

Predicting Support for Arabs' Autonomy from Social Dominance: The Role of Identity Complexity and Dehumanization

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The present study extends previous research on the influence of social dominance orientation (SDO) in international affairs by investigating the role of sociocognitive processes such as social identity complexity (SIC) and intergroup dehumanization in explaining the relationship between SDO and support for Arabs' autonomy. An Italian heterogeneous sample (N = 123), in terms of gender, age, political orientation, religiosity, and income level, was considered. We expected that those low on SDO would be more likely to support Arabs' autonomy, would have higher SIC, and would be less likely to dehumanize Arabs. We also expected that SIC and dehumanization would sequentially mediate the relationship between SDO and support for Arabs' autonomy. Results revealed that Italians low on SDO have higher SIC (i.e., a more inclusive social identity) which endorses lower dehumanization of Arabs. This in turn explained the influence of SDO on support for Arabs' autonomy. These findings integrate the literature about SDO and SIC and enhance the understanding of the sociocognitive processes underlying people's support for international egalitarian movements.

KEY WORDS: social dominance orientation, social identity complexity, dehumanization, intergroup relationships

One of the most important psychological values related to support or opposition to oppressive regimes and to hierarchy-attenuating political movements is social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). People who are higher on SDO tend to prefer relatively oppressive governments within a broad variety of nations (e.g., Dambrun, Mainsseuve, Duart, & Guimond, 2002; Liu, Huang, & McFedries, 2008) and support relatively oppressive foreign policy by their own governments (Pratto, Sidanius, Bou Zeineddine, Kteily, & Levin, 2014).

According to social dominance theory, one important mediator of the relationship between SDO and political attitudes pertinent to intergroup power is how much people endorse cultural legitimizing myths. For example, considering numerous Western nations, Pratto, Saguy, et al. (2014) found that lower SDO was associated with greater support for the Arab uprisings against dictatorial leaders begun in late 2010, and this relationship was mediated by participants' rejection of the stereotypes that Arabs are dangerous to world security and incapable of governing themselves. However, these findings do not inform us about the lower-level psychological processes by which lower SDO pertains to support for counterdominant movements, such as the Arab uprisings. To fill this gap, the present study aims to test a sequential mediation model whereby social identity complexity (SIC; Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and dehumanization explain the relationship between SDO and Arabs' autonomy, that is, political freedom in Arabs' internal and external affairs.

One reason that people lower on SDO may have more complex social identities is that they accept people who are members of a large variety of groups, whereas higher SDO people reject many low-status groups (Pratto et al., 1994). Low SDO individuals have empathy for people in general, and this psychological inclusiveness may mean that they incorporate numerous other identities into their own (e.g., McFarland, Webb, & Brown, 2012). This leads us to assume that individuals with higher SDO will perceive their social identity as characterized by a high degree of overlap between the groups of which they are simultaneously members (i.e., low complexity). Since low complexity in social identity gives rise to intolerance and intergroup prejudice (Brewer & Pierce, 2005) it is plausible that low SIC people living in Western countries tend to dehumanize subordinate outgroups, as Arabs are perceived by some. Dehumanization, in turn, can explain the rejection of support for Arabs' autonomy.

Social Dominance Orientation

SDO has mainly been conceived as an individual difference which stems from socialization experiences in a specific stratum of societies, specific life experiences, and situational factors (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). SDO implies a preference for social hierarchy and inequality and is associated to support for group-differentiating ideologies such as racism or nationalism (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

There are a number of reasons to expect people's SDO scores to be stable for the most part. First, people's basic personality traits, particularly empathy and agreeableness, have persistent influences on lowering SDO levels in longitudinal studies (Sidanius et al., 2013), as does holding a competitive world view (Sibley, Wilson, & Duckitt, 2007). Second, experimental manipulations and historical changes sometimes change the relationship of SDO measures with other measures (e.g., Jetten & Iyer, 2010; Liu et al., 2008) but without changing people's SDO levels on average (Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003; Pratto & Shih, 2000). People's relative SDO scores are stable over time, correlating about $r = .60$ and higher over periods of five months to a year (Perry & Sibley, 2012; Sibley et al., 2007). In the service of their desires to maintain existing power differences between groups in society, individuals high in SDO tend to identify more strongly with more powerful groups and to disidentify with less powerful groups (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). However, research on the relation between SDO and identification with groups has only measured self-reported identification with one group at a time, rather than considering how one understands multiple facets of one's identity.

