Partisan Anger and Partisan Dehumanization

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Abstract

Anger is a pervasive emotion in American politics. While much is known about its implications for political behavior, we know comparatively less about anger's ability to shape extreme political attitudes. In this study, we examine how partisan-based anger leads to one such attitude: partisan-based dehumanization. Drawing on data from two national survey experiments, we find that the exogenous introduction of partisan-directed anger causes Americans to engage in partisan-based forms of dehumanization. We find that this relationship is robust to different estimation strategies and measures of dehumanization. We further examine whether anger's ability to produce partisan dehumanization is dependent upon individuals' level of trait-based dogmatism—that is, their tendency to have a closed and intolerant worldview. Our results indicate that anger's effect on partisan dehumanization is not dependent on this psychological predisposition, suggesting that it is able to broadly shape Americans' views of those whose political beliefs differ from their own.

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In the wake of the assassination of Charlie Kirk, a conservative activist, in September 2025, President Donald Trump told a Fox News host that Americans "on the left" are "vicious" and "horrible" (Beitsch, Samuels and Lillis, 2025). Trump later elaborated on these remarks in a discussion with members of the press before boarding Marine One. "When you look at the agitators, you look at the scum that speaks so badly of our country, the American flag burnings all over the place, that's the left—not the right," said Trump.[1]

Such rhetoric, which uses numerous dehumanizing words and phrases, has become increasingly prominent in American politics (Jones, 2025).[2] This language reveals and, likely, reinforces the belief among both Democrats and Republicans in the mass public that supporters of the opposing political party are subhuman in nature. Evidence of such dehumanization—that is, possessing the either "blatant or subtle" set of attitudes that constitute "the most striking violation of our belief in a common humanity: our Enlightenment assumption that we are all essentially one and the same" (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014)—is widespread in American politics. Indeed, recent polls reveal that, among supporters of both parties, "the number of negative traits . . . abscribe[d] to members of the opposing party has increased substantially over the past six years." Increasingly, Democrats and Republicans view their political others as lazy, immoral, dishonest, unintelligent, and closed-minded (Pew Research Center, 2022).

These attitudes have emerged within the context of an American political climate that is enraged. "Anger," said a 2025 headline in *The Washington Post*, "is a defining character trait for both parties." The article pointed to an over time increase in the percentage of Americans who reported feeling angry towards the federal government. So, too, did the piece highlight a surge in anger-inducing events that were characterized by a now-familiar pattern of partisans blaming each other for the country's ills: the vicissitudes of Barack Obama's presidency, Hillary Clinton's description

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[1]Trump's remarks, delivered on September 15, can be viewed in full here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ok73UYdhR0k.

[2]While these specific words were said by the President, the public perceives the extent of the problem to be broad. In fact, a December 2025 Gallup poll found that Americans' alarm at the state of the country's political rhetoric is at an all-time high. Moreover, the poll found that both Democratic and Republican respondents were "nearly unanimous in believing the other party has gone too far with its rhetoric." According to Gallup, 94% of Democrats believed that Republicans and their supporters had gone too far with their rhetoric, while a nearly identical percentage of Republicans—93%—believed the same about Democrats and their supporters (Jones, 2025).

of Donald Trump's supporters as a "basket of deplorables," and Trump's "grievance-driven" political life (Kane, 2025). Across the political spectrum, a growing body of evidence suggests that "[t]he politics of outrage is fast becoming a political norm" (Freeman, 2018).

In this paper, we study how this culture of anger facilitates the development of dehumanizing attitudes in the American mass public. We argue that anger directed towards the opposing political party causes Americans to engage in the dehumanization of their political opponents. Drawing upon data from two survey experiments composed of nearly 7,000 self-identified partisans, we find evidence in support of our expectation: the exogenous introduction of partisan-directed anger leads to the development of partisan-based forms of dehumanization. We show that this relationship exists for both "explicit" and "subtle" forms of dehumanization, and that this pattern holds regardless of whether we estimate an intent-to-treat effect or a complier-weighted local average treatment effect.

We then investigate whether the nature of the relationship between partisan-based anger and partisan dehumanization is dependent upon a particularly relevant psychological disposition: trait-based dogmatism. Because those individuals who are dogmatic tend to be fixed in, and adamant about, their worldview, and because anger has the psychological effect of shutting down the search for new information and increasing the reliance on stereotypes (see, e.g., Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer, 1994), we expect those who score high on our measure of trait-based dogmatism to be the most likely to channel their partisan-based anger into partisan dehumanization. Across five different coding schemes, however, we find that there are no heterogeneous treatment effects of partisan anger on partisan dehumanization according to one's level of trait-based dogmatism. Anger towards the opposing political party causes Americans to dehumanize their partisan others, and this tendency is not dependent upon an individual's innate level of dogmatism.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, we survey the literature on dehumanization. We outline the various types of dehumanization, point to the antecedents of dehumanization in American politics, and highlight the relationship between emotions and dehumanization. Next, we outline a theory as to how and why partisan-based anger should be expected to cause Americans to engage

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in the dehumanization of their political others. In doing this, we discuss why we expect dogmatism to amplify the effect of anger on dehumanization. We then discuss our empirical strategy before presenting results that are broadly—albeit not entirely—consistent with our theoretical expectations. Finally, we conclude with a discussion about the implication of these findings for American politics and mass-level interactions between Democrats and Republicans.

Dehumanization: Origins and Consequences

Dehumanization is an attitude in which one sees another person or group as less than human. This attitude can develop when one denies the existence of traits or emotions that are central to being human in others (Vaes et al., 2003). Dehumanization also occurs when individuals are seen as "animalistic" (i.e., more akin to animals than humans) or robotic in nature (Haslam, 2006). In a related manner, dehumanization can manifest as possessing views that a person—or group of people—are less physically evolved than one's self (Kteily et al., 2015).

Dehumanization can be either blatant or subtle. Blatant dehumanization is the explicit perception of individuals being less evolved than others (Kteily and Bruneau, 2017). This form of dehumanization is often measured using the visual Ascent of Man scale (see, e.g., Kteily and Bruneau, 2017). The Ascent of Man scale shows the outlines of five human-like forms who progress from a four-legged human ancestor to a final modern human form. Influenced by group status and meta-dehumanization perceptions, blatant dehumanization reveals an underlying source of intergroup aggression and hostility (Kteily and Bruneau, 2017).

