

## Fighting the Past: Perceptions of Control, Historical Misperceptions, and Corrective Information in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Brendan Nyhan  
Dartmouth College

Thomas Zeitzoff  
American University

*What makes people deny wrongdoing that their group has inflicted on others? Prior research argues that refusing to acknowledge past misbehavior contributes to intergroup conflict, making historical misinformation important to understand and address. In particular, feeling a lack of control may make people more vulnerable to these misperceptions—a claim we test in a preregistered survey experiment examining beliefs about the Palestinian exodus during the creation of the state of Israel. Consistent with expectations, Jewish Israelis who were asked to recall an event in which they lacked control were more vulnerable to arguments (incorrectly) denying any Jewish responsibility for the exodus. By contrast, corrective information successfully reduced misperceptions regardless of feelings of control. However, corrections had no effect on attitudes toward the outgroup or support for the peace process, which suggests that historical misperceptions may be more of a symptom of intergroup conflict than a cause of its persistence.*

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Historical denialism and misperceptions are a recurring element of ongoing disputes between national, ethnic, or religious groups. These conflicts frequently feature widespread belief in narratives that emphasize the uniqueness of ingroup suffering and denigrate or ignore injustices suffered by outgroups (Bar-Tal, 2007; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012). Scholars have argued that disputes over historical wrongdoing contribute to the persistence of intergroup conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2000)—a pattern that has been observed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the former Yugoslavia, and Northern Ireland as well as relations between states such as Japan and South Korea (Bar-Tal, 2013). When conflicts between groups intensify, individuals are more likely to excuse or deny collective responsibility for their group's past misdeeds (Roccas, Klar, and Liviatan, 2006; Wohl and Branscombe, 2008). Similarly, acknowledging wrongdoing against the other side in a conflict may provide a path toward reconciliation (e.g., Vollhardt, Mazur, and Lemahieu, 2014; Klar and Schori-Eyal, 2015).

In many cases, denials of historical evidence in intergroup conflicts are buttressed by misperceptions that attribute an injustice to the (nefarious) power of the other group in the conflict. Leaders in divided societies often promote misperceptions and conspiracy theories about outgroups to try to

achieve their own political goals (Lake and Rothchild, 1996). For instance, hard-line elites often mobilize supporters by playing upon and fomenting historical misperceptions (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999). These sorts of theories are likely to be appealing to ingroup members because they denigrate outgroup claims and provide a convenient explanation for reported ingroup misbehavior, reducing otherwise uncomfortable cognitive dissonance (Klar & Baram, 2014; Leidner & Castano, 2012; Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010).

Countering these sorts of myths can be difficult. Intergroup conflict often produces intense factual disputes about controversial issues. Under these circumstances, people are vulnerable to motivated reasoning and often resist corrective information (e.g., Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder, & Rich, 2000; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Intergroup conflict may also make people vulnerable to misinformation due to its effects on their feelings of control. Other research shows that reduced perceptions of control can make people more prone to conspiracy theories, which help them restore a sense of order or control over events (Sullivan, Landau, & Rothschild, 2010; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008a). Elites who promulgate conspiracy theories to explain away historical wrongdoing may therefore attract more adherents during intergroup conflicts, which often produce episodes of violence and/or power imbalances that make people feel vulnerable and lacking control.

Our article makes three important contributions. First, while previous research has found that perceptions of control are related to conspiratorial thinking, we provide a direct experimental test of this hypothesis in the context of historical misperceptions and conspiracy theories about an ongoing intergroup conflict. Second, we provide a test of whether these misperceptions can be corrected and assess how perceptions of control affect that process. Finally, we also test the claim that historical misperceptions contribute to the continuation of intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000) by examining whether correcting historical misperceptions reduces negative attitudes toward outgroups and opposition to the peace process.

We specifically consider historical misperceptions and conspiracy belief in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is often considered one of the most intractable ongoing conflicts in the world. Our study examines an especially divisive historical issue—denial among some Jewish Israelis (e.g., Arens, 2014) that Jewish forces played a consequential role in the Palestinian exodus after the creation of the state of Israel (Morris, 2004). Given the feelings of dissonance that acknowledgment of ingroup wrongdoing can create, we expect misperceptions about the role of Jewish forces in the Palestinian exodus to be relatively common. We predicted that respondents will be especially vulnerable to this misperception and a closely related conspiracy theory attributing the claim to Israel's enemies when they feel lower levels of control. Such feelings are likely to be exacerbated in the real world by the uncertain nature of the conflict, which features rocket attacks and other threats (Zeitzoff, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Previous research has found that many of the effects of political violence on attitudes are the result of psychological consequences of violence exposure such as loss of control and post-traumatic stress (Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll 2009; Galea et al., 2002; Pedersen 2002; Qouta, Punamäki, & El Sarraj 2008). In this case, we expected corrective information describing the consensus among Israeli historians that Jewish forces played a significant role in the Palestinian exodus to help counter these effects but faced motivated resistance among the right-wing Israelis who tend to view the country's history and treatment of Palestinians most positively.

We conducted a large, national survey experiment among Jewish Israelis testing these preregistered hypotheses as well as a series of research questions concerning important potential moderators and auxiliary outcome measures. Our study has three main findings. First, reminders of a lack of

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Palestinians should be more vulnerable to denialism and conspiracy theories (e.g., denying the Holocaust) when they feel a lack of control, distress, or threat due to the Israeli occupation (Canetti, Elad-Strenger, Lavi, Guy, & Bar-Tal, 2015). This hypothesis is beyond the scope of the present study, but we hope to evaluate it in future research.

control made people more vulnerable to the effects of historical denialism, which increased misperceptions and conspiracy belief *more* among people who were asked to remember a time when they had complete control over events. However, the effect of corrective information on misperceptions was *not* affected by feelings of control—corrective information successfully reduced misperceptions even among people primed to feel a lack of control as well as groups we might expect to be most resistant (e.g., right-wing Israelis). Finally, though corrective information caused some change in tolerance toward protests, it had no measurable effect on feelings toward Palestinians and Arab Israelis or the willingness to compromise to achieve peace.

These results suggest that the loss of control that many groups suffer during conflict can contribute to historical denialism and misperceptions about outgroups. But even in the context of what is often perceived to be an intractable conflict, correcting historical misperceptions does lead people to update their beliefs and to be more likely to admit historical ingroup culpability and outgroup victimization. Beliefs and attitudes toward at least some aspects of the conflict may be more malleable than originally thought. However, recognition of past victimization of the outgroup by ingroup members did not change attitudes about core issues in the conflict, which calls into question the claim that the failure to acknowledge outgroup suffering is a major barrier to conflict resolution and reconciliation (Bar-Tal, 2000; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008). Historical misperceptions may be more of a symptom of intergroup conflict than a cause of its persistence.

