

Political Ideology and Psychological Symptoms Following Terror

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The article examines the associations between political ideology and level of psychological symptoms in youth exposed to terror attacks. The study included 2,999 7th to 10th graders from various parts of Israel. Political ideology was examined in two ways: (a) as a content dimension: “political stand”—holding right, centrist, or left wing views and (b) as a content-free dimension: “ideological commitment”—which measured the strength of the political ideology regardless of its content. Findings indicated that youth holding right wing beliefs reported less distress. However, strong ideological commitment was associated with higher levels of symptoms, regardless of the political stand. The discussion concerns the differentiated role of content and content-free dimensions of a political ideology and its implication in psychological distress in the wake of political terror.

Keywords: *terror; youth; psychological symptoms; ideology; political stand*

Exposure to terror and war, whether directly or indirectly through media reports, may have a variety of psychological consequences for children and adolescents. Particularly salient are posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety (e.g., Papageorgiou et al., 2000; Ronen, Rahav, & Rosenbaum, 2003; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2002; Tulin, Behiye, Osman, Nimet, & Melek, 2003) and a vast array of psychological symptoms of distress as well as health and somatic complaints (Llabre & Hadi, 1994; Slone, Kaminer, & Durrheim, 2000; Vizek-Vidovic, Kutervac-Jagodic, & Arambasic, 2000).

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However, despite evidence pointing to the pathogenic role of political violence, differences in reported levels of distress have been consistently noted. These differences may result from various factors, including the nature and number of stressful and traumatic events that the adolescents have been exposed to (e.g., Qouta, Punamäki, & El-Sarraj, 1995; Thabet & Vostanis, 1999), the amount of fear the event has cast (e.g., Dyregrov, Gupta, Gjestad, & Mukanoheli, 2000; Gavrilovic, Lecic, Knezevic, & Priebe, 2002), previous negative life events (e.g., Rotheram-Borus, Weiss, Alber, & Lester, 2005; Shanahan & Bauer, 2004), as well as personal traits and sociocultural contexts (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). This study will assess the role of political ideology in explaining differences in the reported psychological distress of Israeli adolescents exposed to terror.

Political ideology serves as a lens through which a person understands and interprets political events and therefore has an effect on the psychological reaction to the events (Punamäki, 1996). The importance of examining political stand and ideology is suggested by the terror management theory (Becker, 1973, 1975). According to this theory (Greenberg et al., 1990), our awareness of human vulnerability and mortality leads to the development of cultural institutions that provide order and meaning and thereby ensure literal or symbolic immortality. The protective effect of culture is especially salient when awareness of human vulnerability and death is augmented, as it is in times of war and political conflicts. Under such circumstances, people tend to cling to their cultural beliefs or ideology, embracing individuals who are similar to them (the in-group) and rejecting those who are different (the out-group). It seems that when the awareness of death increases, the role of ideology become more salient as it serves as a buffer, providing order in the chaos, meaning, predictability, and even symbolic immortality and thus reducing the pathogenic effect of stressors. In this way, social or political worldviews and actions may give meaning to traumatic experiences (Tedeschi, 1999).

In Israeli society, political identity is a significant component of the individual's self-perception (e.g., Dinur, Beit-Hallahmi, & Hofman, 1996; Spero, 1986). Israeli adolescents' political ideology is highly salient, and their political awareness is greater than that of their counterparts in a variety of other countries (Ichilov, 2005). The definition of right versus left is dictated by the stands regarding issues of foreign affairs and security, not on economic and social policies (Rahav, 2007). On one hand, right wingers tend to see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as yet another epic attempt to demolish the State of Israel. In their view, the only way to stop the terror is by military force. On the other hand, left wingers hold the view that the only

way to end the conflict would be through dialogue and negotiation between the parties, at the end of which Israel would return lands to the Palestinian authority. Between these two contradicting political views of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict lays the centralist view, which is a mixture of the two views above. This political view is based less on firm and constant attitudes but rather tends to be affected by dynamic political events that occur (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Neuberger, 1991; Rahav, 2007).

