



Who's the victim and  
who's to be blamed:  
Contemporary  
social perceptions  
of Italian Fascism  
– A pilot study

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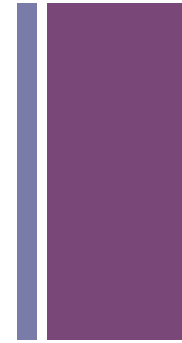
*<sup>2</sup> University  
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COST ACTION – WG4 Meeting, Rome, October 25-26, 2013

# + Fascism

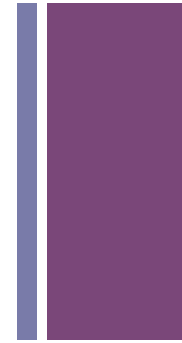


- Political movement founded by Mussolini in 1919
- Rise to power in 1922
- Promulgation of racial laws in 1938
- Alliance with Nazi Germany 1939 and consequently entry in war



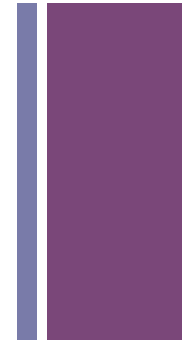
## Historical debate on Fascism

- The historiographical debate on the interpretations of Italian Fascism is still alive (Collotti, 2006; Corni, 2011; De Bernardi, 2006)
- Fascism has combined violence and atrocities, with social control and consensus construction
- The Italian public opinion had never had the chance for an historical reflection: government, except for a few acknowledgements, has never apologized for the crimes committed during the Fascist era



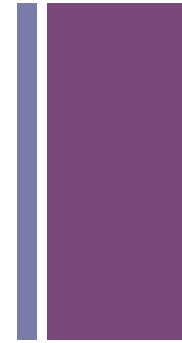
## + Social psychology literature

- Rarity of guilt, shame and sense of responsibility (Leach, Zeinneh, & Cehajic-Clancy, 2013)
- Colonialism: Mari, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, Durante, & Volpato (2010)
- General focus on how to promote sense of responsibility (Cehajic-Clancy et al., 2011; Kofta & Slawuta, in press)
- Less attention to factors that may inhibit sense of responsibility



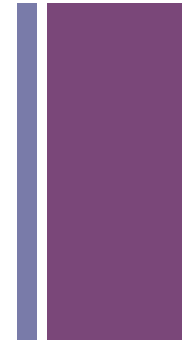
# + Presentism

- People alter the historical record to make the ingroup actions justified and glorified, while de-emphasizing episodes that may potentially damage the ingroup image (Butterfield, Frijda, 1997; Paris, 2000)



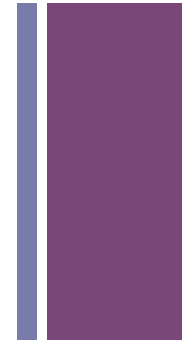
## + What's left of Fascism?

- Myth of “Italians good people” (Del Boca 2005; Volpato, 2009; Volpato, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, Durante, Volpato, 2012)
- “The self-absolution that we generously gave us has left all the burden of Anti-Semitism and Shoah on Germans’ shoulders” (LaRepubblica, 24 October 2013, p. 54; see Prospero, 2012)



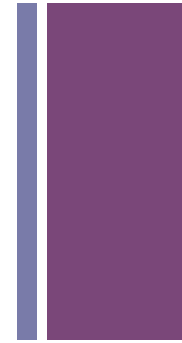
# + What's left of Fascism?

- Who were the victims?
- Who was responsible?
- What is the contemporary evaluation of Fascism?
- Do contemporary Italians absolve the ingroup misdeeds because of the even more despicable Nazis' behavior? → advantageous comparison?  
Positive distinctiveness?



## + Aims of the research project

- Identifying the victims and which groups (or individuals) are considered as perpetrators for the Fascist misdeeds in the social perception of contemporary Italians → **Pilot study**
- Identifying which are the processes inhibiting the assumption of ingroup responsibility and preventing the guilt → **Future research (correlational and experimental)**



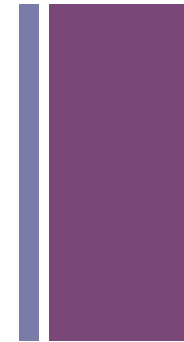


# + Pilot study -Participants and procedure

- Websurvey – SurveyMonkey
- Research presented as a study on shared social images of historical events
- Convenience sample of Italian citizens:

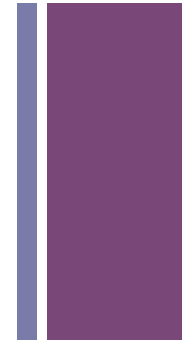
	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b><math>M_{Age}(SD)</math></b>
Students	7	50	57	22.67 (2.19)
Non-students	17	47	64	42.25 (14.57)
Total	24	97	121	33.19 (14.54)

- Education: 18.4% high school diploma; 50.9% MA (laurea)



