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**Moral Tribalism: Moral Judgments of Actions Supporting Ingroup Interests Depend on  
Collective Narcissism**

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### Abstract

In this article, we examine how group identity and protection of group interests shape morality judgments. We argue that actions serving ingroup interests are more likely to be judged as moral (or less immoral) than the same actions that do not serve ingroup interests. However, this group-interest bias should be especially strong among those high in collective narcissism—a defensive belief in ingroup greatness that is not appreciated by others. In Studies 1 ( $N = 185$ , Polish and British participants) and 2 ( $N = 404$ , British participants), participants judged actions favouring interests of outgroup members as less moral than similar actions favouring interests of their ingroup. However, this effect was only present for those high in national collective narcissism. In Study 3 ( $N = 400$ , American participants), moral judgements of the US Senate’s decision about Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination depended on partisanship, but this effect was strengthened by partisan collective narcissism. Finally, in Study 4 ( $N = 711$ , American participants), the association between national collective narcissism and morality judgments of President Trump’s decision to remain an ally of Saudi Arabia was especially strong when national interest was salient (vs. not). None of the studies observed similar moderating effects of conventional ingroup identification. Overall, these results suggest that ingroup interests shape moral judgments, but this bias is most prevalent among those who are defensive about their group identity.

*Keywords:* morality, intergroup processes, ingroup identification, collective narcissism, group interest

## **Moral Tribalism: Moral Judgments of Actions Supporting Ingroup Interests Depend on Collective Narcissism**

During the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump, Professor Alan Dershowitz said: “if a president does something which he believes will help him get elected in the public interest, that cannot be the kind of quid pro quo that results in impeachment” (Begala, 2020; para. 7). The infamous “Dershowitz doctrine” seems to suggest that if a president believes that his actions would serve the national interest, such actions could not be considered unethical (Edmondson, 2020). Does it mean that people believe that actions serving ingroup interests are morally right? Recent research conducted in 60 different societies demonstrates that cooperative behaviours (e.g., helping your group) are uniformly seen as positive (Curry, Mullins, Whitehouse, 2019). This suggests that tribalism may profoundly impact people’s beliefs about what is morally right or wrong. In this paper, we attempt to unpack the intergroup processes involved in moral tribalism. Specifically, we aim to examine how the strength and type of ingroup identification as well as perceptions of ingroup interests shape judgments of morality.

Perceptions of what is moral versus not are, by definition, socially shared (Leach, Bilali, & Pagliaro, 2015) and vital for intergroup relations (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2018; Ellemers & van den Bos, 2012; Haidt, 2008; Halevy, Kreps, Weisel, & Goldenberg, 2015). Nevertheless, we know surprisingly little about whether and how one’s social identity shapes moral judgments. A recent analysis of moral psychology studies conducted between 1940 and 2017 concluded that “[t]he interest in intragroup mechanisms is very rare across the board” (Ellemers, van der Toorn, Paunov, & van Leeuwen, 2019; p. 15). In this paper, we propose that moral judgments of actions of ingroup versus outgroup members can be biased by perceptions of what is in the interest of the group, especially for highly defensive group identifiers.

**Judgments about morality**

People care profoundly about morality. They want to be seen as moral, especially in the eyes of their ingroup members (van Nunspeet, Derks, Ellemers, & Nieuwenhuis, 2014). They are also motivated to seek information about other's moral qualities (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, & Cherubini, 2011; Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, Cherubini, & Yzerbyt, 2012; Wojciszke, 2005) and care whether others behave fairly (Tyler & Blader, 2003). For example, some studies show that people are more willing to accept third-party decisions that do not benefit them as long as they think these decisions were made fairly (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988). This evidence suggests that people should be motivated to form objective and impartial moral judgements. Nevertheless, other psychological research shows that moral judgements are often susceptible to biases.

Even though people perceive their own moral beliefs as objective and rational as scientific statements (Goodwin & Darley, 2008), research shows that moral judgments are biased by various factors, including emotions (Schnall, 2017) and attitudes (Bocian, Baryla, Kulesza, Schnall, & Wojciszke, 2018). For example, when participants lacked information whether another person received more or fewer lottery tickets than them, their justice judgments about the lottery tickets divisions were strongly influenced by their affective states (van den Bos, 2003). Further, evidence suggests that even though people try to make impartial fairness judgments, sometimes their judgements are subject to egocentric interpretations (Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992). A classic example of the egocentric bias is a study by Messick and Sentis (1979), which showed that people overpaid themselves and underpaid others for identical work. More recent research found that people's moral judgment about equality and equity rules depends on their interest—people not only prefer rules which benefit them but also judge them as more moral and fair (DeScioli, Massenkoff, Shaw, Petersen, & Kuzban, 2014).

Studies also show that people selectively endorse general moral principles (e.g., do not kill) to rationalise moral conclusions that would be in line with their political orientation (Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto, 2009; see also Frimer, Gaucher, & Schaefer, 2014; Voelkel & Brandt, 2019). People were more likely to perceive politicians as moral if their program served their interest (compared to politicians whose program undermined their interest; Cislak & Wojciszke, 2006). Along the same line, research shows that people's judgments about counter-normative behaviour are prone to the self-interest bias. When people benefitted from a behaviour which violated social norms, they judged this behaviour more leniently (or even positively). However, their judgment remained objective when their interest was not involved (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014; Bocian, Baryla, & Wojciszke, 2016; see Bocian, Baryla, & Wojciszke, 2020 for the overview).

In this research, we examine how moral judgments would be made at the intergroup level. On the one hand, we could expect that people would be motivated to judge the morality of different actions impartially, that is independently on whether they serve the ingroup versus the outgroup. On the other hand, research on egocentric biases in moral judgements suggest that we could observe similar process involving egocentric interpretation at the intergroup level. The latter possibility should be especially likely when people are motivated to protect the ingroup.

### **Ingroup bias in moral judgements**

Research conducted in the social identity tradition (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) suggests that people tend to show preferential treatment of their own (vs. other) group members. For example, they prefer helping members of their own groups (e.g., Halevy, Weisel, & Bornstein, 2012; Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005) and are more concerned about harm to their ingroup (vs. outgroup) members (e.g., Pratto & Glasfold, 2008). Importantly, ingroup and outgroup members are often judged differently for the same behaviour.

Selfishness of ingroup members is more likely to be judged as fair than selfishness of outgroup members (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). Research conducted in the context of war, provided also some evidence for biased morality judgments. For example, sacrificing outgroup members was seen as more morally acceptable than sacrificing ingroup members (Watkins & Laham, 2019; see also Watkins & Goodwin, 2020). People also justified torture as moral when it was perpetrated by ingroup members, compared to outgroup members (Tarrant, Branscombe, Warner, & Weston, 2012). Also, in the context of intense intergroup competition, people engaging in deceit out of loyalty to their group were perceived as more ethical than people who were honest but not loyal to the group (Hildreth & Anderson, 2018).

Other lines of inquiry show that people are less prone to punish or dislike ingroup (but not outgroup) leaders who committed transgressions (Abrams, Randsley de Moura & Travaglini, 2013; see also Platow, Hoar, Reid, Harley, & Morrison, 1997). This effect was especially likely when these transgressions served ingroup (rather than individual) interests (Abrams et al., 2013; Study 5). Similarly, research indicates that perceptions of policy fairness are based, among other things, on how well these policies serve ingroup interests (Bialobrzeska, Bocian, Parzuchowski, Frankowska, & Wojciszke, 2015). For example, citizens were likely to support policies that benefitted their nation, even if they could harm others (Baron, Ritov, & Greene, 2013). Although these studies did not focus on judgements of morality per se, they suggest that moral judgements of ingroup (vs. outgroup) actions might be generally driven by ingroup interest and group identity.

Overall, the evidence we reviewed suggests that even though people care about fairness, their moral judgments might be biased by egocentric interpretations (Bocian et al., 2020) and ingroup favouritism (see also Oldenquist, 1982; Platow et al., 1997). Therefore, people should perceive the same actions as morally right when they serve their group

interests, but morally wrong when they serve outgroup interests. However, we argue that the prevalence of this bias should depend on the way people identify with their groups.

