The early twenty-first century has been a turbulent era in world politics. From the 9/11 attacks, to the War on Terror, the financial crisis of 2008, the climate emergency, and the COVID-19 pandemic, one calamity seems to follow another. Many nations face severe economic, environmental, and social challenges, and have elected illiberal leaders and parties that promise a return to a glorious past. Multiple factors certainly contributed to support for Trump in the US, Bolsonaro in Brazil (Mafei, Bustamante, and Meyer 2021), Modi in India (Thiruvengadam 2021), and Brexit in the UK, but they all seem to share a common theme: the group-based needs for recognition and dominance. In this chapter, we discuss these two psychological needs and propose that they might have been influential in the rise of illiberalism in the past decades. We believe that understanding these group-based needs can complement studies examining the role of other psychological factors underpinning illiberal politics, including authoritarianism, affective polarization, or emotions such fear, anger, and resentment.

Superficially, the two group-based needs – for recognition and dominance – may appear to develop out of a care and concern for the welfare of one’s social group, such as the nation (see Berezin 2021). Yet, they can backfire with disastrous consequences. Political theorist Fukuyama (2018) argues that much of contemporary politics revolves around the struggle for the nation’s or social group’s recognition, but that this desire can also easily slide into a quest for superiority and dominance. In this chapter, we will try to address the question of how and why the desire for recognition and dominance can result in illiberalism, and ultimately, be harmful for the nation as a social group. To this end, we will summarize quantitative empirical research that illuminates how these two broad psychological motives can contribute to: 1) political (in)tolerance; 2) susceptibility to, and the spread of, misinformation; 3) support for public policies (especially in the domains of public health and environment); and 4) broader vote choices.
Key Terms and Concepts: Group-based Needs for Recognition and Dominance

In social psychology, the need for group-based recognition can be captured by the concept of collective narcissism—a belief in one’s group’s greatness that is contingent on external validation (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009, see also Adorno 1963; Fromm 1973). Collective narcissism is a form of ingroup identity characterized by a strong—even exaggerated—desire for recognition and respect of the group. It can apply to any social group the individual belongs to, be it one’s nationality, ethnicity, or religious denomination. Collective narcissism can have harmful consequences for relations between and within groups (Cichocka 2016; Cichocka and Cislak 2020; Marchlewksa, Cichocka, Jaworska, et al. 2020). In this chapter we will focus on its political concomitants and, in particular, its relations with support for illiberal politics.

The need to defend one’s group image can sometimes translate into the need to show superiority and dominance over other groups (Cichocka and Cislak 2020). The need for group-based dominance can be captured by the concept of social dominance orientation (Pratto et al. 1994). Social dominance orientation is an ideological attitude characterized by a strong preference for maintaining or enhancing present hierarchies in intergroup relations and establishing dominance and superiority over other groups (Ho et al. 2015; Duckitt and Sibley 2010). It is often discussed in relation to right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), which is more preoccupied with tradition, submission to authorities, and punitiveness towards those who seek to change the status-quo in society (Altemeyer 1998). Social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism are both motivational orientations that dispose individuals to prejudice as well as right-wing political beliefs (Duckitt and Sibley 2010). Both likely can contribute to illiberal politics.

Brexit serves as a useful context to illustrate how social dominance orientation, collective narcissism, and right-wing authoritarianism can each independently predict support for political decisions. Social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and national narcissism (that is, collective narcissism measured in relation to the national group) all contributed to support for the Leave campaign (Golec de Zavala, Guerra, and Simão 2017). Different motivational goals may underlie each of these three constructs. While right-wing authoritarians may have seen Brexit as an opportunity to return to traditionalism, collective narcissists may have seen it as an assertion of independence from external influence by “taking back control” (see e.g. Hobolt 2016). Social dominators, however, may have viewed Brexit as a way of maintaining or enhancing Britain’s high status in the international community, or in Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s words, “unleash[ing] Britain’s full potential” (Cockroft 2020). In this chapter we will focus on collective narcissism and social dominance orientation, while we refer readers interested in right-wing authoritarianism to Feldman, Mérola, and Dollman (2021).

Social dominance orientation and collective narcissism fuel prejudice and hostility within and between groups, though they differ both in their antecedents and consequences. Collective narcissism reflects a grandiose but defensive idealization of the ingroup, characterized by a specific hostility towards those who are perceived as critical towards the ingroup. Social dominance orientation reflects a desire for dominance of the ingroup, linked to support for policies that maintain social hierarchy and prejudice towards those considered inferior. As such, social dominance orientation is inherently anti-egalitarian (Pratto et al. 1994), while collective narcissism should not necessarily imply a general preference for inequality (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009). What matters to collective narcissists is a grandiose image of the ingroup, which is not constrained to might (power or authority), but can include things such as culture, values, and a glorious history which make the ingroup unique (and even “chosen” for greatness, Golec
de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazar, and Lantos 2019). Therefore, intergroup aggression (which both constructs predict) may have different roots. Social dominators are aggressive to maintain the hierarchy between groups, but collective narcissists will want to preserve the ingroup’s positive image.

