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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Psychology

Legitimizing inclusion: Psychological interventions increase support for minority inclusion in the political game, but less so during wartime

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Abstract

Minority inclusion is important to ensure proper representation in democracies. Yet, even in democracies, minority inclusion in politics has historically been challenged by members of majority groups, largely due to perceived threat. Existing literature recognizes psychological factors—namely, values, threats, and norms—driving support for political inclusion, but knowledge of relevant interventions remains limited. We designed psychological interventions, presented as news articles, and tested which ones increased mainstream Jewish majority group members' support for the Palestinian Arab minority's political inclusion in coalition formation in Israel. We employed this context, where the perceived ties between the minority's identity and the identity of the rival in the ongoing conflict make the threat particularly salient, in two critical timepoints: the run-up to a decisive election (Study 1, $N = 1248$) and during an ongoing war (Study 2, $N = 1391$). We found that during the run-up to the election, interventions targeting value conflict, tension reduction, and norm perceptions increased support for political inclusion, but none of them had the same effect during the war. These findings illustrate the potential of a real-world intervention tournament, with implications for the promotion of political inclusion in the field.

KEYWORDS

intergroup relations, minority inclusion, psychological interventions, threat, values

Lee Aldar and Ruthie Pliskin contributed equally and share first authorship.

INTRODUCTION

"Without Ahmed Tibi, Gantz has no government," read billboards throughout Israel ahead of the country's 2020 election, paid for by the governing right-wing Likud party. This reference to a well-known legislator representing Palestinian citizens of Israel (i.e., Ahmed Tibi) alongside the main candidate (i.e., Benny Gantz) challenging the incumbent Netanyahu's premiership could have been read as a statement of fact, as support from Palestinian-Arab was then (and still is) necessary for the formation of a center-left governing coalition. Likud was aware, however, that many—if not most—Jewish Israelis would read the message as a warning: Political cooperation with parties representing the disadvantaged Palestinian minority had long been a taboo for Israel's mainstream Zionist parties, and the former had previously never been included in a ruling coalition. Forming a government involving Palestinian parties was therefore seen as threatening the (Jewish-dominated) status quo.

This case of ethnic-political exclusion, in a society that views itself as democratic, is not singular to Israeli society. Historically, states—even supposed democracies—have struggled with granting full civic rights to Indigenous and other disadvantaged groups (Kymlicka, 2000), hereafter referred to as minority groups. Often, even after formally recognizing minorities' political rights, it takes time until countries begin regarding minority members as legitimate political partners in practice. In Australia, decades passed after the Indigenous minority legally gained voting rights until it was integrated into higher levels of government (Richards, 2021). Similarly, in Colombia, the Afro-Colombian minority only recently first gained representation in the government (Agrawal et al., 2012). In Israel, it took nearly sixty years after the country's establishment for the first Palestinian minister to be appointed, and, even then, the minister came from a Zionist party rather than one representing the Palestinian public in Israel.

The inclusion of minorities in political processes—from organizing and partaking in collective action, through voting and participating in elections, to gaining representation—is considered indicative of stable liberal democracies (Agarin, 2020; Sullivan & Transue, 1999), making it a critical issue in modern politics. American and comparative political science literatures provide evidence for the positive effect of minority representation on intergroup relations (Chauchard, 2014; Zonszein & Grossman, 2024). Nonetheless, intolerant attitudes and delegitimizing norms held by politicians and society at large often hinder minorities' political inclusion (Dancygier et al., 2015). Accordingly, it is important to understand whether and how the political inclusion of minorities can be promoted. In this paper, we aim to develop and examine means to increase majority support for political inclusion in the context of intergroup conflict by using the case of Palestinian political inclusion in the Israeli executive branch to test psychological interventions at two critical time points: in the run-up to a critical election (in 2020) and during an ongoing war (in 2024).

Political exclusion as a manifestation of intolerance

Despite the premise that democratic societies should protect the rights and representation of minorities, widespread opposition to political inclusion implies that exclusion is rooted in strong psychological tendencies for intergroup bias, which overrule (or at least compete with) this basic democratic principle. Support for the political inclusion of minorities is a key component of political tolerance, which in turn is connected to general support for democratic principles (Gibson, 2011; Halperin et al., 2014; Sullivan et al., 1982). That is, people living in democracies generally identify as supporters of democratic values (Claassen, 2020; McClosky & Brill, 1983), an identification that should theoretically be linked to political tolerance in general and support for minority inclusion specifically (Marcus et al., 1995;

Sullivan & Transue, 1999). However, political tolerance also presents democratic citizens and leaders with a dilemma, as it requires them to safeguard the full political rights of groups toward which they have animosity (Marcus et al., 1995; Sullivan et al., 1982). As a result, citizens and political decision-makers in liberal democracies often deviate from democratic values, despite publicly endorsing them (Cooley, 2015). Threat perceptions play a critical role in this process.

The inclusion of minorities in politics is often perceived as threatening by the majority, especially in a conflict setting. Given that inclusion challenges existing power relations, it can pose both a realistic (power-centered) and a symbolic (value-centered) threat to any power-holding majority (Stephan et al., 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2013). This threat perception becomes even more apparent—and potentially dangerous—in societies that live in an ongoing violent conflict, where a minority group identified with an enemy might become broadly delegitimized (Bar-Tal, 1990). The degree of perceived intergroup threat is associated with dehumanization (Cassese, 2021), intolerance, and the promotion of exclusionist political attitudes (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008; Shamir & Sullivan, 1983). It also predicts negative outgroup attitudes (Riek et al., 2006) and justifies harm to delegitimized groups (Bar-Tal, 1990), including violence and extreme degradation (Janoff-Bulman & Werther, 2008). In such societies, delegitimizing beliefs are societally shared, often making them normative.

Indeed, exclusionary attitudes toward some groups in societies in conflict, such as Israel, may constitute a social norm (Hermann et al., 2023). Social norms—that is, expectations about what is considered appropriate in a specific social setting—are known to broadly shape political attitudes and behavior (McDonald & Crandall, 2015). Exclusionary norms, accordingly, can uphold exclusion on a societal scale. Democracy derives much of its strength from norms (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), and even in the face of conflicting democratic values, exclusion grounded in threat perceptions is often reinforced by norms (Mortensen et al., 2019; Sparkman & Walton, 2017; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Thus, perceived societal norms regarding minority political participation constitute another mechanism through which an exclusionary status quo is maintained.

Because, as we reviewed, exclusionary attitudes are grounded in perceived threat and reinforced by social norms, people may adopt them despite the contradiction with democratic values. This makes attitudes toward political inclusion of minorities particularly challenging to address, but understanding these processes may also pave the way to identifying interventions to foster more inclusive attitudes. Accordingly, we turned to existing literature and to the field to identify potential interventions to increase public support for the political inclusion of a delegitimized minority, focusing on the case of Palestinian political representatives in Israel.

