

From political opponents to enemies? The role of perceived moral distance in the animalistic dehumanization of the political outgroup

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyzed the relationships among political identity, the perception of moral distance between the political ingroup and the political outgroup, and outgroup animalistic dehumanization. One correlational and one experimental study revealed a positive correlation of ingroup identification (Study 1, $N = 99$) and salience of ingroup membership (Study 2, $N = 96$) with the degree to which participants dehumanized the outgroup. This relationship was mediated by the perceived moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup. The limitations, implications, and possible developments derived from the present findings are discussed.

Keywords

animalistic dehumanization, moral distance, political identity

Although it is not true that all conservatives are stupid people, it is true that most stupid people are conservative.

John Stuart Mill

Good for you, you have a heart, you can be a liberal. Now, couple your heart with your brain, and you can be a conservative.

Glenn Beck

When Kiengo comes out, I become upset. I love animals, for heaven's sake. But when I see the features of an orangutan coming out, I am freaked out.

Senator Roberto Calderoli, speaking about the Italian minister Cécile Kiengo

Beyond the instrumental function of guiding our electoral choices toward a specific political party or candidate, our political attitudes perform an important expressive function: They give us the opportunity to define who we are in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. Viewed in this light, stating that we are conservatives or liberals, if U.S. citizens, or right- or left-wingers, if European citizens (in this paper, these two concepts are synonymously used) has implications outside the political arena and is not relevant merely for politicians in political debate. Indeed, our interests, priorities, and—more broadly—our worldviews can change dramatically according to our political affiliations. The *side* from which we consider the world is a crucial dimension that describes ourselves, defines our identities, and encompasses the networks of our relationships. Thus, being conservative or liberal may be viewed as a sort of “membership emblem” through which we synthetically express our similarities to or differences from groups of individuals in terms of preferences and priorities about how things should work in the world (Green, 2004; Huddy, 2001; Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2007).

In this paper, we build on the idea that political categories may constitute significant sources of social identity, that is, “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Considering the psychological relevance of political identity, we hypothesized that identification with the political ingroup and the salience of political group membership should be positively associated with the perceived moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup, which in turn should be positively associated with a radical form of out-group devaluation: animalistic dehumanization.

We based our reasoning on the idea that political categories allow people to develop a specific portion of their social identity, namely their political identity. As shown by Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, and Ethier (1995), political affiliation significantly contributes to defining our social identity regardless of our identification with any specific political party. Therefore, political identity should be acknowledged as a more complex and flexible phenomenon than partisan identity, which is more connected to the contingent political scenario (Huddy, 2001; Malka & Lelkes, 2010).

Studies based on the social identity theory framework have provided empirical evidence for understanding how ingroup favoritism and inter-group conflict occur and are maintained. Research has revealed that intergroup conflict is considerably stronger in *relational* groups, whose members define themselves based on their differences from a specific outgroup, rather than for *autonomous* groups, whose members do not need to oppose other groups' members to define themselves (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). Ostensibly, political groups fall within the former category as, by definition, they compete with each other to achieve opposing and socially relevant objectives, which systematically make their reciprocal differences salient in the political market.

Despite the importance of social identity theory in understanding intergroup conflict, individual political identity and extreme forms of negative attitudes toward political outgroup members are underinvestigated to date. Nevertheless, some evidence indirectly supports the relevance of this theoretical perspective for understanding the relationships between different political groups. For example, in a Milgram-style experiment conducted by Farina, Chapnick, Chapnick, and Misiti (1972), extremely conservative and liberal individuals from the US were asked to administer shocks to an experimenter's confederate, whose political orientation was manipulated, during a fictitious learning task. Those whose political views presented as different from those of the participants were administered more painful shocks. A subsequent field study was performed on Election Day at selected polling sites in the US and focused on helping behavior toward political ingroup/outgroup members. The results of this study showed that both conservative and liberal voters were more likely to help a confederate of the experimenter who exhibited their same political orientation (Karabenick, Lerner, & Beecher, 1973).

