

Authoritarians and “revolutionaries in reverse”: Why collective narcissism threatens democracy

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Abstract

Collective narcissism is a belief that the ingroup deserves but is denied special treatment and recognition. It is a projection of the narcissistic need to be recognized as better than others on the social level of the self. It is an aspect of ingroup identification, one of the ways group members favour their ingroup. National narcissism is associated with collective narcissism of advantaged national subgroups (e.g., Whites, men). National collective narcissism and collective narcissism of advantaged groups similarly predict discrimination of disadvantaged national subgroups (e.g., racial minorities, women) and legitimization of group-based inequality. Members of disadvantaged groups who endorse national narcissism internalize beliefs legitimizing inequality. Ultraconservative populists propagate national narcissism to undermine the political system that does not sufficiently serve the interests of advantaged groups. National narcissism predicts patriotism and nationalism. Once the three forms of national favouritism are differentiated, it becomes clear that patriotism does not come at the expense of nationalism, discrimination, societal polarization, or erosion of democracy. Instead, it may be a remedy against them.

Keywords

antiestablishment orientation, collective narcissism, conspiracy theories, nationalism, need for chaos, populism, right- and left-wing authoritarianism

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Group narcissism is the very root of the most vicious forms of destructive aggression against others, which is responsible for war and for much of the suffering and injustice in the world. ... We need only to look at the history of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, and at the aggressive nationalism of the present, to understand the significance of group narcissism for society.

Fromm (1964, p. 51)

In the last decade, ultraconservative populist politicians consolidated political power evoking nostalgia for the great national past (Mols & Jetten, 2017) and the alleged need for national rebirth

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(“Make America great again” in the US, “Take back control” in the UK). To restore national superiority, they postulated to return to traditional (hierarchical and often oppressive) organization of societies. Populists advanced the claim that the pursuit of liberal and progressive ideals of rationality, social justice, and equality has undermined national grandeur and its adequate external reception (Mudde, 2019; Müller, 2017). They contrasted the traditional, autochthonic (Dunn, 2015), pure-blooded (Betz, 2018) “people” with the progressive, internationally oriented, “tall-skim double-mocha latte” or “chardonnay sipping,” “linguini-spined elites” that abandoned the traditional ways to pursue dubious liberal values (Eiermann et al., 2017). National narcissism—a belief that the superiority of one’s own country should be, but is not, recognized by others—has been a robust predictor of support for such narratives (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021). It supplied “resentful affectivity” that fuelled “the forceful desire to return to the past” (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018, p. 1272). The involvement of national collective narcissism in many processes that have characterized the current wave of ultra-conservative populism warrants further efforts to better understand collective narcissism.

This article begins discussing initial research on collective narcissism. It then illustrates how national narcissism has been involved in the rise of right-wing populism and processes that have characterized societies governed by populism: conspiracy theories and science denial, public expressions of outgroup hate, marginalization of historically disadvantaged groups and their collective response, and support for undemocratic and disruptive leaders. Next, the article discusses the “why” of collective narcissism. It links national narcissism to authoritarianism (right and left) and the need for chaos grounded in superiority needs and an acute (although not necessarily realistic) sense of marginalization. The article concludes by discussing the relevance of the concept of national narcissism to nationalism research and suggests how the recent findings may inspire efforts to reduce the destructive consequences of collective narcissism.

Collective Narcissism: Between Narcissism and Ingroup Identification

The concept of collective narcissism originates from the works of Frankfurt School scholars and early status theorists. The Frankfurt School scholars understood “collective” or “group narcissism” as a (compensatory) tendency to attribute the ingroup with grandiose characteristics people wanted to possess but felt they lacked (Adorno, 1997; Fromm, 1964, 1973). Fromm (1964, 1973) expected group narcissism to be an inspiration for aggressive nationalism, prejudice, and suspension of rationality in the effort to sustain the ingroup’s inflated image. Status theorists proposed that the need for recognition of the ingroup’s superior status was independent of the ingroup’s relative power, status, or achievements. They also believed any excuse could be used to demand recognition of the ingroup’s superiority from others (Cohen, 1972/2002; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Gusfield, 1963).

Contemporary research on collective narcissism relies on the conceptualization and measurement of collective narcissism proposed by Golec de Zavala (2007, 2011, 2012, 2018, 2023; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). In this work, collective narcissism is conceptualized as an aspect of identification with the ingroup (any ingroup), i.e., the degree to which membership in this ingroup is psychologically consequential (Leach et al., 2008). Specifically, collective narcissism is conceptualized as a distinct form of positive ingroup evaluation (in itself, an aspect of individual investment in the ingroup; Leach et al., 2008) that expresses narcissistic superiority need on the social level of the self. Collective narcissism expresses a desire to be recognized as better than others due to membership in a superior and extraordinary ingroup. The demand for external appreciation that the ingroup is extraordinary and deserves special treatment is a crucial aspect of collective narcissism. Collective narcissists want their ingroup to be recognized as better than others more than they care about the ingroup actually excelling in anything (Golec de

Zavala, 2011, 2023). Table 1 contrasts collective narcissism with other relevant concepts, reflecting the complexity and multidimensionality of ingroup identification (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Leach et al., 2008).

