

# Intergroup commonality, political ideology, and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties in intergroup conflicts

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## Abstract

Despite their pernicious effect on intergroup conflict, collateral casualties are seen as inevitable and justified by many members of the groups involved, particularly those who endorse a right-wing ideology. Drawing on social psychological literature, we examined whether a perception of commonality between in-group and out-group can be beneficial for reducing tolerance to collateral casualties. We hypothesized that viewing the out-group as sharing commonalities with the in-group can reduce processes of out-group delegitimization, which are common among right-wingers in intractable conflicts, and may therefore serve to explain reduction in tolerance to collateral casualties. Three correlational studies were conducted among Jewish-Israelis in the context of the conflict with the Palestinians to test this. In Study 1, right-wing political ideology was associated with stronger support for enemy collateral casualties, and the effect was moderated by perceived intergroup commonality. While leftists were overall non-supportive of collateral casualties, rightists who perceived high intergroup commonality were less tolerant of collateral casualties than those low on intergroup commonality. In Study 2, conducted during violent escalation, we replicated these results while controlling for anger, fear, and hatred. In Study 3, we found that the effect was mediated by delegitimization of the out-group. These results extend the range of beneficial impact of intergroup commonality, and imply that it may be used as a tool to promote conflict resolution.

## Keywords

aggression, commonality, ideology, intergroup conflict

They are not as we are.

Though they are curiously like, even to the bleeding  
and the terrible cries among rubble,

they are not as we are.

They are the collateral damage.

(Thomas W Shapcott, 1995)

Although the exact numbers will probably never be known, US drone attacks in Afghanistan and other areas have led to multiple civilian deaths. Despite the rising death toll and the highly disturbing nature of some of the incidents – for example, the Deh Bala wedding party

airstrike in 2008, in which 47 Afghan wedding guests were killed in a US military aircraft attack – the majority of the US public continues to support such military actions. A recent poll indicates that over 58% of US respondents approve of the USA conducting missile strikes from drones to target extremists in such countries as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia (Pew Research Center, 2013). More generally, almost half (49%) of US respondents in another survey believed military attacks

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targeting and killing civilians are sometimes justified (Gallup, 2011). Similar levels of tolerance of enemy collateral casualties have been found in other contexts of intergroup conflicts, such as in the 1990s during the conflict in Kosovo (Larson & Savych, 2007) and among Jewish-Israelis (over 50% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘it is justified and legitimate for Israel to destroy whole neighborhoods in Gaza in order to destroy terror infrastructure and deter terrorists’; Schori-Eyal et al., 2015). Research also indicates that deaths of non-combatants have negligible impact on support for the use of force (e.g. Mueller, 2000; Tirman, 2011; but see also Eichenberg, 2005).

International humanitarian law decrees that countries should discriminate between uninvolved civilians and combatants, while attacks should only be aimed at the latter. De facto, even Western democratic countries inflict harm upon uninvolved civilians, especially as part of their ‘War on Terror’ (Lewis & Vavrichek, 2016; Sassoli, 2004). Research on public tolerance of enemy collateral casualties found that it is associated with conservative political orientation (e.g. Uhlman et al., 2009), with religiosity and authoritarian personality (Kimhi & Kasher, 2015), and with perceptions of the in-group as a victimized group entitled to defend itself (Schori-Eyal et al., 2017). Women are less likely to support attacks that might bring high numbers of civilian deaths and, unlike men, base their support on the potential gains from an attack (Crawford, Lawrence & Lebovic, 2017). Civilian casualties are also seen as more acceptable when the target country is non-democratic and its citizens support the government’s belligerent policies (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2012), and the casualties are more easily discounted by individuals with high need for closure (Federico, Golec & Dial, 2005).

These civilian deaths during conflict have indisputably detrimental consequences that go beyond the obvious human suffering, financial hardship, and misery. Recent studies suggest that collateral casualties may contribute to the perpetuation and escalation of conflict through radicalization, increased support for in-group militants, and more negative attitudes and subsequent violence toward the out-group that caused the harm (Condra & Shapiro, 2012; Deri, 2012; Lyall, Blair & Imai, 2013). In their study on Afghanistan, Lyall, Blair & Imai (2013) found that civilian casualties inflicted by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) reduced Afghan civilian support for ISAF and led to increased support for Taliban forces. The issue of civilian casualties becomes an even graver concern with the transition into a different form of global warfare, in which

political infrastructure and civilian society replace armies as targets (Lind et al., 1989) and the distinction between combatants and non-combatants blurs (Hoffman, 2007).

Lower public support for policies that increase the likelihood of civilian casualties can therefore have far-reaching consequences for conflict resolution and eventual reconciliation. The goal of the present research is to examine a psychological factor that may be associated with decreased tolerance of enemy collateral casualties, particularly among those most prone to endorse measures leading to civilian deaths: in-group–out-group commonality.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: first, in the next section, we provide a theoretical framework on delegitimization, perceived in-group–out-group commonality, and the possible relationships between the two concepts. We then present three studies that test our hypotheses, conducted during different phases of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in recent years. We conclude with a general discussion of the findings and their theoretical and applied implications.

