

The Impact of Collective Narcissism on National Security: A Psychological Perspective on Nationalism

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Abstract

Collective narcissism can be defined as a group's belief in possessing certain unrecognized privileges. In contrast to patriotism, which reflects genuine affection for one's country, collective narcissism tends to be defensive and compensatory. This study examines the impact of collective narcissism, which serves as the foundation of nationalism, on national security. A literature review methodology was employed to explore the psychology of nationalism and the effects of collective narcissism on national security. The findings revealed that collective narcissism has a detrimental impact on national security, including the erosion of democracy, social polarization, the proliferation of prejudice, and the increased dissemination of conspiracy theories within society. However, the research also suggests that these negative consequences can be mitigated by implementing interventions that enhance positive prosocial emotions and social awareness.

Keywords: *Collective Narcissism, Nationalism, National Security.*

INTRODUCTION

The global political landscape in the second decade of the 21st century has been significantly influenced by the rise of extreme populism. As Brubaker (2017) observes, populist politicians and parties have emerged as key players in Western political systems. Populism, as a centralized ideology, posits that society is fundamentally divided into two antagonistic and homogenous groups: the "pure people" and the "corrupt elites." It asserts that politics should embody the collective will of the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018a). Characterized by its anti-elitism, populism contrasts the "democratic will of the people" with the "self-serving interests of the elite." This movement, which prioritizes the "will of the people," often challenges core principles of pluralistic democracy, such as the rule of law, equality, and the protection of the rights of all social groups (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018b; Muller, 2016). Since populism is not rooted in a specific ideological foundation, it can be integrated into and intensified by various ideological frameworks (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018b). According to Eiermann, Mounk, and Gultchin (2017), the majority of populist parties in the United States and Europe tend to advocate for right-wing policies.

The diverse range of local issues gives rise to a multitude of populist responses, thereby precluding the existence of a singular populist movement. Nevertheless, the majority of populist movements can be attributed to at least two of the following factors: (1) A perception of economic insecurity and anxiety about status; (2) Xenophobia towards those perceived as 'Other', particularly migrants and refugees; (3) Disillusionment with the ruling political elite, accompanied by the conviction that the government is arrogant, distant and indifferent to the needs of the 'people'; (4) Opposition to globalisation and internationalism. Furthermore, there is a resurgence of support for nationalism (5). Additionally, there is a proliferation of cultural and religious hatred (anti-modernist, anti-Enlightenment and anti-secular views) (5). Finally, (6) there is a growing impatience with liberal restrictions on the government and checks and balances that are seen as institutional obstacles to getting things done (Sadurski, 2022). Two categories of

structural conditions have been identified as supporting populism: economic anxiety and cultural reaction (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018a). The cultural reaction dichotomy posits that radical populist right-wing groups exhibit xenophobic tendencies not as a consequence of populism per se, but rather as a result of nativism. This latter term denotes the view that the state should be populated exclusively by members of the original group (i.e. the state), and that non-indigenous individuals (foreigners) threaten the national homogeneity of the state.

Populist leaders take advantage of social integration failures by tapping into the "reservoirs of discontent" created by populist conditions (Gidron & Hall, 2020). Populist leaders create and spread a concept of social identity that includes individuals whose self-esteem and interests are impacted by actual and perceived environmental changes. The "entrepreneur" of social identity is the role that populist leaders assume (Reicher & Haslam, 2017). Such leaders serve to reinforce the perception of a threat to their self-esteem, externalize the sources of this threat, organize their social identity around hatred, and offer redress through rejection and hostility towards those who are blamed, both within and outside the group, for the decline that is perceived to be occurring. Populist leaders evoke sentiments that are latent in traditional narratives of shared adversity, resistance, and regeneration by drawing upon the symbolic resources that are available within society. To be more precise, the past is deliberately employed to instill divisions, engender fear and loss, and designate various "others" who do not conform to the category of "true" citizens as scapegoats. In their revised social identity narrative, they establish the criteria for identifying those who authentically embody the "nation" or "people" that populist leaders espouse. Populist rhetoric underscores the awareness among those in a privileged position within a country that they are no longer regarded as exemplary by external parties.

