Dehumanization in Everyday Politics

A study of discursive dehumanization of beggars on social media

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Abstract

Social science scholars mainly regard dehumanization as a phenomenon of conflict and war. Concurrently, dehumanizing attitudes and behavior in democratic, non-conflict settings is a significant field within social psychology. Given the rise of right-wing populism and populist rhetoric, there is reason to believe that dehumanization has nested its way into political discourse. With this background, the current study has investigated whether dehumanizing attitudes allegedly held by citizens are also expressed in their political arguments. Dehumanization can lead to support for aggression, discrimination, and violence even in democratic societies. Therefore, it is essential for political scientists to acknowledge its existence, as dehumanization can have a severe impact on equality and the defense of human rights. This paper is a cross-cutting study, which bridges the gap between political science and social psychology in the study of dehumanization by answering the question: Whether and how dehumanization is used in the debate on street begging in everyday politics?

Discursive dehumanization on social media was mapped with the help of a novel analytical tool for content analysis. Social psychology has shown that people hold dehumanizing attitudes, and this study has shown that people are also willing to express these attitudes. This study finds that dehumanization is used in the debate on street begging to a significant degree. Dehumanization is mainly used in negative depictions of beggars, which undermine their moral capacity, civility, and refinement. The results of this study provide a foundation for studying both discursive dehumanization and dehumanization in political science.

Keywords: Dehumanization, political communication, discourse, right-wing populism, social media, political participation
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1 Introduction

Dehumanization is the act of perceiving someone as less than human (Haslam and Stratemeyer 2016). It is seen as an explanation for why soldiers, correctional officers, and even ordinary citizens can commit horrendous crimes against other human beings. Dehumanizing metaphors were used as propaganda tools during the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda, where the extermination of Jews and Tutsis were preceded by depictions of them as vermin and pests (Livingstone Smith 2011). Despite this, dehumanization under normal political circumstances in democratic societies has been somewhat forgotten by social and political science. These everyday dehumanizing processes have, however, emerged as a central field of research within social psychology. At the same time, there is a trend towards right-wing populism and a hardening political climate across Europe (Wodak 2013; Ingelhart & Norris 2016). This begs the question of whether it has become accepted for citizens to express dehumanizing views in the political debate. The sphere in which citizens express their political opinions, outside formal and traditional political forums is called everyday politics (Highfield 2016). This sphere is a place where a fifth of the Swedish population expresses their political opinions (Internetstiftelsen 2018).

Political Science and neighboring fields have mainly studied dehumanization as a mechanism of conflict and war, yet social psychology finds that even ordinary people in peaceful, democratic societies hold dehumanizing views. This is called everyday dehumanization (Livingstone Smith 2011; Hagan & Rymond-Richmond 2008; Oliver 2015; Savage 2013; Roscoe 2007; Luft 2015; Haslam & Loughnan 2014). Individuals who hold dehumanizing views have been known to take action against their victim, support acts of violence, and to stay passive when dehumanized groups are in need (Lindén et al. 2015; Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018; Andrighetto 2015; Cuddy 2007). Dehumanization can have severe consequences even in democratic countries. It is regarded as the most severe form of intergroup prejudice (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018) and can lead to support for aggressive retaliatory policies even against vulnerable groups (Maoz & McCauley 2008). Dehumanization is often used as a justification for violence and differential treatment, even in democratic, peaceful societies (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015). With this background, it is critical to understand whether dehumanization is a part of the democratic political debate. Using dehumanizing
narratives about others can threaten democratic principles of equality, and lead to the acceptance of human rights violations that occur right in front of our eyes. From a theoretical perspective, research on democracy and political participation can learn from this study to increase the understanding of the complex relationship between social media and democracy. At the same time as social media are accessible and resource effective means of participation, which provide possibilities for collective action; scholars need to understand that extremism and incitement is also a part of this image. In between the dark and the light side of social media, there is also a grey area, which is explored in this paper.

The rise of right-wing populism, toughening political climate, and increasingly polarized political debate are all a part of the recent political development in Western societies (Wodak 2013; Ingelhart & Norris 2016). Political science has offered different explanations for why people support restrictive immigration policies, and which strategies politicians use to make them do so. The hegemonic theories of economic inequality as the sole factor have been questioned, and the importance of psychological factors have gained increased recognition among scholars (Norris & Ingelhart 2016; Lucassen & Lubbers 2012). Political rhetoric and perception of threat from immigration have been highlighted as two of the contributing factors (Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007; Wirz et al. 2018; Lucassen & Lubbers 2012; Ivarsflaten 2008). Concurrently, research in social psychology shows that exposure to dehumanizing portrayals of immigrants leads to negative attitudes towards immigration in general (Utych 2018; Goméz-Martínez & de la Villa Moral- Jiménez 2018). In addition, several studies find that dehumanization mediates the relationship between threat perception and negative attitudes towards immigration (Maoz & MacCauley 2008; Louis, Esses & Lalone 2013; Prati et al. 2016).

Dehumanizing imagery is theoretically compatible with populist rhetorical form and content. Since dehumanization is based on making generalizations of other groups, especially those who have been traditionally discriminated against (Leyens et al. 2000), it can also be a convenient tool for radical right-wing parties. It is therefore important to study political argumentation through the lens of dehumanization: to investigate whether the rise of right-wing populism brought discursive dehumanization (dehumanization through the use of language) into everyday politics. This study can
thus provide a foundation for cross-cutting studies between social psychology and political science, where both discourses can learn from each other when it comes to studying anti-immigrant attitudes.

Research on everyday dehumanization studies emotions, attitudes, and effects of dehumanization among citizens in non-conflict settings, predominantly western democracies. The expressions of dehumanization, which are studied in this context, are often implicit and partially dehumanizing (Haslam & Loughnan 2014; Volpato & Andrighetto 2015). An emerging field in political science and political participation is everyday politics: the political sphere of ordinary citizens (Highfield 2016). Social psychology has found that dehumanization exists in the form of perceptions and attitudes in the sphere of the everyday. While social psychology can provide insight into the neural and emotional mechanisms of everyday dehumanization, political science can provide the political outlook into dehumanization in everyday politics that engage citizens. Therefore, it is reasonable to inquire whether citizens in their everyday political activities also express dehumanizing views. In the current study, dehumanization is analyzed by using a novel tool built on previous research in social psychology. The extent and use of dehumanization in the debate on begging is mapped through a quantitative content analysis of social media comments. The advantage of using this novel approach to dehumanization is that it enables the study of subtle forms of dehumanization. Furthermore, it aids in the process of bringing order to the conceptional quagmire of social science studies on dehumanization. I will return to this issue in chapter 2.

By studying discursive dehumanization in everyday politics the contribution that this study makes is threefold: 1) To provide a foundation for studying dehumanization in political science by connecting it to right-wing populism, 2) as well as creating an analytical instrument for studying subtle forms of discursive dehumanization. By doing this, the study also 3) complements existing studies on everyday dehumanization by exposing that the dehumanizing views that ordinary people hold are also reflected in their political views and the arguments that they put forward.
1.2 Purpose and Research Question

The ambition of this cross-cutting study is to bridge the gap between right-wing populism and dehumanization, political science and social psychology. This is going to be achieved by applying a theoretical framework from social psychology to everyday politics. By doing this, the study will also complement existing studies within the field of dehumanization. The purpose of this thesis is thus to examine manifestations of dehumanization in everyday politics with the question:

*Whether and how dehumanization is used in the debate on street begging in everyday politics?*

Since there is no data on the prevalence of dehumanizing arguments in the political debate, the study sets out to answer whether dehumanization is used in social media discussions for and against begging. Given that this is a descriptive study, the question of *how dehumanization is used* is answered by examining which elements of dehumanization that are expressed in the debate, and their frequencies.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This paper consists of 5 chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical background and gives the foundation for studying dehumanization as a phenomenon and within political science. The third chapter gives a detailed description of how the study has been carried out regarding method and material selection as well as operationalization and analytical framework. Chapter 4 gives an outline of the results and discusses their implications in the light of previous research. Chapter 5 concludes the study results. Appendix 1-3 shows the analytical tool, the code sheet and examples of how they were applied.
2 Theory

The theory chapter is divided into three parts: anti-immigration rhetoric and attitudes, everyday politics, and dehumanization. The first part places dehumanization within a political science discourse and proposes possible connections between dehumanization and hostile attitudes towards immigration. The second part of the theory chapter deals with previous research on everyday politics: political participation and attitudes online. The final part consists of a brief outline of dehumanization as a research field, concept and definitions, and relationship to other concepts.

2.1 Anti-immigration rhetoric and attitudes

The purpose of this paper is to place dehumanization within a general discussion in political science and connect it to state of the art discussions on migration issues. As previously explained, scholars within social psychology have found evidence of a correlation between dehumanization and actual anti-immigrant sentiments. Modern research on anti-immigration rhetoric and attitudes is mostly conducted under the larger umbrella of right-wing populism. This begs the question of how dehumanization as a factor fits into the debate on immigration policy and the rise of radical populist right-wing parties. This section is therefore devoted to a brief sketch of right-wing populist rhetoric connected to dehumanization. Thereafter the relationship between threat perception and dehumanization is outlined.

Negative attitudes towards immigration are what distinguish the electorate of populist radical right parties from that of other parties (Norris 2005). Scholars within political science have proposed several explanatory factors for why people vote for populist right-wing parties or parties on the extreme right. These factors can be divided into micro, meso and macro levels of analysis where we have both demand and supply side variables (Mudde 2007). Among micro-level explanations, nativism (the preference for native people before immigrants) is a crucial factor behind populist radical right-wing voting (Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2008). Nativism bares resemblance to dehumanization, as the latter is a severe form of devaluation and essentialization of other groups where they are excluded from the realm of humanity
(Leyens et al. 2000). By extension, dehumanization strengthens the feeling of group identity and is often used as a way of legitimizing differential treatment (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015).

2.1.1 Party rhetoric

Beyond ideology, political party propaganda and rhetoric has been proposed as an important factor behind the attraction of populist radical right parties (Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007). Rhetoric, in this case, can be divided into message content and message form respectively (Engesser et al. 2017). Message content denotes what is being presented and message form means how the message is presented, in terms of style and technique. Populist radical right actors employ a combination of radical right and anti-immigration messages with a populist rhetorical toolbox (Wirz et al. 2018). Rhetorical content of right wing-populist actors contain elements of exclusion of certain societal groups, while parties on the more radical end use harsh anti-immigration communication (Mudde 2007; Wirz et al. 2018).

Dehumanizing metaphors are a documented part of anti-immigration content, even in present day. On a general level, dehumanization can be utilized to justify all kinds of action from inequalities to violence. Individuals might seek to justify and protect the status quo and their position of privilege by adhering to an idea that refugees or "others" are undeserving of the same treatment. It can thus, be used as a way to relieve feelings of guilt that might arise from the mistreatment of someone (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015; Esses, Medianu & Lawson 2013). The imagery can play into a politics of fear, which can be utilized politically in order to mobilize support for restrictive immigration policies (Bleiker et al. 2013).

