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Psychological asymmetry in minority–majority relations at different stages of ethnic conflict

Rezarta Bilali^{a,*}, Ayşe Betül Çelik^{b,**}, Ekin Ok^b

^a New York University, United States

^b Sabancı University, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the psychological asymmetry of majority and minority intergroup attitudes at different conflict stages: high versus low intensity conflict. Cross-sectional surveys using the same outcome measures were conducted at two time points with representative Kurdish and Turkish community samples in selected neighborhoods in the city of Izmir in Turkey. The first survey was conducted during a period of low intensity conflict (LIC), whereas the second survey was conducted 6 months later during a period of high intensity conflict (HIC). The results revealed seemingly paradoxical outcomes among minority Kurds, such that during HIC they exhibited higher social distance and less support for (Turkish) nationalistic leaders, but also higher endorsement of assimilative nationalism, less out-group negativity, and lower support for minority Kurdish rights. By contrast, Turks exhibited lower social tolerance, more support for nationalistic leaders, higher out-group negativity, lower support for minority rights, and higher endorsement of assimilative nationalism during HIC than LIC. Turks' and Kurds' images of each other were also assessed, revealing patterns consistent with image theory predictions: Turks viewed Kurds as *rogue*, whereas Kurds viewed Turks as *barbarian*. While Turks' out-group images did not change over time, Kurds' images of Turks were slightly more variable at HIC than LIC. The findings are interpreted in light of distinct challenges that conflict and violence at the national level poses to ethnic minorities and majorities. The results highlight the importance of considering the role of dynamic inter-group contexts on understanding micro-level intergroup outcomes.

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1. Introduction

The social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1999) emphasizes the role of the social context in understanding intergroup relations. While micro-level variables, such as strong in-group identification, low self-esteem, and perceptions of threat can affect social and political tolerance, the context of intergroup relations is also very important (Weldon, 2006). Ethnic conflict and intergroup violence is one of these important political contexts that influence nationalistic attachment, intergroup stereotypes, as well as tolerance and social distance between groups. For instance, early research on the study of

* Corresponding author at: Department of Applied Psychology, New York University, 246 Greene Street, rm407w, New York, NY 10003, United States. Tel.: +1 2129985155.

** Corresponding author at: Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Sabancı University, Orhanlı, Tuzla, Istanbul, Turkey. Tel.: +90 2164839298.

E-mail addresses: rezarta.bilali@nyu.edu (R. Bilali), bcelik@sabanciuniv.edu (A.B. Çelik).

¹ The first and the second author contributed equally to this article, and are listed alphabetically.

stereotyping (e.g., Buchanan, 1951; Meenes, 1943; Seago, 1947) showed that out-group stereotypes become more negative when inter-group relations deteriorate, such as during war or subsequent to attacks toward the in-group (see also Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Hayes, 1992). Yet, despite this early work, recent psychological studies that consider the influence of contextual changes on intergroup perceptions are rare (for exceptions see Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001; Haslam et al., 1992; Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). For instance, while a relatively large literature explores intergroup attitudes and perceptions among majority and minority groups in stable or conflict-ridden societies, little research has investigated the influence of macro-level factors, such as the varying intensity or stage of the intergroup conflict, on intergroup outcomes. The main goal of the present study was to extend the present literature by shedding light on how heightened intergroup tensions at the national level (e.g., due to violent incidents) might shape inter-group orientations, perceptions, and national attitudes in asymmetrical ethnic conflicts. Merging the literature in majority–minority relations with the intergroup conflict and threat literature, we expected to observe a psychological asymmetry in the reactions of majority and minority groups at stages of varying conflict intensity. We hypothesized that an increase in conflict and violence at the national level poses distinct challenges to ethnic minorities as compared to ethnic majorities, resulting in paradoxical consequences in intergroup outcomes among ethnic minorities. To address this issue, we explored national and intergroup attitudes among Turks and Kurds living in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods in a Turkish city (Izmir) that hosts high numbers of Kurdish migrants. We used a cross-sectional design measuring the same outcomes at two time points, during a period of relative calm or low intensity conflict (from here on referred to as LIC), (January 2011) and in the aftermath of increasing violence at the national level that significantly heightened intergroup tensions (i.e., a high intensity conflict stage, from here on referred to as HIC) (August 2011). We focused on a variety of intergroup outcomes including social distance and tolerance, out-group negativity and intergroup images, as well as support for minority rights, and nationalistic attachment.

1.1. *Psychological asymmetry in minority–majority relations*²

A large literature has established a psychological asymmetry in minority–majority relations, particularly with regard to intergroup interactions (e.g., Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Whereas majority group members are less inclined to reflect on their privileged status, minority group members are usually aware of their devalued position and inferior treatment (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Minority groups are concerned with becoming targets of discrimination and prejudice (Plant, 2004; Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005) and live with the threat of stigmatization (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). These concerns arouse self-protection motives among minority groups: For instance, ethnic and racial socialization literature (for a review see Hughes et al., 2006) suggests that minority group parents might promote mistrust and emphasize wariness and caution (i.e., social distance) to their kids in order to protect them from negative interactions with majority group members. At the same time, minority group members might view intergroup interactions as useful because establishing connections with majority group members might provide opportunities for more integration and inclusion in the society (Bastian, Lusher, & Ata, 2012; Berry, 2001). Minority groups are also less likely to express discrimination and out-group derogation, as these are counter-normative (Binder et al., 2009).

Being target of discrimination also increases identification with the ethnic group. Typically, compared to majorities, ethnic minorities identify more strongly with their ethnic group, but they identify less with the national group (Sidanius, Feshbach, Levin, & Pratto, 1997; Staerklé, Sidanius, Green, & Molina, 2010). While majority groups prefer assimilation ideologies that require sacrificing ethnic identities for a shared national identity, minority groups prefer ideologies that allow them to maintain a strong ethnic identity but at the same time assure their inclusion and belonging to the nation (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007).