### **Do moral judgements depend on ingroup commitment?**

People tend to view their own group as more moral than other groups (Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Leach, Ellmers, & Barreto, 2007; Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010; LeVine & Campbell 1972). They value belonging to moral groups to a higher extent than belonging to competent or sociable groups. If moral judgements help maintain positive social identities, they should be stronger for those who are more committed to the group.

People vary in their strength of ingroup identification—the degree to which they view themselves in terms of their group membership and are invested in the group (e.g., Leach et al., 2018; Tajfel, 1982). Insofar as group identity biases social cognition, the stronger individual's identification with the group, the stronger bias we should observe in his or her moral judgments. Yet, most past research which directly examined perceptions of ingroup versus outgroup morality either did not examine (e.g., Tarrant et al., 2012; Watkins & Laham, 2018) or did not detect (e.g., Abrams et al., 2013) a moderating role of ingroup identification in judgements of (im)moral acts of ingroup and outgroup members.

One reason for this might be that people differ not only with respect to the degree of ingroup identification but also with respect to the way they identify with the ingroup (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Amiot & Aubin, 2013; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). We can distinguish between two types of an ingroup commitment. The first type is secure and confidently held identification with the group, which presumes a positive evaluation of the ingroup and its members (Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., 2018; Tajfel, 1982). The second type is a defensive identification, which can be captured with the concept of collective narcissism (Adorno et al., 1950; Cichocka, 2016).

Collective narcissism is defined as a belief in one's ingroup greatness that is contingent upon external recognition of the ingroup's worth (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009). Studies show that collective narcissism correlates positively with other measures of excessive ingroup identification, such as nationalism (Golec de Zavala, Peker, Guerra, & Baran, 2016), blind patriotism (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013) and national glorification (Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala, & Olechowski, 2016). However, collective narcissism is a broader construct, which can refer to any social groups, not only national ones (e.g., Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). For example, past research examined collective narcissism in the context of ethnic and religious groups, college peers, sports teams, or extremist organizations (e.g., Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Jasko et al., 2019; Larkin & Fink, 2018; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Łozowski, Górska, & Winiewski, 2019). Collective narcissism is considered to be a defensive ingroup identification (Cichocka, 2016). It is linked to a constant preoccupation with protecting the image of the ingroup and a conviction that others seek to undermine it (Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala & Olechowski, 2016; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Jaworska, Golec de Zavala, & Bilewicz, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Collective narcissism also predicts hostile reactions to any signs of threat, criticism, or disrespect showed by members of other groups (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013).

There are reasons to believe that collective narcissism might shape moral judgements of intergroup actions. When other members of their group either behave immorally (Brambilla, Sacchi, Pagliaro, & Ellemers, 2013) or are described unfavourably (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988) people feel threatened and are motivated to restore the image of the group as moral (van der Toorn, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2015). Collective narcissists are especially motivated to do so. In the studies by Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec (2013), collective narcissism was specifically linked to hostile reactions to threats to the moral

image of the ingroup. For example, in Poland, national collective narcissism predicted aggressive responses to accusations of anti-Semitism during and after WWII (Golec de Zavala, Cichočka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013; see also Marchlewska et al., 2020; Klar & Bilewicz, 2017). No similar effects were observed for ingroup identification. Thus, when the moral image of the group is at stake, individuals high in collective narcissism should be especially likely to seek to maintain this image by biasing their moral judgments.

In fact, there is evidence that collective narcissism might be associated with downplaying moral transgressions perpetrated by ingroup members. For example, in Poland, national collective narcissism was associated with estimating a greater frequency of moral (e.g., helping Jews) and lower frequency of immoral (e.g., anti-Semitic acts) behaviours of ingroup members during WWII (Bilewicz, Bulska, Babinska, Haska, & Winiewski, 2018). Also, national ingroup glorification (which is conceptually related to collective narcissism), but not the mere strength of ingroup attachment, was linked to reduced feelings of guilt for ingroup's past transgressions (Roccas et al., 2006; see also Leidner et al., 2010). Thus, we propose that it is collective narcissism, rather than conventional ingroup identification, that would strengthen intergroup biases in morality judgements.

### **Overview of the present studies**

The aim of the present studies was twofold. First, we investigated whether there might be a difference in moral judgments of ingroup versus outgroup actions driven by perceptions of what is good or bad for ingroup interests. Second, we tested if these effects would be moderated by the strength of collective narcissism (versus ingroup identification). Specifically, we hypothesised that actions that serve the interests of ingroup members would be judged as more moral (or less immoral) than similar actions that serve the interests of outgroup members. This ingroup interest bias should be especially pronounced for those who

score relatively high in collective narcissism (rather than ingroup identification). We tested our predictions in four studies.

In Studies 1 and 2, participants judged the morality of a fictional decision by a member of their own versus another national group. We investigated whether national collective narcissism (vs. national ingroup identification) would moderate the effect of national group identity on moral judgments of this decision. In Study 3, we used the context of Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court. We examined the role of partisan identity, asking Democrats and Republicans about the moral judgment of the US Senate's decision to confirm Kavanaugh. Again, we tested whether partisan collective narcissism (vs. partisan identification) would moderate the effect of partisan identity on moral judgments.

In Study 4, we directly examined the role of ingroup interests in moral judgements. We asked American participants how they judged President Donald Trump's decision to stand by Saudi Arabia, despite the information that the Saudi Crown may have known about the plan to murder journalist Jamal Khashoggi. We manipulated the salience of the national interest in the US partnership with Saudi Arabia. If collective narcissism biases moral judgments due to perceptions of ingroup interests, it should be a stronger predictor of moral judgements when the national interests are salient (vs. not).

In all studies, we also measured participants' political ideology. We controlled for political ideology in our analyses because: 1) some researchers suggest that conservatives are more likely to view ingroup loyalty as morally relevant than liberals (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), 2) right-wing beliefs tend to be associated with collective narcissism (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Cichocka, Dhont, & Makwana, 2017; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2018) and 3) the context of our research (especially Studies 3-4) was highly politicised.

In this article, we report all measures, all manipulations, and any data exclusions. Any additional measures not included in the main analyses are reported in the Supplement. In all studies, we repeated our regression analyses controlling for age and gender. All results remain very similar when we include these demographics in the models. All studies have been approved by the relevant Research Ethics Committee.

### **Study 1**

In Study 1, we examined whether moral judgments of ingroup versus outgroup actions would differ, and whether this effect would depend on collective narcissism. We presented participants with a news article describing a morally ambiguous decision. We tested whether the decision would be judged differently based on whether an ingroup or an outgroup member was behind it. We measured both morality and competence judgments of the decision-maker, because research suggest that people value these traits in ingroup members differently (Leach et al., 2007). In this way, we also sought to examine whether the effect would be specific to morality judgements or extend to competence judgements as well (which might be indicative of a broader, ingroup favouritism effect; Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2004). Moreover, we predicted that the influence of ingroup identity on moral judgments would be especially strong for those high in collective narcissism.

### **Method**

**Participants and procedure.** At the time of planning the first experiment, we did not use power analysis for sample size estimation. Instead, we used a rule of thumb and aimed to recruit 200 participants (100 for each site: Polish and British), in order to include at least 50 participants “per cell” (high vs. low collective narcissism x ingroup vs. outgroup target; Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2013). In the end, we managed to collect data from 185 participants (136 women; mean age = 23.61 years,  $SD = 8.17$ ). Based on a sensitivity power

analysis conducted with G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), this sample size provides a power of 0.80 to detect an interaction effect size of  $f^2 = 0.04$ .

