

Collective Victimhood and Social Prejudice: A Post-Holocaust Theory of anti-Semitism

Abstract

Anti-Semitism represents one of the most penetrating forms of prejudice, yet social research has failed to address the causal underpinnings of the phenomenon. To this end, we empirically test the notion that anti-Semitism builds on the legacy of the Holocaust. Standing as the bench-mark for collective suffering, the Holocaust creates competition over recognition of the status of the victim. Upward comparisons between victimized ingroups with other victimized outgroups trigger social prejudice. Victimhood, thus, creates an antagonistic view of the Jews that, in turn, fuels anti-Semitic prejudice. We test this theory using data from Greece -the European nation with the highest proportion of anti-Semites- leveraging two survey experiments and a natural experiment. Our results confirm our theoretical expectations, showing that perceived victimhood fuels anti-Semitism. The findings of our research carry important implications for dealing with anti-Semitism and for combating various forms of outgroup prejudice.

Keywords: *anti-Semitism; victimhood; experiments; Greece*

Between July 2013 and February 2014, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) commissioned a survey of attitudes and opinions toward Jews in more than 100 countries around the world.¹ One of the key findings of this study is that anti-Semitic attitudes extended beyond countries of the Middle East, with many European countries scoring remarkably high on the levels of anti-Semitism. Germany, for example, scored a 27%, Spain around 30%, Hungary a 41% and Greece a startling 69%. As a result, pundits and journalists were keen to link the variation in anti-Semitic attitudes with the severe crisis facing Europe at the time.

The link between crises and rises in anti-Semitism is, of course, an old idea. It dates back at least to Durkheim's *Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis* (Durkheim 1899). According to Durkheim, French 19th century anti-Semitism was not due to religious hatred. Instead, it was the result of scapegoating, which served as a mechanism for coping with the suffering from military defeats and economic crises. Such events, Durkheim argued, force individuals to adjust their aspirations to their changed circumstances. The need for this adjustment generates suffering and "*when society suffers, it needs someone to blame, someone upon whom to avenge itself for its disappointments*" (as cited in Goldberg 2008, 303). Glick (2002) suggests that majority ingroup members will adhere to strong ideological cues and will assign the blame for their shared frustration to defenceless minorities like the Jews (see also Adorno et al. 1950; Glick 2005). The key prediction, therefore is that in times of economic decline and relative group deprivation anti-Semitism is expected to rise (see Bilewicz and Krzeminski 2010).

¹More information is provided here: <http://global100.adl.org>. Some surveys were repeated a year later, and the patterns were remarkably similar.

The aim of this paper is to present and systematically test an alternative theory of modern anti-Semitism which builds on the legacy of the Holocaust. Our departure point is that anti-Semitic attitudes are not necessarily associated with economic crises. Instead, building on previous work on victimhood and anti-Semitism (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013; Bilewicz et al. 2013; Guissmé and Licata 2017; Imhoff and Banse 2009), we argue that anti-Semitism stems from a sense of collective victimhood – defined as a perception that an individual’s nation has been a victim of history that is rooted in the historical narratives found in education and other socialization agents (see e.g. Alexander 2002; Volkan 1998; Vollhardt 2012). Collective victimhood gives rise to outgroup prejudice via two channels. First, by inducing ingroup favoritism, which leads ingroup members to downplay the collective suffering of others. Second, through antagonism with other groups widely acclaimed as victims over moral benefits emerging from victimhood status (Noor et al. 2012, 2017; Pettigrew et al. 2008).

We test both mechanisms in a case in which anti-Semitic attitudes appear puzzlingly high: Greece. We experimentally show that victimhood competition generates anti-Semitism and the high levels of prejudice cannot be attributed exclusively to the country’s long-standing financial crisis, but they are product of a widespread latent sense of collective victimhood, which precedes the crisis.

Theoretical Background

Research on anti-Semitism has identified a strong link between personality traits, ideology, and prejudice against the Jews, with ring-wing authoritarians being more likely to register such attitudes (Dunbar and Simonova 2003; Frindte et al. 2005). The prevailing underlying mechanism behind some of these associations is scapegoating. One telling example comes from Charnysh (2015), who shows that variation in Jewish population size in pre-Holocaust Poland

predicts subnational variation in attitudes towards European integration. Depicting Jews as influential in the EU and thus responsible for Poland's unfavourable treatment within the Union seems to have been effective in reducing support for the EU, especially in areas with historically large Jewish populations (see also Dumitru and Johnson 2011). More often than not, scapegoating is linked to declining economic conditions. Collective frustration over economic outcomes creates a need to explain the world and to assign responsibility for those outcomes. During this process, members of the ingroup target an outgroup to assign blame for their distress.

The empirical evidence accompanying these claims, however, is not as clear-cut as is typically assumed. Bilewicz et al. (2013) found that relative economic deprivation (change in economic outlook) predicts higher levels of anti-Semitism in Poland, yet not in Ukraine (see Bilewicz and Krzeminski 2010). Gibson and Howard (2007) in Russia also failed to find supportive evidence for scapegoating theory. Descriptive plots of economic series and anti-Semitic opinions showed that, if anything, anti-Semitism surges in good economic times. What explains this inconsistency across relatively similar cases? We argue that at least one of the reasons behind this ambiguous evidence is that the theory is incomplete. Anti-Semitic attitudes do not only stem from a need to alleviate relative deprivation generated by economic misfortunes. Instead, they are the result of an underlying sense of collective victimhood.

Although the concept of victimhood is old, the literature on the topic is relatively new, widespread across subfields and rather vague about what victimhood means and what are its consequences (for a review see Noor et al. 2012; Vollhardt 2012). For example, in African countries colonialism has been the primary cause of a narrative of ingroup victimhood due to arbitrary border drawing and the racialization of the various tribes by the colonizers (Kiwuwa 2012; Mamdani 2001; Vollhardt and Bilali 2015). Survey work in Rwanda, Burundi, the

Democratic Republic of Congo and on the Crimean Tatars finds that collective victimhood successfully transmits traumas of previous generations to the next ones, prolonging negative intergroup attitudes (Lupu and Peisakhin 2015; Vollhardt and Bilali 2015). Evidence from Kosovo suggests that one way to alleviate competitive victimhood is to engage in re-categorization (Gaertner et al. 1993), a process that helps to establish extended outgroup contacts and common ingroup identifications (Andrighetto et al. 2012; Gaertner and Dovidio 2014). Such a task, however, remains challenging (Moss and Vollhardt 2016). As Bar-Tal and Halperin (2013) put it: ". . . *past events, especially chosen traumas, greatly contribute to the definition of group identity and are therefore maintained in the culture and transmitted to new generations, while also occupying a central place in the collective memory of a society involved in intractable conflict*" (p. 936). Narratives of victimhood can be so pervasive that they also dominate elite strategies. Volkan (1998), for instance, eloquently describes the predominance of the 1389 battle of Kosovo in the 1994 peace negotiations during the Yugoslav civil conflict. The Serbs were focusing on what happened almost 700 years ago to highlight their victimhood and to explain their duty to protect their people.

Indeed, in cases of intractable conflict like the above (and others), victimhood is crucial to understand ingroup/outgroup relationships. Victimhood, however, is not necessarily conflict-specific; it plausibly stems from comparisons using the global context as the reference point (Vollhardt 2012, 2015). Competing for the severity of an ingroup's trauma or level of victimization can be made about groups that have never been perpetrators or at conflict with the ingroup (see also Noor et al. 2012; Vollhardt 2012). In such cases, members of the ingroup keenly associate themselves with attitudes of deservingness and entitlement and the ingroup's victimhood is portrayed as unique, exclusive and incomparable (Eidelson and Eidelson 2003; Noor et al. 2012; Wohl and Branscombe 2008; Zitek et al. 2010).

