

Villains in the Middle East: A Moral Typecasting Theory of Antisemitic Attitudes and Perceptions of Israelis

Manuel Galvan^{a12}, Dylan Selterman^b, Jake Womick^c

^aAssistant Professor, University of California, Berkeley; ^bDirector of Research and Resource Development, Heterodox Academy; ^cAssistant Professor, California State University, Bakersfield

Abstract

We examined how right- and left-wing authoritarianism (RWA and LWA) predict intergroup prejudice in the U.S. during the Israel–Gaza conflict. Drawing on Dyadic Morality Theory (DMT) and the theorized asymmetry between RWA's norm-enforcement motivation and LWA's value-contingent egalitarianism, we predicted that each form of authoritarianism would produce ideologically structured moral typecasting of Israelis and Palestinians. We analyzed data from two U.S. surveys (Ns = 500 and 400) using path models that positioned moral typecasting as a mediating mechanism between authoritarianism and prejudice outcomes, with political orientation included as a covariate throughout. We found evidence that villain perceptions (maliciously causing harm) and victim perceptions (innocently suffering harm) of Israelis and Palestinians mediate the link between left- and right-wing authoritarianism (LWA & RWA) and Judeophobia (ethnic prejudice toward Jewish people), Antizionism (political intolerance of Israel and its supporters), and Islamophobia (ethnic prejudice toward Muslims). The most consistent mediational effects emerged between RWA and Islamophobia and LWA and Antizionism. The results suggest that moral typecasting of conflict parties is a meaningful mechanism through which authoritarian dispositions translate into prejudice, extending DMT to the domain of intergroup conflict and highlighting how moral narratives about ongoing geopolitical events can amplify hostility toward Jews and Muslims across the political spectrum.

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Introduction

Recent escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not only produced catastrophic loss of life (Khatib et al., 2024) but has also shaped political and moral discourse around the world. In the United States, opinion surveys show deep and growing partisan divides in sympathy for

¹ Corresponding Author Contact: Dylan Selterman, Email: dselter1@jh.edu

² Dylan Selterman and Manuel Galvan both contributed equally to the manuscript and should be considered co-first authors, listed in alphabetical order.

Israelis and Palestinians (Van Green et al., 2025): Republicans overwhelmingly express greater sympathy for Israel and Israelis, whereas Democrats are now more sympathetic to Palestinians and more critical of the Israeli government. At the same time, monitoring organizations and journalistic accounts document sharp increases in Antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents since the onset of the war (Shafa, 2025). These developments raise questions about how Israelis and Palestinians are being cast in moral perceptions and how these narratives are linked to politics and prejudice against Jews and Muslims. Across two studies, we sought to answer these questions by examining how right-wing and left-wing authoritarianism are associated with moral perception of Israelis and Palestinians and how these dynamics might explain intolerance toward Jewish and Muslim people.

Our approach builds on Dyadic Morality Theory (DMT), which proposes that moral judgment is organized around a simple but powerful template: an intentional *agent* who helps or harms a vulnerable *patient* (Schein & Gray, 2018). Acts are immoral when agents cause intentional harm to patients (Gray et al., 2022). Actors within the dyad can be perceived to have a number of different moral identities. Agents can appear as *heroes* who tend to help patients or *villains* who tend to harm them. Patients can appear as people who are often *beneficiaries* of good deeds or who are often *victims* of wrongdoing (Goranson et al., 2022).

DMT further suggests that people tend to “typecast” others as primarily agents or patients, which encourages complementary narratives (e.g., a villain implies a victim, a hero implies a beneficiary; Gray & Wegner, 2012). Further, liberals and conservatives dispositionally differ in how much they view different classes of patients (e.g., Israelis vs. Palestinians) as legitimately vulnerable to harm (Womick et al., 2026). Political liberals in the U.S. see members of marginalized groups (e.g., gay people, illegal immigrants) as more vulnerable to harm compared to conservatives who rank members of powerful groups (e.g., CEOs, state troopers) as more vulnerable.

We argue that, in an entrenched intergroup conflict like the Israel–Palestine conflict, the dyadic template invites observers to map entire populations onto these roles: one side as suffering victims and righteous heroes, the other as powerful villains or undeserving beneficiaries of aid and support. Thus, we investigate if U.S. adults apply complementary moral typecasts to Israeli and Palestinian civilians (not combatants) and whether seeing one

group as moral victims is linked to seeing the other as moral villains. We predict that moral perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians will be negatively coupled within roles (e.g., Israeli victims vs. Palestinian victims) and positively coupled across roles (e.g., Israeli villains vs. Palestinian victims). Finally, given the shifts in antisemitism and islamophobia concurrent with rising tensions in Israel and Palestine, we test hypotheses about how moral typecasting explains the link between authoritarianism and prejudice. In doing so, we bridge the moral psychology, authoritarianism, and prejudice literatures, proposing moral typecasting as a mechanism that links authoritarian dispositions to hostility toward Jews and Muslims in context of ongoing conflict.

In addition to shaping perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians, the conflict also shapes two distinct targets of prejudice: Jews and Muslims. Islamophobia encompasses anti-Muslim stereotypes (e.g., that Muslims are untrustworthy or violent), anti-Islam beliefs (e.g., that Islam is inherently dangerous), and conspiratorial narratives about Muslim infiltration of Western societies (Uenal et al., 2021). Antisemitism involves prejudice related to Jewish people (Judeophobia) and the state of Israel (Antizionism).

Antisemitic attitudes can include distinct configurations of stereotypes, beliefs, and emotions that vary across historical and cultural contexts (e.g., Bilewicz et al., 2013). Judeophobia reflects stereotypes of and generalized hostility toward Jewish people as an ethnic-religious group. This fits with historical measures of Antisemitism that measured beliefs that Jews are clannish, disloyal, or financially manipulative (Quinley & Glock, 1983; Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). In the context of the present research, Antizionism involves hostility toward the state of Israel and its supporters as political actors; for reasons that may be antisemitic or not.² Incorporating animosity towards a nation-state linked to an ethnic-religious group of people is unique to antisemitism (e.g., measures of anti-Black bias do not include items tapping animosity towards Africa), rendering it a relatively complex form of prejudice. In mainstream discourse, expressing an appropriate level of legitimate criticism toward Israeli government policies and actions, in a manner that is similar with respect to other nations, is not viewed as Antisemitic, even among Jewish people who feel emotionally connected to Israel (Jewish Electorate Institute, 2023). These two constructs have been

² Note that the definition of Zionism and Antizionism is more contested and complicated than can be explored in this paper (see Marcus, 2015).

combined in prior research to operationalize antisemitism, in large part due to the influence of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which explicitly includes some types of anti-Israeli rhetoric (Allington, 2022; Stern, 2019).

Following these concerns, undue criticism of Israel can function as a coded or socially acceptable expression of anti-Jewish prejudice (Hersh & Royden, 2023; Waxman et al., 2022). Experimental evidence suggests that Antisemitism can cause greater hostility toward Israel and that exposure to anti-Israel rhetoric can, in turn, increase Judeophobia attitudes (Cohen et al., 2009). Nevertheless, Hersh and Royden (2023) argued that theoretically, criticism or opposition toward Israel need not reflect Antisemitic attitudes. This consideration is especially important in the current political context, where many human rights groups, even Israeli organizations, have labeled the Israeli military actions in Gaza a “genocide” (B’Tselem, 2025; Mann et al., 2025).

Additionally, Judeophobia and Antizionism are conceptually and empirically separable (Hersh & Royden, 2023). Recent work using latent profile analysis found that a substantial portion of U.S. adults hold positive attitudes toward Jewish people while simultaneously holding negative attitudes toward Israel, with a moderate correlation between the two attitude subscales (Moskalenko et al., 2025). Critically, these attitudinal profiles showed distinct behavioral correlates: anti-Israel attitudes without antisemitism were associated with legal activism but not aggression or violence, whereas profiles combining anti-Jewish and anti-Israel attitudes were associated with radicalism and aggression (Moskalenko et al., 2025). Given increased international attention to the violence in the conflict, it may be the case that even when scholars attempt to measure *Antizionist antisemitism* (i.e., featuring rhetoric of conspiratorial claims and antisemitic tropes; Allington, 2022), participants may respond in ways that are shaped by both strongly held criticisms of Israeli state actions and antisemitism. Based on these considerations, in the current research, we analyzed Islamophobia as a single composite and conducted analyses for antisemitism with Judeophobia and Antizionism decomposed into two separate variables.

