

Decoding Dehumanization: Policy Brief for Policymakers and Practitioners

May 2019

- 1 FBI. (2018). FBI releases 2017 hate crime statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2017-hate-crime-statistics>
- 2 US Holocaust Memorial Museum. (2018). Countries at risk for mass killings 2018-19: Early warning project statistical risk assessment results. Retrieved from <https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/reports/countries-at-risk-for-mass-killings-2018-19-early-warning-project-statistical-risk-assessment-results>
- 3 Kteily, N., Bruneau, E., Waytz, A., & Cotterill, S. (2015). The ascent of man: Theoretical and empirical evidence for blatant dehumanization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 109(5), 901-931. doi:10.1037/pspp0000048
- 4 Kteily, N., Hodson, G., & Bruneau, E. (2016). They see us as less than human: Metadehumanization predicts intergroup conflict via reciprocal dehumanization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 110(3), 343-370. doi:10.1037/pspa0000044
- 5 E., Jacoby, N., Kteily, N., & Saxe, R. (2018). Denying humanity: The distinct neural correlates of blatant dehumanization. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 147(7), 1078-1093. doi:10.1037/xge0000417

Dehumanization – the perception of other people as less than human – is a psychological process that has accompanied some of the worst atrocities in human history. A growing body of scientific knowledge is uncovering and revealing the psychological processes and brain mechanisms that shape violent human behavior. In the near future, this knowledge will allow us to develop tools and frameworks to mitigate and prevent mass atrocities, address systemic discrimination, and reduce violent conflict.

We do not have to look far to see dehumanization occur. We see it expressed in the statements of political leaders, reflected in public discourse, and embedded within certain ideologies and worldviews. We see increasing rates of hate crimes in the US¹ and a steady global risk of mass atrocities,² and other acts of violence and harm. While we know that dehumanization accompanies this range of hostile behaviors, current practices and policies aimed at preventing hostility from transforming into group-targeted harm have not fully account for the role of dehumanization. Why? Because until now, there has not been a scientifically-based framework for understanding and mitigating dehumanization.

Emerging scientific research on dehumanization now offers the promise of understanding and developing more effective interventions. Beyond Conflict and its scientific partners have developed a series of novel, validated measures of dehumanization which have been tested with over 10,000 people in over a dozen different countries.^{3 4 5} In every cultural context surveyed, at least one group was significantly dehumanized, and in every case, the degree of dehumanization expressed by individuals was strongly associated with support for identity-based hostility.

In Phase 2 of this project, currently underway, we are developing and applying interventions aimed at reducing dehumanization in real-world field settings, particularly in the context of reducing systemic discrimination and preventing mass atrocities. [Initial findings offer practical actionable interventions for practitioners and policymakers on how to:](#)

- [Systematically track](#) blatant dehumanization and dehumanizing speech to better understand the links between dehumanization and violence and create better early warning systems;
- [Design strategic messaging](#) aimed at countering dehumanization and dangerous speech;
- [Quantify and evaluate](#) programmatic impact in promoting reconciliation, preventing violence and reducing discrimination; and
- [Train](#) diplomats, advocates, practitioners, and policymakers to detect and reduce dehumanization.

- 6 Dieng, A. (2014, December 9). Genocide begins with 'dehumanization,' no single country is immune from risk, warns UN official. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/12/485822-genocide-begins-dehumanization-no-single-country-immune-risk-warns-un-official>
- 7 Dieng, A. (2014, December 9). Street by street: Systematic dehumanization in Europe. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Adama%20Dieng-Systematic%20Dehumanization%20in%20Europe.pdf>
- 8 Smith, D. L. (2012). *Less than Human: Why we demean, enslave, and exterminate others*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.
- 9 Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). Dehumanized perception. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 219(3), 175-181. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000065
- 10 Rai, T. S., Valdesolo, P., & Graham, J. (2017). Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(32), 8511-8516. doi:10.1073/pnas.1705238114
- 11 Luft, A., & Solomon, D. (2018, May 25). How dangerous is it when Trump calls some immigrants animals. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/05/25/how-dangerous-is-it-when-trump-calls-some-immigrants-animals/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4fe28f48a37e1
- 12 Kteily, N. S., & Bruneau, E. (2017). Darker demons of our nature: The need to (re)focus attention on blatant forms of dehumanization. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(6), 487-494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417708230>
- 13 Haslam, N., & Stratemeyer, M. (2016). Recent research on dehumanization. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11, 25-29. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.03.009
- 14 Ulfelder, J., & Valentino, B. (2008). Assessing risks of state-sponsored mass killing. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1703426
- 15 Berger, J. (2018). *Extremism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Over the coming two years, we will field test such interventions with the aim of reducing dehumanization and its consequences. The purpose of this document is to offer policymakers, practitioners, and advocates with relevant, digestible, and current information about the science of dehumanization as well as provide suggestions for its practical applications.

