

# Rationalizing Conflict: The Polarizing Role of Accountability in Ideological Decision Making

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Journal of Conflict Resolution

1-30

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DOI: 10.1177/0022002714564431

jcr.sagepub.com



## Abstract

How does accountability impact political decisions? Though previous research on accountability has demonstrated its potential effects in the realms of business, elections, and more, very little research has explored the effect of citizen accountability in highly ideological, intractable, and political conflicts. This article addresses this issue, looking at the unique interaction between accountability and ideology on Israeli citizens' political attitudes regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The results of two experimental studies in Israel reveal that accountable individuals behave in significantly more ideologically partisan ways than their nonaccountable counterparts. Moreover, this polarization is dependent on the specific conflict context, with leftists more affected by the issue of negotiations and rightists by security concerns. This signals that ideological polarization under accountability may depend on the “issue ownership” each ideological group feels toward the specific conflict context and its corresponding social goal of projecting ideological consistency on these issues.

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## Keywords

accountability, ideology, conflict, political attitudes, motivated reasoning

The idea that accountability has the potential to breed moderation among heretofore radical political actors is an oft-cited rationale used by those who seek greater engagement with (and responsibility from) extremist or recalcitrant political groups and leaders. Particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring, optimistic politicians and pundits have pointed out that, for example, the victory of Islamist parties across the Middle East may be positive for democracy in that the accountability of public office will force their leadership to behave pragmatically, eschewing extremist positions, or ideological policy responses that could spur conflict (see Zakaria 2012).<sup>1</sup> However, this article argues that the effects of accountability cannot necessarily be applied to conflict contexts without first considering the interaction between accountability and the strong ideological beliefs that characterize these types of political conflicts. And, indeed, the political impact of accountability in such strongly ideological contexts has rarely been empirically studied. In pushing for greater accountability from citizens and leaders in conflict, are policy makers increasing the chances for ideological moderation or polarization?

We argue that accountability—the implicit or explicit expectation that one may be called upon to justify one’s beliefs, feelings, and actions to others or face some negative consequence (Tetlock, Lerner, and Ramachandran 1994; Tetlock 1992)—may work counterintuitively in political conflicts, serving as a powerful motivating factor to amplify ideological decisions and attitudes. In other words, accountability may cause political actors to resort to familiar ideological arguments and the traditional partisan rationales in which they are the most well versed in order to better justify and explain their decisions to others. Moreover, as accountability is essentially a social phenomenon (Tetlock 1992), it may have an impact on political decision making even with a relatively *minimal* implied punishment, such as the potential “loss of face” to an observer if one is unable to provide adequate justification for their political opinions. This social component of accountability also means that its effects will be profoundly impacted by the *image* an individual wants to project to said observer. Some individuals’ social goals, such as being perceived of as knowledgeable, consistent, or ideologically pure, may be best achieved by utilizing established ideological arguments that they feel they understand and identify with most.

In the following section, we review the literature on the role of accountability in decision-making processes, specifically focusing on how the social-psychological components of accountability can affect political decisions. We then examine the role of ideology in informing political preferences and expand on previous research in these areas to formulate the accountability-ideology interaction hypothesis. Then, we report the findings of two experimental studies conducted among Israeli Jews in 2012 and 2013. Finally, we discuss the findings and their implications within a

broader context of accountability, ideology, and conflict decision-making research and practice.

### *Accountability and Decision Making*

Accountability can be conceptualized in many ways. Often political scientists view accountability as inherently tied to political office—accountability to voters implies that representatives can be voted out of office if they do not satisfy their audience (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995). Others view accountability as implicitly connected to the concept of wrongdoing—individuals must have “transgressed” in some real or perceived way in order to be held accountable and then they must provide some adequate explanation of the transgression (i.e., violence against another) in order to avoid negative consequences (Sitkin and Bies 1993). This approach demonstrates the ways in which accountability—giving “accounts” or explanations (ibid.)—can be used to actually manage and mitigate conflict (ibid.).

However, accountability can also be conceptualized at a more basic psychological level—as a primarily social phenomenon in which individuals seek to maintain prestige and avoid losing face to any potential observers of their actions. In this sense, accountability is defined as the implicit or explicit expectation that individuals may be called upon to justify their beliefs, feelings, and actions to others (Tetlock, Lerner, and Ramachandran 1994; Semin and Manstead 1983; Tetlock 1992) with the assumption that, if one is not able to provide an adequate explanation for their actions or beliefs, they may face some sort of punishment (Stenning 1995). This conception of accountability broadens its relevance to nearly every action or belief of an individual that could be witnessed or observed by others, particularly on socially or politically relevant issues. Thus, the impact of accountability applies broadly, beyond elected officials or militants, to average citizens as they discuss and debate political issues in their daily lives.

Perceived this way, this social component of accountability could have a profound impact on individuals’ political behavior and attitude expression, even in the absence of a behavioral transgression meriting punishment. Indeed, many studies have shown that the mere presence of other individuals can significantly alter behavior (Zajonc 1965). For example, a series of studies (Felson 1982) found that simple *observation* by other individuals (i.e., the presence of a third party) increased the likelihood of the violent escalation of disputes. However, providing adequate explanations for these perceived transgressions often *prevented* this escalation (ibid.). A similar process may also occur in political contexts and the expression of hawkish or dovish political beliefs—the presence and judgment of others may alter the expression of these political attitudes as individuals seek to “save face” or appear in a way they view as socially desirable—providing adequate justification for one’s political views could be perceived of as necessary to avoid a negative evaluation.

Because of these unique characteristics and potential repercussions of accountability, numerous studies have sought to understand the precise ways in which

different types of accountability alter the decision-making processes and behavioral tendencies of individuals in a variety of contexts, such as medicine (Han and Lerner 2009), business negotiations (Lerner and Shonk 2006), tax audits (Buchman, Tetlock, and Reed 1996), postwar aid (Skitka, McMurray, and Burroughs 1991), education (Burke 2005; Fuhrman and Elmore 2004; Linn 2000; Miller 1995), the criminal justice system (Stenning 1995), and representative government (Behn 2001; Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson 1995; Grant and Keohane 2005; March and Olsen 1995; Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). The central goal of most of these accountability studies has been to determine when and how accountability could improve decision-making processes and overall performance.<sup>2</sup> This research has revealed that only certain types of accountability are likely to reduce the effect of cognitive biases and potentially improve the accuracy of decision-making processes. For example, postdecision accountability has been found to promote confirmatory thought (a one-sided attempt to rationalize a prior decision or belief), whereas predecision accountability is more likely to lead to exploratory thought (Lerner and Tetlock 2003). Moreover, studies in the area of representative government have demonstrated that the *audience* to which a decision maker is accountable is particularly important in affecting decision-making processes. Namely, accountability can have the effect of reducing incentives for compromise, as elected officials seek to appeal to their respective ideological bases (e.g., Voeten and Brewer 2006; Koch and Gartner 2005; Anderson and Souva 2010).

Thus, for accountability to promote deep thinking, the views of the audience must be unknown (Tetlock 1992). Accountability must also be (1) predecisional, (2) focused on process as well as outcome, and (3) invoked by an audience who has the *right* to hold a decision maker accountable (Lerner and Tetlock 1999). These findings echo the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty and Cacioppo 1986) of attitude change. Namely, this type of accountability has the potential to promote “preemptive self-criticism” (Tetlock 1983a) or a “central route” of attitude change (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) that entails the thoughtful and careful reconsideration of the true merits of a particular argument or preference. In contrast, if these conditions are not met, or some mitigating factor interferes with this process, accountability may instead trigger peripheral processing (*ibid.*), encouraging conformity to audience views, defensive bolstering of a previously held issue position, escalation of commitment, or a “digging in” effect (Tetlock and Lerner 1999).