Even though these two group-based needs may have different consequences on their own, they can reinforce each other in a toxic way. As suggested by Fukuyama (2018), the need for recognition can easily slide into a need for dominance. The story of the Weimar Republic and later Nazi Germany is a cautionary tale. Nazism grew and gained influence after Germany’s defeat in World War I. The post-war years were characterized by the perception that Germany had been humiliated, and many citizens yearned a return to a glorious past where Germany was respected and recognized. Hitler and the Nazis answered the call by promising a national revival in which Germany’s dominance over other countries would not only be restored, but imposed on minorities and undesirables within their own country. In so doing, the Nazis weaved together these two group-based needs so that the recognition of Germany also meant that it could rightfully dominate others. This toxic blend not only resulted in the invasion and occupation of other countries, but the mass-persecution of enemies within Germany who the Nazis considered inferior or standing in their way.

**Group-based Need for Recognition and Illiberal Politics: Collective Narcissism at Work**

*Compensation through Group Image*

Adorno (1963) famously argued that “weak egos… require the compensation of identifying themselves with… great collectives” (94). Accordingly, the preoccupation with ingroup image – a characteristic of collective narcissism – is thought to develop as a compensation for personal shortcomings. Recent experimental studies took inspiration from these psychoanalytic ideas. Compared to participants randomly assigned to a control condition, participants who were assigned to a situation that threatened their self-esteem (Golec de Zavala et al. 2020) or personal control (Cichocka et al. 2018) scored higher on questionnaire measures of collective narcissism (which include items such as “My group deserves special treatment” (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009)). These findings imply that those high in collective narcissism might be focused on managing their self-interests, rather than group-interests. Consequently, the ingroup may serve as a strong brand for them that compensates for their feelings of low self-worth. This translates into an enhanced need for recognition of the ingroup’s worth. The ingroup image is then defended from enemies both within and outside the group.

At the same time, other ingroup members’ interests, their well-being, health, or even rights may not be the top priority for individuals high in collective narcissism: their attachment to the group as a brand may be stronger than their attachment to other members of their group. In fact, collective narcissism has been linked to lower ingroup loyalty (Marchlewksa, Cichocka, Jaworska, et al. 2020). Past work suggested that leaving the group motivated by seeking membership in a higher-status group was more likely in the case of low (rather than high) identifiers (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1997). However, as those high in collective narcissism prioritize self-interests over ingroup-interests, they may be prone to leaving the group to look for more attractive personal opportunities, despite their seemingly strong ingroup attachment. Indeed, the higher the level of collective narcissism measured with respect to one’s national group, the stronger the willingness to leave the country permanently for personal financial profit (Marchlewksa, Cichocka, Jaworska, et al. 2020). Here, we outline how the compensatory nature of collective narcissism may lay the foundations for the support of illiberal politics.
The Need for Recognition Expressed as Political Intolerance

The obsessive focus on how the group is perceived by others means that those scoring high on collective narcissism will go to great lengths to defend the ingroup image from any criticism, real or imagined (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, and Iskra-Golec 2013; Golec de Zavala et al. 2016). Accordingly, collective narcissism has been related to exaggerated perceptions of threat to the ingroup and an obsessive conviction that others purposefully seek to undermine its worth. Research has shown that both national (Golec de Zavala and Cichocka 2012) and religious (Marchlewksa, Górska, Lipowska, et al. 2021) narcissism is strongly linked to a siege mentality—“a belief held by group members stating that the rest of the world has highly negative intentions toward them” (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992, 42). This belief also helps explain why collective narcissism goes hand in hand with outgroup derogation (Cichocka 2016; Cichocka and Cislak 2020).

Collective narcissism was found to be associated with punitive tendencies and aggressiveness, and even with support for extreme violence—including military aggression—particularly towards those groups that criticize the ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009, 2020; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, and Iskra-Golec 2013; see also Jasko et al. 2020). Similarly, collective narcissism was positively linked to generalized prejudice, especially towards groups perceived as chronically hostile or those that have a history of conflict with the ingroup (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, and Bilewicz 2013). In Poland, national narcissism was found to positively predict prejudice towards ethnic minorities in the country (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, and Bilewicz 2013; Cichocka, Dhont, and Makwana 2017). In the US, collective narcissism among Whites was related to support for White-supremacist movements, exemplified by the Unite the Right Rally held in Charlottesville (Alexander-Grose 2018). At that rally, far-right extremists displaying swastikas and flying the Confederate flag chanted slogans such as “Jews will not replace us,” and violently attacked counter-protesters, leading to the killing of one and leaving many injured (Burke and Sotomayor 2018).

