

INTRODUCTION

- Existential isolation (EI) is the perception that no one around you understands or can come to understanding your subjective experiences or worldview⁴.
- Political divides and barriers to discussions often originate from misperceptions or misbeliefs regarding one's political opponent³.
- Feelings of EI center around perceived differences in experiences and worldviews, therefore it may be that feelings of EI precede the development of misperceptions and lead to an unwillingness to engage with political opponents.

Hypothesis:

Participants will report greater feelings of existential isolation towards their political opponents.

METHOD

Participants:

- Study 1 N = 194 undergraduate students
- Study 2 N = 250 MTurk adult workers

Procedure:

- Completion of online surveys

Study Measures for Study 1 and 2

Political Orientation

- How would you describe your political views? (Very Liberal – Very Conservative)

Existential Isolation

- I feel like liberal/conservative people do not often share my perspective

Study 2 Only Measures

Desire for Social Distance

- How comfortable would you feel if your doctor is politically liberal/conservative?

Political Dehumanization

- Rate the average politically liberal/conservative person on the following traits. (e.g., mechanical and cold)

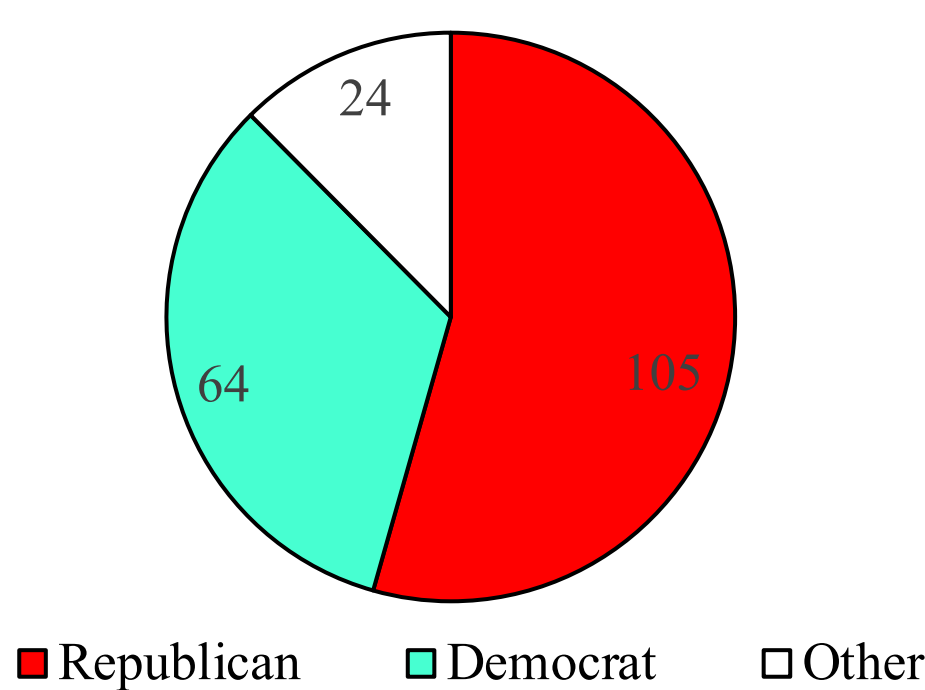
Willingness to engage with opponents

- How willing would you be to have a discussion about politics with an average politically liberal/conservative person.

