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Defensive national identity relates to support for collective violence, in contrast to secure national identity, in a sample of displaced Syrian diaspora members

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines national identities and collective violence beliefs in a sample of Syrian diaspora members (N = 521). Most of the Syria diaspora fled the ongoing civil war and are therefore opposed to President Assad and his regime, which still control most of their homeland. It is therefore a compelling question if national identities, which remain strong in the diaspora despite displacement, shape attitudes towards the regime at home. To this end, we contrast national narcissism (i.e., defensive national identity), an exaggerated belief in one's national ingroup's greatness, and national identification (i.e., secure national identity), a feeling of belonging to the nation and evaluating it positively, as differential predictors of collective violence beliefs. We find that a defensive national identity was related to support for both upward (i.e., violence targeted at regime leaders) and diffuse (i.e., violence targeted at regime supporters) collective violence. Meanwhile, secure national identity was linked to opposition to diffuse collective violence and was unrelated to upward collective violence. Thus, in a sample of displaced, non-WEIRD people, a pattern often found in similar research in the West is replicated, in that secure national identity can relate to benevolent and peaceful group processes. Meanwhile, national narcissism seems to be a driver of hostile intergroup attitudes. National sentiments should therefore be central in any discussion on diasporic attitudes towards the Syrian homeland's regime and fellow citizens. The results could be utilised in designing interventions to promote harmony in diaspora communities around the world, and ultimately reconciliation once peace is finally restored.

The identity dynamics of displaced communities, particularly the Syrian diaspora, present a compelling area of enquiry in the contemporary global landscape. Diaspora politics, defined as political engagement linking constituencies in one country with a real or imagined "homeland" somewhere else, has become a part of everyday politics around the world (Adamson, 2016). Since 2011, the Syrian civil war has resulted in the displacement of millions of Syrians, giving rise to a vast and diverse diaspora (Dagher, 2023; De Juan & Bank, 2015; O'Connor, 2016). This diaspora, grappling with issues of integration and identity amidst the trauma of displacement, is a potential flashpoint for collective violence. As diaspora communities strive to retain a sense of national identity

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while confronting displacement's harsh realities (Mavoudi, 2008, see also Sonn et al., 2017; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012), vital concerns arise about national identities: How do national identities among the Syrian diaspora affect support for collective violence towards the Assad regime and its supporters, which still control most of their homeland? Given that the conflict is ongoing with no immediate end in sight, understanding the social-psychological reasons behind support for collective violence becomes even more crucial. Such understanding can aid in preventing divides within the diaspora and the country and, ultimately, promote social cohesion in the future once peace is finally restored (see Ben David et al., 2017).

Understanding collective violence

Collective violence is the deployment of force or aggression by one or more individuals acting on behalf of a group, aimed against other individuals, groups, or communities (Abou-Ismail et al., 2022; Winiewski & Bulska, 2020). It encompasses various forms such as intergroup conflicts, political violence, and acts of terrorism (Krug et al., 2002). Beliefs about collective violence are tied to the ways individuals support or reject these acts. Hostility, marked by intense negative feelings towards others, can be described as encompassing both the cognitive and affective components of aggression. In its most severe form, hostility can evolve into outright violence (Buss & Perry, 1992). Although the rationale behind violence—based on thoughts or emotions—differs from actual violent actions (Parrott & Giancola, 2007), an individual's attitudes often reliably predict their intended behaviours (Ajzen, 1991; Bosnjak et al., 2020). Given the profound impact of such acts, delving deeper into the reasons behind these beliefs is essential (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

More recently, research has differentiated between varying dimensions of collective violence. Abou-Ismail et al. (2022) found that collective violence beliefs were, in fact two-dimensional, organised around the targets of the violence, rather than the intensity of the act per se. Collective violence aimed at average members of a target group (i.e., diffuse collective violence) and collective violence against leaders or elites of that group (i.e., upward collective violence) are orthogonal factors. In their study, Abou-Ismail et al. (2022) demonstrated that the two dimensions of collective violence attitudes—diffuse and upward—are not only distinct in nature but also differentially related to various constructs. This means a single construct might exhibit a positive correlation with one dimension while showing a negative correlation with the other (e.g., System Justification, Religious Fundamentalism, Perceived Group Efficacy; for more details see Abou-Ismail et al., 2022). Further expanding on this concept, recent research focusing on these dimensions in the context of Lebanon (Abou-Ismail et al., 2023) revealed that collective narcissism may be linked to one dimension of collective violence but not necessarily for the other. Therefore, justifications for committing violent acts against members of a group, and its leaders, seemed to entail different psychological properties.