### Theoretical Approach

Denying the victimhood of other groups is a common and particularly insidious aspect of ethnic, national, and religious conflict. Groups or politicians seeking to bolster their own side's claims may denigrate or deny the suffering of the other side. For instance, Serbian nationalist politicians have denied that Serbs committed war crimes in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo (Gordy, 2013). Alternatively, politicians may seek to shift culpability to other actors, arguing that the dominant historical narrative is the result of a conspiracy by powerful actors against the ingroup or the state. For example, Sudan's President Omar Bashir claimed that Boko Haram and the Islamic State (ISIS) are creations of U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies (Saul, 2015). In other cases, these misperceptions concern the historical record of conflicts between states or groups rather than recent events. China, for example, has criticized Japan for perceived denial of crimes committed during its World War II occupation of the country (Oi, 2013).

Historical misperceptions and foundational myths—including ones that deny ingroup culpability for outgroup suffering—are not just disputes about the past. They can also potentially affect current relations between groups and states. In spring 2015, for instance, Iranian hard-liners “claim(ed) that the U.S. staged the 9/11 attacks as an excuse to invade the Muslim world” (Crowley, 2015) to increase opposition to a possible U.S.-Iran nuclear agreement. These sorts of historical misperceptions can serve as a barrier to the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2000). By contrast, apologies or acknowledgments of past wrongdoing can serve as a catalyst for peace and reconciliation (Lind, 2011). For instance, Shnabel and Nadler argue that acknowledging past wrongdoing allows both perpetrators and victims to “satisfy their emotional needs and cease to feel weaker than or morally inferior to their counterpart” (2008, p. 117). Along these lines, Armenian and Jewish Americans were more likely to support reconciliation with groups that had previously victimized them when they learned that those groups had acknowledged their role in those events (Vollhardt, Mazur, & Lemahieu, 2014). Likewise, South Africans who accepted the findings of the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission were more likely to support racial reconciliation (Gibson, 2004, 2006).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> However, Lind (2011) notes that contrition can potentially have negative effects if hardliners oppose apologies. Hornsey and Wohl (2013) and Okimoto, Wenzel, and Hornsey (2015) also argue that apologies may not lead to reconciliation.

These findings indicate that understanding historical misperceptions and finding new strategies to reduce them is a potentially important approach to reducing intergroup conflict. To date, however, few studies have investigated the causes or consequences of misperceptions outside of the United States. Previous research in the U.S. context is consistent with the evidence from intergroup conflicts, though, in finding that misperceptions and false or unsupported conspiracy theories about controversial issues can often endure in the face of corrections and historical fact, especially among people with strong preferences (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). In this study, we focus on two key factors that may contribute to the persistence of historical misperceptions and conspiracy theories: motivated reasoning and feelings of a lack of control.<sup>3</sup>

First, misconceptions about the outgroup during intergroup conflict are likely to be frequent and persistent as a result of motivated reasoning (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006)—people's tendency to evaluate new information with a directional bias toward one's preexisting attitudes and beliefs. While previous research has typically examined this tendency in the domain of opinions and attitudes, more recent studies have shown that these tendencies extend to factual beliefs about controversial political issues and figures, including conspiracy theories (e.g., Miller, Saunders, and Farhart, 2015; Uscinski, Klofstad, and Atkinson, 2016). As a result, people are often resistant to corrective information about political misperceptions (Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017), though more recent work has found that corrections can help reduce misperceptions under certain conditions (e.g., Fridkin, Kenney, & Wintersieck, 2015; Nyhan, Porter, Reifler, & Wood, n.d.; Nyhan, B., & Reifler, n.d.).

Intergroup conflicts seem likely to produce especially strong motivated reasoning about historical disputes due to the intensity of the intergroup bias they create (the literature in this area is vast; see Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002 for one recent review). These tendencies could be expressed as confirmation bias toward conspiracy theories or other claims that favor the ingroup (which people tend to favor) and/or disconfirmation bias against corrections or other claims that enhance the standing of the outgroup (which people tend to disfavor).

Misperceptions and belief in related conspiracy theories may also be common during intergroup conflict due to feelings of a lack of control resulting from the conflict itself (e.g., the occurrence of random or chaotic violence, minority group status, or structural power imbalances). Previous research has shown that reducing people's perceptions of control over events—as can happen to countries facing the threat of attack—can increase belief in illusory patterns, including conspiracy theories. The interpretation some scholars offer is that perceiving such patterns may help to restore people's feelings of control (see, e.g., Greenaway, Louis, & Hornsey, 2013). In one study, for instance, participants who were asked to recall a time when they lacked control over a situation were more likely to perceive conspiracies in fictional scenarios than those asked to recall an event over which they had complete control (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008a). Likewise, respondents primed with reminders of their lack of control over unpredictable risks were more likely to express belief that the presidential candidate they opposed was engaging in a conspiracy to win the election, which was interpreted as a compensatory response intended to restore their feeling of control over events by attributing diffuse threats to a specific enemy (Sullivan et al., 2010). In addition, other studies find that experimentally manipulated feelings of a lack of control can increase ingroup bias and negative feelings toward outgroups (Fritzsche et al., 2013; Greenaway, Louis, Hornsey, & Jones, 2014). For these reasons, elites and other political actors may be especially likely to promote conspiracy theories during intergroup conflict and to use them to promote denialism and belief in historical misperceptions.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, other factors may contribute to misperception and conspiracy theory belief (e.g., Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004; Oliver & Wood, 2014; Flynn et al., 2017). We focus on two (ideology and lack of control) that we expect to be especially relevant to historical misperceptions during intergroup conflict but discuss the need for further research in the conclusion.

*Application: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

We examine beliefs in historical misperceptions and conspiracy theories in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The seemingly intractable nature of the conflict and its duration has produced intense motivated reasoning and feelings of a lack of control on both sides of the conflict. These factors appear to contribute to widespread misperceptions and belief in false or unsupported conspiracy theories.<sup>4</sup>

A brief review of key events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is necessary to give context to the Palestinian exodus of 1947–49. From 1920 to 1948, a British civilian mandate backed by British troops governed Palestine. Tensions and spasmodic violence between Jews and Arabs (Palestinians) and British troops in the mandate was common, leading Britain to turn the question of the future of the mandate over to the United Nations (Segev, 2000). In November 1947, the U.N. General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states and give Jerusalem international status, prompting strong objections from Arab League states and Palestinian Arabs. Hostilities between Jews and Palestinians reached a crescendo with the declaration of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948. Arab armies from Jordan and Egypt and smaller forces from Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq invaded the next day with support from Palestinian militias and irregular forces (Maoz, 2009, p. 4). The war lasted until July 1949. In the end, no Palestinian state was formed, and approximately 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes in present-day Israel (Morris, 2004).