Avenues for interventions to increase support for political inclusion

The challenge of reducing intergroup prejudice has led scholars of intergroup relations to develop and assess various psychological interventions (e.g., Bruneau et al., 2018; Paluck et al., 2021; Prentice & Paluck, 2020; Aldar et al., 2025). The rich literature on political intolerance—albeit not, to the best of our knowledge, assessing interventions designed to address this particular challenge—provides theoretical insight on relevant mechanisms to target. In our exploration of ways to foster political inclusion, we therefore first considered theory-driven interventions, drawing on three key predictors of political (in)tolerance: the salience of democratic values, threat perception, and changed perceived norms.

Research points to the internalization of democratic values as one way to increase political tolerance, even in situations in which being tolerant is particularly challenging (Halperin et al., 2014; Marcus et al., 1995; Sullivan et al., 1982; Sullivan & Transue, 1999). In accordance with this research, we propose an intervention based on value conflict, or value inconsistency,

aimed at revealing existing gaps between individuals' broader values and their more specific attitudes (Festinger, 1962; Paluck et al., 2021). Once the inconsistency is revealed, the exposed individual faces an uncomfortable tension and wishes to resolve it due to the inherent urge to maintain a consistent and positive image (Paluck et al., 2021). When the value is central enough to their self-concept, the resolution is achieved through a change in the specific behavior or attitude, rather than the broader value (Gringart et al., 2008). The intervention can address the value conflict directly, priming one's attachment to the broader values or addressing the specific context (see Bruneau et al., 2018; Stone & Fernandez, 2008), but also indirectly, to prompt less identity threat and defensiveness. We hypothesized that a value conflict intervention emphasizing the connection between political inclusion and democracy might accordingly increase support for political inclusion.

Individuals' perceived threat from the outgroup is also highly relevant to address, as threats are known to relate to exclusionary tendencies and political intolerance (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008; Hutchison, 2014; Wang & Chang, 2006). Despite broad interest in perceived threat as a predictor of negative intergroup attitudes, only a handful of studies have examined this relationship experimentally (e.g., Rios et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there is evidence that framing situations as opportunities rather than threats can diminish threat perceptions (Rios et al., 2018). The case of minority inclusion readily allows for such reframing, as including groups viewed as "extreme" in political processes can, in fact, lead that group to adopt more moderate, mainstream attitudes (Schwedler, 2011). Thus, an intervention focusing on the potential that minority inclusion holds for potential societal tension reduction, using real examples given from conflict-torn societies, may be effective in making the opportunities in minority inclusion more salient. We hypothesized that such an intervention would increase individuals' perception of inclusion as potentially tension-reducing, thus increasing support for political inclusion.

As social norms play a major role in shaping public opinion, some psychological interventions have targeted norm perceptions to promote a desired change (Munger, 2017; Prentice & Paluck, 2020; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Exposing individuals to information describing ingroup norms around minority inclusion as more positive is likely to motivate them to adjust their attitudes in the same direction. In situations where the target attitudes are not reflected in present norms—as in our test case—trending norms (Mortensen et al., 2019) can be used to indicate that support for inclusion is expected to increase in the future. By emphasizing a future prediction of an increasing trend, a trending norms intervention can encourage attitude shifts among a majority better than a static norm intervention. We hypothesized that a trending norms-based intervention demonstrating increasing public support for political inclusion would shift individuals' perception of ingroup societal norms surrounding political minority inclusion, which in turn should lead to increased support for inclusion.

In addition to basing interventions on broader psychological theory, we considered the specific context in which we intervene. We know the effectiveness of interventions can be context-dependent (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Walton & Wilson, 2018; Yeager & Walton, 2011), and thus considering the political context in general and the more specific asymmetric conflict setting is important. This led us to develop and test three additional interventions. Specifically, these target instrumentality, group-based guilt, and improving perceptions. For more details regarding the three additional interventions, see Supplementary Materials SM5.

Progressing through the mainstream

When considering how different psychological processes can lead to meaningful societal change, it is imperative to recognize the most relevant populations. We argue that in some

settings, like the Israeli case, the political mainstream (i.e., centrists) is most likely to shift the political reality for several reasons. First and foremost, studies show that the majority of the public is, in fact, much less politicized than psychologists tend to assume (Kalmoe, 2020). In Israel, for example, the political mainstream has been on the rise (Shalev, 2018); as of 2022, around 24% of Jewish Israelis self-identify as centrists, with an additional 23% identifying as moderates on either side of the ideological spectrum (Hermann et al., 2023), indicating that centrists and moderates jointly hold significant political power. Moreover, in parliamentary democracies, moderate parties often decide who forms the government, thus having an outsized influence on outcomes.

Additionally, mainstream individuals are most likely to be convinced to change their attitudes since they are likely less confident in their political beliefs than extremists to the right or the left and more tolerant of different viewpoints in general (van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019). Finally, on key issues, parties on the right and left tend to position themselves relative to the mean, or moderate, stance, either by converging or diverging from it (Adams & Somer-Topcu, 2009; Zur, 2021). For these reasons, we believe that on many occasions, the political mainstream holds the key to shifting societal attitudes in and out of the consensus. In this research, as pre-registered, we complement all analyses with a focus on centrists as a target audience of interest for interventions to increase support for minority inclusion in politics.

The current research

We conducted two studies in the context of the political inclusion of the Palestinian minority in Israel. Many Jewish Israelis consider Palestinian citizens not only an outgroup but also enemy collaborators whose power needs to be restrained (see also Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008; Enos & Gidron, 2018; Halperin et al., 2014; Smooha, 2019). Therefore, even though most Palestinian citizens of Israel strive to be included as equal members of society and politics, their potential involvement in political decision-making is viewed by many as a threat. The overarching consensus when we began this research regarded their exclusion from government as necessary to ensure the country's security (Ghanem & Khatib, 2017). Israel's parliament ("Knesset") includes a small minority of legislators (i.e., Members of Knesset, hereafter MKs) who are Palestinian citizens of Israel, termed "Israeli Arabs" by most Jewish Israeli citizens.[1] While they belong to different political parties with different ideologies, changes in the vote threshold for inclusion in parliament have led all Palestinian-majority parties in some recent elections to run on a single ticket, known as the Joint List.

