Negotiating Power: Agenda Ordering and the Willingness to Negotiate in Asymmetric Intergroup Conflicts

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In this research, we investigated how group power influences the way members of groups in asymmetrical conflict approach intergroup negotiations. Drawing on theories of negotiations and of intergroup power, we predicted that group power would interact with features of the proposed negotiating agenda to influence willingness to come to the table. Based on the negotiation literature, we focused on 2 types of sequential negotiation agendas: 1 beginning with the discussion of consequential issues before less consequential issues (consequential first) and 1 leaving the discussion of consequential issues until after less consequential issues are discussed (consequential later). Because they are motivated to advance changes to their disadvantaged status quo, we expected low-power group members to favor consequential first over consequential later invitations to negotiate. High-power group members, motivated to protect their advantage, were expected to show the reverse preference. Converging evidence from 5 experiments involving real-world and experimental groups supported these predictions. Across studies, participants received an invitation to negotiate from the other group involving either a consequential first or consequential later agenda. Low-power group members preferred consequential first invitations because these implied less stalling of change to the status quo, and high-power group members preferred consequential later invitations because these invitations seemed to pose less threat to their position. Theoretical and practical implications for negotiations research and conflict resolution are discussed.

Keywords: negotiations, conflict resolution, intergroup relations, power, asymmetrical conflict

There are all too many historical examples of how intergroup conflicts can have devastating effects on the groups, communities, and societies they involve. From Rwanda to Sarajevo to Gaza, violent intergroup conflict has wrought untold material damage and ravaged millions of lives. While typically less striking, conflict between groups in professional settings (e.g., between management and a labor union), legal settings (e.g., between prosecutors and defendants), or political settings (e.g., between opposition and the governing party) can also exact severe costs on the parties involved. Given the high cost of intergroup conflict, understanding the factors that influence the possibility of arriving at negotiated resolutions between clashing sides has been of major interest to both conflict resolution theorists (Bar-Tal, 2000; Kelman, 1987; Rouhana & Korper, 1996) and negotiation researchers (Bazerman, Curhan, Moore, & Valley, 2000; De Dreu, Beersma, Steinel, & Van Kleef, 2007; Rubin & Brown, 1975). Such interest is not only academic: Persistent intergroup conflicts often elicit strong calls from third parties (e.g., the international community) for the two sides to come to the table and iron out their differences, as evidenced by the unflagging international attention given to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

In spite of the attention that negotiations have received as an avenue for resolving conflict, between both individuals (Bazerman et al., 2000; Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992) and groups (Kelman, 1987; Loschelder & Trotschel, 2010), there has been very little consideration of a critical stage in the negotiation process: the willingness to actually accept an offer to negotiate. The vast majority of negotiations research assumes that two sides are already at the negotiating table (Bear, 2011) and subsequently investigates a number of factors—such as the power asymmetry between the sides (Kim, Pinkley, & Fragale, 2005), time pressure (Carnevale & Lawler, 1986), cognitive biases (Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007), or negotiators’ motivational orientations (De Dreu, Beersma, Stroebe, & Euwema, 2006)—that influence the probability and quality of a resolution. If, however, one (or both) of the two sides in a conflict...
expresses no willingness to enter into negotiations with its counterpart, these other factors will matter very little. This issue of the willingness to negotiate has much real-world importance: At the time of writing, for example, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are at a standstill, with the Palestinian leadership expressing no willingness to negotiate with Israel under current conditions (in particular, while settlement building in Jerusalem and the West Bank continues; Greenberg, 2012). As such, the primary variable of interest in the current research was the willingness (or lack thereof) of conflicting sides to enter negotiations with one another: a crucial yet understudied part of the renegotiation phase.

A central proposition in our research is that group power and associated orientations toward changes to the status quo influence the types of negotiations that high- and low-power group members are willing to enter. Although the extent to which this can vary as a function of context-specific features of the proposed discussions, negotiations typically imply at least some possibility for change in the status quo (Kelman, 1987; Rubin & Zartman, 1995). Given this potential for revisions to the existing order, parties’ perspectives on changes to the status quo needs to be taken into account when considering the willingness to enter a given set of negotiations. An important construct shaping these orientations is group power, traditionally defined as relative control of resources and decreased dependence on the other side (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Emerson, 1962; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In a highly asymmetric conflict, where the high-power group controls the majority of resources, changes to the existing intergroup structure are likely to involve the low-powered group gaining possession of some valuable assets (e.g., land, financial resources) previously under the authority of the high-power group. Given their lack of resources and their motivation to improve their relatively disadvantaged position (Levine & Campbell, 1972; Sidanis & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), low-power group members are likely to welcome such changes. As such, they should prefer negotiations that seem to involve a greater possibility of revisions to the status quo. Although the high-power group can also derive benefits from negotiating (such as quelling dissent), the possibility of changes to their advantaged situation—and the potential loss of resources involved—is likely to induce some feelings of threat (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1983; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005; Sherif & Sherif, 1966; Sidanis & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This sense of threat at the possibility of changes should promote a preference for negotiations that seem to minimize the scope of modifications to the existing order (Bobo, 1999; Okhuysen, Galinsky, & Upton, 2003; Rouhana, 2001; Taylor, 1991). We therefore propose that low-power group members will favor negotiations that seem to imply greater—as compared to lesser—potential for changes to the status quo, whereas high-power group members will favor negotiations that seem to involve less potential for change.

Several features of the negotiating process can provide clues to their potential status quo consequentiality. For example, a given side could analyze media briefings from its counterpart and deduce that the other side is more versus less invested in bringing about serious change to the existing situation in upcoming negotiations. Similarly, the presence of a third party demanding changes or the existence of a strict timetable is a factor that might influence perceptions of the likely status quo consequentiality of negotiations. In the present work, we focused on another important facet of negotiations that can also contain cues about their status quo consequentiality: the negotiating agenda. The negotiating agenda has been recognized as a critical aspect of the negotiating process, oftentimes figuring prominently in renegotiation discussions and holding the potential to influence outcomes (Busch & Horstmann, 2002; De Dreu, Giacomantonio, Shalvi, & Sliqte, 2009). Moreover, unlike other facets of negotiations relevant to the status quo, such as the involvement of third parties, which may be relevant in some contexts but not others, the negotiating agenda is relevant across the vast majority of negotiations. Indeed, the agenda addresses crucial practical matters, specifying which issues will be discussed between the two sides, as well as the manner in which discussion of the issues will proceed (Busch & Horstmann, 2002; Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007; Pendergast, 1990).

Importantly and especially relevant to our current focus, the issues to be resolved between two sides can vary in the degree to which they have consequences for the status quo. We define a relatively consequential issue as one where decisions reached on the matter can have a substantial influence on the power dynamic between parties involved in the conflict. Such issues are typically related to high-value resources at the heart of the power differentiation between the two sides. For example, in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, decisions regarding the borders of a Palestinian state are likely to have a greater effect on the balance of power between the two sides than any agreements about the details of water distribution. Similarly, in the context of a divorce settlement, negotiations over the ownership of a home are more likely to impact the status quo than discussions over the ownership of a car. Given that most negotiations involve multiple issues, an important question that arises with respect to forming a negotiating agenda is the order in which to address the different issues (Flamini, 2007; Malhotra & Bazerman, 2007). One approach is to address various disputed issues simultaneously in order to maximize the possibility of mutually beneficial (i.e., integrative) trades across each issue (Busch & Horstmann, 1997; Inderst, 2000). Nevertheless, human cognitive limitations make sequential bargaining—where negotiators address the various issues in some sequence—a more realistic possibility, and such bargaining tends to be the norm in practice (De Dreu et al., 2009; Flamini, 2007; Lang & Rosenthal, 2001). Here, we examined sequential negotiations, with issues varying in status quo consequentiality. In such negotiations, the most consequential issues can be discussed first (consequential first) or after less consequential issues are discussed (consequential later). Because both consequential first and consequential later orders specify the (eventual) discussion of the same issues, both agendas may seem to have equal potential to influence the status quo. As such, one might expect low- and high-power group members to be indifferent as to which of the two negotiating sequences is proposed. However, we argue that the very order of the agenda can contain important information about the potential status quo consequentiality of the negotiation process, which can critically

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1 The extent to which negotiations impact the relative balance of power between the two sides may also be influenced by what type of issues are at stake. Negotiations can be over material interests (e.g., water or oil resources), symbolic issues (e.g., a formal apology for a previous massacre), or some combination of the two. In the current work, we deal primarily with negotiations over material interests rather than symbolic issues.
shape the willingness of high- and low-power group members to enter the negotiation process.

Specifically, we expect that members of low-power groups will be more favorable toward consequential first agenda orders relative to consequential later ones. Due to their general desire to advance change, low-power group members should be especially eager to negotiate consequential issues because these issues hold the greatest potential to influence their disadvantaged status quo. Research on intergroup encounters (Saguy & Dovidio, in press; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008) and on conflict resolution workshops (Maoz, 2000, 2011; Rouhana & Korper, 1996) supports this notion by showing that low-power group members have a consistent and strong desire to discuss issues that challenge the power differential between the two sides. Whereas consequential first proposals commit to addressing the issues with the greatest potential to influence the status quo from the start, consequential later proposals contain no firm guarantee that the discussion of consequential issues will actually end up taking place. This preference for discussing consequential issues first should also influence responses to negotiating proposals received from the other side. Indeed, when consequential later proposals are received from the other side, they carry a potential risk for the low-power group: namely, that the high-power side is attempting to delay discussion of consequential issues, thereby stalling changes to the status quo.

