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Threatened by the Worst but Hoping for the Best: Unraveling the Relationship Between Threat, Hope, and Public Opinion During Conflict

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Abstract

How does the threat from future violence shape the opinions of those mired in violent intergroup disputes? Two competing rationales seem plausible. During conflict, threat from future violence increases support for dovish policies because the destruction and suffering associated with violence make peace seem more desirable and urgent. At the same time, threat from future violence can decrease support for dovish policies because peace seems inconceivable when violence is on the rise. Indeed, existing studies on the link between threat perceptions and support for conflict-related policies yielded mixed results. We argue that, to some extent, this puzzle could be solved by (1) examining threat through its two core components, namely *perceived severity* of harm and *perceived likelihood* of harm, and (2) linking these two components of threat with the two components of hope, namely the *wish* to attain a goal (in our case peace) and the *expectations* of attaining it. These arguments were tested using original data collected among 800 Israelis and Palestinians. Results show that the part of threat stemming from perceiving future violence as *severe* generates support for dovish policies because it increases citizens' *wishes* for peace. At the same time, the part of threat that stems from perceiving future violence as *likely* decreases support for the same policies due to decreased *expectations* that peace can be achieved. We show that the relative weight of the two components of threat determines citizens' support for conflict-related policies. Implications for political behavior during conflict are discussed.

Keywords Threat perceptions · Hope · Violence · Conflict

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"*There is no hope unmingled with fear, and no fear unmingled with hope.*"

Baruch Spinoza

Peoples' perceptions of threat from conflict and violence shape their attitudes and behaviors on a host of issues, from deciding to emigrate from their conflict-ridden country (e.g., Pliskin et al., 2015), to their voting considerations (e.g., Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014; Gould & Klor, 2010; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009), to their stance on peace negotiations and war (e.g., Canetti et al., 2015; Grossman et al., 2018; Huddy et al., 2007). Indeed, citizens' perceptions of threat from conflict-related violence have been studied extensively in the fields of political behavior and political psychology (e.g., Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008; Conrad et al., 2018; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Huddy et al., 2005). Much of the scholarly attention was aimed at exploring the implications of symbolic vs. realistic threat perceptions (Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Stephan & Stephan, 2017) and discerning between perceptions of threat to one's safety or to the collective as a whole (e.g., Gordon & Arian, 2001; Huddy et al., 2002; Nijs et al., 2019).

One of the main research avenues examines the potential impact of threat on citizens' support for hardline vs. accommodating policies. Some scholarship demonstrates that threat from conflict-related violence is associated with right-wing attitudes and hawkish policy preferences, such as intolerance towards minorities (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008), support for hardline policies (Gordon & Arian, 2001), support for torture (Conrad et al., 2018), voting for right-wing parties (Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014), and willingness to restrict civil liberties (Huddy et al., 2007; see Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012). Overall, it seems that increased threat pushes citizens to support a hardline approach, assuming, perhaps, that hardline policies will hurt the adversary and consequently reduce the threat (see: Berrebi & Klor, 2008).

However, some studies show that threat from conflict-related violence is associated with accommodating attitudes like opposing military intervention (Sadler et al., 2005) and supporting compromises for peace (Gayer et al., 2009). In these examples, threats from conflict-related violence drive citizens to support dovish approaches, perhaps because these policies are believed to hasten peace and thus decrease the threat (see also: Montalvo, 2010).

Whether violence, or the threat from it, increases or decreases support for dovish policies and actions is still debated because both alternatives seem plausible (Cheung-Blunden & Blunden, 2008; Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014). For example, Gould and Klor (2010) show that (up to a certain point), increased exposure to violence raises support for accommodating policies. Indeed, during conflict, increased threats from the reoccurrence of violence can boost the feeling of urgency for peace and, in turn, increase citizens' support for dovish policies. On the other hand, the same threats make peace seem impossible, thereby decreasing support for dovish policies.

Situated in this debate, our study aims to tackle this puzzle by looking more closely at threat and its structure. Existing studies on risk assessment (e.g., Slovic

& Peters, 2006) and collective angst (e.g., Tabri et al., 2018) established that threat is based on two components; the perception of *severity* and the perception of *likelihood* of harmful events. Adopting this approach to the study of violent conflict, we theorize that the part of threat stemming from perceiving future violence as *severe* (i.e., painful, destructive, devastating) generates support for dovish policies because it *increases citizens' wish* to hasten peace. At the same time, the part of threat that stems from perceiving future violence as *likely* (i.e., believing that future violence is probable or even inevitable) decreases support for the same policies due to *decreased expectations* the peace can be achieved. We suggest that threat from future violence shapes policy preference in opposite ways because it increases the wishes for peace but decreases the expectations that peace will be attained.

The introduction section continues as follows. We first present the two factors that constitute threat perceptions: perceived *severity* of harm and perceived *likelihood* of harm, and describe their formation during conflicts. We then discuss citizens' *wishes* and *expectations*, the two appraisal components of hope, and explain their hypothesized connection with the two threat components. We end by offering a novel theoretical model linking threat, hope, and policy preference during conflict and present the conflict between Palestinians and Israel, in which the model was tested.

