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Why the right resists veg(etari)anism: Ideological commitment to consuming animal products

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ABSTRACT

Right-wing adherents — those higher in social dominance orientation (SDO) or right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) — tend to show stronger commitment to consuming meat, partly due to beliefs in human superiority over animals and resistance to the perceived threat that veg(etari)anism poses to traditional food norms. In two large-scale surveys (*N*s = 870 and 1142), we investigated whether these ideological dispositions also predict commitment to dairy, eggs, and fish, not just meat, and more favourable evaluations of animal-based (vs. plant-based) alternatives. The findings demonstrated that the effects of right-wing ideological dispositions (SDO and RWA) persist across different types of animal products and dietary groups, including omnivores, flexitarians, pescatarians, and vegetarians. Perceived veg(etari)anism threat significantly mediated the associations for both SDO and RWA, while human supremacy beliefs also mediated the associations for SDO. These results suggest that animal product consumption and resistance to plant-based alternatives are shaped by ideological worldviews rooted in group-based dominance and cultural traditionalism. Efforts to reduce animal product consumption may need to engage with these underlying ideological narratives.

1. Introduction

In 2024, a video of UK right-wing politician Nigel Farage went viral after he mocked the milk selection at a hotel. Farage disparaged oat and almond milk as "left-wing options," insisting, "I want proper bloody milk." His reaction exemplifies a broader trend within conservative circles, in which plant-based alternatives are increasingly framed as symbols of progressive overreach and threats to cultural traditions. This rhetoric has also fuelled proposals to restrict the use of terms like "milk" or "cheese" to exclude plant-based products. At stake is more than just a preference for cow's milk or alleged consumer confusion about food labels. Instead, such reactions appear to reflect ideological commitment to hierarchy, tradition, and dominant food norms, with animal products becoming the latest front in the culture war. These divisions around food reflect a broader trend in which political ideology extends into lifestyle and consumption choices, where everyday preferences, from milk choices to dietary habits, signal social and political identity (DellaPosta et al., 2015).

Such rhetoric also reflects populist communication styles, which often frame plant-based or environmental initiatives as elitist projects promoted by progressive or cosmopolitan elites and as disconnected from the concerns of "ordinary people" (Krämer et al., 2021; Lockwood, 2018). At the same time, right-wing populist parties may position themselves as defenders of animal protection (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2024), though this support tends to be selective, focusing on companion animals, native wildlife, and traditional rural practices rather than challenging livestock production or meat consumption (Krämer et al., 2021).

Previous research has shown that those endorsing right-wing ideological attitudes tend to report higher levels of meat consumption (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Stanley, 2022) and stronger meat commitment (Ammann et al., 2023; Dhont et al., 2021), referring to a strong desire to eat meat-based meals and a reluctance to substitute meat in meals (Leach et al., 2022; Piazza et al., 2015). However, research to date has predominantly focused on meat consumption, implying that meat may hold a unique ideological role in dietary choices. It remains unclear

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whether ideological dispositions are similarly associated with commitment to other animal products such as dairy, eggs, or fish, not just meat. Investigating a broader range of animal products and consumer groups is needed for a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors shaping animal-based food choices and ideological resistance to plant-based alternatives (Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024a; Ioannidou et al., 2023a; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). More research is also needed to test these associations with larger and more ideologically diverse samples to allow for more generalizable and robust conclusions. In two large-scale studies, we test whether right-wing ideological dispositions predict stronger commitment to consuming a range of animal products and investigate the psychological mechanisms that may account for these associations.

1.1. Right-wing ideologies and animal product consumption

Central to right-wing ideology are two primary dispositional factors: Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Hodson & Dhont, 2015). RWA reflects a preference for submission to authority, commitment to cultural traditions, and hostility toward those who deviate from social norms (Altemeyer, 1996). SDO reflects a desire for social inequality and the belief that some groups should dominate others (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Together, RWA and SDO predict a broad range of intergroup and political outcomes, including outgroup prejudice (e.g., Hodson et al., 2017), especially against low-status groups or those perceived as threats to dominant cultural norms (Asbrock et al., 2010; Osborne et al., 2017; Peitz et al., 2018; Van Assche et al., 2019).

Increasingly, research has shown that these ideological constructs are not only relevant for understanding human intergroup relations, but also have implications for how humans perceive, treat, and consume animals (Caviola et al., 2019; Dhont et al., 2016; Hodson et al., 2020; Hyers, 2006; Milfont et al., 2021). Specifically, previous research has shown that individuals higher in SDO or RWA express greater acceptance of animal exploitation, consume more meat, and display greater bias against those who do not eat meat (vegetarians and vegans; Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Judge & Wilson, 2019; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). These complementary roles of SDO and RWA underscore the relevance of the dual process model of ideology and prejudice in understanding human-animal relations and meat consumption (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Judge & Wilson, 2019). Meat consumption is, in part, ideologically motivated, reflecting group-based dominance motives, as well as endorsement of cultural traditions and resistance to change (e.g., opposition to veg(atari)ans and plant-based alternatives).

