and others. Overall, most studies indicate that men are more likely to externalize their emotions and are thus more likely to engage in 'fight or flight' responses under threatening circumstances, whereas women tend to internalize their emotions and thus engage in 'tend-and-befriend' responses (Bjorklund & Shackelford, 1999; Knight et al., 2002; Verona et al., 2007).

The political science literature has also drawn on women's and men's different social roles and life experiences to account for the gender gap in support for political aggression. The most widely cited explanations are women's preference for cooperation and compromise over aggression as a means for settling disagreements, maternal ethics of care, and feminist commitments (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Caprioli & Boyer, 2001; Melander, 2005; Cole & Coultrap-McQuin, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 2009). However, the direction of the gender gap is reversed when the objective of military interventions is to save innocent lives, or when operations are defined as peacekeeping operations (Brooks & Valentino, 2011; Eichenberg, 2016).

Both the psychological-individual and the more socially constructive political accounts therefore imply almost universal gendered attributes that should transcend differing local contexts in a range of different cultures and regions. However, a major limitation of this literature is its disproportionate focus on the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe. Fewer studies have explored such questions in other regional contexts (Eichenberg, 2007). Tessler and colleagues (Tessler & Warriner, 1997; Tessler, Nachtwey & Grant, 1999), who have looked at the Middle East, did not find any significant difference between men and women in terms

of peaceful vs. hawkish preferences with regard to policies on international conflict, when controlling for feminist commitments. Regional differences, and in particular the salience of conflicts in certain contexts, may explain why the association of women with a preference for nonviolence found in research in the USA and Europe may not apply in other regions. The gender gap may be contingent on a certain physical and psychological distance from violent conflict, or on the nature of the conflict. In protracted conflicts in which all members of society experience proximity to violence, men's and women's attitudes may not display such differences (Eichenberg, 2016).

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has lasted for over a century, is a prototypical example of an intractable conflict: it is protracted, violent, total, and central, perceived as zero-sum, and imposes high material and psychological demands on both sides (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Particularly since the eruption of the second Intifada (Palestinian uprising) in September 2000, in which thousands of Palestinian and Israeli civilians were injured and killed (B'tselem, 2010), both sides have suffered the worst period of mutual violence since the 1948 war. Alongside Israelis' deep mistrust towards Palestinians and their growing support for violent acts against them and toward politicians or public officials that advocate for them (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005), there has been a consistent shift in public support toward more conservative ideologies (Canetti et al., 2009). Indeed, studies have shown that exposure to political violence as well as perception of threat as a result of living in a conflict zone has the effect of hardening political attitudes and increasing support for militancy and violence as opposed to political compromise (Maoz & McCauley, 2009; Hirsh-Hoefler et al., 2014).

Following Tessler and colleagues (Tessler & Warriner, 1997; Tessler, Nachtwey & Grant, 1999), we hypothesize that in political contexts of protracted conflicts, such as the Middle East, we may not witness a significant gender gap in support for direct political aggression, meaning the use of violence for political ends, as had been identified in studies focusing on the USA and Europe.

H1: Women and men in Israel do not differ in their support for direct political aggression.

Gender and indirect political aggression

The psychological literature has suggested that more covert or *indirect* forms of aggression, particularly behaviors aimed at damaging the target's social relations, are more

characteristic of women than of men (e.g. Crick, 1997; Vaillancourt et al., 2003). Such behaviors include manipulation of peer relationships such as ostracism, social rejection, and rumor-spreading aimed at damaging the victim's self-esteem or social status (Crick, 1997). The conceptual disaggregation of aggression to its direct and indirect components was shown to be highly informative to the study of the gender-aggression association in interpersonal relationships (Archer, 2004; Underwood, 2003).

We argue that a similar disaggregation between direct and indirect political aggression, particularly in the context of protracted conflict, is required. The proposed idea of indirect political aggression has some overlap with the concepts of political intolerance and xenophobia employed in the political and psychological literatures. Nevertheless, these manifestations of 'intolerance' are usually not conceptualized so as to clarify their relationship to political aggression. Also, with some exceptions, this literature usually ignores gender altogether or treats it as a control variable rather than a predicting factor (Golebiowska, 1999; Pratto, Stallworth & Sidanius, 1997; Zick, Küpper & Hövermann, 2011).

