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# Support for rights of Syrian refugees in Turkey: The role of secondary transfer effects in intergroup contact

Halime Ünver[1] | Hüseyin Çakal[1] | Meltem Güler[2] | Linda R. Tropp[3]

[1]School of Psychology, Keele University, Keele, UK

[2]Department of Psychology, Cukurova University, Adana, Turkey

[3]Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA

**Correspondence**
Halime Ünver, School of Psychology, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, UK.
Email: h.unver@keele.ac.uk

## Abstract

This study explored the role of secondary transfer effects (STEs) to test whether and how contact between advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds may shape support for the rights of Syrian refugees. We investigated whether dimensions of contact, positive versus negative, between a historically advantaged group (Turks, $n = 300$) and a disadvantaged group (Kurds, $n = 127$), extend to a novel disadvantaged outgroup (Syrian refugees) via attitude generalization and as a function of the perceived threat from the novel outgroup. Controlling for the effects of contact with Syrian refugees, findings show that both positive and negative contacts with the primary outgroups are associated with support for policies benefiting the secondary outgroup, Syrian refugees, but these associations are moderated by perceived threats posed by the secondary outgroup. We discuss the implications of these findings for future research on secondary transfer processes of contact and for research on multiple group contexts. Please refer to the Supplementary Material section to find this article's Community and Social Impact Statement.

KEYWORDS

attitude generalization, intergroup contact, intergroup threat, refugees, secondary transfer effect

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR & Government of Turkey, 2021), Turkey hosts the largest Syrian migrant population in the world (totalling around 3.6 million) while also being home to a large population of Kurds who have been historically disadvantaged as an minority ethnic group. Today, more than 13 million people in Turkey define themselves as Kurdish (Konda, 2019; Yetkin, 2019). Relations between Turks and Kurds have ranged from harmonious to conflictual (Çakal, Hewstone, Güler, & Heath, 2016), while relations between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees have been challenged by perceptions of threat, suspicion and prejudice (see Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Erdoğan, 2014).

This complicated context requires a more detailed understanding of relations between newly arrived Syrian refugees, Turks and Kurds vis-à-vis relations between Turks and Kurds. As the main stakeholders, shared perceptions of Turks and Kurds could play a decisive role in determining public support for the rights of Syrian refugees. However, contact between members of the host society and Syrian refugees is still limited, which may shape host communities' (political) attitudes toward Syrian refugees. In fact, to our knowledge, there has been no research investigating how relations between advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds may inform attitudes and support social policies targeting newly arrived Syrian refugees. Therefore, drawing from the literature on the transferable effect of intergroup contact, that is, secondary transfer effects (STEs; e.g., Boin et al., 2021; Pettigrew, 2009; Vezzali, Di Bernardo, Cocco, Stathi, & Capozza, 2021), we would expect that contact between Turks and Kurds might influence attitudes toward a more distal, recently arrived outgroup, that is, Syrian refugees. Accordingly, these attitudes toward Syrian refugees shaped by contact between members of the host society may then enhance political solidarity with Syrian refugees. The present research examines whether and how contact between advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds may inform support for the rights of Syrian refugees, and how perceived threat from Syrian refugees qualifies this process.

First, we take into account that effects of intergroup contact may extend to groups that are not involved in the actual contact situation (STE; Pettigrew, 2009) and that contact may be positive or negative in nature (Barlow et al., 2012). Accordingly, we advance the idea that contact between Turks and Kurds should affect support for rights of Syrian refugees via attitude generalization. That is, contact between Turks and Kurds should shape their attitudes toward each other and these attitudes, in turn, should inform their attitudes toward a secondary outgroup (Syrian refugees) and, subsequently, their support for policies that would benefit the secondary outgroup. Also, given that intergroup attitudes may be more negative when associated with perceptions of threat (e.g., Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006), we expect that perceiving Syrian refugees to be a source of threat would moderate this attitude generalization process.

In what follows, we first review the research on STEs of intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 2009; Vezzali et al., 2021) and how perceived threat shapes intergroup attitudes and the attitude generalization process (W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 2013; W. G. Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios Morrison, 2015; Zingora & Graf, 2019). We then examine how contact between advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds predicts attitudes toward and support for the rights of Syrian refugees – which are structurally the most disadvantaged of the three groups – and whether perceived threats would moderate Turks' and Kurds' support for Syrian refugees' rights.

### 1.1 | Secondary transfer effects of intergroup contact

A wealth of research indicates that positive interactions between people belonging to different groups can improve intergroup relations (Brown & Hewstone, 2005) by reducing intergroup prejudice (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tausch, Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2007) and perceptions of intergroup threat (Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2010; W. G. Stephan et al., 2002; Tausch et al., 2007). Research also shows that such positive effects of contact between two groups can also extend

to other groups not involved in the contact (Boin et al., 2021; Pettigrew, 2009; Vezzali et al., 2021), which is commonly referred to as the *secondary transfer effect* (STE; Pettigrew, 2009).

Surprisingly, to date, STE research has focussed almost exclusively on the effects of *positive* contact between groups (see Tropp, Mazziotta, & Wright, 2017, for a recent review). However, research also shows that contact can also be experienced negatively (Aberson, 2015; Barlow et al., 2012; Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010; W. G. Stephan et al., 2002). This negative contact can have detrimental effects on intergroup relations by fostering greater perceived threat from outgroups (Aberson, 2015; W. G. Stephan et al., 2002), and more negative intergroup attitudes (Aberson, 2015; Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014; W. G. Stephan et al., 2002). Furthermore, negative contact experiences can influence intergroup attitudes more strongly than positive contact experiences (Aberson, 2015; Graf et al., 2014), though on the whole, positive contact tends to be more common than negative contact (Graf et al., 2014).