These differences in political attitudes are likely to lead to different responses to terror events. A study examining the effects of the first Intifada (the Palestinian uprising in 1987–1991) on various groups in Israeli society found differential effects on right- and left-wing political activists (Pines, 1994). The most negative effect was on Jewish left wing activists, who reported higher levels of emotional burnout than their right-wing counterparts did. It appears that the uprising was incongruent with the former political beliefs regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, therefore leading to a stronger sense of burnout. This highlights the need to understand the role of political ideology of the Israeli youth who have been confronted the terror resulting from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Studies reported that adolescents' ideology buffered the emotional impact of political violence on youths' distress. In a study examining the prevalence of negative psychological symptoms in Israeli youth who have been exposed to political violence, distress was associated with low levels of ideological patriotic commitment. Youths who endorsed higher levels of ideological commitment suffered less from anxiety, low self-confidence, depression, and sense of failure than similarly exposed youth who reported lower ideological commitment (Punamäki, 1996). Similar findings were obtained among Palestinian youths (e.g., Kostelny & Garbarino, 1994; Punamäki, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2001). Especially interesting are cross-cultural comparisons showing that ideologically patriotic committed youth (i.e., militant Black Muslims in Chicago, militant Hamas supporters in the West Bank, and *extreme Zionists*—defined as supporters of a greater Israel) suffered from less distress related to armed conflict than nonideologically committed youth (Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991).

However, these studies identify high ideological commitment with a right-wing political stand. For example, Punamäki (1996) defined ideological commitment based on the glorification of war, patriotic involvement, and defiant attitudes toward the enemy. Defining political ideology as a right-wing viewpoint is a rather limited perspective and does not capture the wider meaning of the term. In fact, Greenberg and Jonas (2003), following Eysenck (1954), have suggested that there is a need to differentiate

between orthogonal political dimensions such as right–left political stands, which falls into the category of content dimension, and a content-free dimension such as the level of ideological rigidity. The content-free dimension may range from low to high, describing the strength of the orientation toward one's political ideology. Therefore, individuals can have strong ideological beliefs whether they hold right- or left-wing political stands, whereas individuals with the same political stand may differ in their ideological commitment.

The importance of differentiating between the content and the intensity of a belief is particularly significant when examining patriotic right-wing positions. Following an extensive meta-analysis, Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) concluded that right-wing ideology is positively related to dogmatism, close mindedness, intolerance of ambiguity, and uncertainty avoidance and negatively related to openness to experience and integrative complexity. The authors claim that right-wing ideological commitment is associated with an inability to adapt to changes. Thus, this may be a factor that impedes one's ability to cope with changes in the political reality. Therefore, higher commitment to a right-wing position entails greater distress whereas lower commitment to the same position entails lower levels of distress. This possibility calls into question the previous findings, which did not differentiate between the content of the ideology and the level of commitment.

This study aims to assess the association between political ideology content dimensions (i.e., right–left wing) and content-free dimensions (i.e., level of ideological commitment) and level of distress in the aftermath of terror. The study will examine whether political ideology can reduce the pathological effects of exposure to terror and negative life events on youths' level of distress. We hypothesize that whereas content dimension of political ideology (i.e., having right- or left-wing ideology) may be associated with reduced distress, high ideological commitment, regardless of the political content, will be associated with elevated distress.

Method

Respondents

This study examined 2,999 adolescents from 11 schools, aged 13 to 15, who were selected by cluster sampling. The schools were drawn from four areas in Israel that differ in their level of exposure to terror attacks during

the beginning of the second Intifada (October 2000 to May 2002): (a) areas within the internationally accepted borders that were not exposed to terror; (b) areas within the internationally accepted borders that were exposed to terror; (c) areas in Judea and Samaria that had low levels of terror incidents; and (d) areas of Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip with high levels of terror incidents. In each area, we randomly chose one secular and one religious high school (except for Area 4, which has no secular schools). The selection of the areas was based on the frequency of terror attacks that took place. High levels of terror attacks in the settlement were areas in which terror attacks were taking place on a daily basis. Low terror attacks in the settlement as well as high terror attacks within the internationally accepted borders were areas in which terror attacks were taking place but not on a daily basis. Low terror attacks within the internationally accepted borders were areas in which no terror attacks took place (Btselem, 2008; Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2008; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008)

After receiving the necessary permits from the Ministry of Education and the consent of the school principals and study participants, we asked all 7th to 10th grade students present on the day of the study to fill out the study questionnaires. On average, the students completed the questionnaires within 45 minutes, in the presence of a research assistant.