Authoritarian populist movements and leaders often draw upon nationalism, a phenomenon that can be better understood through advancements in research and the theory of collective narcissism (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). For instance, former U.S. President Donald Trump openly identified as a nationalist—a term rarely embraced by Western politicians—despite his less frequent identification as a conservative. Trump's nationalism, however, appears to center on securing the recognition the United States perceives it deserves rather than asserting dominance over other nations. In political psychology, nationalism is commonly defined as a belief in national superiority and an inclination toward national dominance (Kosterman et al., 1989). The framework of collective narcissism offers a compelling perspective for interpreting this form of nationalism (de Zavala et al., 2009). Research by Federico, Golec de Zavala, and Bu (2023) reveals that collective narcissism is strongly associated with nationalism and serves as a more consistent predictor of nationalism than absolute satisfaction with one's national group. This suggests that nationalism is more closely tied to national narcissism than to genuine patriotic affection. Furthermore, when national narcissism is accounted for, the relationship between love for the country and nationalism may become inverse.

Nationalism can arguably be rooted in national collective narcissism, a belief that one's group is entitled to privileges unrecognized by others. In Poland and Hungary, collective narcissism has been shown to predict support for populist governments and policies (Cislak et al., 2018; Forgas & Lantos, 2019). Similarly, in the United States, American collective narcissism emerged as the second strongest predictor, after partisanship, of Donald Trump's success in the 2016 presidential election, surpassing other factors such as economic dissatisfaction, authoritarianism, racial animosity, and sexism (Federico & De Zavala, 2018). Unlike general positive sentiments towards one's group, collective narcissism entails a belief in the group's exceptionalism and an expectation of preferential treatment. It is associated with intergroup hostility rather than collective self-esteem or other positive forms of group

identification. Moreover, collective narcissism mediates the relationship between intergroup hostility and tolerance (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019).

Individuals may hold collective narcissistic beliefs about a range of groups, including national, ideological, ethnic, religious, or professional groups, sports teams, university affiliations, or even fictitious groups. The core dimensions of collective narcissism include entitlement, hostility, and resentment, often grounded in perceived superiority based on economic or military power, cultural achievements, divine favor, or historical suffering. Group members evaluate characteristics that distinguish their group from others, convinced of their group's uniqueness and frustrated by what they perceive as inadequate external recognition. Notably, while individuals high in collective narcissism exhibit elevated self-esteem (Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020), they do not unconditionally associate their group symbols with positive traits (de Zavala et al., 2009) and may also demonstrate lower implicit self-esteem (Golec de Zavala et al., 2020).

Recent studies have revealed various implications of collective narcissism across different contexts. Marchlewska et al. (2018) identified a positive correlation between collective narcissism and nationalism. However, collective narcissism encompasses a more comprehensive scope, extending beyond national groups to include various social groups, primarily focusing on protecting the in-group's image, which differs from nationalism's characteristic need for dominance. Following Müller's (Muller, 2016) perspective, it can be argued that the fundamental driver of populism lies in the desire to be recognized as the sole legitimate and moral representative of a nation. Nevertheless, these observed relationships are largely influenced by the interconnection between nationalism and collective narcissism. Other research findings on collective narcissism reveal an unexpected phenomenon, a negative relationship between patriotism and nationalism, which contradicts previous assumptions (Golec de Zavala, 2024). Patriotism emphasizes emotional attachment to the nation without demonstrating dominance or hostility toward other groups. At the same time, nationalism tends to be associated with feelings of superiority and discriminatory attitudes toward out-groups. Collective narcissism, which is linked to both nationalism and patriotism, represents a need for external recognition of national superiority. Research findings indicate that collective narcissism plays a role in increasing tendencies toward nationalism and intergroup hostility.

This study is predicated on whether collective narcissism, as the foundation of nationalism, has a beneficial or detrimental impact on national security. Consequently, the literature review prepared using a qualitative review method, aims to analyze the impact of collective narcissism as the foundation of nationalism on national security. It is anticipated that this literature review will provide insight into the examination of the effect of collective narcissism on national security, taking into account the increasingly intense global security conditions.

RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative review method employed in this study aligns with the principles outlined by experts in qualitative research synthesis. Patton (2002) describes qualitative synthesis as a systematic process of collecting, evaluating, and interpreting existing research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon. This approach facilitates the integration of multiple studies, enabling researchers to identify patterns, relationships, and gaps within the available literature. In the data collection process, this study utilized six major databases: Science Direct, Sage, Research Gate, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley.