We hypothesize that women in societies experiencing a salient protracted conflict will be more supportive of indirect political aggression than men. Varying from the biological and social explanations that previous literature has seen as underlying this gap (e.g. Card et al., 2008; McDermott, 2015), we offer that these differences can be attributed to the ways in which women are interpolated into particular roles in conflicts that revolve around group identity, such as nationalist, ethnic, and communal conflicts. The feminist literature, following Anthias & Yuval-Davis (1989), has long observed that women often serve as 'boundary-markers' between groups in conflict. Dominant nationalist and communalist discourses almost invariably ascribe to women the roles of biological reproducers of the group, of cultural transmitters of the group's identity through the rearing of children, and of the symbolic 'border guards' of the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. Women's dress, bodies, conduct, and relationships are used for the work of distinction and separation, with emphasis on difference and distance from the rival group (Al-Ali, 2000; Ben Shitrit, 2015; Katz, 2003; Ranchod-Nilsson & Tétréault, 2003).

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, the continuous exposure to the conflict has led Israelis to become increasingly suspicious and hostile towards Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCIs) (Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2014), a minority group portrayed in Israeli discourse as posing a

threat to both Israel's national identity and Israelis' physical safety (e.g. Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). In the present study, we examine whether gender predicts support for two forms of indirect political aggression towards PCIs: exclusionism, defined as the wish to exclude the PCI minority by denying it civil and political rights (Canetti et al., 2009), and social distance, defined as the desire to maintain social distance and avoid intimate contact with PCIs (Canetti-Nisim, Ariely & Halperin, 2008).

H2: Israeli women are more supportive than men of indirect political aggression (i.e. exclusionism and social distancing) toward PCIs.

The role of political orientation and threat perception in predicting support for political aggression

One of the strongest and most widely used predictors of support for political aggression is political orientation (e.g. Benjamin, 2006; Jost, 2006). Specifically, right-wing ideologies are generally associated with higher hostility and prejudice toward out-groups and minorities, and higher support for the use of military force (e.g. Hirsch-Hoefler, Canetti & Pedahzur, 2010).

The association between right-wing ideologies and support for aggression can be attributed, at least in part, to rightists' higher perceptual, cognitive, and emotional sensitivity to threat, and lower tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty as compared to leftists (Duckitt, 2013; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). As aggression offers hope for a clear solution to threat-inducing conflict, it is therefore the strategy rightists might opt for in response to threatening stimuli in order to minimize ambiguity and uncertainty (Jost, Kay & Thorisdottir, 2009).

Threat perceptions, in and of themselves, are considered a strong predictor of support for political aggression and intergroup hostility, including social distancing and exclusion of out-groups and minorities (e.g. Halperin, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2007; Huddy et al., 2005). According to the literature, non-tangible threats to a group's beliefs, values or morals may facilitate social rejection and hostility towards out-groups, even in the absence of realistic threats to the in-group's resources (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

The relationship between gender and threat perceptions and political orientation is, however, quite perplexing. While in most studies, women report higher levels of threat perceptions than men (Golebiowska, 1999; Huddy et al., 2002; Nellis, 2009), studies conducted

since the 1980s consistently show women to be more supportive of leftist ideologies (Emmenegger & Manow, 2014; Seltzer, Newman & Leighton, 1997). More work is needed to establish whether gender plays a role in predicting support for direct and indirect aggression, over and above threat perceptions and political orientation, particularly in the context of protracted conflict, where both of these tend to increase. As discussed in the next section, this is the main purpose of the present study.

Study 1

Study 1 examines the effect of gender on support for direct and indirect political aggression,³ controlling for two central predictors of political aggression in the context of protracted conflict: political orientation and threat perceptions. Because entrenched conflicts affect members of society differently than distant, overseas or far off conflicts, we hypothesize that gender does not predict support for direct political aggression in the context of protracted conflict, such that women and men do not differ in their support for direct political aggression, even when controlling for the effects of political orientation or threat perceptions. By contrast, we expect gender to significantly predict support for indirect political aggression over and above political orientation and threat perceptions, such that women demonstrate stronger support for indirect aggression as compared to men. Furthermore, we examine the role of threat perceptions and political orientation as potential mechanisms explaining this hypothesized gender gap in indirect political aggression, by testing whether the effects of these predictors on support for indirect political aggression is different for men and women (moderation hypothesis). To this end, we examine whether gender moderates the effects of threat perceptions and political orientation on support for indirect political aggression.

