Remembering past atrocities – good or bad for attitudes toward minorities?

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Abstract

Discrediting racial hatred and political extremism is one of the explicit aims of commemorating the Holocaust. And yet, remembering the difficult past does not always produce the intended consequences because political actors can challenge the narrative to advance their goals. In particular, right-wing populist movements often counter historical accounts of past atrocities in potentially damaging ways by portraying their own nations as victims rather than perpetrators. The chapter presents the results of an online survey experiment in Poland on how contestation of the Holocaust narrative affects xenophobic and exclusionist views. I find that while uncontested narratives about ingroup wrongdoing (massacre of Jews by Poles in Jedwabne) can reduce ethnocentric beliefs, countering the perpetrator narratives with a victimhood story (massacre of Poles by Ukrainians in Volhynia) weakens this effect and also lowers support for minority rights. I also find that the Holocaust narrative, contested or uncontested, does not affect anti-Semitic or pluralist attitudes.

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Introduction

Commemorating past atrocities is often viewed as a means to promote reconciliation, improve the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, and prevent future violence (Nino 1998; Iterson and Nenadović 2013; Subotic 2019). Memorialization and commemoration activities are particularly salient in regard to the Holocaust, the paradigmatic trauma of the 20th century. The explicit aim of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day is to discredit political extremism and racial hatred, so that genocide never happens again.

It is unclear, however, whether commemoration actually achieves these beneficial effects. Attempts to memorialize past atrocities produce outcomes that range from formal apologies and financial compensation to vehement denials and intergroup tensions (Art 2010; Mendeloff 2004). Perpetrators and their compatriots have reacted to revelations of a violent past with defiance and anger (Rotella and Richeson 2013; Imhoff and Banse 2009), though they can also experience guilt and shame, become willing to rectify past wrongs and perceive ethnic others more favorably (Rees, Allpress, and Brown 2013; Wohl, Branscombe, and Klar 2006). Victims reminded of past traumas may feel threatened or experience the old traumas anew, which can increase their hostility and prejudice – against the original perpetrator group as well as against other groups (Canetti et al. 2018; Brounéus 2010).

One explanation for these divergent consequences of remembrance is that the difficult past invites multiple interpretations. As Art (2006, p. 5) notes, "[e]ven in the prototypical case of 'radical evil' – the Holocaust – the 'lessons of history' are far from self-evident." The extent to which commemorating past atrocities can achieve beneficial effects depends on discursive strategies adopted by domestic political actors. Not surprisingly, political entrepreneurs use history to accomplish more immediate political goals (Subotic 2009; Art 2006). The far right, in particular, denies guilt for historical transgressions and emphasizes national victimhood, to distinguish itself from political opponents and win electoral support (Art 2010). The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), Germany's REP, the Movement for a Better Hungary, the National Front in France, the Slovak far-

right party Kotleba-People's Party Our Slovakia, and the League of Polish Families (LPR) have all questioned the Holocaust and sought to deny their nations' wrongdoings in WWII. Center-right parties in many East European states have adopted similar tactics by reframing the Holocaust and WWII to portray their nations in a more favorable light and to marginalize their political opponents as unpatriotic (Subotic 2019; Charnysh and Finkel 2018).

What are the implications of these conflicting narratives about past violence? Does challenging the ingroup perpetrator narrative with reminders of ingroup victimhood affect the lessons we draw from the difficult past?

Experimental design is particularly well-suited for addressing these questions. In an experiment, specific elements of the narrative can be altered in a controlled setting. No matter how dissimilar the actual historical events juxtaposed in a given message are from the social science perspective, information about these events can be presented in a similar way, replicating the rhetorical strategies adopted by political entrepreneurs. At the same time, randomization alleviates the concern that the message reflects rather than shapes public opinion and that individuals select into different narratives about the past based on preexisting beliefs and party preferences.

Poland is a fitting setting for such an experiment because it both experienced and witnessed genocide during WWII. Its Jewish community of 3.3 million was all but eliminated in the Holocaust. The local Christian population sometimes took advantage of the Jewish plight or even turned against their Jewish neighbors, initiating pogroms and stealing Jewish property (Grabowski 2013; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018; Charnysh and Finkel 2017). Perhaps the best-known incident occurred in the town of Jedwabne in 1941, when the local Catholic population rounded up and burned hundreds of Jews in a barn (Gross 2001). Yet Christian Poles also experienced the horrors of the Soviet and German occupations, ethnic cleansing, and forced expulsions. In 1943-45, 80,000-100,000 Polish civilians were brutally murdered by Ukrainian nationalists in Volhynia (*Wołyń*) and Eastern Galicia.

Both anti-Semitic pogroms and atrocities against Poles are commemorated today. Yet the debates about what these massacres mean for the Polish nation and how to best remember them con-

tinue. Many politicians acknowledged Polish participation in the Jedwabne pogrom and adopted a reconciliatory stance toward Volhynia, but the nationalist right blames the Jedwabne pogrom on the Germans and publicizes Volhynia atrocities to derogate ethnic outgroups. In 2016, the Polish Parliament declared 11 July a National Day of Remembrance of Victims of Genocide perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists, provoking tensions with Kyiv. Two years later, President Andrzej Duda signed a law criminalizing statements that attribute responsibility for the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities to "the Polish nation." Poland is thus in the midst of one of the most contentious debates about WWII and the Holocaust.