We conducted Study 1 in 2020 before the Joint List or any of the parties forming it had ever been included in Israel's ruling coalition. Nonetheless, in 2019, prominent politicians and media personalities began floating the idea of a political partnership between the center-left and the Palestinian parties as potentially the only viable alternative to the long-running rule of Benjamin Netanyahu and the right (Hendrix & Eglash, 2019). Political inclusion was not a popular idea due to the general context described above, and divisive election campaigns made a point of highlighting existing conflict-related tensions. Yet, Study 1 was conducted during a period of relative calm in the security domain. In 2021, a Palestinian party joined a coalition government for the first time in the country's history.

We ran Study 2 several years later (2024), when political partnership with Palestinian representatives again became an unlikely scenario in Israel in light of the ongoing catastrophic

[1]We used the term "Israeli Arab" in the study's questionnaires to refer to Palestinian citizens of Israel since it is the term most used in Jewish Israeli society. However, in the rest of the paper, we prioritize using the term Palestinians to acknowledge the nationhood of Palestinian people within and outside of Israel's borders.

Israel-Hamas war. Notably, at this time, Israeli Jews' fear and perceived threat from Palestinian citizens of Israel became heightened (England, 2023), despite the fact that Palestinian citizens of Israel were not involved in hostilities against Israeli Jews, and some were among the victims of the October 7 attacks. In other words, while there was no elevated threat from this minority group in practice, Jewish citizens were generally more likely to perceive such elevation. The escalation reflected a meaningful shift in the conflict context, which past literature suggests might impact intergroup attitudes and behavior (e.g., Berrebi & Klor, 2006; Hasan-Aslih et al., 2020; Sharvit et al., 2010). Given the potential harmful psychological consequences of such violent shifts, we hypothesized that the findings identified in the first study might be challenged by the changed circumstances.

To test multiple interventions in these contexts, we employed an intervention tournament design (see Aldar et al., 2025; Hameiri & Moore-Berg, 2022 for an overview). Intervention tournaments test and compare several different interventions to discover which is (most) effective and thus applicable for tackling complicated real-world puzzles (Hameiri & Moore-Berg, 2022). Minorities' political inclusion in a democratic conflict setting provides a highly relevant setting for an intervention tournament: on the surface, minorities (e.g., Palestinian citizens of Israel) are marginalized, making it challenging to foster political tolerance among the majority. However, the context of intergroup conflict (e.g., Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories and its mutually destructive, though asymmetric, consequences) provides an additional layer of complexity through heightened threat perceptions, based in part on objective threats. This added layer, we argue, makes this a problem that could involve overcoming more than one psychological barrier, calling for a design that can quickly and effectively test interventions against one another and against a control condition.

STUDY 1

We conducted Study 1 ahead of the March 2020 parliamentary election in Israel, the lead-up to which provided an ideal setting for testing interventions designed to tackle the psychological mechanisms involved in majority group members' legitimization of minorities' political inclusion. The study was part of a collaborative lab-field applied research project at the aChord Center in Israel.

Method

Study 1 consisted of a two-wave design, with the T1 questionnaire delivered in two parts (due to length), and T2, the intervention tournament, beginning with exposure to the interventions (or empty control). Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of each survey, and participants were debriefed following T2, which entailed deception. The study received ethics approval from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Approval Number 650119) and was pre-registered on AsPredicted (https://aspredicted.org/9PS_PGR).

Participants

Recruitment was conducted online through iPanel, an Israeli panel that compensates participants for participation. In T1, anticipating attrition of up to 15% between the two waves, we collected data from 1433 participants who successfully completed all attention checks in

T1 (49% women; ages 18–84, $M_{age}=43.3$, $SD_{age}=15.44$; 42.5% centrists, 30.7% leftists, 26.8% rightists). Demographics for centrists ($n=609$), our pre-registered subgroup of interest, were similar (52.5% women; ages 18–84, $M_{age}=44.89$, $SD_{age}=15.62$). Of the original participants, 1248 returned for T2 and passed the reading and attention checks (47.5% women; ages 18–84, $M_{age}=43.61$, $SD_{age}=15.48$; 41.8% centrists, 30.7% leftists, 27.5% rightists), with $n=522$ of them political centrists (51.1% women; ages 18–84, $M_{age}=45.33$, $SD_{age}=15.48$). The sample size was based on the minimum number of participants needed for the planned analysis, keeping in mind budget restrictions for the project. A post-hoc power analysis for a within-between ANOVA in G*Power 3.1 found that we had 95% power to detect a small simple effect size of Cohen's $f=.1$ among the smaller, centrist sample. The information below pertains to the full sample, followed by the centrist sub-sample in parentheses.

Procedure

The goal of T1 was twofold: (1) to determine the prevalence of support for (and opposition to) political inclusion, to be used as a baseline; (2) to explore potential predictors of support for inclusion for intervention development (see below). Data were collected February 5th-10th, 2020, approximately four weeks before the election. Participants were invited to participate in a study on "positions regarding political partnership between different groups in Israeli society" and were informed that upon providing their consent, they would be asked to complete a two-part questionnaire (divided due to length) over the course of two consecutive days (T1) and would be reapproached in the following weeks to participate in a follow-up study (T2). The T1 questionnaire assessed demographic information, various psychological constructs, and attitudes toward Palestinian citizens of Israel, their Knesset representatives, and political inclusion of these representatives (see the full list of measures in SM1 in the Supplementary Materials).

About two weeks later, in the days leading up to the election (February 23–26), all participants received an invitation to participate in T2. We randomly assigned participants to read one of six messages or to an empty control condition, resulting in $n=176$–189 ($n=69$–80 centrists) per experimental condition. Participants then answered questions pertaining to the dependent variable as well as manipulation checks and exploratory items.

Materials

Intervention manipulations (reported in full in SM4 in the Supplementary Materials) were chosen based on a combination of theoretical relevance and practical, context-sensitive, and data-driven prevalence in the field. We developed three interventions (Value Conflict, Societal Tension Reduction, and Norms), designed to appear as news reports, based on the main constructs identified in the literature as catalysts of and barriers to political tolerance, as follows:

1. *Value Conflict* ($n=167$, of which 69 are centrists), featuring a report on international evidence for political inclusion of minority groups being the most significant element of democratic regimes, thus manipulating the salience of democratic values to generate conflict between one's democratic identity and opposition to political inclusion (see Figure 1);
2. *Societal Tension Reduction* ($n=183$, of which 78 are centrists), featuring international evidence for the positive role of minorities' political inclusion in intergroup tension and hostility