Preoccupation with external reception of the ingroup's image is visible in collective narcissistic hypersensitivity to intergroup threat, especially threat to the ingroup's image, and a tendency to aggressively overreact to anything that is perceived as a criticism or an insult to the ingroup (Bagci et al., 2023; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013, 2016; Guerra et al., 2023, 2024; Hase et al., 2021). The association of collective narcissism with perceived intergroup threat is complex and self-reinforcing. Evidence indicates that collective narcissism generates an exaggerated sense of intergroup threat. Collective narcissism is associated with an antagonistic mindset, a black-and-white, zero-sum perception of intergroup situations according to which the ingroup is always unfairly treated, deprived in comparison to others, threatened and targeted by hostilities of others, and always needs to fight enemies (for a recent review, see Golec de Zavala, 2023). The beliefs about persistent external hostility and threat to the ingroup justify the ingroup's aggression as righteous and defensive (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala, 2011, 2023; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). However, intergroup threat also increases collective narcissism, which leads to increases in intergroup hostility (Guerra et al., 2023, 2024). Finally, collective narcissism magnifies the effect of intergroup threat on intergroup hostility (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013, 2016; Hase et al., 2021).

Collective narcissism research extended the threatened egotism theory (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998) to the intergroup context; this theory proposes that narcissists who face challenges to their inflated self-image are particularly prone to use violence in response to self-image threats. Research has shown that collective narcissism specifically—not individual narcissism, self-esteem, or nonnarcissistic aspects of ingroup identification—amplifies retaliatory intergroup aggression in response to ingroup's image threats

(e.g., Golec de Zavala et al., 2013). Collective narcissism research has also clarified inconsistent findings of research inspired by the rejection identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999). This model posits that positive ingroup identification in the context of ingroup marginalization has a palliative role, protecting group members from the distress of discrimination. Predictions of this model do not apply at high levels of collective narcissism. Instead, collective narcissism is associated with maladaptive psychological and physiological reactions to ingroup exclusion (Golec de Zavala, 2022; Hase et al., 2021). While threats to social identity, such as ingroup rejection and marginalization, increase collective narcissism and nonnarcissistic positive ingroup identification, only the latter is positively related to ingroup members' well-being (Bagci et al., 2023). Collective narcissism, in contrast, is associated with derogation of threatening outgroups (Guerra et al., 2023) and undermined ingroup well-being (Golec de Zavala, 2019, 2022; Marchlewska et al., 2024).

Research on compensatory aspects of collective narcissism has clarified why the self-esteem hypothesis (Abrams & Hogg, 1988) derived from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has not been consistently supported by evidence. This hypothesis proposes that people with low self-esteem should be prone to derogate outgroups to elevate their self-esteem by positive ingroup differentiation from a relevant outgroup, which is achieved in this among other ways (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Research has clarified that low self-esteem increases collective narcissism, which predicts outgroup derogation. In contrast, high self-esteem increases nonnarcissistic ingroup satisfaction, which predicts decreased outgroup derogation. The indirect link between low self-esteem and outgroup derogation via collective narcissism can be observed when the positive overlap between collective narcissism and ingroup satisfaction is taken out of the equation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). Studies may produce conflicting findings regarding the link between self-esteem and outgroup derogation depending on whether they account for the role

Table 1. Collective narcissism and related concepts.

	Definition	Focus
Concepts not specific but applicable to a national ingroup		
Collective narcissism	“Collective narcissism is a belief that one’s own group (the ingroup) is exceptional and entitled to special recognition and privileged treatment but it is not sufficiently recognized by others.” (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, p. 1074)	Entitlement to recognition as superior
Insecure ingroup identity	“someone feels strong affective ties to the in-group, perceives his or her fate to be intertwined with the in-group, experiences a high degree of depersonalization, and perceives a strongly competitive intergroup context.” (Jackson & Smith, 1999, p. 123)	Positive ingroup affect, perceiving oneself as a group member tied to others in common fate in intergroup competition
Secure ingroup identity	“someone with equally strong affective ties to the in-group does not perceive high levels of common fate, depersonalization, or intergroup competition or conflict.” (Jackson & Smith, 1999, p. 123)	Positive ingroup affect
Private collective self esteem	“one’s personal judgements of how good one’s social groups are” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Positive ingroup evaluation
Public collective self esteem	“one’s judgement of how other people evaluate one’s social groups” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Perception of how other’s evaluate the ingroup
Membership collective self esteem	“individuals’ judgements of how good or worthy they are as members of their social groups” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Positive evaluation of oneself as group member
Identity collective self esteem	“the importance of one’s social group memberships to one’s self concept” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 305)	Subjective importance of the ingroup to the self
Collective self esteem contingent-competition	“the extent to which the positive regard a person draws from his or her group membership is dependent on his or her in-group’s standing in comparison to out-groups. . . it taps into individuals’ tendency to base their self-worth on their in-group’s superiority over out-groups following intergroup comparisons.” (Amiot & Hornsey, 2010, p. 64)	Self-esteem derived from the ingroup being better than outgroups
Ingroup glorification	“Viewing the national in-group as superior to other groups and having a feeling of respect for the central symbols of the group” (Roccas et al., 2006, p. 700)	Superiority and internal cohesion
Ingroup attachment	“People who are highly identified in this sense define themselves in terms of their group membership and extend their self-concept to include the group. They feel emotionally attached to the group and want to contribute to it” (Roccas et al., 2006, p. 700)	Emotional attachment and contribution

