

How do conflict narratives shape conflict- and peace-related outcomes among majority group members? The role of competitive victimhood in intractable conflicts

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1 **How do conflict narratives shape conflict- and peace-related outcomes among majority**
2 **group members? The role of competitive victimhood in intractable conflicts**

3

4

Abstract

5 Previous research in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context highlighted two opposing conflict
6 narratives: (a) a *terrorism narrative* and (b) an *independence narrative*. In this paper, we
7 argue that these narratives are relevant to protracted and asymmetrical intergroup conflict
8 (e.g., independence struggles), and therefore have consequences for conflict- and peace-
9 related outcomes regardless of conflict contexts. We tested this generalizability hypothesis in
10 parallel studies in the context of Turkish-Kurdish (Study 1) and Israeli-Palestinian relations
11 (Study 2) among majority group members (Turks and Jewish Israelis, respectively). We also
12 investigated competitive victimhood as a potential mediating variable in the relationship
13 between conflict narratives on the one side and support for non-violent conflict resolution,
14 forgiveness, and support for aggressive policies on the other, in parallel studies with the two
15 aforementioned contexts. We argued that the terrorism narrative is essentially a negation of
16 the narrative of the other group, and the independence narrative is a consideration of that
17 narrative; therefore, competitive victimhood would be lower/higher when the narrative of the
18 other is acknowledged/denied. Results point to the crucial relationship between endorsing
19 conflict narratives and conflict- and peace-related outcomes through competitive victimhood,
20 and to the possibility that these conflict narratives may show some similarities across different
21 conflict contexts.

22

23 **Keywords:** conflict narratives, competitive victimhood, Turkish-Kurdish conflict, Israeli-
24 Palestinian conflict, nonviolence.

1 **How do conflict narratives shape conflict- and peace-related outcomes among majority**
2 **group members? The role of competitive victimhood in intractable conflicts¹**

3 Intractable conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict
4 have grim outcomes, including both parties' alienating each other, forced migration, as well
5 as the violence and trauma associated with ethnopolitical warfare (Fisher, 2006). Compared to
6 other conflicts, intractable conflicts are characterized as being particularly resistant to
7 resolution: irreconcilable, violent, and viewed in a zero-sum nature by their parties (Bar-Tal,
8 1998). Such conflicts, therefore, make life extremely challenging and stressful (e.g., Qouta,
9 Punamäki, & ElSarraj, 1995). People and groups respond to these challenges and stressors in
10 part by developing narratives to understand the conflict.

11 Attempting to explain how people understand conflict in general, and intractable
12 conflict in particular, Bar-Tal (1998, 2007) introduced the idea of the *ethos of conflict*. He
13 argued that people in societies embroiled in intractable conflict cope with the conflict by
14 developing socially shared beliefs about it. The ethos of conflict, therefore, constitutes a
15 socially shared belief system, comprised of eight interrelated themes and beliefs, such as
16 justness of one's group's goals, concern about security for one's group, the special
17 victimization of one's group, among others. Importantly, this socially shared belief system
18 usually leads to the emergence of a dominant (or master) narrative of the conflict, endorsed by
19 the majority of society (Bar-Tal, 1998; Hammack, 2006). Previous research found that
20 endorsement of the ethos of conflict has consequences for conflict and peace, for example,
21 reducing support for compromise and peaceful conflict resolution (Canetti, Elad-Strenger,
22 Lavi, Guy, & Bar-Tal, 2017). The idea of an *ethos of conflict* has thus been an important
23 starting point in understanding how people frame intractable conflict, and how this
24 understanding shapes the course of the conflict.

¹ The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. The authors confirm that the manuscript adheres to ethical guidelines specified in the APA Code of Conduct as well as authors' national ethics guidelines. Materials and data related to the research reported in this manuscript may be obtained by contacting the authors.

1 Recent research has gone one step further, examining the *diversity* of conflict
2 narratives (Cohrs, Uluğ, Stahel, & Kışlıoğlu, 2015). Given that societies in conflict are often
3 engaged in a lively debate over the nature and cause of the conflict, and ways to manage
4 and/or resolve it (anonymized for review), a focus on the dominant narrative alone risks
5 overlooking these dynamics, as it does not capture all narratives in society. In this sense, the
6 dominant narrative does not give a full account of the reality of societies in conflict. An
7 understanding of the dominant narrative alongside other, alternative narratives of conflict may
8 be better suited to capture the complexity of a particular conflict and its consequences, and
9 therefore, promises to provide a more comprehensive perspective on conflict narratives and
10 their effects on conflict. In particular, complementing the research conducted by Bar-Tal and
11 others in this way can deepen the discussion about the consequences of conflict narratives on
12 conflict resolution, prevention, and peace (see also Cohrs et al., 2015).

13 Based on these insights, we argue here that in most conflict societies, next to the
14 *dominant narrative* based in the *ethos of conflict* there are alternative conflict narratives. Due
15 to not being endorsed by a majority of society, these alternative narratives are less prevalent
16 than the dominant narrative. In this sense, while majority group members may be aware of
17 alternative narratives, these narratives get less attention and thus are less visible in society
18 than the dominant narrative (anonymized for review). Yet, due to their potential to increase
19 openness to compromise and perhaps even pave the way for conflict resolution, alternative
20 narratives may be as impactful for the course of the conflict as dominant narratives, and
21 therefore equally important. We believe majority group members tend to less endorse these
22 alternative narratives as they are more likely to worry that these narratives will pose a threat
23 to national continuity (van Leeuwen & Mashuri, 2013) due to being endorsed more by
24 minority group members or “radical” majority members.

1 Dominant conflict narratives present the conflict in black and white terms. They
2 produce mistrust, hostility, a sense of threat between the conflict parties and reduce support
3 for compromise (Canetti et al., 2017). As dominant narratives influence individuals to
4 interpret situations in ways that contribute to the perpetuation or even escalation of the
5 conflict (Cohrs et al., 2015), we argue that alternative narratives may help majority group
6 members see the conflict in a new light. The identification of such alternative voices may
7 contribute to a more differentiated conflict analysis and these alternative voices may, in turn,
8 contribute to more effective approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation (Coleman,
9 2003; Shmueli, 2003). These alternative narratives can help to diversify the social realities
10 that circulate and are considered in society. They may help to develop strategies of change
11 (Grabe & Dutt, 2015) and can have greater potential for social change in conflict contexts
12 (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011; see also Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008).

13 As mentioned earlier, majority group members are not inclined to endorse minority
14 groups' conflict narratives (e.g., independence struggles). We tested this hypothesis in the
15 context of the Turkish-Kurdish and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among majority group
16 members by investigating whether minority groups' conflict narratives would predict more
17 support for non-violent conflict resolution and less support for aggressive policies, whereas
18 dominant conflict narratives based on the ethos of conflict would predict more support for
19 violent conflict resolution and aggressive policies (e.g., Canetti et al., 2017).