The Psychosocial Relevance of Conflict in Intergroup Political Relations

In contemporary society, it is considered extremely negative to express openly biased, hostile attitudes toward outgroups. Based on a general concern regarding social justice—what has been called the fairness norm (e.g., Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; Peters & van den Bos, 2008)—ingroup favoritism and outgroup denigration are expected to be kept under control. Yet, as demonstrated by groups who have committed violent crimes (such as Nazis and terrorists), not all groups are protected to the same degree by the fairness norm (e.g., Mucchi-Faina, Pacilli, Pagliaro, & Alparone, 2009; Pacilli, Mucchi-Faina, Pagliaro, Mirisola, & Alparone, 2013).

From a psychosocial perspective, the application of the fairness norm where political categories are concerned is unique and particularly interesting, in that at least moderate levels of antagonism between political groups are often tolerated and sometimes even promoted. Indeed, from a political/partisans' political viewpoint, the expression of some degree of rivalry between different parties is meant to guarantee the healthy functioning of democracy (Bobbio, Matteucci, & Pasquino, 1990). Thus, as citizens, we have plausibly internalized an implicit social norm in which conservatives and liberals are not particularly concerned about expressing negative opinions regarding members of their outgroup. Hence, not only do political categories constitute meaningful sources of identity but they are also placed in a specific social arena where outgroup denigration and devaluation are not inevitably condemned. This is reflected in the literature on *schadenfreude*, that is, joy at someone suffering in response to negative events (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003). Indeed, Combs, Powell, Schurtz, and Smith (2009) showed that when potential gain was possible for their own political party, Democrats and Republicans who highly identified with their political parties expressed positive emotional reactions to news articles describing the misfortunes of those belonging to their political outgroups.

This psychosocial line of reasoning resounds with some classic ideas developed by political scientists. Emblematically, at the beginning of the 20th century, Schmitt (1927) argued that the conflict between friends and enemies was the ultimate core

of politics. According to him, politics inevitably brings conflict into play, as it always counters two different and competing world-views, each considering itself as better than the other. Consequently, political disputes often risk degeneration into good-versus-evil struggles. Accordingly, the members of the opposed political group can transform from adversaries into enemies, which would entail the reciprocation of moral disrespect and harsh derogation.

Morality and Dehumanization Processes

In recent years, the issue of morality has gained great importance in social psychology (Ellemers, Pagliaro, & Barreto, 2013). Ellemers and van den Bos (2012) proposed a taxonomy distinguishing three different social functions of morality. Based on this model, morality is *identity defining*: It helps individuals define who they are in relation to relevant groups (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Morality also plays an active role in intragroup regulation processes, as it serves as a strong tool for regulating individual group members' behavior (*group dynamic function*; Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008; Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011). Finally, and more importantly for the present research, morality presents fundamental implications for the ways in which we relate to other meaningful groups. In this sense, the perceived morality of a group—that is, the perceived integrity and trustworthiness of its social behavior (Ellemers et al., 2013)—can affect how we perceive its members and interact with them (*intergroup relations function*; Ellemers & van den Bos, 2012). Affirming the distinctiveness of one's own group by exaggerating its differences from another group is a well-known psychological mechanism in intergroup relations (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this sense, as morality plays a crucial role in defining one's group's identity, it also constitutes a crucial domain for affirming intergroup distinctiveness (Ellemers et al., 2013).

The concepts of morality and humanness are strongly interrelated (Bastian, Laham, Wilson, Haslam, & Koval, 2011; Haslam, Bastian, Laham, & Loughnan, 2012). Individuals are credited with moral worth and are considered to deserve moral treatment “simply” by virtue of being human (Bandura, 1999; Haslam et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, humanness is not universally assigned to every- one. A form of outgroup devaluation observed throughout the history of humankind is *dehumanization*, which involves the categorization of individuals or groups as being outside the human community. Dehumanization can assume different forms, such as *objectification* (Loughnan et al., 2010; Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014), *mechanization* (Haslam, 2006), and *demonization* (Giner-Sorolla, Leidner, & Castano, 2012).

