



# Right-wing political orientation, national identification and the acceptance of immigrants and minorities

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intriguing possibility that higher national identification commonly found among political conservatives can make them more, rather than less, accepting towards immigrants and minorities. This possibility is based on the theoretical reasoning that national attachment, net of national narcissism, provides a secure and stable sense of national belonging that forms a basis for a more open attitude towards outgroups. In two studies using three nationally representative samples from Germany and Netherlands ( $N = 4440$ ), we show that stronger political conservatism predicts more positive outgroup attitudes and higher tolerance through stronger national attachment, specifically when partialling out national narcissism. These findings indicate that higher national identification from politically more conservative individuals can provide a confident basis for positive outgroup attitudes.

## 1. Introduction

A large literature demonstrates that rejection of immigrants and minority rights is stronger among political conservatives, or the right, than among political liberals, or the left (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Mudde, 2007; Sears & Henry, 2003). On well-known left-right, or liberal-conservative, continuous scales of political orientation, more conservative people are more likely to display outgroup closure, oppose immigrants, favor more restrictive immigration policies (Brooks et al., 2016; Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Citrin & Sides, 2008; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010), and object to equal rights for minorities and newcomers (e.g., Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2009). Furthermore, it is almost a truism that national identification is stronger among conservatives than liberals, as conservatives tend to be more committed to the nation, are more nationalistic, and have stronger collective narcissist beliefs about the exceptionality of the national ingroup that they believe is not sufficiently recognized by others (see Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). In turn, national identification forms an important basis for drawing group boundaries and perceiving outgroup threats with the related negative attitudes towards immigrants and minority rights (e.g., Anderson & Ferguson, 2018; Meeus et al., 2010; Sides & Citrin, 2007; Verkuyten, 2009).

However, national identity can have different contents, and identification with a nation can take different forms. For example, conceptions of national identity can be understood in civic, ethnic, or cultural ways with the former having more favorable implications for immigrants than the latter two (see Pehrson & Green, 2010; Reijerse et al., 2013; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Similarly, national identification can take the form of national glorification, hubris, or blind patriotism, which are associated with out-group negativity, or it can instead take the form of national attachment, pride, or constructive patriotism that is not associated with outgroup negativity (e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003; de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Roccas et al., 2006; Schatz et al., 1999; Selvanathan & Leidner, 2020; Spry & Hornsey, 2007).

In addition to this research on the importance of the specific *content and mode* of national identity psychological research has considered the motivational *roots* with national identification manifesting itself in a more defensive vs. secure form of national attachment. On the one hand, people's national identification can be more defensive and contingent upon external approval (i.e., defensive national narcissism), or be more secure and stable, thereby forming a more confident basis for openness to other groups (i.e., secure national attachment; Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Hamer et al.,

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2018; Jordan et al., 2005). According to this theorizing, a secure sense of ingroup belonging involves satisfied individual needs and can form the confident psychological basis for an open attitude towards others. In contrast, an insecure and defensive national narcissism stems from frustrated individual needs and can produce negative reactions towards others as it elicits an inflated image of one's nation that is contingent upon external recognition of ingroup worthiness. Thus, individuals who are higher in national identification do not necessarily have negative attitudes towards immigrants and minority rights, and at times may even hold more positive attitudes (Citrin et al., 2012; De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003; Jackson et al., 2001). This suggests the intriguing possibility that higher national identification commonly found among more conservative and right-wing individuals could make them more, rather than less, accepting towards immigrants and minorities.

The current research examines this possibility in two studies using national probability samples from the Netherlands (Study 1 and 2) and Germany (Study 2). We focused on the role of national identification for outgroup attitudes while considering the statistical overlap between secure and defensive national attachment. Specifically, national identification minus its statistical overlap with collective narcissism can be interpreted as a secure and positive sense of national belonging that does not depend on external recognition (Cichocka, 2016). Thus by taking concerns about the external recognition of the nation's exceptionality into account (national narcissism), it is possible to examine the role of national identification as a secure sense of national attachment. We expected that increased conservatism would be positively associated with both greater secure national attachment and defensive national narcissism, but that national attachment (net of national narcissism) would be associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, and national narcissism with more negative attitudes. Empirical evidence for this expectation would indicate that increased conservatism is associated with stronger national attachment that can function as a confident psychological basis for a more open attitude towards immigrants and minorities.