Metaphors depicting people as vermin and pests is something most people associate with the infamous depictions of Jewish people as rats during the Holocaust, or Tutsis as cockroaches during the genocide in Rwanda (Livingstone Smith 2011). Still, this form of animalistic dehumanization exists even today when the media, politicians, and opinion makers argue for restricted immigration. For example, refugees have been depicted as vermin and carriers of disease in Canadian media. The claim is that if refugees are allowed into the country, they will spread infectious disease and
contaminate the environment (Esses, Medianu & Lawson 2013). In 2015 a columnist in the Sun depicted refugees in Calais as a plague of cockroaches, and former British Prime Minister David Cameron indirectly referred to migrants coming to the UK as insects by calling them "a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean…” (Anderson 2017: 13). In these xenophobic statements, dehumanizing metaphors are used as a way of expressing that migrants are an alleged threat as they come in large numbers and are implied to be a contagion.

Although there are many similarities, it is worth noting that not all dehumanizing statements take a stance against immigration, and not all arguments against immigration are dehumanizing. For instance, “taking care of group x is not our responsibility” is an example of an argument against receiving refugees or economic migrants. Yet, it is not an example of dehumanization.

It is predominantly the ideology of the populist radical right that we associate with dehumanization. However, a populist rhetoric style can lend itself to dehumanizing metaphors. The idea of the people versus the elite is often expressed through the use of simple, ordinary language that can appeal to the man in the street as well as polarizing rhetoric where someone is either friend or foe (Bos et al. 2013; Engesser et al. 2017). Immigrants and asylum seekers are often a target when populists assign blame (Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Engesser et al. 2017). One example is the sentiment refugees are bogus, which is an example of moral dehumanization of refugees (Esses, Medianu & Lawson 2013). The statement is a simplified way of expressing the opinion that refugees are not really in need, but are immoral people who would not stop at any measure to get into a country (Esses et al. 2008). Consequently, it is also an example of populist rhetorical form as it paints a clear picture of a foe by using very simple language. The populist rhetorical form should not be discarded as mere rhetoric. It is important to acknowledge the possible impact of the rhetorical tools themselves. For example, an experimental study by Bos et al. (2013) found that populist style had a positive impact on their perceived legitimacy among lower educated and politically cynical voters.
2.1.2 Sense of Threat

An increasing amount of scholars are beginning to question the economic inequality theory as the sole reason for people to support populist parties (Norris & Ingelhart 2016; Lucassen & Lubbers 2012). One pervasive theoretical macro-level explanation in the literature is a perceived ethnic threat from immigration. As concluded by Mudde (2007), these studies provide mixed results. Many of these studies investigate the relationship between the level of immigration or refugee intake and support for populist radical right parties. Consequently, this is at best a proxy for a perceived threat, as we cannot equate immigration figures with perceptions. It is therefore critical to distinguish realistic threats, that is, actual competition over resources such as jobs and welfare from symbolic threats, i.e. the anticipation or fear that a difference in values, norms and morality may result in adverse outcomes (Stephan et al. 1998). More recent studies have used surveys to directly measure perceived economic or cultural threats on micro-level, where the latter has been highlighted as the most significant (Lucassen & Lubbers 2012).

The claim that immigration is a threat to norms, culture or social cohesion has been highlighted as a crucial way for populist right-wing parties to mobilize support (Ivarsflaten 2008). The experience of losing power and influence in a society makes people especially susceptible to populist ideas: "the rise of populist parties reflects, above all, a reaction against a wide range of rapid cultural changes that seem to be eroding the basic values and customs of Western societies" (Norris & Ingelhart 2016). A recent study on right-wing populist voting in Sweden lends support for this conclusion. Among voters for the Sweden Democrats, 82-85% agree with a statement that immigration threatens Swedish culture by weakening it, and 96-98% believe that immigration leads to an increase in criminality. By contrast the 49 respectively 80 percent of voters for the Swedish conservative party Moderaterna shared this view. As for the Social Democrats, only 22% agreed that immigrants posed a threat to Swedish culture, and 43% thinks immigration increases criminality (Jylhä, Rydgren & Strimling 2018). In correspondence with earlier studies, the sense of economic threat was lower compared to cultural threat, on 31-37% (Jylhä, Rydgren & Strimling 2018; Lucassen & Lubbers 2012).
The direction of the relationship between threat perception and support for right-wing populist parties is yet to be established. Previous studies indicate that the relationship is bidirectional, where right-wing populist parties influence threat perception, and threat perception, in turn, leads to support for right-wing populist parties (Berning & Schlueter 2015). It is thus possible that harsh anti-immigration rhetoric contributes to the perception of immigrants as threatening among party followers, as well as the public (Berning & Schlueter 2015; Rydgren 2007; Louis, Esses & Lalonde 2013). Negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety can shape the attitudes of citizens, especially those with lower education levels (Matthes and Schmuck 2017; Stephan et al. 1998; Wirz et al. 2018).

On an empirical level, sense of threat and dehumanization are two distinct psychological phenomena even though they tend to appear together (Haslam 2006; Maoz & MacCauley 2008; Louis, Esses & Lalonde 2013). Results of previous experiments in social psychology show that a decreased perception of threat is correlated with decreased dehumanization (Prati et al. 2016). In these studies, both symbolic and realistic threats, as well as feelings of worry and intergroup anxiety are measured (Prati 2016; Stephan & Stephan 2000). The proposed correlation between the two is that perceived threat is an antecedent to dehumanization, and several studies have results to support that conclusion (Maoz & MacCauley 2008; Louis, Esses & Lalonde 2013; Prati et al. 2016). More specifically, dehumanization has been established as a mediator between sense of threat and hostile attitudes towards immigration (Louis, Esses & Lalonde 2013).

In conclusion, the relationship between dehumanization and anti-immigration attitudes can work in many ways. Dehumanization can play a rhetorical role in the expression of populist and anti-immigration opinions and politicians have been known to occasionally use dehumanizing language to convey political messages. This suggests that some of the people who hold negative attitudes toward immigration in general and EU migrants in particular, also express dehumanizing arguments in the debate. Therefore it is likely that dehumanization is used to some extent in the debate, and these attitudes are likely to be held by people who argue for a ban against street begging. In addition, dehumanization itself can be a facilitating mechanism between threat perception and hostile attitudes toward immigration, as some studies find. At the same time, there is a
correlation between perceiving immigration as a cultural threat, and having negative attitudes towards immigration. If dehumanization mediates the relationship between sense of threat and hostile attitudes towards immigrant, we are likely to find dehumanization on all party pages, as party supporters across the board perceive immigration as a threat to some extent (Jylhä, Rydgren & Strimling 2018).

2.2 Everyday politics

In this paper everyday politics is a form of political participation. Rather than politics by politicians, everyday politics is politics by the people. This concept requires an appreciation of politics as more than voting, protesting or political speeches and reforms. In this day and age, everyday politics takes place on various social media platforms (Highfield 2016). Therefore, this chapter deals with political participation and activities online, including empirical data from Sweden to better interpret the results of this study.

Most notably political participation on social media has gained the public’s attention through online mobilization and collective action during the Arab spring. Whether social media can bring about or enhance democracy, transparency, and accountability is a disputed topic and the initial positivity around the power of Social Media has partly faded and turned into skepticism (Bellin 2012; Halpern & Gibbs 2013; Harlow & Johnson 2011). Some studies show a positive correlation between social media activity and support for civil liberties and democratic norms (Swigger 2013; Placek 2017). At the same time, Facebook is being used as a tool to spread hatred and violence. United Nations investigator to Myanmar established that Facebook had played a role in inciting violence against the Rohingya people: “It[social media] has ... substantively contributed to the level of acrimony and dissension and conflict, if you will, within the public. Hate speech is certainly of course a part of that.” (Miles 2018).

Notwithstanding this discussion, social media platforms are important forums for citizens to express, debate and share their political opinions in democratic societies. The Internet has brought a whole range of new forms of resource effective participation. These acts are usually on the smaller end of the spectrum, ranging from sharing and liking images, texts and video clips to participating in online campaigns (Margetts
2019). Even though hashtags such as #blacklivesmatter, #metoo, and #bringbackourgirls have gained enormous attention, protests and calls for collective action are just a small part of this discussion. Often the purpose of the campaigns is to gain attention, tell a story and express emotions (Highfield 2016). At the same time, studies on political participation suggest that expressing political views online is a form of slacktivism that rarely leads to other forms of political engagement offline. A less cynical take is that political participation merely has moved into the Internet arena (Vissers & Stolle 2013). Nowadays citizens sign petitions, communicate with officials, and political groups in the virtual rather than physical world (Schlozman, Verba & Brady 2010).

The Internet is also a key place for voters to interact with politicians and parties who in turn are increasingly dependent on social media to get their messages out (Ernst et al. 2017). If social media is a platform for the uncensored opinions of the public (Ceron 2014), it is also a way for populist politicians to speak to the public without interference from journalists (Ernst et al. 2017; Domonkos 2015): ”While the mass media adhere to professional norms and news values, social media serve as direct linkage to the people and allow the populists to circumvent the journalistic gatekeepers” (Engesser et al. 2017: 1110).

Many have raised concerns about the dangers to democracy in this new playing field, as this dark side of social media reveals “fake news,” echo chambers, automated propaganda accounts, voter manipulation, and dark ads directed at specific groups (Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018; Margetts 2019). Facebook collects user information in order to target content to affect the desires, perceptions, and actions of the users. This material can easily be taken advantage of by not only advertisers but by political actors who wish to sway political opinion and impact voting behavior. Examples include Cambridge Analytica and Russian election interference (Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018).

On the most extreme end, we see groups such as Isis find sympathizers and recruit new members via platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Awan 2017). Right-wing extremist groups use the Internet for mobilization and to strengthen internal linkages (Caiani & Parenti 2013). At the same time, survey research in Sweden shows a
shift in opinion from support for the right to express extreme views online to a majority supporting the limitation of that right (Internetstiftelsen 2018).

In tandem with this development, Twitter and Facebook have increased their restrictions on which opinions users are allowed to express on their respective platforms (Dredge 2015; Gadde & Harvey 2018). Twitter has recently banned dehumanizing language on their site, stating that: “Language that makes someone less than human can have repercussions off the service, including normalizing serious violence” (Gadde & Harvey 2018). Furthermore, people are being taken to court for posting dehumanizing content on social media. A Swedish man was recently prosecuted for hate speech after he compared Arabs with different animals (Iselidh 2018).

