







## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Collective victimhood and support for joint political decision-making in conflict regions: The role of shared territorial ownership perceptions

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## Abstract

In territorial interethnic conflicts people often claim exclusive land ownership for their ingroup. However, they can also view the ingroup and outgroup as entitled to the land. It is unknown what explains such shared ownership perceptions and how these in turn inform opinions about conflict resolution. We focused on different types of collective victimhood as precursors of shared ownership perceptions, and on joint decision-making as a political outcome. In the context of the Israeli–Palestinian and Kosovo disputes, using national samples of Jewish Israelis ( $N = 609$ , Study 1) and Albanians and Serbs ( $N = 995$ , Study 2), we found that inclusive victimhood was related to higher, and competitive victimhood to lower, shared ownership perceptions. Shared ownership was, in turn, related to more support for joint decision-making. Our findings highlight the importance of collective victimhood in explaining shared ownership perceptions, which consequently inform opinions about the political route to conflict resolution.

## KEYWORDS

collective victimhood, conflict resolution, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Kosovo, shared territorial ownership

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Territory is central to humans and territorial conflicts are common (Toft, 2014) among neighboring ethnic groups (Vasquez, 1995), such as Jews and Palestinians in Israel/Palestine, Ukrainians and Russians in Crimea, Greek and Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus, and Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Groups involved in such territorial conflicts often feel that the land belongs to their ingroup, and this sense that one owns a territory together with their ingroup members is referred to as *collective psychological ownership* (Pierce & Jussila, 2010; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017). In cases of territorial conflicts, territory is a relevant resource that groups claim ownership of (see realistic conflict

theory; Blalock, 1967; Sherif et al., 1961). When group members see their ingroup as the sole owner of the disputed territory, this can be an important barrier to conflict resolution. A recent study in Kosovo, Israel, and Cyprus suggests that collective psychological ownership of the territory is associated with lower motivation to reconcile with and forgive the rival group (Storz et al., 2020). However, we know little about the role of shared ownership perceptions—that is, perceiving that one's own group and the rival outgroup are both entitled to the disputed territory—on attitudes toward conflict resolution.

This article extends initial research on collective psychological ownership (Brylka et al., 2015; Nijs et al., 2021; Selvanathan et al., 2021; Storz et al., 2020; Torunczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020) by shedding

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light on possible explanations of *shared ownership perceptions in conflict regions*. In addition, we add to previous research on ownership perceptions in conflict regions by examining the role of these perceptions in informing opinions about conflict resolution, rather than focusing on intergroup reconciliation. First, we propose that groups' conflict experiences (i.e., sacrifices and past victimizations) likely matter for shared ownership perceptions. More specifically, we argue that different forms of collective victimhood (competitive vs. inclusive victimhood) should differentially relate to perceptions of shared ownership of the contested territory. Second, we consider the role of shared ownership perceptions in facilitating conflict resolution by examining support for joint political decision-making. We investigate this in one protracted conflict that involves territorial disputes—the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—and in post-conflict Kosovo where Albanians and Serbs both claim to own the country.

### 1.1 | Psychological ownership

Psychological ownership is the perception of owning something, which can be an object or a place, but also something non-physical such as ideas (Pierce et al., 2001). This perception of ownership is intuitive, and can be independent from legal ownership (Merrill, 1998; Snare, 1972). For instance, children have a strong sense of ownership, such as their sandcastle, or their spot to pick flowers (Verkuyten et al., 2015). Importantly, group members can also experience a sense of ownership on behalf of their group, which is referred to as collective psychological ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). When there is a sense of “us,” there can also be a sense of “ours.” For instance, organizational scholars have argued that teams can have a feeling that something is “their” work outcome or “their” working space (Pierce & Jussila, 2010; Pierce et al., 2018).

Psychological ownership infers a bundle of rights, such as the right of usage, the right to decide what happens with the owned object or place, and the right to include or exclude others from using it (Merrill, 1998; Snare, 1972). Thus, collective psychological ownership has been theorized to predict limited sharing, fear of infringement, thereby potentially becoming an obstacle to intergroup cooperation (Pierce & Jussila, 2010).

In multiethnic regions or countries, the feeling that one's ethnic group owns the territory or country can have consequences for interethnic relations (Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017). Perceiving the territory as “ours” is linked to more negative attitudes toward other groups (e.g., immigrants) present on that territory (Brylka et al., 2015; Nijs et al., 2021), and to less openness to newcomers in one's neighborhood (Torunczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020). Moreover, first research has been conducted in the context of settler societies (Selvanathan et al., 2021) where questions regarding territorial ownership, such as the question of land restitution of indigenous groups, are more relevant than in Western Europe. This research showed that ingroup ownership perceptions among majority group members relate to collective action to defend the status quo in favor of the majority population (Selvanathan et al., 2021). While these settler societies are currently peaceful, land ownership is particularly salient in regions

with recent or ongoing territorial conflicts (Toft, 2014). We aim to build on this previous research on ownership and intergroup relations in rather uncontested territories by considering contexts in which territorial ownership is at the core of the violent intergroup conflict. There is first evidence that, when two or more groups feel that the contested territory belongs to their own group, ingroup ownership feelings can become an important obstacle to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and forgiveness (Storz et al., 2020). However, even in territorial conflicts, we find evidence that, despite a strong sense of ingroup ownership, group members also perceive some degree of shared territorial ownership—that is, they acknowledge that next to their own group, the outgroup also owns the territory (Storz et al., 2021). This sense of shared ownership is especially relevant to consider in conflict regions since it might be a way to open up doors to conflict resolution.

### 1.2 | Collective victimhood and shared ownership perceptions

In protracted conflicts, many group members are impacted by violence, either directly or indirectly (e.g., through family members, friends, ancestors). The perception that one's group has been harmed intentionally and undeservingly is referred to as collective victimhood (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Recent theory (Noor et al., 2012) and research (e.g., Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015; Vollhardt et al., 2021) distinguishes between competitive and inclusive victimhood (also referred to as inclusive victim consciousness, Vollhardt, 2012).

Competitive victimhood refers to the belief that the ingroup's suffering was more severe than the suffering of other groups (Noor et al., 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012). Competitive victimhood is one dimension of the overarching construct of exclusive victimhood. Exclusive victimhood refers to different ways of viewing the ingroup's victimization as distinct from that of other groups; in intergroup conflicts, one common way in which groups view their ingroup victimization as distinct is through comparisons of sufferings, and viewing their ingroup to have suffered more than the outgroup (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). This is because in conflict contexts claiming that *only* the ingroup has suffered might be difficult considering reality constraints (i.e., the facts about violence targeting both sides of the conflict). Competitive victimhood is the most studied aspect of exclusive victimhood, and is especially relevant when violence has been committed from both sides (Adelman et al., 2016; Andrighetto et al., 2012; Noor et al., 2008; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Perceptions of competitive victimhood can be psychologically beneficial for group members as they serve to establish the ingroup's moral legitimacy in conflict (Čehajić & Brown, 2010). Competitive victimhood is associated with negative intergroup outcomes such as social distance and exclusion (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015), resentment toward the perpetrator group (Vollhardt et al., 2021), and lower acknowledgement of ingroup responsibility and less willingness to compromise or to forgive (Čehajić & Brown, 2010; Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2011; Noor et al., 2008; Uluğ et al., 2020).

