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# **On the Psychological Function of Nationalistic ‘Whitelash’**

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## **Abstract**

A noticeable feature of the political discourse accompanying the rise of Nationalism in White-majority countries is that White people fare worse than other ethnic groups in their societies. However, it is unclear based on the extant literature why group-based relative deprivation (GRD) would correlate with majority-group Nationalism. Here, we propose that the psychological function of Nationalism for majority-group members lies in its ability to assuage the negative feelings arising from GRD. Accordingly, in a New Zealand national probability sample (N= 15,607), we found that GRD among Whites was negatively associated with wellbeing. However, we also found an opposing indirect association mediated by Nationalism. GRD was associated with higher Nationalism, which was in turn associated with higher wellbeing. These findings suggest that endorsing beliefs about national superiority is one way a nation's dominant ethnic group can cope with the negative psychological consequences of perceiving that their group is deprived.

## **On the Psychological Function of Nationalistic ‘Whitelash’**

A noticeable feature of the political discourse accompanying the recent rise of Nationalism in White-majority countries is that native Whites are faring worse in their societies than other ethnic groups (Wilson, 2016; Pai, 2016). For example, when Molly Ball, a reporter for *The Atlantic* magazine, interviewed Trump supporters during the Republican primaries, she noted an underlying resentment that “they, the others, enjoy privileges, resources, and status to which we are denied access” (Ball, 2016). Also during the Primaries, a Washington Post/ABC News poll showed that a majority of Trump supporters thought that “Whites losing out because of preferences for Blacks and Hispanics” was a bigger problem facing the country than minorities losing out because of preference for Whites (Sargent, 2016). More generally, White Americans now view anti-White bias as being a bigger social problem than anti-Black bias – a change from the preceding four decades in which anti-Black bias was viewed as a bigger problem (Norton & Sommers, 2011).

The perception that one’s own group is losing out to other groups, referred to as ‘group-based relative deprivation’ (GRD) – often contrasted with ‘individual relative deprivation’ (IRD) – has been a central construct in the literature on political attitudes for over five decades (Runciman, 1966; see Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin & Bialosiewicz, 2012, for a review). Yet, extant theory and research has neglected the link between GRD and the kind of majority-group Nationalism that has become salient in the current political environment<sup>1</sup>. The present study addresses this oversight by investigating this link and examining the psychological function of Nationalism. We argue that Nationalism is appealing to ethnic majorities in the face of perceived group deprivation because it buffers their wellbeing against the negative psychological consequences of feeling that their group is deprived. We examine this idea in a large, nationally representative sample in New Zealand (N = 15,607),

by testing a model in which GRD has both a negative direct relationship with wellbeing, and a positive indirect relationship with wellbeing via increased Nationalism.

In doing so, we (a) advance a novel explanation for why perceptions of GRD among Whites may be contributing to the rise of ethnic Nationalism, (b) extend the relative deprivation literature by showing that GRD can have negative consequences for wellbeing over and above IRD, (c) show how these negative consequences can be buffered by Nationalism, and (d) speak to the debate among social commentators over the degree to which support for Nationalistic candidates reflects Whites' concerns about their own personal circumstances versus concerns about their group's position in society (Casselmann, 2017; Robinson, 2017).

### **Relative Deprivation Theory**

According to Relative Deprivation Theory, people's perceptions of how deprived they are – relative to those with whom they compare themselves – are more psychologically relevant than their objective levels of deprivation (Walker & Smith, 2002). This idea has spawned hundreds of studies over five decades, and has influenced multiple fields including Sociology, Psychology, History, Political Science, and Economics (see Smith et al., 2012). Relative deprivation has been linked to outcomes as varied as individual behavior (e.g. bullying; Breivik & Olweus, 2006), collective behavior (e.g., protest; Osborne & Sibley, 2013), intergroup attitudes (e.g., prejudice; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), and internal states (e.g., optimism; Chen & Paterson, 2006).