The current study emphasizes that, in political conflict, the potential of accountability to encourage ideological consistency may exist even under these “ideal” accountability circumstances, due to the sheer power of ideology to inform political attitudes in conflict contexts and individuals’ social goal of projecting consistency on these issues.<sup>3</sup> This hypothesis is rooted in the idea of the contingency model of accountability (Tetlock 1992). The contingency model explains the effects of accountability on judgment and decision making through the lens of the social desirability of individuals to feel “the approval and respect of those to

whom they are accountable” (p. 339). In other words, the implied punishment of accountability can be as minimal as social disapproval and still influence decision making and behavior.<sup>4</sup>

### *Ideology and Political Attitudes*

The strong influence of political ideology on political preferences and behavior is also well established in political science literature (for a review, see Hinich and Munger 1996). And indeed, ideology has been shown to be “a *potent* motivational force,” as “human beings are capable of committing atrocities (as well as acts of generosity and courage) and *sacrificing even their own lives* for the sake of abstract belief systems” (Jost and Amodio 2011, 55, emphasis added). In political conflicts, the role of ideology in political decision making is often particularly strong (Bar-Tal 2007). However, ideology is also often a fraught term with many different meanings for political scientists. The present research utilizes a political psychological definition of ideology, conceptualizing it as a set of beliefs that aim to “provide both an interpretation of the environment and a prescription as to how that environment should be structured” (Denzau and North 1994, 24).<sup>5</sup> According to Jost, Federico, and Napier (2009), ideologies are more than just a collection of political beliefs and in fact fundamentally help citizens to interpret their world by “making assertions or assumptions about human nature, historical events, present realities, and future possibilities” (p. 309). Thus, in the motivational approach, ideology and specific support for concrete political policies are distinct but related concepts. Moreover, rather than expressing ideology as contingent on political information and sophistication, and therefore only pertinent to a subset of the population, this approach understands ideology as relevant to *all* individuals due to the role it plays in serving basic psychological needs that all people possess.

This idea of motivated reasoning (Tetlock 1983a, 1983b, 1985; Kunda 1990; Gerber and Green 1999; Lodge and Taber 2005; Redlawsk 2002), as it pertains to ideology, strongly supports the hypothesis of this article—that individuals will be motivated to behave in more ideologically consistent ways to the extent that they feel they will be held accountable (and thus have to justify) their political decisions to a third party. In a highly ideological environment like the one of intractable conflicts, ideological consistency may represent a more important social goal for individuals than moderation or self-critical thought, even when the views of the “audience” to whom they are accountable are unknown. Moreover, expressing more ideologically consistent attitudes may help individuals better defend their issue positions using traditional well-versed ideological arguments. Thus, in these contexts, ideology may serve as both a tool for projecting cognitive consistency and an easily accessible set of arguments that enables individuals to justify their decisions and project acumen and confidence regarding their political beliefs (Federico and Hunt 2013).

### *The Accountability–Ideology Interaction Hypothesis*

This article thus merges the motivational approach to the study of the ideology policy preference association with the contingency theory of accountability, hypothesizing that, to the extent that accountability is a social process of judgment (Tetlock 1992), accountability will reinforce ideology as an important mechanism for rationalizing and justifying political decisions. In other words, higher levels of accountability will increase participants' adherence to their ideological beliefs in their reported policy preferences rather than moderating their attitudes toward the ideological center, particularly in the strongly ideological context of intractable conflict.

We hypothesize that this interaction occurs for two main reasons. First, according to the ELM model, when individuals expect that they will need to justify their beliefs to a third party, they will tend to search for more arguments to support their viewpoints (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Because ideological arguments, and their corresponding rationales, are familiar, well known, and easily accessed in political debates, ideology serves as a source of justification for individuals placed under stress by the demands of accountability. Particularly in the Israeli context of this study, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a highly salient ideological issue, with Israeli citizens supporting or opposing compromises or military actions toward the Palestinians largely along a left–right partisan continuum. On both sides of the ideological spectrum, Israeli citizens are highly steeped in the political rhetoric of the conflict, familiar with, and taking strong positions regarding, the ideological arguments for and against militancy or compromise with the Palestinians (Shamir and Arian 1999; Hazan 2007). Thus, individuals may be even more likely to resort to these ideological rationales and defensive bolstering of their position<sup>6</sup> when they are held accountable in order to maintain the appearance of consistency and better justify their decision to an outside observer. In other words, individuals may become more ideologically extreme rather than moderating their views toward the center of the political spectrum.

Second, individuals may respond more ideologically because the social goals of ideological individuals in conflict contexts may *not* be to appear moderate or compromising, but rather to appear ideologically consistent to an outside observer. Indeed, ideological individuals will most likely want to be seen by others (and by themselves) as staying true to their ideological belief systems and social–political values, rather than compromising their ideological values for the sake of moderation. In other words, under situations of accountability, in order to avoid being forced to explain differences between their proclaimed ideological affiliation and their current political positions, individuals may be tempted to double down, selecting their policy preferences in more classically ideological ways. As such, under situations of high accountability, a fundamentally social phenomenon in which individuals are judged and evaluated by others, people may report stronger adherence to ideological political principles than they would have under more

ambiguous, anonymous circumstances in order to project a self-image that they would consider both positive and consistent.

## **The Context—The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict**

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is one of the world’s most deeply intractable conflicts. Originating in the early twentieth century over competing claims to the land between Jewish Zionist immigrants and the Arab inhabitants of mandate Palestine, then under British control, this conflict continues to rage over core issues of borders, refugees, security, and the fate of the holy city of Jerusalem. Since 2000, 6,876 Palestinian citizens have been killed by Israeli security forces; likewise, 1,082 Israeli citizens have been killed by Palestinian militants (B’Tselem 2013). Recent years have seen little improvement. In Operation Cast Lead alone—the three-week armed conflict that took place in the Gaza Strip during the winter of 2008 to 2009 in response to rocket fire from the Hamas-controlled Strip—1,398 Palestinians were killed by Israeli strikes and over a million Israelis lived within range of Hamas rockets, routinely running to bomb shelters as air raid sirens rang overhead (B’Tselem 2013).

Years of negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (formerly the PLO) in the West Bank have also produced disappointing results. After the promise of the Oslo Accords in the late 1990s, the region quickly descended into violence once more with the failure of the 2000 Camp David talks and the start of the Second Intifada, a violent Palestinian uprising that led to the deaths of over 4,000 Palestinians and 500 Israelis. A series of failed peace talks followed the intifada—the 2001 Taba Summit, the 2002 Quartet “Road Map,” the 2003 Geneva Initiative, the 2007 Annapolis Conference, and the most recent 2013 effort by US secretary of state John Kerry that has largely stagnated.

This frustrating history has engendered a strong ideological debate within Israeli (and Palestinian) society over the correct path toward peace (or even if such a path exists at all). The Israeli left supports the concept of “land for peace” and endorses good faith negotiations with the Palestinians on the basis of the 1967 borders (Arian and Shamir 2011). The Israeli right, on the other hand, privileges Israeli security concerns and emphasizes the importance of attacking terrorist networks and maintaining Israeli sovereignty over disputed territories in the West Bank (Arian and Shamir 2011). It is in this violent, frustrating, and strongly ideological conflict in which the current study takes place.