Dhont and Hodson (2014) demonstrated that two key psychological processes are at play. The first mechanism is the belief that humans are inherently superior to animals (i.e., human supremacy beliefs), which closely aligns with general preferences for group-based dominance and social hierarchy expressed in SDO (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Jackson & Gibbings, 2016; Salmen & Dhont, 2021). Human supremacy beliefs are associated with the exclusion of animals from the circle of moral concern, and these effects generalize across different animal categories, including farmed, wild, and companion animals (Krings et al., 2021; Leite et al., 2019). By considering animals as inherently inferior, these beliefs help justify and maintain the subordinate social status of animals, thereby legitimizing their exploitation for human purposes, including food consumption (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Leite et al., 2019; see also Joy, 2010; Tallent, 2023). As such, human supremacy beliefs serve as a legitimizing myth that reinforces the moral acceptability of meat consumption, symbolizing power and dominion over animals. This helps explain why those higher in SDO are more strongly committed to meat (Dhont & Hodson, 2014).

The second psychological mechanism is perceived veg(etari)anism threat. Individuals higher in SDO or RWA are especially sensitive to threats against established hierarchies and traditional norms (e.g., De Coninck et al., 2024; Duckitt, 2006; Van Assche et al., 2016). Veg(etari)anism may be considered as such a threat because it challenges valued familial and cultural traditions surrounding meat consumption and the dominant economic and ideological systems sustaining them (Dhont et al., 2016; Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Stanley, 2022). Following Twigg's (1983) theorizing on the hierarchy of foods, meat occupies a culturally dominant position, symbolizing power and prestige and taking a central position in meals and consumption patterns. Other animal products such as fish, eggs, and dairy occupy intermediate positions, while plant-based foods are typically placed at the periphery of the plate and meal, reflecting their lower status in conventional food hierarchies (Dagevos & Voordouw, 2013; Schösler et al., 2012; Twigg, 1983). Accordingly, veg(etari)anism challenges this established food hierarchy, provoking resistance among those motivated to preserve social and cultural order. Heightened veg(etari)anism threat can therefore elicit defensive reactions, including negative attitudes toward vegetarians and vegans (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017; Stanley, 2022), consistent with intergroup theory and research indicating that perceived threats to ingroup norms and values reliably predict outgroup prejudice (Duckitt, 2006; Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Moreover, this defensive reactivity can also manifest in the form of increased meat consumption and stronger resistance to plant-based food (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Rosenfeld et al., 2023; Stanley, 2022). Thus, perceived veg(etari)anism threat helps explain why both those higher in RWA and those higher in SDO may be more committed to meat consumption, affirming food traditions while resisting alternative, pro-animal ideologies (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; MacInnis & Hodson, 2017).

However, most research in this area has focused narrowly on meat consumption, leaving open the question whether right-wing ideologies predict stronger commitment to consuming other animal products, such as dairy, eggs, and fish. On the one hand, people across the ideological spectrum may perceive dairy and egg consumption as less morally problematic than meat, and less directly linked to animal suffering. Along similar lines, fish and aquatic animals tend to be perceived as less sentient and morally relevant than farmed land animals (Ioannidou et al., 2024), which makes fish consumption appear more acceptable (e.g., Cullen et al., 2025). As such, non-meat animal product consumption may be less strongly tied to dominance-based values and human supremacy beliefs than meat consumption. Dairy, egg, and fish consumption also generally lack the symbolic cultural value of power and traditional masculinity that meat has (Adams, 1990; Allen et al., 2000; Rosenfeld, 2020; Salmen & Dhont, 2023). Therefore, the consumption of non-meat animal products might be more ideologically neutral and less shaped by dominance or tradition-based motives expressed in SDO or RWA.

On the other hand, recent findings indicate that consumers of dairy and egg (including vegetarians, pescatarians, and omnivores), as well as consumers of fish (including pescatarians and omnivores) use comparable justifications to defend their consumption as those used by meat consumers (Hopwood et al., 2025; Ioannidou et al., 2023a, 2023b). Along similar lines, we could expect that the ideological motives underpinning meat consumption also extend to dairy, egg, and fish consumption, and across dietary groups that consume these products. If meat consumption reflects general dominance desires, tradition-based values, and resistance to plant-based alternatives, then right-wing ideologies could be expected to underlie the consumption of other animal products. As human supremacy beliefs justify the moral exclusion and exploitation of animals across domains (e.g., Leite et al., 2019), then these beliefs should also justify consumption of a wider range of animal products, not just meat. Accordingly, human supremacy beliefs may partly account for the associations between SDO and animal product commitment across food categories. Furthermore, cultural traditions and dominant food systems encompass not only meat but a broad range of animal products, which may likewise be perceived as under threat by vegans in the case of egg and dairy products and by both vegetarians and vegans in the case of fish (Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024b). In line with the hierarchy of foods (Twigg, 1983), animal products occupy higher-status

positions than plant-based foods, and non-meat animal products such as cheese, eggs, or fish may even occupy the top of the hierarchy among meat reducers or avoiders (Dagevos & Voordouw, 2013; Verain & Dagevos, 2022). Therefore, those higher in SDO and those higher in RWA may be particularly motivated to uphold this hierarchy by maintaining commitment to consuming dairy, eggs, and fish, through heightened perceived veg(etari)anism threat.

1.2. The present research

The aim of the present research is to test whether right-wing ideological dispositions (SDO and RWA) predict stronger commitment to consuming a range of animal products, including dairy, eggs, and fish, in addition to meat. We further investigate the mediating role of human supremacy beliefs and perceived threat from veg(etari)anism. We test the following hypotheses:

H1. SDO and RWA will be positively associated with stronger commitment to consuming dairy (Study 1), but also to consuming more eggs, fish, in addition to meat (Study 2).