20 *Dominant and alternative narratives in conflict contexts.* Related to our core
21 hypothesis, previous research in the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict highlighted two
22 opposing conflict narratives among lay people: (a) a *terrorism narrative* that describes the
23 problem as stemming mainly from the armed wing of the Kurdish national movement, PKK
24 (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan), and (b) an *independence narrative* that describes the problem as
25 a need for independence for Kurds (anonymized for review). These two conflict narratives

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1 were created representing the core of these two viewpoints based on the findings of a Q
2 methodology study (a mixed qualitative-quantitative method; Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this
3 research, it has been shown that both the terrorism narrative and the independence narrative
4 may predict the advantaged group's attitudes (i.e., Turks' attitudes) towards reconciliation and
5 the peace process in Turkey (anonymized for review). This research was conducted during the
6 peace process between 2013 and 2015. However, the peace process ended abruptly in 2015
7 and the attacks from both sides have been continuing.

8 By building on previous research on conflict narratives (anonymized for review) and
9 competitive victimhood (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Sullivan, Landau,
10 Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012) and taking the political developments in Turkey into
11 account (e.g., escalation of the conflict within the country and the Syrian conflict in the
12 region), we decided to focus on conflict-related outcomes such as support for stopping
13 violence and support for aggressive policies as well as peace-related outcomes such as support
14 for non-violent conflict resolution and forgiveness. We hypothesized that the terrorism
15 narrative (as the dominant narrative of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict endorsed most strongly
16 by the majority of ethnic Turks; anonymized for review) would predict more conflict-related
17 outcomes (e.g., support for aggressive policies), whereas the independence narrative (as an
18 important alternative narrative endorsed by a minority of ethnic Turks; anonymized for
19 review) would predict more peace-related outcomes (e.g., support for non-violent conflict
20 resolution; forgiveness). This attempt at a psychological understanding of the terrorism
21 narrative, in particular, can help explain why even powerful conflict parties such as Jewish
22 Israelis or Turks can consider themselves to be the main victim in the conflict and therefore at
23 times act more aggressively than seems necessary or justifiable from a third-party's
24 perspective.

1 *Competitive victimhood*. Besides our prediction that different conflict narratives will
2 have different conflict- and peace-related outcomes, we also hypothesized that these conflict
3 narratives would predict important process variables such as *competitive victimhood* (i.e.,
4 people's belief that their group has suffered more than the adversarial group; Noor et al.,
5 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012). In other words, we predicted that competitive victimhood will
6 mediate the relationship between conflict narrative and conflict- and peace-related outcomes.
7 In different intergroup contexts, it has been observed that members of advantaged groups are
8 also motivated to see themselves as victims or relatively deprived such as having suffered
9 personal or identity-based hardship (e.g., Phillips & Lowery, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2012; see
10 also Killian, 1985). As groups tend to have a general motivation to maintain a positive in-
11 group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), advantaged group members also tend to see their in-
12 group as the victim and their outgroup as the perpetrator. However, advantaged groups can
13 experience suffering and engage in competitive victimhood, especially when they are faced
14 with the threat of radical institutional reforms that lead to significant material redistributions
15 (Noor et al., 2012). For example, it has been shown that even though the political Left was the
16 target of most of the physical violence inflicted by the military regime during the Pinochet
17 rule in Chile, the political Right still often highlights its physical suffering caused by leftist
18 guerrilla attacks and assassinations (Roniger & Sznajder, 1999). It is argued that the claim of
19 victimhood by the political Right is a result of radical reforms by Allende's leftist government
20 in Chile (Perez de Arce, 2008).

21 Competitive victimhood affects people's attitudes toward forgiveness, reconciliation,
22 and conflict in both conflict and post-conflict settings (e.g., Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi,
23 & Lewis, 2008). For example, it may lead to reduced empathy and less willingness to
24 reconcile with the adversary (Vollhardt, Bilewicz, & Olechowski, 2015), and to more
25 negative attitudes toward the other conflict party and toward resolving the conflict in various

1 contexts (Noor, Vollhardt, Mari, & Nadler, 2017). It also predicts less willingness to
2 acknowledge ingroup harm-doing during war (Čehajić & Brown, 2010), less forgiveness
3 (Noor et al., 2008), and more support for aggressive policies (Adelman et al., 2016).

4 As we mentioned earlier, conflict narratives may shape people’s attitudes toward
5 conflict and peace, and people’s beliefs regarding the ingroup’s victimization play a central
6 role in stirring and sustaining intractable conflict (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019; Rouhana & Bar-
7 Tal, 1998; Vollhardt, 2012). Importantly, however, the two narratives should predict
8 competitive victimhood differently. Viewing the outgroup’s actions as acts of terrorism and
9 making an essentialist attribution such as “they are evil” should leave little room to see the
10 suffering and victimization of the outgroup, and emphasize the suffering and victimization of
11 the ingroup. On the other hand, viewing the outgroup’s actions in the conflict as a
12 consequence of legitimate grievances such as a lack of independence should lead to the
13 realization that both the ingroup *and* the outgroup suffered as victims of the conflict. Thus, the
14 terrorism narrative should strengthen people’s belief that the ingroup has suffered more than
15 the outgroup, whereas the independence narrative should, if anything, weaken that belief.
16 These differential effects of the type of narrative on competitive victimhood should then lead
17 to differential effects in terms of conflict- and peace-related outcomes.

18 The current studies sought to test several important questions regarding the role of
19 conflict narratives in intractable conflicts. First, in order to test the generalizability of the role
20 of conflict narratives, we conducted parallel studies in the context of Turkish-Kurdish
21 relations (Study 1) and Israeli-Palestinian relations (Study 2), as both conflicts are seen as
22 intractable and asymmetric. Testing the role of conflict narratives as well as competitive
23 victimhood in asymmetric conflicts is particularly important because it helps us understand
24 how groups who differ markedly in power (do not) support different conflict- and peace-
25 related outcomes. In each case, we examined the perspective of majority/dominant group

1 members (i.e., Turks and Jewish Israelis, respectively) towards the outgroup (i.e., Kurds and
2 Palestinians, respectively). Second, we examined the extent to which endorsing independence
3 and terrorism narratives independently predict conflict- and peace-related outcomes such as
4 willingness to forgive the outgroup, support for non-violent conflict resolution, aggressive
5 policies and stopping violence. Third, we also investigated a potential process variable that
6 transmits the effects of conflict narratives on outcome variables: *competitive victimhood*. We
7 hypothesized that stronger endorsement of the independence narrative would predict less
8 competitive victimhood, whereas stronger endorsement of the terrorism narrative would
9 predict more competitive victimhood. We also hypothesized that greater competitive
10 victimhood would predict less support for non-violent conflict resolution, less forgiveness,
11 less support for stopping violence, and more support for aggressive policies (see Figure 1 for
12 the theoretical model).

