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National narcissism in politics and public understanding of science

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Abstract

People seek belongingness to groups that they evaluate positively and identify with. A strong ingroup identity is typically thought to bring about positive outcomes for the individuals and for the group. However, when group identity is motivated by frustrated psychological needs, it can manifest as collective narcissism—a belief that one's group is exceptional and deserves special treatment. Such a defensive ingroup identity is related to a motivated social cognition focused on the enhancement and protection of the ingroup image, even at the expense of ingroup members. In this Review, we consider the implications of differentiating collective narcissism from ingroup identification in the national context, and their different intragroup and intergroup manifestations. We focus on two domains: political attitudes and behaviors as well as public understanding of science related to health and environmental protection. We outline how concerns for national image enhancement and protection can shape political and social manifestations of national narcissism such as susceptibility to national image enhancement narratives, sensitivity to disrespect and suspicion of outgroups, and misinformation acceptance.

[H1] Introduction

People gain a sense of who they are by identifying with different social groups. These groups might be based on the social networks one interacts with frequently (such as workplace colleagues or sports teams) or abstract categories (such as one's nationality or ethnicity)[1]. Adopting a social identity means establishing a link between the group and the self, and typically implies that one feels part of the group and evaluates it positively[2–4]. According to social identity theory, the positive evaluation of the ingroup and its positive distinctiveness from other groups enable individuals to feel better about themselves. However, one consequence of people deriving their individual feelings of self-worth partly from group belongingness and intergroup comparisons is ingroup favoritism: people tend to view their ingroups in a more positive light than outgroups and show a preference for ingroup over outgroup members[5,6]. Accordingly, intergroup biases can serve as self-worth management tools[7,8].

Importantly, social identity can take different forms. For example, studies of national identity distinguish between patriotism and nationalism[9], constructive and blind patriotism[10], and national attachment and national glorification[11]. These studies converge in the conclusion that different forms of identity are related to different group outcomes. Nationalism, blind patriotism, and national glorification exemplify defensive forms of national identity because they are primarily aimed at satisfying individual enhancement motives by highlighting belongingness to a strong national group[12]. By contrast, patriotism, constructive patriotism, and national attachment, reflect genuine commitment to one's compatriots (rather than to the national label or image)[12].

A broader framework differentiates the more defensive collective narcissism (the belief that one's group is exceptional and deserving of privileged treatment but underappreciated by others[13]) from more secure ingroup identity (an unpretentious investment

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in the ingroup, independent of the recognition of the group in the eyes of others[14,15]; see Box 1)[12,16]. Accumulating empirical evidence demonstrates that collective narcissism and secure ingroup identity have different motivational underpinnings[17,18], and therefore different intragroup and intergroup manifestations. Collective narcissism and ingroup identification can be studied in relation to almost any social group (see Box 2 for a discussion of their application to organizations). Thus, this framework has the potential to unify research from organizational, social, and political psychology. Although all social groups can also be important sources of identity, nations as groups are bound together by common symbols, language, history, and culture[19,20], and provide a basis for social norms as well as a sense of historical continuity[1]. Thus, the concept of collective narcissism is most frequently applied to the national context (national narcissism).

In this Review, we aim to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the concomitants of national narcissism. First, we describe how national narcissism—a defensive national identity rooted in feelings of underappreciation—results in motivated social cognition characterized by a focus on national enhancement and protecting national image. Next, we demonstrate how image enhancing and image protecting processes underlying national narcissism can explain contemporary social and political phenomena by reviewing research that elucidates intergroup and intragroup consequences of national narcissism (versus secure national identity) in two domains: political attitudes and public understanding of science related to public health and environmental protection (Figure 1).

[H1] The defensive nature of national narcissism

Research and theorizing on collective narcissism take inspiration from ideas about psychological defensiveness at the individual level. Personal defensiveness is a self-favoring bias associated with a need for approval, potentially stemming from personal frustrations[21,22].

Such defensiveness is characteristic of trait narcissism—a belief in one's own superiority and entitlement to special treatment, accompanied by a need for external validation[23,24]. Researchers have argued that people can be narcissistic not only about their individual self (in which case the self requires appreciation and validation), but also the social groups they belong to (in which case one's social group requires appreciation and validation)[13]. These ideas are rooted in the psychoanalytic tradition[25,26] according to which collective narcissism is a compensatory idealization of one's group.

Individual and collective narcissism are typically positively correlated[12,13]. They are both regulated by the needs to enhance and protect the self (in the case of individual narcissism) or the group image (in the case of collective narcissism)[27,28]. However, although collective narcissism might be understood as an extension of individual narcissism to the group level[29], their motivational underpinnings and social manifestations might differ. Research on the development of individual and collective narcissism is still scarce, but there is some evidence that individual narcissism is linked to external (parental) overappreciation[30] whereas collective narcissism is linked to feeling underappreciated[17,18,24]. Collective narcissism might also be more closely linked to self-worth frustrations and resentment (which are characteristic of anxious forms of psychological attachment and vulnerable forms of narcissism[31,32]) rather than personal grandiosity (traditionally linked to narcissism)[33].

