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The energy island: Texan collective narcissism predicts support for energy isolationism

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Abstract

This research examined whether state-level collective narcissism, a belief that one's state is exceptional and entitled to special treatment, predicts support for policies that prioritize state independence even if they harm fellow residents. Three pre-registered studies focused on controversies around the independent power grid in Texas, which has been linked to major power shortages in the state. In Study 1 ($N=223$), Texan collective narcissism was strongly linked to support for energy isolationism. Study 2 ($N=217$) replicated this finding, even when costs were emphasized, but the effect was weaker for those who supported the state Governor. In Study 3 ($N=543$), emphasizing personal costs of energy isolationism reduced support for grid independence among those high in collective narcissism. This finding suggests that self-related motives might be behind the appeal of isolationist policies for those high in collective narcissism. The effects we observed were similar even when adjusting for political beliefs and regional identification (Studies 1–3), national narcissism and identification (Study 2), as well as individual narcissism and self-esteem (Study 3). These studies highlight the role of narcissistic regional identity in policy preferences.

KEYWORDS

collective narcissism, energy policy, ingroup identification, local identity, regional identity

[Correction added on 07 April 2026, after first online publication: The copyright line was changed.]

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Highlights

- Regional (state) narcissism in Texas was associated with support for keeping the state power grid separate from the rest of the country, a decision that makes Texans more vulnerable during energy crises.
- Highlighting the personal costs of this separation (such as increased personal health risks during energy outages) weakens the relationship between regional narcissism and energy isolationism.
- Interventions that emphasize individual costs may help to mobilize support for policies typically opposed by those high in collective narcissism.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2021, Texas was hit by a major snowstorm, Uri, which resulted in an energy crisis, leaving over 4 million homes and businesses without power for days. Over 200 people died as a result (FERC, NERC and Regional Entity Staff Report, 2021). Although less severe, there have been several winter and summer energy crises in the state since (Cohen, 2024). Many commentators blame problems with power delivery on inefficiencies of the states' independent power grid (e.g., Dhanesha, 2022; Krauss et al., 2021). Texas has been referred to as an “energy island”: the state's grid is currently not connected to the rest of the country, which means it cannot easily borrow power from other states if its infrastructure fails (Dhanesha, 2022). At the same time, “the isolation of the Texas power grid has become a symbol of the state's independent streak and resistance to federal oversight in recent years” (Cohen, 2024; para. 2). “In Texas, energy regulation is as much a matter of philosophy as policy. Its independent power grid is a point of pride that has been an applause line in Texas political speeches for decades.” (Krauss et al., 2021; para. 41). For example, Texas Governor, Greg Abbott, seems confident in the grid. At an energy summit in Houston, he said: “Texas is the economic engine of America, where industry leaders know that they live in a state that can power the future to produce a bigger, better Texas.” (Office of the Texas Governor, 2024; para. 2).

Abbott's enthusiasm shows that support for state policies, including energy policies, can be linked not only to the balance of economic and political costs and benefits, but also to people's sentiments about their region. Indeed, Texans tend to feel a strong attachment to their state (as opposed to their other regional identities; Myers, 2010). A report on Texas identity concluded that in Texas, people of diverse backgrounds feel deep connections to a shared identity and to a shared story (Malvar et al., 2021). In this project, we aim to investigate to what extent the nature of their sentiments about their state matters for understanding their policy preferences.

In social and political psychology, researchers often differentiate positive forms of social identity, capturing unpretentious pride in one's social group, from defensive social identities, characterized by beliefs in group superiority and exceptionalism (Cichocka, 2016; Gronfeldt, Cislak, Sternisko, et al., 2023). The latter can be operationalized as collective narcissism—a belief that one's group is exceptional and entitled to privileged treatment (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Collective narcissism has been studied extensively in relation to various social identities, including religion (Marchlewska et al., 2019), ethnicity (Marinthe et al., 2024), partisanship (Gronfeldt, Cislak, Wyatt, & Cichocka, 2023; Marchlewska, Górska, Podsiadłowski, et al., 2024), workplace teams (Cichocka, Cislak, et al., 2022), sports teams (Bertin et al., 2024), and—probably most extensively—nationality (Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that people can also develop narcissistic beliefs about their state or region (see Simon et al., 1995), and these would have particular implications for their political attitudes and behaviors.

Collective narcissism is a compensatory belief, which develops as a way of managing personal needs and frustrations (Cichocka et al., 2018; Eker et al., 2023). It can be seen as a group-based ego enhancement strategy, whereby the group's image as strong and independent can reflect positively on the individual, while there is less concern about other members of the group (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). This has implications for attitudes and preferences favored by people high in collective narcissism. Studies show that collective narcissism, in contrast to ingroup identification, can be detrimental to relations between and within groups (Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). Those high in collective narcissism tend to see their group as strong, and even superior to others, leading to out-group derogation and prejudice (e.g., Bertin et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Marchlewska, Górka, Podsiadłowski, et al., 2024), beliefs that other groups conspire against the ingroup (Cichocka et al., 2016), and even support for political extremism and intergroup violence (Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2023; Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022; Jasko et al., 2020).