Moral Perceptions as a Bridge Between Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Prejudice

A long tradition in political psychology links authoritarianism to prejudice, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia (Kaufman, 1957). Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is characterized by deference to established authorities, traditionalism, and punitive attitudes toward those who defy these authorities or traditions (Altemeyer, 1996). Central to RWA is a norm enforcement motivation: authoritarians monitor and police group boundaries by targeting those seen as violating or destabilizing the group's norms and conventions, treating outgroup deviance as a threat to the social order (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Feldman, 2003). Decades of research shows that RWA is a powerful predictor of generalized prejudice and support for hierarchical, exclusionary social arrangements (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Osborne et al., 2023). Prejudice results from right-wing authoritarianism because out-group members are often perceived as threatening or harmful to social cohesion or tradition (Osborne et al., 2023). Groups seen as threatening are often from non-normative (e.g., non-dominant) religious, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds (Faragó et al., 2019; Obaidi et al., 2018; Cohrs & Ibler, 2009). RWA, and thus its association to prejudice, may also be exacerbated by threatening social contexts such as war, conflict, or terrorism (Asbrock & Fritzsche, 2013) and moral perceptions of the actors involved.

The current conflict invokes strong moral perceptions about victims and villains in ways that may influence prejudice towards the groups associated with each side. The prejudice literature has long recognized moral vilification of outgroups, or in DMT terms, perceiving them as intentional agents of harm, as a psychological antecedent that motivates and sustains prejudice (Pettigrew, 1979; Leyens et al., 2000). Casting an outgroup as a willful perpetrator of harm precedes and justifies hostile attitudes toward them, while casting a group as an innocent victim of harm motivates sympathy and protection. We propose that RWA's norm enforcement motivation is likely to shape how people formulate moral assignments: those perceived to threaten social conventions or group cohesion are cast as harm-causing agents, while those perceived as conforming to or upholding norms are cast as harm-vulnerable victims deserving of protection. In the context of an entrenched intergroup conflict like the Israel-Palestine conflict, these villain-victim assignments become especially salient, as entire populations are mapped onto moral roles of harm-doer and harmed party that reflect

broader ideological commitments rather than the actions of specific individuals. This moral typecasting, in turn, may motivate and amplify prejudice toward the group cast as the harm-causing aggressor.

In contemporary U.S. politics, pro-Israel foreign policy sentiment is stronger on the ideological right, and right-wingers are also more likely to have a negative view of Palestinians specifically and Muslims more broadly (Telhami, 2025a). Muslims are frequently cast in right-wing discourse as harm-causing agents associated with terrorism and cultural threat to Western norms (Beck & Plant, 2018; Obaidi et al., 2018; Uenal et al., 2021). Similarly, RWA was developed in direct response to efforts to understand the psychological roots of the Holocaust (Adorno et al., 1950), and endorsement of RWA is reliably linked to greater Judeophobia across European and U.S. samples (Frindte et al., 2005). Both Jews and Muslims are religiously and ethnically distinct minority groups in predominantly Christian Western societies and may be perceived as norm-violating, harm-threatening outgroups under RWA's norm enforcement logic (Obaidi et al., 2018; Górska et al., 2022).

The link between RWA and Antizionism is more theoretically complex. RWA may seem to predict perceiving Israelis as harm-causing aggressors, given that Israelis are disproportionately Jewish and Jews may be seen as norm-threatening. However, in the contemporary U.S. political context, Israelis may instead be seen as harm-vulnerable political allies against Palestinians who are typecast as representing an Islamic threat (Beck & Plant, 2018; Van Green et al., 2025). Indeed, an overwhelming majority of Republicans express a preference for U.S. support of Israelis over Palestinians (Van Green et al., 2025), a pattern driven in part by Evangelical Republicans who hold theologically motivated pro-Israel commitments (Inbari et al., 2020; Telhami, 2021). RWA is strongly associated with religious fundamentalism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004), and among Christian right-wing authoritarians, support for Israel may be reinforced by beliefs about biblical prophecy (Inbari et al., 2020), allowing pro-Zionist and Judeophobic attitudes to coexist. Furthermore, because relative support of Israel over Palestine is the prevailing norm among particularly older conservatives in the U.S. (Telhami, 2025b), the tendency to conform to social norms among right-wing authoritarians may itself suppress Antizionism. Authoritarians often follow their community's lead in targeting deviant outgroups as harm-causing aggressors, so they may also

follow the community in accepting allies as harm-vulnerable victims deserving of protection (Górska et al., 2022). Thus, in the US political context RWA would be associated with typecasting Palestinians as villains that represent an Islamic cultural threat to the Western social order. In contrast, Israelis would be perceived as harm-vulnerable political and theological allies. These dual effects would suppress Antizionism even among those who simultaneously harbor Judeophobic attitudes.

Moral Perceptions as a Bridge Between Left-Wing Authoritarianism and Prejudice

More recently, researchers have focused on understanding how authoritarianism and prejudice might manifest on the political left. Left-wing authoritarianism (LWA) involves support for aggression that deconstructs hierarchies, intolerance of ideologically dissimilar others, and support for censorship in service of egalitarian aims (Costello et al., 2022). Despite their shared use of the term authoritarianism, there is substantive debate about whether RWA and LWA tap a common underlying construct (Nilsson, 2024; Nilsson & Jost, 2020). Nilsson (2024) notes that both widely used RWA and LWA measures contain items that blend authoritarian with ideological content, which can inflate the association between each construct and political orientation. Additionally, the two constructs have distinct motivational origins. RWA is motivated by norm enforcement to a dominant social order, while LWA is motivated by value-contingent aggression (Nilsson, 2024). This distinction has important implications for how each form of authoritarianism relates to prejudice. In contrast to RWA, LWA predicts ideologically selective hostility — directed specifically at groups coded as powerful, dominant, or oppressive within a left-wing moral framework, while simultaneously expressing tolerance or sympathy toward historically marginalized groups (Nilsson & Jost, 2020). Thus, while both constructs involve aggression, they differ fundamentally in the targets, motivational basis, and relationship that aggression has with prejudice. In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, we expect LWA to operate particularly through egalitarian commitments: aggression directed at those perceived as harmful oppressors or as perpetuating illegitimate hierarchies.

Just as RWA's norm enforcement motivation shapes moral perceptions of harm-causing and harm-vulnerability, we propose that LWA's value-contingent egalitarianism

similarly structures how those on the political left assign villain and victim roles in intergroup conflicts. Rather than casting norm-violating outgroups as harm-causing aggressors, LWA leads individuals to cast groups perceived as perpetuating unjust hierarchies as harm-causing villains, while groups perceived as subjugated or dispossessed are cast as harm-vulnerable victims deserving of protection and solidarity (Nilsson, 2024). The more powerful party is cast as the harm-causing oppressor, while the less powerful party is cast as the harm-vulnerable victim. These moral perceptions, in turn, motivate prejudice toward the group cast as the harm-causing hierarchy-perpetuator, producing the ideologically selective prejudice profile that distinguishes LWA from the generalized outgroup hostility of RWA.

Consistent with this proposition, LWA should have a negative association with prejudice against historically marginalized groups (Nilsson & Jost, 2020). A limited number of empirical studies show that LWA is positively associated with support of LGBT rights and rejection of modern racism (Bertrams & Krispenz, 2026; Costello et al., 2022). However, this protection is contingent on how a group is morally typecast. LWA predicts hostility toward marginalized groups when those groups are perceived as aligned with harm-causing hierarchies (e.g., Black Christians or Jews perceived as supporting Israel; Conway et al., 2018), likely due to the ideological coding of those targets rather than their ethnic or racial identity.