The chapter analyzes the results of an online survey experiment that randomly assigned Polish respondents to three different historical narratives. The control group read about the 1995 massacre in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The two treated groups received information about the Jedwabne pogrom. One of the treated groups also learned about the 1943 massacre in Volhynia, with a note that the Polish suffering at the hands of Ukrainian nationalists received far less publicity than the Jewish suffering in Jedwabne. This treatment was designed to mirror the discursive strategies of the Polish right, which elevates national victimhood to counter the Jedwabne narrative.

Approaching the Holocaust from a social science perspective clarifies its current role in domestic politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Reframing the Holocaust is an attempt by political elites to construct a more "usable past" that will legitimize their ethno-nationalist vision and appeal to the illiberal and conservative segments of population. As shown below, such narratives are indeed capable of changing individual attitudes on minority rights and increasing ethnocentrism.

Scholars typically quantify exposure to mass violence ("treatment") using death counts, the duration of the violent regime, or distance to the site where violence took place (e.g., Rozenas and Zhukov 2019; Charnysh and Finkel 2017). They investigate whether more destructive, long-lasting, or proximate episodes of violence have a higher impact. Yet the long-run political effects of mass violence are also shaped by how specific historical events are interpreted and reinterpreted. The Jedwabne pogrom is a case in point: it was one of many pogroms against Jews in the summer of 1941 (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018) and peripheral to the elimination of Poland's

Jewish minority in the Holocaust, yet it provoked greater soul-searching and shaped views on Polish-Jewish relations during WWII to a greater extent than most other, no less horrific incidents. The significance of Jedwabne comes from the contemporary debates about the pogrom, not from the particulars of the pogrom itself. Thus, studying the impacts of specific narratives about the Holocaust is essential for understanding its multifaceted consequences.

The study contributes to work on the legacies of mass violence by investigating an alternative channel of remembrance and (re)interpretation, which likely operates side-by-side with the intergenerational transmission channel emphasized in existing research (e.g., Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Rozenas and Zhukov 2019). While the immediate victims are long gone, the Holocaust has become institutionalized in formal institutions and structures across Europe. Its effects are no longer limited to perpetrator, bystander, and victim communities, but are experienced by national and international audiences. In this context, narratives offered by political actors and the media are particularly significant.

I also contribute to the literature on outgroup discrimination, which identifies intergroup contact as a particularly effective strategy for reducing prejudice (Scacco and Warren 2018). In post-genocide settings opportunities for intergroup interaction are extremely limited. Indeed, the reconstruction of WWII memory in a way that unambiguously favors ethnic majorities may not have been possible had Jews remained present in post-Holocaust Eastern Europe (Charnysh 2015). Educating the population about the past in a way that is both historically accurate and conducive to reconciliation is all the more important in these curcumstances.

Understanding reactions to the difficult past

I build on research in social psychology to understand how reminders of violence perpetrated by the ingroup – alone or countered by reminders of ingroup victimhood – shape ingroup and outgroup attitudes among the population that was not directly involved in the massacre, but shares identity with the perpetrator and/or victim of the historical incident.

People derive status from their ingroup attachment and are motivated to view the ingroup in

positive terms (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Reminders of ingroup wrongdoing threaten the positive view of the ingroup, triggering cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957; Aronson 1992). Cognitive dissonance is defined as a negative affect that arises when individuals either do something or are induced to think differently about something such that they are confronted with a cognitive inconsistency. Dissonance is "psychologically uncomfortable" (Festinger 1957, p. 3). To reduce dissonance individuals may change their beliefs and behaviors in accordance with the new information about the ingroup or, instead, rationalize away the dissonance and avoid change (Steele and Liu 1983; Gubler 2013). These divergent implications of cognitive dissonance can help explain why scholars disagree about the benefits of remembering past traumas.

The first approach to reducing cognitive dissonance is what the advocates of Holocaust education hope for. Reminders of ingroup transgressions may produce collective guilt or shame, motivating positive attitudinal and behavioral changes. In particular, people may seek to atone for the harm done by apologizing to the outgroup or even providing financial compensation (Doosje et al. 1998; Doosje et al. 2006; Wohl, Branscombe, and Klar 2006). German foreign policy after WWII and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission are perhaps the best-known examples of the positive consequences of collective guilt. Reminders of past transgressions may also improve perpetrator attitudes toward third groups: Rees, Allpress, and Brown (2013) find that the feelings of moral shame for the Nazi past improve attitudes toward Turkish immigrants among Germans.

However, the opposite outcome has been documented as well. Upon learning about past transgressions by their ingroup, individuals may seek to minimize, deny or justify ingroup transgressions to reduce cognitive dissonance (Branscombe and Doosje 2004; Branscombe, Schmitt, and Schiffhauer 2007). Even in Germany, often portrayed as a paragon of repentance, information about ingroup-perpetrated atrocities has been linked to "secondary anti-Semitism," a belief that the Jews abuse other nations' feelings of guilt and are responsible for anti-Semitic prejudice (Imhoff and Banse 2009). Such reactions may be particularly likely when the perpetrator narrative is contested by invoking ingroup suffering. Victimhood narratives impart a degree of moral entitlement

on the ingroup and thus legitimize harmful behavior toward outgroups (Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Wohl and Branscombe 2008). For example, Canetti et al. (2018) find that priming Israeli Jews with the Holocaust increases support for aggressive policies against Arabs and identification with Zionism.