We specifically examine misperceptions and conspiracy beliefs among Jewish Israelis about the role Jewish forces played in the Palestinian exodus, which is called the *Nakba* by Palestinians (“catastrophe” in Arabic). The exodus is commemorated by many Palestinians each year and often features protests that lead to clashes with Israeli forces (e.g., Khoury, Levinson, & Cohen, 2014). Many Jewish Israelis resent the protests and view them as a Palestinian effort to delegitimize Israel (e.g., Tobin, 2014). Some right-wing Jewish Israelis further argue that the predominant Palestinian *Nakba* narrative is a “lie” used to manipulate public opinion against Israel (Arens, 2014) and that Palestinians abandoned their villages on their own or at the behest of Arab leaders. These claims contribute to the persistence of the misperception that Palestinians fled of their own volition, which the distinguished Israeli historian Benny Morris calls “[t]he official Israeli narrative”:

The official Israeli narrative, that the Palestinians fled “voluntarily” (meaning not as a result of Jewish compulsion) or that they were asked or ordered to do so by their leaders and by the leaders of the Arab states, helped leave intact the new state’s self-image as the haven of a much persecuted people, a body politic more just, moral and deserving of the West’s sympathy and help than the surrounding sea of reactionary, semi-feudal, dictatorial Arab societies. (2004, p. 2)

The evidence suggests a more complex story. It is true that the war which gave birth to the refugee problem was started by an attack on Israel and many Palestinians fled voluntarily on their own or at the behest of their leaders. Moreover, most historians (including Morris) reject Arab claims that Israel was carrying out a systematic and premeditated policy of ethnic cleansing (e.g., Gelber, 2006). However, Morris and other historians conclude that actions by Jewish forces during the conflict played an important role in the exodus. Though the causes of the exodus were complex and varied between locations, he finds that “[i]n general, throughout the war,” he writes, “the final and decisive precipitant to flight in most places was Haganah, IZL, LHI, or IDF attack [Jewish military or paramilitary forces] or the inhabitants’ fear of imminent attack” (2004, p. 599). Moreover, “the departure of the Arabs was

<sup>4</sup> We will often refer in this article to “misperceptions and conspiracy theories,” but we may also refer to these using the shorthand of “misperceptions” or “historical misperceptions” for expositional reasons. We group these terms together because of our focus on false or unsupported conspiracy theories, which can be understood as a type of misperception (Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017; Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).



deeply desired on the local and national levels by the majority in the Yishuv [the Jewish population in Palestine before Israel was created],” and Jewish forces acted in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion that was largely consistent with this goal due to its perceived necessity and desirability: “[W]hile this general will was never translated into systematic policy, a large number of Arabs were expelled, the frequency of expulsions and the expulsive resolve of the troops increasing following the pan-Arab invasion of mid-May 1948” (Morris, 2004, p. 589; see also pp. 593, 596).<sup>5</sup>

These competing historical narratives about what happened in 1948 represent fundamental differences in viewpoints about the origins of the conflict and which group is responsible for it. The Israeli narrative that Palestinians fled of their own volition supports beliefs that the country was founded ethically and is not responsible for the refugee problem, whereas the *Nakba* narrative that Palestinians were expelled by Jewish forces reinforces feelings of injustice. Such differing views may be an important obstacle to a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000).

The studies described above suggest that ideology and feelings of control are likely to be especially important in explaining historical misperceptions and conspiracy beliefs about the Palestinian exodus. First, we expect people whose ideological beliefs are consistent with misperceptions to be more resistant to corrective information. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the main axis of political competition (left–right) is largely captured by attitudes towards peace and the conflict (Schofield & Sened, 2005). As such, ideology is likely to play an important role in historical misperceptions about Israel’s founding and the subsequent Palestinian refugee exodus. Vulnerability to misperceptions and resistance to corrective information should thus be highest among right-wing Jewish Israelis. As noted above, previous research has found that misperceptions are typically higher among sympathetic ideological groups and that corrections may be ineffective or even backfire for these populations (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

Second, we expect that feelings of a lack of control are likely to contribute to misperceptions about the Palestinian exodus and endorsement of denialist conspiracy theories. This vulnerability is likely to be especially strong in the Israeli context due to exposure to violence and threats resulting from the conflict. Previous research has found, for instance, that terrorism exposure is common among Jewish Israelis and is associated with feelings of a lack of control (Bleich, Gelkopf, & Solomon, 2003; Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, & Johnson, 2006). Those feelings can in turn have significant psychological and political effects. For instance, the threat of Iraqi Scud missile attacks during the first Gulf War was found to increase magical thinking among Israelis (Keinan, 1994). In addition, the threat of rocket attack from the Gaza Strip was found to increase voting for nationalist parties among Jewish Israelis (Getmansky & Zeitzoff, 2014).

## Study Design

To test how feelings of control influence the persistence of misperceptions about the Palestinian exodus and the effectiveness of corrective historical information, we conducted a survey experiment among a diverse online sample of 2,170 Jewish Israelis age 18 or older that was approved by human subjects committees at both authors’ institutions. The design, hypotheses, and analysis approach for this study was preregistered in the EGAP archive before the study was conducted—an emerging best practice in scientific research (e.g., Miguel et al., 2014; Monogan, 2013).<sup>6</sup> The full text of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix S1 in the online supporting information.

<sup>5</sup> Hirsch (2007) also presents evidence that the “New Historians” (e.g., Morris, Tom Segev, and others) who questioned the official Israeli narrative on Palestinian refugees made it more acceptable to broach these politically difficult topics within present-day Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. This revisionist perspective has encountered resistance from critics who accuse them of misrepresenting the historical record for partisan and ideological purposes (e.g., Karsh, 1996, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> The preregistration is available at <http://egap.org/registration/737>. All deviations from the preregistered study plan are noted below.

