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Left-Right Ideological Differences in Moral Judgments: The Case of Acceptance of Collateral Civilian Killings in War

Julia Elad-Strenger¹  | Daniel Statman² | Thomas Kessler³¹Department of Political Studies, Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel | ²Department of Philosophy, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel | ³Department of Social Psychology, Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, Jena, Germany**Correspondence:** Julia Elad-Strenger (eladstj@biu.ac.il)**Received:** 20 June 2024 | **Accepted:** 3 February 2025**Funding:** The authors received no specific funding for this work.**Keywords:** civilian casualties | ingroup norms | moral foundations | political orientation

ABSTRACT

Public sentiment on collateral civilian killings during wartime may crucially impact critical governmental decisions and the trajectory of the conflict itself. Across six studies in Israel and the United States, we examined (1) left-right ideological differences in acceptance of collateral civilian killings across diverse war scenarios and (2) the role of moral values and ideological ingroup norms in underlying them. Conservatives/rightists consistently showed higher acceptance of collateral civilian killings than liberals/leftists, regardless of whether the civilians killed are members of a current rival group or a strategic partner, whether the war involves real-life or fictitious groups, or whether participants are members of the group conducting the killings or mere observers. These ideological differences were mediated by conservatives'/rightists' lower endorsement of individualizing moral foundations but not by their higher endorsement of binding moral foundations. Finally, results suggest that ideological ingroup norms may play an indirect role in shaping these ideological differences.

1 | Introduction

Across the world conflicts and wars persist, casting a shadow over global stability and security. From the ongoing civil war in Syria, the protracted conflict in Yemen and the escalation of Russian attacks on Ukraine, to the recent war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, these conflicts are marked by devastating humanitarian crises and widespread civilian suffering. Public acceptance of civilian casualties has critical effects on the conduct and outcome of conflicts. It influences both domestic and international legitimacy of military actions, affects diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives including aid allocation and can fuel grievances among affected populations that may intensify conflicts. It is therefore crucial to understand the diverse perspectives that shape public discourse on the consequences of warfare and the factors that underlie them.

Despite the widespread recognition of the devastating impact of civilian casualties in warfare, public opinion surveys (e.g., Chicago Council Surveys 2022; Israeli Democracy Institute 2019; Pew Research Center 2015) indicate that public perceptions on this issue are deeply divided along the left-right political spectrum. Specifically, left-leaning individuals typically express stronger support for minimizing civilian casualties compared to their right-leaning counterparts. Despite the intuitive nature of these left-right ideological differences, empirical studies systematically exploring their consistency and robustness and their underlying mechanisms, are scarce.

This research addresses two primary objectives. First, it examines the relations between left-right political orientation and acceptance of collateral killings (hereafter: ACK) across different war scenarios, while varying key conflict features that may

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qualify these relations. Second, it examines two psychological mechanisms that potentially underlie these ideological differences: individual-level moral intuitions and perceived ideological ingroup norms. To achieve these objectives, we conducted five experimental studies among Jewish-Israelis (Studies 1–3, pre-registered Study 6) and US Americans (Study 4) and one naturalistic study among Jewish-Israelis during the 2023 war between Israel and Hamas (hereafter: ‘Israel–Hamas war’; Study 5).

1.1 | Ideological Differences in Acceptance of Collateral Civilian Casualties in War: Context-Dependent or Independent?

Research among Jewish-Israeli civilians (Hertz et al. 2022; Schori-Eyal et al. 2019), soldiers (Kimhi and Kasher 2015) and legal experts (Sulitzeanu-Kenan et al. 2016) found leftists more averse to Palestinian civilian casualties than rightists. Similar patterns emerged among US liberals and conservatives regarding Iraqi civilians (Uhlmann et al. 2009), potential Iranian casualties in hypothetical nuclear strikes (Sagan and Valentino 2017; Slovic et al. 2020) and ISIS-related civilian casualties (Ben-Nun Bloom et al. 2019). Bell et al. (2022) extended these findings to *intentional* civilian killing in hypothetical scenarios. These align with broader ideological differences in aggressive foreign policies and hostility towards security-threatening minorities (Golec de Zavala Cislak and Wesolowska 2010; Holsti and Rosenau 1996; see Hibbing et al. 2014; Jost et al. 2003, for reviews). We could term this the ‘general association hypothesis’ of ideological differences in ACK: conservatives/rightists generally show higher tolerance for both collateral and *intentional* civilian casualties than liberals/leftists.

Recent scholarship challenges assumptions about context-independent psychological differences between leftists/liberals and rightists/conservatives. Using systematic stimulus sampling, researchers found that ideological differences vary significantly by the stimuli used to represent psychological constructs. This applies to conservative-liberal differences in prejudice (Brandt 2017; Chambers et al. 2013), resistance to change (Proch et al. 2019), disgust sensitivity (Elad-Strenger et al. 2024), attitude formation (Fiagbenu et al. 2021) and integrative complexity (Conway et al. 2014). Studies also show that the emergence of ideological differences in morality and affective processes is highly context-dependent (see Pliskin et al. 2020; Pliskin 2023). We could term this the ‘context-dependence hypothesis’ of ideological differences.

In the present context, the context-dependence hypothesis would imply that ideological differences in ACK vary depending on the specific circumstances of each war. The problem with previous studies on ideological differences in ACK is that they inadvertently focused on collateral killings by participants’ ingroup against adversaries in the ongoing conflict, where war legitimacy is often highly politicized and ideologically polarized. This may have conflated ideological differences in war legitimacy assessment (*jus ad bellum*) with differences in evaluating actions within war (*jus in bello*). Though these judgments should remain separate (Walzer 2015), people often base *in bello* judgments on their war legitimacy perceptions (Sagan and Valentino 2019; Watkins and Goodwin 2020). To properly examine ideological

differences in ACK, we must either systematically vary perceived war legitimacy or hold it constant.

Complicating matters further is the fact that past studies exploring ideological differences in ACK focused on scenarios where participants’ national group caused civilian casualties. Because conservatives typically identify more strongly with their nation than liberals (e.g., Golec de Zavala et al. 2009), and stronger identifiers exhibit greater outgroup hostility (Sagan and Valentino 2020), this may confound the relationship between ideology and ACK. Furthermore, group identification can both affect and be affected by judgments of war legitimacy (*ad bellum*) and conduct (*in bello*)—those who identify more strongly with their group tend to view both their group’s military actions and the overall war as more justified. This raises critical questions: Are rightists/conservatives universally more accepting of collateral killing, or does this pattern emerge only when their own national group commits such acts? Does the ideological gap persist when leftists/liberals and rightists/conservatives share equivalent levels of national identification and support for the war? To properly understand ideological differences in ACK, we must account for how ingroup identification shapes this relationship.

To address these potential confounds, the present research examined the relationship between political orientation and ACK while focusing on wars of self-defence (a paradigmatic case of a ‘just war’; Watkins and Goodwin 2020), thereby maintaining a key aspect of *ad bellum* judgments constant. All war scenarios used in this research depicted Group A as considering collaterally harming civilians in a counterattack against Group B, emphasizing the strategic value of Group A’s actions in undermining Group B’s capabilities. Simultaneously, we varied critical features of the war scenarios that may alter ideological differences in ingroup identification and perceived war legitimacy and, consequently, in ACK: Whether collateral victims belong to a current rival group or a strategic partner, whether the groups in conflict are real or fictitious, whether it is a real-life or a hypothetical war. In the context of war between fictitious groups, we also manipulated (and measured) participants’ level of identification with the group committing the collateral killings, to disentangle differences in ingroup identification from ideological differences in ACK. A comprehensive breakdown of these variations is provided in the ‘current research’ section below.

1.2 | Moral Intuitions and Ideological Ingroup Norms as Potential Mechanisms in the Ideology–ACK Relations

If ideological differences in ACK persist across scenarios, we must identify the ‘active ingredient’ within political orientation driving them. Given ACK’s moral and ethical nature, moral values are an obvious factor. Studies show that individuals’ fundamental beliefs about the nature of morality, and moral intuitions like retributive beliefs, compatriot partiality, authority deference, in-group loyalty and other-regarding values, crucially shape their perceptions of responsibility and potential harm to others, particularly in the context of warfare (Ben-Nun Bloom et al. 2019; Bell et al. 2022; Dill et al. 2022; Doron et al. 2013; Hertz et al. 2022; Koch 2023; Rathbun and Stein 2020; Sagan and Valentino 2017).

Moral foundations theory (Haidt and Graham 2007) offers a framework for understanding variations in moral intuitions. It distinguishes between ‘individualizing’ foundations emphasizing individual rights and welfare regardless of group membership (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity) and ‘binding’ foundations prioritizing group cohesion and social order (loyalty/betrayal, authority/submission, purity/derogation). Recent studies suggest these moral foundations underlie ethical dilemmas like civilian harm in war, where individual welfare competes with group interests (Bell et al. 2022; Rathbun and Stein 2020; Smetana and Vranka 2021).

Specifically, these studies indicate that lower acceptance of collateral killings correlates positively with the endorsement of individualizing moral foundations and negatively with the endorsement of binding foundations. This raises the question: Can ideological differences in the endorsement of these moral intuitions help elucidate *ideological differences* in ACK?

Empirical studies consistently show liberals/leftists and conservatives/rightists differ in their endorsement of moral foundations. Liberals/leftists typically show greater endorsement of ‘individualizing’ foundations and lower endorsement of ‘binding’ foundations compared to conservatives/rightists (e.g., Elad-Strenger et al. 2019; Graham et al. 2009). While political beliefs and moral intuitions are interrelated, recent research suggests that political ideology primarily shapes moral foundations, rather than the reverse (Hatemi et al. 2019). This directional relationship provides a compelling rationale for considering moral foundations as mediators between political orientation and moral attitudes. Indeed, moral foundations were shown to mediate the relation between political ideology and responses to various moral issues, from racial justice protests (Richardson and Conway 2022) to human rights support (Stolerman and Lagnado 2020).

If differing levels of moral foundation endorsement among liberals/leftists versus conservatives/rightists can indeed explain ideological differences in ACK, a crucial question arises: Which of these sets of foundations predominantly drives these ideological differences? Is higher ACK among conservatives/rightists related more to their greater reliance on binding foundations, emphasizing group interests, or to their weaker reliance on individualizing foundations, which prioritize avoiding harm to individuals? We address this question in the current research, by considering the endorsement of both individualizing and binding moral foundations as competing mediators in the relationship between political orientation and ACK.

Alongside individual-level moral intuitions, understanding the link between political orientation and morality requires examining the social dimensions of moral values associated with conservatism and liberalism. In Western societies, ‘liberals’/‘leftists’ and ‘conservatives’/‘rightists’ often function as opposing social groups, regardless of whether they represent objectively antagonistic belief systems (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Huddy and Bankert 2017). Social groups are defined by shared norms, with descriptive ingroup norms—reflecting typical behaviours of group members—significantly influencing members’ moral judgments and actions, even without explicit pressure from the group (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Deutsch and Gerard 1955; Sherif 1936). As left/liberal and right/conservative ideologies

delineate social groups, they are characterized by distinct ideological ingroup norms that serve as powerful guides for behaviour and attitudes, shaping individuals’ moral judgments to align with what they perceive as typical for their ideological ingroup. Using self-categorization theory terms (Turner et al. 1987), adherence to group norms allows individuals to maintain normative fit’ with their social category, an essential part of the social categorization process.

Therefore, differences in ACK between liberals/leftists and conservatives/rightists may be shaped not only by their individually held moral values but also by the different normative expectations within their ideological groups. Specifically, leftists (vs. rightists) may perceive that their ideological ingroup norm is to be less tolerant of collateral casualties and adjust their ACK accordingly. Adopting attitudes consistent with perceived ideological group norms reinforces group belonging and maintains clear distinctions between ideological categories (Elad-Strenger et al. 2024). Thus, alongside moral foundations, the current research examines ideological ingroup norms as potential mediators in the relations between political orientation and ACK.

Indeed, it is important to note that moral values and ingroup norms may be interconnected and even mutually reinforcing. Values can guide the formation of social norms within groups, while established norms can gradually shape individual members’ personal values (Bicchieri 2005; Cialdini and Trost 1998). Our research addresses this complexity by examining moral foundations and ideological ingroup norms as both parallel and serial mediators (Studies 3–5), acknowledging their potential to operate independently or sequentially in influencing ACK. Study 6 further explores this relationship by manipulating ideological ingroup norms directly.

1.3 | The Current Research

The current study aims to (1) examine relations between political orientation and ACK across war contexts and (2) examine the role of (a) individualizing foundations, (b) binding foundations and (c) ideological ingroup norms in these differences. We conducted six studies in Israel (Studies 1–3, 5 and 6) and the United States (Study 4), nations with recent military conflicts and debates over military action ethics.

Participants read vignettes about a self-defence war where Group A, attacked by Group B, targets B’s army headquarters in a populated area, expecting civilian casualties. Subsequently, participants were asked to estimate the maximum number of collateral civilian casualties in Group B that they would consider morally acceptable (ACK).