### 1.1. Political orientation and secure versus defensive national identification

Although the meaning of a left-wing, or politically liberal, and right-wing, or politically conservative, orientation has changed over the years and differs across countries, political orientation helps to explain a range of social attitudes and behaviors because it organizes people's values and beliefs (Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2003). Conservatives are more likely than liberals to be committed and concerned about the national ingroup and feel a stronger sense of belonging and pride (Karasawa, 2002; Morales, 2010; Schatz et al., 1999). A psychological reason for this higher national identification is that conservatives generally have a stronger need for order, predictability, safety and control (Jost et al., 2017). Group identification can provide stability and compensates for feelings of uncertainty, threat, and low personal control (Hogg, 2007; Thorisdottir et al., 2007).

However, identification not only stems from frustrated or threatened needs with the related defensiveness and collective narcissism, but can also be based on need satisfaction with a secure and confidently held positive evaluation of one's group membership (Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Hamer et al., 2018; Jordan et al., 2005). Collective narcissism involves the belief in one's nation's exceptionality which compensates an undermined sense of personal control and self-worth. Longitudinal and experimental research has found that low feelings of personal control increase collective narcissism as a form of defensive ingroup commitment, while feelings of high personal control can increase a secure ingroup identification (Cichocka et al., 2018; Marchlewska et al., 2020). Furthermore, high national identification can be based on satisfied social identity needs, such as the need for distinctiveness, belonging, and self-continuity (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014; Vignoles, 2011).

Ingroup identification and collective narcissism overlap, but differ in

the related beliefs and underlying psychological profiles (Cichocka, 2016). Whereas both defensive and secure ingroup attachments reflect positive ingroup attitudes, they might have different implications for outgroup attitudes. Previous research shows that national narcissism is related to hypersensitivity to threat which drives prejudice towards outgroups, and hostile and aggressive responses to perceived criticisms or insults to the ingroup (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020). In threatening contexts, collective narcissism even predicts support for ideological extremism and political violence (Jasko et al., 2020).

Stronger ingroup identification can be associated with stronger outgroup rejection because it partly overlaps with narcissistic beliefs about the ingroup. Yet this association does not have to exist, or might be reversed, once narcissism is accounted for (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019). National identification minus its statistical overlap with collective narcissism is conceptualized as a secure and positive sense of national belonging that does not depend on external recognition and forms a confident basis for being open and accepting towards outgroups (Cichocka, 2016). Research in Germany has found that national identifiers with a more secure sense of national belonging had lower feelings of outgroup threat and more positive attitudes towards immigrants (Spiegler et al., 2021; see also Phinney et al., 2007; Whitehead et al., 2009). Secure national attachment and defensive national narcissism might be uniquely related to outgroup attitudes, but in opposite ways. For example, collective narcissism is associated with increased perceptions of outgroup threat and related negative outgroup attitudes and responses (Cichocka, 2016; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Roccas et al., 2006), while national identification (net of narcissism) has been found to predict more positive outgroup attitudes and no defensive reactions in response to threats (Cichocka et al., 2018; Golec de Zavala et al., 2013; Guerra et al., 2020).

For the current research we expected that stronger conservatism, or right-wing political orientation, will be associated simultaneously with both higher secure national attachment and higher defensive national narcissism. However, national attachment will be associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, and national narcissism as the defensive form of ingroup commitment with more negative outgroup attitudes (each net of the other). Specifically, we predicted indirect effects such that a more right-wing political orientation would be associated with more negative outgroup attitudes via stronger national narcissism, but with more positive outgroup attitudes via stronger national attachment. Empirical support for this expectation would indicate that stronger political conservative orientation does not only predict greater national narcissism with the related outgroup closure, but also a relatively strong secure national attachment that functions as a psychological basis for a more open attitude towards other groups. The positive role of secure national attachment will be tested by taking the variance shared with national narcissism into account in a structural model in which both constructs contribute to indirect effects in the association between political orientation and outgroup attitudes.

## 2. Study 1

Study 1 tested our main prediction in the context of the Netherlands focusing on two indexes of intergroup relations: outgroup prejudice and outgroup tolerance (see Verkuyten et al., 2020, for distinction). Similar to other western countries, there are strong debates on immigration and minority rights in the Netherlands, and there is a pattern of political polarization with the rise of populist political parties (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). After the latest general election (March 2021), 82 of the 150 parliamentary seats are occupied by right-wing oriented political parties and 28 of these are considered far-right.

### 2.1. Data and method

Dutch participants were selected from the national representative panel maintained by research organization *kantar*, and a random sample

of around 2000 panel members was approached in February 2019. The response rate was 52% ( $N = 1050$ ) which is similar to other national surveys in the Netherlands (Stoop, 2005). Participants were all Dutch majority members and had a mean age of 46.98 ( $SD = 16.66$ , range = 18–85), and 51% were female. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and anonymous and received the regular compensation (e.g. bonus points) as part of their continuing involvement in the panel. Like with other large-scale data collections, a team of researchers was involved which resulted in various topics being examined, such as attitudes towards child-rearing practices, slippery slope thinking, and justifying beliefs. Here we focus on all the questions that we were able to include in the questionnaire for empirically examining our research question. The study (and also Study 2) was ethically approved by the respective ethical faculty board and informed consent was obtained.