## **Theoretical background**

One of the greatest obstacles for reducing violence between groups is delegitimization of the enemy; even more so its extreme form, dehumanization. Delegitimizing the enemy provides rationale and justification for breaching the universal and respected injunction to preserve life. Based on extremely negative out-group characterization (Bar-Tal, 1989), delegitimization entails denial of the out-group’s humanity; such dehumanization is associated with unwillingness to recognize the other’s pain and suffering (e.g. Nagar & Maoz, 2017), and with the perception of intergroup aggression as permissible and justified (Kteily et al., 2015; Maoz & McCauley, 2008; see also Bandura et al., 1996; Struch & Schwarz, 1989; Viki, Osgood, & Phillips, 2013). Dehumanization involves denying a person’s essential facets of identity and community – being an agentic individual and a part of an interconnected network of caring individuals – thus reducing their capacity to evoke compassion and moral emotions, and making them more likely to be treated as means toward vicious ends (Kelman, 1973). Delegitimization and dehumanization can lead to the out-group’s exclusion from the international community as a licit member, worthy of basic civil and human rights (Bar-Tal, 1989; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2007). Those subjected to moral exclusion are seen as ‘non-entities, expendable, or undeserving; consequently,

harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just' (Opotow, 1990: 1). As such, all members of delegitimized and dehumanized groups are perceived as legitimate targets, including civilians not involved in fighting; for example, dehumanization was recently found to predict support for drone strikes that resulted in civilian casualties (Rai, Valdesolo & Graham, 2017). This process of delegitimization and dehumanization may therefore stand at the core of support for collateral damage.

What type of cognitions can therefore be associated with reduced delegitimization? The social psychological literature points to perceptions of commonalities across group lines as a powerful mechanism linked with a range of positive out-group orientations. Focusing on commonalities – elements of common identity and similarities shared by members of both groups – was consistently found to relate to more positive out-group attitudes (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), to foster more intimate cross-group interactions (Dovidio et al., 1997), and to promote prosocial behavior between groups (Nier et al., 2001). The process accounting for the common identity effects is rooted in categorization (Turner et al., 1987). Recategorizing different social groups as sharing a superordinate, overarching identity – including through cues that emphasize elements common to both – redirects the natural tendency to favor one's in-group to encompass out-group members, now included in the same superordinate group (Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2015).

Despite these findings, most research on cross-group commonalities did not consider outcomes that go beyond out-group attitudes (see Saguy et al., 2016 for a review) and scholars have raised doubts that correlates of commonalities might be superficial and reflect more of a 'lip-service' than actual commitment for change (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013; Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005). In the current research, we place perceptions of cross-group commonalities in a consequential context of intergroup violence and examine whether its impact extends to the specific and malignant form of aggression that is at the center of the present research: support for actions that would lead to collateral casualties among enemy civilians. If, indeed, it will be more difficult to delegitimize an enemy that is perceived to be similar to one's in-group, then commonality perceptions can be associated with less tolerance of enemy collateral casualties.

Given that our focus is on visceral intergroup conflict, associated with deep-seated beliefs about the out-group and the relationship between the groups, individual differences pertaining to the conflict, specifically those

captured by political ideology, are likely to play a moderating role in the proposed effects. Political ideology is connected with a variety of interpersonal and intergroup attitudes and outcomes (see Jost, Federico & Napier, 2009 for a review), including particular conflict-related attitudes. Rightist ideology has been found to influence the positions and behavioral tendencies of individuals, facilitating hostile intergroup attitudes, support for violence, and the rejection of conciliatory measures (e.g. Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Cohrs, 2012; Porat, Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2015). For example, conservatives tend to favor aggressive and hawkish ways of dealing with international powers, particularly when they are seen as immediate threats (Holsti & Rosenau, 1996; Wittkopf, 1990) and are more supportive of war efforts than liberals (Cohrs & Moschner, 2002; Doty et al., 1997; Granberg & Corrigan, 1972; Henderson-King et al., 2004; Izzet, 1971). There is also an established relationship between political conservatism and greater hostility against minorities perceived as part of the terrorist threat (de Zavala, Cislak & Wesolowska, 2010).<sup>1</sup> Pertaining to our research focus, when American participants were presented with a military action that foreseeably but unintentionally killed innocent civilians, conservatives took a more permissive view of collateral casualties compared with liberals (Uhlman et al., 2009). In keeping with this finding, Kimhi (2014) found that among both regular and reserve IDF soldiers, right-wing attitudes were associated with more force and choosing greater use of fire in a hypothetical moral dilemma involving civilian casualties. Given that rightists are particularly prone to rely on processes of delegitimization (e.g. Bar-Tal et al., 2012), their greater tolerance of enemy collateral casualties is expected.

This further suggests that the process we are proposing, from cross-group commonalities via reducing delegitimization to decreased support for collateral damage, might play out more potently among right-wingers. Because leftists tend to rely less on delegitimization and to have overall lower support for collateral damage, perceptions of intergroup commonalities might have less leeway to exert impact on leftists. Indeed, several studies demonstrate that the effects of interventions that aim to promote peacemaking are particularly pronounced among rightists, whereas leftists tend to have overall more conciliatory tendencies to begin with and are less impacted by such manipulations. For example, in a study

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<sup>1</sup> Although some recent studies contest this approach to ideology-based differences (e.g. Kessler et al., 2015).

where Israelis were trained in emotional reappraisal, right-wing (but not left-wing) people expressed lower levels of negative emotions and political intolerance towards Palestinian citizens of Israel after the training (Halperin et al., 2013). In another intervention, a long-term paradoxical thinking campaign was particularly effective among right-wing participants and led them to express more conciliatory policies regarding the conflict and vote for more dovish parties (Hameiri et al., 2014).