In contrast, inclusive victimhood refers to perceiving similarities between the ingroup's experience of violence and that of other groups (Cohrs et al., 2015; Vollhardt et al., 2016), including the victimization

and suffering of the direct “opponent” in the conflict (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Inclusive victimhood emphasizes commonalities with the outgroup and therefore is expected to predict more positive intergroup outcomes (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Inclusive victimhood is positively associated with forgiveness, perceiving peace as desirable and feasible, greater prosocial attitudes, and more preference for inclusive political leaders (Noor et al., 2015; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015; Vollhardt et al., 2016).

We propose that perceptions of comparative victim beliefs may also relate to shared ownership perceptions of one’s country. At the interpersonal level, people can derive feelings of entitlement from feeling wronged (Zitek et al., 2010). Also on a collective level, it has been suggested that victims have the tendency to establish ideologies of entitlement, which may relate to the perceived right to own what one desires (Volkan, 2007; see also Bayer & Pabst, 2017). We argue that past victimization can provide a moral basis for claiming entitlements to the land. Consistent with this idea, an experimental study showed that reminding Jewish participants of the Holocaust (victimization reminder) was related to a stronger claim to the land of Israel (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008), thus providing the first evidence that experiences of past victimization can relate to perceived ownership of a territory.

Furthermore, competitive and inclusive victimhood should matter differently for shared ownership perceptions. Believing that one’s ingroup has been victimized more (competitive victimhood) might elicit stronger ingroup ownership claims and hence serve as a barrier to shared ownership perceptions. By contrast, inclusive victimhood suggests that both groups have suffered, and therefore may be entitled to the land. In line with the common ingroup identity model (Dovidio et al., 2007), inclusive victimhood can constitute a superordinate category of victimized groups (Vollhardt et al., 2016) who may then be seen as entitled to the land and deserving to own it (Feather, 1999; Volkan, 2007; Zitek et al., 2010). Consequently, we expect competitive victimhood to be related to weaker and inclusive victimhood to stronger perceptions of shared ownership of the contested land.

### 1.3 | Shared territorial ownership and joint political decision-making

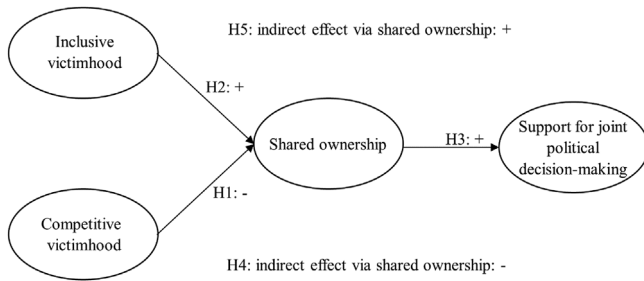
Joint political decision-making about territorial concerns is an important step toward territorial conflict resolution and peace settlement. Supporting joint political decision-making is especially relevant in intractable territorial conflicts in which parties refuse to work with the outgroup to resolve conflict issues. Joint political decision-making in an early stage of peace settlement can take the form of inclusive negotiation (Fitzduff, 2002; Rosler, 2019) and in a later stage of continuing to make political decisions together. Political scientists have argued that joint decision-making can help resolve or regulate conflict (McGarry & O’Leary, 2016). For instance, peace settlements last longer when former rival groups (e.g., the government and the rebel group) agree on jointly deciding on political issues (Mattes & Savun, 2009). Deciding on political matters concerning the territory together with an outgroup also requires support from constituencies of groups in conflict,

and thus general support for joint political decision-making (i.e., working together on resolving conflicting issues) between two rival groups is deemed to be relevant, both at an early and a later stage of conflict resolution processes. As such, joint political decision-making goes one step further than conflict negotiations—it not only involves the parties sitting at the negotiation table discussing and negotiating terms based on their interests (Van Kleef et al., 2013), but is a more active approach to resolve a conflict together, in which both sides continuously work together and make joint decisions on territorial conflict resolution, but also on other relevant issues. Furthermore, support for joint political decision-making is distinct from reconciliation intentions since the latter is about changes in the orientation of the general population regarding its willingness to engage in interpersonal relations with the former enemy (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004). In ongoing unresolved conflicts, reconciliation is very hard and probably unrealistic before the conflict has been officially resolved. Examining joint political decision-making instead of support for negotiations or reconciliation is relevant among others because of the asymmetry of the conflicts considered. When the groups accept joint decision-making, this is an indication that they accept shared power of both parties involved in the conflict. In joint decision-making, there is a sharing of power, in which now the groups work together to resolve the problems and issues in conflict.

Just as individual or collective ownership implies that the person or group members have the right to decide upon the owned target (Merrill, 1998; Snare, 1972), we argue that shared ownership implies the right for two or more groups to co-decide what happens to the object of ownership, in this case, territory and political decisions that are being made on that territory. Thus, if one perceives that the territory belongs to both groups, outgroup members will probably be regarded as having the right to be included in the decision-making concerning that territory as well as political issues decided upon on that territory.

## 2 | PRESENT RESEARCH

The aim of the present research was to investigate how inclusive and competitive victimhood relate to shared ownership perceptions and how shared ownership perceptions in turn relate to joint political decision-making in territorial conflict regions. We hypothesize that higher competitive victimhood will be related to weaker perceptions of shared land ownership (H1) whereas higher inclusive victimhood will be related to stronger (H2) perceptions of shared land ownership. Moreover, stronger perceptions of shared ownership of the land will relate to more support for joint political decision-making in questions concerning conflict resolution (H3). In addition, we also assess indirect relationships between different types of collective victimhood and the political outcome via shared ownership perceptions. We hypothesize that competitive victimhood will be related to *less* support for joint-political decision-making via *weaker* shared ownership perceptions (H4), whereas inclusive victimhood will be related to *more* support for joint political decision-making via *stronger* shared ownership perceptions (H5) (see Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual model

We tested this model in two conflict contexts, in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and in the conflict about Kosovo. First, we tested a model without any control variables included, followed by a model where we included a few control variables that have been shown to relate to at least two of our constructs of interest. These variables could thus represent confounding explanations. We considered place attachment and ingroup identification since previous research has found them to relate to collective psychological ownership and reconciliation (Storz et al., 2020) and to intergroup relations more broadly (Torunczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020). Since there was little variation in the level of ingroup identification in our samples (among Israeli Jews, 50% of participants identified strongly with their ingroup [ $\bar{6}$  = “Agree,” or higher];  $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ; regarding Kosovo, even 79% of participants identified strongly with their ingroup;  $M = 6.16$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ), we instead considered ingroup superiority: a sense that one’s group is better than other groups. Importantly, superiority has been shown to have more negative intergroup consequences than ingroup attachment (Roccas et al., 2008), and to relate to competitive victimhood (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Furthermore, the two rival groups in both conflicts have a different religion, and in conflicts between religiously distinct groups religiosity correlates with less support for political solutions, and with lower inclusive and higher competitive victimhood (see, e.g., Hameiri & Nadler, 2017; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007). Therefore, we controlled for participants’ degree of religiosity. Additionally, political orientation predicts attitudes toward political compromise (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007). Finally, we controlled for the standard demographic variables, namely: age, gender, and educational level.