## **The Current Research**

The following two experimental studies examine the ideology–accountability interaction hypothesis in the context of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Study 1 seeks to first establish the validity of the hypothesis by examining Israeli citizens’ receptiveness to specific political compromises with the Palestinians in a potential

negotiation scenario under accountable and nonaccountable circumstances. Study 2 expands on study 1 by examining whether the accountability–interaction hypothesis remains valid in *different* types of conflict scenarios and whether it also influences *general* political preferences for military or diplomatic solutions to the conflict.

## Study 1

Study 1 was designed to causally test the ideology–accountability interaction hypothesis by manipulating accountability and then measuring support for a specific (supposedly existing) proposal by Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas for the renewal of negotiations with Israel. In this study, the central hypothesis is that ideological differences in support for the negotiations proposal will be *exacerbated* by accountability. Specifically, we expect that accountable leftists and rightists will evoke significantly more partisan political attitudes toward the proposal than those in the control condition. In contrast, because centrists are often defined by their very lack of conformity to a specific ideology, centrists should feel little social pressure to conform to a clear left or right wing ideology or appear more ideologically consistent when held accountable. Moreover, since centrists may also be apathetic or generally confused about their political views, the social pressure to project a specific viewpoint should be largely absent. Thus, we hypothesized that we should not see any significant changes in the political attitudes of centrists between the accountable and control conditions.

## Methodology

**Participants.** Seventy-four law and government students at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya (thirty-four males and forty females), age ranging from twenty-two to fifty ( $M = 25.67$ , standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 3.4), participated in the study and were entered into a raffle to win 150 Israeli shekels for their participation (approximately US\$40).<sup>7</sup> The sample was largely secular, with 38 percent of the participants identifying themselves as secular, 35.6 percent identifying themselves as secular–traditional, 12.3 percent as traditional, and only 6.8 percent as religious or Ultra-Orthodox (an additional 6.8 percent chose not to answer). Politically, the sample leaned somewhat to the right, like the Israeli society as a whole, with 27.4 percent of the participants identifying themselves as belonging to the right or the extreme right, 26 percent identifying as moderate right-wingers, 17.8 percent identifying themselves as centrist, and 28.8 percent as belonging to the center-left, left, or extreme left.<sup>8</sup>

**Procedure.** All participants were handed a survey form in which they were initially exposed to the accountability or control condition and asked to read a fictional proposal sent by the Palestinian Authority to Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu for the renewal of negotiations (they believed the proposal was genuine until their debriefing at the end of the study). Thirty-six individuals were randomly



assigned to the control condition and thirty-six individuals to the accountability condition.

Following Lerner, Goldberg, and Tetlock (1998), participants in the accountability condition were informed that, following their completion of the questionnaire, they would be contacted to undergo a phone interview with (a fictional) Dr. Ephraim Cohen during which they would be asked to detail the rationale behind their decisions about the proposal. They were told that Dr. Cohen is a senior researcher at the IDC who has studied the field of conflict decision making for many years. Importantly, they knew nothing about this fictional researcher's political predispositions. The wording of this manipulation mirrored the language used in Lerner, Goldberg, and Tetlock's (1998, 566) accountability manipulation in their article published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. Participants in the control condition on the other hand were told that their decision and answers to the questions subsequently were completely anonymous and that we would not possess any identifying information from the questionnaires.

This well-established accountability manipulation fits the accountability criteria outlined by Tetlock and Lerner (1999) and Tetlock, Lerner, and Ramachandran (1994) of "evaluation"—participants expect that their performance will be assessed by another according to some normative ground rules and with some implied consequences, social or material. Participants must "give a social account," not of their actions but of their political beliefs, in order to avoid the "punishment" of the negative social stigma they may receive for being unable to justify these important beliefs (Sitkin and Bies 1993). This manipulation was designed to meet the standards of accountability that Tetlock and Lerner (1999) conclude are *most likely* to encourage thoughtful decision-making processes and a more central route of information processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986): (1) individuals are accountable to an audience with unknown views,<sup>9</sup> (2) individuals are held accountable for the decision-making process and not just the decision itself (i.e., their ability to justify their rationale), (3) individuals are held accountable to someone who has the right to hold them accountable (by virtue of expertise or position), and (4) individuals are told that they will be accountable *prior* to making decisions.

The proposal itself offered ostensibly reasonable conditions for a return to negotiations in which all final status issues would be on the table. Both the Palestinians and the Israelis would make minor compromises, for example, by increasing prosecution of suspected terrorists in the West Bank (the Palestinians) or by removing impediments to Palestinian freedom of movement such as roadblocks or checkpoints (the Israelis). This proposal was purposely designed to avoid the most ideologically steeped core final status issues, focusing instead on smaller compromises for which we might expect more flexibility of attitudes and less reflexively ideological policy positions among respondents. After reading the proposal, participants were asked to fill in a battery of questions regarding their political opinions concerning the proposal. They were asked to evaluate on a ten-point Likert-type scale political questions directly related to their acceptance or rejection

of this specific proposal, the study's dependent variable. After a series of filler questions designed to distance participants from the manipulation and the conflict context, participants then answered a series of demographic questions, including a question regarding their self-placement on the ideological spectrum from extreme right to extreme left. Students then submitted their questionnaires to the examiners and received a debriefing before leaving the classroom.

*Measures.* *Support for political compromise* was measured by averaging the answers to four questions related to support for the proposal, as rated on a ten-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1—*Not at all*—to 10—*Very much* ( $\alpha = .94$ ). The scale included the items “to what extent would you support this proposal if it was brought to a referendum,” “to what extent would you personally recommend this proposal if you were an advisor to the Israeli government,” “to what extent do you think Israel should accept this proposal,” and “to what extent is this proposal good for Israel.”

*Ideological affiliation* was assessed by individuals' response to the question, “What is your political position?” Individuals could select extreme right, right, center right, center, center left, left, or extreme left. This question was asked at the very end of the study after a long series of other filler and demographic questions to ensure that the manipulation would still not influence respondents' answers to this question.<sup>10</sup>

*Demographic measures*, in addition to ideology, included were the variables age, gender, level of political engagement, religiosity, socioeconomic status, and education level. Demographic questions were specifically limited to these items due to the necessity of keeping the survey short in order to ensure full participation by the students.

## Results

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables.* We examined the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the variables, including the dependent variables, possible control and mediating variables, and demographic indicators (see Table 1). As hypothesized, levels of support for compromises were significantly correlated with political ideology. This suggests, not surprisingly, that leftists were more inclined to political compromise than rightists. Further regression analysis revealed that even when controlling for the effects of all relevant sociopolitical variables (gender, age, socioeconomic level, political involvement, and educational attainment) on support for political compromise, ideology's ability to predict such support remained strong, model:  $R^2 = .44$ ;  $F(7,58) = 6.40$ ,  $p = .00$ ; and coefficient:  $\beta = .48$ ,  $p = .00$ . In fact, level of religiosity was the only other variable that was significantly related to support for political compromise ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Table 2). This relationship is not surprising in the Israeli context, where ideology and religiosity are highly correlated in the population (Shamir and Arian 1999; Hazan 2007).