Why Should We Care About Dehumanization?

"Genocide begins with dehumanization," according to Adama Dieng, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.^{6,7} The Movement for Black Lives in the United States has as one of its central aims the "Immediate end to the... dehumanization of Black youth." Both the UN and Black Lives Matter have identified dehumanization as a critical factor in putting vulnerable communities at risk. [The historical record shows that dehumanization is a powerful psychological mechanism that has accompanied the worst atrocities in human history,⁸ and growing scientific evidence suggests that certain forms of dehumanization likely enable – and perhaps motivate – group-targeted harm.^{9 10 11 12}](#)

While many practitioners, policymakers, and advocates recognize the importance of dehumanization, they have not been provided with the latest scientific understanding of dehumanization¹³ – which can inform new interventions and be used to develop practical tools to detect, disrupt, and reduce it. [A scientifically-informed understanding of dehumanization helps practitioners to better conceptualize and measure a key contributing factor to group-targeted harm.](#)

This leaves a serious gap that must be addressed if we are to create evidence-based ways of reducing systemic discrimination, such as apartheid in South Africa, and preventing mass atrocities, such as genocide or ethnic cleansing. The international community has limited tools to successfully intervene to prevent mass atrocities. Appeals to human rights often do not work to change the behavior of violent actors unless accompanied by stronger costs, economic pressure can be limited in its effect, and military intervention is costly in terms of economic resources and human lives, and its aftereffects can leave matters worse. Similarly, nudges to reduce systemic discrimination are often siloed into particular policy or practice spheres, such as education, housing, and health care, among others. All of these approaches to reducing systemic discrimination are influenced, at least in part, by the psychological process of dehumanization.

We focus on two cases in which dehumanization may play a particularly important role: [mass atrocities](#) – large-scale, deliberate attacks on civilians, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, or war crimes and [systemic discrimination](#) – the widespread pattern of behaviors, practices, and/or policies that disproportionately disadvantage a certain identity group. There are two principal reasons for this choice. First, systemic discrimination is one of the common risk factors of mass atrocities, but scholars have yet to establish the reasons behind this link.¹⁴ We believe that dehumanization may be an important mechanism that links these two phenomena. Second, while both phenomena involve vastly different levels of violence, they share a foundation of group-based status hierarchies, and center around the targeting of dehumanized outgroups, whether combatants or not. The range of actions here go from mild harassment to genocide.¹⁵ In other words, both systemic discrimination and mass atrocities involve conceiving of innocent people as being unworthy of protection, and

- 16 Steizinger, J. (2018). The significance of dehumanization: Nazi ideology and its psychological consequences. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 19(2), 139-157. doi:10.1080/21567689.2018.1425144
- 17 Leader Maynard, J., & Benesch, S. (2016). Dangerous speech and dangerous ideology: An integrated model for monitoring and prevention. *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 9(3), 70-95. doi:10.5038/1911-9933.9.3.1317
- 18 Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), 252-264. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4
- 19 Haslam, 2006
- 20 Cikara, M., Eberhardt, J. L., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). From agents to objects: Sexist attitudes and neural responses to sexualized targets. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 23(3), 540-551. doi:10.1162/jocn.2010.21497
- 21 Orehek, E., & Weaverling, C. G. (2017). On the nature of objectification: Implications of considering people as means to goals. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(5), 719-730. doi:10.1177/1745691617691138
- 22 Haslam, N., Loughnan, S., & Sun, P. (2011). Beastly: What makes animal metaphors offensive? *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 30(3), 311-325. doi:10.1177/0261927x11407168
- 23 Bruneau, E. (2018, May 18). Why it matters when the president calls people, even violent gang members, 'animals.' *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/18/why-it-matters-when-the-president-calls-people-even-violent-gang-members-animals/?utm_term=.9d63f647daaf
- 24 Amnesty International USA. (2017, November 20). Myanmar: Rohingya trapped in dehumanizing apartheid regime. Retrieved from <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/myanmar-rohingya-trapped-in-dehumanizing-apartheid-regime/>
- 25 Gerson, M. (2016, May 12). The cycle of dehumanization. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-ugly-speech-threatens-our-ideals-and-our-safety/2016/05/12/392407e0-1860-11e6-9e16-2e5a123aac62_story.html?utm_term=.7bf66f6f8f39
- 26 Bruneau, E., Kteily, N., & Laustsen, L. (2018). The unique effects of blatant dehumanization on attitudes and behavior towards Muslim refugees during the European 'refugee crisis' across four countries. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(5), 645-662. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2357

are threatening enough to warrant active harm in large numbers.