Subtle dehumanization is the differential attribution of human qualities to others (Haslam, 2006). Because humans are distinct in emotions and cognition from two particular entities, animals and machines, subtle dehumanization can take the form of a lack of ascription of humanity along two dimensions: mechanistic and animalistic (Haslam et al., 2005; Haslam, 2006; Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). Animals and machines are both non-human but in different ways; while animals are non-human because of their lack of higher cognition, machines are non-human be-

cause of their inability to experience higher emotions. Therefore, mechanistic dehumanization is the withholding of traits that separate humans from machines, while animalistic dehumanization is the withholding of traits that separate humans from animals.

These two dimensions of humanity can also be conceptualized as human uniqueness and human nature—with human uniqueness relating to the cognitive aspects of humanity, while human nature relates to the emotionality feature of humanity (Haslam, 2006). Dehumanization along the human uniqueness dimension is conceptualized as perceptions of qualities such as being uncivilized, possessing low intelligence, and being uncultured. Dehumanization along the human nature dimension, on the other hand, refers to perceptions of qualities like amorality and a lack of emotion (Haslam, 2006).

Dehumanization is not limited to relationships that are strictly interpersonal. On the contrary, given humans' tendency to engage in social categorization and think as members of groups (Tajfel and Turner, 2004), dehumanization can also occur within the context of group affiliations (Leyens et al., 2007).[3] One of, if not the most, powerful intergroup dynamics in American politics is the relationship between members of the Democratic and Republican parties. For this reason, scholars have begun to study the effects of dehumanization within this specific intergroup relationship. Prior scholarship has shown that American partisans report attitudes of both blatant and subtle dehumanization of the out-party (Cassese, 2021; Martherus et al., 2021). Moreover, this dehumanization takes place among both partisan elites (Cassese, 2018) and partisans in the mass public (Cassese, 2021; Martherus et al., 2021).

Partisan dehumanization is consequential for American political life. Prior work has shown that blatant partisan dehumanization predicts both support for violence towards members of the out-party and a willingness to engage in political violence against out-partisans (Landry, Druckman and Willer, 2024). Similarly, greater dehumanization of the out-party predicts greater preference

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[3]"Infra-humanization" details how humanity is assigned based on in- or out-group membership (Leyens et al., 2007). Infra-humanization is distinct from dehumanization in that it *compares* humanity between two groups, rather than denying humanity on the whole to the out-group, without regard to ones' ascription of humanity to ones' own group. Measures of dehumanization, rather than infrahumanization, ask only about humanity of the out-group, while measures of infra-humanization capture how much more a person ascribes humanity to their own group compared to an out-group.

for social distance between partisans, indicating that partisan dehumanization has consequences for our social fabric that could contribute to even more partisan homogeneity and a lack of cross-cutting cleavages along party lines. Blatant dehumanization can also influence individuals' policy opinions, such as support for torture and collective punishment of out-groups (Kteily et al., 2015; Kteily, Hodson and Bruneau, 2016).

Given its potential to predict normatively undesirable outcomes, plenty of work has sought to understand the origins of partisan dehumanization. The strength of one's attachment to their partisan identity is a notable predictor of engaging in partisan dehumanization. Those individuals who consider themselves "strong partisans," as opposed to more weakly attached partisans or independents who lean towards one of the two parties, are more likely to express dehumanization of the out-party (Cassese, 2021; Martherus et al., 2021). Similarly, greater affective coolness towards the out-party is positively correlated with greater dehumanization (Martherus et al., 2021). A fixed, rather than a fluid worldview (Hetherington and Weiler, 2009), also predicts greater dehumanization (Martherus et al., 2021). Partisan dehumanization is also predicted by psychological factors, such as greater perceptions of moral distance between the two parties (Pacilli et al., 2016).

Though studies of the effect of emotions on dehumanization are relatively scarce (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014), prior work has shown that negative emotions are one source of intergroup dehumanization (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2023). In particular, anger and fear have been shown to trigger feelings of threat from the out-group, which in turn leads to greater dehumanization of the out-group.[4] Such claims stem from experimental work which shows that, when a fictional out-group was depicted as harmful, the emotion of anger mediated dehumanization attitudes expressed towards that out-group (Giner-Sorolla and Russell, 2019). Anger has also been shown to mediate one's exposure to dehumanizing rhetoric about immigrants and subsequent support for policies negatively impacting them, such as decreasing amnesty and increasing border security (Utych, 2018).

Anger can also be an *outcome* of being or feeling dehumanized (Bastian and Haslam, 2011).

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[4]Disgust has also been shown to lead to intergroup dehumanization, even in a minimal-group environment (Buckels and Trapnell, 2013).

This is notable, as partisans perceive greater levels of dehumanization of their own party by the out-party than partisans actually report (Moore-Berg et al., 2020; Petsko and Kteily, 2024). This suggests a potential vicious cycle between anger and dehumanization in the partisan context; perceptions of dehumanization by the out-party can produce anger, which might then lead to greater dehumanization of the out-party.

Anger and Dehumanization

Given the substantial negative consequences of partisan dehumanization, it is critical to fully understand the origins of this attitudinal tendency. We argue that a significant portion of partisan dehumanization is driven by feelings of anger towards out-partisans. And, while the specific pathway that leads from one's anger to the formation of dehumanizing views about out-partisans may vary from person to person, we suspect that three possible (and related) mechanisms are at work.

First, anger can lead to the dehumanization of out-partisans due to the nature of the emotion itself. Like all emotions, anger can shape attitudes in a consequential manner. Anger's classification as a negatively valenced emotion means that individuals who are angry tend to evaluate other entities in a negative manner (Bower, 1991). As part of this negative evaluation, anger can powerfully shape one's substantive evaluation of others, with those who are angry more likely to rely on stereotypes while forming opinions (Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer, 1994). Though these attitudinal shifts are most strongly directed towards the source of one's anger, they can also "spill over" to shape an individual's judgment of people or things materially unrelated to their anger (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, by experiencing a negative emotion—anger—regarding politics or political competition, people are likely to view the rest of their world, and especially their political world, in a more negative light. Thus, we should expect them to feel more negative towards, and more likely to dehumanize, political opponents due to the very nature of feeling angry.