In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, villain-victim typecasting of those high on LWA may map onto the involved groups in predictable ways. Majorities of liberal Democrats are concerned with the plight of Palestinians (Van Green et al., 2025, Telhami, 2025b) and have generally been concerned about Islamophobia and the marginalization of Muslims (Telhami, 2025a). Thus, those high in LWA may typecast Palestinians as harm-vulnerable victims, producing a negative association with Islamophobia. In contrast, majorities of liberal Democrats view the Israeli government unfavorably (Van Green et al., 2025), and view Israeli military actions in Gaza as constituting genocide (Telhami, 2025b). Thus, LWA may predict typecasting Israelis as harm-causing villains perpetuating unjust hierarchy against a dispossessed population and, accordingly, higher Antizionism. Finally, LWA might predict lower Judeophobia, given the status of Jewish people as a historically persecuted ethnic and religious minority. However, prior research has found that LWA is

associated with more prejudice against Jews when they are seen as very supportive of Israel (Conway et al., 2018). Similarly, there is some evidence that increased antizionism may predict higher antisemitic attitudes (Cohen et al., 2009). Therefore, LWA's positive association with perceiving Israelis as villains may also be associated with a higher level of Judeophobia.

The Present Research

The theoretical framework outlined above conceptualizes moral typecasting as a psychological antecedent that motivates and sustains prejudice (Pettigrew, 1979; Leyens et al., 2000; Gray et al., 2022). Accordingly, our analysis modeled moral typecasting variables as mediators linking authoritarianism to prejudice outcomes. First, we estimated if LWA and RWA predict moral typecasting of Israelis and Palestinians in ways that reflect their asymmetric motivational bases. Specifically, we predict that LWA will be associated with increased tendency to typecast Israelis as villains and Palestinians as victims, while RWA will be associated with typecasting Palestinians as villains and Israelis as victims. Second, we estimated how moral typecasting of these groups predicts Antizionism, Judeophobia, and Islamophobia. Here, we expect that seeing Israelis as villains and Palestinians as victims will be associated with higher Antizionism, and Judeophobia but lower Islamophobia, while we expect the opposite pattern for seeing Palestinians as villains and Israelis as victims. Finally, we estimated the extent to which moral typecasting indirectly mediated the association between authoritarianism and prejudice. For example, we will test if the link between LWA and Judeophobia is partly explained by perceiving Israelis as moral villains, reflecting the possibility that LWA may simultaneously elevate Antizionism and, through it, shape attitudes toward Jewish people.

Our research uses two U.S. survey studies, following the October 7th, 2023 attacks to examine how right and left-wing authoritarianism are linked to moral typecasting of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and how these are both related to Islamophobia, Judeophobia, and Antizionism. In Study 1, participants reported their levels of LWA, RWA, Judeophobia, Antizionism, and Islamophobia, and rated "the average civilian" in Israel and Palestine on semantic-differential scales indexing moral hero versus villain and victim versus fortunate.

Because no prior study has investigated DMT in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, we provide some descriptive information about how moral typecasting of Israelis and Palestinians are correlated with each other.

For Study 2, we used a pictorial measure of moral typecasting adapted from the Moral Identity Picture Scale (Goranson et al., 2022), which allows participants to assign Israelis and Palestinians to hero, villain, victim, and beneficiary roles within shared moral scenes. Unlike the bipolar semantic-differential items in Study 1, this measure allows simultaneous, independent assessment of all four moral identities for each group, providing a more nuanced test of the DMT-predicted role structure. Based on our predictions, we focused particularly on victim and villain perceptions. Together, these studies aim to illuminate how political authoritarianism on the left and right shapes moral perception and, in turn, prejudicial attitudes. Finally, because both RWA and LWA measures have been criticized for blending anti-democratic predispositions with ideological content (Nilsson, 2024), our models include general liberal-conservative orientation as a covariate at every path, isolating variance in each authoritarianism predictor that is not shared with political orientation.

Study 1

Method

Participants were 500 adults (319 women; Mean age = 52.05, *SD* age = 17.72) recruited through ResearchMatch, an online participant recruitment platform beginning in August 2024. Most (82%) reported having a bachelor's degree or higher and were left-of-center politically (measured with a single item on a 1=Very Liberal to 7=Very Conservative scale). Descriptive statistics and reliabilities for all measures can be found in Table 1.

Participants completed the 15-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA; Duckitt et al., 2010), which assesses three underlying psychological traits: (a) Submission (e.g., “*Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn*”), (b) Conventionalism (e.g., “*This country will flourish if young people stop experimenting with drugs, alcohol, and sex, and pay more attention to family values*”), and (c)

Aggression (e.g., *“Being kind to loafers or criminals will only encourage them to take advantage of your weakness, so it’s best to use a firm, tough hand when dealing with them”*), They also completed a 15-item Left-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (LWA; Costello et al., 2022), which assesses three underlying psychological traits: (a) Antihierarchical Aggression (e.g., *“The rich should be stripped of their belongings and status”*), (b) Anticonventionalism (e.g., *“Anyone who opposes gay marriage must be homophobic”*) and (c) Top-Down Censorship (e.g., *“University authorities are right to ban hateful speech from campus”*).

For prejudice, we administered The Generalized Antisemitism Scale (GeAs; Allington, 2022) captures two psychological factors, one that pertains to Judeophobic Antisemitism (e.g., *“Jewish people chase money more than other people do”*), and Antizionist Antisemitism (e.g., *“Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews”*). We also asked participants to complete the Tripartite Islamophobia Scale (TIS; Uenal et al., 2021), which captures three psychological factors, (a) anti-Muslim prejudice (*“Muslims are not trustworthy,”*), (b) anti-Islam prejudice (*“Islam is a violence-glorifying religion”*), and (c) conspiracy beliefs (e.g., *“Muslims are planning to Islamise the West step by step”*).

Participants then responded to items gauging their perceptions toward Israelis and Palestinians on two bi-polar moral typecast items using a 1-7 semantic differential scale from 1-“hero” to 7-“villain” and from 1-“victim” to 7 “fortunate”). Importantly, participants were explicitly instructed to consider the average civilians living in Israel and Palestine (i.e., not Hamas fighters or IDF soldiers).

Analysis

We estimated separate but structurally identical models for LWA and RWA. In each model, four moral typecasting variables (perceptions of Israelis as villains, Israelis as victims, Palestinians as villains, and Palestinians as victims) were regressed on authoritarianism. The three prejudice outcomes (Judeophobia, Antizionism, and Islamophobia) were then each regressed on the four typecasting variables and the authoritarianism predictor. The direct paths from authoritarianism to each prejudice outcome allowed us to evaluate indirect effects through moral typecasting while accounting for any residual direct association. Across the model, political orientation was treated as a covariate when estimating every path. Residual

covariances were added between variables at the same stage of the model (i.e., between typecasting variables or among prejudice outcomes) where indicated by modification indices to improve model fit. The covariance between the authoritarianism predictor and political orientation was also estimated, given their expected empirical association. All models were estimated in R using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Indirect effects were computed as defined parameters and tested using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (1,000 samples). All reported effects are standardized.

Study 1 Results

First, we examined correlations between moral typecast ratings for Israelis and Palestinians, shown in Table 1. Ratings for Israelis and Palestinians as moral villains were negatively correlated, as were ratings of Israelis and Palestinians as moral victims. Similarly, ratings of Israelis as villains and Palestinians as victims were positively correlated, as were ratings of Palestinians as villains and Israelis as victims. These correlations show evidence that participants' perceptions of these groups coincided with moral typecasting relationships.