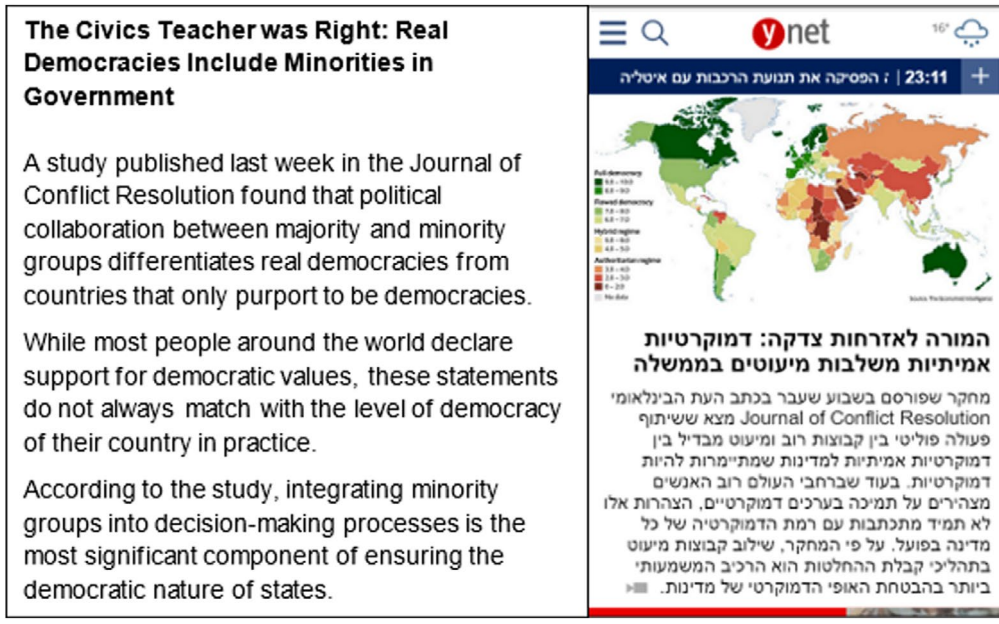

FIGURE 1 The Value Conflict intervention is designed as a news article (left—English translation of text; right—as originally presented in Hebrew).

reduction, thus highlighting the potential benefit of inclusion and manipulating its perceived societal tension reduction potential;

3. *Norms* ($n = 176$, of which 74 are centrists), featuring trending norms among Jewish Israelis, with a focus on centrists, regarding the political inclusion of Palestinian parties, thus manipulating inclusion norms;

T1 comprised over 100 items, many of which were for exploratory and applied purposes (i.e., descriptive statistics), and T2 comprised only ~50, some identical to T1 and others newly added as manipulation checks for the interventions. As is apparent in the pre-registration, measures not detailed below were included for exploratory purposes only and therefore were not used for the primary analysis (see SM1 and SM3 in the Supplementary Materials for the full questionnaires). Unless otherwise noted, reliability statistics are provided based on the full sample in T2. Unless otherwise noted, response scales ranged from 1 (not at all agree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Political ideology was determined in T1 based on an ideological identification question on a scale of 1 (extreme right) to 7 (extreme left). Those who chose 4 (center) were coded as centrists, whereas 1–3 responses were coded as rightists and 5–7 responses were coded as leftists.

Support for political inclusion was assessed in both waves using a five-item measure ($\alpha_{T1} = .875$, $\alpha_{T2} = .888$). We created this measure to capture support for minority political inclusion from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. Two items probed support ("if necessary") for forming two types of "inclusive" governments: a majority governing coalition that would include the Joint List and a minority governing coalition that would lean on the Joint List only as external support (see SM6 in the Supplementary Materials for analyses of the interventions' effect on each of these two discrete items). The remaining three items measured support for political inclusion more broadly (e.g., "I will support any government that will promote my values, regardless of the national identity of its parties").

Manipulation checks

As a manipulation check for the *Value Conflict* intervention, **adherence to democratic values** was measured through four items related to a different aspect or value identified with liberal democracies (e.g., "a society made up of different and diverse groups is a healthier and stronger society than a society that is not diverse") ($\alpha = .792$).

As a manipulation check for the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention, **perceived societal tension reduction potential** was measured using two items touching on the potential societal security-increasing and tension-decreasing benefits of minority inclusion (i.e., "The integration of minority groups in the government can increase the sense of security of the general public in Israel" and "Integrating minority groups in government can reduce tensions between different groups in society") ($r = .777$).

As a manipulation check for the *Norms* intervention, **perceived inclusion norms** were measured through two items, using a slider from 0% to 100%, asking respondents to estimate the percentage of Jewish centrists who support the different forms of inclusion ($r = .704$).

Three additional measures—belief in the instrumental function of political inclusion, group guilt, and positive perception of Palestinian politicians—were included as manipulation checks for the three context-driven interventions. See SM4 and SM5 for details.

Analysis plan

We ran the analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (version 26.0) (2017). After collecting T1 data, we examined descriptive statistics for use as a baseline for T2. We further ran bivariate correlations between support for olitical inclusion (our main DV) and its potential predictors, as well as regressions to test the predictive power of specific emotions, beliefs, and messages (see SM2 in the Supplementary Materials for additional information).

In T2, we first employed T-Test analyses for the manipulation checks (between each target condition and *Control*) to test whether each intervention in T2 affected the construct targeted. For our main analysis on support for political inclusion, as pre-registered, we conducted a mixed within-between analysis of variance (ANOVA), with condition as a between-subjects variable and time (pre-manipulation in T1 vs. post-manipulation in T2) as a within-subject variable. The main dependent variable was the Support for Political Inclusion scale, but we also conducted secondary analysis focusing on Support of a Joint Coalition and Support for a Minority Coalition (see SM6). We report interactions and simple effects based on planned comparisons for the sample as a whole and then for centrists, our pre-registered main group of interest (moderation by ideology, which was pre-registered as a secondary, exploratory analysis, is reported in SM7 in the Supplementary Materials alongside the simple effects for the other ideological groups). Per common practice in intervention tournaments involving independent comparisons, we do not adjust for multiple comparisons (see Hameiri & Moore-Berg, 2022; Rubin, 2021). Specifically, we begin with comparisons between each intervention and the control condition in T2 and move on to comparing conditions to their own T1 baselines.

Results

In T1, we examined the degree to which participants supported political inclusion. As expected, the ANOVA revealed that levels of support were significantly different for the three ideological groups ($F(2, 1430) = 631.74$, $\eta^2 = .4$, $p < .001$). A Scheffé post-hoc test confirmed that centrists' support for political inclusion ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.12$) was lower than that of leftists

($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.06$) and higher than that of rightists ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .96$). Notably, centrists' support was around the scale's midpoint, and their variance was the highest of all ideological groups, lending support to our assumption that centrists' support may be more amenable to change. Thus, from this point on, all analyses in the results section will be reported for the full sample and then for centrists. We conducted a one-way ANOVA that ensured there were no statistically significant differences in baseline support for political inclusion among the different conditions for either the entire sample ($F(6, 1273) = .048$, $\eta^2 = .000$, $p = 1.00$) or for centrists ($F(6, 515) = .457$, $\eta^2 = .005$, $p = .84$).

