

Double trouble: How sectarian and national narcissism relate differently to collective violence beliefs in Lebanon

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Abstract

Collective narcissism is a belief in ingroup greatness which is contingent on external validation. A lack of research on collective narcissism amongst non-Western contexts and minority groups remains a challenge for the field. However, here we test two types of collective narcissism (sectarian and national) as differential predictors of two dimensions of collective violence beliefs (against outgroup members and leaders) in a large, diverse, community sample from Lebanon ($N = 778$). We found that sectarian narcissism (narcissism related to smaller political and religious ingroup identity) predicted support for collective violence against members of different sects, while national narcissism predicted opposition to such collective violence. Neither form of collective narcissism had any significant relationship with collective violence against outgroup leaders. We controlled for both sectarian and national identification and found no significant effects in predicting either one of the two dimensions of collective violence beliefs. In this non-Western context, in which a coherent national identity is undermined by sectarianism, national narcissism seems to be a progressive motivator for unity and social change, while sectarian narcissism is rather associated with extreme attitudes, such as support for collective violence.

KEYWORDS

collective narcissism, collective violence, intergroup conflict

1 | DOUBLE TROUBLE: SECTARIAN AND NATIONAL NARCISSISM AS DIFFERENTIAL PREDICTORS OF COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE BELIEFS IN LEBANON

In 2019, the October Revolution took place in Beirut, Lebanon. One of the aims of the revolution, in which hundreds of thousands participated, was to end sectarianism which has divided the country

between different Muslim and Christian political identities. The revolution was, however, unsuccessful in achieving major change. Nevertheless, the first postrevolution election resulted in 13 new Members of Parliament who eschewed representing their birth sect and instead emphasised a shared Lebanese national identity. Although most Lebanese would without doubt claim to love their country, their idealised vision for Lebanon would usually be dictated by their sectarian ingroup's narrative (Henley, 2015; Salibi, 1990).

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Nevertheless, while there are ongoing efforts to establish a shared Lebanese national identity (Abouanou, 2022), such sentiments remain a minority position. This recent trend away from sectarian politics in Lebanon, while understudied, has key analogues to a number of initiatives to heighten the salience of superordinate identities that unite (potentially) conflicting subordinate identities. For example, European identity is seen as a way to bridge divisions between different European countries (Mayer & Palmowski, 2004). Just as national identities remain salient in Europe, sectarian identities continue to represent most of the Lebanese people (The Century Foundation, 2019).

Interestingly, both movements campaigning for sectarian groups and groups campaigning for a united national identity, believe *their* 'Lebanon' was once great, but has been underappreciated and undermined in more recent history and lacking recognition from other groups in the country or the outside world (Abdeni-Holman, 2022). These beliefs can be captured by collective narcissism, a belief that the ingroup is exceptional but underappreciated (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Marchlewska et al., 2020). People high in collective narcissism think their ingroup is unique and entitled to privileged treatment, but that its greatness is not sufficiently recognised by others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). They also see other groups as undermining their interests (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). Collective narcissism is a strong predictor of outgroup hostility, especially toward outgroups perceived as threatening to the ingroup's image (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). Collective narcissism can generate hostility that manifests in the justification of extreme violence against outgroups (Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022) and support for political violence (Jasko et al., 2020). In this paper, we examine collective narcissism at the sectarian and national levels as predictors of two dimensions of collective violence beliefs in Lebanon (one targeted at sectarian outgroup members, and another at sectarian outgroup leaders), a country afflicted by deep sectarian divides, intergroup conflict and the absence of a religious or ethnic majority group (Henley, 2015; Salibi, 1990).