Importantly, in relation with this paper, another important way through which dehumanization occurs is *animalization*, that is, the consideration of a certain group of people as more animal- and less human-like. Recently, two theoretical models have been elaborated by Leyens et al. (2003) and by Haslam (2006; for a review, see Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) to define this human/animal divide. In the first model (by Leyens et al., 2003), the human/animal divide is determined by the strategic allocations of secondary (typically human) and primary (shared by humans and animals) emotions to the ingroup and to the outgroup. In contrast, in Haslam's (2006) model, animalistic dehumanization involves the missing attribution of cognitive aspects mainly related to rationality and superior intellectual qualities. Despite these differences (which mainly relate to the dimensions on which humans differ from other animals), both models are focused on a subtle form of dehumanization and suggest the use of indirect measures to assess it. Nevertheless, beyond these relevant subtle forms, dehumanization can also assume explicit forms, such as the overt attribution of animal sta- tus to another person/group. Blatant animalistic attribution has been described by Bandura (1999) as a dimension of moral disengagement toward a person. From this perspective, dehumanizing another person is a strategy through which negative attitudes and even violent actions toward an individual can be justified and reconciled with common moral sensibilities.

Historically, in the political ideology of hatred, the transformation of opponents into enemies often manifested itself through derogatory animal metaphors in political propaganda (Ventrone, 2005; Yanay, 2013). Indeed, whereas a political opponent is someone whose ideas you want to *defeat*, a political enemy is someone you need to *suppress*; this suppression may be justified by positing the "enemy" as being not human but animal- like. Even today, the animal metaphor has been

frequently adopted to attack political opponents. For instance, George W. Bush and, later, the Obama family have often been depicted as apes by U.S. and European newspapers (Cesca, 2011; Kassam, 2014); furthermore, an Italian right-wing senator recently declared that a Black minister for intercultural integration had the features of an orangutan (Davies, 2013). The exact quotation is reported at the beginning of this paper.

To conclude, as the current political arena is still a context in which the expression of out-group denigration is tolerated and perceived as legitimate (Combs et al., 2009; Crawford, Modri, & Motyl, 2013), we found it relevant to predict the occurrence of blatant expressions of negative attitudes toward the political outgroup, that is, the explicit animalistic dehumanization of the out-group in intergroup political relations.

The Present Research

In this research, we performed two studies examining political identity from the perspective of social identity theory (Green, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). We aimed to extend our understanding of the known relationship between morality and dehumanization in three ways. First, we examined this relation in an inadequately explored field—the intergroup context based on political groups. Second, we used a measure of morality that allowed us to assess explicit perceived moral differences between the ingroup and the outgroup. Third, we assessed dehumanization through a more explicit measure than the typically used measure. Through one cross-sectional and one experimental study, we examined whether identification with the political group (Study 1) and the salience of political membership (Study 2) predicted animalistic dehumanization of the outgroup. Moreover, we tested whether the perception of moral distance between ingroup and outgroup members mediated such a relation.

For Study 1, we hypothesized that the more intensely individuals identify with their political ingroup, the more they will be prone to distinguish their group from the outgroup in terms of morality (Hypothesis 1). We based our rationale on evidence for the primacy of morality in an individual's identification with relevant

groups: As shown in the literature, individuals strive for positive distinctiveness of their own group (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and this process is particularly salient when morality is the dimension defining this social comparison (Leach et al., 2007; for a review, see Ellemers et al., 2013). Indeed, morality is the strongest dimension with which individuals define themselves in terms of group membership, identify with the relevant groups, and take pride in their membership and belonging.