In an article in *Le Monde* entitled '*La pitié et la raison*', Emmanuel Terray noted bitterly that since he and his ancestors have never been victims of any kind of violence he is at the bottom of social existence. This statement echoes the common wisdom among students of trauma, working both at the individual and the collective level. Since the trauma becomes a solid component of individual and collective identity, it can also be socially instrumental (see e.g. Cole 2007). Victimhood solidifies group unity (Bar-Tal 2007), encourages national glorification and transforms traumas into a social process with exchangeable value (see Cole 2007; Eyerman et al. 2004; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Moses 2011; Sztompka 2000).

Victimhood & anti-Semitism

Although instances of genocides and mass killings have been far from rare throughout history (Kier-nan 2004), it was the World War II (WWII) experience that attracted scholarly and institutional attention to the fate of victims. The Holocaust gradually became the premium historical analogy or the reference point to any episode of collective suffering (Alexander 2002; Dean 2004, 2010). Its legacy created universal moral, legal and cultural standards that postwar societies had to build their future upon, as it became apparent even for societies that have not directly experienced it, USA being the most exemplary case (Novick 1999). The hypothesis that all people might become victims because of their ethnicity, race, gender, or sexuality – because of who they are – has created multiple layers of victimhood. For example, Dean (2004,2010) examines how the suffering and trauma in the United States and Western Europe have become central to identity, with victims competing for recognition. According to this view, popular

attention to the Holocaust produces a seemingly contradictory set of outcomes. On the one hand, scholars of Genocides have noted that apart from international law the most important factor in preventing genocides is the mobilization of public opinion with the threat of Holocaust repetition (Power 2002). Therefore, transforming the Holocaust into a ‘moral universal’ can trigger sympathy and mobilize resources for the ‘victim’. On the other hand, it produces a “surfeit of Jewish memory” that obscures the suffering of other peoples (Dean 2006). Although seemingly competing, the two processes co-exist and generate implications for victimized collectives.²

How does the ambivalent relation of the Holocaust legacy with other victims generate anti-Semitism? We propose two mechanisms. First, collective traumas produce a culture of national inwardness. Societies with a historical background that favors a victimized perception of their past tend to glorify their suffering and relegate the suffering of others.³ Works on social psychology confirm this mechanism at the individual level (Pettigrew et al. 2008). Victimhood influences the way individuals evaluate, think and understand social processes and interactions (Noor et al. 2017). For example, primes of historical victimhood make ingroup members more likely to think of outgroups as more threatening or hostile (see Schori-Eyal et al. 2017). This line of argumentation leads us to expect a positive effect of perceived victimhood on anti-Semitism, even in the absence of other groups claiming the status of victim.

² In a briefing to the Secretary of State concerning Northern Ireland, Simon Prince (University of Kent) and Ian McBride (King’s College London) emphasized the role of victimhood in the peace process. In particular, they maintained that “. . . even those individuals and groups who would once have resisted being described as victims now embraced the term – and the political advantages it brought. As always in these cases, this became a competitive, zero-sum game.” (Prince and McBride 2011).

³ This tendency is documented in several cases in Eastern Europe, as in Hungary (Marsovszky 2010) and Poland (Friedrich 2010).

Second, when such comparisons emerge, they are likely to exacerbate outgroup prejudice. The outgroup's superior suffering might challenge the ingroup's self-esteem, induce feelings of relative deprivation (Pettigrew et al. 2008) and threaten the social identity of the ingroup that was largely built on sentiments of victimization (Noor et al. 2012; Tesser 1988; Vollhardt 2012). The Holocaust, as the exemplary paradigm of suffering, is evaluated in a similar way. The comparison between the ingroup's victimhood and the Holocaust creates outgroup prejudice and negativity. Observational manifestations of this type of prejudice include the trivialization of the Holocaust, which can lead up to Holocaust fatigue and Holocaust denial, and the connection of Jews with conspiracy theories (see also Bilewicz et al. 2013).⁴

⁴ The case of Poland and Germany illustrate how the widespread postwar victimhood sentiments affected the treatment of Jewish survivors in a direct suffering competition that prioritized their experiences (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011). As Olick (2013) has argued, a "me too" claim on victimhood became prevalent and characterized German society until the confrontation with their past became the dominant memorial culture (Moeller 2001, 158). This was an issue raised by the prominent members of the Frankfurt School T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer when they stressed that post-war German guilt was overshadowed by the feelings of victimhood that can be summarized in the famous phrase "Germans will never forgive Jews for Auschwitz", attributed to an Israeli psychoanalyst (as cited in Imhoff and Banse 2009). This so called 'secondary' anti-Semitism exists because of the Holocaust and not in spite of it (Broder 2004). Echoes of this view of Germans as victims were reproduced in the famous Historikerstreit in the late 80s and, even more sadly, in the views of intellectuals as Gunter Grass. In an interview in 2011 he talked about the 'liquidation' of 6 million Germans soldiers by the Red Army, a highly controversial number inflated on purpose to match the 6 million Jewish victims during the Holocaust. <https://www.haaretz.com/the-german-who-needed-a-fig-leaf-1.5158486>.

The increased attention placed by the international community to collective suffering translates trauma prioritization into a need for the widest possible recognition of one's suffering. In so doing, it converts ingroup/outgroup comparisons into a spiral of victimhood (see e.g. Bar-Tal and Halperin 2013). This tendency is imminent in international campaigns for the recognition of alleged or real genocides (see Moses 2012). Any failure in recognizing such proclamations creates a hierarchy of victimhood that produces grievances. As the Holocaust represents the ultimate benchmark of victimhood, this quest for recognition might generate anti-Semitic feelings among the populations who consider themselves to have suffered the same, without their suffering having been sufficiently acknowledged by the international community. Even anecdotally, it is still indicative that in the Anti-defamation league survey we cited in the introduction the rates of anti-Semitic attitudes in Armenia rise to 58% of the population, the highest in the region.⁵ Another example comes from France, where the main opposition to the introduction of the Holocaust in the secondary education curriculum came from pupils of former French colonies background (e.g. Algeria). They juxtaposed the inclusion of this topic with the absence of a subject dedicated on their suffering by the French during the colonial period (Corbel et al. 2004). All this leads us to our second expectation, namely that between-group competition over the magnitude of collective suffering will boost anti-Semitism. We make three contributions to the extant literature. First, previous empirical work examined only the role of relative victimhood in predicting anti-Semitism. Guissmé and Licata (2017) examine African and Muslim immigrants in Belgium and show that victimhood predicts higher levels of anti-Semitism and the recognition of suffering exerts a substantive -mediating- impact. Bilewicz

⁵ It is important to add that competition works both ways. For instance, the State of Israel has not yet officially recognized the Armenian massacres as Genocide failing to admit that Armenians might have gone through a comparable or similar experience to the Holocaust.

et al. (2013) and Bilewicz and Stefaniak (2013) show that Polish respondents who think that Poles have suffered more than people from other countries are more likely to report anti-Semitic stances.⁶ We argue that perceptions of collective victimhood can lead to anti-Jewish attitudes even: a) in the absence of comparison units; and b) when such comparisons use different groups as reference points of suffering. Competition about the status of victim need not turn ingroup members exclusively against the group that is compared with. Rather, it can spread to other groups. This is important because it implies that anti-Semitism can emerge even when the outgroup under comparison is not the Jews. Second, unlike previous studies we try to explicitly distinguish between victimhood and scapegoating, which consists of the most commonly assumed mechanism of anti-Semitism. Third, previous work has been mainly based on correlations between the two concepts, victimhood and anti-Semitism. Given that victimhood and anti-Semitism are probably endogenous, we design a series of experiments and leverage a unique natural experiment to causally identify the relationship. The experiments are tailored to provide robust evidence about the causal effect of victimhood on anti-Semitism and to shed light on the underlying mechanisms. All our analyses take place in a context with worryingly high levels of anti-Semitism.