Second, anger can lead to partisan dehumanization through its ability to reinforce an in-group versus out-group mentality. Political anger increases levels of polarization and subsequently fos-

ters a heightened probability that one will cut-off ties with members of the opposite party (Webster, Connors and Sinclair, 2022), increasing the overall social distance between members of opposing camps. This greater social distance engendered by one's feeling of anger towards their opponents makes dehumanization of the "other" much easier, as people begin to perceive the other party as socially and morally distinct from themselves (Cassese, 2021). By reinforcing these differences, individuals increase the perception that their social group is superior to others in a multitude of ways. These beliefs in a social hierarchy, where some groups are better than other (i.e., social dominance orientation), are one of the largest predictors of an individual's proclivity for dehumanizing their opponents (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014).

Not only does anger on its own directly lead to increased stereotyping towards out-groups, but the reinforcement of an in-group versus out-group mentality further increases the prevalence of viewing opponents through a stereotypical lens (Cassese, 2021). To negatively stereotype a group is, to some degree, to cease thinking about the members in an individualistic human manner. This, in turn, can lead to dehumanization and the justification of injurious action against members of the out-group (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2015). Thus, anger can shift one's perspective towards an increasingly polarized societal worldview in two ways. First, it can reinforce the notion that the in-group (i.e., members of one's own political party) are firmly in opposition to the out-group (i.e., members of the opposing political party). Second, it can give rise to the idea that the out-group is a homogeneous, inhuman opponent—that is, less a group of individuals who simply differ from the in-group in terms of their political beliefs, and more of a faceless, threatening oppositional entity. In this way, the other party might not resemble a political opponent, but rather a predator preparing for attack.

This idea of a homogeneous "attack" leads to our third mechanism: anger—similar to fear—is often an evolutionary-based response to feelings of immediate threat. But unlike other negative emotions, anger decreases one's ability to effectively process information, and instead demands impulsive, passionate, and poorly-thought out immediate action (Giner-Sorolla and Russell, 2019). Unlike fear, which can trigger a "fight-or-flight" response, anger more simply triggers a "fight"

response (Erisen, 2020). Thus, when one feels anger towards a group, especially when that anger is borne out of a feeling of intentional action against oneself (i.e., not a force of nature), it follows that an emotional response regarding the necessity to "fight" against the threat would come (see, e.g., Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer, 1994). Generally, the strongest desire evoked is one which seeks to gain revenge against the anger stimulant by causing them to suffer (Frijda, 1986).

Dehumanization, in particular, arises when one feels threatened by another group (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014). Perceived threats are often easier dealt with when one's opponent is viewed as less-than-human. Citizens in conflict zones, for example, have been shown to be more likely to dehumanize their opponent if they view them as threatening (Maoz and McCauley, 2008); subsequently, these same individuals are more likely to endorse extreme measures to deal with said threat (e.g. Viki, Osgood and Phillips, 2013). Thus, in this way we argue that when one becomes angry with politics, their ultimate goal becomes to act against the opposing party which stands as the source of their anger (Webster, Connors and Sinclair, 2022; Allred, 1999), and make them suffer. To dehumanize them (1) debases their social standing in a way that, by itself, acts as a source of revenge against them, but also (2) eases the path to future acts of retaliation an angry person may desire (whether or not they intend to actually act on them). Those who dehumanize their opponents, for example, tend to more strongly favor aggressive policies towards them as a group (Maoz and McCauley, 2008).

Beyond this simple positive relationship, we further theorize that the association between political anger and partisan-based dehumanization can be amplified by individual traits, namely one's dogmatism. Dogmatism represents a "closed" system of beliefs in which one ascribes absolute authority to their own views while exhibiting sharp intolerance towards—and a rejection of—others and their views (Rokeach, 1954, 1960). While similar to rigidity, dogmatism concerns itself more with how individuals express themselves to others, characteristically in a way that is intolerant of other ideas, and with an assurance that one's own beliefs on a matter are objectively true. The more dogmatic the person, the greater the distance they perceive between what they believe and what they do not, and similarly, the greater the perceived threat of opposing viewpoints and the desire

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to defeat such a threat (Rokeach, 1954). In other words, a dogmatic Republican (Democrat) will perceive greater affective distance between fellow partisans and Democrats (Republicans), view out-partisans as more threatening, and more strongly wish to triumph over them.

A dogmatic person, then, is more likely to belittle or ignore any thoughts which go against their own worldview; indeed, dogmatic people prefer a more segmented society where they do not need to expose themselves to those with opposing ideals (e.g. Palmer and Kalin, 1985). Leone (1989), for example, finds that dogmatists are more likely to polarize ideologically when thinking about a given topic as they work to discredit and attack anything that disagrees with their already-held beliefs. In this same way, an angry dogmatist should similarly be more likely to politically polarize and attempt to discredit and attack those with opposing views. One way to do this, we argue, is to dehumanize the source of that information. If one is angry at an out-partisan *and dogmatic*, they perceive both the distance between in-group and out-group members, as well as the threat this group poses, to be larger than non-dogmatists do. Thus, consistent with the arguments above, it follows that dogmatic individuals will have a greater incentive to dehumanize their opponents in order to minimize the threat of the opposing group, as well as the threat that the out-group's ideas pose to their strict worldview.

Data and Estimation

To estimate the effect of partisan anger on Americans' tendency to engage in partisan dehumanization, we draw on data from two national samples. The first sample, fielded via Lucid Theorem, was collected in January 2025. This sample contains responses from nearly 3,000 self-identified Democrats and Republicans. Our second sample, also fielded via Lucid Theorem, was collected in October 2025. This data contains responses from approximately 4,000 self-identified Democrats and Republicans. In both samples, we treat respondents who identify as independents that lean towards one of the two major parties as partisans.

In both our January 2025 sample and our October 2025 sample, respondents were asked a se-

ries of sociodemographic questions. This included information on respondents' age, gender, racial identification, and educational attainment. We also collected data on respondents' partisan identification and ideological leanings. Respondents to our second sample were asked a 20-item battery that measures their level of trait-based dogmatism. This measure, referred to by psychologists as the DOG scale, measures a "relatively unchangeable, unjustified certainty" in one's beliefs (Altemeyer, 2002). The DOG scale asks respondents to rate their level of agreement with various statements (e.g. "My opinions are right and will stand the test of time") along a -4-4 scale, where -4 represents complete disagreement, 0 indicates neither agreement nor disagreement, and 4 represents complete agreement. The responses to these statements, which contain a mix of positively- and reverse-coded measures in order to reduce demand effects, are combined together into an additive scale that captures a respondent's level of trait dogmatism. The full list of statements can be found in the Appendix.