Minority and majority groups do not only differ in their preferred societal ideologies, or the extent of expression of discrimination and prejudice, but also in the content of stereotypes they hold about each other. Both stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and image theory (Alexander, Brewer, & Herrmann, 1999) propose that intergroup stereotypes or images vary in predictable ways depending on the structural relations between groups, such as differences in the degree of intergroup competition and power relations (see also Leach, Bilali, & Pagliaro, 2014). Image theory is particularly relevant as it makes predictions about inter-group stereotypes in the context of intergroup conflict. Each image is a result of three dimensions of perceived structural relations – goal compatibility (mutual gain, threatening, opportunity to exploit), relative power (stronger, equal, weaker), and cultural status (superior, equal, inferior) (Alexander et al., 1999; Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995). In an asymmetric conflict (e.g., between a majority and minority group) four predominant images are generally observed. Imperialist and barbarian are the images of high power groups endorsed by low power groups. The perceived cultural status as either superior or inferior determines whether the adversary is viewed as an imperialist or a barbarian, respectively. An imperialist is perceived as highly sophisticated, but also dominating and exploitative, whereas a barbarian is viewed as aggressive, dangerous, and irrational. Colony (also referred to as ‘dependent’) and rogue are the images ascribed to low power groups in asymmetric conflicts: Both are perceived as inferior in cultural status, weak, incompetent and inefficient. But, while a rogue group is threatening due to aggressive elites or extremists, the colony poses an opportunity for gain and exploitation (Bilali, 2010). For instance, in the context of racial relations in the U.S., Alexander, Brewer, and

² In this paper, “majority” refers to a group of larger numerical size, as well high power and social status; “minority” refers to a group of lower numerical size, as well as lower power and social status.

Livingston (2005) found that White Americans endorsed a barbarian image of Blacks, but a colony/dependent image of Native Americans; whereas Black and Native Americans endorsed an imperialist image of Whites.

1.2. *Minority–majority intergroup outcomes at different conflict stages*

Intergroup conflict, especially when it involves instances of violence, has profound negative influences on intergroup relations. Tension and violence in intergroup contexts can enhance the tendency to make judgments based on group stereotypes (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), along with eliciting greater discriminatory behavior, mistrust and delegitimization of adversaries (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Heightened conflict triggers negative emotional reactions (i.e., fear, anger) to the out-group (Canetti, Hall, Rapaport, & Wayne, 2013), increases in-group identification (Moskalenko, McCauley, & Rozin, 2006), nationalistic attachment and support for nationalistic leaders (Herrmann, Tetlock, & Visser, 1999; Huddy, Feldman, & Weber, 2007), as well as produces prejudice and out-group derogation (e.g., Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll, 2009; Oswald, 2005; Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004; Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999).

However, we know little about whether these effects of heightened intergroup tensions extend to minority groups in an asymmetric conflict, particularly when the conflict has escalated due to violence perpetrated by minority group insurgents. Acts of violence by members of minority groups would increase out-group hostility and nationalistic attachment among majority group members, followed by a rise in discrimination, exclusion and even hate crimes toward minorities. For instance, prejudice, hostility and hate crimes toward Muslims and Arabs in the U.S. increased in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks (e.g., Coryn, Beale, & Myers, 2004; Panagopoulos, 2006; Sheridan, 2006). Similarly, in a longitudinal study in Israel, Bar-Tal and Labin (2001) found that Israeli adolescents exhibited more stereotypical perceptions and more negative attitudes toward Palestinians and Jordanians in the aftermath of violent attacks. In contrast, minority group members' primary concern is the potential violence and discrimination that might be targeted toward them due to increased hostility among majority group members (Rodriguez Mosquera, Khan, & Selya, 2013). Discrimination, exclusion, and threat of victimization have direct implications in minority group members' lives, particularly in cities where the two groups co-exist. Such concerns should motivate minority group members to protect themselves from becoming targets of violence and from the negative consequences of discrimination. Therefore, we predicted that at HIC, minority group members might be more cautious about intergroup interaction, exhibiting higher social distance. They also should be less supportive of nationalistic leaders, who often have a tendency to exacerbate discriminative policies or endorse violent solutions to conflict that have detrimental consequences for the minority group. At the same time, due to the physical proximity and considering that minority group members' livelihood depends to some extent on their integration to the urban life, such as for employment, minorities should also be motivated to reduce potential exclusion and discrimination targeted toward them by disconfirming the negative stereotypes of the in-group as threatening and affirming their loyalty and belonging to the society. These motives can be manifested in a variety of seemingly clashing attitudinal outcomes. For instance, during HIC, to affirm their loyalty, minority group members might be more willing to endorse national assimilation ideologies, and might be less likely to voice their quest for minority group rights, which is often perceived as threatening by the majority group. However, they might also be less likely to express out-group negativity and stereotypes, which should serve a palliative function. Another way to restore in-group's social image and disconfirm the negative stereotypes is by distancing the in-group from those who perpetrated harm on the majority group, for instance by excluding them from the representation of the in-group – a phenomenon known as the 'black sheep' effect (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Dougill, 2002; Marques & Zyerbyt, 1988).