As implied earlier, Lebanon is an interesting context for the study of identity dynamics given the presence of multiple competing ingroup identities known as sects (Henley, 2015; Salibi, 1990). These sects, while religious in origin, play a significant role in the country's political scene, forming the foundation of political identities and values (Henley, 2015; Salibi, 1990). Although there are disagreements amongst these sects regarding Lebanon's national identity (Salibi, 1971, 1990), citizens may still have formed a sense of national identity with the country at large—at least their version of what Lebanon is. This makes the concept of collective narcissism a useful framework for studying national or sectarian identities in a diverse country like Lebanon. It also offers an ideal opportunity to study the effects of multiple types of collective narcissism in parallel. While people can develop collective narcissism with any social group (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), the competing effects of different types of collective narcissism have never been assessed. Therefore, it is not

entirely clear whether the collective narcissism of superordinate groups (i.e., nations) behaves the same way as subordinate groups (i.e., sects). In contexts where multiple ingroup identities coexist and compete, the meaning of ingroup sentiments may differ, particularly if the given national identity is viewed as progressive and seeks to unite more established and traditional subordinate identities into a superordinate one. The presence of a superordinate national identity along with strong sectarian identities make Lebanon a useful test case. Thus, we can contrast collective narcissism at the national level (i.e., national narcissism) and the sectarian level (i.e., sectarian narcissism) and test if they relate differently with support for collective violence, which has unfortunately characterised much of the country's short history.

1.1 | Collective narcissism: The quest for ingroup recognition

Collective narcissism assumes an exaggerated ingroup positivity and therefore has a moderately positive association with other constructs emphasising ingroup greatness (e.g., social dominance orientation [SDO], Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). However, in contrast to SDO, collective narcissism is not necessarily a quest for dominance over other groups, but rather a quest for recognition from other groups (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Gronfeldt et al., 2021). This becomes especially relevant in contexts where collective narcissism is not expressed through military strength or other forms of material power. For instance, God's love, exceptional loss, suffering, and martyrdom are the bases for collective narcissism in Hungary (Forgas & Lantos, 2020) and Poland (Skarżyńska et al., 2012). National narcissism also differs from nationalism (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Federico et al., 2023), which has been described as a belief in national superiority (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) and 'chauvinistic arrogance and desire for dominance in international relations' (Li & Brewer, 2004, p. 728). Nationalism captures the perception that its superiority entitles the nation to use force and hostility to achieve and maintain dominance in international affairs (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Mummendey et al., 2001; Pehrson et al., 2009). In contrast, people high in collective narcissism would justify hostility, such as collective violence, but primarily as a way to satisfy a hubristic need for recognition of their uniqueness and achievements (Golec de Zavala, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019).

Collective narcissism has mostly been studied in the context of Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Developed (WEIRD; Golec de Zavala et al., 2022) samples (though see Jasko et al., 2020; Marinho et al., 2022; Yustisia et al., 2020 for few notable exceptions). However, populations not accustomed to dominance nationally or internationally also display it. For example, collective narcissism is higher in countries that are less globalised, especially in terms of their political and economic systems (Cichocka, Sengupta, et al., 2022).

It is important to note that not all forms of ingroup identity are defensive. Contrary to collective narcissism, social identification can be secure and confident in that it does not depend on external validation (Cichocka, 2016). Generally, when controlling for collective narcissism, social identification predicts constructive outcomes in intergroup relations, such as tolerance (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013; Marchlewska et al., 2020) and outgroup solidarity (Górska et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2022).

1.2 | Collective narcissism and collective violence beliefs

Collective violence refers to acts perpetrated by individuals or a group of individuals on behalf of their collective, irrespective of whether the larger group acknowledges or endorses these actions. It involves targeting one or more individuals from a different group solely based on their group membership (Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2022; Winiewski & Bulska, 2020). Collective violence beliefs then, are related to how individuals justify or oppose such acts. Hostility, characterised by a strong negative attitude toward others, can be described as encompassing both the cognitive and affective components of aggression. In extreme cases of aggression, hostility can escalate into violence (Buss & Perry, 1992). While the justification for violence, which might be related to how one thinks or feels, is different than acts of violence (Parrott & Giancola, 2007), people's attitudes are generally a good predictor of their intentions and actions (Ajzen, 1991; Bosnjak et al., 2020). Admittedly, only a small percentage of those who believe violence is justified would themselves act on those beliefs, however, with a phenomenon that can leave ever-lasting effects, a deeper understanding of what motivates such beliefs becomes a compelling task (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022).

Research shows that collective narcissism can lead to downstream intergroup hostility as a means to achieve the recognition the ingroup is perceived to deserve (Golec de Zavala, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). This can take the form of explicit support for extreme collective violence against outgroups (Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022; Jasko et al., 2020) as well as justification for the ingroup using antidemocratic means to achieve recognition (Bocian et al., 2021; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2022). A characteristic of collective narcissism is an exaggerated perception that the ingroup is constantly under threat (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016), and therefore deserving of being defended by any means necessary (Golec de Zavala, 2011; Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020).