We therefore believe that [systemic discrimination and mass atrocities should not be treated as completely separate phenomena](#). Rather, we should understand them – and therefore our actions to prevent their occurrence and mitigate their consequences – as deeply related and governed by the dynamics of intergroup relations. This point of view also affords us a better chance at early prevention – the preferable course of action – because it recognizes the connections between milder forms of harm and the potential for escalation towards more severe forms of violence.¹⁶ In particular, dehumanization is commonly expressed as part of dangerous speech or ideology,¹⁷ which are used in motivating and enabling both systemic discrimination and mass atrocities. A better understanding and use of dehumanization can be particularly important in interventions aimed at countering dangerous ideologies or dangerous speech.

The Science of Dehumanization

Dehumanization is the psychological process by which we perceive other people as less than human.¹⁸ [Scientists classify dehumanization into three subtypes: animalistic, mechanistic, and objectifying.](#)¹⁹ Animalistic dehumanization attributes animal-like qualities to humans, denying them uniquely human qualities, such as moral reasoning, and higher-level cognition. For instance, when racist propaganda compares African-Americans to apes instead of recognizing their full humanity. Mechanistic dehumanization compares humans to automaton and machines, denying them qualities such as warmth, independent thought, and emotion. For example, when Asian people are referred to as unthinking and cold automatons rather than as warm and feeling individuals. Finally, objectifying dehumanization is the comparison of humans to objects, treating them as means to an end or things. Objectification is often associated with sexism, often focusing on women's appearances and body parts rather than minds or emotions.^{20 21}

While all three forms of dehumanization are likely relevant to group-targeted harm, the most salient is animalistic dehumanization.²² Historical evidence and the experience of practitioners and policymakers informs their intuitions that animalistic dehumanization is present in instances of oppression, mass atrocities, and in other behaviors that governments, international institutions, and civil society organizations are trying to prevent. [Prominent examples of historical animalistic dehumanization include the depiction of Tutsis as cockroaches before the Rwandan genocide; Jews as vermin during the Holocaust; and African-Americans as apes during the American chattel slavery.](#) Today, animalistic dehumanization is actively used to justify draconian immigration policies in the United States,²³ ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in Myanmar,²⁴ systemic discrimination of the Roma in Hungary,²⁵ and anti-refugee policies throughout Europe.²⁶

Since the end of World War II, social psychologists have been developing and validating implicit dehumanization measures. This has been based on the assumption that people would not report blatant dehumanization and that dehumanization might now be relegated to unconscious echoes of past explicit expressions. Contrary to this belief, Beyond Conflict's experience working in cultural contexts where dehumanization takes place has shown that explicit dehumanizing expressions are a matter of fact. [In collaboration with its scientific research partners, Beyond Conflict](#)

- 27 Kteily et al., 2016
- 28 Kteily et al., 2015
- 29 Kteily et al., 2015
- 30 Kteily et al., 2016
- 31 Casas, A., Kteily, N. & Bruneau, E. (2019). "Dehumanization in Colombia" in prep.
- 32 Bruneau, E. & Kteily, N., 2017
- 33 Moore-Berg S. & Bruneau E. (2019). "Perceptions of migrants among Americans." in prep
- 34 Moore-Berg S. & Bruneau E. (2019). "False polarization in the United States." in prep
- 35 Bruneau et al, 2018

has now developed a cross-cultural tool to quantify and measure levels of blatant dehumanization. This tool, the Ascent Dehumanization Scale, referred to in Figure 1, asks recipients to rate another group with regard to how evolved it is on a scale that ranges from ape-like to fully human. This measure, validated in over 12 countries over five years of research, predicts various forms of intergroup hostility and aggression across many contexts.²⁷ In every country in which it was measured, high levels of dehumanization on the Ascent Dehumanization Scale predicted support for group-targeted harm. Blatant dehumanization was associated with: support for a policy that provides Roma women with contraceptives that have a high chance of permanent sterilization;²⁸ support for aggressive anti-terrorism (i.e., torture of terror suspects);²⁹ support for war with Iran, and opposition to the Iran Deal;³⁰ opposition to the peace deal with FARC among Colombians, and support for punishment of FARC members' children;³¹ comfort with civilian casualties among Israelis and Palestinians;³² support for the family separation policy in the US;³³ and support for policies that harm the other political party, even to the detriment of the country.³⁴