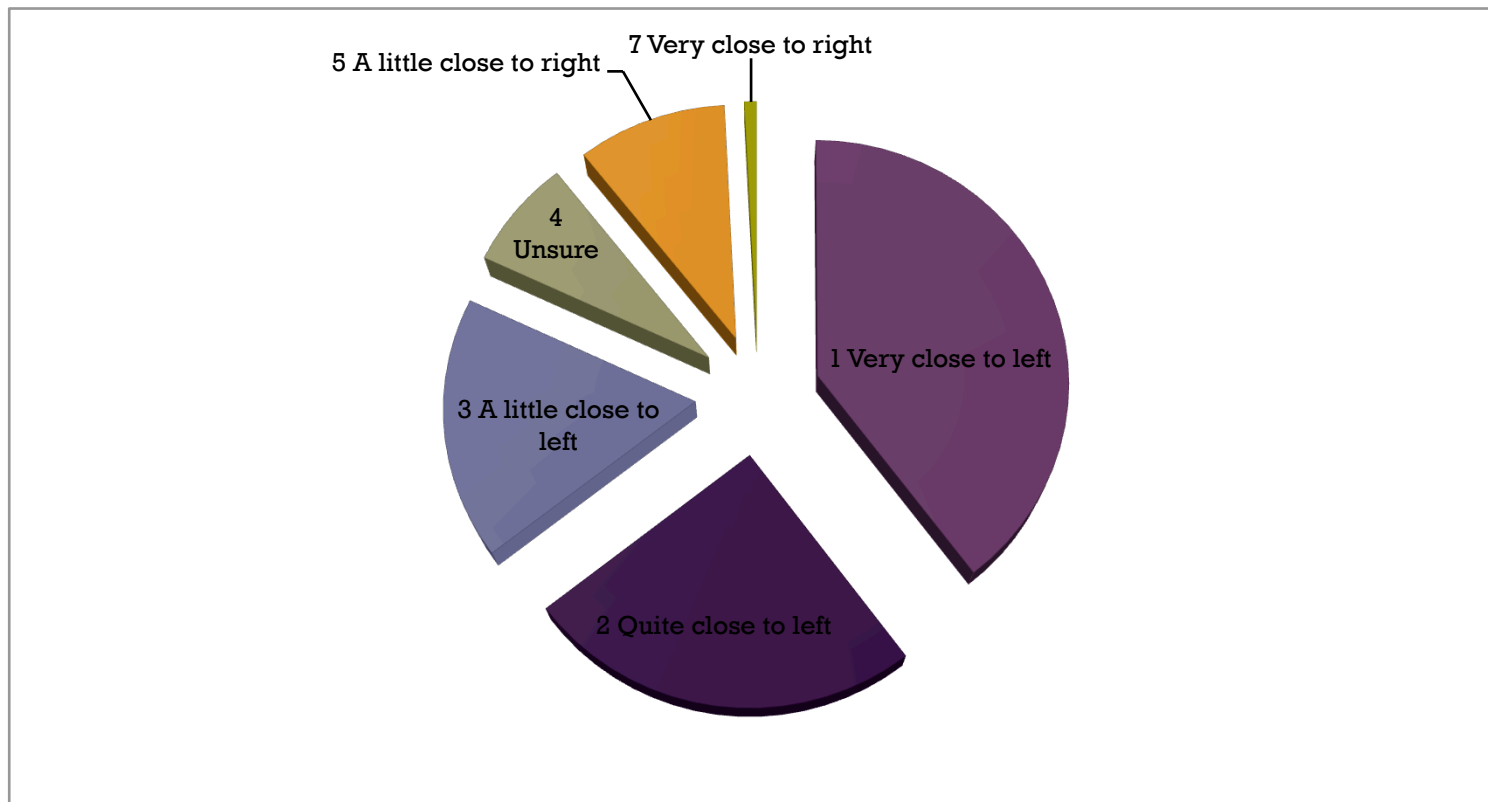
# + Participant political orientation

- 7- point scale: 1=Extreme Left-wing, 7=Extreme Right-wing
- Left-wing sample



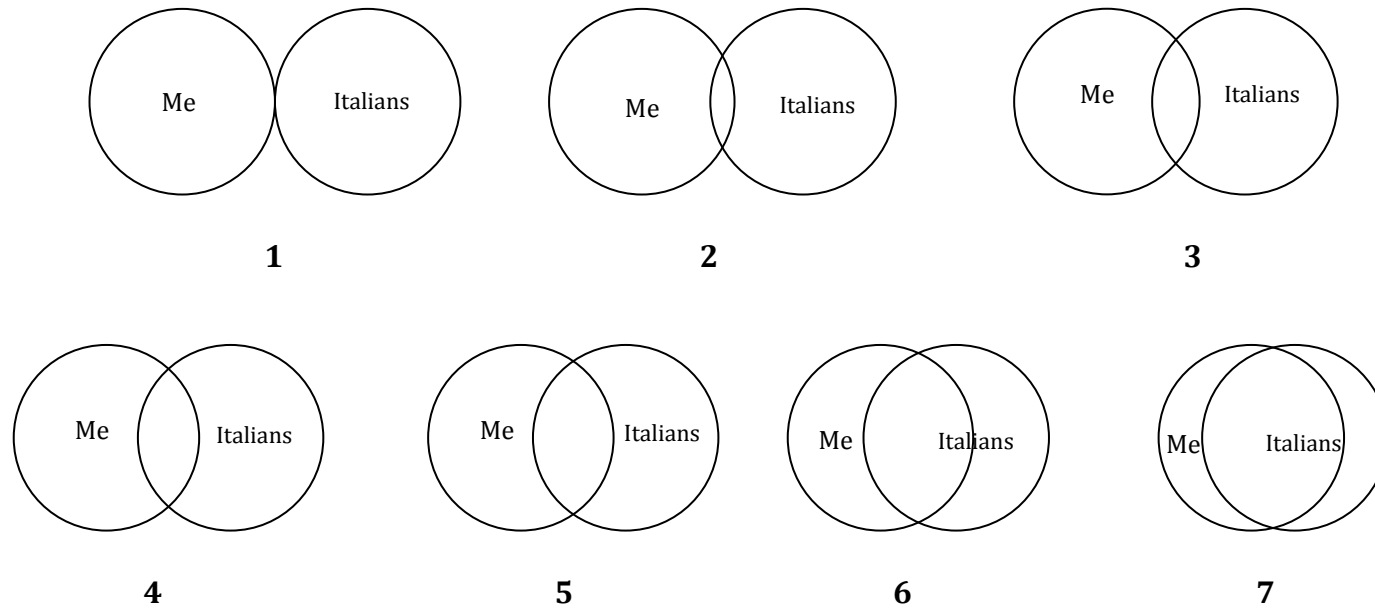
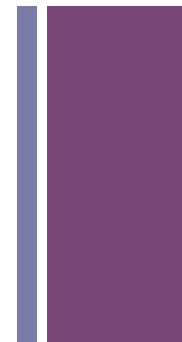
	<b>Students</b>	<b>Non-students</b>	<b>Total</b>
Political orientation	2.91 (1.46)	1.70 (1.01)	2.26 (1.38)