Of the participants, 1,244 (42.2%) were boys and 1,701 (57.8%) were girls; 1,043 (35.5%) were in the 7th grade, 1,073 (36.5%) in the 8th grade, 790 (26.9%) in the 9th grade, and 30 (1%) in the 10th grade. 1,148 (39.3%) described themselves as religious, 806 (27.6%) as traditional, and 967 (33.1%) as secular.

Instruments

Personal data. Data were gathered regarding gender, grade, religiosity, and parents' occupation.

Objective exposure to terror. Lavi's exposure to war and terror questionnaire (Lavi & Solomon, 2005) was used to assess objective exposure to terror. In its current form, the questionnaire contains 17 statements describing different kinds of traumatic incidents connected to terror (e.g., "Stones were thrown at a car in which an acquaintance of mine was traveling," "I was injured in a terror attack"). Respondents were asked to indicate which of the events applied to them. Objective exposure to terror was calculated as the total number of terror incidents to which the respondent was exposed.

Scores ranged from 0 to 17. The level of objective exposure to terror varied according to the area in which the youth was living in. High level of exposure were found among youth living in Area 4, whereas low levels were found among youth in Area 1.

Subjective exposure. For each terror incident they endorsed, the respondents were asked to indicate the level of fear they felt at the time, on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not scared*) to 4 (*very scared*; Lavi & Solomon, 2005). Subjective exposure—henceforth referred to as *feeling of fear*—was calculated as the mean of each respondent's responses.

Negative life events. The students were given a list of negative life events (e.g., a parent's unemployment, traffic accident) and were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of them in the previous year, concurrently with their exposure to terror (Lavi & Solomon, 2005).

Political position. Political stand was measured by a single item. "In your opinion, are your political views considered as: right, center, or left?" These terms are well known and used in Israel (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Neuberger, 1991; Rahav, 2007).

The need to include a centrist political view resulted from the fact that in recent years Israel has been governed by a centrist political party which comprises politicians from both the right and left.

Of the participants, 1,921 (70%) identified themselves as politically right wing, 632 (23.0%) as centrists, and 192 (7.0%) as left wing.

Ideological commitment. The nature of the participants' level of ideological commitment, regardless of their political stand, was assessed using an ideological commitment questionnaire devised for this study. The questionnaire consists of 20 statements, each rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*to a great extent*) to 4 (*not at all*; e.g., "I am willing to participate in demonstrations," "I am convinced that I will adhere to my current political views when I am older" and "I think there are some political views that should not be heard"). Ideological commitment was measured as the mean of all the questionnaire items ($\alpha = .89$).

Psychological symptoms. Psychological symptoms were examined using the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI; Derogatis & Spencer, 1982). This is a self-report questionnaire that measures general symptoms of psychological

distress. It is a short version of the SCL-90 (a psychological self-report symptom scale) consisting of 53 items, each of which is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*).

The responses to the BSI can be analyzed both globally and with symptom specificity. The BSI yields scores on 10 symptom subscales: psychoticism, hostility, anxiety, somatization, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, depression, obsession-compulsion, interpersonal sensitivity, and additional symptoms. Participants received 10 scores, each calculated as the mean of the subscale. A global score—the General Severity Index (GSI)—can also be obtained by calculating the mean score of all 53 items.

Internal consistencies as measured by Cronbach's alphas were .96 for the GSI and as follows for each of the subscales: psychoticism—.69; hostility—.70; anxiety—.79; somatization—.83; phobia—.73; paranoia—.67; depression—.77; obsession-compulsion—.81; interpersonal relationships—.72; and additional symptoms—.56.

Results

Exposure to Terror and to Negative Life Events

First, we examined whether right, central, and left wing youth differed in their level of exposure to terror, fear, and negative life events; 2,092 adolescents (70.1%) stated they were exposed to at least one terror incident in the previous year; 19.2% were exposed to one terror incident; 25.9% to two or three terror incidents; 11.5% to four of five terror attacks; and 13.5% to six or more terror attacks. An ANOVA analysis revealed that right-wing youths were more exposed to terror events than those holding left-wing or centralist views, $F(2, 2737) = 45.36, p < .001$.

Of those who were exposed to terror incidents, 1,351 adolescents (64.6%) reported feeling some degree of fear stemming from the experience. A third (29.3%) reported that they were afraid or very afraid. An ANOVA analysis revealed no significant difference in the fear reported by youths holding different political positions, $F(2, 1958) = 2.69$.