## 2.2. Measures

National attachment, national narcissism, outgroup attitude and general tolerance were latent constructs comprised of multiple items for which respondents indicated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ('completely disagree' to 'completely agree'). The reliability of the scales is indicated with the recommended composite reliability measure rho ( $\rho$ ; Raykov, 2017).

**National attachment** was measured with two items taken from previous research (Verkuyten, 2009): "I identify with the Netherlands", and "I feel connected to other Dutch people" ( $\rho = 0.91$ ).

**National narcissism** was measured with a five item version of the reliable and validated collective narcissism scale which has been used successfully in countries such as Poland, Greece, Germany, Portugal, United Kingdom, and the United States (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Guerra et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020): "I am not happy until the Dutch get the appreciation that they deserve", "I get very angry when the Netherlands or Dutch people are criticized", "If the Netherlands was able to have more of a say in the world, the world would be a better place", "The interests of the Netherlands is not understood by many people", and "In general the Dutch are not respected enough" ( $\rho = 0.98$ ).

**Outgroup attitudes** was measured by asking respondents to use the well-known feeling thermometer, which ranged from 0 (very cold) to 100 (very warm), to indicate how in general they feel towards the following categories of immigrants living in the Netherlands: Polish, Turkish, immigrants, Muslims, refugees, Moroccans, Romanians, Antilleans and Surinamese. Using feeling thermometers with wider ranges of responses than Likert-type scales generates a more reliable measure (Alwin, 1997).

**Tolerance** was measured with the following five items: "I am tolerant toward people who hold fundamentally different values than I do", "Judge the sin and not the sinner", "is an important principle for me", "Everyone is allowed to live the way they want to even if it goes against what I think is good and proper", "I accept it when people do things that I deeply disapprove of", and "Even people that I detest have a right to live their own life" ( $\rho = 0.98$ ).

**Political orientation** was measured with the well-known self-placement question that has been found to have good construct and predictive validity (Jost, 2006), also in the context of the Netherlands (Bot & Verkuyten, 2018; Van der Heijden & Verkuyten, 2020). Respondents were asked the question, "Regarding politics in general, do you consider yourself as more left-wing, center, or more right-wing?". Answers were given on a 7-point scale with value 1 representing a strong left-wing political orientation and value 7 representing a strong right-wing political orientation. Respondents choosing not to answer this question were coded as missing ( $N = 114$ ).

**Control variables.** Age, gender and education were used as control variables in the analysis. Education was assessed as the highest level of education completed and ranged from 'No education or primary school'

(1) to 'master or doctoral degree' (7). The distinction between these levels of achieved education is comparable to the international ISCED-measure that is used, for example, in the European Social Survey. Similar to other research in the Netherlands (e.g., De Graaf et al., 2000; Van Tubergen & Van de Werfhorst, 2007), education was treated in the analysis as a continuous variable.

## 2.3. Measurement model

Using Mplus version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run to assess the measurement model of the latent variables national attachment, national narcissism, outgroup attitudes, and tolerance (Table 1). The modification indices indicated that the fit was improved by allowing the correlation of the errors between some of the items used to assess thermometer-like feelings towards the various outgroups, namely between Romanians and Polish, between Antilleans and Surinamese as well as immigrants and refugees. Because it is reasonable to assume that feelings towards these groups are highly correlated, these modifications were applied resulting in a very good model fit,  $\chi^2(161) = 672.36$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.055$ ,  $CFI = 0.955$ ,  $TLI = 0.947$ ,  $SRMR = 0.040$  (see Table 1).

## 2.4. Results

### 2.4.1. Descriptive findings

Table 2 (above the diagonal) shows the descriptive findings for all measures and their intercorrelations. National attachment and national narcissism were positively correlated. Furthermore, increased political conservative orientation was associated with stronger national narcissism and national attachment, and also with more negative outgroup attitudes and lower general tolerance. Outgroup attitudes and tolerance were positively associated.

