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**My way or the highway:**

**High Narcissism and Low Self-esteem Predict Decreased Support for Democracy**

Marta Marchlewska

Polish Academy of Sciences

Kevin A. Castellanos

University of Maryland

Karol Lewczuk and Mirosław Kofta

University of Warsaw

Aleksandra Cichocka

University of Kent

**Author note**

Marta Marchlewska, Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

([marta.marchlewska@psych.pan.pl](mailto:marta.marchlewska@psych.pan.pl)). Kevin A. Castellanos, Government and Politics

Department, University of Maryland, US ([kcastell@umd.edu](mailto:kcastell@umd.edu)). The first two authors contributed  
equally to this work and should be considered co-first authors. Karol Lewczuk

([karol.lewczuk@psych.uw.edu.pl](mailto:karol.lewczuk@psych.uw.edu.pl)) and Mirosław Kofta ([kofta@psych.uw.edu.pl](mailto:kofta@psych.uw.edu.pl)), Faculty of  
Psychology, University of Warsaw, Poland. Aleksandra Cichocka ([a.k.cichocka@kent.ac.uk](mailto:a.k.cichocka@kent.ac.uk)),

School of Psychology, University of Kent, UK. Correspondence regarding this article should be

directed to Aleksandra Cichočka, School of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NZ, UK. The preparation of this paper was supported by grants from the National Science Center DEC 2014/15/N/HS6/04160 and DEC 2014/15/B/HS6/03755. The authors would like to thank Aife Hopkins-Doyle, Orestis Panayiotou, Linus Peitz, Aino Petterson, Ben Seyd, Robbie Sutton, and Maddy Wyatt for their comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript and Filip Łozowski for his help with manuscript preparation.

### **Abstract**

In two studies, we analyzed the relationships between different types of self-evaluation (i.e., narcissism and self-esteem) and support for democracy. Support for democracy requires the ability to respect the views and opinions of others, even if one disagrees with them. Classic studies have linked support for democracy with high self-evaluation, which should assume psychological security and, thus, the ability to trust others. However, not all forms of high self-evaluation are secure. Narcissists have high feelings of self-worth, but tend to be defensive: they are easily threatened by criticisms or conflicting views. We then expected that while support for democracy should be positively predicted by secure, non-narcissistic self-evaluation, it should be negatively predicted by narcissistic self-evaluation. In two studies, conducted in the U.S. (Study 1, n=407) and in Poland (Study 2, n=405), support for democracy was positively predicted by self-esteem and negatively predicted by narcissism. Study 2 additionally demonstrated that interpersonal trust mediated the effects of self-esteem on support for democracy. We discuss the role of psychological predispositions in understanding support for democratic systems.

Keywords: narcissism, self-esteem, democracy, trust

### My Way or the Highway:

#### High Narcissism and Low Self-esteem Predict Decreased Support for Democracy

“Democratic character develops only in those who esteem themselves enough to esteem others”

(Laswell, 1962, p. 162)

Over the last years, one of the major challenges for social scientists has been understanding people’s relationship with democracy (e.g., Moghaddam, 2016). Some argue that citizens are becoming increasingly “likely to express hostile views of democracy” and “vote for anti-establishment parties and candidates that disregard long-standing democratic norms” (Mounk & Foa, 2016, para. 2). Others have questioned these analyses, suggesting that small between-country and generational variations put aside, the overall trend for democratic support is relatively stable (Voeten, 2016). In times of a volatile political climate it might, however, be crucial not only to ask whether support for democracy is changing, but also to re-visit one of the basic lines of inquiry in the psychology of political attitudes: what predisposes people to support democratic principles?

Individuals’ support for the democratic system is of course dependent on the social and political context, but it is at least partially driven by psychological characteristics (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1980; Dahl, 1971; Lipset, 1959). In the current paper, we return to the classic question on whether individuals’ feelings of self-worth predict support for democracy (Sniderman, 1975). We argue that support for democracy should be differently associated with varying forms of self-evaluation: it should be positively related to secure (i.e., genuine) self-evaluation, but negatively associated with narcissistic self-evaluation that is easily threatened by criticism (Konrath, Bushman, & Campbell, 2006; Stucke & Sporer, 2002). We base this

reasoning on research highlighting the role of threat and trust in support for democratic principles.

In their extensive review of psychological underpinnings of democracy, Sullivan and Transue (1999) argue that support for democracy depends on peoples' willingness to participate in politics and, especially, on their tolerance of others' efforts to do so. This requires individuals to have faith in the political opposition, who might promote views that do not support their own convictions or broader societal norms. Sniderman (1975) suggested that support for democracy should then be associated with psychological security which promotes an ability to respect the views and opinions of others, even if one disagrees with them. In line with this logic, personality research has shown that those in favor of democratic values are considerate of people with dissimilar opinions, and psychologically secure in admitting that they could hold incorrect information—at least when compared to their non-democratic counterparts (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Kinder & Sears, 1985; Uslaner, 1999). At the same time, individuals who are unable or unwilling to alter their opinions for the sake of compromise may be more easily threatened by political heterogeneity and, hence, come to contest democratic norms that attempt to accommodate diverse sets of opinions (Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2003). Thus, both chronic defensiveness and induced perceptions of threat can contribute to decreased support for democracy (e.g., Hastings & Shaffer, 2005; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Wood, 1995; Sullivan, Marcus, Feldman, & Piereson, 1981) as well as increased support for alternatives to democracy, for instance strong authoritarian leadership (e.g., Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017; Landau et al., 2004).