Collective narcissism has also been linked to problematic relations within the group. Those high in collective narcissism tend to treat other members of the group instrumentally (Cichocka et al., 2022; Molenda, Green, et al., 2023). They prioritize external ingroup image over the well-being of ingroup members (Gronfeldt et al., 2024; Gronfeldt, Cislak, Sternisko, et al., 2023). This psychological dynamic has important implications for understanding policy preferences linked to collective narcissism. Possibly the most striking evidence comes from studies conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United Kingdom, collective narcissism measured in relation to participants' British identity predicted support for the country being allocated more medical resources relative to other countries, but at the expense of absolute profit for the country (Gronfeldt et al., 2024). In studies conducted with American participants, collective narcissism predicted support for reducing testing for COVID-19 in order to make the country look better in international infection comparisons (Gronfeldt, Cislak, Sternisko, et al., 2023). People high in collective narcissism tend to see in-group members as an acceptable sacrifice for keeping up a strong and independent image of their in-group.

Parallel findings stem from research on environmental policy preferences. Focusing again on collective narcissism in relation to one's nation (national narcissism for short), studies consistently indicate that it predicts preference for environmental policies projecting national strength and independence, even if they would come at a cost to compatriots (see Cislak et al., 2024 for a review). For example, people high in national narcissism were open to promoting the country as green in order to portray it in a positive light, but opposed initiatives that would genuinely tackle climate issues (so-called political *greenwashing*; Cislak et al., 2021). Cislak et al. (2018, 2023) also found that those high in national narcissism were inclined to support policies that challenge pro-environmental pressures from external bodies. In Poland, national narcissism predicted support for logging a protected forest and for a government subsidy for the coal industry, both of which have detrimental effects on the local environment. The effects were mediated by the desire to make decisions independently of international pressures, for instance, from the EU. These preferences were typically unrelated to positive forms of national identity.

Skepticism of external interference, likely underlined by a general suspicion of out-groups, also means that national narcissism predicts negative views of supranational organizations. Clear examples come from research on attitudes toward the European Union. In the United Kingdom, national narcissism was a robust predictor for voting leave in the Brexit referendum (Cislak et al., 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2017; Marchlewska et al., 2018; see also Huddy et al., 2021). In Poland, national narcissism similarly predicted support for a hypothetical Polexit, and this was driven by a biased perception that the country contributes more than it allegedly benefits from membership (Cislak et al., 2020). Overall, these studies suggest that collective narcissism, at least in the context of national identities, is an important predictor of

support for policies that tend to favor group strength and independence, even if they bear costs for the group.

OVERVIEW

In this project, we seek to extend past research by examining the role of *regional* identities, such as state-level collective narcissism, can play in predicting support for policies that emphasize group independence. We test these ideas in the context of Texans' support for energy isolationism, that is for the independent power grid. There are reasons to believe that at least some Texans might exhibit high regional collective narcissism. A study of residents of 50 U.S. states examined what people thought was their home state's contribution (in terms of percentage) to the history of the U.S. Texans scored relatively high compared to other states, estimating the state's contribution at 21% (Putnam et al., 2018). Such (over)estimates of one's group's historical contributions go hand in hand with self-reported levels of collective narcissism (Główczewski et al., 2022).

Although the debate about the separate power grid in Texas reflects a complex set of factors, including economic, environmental, and societal concerns (e.g., Cohn, 2022), it also serves as a good illustrative example of a tension between independence and the ability to protect one's group members. Drawing on research showing that those high in collective narcissism might favor group strength and independence, even over the well-being of ingroup members, we examine whether those high in Texan collective narcissism would be supportive of the independent power grid (Studies 1–3), even if we highlight potential costs to fellow Texans (Studies 2–3). In Study 3, we examine if this effect might be attenuated by highlighting costs to the self (as opposed to other group members). For exploratory purposes, we additionally asked participants about their behaviors reflecting Texan collective identity (e.g., whether they owned a Texas flag; see the Supplement for details).

All studies were pre-registered (also for items included for exploratory purposes), with pre-registrations, data, and coding available at: https://osf.io/encdz/?view_only=3c899b471dbf4912bb3652666d37bc74. Data were analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0. Figures were prepared using Jamovi. Across studies, we interpret effect size strength based on Lovakov and Agadullina (2021).

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we aimed to test our hypotheses that collective narcissism in relation to one's state, Texas, will predict the support for the independent power grid. Because collective narcissism places emphasis on group strength and independence, it should be linked to support for the grid, even if it is contrasted with the potential benefits of alternative arrangements. We also examined whether this effect would be observed over and above positive identification with the state, as well as political orientation or support for the state Governor, Greg Abbott.

Method

Participants and procedure

A priori power analysis determined that a sample size of 173 would achieve a power of .80 to detect the average social psychology effect size ($r = .21$; Richard et al., 2003). We pre-registered to collect answers from 250 participants (and to top up the sample if exclusions resulted in

a sample smaller than 173). We recruited 252 participants via Prolific. In line with our pre-registration, we excluded the responses of 29 participants who did not confirm they live in Texas, identify as Americans and Texans, or did not complete all items. The final sample included 223 participants, 109 women, 111 men, and 2 non-binary persons (one person did not indicate their gender), 114 who identified as White, and 109 as other ethnicities. Participants' age ranged between 18 and 80 ($M=38.73$, $SD=13.12$).