Historical background: WWII in Poland

Before WWII, ethnic minorities comprised a third of Poland's population. Ukrainians and Jews were the two largest groups, at 13% and 10%, respectively. Genocide and forced population transfers at the end of the conflict made Poland one of the most ethnically homogeneous states in Europe. The Jewish population, at 3.3 million on the eve of WWII, was first rounded up into ghettos and then nearly completely eliminated during the Nazi occupation. While some Poles rescued Jews, many others were indifferent to the plight of their Jewish neighbors. Some participated in anti-Semitic pogroms, collaborated with the German police, and stole the property of their Jewish neighbors. Grabowski (2013) estimates that about 200-250,000 Jews died at the hands of the Poles during WWII.

One of the most contentious WWII memories in contemporary Poland pertains to a series of anti-Semitic pogroms that occurred in the summer of 1941 in eastern territories first occupied by the Soviet Union and then taken over by Germany (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018). The best-known incident occurred on July 10, 1941 in the town of Jedwabne, where the Polish population herded local Jews into the market square, beating and humiliating them, and eventually burned them alive in a barn.

During the war, Polish Christians were also victimized by their neighbors. Taking advantage of the German occupation, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists killed about 100,000 Poles in 1943-1945 in Volhynia (Wołyń) and Eastern Galicia. [1] One of the most brutal massacres occurred on July 11, 1943, as UPA units attacked 167 villages, killing approximately 10,000 Polish civilians (Polonsky 2004/2005, p. 290). Polish partisans mobilized against UPA in response, also retaliating against civilians.

[1] These regions are in Western Ukraine today but belonged to the Polish Second Republic before WWII and contained large Jewish and Ukrainian minorities.

Both tragedies were swept under the rug during the Communist period (1945-1989). Since the new Ukrainian state was a fellow socialist republic, the perpetrators of Volhynia atrocities were presented as German collaborators.[2] The Holocaust was also viewed primarily through the lens of the broader suffering of the Polish people.

The democratic transition provided an opportunity to revisit the past and to reconstruct Poland's national history. The opening of archives spurred ground-breaking research on previously avoided subjects. Although the crimes of the communist government received most attention, researchers also shed new light on Polish relations with ethnic minorities.

The publication of *Neighbors* by Princeton historian Jan Gross arguably contributed the most to revisiting Polish behavior toward Jews during WWII. The book retold the story of the Jedwabne pogrom (Gross 2001). It prompted soul-searching, a forensic investigation at the site of the massacre, and even an official apology by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, of the Democratic Left Alliance, in 2001. At least 300 articles on Gross's publication and the events in Jedwabne had appeared in the Polish press by 2003 (Wasserstein 2001; Stola 2003). Some 48% of Poles disapproved of Kwaśniewski's apology in a 2001 poll, and the nationalist right quickly framed revelations of Polish complicity as attacks on the national "honor" and as a diminution of Poland's victimhood in WWII. Some accused the Polish president of "stoning the Polish nation" by apologizing for the tragedy (Himka and Beata 2013, p. 343). Father Tadeusz Rydzyk's Radio Maryja, with a circulation of 250,000 and representatives in the Polish Parliament, launched a campaign against the book. It blamed the atrocities on the Germans and accused Jedwabne Jews of collaboration with the Soviet NKVD during the Soviet occupation (Wolentarska-Ochman 2003). Debates over Jedwabne were sometimes bundled with the discussion of Volhynia (Polonsky 2004/2005). Critics claimed that Jedwabne received undue attention because of the Jewish lobby, whereas the powerless Volhynia victims were nearly forgotten.

This claim came into the mainstream with the ascendance of the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) in 2015. In 2016, the PiS government declared July 11 a National Day of Remembrance

[2]This was not inaccurate, as some Ukrainian nationalists initially collaborated with the Nazis in murdering local Jews.

of Victims of Genocide perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists. Next, PiS took over a World War II museum in Gdańsk in an effort to restructure the exhibitions and emphasize Polish suffering and heroism, while marginalizing the victimization of ethnic minorities. The party encouraged the commemoration of the so-called Cursed Soldiers, the anti-communist underground active in the years after WWII, as well as the Katyn massacre of Polish officers by the NKVD in 1940.

At the same time, PiS has tried to rid Poles of guilt over the Jedwabne pogrom and other immoral actions during the Holocaust. PiS-appointed education minister Anna Zalevska (2015-19) blamed the Jedwabne pogrom for "many misunderstandings and very biased opinions" (cited in Harper (2018, p. 204)). In February 2018, President Andrzej Duda (PiS) signed a controversial law criminalizing statements that attribute responsibility for the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities to "the Polish nation." In reaction to international criticism, the criminal penalties were later reduced to civil offences, but the law has done some real damage, intensifying open anti-Semitism in public debates (Babińska et al. 2018).

Historical revisionism instigated by PiS conforms to public preferences: in a 2015 poll, just 23% of respondents agreed that Poles' crimes against Jews were "still valid and needed to be disclosed and publicized" (Charnysh and Finkel 2018).

How dangerous is PiS's rhetoric about the past? Does challenging the ingroup perpetrator narrative by emphasizing ingroup victimization actually influence individual political attitudes and behavior, or is PiS simply reflecting preexisting opinions and beliefs? Below, I discuss the results of an online survey experiment that explores this question.