To assess ideological differences in ACK across scenarios, we varied Groups A and B’s identities. Studies 1 and 4 examined ACK in hypothetical wars between participants’ national ingroup (Group A) and real-life adversaries (Group B), including both active rivals in ongoing conflict (Palestinians for Israelis, North Korea for US Americans) and former adversaries now perceived as strategic partners (Egypt for Israelis, Iraq for US Americans). Ideological differences in perceptions of historical and current relationships with adversaries (including perceived threat, power relations

and rival dehumanization), and consequently in perceived war legitimacy, may be less pronounced with strategic partners than active rivals. This could lead to smaller or diminished differences in ACK.

Studies 2–4 and 6 examined ACK in conflicts between fictitious groups, where the absence of known history suggested smaller ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy compared to real-life rivals. Studies 2–4 manipulated participants' group identification by assigning them to 'actor' (Group A member) or 'observer' (unaffiliated) conditions. This manipulation tested whether rightists' higher ACK stems from stronger national ingroup identification by examining if ACK differences persist with varying levels of group identification.

Study 5, conducted during the 'Israel– Hamas war', tested whether ideological differences in ACK persist in an acute real-life (rather than hypothetical) war, where ideological differences in ingroup identification and perceived war legitimacy were expected to be minimal.

Consistent with our second objective, Studies 3–6 investigated the role of individual-level endorsement of individualizing and binding moral foundations, and ideological ingroup norms concerning collateral killings, as potential mediators in the relationship between political orientation and ACK. Studies 3–5 examined moral foundations and ideological ingroup norms as both parallel (competing) mediators and serial mediators (in both possible sequential orders) in the relationship between political orientation and ACK. In Study 6, we experimentally manipulated ideological ingroup norms to examine its role, alongside measured endorsement of moral foundations, as a process variable.

As our studies focused on the moral judgment aspect of ACK, we considered two additional factors as potential controls: (a) the estimated number of collateral casualties that are perceived to be unavoidable for Group A to attain its military goals (CK_{UN}) and (b) the expected number of civilians to be killed in such an attack (CK_{EST}). This decision was rooted in our desire to isolate participants' moral acceptability thresholds from practical considerations and situational constraints, which often influence moral judgments in real-world scenarios. By controlling for these factors, we sought to conduct a more conservative analysis of the ethical dimension of ACK and thus increase the robustness of our findings.

All participants gave their informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study. All studies, measures, manipulations and data/participant exclusions are reported in the article or the [Supporting Information](#). Datasets and syntax are available at https://osf.io/r6bwx/?view_only=5c9a2d8e6fe54fa69b6a9ffc51902bd2.

2 | Study 1

Study 1 examined ideological differences in ACK among Jewish-Israelis. Participants read a vignette describing a war between Israel (Group A) and one of the following groups (Group B): (1) *Palestinians*, with whom Israel has been engaged in a prolonged

and violent conflict for over 100 years; (2) *Iran*, with whom Israel has been engaged in an ongoing proxy conflict for over 40 years, but with no direct military confrontation at the time the study was conducted; and (3) *Egypt*, with whom Israel has a history of violent conflicts but enjoys a relatively stable peace treaty, at the time the study was conducted.

Across experimental conditions, the vignette described Israel as the victim of an attack by Group B, prompting Israel to retaliate, potentially causing collateral civilian casualties in Group B ([Supporting Information](#), pp. 4–5). In each condition, participants were asked to estimate the maximum number of collateral civilian casualties in Group B that they would deem morally acceptable (hereafter: CK_{MA}), which was used as our operationalization of ACK. Participants also estimated (a) the number of unavoidable civilian casualties in achieving Group A's goals (CK_{UN}) and (b) the number of civilians expected to be killed (CK_{EST}) in such an attack, serving as covariates.

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Participants were recruited for this online study through a professional Israeli survey company in July 2020. Our sample comprised 403 Jewish-Israelis (52.1% female, 47.6% male, 0.2% other; M_{age} [SD] = 41.05 [12.08]; M [SD] of political orientation, rated 1 (right) to 6 (left): 3.36 [1.18]).¹ A sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al. 2009) indicated that this sample size is sufficient for detecting at least a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.02$) in a multiple regression, based on standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power.

2.1.2 | Procedure and Measures

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, which included (alongside gender, age, religiosity, education and income) a political orientation item (1 = extreme right, 2 = right, 3 = center-right, 4 = center-left, 5 = left, 6 = extreme left) and were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (rival: Egypt/Iran/Palestinians).

After reading the war vignette, participants completed three reading comprehension checks ([Supporting Information](#), p. 16). Participants who failed to correctly answer at least one of these checks had their participation in the survey automatically terminated. Subsequently, participants rated the perceived legitimacy of Israel's war against Group B on a 1–7 scale ('To what extent is Israel's war against Group B: (a) *'legitimate'*, (b) *'a war of self-defense'*; $r = 0.65$). Next, participants answered the item assessing ACK (CK_{MA}): 'If, in fact, Israel attacks the headquarters of Egypt/Iran/Palestinians, what is the maximal number of collateral civilian casualties you would deem morally acceptable?' We refrained from providing participants with a numerical anchor to avoid biasing their responses.

Finally, participants answered the following items, used as covariates: 'What is the number of civilian casualties that, in your opinion, would be unavoidable for Israel's attack to eliminate the

TABLE 1 | Regression analyses predicting perceived war Legitimacy by political orientation, rival group (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 1).

Reference category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Pal	Cpol	-0.41	0.08	-0.45	-5.48***	<0.001	[-0.56, -0.26]	0.34	2.97
	Egypt	0.16	0.13	0.07	1.23	0.219	[-0.09, -0.41]	0.75	1.34
	Iran	0.27	0.13	0.12	2.14*	0.033	[0.02, 0.51]	0.75	1.34
	Cpol × Egypt	0.25	0.11	0.16	2.33*	0.020	[0.04, 0.46]	0.50	1.99
	Cpol × Iran	0.28	0.11	0.18	2.66**	0.008	[0.07, 0.49]	0.51	1.98
Egypt	Cpol	-0.16	0.08	-0.18	-2.16*	0.031	[-0.31, -0.02]	0.33	3.00
	Iran	0.11	0.13	0.05	0.89	0.373	[-0.14, 0.36]	0.74	1.35
	Pal	-0.16	0.13	-0.07	-1.23	0.219	[-0.41, 0.09]	0.74	1.35
	Cpol × Iran	0.04	0.11	0.02	0.34	0.734	[-0.17, 0.25]	0.50	1.99
	Cpol × Pal	-0.25	0.11	-0.16	-2.33*	0.020	[-0.46, -0.04]	0.49	2.03
Iran	Cpol	-0.13	0.08	-0.14	-1.67	0.096	[-0.28, 0.02]	0.33	3.04
	Egypt	-0.11	0.13	-0.05	-0.89	0.373	[-0.36, 0.14]	0.76	1.32
	Pal	-0.27	0.13	-0.12	-2.14*	0.033	[-0.51, -0.02]	0.76	1.32
	Cpol × Egypt	-0.04	0.11	-0.02	-0.34	0.734	[-0.25, 0.17]	0.50	2.01
	Cpol × Pal	-0.28	0.11	-0.18	-2.66**	0.008	[-0.49, -0.07]	0.49	2.03

Abbreviations: CI, confidence intervals; Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more leftist orientation); Pal, Palestinians; VIF, variance inflation factor.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

headquarters of Egypt/Iran/The Palestinians?' (CK_{UN}), and 'How many Egyptian/Iranian/Palestinian civilians do you estimate will actually die in the course of the action?' (CK_{EST}).

Given the extreme non-normality of the CK_{MA} , CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} (skewness > 20, kurtosis > 401) measures (Supporting Information, pp. 11–12), we transformed them from interval into ordinal scales, in line with recommendations to consider alternative data treatments when parametric assumptions are severely violated (e.g., Tabachnick and Fidell 2013). While specific thresholds for transformation vary in the literature, our values far exceeded commonly cited guidelines for normality (e.g., West et al. 1995). The distribution of the transformed CK_{MA} measure (skewness: 0.36, kurtosis: -0.56) supports its use as a dependent variable in a regression without violating normality assumptions.

2.2 | Results and Discussion

2.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations between the main study variables are presented in the Supporting Information (p. 17, Table 4A).

We analysed ideological differences in *perceived war legitimacy* by regressing legitimacy ratings on political orientation, rival group condition (dummy coded) and their interaction, running three separate analyses with each rival group as a reference (Table 1). As shown in Table 1, rightists rated war as more legitimate

than leftists when fighting Palestinians, less so when fighting Egypt, and showed no ideological differences regarding war with Iran. A closer look at the significant interactions (Supporting Information, pp. 22–23) confirms, that ideological differences were larger in the Palestinians' condition compared to both the Iran and Egypt conditions.

2.3 | Ideological Differences in ACK

We analysed ideological differences in CK_{MA} across conditions by regressing CK_{MA} on political orientation, condition (dummy coded) and their interaction, running three separate analyses with each rival group as reference (Table 2). As shown in Table 2, rightists' CK_{MA} rating were significantly higher than leftists' in war against Palestinians (partial $r = -0.155$), Egypt (partial $r = -0.187$) and Iran (partial $r = -0.145$). These ideological differences were unqualified by the experimental condition. Results held when covariates (CK_{UN} and CK_{EST}) were controlled for and when outliers on at least one of the CK items (whose estimates were 3 *SD* above the mean or higher; see Tabachnick and Fidell 2013) were excluded from the analysis (Supporting Information, pp. 23–25).

In terms of main effects of the experimental condition, as shown in Table 2, CK_{MA} ratings were significantly higher in the Iran condition compared to the Palestinians and Egypt conditions but not when covariates were controlled for (Supporting Information, pp. 23–25). These findings indicate that while the identity of the rival influenced overall CK_{MA} levels, the relationship between political ideology and CK_{MA} remained consistent across conditions.

TABLE 2 | Regression analyses predicting CK_{MA} by political orientation, rival group (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 1).

Reference category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Pal	Cpol	-3.06	0.93	-0.27	-3.29**	0.001	[-4.89, -1.23]	0.34	2.97
	Egypt	1.85	1.57	0.07	1.18	0.239	[-1.23, 4.94]	0.75	1.34
	Iran	6.16	1.55	0.22	3.97***	<0.001	[3.11, 9.21]	0.75	1.34
	Cpol × Egypt	-0.64	1.32	-0.03	-.49	0.625	[-3.24, 1.95]	0.50	1.99
	Cpol × Iran	0.17	1.33	0.01	-0.13	0.896	[-2.43, 2.78]	0.51	1.98
Egypt	Cpol	-3.71	0.94	-0.32	-3.96***	<0.001	[-5.55, -1.87]	0.33	3.00
	Iran	-1.85	1.57	-0.07	-1.18	0.239	[-4.94, 1.23]	0.74	1.35
	Pal	4.31	1.55	0.15	2.78**	0.006	[1.26, 7.37]	0.74	1.35
	Cpol × Iran	0.64	1.32	0.03	-0.49	0.625	[-1.95, 3.24]	0.50	1.99
	Cpol × Pal	0.82	1.33	0.04	-0.62	0.538	[-1.79, 3.43]	0.49	2.03
Iran	Cpol	-2.89	0.94	-0.25	-3.06**	0.002	[-4.74, -1.03]	0.33	3.04
	Egypt	-4.31	1.55	-0.15	-2.78**	0.006	[-7.37, -1.26]	0.76	1.32
	Pal	-6.16	1.55	-0.22	-3.97***	<0.001	[-9.21, -3.11]	0.76	1.32
	Cpol × Egypt	-0.82	1.33	-0.04	-0.62	0.538	[-3.43, 1.79]	0.50	2.01
	Cpol × Pal	-0.17	1.33	-0.01	-0.13	0.896	[-2.78, 2.43]	0.49	2.03

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more leftist orientation); Pal, Palestinians.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

To summarize, results of Study 1 indicate that Jewish-Israeli rightists demonstrate higher ACK than leftists regardless of whether the civilians are members of a group with which Israel is in an ongoing armed conflict (e.g., Palestinians), engaged in a proxy war (e.g., Iran), or a former rival now considered a strategic partner (e.g., Egypt). This replicates prior research on Jewish-Israelis' acceptance of collateral killings of Palestinians (Kimhi and Kasher 2015; Schori-Eyal et al. 2019), extending it across adversary groups.

The 'rival' conditions (Palestinians/Iran/Egypt) may have varied not only the intensity of conflict but also the perceived threat by the rival, perceived damage of retribution by the rival and level of hostility towards (and dehumanization of) outgroup civilians, all potential influencing the extent of ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy. Indeed, these scenarios produced different magnitudes of ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy, with the highly politicized Palestinian conflict showing the largest gap between leftists and rightists, followed by Egypt and then Iran. Despite these varying levels of ideological differences in war legitimacy, however, ideological differences in ACK remained consistent. This consistency suggests that ideological differences in ACK may operate independently of how legitimate they perceive the conflict to be, at least for the specific adversaries we examined.