Measures

Regional narcissism was measured with the 9-item version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), for example, "Texas deserves special treatment", "It really makes me angry when others criticize Texas", "If Texans had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place." Participants indicated to what extent they agree with these statements on a scale from 1 = *definitely not* to 7 = *definitely yes*, $\alpha = .92$, $M=3.00$, $SD=1.47$.

Regional identification was measured with 12 items from the Social Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004), for example, "I have a lot in common with other Texans," "I feel strong ties to other Texans," "In general, I am glad to be a Texan." Participants indicated to what extent they agree with these statements on a scale from 1 = *definitely not* to 7 = *definitely yes*, $\alpha = .93$, $M=4.46$, $SD=1.41$.

Energy isolationism was measured with five items, each including a pair of statements indicating that Texas should either stay independent from the federal power grid even at the cost of power outages versus Texas should join the federal power grid. In each case, participants were asked to decide which strategy was closer to their position and indicate this on a scale ranging from 1 to 7; for example, "1 = *We should keep our Texan power grid separate from the federal grid* – 7 = *We should ensure we can get extra power by joining the federal grid*," $\alpha = .97$, $M=3.24$, $SD=2.02$.

Political orientation was measured with one item, "Overall, where would you place yourself, on the following scale of liberalism – conservatism?" on a scale from 1—*extremely liberal* to 7—*extremely conservative*, $M=3.55$, $SD=1.74$. Support for the Texas Governor was measured with the item "To what degree do you support Texas Governor Greg Abbott?", with a scale from 1 = *definitely do not support* to 5 = *support strongly*, $M=2.31$, $SD=1.41$.

Results

Correlations are presented in Table 1. All variables measured in Study 1 were significantly and positively correlated. Crucially, in line with our pre-registered hypothesis, we observed

TABLE 1 Zero-order correlations between variables with 95% confidence intervals (Study 1).

	1	2	3	4
1. Regional narcissism	–			
2. Regional identification	.67*** [.59, .74]	–		
3. Energy isolationism	.66*** [.58, .73]	.52*** [.41, .61]	–	
4. Political orientation	.58*** [.49, .66]	.48*** [.37, .58]	.68*** [.60, .74]	–
5. Governor support	.61*** [.52, .68]	.51*** [.41, .60]	.62*** [.53, .70]	.72*** [.65, .78]

*** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Regression models with energy isolationism as the dependent variable (Study 1).

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i> [95% CI]	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>p</i>
1. Regional narcissism	4.66 [3.55, 5.77]	.57	<.001	2.79 [1.69, 3.89]	.34	<.001
2. Regional identification	1.17 [0.02, 2.33]	.14	.047	.38 [−.67, 1.43]	.04	.479
3. Political orientation				2.60 [1.67, 3.52]	.37	<.001
4. Governor support				.72 [−.06, 1.51]	.13	.071
5. Gender (woman)				.18 [−.18, .55]	.05	.324
6. Age				−.17 [−1.07, .73]	−.02	.713
7. Ethnicity (White)				.18 [−.20, .55]	.04	.353
	<i>F</i> (2, 216)=86.16, <i>p</i> < .001			<i>F</i> (7, 211)=41.43, <i>p</i> < .001		
	<i>R</i> ² _{adj} = .44			<i>R</i> ² _{adj} = .57		

Note: The continuous predictors were rescaled from 0 to 1; unstandardized regression coefficients represent predicted mean differences in the dependent variable between the highest and lowest observable values of the predictor. Gender was coded 1 for female participants, 0 for male participants (other categories were excluded from the analyses due to small numbers). Ethnicity was coded 1 for White participants, 0 for non-White participants. Pairwise deletion was applied.

a strong significant correlation between regional narcissism and support for the independent power grid.

We further tested our hypotheses with regression analyses (Table 2). As expected, regional narcissism positively predicted energy isolationism, and this effect remained significant when we adjusted for regional identification, political orientation, support for the Texas governor Greg Abbot, and demographics.¹ In Step 1, we also observed a weak, positive effect of regional identification that became non-significant when adding political and demographic variables in Step 2.

Discussion

In Study 1, we reliably measured collective narcissism in relation to one's state—in this case, Texas. In line with our predictions, we observed a strong relationship between Texan collective narcissism and support for the energy policy involving maintaining the independent power grid. This result is consistent with past work showing that collective narcissism is predictive of policies that portray the group as powerful and independent of external influences (Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). The effect was robust to controlling for regional identification, which was weakly associated with energy isolationism, as well as for variables measuring political beliefs and demographics.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we sought to examine whether the effects observed in Study 1 would replicate if we explicitly highlighted the potential risks of maintaining an independent power grid in Texas. Past work has indicated that collective narcissism might be supportive of policies

¹For clarity, in all studies, we deviate slightly from our pre-registrations and present models including regional identity indices, and then a model adjusting for political variables and demographics. In the Supplement, we present results of the main pre-registered models (note that they do not substantively change the pattern of the results).

portraying ingroup strength even at a cost to the ingroup (Cichocka, Cislak, et al., 2022; Gronfeldt, Cislak, Sternisko, et al., 2023). We also wanted to examine whether the effects would hold when adjusting for the effects of national narcissism and identification, alongside regional identities. Past work shows that subgroup (e.g., ethnic) attachment does not necessarily imply lower attachment to the broader national group (Huo & Molina, 2006). In line with this, we expect to observe a positive association between regional and national narcissism (and, similarly, between regional and national identification) because they both reflect similar type of ingroup identity. However, isolationist regional policies should be less appealing to those high in national narcissism as they might be concerned about weakening the country's strong image.