The characterization among low-power group members that their counterpart is purposefully putting off discussion of issues they are eager to discuss is likely to reduce the willingness to come to the table because it decreases the perception of the counterpart as a serious negotiating partner. Indeed, such fears of stalling are likely to be particularly relevant to low-power groups given their inclination to mistrust their opponents in the absence of full information about their intentions and motives (Bar-Tal, 2007; Loschelder & Trotschel, 2010). Moreover, their relatively weaker control over the negotiating process (Kelman, 1987; Rubin & Zartman, 1995; see also De Dreu, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2008) means they have less ability to counteract any stalling should it ultimately take place.

In contrast to members of low-power groups and consistent with their preference for minimizing changes to their advantaged status quo, we expect high-power group members to prefer putting off the negotiation of highly consequential issues that have a greater capacity for influencing existing arrangements. In line with this idea, Saguy et al. (2008) and Saguy and Dovidio (in press) showed that in situations of intergroup contact, high-power group members avoid the discussion of topics pertaining to power relations and instead prefer to focus on less contentious topics that may distract attention from the need to alter the unequal status quo. Similarly, in the domain of marital conflict, researchers have described demand–withdraw patterns of behavior, in which the lower power wife demands change in the relationship and the higher power husband withdraws from the interaction, avoiding discussion of change (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993). De Dreu and colleagues (2008) also showed, in interpersonal negotiations, that the side preferring maintenance of the status quo—typically also the side holding greater power—employs more avoidance tactics compared to the low-power party desiring change. Drawing on these ideas, we propose that high-power group members will perceive more threat in response to consequential first agenda orders that, compared to consequential later orders, more immediately invoke the possibility for changes to the current arrangement favoring their side. Receiving a consequential first invitation from the low-power group might further signal that they are especially eager to enact changes to the status quo, raising the threatening perception that they are aggressive, looking to drive a hard bargain and unwilling to compromise. In contrast, when the low-power group proposes a consequential later agenda, this delays the possibility of major changes to the existing order—threatening to the advantaged high-power side—and may further signal that they are relatively agreeable and respectful (essentially, that they know their place).

Thus, we expected to find an interaction between power and proposed issue order predicting willingness to negotiate. Consistent with our interaction hypothesis, we predicted opposing simple effects within each group. That is, we expected low-power group members would be more willing to negotiate when considering consequential first as compared to consequential later negotiating agendas because consequential later agendas would be perceived as potentially stalling changes to the status quo. In contrast, we expected high-power group members to prefer consequential later over consequential first orders because the consequential first agendas would induce greater threat to their advantaged position.

In addition to examining our predicted interaction between group power and issue order, we further explored a potential main effect of group power on the willingness to negotiate. If negotiations imply changes to the status quo (which, as it stands, favors their group), then one might reason that high-power groups should eschew negotiations altogether, producing an overall greater willingness to negotiate on the part of low-power groups (see Christen, 2004). Nevertheless, several factors limit confidence in predicting a main effect of power on willingness to negotiate. High-power groups can still derive benefits from negotiations, even if these involve the possibility of giving up certain material advantages. One clear benefit is ending potentially destabilizing conflict. Conflict with a dissenting group—even if it is relatively powerless—can be costly for the high-power group, which needs to effectively counter resistance efforts (which may inflict harm on the high-power group) while upholding a moral image (both internally and in the eyes of third parties; see Jackman, 1994). A related factor that can lead high-power groups to the table is the substantial pressure they sometimes face from third parties to arrive at a resolution (Rouhana & Korper, 1996). For example, the United States has placed substantial pressure on Israel to negotiate a resolution with the Palestinians (Ravid, 2011), and this pressure cannot be taken lightly given the United States’ important role as a strategic ally of Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). Moreover, research on power in interpersonal settings shows that power is associated with increased goal directedness (Guinote, 2007) and more approach orientation (Keltner, Anderson, & Gruenfeld, 2003). These factors might contribute to an emboldened feeling among high-power groups about their ability to claim benefits once at the negotiating table, thus increasing their willingness to negotiate. On the other hand, although one might assume that low-power groups should be eager to enter negotiations in order to gain resources they do not have access to, they may nevertheless be deterred from negotiating at times by a fear of exploitation at the hands of the high-power group (Lawler, 1986) or by a conviction that negotiation with their counterpart is unlikely to yield beneficial changes for their group.
As such, we did not expect a simple linear relationship between power and the willingness to negotiate. Nevertheless, although several factors might complicate whether the low-power group or the high-power group is generally more willing to negotiate in a particular context, we argue that power will reliably interact with proposed issue order, a status quo–relevant feature of the negotiating process, to influence willingness to negotiate. That is, despite possible fluctuations in mean levels of willingness to negotiate between groups across different contexts, low-power groups will continue to prefer those types of negotiations that seem to imply greater (rather than lesser) possibilities for change, whereas high-power groups will prefer negotiations that seem to minimize the potential for change. In the context of our study, we expect low-power group members to prefer consequential first over consequential later invitations to negotiate and high-power groups to show the reverse issue-order preference.

Overview of Studies

We conducted five studies to test our hypotheses. In Study 1, we used real-world samples—Palestinians and Israelis—representing low- and high-power groups, respectively. We tested our proposed interaction and the simple effect of proposed issue order on willingness to negotiate among each group. In Studies 2 and 3, we investigated our predictions among experimentally induced high- and low-power groups (across two different fictional contexts) and examined the role of perceived stalling (among low-power groups) and of perceived threat (among high-power groups) in influencing willingness to negotiate, as a function of proposed issue order. In Study 4, we further investigated high- and low-power group members’ behavior in organizing their own negotiating agendas. In Study 5, we returned to the real-world Israeli–Palestinian context, both in order to rule out alternative explanations for our hypothesized effects and to further explore possible explanations for our findings.

Study 1

In Study 1, we examined our hypotheses regarding the influence of proposed issue order on willingness to negotiate in a relatively intratable real-world context of much importance: the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Although we also assessed participants’ subjective perceptions of the power dynamic between the two sides, Israel is generally accepted to benefit from a substantial power advantage relative to Palestinians (Tessler, 1994). In the study, participants from both groups received an invitation to negotiate that included either a consequential first agenda or a consequential later agenda. We expected group power to interact with proposed issue order to predict the willingness to negotiate. Specifically, we hypothesized that because low-power group members are generally motivated to advance changes to the status quo and because consequential first invitations would be perceived as more status quo consequential, Palestinians would exhibit greater willingness to negotiate with the other side when receiving consequential first relative to consequential later invitations. Conversely, we hypothesized that because high-power group members are generally motivated to protect their relative advantage and because consequential first invitations would entail greater threat to their favorable status quo, Israelis would show decreased willingness to negotiate when receiving consequential first compared to consequential later invitations.

Method

Participants. 123 Palestinians residing in the West Bank (62% female; M age = 21.97 years, SD = 4.96), were asked to complete a survey in Fall 2010 at a large Palestinian university near Ramallah. Also in Fall 2010, 253 Jewish-Israeli participants (51% female; M age = 36.86 years, SD = 12.58) who were passengers on a train were asked to complete the same survey. All participants who agreed to take part in our study were handed a questionnaire, which contained our experimental manipulation and measures.

Procedure and Measures. Participants completed demographic information and then answered the following item assessing their perceptions of the power dynamic between Israel and the Palestinians: “When you think of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, who do you think has more power?” (1 = Definitely Palestinians, 7 = Definitely Israelis).

Subsequently, participants were asked to take on the role of the head of a negotiating delegation receiving an invitation to negotiate from the other side. They were asked to answer all questions in their role as the representative of their group. The letter began with a professional and polite introduction and had a generally positive tone. In both experimental conditions, the letters were identical, with the single difference being the order in which the other side (the Israelis for Palestinian participants, the Palestinians for Israeli participants) proposed to deal with the consequential issues. We identified the consequential issues with reference to those issues highlighted as consequential in the Oslo peace discussions (Tessler, 1994) and by analyzing current discourse regarding Israel–Palestine (e.g., Phillips, 2012).

To avoid problems of demand, which would be obtained if the invitations were to explicitly state “consequential issues are prioritized (or delayed)”, we used distance in position on the issues as a proxy for consequentiality. Because groups in negotiations are typically interested in claiming as much value for their own side as possible (De Dreu et al., 2007; Druckman, 1994) and because consequential issues relate to high-value resources, consequential issues tend to also be those issues on which the two sides’ positions are further apart (i.e., where there is more disagreement between the two sides; see De Dreu et al., 2009). Thus, in the invitations, in lieu of mentioning consequentiality directly, we referred to the two sides’ distance in position on the various issues. Specifically, in the consequential first condition, the invitation read,

We are hoping to open this round of discussions by negotiating those issues on which there is the most disagreement between the two sides. Our priority is to first address difficult final status issues such as the Palestinian right of return, final borders, the status of Jerusalem, and the makeup of a future Palestinian state. After that, we can turn our attention to the less conflictual issues on which our positions are closer. That is, we hope to include the matters on which there is the least, rather than most, agreement in the immediate agenda of our upcoming talks, in the hopes of dealing best with the challenges ahead.

