Politics and Governance
2025 • Volume 13 • Article 10025
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.10025

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Open Access Journal

Collective Narcissism, Left- and Right-Wing Authoritarianisms, and Justification of War

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Submitted: 31 January 2025 **Accepted:** 25 June 2025 **Published:** 27 August 2025

Issue: This article is part of the issue "The Moral and Political Legitimations of War and the Complex Dynamics of Peace Negotiation Processes" edited by Alexander Yendell (Research Institute Social Cohesion, Section Leipzig) and Oliver Hidalgo (University of Passau), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i391

Abstract

Previous studies found positive relationships between collective narcissism, right-wing authoritarianism, and acceptance of wars; however, they overlooked how these wars are seen as justified. In our study (N = 448, Polish community sample), we used a new tool to measure beliefs justifying war, identifying three dimensions: just war (with morally restricted views on reasons and means), unrestricted reasons, and unrestricted means. Using correlational, path, and network analyses, we found that left-wing authoritarianism is related to lower acceptance of just war and higher acceptance of unrestricted means, while secure national identification indicates opposite patterns. Contrary to our expectations, communal national narcissism was linked to lower acceptance of just war. Unexpectedly, even though beliefs justifying war reflect moral principles, they did not vary with religious identification or right-wing authoritarianism. This suggests that being attached to people sharing the same religious affiliation does not necessarily imply adherence to the moral principles that underpin that worldview. This study is the first to demonstrate a disconnect between beliefs justifying war and different forms of ingroup attachment.

Keywords

authoritarianism; collective narcissism; just war; morality; national identification; religious identification

1. Introduction

In psychological research, war is often defined as a large-scale, organized, violent intergroup conflict (Lazar, 2017; Watkins, 2020). War is an extreme case of intergroup conflict, which causes immense suffering and breaks moral rules (Lopez & Johnson, 2020; Walzer, 1977). War justification beliefs have been extensively studied (Lopez & Johnson, 2020; Watkins, 2020). Most studies conducted in political psychology examined general attitudes towards war (Bizumic et al., 2013; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Kowalski et al., 2025), investigated attitudes towards specific conflicts, such as the US–Iraq or Russia–Ukraine war, asked about the use of specific means, such as nuclear weapons (G. Brown & Marinthe, 2024; Crowson, 2009; Gulevich & Osin, 2023; McFarland, 2005), or used vignette-based scenarios (Watkins, 2020). Most of these previous studies focus on selected psychological factors, such as personality or political ideology (Watkins, 2020).

In this article, we study how personal traits relate to why and how people justify war (Coates, 2018; Watkins, 2020). We focus on collective narcissism (CN), that is, a strong and blind attachment to the ingroup (Golec de Zavala, 2024), and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and left-wing authoritarianism (LWA), which are characterized by a strong attachment to the ingroup's ideology, aggression toward those with opposite worldview, and sensitivity to threats toward the ingroup (Altemeyer, 1988; Costello et al., 2022). To examine these relationships, we collected samples in Poland, a stable democracy with historical tendencies toward both types of authoritarianism.

We compare these relations across narcissistic and secure identity (SI), following previous studies on accepting war (e.g., Abou-Ismail et al., 2024; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). We focus on national and religious identity because they are essential in explaining intergroup conflicts (Böhm et al., 2020). Lastly, we distinguish between agentic and communal forms of CN because they refer to two main domains of human functioning: efficacy and power (agency) and warmth and morality (communion; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2020). Intergroup conflicts are related both to agentic and communal threats (Stephan et al., 2009), whereas the justification of conflict belongs to only the communal domain (Lazar, 2017; Walzer, 1977). Thus, the distinction between agency and communion seems promising in studying beliefs justifying wars to reveal the specific motivation underlying the link between the type of ingroup identification and acceptance of various views on just war.

2. The Concept of Just War

The concept of "just war" was originally addressed from theological and philosophical perspectives (Lazar, 2017; Moseley, 2011; Walzer, 1977). This concept refers both to reasons for going to war and ways in which it is conducted (Walzer, 1977; Watkins, 2020). Just war is defined by the Christian tradition as one declared for right and noble reasons, fought in a way that avoids unnecessary suffering, especially for civilians, and is fought only when other alternative means appear impossible (Lazar, 2017; Walzer, 1977). Therefore, the concept of just war refers to two general moral principles: "*ius ad bellum*" (i.e., legitimized reasons for waging war) and "*ius in bellum*" (i.e., morally justified ways of waging war), which are reflected in international law regulating international conflicts (Lazar, 2017). Such a definition has influenced how the concept of just war is understood in political psychology. Coates (2018) argued that a stronger justification of the reasons behind war leads to lesser restraint in the means used to carry it out. He further argued that a key dilemma in defining "just war" pertains to justification (i.e., morally unrestricted) versus restraint (i.e., morally restricted) reasons

and means. Therefore, from the moral perspective, the concept of just war can take four possible forms (see Figure 1): just (i.e., accepting selected reasons and selected means), holy (i.e., accepting selected reasons and all means), utilitarian (i.e., accepting all reasons and selected means), and dirty (i.e., accepting all reasons and means). Parenthetically, pacifism does not justify any means or reasons. This classification is aligned with actual wars from history (Parker, 2020). Given that a "holy war" assumes violence for moral reasons, which is characteristic of extremism and radicalization (Schmid, 2016), it is unlikely to be found within stable and democratic societies, such as in Poland. Specifically, in the case of Poland, where we collected our sample, we would expect the level of extremism to be low, as suggested by the results of elections and low levels of terrorism in the country (Trading Economics, 2025).