A wealth of studies has probed the precursors of collective violence, illustrating the interaction of individual, group, and societal factors that escalate intergroup conflicts (Tajfel et al., 1979; Staub, 2003). Collective violence is often sparked by a combination of group-based processes, such as group-based grievances (Koos, 2018), low political efficacy (Dyrstad & Hillesund, 2020), dehumanisation of outgroup members (Haslam, 2006), and perceived legitimacy of violence as a tactic to achieve group goals (Staub, 2003). Of importance for our study, a recent meta-analysis (Jahnke et al., 2022) pointed to the role of ingroup identification as one of the strongest predictors of support for political violence among adolescents and young adults. However, few studies to date have examined the complex role ingroup identities may play in support for collective violence, especially by distinguishing defensive and secure forms of identities (Cichocka, 2016). Understanding this interplay is key to formulating effective interventions that prevent violence and encourage peace, particularly within diverse communities.

Forms of national identities

Various traditions and frameworks in social psychology conceptualise national identity as multidimensional (see e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Osborne et al., 2017). National identities that emphasise a sense of superiority or glorification significantly contribute to intergroup aggression and conflict (e.g., nationalism, Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; blind patriotism, Schatz et al., 1999; glorification, Roccas, et al., 2006). Conversely, identities emphasising pride without outgroup derogation may also serve as potential platforms for reconciliation or peaceful intentions (e.g., patriotism, Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; constructive patriotism, Schatz et al., 1999; attachment, Roccas et al., 2006). In this paper, we differentiate defensive and secure forms of national identities in the Syrian diaspora, drawing on the theoretical framework of collective narcissism (see Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). National narcissism[1] is a belief in one's national ingroup's greatness dependent on external recognition, coined with the sentiment that the national ingroup is exceptional and entitled to privileged treatment (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). Thus, national narcissism has been described as a craving for recognition on behalf of the national ingroup that can never really be satisfied, because such demand for constant praise from others is unsustainable and bound to result in perceived offence (Gronfeldt et al., 2021). On the other hand, national identification is a feeling of belonging to the nation and evaluating it positively (Leach et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1978). National identification can be secure and confident, as it does not necessitate the derogation of others to maintain pride (Cichocka, 2016). In essence, while national identification taps into ties and bonds with the national ingroup and its centrality to an individual's self-concept (Cameron, 2004), national narcissism is preoccupied with what the individual thinks *outsiders* think of the ingroup (Cichocka, 2016).

[1] More broadly, the term collective narcissism can refer to virtually any social group (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), but national narcissism is here used for simplicity and context-specificity (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020).

Since both national narcissism and national identification assume a positive evaluation of the ingroup, the constructs correlate moderately (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013) and accounting for their statistical overlap allows to distinguish 'purely' defensive and secure forms of ingroup identity (Cichocka, 2016). Once the overlap with national identification is controlled for, what remains from national narcissism is a defensive entitlement and concern about external recognition of the ingroup in the eyes of others (i.e., a defensive national identity; see Cichocka, 2016). Similarly, when controlling for national narcissism, what remains from national identification is an unpretentious investment in and satisfaction with the national ingroup (i.e., a secure national identity; see Cichocka, 2016, see also Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Marchlewska et al., 2020). These two forms of national identities likely play fundamentally different roles in relation to collective violence.

Defensive national identity: feeding the fire of collective violence?

A growing body of evidence suggests that defensive national identity is a risk factor of support for collective violence. For example, Cichocka and colleagues (2022) found that in the United Kingdom, United States and Poland, national narcissism related to support for extreme ethnic violence against migrants. Jasko and colleagues (2020) found that those higher in religious or national narcissism were more supportive of collective violence in radical (vs. non-radical) social contexts. In Lebanon, Abou-Ismail et al. (2023) found that sectarian narcissism predicted support of collective violence against citizens of other sects (i.e., diffuse collective violence).