Social Identity Complexity

The theoretical construct of SIC means that the set of multiple social categories that might compose one's social identity structure can be represented along a continuum of complexity and inclusiveness, reflecting the degree to which different memberships are differentiated and integrated in the individual's cognitive representation of his- or herself (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

People who have more inclusive and complex social identities acknowledge the distinctive memberships of multiple ingroups but also form a combined representation which is the sum and not the crossing of all these group identities. In contrast, people with less complex social identities value power and conservatism more, have lower tolerance for diversity, and have higher explicit and implicit racial attitudes (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Schmidt, Hewstone, Tausch, Cairns, & Hughes, 2009). Such patterns regarding low-identity complexity are even found among subordinated groups. Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012) found that Muslim immigrants to the Netherlands who had less complex identities (i.e., reporting lower overlap between ethnic and other ingroup identities) tend to distance themselves more from the host national groups and to show higher ingroup bias than immigrants with a more complex identity structure. Thus, low SIC predicts social exclusion as it leads to perceiving outgroup members as different from oneself or from members of one's own ingroups.

Dehumanization

One of the most heinous forms of social exclusion is dehumanization, that is, the denial of others' humanness. One particular index of dehumanization, namely *infracumanization* (Leyens et al., 2001) is the tendency to attribute uniquely human emotions to ingroup members to a *greater* extent than to outgroup members, regardless of the valence of the emotion (Demoulin et al., 2004). Uniquely human or secondary emotions (e.g., admiration, regret), in contrast with primary emotions (e.g., pleasure, anger), are assumed not to be experienced by animals (Leyens et al., 2001). This, like other forms of dehumanization (Haslam, 2006), implies that outgroup members do not deserve the same human rights and treatment as ingroup members (Albarello & Rubini, 2012, 2015; Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, & Giovanazzi, 2003). Indeed, perceiving groups or individuals as less than human can form the basis for justifying their moral exclusion (Opatow, 1990), thus legitimizing intentional behaviors that violate their human rights such as autonomy, freedom, and ultimately life (Bar-Tal, 1990; Kelman, 1973; Opatow, 1990; Staub, 1989). Research has shown that higher SDO individuals dehumanize refugees, expressing less admiration, more contempt, and less favorable attitudes towards them than do lower SDO individuals (Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008; Hodson & Costello, 2007). This body of research suggests that dehumanization may be a process by which higher SDO influences attitudes towards subordinate outgroup members and opposition to their attempts to claim political autonomy.

The Present Study

Our study tested whether individuals higher on SDO would oppose contemporary attempts for ordinary Arabs to gain political autonomy and whether this relationship would be sequentially mediated by social identity complexity and dehumanization of Arabs. Low SDO people oppose hierarchical social structures (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), so they should have a more complex social identity structure, which in turn should attenuate the tendency to dehumanize Arabs. Because high SIC predicts tolerance for social diversity, it should also reduce heinous behavioral intentions towards stigmatized and dominated outgroups, such as the people of Arab countries. Finally, lower measured dehumanization of Arabs should predict support for Arabs' political autonomy—for Arab citizens' political freedom from dictatorships and outside interference in their governance. These predictions were tested in a sequential model whereby SIC and Arabs' dehumanization mediated the relationship between SDO and support for Arabs' autonomy.

We used Italians as respondents for several reasons. Italy is one of the Western democratic nations that have been heterogeneous in the reactions towards Arabs' uprisings (Asseburg, 2013). Furthermore, Italy is one of the Western countries most directly affected by the consequences of the

recent Arab uprisings because Italy has received tens of thousands of refugees from Arab nations, who often arrive by sea (Nascimbene & Di Pascale, 2011; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015).

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty-three Italian participants (58.7% females, 41.3% males; $M_{\text{age}} = 41.57$, $SD = 12.3$) were recruited in different public places such as airports, train stations, and coffee shops to obtain a heterogeneous sample in terms of gender, age, political orientation (21.6% left, 19.6% left-of-center, 15.7% center, 19.6% right-of-center, 23.5% right), religiosity (58.7% Christians, 41.3% atheists), and education (26.6% secondary school, 39.4% technical school, 34% university).

Procedure and Materials

Respondents completed a questionnaire containing the measures of the study. SDO was measured with the four-item short SDO scale (Pratto, Çidam, et al., 2013). Ratings were expressed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly favor*). After reversing two items (see Pratto, Çidam, et al., 2013), a composite SDO index ($\alpha = .71$) was created, whereby high scores indicate high SDO.