In contexts that are already conflictual (such as Lebanon), actual intergroup behaviours can further exaggerate threat perceptions. The response to any form of deliberate provocation might take a more extreme form of hostility, such as collective violence. Jasko et al. (2020) found that the collective quest for significance motivated extreme ideological behaviours (such as political violence), especially

in conflictual contexts. Collective violence is supported more strongly by those high in collective narcissism in radical contexts (vs. nonradical). The collective significance quest is not necessarily narcissistic but captures a similar desire for ingroup greatness. Additionally, people more readily engage in violence where it is descriptively normative, and feel belonging to (Littman & Paluck, 2015) and greater identification (Jasko et al., 2020) with groups that use it. It follows that collective narcissists may be especially prone to violence in conflictual contexts.

Somewhat different dynamics seem to be at play for collective narcissism amongst people whose political identities are minoritized. Establishing respect and recognition for the ingroup is a core element of collective narcissism, so in minoritized identity groups, this can be expressed in support of more progressive values, such as racial justice (Marinthe et al., 2022). Recent research found that collective narcissism in minority groups, such as Black people in America, is associated with support for pro-ingroup, but progressive social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, a movement defending Black people's rights (Marinthe et al., 2022). The expression of collective narcissism in relation to different groups in multisectarian societies like Lebanon can likely take on either a reactionary or progressive form, depending on the dynamics between the groups. Specifically, in the context of the study on collective violence, those high in sectarian narcissism may continue to hold reactionary beliefs about intergroup relations, including support for the prevalent sectarian violence in Lebanon. This reinforces its normative descriptive status. However, individuals who identify narcissistically with the nation *and* are in the minority political group in multigroup contexts with newly established national identities (such as in Lebanon), may reject sectarian violence as a national embarrassment standing in the way of the country's recognition on the international stage. Instead, they may adopt a more progressive and forward-looking perspective on Lebanese society's need to move beyond sectarian violence.

In the Lebanese context, political divisions operate along sectarian lines, with each sect representing a different religious subgroup. At the sectarian level, collective narcissism is likely to fuel ongoing collective violence, both targeted at outgroup members and outgroup leaders. This expectation is based on the vast literature showing the relationship between collective narcissism and outgroup hostility of various kinds, including violence (Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala, 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2019; Jasko et al., 2020). However, movements also exist that call for a decreased emphasis on sectarian identity in favour of a superordinate Lebanese identity (L'Orient Today, 2022). In line with the expectations of the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner et al., 1993), movements in Lebanon seeking to establish a stronger superordinate national identity expect this to reduce sectarian divisions, even if tension remains between maintaining a subordinate as opposed to a superordinate identity (Wenzel et al., 2008).

Given the novelty of our approach, making directional predictions for national narcissism in Lebanon is not as clear cut as for

sectarian narcissism. On the one hand, those high in national narcissism may blame one sect or another as being in the way of establishing an externally respected national identity, which can lead to support for violence against its members or leaders. On the other hand, if sectarian conflict itself is seen as a national embarrassment, those high in national narcissism, who are preoccupied with maintaining a good national image (Gronfeldt et al., 2022), may want to dispel threats to their national image by refraining from participating in sectarian conflict; whether targeted at outgroup members or leaders. Anecdotal evidence suggests the latter process may be at play. Individuals who exhibit narcissistic identification with the Lebanese nation may seek to present an image of the country that aligns with a nostalgic perception of its distant past. In fact, Lebanon's distant past is often portrayed in the media as a community that is peaceful, respectful of diversity, and open to the world (Bleecker Street, n.d.). Lebanon was even colloquially referred to as the central bank, the hospital, the casino, and the University of the Middle East (American University of Beirut, 2016; Bleecker Street, n.d.; Rose, 2020). Indeed, previous research has found that national narcissism predicts support for leaders that promise a return to a 'glorious past' (Cisłak et al., 2020; Lantos & Forgas, 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2018). By appealing to national nostalgia and blaming sectarianism and intergroup conflict for lack of respect from other countries (Abdeni-Holman, 2022), these gestures suggest that those high in national narcissism would rather reject sectarian violence.