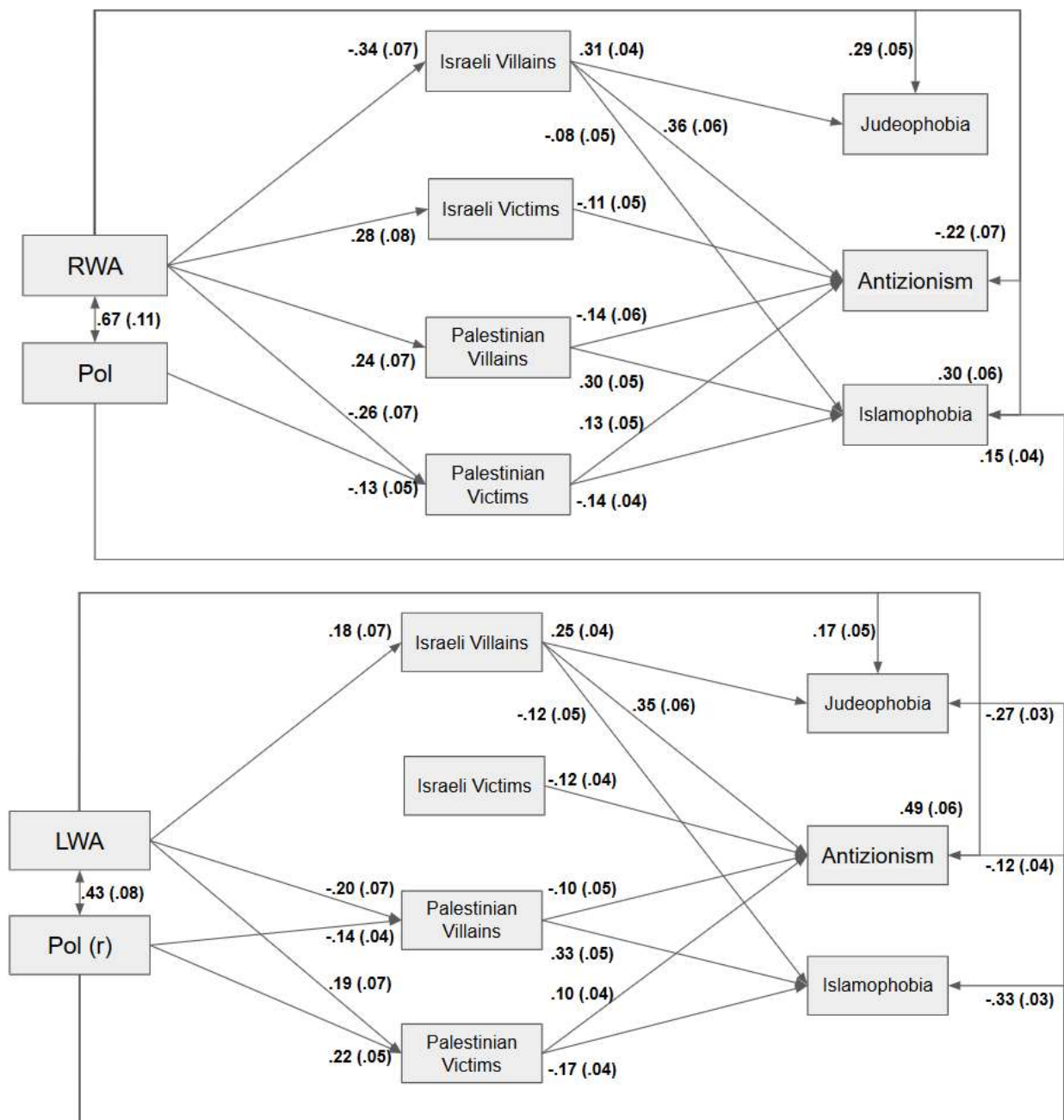
RWA, Moral Typecasting, and Prejudice

To test our theoretical model that authoritarianism shapes prejudice through moral perception, we estimated separate path models for each authoritarianism predictor, following the structure described in the analysis section. We first examined RWA. The model was estimated using 431 of 500 available cases after listwise deletion. Model fit was good across most indices: CFI = .99, TLI = .93, and SRMR = .02. The model chi-square was significant, $\chi^2(3) = 9.09$, $p = .028$, though this is expected given the sample size. RMSEA was .07 (90% CI [.02, .12]), falling within an acceptable range, though the wide confidence interval reflects uncertainty due to the low degrees of freedom. Overall, fit indices indicated that the model adequately represented the data.

Figure 1 (top) displays all of the statistically significant paths ($ps < .05$). RWA was associated with perceiving Israelis as villains less and as victims more, while perceiving Palestinians in the opposite light. This typecasting pattern in turn had downstream

consequences for prejudice. Perceiving Israelis as villains was the most consequential typecasting variable, positively predicting both Judeophobia and Antizionism. Perceiving Palestinians as villains positively predicted Islamophobia, while perceiving Palestinians as victims negatively predicted Islamophobia. Antizionism was also predicted by perceiving Israeli victims, Palestinian villains, and Palestinian victims, reflecting sensitivity to the full moral narrative surrounding the conflict. Beyond the indirect pathways through typecasting, RWA retained significant positive direct effects on both Judeophobia and Islamophobia, and a negative direct effect on Antizionism, suggesting that RWA's association with these outcomes is only partially explained by moral typecasting.

Figure 1. Right-Wing and Left-Wing Authoritarianism as Predictors of Moral Typecasting and Prejudice (Study 1)



Note. Standardized path coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses. All displayed effects are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Political orientation was included as a covariate when estimating all paths; only its statistically significant effects are displayed. Nonsignificant paths and correlated residual paths are suppressed to increase readability.

RWA had a significant negative total indirect effect on Judeophobia through moral typecasting ($\beta = -.13$, 95% CI $[-.14, -.05]$), primarily through reduced perceptions of Israelis as villains ($\beta = -.11$, 95% CI $[-.12, -.05]$); no other specific indirect paths to Judeophobia were significant. The total indirect effect of RWA on Antizionism was also significant and negative ($\beta = -.22$, 95% CI $[-.39, -.19]$), significant indirect effects through each of the four typecasting variables, though the effect through Israeli villain perceptions was substantially larger than the rest: Israeli villain perceptions ($\beta = -.12$, 95% CI $[-.24, -.08]$), Israeli victim perceptions ($\beta = -.03$, 95% CI $[-.08, -.01]$), Palestinian villain perceptions ($\beta = -.03$, 95% CI $[-.08, -.01]$), and Palestinian victim perceptions ($\beta = -.03$, 95% CI $[-.09, -.01]$). For Islamophobia, the total indirect effect was significant and positive ($\beta = .15$, 95% CI $[.09, .23]$), with significant specific indirect paths through Palestinian villain perceptions ($\beta = .07$, 95% CI $[.03, .14]$) and Palestinian victim perceptions ($\beta = .04$, 95% CI $[.02, .07]$). When combining indirect and direct effects, RWA showed significant positive total effects on Judeophobia ($\beta = .17$, 95% CI $[.03, .22]$) and Islamophobia ($\beta = .44$, 95% CI $[.35, .60]$), and a significant negative total effect on Antizionism ($\beta = -.44$, 95% CI $[-.70, -.40]$).

Taken together, these effects suggest that there is a consistent pattern of direct and indirect effects linking RWA to higher Islamophobia and lower Antizionism. RWA is associated with typecasting Israelis as morally sympathetic and Palestinians as morally threatening in ways that complement the direct link between RWA and Islamophobia and Antizionism. In contrast, there is a positive direct link between RWA and Judeophobia that suppresses the indirect effect pattern of RWA predicting less Israelis villain perceptions and thus lower Judeophobia. Additionally, although RWA and political orientation were strongly associated ($\beta = .67$), RWA was generally the stronger and more consistent predictor across the model. Political orientation was not a significant predictor, with two exceptions: it independently predicted perceiving Palestinians as victims and Islamophobia, suggesting some unique contribution of political conservatism beyond authoritarianism in these specific paths. Finally, the persistence of direct effects (most notably for Judeophobia) despite accounting for indirect effects through moral typecasting suggests that additional mechanisms link RWA to prejudice beyond the moral narratives captured here.