1.3. *The Turkish–Kurdish conflict: a dangerous move toward social polarization*

The Kurdish Issue has for decades been known as a conflict between the irredentist PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers' Party*) and the Turkish state, and has resulted in polarization along ethnic lines in Turkey. Founded in 1978, the PKK became the most significant Kurdish actor in Turkey's history, especially after the 1980 military coup, which resulted in "the harsh reaction against manifestations of Kurdishness" (Kirisçi & Winrow, 1997, p. 111). The 1982 Constitution banned expressions of cultural pluralism, with its articles emphasizing "the prohibition of any other language than Turkish to be used in the expression and dissemination of thought" (Article 26). Following the PKK's attacks to the Turkish state starting in 1984, the state declared "the state of emergency rule" (*Olağanüstü Hal, known as OHAL in Turkish*) in thirteen of the heavily Kurdish-populated cities in 1987, which gave the appointed governors extraordinary rights, including the right to expel citizens from the region, restrict property ownership, and restrict freedom of the press and expression (Çelik, 2010). The conflict between the army and the PKK guerillas escalated throughout the 1990s – a period marked by a high number of deaths and casualties, human rights violations, as well as forced displacement of high numbers of Kurdish people from their villages to big western cities. After the capture of the PKK leader, Öcalan, and EU's acceptance of Turkey's candidacy in 1999, the Turkish government carried out political and cultural reforms, which resulted in a state of non-violence until 2004, when the conflict re-escalated. Between 2004 and 2009, there was sporadic violence in rural southeastern Anatolia and bombings in western cities as well as increasing nationalist feelings on each side. During this period, the conflict spread to the intergroup relations, polarizing Turkey along ethnic lines (Yavuz & Özcan, 2006), including "open ethnic confrontations in some Turkish towns in Western Turkey" and "an anti-Kurdish discourse in popular media and the internet" (Saraçoğlu, 2009, p. 641).

The year 2009 marks an important positive turning point as, in July 2009, the AKP government initiated the “Kurdish Opening” to address the Kurdish Issue. When the initiative was originally proposed, it was believed to include greater cultural rights for Kurds (excluding teaching in Kurdish), some form of local autonomy, and incentives to demobilize and reintegrate PKK fighters into society, which also led the PKK to declare ceasefire. However, the initiative ended by only providing a Kurdish channel in the state-owned TV broadcasting network, changes in laws dealing with rehabilitating minors involved in “terrorist acts” and allowing the use of Kurdish in prisons.

The intergroup relations started to deteriorate again in the spring/summer of 2011. In February 2011, PKK announced the end of the cease-fire (Champion, 2011), and in May, 12 PKK rebels and five Turkish soldiers were killed in counter-insurgency operations. This incited massive protests throughout Turkey, leading to the detainment of more than a thousand people (Gokce, 2011). On July 14th 2011, in Silvan, Diyarbakır, PKK killed 13 Turkish soldiers. The hatred incited by this attack resulted in attacks to the pro-Kurdish political party’s building in a city in Eastern Anatolia. On the very same day, DTK (*Democratic Society Congress*), an umbrella organization for Kurdish political groups, declared what it calls *democratic autonomy* with 850 delegates in Diyarbakır and “invited Kurds to introduce themselves as democratically autonomous Kurdistan citizens” (Hürriyet Daily News, 2011). This was followed by increased tensions in major cities in Turkey and by military operations by the Turkish army to kill Kurdish rebels (Reuters News, 2011).

2. The present study

The main goal of the present study was to examine intergroup perceptions and attitudes among ethnic majority and minority group members as a function of a changing context of intergroup conflict. We propose that minority and majority groups have distinct challenges at different phases of a conflict, therefore their intergroup orientations should serve to cope with the different threats that they face at these stages. While some studies (e.g., Coryn et al., 2004; Panagopoulos, 2006; Sheridan, 2006) have assessed the shifts in intergroup perceptions and attitudes of majority group members as a function of major national events of violence (e.g., 9/11 attacks), we know little about minority groups’ reactions to a changing context of conflict. The current study contributes to this literature by assessing change in both minority and majority groups’ intergroup orientations over time. We examined this issue in Izmir – a metropolitan city in western Turkey that hosts ethnic Turks and ethnic Kurds – at two time periods of low and high conflict intensity: The first survey was conducted in January 2011 (LIC), whereas the second survey was conducted in August 2011 (HIC) immediately after the end of ceasefire between the Turkish government and the PKK.

Izmir is the third most populous city of Turkey after Istanbul and Ankara, located on the coast of Aegean Sea in the westernmost part of the country. It is an important economic center and the second-largest port city of Turkey after Istanbul. Izmir is one of the cities that have received a significant number of Kurdish migrants from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in the last few decades (Çelik, 2005). Most of the ethnic Kurds who came to the city were deprived of the education and skills necessary to be competitive in the job market (Saraçoğlu, 2009). Limited economic opportunities and low standards of living brought an obvious spatial and socio-economic separation between the Kurdish migrants and the rest of the population in the city. Our study reflects this reality: We examined intergroup attitudes in Kadifekale neighborhood, which is one of the foremost examples of such isolated and exclusively Kurdish districts in Izmir (Saraçoğlu, 2009), as well as in Mavisehir and Bostanlı neighborhoods, which are also rather isolated but inhabited almost entirely by Turks.

The increased intensity of the ethnic conflict in Turkey also impacted Izmir, where intergroup tensions between Turks and Kurds increased during the summer of 2011 (e.g., Yildiz, 2011). We predicted that majority and minority groups would react differently to heightened intergroup tensions following the break of ceasefire by the PKK. Drawing on the intergroup threat literature, we expected ethnic Turks to exhibit higher nationalism, more social distance, less tolerance, and less support for minority rights during HIC compared to LIC. In addition, based on research suggesting that perceived out-group homogeneity increases under threat (e.g., Rothgerber, 1997), during HIC, Turks would be more likely to view the PKK as representative of Kurds than during LIC. In contrast, during HIC, minority group members’ self-protection motives and need for belonging and inclusion would increase, which in turn might lead to seemingly paradoxical outcomes. On one hand, minority group members might exhibit higher social distance and less support for (Turkish) nationalistic leaders. On the other hand, they would express less out-group negativity, more distance from the PKK (e.g., portraying PKK as less representative of the in-group), and would tone down their requests for minority rights. To affirm their belonging to the society, minority group members might endorse more assimilative nationalism, which requires minorities to sacrifice their ethnic identity for the sake of the national identity (Staerklé et al., 2010).