Accordingly, compared with the research on the STE of positive contact, research on the STEs of negative contact is still in its infancy (Boin et al., 2021; Vezzali et al., 2021). As one example, Brylka, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Mähönen (2016) found that Estonian and Russian immigrants' negative contact with host Finns were associated with less positive attitudes toward the other immigrant groups, while positive contact with Finns was related to improved attitudes toward the other minority groups via attitudes toward Finns. In a similar vein, Meleady and Forder (2019; Study 3) reported that positive contact with the Muslim minority was associated with higher contact intentions toward secondary outgroups (Eastern European, Indian and black African immigrants) among British people, via increased contact intentions toward Muslims. On the contrary, negative contact with the Muslim minority was linked with lower contact intentions toward the secondary outgroups via reduced contact intentions toward Muslims. Given that negative contact is particularly relevant to conflictual intergroup contexts where intergroup relations are rife with suspicion, negativity and threat (see Wagner & Hewstone, 2012), it is especially important to consider how both positive and negative forms of contact function simultaneously in secondary transfer processes of intergroup contact. In the present research, we seek to replicate these earlier findings by testing the effects of both positive and negative contact, while extending emerging research in this area in three ways.

*Attitude generalization*. First, a key process underlying STEs is that of attitude generalization, whereby the positive feelings toward primary outgroups generated through intergroup contact then extend to secondary outgroups not involved in the contact situation (Boin et al., 2021; Lolliot et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 2009; Schmid, Hewstone, Küpper, Zick, & Wagner, 2012; Tausch et al., 2010; Vezzali et al., 2021). Correspondingly, then, some have posited that negative contact with the primary outgroup might correspond with more negative attitudes toward the secondary outgroup via the attitude generalization process too (Harwood, Paolini, Joyce, Rubin, & Arroyo, 2011, for a related argument). Given that the link between negative contact and prejudice tends to be stronger than the link between positive contact and prejudice (see Aberson, 2015), we examine whether and how both positive and negative forms of contact may contribute to attitude generalization from primary outgroups to a secondary outgroup.

*Predicting outgroup attitudes* versus *support for outgroup rights*. Second, the present research examines not only how secondary transfer processes may inform attitudes toward secondary outgroups but may also shape attitudes toward policies that affect how that group is treated (see Zingora & Graf, 2019). An ever-growing critique of contact research is that, given its long-standing emphasis on improving intergroup attitudes, it has remained limited in its ability to predict support for social change or policies that would benefit disadvantaged groups in unequal societies (see, e.g., Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012). Emerging research has begun to show that greater positive intergroup contact often predicts greater support for policies that would favour disadvantaged groups (e.g., Dixon et al., 2010; Fingerhut, 2011), greater endorsement of disadvantaged group's social change motivations (Çakal, Halabi, Cazan, & Eller, 2021), or even motivates collective action in favour of them (Reimer et al., 2017). However, such a focus has rarely and only recently been extended to the processes related to STEs (e.g., Flores, 2015; Zingora & Graf, 2019).

*Examining STEs among both advantaged and disadvantaged groups*. Third, the present research extends prior work on secondary transfer processes by examining positive and negative contact in STE effects among both advantaged

and disadvantaged groups in the same intergroup context. Prior STE studies have tended to focus either on the perspectives of advantaged groups in relation to disadvantaged outgroups (e.g., Meleady & Forder, 2019; Pettigrew, 2009) or investigated the perspectives of disadvantaged groups in relation to an advantaged group (e.g., Brylka et al., 2016). It is uncommon for studies of secondary transfer processes to simultaneously examine the perspectives of more than one group within the same intergroup context (e.g., Tausch et al., 2010, Study 1) and even more rare to examine secondary transfer processes across both advantaged and disadvantaged groups in relation to the same secondary outgroup (e.g., Marrow, Tropp, Van Der Linden, Okamoto, & Jones-Correa, 2019). The present research extends work in this area by examining how both positive and negative contact may contribute to secondary transfer processes among both advantaged and disadvantaged groups (in this case, Turks and Kurds in Turkey) in relation to a novel, disadvantaged secondary outgroup (Syrian refugees). Turkey constitutes a unique context in which to investigate STEs involving multiple groups, and to expand the scope of intergroup research beyond binary perspectives (see Dixon et al., 2020; Psaltis & Cakal, 2016), as it includes a historically advantaged group (Turks), historically disadvantaged groups (Kurds, Arabs and Christians), and Syrian refugees as a relatively new minority group that is severely disadvantaged relative to other groups (Çakal & Husnu, in press).

Together, then, the present research extends previous STE research by examining (a) how both positive and negative contact may inform our understanding of secondary transfer processes; (b) how secondary transfer processes may not only shape intergroup attitudes but may also contribute to support for outgroup rights and (c) how secondary transfer processes may function among both advantaged and disadvantaged groups in relation to the same secondary outgroup within a shared intergroup context.

## 1.2 | Threat perceptions

The present research also considers the potentially moderating role of threat perceptions in the secondary transfer process. Previous work shows that threat is an important aspect of conflictual intergroup relations and thus is likely to be salient in intergroup situations that have been fuelled by conflict (Schmid, Al Ramiah, & Hewstone, 2014; W. G. Stephan et al., 2000; Tausch et al., 2007) and social change (Çakal et al., 2016). Perceptions of intergroup threats may be lessened or exacerbated by the salience of group differences (González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008; Riek et al., 2006; Riek, Mania, Gaertner, McDonald, & Lamoreaux, 2010), prior intergroup conflict (Florack, Piontkowski, Balzer, & Perzig, 2003; González et al., 2008; Schmid et al., 2014) or the nature of intergroup contact (Aberson, 2015; Schmid et al., 2014).

Indeed, greater positive contact between groups tends to be associated with the lower perceived threats from the outgroup (Schmid et al., 2014; W. G. Stephan et al., 2000), whereas greater conflict between groups tends to be associated with a greater perceived intergroup threats (Aberson, 2015; W. G. Stephan et al., 2000). Greater perceptions of intergroup threat, in turn, predict more negative attitudes toward outgroups (Kamans, Otten, & Gordijn, 2011; W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 2013) as well as more negative attitudes toward social policies that would benefit outgroup members (Dixon et al., 2010; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010), even triggering collective action to maintain or improve advantaged ingroup's conditions.

Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2016) tested the perceived threat from the primary outgroup as a mediating mechanism of the STE process for the first time. Results showed that the link between the primary group contact and secondary group attitudes was not mediated by the perceived threat from the primary outgroup. Conversely, Zingora and Graf (2019) investigated perceived threat from both the primary group and the secondary outgroup as an underlying mechanism of the STE process simultaneously. They found that contact with the primary group predicted voting for the secondary outgroup–related policies through a perceived threat from the primary and the secondary outgroups, respectively.

Although interesting and novel, this line of research did not investigate the moderating effect of the perceived threat from both or either outgroup on the attitude generalization process. Moreover, studies investigating the

moderators of the STE have not truly applied to the STE process as they mostly focussed on the link between contact and attitudes toward the primary outgroup (acted as moderators of general contact; see Harwood et al., 2011; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2020 for exceptions and see Vezzali et al., 2021 for a review). Since research on (true) moderators of the STE is scarce and there is a need for further examination of relevant moderating factors, we aim to examine perceived threat from the secondary outgroup as a moderator of attitude generalization mechanism. Accordingly, we expect that secondary transfer processes will customarily yield more positive attitudes toward secondary outgroups within the attitude generalization process, while we also expect that greater threat perception from the secondary outgroup would weaken the strength of the association between primary and secondary outgroup attitudes.

### 1.3 | Secondary transfer effects in context: Turks, Kurds and Syrian refugees in Turkey

In this research, we examine secondary transfer processes and threat perceptions in the context of intergroup contact between Turks and Kurds and their support for the rights of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the state has been dominated by *national unity* with Turkish as the national language and the ethnic Turks as the founders. This nationalist ideology neglected the reconciliation of minorities and their rights, which led to Kurdish attempts to achieve recognition of ethnic Kurdish identity and political representation via armed struggle (Baysu et al., 2018). Thus, the Kurdish–Turkish conflict has been an armed and violent conflict between the Turkish government and the members of insurgent PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) who have fought for separation from Turkey to create an independent Kurdish state and greater political, social and cultural rights for Kurds living in Turkey (Gatehouse, 2010).

Kurds in Turkey, unlike other Kurds living in Iraq, Syria and Iran, do not live in specific areas of the country. For instance, contrary to what one would assume, the largest Kurdish population globally live not in cities with historically large populations of Kurds, for example, Diyarbakır in southeastern Turkey or Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Yetkin, 2019) but in İstanbul. The existence of a higher number of Kurds in urban areas is the result of the internal immigration motivated by the military conflict (Çakal et al., 2016). This displacement of large numbers of Kurds from rural to urban areas, however, also created opportunities for intergroup contact that could potentially improve intergroup harmony and attitudes between the two groups. Moreover, most Kurds who live in urban areas speak Turkish as their first language. Kurdish children start and complete their education in the Turkish language, just like their Turkish peers do. Kurds are considered a native community of Turkish society, and two groups, at least in urban centres, maintain relatively non-violent low conflictual intergroup relations, at least in urban centres.

Following the Syrian Civil War, Syrian refugees have involved in this multigroup equation of Turkey, too. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), around 5 million Syrians were externally displaced and left their country with the hope to live in a safer place. More than 3.6 million of them came into Turkey, which currently hosts the largest Syrian refugee population in the world (UNCHR & Government of Turkey, 2021). Turkey has also started to re-admit Syrian refugees who arrived in European countries through Turkish territory within the scope of the readmission agreement between the European Union and Turkey (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, 2017; Yıldırım Mat & Özdan, 2018). Interestingly, Turkish authorities consider only asylum seekers from Europe as refugees, whereas individuals from other nationalities are admitted under a 'temporary protection' condition; hence, Turkey does not officially recognize Syrians as refugees, and, as such, Syrian people in Turkey do not have official rights as refugees (e.g., permanent residency, work permits) although they have free access to education and health services. Thus, Syrian refugees tend to experience poor living conditions and uncertainty about their future, and this impacts their physical and psychological health (Döner, Özkara, & Kahveci, 2013).

Relative to Turkish citizens, Syrian refugees (especially those with no or limited qualifications) are forced to work for low wages and without social security. As many Syrian refugees are willing to work for low wages, members of the host society, Turks and Kurds, perceive them as threatening in the labour market. At the same time, Turkish

media sources present Syrian refugees as 'dirty, uncivilized, unqualified, criminal and beggars' and label them as 'others' and as 'strangers', which adds an extra challenge in terms of promoting positive and meaningful social interactions between refugees and host society members (Kolukırık, 2009). Erdoğan's (2020) national survey report and Genç and Özdemirkıran's (2015) case study provide corroborating evidence that attitudes toward Syrian refugees are negative, and they are perceived as threatening. For instance, the emergent solidarity between Kurdish Syrian refugees and Kurds living in Turkey just after the first immigration flow has transformed into a conflict and power struggle in areas where both Kurdish groups co-exist (Kılıçaslan, 2016). Accordingly, most members of the host society (i.e., both Turks and Kurds) currently show strong opposition to granting Turkish citizenship to Syrian refugees (Erdoğan, 2014; Karasu, 2016; Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016).

### 1.4 | Present study and overview of hypotheses

In sum, the present research examines how secondary transfer processes associated with positive and negative contact predict attitudes toward policies that would benefit Syrian refugees, among both historically advantaged Turks and historically disadvantaged Kurds in Turkish society. Moreover, it also considers whether and how perceptions of threat factors into this equation. Thus, we aimed to extend previous research in this area in several ways. First, we examined secondary transfer processes from the perspectives of both historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups, in relation to a novel disadvantaged outgroup (Syrian refugees; Erdoğan, 2020). Second, we simultaneously consider both positive and negative forms of intergroup contact in this novel context; third, we investigated the moderating role of perceived threat in relation to the secondary outgroup. Thus, we conducted a survey in Turkey where historically advantaged Turks, disadvantaged Kurds and a sizeable Syrian refugee minority co-exist to test our proposed model. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Keele University Ethics Committee (ERP2383). We expected to observe indirect effects such that positive contact between Turks and Kurds would predict greater support for the secondary outgroups' rights via positive attitudes toward the primary and the secondary outgroup, respectively (H1), whereas negative contact would predict less support for the secondary outgroup's right through the same mechanism (H2). Moreover, we expected that perceived threat would negatively moderate the link between positive attitudes toward primary and secondary outgroups (H3), such that more positive attitudes toward the primary outgroup would be linked to more positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees when threat perceptions were low, whereas positive attitudes toward the primary outgroup would be less strongly linked to positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees when threat perceptions were high.