H2. Human supremacy beliefs will mediate the associations between SDO and animal product commitment (Studies 1 and 2).

H3. Perceived veg(etari)anism threat will mediate the associations between both SDO and RWA and animal product consumption (Study 2).

In Study 1, we provide an initial test of Hypotheses 1 and 2 by investigating the associations between right-wing ideologies and commitment to dairy consumption, and the role of human supremacy beliefs. In Study 2, we sought to extend the findings by investigating the associations of RWA and SDO with commitment to a wider range of animal products, including dairy, egg, fish, and meat, and the roles of both human supremacy beliefs and veg(etari)anism threat (testing Hypotheses 1 to 3).

All materials and data files used for the studies are available via the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/6trnv).

2. Study 1

In Study 1, we focus on dairy commitment, and specifically test the associations between right-ideologies (SDO and RWA) and dairy commitment as captured by a) explicit endorsement (e.g., "I would never give up dairy products", Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024a), and b) differential evaluations of dairy products relative to plant-based dairy alternatives in terms of appeal and expected taste. Finally, we test the mediating role of human supremacy beliefs.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Data were collected online from a Prolific sample of 880 adult UK residents, representative in terms of age, ethnicity, and sex. Given the focus on dairy consumption, participants who identified as vegan were not included in the analyses, leaving a final sample of 870 participants, including 705 omnivores, 84 flexitarians, 31 pescatarians, and 50 vegetarians (Mage = 46.69 years, SDage = 15.79 years; 441 female, 422 male, 5 non-binary/third gender, 2 prefer not to say or self-describe and 6 missing). This sample size exceeds the recommended sample size of 520 to be able to detect indirect effects (α = .05, power = .80) using bootstrap analyses and assuming small effect sizes for the a-, b-, and c'-paths ($\beta s = 0.14$) (Kenny, 2017, see also Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007).

After providing informed consent, respondents were asked to complete a survey, including the measures described below, and provided demographic information. At the end, they were thanked and debriefed. The study was approved by the ethics research board at the first author's institution.

2.1.2. Measures

The measures of RWA, SDO, human supremacy beliefs, and dairy commitment, were completed on 7-point scales (1 = *Strongly Agree*; 7 = *Strongly Disagree*). Reverse-keyed items were recoded and for each scale, and items were averaged into a single score with higher scores indicating higher levels of the construct.

RWA was measured with six items (α = .83) of Duckitt et al.'s (2010) scale (e.g., "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.") and SDO with six items (α = .86) of the short SDO$_7$-scale by Ho et al. (2015; e.g., "An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom"). Participants also completed the 6-item Human Supremacy Beliefs Scale (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; e.g., "Animals are inferior to humans") (α = .89). Dairy commitment was measured with three items (α = .89): "I would never give up consuming dairy products"; "I am committed to consuming dairy products"; "I cannot imagine substituting dairy products from a meal" (Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024a; adapted from Piazza et al., 2015).

To measure differential evaluations of dairy products relative to plant-based alternatives, participants were asked to evaluate six product images. Three images showed dairy products made from regular milk (i.e., cheese, yoghurt, and chocolate), and three images showed parallel plant-based dairy alternatives (for details: https://osf.io/6trnv/). Critically, to control for what was presented in the images, we varied the labels assigned to the products (see also Krings et al., 2022). For all participants, three products were labelled as regular dairy and three as plant-based dairy alternatives. These labels were counterbalanced across participants such that each product was labelled as regular dairy to half of the participants, and as plant-based dairy alternative to the other half.

Participants were asked to imagine they had the food in front of them and evaluate the products in terms of appeal (1, *extremely repulsive; 7, extremely appealing)* and taste (1, *tastes extremely bad;* 7, *tastes extremely good*) and how likely they would be to eat it (1, *extremely unlikely;* 7, *extremely likely*) if it was offered on a buffet. For both label conditions, the items were averaged across images into a single score with higher scores indicating more positive evaluations ($\alpha s > .81$). The relative index was calculated by subtracting the ratings of plant-based alternatives from the ratings of regular dairy products, such that higher scores indicated more favourable evaluations of regular dairy (vs. plant-based) products.

2.2. Results

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations and the correlations between the variables. The correlations confirmed that RWA, SDO, and human supremacy beliefs were associated with stronger explicit dairy commitment and more favourable evaluations of dairy (vs. plant-based) product.

Next, we tested a model in which RWA and SDO predict dairy commitment and product evaluations, via human supremacy beliefs (Fig. 1). As expected, SDO uniquely predicted human supremacy beliefs, which in turn, was positively associated with dairy commitment and dairy (vs. plant-based) product evaluations. SDO was significantly indirectly related to dairy commitment and dairy product evaluations

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Variables (N = 870) (Study 1).