### 3 | STUDY 1

In Study 1 we tested our hypotheses in the context of one of the longest-lasting conflicts worldwide—the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—among an Israeli Jewish community sample. The conflict over Israel/Palestine started 140 years ago when Zionist Jews increasingly started to remigrate to the territory, back then known as Palestine, that they saw as their ancestral land—the Land of Israel (Waxman, 2019). In 1947, the United Nations decided to divide the land, followed by Israel’s declaration of independence and the outbreak of an intercommunal armed conflict between Jews and Palestinians, which later escalated to an inter-state war between Israel and its Arab neighbors (Tessler, 2009). The borders of the State of Israel were drawn based on armistice lines in 1949, and have since been disputed, especially

after Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the 1967 war (Rosler et al., 2018). The majority of Israeli Jews feel they are the exclusive victims of the conflict, which is correlated with non-compromising views about the conflict (Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). Consequently, the question of shared ownership of the land of Israel/Palestine—the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea that is contested between the parties—is highly relevant for the future of the conflict. Furthermore, an inclusive and substantial negotiation process in which both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians take part as equal partners in political decision-making is necessary to resolve the conflict peacefully (Zartman, 2018).

## 3.1 | Method

### 3.1.1 | Data and participants

Data were collected among Israeli Jews by the research agency Kantar in collaboration with the regional partner agencies Profiles and iPanel that manage panels of participants who regularly take part in research. These panel members could access the survey and participate if they were eligible. Additionally, the agency targeted adult participants who self-identified as Jewish Israelis and invited them to participate in the online survey via email. Following informed consent, participants first read an introduction about the research, which was presented as a study of opinions about several societal topics, including the territorial conflict and feelings of ownership. Then they completed a questionnaire in Hebrew (computer-assisted web interviewing, CAWI) in exchange for a modest compensation in accordance to the agency’s standard practices. No attention checks were integrated into the survey.

In order to meet sample size criteria as determined by Soper, we needed at least  $N = 288$  participants. The sample consists of 609 Israeli Jews. An additional 659 participants took part in this survey but completed a different version of the questionnaire which included an experiment, so these participants were not considered here. While the sample is not representative of the population, it mirrors the distribution of the general population in terms of gender (50% male) and age (ranging from 18 to 84 years,  $M = 45$ ,  $SD = 16$ ) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, the sample is diverse in terms of religious beliefs (56% secular, 18% traditional—not so religious, 6% traditional religious, 13% religious, 7% ultra-orthodox) and educational level (11% primary, 39% secondary, and 50% tertiary level).

### 3.1.2 | Measures

All core items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 7 = “Strongly agree.” When assessing scale reliability of latent variables, we report the recommended composite reliability measure rho ( $\rho$ ; Raykov, 2004) which is superior to Cronbach’s alpha because it does not assume equal factor loadings of all items. A rho with values above 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability. This measure can be obtained for constructs consisting of two or more items.

### Collective victimhood

Items were inspired by previous research (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). *Inclusive victimhood* was assessed by two items: “Israeli Jews and Palestinians are both victims of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict” and “Jews and Palestinians have both suffered during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict” ( $\rho = 0.86$ ), as was *competitive victimhood*: “Jews were victimized more during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict than Palestinians” and “Palestinians have suffered more during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict than Jews” (reversed) ( $\rho = 0.70$ ).

### Shared territorial ownership perceptions

Items assessing shared territorial ownership perceptions of the contested land were created for the present research: “The following questions deal with the idea of sharing the ownership of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements,” followed by the three statements: “I think that Israeli Jews and Palestinians own this land together,” “I feel that the land belongs to both Jews and Palestinians,” and “Jews and Palestinians share the ownership of this land” ( $\rho = 0.94$ ).

### Support for joint political decision-making

In the absence of scales measuring support for joint political decision-making, we generated three items, inspired by research about actual power sharing practices in conflict regions (e.g., Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003): “It is important that Israeli Jews and Palestinians together decide on political issues in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea,” “Jews and Palestinians should work together to find a solution to the territorial conflict,” and “Jews and Palestinians should both have a say in the political decision-making regarding this land” ( $\rho = 0.85$ ).

### Control variables

Three items measured *place attachment*: “The land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea feels like my home,” “I feel attached to this land” and “I would regret having to leave this land” ( $\rho = 0.83$ ; Lewicka, 2010; Torunczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020). *Ingroup superiority* was also measured by three items: “Jews are better than other groups in many respects,” “Other groups can learn a lot from Jews,” and “Jews are the chosen people” ( $\rho = 0.88$ ; Roccas et al., 2008). We controlled for participants’ *degree of religiosity* by contrasting secular participants (reference category) with traditional—not so religious, traditional religious, religious, and ultra-orthodox. Political orientation was assessed using a 5-point scale (1 = “left-wing” to 5 = “right-wing”). In addition, *age* (continuous), *gender* (1 = male; 0 = female), and *educational level* (primary, secondary, and tertiary, with secondary being the reference category) were included.

## 3.1.3 | Data analytic procedure

In order to obtain results that are representative in terms of demographics, we used weighted data based on participants’ age, gender,

and the region they lived in (15% of participants lived in the area of Jerusalem, 25% lived in the central/Gush Dan area which includes Tel Aviv, 21% lived in the North including Haifa, 21% lived in Shfela and the South, and 18% lived in Sharon).

We conducted the analyses in *Mplus* version 8.0, using the Maximum Likelihood estimator (ML; Muthén & Muthén, 2012). We opted for the ML estimator because we wanted to obtain bootstrapped standard errors and confidence intervals. We additionally analyzed the model using robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR), which is more robust to deviations from normality. Results using the MLR estimator were exactly the same.

We used latent variables and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to fit a measurement model. We then estimated a structural mediation model to test our hypotheses, first without and then with control variables. For the latter, we used full information maximum likelihood (FIML) in order to account for missing values in degree of religiosity, political orientation and educational level.

## 3.2 | Results

### 3.2.1 | Measurement model

A model with the six theorized latent constructs—*inclusive victimhood*, *competitive victimhood*, *shared ownership*, *joint political decision-making*, *ingroup superiority*, and *place attachment*—which were allowed to correlate, fitted the data reasonably well:  $\chi^2(df) = 268.89(89)$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.058 [0.050, 0.065]; CFI = 0.962; SRMR = 0.042. Standardized loadings of all items were above 0.62. All possible alternative 5-factor models where we, one by one, combined two constructs into one, fitted the data significantly worse than the 6-factor model (Table S1.1 in the Online Supplement 1.1). This confirms that the proposed constructs are empirically distinct.