Survey experiment

In July 2014, I administered a survey experiment in Poland using the online platform Ariadna (*Ogólnopolski Panel Badawczy Ariadna*, http://panelariadna.pl/userpanel.php). The platform provides access to over 80,000 Polish Internet users who, in return for filling out surveys, receive points redeemable for various items through the Ariadna Loyalty Program.[3] Ariadna uses ran-

[3]This research was approved by Harvard Institutional Review Board, Protocol No. CR14-2380-01.

dom stratified sampling of subjects to increase representativeness of its samples. Even though this approach does not generate a true nationally-random sample, the subject pool is geographically representative (see Table 4 in the Appendix). Respondents are comparable to the national sample on age and income.[4] The sample is not representative on gender, education, and rural/urban residence: just 35% of respondents are male (the national average is 48.4%); respondents with higher education make up 35% of the pool (above the 21% national average); and only 25% of respondents live in rural areas (the national-level share is 40%).

All potential participants received an email from Ariadna inviting them to take a 15-minute survey about Polish history. Those who clicked on the link were presented with a consent form, which clarified that the survey was anonymous and focused on "the violent historical past," which could make them uncomfortable.[5]

Treatment

Figure 1 presents the sequence of questions and treatments graphically. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked about the strength of their attachment to Poland. This question allowed a pre-treatment measure of ingroup identification and ensured that, when presented with the narratives about past atrocities, respondents thought in group rather than individual terms.

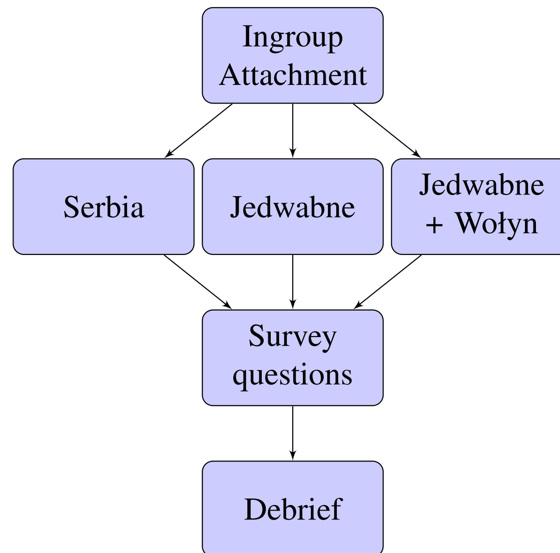
Respondents were then randomized into three groups.[6] Each group received open-ended questions about the victim and the perpetrator group in a given historical incident, to gauge prior knowledge about the event. Next, respondents read information about this incident, with facts about the

[4]The median age of respondents is 40 (identical to the national median of 39), and the mean income level (3843 Złoty per month) is near the national average (3740 Złoty) in 2014, despite a high non-response rate to this survey question.

[5]Respondents who did not complete the entire survey received partial compensation for the share of the survey they completed. The questionnaire was completed by 445 (88%) out of the 503 respondents who started it.

[6]Balance tests across treatment conditions are presented in Table 5 in the Appendix. Slightly more respondents assigned to control (N=164) completed the survey (135 and 150 respondents received the uncontested and contested Jedwabne treatments). There are significantly more men in the control condition (at 42%) than in the two treatment conditions (at 32 and 31%). Lower attrition rates in the control group may have been due to the sensitive nature of the Jedwabne treatment. In other surveys of Polish respondents, men exhibit a higher prejudice toward Jews and other minorities and are more likely to agree with statements such as "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust" (Anti-Defamation League 2020). While attrition at this stage of the experiment is problematic for inference, it would arguably bias the coefficients on both treatments downward by reducing the proportion of male respondents, who are most likely to negatively react to the perpetrator narrative.

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the experimental flow.



massacre, a graphic eyewitness quote, and a collage with photographs of some of the victims created from publicly available images by the researcher. The two treatment groups were asked about the massacre in Jedwabne. Respondents were reminded that 73 years ago, "Poles from Jedwabne burned their Jewish neighbors alive" (see page 1 of the Appendix for full text of the treatments). They read a graphic account by an eyewitness, Abraham Śniadowicz, followed by a note that Jedwabne "was not an isolated incident" and that similar pogroms occurred in over 20 localities. After reading the Jedwabne story, the second treatment group also received a message that Poles were also victims in WWII and were murdered in Volhynia, designed to mimic rhetorical strategies of the far right in Poland. The control group instead read about the massacre of Muslim Bosniaks in Višegrad, Bosnia-Herzegovina in June 1995. They were also told that Višegrad was not an isolated incident and that between 1992 and 1995, an estimated 100,000 people were killed, 80% of whom were Bosniaks.

Random assignment to three groups enabled measuring the effects of contested and uncontested reminders of the ingroup-perpetrated atrocity, relative to narratives about similar episodes of violence that did not involve the ingroup. Because all three groups were "treated" with a violent narrative, the attitudinal variation across respondents in the three conditions can arise solely due to differences in the role of the ingroup, rather than due to exposure to violence as such. Because no

group received the victimhood treatment alone, without the perpetrator message, the experiment provides information only about the effects of contestation of the perpetrator narrative.

As a manipulation check, after reading the narrative, respondents were asked to report *when* the massacre occurred. Those who failed the test likely did not read the story and therefore did not receive treatment. Most were able to identify the year, or even the month correctly, though some responses (33% in the control group, 14% in the perpetrator treatment group, and 17% in the contested perpetrator treatment group) suggested that they did not read or fully understand the text. Below, I present results for both for the full sample and for only the respondents who passed the manipulation check.