Despite varying the adversary group, one factor remained constant across conditions: the ingroup (Israel). As potential ideological differences in identification with Israel could confound ideological differences in ACK, Study 2 investigated ideological differences in ACK in the context of a war between fictitious groups, while also varying participants' perceived membership in

Group A. Examining ACK in the context of a war between fictitious groups also helps neutralize any context-specific features inherent in scenarios involving real-life groups.

3 | Study 2

Study 2 built upon Study 1 by investigating ACK in a hypothetical conflict between fictitious Group A ('Zachland') and Group B ('Passland'). Additionally, participants' level of group identification was manipulated by instructing them to imagine themselves as citizens of 'Zachland' before reading the vignette ('actor' perspective condition) or not providing this instruction ('observer' perspective condition).

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

Participants were recruited for this online study using a professional Israeli survey company in July 2020. Our sample included 405 Jewish-Israelis (52.1% female, 47.6% male, 0.2% other; M_{age} [SD] = 41.05 [12.08]; M [SD] of political orientation, rated 1 (right) to 6 (left): 3.37 [1.22]). Sensitivity power analyses using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) indicated that this sample size is sufficient for detecting at least a small-sized effect ($f^2 = 0.02$) in a multiple regression, based on standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power.

3.1.2 | Procedure and Measures

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire (including political orientation) and were informed that they would read

TABLE 3 | Regression analyses predicting ingroup identification, perceived legitimacy and CK_{MA} by Political orientation, condition and their interactions (Study 2).

Outcome variable	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Ingroup identification	Cpol	-0.11	0.10	-0.07	-1.08	0.281	[-0.31, 0.09]	0.54	1.85
	Condition	0.54	0.18	0.14	2.94**	0.004	[0.18, 0.90]	0.99	1.00
	Cpol × Condition	-0.17	0.15	-0.08	-1.15	0.251	[-0.47, 0.12]	0.54	1.85
Perceived Legitimacy	Cpol	0.03	0.08	0.02	0.34	0.735	[-0.12, 0.17]	0.54	1.85
	Condition	-0.05	0.14	-0.02	-0.40	0.691	[-0.32, 0.21]	0.99	1.00
	Cpol × Condition	-0.20	0.11	-0.12	-1.84	0.067	[0.42, 0.01]	0.54	1.85
CK _{MA}	Cpol	-3.97	0.75	-0.34	-5.32***	<0.001	[-5.43, -2.50]	0.54	1.85
	Condition	0.84	1.34	0.03	0.53	0.532	[-1.80, 3.48]	0.99	1.00
	Cpol × Condition	0.42	1.10	0.03	0.38	0.703	[-1.75, 1.59]	0.54	1.85

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more leftist orientation).

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

a war vignette between two fictitious countries: ‘Zachland’ and ‘Passland’. They were randomly assigned to either the ‘actor perspective’ condition, where they were instructed to imagine themselves as citizens of ‘Zachland’ or the ‘observer perspective’ condition without this instruction. After reading the vignette (Supporting Information, p. 6), participants completed reading comprehension items (Supporting Information, p. 16; only those correctly answering all checks continued the survey) and rated their identification with ‘Zachland’ as a manipulation check (three items; e.g., ‘I identify as a citizen of Zachland, rated 1–7; $\alpha = 0.98$). They then rated the perceived legitimacy of Zachland’s war against Passland, as in Study 1 ($r = 0.74$). Finally, participants provided their estimate of CK_{MA} (dependent variable), and CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} (covariates). As in Study 1, CK_{MA}, CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} values were recoded into ordinal scales to avoid overweighting outliers and extreme values in the original distribution (Supporting Information, pp. 11–12). The distribution of the transformed CK_{MA} measure (skewness: 0.81, kurtosis: -0.18) supported its use as a dependent variable in a regression without violating normality assumptions.

3.2 | Results and Discussion

3.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations between the main study variables are provided in the Supporting Information (p. 17, Table 5A).

As a manipulation check, we regressed *ingroup identification* on political orientation, condition (actor = 1, observer = 0) and their interaction (Table 3). As shown in Table 3, the condition had a significant main effect, indicating that as intended, participants identified more strongly with ‘Zachland’ in the ‘actor’ condition compared to the ‘observer’ condition. Neither political orientation nor its interaction with conditions affected identification levels.

To examine ideological differences in *perceived war legitimacy* across conditions, we regressed perceived war legitimacy on

political orientation, condition and their interaction (Table 3). As shown in Table 3, neither political orientation, nor condition, or their interaction were significantly associated with perceived war legitimacy.

3.2.2 | Ideological Differences in ACK

We examined ideological differences in CK_{MA} across experimental conditions by regressing CK_{MA} on political orientation, condition and their interaction (Table 3). As shown in Table 3, the analysis revealed a significant main effect for political orientation (partial $r = -0.251$), which was not qualified by experimental condition, such that rightists’ CK_{MA} ratings were higher than leftists’. Results held when covariates (CK_{UN} and CK_{EST}) were controlled for, when ingroup identification was controlled for, and when outliers on at least one of the CK items were excluded from the analysis (Supporting Information, p. 26).

These results suggest that rightists’ ACK is higher than leftists’ even when the conflict involves fictitious groups, and irrespective of whether participants are members of the group committing collateral killings or mere observers. Furthermore, ideological groups did not differ in measured ingroup identification (manipulation check) or perceived war legitimacy, indicating these factors cannot explain their differing attitudes towards civilian killing in the context of war between fictitious groups.

To summarize, Studies 1 and 2 demonstrate that ideological differences in ACK remain stable across varied contexts. While our investigations did not explore every possible context variation, they reveal that these differences persist despite variations in rival identity, both real-life and fictitious. Moreover, neither ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy nor in ingroup identification adequately explain these consistent ideological differences in ACK. These findings prompt us to examine whether more fundamental psychological differences between ideological groups—ones that transcend specific war contexts—may better explain why leftists and rightists differ in their attitudes towards civilian casualties.

Study 3 examined two mediators in the relations between political ideology and ACK. First, following moral foundations theory, we examined whether these differences are mediated by rightists' weaker endorsement of individualizing moral foundations, their stronger endorsement of binding foundations or both. Second, we explored whether leftists and rightists differ in their ideological ingroup norms regarding collateral killings, independent of a specific war context, as another possible mediator of these differences.

4 | Study 3

Study 3 replicated the design of Study 2 while investigating the endorsement of individualizing/binding foundations and perceived ideological ingroup norms regarding collateral killings, as both parallel and serial mediators in the relations between political orientation and ACK. Like in Study 2, ACK was assessed within the context of a fictitious war between 'Zachland' and 'Passland', with participants assigned to either the 'actor perspective' or 'observer perspective' condition.

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

Participants were recruited for this online study using a professional Israeli survey company in August 2020. Based on the results of Study 2, a power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al. 2009) indicated that a sample size of 120 participants would be needed to detect a medium-sized effect ($f^2 = 0.067$) in multiple regression, with standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power. An a priori Monte Carlo power analysis (Schoemann et al. 2017) indicated that a sample size of 300 participants would be needed to detect significant indirect effects for a three-mediator model, based on small-sized standardized coefficients, standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power. Our sample included 400 Jewish-Israelis (54% female, 46% male; $M_{\text{age}} [SD] = 44.45 [17.61]$; $M [SD]$ of political orientation, rated 1 (right) to 6 (left): 3.32 [1.04]). A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al. 2009) indicated this sample size is adequate to detect at least a small-sized effect ($f^2 = 0.02$) in a multiple regression, with standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power.

4.1.2 | Procedure and Measures

After completing the demographic questionnaire, participants filled out the 20-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-20; Graham et al. 2009), which measures prioritization of the five moral foundations: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity (all items rated on a 1–6 scale; Supporting Information, pp. 13–14 presents full list). Consistent with prior studies (Hatemi et al. 2019), ratings on harm/care and fairness/reciprocity items were averaged to indicate endorsement of individualizing foundations ($\alpha = 0.74$), while ratings on ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity items were averaged to indicate endorsement of binding foundations ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Participants were randomly assigned to either the 'actor' or 'observer' perspective, as in Study 2. After reading the vignette and answering comprehension questions (only those correctly answering all checks continued the survey), participants rated their identification with 'Zachland' ($\alpha = 0.98$, used as manipulation check) and perceived legitimacy of Zachland's war against Passland ($r = 0.80$). They then provided estimates of CK_{MA} , CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} . As in previous studies, we recoded these values into ordinal scales (Supporting Information, pp. 11–12). The distribution of the recoded CK_{MA} measure (skewness: 0.50, kurtosis: -0.74) supported its use as a dependent variable in a regression without violating normality assumptions.

Finally, participants completed a three-item scale evaluating the moral acceptability of collateral killings within their ideological ingroup (e.g., 'among the political left [/right] in Israel, causing the death of civilians during war, as described in the vignette, is considered an inappropriate act', rated 1–7, $\alpha = 0.84$; Supporting Information, p. 15). Participants were presented only with items referring to their ideological ingroup, determined by their ratings on the political orientation item. Higher scores indicated stronger perceived ingroup norms opposing collateral killings.

4.2 | Results and Discussion

4.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations between the main study variables are presented in the Supporting Information (p. 18, Table 6A). As shown in Table 6A, endorsement of individualizing foundations was only moderately correlated with endorsement of binding foundations ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$) and with perceived ideological ingroup norms against collateral killings ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$). Endorsement of binding foundations and perceived norms were uncorrelated ($r = -0.03$, $p = 0.512$). Perceived ingroup norms, endorsement of individualizing foundations and ingroup identification, but not endorsement of binding foundations, were significantly associated with CK_{MA} .

As a manipulation check, we regressed ingroup identification on political orientation, condition (actor = 1, observer = 0) and their interaction (Table 4). As shown in Table 4, and as in Study 2, the analysis revealed a significant main effect for condition, indicating that participants identified more strongly with 'Zachland' in the 'actor' condition than in the 'observer' condition. Neither political orientation nor its interaction with condition affected identification levels.

Ideological differences in *perceived war legitimacy* across conditions were examined by regressing perceived war legitimacy on political orientation, condition and their interaction (Table 4). As shown in Table 4 and as in Study 2, neither political orientation, nor condition, nor their interaction were significantly associated with perceived war legitimacy.

4.2.2 | Ideological Differences in ACK

We examined ideological differences in CK_{MA} across experimental conditions by regressing CK_{MA} on political orientation,

TABLE 4 | Regression analyses predicting ingroup identification, perceived legitimacy and CK_{MA} by Political orientation, condition and their interactions (Study 3).

Outcome Variable	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Ingroup Identification	Cpol	-0.25	0.13	-0.14	-1.90	0.058	[-0.51, 0.01]	0.46	2.16
	Condition	0.50	0.18	0.13	2.70**	0.007	[0.14, 0.86]	1.00	1.00
	Cpol × Condition	0.02	0.18	0.01	0.11	0.914	[-0.33, 0.37]	0.46	2.16
Perceived Legitimacy	Cpol	-0.04	0.10	-0.03	-0.43	0.669	[-0.23, 0.15]	0.46	2.16
	Condition	0.02	0.14	0.01	0.15	0.878	[-0.25, 0.29]	1.00	1.00
	Cpol × Condition	0.12	0.13	0.07	0.88	0.378	[-0.14, 0.38]	0.46	2.16
CK _{MA}	Cpol	-3.55	0.87	-0.29	-4.08***	<0.001	[-5.26, -1.84]	0.46	2.16
	Condition	-0.15	1.22	-0.01	-0.13	0.900	[-2.56, 2.25]	1.00	1.00
	Cpol × Condition	0.83	1.19	0.05	0.70	0.484	[-1.50, 3.17]	0.46	2.16

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more leftist orientation).

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

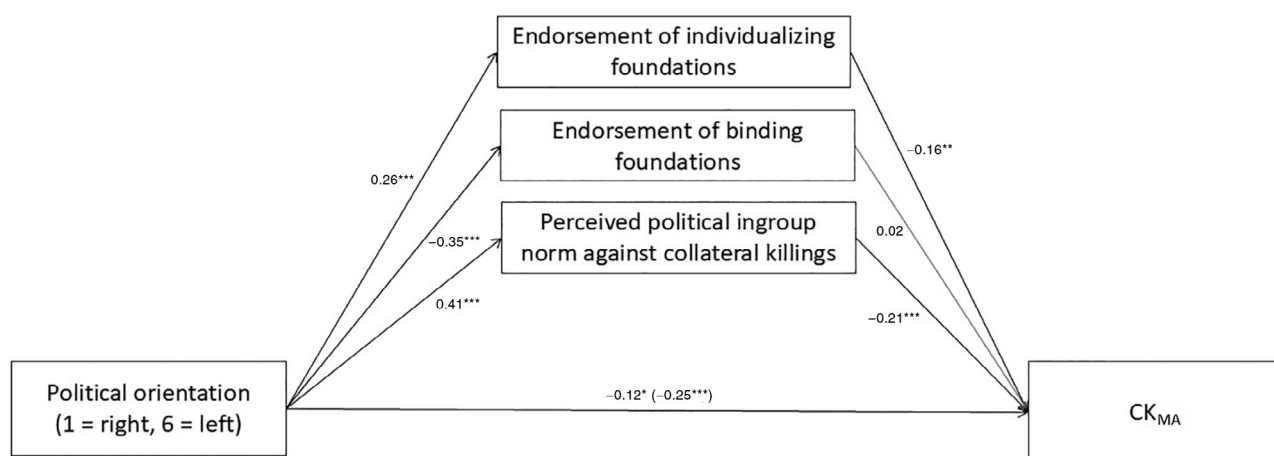


FIGURE 1 | Parallel mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4), Study 3. *Note:* This figure presents standardized coefficients. Insignificant paths are marked in gray. **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001

condition and their interaction (Table 4). As shown in Table 4, the analysis revealed a significant main effect for political orientation (partial $r = -0.201$), which was not qualified by condition. In other words, as in Study 2, rightists' CK_{MA} estimates were consistently higher than leftists. Results held when covariates (CK_{UN} and CK_{EST}) were controlled for, when ingroup identification was controlled for, and when outliers on at least one of the CK items were excluded from the analysis (Supporting Information, p. 27).

