

Antisemitism and Perception of Hamas: The Role of Significance Quest

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Abstract

The present study examines antisemitism as a response to an unmet desire for personal significance (i.e., wanting to be more respected, important, and socially valued). This was tested in a two-wave study of Americans' perceptions of the Israel–Hamas war conducted six and fifteen months after Israel's initial ground operation in Gaza following the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023. Results indicated that the quest for significance predicted endorsement of two conceptually distinct forms of antisemitism: beliefs concerning disproportionate Jewish power and beliefs portraying Jewish people as adversaries of Christianity. In turn, power-based antisemitism independently predicted perceptions of Hamas as motivated by justice, suggesting that the quest for significance may shape perceptions of the Israel–Hamas conflict partly through antisemitic narratives. These findings are consistent with the possibility that individuals experiencing unmet significance needs may be predisposed to interpret Hamas as resisting a disproportionately powerful adversary.

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Introduction

In his prescient memoir *Friendly Fire*, Ami Ayalon, the former Director of the Shin Bet (Israel's internal security service), writes, “the battle for international public opinion is just as important for our security as weapons systems. What matters most is the perception of justice” (Ayalon, 2020, p. 244). In examining Americans' perceptions of the 2023-2025 Israel-Hamas war, perceptions of justice, grievance, and power are of the utmost importance and yet have not thus far been studied from a social psychological standpoint. The present

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article posits that Americans' own grievances and feelings of insignificance predict their adherence to antisemitic narratives, which offer a culturally sanctioned source for their grievances. This, in turn, may even motivate perceptions of Hamas as seekers of justice in its fight with Israel.

Our argument builds on significance-quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2022a), which posits that a desire for significance, which reflects a human need to feel respected and worthy, drives human social behavior of all types, from aggression (Kruglanski et al., 2023) to romance (Ellenberg et al., 2025). We posit that people with a strong desire for significance are more likely to hold antisemitic beliefs. Moreover, we hypothesize that the type of antisemitism to which one adheres will become the basis for perceptions of justice-seeking in the context of the 2023 Israel-Hamas War. In this context, antisemitism can manifest in a perception of Jewish evil toward Christians, but also of disproportionate global Jewish power. When inferring the motives of Hamas, individuals motivated to pursue significance may derogate or scapegoat Jews as conspiring to claim power, and this may lead them to sympathize with Hamas' grievances.

The link between the quest for significance and antisemitism has been discussed extensively, particularly in the context of research on conspiracy theories (Basit, 2021; Kruglanski et al., 2022b; Rousis et al., 2022). In general terms, when someone's need for significance is activated, they are driven to search for and adopt a narrative, supported by a network, which explains the source of their grievances and provides a means to rectify those grievances and gain or regain significance (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Antisemitism is a core part of many conspiracy theories and violent extremist narratives, from the far-right to militant jihadism and everything in between (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2020). Antisemitism—defined most simply and easily for the present purposes as a negative attitude toward Jews (Bilewicz et al., 2013)—may immediately be understood as an ideological narrative that defines a clear culprit for one's grievances. However, it also creates a group of people who define themselves in opposition to that culprit. Believers are bonded by both a shared enemy and a shared understanding of the world—who *really* controls the government, media, and economy—to which most people are not privy, making them feel important and special; in other words, significant (Kruglanski et al., 2022b). Whether someone feels personally humiliated by financial failure or perceives a cultural shift away from what they

see as traditional values, antisemitism provides a reassuring answer that one is not to blame and that there are others in the world who share one's struggles. In identifying a culprit to blame not only for one's own grievances but for many of the world's ills, antisemitism also provides justification for violence against Jewish people, turning hate crimes and terrorism into righteous acts in furtherance of justice (Leander et al., 2020).