Intervention tournament

A series of independent samples *t*-tests revealed that the *Value Conflict* and *Societal Tension Reduction* interventions successfully affected their respective manipulation checks. Overall, participants in the *Value Conflict* condition reported more adherence to democratic values ($M = 3.81$, $SE = .12$) than participants in the *Control* condition ($M = 3.48$, $SE = .11$), $t(343) = 2.08$, $p = .023$. This was also true for centrists, who displayed marginally more adherence to democratic values in the *Value Conflict* condition ($M = 4.94$, $SE = .08$) than in the control condition ($M = 4.70$, $SE = .11$), $t(143) = 1.78$, $p = .078$. Overall, participants in the *Societal Tension Reduction* condition reported higher on the perceived societal tension reduction potential measure ($M = 3.85$, $SE = .09$) than participants in the *Control* condition ($M = 3.57$, $SE = .09$), $t(359) = 2.14$, $p = .033$. Centrists in the *Societal Tension Reduction* condition were also (marginally) significantly higher on the perceived societal tension reduction potential measure ($M = 4.11$, $SE = .12$) than participants in the *Control* condition ($M = 3.72$, $SE = .13$), $t(152) = 2.074$, $p = .057$. Finally, participants in the *Norms* condition in the overall sample were higher on perceived inclusion norms ($M = 37.53$, $SE = 1.43$) than participants in the *Control* condition ($M = 32.16$, $SE = 1.5$), $t(3522) = 2.59$, $p = .01$. However, the manipulation check for the *Norms* condition produced non-significant results among centrists ($p = .332$), implying less confidence that it worked as planned within this specific group.

A mixed within-between ANOVA, with condition as a between-subjects variable and time (T1 vs. after the manipulation in T2) as a within-subject variable, was conducted on the full sample to reveal the effects of the interventions on support for political inclusion. It revealed a significant main effect of Time, $F(1, 1241) = 16.177$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .013$, no main effect for Condition, $F(6, 1241) = .351$, $p = .909$, $\eta^2 = .002$, and a significant interaction between Time and Condition, $F(6, 1241) = 2.270$, $p = .035$, $\eta^2 = .011$. Pairwise comparisons showed that one intervention, *Value Conflict*, led to significantly higher support for political inclusion ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.54$) relative to the *Control* condition ($M = 3.478$, $SD = 1.48$), $p = .042$. Support for political inclusion was also marginally higher in the *Societal Tension Reduction* condition ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.49$), $p = .092$.

When we zoomed in on centrists, we found a significant main effect of Time ($F(1, 515) = 10.016$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .019$) and no main effect for Condition ($F(6, 515) = .475$, $p = .827$, $\eta^2 = .005$). Importantly, the interaction of time and condition was significant ($F(6, 515) = 2.643$, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Pairwise comparisons indicated that one intervention, *Value Conflict* ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.23$), led to significantly higher support for political inclusion relative to the *Control* condition ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.16$), $p = .030$ (See Figure 2). In the other conditions, participants' support for political inclusion was not significantly higher than in the *Control*.

Notably, Time showed a trend of *decreasing* support for political inclusion among centrists in the *Control* condition ($F(1, 515) = 3.4$, $p = .066$, $\eta^2 = .007$). This change potentially reflects growing resistance among centrists in Israel to the inclusion of Palestinians in government, possibly as a reaction to the widespread delegitimization campaign that took place against such inclusion. Nonetheless, support for political inclusion increased significantly in T2 (compared to T1) in the *Value Conflict* condition ($F(1, 515) = 8.2$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .016$) and the *Societal Tension Reduction* condition ($F(1, 515) = 7.87$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .016$). In the *Norms* condition, the

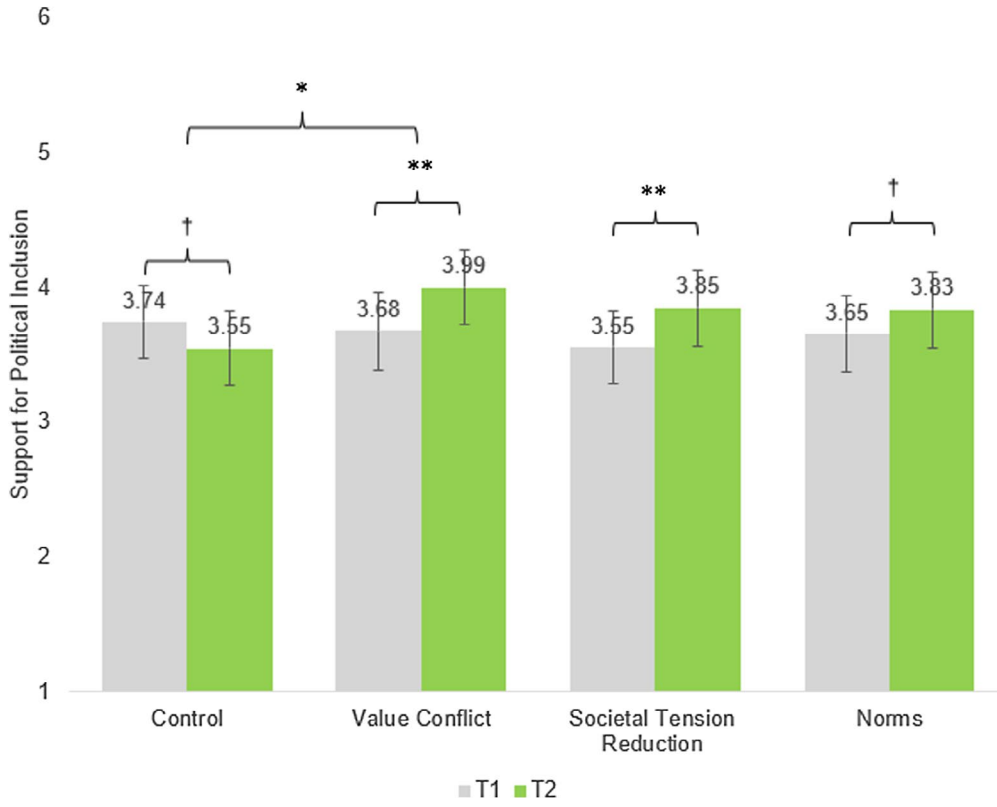

FIGURE 2 Support for political inclusion per condition pre- (T1) and post-treatment (T2) among centrists $^{\dagger} < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

increase in support for political inclusion did not reach significance ($F(1, 515) = 2.78$, $p = .096$, $\eta^2 = .005$), but did show a promising trend.