In the consequential later condition, the other side stated,

We are hoping to open this round of discussions by negotiating those issues on which there is the most agreement between the two sides. Our priority is to first address the less conflictual issues on which are positions are closer. After that, we can turn our attention to the
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difficult final status issues such as the Palestinian right of return, final borders, the status of Jerusalem, as well as the makeup of a future Palestinian state. That is, we hope to include the matters on which there is the most, rather than least, agreement in the immediate agenda of our upcoming talks, in the hopes of dealing best with the challenges ahead.\(^2\)

To assess participants’ willingness to accept the other side’s invitation to the negotiating table, they were subsequently asked, “Would you be willing/unwilling to accept the invitation to negotiate?” Responses were provided using a rating scale from 1 (not willing at all) to 7 (very willing). Although such measures afford less statistical power, we also assessed willingness to negotiate using a dichotomous measure in order to approximate the real-world decision facing negotiators. Thus, participants were asked to choose between accepting versus rejecting the invitation to negotiate, with a choice of 0 indicating rejection and 1 indicating acceptance of the invitation.

Results

We first assessed participants’ subjective perceptions of the power dynamics between the two groups. Both Israelis and Palestinians agreed that Israel was the high-power group and that Palestinians were the low-power group, with each group’s mean rating differing significantly on a one-sample t test from the scale midpoint of 4 indicating equal power, \(M = 5.87, SD = 1.73\), for Palestinians: \(t(122) = 12.10, p < .001\); \(M = 5.58, SD = 1.37\), for Israelis: \(t(251) = 18.20, p < .001\). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) suggested that there was a marginally significant difference between the groups in terms of power perceptions, such that Palestinians perceived their group to be slightly lower in power than did Israelis, \(F(1, 375) = 3.38, p = .07, \eta^2 = .01\). Thus, we controlled for this difference in our subsequent analyses.

Subsequently, we conducted a two-way ANOVA with group power and proposed issue order as independent variables and our main construct of interest—willingness to negotiate—as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a main effect of group power, \(F(1, 364) = 38.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10\), such that Israelis were, on average, more willing to negotiate than Palestinians. There was no main effect of proposed issue order, \(F(1, 364) = 1.90, p = .17, \eta^2 = .005\). As hypothesized, the interaction between group power and proposed issue order was again significant, \(F(1, 364) = 13.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04\). Analyses of the simple effects revealed that Palestinians (members of the low-power group) were significantly more willing to accept the invitation to negotiate when it involved a consequential first order (\(M = 5.94, SD = 2.08\)) compared to a consequential later order (\(M = 2.77, SD = 2.04\), \(F(1, 117) = 9.06, p = .002, \eta^2 = .08\). In contrast, Israelis (members of the high-power group) were less willing to negotiate when the agenda involved a consequential first order (\(M = 4.52, SD = 2.03\)) as compared to a consequential later order (\(M = 5.04, SD = 1.93\), \(F(1, 245) = 4.28, p = .04, \eta^2 = .02\).

Convergent results emerged using the dichotomous measure of willingness to negotiate. We conducted a logistic regression with group power, proposed issue order, and their interaction entered. Consistent with the results on the continuous measure of willingness to negotiate, \(b = .003, \text{Exp}(B) = 1.00, p = .99\), had no effects on the decision to accept versus reject the invitation to negotiate. Group power was a significant predictor, \(b = -1.23, \text{Exp}(B) = .29, p < .001\), with Israelis showing increased overall willingness to accept invitations from the other side compared to Palestinians. Most importantly, the predicted interaction between group power and proposed issue order was again significant, \(b = -1.66, \text{Exp}(B) = .19, p < .001\). Whereas 59.2% of Palestinian participants receiving the consequential first letter accepted the invitation to negotiate, this dropped to 31.3% amongst those participants receiving the consequential later invitation, \(\chi^2(1) = 9.32, p = .002\). Conversely, Israeli participants were more likely to accept the consequential later invitation (78.0%) compared to the consequential first proposal (67.5%), \(\chi^2(1) = 3.36, p = .07\).

Discussion

Study 1 provided initial support for our prediction that group power position interacts with features of the negotiating agenda to influence willingness to negotiate. Specifically, members of the low-power Palestinian group were more willing to negotiate with Israel when the Israeli side suggested that negotiations would begin by discussing the most status quo—consequential issues (e.g., final borders of a Palestinian state) rather than leaving these issues until after discussion of less consequential issues on which the two sides were closer. In contrast, Jewish-Israelis, who reported feeling relatively advantaged compared to the Palestinian side, were more favorable toward invitations to negotiate that left discussion of more consequential issues until after discussion of issues with less consequence to the power balance. This was the case both on continuous measures of willingness to negotiate and the less powerful (but arguably more ecologically valid) dichotomous measure.

One limitation in this study was the use of distance in position as a proxy for consequentiality. Because we were concerned by the experimental demand implied in directly telling participants that the other side wanted to “leave more consequential issues until later” (in the consequential later condition), we took advantage of the fact that sides’ distance in position on the issues and the issues’ consequentiality are often associated and referred to the former in our manipulation. Although this mitigates the problem of demand, this operationalization also limits our ability to conclusively determine whether our effects are driven by distance in position on the issues or instead, as hypothesized, by their associated consequentiality. Conceptually, however, there is little reason to expect the low-power group (Palestinians in this study) to favor prioritizing issues such as final borders due to the greater disagreement between the sides on these issues per se. Rather, we reasoned that—because the low-power group favors larger changes to the status quo—Palestinians’ preference for prioritizing such issues was due to the issues’ greater potential to impact change (i.e., their consequentiality).

On the other hand, the reasons underlying the high-power group’s preference for delaying the discussion of consequential issues are less clear. For them, this preference may be due to the sides’ greater distance in position (i.e., driven by a desire to start

\(^2\) At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to think back to the invitation to negotiate and to answer a question that asked whether the other side had proposed to begin with the consequential issues first, then the less consequential issues, or the reverse agenda order. In this study and in all subsequent studies reported, only participants who identified the correct issue order they had received were included.

\(^3\) The variable relative power perceptions, included as a covariate, was not significantly associated with the willingness to negotiate (\(F < 1\)).
on the right foot with issues where the two sides’ position is closer) or due to these issues’ consequentiality (i.e., driven by perceptions of threat at changes to their advantaged position). To more firmly establish the role of consequentiality in our findings, we therefore sought to establish that the effect of order on willingness to negotiate is mediated by threat among the high-power group. If the high-power group’s preference for consequential later invitations is driven by concerns about starting on the right foot, then this preference should not be influenced by a sense of threat to its power. If, however, this preference is driven by an attempt to delay discussion of the consequential issues, then perceptions of threat should be importantly related. We also sought to demonstrate that the effect of order on willingness to negotiate is mediated by perceptions of stalling among the low-power group. Fears of stalling of changes to the status quo in the consequential later condition should only be relevant to low-power group members to the extent that their issue-order preferences are driven by concerns about consequentiality (rather than distance in position). This was one of our key goals in Study 2.

In addition to the interaction with proposed issue order, we also observed a significant main effect of power in this study, indicating that Israelis were generally more willing to negotiate than Palestinians were. In the specific Israeli–Palestinian context, the fact that Israelis exhibited a generally greater willingness to negotiate with Palestinians than vice versa is consistent with the well-documented greater frustration among Palestinians with the general failed history of negotiations between the two sides, beginning from the failed Oslo peace process onward (Abunimah, 2006; Tessler, 1994). Given the fact that low-power groups place greater importance on achieving changes to the status quo relative to high-power groups (Saguy et al., 2008; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005) and given the backdrop of a negotiating process that the low-power Palestinians perceive to have generally failed them, it is perhaps not surprising that the Palestinians in our study showed low overall support for negotiating with Israel. The high-power group, less concerned with implementing changes to the status quo which favors it, may be less affected by the history of failed negotiations. Critically, however, our central interaction thesis applied in spite of this backdrop. Even in a context where it was not very keen on negotiations altogether, the low-power group still preferred consequential first versus consequential later proposals, consistent with its heightened orientation toward changes to the status quo, whereas the high-power group, even when it exhibited greater overall willingness to negotiate, still preferred the proposal that delayed discussion of issues with a greater potential to influence its relative advantage.

Importantly, Study 1 investigated our hypotheses in the context of a real-world conflict that has been hotly contested and resistant to resolution. The fact that our experimental manipulation influenced willingness to negotiate in such a context is particularly telling given that individuals invested in the conflict are likely to have already formed fairly crystallized opinions about the other side, about the conflict more generally, and likely about negotiations as well (see Bar-Tal, 2007). Notwithstanding the benefits of testing our predictions in a highly relevant real-world context, however, examining only one context fails to rule out the possibility that any effects are due to context-specific factors such as the history of negotiations discussed earlier. In particular, Israelis and Palestinians have had some experience with resolution efforts that bore a strong resemblance to consequential later proposals. The Oslo Accords signed in 1993 between the two sides (Roy, 2002; Tessler, 1994) stipulated a 5-year interim period, which involved a gradual transfer of authority over issues such as health care and education, while explicitly postponing the resolution of more consequential issues (e.g., final borders, the status of Jerusalem) until the end of that period. The consequential issues remain, at the time of writing, unresolved, sustaining the uneven status quo. As such, it might be the case that Palestinians in particular, rather than low-power group members more generally, are averse to consequential later proposals, whereas Israelis specifically, rather than high-power groups generally, see benefits to them. To test our prediction that these effects would apply to high- and low-power groups more generally, Studies 2 and 3 were conducted in two different experimentally created intergroup contexts, unencumbered by a complex historical background.

**Study 2**

The goal of Study 2 was to test our predictions regarding the effect of order on willingness to negotiate in a context in which power was experimentally manipulated. We constructed a fictional conflict between experimental groups that shared some of the relevant features of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict but where participants had no experience of historical features of the negotiating process between the conflicting groups. This experimental context further enabled us to examine the responses of participants when group power was assigned at random. We hypothesized, consistent with Study 1, that low-power group members would be more willing to accept invitations that specified a consequential first issue order, whereas high-power group members would be more willing to accept invitations that specified a consequential later order. Thus, we predicted a two-way interaction between power and order on willingness to negotiate.