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

	Definition	Focus
Ingroup satisfaction	“one’s positive feelings about the group and one’s membership in it” (Leach et al., 2008, p. 146)	Pride and liking
Ingroup centrality	“chronic salience as well as the subjective importance that individuals give their group membership” (Leach et al., 2008, p. 146)	Importance of the ingroup to the self; identification strength, importance
Identity fusion	“a visceral feeling of ‘oneness’ with the group” (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015, p. 52)	Subjective overlap between the group and the self
Ingroup entitlement	“stable and pervasive belief that one’s ingroup deserves more and qualifies more than other groups” (Endevelt et al., 2021, p. 352)	Entitlement and deservingness
Concepts specific to a national ingroup		
Nationalism	“The view that America is superior and should be dominant” (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 261)	Asserting international dominance
National chauvinism	“national superiority and dominance” (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003, p. 175)	Asserting international dominance
Nativist nationalism	“alludes to the notion that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’)” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 34)	Exclusion based on shared ethnicity
Pseudo-patriotism	“blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and rejection of other nations as outgroups” (Adorno et al., 1950, p. 107)	Uncritical conformity and rejection of outgroups
Patriotism	“Feelings of attachment to America” (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 261)	Attachment expressed as love, devotion, and pride
Blind patriotism	“A rigid and inflexible attachment to country, characterized by unquestioning positive evaluation, staunch allegiance, and intolerance of criticism” (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153)	Unquestioning positive evaluation
Constructive patriotism	“An attachment to country characterized by ‘critical loyalty,’ questioning and criticism of current group practices that are driven by a desire for positive change” (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153)	Attachment, care, and loyalty
Concepts specific to another ingroup		
White nationalism	“The belief . . . that White people are inherently superior to people from other racial and ethnic groups” (Reyna et al., 2022, p. 80) “a sense of racial and national greatness and entitlement that idealizes . . . a former America dominated by Whites . . . condemning modern America’s . . . decline and devaluation of Whiteness” (Reyna et al., 2022, p. 81)	Entitlement and deservingness of Whites as an ethnic group

of positive ingroup evaluation and the extent to which its measure taps into collective narcissism versus ingroup satisfaction.

Since collective narcissists endorse two potentially contradictory beliefs—that the ingroup is exceptional and that it is not recognized by others—they are likely to experience chronic discomfort and be motivated to reduce it. In other words, collective narcissism is a case of motivated social cognition. This may explain collective narcissistic suspension of rationality. Collective narcissism is pervasively associated with susceptibility to unsubstantiated beliefs because they provide specific and nonspecific cognitive closure (Golec de Zavala, 2020, 2023). For example, collective narcissism is robustly associated with a tendency to endorse conspiracy theories regardless of their content (for a recent meta-analytical review, see Golec de Zavala et al., 2022). Conspiracy theories that attribute outgroups hostile intentions towards the ingroup provide a specific explanation for the apparent contradiction between the ingroup's greatness and others' unwillingness to recognize it. Collective narcissists attribute outgroups jealousy and hostility and see them as a threat regardless of whether any real indication of their hostility exists (e.g., Polish collective narcissism is related to the stereotypical perception of Jews as conspiring against Poland; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; Kofta et al., 2020). Such attributions allow collective narcissists to posit that aggression and hostility of their ingroup is defensive and, thus, justified and indeed righteous. However, collective narcissism is also associated with a more general susceptibility to endorse simplistic explanations of events that provide quick cognitive closure. This may explain why national narcissism is so prominently involved in support for populist rhetoric.

Collective Narcissism of Populist Politics

Research conducted during the American presidential election in 2016 demonstrated that voters'

national narcissism predicted an increase in conspiratorial thinking during the presidential campaign (Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018) and voting for Donald Trump (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018). Subsequent studies confirmed the link between national narcissism and support for populist leaders in other countries (Lantos & Forgas, 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2018). Based on the findings of collective narcissism research outlined above, we predicted that Donald Trump's presidency would be characterized by erosion of democracy, societal polarization, public expressions of prejudice and intergroup hate, marginalization of disadvantaged groups justified by an exclusive and narrow understanding of what it means to be a "true American," and increased importance of delusional beliefs, malicious gossip, and conspiratorial ideation in public discourse (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018). The findings discussed below speak to accuracy of those predictions.

Collective Narcissism and Triumph of Irrationality: Conspiracy Beliefs and Science Denial

As we predicted, one pronounced feature of the current wave of populism has been the eruption of irrationality: endorsement of fake news, conspiracy theories, and distrust in science, which played an infamous role in the populist reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. President Trump and other populist leaders (e.g., the Tory government in the UK, Orban in Hungary, the ultraconservative government in Poland) demonstrated a remarkably similar incompetent and damaging approach. First, they denied and minimized the crisis, undermined scientific experts, and used misinformation, war-time rhetoric, and conspiracies to communicate about the pandemic. This was then followed by the aforementioned leaders forcing the understanding of the public health crisis into the framework of opposition against secret enemies, vaguely presented as "elites," scientists, experts, and educated specialists as well as liberal politicians and people who trust them. These leaders made misguided decisions that contributed to excess mortality in populist-governed countries

(Bayerlein et al., 2021; Lasco, 2020; Lasco & Curato, 2019).

National narcissism was associated with endorsing and spreading of contradictory conspiracy theories about COVID-19. National narcissists simultaneously believed that the pandemic was a hoax and a virus secretly produced and spread by China (Sternisko et al., 2023). Endorsement of conspiracy theories was a robust predictor of negative responses to pandemic regulations: opposition to vaccination, selfish hoarding, and lower willingness to follow regulations to contain the disease (Bierwaczonek et al., 2022). Indeed, national narcissism predicted lack of solidarity with conationals during the pandemic (Federico et al., 2021) and refusal to vaccinate, often because of a tendency to endorse conspiracy beliefs about the vaccines (Górska et al., 2022; Marchlewska, Hamer, et al., 2022). Research has also shown that national narcissism is a robust predictor of science scepticism and distrust in education and experts (Golec de Zavala, 2023). This association also explains why collective narcissism predicted refusal to vaccinate and engage in preventive behaviours during the pandemic.