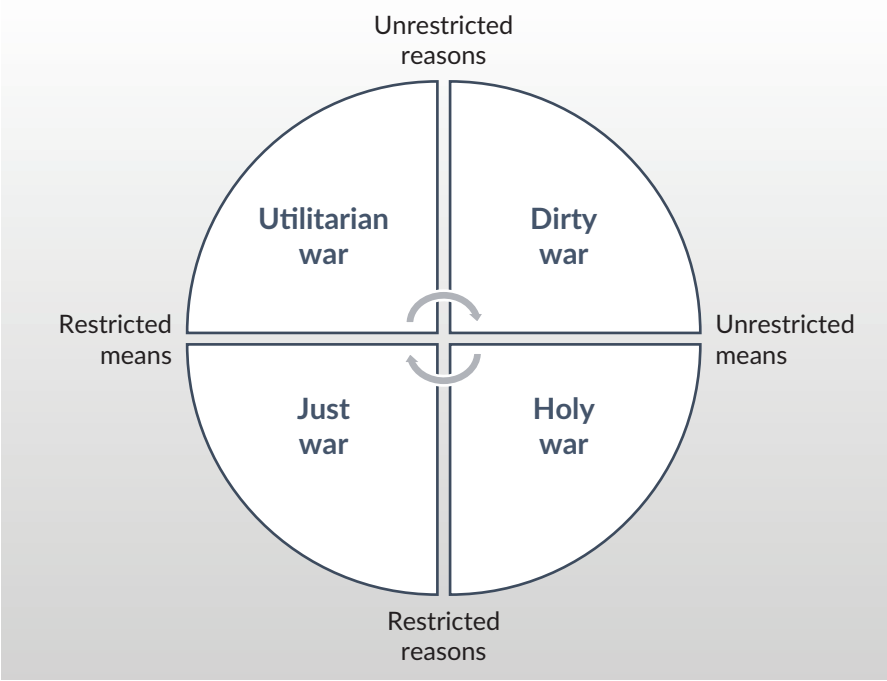

Figure 1. Possible views on just war: Justification of means and reasons. Note: The axes represent the conceptual independence of dimensions.

3. Collective Narcissism and the Views on Just War

In political psychology, the concept of CN was introduced to help explain intergroup conflicts (Golec de Zavala, 2024), including the acceptance of military aggression in intergroup relations (Abou-Ismail et al., 2024; G. Brown & Marinthe, 2024; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021). CN constitutes an emotional investment in the unrealistic belief in the superiority of one's group and grievance for the perceived lack of recognition of their superiority (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Narcissistic ingroup identity can refer to any group important to the self (Golec de Zavala, 2024), including one's nation (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) or religious group (Marchlewska et al., 2019). A sizable literature illustrates primarily adverse effects of CN (i.e., national and religious) on intergroup relations, including prejudice, intergroup violence, and support for populist parties (Golec de Zavala, 2024). Collective narcissists, both attached to their own nation and the group sharing their religious worldview, strongly engage in defending the worldview shared by their ingroup (Golec de Zavala, 2024). Nationalistic ideology

and religious fundamentalism are key factors in the acceptance of intergroup aggression (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005; Doob, 1977; Watkins, 2020), making them crucial in explaining attitudes toward war.

Ingroup identification (both secure and narcissistic) is a crucial factor in explaining intergroup conflict (Stephan et al., 2009). As such, CN (national and religious) is particularly promising in explaining war justification. A strong attachment to the group's interest makes collective narcissists more prepared to accept any actions that support these interests (Bocian et al., 2021); however, little is known about the relationship between CN and more abstract moral judgments (Golec de Zavala, 2024). Therefore, we could expect that CN is positively related to any views supporting the justification of war, while secure identification with one's group should be positively related only to accepting restricted reasons and restricted means of war. Since communal collective narcissists (CCN) are interested in indicating their high moral standards (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021), we expected that the communal forms of CN are related only to a higher acceptance of restricted reasons and means. As long as both national and religious-based ideologies are important in the acceptance of war (Watkins, 2020), it is plausible that we could find a parallel pattern of interrelations across both types of ingroup identifications, in their secure and narcissistic forms.

4. Authoritarianism and the Views of Just War

Beliefs accepting war can be explained by a high level of authoritarianism, understood as a specific political ideology (e.g., Crowson, 2009; Heaven et al., 2006). Most researchers have recognized that authoritarianism is a phenomenon inextricably linked to the far-right ideology, the core of which is traditionalist conservatism. On the other hand, LWA has been called a myth or the "Loch Ness Monster" of political psychology (Altemeyer, 1996). Only a few have attempted to conceptualize and measure LWA (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Conway et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2022). The most fruitful attempt by Costello et al. (2022) has shown LWA as heavily saturated with far-left socio-political progressivism. In that approach, LWA consists of three correlated dimensions: anti-hierarchical aggression, top-down censorship, and anti-conventionalism "that broadly and inexactly reflect authoritarian dominance, authoritarian submission, and morally absolutist and intolerant desires for coercive forms of social organization, respectively" (Costello et al., 2022, p. 38).

The dual-process motivational model (Duckitt & Sibley, 2017) highlights the experience of threat to social order, which deprives people of basic control over their own lives by inducing a sense of danger and uncertainty. In the case of LWA, the evidence for its vulnerability to various forms of threat is much smaller, mainly due to the limited number of studies on this construct. However, Costello et al. (2022), summarizing the similarities and differences between LWA and RWA, placed vulnerability to threat firmly on a similar side for both forms of authoritarianism. They note that LWA systematically predicts neuroticism, suggesting that left-wing authoritarians may be even more sensitive to certain facets of threat and uncertainty than RWA.

Recently, Osborne et al. (2023) have proposed an approach that integrates both constructs. They argue that both RWA and LWA express a dogmatic style of thinking about the social world, submission to strong authorities, and a tendency to punish people who hold different norms and normative beliefs. The submission to authority is accompanied by aggression toward those who violate norms valued by the group, regardless of whether those norms reflect traditional or progressive values. This view is, in fact, very close to the earlier concept of group authoritarianism (Duckitt, 1989; Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005).

Its proponents argue that the very core of authoritarianism is a set of normative but ideology-free attitudes regulating the "correct" intragroup relations. These attitudes include conformity to group norms, uncritical submission to group leaders, and aggression toward ingroup and outgroup members contesting group order.

The essence of authoritarianism, described in the above approach, shows a key reason why both LWA and RWA should likely imply a justification for warfare. Specifically, there is a focus on retaliatory aggression, which stems from sensitivity to threats to group well-being and punitiveness towards "enemies." Thus, RWA and LWA should be related to CN, as blind attachment to one's group makes collective narcissists particularly obsessed with ingroup well-being and sensitive toward threats from outgroups (Golec de Zavala, 2024). At the same time, secure identification does not require adopting an authoritarian worldview, as people with secure ingroup attachment do not experience threat from outgroups (Golec de Zavala, 2024).