$p < .001$



# + Measures

- IOS Scale (Aaron & Aaron, 1986) – Inclusion of others in the Self → identification with the ingroup

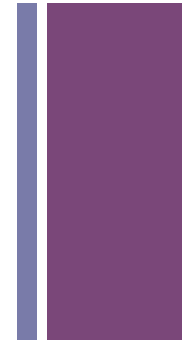


	<b>Students</b>	<b>Non-students</b>	<b>Total</b>
IOS of Italians	4.80 (1.36)	4.05 (1.67)	4.29 (1.60)

$p < .01$

# + Measures

- **Victims of Italian Fascism**
  - Open question → Focus on Italians' view (not personal beliefs)
  - According to Italians, which are the groups of people who suffered more, physically and psychologically, during Fascism
- **Level of sufferance** of the victims according to the Italian society
  - 1 = not at all; 4 = on average; 7 = a lot



# + Results – Victims of Fascism

Victims	Frequency	Level of sufferance M(SD)
Jews	91	6.57 (0.99)
Political opponents	82	5.83 (1.24)
Generic minorities	74	5.26 (1.45)
Homosexuals	46	5.54 (1.81)
Civilians	31	5.03 (1.62)
Women	21	4.67 (1.62)
Disabled people	18	6.28 (1.23)
Romani and Gypsies	13	5.31 (2.21)
Colonies	11	5.36 (1.50)
Intellectuals	11	5.73 (1.27)
Children	9	5.33 (1.80)
Soldiers	6	5.50 (1.22)
Fascists & Nazis	8	1.62 (1.41)
Linguistic minorities	8	4.62 (1.77)
Others	13	3.15 (1.95)

Students <  
Non-students

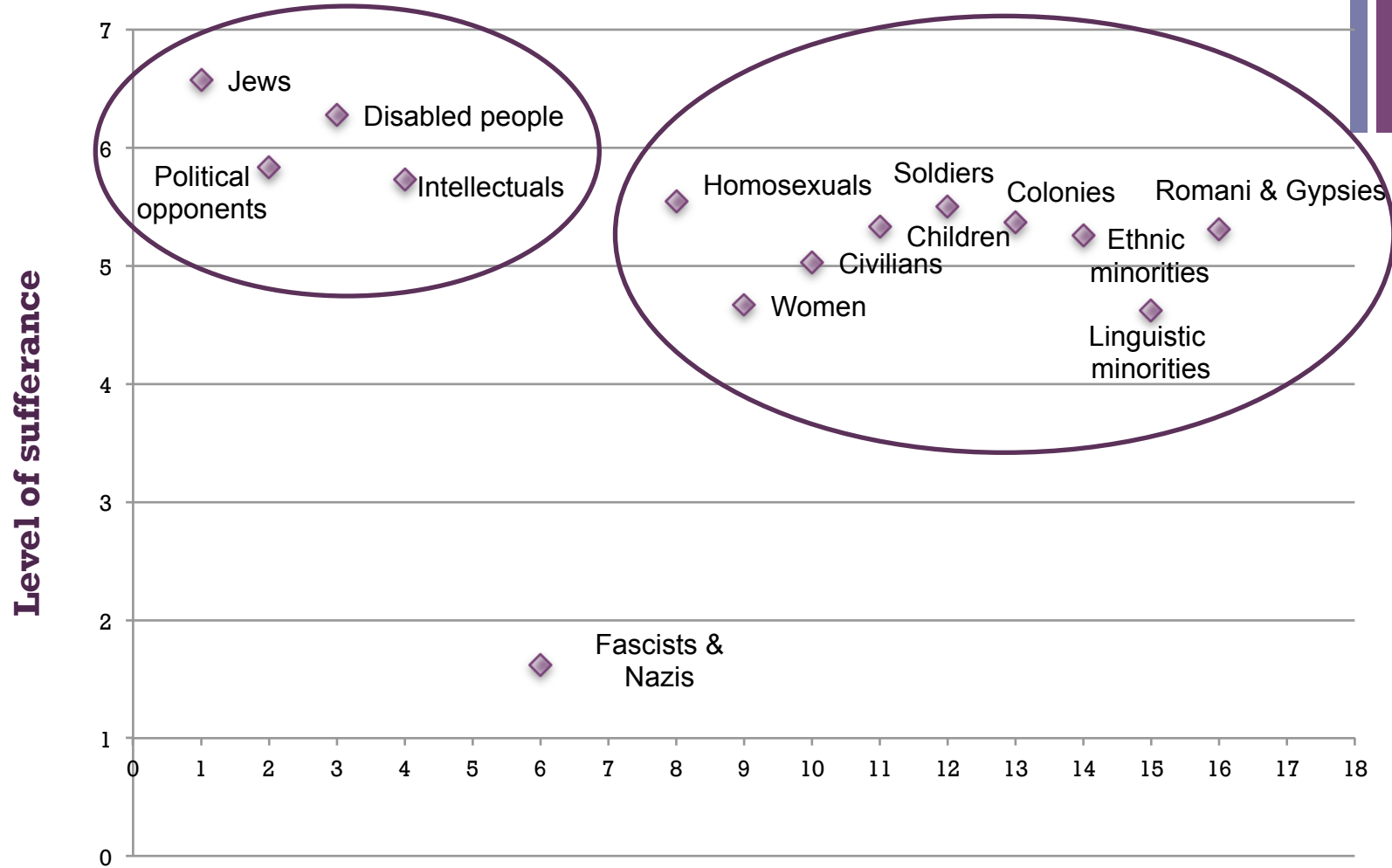


Students >  
Non-students



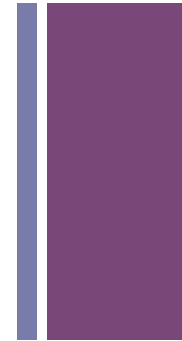


# Victims of Fascism – Cluster analysis



## + Measures

- Responsible people of the victims' sufferance
  - Thinking on the group who suffered, according to Italians, who is responsible for such sufferance?
- Level of responsibility of the victims' sufferance according to the Italian society
  - 1 = not at all; 4 = on average; 7 = a lot