13 _____
14 Insert Figure 1
15 _____

16 **Study 1**

17 In Study 1, we examined the perspectives of the majority group in Turkey (i.e., Turks)
18 in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context. We investigated how the endorsement of the
19 independence narrative and terrorism narrative would predict the conflict- and peace-related
20 outcomes through the pathway of competitive victimhood.

21 **Method**

22 **Participants and Procedure**

23 A total of 110 self-identified Turkish participants completed the survey online (see
24 Table 1 for demographic information). We distributed the link to the survey on a variety of
25 Facebook groups and blogs. Respondents were informed in the consent form that the goal of
26 this research was to examine attitudes toward the issue that is variously defined as the

1 “Kurdish problem,” “terrorism problem,” “ethnic identity problem,” “Southeastern problem,”
2 or “independence problem.” We used various labels for the issue to prevent possible
3 perceptions of research(er) bias (see anonymized for review for a similar approach). Each
4 survey participant read both narratives. Then, they reported their endorsement of each
5 narrative, their competitive victimhood, support for non-violent conflict resolution,
6 forgiveness, and support for aggressive policies and support for stopping violence, as well as
7 several demographic questions such as gender and level of education.

8 _____
9 Insert Table 1
10 _____

11 **Materials**

12 With the exception of the demographic items mentioned above, all items used 7-point
13 response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). All means and *SDs* are reported in
14 Table 2.

15 **Conflict narratives.** We used two conflict narratives identified by previous research
16 with lay people (anonymized for review): (a) a *terrorism narrative* and (b) an *independence*
17 *narrative*. Q methodology, a mixed qualitative-quantitative method, was used in that previous
18 research to identify socially shared perspectives in relation to contentious issues (e.g., Watts
19 & Stenner, 2012). Based on the findings of the previous research, we created short narratives
20 that represent the core of these two viewpoints. These narratives have been established and
21 used by people in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict context (anonymized for review). Participants
22 were asked to indicate their endorsement of each of the two narratives:

23 ***Endorsement of the independence narrative.*** The following one-item measure
24 assessed participants’ endorsement of the independence narrative: “In my opinion, the
25 Kurdish problem is an independence problem for Kurds because the status of Kurds living in
26 Turkey is like a colony under the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, to solve this problem, an

1 independent Kurdistan should be established, and its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan,
2 should be released.”

3 **Endorsement of the terrorism narrative.** The following one-item measure assessed
4 participants’ endorsement of the terrorism narrative: “In my opinion, this problem is a
5 problem created by the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*). The causes of this problem are
6 PKK and the instigation of foreign powers. To solve this problem, PKK should give away
7 their weapons and TSK (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri-Turkish Armed Forces*) should fight and end
8 terror by active counter-terrorism policies. No matter what happens, the unitary state structure
9 of Turkey should not be changed.”

10 **Competitive victimhood.** Competitive victimhood was measured with three items
11 adapted from Noor et al. (2008): “Throughout the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, Turks suffered
12 more than Kurds,” “Turkish victims need more protection than Kurdish victims,” and “In
13 general, the trauma of the events in the 80s and 90s has been more severe for Turks than for
14 the Kurds.”

15 **Support for non-violent conflict resolution.** Two items assessed participants’
16 support for non-violent conflict resolution in Turkey (anonymized for review): “In general, I
17 support the peace process in Turkey” and “The İmralı talks should restart.”

18 **Forgiveness.** Four items adapted from Noor et al. (2008) assessed intergroup
19 forgiveness: “I feel resentment toward Kurdish people for the misdeeds that they committed
20 in the past” (reverse coded), “I hold ill thoughts about Kurdish people for the misdeeds that
21 they committed in the past” (reverse coded), “I draw the conclusion that I am prepared to
22 forgive Kurdish people for the misdeeds that they committed in the past,” and “I am able to
23 forgive Kurdish people for the misdeeds that they committed in the past.”

1 whereas stronger endorsement of the independence narrative was unrelated to competitive
 2 victimhood and most of the outcome variables (with the exception of support for non-violent
 3 conflict resolution). More competitive victimhood predicted less support for non-violent
 4 conflict resolution, less forgiveness, less support for stopping violence, and more support for
 5 aggressive policies. In addition to this indirect effect of endorsement of the terrorism narrative
 6 on the outcome variables through competitive victimhood (see Table 3 for indirect effects),
 7 endorsement of the terrorism narrative also had an additional positive direct effect on support
 8 for aggressive policies, and an additional negative direct effect on support for stopping
 9 violence. Thus, the effects of endorsement of the terrorism narrative on support for aggressive
 10 policies and support for stopping violence were partially transmitted by competitive
 11 victimhood, whereas the effects of endorsement of terrorism narrative on forgiveness and
 12 support for non-violent conflict resolution were fully transmitted by competitive victimhood.
 13 Importantly, these additional direct effects of the terrorism narrative were in line with our
 14 theoretical expectations regarding the indirect effects of the terrorism narrative.

15 We also tested an alternative model in which the two narratives mediated the
 16 relationship between competitive victimhood and conflict- and peace-related outcomes (for a
 17 similar strategy, see Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008). However, this alternative model was
 18 inferior to our hypothesized model as well as to our modified model (i.e., with additional
 19 paths from exogenous variables to endogenous outcome variables), $\chi^2(5) = 97.60, p < .001,$
 20 $SRMR = .14, NFI = .80, CFI = .80, AIC = 143.60$ (see Supplementary Materials for the
 21 alternative model).

22 Insert Table 3

23
 24
 25 **Discussion**

1 Study 1 found support for our hypothesis that endorsing the terrorism narrative would
2 predict more support for aggressive policies, less support for stopping violence, less
3 forgiveness and less support for non-violent conflict resolution through the pathway of more
4 competitive victimhood. Study 1 also found support for our hypothesis that endorsing the
5 independence narrative would predict more support for non-violent conflict resolution;
6 however, we should also note that Study 1 did not find that the independence narrative
7 predicted competitive victimhood. While this lack of an indirect pathway through competitive
8 victimhood did not support our hypothesis, it is also important to note that the direct path
9 from the independence narrative to support for peace that we found instead did not actively
10 refute our hypothesis. Only if this path had been negative, would it have actively gone against
11 our expectations. Instead, this path being positive was generally in line with our theoretical
12 predictions.

13 Last, Study 1 found support for our hypothesis that more competitive victimhood
14 would predict more support for aggressive policies and less support for non-violent conflict
15 resolution, less support for forgiveness and less support for stopping violence. The results
16 suggest that endorsement of the rather one-sided terrorism narrative increases competitive
17 victimhood, and ultimately strengthens support for aggressive policies and weakens support
18 for forgiveness, stopping violence, and nonviolent conflict resolution.