Participants read a fake news article about a pub owner in Poland or England who threw out English or Polish customers because of a verbal altercation provoked by another customer. The clients reported the incident to the police, but a local prosecutor dropped the case against the owner of pub (see the Supplement for full text). This decision was purposefully created to be morally ambiguous. We randomly allocated participants to one of two conditions. In the ingroup target condition, an ingroup member (the prosecutor) dropped the case against the ingroup owner of pub which affected outgroup members (the pub clients). In the outgroup target condition, an outgroup member (the prosecutor) dropped the case against the outgroup owner of pub which affected ingroup members (the pub clients). For example, in the ingroup target condition Polish participants read that a Polish pub owner threw out English customers from his pub, but the case accusing the owner of intolerance was dropped by the Cracow Prosecutor's Office in Poland.

In the outgroup target condition, Polish participants read that English pub owner threw out Polish customers from his pub, but the case accusing the owner of intolerance was dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service in UK. Next, participants judged the actions of the prosecutor in terms of how moral and how competent they were. At the end of the study, participants reported their national narcissism and ingroup identification, as well as political ideology (in this order).

**Morality judgments** of the target were measured with four items: "The prosecutor acted fairly", "The prosecutor acted morally", "The prosecutor proved to be reliable", "The prosecutor's actions were just". Participants indicated to what extent they agree with each of the statements using a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .90$ ,  $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ).

**Competence judgments** of the target were measured with four items: “The prosecutor proved to be effective”, “The prosecutor acted efficiently”, “The prosecutor acted skilfully”, “The prosecutor proved to be intelligent”. Participants indicated to what extent they agree with each of the statements using a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .86, M = 2.71, SD = 0.81$ ).

**National collective narcissism** was measured with a 9-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) used in reference to the Polish or British as the ingroup. Sample items were: “[National group] deserves special treatment”, “It really makes me angry when others criticize [national group]”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .89, M = 2.70, SD = 0.94$ ).

**National identification** was measured with a 12-item version of the Social Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004) used in reference to the Polish or British as the ingroup, e.g., “I feel strong ties to other [national group] people”, “In general, I’m glad to be [national group]”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .86, M = 3.29, SD = 0.63$ ).

**Political ideology** was measured with a single item. Participants were asked to report their political ideology on a scale from 1 = *strongly liberal* to 7 = *strongly conservative* ( $M = 3.19, SD = 1.33$ ).

## Results

**Zero-order correlations** are presented in Table 1. Morality judgments were positively correlated with competence judgments. National narcissism was positively correlated with national identification and political ideology.

Table 1

*Correlations between Main Variables (Study 1)*

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Morality judgments	-			
2. Competence judgments	.83***	-		
3. National narcissism	-.08	-.09	-	
4. National identification	.02	.01	.49***	-
5. Political ideology	.01	.04	.42***	.31***

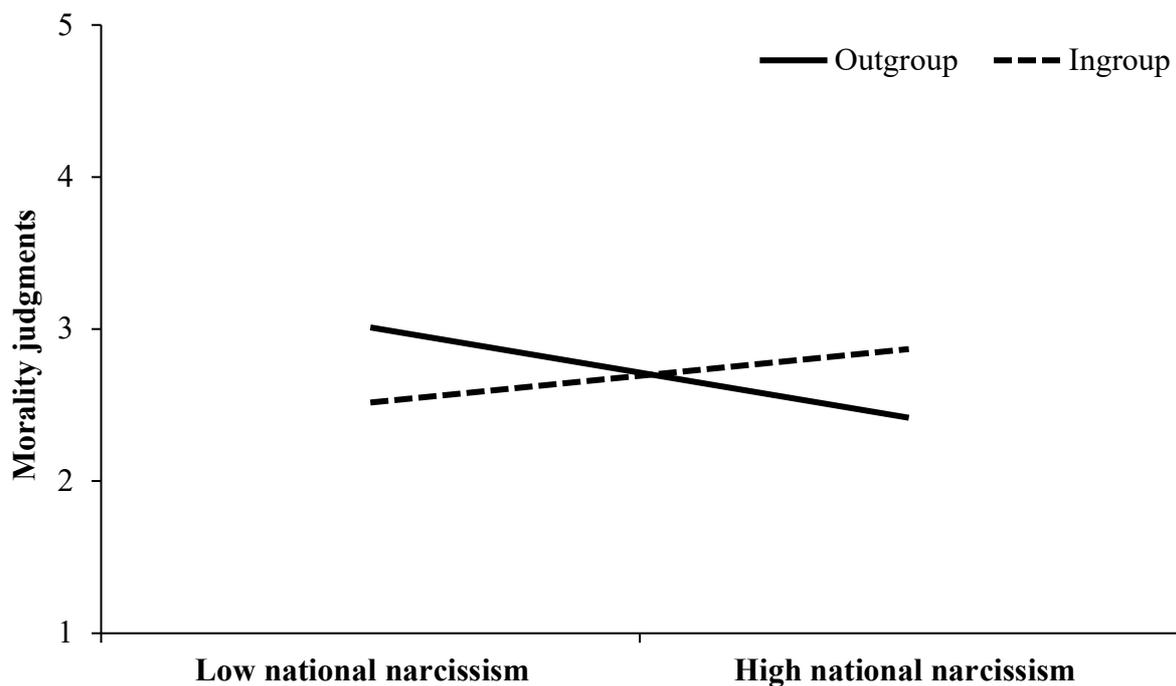
Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To test whether national narcissism would moderate the impact of target identity (outgroup vs. ingroup) on morality judgments we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with site (Poland vs. the UK) as a co-variate (see Table 2).<sup>1</sup>

In Step 1, we regressed target identity (-1 = outgroup, 1 = ingroup), national narcissism (mean-centred) and their interaction on morality judgments of the prosecutor. The main effect of the target identity manipulation was nonsignificant. However, we found that national narcissism moderated the effect of target identity on morality judgments (see Figure 1),  $\Delta R^2 = .076$ . To probe this interaction, we computed simple slopes analysis for low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) national narcissism. For those scoring low on national narcissism, the effect of identity on moral judgments was negative and significant,  $B = -0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p = .005$  (that is, they judged the target who favoured the ingroup as less moral than the target who favoured the outgroup). For those scoring high on national narcissism, the effect of identity on moral judgments was positive and significant,  $B = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $p =$

<sup>1</sup> In all models multicollinearity was not a problem, with all VIFs < 2.0.

.010 (that is, they judged the target who favoured the ingroup as more moral than the target who favoured the outgroup). Moreover, national narcissism significantly and negatively predicted morality judgments of the target in the outgroup favouring condition,  $B = -0.32$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p = .001$ , and positively (although not significantly) in the ingroup favouring condition,  $B = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p = .054$ .



*Figure 1.* Interaction effect of national narcissism and outgroup versus ingroup target on morality judgments.

In Step 2, we introduced competence judgments and found its positive effect on morality judgments. After introducing competence judgments, the moderating effect of national narcissism on morality judgments remained significant.

In Step 3, we introduced political ideology and national identification as co-variates. Again, the moderating effect of national narcissism on morality judgments remained significant.

We also checked whether we would observe a similar moderating effect for national identification and political ideology. When we added the target identity x identification interaction to the model, this interaction effect was not significant,  $B = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .064$ .<sup>2</sup> The interaction effect for target identity x political ideology was not significant  $B = 0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $\beta = .04$ ,  $p = .415$ .<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, we performed a second hierarchical multiple regression analysis for competence judgments as the DV. Even though we observed a significant interaction between target identity and national narcissism on competence judgements,  $B = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p = .004$ , we found that this moderating effect of national narcissism disappeared when we introduced morality judgments as a co-variate,  $B = -0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $p = .674$ .

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<sup>2</sup> When we tested this moderation effect without the other predictors, the target identity x national identification interaction was not significant,  $B = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .661$ .

<sup>3</sup> When we tested this moderation effect without the other predictors, the target identity x political ideology interaction was significant,  $B = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = .20$ ,  $p = .007$ .

