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## A trauma-like model of political extremism: psycho-political fault lines in Israel

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This study examines a trauma-like model of potentially violent political extremism among Jewish Israelis. We study the psychosocial characteristics of political extremists that may lie at the root of sociopolitical instability and assess personal (gender, stressful life events, Holocaust family background, and political activism) and psychological parameters (self- and political transcendence, perceived political threats, in/out-group identification ratio) that may predict readiness to engage in destructive political behavior. We examine the ideological zeal of various political groups, the relationship between the latter and perceived political threats, and the predictors of extreme political activism. Results showed that the extreme political poles displayed high level of ideological and morbid transcendence. Right extremists displayed higher perceived threats to physical existence and national identity. Left extremists scored highest on perceived moral integrity threat. Higher perceived threats to national identity and moral integrity, risk, and self-transcendence statistically explain morbid transcendence. When fear conjures up extremely skewed sociopolitical identifications across political boundaries, morbid transcendence may manifest itself in destructive political activity.

**Keywords:** trauma; political extremism; transcendence; threats; fault line conflict; Jewish-Arab conflict

### Introduction

Fault line political conflicts are characterized by struggles between identity groups for control over territory or people with the aim of occupying this territory and freeing it from the control of “nongroup” members. Such struggles may lead to outbursts of extreme violence.<sup>1</sup> This study examines the Israeli scene against the backdrop of the second Intifada, exploring within a trauma-like model the factors that have driven Jewish-Israeli extremists to implement aggressive orientations politically.

On the basis of attitudes toward issues of moral, existential, and national identity as well as of aggression and reconciliation, Bar-Tal<sup>2–4</sup> defined the construct “ethos of conflict”: in Jewish Israelis, conflict triggers traumatic historical schemata (e.g., the Holocaust) that give rise to processes of cross-national identification and demonization.

Feeling threatened increases ethnocentrism and xenophobia,<sup>5</sup> promotes intolerance,<sup>6</sup> increases willingness to take risks,<sup>7</sup> and is a fundamental cause of prejudice.<sup>8</sup> Conflicts breed perceived threat, in-group identification, and political intolerance.<sup>9</sup> They characterize three kinds of perceived threat: to security, democracy, and to Jewish identity.

Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs views the devotion to a cause beyond the self (self-transcendence) as a motivational step beyond self-actualization.<sup>10</sup> Researchers suggested enlisting the notion of self-transcendence to understand religious violence and terrorism.<sup>11</sup> Cloninger *et al.*<sup>12</sup> see self-transcendence as encompassing a sense of self-actualization, fulfillment, and direction in one’s life, but do not refer to political transcendence, the experience that life is meaningless without the vibrancy of political ideals. Considering political ideals as more important than life itself and adhering to extreme political ideologies may lead to

morbid intentions involving the annihilation of self and others.

This study examines personal (e.g., gender, life events, Holocaust background, political activism) and psychological (self- and political transcendence, perceived political threats, ethos of conflict, in-group, and out-group sociopolitical identification) parameters predicting readiness to engage in destructive political behavior. We investigate: (1) the level of ideological zeal characterizing various political groups; (2) the relationship between extreme political ideology and perceived political threats and their association with personal risk and vulnerability; (3) empathy of political factions with the conflicting groups; and (4) predictors of extreme political activism.

We postulate that (a) compared to political centrists, extremists will show higher levels of self-transcendence, ideology devotion, perceived political threat, morbid transcendence, and exposure to stressful events; (b) the extreme political right will be more sensitive to threats to physical existence and national identity, whereas the political left will be more challenged by threats to moral integrity; (c) the extreme left will be more empathetic toward the Palestinians than toward the Jewish Israelis and the settlers, whereas the extreme right will be more empathetic toward the settlers than toward the Jewish Israelis and the Palestinians; and (d) ideological and morbid political zeal, as well as the balance of empathy toward the in-group and the out-group predict extreme political activism.

Recent research proposed a stress-based model of political exclusionism. This paper extends the implications of the model for political extremism in general, emphasizing ideological and psychological parameters.<sup>13</sup>

## Method

### Subjects

The data were collected during the 3-month period preceding Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip (August 2005). The questionnaires were completed by a convenience sample of 245 Israeli-Jewish participants (44% male, mean age = 26.8, SD = 7.4): 99 university students (40.4%, mean age = 23.7, SD = 2.8), 93 West Bank settlers (38%, mean age = 24.7, SD = 5.3), and 53 left-wing activists (21.6%, mean age = 29.4, SD = 6.02).