National narcissism also predicted support for misguided policies that harmed individual citizens while attempting to project a positive ingroup image to others. For example, American collective narcissism was related to support for reduced COVID-19 testing (an established measure to control the pandemic) to decrease the reported number of new infections; the intention being to hide how quickly the disease spread in the United States. In Britain, national narcissists supported the Tory's (the United Kingdom's conservative party) decision to ignore the invitation to participate in the "ventilator scheme" ("the EU solidarity in action"). This decision was made to leverage the single market buying power and to secure faster and cheaper orders of ventilators and protective equipment for European citizens early in the COVID-19 pandemic. Refusing to participate in the scheme ultimately hurt those with more severe COVID-19 presentations and the NHS staff who were dependent on the availability of ventilators and protective equipment. British

collective narcissists agreed that participation in the EU scheme would damage the UK's reputation (Gronfeldt et al., 2023). The pursuit of external recognition of the ingroup at the price of harming others—members of the ingroup or the outgroup—is a prominent feature of collective narcissism. It has been salient in another pronounced aspect of ultraconservative populism: increased societal polarization, prejudice, and public expressions of outgroup hate.

Collective Narcissism and Societal Polarization

As we predicted, during Trump's presidency, the number of hate crimes (crimes motivated by prejudice) increased, and domestic (instead of external) terrorism became a main threat to national security in the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020). There were more hate crimes committed in the counties that held Trump's rallies in comparison to the counties that did not (Edwards & Rushin, 2018; Feinberg et al., 2022). Such data illustrate that the polarization of societies governed by populist leaders is driven by increasing marginalization of social groups targeted by prejudice. Increasing group-based inequality and marginalization are met by opposition from the disadvantaged groups and their allies.

In all researched countries, national narcissism has been robustly associated with prejudice towards disadvantaged groups (such as women, minorities, and displaced people) and decisive (sometimes violent) opposition to movements towards their emancipation. Among members of disadvantaged groups, national narcissism has been associated with a tendency to internalize prejudice. In contrast, collective narcissism with reference to disadvantaged groups (e.g., female, Latinx, Black, or gay) has been associated with a tendency to fight for the ingroup's emancipation (for a review, see Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). Those findings are presented in more detail below.

Xenophobia and prejudice. Under populist governance, national narcissism has predicted rejection

of newcomers: immigrants and refugees. British collective narcissism stood behind the Brexit vote because it was linked to xenophobia and rejection of immigrants (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). American collective narcissism has been linked to prejudice (Golec de Zavala, Ziegler, et al., 2024) and aggression towards Mexican immigrants (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020). In France, it has been linked to prejudice and discrimination of immigrants (Bertin et al., 2021), while in Poland, it predicted rejection of refugees from the Middle East and Africa (Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019), prejudice towards Ukrainian immigrants (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020), and siding with Russia after the Russian invasion in Ukraine in February 2022 (Golec de Zavala, 2023); it also predicted rejection of Ukrainian refugees in Poland after the Russian invasion (Nowak et al., 2023).

National narcissism has predicted racism and prejudice toward ethnic minorities. [Please note edit] Polish collective narcissism has been linked to anti-Semitism and endorsement of conspiratorial stereotyping of Jews (Golec de Zavala, 2020, 2023; Kofta et al., 2020). National narcissism in Britain and the United States has been linked to anti-Black racism (Bagci et al., 2023), support for White supremacist movements, a negative attitude towards the Black Lives Matter movement for racial equality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022), and denial of racism among Whites (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; West et al., 2022). National narcissism has predicted prejudice towards religious minorities. German and Dutch collective narcissism has been linked to prejudice towards Muslims, who constitute the largest religious minority in those countries (Verkuyten et al., 2022). Muslim collective narcissism in Indonesia, where Islam is a dominant religion, was associated with prejudice and hatred towards religious outgroups, specifically, non-Muslim Chinese and Christian Indonesians (Putra et al., 2022).

National narcissism has predicted prejudice towards sexual minorities. Polish collective narcissism has been linked to explicit (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021; Mole et al., 2021) and implicit (Lantos et al., 2023) homophobia. This association was

driven by endorsement of traditional beliefs about gender roles and the belief that people whose sexuality is not conventional compromise the positive image of the Polish nation (Mole et al., 2021). National narcissism is also associated with a tendency to essentialize the differences between heterosexuals and sexual minorities, but also a tendency to see nonnormative sexuality as a controversial individual choice (Lantos et al., 2023).

Exclusion of women. Infringement of women's rights has been another pronounced feature of ultraconservative populism. "Gender ideology" was declared as dangerous by the Catholic Church elevated to the level of national authority in populist Poland. In 2020, the Polish government introduced a highly controversial, near-total abortion ban, the most restrictive antiabortion law in Europe, and used the state power to crash street protests against it. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán banned gender studies from universities. Hostile sexism was a strong predictor of voting for the conservatives in the 2019 election in Britain (De Geus et al., 2022). In 2022, the American Supreme Court overruled the *Roe v. Wade* decision that had guaranteed constitutional protection of women's rights to reproductive health since 1974. Its overruling allowed individual states to introduce laws that limit those rights.