As suggested by the wide variety of extremist groups and conspiracy theories that incorporate antisemitism into their core narratives (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2020), different components, types, and manifestations of antisemitism appeal to different people and different communities. In the present article, we explore two conceptually distinct categories of antisemitism (surely not the only categories), each of which has historically been linked to Americans' perceptions of Israel and the Palestinians. The first conceptual category is based on the idea that Jews hold disproportionate power in society. This idea is the basis for many—if not most—antisemitic conspiracy theories, tracing back to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which Hagemeister (2021) called “the perennial conspiracy theory.” Written at the behest of the Russian secret police in the early 20th century, *The Protocols* purports to be a confessional report by the leader of a secretive cabal of Jews who seek to take over global financial, political, and cultural institutions. *The Protocols*, and the ideas it propagated, continue to be cited in antisemitic claims all over the world (Hagemeister, 2008). Narratives of disproportionate Jewish power can be clearly linked to a person's own unmet desires for significance, as antisemitic conspiracy theories focused on Jewish control of global economies and politics explain why one has experienced a dearth of significance through financial loss, low socioeconomic status, or political disenfranchisement. This type of antisemitism may be closely linked to perceptions of Hamas within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Narratives of Jewish power can be distinguished from Christianity-based antisemitism, which is instead based on beliefs that the Jews killed Jesus or that Jews use the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes (Pargament et al., 2007; Hsia, 2004). Adherents to this type of antisemitism, typically, evangelical Christian nationalists (Dennen & Djupe, 2023), hold deep prejudices against Jews. Yet, the same people tend to be highly supportive of Israel in what they see as an apocalyptic struggle of “Judeo-Christian” values against Islamic ones, or as a necessary precondition to the rapture (Ben Barka, 2012). We hypothesize that

Christianity-based antisemitism, then, can be linked to the quest for significance in that it designates a culprit for one's grievances and feelings of insignificance or disrespect. However, Christianity-based antisemitism should not predict antipathy toward the state of Israel or sympathetic perceptions of justice-seeking by Hamas in its fight against Israel. In this context, the Quest for Significance is more about power and allegiance (see also Leander et al., 2020).

It is important to note that the antisemitism versus anti-Zionism debate is outside the focus of this article. Rather, we are focused specifically on perceptions of Hamas, a group that defines itself in opposition to Israel, and implicates narratives about Jewish power, including beliefs that *The Protocols* “documents a conspiracy of delegates to the first Zionist Congress at Basel in 1897” (Hagemester, 2008, p. 89). Indeed, sympathy for the powerless is common and closely linked to American support for the Palestinian cause (Bruneau et al., 2017), particularly since Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War shifted the public's perception of Israel from “underdog to occupier” (Gelber, 2021). Although this might imply that opposition to Israel or support for Palestine could be derived from a perception of asymmetric power, the present research focuses exclusively on perceptions of Hamas justice-seeking within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as derived from prejudicial beliefs about *disproportionate global Jewish power*.

The present theorizing also does not assume that antisemitism of any type is a necessary antecedent to affinity for the Palestinian people or cause, nor do we measure Americans' explicit support for Hamas. Americans' perceptions of Hamas as motivated by justice could reflect a self-serving bias, or even projection. A justice motivation may be conceived of as a particular manifestation of the quest for significance, wherein the quest is activated by an experience or feeling of injustice (Kruglanski et al., 2022a). For example, Kruglanski and colleagues (2009) identify a perceived experience of injustice as one of several significance-related motivations for suicide bombers. Additionally, Jasko and colleagues (2019) found that activists and protesters motivated to pursue social justice gained a sense of personal significance when they engaged in political action on behalf of their justice-related causes. Although perceiving that Hamas is motivated by justice does not necessarily imply that one is *justifying* Hamas's actions, it does require that the perceiver believe that Hamas has experienced injustice; otherwise, there would be no reason to be

motivated by justice. Therefore, we hypothesize that those whose own experiences of grievance and significance-loss predict their adherence to a power-based type of antisemitism, which subsequently predicts their perception that Hamas is motivated by the pursuit of justice. That pursuit of justice, for those who adhere to a power-based form of antisemitism, is presumably against the disproportionately powerful state of Israel and a disproportionately powerful global Jewish community.