1.3 | The present research

This research examines the relationship between collective narcissism and collective violence in Lebanon. We specifically investigate the differential effects of sectarian and national narcissism on two dimensions of collective violence beliefs—diffuse collective violence (DCV) that target outgroup members and upward collective violence (UCV) that target outgroup leaders (Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2022).

Abou-Ismaïl et al. (2022) developed a new scale to measure collective violence beliefs, which was tested in multiple samples from three non-WEIRD contexts, including Lebanon. They found that the intensity of the collective violence act did not differentiate between the justification of violence but rather the target group. Their analysis identified two dimensions: one targeted at outgroup members (DCV) and the other at outgroup leaders (UCV). We incorporate this new model and scale for collective violence, for the sake of gaining a full picture of people's beliefs and use a validated measurement tool. We hypothesise that sectarian narcissism will positively predict collective violence beliefs directed at both outgroup members and leaders, whereas national narcissism will negatively predict support for sectarian violence against outgroup members and leaders. In our analyses, we will measure and control for national and sectarian identification without making any hypotheses regarding their potential effects. The sample will comprise a large, diverse community sample from Lebanon.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Participants

An adult convenience sample was collected by circulating an anonymous Qualtrics link via social media to community organisations in Lebanon. The sample consisted of 778 participants and was broadly representative of the various sectarian groups in this diverse country. Specifically, the sample was 11.3% Christian Maronite, 17.5% Shi'a, 38.5% Sunni, 6% Druze, 4.4% Christian Orthodox, 0.5% Armenian, 3% Other Christian sects, 5% Other Muslim sects, 13.8% No sectarian identification. Most of the sample (41.1%) had no political affiliation, while the remainder varied between eight other Lebanese political groups. The sample had a mean age of 33.07 (SD = 11.43) and comprised 65.5% of women.

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | Collective narcissism

Collective narcissism at both the sectarian and national levels was measured using the ultrashort version of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) proposed by (Sibley, 2021) and used in (Eker et al., 2023). The three items we used were 'I insist upon my sect/Lebanese getting the respect that is due to it', 'If my sect/Lebanese had a major say in the world, the world would be a much better place', and 'The true worth of my sect/Lebanese is often misunderstood'. All items were measured on a scale from 1 to 5. National narcissism had questionable reliability ($\alpha = .61$; $\omega^2 = 0.63$, $M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.90$) while sectarian narcissism had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .74$; $\omega^2 = 0.74$, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.14$).

2.2.2 | Collective violence beliefs

Justification for collective violence was measured using Abou-Ismaïl et al. (2022) items. The scale measures two dimensions for collective violence beliefs based on the target of the act rather than the intensity of the act (for more see Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2022). The scale measures collective violence beliefs against average members of the outgroup, which in this case is members of different sects (e.g., 'It is justified for members of my sect to become physically aggressive toward members of a different sect') in one dimension, which we call DCV ($\alpha = .87$; $\omega^2 = 0.87$, $M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.91$); and it measures collective violence against leaders of the outgroup, which in this case is leaders of different sects (e.g., 'One can justify people's need to be violent toward our country's leaders especially those from a different sect') in the other dimension, which we call UCV ($\alpha = .86$; $\omega^2 = 0.87$, $M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.19$). Each subscale was measured using six items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 completely disagree to 5 completely agree.

2.2.3 | Sectarian and national identification

Sectarian and national identification were used as control variables and measured using three items each from the scale originally developed by Leach et al. (2008) 'I feel a bond with my sect/Lebanon' 'I feel solidarity with my sect/Lebanon' and 'I feel committed to my sect/Lebanon'. Sectarian identification had good reliability ($\alpha = .80$; $\omega^2 = 0.81$, $M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.26$) while national identification had a questionable one ($\alpha = .62$; $\omega^2 = 0.63$, $M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.03$).