Table 2

*Results of a Multiple Regression Predicting Morality Judgments (Study 1)*

Predictor variable	Step 1				Step 2				Step 3			
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Group (-1=OUT, 1=IN)	-0.01(0.06)	[-0.13, 0.11]	-0.01	.863	-0.04(0.04)	[-0.11, 0.03]	-0.05	.262	-0.04(0.04)	[-0.11, 0.03]	-0.05	.274
National narcissism	-0.06(0.07)	[-0.20, 0.07]	-0.07	.348	-0.01(0.04)	[-0.09, 0.07]	-0.01	.850	-0.00(0.05)	[-0.10, 0.09]	-0.00	.944
National narcissism x group	0.25(0.07)	[0.12, 0.38]	0.28	< .001	0.10(0.04)	[0.02, 0.17]	0.11	.013	0.10(0.04)	[0.02, 0.17]	0.11	.015
Competence					0.85(0.05)	[0.76, 0.94]	0.81	< .001	0.85(0.05)	[0.76, 0.94]	0.81	< .001
Political ideology									-0.02(0.03)	[-0.08, 0.04]	-0.03	.574
National identification									0.02(0.07)	[-0.11, 0.15]	0.01	.779
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.08					.70				.70	
<i>F</i>		4.06		.004			81.90	< .001			58.02	< .001

*Note.* OUT = outgroup target, IN = ingroup target. Site (Poland vs. UK) was used as a co-variate.

### Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided initial support for our hypothesis that group identity would influence moral judgments of ingroup and outgroup decisions, but only among those high in collective narcissism. In line with our predictions, participants' moral judgments about the prosecutor's decision depended on the target's identity: when the prosecutor was an ingroup member (and harmed outgroup members), their decision was judged as more moral than when the prosecutor was an outgroup member (and harmed ingroup members). Yet, this bias was not universal—it was only observed for those high in national collective narcissism. Thus, collective narcissism (but not identification) moderated the effect of group identity on moral judgment.

The effects we observed were especially pronounced for morality judgments: the effect for morality judgements remained significant when we accounted for the overlap with competence judgements, but the opposite was not true (when we controlled for morality judgements, the effect on competence judgements was no longer significant). This is likely because morality is more important than competence in positive evaluation of ingroup members (Leach et al., 2007).

One limitation of Study 1 was that we did not achieve the planned sample size. We also found an unexpected reversed effect for morality judgments for participants scoring relatively low on national collective narcissism: they judged the decision of the outgroup member as more moral than a similar decision of an ingroup member. We sought to examine whether this effect would replicate with a use of a larger, better powered sample in Study 2.

## Study 2

### Method

Study 2 was a direct replication of Study 1 with two exceptions. First, we used a larger sample consisting of British participants only. Second, we measured morality judgments only. The remaining sections of Study 2 were identical to Study 1.

**Participants and procedure.** Because we were primarily interested in the moderating effect of collective narcissism, we used G\*Power to calculate target sample size for a small  $R^2$  increase ( $f^2 = .02$ ), power of .80, with one tested predictor and five predictors total. This analysis yielded a total sample size of 395. Thus, we sought to recruit at least 400 participants. We achieved the planned sample size. We recruited 404 British participants using Prolific Academic (261 women; mean age = 35.67 years,  $SD = 12.61$ ) to participate in an on-line study about reactions to the news.

Participants read the same fake news article as in Study 1 about a pub owner in Poland or England who threw out English or Polish customers because of a verbal altercation provoked by another customer. Next, participants judged the actions of the prosecutor in terms of how moral they were. At the end of the study, participants reported their national narcissism and ingroup identification in random order, as well as political ideology.

### Measures.

**Morality judgments** of the target were measured as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ).

**National collective narcissism** was measured as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ).

**National identification** was measured as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ).

**Political ideology** was measured as in Study 1 ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ).

### Results

**Zero-order correlations** are presented in Table 3. Morality judgments were positively correlated with national narcissism and identification. National narcissism was positively correlated with national identification and political ideology.

Table 3

*Correlations between Main Variables (Study 2)*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Morality judgments	-		
2. National narcissism	.13**	-	
3. National identification	.15**	.54***	-
4. Political ideology	.05	.39***	.31***

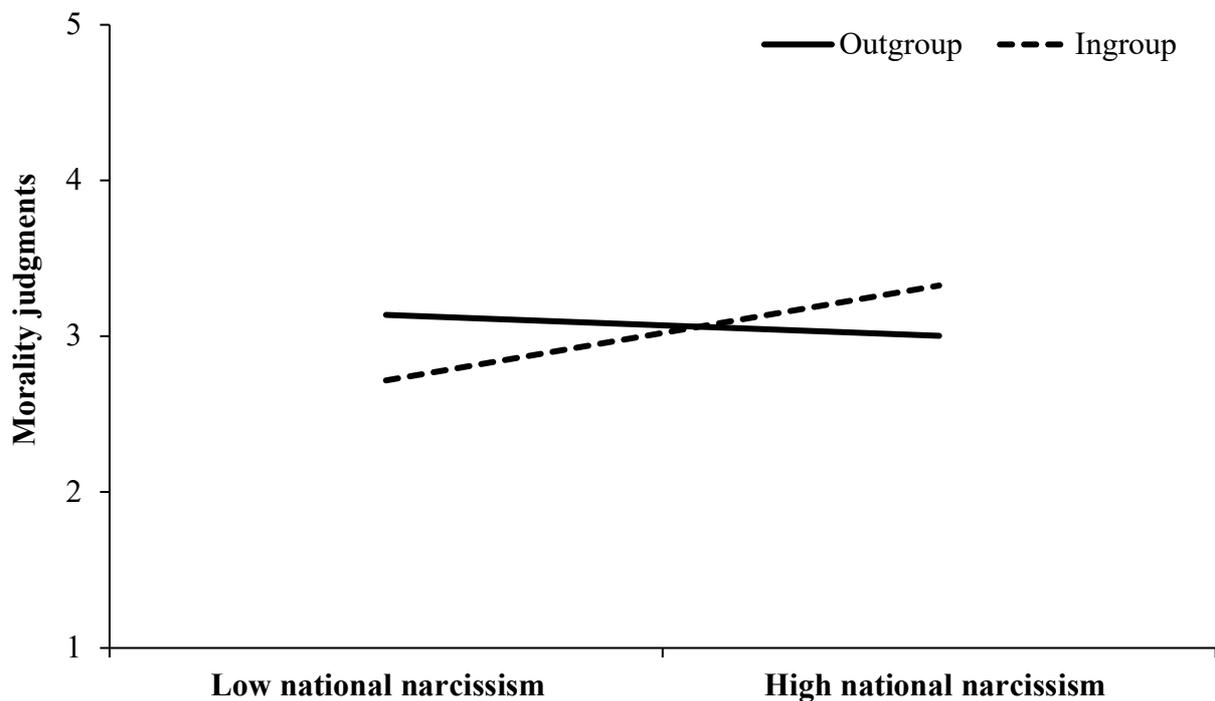
*Note.* \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To test whether national narcissism would moderate the impact of target identity (outgroup vs. ingroup) on morality judgments we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis (see Table 4).

In Step 1, we regressed target identity (-1 = outgroup, 1 = ingroup), national narcissism (mean-centred) and their interaction on morality judgments of the prosecutor. Again, the main effect of the target identity manipulation was nonsignificant. However, we found that national narcissism moderated the effect of target identity on morality judgments (see Figure 2),  $\Delta R^2 = .047$ .

To probe this interaction, we computed simple slopes analysis for low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) national narcissism. As in Study 1, for those scoring low on national narcissism the effect of identity on moral judgments was negative and significant,  $B = -0.21$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .001$  (that is, they judged the target who favoured the ingroup as less moral than the target who favoured the outgroup). For those scoring high on national narcissism, the effect of identity on moral judgments was positive and significant,  $B = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p =$

.006 (that is, they judged the target who favoured the ingroup as more moral than the target who favoured the outgroup). Moreover, national narcissism did not predict morality judgments of the prosecutor in the outgroup condition,  $B = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $p = .240$ , although significantly positively predicted them in the ingroup condition,  $B = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $\beta = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ .



*Figure 2.* Interaction effect of national narcissism and outgroup versus ingroup target on morality judgments.

In Step 2, we introduced political ideology and national identification as co-variates. Again, the moderating effect of national narcissism on morality judgments remained significant.