A study by Mellon and Prosser (2017) found that Facebook and Twitter users were more educated and more liberal than the general population. The results were entirely driven by a demographic difference in age, gender, and education. In consequence, social media is in many countries not representative of the general population. This year, 20% of Swedes have expressed political opinions online (Internetstiftelsen 2018). This number overreaches the number of Swedish people who are members of political parties by far. In 2011, this number had halved to 250,000 over the last 20 years (Sandberg & Bjereld 2015). In accordance with previous research in other countries, people who are younger, more liberal, as well as men participate to a considerably higher extent than the rest of the population (Sandberg & Bjereld 2015; Internetstiftelsen 2018). It is, nevertheless, the politically interested who express their political opinions most frequently. The difference between politically interested a non-interested in Sweden is 45% respectively 7% (Internetstiftelsen 2018). Although bipartisan discussions exist, on a general level, users tend to interact with people with the same political conviction (Jungerr 2016). The same is true in the Swedish case, where people engage in discussions with people who share their political opinions to a significantly larger extent (Internetstiftelsen 2018). These echo chambers of people sharing the same political convictions, and reproducing the same content and ideas, are feared as threats to democracy by some who believe that they lead to polarization and foster extreme opinions (Margetts 2019; Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018). The majority of comments on all Party pages in Sweden is positive towards the party and show support for their respective political proposals (Falasca, Dymek and Grandien 2017).
The reason can, of course, be that people tend to interact with those from the same party, but there is also a possibility that the parties themselves remove negative comments (Ibid). All parties in this current study demand a respectful tone in their respective terms and conditions. The Moderate Party and the Social Democrat Party also reserves the right to remove comments that include hateful or offensive language (Moderaterna 2018; Socialdemokraterna 2018).

How politicians and political campaigns make use of Facebook and Twitter, and what impact this has on voter behavior is the main discourse in the study of social media in political science (Jungerr 2016; Spierings & Jacobs 2013; Zhang et al. 2010; McKinney et al. 2014; Enli 2017). How citizens engage with politicians or express their attitudes is understudied in comparison. Most studies research volumes of user data without analyzing specific content. One common type of election result forecast is to count the number of likes, followers and party interaction (DiGrazia 2013; Ceron et al. 2014; Engesser et al. 2017). Studies rarely go beyond counting the number of likes when evaluating citizen attitudes online. For example, Bobba et al. (2018) study a gender gap in populist party support by counting the share of likes divided by gender. Evidently, there is a need to go more in-depth in the analysis of citizen attitudes and behavior on social media, as the study of how and which attitudes citizens express online is has been left untouched.

In summary, previous research finds that extremism can grow and populist right-wing voices are expressing themselves online, while the majority of Internet users are more liberal and more educated than the general population. Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook prohibit dehumanizing language in their respective terms of condition, and the probability that arguments unrelated to dehumanization are the most central to the debate, we should expect few indications of blatant dehumanization using animal metaphors. Given that this type of behavior can result in anything from being banned from the site to being prosecuted, people probably shy from using very stark language. Especially on sites such as Facebook, where there is no anonymity.
2.3 Dehumanization – An overview

This chapter is designed to describe dehumanization as a theoretical concept, and define the intersections and differences with other phenomena in order to give clarity and provide a foundation for building the analytical instrument. The first section gives an overview of the field of dehumanization and the main strands of research. The rest of the chapter outlines the concept and definitions of dehumanization, as well as the relationship with other concepts.

2.3.1 Introduction to the Field of Dehumanization

Given the multidisciplinary nature of dehumanization as a phenomenon, the concept has previously been studied in multiple fields of research. These fields include psychology, sociology, anthropology, communication, and to a limited extent within political science. The predominant part of dehumanization research is, however, conducted within social psychology (Haslam and Stratemeyer 2016). This strand will consequently occupy the main part of this review. As this paper is a review of the use of dehumanizing language, media depictions of the phenomena are also included in this chapter.

Early dehumanization research focused on the context of conflict and mass violence (Kelman; 1973; Opotow 1990; Bandura 1999). Dehumanization was studied primarily as an enabler and a mechanism of genocide. It is a way to morally justify and distance oneself from atrocious acts that would be unacceptable under normal circumstances (Opotow 1990; Bandura 1999). There has been a significant proliferation of studies on dehumanization within the last decade. The lion's share of these studies has been conducted in social psychology and neighboring fields. Focus has shifted from the study of dehumanization in intergroup conflict to everyday non-conflict settings where perceptions of other groups are studied. Studies have shown that dehumanization is not exclusively an inter-group phenomenon, as previously assumed, since individuals can also be victims of dehumanization (Haslam 2006). Within social psychology, much interest has been vested in studying the emotional response to different stimuli that are said to trigger dehumanization and the effect that this has on attitudes and perceptions of the dehumanized group (Haslam 2006; Haslam & Loughnan 2014). The majority of
these studies are experimental studies in laboratory environments where dehumanization of fictive groups has been studied. A handful of studies have been conducted where attitudes toward existing groups have been examined. These include blatant dehumanization of Muslim refugees in Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as disgust as a mediator of dehumanizing attitudes towards Roma people in Norway (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018; Dalsklev & Kunst 2015).

As previously noted, dehumanization is not just an outcome, but dehumanizing attitudes can lead to support for violence, differential treatment and individual action against other groups even in democratic societies (Maoz & McCauley 2008). For example, people who dehumanize terrorists support the idea that the Swedish military should use torture as a means to fight terrorism (Lindén et al. 2015). People who dehumanize are also more likely to take action against immigration through protests and petitions and support aggressive behavior against them (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018). Dehumanization also decreases willingness and propensity to help after natural disasters (Andrighetto 2015; Cuddy 2007). Dehumanization can still affect the victim, even in situations where it does not lead to other outcomes. Individual effects of dehumanization have previously been studied through the experience of being dehumanized and the effects on the dehumanized individual. Dehumanizing maltreatment result in feelings of guilt and shame, as well as the feeling of lower social status (Hartley & Fleay 2017; Bastian & Haslam 2011; Volpato & Contarello 1999).

Media and communication research, on the other hand, has focused on dehumanizing depictions in news media. These depictions are predominantly in the form of animal-metaphors or animal related words, disease and contamination, natural disaster or pollution metaphors (Steuter & Wills 2010; Santa Ana 1999; Santa Ana 2002; O’Brien 2003a; Bleiker et al. 2013; Anderson 2017). In 2007, American paper the Columbus Dispatch included a cartoon in which the map of Iran had been replaced by a sewer swarming with cockroaches (Livingstone Smith 2011). In 2005 campaigns for British Parliament, images of refugees as flows, floods or tidal waves were used as a way of emphasizing not only sheer numbers but also how immigrants allegedly transform the land that they sweep across in a damaging way (Charteris-Black 2006). In the United States, Mexican immigration has been referred to as a "brown tide": a local metaphor that connotes a brown algae infestation off the Gulf of Mexico (Santa Ana 2002).
During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump tweeted "Crooked Hillary Clinton wants to flood our country with Syrian immigrants" (Utych 2018). These statements should not be discarded as mere rhetoric. There has been some cross-fertilization between social psychology, and media studies, in the study of dehumanization. Previous studies have shown that negative portrayals of immigrants impact dehumanizing attitudes within the audience (Esses, Medianu & Lawson 2013). In turn, dehumanizing depictions of immigrants lead to negative attitudes towards immigration (Utych 2018; Goméz-Martínez & de la Villa Moral- Jiménez 2018).

2.3.2 The Concept of Dehumanization

Many people are surprised to hear that dehumanization has not been widely studied in social science, chiefly because the word is often used as a tool in debates, especially surrounding sensitive issues (Livingstone Smith 2011). Dehumanization was mentioned 10-30 times per year by Swedish newspapers between the years 1960 and 2012, while in 2015 the usage peaked at 794 times (Svenska Dagstidningar 2018). At the same time, clear definitions, systematic analyses, and supporting evidence are lacking both in the debate itself and the study of it. This conclusion is further supported by Haslam et al. (2008a) who emphasize how the myriad of studies under the umbrella of dehumanization fail to show when dehumanization can be claimed. This suggests that a systematic and transparent approach to dehumanization is needed, especially in social science.

Dehumanization can be expressed in different ways: discursively, in the treatment of others as well as experienced. Regardless of which, it stems from the perception of the other as subhuman (Livingstone Smith 2011). Most scholars agree that dehumanization should not be seen as a dichotomous concept where dehumanization is either absent or present. It usually described as working on a continuum or on a discrete scale (Oliver 2011; Livingstone Smith 2011; Savage 2013). This assumption is adopted across the board, in social sciences, psychology, and neuroscience.

Dehumanization has been described as a spectrum from mild to severe, or subtle to blatant. When it comes to dehumanizing actions, genocide is usually recognized as the most severe expression of dehumanization (Livingstone Smith 2011), while social
exclusion and slight degradation are considered as milder forms (Haslam & Loughnan 2014). However, an important question, which every scholar much address, is from where this scale departs, and whether infrahumanization – the denial of uniquely human emotions (Leyens et al. 2000) is recognized as a form of dehumanization. The problem can partly be attributed to a lack of definitions, which we will return to later in this chapter. Another reason is the lack of clarity regarding what is meant by the terms subtle and blatant dehumanization. Usually, these words refer to either a perception of the other or how the other is described, rather than dehumanization actions.

There is no consensus among dehumanization scholars on what is meant by subtle or blatant dehumanization, and the terms are often used without being defined. Whether this is a question of degrees of overtness, or whether someone is partly or fully dehumanized is not always clear. In order for scholars to build descriptive theories on dehumanization, it is important to clarify what is meant by these terms. The distinction is also important to make since the produced effect is different depending on the form of dehumanization. Whereas distinctive feature of subtle forms of dehumanization is that they can permeate social relations regardless of intergroup conflict, or the knowledge of the actors involved, blatant dehumanization is direct, explicit and overt. The latter is said to be more closely connected to aggressive attitudes, support for torture and violent action towards other groups (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015; Kteily et al. 2015). By using distinctions made by Haslam and Loughnan (2014), and Kteily and Bruneau (2017) respectively I have created a matrix of different examples of discursive dehumanization to clarify the concept, and to illustrate the differences between different types of dehumanization.
Figure 1: The Spectrum of dehumanization

This figure shows dehumanization on a scale between implicit and explicit, respectively partial and full dehumanization. The mathematical distance between the examples is not an accurate depiction; it is rather an illustration of the relationship.

Many scholars use the term subtle dehumanization to refer to a partial exclusion from humanity; others use it to signify that the dehumanization is implicitly conveyed (Haslam & Loughnan 2014). When a group is partially excluded, they are deprived of certain aspects of their humanity such as agency, and when a group is fully excluded, they are deprived of their full humanity (Figure 1). When Bruneau et al. (2018) use the term blatant dehumanization they refer to expressions that are both overt and absolutely dehumanizing, such as calling someone a subhuman, pests or vermin (Figure 1, upper right corner).