Early in the development of the theory, Runciman (1966) proposed that people can experience two distinct kinds of relative deprivation based on whether they compare themselves to other individuals (individual relative deprivation; IRD), or compare their group to other groups (group-based relative deprivation; GRD). Consistent with this distinction, research shows that IRD is associated with psychological outcomes relevant to the individual

(e.g. wellbeing), whereas GRD is associated with outcomes relevant to one's group (e.g., collective action; Dion, 1986). By implication, this pattern has sometimes been taken to mean that IRD is generally irrelevant to understanding group-focused outcomes, and GRD is irrelevant to understanding individual-focused outcomes (Smith & Oritz, 2002). Here, we argue that GRD may spill over into at least one individual-focused outcome (namely, wellbeing)<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, attending to these effects might help to explain the contemporary appeal of Nationalistic parties and candidates.

Only a few studies have simultaneously tested the associations of IRD and GRD with wellbeing, yielding mixed results. In three early examples, IRD (but not GRD) was linked to greater stress symptoms (Walker & Mann, 1987), lower personal satisfaction (Koomen and Fränkel, 1992), and lower self-esteem (Walker, 1999). However, these studies were conducted with extremely small samples (64, 81 and 80 respondents, respectively). In a somewhat larger sample (N = 235), GRD showed significant associations with self-esteem and life satisfaction (Zagefka and Brown, 2005). In the two largest samples to date, Abrams and Grant (2012; N = 911) and Osborne and Sibley (2013; N = 6886) both found significant links between GRD and wellbeing (i.e., depression and satisfaction with standard of living, respectively), although these links were weaker than those with IRD. Finally, the only longitudinal test of the concurrent effects of GRD and IRD on wellbeing found that both IRD and GRD had negative effects on life satisfaction over time, and that these effects were similar in magnitude (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes and Garcia, 2010). Overall, these findings suggest that GRD may sometimes reduce individuals' wellbeing (albeit to a lesser extent than IRD). Indeed, studies with larger samples find significant effects, which suggests that early work showing no relationship between GRD and wellbeing might have lacked the statistical power to detect the smaller effects GRD exerts relative to IRD.

### **The Rejection-Identification Model**

Indeed, it would be extremely surprising if perceiving one's group to be deprived was not associated with people's wellbeing at all, given the consistent finding that perceiving discrimination against one's group is negatively associated with wellbeing (see Schmitt, et al., 2014 for a meta-analytic review). Although GRD and perceived discrimination are different constructs, common to both is the perception that one's group is being treated unfairly in society compared to other groups. Moreover, perceiving pervasive discrimination that is attributable to one's group membership is much more deleterious to wellbeing than incidental exposure to discrimination (Schmitt et al., 2014). Thus, it is the very operationalization of perceived discrimination that is most similar to GRD that shows the strongest negative relationship with wellbeing.

The literature on the effects of discrimination on wellbeing also provides an indication of how people cope with perceptions that their group is being unfairly treated. Specifically, Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey (1999) showed that identifying more strongly with one's group protected against the negative effects of perceiving pervasive societal discrimination against that group. Perceived discrimination had a negative direct effect on the wellbeing of African Americans. However, it also had a positive association with ingroup identification, which in turn, was positively associated with wellbeing (Branscombe et al., 1999). This 'Rejection-Identification Model' has been tested with in several intergroup contexts, and also holds longitudinally (Schmitt & Branscombe, Kobrynowicz & Owen, 2002; Stronge, Sengupta, Barlow, Osborne, Houkamau & Sibley, 2016). However, the model has primarily been used to understand how socially disadvantaged groups cope with perceptions of systemic unfairness against their group (but see Schmitt et al., 2002)<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Psychological Function of Nationalism**

Here, we extend this general idea to advantaged groups. We argue that, in addition to clinging to their ethnic identity, advantaged groups have another option to buffer their

wellbeing against GRD: They can cling to their national identity. This is because the content of national identity is heavily influenced by the dominant cultural group within the nation. For example, studies in Germany, USA and Australia have shown that members of both ethnic majority and minority groups associate the symbols and culture of the majority group more strongly with the superordinate national category than minority-group culture, on both implicit and explicit measures (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Devos, Gavin & Quintana, 2010; Sibley & Barlow, 2009; Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel & Boettcher, 2004; see also Sidanius & Petrocik, 2001). This projection of ethnic-majority identity onto a superordinate category makes the national category available to majority groups as an additional source of positive identification in the face of GRD.