### 2.4.2. Structural model

We tested our hypothesized model using Mplus (Version 7.3, Muthén & Muthén, 2010) with Full Information Maximum Likelihood Estimation for dealing with missing data (Kline, 2016). The fit of the model was assessed by the following cut-off values:  $\chi^2/df < 3$ ,  $CFI \geq 0.93$ ,  $TLI \geq 0.93$ ,  $RMSEA \leq 0.07$ , and  $SRMR \leq 0.07$  (Marsh et al., 2004). We treated political orientation as the independent variable, national attachment and national narcissism as the two mediators, and outgroup attitude and general tolerance as the two dependent variables, while controlling for the effects of age, gender, and education on the mediators and outcome measures (effects without the control variables are reported in the Supplementary material). The three error covariances reported for the measurement model above were included. Indirect effects were computed with 5000 bootstraps and using 95% Confidence Intervals. Fig. 1 presents the standardized path coefficients in the final mediation model.

The structural model had an adequate fit to the data,  $\chi^2(228) = 892.520$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.053$ ,  $CFI = 0.944$ ,  $TLI = 0.934$ ,  $SRMR = 0.041$ , and indicated that stronger political conservative orientation was associated with higher national narcissism,  $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , and stronger secure national attachment,  $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .01$ . National narcissism, in turn, predicted more negative outgroup attitudes,  $\beta = -0.48$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , and lower general tolerance,  $\beta = -0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore and as expected, stronger national attachment was associated with more positive outgroup attitudes and higher tolerance,  $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , and  $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively. Stronger political conservative orientation was also directly and negatively related with outgroup attitudes,  $\beta = -0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , and with tolerance,  $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p > .01$ .

Analysis of indirect effects showed that national narcissism significantly mediated the association between political orientation with outgroup attitudes (IE =  $-0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [ $-0.21$ ,  $-0.12$ ]) and tolerance (IE =  $-0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [ $-0.16$ ,  $-0.07$ ]). Importantly

**Table 1**

Confirmatory factor analysis (fit indices and model comparisons) for latent variables national attachment, national narcissism, outgroup attitudes, and tolerance.

Model	$\chi^2$	df	p	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	df	p
No modification	1176.781	164	>0.001	0.077	0.912	0.898	0.043			
1 covariance	963.582	163	>0.001	0.068	0.930	0.919	0.043	213.199	1	>0.001
2 covariances	804.166	162	>0.001	0.061	0.944	0.934	0.041	159.416	1	>0.001
3 covariances	672.36	161	>0.001	0.055	0.955	0.947	0.040	131.806	1	>0.001

Note. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. Model comparison results are based on the Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Square difference test.

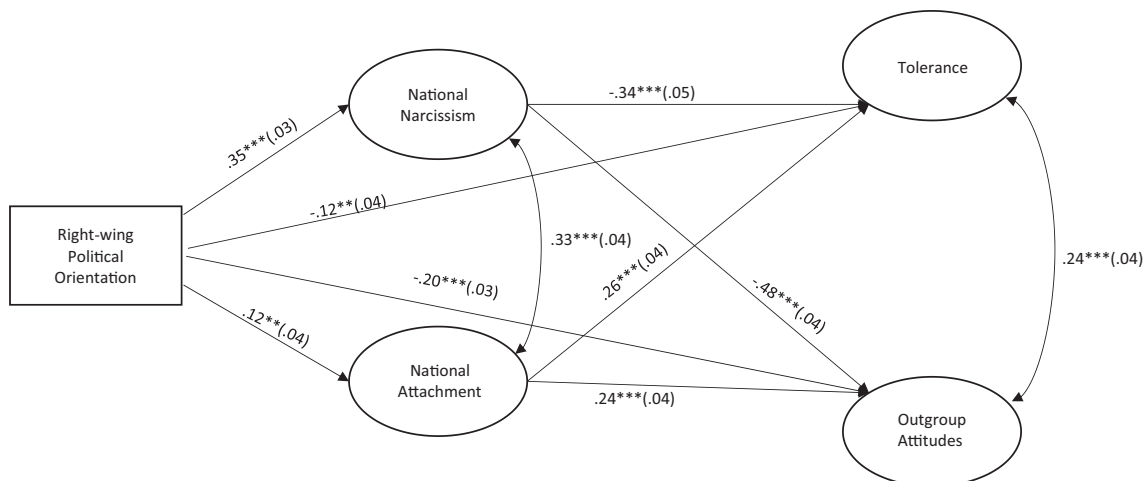
**Table 2**

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between latent variables (Study 1 above the diagonal, and Study 2 below the diagonal).