Although collective narcissism can be studied in relation to various social groups, it was originally examined in the context of national identities[13,25]. Such national narcissism can be considered defensive to the extent that it measures a group-aggrandising evaluation of one's nation that requires external validation[12]. National narcissism can also be considered as a compensation for individual frustrations[25,26]. Indeed, cross-sectional, experimental, and longitudinal studies indicate that national narcissism (typically assessed using a self-report scale in which participants are asked to indicate to what extent they agree with statements

such as "My nation deserves special treatment" or "If my nation had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place"[13]) increases following threats to personal needs. For example, US participants asked to recall a negative situation in which they did not have control over their lives reported higher US national narcissism compared to those asked to recall a negative yet controllable situation[18]. An examination of the specific motives that drive identification with social groups demonstrated that collective narcissism (measured in relation to various groups) was associated with the desire for the recognition and prestige that one can receive from that group and (albeit less consistently) with regulating self-worth and internal pressures[34]. Similarly, other studies link US and Polish national narcissism to low self-esteem[17], although this effect did not replicate in a multi-country survey[35].

National narcissism reflects a demand for recognition, privileges, and special treatment (national image enhancement) and predicts aggression and hostility when these are not afforded to the nation (national image protection). In this way national narcissism parallels individual narcissism, which is regulated by engaging in assertive self-enhancement (striving for uniqueness or grandiose fantasies) and antagonistic self-protection (striving for supremacy or devaluing others)[27]. These two aspects of individual narcissism tend to reinforce each other[36], but those high in narcissism are especially likely to display rivalry when their self-promoting efforts fail to succeed[37]. Similarly, those high in national narcissism might manifest more aggrandizing or more dominating tendencies.

Indeed, national narcissism is positively correlated with other forms of belligerent national sentiments, with the effect sizes ranging from moderate ($r = .34$[38]) to strong ($\varphi. = 83$[39])[14,39,40]. These belligerent national sentiments include group-aggrandizing beliefs, such as ingroup glorification (seeing one's nation as superior to others and respecting its symbols)[11] or blind patriotism (unquestioning positive evaluation of the nation)[10] as well as dominating beliefs, such as nationalism (a belief that one's nation is superior and, crucially, should

dominate or devalue other nations). National narcissism is a group-based ego-enhancement strategy that motivates individuals to seek both national aggrandizement as well as antagonistic self-protection from others; the latter is especially likely when the ingroup image is threatened[13,41]. Thus, a desire for the nation's recognition can turn into a quest for superiority and dominance[42].

A belief in a great-yet-underappreciated nation might also be used to compensate for negative intergroup experiences. For example, national narcissism increases in response to experimental manipulations that make participants believe that the nation has been in some way disadvantaged[43] or excluded[17] in international relations. Research conducted across 56 countries has also demonstrated that a lower level of globalization (which implies that one's nation is more isolated) is associated with higher national narcissism among citizens[35].

Regardless of the specific motives that drive national narcissism, its goals include self and group-enhancement. Thus, national narcissism should be associated with concern with how the group's image reflects on the individual. Indeed, national narcissism is characterized by defensive reactions to any threats to the national image, similar to defensive tendencies in those high in individual narcissism[44–46]. These reactions can include avoiding information that might undermine the country, attacking or questioning sources of threats, and a general proclivity for intergroup hostility[13,41,47].

Paradoxically, the need to protect the grandiose national image can make people more vigilant to threats to the ingroup. In fact, national narcissism is associated with interpreting ambiguous situations as critical or insulting[38]. Such oversensitivity can further increase national narcissism (for example, owing to perceptions of disadvantage[14]). Thus, a narcissistic investment in the national image does not necessarily serve to successfully manage the motives that drive it. That is, national narcissism is a compensatory response to threats, but it can also increase perceptions of threats. This dynamic is typical for defensive processes,

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whereby a compensation of frustrated needs can further thwart these needs and lead to negative psychological outcomes[18,23]. Furthermore, the egoistic nature of national narcissism means that the obsession with maintaining and protecting the ingroup image might trump concern for fellow group members[48]. The national image needs to be protected at all costs, even if it means harming other members of the group and/or has negative long-term consequences for the group.

In sum, national narcissism is a nation-based ego-enhancement strategy that serves as compensation for individual frustrations and unsatisfied psychological needs. It can be considered a defensive form of national identity to the extent that it motivates individuals to seek both national image enhancement that requires external validation as well as antagonistic protection from others.