The Present Study

The present study therefore aims to explore the link between the quest for significance, antisemitism (to the extent that it concerns Jewish power), and perceptions of Hamas as motivated by justice in the 2023-2025 Gaza war. We hypothesized that the quest for significance predicts antisemitism, meaning that people who feel a sense of grievance in their lives will be more likely to adhere to a shared ideology which provides a culprit for their feelings of disrespect, insignificance, indignity, or injustice, than those who are more satisfied with their circumstances and not susceptible to narratives of blame. This hypothesis mainly pertains to antisemitism focused on a perception of disproportionate Jewish power; power-based antisemitism affords a motivated perception that Hamas, in opposition to Israel, is motivated by justice.

Method²

The present research used a two-wave study of Americans' perceptions of the Israel-Hamas war, conducted six and 15 months after Israel's initial ground invasion in Gaza after the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, to explore the role of QFS in motivating antisemitism and perceptions of Hamas as motivated by justice among Americans who generally do not have direct connections to the conflict. The study was embedded as part of a large panel study of American perceptions of the Israel-Hamas war, which began at the end of October 2023, shortly after Israel's initial ground incursion into Gaza following the Hamas attacks. Antisemitism was measured in the last two of the seven waves (Wave A, April 30-May 2,

² The dataset and code for this project are available on Open Science Foundation:
https://osf.io/cpb4u/overview?view_only=de09c6fe1a484aec9e7857161d3bca92

2024; and Wave B, January 21-22, 2025), which were completed by 338 participants who participated in each of the seven waves. Quest for significance and perception of Hamas as motivated by justice were measured in each wave.

Participants

The participants, all U.S. citizens fluent in English, were recruited through the online research platform Prolific. Participants provided informed consent for each wave of the study in accordance with ethical guidelines approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Maryland³ and were compensated at least \$9 per hour for each wave they completed in the study, consistent with Prolific's fair pay policies. Only participants who completed the first wave (October 30-31, 2023; N = 1,200) were eligible to participate in future waves, and only participants who completed each wave were included in the final analysis.

As noted above, the present sample includes 338 participants (50.89% male, 48.51% female, 0.60% other gender). Participants' ages fell in the following age brackets: 18-24 (2.07%), 25-34 (12.13%), 35-44 (15.38%), 45-54 (17.46%), 55-64 (31.66%), 65 and older (21.30%). Participants had the following levels of educational attainment: Some high school or less (0.60%), high school graduate/GED (16.96%), some college (24.12%), college graduate (41.37%), graduate degree (16.96%). Participants reported the following religious affiliations: Catholic (18.40%), Protestant (29.97%), Jewish (1.78%), Hindu (0.30%), Buddhist (0.59%), Atheist (13.06%), Agnostic (14.84%), None (10.68%), Other (10.39%). Finally, participants fell into the following income brackets: Under \$15,000 (13.95%), \$15-25,000 (9.79%), \$25-35,000 (10.09%), \$35-50,000 (17.51%), \$50-75,000 (23.44%), \$75-100,000 (9.20%), \$100-150,000 (10.09%), \$150-200,000 (2.97%), over \$200,000 (2.97%).

As a point of comparison, the initial sample for the larger panel study included 1,200 participants (49.25% male, 48.83% female, 1.92% other gender). Participants in the present study appeared slightly older than the total sample for the larger panel study (for example, 9.58% of all participants in the first wave were between the ages of 18 and 24, compared to only 2.07% of participants in the present study). In both the larger study and the present study, the majority of participants had a college degree or higher, making the sample slightly more

³ IRB registration number: 2119354

highly educated than the general American population, in which approximately 40% of adults 25 and older hold a college degree or higher (United States Census Bureau, 2025). The breakdown of religious affiliation for the present sample was approximately the same as the breakdown for the first wave of the larger panel study, suggesting that no religious group showed notable drop-off rates, with the exception of participants who identified as Muslim—in the first wave, 0.83% of participants identified as Muslim, while no participants in the present study identified as Muslim. The absence of Muslim participants in the present study is certainly a limitation. Income levels for the participants were similar in both the first wave of the larger study and the present study.