One of the crucial factors shaping psychological defensiveness versus security is the conviction about one's self-worth. Lane (1962) argued that "the democratic machinery can be

operated only by men who estimate their own worth, as well as the worth of others, as significantly high (p. 242).” In line with this reasoning, Sniderman (1975) would later find that high self-esteem was indeed related to support for democratic principles, alongside political engagement and political knowledge. In a similar vein, Sullivan and colleagues (1981) evaluated the impact of personality factors contributing to political tolerance and found that high-self-esteem (which they considered a marker of “psychological security”), was positively associated with political tolerance and general support for democratic norms. These studies suggest that high self-evaluation should result in support for democracy.

However, more recent studies, conducted in the U.S. (Shaffer & Hastings, 2004) and Finland (Miklikowska, 2012), did not find significant correlations between support for democratic values and self-esteem. We propose that past research on the link between self-evaluation and support for democracy might have resulted in inconsistent findings because high self-evaluation may take different forms which are not always secure. Research on self-evaluation often distinguishes between high secure self-esteem and narcissism (e.g., Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala, 2016; Marchlewska & Cichocka, 2017; Locke, 2009; Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004; Stronge, Cichocka, & Sibley, 2016).

Narcissism assumes positive feelings of self-worth but is considered defensive, rather than secure. It is an excessive self-evaluation associated with feelings of entitlement and self-importance (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Horvath & Morf, 2009; Krizan & Herlache, 2018). Narcissists believe themselves to be unique and superior to others (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). They tend to support social hierarchies, especially if they feel they can be on top of the pecking order (Zitek & Jordan, 2016; see also Cichocka, Dhont, & Makwana, 2017). At the same time, they are exhibitionistic and constantly look for external validation (Baumeister

& Vohs, 2001; Byrne & O'Brien, 2014; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Reynolds & Lejuez, 2011). They also have a tendency to perceive others' actions as intentionally malicious (Cichocka et al., 2016). Overall, narcissists are hostile to people who undermine their infallibility and are easily threatened by opinions inconsistent with their own (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Horvath & Morf, 2009; Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989). Therefore, we predicted that due to their increased sensitivity to threats stemming from criticism or disagreement (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Horton & Sedikides, 2009; Morf & Rhodewalt, 1993), narcissists should be less enthusiastic about democracy, which inherently assumes the need to respect different ideologies and opinions.

Thus, support for democracy should only be associated with high self-evaluation to the extent that this self-evaluation is well-anchored and not easily undermined by others. Such confidence is characteristic of secure self-evaluation (also sometimes called mature, genuine or optimal self-evaluation)—that is, self-esteem without the defensive component captured by narcissism (Horney, 1939; Kernis, 2003; Marchlewska & Cichocka, 2017; Paulhus, et al., 2004). Secure self-evaluation captures unassuming pride in the self without the need for external validation (Locke, 2009; Cichocka et al., 2017; Marchlewska & Cichocka, 2017) and serves as a buffer against psychological threats (Paulhus et al., 2004). Secure self-evaluation is also associated with general positive attitudes toward other people (Cichocka et al., 2016) and, as such, is likely to foster the ability and willingness to trust them. Thus, we assumed that only high non-narcissistic self-evaluation should predict support for democracy. One mediator of this link could be interpersonal trust.

Interpersonal trust is a key precondition for political tolerance and support for democracy (Gibson, 1992; Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Those who do not trust others are unlikely to respect



their right to govern or influence the political system. Indeed, research has shown positive links between general interpersonal trust and support for democratic values (Almond & Verba, 1963; Miklikowska, 2012; Verba, 1961). For example, Sullivan and colleagues (1981) found that trusting individuals were more tolerant of those holding contrasting political attitudes and positions. Similarly, Inglehart (1997) argued that levels of interpersonal trust can contribute to the existence and stability of democratic regimes (see also Sullivan & Transue, 1999). In line with these results, Almond and Verba (1963) linked interpersonal trust, associated with high self-evaluation and sense of security, to democratic participation. Also, Sullivan and colleagues (1981) found that trusting individuals were more tolerant of those holding contrasting political attitudes and positions.

Past research indicated that trust is also associated with feelings of self-worth. Those with high self-esteem are more likely to trust others (e.g., Cicero & Kerns, 2011; Stimpson, & Maughan, 1978) and less likely to perceive others' actions as intentionally malicious (Cichocka et al., 2016). Narcissism, on the other hand, is associated with higher distrust (e.g., Back et al., 2013; Miller & Maples, 2011; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Therefore, we predicted that interpersonal trust could at least partially account for the associations between narcissism versus self-esteem and support for democracy.