Furthermore, in Study 2, we examined our proposed mediating mechanism for each group. Members of low-power groups were expected to prefer consequential first invitations because they would judge such agendas as affording less potential for the high-power group to cynically stall negotiated changes to the status quo (thus serving as a sign that the high-power group was a serious negotiating partner). Members of high-power groups were expected to prefer consequential later invitations because they would feel less threatened by proposals delaying discussion of the issues with the greatest potential to affect their advantaged position (Bobo, 1999; Jackman, 1994, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Low-power group members proposing consequential first agendas might also provoke threat by seeming more assertive and forceful and less pliable in their attempt to enact changes to the status quo. Study 2, therefore, included measures of perceived stalling among the low-power group and of threat among the high-power group and examined their role as mediators of the effect of issue order on willingness to negotiate.

**Method**

**Participants.** Participants were 243 U.S. residents (50% female; M age = 31.32 years, SD = 11.21) recruited online through Amazon’s mTurk platform, a reliable and high-quality platform for the recruitment of diverse participant samples (Buhmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).
Procedure and materials. We asked participants to take part in “an interactive study on attitudes toward negotiation.” Participants were first provided with information about a conflict between two parties—the administration (high power) and the graduate students’ union (low power)—taking place at a fictional academic institution called Rambert University. Participants were told that after reading the information, they would be assigned to represent one of the two conflicting sides and asked to answer some questions about the events. To increase their attention to the details in the scenario, they were told that they would later engage in an online discussion with another participant representing the other side. The introductory information was as follows:

Rambert University is one of the top universities in the country. Just as in other large universities, Rambert’s graduate students serve as Teaching Assistants for Rambert’s undergraduate classes, for which they receive a stipend to help cover the costs of tuition and living expenses. Rambert’s graduate students are members of a Graduate Student Union that represents their interests in any issues that may arise at the University. The contracts for Teaching Assistants at Rambert University are supposed to be renegotiated, over a series of meetings between the Graduate Student Union and the Administration, every 6 years. The Teaching Assistants’ contract is nearly expired, and is supposed to be up for renegotiation.

After reading this information, participants were randomly assigned to play one of the two roles. In both cases, they were asked to imagine that they were selected to represent their respective side in any negotiations with the other side. Participants then read a description of the dispute between the two sides, modeled on an actual dispute that occurred at McGill University, a large university in Canada (“McGill TA Strike,” 2008). This information, identical across conditions, indicated that recently, the teaching assistants had grown increasingly unhappy with their situation, claiming the terms of their existing contract were worse than those of teaching assistants at comparable universities. The administration claimed that the teaching assistants’ contract was fair and that the teaching assistants’ demands were unreasonable and unrealistic. Participants were told that representatives of each side had submitted letters to the press denouncing the other side’s position and that both sides had come under pressure from the public to end their dispute and reach a resolution.

Thereafter, participants were told that the graduate student union was seeking to reach a settlement on each of the following issues: (a) salary, (b) overtime pay for tasks (such as grading papers) that require more work hours than agreed upon, (c) increased office space, and (d) increased number of sick days permissible. Participants were further told that the issues on which the positions of the two sides were furthest apart were salary and unpaid overtime, whereas their positions on increased office space and increased number of sick days permissible were closer. As in Study 1, this information about distance in positions served as a proxy for consequentiality, avoiding problems of experimental demand. A pretest experimentally established that giving participants information on differences in the distance in the two sides’ position across the set of issues described in the scenario (vs. not giving any such information) caused an increase in perceptions of these issues’ difference in status quo consequentiality, providing empirical support for the use of distance in position as a proxy for consequentiality. To further establish that the issues varied on consequentiality in the manner we expected, participants responded to the following item in a pretest:

Sometimes in conflict, some issues have the potential to affect the status quo more than others. Please rate on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) the extent to which you think each of the following items have the potential to affect the status quo between the two sides.

As expected, participants perceived the issues of salary ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.40$) and overtime pay ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.41$) as more consequential to the status quo than the issues designated as less consequential (office space, $M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.38$; number of sick days, $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.55$). A paired-samples $t$ test confirmed that this difference between the consequentiality of more versus less consequential issues (mean difference $= 1.84$, $SD = 1.50$) was significant, $t(291) = 21.19$, $p < .001$, and an ANOVA confirmed that this perceived difference in consequentiality of issues did not differ as a function of group power, $F(1, 292) = 1.09$, $p = .30$.

To assess perceptions of the power balance between the two sides, participants responded to the two following items: “In general, when you think of the Administration and the Graduate Student Union, who do you think has more power?” and “In the context of the current contract dispute, which side do you think has more power?” ($r = .61$, $p < .001$). Responses were rated on a scale from 1 (Definitely Administration) to 7 (Definitely Graduate Student Union). Subsequently, the procedure paralleled that used in Study 1: Participants were asked to imagine that, as a representative of their side, they had received an invitation to negotiate from the other side. The letter opened with a generally positive tone, and then turned to specify the proposed order of issue discussion. In the consequential first low-power condition, the letter read,

We are hoping to open this round of discussions by negotiating those issues on which there is least agreement between the two sides. We would like to begin by first discussing salary and overtime pay. After that, we can turn our attention to issues on which our positions are closer, such as office space and the number of sick days. That is, we hope to include the matters on which there is least, rather than most, agreement in the immediate agenda of any upcoming talks, in the hopes of best dealing with the challenges ahead.

The text of the consequential later invitation was identical, except that the issues to be discussed first were the less consequential ones (office space and the number of sick days) and those to be discussed later were the more consequential ones (salary and overtime pay).

After reading the letter, we assessed participants’ reactions using items similar to those used in Study 1. Unless otherwise indicated, responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). We assessed perceived stalling among the low-power group with the following two items: “The Administration seemed to be simply attempting to stall the negotiations and waste time” and “The Administration is trying to delay the Graduate Student Union’s attempts at getting an improved contract.” ($r = .77$, $p < .001$). To assess the extent to which high-power group members felt threatened by the low-power group’s invitation letter, members of the administration answered the following four items: “The Graduate Student Union seemed to pose a significant threat to the Administration,” “I found the Graduate Student Union’s plans to be aggressive,” “The Graduate Student Union is being too pushy in its attempts to get what it wants,” and “The Graduate Student Union is getting a bit ahead of itself” ($α = .76$).

To measure willingness to negotiate, we added the two following items to the one used in Study 1: “Do you feel any reluctance in accepting the other side’s invitation to negotiate?” (reverse-
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proposed issue order in Study 2. Error bars indicate

Figure 1.

Willingness to negotiate as a function of group power and proposed issue order in Study 2. Error bars indicate ±1 standard error.

Results

We first assessed participants’ perceptions of the power balance between the administration and the graduate student union groups. High- and low-power group members’ perceptions did not differ from one another, F(1, 243) < 1. Both high-power (M = 2.15, SD = 1.06) and low-power (M = 2.16, SD = 1.14) participants perceived the graduate student union to be the low-power group and the administration to be the high-power group. A one-sample t test confirmed that this score significantly differed from the midpoint (indicating equal power) for each group, high power: t (111) = −18.48, p < .001; low power: t (130) = −18.50, p < .001.

We subsequently ran a 2 (power position: low vs. high) × 2 (proposed issue order: consequential first vs. consequential later) ANOVA on the scale assessing willingness to negotiate. The analysis revealed no main effect of power, F(1, 239) = 1.11, p = .29, or order (F < 1); the expected interaction between power and order, however, was obtained, F(1, 239) = 14.84, p < .001, η2 = .06. In line with Palestinians from Study 1, members of the low-power group were significantly more willing to negotiate when they received consequential first invitations (M = 5.82, SD = 1.05) than consequential later invitations (M = 5.09, SD = 1.65). F(1, 239) = 9.64, p = .002, η2 = .04. Conversely, consistent with Israeli participants in Study 1, high-power group members were more willing to negotiate when they received consequential later invitations (M = 5.93, SD = 1.08) than consequential first invitations (M = 5.34, SD = 1.31), F(1, 239) = 5.63, p = .02, η2 = .02 (see Figure 1).

We next turned to examining our mediation hypotheses using Preacher and Hayes’s (2008) INDIRECT macro. We predicted that the interaction effect of power and order on willingness to negotiate would be mediated by perceptions of stalling among the low-power group and perceptions of threat among the high-power group. Among low-power group members, order had a significant effect on perceptions of stalling, with those participants in the consequential later condition perceiving more stalling than those in the consequential first condition, b = .85, t(130) = 3.34, p = .001. Additionally, perceptions of stalling exerted a significant effect decreasing willingness to negotiate, b = −.70, t(130) = −11.49, p < .001. Supportive of our mediation hypothesis, the effect of order on willingness to negotiate, b = −.72, t(130) = −2.91, p = .004, became nonsignificant, b = −.13, t(130) = −.71, p = .48, once stalling was taken into account, and the indirect effect of order on willingness to negotiate through stalling was significant (indirect effect = −.59, 95% CI [−.94, −.28]; see Figure 2A). Furthermore, as expected, order had a significant effect on perceptions of threat among high-power group members, with those participants in the consequential first condition perceiving more threat than those in the consequential later condition, b = −.49, t(111) = −2.27, p = .03. In addition, perceptions of threat exerted a significant effect decreasing willingness to negotiate, b = −.55, t(111) = −6.31, p < .001. Indicating mediation, the effect of order on willingness to negotiate, b = .60, t(111) = 2.60, p = .01, became nonsignificant, b = .33, t(111) = −.71, p = .11, once threat was taken into account, and the indirect effect of order on willingness to negotiate via threat was significant (indirect effect = .27, 95% CI [.04, .58]; see Figure 2B).

Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicated and extended the findings from Study 1. Using an experimental procedure in which participants were randomly assigned to represent the role of either a high-power group or a low-power group, this study established the generalizability, as well as the validity, of the interactive effect of power and order on willingness to negotiate.

Study 2 also provided initial evidence for the mediating mechanisms by which proposed issue order exerts its effects among low- and high-power group members. As expected, perceptions of stalling contributed to low-power group members’ rejection of consequential later agendas, suggesting that their sensitivity to threat in the status quo indeed drives their preference for consequential first agendas. Conversely, high-power group members’ preference for consequential later agendas was driven by threat experienced when low-power group members proposed to first discuss those consequential issues at the heart of their power advantage. Importantly, these mediation findings are supportive of our contention that it is the differences in the consequentiality of the issues that drove the effects, and not in sides’ distance in position on these issues per se. If low-power group members were responding solely to disagreement in the two sides’ position on the issues, they should not perceive the other side as attempting to stall when they propose to begin with issues on which the two sides’ position are closer (and which are thus perhaps likely to proceed more smoothly). Rather, this finding seems much more consistent with our hypothesis that low-power group members are sensitive to the possibility that proposing to begin with less consequential issues is a ploy on the high-power group’s part to delay changes to the status quo. Similarly, if high-power group members were responding to the distance in position on the issues rather than their associated consequentiality, perceptions of threat to power would not be expected to account for their consequential later preference. In Study 3, we sought to further clarify our operationalization of the issues’ consequentiality by omitting any reference to the distance in position on the issues.
One goal of Study 3 was to further establish the generalizability of our results by examining a more conflictual experimental context. Although the relatively collaborative Rambert context provides a rather conservative test of our issue-order predictions, it speaks less to situations in which the two sides’ relationship is characterized by stable enmity and disregard. Study 3 introduced another scenario, describing a conflict between two groups in a fictional country, bearing resemblance to the heated animosity between Israelis and Palestinians. Furthermore, although we obtained initial support in Study 2 for our mediation hypotheses, we did not measure perceptions of stalling and threat simultaneously among each group. As such, we were unable to rule out threat as a potential mediator among the low-power group and stalling as a potential mediator among the high-power group. In Study 3, we measured stalling and threat for each of the two groups. We also considered a possible role for surprise in mediating our issue-order effects. Specifically, low- and high-power group members might be surprised at proposals from the other side that run counter to their expectations of their counterpart’s motives. For example, low-power group members might be positively surprised when high-power group members propose to begin with consequential issues, which might contribute to their increased willingness to negotiate. Similarly, the high-power group might be pleasantly surprised and perceive their low-powered counterpart as more cooperative when it proposes to leave discussion of consequential issues till later (Saguy et al., 2008). As such, we measured participants’ surprise in response to the other side’s proposal in Study 3.

We also sought in this study to clarify our manipulation of consequentiality. To that end, we established in a pretest which issues in our scenario were perceived to be of low versus high consequentiality. To that end, we introduced an intergroup context that is comparatively collaborative: Despite the power difference, both sides (administration and graduate students) ultimately work together and derive some benefit from one another. In such contexts and in the absence of a long, negative history of negotiations, both high- and low-power groups may express a high willingness to come to the table and resolve their conflict, even if they still prefer consequential later and consequential first agenda proposals, respectively.

Study 3

Figure 2. A: Mediational model of the effects of proposed issue order on willingness to negotiate among low-power group members in Study 2, through perceptions of stalling. B: Mediational model of the effects of proposed issue order on willingness to negotiate among high-power group members in Study 2, through perceptions of threat. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Also worth noting was the absence of a main effect for power in Study 2. Thus, unlike the case of the Israeli–Palestinian context in Study 1, where Israelis were generally more willing to negotiate than Palestinians, the high- and low-power groups in our Rambert scenario indicated equal willingness to negotiate. Indeed, the overall willingness to negotiate was quite high in the present scenario across groups and conditions. This may be because the scenario used in this study involved an intergroup context that is comparatively collaborative: Despite the power difference, both sides (administration and graduate students) ultimately work together and derive some benefit from one another. In such contexts and in the absence of a long, negative history of negotiations, both high- and low-power groups may express a high willingness to come to the table and resolve their conflict, even if they still prefer consequential later and consequential first agenda proposals, respectively.

Method

Participants. Three hundred American participants (52.7% female; M age = 32.71 years, SD = 12.53) were recruited online through Amazon’s mTurk platform.

Procedure and materials. Participants received materials in which a conflict between two fictitious groups (A and B) was described. The groups were described as involved in conflict for many years because each wanted control over the same area: a piece of land they both resided in, called Raga. Each group was said to believe that Raga was its home, with each asserting a rightful historic claim to the entire land. Participants were further told that escalating tensions between the two sides led to a devastating war, which Group A had won. Group A had gained control over the land of Raga and established its own state. Members of Group B were said to still live in Raga, having lost much of the land and living under the general control of Group A. Specifically, Group A was described as controlling fundamental resources such as Raga’s large oil fields and water reservoirs (highly valuable given Raga’s dry climate), in addition to an area popular in the winter with some tourists and a small area dense with olives (exported for profit). The people of Group B were described as living with relative economic difficulty and as feeling angry and wronged by their situation, frequently leading to tensions and hostilities between the two sides.

The resources (oil, water, tourist area, and olive groves) discussed were later used as the four issues to be negotiated between
the two sides. We determined in a pretest that these issues differed in their perceived consequentiality using the same procedure used in Study 2. As assumed, pretest participants perceived the issues of oil (M = 6.48, SD = 1.01) and water resources (M = 6.10, SD = 1.17) as more consequential to the status quo than the issues of tourist areas (M = 4.35, SD = 1.70) and olive trees (M = 4.57, SD = 1.61). A paired-samples t test confirmed that this difference between the consequentiality of more versus less consequential issues (mean difference = 1.82, SD = 1.56) was significant, t(240) = 18.08, p < .001. This perceived difference in consequentiality of issues did not differ as a function of group power (F < 1).

After reading the history of the conflict, participants were, as in Study 2, randomly assigned to represent either Group A (high power) or Group B (low power) and were first asked about their power perceptions with the following item: “In general, when you think of Group A and Group B, who do you think has more power?” (1 = definitely Group A, 7 = definitely Group B). Because the definition of power on which we based our theorizing involves increased access to resources and a more favorable position in the current status quo, we further asked participants, using the same scale, to indicate which group they believed benefited more from the status quo, using the following three items: “Which side benefits most from the status quo between the parties?”, “Which side in the conflict has a more desirable current state of affairs?”, and “At present, which side holds more of the resources outside of the resources that the two groups desire?” (α = .73). These three items correlated with our original item about relative power to a high extent (r = .60, p < .001), and the four items formed a reliable (α = .82) and unidimensional scale, which we used to assess overall power perceptions.

We used the same methodology as in previous studies. In the consequential first letter, participants read that the other side proposed to begin with the issues of the oil fields and water resources and then address the issues of the tourist areas and olive trees. In the consequential later letter, the order was reversed. Neither the letter nor the information given about the different issues gave information about the issues’ consequentiality or the sides’ distance in position. Thus, participants were provided simply with the agenda proposed by the other side.

We next assessed perceived stalling and perceived threat, this time applying both measures to each of the high-power and low-power groups. Perceived stalling was measured with the same two items used in Study 2 (r = .74, p < .001). Perceptions of threat were assessed with the four items from Study 2, in addition to these two items: “The other side is playing hardball” and “Our control would be weakened if we accepted the other side’s plans as they stand” (α = .87). We also assessed participants’ surprise at the proposal received from the counterpart, using the following two items: “I found the other side’s plans surprising” and “The other side’s proposal ran counter to my expectations of them” (α = .80). To assess willingness to negotiate, we used the same three items we had used in Study 3, in addition to the following item: “I would refuse to accept the other side’s invitation to negotiate unless I could alter the terms of the discussion.” (α = .88). We also assessed willingness to negotiate using the dichotomous item we had used in Study 1.

### Results

We first assessed participants’ perceptions of the power balance between the two sides. Both sides perceived Group A as the relatively powerful side (for Group A: M = 1.29, SD = .70; for Group B: M = 1.65, SD = 1.03). For each of the high-power group, t(156) = -47.8, p < .001, and the low-power group, t(140) = -23.1, p < .001, this perception differed significantly from the midpoint of 4 indicating equality. Although both sides saw Group A as benefiting from the status quo, the high-power side perceived a greater advantage for its group, F(1, 298) = 12.92, p = .001. To ensure this difference did not account for any effects, we controlled for this variable in all remaining analyses.

A two-way ANOVA with group power and order as the independent variables and willingness to negotiate as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect of group power, F(1, 297) = 12.50, p < .001, η² = .04, indicating that on average, the low-power Group B (M = 4.92, SD = 1.36) was more willing to negotiate than the higher power Group A (M = 4.37, SD = 1.68). The main effect of order was not statistically significant (F < 1). As hypothesized and replicating Study 2, the interaction between group power and order was significant, F(1, 297) = 10.10, p = .002, η² = .03. Low-power group members who received the consequential first invitation were significantly more willing to negotiate (M = 5.21, SD = 1.35) than those who had received the consequential later invitation (M = 4.63, SD = 1.32), F(1, 297) = 5.55, p = .034, η² = .02. Conversely, high-power group members who received the consequential first invitation were substantially less willing to negotiate (M = 4.07, SD = 1.74) than those who had received the consequential later invitation (M = 4.66, SD = 1.58), F(1, 297) = 5.65, p = .018, η² = .02.