Threat Perceptions During Conflict

Threat is a deep sense of vulnerability to future harm that may result in loss (Gilbert, 2005). During conflict, threats concerning future violence influence peoples' attitudes and preference for conflict-related policies (e.g., Canetti et al., 2015; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Lavi et al., 2014; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009). Threat can also be immediate, as when violence is occurring on the scene. In these hazardous situations, one might experience heighten feelings of threat and vulnerability. However, once the violence subsides, the immediate experience will be replaced by threats from the recurrence of violence and hostility. In this paper, we focus on citizens' threats from *future* violence and its relationship with policy preference.[1]

Studies on threat during conflict often distinguish between threats for personal safety (also termed egocentric threat) and threats for the nation or the collective (referred to as sociotropic threat) (Hirschberger et al., 2016; Jacobson & Bar-Tal, 1995; Nijs et al., 2019). Several studies demonstrated that, compared to perceived threats to one's own safety, threats for national safety are stronger predictors of conflict-related outcomes such as supporting right-wing parties (Nijs et al., 2019) and hardline policies (Hirschberger et al., 2016).

Many studies on the relationship between threat from violence and support for dovish vs. hawkish policies explored threat by examining citizens' assessment of

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[1] We also focus on threat perceptions and not on the emotional response threat perceptions might elicit (Lambert et al., 2010).

the likelihood of violence (e.g., Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Huddy et al., 2002). Quite straightforwardly, the more people think that future violent events (e.g., suicide bombings, airstrikes) are likely, the higher the threat. This approach yielded valuable insights. However, research on risk assessment (Slovic, 1999; Slovic & Peters, 2006) and collective angst (Wohl & Branscombe, 2009; Wohl et al., 2010) propose that another dimension of threat should be considered: the perceived *severity* of the threatening event.

Risk assessment theory described how people assess the risk of objects or events that may pose hazards (e.g., diseases, toxins, nuclear energy) (Sjoberg, 2000; Slovic et al., 1984). According to risk assessment research, risk assessment is affected by perceptions of *probability* and *consequences* of the risk (Slovic, 1999; Slovic & Peters, 2006; see Thompson & Dean, 1996). Risk will be assessed as high when harm is perceived as probable and its consequences highly adverse. In other words, it is not only the perceived likelihood of harm but also the severity of harm that factors into people's risk assessment. Additional support for the bi-dimensional conceptualization of threat is provided by research on collective angst, which explores peoples' angst concerning the future vitality of their group (Tabri et al., 2018). Here, again, two factors are highlighted as determinants of collective angst; the perceived likelihood of an attack against the group (Wohl & Branscombe, 2009) and the perceived severity of harm these attacks will bring if they were to occur (Wohl et al., 2010).

Our conceptualization and operationalization of threat from conflict-related violence are based on the above work. We argue that citizens' perceptions of threats from conflict-related violence are based not only on the perceived likelihood of violence but also on the severity (i.e., pain, suffering, destruction) this violence is believed to cause. Holding constant the perceived severity of violence, the more likely the violence, the higher the threat. Holding constant the perceived likelihood of violence, the more severe the violence, the higher the threat.

During conflict, people might differ in their perceptions of severity *and* likelihood of potentially threatening situations. Several situational factors could influence these perceptions. Leaders' intentional manipulation (e.g., Jervis, 1976; Stein, 2013), media framing (e.g., Simon, 2006), and the content of school textbooks (Adwan et al., 2014) could all play a role in shaping threat perceptions among populations involved in conflict.[2] Ideology, religiosity, and one's personal experiences or proximity to conflict-related violence might affect these perceptions (Hobfoll et al., 2006; Huddy et al., 2005, 2007; White, 2016).

The Hope for Peace

Hope is a desire accompanied by an expectation of fulfillment (Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010; Sagy & Adwan, 2006) and so, like threat, is also comprised of two core components: the *wish* to achieve a goal and the

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[2] We thank the anonymous reviewers for highlighting this point.

expectation (though not certainty) that the goal can be achieved (Erickson et al., 1975; Leshem, 2017, 2019; Staats & Partlo, 1993; Stotland, 1969). The extent one wishes (i.e., desires, aspires) to attain a goal and the levels of one's expectations that the goal will be attained are the two factors that determine the levels of hope (Bury et al., 2020; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). Thus, during violent conflicts, hope for peace will depend on how much one *wishes* for peace, and how much one *expects* peace to materialize.

Exiting work shows that during conflicts, people differ in how much they wish for peace and how much they expect peace to materialize (Leshem, 2017; Sagy & Adwan, 2006). Some might harbor intense desires for peace, while others might be more indifferent to the idea. Some might think peace is utterly impossible, whereas others might believe that future peace is probable, even inevitable (Leshem et al., 2016). Interestingly, though wishes and expectations are correlated, the strength of the association is only moderate (0.2 to 0.3) (Leshem & Halperin, 2020a, 2020b).[3]

Studies have shown that both wishes and expectations for peace predict dovish policy preferences. When wishes and expectations for peace are high, people are more inclined to make concessions (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015) and humanize their rivals (Halperin et al., 2008). Having high hopes for peace also predicts support for peacebuilding (Leshem, 2019) and reluctance to launch costly preemptive strikes (Halevy, 2017). Overall, theoretical (Fromm, 1968; Havel, 1990) and empirical research (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015; Leshem & Halperin, 2020a) place hope for peace (i.e., wishing for peace and having some expectation that peace can be attained) as a central facilitator of peace-promoting behaviors.