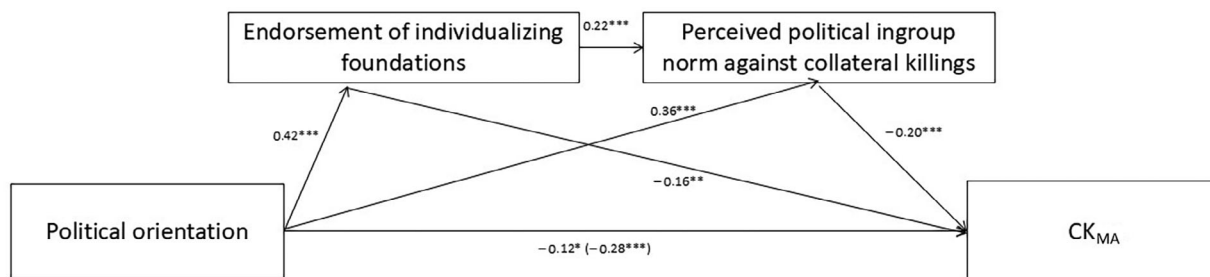
4.2.3 | Values and Ideological Ingroup Norms as Underlying Ideological Differences in ACK

First, we conducted a parallel mediation analysis using Hayes' (2017) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5000 iterations (model 4), with political orientation as the independent variable, endorsement of individualizing foundations and binding foundations and perceived ideological ingroup norms as competing

(simultaneous) mediators, and CK_{MA} as the outcome variable, controlling for condition. Results are presented in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 1, leftist (vs. rightist) political orientation was positively associated with the *endorsement of individualizing foundations* and with *perceived ingroup norms against collateral killings*, which were in turn negatively associated with CK_{MA}. The indirect effects of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of individualizing moral foundations (effect: -0.14 , $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.21, -0.06]$) and ingroup norms (effect = -0.09 , $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI $[-0.14, -0.04]$) were both significant. Leftist (vs. rightist) political orientation was negatively associated with the *endorsement of binding foundations*, which was in turn not significantly associated with CK_{MA}. The indirect effect of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of binding foundations was, as expected, not significant (effect: -0.01 , $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.05, 0.03]$). Results held when all covariates were controlled for (Supporting Information, pp. 28–29).

Serial mediation model A



Serial mediation model B

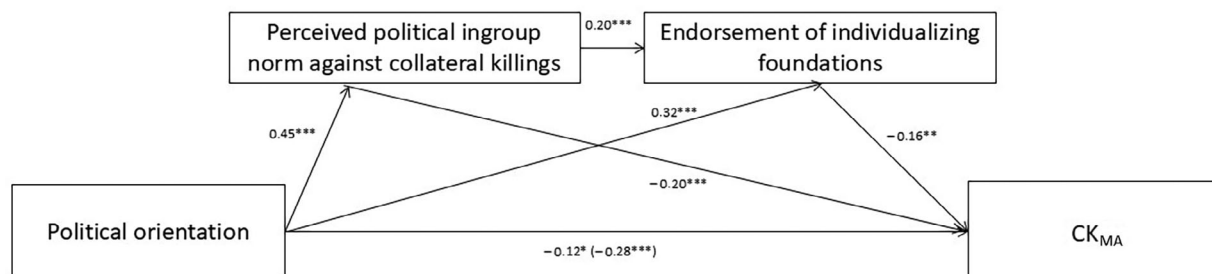


FIGURE 2 | Serial mediation analyses (PROCESS model 6), Study 3. Note: This figure presents standardized coefficients. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Next, we examined the role of perceived norms and endorsement of individualizing moral foundations as sequential (serial) mediators in the relations between political orientation and ACK. To that end, we conducted two serial mediation analyses (PROCESS model 6; Hayes 2017), alternating the order of these two mediators, controlling for the endorsement of binding foundations and condition. Results are presented in Figure 2.

As shown in Figure 2, data provided support for both alternative models, such that the indirect effects of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of individualizing moral foundations followed by perceived ingroup norms (model A: -0.02 , $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.04, -0.01]$) and vice versa (model B: -0.02 , $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.03, -0.001]$) were both significant. Results held when all covariates were controlled for (Supporting Information, pp. 29–30).

Taken together, our results replicate the findings of Study 2 by suggesting that rightists demonstrate higher ACK than leftists when the war involves fictitious groups, and regardless of whether they are members of the group committing the killings or external observers. In addition, as in Study 2, these ideological differences in ACK emerged despite leftists and rightists showing similar levels of ingroup identification and perceived war legitimacy.

Although rightists demonstrated higher endorsement of binding foundations and leftists higher endorsement of individualizing foundations (consistent with previous research, e.g., Graham et al. 2009), ideological differences in ACK were mediated by the endorsement of individualizing, but not binding, foundations. In other words, rightists' higher ACK was more consistent with their weaker adherence to values that prioritize the protection of vulnerable individuals than with their stronger adherence to

values that prioritize the protection of group interests. Importantly, the endorsement of these moral values was measured before reading the war vignette, reflecting general support of these values irrespective of any specific target group. Our findings also indicate that perceived ideological ingroup norms towards collateral killings (which were only moderately correlated with endorsement of individualizing foundation) mediated ideological differences in ACK.

Our findings suggest that these mediating factors operate both independently (parallel mediation) and sequentially (serial mediation) in explaining the relationship between ideology and ACK. Given the correlational design of our study, we cannot definitively establish the direction and nature of these mediational pathways. Addressing this question requires experimental manipulation, which we implement in Study 6. Before further examining these causal relations, however, we first investigate the generalizability of our findings from Studies 1–3 by extending our research beyond the Israeli context (Study 4) and examining these patterns in a naturalistic war setting (Study 5).

5 | Study 4

Study 4 replicated Studies 1–3 with US participants, given the US–Israel parallels: both experienced major terrorist attacks, conducted large-scale military operations abroad, and showed liberal-conservative polarization regarding collateral killing justness (Bell et al. 2022; Schori-Eyal et al. 2019; Uhlmann et al. 2009).

Participants were randomly assigned to four conditions: two involving US wars with real-life adversaries (North Korea, Iraq)

and two involving fictional countries ('Levland'² and 'Passland'), with participants as either 'actors' or 'observers'. This design allowed direct comparison of ACK, ingroup identification and perceived war legitimacy across fictitious versus real-life contexts. As in Study 3, we examined moral foundations and perceived ingroup norms as parallel and serial mediators between ideology and ACK.

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk³ in July 2021. Based on Studies 1–3 (f^2 s = 0.027–0.067), power analyses using G*Power (Faul et al. 2009) indicated needing 285 participants to detect small effects ($f^2 = 0.027$) in multiple regression ($\alpha = 0.05$, 80% power). A Monte Carlo power analysis (Schoemann et al. 2017) indicated needing 500 participants for small indirect effects in a three-mediator model. Our sample included 543 US Americans (43.5% female, 56.5% male, 0.2% other; $M_{\text{age}} [SD] = 44.33 [12.81]$; $M [SD]$ political orientation, 1 (conservative) to 6 (liberal): 3.62 [1.57]). Sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al. 2009) indicated adequate power to detect small effects ($f^2 = 0.01$) in a regression with standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power.

5.1.2 | Procedure and Measures

Participants completed demographics including political orientation (1 = very conservative, 6 = very liberal), measures of individualizing ($\alpha = 0.81$) and binding foundations ($\alpha = 0.92$), then were randomly assigned to the four experimental conditions. After reading the war vignette (Supporting Information, pp. 6–9) and passing comprehension checks, they completed ingroup identification items ($\alpha = 0.99$) regarding either the United States (Iraq/North Korea conditions) or 'Levland' (actor/observer conditions). They rated perceived war legitimacy ($r = 0.69$) and provided CK_{MA} , CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} estimates. Values were recoded to ordinal scales (Supporting Information, pp. 11–12), with recoded CK_{MA} distribution (skewness: 0.31, kurtosis: -0.98) supporting its use as an outcome in a multiple regression. Finally, participants rated perceived ideological ingroup norms regarding civilian casualties in war (three items, $\alpha = 0.74$), with higher scores indicating stronger norms against collateral killing.

5.2 | Results and Discussion

5.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations between the main study variables are presented in the Supporting Information (p. 19, Table 7A). Endorsement of individualizing foundations was not correlated with endorsement of binding foundations ($r = -0.02$, $p = 0.636$) and both were only moderately correlated with perceived ideological ingroup norms against collateral killings ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$ and $r = -0.28$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). Perceived ingroup norms and endorsement of individualizing foundations were significantly associated with CK_{MA} , but ingroup identification and endorsement of binding foundations were not.

As in Studies 2 and 3, we analysed ideological differences in *ingroup identification* by regressing identification ratings on political orientation, rival group condition (dummy coded) and their interaction, running four separate analyses with each rival group as reference (Table 5).

As shown in Table 5, as in Studies 2 and 3 and consistent with the manipulation, participants identified more strongly with 'Levland' in the 'actor' versus 'observer' condition. Unsurprisingly, participants also identified more strongly with the United States (North Korea and Iraq conditions), than with 'Levland' ('actor' and 'observer' conditions). As indicated by the main effects for political orientation, and by a closer look at the political orientation \times Iraq versus 'actor' variable interaction (Supporting Information, p. 30), conservatives were more identified than liberals with the United States and with 'Levland' in the 'observer condition' but did not significantly differ from liberals in their identification with 'Levland' in the 'actor' condition.

We then regressed *perceived war legitimacy* on political orientation, condition (dummy coded), and their interactions, each time with a different rival as the reference group (Table 6). As shown in Table 6, conflicts involving the fictitious nations ('Levland' vs. 'Passland') were rated most legitimate (and as in Studies 2 and 3, as equally legitimate), followed by the US–North Korea conflict, with the US–Iraq war perceived as least legitimate. Ideological differences emerged only in real-world conflicts: conservatives rated both the North Korea and Iraq wars as more legitimate than liberals did. A closer look at the political orientation \times North Korea versus 'actor' variable interaction (Supporting Information, p. 30) revealed that the ideological difference was stronger in North Korea compared to the 'actor' condition.

5.2.2 | Ideological Differences in ACK

We analysed ideological differences in CK_{MA} across conditions by regressing CK_{MA} on political orientation, condition (dummy coded) and their interaction, running four separate analyses with each rival group as reference (Table 7). As shown in Table 7, political orientation was negatively associated with CK_{MA} in all analyses, such that conservatives reported significantly higher CK_{MA} than liberals in the 'actor' condition (partial $r = -0.125$), 'observer' condition (partial $r = -0.094$), North Korea condition (partial $r = -0.103$) and Iraq condition (partial $r = -0.171$). These main effects were not significantly moderated by condition. In addition, there was a main effect for condition, such that CK_{MA} ratings were lowest when the rival was Iraq, a former adversary which is currently considered a strategic partner of the United States. Results held when covariates (CK_{UN} and CK_{EST}) were controlled for, when ingroup identification was controlled for, and when outliers on at least one of the CK items were excluded from the analysis (Supporting Information, pp. 31–39).

5.2.3 | Values and Ideological Ingroup Norms as Underlying Differences in ACK

As in Study 3, we first conducted a parallel mediation analysis using Hayes' (2017) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5000

TABLE 5 | Regression analyses predicting ingroup identification by political orientation, rival group (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 4).

