

FROM THREAT TO ACTION:

THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM IN

BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO IMMIGRATION THREAT

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Theoretical Framework

Although concerns about immigration are widespread across many Western democracies, the Italian case represents a particularly interesting context for examining their psychological consequences (Barone et al., 2016). Over the last three decades, Italy has undergone a rapid demographic transformation, turning into one of the main destinations for migrants in Southern Europe (Colucci, 2020). The salience of immigration is reflected not only in public opinion but also in the strategic positioning of political actors, particularly on the populist right, who have frequently framed immigration in terms of national vulnerability (Barone et al., 2016; Ambrosini, 2025).

According to Intergroup Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), perceived threats can be distinguished into realistic threats, which concern material resources and physical safety, and symbolic threats, which target the ingroup’s values, traditions, and cultural identity. Immigration is often framed by right-wing parties as simultaneously threatening both domains, by increasing competition for resources and challenging national values (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017).

Research suggests that both realistic and symbolic threats predict increases in collective narcissism (Guerra et al., 2022), defined as a belief in the exaggerated greatness of one’s ingroup (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Collective narcissism has traditionally been linked to antagonistic intergroup outcomes, including hostility, retaliation, and opposition to outgroups perceived as threatening (Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; Guerra et al., 2022). At the same time, it is generally negatively associated with solidarity-based collective action, indicating lower willingness to support disadvantaged outgroups (Górska et al., 2020).

From this perspective, individuals may endorse collective narcissism in response to perceived threat, as a way to reaffirm and protect their identity. This process may in turn motivate different forms of collective action and helping behaviors.

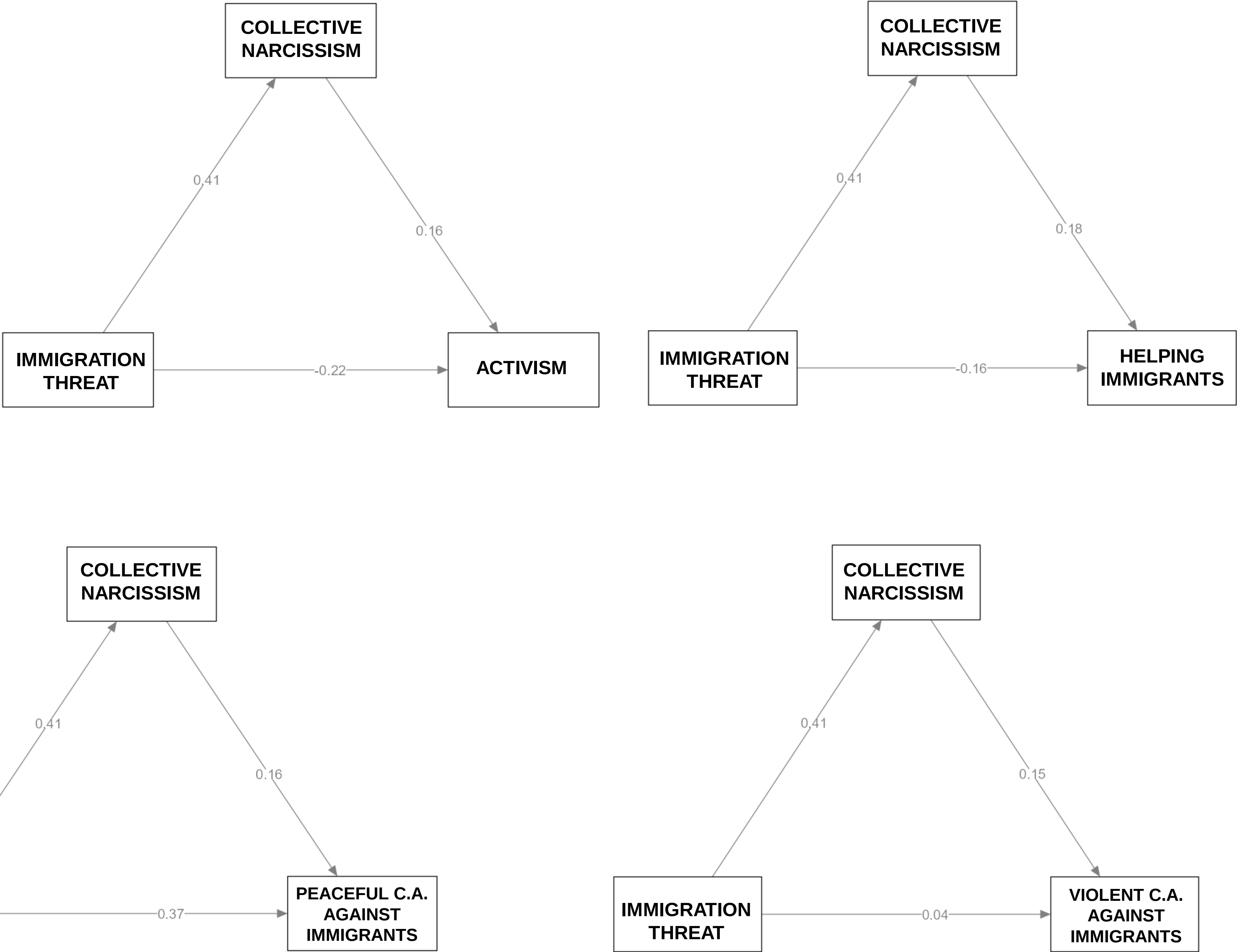
Results

Significant indirect effects were observed for:

- Activism intentions (B = 0.067, p = .016)
- Intention to help Italians (B = 0.076, p < .001)
- Violent collective actions in favor of immigrants (B = 0.047, p = .028)
- Peaceful collective actions against immigrants (B = 0.065, p = .031)
- Violent collective actions against immigrants (B = 0.064, p = .003).

No significant indirect effects emerged for:

- Radicalization intentions (B = 0.058, p = .067),
- Peaceful collective actions in favor of immigrants (B = 0.012, p = .673)
- Intention to help immigrants (B = 0.029, p = .221).



Discussion and Conclusions

Consistent with Intergroup Threat Theory, perceived immigration threat positively predicted collective narcissism. In turn, collective narcissism was associated with a broad range of behavioral intentions, including activism, helping fellow Italians, and different forms of collective action.

Interestingly, the pattern of results suggests that collective narcissism is not limited to intergroup hostility: it was positively associated with ingroup-oriented helping intentions, indicating a tendency toward protective or compensatory behaviors directed at the ingroup.

At the same time, collective narcissism also predicted some forms of collective action directed against immigrants, as well as, unexpectedly, violent collective action in favor of immigrants. Taken together, these findings suggest that collective narcissism may increase general motivational engagement in collective action under conditions of perceived threat, rather than exclusively shaping the direction (pro- vs. anti-outgroup) of such behaviors.

Overall, the results point to collective narcissism as a threat-sensitive mechanism that amplifies collective mobilization, shaping both ingroup protection and participation in intergroup conflict in complex and context-dependent ways.

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The Present Study

We hypothesized that collective narcissism would mediate the relationship between perceived immigration threat and a broad range of related behavioral intentions.

Measures:

- Collective narcissism
- Perceived threat associated with the arrival of immigrants
- Activism
- Radicalization
- Helping ingroup and outgroup members
- Participation in peaceful or violent collective action either supporting or opposing immigrants
- Political orientation (M = 3.904, SD = 1.614)

Data collected on October 2025

313 Italian participants
(M = 53.33, SD = 13.28)