Exploratory analysis

Whereas we only pre-registered manipulation checks and the main DV as planned analysis in Study 1, we conducted some additional analyses on other T2 variables to explore potential mechanisms that might be at play. Namely, we were interested in whether exposure to incitement against political inclusion acts as a moderator and whether threat perception, intergroup emotions (i.e., fear from Arab citizens, empathy toward Arab citizens, hope for Jewish-Arab partnership), and attitudes toward social inclusion could be considered as potential mediators. A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant interaction between Condition and Exposure to Incitement Against Political Inclusion. Respective ANOVAs conducted among the full sample revealed no reliable effects of any of the leading interventions compared to Control on the other variables (for an effect of one of the context-driven interventions on Empathy, see SM5 in the Supplementary Materials; for some marginal effect of the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention on the exploratory variables, see SM6).

Discussion

In a two-wave intervention tournament among Jewish-Israeli centrists, we tested six interventions in the run-up to the 2020 Israeli election. Results indicated that two

interventions—*Value Conflict* and *Societal Tension Reduction*—were effective to varying degrees in increasing Jewish Israelis, and especially centrists', support for the political inclusion of the Palestinian minority. The results of the manipulation checks for these two interventions also highlight that they were successful in manipulating their intended constructs: increased salience of democratic values and increased recognized potential benefits of political inclusion, respectively. Another intervention, manipulating *Norms*, showed an indication of possible effect among centrists. We consider the effects of the leading interventions to be especially important in the presence of a general threat tied to an intractable conflict and in the midst of an election campaign involving public efforts to delegitimize political inclusion.

While establishing successful interventions for increasing support of political inclusion, the first study had a number of limitations mostly stemming from the intervention tournament design: first, due to the scope of the project and the emphasis on testing multiple interventions under the same external political conditions against an identical *Control*, we were unable to establish full mechanisms for the interventions that were found effective, although we received important indications from the manipulation checks. Second, our sample size was limited, especially in relation to our analysis among centrists. Third, whereas we tested the interventions in a timely and relevant political context, it was also a period of relative calm in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (i.e., when the conflict was not salient in the lives of most Jewish Israelis). Study 2 was designed to address these limitations, zooming in on the three interventions that emerged as effective in Study 1.

STUDY 2

Method

Study 2 was designed to test the effectiveness of the "winning" interventions—*Value Conflict, Societal Tension Reduction*, and *Norms*—in a much more challenging period in Jewish-Palestinian relations in Israel: the aftermath of the October 7th Hamas attacks in Israel and in the midst of Israel's counterattacks in Gaza, with a continuously rising death toll and unprecedented hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians. With this in mind, we pre-registered our concern that it may be much more challenging to increase support for the political inclusion of Palestinian citizens of Israel at this time, as the us vs. them dynamic is taken to its extreme.

Study 2 also included improved manipulation checks and several measures designed to capture mechanisms through which the interventions increase support for inclusion. Notably, the political context had changed in two other important ways from Study 1: (1) The Joint List disassembled, and one of its parties ("Raam") had joined a short-lasting ruling coalition, briefly overcoming the long-lasting taboo on political inclusion of Palestinian-Arab parties in Israeli governments; (2) despite great political turbulence in Israel, there was no national election in sight.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the survey, and participants were debriefed at the end of the survey on the deception. The study received ethics approval from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Approval Number IRB_2024_110) and was pre-registered on AsPredicted (https://aspredicted.org/LMW_KQK).

Participants

For Study 2, we recruited 1391 Jewish Israeli participants who passed the attention check (38.6% women; ages 18–88, $M_{age}=48.82$, $SD_{age}=17.33$; 39.6% centrists, 21% leftists, 39.4% rightists),

again through iPanel, with $n = 551$ of them centrists (47.4% women; ages 18–88, $M_{age} = 51.7$, $SD_{age} = 17.15$). A post-hoc power analysis for a within-between ANOVA in G*Power 3.1 found that we had 95% power to detect a small-medium simple effect size of Cohen's $f = .175$ among the smaller, centrist sample.

Procedure

We collected data eight months following October 7th (i.e., in June 6–12, 2024). This time, we randomly assigned participants to read one of only three messages (i.e., the most effective interventions from Study 1, adapted to the present context) or to an empty control condition, resulting in $n = 339$–356 ($n = 133$–141 centrists) per condition. Participants then responded to the dependent variables as well as manipulation checks and exploratory mediators.

Materials

The **manipulations** in Study 2 were nearly identical to those in Study 1. We adjusted the manipulation's breadth, this time including only the *Value Conflict* ($n = 339$, of which 133 are centrists), *Societal Tension Reduction* ($n = 349$, of which 141 are centrists), and *Norms* ($n = 347$, of which 138 are centrists) interventions, alongside an empty control condition ($n = 356$, of which 139 are centrists). We also edited the news report to now all include an opening statement acknowledging the tense present reality and tying the report to it (i.e., "These days, Israeli society is facing a significant threat to its existence and characters;" see Supplementary Materials SM8 for the full texts).

Unless otherwise noted, all responses were given on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all agree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Political ideology was assessed and coded as in Study 1.

Support for political inclusion was assessed with five items ($\alpha = .865$) as in Study 1, with several adjustments due to the changed context: the main items asked respondents about their willingness to *consider supporting* (instead of "*support if necessary*") the formation of two types of "inclusive" governments *in the next election* (with no election in sight, this was now specified): a majority governing coalition that would include *Arab parties* (instead of the Joint List, which does not currently exist in united form) and a minority governing coalition that would lean on the Arab parties only as external support.

Manipulation checks

In Study 2, one of our goals was to use more specific manipulation checks to capture the intended manipulations.

As a manipulation check for the *Value Conflict* intervention, we now measured perception of **adherence to democratic values** more specifically with two items, based on the original four used in Study 1, but focusing more specifically on the status of minorities and adapted to the war context: "Even in times of war, minorities in a democracy should receive the same rights as the majority" and "In a democratic country, all groups, including minority groups, should have real influence on decision-making" ($r = .743$).

As a manipulation check for the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention, we used the same items as in Study 1 to measure perceived **societal tension reduction potential** ($r = .845$).

As a manipulation check for the *Norms* intervention, since we wanted to examine effects beyond centrists, **perceived inclusion norms** were measured with two items, asking respondents to

estimate on 0–100% sliders the percentage of Jewish Israelis and Jewish centrists who support political inclusion ($r = .688$).

Additional exploratory variables included to test for potential mechanisms include adherence to democratic values, threat perception, group image threat, perceived legitimacy of political inclusion, political intolerance, group emotions (i.e., guilt, empathy, and fear), identification, and national narcissism (see details of these measures—which proved unfruitful in this context—in SM8 in the Supplementary Materials).