Method and measures

The data were collected during 2003–05 and obtained using a random sampling of landlines, to achieve a

representative sample of adult Israeli Jews. The final sample consisted of 2,319 respondents.⁴ We used a structured questionnaire drawn from several measures that was completed by most participants in approximately 20 minutes. All items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), unless indicated otherwise. All scales were computed by calculation of the average of all items in each scale.

*Support for direct political aggression*⁵ was measured using a three-item scale adapted from Pedahzur, Hasisi & Brichta (2000), tapping participants' support for (1) sending threatening letters, (2) using arms, and (3) physically injuring politicians in pursuit of political ends ($\alpha = .67$).

Support for indirect political aggression consisted of two concepts:

1. *Exclusionism* was measured using four items adapted from Scheepers, Gijbbers & Coenders (2002) to tap participants' beliefs regarding the required public policy directed at PCIs (see also Canetti-Nisim, Arieli & Halperin, 2008; e.g. 'PCIs should not be allowed equal social rights as Jews'; see full items in the Online appendix, Tables 1 and 2). The scale has been found to have broad, cross-cultural applicability across 22 European countries ($\alpha = .77$).
2. *Social distance* was measured using four items adapted from Crandall's (1991) Social Distance Questionnaire and adjusted to reflect Israelis' support for socially distancing PCIs: (e.g. 'would you agree to have a family member romantically involved with a PCI?'; see full items in the Online appendix, Table 1) ($\alpha = .83$).

Threat perceptions were measured using a three-item scale that is often used in Israel (e.g. Canetti et al., 2009), tapping three dimensions of threat perceptions toward PCIs: 'to what extent do you think PCIs pose a threat to:

⁴ See Online appendix for details about survey sampling and procedure.

⁵ To confirm the discriminant and divergent validity of the direct political aggression scale, we conducted two exploratory factor analyses using Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, for the three items of the direct aggression scale along with the four items of each of the indirect political aggression scales. As expected, each analysis yielded two components with eigenvalues greater than 1 that accounted for more than 60% of the variance. Loadings (see Online appendix, Tables 1 and 2) showed that the direct political aggression items loaded highly onto the first component ($> .75$), and the indirect political aggression items loaded strongly onto the second factor ($> .74$ for social distancing and $> .69$ for exclusion).

³ The measures of direct and indirect political aggression in this study did not assess actual participation in acts of political aggression, but rather the attitudinal support of such acts. Although correlations between attitudes and behaviors are often far from absolute, research in the social sciences has come to rely on attitudinal measures particularly when the direct measurement of behavior is difficult or impossible, as is the case with participation in acts of political aggression (Ajzen, 2001; Pedahzur, Hasisi & Brichta, 2000).

(1) Israel's security, (2) the democratic character of Israel, and (3) the Jewish character of Israel'. Consistent with integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), the scale combines realistic (e.g. security threat) and symbolic (e.g. threat to the Jewish/democratic character of the state) aspects of threat perceptions ($\alpha = .88$).

Political orientation was rated on the following scale: 1 = extreme right, 2 = right, 3 = center, 4 = left, 5 = extreme left.

Gender was coded as 0 = male, 1 = female.

Demographic covariates: We accounted for a number of variables that have been previously shown to be related to political aggression: age, education, income, and religiosity. All control variables except for age were dummy-coded prior to conducting the analyses.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables are presented in Table 3 of the Online appendix. As predicted, gender was positively and strongly associated with exclusionism and social distancing, indicating that women scored significantly higher than men in both types of indirect political aggression. However, no significant association was found between gender and direct political aggression. In other words, women and men did not differ in their support for direct political aggression. Also, gender was not significantly associated with threat perceptions, and only weakly associated with political orientation, with women slightly more leftist than men. Correlations between social distancing and exclusionism were significant, but did not reach the critical value for multicollinearity (i.e. $r = .70$; Bagozzi, Yi & Phillips, 1991).

The role of gender in predicting direct and indirect political aggression

To examine the role of gender in predicting support for direct and indirect political aggression, we conducted three multiple regression analyses, one for each dependent variable (direct political aggression, exclusionism, and social distancing). In each of these analyses, we assessed the unique effects of gender on political aggression, controlling for two central predictors of political aggression: threat perceptions and political orientation, as well as for demographic covariates (participants' age, income, education, level of religiosity) and year of survey.