In all, 1,110 respondents (37%) reported having experienced negative life events in the previous year. 29.3% reported one negative event, 6.7% reported two negative life events, and 1.1% reported three negative life events. There was no significant difference in the number of life events experienced by respondents holding different political positions, $F(2, 2745) = 1.34$.

Political Stand and Ideological Commitment

Next, differences in the level of commitment to political ideology between youth holding right-, central-, and left-wing beliefs were examined.

An ANOVA revealed significant differences in the ideological commitment measures of respondents holding different political stands, $F(2, 2676) = 139.06$, $p < .001$. Scheffe tests indicated that youth holding right-wing beliefs were the most ideologically committed, followed by youth holding left-wing beliefs, and finally those holding centralist views.

Level of Distress

The main aim of the study was to examine whether distress levels following exposure to terror vary according to political position. Thus, this section examines differences in distress levels among youth holding right-, central-, and left-wing beliefs.

Table 1 presents BSI scores for the entire sample and for each of the political groups. As can be seen in the table, a Scheffe test indicates that youth holding centrist view had higher overall symptomatology scores—GSI, somatization, and obsessive-compulsive complaints—compared to both youth holding right- and left-wing beliefs. Furthermore, this group reported a higher level of phobic anxiety, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity compared to youth holding right-wing beliefs, and more symptoms of hostility compared to youth holding left-wing beliefs.

Distress (GSI) by Political Stand, Exposure, and Fear

To rule out the possibility that differences in distress levels between the political position groups are related to differences in their exposure to terror or fear, we used a two-way ANOVA to examine the associations between distress, political stand, and objective and subjective exposure.

The ANOVA of distress associated with the interaction between political stand and exposure was significant, $F(2, 2516) = 11.23$, $p < .001$, as well as for exposure as a main effect, $F(1, 2516) = 44.56$, $p < .001$. No main effect was found for political stand, $F(2, 2516) = 0.86$, ns .

The ANOVA of distress as a function of the interaction between political stand and fear was nonsignificant, $F(2, 1814) = 1.29$, ns . A significant main effect was found only for fear, $F(1, 1814) = 39.14$, $p < .001$.

To better understand the interaction found between political stand, exposure, and distress, we examined correlations between exposure to terror and distress within each political stand group (Table 2). The results indicated

Table 1
Measures of BSI According to Political Stand Group

Subscale	All subjects (<i>n</i> = 2,525)	1. Right Wing (<i>n</i> = 1,772)	2. Central Wing (<i>n</i> = 569)	3. Left Wing (<i>n</i> = 184)	<i>F</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
GSI	.68 (.67)	.66 (.66)	.76 (.70)	.61 (.57)	5.56** 2 > 1,3
Psychoticism	.54 (.77)	.53 (.77)	.60 (.78)	.45 (.69)	3.33*
Hostility	.76 (.89)	.75 (.90)	.82 (.92)	.60 (.69)	4.27* 2 > 3
Anxiety	.82 (.83)	.81 (.83)	.89 (.85)	.75 (.73)	3.09**
Somatization	.45 (.70)	.43 (.68)	.56 (.78)	.39 (.58)	8.41*** 2 > 1,3
Phobic anxiety	.82 (.88)	.79 (.87)	.92 (.91)	.80 (.84)	4.51* 2 > 1
Paranoid ideation	.87 (.87)	.85 (.87)	.92 (.91)	.83 (.79)	1.62
Depression	.66 (.77)	.64 (.76)	.76 (.81)	.63 (.70)	5.89** 2 > 1
Obsessive-compulsive	.60 (.78)	.59 (.77)	.69 (.82)	.51 (.62)	4.86** 2 > 1,3
Interpersonal sensitivity	.66 (.88)	.63 (.87)	.78 (.91)	.61 (.78)	6.61** 2 > 1

Note: BSI = Brief Symptom Inventory; GSI = General Severity Index.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

significant associations between exposure and distress in each of the political groups ($r = .16$, $p < .001$; $r = .25$, $p < .001$; $r = .32$, $p < .001$ for right, left, and central positions, respectively). z tests for the comparison of correlations showed a significant difference between youth holding right versus central beliefs ($z = 3.40$, $p < .001$). Other differences were nonsignificant, that is, the positive relationship between exposure and distress is significantly lower among youth with right-wing views than among youth with central beliefs.