Taken together, we expected that higher levels of perceived in-group–out-group commonality would be related to lower tolerance of enemy collateral casualties particularly among right-wing group members (who tend to be more permissive of this form of aggression); among left-wingers, for whom delegitimization levels are generally low, the effect would be weaker due to less latitude for change. These ideas were tested across three studies conducted among Jewish-Israelis in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In the first two studies, we examined the basic relationship between intergroup commonality and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties, moderated by political ideology. Study 1 was conducted during a relative lull in the conflict; Study 2 was conducted during a time of radically increased tensions and almost daily attacks on Israeli citizens and military personnel. In Study 3, we tested delegitimization as a possible mechanism involved in this relationship.

### Study 1: Testing the relationship between perceived commonality and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties

The aim of Study 1 was to test our main hypothesis among Israeli Jews – the high-power party in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. We expected that those who see Israelis and Palestinians as more similar to each other would be less tolerant of enemy collateral casualties. We also expected political ideology to moderate this effect: high levels of perceived intergroup commonality were expected to be associated with lower levels of such tolerance among right-wing respondents. A weaker association was expected among left-wingers, for whom tolerance for collateral damage was expected to be low.

#### *Participants and procedure*

In exchange for monetary compensation,<sup>2</sup> 279 Jewish-Israeli participants (122 men, 157 women, ranging in

age from 18 to 79; mean age = 37.50, SD age = 13.48) took part in the study. Regarding political orientation, 50.9% defined themselves as right-wing, 33.7% as centrists, and 15.4% as leftists. Participants were recruited via an online panel to complete a series of questionnaires. The research design also included a manipulation of extended contact which was unsuccessful and was therefore controlled for in all statistical analyses.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Tools*

*In-group–out-group commonality* was assessed using five items. Four items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree): ‘There is a lot of similarity between Israelis and Palestinians’; ‘Palestinians are very different from Israelis’ (reverse coded); ‘Israelis and Palestinians share a lot of characteristics’; ‘it is easy to detect many things that are common to Israelis and Palestinians’. A fifth item (based on Schubert & Otten, 2002) instructed participants to indicate the degree of overlap between Israelis and Palestinians, ranging from 1 (no overlap) to 6 (complete overlap);  $\alpha = .83$ .

*Tolerance of enemy collateral casualties (TECC)* was assessed using a vignette describing an Israel Defense Forces unit operating in a crowded neighborhood in the Gaza strip; attacked by Palestinian militants, the decision needs to be made whether to launch missiles at the house in which the militants are hiding, thus endangering a large family of non-combatants that resides in an adjacent building. TECC was assessed using participants’ responses to two items which followed the vignette: ‘how many people in the adjacent building is it justified to kill in an attempt to achieve the military goal?’; ‘if you were in command of the tank, how many people in the adjacent building would you be willing to kill in an attempt to achieve the military goal?’. Responses ranged from 0 (no civilians) to 25 (all civilians in the building) ( $r = .80$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Political ideology* was assessed using the following item: ‘with regards to issues of security and foreign policy, how would you describe your political attitudes?’ Responses ranged from 1 (radical left) to 7 (radical right).

#### *Results and discussion*

Means, standard deviations, and zero-sum correlations between variables for all three studies are presented in Table I. As expected, right-wing political ideology was

<sup>2</sup> Participants in Studies 1 and 2 received approximately \$2 for their participation; participants in Study 3 received \$7.

<sup>3</sup> Studies 2 and 3 were also part of larger studies and included similar unsuccessful manipulations. The experimental conditions were controlled for in each study.

Table I. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between main variables in Studies 1–3

		Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. In-group–out-group commonality	Study 1	2.96 (1.32)						
	Study 2	3.14 (1.48)						
	Study 3	3.18 (1.54)						
2. Political ideology	Study 1	4.95 (1.34)	-.46**					
	Study 2	4.85 (1.64)	-.54**					
	Study 3	4.72 (1.49)	-.53**					
3. Tolerance of enemy collateral casualties	Study 1	7.64 (9.32)	-.41**	.45**				
	Study 2	7.97 (9.27)	-.43**	.45**				
	Study 3	5.87 (8.72)	-.36**	.32**				
4. Group-based anger toward Palestinians	Study 2	4.88 (1.20)	-.57**	.57**	.41**			
	Study 3	4.68 (1.77)	-.40**	.33**	.27**			
5. Group-based fear toward Palestinians	Study 2	3.98 (1.58)	-.28**	.22**	.10	.33**		
	Study 3	3.98 (1.81)	-.09	-.02	-.09	.36**		
6. Group-based hatred toward Palestinians	Study 2	3.90 (1.62)	-.64**	.57**	.48**	.69**	.48**	
	Study 3	3.51 (1.95)	-.54**	.32**	.40**	.65**	.28**	
7. Delegitimization	Study 3	3.56 (1.25)	-.69**	.52**	.58**	.49**	.11	.65**

\*\* $p < .01$ .