	M	*SD*	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. RWA	4.26	1.21	/			
2. SDO	3.16	1.21	.42***	/		
3. Human Supremacy Beliefs	3.87	1.31	.21***	.39***	/	
4. Dairy Commitment	4.54	1.56	.31***	.31***	.38***	/
5. Dairy (vs. Plant-based) Product Evaluations	0.89	1.15	.09*	.19***	.33***	.45***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

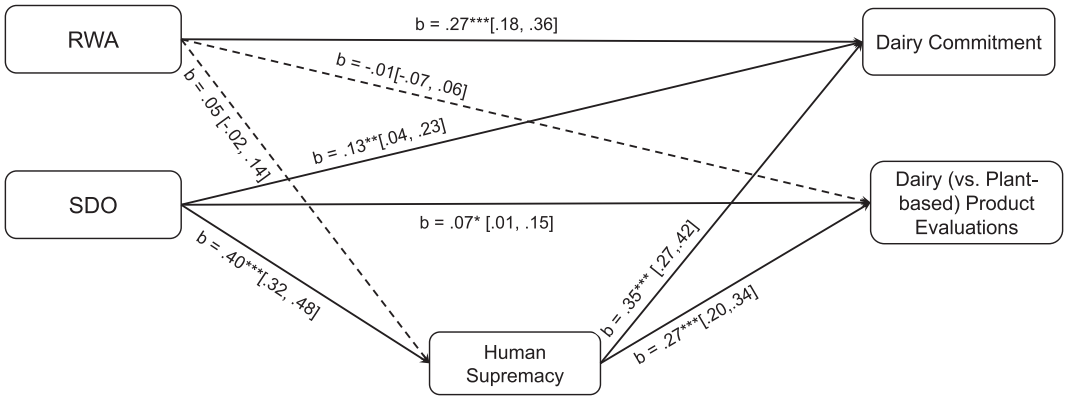

Fig. 1. Mediation model showing right-wing attitudes predicting explicit dairy commitment and favourable evaluations of dairy (*vs.* plant-based) products, through human supremacy beliefs (Study 1).
Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Dashed paths represent non-significant associations. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation

Table 2
Results of Mediation Analysis (N = 870) (Study 1).

		Dairy Commitment				Dairy (vs. Plant-based) Product Evaluations			
		β	*b*	95 %CI	*p*	*β*	*b*	95 %CI	*p*
RWA	Total effect	0.22	0.29	0.20, 0.38	< .001	0.01	0.04	−0.06, 0.08	.879
	Direct effect	0.21	0.27	0.18, 0.36	< .001	−0.01	−0.01	−0.07, 0.06	.792
	Indirect effect via Human Supremacy	0.01	0.02	−0.01, 0.05	.160	0.02	0.01	−0.01, 0.04	.160
SDO	Total effect	0.21	0.27	0.17, 0.37	< .001	0.19	0.18	0.10, 0.26	< .001
	Direct effect	0.10	0.13	0.04, 0.23	.003	0.08	0.07	−0.01, 0.15	.042
	Indirect effect via Human Supremacy	0.11	0.14	0.10, 0.18	< .001	0.11	0.11	0.08, 0.15	< .001

Note. Confidence intervals (CI) are bias-corrected percentile bootstrapped (5000 bootstrap samples) CI for the unstandardized estimates. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation.

(Table 2). Furthermore, SDO still showed a significant (but weaker) direct association with both outcomes. This finding indicates that human supremacy beliefs partially account for why those higher in SDO are more committed to dairy consumption. RWA was significantly directly related to explicit dairy commitment, but not to dairy (vs. plant-based) product evaluations (Table 2).

3. Study 2

In Study 2, we investigate the associations of RWA and SDO with dairy, egg, fish, and meat commitment and test whether a) whether human supremacy beliefs mediate the associations for SDO and b) perceived veg(etari)anism threat mediates the associations for both SDO and RWA, explaining why right-wing adherents are more committed to animal product consumption.

Furthermore, because most Study 1 participants were meat-eaters, we recruited greater proportions of participants from other dietary groups. This way, we could test whether the expected associations between ideological attitudes and animal product commitment would persist in a wider range of consumers, including omnivores, flexitarians, pescatarians, and vegetarians.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited via social media platforms and English-speaking social media groups (e.g., Facebook, Reddit groups, Instagram) with predominantly users from North America and Europe and through Prolific. We aimed to recruit English-speaking adults from a range of dietary groups (omnivores, flexitarians, pescatarians, vegetarians, vegans), with a minimum of 150 participants for each group. This would allow to detect differences between groups with small to medium effect sizes ($d \geq 0.33$ with $\alpha = .05$, power = .80, G*Power, Faul et al., 2007). Furthermore, to be able to detect indirect effects ($\alpha = .05$, power = .80) using bootstrap analyses and assuming small effect sizes for the a-, b-, and c'-paths ($\beta s = 0.14$), we aimed to recruit at least 520 participants for each model test (Kenny, 2017, see also Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007).

The full survey was completed by 1142 respondents, including 370 omnivores/meat lovers, 164 flexitarians, 161 pescatarians, 205 vegetarians, and 242 vegans (*M*age = 33.69 years, *SD*age = 13.22 years; 732 women, 326 men, 54 non-binary/agender/gender fluid, 24 prefer not to say or self-describe and 6 missing).

Participants provided informed consent before starting an online survey including the measures described below and demographic questions. They were also asked to report their dietary group (meat lover: I prefer to have meat in all or most of my meals; omnivore: I eat meat and other animal products, like dairy and/or eggs; flexitarian: primarily vegetarian but sometimes I eat meat or fish; pescatarian: I eat fish and/or seafood, as well as dairy products and eggs, but no other meat; vegetarian: I eat dairy products and/or eggs, but no meat or fish; vegan: I eat no animal products, including dairy, eggs, honey, gelatin, etc.; other). At the end participants were thanked and debriefed. The study was approved by the ethics research board at the first author's institution.