Threat, Hope, and their Postulated Relationship

We presented the core components of threat and hope and situated them in the context of violent conflicts. The question then becomes, what is the nature of their relationship? Though little is known about their connection, some conjectures can be made. First, people mired in conflict might differ in how they perceive the severity of future violence. Some might perceive future violence as extremely horrific and unbearable. They will be highly concerned from the terrible devastations that violence entails, including losing loved ones and the endless suffering that follows. Others may be more moderate in their perceptions about the severity of future violence, envisioning conflict-related violence in less intense terms. It could be argued the those who perceive future violence as extremely devastating and unbearable would be more inclined to yearn for the end violent confrontations and more eager to hasten peace. We contend that all else equal, the more one is threatened by the pain and suffering conflict-related violence entails, the more one would wish for peace. Accordingly, those who do not perceive future violence in extremely devastating terms will be, to a certain degree, less eager about peace. Of course, this

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[3] Note that the colloquial use of hope is confusing. In some cases, hope signifies a wish without estimating the probability of attainment, while in other instances, hope is used to signify only expectations.
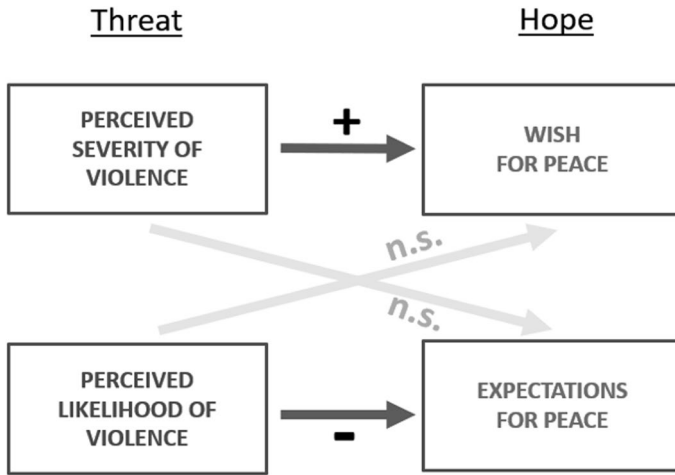
Fig. 1 Postulated connection between threat perceptions and hope for peace during conflict

does not mean that people who perceive the severity of future violence as moderate or even low do not wish for peace. They, too, are likely to desire peace and the end of confrontations. However, all else equal, their wishes for peace are inclined to be lower than those who perceive violence in severe terms.

People involved in conflict might also differ in their perceptions of the likelihood of future violence. Some might think that future violence is highly probable, even inevitable, while others may think that future violence is unlikely. We propose that all else equal, those who think that future violence is likely are more inclined to have low *expectations* for peace. This connection might stem from lay peoples' tendency to connect the frequency of conflict-related events with the improbability of peace (though frequent violent confrontations often precede successful peace processes (Goertz & Diehl, 1995)). We therefore suggest that threats stemming from perceiving conflict-related violence as likely will have an inverse relation with expectations for peace. The higher the perceived likelihood of violence, the lower the estimated chances for peace.

In sum, we postulate that the part of threat that derives from citizens' perceptions of future violence as s*evere* would be positively associated with their *wish* for peace, while the part of threat that stems from the perceptions of violence as *likely* would be negatively associated with the *expectations* for peace (Fig. 1). Though some spillover is probable, the model does not predict cross-effects.

Note that our model presumes that threat precedes hope. This is because threat is a primary mental process that requires little cognitive effort (Bar-Tal, 2001; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006), whereas hope demands deliberation and substantial mental resources (Lazarus, 1991). Their sequence is thus postulated to flow from threat to hope rather than the other way around.
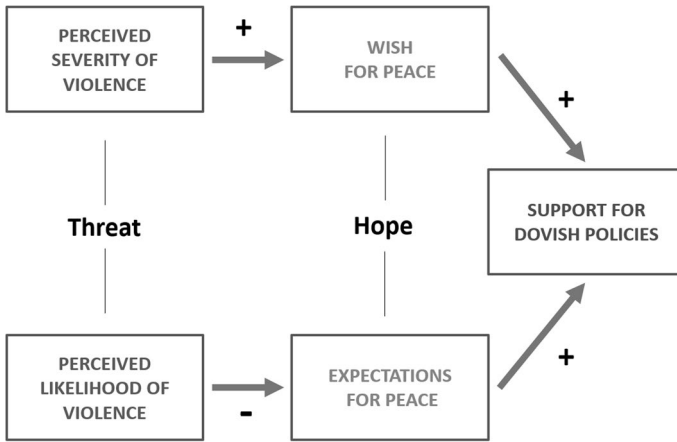
Fig. 2 Hypothesized model linking threat, hope, and support for dovish policies during conflict

Threat, Hope, and Support for Dovish Policies

The central question we aim to explore concerns the perplexing relationship between peoples' threat from future violence and their support for dovish vs. hawkish policies. The mixed results in the literature suggest that threat can elicit both support for and opposition to dovish approaches. We argue that this puzzle could be answered, at least in part, by looking at the core components of threat and their relations with hope's core components. First, threat deriving from perceiving future violence as highly severe is linked to citizens' heightened desires for peace. Heightened desires for peace are then translated to greater support for dovish policies. At the same time, the part of threat deriving from perceiving future violence as highly probable is associated with low levels of expectation for peace. Low expectations that peace can be achieved dwindles the support for the same policies. The relative strength of each threat component will ultimately determine citizens' support or opposition to a dovish policy approach.