Our study, which we describe in more detail below, is a survey experiment with a  $2 \times 2$  design plus a baseline condition in which respondents did not receive any stimuli. It was carried out in the spring of 2015 via the Midgam Project online survey panel, a diverse panel of Jewish Israelis that has been used in numerous academic studies (e.g., Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross, & Dweck, 2011; Leidner, Castano, & Ginges, 2013). The survey was designed in English, translated into Hebrew by a professional translator, and double-checked by a native speaker familiar with political surveys. The survey was fielded on March 31, 2015.<sup>7</sup>

### *Experimental Treatments*

Participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions—either a baseline condition or to one of four experimental groups in a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects design in which we independently manipulated level of control (low vs. high) and exposure to corrective information (historical denial vs. denial plus corrective information):<sup>8</sup>

- Baseline condition;
- Historical denial of Jewish role in the Palestinian exodus; low control;
- Historical denial + correction; low control;
- Historical denial; high control;
- Historical denial + correction; high control.

In the experimental conditions, participants were randomly assigned to write a brief essay about a personal experience in which they had complete control over events (high control) or no control over events (low control). This induction task, which has been validated as affecting reported levels of control (Goode, Keefer, & Molina, 2014; Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008) and conspiracy beliefs (Prooijen & Acker, 2015; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008b) in multiple published studies in the literature, allows us to estimate the effects of a heightened feeling of a lack of control versus a higher control baseline. In practice, we believe feelings of a lack of control resulting specifically from the conflict increase Israelis' vulnerability to historical denial and conspiracy theories. However, reminding participants of the conflict in the manipulation would prevent us from isolating the effects of lack of control in our statistical analysis. We therefore use instead a content-neutral experimental design to prime feelings of a lack of control that omits any reminder of the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Respondents in the experimental conditions were then exposed to a text that denied the Jewish role in the Palestinian exodus and instead attributed it to an anti-Israeli conspiracy. Subjects were then independently randomized to either receive no further information (no correction) or to receive corrective information describing the historical consensus that the Jewish forces played an important role in the Palestinian exodus (correction).<sup>10</sup> By contrast, participants who were randomly assigned the baseline condition were not given any experimental stimuli, which allow us to estimate the base rate of misperceptions about the Palestinian exodus among participants.

To ensure the external validity of the stimuli provided to respondents, the language of the message denying any Jewish role in the Palestinian exodus was adapted from a booklet called "Nakba

<sup>7</sup> We intentionally held the survey two weeks after legislative elections so that political tensions could cool.

<sup>8</sup> Table S1 in the online supporting information shows that our randomization procedure successfully achieved balance across treatments.

<sup>9</sup> Due to concerns about potential demand effects and problems with self-reporting feelings of a lack of control, a manipulation check was omitted. The results described below indicate that the control manipulation had significant effects, suggesting that it worked as intended.

<sup>10</sup> Respondents who were exposed to the denial message alone were instead shown this corrective information in a debriefing after the study was complete.

Nonsense” that was published by the right-wing Israeli group Im Tirtzu (Tadmor & Segal, N.d.) and subsequently covered in the Israeli press (e.g., Hartman & Harkov, 2011; Rolef, 2011; Solomon, 2016). The denial message (which is provided in Appendix S1 in the online supporting information) uses the fact that there was no overarching policy of ethnic cleaning as a pretext to refuse to acknowledge any Jewish responsibility for the Palestinian exodus, a belief that is described in explicitly conspiratorial terms as the result of “a huge campaign of lies that seeks to rewrite, distort, and falsify history” (Tadmor & Segal, n.d.). The conspiracy theory of a plot by Israel’s enemies is thus used to support and reinforce a denialist message promoting misperceptions that deny any Jewish responsibility for the exodus.<sup>11</sup>

Respondents in the correction conditions were subsequently exposed to accurate information adapted from Hazkani (2013), which explains that “Most historians in Israel and abroad no longer dispute the fact that IDF soldiers expelled large numbers of Palestinians from their homes during the 1948 war” and provides evidence supporting this claim. (Again, see Appendix S1 in the online supporting information for the full text.<sup>12</sup>)

After the manipulations, we measured misperceptions and conspiracy beliefs about the Palestinian exodus; beliefs and attitudes on other key issues related to the conflict (tolerance for *Nakba* protests, final status of settlements, Jerusalem, etc.); and respondents’ more general views about Israel and feelings toward Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

### *Hypotheses and Research Question*

Based on the theoretical approach above, we specifically test the following four hypotheses.<sup>13</sup>

*H1:* Respondents in the low-control condition will report greater misperceptions and conspiracy beliefs about the Palestinian exodus and less critical views of Israel’s behavior than those in the high-control condition.

*H2:* Misperceptions will increase more *relative to the baseline condition* due to exposure to historical denial among respondents in the low-control condition than among those in the high-control condition (i.e., the effect of denial exposure on misperceptions relative to baseline will be moderated by the level of control).<sup>14</sup>

*H3:* Individuals in the correction conditions will report lower misperceptions than those who receive only misleading information about the Palestinian exodus.<sup>15</sup>

*H4:* Right-wing respondents will be more resistant to the effects of corrective information than non-right-wing respondents. Specifically, the misperception-reducing effect of the correction will be weaker among right-wing respondents than among other participants (relative to respondents in each group who are only exposed to the historical denial treatment).

<sup>11</sup> As described below, we consider the effects of exposure to this message—and, in some cases, of corrections to it—on belief in historical misperceptions and conspiracy theories.

<sup>12</sup> This article of course differs from the denial message in both tone and content, reflecting our interest in determining the conditions under which realistic corrections effectively counter historical denial and reduce misperceptions.

<sup>13</sup> Note: The hypotheses are renumbered for the sake of clarity from the preregistration; they are listed here in the order they are discussed in the results section below.

<sup>14</sup> Our 2 × 2 (high vs. low control × historical denial vs. denial + correction) allows us to estimate how priming feelings of a lack of control moderate the effects of information versus both the high-control condition as well as a baseline condition.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible that feelings of a lack of control could not only increase misperceptions in response to exposure to a denial message but also resistance to subsequent corrective information. We lack strong theory or evidence to support this conjecture, however, and did not predict such an outcome in our preregistration.



We also consider a preregistered research question about the effect of corrective information on tolerance for protests commemorating the *Nakba*, feelings towards Palestinians and Arab Israelis (Palestinian Citizens of Israel), and support for potential compromises that could be required in the peace process. If historical misperceptions exacerbate intergroup conflict, then humanizing outgroup members by acknowledging their past victimization might make ingroup members view them more favorably, increase tolerance of protests, and increase support for the peace process. However, previous research suggests that attitudes and interpretations may not change in tandem with factual beliefs (e.g., Gaines, Kuklinski, Quirk, Peyton, & Verkuilen, 2007; Kuklinski et al., 2000). It is possible, in other words, that factual beliefs could change but that views toward outgroup members and the conflict will not.