In addition, building on the strong situation hypothesis (e.g., Mischel, 1977), we also explored whether during HIC (i.e., a strong situation) members of each group would exhibit more homogeneous reactions than during LIC. That is, we examined whether the intensity of the conflict would influence not only the mean levels of intergroup orientations but also the variance of group members’ reactions.

Drawing on image theory, we expected Turks to view Kurds as rogue (i.e., threatening, low power, and inferior cultural status), whereas Kurds would view Turks as either imperialist or barbarian (i.e., threatening, high power, superior or inferior culture). Heightened intergroup tensions are a reflection of changing structural relations (e.g., more competitive and threatening relations) between groups, which should result in more negative intergroup associations and stereotypes. Therefore, we assessed the valence of stereotypes and their malleability as a function of varying intensity of intergroup conflict.

3. Methods

3.1. Selection of data collection sites

The data for this study were collected in spatially segregated and ethnically homogenous neighborhoods. We drew two representative samples of Kurds at two time points in Kadifekale neighborhood, which is made up of exclusively Kurdish people who have voluntarily or involuntarily migrated to Izmir starting the mid-1980s, due to the eruption of the armed conflict in the heavily Kurdish-populated provinces in the East. Situated in the periphery of the city, Kadifekale is one of the most striking examples of spatial disintegration and socio-economic marginalization of the Kurdish migrants in the city of Izmir (Saraçoğlu, 2009). Representative samples of Turkish respondents were drawn in Mavisehir (January 2011) and Bostanlı (August 2011) neighborhoods, which were chosen because they are also rather isolated communities in the periphery of the city and they are inhabited entirely by ethnic Turks. After the increase in violence and social tension in July–August 2011, we were not granted permission to repeat the study in the same Turkish neighborhood (Mavisehir). Therefore, we chose Bostanlı, another demographically very similar neighborhood, almost entirely inhabited by ethnic Turks.

The Turkish and Kurdish neighborhoods differ considerably in socio-economic status, education, and income levels – Kadifekale includes a poor and disadvantaged community, whereas Mavisehir and Bostanlı are middle and upper class neighborhoods. Although these differences make comparisons across ethnic groups problematic, this is less of an issue in the present study because our focus was on change within each ethnic community over time, rather than on differences across communities.

3.2. Participants

We conducted face-to-face survey interviews in Turkish (all participants spoke Turkish fluently) with ethnic Turks and Kurds in selected neighborhoods at two time points: January 2011 (66 Kurds and 66 Turks) and August 2011 (75 Turks and 72 Kurds). To decide the sample size, we used the number of voter populations (aged 18 or over) in the selected neighborhoods from the district civil registration offices (*İlçe Nüfus Müdürlüğü*). Based on the size of the neighborhoods and staying within 90% confidence level, the calculated sample size for each neighborhood ranged between 65 and 75 participants.

To determine the participants, we used clustered sampling with the household as the unit. The total number of households (apartments or houses) on each street was calculated using data from the locally elected neighborhood headmen (*muhtar*). To reach specific households, we divided the total number of households in the neighborhood by the specified sample size, and used the outcome to identify the destination households (e.g., every 79th household) starting with a randomly chosen household (e.g., 33rd apartment). In the selected households, whoever was available was chosen as the participant, but we paid a special attention to keep the gender ratio equal (across the four sub-samples, 44–54% of respondents were women). When the occupants of the selected apartments were absent or refused to participate, one of their next-door neighbors was interviewed. At Time 1 (during LIC), the neighborhood headman accompanied and introduced the researcher (the third author of this article) to the respondents, which was important to overcome trust issues, reduce social desirability, and increase the response rate. At Time 2 (during HIC), the interviewers were local researchers (working for a local public opinion firm) who had previous experience with data collection in these neighborhoods, thus they did not have an access problem. To reduce social desirability, Turkish and Kurdish interviewers were sent to respective neighborhoods. In both studies, participants were first informed about the goal of the research and were told that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The items were read to the participants, and the interviewers filled out the surveys.

As expected, there were large demographic differences between the Kurdish and Turkish samples. Kurdish respondents at both time points had low education (elementary to middle school education), whereas Turkish respondents' average education was a university degree in both samples. Similarly, the average family income in both Kurdish samples was less than 1000TL/month, whereas the average family income among Turks at both time points was reported to be between 3500 and 6000TL/month (TL/USD exchange rate fluctuated between 0.65 and 0.53 between January and August 2011). The Kurdish sample was also slightly younger (LIC: $M_{age} = 35$, $SD = 12.15$; HIC: $M_{age} = 38.8$, $SD = 11.97$) than the Turkish sample (LIC: $M_{age} = 43.9$; $SD = 9.95$; HIC: $M_{age} = 41.2$, $SD = 13.66$). Importantly, there were no demographic differences within ethnicity at the two time points.

3.3. Measures

All close-ended items were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales, with higher scores measuring higher agreement. (The Turkish version of the scales is available in the Online Appendix).

3.3.1. Social distance

Social distance was assessed with 6 items similar to those used by Bogardus (1933) ($\alpha = 0.92$): Would you like – to be next-door neighbors/to be close friends/to marry someone/your child to marry someone/your child's best friend with/rent your house to – someone from a different ethnic background (1 = absolutely no; 5 = absolutely yes)? All items were reverse-coded, so that higher scores reflect higher social distance ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.92$).