Participants were ascribed to a political group on the basis of (a) their reported vote in the 2003 election, and (b) their political attitude on a scale ranging from "definite right" (5) to "definite left" (1). Participants who voted for a right-wing extremist party (e.g., "National Union") and defined themselves as "right" or "definite right" were classified as "extreme right." Settlers living on the West Bank who identified their political stance as "definite right" were also included in the "extreme right" group even if they voted for nonextremist parties (e.g., Likud) ( $n = 82$ ). Participants who voted for a left-wing extremist party (e.g., National Democratic Alliance) and identified their political stance as "left" or "definite left" were classified as "extreme left" ( $n = 41$ ). Participants who voted for nonextremist parties (e.g., Labor, Likud) and identified their political stance as indeterminate right or left were labeled "center" ( $n = 92$ ). Thirty participants could not be classified according to this algorithm and were not included in the analysis.

Compared to the center and the left-wing participants, the right-wing participants being mainly orthodox nationalists, are mostly married (17%, 12%, and 57%, respectively;  $\chi^2 = 78.15$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and have more children ( $0.37 \pm 0.87$ ,  $0.22 \pm 0.76$ , and  $1.38 \pm 1.89$ , respectively;  $F[2, 209] = 16.02$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), despite being slightly younger ( $27.11 \pm 8.6$ ,  $29.21 \pm 6.32$ , and  $24.47 \pm 5.46$ , respectively;  $F[2, 211] = 6.67$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ).

## Instruments

### *The following questionnaires were administered individually*

*A demographic questionnaire* collected information concerning gender, age, religious identity, voting, political identification, and affect of the Holocaust to the individual and the family.

*Political activism:* This scale, developed for this study, describes three levels of political activism: low (complete indifference and avoidance of any political activity); moderate (participating in political debates, donating money for political causes, publicly expressing political opinions); or high (organizing demonstrations and violating the law to express political opinions).

*Self-transcendence* was measured by the three self-transcendence factors of Cloninger *et al.*'s.<sup>14</sup> *Temperament and Character Inventory* (TCI): *self-forgetful versus self-conscious experience* (e.g., "I

often become so fascinated with what I'm doing I get lost in the moment, as if I'm detached from time and place"); *transpersonal identification versus self-isolation* (e.g., "I sometimes feel so connected to nature that everything seems to be part of one living organism"); *spiritual acceptance versus rational materialism* (e.g., "I seem to have a 'sixth sense' that sometimes allows me to know what is going to happen").

*Political transcendence* was measured by a 17-item scale developed for this study with scores ranging from (1) not at all to (5) strongly. A principal components factor analysis (Varimax rotation) revealed two factors (eigenvalues > 1): (a) Ideological Transcendence consisted of 10 items (e.g., "I devote my life to fulfilling my views") and (b) morbid Transcendence consisted of seven items (e.g., "I am willing to die to preserve the right of my people to live in this land"). The internal reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) were 0.80 and 0.73, respectively.

*Ethos of conflict*: The short version<sup>15</sup> of Zafran's<sup>16</sup> questionnaire based on the concept "ethos of conflict" consists of 16 items describing various aspects of the Israeli-Arab conflict. A total score reflects right-wing hawkish ideology (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

*Risk*: This scale consists of 10 items covering stressful life events during the past year (e.g., divorce, death in the family, birth of a child, car accident, exposure to terrorist attacks, hospitalization). A risk index, a significant predictor of posttraumatic stress, was computed as the sum of the items checked.<sup>17</sup>

*Sociopolitical identification*: Participants rated their identification with and empathy toward the suffering of Israeli settlers, Palestinians living on

the West Bank, and Israeli citizens who are not settlers. Three variables reflecting the sociopolitical fault lines were computed as the ratios of identification with (1) Israelis over Palestinian (I/P), (2) settlers over Palestinians (S/P), and (3) settlers over Israelis (S/I).

*Perceived political threat*: A 13-item scale was developed to assess perceived political threat. Participants reported to what extent each item worried them on a daily basis, on a scale ranging from (0) not at all to (3) all the time. Factor analysis (Varimax rotation) yielded three factors (eigenvalues > 1; 5, 4, and 3 items, respectively): (1) moral integrity (e.g., "A deliberate discrimination policy will be carried out against Israeli Arabs"); (2) national identity (e.g., "Some of Israel's land will be returned to the Palestinians"); and (3) physical existence (e.g., "The State of Israel will be destroyed physically"). Internal reliability coefficients were 0.74, 0.81, and 0.68, respectively.