Those high in collective narcissism are even willing to restrict the civil rights and liberties of their own group members if they do not conform to their group ideal. This has been shown, for example, in research on Catholic narcissism which has been linked to a desire to punish everyone who does not conform to Catholic values (Marchlewksa, Cichocka, et al. 2019) or research on gender-related narcissism which was related to prejudice towards those who do not conform to traditional gender norms (Marchlewksa, Górska, Malinowska, et al., 2021). Those high in collective narcissism are also prone to accept restrictions to the rights of minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community or refugees, as well as women’s reproductive rights (Górska, Stefaniak, et al. 2020; Marchlewksa, Górska, Malinowska, et al., 2021). Recent studies show that they are also willing to accept governmental surveillance (that is, countries spying on their own citizens) in their own country and even to engage in surveillance activities against other ingroup members themselves (Biddlestone et al. 2020). Consequently, collective narcissism is also predictive of decreased overall support for democracy (Marchlewksa, Cichocka, Furman, et al. 2021).

The Need for Recognition and the Susceptibility to, and Spread of, Misinformation

The need for ingroup recognition makes those high in collective narcissism susceptible to misinformation (e.g. conspiracy theories, fake news, and anti-science rhetoric). This is especially likely in the case of pseudoscience or pseudohistorical narratives that allow for maintaining a
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belief in the greatness of the nation (Sternisko, Cichocka, and Van Bavel 2020). In this section we focus on the relationships between collective narcissism and biased processing of information relevant to the in-group image (Cichocka, Panayiotou, et al. 2018), as well as conspiracy beliefs (Cichocka et al. 2016; Marchlewskas, Cichocka, et al. 2019).

Collective narcissists use many different strategies that help them manage the ingroup image. One of these strategies is related to the way collective narcissists perceive and interpret their ingroup’s past actions. This can manifest as biased information processing and distorted collective memory. Illustrative examples come from research on perceptions of morality. Those high in collective narcissism judge actions that favour interests of their group as more moral than similar actions favouring the interests of an outgroup. For instance, Republicans judged the US Senate’s decision to confirm Kavanaugh as more moral than Democrats did, but this difference was especially pronounced for those scoring high in partisan narcissism (Bocian, Cichocka, and Wojciszke 2021). Those scoring high in collective narcissism also tend to overestimate ingroup members’ heroic deeds (Bilewicz et al. 2018) and their ingroup’s general contribution to world history (Zaromb et al. 2018), as well as deny accounts that challenge the positive image of the ingroup (Klar and Bilewicz 2017; Marchlewskas, Cichocka, Jaworska, et al. 2020). For example, Marchlewskas, Cichocka, Jaworska, and colleagues (2020) demonstrated that Polish participants high in national narcissism showed negative reactions to films that reminded people of crimes committed by their nation during and after World War II. Specifically, they perceived these films as malignant anti-Polish propaganda, full of distortions that depict Poles in a bad light.

Memory politics, in the form of historical distortions or revisions, play a central part in many illiberal or autocratic regimes’ grip on power. Collective nostalgia can increase ingroup cohesion (Wildschut et al. 2014) and encourage resentment towards outgroups (Wohl, Stefniak, and Smeekes 2020). Promoting a narrative about the ingroup’s history as once being “great,” homogeneous, and strong (along with promises of a restoration of these features) certainly appeals to collective narcissists.

The role of national history in a narcissistic craving for recognition has also been analyzed in research on beliefs in conspiracy theories, which see secret plots by powerful actors as the causes of significant social and political events (Douglas et al., 2019). Cichocka and colleagues (2016) examined the context of commemorations of the fall of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. They found that Polish national narcissists perceived the fact that the Berlin Wall is a more renowned symbol of the fall of Communism than the Polish free elections as a result of conspiratorial actions by other nations. These findings suggest that national narcissism is linked not only to distortions in collective memory or biased information processing, but also a tendency to search for potential enemies that could be blamed for the lack of ingroup recognition. The distrust typical of collective narcissism can spiral into conspiracism, where enemies are identified both within and outside of the country (Moore 2018).