Beyond the link between national narcissism and violence against outgroups, we argue that national narcissism could be linked to support for violence against members of one's own nation. National narcissism is related to increased hostility towards ingroup or outgroup members that are perceived to be somehow threatening to the national ingroup (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, 2013). For example, national narcissism in Poland predicted homophobia because LGBT+ individuals were considered a threat to the nation's norms and values (Mole et al., 2021; see also Górska et al., 2020 and Marchlewska et al., 2019). Therefore, national narcissism predicts exclusionary attitudes and fuels political intolerance within the country, not just hostility towards outsiders. Second, national narcissism is related to enhanced support for short-term policies and actions overtly worse for the nation but aimed at enhancing its image as strong or powerful in the eyes of others (Cislak et al., 2018, 2021; Gronfeldt et al., 2022, 2023, see also Jamróz-Dolinska et al., 2023). Further, national narcissism predicts opposition to democracy (Federico et al., 2022; Keenan & de Zavala, 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2022). This support for radical actions is also observed among disadvantaged groups. Górska and colleagues (2023) showed that, among LGBTQ+ people, collective narcissism predicted support for collective action, and it was especially related to support for non-normative actions.

Overall, these studies highlight that national narcissism can be related to aggression towards groups perceived as threatening, whether outgroups or subgroups within the ingroup. We aim to extend these findings on the role national narcissism may have on diffuse and upward collective violence within a nation, and examine it in a specific and understudied cultural context of Syrian diaspora. First waves of Syrian diaspora are characterised by a strong opposition to the homeland regime. Therefore, we assume that the regime leaders, as symbolic representant of the regime, but also regime supporters, could be seen as a threat to the nation. Therefore, national narcissism is likely to be related to support for both dimensions of collective violence—against both the regime's ordinary supporters (diffuse collective violence) and its leaders (upward collective violence). This is of importance since levels of national narcissism are likely to be elevated in Syrian diaspora. Indeed, within the Syrian diaspora, a highly radical social context in which national sentiments remain strong, a significant portion of the community perceives itself as powerless, undervalued and deserving of more recognition (Takaoka, 2019). A lack of recognition, and feelings of marginalisation and resentment, can amplify the growth of national narcissism (Marchlewska et al., 2020). Relatedly, national narcissism's defensive hostility is exacerbated by perceiving the ingroup to be excluded or ostracised (Golec de Zavala, 2022; Hase et al., 2021). Thus, national narcissism is likely to be a powerful force in a community of displaced diaspora members.

Secure national identity: a motivator of reconciliation?

As implied earlier, national (or ingroup) identification is the "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63), in other words, feeling part of the ingroup and evaluating it positively (Leach et al., 2008; Cameron, 2004). Studies shown that while negative national identity predicts prejudice, secure national identity does not (e.g., Bertin et al., 2022). Some studies also emphasised the potential benefits of national identification, as a superordinate identity, in nurturing positive intergroup relations. Evidence suggests that individuals with higher levels of national identification are more likely to support outgroup (e.g., ethnic) members and engage in intergroup contact (Charnysh et al., 2015; Hindriks et al., 2014), because national identification could act as a superordinate identity, fostering positive feelings towards fellow citizens beyond their respective sub-identities (González & Brown, 2003; Moss & Vollhardt, 2016). This positive effect of national identification is even stronger when considering secure national identity. After controlling for national narcissism, national identification (i.e., secure national identity), generally predicts tolerance and positive attitudes towards outgroups, even outside the national ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Marchlewska et al., 2020) and intergroup solidarity (Górska et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2022). Secure national identity is also related to caring for fellow citizens, rather than a desire for national dominance (e.g., Gronfeldt et al., 2023). Thus, within the context of the Syrian diaspora, understanding of secure national identity as a powerful means to diminish intergroup tensions could promote peaceful conflict resolution within diverse communities in a country and deter the escalation of collective violence.