LWA, Moral Typecasting and Prejudice

We next examined the LWA model. The model was estimated using 432 of 500 available cases after listwise deletion. Model fit was acceptable across most indices: CFI = .99 and SRMR = .02 both indicated good fit. The model chi-square was significant, $\chi^2(2) = 7.45$, $p = .024$, though this is expected given the sample size. TLI = .90 fell below the conventional .95 threshold, and RMSEA = .08 (90% CI [.02, .14]) approached the boundary of acceptable fit; however, both statistics are known to be unstable with low degrees of freedom, and the wide confidence interval on the RMSEA reflects this uncertainty. Overall, the CFI and SRMR suggest the model adequately captured the primary structural relationships in the data.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Table for Study 1

Variable	N	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Right Wing Authoritarianism	487	0.91	2.87	1.15	1									
2. Left Wing Authoritarianism	489	0.86	3.45	1.03	-0.41***	1								
3. Political Orientation Liberal (1) - Conservative (7)	451	-	2.81	1.65	0.67***	-.46***	1							
4. Islamophobia	476	0.95	2.83	1.26	0.56***	-0.27***	0.48***	1						
5. Judeophobia	476	0.80	1.87	0.87	0.19***	0.09*	0.16**	0.21***	1					
6. Antizionism	476	0.88	3.05	1.42	-0.4***	0.58***	-0.24***	-0.3***	0.37***	1				
7. Israelis are Heroes (1) vs Villains (7)	442	-	3.73	1.04	-0.31***	0.23***	-0.19***	-0.27***	0.23***	0.48***	1			
8. Israelis are Fortunate (1) vs Victims (7)	443	-	3.57	1.26	0.25***	-0.14**	0.13**	0.25***	0	-0.27***	-0.15**	1		
9. Palestinians are Heroes (1) vs Villains (7)	441	-	3.79	1.12	0.29***	-0.27***	0.24***	0.47***	-0.04	-0.31***	-0.15**	0.28***	1	
10. Palestinians are Fortunate (1) vs Victims (7)	439	-	5.18	1.31	-0.34***	0.29***	-0.31***	-0.37***	-0.03	0.32***	0.23***	-0.19***	-0.24***	1

Note. All bolded effects are statistically significant, with level of significance noted by * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Figure 1 (bottom) displays all of the statistically significant ($ps < .05$) paths. Higher LWA was associated with a moral narrative that is roughly the mirror image of RWA: it predicted perceiving Israelis as villains more, Palestinians as villains less, and Palestinians as victims more, but notably no significant association with perceptions of Israelis as victims. This typecasting pattern again had downstream consequences for prejudice. Perceiving Israelis as villains was the most consequential typecasting variable, positively predicting both Judeophobia and Antizionism while negatively predicting Islamophobia. Perceiving Palestinians as villains positively predicted Islamophobia, while perceiving Palestinians as victims positively predicted Antizionism and negatively predicted Islamophobia. Israeli victim perceptions negatively predicted Antizionism. Beyond the indirect pathways through typecasting, LWA retained significant positive direct effects on both Judeophobia and Antizionism, but unlike RWA, showed no significant direct effect on Islamophobia. Notably, the direct effect of LWA on Antizionism was particularly strong, suggesting that LWA's association with Antizionism extends well beyond what is explained by moral typecasting alone.

Unlike RWA, LWA did not show a significant total indirect effect on Judeophobia through moral typecasting ($\beta = .04$, 95% CI $[-.01, .07]$); however, the specific indirect path through Israeli villain perceptions was significant ($\beta = .05$, 95% CI $[.01, .07]$), reflecting LWA's tendency to perceive Israelis as villains, which in turn predicted higher Judeophobia. The total indirect effect of LWA on Antizionism was significant and positive ($\beta = .11$, 95% CI $[.06, .24]$), driven primarily by the path through Israeli villain perceptions ($\beta = .06$, 95% CI $[.02, .15]$); no other specific indirect paths to Antizionism were significant. For Islamophobia, the total indirect effect was significant and negative ($\beta = -.13$, 95% CI $[-.22, -.08]$), with significant specific indirect paths through Palestinian villain perceptions ($\beta = -.06$, 95% CI $[-.13, -.03]$) and Palestinian victim perceptions ($\beta = -.03$, 95% CI $[-.07, -.01]$). When combining indirect and direct effects, LWA showed significant positive total effects on Judeophobia ($\beta = .21$, 95% CI $[.08, .26]$) and Antizionism ($\beta = .60$, 95% CI $[.71, .98]$). The total effect of LWA on Islamophobia was not significant ($\beta = -.09$, 95% CI $[-.23, .01]$).

Taken together, the LWA findings present a notably different pattern from RWA. LWA is associated with typecasting Israelis as morally threatening and Palestinians as

morally sympathetic, and these perceptions in turn predict higher Antizionism and lower Islamophobia. However, unlike RWA, LWA only had a modest indirect effect on Islamophobia. The strength of LWA's direct effect on Antizionism was much stronger than the indirect pathway and suggests that LWA's association with Antizionism is strongly tied to other mechanisms beyond the moral narratives captured here. As with RWA, there is a positive direct link between LWA and Judeophobia that is not explained by moral typecasting. Although LWA and political liberalism were positively correlated ($\beta = .46$), political orientation was a more pervasive independent predictor in this model than in the RWA model. In contrast with RWA, political liberalism had opposite associations with prejudice compared to LWA. While LWA had positive direct and indirect associations with Judeophobia and Antizionism, political liberalism had negative associations with Judeophobia, Antizionism, and Islamophobia.

Study 2

In Study 2, we used a more nuanced method to assess moral perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians. DMT suggests that people think about others as morally typecasted characters in a dyadic interplay (e.g., villains harming victims, heroes helping beneficiaries) rather than as individuals acting in isolation from each other. So, rather than merely assess the extent to which people view Israelis and Palestinians separately as moral agents or patients, we employed a measure created (Goranson et al., 2022) to gauge how people conceive the moral identities of these dyadic groups. This measure allowed us to simultaneously gauge perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians as embodying all 4 moral character identities (hero, villain, victim, and beneficiary).

Study 2 Method

For Study 2, we recruited a sample of 400 participants (177 women; Mean age = 37.84, $SD = 24.55$) in the latter part of 2024 through Cloud Research Connect, also beginning in August 2024. As with Study 1, a majority of participants reported having a college degree or higher

(65%) though the sample was more politically moderate. Descriptives and reliabilities for all measures are shown in Table 2.

Participants completed a similar set of measures as in Study 1: 14-items measuring right wing authoritarianism (Mavor et al., 2010) and 12-items measuring left-wing authoritarianism (Costello & Patrick, 2022) and the same measures of Judeophobia, Antizionism and Islamophobia. Participants then completed a modified version of the Moral Identity Picture Scale (Goranson et al., 2022) as a means to gauge perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians as moral characters in an interplay with each other. For this measure, participants viewed a series of cartoon images depicting generic characters in situations where there are clear moral and immoral actions. The characters are portrayed as either heroes (e.g., leading others to safety), beneficiaries (e.g., being rescued), villains (e.g., committing violence), or victims (e.g., being assaulted). In our modified version, participants responded by indicating the extent to which they associate the characters with the average Israeli and Palestinian person. This measure allowed us to separately examine all 4 moral typecasting categories. Given our theoretical rationale, Study 2 analyses focused on victims and villains.