Method

Participants and procedure

In Study 2, we pre-estimated (and pre-registered) the sample size based on the same rationale as in Study 1. We recruited 252 participants via Prolific. In line with our pre-registration, we excluded 35 participants who did not confirm they identify as Americans and Texans, or who did not complete all items—predictors and the dependent variable. The final sample included 217 Prolific participants, 109 women, 106 men, 1 non-binary person, and one person who did not state their gender; 125 participants identified as White, and 92 as other ethnicities. Participants' age ranged between 18 and 81 ($M = 40.94$, $SD = 13.43$).

Participants first reported their demographics, political orientation, and support for the Texas governor. Then, they reported their regional narcissism and regional identification, national narcissism, national identification (counterbalanced). Before measuring energy isolationism, we asked them to read an excerpt from a text from Forbes (Cohen, 2024), which highlights that the isolation of the Texas power grid has become a symbol of the state's independence, but the system is vulnerable to severe weather, which in the past has resulted in harm to Texans (for full text, see the Supplement).

Measures

Regional narcissism and regional identification, energy isolationism, political orientation, and support for Texas Governor Greg Abbott were all measured with the same items in Study 1. National identification and national narcissism were measured using the same items as regional identities but with reference to the USA and Americans, for example, "In general, I am glad to be an American." Means, standard deviations, and reliabilities are reported in Table 3.

Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3. All variables measured in Study 2 were significantly and positively correlated, and again, we observed a medium to strong significant correlation between regional narcissism and support for the independent power grid.

Next, we conducted regression analyses (see Table 4). As expected, regional narcissism positively predicted energy isolationism, and this effect remained significant when we adjusted for regional identification, national narcissism, and national identification. Interestingly, in Study 2, while regional identification also predicted energy isolationism positively, there were no significant effects of national narcissism or identification. In contrast to our pre-registered hypothesis, the

TABLE 3 Zero-order correlations between variables with 95% confidence intervals (Study 2).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Regional narcissism	–						
2. Regional identification	.59*** [.50, .67]	–					
3. National narcissism	.80*** [.75, .85]	.45*** [.34, .55]	–				
4. National identification	.34*** [.21, .45]	.61*** [.51, .68]	.45*** [.34, .55]	–			
5. Energy isolationism	.34*** [.22, .45]	.41*** [.30, .52]	.21** [.08, .33]	.18** [.05, .31]	–		
6. Political orientation	.45*** [.34, .55]	.39*** [.27, .50]	.35*** [.23, .46]	.27*** [.15, .39]	.46*** [.35, .56]	–	
7. Governor support	.53*** [.43, .62]	.44*** [.32, .54]	.44*** [.32, .54]	.31*** [.18, .42]	.51*** [.40, .60]	.68*** [.60, .75]	–
<i>M</i>	3.36	4.81	3.55	4.99	3.30	4.05	2.62
<i>SD</i>	1.52	1.26	1.37	0.97	1.91	1.67	1.43
α	.92	.92	.91	.85	.95	–	–

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4 Regression models with support energy isolationism as the dependent variable (Study 2).

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i> [95% CI]	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>p</i>
1. Regional narcissism	1.87 [0.04, 3.70]	.25	.045	0.39 [−1.40, 2.19]	.05	.666
2. Regional identification	2.96 [1.42, 4.50]	.36	<.001	2.42 [0.99, 3.85]	.29	.001
3. National narcissism	−1.04 [−2.92, 0.85]	−.12	.280	−0.96 [−2.70, 0.78]	−.12	.279
4. National identification	−0.75 [−2.71, 1.22]	−.06	.455	−1.20 [−3.03, 0.63]	−.10	.198
5. Political orientation				1.24 [0.16, 2.33]	.18	.025
6. Governor support				1.63 [0.73, 2.53]	.31	<.001
7. Gender (woman)				−0.15 [−0.58, 0.29]	−.04	.508
8. Age				0.01 [−1.11, 1.13]	.001	.989
9. Ethnicity (White)				0.02 [−0.45, 0.49]	.01	.939
	$F(4, 210) = 12.74, p < .001$			$F(9, 205) = 11.55, p < .001$		
	$R^2_{adj} = .18$			$R^2_{adj} = .31$		

Note: The continuous predictors were rescaled from 0 to 1; unstandardized regression coefficients represent predicted mean differences in the dependent variable between the highest and lowest observable values of the predictor. Gender was coded 1 for female participants, 0 for male participants (other categories were excluded from the analyses due to small numbers). Ethnicity was coded 1 for White participants, 0 for non-White participants. Pairwise deletion was applied.