Indeed, previous research showed that collective narcissism is a robust predictor of beliefs in a variety of conspiracy theories (Cichocka et al. 2016; Marchlewskas, Cichocka, et al. 2019) as well as a willingness to share such theories online (Sternisko et al. 2021). In the US, national narcissism was related to beliefs in foreign governments engaging in conspiracies (Cichocka et al. 2016; see also van Prooijen and Song 2020) and to a general predisposition towards seeing conspiracies in politics (Golec de Zavala and Federico 2018). Similarly, in China, it predicted a belief that US institutions and companies were conspiring against Chinese interests (van Prooijen and Song 2020). In the Polish context, national narcissism was linked to belief in a Jewish conspiracy (Golec de Zavala and Cichocka 2012) or conspiracy theories surrounding the Smoleńsk plane crash (Cichocka et al. 2016). Similarly, Catholic collective narcissism was found to positively predict gender conspiracy beliefs. According to gender conspiracy theory,
scientists and activists who emphasize that gender is not only a biological phenomenon but also a psychological one, together with feminists and the LGBTQ+ movement, represent forces that secretly promote an ideology designed to harm traditional values and social arrangements (Marchlewska, Cichocka, et al. 2019).

For those scoring high in collective narcissism, conspiracy theories might serve as an explanation for group misfortunes. In fact, collective narcissism has been linked to feelings of collective victimhood (Skarżynska and Przybyła 2015), which often feature in illiberal identity narratives (Reicher and Ulusahin 2020). A victimhood-based identity entails the conviction that the ingroup has been treated unfairly and that it has suffered from major atrocities throughout history, the likes of which other groups have not had to endure (Noor et al. 2012). Such feelings of martyrdom can coincide with a rejection of the suffering of other groups. For example, in Poland, victimhood-based identity is interwoven with the sentiment that Jews do not deserve unique status as victims of the Holocaust and that the suffering of Poles during World War II should be stressed to a greater extent (Bilewicz and Stefaniak 2013). Similarly, the narcissistic belief that one’s own group is uniquely victimized by the outside world can facilitate resentment and conspiracy beliefs about outsiders (Golec de Zavala and Cichocka 2012; Cichocka et al. 2016).

All of these examples illustrate how a narcissistic identity can draw people to conspiracy theories which may serve as an explanation for an insufficient recognition of one’s ingroup. Furthermore, adopting and disseminating conspiracy beliefs by people high in collective narcissism may be another approach to draw attention to the group as the one knowing the truth behind major world events or political reality (see Lantian et al. 2017).

The Need for Recognition Translated to Support for Public Policies

The collective narcissists’ striving for the validation of an ingroup image in the eyes of others may result in a readiness to support policies that may eventually turn against their compatriots – undermining their health, well-being, or by renouncing the benefits which are available to them (Cichocka 2016; Cichocka and Cislak 2020). Collective narcissists emphasize their independence from experts (e.g. scientists or pharmaceutical companies) to reinforce the ingroup image as strong, powerful, and not gullible (Cislak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018; Cislak, Marchlewska, et al. 2020). This means that collective narcissism can be associated with anti-science attitudes. In the public health domain, collective narcissism was found to be a strong predictor of support for a voluntary vaccination policy (vs. a mandatory one), and this effect was driven by a conviction that pharmaceutical companies, scientists, or governments conspire to cover up the risks associated with vaccines (Cislak, Marchlewska, et al. 2020). Similarly, collective narcissism was a predictor of belief in conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic (Gór ska, Marchlewska, et al. 2021; Sternisko et al. 2021).

Although health-related conspiracy theories may well be motivated by the need to protect ingroup members from malevolent actors, conspiracy beliefs may eventually undermine public health in the collective narcissists’ own country (Jolley and Douglas 2014). There is evidence that collective narcissism predicts a readiness to sacrifice one’s own ingroup members if this helps to promote a strong ingroup image. For example, some preliminary evidence coming from studies conducted in the US in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that collective narcissism predicted a willingness to reduce testing for COVID-19 in order for the country’s case numbers to look better compared to other countries. The same line of research found collective narcissism to positively predict a willingness to hasten the country’s
development of a COVID-19 vaccine, even at the expense of its safety and effectiveness, in order to beat other countries (Gronfeldt et al. 2021).

Furthermore, research conducted predominantly in the organizational context suggests that collective narcissism is linked to a willingness to exploit ingroup members for personal gain (Cichocka, Cislak, et al. 2021). Parallel findings stem from research examining environmental attitudes. Collective narcissists take an exploitative view of national natural resources. In a series of studies conducted in Poland, collective narcissism predicted lower support for introducing pro-environmental policies (Cislak, Cichocka, et al. 2021) but higher support for anti-environmental policies, such as providing governmental subsidy for the coal industry or logging a unique, protected national forest (Cislak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018). The policy support was at least partially driven by the need to take decisions independently from the international community. Similar stances are visible in other contexts – for example, the Brazilian President Bolsonaro’s claimed that “the Amazon is ours” as he called for more exploitation of the ecologically important rainforest (Phillips 2019). Implementing anti-environmental policies may not only undermine national heritage, but also translate to a deterioration of citizens’ well-being and health (Calderón-Garcidueñas et al. 2008; European Environment Agency 2016). Overall, prioritizing ingroup image over concern for civil liberties, democracy, and citizens’ well-being has implications for the decisions made by voters.