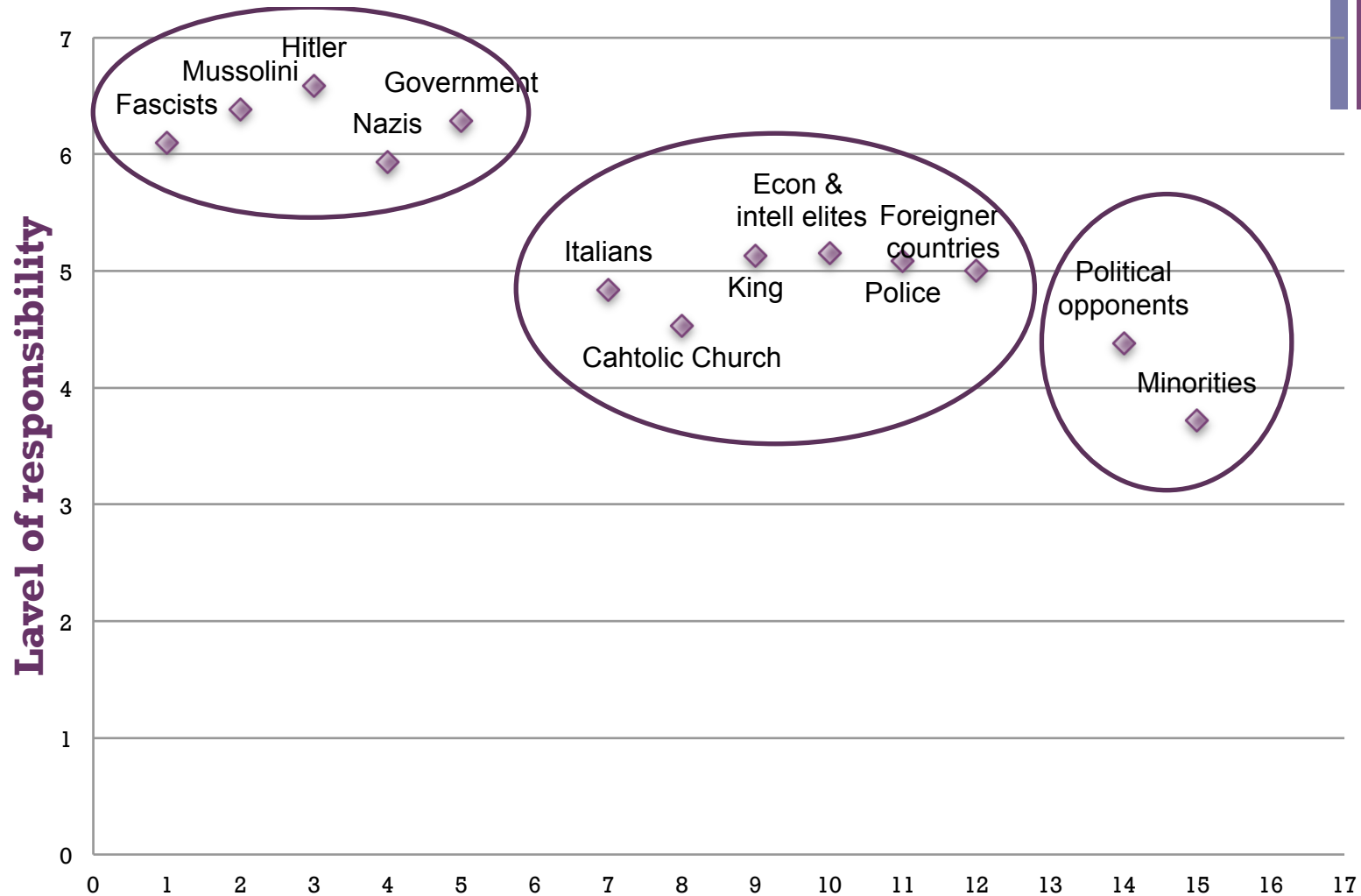
# + Results – Responsible of sufferance

Responsible people	Frequency	Level of culpability
Fascists	80	6.10 (1.25)
Mussolini	78	6.38 (1.00)
Hitler	36	6.58 (0.77)
Catholic Chruch	34	4.53 (1.54)
Italians	31	4.84 (1.75)
Nazists	30	5.93 (1.70)
Government (generic)	21	6.28 (1.06)
Intellectual elite	20	5.15 (1.63)
King & Monarchy	15	5.13 (1.30)
Minorites	14	3.71 (2.37)
Army and police (generic)	12	5.08 (1.88)
Other countries	9	5.00 (2.23)
Political opponents	8	4.37 (1.85)
Others	10	5.10 (1.44)

Students < Students > Non-students  
Non-students



# + Perpetrators & bystanders – Cluster analysis



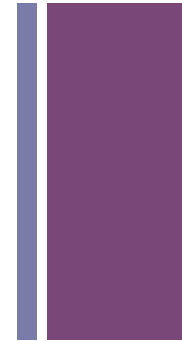
# + Measures

- Ingroup responsibility
  - According to the Italian society, how much WE Italians are responsible for the sufferance of the indicated groups during Fascism?
    - 1 = not at all; 4 = on average; 7 = a lot
    - $M = 3.99$ ,  $SD = 1.55$
    - No differences between subsamples