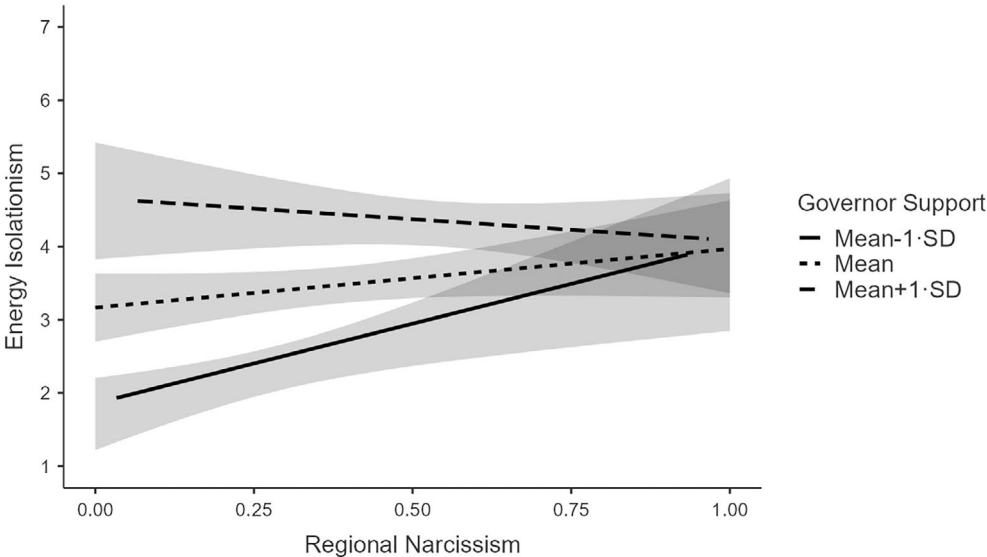


FIGURE 1 Support for the independent power grid as a function (with 95% confidence intervals) of regional narcissism and support for Texas governor (Study 2).

effect of regional narcissism was no longer significant when we adjusted for political orientation, support for Greg Abbott, and demographics. Note, however, that this analysis should be treated with caution, as we observed potential multicollinearity with a VIF over 4 for regional narcissism.

Because the second step analysis revealed a moderate to strong effect of support for Greg Abbott, we deviated from our pre-registration and examined whether the effect of regional narcissism might have been contingent on Abbott support (Figure 1). We found a significant interaction effect, $B = -3.85 [-6.42, -1.29]$, $\beta = -.17$, $p = .003$, showing that the effect of regional narcissism on power grid support was significant among those less supportive ($-1SD$) of the

governor, $B=2.18$ [0.80, 3.56], $\beta=.29$, $p=.002$, but not significant among those who were more (+1SD) supportive of him, $B=-.58$ [-1.93, 0.77], $\beta=-.08$, $p=.401$.² The interaction remained significant when adjusting for the remaining predictors and demographics (although, again, we observed issues with multicollinearity).

Discussion

In Study 2, we again observed a positive association between Texan collective narcissism and energy isolationism. This effect was significant after adjusting for regional identification as well as national identification and national narcissism. Although national identification and narcissism were positively correlated with support for independent grid, these effects became non-significant once the overlap with regional narcissism and identification was included in the model.

Contrary to our predictions, we found the effect of regional narcissism to become non-significant when we adjusted for political beliefs (as well as demographics). Further exploratory analyses revealed that the effect of Texan collective narcissism was contingent on support for the Republican governor, Greg Abbott: while regional narcissism predicted support for the independent grid at low levels of governor support, the effect became weaker and non-significant at high levels of governor support. The study was conducted in September 2024,³ in the heat of the presidential campaign in the United States, which might have made political alliances and animosities salient. Past research has indicated that national narcissism is associated with support for conservative politicians (e.g., Marchlewska et al., 2018), and in both studies, we observed similar effects of regional narcissism: It was correlated both with support for Abbott and with conservative political orientation. Because Abbott has been seen as a strong proponent of the power grid solution and has praised its capabilities at an energy summit not long before the study was conducted (e.g., Misra, 2024), the level of regional narcissism might not have played a role for those who already supported the governor and his policies. It is possible that Abbott's support for the power grid, and broader policies of maintaining a positive image of a strong state (Office of the Texas Governor, 2024), address the needs associated with collective narcissism. Thus, when the support for governor Abbott is included into the model, it accounts for the variance that was previously attributed to collective narcissism. In contrast, for those who were less likely to support governor Abbott, regional narcissism still predicted stronger support (or, at least, weaker disapproval) of the power grid.

Furthermore, in Study 2, we asked participants to read an actual press article discussing the history and consequences of maintaining a separate power grid in Texas, including greater independence from federal oversight but also higher energy prices, increased risk of losing power during crises due to a lack of interconnection, and even health and life hazards. This press excerpt may have thus highlighted not only the group costs but also the personal costs of Texan energy isolationism. As collective narcissism is theorized to be a group-based self-enhancement strategy, whereby group strength and independence are used to manage individual needs (Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020), highlighting potential harm to the self might have attenuated the link between regional narcissism and support for maintaining a separate power grid. Interestingly, the personal and group costs seem not to affect the link between a more secure regional identity which is not underlain by similar group-image

²We did not find similar interaction effects between regional identification and Governor support.

³Note that Study 2 was conducted in September of 2024, after we collected data of Study 1 (which was conducted in April 2023) and Study 3 (which was conducted in June 2023). For presentation purposes, we presented the studies in a different chronological order.

considerations (Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). We further examine the role of group versus personal motives in Study 3.