At first glance, authoritarians should accept beliefs justifying wars more strongly than non-authoritarians. However, authoritarian ideology is certainly not a source of acceptance of warfare free from moral constraints. On the contrary, authoritarians, being attached to the strict view of social and moral order, should justify only the specific actions in warfare that are defensive and non-expansive (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Therefore, within the theoretical framework of acceptable reasons and means of war (Walzer, 1977; Watkins, 2020), both right-wing and left-wing authoritarians should be inclined to accept only those actions and reasons that are morally justified (restricted), i.e., excluding dirty and utilitarian wars. We believe, however, that potential differences between left-wing and right-wing authoritarians may determine the type of moral premises that underlie the ethical acceptability of specific means of warfare.

Both the right-wing and left-wing authoritarian mindsets generate resources of pro-authoritarian ideology in their own way, but ultimately for similar reasons. People with extreme worldviews believe they are morally right. In general, the stronger one's conviction in their moral superiority is, the less tolerant they are of others' opinions (Goodwin & Darley, 2008, 2012; Haidt, 2012). Moral judgments about what is good or bad are generally absolute and unquestionable. However, the source of the legitimacy of moral norms for people characterized by RWA (far-right traditionalist conservatism) is based on the natural law identified primarily with the will of God and the earthly authorities that embody that law (Altemeyer, 1996). At the same time, the source of the legitimacy of moral norms for people characterized by LWA (far-left socio-political progressivism) is the universalist doctrine of human rights and the fight against manifestations of social injustice (Costello et al., 2022). We believe that because of this fundamental difference in the prerequisites of moral legitimacy, right-wing authoritarians, compared to left-wing authoritarians, may be more likely to accept holy wars (that is, a combination of restricted reasons and unrestricted means), whereas, left-wing authoritarians, compared to right-wing authoritarians, may be much more likely to accept just wars (that is, a combination of restricted reasons and restricted means). Because an authoritarian worldview is motivated by experiencing threat from outgroups, it could explain the link between CN and accepting beliefs justifying wars, but should not explain the analogous link between secure identification and accepting beliefs justifying war.

The link between authoritarianism and CN has been established by numerous studies (for a summary, see Golec de Zavala, 2024). There is rather little known about the extent to which national and religious narcissism could be related to LWA and RWA, yet, given that collective narcissists are sensitive to threats, they are also ready to adopt a worldview protecting and enhancing their preferred perception of reality

(Golec de Zavala, 2024; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). The interplay between national and religious narcissism remains underexplored (Golec de Zavala, 2024; Marchlewska et al., 2019), yet it seems important in the context of justifications of warfare. On the one hand, being strongly attached to one's own nation could result in greater sensitivity to international threats, but it could be positively related to both RWA and LWA. In contrast, being blindly attached to one's religious group could result in a stronger attachment to the religious worldview, which is logically aligned with RWA, as opposed to LWA. Thus, while national and religious narcissists could be authoritarian and accept war as an acceptable resolution of intergroup conflict, there could be a notable difference between these two forms of narcissistic identities.

5. The Current Study

In this article, we explore how selected individual differences relate to beliefs justifying war. CN is particularly relevant to the acceptance of intergroup violence (Golec de Zavala, 2024). Given that intergroup conflicts are driven by a strong attachment to one's group and the fact that most intergroup conflicts are rooted in national and religious issues (Böhm et al., 2020), we focus on religious and national identity—in the form of secure and narcissistic ingroup attachment (Golec de Zavala, 2024)—in relation to the moral justifications of war.

The study is grounded in the agency-communion model of CN (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, et al., 2021; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2024). It offers a distinction between agentic and communal ingroup enhancement, which appears to be particularly relevant for understanding intergroup conflicts and prejudice (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2022). Collective narcissists are prejudiced toward outgroups and willing to accept military interventions (Golec de Zavala, 2024; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021); however, only communal narcissists seem to be sensitive to moral issues, which may shape how their acceptance of specific beliefs justifying war manifests.

Yet, there is little known about a kind of narcissistic identification—religious or national—that is relevant for the acceptance of war. To this end, we examine both agentic (ACN) and communal CCN, in conjunction with national and religious identity in Polish society, which is indirectly exposed to the ongoing war in Ukraine (Nowak et al., 2023). The interplay between religious and national identity is special in Poland, a culturally and religiously homogeneous population, with a strong association between being Polish and being Catholic (Boguszewski et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2019; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, & Sawicki, 2023). Given that collective narcissists accept authoritarian worldviews (which, in turn, is an important risk factor in accepting intergroup prejudice; Golec de Zavala, 2024; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2020; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, & Sawicki, 2023), we focus on both LWA and RWA. Both forms of authoritarianism could be identified in the Polish society (Piotrowski et al., 2023) and could lead to accepting war, albeit only for morally restricted reasons and means. Thus, we aim to test the following hypotheses:

H1: CN is positively related to the justification of war (all reasons and means).

H2: Secure identification is positively related only to the justification of restricted reasons and means.

H3: CCNs are related only to higher acceptance of restricted views on justified reasons and means of war.

H4: ACNs are related to higher acceptance of justification for all reasons and means of war.

H5: RWA is positively related to accepting restricted beliefs on the reasons and means of war.

H6: LWA is positively related to accepting restricted beliefs on the reasons for war.

H7: Only the relationship between CN and accepting beliefs justifying war is mediated by RWA and/or LWA.

Additionally, we test whether the expected pattern of relationships is similar for religious-based and national ingroup attachment (secure and narcissistic).

6. Method

6.1. Participants and Procedure

The data was collected in October 2023 through an Ariadna online panel (www.ariadna.pl) in Polish among current residents of Poland. Participants were rewarded with loyalty points in the research panel system. The total collected sample was $N = 461$. No one failed the attention checks, but we excluded 16 participants who provided identical responses to the 30 items, indicating both justifiability and non-justifiability of war. The final sample size included 448 participants. The final sample was 52% female, with a mean age of 49.9 ($SD = 15.1$); 34% have postsecondary or higher levels of education. In regard to participants' religious affiliation, 79% identified as Catholics, 13% as atheists, 5% as agnostics, and 3% were affiliated with other religious groups. An average political orientation, defined on a 10-point scale from 1 (*definitely left-wing*) to 10 (*definitely right-wing*), was 4.7 ($SD = 2.27$). The study was approved by the Ethical Review Board at the first author's, Magdalena Anna Żemojtel-Piotrowska, institution.