National narcissism is associated with sexism, as well as prejudice towards and discrimination against women. Polish collective narcissism predicted support for the abortion ban in Poland (Szczepańska et al., 2022), and a negative attitude, among men and women, towards women's civil protests against it (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023, 2024). Polish collective narcissism predicted hostile and benevolent sexism among men and women (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021). Hostile sexism comprises derogatory and antagonistic attitudes towards women rooted in intergroup-level competition of men with women. Benevolent sexism comprises paternalistic prejudice based on the belief that women are passive and incompetent and should be protected. Although superficially positive, benevolent sexism is associated with hostile sexism, legitimization of

gender inequality, and reduction of desire for emancipation among women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). National narcissism is associated with endorsement of benevolent sexism more strongly among women than among men (Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021). Thus, women who endorse national narcissism internalize sexism.

This is because, as discussed in detail below, national narcissism is associated with the pursuit of the interests and goals of advantaged groups within the nation, in this case, men (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). The current wave of ultraconservative populism that has national narcissism at its heart legitimizes discrimination of women preaching the need to return to traditional values, traditional hierarchical organization of societies, and traditional gender roles that discriminate women. Moreover, national narcissism promotes the projection of male characteristics on the whole nation. In consequence, national narcissists perceive and treat women as less representative and, thus, less worthy conationals.

Collective narcissism and inequality: Relevance to social justice and terrorism research. Research in populist-governed countries indicates that national narcissism has facilitated acceptance of inequality among advantaged and disadvantaged groups, and has been associated with stronger endorsement of beliefs legitimizing inequality in disadvantaged groups. Women national narcissists who internalized benevolent sexism more than men are not the only disadvantaged group that endorsed prejudice that targeted them. National narcissism also facilitated endorsement of symbolic racism, especially among Black Americans in comparison to American Whites (Golec de Zavala, 2023).

Such findings align with system justification theory (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994), which proposes that members of disadvantaged groups may be motivated to endorse the social system that disadvantages them even more strongly than members of advantaged groups. Collective narcissism research specifies that those disadvantaged groups' members are likely to endorse national narcissism. Their tardiness to challenge

the system that disadvantages them does not have to be motivated by the need to justify the system (for discussion regarding this motive, see also Brandt, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 2023). Instead, it may be motivated by the pursuit of the narcissistic need at the superordinate level of self-categorization. In other words, it may be motivated by the group members' need to be recognized as better than others because they are members of a national ingroup, rather than a disadvantaged subordinate group within this nation. Since their self-image is invested in the assumed superiority of the nation, they find it hard to dissociate from the nation even when their subordinate ingroup within it is marginalized and disadvantaged. There is nothing palliative about this process. National narcissism and collective narcissism in advantaged and disadvantaged groups are associated with undermined well-being and negative emotionality (Bagci et al., 2023; Golec de Zavala, 2019).

Results linking national narcissism to internalized prejudice suggest that promoting the "broader we" identification may be damaging to the pursuit of equality and social justice, especially when it takes a form of propagating national narcissism. This aligns with literature suggesting that reducing prejudice by efforts fostering recategorization and identification with a common ingroup (e.g., a nation) impairs the chances for social change towards greater equality (Dovidio et al., 2009, 2016; Saguy et al., 2009; Ufkes et al., 2016). Among others, this is because national narcissism is associated with the pursuit of the interests of historically advantaged groups as suggested by research demonstrating that predictions of national narcissism and narcissism in advantaged groups (e.g., Whites, males, religious majorities) are remarkably similar when it comes to prejudice towards disadvantaged groups. White collective narcissism predicts racism (Bagci et al., 2023; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), denial of racism (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; West et al., 2022), and rejection of social movements towards racial equality (Marinthe et al., 2022; for a review, see Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). Male collective narcissism predicts sexism

(Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021), exclusion of women (Golec de Zavala, 2022), and disapproval of social movements for gender equality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; Górska et al., 2020). Indeed, ultraconservative populism uses rhetoric infused with national narcissism to mobilize whole societies to support the interests of advantaged groups (see also Golec de Zavala et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; Mole et al., 2021).

Such a conclusion is also supported by research indicating that American and White collective narcissism overlap more strongly than American and Black or Latino collective narcissism (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023), and that Polish and gender collective narcissism overlap more strongly among men than among women (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021). Such results align with previous findings that national identification is stronger among men than women (Van Berkel et al., 2017), and among Whites than ethnic minorities (Sidanius et al., 1997; Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001). Such findings suggest that members of advantaged groups have a greater sense of ownership of the nation than members of disadvantaged groups (Molina et al., 2015). This conclusion also aligns with research on ethnocentric projection indicating that advantaged groups claim national prototypicality more than disadvantaged groups do (Brewer et al., 2013; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos et al., 2010); and research on ingroup projection indicating that members of advantaged groups, more than members of disadvantaged groups, project the characteristics, values, and interests of their advantaged ingroups onto the whole nation (Wenzel et al., 2016). However, collective narcissism research qualifies the previous results suggesting that the greater overlap and the ingroup projection happen especially at high levels of collective narcissism. People who do not endorse national narcissism and members of advantaged groups who do not endorse those groups' collective narcissism may be more likely to support members of disadvantaged groups in their pursuit of equality and wider representation in the national community.