The analyses revealed no significant main effect for gender on support for direct political aggression ($B = -.03$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = -.02$, $t = -.68$, $p = .499$),

Table I. Multiple regressions predicting direct political aggression, social distancing, and exclusionism (Study 1)

Variable name	Direct	Social	Exclusionism
	political aggression β (s.e.)	distancing β (s.e.)	β (s.e.)
Female	-.03 (.05)	.20 (.05)***	.20 (.05)***
Leftist orientation	-.12 (.03)***	-.43 (.12)***	-.41 (.03)***
Threat perceptions	.13 (.02)***	.38 (.02)***	.46 (.02)***
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Less than high-school education	.41 (.14)**	.31 (.16)	-.21 (.15)
High-school education	.15 (.06)**	.32 (.07)***	.38 (.06)***
Post high-school education	.16 (.06)**	.24 (.07)**	.21 (.06)**
Below average income	.17 (.05)**	.18 (.06)**	.12 (.06)*
Average income	.04 (.06)	-.09 (.07)	-.00 (.06)
Year 2003	.14 (.06)**	.11 (.07)	.10 (.06)
Year 2004	.12 (.06)*	.15 (.07)*	.18 (.06)**
Secular	.22 (.09)*	-.99 (.11)***	-.50 (.10)***
Observant	.19 (.09)*	-.68 (.11)***	-.29 (.10)**
Religious	.08 (.11)	-.43 (.12)**	-.22 (.11)*
R ² (adjusted)	.10 (.94)	.49 (1.10)	.56 (.98)

Cells contain unstandardized parameter estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. The reference categories for the dummy-coded covariates were as follows: for religion = 'very religious'; for education = 'academic education'; for income = 'above average income' (this applies to all subsequent tables in the article).

indicating that women and men did not differ in their support for direct political aggression, even when controlling for the effects of other potential predictors. However, the analyses revealed a significant main effect for gender on support for social distancing ($B = .20$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = .06$, $t = 3.70$, $p = .000$) and exclusionism ($B = .20$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = .07$, $t = 4.23$, $p = .000$), indicating that women were more supportive of both types of indirect political aggression than men, even when controlling for the effects of other potential predictors (see Table I).

We then examined whether differences in the effects of threat perceptions or political orientation on men's and women's support for indirect political aggression can account for this gender gap: to the extent that threat perceptions/political orientation affect women's support for indirect political aggression less (or more) than men's, this might create differences in their level of support for indirect political aggression (see Hartevelde et al., 2015). To test this hypothesis, we examined whether gender moderates the effects of each of these predictors on support for indirect political aggression, by conducting two

Table II. Multiple regressions with interactions predicting social distancing and exclusionism (Study 1)

<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Social distancing</i> β (<i>s.e.</i>)	<i>Exclusion</i> β (<i>s.e.</i>)
Female	.20 (.05)***	.20 (.05)***
Leftist orientation	-.46 (.05)***	-.45 (.05)***
Threat perceptions	.36 (.03)***	.45 (.02)***
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Less than high-school education	.28 (.16)	-.22 (.15)
High-school education	.34 (.07)***	.38 (.06)***
Post high-school education	.24 (.07)**	.21 (.06)**
Below average income	.18 (.06)**	.12 (.06)*
Average income	-.09 (.07)	-.00 (.06)
Year 2003	.11 (.07)	.11 (.06)
Year 2004	.15 (.07)*	.18 (.06)**
Secular	-.99 (.11)***	-.50 (.10)***
Observant	-.68 (.11)***	-.29 (.10)**
Religious	-.42 (.13)**	-.22 (.11)*
Gender * Leftist orientation	.06 (.07)	.07 (.06)
Gender * Threat perceptions	.05 (.04)	.02 (.03)
R^2 (adjusted)	.49 (.11)	.56 (.98)

Cells contain unstandardized parameter estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

multiple regression analyses, one for each dependent variable (i.e. exclusionism and social distancing). In each analysis, the interaction terms of gender with political orientation and with threat perceptions were specified as predictors of support for indirect political aggression, controlling for the main effects of all predictors, for the demographic covariates, and for year of survey.⁶

Results revealed a significant main effect for gender on both exclusionism and social distancing, such that women reported higher support for indirect political aggression than men, controlling for all other predictors. However, gender did not interact significantly with either threat perceptions or political orientation in predicting indirect political aggression (see Table II).