**The Need for Recognition and Vote Choice**

Illegitimate political leaders and parties offer great visions of a nation for those who crave recognition. They promote commitment to a group that needs acknowledgment as the only legitimate representation of “the people” (Müller 2016) and build their positions by priming feelings of injustice, resentment towards outgroups (e.g. immigrants in the UK and US, sexual minority groups in Poland), and anti-elitism (Marchlewsva et al. 2018). In other words, illegitimate populists seek to convince the public that there is a serious problem caused by its alleged enemies. They then provide a solution as to how they can deal with this issue, usually resorting to outgroup hostility. Indeed, a series of studies conducted in different political contexts demonstrated that national narcissism was positively linked to support for populist leaders and parties. For example, it predicted support for Donald Trump in the US (Federico and Golec de Zavala 2018; Marchlewsva et al. 2018), Law and Justice in Poland (Marchlewsva et al. 2018), and Fidesz in Hungary (Forgas and Lantos 2019).

A defining feature of many of the world’s illegitimate leaders and movements that have now risen to power is an opposition to international institutions and a return to traditional notions of national sovereignty. In his 2019 address to the United Nations’ General Assembly, President Trump made the remark that “The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots.” (The White House 2019). He is not alone in this stance. Aside from Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization, there is the United Kingdom’s choice to leave the European Union and a rising Euroscepticism in Poland and Hungary. As we discussed in the introduction, collective narcissism is associated with support for leaving supranational organizations such as the European Union, and thus renouncing the political and financial benefits that are available to the ingroup members. For example, collective narcissism was not only predictive of voting for Leave in the Brexit referendum (Golec de Zavala, Guerra, and Simão 2017; Marchlewsva et al. 2018) but also with a readiness to vote Leave in a potential “Polexit” referendum (Cislak, Pyrzyczak, et al. 2020). Together, these findings suggest that collective narcissism may be a risk factor in terms of making political
choices and shaping readiness to support the illiberal policies that may turn against the citizens (including those who support these policies).

**The Group-based Need for Dominance and Illiberal Politics: Social Dominance Orientation at Work**

**From Recognition to Superiority: The Need for Dominance**

The need to gain recognition can only too easily turn into the need to establish dominance and superiority over other countries. This can further erode the liberal democratic order. As we argued in the introduction, the group-based need for dominance can be captured by social dominance orientation — a preference for the maintenance or enhancement of a hierarchy between social groups (Pratto et al. 1994). Social dominance orientation is thought to stem from low agreeableness and tough-mindedness which contribute to a general conviction that the “social world is a competitive jungle characterized by a ruthless, amoral struggle for resources and power in which might is right and winning everything” (Duckitt et al. 2002, 92). Ho and colleagues (2015) differentiate two subdimensions of social dominance orientation: 1) a dominance dimension which constitutes support for more forceful methods to subordinate other groups (such as old-fashioned racism); and 2) an anti-egalitarian dimension characterized by support for more covert, subtle hierarchy-enhancing ideologies and policies aimed at maintaining intergroup inequality. For the sake of simplicity, we discuss social dominance orientation as a single dimension in this chapter.

Nationalism is perhaps one of the most prominent political manifestations of social dominance in politics (Pratto et al. 1994). Nationalism can be described as a belief in national superiority and a longing for dominance over other nations (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). Social dominance orientation and nationalism are not synonymous — rather, nationalism can be considered as one of the key legitimizing myths that social dominators use to justify inequality and hierarchy (Pratto et al. 1994).

**The Need for Dominance Expressed as Political Intolerance**

The need for national dominance affects politics both home and abroad. In international relations, it fuels support for wars, military spending (Pratto, Stallworth, and Conway-Lanz 1998), and nuclear weapons (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). Social dominators even blatantly dehumanize others, meaning that they deny outgroups the most basic identity of being human (Kteily et al. 2015). In fact, dehumanization may be an important mediator of the relationship between social dominance orientation and prejudice (Trounson, Critchley, and Pfeifer 2015).