[H1] National narcissism and political attitudes

The defensive character of national narcissism has important implications for political attitudes and behaviors. National narcissism manifests in a focus on ingroup enhancement coupled with a doubt about others appreciation for the group. Narratives that involve nostalgia for a glorious past[45] or collective victimhood[49,50] might be especially appealing to those high in national narcissism because they have the potential to satisfy narcissistic needs for national recognition and uniqueness[33,51]. Indeed, national narcissism is associated with support for politics and politicians that aim to boost the national image[43,52–55] even if this strategy goes against other groups, paralleling the dynamics of individual narcissism which is pursued via self-promotion or other-derogation pathways[27].

In this section, we outline how national image concerns shape political manifestations of national narcissism in contrast to secure national identity.

[H2] Glorifying the past

National image concerns and nostalgia for the glorious nation's past motivate the special interest in the nation's history among those high in national narcissism[56,57]. This interest in national history can manifest in seeking ways to glorify the nation's virtues while downplaying or denying its flaws.

People's proneness to perceive one's nation as greater than others is illustrated by a tendency to overestimate one's own nation's contribution to world history[56,58] (similar to how individuals might overestimate their contribution within a group[59]). This tendency is better predicted by national narcissism than by secure national identity[58]. At the same time, those high in national narcissism tend to be convinced that their nation is underappreciated for its historical contributions. For example, Poles higher in national narcissism are more likely to think that their contribution to the fight against communism is underappreciated[40]. National narcissism can also be mobilized to champion nation-enhancing historical policies. For example, in studies conducted in Poland those higher in national narcissism were more likely to support revisions to historical textbooks that emphasized the nation's outstanding achievements as well its past dominance over others (even at the expense of other historical information)[58].

The other side of the coin is the need to deny or distort historical facts which could undermine the group's image as morally superior[60]. Arguably the starkest examples come from research on the atrocities of World War II. In a series of studies conducted in Germany, those higher in national narcissism were more likely to demand historical closure on the Holocaust[61]. They were also more likely to engage in other defensive strategies such as moral delegitimization of Holocaust victims and wanting to recognize the perpetrator ingroup's suffering[61]. In a study conducted in Poland those high in national narcissism idealized[62] the nation's past by underestimating the percentage of Poles who collaborated with the Nazis[63]. Similarly, national narcissism was associated with boycotting or protesting artistic works that

discussed negative aspects of the nation's past (for example, accusations of anti-Semitism)[47], and with perceiving such works as less artistic[64].

Overall, such tendencies to whitewash the nation[62] might impede reconciliation with a difficult past[12]. Thus, public policies regarding the national historical narratives that appeal to those high in national narcissism involve nostalgia and oppose attempts to present the past in a critical manner[47]. By contrast, those high in secure national identity should be more prone to acknowledge both the positive and negative aspects of national history[65] and harms done by past members of the national ingroup.

[H2] Prejudice and intergroup conspiracy beliefs

Citizens' national narcissism can shape international relations through intergroup animosity. Owing to increased threat sensitivity, those high in national narcissism might be especially susceptible to intergroup conspiracy theories[66], that is, attempts to explain the causes of important social or political events by accusing members of other groups of secret plots[67–69]. This susceptibility to conspiracy beliefs can be exploited by political leaders. For example, national narcissism in Poland was associated with belief in conspiracy theories about Russian involvement in the Smolensk plane crash (during which the Polish President and multiple Polish prominent politicians from both sides of the political spectrum lost their lives)[40], as well as with beliefs in conspiracy theories about Jewish people[70]. National narcissism in the US was associated with a tendency to interpret political events around the 2016 presidential election in terms of group-based conspiracies[71], and with a belief that foreign (but not US) governments are involved in conspiracies[40]. National narcissism also predicted mutual conspiracy beliefs between the US and China[72].

Research on conspiracy beliefs also demonstrates that national narcissism is characterized by a general lack of trust towards outgroups as well as a propensity to interpret even ambiguous international signals negatively[38]. Consequently, national narcissism predicts

generalized intergroup hostility[14,70]. For example, national narcissism is associated with prejudice and overt aggression towards minority ethnic groups[14,73,74], support for anti-immigrant extremism, as well as justification of restrictive immigration policies[74]. Those higher in national narcissism also exhibit less willingness to engage in solidarity based collective action towards others (for example refugees)[75] and are reluctant to support pro-outgroup collective movements[75,76] (Box 3).

[H2] Narcissistic diplomacy

An image-focused national narcissistic orientation in international relations has implications for international diplomacy style. As described above, national narcissism is related to reluctance to take responsibility for any misdeeds of ingroup members, and therefore to protesting in response to criticism or threat in the international arena. For example, in Poland those high in national narcissism supported delivering a diplomatic démarche against President Macron who encouraged environmental activists to protest against Poland's opposition to the Green Deal policy. Those higher in national narcissism were also more likely to support actions like dismissing Poland's ambassador from France, and to demand explanations and an apology from the French embassy in Warsaw. By contrast, those high in secure national identity prioritized pro-environmental actions (such as passing a law supporting renewable energy sources) in response to the same event[52].