Moreover, in line with Demoulin et al. (2009), who showed a positive association between ingroup identification and inhumanization of the outgroup (but only when membership categories were relevant from the psychological viewpoint), in Study 1, we expected political ingroup identification to show a positive association with outgroup animalistic dehumanization (Hypothesis 2). This prediction was based on the facts that (a) in the political arena, the expression of outgroup denigration is neither condemned nor discouraged (Combs et al., 2009; Crawford et al., 2013) and (b) in Italy, the left and right wings are relevant sources of social identity even among those uninterested in politics (Corbetta, Cavazza, & Roccato, 2009). To measure political orientation, we adopted participants' self-definition in terms of left- or right-wing orientation as the basis of their political identification. In Italy, the left-right dimension is the primary tool that people use to represent and interpret the political world (Ricolfi, 1999), and the same holds true in other countries characterized by strong ideological contrasts, such as Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand (Duckitt, 2001).

Perceiving differences that challenge a group's cultural and moral worldview provokes intense negative emotional reactions and elicits a desire for greater social and physical distance from people with different moral convictions (Ellemers & van den Bos, 2012). Moreover, moral controversies lead not only to a reduced ability to resolve intergroup differences but also to a disregard for procedural safeguards (Skitka & Mullen, 2002). As Ellemers and van den Bos (2012) argued, "people who do not share the same moral values may even be seen as less human, so that aggression against them seems justified" (p. 884). Thus, we hypothesized that the effect of ingroup identification on animalistic dehumanization should be explained

by perceived moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup (Hypothesis 3).

The test of these predictions was subsequently extended in an experimental study (Study 2), in which we hypothesized that merely making participants' political membership salient would increase their perceived moral distance between ingroup and outgroup (Hypothesis 1) and outgroup animalistic dehumanization (Hypothesis 2). Moreover, we hypothesized that making participants' political membership salient would amplify outgroup animalistic dehumanization through the mediation of perceived moral distance between ingroup and outgroup (Hypothesis 3).

Study 1

Method

In Study 1, we tested our hypotheses with a cross-sectional design. A community sample comprising 99 participants (48 women and 51 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.31$; $SD = 16.67$) from Perugia, an Italian city, voluntarily participated in the study. Participants were thoroughly debriefed after completing the questionnaire. We measured identification with the political ingroup through seven balanced items with a 6-point response format (from 1 = *absolutely unimportant* to 6 = *very important*), adapted from Barreto and Ellemers' (2000) Identification Scale ($\alpha = .68$). Adapting the items from Leach et al. (2007), we measured the perceived moral distance between ingroup and outgroup by asking participants to estimate, using four items with a 7-point response format (ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a lot*), how much members of their political ingroup differed from those of their political outgroup in terms of morality, honesty, trustworthiness, and sincerity ($\alpha = .95$).

Then, we assessed outgroup animalistic dehumanization by means of four items selected from the Dehumanization Scale of Caprara et al. (2006; with responses ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*; $\alpha = .80$). The selected items included those that evoked explicit animalistic dehumanization. The items of the Political

Ingroup Identification Scale and those of the Animalistic Dehumanization Scale are reported in the Appendix. For each scale, indexes were computed by averaging the relative items. Next, a standard sociodemographic form was used, including a question that asked participants to state their political placement along a 1–12 (*extreme left–extreme right*) continuum.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the variables used. Through a regression approach (Figure 1), we ascertained that ingroup identification significantly predicted both perceived moral distance (confirming Hypothesis 1) and outgroup animalistic dehumanization (consistent with Hypothesis 2). Moreover, perceived moral distance significantly predicted outgroup animalistic dehumanization. When both identification (the independent variable) and perceived moral distance (the proposed mediator) were simultaneously entered as predictors of dehumanization, the effect of identification was strongly reduced. To test whether this reduction was significant, using PROCESS, the SPSS macro developed by Hayes (2012), we examined the effects of ingroup identification on outgroup animalistic dehumanization via the mediation of perceived moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .27$, $F(2, 96) = 17.74$, $p < .001$. We followed the procedure described by Hayes (2013) for estimating indirect effects and checked whether the reduction in the direct effect could have been attributed to our proposed mediator using bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples to compute 95% confidence intervals (CIs). CIs that do not contain 0 denote statistically significant indirect effects. As predicted (Hypothesis 3), the indirect effect of ingroup identification on outgroup dehumanization was significant (indirect effect = .29, 95% CI [0.1324, 0.5767]).¹ Thus, these results confirmed that identification with a political ingroup could lead people to deny the humanity of members of the outgroup via the mediation of perceiving them as morally distant from the ingroup.²