### **Overview of the Current Research**

In two studies, we examined the relationships between different types of self-evaluation (i.e., narcissism and self-esteem) and support for democracy. We assumed that support for democracy should be positively predicted by self-esteem, but negatively by narcissism. In Study 1, conducted in the U.S., we examined the basic relationships between self-esteem, narcissism and democratic support. In Study 2 we sought to replicate the results of Study 1 in a different

social-political context. We collected data from a post-Communist country, Poland, which tends to score lower in the levels of democratization (The Economist Intelligence Unit; EIU, 2016) and where general support for the political system tends to be lower than in Western democracies (Cichocka & Jost, 2014; Cichocka, Winiewski, Bilewicz, Bukowski, & Jost, 2015; cf. Baryla, Wojciszke, & Cichocka, 2015). Study 2 further investigated whether interpersonal trust mediated the link between the two types of self-evaluation and support for democracy. In both studies, we aimed to include at least 400 participants, which gave us a power of .80 for detecting even small associations between variables (for  $r = .14$ ; Cohen, 1988; G\*Power yields a target of 395 participants). Data for both studies are available at: <https://osf.io/84amd/>

### Study 1

In Study 1 we tested our basic hypothesis that support for democracy would be positively predicted by self-esteem and negatively by narcissism. We also accounted for potentially confounding effects of two broad ideological predispositions that are robustly related to political attitudes and behavior: right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)—a “threat-driven motivation for collective security and social cohesion” (Sibley & Duckitt, 2009, p. 546; Altemeyer, 1998) and social dominance orientation (SDO)—a general opposition to equality and preference for certain groups in the society dominating over others (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994, Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; see also Duckitt, 2001; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Meeusen & Dhont, 2015; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008; Weber & Federico, 2007). In past research, endorsement of democratic values was negatively associated with RWA (Miklikowska, 2012; Shaffer & Hastings, 2004). Also, both RWA and SDO were associated with support for restrictions of civil liberties (e.g., Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, & Moschner, 2005). Both of these traits have also been linked to narcissism. Narcissism tends to be positively associated with SDO (Cichocka et al.,

2017; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013; Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009) and negatively associated with RWA (especially once we account for SDO and self-esteem; Cichocka et al., 2017). Therefore, we aimed to show that the effects of self-esteem and narcissism on support for democracy would be observed over and above any effects of RWA and SDO.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** We used data from a 2016 survey of US residents.

Respondents were recruited using the Prolific Academic platform. The survey was completed by 407 participants, 182 women, 225 men, aged 18-70 ( $M=32.41$ ,  $SD=11.84$ ). Most participants reported having a university degree ( $n=238$ ) and White (non-Hispanic) as their ethnicity ( $n=305$ ). Mode family income for the study participants was between \$50,000 and \$59,999. Participants filled out measures of self-esteem, narcissism and support for democracy, as well as the two adjustment variables (RWA and SDO) among other variables<sup>1</sup>.

## Measures

**Support for democracy** was measured with the eight item Democratic Support Scale (e.g., Magalhães, 2014). Participants were asked to what extent they agreed or disagree with statements such as “Democracies are indecisive and squabble too much” and “Democracies aren’t good at maintaining order” using a scale from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree,  $\alpha=.77$ ,  $M=5.04$ ,  $SD=0.88$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher support for democracy. Magalhães

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<sup>1</sup> This dataset was also used by Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, and Batayneh (2018). However, these authors focused on a different set of variables. Among other variables, the study included a short measure of personality traits (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Controlling for personality did not affect the pattern of results (please see the Supplement for details).

(2014) differentiated three factors of diffused support for democracy. In Study 1 we identified two factors. Additional analyses separating the two factors are presented in the Supplement.

**Self-esteem** was measured with Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale. Sample items include: "I take a positive attitude toward myself," and "I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others." Participants responded to 10 items on a scale from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree,  $\alpha=.93$ ,  $M=2.87$ ,  $SD=0.65$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher self-esteem.

**Narcissism** was measured with the short, six-item version of the NARQ questionnaire by Back and colleagues (2013), where participants rated statements representing narcissistic traits, for example, "I deserve to be seen as a great personality" or "I want my rivals to fail" on a scale from 1= not at all like me to 6= very much like me,  $\alpha=.75$ ,  $M=2.80$ ,  $SD=0.86$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher narcissism. Separate analyses for the two NARQ subscales are reported in the Supplement.

**Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)** was measured using four items reflecting authoritarian submission and traditionalism from the scale by Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss and Heled (2010), also previously used by Dhont, Hodson and Leite (2016). The items were as follows: (1) "What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity.", (2) "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn.", (3) "The old fashioned ways and old fashion values still show the best way to live.", (4) "This country will flourish if young people stop experimenting with drugs, alcohol, sex, and pay more attention to family values.". Participants were asked to respond on a scale from 1= extremely disagree to 7=extremely agree,  $\alpha=.87$ ,  $M=3.07$ ,  $SD=1.52$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher RWA.

**Social dominance orientation** (SDO) was measured with the Short Social Dominance Orientation Scale by Pratto and colleagues (2013). The items reflect both opposition to equality and group-based dominance (Jost & Thompson, 2000): (1)“In setting priorities, we must consider all groups.” (reverse coded), (2)“We should not push for group equality.”, (3)“Group equality should be our ideal.” (reverse coded), (4)“Superior groups should dominate inferior groups.”. Participants were asked to respond on a scale from 1= extremely oppose to 7=extremely favor,  $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M=2.27$ ,  $SD=1.24$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher SDO.

## Results

**Zero-order correlations.** We first computed correlations between all continuous variables (see Table 1). In line with our predictions, support for democracy was negatively related to narcissism and positively related to self-esteem. Support for democracy was also negatively related to RWA and SDO. We also found a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and RWA, and significant positive relationships between narcissism and RWA as well as SDO<sup>2</sup>. Self-esteem was unrelated to narcissism in this sample.