We also checked whether we would observe a similar moderating effect for national identification and political ideology. When we added the target identity x identification interaction to the model, this interaction effect was nonsignificant,  $B = 0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $\beta$

$\beta = .09, p = .134$ .<sup>4</sup> The interaction effect for target identity x political ideology was also nonsignificant  $B = 0.06, SE = 0.04, \beta = .09, p = .094$ .<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> When we tested this moderation effect without the other predictors, the target identity x national identification interaction was significant,  $B = 0.24, SE = 0.07, \beta = .18, p < .001$ .

<sup>5</sup> When we tested this moderation effect without the other predictors, the target identity x political ideology interaction was significant,  $B = 0.10, SE = 0.03, \beta = .16, p = .002$ .

Table 4

*Results of a Multiple Regression Predicting Morality Judgments (Study 2)*

Predictor variable	Step 1				Step 2			
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Group (-1= OUT, 1= IN)	-0.02(0.04)	[-0.11, 0.06]	-0.03	.554	-0.02(0.04)	[-0.10, 0.06]	-0.03	.606
National narcissism	0.13(0.05)	[0.04, 0.22]	0.14	.004	0.08(0.06)	[-0.03, 0.19]	0.09	.139
National narcissism x group	0.20(0.05)	[0.11, 0.29]	0.22	< .001	0.20(0.05)	[0.11, 0.28]	0.21	< .001
Political ideology					-0.01(0.04)	[-0.08, 0.06]	-0.01	.801
National identification					0.14(0.08)	[-0.02, 0.29]	0.10	.081
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.07				.07		
<i>F</i>		4.06		< .001		81.90		< .001

*Note.* OUT = outgroup target, IN = ingroup target.

### Discussion

Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 with the use of a larger sample. As in Study 1, participants scoring high in national collective narcissism judged the decision of an ingroup prosecutor as more moral than a similar decision made by an outgroup prosecutor. This result suggests that collective narcissism was associated with greater sensitivity to ingroup loyalty. Only those who were high in collective narcissism awarded the ingroup (vs. outgroup) target who protected ingroup (vs. outgroup) interests with higher morality judgments.

Again, as in Study 1, those scoring low in collective narcissism made more favourable morality judgments about an outgroup (vs. ingroup) target. One potential explanation of this effect comes from research on the black sheep effect. When actions of ingroup members are perceived as questionable, they may be derogated (Marques & Paez, 1994). Moreover, immoral (vs. incompetent) individuals are more likely to be rejected by other group members, because they are perceived as different from the group (van der Lee, Ellemers, Scheepers, & Rutjens, 2017). It could be that those who scored low in collective narcissism were especially willing to distance themselves from ingroup members who acted in a morally ambiguous way (Eidelman & Biernat, 2003).

Finally, neither in Study 1 nor in Study 2 did we observe any main effects of target identity (i.e., group membership) on morality judgments. We also did not observe any moderating effects of national identification. Thus, our findings speak against a simple ingroup favouritism explanation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2004). We found that the effect of group interests on moral judgments was moderated by collective narcissism and limited to individuals scoring relatively high on this dimension. This result suggests that only individuals defensively identified with the group are susceptible to egocentric interpretations of moral judgements.

### Study 3

In Study 3, we sought to replicate the results of the previous studies in a different context: we moved from national to political identities. This time, we also focused on a real-life example of a highly moralised issue. We framed our study in the context of Brett Kavanaugh's (a Republican nominee) confirmation to the Supreme Court by the US Senate. Because Kavanaugh had been accused of sexual misconduct, his nomination was accompanied by a moral controversy, which strongly divided the American society (Cowan, Becker, & Morgan, 2018). We asked Democrats and Republicans how they would judge the morality of this decision. We assumed that the moral judgments of the US Senate's decision would heavily depend on partisanship, but that this effect would be especially strong for those high in partisan collective narcissism.

#### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Again, we expected a relatively weak moderating effect. As in Study 2, we used G\*Power to calculate target sample size for a small  $R^2$  increase ( $f^2 = .02$ ), power of .80, with one tested predictor and five predictors total, which yields a total sample size of 395. We then sought to recruit at least 400 participants (200 Democrats and 200 Republicans).

We recruited 400 participants from the US using Prolific academic (176 women; mean age = 35.93 years,  $SD = 12.34$ ) among which 184 identified as Republicans and 198 as Democrats (we used a two-step question, where if participants indicated they thought of themselves as Independent, they were further asked whether they were closer to the Republican or the Democratic Party). The remaining 18 participants identified as pure Independent. Because the focus of Study 3 was on partisan identities, they were excluded from the analyses.). Because the final sample was slightly lower than our target, we

conducted a sensitivity power analysis. The final sample size of  $N = 382$  still provides a power of 0.80 to detect of an interaction effect size of  $f^2 = 0.02$ .

We informed participants that we are interested in their reaction to news stories. As a basis for our study, we used a Reuters article (Cowan, et al., 2018), which presented the case of Kavanaugh's confirmation as well as the accusations placed against him. Specifically, the text explained that Christine Blasey Ford accused Kavanaugh "of sexually assaulting her in the upstairs bedroom of a home in a wealthy suburb of Washington in 1982" (Cowan et al., 2018; para. 8). The news article also described that the Republican-controlled US Senate confirmed Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court on October 6<sup>th</sup> (see the Supplement for full text). We ran the study on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018, as the public debate about Kavanaugh's confirmation was still ongoing.

There was no manipulation and only one condition. After reading the news we asked participants several questions regarding moral and social aspects of the US Senate decision in reference to both Kavanaugh and Ford. Afterwards, participants reported their partisan narcissism and group identification (in a randomised order), before reporting their political ideology and partisanship.

### **Measures.**

**Morality judgments** of the US Senate decision to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court were measured with four items: "The Senate acted fairly", "The Senate acted morally", "The Senate's decision was ethical", "The Senate's decision was just". Participants indicated to what extent they agree with each of the statements using a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .98$ ,  $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ).

**Partisan collective narcissism** was measured with a short 5-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) adapted to the partisan context, e.g., "My party deserves special treatment", "Not many people seem to fully understand the

importance of my party". Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .81$ ,  $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ).

**Partisan identification** was measured with a single item (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with the statement: "I identify with my political party", using a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ).

**Political ideology** was measured with a single item. Participants were asked to report their political ideology on a scale from 1 = *extremely liberal* to 7 = *extremely conservative* ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ).

## Results

**Zero-order correlations** are presented in Table 5. Morality judgments were positively correlated with partisan narcissism, partisan identification and political ideology. Partisan narcissism was positively correlated with partisan identification and political ideology.

Table 5

*Correlations between Main Variables (Study 3)*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Morality judgments	-		
2. Partisan narcissism	.13**	-	
3. Partisan identification	.15**	.61***	-
4. Political ideology	.79***	.12*	.18***

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

To test whether partisan narcissism would moderate the impact of partisanship on morality judgments we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis (Table 6).

In Step 1, we regressed party identity (-1 = Democrats, 1 = Republicans), partisan narcissism (mean-centred) and their interaction on morality judgments of the Senate's decision to confirm Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. The main effect of party identity was strong and significant, indicating that Republicans found this decision to be more moral than Democrats did.

However, we found that partisan narcissism still moderated the effect of partisanship on morality judgments,  $\Delta R^2 = .033$  (see Figure 3). A simple slopes analysis for low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) partisan narcissism indicated that the effect of partisan identity on moral judgments was weaker (although still significant),  $B = 1.37$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $\beta = .61$ ,  $p < .001$  for those scoring low on partisan narcissism, than for those scoring high on partisan narcissism,  $B = 2.19$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $\beta = .97$ ,  $p < .001$ . Additional simple slopes analysis indicated that the effect of partisan narcissism on morality judgements was significant and positive for Republicans,  $B = 0.51$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ , and significant and negative, for Democrats,  $B = -0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p = .004$ .