Procedure

Participants were unaware of the specific hypotheses of the study, and all items after the informed consent section were presented in a randomized order within sections to minimize order effects. To increase data quality, we included only participants who had completed all previous waves. Participants who showed evidence of straight-lining or impossibly short completion times in the first wave were not invited to complete subsequent waves.

Measures

Quest for Significance

The Quest for Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021) is a six-item measure assessing the extent to which participants personally seek to be more significant, respected, and important. Items are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (“Totally Disagree”) to 7 (“Totally Agree”). A total score is computed as a mean of the six items. In the present study, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .96$ for both Wave A and Wave B. The following items comprise the Quest for Significance Scale: “I wish I could be more respected,” “I wish I meant more to other people,” “I wish other people thought I were significant,” “I wish I were more appreciated by other people,” “I want people to care more about me,” and “I want to be more important.”

Antisemitism

Antisemitism was measured with Bilewicz and colleagues' (2013) eight-item measure of antisemitic beliefs. None of the items mentioned Israel, which avoids conflating the measure of antisemitism with other variables in the study related to the Israel-Hamas war. Typically, all eight items are combined into a single antisemitism construct. However, the present research is mainly concerned with power-based antisemitism, which was reflected by six of the items: "Jews would like to rule the world," "Jews achieve their collective goals by secret agreements," "Jews would like to control the international financial institutions," "Jews often meet in hiding to discuss their plans," "Jews aim at influencing the world economy," and "Jews act in a secret way." We conceptually distinguish power-based antisemitism from Christianity-based antisemitism, which was reflected with two other items: "Jews use Christian blood for ritual purposes" and "Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ." For the purpose of the present work, these two items were separated by face validity and treated as a separate construct. In the present study, internal reliability was poor for the Christianity-based items in Wave A ($r = .39$) and Wave B ($r = .36$). For the conspiracy-based items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$ for Wave A and Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$ for Wave B.

Perception of Hamas as Motivated by Justice

Perception of Hamas as motivated by justice was measured as a single item within a list of seven possible motivations for Hamas ("influence of religion," "influence of ideology," "desire for power," "desire for significance," "desire for attention," "compensation for inadequacy," and "desire for justice"). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they thought HAMAS was driven by each motivation on a Likert scale from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree").

Statistical Design

We used R Studio ("psych," "lavaan," and "semPlot" packages) for the present analyses. First, we used paired-samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether participants' scores on any of the relevant measures changed between Wave A and Wave B. Because none of these t-tests yielded significant results, we used average scores for each of the variables in the subsequent analyses. Next, we conducted correlational analyses between

all the variables of interest, followed by simple linear regression for the first two hypothesis tests. For the third hypothesis test, we used structural equation modeling to test a parallel mediation model with two mediators, using QFS as the predictor, the two categories of antisemitism items as the mediators, and perception of Hamas as motivated by justice as the outcome variable.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

Participants' quest for significance scores did not change significantly ($t(337) = -1.01$, $p = .32$) between Wave A ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.57$) and Wave B ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.54$). Additionally, participants' overall antisemitism scores did not change significantly ($t(337) = -1.67$, $p = .10$) between Wave A ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 0.98$) and Wave B ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.03$). Nor did participants' perception of Hamas as motivated by justice change significantly ($t(336) = -0.01$, $p = .90$) between Wave A ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 2.00$) and Wave B ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.90$). Because none of the variables of interest changed over time, average scores were used in all future analyses. Correlations between the variables of interest are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. QFS	3.62	1.47	—				
2. Antisemitism	1.86	0.96	.24**	—			
			[.14,				
			.34]				
3. Power-Based Antisemitism	1.91	1.08	.25**	.99**	—		
			[.15,	[.99,			
			.35]	.99]			
4. Christianity-Based Antisemitism	1.71	0.82	.14**	.81**	.71**	—	
			[.04,	[.77,	[.65,		
			.25]	.84]	.76]		
5. Perception of Hamas as Motivated by Justice	4.82	1.76	.30**	.23**	.25**	.09	[- —
			[.20,	[.12,	[.14,	.01,	.20]
			.40]	.33]	.34]		