We thus propose the following model (Fig. 2) and hypotheses linking threat, hope, and public support for dovish policies. We first hypothesize that perceiving conflict-related violence as more severe will predict higher wishes for peace. Our second hypothesis is that perceiving conflict-related violence as more likely will predict less expectations for peace. Third, we hypothesize that no cross-effects will be observed. That is, the wish for peace will be independent of the perceived likelihood of violence, and the expectations for peace independent from the perceived severity of violence. Our fourth hypothesis is that both wishes and expectations will positively predict citizens' support for dovish policies and will serve as mediators between threat perceptions and support for these policies. We test these hypotheses in a study administered among 800 Jewish-Israelis and West-Bank Palestinians.

The Context

The conflict in Israel-Palestine is a prototypical case of a protracted conflict (Bar-Tal, 2013). It is longstanding, demands enormous investments from the rival parties, and total in its impact on the daily lives of those living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. For roughly a century, the well-being of Palestinians and Jews has been impaired by the prolonged conflict (Brecher, 2017). The conflict is also asymmetric, with Israel having superior political, economic, and military power. This asymmetry is apparent in the number of casualties from each side. From January 2008 till January 2021, 5,594 Palestinians lost their life from conflict-related violence compared to 251 Israelis (a ratio of 22:1).[4] Though high-power and low-power groups are likely to experience conflict in distinct ways, we postulate that the models linking threat, hope, and support for dovish policies generalize across the two societies.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

Data were simultaneously collected among 300 West Bank Palestinians and 500 Jews residing in Israel. Jewish-Israeli participants were part of an online panel operated by an Israeli polling center. Stratified probability sampling was used to recruit Palestinian participants living in cities, villages, and refugee camps in the West Bank (complete sampling protocols are provided in the supplementary material).[5] Overall, the samples mirror the adult population of Jews living in Israel and Palestinians living in the West Bank (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics 2018, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017), though the Israeli sample was slightly more secular than the Jewish-Israeli population. To correct this skew, the sample was reweighted according to the actual proportion of religiosity in the Jewish-Israeli population.[6]

Measures

Perceived threat. Adapting items from Lavi et al. (2014), threat perceptions were gauged based on threat's two components, perceived severity and perceived likelihood. First, participants rated the likelihood of conflict-related violence relevant to their party by answering the question: "*How likely do you think the following event*

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[4] https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties.

[5] This study uses data from the Hope Map Project that was also conducted in the Gaza Strip. As can be expected, Gazans' threat perceptions were extreme and abnormally distributed. The skewed scores and distributions made it difficult to include Gazans in the analyses. We therefore provided a separate report on Gazan's threat appraisals in the supplementary material but excluded the Gaza subsample from our main analysis.

[6] Results replicate when the samples remain unweighted.

can occur? A large-scale military attack against Palestinians (e.g., airstrikes, incursions into cities, etc.) / A large-scale attack against Israelis (e.g., suicide bombings, rocket attacks, etc.) (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely). Participants then rated the severity of the same conflict-related violence by answering the question: "*How much are you concerned from the harm the following violent event entails if it were to occur*" *A large-scale military attack against Palestinians (e.g., airstrikes, incursions into cities, etc.) / A large-scale attack against Israelis (e.g., suicide bombings, rocket attacks, etc.)* (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very Much).

Note that we focus on perceived threats to the collective (sociotropic threats) rather than threats explicitly targeting the individual (egoistic threats) as sociotropic threats have been shown to be strong predictors of conflict-related outcomes (Hirschberger et al., 2016; Nijs et al., 2019). Though important and interesting, items about threats for personal safety are also less adequate for our purposes because they limit the scope of plausible threats to those relevant only for the participant.[7]

Hope for peace. Following Lopez and Snyder (2003), hope was measured based on hope's two components, wishes and expectations. Thus, one item assessed the levels of participants' wish for peace (1 = I have no such wish, 6 = I wish very much), and the other item gauged their expectations that peace will materialize (1 = totally unlikely, 6 = very likely). In the present research we were interested in assessing participants' general hope for peace without imposing an external definition of what peace "is." However, to ensure findings were not confined only to generic definitions, we also measured Israelis' and Palestinians' wishes and expectations for concrete definitions of peace (e.g., "a mutually agreed upon accord that ensure safety and security for Israelis and freedom and independence for Palestinians"). In all analyses, findings replicate when using the concrete definitions (see supplementary material).