The Socialization of Victimhood: Collective Trauma in Greece

Greece provides a context that allows us to examine the effects of both absolute and competitive victimhood on anti-Semitism. Starting with the former, the military defeat that ended the war against Turkey in 1922 transformed Greece overnight (from an advancing peripheral European

⁶ To be sure, victimhood is conceptually different in the above studies; it is a product of the Romantic-Messianic view of Poland that created antagonistic views between Poles, Jews and also Germans (see Krzemiński 1993, 2002)

power) into a humiliated nation seeking to heal the territorial and social trauma caused by the defeat (Leontaritis 1990).⁷ The remedy employed was the attribution of blame to foreign factors, the so-called “Great Powers”. This tendency was repeated in all other major events of the last century, such as the civil war (Marantzidis and Antoniou 2004), the military coup, or even the current debt crisis. These narratives have enabled the development and priming of self-centered victimization, accompanied by a mindset of historical injustice (Demertzis 2011) and “underdog culture” (Diamantouros 1983).⁸ The socialization agents that help the intergenerational transmission of these beliefs are typically public education, national commemorations, public history accounts and family narratives (see e.g. Lupu and Peisakhin 2015). All these operate during the early years of socialization and they turn those narratives into identity components (Voigtländer and Voth 2015). The identity becomes so strong that any challenge to the dominant narrative meets severe criticism. One such example was the 6th-grade textbook project debacle that took place in 2008. The project met a wide front of resistance that rejected the presentation of the 1922 “Asia Minor Catastrophe” in a less sentimental (i.e. less victimized) way. The outrage in public opinion, the press and the political elites against the reappraisal of the magnitude of Greek suffering and victimhood resulted in the cancellation of the project (Athanasiaides 2014). Perhaps unexpectedly, Greece makes a strong case for competitive victimhood as well. The ethnic group of Greek Pontiacs of Anatolia suffered severe casualties during the Greek –Turkish war in the 1920s. Since their (forced) migration to the motherland, Pontiac Greeks have been a

⁷ By “Asia Minor Catastrophe” we refer to the 1919-22 war fought between Greece and the Turkish National Movement during the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

⁸ See Vollhardt et al. (2015) for a very interesting portrait of Polish suffering. Note that Poland -a nation with large jewish populations- also has a high share of anti-Semites.

fringe but coherent and politically influential group (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002). The third generation of these Pontiac refugees has initiated an international struggle for the recognition of the Pontiac Genocide. Although this endeavor never attracted significant international attention, Greek public opinion has embraced the notion of the Pontiac Genocide, and the Greek parliament recognized it in 1994.⁹ Two years later the Greek Parliament also recognized the Armenian Genocide only to top that with another recognition of a third genocide, that of the Asia Minor Greeks, in 1998. The Holocaust was only recognized ten years after the recognition of the Pontiac Genocide.

This Greek version of genocide competition was revived recently over a controversy about an anti-racist bill that was voted in Greek Parliament in 2014. The bill was considered of utmost significance to confront the Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party threat, and it was thus welcomed by every party in the Greek Parliament. Despite the political consensus, the bill was withheld twice over a period of two years and was approved only after a successful political blackmail of about 35 MPs who demanded the revision of the article about Holocaust denial. The amended legislation included explicit references to the penalization not only of the Holocaust but also of the Genocide of the Christian populations of Asia Minor including the Armenians and the ethnic Greek populations persecuted by Kemal Ataturk. Obviously, such a revision meant that a prerequisite to respect Jewish suffering was the simultaneous recognition of Christian and Greek suffering and the elevation of the latter to the legal and symbolic status of the former.

⁹ As shown in the concluding section, almost 90% of Greek public opinion believes that the teaching of the Pontiac Genocide should be mandatory.

Research Design

We use data from three national representative surveys conducted in Greece during 2014 and 2015.¹⁰ We measure anti-Semitic attitudes with two indicators. The first draws on one of the facets of modern anti-Semitism relating to the tendency to trivialize the Holocaust and/or to accuse the Jews of using it instrumentally (Bergmann 2008; Bilewicz et al. 2013; Gibson and Duch 1992; Stone, 1980). In particular we used a five-point-scale measuring agreement with the following statement: Jews exploit the Holocaust to gain influence in the international arena. The second indicator reflects a more explicit manifestation of racial discrimination, asking respondents if they agree or disagree with the statement that It should be denied from Jews to buy land in Greece. Taken together, the two items allow us to test our theory across different degrees of intensity in terms of anti-Semitic sentiments. According to the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia and the later Agency for Fundamental Rights of the European Union, such attitudes are considered as anti-Semitic (EU-Report 2013).¹¹

We present three studies. Study 1 examines the role of victimhood competition. It extends existing evidence by randomly varying the comparison group in the competitive victimhood questions. It examines whether competition over collective suffering correlates with anti-Semitism and illustrates that the exact choice of the comparison group makes little difference insofar as there is some recognition about its status of victim. Study 2 moves from correlations to a more causal estimate of the effect of perceived victimhood on attitudes

¹⁰ More information about the surveys and the marginal distributions of the key items can be found in the Appendix.

¹¹ Other elements are a) a tendency to equalize Israel with Nazi Germany; and b) a belief that the Jews are overrepresented in powerful economic and political institutions (Bilewicz et al. 2013; Stone 1980).

towards the Jews. It makes use of a natural experiment to show how an exogenous shift in perceptions of competitive victimhood can also lead to a change in anti-Jewish attitudes. Finally, the scope of study 3 is twofold. First, we examine whether perceived victimhood leads to anti-Semitism even when no comparison between groups is entailed. Second, we design the experiment in such a way so that we can disentangle the victimhood from the scapegoating hypothesis.

Study 1: Competitive Victimhood and anti-Semitism

Our first study consists of two large-n surveys (Survey 1: $n=1043$, $\text{age}(\text{sd}) = 51.01(16.34)$, $\% \text{Female} = 58.91\%$; Survey 2: $n=1174$, $\text{age}(\text{sd}) = 50.09(14.40)$, $\% \text{Female} = 62.61\%$) and tests whether competitive victimhood predicts higher levels of anti-Semitism. Unlike previous studies, however, we use multiple benchmark groups against which we compare the Greeks. Guided by our theory, we vary the degree of recognition of the outgroup's status of victim. We expect perceptions of victimhood to predict higher levels of anti-Semitism, especially when comparing Greeks against other groups with well-acknowledged status of victim. Respondents are asked how much they agree or disagree with the statement that Greeks have suffered more than X. X varies according to the treatment. In The first survey, X is a) the Jews; b) the Armenians; c) Others; and d) the Carthenians. The first two groups represent well-known cases of collective suffering.¹² The third treatment, replicates previous work (Bilewicz et al. 2013), making no reference to a specific group, thus leaving the window open for comparisons. The fourth