Not all animal metaphors are fully dehumanizing. Calling someone an Ape is a way of explicitly denying a person some human characteristics such as cognitive abilities (Figure 1, upper left corner). The reason is, that humans and several other apes share a closer taxonomical relationship than lets say humans and rats. Animal metaphors with a more distant relationship to humans are consequently an explicit and more absolute
exclusion from humanity. A group that is depicted as pests or vermin is being denied both cognitive and emotional abilities, while a person depicted as an ape is only being denied cognitive abilities (Tipler & Ruscher 2014).

Using animal-related words to describe the actions and behavior of humans is an indirect, yet still a way of fully dehumanizing someone (Figure 1, lower right corner). Examples of such sentences are "Suspected al-Qaida Nest", "Muslim Sect Breeding ground for Al- Qa’ida" and “public benefits are a lure to immigrants” (Steuter & Wills 2010: 155-156; Santa Ana 1999). By using terminology that is associated with animals rather than humans of the 21th century their inhumaness is implied.

This study will predominantly study forms of dehumanization, which are partially excluding, and on the implicit end of the dehumanization spectra, as it is highly unlikely that blatant forms of dehumanization exist in moderated areas of social media. This form is often referred to as subtle dehumanization (Figure 1, lower left corner). This occurs when a group is implicitly deprived of one aspect of their humanity, by for example being called immoral, irrational or unrefined (Haslam 2006).

2.3.3 Defining Dehumanization

Conceptual discussions are often lacking in the study of dehumanization especially in social science. In many cases, definitions are often implied or simply assumed without argument. One example is an otherwise ambitious study by Haagensen & Croes (2012) where the empirical indicators used in their study is a compilation of dehumanizing manifestations found in other studies. Steuter and Wills (2010) use the same approach in their analysis of media discourse and the war on terror. They depart from previously established animal metaphors without defining dehumanization.

In sociology, dehumanization has been defined as the essentialization and denial of the humanness of a group, which is subsequently excluded: ”a denial that a certain group is ‘equally’ human, no matter how ‘humanity’ is defined” (Savage 2013:143). In this case, the door is left open for all possible meanings one might put into the word
dehumanization. By adding the term ‘equally’ human, all forms of partial and verbally subtle dehumanization are included. This definition is consequently rather wide. By not defining who belongs to the realm of humanity, or what makes a human we do, however, open up for arbitrary categorizations of dehumanization. In addition, if we are interested in studying aspects of dehumanization beyond self-explaining dehumanizing metaphors, we also need to define what humanness is. Otherwise, we cannot study dehumanization in negative terms, i.e., what someone is not. These definitions are lacking across the board with only a few exceptions (Haslam 2006; Savage 2013).

Others apply stricter definitions of dehumanization, which do not encompass partial dehumanization: "The act of conceiving of people as subhuman creatures rather than as human beings" (Livingstone Smith 2011: 37). In this case, a person must be perceived as something that is truly subhuman. It is not sufficient to be for example treated as an object (Livingstone Smith 2011). These narrow definitions certainly serve the purpose of not watering down the concept. However, the problem is that this definition only allows us to study dehumanization in contexts marked by extreme violence and atrocities. The everyday and less blatant expressions of dehumanization are lost if we use this definition as a measurement.

In order to study the less direct forms of dehumanization, we need a definition that encompasses subtle forms of dehumanization. Therefore this study adopts a definition widely used in social psychology. This study defines dehumanization as the act of perceiving someone as less than fully human (Haslam and Stratemeyer 2016: 25). Seeing someone as less than human can serve as a way of legitimizing dehumanizing practices (Haslam & Stratemeyer 2016). Within contemporary social psychology “less than” human usually implies a scale of humanness rather than a dichotomous relationship. Someone can be subhuman, non-human or less than human compared to others. If we accept that “several features are consensually considered necessary (though none of them is sufficient) to be perceived as human beings” (Leyens et al. 2000: 187), we can agree that being denied one of those qualities is dehumanizing. In other words, the quality of being a rational person is not sufficient to qualify as a human. In that case, artificial intelligence could be human. However, rationality is one of the features, which are considered necessary to be called a human.
Is dehumanization rendered superfluous when we have concepts such as prejudice, racism and ethnic discrimination? The answer is no. In this section I will explain why by distinguishing dehumanization from other related concepts.

Since dehumanization is often used as a tool to legitimize differential treatment and segregation, it can be used for purposes of ethnic discrimination and subjugation of women (Haslam 2006; Volpato & Andrighetto 2015). Racism as an ideology is built on the idea that different groups of people can be divided into subgroups based on their alleged qualities, characteristics, and capabilities. Patriarchal ideas are based on the notion that women are inferior to men. Dehumanization is also an idea based on the belief that there are vertical divides between groups of people. Hence, the main similarity is that they are methods to debase other groups. They are, however, different constructs. For example, dehumanizing metaphors attain a sexual dimension when women are depicted as "prey" such as bunnies, which distinguishes it from the common prey metaphor where men are portrayed as game animals. By attributing such metaphors to women it implies that these women are flirty temptresses that are easily dominated and passive (Tipler & Ruscher 2017). The implication of the female prey metaphor is that women should be domesticated. This metaphor can consequently be seen as a justification of the subjugation of women. However, sexism can occur without dehumanization and vice versa. Women can be treated as objects and simultaneously being seen as human (Livingstone Smith 2011). The same goes for dehumanization based on ethnicity, sexual orientation and of people with disabilities.

Although prejudice and dehumanization appear simultaneously in some cases, they too are conceptually different (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018; Kteily et al 2015; Harris & Fiske 2011). Prejudice is defined as negative attitudes towards a person due to them belong to a particular group, for example, a sexual minority (Hodson & MacInnis 2012). The common denominator between dehumanization and prejudice is that they both involve negative sentiments and involve intergroup bias. However, prejudice can involve ascribing someone with any trait, while dehumanization specifically involves the denial of human traits. The central tenet of prejudice is the negative sentiment, while the main component of dehumanization is the rejection of humanness (Hodson &
MacInnis 2012). It is possible to strongly dislike a group of people on account of a stereotype without dehumanizing them. Equally, a person can be dehumanized in the absence of negative prejudice. One such example is the image of the “Noble Savage” who symbolizes goodness while lacking civility and refinement (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018). Accordingly, the sentence "vulnerable people lacking education and knowledge of the Swedish language have no other option but to beg" is not dehumanizing. The reason being that it is permeated with empathy and understanding, rather than negative sentiments.

To conclude this chapter, state of the art dehumanization research can provide some indications on the direction of the results of this study. Dehumanization is conceptually distinct from other related phenomena. It should be regarded as a spectrum where dehumanization can take different forms, and be expressed in a multitude of ways. This study examines discursive dehumanization in particular, and examines both explicit and explicit forms, with a focus on the latter. Given that subtle dehumanization, where someone is implicitly and/or partly denied their humanness is more widespread in everyday contexts, we are more likely to find evidence of this rather than explicit forms. Previous studies show that dehumanizing views exist on a societal level and can be transformed into action. Still, there has been no study of the prevalence of subtle dehumanization in political debate. As for this study, previous research suggests that we should be able to find dehumanizing language in political discussions, but it does not give us an idea of the extent to which it is being used.
3 Methodology

This is a quantitative study designed to map the extent to which dehumanization is used in political discussions online. This chapter presents and discusses the methodological choices and problems of this paper starting with design, method, and material; ending with operationalization, including the analytical tool.

3.1 Design

Even though subtle dehumanization has been extensively studied in other academic fields than political science, this particular method and tool for analysis have not yet been tried. Before the research was initiated there were few indications to whether we would find any evidence of discursive dehumanization. Likewise, it is difficult to generate testable hypotheses from a single case study; therefore a simple case study design was chosen for the study at hand. Even though the definition of a case study has been described as a "definitional morass" (Gerring 2013: 1136), it is despite this a useful way to capture how this study investigates one phenomenon with the help of one political issue.

3.2 Method

The chosen method is a quantitative and descriptive content analysis of social media discussions on street begging. The purpose of the analysis is to describe the substance characteristics of social media content. Finding indications of more subtle forms of dehumanization is a challenge, but in order to bring stringency and predictability to an otherwise eclectic field in social science, it is preferable to turn to quantitative methods. For the same reason, I’m using predefined categories in the analysis. Using quantitative methods also allow us to build on extensive dehumanization research in Social Psychology, and text analysis, in particular, complements previous research in that field.

This study seeks to answer whether and how dehumanization is used in political discussion on social media. Therefore, the frequency and type of dehumanizing messages is the focus of the analysis. Since the content analysis is theoretically driven,
the categories are derived from previous literature on dehumanization. You can find more information about the variables and categories in the chapter on Operationalization. Traditionally, units of analysis are coded with the help of a physical code sheet (Esiasson 2017). In this instance, I coded the material through Microsoft Excel. You will find the Codebook in Appendix 2.

Quantitative content analysis is indeed designed to be systematic and objective (Esiasson 2017). The extensive analytical tool (Appendix 1) and the exemplification of the coding process (Appendix 3) are some of the ways in which I tried to achieve this. Still, the superior way of ensuring high reliability is by having multiple coders and to conduct intercoder reliability tests. Due to lack of resources, it was not possible to look at the agreement between the results of independent coders. The fact that I am the sole coder should be taken into account when assessing the reliability of the results of this paper.

3.2.1 Case Selection

Being a humanitarian nation is a central part of Swedish foreign policy, and the country has been called the last bastion of liberal values in Europe (Embury-Dennis 2018; Stavrou 2018; Al Jazeera News 2018). Thus, if we find evidence of dehumanization in Swedish everyday politics, we are likely to find it elsewhere as well. This evidence would also provide strong evidence for the existence of dehumanization towards immigrants in particular and dehumanization in everyday politics general.

Applying the same logic in case selection is ill-advised as this is the first study of its kind and we need to use a case that lets us try the framework of analysis. Dehumanization is expressed through perceptions or treatment of other groups and is predominantly an intergroup phenomenon. The issue of street begging is consequently suitable, as it is centered on the perception of a group of people that exist inside, but apart from Swedish society. Since the issue and the group are closely connected the case provides a good foundation for trying out whether it is possible to conduct a study on discursive dehumanization. This is especially important when it comes to material selection because it allows us to use a neutral term such as begging (tiggeri in Swedish) and still capture a central proportion of the debate. Consequently, this is a matter of
weighing feasibility and the possibility of being able to conduct this study, against external validity. Given that begging is such a contentious issue in Sweden, generalizations to other political issues should be made with caution.