Table II. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of tolerance of enemy collateral casualties (TECC) – Study 1

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceived in-group–out-group commonality	-1.90	0.41	-4.61	<.001
Political orientation	2.39	0.41	5.84	<.001
Commonality × ideology	-.65	.25	-2.63	<.001
Simple effect (right-wing ideology)	-2.77	.54	-5.10	<.001
Simple effect (left-wing ideology)	-1.03	.51	-2.00	.047

associated with lower perception of commonalities with Palestinians and greater tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. The negative correlation between intergroup commonalities and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties was moderate to strong.

To test our predictions of a possible interaction between perceived in-group–out-group commonality and political orientation on TECC, Hayes's (2013) PROCESS Model 1 was used (Table II). Results indicated a main effect of perceived in-group–out-group commonality, suggesting less support for TECC among those perceiving greater commonalities, and a main effect of political orientation, revealing greater support for TECC among right-wingers. When the main effects were taken into account, the interaction was found to be a significant predictor of TECC. Analysis of the simple effects indicated that the degree of in-group–out-group commonality was associated with TECC among right-wing respondents: those who perceived a high degree of commonality between Jews and Palestinians were

significantly less tolerant of enemy collateral casualties. The same pattern, though less pronounced, was found among left-wing participants (Figure 1).

Study 1 presents the first indication that perceived commonality has an impact on this particular form of aggression, especially among those who are prone to endorse it. Results show that high levels of perceived commonality among members of the high-power group were associated with lower support of military actions that would lead to casualties among out-group civilians. More interestingly, the interaction indicates that the perception of substantial intergroup commonality has a stronger impact among right-wing members of the high-power group, who tend to be more supportive of aggressive actions against rival out-groups, than on left-wing group members. While perceived intergroup commonality was associated with lower tolerance of enemy collateral casualties among left-wing respondents as well, its effect was weaker. These results provide indication that perceived commonality can have an ameliorative effect

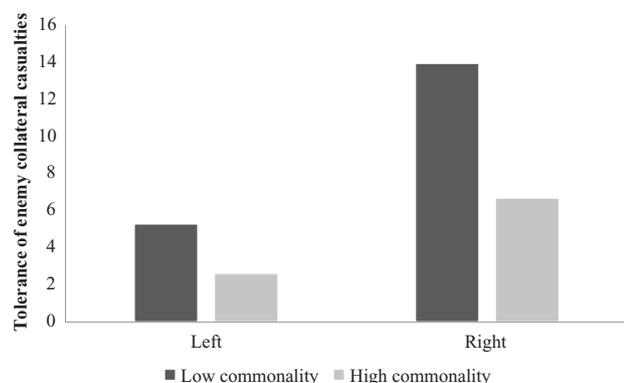


Figure 1. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of tolerance of enemy collateral casualties (TECC) – Study 1.

that reduces the association between right-wing political ideology and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. When out-group members are perceived as sharing characteristics with members of the in-group, the former are seen as deserving greater protection and morally included (rather than excluded beyond the boundaries of fair treatment and justice; Opatow, 1990). But will individuals still be able to perceive shared characteristics and values between the rival parties, and benefit from this perception, when the enemy out-group is actively launching attacks against the in-group? To test whether the relationships that were found in Study 1 would remain stable when conflict circumstances change, we conducted Study 2 during a time of open and frequent hostilities.

### Study 2: Replicating the relationship during conflict escalation

Although some research implies that the perception of intergroup commonality and similarity can be beneficial in the context of violent intergroup conflict (e.g. Kanazayire et al., 2014; Kimel et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2015), there is little indication as to whether its salutary impact would extend to times of conflict escalation. Periods of heightened tension, threat, and violence could potentially increase the impact of other factors associated with support for aggression – such as political ideology. The third *Intifada*, which flared up during the second half of 2015, provided us with an opportunity to test whether the interaction hypothesis supported by the results of Study 1 would still be valid under highly threatening conflict-related circumstances. This conflict escalation, also known as ‘the lone wolves’ *intifada*, broke

out in September 2015. Study 2 was conducted the following month (October 2015), a month characterized by almost daily Palestinian attacks on IDF soldiers and Israeli civilians both in the West Bank and in Israeli cities within the Green Line. The 620 attacks carried out during that month against Israeli citizens and members of security forces (including stabbing attacks, shootings, ramming attacks, and firebombs) led to 11 casualties and 80 wounded (Israeli Security Agency, 2015).

Against this backdrop of violent escalation, we tested the interaction hypothesis again in an attempt to replicate the same relationship between perceived intergroup commonality, political ideology, and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. An alternative hypothesis would be that in the face of frequent attacks aimed at Jewish-Israeli civilians throughout the country, political ideology would become the predominant factor that would determine group members’ attitudes towards the out-group and support for aggressive policies; perceived intergroup commonality would no longer exert an influence beyond the dictates of political orientation.

Another addition, highly relevant to the context of conflict escalation, was assessment of the impact of group-based emotions on the interaction. Because group-based emotions, particularly anger, fear, and hatred toward the enemy out-group, can have a powerful impact in situations of increased violence (e.g. Cheung-Blunden & Blunden, 2008; Halperin, 2015; Lerner et al., 2003; Maoz & McCauley, 2008; Skitka et al., 2006), we measured these emotions as sentiments (i.e. temporally stable, general emotional dispositions towards an object that is unrelated to any specific action or statement by this object; Halperin, 2015) and assessed their effect on the suggested interaction.<sup>4</sup> As with political ideology, it could be the case that due to their powerful impact, group-based sentiments might overshadow any potential effect of cross-group commonalities. We tested in Study 2 whether this is the case, or whether the predicted interaction hypothesis holds even controlling for such potential influence.