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Participants and procedures

A total of 300 Turkish and 127 Kurdish university students (221 females and 206 males, $M_{age} = 21.05$ and $SD = 2.66$) were recruited from a multi-ethnic city in southeast Turkey between October and December 2018 to participate in this study. Participants who met the inclusion criteria (18 years or older and of Turkish or Kurdish descent) completed an anonymous paper survey in partial fulfilment of their course requirement. Responses from 27 other students were excluded due to ethnic identification other than Turkish or Kurdish.

All participants completed the survey in Turkish, as Kurdish participants were recruited from among adults who live in urban areas; all spoke Turkish as their first language or reported being highly proficient in Turkish. All measures adapted from other sources were translated into Turkish by the first author and back-translated into English and checked by the second and third authors with the original items to assure the accuracy of the translation.

After providing consent to take part in the study, participants were handed a questionnaire to complete individually, which they returned to the researcher upon completion.

Participants were asked to report their age, gender, ethnic identification and household income (estimated on a monthly basis). This section on demographic information was followed by a section asking questions about attitudes toward and contact with members of the primary outgroup. The third and final section of the survey asked participants about their attitudes toward and contact with Syrian refugees, as well as how much threat they perceive from Syrian refugees and how much they support the rights of Syrian refugees.

## 2.2 | Contact measures

Measures of positive and negative contact were scored on 7-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (very often). Items assessing positive and negative contact with the primary outgroup asked about contact with Kurds among Turkish participants and about contact with Turks among Kurdish participants. Items assessing positive and negative contact with the secondary outgroup always asked participants about contact with Syrian refugees.

*Positive contact with the primary outgroup*[1] was measured using three items adapted from Dixon et al. (2017), asking participants about how much time they spend with their [Kurdish/Turkish] friends and university classmates and how often they have contact with [Kurdish/Turkish] university classmates ($\alpha = .92$).

*Positive contact with the secondary outgroup* (i.e., Syrian refugees) was measured using two of the items adapted from Dixon et al. (2017), asking participants about how much time they spend with Syrian refugee friends and university classmates. Responses to these items were positively correlated ($r = .65$, $p < .01$). Only these two items were used because, although less than 10% of Syrian refugees currently live in refugee camps and others have spread out in rural and urban areas around the country (WFP Turkey, 2016), there is still very limited interaction between host society members and Syrian refugees in Turkey.

*Negative contact* was assessed using three items adapted from prior work (e.g., Hayward, Tropp, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2017; C. W. Stephan et al., 2000). Two sets of three items were used to assess participants' negative contact experiences in relation to both the primary outgroup (Turks or Kurds) and the secondary outgroup (Syrian refugees): '*How often have you been verbally abused by a [Kurdish person/Turkish person/Syrian refugee] in the past*?', '*How often have you been verbally insulted by a [Kurdish person/Turkish person/Syrian refugee] in the past*?' and '*How often have you been verbally threatened by a [Kurdish person/Turkish person/Syrian refugee] in the past*?' ($\alpha = .89$ and $\alpha = .85$ for measures of negative contact with primary and secondary outgroups, respectively).

## 2.3 | Attitude and threat measures

*Attitudes toward the primary and secondary outgroups* were assessed by feeling thermometers in relation to each group (Miller & Miller, 1977) with possible scores ranging from 0 (cold) to 100 (warm). To assess attitudes toward the primary outgroup, Turkish participants were asked to complete a feeling thermometer in relation to Kurds, and Kurdish participants were asked to complete a feeling thermometer in relation to Turks. Attitudes toward the secondary outgroup were measured by asking participants to complete a feeling thermometer in relation to Syrian refugees.

*Support for the rights of Syrian refugees* was measured by asking participants to respond to two items indicating their support for the rights of Syrian refugees: '*Syrian refugees should have legal rights and permissions to seek a job*' and '*I am pleased with the steps taken to promote the rights of Syrian refugees*'. Responses to these items ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) so that higher scores would correspond with greater support for Syrian refugees' rights. Responses to these items were positively correlated ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) and averaged to create a composite measure.

*Threat from Syrian refugees* was assessed using six items adapted from Florack et al. (2003), with the same item stem: 'If I think about [specified domain], I perceive Syrian refugees as…'. Six items assessed threat in the domains of the job market, education, social, religion, eating habits and language ($\alpha = .83$). Responses to these items ranged from 1 (enriching) to 7 (threatening) so that higher scores would correspond to greater perceived threat. Although realistic and symbolic threat are conceptually different, we merged all items into a single threat variable. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that all items loaded into one factor and the range of factor loading changed between .58 and .74 with a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 18.72$, $p = .005$, $df = 6$; Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .979; Tucker–Lewis Index [TLI] = .948; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .071 90% confidence interval [CI] [.036,.108]; standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .032).

## 3 | RESULTS

We first looked at *descriptives and intervariable correlation* separately to see responses and intervariable correlations for the two subsamples and the whole sample. We then conducted the *main analysis* for the whole sample and created CIs based on 5,000 resamples to test whether *indirect paths* were significantly different from zero. Next, we conducted a *multigroup analysis* to investigate the possible differences between advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds. Before the final stage, we tested *alternative models* to enhance our confidence in our results. Last but not least, we checked the *moderator effect* of the perceived threat from the secondary outgroup on the attitude generalization mechanism.

*Descriptives and correlations*. Mean scores and correlations between the variables included in the model are reported in Table 1. Positive contact with the primary outgroup was positively associated with positive attitudes toward the primary outgroup and vice versa for negative contact for all samples. In a similar vein, positive contact with Syrian refugees was associated with more positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees, more support for their rights and lower perceptions of threat in relation to Syrian refugees. By contrast, greater negative contact and greater perceptions of threat were associated with more negative attitudes toward and less support for the rights of Syrian refugees.