--- Table 1 ---

**Regression analysis.** Second, we performed a stepwise hierarchical regression analysis to investigate the effects of both forms of self-evaluation on support for democracy. We investigated the effects of narcissism and self-esteem on support for democracy in Step 1,

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<sup>2</sup> Cichocka and colleagues (2017) found RWA to be negatively associated with narcissism (especially when accounting for the overlaps between RWA and SDO, and between narcissism and self-esteem). This is likely because right-wing authoritarians value traditional social arrangements (Altemeyer, 1998), while narcissists have a strong need for uniqueness and non-conformity (Raskin & Terry, 1988). We did not replicate this finding in our dataset—narcissism was positively correlated with RWA, and this effect remained significant even after controlling for SDO, and self-esteem. This could be due to a different measure of narcissism used in this study.

controlling for demographics in Step 2 and RWA and SDO in Step 3 (Table 2). In this way, we were able to observe the effects of self-esteem and narcissism without controls (Step 1) and when controlling for additional variables (Steps 2 and 3). We found a significant positive effect of self-esteem and a significant negative effect of narcissism on support for democracy.

--- Table 2 ---

### **Discussion**

The results of Study 1 provided support for our hypotheses that self-esteem is positively related to support for democracy, whereas narcissism is negatively related to support for democracy. These results remained significant even after we controlled for basic demographics. Low support for democracy was also associated with higher RWA (as in past work by Miklikowska, 2012) as well as higher SDO. The latter association might be due to the low concern for civil liberties associated with SDO (Cohrs et al., 2005). Nevertheless, controlling for RWA and SDO did not affect the basic relationships between self-esteem and narcissism. Therefore, we did not include these variables in Study 2.

### **Study 2**

In Study 2 we aimed to replicate the pattern of results obtained in Study 1 in a different socio-political context. We conducted Study 2 in 2016 in Poland—a post-Communist country which is still in transition into full democracy and is considered by The Economist Intelligence Unit as a flawed democracy (EIU, 2016).<sup>3</sup> As in Study 1, we hypothesized that support for democracy would be positively predicted by self-esteem and negatively predicted by narcissism. We additionally examined whether these effects may be accounted for by interpersonal trust. We

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<sup>3</sup> Note that at the end of 2016 the US also was downgraded from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy” (EIU, 2016).

predicted that self-esteem would predict increased interpersonal trust, which would further be associated with greater support for democracy. At the same time, we predicted that narcissism would predict decreased interpersonal trust, which would translate to lower support for democracy.

## Method

**Participants and procedure.** Study 2 was a paper and pencil survey, conducted among 405 Polish speaking, Caucasian, respondents, 236 women, 163 men, 6 unknowns, aged 18-41 ( $M=22.63$ ,  $SD=4.16$ ) recruited in a university library. Most participants ( $n=364$ ) reported to be students. First, participants filled out measures of self-esteem and narcissism (counterbalanced)<sup>4</sup>. Next, they completed a measure of interpersonal trust and ended the survey with a measure of their support for democracy.

## Measures

**Support for democracy** was measured as in Study 1 with the eight item Democratic Support Scale (Magalhães, 2014), with responses from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree,  $\alpha=.86$ ,  $M=5.08$ ,  $SD=1.19$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher support for democracy. In Study 2, we identified only one factor for this scale (please see the Supplement for details).

**Self-esteem** was measured similarly as in Study 1 with Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale (Polish adaptation: Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, & Łaguna, 2008), with responses from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree,  $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M=2.84$ ,  $SD=0.47$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher self-esteem.

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<sup>4</sup> Presentation order did not moderate the effects. At the end of the study, we also measured personal control (Cichocka et al., 2018) for exploratory purposes associated with a different project.

**Narcissism** was measured with a Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979; 34-item Polish adaptation, Bazińska & Drat-Ruszczak, 2000), where participants rated statements representing narcissistic traits, for example, “I am going to be a great person” or “I like to be the center of attention” on a scale from 1= not at all like me to 5= very much like me,  $\alpha=.91$ ,  $M=3.09$ ,  $SD=0.56$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher narcissism.

**Interpersonal trust** was measured using seven items (Różycka, 2012), for example, “Most people can be trusted.” or “In general, people are inherently good.” Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement to these items using responses ranging from 1= extremely disagree to 7=extremely agree,  $\alpha=.90$ ,  $M=3.86$ ,  $SD=1.15$ . Higher mean scores indicate higher trust.

## Results

**Zero-order correlations.** We first computed correlations between all continuous variables (see Table 3). Support for democracy was negatively correlated with narcissism but was not significantly correlated with self-esteem. Interpersonal trust was positively related to support for democracy and self-esteem, but it was not significantly associated with narcissism.

--- Table 3 ---

**Regression analyses.** We then tested the hypotheses that low narcissism and high self-esteem will predict support for democracy, and that this relationship will be accounted for by interpersonal trust (Table 4).

As in Study 1, in Step 1 we introduced self-esteem and narcissism as joint predictors of support for democracy. Although self-esteem alone was not correlated with support for democracy, when we accounted for the overlap between self-esteem and narcissism, non-narcissistic self-evaluation became a significant positive predictor of support for democracy.