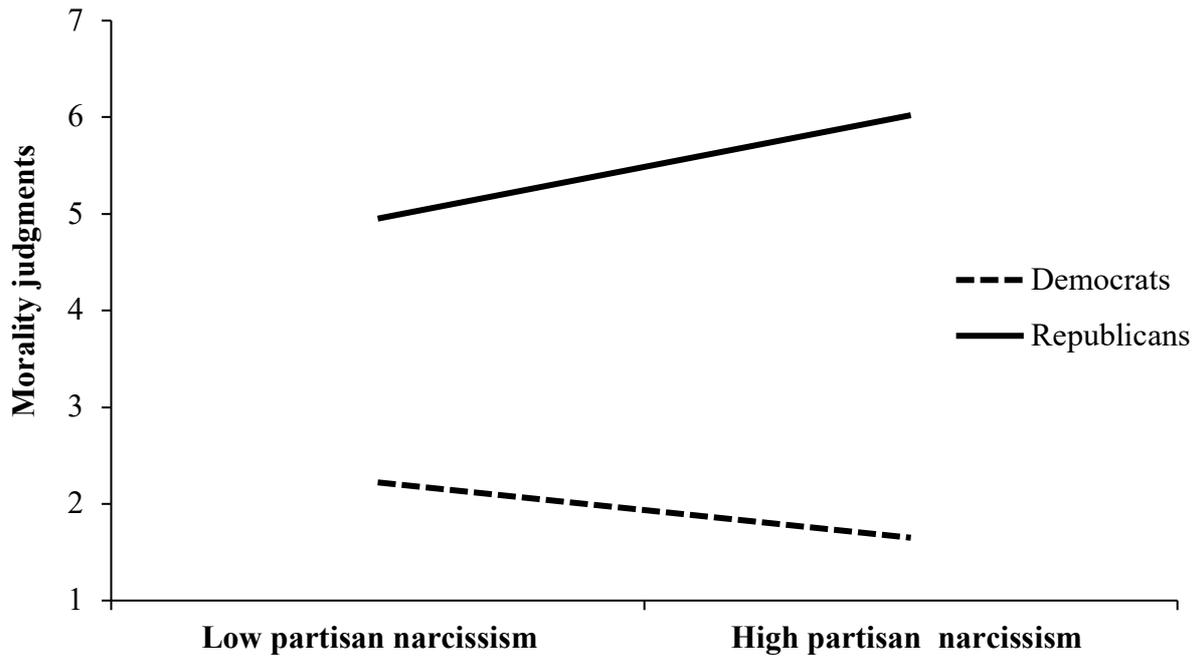


Figure 3. Interaction effect of partisan narcissism and partisanship on morality judgments of the US Senate decision to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

In Step 2, we introduced political ideology and political party identification as covariates<sup>6</sup>. The moderating effect of collective narcissism on morality judgments remained significant.

We also checked whether we would observe a similar moderating effect for partisan identification. When we added the party identity x partisan identification to the model, this interaction effect was not significant,  $B = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = .02$ ,  $p = .560$ .<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> We observed issues with multicollinearity ( $VIFs > 2.0$ ) in this model, presumably because partisanship tends to be closely linked to political ideology in the US context (e.g., Jost, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> However, when we tested this moderation effect without the other predictors (i.e., without controlling for collective narcissism), the party identity x partisan identification interaction was significant,  $B = 0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Table 6

*Results of a Multiple Regression Predicting Morality Judgments (Study 3)*

Predictor variable	Step 1				Step 2			
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Party (-1=DEM, 1=REP)	1.78(0.07)	[1.64, 1.91]	0.79	< .001	1.14(0.12)	[0.91, 1.37]	0.50	< .001
Partisan narcissism	0.12(0.06)	[-0.01, 0.24]	0.06	.066	0.11(0.08)	[-0.04, 0.26]	0.05	.164
Partisan narcissism x party	0.39(0.06)	[0.27, 0.52]	0.18	< .001	0.29(0.06)	[0.17, 0.42]	0.14	< .001
Political ideology					0.41(0.06)	[0.29, 0.54]	0.34	< .001
Partisan identification					-0.03(0.06)	[-0.14, 0.08]	-0.02	.627
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.67				.70		
<i>F</i>		253.27		< .001		175.97		< .001

*Note.* REP=Republicans. DEM=Democrats.

### Discussion

Study 3 conceptually replicated the results of Studies 1 and 2 using a different sample and a different intergroup context. Unsurprisingly, partisanship had a strong effect on moral judgements of the US Senate's decision to confirm Kavanaugh, who was a Republican nominee. Republicans were more likely to judge the decision as moral while Democrats were more likely to judge it as immoral. In contrast to Studies 1 and 2, we found a strong main effect of group identity on moral judgment, which suggests that intergroup conflict (in this case, between political parties) might be a critical factor which intensifies the need to protect ingroup interests by the biased perception of what is right and wrong. Crucially, we found that even this strong partisan effect was moderated by partisan narcissism (but not by partisan identification). This evidence supports our assumption that individuals who defensively identified with the ingroup are most likely to show biased morality judgments, likely to protect the interests of their group.

### Study 4

Studies 1-3 confirmed that group identity shapes moral judgements, especially for those high in collective narcissism. We argue that the driving force behind this effect is protection of ingroup interests. Just as personal interests can shape perceptions of moral actions of others (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014; Bocian et al., 2016), group interests should shape perceptions of actions of ingroup and outgroup members (see e.g., Abrams et al., 2013). Thus, in Study 4, we manipulated ingroup interests directly, to examine whether the effect of collective narcissism on morality judgements would be especially strong when ingroup interests are salient.

We again used a relatively known news story. We asked participants to evaluate the morality President Trump's decision to remain a partner of Saudi Arabia, despite the worldwide debate about accusations against the Crown Prince related to the Khashoggi

murder (Stone, 2018). This story provided the perfect context to manipulate information about national interests: commentators often pointed out that US economy benefits from partnership with Saudi Arabia (Guay, 2018). In fact, some argued that the US relationship with Saudi Arabia needs to balance out American values and moral responsibility with economic interests (LaFranchi, 2018). We expected that perceptions of national interests could shape moral judgements in this case. We assumed that when national interest would be salient, Americans would judge Trump's decision to remain Saudi Arabia's ally as less immoral in comparison to a condition lacking this information. Those high in national narcissism should be especially responsive to the national interest manipulation. Thus, we assumed that the effect of national interests would be moderated by national narcissism rather than by national identification. In other words, national narcissism should be a stronger predictor of moral judgements when national interests are salient, than when they are not.

## **Method**

**Participants and procedure.** To estimate the desired sample size for Study 4, we used recommendations of Giner-Sorolla (2018) for powering interactions. We assumed that the effect of national narcissism on judgments of President Trump's morality in the national interest condition might be similar in strength to the correlation between partisan narcissism and moral judgments for Republicans in Study 3 ( $r = .39$ ). Using Gpower, we estimated the target sample size to replicate this effect to be  $N = 46$  (assuming power of .80, two-tailed). We expected the effect of collective narcissism to be weaker in the control condition than in the national interest condition. Because it is difficult to predict the exact difference in magnitude, following the recommendations of Giner-Sorolla (2018), we assumed a 50% attenuation and, hence, multiplied the sample size by a factor of 14. This calculation resulted in a target sample of 644 participants. We decided to seek to recruit around 700 participants using Prolific Academic. In the end, 711 participants from the US took part in the study (346

women; mean age = 33.95 years,  $SD = 11.63$ ) among which 150 identified as Republicans and 451 as Democrats (1 missing; the remaining 109 participants identified as Independent).

Based on a sensitivity power analysis, this sample size provides a power of 0.80 to detect an interaction effect size of  $f^2 = 0.01$ .

In Study 4, we again used a Reuters article, discussing President Trump's decision to remain a "steadfast" partner of Saudi Arabia despite the accusations against the Crown Prince who could be involved in murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (see the Supplement for full text). We conducted the study around five months after the first publication of the article, when the case was still present in the media.