After answering these questions, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: a treatment condition that sought to prime anger towards the opposing political party, its leaders, or its supporters; or a control condition that was designed to elicit no emotional reaction. The treatment condition asked individuals to "write about a time [they] were very angry" at the opposing political party, its leaders, or its supporters in the electorate. In all cases, this question was designed so that the text mentioned the party that the respondent does not identify with. Thus, Democrats were asked to write about a time they were very angry at the Republican Party; conversely, Republicans were asked to write about a time they were very angry at the Democratic Party. This design, known as an "emotional recall" task (Lerner and Keltner, 2001), works by asking respondents to write about an emotionally-charged event and, accordingly, temporarily re-experience or "recall" the prompted emotion. The control condition asked respondents to write about what they ate for breakfast in the morning which, given its orthogonality to any emotional state, serves as a useful baseline from which to compare the effect of anger on partisan dehumanization. In our first sample, we employed a marginal randomization—that is, the assignment to the treatment or the control condition occurred without respect to any other covariates. In our second

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sample, we first blocked on respondents' partisan identification and then assigned individuals to either the treatment or the control condition based on their partisan affiliation.

We have three dependent variables in our study. Our first dependent variable, an explicit measure of partisan dehumanization, is included in both of our samples and was measured shortly after the experimental manipulation. In both samples, we used a four-item measure of partisan dehumanization where respondents were asked to indicate how well they believe four statements describe out-partisans. The statements are, in order, "they are like robots;" "they are like animals;" "they have no feelings;" and, finally, "they are uncivilized." Potential responses to each statement are "not at all," "not very well," "somewhat well," and "extremely well." In all cases, this prompt was phrased in a way that presented survey respondents with text that explicitly mentioned the out-party. Thus, self-identifying Democrats were asked to indicate how well each of the statements describe Republicans. Similarly, self-identifying Republicans were asked to indicate how well each of the statements describe Democrats. We coded these responses numerically to range from 0-3, where higher values indicate a great level of agreement with the statement. To create our overall measure of partisan dehumanization, we combined responses to each of these statements into an additive scale and then divided by four. Our measure of partisan dehumanization, then, ranges from 0-3 in each sample. In both samples, higher scores on this measure indicate a greater amount of partisan dehumanization.

We draw on two related measures contained in our January 2025 sample as our remaining dependent variables. The first is a measure of respondents' perception as to the human nature of out-partisans, while the second measures respondents' perception of the human uniqueness of out-partisans. These measures are drawn from Haslam's (2006) work on dehumanization, which distinguishes between animalistic and mechanistic forms of dehumanization. Both the human nature and human uniqueness measures are additive scales that assess respondents' ratings of how well various adjectives describe supporters of the opposing political party. Each scale contains positively-coded (e.g. "passionate," "curious," "humble," "polite") and reverse-coded (e.g. "im-

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patient," "aggressive," "hard-hearted," "cold") descriptors.[5] Respondents could indicate that each adjective describes out-partisans "not at all," "not very well," "somewhat well," or "extremely well." For the purposes of empirical estimation, these responses are scaled numerically to range from 0-3. For the positively-coded adjectives, higher numerical values indicate a greater agreement that the adjective describes out-partisans; for the reverse-coded adjectives, higher numerical values indicate a lower agreement that the adjective describes out-partisans. Our primary measurement combines the positively- and reverse-coded items into an overall scale before dividing by 10; higher scores on this overall measure indicate a greater belief in the human nature and the human uniqueness of one's political opponents (i.e., less dehumanization). In addition to this standard operationalization, we also separately analyze the effect of partisan anger on the combined responses to the positive and negative adjectives. For these analyses, the positive and negative adjectives are both scaled in a manner whereby higher values indicate a greater belief that the adjectives describe out-partisans. Thus, higher scores on the positive adjectives scale indicate a greater belief that the positive adjectives describe out-partisans; in a similar manner, higher scores on the negative adjectives scale indicate a greater belief that the negative adjectives describe out-partisans.

Given the randomized nature of our study, estimation of the effect of partisan anger on partisan dehumanization is straightforward. In our January 2025 sample, we simply regress our dependent variable on an indicator variable for being randomized into the treatment condition. In our October 2025 sample, we regress our partisan dehumanization measure on an indicator variable for being randomized into the treatment condition and—reflecting the blocked-randomized design that we employ here—a dummy variable for self-identified Democrats. In an alternative model specification estimated on our October 2025 sample, we include an interaction between our treatment indicator and a dummy variable indicating that the respondent scores above the median on our dogmatism measure.

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[5]The full list of adjectives can be found in the Appendix.

Results

Before proceeding with our results, we first present balance plots for both our January 2025 and our October 2025 experiments. Figure 1(a) shows the difference between treated and control units in our January 2025 sample in terms of race (a dummy variable for non-White respondents), ideology (measured according to the traditional seven-point scale), gender (a dichotomous indicator for female respondents), partisanship (a dummy variable for Democrats), and educational attainment (a variable indicating whether the respondent possesses a Bachelor's degree or higher). Figure 1(b) presents these same statistics for our October 2025 sample; however, because this experiment was randomized conditional on respondents' partisanship, we omit the variable showing the difference in partisan affiliation between treated and control units. These figures show that our randomization process worked as intended. Indeed, across each of these sociodemographic and political variables, we find no statistically significant differences between treated and control units. Accordingly, we proceed with our estimation as planned.

Table 1 shows the results of our experimental manipulation. Column 1 shows the causal effect of partisan anger on partisan dehumanization in our January 2025 sample. Here, we find that anger causes respondents to be more likely to engage in partisan dehumanization ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = 0.102$; $p < .01$). The results in Column 2 indicate that this finding is not limited to just one sample or one period of time. On the contrary, we are able to replicate this finding in our October 2025 sample: once again, we find that anger causes respondents to engage in partisan dehumanization ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = 0.112$; $p < .001$).