6.2. Measures

The beliefs justifying war scale (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, et al., 2023) is a 22-item scale measuring restricted and unrestricted reasons and means of going to war. The beliefs justifying war used in the scale were based on a classical just war theory (Lazar, 2017; Walzer, 1977). Restricted reasons included defensive war (i.e., defense and responding to attacks). Restricted means are aimed at minimizing human suffering and targeting only military forces, without attacking civilians. The large scope of commonly known but not considered restricted reasons and means were labeled "unrestricted." Items were generated and discussed by our international team, comprised of scholars (social and political psychologists) originating from Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Czechia, and the UK, with the final set of 22 items. The exact wording was then examined by the international team involved in the Beliefs in Just War: Cross-Cultural Studies project. We have decided to use highly specific and contextualized items, reflecting the narrative of war presented in the media, aiming to include such reasons and means that align with current forms of waging war. We used a response scale ranging from 1 = *never can be justified* to 10 = *always could be justified*.

The LWA scale (Costello et al., 2022; Costello & Patrick, 2023; Polish version by Piotrowski et al., 2023) is a 13-item scale measuring LWA, with three subdimensions: anti-egalitarian aggression (four items),

anti-conventionalism (four items), and top-down censorship (five items). A response scale ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

The RWA scale (Nießen et al., 2019; Polish version by Lech, 2023) is a nine-item scale measuring three subdimensions of RWA: aggression, submissiveness, and conventionalism (three items per scale). A response scale ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

An eight-item collective narcissism scale (the CNS; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) and a seven-item communal collective narcissism inventory (the CCNI; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021) serve as a measure of narcissistic identification, following the procedure described in Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, and Sedikides (2021). The former measures agentic collective narcissism (ACN), the latter measures the communal CCN. In both scales, items refer to "my group." We modified items of these scales to the reference group ("my nation" for national identity and "people of my religion" for religious identity). To maintain consistency across the different kinds of identification, we avoided exact labels (like "Poles" or "Catholics") to stress ingroup identification.

A four-item SI subscale from collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), with two reversely-scored items, referred to the importance of the group for the self (e.g., "My X is an important reflection of who I am"; "My X is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am"), where X is a specific group. The scale was administered twice, first with the national and a second time for the religious group.

The question phrasing for items in the ACN religion, CCN religion, and SI religion scales included religious groups when participants indicated they were religious, and agnostic and atheists when the participants indicated identification with those. The resulting indicators were combined across religious, atheistic, and agnostic participants. In all of these scales, the response scale ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. All reliability indices and descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1. The full wording of all the scales in both Polish and English is available in the Supplementary Materials.

6.3. Analytical Strategy

In order to test the key measurement model of just war beliefs, we employed confirmatory factor analysis and adjusted the model following suggestions from the standardized loadings magnitude and their *p*-values, as well as modification indices (T. A. Brown, 2015). To model the associations between our key variables, we explored mediation through a path analysis using the R package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). We used maximum likelihood robust estimation and treated missing values with full maximum likelihood. Following the conventional cutoffs for factor models (Hu & Bentler, 1999), we considered the model to be well-fitted when the comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) were greater than 0.9 and when the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were lower than 0.08. We considered a good model fit as RMSEA < 0.06 and CFI < 0.95.

For mediation analysis, we used composite indices of all the scales because the full structural equation model appeared to be too large for a modest sample size (the number of parameters would be larger than our sample size). Moreover, in light of the recent critique of mediation analyses with cross-sectional data (Rohrer et al.,

2022), in which the directionality of the paths is uncertain, we performed a robustness check, an additional network analysis that does not make causal or directional claims, representing partial correlations across all the variables. Network models were fit using graphical lasso estimation with extended Bayesian information Criterion used to select regularization parameters as implemented in the R package bootnet (Epskamp et al., 2016). In addition, we fitted an item-level network model to overcome potential limitations related to the construction of indices and latent variables (e.g., Borsboom et al., 2021). Such a model allowed for exploring associations between all the items across the scales and to discover whether particular items might have had a differential contribution to the index-level results. The R code and data are openly available in the Open Science Framework directory (https://osf.io/pz2bk).

7. Results

7.1. Test of the Theoretical Measurement Model

The theoretical model of beliefs justifying war was based on the notion of war restriction, with a distinction between restricted and unrestricted reasons (*ius ad bellum*) and means (*ius in bello*). The initial measurement followed this distinction and expected four or possibly five factors: restricted reasons, restricted means, unrestricted reasons, and unrestricted means, whereas a potential fifth factor may stem from extremely unrestricted means such as nuclear and chemical weapons (see Figure S1 in the Supplementary Material). Given the wording of the items, we expected a cross-loading for the only reverse-coded item assessing the justifiability of evacuating the wounded, which was hypothesized to load on both the restricted means factor (positively) and the unrestricted means factor (negatively). In addition, we expected residual covariance between justification of the chemical and nuclear weapon use, as well as own and enemy losses. We expected some deviations from this theoretical structure as we used a new measurement instrument and conducted a study in a specific news context.

The theoretical model fit the data marginally ($\chi^2 = 433$, $df = 200$, $p < 0.001$, CFI/TLI = 0.910/0.896, RMSEA = 0.056 [0.049, 0.063], SRMR = 0.072); however, the correlation between restricted means and restricted reasons was overly high ($r = 0.94$) which suggested collapsing these factors into a single restricted (just) war factor. The updated model, therefore, included three factors. In addition, the modification indices strongly suggested a cross-loading from "food requisition" on the restricted war factor. Apparently, in the given Polish socio-political context, this item was interpreted as both a restricted and an unrestricted mean. Such a model was fitted well to the data ($\chi^2 = 390.2$, $df = 202$, $p < 0.001$, CFI/TLI = 0.927/0.917; RMSEA = 0.050 [0.043, 0.058], SRMR = 0.066) with all standardized factor loadings above 0.3 (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Material). Following the results of this analysis, we calculated the composite indices for restricted war, unrestricted means, and unrestricted reasons, with $\alpha = 0.79$, 0.77, and 0.84, respectively. Therefore, we decided to use a three-factor model, which turned out to be better fitted to the data than the four-factor model (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Material).