*Main Effects.* A *t*-test analysis found no main effects of accountability on mean levels of support for political compromise between the accountability condition ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ) and the control condition,  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ,  $t(72) = -.29$ ,  $p = .77$ ,

**Table 1.** Bivariate Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables in Study 1.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Support for political compromise (low: 1 → high: 10)	4.15 (1.95)	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Age (20–50)	25.69 (3.39)	.070	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Gender (M: 1, F: 2)	1.54 (.50)	-.148	-.402**	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Level of political engagement (low: 1, high: 6)	3.91 (.84)	-.218	.098	-.285*	1	—	—	—	—	—
5. Ideological orientation (extreme right [1] → extreme left [7])	3.56 (1.41)	.556**	.137	-.164	.231	1	—	—	—	—
6. Religiosity (low: 1 → high: 6)	1.84 (.91)	-.310**	-.008	-.123	.042	-.341**	1	—	—	—
7. Socioeconomic status (low: 1 → high: 6)	3.34 (1.54)	-.223	-.056	.258*	.037	-.173	-.283*	1	—	—
8. Education (low: 1 → high: 6)	4.00 (.414)	-.153	.279*	.000	.041	-.099	.114	.201	1	—

Note: F = female; M = male; M, mean; SD = standard deviation.

\* $p \leq .05$  (two tailed). \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two tailed).

**Table 2.** Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Predicting Support for Peace Negotiations through Ideology, Controlling for All Other Relevant Variables in Study I.

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$
Ideology	.649	.158	.481**
Age	-.009	.062	-.016
Gender	.005	.482	.001
Socioeconomic status	-.199	.147	-.162
Politically engaged	.279	.265	.119
Education	-.252	.585	-.046
Religiosity	-.488	.239	-.237*
R <sup>2</sup>	.436		
F	6.402**		

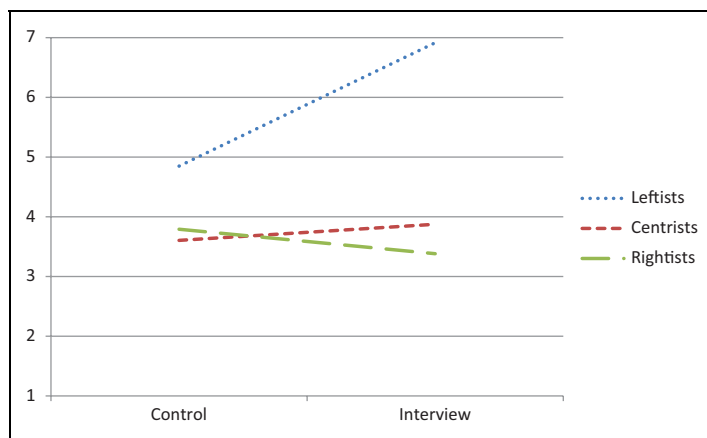
Note: SE = standard error.

\* $p \leq .05$  (two tailed). \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two tailed).

suggesting that accountability's effect on these variables was contingent on its interaction with ideology. Interestingly, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparison of the proposal support mean by the three ideological groupings (leftists, centrists, and rightists)<sup>11</sup> also indicated that the impact of ideology on political preferences was *not* significant in the control condition,  $F(2,33) = 1.62, p = .21$ , and was only significant in the manipulation (accountability) condition,  $F(2,33) = 16.83, p = .00$ . A Scheffe post hoc test confirmed that in the control condition, there was no significant difference between leftists' and rightists' responses to the proposal ( $p = .28$ ), but that in the accountability condition there was a significant difference ( $p = .00$ ). Thus, the impact of both ideology and accountability on political attitudes seemed to be largely contingent on their interaction. Put plainly, leftists and rightists responded with similar political attitudes in the absence of accountability, and accountability seemed to not generate changes in political attitudes without accounting for ideological differences among respondents.

### Accountability–Ideology Interaction Effects

We thus turned to test the hypothesized accountability  $\times$  ideology interaction on support for the proposal. To examine whether and how ideology moderated the relationship between accountability and support for the proposal, we employed Hayes's (2013) PROCESS regression command (model 1) to test the conditional effect,  $R^2 = .41, F(3,68) = 15.53, p = .00$ . Further regression analysis revealed no significant main effect for ideology ( $B = .37$ , standard error [SE] = .41,  $t = -.96, p = .34$ ) on support for the negotiations proposal once the interaction term was included in the regression. Even more important, the interaction term (accountability  $\times$  ideology) had a significant effect on support for the proposal ( $B = .77, SE = .26, t = 2.99, p = .00$ ), indicating that the relationship between accountability and attitudes toward the proposal was indeed moderated by political ideology.



**Figure 1.** Means comparison of interaction of ideology and accountability on support for compromise in study 1.<sup>18</sup>

A PROCESS analysis of the conditional effects of accountability on support for the proposal at three different values of political orientation (the mean [ $3.56$ ],  $1$   $SD$  above the mean [ $4.97$ ], and  $1$   $SD$  below the mean [ $2.14$ ]) allowed us to shed light on the nature of this interaction. This analysis revealed that among people on the high edge of the ideology measure ( $1$   $SD$  above the mean, from here on termed leftists), there was a significant relationship between accountability and support for the negotiations proposal ( $B = 1.62$ ,  $SE = .51$ ,  $t = 3.16$ ,  $p = .00$ ). This relationship among people around the ideology measure's mean (centrists), however, was not significant ( $B = .52$ ,  $SE = .36$ ,  $t = 1.45$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Interestingly, for people on the low edge of the ideology measure ( $1$   $SD$  below the mean, from here on termed rightists), there was also no significant relationship between accountability and levels of support for the proposal ( $B = -.57$ ,  $SE = .52$ ,  $t = -1.10$ ,  $p = .27$ ; see Figure 1). Thus, the significance of the interaction effect appears to be largely driven by the polarization of leftists' political attitudes under accountability.

## Discussion

The first study revealed that the interaction of accountability and ideology significantly increased ideological adherence to specific policy preferences—indeed, in its absence, attitudes toward the proposal were not significantly different between ideological groups; however, this relationship between accountability and ideology was only significant for leftists. Although rightists also showed increased ideological affinity in the accountability condition, the effect was not significant. This result raises the possibility that the differences in how rightists and leftists

respond politically to being held accountable may be due to the concept of ideological issue ownership. Study 1 explicitly tested an issue “owned” by the political left in Israel—negotiations with the Palestinians—and so, accountable leftists may have felt more social pressure to “put their money where their mouth was” and express policy positions more consistent with their proclaimed ideology, when held accountable. This result therefore indicates that the social pressure for consistency of views may indeed be a primary mechanism in triggering increased ideological adherence to policy position. Seeking to explore this discrepancy between rightists and leftists’ responses to accountability further, we designed study 2 to test the effect of the ideology–accountability interaction in distinct political contexts and issues.

## Study 2

Study 2 was conducted in a similar fashion to study 1, with two notable changes designed to address the questions highlighted previously. First, study 2 sought to test whether the accountability–ideology interaction would hold in different contexts utilizing an experimental 2 (high vs. low accountability)  $\times$  2 (security vs. negotiations) design that manipulated both levels of accountability *and* the specific issue at hand—security or negotiations. Thus, essentially, study 2 was composed of two studies conducted simultaneously—one under a negotiations context and another under a security context. By using two distinct scenarios in this study, we hoped to be able to generalize our results across diverse ideological contexts and better understand the role of issue ownership in this ideology–accountability interaction.

Also in study 2, we introduced a new dependent variable, designed to test *general* preferences for military versus diplomatic solutions to the conflict, rather than support for minor onetime political compromises. This variable was designed specifically to position military and diplomatic solutions as opposing choices; participants would need to privilege one over the other. If the ideology–accountability interaction significantly affects such broad and important political attitudes, we can generalize our findings more widely to different types of political decisions in conflict contexts.