*Note. Values in brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. ** $p < .01$.*

Quest for Significance and Antisemitism

We first tested whether quest for significance predicted antisemitism. Full results are presented in Table 2. The key result was that a higher QFS predicted higher levels of overall antisemitism ($F(1, 336) = 20.87, p < 0.001, R^2 = .06$). Examining the two different types of antisemitism, a higher QFS predicted higher levels of both power-based antisemitism ($F(1, 336) = 22.84, p < 0.001, R^2 = .06$), and Christianity-based antisemitism ($F(1, 336) = 7.005, p < .01, R^2 = .02$).

Table 2

Effect of Quest for Significance on Overall, Power-Based, and Christianity-Based Antisemitism

Dependent Variable	Estimate	SE	95% CI	T	p-value
Overall Antisemitism	0.16	0.03	[0.09, 0.23]	4.57	<.001
Power-Based Antisemitism	0.18	0.04	[0.11, 0.26]	4.78	<.001
Christianity-Based Antisemitism	0.08	0.03	[0.02, 0.14]	2.65	.01

*Note. Values in brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. ** $p < .01$.*

Antisemitism and Perception of Hamas as Motivated by Justice

Next, we tested whether power-based antisemitism predicted the perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. As hypothesized, higher levels of power-based antisemitism significantly predicted perception of Hamas as motivated by justice ($F(1, 336) = 21.87, p < .001, R^2 = .06$). A subsequent linear regression demonstrated that higher levels of Christianity-based antisemitism were unrelated to perception of Hamas as motivated by justice ($F(1, 336) = 2.87, p = .09, R^2 = .01$).

Table 3

Effects of Overall, Power-Based, and Christianity-Based Antisemitism on Perception of Hamas as Motivated by Justice

Predictor	Estimate	SE	95% CI	T	p-value
Overall Antisemitism	0.41	0.10	[0.22, 0.61]	4.26	<.001
Power-Based Antisemitism	0.41	0.09	[0.23, 0.58]	4.68	<.001
Christianity-Based Antisemitism	0.20	0.12	[-0.03, 0.43]	1.70	.09

*Note. Values in brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. ** $p < .01$.*

Quest for Significance and Perception of Hamas as Motivated by Justice, Via Antisemitism

The focal hypothesis was that quest for significance would predict perception of Hamas as motivated by justice through power-based antisemitism. Using structural equation modeling, we tested a parallel mediation model, using standardized values of quest for significance as the predictor, power- and Christianity-based antisemitism as parallel mediators, and perception of Hamas as motivated by justice as the outcome variable. The total effect of quest for significance on perception of Hamas as motivated by justice was significant ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), as was the total indirect effect ($\beta = .06, p < .01$). As predicted, the indirect effect of quest for significance on perception of Hamas as motivated by justice via power-based antisemitism was significant ($\beta = .09, p < .01$), while the indirect effect of quest for significance on perception of Hamas as motivated by justice via Christianity-based antisemitism was not significant ($\beta = -.03, p = .13$). If anything, Christianity-based antisemitism, while positively predicted by QFS, was negatively associated with the perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. Further details of the model are presented in Table 4. The parallel mediation model is presented graphically in Figure 1.