We then conducted a logistic regression with the dichotomous measure of willingness to negotiate (0 = reject, 1 = accept) as the outcome. Power had a marginally significant effect on willingness to negotiate, b = -.50, Exp (b) = 1.65, p = .05, with the low-power group showing greater overall willingness to negotiate. As expected, the interaction effect was significant, b = 2.32, Exp (b) = .10, p < .001. Follow-up chi-square analyses revealed that for the low-power group, 90% of participants assigned to the consequential first condition accepted the invitation to negotiate, compared to 63% of participants in the consequential later condition, χ²(1) = 14.31, p < .001. For the high-power group, 59.0% of invitations were accepted in the consequential first condition, compared to 73.4% in the consequential later condition, χ²(1) = 3.66, df = 1, p = .06.

We next turned to examine our mediation hypotheses. We predicted that the effect of order on willingness to negotiate would be mediated by perceptions of stalling (and not threat) among the low-power group and by perceptions of threat (and not stalling) among the high-power group. We were also interested in the possibility that surprise might mediate part of the issue-order effect for each group. We first assessed, using one-way ANOVAs, whether proposed issue order influenced each of the various potential mediators for each of the two groups. For the low-power group, there was a significant effect of proposed issue order on perceptions of stalling, F(1, 139) = 5.73, p = .02, but not on perceptions of threat or surprise (Fs < 1). For the high-power group, there was a significant effect of proposed issue order on perceptions of threat, F(1, 156) = 4.35, p = .04, but not on
perceptions of stalling or surprise ($F$s < 1). Thus, surprise was not affected by proposed issue order for either group, failing the first condition for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). We assessed mediation by conducting multigroup structural equation modeling (using LISREL 8.80) with each of the high-power and low-power groups, with order as the independent variable, perceptions of stalling and of threat as the mediating variables, and willingness to negotiate as the dependent variable. We then assessed the significance of the simple indirect effects from order to willingness to negotiate through each of stalling and threat for each group.

The fit of the overall multigroup model was excellent, $\chi^2(2) = 0.00, p = 1.00$, root-mean-square error of approximation < .001 (see Figure 3). Among low-power group members, order (consequential first = 0; consequential later = 1) was a significant predictor of stalling ($b = .55, t = 2.40, p = .02$), but not of threat ($b = .06, t = 0.27, p = .79$). Stalling predicted willingness to negotiate ($b = -.41, t = -5.30, p < .001$), as did perceptions of threat ($b = -.30, t = -3.65, p < .001$). As predicted, whereas the specific indirect effect from order to willingness to negotiate through stalling was significant (indirect effect = -.23, $t = -2.18, p = .03$), the parallel indirect pathway through threat was not (indirect effect = -.02, $t = -0.27, p = .79$). Among high-power group members, order was a significant predictor of threat ($b = -.49, t = -2.30, p = .02$), but not of stalling ($b = -.35, t = -1.81, p = .07$). Perceptions of threat subsequently predicted willingness to negotiate ($b = -.80, t = -8.98, p < .001$), whereas perceptions of stalling did not ($b = -.09, t = -0.90, p = .36$). Finally, whereas threat was a significant mediator of the effect of order on willingness to negotiate (indirect effect = .39, $t = 2.22, p = .03$), stalling was not (indirect effect = .03, $t = 0.81, p = .42$). In order to further confirm that the mediating processes were different amongst high- versus low-power group members, we set parameter constraints in order to test the degree of deterioration observed if mediating paths in the model for each group were set to equality. Indeed, when these paths were constrained to equality, we observed significant deterioration in model fit, $\chi^2(10) = 35.64, p < .001$, suggesting that the two groups’ mediating mechanisms differed from one another.

Discussion

As in Studies 1 and 2 but in a new experimental context, members of the low-power group were more willing to negotiate when their high-powered counterpart proposed to begin with the more consequential issues first, whereas members of the high-power group exhibited the reverse issue-order preference. Extending the conclusions from these previous studies, we observed that the mediating mechanisms of the effects of order on willingness to negotiate differed for each group. Perceptions of stalling (but not threat) led to low-power group members’ rejection of consequential later proposals, whereas perceptions of threat (but not of stalling) led to high-power group members’ preference for these proposals over ones in which the low-power group wanted to address the most consequential issues immediately. Finally, the manipulation used in this study was improved over previous studies. Using a pretest, we determined that participants naturally perceived the issues to differ in their status quo consequentiality in the manner we had expected. Thus, we gave participants in the study no further information about the issues, making it even less plausible that our use of distance in positions as a proxy for consequentiality had been responsible for our earlier effects.

Whereas the willingness to negotiate had been equal (and high) across both groups in the relatively collaborative university context developed in Study 2, we observed a slightly greater willingness to negotiate among low-power group members relative to high-power group members in the hostile, competitive scenario of Study 3. In the current scenario, it was made clear that the low-power group suffered from an especially dire situation in terms of resource control. As such, low-power group members may have been relatively keen to negotiate as negotiations represent an avenue through which to gain access to needed resources. Moreover, given that this scenario presented a novel conflict between the two groups, low-power group members in the present study (unlike Palestinians in Study 1) were not influenced by the backdrop of a long, negative history of failed negotiations that may otherwise have dampened their enthusiasm for negotiating. Conversely, as the side in control of the vast majority of resources (and relatively less affected by the cooperation of their counterpart than...
the high-power administration in Study 2), the high-power side may have perceived relatively fewer benefits to negotiating. Most critically to our hypothesizing and consistent across all studies, the interaction between group power and issue-order preferences was again reliable. That is, despite differences in mean willingness to negotiate across studies, the low-power group showed the consistent preference for consequential first over consequential later invitations to negotiate, and the high-power group favored the reverse.

Study 4

In Study 4, we were interested in extending our assessment of issue-order preferences as a function of group power by assessing not only participants’ attitudes toward negotiating proposals received from their counterpart but also their behavior when they were themselves asked to organize a negotiating agenda. As such, using the conflictual experimental scenario we developed in Study 3, we asked participants to list the various issues—which differed in consequentiality—in the order that they preferred to address them in any negotiations with their counterpart. That is, we aimed to examine whether—when given the opportunity to determine the negotiating agenda themselves—they would sort the more versus less consequential issues in a manner consistent with our theorizing. Such a finding would also provide us with behavioral evidence for our proposed issue-order inclinations. Consistent with our reasoning that low-power group members should be eager to advance major revisions to the existing status quo arrangement, we expected them to include highly consequential issues earlier in the negotiating agenda, allowing them to immediately discuss those issues with the greatest potential to influence the balance of power. Conversely, in line with our theorizing that high-power group members should be threatened at the prospect of large revisions to the status quo, we predicted that they would be more likely to select less consequential issues at the forefront of the agenda, delaying the discussion of more consequential issues.

Method

Participants. One hundred and seventy-nine American participants (63.1% male; M age = 27.6 years, SD = 10.42) were recruited online through Amazon’s mTurk platform.

Procedure and materials. Participants received the same description of the conflict between Group A and Group B that participants in Study 3 had received. After reading the history of the conflict, participants were, as in Study 3, randomly assigned to represent either Group A (high power) or Group B (low power). Subsequently, participants were asked about their power perceptions with the same items used in Study 3 (α = .81). Finally, participants were asked to rank-order the four issues (oil resources, water resources, tourist area, and olive groves) in the sequence that they would like to discuss them in negotiations with the other side. As in Study 3, no mention of distance in position or consequentiality of the issues was made.

Results

We first assessed participants’ perceptions of the power balance between the two sides. Consistent with Study 3, both sides perceived Group A as the relatively powerful side (for Group A: M = 1.35, SD = .60; for Group B: M = 1.61, SD = .98). For each of the high-power group, t(84) = −40.6, p < .001, and the low-power group, t(93) = −23.6, p < .001, this perception differed significantly from the midpoint of 4 indicating equality. Just as in Study 3, although both groups perceived Group A to be the side with the very clear power advantage, high-power group members saw their group as slightly more powerful than low-power group members did, F(1, 178) = 4.30, p = .04.

We next assessed the manner in which high- and low-power group members arranged the negotiating agenda. As expected, high- and low-power group members ordered the issues in very different ways. Whereas 70.3% of low-power group members chose a consequential issue (oil or water resources) to appear first in the agenda, only 36.2% of high-power group members chose a consequential issue as their first choice, χ²(1) = 17.64, p < .001. This represented a significant deviation from randomness among each group, in the theoretical direction expected, low power: χ²(1) = 15.04, p < .001; high power: χ²(1) = 4.25, p = .04. We next considered the proportion of participants who chose to leave discussion of both consequential issues until the end (i.e., Positions 3 and 4 in the negotiating agenda). Again, we observed a significant difference as a function of group power. Whereas 57.6% of high-power group members placed both consequential issues at the end of the negotiating agenda, only 23% of low-power group members chose to do so, χ²(1) = 21.93, p < .001. We also considered the proportion of participants who chose to prioritize discussion of consequential issues by placing both consequential issues up front (i.e., in Positions 1 and 2 in the negotiating agenda). Whereas 60.4% of low-power group members chose such an ordering, only 34.1% of high-power group members selected this issue order, χ²(1) = 12.21, p < .001.