We hypothesized that, regardless of whether Israeli rightists and Israeli leftists were presented with a negotiations context or a security context, accountability would cause participants to skew their policy preferences more in line with their ideological self-categorization, but that this interaction would only be significant for leftists in a negotiations context and for rightists in a security context, due to the perceived “ownership” of each issue with the political right and left, respectively. Centrists’ political attitudes should, again, not shift significantly in either context.

## Methodology

**Participants.** A total of 145 students at the IDC Herzliya (ninety-three males and fifty-two females), age ranging from twenty-one to fifty ( $M = 26.38$ ,  $SD = 4.74$ ),

participated in the study and were entered into a raffle to win 200 Israeli shekels for their participation (approximately US\$55).<sup>12</sup> The sample was largely secular, with 60.7 percent of the participants identifying themselves as secular, 20.7 percent identifying themselves as secular–traditional, 11 percent as traditional, and only 5.5 percent as religious or Ultra-Orthodox (an additional 2.1 percent chose not to answer). Politically, the sample leaned somewhat to the right, with 43.4 percent of the participants identifying themselves as belonging to the center-right, right, or the extreme right; 23.4 percent identifying themselves as centrist; and 32.4 percent as belonging to the center-left, left, or extreme left.<sup>13</sup>

**Procedure.** All participants were handed a survey form in which they were initially asked to answer a series of demographic questions, including a question regarding their self-placement on the ideological spectrum from extreme right to extreme left.<sup>14</sup> Participants were then randomly assigned to a control or accountability condition *and* to a security or negotiations condition, in a  $2 \times 2$  design, resulting in four groups: accountability–negotiations, control–negotiations, accountability–security, and control–security. In the negotiations scenario, participants were asked to read a fictional proposal (that they thought was genuine) sent by the Palestinian Authority to Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu for the renewal of negotiations. This scenario was the same as in study 1 with some minor alterations, due to changes in the real-world conflict context from 2012 to 2013. In the security scenario, participants were asked to read a fictional intelligence report (that they, again, thought was genuine) from the Israeli Security Agency indicating that the levels of violence and militancy from Hamas in the Gaza Strip were increasing—that rocket attacks had increased and that more terrorist attacks or kidnappings were being planned.

After reading the proposal, participants were asked to fill in a battery of questions regarding their general preference for negotiations versus militancy, the study's dependent variable. These questions were the same for participants in both scenarios, enabling us to compare responses across contexts. Students then submitted their questionnaires to the examiners and received a debriefing before leaving the classroom.

**Measures.** *General support for militancy over compromise* was measured by averaging the answers to five questions related to support for the proposal ( $\alpha = .71$ ), ranked on a six-point Likert-type scale from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (6). Questions included the items “Palestinians are not interested in ending the conflict peacefully, so there is no point to take seriously the proposals that come from their leaders,” “Israel should accept any peace initiative by Palestinians in order to clarify its commitment to resolving the conflict through negotiations” (reverse), “Since the Palestinians understand only force there is no point in negotiations with them, but only use force against them,” “Only by Israel's military power can guarantee the security,” and “As a democracy, Israel has a moral duty to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians fairly and justly” (reverse). A high

score on this scale thus represents more support for militant policies, while a low score represents more support for diplomatic solutions to the conflict.

*Ideological affiliation* was assessed by individuals' response to the question "What is your political position?" Individuals could select extreme right, right, center right, center, center left, left, or extreme left. This ideological self-categorization was asked alongside other demographic questions at the very beginning of the study so as not to be affected by the manipulation itself.

*Demographic measures*—in addition to ideology, we measured participants' age, gender, level of political engagement, and religiosity. Because our sample was composed of undergraduate students, education level was not asked in this study, due to time constraints. As the student population at IDC is also relatively economically homogenous (middle class) and socioeconomic status was not a predictor in the first study, this variable was also dropped due to time constraints on the study.

## Results

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables.* We examined the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the variables, including the dependent variables, possible control and mediating variables, and demographic indicators (see Table 3). As hypothesized, levels of support for militancy over compromise were significantly correlated with political ideology. This correlation suggests, not surprisingly, that leftists were more inclined to political compromise and rightists to military action. Further regression analysis revealed that even when controlling for the effects of all relevant sociopolitical variables (gender, age, socioeconomic level, political involvement, and educational attainment) on support for militancy over compromise, ideology's ability to predict support for militancy over compromise remained significant, model:  $R^2 = .49$   $F(5,134) = 26.05$ ,  $p = .00$  and coefficient:  $\beta = -.65$ ,  $p = .00$ . Level of religiosity was the only other variable that was significantly related to support for militancy over compromise ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p = .05$ ; see Table 4).

*Main Effects.* A  $t$ -test analysis once more found no main effects of accountability on mean levels of support for political compromise between the accountability and control conditions for either the negotiations scenario, accountability:  $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ , and control:  $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .85$ ,  $t(69) = -3.77$ ,  $p = .71$ , or the security scenario, accountability:  $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ , and control:  $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $t(72) = -1.72$ ,  $p = .09$ , suggesting that accountability's effect on these variables was again contingent on its interaction with ideology. A one-way ANOVA comparison of mean support for militancy over compromise by the three ideological groupings (leftists, centrists, and rightists), also conducted separately for each scenario, again indicated that the impact of ideology on political preferences was only marginally significant in the control condition, negotiations:  $F(2,28) = 3.15$ ,  $p = .06$ , and security:  $F(2,33) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .10$ , but was significant in the manipulation



**Table 3.** Bivariate Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables in Study 2.

	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Preference for Militancy over compromise (very dovish [1] → very militant [6])	3.10 (1.01)	1	–	–	–	–	–
2. Age (21–50)	26.38 (4.74)	–.016	1	–	–	–	–
3. Gender (M=1, F=2)	1.36 (.48)	–.035	.113	1	–	–	–
4. Political interest (not at all [1] → very [6])	3.64 (1.04)	–.085	.079	–.144	1	–	–
5. Ideology (extreme right [1] → extreme left [7])	3.79 (1.39)	–.697**	.087	.024	.153*	1	–
6. Religiosity (not at all [1] → very [6])	1.62 (.94)	.361**	.105	.105	–.026	–.344**	1

Note: F = female; M = male; *M*, mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

\* $p \leq .05$  (two tailed). \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two tailed).

**Table 4.** Summary of Simple Regression Analyses for Predicting Support for Militancy over Negotiations through Ideology, Controlling for Other Relevant Variables in Study 2.

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Ideology	–.472	.049	–.651**
Age	.006	.013	.031
Gender	–.016	.132	–.008
Politically engaged	.023	.062	.024
Religiosity	.138	.071	.121*
$R^2$	.493		
<i>F</i>	26.054**		

Note: *SE* = standard error.

\* $p \leq .05$  (two tailed). \*\* $p \leq .01$  (two tailed).

(accountability) condition, negotiations:  $F(2,37) = 18.94$ ,  $p = .00$ , and security:  $F(2,34) = 20.52$ ,  $p = .00$ . A Scheffé post hoc test further showed that, in the control condition, there were only marginally significant differences between leftists' and rightists' responses to the proposal (negotiations:  $p = .06$  and security:  $p = .10$ ) but that in the accountability condition the differences were significant (negotiations:  $p = .00$  and security:  $p = .00$ ). Thus, the impact of both ideology and accountability once again seemed to be largely contingent on their interaction. We thus turned to test the hypothesized accountability  $\times$  ideology interaction.