Prevalence of societal polarization in populist-governed societies has also been elucidated

by research clarifying that while collective narcissists in advantaged groups endorse beliefs that justify and legitimize inequality and disapprove of social movements towards emancipation of disadvantaged groups (also supporting state violence against them), collective narcissists in disadvantaged groups are more likely to pursue equality and engage in collective action for emancipation of their disadvantaged ingroups (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021, 2023; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023; Marinthe et al., 2022). For example, among Blacks in the UK, racial collective narcissism is associated with challenging anti-Black racism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Among Black and Latinx participants in the US, racial collective narcissism is linked to support for the Black Lives Matter movement, egalitarian values, and intentions to engage in collective action for racial equality (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2023). Among the LGBTQIA+ community in Turkey, collective narcissism predicts collective action challenging discrimination against sexual minorities (Bagci et al., 2022). Gender collective narcissism among women in Poland is associated with anger and distress at women's exclusion by men (Golec de Zavala, 2022), and engagement in collective action for gender equality (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021, 2023).

As collective narcissism motivates an antagonistic mindset promoting and justifying intergroup aggression, collective narcissists in advantaged and disadvantaged groups are likely to clash. While collective narcissism in advantaged groups motivates the reactionary backlash to disadvantaged groups' pursuit of recognition, in disadvantaged groups, it is likely to motivate radicalization towards political violence and terrorism in response to reactionary backlash. Reactionary backlash elicits pessimism regarding the possibility of systemic change among members of disadvantaged groups (Tabri & Conway, 2011; Tausch & Becker, 2013), prevents them from seeing the possibility of reconciliation or allyship with advantaged groups (Hässler et al., 2022; Shnabel & Ullrich, 2013; Urbiola et al.,

2022), and pushes them towards more extreme and disruptive collective action (Louis et al., 2020; Simon, 2020). Indeed, studies have linked collective narcissism in disadvantaged groups to ideological extremism (Jaško et al., 2020). They also demonstrated that collective narcissism predicts support for terrorist violence (including suicide terrorism, a violent attack in which the attacker willingly dies as a result of the method of attack they use) in tight (valuing strict adherence to group norms and intolerance of group norm deviants; Yustisia et al., 2020) and radicalized (Jaško et al., 2020) networks linking members of disadvantaged groups.

Future research should consider how members of disadvantaged groups manage the conflict between attitudes inspired by national narcissism and collective narcissism with reference to the disadvantaged ingroup. As people who endorse collective narcissism with reference to one social group are more likely to endorse collective narcissism with reference to another social group (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021, 2023; Mole et al., 2021), members of disadvantaged groups high on collective narcissism are likely to experience such a conflict. While endorsing national narcissism, they attempt to pursue superiority needs by external recognition of the ingroup in which, by definition of their disadvantaged status, they are second-class members. They may feel compelled to overcompensate for their lower status and discriminate against members of their own disadvantaged ingroup, such as women representing the Polish Life and Family Foundation, a proponent of the “Stop abortion” bill, the most restrictive abortion law penalizing any case of abortion. However, they may also reject national narcissism to pursue goals of their disadvantaged ingroup. This may explain why collective narcissists in disadvantaged groups pursue nonnarcissistic, egalitarian ideals and are lower on national narcissism than collective narcissists in advantaged groups (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2023). The social creativity framework (e.g., van Bezouw et al., 2021) may prove useful to inspire future research investigating when those and other strategies to managing the expression

of narcissistic needs at superordinate and subordinate levels of social categorization are used.

Collective Narcissism, Authoritarianism, and Revolutionaries in Reverse

The current wave of populism is often referred to as “authoritarian populism” (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Thus, it is worthwhile to consider the association between national narcissism and authoritarianism. The latter concept has a long tradition in political science. Originally proposed as “authoritarian personality” by Adorno et al. (1950), it is most widely studied as “right-wing authoritarianism,” a cluster of three attitudes: loyalty to authorities defined by coercive power, conventionalism, and aggression towards those who threaten the social order and do not adhere to norms (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988). Authoritarianism is interpreted as a desire for predictable social order (Feldman, 2003) and a component of political conservatism, an ideological orientation grounded in the perception of the world as a dangerous and unpredictable place (Duckitt, 2001; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). While right-wing authoritarianism expresses authoritarian submission, social dominance orientation—preference for the hierarchical organization of societies (Pratto et al., 1994)—has been conceptualized as a complementing dominant aspect of right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1998). Social dominance orientation is also interpreted as a second component of the conservative political outlook associated with zero-sum competitiveness (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010).

National narcissism is positively associated with right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. It makes similar but independent predictions regarding intergroup hostility, prejudice, support for undemocratic leaders, and political conservatism (for a review, see Golec de Zavala, 2023). However, national narcissism is not exclusively a feature of conservative and right-wing politics. National narcissism is concurrently associated with right- and left-wing authoritarianism (Golec de Zavala, 2023; Golec de Zavala

& Federico, 2024). Altemeyer (1996) proposed that left-wing authoritarians are “revolutionaries who (1) submit to movement leaders who must be obeyed, (2) have enemies who must be ruined, and (3) have rules and ‘party discipline’ that must be followed” (Altemeyer, 1996, pp. 219–220). Empirical work on left-wing authoritarianism defines it as a syndrome of three attitudes: antihierarchical aggression, anticonventionalism, and top-down censorship (Costello et al., 2022). Antihierarchical aggression reflects the willingness to use violence to overthrow the established social order and destroy existing group-based hierarchies. Anticonventionalism pertains to rigid rejection of traditional norms and conventions. Top-down censorship taps acceptance of controlling public expression of ideas that contradict liberal and progressive worldviews. It reflects rigid adherence to liberal and progressive values and the undemocratic and illiberal desire to coercively impose those values on others to achieve ideologically homogenous ingroup coherence.