19 Study 1 had some limitations though. First, participants were recruited through
20 snowball sampling on social media sites (e.g., Facebook). Relatedly, participants were mostly
21 left on the political spectrum and not very religious. We addressed this issue in Study 2 by
22 making a more concerted effort to get a more heterogeneous sample regarding these
23 demographics. Second, we situated Study 2 in a different conflict context than Study 1 (the
24 Israeli-Palestinian conflict), and consequently also targeted a different group for our sample

1 (Jewish Israelis) to address the average level of competitive victimhood in Study 1 ($M =$
2 2.71).

3 Study 1 made use of conflict narratives that were identified in previous research in the
4 Turkish-Kurdish conflict context (anonymized for review). However, it is unclear to what
5 extent these narratives are applicable in other conflict contexts. Therefore, Study 2 tested the
6 applicability and generalizability of these narratives in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian
7 conflict. The aim here was to show that the processes found in Study 1 are not unique to a
8 specific conflict but replicate in other contexts that differ in many respects such as history,
9 language, religion, and levels of violence.

10 Study 2

11 Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings of Study 1 in the context of the Israeli-
12 Palestinian conflict. Specifically, Study 2 examined whether endorsing a particular conflict
13 narrative predicts conflict- and peace-related outcomes and whether the terrorism and
14 independence narratives generalize to contexts other than the Turkish-Kurdish one. While
15 doing so, Study 2 also improved on the recruitment strategy and sampling issues of Study 1,
16 as well as on the average level of competitive victimhood in Study 1. As we aimed to get a
17 representative sample in Israel, we also aimed to have more variance on the variables of
18 interest that we did not have in the more left-leaning sample of Study 1.

19 Method

20 Participants

21 A total of 199 Jewish Israeli participants participated in our study (see Table 4 for
22 demographic information). To obtain a more heterogeneous sample with respect to political
23 orientation, we used a research company to recruit a representative sample (matched on 2015
24 voting patterns) of self-identified Jewish-Israeli participants (The Midgam Project Web Panel:
25 www.midgam.com). Midgam is a company that specializes in providing infrastructure

1 services for internet research and allows for surveying samples representative of the Israeli
 2 population.

3 _____
 4 Insert Table 4
 5 _____

6 **Materials**

7 Participants completed a similar set of measures as in Study 1 (see Table 3 and
 8 Appendix; see Supplementary Materials for all the measures), most of them having a similar
 9 wording and content; only for the measures of support for nonviolent conflict resolution and
 10 support for aggressive policies, we adapted the items to fit the context of the Israeli-
 11 Palestinian conflict. We also dropped the measure of support for stopping violence in Study 2,
 12 to keep the model simple.² All items used 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 =
 13 *strongly agree*).

14 **Support for non-violent conflict resolution.** Two items assessed participants’
 15 support for non-violent conflict resolution in Israel: “I support a peace agreement with the
 16 Palestinians on the basis of two states for two people” and “I support a unilateral Israeli
 17 withdrawal from territories in Judea and Samaria.”

18 **Support for aggressive policies.** Four items assessed participants’ support for
 19 aggressive policies: “I support expelling Palestinians from the land of Israel,” “I support the
 20 continuation of the current situation,” “I support annexing some of the territories to Israel
 21 (such as Area C and Maale Adumim), and continued Israeli control of the rest of the
 22 territories” and “I support annexing the entire West Bank and instating Israeli Jurisdiction
 23 over the territories.”

24 **Results**

25 **Preliminary Analyses**

² We dropped this measure as we have already had a similar outcome measure (i.e., support for non-violent conflict resolution) and therefore to keep the model simple, we decided to drop it.

1 Stronger endorsement of the terrorism narrative predicted more competitive
 2 victimhood, whereas stronger endorsement of the independence narrative predicted less
 3 competitive victimhood. More competitive victimhood predicted less support for non-violent
 4 conflict resolution and less forgiveness, and more support for aggressive policies. Lastly,
 5 endorsement of the independence narrative predicted more support for non-violent conflict
 6 resolution and less support for aggressive policies. Besides the predicted indirect effects of the
 7 narratives on the outcome variables through competitive victimhood (see Table 6 for indirect
 8 effects), again, as in Study 1, there were also additional direct effects.

9 As in Study 1, we also tested the alternative model: The two narratives mediated the
 10 relationship between competitive victimhood and conflict- and peace-related outcomes (for a
 11 similar strategy see Noor et al., 2008). This alternative model, $\chi^2(4) = 87.70, p < .001, SRMR$
 12 $= .12, NFI = .83, CFI = .84, AIC = 121.70$, was empirically superior to our hypothesized
 13 model but not empirically superior to our modified model. Yet, given that the purpose of
 14 Study 2 was to replicate and confirm the model of Study 1, we consider our modified model
 15 (i.e., with additional paths from exogenous variables to endogenous outcome variables) to be
 16 superior from a theoretical and confirmatory hypothesis testing perspective.

17 _____
 18 Insert Table 6
 19 _____

20 **Discussion**

21 Study 2 provided support for our hypothesis that endorsement of the terrorism
 22 narrative predicts more support for aggressive policies and less support for non-violent
 23 conflict resolution and forgiveness through the pathway of more competitive victimhood.
 24 Study 2 also found support for our hypothesis that endorsement of the independence narrative
 25 predicts more support for non-violent conflict resolution and less support for aggressive
 26 policies, but it did not predict more support for forgiveness. Finally, the results of Study 2

1 provided evidence for our hypothesis that more competitive victimhood predicts more support
2 for aggressive policies and less support for non-violent conflict resolution and forgiveness.
3 Importantly, whereas Study 1 found no evidence for a significant relationship of the
4 independence narrative with less competitive victimhood, Study 2 found this relationship to
5 be significant in the expected direction. This finding is particularly noteworthy given that the
6 Jewish Israeli sample in Study 2 was overall more right-wing than the Turkish sample in
7 Study 1.

8 **General discussion**

9 Our results highlighted the relationship between endorsing conflict narratives and
10 conflict- and peace-related outcomes such as forgiveness, support for non-violent conflict
11 resolution and support for aggressive policies. In addition, competitive victimhood was shown
12 to be an important mediator of the relationship between conflict narratives and these conflict-
13 and peace-related outcomes. The results of Study 1 indicated that endorsing the terrorism
14 narrative predicts more support for aggressive policies, less support for stopping violence, less
15 forgiveness and less support for non-violent conflict resolution through the pathway of more
16 competitive victimhood. Study 1 also found support for our hypothesis that more competitive
17 victimhood predicts more support for aggressive policies and less support for non-violent
18 conflict resolution, less support for forgiveness and less support for stopping violence. Study
19 2 conceptually replicated the results of Study 1 with respect to the effects of the terrorism
20 narrative. Further, Study 2 also found effects of the independence narrative on predicting
21 competitive victimhood and support for aggressive policies negatively and support for non-
22 violent conflict resolution positively, as expected in the opposite direction of the terrorism
23 narrative. Finally, it is noteworthy we found these findings not only among our left-leaning
24 sample in Turkey but also among our representative sample in Israel.