Social dominance orientation and nationalism are also both predictive of support for stricter immigration policies (Mummendey, Klink, and Brown 2001; Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Pehrson, Brown, and Zagafka 2009) — even in countries that one does not live in (Craig and Richeson 2014). Much of the anti-immigrant, right-wing rhetoric in Western politics pertains to the idea that immigrants should adjust to their new country. Such rhetoric appeals to people scoring high in right-wing authoritarianism as they stress obedience, submission to ingroup norms, and social conformity (Altemeyer 1998). However, this is not the case for social dominators (Thomsen, Green, and Sidanius 2008). Instead, social dominance orientation predicts a willingness to persecute immigrants who do assimilate to the dominant culture as assimilation blurs the boundaries between the natives and the immigrants (Thomsen, Green, and Sidanius 2008; Guimond et al. 2010).
Social dominators’ derogation of others is even apparent in their humour. They find jokes about low-status groups (e.g., Mexicans in the US), funnier than do individuals who are low on social dominance orientation (Hodson, Rush, and MacInnis 2010). There is, however, more to social dominance than bad humour. Hate speech has long been a problem in political discourse in the West. Interestingly, one study suggested that while both social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism predicted prejudice, only social dominance orientation predicted the acceptance of hate speech against minorities (Bilewicz et al. 2017). In fact, right-wing authoritarianism was positively related to support of a prohibition of hate speech, to the extent that it violates societal norms. This somewhat surprising finding may neatly underline the different nature of social dominance and right-wing authoritarianism. Social dominators may be more willing than authoritarians to break societal norms to further their illiberal agenda (Bilewicz et al. 2017). This tendency may be on the rise now that extremist groups are becoming more mainstream and enjoying more influence (Hartzell 2018). The demonstrations of White supremacists in the US seem to be becoming more openly anti-Semitic or anti-Black than they have been in decades, exemplified in events such as the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in 2017 (Atkinson 2018).

Social dominance is, thus, inconsistent with the democratic ideal in which every citizen has a voice and human rights are respected. For example, social dominance orientation predicts lower support for democracy in general (Marchlewksa, Castellanos, et al. 2019) and less support for civil rights (Pratto et al. 1994). Social dominance orientation is also related to lower political tolerance, especially towards groups that have political objectives related to making society more equal (Crawford and Pilanski 2014). For example, in the context of the racial unrest in the US in 2020, social dominance orientation predicted justification of police brutality against black people and resistance to the Black Lives Matter movement (Rudman and Saud 2020). Social dominators are also prejudiced against groups that are considered of low status but do not threaten the system, such as the poor or physically disabled (Duckitt 2006; Asbrock, Sibley, and Duckitt 2010).

The need to show dominance over other groups also translates into a lower concern for human rights and civil liberties, likely due to the competitive world beliefs that are characteristic of a social dominance orientation (Crowson 2009). Indeed, social dominance orientation correlates negatively with the endorsement of human rights but positively with their restriction (Cohrs et al. 2007), especially during times of war (Crowson, Debacker, and Thoma 2006; see also McFarland and Mathews 2005). Similarly to collective narcissism, social dominance orientation also predicts support for surveillance measures at home (Cohrs et al. 2005; also Feldstein 2021).

### The Need for Dominance and the Susceptibility to, and Spread of, Misinformation

While we know dominance motives are linked to intolerance and the acceptance and spread of hateful messages (Bilewicz et al. 2017), less is known about their links to the processing and spreading of misinformation. Compared to the need for group-based recognition, the need for dominance may differ in the extent to which it motivates belief in misinformation and a tendency to spread conspiracies. Social dominance orientation does not necessarily entail the mindset that the ingroup is underappreciated in intergroup relations (see e.g. Golec de Zavala 2009; Cichocka et al. 2016), likely making social dominators less interested in conspiracy theories about outgroups than collective narcissists.

Still, social dominance orientation does correlate to some extent with conspiracy mentality (Green and Douglas 2018) – a general propensity to believe in conspiracy theories (Goertzel
The difference between social dominators and most conspiracy theorists is, however, that unlike the latter, social dominators respect powerful groups and think of them as less threatening than low-status groups (Imhoff and Bruder 2014). Social dominance orientation is therefore more strongly correlated with belief in pro-establishment conspiracies (for example, that immigration is a conspiracy to change society) rather than anti-establishment conspiracies (such as believing that the government is secretly working on destroying individual freedom; Wood and Gray 2019). Importantly, social dominance orientation has also been linked to acceptance of politicians deliberately spreading false information (De keersmaecker and Roets 2019) and willingness to personally spread such information (Lobato et al. 2020). While these findings seem to echo research on political ideology and the spread of conspiracies and misinformation (Freelon, Marwick, and Kreiss 2020), more research is needed on how group-based dominance influences online mobilization via misinformation and conspiracy theories.

The Need for Dominance Translated to Support for Public Policies

Social dominators oppose any efforts to make society more equal (Pratto, Stallworth, and Conway-Lanz 1998). This includes policies such as affirmative action, that is, policies aimed at reducing discrimination and giving opportunity to members of disadvantage groups that have historically been discriminated against (Haley and Sidanius 2006). Affirmative action can be considered controversial, and certain “principled objections” can be made against it (such as individual merit), but studies still suggest that these objections are mediated by dominance motives (Federico and Sidanius 2002). Social dominance orientation is also associated with a preference towards harsh punishment for criminals, including the death penalty and torture (Sidanius et al. 2006), instead of a more lenient, rehabilitative approach (Capps 2002). This can be illustrated with the example of the War on Drugs in the US. Disproportionate incarceration of racial minorities, such as Blacks and Hispanics for drug offenses compared to Whites (Golub, Johnson, and Dunlap 2007) as well as police methods, such as racial profiling (Welch 2007) and stop-and-search (Bowling and Phillips 2007), can ultimately be seen as hierarchy-enhancing actions perpetrated by the White majority.