STUDY 3

In Study 3, we aimed to examine whether the effect of collective narcissism might be attenuated when we specifically highlight the costs the independent power grid could have for the individual. We predicted that people high in collective narcissism should be ready to support image-boosting policies even if they carry costs for ingroup members, but less so if they carry costs for the self. We relied on an experimental design to highlight that in the event of grid inefficiencies, there might be either costs to the group (in this case, fellow Texans) or to the self.

Because we were interested in self-serving motivations, it was important to account for any overlap collective narcissism has with individual feelings of self-worth (e.g., Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). Similarly to differentiating collective narcissism from more positive forms of identity, researchers tend to differentiate individual narcissism, that is feelings of personal grandiosity and entitlement, from self-esteem, that is feelings of adequacy (Brummelman et al., 2016). Notably, current literature tends to view narcissism and self-esteem as conceptually (and empirically) distinct constructs, with different developmental origins (Brummelman et al., 2016), trajectories (Cichocka et al., 2019), and nomological networks (Hyatt et al., 2018). Manifestations and consequences of narcissism and self-esteem are also different. For instance, low self-esteem but high individual narcissism are related to antisocial tendencies (Paulhus et al., 2004) and anti-democratic attitudes (Marchlewska et al., 2019). Thus, to account for self-related motives, we included both measures of narcissism and self-esteem in Study 3 (see Cichocka et al., 2024).

Method

Participants and design

Based on previous results, in the condition highlighting costs to others, we expected the effect to be large (Funder & Ozer, 2019). To detect an effect of .30 with a two-tailed test and power of .80, we estimated this target sample with Gpower to be 82. As we expected the effect to be attenuated in the cost-to-the-self condition, we multiplied this number by 7, which resulted in the target sample of 574 (Giner-Sorolla, 2018). Taking into account possible exclusions, we rounded this number up to 600. We recruited 601 participants via Prolific. In line with our pre-registration, we excluded 58 participants who did not confirm they live in Texas, identify as Americans and Texans, or did not complete all the items—predictors and dependent variable. The final sample included 543 participants, 271 women, 268 men, 3 non-binary persons, one person who did not indicate their gender, 290 participants identified as White, and 253 as other ethnicities. Participants' age ranged between 18 and 81 ($M = 36.09$, $SD = 13.03$).

First, we measured demographics. Subsequently, we measured regional narcissism, regional identification, individual narcissism, and self-esteem (counterbalanced). Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. We directly manipulated brief information about Texas' government energy policy. In the first experimental condition, participants read about potential risks due to the power shortages for fellow Texans. In the second experimental condition, they read about potential risks for them personally (please see the Supplement for details). Finally, we measured support for the independent power grid in Texas as the dependent variable.

Measures

Regional narcissism ($\alpha=.91$, $M=2.82$, $SD=1.39$), regional identification ($\alpha=.93$, $M=4.26$, $SD=1.35$), energy isolationism ($\alpha=.97$, $M=2.97$, $SD=1.92$), support for the Texan Governor ($M=2.06$, $SD=1.27$), and political orientation ($M=3.28$, $SD=1.68$) were all measured as in the previous studies.

Self-esteem was measured with the item, “I have high self-esteem.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *not very true of me* to 7 = *very true of me* ($M=4.50$, $SD=1.62$). Individual narcissism was measured with four items from the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen Scale (Jonason & Webster, 2010), for example, “I tend to want others to admire me,” “I tend to expect special favors from others.” Participants responded on a scale from 1 = *definitely not* to 7 = *definitely yes* ($\alpha=.86$, $M=3.04$, $SD=1.43$).

Results

Correlations are presented in Table 5. Energy isolationism again strongly correlated with regional narcissism, as well as other variables except for individual narcissism.

We then examined whether the effects of regional narcissism were moderated by the experimental manipulation (Table 6, Figure 2).⁴ As predicted, the interaction effect was significant, showing that the effect of regional narcissism on energy isolationism was stronger in the condition stressing harm to the ingroup, $B=2.01$ [1.13, 2.903], $\beta=.24$, $p<.001$, than in the condition stressing harm to the self, $B=0.91$ [0.02, 1.80], $\beta=.11$, $p=.046$.⁵ The interaction was significant regardless of controlling for the remaining predictors and demographics (Table 6).⁶

Discussion

In Study 3, regional narcissism was again related to energy isolationism. However, we found that this effect was attenuated when we led participants to believe that the current grid could have costs to the self, as compared to a condition where we highlighted costs to fellow residents of Texas. Like in Study 1, the effect was present when we adjusted for political variables, as well as when we considered variables capturing self-worth, namely individual narcissism and self-esteem. In fact, despite being positively correlated with regional narcissism, individual narcissism predicted *lower* support for the power grid.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In three pre-registered studies, we investigated the role narcissistic beliefs about one's state can play in support for state policies. Leveraging the context of the controversies around the power grid in Texas, we found that state-level collective narcissism explained energy isolationism, that is, support for power grid independence, even if it could come at a cost to fellow state

⁴We did not find similar interaction effects between regional identification and the experimental manipulation.

⁵Note that the interaction between regional narcissism and Governor support was marginal in this study, but the shape of the interaction was similar to the one we observed in Study 2.