3.3.2. Social tolerance

Three items from Weldon (2006) were adopted to the Turkish context to measure social tolerance ($\alpha = 0.78$). These included: (1) I would feel discontent if I heard someone on the street speaking in a different language than my own; (2) I would feel displeasure to see people from different ethnic backgrounds in the shops I regularly go to; (3) I would feel discontent if the primary school teacher of my child was from a different ethnic background (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). All items were reverse coded so that higher scores reflect higher social tolerance.

3.3.3. Nationalism

We used three items to assess different aspects of nationalistic attachment with Turkey (anchored at: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). One item, "Seeing Turkish flags hung on balconies makes me feel good," was used to assess national pride. Another item assessed assimilative nationalism: "Citizens should give up their ethnic identities and accept that first and foremost they are Turkish citizens." The last item measured support for nationalistic leaders: "I believe that only a nationalistic leader or political party in Turkey can resolve the Kurdish issue (this item refers to Turkish nationalistic leader and political parties; and this was explained to the participants)." These items were inspired from Saraçoğlu (2009) and were constructed by the authors taking into consideration the nature of the Kurdish Issue and Turkish nationalism. As expected the items were not highly correlated ($r = 0.07–0.33$ for Turks; $r = 0.07–0.26$ for Kurds) as they tap different aspects of nationalism, thus they were analyzed separately.

3.3.4. Support for minority (Kurdish) rights

Support for Kurdish rights was assessed with three items measuring support for allowing: (1) education in mother tongue, (2) teaching Kurdish as an elective course in schools, and (3) broadcasting in Kurdish (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) ($\alpha = 0.88$). These items were adapted to the Turkish context from Weldon's political tolerance measure (2006).

3.3.5. PKK as representative of Kurds

We measured the degree to which participants believed that the PKK is representative of Kurds (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) by one item from Bilali (2014): "I believe that PKK is an organization that represents all Kurds."

3.3.6. Out-group negativity/positivity and images

One open-ended question assessed out-group associations and stereotypes. The question asked the respondents to name up to three words that came up to their mind to characterize Kurds (Turks) or Kurdishness (Turkishness). This open-ended assessment allowed us to examine the degree of negative versus positive inter-group perceptions, and to assess inter-group images. This open-ended measure is a novel strategy to assess inter-group images.

Among the Kurdish participants, 82% used at least one word to describe Turks, 67.6% used at least two words, and 52.5% used three words. Among Turks, 97.1% used at least one word, 91.4% used at least two words, and 72.9% used three words to describe Kurds. Overall, Turks ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.58$) provided more out-group descriptions than Kurds ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.78$), $F(1, 246) = 11.39$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$.

4. Results

4.1. Intergroup attitudes, support for Kurdish rights, and nationalism

We conducted univariate ANOVAs with each dependent variable (close-ended measures), with ethnicity and stage of conflict as predictors. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for each measure separately for Turks and Kurds at the two time points, as well as the main and interaction effects from univariate analyses.

As predicted, Turks compared to Kurds expressed higher social distance, less tolerance, less support for Kurdish rights, and viewed the PKK to be less representative of Kurds. With regard to nationalism, Turks exhibited higher support for nationalistic leaders, higher national pride, and higher assimilative nationalism than Kurds.

Overall, participants, both Turks and Kurds, expressed less social tolerance and less support for Kurdish rights during heightened inter-group tensions than during the period of calm. The other differences related to the conflict stage were qualified by interactions with ethnicity. To clarify these interaction effects, we conducted separate regression analyses with conflict stage as the predictor of each outcome, for each ethnic group separately.³ Specifically, as predicted, during HIC, Turks exhibited higher national pride ($B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = 0.005$), higher support for nationalistic leaders ($B = 1.07$, $SE = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), and were more likely to view the PKK as representative of all Kurds ($B = 0.54$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = 0.008$) than during LIC. However, the stage of conflict did not influence Turks' reported social distance ($B = 0.05$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.77$) or assimilative nationalism ($B = -0.07$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = 0.62$). Conversely, during HIC Kurds rated higher in social distance ($B = 0.65$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$), they showed less support for (Turkish) nationalistic leaders ($B = -0.53$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = 0.02$), were marginally less

³ We also ran the analyses by adding demographic controls (age, gender, education, income) to the regressions. These covariates did not affect the main results of the stage of conflict, and their effects were either not significant or not consistent across measures. Therefore, we chose not to report those effects here.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations of all outcome measures and the results of univariate analyses.

Outcomes	Turks		Kurds		Ethnicity		Conf. <i>F</i>	Stage <i>p</i>	Stage <i>F</i>	X Ethn. <i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>				
Social tolerance										
LIC	3.50 ^a	1.04	4.53 _a	0.55	170.34	0.00	16.17	0.00	1.08	0.30
HIC	3.06 ^b	0.75	4.27 _b	0.40						
Social distance										
LIC	2.73	1.00	1.39 _a	0.52	139.14	0.00	15.43	0.00	11.65	0.001
HIC	2.77	0.84	2.03 _b	0.44						
Nationalism										
Assimilative nationalism										
LIC	4.49	1.12	2.71 _a	1.67	82.32	0.00	9.88	0.002	13.77	0.00
HIC	4.41	0.52	3.67 _b	1.10						
National pride										
LIC	4.17 ^a	0.95	2.81	1.32	184.55	0.00	0.25	0.62	7.87	0.00
HIC	4.59 ^b	0.77	2.51	1.13						
Nationalistic leader										
LIC	2.28 ^a	1.29	2.21 _a	1.54	37.56	0.00	3.66	0.06	31.80	0.00
HIC	3.35 ^b	0.88	1.68 _b	0.93						
Support for Kurdish rights										
LIC	2.93 ^a	1.01	4.78 _a	0.53	265.13	0.00	52.88	0.00	0.85	0.354
HIC	1.99 ^b	1.13	4.06 _b	0.99						
PKK represents Kurds										
LIC	2.11 ^a	1.33	3.51 _a	1.52	34.35	0.00	0.19	0.66	10.06	0.002
HIC	2.67 ^b	1.02	3.08 _a	1.28						

Notes. The different superscripts show that those means are significantly different; similarly, the different subscripts show that the means are significantly different from each other.