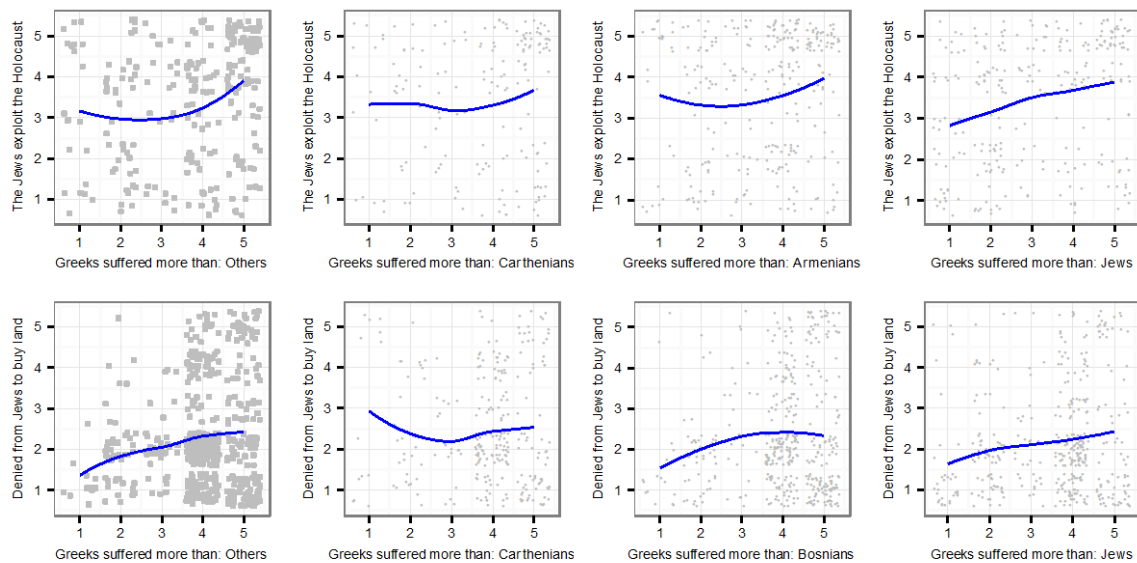
¹² Seen as victims of the same historical "enemy", i.e. the Ottoman Empire and the newly established Turkish state, Armenians consist of a fairly strong benchmark due to the favorable perceptions harbored among the Greek public opinion towards this group.

treatment uses a fictional group (the Carthenians). The rationale for this condition is to use a benchmark with no established status of victim.¹³ Comparisons with groups that lack recognized victim status leave little room for victimhood competition. If such competition matters, we expect victimhood to exert a weaker effect on anti-Semitism in this condition compared to all others. We repeated this exercise in the second study, in which we only changed the dependent variable (now measuring explicit racist attitudes – It should be denied from Jews to buy land in Greece) and one of the comparison groups. In particular, we replaced the Armenians with a group also well-known to the Greek public but in which public discourse has not been as positive as in the case of the Armenians: the Bosnians (Greeks have suffered more than the Bosnians.).¹⁴

Figure 1: Tracing anti-Semitic sentiments over Perceived Collective Victimhood.

¹³For the usage of fictional groups in survey research see also Gibson and Duch (1992).

¹⁴The Yugoslavian war was very salient among the Greek media, which held almost unanimously a pro-Serbian stance. We thus expect Greek public opinion to downplay the suffering of Bosnians against their collective suffering, compared to either the Armenians or the Jews.



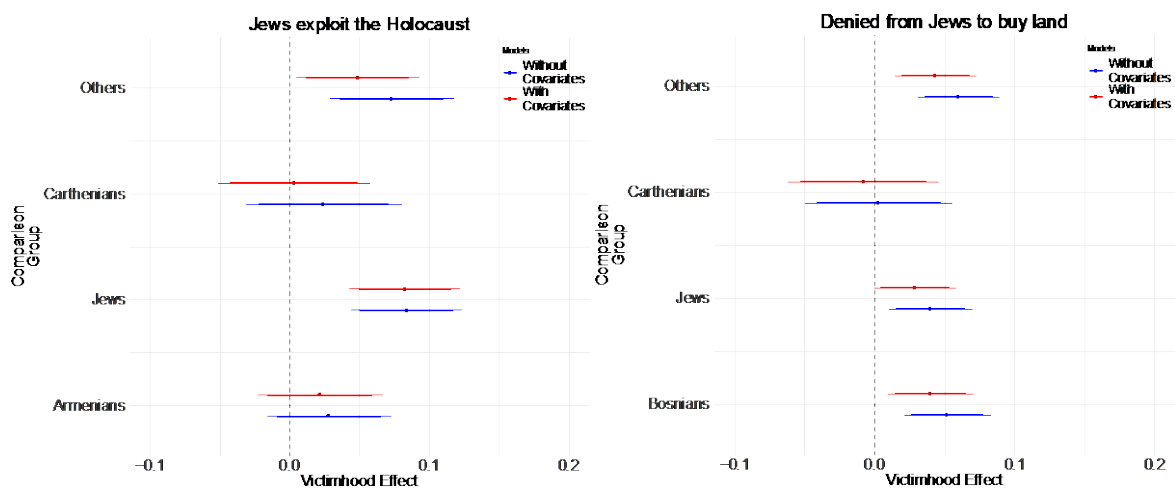
Note: The blue curves show the local linear regression estimate (span=1), with the shaded area surrounding capturing the point-wise 95% confidence intervals. All scatterplot dots are jittered to enable the visualization of the conditional distribution of anti-Semitic attitudes, given the level of collective victimhood.

Figure 1 plots the relationship between victimhood and anti-Semitism. The first row uses the Holocaust instrumentalization item whereas the second uses the item about whether Jews should be allowed to buy land. The local linear regression line locally summarizes this relationship. Three remarks are in place. First, as shown by the scatterplots, the levels of collective victimhood are very high and remain so irrespective of the comparison group. Indeed, the percentage of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that Greeks have suffered more than the benchmark group ranges between 65% in the case of the Jews up to 82% in the case of “Others”.¹⁵ Second, there is remarkable variation in the levels of agreement with each of the anti-Semitic statements. As expected, the percentage of respondents agreeing with the statement that the Jews exploit the Holocaust is much larger, 59%, than those agreeing that it

¹⁵The marginal distributions for both the victimhood and the anti-Semitism items are shown in the Appendix (see figures A.1, A.2, A.3).

should be forbidden for Jews to buy land (21.5%). Third, regardless of which outcome and which benchmark group is used, there is a largely monotone positive relationship between victimhood and anti-Semitic attitudes. The only exception to this rule is the treatment using the fictional group of Carthenians. Consistent with our expectations, when the comparison group does not signal a well-known case of victimization the relationship between victimhood and anti-Semitism weakens considerably.

Figure 2. Perceived Victimhood and Anti-Semitism



Note: Dots denote the OLS regression estimates whereas the horizontal bars spikes capture the 90% (thick line) and the 95% (thin line) Confidence Intervals.

Figure 2 tries to summarize the overall patterns, providing a linear approximation in the relationship between victimhood and anti-Semitism. Two sets of regression estimates are shown—with and without covariates.¹⁶ Each represents the change in anti-Semitic attitudes associated with a unit increase in victimhood.¹⁷ We find that in all conditions but for the fictional

¹⁶ Covariates include age, gender, degree of religiosity and level of education.

¹⁷We use a binary outcome, which corresponds to the comparison between those who agree or strongly agree with each statement and all other respondents. This is the distinction we are mainly interested in. The results remain remarkably robust to different measurement strategies.

group higher levels of victimhood are associated with significantly higher levels of anti-Semitism. These effects are non-trivial. We use as benchmark the 2014 Anti-Defamation League (ADL) survey—a comparative survey of anti-Semitism across the globe. The ADL survey includes a question similar to the Holocaust Instrumentalization question we use here. The exact wording is: “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.” ADL provides information about the percent-age of people in each country agreeing with this statement. Using the resulting country-rank as benchmark, we find that agreeing that Greeks have suffered more than others is associated with an increase in anti-Semitism that is equivalent to a shift from the 25th percentile (25%) to the 75th percentile (49%) in the distribution of anti-Semitism across Western European countries. The similarity in the magnitude of the effects across treatments is also important because it helps to address endogeneity concerns. If we only found an effect when using the Jews as a comparison group, such effect could be also attributed to a feedback loop from anti-Semitic attitudes to victimhood. The fact that the effect appears to be indistinguishable between Jews, Others, Armenians and Bosnians helps to rule out the possibility that the relationship is simply due to endogeneity. The only condition for which no significant effect is found is the group with no reputation of suffering.