SIC was assessed by using the overlap measure (Brewer, Gonsalkorale, & van Dommelen, 2013). Note that this measure invokes only groups to which participants belong. Participants were asked to rate the perceived overlap between all pairs of three groups presented (professional/political/national). That is, they were asked to answer the same question repeated for all possible pair combinations. All pairs were rated in both directions (e.g., “When you think about people who are Italians, how many are of your political group?” and “When you think about people who are of your political group, how many are Italians?”). Thus, each participant provided six ratings. The response scale ranged from 0 to 100 (with demarcations 0 = *none are*, 50 = *half are*, 100 = *all are*). Scores were then reversed so that higher scores denote higher overlap complexity and were averaged to obtain a measure of SIC.¹

Since the ingroups considered in SIC measures should not substantially differ in their relevance for respondents (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002), two items drawn from Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) collective self-esteem scale were used to check the extent to which participants identified with each of the three ingroups (i.e., national, professional, and political ones): “To what extent is being a member of your national (professional, political) group an important part of who you are?”; “To what extent do you feel proud of being a member of your national (professional, political) group?” (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*).

Dehumanization of Arabs was measured using six secondary emotions (positive: *hope*, *admiration*, *optimism*; negative: *pessimism*, *regret*, *remorse*). The order of the emotions was randomized. Participants first rated the extent to which each emotion was experienced by Arab people. At the end of the questionnaire, they rated the extent to which the same emotions were experienced by Italian people (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). An index of Arabs’ dehumanization was composed subtracting secondary emotions ratings attributed to Arabs ($\alpha = .65$) from those attributed to Italians ($\alpha = .69$).

¹ Since in previous research (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), SIC has been measured not just in terms of overlap but also in terms of perceived similarity among group memberships, respondents rated on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which they thought that “Being a member of your national (political/ professional) group means the same as being a member of your political (professional/ political) group?” and “A typical member of your national (political/ professional) group is very similar to the typical member of your political (professional/ national) group?” Items were reversed, so that higher scores indicated greater similarity complexity ($\alpha = .88$).

Support for Arabs' autonomy was assessed by using four items drawn from Pratto, Saguy, et al. (2014): "The Arab people are competent enough to govern themselves"; "Arab dictators prevent Islamic extremists from taking power"; "Outside control over Arabs is necessary for the world's security"; and "Outside control over Arabs is not necessary for everyone's prosperity" (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly favor*). After reversing items 2 and 3, a composite index was obtained by averaging the four items ($\alpha = .79$). To control for heterogeneity of the sample, respondents were also asked to indicate their political orientation, religiosity, education, age, and gender.

Results

Preliminary paired sample t-tests showed no significant differences in the identification with the three ingroup memberships selected to compose the SIC index ($M_{\text{nationality}} = 3.35$; $SD = 1.05$; $M_{\text{political group}} = 3.23$, $SD = .99$; $M_{\text{professional group}} = 3.27$, $SD = 1.22$); all $ps > .20$. Table 1 provides means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the measures of this study². We ran bootstrapping analyses (5,000 resamples) using the MEDTHREEc macro for SPSS to test direct and indirect effects in multiple-step mediation models (Hayes, Preacher, & Myers, 2011; see also Moscatelli, Albarello, Prati, & Rubini, 2014). As shown in Figure 1, we tested a model using SDO as independent variable, support for Arabs' autonomy as dependent variable, SIC, and Arab's dehumanization as multiple mediators operating in sequence. Political orientation, religiosity, education, age, and gender were entered as covariates. Findings showed that SDO predicted SIC: path 1 $B_1 = -2.38$, $SE_1 = 1.04$, $p = .026$. SIC predicted Arab's dehumanization, while controlling for SDO: path 2 $B_2 = -0.09$, $SE_2 = 0.01$, $p = .003$. Finally, Arab's dehumanization predicted support for Arabs' autonomy while controlling for SDO and SIC: path 3 $B_3 = -0.38$, $SE_3 = 0.15$, $p = .022$. The point of estimate for the sequential indirect effect of SDO on support for Arabs' autonomy equated to -0.20 ($SE = 0.08$), with 95% bias corrected confidence interval (BC CI) bounded by -0.41 and -0.06 . The fact that zero falls outside this interval indicates the presence of a significant sequential indirect effect of SDO on the support for Arabs' autonomy via SIC and Arab's dehumanization. Including the two mediators in the regression analysis, the relationship between SDO and support for Arabs' autonomy became nonsignificant (before inclusion of mediators: path 4 $B_4 = -0.29$, $SE_4 = 0.14$, $p = .040$; after inclusion of mediators: path 4 $B_4 = -0.09$, $SE_4 = 0.14$, $p = .521$). These findings controlled for political orientation, $B = -0.45$, $SE = 0.39$, $p = .26$, religiosity, $B = 0.06$, $SE = 0.38$, $p = .87$, education, $B = 0.36$, $SE = 0.42$, $p = .39$, age $B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .25$, and gender, $B = -0.13$, $SE = 0.38$, $p = .74$.³