3.1.2. Measures

Measures were completed on 7-point scales (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Reverse-keyed items were recoded and for each scale, items were averaged into a single score with higher scores indicating higher levels of the construct. RWA ($\alpha = .79$), SDO ($\alpha = .79$), and Human Supremacy Beliefs ($\alpha = .81$) were measured with the same scales as in Study 1.

Veg(etari)anism threat was measured with six items ($\alpha = .98$). Participants completed two items of the original vegetarianism threat scale (Dhont & Hodson, 2014), which focused on threat to meat-eating habits

(e.g., "Eating meat is part of our cultural habits and identity and some people should be more respectful of that"). They also completed four adapted versions of these items, which focused on threat to fish-eating habits (two items, e.g., "Eating fish is part of our cultural habits and identity and some people should be more respectful of that"), and on threat to dairy and egg consumption (two items e.g., "Vegans should have more respect for our traditional eating customs, which dairy and eggs are simply part of" see Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024b). A factor analysis confirmed that the 6-item veg(etari)anism threat scale was unidimensional, explaining 87.77 % of the variance, with all factor loadings >.91.

Dairy commitment was measured with two items (r = .86) used in Study 1. Parallel items were used to measure egg (r = .84), fish (r = .86), and meat commitment (r = .90): "I would never give up eating dairy/egg/fish/meat products" and "I am committed to eating dairy/egg/fish/meat products" (Dhont & Ioannidou, 2024a; Piazza et al., 2015).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses

Table 3 presents means and standard deviations of all variables for the full sample and for each dietary group. A series of ANOVAs revealed significant dietary group differences in all variables (Table 3). Omnivores' levels of RWA, human supremacy beliefs, and veg(etari)anism threat were the highest of all groups, followed by flexitarians, pescatarians, and vegetarians, whereas vegans' levels were the lowest. SDO levels were higher among omnivores and flexitarians compared to pescatarians, vegetarians, and vegans.

As expected from the dietary categories, omnivores and flexitarians scored higher on meat commitment than pescatarians, vegetarians, and vegans. Omnivores, flexitarians, and pescatarians scored higher on fish commitment than vegetarians and vegans, while omnivores, flexitarians, pescatarians, and vegetarians scored higher on dairy and egg commitment compared to vegans. Noteworthy, omnivores were more strongly committed to consuming all animal products compared to all other groups, and flexitarians and pescatarians were more strongly committed to dairy and egg consumption compared to vegetarians. Pescatarians were more strongly committed to fish consumption compared to flexitarians.

Table 4 presents the correlations between the variables, which confirmed that RWA, SDO, human supremacy beliefs, and perceived veg(etari)anism threat were associated with stronger dairy, egg, fish, and meat commitment.

3.2.2. Hypotheses tests

Next, we tested the hypothesized associations in a series of models in which RWA and SDO predict animal product commitment, via human supremacy beliefs and veg(etari)anism threat. For each commitment variable, we only conducted the analyses with the subsample of participants that consumed the type of animal product. As such, the analysis of dairy and egg commitment only included dairy and egg consumers (n = 900 omnivores, flexitarians, pescatarians, and vegetarians), the analysis of fish commitment only included fish consumers (n = 695 omnivores, flexitarians, and pescatarians), and the analysis of meat commitment only included meat consumers (n = 534 omnivores and flexitarians).

The results of these analyses were highly consistent across commitment variables (Fig. 2). As predicted, both SDO and RWA predicted greater veg(etari)anism threat and SDO (but not RWA) predicted stronger human supremacy beliefs. Veg(etari)anism threat and were, in turn, positively associated with dairy, egg, fish, and meat commitment. For all animal products (Table 5), the effects of SDO were significantly mediated through both veg(etari)anism threat and human supremacy beliefs, while the direct effects were non-significant. For all animal products, the effects of RWA were significantly mediated through veg(etari)anism threat. The direct effects of RWA were still significant but clearly weaker compared to the total effects (Table 5). Taken together, veg(etari)anism threat and human supremacy largely accounted for why those higher in RWA or SDO are more strongly committed to consuming dairy, egg, fish, and meat products.

4. Discussion

Public and scholarly discourses have long emphasized the unique symbolic status of meat, expressing strength, cultural traditions, and dominance, and thus values that resonate with right-wing adherents (Adams, 1990; Choma et al., 2024; Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Joy, 2010; Michielsen & van der Horst, 2022). This narrow focus on meat, however, might have contributed to the impression that meat holds a unique ideological role in dietary behavior. Our findings challenge this idea by demonstrating that right-wing adherents (those higher in SDO or RWA) express greater commitment not just to meat consumption but to a broader range of animal products, including dairy, eggs, and fish. Clearly, ideologically motivated commitment to animal product consumption extends beyond meat (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Stanley, 2022), and is evident among consumers of dairy, egg, and fish, including not only omnivores, but also flexitarians, pescatarians, and vegetarians.