**Procedure**

Following the Institutional Review Board approval, trained experimenters administered the questionnaires anonymously and explained the project explores political and ideological viewpoints. To ensure cooperation, a trained key group member distributed the questionnaires to settlers and left-wing activists.

**Results**

Table 1 shows a positive correlations between the TCI and the newly developed ideological and morbid transcendence scales ( $r = 0.439$  and  $0.233$ , both  $P < 0.01$ , respectively) and between morbid and ideological transcendence ( $r = 0.415$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). The

**Table 1.** Pearson correlations between transcendence categories, perceived threats, and risk ( $n = 285$ )

	Morbid transcendence	Ideological transcendence	Self-forgetful	Transpersonal identification	Spiritual acceptance	Total self-transcendence
Morbid transcendence	1	0.415**	0.121*	0.393*	0.173**	0.273**
Ideological transcendence	0.415**	1	0.330**	0.437**	0.295**	0.439**
Physical existence threat	0.247**	0.274**	-0.015	0.125*	0.263**	0.199**
Moral integrity threat	0.238**	0.195**	0.101	0.156*	-0.122*	0.061
National identity threat	0.144*	0.091	0.013	0.120	0.156*	0.142*
Risk	0.169*	0.253*	0.119*	0.228**	0.180**	0.233**

\*  $P < 0.05$ .  
 \*\*  $P < 0.01$ .

three perceived threats correlated positively with most transcendence scales, except moral integrity, which correlated negatively with the TCI spiritual acceptance scale ( $r$  range =  $-0.122$ – $0.274$ ).

The sociopolitical identification ratios (S/P, I/P, and S/I) correlated negatively to the threat to moral integrity ( $r = -0.21, -0.25, -0.13$ , respectively,  $P < 0.001$  except for the last) and positively to threat to national identity ( $r = 0.36, 0.28, 0.26$ , respectively, all  $P < 0.001$ ) and to physical existence ( $r = 0.29, 0.28, 0.28$ , respectively, all  $P < 0.001$ ).

**Gender differences**

Multivariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no main effect for gender and no significant gender  $\times$  political group interaction for the three threats, TCI, ideological transcendence, sociopolitical identification, political involvement, and Holocaust influence (all  $P > 0.05$ ). Males reported higher morbid transcendence than females (mean  $\pm$  SD =  $2.77 \pm 0.79$  and  $2.23 \pm 0.81$ , respectively) ( $F[1, 185] = 11.04, P < 0.001$ ). There were no significant gender  $\times$  political group interactions for political activism and morbid transcendence ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Political group and self-transcendence**

Table 2 summarizes the mean levels of total self-transcendence and its subscales by political group. One-way ANOVAs followed by Bonferroni *post hoc* tests revealed that subjects on the extreme politi-

cal left and center reported significantly lower levels of total self-transcendence compared to subjects on the extreme right ( $F[2, 206] = 11.4, P < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, extreme right participants reported higher levels of Spiritual Acceptance ( $F[2, 206] = 19.8, P < 0.01$ ) compared to extreme left and center participants, and higher levels of Transpersonal Identification compared to the center ( $F[2, 206] = 4.28, P < 0.01$ ). No significant differences emerged for the self-forgetful subscale ( $F[2, 206] = 1.55, P > 0.05$ ).

**Political group, Holocaust background, ideological and morbid transcendence**

One-way ANOVA followed by Bonferroni *post hoc* tests indicated that extreme right and extreme left participants reported higher morbid ( $F[2,206] = 16.22, P < 0.01$ ) and ideological ( $F[2,206] = 8.52, P < 0.01$ ) transcendence compared to participants on the center (Table 2).

The distribution of the political groups according to political activism (low/moderate/high) shows the highest activism among extreme left participants (0%, 12%, 88%, respectively), lower in the extreme right group (12%, 61%, 27%, respectively), and lowest in the center group (66%, 32%, 2%, respectively) ( $\chi^2 = 147.2, df = 4, P < 0.001$ ).