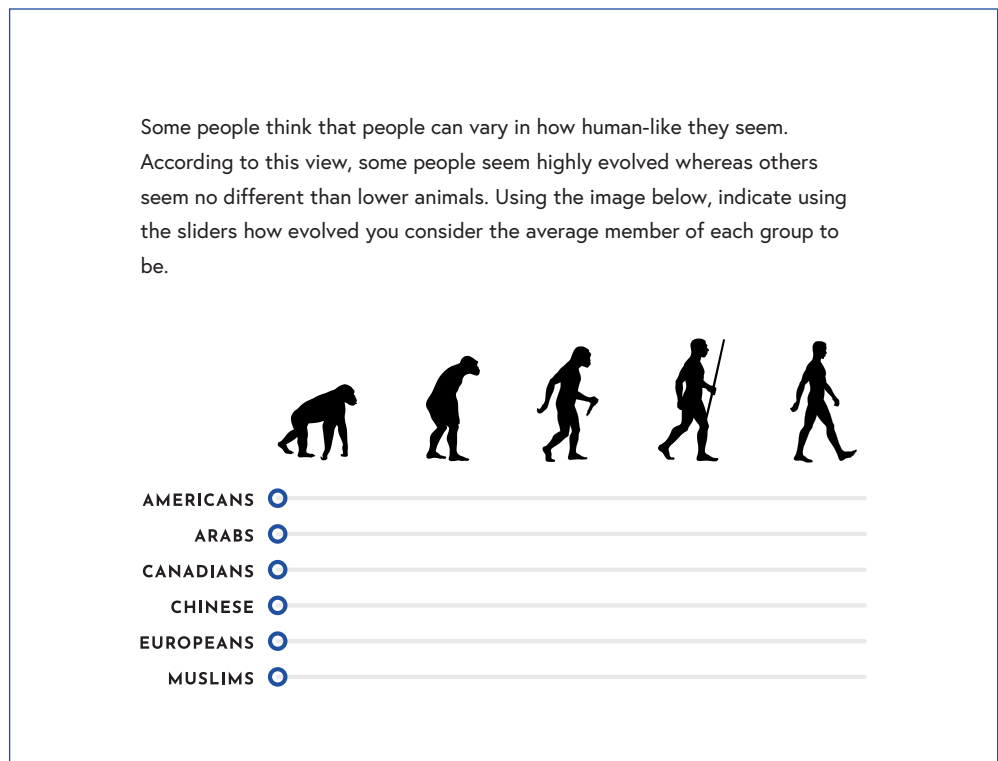


Figure 1 - Ascent Dehumanization Scale *

This measure of blatant dehumanization offers great promise because it is simple, can be used across cultural and linguistic barriers, predicts meaningful outcomes related to intergroup hostility, and is rooted in neurobiology.

Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which detects the activation patterns of different regions of the brain, Beyond Conflict and its scientific partners have identified distinct neural mechanisms underlying blatant dehumanization and dislike.³⁵ In other words, dehumanization is a cognitively distinct process from prejudice or dislike. Moreover, [this research indicates that often discriminatory behavior towards marginalized groups is better predicted by blatant dehumanization](#)

- 36 Bruneau, E., Szekeres, H., Kteily, N. S., Tropp, L., & Kende, A. (2019). Beyond dislike: Blatant dehumanization predicts teacher discrimination even (and especially) among teachers low in prejudice. In prep.
- *Beyond Conflict recognizes the sensitivity of this depiction for many readers but has found that its stark nature allows for the accurate measurement of dehumanization.
- 37 Bastian, B., & Haslam, N. (2011). Experiencing dehumanization: Cognitive and emotional effects of everyday dehumanization. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 33(4), 295-303. doi:10.1080/01973533.2011.614132
- 38 Kteily et al., 2016
- 39 Neilsen, R. (2015). 'Toxification' as a more precise early warning sign for genocide than dehumanization? An emerging research agenda. *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 9(1), 83-95. doi:10.5038/1911-9933.9.1.1277
- 40 Bandura, A. (2015). *Moral disengagement*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- 41 Waller, J. E. (2007). *Becoming evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing*.
- 42 Rai, T. S., Valdesolo, P., & Graham, J. (2017, August 8). Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence. Retrieved from <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/32/8511.long>