Upon completing the search and selecting relevant references, the researchers successfully compiled 30 articles that met the predefined search criteria.

To analyze and structure the findings, this study employed narrative synthesis, as recommended by Popay et al. (2006). This approach allows for the organization of data into meaningful themes, ensuring that similar findings are systematically grouped by the research objectives. Additionally, the open coding method, widely recognized in qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1999), was applied to systematically categorize data based on theoretical perspectives, research findings, study limitations, and implications in theoretical, practical, and policy contexts

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Psychology of Nationalism

National identity can be defined as a subjective attachment and identification with the nation and fellow nations. Because of the complexities of national identity ideas and attitudes, not all of them are supported by people with opposing worldviews and political allegiances (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). In general, a good attitude towards a country, regardless of its shape, is founded on and implies national affiliation. This can be characterized as identifying oneself as a member of a national group and believing that participation in this group is crucial to one's self-concept (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). A robust national identity is often linked to a sense of patriotism, which encompasses a deep affection for one's country and a commitment to abide by its established norms, including the conduct and beliefs expected of devoted members of the nation. In this context, patriotism can be defined as a specific form of loyalty. However, the precise manifestations and consequences of patriotism are contingent upon the national context and the nature of the shared national norms. Different types of patriotism can be separated from one another. These include "constructive patriotism," which combines a favorable attitude towards the national group with the concept that the group may be changed and developed as needed, and "blind patriotism," which focuses on protecting the national group's idealized image (Parker, 2010).

However, patriotism is not the same as nationalism, a chauvinistic ideology that includes an "orientation towards national domination" (Federico et al., 2005; Sidanius et al., 1997). However, it is important to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. The latter is a chauvinistic ideology that includes an "orientation towards national domination" (Federico et al., 2005; Sidanius et al., 1997). In political psychology, nationalism is characterized as a sense of "national superiority and domination" that comprises commitment to the nation (like patriotism) but also contains hostility towards foreigners (De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003). Both are distinguished by a good attitude towards the nation. According to Cichocka & Cislak (2020), nationalism is driven by a competitive conviction in the superiority of national groups and a desire for global dominance. Nationalists are more likely to demonstrate overt dominance and resistance to weakness (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019).

As a result, nationalists legitimize intergroup animosity to achieve national supremacy. Furthermore, the look of immigrants towards a country is also influenced by a sense of dislike or superiority towards other nations. Nationalism is a more divisive phenomenon than patriotism. It is more likely to cause national division and lead to a range of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors, including classical racism, anti-Semitism, negative views of immigrants, xenophobia, and contempt for foreigners (Ariely, 2012; Blank & Schmidt, 2003). Consequently, nationalism has been characterized as a concept that encompasses both love for a particular group and hatred for another (Brewer, 1999).

Nationalism and Collective Narcissism

National chauvinism and nationalism are two concepts that are often conflated. They are both concerned with the advancement of purity and national superiority. It may be surmised that there is a positive correlation between patriotism and nationalism; that is to say, the two concepts are mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, an affinity for a particular national group carries the potential for reciprocal animosity from those with opposing views. This is despite the findings of empirical research indicating that nationalism, rather than patriotism, is linked to group-based antiegalitarianism and animosity towards other countries or minority groups within a country (Federico et al., 2023). This renders nationalism incongruous with patriotism. Collective nationalism addresses this issue by distinguishing between national narcissism and patriotism and nationalism. This is consistent with the view that a multifaceted national disposition can transcend the distinction between patriotism and nationalism (Kosterman et al., 1989). Nationalism and patriotism are positively correlated with collective narcissism. Patriotism is characterized by an affirmation of the intrinsic values associated with the nation whereas nationalism entails a demand for greater recognition of the country by others. Both national narcissism and nationalism are predicated on the assumption of national superiority.