While right-wing authoritarianism is associated with support for pro-state violence (Webber et al., 2020), left-wing authoritarianism, especially antihierarchical aggression, is associated with acceptance of antistate violence (Costello et al., 2022). Since national narcissism is associated with both right- and left-wing authoritarianism, it stands to reason that the particular ideology that justifies the use of violence is not a matter of importance for collective narcissists. National narcissism predicts support for violence whether it is used to uphold the status quo or to flip it, or to overthrow the existing hierarchies and replace them with new ones. Collective narcissists admire destructive power. They are likely to switch party or ideological allegiances to follow the leaders that provide the most convincing justification for violence, regardless of whether it is used to maintain or to overthrow the established system. Two lines of research support this conclusion: (a) studies showing that national narcissism is related to support for undemocratic and ruthless leaders, and (b) studies demonstrating that national narcissism is associated with antiestablishment orientation and need for chaos.

National narcissism is related to support for undemocratic leaders likely to disrupt rather than maintain the existing social order (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021; Marchlewska, Cichocka, et al., 2022). For example, in 2020, American collective narcissists agreed that Donald Trump should stay in power despite the fact that he lost the democratic election. They supported Trump using illegal and undemocratic means of securing his position as president (Federico, Farhart, et al., 2022; Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021). American collective narcissists also supported the Capitol Hill raid on January 6, 2021, the riot that broke after Donald Trump framed his loss of the presidential election to Joe Biden as a fraud. Collective narcissists believed the rioters were “true Americans” motivated by a “love of freedom and justice” (Keenan & Golec de Zavala, 2021). Along the same lines, national narcissism in 40 countries was associated with support for economic ties with Vladimir Putin’s Russia before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, but after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, national narcissism in Poland (Golec de Zavala, 2023) and France (Brown & Marinthe, 2022) was associated with siding with Russia. This suggests that national narcissists have a predilection towards ruthless rulers willing to disrupt democratic systems. In a non-Western political context, national narcissism in Lebanon was associated with support for collective violence towards established political leaders representing ideological opposition (Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2023).

Ruthless leaders cause damage. Research suggests that this also appeals to national narcissists. National narcissism is associated with variables that tap into a desire to destroy the existing social order by violent means (Golec de Zavala, 2023; Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2024). It is associated with an antiestablishment orientation that captures a negative attitude toward the established political order irrespective of partisanship or ideology. Antiestablishment orientation comprises Manichean contrasting of the “good” people with the “evil” elites, and conspiratorial assumptions that powerful groups work towards

malevolent and unlawful goals (Uscinski et al., 2021). National narcissism is also associated with the need for chaos, a motivation to *disrupt* the existing social order and established hierarchies to advance up the social hierarchy (Golec de Zavala, 2023; Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2024). This concept taps a mindset that emerges among people with high dominance needs and an acute sense of marginalization. It is “a desire for a new beginning through the destruction of order and established structures . . . that emerges from the interplay between dominance-oriented traits and marginalized states” (Petersen et al., 2023, p. 1489). People high in need for chaos “are not idealists seeking to tear down the established order so that they can build a better society for everyone.” Instead, they want to “unleash chaos and mobilize individuals against the established order that fails to accord them the respect that they feel they personally deserve” (Petersen et al., 2023, p. 1489). Collective narcissism research suggests that this motivation may also be expressed through membership in a group in whose name the established status quo is challenged (for this interpretation of collective narcissism, see also Golec de Zavala, 2023; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021).

In sum, national narcissism combines authoritarian servitude and admiration for power with disruptive antagonism. National narcissism is simultaneously associated with political conservatism and antiestablishment orientation, and the need for chaos orthogonal to the liberal-conservative dimension. National narcissists are equally ready to follow and overthrow established authoritarian leaders. They are the volatile supporters of ruthless leaders, subservient to those leaders who are currently in power, but eager to switch loyalties once other stronger and more brutal leader emerges. What matters is not the social order the leaders envision, but how much their visions justify destruction and violence. Although subjectively rebellious and antiestablishment, collective narcissists are revolutionaries in reverse. They want to advance, not destroy, hierarchies. They want to advance their ingroup’s status by pushing for more

group-based inequality or “see the world burn” if it does not recognize superiority of their ingroup. This narcissistic dynamic may explain why so often the turmoil of revolutions is followed by the emergence of dictatorships even more oppressive than those overthrown by the revolutions (Colgan & Weeks, 2015).

What About Love for the Country? Relevance to Research on Nationalism

Perhaps the biggest input of collective narcissism research is the finding that patriotism has a negative, not positive as it has been assumed (e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), association with nationalism. In political sciences and philosophy, the idea of liberal nationalism expresses the premise that cultivating shared national identity enables national cohesion despite internal diversity (Miller & Ali, 2014). However, political psychology acknowledges that the emphasis on national cohesion is often linked to the marginalization of minorities within the nation and a desire for international dominance. It poses the question of who righteously belongs to the nation. Nativist nationalism, resurrected by the populist narrations, advances the idea that membership to the nation is narrowly determined by ancestry and blood ties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Nativist nationalism relies on what Anthony Smith (1991, p. 12) called “ethnic national identity,” which is more exclusive in comparison to “civic national identity,” which relies on national identification and responsibility towards the national community.