Study 2 Results

Analyses followed the same procedure as in Study 1. we first examined correlations between ratings for Israelis and Palestinians on moral typecasting traits, shown in Table 2. Contrary to the fully zero-sum pattern observed in Study 1, perceptions of Israeli victimhood and Palestinian victimhood were moderately correlated, suggesting that some respondents extended victim status to both parties simultaneously. The pattern for villain ratings was weaker and non-significant, indicating less consistency in dual-perpetrator attribution. Despite this departure from strict zero-sum typecasting, the dominant structure remained oppositional: Israeli Villain and Palestinian Victim were strongly positively correlated, as were Israeli Victim and Palestinian Villain, replicating the core DMT dyadic structure observed in Study 1. Together, these patterns suggest that although respondents in Study 2 were somewhat more willing to assign shared victim status across groups, moral agency and patiency remained strongly organized into opposing narratives anchored to each side of the conflict.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Table for Study

Variable	N	α	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Right Wing Authoritarianism	400	0.91	3.21	1.23	1									
2. Left Wing Authoritarianism	400	0.86	3.55	1.16	-0.26***	1								
3. Political Orientation Liberal (1) - Conservative (7)	400	-	3.58	1.89	0.60***	-0.38***	1							
4. Islamophobia	400	0.97	3.53	1.57	0.54***	-0.29***	0.50***	1						
5. Judeophobia	400	0.89	2.85	1.35	0.41***	0.07	0.29***	0.25***	1					
6. Antizionism	400	0.87	3.53	1.37	-0.15**	0.43***	-0.17**	-0.25***	0.52***	1				
7. Israeli Villain	398	-	2.65	1.17	0.03	0.34***	-0.06	-0.05	0.41***	0.55***	1			
8. Israeli Victim	390	-	1.96	0.88	0.39***	0.08	0.24***	0.34***	0.23***	-0.1	0.14**	1		
9. Palestinian Villain	398	-	2.06	1.02	0.47***	-0.12*	0.35***	0.48***	0.11*	-0.32***	0.07	0.73***	1	
10. Palestinian Victim	399	-	2.52	1.00	0.04	0.33***	-0.03	-0.01	0.29***	0.39***	0.77***	0.35***	0.16***	1

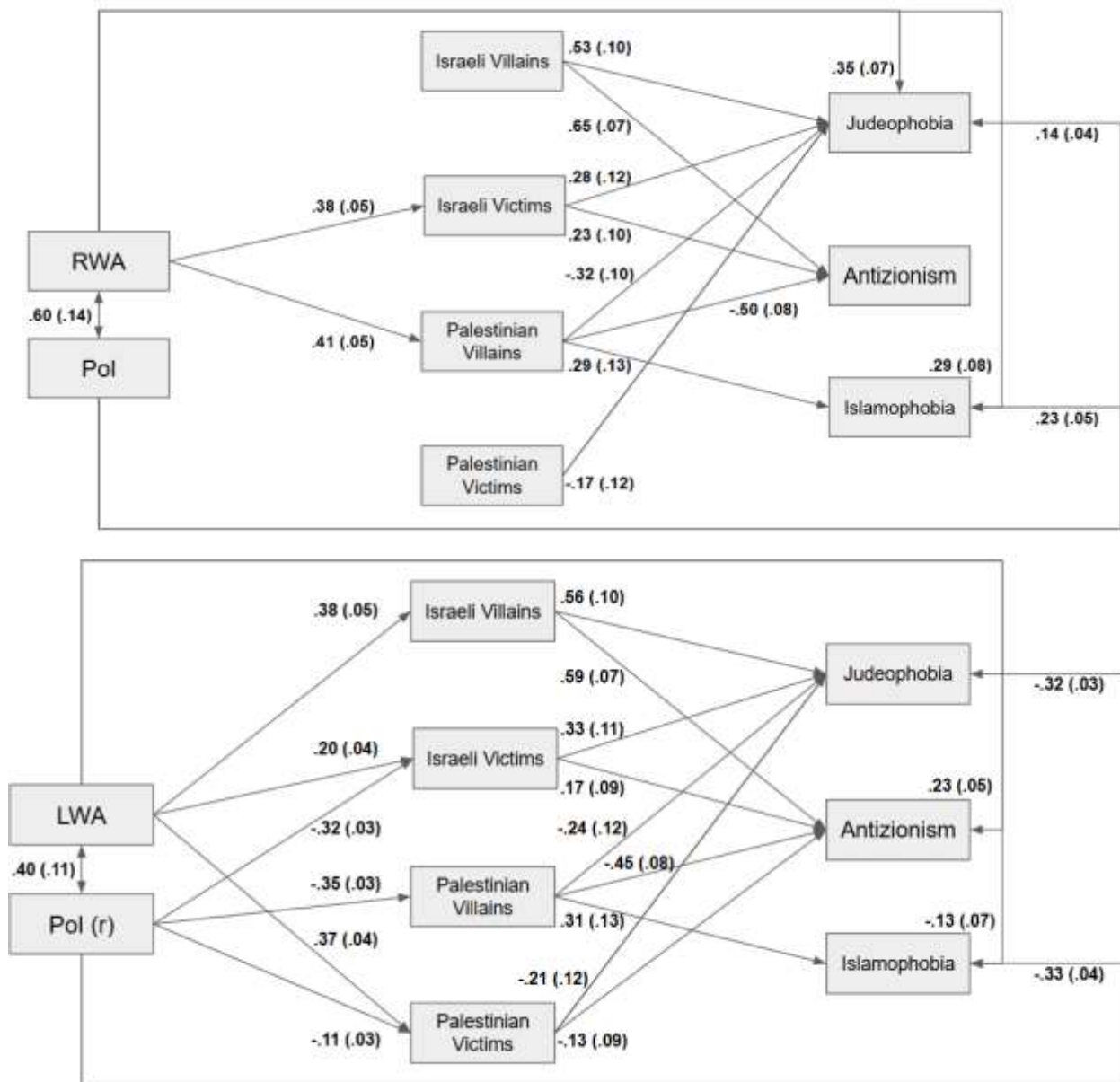
Note. All bolded effects are statistically significant, with level of significance noted by * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

RWA, Moral Typecasting, and Prejudice

Again, we examined how RWA is linked to moral typecasting and prejudice in Study 2. The model was estimated using 386 of 400 available cases after listwise deletion. Model fit was good across most indices: CFI = .99, TLI = .94, and SRMR = .03. The model chi-square was significant, $\chi^2(2) = 8.14$, $p = .017$, though this is expected given sample size sensitivity. RMSEA was .09 (90% CI [.03, .16]), falling within a marginally acceptable range, though the wide confidence interval reflects uncertainty due to the low degrees of freedom. Overall, fit indices indicated that the model adequately represented the data.

Figure 2 (top) displays all statistically significant ($ps < .05$) paths in the RWA model. In contrast to Study 1, RWA predicted only a partial moral narrative: higher RWA was associated with perceiving Israelis as victims more and Palestinians as villains more, without the corresponding reduction in Israeli villain or Palestinian victim perception observed in Study 1. In turn, Israeli Villain perceptions remained the dominant predictor of Judeophobia and Antizionism, and Palestinian Villain perceptions were the primary predictor of Islamophobia. All four moral perception variables significantly predicted Judeophobia and Antizionism, reflecting sensitivity to the full moral narrative surrounding the conflict for these outcomes. Beyond the indirect pathways through typecasting, RWA retained significant positive direct effects on Judeophobia and Islamophobia, with no significant direct effect on Antizionism.

Figure 2. Right Wing and Left Wing Authoritarianism as Predictors of Moral Typecasting and Prejudice (Study 2)



Note. Standardized path coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses. All displayed effects are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Political orientation was included as a covariate when estimating all paths; only its statistically significant effects are displayed. Nonsignificant paths and correlated residual paths are suppressed to increase readability.

The total indirect effect of RWA was non-significant for both Judeophobia and Antizionism. Because the four moral typecasting variables are substantially intercorrelated (see Table 2), specific indirect effects through individual typecasting paths are susceptible to statistical suppression and should be interpreted with that caveat in mind. For both Judeophobia and Antizionism, significant specific indirect paths emerged through Israeli victim and Palestinian villain perceptions but operated in opposite directions, consistent with a suppression pattern rather than substantive mediation. For Islamophobia, the total indirect effect was significant and positive ($\beta = .10$, 95% CI [.06, .21]), driven primarily by Palestinian villain perceptions ($\beta = .12$, 95% CI [.06, .25]). Combining indirect and direct effects, RWA showed significant positive total effects on Judeophobia ($\beta = .36$, 95% CI [.25, .53]) and Islamophobia ($\beta = .39$, 95% CI [.34, .63]), while the total effect on Antizionism was non-significant ($\beta = -.07$, 95% CI [-.21, .05]).