In contrast to nationalism, which inherently involves a desire for national dominance (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Kosterman et al., 1989; Mummendey et al., 2001; Pehrson et al., 2009), national collective narcissism refers to the aspiration for one's nation to be recognized as superior for any reason (de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). Nationalism is characterized by a proactive, assertive, and often offensive stance, whereas national collective narcissism is driven by compensatory and defensive motives (de Zavala et al., 2013; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). In essence, nationalism focuses on what one nation should be able to impose on another, while collective narcissism centers on demanding respect and recognition from others (Federico et al., 2023). While nationalism can sometimes stem from collective narcissistic motives, this is not a typical pattern. Although compensatory motives may underlie feelings of national superiority, they are not the sole drivers of nationalism. Some individuals are attracted to nationalism due to a proactive enthusiasm for national dominance, while others are motivated by concerns about ensuring their nation's perceived status and greatness are adequately recognized.

In contrast to nationalists, national collective narcissists prioritize the demand for the recognition of their group's superiority rather than its dominance (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016, 2019). Consequently, both collective narcissism and nationalism can serve as predictors of intergroup hostility, though they differ in their motivations and approaches. Nationalistic hostility is often openly aggressive and assertive, whereas collective narcissistic hostility adopts a defensively subjective stance, driven by the need to safeguard the group's image and secure the acknowledgment it perceives as deserved. However, this defensive posture is inherently biased and does not fully capture the essence of collective narcissistic hostility. Acts of hostility are frequently fueled by a combination of nationalistic supremacy and a collective narcissistic belief that the group is entitled to recognition and rewards.

The Impact of Collective Narcissism as The Foundation of Nationalism on National Security

In terms of conceptualization, nationalism, and national collective narcissism exhibit a greater overlap than is observed between nationalism and national group satisfaction. The two concepts, nationalism, and national collective narcissism are characterized by antagonistic elements between groups. Nationalism, on the other hand, is defined by an intrinsic desire to dominate one's group, whereas national collective narcissism is subjectively compensating and defensive in nature. Collective narcissism has been linked to vindictive aggression motivated by a lack of recognition (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016, 2019) and perceived hostility from others (de

Zavala et al., 2009; Guerra et al., 2022). Nationalism may be motivated by compensating incentives, but it can also indicate a desire for national dominance (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). While some people are drawn to nationalism for this reason, others are drawn to it because they are egotistical about others' unwillingness to recognize the inflated greatness of their own countries. In other words, nationalism is concerned with the capabilities of a country in other countries, whereas collective narcissism is concerned with the obligations of other countries to a country in terms of respect. While there is a potential for a causal relationship between the two, this is not a universal phenomenon. Whether national group satisfaction can act as a trigger for nationalism remains a topic of ongoing debate. Both concepts manifest an outwardly positive evaluation of national groups, which suggests a fundamental interconnection between them. However, nationalism is distinguished by its inherent tendency towards hostility and a perception of superiority, which are not inherent in group satisfaction, particularly when the latter is devoid of collective narcissism (De Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

Collective narcissism has been shown to foster feelings of national superiority and a desire to assert dominance on the global stage (De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; Hase et al., 2021; Jasko et al., 2020; Sidanius et al., 1997). This phenomenon is closely linked to support for political leaders with strong nationalist agendas and authoritarian populist parties (Federico & De Zavala, 2018; Forgas et al., 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016; Keenan & de Zavala, 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2010). While not entirely independent, collective narcissism plays a critical role in explaining support for populist autocratic regimes. It is also associated with conservatism and skepticism toward supranational entities such as the European Union. These patterns align with findings on the connection between collective narcissism and populism in countries like the United Kingdom (de Zavala et al., 2017), Poland (Marchlewska et al., 2018), and the United States (Federico & De Zavala, 2018). The influence of collective narcissism on populist support may be mediated by its relationship with conservatism, which serves as a conduit between these variables. For instance, in the case of support for Fidesz, conservatism bridges collective narcissistic attitudes and populist tendencies. Together, collective narcissism, conservatism, and populist support have been shown to shape a variety of outcomes (Bornschier, 2017; Marchlewska et al., 2018; Milojev et al., 2015). It is reasonable to expect that an increase in collective narcissism, such as a result of extended exposure to government propaganda that exploits collective narcissism's hypersensitivity, will lead to the emergence of more radical political views. These can emerge as either conservatism or liberalism, depending on the inner group and the political situation. These increasingly radical political viewpoints can, in turn, indirectly explain the observed rise in populism, whether on the right or left of the political spectrum. The implementation of state leadership by individuals with a pronounced nationalistic and populist orientation may precipitate a multitude of challenges, including the deterioration of democratic principles, the intensification of societal polarisation, the public manifestation of prejudice and animosity between groups, the marginalization of disadvantaged communities based on an exclusive and narrow interpretation, and the growing prevalence of delusional beliefs, malevolent rumors, and conspiracy theories in public discourse (Federico & De Zavala, 2018).