Conf., conflict; Ethn., ethnicity; LIC, low intensity conflict; HIC, high intensity conflict.

likely to view the PKK as representative of all Kurds ($B = -0.42$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = 0.08$), and were more likely to endorse assimilative nationalism ($B = 0.96$, $SE = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). There was no effect of stage of conflict on national pride ($B = -0.29$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = 0.16$) among ethnic Kurds.

We were also interested in assessing whether higher intergroup tensions reduced individual differences in intergroup attitudes. We used the Levene's test for equality of variances to compare the variance in the responses at HIC and LIC. Among Turks, as expected, the variance was lower for assimilative nationalism, $F(1, 138) = 8.96$, $p = 0.003$, support for nationalistic leaders, $F(1, 138) = 11.60$, $p = 0.001$, belief that PKK represents all Turks, $F(1, 138) = 4.03$, $p = 0.05$, and it was marginally lower for social tolerance, $F(1, 138) = 2.92$, $p = 0.09$. There were no differences at the two conflict stages in the variances of responses for social distance, $F(1, 138) = 1.08$, $p = 0.30$, national pride, $F(1, 138) = 2.25$, $p = 0.14$, or support for Kurdish rights, $F(1, 138) = 1.50$, $p = 0.22$.

Similar to the results in the ethnic Turkish sample, in the Kurdish sample there was lower variability of reactions during HIC than LIC for assimilative nationalism, $F(1, 136) = 32.48$, $p < 0.001$, support for Turkish nationalistic leader, $F(1, 137) = 36.22$, $p < 0.001$, the belief that PKK represents all Kurds, $F(1, 137) = 4.83$, $p = 0.03$, and social tolerance, $F(1, 137) = 9.77$, $p = 0.002$. However, the variance was larger for support for Kurdish rights, $F(1, 137) = 39.69$, $p < 0.001$, but did not differ for national pride, $F(1, 137) = 1.39$, $p = 0.24$, and social distance, $F(1, 137) = 2.03$, $p = 0.16$.

4.2. Out-group negativity

We used the open-ended intergroup descriptions to assess the extent of out-group negativity among Turks and Kurds. To assess out-group negativity, two independent coders coded the valence of each word ($Kappa = 0.86$) used to describe the out-group into three categories: negative (-1), neutral (0), and positive ($+1$). Then, we averaged the valence across words to get a composite out-group negativity rating for each participant. Afterwards, we conducted an ANOVA using the composite out-group negativity as the outcome, and ethnicity and conflict stage as predictors. The results revealed a main effect of Ethnicity, $F(1, 246) = 21.32$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$, such that, as expected, Turks exhibited higher out-group negativity ($M = -0.68$, $SD = 0.42$) than Kurds ($M = -0.31$, $SE = 0.68$). The results also yielded a main effect of conflict stage, $F(1, 246) = 12.07$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$, and a conflict stage \times ethnicity interaction, $F(1, 246) = 19.84$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$. While there was no difference in out-group negativity among Turks at the low ($M = -0.65$, $SD = 0.42$) versus high intensity ($M = -0.71$, $SD = 0.43$) conflict stage, $F(1, 134) = 0.84$, $p = 0.36$, Kurds at HIC ($M = -0.10$, $SD = 0.70$) expressed less out-group negativity than at LIC ($M = -0.64$, $SD = 0.50$), $F(1, 7.88) = 19.83$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.15$.

Table 2

Ten most frequent word categories used to describe the out-group.

Out-group descriptions	LIC	HIC	Total
<i>Turkish respondents</i>			
1. Terrorist, terror, PKK	14	35	49
2. Uneducated, uncultured, ignorant	18	15	33
3. Separatist, separatism	4	12	16
4. "Kurdish Opening"	0	15	15
5. Many kids, crowded, uncontrolled population growth	3	13	10
6. Aggressive, quarrelsome	8	4	12
7. Suppressed, oppressed, victim	10	1	11
8. East, Southeast, Easterner	5	5	10
9. Underdevelopment, underdeveloped, anachronistic	5	4	9
10. Rude	6	3	9
<i>Kurdish respondents</i>			
1. Fascist, oppressive, evil	6	15	21
2. Soldier, military, police, army	1	18	19
3. Extreme nationalists, nationalism	13	0	13
4. Power, monopoly, boss, control	1	8	9
5. Islam	0	7	7
6. Discriminatory, exclusion	0	7	7
7. Brotherhood	4	4	8
8. Condescending	6	1	7
9. Lacking empathy	6	0	6
10. Barbarian, barbarism	5	1	6

Notes. HIC, high intensity conflict stage; LIC, low intensity conflict stage.

In addition, we also assessed the individual differences in out-group negativity at HIC compared to LIC. Levene's test of equality of variances showed that the variance in out-group negativity at HIC was higher than at LIC in the Kurdish sample, $F(1, 112) = 9.91, p = 0.002$, but did not differ in the Turkish sample, $F(1, 134) = 14, p = 0.71$.