3 | RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables are presented in Table 1. We fit a structural equation model to test the simultaneous effects of sectarian and national narcissism on DCV and UCV while adjusting for the residual covariance between the two

outcomes. As shown in Figure 1, latent DCV and latent UCV were each regressed on latent sectarian narcissism, latent national narcissism and other covariates simultaneously namely: secure sectarian identification, secure national identification, age and gender (coded as 1 female, 2 male; see Table 2 for more details). Overall, results showed that model fit the data very well ($\chi^2 (281) = 590.59$, $p < .001$, comparative fit index = 0.93, standardised root mean square residual = 0.06, root mean square error of approximation = 0.03, confidence interval [0.033, 0.042]).

Sectarian narcissism had a positive relationship with DCV ($b = 0.57$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .03$), though it was not associated with UCV ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = .76$). Additionally, secure sectarian identity was not associated with either diffuse ($b = -0.14$, $p = .50$) or UCV ($b = -0.12$, $p = .55$). National narcissism was negatively associated with DCV ($b = -0.55$, $SE = 0.18$, $p = .002$) and not associated with UCV ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .49$). As with secure sectarian identity, secure national identity was not associated with diffuse ($b = -0.03$,

TABLE 1 Correlation matrix between all latent constructs tested in the model.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Sectarian identification								
2. National identification	0.32**							
3. Sectarian narcissism	0.60**	0.25**						
4. National narcissism	0.28**	0.32**	0.45**					
5. Diffuse collective violence	0.11**	-0.06*	0.10**	-0.14**				
6. Upward collective violence	0.05	-0.004	0.11**	0.04	0.43**			
7. Age	0.02	0.002	0.03	0.04	-0.19**	-0.17**		
8. Gender	-0.15**	-0.07	-0.10**	-0.17**	0.06	0.11**	-0.08*	
M	3.45	3.96	3.67	4.23	1.60	2.60	33.07	1.35
SD	1.26	1.03	1.14	0.90	0.91	1.19	11.43	0.48

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

FIGURE 1 Structural equation model in which latent sectarian narcissism and latent national narcissism are modelled as simultaneous predictors of latent diffuse collective violence beliefs and latent upward collective violence beliefs. For visual simplicity, observed indicators and covariates are not shown. * $p < .05$.

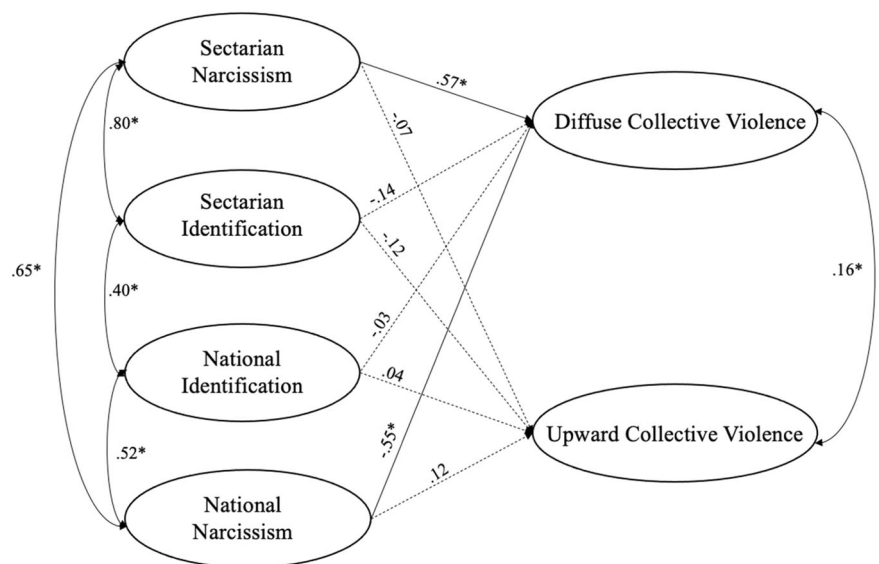


TABLE 2 Parameter estimates for the models predicting diffuse and upward collective violence beliefs.