### 3.2.2 | Descriptive analysis

Israeli Jews perceived *competitive* as well as *inclusive victimhood* (Table 1). However, *inclusive victimhood* was significantly higher than *competitive victimhood* (Wald(1) = 14.55,  $p < .001$ ). On average, participants disagreed that the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is shared between Jews and Palestinians, and they scored around the neutral midpoint on their support for joint political decision-making.

For bivariate correlations of the main variables, please see Table 1.

### 3.2.3 | Structural model

We specified paths from *competitive* and *inclusive victimhood* to both *shared ownership perceptions* and *joint decision-making*, and a path from *shared ownership perceptions* to *support for joint*

**TABLE 1** Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the main constructs, Study 1 ( $N = 609$ )

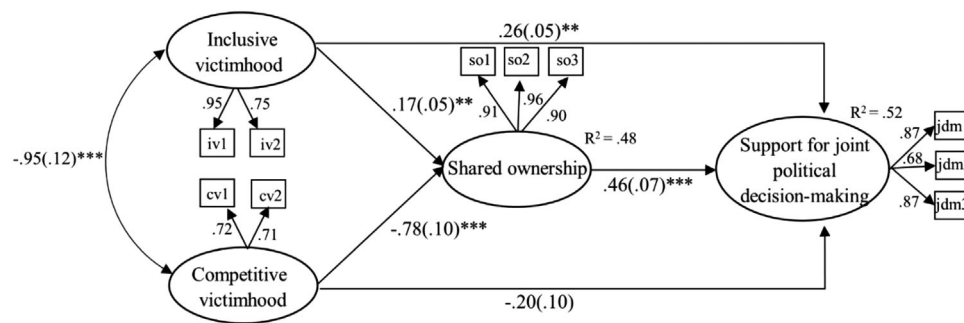
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	M	SD
1. Inclusive victimhood	-						5.23	1.48
2. Competitive victimhood	-.42**	-					4.85	1.51
3. Shared ownership	.44**	-.65*	-				2.89	1.75
4. Joint political decision-making	.53**	-.54**	.67**	-			4.11	1.60
5. Ingroup superiority	-.36**	.70**	-.60**	-.48**	-		4.60	1.78
6. Place attachment	-0.03	.40**	-.40**	-.21**	.48**	-	6.01	1.16
7. Political orientation	-.35**	.60**	-.61**	-.52**	.37**	.65**	3.62	1.09

Note: All constructs were measured on 7-point scales ranging from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree," apart from political orientation which was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "left-wing" to 5 = "right-wing."

The correlation between ingroup and shared ownership was significantly negative ( $r = -0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

\* $p < .01$ .

\*\* $p < .001$ .

**FIGURE 2** Results of a structural equation model explaining support for joint political decision-making in the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, Study 1 ( $N = 609$ )

Note: R<sup>2</sup> is the explained variance of the latent outcome variables; Figure presents unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; the factor loadings are standardized; \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Model fit:  $\chi^2(df) = 93.34(29)$ \*\*\*; CFI = 0.976; SRMR = 0.029; RMSEA = 0.060 (0.047, 0.074).

decision-making. In a first step, only these main variables were included in the model (see Figure 2), and in a second step we controlled for ingroup superiority, place attachment, degree of religiosity, age, gender, and educational level in relation to the mediator and the dependent variable (see Table S1.2 in the Online Supplement 1.2). We estimated bootstrapped standard errors and confidence intervals with 10,000 replacement samples drawn to receive more reliable estimations of the indirect paths. Indirect paths are significant when the 95% confidence interval does not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

As expected (H1–H2), higher competitive victimhood was significantly associated with a weaker sense of shared ownership, and higher inclusive victimhood with a stronger sense of shared ownership of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Further, in line with H3, stronger feelings of shared ownership were significantly related to more support for joint political decision-making between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Supporting H4, the indirect relation between competitive victimhood and support for joint political decision-making via shared ownership was negative and significant,  $b = -0.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI:  $[-0.51, -0.24]$ . Furthermore, consistent with H5, the indirect path from inclu-

sive victimhood to support for joint political decision-making via shared ownership was positive and significant,  $b = 0.08$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI:  $[0.03, 0.13]$ .

Both competitive and inclusive victimhood had significant total relations with support for joint political decision-making: competitive victimhood was negatively ( $b = -0.56$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and inclusive victimhood positively ( $b = 0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), related to support for joint political decision-making. For competitive victimhood, the remaining direct path was non-significant. The positive direct path from inclusive victimhood to support for joint political decision-making, however, remained significant.

We added the control variables to this structural model to check the robustness of our findings (see Table S1.2, Online Supplement 1.2). We found a similar pattern for the main results. Furthermore, place attachment and more right-wing political orientation were related to less shared ownership, and participants with primary education perceived less shared ownership than those with secondary education. Men and older participants agreed more with joint political decision-making than women and younger participants.

### 3.3 | Discussion

Study 1 offers first evidence that different types of collective victimhood matter differently for shared ownership perceptions in territorial conflict disputes, and that shared ownership informs opinions on political solutions to the conflict. In line with our expectations, among Israeli Jews, inclusive victimhood was significantly related to higher shared ownership perceptions, and indirectly, to stronger agreement with joint political decision-making. In contrast, competitive victimhood was related to lower shared ownership perceptions, and in turn, to less agreement with joint political decision-making. Thus, the way in which the victimization of the ingroup as compared to the relevant outgroup in a conflict is perceived seems to matter for shared ownership perceptions among the general population, which, in turn, helps us to understand why some people agree more than others that decisions regarding the territory should be made jointly.

## 4 | STUDY 2

In Study 2 we tested the same hypotheses, this time in the post-conflict context of Kosovo, and from a two-sided perspective, considering the two rival ethnic groups: Albanians and Serbs. We were thus able to focus on a majority (Albanians) and a minority (Serbs in Kosovo) group, and we also considered the group of Serbs in Serbia who are a local majority but concerned with ownership of Kosovo with its Serbian minority population as well.

Kosovo is nowadays recognized as an independent country by 22 out of 27 EU member states and by 50% of UN member states. Between 1945 and 2008 it was part of Serbia. In 1998–1999, there was an armed conflict between Albanians and Serbs, in which the Serbian government was also involved (Judah, 2008). This conflict ultimately resulted in the declaration of independence in 2008, driven by the Albanian majority. The independence is contested by the Serbian minority in Kosovo as well as by many Serbs from Serbia, whose government officially still sees Kosovo as part of Serbia (Constitution of The Republic of Serbia, Part Seven: Territorial Organization, n.d.). As such, the term “post-conflict” refers to the fact that there is no violence in the region anymore, but that political tensions remain high and the territorial dispute is still ongoing.

Questions of territorial ownership thus apply to Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo as well as to Serbs in Serbia, which is why in this study we also consider Serbs from Serbia to fully account for the Serbian perspective. Nowadays, Albanians represent the ethnic majority in Kosovo (87%) and Serbs an ethnic minority (8%, European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo, 2013). Given the historical conflict and victimization over the centuries, the two groups both claim to have been victims of the Kosovo conflict (Amnesty International, 2017). Until today, Albanians and Serbs see their ingroup as having rights over the territory of Kosovo and the other ethnic group as an invader (Judah, 2008). Nevertheless, since the declaration of independence, the idea of political inclusion is reflected in the Constitution of Kosovo

that guarantees a minimum number of seats for representatives of the Serbian minority in the Kosovo parliament. This means that there is potential for joint decision-making on the political level, which however needs to be supported by the society in large, signaling willingness for conflict resolution of the general population. This support by the general population is needed in order for conflict resolution to be successful.