4.3. Intergroup images

To assess out-group images we used the following data analytic procedure. First, for each ethnic group, the descriptions that conveyed the same or similar meaning were categorized together (summing a total of 95 word categories used by Kurds to describe Turks, and 104 word categories used by Turks to describe Kurds). For instance, words such as terror, terrorist, terrorism were grouped in the same category. Similarly, words related to army such as soldier, army, tank, military, were also grouped in the same category. Then, we calculated the frequency of each word category separately for each group. Table 2 shows the most frequent 10 word categories used to describe the out-group, separately for Turks and Kurds. As shown in the table, the most frequent words used by Turks to describe Kurds are related to terrorism, especially prevalent at the high intensity conflict stage. Other frequent descriptions of Kurds reflect negative group characteristics related either to human nature (e.g., aggressive nature, rude) or an inferior culture (e.g., underdeveloped, "uncultured," ignorant). Conversely, the most frequent out-group descriptions used by Kurds related to oppression and the military, but also to extreme nationalism and exclusion. Therefore, beyond the general out-group negativity in intergroup perceptions, these examples also demonstrate an asymmetry in the content of out-group stereotypes among Turks and Kurds.

To more systematically examine this asymmetry, in the next stage, we coded each category along the three image theory dimensions: power (high power, equal power, and inferior power), culture (positive culture, equal culture, and inferior culture) and intentions (threat, opportunity to exploit, or mutual gain). Many descriptions (e.g., "Anatolia," "shepherd," etc.) did not fit into any of these dimensions, and others fitted more than one dimension. For instance, a category including the words "cheater, deceitful, untrustworthy" was coded as denoting "inferior cultural status" because it shows a perceived negative out-group character, but it was also coded as "threat" because it implies negative out-group intentions during inter-group interactions. The coding was completed in two stages. First, two coders independently coded a subset of the data and discussed disagreements. Then, they independently coded the rest of the data ($Kappa = 0.80$). All disagreements were resolved by discussion. The results of image theory coding are shown in Table 3.

As predicted, Turks' descriptions of Kurds fit the rogue image: high threat, inferior in cultural status, and low power, whereas Kurds' descriptions of Turks fit the barbarian image: high threat, high power, and inferior culture. These images were in general consistent across low and high intensity conflict stages, though few different trends are noteworthy for Kurds. In line with the results suggesting higher variance of out-group negativity at HIC, Kurds' descriptions of Turks were more varied at HIC compared to LIC, particularly for cultural status and intentions. Specifically, Kurds used more words in "mutual gain" and "superior/equal status" categories at HIC: Among words coded under "intentions" dimension, 30.5% denoted mutual gain (69.5% denoted high threat) at HIC, as compared to 10.5% denoting mutual gain at LIC (89.5% denoted high threat). In addition, among "cultural status" descriptions, 44.5% of the words at HIC were coded under equal or superior culture, as compared to 11.6% of the words coded in these same categories at LIC.

Table 3
Frequency of out-group descriptions coded according to the three structural dimensions of image theory.

Image theory dimensions	Turkish respondents			Kurdish respondents		
	LIC	HIC	Total	LIC	HIC	Total
<i>Intentions</i>						
Threat	105	126	231	51	91	142
Mutual gain	5	22	27	6	40	46
Opp. to exploit	3	0	3	0	0	0
<i>Power</i>						
High	0	0	0	39	88	127
Equal	0	0	0	0	2	2
Inferior	21	11	32	0	1	1
<i>Cultural status</i>						
Superior	9	4	13	5	27	32
Equal	0	5	5	4	14	18
Inferior	131	126	257	68	51	119

Notes. HIC, high intensity conflict; LIC, low intensity conflict; Opp., opportunity.

5. Discussion

Overall, the results shed light on the extent and nature of out-group negativity as well as on the asymmetry in the perceptions, attitudes, and images of the out-group among majority Turks and minority Kurds in Turkey. As predicted, minority and majority communities reacted differently to the changing context of the intergroup conflict. In line with the intergroup threat literature, in the Turkish neighborhoods we found more out-group negativity in most measures during HIC than LIC (except for social distance and assimilative nationalism in which there were no differences). Kurds' reactions however were more complex: In the Kurdish neighborhood, we found less support for nationalistic leaders and higher social distance at HIC compared to LIC. We believe these results reflect a self-protection motive toward the expected increase in prejudice and discrimination in society. At the same time, Kurds at HIC also endorsed more assimilative nationalism (i.e., the belief that citizens should sacrifice their ethnic identity for their national identity), toned down their request for minority rights, and distanced themselves from the insurgent PKK – the responsible party for the attacks on Turkish soldiers which ended the ceasefire. These findings provide initial support to our claims regarding the impact that heightened national-level conflict and violence on minority groups in cities where they live in physical proximity with the majority group.

National-level violent events threaten minorities' well-being by making minority group members targets of discrimination and social exclusion. We hypothesized that there are several ways in which minority group members can cope with these threats by trying to either reduce the threat (e.g., by portraying the in-group as non-threatening and attempting to disconfirm the negative stereotypes or by affirming one's loyalty to the society) or avoid its negative consequences (e.g., being cautious of intergroup interactions), which were manifested in the observed attitudinal trends in the current study. For example, Kurds' open-ended out-group descriptions at HIC revealed the least out-group negativity and included more positive descriptions of Turks. Expressions of more positive out-group attitudes might be one strategy that some minority group members might use to cope with heightened tensions, by trying to restore the broken relations and seeking acceptance to the larger community. Exhibiting less out-group prejudice and stereotypes might serve to reduce exclusion and alienation by majority group members, as well as counteract the stereotypes that portray minority group members as harboring hatred and being unwilling to live in peace with the majority group. Therefore, the need for inclusion and acceptance might be strategic and instrumental and serve to reduce discrimination and exclusion. The ethnic minorities who live in segregated neighborhoods as in the current study are still dependent on urban institutions and urban culture (Ayata, 2008), and they often have to compete with majority group members for resources (Ryan, 2010).