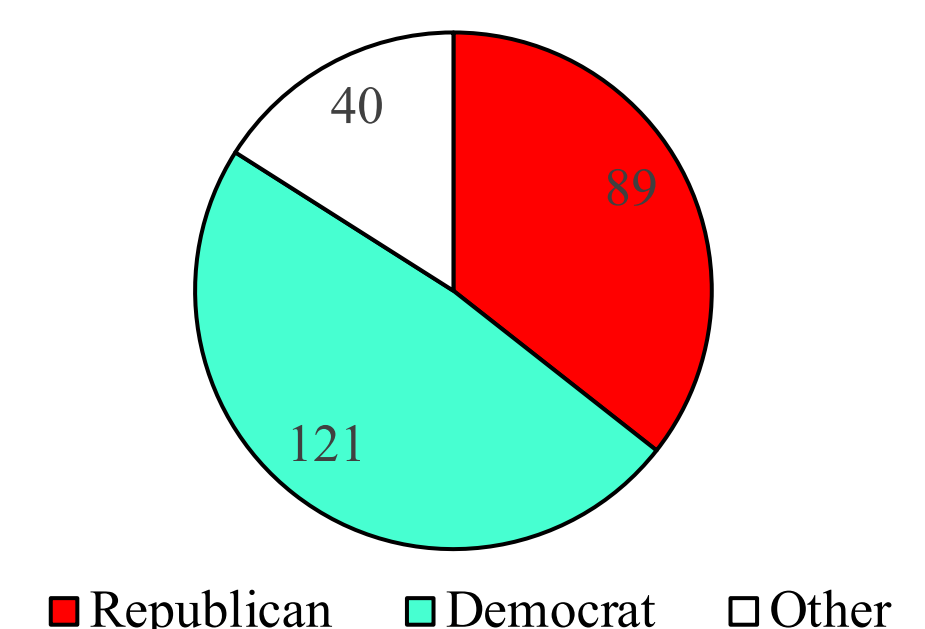
Perceived Acceptance of Immoral Acts

- The average politically liberal/conservative person believes [e.g., murder] is acceptable/immoral.