### *Outcome Measures*

Our principal outcome measure is respondents' average misperceptions about Jewish military behavior during the Palestinian exodus in 1948. We follow other research (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010) in defining misperceptions as beliefs that are false or inconsistent with the best available evidence. Specifically, respondents were asked to evaluate the accuracy of the following denialist statements on a 5-point scale from "Very accurate" to "Very inaccurate":

- Jewish soldiers forcibly expelled Palestinian Arabs from many villages in 1948.
- Palestinian Arabs in Israel abandoned their villages on their own in 1948; they did not leave because of Jewish actions.
- Jewish civilian and military leaders knew about and in some cases authorized the expulsions of numerous Palestinian Arabs in 1948.
- The claim that Jewish soldiers forcibly expelled Palestinian Arabs from many villages in 1948 is a lie that is spread by Israel's enemies.

The fourth item uses explicitly conspiratorial language of the sort used in the pamphlet that was adapted in our study materials.<sup>16</sup> Because the conspiracy theory in question is not supported by the evidence, we consider it as part of our scale of historical misperceptions.

We designed these measures assuming that most Israelis do not have specific beliefs about statistics such as the number of people or villages displaced and thus omitted quantitative values from the items and response options. Our language instead follows Morris and others in describing Israeli actions as significant in qualitative terms—for example, "a large number of Arabs were expelled" (2004, p. 589). Responses were scored on a 5-point scale where 5 represents the greatest misperception and 1 represents the least (with scales reverse-coded as appropriate). Per our preregistration, we calculate the mean of the four questions.<sup>17</sup>

We also consider the following secondary outcome measures in the main text:<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> We believe this claim about the origins of the belief that Israel played a role in the Palestinian exodus meets the standard proposed by Uscinski and Parent, who define a conspiracy theory as an explanation of events "which cites as a main causal factor a small group of powerful persons (the conspirators) acting in secret for their own benefit, against the common good" (2014, p. 32).

<sup>17</sup> As we note below, however, our results are consistent if we construct a binary outcome measure for respondents with the highest levels of misperceptions on each outcome measure (i.e., "extremely" or "very accurate" for false statements, "not very" or "not at all accurate" for true ones).

<sup>18</sup> For the first and third measures, we take the mean of the relevant questions after responses are reverse-coded as appropriate unless the items do not scale together, which is the approach we specified in advance. (Again, see Appendix S1 in the online supporting information for the full text of each of these questions.)

- Attitudes toward protests commemorating the *Nakba*.
- Feeling thermometer scores for respondents' attitudes toward Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, and Palestinians (we calculate the difference between respondents' thermometer score for Jewish Israelis and their mean score for Arab Israelis and Palestinians).
- Attitudes on core issues in the dispute over a final status agreement between Jews and Palestinians.

### Statistical Models

We use OLS with robust standard errors to estimate the average treatment effects of our four experimental conditions relative to the control condition for our primary outcome measure (misperceptions about the role of Jewish forces in the Palestinian exodus) and the secondary dependent variables listed above (Samii & Aronow, 2012). We then compute the appropriate quantities to test our hypotheses via a series of planned contrasts between conditions that often differ from the coefficients listed in the tables.<sup>19</sup> For instance, to determine whether a lack of control moderates the effect of exposure to historical denial, we estimate the difference between the treatment effects for the low- and high-control conditions in which respondents are exposed to information denying that Jewish forces played a role in the Palestinian exodus.<sup>20</sup> For Hypothesis 4, we interact the four experimental conditions with an indicator for right-wing self-identification (the two most extreme options on a 7-point scale: right or extreme right) and calculate the difference in correction effects between right-wing respondents and other participants in the low- and high-control conditions (which is again a difference-in-differences estimate).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

We first compare the distribution of our sample relative to the population. As shown in Table 1a, the sample matches the geographic distribution of the Jewish Israeli population, although Table 1b indicates that our participants are somewhat more likely to be secular. We also show in Table S1 in the online supporting information that the randomization was successful in balancing the distribution of a number of relevant characteristics (ideology, age, gender, education, and religiosity) across conditions.

Descriptive statistics from the sample also illustrate the prevalence of misperceptions and conspiracy beliefs about the Palestinian exodus among Jewish Israelis. As Figure 1 indicates, 53% of respondents in our sample stated that it is “not at all accurate” or “not very accurate” that Jewish soldiers forcibly evicted Palestinian Arabs from many villages, including 57% in the control condition. Similarly, 30% said it is inaccurate that Jewish leaders knew about the deportation of many Palestinian Arabs and in some cases gave permission (27% for controls). Conversely, 34% said it is “extremely accurate” or “very accurate” that Palestinian Arabs in Israel abandoned their villages voluntarily (38% for controls), and 36% endorsed the claim that the *Nakba* narrative is a lie spread by

<sup>19</sup> In each of the tables below, the coefficients represent differences in means relative to the baseline condition, which is the excluded category.

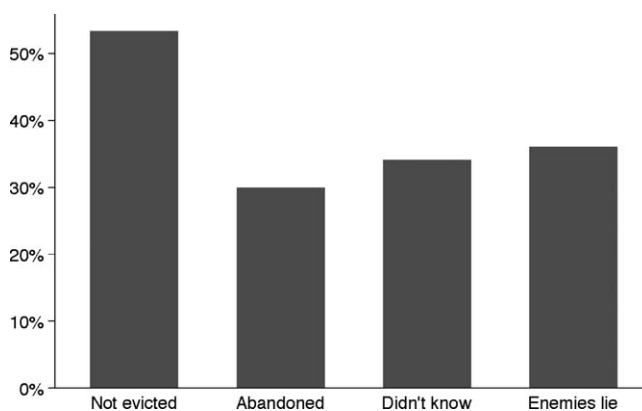
<sup>20</sup> In other words, we can estimate how lack of control changes the effect of exposure to historical denial using the following difference-in-differences model where  $m$  represents the mean:

$$\underbrace{(m_{\text{lowcontrol/uncorrected}} - m_{\text{baseline}})}_{\text{low control/uncorrected treatment effect}} - \underbrace{(m_{\text{highcontrol/uncorrected}} - m_{\text{baseline}})}_{\text{High control/uncorrected treatment effect}}. \quad (1)$$

**Table 1.** Sample/Population Comparisons

(a) <i>Geography</i>			
District	<i>N</i>	Sample %	Population %
Jerusalem	230	11%	11%
North	221	10%	10%
Haifa	291	13%	11%
Central	612	28%	28%
Tel Aviv	504	23%	20%
South	199	9%	14%
West Bank	113	5%	6%
(b) <i>Religiosity</i>			
Affiliation	<i>N</i>	Sample %	Population %
Secular	1,254	58%	44%
Traditional	422	19%	36%
Religious	294	14%	10%
Orthodox	200	9%	9%

Source. Population data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2014).