7.2. Mediation and Network Analyses

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the key variables are listed in Table 1. Network analysis (Figure S2 in the Supplementary Material) showed a complex pattern of interrelations between national and religious identification, both in narcissistic and secure forms. The items tended to cluster

around types of identification (i.e., religious or national) rather than the domain of identification (i.e., agentic or communal). The item-level analysis suggested that these correlations cannot be attributed to the method alone since each scale occupied its own distinct network areas. Moreover, a few high correlations within these clusters (mostly between narcissisms) were not sufficient to override their conceptual differences. Therefore, we distinguished between different forms of CN and, separately, the kinds of secure identification. Also, given the low reliability of the SI scales, we run additional analyses without them. However, the results (Table S5 in the Supplementary Material) indicated a less clear pattern; therefore, we have decided to include secure identifications in the model.

Justification of restricted war was negatively correlated with both the total score of LWA and its subscales, especially with anti-hierarchy and anti-conventionalism. It also negatively correlated with one RWA subscale, namely, submissiveness. The justifiability of the unrestricted reasons did not correlate with most other scales, except for a weak positive association with ACN religion. Finally, the justification of unrestricted means had a small but positive correlation with LWA and a negative correlation with secure identification with one's own nation.

Next, we ran a path analysis with the four kinds of CN, as well as SI indices as predictors, LWA and RWA as mediators, and the three kinds of war justification as outcome variables. The results are listed in Figure 2 and in Table S3 in the Supplementary Material. First of all, the associations between variables are sparse, so we observed only a few direct effects on the war justification indices and only one weak indirect effect tracing from SI religion, through LWA, to the restricted war justifiability. Direct negative effects on restricted war came from LWA ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.001$) and CCN nation ($\beta = -0.27$, $p = 0.002$, the latter kept its significance in a total effect; $\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.001$), and weak positive effect of SI nation ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.013$; total effect of SI nation, $\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.006$). Thus, restricted war was negatively associated by LWA and CCN, and positively by national SI. In contrast, unrestricted means turned out to have a positive effect on LWA ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.021$) and a negative effect of SI nation ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = 0.017$; total effect, $\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.010$). Therefore, the acceptance of unrestricted means was positively associated with LWA but negatively with secure national identification. Unrestricted reasons did not have a single significant effect in this model.

Since path analysis makes multiple assumptions regarding the causal relations and directionality of the variables, which are unverifiable with cross-sectional data, we further explored a network model that does not take that many assumptions and allows for an arbitrary number of "mediators" (it afforded splitting LWA and RWA into subscales). The results presented in Figure 3 are very similar to the path model described above. The war justifiability indices were mostly disconnected from the rest of the variables, except for an LWA-anti-hierarchy which revealed a mid-size positive link with restricted war justification and a weak positive link with unrestricted means. On the other hand, four kinds of CN showed close associations with each other. Expectedly, nation-focused identifications were also closely related to each other and to the two subscales of RWA, due to their focus on nationalistic concerns. Interestingly, the LWA components are barely related to RWA and mostly negatively related to all nation-related identifications.

We ran two additional robustness checks. First, since initially we combined participants affiliated with a religion and those not affiliated into a single sample, which could have resulted in a different meaning of the religion-related constructs (e.g., CCN religion). We repeated the mediation analysis, excluding non-religious participants. The results demonstrated practically the same results (see Table S4 in the Supplementary

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the key variables.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*α*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Restricted	6.85	2.00	0.77										
2. Unrest_reasons	3.80	1.84	0.79	0.32**									
3. Unrest_means	3.15	1.49	0.84	0.24**	0.57**								
4. ACN nation	4.13	1.26	0.92	–0.01	0.09	0.01							
5. CCN nation	4.02	1.43	0.96	–0.07	0.03	–0.00	0.80**						
6. ACN religion	3.84	1.23	0.93	0.02	0.12*	0.04	0.69**	0.60**					
7. CCN religion	3.99	1.42	0.97	0.03	0.08	0.00	0.54**	0.63**	0.77**				
8. SI nation	4.21	1.08	0.51	0.10*	0.01	–0.10*	0.51**	0.46**	0.32**	0.25**			
9. SI religion	3.98	1.15	0.51	0.09	0.06	–0.01	0.27**	0.24**	0.45**	0.45**	0.36**		
10. RWA total	4.31	1.14	0.91	–0.09	0.03	–0.01	0.61**	0.59**	0.47**	0.39**	0.35**	0.19**	
11. LWA total	3.19	0.98	0.87	–0.24**	0.05	0.12*	–0.05	–0.08	–0.02	–0.07	–0.13**	–0.16**	–0.00

Notes: $N = 448$ in all cases; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; U = unrestricted; for statistics of subscales of LWA and RWA, see Table S2 in the Supplementary Material.

Material). Second, to explore the collinearities across different predictors of just war attitudes, we ran three additional regression models for each of the three aspects of just war attitudes (see Table S5 in the Supplementary Material). Initial regression used combined RWA and LWA indices and basically replicated the direct effects previously detected by the mediation analysis. Collinearity was not an issue as the variance inflation factor was 4.06, lower than a strict cutoff of 5. Next, we split RWA and LWA into their components and used them as predictors of just war attitudes. The results showed negative effects of LWA, anti-hierarchical aggression as well as RWA-submission on restricted means and reasons, whereas the other components of authoritarianism did not show any effects. Both new effects were weak, whereas the effect