Study 2: A Natural Experiment

Although Study 1 randomizes the identity of the comparison group, it does not randomly vary perceptions of competitive victimhood. Study 2 tries to fill in this exact gap. We consider what happens when a random shock changes perceptions of victimhood. We conducted a survey in Greece in June 2014 (n=1043, age(sd) = 49.90(15.10), %Female = 63.16) and measured trust in Jews and other outgroups as well as a measure of competitive victimhood (“Greeks have

suffered more genocides than the Jews'). Interviews for the first survey took place from Monday, 23 June until Friday 27, June 2014. On Tuesday night, 24 June, the Greek national football team was playing against the national team of Ivory Coast in what was the last game of the group stage in the Brazil World Cup finals. Greece could only classify to the next round by winning that game. Indeed, Greece won 2-1 with a controversial injury-time penalty. With this victory, Greece qualified for the first time to the last 16 of the tournament. Given that football is by far the most popular sport in the country and given that the World Cup represents the most salient and prestigious international tournament, this victory became –hardly unexpectedly– headlines in the national news. One-third of our respondents (n = 354, 33.88%) were already interviewed before this game, and two-thirds (n = 691, 66.12%) were interviewed between Wednesday and Friday, i.e. after knowing the result of this football match.

We use this setup to pursue two goals. First, linking this study back to the first study, the design allows us to examine whether the association between competitive victimhood and anti-Semitism holds when we employ an exogenous shift in perceptions of competitive victimhood. Second, we use this case to illustrate how victimhood effects can play out in the real world. If negative judgments against the Jews stem from self-categorizations of the nation as the underdog, a sports victory of this magnitude and salience, coming with an ambiguous–yet favorable–decision by the referee, should, if anything, reduce perceived victimhood. If perceived victimhood is a driving force of anti-Semitic sentiment, then we should also see reduced levels of anti-Semitic judgments. Since our measure of victimhood is a relative one, comparing Greeks to the Jews, our design allows us to identify the effect of competitive victimhood on anti-Jewish attitudes.

Our instrument of victimhood is the date of the interview. Respondents interviewed from Wednesday to Friday are given the score of one whereas those interviewed on Monday and Tuesday (the last Tuesday interview had ended before the start of the game) are given a zero. Our

treatment is also binary, switching on for those respondents who agree or strongly agree that the Greek nation has suffered worse genocides than the Jews. We use as outcome the Holocaust Instrumentalization item, both in binary format and by using the 1-5 scale.¹⁸

The first four columns present the so-called reduced form, i.e. the difference in the levels of anti-Semitism before and after the game. We use two measures of the outcome, a binary indicator denoting those who agree that the Jews exploit the Holocaust and the 1-5 Likert scale of the same item. Looking at Models (1) and (3), we find that both measures yield a significant negative effect, implying that those interviewed after the match are less anti-Semitic. This effect seems to be robust to the inclusion of covariates (Models 2 and 4). Models (5) and (6) present the first stage of the IV analysis that examines the link between the instrument (i.e. the interview date) and a sense of victimhood, both with (6) and without (5) covariates—all variables shown in Table 2. In both instances, people interviewed after the game register lower levels of victimhood. That said, the estimates are relatively noisy.

Table 1: Instrumental Variables Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	ITT Reduced Form Y: Anti-Semitism				First Stage: Y: Victimhood		Second Stage Y: Anti-Semitism			
	Binary		Full Scale		Binary		Wald Estimator		2SLS	
							Binary	Full scale	Binary	Full Scale
Post Game	-0.067** (0.033)	-0.101** (0.035)	-0.250** (0.098)	-0.315** (0.104)	-0.072** (0.030)	-0.074** (0.032)				
<i>Victimhood</i>							0.930 (0.611)	3.784* (2.141)	1.445* (0.830)	4.806* (2.721)
Controls		✓		✓		✓			✓	✓
N	875	765	875	765	981	843	851	851	745	745

¹⁸ We use a binary victimhood measure because it works best in the first stage, as a way to enhance the strength of the instrument. Doing so helps to reduce bias stemming from a weak first-stage in IV analysis (Angrist and Pischke 2008).

Note: The cell entries are OLS regression estimates, heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses; $p < 0.10$, $p < 0.05$.

Although the football match seems to work towards the expected direction, it does not seem to be a very strong instrument (F-value=3.66) making it a conservative test of the victimhood hypothesis. Finally, the last four columns present the Local Average Treatment Effect estimates that are shown here to strengthen our inferences from the experimental work we presented in Study 1 and Study 2. Models (7) and (8) show the estimates obtained from the Wald Estimator, hence without using any covariates in the IV analysis. Both estimates point to the same direction: Competitive victimhood, as instrumented by whether respondents were interviewed before or after the match, does seem to lead to more anti-Semitic attitudes. Models (9) and (10) confirm this effect in the presence of covariates.¹⁹

Our IV rests on two major assumptions: that the date of interview is as-good-as randomly assigned (ignorability) and that the interview date itself did not cause a reduction in anti-Semitism via an alternative path other than reduction in perceived victimhood due to the football game (exclusion). We think ignorability is unlikely to be violated because in telephone surveys that take place amidst the electoral cycle there is little scope in choosing when to be interviewed. Exclusion, however, can be violated for two reasons. First, different people might

¹⁹ We also implemented the Local Average Response Function estimator as a way to relax the assumption of constant treatment effects within strata of the covariates (Abadie 2003). The results are very similar to those obtained with 2SLS estimator: LATE is 0.942 (std. error 0.711) when using the binary indicator and 4.692 (std. error 2.841) when using the 1-5 scale.

be more accessible at the beginning of the week than towards the end of the week. These differences might have an effect on anti-Semitism without being driven by a change in underdog feelings caused by the football match. Second, the game might not have resulted in lower anti-Semitic prejudice because of a decline in the sense of victimhood but due to an increase in the feel-good factor generated by the victory. Table 2 tries to address the first concern by examining baseline differences between respondents interviewed before and after the match. We include a series of demographics and two attitudinal predictors (political knowledge and ideological self-placement), which we believe are unlikely to have been influenced by the match. We find no significant difference between the two groups. The overall level of balance approaches the standards of a randomized experiment.²⁰

Table 2: Balance Statistics

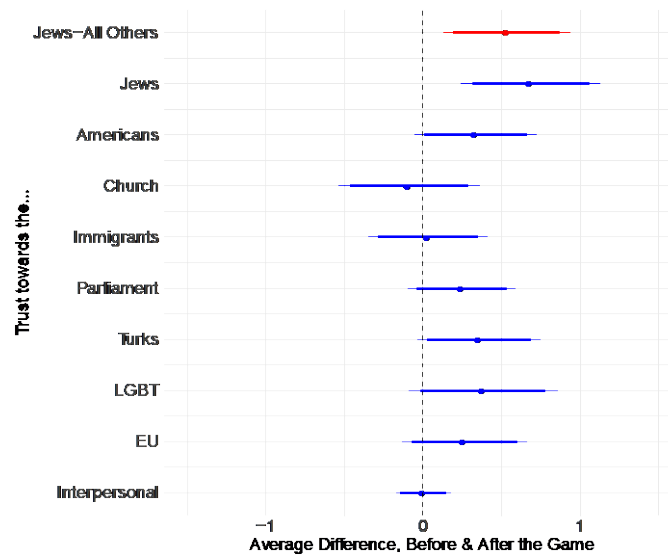
	Pre Game	Post Game	p-value
Female	64.4	62.5	0.549
<i>Age</i>			
18-30	18.9	16.3	0.297
31-50	42.4	43	0.851
51-	38.7	41.0	0.540
<i>Education</i>			
Primary/No School:	12.7	11.4	0.545
Secondary/Vocational	45.8	44.3	0.649
University Title	34.1	38.8	0.145
<i>Ideology</i>			
Left-Right	4.53	4.69	0.448
<i>LR²</i>	29.24	30.46	0.557
Knowledge	1.47	1.53	0.471

²⁰ We employed an omnibus test, proposed by Hansen and Bowers (2008), which tests the null of no systematic differences between groups and assesses balance not only on the set of covariates listed in Table 2, but also on all their linear combinations. The χ^2 statistic is 6.53, which with 9 degrees of freedom gives a p-value of 0.686.