Taken together, these findings provide support for the hypothesized gender gap in support for indirect political aggression (with women more supportive of exclusionism and social distancing than men), and the hypothesized absence of a gender gap in support for direct political aggression, in the context for protracted conflict.

Furthermore, our analyses revealed that threat perceptions and political orientation are equally predictive of women's and men's support for indirect political aggression, ruling these predictors out as potential mechanisms explaining the gender gap. Threat perceptions and political orientation, however, can potentially explain women's and men's similar support for direct political aggression, as no gender differences were found in threat perceptions, and only minor differences were found in political orientation (as indicated in the bivariate correlations). Indeed, the past years have witnessed a conservative shift in Israeli public opinion (Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014), as well as an increase in threat perceptions due to continuous exposure to conflict-related violence. Insofar as women and men in the Israeli context do not differ in their levels of threat perceptions and rightist orientation, these factors may account for their similar levels of support for direct political aggression, but not indirect political aggression.

Study 2

Given that our initial hypotheses regarding direct and indirect political aggression were supported, we proceeded to test additional mechanisms that might explain gender differences (and lack thereof) in support for different types of political aggression. We consider two such salient factors in the context of protracted conflict: militarism and emotions towards the rival in conflict. In the context of conflict, societies as a whole often become relatively militarized. The extensive literature on militarism and gender often examines militarism's effect on gender relations (for example norms of masculinity and femininity, or gender-based violence) but less on women's and men's attitudes toward out-groups in conflict (for a few examples: Adelman, 2003; Cockburn, 2010; Enloe, 2000; McEnaney, 2000; Sjoberg & Via, 2010). In Israel, although women's positions in the army remain mostly confined to non-combat roles, their duration of service is shorter than their male counterparts, and they may be more easily exempted from the army than men due to marriage or motherhood (Golan, 2015), the fact remains that most Jewish Israeli women serve in the army and are socialized into a typically masculinist, certainly hawkish, institution. By conforming to an overwhelmingly masculinist militaristic culture in their behaviors (Sasson-Levy, 2002) and by going through the same system of military conscription, Israeli women may also align more closely with their male counterparts in terms of their attitudes towards militarism and political aggression.

⁶ Continuous variables were centered prior to conducting the analyses.

Long-term intergroup conflicts are also saturated with negative intergroup emotions that powerfully shape society members' attitudes and behaviors, including their support for political aggression (Bar-Tal, Halperin & DeRivera, 2007). Although negative emotions towards the rival in conflict, such as anger and fear, play a major role in initiating and maintaining intergroup conflicts, each emotion is linked to a separate behavioral intent: whereas fear is generally associated with moving away (avoidance) from the threatening out-group, anger is generally associated with moving toward (attack) the threatening agent, or towards whoever is perceived to be responsible for not eliminating the threat (Cheung-Blunden & Blunden, 2008; Halperin, 2015). In terms of direct and indirect political aggression, fear of the rival in conflict is expected to be associated with exclusion and distancing from the members of the rival group, whereas anger towards the rival is expected to be associated with direct forms of political aggression.

Considering the important role of militaristic attitudes and emotions in predicting different types of aggression in the context of protracted conflict, we examine their role as potential explanatory mechanisms in the relationship between gender and support for political aggression, alongside threat perceptions and political orientation.

In Study 2, we therefore examine the role of gender in predicting direct and indirect political aggression, controlling for the effects of political orientation, threat perceptions, militarism, and emotions towards the rival in conflict. Consistent with the results of Study 1, we predict that gender will not predict support for direct political aggression in the context of protracted conflict, but will significantly predict support for indirect political aggression, even when controlling for other central predictors. We expect that insignificant gender differences in militarism in the context of protracted conflict may function as potential explanation for the absence of gender differences in support for direct political aggression. In addition, given the strong empirical link between anger towards the rival in conflict and direct political aggression (Halperin, 2015), and insofar as anger predicts men's and women's support for direct political aggression equally well, we expect that similarity in the levels of anger among men and women can account for gender similarities in support for direct political aggression. Finally, given the strong empirical link between fear and indirect political aggression (Halperin, 2015), we also contend that fear of the rival in conflict may play a role in explaining the gender gap in support for indirect political aggression, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. More specifically, gender differences in support for indirect political aggression may be attributed to differences in the extent to which women's and men's support for this type of

political aggression is driven by fear. Women are often constructed in the discourse of groups in conflict as particularly targeted, vulnerable, and in need of protection (Elsh-tain, 1987). If women internalize this sense of enhanced vulnerability, it is possible that we might find higher prevalence of fear among women in the context of conflict.