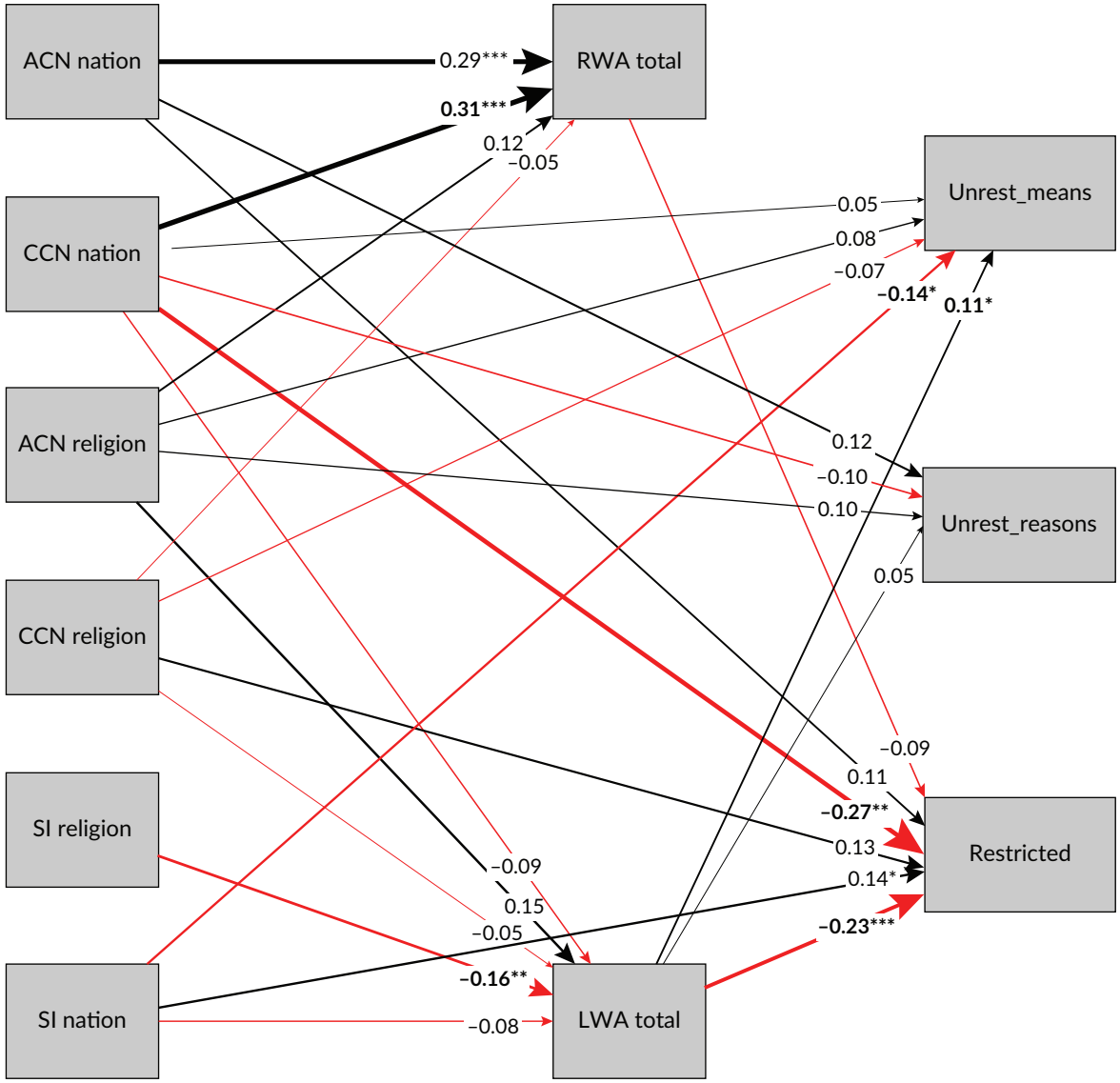

Figure 2. Path diagram with standardized estimates. Notes: Non-significant paths with standardized estimates < 0.05, covariances between war justifiability and kinds of collective narcissism (CN)/secure identification (SI), and residuals are dropped for simplicity. Variables are composite indices; red arrows indicate negative effects; the width of the arrows shows the magnitude of the coefficient; unrest = unrestricted, RWA Total = right-wing authoritarianism overall index, LWA Total = left-wing authoritarianism overall index; SI nation/religion = secure identification, CCN nation/religion = communal collective narcissism, ACN nation/religion = agentic collective narcissism; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

of combined LWA in the original model was relatively strong. The third model dealt with the relatively low reliability of secure identification and excluded it from the models. This exclusion's effect on the other coefficients was trivial. None of the models demonstrated high multicollinearity. Finally, we computed Bayes factors for each predictor in each model and found support for the null effects of ACN religion and SI religion, among others.

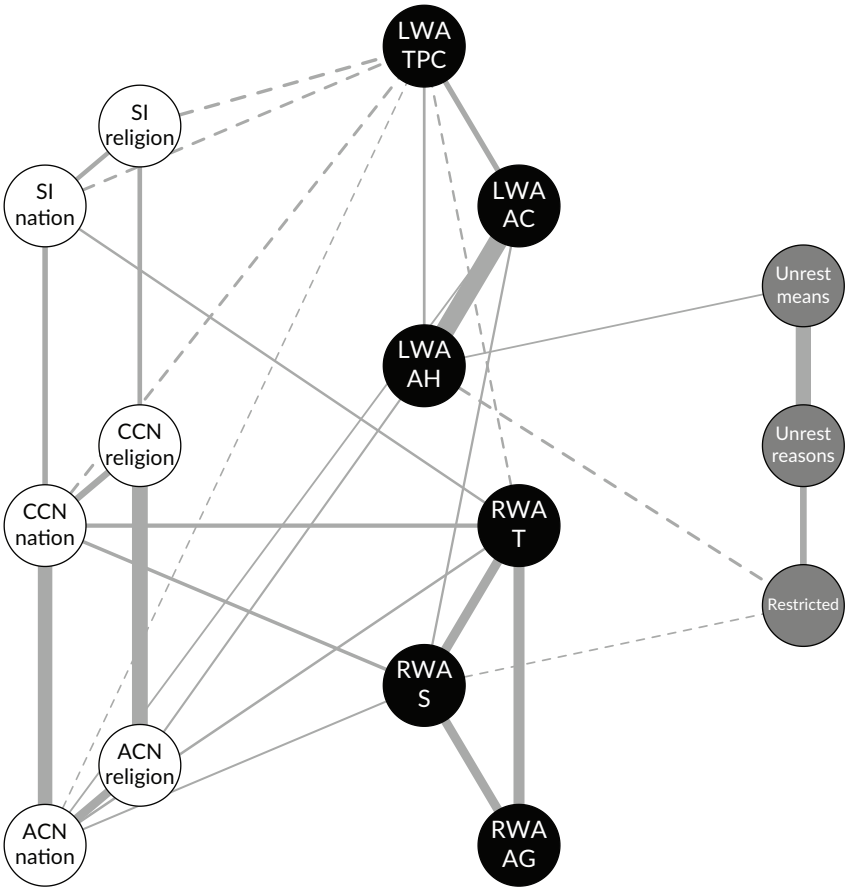

Figure 3. Network model based on partial correlations and estimated with the EBICglasso algorithm. Notes: Solid lines represent positive and dashed ones represent negative partial correlations; the width of the edges reflects their magnitude. Unres reasons/means = unrestricted reasons/means; RWA_AG = right-wing authoritarian aggression; RWA_S = submission; RWA_T = tradition; LWA_AH = anti-hierarchical aggression; LWA_AC = anti-conventionalism; LWA_TPC = top-down censorship; SI nation/religion = secure identification; CCN nation/religion = communal collective narcissism; ACN nation/religion = agentic collective narcissism.