	Diffuse collective violence beliefs						Upward collective violence beliefs					
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					Low	High					Low	High
Sectarian narcissism	0.43	0.11	3.90	.03	0.07	1.23	-0.17	0.11	-1.58	.80	-0.54	0.40
National narcissism	-0.51	0.12	-4.30	.002	-0.90	-0.20	0.15	0.11	1.26	.49	-0.21	0.45
Sectarian identity	-0.14	0.20	-0.67	.50	-0.53	0.26	-0.12	0.19	-0.60	.55	-0.50	0.26
National identity	-0.03	0.12	-0.22	.82	-0.26	0.21	0.04	0.11	.31	.76	-0.19	0.26
Age	-0.02	0.006	-2.54	.01	-0.29	-0.04	-0.005	0.006	-0.86	.39	-0.18	0.07
Gender	0.04	0.15	0.28	.78	-0.11	0.14	0.31	0.14	2.15	.03	0.01	0.27

Note: Values in bold refer to estimates with $p < .05$ (i.e., having a significant relationship).

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

$p = .82$) or UCV ($b = 0.04$, $p = .76$). Overall, these results suggest that national and sectarian collective narcissism have opposing effects on DCV. Specifically, sectarian narcissism is positively associated with it, while national narcissism is negatively associated. Furthermore, the effects of collective narcissism appear to be restricted to DCV and do not extend to UCV. Finally, the results indicate that secure sectarian and national identification are unrelated to either type of violence.

4 | DISCUSSION

Using a large community sample from a multisectarian country, we tested the relationship between collective narcissism at two levels (i.e., sectarian, and national) and collective violence beliefs. Consistent with our predictions, we found that those high in sectarian narcissism showed higher support for collective violence against members of the sectarian outgroup. While there were reasons to expect that the effect of national narcissism on collective narcissism may go either way, national narcissism was negatively related to collective violence beliefs against outgroup members as we hypothesised. Contrary to our predictions, sectarian collective narcissism had no significant relationship with collective violence beliefs targeted at outgroup leaders. Similarly, national narcissism also had a non-significant relationship with collective violence beliefs targeted at outgroup leaders.

While in line with our predictions, the contradicting relationships national and sectarian narcissism have with DCV beliefs remain striking findings. Participants high in national narcissism showed a strong opposition to collective violence beliefs against outgroup members, whereas those high in sectarian narcissism supported collective violence beliefs against outgroup members. These results suggest that people see attaining respect for the nation as arising from a different process from respect for one's sect within the nation. Those high on sectarian narcissism, which is more traditional in Lebanon, may resort to conventional methods of sectarian violence. This is not surprising given the perceived (and often realistic) threats many Lebanese face from sectarian outgroups (Ghaddar, 2015).

People high in sectarian narcissism are constantly reminded that the perceived image they hold of their sects continues to be attacked by members of other sects. This pattern, however, might not be exclusive to Lebanon; several countries with comparable social structures, particularly those that emerged after World War I and the division of the Ottoman Empire, exhibit similar characteristics. These countries, which are often overlooked in research, share commonalities, and are distinguished by their non-Western and non-Eastern identities, according to recent research (Uskul et al., 2023).

Our findings regarding national narcissism, in the Lebanese case, add to mounting evidence of collective narcissism amongst minority groups in Western countries (e.g., Marinthe et al., 2022). In a deeply divided and sectarian society like Lebanon, it is important to note that while identification with the national group may be gaining momentum amongst individuals, it has not necessarily translated into significant political influence, as evidenced by the outcome of the recent parliamentary elections. The return of traditional sectarian parties as the majority reflects the ongoing challenges in achieving substantial political change (UNDP, 2022). Thus, despite an increasing presence in people's minds, this national identity may still face political oppression and remain less influential at the political level. While those high in collective narcissism are often reactionaries, it is possible that national narcissists adopt alternative strategies that create a progressive facade, especially if they believe that reactionary behaviour could have adverse effects on the country's image.