However, another explanation for the higher assimilative nationalism, lower out-group negativity, lower support for minority rights and distancing of the PKK from the in-group relates to the nature of the specific event that led to the heightened conflict – the Kurdish insurgent group, PKK, was said to break the ceasefire by attacking Turkish soldiers. Such harm-doing events implicate the whole minority group, which is viewed to be associated with the insurgents. Harm-doing by members of the in-group evokes collective guilt (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008) and increases the need to restore the in-group's positive social image and acceptance by the out-group (Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009). It is important that future research tests these alternative explanations.

Among both Turks and Kurds, individual differences in four outcomes assessed in this study were lower during HIC than LIC, thereby supporting the idea that intense conflict contexts increase the homogeneity of group members' reactions. However, these results were not consistent across all measures, and interestingly, in the Kurdish sample, the variance increased in few outcomes: support for Kurdish rights, out-group negativity, and intergroup images. These findings raise important questions regarding the impact of contextual pressures on minority group members. While such pressures might lead to convergence in some attitudes and opinions among group members, it seems also to result in divergence in other attitudes and opinions. Understanding the factors that moderate the differential impact of contextual pressures on intergroup outcomes would be an important goal of future research.

The idea that stereotypes change to reflect the changes in the social realities of the intergroup relations is a core idea in the social identity tradition in social psychology (e.g., Turner, 1999; see also Reicher, 2004). The present study built on this core idea to assess the content of out-group stereotypes (i.e., images) among majority and minority groups at different stages of conflict intensity. This was also the first study to assess images through coding of open-ended descriptions of the out-group. Overall, the results did not reveal major shifts in the main out-group images endorsed by each group at the two time points. Yet, we observed some differences in the specific stereotypes or words used to describe the out-group during HIC (e.g., Turks used more words related to terrorism, whereas Kurds used more words related to oppression and the military) compared to LIC. These descriptions reflect the nature of the conflict context at different points in time.

Despite the large socio-economic differences across ethnic Turkish and ethnic Kurdish neighborhoods, the observed ethnic differences were consistent with majority–minority literature. Turks compared to Kurds showed more negative attitudes, including higher social distance, less tolerance, higher nationalism (across its different facets), less support for minority rights, as well as more out-group negativity in open ended responses. In addition, in line with Bilali (2014), Turks compared to Kurds viewed the insurgent group, the PKK, to be less representative of Kurds (see also Celebi, Verkuyten, Kose, & Maliepaard, 2014). It is however important to note that the present study included participants from spatially isolated neighborhoods where there are fewer opportunities for intergroup contact. Therefore, it is not clear whether the current findings would generalize to other settings where there are more opportunities for intergroup contact. Future research should assess the potential moderating role of intergroup contact on the effects of intensity of conflict on intergroup attitudes and stereotypes.

There are several limitations of the present study that weaken our ability to make conclusive statements about the role of conflict stages on intergroup attitudes. First, the national event leading to heightened conflict is a naturally occurring event. Different from a randomized experiment, there are many threats to any claims of causal inference – that is, methodologically we cannot claim that the national event *caused* the observed differences over time. It is possible that other unaccounted factors and events that might have taken place in the city or in the specific neighborhoods during the period between our two data collection time points might also have influenced the changes in observed attitudes. Furthermore, the study involves comparisons of cross-sectional data at two time points, rather than assessment of the same individuals over time. We drew two representative samples of Kurds from a single neighborhood, which gives us more assurance regarding the validity of over-time comparisons. However, the Turkish samples were drawn from two similar neighborhoods. Hence, it is possible that differences across these two neighborhoods, rather than heightened conflict at the national level, might account for Turks' attitudinal differences at HIC versus LIC.

Because of the nature of macro-level shifts in political context, randomized experimental studies that manipulate the independent variable (e.g., stage of conflict) are not possible. Similarly, longitudinal studies are difficult to plan (for an exception see Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001) considering that contextual changes are hard to predict. It is only through a program of research including studies similar to the present research in conjunction with studies that manipulate (e.g., by priming) specific features of the political context, that we can advance our understanding of intergroup relations at dynamic political contexts. Thus, despite its drawbacks, the present study can be considered an important step in a program of research investigating the influence of shifts in the conflict context at the national level on micro-level outcomes and intergroup relations. This study makes an important contribution especially by extending our knowledge about minority groups' reactions to changing intensity of conflict.

Future research should also assess the specific mechanisms that lead to differential outcomes among majority and minority groups. In the present study we did not specifically test the mechanisms behind our hypotheses. For instance, we discussed two likely interpretations for Kurds' expressions of more positive out-group attitudes at HIC: the first was related to minorities' concerns about their well-being due to increased discrimination and exclusion in society as a result of national-level incidents of violence, whereas the second related to a higher need for acceptance among minority group members due to the nature of the violent incidents, which involved acts of harm-doing by members of the minority group.

The current research also sheds light on the dynamics of the Turkish–Kurdish conflict. Studies on this conflict mostly analyze it from a political perspective, focusing on the political developments, democratization, and human rights (see Çelik & Rumelili, 2006; Kirişçi & Winrow, 1997; Somer, 2004; Tank, 2005; Yavuz & Özcan, 2006). Only recently have there been attempts to assess ordinary people's perceptions of the intergroup conflict (e.g., Bilali, 2014; Celebi et al., 2014; Dixon & Ergin, 2010). This study is also important for understanding the dynamics of peace processes, as there are only few studies examining how a negative event can spoil the peace process by increasing stereotypic perceptions of the majority group (Bar-Tal & Labin, 2001), and almost no studies on how such events affect attitudes of minority groups.

Authors' contributions

RB led the analyses and the write-up of the paper; ABC designed the study, arranged data collection, and contributed to the write-up of the draft. The data at Time 1 were collected by the third author, and was part of her master's thesis.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2014.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2014.09.002).

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