Support for dovish policy. Five items were used to measure participants' support for a wide range of dovish policies. Participants were asked to mark, on a scale from 1 to 5, the extent they would be willing to support (1) " a *peace agreement that would establish East-Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital and West-Jerusalem as the Israeli capital,*" (2) " a *peace agreement that would include Israel's acknowledgment of its share in causing the refugee problem and accepting only an agreed-upon number of refugees into its territory with compensation made to the remaining refugees from an international fund,*" (3) "a *joint non-violent demonstration of Palestinians and Israelis calling for peace, justice, and security for all,*" (4) "a *team of Palestinian and Israeli ex-diplomats that are working on drafting a just and sustainable solution to the conflict.*" and (5) "*sharing the land for peace.*" ($\alpha = 0.74$, 0.82_{ISR}, 0.6_{PAL}).

Demographic and sociopolitical measures. Participants' age, gender, levels of religiosity, and education were collected as controls. We also measured participants' hawkish-dovish stance using the Adherence to the Ethos of Conflict scale (Bar-Tal et al., 2012). The scale taps into citizens' core conflict-related beliefs and has

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[7] For exploratory purposes, we also measured threat for personal safety. Findings replicate when threats for personal safety serve as our main predictors (see supplementary material for full results).

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of main variables

	Range	Palestinian sample	Israeli sample	Difference PAL − ISR
Threat				
Severity of violence	1–5	3.52 (1.41)	3.58 (1.24)	$t = -.6$
Likelihood of violence	1–5	3.48 (1.4)	4 (1.02)	$t = -5.5$***
Hope				
Wish for peace	1–6	4.57 (1.61)	5.03 (1.28)	$t = -4.1$***
Expect peace	1–6	2.78 (1.49)	2.28 (1.27)	$t = 4.8$**
Support for dovish policies	1–5	2.21 (0.84)	2.24 (1)	$t = -.5$

Two-tailed significance, p*** < .001, p** < .01, Standard deviation in parentheses

been validated in various contexts, including the Kurdish conflict in Turkey (Uluğ & Cohrs, 2019), the conflicts in former Yugoslavia (Petrović et al., 2019), and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Canetti et al., 2015). Using the EOC scale enables the use of items that are relevant for both parties and comparable across them. For example, one of the items presented to Palestinians was: "I do not believe in the peaceful intentions of the Israelis," while Israelis were presented with "I do not believe in the peaceful intentions of the Palestinians." (see supplementary material for full items of all covariates). All materials, including the dataset, are available in the Zenodo public repository under "the nuanced relationship between threat and hope.

Data Analysis Strategy

We first provide descriptive statistics on Israelis' and Palestinians' threats and hopes and explore correlations between main variables. We particularly report on the distinct nature of the threat components, as our study seems to be the first to explore conflict-related threats by distinguishing between perceived severity and perceived likelihood of violence. Next, we utilized two regression models to test our hypotheses concerning the relationship between threat and hope during violent conflicts. As the last step, we utilize mediation analysis to explore whether hope explains the link between threat and policy preference. Because we sought to detect overarching patterns across societies embroiled in conflicts, we conducted our primary analysis on the entire pool of participants ($N = 800$). However, to make sure trends replicate in each society, we also ran all analyses on each national sample. For the sake of brevity, and because trends mostly replicated across societies, we report findings from the pooled sample except in places where results differ between samples (for full results from each sample, see the supplementary material).[8]

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[8] Complete dataset, codebook, and code available at: http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4924099.

Table 2 Effects of main variables and covariates on the hope for peace

	Wish for peace	Expectation for peace
Perceived severity of violence	.18*	− .014
Perceived likelihood of violence	.01	− .13*
Nationality (+ = Israeli)	.1	− .17
Nationality × severity	− .09	.06
Nationality × likelihood	.09	− .06
Hawkish-Dovish stance (+ = more hawkish)	− .1**	− .25***
Religiosity	− .1*	− .06
Gender (1 = female)	.004	.04
Education	− .03	.05
Age	.18***	− .01
R^2	.11	.15

Entries are standardized OLS coefficients. Two tailed significance. $p^{***} < .001, p^{**} < .01, p^* < .05$

Results

We start by presenting descriptive statistics (Table 1). First, it seems that among Israelis and Palestinians, the perceived severity of future violence is high, with 31.6% ($33\%_{PAL}$, $30.6\%_{ISR}$) (the mode) marking the highest score on perceived severity. Interestingly, the means were similar across societies ($t = - 0.6, p = 0.54$), indicating that the severity of future violence equally threatens Israelis and Palestinians. Threat from the likelihood of violence is also high, with 36.3% (the mode, $31.7\%_{PAL}$, $39.1\%_{ISR}$) believing conflict-related violence is very likely. Yet, it appears that Jewish-Israelis are more threatened by the likelihood of violence compared to Palestinians ($t = - 5.5, p < 0.001$). Correlation analysis reveals that the two components of threat are only moderately associated ($r = 0.34, p < 0.001$), indicating that the threat components are distinct though interdependent. As for the hope components, compared to Palestinians, Jewish-Israelis have significantly higher wishes for peace ($t = - 4.1, p < 0.001$) but lower expectations that peace will materialize ($t = 4.8, p < 0.001$). Here the correlation between the components was weak ($r = 0.18, p < 0.001$), indicating the relative independence of wishes and expectations for peace. Last, it seems that both Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis equally oppose dovish policies ($t = - 0.5, p = 0.6$), with only 18.2% (14.7% $_{PAL}$, $20.3\%_{ISR}$) scoring above the midpoint of the scale.