*Main analysis*. We employed Structural Equation Modelling in Mplus (version 8.1; L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2008, 2017) to test our theoretical model and used the Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation method against any possible non-normality in the data. The overall model fit was assessed through the $\chi^2$ test, RMSEA, CFI, TLI and SRMR. Acceptable cut-off points for these indices are a non-significant $\chi^2$ value (Barrett, 2007; Kline, 2005) .08 or lower for RMSEA and .08 or lower for SRMR (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hu & Bentler, 1999) .90 or higher for CFI and TLI (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Overall our model fits the data very well with fit values well below the cutoff values and a non-significant $\chi^2$ value, which indicates excellent fit ($\chi^2 = 80.12$, $p = .21$, $df = 71$; CFI = .996; TLI = .995; RMSEA = .017 90% CI [.000.034]; SRMR = .031).

Theoretically, within the SEM model, we examined the effect of positive and negative contact with the primary outgroup on support for the rights of Syrian refugees via attitudes toward the primary outgroup and toward the secondary outgroup in a serial mediation model. That is to say, we first entered positive and negative contact with the primary outgroup as direct predictors of primary outgroup attitudes, which, in turn, were entered as a predictor of attitudes toward Syrian refugees (as the secondary outgroup), which was in turn entered as a predictor of support for the rights of Syrian refugees. To control for the effects of direct contact with Syrian refugees in testing these indirect effects, we included positive and negative contact with Syrian refugees as statistical control variables in the analyses.

Figure 1 summarizes the results, which are in line with the predictions suggested by STE research. Positive contact with the primary outgroup predicted more positive attitudes toward them ($\beta = .63$, $p < .001$), while negative contact with the primary outgroup predicted more negative attitudes toward the primary outgroup ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$). Positive attitudes toward the primary outgroup also predicted more positive attitudes toward Syrian

**TABLE 1** Mean scores and correlations between the variables in the model

| Variable (Total) | *M* | *SD* | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Positive contact: Primary outgroup (1–7) | 4.72 | 1.58 | .12* | .58** | .19** | −.02 | .22** | −.21** | .21** |
| 2. Negative contact: Primary outgroup (1–7) | 2.17 | 1.61 | | −.10* | .06 | .35** | −.05 | .06 | .01 |
| 3. Attitudes: Primary outgroup (0–100) | 67.11 | 19.76 | | | .11* | −.08 | .36** | −.29** | .22** |
| 4. Positive contact: Syrian refugees (1–7) | 2.20 | 1.32 | | | | −.05 | .34** | −.32** | .31** |
| 5. Negative contact: Syrian refugees (1–7) | 1.51 | 1.10 | | | | | −.26** | .25** | −.19** |
| 6. Attitudes: Syrian refugees (0–100) | 44.04 | 19.80 | | | | | | −.62** | .62** |
| 7. Perceived threat: Syrian refugees (1–7) | 4.77 | 1.20 | | | | | | | −.63** |
| 8. Support for rights of Syrian refugees (1–7) | 3.25 | 1.64 | | | | | | | 1 |

| Turks | *M* | *SD* | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Positive contact: Primary outgroup | 4.45 | 1.53 | −.05 | .59** | .23** | −.02 | .23** | −.18** | .21** |
| 2. Negative contact: Primary outgroup | 1.89 | 1.47 | | −.18** | −.01 | .42** | −.18** | .19** | −.10 |
| 3. Attitudes: Primary outgroup | 64.85 | 19.90 | | | .12 | −.07 | .36** | −.27** | .20** |
| 4. Positive contact: Syrian refugees | 2.14 | 1.27 | | | | −.05 | .34** | −.37** | .32** |
| 5. Negative contact: Syrian refugees | 1.57 | 1.17 | | | | | −.27** | .26** | −.19** |
| 6. Attitudes: Syrian refugees | 40.49 | 18.84 | | | | | | −.59** | .59** |
| 7. Perceived threat: Syrian refugees | 4.92 | 1.14 | | | | | | | −.57** |
| 8. Support for rights of Syrian refugees | 2.99 | 1.54 | | | | | | | 1 |

| Kurds | *M* | *SD* | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Positive contact: Primary outgroup | 5.34 | 1.52 | .22* | .50** | .06 | .08 | −.01 | −.13** | .04 |
| 2. Negative contact: Primary outgroup | 2.84 | 1.72 | | −.11 | .14 | .34** | −.05 | .01 | .02 |
| 3. Attitudes: Primary outgroup | 72.46 | 18.40 | | | .07 | −.03 | .26** | −.24** | .16** |
| 4. Positive contact: Syrian refugees | 2.35 | 1.43 | | | | −.02 | .34** | −.21* | .26** |
| 5. Negative contact: Syrian refugees | 1.36 | .91 | | | | | −.19* | .18* | −.12 |
| 6. Attitudes: Syrian refugees | 52.14 | 19.62 | | | | | | −.62** | .60** |
| 7. Perceived threat: Syrian refugees | 4.39 | 1.25 | | | | | | | −.69** |
| 8. Support for rights of Syrian refugees | 3.87 | 1.71 | | | | | | | 1 |