Taken together, RWA predicted higher Judeophobia and Islamophobia primarily through direct pathways, with meaningful mediation through moral typecasting only for Islamophobia. The absence of a significant mediation through the Israeli Villain path, in contrast to Study 1, blocked the primary indirect route to Judeophobia and Antizionism, despite robust direct effects on both outcomes. RWA and political orientation were strongly correlated, and political orientation independently predicted Judeophobia and Islamophobia above and beyond RWA and moral perceptions. This suggests that RWA and political conservatism predict prejudice uniquely, but in the same direction.

LWA, Moral Typecasting and Prejudice

We next examined the LWA model in Study 2. The model was estimated using 386 of 400 available cases after listwise deletion. Model fit was good across all indices: CFI = .998, TLI = .97, SRMR = .03, and RMSEA = .06 (90% CI [.000, .13]). The model chi-square was non-significant, $\chi^2(2) = 5.11$, $p = .078$, indicating no significant misfit. Overall, fit indices indicated that the model adequately represented the data.

Figure 2 (bottom) displays all statistically significant ($ps < .05$) paths in the LWA model. As in Study 1, higher LWA was associated with a moral narrative casting Israelis as morally threatening and Palestinians as morally sympathetic. Unlike Study 1, LWA also

significantly predicted perceiving Israelis as victims more, but did not significantly predict Palestinian villain perceptions. Downstream consequences for prejudice were largely consistent with Study 1: Israeli Villain perceptions were again the dominant predictor of Judeophobia and Antizionism, while Palestinian Villain perceptions were the primary predictor of Islamophobia. Beyond the indirect pathways through typecasting, LWA retained a significant positive direct effect on Antizionism and a significant negative direct effect on Islamophobia. Unlike Study 1, LWA showed no significant direct effect on Judeophobia.

The total indirect effect of LWA on Judeophobia was significant and positive ($\beta = .19$, 95% CI [.15, .30]), driven primarily by Israeli Villain perceptions ($\beta = .21$, 95% CI [.15, .34]), with additional significant contributions through Israeli Victim perceptions ($\beta = .07$, 95% CI [.03, .14]) and a suppressing contribution through Palestinian Victim perceptions ($\beta = -.08$, 95% CI [-.17, -.01]). Notably, LWA's relationship with Judeophobia in Study 2 was fully mediated through moral typecasting, which is a stronger mediation pattern than observed in Study 1. The total indirect effect of LWA on Antizionism was also significant and positive ($\beta = .20$, 95% CI [.16, .32]), driven by Israeli Villain perceptions ($\beta = .22$, 95% CI [.19, .35]) and Israeli Victim perceptions ($\beta = .03$, 95% CI [.01, .09]). For Islamophobia, the total indirect effect was non-significant. Combining indirect and direct effects, LWA showed significant positive total effects on Judeophobia ($\beta = .21$, 95% CI [.13, .37]) and Antizionism ($\beta = .43$, 95% CI [.40, .64]), and a significant negative total effect on Islamophobia ($\beta = -.12$, 95% CI [-.29, -.04]).

General Discussion

The present research probed how Americans, during a period of war in Gaza, morally construed ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, and how those moral perceptions may relate to authoritarianism and prejudice. Our findings largely support and extend Dyadic Morality Theory (DMT; Schein & Gray, 2018) by showing that people perceive the two sides of the conflict in terms of moral typecasts. Across two studies, respondents routinely cast Israeli and Palestinian civilians into complementary dyadic roles. When one group was seen more as moral victims, the other was more likely to be seen as moral villains, and vice versa.

In Study 1, using simple semantic-differential items, perceptions of Israelis and Palestinians showed a clear zero-sum pattern, suggesting that people often apply dyadic complementarity at the group level. A striking pattern in Study 2 was the asymmetric structure of villain and victim perceptions across conflict parties. The cross-role dyadic coupling predicted by DMT was replicated: perceiving Israelis as villains was positively correlated with perceiving Palestinians as victims and vice versa. Within the victim role, however, perceptions of Israeli and Palestinian victimhood were moderately positively correlated, indicating that a substantial portion of observers extended patient status to both groups simultaneously. The parallel correlation for villain perceptions was weak and non-significant. This asymmetry may be partly due to shifting to unipolar measures, but may also suggest a refinement to how DMT applies in intergroup contexts. DMT describes moral judgment as organized around complementary agent-patient pairings (Schein & Gray, 2018), and our cross-role correlations strongly support this architecture. Our within-role findings suggest that, in an entrenched conflict, patiency may be more psychologically expandable than agency. Acknowledging that a group suffers does not require resolving who caused the suffering, while assigning villain status appears to involve a more exclusive moral commitment. This pattern has implications for how DMT scales from interpersonal dyads (e.g., Goranson et al., 2022) to group-level moral judgment in sustained intergroup conflict. Future research could examine whether shared-victim perception functions as a stable attitudinal position associated with more moderate intergroup attitudes, or whether it reflects moral ambivalence that resolves into zero-sum typecasting under ideological or political pressure.

Authoritarianism and Intolerance on the Left vs. Right

According to Nilsson (2024), RWA revolves around enforcement of social norms, while LWA revolves around enforcement of system-challenging ideological values. We found some evidence that moral perceptions link authoritarianism and prejudice in ways that are consistent with this framework. Replicating across both studies, moral typecasting mediated the link between RWA and Islamophobia and between LWA and Antizionism. For right-wing authoritarians, we found evidence that moral perception can act as a bridge to negativity

directed at Muslims. In contrast, for left-wing authoritarians, we found evidence that moral perception can act as a bridge to negativity directed at Israel and Israel supporters. In other words, moralization from authoritarianism on the right targets a religious group often portrayed as threatening western norms through terrorism (Beck & Plant, 2018; Obaidi et al., 2018; Uenal et al., 2021) and on the left moralization via authoritarianism targets a nation state often portrayed as threatening egalitarianism by harming an oppressed population (B'Tselem, 2025).

For left-wing authoritarianism, one could reasonably suggest that the link we observed with Antizionism results from criticism of the Israeli military actions in the current war with Hamas (e.g., B'Tselem, 2025). Indeed, compared to the political right, the left is more likely to see Israel as committing war crimes or genocidal acts during the current Gaza conflict, but are also concerned about rising antisemitism (Jones, 2024; Telhami, 2025b). However, prior research has linked LWA to Antisemitism in data that were collected before this recent conflict (Allington et al., 2023). Thus, hostility toward Israel may be consistent with a political worldview that centers opposition to hierarchy, power asymmetries, and perceived oppression. If those high on left-wing authoritarianism perceive Israel as disproportionately powerful (sample item: *“Israel can get away with anything because its supporters control the media”*) and likely to wield that power to cause anti-egalitarian harm (sample item: *“Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews”*), then it makes sense that intolerance for that nation state and its supporters would result from this political view. Simultaneously, because this form of authoritarianism is left-wing, it still involves sensitivity to the historical marginalization of oppressed groups (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). As a result, it is associated with more concern for right-coded anti-Jewish prejudice. Thus, the same egalitarian commitments that motivate Antizionism may actively suppress Judeophobia, producing the pattern we observe.

Right-wing authoritarianism, by contrast, appears to relate to antisemitism according to a different logic. RWA is historically linked to prejudice broadly (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007), and towards Jews, specifically (Frindte et al., 2005). It was, after all, a construct created from psychological attempts to understand how everyday people perpetrated the holocaust (Adorno et al., 1950). Yet, those higher on right-wing authoritarianism, who dislike Jews as people,

still defend Israel. Perhaps Judeophobia can coexist with support for Israel insofar as Israel is seen as an ally in the fight against terror and Islamic extremism. From this perspective, support for Israel may resolve the tension posed by Jewish presence in majority-Christian or majority-White societies.