**Figure 1.** Historical misperception endorsement: binary measures. Respondents stating that it is “not at all” or “not very accurate” that Jewish soldiers forcibly evicted many Palestinian Arabs; “not at all” or “not very accurate” that Jewish leaders knew about the deportation of many Palestinian Arabs and in some cases gave permission; “extremely” or “very accurate” that Palestinian Arabs in Israelis abandoned their villages voluntarily; and “extremely” or “very accurate” that the *Nakba* narrative is a lie spread by Israel’s enemies.

Israel’s enemies (36% for controls). In total, 67% of respondents endorsed a misperception, and the mean number of misperceptions endorsed is 1.53 (68% and 1.57 among controls).<sup>21</sup>

### *Experimental Estimates*

We now turn to the results of our experiment. Table 2 presents OLS models of our primary outcome measure of average misperceptions about the Palestinian exodus across the four scale items. The measure is coded as respondents’ beliefs across four questions answered on 5-point scales where

<sup>21</sup> These descriptive statistics are presented in binary form for ease of interpretation. We examine the effects of our treatments on beliefs more systematically below using the full 5-point accuracy scales provided to respondents, which are more precise and provide additional variance.

**Table 2.** Experimental Effects on Historical Misperception Scale

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Low Control/Uncorrected	0.12** (0.06)	0.13** (0.05)	0.14** (0.06)
Low Control/Correction	−0.19*** (0.06)	−0.17*** (0.05)	−0.20*** (0.06)
High Control/Uncorrected	0.01 (0.06)	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.06)
High Control/Correction	−0.12** (0.06)	−0.12** (0.05)	−0.10 (0.07)
Right-Wing		0.56*** (0.04)	0.56*** (0.08)
Right-Wing × Low Control/Uncorrected			−0.01 (0.12)
Right-Wing × Low Control/Correction			0.10 (0.12)
Right-Wing × High Control/Uncorrected			−0.03 (0.11)
Right-Wing × High Control/Correction			−0.06 (0.11)
Constant (baseline)	3.26 (0.04)	3.08 (0.04)	3.08 (0.05)
<i>N</i>	2053	2053	2053

*Note.* OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

higher values indicate greater misinformation (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.73$ ). Model 1 estimates average treatment effects of each experimental treatment relative to our baseline condition. We then use quantities from this model to evaluate hypotheses Hypotheses 1–3, which are tested via a series of planned contrasts between conditions.

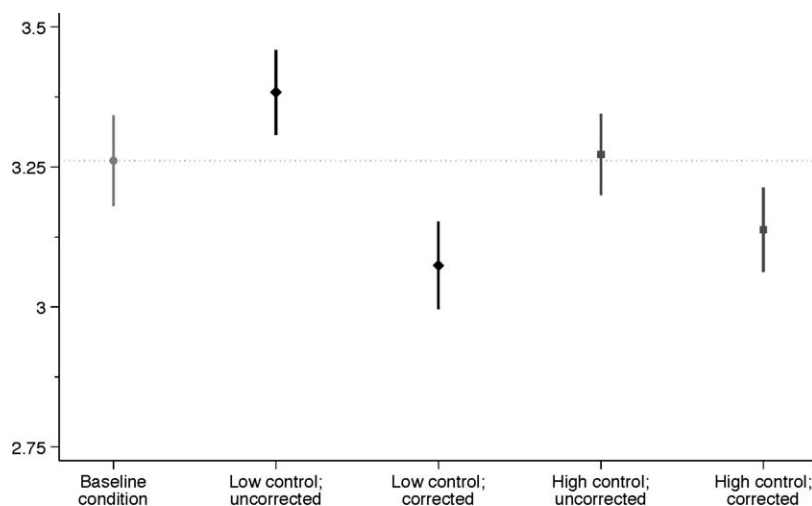
First, Hypothesis 1 predicts that misperceptions about Jewish forces’ role in the Palestinian exodus will be higher in participants who are primed to feel lower levels of control than those in the high-control condition. We find partial support for this hypothesis. Respondents exposed to an uncorrected denialist conspiracy theory reported greater misperceptions about the Palestinian exodus when they were primed to feel low levels of control compared with those primed to feel higher levels of control ( $0.11, p < .05$ ). By contrast, priming respondents to feel low levels of control did not have a significant effect on misperceptions (relative to high control) among respondents who were exposed to corrective information ( $-0.06, ns$ ).<sup>22</sup>

We find support for Hypothesis 2, which predicts that the effect of misinformation on historical misperceptions will be moderated by participants’ feelings of control. Respondent misperceptions increased more versus the baseline condition in the low control/uncorrected condition ( $0.12$ ) than in the high control/uncorrected condition ( $0.01$ )—the difference-in-differences is statistically significant ( $0.11, p < .05$ ). These results suggest that the effect of low control on vulnerability to misperceptions is strongest when misinformation is presented without refutation (i.e., no contradictory information or cues are available).<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicts corrections will decrease misperceptions compared with conditions in which participants are only exposed to an uncorrected denialist conspiracy theory. As expected,

<sup>22</sup> The preregistration states that we will test our hypotheses using OLS models with indicators for each condition, but when we pool respondents in the low- and high-control conditions, the difference is not significant ( $0.02, ns$ ).

<sup>23</sup> These effects do not appear to vary by violence exposure, which could have increased people’s feelings of a lack of control (a preregistered research question). We find no statistically significant change in model fit—see Table S3 and Figure B1 in the online supporting information.



**Figure 2.** Historical misperceptions by experimental condition. Mean and 95% confidence interval of historical misperceptions scale by experimental condition.

misperceptions decreased significantly in response to corrections for respondents primed to feel both low and high levels of control relative to those exposed to an uncorrected conspiracy theory (low control:  $-0.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ; high control:  $-0.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ; exploratory pooled  $t$ -test of correction vs. no correction conditions:  $t = -0.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ).<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, an exploratory analysis shows that the correction effect was *larger* in the low-control condition than in the high-control condition ( $-0.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This unexpected effect appears to be largely attributable to the effect of the low-control manipulation in the uncorrected condition, which increased misperceptions relative to the high-control condition and created more scope for the correction effect, which reduced the difference in misperceptions to statistically indistinguishable levels between the low- and high-control correction conditions ( $-0.06$ , *ns*).<sup>25</sup>

Figure 2 summarizes these results using the mean and 95% confidence interval for our historical misperceptions scale for each experimental condition (the dotted line indicates average misperceptions in the baseline condition). As the figure indicates, priming low levels of control increases misperceptions only when misinformation was not corrected. Average misperceptions are significantly higher in the low-control/uncorrected condition than the high-control/uncorrected condition as expected (3.38 vs. 3.27, respectively), but the difference is smaller and not statistically significant among respondents exposed to corrective information (3.07 for low control versus 3.14 for high). We also find that misperceptions increase significantly more relative to the baseline condition in response to exposure to an uncorrected conspiracy theory for respondents in the low-control condition (3.26 in the baseline condition vs. 3.38 in the low-control/uncorrected condition) than among those in the high-control condition (3.26 for baseline vs. 3.27 for high control/uncorrected). Finally, corrections decrease misperceptions compared to the uncorrected condition for respondents primed to feel both low and high levels of control (3.07 vs. 3.38 and 3.14 vs. 3.27, respectively).