Those higher in national narcissism are also more likely to support reacting with violence and aggression[41] rather than other diplomatic efforts in response to threats or criticisms of the nation in the international arena. For example, national narcissism predicted support for military aggression in the context of the US-Iraq relations[13], and for a tougher China policy in the context of US-China relations[77]. In a study conducted in Poland, those higher in national narcissism (but not secure national identity) were more likely to support hostile actions against a British representative in a condition where they were told that the

British public criticized Poles for anti-Semitism during World War II (compared to a condition where they were told that the British public praised Polish help offered to Jewish people during that time)[41].

[H2] Skepticism towards supranational organizations

National image concerns that are characteristic of national narcissism can also manifest in skepticism toward multi-national organizations and centrifugal tendencies, that is tendencies to evaluate negatively and withdraw from supra-national organizations (or multi-national states)[53]. For example, in the UK and Poland, those high in national narcissism supported policies that reflect societal dissatisfaction with EU membership. National narcissism was associated with voting 'leave' in the Brexit referendum in the UK[43,53,54], and with intentions to vote 'leave' in a hypothetical Polexit referendum in Poland (whereas secure national identity was associated with intentions to vote 'remain')[54]. Both in the Brexit and Polexit referenda, the willingness to vote 'leave' was driven by views that EU membership is a bad deal: those high in national narcissism believed that the overall balance of gains and losses from EU membership was bad for their country[54].

These results suggest that exploiting the narratives of unappreciated greatness of one's nation and need for recognition might mobilize dissatisfaction with the effects of European integration (and, by extension, with membership in other supranational organizations), and thereby support for populist candidates or parties. However, dissatisfaction with supranational organizations such as the EU might be accompanied by a willingness to offer help to nations belonging to such organizations when narcissistic grandiosity is rooted in beliefs about the nation's exceptional morality (communal collective narcissism; Box 4).

[H2] Populism and illiberalism

Finally, national narcissism has been linked to illiberalism[78] and populism[79]. National narcissism is a robust predictor of support for populist leaders (such as Donald Trump in the

US[71], Victor Orbán in Hungary[80] and Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland[33]), and populist parties (such as Hungarian Fidesz[41] or Polish Law and Justice party[43]). Paradoxically, susceptibility to populist anti-elitism narratives is not related to respect for the people's will. In fact, national narcissism (but not secure national identity) is associated with lower support for democracy[15].

The illiberal orientation of those high in national narcissism is also reflected in their readiness to support restrictions on the civil rights and liberties of compatriots (including, but not limited to, minority groups). For example, national narcissism is associated with support for government surveillance of its citizens (such as the Polish government's use of the Pegasus spy software)[81]. Those higher in national narcissism are also more likely to report being willing to engage in actions such as wiretapping citizens, spreading false information if required, or engaging in internet surveillance without consent if they held a government position[31,81]. Thus, anti-ingroup tendencies of national narcissism manifest in prioritizing the reinforcement of the national image over the well-being of ingroup members[82].

In sum, prioritizing national enhancement in politics often comes at a price: national narcissism is associated with intergroup tensions, dissatisfaction with supranational organizations, centrifugal tendencies, whitewashing history, and narcissistic diplomacy. Populism and illiberalism are psychologically appealing to those high in national narcissism because they focus on reinforcing the national image, which serves as a promise of protection against frustrated individual needs. Importantly, national narcissism is related to other variables often associated with illiberal policies and intergroup animosities, such as social dominance orientation[73] (one's preference for inequality between social groups[83]), authoritarianism[73], and right-wing political orientation[62,84]. However, national narcissism tends to predict political outcomes over and above these constructs[13,41,52,62,73,84].

[H1] National narcissism and science attitudes

A vast literature has focused on social and psychological mechanisms underlying different approaches to addressing major contemporary challenges such as environmental changes[85–87] and public health crises[88,89]. Because these challenges are characterized by a tension between global common goals and local actions[90], people's attitudes toward them and policy preferences tend to depend on national identity[91].

As outlined above, national narcissism is related to skepticism toward global arrangements[35] and higher country-level national narcissism is associated with a lower globalization index[92]. In this section, we draw on examples from public health and environmental protection to illustrate how those high in national narcissism are driven by a motivated social cognition characterized by opposition to externally imposed national-level political measures that either fail to reinforce the image of the nation as strong and powerful or entail national-level or personal-level restrictions.