**Interaction Effects.** We ran a regression analysis testing the three-way interaction of ideology  $\times$  condition  $\times$  scenario, finding that the scenario was not significant in

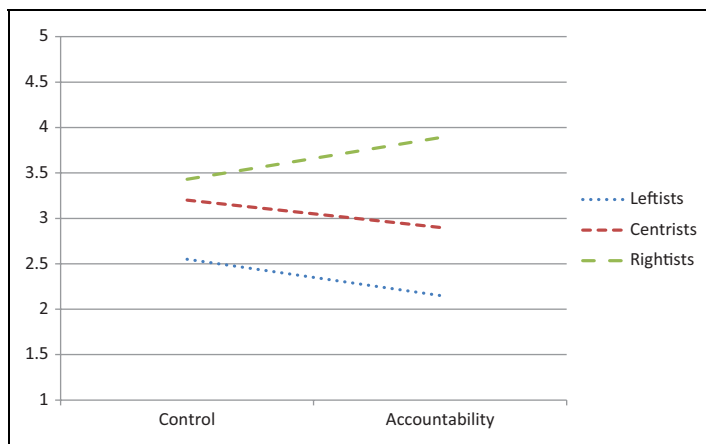
affecting the interaction trend, model:  $R^2 = .52$ ,  $F(7,136) = 21.40$ ,  $p = .00$ , and coefficient:  $\beta = .097$ ,  $p = .92$ . In other words, the accountability–ideology interaction appeared to work similarly for both scenarios, polarizing political attitudes in both cases. We thus turned to test the hypothesized accountability  $\times$  ideology interaction for each scenario separately to analyze which ideological groups drove the interaction effect in each context.

First, we explored the negotiations scenario. To examine whether ideology moderated the relationship between accountability and preference for militancy over negotiations, we again employed Hayes's (2013) PROCESS regression command (model 1) to test the conditional effect,  $R^2 = .54$ ,  $F(3,67) = 26.44$ ,  $p = .00$ . Additional regression analysis revealed no significant main effects for ideology ( $B = -.05$ ,  $SE = .22$ ,  $t = -.23$ ,  $p = .82$ ) on preference for militancy over compromise once controlling for the effects of the interaction term. More important, the analysis once again supported our hypothesis: the interaction term (accountability  $\times$  ideology) had a significant effect on support for militancy over compromise ( $B = -.27$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = -2.15$ ,  $p = .04$ ), indicating that the relationship between accountability and political attitudes toward militancy or compromise was moderated by political ideology.

A PROCESS analysis of the conditional effects of accountability on support for militancy over compromise at three different values of political orientation allowed us to again shed light on the nature of this interaction: this analysis revealed that among people on the high edge of the ideology measure (5.09, leftists), there was a marginally significant relationship between accountability and levels of militancy ( $B = -.42$ ,  $SE = .24$ ,  $t = -1.77$ ,  $p = .08$ ).<sup>15</sup> This relationship among people around the ideology measure's mean (3.68, centrists), however, was again not significant ( $B = -.04$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t = -.22$ ,  $p = .83$ ). Similarly, for people on the low edge of the ideology measure (2.26, rightists), there was no significant relationship between accountability and levels of militancy ( $B = .35$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $t = 1.39$ ,  $p = .17$ ; see Figure 2). Thus, it appears that, once more, the significance of the interaction effect appears to be largely driven by changes in leftists' political attitudes under accountability.

Next, we turned to review the security context. We again employed Hayes's (2013) PROCESS command (model 1) to test the conditional effect,  $R^2 = .50$ ,  $F(3,69) = 23.30$ ,  $p = .00$ . Further regression analysis revealed that, after controlling for the effects of the interaction term, there were no significant main effects for ideology ( $B = -.09$ ,  $SE = .22$ ,  $t = -.41$ ,  $p = .69$ ) on preference for militancy versus negotiations. The interaction term (accountability  $\times$  ideology), on the other hand, had a marginally significant effect on support for militancy over negotiations ( $B = -.25$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = -1.97$ ,  $p = .053$ ), supporting our hypothesis and indicating that the relationship between accountability and political attitudes toward militancy or compromise was again moderated by political ideology.

Conducting a PROCESS analysis of the conditional effects of accountability on support for militancy over negotiations at three different values of political



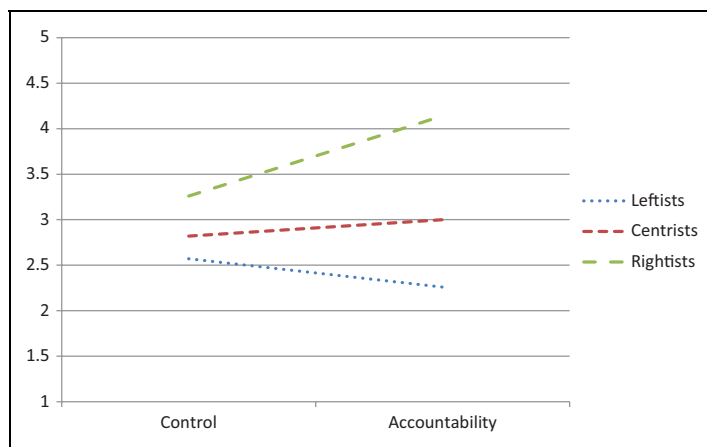
**Figure 2.** Means comparison of interaction of ideology and accountability on preference for militancy over compromise in study 2 (negotiations scenario).

orientation enabled us to again examine the nature of this interaction. This analysis revealed that—in contrast to the negotiations context—among people on the *low edge* of the ideology measure (2.56, rightists), there was a significant relationship between accountability and levels of militancy ( $B = .61$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $t = 2.46$ ,  $p = .02$ ), whereas, in contrast, there was no significant relationship between accountability and levels of militancy for leftists (5.28;  $B = -.08$ ,  $SE = .24$ ,  $t = -.34$ ,  $p = .73$ ). The relationship among centrists (3.92) was also, again, non-significant ( $B = .26$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t = 1.54$ ,  $p = .13$ ; see Figure 3). In this context, we thus see changes in *rightists'* political attitudes under accountability as the driving force behind the significance of the interaction effect.

Essentially, these results demonstrated that accountability significantly increased the difference between the espoused political attitudes of rightists and leftists, but this widening divide was driven by changes within different ideological groups, depending on the specific conflict context at hand. On issues of *negotiation*, accountability primarily polarized leftists' support for militant versus diplomatic political processes, whereas on issues of *security*, rightists' political attitudes were most polarized.

## Discussion

In this study, we used two distinct political scenarios in order to further explore the issue ownership hypothesis and help generalize our results across different potential conflict contexts. We hypothesized that regardless of the context—be it negotiations or security—accountability would trigger increased ideological adherence to concrete policy preferences among self-identified leftists and rightists. And indeed, in



**Figure 3.** Means comparison of interaction of ideology and accountability on preference for militancy over compromise in study 2 (security scenario).

both scenarios, the interaction between ideology and accountability produced the same trend. Namely, accountability caused both rightists and leftists to skew in the direction of their respective ideological extremes. However, these effects were only significant for leftists in the negotiations condition and for rightists in the security condition. As before, centrists did not exhibit any significant changes.