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

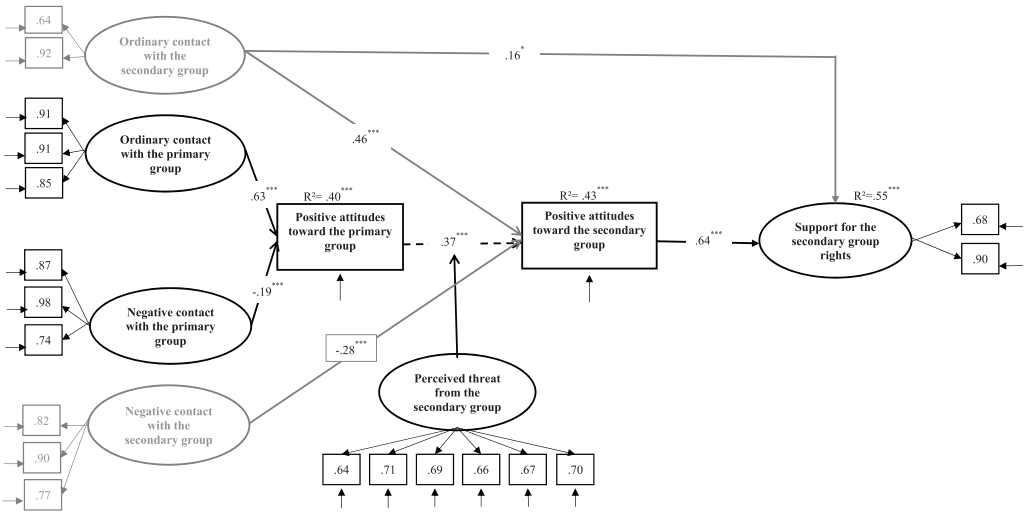



**FIGURE 1** Saturated structural equation model (SEM). Saturated model showing positive and negative contact with the primary group predicting support for Syrian refugees' rights via attitudes toward the primary and secondary outgroup; perceived threat from Syrian refugees moderating the attitude generalization process. $N = 427$. Model fit values ($\chi^2 = 80.12$, $p = .21$, $df = 71$; Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .996; Tucker–Lewis Index [TLI] = .995; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .017 90% confidence interval [CI] [.000, .034]; standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .031). Standardized coefficients; only significant paths are reported; the dashed line represents the moderated path. Variables and lines shown in grey represent control variables and related coefficients. *$p$ < .05, **$p$ < .01, ***$p$ < .001

refugees ($\beta = .37$, $p$ < .001). In turn, positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees predicted greater support for the rights of Syrian refugees ($\beta = .64$, $p$ < .001).

*Testing indirect effects*. We then investigated whether the contact variables showed any indirect effects on support for the rights of Syrian refugees via attitudes toward the primary outgroup and attitudes toward Syrian refugees. We used the bias-corrected bootstrap command on Mplus and created CIs based on 5,000 resamples to test whether indirect paths were significantly different from zero. Re-sample numbers below 5,000 are known to produce biased inferences and false positives (Hesterberg, 2015). Point estimates (PEs) represent the effect sizes, and their values are consolidated through CIs. The PEs are considered significant if CIs do not include zero (Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

The significant indirect effects of positive and negative contact with the primary outgroup on support for Syrian refugees' rights are reported in Table 2. In line with H1 and H2, both positive contact (PE on mean $\beta = .15$, 99% CI [.074, .250]) and negative contact (PE on mean $\beta = -.04$, 99% CI [−.091, −.015]) with the primary outgroup showed an indirect effect on support for rights of Syrian refugees via the serial pathway of attitudes toward the primary outgroup and attitudes toward Syrian refugees as the secondary outgroup.

Results also showed that there was no significant direct association between positive contact ($\beta = .06$, $p = .387$) and negative contact ($\beta = .06$, $p = .231$) with the primary outgroup and support for Syrian refugees' rights. In a similar vein, there was also no significant direct association between positive contact ($\beta = .16$, $p = .067$) and negative contact ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .508$) with Syrian refugees and support for their rights. The model explained 55% of the variance in support for the rights of Syrian refugees, 40% of the variance in attitudes toward the primary outgroup and 43% of the variance in attitudes toward Syrian refugees, respectively.

*Multi-group analysis*. We tested whether our model differs across the groups on all paths of the model with the multi-group analysis approach in Mplus (Byrne, 2013; B. O. Muthén & Asparouhov, 2002). We forced one path at a time to be equal across Turkish and Kurdish groups and tested for significant deterioration of the model fit with the

**TABLE 2** Mediation 5,000 bootstrap test results

| Path | Mediator | Point estimate (β) | 95% CI | 99% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive contact with the primary outgroup–support for Syrian refugees' rights | Attitudes toward the primary outgroup-Attitudes toward the secondary outgroup | .147 | | [.074, .250] |
| Negative contact with the primary outgroup–support for Syrian refugees' rights | Attitudes toward the primary outgroup-Attitudes toward the secondary outgroup | −.044 | | [−.091, −.015] |

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

Satorra–Bentler Chi-square Difference Test. We detected no significant moderating effects of group status on any path of the model (unconstrained multi-group model: $\chi^2 = 220.89$, $p < .001$, $df = 160$, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .042, SRMR = .046; constrained multi-group model: $\chi^2 = 230.39$, $p < .01$, $df = 170$, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .041, SRMR = .060; unconstrained model vs. constrained model 1: $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 9.62$, $p = .47$).

*Alternative model testing*. Before we proceed to test the moderator effect of perceived threat on the attitude generalization process, we tested alternative models to enhance our confidence in our results. Despite the fact that our results are consistent with earlier research on STE, claims of causality should only be considered provisional as the data are correlational. To test for the possibility of different causal orders, we specified alternative models to the tested model. For instance, contact with Syrian refugees might predict attitudes toward the primary outgroup via attitudes toward Syrian refugees and support for their rights, that is, a reverse STE model. This model fit the data somewhat worse than the principal model (alternative model 1: $\chi^2 = 106.91$, $p < .01$, $df = 72$, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .034, SRMR = .042; principal model vs. alternative model 1: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 45.62$, $p < .001$). We also tested a reverse casual order, as a second alternative model, where support for Syrian refugees' rights would predict contact with the primary outgroup via attitudes toward the secondary and primary outgroups, respectively. We specified this model to rule out the alternative explanation that STE occurs because more tolerant and supportive people engage in more intergroup contact. The fit values of the alternative model were considerably poorer than the principal model (alternative model 2: $\chi^2 = 322.48$, $p < .01$, $df = 73$, CFI = .89, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .091, SRMR = .109; principal model vs. alternative model 2: $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 120.10$, $p < .001$). We, therefore, rejected both alternative models.