# + Measures

- Negative events of Fascism
  - Which are the aspects of Fascism that Italians consider negative?
- Level of negativity of such events according to the Italian society
  - 1 = not at all negative; 4 = on average; 7 = extremely negative



# + Results – Negative events of Fascism

Events	Frequency	Level of negativity
Racial laws & persecution	111	6.22 (1.21)
Liberties' oppression	78	5.73 (1.20)
Violence	54	6.31 (0.98)
Dictatorship	54	5.85 (1.35)
War	29	5.59 (1.27)
Socioeconomic conditions	22	3.68 (1.99)
Alliance with Hitler	21	6.42 (0.81)
Ignorance	10	5.20 (1.81)
Colonialism	9	3.78 (1.92)
Nationalism and protectionism	8	4.12 (1.55)
Propaganda	4	5.75 (1.25)
Others	18	4.83 (1.54)

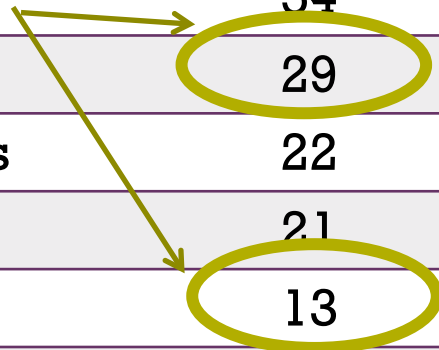
Students <  
Non-students



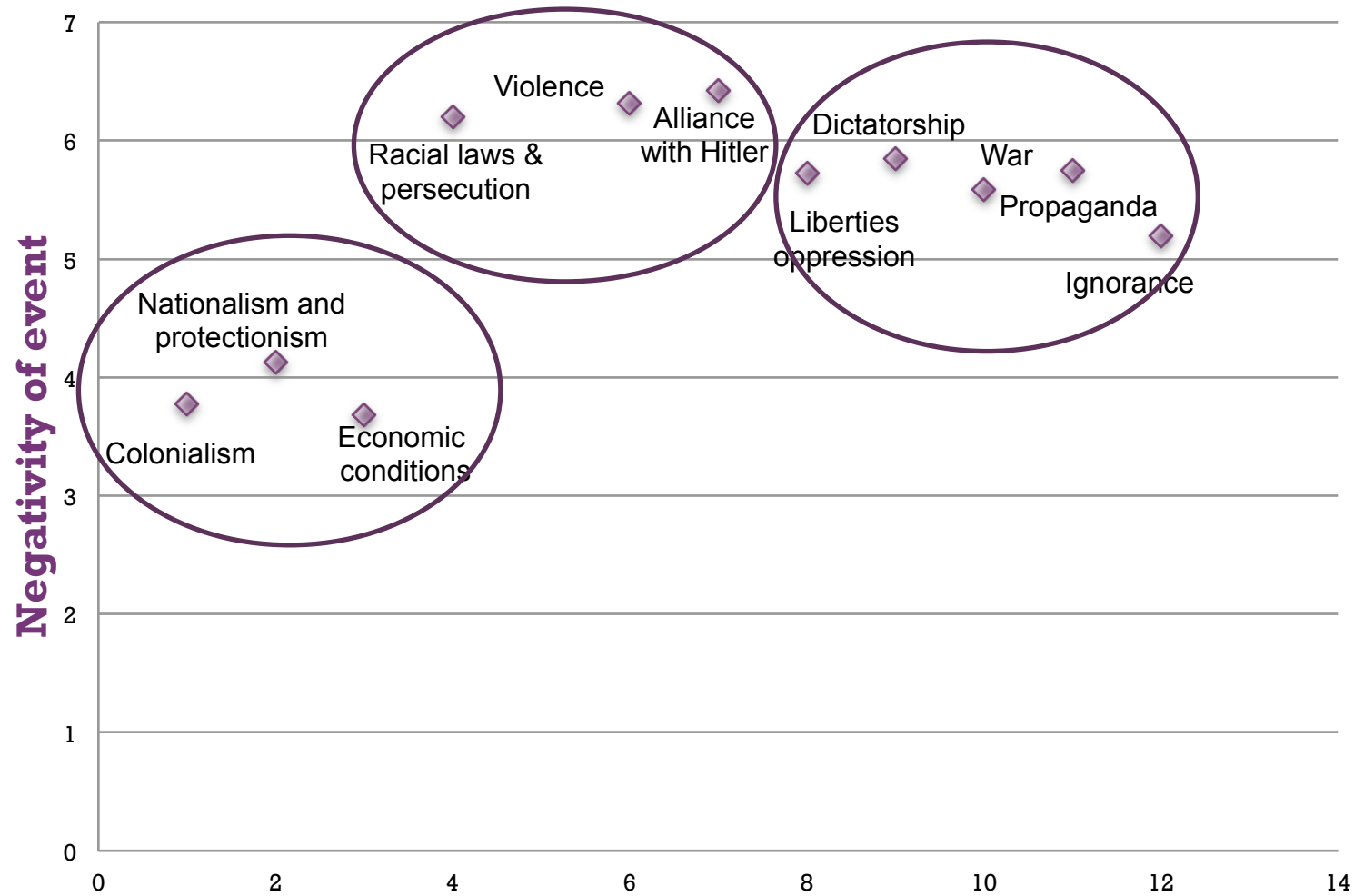
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Events	Frequency	Level of negativity
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Liberties' oppression	78	5.73 (1.20)
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Dictatorship	54	5.85 (1.35)
War	29	5.59 (1.27)
Socioeconomic conditions	22	3.68 (1.99)
Alliance with Hitler	21	6.42 (0.81)
Anti-Semitism	13	6.38 (0.96)
Ignorance	10	5.20 (1.81)
Colonialism	9	3.78 (1.92)
Nationalism and protectionism	8	4.12 (1.55)
Propaganda	4	5.75 (1.25)
Others	18	4.83 (1.54)