than by prejudice, particularly when assaying support for behaviors that are more aggressive, hostile and extreme.³⁶ Historical examples can help illustrate this phenomenon. For instance, policies that forcibly removed Native American children from their families in order to "civilize" them, were likely informed by people who cared for Native children, but who simultaneously believed them fundamentally inferior to their own group, a pervasive view at the time. This finding has implications for practice because many programs aimed at preventing discrimination and mass atrocities focus on approaches aimed at reducing prejudice between groups as opposed to dehumanization.

The feeling of being dehumanized is a powerful one, since it is deeply tied to perception of threatening intent on the part of an outgroup.³⁷ To better capture this potent feeling, [Beyond Conflict and our scientific partners have developed a measure called meta-dehumanization which is the perception that other groups perceive you or your own group as less than human](#). Scientists have found that [meta-dehumanization, predicts the surveyed group's dehumanization of other groups, as well as intergroup hostility](#).³⁸ This makes sense, if one believes that an outgroup holds ill-intent, as expressed through dehumanization, then one is likelier to dehumanize them. This dynamic could lead to a cycle of misperception and hostility, as meta-dehumanization takes hold on many different sides. Meta-dehumanization also offers great promise for tracking dehumanization among elite decision-makers because, in general, people are less reluctant to share their perspective on other people's perspectives than they are to share their own, potentially offensive or inflammatory, views.

While we know much about dehumanization's role in perpetuating violent conflict, we are still uncovering the cognitive and psychological precursors of dehumanization. Initial research indicates that essentialism – the belief that an outgroup's character is unchanging and immutable – could be an important driver of dehumanization. Another promising direction for further research is the relationship between threat perception and dehumanization. In particular, it is possible that threats to purity may lead to greater levels of dehumanization. Some research in the mass atrocities literature already points in this direction, citing "toxification" as an important variety of dehumanization.³⁹ More applied research is needed to investigate both of these potential precursors.

Finally, and most importantly, [while dehumanization is a risk factor, we still do not have decisive causal evidence that establishes the relationship between dehumanization and violence](#). While there is preliminary evidence supporting this relationship, along with historical and anecdotal evidence, we still cannot say with certainty whether dehumanization causes violence. [We now have the opportunity to conduct research that determines the extent of this relationship](#). Below we offer potential explanations of the pathways between dehumanization and violence.

Pathways Between Dehumanization and Violence?

The most common explanation of the relationship between dehumanization and group-targeted harm is that dehumanization promotes moral disengagement, removing an individual or group from the realm of moral concern. Moral disengagement is presumed to then enable perpetrators to justify the harm they inflict upon other humans by removing the moral concern that would normally

- 40 Bandura, A. (2015). *Moral disengagement*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- 41 Waller, J. E. (2007). *Becoming evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing*.
- 42 Rai, T. S., Valdesolo, P., & Graham, J. (2017, August 8). Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence. Retrieved from <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/32/8511.long>
- 43 Valentino, B. A. (2013). *Final solutions: Mass killing and genocide in the 20th century*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 44 Straus, S. (2015). *Making and unmaking nations: The origins and dynamics of genocide in contemporary Africa*.
- 45 Steizinger, J. (2018). The significance of dehumanization: Nazi ideology and its psychological consequences. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 19(2), 139-157. doi:10.1080/21567689.2018.1425144
- 46 Hagan, J., & Raymond-Richmond, W. (2008). The collective dynamics of racial dehumanization and genocidal victimization in Darfur. *American Sociological Review*, 73(6), 875-902. doi:10.1177/000312240807300601
- 47 Based on consultations with UN, US Government, and FCO officials. Conducted under Chatham House rules between July-August 2018.
- 48 Wilde, V. K., Martin, K. D., & Goff, P. A. (2014). Dehumanization as a distinct form of prejudice. *TPM-Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 21(3), 301-307.
- 49 Acharya, A., Blackwell, M., & Sen, M. (2014). The political legacy of American slavery. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2538616
- 50 Williams, J. (2018). Historical lynchings and contemporary voting behavior of blacks. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Historical-Lynchings-and-Contemporary-Voting-of-Williams/912806a059a69a252a92389d788cb4ab2e47e5cd>
- 51 Goff, P. A., Eberhardt, J. L., Williams, M. J., & Jackson, M. C. (2008). Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(2), 292-306. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.2.292
- 52 Rai, T. S., Valdesolo, P., & Graham, J. (2017). Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(32), 8511-8516. doi:10.1073/pnas.1705238114