	Study 1	Study 2	1.	2.	3.	4.	5
	M (SD)	M (SD)					
1. Political orientation	4.09 (1.48)	3.83 (1.27)		0.37***	0.10***	-0.37***	-0.23***
2. National narcissism	4.14 (1.11)	4.06 (1.08)	0.28***		0.30***	-0.52***	-0.32***
3. National attachment	5.20 (0.96)	5.17 (1.09)	0.17***	0.53***		0.08*	0.15***
4. Outgroup attitudes	47.64 (18.6)	45.61(18.7)	-0.40***	-0.57***	-0.21***		0.42***
5. Tolerance/rights	4.69 (0.83)	4.00 (1.47)	-0.32***	-0.39***	-0.05*	0.77***	

Note. Tolerance refers to the Tolerance measure from Study 1, Rights refers to the Expressive Rights measure from Study 2. Correlations from Study 1 appear above the diagonal; Correlations from Study 2 appear below the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ .  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ .  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



**Fig. 1.** The effect of political orientation on tolerance and outgroup attitudes via national narcissism and national attachment (controlled for gender, education and age) in Study 1. Bootstrapping applied (5000). Standard errors in brackets. All results are standardized. Two tailed significance \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

and in support of our expectation, secure national attachment also significantly mediated the association between stronger political conservatism and outgroup attitudes (IE = 0.03, SE = 0.01, 95% CI [0.01, 0.05]) and tolerance (IE = 0.03, SE = 0.01, 95% CI [0.01, 0.06]), in the opposite direction from national narcissism. These results remain consistent when control variables were excluded (see Supplementary material).

In summary, Study 1 confirmed our main prediction that when controlling for national narcissism, stronger political conservative orientation is associated with stronger secure national attachment, which in turn is associated with more positive outgroup attitudes and higher levels of general tolerance.

**3. Study 2**

Study 2 expanded these findings in two important ways. First, based on ongoing discussions about the importance of replications and generalizability for psychological evidence (Asendorpf et al., 2013;

Simons, 2014), we tried to replicate Study 1 by investigating whether the associations found generalize to Germany. Germany offers a useful context to replicate these effects given its distinct linguistic, cultural, and governmental structure (e.g., Germany is a federal republic, while Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy). Germany also differs from Netherlands in that people show somewhat greater levels of support for free religion and speech than the Netherlands (86% vs. 69% on free speech, and 72% vs. 58% on free religion; Wike et al., 2019). However, Germany and Netherlands are also similar in that both countries have seen a rise in right-wing populist parties over the last decade (see Muis & Immerzeel, 2017), both have over 50% of parliamentary seats held by right-wing oriented parties, and strong debates about immigration and minority rights are commonplace in both countries. Furthermore, Study 2 focused on people's views towards Muslim minorities as the immigrant-origin group that is perceived most negatively in Germany and the Netherlands, with approximately a quarter of people in both countries explicitly expressing unfavorable views of Muslims (28% in Netherlands, and 24% in Germany; Wike et al., 2019). Second, in



addition to attitudes towards Muslims, Study 2 measured endorsement of Muslim expressive rights as a concrete operationalization of tolerance (Verkuyten et al., 2020), which was measured in its more abstract form in Study 1. This allowed us to develop a further understanding of the role that national identification might play in the acceptance of a societal least liked group (Muslim minorities).

### 3.1. Data and method

In May and June 2019, potential participants in Germany and the Netherlands were sent an e-mail invite to take part in the “Research about social changes” and an anonymous survey was carried out by Kantar. In the Netherlands, respondents were selected from the Kantar consumer panel for fieldwork in the Netherlands. From this panel, a representative sample of the Dutch population aged 18 years and older was compiled via a stratification procedure based on the characteristics gender, age, education, household size and region. Only respondents with two ethnic Dutch parents received an invitation to complete the questionnaire. In Germany, population data was derived from the MiniCensus and used to compile a representative sample of the German population aged 18 years and older via a stratification procedure based on the characteristics age, gender and education. Similar as for the Dutch sample, only respondents with two ethnic German parents were invited to complete the survey. This preliminary selection led to a total sample of 3390 participants. This sample consisted of 48.5% ( $N = 1645$ ) Dutch and 51.5% ( $N = 1745$ ) German respondents. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 100 years ( $M = 51.95$ ,  $SD = 16.35$ ) and 50.2% ( $N = 1702$ ) were women.

A team was again involved in the data collection which resulted in various topics being examined, such as attitudes towards child-rearing practices, secularism, intuitive and deliberative thinking, and the evaluation of societal protest actions. We again focus on the questions that we were able to include in the questionnaire for empirically examining our research question.

### 3.2. Measures

**National attachment and national narcissism** were measured with the exact same items and 7-point scales as in Study 1 ( $\rho = 0.95$ , and  $\rho = 0.99$ , respectively).