<sup>24</sup> There is no evidence these findings are the result of demand effects, which should be reduced by the two-sided design (i.e., denial versus correction). Several other studies have been found null or backfire effects of corrections on factual beliefs using similar designs (for a review, see Flynn, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> These effects also appear to be domain-specific. As we show in Table S4 in the online supporting information, we find no evidence of change in misperceptions about the Sabra and Shatila massacres (a preregistered research question), which are not addressed in the experimental manipulation.



**Table 3.** Historical Misperceptions: Individual-Item Results

	Average Misperceptions	Palestinians Not Evicted	Voluntarily Abandoned	Jewish Leaders Didn't Know	<i>Nakba</i> Is Lie From Enemies
Low Control/Uncorrected	0.12** (0.06)	0.07 (0.07)	0.20*** (0.08)	0.04 (0.07)	0.18** (0.09)
Low Control/Correction	−0.19*** (0.06)	−0.34*** (0.07)	0.06 (0.08)	−0.34*** (0.07)	−0.12 (0.09)
High Control/Uncorrected	0.01 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	−0.01 (0.07)	0.03 (0.09)
High Control/Correction	−0.12** (0.06)	−0.19*** (0.07)	0.00 (0.08)	−0.24*** (0.07)	−0.07 (0.09)
Constant (baseline)	3.26 (0.04)	3.72 (0.05)	2.97 (0.05)	3.29 (0.05)	3.06 (0.06)
<i>N</i>	2053	2053	2053	2053	2053

*Note.* OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

The substantive magnitude of these effects is most notable at the top end of the distribution. We conducted an exploratory analysis identifying the individuals with the most consistent denialism, which we measure as those respondents who endorsed at least three of the four historical misperceptions tested.<sup>26</sup> The proportion of denialist Jewish Israelis increased from 25% in the baseline condition to 33% in the low-control/uncorrected condition, an absolute increase of eight percentage points and a 30% increase in relative risk of denialism. By contrast, the prevalence of denialism decreases by 1–4 percentage points relative to controls and 5–11 percentage points versus the corresponding uncorrected conditions when respondents are exposed to corrective information (22% in low-control/corrected; 30% in high-control/uncorrected versus 24% in high-control/corrected).<sup>27</sup>

It is also useful to consider treatment-effect estimates for individual items from the historical misperceptions scale, which are presented in disaggregated form in Table 3.<sup>28</sup> We did not make predictions in advance about differences between the specific outcome measures so our interpretation here must be considered exploratory. However, there are striking differences in treatment effects between individual items. The low-control/uncorrected treatment had its most significant effect in increasing agreement with statements that directly exonerated Israel. Relative to baseline, respondents in that condition were significantly more likely to agree with the abandonment claim (third column) and the conspiracy theory (fifth column). These effects were significantly larger than in the corresponding high-control condition ( $p < .10$  in both cases). By contrast, the effects of corrective information relative to baseline were substantively larger for statements that implicated Jewish forces in the Palestinian exodus (the second and fourth columns). Misperceptions decreased significantly relative to baseline in response to corrective information at both low and high levels of control for both outcomes.

These results suggest that low levels of control made respondents more likely to endorse exculpatory claims about Israel’s role. By contrast, corrective information increased agreement with statements describing evidence of Jewish forces’ role in the Palestinian exodus accurately.

<sup>26</sup> Responses to each of the four primary outcome measures were classified as denialist if they misidentified three or more inaccurate statements were “very” or “extremely accurate” or accurate statements as “not very” or “not at all accurate.”

<sup>27</sup> Results are substantively similar if we instead use a binary indicator for average misperceptions of 4 or higher on our 1–5 scale (available upon request).

<sup>28</sup> All OLS model estimates for ordered outcomes such as these are substantively identical when estimated with ordered probit (available upon request).

**Table 4.** Experimental Effects on Outgroup Attitudes

	Punish/Prevent <i>Nakba</i> Protest	Ingroup Feelings Versus Outgroups	Opposition to Peace Process
Low Control/Uncorrected	−0.13 (0.11)	2.32 (2.24)	0.04 (0.06)
Low Control/Correction	−0.26** (0.11)	−1.85 (2.29)	−0.03 (0.06)
High Control/Uncorrected	−0.20* (0.11)	0.60 (2.32)	0.07 (0.06)
High Control/Correction	−0.15 (0.11)	2.75 (2.29)	0.04 (0.06)
Constant (baseline)	3.53 (0.08)	53.81 (1.63)	2.63 (0.04)
<i>N</i>	2029	2021	2021

Note. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Next, we consider whether these treatment effects are moderated by ideology. We first consider ideology using Models 2 and 3 in Table 2, which report OLS estimates that can be used to test Hypothesis 4. Specifically, Hypothesis 4 predicts right-wing respondents will be more resistant to corrective information than nonconservatives, but we find no evidence to support this claim when we estimate a model (Model 3) allowing for treatment effects to vary by right-wing self-identification. Specifically, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no difference in correction effects compared to those who receive uncorrected information for respondents in the low- and high-control conditions.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, we consider the effects of our experimental treatments on attitudes toward Arab Israelis and Palestinians and core issues in the peace process. We preregistered a research question asking whether our corrective information changes fundamental attitudes towards the outgroup or towards the conflict itself, which may be more crystallized and thus more resistant to change. Specifically, does providing corrective information about the Palestinian exodus increase sympathy toward and tolerance for Palestinians and Arab Israelis and/or increase support for the peace process among our Jewish Israeli respondents? Results from these analyses are provided in Table 4. The outcome measure in the first column is an average of two items measuring opposition to the right to hold Nakba Day protests (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.71$ ). The outcome measure in the second column is the difference between respondents' feelings toward Israeli Jews and their average feelings toward Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza on a 0–100 feeling thermometer (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.67$ ). Finally, the third column measures average opposition to the peace process across three questions (see text of these and all other questions in Appendix S1 in the online supporting information; Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.82$ ). We only find significant experimental effects relative to baseline for attitudes toward Nakba Day protests. Support for punishing protesters and opposition to their right to protest decreases significantly relative to baseline for the low-control/correction ( $p < .05$ ) and (unexpectedly) the high-control/uncorrected condition ( $p < .10$ ). However, the effect of the correction does not vary by level of control or vice versa. By contrast, while the experimental treatments do not affect the difference in feelings toward the ingroup