Distress (GSI) by Political Stand and Ideological Commitment

A major aim of this study was to explore whether differences in the level of distress are related to differences in ideological commitment, regardless of political stand. Therefore, correlations between level of ideological

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

	<i>M (SD)</i>	Subjective Fear	Life Events	Ideological Commitment	Distress
Total sample					
Exposure to terror	2.50 (2.84)	.09***	.03	.35***	.19***
Subjective fear	2.07 (0.90)		.06**	.08**	.27***
Life events	0.46 (0.67)			.01	.14***
Ideological commitment	2.53 (0.81)				.19***
Distress (GSI)	0.68 (0.67)				
Right wing					
Exposure to terror	2.83 (3.02)	.11***	.02	.34***	.16***
Subjective fear	2.06 (0.88)		.07**	.08**	.29***
Life events	0.45 (0.67)			.02	.15***
Ideological commitment	2.69 (0.81)				.18***
Distress (GSI)	0.66 (0.67)				
Center wing					
Exposure to terror	1.84 (2.33)	.06	.09*	.25***	.32***
Subjective fear	2.16 (0.97)		.01	.21***	.24***
Life events	0.49 (0.66)			.07	.09*
Ideological commitment	2.10 (0.68)				.35***
Distress (GSI)	0.76 (0.70)				
Left wing					
Exposure to terror	1.41 (1.71)	.20*	.12	.11	.25***
Subjective fear	2.04 (0.86)		.06	-.03	.18
Life events	0.50 (0.73)			-.08	.14
Ideological commitment	2.33 (0.68)				.28***
Distress (GSI)	0.61 (0.57)				

Note: GSI = General Severity Index.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

commitment and distress were examined for the entire sample, as well as for each of the political position groups (Table 2). Results revealed positive correlations between ideological commitment and distress for the entire sample and for each of the political groups: among youth holding right-wing beliefs ($r = .18, p < .001$), among youth with central views ($r = .35, p < .001$) and among youth holding left-wing beliefs ($r = .28, p < .001$). The correlation among center-wing youths was significantly higher than the correlation among youth holding right-wing views ($z = 3.55, p < .001$),

indicating that ideology is more strongly associated with distress among youth with central views than among youth holding right-wing views.

Exposure, Fear, and Ideology Commitment, by Political Stand

To explore whether ideological commitment is associated with exposure to terror events, we have assessed the associations between ideological commitment and exposure to terror and fear for the entire sample and for each of the political stand groups separately.

Table 2 also presents correlations between exposure, fear, and ideological commitment. Results indicate that ideological commitment was associated with exposure to terror for youth holding right-wing views ($r = .34$; $p < .001$) as well as for youth with central views ($r = .25$; $p < .001$) but not for youth holding left-wing beliefs ($r = .11$; *ns*). Ideological commitment was associated with fear among the central-wing youth ($r = .21$; $p < .001$) but not among youth holding left-wing beliefs ($r = -.03$; *ns*). The association between ideological commitment and fear among youth with right-wing views was marginal ($r = .08$; $p < .01$).

Regression Analysis for Predicting Distress

To examine the role of political stand and ideological commitment in youths' psychiatric symptoms, over and above levels of exposure, fear, and life events, two sets of regression analyses were conducted—the first for the entire sample (Table 3) and the second for each subgroup by political stand (Table 4). Gender, age, and geographic area were not found to be significant in former analysis and therefore are neither reported here nor included in the regression models.

In the entire sample (Table 3), exposure to terror, subjective fear, and recent life events were entered first and political stand was entered second, as two dummy variables: rightist stand (vs. centrist and leftist) and leftist stand (vs. centrist and rightist); or centrist stand (vs. rightist and leftist) and leftist stand (vs. centrist and rightist). These two combinations of political stands were chosen to avoid the multicollinearity of rightist and centrist stands ($r = -.83$, $p < .001$). Ideological commitment was entered third. (For means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations see Table 2.)