Beyond how moral typecasting links authoritarianism and prejudice, this work also unpacks how Islamophobia, Judeophobia, and Antizionism are expressed on the authoritarian left and the right. Replicated across both studies, we find that, after accounting for political orientation and moral typecasting, RWA has a moderate direct association with Judeophobia and Islamophobia and LWA has a moderate direct association with Antizionism. This suggests that the norm vs value enforcing motives of RWA and LWA, respectively, influence prejudice in ways that expand beyond our focus on moral typecasting. Political orientation is another layer to consider. We find that, after accounting for authoritarianism and moral typecasting, political orientation reinforced the links between RWA and higher Islamophobia and LWA and lower Islamophobia. Political liberalism also consistently predicted lower Judeophobia, which is in opposition to direct and indirect positive associations between LWA and Judeophobia. This suggests that there may be some asymmetry in how authoritarianism (and its links to prejudice) aligns with the broader political left and right. In our results, RWA's link to Islamophobia is more consistent with broader conservative ideological views, while LWA's link to Antizionism and Judeophobia may emerge in opposition to liberal ideological views.

Future research should explore how religious ideology may further reinforce this pattern. Right-wing authoritarianism is strongly associated with religious fundamentalism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004). When political authoritarianism and religious extremism operate together, support for Israel may result from beliefs about biblical prophecy (Inbari et al., 2020). This theological framing allows Judeophobia and pro-Israel attitudes to coexist without psychological dissonance. Religious right-wing authoritarians may view Jewish people as necessary actors in a sacred narrative, but not necessarily moral equals.

The Nature of Antisemitism

Our results speak to ongoing debates about how to conceptualize and measure Antisemitism. The Generalized Antisemitism scale (Allington, 2022) was designed to align with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition, and it deliberately includes both Judeophobic and Antizionist content. Critics of the IHRA definition argue that conflating Antisemitism and Antizionism risks labeling legitimate criticism of Israeli state policy as Antisemitic, which can chill legitimate debate and international attention to human rights violations (Deckers & Coulter, 2022; Stern, 2019; Tatour, 2024). Supporters of this conceptualization emphasize that some forms of anti-Israel rhetoric rely on double standards, conspiratorial tropes, or collective blame that extend beyond ordinary policy disagreement (Allington, 2022; Cohen et al., 2009).

The present data underscore why this debate matters empirically. The Antizionism items of the Generalized Antisemitism scale were designed to measure an Antisemitic form of Antizionism, and our data show that Antizionist attitudes, as measured here, correlate to a significant extent with Judeophobia. However, despite the overlap these variables operate very differently in terms of how they connect to ideological traits and moral perceptions of Middle Eastern peoples. The strong links between Antizionism, villainizing Israelis, and authoritarian dispositions underscore why, in some contexts, Antizionist ideology may function as a vehicle for Antisemitic hostility. Simultaneously, Prozionist ideology can coexist with (and only slightly attenuate) strong Antisemitic sentiment.

Normatively, these results neither endorse nor reject any particular definition of Antisemitism. They do, however, highlight the importance of conceptual precision. Scholars, journalists, and advocates should be explicit about whether they are referring to hostility toward Jews as a group, hostility toward Israel as a state, and specific rhetorical forms (e.g., conspiratorial claims about "Zionist control") that may bridge the two. Different configurations of these elements show up on different parts of the ideological spectrum and likely have different causes and consequences. In principle, Judeophobia and Antizionism are distinct in the sense that some people reject Judeophobic attitudes while criticizing Israel, or endorse Judeophobic attitudes while being supportive of Israel. Latent profile analysis of U.S. adults provides direct evidence for this dissociation at the individual level (Moskalenko et al.,

2025), and the differential predictive structure observed in the present path models converges with that conclusion, where Judeophobia and Antizionism share some predictors but are linked to authoritarianism and moral perception through partly distinct pathways.

These contributions are made by integrating perspectives found in largely parallel literatures focusing on intergroup conflict, political authoritarianism, prejudice, and morality. Prior research has shown that authoritarianism predicts intolerance (Duckitt & Sibley, 2007). Separately, moral psychology has demonstrated that moral judgment is fundamentally organized around perceptions of intentional harm to vulnerable victims (Schein & Gray, 2018). Separate literature has also linked moral perception to intolerance (e.g., Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). Here, we connect these literatures to show that authoritarianism and associated moral perceptions of groups of actors tied to conflict, may shape intolerance.

Implications for Addressing Extremism

Our integration of authoritarianism, dyadic morality, and intolerance has important implications for extremism interventions. Authoritarianism and prejudice are relatively stable individual differences and are difficult to change (Paluck et al., 2021). Attempts to reduce extremism might benefit from attempting to change how people perceive moral harm, rather than targeting these dispositional characteristics.

Dyadic morality theory implies that moral judgment hinges on how much people and groups are perceived as causing or suffering from harm (Gray et al., 2022). If, as our results suggest, extremism is tied up in moral narratives of villains and victims, then disrupting these perceptions may be a promising strategy for reducing intolerance. Interventions that highlight civilian suffering, emphasize shared vulnerability, or disrupt simplistic agent–patient perceptions may break through the extremist moral typecasting that otherwise results from authoritarianism and intolerance during conflict. By shifting perceptions of who is harmed and how harm occurs, moral reframing may reduce the villainization that arises from political and intergroup extremism.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations temper our conclusions. First, the data are cross-sectional and correlational, collected at a particular historical moment when the Israel-Palestine conflict and U.S. partisan divisions were especially salient. The political discourse surrounding this conflict may have increased how much of a wedge exists between how people perceive Israel and how they perceive Jews broadly. Future research should further clarify how knowledge and perception of the conflict shapes Antizionism, Judeophobia and moral perceptions. Future research could also examine how participants' religious identities (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, Christian) would influence both the prejudices (e.g., Judeophobia) and the moral perceptions (e.g., Israelis as villains).

Our analysis was designed to test a particular theoretical model whereby authoritarian views shape moral typecasting and, in turn, prejudice. But of course, due to the cross-sectional nature of these data, we cannot say whether authoritarianism leads people to adopt certain prejudices and moral narratives, whether preexisting prejudices lead people toward particular ideological coalitions, or whether both are shaped by broader political and media environments. Longitudinal and experimental work will be needed to clarify causal and temporal pathways, such as manipulating exposure to different moral frames or tracking changes in attitudes over time as events unfold. Hersh and Royden (2023) argued that Antisemitic beliefs can give rise to opposition toward Israel, with intense hostility to the Jewish state sometimes functioning as a socially permissible outlet for anti-Jewish sentiment. They also argue it is theoretically possible for Antizionism to exist independent from Antisemitism (Hersh & Royden, 2023), as people could oppose Zionism for other reasons. Our cross-sectional data cannot adjudicate among these directional possibilities.

These data also have limited global generalizability. Our samples were U.S.-based and relatively educated, with Study 1 skewing liberal. Moral typecasting, Antisemitism, and Islamophobia may take different forms in other countries, especially where local histories of Antisemitism, colonialism, or migration differ substantially. Importantly, few of our participants were Jewish or Muslim, and because all participants were in the U.S., we assessed outsider's perceptions of a conflict. Future research should replicate these analyses in other national contexts, and among those directly involved in conflict.

Conclusion

The current studies provide a theoretically integrated account of how authoritarianism may shape moral narratives about Israelis and Palestinians and ultimately Judeophobia, Antizionism, and Islamophobia. Dyadic Morality Theory helps explain why this conflict may be related to recent increases in prejudice and that this may be partly due to authoritarian worldviews and moral perceptions. On the right, Palestinians are seen as villains which contributes to hostility toward Muslims. On the left, Israelis are seen as villains which increases hostility toward Israel.

Understanding these patterns is not only theoretically useful; it has practical implications for how we talk about the conflict. Political rhetoric, media coverage, and activist messaging that relentlessly cast one side as pure villains and the other as pure victims are likely to foster or legitimize prejudice, even when they are animated by genuine moral concern. Recognizing the dyadic structure of these narratives—and the ways they interact with ideology—may help scholars, journalists, and citizens alike to criticize states and policies without collapsing entire peoples into the role of villains and victims in the Middle East.

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