Study 2 again demonstrated that ideology is a powerful moderator of individuals' espoused political preferences when held accountable. By manipulating the context while keeping the audience constant (the same university professor), study 2 was able to explore whether it was the issue or the perceived views of the (ambiguous) audience that affected the expression of political attitudes under accountability. The differential responses we received in both studies—leftists becoming more leftist in a negotiations scenario and rightists becoming more rightist in a security scenario—suggest that the changes in participants' expressed attitudes were driven more by the particular issue at hand (and its "ownership" by the ideological left or right) rather than by their perception of the audience's views.

These experimental results correspond strongly to the real-world political climate in Israel today. Namely, support for negotiations with the Palestinians for a two-state solution is the most important ideological issue for Israeli leftists, whereas Israeli rightists, on the other hand, tend to frame their most important issue as protecting national security (Arian and Shamir 2011). Thus, it makes sense—and, in fact, provides support for the proposed mechanism of social desirability under accountability—that in a negotiations scenario accountable leftists feel more socially obligated to take a more stereotypically leftist stance, whereas in a security scenario, accountable rightists would feel the same need to take a more stereotypically rightist stance on this issue.

## General Discussion

Judicious public policy agendas that promote compromise and collaboration among citizens of varying ideological groups are of vital importance to the functioning of democratic governments and can be particularly important for those in unstable or divided societies in conflict, such as the one examined in this study. However, a central challenge of political compromise stems from the inherent conflict between the aspiration to gain consensus for conciliatory policies that limit conflict (and can be practically implemented) and the ideological fervor and conflicting worldviews that characterize violent, intractable conflict (as well as other divisive political contexts). As such, unpacking the potential factors that may encourage political compromise in situations of violent, ideological conflict is a central challenge for researchers in this field.

The aim of the present study was to test the impact of one such factor in political decision making—accountability. Contrary to the idealistic lay impression of accountability as a universal panacea for encouraging judicious decision making, we hypothesized that, under the highly ideological circumstances of violent conflict, the interactive effect of ideology and accountability may trigger a different effect. Specifically, we hypothesized that, under accountability, individuals would be *more* motivated to resort to traditional ideological rationales that they could use to both maintain an image of consistency and better justify their views on a political problem to those who are holding them accountable.

These studies have confirmed our hypotheses and produced several important findings. First, it appears that accountability—even the “ideal” predecisional, unknown audience form of accountability used in this study—does not encourage moderation or pragmatism on important political issues (such as the preference for military or diplomatic strategies) in conflict. Rather, accountability’s impact on political attitudes is contingent on its interaction with ideology and actually seems to have a *polarizing* effect on political opinions.

Second, the differential response of leftists and rightists in varying conflict contexts offered important insight into the potential motivations guiding citizens’ political attitudes under accountability. Namely, individuals’ attitude polarization may be attributed to the social goals they associate with accountability in different political contexts. On issues conceived of as central to their ideological identity, individuals appear much more likely to have their political attitudes polarized by accountability. Thus, for leftists, this means espousing much more dovish attitudes in the context of negotiations. In contrast, for rightists, a security context triggers increased professed support for militant policies. In the absence of cues as to the audience’s views, it appears that individuals focus on projecting ideological consistency and clarity on the issues “owned” by their ideological group in order to project what they view as a positive, knowledgeable, and consistent self-image to those holding them accountable.

How exactly the achievement of this social goal altered participants’ information processing during decision making is still an important question for future research,

as the present research did not directly test the decision making *process* that undergirded this attitude polarization. Leftists and rightists could be responding more ideologically because they are processing information *more* deliberatively and centrally, resulting in decisions that are more principled and broadly consistent with abstract ideals, or they could be engaging in a *less* deliberative process, relying on ideological heuristics as an easy cue to project the image of political expertise and consistency to an observer. Untangling the effects of accountability on this decision-making process is thus an important direction for future research.

Nevertheless, the question of how exactly accountability affects the expression of political attitudes in situations of political conflict is critically important, particularly as lay observers and pundits across the political spectrum clamor for greater accountability processes in governments and among citizens in countries that are currently transitioning to democracy and/or attempting to heal internal conflict within their societies. And although numerous studies have explored the types of accountability most likely to encourage judicious decision making (see Lerner and Tetlock [1999] for a review), the impact of these “ideal” types of accountability may be considerably more complicated in political settings. If this model type of accountability tends to encourage ideological extremity in conflict contexts, the implications for peacemaking, forming structures of governance, and developing methods of citizen political participation in emergent (and well-established) democracies are very significant.<sup>16</sup>

### *Theoretical Implications*

The results of the current research also contain important theoretical implications. To start, this is the first research, to our knowledge, that has demonstrated the existence of an interaction effect between ideology and accountability in political conflicts (outside of the literature on electoral accountability which, in contrast, addresses the issue of accountability to an electorate with *known* views). This research thus adds to the ongoing debate about the impact of accountability in political decision making.

Although previous research on accountability has focused on *what type* of accountability is most effective in encouraging effortful thought, this study has focused on in *what context* accountability may have this effect. The results of this study indicate that even under the ideal conditions of accountability identified by previous researchers (Lerner and Tetlock 2003), accountability does not necessarily lead to policy moderation. Rather, respondents resort to more ideological arguments, behaving in more stereotypically ideological ways than their counterparts in the control condition. This finding thus contradicts to some extent the idea that the “right” type of accountability necessarily contributes to policy moderation and compromise.

Finally, this study broadens our understanding of the factors that govern the role of political ideologies in shaping policy preferences, adding to recent work that introduces motivational processes of ideological polarization (e.g., Jost and Amodio

2011; Federico and Schneider 2007; Lavine 2002; Jost, Federico, and Napier 2009; Sultzeanu-Kenan and Halperin 2012). This current work links ideological motivations not to internal personal differences but rather to an external factor—accountability—which motivates individuals to maintain the image of consistency with their ideological belief systems and their policy choices to an outside observer. Thus, this work has introduced another potential moderator of the relationship between ideology and political preferences.

### *Applied Implications*

This study also suggests important practical implications for the role of accountability in shaping political preferences. To begin, the results of this study suggest that practitioners should use caution in advocating accountability as a universal factor for encouraging moderation and cooperation in political processes. Accountability may work to hinder self-critical decision making and moderate policy choices, instead encouraging citizens to rely on familiar, more readily defensible ideological arguments when formulating their political attitudes.

As has often been demonstrated in the electoral accountability literature, accountability may also have the effect of polarizing elected officials and inhibiting moderation and compromise, *even if* they are unclear of the views of their political audience. Moreover, to the extent that leaders are more or less accountable at different times (e.g., before or after elections), leaders may also behave in more or less ideological ways depending on the specific time period, indicating that those who seek compromise should potentially pursue it only in the aftermath of an election when leaders may feel less accountable and, therefore, more ideologically flexible.

Finally, this study, conducted in the context of one of the world's most intense intergroup conflicts, offers potential avenues for scholars studying conflict resolution. For example, conflict resolution practitioners may want to hesitate before advocating for transparency in diplomatic processes between leaders of conflicting groups—this transparency and accountability may lead to increased adherence to their respective standpoints and limit potential opportunities for compromise. In contrast, the potential of accountability to encourage self-proclaimed doves to align their political preferences more with their ideological belief systems may encourage peace advocates seeking new ways to engage and mobilize would-be peace activists in support of their cause.

### *Limitations and Future Studies*

This study has its limitations. To begin, as two relatively small experimental studies conducted among a student sample, more evidence is needed to conclude that this phenomena truly exists in the “real world.” Broadening experimental work to include larger, more diverse samples representative of the overall population would also increase the statistical power of the results.<sup>17</sup> Future studies should also focus on

different geographical and political contexts in an effort to more thoroughly establish the types of situations in which this model is applicable.