3.3 Material

Getting first-hand access to the space of everyday politics is not easy; as it takes place outside the traditional political sphere and in the informal everyday of citizens (Highfield 2016). It would require us to observe political debates at breakfast tables, in the office, and private associations. Luckily, social media provides a window into everyday politics, as it has become the center stage for people to express their private opinions publically. 72% of all Swedes use Facebook, 60% use Instagram, 38% use Snapchat, and 22% use Twitter (Davidsson, Palm & Mandre 2018). Even though Instagram provide the opportunity to comment and engage in political discussions, it is rarely used as such. For example, the search term "beggar" (tiggare in Swedish) almost exclusively generates pictures of cute dogs begging for food. Which makes Facebook and Twitter the most suitable platforms for analyzing political opinions.

Even though a large proportion of the Swedish population use Social Media, we cannot claim that this group is representative of the general population, as Internet users and non-internet users differ in some important regards. In the case of Sweden as well as other countries, Internet users are less authoritarian and more positive towards immigration than the general population (Sandberg & Bjereld 2015; Mellon & Prosser 2017). It is also important to keep in mind that the discussant in this study might differ from the general population because they chose to partake in political discussions, something that not all citizens do.

The selection of sources was based on several criteria. Accessibility and representation were important factors. In order to avoid bias in the selection, the material had to encompass both sides of the debate and not include forums where we are most likely to find dehumanization. Consequently, certain popular forums on the fringe such as flashback and Swedish far-right forum Samtiden (formerly known as Avpixlat) were not an option. In addition, forums that offer anonymity tend to have a harder tone than for example Facebook (Halpern & Gibbs 2013). Large social media platforms such as
Twitter and Facebook have terms of use that does not allow hateful language. Twitter has now moved even further to ban dehumanizing language in particular (Gadde & Harvey 2018). This is not necessarily a problem for this study, as it focuses on mapping subtle dehumanization.

Virtually every Swedish newspaper has removed the ability to comment their articles online, as well as social media. The reason being the difficulty to moderate the online forum to ensure that the discussion does not escalate, especially in discussions around sensitive issues such as immigration (Granström 2018; Aftonbladet 2014). Which restricts the possibility to use comments on news articles as sources.

The chosen unit of analysis is comments and posts from Facebook and Twitter. As these comments are predominantly one sentence long, we do not have to worry too much about pulling sentences out of context. Furthermore, some contextual interpretations had to be made regarding whether the comment is an answer to another comment and the current discussion topic. For example, if a person writes, “no [name of another discussant], you are wrong,” it is interpreted as a positioning against the discussant whom they referred to in their comment.

3.3.1 Data collection

For purposes of external validity, the optimum method would be random sampling. However, the limitations of the respective social media platforms do not allow this, which propels us to use other methods of selection. Facebook has become extremely restrictive on handing out large amounts of data after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which makes automatized data collection very difficult. Hence, the information will be manually collected from party Facebook pages. When this study commenced, and before the data was analyzed there was no way of knowing whether we would find a sufficient amount of dehumanizing comments to study development over time, which is why the study is limited to one period. The time period from which data was gathered is 2017-2018, which is the time frame of the current debate. Consequently, the parties that are represented in this study are the ones that have been vocal about the issue on social media. This selection coincides with those who have played the most active part in the debate: Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD), Social Democrats
(Socialdemokraterna, S), and the Moderate Party (Nya Moderaterna, M). The data set created for this study contains a total of 586 comments, where 461 of these are Facebook comments (167= Sweden Democrat, 137= Social democrat and 157= Moderate Party) and 125 are Twitter comments. In contrast to private Facebook groups, a public party page is a discussion between parties and citizens thus a much more open and accessible forum for discussion. The selection of posts was based on which were most discussed (amount of comments, likes, and reactions). Therefore we are less likely to find dehumanization here, which means that the conclusions derived from this paper can represent a baseline in private forums.

I used the same period for Twitter as Facebook and made sure to disable the quality filters before collecting the data. Due to Twitter search metrics and filters, it is complicated, if not impossible to collect all the tweets that exist on a specific topic. Consequently, it is hard to know the sheer size of the population of tweets from which we draw our sample (Lorentzen & Nolin 2017). Using the same method of selection for Twitter as I did for Facebook is not feasible, as people interact with specific politicians rather than parties, which would make the selection method too time-consuming. A term such as begging is not exclusively used in the debate around this particular issue, but other discussions as well. Therefore, I chose to use the most popular hashtag to discuss Swedish politics #svpol and combined it with the term "beggars" OR "begging". All comments in the search were collected for analysis. By using this hashtag, we only find comments from people who are interested in having a political discussion. Moreover, politicians, journalists, opinion makers, and news outlets are using the hashtag as well. This suggests that it is central to the debate, and not on the fringe or an extreme end of the political spectra.

Afterwards, the collected data was filtered according to criteria of relevance: Whether the statement or comment is addressing the issue of begging or not. For example: "if you collaborate with party x you will win the election", is excluded accordingly. Comments that are related to other issues will not be included. Examples of non-relevant comments are those who slander other political parties, personal attacks on other discussants, tagged friends etc. Spam was also filtered away in the coding process. Comments posted several times were counted as one in order to avoid a skewed result (Ceron et al. 2014).
3.3.2 Ethical Considerations

Research on Social Media is a developing social science field, and naturally articles, which deal with ethical risk and dilemmas, are few (Moreno et al. 2013). A pivotal question that research on Social Media needs to answer is whether it involves human subjects or not. In order to not qualify as research without human subjects, the following criteria need to be met: “access to the SMW[Social Media Website] is public; information is identifiable, but not private; and information gathering requires no interaction with the person who posted it online” (Moreno et al. 2013: 16). Regarding the current study, the information is publicly available on the Party pages and Twitter hashtags. I did not interact with any of the subjects, nor the Facebook pages, or collect any of their personal information. The units of analysis in this study are the comments, not the users. As I have not obtained consent from the discussants, I chose to exclude all personal information and personal identifiers when giving reference, as gender and Party page. This is a small trade-off given that this information is interesting, but not imperative for the reader to acquire.

3.4 Data analysis

This section builds on the overview and conceptualization of dehumanization from the theory chapter and contains the method of analysis: operationalization, indicators and analytical framework.

3.4.1 Operationalization

Psychologist Nick Haslam’s theory of dehumanization was used as a basis for the operationalization. His theory is the most highly developed theory as it has sprung from empirical research and has been tested empirically by different scholars. It is based on an extensive literature review in which he analyses different conceptualizations, and subsequently presents two forms or facets of dehumanization (Haslam 2006). This disaggregation has been corroborated by subsequent research on dehumanizing perceptions and experiences (Bastian & Haslam 2011; Andrighetto et al. 2014; Hartley & Fleay 2017). The two forms are derived from the idea that there are two distinct ways to define humanness. One definition states that there are distinct characteristics that
make us human, i.e. typically human traits such as agency, individuality, emotional responsiveness, cognitive openness and interpersonal warmth. The other definition postulates traits that differentiate humans from animals, i.e. uniquely human traits such as civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality, and maturity (Haslam 2006). These aspects of dehumanization are featured in the table below, including ways in which these attributed can be denied. By using this theory we are also able to study subtle expressions of dehumanization, where someone is partly, or implicitly dehumanized.

Table from Haslam (2006:257)

Defining humanness according to human essence and what makes us human easily leads to subjective judgments and normative assumptions about what the core of a human being is. In addition, dehumanization focused on the denial of human essence is more closely associated with the dehumanization of groups other than immigrants. For example, depersonalization and emotional non-responsiveness can characterize doctor-patient relationships, and objectification of women generally involves a denial of agency and individuality (Haque & Waytz 2012; Tipler & Ruscher 2017). Whereas the denial of characteristics that differentiate humans from animals is related to vertical hierarchies and lower status (Bastian & Haslam 2011; Haslam 2006). Negative stereotypes of Roma people depict them as lazy, unhygienic, criminals, with hostile and aggressive behavior (Orosz et al. 2018), which are all associated with animalistic dehumanization. Therefore, I have chosen to restrict this inquiry to examine the dehumanization of uniquely human traits. The research by Orosz et al. (2018) on Roma in particular, as well as research on the dehumanization of immigrants in general (Esses
et al. 2008), leads to the careful expectation that moral dehumanization will appear in the results.

3.2.2 Operational Indicators

Drawing from Haslam’s definition of human uniqueness I have created different indicators for subtle dehumanization. Since these aspects of dehumanization are common adjectives used to describe someone, dictionaries along with previous research on dehumanization have provided definitions and examples. The analytical matrix (Appendix 1) was construed prior to the analysis, and only downgrading examples were used. The variables coarseness and lack of culture are difficult to separate both in theory and practice. Some dictionary definitions overlap, where lack of manners or impoliteness is sometimes used to define both adjectives. Politeness and cleanliness were thus connected to lack of culture, while aggressive and offensive behavior was classified as coarseness before the initiation of the study. However, as the analysis progressed, it became evident that coarseness and lack of culture are difficult to separate also in practice. In the analysis, the two variables were therefore aggregated. Even though previous research in dehumanization displays several examples of so-called moral dehumanization, where immigrants are described as bogus, and as cheaters, I have complemented this by using a breakdown of the rules of common morality. These components are "do not deceive," "keep your promises," "do not cheat," "obey the law" and "do your duty" (Gert 2004). For full operationalization, and examples see Appendix 1. Appendix 3 provides examples of how the analysis was conducted in order to be transparent and give the reader insight into the analytical process.

To capture even more explicit aspects of dehumanization, the categories of animal metaphors and animal behavior was included in the analysis. Since indications of these metaphors were few, the variables were aggregated into one the coding scheme. They are perhaps not as prevalent, but they represent a stark and deliberate form of dehumanization. Although some animals represent the same characteristics that are subtly denied someone, such as cognitive abilities, they are still different categories, as they are linguistically separate expressions. In addition, the less direct type where someone is denied human characteristics can be expressed without the awareness of the perpetrator (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015).
3.2.3 What is not Dehumanization?

In the spirit of good research, it is important to clarify the aspects, which are not indications of dehumanization. Using animal words does not automatically qualify as dehumanization. A person is not automatically dehumanized simply because an animal metaphor is used (Haslam et al. 2008a). A vast amount of idioms and proverbs in many different languages use animal metaphors to highlight positive qualities in people. Expressions such as: "strong like an ox", "as busy as a bee", "night owl" and "top dog" are consequently not dehumanizing. This is because the meaning of the animal word is replaced by another meaning in an idiom.

An example of moral dehumanization is “you see beggars enter a fancy Mercedes at the end of the day, so they are definitely not poor, they’re just want to trick you into thinking that they are", while a sentence stating that "sometimes, the money that they earn go to trafficking" is not dehumanizing. The difference is whether beggars are considered immoral, or whether they are being used. In a similar manner, saying that begging is organized is not dehumanizing in the same way as saying that begging equals organized criminal activity. As many negatively charged words have positively charged counterparts or similes, the former is usually chosen in the context of dehumanization. In the matrix, I only used negatively charged sentences. During the process of analysis I double-checked I consulted dictionaries to confirm whether some words are considered downgrading or not.