Analysis plan

The analysis plan was identical in Study 2 to the one we used for the intervention tournament in Study 1, with the following differences in our main analysis: Since we did not have a T1 baseline in Study 2, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with condition as a between-subjects variable (rather than a mixed within-between ANOVA) and reported the results in relation to the full sample and then in relation to centrists. Additionally, in Study 2, we added pre-registered mediation analysis, as well as some exploratory analysis to explain our findings.

Results

A series of independent samples *t*-tests revealed that the three interventions did not successfully affect their respective manipulation checks among either the general sample or centrists, implying that our interventions were unable to impact the targeted constructs as they did in Study 1.

A one-way ANOVA examining the interventions' impact on support for political inclusion yielded no main effect for condition among the full sample, $F(3, 1387) = .152$, $p = .93$, $\eta^2 = .00$, nor among centrists, $F(3, 547) = .66$, $p = .576$, $\eta^2 = .004$, suggesting no significant difference in support for political inclusion across the different conditions. Tests for the exploratory outcome variables and mediators—namely, adherence to democratic values, threat perception, threat to group image, and perceived legitimacy of political minority inclusion—also yielded null results.

Exploring the impact of proximity to the war

As the above results may indicate that the context of war and increased hostilities undermined the effectiveness of our interventions, we explored whether the residence area—directly tied to the impact of the war—moderated the interventions' impact on Support for political inclusion. To do so, we recoded the six regions of residence (included as a demographic variable in our survey) into "hot" (i.e., generally most directly affected by the October 7th violence and the war with Hamas and Hezbollah, often including displacement due to elevated risk and destruction) and "cold" (i.e., generally affected by the war in more indirect ways) areas and tested the new binary variable—Proximity to War—as a moderator for each intervention.

A two-way ANOVA on the full sample yielded no main effect for Proximity to War, $F(1, 1383) = .133$, $p = .715$, $\eta^2 = .000$, but the interaction between Proximity to War and condition was marginally significant, $F(3, 1383) = 2.232$, $p = .083$, $\eta^2 = .005$. Specifically, pairwise comparisons revealed that in "hot" war areas, support for political inclusion was significantly higher in the *Societal Tension Reduction* condition ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.32$) relative to the *Control* condition ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.36$), $p = .028$.

Following this finding, we zoomed in on participants from both "cold" and "hot" areas who were allocated to the *Societal Tension Reduction* or *Control* conditions and discovered that

the interaction between condition and Proximity to War had a marginally significant effect on the perceived societal benefits of inclusion manipulation check ($F(1, 701) = 3.593$, $p = .058$, $\eta^2 = .005$). Specifically, the results revealed that while the perceived societal benefits of inclusion did not differ between the two conditions, participants who were exposed to the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention ($n = 161$, $M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.62$) believed in the societal benefits of inclusion significantly more if they resided in "hot" areas compared to those from "cold" areas ($n = 188$, $M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.52$). A moderation analysis further supported this pattern, revealing a small but significant interaction effect ($p = .014$), whereby the impact of condition on support for political inclusion varied by Proximity to War. Estimated marginal means indicated that in hot war areas, those in the societal tension reduction condition ($M = 3.42$, $SE = .11$) reported significantly higher support for political inclusion than those in the control condition ($M = 3.07$, $SE = .12$, $p = .027$). However, in "colder" war areas, we did not identify such differences, and the non-significant pattern ($p = .228$) was reversed: support for political inclusion was slightly lower in the societal tension reduction condition ($M = 3.20$, $SE = .10$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.36$, $SE = .10$).

We did not find similarly significant interactions for the other interventions' manipulation checks. We report results pertaining to this exploratory analysis among centrists in SM9 in the Supplementary Materials.

Discussion

In a second study, we were unable to replicate the results of Study 1. As we noted in our preregistration, this replication took place during a particularly challenging period in the region, with the aftermath of the October 7th Hamas attack that killed ~1400 people in Israel and the ongoing devastation in Gaza caused by Israel's unprecedented counterattack, killing tens of thousands of Palestinians to date. Although we adapted the interventions to this reality, the messages conveyed in them may still have felt out of touch to respondents.

Core characteristics of intractable conflicts include high levels of perceived intergroup threat (which often outweighs the perceived benefits of peace; see Maoz & McCauley, 2009), along with a "tendency to cognitively freeze on existing, pro-ingroup belief" (Wohl et al., 2016, p. 65). These are heightened in times of war, with direct violence posing significant challenges to promoting democratic values and minority inclusion (Hutchison, 2014). A combination of heightened threat perception with strengthened ingroup favoritism makes people more hawkish (Berrebi & Klor, 2006; Sharvit et al., 2010) and less willing to extend basic civil rights and liberties to minorities (Hutchison, 2014). Additionally, manipulating individuals' perceptions and values becomes more challenging under such high-stakes conditions (Huddy et al., 2005), with individuals clinging more tightly to existing beliefs and group identities as a psychological defense mechanism, making them less malleable to external influence.

Yet, past studies have also found that certain manipulations can be effective in unfreezing attitudes even in challenging contexts (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2021; Wohl et al., 2016). For example, Wohl et al. (2016) found (in a time of relative peace) that making salient the peace with the Palestinians would reduce the Iranian nuclear threat, leading to unfreezing. The interaction effect we find between the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention and Proximity to the War may support the notion that attitudes may be more frozen during war, but a message presenting a way in which related tensions can be reduced may enable unfreezing for those most impacted by the present threat.

One potential reason for the reduced effectiveness of our interventions in Study 2 is that heightened threat perceptions during wartime may have disrupted the cognitive and emotional pathways necessary for attitude change. In Study 1, our interventions might have worked by

evoking cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) and making democratic values more salient, or employing instrumental motivations, as supported by the manipulation checks. However, under conditions of acute intergroup threat, individuals may exhibit motivated reasoning (Taber & Lodge, 2006), selectively processing information that reinforces pre-existing attitudes while rejecting counter-attitudinal messages. This could explain why, despite successful manipulation in Study 1, the same interventions failed to yield significant effects, including on their intended manipulation checks, in Study 2.

The failure of manipulation checks in Study 2 suggests that the interventions may not have been processed as intended, which potentially could be due to cognitive overload and emotional reactivity (Marcus et al., 2000) induced by ongoing conflict. While war generally heightens resistance to attitude change, our findings suggest that contextual receptivity varies within conflict settings. In hot zones, where exposure to violence is highest, participants were more responsive to the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention, which framed inclusion as a means of reducing societal tensions—potentially providing people in this population the greatest benefit. This aligns with research showing that under acute threat, individuals may be more receptive to pragmatic solutions that promise immediate group benefits (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Rather than resisting persuasion entirely, those most affected by conflict may evaluate inclusion through a security lens, making interventions that highlight stability and conflict reduction more effective than abstract democratic appeals. Future research should explore whether security-oriented framings consistently enhance intervention receptivity in high-conflict contexts and whether these effects endure beyond wartime.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our goal in the present research was to develop and determine the effectiveness of psychological interventions aimed at increasing support for the political inclusion of a delegitimized minority group among mainstream majority group members.