**Outgroup attitudes** was measured in terms of *feelings* and *expressive rights*. The feelings component of outgroup attitudes was measured with two items. Using a 7-point agreement scale the first item was “In general I have more negative than positive feelings towards Muslims” and the second item was again a ‘feeling thermometer’ in which participants were asked to indicate their general feelings towards Muslims. Endorsement of Muslims' expressive rights was a latent construct that consisted of four items taken from previous research (Verkuyten, 2009). The items were, “Muslims in the Netherlands/Germany should be able to display and live out their own faith in public”, “Muslims in the Netherlands/Germany should be able to celebrate their Islamic festivals not just at home but also in public”, “Muslims should have the right to build mosques in the Netherlands/Germany”, and “Muslims should have the right to set up Islamic organization in the Netherlands/Germany” ( $\rho = 0.99$ ).

**Political orientation** was again measured with a 7-point self-placement scale. In total there were 460 (12.2%) missing on this measure, comprising 13.8% of the Dutch respondents ( $N = 233$ ) and 11% of the German sample ( $N = 277$ ).

**Control variables.** Education was assessed as the highest level of education completed. The categories were: ‘No education’ (1), ‘primary school’ (2), ‘lower secondary’ (3), ‘higher secondary’ (4), ‘lower occupational education’ (5), ‘higher occupational education’ (6), ‘bachelor degree’ (7), ‘master degree’ (8) ‘doctoral degree’ (9). Education was treated as a continuous variable. Age was measured in years.

### 3.3. Measurement model

Using Mplus version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010) a four-factor model was estimated including the latent constructs of national attachment, collective narcissism, feelings towards Muslims and endorsement of expressive rights. This model fit the data well,  $\chi^2(59) = 826.252$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.968, TLI = 0.958, SRMR = 0.040. Subsequently, a multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for assessing measurement invariance across the two national groups (Table 3). A configural model was first fitted in which the intercepts and factor loadings were freely estimated across the two national groups. This configural model was then compared to a metric model where the factor loadings were constrained to be equal across the groups. Fit statistics indicated that both models had a very good fit. While according to the chi square difference test, the metric model fit the data significantly worse than the configural model,  $\Delta\chi^2(9) 37.037$   $p < .001$ , comparison of alternative fit indices suggests metric invariance was achieved (i.e.,  $\Delta CFI < 0.01$ ,  $\Delta RMSEA < 0.015$ , see Chen, 2007; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016; see Meade et al., 2008 for even more conservative cutoffs that suggest metric invariance was still achieved here). Because we intended to compare regression coefficients across groups, metric invariance was sufficient for our purpose (Chen, 2007; see Table 3 for information on scalar invariance testing). This model was therefore selected as the final model to be used for the structural equation modelling.

### 3.4. Results

#### 3.4.1. Descriptive findings

The mean scores for the different constructs (Table 2) were similar to those in Study 1. Furthermore, stronger political conservative orientation was again associated with stronger national narcissism, but also stronger national attachment. Additionally, stronger political conservatism was associated with more negative attitudes towards Muslim minorities. Higher national narcissism and stronger national attachment were also associated with more negative outgroup attitudes. The same pattern of associations was found in the two countries separately (see Supplementary material).