Reference category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Iraq	Cpol	-0.36	0.09	-0.27	-4.25***	<0.001	[-0.53, -0.19]	0.18	3.64
	Observer	-2.57	0.20	-0.52	-12.83***	<0.001	[-2.96, -2.18]	0.70	1.43
	Actor	-2.08	0.20	-0.42	-10.37***	<0.001	[-2.48, -1.69]	0.70	1.44
	NK	0.18	0.19	0.04	0.95	0.343	[-0.19, 0.55]	0.68	1.48
	Cpol × Observer	0.15	0.13	0.05	1.15	0.250	[-0.10, 0.39]	0.55	1.83
	Cpol × Actor	0.27	0.13	0.10	2.18*	0.030	[0.03, 0.52]	0.53	1.88
	Cpol × NK	0.15	0.12	0.06	1.23	0.219	[-0.09, 0.39]	0.52	1.93
Actor	Cpol	-0.09	0.09	-0.07	-0.98	0.330	[-0.25, 0.09]	0.24	4.21
	Observer	-0.49	0.21	-0.10	-2.34*	0.020	[-0.90, -0.08]	0.44	1.56
	NK	2.26	0.20	0.49	11.41***	<0.001	[1.87, 2.65]	0.61	1.63
	Iraq	2.08	0.20	0.45	10.37***	<0.001	[1.69, 2.48]	0.62	1.62
	Cpol × Observer	-0.13	0.13	-0.05	-0.97	0.332	[-0.38, 0.13]	0.51	1.96
	Cpol × NK	-0.12	0.13	-0.05	-0.95	0.341	[-0.37, 0.13]	0.48	2.07
	Cpol × Iraq	-0.27	0.13	-0.11	-2.18*	0.030	[-0.52, -0.03]	0.46	2.18
Observer	Cpol	-0.22	0.07	-0.16	-2.31*	0.021	[-0.40, -0.03]	0.23	4.39
	Actor	0.49	0.21	0.10	2.34*	0.020	[0.08, 0.90]	0.44	1.56
	NK	2.75	0.20	0.60	13.91***	<0.001	[2.36, 3.14]	0.62	1.62
	Iraq	2.57	0.20	0.55	12.83***	<0.001	[2.18, 2.96]	0.42	1.62
	Cpol × Actor	0.13	0.13	0.05	0.97	0.332	[-0.13, 0.38]	0.49	2.06
	Cpol × NK	0.01	0.13	0.00	0.04	0.965	[-0.25, 0.26]	0.47	2.12
	Cpol × Iraq	-0.15	0.13	-0.04	-1.15	0.250	[-0.39, 0.10]	0.45	2.33
NK	Cpol	-0.21	0.09	-0.16	-2.38*	0.018	[-0.38, -0.04]	0.25	3.95
	Observer	-2.75	0.20	-0.56	-13.91***	<0.001	[-3.14, -2.36]	0.72	1.40
	Actor	-2.26	0.20	-0.46	-11.41***	<0.001	[-2.65, -1.87]	0.71	1.40
	Iraq	-0.18	0.19	-0.04	-0.95	0.343	[-0.55, 0.19]	0.70	1.44
	Cpol × Observer	-0.01	0.13	-0.00	-0.04	0.965	[-0.26, 0.25]	0.53	1.90
	Cpol × Actor	0.12	0.13	0.05	0.95	0.341	[-0.13, 0.37]	0.51	1.95
	Cpol × Iraq	-0.15	0.12	-0.06	-1.23	0.219	[-0.39, 0.09]	0.48	2.10

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more liberal orientation); NK, North Korea.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

iterations (model 4) to examine the role of endorsement of individualizing and binding foundations and perceived ideological ingroup norms as competing mediators in the relations between political orientation and ACK, controlling for condition. Results are presented in Figure 3.

As shown in Figure 3., and as in Study 3, liberal (vs. conservative) political orientation was positively associated with the *endorsement of individualizing foundations* and with *perceived ingroup norms against collateral killings*, which were in turn negatively associated with CK_{MA}. The indirect effects of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of individualizing foundations (effect: -0.04, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.07, -0.01]) and ingroup norms (effect: -0.06, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.10, -0.02]) were both

significant. Liberal (vs. conservative) orientation was negatively associated with the *endorsement of binding foundations*, which was in turn not significantly associated with CK_{MA}. The indirect effect of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of binding foundations was, as expected, not significant (effect: 0.02, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI [0.03, 0.08]). Similar results were obtained when all covariates were controlled for ([Supporting Information](#), pp. 39–40).

Next, we examined the role of perceived norms and endorsement of individualizing moral foundations as sequential (serial) mediators in the relations between political orientation and ACK, controlling for the endorsement of binding foundations and conditions. We conducted two serial mediation analyses (PROCESS

TABLE 6 | Regression analyses predicting perceived legitimacy by political orientation, rival group (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 4).

Reference category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Iraq	Cpol	-0.17	0.07	-0.18	-2.49*	0.015	[-0.32, -0.03]	0.18	3.64
	Observer	1.41	0.17	0.40	8.38***	<0.001	[1.08, 1.74]	0.70	1.43
	Actor	1.36	0.17	0.38	8.04***	<0.001	[1.03, 1.69]	0.70	1.44
	NK	0.91	0.16	0.28	5.74***	<0.001	[0.60, 1.23]	0.68	1.48
	Cpol × Observer	0.06	0.11	0.03	0.52	0.606	[-0.15, 0.26]	0.55	1.83
	Cpol × Actor	0.19	0.11	0.10	1.80	0.073	[-0.02, 0.40]	0.53	1.88
	Cpol × NK	-0.09	0.10	-0.05	-0.85	0.396	[-0.29, 0.12]	0.52	1.93
Actor	Cpol	0.01	0.08	0.02	0.19	0.853	[-0.14, 0.17]	0.24	4.21
	Observer	0.05	0.18	0.02	0.31	0.759	[-0.29, 0.40]	0.44	1.56
	NK	-0.45	0.17	-0.13	-2.67**	0.008	[-0.77, -0.12]	0.61	1.63
	Iraq	-1.36	0.17	-0.40	-8.04***	<0.001	[-1.69, -1.03]	0.62	1.62
	Cpol × observer	-0.13	0.11	-0.07	-1.32	0.224	[-0.35, 0.08]	0.51	1.96
	Cpol × NK	-0.28	0.11	-0.15	-2.58*	0.010	[-0.49, -0.07]	0.48	2.07
	Cpol × Iraq	-0.19	0.11	-0.10	-1.80	0.073	[-0.40, 0.02]	0.46	2.18
Observer	Cpol	-0.12	0.08	-0.13	-1.52	0.128	[-0.27, 0.04]	0.23	4.39
	Actor	-0.05	0.18	-0.02	-0.31	0.759	[-0.40, 0.29]	0.44	1.56
	NK	-0.50	0.17	-0.15	-3.00**	0.003	[-0.83, -0.17]	0.62	1.62
	Iraq	-1.41	0.17	-0.42	-8.38***	<0.001	[-1.74, -1.08]	0.42	1.62
	Cpol × Actor	0.13	0.11	0.07	1.32	0.224	[-0.08, 0.35]	0.49	2.06
	Cpol × NK	-0.14	0.11	-0.08	-1.32	0.188	[-0.36, 0.07]	0.47	2.12
	Cpol × Iraq	-0.06	0.11	-0.03	-0.52	0.606	[-0.26, 0.15]	0.45	2.33
NK	Cpol	-0.26	0.07	-0.28	-3.52***	<0.001	[-0.41, -0.12]	0.25	3.95
	Observer	0.50	0.17	0.14	3.00**	0.003	[0.17, 0.83]	0.72	1.40
	Actor	0.45	0.17	0.13	2.67**	0.008	[0.12, 0.77]	0.71	1.40
	Iraq	-0.91	0.16	-0.27	-5.74***	<0.001	[-0.123, -0.60]	0.70	1.44
	Cpol × Observer	0.14	0.11	0.07	1.32	0.188	[-0.07, 0.36]	0.53	1.90
	Cpol × Actor	0.28	0.11	0.14	2.58*	0.010	[0.07, 0.49]	0.51	1.95
	Cpol × Iraq	0.09	0.10	0.05	0.85	0.396	[-0.12, 0.29]	0.48	2.10

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more liberal orientation); NK, North Korea.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

model 6; Hayes 2017) which alternate the order of the mediators. Results are presented in Figure 4. As shown in Figure 4, data supported both alternative models, with the indirect effects of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of individualizing moral foundations followed by perceived ingroup norms (model A: -0.01 , $SE = 0.004$, 95% CI [-0.02, -0.001]) and vice versa (model B: -0.01 , $SE = 0.003$, 95% CI [-0.01, -0.001]) being significant. Results held when all covariates were controlled for (Supporting Information, pp. 40–41).

To summarize, results in the United States replicate the findings of Studies 1–3 in suggesting that conservatives demonstrate higher ACK than liberals, when dealing with both a strategic

ally and an active adversary, when considering real or fictitious rival groups, and when their own group is not responsible for the civilian casualties. Importantly, ideological differences in ACK remained consistent across conditions, although ideological differences in both ingroup identification and perceived war legitimacy did not, suggesting that ideological differences in neither ingroup identification nor war legitimization can account for the observed ideological differences in ACK.

As in Study 3, endorsement of individualizing (but not binding) moral foundations, and perceived ingroup norms regarding collateral killings, emerged as both parallel and serial mediators in the relations between political orientation and ACK.

TABLE 7 | Regression analyses predicting CK_{MA} by political orientation, rival group (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 4).

Reference Category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Iraq	Cpol	-3.87	0.97	-0.32	-4.00***	<0.001	[-5.77, -1.97]	0.28	3.64
	Observer	7.94	2.28	0.17	3.48***	<0.001	[3.45, 12.42]	0.70	1.43
	Actor	6.74	2.29	0.15	2.95**	0.003	[2.24, 11.23]	0.70	1.44
	NK	9.87	2.15	0.23	4.59***	<0.001	[5.64, 14.10]	0.68	1.48
	Cpol × Observer	1.56	1.49	0.06	1.09	0.277	[-1.26, 4.38]	0.55	1.83
	Cpol × Actor	0.83	1.42	0.03	0.59	0.558	[-1.96, 3.62]	0.53	1.88
	Cpol × NK	1.46	1.40	0.06	1.04	0.297	[-1.29, 4.20]	0.52	1.93
Actor	Cpol	-3.04	1.04	-0.25	-2.93**	0.004	[-5.08, -1.00]	0.24	4.21
	Observer	1.20	2.38	0.03	0.50	0.615	[-3.48, 5.87]	0.44	1.56
	NK	3.14	2.26	0.07	1.39	0.165	[-1.30, 7.57]	0.61	1.63
	Iraq	-6.74	2.29	-0.16	-2.94**	0.003	[-11.23, -2.24]	0.62	1.62
	Cpol × observer	0.73	1.49	0.03	0.49	0.623	[-2.19, 3.65]	0.51	1.96
	Cpol × NK	0.63	1.45	0.03	0.43	0.666	[-2.22, 3.47]	0.48	2.07
	Cpol × Iraq	-0.83	1.42	-0.04	-0.59	0.558	[-3.62, 1.96]	0.46	2.18
Observer	Cpol	-2.31	1.06	-0.19	-2.18*	0.030	[-4.39, -0.22]	0.23	4.39
	Actor	-1.20	2.38	-0.03	-0.50	0.615	[-5.87, 3.48]	0.44	1.56
	NK	1.94	2.25	0.05	0.86	0.389	[-2.48, 6.37]	0.62	1.62
	Iraq	-7.94	2.28	-0.18	-3.48***	<0.001	[-12.42, -3.45]	0.42	1.62
	Cpol × Actor	-0.73	1.49	-0.03	-0.49	0.623	[-3.65, 2.19]	0.49	2.06
	Cpol × NK	-0.11	1.46	-0.00	-0.07	0.942	[-2.98, 2.77]	0.47	2.12
	Cpol × Iraq	-1.56	1.49	-0.07	-1.09	0.277	[-4.38, 1.26]	0.45	2.33
NK	Cpol	-2.42	1.01	-0.20	-2.40*	0.017	[-4.39, -0.44]	0.25	3.95
	Observer	-1.94	2.25	-0.04	-0.86	0.389	[-6.37, 2.48]	0.72	1.40
	Actor	-3.14	2.26	-0.07	-1.39	0.165	[-7.57, 1.30]	0.71	1.40
	Iraq	-9.87	2.15	-0.23	-4.59***	<0.001	[-14.10, -5.64]	0.70	1.44
	Cpol × Observer	0.11	1.46	0.00	0.07	0.942	[-2.77, 2.98]	0.53	1.90
	Cpol × Actor	-0.63	1.45	-0.03	-0.43	0.666	[-3.47, 2.22]	0.51	1.95
	Cpol × Iraq	-1.46	1.40	-0.06	-1.04	0.297	[-4.20, 1.29]	0.48	2.10

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more liberal orientation); NK, North Korea.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