Statements that are negative towards a group are not necessarily dehumanizing. "They don't belong here", or "stop imported begging", cannot be classified as dehumanizing unless there is a reference to why they don't belong here, or why imported begging is different from so-called domestic begging. The underlying reason could be dehumanization, but not necessarily. Other examples from this study are: “Ban begging completely, [I’m] so tired of seeing them at every grocery store, by the subway etc” (Appendix 3). Being tired of seeing suffering might be an effect of dehumanization, but we cannot determine that from the statement itself. Even aggressive statements such as "I am so angry at begging, I just want to shove a pizza in their faces" or "we should all stand up and go to every damn store where there's beggar scum" are not dehumanizing on their own.
4 Results and Discussion

The question that this paper sets out to answer is whether and how dehumanization is used in the debate on street begging in everyday politics. The issue was mapped using a novel tool for content analysis, which contained five elements of dehumanization that were based on previous research in social psychology. These elements are lack of culture, coarseness, amorality, irrationality and immaturity. In this section, the empirical findings from the quantitative content analysis are first presented, and thereafter discussed in the subsequent section.

4.1 Results

The results section starts with an outline of the general results, where the overall share of dehumanizing comments is presented. After that, the chapter continues with a breakdown of results by party page, and lastly, dehumanization is disaggregated into different elements in order to show how dehumanization is used. Issues and insecurities regarding the tool of analysis are also explained in this section. Whereas the analysis was conducted in Swedish, the quotes included in the results section are in English and translated by me. As explained in the ethics section, I chose not to include the names or aliases of the people who engaged in the discussions, even though they are publically available.

4.1.1 General Results

After removing spam and comments that did not concern the debate, the total amount of dehumanizing comments in all categories were 130 out of 586 (Table 1). Which means that the aggregated amount of dehumanizing comments add up to 22% of all arguments used. All discussants that used dehumanizing arguments also expressed negative or hostile attitudes towards beggars and begging. Even though most commentators expressed their dislike with beggars, only a handful explicitly stated that they want a ban on begging: "Begging should be banned! We're not going back in time. So annoying with all these beggars and they have no self-control, especially not when they sit outside the regional hospital where people who are seriously ill have to put up with
these people every time they seek care". Others used dehumanizing arguments not to support a ban, but to support the removal or deportation of people who beg: “[…] If someone likes begging, trafficking and prostitution they should be deported along with these parasites […].”

There was no noteworthy difference between the share of dehumanizing comments on Facebook and Twitter respectively. However, within the material, there are differences in the percentage of dehumanizing comments depending on which party page the comment was posted on. Unlike Facebook, the Twitter results were not disaggregated by party, since only a few cases were clear-cut. Among the users in this material, ideological preferences were more often stated. Some users also shared material and used hashtags from several parties, which created coding issues. Other differences that this study tested for was a difference in gender. When doing a simple correlation there was no relationship between the variables gender and dehumanization in this sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dehumanizing</th>
<th>Non-dehumanizing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook: SD</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook: S</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook: M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Frequency of dehumanizing comments: Number of comments containing at least one form of dehumanization, and non-dehumanizing comments respectively

4.1.2 Party page Specific Results

Figure 2 shows the rate of dehumanizing comments for each party page. Even though we cannot know for sure whether discussants on party Facebook pages are supporters of those parties, we can observe a discrepancy in the share of dehumanizing comments between different party pages.

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1 Nr. 324
2 Nr. 67
Figure 2 Dehumanization by source: Share of dehumanizing comments for each source. SD= SD on Facebook, S= S on Facebook, and M= M on Facebook.

There was no significant difference in the percentage of dehumanizing comments between the respective social media platforms. The share of dehumanizing comments on Twitter was 26%, while the total Facebook average was 22%. The lowest share of dehumanizing comments, 5%, was found on the Social Democrat Facebook page, where only a few individual comments contained dehumanization. It is important to point out that a majority of the discussants where against a ban on begging, stating that such a ban would de facto be a prohibition of poverty. This needs to be underscored because almost all dehumanizing comments were used to depict begging and beggars in a negative light. The second lowest share was found on the Moderate Party Facebook page on 11%. The Sweden Democrat page had the highest share of dehumanizing comments with 43%.

Without further studies we cannot draw any conclusions based on this discrepancy, we can only note that it is there. However, many people openly expressed their support or political identity through comments in the style of “That’s my party <3” or “that’s not the Social democrats I voted for.” Which indicates that at there is at least some correlation between commenting on a party page and actual party support.
4.1. 3 Elements of Dehumanization

The elements of dehumanization that are mapped in this paper are lack of culture, coarseness, immorality, irrationality, and immaturity. The majority of the dehumanizing comments were partly dehumanizing, where specific qualities were denied people, rather than their complete humanness. Only 6% of the dehumanizing comments were based on explicit metaphors or metaphors that entirely exclude people from the realm of humanity; the words “Parrots” and “parasites” were the only examples of animal metaphors in the material. Other examples of more explicit dehumanization were garbage related metaphors such as: "A ban is a good thing. We don't need to be the landfill of Europe". It is possible that other explicit dehumanizing comments have been removed by the moderators of the party pages, or have been reported by other users. Unfortunately, we cannot know whether that is the case, or to what extent comments are removed, or who removes them.

The analysis conveys little variety in the elements of dehumanization that were used. As shown in Figure 3, the results show a dominance of mainly two elements of dehumanization: immorality with 56% and the combined category uncultured/unrefined with 34%.

![Elements of Dehumanization](image)

Figure 3 Elements of dehumanization: Percentages of different elements of dehumanization of the total dehumanizing comments

---

3 Nr. 46 and Nr.47
4 Nr. 39 and Nr.67
5 Nr. 278
Even though there is a dominance of mainly two elements of dehumanization, there is considerable variety within these two categories. What they have in common is negative sentiments towards beggars. The next section contains a presentation of the results from the main categories, including further classifications of the different components of dehumanization based on the analytical tool.

**Questioning Civility and Refinement**

Questioning the civility or refinement of beggars was the second most common strategy of dehumanization. Claims that beggars are rude, engage in harassment, or are unhygienic are the most frequent comments of this type.

As previously explained in the methods section, I chose to aggregate the categories of lack of culture and coarseness, as they are overlapping in theory and in practice. The problem with using a combined category is that it contains several different elements, which can be impractical. Especially when a concept such as civility can refer to things on different dimensions such as physical appearance as well as behavior. I chose to aggregate these categories despite these issues, as they fill no functions separately without clear distinctions. The next examples will show that line between impolite and crude behavior is not always easy to draw. In many cases, being rude and offensive are parts of the same narrative where beggars negatively affect the social environment:

“[…] I think it is rather deplorable that I’m not able to sit on the subway or commuter train without being molested by obtrusive beggars. They don’t pay for their tickets yet they are allowed to harass us who actually have”

A person who is obtrusive is “forward in a manner of conduct” with no regard for propriety (Merriam-Webster). This type of behavior can be interpreted as both impolite and untactful, especially in a Swedish context. The comment would thus qualify as depriving someone of civility. It can also be described as aggressive behavior. In that case, the comment would qualify as crude.

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6 Nr. 26
Another way of depriving someone of civility and refinement is to picture them as filthy and unhygienic. These claims are often used to support a claim that beggars negatively affect the physical environment in terms of cleanliness and sanitation:

“Roma beggars threaten park workers who have to clean up the beggar poo after them”\(^7\)

In some cases, anecdotal evidence paints the picture of beggars as negatively affecting both the physical and social environment:

“It is hardly the Salvation Army or the Church who create problems. I have never met e.g. a Salvation Army soldier who runs around in the subway shoving rattling cups or newspapers in my face. Neither have I heard about priests dirtying parks or campsites.”\(^8\)

The element of degradation, which is a fundamental part of dehumanization, comes out very clearly when a group is contrasted against another. This comment is not the only example of beggars being dehumanized by being negatively compared to other groups such as charity organizations, people with traditional jobs, or Swedish people in general.

**Questioning Morality**

Moral dehumanization of beggars represented a majority of dehumanizing comments with 56% of the amount. The different varieties and ways of questioning the moral capacity of beggars largely corresponded to Gert’s (2004) definition of the rules of common morality. A person violates these rules by not obeying the law, do their duty or keep their promises, and by being deceptive and cheating (Gert 2004). The only aspect, which was not included among these, was keeping one’s promises.

The were many examples of discussants equating beggars with criminals, or claiming that beggars disrespect Swedish legislation. Some examples include calling beggars “Bandits,” “Criminal trash,”\(^9\) or claiming that “they create problems by committing unquestionably criminal acts.”\(^10\) A common comparison found in the commentary was between beggars and charity organizations, where the latter is described as law-abiding

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\(^{7}\) Nr. 558  
\(^{8}\) Nr. 393  
\(^{9}\) Nr. 167  
\(^{10}\) Nr. 383
and always seeking a permit for collecting donations in public, while beggars are contrasted as violators of the law who never bother to acquire permission to sit anywhere.

A typical narrative is that beggars “cheat the system” by not paying taxes like everybody else, and they that are not actually in need because they are not actually poor, or because they earn a lot of money from begging:

“I saw a beggar woman I recognized get into a fancy Mercedes… Could have been the mob, or maybe her husband… They were not poor that’s for sure, not like our pensioners.”11

Another common way to undermine the needs and vulnerability of beggars is to claim that a poor person would not have a cell phone, ergo beggars cannot be truly poor. These arguments are sometimes coupled with the claim that beggars are deceptive, and will try to deliberately trick you, or take advantage of your good will:

“A thing with beggars is that they are hardly poor, some of them have insanely expensive cell phones, and they pretend to have one leg and then they often have two when they get up and nobody is around. So stop feeling sorry for them. They are just making fools of us all”12.

The material contained several other examples such as the one above, where it is claimed that beggars fake disabilities to deceive you and take your money.

The related idea that beggars “do not do their duty” was illustrated by portraying them as idle and lazy. The notion that begging is not “honest work”, is prevalent in the material: “I told a beggar the other day “do you really think that I should give you money that I’ve worked hard for, when all you do is sit on your ass all day long and don’t do anything to support yourself”? She had no answer to this.”13 This comment reflects the attitude that begging is not a real job where you actually do something to earn your salary. Begging is just a way to sit around without contributing to society.

11 Nr. 5
12 Nr. 90
13 Nr. 78
4.2 Discussion

This chapter is mainly devoted to a discussion of the results and interpretation of them in the light of previous research. The start of the chapter deals with the general results, their implications and their relationship to earlier research. The second part discusses the difference in results by party page and how we can interpret this. The third part discusses the elements of dehumanization found in this study in relation to other studies, while the final part assesses the applicability of our results to other issues and areas of research.