#### *Participants and procedure*

A total of 168 Jewish-Israeli participants (75 men, 89 women, ranging in age from 19 to 79; mean age =

<sup>4</sup> While some of the emotions measured were used in previous work as a proxy for dehumanization (e.g. Maoz & McCauley, 2008), we used them as discrete and independent measures of affect.

38.68, SD age = 13.40) took part in the study. Regarding political orientation, 51.3% defined themselves as right-wing, 30% as centrists, and 18.7% as leftists. Participants were recruited via the same online panel used in the previous study to complete a series of questionnaires similar to those used in Study 1, and also measures of group-based sentiments towards the Palestinians.

### Tools

*Intergroup commonality* ( $\alpha = .65$ ), *TECC* ( $r = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and political ideology were assessed using measures similar to those used in Study 1, except for minor changes in the TECC vignette to improve its congruence with the situation. To assess *group-based sentiments towards the Palestinians*, participants were asked the following question: ‘when you think of the Palestinians, to what extent do you feel each of these emotions?’ (Halperin & Gross, 2011). They then responded on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 6 (very much) on 12 sentiments, including *fear of the Palestinians*, *hatred toward the Palestinians*, and *anger toward the Palestinians*.

### Results and discussion

We began by examining means and correlations of variables in Study 2. The means were similar to those found in Study 1. Group-based anger toward the Palestinians was quite high, and both group-based fear and hatred were also above the mid-point of the scale. The pattern of correlations between variables was similar to the pattern found in Study 1: in-group–out-group commonality was negatively correlated with right-wing political ideology and with tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. Group-based anger and fear were moderately correlated with each other, anger and hatred were strongly correlated, and hatred and fear were moderately to strongly related. All three emotions were negatively correlated with in-group–out-group commonality and positively correlated with TECC.

PROCESS model 1 was used again to test for the hypothesized interaction, controlling for the experimental condition and for group-based sentiments of fear, anger, and hatred towards the Palestinians (Table III). Results indicated a marginal main effect of in-group–out-group commonality, and a main effect of political orientation. Once the main effects were taken into account, the interaction was again found to be a significant predictor of TECC. Analysis of the simple effects indicated that high levels of perceived commonality were associated with low levels of

Table III. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of TECC – Study 2

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceived in-group–out-group commonality	–1.96	.58	–2.28	.1
Political orientation	1.28	.56	2.28	.02
Commonality × ideology	–.55	.26	–2.12	.04
Simple effect (right-wing ideology)	–1.77	.71	–2.51	.01
Simple effect (left-wing ideology)	–.15	.69	–.22	.82

TECC among right-wing participants ( $p = .01$ ) but not among left-wingers.<sup>5</sup>

The results of Study 2 replicate those found in Study 1, and indicate that, contrary to an alternative hypothesis we raised, the interaction retains its predictive power even during times of violent conflict escalation and increased intergroup tensions. Right-wing group members who held on to a sense of common characteristics and similarity between their group and the rival group were less tolerant of enemy collateral casualties, even at a time in which a laxer code of conduct might be deemed acceptable. The findings also indicate that the interaction retains its predictive power when controlling for relevant group-based sentiments (anger, fear, and hatred). Therefore, the effect is not driven by negative affect towards the rival out-group, but by the combination of political ideology and perceived commonality. This finding is congruent with research indicating that right-wingers’ attitudes regarding various policies are less susceptible to influence by their emotional reactions compared with leftists (Pliskin, Sheppes & Halperin, 2015). Overall, Study 2 demonstrated that a period of danger and uncertainty does not counter the effect of in-group–out-group commonality among right-wing group members, who tend to be more sensitive to cues of threat. The robustness of perceived commonality and its significant impact even during escalation implies that it could be a useful tool for reducing intergroup hostilities even during highly violent phases of conflict. In Study 3 we expanded the model to include delegitimization as a mediator in the relationship between intergroup commonality,

<sup>5</sup> When the analysis was conducted without controlling for group-based sentiments, a similar main effect of political orientation and interaction effects were found; the main effect of perceived commonality was significant. In addition, high levels of commonality were associated with low levels of TECC among left-wingers as well as among right-wingers.

Table IV. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of TECC – Study 3

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceived in-group–out-group commonality	–1.96	.58	–3.4	.001
Political orientation	.67	.54	1.25	.02
Commonality×ideology	–.99	.31	3.17	.002
Simple effect (right-wing ideology)	–3.47	.77	–4.50	<.001
Simple effect (left-wing ideology)	–.45	.72	–.62	.53

political ideology, and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties.

### Study 3: The role of delegitimization as a mediator

The goal of Study 3 was to examine whether delegitimization indeed mediated the predicted effects obtained in Studies 1 and 2. We expected right-wing group members who also perceive commonalities between in-group and enemy out-group to engage less in its delegitimization. This in turn would lead to less tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. The study was conducted in three waves. This enabled us to measure its elements separately, thus reducing the risk of answers to one measure influencing responses to another. All waves were conducted during times in which few open hostilities occurred.