Based on random assignment we allocated participants to one of two conditions. In the national interest condition, we stressed that it was in the interest of the US economy to remain a partner of Saudi Arabia. For example, we used President Trump's statement in which he said: "I'm not going to destroy the economy for our country by being foolish with Saudi Arabia" (Stone, 2018). In the control condition, we did not mention the US interests. Rather, we adapted the statement to read: "I'm not going to destroy the world economy by being foolish with Saudi Arabia". After participants read the news, they judged the morality of President Trump's decision. To account for any order effects, we measured national narcissism and national identification either before or after the manipulation (randomised) and political ideology.

### **Measures.**

**Morality judgments** of the Trump's decision to stand by the Saudi prince and Saudi Arabia were measured with four items: "President Trump acted fairly", "President Trump acted morally", "President Trump's decision was ethical", "President Trump's decision was just". Participants indicated to what extent they agree with each of the statements using a scale from 1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .97$ ,  $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ).

**National collective narcissism** was measured with the short 5-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), e.g., “Americans deserve special treatment”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .86, M = 2.33, SD = 1.03$ ).

**National identification** was measured with five items, e.g., “Being American gives me a good feeling”, “I am glad to be American”. Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = .93, M = 4.75, SD = 1.76$ ).

**Political ideology** was measured with a single item. Participants were asked to report their political ideology on a scale from 1 = *extremely liberal* to 7 = *extremely conservative* ( $M = 3.10, SD = 1.58$ ).

## Results

**Zero-order correlations** are presented in Table 7. Morality judgments were positively correlated with national narcissism, national identification and political ideology. Collective narcissism was positively correlated with national identification and political ideology.

Table 7

*Correlations between Main Variables (Study 4)*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Morality judgments	-		
2. National narcissism	.56***	-	
3. National identification	.41***	.64***	-
4. Political ideology	.58***	.55***	.44***

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To test whether national collective narcissism would moderate the impact of national interests on morality judgments we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis (see

Table 8). In Step 1, we regressed national interest (-1 = control, 1 = interest salient), national narcissism (mean-centred) and their interaction on morality judgments of President Trump's decision to stand by Saudi Arabia. The main effect of the manipulation of national interest was nonsignificant. However, we found that national narcissism moderated the influence of national interests on morality judgments,  $\Delta R^2 = .004$  (see Figure 4). A simple slopes analysis for low (-1SD) and high (+1SD) national narcissism indicated that the effect of interest salience on moral judgments was nonsignificant,  $B = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $p = .471$ , for those scoring low on national narcissism but positive and significant,  $B = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $\beta = .10$ ,  $p = .023$ , for those scoring high on national narcissism. While the effect of national narcissism on morality judgments was significant and positive for the control condition,  $B = 0.75$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $\beta = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ , it was even stronger in the national interest condition,  $B = 0.95$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $\beta = .63$ ,  $p < .001$ .

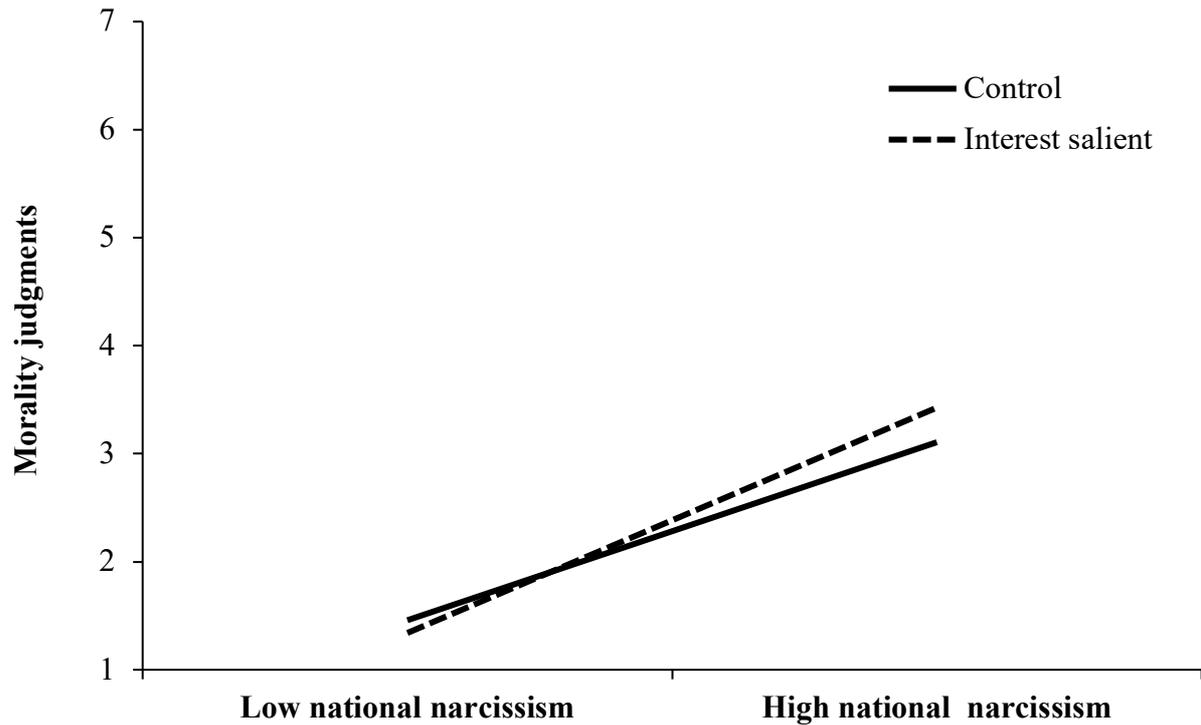


Figure 4. Interaction effect of national narcissism and national interests on morality judgments.

In Step 2, we introduced political ideology and national identification as co-variates. Again, the moderating effect of national narcissism on morality judgments remained significant.<sup>8</sup>

We also checked whether we would observe a similar moderating effect for national identification and political ideology. When we added the national interest x national identification to the model, this interaction effect was not significant,  $B = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $\beta =$

<sup>8</sup> When we controlled for partisanship, the moderating effect also remained significant,  $B = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $p = .004$ , although this model had issues with multicollinearity ( $VIF > 2.00$ ).

.04,  $p = .240$ .<sup>9</sup> The national interest x political ideology interaction was also not significant,  $B = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .088$ .<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> When we tested this moderation effect without the other predictors, the national interests x national identification interaction was significant,  $B = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $p = .0496$ .

<sup>10</sup> Without the other predictors, the national interests x political ideology interaction was significant,  $B = 0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $p = .016$ .

Table 8

*Results of a Multiple Regression Predicting Morality Judgments (Study 4)*

Predictor variable	Step 1				Step 2			
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> CI <sub>95%</sub>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Interest (-1=CONT,1=EXP)	0.05(0.05)	[-0.04, 0.15]	0.03	.288	0.05(0.04)	[-0.04, 0.14]	0.03	.259
National narcissism	0.85(0.05)	[0.76, 0.94]	0.56	< .001	0.49(0.06)	[0.37, 0.61]	0.32	< .001
National narcissism x national interest	0.10(0.05)	[0.01, 0.19]	0.07	.034	0.13(0.04)	[0.04, 0.21]	0.08	.003
Political ideology					0.39(0.03)	[0.33, 0.46]	0.40	< .001
National identification					0.03(0.03)	[-0.04, 0.09]	0.03	.370
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.32				.43		
<i>F</i>		110.04		< .001		106.64		< .001

*Note.* CONT = control group, EXP = experimental group (national interests salient).

## Discussion

Study 4 extended the results of Studies 1-3 by demonstrating the effect of group interest salience on moral judgments. In line with our assumptions, the national interest of the US shaped national narcissists' perception of morality of President Trump's decision to remain an ally of Saudi Arabia. We observed that participants judged Trump's decisions as less immoral when they read that it served the national interest of the US; however, this effect was only present for those high in national narcissism. This complements the results of Studies 1-3 by showing that collective narcissism biases morality judgements, especially when ingroup interests are at stake. Additionally, as in Studies 1-3, we found that conventional ingroup identification did not show a similar moderating effect, indicating that it is the defensive nature of collective narcissism, rather than the mere strength of ingroup identification, that motivates biases in intergroup morality judgments. One could suspect that high identifiers would rely more on ingroup norms and values, rather than on the need to protect ingroup interests, in judging morality (Ellemers & Van der Toorn, 2015; Masson & Fritsche, 2014). Yet, we also failed to observe any (positive or negative) main effects of ingroup identification on morality judgments in this case.