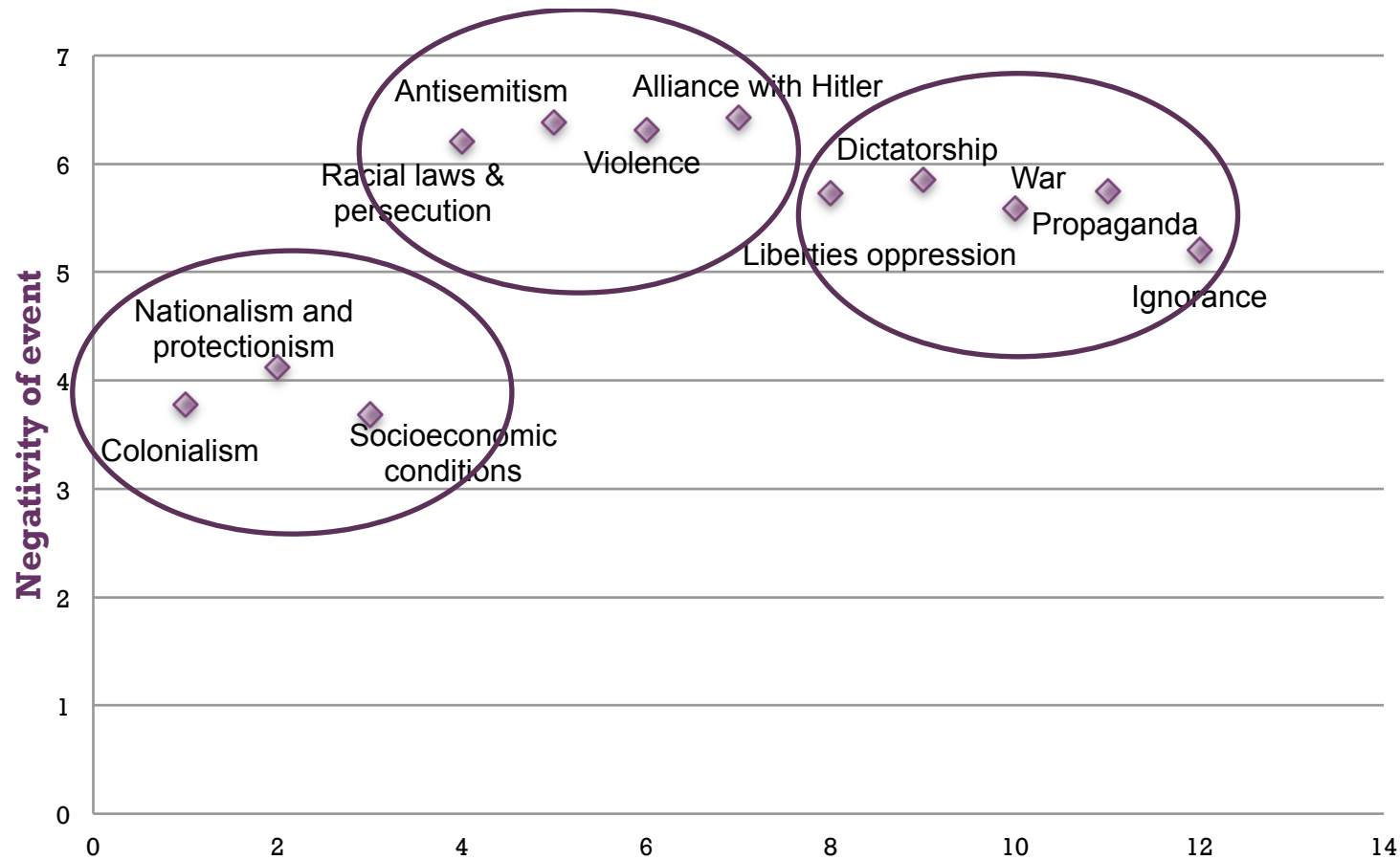
Students <  
Non-students



# + Negative events of Fascism

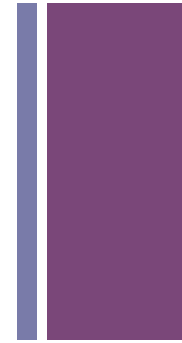


# + Negative events of Fascism



# + Measures


- Positive events of Fascism
  - Which are the aspect of Fascism that Italians consider positive?
  
- Level of positivity of such events according to the Italian society
  - 1 = not at all positive; 4 = on average;  
7 = extremely positive