This suggests that morality is crucial for people's definition of their collective selves (Ellemers et al., 2013). The more a person identifies with an ingroup, the more

the person is prone to distinguish it from the outgroup in terms of particular dimensions such as morality. Thus, political groups appear as significant sources of identity and can elicit strongly negative attitudes toward outgroup members in privileged intergroup contexts where conflict is generally perceived as legitimate and acceptable.

Study 2

Study 2 tested the three hypotheses with an experimental design, which manipulated the salience of political membership.

Method

Ninety-six students from Torino University (46 women and 50 men; $M_{age} = 22.90$; $SD = 2.61$) participated in this study. Participants were recruited within the university campus using a snowball strategy. After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked, fully debriefed, and asked

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive statistics of the main variables considered and

Variables	Descriptive statistics		Correlations			
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Outgroup animalistic dehumanization	2.60	1.60	–	.41***	.45***	.13
2. Political ingroup identification	3.97	0.73		–	.38***	.02
3. Moral distance between ingroup and outgroup	3.90	1.96			–	–.05
4. Political orientation	5.69	3.68				–

Note. *** $p < .001$.

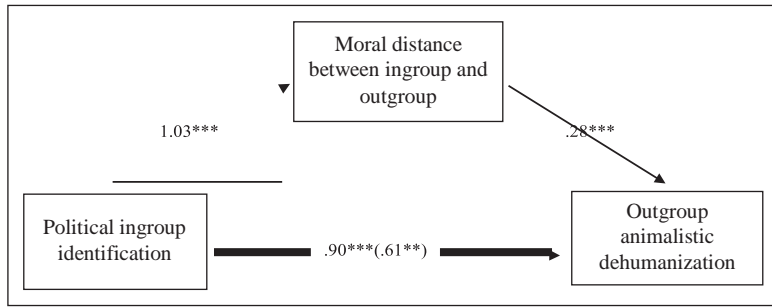


Figure 1. Study 1: Moral distance mediates the relation between political ingroup identification and outgroup animalistic dehumanization (unstandardized estimates; estimate of the mediated model is in parentheses).

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$.

to escort to the laboratory a friend who was known to have either left-wing or right-wing leanings. The structure, hypotheses, and measures used (outgroup animalistic dehumanization: $\alpha = .79$; perceived moral distance between ingroup and outgroup: $\alpha = .87$) were analogous to those used in Study 1. Once more, we measured participants' political orientation using a 12-category item (1 = *extreme left* to 12 = *extreme right*).

We manipulated the salience of membership using a twofold procedure. First, in the experimental group, the questionnaire commenced with a question on the participants' political orientation on the left–right axis, whereas in the control group, this question was the last one asked. Moreover, following Reynolds, Turner, Haslam, and Ryan (2001), we asked liberal members of the experimental group to respond to the questionnaire items in accordance with the following instruction provided at the top of every scale: “Considering that you are a left-winger, please respond to the following questions.” Conversely, the instructions given to the conservative members of the experimental group were “Considering that you are a right-winger, please respond to the following questions.” Participants in the control group did not receive such instructions.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the variables we used. Through a regression approach (Figure 2), we ascertained that the salience of political group membership (effect coded as -1 = *not salient* to 1 = *salient*) significantly predicted both the perceived moral distance (confirming Hypothesis 1) and outgroup animalistic dehumanization (consistent with Hypothesis 2), although the latter relationship only approached statistical significance; $b = .26$, $p = .07$. Moreover, perceived moral distance significantly predicted outgroup animalistic dehumanization. When

Table 2. Study 2: Descriptive statistics of the main variables considered and correlations among them.