Note: Entries in the first two columns are group averages whereas the third column shows the of the t-test between the two groups. Kolmogorov- Smirnov tests for differences in distributions are not shown here but denote equally satisfactory levels of balance. n varies between 891 and 1045.

Although a football match cannot be equated with a national tragedy (or triumph), we do think that such a secondary event to have visible effects on trust toward Jews (and not anyone else) is noteworthy. Becoming “Kings for a Day,” Greek citizens felt less victims than usual, and this led to a more favorable posture towards the Jews.²¹

Figure 3. Changes in Levels of Trust towards groups and institutions after the game



Note: All entries indicate the OLS coefficient from regressing each trust indicator on the dummy distinguishing respondents according to whether they were interviewed before or after the game. The horizontal spikes denote the 90% (thick lines) and 95% (thin lines) CIs. All trust items are measured using a 0-10 scale, except from Interpersonal trust, which is originally measured with a 5-point scale but has been recoded into a 0-10 scale. The first entry denotes the difference in trust between Jews and the average of all other groups and ranges from -10 to 10.

Study 3: Victimhood Vs Scapegoating

²¹The survey includes two additional indicators of anti-Semitism, one that builds on the equalization of Israel with Nazi Germany and one that makes reference to stereotypes about how powerful the Jews are in global centres of power. We also combine the Holocaust Instrumentalization item with these two items to create an index of anti-Semitism. The results remain unchanged.

Thus far we have seen that competitive victimhood boosts anti-Semitic attitudes and that the identity of the outgroup matters little insofar as its victimhood has been recognised. Study 3 extends these findings in two ways. First, we examine whether perceptions of collective victimhood matter even in the absence of a comparison group. We thus distinguish between competitive victimhood and absolute victimhood. Second, we design an experiment tailored to help us distinguish between the victimhood hypothesis and its main rival hypothesis, namely the scapegoating hypothesis. Study 2 is also a survey experiment ($n=1037$, $age=52.05$,²² %Female = 56%) and is designed to address three questions: a) Are these effects causal?, b) Are they driven by the economic deprivation facing Greece since 2009?, and c) would they also persist even without a comparison group?

The design builds on the link between scapegoating and crises. We thus use Greece's debt crisis as a way to activate scapegoating, while we try to induce victimhood via a general historical claim about collective suffering. All treatments are denoted by a different introductory sentence to the Holocaust Instrumentalization question. As shown in Table 3, the first treatment introduces a sense of historical injustice against the Greeks as a way to induce victimhood without making reference to the current crisis. The second scenario explicitly refers to the crisis and focuses on blame attribution to generate a favourable setting within which scapegoating can operate. The last treatment combines victimhood and scapegoating to test for interactive effects. It might be that either scapegoating or victimhood do not operate on their own but only in conjunction with each other. We try to account for this possibility by combining the two treatments. A fourth group (control) receives no treatment and we only record the outcome.

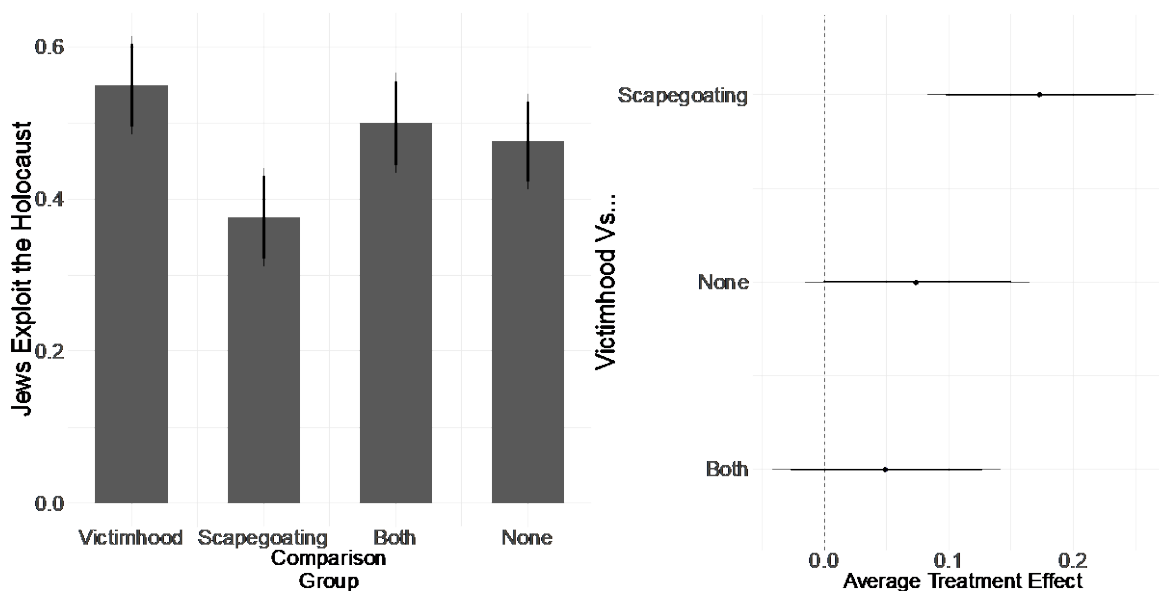
²² Age was coded into categories: 18-24 (51); 25-34 (79); 35-44 (185); 45-54 (262); 55-64 (246); 65+ (214), n in parentheses.

Table 3: Victimhood and Scapegoating: The Experimental Setup

Control Group	Considering yourself, to what extent do you agree with what is generally said, i.e. that Jews exploit the Holocaust to achieve better treatment in the international arena?
Victimhood	History has been unfair to the Greek people. Considering yourself, to what extent do you agree with what is generally said, i.e. that Jews exploit the Holocaust to achieve better treatment in the international arena?
Scapegoating	Others, and not Greece, are to be blamed for the current economic crisis. Considering yourself, to what extent do you agree with what is generally said, i.e. that Jews exploit the Holocaust to achieve better treatment in the international arena?
Victimhood and Scapegoating	History has been unfair to the Greek people. One example is the current economic crisis, for which other, and not Greece, are to be blamed. Considering yourself, to what extent do you agree with what is generally said, i.e. that Jews exploit the Holocaust to achieve better treatment in the international arena?

The results appear in Figure 4. As the first panel of the Figure shows, the highest percentage of agreement with this statement is found for those who received the victimhood treatment, whereas the lowest level of agreement is observed for the scapegoating treatment. The victimhood category also outweighs by nearly ten percentage points the control category, in which the question about the Jews was not preceded by the treatment. The second panel of Figure 4 directly compares victimhood against the other three conditions.

Figure 4: Victimhood, Scapegoating or Both?



Note: Each bar represents the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statement that the Jews exploit the Holocaust. The vertical bars represent the parametric 95% CIs. Right Panel. Points denote means differences from victimhood and horizontal errors show both 90% (thick line) and 95% (thin line) CIs.

Our main interest lies in the comparison between victimhood and scapegoating. We find a significant difference, with respondents in the victimhood treatment being approximately 17% more likely to agree with the Holocaust statement (95% CIs [0.079–0.261]). Victimhood is also likely to lead to a higher percentage of agreement compared to the control condition, although this difference marginally fails to reach statistical significance (95% CIs [-0.018–0.158]). The

effect amounts to nine percentage points increase, which given the baseline of 47%, translates into a 20 percent increase in anti-Semitic attitudes. This is equivalent to the difference we observe in our survey when comparing university degree holders with high-school graduates.