*Moderator testing*. Finally, we entered the perceived threat measure as a potential moderator for the path between attitudes toward the primary and secondary outgroups (i.e., attitude generalization). In line with H3, we detected a significant moderation effect of perceived threat on the association between primary and secondary outgroup attitudes ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .020$). Among those who perceived low threat from Syrian refugees, the association between primary and secondary outgroup attitudes was strong ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$). However, this association was weaker among those who perceived moderate threat from Syrian refugees ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) and those who perceived high threat from Syrian refugees ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$). In other words, the more strongly participants perceived threat from Syrian refugees, the less strongly attitudes toward the primary outgroup were associated with attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

The indirect effects of positive and negative contact with the primary outgroup on support for Syrian refugees' rights also varied depending on levels of perceived threat: (PE on −1 *SD* $\beta = .16$, 99% CI [.083, .278]; PE on mean $\beta = .12$, 99% CI [.067, .203]; PE on +1 *SD* $\beta = .08$, 99% CI [.013, .145]). The indirect effect of negative contact on support for the secondary outgroup: (PE on −1 *SD* $\beta = -.03$, 95% CI [−.075, −.007]; PE on mean $\beta = -.02$, 95% CI [−.054, −.004]; PE on +1 *SD* $\beta = -.02$, 95% CI [−.039, −.001]). That is to say, the more strongly participants perceived threat from Syrian refugees, the less strongly positive contact with the primary outgroup was indirectly associated with support for Syrian refugees' rights. In a similar vein, the more strongly participants perceived threat from Syrian refugees, the more strongly negative contact with the primary outgroup was indirectly associated with support for Syrian refugees' right.

Last but not least, we wanted to compare the overall effects of positive versus negative contact on our variable of interest, support for Syrian refugees' right. A relatively straightforward test of this would be to estimate the direct and indirect effects of both variables simultaneously, constrain the paths in a stepwise fashion and evaluate the model fit improvement or deterioration (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006; Williams & MacKinnon, 2008). An alternative could be a joint significance test of both paths, which enable the researcher to establish if all the individual paths making up the full path are significant (Leth-Steensen & Gallitto, 2016). However, in our case, we have two independent mediators in a serial mode and neither of these two analytical procedures are applicable as there are no established procedures to *statistically* compare two indirect effects (VanderWeele & Vansteelandt, 2014). Therefore, we qualitatively discuss both the direct and indirect effect sizes of both variable across the model. Our results showed that both positive contact ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) and negative contact ($\beta = -.04$, $p < .001$) with the primary outgroup have indirect associations with support for the secondary outgroup rights via the serial pathway of attitudes toward the primary outgroup and attitudes toward the secondary outgroup. Based on these results, we can argue that positive contact is more likely to have a stronger indirect effect than negative contact on political solidarity with the secondary outgroup.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

Results showed that, among both Turks and Kurds, positive and negative contact with the primary outgroup (another ethnic group) indirectly predicted greater support for the secondary outgroup rights (Syrian refugees) via attitudes toward the primary outgroup, Kurds and Turks, and the secondary outgroup, Syrian refugees, respectively. Consistent with other findings from the STE literature (Tausch et al., 2010), these effects remained significant even when controlling for direct contact experiences with the secondary outgroup. Thus, in line with previous STE research, our findings suggest that contact with a primary outgroup can 'generalize' by contributing to shaping attitudes toward other groups not involved in the contact (see Boin et al., 2021; Pettigrew, 2009; Vezzali et al., 2018, 2021). We also observed that greater perceptions of threat from Syrian refugees negatively moderated the link between primary outgroup attitudes and secondary outgroup attitudes, that is, attitude generalization process. These findings are consistent with the literature on the intergroup threat, which suggests a strong association between perceptions of intergroup threat and outgroup attitudes (see e.g., Florack et al., 2003; W. G. Stephan et al.,2000; W. G. Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 2013). Nonetheless, the present findings show that the perceived threat from Syrian refugees may weaken the positive association between the attitude generalization process in the context of Turkey. These patterns of effects were observed among both advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds. Considering that there is scarce evidence showing the role of established moderators of contact in the STE processes (Boin et al., 2021; Vezzali et al., 2021), we can say that investigation of intergroup threat as a 'true' moderator of the STE mechanism is an important contribution to the STE literature.

Overall, the present research provides support for the notion that secondary transfer processes in intergroup contact can contribute to shaping attitudes toward and support for the rights of groups not involved in the contact situation, that is, Syrian refugees. In the present research, positive and negative contact indirectly predicted support for the rights of Syrian refugees through the pathways of improved attitudes toward the primary outgroup (another ethnic group) and attitudes toward the secondary outgroup (Syrian refugees) among both members of an advantaged group (Turks) and a disadvantaged group (Kurds).

### 4.1 | Implications for research on secondary transfer effects of contact

Importantly, first, we observed that the indirect STE of contact with the primary outgroup on attitudes toward the secondary outgroup was not only accounted for by (positive) contact experiences but may also be explained by negative contact experiences. Negative contact with the primary outgroup corresponded with less positive attitudes

toward the secondary outgroup, just as (positive) contact with the primary outgroup corresponded with more positive attitudes toward the secondary outgroup. These findings add to the limited empirical research literature on STEs involving negative intergroup contact (Boin et al., 2021; Brylka et al., 2016; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016; Meleady & Forder, 2019; Vezzali et al., 2021; Zingora & Graf, 2019).

Second, we also extended this body of work by demonstrating that STEs involving contact with a primary outgroup may also extend beyond promoting favourable outgroup attitudes to supporting outgroup rights by creating wider patterns of political solidarity (Flores, 2015; Zingora & Graf, 2019). Turks' and Kurds' contact with each other not only predicted their attitudes toward each other but indirectly predicted their attitudes toward Syrian refugees (as a secondary outgroup) and their support for the rights of Syrian refugees. Such patterns suggest that examination of secondary transfer processes could be usefully extended in future research to consider how intergroup contact might play direct and/or indirect roles in predicting political solidarity and inclinations to engage in collective action to benefit primary and secondary outgroups (see Tropp et al., 2017 for a related discussion).

A third implication of the present research is that, even if and when we observe meaningful indirect effects of intergroup contact on policy support through STE processes, such effects may be facilitated or suppressed by additional processes, for example, perceived threat. In the present research, we demonstrated how threat perception posed by the secondary outgroup weakens the attitude generalization process. However, we only assessed perceptions of threat in relation to Syrian refugees as a secondary outgroup. Yet, it is possible that perceptions of threat in relation to the primary outgroup may also play a role in determining the nature and magnitude of STEs. Future studies could simultaneously examine the effects of the perceived threat from both the primary and secondary outgroups in more complex models.