#### Participants and procedure

A total of 168 Jewish-Israeli participants (100 women, 68 men, ranging in age from 17 to 79; mean age = 38.98, SD age = 13.04) took part in the study across the three waves of measurements. Regarding political orientation, 47% defined themselves as right-wing, 31% as centrists, and 22% as leftists. Participants were recruited via the same online panel previously described to complete a series of questionnaires in three waves. As part of a larger study, participants completed measures of political ideology (T1), delegitimization (T2), and in-group–out-group commonality and TECC (T3). Waves 1 and 2 were approximately ten days apart; Wave 3 was conducted two months after the completion of Wave 2 data collection. An analysis revealed no drop-out bias on our main variables.

#### Tools

*In-group–out-group commonality* ( $\alpha = .90$ ), *TECC* ( $r = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ ), *political ideology* and *group-based anger, fear, and hatred* were assessed using identical measures to

those used in the previous studies. *Delegitimization* was assessed using six items (based on Bar-Tal, 1989), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items: ‘Palestinians are less moral than what is acceptable in human society’; ‘Palestinians are an inferior species of humans’ ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

#### Results and discussion

Means were similar to previous studies, except for slightly lower tolerance of enemy collateral casualties compared with Study 2 ( $M = 7.98$ ;  $t(321) = 2.11$ ,  $p = .036$ ). This may be due to the different context and the reduced intergroup tensions relative to Studies 1 and 2. The pattern of correlations also resembled Study 2, although group-based emotions (particularly fear) were a little more weakly correlated with all study variables. Delegitimization of the out-group was moderate and positively correlated with tolerance of enemy collateral casualties and with right-wing political ideology; it was also strongly and negatively correlated within-group–out-group commonality.

As in the two previous studies, we found a main effect of in-group–out-group commonality on TECC, although political orientation was not a significant predictor. However, the commonality×ideology interaction was a significant predictor of TECC (Table IV). Analysis of the simple effects indicated that high levels of perceived intergroup commonality were associated with low levels of TECC among right-wing participants but not among left-wingers (Figures 2 and 3).

We then repeated the analysis but this time with delegitimization of Palestinians as the dependent variable (Table V). Results indicated a main effect of in-group–out-group commonality and of political ideology. Once the main effects had been taken into account, the commonality×ideology interaction on delegitimization of Palestinians was marginally significant. Analysis of the simple effects indicated that high levels of perceived intergroup commonality were associated with low levels

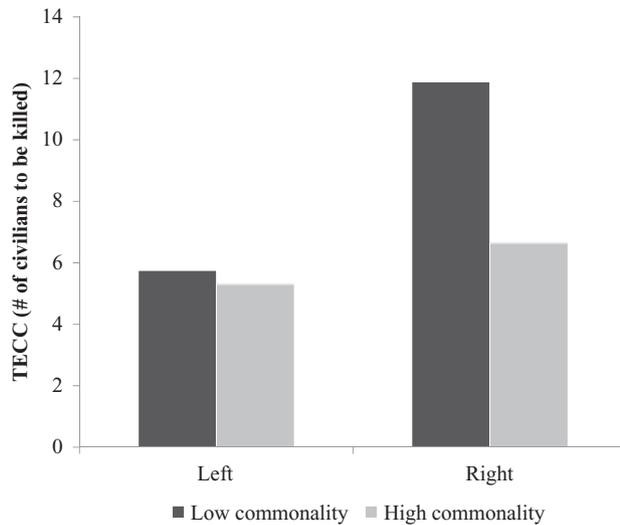


Figure 2. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of TECC – Study 2

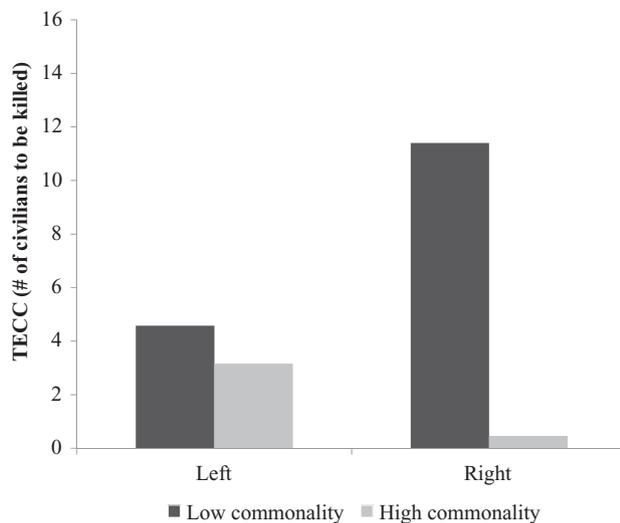


Figure 3. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of tolerance of enemy collateral casualties – Study 3

of delegitimization among left-wing participants and also among right-wingers (Figure 4).