8. Discussion

In this article, we were interested in explaining how national and religious identification in both narcissistic and secure forms could relate to accepting specific beliefs justifying war. We included various forms of national and religious identification, basing our expectations on the agency–communion model of CN (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021) and referring to the concept of just war (Lazar, 2017; Moseley, 2011; Walzer, 1977; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, et al., 2023). As intergroup conflicts are rooted in specific political ideologies, we additionally included authoritarianism as a possible mediator of the link between CN and beliefs justifying war, because CN is related to greater sensitivity for

threats toward ingroups (Golec de Zavala, 2024). We considered both LWA and RWA. In addition, we tested associations with national identification, which were thoroughly studied in the context of intergroup conflicts (Golec de Zavala, 2024; Nathanson, 2009), as well as religious identification, which was not (for an exception, see Marchlewska et al., 2019). Therefore, it was not clear to what extent the relationships between religious-, narcissistic-, and secure-identification were similar to those known from research on national narcissistic and secure identifications. We anticipated that religious identification would have a stronger influence on beliefs justifying war than national narcissism or secure identifications.

We have identified a three-dimensional model of beliefs justifying war: classical just war view (composed of morally restricted view on means and reasons), unrestricted reasons, and unrestricted means of war. Thus, the theoretical model generally matched the factor structure in our sample. The classical view of just war as based on self-defensive reasons for waging war and minimizing human suffering was replicated in our data, while unrestricted reasons and unrestricted means, albeit positively related, were separate factors.

8.1. National and Religious Identification

We examined four hypotheses concerning national and religious identifications. First, we expected that CN is positively related to the justification of war (all reasons and means), while secure identification is positively related only to the justification of restricted reasons and means. These hypotheses were in part supported.

Next, secure national identification was positively correlated with the acceptance of just war and negatively related to the acceptance of unrestricted means. CN was unrelated to the justification of war, with a few exceptions, discussed ahead. This indicates that only secure national identification may prevent the justification of violent resolutions of wars in favor of morally restricted means and reasons.

Further, following the agency-communion model of CN, we expected that CCNs are related only to higher acceptance of restricted views on just reasons and means, while ACNs are related to a higher acceptance of justification for all reasons and means of war. These hypotheses were not supported. CCN national was related to lower acceptance of restricted view of war, reflecting classical just war beliefs (Lazar, 2017; Watkins, 2020), yet it was unrelated to accepting unrestricted means and reasons. Given that CCNs present themselves as moral (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021), they are not genuine in their moral decisions. It is congruent with other studies showing such inconsistencies between declarations and actual deeds or more specific attitudes (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2022, 2024). Unlike CCN national, people with secure identification with their nation are ready to accept only restricted views on war and not extreme hostility in warfare.

The pattern of relationships was different for religious identification. Since the morality of waging war is strongly related to religious worldviews (Lazar, 2017; Walzer, 1977), we expected that religious narcissistic and secure identification would be relevant in explaining the acceptance of beliefs justifying war. However, this was not the case. Although agentic religious narcissism was positively correlated with the acceptance of unrestricted reasons, this relationship was not supported by the results of path analyses, where we controlled for shared variance of all identifications.

It is conceivable that attachment to a religious group may work both ways—as a moral compass preventing violence and as a warmonger promoting violence (e.g., the Church blesses soldiers and supports the army). Moreover, religious attachment may belong to a different realm in the Polish context in 2023, where the most salient notion of war currently is nation-centric. It is likely that in the context of a war involving religious enmity (e.g., the Middle East), religious beliefs would be more strongly related to war justifications.

8.2. Authoritarianism

We expected that RWA would be positively related to accepting restricted beliefs on reasons and means, while LWA would be positively related to accepting restricted beliefs on reasons for war. These hypotheses were not supported. RWA was unrelated to any beliefs justifying war, and this pattern was consistent across all types of analyses. LWA was related to lower acceptance of just war beliefs and higher acceptance of unrestricted means.

8.3. Mediation

Lastly, we expected that authoritarianism could explain the link between collective narcissism, secure identification, and beliefs justifying war. Specifically, we expected that the relationship between collective narcissism and beliefs justifying war is mediated by authoritarianism, while the relationship between SI and accepting beliefs justifying war is not mediated by authoritarianism. We have found an expected positive correlation between RWA and all types of identifications, both narcissistic and secure. Secure identifications were also negatively, albeit weakly, related to LWA.

Path analyses supplemented this picture, again, by controlling for shared variance of all forms of identification. We have found only one significant mediation effect, as religious SI was related to higher acceptance of restricted views on war through lower LWA. Thus, our hypothesis about mediation was not supported. Therefore, most of the detected relationships between CN, SI, authoritarianism, and justification of war were direct, so that we observed rather their additive effects than mediations.

More importantly, some of our findings were at odds with previous findings regarding the strong effects of RWA on the acceptance of wars. It is possible these relationships were rather weak for at least two reasons. First, former studies on the relationship between RWA and acceptance of war were focused on specific wars (Crowson, 2009; Heaven et al., 2006); second, the studies were conducted with the focus on specific ingroup identification, namely, national one (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2022; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, Sedikides, Sawicki, et al., 2021). Thus, the threat associated with real conflicts could lead to stronger effects of RWA, which is motivated by ingroup security and sensitivity toward specific threats from outgroups (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). The moral component of beliefs justifying hypothetical war seems to be less related to authoritarian worldviews, particularly in the case of right-wing authoritarian beliefs. Thus, future studies exploring the relationship between authoritarianism and just war beliefs may aim to address these beliefs in the context of specific conflict settings.

Whereas, in the case of the LWA, a stronger relationship appeared for hypothetical moral justifications of war. This may be related to the ideological composition of LWA, and a dogmatic commitment to anti-hierarchical beliefs, with an “any means necessary” approach to creating egalitarianism, regardless of the means required

to achieve this goal. These findings highlight an important, yet underexplored, difference in the construction of authoritarianism, differentiating the right- and left-wing forms.