Given the results thus far, the third entry comes as no surprise: when combined the two treatments seem to cancel each other out. If anything, victimhood seems to operate better alone than in conjunction with scapegoating, even though this difference is not statistically significant (95% CIs: [-0.047–0.128]). Despite the quite high level of uncertainty surrounding these estimates, it seems safe to conclude that the only treatment that induces higher levels of anti-Semitism is the one used to tap victimhood with the scapegoating treatment having the reverse effect (as in Gibson and Howard 2007).²³ One last concern could be that our treatment works not because of activating victimhood but rather because it activates scapegoating. Our manipulation check suggests that this is not the case. We find that the treatment of victimhood sparked higher rates of “Strongly Agree” responses in the victimhood item, while it had no discernible effect on the scapegoating question.²⁴ Taken as a whole, Study 3 shows that perceived victimhood exerts a causal effect on anti – Semitism even when no benchmark group is present and that this effect is not due to scapegoating .

²³ Randomization inference estimates are shown in Figure A.4 in the Appendix and confirm those presented here.

²⁴ The full results can be found in the Appendix (Figures A.5 and A.6). Note that the equivalent manipulation check for scapegoating also does not influence victimhood. It also does not influence the corresponding scapegoat manipulation check. People have very strong opinions about who is responsible for the Great Recession; it should not come as a surprise that we are unable to move that item with the scapegoating treatment.

Discussion

Anti-Semitism, “The Longest Hatred” as Robert Wistrich 1991 eloquently described it, neither started nor ended with the Holocaust. Masqueraded in various forms of prejudice against the Jews, it has been with us for millennia. The Holocaust experience and various attempts to combat this phenomenon after the end of the WWII have resulted in a decrease in the levels of anti-Semitism compared to the interwar period. That said, anti-Semitic attitudes are still worryingly high. Importantly, although modern anti-Semitism represents a more latent and less explicit attitude than in the past, it still has important behavioral implications. Attacks against Holocaust memorials, Synagogues, and Jewish properties are far from rare. The puzzle is thus still vivid. What accounts for this prejudice?

Using multiple survey experiments and a natural experiment we have shown that perceived victimhood, both in absolute and relative terms, is at least in part responsible for the persistence of anti-Semitism after the WWII. Perceptions of collective suffering, especially when triggered by comparisons with groups whose victimhood appears to be undisputed, triggers hostile attitudes towards the Jews. Our study makes five significant contributions in the existing literature.

First, we show that victimhood can extend beyond binary comparisons between groups in direct conflict to each other. In particular, we show that a feeling of collective suffering can fuel anti-Semitism via two mechanisms. First, collective victimhood can increase ingroup favoritism, thereby reducing empathy towards others. Second, competition over the magnitude and intensity of suffering can lead to the relegation of others’ victimhood, thereby again undermining outgroup empathy.

Second, the findings touch upon a more general trend after the WWII. The Holocaust experience has activated the international community in becoming more alert when human

rights violations are observed. Over the last decades, various groups have been trying to motivate the international community to recognize past or more recent genocides. This is not surprising, as the status of victim has nowadays more concrete and symbolic benefits than in the past. Based on these findings, we should expect that this trend will have counter effects, boosting competition between groups and thus leading to higher levels of anti-Semitism. Future research on this question might be useful in shedding light on the unintended consequences of the internationalization of victimhood.

Third, our findings lead us to qualify existing explanations of anti-Semitism. As the example of interwar Germany indicates, the sense of victimhood might be the fundamental element in both anti-Semitic attitudes and the scapegoating narrative. Although this sense of collective victimhood (stemming from the Versailles treaty and its devastating terms) was conflated with scapegoating (with the appearance of the “stab in the back” myth in the Weimar Republic or the then popular conspiracies about Jews) most scholars would agree that the former brought the latter and not vice versa. Importantly, the way future generations learned about the WWII and the Holocaust had serious implications for post-war anti-Semitism. By the late 1950’s, anti-Semitism was –again– on the rise and the Germans decided that an alternative pedagogical approach to their recent past was necessary to move forward. This shift included a direct confrontation with their own responsibilities. As Puaca (2011, 136) suggests, “Post-War textbooks left no doubt that the war had created many victims, but their authors also had no qualms about placing the German people high on that list.” A decade later, the History curriculum and the general attitude toward the WWII changed dramatically to address the nation’s responsibility for WWII and the extermination of the Jews. This shift from portraying the German people as (one more) victim of the Third Reich to a nation that bears responsibility for war crimes altered the course of socialization for a generation of young Germans.

Fourth, our findings inform policy initiatives to fight anti-Semitism. Combating anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice does not necessitate continuous reference to the Holocaust and other genocides; indeed, although increasing public knowledge is always helpful, it can backfire, especially in contexts most needed, unless combined with a shift towards an educational paradigm characterized by extrovert historical interpretations. Voigtländer and Voth (2012) find the route away from anti-Semitic prejudice is cosmopolitanism through open trade. As an analogy, we could think of the widening or perhaps the internationalization of the education curriculum as a means to break the socialization of collective trauma.

This brings us to our last, fifth, point. Although our focus has lied on anti-Semitism, our findings also apply to other outgroups – immigrants, muslims, homosexuals, or blacks, to name some examples. Various studies have tried to identify ways through which we can reduce outgroup prejudice (Adida et al. 2018; Broockman and Kalla 2016; Paluck 2009; Paluck and Green 2009). One of the key factors emerging from this work is past experience of victimhood. While in some cases such experiences lead to more prejudice (Bar-Tal 2007; Rozenas et al. 2017), in others they lead to significant reduction in prejudice (Dinas et al. 2020; Wayne and Zhukov 2019). The findings of our study can be useful in explaining this seeming discrepancy, by pointing to the role of victimhood recognition. The degree to which members of the ingroup perceive their victimhood to be sufficiently recognized by others can play an important role in converting the negative effects of prior experience into positive ones. To be sure, more work on this exact question will help to shed more light on the mechanism through which perceived victimhood can turn from a source of outgroup hostility to a channel of outgroup empathy.

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Appendix

Information about the Surveys

Survey 1:

Sample: 1,045 Greeks over 18 sampled via a multistage quote random sample.

Fieldwork: June 23-27 2014

Method of Data Collection: CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Surveys)

Response Rate: 6108 calls made, 1045 interviews completed (17%)

Survey 2:

Sample: 1,043 respondents over 18 via a multistage quote random sample

Fieldwork: January 10-14 2015

Method of Data Collection: CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Surveys)

Response Rate: 6510 calls made, 1043 interviews completed (16%)

Descriptive Statistics

Figure A.1 presents the marginal distribution of various measures of anti-Semitism. The first three indicators stem from the June 2014 survey, whereas the last one ("Jews should not buy Land") comes from a 2015 survey. *Responses to all three items follow the classic 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).* The exact wording is as follows:

Holocaust: Jews exploit the Holocaust to gain influence in the international arena

Israel: Israel treats Palestinians in the same way they were treated by the Germans in WWII.

Business: Jews have too much power in the business sector.