Social dominance orientation was originally conceptualized as one’s degree of preference for inequality among social groups (Pratto et al. 1994), and this chapter’s focus is on dominance as a group-phenomenon. However, research shows that people high in social dominance orientation are also generally dominant, disagreeable, and aggressive towards other individuals (Lippa and Arad 1999) and desire status, prestige, and power (Pratto et al. 1997). Subsequently, when put in a leadership role, social dominators tend to be exploitative and unsympathetic to subordinates. In a study by Son Hing and colleagues (2007), socially dominant leaders supported maximizing the profit of their organization over ethical concerns. For example, they supported exporting toxic waste to less developed nations, marketing unsafe drugs, and failed to support victims of sexual abuse in order not to alienate business supervisors. Social dominance orientation and collective narcissism therefore overlap in their exploitative approach towards fellow ingroup members (Cichocka, Cislak, et al. 2021), as well as towards the natural environment (Cislak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018). This overlap is important in light of the current environmental crisis, which leaders preoccupied with image or dominance fail to address.

Social dominance orientation, more specifically, does not only pertain to social relations between humans, but also extends to people’s attitudes towards nature (Milfont et al. 2013). It is a negative predictor of environmentalism (Milfont et al. 2017) and a positive predictor of support for unsustainable exploitation of the environment (Milfont and Sibley 2014). Furthermore, social dominators tend to reject that climate change is real and caused by humans
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(Milfont et al. 2013) and are less likely to engage in behaviours in their private life aimed at environmental protection (Milfont et al. 2017). This mirrors the aforementioned results that have been obtained for collective narcissism in terms of unsustainable exploitation and the disregard of how environmental problems affect the nation (Cislak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018).

Indeed, both group-based needs for dominance and recognition can result in actions and support for policies that can be harmful for the groups that social dominators and collective narcissists claim to cherish so greatly. Keeping in mind that both social dominators (Duckitt and Sibley 2010) and collective narcissists (Golec de Zavala et al. 2016; Cichocka and Cislak 2020) tend to exhibit nationalism, an intuitive assumption to make would be that these highly devoted members should favour their ingroup and prioritize its welfare. For example, given social dominators’ exploitative attitudes toward environmental resources, the profiteering of the environment should, at least in the short term, lead to the economic benefit of their countries as a whole. As the cake gets bigger, everyone in the dominant group gets a bigger slice. However, that appears not to be the case. Instead, social dominators want to have the cake and eat it too. Social dominators are less communal, altruistic, and less interdependent on others (Pratto et al. 1994), making them far from ideal team members. This “lone-wolf” mentality has consequences as to how they behave within their groups.

The callous nature of group-based dominance has been revealed in economic games, which measure actual behaviour (rather than attitudes). In a typical game, participants are asked to distribute money and tokens between other individuals or groups. In one study by Sidanius and colleagues (2007), participants high in social dominance orientation chose to maximize the difference between groups in allocating resources: they were willing to sacrifice their own group’s absolute interests as long as they received more money than an outgroup (despite the fact that they would have made more money out of an equal allocation). A study by Halali and colleagues (2018) revealed that social dominance orientation might also be linked to individual self-interest. Participants were given the choice to allocate tokens to themselves, fellow compatriots, or a group that included both members of their own and other national groups. As was to be expected, social dominance orientation correlated negatively with sharing the tokens with other groups, but it was unrelated to sharing with ingroup members – instead, social dominators allocated the tokens to themselves. On the intergroup level, social dominators desire hierarchy with their group on top, but in relations to other individuals – even members of their own group – they will behave selfishly and ruthlessly.