Providing initial support for our hypotheses, it seems that perceived severity of harm is positively correlated with the wish ($r = 0.17, p < 0.001$), but not with the expectations for peace ($r = - 0.04, p = 0.3$), while perceived likelihood of harm is negatively correlated with the expectations for peace ($r = - 0.24, p < 0.001$) but only marginally associated with the wish for peace ($r = 0.06, p = 0.082$) (See supplementary material for full correlation matrices).

Next, we provide results from two regression models, one predicting the wish for peace and the other predicting the expectations for peace (see Table 2). Perceived severity of harm and perceived likelihood of harm were entered as the key predictors

while controlling for collected sociopolitical and demographic measures. The two-way interactions Nationality X Perceived Severity and Nationality X Perceived Likelihood were also entered as predictors into the model to account for the tentative possibility that group-specific contexts affect the relationship between threat and hope.[9]

Results fully support our first, second, and third hypotheses. First, it appears that perceptions of the severity of conflict-related violence predict citizens' wishes for peace. The more the violence is perceived as severe, the greater the wish for peace ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.014$). Second, perceptions of the likelihood of violence are negatively associated with citizens' expectations for peace ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.038$). The more one thinks that conflict-related violence is likely to occur, the less one believes in the possibility of peace. In line with our third hypothesis, no cross effects were observed. Perceived severity of violence does not predict citizens' expectations for peace ($\beta = -0.014$, $p = 0.8$), and perceived likelihood of violence does not predict citizens' wish for peace ($\beta = 0.01$, $p = 0.93$). The lack of interaction effect with nationality in both models indicates that the relationships between threat and hope are similar across societies. Separately examining each national sample validates these results (see supplementary material).

Especially intriguing is the connection between the perceived severity of violence and the wish for peace. It seems that all else equal, people who perceive future violence as highly intense, destructive, and harmful desire peace more than those who are relatively moderate in their perceptions of severity. We want to elaborate on this connection. First, it could be postulated that hawkish-dovish stances, religiosity, or other factors confound our findings (e.g., Leshem & Halperin, 2020a, 2020b). However, we show that perceived severity of violence predicts the wish for peace even when accounting for covariates mentioned above. To corroborate this finding, we also placed each covariate as a tentative mediator between perceived severity of violence and wish for peace. As expected, none of the covariates, including hawkish-dovish stance ($b = -0.005$, p $= 0.8$), religiosity ($b = 0.007$, $p = 0.11$), education, ($b = 0.003$, $p = 0.21$), gender ($b = 0.01$, $p = 0.9$), and age ($b = -0.01$, $p = 0.15$) explain the observed connection between perceived severity of violence and the wish for peace. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that other variables not collected in this study might have influenced our results. We expand on this issue in the discussion.

Second, it would be a misinterpretation of results to assume that those less threatened by the severity of violence have no wish for peace. Using the model, we can predict that, all else equal, people who are not as threatened by the severity of violence (1SD below the mean) have a wish for peace score of 4.65 ($SE = 0.08$), which is more than one point above the 3.5 midpoint of the scale. This implies that Israelis' and Palestinians' wish for peace is high even among those who assess future violence

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[9] Results from an exploratory analysis revealed that the interaction term Perceived Severity X Perceived Likelihood had no significant effect on wishes ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .7$) or expectations ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .6$) for peace. Also, no significant effects of the three-way interaction (Nationality X Perceived Severity X Perceived Likelihood) were found on wishes ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .4$) or expectations ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .2$) for peace.

in less intense terms. Third, the fact that the perceived likelihood of violence does not predict the wishes for peace might seem surprising. After all, one could argue that those who think future violence is likely will have stronger desires for peace. Indeed, we find a hint to this connection in the marginal correlation between the perceived likelihood of violence and the wish for peace ($r=0.06$, $p=0.08$). However, this association disappears ($p=0.9$) in our main regression models that include both threat components.[10] It seems that, holding all else equal, peoples' desires for peace are strongly linked to their threats from the severity of violence and that this strong connection overshadows the (weak) connection between perceived likelihood of violence and desires for peace.
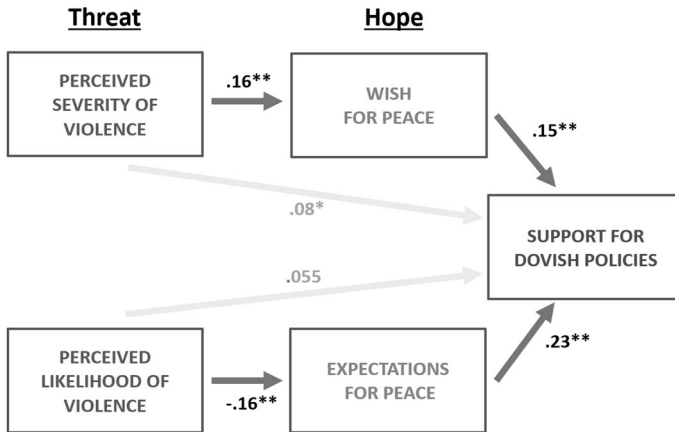
Threat, Hope, and Public Support for Dovish Policies

We first test whether greater threat stemming from the perceived severity of violence predicts higher support for dovish policies and whether this link is explained by the wish for peace. To test this hypothesis, we estimated a mediation model where perceived severity of violence serves as the independent variable, support for dovish policies as the dependent variable, and the wish for peace as the mediating variable. To ensure that the other threat and hope components were not confounding the results, we controlled for citizens' perceptions about the likelihood of violence and their expectations for peace.