The Syrian context

Since the 1960 s, Syria has been under the governance of the Ba'ath Party, initially led by Hafez Al-Assad, who hailed from the Alawite minority in a predominantly Sunni country (Pierret, 2014). Under the banner of promoting a national Syrian identity and eliminating sectarian divisions, the regime consolidated power, significantly enhancing the influence of the Alawite minority within the government (Sharkawy, 2017). The year 2011 was a turning point in Syrian history, marked by an uprising that rapidly escalated into violent conflict (Pietrzak, 2019). The initial stages saw defections from the Syrian army and the regime's elite, coupled with the resurgence of long-standing opposition to the Al-Assad family (Aldassouky, 2021). This opposition evolved into both political and military movements. However, the conflict's landscape changed dramatically with the entry of Islamic groups such as ISIS and Nusra Front. This shift transformed the uprising into a multifaceted civil conflict, deviating from its initial aim of challenging the authoritarian regime (Lister, 2014). Consequently, the struggle led millions to flee Syria, most of which opposed the Al-Assad's regime, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries and Europe (Muhammad & Mengal, 2020).

Today, the Syrian conflict can ostensibly be divided into two broad groups: those who support the regime and Al-Assad, and those who oppose it. However, the reality, as is often the case, is far more complex. The Syrian opposition is far from a monolith, riddled with its own disagreements and internal struggles (Lund, 2012). The singular thread that unites these diverse groups of Syrian nationals is their opposition to the Ba'ath regime, but history has repeatedly shown that this singular point of agreement is insufficient to foster cohesive and effective opposition (Saleh, 2017).

National identity, in the context of a civil war, often encompasses a wider range of sentiments and affiliations than those covered by specific political or opposition groups (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Kalyvas, 2006; Varshney, 2003). It captures the overarching sense of belonging and connection to the nation as a whole, which can be a crucial factor in shaping attitudes and beliefs, particularly in a conflict where national identity itself may be a central issue (e.g., Yugoslav Wars; see Ragazzi, 2013). In the current paper, by focusing on national identification, we aimed to include a broad spectrum of displaced Syrians, irrespective of their specific political alignments or affiliations. This approach allowed us to capture a more inclusive range of perspectives within the Syrian diaspora. Given the diverse and fragmented nature of opposition groups and political parties within the Syrian context, measuring identification at the level of these smaller groups could have led to a more segmented and less comprehensive understanding of the attitudes prevalent in the Syrian diaspora. We believe that the national level of identification provides valuable insights into the general sentiments and attitudes towards the nation, which transcend specific political affiliations.

The present research

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between defensive and secure national identities with collective violence beliefs among the Syrian diaspora. We predict that defensive and secure national identities will differentially relate to the propensity for collective violence beliefs (Abou-Ismail et al., 2022). We hypothesise that defensive national identity (i.e., national narcissism net of national identification) will be related to support for collective violence. In contrast, secure national identity (national identification net of national narcissism) will be related to opposition to it. However, given the pioneering nature of our investigation into the specific context of the Syrian diaspora, and the lack of extensive precedents differentiating upward collective violence (targeting leaders) from diffuse collective violence (targeting supporters), our study adopts an exploratory approach to these distinctions. This exploration is guided by a recognition that the dynamics of collective violence beliefs are likely to be complex and multifaceted, potentially differing from established patterns observed in other settings or conflicts (e.g., Lebanon; Abou-Ismail et al., 2023). Therefore, while we draw upon the conceptual framework of defensive and secure national identities, we remain open to uncovering nuanced patterns of association that may contribute to a foundational understanding of these under-researched dimensions of collective violence. For example, while it is established that secure national identity relates to benevolent concerns for ingroup members (Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022), it is unclear if it extends to ideologically opposed national ingroup members or their leaders, such as in the case of conflicting sides of a civil war.

We test our hypotheses on a large, diverse community sample from the Syrian diaspora. Studies have only recently begun to investigate national narcissism in non-WEIRD samples (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Developed; Golec de Zavala, 2022; though see Abou-Ismail et al., 2023; Cichocka, Sengupta, et al., 2022 for notable exceptions). This study is the first (to our best knowledge) investigation into the levels of national narcissism in a group of displaced people who have fled their home country. This sample is of particular interest to our research question, as the issue of social division and cohesion is crucial to (future) reconciliation processes between those who have left and those who have stayed. This effort enriches the existing body of research, potentially guiding interventions tailored towards conflict prevention and resolution.