## 4.1 | Method

### 4.1.1 | Data and participants

Data were collected among Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, and Serbs in Serbia by the research agency Kantar in collaboration with a regional partner agency, TNS Bulgaria. Participants were approached by an interviewer of same ethnicity. Following informed consent, participants completed a questionnaire in either Serbian or Albanian on a tablet (computer assisted personal interviewing; CAPI). No incentives were provided.

Multistage random probability sampling was used to select participants. In Kosovo, the sample was stratified per municipality, which included 27 Albanian majority municipalities and 11 Serbian majority municipalities. Each municipality included one urban and one rural stratum, resulting in 54 strata for the Albanian sample, and 22 strata for the Serbian sample. In Serbia, the sample was stratified per region. There were four regions, each with one urban and one rural stratum. For all three samples, multiple starting points were chosen per stratum, and the households were then selected based on the “random route” method. In urban areas every third household was selected, with the exception of blocks of flats where in Serbia a maximum of three households were approached and in Kosovo every fifth or tenth, depending on the size of the building. In rural areas, every third inhabited house was selected in Kosovo and every second in Serbia. In both Kosovo and Serbia, the participant in the selected household was chosen by the “next birthday” method. If a participant was not available after the third visit or refused to participate, the neighboring household was selected.

The response rate among Albanians was 57%, among Serbs from Kosovo it was 51% and among Serbs from Serbia there was a response rate of 65%. Moreover, an additional 399 Serbs in Serbia and 410 Albanians in Kosovo took part in this survey but completed a different version of the questionnaire which included an experiment, and we did not consider them here. The final sample for the present study consists of 995 participants, including 390 Albanians from Kosovo, 200 Serbs from Kosovo, and 405 Serbs from Serbia.

Participants read a similar introduction to the one in Study 1. Further, participants' ethnicity was determined by their self-identification as Albanian or Serbian. The demographic information for each group is presented in Table 2. All three samples are relatively diverse: around half of the participants are male, the age varies between 18 and 84 years, and participants with varying levels of education are all represented.

**TABLE 2** Descriptive statistics of demographic variables, broken down by ethnic group, Study 2 (total  $N = 995$ )

	Albanians (Kosovo) $N = 390$			Serbs (Kosovo) $N = 200$			Serbs (Serbia) $N = 405$		
	Range	M / %	SD	Range	M / %	SD	Range	M / %	SD
Male	0/1	46.20%		0/1	53.50%		0/1	50.40%	
Age	18–83	42.67	16.75	18–84	48.49	16.31	18–82	44.57	15.37
Education									
Primary		29.70%			6.50%			20.00%	
Secondary		48.50%			67.00%			55.60%	
Tertiary		21.80%			26.50%			24.40%	

#### 4.1.2 | Measures

All core items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 7 = “Strongly agree.” The ingroup was always mentioned first and the outgroup second, given that this is a sensitive context and mentioning the outgroup first could be experienced as insulting. Below we present the items as presented to Albanian participants.

##### Collective victimhood

*Inclusive victimhood* was assessed by the same two items as in Study 1 ( $\rho_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo)})} = 0.88$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.92$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.88$ ), while *competitive victimhood* was assessed by the items: “Albanians have suffered more during the Kosovo conflict than Serbs” and “Albanians were harmed more during the Kosovo conflict than Serbs” ( $\rho_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo)})} = 0.75$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.88$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.92$ ).

##### Shared territorial ownership perceptions

The same three items as in Study 1 were used to measure shared territorial ownership perceptions, but regarding Albanians and Serbs owning Kosovo ( $\rho_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo)})} = 0.82$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.78$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.93$ ).

##### Support for joint political decision-making

This construct was assessed as in Study 1, but regarding joint decision-making between Albanians and Serbs concerning Kosovo ( $\rho_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo)})} = 0.84$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.79$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.93$ ).

##### Control variables

We again controlled for *place attachment*, this time with two items: “I feel attached to Kosovo,” “Kosovo is part of me” ( $\rho_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo)})} = 0.68$ ;<sup>1</sup>  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.96$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.96$ ). *Ingroup superiority* was measured by two items from Study 1: “Albanians are better than other groups in many respects” and “Other groups can learn a lot from Albanians” ( $\rho_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo)})} = 0.70$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.70$ ;  $\rho_{(\text{Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.80$ ). Furthermore, we controlled for *religiosity* assessed with the question “How religious are

you?” (1 = “Not at all” to 7 = “Very much”), political orientation (1 = “left-wing” to 5 = “right-wing”), *age* (continuous), *gender* (1 = male; 0 = female), and *educational level* (primary, secondary, and tertiary, with secondary being the reference category).

#### 4.1.3 | Data analytic procedure

We analyzed the data in a multi-group framework in *Mplus* version 8.0, using the Maximum Likelihood estimator (ML; Muthén & Muthén, 2012) with Albanians from Kosovo, Serbs from Kosovo, and Serbs from Serbia forming the three groups. We used latent variables and tested for measurement invariance to ensure that the latent constructs have the same structure and meaning across groups (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Then we tested our hypotheses in three steps to obtain the most parsimonious structural model with a good fit, while also estimating bootstrap confidence intervals to receive more reliable estimators of the mediation paths (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). We specified (1) a model in which all the hypothesized paths were freely estimated in each group (unconstrained structural model); (2) a model in which all hypothesized paths were set to be equal across groups (constrained structural model); and (3) a model with only statistically different paths being freed (partially constrained structural model). We interpreted the latter, and we reported this model first without, and then with, the control variables where we used FIML in order to account for missing values in political orientation.

## 4.2 | Results

### 4.2.1 | Measurement model

We specified a model with metric invariance, in which factor loadings for the latent constructs of inclusive victimhood, competitive victimhood, shared ownership, support for joint political decision-making, ingroup superiority, and place attachment were constrained to be equal across groups whereas intercepts were allowed to vary across groups. This metric model had a reasonable fit (see Table S2.1, Online Supplement 2.1), and all fit indices except for the Chi-square difference indicated an equally good fit as that of a configural model with all factor loadings freed. The Chi-square test is sensitive to small deviations

<sup>1</sup> The rho of place attachment among Albanians was slightly below generally accepted values. However, the  $R^2$  of both items that form the place attachment scale was acceptable (above 0.3), and we do not have a theoretical explanation for this relatively low rho.