Specifically, restricted views on war, congruent with classical just war theory, were explained by the joint effects of authoritarianism (both left-wing and right-wing) and secure national identification, as well as the joint effects of secure religious identification and RWA. Both secure identifications were related to higher acceptance of just war beliefs: national ones directly predicted just war beliefs, while the religious SI explained the acceptance of just war beliefs via lower LWA. Such results were congruent with former studies indicating that strong identification with one's nation, even if it is secure and based on a positive view of one's nation, could result in outgroup derogation and accepting war, albeit only if this war is seen as morally restrained (Nathanson, 2009). In our sample, we have found that people with higher levels of secure religious identification were more ready to accept just war beliefs only because they were less ready to accept LWA. Lack of direct relationships between secure identification with a religious group and accepting beliefs justifying war could be obscured by pacifism, lowering acceptance of any reasons and means of waging war, or by the fact that we jointly analyzed people identifying themselves as believers and non-believers. However, we obtained a similar pattern of results with only believers.

Because mediation analyses were based on total scores of LWA and RWA, we supplemented our analyses with network analysis to reveal more complex patterns of relationships between variables. These additional analyses revealed mostly interesting patterns within LWA subdimensions, shedding additional light on mediations based on total scores of LWA and RWA. The negative relationship between LWA and religious identifications could be attributed exclusively to top-down censorship, as this component assumes attacking right-wing ideology (like banning hate speech, for example, against sexual minorities; see Costello et al., 2022). Collective narcissists in Poland are prejudiced toward people questioning social order, like sexual minorities (Lantos et al., 2024; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2022). In addition, subdimensions of LWA were inconsistently related to RWA, which was not congruent with the US context (Costello et al., 2022).

A possible explanation for these results could be found in the specificity of our sample. Poland is a post-communist country, where left-wing political identification has a different meaning than in the US or other Western democracies (Tavits & Letki, 2009). Thus, LWA could also have a different meaning in the Polish population, where anti-establishment orientation is integrated with attachment to traditional values so that anti-hierarchical aggression is not necessarily the opposite of a strong attachment to national and cultural values (Tavits & Letki, 2009), unlike top-down censorship. Such interpretation is congruent with our item-based network analysis, where a subscale representing top-down censorship is clearly separated from the two remaining subscales, which are positively related to RWA and to each other.

To summarize, our study revealed that specific beliefs justifying war in more abstract terms are rather weakly explained by attachment to one's nation and attachment to one's religious group (in our case, people sharing the same view on religion). Our model was especially ineffective in explaining the acceptance of unrestricted reasons for waging war, probably because they are more context-dependent (Kumove et al., 2025) and are shaped by self-interest (Bocian et al., 2021). Acceptance of unrestricted means, being a representation of direct hostility, was solely explained by higher LWA and lower secure national identification. Thus, LWA outperformed the explanatory power of its right-wing counterpart.

Lastly, results for national narcissism are more straightforward than for religious narcissism and consistent with the agency-communion model of CN (Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, & Sedikides, 2021; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2024). CCN national were similar to those with a secure national identity, as they accepted a restricted view of war. However, at the same time, they did not reject unethical means of waging war. Thus, higher CCN does not prevent the acceptance of violent means of conflict resolution; it just limits what might be deemed acceptable. On the other hand, secure identification with one's nation is accompanied only by accepting morally restrained war, without accepting unethical means, replicating Nathanson (2009). Essentially, our study reveals that specific views justifying war are different from the general acceptance of real-life conflicts. Neither identity nor political worldview was strongly associated with the acceptance of any specific view on war in our sample. Yet, albeit the effects found in our study are rather weak, we could point to some notable suggestions for future studies. First, being strongly attached to their nation does not mean they endorse pacifism, but only "reasonable" defense, still limited by respecting moral principles, known as just war (Lazar, 2017; Walzer, 1977). Being blindly attached to the group does not mean the acceptance of any way of waging wars. Collective narcissists are rather indifferent to moral considerations related to why and how war should be waged, even though they are prejudiced, accept wars as a rule, or accept an authoritarian worldview (Golec de Zavala, 2024). Even while presenting as particularly moral and tolerant, it is not reflected in their beliefs justifying war, as they do not reject overt hostility in conflict resolution. Lastly, our findings shed light on the difference between RWA and LWA regarding the justification of war. Probably, right-wings authoritarians are driven by two opposite motivations, outgroup hostility and need for security, which could be destroyed by war. Thus, their view of moral war is unspecified. Left-wing authoritarians, being less attached to the existing social order, are more hostile, and their outgroup hostility is multiplied by rejecting the existing status quo, which makes them more ready to accept beliefs justifying warfare; ultimately, constituting a holy war view, where all means justify the end.

9. Limitations and Further Directions

Our study was conducted at a specific time and on a specific population, so the generality of our findings is limited. Polish society is homogenous, dominated by the Christian faith, with a strong relationship between religious and national identity (Boguszewski et al., 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2019; Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Piotrowski, & Sawicki, 2023), which could affect the interrelations between the various forms of narcissistic and secure identifications (Stopka et al., 2024; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2023; Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2024). Although culturally specific, we could still observe the effects of authoritarianism on accepting specific views of just war. Detected relationships were mostly weak. Future studies should differentiate better between abstract and specific attitudes toward wars (Watkins, 2020). Replication of our conceptual model in other cultural contexts is highly recommended. Albeit indirectly affected by the Russo-Ukrainian war, Poland is not exposed to direct military actions (Nowak et al., 2023). Being involved in war could seriously affect not only the levels but also the views of just war (Kumove et al., 2025). The post-communist past could also affect how LWA and RWA were expressed and related to the outcome variables (Costello et al., 2022; Tavits & Letki, 2009). We used abbreviated versions of LWA and secure identifications. The reliability of LWA and its subdimensions was very good, but the scales measuring secure identifications were characterized by low internal consistency. Future studies should employ more reliable measures or potentially use the long-form version of the scales. Low reliability could be explained by both a low number of items but also by the heterogeneous nature of secure identification (Cameron, 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Thus, it is worth exploring whether each component of secure identification is related to the

justification of warfare in a similar way. Despite these limitations, the current study has contributed theoretically and practically to the understanding of moral justifications and support for warfare. First, we have found a notable difference between leftist and rightist authoritarians. Secondly, our findings suggest that only secure identification has importance in accepting specific beliefs supporting violent conflicts.

Funding

Data collection was supported by a small grant awarded to Magdalena Anna Żemojtel-Piotrowska by the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University in Warsaw, Project No. IP-2/23.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The R code and data are openly available in the Open Science Framework directory (https://osf.io/pz2bk).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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