This is indicative of a potential suppression effect, in which an effect of one predictor strengthens once the variance shared with another predictor is accounted for (Cichocka & Bilewicz, 2010; Marchlewska & Cichocka, 2017; Paulhus et al., 2004). We checked for a suppression effect of narcissism using bootstrapping with 10,000 re-samples in Mplus7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). The suppressing effect of narcissism was significant, -0.18 with a bootstrap 95% bias-corrected confidence interval of -0.33 to -0.05, indicating that the positive effect of self-esteem on support for democracy strengthened when narcissism was included in the model<sup>5</sup>.

--- Table 4 ---

In Step 2, age and gender were introduced into the model. Results indicated that older participants declared stronger support for democracy. The effects of self-esteem and narcissism remained significant. The suppression effect also remained significant once we controlled for demographics, indirect effect = -0.13 [-0.28, -0.004]. In the last step, we introduced interpersonal trust which proved to be a significant positive predictor of support for democracy. Still, we found a significant, albeit weaker, positive effect of self-esteem and negative effect of narcissism.

To perform a full test of our hypotheses, we conducted path analysis in MPlus using bootstrapping to check for indirect effects of: (1) self-esteem and (2) narcissism as predictors (included in the model command) of support for democracy via interpersonal trust (Figure 1). First, we tested whether interpersonal trust mediated the path between self-esteem (controlled for narcissism) and support for democracy. The indirect positive effect of self-esteem on support for

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<sup>5</sup> Note that we did not test for suppression effects in Study 1, because in that sample narcissism was not significantly correlated with self-esteem. This is likely because self-esteem tends to be positively associated with the Admiration, but negatively associated with Rivalry subscales of the NARQ (Back et al., 2013).

democracy via interpersonal trust of 0.05 had a bootstrap 95% bias-corrected confidence interval of 0.01 to 0.14. This effect remained significant once we controlled for demographics, indirect effect = 0.05 [0.01, 0.13]. Second, we tested whether interpersonal trust mediated the path between narcissism (controlled for self-esteem) and support for democracy. The indirect negative effect of narcissism on support for democracy via interpersonal trust was not significant, = -0.02 [-0.07, 0.00], with the same effect when controlled for demographics.

--- Figure 1 ---

### **Discussion**

Study 2 corroborated the results of Study 1 in a context of a younger democracy (Poland). In Study 2, narcissism was significantly positively correlated with self-esteem, confirming past research that used the NPI (e.g., Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995; cf. Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004). After we entered narcissism and self-esteem simultaneously into the regression model, we found opposite relationships between the two types of self-evaluation and support for democracy. Narcissism proved to be significantly negatively related to support for democracy. Although self-esteem was not significantly correlated with support for democracy, it became a significant positive predictor once we accounted for the overlap between self-esteem and narcissism. This suggests that only the non-narcissistic, secure form of self-evaluation is associated with support for democracy. Mediation analyses further indicated that interpersonal trust partially accounted for the associations between non-narcissistic self-esteem and support for democracy. The effect of narcissism on lower support for democracy via decreased trust was weaker, and not significant.

### **General Discussion**

The primary objective of our studies was to elucidate the role of self-evaluation in support for democracy. Whereas classic theoretical analyses uniformly suggested that support for the democratic system should be stronger among people with higher feelings of self-worth, empirical studies provided only mixed support for this claim (sometimes self-evaluation appeared to be positively related; Sniderman, 1975; Sullivan et al., 1981; and sometimes unrelated to democratic support; Miklikowska, 2012; Shaffer & Hastings, 2004). We argued that this inconsistency was due to the fact that self-evaluation is not a unitary concept: it can be secure (i.e., non-narcissistic), or defensive (i.e., narcissistic). In two studies, conducted in the U.S. (Study 1) and Poland (Study 2), we demonstrated that whereas the former is positively related to support for democracy, the latter is negatively associated with support for democracy. A significant positive correlation between self-esteem and support for democracy was observed in Study 1 but not in Study 2 (compare Tables 1 and 3). However, when we entered narcissism and self-esteem simultaneously into our regression equation, both the secure self-evaluation (without the narcissistic component) and narcissistic self-evaluation emerged as significant, even if relatively weak, predictors of support for democracy—they were just working in opposite directions. In Study 1, we additionally found that these effects remained significant despite the inclusion of ideological predictors (such as SDO and RWA) in the model.

In Study 2 we found that the effect of self-esteem on support for democracy was mediated by a degree of interpersonal trust. Thus, our findings shed light on how a positive, non-defensive self-view is operating to bring about approval of democratic values: it is at least partly attributable to the fact that people with high secure self-evaluation are in general more likely to trust others. It seems probable that those with a secure self-evaluation would develop better social networks based on self-confidence, which might help foster mutual respect and lower

suspicion to others' intentions (e.g., Cichocka et al., 2016). This deep psychological attitude might make them more confident about democratic organization of social life, based on openness to others' views and opinions (which are frequently different from their own; see also Putnam, 1995). It is then plausible that people with high secure self-evaluation would be more tolerant of ideological diversity, and perhaps even of ideologically opposing political candidates. In essence, individuals high in secure self-evaluation are likely to have faith in their fellow citizens and their electoral choices. They are also likely to feel empowered to change the political system if they partake in the process. More importantly, they might attribute these efficiencies to others and come to believe that although the ruling party may represent an ideological opposition, the political system provides an avenue for restitution come next election season (Sniderman, 1975). These possibilities await further empirical evaluation.