Table 4
Parallel Mediation Model

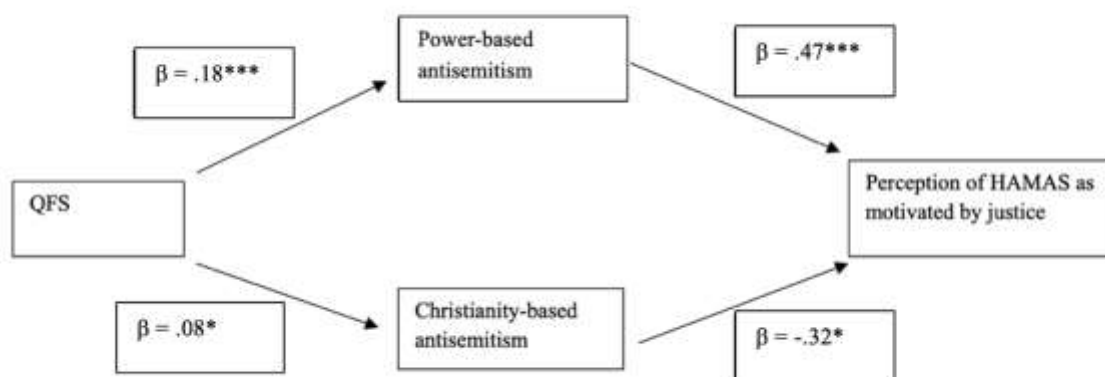
Path	Effect	<i>Boot-LLCI</i>	<i>Boot-ULCI</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Total Effect	0.36	0.24	0.50	0.07	5.61	<.001
Direct Effect	0.30	0.17	0.44	0.07	4.48	<.001
QFS-power-based Antisemitism	0.18	0.10	0.27	0.04	4.27	<.001
QFS-Christianity-based Antisemitism	0.08	0.01	0.15	0.03	2.32	.02
Power-based Antisemitism- Hamas Motivated by Justice	0.47	0.26	0.70	0.11	4.28	<.001
Christianity-based Antisemitism-Hamas Motivated by Justice	-0.32	-0.63	-0.01	0.16	-1.98	.05
Total Indirect Effect	0.06	0.03	0.11	0.02	2.98	.003

QFS-Power-Hamas	0.09	0.04	0.15	0.03	2.95	.003
QFS-Christianity-Hamas	-0.03	-0.06	0.002	0.02	-1.50	.13

Note. Values in brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1

Quest for significance predicts perception of Hamas as motivated by justice via power-based antisemitism but not via Christianity-based antisemitism



Note. Values in brackets represent 95% confidence intervals. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results support the hypotheses and contribute to the broader significance-quest theory literature as well as to the literature on antisemitism and its psychological underpinnings and consequences. First, we demonstrate a link between the quest for significance and antisemitism, both power- and Christianity-based. This result reaffirms prior findings that the quest for significance predicts adherence to extremist ideologies (Webber et al., 2018a). Based on the 3N model of radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2019), the result implies that people whose communities are more focused on power asymmetry or inequality would be more likely to adopt a power-based antisemitic ideology when their quest for significance is

activated, whereas people who are embedded in Christian nationalist milieus are more likely to adopt Christianity-based antisemitic ideologies when their quest for significance is activated. In each case, the ideology provides a culturally supported explanation for their grievances.

Second, we demonstrate that power-based antisemitism significantly predicts perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. Although this does not equate to supporting Hamas *per se*, it does imply that people who believe that Jews hold disproportionate power in the world are more likely to perceive Hamas as having experienced injustice—presumably at the hands of the ostensibly more powerful state of Israel—and that their fight is one for justice. One might speculate that adherents to a power-based antisemitic ideology might even perceive Hamas as fellow travelers with a common enemy, and thus might perceive that Hamas's fight against Israel is a fight against global Jewish power more broadly. Results also suggest that Christianity-based antisemitism does not significantly predict perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. Notably, Christianity-based antisemitism, which might be associated with a broader Christian nationalist worldview that ascribes to Israel the role of existential opponent to the Islamic world (Ben Barka, 2012), might be assumed to negatively predict perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. While this finding was borne out as a direct effect in our parallel mediation model, the result of linear regression when not controlling for quest for significance was not significant, likely because the strength of the positive effect of quest for significance on perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. Both of these results contribute to the broader literature on antisemitism, drawing a conceptual distinction between power- and Christianity-based antisemitism and showing that although the two types of antisemitism were strongly correlated with each other and both predicted by the quest for significance, only power-based antisemitism predicted a perception of Hamas as motivated by justice.