Discussion

Study 4 extended our findings regarding issue-order preferences to the behavioral domain. When asked to rank-order the various issues at stake in the conflict between their two groups, low- and high-power group members behaved, as hypothesized, very differently. Specifically, low-power group members, whom we expected to be relatively eager to achieve changes to the status quo, tended to prioritize the discussion of highly consequential issues that held a greater potential for impacting the existing relationship. In fact, well over half the low-power group members placed both consequential issues in the first two slots. In contrast, high-power group members—whom we expected to be threatened at considering changes to their relatively advantaged status quo—were much less likely to choose to begin with consequential issues. In fact, more than half of high-power group members placed both consequential issues in the last two slots.

Our goal in Study 5 was to further examine the hypothesized process among the high-power group and to examine potential moderation of our effects.

Study 5

In Study 5, we returned to examine the high-power context in further detail. We theorized that the high-power group’s preference for leaving consequential issues until later was due to its desire to
delay changes to the advantaged status quo benefitting its group. As such, our interpretation is that this pattern reflects group-interested motivations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Indeed, our findings suggest that threat upon receiving a consequential first proposal from the other side is a significant mediator for high-power groups, consistent with such theorizing. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the high-power group’s preference for leaving consequential issues until later may be motivated by less group-interested motivations. For example, the high-power group might prefer leaving consequential issues until later because it anticipates that consequential issues may be more problematic for both sides to negotiate successfully and serve as a roadblock in negotiations. Given its preference for dealing with consequential issues immediately, such reasoning does not apply to the low-power group. As such, we sought in Study 5 to obtain more support for the role of group interest in the high-power group’s issue-order preference. We returned to the real-world Israeli–Palestinian conflict and introduced a moderator for the effect of proposed issue order on willingness to negotiate. Specifically, we measured which proposed agenda was perceived as more likely to influence the status quo in the Palestinians’ favor. We predicted that the consequential later preference would be upheld among those who perceived that agenda order to be beneficial to their group. However, among those who perceived this agenda as more likely to diminish Israel’s advantage, we expected the consequential later preference not to be observed and perhaps even to be reversed. Such a moderation effect would lend support to our theorizing that the high-power preference for consequential later is importantly driven by desire to maintain power.

Method

Participants. Participants were 104 Jewish-Israeli residents (60.8% female; M age = 27.00 years, SD = 9.85) who were recruited while riding the train in Israel in Spring 2012.

Procedure and materials. Participants followed the same general procedure as in previous studies. They were first asked about their perception of the power dynamics, with the same items used in Study 3, in addition to the following item: “If nothing were to change with respect to the control that each side has today over resources, which side would be happier?” All items were measured on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating Definitely Palestinians and 7 indicating Definitely Israel (α = .71). Next, participants were asked to imagine themselves playing the role of an Israeli negotiator receiving an invitation to negotiate from the head of a Palestinian negotiating delegation. In the consequential first condition, the Palestinian negotiator suggested discussing the issues of the status of Jerusalem, the right of return, and final borders of a Palestinian state first, and then discussing the issues of water arrangements and the distribution of agricultural lands. In a second condition, the order of issues was reversed. As in Study 3, participants were given no information on the sides’ distance in position on the various issues (at the end of the study, after assessing willingness to negotiate, participants rated their perceptions of the status quo consequentiality of the issues). We measured perceptions of threat (α = .87), perceptions of stalling (r = .83, p < .001), and willingness to negotiate (α = .86) with the same items used in Study 3.

Finally, we added an item about the potential of each agenda to benefit Palestinians using the following item: “Which negotiation plan has a better chance of increasing Palestinians’ relative power compared to Israel?” The response options were as follows: (a) “A negotiation plan in which water arrangements and agricultural land distribution are discussed first, followed by the right of return, the status of Jerusalem, and final borders” or (b) “A negotiation plan in which the right of return, the status of Jerusalem, and final borders are discussed first, followed by water arrangements and agricultural land distribution.”

Results

As in Study 1, Israelis perceived their side to be the more powerful one, enjoying a favorable status quo relative to Palestinians (M = 5.15, SD = 1.02), and a one-sample t test confirmed that their perceptions differed significantly from the midpoint of 4, t(104) = 11.6, p < .001. Validating our choice of issues, participants rated the issues of water arrangements (M = 4.43, SD = 1.55) and agricultural land distribution (M = 4.64, SD = 1.62) as less consequential than the issues of the Palestinian right of return (M = 6.13, SD = 1.21), the status of Jerusalem (M = 6.38, SD = 1.22), and final borders (M = 6.28, SD = 1.32). A paired-samples t test confirmed that, as expected, the two sets of issues differed in terms of their consequentiality, t(103) = 10.17, p < .001.

We subsequently examined the effect of order on willingness to negotiate. Israelis were more willing to negotiate when the Palestinians proposed to leave the more consequential issues until later (M = 4.05, SD = 1.72) compared to when they proposed to begin with them up front (M = 3.42, SD = 1.51), F(1, 104) = 3.93, p = .05, η² = .04. The same pattern was obtained for the dichotomous willingness item, with 86.5% of participants accepting the invitation to negotiate in the consequential later condition, compared to 67.9% in the consequential first condition (χ² = 5.16, df = 1, p = .02).

We again employed Preacher and Hayes’s (2008) INDIRECT macro for probing indirect effects using bootstrapping in order to test our proposed mediating mechanism. We entered proposed issue order as the independent variable and willingness to negotiate as the dependent variable, with perceptions of stalling and perceptions of threat as mediators. Proposed issue order exerted a significant effect on perceptions of threat (b = −.80, t = −3.05, p = .003), with Israeli participants in the less consequential first condition perceiving less threat compared to the consequential first condition. Stalling, on the other hand, was not affected by proposed issue order (b = −.49, t = −1.43, p = .16). Both stalling (b = −.34, t = −3.99, p < .001) and perceptions of threat (b = −.45, t = −4.07, p < .001) subsequently predicted willingness to negotiate. Nevertheless, whereas the indirect pathway from order to willingness to negotiate through perceived stalling was not significant (b = .16, z = 1.35, p = .18, 95% CI [−.024, .449]), perceptions of threat were a significant mediator (b = .35, z = 2.46, p = .01, 95% CI [.107, .725]).

Finally, we turned to our question regarding Israelis’ perceptions of the two different issue orders’ likelihood of improving Palestinians’ relative power. As expected, 65.7% of Israelis perceived that the consequential first issue order was the more likely to improve Palestinians’ relative power, whereas the remaining 34.3% in fact perceived the consequential later order as the more
likely to improve their relative power. Next, we turned to assessing the effect of issue order on willingness to negotiate for each category using Hayes and Matthes’s (2009) MODPROBE macro. As predicted, there was a significant interaction between proposed issue order and our item assessing perceptions of which of the agendas would increase Palestinians’ relative power ($b = -1.66$, $t = -2.26$, $p = .03$, $R^2$ change = .05; see Figure 4). Indeed, the preference for beginning with less consequential issues first and leaving more consequential issues till later was especially strong among those Israelis who perceived the consequential first agenda as more likely to increase Palestinians’ power relative to Israel ($b = 1.30$, $t = 3.21$, $p = .002$). In fact, among the minority of Israelis who perceived the consequential later agenda as being more likely to increase Palestinians’ power, no issue-order effect was observed. If anything, the (nonsignificant) trend was in the reverse direction, with those participants more willing to negotiate in the consequential first condition ($b = -.37$, $t = -0.66$, $p = .55$).

**Discussion**

Study 5 provided further support for the notion that high-power groups’ preference for consequential later proposals from the other side are driven by perceptions of threat (as opposed to perceptions of stalling). Moreover, this study was conducted using our improved manipulation of issue order, with the different issues (which participants perceived to differ in consequentiality) and issue orders presented without any extra information provided. As such, this study further bolstered our conclusion that the effects of proposed issue order on perceptions of threat and the willingness to negotiate among high-power group members are indeed a function of differences in the issues’ perceived status quo consequentiality.

Moreover, Study 5 provided further support for our theorizing that group-interested motivations to avoid major changes to their favorable status quo drive the effects of issue order for high-power groups. If their preference for consequential later proposals and agenda orders is based on the desire to hold onto power and its associated favorable status quo, then our effects should be strongest among Israelis perceiving the consequential first proposal as more likely to lead to an increase in Palestinians’ power relative to Israel. Conversely, if group-interested motivations are irrelevant to the issue-order preferences among high-power groups, perceptions about the plans’ effects on relative power should matter little. In fact, perceived effects of the agenda plans on relative power did matter: Israelis’ overall consequential later preference was significantly strengthened among those perceiving the consequential first to increase Palestinians’ relative power. Among those who perceived the consequential later proposal as more likely to increase Palestinians’ relative power, there was a slight (though nonsignificant) preference to deal with consequential issues first. This finding, in combination with our consistently observed mediation of the consequential later preference through increased threat, provides compelling support for our assumption that this preference is due to the desire to protect the group’s power advantage.

**General Discussion**

Across five studies among both real-world and experimental groups, we obtained convergent and consistent support for our hypotheses: Power interacted with proposed issue order to influence the willingness to negotiate. Low-power group members were more willing to enter negotiations when the high-power side proposed to deal with more consequential issues first, followed by less consequential issues. Conversely, high-power group members were more willing to enter negotiations when the low-power side proposed the reverse issue order. We also observed that these agenda-order preferences extended to group members’ own behavior: When participants were asked to arrange a negotiating agenda for negotiations with the other side, group power strongly influenced the issue order chosen in a manner consistent with our theorizing. This represents the first empirical evidence that group power orients individuals toward (status quo–relevant) features of the negotiation process to predict willingness to negotiate. Moreover, we uncovered different psychological mechanisms by which features of negotiating agenda proposals received from the other side affect members of high- and low-power groups. Low-power group members rejected offers to negotiate to the extent that the offer signaled the other side’s attempt to stall progress toward change, whereas high-power group members rejected offers to negotiate when the offers were perceived to pose a threat to their advantage. Further consistent with our theorizing, high-power group members were especially likely to reject negotiations beginning with consequential issues when they perceived this agenda as likely to diminish their power advantage.