Those high in narcissism, in contrast, were less likely to support democracy. Interpersonal trust did not emerge as a mediator for this association. One reason could be that in this work we used scales which capture grandiose narcissism, rather than vulnerable narcissism which is linked to low feelings of self-worth, anxiety and distress (see Krizan & Herlache, 2018 for a review). Research shows that vulnerable narcissism is more strongly associated with mistrust (Krizan & Johar, 2015). Thus, vulnerable narcissists may be the ones who are too anxious and insecure to trust or believe in others.

It is then likely that grandiose narcissism predicted lower support for democracy due to other factors. These could include narcissistic competitiveness and feelings of superiority, which result in lower tolerance of diverse opinions<sup>6</sup>. Grandiose narcissists might be likely to exhibit

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<sup>6</sup> Exploratory analyses conducted separately for the admiration and rivalry subscales of the NARQ confirm that the negative link with support for democracy was stronger for the rivalry

inflated confidence in their understanding of politics (Rozenblit & Keil, 2002; Vitriol & Marsh, 2018) and feel threatened by criticism and disagreement with their beliefs. Importantly, their motivations are likely to be different from those who might reject democracy if they perceive threats to the social order, such as right-wing authoritarians. Indeed, in Study 1 the effect of narcissism was observed over and above the effects of RWA. Finally, narcissists, relative to non-narcissists, seem to regard others' narcissistic traits in a positive way (Hart & Adams, 2014). Thus, another explanation for the observed relationship may be a narcissistic tendency to favor non-democratic political parties led by narcissistic individuals.

Because our studies were correlational, they do not allow to establish causal relationships between the variables. Our approach assumes that the more basic personality traits predict broader opinions about the organization of the social world. Nevertheless, we could also consider the possibility that non-democratic political systems alter the way personality is functioning. When there is high injustice, inequality, or economic uncertainty, it seems at least plausible that some citizens would find their personal needs threatened. Under these circumstances, they may become defensive about their self-worth (e.g., Pickett & Wilkinson, 2010). This may be associated with further rejection of democratic values and a growing acceptance of authoritarian political solutions. Still, we hope that our research helps clarify past inconsistencies and possibly offer a direction into how to better understand the psychological mechanisms driving support for democracy. Future research would do well to examine the causal pathways to the endorsement of democratic values as well as the ramifications of mass narcissism and mass self-esteem across nations for regime or party changes.

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subscale, which measures narcissistic devaluation, supremacy and aggressiveness. Please see the Supplement for details.

For the functioning of democracy, it seems useful to foster positive feelings of self-worth, but if those become narcissistic, they can threaten the democratic process. Although the jury is still out on whether the new generations are more narcissistic than the previous ones (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008; Wetzel et al., 2017), it is important to monitor how societal changes, including the developments of technology and social media, affect the self (Twenge, 2017; see also Do social media threaten democracy?, 2017). In the end, these processes may have important implications for our social and political attitudes.

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Table 1

## Zero-order Correlations between Continuous Variables (Study 1)

| Measure                  | 1.               | 2.             | 3.              | 4.              |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Support for democracy | -                |                |                 |                 |
| 2. Self-esteem           | .16<br>p = .001  | -              |                 |                 |
| 3. Narcissism            | -.23<br>p < .001 | .04<br>p = .44 | -               |                 |
| 4. RWA                   | -.24<br>p < .001 | .13<br>p = .01 | .26<br>p < .001 | -               |
| 5. SDO                   | -.29<br>p < .001 | .05<br>p = .33 | .29<br>p < .001 | .36<br>p < .001 |

Table 2

Regression for Narcissism and Self-Esteem Predicting Support for Democracy (Study 1)

| Variables                 | Step 1      |         |       | Step 2       |         |       | Step 3      |         |       |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------|-------|--------------|---------|-------|-------------|---------|-------|
|                           | B(SE)       | $\beta$ | p     | B(SE)        | $\beta$ | p     | B(SE)       | $\beta$ | p     |
| Self-esteem               | 0.23(0.06)  | .17     | <.001 | 0.16(0.07)   | .12     | .02   | 0.17(0.07)  | .13     | .01   |
| Narcissism                | -0.24(0.05) | -.24    | <.001 | -0.26(0.05)  | -.26    | <.001 | -0.13(0.05) | -.13    | .01   |
| Age                       |             |         |       | 0.004(0.004) | .06     | .28   | 0.01(0.004) | .13     | .01   |
| Gender (1=female, 0=male) |             |         |       | -0.02(0.08)  | -.01    | .79   | -0.11(0.08) | -.06    | .19   |
| Race (1=White, 0=other)   |             |         |       | 0.06(0.10)   | .03     | .57   | 0.12(0.09)  | .06     | .21   |
| Education                 |             |         |       | 0.05(0.03)   | .07     | .15   | 0.03(0.03)  | .05     | .33   |
| Income                    |             |         |       | 0.04(0.01)   | .14     | .01   | 0.04(0.01)  | .16     | .001  |
| RWA                       |             |         |       |              |         |       | -0.09(0.03) | -.16    | .001  |
| SDO                       |             |         |       |              |         |       | -0.18(0.04) | -.25    | <.001 |
| F                         | 18.13       |         | <.001 | 7.19         |         | <.001 | 11.66       |         | <.001 |
| $R^2_{adj}$               |             | .08     |       |              | .10     |       |             | .19     |       |