1 Our findings further our understanding of how a culturally dominant conflict narrative
2 increases competitive victimhood. Perceiving one's group to be a victim may lead to the
3 perception that such aggressive steps are necessary for the group's security in spite of the fact
4 that the in-group is more powerful, to begin with. In this way, the research presented here
5 helps to understand the actions of groups in intractable conflicts, and why these actions (e.g.,
6 aggression or coercion) seem rational to those groups, while other groups (e.g., third parties or
7 allies of the other side in the conflict), especially from an outside perspective, view these
8 actions as irrational. However, this research also suggests that there is diversity in the conflict
9 narratives at play in conflicts, and these alternative conflict narratives (e.g., independence
10 narrative) that are usually embraced by the minority or low-power group in a conflict can also
11 play an important role in the majority or high-power group embracing more constructive
12 orientations to the conflict and its resolution. The results show that if majority group members
13 think violence is the result of frustrated national aspirations, they may try to find a way to
14 satisfy these aspirations. If they think violence is characteristic of the out-group, they may
15 want to fight back and eliminate the threat. In a similar vein, our results indicate that the
16 independence narrative can have positive outcomes even for majority groups, among which
17 this narrative is not the dominant narrative.

18 The finding that the effects of conflict narratives (especially the terrorism narrative)
19 largely replicated in two different conflicts with different groups and histories also supports
20 the notion that although every conflict has unique characteristics (Yıldız, 2014), there are also
21 important commonalities that different conflicts share (see also Aktaş, 2014). Specifically, our
22 results indicate that the terrorism and the independence narrative, which were originally
23 derived from the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (anonymized for review), also play
24 important roles in other conflicts characterized by a struggle between asymmetrical powers
25 that can either be seen as a struggle for independence or as terrorism. Thus, the independence

1 narrative and its peace-related outcomes can have important implications for conflict
2 resolution and intervention more generally (rather than only in one specific conflict).

3 Overall, our results contribute to the works of literature on conflict narratives and
4 competitive victimhood in particular and on peace and conflict in general by highlighting the
5 crucial link between endorsement of conflict narratives, competitive victimhood, and conflict-
6 and peace-related outcomes such as forgiveness, support for non-violent conflict resolution
7 and support for aggressive policies. In addition, the results highlight the importance of
8 acknowledging the diversity of conflict narratives in a society, including narratives that are
9 less visible than the dominant narrative born out of the ethos of conflict. As dominant
10 narratives present the conflict in black and white terms and produce mistrust, hostility, a sense
11 of threat between the conflict parties, reduce support for compromise, and influence
12 individuals to interpret situations in ways that contribute to the perpetuation or even escalation
13 of the conflict (Cohrs et al., 2015), alternative narratives may help majority group members
14 see the conflict in a new light. The identification of such alternative voices may contribute to
15 a more differentiated conflict analysis and in turn more effective approaches to conflict
16 resolution and reconciliation (Coleman, 2003; Shmueli, 2003). This argument is connected to
17 the concept of “counter-narratives” (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004) and the notion that
18 identifying counter-narratives can help to diversify the social realities that circulate and are
19 considered in society, which in turn may help develop strategies of change (Grabe & Dutt,
20 2015). As minority views sometimes have greater potential for social change (Elcheroth et al.,
21 2011; see also Subašić et al., 2008), we argue that incorporating the majority/dominant
22 narrative of the adversary group (e.g., independence narrative) into the perspective of one’s
23 own group may thus open up some new opportunities for conflict resolution and
24 peacebuilding.

25 **Limitations and Future Directions**

1 Our research has a few specific limitations. First, even though our results show that
2 the conflict narratives and their outcomes generalize to different conflict contexts, we should
3 highlight that there are some differences between the two studies. For example, the correlation
4 between the two narratives is considerably higher in Study 1 than in Study 2; the competitive
5 victimhood mean is considerably higher in Study 2 than in Study 1; and the terrorism
6 narrative mean is higher in Study 2 than in Study 1. We wonder to what extent these
7 differences may be related to the left- vs. right-leaning tendencies of the samples in both
8 studies, but not to the nature of the conflict. Even though there are some differences between
9 the two studies, we should highlight again that we found the findings among our left-leaning
10 sample in Turkey are generalizable to our more right-leaning sample in Israel and some
11 fundamental processes are highly similar.

12 Second, we conducted these studies in different phases of the respective conflicts.
13 Turkish data collection occurred during the escalation of the conflict after the breakdown of
14 the Turkish-Kurdish peace process, whereas Israeli data collection occurred during a
15 relatively calmer period of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Previous research has indicated that
16 people's understanding of conflict can shift during periods of conflict escalation (Bilali, Çelik,
17 & Ok, 2014; Uluğ, Odağ, Cohrs, & Holtz, 2017). This difference might explain why we were
18 not able to detect the differential effects of the two narratives as easily in the Turkish study as
19 in the Israeli study. Second, we focused on competitive victimhood rather than distinguishing
20 between inclusive (i.e., perceiving other groups' suffering as similar to one's own group) and
21 exclusive victim beliefs (i.e., the perceived distinctiveness of ingroup victimization; see
22 Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Previous research suggests that victim beliefs do not always lead to
23 violence (Vollhardt, 2009). If people endorse victim beliefs that recognize similarities of
24 experiences between the conflict parties, this may help them empathize with the other side of

1 the conflict (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008). Future studies should, therefore, examine whether
2 different conflict narratives may lead people to engage in inclusive vs. exclusive victimhood.

3 Third, one may question why the endorsement of narratives is assessed with a single
4 item and argue that these items may have the potential to be multi-barreled and therefore
5 multi-dimensional. However, we chose this approach because these narratives have been
6 developed based on empirical studies (anonymized for review), used in previous research and
7 it was well established that these narratives may predict peace-related attitudes such as
8 reconciliation (anonymized for review). Future studies may consider using shorter narratives
9 to avoid multi-dimensionality. In addition to the specific alternative narratives we have used
10 (i.e., independence narrative) in this research, future research may also look at yet other
11 alternative narratives, for instance, the ones found in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict: a)
12 economic narrative, b) democracy and Islam narrative, and c) democracy and rights narrative
13 (anonymized for review). Many people may also endorse different narratives to some extent.
14 This ambivalence may have an epistemic basis (trying to understand why violence happens)
15 and/or a motivational basis (each narrative has both costs and benefits for the in-group).
16 Therefore, future studies may also look to what extent people endorse more than one narrative
17 at the same time and how the endorsement of both different narratives may help to find
18 common grounds across these narratives.