Though these results indicate that partisan anger exerts a causal effect on partisan dehumanization, and does so across two samples, it is possible that our results are being driven by the measurement of our dependent variable. Thus, it is possible that we are detecting an effect of anger on dehumanization because of the explicit nature of our dependent variable. To determine the robustness of our findings to alternative measures of dehumanization, we rely on the two measures of subtle dehumanization that were included in our January 2025 sample. Because these measures were both asked post-treatment, we can obtain estimates of the average treatment

(a) Balance Plot, Jan. 2025
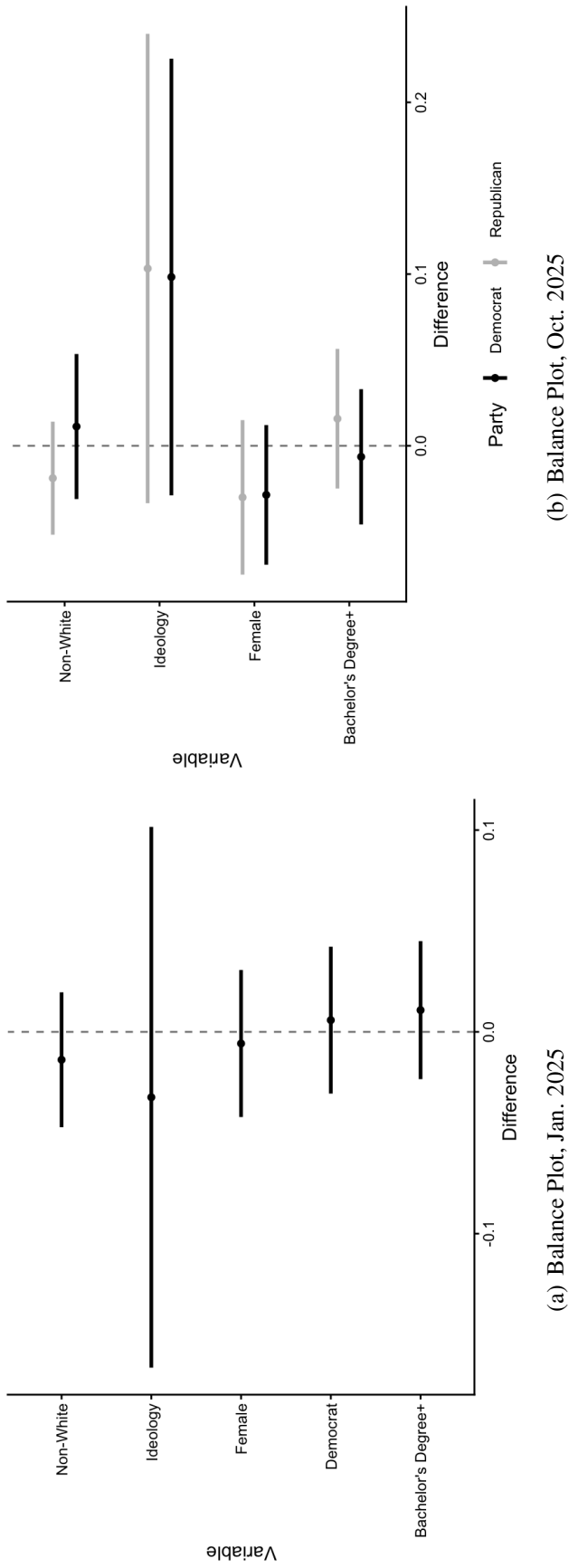

(b) Balance Plot, Oct. 2025

Figure 1: Balance Plots. These figures show the difference between treated and control units across key variables. Figure 1(a) shows the balance between treated and control units in our January 2025 sample; Figure 1(b) shows the balance between treated and control units in our October 2025 sample. Horizontal lines indicates 95% confidence intervals.

	Partisan Dehumanization	
	Model 1	Model 2
Treated	0.102**	0.112***
	(0.034)	(0.028)
Democrat		0.074**
		(0.028)
Constant	1.403***	1.586***
	(0.024)	(0.024)
R^2	0.003	0.006
Adj. R^2	0.003	0.005
N	2,880	3,949

$^{***}p < 0.001; ^{**}p < 0.01; ^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 1: Partisan Anger and Partisan Dehumanization. This table shows the effect of partisan anger on partisan dehumanization. Data come from our January 2025 sample (Column 1) and our October 2025 sample (Column 2).

effect by regressing the human nature and the human uniqueness scale on our indicator variable for treated units. To more thoroughly illustrate the nature of any treatment effects, we also regress the two components of each scale—that is, the combined positively- (e.g. "curious," "trusting") and negatively-valenced (e.g. "jealous," "aggressive") adjectives—on our treatment dummy variable. These results are shown in Table 2.

The first three columns show the effect of anger on respondents' views of the human nature of their political opponents. Column 1 shows the treatment effect under the standard operationalization of the dependent variable (higher values indicate a greater acceptance of the human nature of out-party supporters). Here, we see that anger causes individuals to be less likely to endorse the human nature of those with whom they disagree politically ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = -0.094; p < .001$). Given the coding of the dependent variable, this coefficient estimate could be obtained in one of three ways. One possibility is that our anger treatment caused survey respondents to be less likely to endorse the positive adjectives in regards to those with whom they disagree politically. A second possibility is that the treatment caused respondents to more likely to endorse the negative adjectives as descriptors of supporters of the out-party. A final possibility is that our treatment served

to both decrease the endorsement of the positive adjectives *and* increase the endorsement of the negative adjectives as accurate descriptors of the opposing party's supporters. Columns 2 & 3 shed light on the nature of the relationship between anger and a rejection of the human nature of one's political opponents. We find that anger leads to this subtle form of dehumanization in a manner that is consistent with the third possibility. Thus, anger leads individuals to reject the human nature of those with whom they disagree politically by both reducing agreement with positive adjectives as descriptors of out-partisans ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = -0.089$; $p < .01$) and increasing agreement with negative adjectives as descriptors of out-partisans ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = 0.107$; $p < .001$).