When controlling for the positive overlap among patriotism, national narcissism, and nationalism, a negative correlation between patriotism and nationalism emerges (Federico et al., 2023). This finding aligns with research on collective narcissism, which suggests that patriotism is negatively associated with nationalism, challenging the assumption of a positive relationship between the two. By distinguishing national narcissism, it becomes possible to recognize a form of national attachment that fosters a love for one's country without promoting hostility or intolerance toward external groups.

This perspective aligns with findings from numerous studies, which demonstrate that authentic and non-narcissistic satisfaction with one's national group is negatively associated with indicators of intergroup hostility and destructive tendencies, once national narcissism is controlled for. Conversely, the relationship between national narcissism and intergroup hostility, as well as a predisposition toward social discord, becomes stronger when national group satisfaction is separated from national narcissism (De Zavala, 2011; de Zavala et al., 2017; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). This trend has been observed in expressions of hostility toward outgroups, minorities, and marginalized communities. The identification of this negative correlation between patriotism and nationalism suggests that a positive attitude toward one's national group does not inherently lead to national arrogance or dominance-seeking tendencies over time. Non-narcissistic patriotism has been found to mitigate tendencies toward nationalism, international dominance, and internal conflict (Federico et al., 2023b; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020). Unlike national narcissism, patriotism does not aim to disrupt social order but instead supports gradual social progress rather than violent upheaval of the social hierarchy. Patriotism, unlike national narcissism, does not assume hostility from others, does not frame intergroup relations as zero-sum competition, and prioritizes cooperation over rivalry. Moreover, patriotism is characterized by trust in reason, science, and fellow citizens. Individuals exhibiting this form of patriotism derive satisfaction from their community membership and demonstrate a commitment to the collective well-being of their compatriots, making them less likely to endorse policies that could harm the broader community (Golec de Zavala, 2023).

Research has demonstrated that national narcissism, due to its connection with patriotism, is linked to positive prosocial outcomes. Leveraging these connections could potentially reduce the negative effects of collective narcissism (De Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; Keenan & de Zavala, 2021). Positive prosocial emotions can regulate negative emotions, enhance emotional resilience, and initiate an upward emotional spiral with lasting effects on physiological and neural processes (Garland & Fredrickson, 2019; Kok et al., 2013). The findings suggest that interventions aimed at increasing the conscious experience of positive prosocial emotions, such as compassion and gratitude (Golec de Zavala, Förster, et al., 2024) could help mitigate the strong link between national narcissism and prejudice (Golec de Zavala, Keenan, et al., 2024). For instance, the association between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism was significantly reduced after participants engaged in a 10-minute audio-guided appreciation exercise (Golec de Zavala, Keenan, et al., 2024). Additionally, a six-week thankfulness training program was found to diminish the relationship between Polish collective narcissism and anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, and prejudice against immigrants. The program enhanced participants' dispositional awareness, positive affect, and appreciation, while also lowering their everyday stress. Although national narcissism levels remained unchanged during the training, the program decreased the link between national narcissism and various forms of bias (Golec de Zavala, Keenan, et al., 2024). These findings suggest that emphasizing the connection between narcissism and prosocial behaviors may help reduce the negative emotional and social consequences of collective narcissism

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of collective narcissism, which serves as the foundation for the development of nationalistic ideologies, has been identified as a significant contributor to the deterioration of national security. Collective narcissism fosters sentiments of national superiority, a proclivity for domination, and animosity toward external entities, which can

precipitate heightened international tensions and conflicts. Furthermore, it is associated with the endorsement of authoritarian populist leaders and policies that can undermine democratic processes and intensify societal polarization. In contrast to healthy patriotism, collective narcissism is characterized by a defensive and compensatory tendency, which can manifest as aggression and intolerance. However, research indicates that these negative impacts can be mitigated through interventions that foster positive prosocial emotions and awareness. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between constructive patriotism and collective narcissism to maintain national security and harmonious international relations.

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