inhibit harmful behaviors like killing, discriminating, or torturing others based on their group identity.⁴⁰ The focus here is on ordinary perpetrators, and the underlying brutal question is this: how can ordinary people do such horrible things?⁴¹ Other research has also indicated that dehumanization is particularly associated with instrumental violence – violence that is morally objectionable but desirable for instrumental reasons.⁴²

There are two other important explanations of the relationship between dehumanization and group-targeted harm that warrant attention. The first has to do with elite threat perception – the conscious or unconscious estimation of political, military, or economic decision-makers that a group is dangerous. The literature on mass atrocities demonstrates that elite threat perception, which is shaped by the worldview and ideology of political, military, economic, and media elites – is a strong predictor of mass atrocities.^{43 44} Elite conceptions of threat are often imbued with dehumanizing ideas, like worldviews that prioritize notions of group purity, which can lead to violence through explicit policies or implicit directives.^{45 46}

Some observers argue that political elites do not necessarily believe dehumanizing ideologies, but rather are rational, strategic actors who make use of dehumanizing propaganda to legitimize atrocities or discriminatory acts in order to preserve their power or advance their interests.⁴⁷ In other words, dehumanization, in the form of dangerous speech, is a tool at the hands of strategic manipulators, and is used to mobilize groups of people against another group of people by describing them as threatening, often in dehumanizing ways, in ways that serve cynical self-interest. Either way, the mechanism and result are the same – elites use dehumanizing rhetoric to describe threatening outgroups in order to mobilize their communities.

The second potential pathway between dehumanization and group-targeted harm has to do with the persistence of dehumanizing stereotypes and associations in the absence of mass violence. Dehumanization may be embedded within the institutions of society. In other words, dehumanizing ideas and rhetoric do not have to be active and acute to be harmful. Rather, many societies exhibit chronic forms of dehumanization, by which certain groups are subjected to permanent less than human status. For instance, the Roma in various European countries are discriminated against in nearly all sectors of society. The levels of dehumanization are persistent and pervasive across Europe, despite massive resources invested in Roma integration. As dehumanizing ideas become embedded within the institutions and structures of a society, group-targeted harm can become pervasive. This has to do with the power of institutions to shape the mindsets of individuals, even after particular institutions fade away.⁴⁸ The prototypical example is the lingering effects of the United States' constitution's three-fifths compromise, which characterized African-American slaves as less than fully human. To this day, a history of slavery and lynching in certain US counties in the South predicts voting behavior better than most other factors.^{49 50} Research has also shown how the implicit residue of the historical representation of African-Americans as ape-like is still associated with racist outcomes in the present day.⁵¹

Relatedly, in post-conflict situations, residual dehumanization may hinder reconciliation and stability,⁵² setting the stage for future conflict and violence. In other words, dehumanization and dehumanized perception may still linger even after conflict.

Future Directions: How Can We Reduce Dehumanization?

In light of the present research on dehumanization, there are at least four [potential applications that policymakers and practitioners should consider](#). These applications are in development, and all require partnerships with local organizations and mapping of relevant stakeholders. In addition, they are imagined as additive to existing approaches and are aimed at strengthening and improving current practices and policies, rather than replacing them.

- [Improved early-warning systems](#) – By systematically tracking blatant dehumanization among relevant groups (using nationally representative surveys) and elites (using more targeted conversational techniques), we can track an important potential risk factor that is currently not accounted for in most early warning systems. This can be used by governmental agencies and international organizations focused on atrocity prevention, or local organizations working at the grassroots.
- [Strategic messaging interventions](#) – Building upon the precursors to dehumanization, we can build evidence-based messaging interventions aimed at countering dangerous speech and dehumanizing rhetoric. These could be targeted both towards publics, to reduce their susceptibility to dehumanizing rhetoric; and to elites, using more targeted techniques. These could be administered using SMS, mass media, social media, or in targeted workshops and trainings.
- [Monitoring and evaluation](#) – Using the blatant dehumanization scale, as well as other measures, we could better quantify and measure programmatic efforts aimed at promoting reconciliation, preventing violence, and reducing discrimination.
- [Training for diplomats and practitioners](#) – Diplomats are often in a position to best evaluate the thinking and perceptions of elites. Creating training modules about the early detection of dehumanization in field settings, as well as training in techniques to reduce dehumanization, would be helpful to diplomats and practitioners in field settings. For practitioners and social movement leaders, learning about dehumanization could lead to better techniques and tactics to protect vulnerable communities.