Methods

Participants

An adult convenience sample was collected by circulating an anonymous Qualtrics link via social media, using the lead author's links with community members within the Syrian opposition in the Diaspora. The sample consisted of 521 participants ($M_{age} = 39.65$, $SD = 13.36$, 42.7% female) and was broadly representative of the various religious and political opposition groups from Syria (38.8% Sunni, 20.9% Christians, 7% Alawites, 7.8% Armenian, 2.4% Druze, 2.1% Other Muslim sects, 21.1% No sectarian identification). A plurality (25.3%) had no political affiliation, while the remainder varied between Syrian opposition groups that were either

established after the Syrian revolution (e.g., Revolution and Opposition coalition, 5.7%), or became active after it (e.g., Communist Party, 6.4%; Muslim Brotherhood, 3.8%). It is important to note that the entire sample consisted of Syrian opposition members that fled the country after 2011 and can therefore be considered refugees or displaced peoples. Syrian diaspora communities existed around the world before the civil war, but these groups are not under investigation here. A G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) sensitivity analysis suggested that this sample size provides 80% power to detect a small or small effect for a single regression coefficient (f^2 =.015).

Measures

The survey administered to this sample was part of a broader research project examining attitudes towards collective violence .[2] All scale items were measured on a scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*).

National Narcissism. We measured national narcissism (ω^2 =.75, M = 3.92, SD = 0.88) using the ultrashort version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) proposed by Sibley (2021) and used in Eker et al. (2023). The three items were "I insist upon Syria getting the respect that is due to it", "If Syria had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place", and "The true worth of Syrians is often misunderstood."

National Identification. Previous research has shown that the sub-dimensions of satisfaction and solidarity are both best able to account for secure identity (Jaworska, 2016). Therefore, we measured national identification (ω^2 =.77, M = 4.11, SD = 0.90) using the three items of solidarity from the scale developed by Leach et al. (2008): "I feel a bond with Syrians", "I feel solidarity with Syrians" and "I feel committed to Syrians."

Collective Violence Beliefs. We measured justification for collective violence using Abou-Ismail and colleagues' (2022) scale. The scale measures two dimensions of collective violence beliefs based on the target of the act rather than the intensity of the act. The scale measures collective violence beliefs against the average supporter of the Assad regime (e.g., "It is justified for the opposition to become physically aggressive towards regime supporters") in one dimension, which we call diffuse collective violence (ω^2 =.95, M = 2.12, SD = 1.26); and it measures collective violence against leaders, which is this case is leaders of the Assad regime (e.g., "One can justify people's need to be violent towards our country's leaders especially those from the regime") in the other dimension, which we call upward collective violence (ω^2 =.96, M = 3.19, SD = 1.31).

Results

We first investigated zero-order correlations between study variables (see Table 1; also see Figures SI1–4 for more information on descriptive statistics). Most importantly, upward collective violence correlated with both national narcissism and national identification, whereas diffuse collective violence correlated only with national narcissism.

We then fitted a structural equation model to test the simultaneous effects of national narcissism and national identification on diffuse collective violence and upward collective violence, while adjusting for the residual covariance between the two outcomes. As shown in Fig. 1, latent diffuse collective violence and latent upward collective violence were each regressed on latent national narcissism, latent national identification, and other covariates simultaneously namely: age, and gender (coded as 1 female, 2 male; see Table 2 for more details). Considering national narcissism and national identification as simultaneous predictors (and therefore accounting for their covariance) allows us to identify the effect of defensive and secure national identity, respectively. Overall, results showed that model fits the data very well, χ^2 (161) = 270.83, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.98, SRMR = .03, RMSEA = .04 90% CI [.034,.051]. National identification had a negative association with diffuse collective violence ($\beta = -.20$, $p = .03$). Conversely, national narcissism had a positive association with diffuse collective violence ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$) as well as upward collective violence ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$). However, there was no significant relationship found between national identification and upward collective violence ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .36$).