Descriptive statistics Correlations

Variables						
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Outgroup animalistic dehumanization	2.24	1.39	–	.19a	.25*	–.0
2. Political membership salience	0.50	0.50		–	.22*	–.0
3. Moral distance between ingroup and outgroup	3.36	1.57			–	–.1
4. Political orientation	6.90	4.67				–

Note. a $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

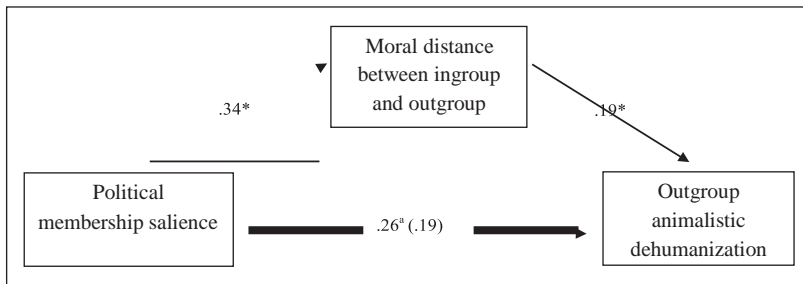


Figure 2. Study 2: Moral distance mediates the relation between political membership salience and outgroup animalistic dehumanization (unstandardized estimates; estimate of the mediated model is in parentheses).

* $p < .05$. a $p = .07$.

both the salience of political group membership (the independent variable) and perceived moral distance (the proposed mediator) were simultaneously entered as predictors of dehumanization, the effect of the salience of political group membership was reduced. Then, similar to Study 1, we tested a mediated model to predict the significance of the indirect effect of the salience of political group membership on outgroup animalistic dehumanization through the mediation of perceived moral difference between the ingroup and the outgroup. The whole model proved to be significant, $R^2 = .08$, $F(2, 93) = 3.98$, $p < .05$. We followed the procedure described by Hayes (2012) for estimating indirect effects using bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples to compute 95% CIs. As expected, the indirect effect of salience of political group membership on animalistic dehumanization was significant (indirect effect = .07, 95% CI [0.0032, 0.1922]).³

The results of the present study expanded upon those of Study 1, showing that the mere reminder of one's political orientation was sufficient to lead one to consider the outgroup members as deserving to be treated as animals, via the mediation of the perception of these members as morally distant from the ingroup.⁴

General Discussion

According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, morality, humanness, and politics are tightly bound. Considering politics the privileged space in which human action occurs, Aristotle saw the very essence of humanity as political and accordingly viewed morality as being at the core of political life. In the present research, based on a social identity perspective, we attempted to connect and integrate two areas of research—the evaluative dimension of morality and animalistic dehumanization—to show the relevance of this relation in the political context.

We started with the idea that political categories can be meaningful sources of social identity as well as outgroup denigration. Ideology is indeed the result of identity-related motivations and can thus be used as a lens through which people observe the world, shape interpersonal relationships, and satisfy social identity motives and relational needs for affiliation (Huddy, 2001; Jost et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, existing literature offers little insight into the effects of individuals' political identity on extreme forms of reciprocal political outgroup denigration, that is, the denial of the humanity of outgroups (for exceptions, see Crawford et al., 2013).

Using a cross-sectional and an experimental study, we tested the hypotheses that within the political domain, ingroup identification (Study 1) and salience of ingroup membership (Study 2) would determine the animalistic dehumanization of the outgroup via the mediation of a highlighted perception of moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup. Our results generally supported our hypotheses. The emerging scenario indicates how relevant political membership can be for ordinary people.

Study 1 offered preliminary correlational evidence that individuals who more strongly identified with their political ingroup regarded outgroup members as more deserving to be treated as animals. This relation was mediated by the perception of a marked moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup. Study 2 sheds further light on the results of Study 1 and, through an experimental approach, shows that when an intergroup context is made salient, it triggers a causal path between the salience of political ingroup membership and a stronger tendency toward outgroup animalistic dehumanization via the mediation of a higher moral distance between the two groups. This is an extremely remarkable result as it reveals that simply emphasizing one's political membership or reminding people of their political orientation is adequate to increase their perception of the political outgroup as subhuman.