4.2.1. Making Sense of the 22 percent

The degree to which dehumanization was used in the discussions was 22%. Even though the results varied depending on party page, dehumanization was to some extent present in all cases. Which means that more than a fifth of the discussants consciously or subconsciously believe that people who beg are less than human. That beggars lack some qualities that they or their kin intrinsically possess. As previous research shows that dehumanization reduces the propensity to help (Andrighetto 2015; Cuddy 2007), there is reason to believe that beggars are less likely to be extended a helping hand than others. As dehumanization is often used as a justification for differential treatment (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015), it is easier to infringe on the rights of people who are victims of dehumanization. It is thus critical to investigate the possible consequences for democracy in terms of equal participation and voice. Beyond the potential political consequences, the feeling of being dehumanized often manifests itself in internalized dehumanization. Victims of dehumanization experience guilt, shame and perceive themselves as having lower social status (Hartley & Fleay 2017; Bastian & Haslam 2011; Volpato & Contarello 1999).

Dehumanization is being used almost exclusively as a way to express negative sentiments towards beggars. Even though only a few people explicitly used dehumanizing statements to argue for a ban on begging or deportation of beggars, the results clearly show that they are being used to express negative attitudes towards beggars in the debate. By targeting and excluding certain societal groups, these results have similarities with right wing-populist rhetoric (Mudde 2007; Wirz et al. 2018). Populist style rhetoric often assigns blame and depicts subjects and people in a
polarizing manner. This blame is often assigned to immigrants and asylum seekers (Bos et al. 2013; Engesser 2017; Jagers & Walgrave 2007).

Another reason to further investigate the use of discursive dehumanization in rhetoric is that social psychologists have found a correlation between dehumanizing depictions of immigrants and negative attitudes towards immigration (Utych 2018; Goméz-Martínez & de la Villa Moral-Jiménez 2018). Conclusions from these studies suggest that the use of dehumanizing imagery have repercussions beyond the person who dehumanizes. If this applies to the investigation at hand, a lot of people run the risk being influenced by these views. Especially since these are public discussions on popular pages which everyone has access to.

4.2.2 Dehumanization and Party support

The results established that dehumanization is used in the debate. However, the results also showed a discrepancy in the number of dehumanizing comments depending on the party page. Even though we cannot know the extent to which people who interact with party pages are also supporters of that party, we can at least conclude that there is a discrepancy. It is possible to, for example, conduct a survey on dehumanization where participants answer questions on party preference, political identity, and ideology to be able to draw such conclusions.

In this case, the difference between the parties engaged in the debate could be a result of a difference in ideology and party support, but it can also be a result of party page moderation. Unfortunately, we cannot know to what extent the party pages are moderated (Falasca, Dymek and Grandien 2017). Both the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party reserves the right to remove hateful and offensive comments (Socialdemokraterna 2018; Moderaterna 2018). The Sweden Democrats do not state that they will remove hateful comments, but encourage the use of respectful language. Despite this, a large proportion of the material in this study violates the terms and conditions for commenting on these pages. Which suggests that the pages are not completely moderated.
The high rate of dehumanization on the Sweden Democrat Party page could also be a result of comments by people placed further to the right than SD. Still, previous research finds that people tend to interact with others who share their political convictions (Jungerr 2016; Internetstiftelsen 2018). Which suggests that people might seek out their kin by interacting with their own party, and people who support the same party as themselves. Although many discussants used the party forums to express their support or dissatisfaction with the party proposals, and support for the parties themselves, we cannot equate a comment with actual support. The results are thus inconclusive in this regard.

What we can draw from the discrepancy between different parties is that the rate of dehumanization can differ depending on the forum. The general social media demographic is more liberal, more educated and more positive to immigration than the rest of the population (Mellon & Prosser 2017; Internetstiftelsen 2018; Sandberg & Bjereld 2015). At the same time, hate speech and antagonistic comments flourish on the Internet (Iselidh 2018; Näthatsgranskaren 2018). If both of these camps are right, it suggests that social media users are liberal on a general level, while isolated extreme forums also exist. The results of this study are placed somewhere in between.

4.2.3 The Relative Prevalence of Moral Dehumanization

As previously illustrated, the results show a dominance of mainly two elements of dehumanization: immorality with 56% and the combined category uncultured/unrefined with 34% (Figure 3). The implication of combining the category is of course, that the relative frequency increases. However, these categories separately would still overshadow the results of the remaining elements. Besides, there were few unambiguous cases between the two categories, and the analytical tool needs further development if they are to be applied separately.

The fact that immorality and lack of culture/coarseness are the most frequently occurring elements probably says more about the debate in particular and debates on immigration issues in general, than it does about dehumanization as a phenomenon. Previous research shows that different groups are dehumanized in different ways (Haslam 2006). The results of this study are consistent with previous research on
dehumanization of immigrants, which highlight moral dehumanization of refugees as especially common (Esses et al. 2008). Even though these groups and the related political issues are different, dehumanization of immigrants in general, have been known to contain moral elements (Haslam 2006).

By utilizing cultural stereotypes, it is easy to use dehumanization as an argument for why a particular group does not belong. So, it is natural that dehumanizing arguments hinges on traditional stereotypes to gain credibility. The findings here confirm previous studies on negative stereotypes of Roma people (Orosz et al. 2018), which go under the umbrella of subtle dehumanization. Among people proposing a ban, a majority of arguments were built on traditional stereotypes of Roma people as idle, filthy, with low moral and hostile behavior. Cultural stereotypes might also be the reason why some elements of animalistic dehumanization are not present in this study, such as irrationality and maturity. Earlier studies of dehumanization have shown that people with intellectual disabilities and African people are the most usual targets of this type of dehumanization (O'Brien 2003b; Haslam 2006). In this paper, I investigated accounts of animalistic dehumanization, which means that I have not examined mechanistic dehumanization, and the deprivation of human qualities such as empathy, agency, individuality etc. (Haslam 2006). As explained in the methods chapter, I deselected these forms because of feasibility, objectivity, and findings by previous research. Since they were not included as indicators, we can only rely on previous research to deduce whether they are present in the debate or not.

4.2.4 The Applicability of the Results

This study has consequently found that dehumanization is being used in the debate on street begging in everyday politics. As previously explained, it is difficult to estimate population size, and acquire representative samples through random sampling. For our results, this means that we cannot claim that these figures are a perfect representation of the entire debate. Given that the material in this paper comes from popular public forums, we can expect the results to differ or be higher in less public discussion forums online. The majority of our results (94%) consist of indirectly and partly dehumanizing comments. Only 6% were explicit and absolute (Figure 3). Considering that blatant dehumanization correlates with signs of aggression and support for aggressive behavior
(Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018), we should not take lightly on this figure. Given the risk of being prosecuted for posting blatantly dehumanizing comments and the right to remove these comments from platforms such as Facebook, it is unlikely that we would find a higher rate of this type of comments on official channels without anonymity.

Even though the prospects to make inferences from the results of a case study are low (Gerring 2013), we can at least estimate whether 22% is low or high in relation to other political topics. Previous research gave some indications to whether we would be able to find examples of dehumanization, without appreciating the expected share of dehumanization. Studies within social psychology find that dehumanizing views are held against outgroups even in democratic societies. As several studies also show that dehumanization can be transformed into action (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen 2018; Andrighetto 2015; Cuddy 2007), finding at least some evidence of dehumanization was anticipated in this study. Given that subtle dehumanization in discourse has not been previously studied, there was no indication of the specific amount.

As explained in the theory chapter, dehumanization is often used as a justification of violence or aggression, distancing individuals from an event that might invoke feelings of guilt or compassion, or legitimizing the current social position of a group (Volpato & Andrighetto 2015). In this particular political issue, all three are possible reasons why people dehumanize beggars. In this case, dehumanization can work as a way to justify violence or aggression on the side of the police. Many people argue for the removal of beggars from the streets in particular and the country in general. Dehumanization as a way of distancing oneself from feelings of guilt or compassion is probably especially relevant in this case as we are constantly reminded and exposed to the misery and poor conditions of beggars, unlike many other groups. In order to avoid feelings of responsibility or guilt when passing a beggar outside a grocery store, it is probably easier to dehumanize them and continue with our lives as usual. From our results, we can observe that many dehumanizing arguments were based on anecdotal evidence, true or not. Which suggests that many people experience seeing beggars everywhere, and must find some way to deal with this. Dehumanization can also serve as an explanation to why you are not the one sitting outside on a cold winter day asking strangers for money. The idea that some people are less than human because they are immoral, lack sophistication or intelligence makes it easy to justify that they do not
deserve to have the same living standards as yourself. Taken together, this suggests that the results in this regard are not applicable to other cases or political issues where outgroups are dehumanized. Furthermore, this indicates that the results of this study represent a maximum level, and we should probably expect the number of dehumanizing comments to be lower in debates on less contentious issues in Sweden where people are not exposed to the issue in their daily lives.
5 Conclusion

This study set out to answer whether and how dehumanization is used in the debate on street begging in everyday politics. This concluding chapter begins by answering the question of whether dehumanization is used. The second part gives an answer to how dehumanization is used and reviews the analytical tool. The last section contains implications as well as the main theoretical, empirical and methodological conclusions for further research.

5.1 Whether Dehumanization is Used

The short answer to the question of whether dehumanization is used is yes. It is being used, at the rate of 22%, and predominantly to express hostility and negative sentiments towards beggars. What the results mean in general is that discursive dehumanization is part of the debate in everyday politics, and not just a propaganda tool of in war and genocide. This study corroborates findings from previous studies, which have found a connection between dehumanizing attitudes and negative attitudes towards immigration (Utych 2018; Goméz-Martínez & de la Villa Moral- Jiménez 2018). In a broader sense, this study contributes to the general dehumanization discourse by showing that people are also willing to express their dehumanizing views openly. In light of these results, it is key to investigate whether dehumanization can lead to restrictions of rights and liberties in democratic societies. Avenues for future research can be whether dehumanization is intently used, or whether it is explicitly being used to support arguments for restricting immigration.

To nuance the answer to whether dehumanization is used, our results also showed that the extent largely varies depending on the party page. We can conclude that there was a difference in the rate of dehumanizing comments between party pages. These results can provide a foundation for further research on dehumanization in political science. This question could be investigated through survey research connecting political affiliation and ideology to dehumanization. Given that threat perception of immigrants exist, and that threat is an antecedent to dehumanization, a possible venue for future studies could thus be to examine the relationship between the perceived threat from
immigration, dehumanization and political attitudes among supporters of radical right-wing populist parties.