Discussion

We observed significant associations between defensive (i.e., national narcissism net of national identification) and secure (national identification net of national narcissism) national identities and collective violence beliefs. First, and in line with our hypotheses, the analysis suggests that defensive national identity, based on national narcissism, a belief in one's national ingroup's greatness (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) is strongly related to beliefs supportive of collective violence, both targeted at regime leaders and supporters. Members of the Syrian diaspora higher in national narcissism, that is who perceive their nation as undervalued and deserving of greater recognition (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), displayed a heightened inclination towards aggressive stances against regime supporters and its leader. The same cannot be said however, about Syrian diaspora members (that are certainly deserving of a greater recognition), who are lower in national narcissism and for some reason either do not think of their national ingroup as undervalued, do not depend on external validation to determine self-worth, or aim for the superiority or domination and therefore (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). In line with our hypothesis, secure national identity, a feeling of belonging to the nation and evaluating it positively (Leach et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1978), was associated with decreased support for collective violence

[2] This project encompassed a wider range of constructs, including Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), among others, which are beyond the scope of the current study, and therefore will not be covered here. The additional data collected will be utilised for future research.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations Between Study Variables.

	1	2	3	4
1. National narcissism				
2. National identification	.49*			
3. Diffuse collective violence	.21*	-.01		
4. Upward collective violence	.37*	.20*	.69*	

* $p < .001$

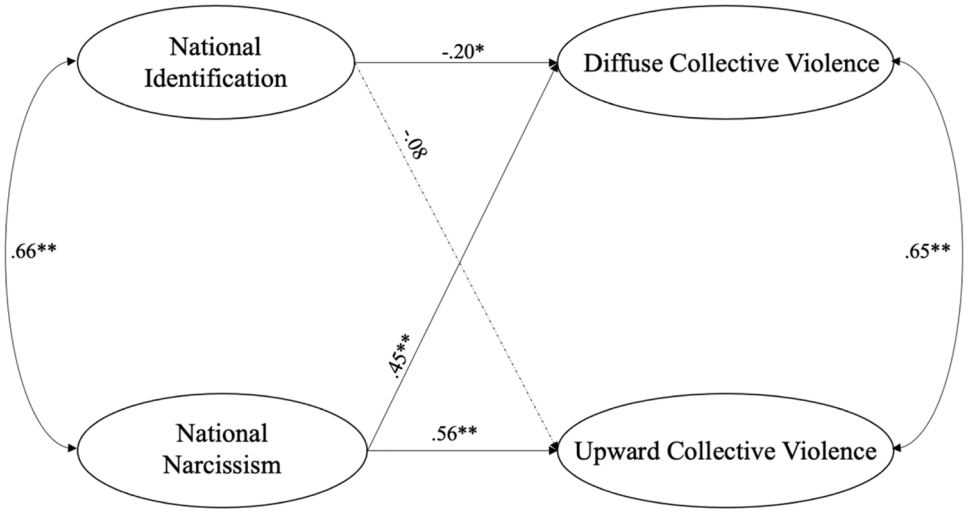

Fig. 1. Structural Equation Model with Latent National Narcissism and National Identification Modelled as Simultaneous Predictors of Latent Diffuse and Upward Collective Violence Beliefs. Note. For visual simplicity, observed indicators and covariates are not shown.[3] * * $p < .001$, * $p < .05$.

[3] The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) conducted on all latent variables demonstrated that each item exhibited strong loading on its designated factor.

toward regime supporters. We did not find any significant relationship between secure national identity and support for collective violence beliefs against regime leaders. The results highlighted how national identities could either be predictive of or protective against the formation of collective violence beliefs.[4]

National identity and collective violence: the crucial distinction between secure and defensive identity

Our findings resonate with previous research on the link between national narcissism and support for collective violence, while also adding a fresh dimension to this established body of work (see e.g., Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022). The significant positive relationship between national narcissism and collective violence beliefs observed here aligns with earlier findings (Abou-Ismail et al., 2023; see also Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022). Our research reinforces the notion that when group members feel their group is great yet undervalued, it may precipitate a propensity for aggression and violence. However, our research also extends this understanding by focusing on national narcissism within the Syrian diaspora–a context that has received less attention in the literature. This meets the invitation to

[4] It is important to highlight that although our study did not specifically formulate hypotheses related to gender and age, these demographic factors were incorporated as controls in our model due to their potential association with collective violence beliefs and removing them does not change the pattern of results. Notably, our findings revealed significant and consistent correlations between these demographics and attitudes towards collective violence. In particular, younger males were more likely to justify both dimensions of collective violence attitudes compared to other groups. This observation aligns with existing literature that examines gender differences in aggression, suggesting a broader pattern consistent with research in this area (Shaban & Kumar, 2016).