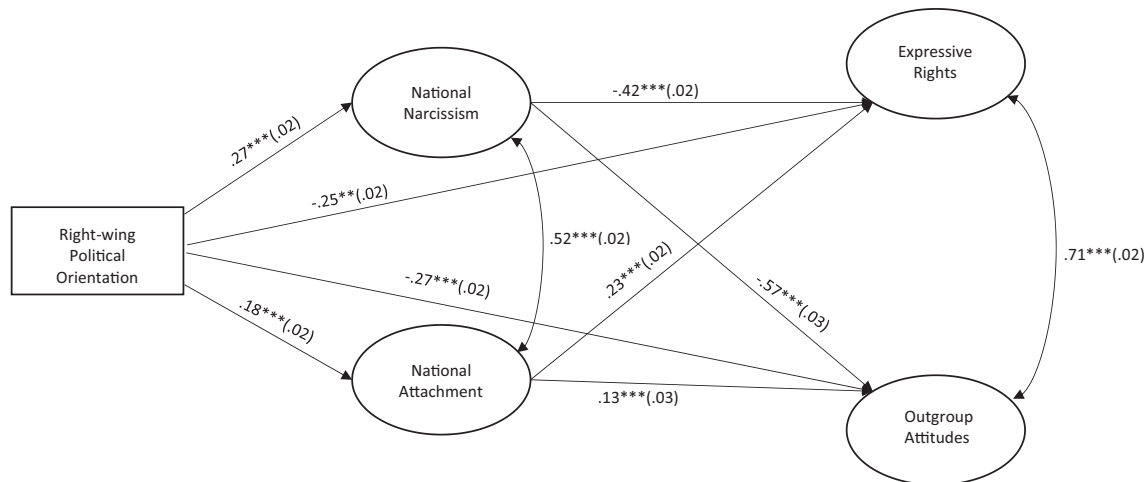
#### 3.4.2. Structural model

The results of the structural equation model with the control variables and for the total sample are presented in Fig. 2. The model had an adequate fit with the data,  $\chi^2(98) = 1101.39$ , RMSEA = 0.052, CFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.948, SRMR = 0.036. Similar to Study 1, stronger political conservative orientation was associated with higher national narcissism,  $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , and stronger national attachment,  $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . National narcissism, in turn, predicted more negative outgroup attitudes,  $\beta = -0.57$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , and lower support of expressive rights,  $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore and as expected, stronger national attachment was associated with more positive outgroup attitudes and support for expressive rights,  $\beta = .013$ ,  $SE = .003$ ,  $p < .001$ , and  $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively. Stronger political conservative orientation was also directly related with more negative outgroup attitudes,  $\beta = -0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ , and with lower support for expressive rights,  $\beta = -0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p > .001$ .

Analysis of indirect effects showed that national narcissism significantly mediated the association between political conservatism and outgroup attitudes (IE =  $-0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [ $-0.19$ ,  $-0.13$ ]) and support for expressive rights (IE =  $-0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [ $-0.14$ ,  $-0.09$ ]). Importantly and in support of our expectation, national attachment also significantly mediated the association between political orientation and outgroup attitude (IE =  $0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [ $0.01$ ,  $0.04$ ]) and support for expressive rights (IE =  $0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [ $0.03$ ,  $0.06$ ]), but in the opposite directions from national narcissism. These results remain consistent when control variables were excluded

**Table 3**  
Measurement invariance testing across Dutch and German samples (fit indices and model comparisons).

Model	$\chi^2$	df	P	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$	df	p
Measurement	826.252	59	<0.001	0.059	0.968	0.958	0.040			
Configural	896.723	118	<0.001	0.059	0.968	0.957	0.041			
Metric	933.758	127	<0.001	0.058	0.967	0.959	0.044	37.035	9	<0.001
Scalar	1114.788	136	<0.001	0.062	0.960	0.954	0.047	181.030	9	<0.001



**Fig. 2.** The effect of political orientation on expressive rights and outgroup attitudes via national narcissism and national attachment (controlled for gender, education and age) in Study 2. Bootstrapping applied (5000). Standard errors in parentheses. All results are standardized. Two tailed significance \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

(see Supplementary material).

### 3.4.3. Cross-national comparison

Wald tests were conducted without and with the addition of the control variables to assess whether the different paths could be constrained to be equal across the two national groups. While maintaining constraints on the factor loadings (i.e., metric invariance, see above), we conducted these Wald tests on one path and indirect effect at a time, while leaving the rest of the effects to vary freely. This allowed a test of whether there were significant differences in the associations between the two national groups.

Only one indirect effect was found to significantly differ between the two countries: the one from political conservative orientation to outgroup feelings through national narcissism, Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 22.77$   $p < .001$ . Importantly, the nature of this indirect effect did not differ between the two countries, but rather the indirect effect was significantly stronger in the Netherlands compared to Germany. The Wald tests showed that all other indirect effects were equivalent (i.e., not significantly different) between the two countries (see the Supplementary material for the country specific findings).

## 4. Discussion

A strong sense of national commitment and belonging among individuals with a political conservative orientation is often considered to be associated with ingroup closure and opposition towards immigrants and minority rights. Research indicates that those on the political right tend to more strongly identify with the nation and have more negative attitudes towards immigrants and minority rights, compared to those on the political left (De Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003). Furthermore, stronger national identification typically goes together with more negative outgroup attitudes, especially in non-settler European societies (Pehrson & Green, 2010). We have complemented this research by examining whether conservatives' stronger national identification can also be

associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, once national narcissism is taken into account. This test is based on the theoretical reasoning and related research, that national attachment, net of narcissism, indicates a secure and stable sense of national belonging that can form a basis for an open attitude towards newcomers (Cichocka, 2016; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Hamer et al., 2018; Jordan et al., 2005; Spiegler et al., 2021). While for collective narcissists the nation is like a bastion that needs to be defended, strong national attachment (net of narcissism) might provide a self-confident basis for being open towards other groups.