Findings indicated that greater exposure to terror, higher subjective fear, and more recent life events were related to greater distress. Adolescents

Table 3
Regression Analyses of Distress on Exposure, Fear, Life Events,
Political Stand, and Ideological Commitment

Step		<i>B</i>	SEB	β	<i>B</i>	SEB	β
1	Exposure	0.03	.01	.13***	0.03	.01	.13***
	Fear	0.20	.02	.25***	0.20	.02	.25***
	Life events	0.14	.02	.13***	0.14	.02	.13***
2	Exposure	0.04	.01	.14***	0.04	.01	.14***
	Fear	0.20	.02	.25***	0.20	.02	.25***
	Life events	0.13	.02	.13***	0.13	.02	.13***
				Right wing			Centrist
		-0.13	.04	-.08***	0.13	.04	.07**
				Left wing			Left
	-0.08	.07	-.03	0.05	.07	.02	
3	Exposure	0.02	.01	.09***	0.02	.01	.09***
	Fear	0.19	.02	.24***	0.19	.02	.24***
	Life events	0.13	.02	.13***	0.13	.02	.13***
				Right wing			Centrist
		-0.20	.04	-.13***	0.20	.04	.12***
				Left wing			Left
		-0.12	.07	-.04	0.08	.07	.03
	Ideological commitment	0.14	.02	.16***	0.14	.02	.16***

Note: For both analyses: Step 1, $R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$; Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$; Step 3, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .001$. Total $R^2 = .13$, $F(6, 1804) = 46.23$, $p < .001$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. SEB = Standard Error of the regression coefficient B.

holding right-wing beliefs were less distressed than others, whereas centrist adolescents were more distressed than others. Higher ideological commitment was related to greater distress, beyond exposure, fear, life events, and political stand. It added to adolescents' distress and did not reduce the effect of the other independent variables, as their contribution remained significant.

To examine the effect of ideological commitment on distress within each of the political position subgroup, three regression analyses were conducted for each of the political position groups (Table 4). (For means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations, see Table 2.)

For youth holding right-wing views, greater exposure to terror, higher fear, and more recent life events were related to greater distress. Ideological

Table 4
Regression Analyses of Distress on Exposure, Fear, Life Events,
and Ideological Commitment Within Political Stand Subgroups

Step		Right Wing			Central Wing			Left Wing		
		<i>B</i>	SEB	β	<i>B</i>	SEB	β	<i>B</i>	SEB	β
1	Exposure	0.02	.01	.10***	0.09	.02	.30***	0.04	.04	.11
	Fear	0.21	.02	.27***	0.18	.04	.23***	0.10	.06	.14
	Life events	0.14	.03	.13***	0.09	.05	.08	0.17	.07	.22*
2	Exposure	0.01	.01	.06*	0.08	.01	.24***	0.06	.04	.14
	Fear	0.21	.02	.26***	0.13	.04	.16***	0.10	.06	.14
	Life events	0.13	.03	.13***	0.08	.05	.07	0.19	.07	.24**
	Ideological commitment	0.10	.02	.12***	0.34	.05	.30***	0.24	.08	.28**

Note: Right wing: Step 1, $R^2 = .11$, $p < .001$; Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$; Total $R^2 = .12$, $F(4, 1316) = 44.54$, $p < .001$; Central wing: Step 1, $R^2 = .16$, $p < .001$; Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .001$; Total $R^2 = .24$, $F(4, 373) = 29.48$, $p < .001$; Left wing: Step 1, $R^2 = .10$, $p < .05$; Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .01$; Total $R^2 = .17$, $F(4, 107) = 5.65$, $p < .001$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. SEB = Standard Error of the regression coefficient *B*.

commitment added 1% to the prediction, beyond exposure, fear, and life events. For youth with central views, greater exposure to terror and higher fear predicted greater distress, yet recent life events were unrelated to distress. Ideological commitment added 8% to the prediction beyond exposure and fear. For youth holding left-wing beliefs, more recent life events were related to greater distress. Ideological commitment added 7% to the prediction, beyond life events. In all three cases, ideological commitment did not mediate the association between exposure, fear, life events, and distress, as they retained their significance.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the association between youths' political ideology and distress following terror attacks. Political ideology was divided into two variables: the first—political stand—measured the content of the political ideology, reflecting the unique interpretation of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The second—ideological commitment—measured the strength of political ideology (i.e., how strong is one's belief in one's political perceptions). The study found that the content dimension

(i.e., having a right- or left-wing stand) was associated with less distress whereas the content-free dimension (i.e., level of ideological commitment) was associated with more distress.