Only among extreme left participants significant positive associations appeared between perceived

**Table 2.** Risk, transcendence subscales, and perceived threats by political group

	Extreme left		Center		Extreme right		F(2, 206)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Risk	1.83	1.59	1.48 <sup>a</sup>	1.39	2.27 <sup>a</sup>	1.34	6.57 <sup>**</sup>
Morbid transcendence	2.64 <sup>a</sup>	0.66	2.13 <sup>ab</sup>	0.77	2.87 <sup>b</sup>	0.75	16.22 <sup>**</sup>
Ideological transcendence	3.25 <sup>a</sup>	0.65	2.87 <sup>ab</sup>	0.76	3.40 <sup>b</sup>	0.66	8.52 <sup>**</sup>
Total self-transcendence	13.62 <sup>a</sup>	6.89	14.97 <sup>b</sup>	6.09	18.69 <sup>ab</sup>	4.86	11.40 <sup>**</sup>
Self-forgetful	5.17	2.48	5.52	2.59	5.54	2.35	1.55
Transpersonal identification	3.22	2.15	2.93 <sup>a</sup>	2.25	4.10 <sup>a</sup>	1.96	4.28 <sup>**</sup>
Spiritual acceptance	4.80 <sup>ab</sup>	3.47	6.53 <sup>ac</sup>	2.97	9.14 <sup>bc</sup>	2.45	19.87 <sup>**</sup>
Moral integrity threat	9.80 <sup>ab</sup>	3.25	5.47 <sup>a</sup>	3.12	5.33 <sup>b</sup>	3.64	27.84 <sup>**</sup>
National identity threat	6.05 <sup>a</sup>	2.94	5.61 <sup>b</sup>	2.74	8.73 <sup>ab</sup>	3.36	23.99 <sup>**</sup>
Physical existence threat	1.88 <sup>ab</sup>	1.11	2.49 <sup>a</sup>	0.25	2.91 <sup>b</sup>	0.33	18.18 <sup>**</sup>
Ethos of conflict	1.55 <sup>ab</sup>	0.24	2.83 <sup>ac</sup>	0.58	3.82 <sup>bc</sup>	0.38	248.6 <sup>***</sup>

Groups with the same superscript letter are significantly different according to Bonferroni *post hoc* test ( $P < 0.05$ ).

\*\*  $P < 0.01$ .

\*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ .

impact of the Holocaust on their life and morbid transcendence as well as between their perceived feelings of hurt by the Holocaust and their sociopolitical identification with Palestinians (both  $r = 0.35$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The proportion of individuals reporting their families were Holocaust survivors was greater among extreme left participants than among extreme right ones (66% and 42%, respectively,  $\chi^2 = 21.59$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). However, a greater proportion of extreme right participants reported feeling personally hurt by the Holocaust to a moderate or high degree compared to those on the extreme left (62% and 34%, respectively;  $\chi^2 = 14.35$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

#### Political group, risk, ethos of conflict, and perceived threat

The three political groups differed significantly on the risk index ( $F[2, 212] = 6.57$ ,  $P < 0.005$ ). Bonferroni *post hoc* test revealed increased risk among extreme right participants compared to those at the political center.

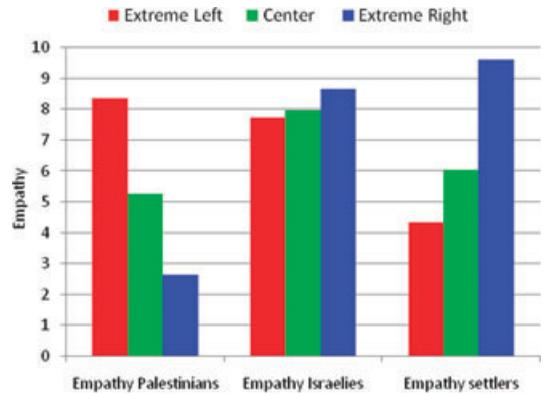
The analysis of the three perceived threats according to political group showed that extreme left participants scored highest on the moral integrity threat ( $F[2, 206] = 27.8$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and lowest on the physical existence threat ( $F[2, 207] = 18.2$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), whereas those on the extreme right scored highest on the national identity threat ( $F[2, 206] = 24.0$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) (Table 2).