Outcomes

The treatments were followed by questions that assessed emotional responses to the survey. Respondents were then asked whether they agree with statements designed to measure attitudes toward minority rights, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, and pluralism. These statements were modeled on the questions asked in other Polish opinion surveys and presented in random order. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and were averaged to measure underlying concepts.[7]

The minority rights index was based on agreement with four statements: (1) Ethnic and religious minorities should be allowed to express their traditions, such as practicing ritual slaughter; (2) Ethnic and religious minorities should be exempt from the requirement to win at least 5% of votes to enter Sejm (the Lower House of Polish parliament); (3) Ethnic and religious minorities should have an opportunity to use their language for naming localities, side by side with the Polish language on signs; (4) Ethnic and religious minorities should receive financial support from the state in order to maintain their culture and traditions.

Anti-Semitism was measured based on agreement with the following statements: (1) I get the impression that the Jews use our pangs of conscience over the past; (2) Jews want to get

[7] An alternative empirical strategy would be to use factor analysis to reduce dimensionality, but this would complicate the interpretation of effect sizes.

compensation from Poles for the wrongs that were perpetrated by the Germans; (3) Jews often act in secret, behind the scenes; (4) Jews want to have a decisive voice in international financial institutions; (5) Jews seek to expand their influence on the world economy. One concern with using explicit measures of anti-Semitism is social desirability bias, which is likely to attenuate differences across treatment conditions and between treatment and control. Mean agreement with all five questions was at 4.285, which suggests they are still informative.

Ethnocentrism, understood as ethnic group self-centeredness and self-importance (Bizumic and Duckitt 2012), was measured as averaged agreement with the following statements: (1) I would rather be a citizen of Poland than of any other country in the world; (2) The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like the Poles; (3) People should support their country even if the country is in the wrong; (4) There are some things in contemporary Poland that I am ashamed of as a Pole (reverse order). Correlation of agreement with the first three statements and the fourth statement was low, at 0.13, though results did not change when this statement was excluded from the analysis.

I also measure a related concept of collective narcissism, defined as an emotional investment in an unrealistic belief about the greatness of an ingroup (Zavala and Cichocka 2012). In the Polish context, collective narcissism predicts greater anti-Semitism, but not prejudice toward other ethnic groups "because it increases sensitivity to intergroup threat and support for stereotypical perception of Jews as a particularly threatening outgroup" (Zavala and Cichocka 2012, pp. 213–24). This concept relates to willingness to reconcile because it predicts retaliatory intergroup hostility. Collective narcissism is measured using agreement with the following statements: (1) My group deserves special treatment; (2) Few people fully understand how important my group is; (3) I get really angry when my group is criticized; (4) The world would be a better place if my group had more say; and (5) I will not rest until my group receives proper recognition. All items were highly correlated with one another ($\rho > 0.63$).

Pluralist views were measured based on agreement with the following statements: (1) No matter what a person's beliefs are, he/she is entitled to the same rights as anyone else; (2) Society

should not tolerate political views that are very different from those of the majority (reverse order); (3) Everyone should have the right to express their own political views, even those that are very different from the views of the majority. Agreement with the second statement was only weakly correlated (0.14) with agreement with the other two.

The survey concluded with a number of standard demographic questions about respondents' age, gender, income, religiousness, education, occupation (self-employed), and urban/rural residence (not randomized). All respondents were debriefed at the end.

Results

It is illuminating to first look at the extent of knowledge about the difficult past in the survey sample (see Table 1). As expected, the majority of respondents were aware of Jedwabne: an average of 36% have "heard a lot" about the massacre. For comparison, 20% of respondents "heard a lot" about the massacre in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the two treatment conditions, which inquired about Jedwabne, 63% of respondents reported that Jews were victims.[8] Some responses to the question about the identity of the victims were quite pointed. One respondent claimed that although Jews were the "direct" victims, the "descendants of the [Polish] perpetrators of this crime" were victimized "indirectly."[9] Another stated that"Jews but also Poles (instigated by the occupier)" are victims of the Jedwabne massacre. Half of the respondents recognized Poles as the perpetrators in Jedwabne, but some clarified that Poles were "encouraged by the Germans." A third of respondents mentioned only non-Polish perpetrators, such as Germans, Russians, and Ukrainians.

Did any of the treatments influence political attitudes? Figure 2 graphically presents the coefficients on the main outcome variables for all respondents as well as only for the respondents that passed the manipulation check (and thus definitely read the text). Results across all three experimental conditions are also presented in the regression framework in Table 3 in the Appendix.

[8] Counted here are also a few responses that claimed that Jews and another group (Poles, Ukrainians, or Gypsies) were victimized).

[9] "Bezpozrednio zydowcy mieszkający w tej miejscowozci ale pozrednio takze potomkowie sprawcow tej zbrodni" [sic].

Table 1: Prior knowledge about the events in Jedwabne and Višegrad among survey respondents. The questions were asked before the treatment was administered.