Method and measures

The data were collected during 2007 as part of a larger project on violence and extremism. To achieve a representative sample of adult Israeli Jews, the study employed a similar sampling method to that used in the present Study 1. The final sample consisted of 807 respondents.⁷ Because the research was conducted with additional aims in mind, the findings for the present study are exploratory.

We designed a closed-ended questionnaire incorporating the following measures:

*Support for direct political aggression*⁸ was measured using the same three items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .69$).

Support for indirect political aggression was assessed using the four-item measure of *Exclusionism* towards PCIs that used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .74$).

Threat perceptions were measured using the same three-item scale used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .88$).

Emotions towards the rival in conflict were assessed using two items, tapping the extent to which PCIs and their leaders make participants feel *fear* and *anger*. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they were feeling fear/anger on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) scale. Single-item measurement has been used in many studies and has been shown to be reliable way of differentiating discrete emotions (Halperin, 2015).

Militarism was assessed by measuring participants' agreement on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) scale with the following item: 'the only way to achieve anything in the Middle-east is by using force' (Kimmerling, 1993).

Political orientation, Gender, and Demographic covariates were measured and coded as they were in Study 1.

⁷ See the Online appendix for details about survey sampling and procedure.

⁸ To confirm the discriminant and divergent validity of the direct political aggression scale, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis using Varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, for the three items of the direct aggression scale along with the four items of the exclusionism scale. As expected, the analysis yielded two components with eigenvalues greater than 1 that accounted for more than 60% of the variance. Loadings (see Online appendix, Table 4) showed that the direct political aggression items loaded highly onto the first component ($> .72$), and the indirect political aggression (exclusionism) items loaded strongly onto the second factor ($> .69$).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables are presented in Table 5 in the Online appendix. As predicted, gender was positively associated with indirect political aggression (women supporting exclusionism more than men), but not with direct political aggression. Further, gender was not significantly associated with either threat perceptions or political orientation. Gender was also not significantly associated with militarism and anger towards PCIs, but positively associated with fear of PCIs, with women reporting higher fear of PCIs than men. Fear and anger were only moderately related, further supporting the distinct nature of these two types of negative emotions.

The role of gender in predicting direct and indirect political aggression

In light of these results, we conducted a multiple regression analysis to examine the role of gender in predicting support for direct and indirect political aggression, controlling for all predictors (threat perceptions, political orientation, emotions towards PCIs, and militarism), as well as for the demographic covariates.

As predicted, the analyses revealed no significant main effect for gender on support for direct political aggression ($B = .03$, $SE = .08$, $\beta = .01$, $t = .35$, $p = .727$), indicating that women and men did not differ in their support for direct political aggression, even when controlling for all other potential predictors. However, when exclusionism was the outcome variable, the analyses revealed a significant main effect for gender ($B = .35$, $SE = .07$, $\beta = .12$, $t = 4.85$, $p = .000$), such that women were more supportive of exclusionism than men, even when controlling for all other potential predictors (see Table III).

To examine whether differences in the effects of our predictors on men's and women's support for indirect political aggression can explain this gender gap, we conducted a multiple regression analysis, in which exclusionism was regressed on the interaction between gender and each of the main predictors (threat perceptions, political orientation, anger, fear, and militarism), controlling for their main effects and the demographic covariates.

As predicted, results revealed a significant main effect for gender on exclusionism, with women scoring higher than men, controlling for all other predictors. Results also revealed a significant interaction between gender and fear in predicting support for exclusionism ($B = .10$, $SE = .04$, $\beta = .09$, $t = 2.32$, $p = .021$). Moreover, fear of PCIs has a stronger impact on women's

Table III. Multiple regressions predicting direct political aggression and exclusionism (Study 2)