This pattern can be interpreted within Twigg's (1983) conceptualization of a hierarchy of foods, which places meat at the top, followed by other animal products (e.g., fish, dairy, eggs), and plant-based foods at the bottom (see also Schösler et al., 2012). However, as shown by recent work, this hierarchy is not static but varies systematically across dietary groups. For meat reducers or avoiders, non-meat animal products such as cheese, eggs, or fish can occupy the highest positions, while plant-based foods become more central to the meal (Dagevos & Voordouw, 2013; Verain & Dagevos, 2022). Our results complement these observations by showing that ideological dispositions may reinforce commitment to the upper tiers of this hierarchy, regardless of where different dietary groups place their emphasis. That is, individuals higher in SDO and RWA appear particularly motivated to maintain the cultural

Table 3
Descriptives statistics and tests for differences between dietary groups (Study 2).

	Full Sample N = 1142		Omnivores n = 370		Flexitarians n = 164		Pescatarians n = 161		Vegetarians n = 205		Vegans n = 242		Group differences		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	$F(4, 1137)$	p	η_p^2
RWA	3.10	1.22	3.61^{a}	1.20	3.18^{b}	1.21	3.07^{bc}	1.27	2.86^{c}	1.12	2.50^{d}	0.96	37.02	< .001	0.12
SDO	2.42	1.13	2.74^{a}	1.17	2.56^{a}	1.14	2.27^{b}	1.06	2.22^{b}	1.09	2.10^{b}	0.98	15.98	< .001	0.05
Human Supremacy	3.11	1.48	3.97^{a}	1.40	3.38^{b}	1.30	3.02^{c}	1.35	2.60^{d}	1.28	2.09^{e}	1.08	88.07	< .001	0.24
Veg(etari)anism Threat	2.72	1.83	3.94^{a}	1.81	3.20^{b}	1.75	2.49^{c}	1.52	1.90^{d}	1.28	1.33^{e}	0.82	137.47	< .001	0.33
Meat commitment	2.53	2.11	4.99^{a}	1.72	2.38^{b}	1.47	1.20^{c}	0.71	1.09^{c}	0.55	1.00^{c}	0.03	627.03	< .001	0.69
Fish commitment	2.83	2.08	4.33^{a}	1.98	3.36^{b}	1.86	3.70^{c}	1.74	1.13^{d}	0.51	1.02^{d}	0.21	264.61	< .001	0.48
Dairy commitment	3.43	2.11	5.07^{a}	1.71	3.85^{b}	1.77	3.56^{b}	1.77	2.89^{c}	1.55	1.02^{d}	0.12	274.80	< .001	0.49
Egg commitment	3.33	2.07	4.91^{a}	1.71	3.71^{b}	1.73	3.50^{b}	1.72	2.74^{c}	1.63	1.06^{d}	0.37	246.46	< .001	0.46

Note. Within rows, means with different superscripts indicate that the dietary groups differed significantly from each other (ps < .05). RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation.

Table 4
Correlations between variables ($N = 1142$; Study 2).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. RWA	/						
2. SDO	.50***	/					
3. Human Supremacy	.27***	.34***	/				
4. Veg(etari)anism Threat	.41***	.32***	.44***	/			
5. Dairy Commitment	.36***	.25***	.49***	.53***	/		
6. Egg Commitment	.33***	.23***	.51***	.55***	.84***	/	
7. Fish Commitment	.33***	.23**	.46***	.53***	.64***	.70***	/
8. Meat Commitment	.37***	.29***	.49***	.63***	.66***	.66***	.65***

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation.

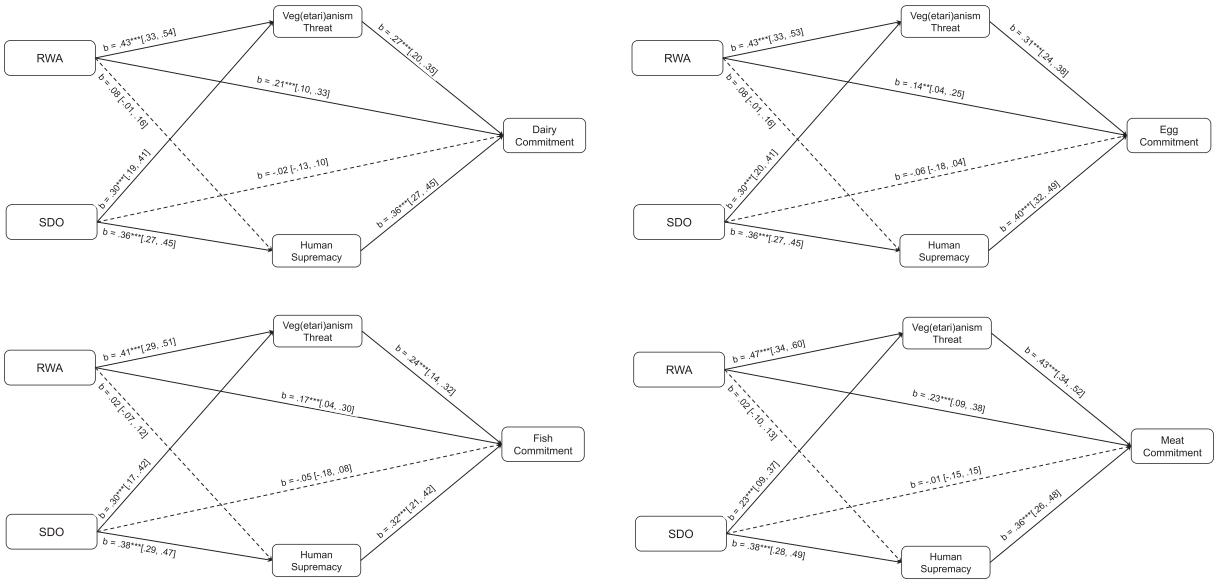

Fig. 2. Mediation models showing right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) predicting dairy, egg, fish and meat commitment, through veg(etari)anism threat and human supremacy beliefs (Study 2).
Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Dashed paths represent non-significant associations.

and symbolic order that privileges animal-based over plant-based foods, even when that order is expressed through different animal products among flexitarians, pescatarians, or vegetarians.