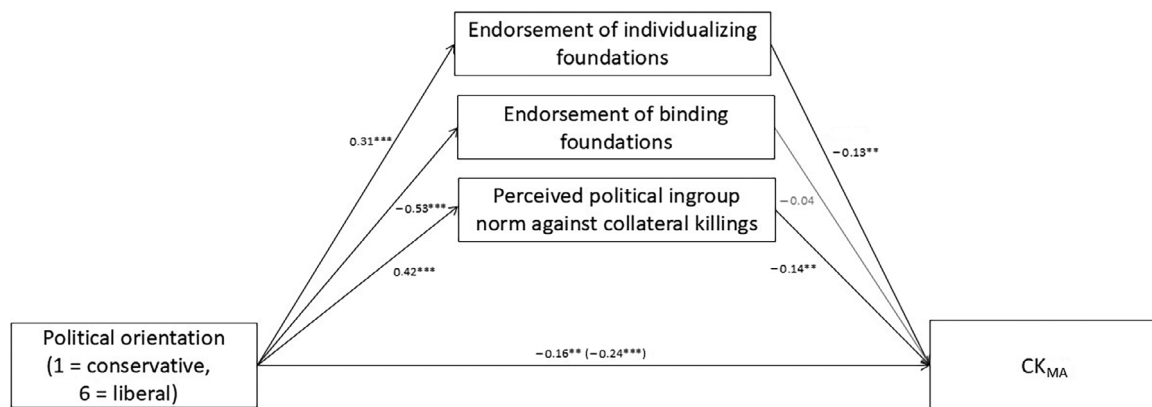
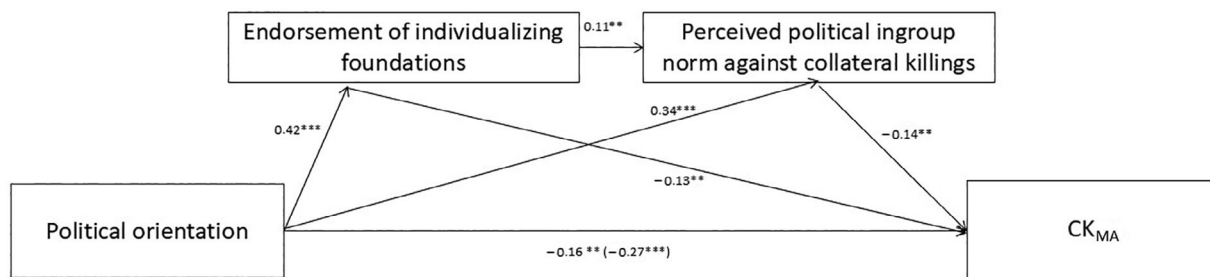


FIGURE 3 | Parallel mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4), Study 4. Note: This figure presents standardized coefficients. Insignificant paths are marked in gray. **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < 0.001

Serial mediation model A



Serial mediation model B

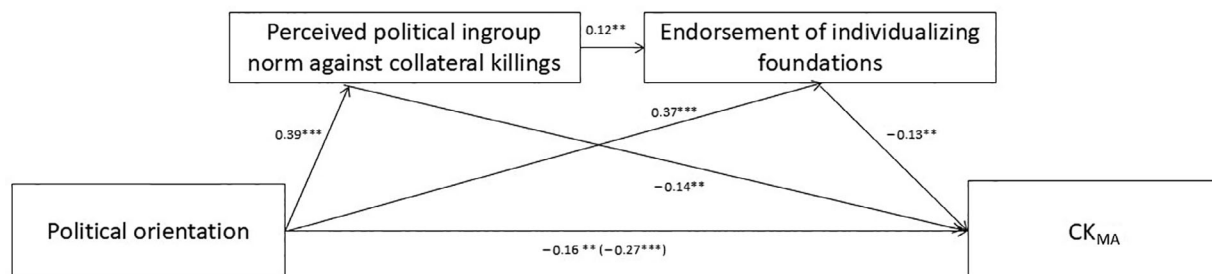


FIGURE 4 | Serial mediation analyses (PROCESS model 6), Study 4. Note: This figure presents standardized coefficients. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

6 | Study 5

Study 5 aimed to replicate findings from Studies 1–4 in the context of an acute real-life conflict, surveying Jewish-Israelis during the peak of the ‘Israel–Hamas’ war (22 October–1 November 2023), as Israel began extensive aerial attacks in Gaza and initiated ground operations.

We targeted Study 2 participants for this study due to the potential shift in political attitudes during wartime. We hypothesized that a real-life war situation might cause many individuals, particularly those originally left-wing, to adopt more right-wing positions. This shift could potentially alter the relationship between ideology and ACK. By re-engaging Study 2 participants, we gained the unique opportunity to examine the ideology–ACK relationship using both their wartime political orientation and their pre-war orientation as measured in Study 2.

Participants were presented with the war vignette used in Studies 1–4, adapted to reflect the actual Israel–Hamas war events. As in Studies 3 and 4, Study 5 examined the mediating role of individualizing foundations, binding foundations and perceived ideological ingroup norms in the relationship between political orientation and ACK, both through parallel and serial mediation analyses.

6.1 | Method

6.1.1 | Participants

We recruited participants through an Israeli survey company, drawing from those who had completed Study 2. Of the original 405 Study 2 participants, 155 participated in the current study

(46.5% female, 53.5% male; $M_{\text{age}} [SD] = 53.14 [18.95]$; $M [SD]$ of political orientation, rated 1 (right) to 6 (left): 3.39 [1.07]). Sensitivity power analyses (Faul et al. 2009) indicated this sample size is adequate to detect at least a small-to-medium-sized effect ($f^2 = 0.05$) in multiple regression, with standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power.

6.1.2 | Procedure and Measures

Participants completed the demographic questionnaire and rated their endorsement of individualizing ($\alpha = 0.71$) and binding foundations ($\alpha = 0.72$), as in Studies 3 and 4. Participants then read the war vignette (Supporting Information, p. 10), followed by a measure of identification with Israel ($\alpha = 0.94$) and an item of perceived war legitimacy (the extent to which they consider Israel’s current war against Hamas as a war of self-defence). Then, they provided their estimates of CK_{MA}, CK_{UN} and CK_{EST}. As before, we recoded participants’ CK_{MA}, CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} values into ordinal scales (Supporting Information, pp. 11–12). Skewness (0.05) and kurtosis (–1.12) values of the recoded CK_{MA} scale were consistent with assumptions of normality. Finally, participants rated their perceived ideological ingroup norms, with higher scores representing stronger perceived norms *against* collateral killings ($\alpha = 0.74$).

6.2 | Results and Discussion

6.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Table 8A (in the Supporting Information, p. 20) displays means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations among the main study variables. Endorsement of individualizing foundations was

TABLE 8 | Regression analyses predicting perceived ideological ingroup norms (manipulation check) by political orientation, condition (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 6).

Reference category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Control	Cpol	0.39	0.08	0.25	4.71***	<0.001	[0.23, 0.55]	0.33	3.05
	Control	-0.15	0.13	-0.04	-1.13	0.261	[-0.40, 0.11]	0.75	1.34
	High	-0.34	0.13	-0.09	-2.64**	0.008	[-0.59, -0.09]	0.75	1.34
	Cpol × High	0.08	0.12	0.03	0.79	0.428	[-0.16, 0.32]	0.87	2.01
	Cpol × Control	0.15	0.12	0.06	1.27	0.203	[-0.08, 0.37]	0.87	2.02
Low	Cpol	0.54	0.08	0.34	6.60***	<0.001	[0.38, 0.69]	0.34	2.96
	High	-0.20	0.13	-0.05	-1.52	0.128	[-0.45, 0.06]	0.75	1.33
	Low	0.15	0.13	0.04	1.13	0.261	[-0.11, 0.40]	0.75	1.33
	Cpol × High	-0.06	0.12	-0.02	-0.48	0.633	[-0.28, 0.17]	0.50	1.98
	Cpol × Low	-0.15	0.12	-0.05	-1.27	0.203	[-0.37, 0.08]	0.51	1.97
High	Cpol	0.48	0.08	0.31	5.87***	<0.001	[0.32, 0.64]	0.33	3.01
	Low	0.34	0.13	0.09	2.64**	0.008	[0.09, 0.59]	0.75	1.34
	Control	0.20	0.13	0.05	1.52	0.128	[-0.06, 0.45]	0.75	1.34
	Cpol × Low	-0.08	0.12	-0.03	-0.79	0.428	[-0.32, 0.16]	0.90	1.99
	Cpol × Control	0.06	0.12	0.02	0.48	0.633	[-0.17, 0.28]	0.90	2.01

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more leftist orientation); High, high acceptance condition; Low, low acceptance condition; control, control condition.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

moderately correlated with endorsement of binding foundations ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$), and both were only weakly correlated with perceived ideological ingroup norms against collateral killings ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.035$ and $r = -0.14$, $p = 0.074$, respectively).

There was no significant correlation between political orientation and either *perceived war legitimacy* ($r = 0.10$, $p = 0.241$) or *national identification* ($r = -0.15$, $p = 0.071$). The relatively high means of perceived legitimacy ($M [SD] = 6.60 [1.23]$ on a 1–7 scale) and national identification ($M [SD] = 6.56 [0.79]$ on a 1–7 scale) indicate that at the initial and highly intense stage of the war in which the study was conducted, both rightists and leftists identified relatively strongly with Israel and saw Israel's war in Gaza as highly legitimate.

Participants' political orientation ratings before the war ($M [SD] = 3.39 [1.07]$) and during the war ($M [SD] = 3.38 [1.03]$) were highly correlated ($r = 0.87$, $p < 0.001$).

6.2.2 | Ideological Differences in ACK

To examine ideological differences in CK_{MA} , we regressed perceived CK_{MA} on political orientation. Political orientation had a significant effect on CK_{MA} , with rightists showing higher CK_{MA} than leftists ($b = -3.66$, $SE = 0.80$, $\beta = -0.35$, $t = -4.58$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-5.24, -2.08]; partial $r = -0.347$). Similar results were obtained when controlling for CK_{UN} , CK_{EST} and ingroup identification, when one participant, who was an outlier on at least one of the CK items, was excluded from the analysis, and

when participants' pre-war political orientation served as the predictor (Supporting Information, p. 42).

6.2.3 | Values and Ideological Ingroup Norms as Underlying Differences in ACK

As in Studies 3 and 4, we first conducted a parallel mediation analysis using Hayes' (2017) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5000 iterations (model 4), with political orientation as the independent variable, endorsement of individualizing foundations, binding foundations and perceived ideological ingroup norms as competing (simultaneous) mediators and CK_{MA} as the outcome variable. Results are presented in Figure 5.

Consistent with Studies 3 and 4, leftists showed higher endorsement of *individualizing foundations*, which was in turn associated with lower ACK (indirect effect: -0.13 , $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.23, -0.04]). Although leftist political orientation was positively associated with perceived *ideological ingroup norms* against collateral killings, perceived norms did not mediate the ideology–ACK relation (indirect effect: -0.07 , $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.01]). Political orientation was not significantly associated with endorsement of binding foundations, which did not mediate the ideology–ACK relations (indirect effect: -0.01 , $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.01]). Results held when we controlled for CK_{UN} , CK_{EST} and ingroup identification, and when using pre-war political orientation as predictor (Supporting Information, pp. 43–44).

As only endorsement of individualizing foundations (but not perceived ingroup norms) was significantly associated with CK_{MA} ,

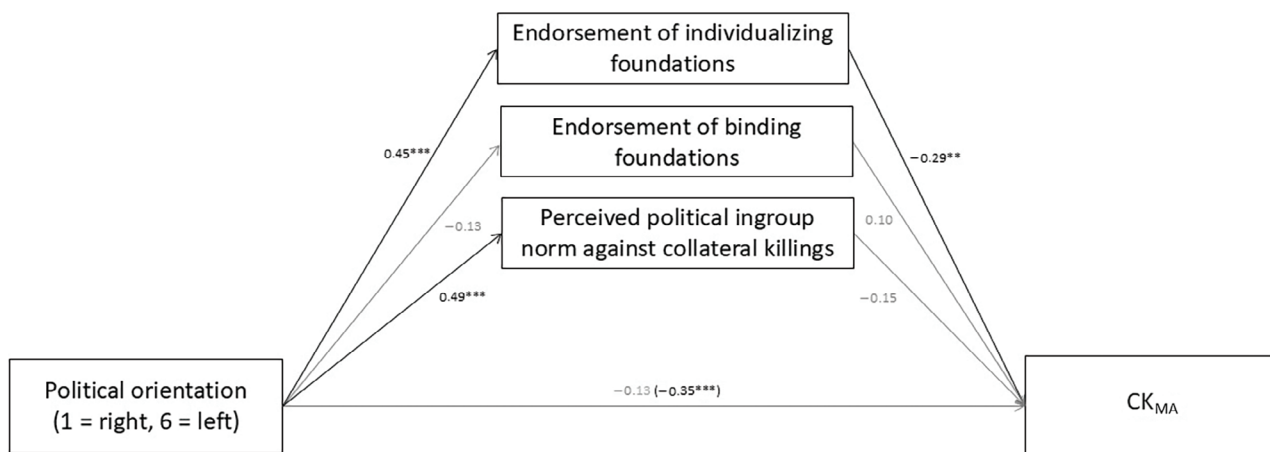


FIGURE 5 | Parallel mediation analysis (PROCESS model 4), Study 5. *Note:* This figure presents standardized coefficients. Insignificant paths are marked in gray. * $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.001$

Serial mediation model B

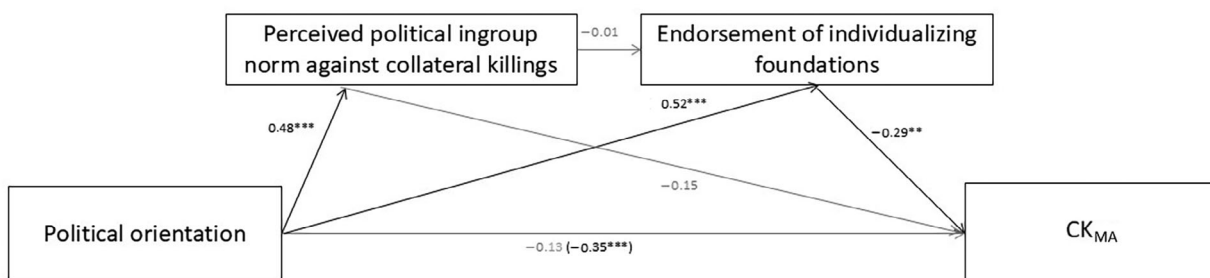


FIGURE 6 | Serial mediation analysis (PROCESS model 6), Study 5. *Note:* This figure presents standardized coefficients. Insignificant paths are marked in gray. * $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.001$

we conducted one serial mediation analysis (PROCESS, model 6), in which political orientation was the independent variable, perceived ideological ingroup norms was the first mediator, followed by endorsement of individualizing foundations as the second mediator, and CK_{MA} was the outcome variable, controlling for endorsement of binding foundations. Results are presented in Figure 6.