The second three columns in Table 2 show the effect of anger on respondents' perceptions of the human uniqueness of their political others. As with our analysis of the effect of anger on perceptions of out-partisans' human nature, we once again estimate the effect of anger on human uniqueness in three ways. First, we regress the combined scale that contains responses to the positive- and negatively-valenced items on our dummy variable for treated respondents (Column 4). We then separately regress the combined positively-valenced items (Column 5) and negatively-valenced items (Column 6) on our treatment measure. The results in Column 4 show that partisan anger causes individuals to be more likely to doubt the human uniqueness of those with whom they disagree politically ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = -0.101$; $p < .001$). And, as with our analysis of the effect of anger on respondents' perceptions of the human nature of out-partisans, we find that scores on the measure of human uniqueness are produced through shifts in both the positively- and the negatively-valenced items. Column 5 shows that anger causes a reduction in the amount of agreement that individuals express in terms of the positive attributes ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = -0.110$; $p < .001$); so, too, does anger cause an increase in respondents' agreement with the negative adjectives as descriptors of out-partisans ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = 0.095$; $p < .001$). That anger causes a reduction in Americans' perceptions of the human uniqueness of out-partisans, as well as their perceptions of the human nature of out-partisans, reveals that our findings are not driven by using an explicit measure of dehumanization as our dependent variable. On the contrary, partisan anger causes an increase in partisan dehumanization and does so in both explicit and subtle ways.

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	Human Nature			Human Uniqueness		
	Combined	Positive	Negative	Combined	Positive	Negative
Treated	−0.094***	−0.089**	0.107***	−0.101***	−0.110***	0.095**
	(0.020)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Constant	1.391***	1.443***	1.660***	1.233***	1.208***	1.738***
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.021)
R^2	0.008	0.003	0.005	0.007	0.005	0.003
Adj. R^2	0.007	0.003	0.005	0.006	0.004	0.003
N	2,839	2,865	2,864	2,836	2,866	2,860

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 2: Partisan Anger, Human Nature, and Human Uniqueness. This table shows the effect of partisan anger on individuals' views of the human nature and human uniqueness of political others. Data come from our January 2025 sample.

Given the estimation strategy, the results in Tables 1 & 2 are displaying intent-to-treat (ITT) effects. It is possible that, although they were randomized into the treatment condition, some individuals did not comply with the assignment by refusing to write about a time they were very angry at the opposing political party. To determine the complier-weighted average treatment effect (CATE) of anger on partisan dehumanization, we employ a two-stage least squares regression. In the first stage, we regress a measure of the percentage of anger-related words that individuals wrote in their emotional recall stories on a dummy variable for treatment status. Anger-related words are categorized according to the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) dictionary. Our second stage regresses the measure of partisan dehumanization on the instrumented percentage of angry words that individuals wrote in their emotional recall stories. In our October 2025 sample, we once again condition on the direction of an individual's partisanship in order to account for the blocked randomized nature of our design.

The results of our first set of analyses, which correspond to those found in Table 1, are shown in Table 3. Column 1 shows the first stage regression—that is, the effect of being assigned to our treatment condition on the percentage of anger-related words that individuals wrote in their emotional recall stories—in our January 2025 sample. The results indicate that our treatment did

	January 2025		October 2025	
	Pct. Angry Words	Dehumanization	Pct. Angry Words	Dehumanization
Treated	2.819***		2.464***	
	(0.153)		(0.142)	
Pct. Angry Words		0.036**		0.047***
		(0.012)		(0.012)
Democrat			0.011	0.068*
			(0.139)	(0.030)
Constant	0.043**	1.401***	0.044	1.588***
	(0.016)	(0.025)	(0.077)	(0.026)
R^2	0.109	−0.044	0.075	−0.078
Adj. R^2	0.109	−0.044	0.075	−0.079
N	2,859	2,837	3,906	3,864

$^{***}p < 0.001; {}^{**}p < 0.01; {}^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 3: Partisan Anger and Dehumanization (IV Estimates). This table shows the effect of treatment-induced anger on dehumanization. Data come from our January 2025 sample (Columns 1-2) and our October 2025 sample (Columns 3-4).

serve to increase the percentage of anger-related words that individuals wrote in their responses to our prompt ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = 2.819; p < .001$). Column 2 shows the results of the second stage regression. Here, we see that being induced by the treatment into using a greater percentage of anger-related words in one's emotional recall story causes individuals to engage in a greater amount of partisan dehumanization. These results reveal that, not only did our treatment succeed in eliciting anger in this sample, it is this emotional reaction that leads individuals to engage in partisan-based forms of dehumanization.

Columns 3 & 4 show the first and second stage regressions, respectively, on our October 2025 sample. As with our January 2025 sample, we again find that being assigned to our treatment caused respondents to write a greater percentage of anger-related words in their emotional recall stories ($\beta_{\text{Treated}} = 2.464; p < .001$). We further find that being induced by the instrument (that is, our treatment assignment) into using a greater percentage of anger-related words leads to an increase in respondents' degree of partisan dehumanization. Thus, we are able to entirely replicate the findings from our earlier sample in our October 2025 sample. We find that our treatment

prompted individuals to become angry, and it is this elicitation of anger that causes partisans to dehumanize those with whom they disagree politically.

We can further test whether anger is the mechanism linking our treatment to partisan dehumanization by producing an instrumental variable analysis for the models estimating the effect of anger on subtle forms of dehumanization. Because Table 3, Column 1, displays the first stage of this regression, in Table 4 we only show the results of the second stage regressions. As we did in our ITT estimates in Table 2, we once again analyze the effect of anger on respondents' perception of the human nature and human uniqueness of out-partisans in three ways: by analyzing the additive (overall) scale, the scale of the positively-valenced items, and the scale of the negatively-valenced items. Columns 1-3 present the results of our models on the measure of human nature; Columns 4-6 do the same for our measure of human uniqueness.

As shown in Table 4, our findings are entirely robust to this alternative estimation strategy. Being induced by our treatment assignment into using a greater percentage of anger-related words in one's emotional recall story causes a reduction in one's assessment of the human nature of out-partisans ($\beta_{\text{Pct. Angry Words}} = -0.033$; $p < .001$). And, as with our intent-to-treat models in Table 3, we once again find that this effect is driven by both a decrease in a respondent's score on the positively-valenced scale and an increase in the respondent's score on the negatively-valenced scale. We find a similar pattern of results when analyzing responses to the measure of human uniqueness. Column 4 shows that being induced by our treatment into using a greater percentage of anger-related words causes respondents to score lower on our measure of human uniqueness ($\beta_{\text{Pct. Angry Words}} = -0.037$; $p < .001$); Columns 5-6 show that this shift in the overall measure of human uniqueness is attributable to a decrease in assigning positive attributes to out-partisans and an increase in assigning negative attributes to out-partisans.