In light of these results, we decided to proceed with a moderated mediation analysis. We used Hayes's (2013) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (Model 7) to test the indirect effect of perceived intergroup commonality on tolerance of enemy collateral casualties through delegitimization, among right-wing and left-wing participants. This test indicated the presence of moderated mediation (index of moderate

mediation = .19,  $SE = .11$ ,  $CI: [0.03, 0.47]$ ). This analysis revealed that the indirect effect of intergroup commonality through delegitimization was significant for right-wingers (effect =  $-.64$ ,  $SE = 0.38$ ,  $CI: [-1.75, -0.08]$ ), indicating that, consistent with our predictions, for right-wingers the association between commonalities and TECC was explained by reduced levels of delegitimization. Stated differently, those right-wingers who perceived that they share things in common with Palestinians are also those who delegitimize them less, and arguably consequently are also less supportive of attacks leading to deaths of innocent victims from the Palestinian side.

As for left-wingers, even though the total effect of commonality on TECC was not significant, the indirect effect of commonality on TECC via delegitimization was significant (effect =  $-1.23$ ,  $SE = 0.40$ ,  $CI: [-2.21, -0.54]$ ). This suggests that even though left-wingers tend to be generally opposed to military actions that involve killing civilians, changes in delegitimization among them, which are a function of commonality, are meaningful in predicting TECC.

The results of Study 3 provided further support for the conditional effect of in-group–out-group commonality on tolerance for enemy collateral casualties. The findings indicate that political ideology moderated the effect of perception of similarity and common traits between in-group and enemy out-group orientation on TECC. Although the mediator and moderator were measured several weeks prior to the assessment of the dependent variable, they were embedded in a large battery of measures and it is unlikely that they were affected by the previous measurement. As in the previous study, intergroup commonality was less influential among left-wing participants, who tended to be intolerant of enemy civilian casualties regardless of how much they perceived the in-group and out-group to be similar. However, perceived intergroup commonality was strongly associated with different levels of TECC among right-wing group members: those who saw many similarities between Israelis and Palestinians were less tolerant of enemy collateral casualties as a by-product of achieving a military goal. Study 3 also showed this effect to be mediated through delegitimization of Palestinians for both right- and left-wing respondents. These findings shed light on a mechanism that underlies the association between political ideology, perceived intergroup commonality, and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. Perceiving common elements between the in-group and the rival out-group enables right-wingers, who generally tend to adhere more strongly to belligerent aspects of the

Table V. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of delegitimization – Study 3

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceived in-group–out-group commonality	–.29	.06	–4.81	<.001
Political orientation	.14	.06	2.44	.02
Commonality×ideology	.06	.09	1.82	.07
Simple effect (right-wing ideology)	–.38	.07	–5.03	<.001
Simple effect (left-wing ideology)	–.20	.08	–2.46	.02

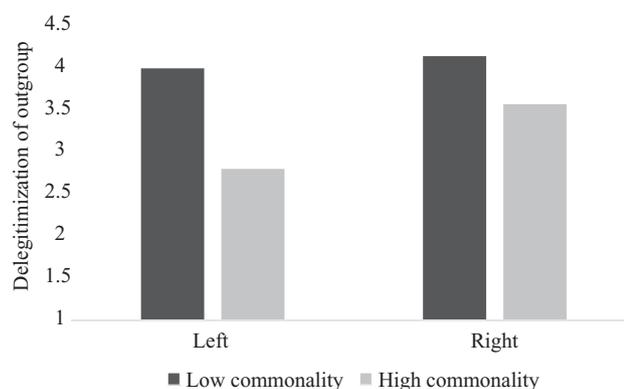


Figure 4. Interaction between political orientation and perceived in-group–out-group commonality as a predictor of delegitimization of Palestinians – Study 3

in-group narrative of the conflict, to see the enemy in a more human and less negative light. Such perception is, in turn, associated with seeing the Other, even if a bitter enemy, as still deserving justice and fairness. Interestingly, even though the difference in delegitimization is relatively small among right-wing participants who perceive high or low levels of commonality, it is sufficient to lead to a large difference in TECC (as indicated by the results of the moderated mediation). This supports the notion that delegitimization and dehumanization of the enemy are an important factor in whether or not civilian members of rival out-groups are afforded basic human rights, and that perceived intergroup commonalities may be a key part of this process.

## Discussion and conclusion

The level of collateral damage – the unintentional or incidental injury or damage to persons or objects that are not lawful military targets (Department of Defense, 2011: 55) – in recent international armed conflict is alarmingly high, despite the protection non-combatants are supposed to be accorded under International Humanitarian Law. In multiple cases in the past

decades, tens of thousands of civilians were killed by military organizations committed to the principle of civilian immunity and to the protection of non-combatants imposed by the laws and customs of war (Cronin, 2013) – this despite indications that collateral casualties can contribute to the perpetuation or even escalation of violent conflict (Condra & Shapiro, 2012; Deri, 2012; Lyall, Blair & Imai, 2013).

Also troubling is the tacit approval of collateral casualties as justified among many members of groups involved in such conflicts (e.g. Gallup, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2013). The three studies presented indicate that the perception of similarity and common elements shared by members of the in-group and the adversarial out-group is negatively associated with this tendency and can potentially be used as a future mitigator of the tolerance of harm to non-combatants. Furthermore, this negative association between intergroup commonality and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties was demonstrated among right-wing individuals, who tend to support general aggressive measures against rival out-groups and to condone collateral casualties in particular. The relationship was mediated by delegitimization of the out-group, which provides a glimpse into a possible mechanism of this effect and remained stable when controlling for relevant group-based sentiments such as anger, fear, and hatred.