Although SDO is usually considered as a stable individual characteristic (Pratto et al., 1994), one could argue that people who hold complex representations of their multiple identities would endorse a world view that is more egalitarian and disagrees with the idea of some groups being more dominant than others (i.e., low SDO). To rule out the possibility of a reversed relationship between SDO and

² Before testing the sequential multiple-mediation model, we tested a measurement model with AMOS to show that the items considered measure four different constructs. We tested a model with four latent variables: SDO (with four observed indicators), support for Arabs' autonomy (with four observed indicators), SIC (with three observed indicators: professional and political identities, professional and national identities, and political and national identities), and Arab's dehumanization (with two observed indicators: positive and negative emotions). Findings revealed that the fit of the measurement model was good (χ^2/df 1.92; GFI .92; CFI .95; RMSEA .07), supporting the distinction among the four constructs of SDO, SIC, dehumanization, and support for Arabs' autonomy.

³ Since national identity might heighten the likelihood of viewing Arabs as foreigners, we tested the same model using a measure of SIC in terms of overlap of respondents' professional and political affiliations only. The sequential indirect effect equated to -0.17 ($SE = 0.08$), 95% BC CI (-0.35 , -0.03) supporting findings of the main analysis.

We also tested the sequential model by employing the alternative measure of SIC (i.e., similarity complexity). Supporting findings of the main analyses, the sequential indirect effect equated to -0.15 ($SE = 0.08$), 95% BC CI (-0.32 , -0.02),

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson's Correlations Between All Measures.

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. SDO	3.85	1.57	--	-.31**	.32**	-.26*
2. SIC	50.76	15.09		--	-.33**	.35**
3. Arabs' Dehumanization	0.83	1.35			--	-.39**
4. Support for Arabs' Autonomy	5.12	2.01				--

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

SIC, we tested a model using SIC as independent variable, SDO and Arab's dehumanization as sequential mediators, and support for Arabs' autonomy as dependent variable. Demographic variables were entered as covariates, as in the previous model. SIC predicted SDO: path 1 $B_1 = -0.03$, $SE_1 = 0.01$, $p = .026$. SDO predicted Arab's dehumanization, while controlling for SIC: path 2 $B_2 = 0.23$, $SE_2 = 0.09$, $p = .013$. Arab's dehumanization predicted support for Arabs' autonomy while controlling for SIC and SDO: path 3 $B_3 = -0.36$, $SE_3 = 0.15$, $p = .022$. The point of estimate for the sequential indirect effect equated to 0.00 ($SE = 0.00$), with 95% BC CI (-0.002, 0.006). Including the two mediators in the regression analysis and controlling for the demographic variables, the relationship between SIC and support for Arabs' autonomy was still significant, showing no mediation effect (before inclusion of mediators: path 4 $B_4 = 0.05$, $SE_4 = 0.01$, $p = .001$; after inclusion of mediators: path 4 $B_4 = 0.04$, $SE_4 = 0.01$, $p = .005$).

Discussion

The present study expands knowledge about the social-cognitive processes that mediate the relationship between SDO and practices promoting the power of subordinated groups. Specifically, we found that individuals low in SDO, who prefer greater equality between groups, are in favor of Arabs' political autonomy. In other words, they support changes that should decrease the oppression of Arab people and increase their political freedom. A sequential mediation model reveals that this relationship is explained by low SDO individuals' tendencies to understand their social identities in a rather complex and inclusive way, which in turn prevents them from viewing subordinated group members as less than human.

These results can be considered to have high validity given that the sample of Italians on which the study was run is very heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, political affiliation, and religiosity.