The Need for Dominance and Vote Choice

Social dominance orientation seems to influence both vote choice in domestic politics and attitudes about international relations and cooperation between countries. Similarly to national narcissism, both social dominance orientation (Peitz, Dhont, and Seyd 2018) and nationalism (Zmigrod, Rentfrow, and Robbins 2018) evoke suspicion of supranationalism and a support for exclusionary and isolationist attitudes. Social dominance orientation has been found to predict extreme right-wing voting, over and above authoritarianism (Van Hiel and Mervielde 2002). Furthermore, in 2016, Trump voters were unique in their desire to dominate outgroups in an aggressive manner while not necessarily scoring higher on other traditional conservative right-wing values, such as authoritarian submission or conventionalism (Womick et al. 2019). While Trump certainly tried to appeal to the religious right and other traditional conservative groups, his rhetoric and policies attracted social dominators and extremist groups, for example the so-called “alternative right” or “alt-right.”
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The alt-right in the US is a relatively new political phenomenon, but its influence has been elevated by Trump’s rise (Cook 2016). It can be described as a loosely aligned group of pro-White and reactionary far-right wing supporters whose main goal is to increase pro-White racial consciousness (Hartzell 2018). Psychological research suggests that one of the main characteristics of alt-right supporters is a high need for group-based dominance, willingness to dehumanize minorities, and sexism (Forscher and Kteily 2020). However, interestingly, alt-right supporters do not seem to exhibit the anti-establishment attitudes the media often portrays them as having. Racism seems to be their main driver, but as a dominant group in society, consisting mostly of White males, they seem to be content with their current economic situation and feel that the government is not corrupt. This, yet again, underlines how individuals with a high need for group-based dominance may differ from other supporters of far-right or illiberal leaders and movements.

The Interplay Between Needs for Recognition and Dominance

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that both the need for recognition – characteristic of collective narcissism – and the need for dominance – associated with social dominance orientation and nationalism – fuel prejudice and hostility within and between groups. However, feelings such as pride and attachment to one’s country (more typically understood as patriotism), are associated with greater tolerance and support for democracy (Wagner et al. 2012; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, and Bilewicz 2013; Cichocka 2016; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Furman, et al. 2021). A strong sense of national identity in and of itself is therefore not inherently illiberal, but national identity that stems from a need for recognition and dominance can be.

Although the needs for recognition and dominance tend to be associated with similar outcomes, there are subtle differences in how they manifest. Collective narcissism and social dominance orientation both assume a positive evaluation of the ingroup and a belief in its greatness, and therefore they are correlated to a moderate degree (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009). They do, however, differentially predict prejudice: the group-based need for recognition fuels prejudice against those who do not appreciate the ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016), while the group-based need for dominance fuels prejudice against inferior groups (Duckitt 2006). It is even possible to imagine collective narcissism manifesting itself as pro-egalitarian in countries or political groups with egalitarian goals (although even in this case, it might be associated with support for radical political activism, Panayiotou 2020). Furthermore, collective narcissism correlates more strongly with sensitivity to threats and insults than social dominance orientation (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009). Social dominators also seem not to respond to criticism with retaliatory hostility, like collective narcissists do (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, and Iskra-Golec 2013).

Yet, despite their different outcomes, needs for recognition and dominance can overlap. The interplay between the two group-based needs is well illustrated in the discussion on climate change, which is perhaps the most defining issue of our era. As we alluded to earlier, social dominance orientation and collective narcissism may both be important in the environmental policies that illiberal leaders have enforced: exploitation of the natural environment can be utilized to signal both dominance over nature and the nation’s sovereign right to exploit it, despite criticism from abroad. Dominant leaders, like President Bolsonaro of Brazil, use legitimizing myths to justify human exploitation of nature, such as in the case of the destruction of the Amazon rainforest (see Milfont et al. 2013). According to these myths, all natural phenomena are inherently there to be subjugated by humans and should be used to enhance humankind’s welfare in pursuit of its objectives (see also Dhont and Hodson 2014). Bolsonaro’s policies
towards the exploitation of the Amazon can also be interpreted as an assertion of independence from outsiders: the Amazon is ours and therefore we can treat it as we please (see also Cisulak, Wojcik, and Cichocka 2018). A narrative motivated by group-based needs for recognition and dominance can therefore lead to a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle of exploitation in which nature is subjugated not merely for the purpose of utilizing its resources, but to send a message to the world that this country will not be controlled.

Conclusion

The mixture of cravings for both recognition and dominance can manifest itself in the illiberal politics that we experience today. The Trump presidency and the MAGA movement present a modern example of how calls for recognition and dominance intertwine. The movement began as a call for recognition and a restoration of America’s positive image by “[Making] America Great Again.” After the movement ascended to power and in the early years of Trump’s presidency, its defensiveness often resulted in retaliatory hostility towards those deemed to have offended the US or enemies within the nation, such as left-wingers and liberals. As Trump struggled to maintain his power, he and his followers became increasingly dominant. In the first presidential debate for the 2020 election, Trump refused to condemn White-supremacists and instead sent them a message to “stand back and stand by” (Nix 2020), insinuating that their time might soon come if his vision of America did not receive sufficient recognition in the elections. This rhetoric culminated in the deadly siege of the US Capitol in January 2021. Needs for recognition can translate into dominance, but so far research has only empirically examined these dynamics to a limited extent. We hope that future studies will examine their trajectories in the development of illiberal politics more closely.

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References


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