These results underscore the importance of considering the power dynamics between groups when studying intergroup negotiations, particularly when considering individuals’ willingness to enter these negotiations in the first place: an outcome very rarely considered in the literature (Bear, 2011; Christen, 2004). Thus, our findings suggest that group power influences the type of negotiations group members are willing to consider, with low-power group members favoring negotiations that seem to have a greater potential to influence the status quo and high-power group members favoring negotiations that seem to minimize the potential for major changes. At the same time, our findings suggest that power may not determine whether or not group members are open to the
principle of negotiating more generally. We did not obtain a consistent pattern when examining the main effect of power on willingness to negotiate. Members of the low-power Palestinian group were less willing to negotiate, on average, than members of the high-power Israeli group in Study 1. We observed no significant difference in overall willingness to negotiate in the conflict between the high-power administration and the low-power graduate students in Study 2. In Study 3, the low-power Group B members were more willing to negotiate than the high-power Group A members.

This pattern of results is consistent with our reasoning that the factors influencing groups’ overall decisions to pursue negotiations are manifold and complex. Thus, we suspect that Palestinians, in spite of their low-power position and the fact that negotiations serve as a potential avenue to gaining access to needed resources, were less willing to negotiate than Israelis due to their well-documented frustration with a negotiating process that has gone on for several decades without yielding the anticipated returns. As members of the high-power group—less concerned with implementing changes to the status quo (which favors their side; Saguy et al., 2008)—Israels may have been less affected by the backdrop of failed negotiations and thus more willing to negotiate. In contrast, members of the low-power group in the Raga scenario in Study 3—presented with a novel conflict scenario and absent a prolonged history of frustrating negotiations—may have been more eager to negotiate than their high-power group counterparts because of their desire to improve the situation of their group, which they were told was especially bleak. Given their control over the vast majority of resources, high-power group members in this context may have perceived the potential benefits of negotiating to be relatively modest. Finally, in the more collaborative university context developed in Study 2, the willingness to negotiate was generally high amongst members of both the high-power administration and the low-power graduate students. In this setting (and unlike the other two contexts), the groups were not engaged in violent conflict, and both sides ultimately worked together toward the efficient running of a university from which they both derived benefits. This may have explained the lack of overall difference between the two groups in the willingness to negotiate. Nevertheless, in this context as in all others considered, the type of negotiation mattered: The low-power group made more positive attributions toward the other side and was more willing to negotiate when its counterpart offered to leave with consequential issues up front, and the high-power group showed the same pattern when its counterpart offered to leave those consequential issues until later.

Our hypothesized findings were observed even in the face of factors that might have pushed the effects in the reverse direction. For example, low-power group members may see strategic advantages to consequential later proposals, as these may allow them to gain concessions on big requests by first obtaining consent on smaller demands (Ciardini, 1997; Freedman & Fraser, 1966). Similarly, ceding early on less consequential issues might provide low-power groups greater moral license (Monin & Miller, 2001) to stand firm on issues with more consequence to the status quo. Although our participants nevertheless showed the preferences we expected, these potential countervailing processes should be explored in future research.

Future research may also consider potential boundary conditions of our observed effects. One important factor to consider is participants’ perceptions regarding the power dynamics at play. Individuals’ perception of the legitimacy of the power dynamics is likely to influence the pattern of relationships we observed for both low-power and high-power group members. For example, when low-power group members perceive the power dynamic to be illegitimate, they are less likely to justify and more likely to challenge the system (Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Under these conditions, they may be especially attuned to stalling and particularly eager to deal immediately with consequential issues. This tendency may grow even stronger when the power relations are further considered to be unstable and impermeable: Indeed, under these conditions, low-power group members are most likely to compete for resources and take action to advance their group’s position (Ellemers et al., 1993; Turner, 1999). These factors should also affect high-power group members’ preferences. High-power group members who perceive their advantage to be illegitimate may be more willing to discuss consequential issues (see Saguy et al., 2008), even if that opens up the possibility of concessions. Perceptions of power instability are also likely to be critical among high-power group members, who are likely to experience threat (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005) and reduced approach motivation (Sliite, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011) and to become more vigilant to details of the proposed agenda (see Saguy & Kteily, 2011), including the issue order proposed. Under these conditions, they might be even less likely to favor discussion of consequential issues at the core of their power advantage. Conversely, to the extent that individuals feel secure and confident in their overall power position, they may be more approach oriented (Sliite et al., 2011) and more open to discussing consequential issues.

Another outstanding question relates to the likelihood of our findings extending to more balanced contexts, in which the power difference is not so stark. Although we set out to deal with asymmetric intergroup contexts, in which one group is necessarily higher in power than another, the extent of power asymmetry may still impact the degree to which the sides are influenced by proposed issue order. In the contexts considered thus far—especially the Israeli–Palestinian and Raga contexts—the power asymmetry was especially stark. In the Raga scenario, for example, the high-power group was in control of each of the oil, water, tourist areas, and olive tree resources. As such, high-power group members may have seen only a small potential upside (and large potential downside) to negotiating, increasing their likelihood of perceiving negotiations as threatening, particularly those prioritizing more consequential issues. If, for example, the high-power group controlled only 60% of resources, then perhaps it might be more eager to discuss consequential issues with a view to expanding its advantage. The low-power group might then also feel it had more to lose and lessen its insistence on discussing consequential issues up front.

Similarly, the extent to which our findings extend to more integrative intergroup negotiations (i.e., negotiations with a clear potential for win–win resolutions) is another fruitful avenue for future research. Although most multiple-issue negotiations involve at least some potential for integrative trades across issues (De Dreu et al., 2009), the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is considered a paradigm case of zero-sum conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000; Kelman, 1987).
Similarly, both experimental scenarios we developed did not explicitly suggest any potential for mutual gains or win–win solutions. Two sides involved in negotiations with clearer integrative potential may focus more on structuring the negotiations to maximize potential mutually beneficial tradeoffs. For example, they might show greater willingness to deal with several issues at once (i.e., simultaneous bargaining), tying compromise by their side on an issue they value less than their counterpart to compromise by the other side on an issue they value relatively more (i.e., logrolling; Froman & Cohen, 1970). In such circumstances, insistence on a particular issue order may be less rational, and both sides may be more flexible in the agenda structures they are willing to consider. Similarly, given that the two sides’ interests are not diametrically opposed, the atmosphere in integrative negotiations is likely to be less hostile and less characterized by mutual suspicion and distrust than is typically the case in distributive negotiations (DeRue, Conlon, Moon, & Willaby, 2009). In a more trusting atmosphere, the two sides may be less likely to see a particular negotiating agenda as jeopardizing the interests of their group.

Finally, future work may further illuminate a pattern we observed in our data: the tendency for the issue-order effect to be somewhat weaker among high-power versus low-power group members. The effect size of order on willingness to negotiate for the high-power group in Study 2 was double its size for the high-power group, and the effect size was similarly stronger among Palestinians than Israelis. One plausible explanation for this pattern involves differences in control between the groups. By virtue of their weaker position, low-power groups have relatively less control over the negotiating process and a lessened ability to impose their will on the other side (De Dreu et al., 2008; Kelman, 1987; Rubin & Zartman, 1995). As such, they may feel more pressure than the high-power group to carefully consider the negotiating agenda before they come to the table. When receiving proposals from the other side, this may lead them to pay more attention to the possibilities such as stalling by their counterparts, especially seeing as the experience of low power has also been found to make individuals more sensitive to threats in their environment and more likely to engage in controlled information processing (Keltner et al., 2003; see also Kamas, Otten, & Gordijn, 2011; Saguy & Kteily, 2011).

**Practical Implications**

Beyond their theoretical contributions, our findings also have important practical implications for conflict resolution and intergroup negotiations. From the perspective of promoting negotiations, one might view our findings as somewhat negative, as they suggest that high- and low-power groups may have opposing overall preferences for how to structure talks. On the other hand, the conclusions can be viewed more optimistically. For example, our finding that low-power groups are concerned about the possibility of stalling suggests that to the extent that the high-power side is in fact not attempting to use the negotiations as a means to stall change, it would have more success in convincing low-power group members to come to the table by committing to negotiate status quo–consequential issues up front. Thus, even in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, marked by exceptionally high levels of mistrust, suspicion, and crystallized negative attitudes (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2007), Israeli invitations to negotiate that proposed to deal with consequential issues up front promoted Palestinian willingness to negotiate. Conversely, a low-power group that trusts its high-powered counterpart to negotiate in good faith could agree to leave consequential issues till later so as to avoid arousing negativity on the other side’s part from the outset of negotiations.

**Conclusion**

Our work demonstrates that psychological processes associated with relative power pervade in the context of intergroup negotiations as in many other areas of social psychology. Members of groups in conflict impute different intentions to the other side on the basis of the same proposals, as a function of their group’s power position and their associated orientation toward the status quo. Importantly, these differing perceptions in turn predict individuals’ willingness to enter into negotiations with the other side, a critical but understudied outcome in research on negotiations. Together, the findings elucidate psychological processes that guide people when approaching negotiations and, as such, advance both our theoretical and practical understanding of negotiations between groups in asymmetrical conflicts.

**References**


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