Variable name	Direct political	
	aggression β (s.e.)	Exclusionism β (s.e.)
Female	.03 (.08)	.35 (.07)***
Leftist orientation	-.03 (.05)	-.24 (.05)***
Threat perceptions	.13 (.03)***	.51 (.03)***
Anger toward PCIs	-.02 (.03)	.13 (.03)***
Fear of PCIs	.05 (.02)*	-.04 (.02)
Militarism	.02 (.02)	.07 (.02)**
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Less than high-school education	.58 (.20)*	.09 (.19)
High-school education	-.15 (.09)	.00 (.09)
Post high-school education	-.16 (.09)	.05 (.09)
Below average income	.22 (.09)*	-.01 (.09)
Average income	.14 (.10)	-.13 (.09)
Secular	.20 (.13)	-.24 (.13)
Observant	.27 (.14)	-.35 (.13)*
Religious	-.04 (.15)	-.16 (.15)
R ² (adjusted)	.11 (.88)	.64 (.84)

Cells contain unstandardized parameter estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

exclusionism ($B = .25$, $SE = .04$, $\beta = .34$, $t = 7.30$, $p = .000$) compared to men's ($B = .13$, $SE = .05$, $\beta = .16$, $t = 2.87$, $p = .004$). All other interactions were not significant, indicating that all other variables predict exclusionism equally well for men and women, and can therefore not account for the difference in men's and women's support for indirect political aggression⁹ (see Table IV).

⁹ Following previous studies on gender differences in attitudes (Harteveld et al., 2015; Lietaert et al., 2015), we also examined whether gender differences in the level of fear of PCIs can explain the gender gap in support for indirect political aggression (i.e. mediation hypothesis). To test this hypothesis, we conducted a two-step hierarchical linear regression analysis. In the first step, exclusionism was regressed on gender, controlling for the demographic covariates. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for gender ($B = .30$, $SE = .10$, $\beta = .11$, $t = 3.01$, $p = .003$), such that women report higher exclusionism than men. In the second step, fear of PCIs was also entered as a predictor of exclusionism, significantly reducing the regression coefficient of gender ($B = .11$, $SE = .10$, $\beta = .04$, $t = 1.10$, $p = .271$). These results suggest that the gender gap in exclusionism may be attributed to differences in the distribution of fear of PCIs among men and women, further supporting the role of fear as an explanatory mechanism underlying the gender gap in support for indirect political aggression.

Table IV. Multiple regression with interactions predicting exclusionism (Study 2)

Variable name	<i>Exclusionism</i> β (s.e.)
Female	.36 (.07)***
Leftist orientation	-.25 (.07)***
Threat perceptions	.54 (.04)***
Anger toward PCIs	.13 (.04)**
Fear of PCIs	-.09 (.03)**
Militarism	.05 (.03)
Age	.00 (.00)
Less than high-school education	.08 (.19)
High-school education	.00 (.09)
Post high-school education	.05 (.09)
Below average income	.01 (.09)
Average income	-.12 (.09)
Secular	-.24 (.13)
Observant	-.36 (.13)**
Religious	-.16 (.15)
Gender * Leftist orientation	.01 (.10)
Gender * Threat perceptions	-.07 (.06)
Gender * Anger	.01 (.05)
Gender * Fear	.10 (.04)*
Gender * Militarism	.03 (.04)
R ² (adjusted)	.64 (.84)

Cells contain unstandardized parameter estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The findings of Study 2 provide further support for the hypothesized gender gap in support for indirect political aggression (with women more supportive of exclusionism than men), and the hypothesized similarity in women's and men's support for direct political aggression, in the context of protracted conflict. Furthermore, these findings shed more light on mechanisms that can potentially explain these gender differences (or lack thereof). Alongside the potential role of threat perceptions and right-wing political orientation in explaining the lack of gender differences in direct political aggression (replicated in both studies), the findings of Study 2 suggest that (1) fear of PCIs affects women's support for indirect political aggression more than men's. Insofar as women reported more fear of PCIs than men (as indicated by the bivariate correlations), this difference can account for women's higher support for indirect political aggression; (2) anger towards PCIs and militarism can shed more light on why women and men do *not* differ in their support for direct political aggression. As men and women report similar levels of anger towards PCIs, as well as similar levels of militarism (indicated by the bivariate correlations), and insofar as their support for direct political aggression is equally affected by these

variables, they can both potentially account for this absence of a gender gap.

Discussion

This article emphasizes the complex association between gender and support for different types of political aggression in the context of protracted conflict. Our findings suggest that gender has a unique effect on indirect forms of political aggression in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, so that women are more supportive of social distancing and exclusion towards PCIs as compared to men. Nevertheless, women and men did not differ in their support for direct political aggression against government officials.