In summary, the growing body of knowledge on dehumanization provides us with insights that can or will shape specific interventions. Following a successful initial phase aimed at synthesizing insights about the science of dehumanization, Beyond Conflict is now working on Phase 2 of the Decoding Dehumanization project, which will pilot and test interventions to measurably reduce dehumanization in real-world contexts, and work to further examine the connection between dehumanization and violence.

Acknowledgements

This policy brief is a result of extensive research and two workshops that took place in 2018, which brought together scientists and practitioners to discuss the relationship between dehumanization, discrimination, and mass atrocities. It is also a result of briefing discussions and extensive consultations with American and British government officials, UN representatives, leading neuroscientists and social psychologists, peace-building practitioners, social justice advocates, and many others. All meetings and conferences took place under Chatham House rules, and therefore, we are not naming the dozens of individuals who participated, and whose expertise informs this briefing. Beyond Conflict is grateful to them all for their time and contributions.

About Beyond Conflict

Beyond Conflict has created powerful and innovative frameworks to open pathways for progress in peace talks, transitions to democracy, and national reconciliation in the aftermath of division and violence in over 75 countries. By leveraging our global network of leaders, activists, and other seasoned practitioners, we have catalyzed the field of transitional justice, facilitated the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa, and charted a course towards peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, Central America, Cuba and other divided societies grappling with difficult social challenges.

Founded in 1992, our powerful methodology of shared experience is grounded in two core principles: that people can learn from each other, and that people can change. Accumulated evidence from brain science supports these principles. Beyond Conflict has found that the combined knowledge of emerging research within science matched to our direct real-world experience offers a powerful new approach that has the potential to revolutionize the very fields of conflict resolution, reconciliation and social change, both in the US and abroad, and has championed the field of Neuroscience and Social Conflict, by promoting this research, developing policy recommendations for national leaders, and convening six global conferences for key scientists, policymakers, practitioners, journalists and funders.

Building on this momentum, and our early success in developing key metrics with targeted groups on dehumanization, polarization, and inclusion, we recently launched the Beyond Conflict Innovation Lab for Neuroscience and Social Conflict to demonstrate the value of applying science-informed design to practical, real-world problems. We plan to show tangible progress on three pioneering pilot initiatives on polarization, racism and inclusion, and displaced refugees and migrants in the next 18 to 24 months; and then scale our validated approaches more broadly to address other key issues such as criminal justice reform, hate speech, immigration reform, and the treatment of other vulnerable populations.

Beyond Conflict is available and happy to be a resource for policymakers who are looking to connect with experts in the field of dehumanization.

beyondconflictint.org

 @Beyond_Conflict

 @BeyondConflictInt

References

- Acharya, A., Blackwell, M., & Sen, M. (2014). The political legacy of American slavery. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2538616
- Amnesty International USA. (2017, November 20). Myanmar: Rohingya trapped in dehumanizing apartheid regime. Retrieved from <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/myanmar-rohingya-trapped-in-dehumanizing-apartheid-regime/>
- Bandura, A. (2015). *Moral disengagement*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Bastian, B., & Haslam, N. (2011). Experiencing dehumanization: Cognitive and emotional effects of everyday dehumanization. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 33*(4), 295-303. doi:10.1080/01973533.2011.614132
- Bruneau, E. (2018, May 18). Why it matters when the president calls people, even violent gang members, 'animals'. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/18/why-it-matters-when-the-president-calls-people-even-violent-gang-members-animals/?utm_term=.9d63f647daaf
- Bruneau, E., Jacoby, N., Kteily, N., & Saxe, R. (2018). Denying humanity: The distinct neural correlates of blatant dehumanization. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 147*(7), 1078-1093. doi:10.1037/xge0000417
- Bruneau, E., Kteily, N., & Laustsen, L. (2018). The unique effects of blatant dehumanization on attitudes and behavior towards Muslim refugees during the European 'refugee crisis' across four countries. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 48*(5), 645-662. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2357
- Cikara, M., Eberhardt, J. L., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). From agents to objects: Sexist attitudes and neural responses to sexualized targets. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience, 23*(3), 540-551. doi:10.1162/jocn.2010.21497
- Dieng, A. (2014, December 9). Genocide begins with 'dehumanization;' no single country is immune from risk, warns UN official. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/12/485822-genocide-begins-dehumanization-no-single-country-immune-risk-warns-un-official>
- Dieng, A. (2014, December 9). Street by street: Systematic dehumanization in Europe. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Adama%20Dieng-Systematic%20Dehumanization%20in%20Europe.pdf>
- FBI. (2018). FBI Releases 2017 Hate crime statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2017-hate-crime-statistics>