Fourth, in the present research, we investigated STE processes among members of both advantaged Turks and disadvantaged Kurds in the Turkish context, in relation to Syrian refugees as a novel disadvantaged secondary outgroup, thereby addressing Dixon et al.'s (2020) concern that much of the contact literature is limited by a binary perspective on intergroup relations (e.g., minority vs. majority). Here, we observed similar patterns of STEs across both samples from an under-represented context, suggesting that the secondary transfer processes functioned similarly across both groups and largely independent of their relative status positions in Turkish society. At present, there is no consensus in the research literature regarding whether comparable STEs should be observed among differentially positioned groups, with some studies revealing significant STEs only among advantaged groups (Marrow et al., 2019), some showing significant STEs only among disadvantaged groups (Bowman & Griffin, 2012), and some studies exhibiting otherwise mixed results (Hindriks, Verkuyten, & Coenders, 2014). It may be, then, that beyond mere considerations of group status, more attention must be paid to other contextual factors – such as degrees of intergroup inequality intensity of intergroup conflict and/or legacies of intergroup violence – that may also contribute to shaping the nature and potential of secondary transfer processes.

Our results also show that, among both advantaged and disadvantaged groups, STE can result in positive attitudes toward another disadvantaged secondary group indirectly, even when the secondary outgroup is relatively dissimilar (Harwood et al., 2011; Hindriks et al., 2014; Vezzali et al., 2018). Although most Syrian and Turkish people would gather under the umbrella of a common religion, Islam, contrary to more Euro-centric expectations, Syrian refugees and native groups in Turkey have many dissimilarities such as culture, language, way of life, gender roles and even religious practices (Antmen, 2019; Erdoğan, 2020). Kurds, for instance, are a native community in Turkey and, thus, have cultural and linguistic similarities with Turks. Thus, in line with other recent studies (Harwood et al., 2011; Hindriks et al., 2014; Vezzali et al., 2018), our findings provide additional evidence for the existence of secondary transfer processes among dissimilar groups.

## 5 | LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Though our findings are compelling, we also recognize some limitations associated with the present research. First, the data were collected from only one site in Turkey, a multi-ethnic city where Turks and Kurds, as well as some

Arabs and other ethnic groups, have lived together for centuries. It is possible that Turks' and Kurds' prior interactions with Arabs living in Turkey could have somehow shaped their perceptions of Syrian refugees, even if these Arabs residing in Turkey are not necessarily of Syrian origin. Our study did not directly assess contact and attitudes toward other Arabs living in Turkey; however, future studies could examine secondary transfer processes involving Syrian refugees in relation to Turks' and Kurds' experiences with other Arabs residing in Turkey. Moreover, future research may be also conducted in different parts of Turkey, for example, ethnically heterogeneous versus homogenous, urban versus rural areas, to compare the contact experiences and attitudes of members of the host society.

A second limitation of our research involves our use of a cross-sectional research design. Along with limiting our ability to make causal claims, the static nature of the data we examine makes it difficult to capture dynamic changes in relations and attitudes between the groups under study over time. For instance, as our findings show, both Turks and Kurds have low levels of contact with Syrian refugees, likely due to the lack of Syrian refugees' Turkish language proficiency. It is, however, plausible that, over time, some Syrian refugees may acquire stronger Turkish language skills, and as their Turkish language proficiency improves, one would expect that contact between Syrian refugees and the Turkish and Kurdish host communities would increase as well. Future studies might, therefore, employ longitudinal designs that could capture dynamic aspects of the processes under study.

The third limitation of our research is that our data are not necessarily representative of the particularly Kurd community. As we collected our data from university students, our Kurd participants were highly proficient in Turkish, highly educated and integrated, so less disadvantaged than the general Kurd population in Turkey. This might be the reason for relatively higher levels of positive contact and attitudes toward, as well as decreased negative contact with the primary outgroup. Future research might put our study's findings to the test with larger, ideally representative, adult samples.

Identical attitude and contact measures that we used to ensure consistency between variables pose another limitation. This may cause common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Future research may employ equivalent, but not identical, items to measure the primary and the secondary outgroup contact and attitudes. Therefore, the possibility of common method bias on the results can be eliminated. In addition, the negative contact with the secondary outgroup measure has another limitation as it focusses on verbal elements, particularly when it comes to Syrian refugees who do not speak Turkish proficiently. Future research along with measurement tools should be conceptualized with careful consideration of the characteristics of the outgroup.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present research extends prior work on secondary transfer processes in several noteworthy ways in a new underrepresented context. We have extended STE research by examining how secondary transfer processes may predict support for refugee rights beyond the more common focus on intergroup attitudes. We have shown that contact with a primary outgroup not only shapes attitudes toward a secondary outgroup via attitude generalization, but that this, in turn, predicts political solidarity with the secondary outgroup; we also found that perceived threat may shape the degree to which primary outgroup attitudes extend to secondary outgroup attitudes. Our findings indicate that such processes can occur among members of both advantaged groups (e.g., Turks) and disadvantaged groups (e.g., Kurds) in reference to another disadvantaged secondary outgroup (e.g., Syrian refugees in Turkey). Moreover, we have observed that secondary transfer processes may involve positive and negative forms of intergroup contact that these groups have a conflict with each other. Taken together, these trends move us several steps forward in understanding the implications of intergroup contact between advantaged and disadvantaged groups for support for refugee rights.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Halime Ünver and Hüseyin Çakal:** Designed research. **Meltem Güler:** Performed research. **Halime Ünver and Hüseyin Çakal:** Analysed data. **Halime Ünver, Hüseyin Çakal and Linda R. Tropp:** Wrote the paper.

## ENDNOTE

[1] Some of the items included in this measure assess *general* contact with classmates, rather than specifying *positive* contact with classmates; however, we refer to this composite measure as one that assesses *positive* contact because the general contact items are very strongly associated with participants' reports of cross-group friendships ($\alpha = .92$), and because prior research indicates that positive contact experiences tend to be much more common than negative contact experiences (e.g., Graf et al., 2014).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## ORCID

*Halime Ünver* https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2208-129X

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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