Table 2
Parameter Estimates for the Models Predicting Diffuse and Upward Collective Violence Beliefs.

	Diffuse Collective Violence						Upward Collective Violence				
	b	*z*	*p*	95% CI			*b*	*z*	*p*	95% CI	
				low	*high*					*low*	*high*
National Identification	-.20	-2.13	.03	-.38	-.02	National Identification	-.08	0.92	.36	-.26	.09
National Narcissism	.45	4.92	< .001	.27	.63	National Narcissism	.56	6.66	< .001	.40	.72
Age	-.20	-4.06	< .001	-.30	-.10	Age	-.14	-3	.003	-.23	-.05
Gender	.13	2.61	.009	.03	.23	Gender	.10	2.15	.03	.009	.19

extend social psychology research outside WEIRD contexts (Apicella et al., 2020) and, specific to collective narcissism literature, to test its adequation within structurally disadvantaged groups (see Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022). Our results contribute to this emergent field, underlining that defensive national identity may be a risk factor for political violence, even when it emanates from non-WEIRD or disadvantaged groups (see also Górska et al., 2023). This also deepens our comprehension of how the nuanced complexities of a specific diasporic setting can shape national-narcissistic tendencies and their potential implications for intergroup conflict.

On the flip side, the relationship between secure national identity and collective violence beliefs found in our study offers an important counterpoint to the existing literature on national narcissism. Contrary to the aggression-precipitating tendencies associated with defensive national identity, secure national identity was linked with lower support for diffuse collective violence. This is in accordance with prior research indicating that ingroup identification, characterised by a secure and positive attachment to one's group, contributes to constructive intergroup attitudes and reduced aggression (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Górska et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2022). Recent findings (Jamróz-Dolińska et al., 2023) demonstrate that constructive patriotism, which constitutes a different approach to secure national identity, relates to the adoption of a future time perspective of the nation. That is, those high in constructive patriotism preferred policies with long-term advantages, even at the expense of short-term advantages (see also Gronfeldt et al., 2023). Our findings support this notion: Secure national identity promotes tolerance and may be beneficial for long-term perspectives (e.g., reconciliation). However, the absence of a relationship between secure national identity and upward collective violence does not necessarily indicate support or indifference towards the regime, rather divergent perspectives within the opposition. Some might view such strategies as effective, while others disagree, reflecting the deep-seated differences in how opposition groups perceive and approach the conflict with the Al-Assad regime.

A significant contribution of our study is the exploration of differential prediction of various forms of collective violence by defensive and secure national identity. While much of the existing literature has looked at collective violence as a monolithic construct with few exceptions (see Abou-Ismail et al., 2023), our study acknowledges the heterogeneity of collective violence, exploring distinct dimensions like diffuse collective violence and upward collective violence. This enhances the existing literature by providing a more refined and nuanced understanding of the psychological predictors of different forms of violence, adding to the depth and complexity of our comprehension of intergroup conflict dynamics.

Implications

Our findings deepen the understanding of intergroup conflicts, especially within the Syrian diaspora, and underscore the essential role of national sentiments in collective violence beliefs. The observed associations between defensive national identity, secure national identity, and attitudes toward collective violence illuminate the psychological underpinnings that could potentially trigger intergroup conflicts, providing novel avenues for prevention and intervention. Defensive national identity emerged as a significant factor associated with support for collective violence in this context. Understanding this relationship is crucial as it not only helps us decipher the psychological mechanisms underpinning conflict but also aids in identifying those groups that may be more susceptible to resort to aggression due to an inflated belief in ingroup greatness and a sense of being undervalued (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). On the other hand, secure national identity may act as a buffer against the support for violence, emphasising the potential protective role of ingroup identification. This identification, driven by a sense of belonging to Syria and appreciation rather than superiority or external validation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013, 2019; Marchlewska et al., 2020), could serve as a basis for fostering harmonious intergroup relations and reducing the propensity for collective violence. Interestingly, secure national identity is related to decreased collective violence beliefs towards supporters, that is fellow citizens, but not against the regime. This highlights that secure national identity may be a way to promote social harmony without abandoning ideological combats.