On this subject, it is important to emphasize how we measured animalistic dehumanization, which should be considered among the strengths of this paper. Indeed, we tapped an explicit component of dehumanization, in which members of the political outgroup were openly considered as deserving of being treated as animals. However, as far as we know, no previous research has considered whether forms of blatant and harmful outgroup dehumanization, such as explicit outgroup animalization, are associated with increased moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup in the political domain.

In addition, this paper has two strong points. First, the experimental approach used in Study 2 allowed us to show a causal relationship underlying the animalistic dehumanization of the out- group. Second, ingroup identification has not been extensively investigated in the literature on dehumanization, especially considering simultaneously the ingroup and outgroup members when a situation of conflict is present.

This research, beyond answering some questions, also revealed new possible avenues of research. The role essayed by ingroup identification and the salience of membership in increasing outgroup animalistic dehumanization by the effect of ingroup–outgroup moral distance presents important consequences for social harmony. The perceived morality of ingroup and outgroup targets is a primary predictor of both behavioral intentions toward them and the desire to socially interact with them (Brambilla, Sacchi, Pagliaro, & Ellemers, 2013). Moral differences are more socially divisive than other classes of differences, and diversity in issues relevant to moral beliefs tends to aggravate intergroup conflict (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003). Consequently, ingroup favoritism may turn into explicit out- group denigration and hate. In this regard, the results from these studies may be relevant not only for political intergroup conflict but also for other hostile intergroup relations.

For instance, in a recent study involving Israeli Jewish and Palestinian participants, Shnabel, Halabib, and Noor (2013) have shown that reducing moral defensiveness (i.e., the need to protect the ingroup’s moral image) helps diminish inter- group conflict. Though differences between groups need to be recognized rather than dis- missed, *moral* differences—far from facilitating positive encounters between conflicting groups—generate and exacerbate conflict. In the present paper, we have provided some evidence that the possibility of reducing negative intergroup attitudes lies, at least partly, in the perceived morality differences between ingroups and outgroups.

To delve into the mediating mechanism tested here, future studies should compare the roles played by the perceptions of difference between ingroup and outgroup members along different value-oriented dimensions. Certainly, a limit of our research is

that we measured only perceived moral distance between groups. Thus, the question remains regarding whether other dimensions relevant to intergroup relations could mediate the relation between ingroup political identification and outgroup dehumanization. Moreover, it should be noted that we also tested the reversed mediation model, which was also significant. Thus, further experimental studies are needed to confirm the direction of the causality between moral distance and animalistic dehumanization tested in this research. Since we did not measure ingroup political identification in Study 2, future studies should also consider whether and how the joint effects of the level of self-reported identification with the ingroup and the salience of group membership affect the animalistic dehumanization of the outgroup via the perception of morality distance between the ingroup and the outgroup.

Another possible development of our research stems from our observation that in both Study 1 and Study 2, the general mean scores for animalistic dehumanization were below the scale mid-point. Even if the fairness norm in the political field is reasonably weaker than in other inter- group domains, we believe that this result depended on the very explicit content of our measure. In this light, the effect we found would have been stronger had we adopted more subtle measures of outgroup dehumanization. Given the broad implications of this study, future efforts should attempt to replicate these results focusing on different measures of dehumanization by examining, for instance, the denial of specific human attributes to the members of the political outgroup (Loughnan, Haslam, & Kashima, 2009).

Moreover, future studies should control for political outgroup hostility to ensure that political identification still predicts animalistic dehumanization after accounting for a generally negative attitude toward the outgroup.