Partisan Anger, Dogmatism, and Dehumanization

The preceding results have shown that partisan-directed anger causes Americans to engage in partisan-based forms of dehumanization. This finding is robust to different samples and

	Human Nature			Human Uniqueness		
	Combined	Positive	Negative	Combined	Positive	Negative
Pct. Angry Words	−0.033***	−0.031**	0.037***	−0.037***	−0.041***	0.034**
	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Constant	1.392***	1.448***	1.661***	1.235***	1.212***	1.739***
	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.022)
R^2	−0.099	−0.045	−0.064	−0.084	−0.064	−0.043
Adj. R^2	−0.100	−0.045	−0.065	−0.085	−0.064	−0.043
N	2,798	2,822	2,823	2,800	2,825	2,822

$^{***}p < 0.001; ^{**}p < 0.01; ^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 4: Partisan Anger, Human Nature, and Human Uniqueness (IV Estimates). This table shows the effect of treatment-induced anger on respondents' views of the human nature and human uniqueness of political others. Data come from our January 2025 sample.

different operationalizations of our dependent variable. These findings are in line with our primary expectation about the relationship between anger and dehumanization. Left unexplored is the potential heterogeneous nature of this effect according to an individual's level of trait-based dogmatism. Recall that our measure of dogmatism is composed of responses to 20 items, each of which accepts a numerical answer that ranges from -4 at the lowest end to 4 at the highest end. After reverse coding half of the statements in order to guard against potential demand effects, responses to each of the 20 items are added together to form an overall measure that hypothetically ranges from -80 to 80, where higher numerical values indicate a higher degree of trait-based dogmatism. The histogram of scores on this measure is shown in Figure 2.

The histogram shows that the modal score on the dogmatism measure is a zero. Just over a quarter of the sample—26%—score above a zero on the measure. Driven by the nature of the distribution, the mean score is -11.56; the median is -6.

Our expectation is that higher levels of trait-based dogmatism should amplify the effect of anger on partisan dehumanization. To test this hypothesis, we replicated the model from Table 1, Column 2, but included an interaction between our treatment indicator and our dichotomous indicator for whether a respondent scored above the median on our dogmatism measure. Table 5 shows the result of this regression.
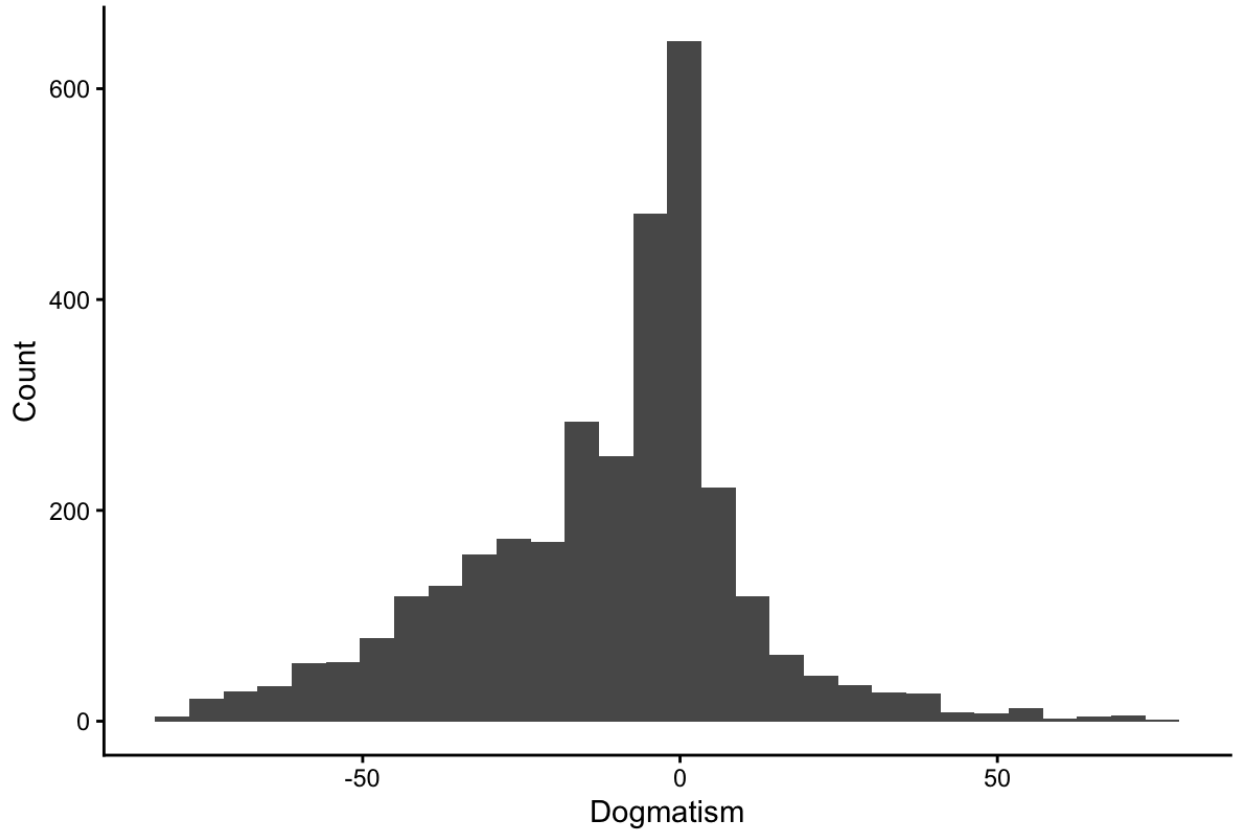
Figure 2: Histogram of Trait-Based Dogmatism. This figure shows the histogram of scores on our measure of trait-based dogmatism. Data come from our October 2025 sample.

[h]

We find that dogmatism, operationalized by our median split measure, does predict an individual's amount of partisan dehumanization. However, we do not find that this measure moderates the relationship between partisan-based anger and partisan dehumanization ($\beta_{\text{Treated x Dogmatism}} = -0.002; p = .979$). This null finding does not appear to be driven by our decision to use a median split as our coding scheme for individuals' level of dogmatism. We re-analyzed our model but switched the dogmatism coding to be a mean split, a dummy variable for those who score above zero, a mean standardization, and the untransformed measure of dogmatism. These models are shown in columns two through five, respectively. In no case do we find that dogmatism acts as an effect moderator between partisan anger and partisan dehumanization. Anger causes Americans to engage in partisan dehumanization and does so regardless of one's innate tendency to be dogmatic.