While the present results might contradict previous work suggesting that collective narcissism has harmful effects on relations within groups (e.g., Biddlestone et al., 2022; Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022), it is unclear how genuine support for progressivism is amongst those high in collective narcissism, even amongst minority groups. A comparison can be made with research from Poland (Cislak et al., 2021) which found that those high in national narcissism supported a marketing strategy for their country promoting it as 'green', but simultaneously opposing genuine environmental reforms, a phenomenon referred to as 'greenwashing'. Likewise, national narcissism in the United States predicted rushing mass vaccination of the American public, without adequate safety trials, for the country

to 'look great' by being ahead of other countries (Gronfeldt et al., 2022). It cannot be concluded with the current data whether such paradoxical effects would generalise to other minority groups, or marginalised political identities, but it is possible that the opposition to diffuse violence expressed by those high in national narcissism in our sample is relatively 'thin'. It could be that those high in national narcissism in a context like Lebanon would rather distance themselves from sectarian politics all together to try and portray a better image of themselves. Therefore, making their attitudes in line with the established understanding of collective narcissism as a construct concerned with maintaining a better image; rather than actually being progressive. For instance, it is not clear how the same individuals would justify or oppose collective violence beliefs against members of different nations Lebanon has antagonistic relations with, such as Israel. This means results found here may change according to the political landscape at any given time. For example, collective narcissism in groups with egalitarian goals is associated with support for radical political activism (Panayiotou, 2020). More research should be devoted to collective narcissism in diverse societies, such as Lebanon with its sectarian divides, or contrasting advantaged and disadvantaged groups, such as the United States.

Surprisingly, neither national nor sectarian narcissism predicted UCV beliefs, which refer to violence directed toward outgroup leaders. One might have intuitively expected that outgroup leaders would be perceived as a threat to the image of one's sectarian ingroup. However, recent research conducted by Brown and Marinthe (2022) in the United States and France revealed that national narcissism predicted positive attitudes toward Vladimir Putin and Russian military attacks in Ukraine. Notably, this effect did not extend to positive attitudes toward the Russian people. This suggests that individuals high in national narcissism may support populist outgroup leaders and their actions due to ideological similarity while displaying indifference toward the well-being of the citizens of the outgroup. Further, it is possible that those high on sectarian narcissism hold high respect for authority, even when it represents exemplars of the outgroup. This is in line with previous research on the effects of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and SDO on collective violence beliefs, where RWA was a negative predictor of collective violence beliefs against outgroup leaders (Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2023). These two processes together might have accounted for the nonsignificant relationship. On the other hand, while those high in national narcissism might think justifying violence against outgroup leaders is bad for Lebanon's image, it is possible that they also perceive sectarian leaders as the reason for Lebanon's disunity, which might lead to justification of violence against them. This means it is possible those two opposing processes be operating at the same time affecting the significance of the relationship. All these assumptions show more research should be devoted to understanding how collective narcissism relates to support for violence against outgroup leaders.

Theoretically, our study extends previously established findings in the literature. Collective narcissism predicts intergroup hostility (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013; Golec

de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013), which we confirmed in this study for sectarian narcissism with its relationship with DCV beliefs against outgroup members (see also Cichocka, Bocian, et al., 2022). Our study contributes to the field by providing nuanced insights, revealing distinct effects within the realm of collective narcissism. Specifically, we found that national narcissism was associated with the rejection of DCV beliefs. This pattern shows the benefits of studying collective narcissism in a highly conflictual, non-WEIRD context. National identity in contexts where multiple ingroup identities coexist and are at times in a state of conflict might hold a different meaning, especially if this identity is perceived as progressive, aiming at uniting the subordinate identities into a superordinate one. Identifying with an emerging nation in a place where the majority identifies with smaller groups (i.e., sects) can be perceived as a progressive act, even an act of rebellion. This places national groups in multiple ingroup identity contexts in the position of minority, and also of disadvantage. Members of this national group will most likely be derogated by their sect members for not prioritising the interest of the sect. Importantly, members of such national groups might be treating a superordinate unifying identity that subsumes competing subordinate group identities (Wenzel et al., 2008).

This is in contrast to how national identity is often deployed, as an exclusive category designed to delineate the boundary between native citizens and foreigners/outsideers (Louis et al., 2013). This means that those people might only be identifying with the higher-level identity to end the conflict and introduce a change to the status quo. While they remain collectively narcissistic in how they perceive this higher-order identity as lacking in appreciation, they might not necessarily believe that aggression is a way to reinstate that image.