<sup>29</sup> We also find no evidence that the effect of corrective information and ideology on misperceptions is moderated by level of control (a preregistered research question). When we compare the estimates from Models 2 and 3, we cannot reject the null of no difference in model fit between the interactive model and a nested model including only indicators for the experimental conditions and right-wing self-identification, which was our planned test. (See Figure S2 in the online supporting information for corresponding graphs of means by condition and ideology.)

(Jewish Israelis) and outgroups (Arab Israelis and Palestinians) compared with the baseline condition, exploratory analyses indicate that corrective information does reduce ingroup preferences compared with the uncorrected conspiracy theory for respondents primed to feel low levels of control ( $p < .10$ ). Moreover, this effect is significantly greater than the corresponding correction effect for respondents primed to feel high levels of control ( $p < .05$ ). No significant differences between conditions are observed for attitudes toward the peace process, which are likely to be among the most deeply held in Israeli politics and thus very difficult to change.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

Our experimental findings offer important insights into the persistence of historical misperceptions and conspiracy theories in intergroup conflict and the prospects for correcting those mistaken beliefs. A national survey experiment among Jewish Israelis found that inducing lower levels of control makes respondents more vulnerable to the effects of historical denialism. Exposure to a message-denying evidence of the forced expulsion of many Palestinians during the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 increased misperceptions only when people were reminded of feelings of a lack of control. However, corrective information was quite effective in countering this effect—misperceptions about the Palestinian exodus declined significantly even for respondents in the low-control condition and those whom we might expect to be most motivated to resist this information (e.g., right-wing Jewish Israelis). Finally, exposure to corrective information also had some effect on respondents' tolerance of protests but induced no measurable change in their general feelings about outgroups or views of the peace process.

These results have important implications for the study of intergroup conflict, historical memory, and political misperceptions. First, our findings suggest that intergroup conflicts can make people more vulnerable to misperceptions by inducing a feeling of a lack of control resulting from violence or oppression. Under these circumstances, people may be more likely to endorse misperceptions they hear or read or to blame outgroups for past ingroup behavior.

Nonetheless, members of groups involved in intergroup conflicts may be more receptive to corrective information than previously thought. We find that corrections are fairly effective in changing beliefs about historical events and past ingroup behavior even among respondents who we would expect to be especially resistant due to ideological motivations or psychological factors. These findings suggest that corrective information can be effective at reducing misperceptions about highly controversial issues under some circumstances. Given the highly political nature of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this finding is important. We are especially struck by the evidence that corrective information can trump the effects of low control on misperceptions. This result tentatively suggests that while perceptions of control matter, the informational environment may play a more important role in fostering or hindering misperceptions.

However, reducing historical misperceptions did not lead to changes in Jewish Israeli attitudes towards Arab Israelis and Palestinians or core issues in the peace process, which echo recent studies showing that corrective information changed factual beliefs but did not affect candidate opinions during the 2016 U.S. presidential race (Swire, Berinsky, Lewandowsky, & Ecker, 2017; Nyhan et al., n.d.). In many contexts, changing factual beliefs may not be enough to change opinions. This finding contradicts prior claims that misperceptions and denial of past suffering are a major barrier to conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 2000). Efforts to improve intergroup relations by acknowledging past

<sup>30</sup> The results of the experimental manipulation on respondents' more general views of Israel were also limited (a preregistered research question). As Table S5 shows in the online supporting information, corrective information increased critical views of how Jewish Israelis viewed the actions of Jewish forces during the Palestinian exodus, but beliefs about Israel's founding do not change measurably.

wrongdoing may be ineffectual or require further steps toward reconciliation by members of the victimizing group.

Of course, this study has limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, though we conducted a large national survey experiment, we could only consider one population (Jewish Israelis) and one set of misperceptions (related to the Palestinian exodus). It would be desirable to test whether our findings hold for other historical misperceptions and populations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g., Holocaust denial among Palestinians) as well as other intergroup conflicts. Given the duration and seemingly entrenched nature of attitudes related to the conflict, the fact that perceptions of past Israeli actions changed both as a result of feelings of control and corrective information suggests that our findings would translate to other conflicts, but further study is needed. In particular, scholars should test whether correcting historical misperceptions is more effective at changing fundamental attitudes toward outgroups in other contexts, including postconflict settings. Second, as in any study, our results may have been affected by the social and political context at the time of data collection, making replication desirable. Finally, many other factors such as trust and education can also influence misperception and conspiracy theory belief (e.g., Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004; Goertzel, 1994). The role they play in historical misperception belief during situations of intergroup conflict should be investigated further.

In the end, these results are encouraging but also suggest the limits of historical truth in changing conflict dynamics. We observe less resistance to corrective information in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than is often observed in domestic U.S. politics among committed partisans or ideological groups (Flynn et al., 2017). Our findings thus offer reason for hope that it may be possible to promote a shared historical understanding of the past actions taken by both sides as well as the suffering they have experienced. On the other hand, these belief changes did not translate into measurable differences in attitudes toward Palestinians or support for the peace process. While some have argued that misperceptions contribute to the intractable nature of many conflicts (Bar-Tal, 2000), correcting myths about the Palestinian exodus did not change Jewish Israeli attitudes towards the conflict, which suggests that historical misperceptions may be more of a symptom than a cause of ongoing intergroup strife.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

**Appendix S1.** Experimental Instrument

**Appendix S2.** Additional Results

**Figure S1.** Misperceptions About the Palestinian Exodus by Condition and Ideology.

**Figure S2.** Misperceptions About the Palestinian Exodus by Condition and Violence Exposure.

**Table S1.** Balance Statistics

**Table S2.** Historical Misperceptions: Binary Outcome Measure Results

**Table S3.** Misperceptions About the Palestinian Exodus: Differences by Condition and Violence Exposure

**Table S4.** Experimental Effects on Sabra/Shatila Misperceptions

**Table S5.** Experimental Effects on Beliefs About Israel