It appears that right- or left-wing political interpretations of terror events were associated with fewer symptoms of distress among adolescents compared to those with centrist political views. This may be due to the fact that the centrist interpretation of the political conflict is not clear-cut and unequivocal and is in fact a confused mix of leftist and rightist views (Neuberger, 1991; Rahav, 2007). Previous evidence indicated that assigning unambiguous significance to stressful events lessens distress levels, as it places the event into a framework of structured meaning (Bettelheim, 1961; Overcash, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 1996). This was found to be especially important in times of political violence and terror attacks (Tedeschi, 1999). Therefore, we estimate that the ability of the centrists to assign unambiguous and meaningful interpretations to terror events is lower than that of the left or right wingers. In contrast, left- or right-wing political views contain far clearer and cohesive explanations for the factors leading to the occurrence of terror events as well as effective ways of combating terror; in other words, these views consist of a clearer understanding of terror and provide terror coping strategies with greater meaning.

While youth holding right- or left-wing beliefs fared better than the centrist, right, and left differ in significant ways. While the right-wing view regards the Intifada as an inevitable war, the left-wing view sees it as something that may be circumvented (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007). This implies that for youth holding right-wing views, the current violence of the Intifada is congruent with their world view. According to a study by Pines (1994), when the ideological assumptions are in line with the political reality, better adjustment is expected. Therefore, it appears that youth holding right-wing views are less affected by terror when compared to youth holding left-wing views.

Further examination of the results indicated that although youth holding left- or right-wing views had the same level of distress, they differed in their level of objective exposure. Youth holding right-wing beliefs were the most exposed group, suffering from higher levels of exposure compared to both youth with left or central beliefs. However, although they were the most exposed group, youth holding right-wing beliefs reported having the same level of subjective exposure, meaning fear, as did youth holding left or central views. Moreover, when the association between exposure and distress was examined separately for each of the political groups, the association was significantly lower for youth with right-wing views, indicating that in this group high exposure to terror is less associated with distress than in the other groups.

These results point to the fact that in this case, the right-wing political ideology tends to be positively associated with well being in the face of terror events, more so than the left and the centrist view points. The association between right-wing ideology and elevated well-being during arm-conflict was noted in several studies (e.g., Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991; Kostelny & Garbarino, 1994; Punamäki, 1996; Punamäki, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2001). It seems that at least for political terror, a right-wing ideology that views political violence as inescapably imposed by the enemy is more likely to assign meaning to the suffering and to help cope with it.

The study also examined ideological commitment, measuring the strength of one's political belief, regardless of its content. Although a well-held political ideology (right or left) may have an adaptive side, this was not found regarding the strength of the commitment to the political ideology. The results suggested that having a strong belief in one's political ideology may be maladaptive, as it was associated with higher levels of distress. This was true regardless of the youth's political views. Specifically, adolescents who were identified with high levels of ideological commitment reported more psychological distress than less ideologically committed youth of the same political stand.

It appears that the fact that the adolescent holds a clear view that explains and assigns meaning to political events is effective in itself. However, the higher the commitment to that view, the lower is the adolescent's ability to consider other options for understanding reality and traumatic events. Previous studies have already found that cognitive flexibility is associated with the ability to cope more effectively (Block & Block, 1980; Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Westphal, & Coifman, 2004). This being the case, greater commitment to a specific political view may preclude cognitive flexibility and increase rigidity, which in turn may negatively affect the adolescent's coping abilities.

Another interesting finding of this study is that although ideological rigidity is not to the advantage of any political group, it was less strongly associated with distress among the right-wing group, compared to the other groups. There is no satisfactory explanation for this. However, some researchers claim that right-wing stands are, by their very nature, characterized by ideological rigidity, as suggested by rigidity of the right hypothesis (Tetlock, 1989). Similarly, in our study it was also found that youth holding right-wing views were characterized by the highest ideological commitment. It is possible that a right-wing political stand is by its nature more rigid and is less affected by a higher level of ideological commitment. In contrast, left-wing and centrist stands that are normally characterized as

being far more flexible (Fibert & Ressler, 1998) are negatively influenced to a far greater degree by a stronger cognitive rigidity.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that a belief in a well-held political ideology that assigns meaning to political events in itself constitutes an effective coping mechanism. Even so, when the level of commitment to certain political views is high, this may result in cognitive rigidity which undermines the ability to cope with the complex reality of traumatic events.