	Jedwabne Massacre	**Višegrad massacre**
Have you heard about the massacre?		
Heard a lot	36%	20%
Heard something	47%	58%
Heard nothing	17%	22%
Who was the victim?		
	Jews	*Muslims*
Correct response	63%	16%
Who was the perpetrator?		
	Poles	*Serbs*
Correct response	50%	29%

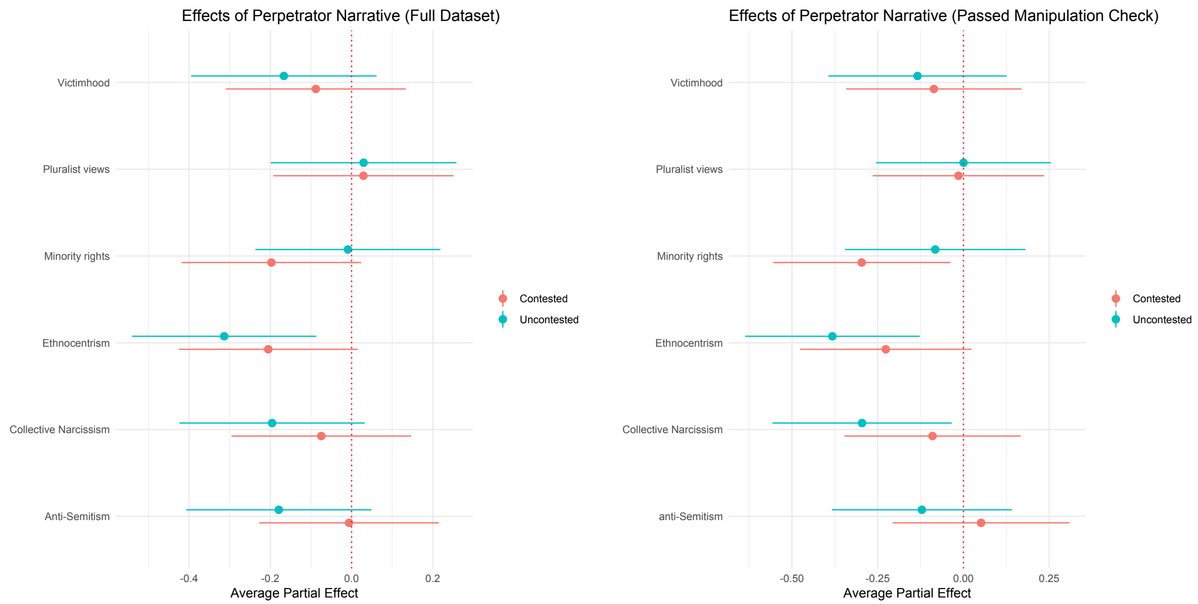
As expected, the addition of demographic controls does not affect the conclusions and slightly increases the magnitude of the coefficients on the treatment variables.

Only the uncontested perpetrator narrative reduced ethnocentric beliefs and collective narcissism in the experiment. Regression analysis of the sample of respondents who passed the manipulation check indicates that relative to the group primed with the uncontested Jedwabne narrative, the control group is more likely to express ethnocentrism by 0.4 points ($p < 0.01$), which is equivalent to a third of standard deviation on this variable. At the same time, differences between the control group and the treated group that received the contested perpetrator narrative are half as small in magnitude and do not reach significance. The results are similar for collective narcissism. This suggests that although reminders of ingroup wrongdoing reduce the tendency to aggrandize the ingroup and exaggerate outgroup threats, challenging ingroup wrongdoing by evoking past victimization reduces this effect.

There are also differences across treatment groups with respect to respondents' support for minority rights. Contrary to expectations, the reminder of ingroup wrongdoing does not affect support for minority rights, relative to the control group. The contestation of the perpetrator narrative, on the other hand, reduces support for minority rights. The difference is 0.45 ($p < 0.05$). A possible explanation for this counterintuitive result is that bringing up the atrocities in Volhynia by

the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) primed respondents to consider the two decades of contradictory policies toward the Ukrainian minority by the interwar Polish governments, which ranged from accommodation to forced assimilation and persecution.

Figure 2: The impact of treatment (contested and uncontested Jedwabne narrative) on selected attitudes. Dots are point estimates of each treatment, relative to the control condition; bars are 95% confidence intervals.



Note: Right panel excludes the respondents who failed manipulation check.

It is important to note that the effect estimates in Table 3 are conservative, as all three groups were exposed to the narratives about atrocities perpetrated by one ethnic group against another. The effects of commemorating past violence are probably larger in magnitude when compared to the lack of discussion and remembrance.

Contrary to expectations, the differences in the averaged anti-Semitism indicator between the control group and the two treatment conditions are relatively small and do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The largest differences in anti-Semitism are observed between the two treatment groups: respondents in the uncontested perpetrator narrative are less likely to agree with anti-Semitic statements than respondents in the contested perpetrator narrative, though this difference also does not reach statistical significance. Some differences emerge when we consider

agreement with anti-Semitic statements separately. In particular, respondents presented with an uncontested perpetrator narrative are less likely to agree with the statement "I get the impression that the Jews use our pangs of conscience over the past," significant at the 5% level in the full sample.

Finally, pluralist views and perception of ingroup victimhood are virtually identical across treatment and control conditions (see Table 3). Neither of the perpetrator narratives influences support for political pluralism.

I also tested for heterogeneous effects using the strength of national attachment measured prior to treatment assignment (not reported).[10] None of the coefficients on the interaction between treatments and strength of ingroup attachment are statistically significant.

Discussion and conclusion

Social scientists have typically studied the Holocaust as unique case, or, at best, carefully compared it to other, well-established genocidal events (King 2012, p. 324). By contrast, political actors routinely invoke the Holocaust side-by-side with other traumas of WWII in Central and Eastern Europe. They make use of the fact that WWII produced "a cascading form of victimhood," where perpetrators in one period were targets in another (King 2012, pp. 332–33). Experimental methods are particularly well-suited to investigating how such "faulty" historical analogies shape contemporary political attitudes.