In study 1, which took place in the run-up to a national election in Israel, we found a *Value Conflict* intervention to be the most effective, followed by a *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention. The *Value Conflict* intervention, exposing an inconsistency based on value conflict (Paluck et al., 2021), shows that increasing the salience of democratic values can increase citizens' support of minority inclusion in societies where democracy is considered the norm. Individuals exposed to this intervention may have felt a conflict due to a clash between their stated democratic values and attitudes regarding minority inclusion prior to their exposure to the intervention, though this mechanism remains to be tested. This provides further support for the critical role of democratic values in promoting political tolerance (Agarin, 2020; Halperin et al., 2014), as well as the potential of inconsistency interventions, which have been previously shown to improve intergroup attitudes (Bruneau et al., 2018; Heitland & Bohner, 2010).

Another intervention, manipulating the perception of the positive potential of minority inclusion in reducing societal tensions, was also partially successful. It illustrates the potential of shifting the focus of the situation from threats to opportunities, supporting past work (Rios et al., 2018). Importantly, while threat perception often serves a functional role in conflict situations, gaps might exist between perception and reality, leaving room for individual variation in both directions (Hirschberger et al., 2016). Framing a desired outcome (i.e., political inclusion) as a potential for societal stress reduction may help in addressing this challenge. Although we could not replicate the effect as it is in Study 2, the exploratory finding suggesting it increased support for political inclusion among individuals most affected by the ongoing war implies that presenting inclusion as reducing societal tensions might also serve to promote unfreezing among those most haunted by the threat.

Our research takes a unique approach in the search for new paths for intervention in the field, and several factors make our results stand out in the literature. First, the interventions were twice tested under conditions that challenge improving attitudes about minority inclusion (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008), given the ongoing intractable conflict in Israel-Palestine: the delegitimizing election campaigns against Palestinian political representatives (Study 1) and especially the 2023–2024 Israel-Gaza war (Study 2). Second, unlike many socio-psychological prejudice-reduction interventions, our outcome variable focuses on the *political* inclusion of a *delegitimized* minority, with implications for intergroup power relations. Delegitimized minorities, especially when associated with the rival in an ongoing conflict, are seen as much more threatening by majority group members than other groups addressed in the diversity and inclusion literature, and the threat of changing power relations adds another layer of complexity (Hodson et al., 2022). The findings' implications may generalize across contexts in which minorities face political exclusion.

Our findings contribute to knowledge on means to increase mainstream support for minority political inclusion, specifically by highlighting the values and potential benefits connected to this political step. Our findings also imply that engaging with global norms (rather than local ones) and their intersection with individuals' core identities—in this case, their democratic, security-seeking identities—could be a useful strategy to promote support for inclusion.

While these findings contribute to knowledge on means to increase mainstream support for minority political inclusion, a key limitation of this study is the inability to replicate the effect of the interventions in wartime (Study 2), as well as the non-significant manipulation checks, which indicate the interventions failed at a mechanism level at this time. This suggests that during heightened intergroup conflict, individuals may become less receptive to messages promoting political inclusion due to increased psychological resistance (Huddy et al., 2005) and reduced processing of counter-attitudinal information when attitudes are already crystallized (Nir, 2011). In such contexts, existential concerns may further activate worldview defense mechanisms (Rubin, 2018) and inhibit cognitive engagement through freezing-like responses to threat (Klaassen et al., 2021), potentially limiting the intervention's ability to influence underlying attitudes.

While our intervention tournament design limits in-depth testing of mechanisms, the interventions were grounded in established theory and prior findings, providing confidence in the plausibility of the proposed processes. The *Value Conflict* intervention likely increased support for political inclusion by heightening the salience of democratic values and exposing inconsistencies between those values and exclusionary attitudes—an effect supported by our manipulation check. This aligns with prior research suggesting that when core values like democracy are made salient, individuals are motivated to resolve dissonance by adjusting specific attitudes to maintain a coherent self-concept. Similarly, the *Societal Tension Reduction* intervention appears to have worked by reframing inclusion as a means of promoting societal stability and reducing intergroup threat, as reflected in participants' increased perceptions of inclusion as beneficial. These findings are consistent with previous work on threat reduction and opportunity framing.

However, based on these two studies, we are still unable to establish the exact mechanisms through which *Value Conflict* and *Societal Tension Reduction* interventions increased support for political inclusion. Future research, at times of war or relative calm, could delve further into the mechanisms behind these effects (or their absence), potentially contributing to the further refinement and improvement of interventions. Specifically, we believe that studies testing mechanisms of attitude flexibility and rigidity during times of both violent escalation and relative calm could enhance our understanding of how and when these or other interventions can best be implemented to create healing societal effects.

Other than adding to the theoretical understanding of political inclusion, our findings also highlight the potential of applying psychological interventions to real-world settings.

Whereas our participants in both studies were exposed to the interventions as part of an online survey, the fabricated news report used as a manipulations drew on existing information and could easily be applied by actors in the field wishing to promote minorities' political inclusion.

While establishing successful interventions for increasing support of political inclusion in a timely and relevant political context, this research has two main limitations. First, despite including more focused measures in Study 2 to explore the mechanisms of the successful interventions, our efforts were hindered by a challenging context. Second, while findings from our tournament can inform interventions in other places, especially where the political inclusion of minorities is threatened in the context of intergroup conflict, the downside of testing the context-targeted interventions is a diminished ability to predict how well they will generalize across contexts. Even within the single regional and societal context of Israel, political circumstances changed dramatically between studies. Further research would be needed to determine how different forms of minorities' political inclusion change the social reality for members of the advantaged majority in Israel and elsewhere at different points in a conflict's escalation or resolution.

In summary, this research addresses the challenge of increasing the political representation of minority groups by increasing support for inclusion among majority group members. We suggest that interventions emphasizing democratic values and the potential societal tension reduction as a result of political inclusion may be effective in promoting this goal. Through an intervention tournament, we found that interventions tackling these core constructs increased support for political inclusion during an election period rife with minority delegitimization—but not during war. Thus, the current research offers a new avenue for those working to advance more inclusive political systems in challenging contexts.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data and materials that support the findings of the research presented in this papers are available at: https://osf.io/vka5d/.

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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