Extreme right participants reported the highest ethos of conflict score and those on the extreme left the lowest ( $F[2, 206] = 248.6$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Ethos of conflict was associated positively with threats to national identity and physical existence, and negatively with moral threat ( $r_s = 0.29, 0.44$ , and  $-0.37$ , respectively, all  $P < 0.001$ ). Also, ethos of conflict was positively associated with morbid but not with ideological transcendence ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $P < 0.001$  and  $r = 0.0$ ,  $P > 0.05$ , respectively).

#### Sociopolitical identification

A one-way ANOVA showed that the three political groups differed in their sociopolitical identification with Israelis (extreme left < extreme right) ( $F[2, 176] = 3.6$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), settlers (extreme left < center < extreme right) ( $F[2, 177] = 97.2$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), and Palestinians (extreme left > center > extreme right) ( $F[2, 177] = 118.9$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

Extreme left participants identified more strongly with Palestinians than with Israelis ( $t[33] = 2.28$ ,



**Figure 1.** Empathy toward self and others by political group. (In color in *Annals* online.)

$P < 0.05$ ), and more strongly with Israelis than with settlers ( $t[33] = 10.79$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Extreme right participants identified significantly more strongly with settlers than with Israelis ( $t[57] = 4.83$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) (Fig. 1).

#### Prediction of morbid transcendence and I/P and S/P ratios

According to stepwise multiple regression analyses, higher national identity and moral integrity threats, risk, and total self-transcendence contributed to the statistical explanation of morbid transcendence ( $F[4, 182] = 9.86$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Lower perceived threat to moral integrity, and higher perceived threat to both national identity and physical existence, as well as of total self-transcendence, predicted the I/P and the S/P ratios ( $F[4, 159] = 15.51$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; and  $F[4, 161] = 25.67$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , respectively).

#### Discussion

This study proposes a trauma-like model of sociopolitical destructive instability propagated by violent adherence to extreme ideologies within the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict in a period of ongoing polarization. Canetti-Nisim *et al.* recently attempted the same objective with a different methodology.<sup>13</sup> In their study, a telephone survey of a representative sample of Israeli Jews found that exclusionist attitudes toward Palestinian Israeli citizens were directly predicted by perceived threat from them, and indirectly by psychological distress associated with exposure to terrorist attacks. Our study included individuals in the center and extreme poles of the political spectrum and conceptualized specific threats for each pole. The fact that these two

studies performed almost simultaneously reach similar conclusions strengthens the validity of the findings.

Our first hypothesis, that both extreme political poles display higher self-transcendence and political zeal compared to the center was supported almost completely. Both extreme poles displayed a high level of ideological and morbid transcendence. This result is in line with Van Hiel *et al.*, who found high levels of authoritarian aggression among activists of extremist left-wing parties in Belgium.<sup>18</sup> Contrary to our hypothesis, the extreme right was the highest on self-transcendence, whereas the extreme left did not differ significantly from the center. Extreme right participants also reported the highest risk. These findings can be explained by the low score of the left and the high score of the right extreme groups on the spiritual acceptance subscale of self-transcendence. The demographic characteristics of the extreme right group, which comprised mainly religious settlers, living on the Intifada-ridden West Bank, may explain their high score on spiritual acceptance.

The analyses also confirmed our second hypothesis that extreme groups differ in their perceived political threats. Extreme right participants scored higher than extreme left participants on perceived threats to physical existence and to national identity. The extreme left scored highest on perceived threat to moral integrity. Although the political center and the extreme left did not differ on perceived threat to national identity, the extreme left scored lowest on perceived threat to physical existence. This could be viewed in line with Shamir and Sagiv-Schifter who stated that the Zionist ideology may make it difficult for its adherents, in our case, particularly the extreme ones, to distinguish realistic threats from symbolic ones.<sup>9</sup>

The associations between ethos of conflict and the extreme groups' characteristic threats as well as with their level of morbid transcendence support Bar-Tal *et al.*'s<sup>19</sup> findings and may validate our political subgroups classification. Volkan labeled an entrenched collective painful memory as a "chosen trauma," or "a large-group's mental representation of a historic event that resulted in collective feelings of helplessness, victimization, shame, and humiliation at the hands of 'others'..." It becomes a significant element in the contemporary identity and is activated in the face of danger from the "other" "to enhance

the group's identity and strengthen it to face the threat" (pp. 173–174).<sup>20</sup>

We propose that the "chosen trauma" of the extreme right may be diametrically opposed to that of the extreme left. The former counter-identifies with the historical experience as victim, revealing fears regarding existence and national identity. The latter counter-identifies with the victimizer, therefore expressing moral fears over becoming one. The fact that perceived threats to national identity and moral integrity together with cumulative risk and self-transcendence explained a significant proportion of morbid transcendence may support a "trauma-like" model of destructive political transcendence.