- Gerson, M. (2016, May 12). The cycle of dehumanization. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-ugly-speech-threatens-our-ideals-and-our-safety/2016/05/12/392407e0-1860-11e6-9e16-2e5a123aac62_story.html?utm_term=.7bf66f6f8f39
- Goff, P. A., Eberhardt, J. L., Williams, M. J., & Jackson, M. C. (2008). Not yet human: Implicit knowledge, historical dehumanization, and contemporary consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*(2), 292-306. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.2.292
- Hagan, J., & Raymond-Richmond, W. (2008). The collective dynamics of racial dehumanization and genocidal victimization in Darfur. *American Sociological Review, 73*(6), 875-902. doi:10.1177/000312240807300601
- Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2011). Dehumanized perception. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie, 219*(3), 175-181. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000065
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10*(3), 252-264. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4
- Haslam, N., Loughnan, S., & Sun, P. (2011). Beastly: What makes animal metaphors offensive?. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 30*(3), 311-325. doi:10.1177/0261927x11407168
- Haslam, N., & Stratemeyer, M. (2016). Recent research on dehumanization. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 11*, 25-29. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.03.009
- Kteily, N., Bruneau, E., Waytz, A., & Cotterill, S. (2015). The ascent of man: Theoretical and empirical evidence for blatant dehumanization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109*(5), 901-931. doi:10.1037/pspp0000048
- Kteily, N., Hodson, G., & Bruneau, E. (2016). They see us as less than human: Meta-dehumanization predicts intergroup conflict via reciprocal dehumanization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 110*(3), 343-370. doi:10.1037/pspa0000044
- Leader Maynard, J., & Benesch, S. (2016). Dangerous speech and dangerous ideology: An integrated model for monitoring and prevention. *Genocide Studies and Prevention, 9*(3), 70-95. doi:10.5038/1911-9933.9.3.1317
- Luft, A., & Solomon, D. (2018, May 25). How dangerous is it when Trump calls some immigrants animals. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/05/25/how-dangerous-is-it-when-trump-calls-some-immigrants-animals/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4fe28f48a37e1;
- Neilsen, R. (2015). 'Toxification' as a more precise early warning sign for genocide than dehumanization? An emerging research agenda. *Genocide Studies and Prevention, 9*(1), 83-95. doi:10.5038/1911-9933.9.1.1277
- Orehek, E., & Weaverling, C. G. (2017). On the nature of objectification: Implications of considering people as means to goals. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(5), 719-730. doi:10.1177/1745691617691138
- Rai, T. S., Valdesolo, P., & Graham, J. (2017). Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114*(32), 8511-8516. doi:10.1073/pnas.1705238114

- Smith, D. L. (2012). *Less than Human: Why we demean, enslave, and exterminate others*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Steizinger, J. (2018). The significance of dehumanization: Nazi ideology and its psychological consequences. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 19(2), 139-157. doi:10.1080/21567689.2018.1425144
- Straus, S. (2015). *Making and unmaking nations: The origins and dynamics of genocide in contemporary Africa*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ulfelder, J., & Valentino, B. (2008). Assessing risks of state-sponsored mass killing. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1703426
- Valentino, B. A. (2013). *Final solutions: Mass killing and genocide in the 20th century*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Waller, J. E. (2007). *Becoming evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing*.
- Williams, J. (2018). Historical lynchings and contemporary voting behavior of blacks. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Historical-Lynchings-and-Contemporary-Voting-of-Williams/912806a059a69a252a92389d788cb4ab2e47e5cd>