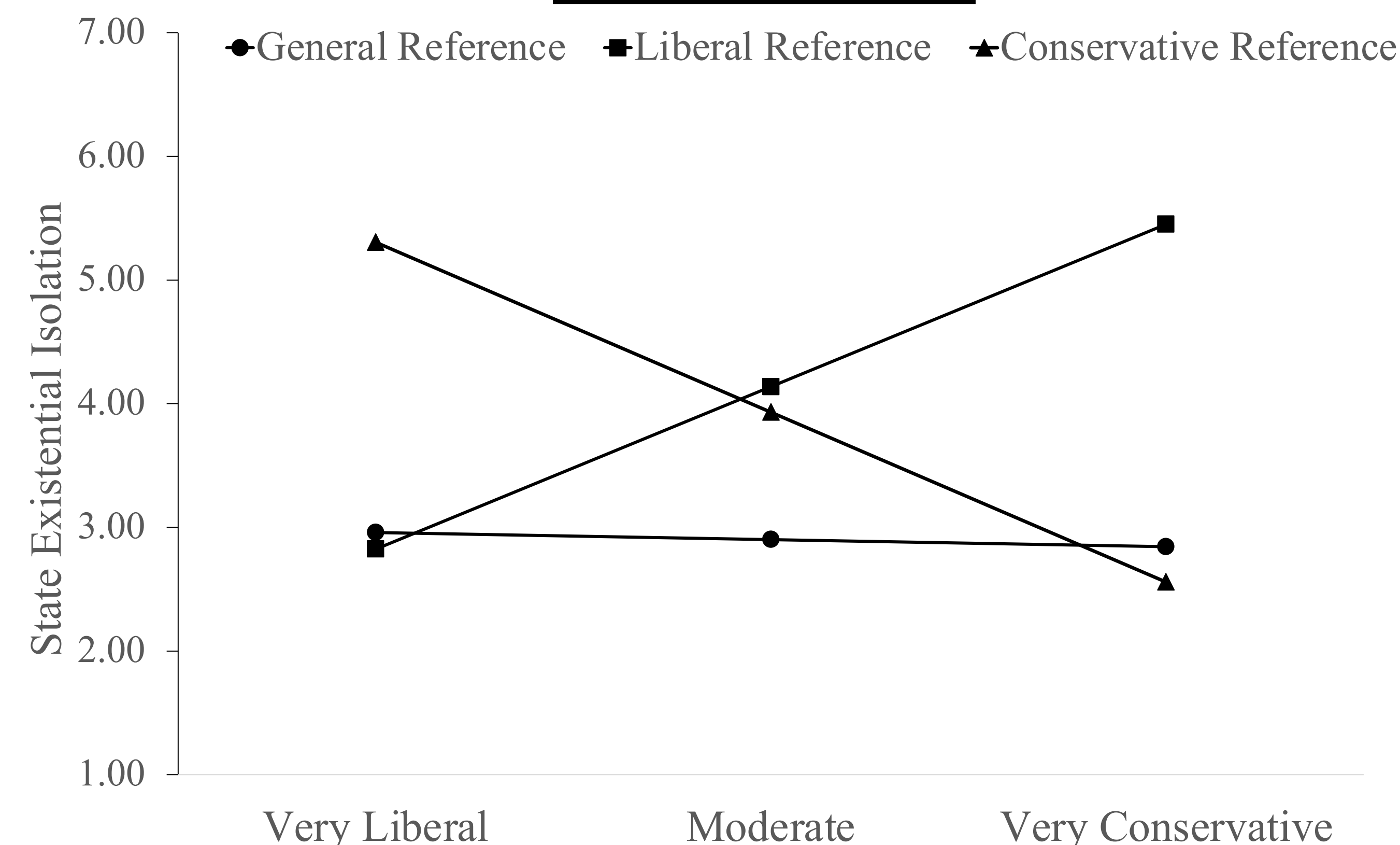
Political Party Affiliation Study 1



Political Party Affiliation Study 2



RESULTS

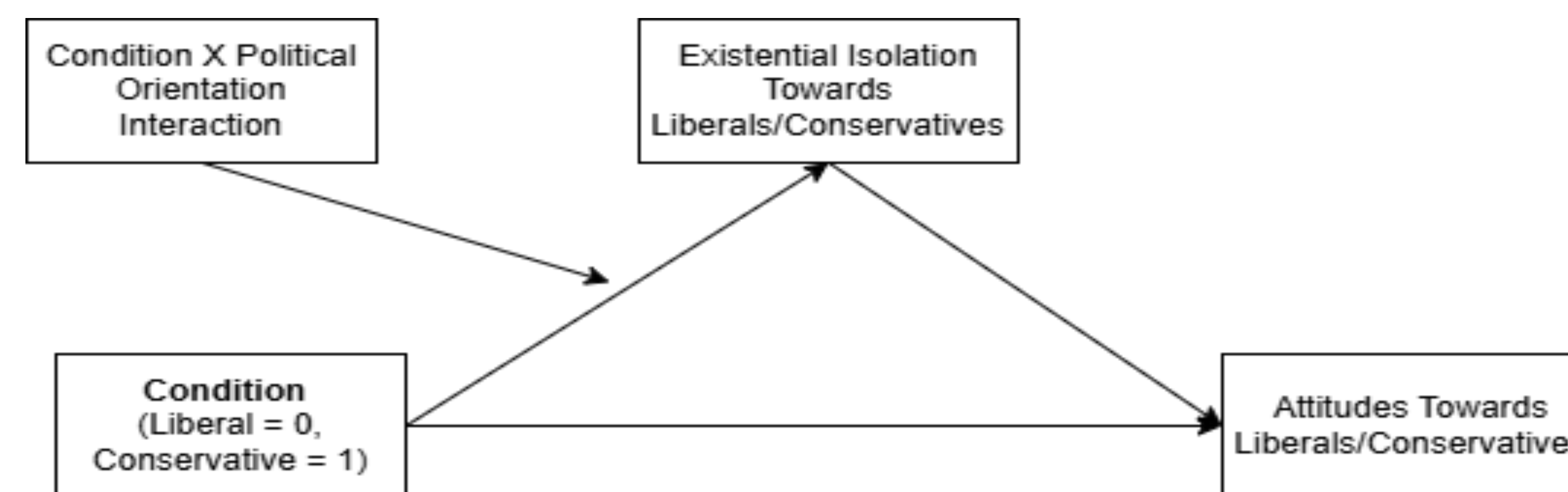


Study 1:

The more conservative the participant was, the more existentially isolated the felt from liberals (and the less they felt from conservatives) and vice versa, $ps \leq .001$. Political orientation was unrelated to general feelings of existential isolation.

Study 2:

Observed the same moderation pattern as Study 1.



	Index of Moderated Mediation
Political Dehumanization	$b = -.57 (.06)$, 95% CI [-.698, -.444]
Willingness to Engage	$b = .37 (.05)$, 95% CI [.280, .476]
Perceived Acceptance of Immoral Acts	$b = -.46 (.08)$, 95% CI [-.631, -.307]
Desire for Social Distance	$b = 11.23 (1.47)$, 95% CI [8.432, 14.207]

Summary: People feel more existentially isolated from people with opposing political orientations, which, in turn, is associated with viewing these opponents as subhuman, desiring social distance from these opponents, being less willing to engage in discussion with these opponents, and believing that these opponents are likely to view objective moral wrongs (e.g., murder) as being morally acceptable.

CONCLUSION

The present findings suggest that feelings of EI may serve a critical role in the persistence of political divides, as individuals tend to feel existentially isolated from their political opponents. This EI then fuels negative attitudes and beliefs about one's political opponents, which may inhibit willingness to engage in discussions that could bridge these divides.

Limitations:

- This study is correlational. We cannot make causal statements in determining whether EI predicts the perception of others or if the perception of others predicts EI.
- This study also did not examine behaviors, instead we focused on attitudes and perceptions of others.

Future Directions:

- Focusing on reducing feelings of EI towards political opponents (e.g., shared beliefs and characteristics or shared realities in non-political settings).
- Examining implications of political EI towards bipartisan policy. Could EI be a mediator in dislike of a policy proposed by a political outgroup?

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