We also confirmed our third hypothesis that the extreme left identify more strongly with Palestinians than with Jewish Israelis and settlers, whereas the extreme right would identify more strongly with settlers than with Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. The tensions among the various sociopolitical identifications within each of the extreme groups may be formulated as constitutive of psychopolitical fault lines. The logic of historically chosen trauma is accompanied by vacillation between the poles of "identification with the aggressor or with the victim." Right-wing extremists seem to consider the aggressor's position, while left-wingers consider that of the victim. Beyond this regressive logic, one may claim that right-wing extremists are least empathic toward the "object-group" whereas left-wing extremists are least concerned about the threat to the physical safety of the "self-group." Interestingly, the level of morbid transcendence was predicted by the two perceived threats characterizing the extreme groups (i.e., national identity and moral integrity) against a background of stressful life events and self-transcendence. Hence, both extreme groups may be partially distorting reality, whether of "the self" or of "the object."

Indeed, within the extreme left group, perceived Holocaust influence was positively associated with their level identification with Palestinians, and feeling hurt by the Holocaust was positively correlated with morbid transcendence. These findings stand out in stark comparison to the extreme right group. Despite the greater proportion of extreme right families who reported to be Holocaust survivors, this family history had no association with morbid transcendence and empathy toward the other.

Furthermore, by partially disavowing considerations of self-safety, left-wing extremists can construct an idealized position, whose values may appear to belong within the Jewish history of moral self-sacrifice as well as within the universal community. By partially disavowing empathy toward the other, right-wing extremists can create an idealized position rooted in their commitment to values of existence and culture. Both extreme groups may use disavowal and idealization to avert the healing process over death-fear and of mourning over historical and current trauma. Destructive political action is conjured up in their place.

Finally, to our fourth hypothesis, that ideological and morbid political zeal as well as the ratio between in- and out-group sociopolitical identification predict extreme political activism. As with morbid transcendence, the I/P and S/P ratios were also significantly explained by low perceived threat to moral integrity, and high perceived threat to national identity and physical existence, as well as total self-transcendence. Perhaps the ratio between in- and out-group sociopolitical identification could serve as touchstone for dehumanization. If this is the case, our data support the notion that dehumanization inhibits guilt feelings and distress about the harm inflicted to the other and thus may operate as an important obstacle in creating support for reparation policies.<sup>3</sup>

We showed the important role played by perceived threats in determining sociopolitical attitudes and identification. Contrary to Altemeyer,<sup>21</sup> who found that conservatives perceive the world as more threatening than do liberals, we showed that both political extremes reported threat, though their type and content differed.

In conclusion, fault line wars may raise real and perceived threats to physical existence, group identity, and moral integrity. These, in turn, may reinforce conflicts in sociopolitical identification, which may find their expression in political ideology. A combination of psychosocial underpinnings may be at the root of violent political involvement. Within a political conflict situation that takes place against the backdrop of collective historical trauma, given personal risk, individuals with sensitivity to various types of threats may respond with high ideological transcendence. Ideology may serve an adaptive function but, at times, may get derailed and distort reality, transforming symbolic threats into con-

cretely perceived ones. These may invite immediacy and forcefulness. When fear conjures up skewed sociopolitical identifications, morbid transcendence may manifest in destructive political activity. Future research with larger representative samples could validate the model implied by our findings.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was not representative of the Jewish-Israeli population, but rather a convenience sample recruited to include individuals from the extreme left, extreme right, and center of the political spectrum. Because extremists are often involved in social protest and law infractions, their recruitment presented an objective difficulty reflected in their relatively smaller group size.

Second, several scales were developed for the study. Although the results provide initial validation, more meticulous attention should be given to their psychometric parameters.

Third, we did not measure participants' psychological distress and sociopolitical identification with Arab-Israeli citizens.

Fourth, we defined nine degrees of political involvement. Nevertheless, right-wing extremists living in unauthorized settlements may exhibit an extreme kind of political involvement akin to illegal activity.

Finally, we explored morbid attitudes and behavioral intentions rather than actual destructive behavior. The literature recognizes the partial relationship between behavioral intentions and actual behavior.<sup>22</sup>

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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