However, before conducting the studies recommended before, we believe that our results provide evidence that the de-legitimization of political opponents through dehumanization often observed in the political arena may shift to the context of everyday intergroup relations, provoking negative consequences for intergroup harmony. For Adams (1918; cited in Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013), politics is the systematic organization of hatreds: Indeed, a deep-rooted belief system indicates that intergroup conflict is reasonable and less blameworthy in politics than in any other human field. Hence, it is unsurprising that politics is progressively reduced to a “blood sport” among parties (Combs et al., 2009). Thus, the risk remains for vicious cycles in which the stronger the perceived moral distance between groups, the more intense the outgroup dehumanization and the deeper the conflict. Conservatives and liberals present very different views on what constitutes the “common good,” but as Jost (2006, p. 667) argues, “there is reason to assume that human beings have required and will continue to require the characteristics that are associated with the political left as well as the political right.”

In conclusion, it is useful to remember that politics is not intended as a proxy for war but as the only reliable alternative to it (Ignatieff, 2013). We would like to close this paper with Bobbio’s (1998) invitation: After picturing politics as a realm of conflict, that is, a world in which relations between the parties mostly occur through a struggle between *enemies*, he suggested that it is not only possible, but also pressing, to switch from a belligerent political world to a *moral* world, in which respect of others’ diversity is what makes us human.

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Foot Notes

1. We also tested a mediated model in which identification with the political ingroup increased the perception of moral distance via the mediation of animalistic dehumanization. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .25$, $F(2, 96) = 16.04$, $p < .001$. The indirect effect of ingroup identification on moral distance was significant (indirect effect = .39, 95% CI [0.1572, 0.6946]). The direct effect of identification on moral distance decreased ($b = 1.03$, $p < .001$ to $b = .64$, $p < .05$) when introducing the mediator. Given the cross-sectional assessment of the proposed mediator and the proposed outcome, it is not surprising that the reversed model was also significant. However, a mediational test is above all theory-driven. From a theoretical perspective, the path in which a milder perception (i.e., the perception of moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup) represents the mediator and a more negatively loaded attitude (i.e., the outgroup animalistic dehumanization) represents the outcome seems more plausible.
2. As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, we further checked whether the mediational path was moderated by participants' political orientation, testing the conditional effects of ingroup identification on outgroup animalistic dehumanization via the mediation of perceived moral distance between the ingroup and the outgroup at different levels of political orientation (PROCESS

Model 5; Hayes, 2012). The interaction between political orientation and ingroup identification was not significant ($b = -.06$; $p = .25$, 95% CI [-0.1801, 0.0472]), whereas the indirect effect via perceived moral distance was significant ($b = .32$; 95% CI [0.1212, 0.5744]).

3. As in Study 1, we also tested a mediated model in which the salience of political group membership increased the perception of moral distance via the mediation of animalistic dehumanization. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .09$, $F(2, 93) = 4.66$, $p < .05$. The indirect effect of ingroup identification on moral distance was significant (indirect effect = .06, 95% CI [0.0013, 0.2029]). The direct effect of identification on moral distance decreased ($b = .34$, $p < .05$ to $b = .28$, $p = .07$) when the mediator was introduced.
4. As requested by an anonymous reviewer, as in Study 1, we further checked whether the mediational path was moderated by participants' political orientation (PROCESS Model 5; Hayes, 2012). This analysis showed that the interaction between political orientation and the salience of political group membership was not significant ($b = .01$; $p = .87$, 95% CI [-0.0624, 0.0732]), whereas the indirect effect via perceived moral distance was significant ($b = .07$; 95% CI [0.1212, 0.5744]).

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Appendix

Items of the Political Ingroup Identification Scale:

1. It is important for me to be a left[right]-winger.
2. Being a left[right]-winger has nothing to do with my identity. (R)
3. I feel strong ties with left[right]-wingers.
4. I am very critical of left[right]-wingers. (R)
5. Saying “I am a left[right]-winger” would bother me.

6. I identify myself with left[right]-wingers.
7. Left(right)-wingers share similar ideas.

Items of the Animalistic Dehumanization Scale:

1. Some left[right]-wingers deserve to be treated as animals.
2. It is good to mistreat a left[right]-winger who behaves like a worm.
3. A left[right]-winger who behaves as an animal should expect others to treat him/her the same way.
4. Some left[right]-wingers should be treated as beasts of burden to be obligated to work.