19 Fourth, in both studies, we tested an alternative model in which the two narratives
20 mediated the relationship between competitive victimhood and conflict- and peace-related
21 outcomes (see, e.g., Noor et al., 2008). In Study 1, this alternative model was inferior to our
22 hypothesized model as well as to our modified model. In Study 2, even though this alternative
23 model was empirically superior to our hypothesized model it was not empirically superior to
24 our modified model. As the purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and confirm the model of
25 Study 1, we consider our modified model to be superior from a theoretical and confirmatory

1 hypothesis testing perspective. One can argue that it may be equally plausible for competitive
2 victimhood to motivate particular narratives and both models are equally likely. Adelman et
3 al. (2016) showed how different conflict narratives (inclusive vs. exclusive) may affect
4 competitive victimhood in experimental studies. Therefore, we believe that it is conflict
5 narratives that may motivate people to engage in competitive victimhood. However, future
6 studies should also test the sequence of these processes with larger samples and experimental
7 studies.

8 Given that the two conflicts we focused on are asymmetrical and protracted conflicts,
9 our data cannot speak to whether our findings are generalizable to 1) symmetrical and/or non-
10 protracted conflicts and 2) the minority or the less powerful party in the conflict. While our
11 focus on one particular (and particularly important) type of conflict had the advantage of
12 examining the extent to which our findings were reproducible across different countries,
13 future studies may also examine the extent to which these results can be reproduced in other
14 types of conflicts (e.g., the relatively more symmetrical conflict in Northern Ireland). In this
15 sense, our results speak to the generalizability across countries but stay silent on
16 generalizability across types of conflicts. Also, in each conflict setting, due to the
17 asymmetrical nature of the conflict (see Elcheroth & Spini, 2015), these parties are the
18 stronger parties compared to their opponents. However, we do not know what happens if the
19 minority or the less powerful party in the conflict endorses the narrative held by the majority
20 of the other, stronger party. Previous research indicated that when Palestinians show empathy
21 for the Holocaust, it leads to reciprocal empathy between Palestinians and Israelis (Gubler,
22 Halperin, & Hirschberger, 2015). Future research should also focus on whether endorsement
23 of the more powerful group's narrative in an ongoing conflict increases competitive
24 victimhood among the less powerful group, or not. To more fully understand the link between
25 conflict narratives, competitive victimhood, and conflict- and peace-related outcomes, the

1 phenomena and processes we have shown here should also be investigated from the
2 perspective of the less powerful party to the conflict.

3 Finally, future studies may focus on intervention strategies to change competitive
4 victimhood via conflict narratives. Vollhardt and Bilali (2015) argue that hearing stories about
5 others' suffering, which are similar to one's ingroup experiences, through intergroup contact
6 may increase inclusive victimhood. We argue that even hearing the way in which the *other*
7 side understands the conflict as well as the reasons for the other side's actions through
8 intergroup contact may be helpful to lower competitive victimhood (see also Bruneau & Saxe,
9 2012). Future studies may also look for intervention strategies on how to change competitive
10 victimhood by exposing people to others' conflict narratives, which may pave the way for
11 conflict resolution (see also Adelman et al., 2016). For example, interventions should focus on
12 how to increase perspective-taking or empathy since both studies indicate that the problem is
13 a one-sided view of the conflict that does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the other. The
14 paradox is that the one-sided view is psychologically more satisfying (e.g., we are good, they
15 are evil) but leaves less hope for improvement (e.g., if they are evil in essence, there is little to
16 do but fight them). The independence narrative may be seen as undermining the group and
17 even treacherous, but it offers *hope* for change by indicating if we address the grievances,
18 hostilities between groups may decrease.

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Table 1

Demographic information for Study 1.

	Frequency/Mean/SD
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	69
Male	39
Other	2
<i>Education</i>	
PhD	19
Master's degree	27
Bachelor's degree	46
High-school degree	17
Secondary-school degree	1
<i>Political orientation</i>	$M = 3.10$ $SD = 1.93$ Range = 1 (<i>left</i>) – 9 (<i>right</i>)
<i>Religiosity</i>	$M = 2.56$ $SD = 2.24$ Range = 1 (<i>not religious at all</i>) – 9 (<i>very religious</i>)

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Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables in Study 1.

Variables	α	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Independence narrative	-	2.79 (1.94)	-						
2. Terrorism narrative	-	3.87 (2.37)	-.73***	-					
3. Competitive victimhood	.83	2.71 (1.48)	-.53***	.69***	-				
4. Support for non-violent conflict resolution	.70	4.93 (1.81)	.57***	-.62***	-.60***	-			
5. Forgiveness	.75	5.53 (1.25)	.30**	-.31**	-.48***	.45***	-		
6. Support for stopping violence	.71	5.19 (1.86)	.55***	-.68***	-.78***	.68***	.51***	-	
7. Support for aggressive policies	.83	3.14 (1.72)	-.63***	.73***	.71***	-.58***	-.49***	-.74***	-

1 *Note.* *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$

2

NARRATIVES, VICTIMHOOD, CONFLICT AND PEACE

1 Table 3
 2
 3 *Standardized indirect effects (Study 1).*

	Indirect effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Independence narrative						
Support for non-violent conflict resolution	.016	.064	.254	.799	-.11	.14
Forgiveness	.013	.052	.254	.799	-.08	.11
Support for stopping violence	.020	.082	.254	.799	-.14	.36
Support for aggressive policies	-.019	.074	-.254	.799	-.16	.13
Terrorism narrative						
Support for non-violent conflict resolution	-.405	.074	-5.434	< .001	-.55	-.26
Forgiveness	-.323	.071	-4.549	< .001	-.46	-.18
Support for stopping violence	-.513	.081	-6.313	< .001	-.67	-.36
Support for aggressive policies	.467	.078	5.977	< .001	.32	.62

4 *Note.* Although endorsement of the independence narrative was not a significant predictor of
 5 competitive victimhood in the model (see Figure 2), to be consistent across the two
 6 independent variables, we tested (and showed) non-significant indirect effects of endorsement
 7 of the independence narrative on the dependent variables.