The strong correlations among the commitment measures may also reflect a broader defensive stance toward perceived restrictions on dietary autonomy. Vegans and animal advocates are often portrayed as moralistic or condescending, which can elicit psychological resistance to perceived threats to personal choice, particularly among right-wing adherents (Aloni et al., 2024; De Groeve et al., 2022; Gregson et al., 2024). Our findings suggest that, much like meat consumption, dairy, egg, and fish consumption may hold a symbolic meaning reflecting dominance-and tradition-based values and serve as a form of pushback against ideologies that challenge animal product consumption (i.e., veg (etari)anism). Indeed, consistent with Dhont and Hodson's (2014) findings, right-wing ideologies predicted commitment to animal product consumption through perceived veg(etari)anism threat (for both SDO and RWA effects), and human supremacy beliefs (for SDO effects). By demonstrating these dual pathways, our findings align with the dual process model of ideology and prejudice (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Judge & Wilson, 2019) yet also reveal that the relevance of ideological dispositions in dietary attitudes and behaviors is more far-reaching than previously understood.

4.1. Broader sociopolitical context and ideological polarization

While our study focused on consumer attitudes and ideological dispositions, the findings resonate with broader sociopolitical debates and strategies surrounding meat production and plant-based diets. The patterns we observed are consistent with evidence that political ideology increasingly extends into lifestyle and consumption domains, where food preferences function as symbolic expressions of social and political identity (DellaPosta et al., 2015). Beyond individual consumption, food, agriculture, and climate issues have become increasingly politicized, reflecting ideological struggles over national identity, environmental responsibility, and cultural tradition across Western societies. For instance, de Boer and Aiking (2023) showed that political orientation shapes support for climate-friendly agricultural and dietary policies, with right-leaning individuals expressing greater resistance to such shifts. Within this larger sociopolitical landscape, commitment to animal products can be understood as part of a broader pushback against perceived progressive agendas, including environmentalism and animal rights.

Such pushback is also evident at the institutional level. Research has shown how meat-industry organizations strategically construct public narratives that reframe scientific evidence and normalize continued meat consumption, reinforcing cultural attachments to meat and deflecting pressure for dietary change (Clare et al., 2022). Likewise, analyses of pro-livestock advocacy have demonstrated how some scientific actors associated with the meat and livestock sector mobilize the authority of science to legitimize ongoing meat production and downplay its environmental and ethical costs, embedding ideological and economic interests within policy and scientific discourse (Bryant et al., 2024; Espinosa et al., 2025; Krattenmacher et al., 2024). These dynamics, evident across Western contexts, could reflect the normalization

Table 5
Results of mediation models (Study 2).

		Dairy Commitment				Egg Commitment				Fish Commitment				Meat Commitment			
		β	*b*	95 %CI	*p*	*β*	*b*	95 %CI	*p*	*β*	*b*	95 %CI	*p*	*β*	*b*	95 %CI	*p*
RWA	Total effect	0.23	0.36	0.24, 0.47	< .001	0.20	0.31	0.20, 0.42	< .001	0.17	0.27	0.14, 0.40	< .001	0.26	0.44	0.29, 0.59	< .001
	Direct effect	0.14	0.21	0.10, 0.33	< .001	0.09	0.14	0.04, 0.25	.006	0.11	0.17	0.04, 0.30	.007	0.14	0.23	0.09, 0.38	< .001
	Total indirect effect	0.09	0.14	0.09, 0.21	< .001	0.11	0.16	0.10, 0.22	< .001	0.07	0.10	0.05, 0.17	< .001	0.12	0.21	0.12, 0.31	< .001
	Indirect effect via Human Supremacy	0.02	0.03	−0.004, 0.06	.081	0.02	0.03	−0.003, 0.07	.079	0.004	0.01	−0.02, 0.04	.637	0.004	0.01	−0.03, 0.05	.707
	Indirect effect via Veg(etari)anism Threat	0.08	0.12	0.08, 0.17	< .001	0.09	0.13	0.10, 0.18	< .001	0.06	0.10	0.06, 0.15	< .001	0.12	0.20	0.13, 0.28	< .001
SDO	Total effect	0.12	0.19	0.08, 0.32	.001	0.11	0.18	0.05, 0.30	.003	0.08	0.14	0.002, 0.28	.043	0.13	0.24	0.08, 0.39	.002
	Direct effect	−0.01	−0.02	−0.13, 0.10	.770	−0.04	−0.06	−0.18, 0.04	.253	−0.03	−0.05	−0.18, 0.08	.459	−0.003	−0.01	−0.15, 0.15	.936
	Total indirect effect	0.13	0.21	0.16, 0.27	< .001	0.15	0.24	0.18, 0.31	< .001	0.11	0.19	0.14, 0.25	< .001	0.14	0.24	0.16, 0.33	< .001
	Indirect effect via Human Supremacy	0.08	0.13	0.09, 0.18	< .001	0.09	0.15	0.10, 0.20	< .001	0.07	0.12	0.08, 0.18	< .001	0.08	0.14	0.09, 0.21	< .001
	Indirect effect via Veg(etari)anism Threat	0.05	0.08	0.05, 0.13	< .001	0.06	0.09	0.06, 0.14	< .001	0.04	0.07	0.04, 0.12	< .001	0.06	0.10	0.04, 0.17	.001