As for the other variables associated with distress, our study found that objective and subjective exposure to terror and negative life events are all positively associated with level of distress among adolescents. This is all in line with previous findings (Qouta et al., 1995; Thabet & Vostanis, 1999; Zahr, 1996), indicating that the level and proximity of the traumatic events are associated with one's level of distress. The association between subjective exposure to terror and distress found in the current study, as well as in studies on adults (Dyregrov et al., 2000; Gavrilovic et al., 2002) indicates the importance of understanding the subjective interpretation of the event. As Lazarus and Folkman (1987) have postulated, the effects of stressors are dependent on subjective appraisal and resources and therefore a better understanding of the events' effects should be achieved through examining subjective means of interpretation, such as fear and political stand.

This study also found an association between subjective and objective exposure and ideological commitment. Some theories (e.g., terror management theory) suggest that the need to cling to cultural worldviews is stronger when mortality is salient (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). According to this notion, our awareness of human vulnerability and mortality leads to the development of cultural institutions that provide order and meaning and thereby ensure literal or symbolic immortality. The protective effect of culture is especially salient when awareness of human vulnerability and death intensifies, as it does in times of war and political violence. It may follow that youth exposed to terror will tend to cling to their political beliefs more than unexposed youth, thus intensifying the former's ideological commitment.

Overall, the study findings indicate that while holding a firm political stand, especially a right-wing one, is associated with less psychological distress following exposure to terror, having a rigid ideology may lessen its effect. Extreme ideological commitment is maladaptive in itself, regardless of the youth's political view. It appears that both the content of the political belief and the level of the belief are important for understanding the association between political ideology and distress levels among adolescents.

Our study has several limitations. First, the study was designed to encompass various parts of Israel that differed in their levels of exposure to terror. However, the areas more exposed to terror are the settlements outside the 1967 borders, which are also mostly populated by right-wing families. As a result, only a small percentage (7%) of the youth participating in the study held left-wing ideology. Although they amount to almost 200 adolescents, caution should be taken when generalizing the findings. In addition, the research population consists of adolescents. As political identity among adolescents is in the process of being formed, it is difficult to make inferences about the effect of the political ideology on distress in adults. This is even more so giving the fact that in this study political position was examined by a single item. Another limitation refers to the extent to which the ideological commitment dimension is indeed a content-free dimension that measures the strength of political belief. The study shows that right-wing youth have a higher level of ideological commitment, which may indicate that there is a connection between content and content-free political dimensions, as some researchers suggested (Jost et al., 2003). Nonetheless, despite the potential connection between the different dimensions, we think that the differentiation enables a deeper understanding of the broader concept of "political ideology." It also should be noted that political ideology and religiosity, as well as other measures in this study, are multifaceted concepts. Hence, our investigation is based on only a narrow operationalization of these concepts. Finally, it is difficult to generalize from one political context to another, since not only the political reality may be different but also the content of the political ideologies. This being the case, the results of this study regarding political ideology are limited and further studies in other political contexts are needed.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the current study provides a broader understanding of the connection between political ideology and distress, as well as of the different dimensions constituting political ideology. Thus, it contributes to our understanding of the role of cognitive perceptions in distress following traumatic events.

It seems that extreme political ideologies are associated with rigidity, which in turn is implicated in distress. Thus, these findings suggest that peace education aimed to increase tolerance and coexistence is called for. Such educational programs may promote both more tolerant and accepting attitudes toward people in other political/national groups and help reduce personal distress. The educational and psychological establishments often hold nonpartisan attitudes. That is, they refrain from promoting any specific political stand. Rather, they tend to endorse more general and neutral attitudes and

shy away from dealing with political issues. It seems, however, that promoting greater flexibility while discouraging more rigidity may entail considerable benefits both to society as a whole and to the individual citizen.

Future studies are encouraged to assess in greater detail the role of ideology in coping with adversity. Such studies may benefit from differentiating content and content-free ideology, as well as including both qualitative and quantitative measure that will deepen our understanding of both the components of ideology and its effects on psychological well-being. Finally, to allow generalizability, future studies should assess both adults and adolescents in various political contexts.

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