These findings have significant practical implications. By identifying the psychological constructs that are linked with the support for or opposition to various forms of collective violence, policymakers, community leaders, and humanitarian organisations can better tailor strategies to mitigate potential violence. For instance, interventions could be designed to promote the more secure form of national identification over national narcissism, emphasising the shared commonalities and mutual respect amongst diverse factions within the Syrian diaspora. This could help foster a sense of unity and collective resilience, mitigating the appeal of violence to address perceived grievances. Addressing and transforming the long-term, ingrained resentment within communities is crucial, as such negative emotions can perpetuate a cycle of violence and mistrust, impeding sustainable peace and reconciliation (Bar-Tal et al., 2007).

Furthermore, by recognising the potential pitfalls of national narcissism, efforts can be made to address the issues of perceived

undervaluation and marginalisation within the community. This could involve amplifying the voices and concerns of the community, acknowledging their struggles, and working collaboratively to address them, thereby reducing feelings of resentment and the subsequent growth of national narcissism (see Marchlewska et al., 2020). Ultimately, our study's findings offer a more nuanced understanding of the complex conflicts within the Syrian diaspora, providing an empirical basis for the creation of more effective peacebuilding strategies. It must, however, be acknowledged that manipulating national sentiments is convoluted and more research is needed before designing interventions to avoid backlash effects (see Gronfeldt et al., 2023).

Limitations and recommendations for future research

While our study has important strengths, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, which in turn open avenues for future research. First, our study was conducted within a specific context: the Syrian diaspora. While this allows for rich, contextual insights, it may limit the generalisability of our findings to other diasporic communities or national contexts. Future research could consider replicating this study across different diasporic or national communities to validate our findings and explore potential cultural or contextual variations. Second, our research was cross-sectional, limiting our ability to imply causal or temporal relationships between defensive national identity, secure national identity, and collective violence beliefs. Longitudinal studies could be useful in tracking these dynamics over time, offering insights into how these relationships evolve and the potential influence of changing socio-political circumstances. Third, our study focused on national narcissism as a form of collective narcissism. However, collective narcissism is multifaceted and can be based on other group identities like religion, ethnicity, or even more localised communities (see e.g., Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022; Marinthe et al., 2022). It would be enlightening for future research to investigate the role of collective narcissism associated with different groups in predicting collective violence beliefs.

Furthermore, while our study made strides in exploring national sentiments' role in collective violence beliefs, it would be worthwhile to investigate the potential moderators or mediators in this relationship by relying on both intergroup relations and collective violence research fields. For instance, emotions could act as mediators: While empathy and positive emotions are known as powerful drivers of intergroup prejudice reduction (Pettigrew et al., 2011), negative emotions such as anger or contempt are related to support for collective violence (e.g., Adamczyk et al., 2014; Tausch et al., 2011). It might also be interesting, particularly with people from the diaspora, to explore the potential moderating role of context. Indeed, the radical nature of the environment in which an individual finds himself moderates the link between collective narcissism and violence (Jasko et al., 2020). Similarly, levels of inequality within a country or poor governance can exacerbate collective violence (e.g. Piazza, 2013; Vijaya et al., 2018). Therefore, studying the context–both in terms of the country of origin and the host country–could provide more explanations of how national identity can translate more or less strongly on collective violence.

Conclusion

This study has added depth to the understanding of the relationships between secure and defensive national identities, and collective violence within the Syrian diaspora context. Highlighting the risks of defensive identification depicted as national narcissism and benefits of genuine ingroup identification, it presents a nuanced perspective on different identification forms and their influence on collective violence beliefs. Our findings are instrumental both theoretically, by enhancing our knowledge of these relationships, and practically, by informing strategies to reduce violence and promote peace within diverse communities. Furthermore, they lay the groundwork for future research in exploring other forms of collective narcissism and their impact within various national or diasporic contexts.

Author note

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Gaelle Marinthe: Writing – review & editing, Validation, Resources. **Bjarki Gronfeldt:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Conceptualization. **Ramzi Abou-Ismail:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Data availability

The supporting data for the findings presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Please feel free to contact the corresponding author.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.101954.

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