Analysis confirms our previous finding that perceived severity of violence positively predicted citizens' wishes for peace ($b=0.17$, $SE=0.04$, $p<0.001$) and revealed that the wish for peace positively predicted support for dovish policies ($b=0.15$, $SE=0.02$, $p<0.001$). Importantly, we find that the perceived severity of harm positively predict support for dovish policies ($b=0.093$, $SE=0.02$, $p<0.001$) and that this effect was significantly reduced ($b=0.069$, $SE=0.02$, $p=0.005$) when the wish for peace was introduced to the model. Bootstrapping analysis with 5000 iterations (Ostfeld, 2019) shows that the indirect effect through the wish for peace is indeed significant ($b=0.024$, $SE=0.007$, 95% CI 0.011, 0.39). Overall, results demonstrate that people who perceive future violence as severe are more supportive of dovish policies, partially because they wish for peace more.

A similar mediation model tested whether greater threat stemming from the likelihood of violence predicts lower support for dovish policies, by way of decreased expectations. Results show that perceived likelihood of violence negatively predicted expectations for peace ($b=-0.29$, $SE=0.04$, $p<0.001$) and that expectations for peace positively predicts support for dovish policies ($b=0.22$, $SE=0.02$, p<0.001). Notably, we found a negative effect of perceived likelihood of harm on support for dovish policies ($b=-0.07$, $SE=0.03$, $p=0.01$) that disappeared ($b=-0.006$, $SE=0.03$, $p=0.83$) when expectation for peace was included in the model. As anticipated, the indirect effect via expectations was significant ($b=-0.067$, $SE=0.012$,

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[10] Further support for these finding was observed in four additional exploratory regression models (see supplementary materials for full results).

Fig. 3 Estimation of hypothesized model linking threat, hope, and support for dovish policies. *Note*: Entries are standardized coefficients, $p** < .001$, $p* < .01$

95% *CI* − 0.092, − 0.043). Here, citizens' expectations for peace fully explains the negative effect of perceived likelihood of violence on support for dovish policies.

The mediation analyses support our hypothesis that the relationship between threat perceptions and support for dovish policies is, at least partly, explained by hope. As a robustness check, we tested our hypothesized model linking threat, hope, and support for dovish policies using Structural Equation Modeling (see Carreras & Bowler, 2019 for a similar approach). This step allows for the simultaneous estimation of the two mediation paths (i.e., testing one path while controlling for the other). Support for dovish policies was entered as the endogenous dependent variable while controlling for all covariates and allowing for correlations between error terms of the endogenous variables and the exogenous variables. After trimming nonsignificant paths, our hypothesized model yielded a good fit $\chi^2 = 19.75$, $df = 15$, RMSEA = 0.02, CFI = 0.994, TLI = 0.985, SRMR = 0.016, χ^2/df ratio = 1.32. Figure 3 presents the estimated standardized effects of the hypothesized model. For simplicity, paths of covariates are not presented (see supplementary material for full model and model fit).[11]

As can be seen, the higher the perceived severity of violence, the more citizens wish for peace ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and, in turn, the greater their support for dovish policies ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the higher the perceived likelihood of violence, the less citizens expect peace to materialize ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$), and, in turn, the lower they support the same dovish policies ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). Post SEM mediation analysis corroborates our findings by showing that the indirect

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[11] Results replicate in each national sample (see supplementary material). We also tested an alternative model where hope predicts threat and not the other way around. Results indicate that the fit of this alternative model ($\chi^2 = 36.28$, $df = 15$, RMSEA = .042, CFI = .975, TLI = .933, SRMR = .025, χ^2/df ratio = 2.15) was inferior to our proposed model ($\chi^2_{diff} = 16.53$, $df_{diff} = 0$).

effects of threat on support for dovish policies via wishes ($b=0.018$, $SE=0.005$, $p<0.001$) and expectations ($b=-0.039$, $SE=0.007$, $p<0.001$) are significant.

Are those more threatened by the severity of violence rather than its likelihood also more supportive of dovish policies? If so, is the phenomenon explained by one's wishes and expectations for peace? To answer this question, we first created a within-subject variable that captures the relative weight of each threat component per each participant. The variable was calculated by dividing one's perception of threat from the severity of violence by the sum of the two components. The higher the score, the larger the weight of the perceived severity of violence compared to its perceived likelihood. Scores above 0.5 indicate that one's perception of the severity of violence is higher than one's perception of the likelihood of violence, whereas scores below 0.5 indicate an opposite pattern. A score of 0.5 indicates that the two components are equal. Next, we tested whether the relative weight of the components predicts support for dovish policies and if hope mediates the tentative effect. We thus estimated a mediation model where the relative weight of the threat components serves as the IV, support for dovish policies serves as the DV, and the two hope components serve as mediators.