**TABLE 3** Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the main constructs per ethnic group, Study 2 (total  $N = 995$ )

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	M	SD
<b>Albanians (Kosovo; N = 390)</b>									
1. Inclusive victimhood	-							3.34	1.84
2. Competitive victimhood	-0.13	-						6.34	1.07
3. Shared ownership	.61***	-.22**	-					3.05	1.58
4. Joint political decision-making	.63***	-.15*	.74***	-				3.53	1.60
5. Ingroup superiority	0.05	.26***	-.13*	-0.03	-			5.74	1.03
6. Place attachment	-.14*	.35***	-.29***	-.22**	.41***	-		6.32	0.85
7. Religiosity	-0.07	.22***	-.15**	-.15***	.26***	.24***	-	5.77	1.60
8. Political orientation	-0.02	0.16	-0.05	0.04	0.05	-0.08	0.05	3.45	1.61
<b>Serbs (Kosovo; N = 200)</b>									
1. Inclusive victimhood	-							5.04	1.44
2. Competitive victimhood	0.03	-						5.89	0.99
3. Shared ownership	.26**	-0.11	-					2.93	1.13
4. Joint political decision-making	0.12	-0.05	.50***	-				4.21	1.50
5. Ingroup superiority	-0.02	0.17	-.24**	-.26**	-			5.07	1.12
6. Place attachment	0.08	0.15	0.05	-.17*	.32**	-		6.26	0.98
7. Religiosity	.41***	0.08	.18*	-0.01	0.13	0.07	-	5.85	1.40
8. Political orientation	-0.07	-0.02	-0.09	-0.17	-0.07	-0.12	-0.26	3.15	1.32
<b>Serbs (Serbia; N = 405)</b>									
1. Inclusive victimhood	-							4.74	1.47
2. Competitive victimhood	0.09	-						5.57	1.31
3. Shared ownership	.40***	-.23***	-					3.71	1.63
4. Joint political decision-making	.46***	-0.03	.58***	-				4.53	1.51
5. Ingroup superiority	-0.08	.54***	-.19**	-0.12	-			4.78	1.29
6. Place attachment	-.18**	.29***	-.25***	-.16**	.44***	-		4.35	1.69
7. Religiosity	-0.10	.13*	-0.09	-.12*	.35***	.25***	-	4.64	1.73
8. Political orientation	0.00	0.06	-0.12	0.02	0.00	.13*	0.11	3.04	1.33

Note: All constructs were measured on 7-point scales ranging from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree," apart from political orientation which was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "left-wing" to 5 = "right-wing."

The correlation between ingroup and shared ownership was moderately negative (Albanians:  $r = -0.14$ ,  $p = .020$ ; Serbs from Kosovo:  $r = -0.17$ ,  $p = .026$ ; Serbs from Serbia:  $r = -0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

in large samples though (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Hence, we can assume that the latent constructs have the same meaning across groups and we can compare the structural paths. The scalar model with both loadings and intercepts constrained had a worse fit across all indices (Table S2.1, Online Supplement 2.1), which means that we cannot compare latent means across groups (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). The metric model was our final model.

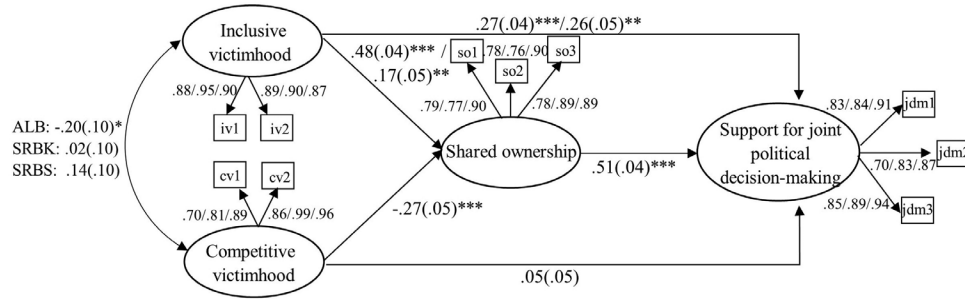
#### 4.2.2 | Descriptive analysis

As shown in Table 3, all groups revealed strong competitive victimhood. At the same time, Albanians from Kosovo on average somewhat disagreed whereas Serbs somewhat agreed with inclusive victimhood.

In addition, in all three samples competitive victimhood was significantly higher than inclusive victimhood (Albanians:  $Wald(1) = 711.09$ ,  $p < .001$ , Serbs(Kosovo):  $Wald(1) = 49.01$ ,  $p < .001$ , Serbs(Serbia):  $Wald(1) = 79.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On average, participants across samples disagreed that the ownership of Kosovo is shared between Albanians and Serbs. While Albanians tended to disagree with joint political decision-making, Serbs from Kosovo and from Serbia tended to slightly agree. For bivariate correlations between the variables, see Table 3.

#### 4.2.3 | Structural model

We estimated the same structural mediation model as in Study 1. We first specified an unconstrained model where all hypothesized paths



**FIGURE 3** Results of a multi-group structural equation model explaining support for joint political decision-making in Kosovo, among Albanians from Kosovo and Serbs from Serbia (before slash) and Serbs from Kosovo (after slash), Study 2 (total  $N = 995$ )

Note: All paths could be constrained to be equal for Albanians in Kosovo and Serbs in Serbia; two paths had to be freed for Serbs in Kosovo (after slash);  $R^2$  is the explained variance of the latent outcome variables (shared ownership: Albanians  $R^2 = .39$ , Serbs from Kosovo  $R^2 = .11$ , Serbs from Serbia  $R^2 = .21$ ; support for joint political decision-making: Albanians  $R^2 = .56$ , Serbs from Kosovo  $R^2 = .16$ , Serbs from Serbia  $R^2 = .45$ ); Figure presents unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; the factor loadings are standardized (Albanians/Serbs from Kosovo/Serbs from Serbia); \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Model fit:  $\chi^2(df) = 193.29(107)$ \*\*\*; CFI = 0.986; SRMR = 0.045; RMSEA = 0.049 (0.038, 0.060).

were estimated freely across the three groups (see Table S2.2, Online Supplement 2.2), followed by a model where all hypothesized paths were constrained to be the same. The structurally unconstrained model ( $\chi^2(df) = 181.49(99)$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.986, SRMR = 0.036, RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.050 [0.038, 0.062]) had a better fit than the constrained model ( $\chi^2(df) = 196.20(109)$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.979, SRMR = 0.068, RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.049 [0.038, 0.060]), as the Chi-square difference test indicates ( $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 39.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ). To improve the fit and achieve partial invariance, we freed the paths one by one, starting from the path with most divergent coefficients. After freeing the path between inclusive victimhood and shared ownership for Serbs from Kosovo, while keeping this path the same for Albanians in Kosovo and Serbs in Serbia, the overall fit improved compared to the constrained model ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 24.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but it was still worse than the unconstrained model ( $\Delta\chi^2(9) = 20.92$ ,  $p = .013$ ). Releasing an additional path between inclusive victimhood and support for joint political decision-making for Serbs in Kosovo resulted in a fit that was as good as the fit of the unconstrained model ( $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 11.80$ ,  $p = .160$ ). The model fit did not improve when freeing the remaining paths for any of the groups. Thus, only for Serbs in Kosovo two paths had to be unconstrained, and this model with full structural invariance among Albanians in Kosovo and Serbs in Serbia but partial structural invariance for Serbs in Kosovo is the model that we interpret. The results are presented in Figure 3.