Data from an online survey experiment in Poland suggest that debating the violent past carries some risks. In particular, I find that positive consequences of priming ingroup perpetrator narratives on ethnocentrism and collective narcissism are eliminated in the presence of competing victimization frames. Even more concerning is that the bundled perpetrator-victim narrative dampened support for minority rights, the outcome that was unaffected by the perpetrator narrative in isolation. At the same time, reminders of past violence against Jews do not lower anti-Semitism or influence support for pluralist views. This is not to say that historical facts should be kept away

[10] In the overall sample, 29% and 55% of respondents reported "very strong" or "strong" attachment to Poland, respectively.

from the public. Even if its effects on political attitudes and behavior are extremely mixed, commemorating the difficult past may be worthwhile in and of itself, to the extent that we value the truth.

Overall, the analysis shows that combating xenophobia and discrimination by referencing ingroup wrongdoing in the past works best when uncontested and becomes less effective when accompanied by ingroup victimhood narratives. Antoniou, Dinas, and Kosmidis (2020) find similar patterns in Greece, where upward comparisons between the victimized Greek ingroup and the victimized outgroup (Jews) increases anti-Semitism among respondents in a survey experiment.

The experiment is not without limitations. Although the survey was anonymous, it is possible that social desirability bias prevented respondents from expressing their true views about Jews, minority rights, and their national ingroup. Future research on the subject would benefit from utilizing implicit bias measures or list experiments to further probe the robustness of the conclusions. Respondents were exposed to the perpetrator and victim narratives only briefly, so the uncovered changes in political attitudes are likely to be short-lived.

The chapter shows the value of experimental methods for understanding the enduring legacies of the Holocaust and intergroup violence more broadly. Most political science and economics studies on these topics have used quantitative and qualitative historical data, developed in isolation from the experimental research on ingroup identity and collective guilt done in social psychology. Yet even though the majority of perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust are no longer alive, experimental designs remain useful and may even be necessary for understanding the micro-level mechanisms behind some of the most striking patterns uncovered in this field of inquiry. If we want to understand why living next to a former death camp influences support for the far right (Charnysh and Finkel 2017), when exposure to violence will lead individuals to reject of the perpetrator's political identity (Lupu and Peisakhin 2017) or why the effects of state-induced famine on political preferences change with shifts in political opportunity structures (Rozenas and Zhukov 2019), we may want to consider how historical traumas are remembered and interpreted.

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Appendix

Historical narratives in three experimental conditions

Treatment 1. Poles as perpetrators

On the anniversary of the Jedwabne pogrom: Painful memories of the neighbors

On Thursday (10.07) it was another anniversary of the tragic events from 73 years back, when Poles from Jedwabne burned their Jewish neighbors alive. That day, Jewish townspeople were gathered on the market square, beaten, humiliated, and then driven to a wooden barn on the outskirts of the village and burned alive there. According to Polish historians, no fewer than 340 Jews were killed then.

An eyewitness to this event, Abraham Śniadowicz, described the extermination of Jews from Jedwabne as follows: “Searching for homes, they found old, sick and children, beat them cruelly, chopped off their heads, cut off their tongues, pricked with forks, rushed to the barn. The barn was flooded with gasoline from all sides and set on fire. Terrible smoke appeared, and the screams and crying of burning Jews reached the sky. Who was caught later, thrown with a pitchfork into a burning barn. Gradually the screams grew weaker and a heap of ash remained from the whole mass of Jews ... ”

This was not an isolated incident. While only rough estimates are possible, the number of Jews killed by the local Polish population during WWII reaches approximately 175,000 to 210,000 victims – men, women, the elderly, and children. Anti-Semitic acts by the Polish population of Podlasie were perpetrated in more than 20 localities. The frequency of these events suggests that they were part of a broader phenomenon.

Treatment 2. Poles as perpetrators and victims

Treatment 1 followed by this text:

Remembering Jedwabne, forgetting Wołyń?

Not everyone agrees with this interpretation of the Jedwabne incident. According to a representative of one of the youth organizations, the ceremonies in Jedwabne serve to make Poles lose their national pride. Others argue that no nation suffered as much as Poles. The issue of Poles’ historical memory has become an element of manipulation.

Although the whole world knows about the crime in Jedwabne, hardly anyone knows about the thousands of terrible crimes committed against them in Wołyń. On July 11 and 12, 1943, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army attacked in a coordinated attack on around one hundred and fifty Polish villages and settlements. The situation is abnormal when the young generation of Poles is aware of what the barn in Jedwabne was, and the concept of the Volhynia massacre is some abstract concept, read somewhere by chance on national portals.

Control: Massacre in Bosnia and Herzegovina

On the anniversary of the Visegrad massacre: Painful memories of the neighbors

In June (10.06) passed another anniversary of the tragic events from 22 years back, when Serbs committed crimes against the Muslim population in Višegrad, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbian soldiers and police drove Muslims out of their homes, tormented them, and threw dead bodies into the Drina River. According to historians, no less than 130 Bosnians were burned alive in the homes of Bikavac and Pionirska streets.

An eyewitness, Zehra Turjačanin, described the extermination of Bosniaks as follows: “Most people were young women with children, and there were a few old men and women. Serbian soldiers first threw stones at the windows to smash them, and then threw grenades. For some time, they shot the crowd at home and set fire to the house. People were burned alive, everyone cried; what I heard then just can’t be described.”

This was not an isolated incident. While only rough estimates are possible, between 1992 and 1995, an estimated 100,000 people were killed, 80% of whom were Bosniaks. Hundreds of Bosnian towns and villages were eliminated.