Results first show that the total effect was positive and significant ($\beta=0.14$, $p<0.001$) such that an increase in the weight of perceived severity of violence relative to the perceived likelihood of violence predicts an increase in the support for dovish policies. This means that people whose threats are more about the severity of violence than its likelihood tend to be more supportive of dovish policies than those whose threat structure is reversed. Second, it seems that this effect was significantly reduced ($\beta=0.078$, $p<0.001$) when wishes and expectations were introduced to the model showing that the hope components explain, at least in part, the observed effect. These trends replicate in each national sample and when threats for the individual replace threats for the nation (see supplementary material).

To corroborate these findings, we directly compared the support for dovish policies between participants whose threats are driven mainly by perceived severity of violence (those scoring above 0.5, $N=208$) and those whose threats are primarily driven by the likelihood of violence (scores below 0.5, $N=279$). Results reveal that citizens whose threats derive mostly from the severity of violence tend to support dovish policies more than those whose threats stem chiefly from the perceived likelihood of violence ($t=3.79$, $p<0.001$). Similar trends were observed in each national sample and when threats for the individual replace threats for the nation (see supplementary material).

Discussion and Conclusion

How do people who live in harsh circumstances of conflict and political turmoil envision the future? Does their outlook include threatening images of violence and war? Is it painted in hopeful colors of life without plight and horror? Is it a mixture of both? Most importantly, how do these images influence citizens' attitudes towards conflict-related policies? Scholarship in political science has tackled this interesting question from multiple perspectives. Research on hope is generally in consensus

about hope's positive role in facilitating support for peacebuilding and compromise (e.g., Cohen-Chen et al., 2015; Leshem & Halperin, 2020a, 2020b). Research on the potential influence of threat is more divided, with studies showing that threat can elicit support for hardline (e.g., Gordon & Arian, 2001) or accommodating (e.g., Gayer et al., 2009) policies. We sought to contribute to the debate by looking at the building blocks of threat and hope.

In line with our hypotheses, we show that the part of threat that stems from perceiving conflict-related violence as probable or, in extreme cases, unavoidable, lowers the belief in the possibility of peace. In turn, having low or no expectations that peace can be achieved depletes the motivation to support a dovish policy approach. Therefore, perceiving future violence as likely *decreases* support for dovish policies. These findings correspond with research showing that threat decreases support for accommodating policies (e.g., Maoz & McCauley, 2008). Simultaneously, the part of threat stemming from perceiving conflict-related violence as intense and acutely painful *increases* the desire for peace. When desires for peace are strong, citizens' support for a dovish approach rises in tandem. Thus, threats from the severity of violence *increase* the support for dovish policies. These findings are in line with research demonstrating the link between threats and support for dovish policies (e.g., Sadler et al., 2005). Last, we demonstrate that the relative weight of each component eventually determines citizens' support or opposition to policies aiming at promoting peace.

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to explore threat from violence by disentangling the two components of threat. We demonstrated that separately gauging perceptions of severity and likelihood is essential not only because people might have different perceptions about the intensity and the likelihood of violence but also because each component seems to trigger opposite processes. Introducing the bi-dimensional approach to threat and demonstrating its utility in deciphering the link between threat and policy preference is one of our contributions to studying attitudes and behaviors during conflict. Our second contribution pertains to the use of hope as a valuable prism through which political processes could be explored. Thinkers from Erich Fromm (1968) to Vaclav Havel (Havel, 1990) stressed the centrality of hope to political processes. However, the empirical use of hope in the study of political behavior is still in its early stage. We "hope" our paper will promote research on hope in a host of political situations.

That said, there is still much to learn about the two components of threat, how they interact with each other and with hope's components, and their roles in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. Potentially confounding factors like proximity to conflict-related violence, personality variations in risk assessment, sensitivity to strategics vs. symbolic threats, and other elements that might impact the relationship between threat and hope were not collected in our study and should further be explored. Future research should thus focus on the boundaries of the two constructs and the factors that moderate their impact.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our study offers a glance at the theoretical and empirical utility of conceptualizing threat and hope as bidimensional constructs and exploring them together in the study of political phenomena. For example, a valuable insight emerges from the findings as to why protracted conflicts, though

characterized by fluctuating levels of violence, are exceptionally resilient to resolution. When conflict escalates, citizens' threats from future violence are likely to rise. Heightened threat increases citizens' wish for peace and consequently raises their support for dovish policies. At the same time, increased threat decreases expectations that peace can materialize and, in turn, decreases support for the same policies. During relative calm, both threat components drop, and so peace might seem more feasible but, at the same time, not as desirable (compared to when violence is surging). Again, the opposite trends generate a standstill concerning public support for peacebuilding and reconciliation.

One of the most disheartening conditions during conflicts is the discrepancy between citizens' high wishes for peace and their disbelief in its attainability. This study suggests that people need to desire peace *and* believe in its feasibility to support the risky process of peacemaking. Some steps have been made to develop and test hope-inducing interventions aimed at increasing the support for negotiations and peacebuilding among those embroiled in violent conflicts (e.g., Cohen-Chen et al., 2015; Leshem et al., 2016). Much more research is needed to understand how to create the paradigmatic change needed to carve a pathway out of violent conflicts.

Declarations

Conflict of interest Authors report no conflict of interest or competing interests.

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