Table 3

## Zero-order Correlations between Continuous Variables (Study 2)

| Measure                  | 1.              | 2.              | 3.              |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Support for democracy | -               |                 |                 |
| 2. Self-esteem           | .08<br>p = .12  | -               |                 |
| 3. Narcissism            | -.10<br>p = .04 | .44<br>p < .001 | -               |
| 4. Interpersonal trust   | .13<br>p = .01  | .15<br>p = .003 | -.01<br>p = .80 |

Table 4

Regression for Narcissism, Self-Esteem and Interpersonal Trust Predicting Support for Democracy (Study 2)

| Variables                     | Step 1      |         |      | Step 2      |         |       | Step 3      |         |       |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------|------|-------------|---------|-------|-------------|---------|-------|
|                               | B(SE)       | $\beta$ | p    | B(SE)       | $\beta$ | p     | B(SE)       | $\beta$ | p     |
| Self-esteem                   | 0.38(0.14)  | .15     | .01  | 0.34(0.14)  | .14     | .01   | 0.29(0.14)  | .11     | .04   |
| Narcissism                    | -0.34(0.12) | -.16    | .004 | -0.26(0.12) | -.12    | .03   | -0.23(0.12) | -.11    | .046  |
| Age                           |             |         |      | 0.05(0.01)  | .16     | .001  | 0.05(0.01)  | .16     | .002  |
| Gender (1=female, 0=male)     |             |         |      | 0.21(0.12)  | .09     | .08   | 0.21(0.12)  | .09     | .08   |
| Interpersonal trust           |             |         |      |             |         |       | 0.11(0.05)  | .11     | .03   |
| F                             | 5.55        |         | .004 | 6.01        |         | <.001 | 5.84        |         | <.001 |
| R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub> |             | .02     |      |             | .05     |       |             | .06     |       |

Figure 1

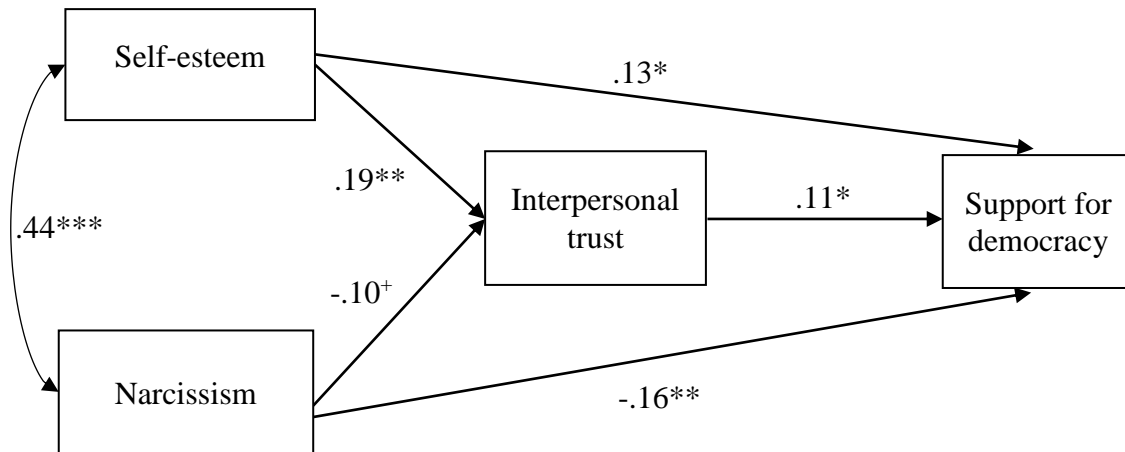


Figure 1 Caption

Figure 1. The effects of individual narcissism and self-esteem on support for democracy via interpersonal trust (Study 2). The indirect effect of narcissism on support for democracy via interpersonal trust = -0.02 [-0.07 to 0.00]. The indirect effect of self-esteem on support for democracy via interpersonal trust = 0.05 [0.01 to 0.14]. Entries are standardized coefficients, without controlling for demographics.

+  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



### Study 1 Additional Analyses

#### Factor analysis

We conducted a principal component analysis for the eight-item Democratic Support Scale (Magalhães, 2014) using oblique rotation (oblimin). In Study 1, the KMO=.79, indicating acceptable sampling adequacy. Two factors had eigenvalues higher than 1, and in combination explained 55.27% of the variance (see Table S1 for factor loadings). Of the factors suggested by Magalhães (2014), Factor 1 captured democratic performance evaluation and explicit support for democracy, while Factor 2 captured democracy-autocracy preference.