Authors tend to agree that positive national identification is multidimensional. The dimensions that have received the most attention from researchers are patriotism and nationalism (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Huddy & Khatib, 2007). Nationalism (sometimes also labelled “national chauvinism”) is defined as “an orientation toward national dominance” that combines national superiority and outgroup derogation. It is differentiated from patriotism, “a feeling of national attachment” that pertains to national

favouritism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 271; see also de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003). Patriotism is most commonly defined as love for the nation, and the belief that the nation and the membership in it are valuable and worth being proud of (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Viroli, 1995).

Authors often assume that nationalism and national chauvinism combine national attachment with the advancement of national purity and superiority (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Sidanius, et al., 1997). The dominant intuition has it that patriotism generates nationalism, or at least patriotism and nationalism are positively associated, national ingroup love bears a danger of outgroup hate (Brewer, 1999). This is despite empirical findings showing that it is nationalism, not patriotism, that is associated with hostility toward other nations, hostility toward minorities within one's nation, and group-based antiegalitarianism (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Carter & Perez, 2015; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Federico et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; Huddy & del Ponte, 2019; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Sidanius et al., 1997). Such findings make nationalism incompatible with patriotism.

Collective narcissism research addresses this conundrum clarifying that national narcissism, patriotism, and nationalism are distinct constructs, consistent with the argument that the multidimensionality of national attitudes may go beyond the distinction between patriotism and nationalism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). National narcissism is positively associated with patriotism and nationalism. With patriotism, it shares the belief in the inherent high worth of the nation. It differs from patriotism because it demands that the nation must be recognized as better by others. With nationalism, national narcissism shares the belief in national superiority. Nationalism and national narcissism differ in reference to how much this belief is based on international dominance. National narcissism is a desire to assert appropriate recognition that the nation is better than others for whatever

reason, while nationalism is a desire to dominate, rule, and control other nations (Federico, Golec de Zavala, & Wen, 2022; Golec de Zavala, 2023).

Importantly, when the positive overlap between patriotism, national narcissism, and nationalism is controlled for, the negative association between patriotism and nationalism can be observed (Federico, Golec de Zavala, & Wen, 2022). Thus, collective narcissism research clarifies that patriotism has a negative—not positive, as it has been assumed—association with nationalism. Differentiating national narcissism uncovers the possibility of national ingroup love that constrains nationalism and does not have to come at the price of outgroup hostility and intolerance.

This proposition aligns with a vast body of research showing that genuine, nonnarcissistic national ingroup satisfaction is negatively associated with variables reflecting intergroup hostility and predilection towards destruction once its overlap with national narcissism is removed. By the same token, the relationship between national narcissism and intergroup hostility and preference for societal disruption becomes stronger when national ingroup satisfaction is removed from national narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2011, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019, 2020; Golec de Zavala, Ziegler, et al., 2024). This pattern has been demonstrated with respect to hostility toward national outgroups, minorities, and marginalized groups (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020; for sexism, cf. Golec de Zavala & Bierwiazzonek, 2021; for racism, Golec de Zavala, Ziegler, et al., 2024). Together with previous research (Brewer, 1999; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), the finding of the negative relationship between patriotism and nationalism suggests that a positive orientation towards the national group needn't spill into national arrogance or aspirations to dominance over time. Rather, nonnarcissistic patriotism may reduce one's attraction to nationalism, international dominance, and internal hostility (Federico, Golec de Zavala, & Wen, 2022; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

Unlike national narcissists, patriots do not want societal disruption and prefer a gradual societal transformation rather than the violent overthrow of social hierarchies. Unlike national narcissists, patriots do not attribute others hostile intentions towards their nation, do not see intergroup relations as zero-sum competitions, and prefer to collaborate than to compete with others; further, patriots trust reason, science, and their conationals. They find belonging to a community intrinsically satisfying; they feel loyal towards their conationals and do not support political decisions that would harm them (for a review, see Golec de Zavala, 2023).

Such findings also suggest that, by virtue of its overlap with patriotism, national narcissism is linked to the benefits of positive prosociality. Capitalizing on this link may reduce the negative consequences of collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). This is because experiencing positive prosocial emotions facilitates down-regulation of negative emotions, boosts emotional resilience, and initiates an upward spiral of positive emotionality with durable consequences for physiological and neural activity (Garland & Fredrickson, 2019; Kok et al., 2013). Indeed, research has demonstrated that interventions training the ability to consciously experience positive prosocial emotions (e.g., compassion, gratitude, Golec de Zavala, Ziegler et al., 2024) reduce the otherwise robust association between national narcissism and prejudice (Golec de Zavala, Keenan et al., 2024). The association between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism was reduced by half after participants took part in a 10-minute, audio-guided mindful-gratitude practice (Golec de Zavala, Keenan et al., 2024). The link between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, and prejudice towards immigrants was reduced among participants in a 6-week mindful-gratitude training. The training increased participants' dispositional mindfulness, positive affect, gratitude, and reduced their level of daily stress. While the levels of national narcissism

stayed the same during the training, it worked to reduce the association of national narcissism with all measured forms of prejudice (Golec de Zavala, Keenan, et al., 2024). Such findings indicate that emphasizing its overlap with positive prosociality may help reduce collective narcissistic negative emotionality and the destructive consequences of collective narcissism. The initial results warrant further research using interventions to address the negative emotionality underlying collective narcissism.

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