[H2] Public health

Because national narcissism is related to prioritizing defense and reinforcement of the national image over the well-being of compatriots, national narcissism is associated with support for policies that might be harmful to their societies in the long run. This propensity of those high in national narcissism to prioritize national image over the well-being of compatriots is perhaps best illustrated by a study that investigated support for strategic political public health decisions during various stages of the COVID-19 pandemic[48]. In the UK, national narcissism was associated with greater support for declining the invitation from the EU to participate in the so-called 'ventilator scheme' (that is, joint and therefore cheaper purchase of equipment for UK and EU patients suffering from long-term effects of COVID-19). Thus, national narcissism was linked to support for a decision that validated the image of the national group as being capable of caring for COVID-19 patients but that risked

deterioration of ingroup members' health if sufficient ventilators were not available. In the US, image enhancement concerns were associated with a greater willingness to decrease the number of coronavirus tests taken in the country. Those high in national narcissism were ready to accept the health-related consequences of undertesting because mass testing might reveal a higher number of infections, which could diminish the country's image by suggesting that it was not excelling in curbing the spread of the virus. Moreover, despite their reluctance to become vaccinated themselves (vaccine hesitancy), those higher in national narcissism in the US were also more likely to support introducing the US-developed vaccine ahead of other countries, even if that required promoting and selling the vaccine without due diligence (vaccine rush). These ostensibly divergent outcomes (vaccine hesitancy and vaccine rush) can be explained by the same underlying mechanism: national image concerns.

None of these counterproductive policy preferences involving purchasing of medical equipment, mass testing, and COVID-19 vaccine roll-out were predicted by secure national identity[48]. Meanwhile, a cross-national survey conducted in 67 countries during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that secure national identity predicted stronger support for anti-spread public health policies and propensity to follow rules regarding personal health-related behaviors (for example, distancing and hand-washing)[91].

The tendency to support policies that enhance the national image at the expense of compatriot well-being might be exacerbated by conspiracy beliefs about outgroups and other actors. For example, national narcissism in Poland was positively related to the endorsement of conspiracy beliefs regarding vaccination (for example, "Pharmaceutical companies, scientists and academics work together to cover up the dangers of vaccines" or "The flu vaccine allows the government to monitor the elderly through the implantation of tiny tracking devices")[93]. By contrast, secure national identity negatively predicted these beliefs[94]. Similarly, a study employing data from 56 countries[88,95] found a robust positive effect of

national narcissism and a negative effect of secure national identity on endorsement of conspiracy beliefs regarding the COVID-19 pandemic (such as "The coronavirus is a bioweapon engineered by scientists" or "The coronavirus is a hoax invented by interest groups for financial gains")[88]. Similar findings were observed for the Zika outbreak in France[96]. Importantly, belief in conspiracy theories explains why national narcissism is related to support for public policies such as voluntary (as opposed to obligatory) vaccination in Poland[94]: the effect of national narcissism on policy support was mediated by belief in conspiracy theories regarding vaccines.

In studies conducted in the US and UK, national narcissism predicted willingness to share conspiracy beliefs regarding COVID-19 pandemic on social media[88]. Compared to print media, which provide perspectives of different groups[97], social media create echo chambers that are often suggested to produce ingroup favoritism, polarization, and extremism[98]. The research on national narcissism and social media behavior suggests that echo chambers might satisfy frustrated psychological needs of those who seek external validation of the national image.

[H2] Environmental protection

In the environmental domain, image concerns manifest in willingness to oppose pro-environmental policies and support anti-environmental policies[52,55,99]. This is likely because environmental actions are often perceived as being imposed by powerful groups (other nations or international organizations). Resisting these alleged influences conveys the sense of being independent and autonomous, even if it does not serve national interests in the long run[55]. For example, national narcissism is associated with support for actions that undermine both climate change mitigation efforts and health of compatriots, like subsidizing the coal industry[55], and opposition to policies aimed at global mitigation of climate change, like the

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Green Deal[99]. Moreover, those high in national narcissism even support policies that undermine national environmental heritage, like cutting a protected forest[55].

These findings do not imply that those high in national narcissism never support environmental actions. In fact, they might use it strategically, as illustrated by research on political greenwashing (instrumental exploitation of the environmental narratives to reinforce the nation's image and mobilize political support). Although those higher in national narcissism (but not secure national identity) are more likely to oppose governmental campaigns aimed at increasing environmental protection or mitigation of climate change, they are also more likely to support purely symbolic campaigns aimed at enhancing the country's green image[52]. For example, national narcissism in Poland was associated with prioritizing green image campaign subsidies (that is, promoting Poland as a green country) over green actions (such as investing in renewable energy). This line of research also demonstrates that national narcissism is distinct from political ideology, even though they are positively associated[100]. For example, whereas those high in national narcissism might support environmental actions that are image-enhancing, individuals on the political right have an ideological tendency to reject environmentalism[101–103] and tend to oppose any action that is related to environmental issues (both genuine pro-environmental campaigns as well as greenwashing image campaigns)[52].