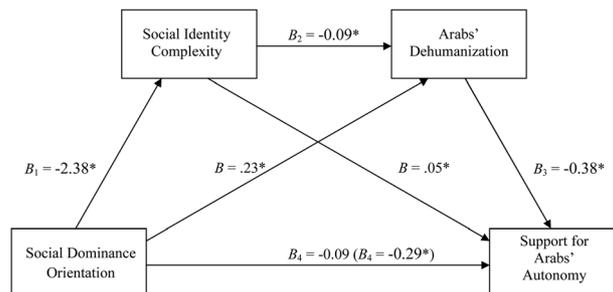


Figure 1. Path model of the effect of SDO on support for Arab's autonomy, showing sequential mediation via SIC and Arabs' dehumanization, controlling for political orientation, religious affiliation, gender, age, and education. For convenience of presentation, covariates variables—political orientation, religious affiliation, gender, age, and education—are not reported in the figure. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Moreover, the mediation effects hold independently of these demographic factors. Alternating the sequence of variables in the model—i.e., from SIC to SDO—did not produce significant results, thus supporting the strength of the predicted paths.

By integrating literatures on SDO, SIC, and dehumanization, the present research goes beyond previous evidence in several novel ways. First, this study adds to the literature on SDO by showing for the first time the relationship between this social ideology and social identity complexity. The less people are in favor of maintaining a dominant and exclusive social structure, whether within or between societies, the more they perceive a complex structure of their own social identity. Second, it is noteworthy that the way we measured social identity complexity had nothing to do with identification with nor prejudice towards the outgroup. People who chronically favor egalitarian and nondominant intergroup relations have more complex and more inclusive organization of their social identities, which is not just an instance of contrasting ingroup versus outgroup identification. It may be that their more coextensive ways of understanding their own identities facilitates their respect and caring for people who do not share membership in their closest identity groups.

Moreover, this study enlarges the understanding of the antecedents of SIC (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2009) by showing that low SDO works as a predictor of the chronic accessibility of the complexity of the structure of the groups of which one is a member. In this vein, this study is one of the few that has investigated the concept of SIC empirically, and our research is the first attempt to examine the role of SIC in reducing exclusion of dominated outgroup members from the human group. Moreover, it extends previous research on the role of SIC in promoting intergroup tolerance (Brewer & Pierce, 2005) by showing for the first time that higher SIC is associated with support for outgroup's autonomy. Respecting other persons as persons, even people in groups who are vilified as dangerous threats or primitive, extends to respecting their right to self-determination.

In addition, the present results extended previous findings (Hodson & Costello, 2007) by showing that SDO predicts dehumanization of a different outgroup target than previous studies have used. Further, we showed that an important aspect of intergroup bias is not simply a tendency to identify with ingroups more than with outgroups. Instead, we found evidence for a more distal yet reliable link between SIC that only involves multiple groups to which participants belonged and dehumanization of an entirely different group. This contributes to understanding how complex social identities, rather than simply low psychological boundaries between self and low-power groups, may prevent dehumanization. Similarly, research already showed that increasing the number or the complexity of category combinations attributed to others reduced dehumanization towards them (Prati, Menegatti, & Rubini, 2015; Prati, Vasiljevic, Crisp, & Rubini, 2015).

Further, results suggest that emotionally dehumanizing low-power groups may be one reason people lack empathy with low-power groups struggling for self-determination.

Additional studies could test the cross-cultural validity of the model we tested with Italians. In addition, future studies could experimentally manipulate social identity complexity and/or the humanity of subordinate groups (e.g., by informing respondents about the group's emotional experiences). By doing so, they would not only provide a causal test of the processes we suggested here but also demonstrate methods of engendering support for antidominant efforts.

Although the present research only examined the psychology behind a specific movement in a particular point in time, one can speculate that related psychologies are behind people involved in new political movements. For example, the increasing slaughter by the Islamic State (IS) of fellow co-nationals, fellow Muslims, and fellow Sunnis suggest that IS members have a very narrow and exclusionary social identity. It would be hard to read their slaughter of civilians as anything other than a result of psychological dehumanization. In fact, their signature form of terrorism via mass media, beheading, can be read as an act that dehumanizes a person by removing the mind, the eyes, and the emotional facial expressions that are so conceived of as essentially human. What remains to be seen, both in our world and in research, is whether engaging in acts of dehumanization results in a

reciprocal process by which people shrink their identities to become narrow enough to dehumanize diverse others and then to endorse widespread slaughter of other people. In conclusion, the present study has started to suggest the psychological processes by which orientations towards dominance translate into endorsement or rejection of political movements that are designed to change the balance of power between groups.

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