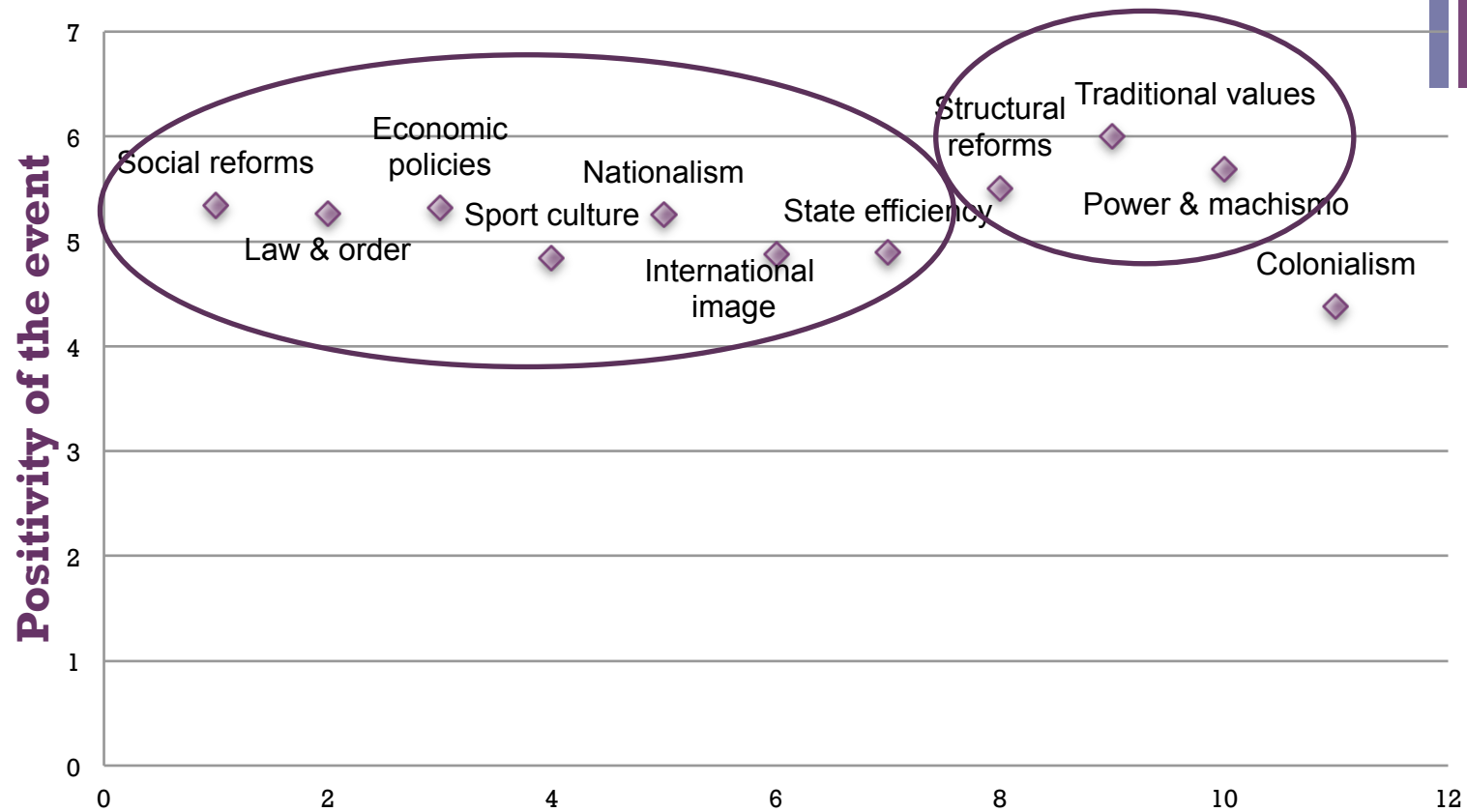


# + Results – Positive events of Fascism

	Frequency	Level of negativity
Structural reforms	83	5.51 (1.11)
Social reforms	70	5.34 (1.11)
Law & order	62	5.26 (1.21)
Economic policies	41	5.32 (1.04)
Nationalism & protectionism	24	5.25 (1.19)
State efficiency	18	4.89 (1.68)
Power & machismo	16	5.69 (0.95)
Sport culture	13	4.85 (1.34)
Colonialism	8	4.38 (1.60)
International image	8	4.87 (0.99)
Traditional values	4	6.00 (0.82)
Others	24	4.79 (1.86)

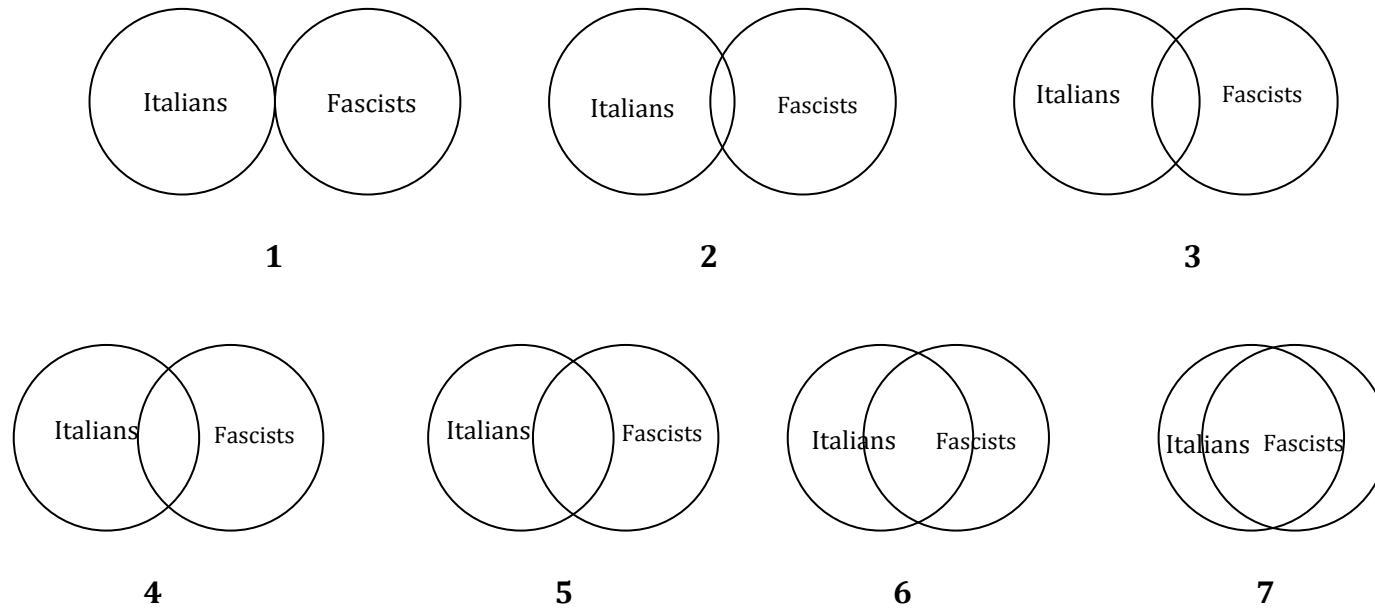
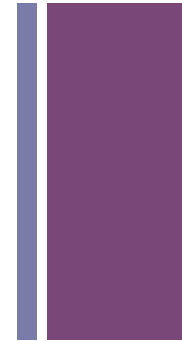
**Students <**  **Non-students**