In three national samples from two West European countries, we found consistent empirical evidence for a stronger political conservative orientation having positive associations with outgroup attitudes and tolerance, through secure national attachment. Simultaneously, however, stronger political conservatism was associated with higher defensive national narcissism, and this was related to more negative outgroup attitudes. Considering the overlap between national narcissism and national attachment allowed us to observe the unique positive and indirect associations of national attachment with outgroup attitudes (Cichocka, 2016). Thus, while stronger conservatism is more strongly associated with the entitlements and perceived lack of appropriate recognition of one's nation in the eyes of others that primarily reflects an uncertain self (narcissism), it is also associated with higher national attachment that indicates a secure sense of self (Marchlewska et al., 2020).

### 4.1. Limitations and future work

In evaluating the key finding of this work, some limitations should be considered. First, while the measure used to assess political orientation is well-established in political psychology (Jost, 2006) and has been successfully used in different countries including the Netherlands and Germany (e.g., Bot & Verkuyten, 2018), this self-placement measure might not fully capture the political cleavages that characterize many

western societies (Middendorp, 1992). It has been argued, for example, that the left-right distinction can refer to economic or cultural issues and that these two dimensions do not have to correspond (Feldman, 2013). For instance, the far-left can endorse equality together with cultural traditionalism, while the far-right can also emphasize the importance of cultural tradition but together with majority dominance (Knutsen, 1995).

Second, we examined the role of national identification as a secure sense of national attachment by taking collective narcissism as the concern about the external recognition of the nation's exceptionality into account statistically (Cichocka, 2016). Thus a secure sense of national belonging was conceptualized as national attachment that does not depend on external recognition (Marchlewska et al., 2020). However, future research could try to examine national identity security in other ways such as by using items that directly tap into a sense of identity security (e.g., Phinney & Ong, 2007) or by examining whether an explicit sense of national belonging goes together with an implicit positive national self (Jordan et al., 2005; Verkuyten, 2005). Additionally, future research could examine national attachment in relation to constructs like blind patriotism, nationalism and ingroup glorification (e.g., Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Roccas et al., 2006). These constructs have overlaps with collective narcissism but focus less on subjective defensiveness based on the need to assert appropriate recognition for the ingroup's exceptionality, greatness and privileged treatment (see Golec de Zavala et al., 2019).

Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data means that no conclusions can be drawn about whether someone's political orientation causes forms of national identification and outgroup attitudes. However, the model tested was theoretically derived and it seems less likely that political orientation is a consequence of national identification and outgroup attitudes. For example, it is easier to understand that higher national attachment leads to more positive outgroup attitudes, than more positive outgroup attitudes causing higher national attachment.

Fourth, although we analyzed data from two countries, the West European context in which this research was conducted raises the question about the further generalizability of the findings. Although other western societies face similar issues related to immigration and minority rights, and a similar relationship between political orientation and attitudes towards immigration has been found (Citrin & Sides, 2008), there are country differences in political systems, economic circumstances, the history of immigration, and the immigration and integration policies. Therefore, it would be useful to examine the positive role of national attachment for outgroup attitudes in relation to stronger conservatism in other countries such as the UK and the US, and also countries that consider themselves multicultural such as Canada and Australia.

#### 4.2. Conclusion

The current work demonstrates that a political conservative orientation has nuanced associations with outgroup attitudes and tolerance for minority rights through secure versus defensive forms of national identification. By accounting for national narcissism, we demonstrated that stronger political conservatism can relate with national attachment that forms a relatively stable basis for an open attitude towards immigrants and minority rights. Stronger conservatism not only relates to insecure feelings of self-worth in the nation's image (Jost, 2017), but can also involve a secure sense of belonging, meaning and continuity derived from the national identity (Smeekes and Verkuyten, 2015). Future research can examine the conditions and processes that makes the development of a secure national identity less or more likely. For example, identity exploration as the process off learning and reflecting upon the meaning and implications of one's national group membership might be important for developing a secure and stable sense of national belonging (Phinney et al., 2007; Spiegler et al., 2021). Thus efforts to promote and sustain national identity can focus on national attachment

and facilitating a secure national identification, but in doing so one has to be wary of the negative effects of national narcissism. Societally, there is a tendency for some to be worried about any expression of national attachment, while others may not notice that certain forms of national identity are problematic. The current research provides a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between political orientation, national identification, and outgroup prejudice and tolerance. National identification not only can have negative implications for minorities and newcomers, but might also be beneficial for outgroup tolerance, as already argued by Allport (1954) in his classic book on 'The nature of prejudice'.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Maykel Verkuyten** secured the funding, conceptualized the study, organized the data collection, and wrote the theoretical introduction and discussion.

**Rachel Kollar** and **Jessica Gale** conducted the statistical analysis.

**Kumar Yogeeswaran** conceptualized the study and (re-)wrote parts of the manuscript.

#### Data availability

The data are stored at the special storage facility of Utrecht University and will be made publicly available at the Data Archive and Networking Services of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

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