These attitudes towards environmental and climate change mitigation policies might be related to conspiracy beliefs. Indeed, national narcissism (but not secure national identity) is positively related to conspiracy beliefs regarding human-caused climate change (for example, endorsement of the statement "The claim that the climate is changing due to emissions from fossil fuels is a hoax perpetrated by corrupt scientists who wish to spend more taxpayer money on climate research")[104], and therefore to climate science skepticism[105].

In sum, in both the public health and environmental protection domains, national narcissism is associated with prioritizing national image over actions that serve global goals[35]. Consequently, national narcissism is associated with support for public policies that enhance the image of a national group as strong and autonomous, even at the expense of the well-being of compatriots. By contrast, secure national identity is consistently related to support for policies that directly serve ingroup members, for example, by enabling effective strategies to combat a pandemic threat. However, when the national ingroup gain is not direct (as in the environmental protection domain), secure national identity is unrelated to support for such policies[52,55].

[H1] National narcissism across domains

The current social and political psychology literature provides robust evidence that different forms of national identity regulate social cognition, and consequently their associations with a range of political consequences. National narcissism (but not secure national identity) is related to motivated social cognition that involves a focus on national image and in group defense. Thus, although those high in national narcissism might be expected to seek national enhancement (for example, via historical enhancement or narcissistic diplomacy), under conditions of threat such defensiveness might motivate them to seek dominance and exert their superiority over other groups (for example, refugees).

The motivated social cognition typical of those high in national narcissism manifests in acceptance of conspiracy theories, opposition to science-backed policies, and susceptibility to narratives of national disadvantage and enhancement. Conspiracy narratives —regarding diseases, medical procedures, climate change, political goals, or intergroup malevolent actions—are appealing to those high in national narcissism because they provide an accessible group-based ego-enhancement strategy and an explanation of the perceived ingroup

disadvantage[16]. The belief that others are conspiring against a group implies that this group is important and others are taking action to minimize its influences. Thus, a national disadvantage would not be something the group members are bringing on themselves, but instead is an effect of others' malevolent actions that cannot be easily exposed and counteracted[12].

Narratives of disadvantage and enhancement—historical, economic, or political—might resonate especially well with those high in national narcissism because they validate national independence and strength by demonstrating resistance to influence from high-status groups, even (or perhaps, especially) when this resistance is harmful to ingroup members (that is, resistance might be a 'costly signal' associated with the status). Symbolic—often fictitious—belief systems evolved to enhance ingroup cohesion and coordination[106], but these might be undermined by national narcissism. Still, national narcissism remains appealing because of its short-term protective function, similar to the paradox observed in individual narcissism: narcissists invest in signaling status and superiority over others, which in the long run undermines their social relations and is therefore counterproductive to their goal of gaining positive feedback and admiration from others[24].

Nevertheless, for some it might be tempting to exploit underlying narcissistic needs and shape the political agenda to fit them. Indeed, those high in national narcissism were found to support populist politicians, parties, and programs[43]. To maintain their support populist politicians might then be tempted to engage in narcissistic diplomacy (mostly symbolic actions that enhance the national image in the short term and thereby mobilize political support within the group at the expense of long-term national ingroup stability). Such actions aim to make a statement about the nation and include delivering diplomatic démarches and opposition to international organizations or policies that could tackle global challenges.

At the same time, national narcissism is associated with lower support for public policies that entail national or personal restrictions. Instead, those high in national narcissism support decisions and policies that serve the national image but harm compatriots by impairing their health, putting their security at risk, or undermining national heritage. Thus, despite their focus on external threats, nations with a history of cherishing the narcissistic concept of national identity might in fact be threatened from within. Because of the societal threats represented by national narcissism, monitoring the level of national narcissism within a nation and educational efforts to avoid or minimize long-term harm are needed.

[H1] Summary and future directions

National narcissism (in contrast to secure national identity) is aimed at serving unsatisfied personal needs by providing an accessible group-based ego-enhancement strategy based on national image enhancement and defense, rather than serving the well-being of compatriots. National narcissism might manifest in a range of undesirable ways, such as poorer well-being owing to reduced ability to apply effective public health measures to contain diseases, harm to the natural environment, the inability to introduce effective climate mitigation policies, or a populist political milieu that might undermine a country's ability to respond to external threats. Thus, national narcissism poses an intranational and international threat.