Whereas the benefits of perceived intergroup commonality were previously examined mostly in the context of attitudes and behavioral intentions, the present research expands the effects to the realm of consequential, real-world outcomes in intractable intergroup conflicts. The findings imply that even without planned interventions, the perception of intergroup commonality has an impact on support for policy that goes beyond attitudes and behavioral intentions such as monetary donations and protest against discrimination. The finding that perceived commonality impacted the persistent phenomena of delegitimization and dehumanization, which are associated with a variety of harmful

consequences (e.g. Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014), and through them the levels of tolerance of enemy collateral casualties, provides additional support for its importance in intergroup relations and its potential as an intervention.

Interestingly, our findings indicate that the degree of perceived intergroup commonality need not be large; even seeing some element of commonality between in-group and out-group was sufficient to moderate the association between right-wing political ideology and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. Considering that clear intergroup boundaries and larger social distance are characteristics of a conservative, right-wing stance, it is important to understand what characterizes individuals who both endorse such political views and are able to perceive some elements common to them and to members of an adversarial group. Another question that should be addressed in future research is whether specific elements of commonality are either easier to accept and/or more robust in moderating the association between political orientation and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. The present research used a rather general framing; other researchers found that presenting information about genetic differences and similarities (Kimel et al., 2016) or about emotional similarity (McDonald et al., 2015) were beneficial in promoting more conciliatory attitudes. Careful examination of different facets of perceived commonality (e.g. in the domain of morality) could be of much interest.

We also suggested that the conditional effect of perceived intergroup commonality on tolerance of enemy collateral casualties is mediated by delegitimization of the out-group. The results indicated that this is indeed the case, and that its impact was somewhat stronger among left-wing group members; however, for both sides of the political map it fully mediated the negative association between intergroup commonality and tolerance of enemy collateral casualties. Other forms of aggression and out-group maltreatment, which may be affected by delegitimization and dehumanization, should be explored in the context of in-group–out-group commonalities and interventions based on such shared characteristics.

It should be noted that dehumanization is not an uncommon phenomenon in conflictual intergroup dynamics (e.g. Haslam & Loughnan, 2016; Kteily et al., 2015). The ethical question arises whether researchers should use items that could be seen as sanctioning or normalizing the dehumanization of certain groups. However, extreme blatant dehumanization is already extant among Israelis (e.g. Bruneau & Kteily,

2017), even when such dehumanization is relatively rare in official socializing channels such as schoolbooks (Adwan, Bar-Tal & Wexler, 2016). Given the prevalence of such beliefs even when they are not formally sanctioned and promoted, we assume that simply measuring them – and using relatively benign items, compared with the often-vitriolic social discourse – would not be seen as endorsement or approval of such statements.

The combination of relatively widespread tolerance of enemy collateral casualties and its negative consequences for conflict resolution suggests that interventions targeting group members who tend to be supportive of such aggressive actions may be useful in promoting reconciliation. The extensive use of commonality-based intervention, such as (but not limited to) contact programs, also makes it a potentially useful tool in managing and even resolving intergroup conflicts. The question remains, though, whether utilizing intergroup commonality as a tool to decrease aggression would lead to unequivocally beneficial results. Our results from three studies indicate that among members of high-power groups, perception of commonality was associated with less tolerance of enemy collateral casualties, even during times of increased tensions and among those who are most likely to display such tolerance (i.e. right-wing individuals). What feature of the combination between perceived commonality and TECC yields such a consistent salutary effect? Delegitimization may be one element; other conflict-related beliefs, or more basic processes, may also be involved.

Focusing on intergroup commonality and similarities may also be threatening for groups involved in intractable conflict. It can reduce the distinctiveness of the two groups and threaten well-defined boundaries necessary for coping with the challenges and stresses of protracted conflict. Inducing a sense of commonality between in-group and out-group may thus produce a wide array of responses, not all of which would promote more harmonious intergroup relations. Additional research should probe which factors can facilitate and which might suppress the salutary impact of commonality on lower tolerance of collateral casualties among enemy civilians.

Finally, although collateral damage is perhaps less of a concern for the low-power party in an asymmetric conflict – due to its inferior military capabilities, and possibly different psychological processes and motivations at work – it is still a relevant question whether an association would be found between commonality and TECC. Existing research on the effects of common identity and commonalities indicates that these effects are not always in the best interests of the low-power group. How – if at

all – would a focus on intergroup commonality affect tolerance of enemy collateral casualties among members of the low-power group? Going further, would it affect support for terrorism – a form of aggression that specifically *targets* civilians?

Future research should not only explore the directions described above, but also address the limitations of the present work. Larger and more fully representative samples, in Israel and in other societies involved in violent conflicts, would provide additional support and enable better generalization of the correlative results found in the present three studies. Experimentally manipulating intergroup commonality and exploring the relationships between variables in different contexts of conflict would strengthen our proposed model and establish its contribution to understanding and possibly decreasing tolerance for enemy collateral casualties. The current findings, however, provide promising indications that intergroup commonality can be fruitful in violent, protracted conflicts. While additional research is certainly needed, it provides hope that a relatively simple intervention may be developed to impact one of the most painful and damaging occurrences during violent conflict – the incidental loss of civilian lives.

### Replication data

The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at <http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets>.

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