Finally, the results of our final parallel mediation model combine the previous two results to present a social psychological model of Americans' perception of Hamas as motivated by justice in the context of the 2023-2025 Gaza war. The model is consistent with significance quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2022a) and with the 3N model of radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2019). Specifically, people who have an activated need for significance have a significantly higher adherence to antisemitic narratives. The quest for significance

predicts adherence to both power-based and Christianity-based antisemitism, though which antisemitic narrative is more appealing is likely based on the networks to which the respondents belong. Finally, power-based antisemitism predicts perception of Hamas as motivated by justice, resulting in a significant indirect effect of quest for significance on perception of Hamas as motivated by justice via power-based antisemitism and not via Christianity-based antisemitism. This result provides an explanation for some Americans' perception of Hamas as fighting a disproportionately, unjustly, powerful enemy.

Alternative Models and Hypotheses

The parallel mediation model tested was selected based on our hypothesis that the quest for significance would be an antecedent to antisemitism, both power- and Christianity-based, rather than antisemitism preceding a heightened quest for significance. Of course, it is possible that antisemitism, and perseverating on antisemitic grievances, could keep one's quest for significance active, but we posit that the quest for significance, as a core social psychological need, ultimately drives adherence to an antisemitic narrative, rather than the other way around. Further, we hypothesized that antisemitism, and power-based antisemitism in particular, would precede perception of Hamas as motivated by justice, rather than one perceiving Hamas to be motivated by justice and therefore becoming antisemitic. As with the relationship between quest for significance and antisemitism, it is likely that antisemitism and perception of Hamas as motivated by justice fuel each other; if one perceives Hamas as motivated by justice, they may consume social media or other content that is supportive of Hamas and contains antisemitic tropes or stereotypes, thus reinforcing an antisemitic worldview. However, we posit that holding a broader antisemitic worldview, ultimately motivated by a heightened need for significance, predisposes people to more narrowly perceive Hamas as motivated by justice.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present research used data from a two-wave study measuring QFS, antisemitism, and perception of Hamas as motivated by justice, but the study was embedded within a larger, seven-wave study of Americans' perceptions of the Israel-Hamas war, beginning shortly after Israel's initial incursion into Gaza following the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023. Although

the original sample for the first wave of the study was designed to be generally representative of the American population, only people who completed the first wave were able to participate in subsequent waves of the study and only participants who completed all seven waves of the study were included in the final sample for analysis in order to ensure that all participants had the same exposure to the questions related to the conflict and that the number of waves in which the participants completed did not impact the results. Therefore, the sample used for the present research consisted of people who had already completed five prior surveys about their perceptions of the war, perhaps making them more aware of the war and Hamas than they otherwise might have been, and likely more aware of the war and Hamas than the average American. However, the finding that participants' perceptions of Hamas as motivated by justice did not significantly change between the two waves of the present study suggests that mere exposure to Hamas through completion of the study did not impact their perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. Relatedly, antisemitism was measured only in the two waves used in the present research and not in the first five waves, conducted during the first five weeks of the war. The present research is therefore limited in that it does not assess whether participants' own antisemitism predated the war or whether the war and its media coverage increased their antisemitism.

The study is also not without methodological limitations, many of which are results of the use of the "rapid response" research design (e.g., Stroebe et al., 2022). For example, because the study was designed and run quickly in order to capture Americans' real-time responses to Israel's incursion into Gaza following the October 7 attacks, several items were not included in the first few waves of the study, including the measure of antisemitism used in the present study as well as a measure of Islamophobia which was also included in the sixth and seventh waves of the larger study. Therefore, because we did not add our variable of present interest to the study until the sixth wave of the larger panel study, we could not conduct our analyses using a longitudinal design or with a larger sample size. Similarly, because the larger study included many different measures, we were not able to include a longer measure of antisemitism that may have included equal numbers of power-based and Christianity-based items, as well as other conceptually different items that may have lent itself to a formal factor analysis. Notably, respondents' antisemitism scores were relatively low,

suggesting a potential desirability bias. Using a measure with different wording to limit such bias would also improve the reliability and generalizability of the study.