This explanatory framework bridging group identity literature and psychoanalytical insights suggests potentially fruitful research avenues. First, scholarly work should verify under which conditions pro-group goals (regarding for example public health or climate change mitigation efforts) could be effectively introduced. Second, to increase internal validity as well as the applicability of this line of investigation, research should establish how specific personal, group, and intergroup factors influence national narcissism but not secure

national identity (and vice versa). Research shows that unsatisfied personal needs and national disadvantage might intensify national narcissism, suggesting that political support can be mobilized around those narratives. However, it is unclear whether fulfilled personal needs always accompany the non-narcissistic form of national identity[18,32]. More practically, to move beyond populist world politics effective ways of mobilizing national identification without intensifying its narcissistic components need to be developed.

Third, disentangling the potential influences of political agenda-setting or framing[107–109] from citizens' personal needs and their interactions with one another on willingness to support certain policies and politicians is crucial from a theoretical as well as practical perspective. Future research might investigate whether populist politicians are able to directly stimulate national narcissism and therefore gain support for populist policies, or whether populist agendas must resonate with existing national narcissism for populists to mobilize political support. Finally, more work is required to understand the underpinnings of national narcissism among members of politically disadvantaged versus advantaged nations or ethnic groups[76].

In contrast to national narcissism, those more securely identified with the nation prioritize group members over group image and are therefore more prone to support public policies and to engage directly in actions aimed at maintaining the health and well-being of compatriots. Thus, addressing the current challenges of humankind such as climate change, rapidly proliferating infectious diseases, and global disparities require overcoming the detrimental effects of national narcissism, as well as identifying factors that solidify a secure national identity[20]. However, in many socio-political contexts secure national identity is associated with support for public health policies, but not proenvironmental or climate-change-mitigating policies. The lack of consistent link between secure national identity and pro-environmentalism might be because industries related to traditional sources of energy

based on fossil fuels are a defining element of national identity in the contexts studied so far[110–113]. Thus, these findings highlight the need for research focused on how environmental protection and sustainable energy sources could be incorporated into national identities to ultimately increase support for climate change mitigation polices.

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In this work, the authors theorize and empirically test a multi-dimensional measure of ingroup identity.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Manifestations of national narcissism. Different outcomes of national narcissism related to political attitudes (blue) and science attitudes (yellow). The different outcomes are linked to the needs to enhance or protect the national ingroup image.

Box 1: Secure national identification

Understanding collective narcissism can help elucidate the concept of secure ingroup identity[12]. Conventionally understood group identification refers to feelings of strong bonds and solidarity with one's ingroup members and a sense of satisfaction from ingroup membership[2]. Consequently, national identification scales (which typically measure the importance of the group to the individual, ties to other ingroup members, and satisfaction with one's group membership) are not well suited to capture the security of one's identity[3]. To address this problem, we can take inspiration from personality psychology, where researchers often co-vary out self-esteem from measures of individual narcissism to tap into a secure sense of self-worth[114,115]. Similarly, conventional ingroup identification, typically measured in social identity research, can comprise both secure and defensive elements. Thus, a measure of secure ingroup identity can be obtained by co-varying out collective narcissism from measures of conventional ingroup identification, especially those that capture the ties to other ingroup members, satisfaction with one's group membership, and importance of the group to the individual[47,116].

Secure ingroup identity stems from satisfaction— rather than frustration—of individual needs (for example, higher personal control[18]). It is also associated with the feeling that one's identity is inherently satisfying, coherent with one's values, and helps reach personally important objectives[34]. Importantly, those with secure ingroup identity have the capacity to serve the group. Secure ingroup identity is thereby associated with greater resilience to intergroup threats and ability to focus on advancing the group by caring for its members[12].

Understanding secure national identity has important implications for observations of potentially positive effects of national sentiments. Indeed, research on national narcissism often controls for conventional national identification, thereby allowing researchers to

observe secure forms of national identity and examine their effects. For example, secure national identity was found to be negatively related to intergroup biases[14]. Crucially, when the overlap between national narcissism and national identification is accounted for, what remains is the defensive entitlement and concern about external recognition of the nation in the eyes of others[14,15,33,47]. Thus, national narcissism captures more closely the defensive nature of social identity postulated by social identity theory.

Box 2: Organizational narcissism

Social groups such as organizations, business companies, or political parties, differ from social categories, such as gender or nationality, in the extent to which group belongingness is voluntary, depends on the individual decision (versus social consensus), and is organized around a concrete (rather than abstract) goal. Thus, organizational identities provide a unique social context for examining social identity.

Organizational identity means that people feel part of the organization and evaluate it positively[117]. Strong organizational identity is typically associated with positive outcomes for individuals (for example, employee satisfaction[118,119]) and groups (for example, higher performance and job involvement[120,121]). However, some studies also find negative effects of strong organizational identification (for example, unethical behavior[122,123]). It has been theorized that ego enrichment motives—that is, motivation to develop and include new elements into self—are linked to secure organizational identity (and thereby to more positive organizational outcomes). By contrast, ego enhancement motives—that is motivation to sustain the positive self-image—are theorized to be linked to narcissistic identity (and, consequently, to more negative outcomes)[124]. When considered as an example of collective narcissism, organizational narcissism is the belief that one's organization is exceptional yet underappreciated externally (note that in other research traditions organizational narcissism has been conceptualized as seeing oneself as central to the organization's identity[125]).