Note. Confidence intervals (CI) are bias-corrected percentile bootstrapped (5000 bootstrap samples) CIs for the unstandardized estimates. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation.

of ideological polarization around food and sustainability, shaping both public discourse and consumers' willingness to shift toward plant-based diets. In this context, our findings highlight how ideological commitments at the individual level mirror broader contextual divisions surrounding animal-product consumption.

4.2. Implications, limitations, and future directions

Based on the present findings, efforts to reduce animal product consumption may need to consider ideological attitudes when engaging audiences on the political right. Although our results suggest that right-wing adherents may be less responsive to conventional appeals focused on environmental and animal rights concerns, partly because they are less likely to give up animal products for such reasons (Hodson & Earle, 2018; Yule & Cummings, 2023), lower baseline willingness to change does not mean that they could not be moved by persuasive messages.

Some research suggests that moral reframing, by aligning messages with conservative values (e.g., appealing to loyalty, authority), can promote pro-environmental attitudes among right-wing individuals (Feinberg & Willer, 2013; Wolsko et al., 2016), yet more recent studies have failed to find consistent support for this approach (Kim et al., 2023; Troy et al., 2024). Building on this, recent advocacy discussions emphasized that engaging conservative audiences may be most effective when appeals are framed around broadly conservative values, including economic fairness, responsibility, and community (Arévalo & Ólafsson, 2024). However, as Jenni et al. (2025) note, such tailoring may require softening core messages, avoiding links to highly polarized issues (e.g., climate policy, social justice), and can risk feelings of inauthenticity or alienation among left-leaning advocates and allies. Beyond message content, successful engagement may also depend on who delivers these messages. Conservative or cross-partisan organizations may more credibly promote animal welfare or diet change within right-leaning communities (Jenni et al., 2025; Leenaert, 2024), without eliciting strong threat perceptions. Future research should further examine how message framing, messenger identity, and organizational alignment shape receptivity to animal product reduction campaigns across ideological groups.

More research is also needed to address the limitations of the current work. Although our mediation approach was theoretically driven and based on prior research (e.g., Dhont & Hodson, 2014), the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about the direction of the associations between ideological dispositions, psychological mechanisms, and commitment to animal product consumption. While we conceptualized animal product commitment as the criterion variable, certain pathways could also operate in the reverse or in a bidirectional way. For instance, highly committed meat consumers may be more likely to perceive veg(etari)anism as a threat, especially when confronted with challenges to their dietary practices (e.g., absence of meat options in their work canteen on meat-free Mondays). In this case, perceived threat could be triggered as a psychological reaction to situational frustrations, which in turn, may reinforce existing commitment or elicit negative responses to plant-based foods (e.g., Rosenfeld et al., 2023). It would be valuable for future research to test these reciprocal dynamics using experimental and longitudinal designs. For instance, studies could examine how situational experiences of frustration (e.g., limited meat availability, perceived social pressure to reduce animal product consumption) influence perceived threat and commitment. At the same time, our assumption that ideological dispositions underlie commitment to animal product consumption is grounded in established theoretical frameworks (e.g., Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010), which conceptualize ideology as a broad motivational foundation shaping more specific attitudes and behaviors. Longitudinal designs would also allow to examine how relatively stable ideological constructs (i.e., RWA, SDO, human supremacy beliefs) shape dietary behaviors over time. Moreover, future work could extend this framework by considering the role of populist attitudes, which may similarly shape resistance to plant-

based diets and the framing of animal consumption within broader ideological narratives.

Furthermore, although we used large and ideologically diverse samples, the data were limited to Western contexts, which may restrict the generalizability of our findings. Research on the ideological underpinnings of animal product consumption would benefit from cross-cultural studies to increase our understanding of the interplay between ideological and cultural factors shaping animal product consumption (e.g., Hopwood et al., 2024; Hopwood et al., 2025).

4.3. Conclusion

To conclude, individual differences in commitment to animal products reflect, in part, fundamental ideological differences rooted in dominance and tradition-based values. The findings demonstrate that right-wing ideologies (SDO and RWA) are associated with commitment to dairy, eggs, and fish consumption, and not just meat. More broadly, our research highlights how ideological dispositions shape attitudes and motivations that are associated with everyday behaviors and food-related decisions, including what we consume at the cost of others (i.e., non-human animals).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Maria Ioannidou: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Georgia Harlow:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation. **Mia Patel:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation. **Stefan Leach:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Gordon Hodson:** Writing – review & editing. **Kristof Dhont:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Ethical statement

The studies were approved by the ethics research board of the School of Psychology at the University of Kent.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

The data files and the materials used for the studies are available via the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/6trnv.

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