8
 9
 10

NARRATIVES, VICTIMHOOD, CONFLICT AND PEACE

1 Table 4

2 *Demographic information for Study 2.*

	Frequency/Mean/SD
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	104
Male	95
Other	-
<i>Education</i>	
PhD	1
Master's degree	23
Bachelor's degree	49
Non-academic professional training	41
Passed a Full Baccalaureate exam	54
High-school degree	22
Elementary-school degree	3
Other	6
<i>Political orientation</i>	$M = 6.01$ $SD = 2.15$ Range = 1 (<i>left</i>) – 9 (<i>right</i>)
<i>Religiosity</i>	$M = 3.81$ $SD = 2.74$ Range = 1 (<i>not religious at all</i>) – 9 (<i>very religious</i>)

3

4

NARRATIVES, VICTIMHOOD, CONFLICT AND PEACE

1 Table 5

2 *Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables in Study 2.*

3

Variables	α	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Independence narrative	-	2.79 (1.99)	-					
2. Terrorism narrative	-	4.48 (2.09)	-.46***	-				
3. Competitive victimhood	.81	4.58 (1.73)	-.39***	.53***	-			
4. Support for non-violent conflict resolution	.65	3.76 (2.27)	.66***	-.53***	-.48***	-		
5. Forgiveness	.83	3.23 (1.61)	.37***	-.49***	-.60***	.44***	-	
6. Support for aggressive policies	.68	4.57 (1.97)	-.50***	.63***	.60***	-.53***	-.50***	-

4 *Note.* *** $p < .001$

5

NARRATIVES, VICTIMHOOD, CONFLICT AND PEACE

1 Table 6

2

3 *Standardized indirect effects (Study 2).*

	Indirect effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Independence narrative						
Support for non-violent conflict resolution	.088	.033	2.637	.008	.02	.15
Forgiveness	.110	.040	2.708	.006	.03	.19
Support for aggressive policies	-.111	.041	-2.711	.006	-.19	-.03
Terrorism narrative						
Support for non-violent conflict resolution	-.214	.039	-5.383	< .001	-.29	-.17
Forgiveness	-.267	.043	-6.094	< .001	-.35	-.18
Support for aggressive policies	.269	.044	6.122	< .001	.18	.36

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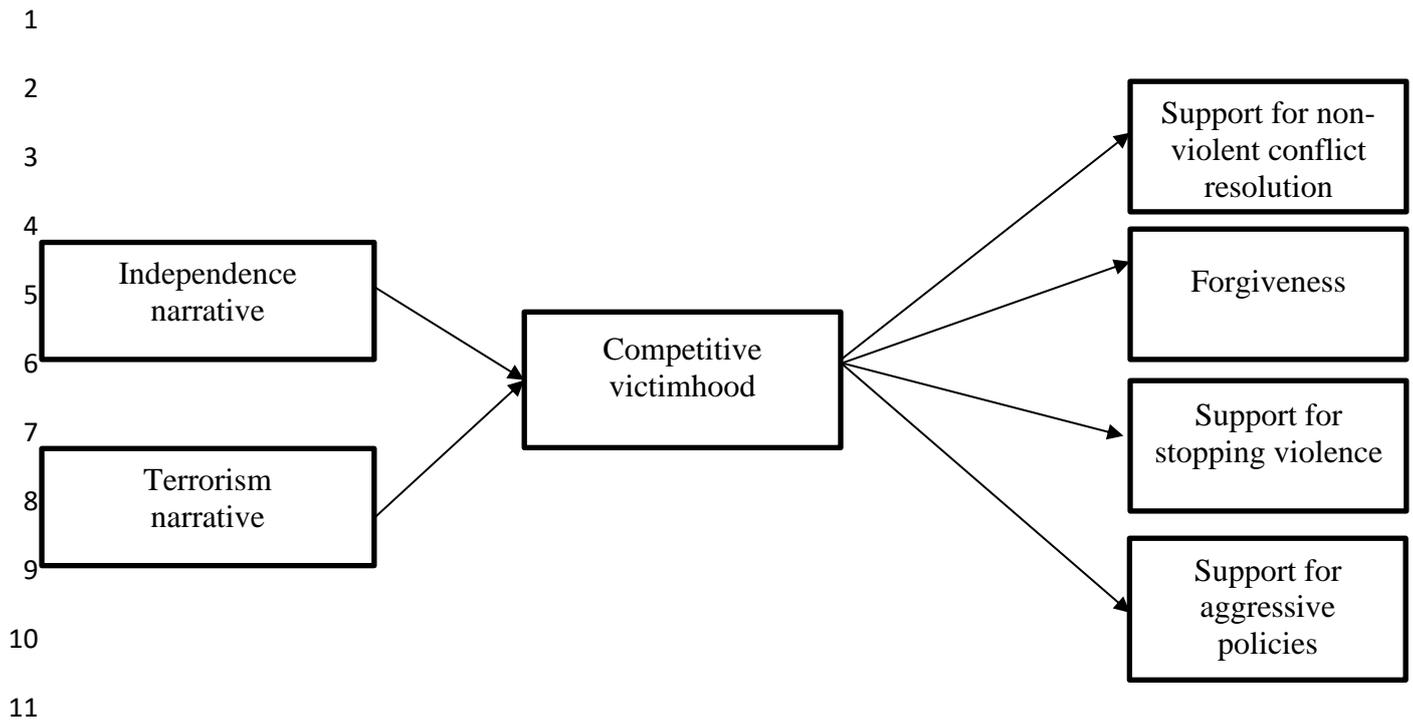
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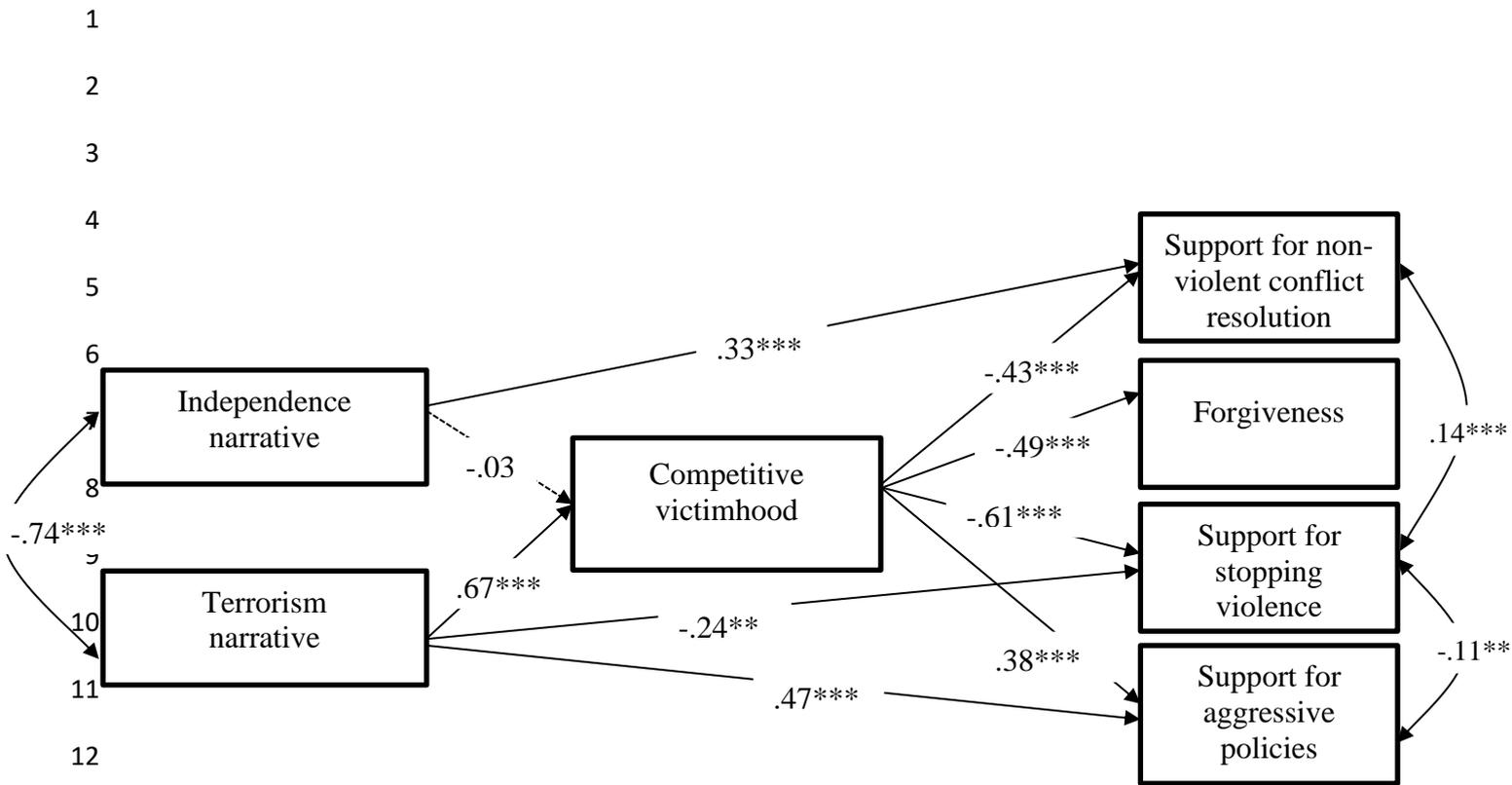
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12 Figure 1. Path diagram of the theoretical model.