Within business organizations, tendencies associated with organizational narcissism include instrumental treatment of co-workers[82] and intentions to engage in workplace conspiracies against them[81]. Within political parties, organizational narcissism is associated with promoting self-interests, building personal power[82] and willingness to engage in secrecy and deception, as well as more devious forms of politicking[126]. Within extremist

organizations, organizational narcissism is associated with support for political violence[127]. In the sports domain, the narcissistic identity of sport team fans is linked to dysfunctional behaviors, both at the intragroup and intergroup level (for example, yelling at referees or initiating conflicts with the rival's fans)[128]. Thus, in contrast to a secure organizational identity, organizational narcissism is associated with lower regard for the well-being of fellow members and might undermine organizational cohesion in the long run.

Box 3: Collective narcissism and collective action

Given that collective narcissism is driven by the need to enhance the group, it should be associated with engagement in political actions aimed at advancing the group's goals and protecting its image or rights. Indeed, national narcissism has been associated with willingness to engage in protests in defense of the group's image[47]. However, the appeal of different collective actions and social movements will depend on the extent to which they serve the group's needs and goals.

When examined in the context of societally advantaged groups (for example, the national majority or high-status ethnic groups), collective narcissism tends to be associated with support for reactionary movements and actions, that is, those that aim to defend the status quo or bring about reactionary social change (for example by increasing, rather than challenging, social hierarchies)[129,130]. In Poland, national narcissism predicted participation in a far-right Independence March[76]. In the US, collective narcissism measured in relation to white identity was associated with support for nationalist white supremacist organizations, such as the alt-right[74,76]. For advantaged groups, the effects of secure ingroup identity on support for reactionary movements are typically smaller than those of collective narcissism[76].

However, a different picture emerges for progressive social movements that challenge the status quo to achieve greater equality[129,130]. Such collective action appeals more to those high in collective narcissism if they are members of societally disadvantaged (vs. advantaged) groups. Preliminary work conducted among minority ethnic groups showed that ethnic collective narcissism was associated with support for progressive movements, such as Black Lives Matter[76]. Interestingly, there were similarly strong effects of secure ethnic identity, suggesting that among members of disadvantaged groups support for progressive movements might be motivated both by the needs to enhance and protect the ingroup image (captured by collective narcissism) as well as affection and ties to ingroup members (captured by secure

ingroup identity)[76]. Nonetheless, collective narcissism and secure ingroup identity should predict preferences for different types of political actions: collective narcissism tends to be associated with support for disruptive or violent actions that violate social norms and cohesion (such as destroying property)[31], whereas secure ingroup identity predicts engagement in more normative actions (such as legal demonstrations)[131].

Box 4: Communal collective narcissism

Although individual narcissism is typically seen as a desire for superiority and dominance in the agentic domain (for example, seeing oneself as especially intelligent or skillful)[23], some researchers argue that self-enhancement motives can also be achieved by feeling superior in a communal domain (for example, seeing oneself as exceptionally helpful or moral)[132]. The latter is thought to be a characteristic of communal narcissism[132]. This distinction in the study of individual narcissism has been applied to collective narcissism[133]. In that study, communal collective narcissism (measured with items that tap into a narcissistic group identity in communal domains, such as "Very few other groups are as moral as mine") was characterized as unrealistically positive convictions about one's ingroup's communal traits (such as morality or warmth), and entitlement to recognition for these virtues[133].

Measures of communal collective narcissism are strongly correlated (r between .62[133] and .83[134]) with the more general Collective Narcissism Scale[13]. These results suggest that a broader conceptualization of collective narcissism might to some degree capture perceptions of the group as exceptional and deserving special appreciation in communal domains. Thus, both general and communal collective narcissism often predict similar outcomes. For example, when measured in reference to the national group in Poland, general and communal collective narcissism were associated with similar beliefs and behavioral intentions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: both were unrelated to self-reports of taking preventive measures but positively related to self-reports of selfish hoarding behaviors[135]. They also both predicted hostility towards outgroups, such as the EU[134], and support for the country's military aggression in international relations[133].

Despite these similarities, focusing on communal aspects of collective narcissism might elucidate some of its unique effects. For example, when the overlap between general

and communal national narcissism was accounted for, communal national narcissism predicted greater willingness to support governmental efforts to help Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic[134]. Communal national narcissism was also associated with support for tsunami victims in Indonesia, and unrelated to support for the country's engagement in humanitarian aid overall, whereas general national narcissism was negatively associated with these outcomes[133].