Despite the limitations of the strategy, we contend that future research on significance quest theory should continue to utilize “rapid response” designs (e.g., Stroebe et al., 2022) which assess the ways that real-world events impact people’s needs for significance and the ways that people’s needs for significance impact their responses to real-world events. In the present research, people’s quest for significance was relatively stable across the two waves, despite changes in the war, including the a ceasefire and hostage and prisoner exchange just two days before the second Wave was run, and other world events, like the 2024 Presidential election and President Trump’s second inauguration the day before Wave B was launched. However, the models show that people’s quest for significance did indeed have both a direct and indirect effect on their perceptions of world events, namely, their perception of Hamas as motivated by justice. Future research should measure people’s quest for significance in the wake of major world events and conduct follow-up surveys to see how that need is affected by world events as well as their own life circumstances, and to see how their activated or satiated needs for significance impact their views about those events. In particular, the current results suggest that because quest for significance increases people’s adherence to ideologies that identify a culprit for their grievances (Kruglanski et al., 2022b), an increased quest for significance during world conflicts should increase their support for, or at least understanding toward, those whom they view as fighting the same culprit.

Implications for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

The results of the present study emphasize and lend further support to the proposition that effective, sustainable deradicalization requires addressing the underlying social and psychological needs that made the individual vulnerable to radicalization; namely, the quest for significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In the context of the present study, if one were to refute a particular ideology that is apparent at first glance, such as by publicizing injustices committed by Hamas, this would not affect the individual’s underlying power-based antisemitic worldview, leaving them susceptible to radicalization by a host of antisemitic violent extremist groups that span the ideological spectrum. And even if one were to address the antisemitic worldview without addressing the need for significance, it would not be

enough, for the individual would remain vulnerable to other groups and ideologies which promise to meet their need for significance. Indeed, among detained terrorists in Sri Lanka, those who participated in a rehabilitation program which was specifically designed to address the quest for significance showed significantly lower radicalization after the program, compared both to their fellow former terrorists, as well as members of the general community (Webber et al., 2018b). In a similar vein, long-term prevention of violent extremism at a societal level must address the social challenges that increase the quest for significance without also offering opportunities for people to meet that need. If this core need is not able to be met in prosocial ways, people will remain susceptible to ever-evolving antisocial groups and ideologies, even if individual groups or ideologies can be countered.

Conclusion

On October 24, 2023, an X (formerly Twitter) account associated with white supremacist Nick Fuentes's "Groyper Army" posted, "Our Jewish media and elite—right [and] left wing—joined in perfect synergy. They are salivating for war and control. In the meantime, they cancel, fire, deport anyone who disagrees with the Israel agenda [...] Jewry is the problem, not its factions." Below, the account added the hashtag, "GazaGenocide" (Tech Transparency Project, 2023). Around the same time, a Canadian white nationalist posted a meme on Telegram depicting racist images of a "Palestinian" and a "Zionist," with the title, "Reject the False Dichotomy." Below, an image of blonde "Crusader" was depicted below the title, "Embrace the third position" (Collen, 2023). These two responses to the early days of the war in Gaza, from individuals who ostensibly adhere to similar far-right ideologies, demonstrate how slight distinctions in the exact antisemitic ideology to which one adheres, in turn inform one's perceptions of Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian people. It is the need for significance which drives the adherence to antisemitism and other hateful or violent ideologies, but it is the specific antisemitic narrative which informs their views of the conflict. For the former individual, whose antisemitism is driven by a perception of disproportionate global Jewish power—in the media, business, and government, as suggested by the X poster—Israel is a representation of global Jewry, and Hamas is motivated by justice because Israel's disproportionate power is unjust. For the latter, whose antisemitism is driven by a

perception of the Jewish people as adversaries of Christianity, views of Israel may vary, but Hamas is not perceived to be motivated by justice.

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