One way of explaining these findings is to suggest that women become just as politically aggressive as men in contexts of protracted intergroup conflict; just as men, they are susceptible to rising threat perceptions, more hawkish political orientations, militaristic attitudes, and anger towards the rival in conflict, all of which are considered significant predictors of direct forms of political aggression in the extant literature. Yet, as the feminist literature has shown, in conflict contexts women are often constructed as uniquely vulnerable targets in need of protection from the rival group, and are assigned the additional role of 'boundary markers' and symbolic 'border guards' that socially separate one community from its 'other'. This link between a sense of vulnerability and fear of the other, for which separation, distancing, and marking boundaries is often presented as an answer in communalist discourse, might explain our results. Indirect political aggression is an acceptable, socially sanctioned way in which women can address the fear they have been conditioned to feel toward the 'other'. The findings of the present research augment our understanding of the ways in which gender and aggression intersect in violent conflicts. Our distinction between direct political aggression on the one hand, and indirect aggression on the other, sheds light on important gendered dynamics that would otherwise have remained obscure.

As with any research, our work has limitations. First, generalizing from Israel to other contexts of conflict requires further empirical work. Yet, Israel is a relevant case, sharing civilians' exposure to violence with other regions of conflict, as well as, increasingly, with Europe, the United States, and other regions – given growing threats of international terrorism and rising militarism of societies through the war on terror (Enloe, 2016). Future studies should examine these relationships in other contexts of conflict.

Notwithstanding its limitations, our research builds on the established literature straddling feminist theory and issues of political aggression and violent conflicts. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to undertake a systematic quantitative examination of the association between gender and political aggression of *both* direct and indirect forms, in the context of protracted conflict. There are two ways in which this article complements the feminist literature. First, most of the existing work on this subject is based on qualitative case studies, rather than large-N quantitative research.¹⁰ Our article demonstrates that theory and insight developed in this literature find significant support also when examined through a quantitative lens. In addition, the existing research on gender and group identity in conflict has generally focused on the way women are ‘used’ as *targets* of nationalist discourses that seek to recruit them to the role of symbolically erecting boundaries between rival groups. Our research shows that women are active *agents* in this process. Possibly due to the fear of group identity boundary trespassing, which hegemonic communalist discourses instill in women, they themselves, more than men, seem to support ideas of group separation, exclusion, and social distance.

On the practical level, our research points to the importance of understanding women’s role in the development of peace in situations of ongoing conflict. Understanding how gender interplays with different forms of political aggression will help researchers and policymakers to better grasp the causes of aggression and form nuanced and long-lasting solutions to conflict (Aolain, Haynes & Cahn, 2011; Vogel, Porter & Keibell, 2014). Overlooking or underestimating women’s experiences and roles in political aggression, particularly within settings of protracted conflict, may result in isolating them post-conflict and cause destabilization or a challenge to peace-consolidation efforts (Mackenzie, 2012; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004; McEvoy, 2009; Thomas & Bond, 2015). Our findings question the targeting of men in attempts to address and

reduce acts of direct political aggression, or support thereof. As our findings suggest, women and men do not differ in their support for direct political aggression, and thus may both have a role in facilitating public support for such acts. Addressing gender differences in support for and participation in indirect forms of political aggression is another crucial lesson arising from this study, which should inform conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts that seek to address not only direct aggression, but also its attendant social forms in inter-group conflict situations.

Finally, examination of the Israeli case illuminates much more than just the fact that women bear no essential relationship to peace and nonviolence. It is crucial to consider that men and women may possess similar motivations for supporting certain forms of political aggression (direct aggression), while holding different motivations to support and engage in other forms of aggression (indirect) in the context of violent conflicts. Thus, as women’s political activity and agency increases throughout the world, understanding *contextual* gender-based similarities *and* differences in support for different types of political aggression is crucial.

Replication data

The Online appendix is available at <https://www.prio.org/JPR/Datasets/>.

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¹⁰ Feminist authors have tended to privilege case studies, narrative, experiential, and other forms of qualitative analysis for both practical and theoretical reasons. Often, high quality quantitative data is not available or is hard to collect in areas of protracted conflict. Moreover, this literature critically challenges the conflation of sex with gender, and often aims to interrogate the social construction of gender, which requires more interpretive work and for which reductive statistical categories are often inadequate. However, see Sjöberg & Wood (2015), Cohen (2013), and Thomas & Bond (2015) for examples of quantitative work in this vein.

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