Table S1

Results of Factor Analysis for Democratic Support Scale (Study 1)

| Item  | Factor 1   | Factor 2   |
|---|------------|------------|
| 1. Democracies are indecisive and squabble too much. (r)  | <b>.64</b> | .19        |
| 2. In democracy, the economic system runs badly. (r)  | <b>.73</b> | .11        |
| 3. Democracies aren't good at maintaining order. (r)  | <b>.76</b> | .16        |
| 4. Having experts, not congress, make decisions according to what they think is better for the country. (r) | .11        | <b>.58</b> |
| 5. Having a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with congress and elections is needed. (r)             | .02        | <b>.81</b> |
| 6. The military should govern in this country. (r)  | -.06       | <b>.75</b> |
| 7. We should have a democratic based political system.  | <b>.74</b> | -.02       |
| 8. Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government.                           | <b>.75</b> | -.23       |
| Eigenvalues   | 3.14       | 1.29       |
| % of variance   | 39.18%     | 16.08%     |

Note. Factor loadings over .40 in bold. The reverse coded items (r) were recoded prior to the analysis so that the higher scores indicate the higher support for democracy.

We repeated our basic regression analyses for the two components of support for democracy (Table S2). We found that the results for the democratic performance evaluation and explicit support for democracy were consistent with our basic findings – they were negatively predicted by narcissism and positively by self-esteem. Narcissism also negatively predicted preference for democracy over autocracy, while self-esteem was not significantly associated with this outcome.

Table S2

Regression for Narcissism and Self-Esteem Predicting Two Components of Support for Democracy (Study 1)

| Predictors                    | Democratic performance evaluation/<br>explicit support for democracy |       |         |                    | Democracy over autocracy<br>preference |       |         |       |
|-------------------------------|--|-------|---------|--------------------|--|-------|---------|-------|
|                               | B  | SE    | $\beta$ | p                  | B                                      | SE    | $\beta$ | p     |
| Self-Esteem                   | 0.30   | 0.08  | .19     | <.001              | 0.10                                   | 0.08  | .07     | .16   |
| Narcissism                    | -0.16  | 0.06  | -.13    | .01                | -0.38                                  | 0.06  | -.32    | <.001 |
| F                             |  | 10.69 |         | <.001 <sup>*</sup> |  | 23.14 |         | <.001 |
| R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub> |  |       | .05     |                    |  |       | .10     |       |

### Analysis including the two NARQ subscales

We also conducted analyses for the two subscales of the NARQ questionnaire: admiration and rivalry (Table S3). Lower support for democracy was more strongly predicted by the rivalry aspect of narcissism, which is consistent with the theoretical rationale that narcissists are especially likely to reject democracy due to their competitiveness and the tendency to devalue others' opinions.

Table S3

Regression for the Two Subscales of Narcissism and Self-Esteem Predicting Support for Democracy (Study 1)

| Predictors  | B     | SE   | $\beta$ | p     |
|-------------|-------|------|---------|-------|
| Self-Esteem | 0.19  | 0.07 | .14     | .01   |
| Admiration  | -0.08 | 0.05 | -.10    | .08   |
| Rivalry     | -0.17 | 0.05 | -.19    | .001  |
| F           |       |      | 12.50   | <.001 |
| $R^2_{adj}$ |       |      | .08     |       |

### Analysis including personality traits

Study 1 also included a measure of personality dimensions based on the Big Five model (McCrae & Costa, 1999) with the use of BFI-10 questionnaire (Rammstedt & John, 2010). Each of the five personality dimensions was measured using two items (scale from 1=disagree strongly to 5=agree strongly). However, there was a mistake in the text of one of the two items measuring Openness, and – as a result – we were forced to rely on just one item for assessing this

personality trait. Because of this mistake, we decided not to include this analysis in the main text of the manuscript.

We conducted multiple regression analysis to investigate the effects of self-esteem and narcissism on support for democracy when controlled for the Big Five personality dimensions: Extraversion ( $\alpha = .72$ ,  $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ), Neuroticism ( $\alpha = .76$ ,  $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ), Agreeableness ( $\alpha = .37$ ,  $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), Conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .55$ ,  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) and Openness ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ; Table S4).

Our results indicated that participants who scored higher on the Conscientiousness and Neuroticism dimensions also declared stronger support for democracy. In line with past work by Miklikowska (2012), the effect of trait Openness was significant, but its reliability is hard to assess, as the score for Openness is based on only one item. The effects of self-esteem and narcissism remained significant.

Table S4

Regression for Self-esteem, Narcissism, and Personality Traits on Support for Democracy (Study 1)

| Predictors        | Step 1 |      |         |      |
|-------------------|--------|------|---------|------|
|                   | B      | SE   | $\beta$ | p    |
| Extraversion      | -0.01  | 0.04 | -.02    | .746 |
| Neuroticism       | 0.09   | 0.04 | .13     | .033 |
| Agreeableness     | -0.01  | 0.05 | -.01    | .872 |
| Conscientiousness | 0.11   | 0.05 | .12     | .038 |
| Openness          | 0.13   | 0.04 | .14     | .003 |
| Self-esteem       | 0.23   | 0.09 | .17     | .007 |

|                               |       |      |      |       |
|-------------------------------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Narcissism                    | -0.24 | 0.05 | -.24 | <.001 |
| F                             |       |      | 7.90 | <.001 |
| R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub> |       |      | .11  |       |

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### Study 2 Additional Analyses

#### Factor analysis

We conducted a principal component analysis for the eight-item Democratic Support Scale (Magalhães, 2014) using oblique rotation (oblimin). In Study 2, the KMO=.85, indicating acceptable sampling adequacy. Only one factor had an eigenvalue higher than 1 (4.11), and explained 51.32% of the variance. This analysis suggests that in Poland the measure captured general support for democracy.