

# What does narcissism have to do with ecology?

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Social identification, i.e., the extent to which an individual believes that a group is of some importance to their identity, may take two basic forms, explains Dr. Adrian Wójcik. Credit: Andrzej Romanski/NCU

A group of researchers from the Nicolaus Copernicus University, the

SWPS University in Warsaw, and the University of Waikato in New Zealand have for some time been scientifically looking at the relationship between different types of identifications with a group and attitudes towards, for example, science, vaccines and workplace behavior.

This time they were interested in the attitudes toward climate change mitigation policies, the attitudes toward pro-environmental measures and [alternative energy sources](#). The researchers wondered whether the attitudes toward these issues are related to the forms of national identity.

They have just published the results of their extensive research in the article "Secure and defensive forms of national identity and [public support](#) for climate policies," in the journal *PLOS Climate*.

## Security and defensiveness

Social identification, i.e., the extent to which an individual believes that a group is of some importance to their identity, may take two basic forms.

"The first one is a more secure form, when I feel I am a member of a particular group and I feel that I have a lot in common with the other members of the group. They are important to me and I associate positive emotions with them. The second, the so-called more defensive one, exemplified by collective narcissism, is largely based on comparing myself with other groups. It is a desire for my group to have some special status among others. This attitude is also associated with prejudice against foreign groups, which is not observed in the more secure form of identity," explains Dr. Adrian Wójcik from the Department of Social and Environmental Psychology at the NCU Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, one of the co-authors of the article and a member of the research group.

"Individuals who are more committed to a defensive form of identity are particularly concerned with maintaining a positive image of their own group. Image is crucial here. Its defense may even be more important than the actual well-being of such a group. We presumed that, with regard to environmental protection, it would not be important what is actually done for the environment, but how the group is portrayed, how it is seen by others," says Wójcik.

Researchers conducted two large survey studies in Poland. In total, more than a thousand people, representative of age, gender and education, took part. Among other things, they measured national narcissism, national identification and support for [climate policies](#) related to the introduction of the European Green Deal. The researchers were also interested in who was more willing to invest in alternative energy sources.

## **Climate narcissism**

The first study showed that people with a so-called more secure identity were more friendly towards pro-environmental solutions. Among national narcissists, this support was significantly lower—in this group, there was a more pronounced acceptance of energy derived from fossil fuels.

It is interesting to note that the researchers did not find a link between support for nuclear energy and forms of national identification, but only a weak relationship with right-wing political views. This shows that the topic of nuclear energy is not politicized in our country.

In the second study, support for pro-environmental policies was shown to be dependent on the amount of funding allocated to enhance the country's green image. The willingness of participants to support image enhancement—in the case of those with higher levels of national

narcissism—could be attributed to their desire for increased [self-esteem](#). At the same time, those with higher levels of secure national identification sought increased funding for real pro-environmental measures.

"For national narcissists, it is not really important what is actually done for the environment. What is more important is how they are portrayed. Hence the greater support for spending finances not on actual pro-environmental measures, but on improving the country's ecological image," explains Wójcik.

"In addition, people who narcissistically identify themselves with their own group are able to promote all sorts of anti-environmental policies just to emphasize the group's right to self-determination and sovereignty," the NCU researcher adds.

An example is the attitude towards the use of coal in the domestic energy sector. In this sector a change to alternative sources can be seen as externally imposed, and therefore, harming the sense of community. Sticking to tradition, in this case, is a sign of not giving in to pressure from external institutions.

## **Convincing the unconvinced**

"The findings also have practical implications regarding the role of psychological needs in shaping support for the introduction of public policies aimed at climate neutrality," explains Dr. Aleksandra Cisiak-Wójcik, SWPS University professor and head of the study.

"It shows how political support can be mobilized among those who would not support such policies for the sole purpose of mitigating global climate change. Its successful implementation depends on showing how it meets the needs of both groups."

**More information:** Aleksandra Cislak et al, Secure and defensive forms of national identity and public support for climate policies, *PLOS Climate* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pclm.0000146](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000146)

Provided by Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun

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