⁶In line with our planned exploratory analyses, we also examined a moderating effect of being hospitalized in the past (which was 58% of the sample). We found that the effect of regional narcissism was indeed moderated by personal experience of hospitalization, with the effect being weaker for those participants who were hospitalized than those who were not (see the Supplement for details). This moderation effect remained significant when we accounted for the moderating effect of the experimental manipulation.

TABLE 5 Zero-order correlations between variables with 95% confidence intervals (Study 3).

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Regional narcissism	–					
2. Regional identification	.65*** [.60, .70]	–				
3. Individual narcissism	.29*** [.21, .36]	.14*** [.06, .23]	–			
4. Self-esteem	.16*** [.07, .24]	.23*** [.15, .31]	.15*** [.06, .23]	–		
5. Energy isolationism	.51*** [.44, .57]	.48*** [.42, .54]	–.03 [–.11, .06]	.16*** [.08, .24]	–	
6. Political orientation	.48*** [.42, .55]	.46*** [.39, .52]	.04 [–.04, .13]	.16*** [.08, .24]	.62*** [.57, .67]	–
7. Governor support	.57*** [.51, .62]	.52*** [.46, .58]	.15*** [.07, .23]	.20*** [.11, .28]	.63*** [.57, .68]	.69*** [.64, .73]

****p* < .001.

TABLE 6 Regression models with energy isolationism as the dependent variable (Study 3).

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	<i>B</i> [95% CI]	β	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	β	<i>p</i>
1. Regional narcissism	4.19 [3.59, 4.79]	.51	<.001	1.46 [0.72, 2.20]	.18	<.001
2. Experimental condition (−1 = self, 1 = group)	0.14 [−0.002, 0.28]	.07	.054	0.08 [−0.04, 0.19]	.04	.194
3. Regional narcissism × condition	0.66 [0.05, 1.26]	.08	.033	0.55 [0.06, 1.05]	.07	.029
4. Regional identification				0.82 [0.11, 1.53]	.10	.023
5. Individual narcissism				−1.23 [−1.75, −0.71]	−.15	<.001
6. Self-esteem				0.27 [−0.18, 0.72]	.04	.240
7. Political orientation				2.12 [1.54, 2.70]	.31	<.001
8. Governor support				1.71 [1.16, 2.27]	.28	<.001
9. Gender (woman)				0.06 [−0.18, 0.29]	.01	.648
10. Age				−0.36 [−0.98, 0.25]	−.04	.247
11. Ethnicity (White)				−0.02 [−0.26, 0.22]	−.004	.897
	$F(3, 534) = 65.05, p < .001$			$F(11, 526) = 51.11, p < .001$		
	$R^2_{adj} = .26$			$R^2_{adj} = .51$		

Note: The continuous predictors were rescaled from 0 to 1; unstandardized regression coefficients represent predicted mean differences in the dependent variable between the highest and lowest observable values of the predictor. Gender was coded 1 for female participants, 0 for male participants (other categories were excluded from the analyses due to small numbers). Ethnicity was coded 1 for White participants, 0 for non-White participants. Due to coding of conditions, the regression coefficient for regional narcissism represents the average effect across both groups.

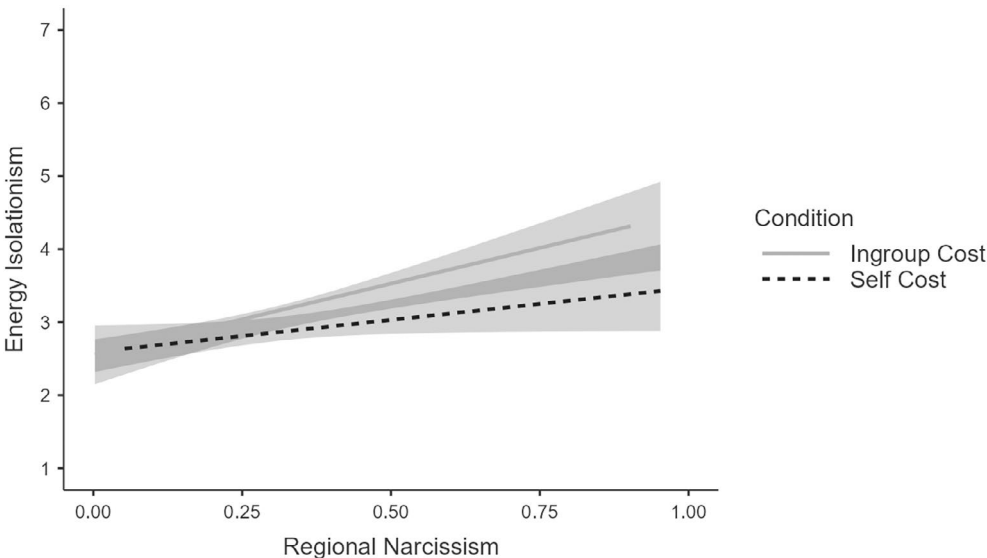


FIGURE 2 Energy isolationism as a function (with 95% confidence intervals) of regional narcissism and the experimental condition controlling for the remaining predictors and demographics (Study 3).

residents. These findings are in line with past research on collective narcissism studied in relation to one's national group, which predicted support for policies that would portray the group as strong but ones that can harm compatriots (e.g., Gronfeldt, Cislak, Sternisko, et al., 2023).