Across all three groups, in line with H1, higher competitive victimhood was related to significantly lower shared ownership perceptions. As predicted by H2, we found higher inclusive victimhood to relate to a stronger sense of shared ownership, even though this relation was significantly weaker among Serbs from Kosovo than among the other two groups. Stronger feelings of shared ownership of Kosovo were found to relate to more agreement with joint political decision-making between Albanians and Serbs (in line with H3), in all three groups alike.

Supporting H4, for all three groups the indirect relation between competitive victimhood and support for joint political decision-making via shared ownership was negative and significant,  $b = -0.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,

95% CI: [-0.20, -0.08]. It should be noted that the total relation between competitive victimhood and support for joint political decision-making was not significant ( $b = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .067$ ), and competitive victimhood was also not directly related to less support for joint political decision-making, meaning that the two were only indirectly related via shared ownership perceptions.

Furthermore, consistent with H5, the indirect paths from inclusive victimhood to support for joint political decision-making via shared ownership were significant in all three groups, albeit weaker for Serbs from Kosovo than for the other two groups ( $b_{(\text{Albanians(Kosovo) and Serbs(Serbia)})} = 0.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI: [0.19, 0.31];  $b_{(\text{Serbs(Kosovo)})} = 0.10$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI: [0.03, 0.17]). Inclusive victimhood had a positive and significant total effect on support for joint political decision-making among Albanians from Kosovo and Serbs from Serbia ( $b = 0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not among Serbs from Kosovo ( $b = 0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .108$ ). As the remaining direct relation between inclusive victimhood and support for joint political decision-making was also positive and significant for these two groups, we can conclude that shared ownership only partially accounted for this association.

To check the robustness of the model, we added the control variables to this partially constrained structural model. We tested whether the partially unconstrained model was valid to use also with control variables included, and results indicate that we can free the same two paths that we freed in the model without control variables (see Online Supplement 2.3 for more detailed analyses). The path coefficients for these control variables were allowed to vary between groups (see Table S2.3, Online Supplement 2.3). The pattern of the main results is comparable to the model without control variables. Furthermore, ingroup superiority was related to less shared ownership and place attachment was related to less support for joint decision-making among Serbs in Kosovo. Male Serbs from Kosovo were more in favor of shared ownership and joint-decision-making. Finally, the more right-wing oriented Serbs from Kosovo were, the less they supported joint decision-making.

### 4.3 | Discussion

In the context of post-conflict Kosovo and among Albanians and Serbs alike, we largely replicated the findings from Study 1. We found that competitive victimhood was related to lower shared ownership perceptions, and indirectly, with weaker agreement with joint political decision-making. In contrast, inclusive victimhood was related to stronger perceptions of shared ownership, and via these to more agreement with joint political decision-making. While we observed a few group differences between the two majority groups (Albanians and Serbs from Serbia) on the one hand, and the minority (Serbs from Kosovo) on the other hand, overall our results show that the model seems to work similarly in this post-conflict setting of Kosovo as in the Israeli–Palestinian setting where the conflict is still ongoing.

## 5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this article we focused on the idea of shared ownership perceptions of the disputed land in territorial interethnic conflicts. We investigated inclusive and competitive victimhood as a possible explanation of shared ownership perceptions, and joint decision-making as a relevant political outcome that could ensure peaceful conflict resolution. We expected that competition over the ingroup's past victimization would be associated with lower perceptions of shared ownership and indirectly with lower support for joint decision-making, whereas the opposite was expected for an inclusive understanding of victimization whereby both the ingroup and outgroup are seen as victims of the conflict. We tested these expectations in two studies: first, from the perspective of Israeli Jews regarding the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, and second, in the understudied context of the Kosovo conflict and, uniquely so, from the perspective of Albanians and Serbs living in Kosovo as well as Serbs in Serbia who have a vested interest in Kosovo's territory.

By considering the role of different types of collective victimhood (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015; Vollhardt et al., 2016) we provided novel insights as to why one would (not) agree that the two conflicting groups own disputed territory together. Jewish Israelis, as well as Albanians and Serbs who felt that their own group had been victimized more than the outgroup, agreed less that the two groups owned the territory in question together. This finding resonates with our theoretical reasoning that feeling wronged in form of perceiving group victimization may evoke feelings of entitlement (Zitek et al., 2010), such as entitlement to land ownership. The perception that one's group has suffered more in their fight for the territory might evoke among ingroup members feelings that the outgroup does not deserve the territory (Feather, 1999). At the same time, those who felt that both groups had been victimized during the conflict agreed more with the idea of shared ownership of the disputed territory. This is in line with our theoretical argument that feeling wronged on an overarching, inclusive level evokes feelings of shared entitlement (Volkan, 2007; Zitek et al., 2010), and this can manifest itself in the form of shared territorial ownership perceptions.

Further, our findings show that stronger perceptions of Israeli Jews owning the land together with Palestinians (Study 1), as well as of Albanians and Serbs owning the territory of Kosovo together (Study 2), were related to more agreement with joint political decision-making in the effort to resolve the conflict, and this was consistently found across the groups studied. This finding was in line with theoretical arguments (Merrill, 1998; Snare, 1972; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2017) and adds to the emerging literature that has shown that an ingroup's territorial ownership perceptions matter for intergroup relations, not only in conflict regions (Storz et al., 2020) but also in countries where territorial ownership is not so much contested (Brylka et al., 2015; Nijs et al., 2021) and where a sense of collective ownership is used as an argument to exclude immigrants. Thus, the present studies extend the initial research on ownership perceptions by showing the importance of *shared* ownership perceptions, beyond ingroup ownership perceptions studied in previous research (Selvanathan et al., 2021; Storz et al., 2020). Unsurprisingly, ingroup ownership perceptions tend to be high in territorial conflict contexts (see Storz et al., 2020). Even though this was not a focus of the present research, we also had measures of ingroup ownership in our data and we found these to be very high, and only weakly (Kosovo context) or moderately (Israeli context), correlated with shared ownership perceptions, revealing that these are distinct constructs.<sup>2</sup> Further, we expand on the initial research on ownership perceptions in contested as well as uncontested territories by showing that shared ownership perceptions go hand in hand with support for political collaboration between conflicting groups. This is an important finding because in order for reconciliation to fully come about, collaborative relations between the groups on the institutional level need to be established or strengthened (Nadler, 2012).