# + Positive events of Fascism



# + Measures

## ■ Inclusion of Fascists in Italian ingroup

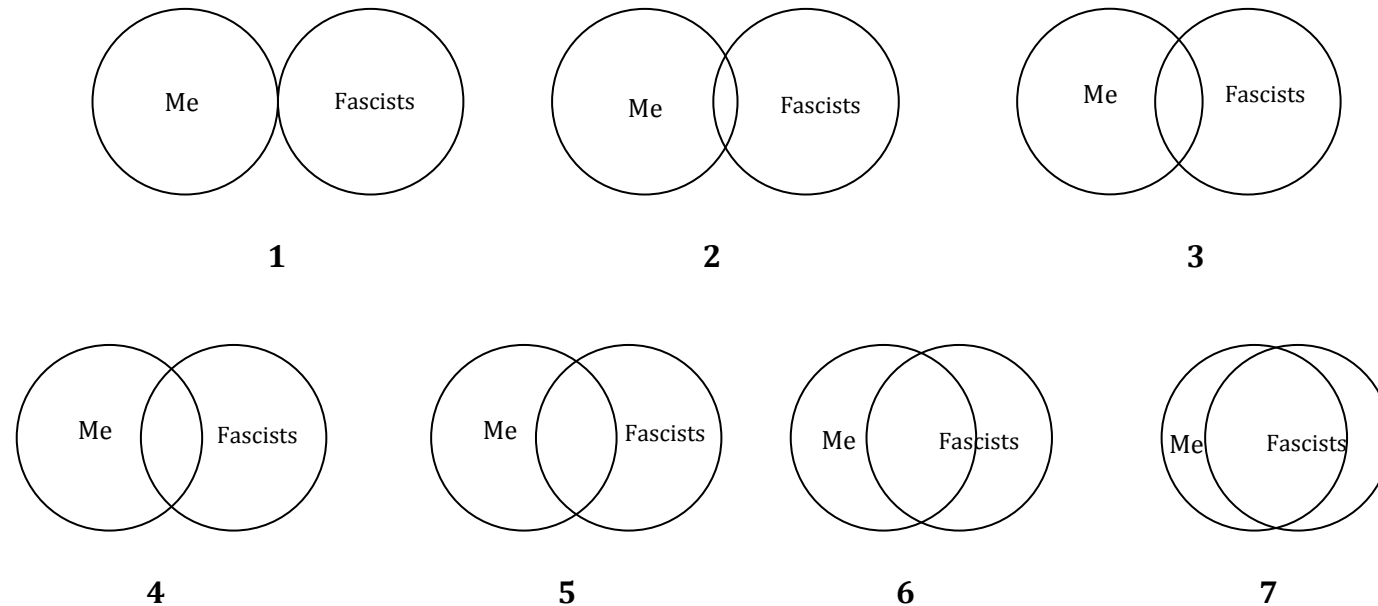


	<b>Students</b>	<b>Non-students</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Italians-Fascists</b>	3.45 (1.45)	4.32 (1.52)	3.91 (1.55)

$p < .01$

# + Measures

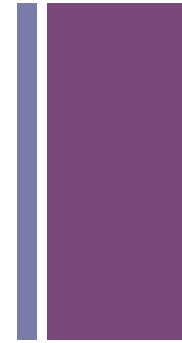
- IOS Scale (Aaron & Aaron, 1986) – Inclusion of others in the Self → identification with Fascists



- $M = 1.23, SD = .58$
- No differences between subsamples

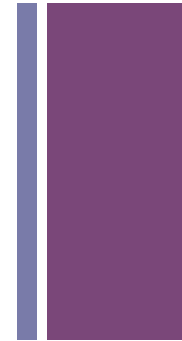
# + Summary

- Victims: Jews, political opponents
- Responsible people:
  - Individuals: Mussolini, Hitler
  - Groups: Fascists, Nazis
  - Italians seem to be perceived more as bystanders
- Replicating the study with a Right-wing sample



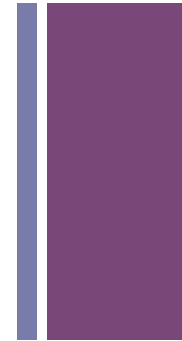
# + Future directions

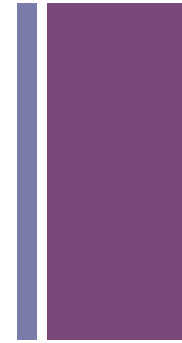
- May (Ingroup) Moral disengagement inhibit ingroup responsibility and guilt?
- Moral disengagement addresses how otherwise good people can do cruel things. They do so through selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions from inhumane conduct (Bandura, 1999)
- ***Advantageous comparison:***
  - Italians, generally make an advantageous comparison with the Germans: the ingroup unethical behavior is compared with an even more harmful conduct, thus making the original behavior acceptable (**group serving bias**)
- The role of this mechanism and other strategies of moral disengagements will be tested in a series of studies both correlational and experimental



# + Main hypotheses

- Mechanisms of moral disengagement
- ***Advantageous comparison:***
  - Italians, generally make an advantageous comparison with the Germans: the ingroup unethical behavior is compared with an even more harmful conduct, thus making the original behavior acceptable (**group serving bias**)
- The role of this mechanism and other strategies of moral disengagements will be tested in a series of studies both correlational and experimental





**Grazie!**