## General Discussion

In this research, we sought to contribute to the scarce literature on intergroup processes involved in moral cognition (Ellemers et al., 2019). We demonstrated that judgments about actions of ingroup and outgroup members depend on the strength and type of ingroup commitment as well as perceptions of ingroup interests. In four studies, we found that collective narcissism (but not non-narcissistic, conventional ingroup identification) biased moral judgments of actions supporting ingroup interests. We demonstrated this pattern of results with two kinds of ingroup identities: national (in Poland, the UK and the US) and partisan (Republicans vs. Democrats in the US). In Studies 1 and 2, moral judgments of

national ingroup members were more lenient compared to those of outgroup members. In Study 3, partisan identity was strongly linked to the moral judgement of US Senate's decision to confirm Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. These effects were either only present (Study 1 and Study 2) or especially strong (Study 3) for those high in collective narcissism (but were not dependent on the strength of ingroup identification). Finally, Study 4 directly demonstrated that these effects were driven by perceptions of ingroup interest.

By systematically examining the mechanisms involved in intergroup morality judgements, we build on and extend the past work in this area. First, while previous research focused mostly on perceptions of policies (Baron et al., 2013; Bialobrzeska et al., 2015) or actions taken in the context of overt conflict (Tarrant et al., 2012; Watkins & Laham, 2018), we examined moral judgements about everyday legal and political decisions. Second, we showed that the effects of group identity and group interests on moral judgments are especially strong for individuals high in collective narcissism. This finding suggests that group-favouring biases in morality judgments might not be ubiquitous (see Lind & Tyler, 1988), but rather they more prevalent among those who are defensive about their group. Finally, we pointed to perceptions of ingroup interests as a factor which drives biased morality judgements associated with collective narcissism. In this, we extended past research (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014; Bocian et al., 2016) on the self-interest bias of moral judgments at the individual level to the intergroup context.

We believe that our results show intergroup effects that go beyond a mere ingroup bias (Tajfel & Turner, 1979/2004). First, in Study 1, once we controlled for morality judgments, we did not observe similar biases in competence judgments. Second, only in Study 3, did we find a main effect of target identity (i.e., group membership) on moral judgments. The main effect of political ideology observed in Study 4 also suggests that conservatives were more likely to judge President Trump's decision as moral than liberals. The highly polarised

political context of Studies 3 and 4 suggests that intergroup threat or conflict might intensify the need to protect ingroup interest and, therefore, bias moral perception of the ingroup versus outgroup member's actions even independently of collective narcissism (as in the studies of Tarrant et al., 2012; Watkins & Laham, 2018). Future work should examine the role of situational threat in more detail, while our findings suggest that biased morality judgments might be associated with chronic perceptions of threat characteristic for collective narcissism. Collective narcissism is characterised by the constant need to defend the image of the ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2020). Thus, biased moral judgments might not only serve as an opportunity to justify actions that serve ingroup interests, but also to reduce any threat to the ingroup image stemming from a potentially immoral behaviour of ingroup members (van der Toorn et al., 2015). We did not observe similar moderating effects for conventional (non-narcissistic) ingroup identification, presumably because it is more secure and less sensitive to potential threats (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). The role of conventional ingroup identification in moral judgments warrants future research.

### **Limitations, implications and future directions**

We acknowledge that our work has certain limitations that might warrant future research. Because we were interested in the way ingroup interests shape morality judgments, we focused on targets which would have relatively high power to represent these interests (i.e., leaders and powerful institutions). More research is needed to establish whether the effects we observed would extend to other (e.g., low status/power) targets. For example, past work showed that people forgive moral transgression committed by ingroup leaders more readily than similar transgressions committed by other ingroup members (Abrams et al., 2013). Thus, it is plausible that the group-based morality effects we observed are especially

strong for authorities, whose actions might serve ingroup interest with higher probability of success.

Furthermore, the effects of partisan narcissism on moral judgments we observed in Studies 3 and 4 involved conservative targets. Although we do not have reasons to believe these effects would be limited to judgements of conservatives only (see e.g., Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017), future research would do well to test the role of partisan identities in moral judgments of liberal targets.

Another promising line of future research might emerge from the somewhat unexpected effects for morality judgments we found in Studies 1 and 2. Specifically, in both experiments, we found that participants who scored *low* in collective narcissism made more favourable morality judgments about an outgroup target than about an ingroup target. If we assume that target's actions were morally questionable, then such harsher judgments of ingroup (vs. outgroup) members could be expected based on research and theorising on the black sheep effect (Marques et al., 1988; Marques & Paez, 1994). Evidence found in Studies 1 and 2 suggests that individual levels of collective narcissism might moderate this effect. For people who score low in collective narcissism, an immoral group member seems to be deserving of moral condemnation (in line with the black sheep effect). However, for people who score high in collective narcissism, immoral member's actions are being justified. Future research could focus more directly on how the different ways of identifying with the ingroup affect judgements of deviant ingroup members.

Future studies would also do well to examine reactions to blatantly immoral behaviour. In our studies, we purposefully focused on actions that were morally ambiguous (Studies 1 and 2) or highly debated (such as the Kavanaugh case in Study 3). The least ambiguous action might have been the Khashoggi murder we presented in Study 4. However, the text we used framed the murder as an economic issue of partnership with Saudi Arabia,

placing less moral weight on the murder itself and, thus, potentially increasing moral ambiguity<sup>11</sup>. Because we did not measure perceptions of moral ambiguity of behaviours we presented, we are not able to determine whether ambiguity plays an essential role in our theoretical model. Future research may investigate this question by using explicit or blatant moral transgression to test if the present effects replicate when the behaviour in question is undeniably immoral (e.g., harm inflicted on another person).

Our work might contribute to understanding why populist leaders, like Trump, are so successful in using morality to advance their political agenda (Mudde, 2017). Populists often argue that they have a moral mandate that comes directly from “the people” (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). They use this mandate to allegedly serve the national interest (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2107), in contrast with “liberal elites” who are prone to sell the national interest out (Sawer & Laycock, 2009). Therefore, any morally ambiguous political or economic decision can be argued to be as less or more moral, depending on whether it is presented as serving ingroup interests. By relying on references to national interests, populists are likely to appeal to their highly collectively narcissistic base. Indeed, past work showed that collective narcissism predicts support for national populism (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, & Batayneh, 2018). The rhetoric of national interest might strengthen individuals’ conviction that their ingroup members and their leaders are morally superior. In consequence, it may foster intolerance of those who do not share similar moral convictions (Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Kouzakova, Ellemers, Harinck, & Scheepers, 2014). Thus, a rhetoric which moralizes protection of ingroup interests might end up justifying hostility towards other groups (Opatow, 1993; Mullen & Skitka, 2006). Given that collective narcissism is a strong predictor of intergroup hostility (e.g., Cichocka, 2016), future research would do well to investigate whether it can fuel moral exclusion.

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<sup>11</sup> We thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting this interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

Haidt (2012) argued we use moral reasoning “to further our social agendas—to justify our own actions and to defend the teams we belong to [...]” (p. 5). In this paper, we relied on recent developments in research on collective narcissism and ingroup identification to elucidate the role ingroup commitment plays in morality judgments. We found that people are indeed driven by their ingroup interests in judging what is morally right or wrong. However, this is especially true when they are defensive about their group identities.

### **Open practices**

All raw data files, analysis scripts, and materials used in this article are available for download from the Open Science Framework (OSF; Data are openly available at [https://osf.io/fth72/?view\\_only=b1416b5a66e94e98b7c1346c4378fff9](https://osf.io/fth72/?view_only=b1416b5a66e94e98b7c1346c4378fff9)).

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