Importantly, we did not observe the same pattern of results for national or sectarian identification. Both types of identification were unrelated to support for collective violence. Typically, after accounting for collective narcissism, social identification predicts constructive or desirable outcomes in intra- and intergroup relations (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013). Apart from the purported positive effect of in-group identification on intergroup attitudes, which may have played a role in our nonsignificant findings. Prolonged periods of conflict and violence in complex social structures with multiple social identities, like Lebanon, could also impact these associations, resulting in decreased inclination to justify violence based solely on in-group identification.

From a practical perspective, this work suggests answers and potential solutions to intractable conflict. In such contexts, where multiple identities are always in some way or another competing, introducing some form of a higher order identification can bring people from different groups together (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner et al., 1993). It might be easier said than done, however, finding similarities, and commonalities between conflicting groups might help pave the way to more peaceful resolutions (Wenzel et al., 2008). That is especially the case between groups within the same country that share a common geography, history, and culture. Focusing on these commonalities and constructing some form of

secure in-group identity (see Cichocka, 2016), while avoiding promoting collective narcissism, might be a positive approach.

As mentioned in the introduction, these forms of higher-order identities do not come without challenges. The lack of a proper understanding of what constitutes such identities, when they relate to collective narcissism, and how they lead to specific outcomes, remains a limitation of this paper; and a future direction that can be explored. For instance, we measured both forms of collective narcissism using a single sample. Future research can strive to measure these two forms independently. Additionally, future research should also explore how sectarian and national narcissism relates to attitudes about international relations. For example, a logical next step would be to examine how sectarian and national narcissism relates to support for collective violence against Israelis or Syrians, prominent outgroups in the eyes of many Lebanese.

Another obvious limitation is that this was only one cross-sectional study in one context. Future research that can explore this or similar contexts, with multiple studies, possibly using experimental approaches where collective narcissism is manipulated would also be interesting and informative; to the degree that ingroup identification, collective narcissism, and collective violence beliefs relate on a causal level. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the internal consistency of our measures for collective narcissism was comparatively weaker than our measures for collective violence beliefs. While this may somewhat decrease confidence in the accuracy of the measures, it does not diminish the significance of our findings and insights. For future research, we recommend utilising the full Collective Narcissism Scale to potentially enhance the robustness of the measurements (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), or if space does not permit then the newly validated three-item Scale (Cichocka, Sengupta, et al., 2022). The lower reliability of certain scales, however, such as national identification, is not unexpected in a country where such identities may hold secondary importance. It is crucial to consider contextual factors when interpreting the role of consistency measures. Furthermore, having used a short three-item measurement might have played a role in the low reliability of those scales. However, it is important to note that the lower internal consistency of our collective narcissism measures does not necessarily preclude testing our hypothesis (Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel, 2007). Nevertheless, this highlights the importance of replicating this study in future research to further validate and strengthen the measurements used. Replication efforts would contribute to enhancing the reliability and generalisability of our findings.

In light of these limitations, we also acknowledge the importance of addressing the variables that were not measured in our study. Specifically, the inclusion of outgroup threat as a variable would provide valuable insights into the relationship between collective narcissism and narcissistic aggression. Additionally, capturing attitudes toward progressivism would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological factors at play. Future research should consider incorporating these variables into their investigations to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding collective narcissism and its potential implications.

Replication studies focusing on these variables would not only contribute to further validating our findings but also strengthen the overall body of knowledge in this area. By expanding the scope of measurement and replication efforts, researchers can enhance the reliability and generalisability of the findings and advance our understanding of the relationship between collective narcissism, aggression, outgroup threat, and attitudes toward progressivism.

5 | CONCLUSION

We tested the relationship between two forms of collective narcissism, namely sectarian and national, and two forms of collective violence beliefs, namely diffuse and upward. We found that those high in sectarian collective narcissism tended to justify diffuse collective violence beliefs (collective violence beliefs targeted against outgroup members), whereas those high in national narcissism tend to oppose diffuse collective violence beliefs. In sectarian societies, those identifying with the higher-order national group may constitute a minority. Narcissistic identification with that national group may entail rejecting sectarian violence, and in that sense, collective narcissism can be expressed as progressive politics, rather than reactionary. More research should be devoted to studying collective narcissism in complex societies and groups.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The supporting data for the findings presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Please feel free to contact the corresponding author, Ramzi Abou-Ismaïl, at r.abou-ismail@kent.ac.uk, to request access to the data.

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