As shown in Figure 6, the two mediators (perceived ingroup norms and endorsement of individualizing foundations) were not significantly correlated when political orientation was included in the model, despite significant (albeit weak) zero-order correlations between them. Indeed, the indirect effect of political orientation on CK_{MA} via perceived ingroup norms followed by endorsement of individualizing moral foundations was not significant ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.04, -0.01]). The only significant indirect effect was the one leading from political orientation to CK_{MA} via endorsement of individualizing moral foundations ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.27, -0.05]). Results held when controlling for CK_{UN}, CK_{EST} and ingroup identification and when using pre-war political orientation as predictor (Supporting Information, pp. 45–46).

In summary, Study 5 replicated the ideological differences in ACK found in Studies 1–4, but in an actual wartime context

rather than in response to hypothetical war scenarios. In this context of acute real-life war, we found no ideological differences in either national identification or perceived war legitimacy, although significant ideological differences in ACK did emerge. This pattern suggests that even in a real-life war context, ideological differences in national identification and war legitimacy perceptions cannot account for the ideological difference in ACK. As in Studies 3 and 4, these differences were mediated by individualizing, but not binding, moral foundations.

Two notable departures from Studies 3 and 4 emerged. First, leftists and rightists showed no significant differences in binding moral foundations, possibly reflecting a shared emphasis on the group's well-being during an intense war period. Second, unlike in Studies 3 and 4, perceived ingroup norms against collateral killings were not associated with ACK when value endorsement was considered in the model and therefore did not mediate the ideology–ACK relations. These findings suggest that during periods of significant upheaval, such as wartime, individual values may override group norms in shaping attitudes (see Durkheim 1893). This could stem from heightened concerns about personal safety and societal stability prompting deeper moral reflection, rather than reliance on group norms for guidance. Additionally, wartime conditions often disrupt social dynamics and information flow, potentially making group norms less clear or consistent.

In such contexts, personal moral foundations may provide a more reliable framework for decision-making. Future research should examine whether this shift towards individual values generalizes across different types of societal crises and explore its underlying psychological mechanisms.

7 | Study 6

Studies 3–5 suggest that ideological differences in endorsing individualizing foundations may explain ideological differences in ACK, while Studies 3 and 4 (but not Study 5) suggest that perceived ideological ingroup norms also play a role. However, these correlational studies cannot determine if factors mediate ideology–ACK relations independently (parallel mediation) or through each other (serial mediation), as Studies 3 and 4 supported both possibilities.

To establish statistical independence between these mediators, Study 6 (pre-registered⁴) first measured moral foundations, then manipulated ideological ingroup norms following the manipulation-of-mediator design (Pirlott and MacKinnon 2016), which manipulates the *systematic variance* in the mediator typically caused by the independent variable. We embedded the norm manipulation in a ‘Zachland’ versus ‘Passland’ war scenario. All participants imagined being ‘Zachland’ citizens (‘actor’ condition in Studies 2–4) and were randomly assigned to three conditions: ‘high acceptance’ of civilian casualties, ‘low acceptance’, or control (no norm information).

Following the ‘testing-a-process-hypothesis-by-an-interaction’ strategy (Jacoby and Sassenberg 2011), we tested our process hypothesis through interaction: if norms function as a process variable, political orientation–ACK relations should depend on whether norms are uninterrupted (control) versus manipulated (high/low acceptance). In other words, we expected political orientation and manipulated norms to interact, with ideological differences in ACK diminishing in ‘high’ and ‘low’ acceptance conditions (where ideological differences in norms are eliminated) but persisting in the control condition (where norms vary freely). Additionally, if norms would be a mediating variable then we would expect manipulated norms to have a main effect, which would show their causal influence. Therefore, if ingroup norms directly affect ACK (rather than through moral values), both leftists’ and rightists’ ACK should be higher under ‘high’ versus ‘low’ acceptance conditions.

7.1 | Method

7.1.1 | Participants

Jewish-Israelis were recruited for this online study using a professional Israeli survey company in May 2022. An a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al. 2009) indicated that a sample size of 787 participants would be needed to detect a small-sized effect ($f^2 = 0.01$) in a multiple regression with standard alpha (0.05) and 80% power.⁵ Our sample included 1004 Jewish-Israelis (54.1% female, 45.8% male, 0.1% other; $M_{\text{age}} [SD] = 44.45[15.17]$; $M [SD]$ of political orientation, rated 1 (right) and 6 (left): 3.32 [1.11]).

A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al. 2009) indicated that this sample size is sufficient for detecting at least a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.01$) in a multiple regression, based on standard alpha (0.05) and higher (90%) power.

7.1.2 | Design and Measures

Participants completed demographics and measures of binding ($\alpha = 0.80$) and individualizing foundations ($\alpha = 0.76$) as in Studies 3–5. After reading the war vignette and passing comprehension checks, they rated identification with ‘Zachland’ ($\alpha = 0.98$). Participants were randomly assigned to three conditions. In two conditions, they were presented with ACK ratings from their ideological ingroup members (fellow leftists/rightists) who allegedly participated in the study earlier, based on items from Studies 3–5 (e.g., ‘killing civilians during war, under the circumstances described, is inappropriate’; [Supporting Information](#), p. 15). The ‘low acceptance norm’ condition showed ingroup ratings of 5–6 on a 1–7 scale (strong norms against collateral killings), while the ‘high acceptance norm’ showed ratings of 2–3 (weak norms against collateral killings). The ‘control’ condition showed no ingroup rating information.

Participants then completed a manipulation check assessing perceived ideological ingroup norm (‘to what extent do you think killing civilians during war, under these circumstances, is considered a violation of leftist/rightist norms in Israel?’; 1–7), with higher scores indicating stronger norms against collateral killing. All participants then provided CK_{MA} , CK_{UN} and CK_{EST} estimates as in Studies 1–5, before debriefing about the nature of the manipulation. Values were recoded to ordinal scales ([Supporting Information](#), pp. 11–12), with recoded CK_{MA} ’s skewness (0.63) and kurtosis (–0.72) meeting normality assumptions.

7.2 | Results and Discussion

7.2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations between the study variables are presented in the [Supporting Information](#) (p. 21, Table 9A). Endorsement of individualizing foundations was moderately correlated with endorsement of binding foundations ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) and with perceived ideological ingroup norms against collateral killings (manipulation check; $r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). Endorsement of binding foundations and perceived norms were uncorrelated ($r = 0.003$, $p = 0.923$).

For the manipulation check, we regressed *perceived ideological ingroup norms* on political orientation, norm condition (dummy coded, each time with one condition as the reference category) and their interactions (Table 8). Table 8 shows that participants perceived their ideological ingroup as less tolerant of collateral killings in the ‘low’ versus ‘high’ acceptance condition. Control condition ratings fell between these extremes, not significantly differing from either condition. To summarize, our manipulation successfully created systematic differences in perceived norms between conditions, unmoderated by political orientation.

TABLE 9 | Regression analyses predicting CK_{MA} by political orientation, condition (dummy coded) and their interactions (Study 6).

Reference category	Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Control	Cpol	-4.50	0.96	-0.23	-4.36***	<0.001	[-6.08, -2.31]	0.34	2.96
	Control	0.20	1.53	0.01	0.13	0.894	[-2.79, 3.20]	0.75	1.34
	High	-0.17	1.53	-0.00	-0.11	0.911	[-3.16, 2.82]	0.75	1.33
	Cpol × High	1.04	1.37	0.03	0.76	0.449	[-1.65, 3.72]	0.50	1.98
	Cpol × Control	0.33	1.37	0.01	0.24	0.808	[-2.36, 3.02]	0.51	1.97
Low	Cpol	-3.84	0.98	-0.21	-3.94***	<0.001	[-5.78, -1.95]	0.33	3.05
	High	0.20	1.53	0.01	0.13	0.894	[-2.79, 3.20]	0.75	1.34
	Low	0.03	1.53	0.00	0.02	0.983	[-2.96, 3.03]	0.75	1.34
	Cpol × High	0.70	1.38	0.02	0.51	0.610	[-2.00, 3.40]	0.87	2.01
	Cpol × Low	-0.33	1.37	-0.01	-0.24	0.808	[-3.02, 2.36]	0.87	2.02
High	Cpol	-3.16	0.97	-0.18	-3.26***	0.001	[-5.07, -1.26]	0.33	3.01
	Low	-0.03	1.53	-0.00	-0.02	0.983	[-3.03, 2.96]	0.75	1.34
	Control	0.17	1.53	0.00	0.11	0.911	[-2.82, 3.16]	0.75	1.34
	Cpol × Low	-0.70	1.38	-0.02	-0.51	0.610	[-3.40, 2.00]	0.90	1.99
	Cpol × Control	-1.04	1.37	-0.03	-0.76	0.449	[-3.72, 1.65]	0.90	2.02

Abbreviations: Cpol, political orientation, centred (higher scores indicate more leftist orientation); High, high acceptance condition; Low, low acceptance condition; control, control condition.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

7.2.2 | Primary Analyses

To examine the role of ideological ingroup norms as a process variable in the ideology–ACK relations, we compared the effect of political orientation on ACK when the mediating process (norms) was left uninterrupted (control condition) versus when it was experimentally manipulated (high and low acceptance conditions). Therefore, we regressed CK_{MA} on political orientation, norm conditions (dummy coded) and their interactions, each time with a different condition as a reference category (Table 9). As shown in Table 9, political orientation significantly predicted CK_{MA} across all conditions, with rightists showing higher CK_{MA} estimates than leftists. Neither the interaction with conditions nor the direct effects of norm conditions were significant.

In other words, although the manipulation was effective in creating systematic variations in perceived norms among both leftists and rightists, results do not provide support for the role of norms in mediating ideological differences in ACK, neither do they provide support for a direct effect of ideological ingroup norms on ACK.

Results held then covariates (CK_{UN}, CK_{EST} and ingroup identification) were controlled for and when three outliers on at least one of the CK items were excluded from the analysis (Supporting Information, pp. 47–50).

Next, we examined the role of endorsement of individualizing foundations and endorsement of binding foundations as mediators in the ideology–ACK relations, and whether this mediation is moderated by norms. To that end, we conducted a moder-

ated mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; Model 8; see conceptual diagram in the Supporting Information, p. 50), with political orientation as the predictor, norm condition (control/low/high) as a multi-categorical moderator, endorsement of individualizing and binding foundations as mediators and CK_{MA} as the outcome variable. Leftist political orientation was associated with increased endorsement of *individualizing foundations* (*b* = 0.15, *SE* = 0.03, *t* = 4.49, *p* < 0.001, 95% CI [0.09, 0.22]) and with decreased endorsement of *binding foundations* (*b* = -0.31, *SE* = 0.04, *t* = -8.75, *p* < 0.001, 95% CI [-0.38, -0.24]). Neither of these effects was moderated by norm condition. Endorsement of individualizing moral foundations, in turn, was significantly associated with CK_{MA} (*b* = -6.40, *SE* = 0.97, *t* = -6.56, *p* < 0.001, 95% CI [-8.31, -4.49]), which was unqualified by norm condition. Neither the norm condition nor endorsement of binding moral foundations had a direct association with CK_{MA}. Finally, the indirect effect of political orientation on CK_{MA} via endorsement of individualizing moral foundations was significant under all norm conditions (control: *b* = -0.99, *SE* = 0.29, 95% CI [-1.62, -0.48], low norm: *b* = -0.99, *SE* = 0.29, 95% CI [-1.60, -0.48], high norm: *b* = -1.01, *SE* = 0.29, 95% CI [-1.63, -0.48]). The indirect effect via endorsement of binding foundations was not (control: *b* = -0.45, *SE* = 0.30, 95% CI [-1.04, 0.14], low norm: *b* = -0.43, *SE* = 0.29, 95% CI [-1.00, 0.13], high norm: *b* = -0.38, *SE* = 0.25, 95% CI [-0.89, 0.11]).