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NARRATIVES, VICTIMHOOD, CONFLICT AND PEACE



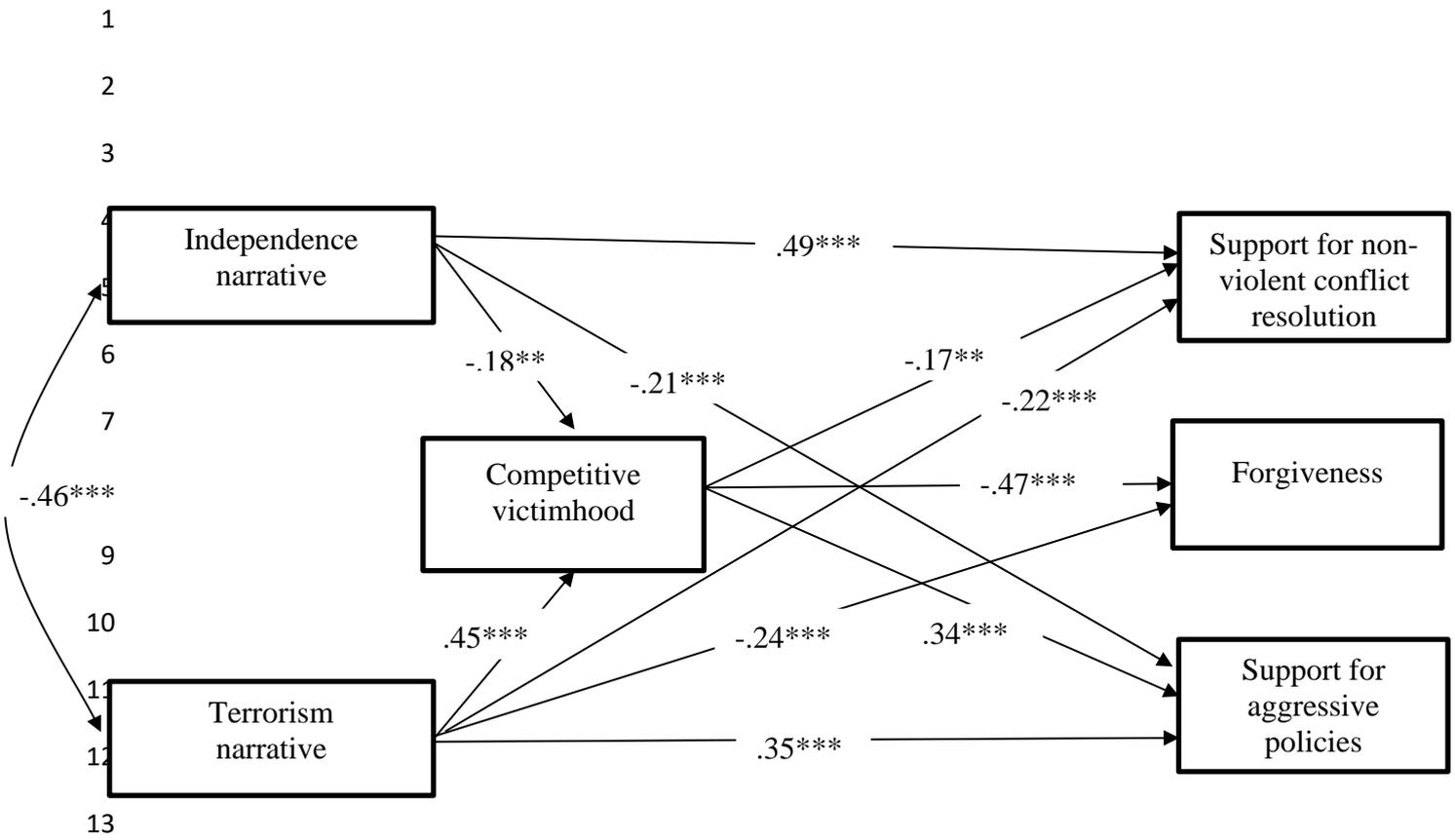
14 Figure 2. Path model for Study 1

15 Note. Dashed lines indicate non-significant paths; $^{***}p < .001$, $^{**}p < .01$.

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NARRATIVES, VICTIMHOOD, CONFLICT AND PEACE



14 Figure 3. Path model for Study 2

15 Notes. $^{***}p < .001$, $^{**}p < .01$.

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Appendix

Conflict narratives in Israel

Independence narrative. In my opinion, the Palestinian problem is an independence problem for Palestinians and that once Palestinians gain independence, they will no longer be motivated to continue the conflict. Therefore, an independent Palestine should be established alongside Israel if we want to resolve this problem.

Terrorism narrative. In my opinion, the Palestinian problem is a problem created by Palestinian terrorism. If we want to solve this problem, Israel needs to deal with terrorism, and the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) should put an end to terror by active counter-terrorism operations. Such a solution to the Palestinian problem would also make it unnecessary to divide the Land of Israel and create a Palestinian state on this land.