	Dehumanization				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Treated	0.122**	0.126**	0.133***	0.123***	0.129***
	(0.043)	(0.048)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.035)
Dogmatism	0.197***	0.213***	0.134**	0.117***	0.005***
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.050)	(0.022)	(0.001)
Democrat	0.084**	0.082**	0.085**	0.101**	0.101**
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
Treated x Dogmatism	−0.002	−0.007	−0.038	0.013	0.001
	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.071)	(0.031)	(0.001)
Constant	1.494***	1.466***	1.553***	1.579***	1.640***
	(0.034)	(0.037)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.029)
Dogmatism Coding	Median Split	Mean Split	Above Zero	Mean Std.	Untransformed
R^2	0.019	0.021	0.011	0.027	0.027
Adj. R^2	0.018	0.020	0.009	0.025	0.025
N	3,228	3,228	3,228	3,228	3,228

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table 5: Partisan Anger, Dogmatism, and Dehumanization. This table shows the results of partisan-based anger, interacted with trait-level dogmatism, on partisan dehumanization. Data come from our October 2025 sample.

Conclusion & Implications

American politics in the contemporary era is characterized by heightened degrees of affective polarization and inter-party negativity (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). Much of this partisan animus is driven by partisans' anger at the opposing political party (Webster, 2020; Phoenix, 2019; Valentino et al., 2011; Banks, 2016). In this paper, we have argued that the presence of this anger has profound effects for how Americans view their political others. Specifically, we have drawn upon two national survey experiments to show that partisan-based anger causes Americans to engage in the dehumanization of those whose political beliefs differ from their own. Moreover, our evidence shows—contrary to our theoretical expectation—that this relationship is not dependent upon one's level of trait-based dogmatism: their innate tendency to be fixed in, and adamant about, their own worldview. Anger, then, has a broad ability to produce a party system in which those on opposing sides of the political divide view their opponents as

less-than-human.

From a normative perspective, these results suggest that the health of American politics would be improved by reducing the amount of anger-inducing stimuli received by the mass public. However, prior scholarship suggests that such a shift in the emotional tenor of political discourse is unlikely. Political elites, for example, have long been known to traffic in emotions (Brader, 2005). Anger, in particular, is an emotion that political elites seek to elicit among the mass public. Among other avenues, such elicitation occurs through the strategic use of angry rhetoric (Stapleton and Dawkins, 2022) or through specific social media strategies (Webster, 2021). Because such appeals are beneficial to politicians' electoral fortunes (Webster, 2020), and because politicians are primarily concerned with electoral matters (Mayhew, 1974), it is unlikely that reductions in anger will arise from a shift in elite-level behavior.

In addition to political elites, the media has strong incentives to appeal to mass-level anger. Sobieraj and Berry (2011) show that different types of media appeal to "outrage discourse" and that, while this phenomenon is more commonly found among right-leaning outlets (see also, Young, 2020), this phenomenon exists across the ideological spectrum. Cable TV, for instance, is notable in its attempts to elicit anger. Such an emotional state is created by booking ideologically extreme politicians as guests (Wagner and Gruszczynski, 2017) and presenting discussions in an up-close, "in your face" format (Mutz, 2015). Because anger is attention grabbing (Kohout, Kruikemeier and Bakker, 2023; Ryan, 2012; Becker et al., 2019) and cable TV networks make their money through attention to television ads, the incentive to appeal to viewers' anger is strong. Thus, just as with political elites, it is unlikely that a shift away from angry rhetoric will emerge as a result of a media-driven change.

Because a reduction in anger and, therefore, dehumanizing attitudes, is unlikely to occur via changes in elite or media behavior, future work should examine interventions that can be designed to mitigate the deleterious effects of mass-level anger on perceptions of out-group members. The literature on emotion regulation—a process that "involves changes to one or more aspects of the emotion, including the eliciting situation, attention, appraisals, subjective experience, behavior, or

physiology" (Mauss, Bunge and Gross, 2007)—offers a potential fruitful path forward. In particular, future work should examine how additional emotions could be induced that might mitigate the tendency of anger to cause individuals to develop dehumanizing views of supporters of the opposing political party. In a related manner, future work should study how partisan-oriented anger may be directed away from the development of dehumanizing attitudes and towards more desirable forms of action: canvassing, donating to a campaign or cause, or voting on election day. Given the pervasiveness of partisan anger and the potentially drastic consequences of partisan dehumanization, understanding the efficacy of various interventions is of the utmost importance.

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Appendix

Dogmatism Scale

1. Anyone who is honestly and truly seeking the truth will end up believing what I believe

2. There are so many things that we have not discovered yet, nobody should be absolutely certain his beliefs are right

3. The things I believe in are so completely true, I could never doubt them

4. I have never discovered a system of beliefs that explains everything to my satisfaction

5. It is best to be open to all possibilities and ready to reevaluate all your beliefs

6. My opinions are right and will stand the test of time

7. Flexibility is a real virtue in thinking, since you may well be wrong

8. My opinions and beliefs fit together perfectly to make a crystal-clear "picture" of things

9. There are no discoveries or facts that could possibly make me change my mind about the things that matter most in life

10. I am a long way from reaching final conclusions about the central issues in life

11. The person who is absolutely certain she has the truth will probably never find it

12. I am absolutely certain that my ideas about the fundamental issues in life are correct

13. The people who disagree with me may well turn out to be right

14. I am so sure I am right about the important things in life, there is no evidence that could convince me otherwise

15. If you are "open-minded" about the most important things in life, you will probably reach the wrong conclusions

16. Twenty years from now, some of my opinions about the important things in life will probably have changed

17. "Flexibility in thinking" is another name for being "wishy-washy"

18. No one knows all the essential truths about the central issues in life

19. Someday I will probably realize my present ideas about the big issues are wrong

20. People who disagree with me are just plain wrong and often evil as well

Human Nature Adjectives

Items 1-5 are positively coded; items 5-10 are reverse coded.

1. Passionate

2. Fun-loving

3. Curious

4. Sociable

5. Trusting

6. Jealous

7. Nervous

8. Impatient

9. Distractible

10. Aggressive

Human Uniqueness Adjectives

Items 1-5 are positively coded; items 5-10 are reverse coded.

1. Humble

2. Thorough

3. Organized

4. Polite

5. Broad-minded

6. Cold

7. Shallow

8. Stingy

9. Hard-hearted

10. Impersonal