In summary, individualizing (not binding) moral foundations mediated ideology–ACK relationship, while experimentally manipulated ideological ingroup norms neither directly affected ACK nor moderated ideology–ACK relations, suggesting norms are not direct mediators. However, these findings do not exclude

indirect mediation, where norms influence ACK through individualizing moral foundations, as suggested in Studies 3 and 4. Study 6's design, measuring values before norm manipulation, cannot provide causal evidence for this potential serial mediation.

Ideally, testing causal paths would require manipulating both moral values and norms independently. However, manipulating deeply held values presents significant methodological and ethical challenges. Future research should explore ethically sound value manipulation methods (e.g., priming techniques, targeted interventions for temporary moral foundation salience). Additionally, stronger norm manipulations more closely approximating real-world social influences may be needed, as our manipulation, though effective on manipulation checks, may have lacked sufficient potency to influence ACK. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking changes in values, norms and attitudes over time may offer valuable causal insights into these processes.

8 | General Discussion

Across six studies conducted in Israel and the United States, our findings reveal consistent ideological differences in ACK, with conservatives/rightists reporting higher ACK than liberals/leftists, across various war scenarios.

Applying the 'stimulus sampling' approach to study ideological differences (e.g., Elad-Strenger et al. 2024; Fiagbenu et al. 2021; Proch et al. 2019), our research design aimed to disentangle ideological differences in the perceived justness of war (*jus ad bellum*) from ideological differences in the perceived justness of actions within the war (*jus in bello*). First, we maintained a consistent setting of a self-defence war (a paradigmatic case of a 'just war'; Watkins and Goodwin 2020), involving collateral killings during high-value military operations. Second, we experimentally varied important war features that might influence perceptions of war legitimacy, including whether adversaries were real or fictitious groups, whether collateral victims belonged to a current rival group or strategic partner, and whether the war was real-life or hypothetical. This variation prompted participants to consider cross-condition differences in factors such as relative power, retaliation capability, threat level, and attitudes towards rival civilians (e.g., level of dehumanization), which may all affect perceived legitimacy. If ideological differences in ACK stem from differences in perceived war legitimacy, then varying these features may affect the magnitude of ideological differences in perceived legitimacy and, consequently, in ACK.

Indeed, our results showed that ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy varied across contexts. Studies 1 and 4, involving real-life adversaries, revealed ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy that varied by adversary identity (Study 1: Palestinians > Egypt > Iran; Study 4: North Korea > Iraq). In studies with fictitious groups (Studies 2–4), no significant ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy emerged. Similar results were found in Study 5, conducted during an acute phase of the Israel– Hamas war. Despite these variations in ideological differences in perceived war legitimacy across conditions, ideological differences in ACK remained consistent

across all contexts, even when legitimization of war between fictitious and real-life adversaries was directly compared (Study 4).

The various contexts we examined can be considered as mobilizing different levels and types of participants' self-defence motivations. The consistency of our findings across these different operationalizations of self-defence motivations suggests that the relationship between political orientation and ACK may reflect a more fundamental ideological difference in the acceptance of harm to outgroup civilians in war than a mere product of situational factors or specific conflict dynamics. In other words, ACK may be more context-independent than perceived war legitimacy, possibly due to ACK tapping into more fundamental moral intuitions and more general ideological norms about the acceptability of harm to outgroup civilians.

Our second goal in varying contexts was to disentangle ideological differences in ingroup identification from those in ACK. These factors are inevitably confounded when individuals' ACK is assessed only in the context of their national ingroup committing civilian harm. We achieved this by manipulating whether participants were members of the group committing the collateral killings, in the context of war between fictitious groups. Indeed, ideological differences in ACK persisted even in the absence of ideological differences in ingroup identification between conditions.

Alongside the identities of the adversaries and the level of ingroup identification, our war scenarios also varied in other details, such as the nature of outgroup attacks (direct missile attacks on ingroup cities vs. targeting overseas bases), implemented to maintain scenario credibility. While these variations may have introduced cross-scenario differences in the potential global implications of these wars, the ideological asymmetry in ACK remained consistent.

Nevertheless, the lack of moderation in relations between political orientation and ACK by war context requires cautious interpretation. Our failure to find significant interactions could reflect insufficient manipulation strength or statistical power, as interactions in social psychology typically have small effect sizes requiring large samples. Moreover, despite varying certain contextual variables, many potential contextual moderators remained unexplored. Previous research (e.g., Confino et al. 2024; Elad-Strenger et al. 2020; Falomir-Pichastor, Pereira, et al. 2012; Falomir-Pichastor, Staerkle, et al. 2012; Staerkle et al. 2015) shows that ACK judgments are significantly influenced by factors like political structure (democratic vs. non-democratic) of involved countries and target population's support for aggressive policies. Indeed, a potential limitation is that all real-life rivals in Studies 1 and 4 were less democratic than the ingroup, potentially enhancing perceived justification for military action and amplifying observed ideological differences in ACK. More research should expand the contextual factors examined, including manipulating war justness independently of adversaries' actions to explore their interaction and influence on moral judgments. Future studies should consider varying features like country size, war history, state versus non-state actors, democracy levels and power differentials between conflicting parties. Additionally, studying citizens of countries less involved in war or with lower political

polarization than Israel and the United States could provide valuable cross-cultural insights.

Relatedly, for the scenarios involving real-life groups, we deliberately chose current or former rival groups with a clear history of collateral casualties inflicted by both sides. Even in the context of strategic peaceful relations, these countries therefore had at least some tensions/rivalry. This decision was made to strike a balance between exploring a range of conflict situations and maintaining scenario credibility. However, we acknowledge that this approach limits the generalizability of our findings to a specific subset of real-life conflicts. Examining attitudes towards ACK in conflicts involving friendly countries or nations with no history of conflict may reveal important nuances in moral decision-making processes, although some scenarios (e.g., the ingroup inflicting civilian casualties on a friendly country) could strain credibility. It is likely, for example, that ideological differences in ACK may reduce for allied civilian casualties, as leftists would likely maintain their low ACK due to harm avoidance principles, whereas rightists may show reduced ACK due to the strategic importance of the ally. However, the identity of the group inflicting allied civilian casualties could also play a crucial role. If an enemy group were to inflict them, ideological differences in ACK might increase, with rightists becoming especially punitive towards enemies harming valued allies, who help protect the ingroup from potential harm.

Stretching these extensions further, we can contemplate scenarios involving ingroup casualties. While ingroup casualties caused by an enemy would likely not elicit significant ideological differences in ACK (with both leftists and rightists strongly opposing such casualties), the more intriguing and morally complex scenario, where ingroup casualties are caused by one's own group, may reveal an ideological divide. The current Israel– Hamas conflict provides a relevant example with the case of Israeli soldiers and hostages in Gaza. Due to their stronger endorsement of binding moral foundations, rightists may show greater acceptance of Israeli military actions that risk hostage casualties when these deaths are framed as necessary sacrifices for broader national security objectives. They may, however, show the same level of ACK as leftists when it comes to collateral deaths of ingroup soldiers. Future research could help elucidate how individuals navigate the complex moral trade-offs inherent in these highly charged and emotionally challenging situations.

Our inclusion of scenarios involving fictitious countries was meant to examine ACK without the confounding effects of pre-existing attitudes towards specific countries or historical conflicts. This method, of course, presents its own challenges. Most importantly, participants may still draw from their own experiences and knowledge of real-world conflicts when interpreting these scenarios, potentially introducing uncontrolled variability. Additionally, the lack of concrete, real-world context might reduce the ecological validity of the findings, as participants' judgments in abstract scenarios may not fully reflect how they would respond to actual geopolitical situations. One additional idea to examine ACK in 'observer' situations could be using conflicts between real-life groups towards which participants themselves are observers rather than actors, especially if these groups have no history of conflict with participants' ingroup and are even generally seen as

allies, which could control for their particular conflict perception (e.g., ethos of conflict; Bar-Tal et al. 2021). More generally, future research should examine ideological differences in ACK across a wider range of intergroup relationships, including those that might seem implausible in current real-world contexts, using futuristic scenarios or alternative history narratives, while aiming to balance between experimental control and ecological validity.

Findings from Studies 3–6 also shed light on potential mediators in the observed ideology–ACK relations. Extending previous studies showing associations between moral foundations and attitudes towards civilian casualties (Bell et al. 2022; Rathbun and Stein 2020; Smetana and Vranka 2021), our results indicate that in the context of *ideological differences* in ACK, differences in the endorsement of values guiding our moral intuitions towards individuals carry more weight than differences in the endorsement of values guiding moral intuitions towards groups. Specifically, ideological differences in ACK were mediated by conservatives'/rightists' weaker endorsement of individualizing foundations (emphasizing avoiding harm to and unfair treatment of others), but not by their stronger endorsement of binding foundations (emphasizing the welfare of the group).

These findings align with previous research on the strong association between dehumanization and support for intergroup violence and collateral civilian casualties (e.g., Bruneau and Kteily 2017; Kteily and Bruneau 2017; Rai et al. 2017; Schrieyal et al. 2019). Notably, previous work demonstrates that individuals high in social dominance orientation (SDO), a trait more common among conservatives, exhibit higher levels of blatant dehumanization (Kteily et al. 2015) and dehumanization of the rival in war (Jackson and Gaertner 2010). Our research shows that rightists' reduced emphasis on individual-focused moral values, even when not specifically targeting a particular outgroup, is associated with their greater acceptance of civilian casualties. This suggests a more generalized tendency to disregard individual welfare in favour of broader, group-oriented goals.

In Studies 3 and 4, we found that perceived ideological ingroup norms concerning collateral killings mediated ideological differences in ACK, alongside the endorsement of individualizing moral foundations. This effect was not observed in Study 5. Studies 3 and 4 also suggest potential bidirectional relationships between ideological ingroup norms and moral values, as they functioned as sequential mediators in the relationship between political orientation and ACK. However, the correlational nature of these studies limits our ability to definitively establish the causal order of this sequential mediation. We attempted to disentangle the causal order in Study 6 by experimentally manipulating ideological ingroup norms. Although our manipulation successfully altered participants' perceived norms, the findings did not provide evidence for their role as a process variable in the ideology–ACK relationship or for their direct effect on ACK.

Nevertheless, the collective results of Studies 3–6 do not rule out the possibility that norms may indirectly mediate the relationship between political orientation and ACK by shaping individuals' moral intuitions. Properly testing their causal role in predicting ACK would require experimental manipulation of deeply held moral intuitions, which may present ethical and methodological

challenges. Nevertheless, future studies are encouraged to explore ethically sound ways to manipulate both norms and values effectively, to help clarify their role in shaping attitudes towards civilian casualties.

It is also crucial to acknowledge the potentially bidirectional relationship between political orientation and moral values. While our research focused on moral foundations as potential mediators of the relationship between political orientation and ACK, consistent with previous research (see Hatemi et al. 2019), we recognize that these relationships may nonetheless be reciprocal and mutually reinforcing over time. Political ideologies can shape moral values, but pre-existing moral intuitions can influence the development of political orientations. Future studies could explore this complexity through longitudinal designs, tracking the co-evolution of moral values, perceived norms and political orientation over time.

Given the influential role of public opinion on civilian casualties in warfare and its impact on conflict duration and outcomes, both internationally and domestically, our findings carry significant policy implications. Policymakers must carefully consider ideological differences in ACK when making and communicating critical decisions, even for conflicts not directly involving their national ingroup and despite national consensus on war legitimacy. They may employ moral framing strategies that appeal to individualizing (rather than binding) moral foundations when addressing different constituencies.

Finally, this paper takes no normative stance on whether liberals/leftists' lower ACK is morally praiseworthy. We demonstrate that tolerance of collateral killing is robustly related to political orientation and mediated by moral values focused on individuals rather than groups. Whether lower tolerance of collateral killings reflects a true grasp of moral considerations or a distortion motivated by over-sensitivity, remains a question for moral and political philosophers to decide.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Disclosure

Data and syntax from all studies, as well as the pre-registration of Study 6, are shared in a publicly available repository on OSF:

Study materials: https://osf.io/r6bwx/?view_only=5c9a2d8e6fe54fa69b6a9ffc51902bd2

Pre-registration: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/JUYAH>

Data Availability Statement

Data and syntax from all studies, as well as the pre-registration of Study 6, are shared in a publicly available repository on OSF.

Ethics Statement

This study conforms to recognized ethical standards and was approved by the IRB at Bar Ilan University.

Endnotes

¹We set quotas on the political orientation item before data collection in Studies 1–5, to ensure an equal representation of self-identified rightists/conservatives (rated 1–3) and leftists/liberals (rated 4–6) in our samples.

²We replaced the imaginary name 'Zachland' with 'Levland' to ease pronounceability for English speakers.

³We only targeted participants with 1000+ approved HITs, a "masters" qualification, and a 90+ approval percentage qualification.

⁴<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/JUYAH>.

⁵The pre-registration initially described power analyses based on the original plan of conducting analysis of variances. However, switching to regression analyses allowed us to both increase the sample size (by including centrists) and enhance statistical power.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.