5.2 How Dehumanization is Used

The answer to the question of how dehumanization is used is mainly by claiming that they are immoral, uncivilized, and unrefined. The results of this study show that dehumanization functions as a way to negatively depict beggars. In some cases, dehumanization functions as an argument for banning or removing beggars. In this particular issue, dehumanization mainly manifests itself as the deprivation of someone’s morality, or civility and refinement. The results from this study show that 56% of the dehumanizing comments have moral elements. As these results are consistent with research on dehumanization of refugees in for example Canada (Esses et al. 2008), they can lay the foundation for new testable assumptions. One such avenue is to test whether moral dehumanization is central to dehumanization of immigrants in general.

The analytical tool created for the task of finding discursive dehumanization is one of the main contributions of this paper. With some modification, it can easily be applied to other European countries, political spheres or issues. Further applications would not only provide ground for cross-country comparisons, but it would also benefit the development of the tool. Given that Sweden is considered to be the last bastion of liberal values, we can expect to find evidence of dehumanizing discourse in other countries as well (Embury-Dennis 2018; Stavrou 2018; Al Jazeera News 2018). Overall, the analytical tool was successfully applied as an initial test. However, further development of the tool is necessary. If the categories overlap, it is not fruitful to distinguish between different elements of dehumanization. Since the aggregated category is rather broad and diverse, it would be wise to construct lack of culture and refinement as clear and separate elements, in the same way as morality, rationality, and maturity are differentiated. Constructing a scale with degrees of discursive dehumanization can further develop the analytical tool. This would provide more nuances to the results than the dichotomous variables that are used in this study can.
There is no consensus among political science scholars as to whether the Internet in general and social media, in particular, enhances democracy, or fosters extremism. Facebook and Twitter are open to everyone, and one of the more accessible means of political participation, and the general social media user is more liberal and more educated than the general population (Internetstiftelsen 2018; Mellon & Prosser 2017; Margetts 2019). Yet, these platforms are used as means for extremists to mobilize and shape their political identity (Caiani & Parenti 2013; Awan 2017). This study paints a dark image of social media. However, unlike Caiani and Parenti (2013), and Awan (2017), this study does not investigate far-right forums, or involve extremists. It involves politically engaged citizens, of which, many express opinions in their own name. Since at least a fifth of the comments is dehumanizing in a subtle way, this study places itself in the grey area between democracy and extremism. Scholars who study new forms of democratic participation need to embrace this darker side of social media as well. For political science to understand the relationship between social media and democracy, we need to study it as more than a means for social change, or a way of enhancing democratic values. If we see that democratic governance is more than just a top-down perspective, where citizens themselves can also steer the political direction, or influence the political agenda, we need to pay attention to how citizens discuss political issues and express their political attitudes.

As dehumanization is conceptually different from other phenomena and can have such dire consequences, it is vital to further the study of how dehumanization is used and where it comes into play. These results can provide a foundation for studies of dehumanization in political science and the understanding of the political impact of dehumanization in democracies. Historically, women and people with disabilities have been denied the right to vote, as they allegedly lack rationality. If we do not believe that someone is our equal, then why should we treat them like such? The results of this study found that many people try to find arguments to support that there is a difference between beggars and beggars. That Swedish charity organizations and churches should not be banned from collecting money in the streets even though they engage in the same activity.
If dehumanization and extreme forms of prejudice are a part of public opinion, we need to recognize it. Regardless of whether these attitudes stem from political rhetoric, or whether politicians take advantage of already existing attitudes (Berning & Schlueter 2015), they can have a serious political impact. Large-N studies show that psychological factors such as threat perception are important factors behind anti-immigrant sentiments (Norris & Ingelhart 2016; Lucassen & Lubbers 2012). At the same time, dehumanization is a mediator between sense of threat and negative attitudes towards immigration (Maoz & MacCauley 2008; Louis, Esses & Lalonde 2013; Prati et al. 2016). As previously written, 96-98% of Sweden Democratic voters believe that immigration leads to increased criminality, 80% of the Moderate Party and 43% of the Social Democrats share this view (Jylhä, Rydgren & Strimling 2018). The results of this study showed that all party pages have comments, which include moral dehumanization of beggars. These results combined suggest that future research should investigate this possible connection between threat perception, dehumanization and anti-immigration attitudes.

Today, everyday politics mainly takes place on social media and a fifth of the population in Sweden state that they express their political opinions online (Highfield 2016; Internetstiftelsen 2018). For democracy researchers, social media networks provide a unique insight into the natural behavior and beliefs of citizens (Moreno et al. 2013). Signing an online petition or tweeting a political statement is far more accessible and resource effective than joining a party or going door-to-door (Margetts 2019). The results of this study shows, not only that dehumanizing language is expressed online, but also that many citizens engage in discussions on political issues on heated topics online. This suggests that political science should pay more attention to the political activities of citizens on social media.

Other researchers have found that it is difficult to gather comprehensive data on one topic on Twitter (Lorentzen & Nolin 2017). In accordance, this study was able to map inputs into the debate, and only fragments of Twitter-discussions. Facebook, on the other hand, enables researchers to follow entire discussions chronologically. Another related methodological lesson to take home from this study is that the interaction between the people and political parties in Sweden is easier to follow on Facebook. As a consequence, if discussion as a form is important, Facebook is the better option.
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### 7 Appendix

**Appendix 1: Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality being denied</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Example from the literature</th>
<th>Possible examples from the debate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civility</td>
<td>Uncultured, uncivilized</td>
<td>“Backwardness” (Bastian and Haslam 2011)</td>
<td>“they are underdeveloped”, “uneducated”, “not fit to work here”, “not fit for this society”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not characterized by good taste, manners, or education” (Oxford Online Dictionary)</td>
<td>“A significant portion of the Gypsies are unfit for co-existence, not fit to live among human beings” (Orosz et al. 2018)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“(of a society or country) without what is thought to be a highly developed culture and way of life, or (of a person) rude and not showing care for others” (Cambridge Online Dictionary)</td>
<td>“Dirty, living like animals” (Livingstone Smith 2011)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evoking disgust by being dirty and living in unsanitary conditions but also through lack of education and way of living (Dalsklev &amp; Kunst 2015).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Group x is impolite” (Haslam et al. 2008b)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refinement</td>
<td>Coarseness: crude or unrefined</td>
<td>Seeing someone as unsophisticated, without language and the ability to communicate with others (Bastian &amp; Haslam 2011)</td>
<td>“they are aggressive”, “they are vulgar”, “they are raucous”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Behaviour or language that is crude and offensive” (Cambridge Online Dictionary)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral sensibility</td>
<td>Amorality, lack of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Orosz et al.* 2018

*Cambridge Online Dictionary*

*Livingstone Smith* 2011

*Dalsklev & Kunst* 2015

*Haslam et al.* 2008b

*Bastian and Haslam* 2011
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>self-restraint</th>
<th>Rationality, logic</th>
<th>Childlikeness, immaturity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Lacking a moral sense; unconcerned with the rightness or wrongness of something” (Oxford Online Dictionary)</td>
<td>“The quality of being illogical or unreasonable” (Oxford Online Dictionary)</td>
<td>“Not having much experience of something”, “Not yet completely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-restraint: “Restraint imposed by oneself on one’s own actions; self-control” (Oxford Online Dictionary)</td>
<td>Describing someone as unintelligent, incompetent (Haslam &amp; Loughnan 2014; Bastian &amp; Haslam 2011)</td>
<td>“Not having much experience of something”, “Not yet completely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“refugees are bogus and not in real need”, “refugees are cheaters who try trick their way in” (Esses et al. 2008)</td>
<td>Driven by wants, desires and emotion, instead of thinking (Haslam et al. 2008b)</td>
<td>“Not having much experience of something”, “Not yet completely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Immigrants don’t follow the rules” (Esses et al. 2008; Louis, Esses &amp; Lalonde 2013)</td>
<td>“deceptive, cheating, does not obey the law, keep their promises or do their duty” (Gert 2004).</td>
<td>“Not having much experience of something”, “Not yet completely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“lack of self-control= someone who cannot control their impulses is unpredictable (Gray et al. 2007) Uninhibited (Orosz et al. 2018)</td>
<td>“they try to trick you”, “they make a lot of money”, “they are not in need or poor, they just pretend to be”, “they are organized criminal networks”, “they should work and earn their money like everybody else” “they are unpredictable”, “they create an insecure environment”</td>
<td>“cannot take care of themselves”, “are not fit to make their own choices”, “they can’t make it on their own”, “they cannot do a job”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
grown or developed” (Cambridge Online Dictionary)

properly/live up to certain standards”, “they don’t take responsibility for anything”, “they are selfish” (Cambridge dictionary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Rats, wolves, vermin, prey (Livingstone Smith 2011; Tipler &amp; Ruscher 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural disaster and disease metaphors</td>
<td>Tidal waves, contagion, virus (Esses, Medianu &amp; Lawson 2013; Anderson 2017; Santa Ana 1999; Santa Ana 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal behaviour and associated words</td>
<td>Swarm, nest, hive, breeding ground (Anderson 2017; Steuter &amp; Wills 2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Variable 1: Source

- **0** = Facebook
- **1** = Twitter
- **2** = Letter to the editor

### Variable 2: Gender

- **0** = Woman
- **1** = Man
- **2** = Other/unidentified

### Variable 3: Tiggeriförbud

- **0** = Against a ban
- **1** = For a ban
- **2** = Unknown

### Variable 4: Party

- **0** = Unknown
- **1** = Sweden Democrats
- **2** = Socialdemocrats
- **3** = Nya Moderaterna

### Variable 5: Uncultured

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 6: Unrefined

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 7: Immorality

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 8: Irrationality

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 9: Immaturity

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 10: Animals

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 11: Natural disaster

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

### Variable 12: Animal behavior

- **0** = No
- **1** = Yes

---

14 Variable 5 and 6 were aggregated after the coding process was finished
### Appendix 3: Applying the analytical tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Outside the grocery store sits a beggar, a large man around 40 years</td>
<td>Variable 5: Uncultured 1 (Yes): “mutters unpleasant things”: -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old. When people pass by he mutters unpleasant things and looks angry</td>
<td>Demeaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and violent when he acts like the cock of the walk. The store gets a</td>
<td>Variable 6: Unrefined 1 (Yes): “looks angry and violent” - Demeaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lot of complaints but “can’t do anything” even though he is in their</td>
<td>Variable 10: Animals 0 (No): “cock of the walk” is an idiomatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private land #svpol” (Nr. 483)</td>
<td>expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Translation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is ALWAYS work, begging is pure fucking laziness” (Nr. 28)</td>
<td>Variable 7: Immorality 1 (Yes): Beggars are idle and do not contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to society, in other words beggars do not do their duty - Demeaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Translation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ban begging completely, [I’m] so tired of seeing them at every</td>
<td>Not dehumanizing. The person does not state why he or she wants to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grocery store, by the subway etc.” (Nr. 13)</td>
<td>ban begging, so we do not know whether the underlying reason is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dehumanizing attitudes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>