The current findings extend past research by showing similar effects of regional and national collective narcissism.

Furthermore, in Study 3, we found that the effects of collective narcissism on isolationism could be attenuated by highlighting costs to the self (rather than ingroup members). Previous work on collective narcissism has theorized that it serves to manage individual psychological needs. Indeed, in experimental and longitudinal studies, collective narcissism has been higher when people experienced low personal control (Cichocka et al., 2018) or difficulties in managing stress (Molenda, Marchlewska, et al., 2023; see also Eker et al., 2023). It can then be argued that collective narcissism is a compensatory belief, in which a strong and independent group one can attach to serves as a promise for an ego boost (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). Thus, policies that stress group strength and independence can be attractive to those high in collective narcissism, even if they are costly to *other* group members. However, making salient costs to the *self* can render such policies less appealing. This research contributes to the literature by pointing to the role of egocentric motives behind collective narcissism, as well as highlighting how its effects can be mitigated. Future research should replicate these findings in the context of other social identities.

The effects of regional narcissism on energy isolationism were observed even once we accounted for related factors, such as strength of identification with the state, national identification and narcissism, and—in Studies 1 and 3—political attitudes, including political orientation and support for the Republican Governor. Interestingly, in exploratory analyses of Study 2, we found that the effect of regional narcissism on support for the independent power grid was moderated by the extent to which participants supported Governor Abbott: the effect was present for those less supportive of him, but diminished at high levels of support. One explanation for this interaction effect could be that ardent Abbott fans are motivated to endorse his policies and vision for the state, regardless of their own feelings about the state. This might be especially the case during a period of increased political polarization, which tends to intensify during presidential campaigns (e.g., Fasching et al., 2024; Hernández et al., 2021), when Study 2 was conducted.

Limitations and future directions

First, while this line of studies involved experimental work examining the psychological motives underlying support for exceptionalist policies like energy isolationism, the focal effect of regional narcissism was verified using correlational methods. Future empirical efforts should thus concentrate on examining the effects we observed in a way that would test causal links between the variables. Such work might rely on longitudinal methods, which could examine the dynamics of regional narcissism and policy preferences over time (e.g., Federico et al., 2023; Marchlewska, Górska, Green, et al., 2024).

Also, in Study 3, we contrasted potential costs to the self with potential costs to the group. We hypothesize that making harmful self-consequences salient explains the observed attenuation of the effect, which would otherwise be expected due to the tendency of those high in collective narcissism to ignore potentially harmful effects for the group (Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). Future work, however, should directly test this idea by including a neutral control condition with no additional information and comparing it against both the self and group costs conditions. Future research would do well to test the role that contextual factors, as well as other identities, play in shaping support for various policies. For example, in October 2024, the Biden administration announced funding for connecting Texas' isolated power grid with neighboring states (Frazin, 2024). It would be interesting to examine how regional identities, ideological factors, and leaders' preferences shape responses to such proposals. Given that the proposal was promoted by the former Democratic president, those high in state-level collective narcissism might perceive it as an external interference, which could even strengthen their conviction that the power grid should be independent (see Cislak et al., 2021).

This work also complements the literature on the way people feel about the places they have made their home. To date, research has pointed to the benefits of local patriotism and place attachment, especially when it comes to civic participation and engagement (e.g., Lewicka, 2005; Richey, 2023). The current findings suggest that people can develop both positive identities about their states or regions as well as more defensive ones, such as collective narcissism. Here, we investigated its role in predicting policy preferences. Given work linking collective narcissism with low social cohesion and intergroup hostility (e.g., Bertin et al., 2022; Górka et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020), future research should examine how regional narcissism might map onto other outcomes, including willingness to cooperate with the federal government, civic engagement, as well as attitudes toward those from other regions.

Finally, this line of research extends previous findings by showing motivational mechanisms behind identification with a group connected by living in the same region, in this case, an American state: Texas. Furthermore, studies should also examine collective narcissism in the context of other American states (see Kitayama et al., 2010), as well as other states and regions beyond the United States. This would allow us to see whether the effects we observed are applicable beyond the rather unique Lone Star State. Similar dynamics could be expected provided other places offer opportunities for narcissistic identity to develop. We would speculate that this necessitates the group being recognizable and offering a distinct identity to substantiate the claims that it is strong, important, or unique (Cislak & Cichocka, 2023). Possibly, such a group would also cherish its glorious past (Kazarovyt'ska & Imhoff, 2023; Wójcik & Lewicka, 2022). The group characteristics that underlie the narcissistic identity of their members require, however, future empirical verification.

CONCLUSION

In three studies, combining correlational and experimental designs conducted in Texas, we predicted and found that regional narcissism goes hand in hand with support for exceptionalist policies, such as energy isolationism, which may turn against the region's inhabitants in times of crisis. Yet, highlighting personal costs associated with the implementation of such policies attenuates this relationship, thereby providing practical suggestions for policy framing. Emphasizing individual, rather than group, costs may help mobilize support for policies typically opposed by those high in collective narcissism.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/encdz/?view_only=3c899b471dbf4912bb3652666d37bc74.

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