Moreover, this study only utilized one specific type of accountability, evaluation, to test the effect of accountability on political preferences. There are many types of accountability that may cause respondents to behave in starkly different ways—*the presence of another* (e.g., Zajonc 1965), *identifiability* (e.g., Reicher and Levine 1994), and *reason-giving* (e.g., Simonson and Nowlis 2000; for a comprehensive review, see Lerner and Tetlock 1999). Prospective studies should study these types of accountability more closely, determining whether there are indeed situations when accountability can lead to the development and support of moderate political policies designed to embrace the ideological center and reduce conflict.

## Conclusion

Violent intergroup conflict is one of the most pressing issues facing scholars and practitioners of diplomacy and government today. The potent role of conflict ideologies in fueling and prolonging these conflicts all too often contributes to a cycle of mistrust, aggression, and polarization that is hard to break (Bar-Tal 2007). Thus, exploring the potential factors that can change these dynamics, encourage reflective deliberation by political actors, and perhaps lead to compromise for peace is a major challenge for scholars of conflict, security, and international relations today. Although this research demonstrates that caution should be used in advocating one such factor, accountability, as a universal panacea for conflict resolution, accountability may still provide an important impetus for conflict parties to reach a settlement in certain situations. Discovering in what specific contexts accountability may indeed play a role in encouraging societies in conflict to compromise for peace remains a central question for future studies.

## Authors' Note

All data and syntax files containing all findings from both studies are available for replication purposes alongside the electronic version of this article on the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* website.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes

1. This perspective is supported by the idea of “the compromise effect”—the tendency for a product or policy to gain attractiveness among accountable individuals simply because it



becomes a middle option in a choice set—a satisficing option that satisfies the most criteria or people (Simonson 1989).

2. An important caveat is required here: many accountability studies have relied on various normative constructs as to what constitutes an “improvement” in decision-making processes or outcomes. Specifically, these studies have typically emphasized the importance of accuracy or efficiency in decision making. In political contexts, these normative judgments as to what constitutes a better process or outcome are more subjective. Should accuracy be sacrificed for efficiency in time-sensitive political crises? Is a decision that leads to violence necessarily worse than one that maintains peace? Is moderation or compromise always better than ideological consistency or steadfastness? The answer is less clear and may depend on the specific political context. Thus, the present study, recognizing these issues, does not make normative claims as to the relative merit of leftist, rightist, or centrist political attitudes. Rather, we discuss several potential implications of our study’s results for conflict societies.
3. There is however, a crucial distinction between what constitutes decision-making processes and decision-making outcomes. While good decision-making processes have been shown to be strongly related to good decision outcomes (Schafer and Crichlow 2002), the two are not strictly collinear. In other words, a “good” unbiased, thorough decision-making process can still lead to a bad outcome (or bad policy, in political contexts), and likewise, “bad” problematic decision processes can precede a positive outcome. Thus, to the extent that accountability may alter the process of decision making, this may not necessarily lead to different decision outcomes. This study focuses explicitly on testing the decision outcome (i.e., the expression of ideologically consistent or divergent political attitudes) under accountability rather than the process. Future studies designed to test aspects of the decision-making process such as information processing tendencies are important to gain a fuller picture of accountability’s affect on political decision making.
4. This conception of accountability parallels the results of other nuanced accountability theories—for example, that transparency will not lead to accountability among the “shameless” (Fox 2007) and its effect on decision making will depend on beliefs about the value of others’ opinion (Foyle 1999).
5. Indeed, in recent years, many studies have begun to move away from the emphasis on political information or sophistication as the main source of ideological affiliation, emphasizing instead these strong motivational components of ideology. For example, previous research on ideological affinities had found that only a subset of citizens, composed of the minority of citizens who actually possess political sophistication and knowledge, routinely structures their political attitudes around a central ideological belief system (Bennett 1988; Converse 1962; Luskin 1987; Zaller 1992). Converse (1962) even famously claimed that ordinary citizens fundamentally lacked the logical consistency and coherence that would be expected of an ideological belief system. From this perspective, the ability to utilize structured ideological belief systems was a problem of *information* and *ability* (Converse et al. 1961; Carpini and Keeter 1996; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993). John Jost (2006), for example, argues that individuals are motivated to select their ideological belief systems to the extent that these ideologies meet important

psychological needs for them. These needs are a psychological resistance to or desire for change and the acceptance of or opposition to inequality.

6. In other words, it may be that political attitudes in this context form a type of “prior decision.” Thus, our accountability may never reach the “ideal” standard of being predecisional, causing participants to engage in defensive bolstering rather than preemptive self-criticism, as predicted by Lerner and Tetlock (1999).
7. Two participants were omitted from our analyses because they did not fill in their ideological affiliations, leaving a sample of seventy-two participants.
8. The study group was composed of thirty-nine self-declared rightists who classified from center-right to extreme right, thirteen centrists, and twenty leftists who classified themselves as center-left or left (there were no self-classified extreme leftists in this sample).
9. Participants were not told the fictional professor’s political views. However, participants may have sought to guess the professor’s views based on his career as a professor in Israel (where the academia historically leans left) and tailor their views to his perceived views, consistent with shared reality theory (Hardin and Higgins 1996). However, this issue appears to have been minimized in this study because only a portion of study participants subsequently expressed more left-wing political attitudes, which would mean that either only a portion of the participants were swayed by the perceived views of the audience due to his academic affiliation or that the views of the audience were indeed unclear to many study participants.
10. Indeed, the difference between the mean ideological affiliations of the control and accountable groups was nonsignificant, demonstrating that the accountable group did not respond to the ideology question differently than the control group, control mean = 3.72; manipulation mean = 3.39,  $t(70) = 1.00, p = .320$ .
11. Leftists were coded as respondents who selected “extreme left,” “left,” or “center left” as their ideological self-categorization. Centrists selected “center.” Rightists were those who selected “extreme right,” “right,” or “center right.”
12. One participant was omitted from our analyses because the individual did not fill in their ideological affiliation, leaving a sample of 144.
13. The study group was composed of sixty-three self-declared rightists who classified from center-right to extreme right, thirty-four centrists, and forty-seven leftists who classified themselves as center-left or extreme leftist.
14. This was in order to make sure that ideological self-categorization was not affected by the specific conflict scenario given. And indeed, there were no significant differences in ideological affiliation between the two contexts (negotiations mean: 3.67 and security mean: 3.92,  $p = .30$ ) or between the manipulation and control (control mean: 3.94 and manipulation mean: 3.68,  $p = .25$ ).
15. The reason this conditional effect was not fully significant in this study (as opposed to study 1) may be due to the smaller sample size we used in study 2.
16. Particularly since, in real-world political contexts, this gold standard of accountability is seldom reached. Government actors and citizens often know the views of the audience to which they are accountable, they often are not held accountable for the decision-making process itself, and so on.

17. Although several recent experimental studies have found no fundamental differences in responses between student and adult respondents (Druckman 2004; Kühberger 1998; Marcus 1995). Moreover, the fact that these studies were conducted among citizens living in the midst of active conflict helps increase their external validity. Additionally, the Israeli student population is typically much more diverse in terms of age than are American undergraduates, as demonstrated by the fact that our student sample ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty.
18. For visualization, respondents are divided into three ideological groupings: leftists (extreme left: seven, left: six, and center left: five), centrists (center: four), and rightists (center right: three, right: two, and extreme right: one).

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