

National narcissists likely to support greenwashing campaigns to improve nation's image

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New research by the University of Kent and the SWPS University has discovered that national narcissists are more likely to support

greenwashing (misleading information about the environmental benefits of a product, a company or a policy) in order to improve their nation's public image.

Findings show that while national narcissists are not likely to support genuine pro-environmental campaigns, they are ready to support political greenwashing campaigns. In business greenwashing decreases consumers' trust and undermines both the image and the profits of the companies that use this strategy. In the realms of politics, it may garner support from those whose strong national attachment is rooted in feelings of underappreciation and belief in their nation's unrecognized greatness.

The study, published by the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, highlights the importance of group-based underpinnings of anti-environmental attitudes. It shows that nation-based defensiveness is a significant barrier in introducing pro-environmental policies, as it is associated with the preoccupation of national image more than with taking actual pro-environmental action. National [narcissism](#), characterized by a strong need to validate a grandiose ingroup image, is related to support for pretending to be green just to impress others. Thereby, those high in national narcissism support creating pro-environmental appearances (although only to the extent they believe it is a low-cost strategy).

The team of psychologists led by Dr. Aleksandra Cislak (SWPS University) and Dr. Aleksandra Cichocka (Kent) hypothesized that although national narcissists might not support pro-environmental actions, they would support promoting a pro-environmental image of their nation. In five studies, psychologists demonstrated that individuals high in national narcissism were less likely to support actual pro-environmental actions (Studies 2-5), but more likely to support greenwashing campaigns (Studies 1-3, 5), although not when

greenwashing would involve financial costs incurred by the ingroup (Study 4). In Study 5, national narcissism predicted support for greenwashing as a political strategy. This was related to the preference for green image enhancement over green actions (controlling for pro-environmental attitudes and individual narcissism). Psychologists did not observe similar effects for national identification or right-wing political ideology.

Lead author, Dr. Aleksandra Cislak from the Center for Research on Social Relations at SWPS University said: "Greenwashing is appealing to those high in national narcissism, as it allows them to maintain external recognition while at the same time refrain from pro-environmental actions. In this, support for greenwashing, while rejecting genuinely green actions, is similar to anti-science attitudes such as vaccination hesitancy. For those high in national narcissism, it feels powerful to reject or undermine policies recommended by other groups, especially the elite."

Dr. Aleksandra Cichocka, a co-author of the research paper and a reader in political psychology at the University of Kent's School of Psychology, added: "When it comes to green deeds that could actually help protect the environment, those with a narcissistic view of their nation may be reluctant to offer support, especially when those actions are costly or seen as being imposed by other countries."

More information: Aleksandra Cislak et al, Words not deeds: National narcissism, national identification, and support for greenwashing versus genuine proenvironmental campaigns, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2021.101576](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2021.101576)

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