Table 2: Difference in means across the two treatments and control group on main outcomes in full and reduced sample

	All survey respondents			Those who passed manipulation check		
Outcome variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**
Minority rights						
Control	3.84	1.55	164	3.98	1.60	110
Jedwabne (Contested)	3.54	1.44	150	3.52	1.46	124
Jedwabne (Non-contested)	3.82	1.56	134	3.85	1.54	115
Anti-Semitism						
Control	4.38	1.61	164	4.32	1.57	110
Jedwabne (Contested)	4.37	1.69	150	4.40	1.71	124
Jedwabne (Non-contested)	4.09	1.55	134	4.12	1.59	115
Ethnocentrism						
Control	4.27	1.22	164	4.35	1.12	110
Jedwabne (Contested)	4.03	1.12	150	4.09	1.14	124
Jedwabne (Non-contested)	3.90	1.09	134	3.91	1.11	115
Colective Narcissism						
Control	3.54	1.49	110	3.62	1.43	110
Jedwabne (Contested)	3.43	1.41	124	3.49	1.48	124
Jedwabne (Non-contested)	3.25	1.49	115	3.19	1.49	115
Pluralist views						
Control	5.64	1.23	110	5.727	1.19	110
Jedwabne (Contested)	5.67	1.20	124	5.71	1.16	124
Jedwabne (Non-contested)	5.67	1.17	115	5.73	1.16	115
Victimization						
Control	4.39	1.45	110	4.35	1.44	110
Jedwabne (Contested)	4.26	1.40	124	4.23	1.39	124
Jedwabne (Non-contested)	4.15	1.36	115	4.17	1.37	115

Table 3: OLS Regression on treatment groups and demographic covariates as well as a pre-treatment measure of knowledge about the historical event in question. Subset of respondents who passed manipulation check. Standard errors in parentheses.

Panel A	Minority rights		Anti-Semitism		Ethnocentrism	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Perpetrator narrative	−0.12	−0.17	−0.20	−0.20	−0.40**	−0.44**
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Contested perpetrator narrative	−0.45**	−0.50**	0.08	0.14	−0.21	−0.22
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.18)
Male		−0.17		0.47**		0.08
		(0.18)		(0.19)		(0.16)
Higher Edu		−0.06		−0.11		−0.02
		(0.17)		(0.18)		(0.16)
Age		0.02***		0.02***		0.02***
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Residence: Town		0.06		−0.03		0.46***
		(0.19)		(0.19)		(0.17)
Residence: Village		0.41*		0.17		0.43**
		(0.22)		(0.23)		(0.20)
Observations	349	346	349	346	349	346
Adjusted R^2	0.01	0.03	−0.0005	0.06	0.01	0.04

Panel B	Collective Narcissism		Pluralism		Victimhood	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Perpetrator narrative	−0.43**	−0.45**	0.0003	−0.05	−0.19	−0.22
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.18)
Contested perpetrator narrative	−0.13	−0.09	−0.02	−0.06	−0.12	−0.08
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Male		0.06		−0.27**		0.004
		(0.17)		(0.13)		(0.16)
Higher Edu		−0.32*		0.23*		−0.48***
		(0.17)		(0.13)		(0.15)
Age		0.004		0.03***		0.01**
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Residence: Town		0.12		0.001		0.19
		(0.18)		(0.14)		(0.17)
Residence: Village		0.26		−0.02		0.50**
		(0.21)		(0.16)		(0.20)
Observations	349	346	349	346	349	346
Adjusted R^2	0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.06	−0.003	0.04

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Geographic distribution of respondents

Table 4: The table compares distribution of survey respondents at the province level to distribution of population in Poland (2014).

Province (województwo)	Population	% Population	No: Respondents	% Respondents
Dolnośląskie	2909997	7.56	27	6.07%
Kujawsko-pomorskie	2092564	5.44	30	6.74%
Lubelskie	2156150	5.60	18	4.04%
Lubuskie	1021470	2.65	13	2.92%
Łódzkie	2513093	6.53	26	5.84%
Małopolskie	3360581	8.73	33	7.42%
Mazowieckie	5316840	13.81	73	16.40%
Opolskie	1004416	2.61	7	1.57%
Podkarpackie	2129294	5.53	25	5.62%
Podlaskie	1194965	3.10	15	3.37%
Pomorskie	2295811	5.96	23	5.17%
Śląskie	4599447	11.95	65	14.61%
Świętokrzyskie	1268239	3.29	15	3.37%
Warmińsko-mazurskie	1446915	3.76	17	3.82%
Wielkopolskie	3467016	9.01	42	9.44%
Zachodniopomorskie	1718861	4.47	16	3.60%
Total	38495659	100	445	100%

Table 5: Balance on demographic variables across treatments.

Characteristics	Total sample	Treatment 1	Treatment 2 (Contested)	Control
Initial group assignment	502	146	171	185
Passed manipulation check	448	134	150	164
Share men	35	32	31	42
Median age	40	42	40	41
Education (share w/ higher education)	34.74	31.11	38.67	34.14
Education mean (levels 1-10)	7.41	7.089	7.52	7.579
Mean income	3843	3748	3443	4251
Left-right ideology median	5.00	5	5	5
Left-right ideology mean	5.15	4.981	5.306	5.136
Share in village	24.49	26.12	25.85	21.95
Share in city above 100,000 people	38.2	34.33	37.41	42.07