Land: Jews should be denied to buy land in Greece

Figure A.1. Anti-Semitism: Descriptive Statistics

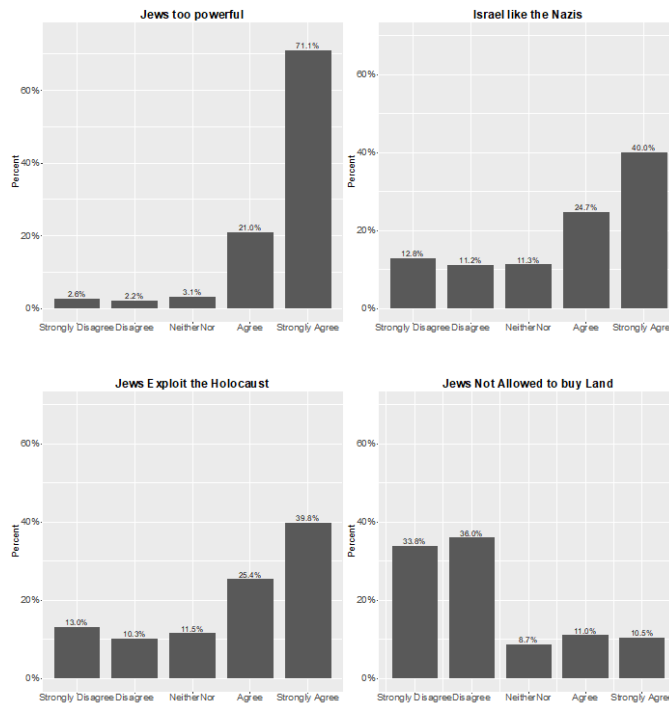
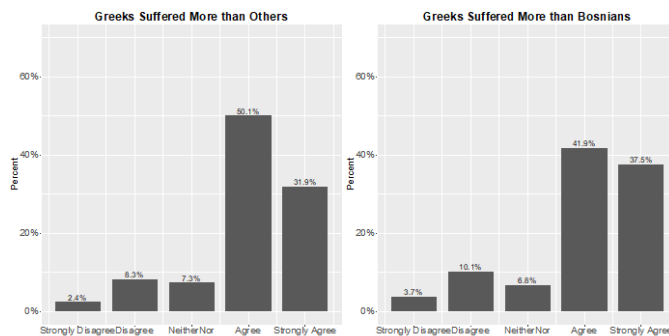


Figure A.2 presents the marginal distribution for the victimhood question, from the first survey, whereas A.3 uses the items from the second survey. The results are similar and point to the relatively high degree of collective victimhood.

Figure A.2: Competitive Victimhood, Descriptive Statistics



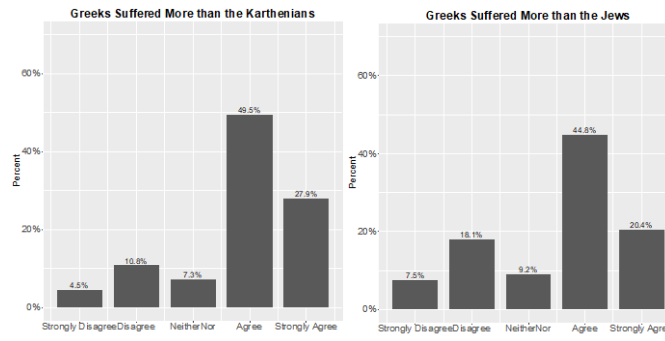
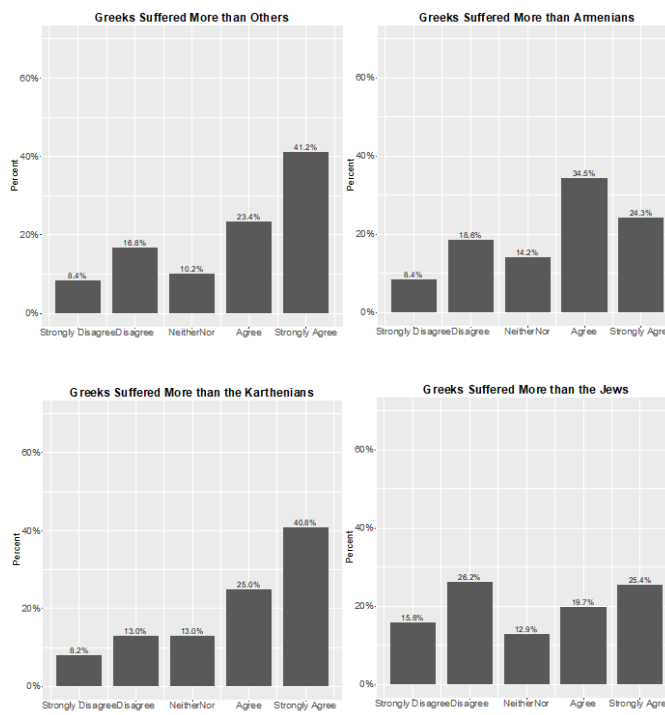


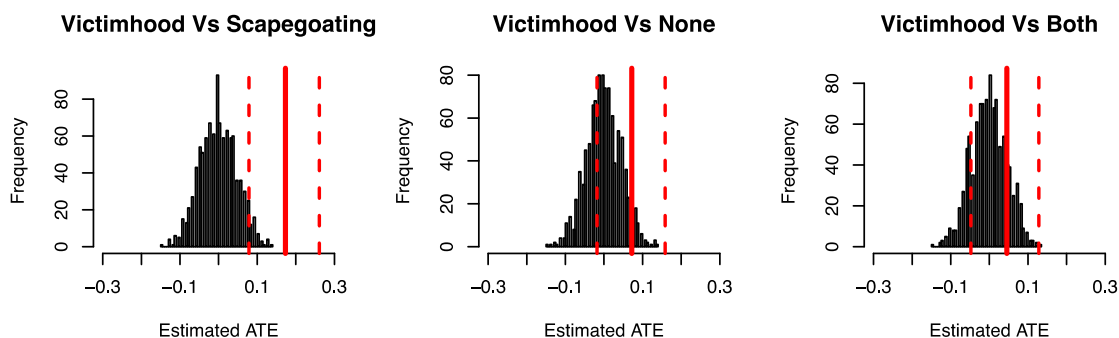
Figure A.3: Competitive Victimhood II, Descriptive Statistics



Full Randomization-Inference Results

We present the distribution of treatment effects under the sharp null, i.e. under the assumption the effect is zero for all respondents. The solid red vertical line denotes the sample treatment effect. The position of this line indicates how likely this estimate is given the null. The dashed vertical lines provide the 95% confidence intervals, stemming from this procedure. Confidence interval construction follows the path described in (Gerber and Green 2011): we impute the missing potential outcomes (Y_1) for the control groups by adding the estimated ATE to the observed Y_0 . For treated observations, missing “untreated” values are imputed by subtracting the estimated ATE from the observed treated values. We then list the estimated ATE from each permutation in ascending order, where the 2.5th percentile marks the bottom of the 95% confidence interval, and the estimate at the 97.5th percentile marks the top.

Figure A.4. Victimhood, Scapegoating or Both? (Randomization Inference)



Note: The histogram in the background indicates the distribution of ATEs under the sharp null. The vertical solid lines denote the observed ATE for each comparison and the dashed lines the 95% CIs, obtained as described above.

Manipulation Checks: Study 2

Figures A.5 and A.6 present the distribution of responses to the questions capturing victimhood and scapegoating, conditional on the treatment condition. Figure A.5 presents the distribution for the victimhood question whereas A.6 presents the distribution for the scapegoating question.

Figure A.5: Manipulation Check, Scapegoating

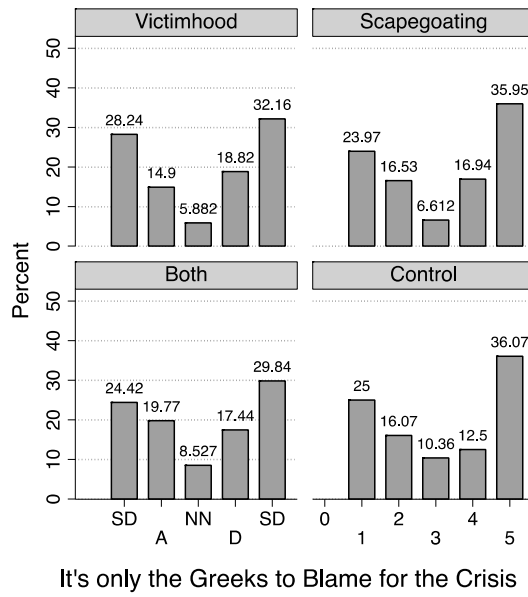


Figure A.6: Manipulation Check, Victimhood