Importantly, in both studies and across all groups, competition over the victim status was related to lower agreement with joint political decision-making through less agreement with shared ownership. Israeli Jews as well as Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo and Serbs in Serbia who thought their own group was considerably more victimized endorsed the idea of shared ownership less, and were indirectly less supportive of intergroup collaboration on a political level. Among Israeli Jews (Study 1) we observed that those who competed more with Palestinians over the victim status overall agreed less that the two groups should jointly decide on political issues regarding Israel and the Palestinian territories, whereas there was no overall relation between competitive victimhood and joint political decision-making among the groups regarding the Kosovo conflict (Study 2). The latter finding corroborates previous research showing that competitive victimhood is not directly negatively related to positive outcomes such as preference for inclusive political leaders (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015). Among Israeli Jews (Study 1), we might have found an overall negative relation between competitive victimhood and joint decision-making because we deal with a conflict which is still ongoing. The victimization at the

<sup>2</sup> Ingroup ownership was very strongly perceived in all samples:  $M(\text{Israeli Jews}) = 6.26$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ;  $M(\text{Albanians}) = 6.62$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ;  $M(\text{Serbs from Kosovo}) = 6.60$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ;  $M(\text{Serbs from Serbia}) = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ . Furthermore, ingroup ownership was only weakly (among Albanians:  $r = -0.14$ ,  $p = .020$ ; Serbs from Kosovo:  $r = -0.17$ ,  $p = .026$ ; Serbs from Serbia  $r = -0.38$ ) or moderately ( $p < .001$ : Israeli Jews:  $r = -0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ) correlated with shared ownership.

hands of the rival is perceived as continuing, and therefore the group arguably has moral entitlement to take unilateral political decisions in order to secure its existence. This resonates with previous research on the Israeli–Palestinian and on the ongoing Turkish–Kurdish conflict, which found a negative relation between competitive victimhood and support for non-violent conflict resolution (Uluğ et al., 2020). Furthermore, trusting that the rival party will accept the possibility of joint decision-making in political issues may be more difficult when one perceives that one's own group has been victimized more (Bar-Tal et al., 2009).

Across studies and groups, inclusive victimhood was related to more agreement with joint political decision-making, indirectly via stronger perceptions of shared ownership. This resonates with the common ingroup identity model (Dovidio et al., 2007): perceiving both groups as belonging to an overarching category of victims was related to more positive intergroup outcomes. Furthermore, inclusive victimhood also had an overall positive relationship with joint political decision-making. This replicates previous findings that inclusive understanding of victimhood also directly fosters various forms of positive intergroup relations and intergroup reconciliation (Adelman et al., 2016; Szabó et al., 2020; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015; Vollhardt et al., 2016), and it extends it to the domain of political decision-making. However, this overall relation was not present for Serbs from Kosovo, where we only found an indirect relation between inclusive victimhood and joint political decision-making via shared ownership. One reason for the observed group differences could be that Serbs from Kosovo are nowadays in the minority position, whereas they used to feel as part of the majority population when Kosovo was an autonomous province of the Republic of Serbia. In contrast, Israeli Jews are the powerful majority in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and Albanians are the majority in Kosovo, while Serbs from Serbia are located outside of the borders of Kosovo and also represent the majority in their state. For Serbs in Kosovo, due to their “sudden” minority position, shared victimhood perceptions might not be sufficient to ensure agreement with joint political decision-making, but this needs to be investigated further.

Our work has several limitations. First, our data did not allow us to further understand group differences and the role of group status in the hypothesized processes. In the future, researchers could conduct qualitative studies to gain a better understanding of what minority and majority members have in mind when they think of joint decision-making. For instance, for majorities this may be a less desirable outcome considering that majority-only decision-making favors majority group's position, whereas from a minority perspective, joint political decision-making is the best possible (realistic) outcome given its small numerical size and low power. Moreover, the explained variance of perceptions of shared territorial ownership as well as joint political decision-making among Serbs from Kosovo was rather low as compared to the other groups. Thus, especially in this minority group, there must be other (important) factors explaining perceptions of shared ownership and support for joint decision-making.

Second, in Study 1 we only considered a one-sided perspective, that of Israeli Jews, while neglecting Palestinians. And even though we adopted a multi-group perspective in Study 2, our design was again

somewhat unbalanced because we did not include Albanians from Albania. However, a recent survey with representative samples shows that Albanians in Albania have less of a vested interest in Kosovo than Albanians in Kosovo have in Albania (Demi & Çeka, 2019). With regard to territorial perceptions, the majority of Albanians in Albania and in Kosovo seem to prefer European Union accession rather than a possible unification under a single Albanian state (Demi & Çeka, 2019). The same study shows that the majority of citizens in Albania and in Kosovo, including Serbs from Kosovo, oppose the idea of border changes between Kosovo and Serbia as part of a final political settlement.

Third, with cross-sectional data we were not able to investigate the causality in the proposed relations. While we have a theoretical rationale for the model tested (Dovidio et al., 2007; Storz et al., 2020; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008), we acknowledge that we cannot make strong claims about the direction of causality. For instance, the causal relation between perceptions of victimization in the past and thoughts about sharing the ownership of the territory today could also be reversed. The sense of ownership is rather fundamental and inherent in people (Rochat, 2014), and one might justify one's ownership claims by referring to past victimization. Since testing for reversed mediation models is statistically not meaningful (Lemmer & Golwitzer, 2017; Rohrer et al., 2021; Thoemmes, 2015), longitudinal and experimental research is needed to clarify the direction of causality.

Finally, we assessed support for joint political decision-making as support for deciding jointly on issues regarding the territory, and not as support for political collaboration between the two conflicting groups in a broader sense. While the conflicts that we researched are territorial conflicts, they are not *only* about the territory. Thus, political power could be shared on matters beyond territorial ones. Assessing joint political decision-making in other political domains might result in lower correlations between shared territorial ownership and joint political decision-making.

## 5.1 | Conclusion

To conclude, with the present research we showed in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict from the perspective of Israeli Jews, as well as in the context of Kosovo and among three groups—Albanians and Serbs from Kosovo, and Serbs from Serbia—that a sense of shared territorial ownership is stronger when one perceives that both groups have been victims of the conflict, but perceiving one's own group to have been victimized more was related to lower shared ownership perceptions. Moreover, we have shown that the perception that the disputed territory belongs to both rival groups together seems to go hand in hand with support for efforts to resolve the conflict jointly. Overall, we provide first evidence that research on territorial conflict resolution could benefit from considering group members' perceptions of collective land ownership, and specifically recognition of ownership of each group involved in the conflict. One implication of these findings, regarding the two conflict contexts studied, and perhaps territorial conflict regions more generally, is that creating a more inclusive understanding

of victimization may foster perceptions of shared territorial ownership, which in turn may benefit the institutional reconciliation efforts.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors report no conflict of interest.

## ETHICS APPROVAL STATEMENT

The research has received ethics approval by Utrecht University (general research line: FETC18-118; Israel: 20-366; Kosovo and Serbia: FETC19-047). Additionally, the research among Israeli Jews has been approved by Tel Aviv University (0001514-1) and the research in Serbia and Kosovo has been approved by the University of Belgrade (2019-027). In Kosovo, no additional ethics approval was possible.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nora Storz (conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing—original draft); Rezarta Bilali (Conceptualization, Writing—substantial review and editing); Borja Martinovic (conceptualization, funding acquisition, writing—substantial review and editing); Edona Maloku (data collection—support with translation; writing—review and editing); Nimrod Rosler (data collection—support with translation; writing—review and editing); Iris Žeželj (data collection—support with translation; writing—review and editing).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data is shared in a publicly available repository on OSF: [https://osf.io/tbvfmm/?view\\_only](https://osf.io/tbvfmm/?view_only).

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