Understanding why ethnic majorities might utilize this additional source of identification requires a consideration of the particular psychological motives that are undermined by GRD. Research on the rejection-identification model suggests that one such motive is the need for belongingness, which is heightened by the sense of exclusion that results from perceiving group-based unfairness (Branscombe et al., 1999). Stronger identification with one's ethnic group helps to fulfil this motive, thereby buffering people's wellbeing (e.g., Stronge et al., 2016). However, given that GRD indexes a perception that one's group is losing out to other groups, we propose that it also threatens another key psychological motive – the need to perceive one's group as having a competitive advantage over other groups. The existence of this type of motivation has been acknowledged by several theories of intergroup relations, and is referred to as the motive for positive group distinctiveness (in the Social Identity tradition; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) or for group-based dominance (in the Social Dominance tradition; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). One's ethnic group cannot fulfil this distinctiveness/dominance motive in the face of GRD because it is this very



group that is seen as conferring lower social status. Therefore, majority group members must turn to the national category as a source of positive identification.

The literature on national identity highlights two distinct ways of identifying with the national category – Nationalism and Patriotism. While these ideologies have been operationalized in different ways, the basic distinction between them is that Patriotism indexes feelings of attachment to one's nation, whereas Nationalism indexes a belief in national superiority (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). This distinction is crucial to our current argument. We propose that beliefs about ingroup superiority should fulfill the need for group distinctiveness/dominance better than mere attachment to the nation. Therefore, endorsing Nationalism, but not Patriotism should buffer people's wellbeing against the threat to group distinctiveness/dominance that arises from GRD.

Specifically, we predict the negative direct effect of GRD on wellbeing (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes & Garcia, 2014) will be offset by a positive indirect effect via Nationalism. GRD should be associated with increased Nationalism (thereby fulfilling the dominance motive), and Nationalism should subsequently be associated with increased personal wellbeing. In line with the rejection-identification model, we also predict that GRD will be associated with increased ethnic identification (thereby fulfilling the belongingness motive), and that ethnic identification will in turn be associated with increased personal wellbeing. On the other hand, we do not expect Patriotism to mediate the relationship between GRD and wellbeing because (a) the national category, unlike the ethnic group, does not help fulfil the belongingness motive that is undermined by GRD, and (b) feelings of national attachment, unlike feelings of national superiority, do not help fulfil the dominance motive that is undermined by GRD.

We test these hypotheses using data from a New Zealand national probability sample. New Zealand is a country that has not experienced the same rise in far-right politics as similar

White-majority countries. Testing our model in the New Zealand context, then, should reveal whether the apparent link between expressions of majority-group deprivation and the appeal of Nationalistic candidates (e.g., Ball, 2016) can be explained in terms of a general psychological process, or whether this phenomenon is more specific to the political discourse prevalent in the countries that have experienced an increase in Nationalism.

## **Method**

### **Sampling Procedure and Participants**

Data for this study come from Time 5 (2013) of the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS)<sup>4</sup>, a national probability sample of adults drawn from the New Zealand electoral roll (which provides contact details for all registered voters aged 18 or over). We chose to analyze data from this wave of the study because, after booster sampling, it contained the largest number of participants while also including all of the measures required for our analysis, thus maximizing our statistical power. The Time 5 NZAVS contained responses from 18,264 participants. Since our hypotheses are about majority-group attitudes, we restricted our analysis to the 15,607 participants who identified as “New Zealand European”, and who had completed all the relevant measures.

### **Measures**

**Focal variables.** GRD was measured using the following two items adapted from Abrams and Grant (2012): “I’m frustrated by what my ethnic group earns relative to other groups in NZ” and “People from my ethnic group generally earn less than other groups in NZ” ( $r = .41$ ). Nationalism was measured using the following two items adapted from

Kosterman and Feshbach (1989): “Generally, the more influence NZ has on other nations, the better off they are” and “Foreign nations have done some very fine things but they are still not as good as New Zealand” ( $r = .30$ ). All of the above items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Subjective wellbeing was measured using ratings of satisfaction on a 0-10 scale (0 – completely dissatisfied; 10 – completely satisfied) for the following four items: “Your health”; “Your personal relationships”; “Your standard of living”; “Your future security” ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Covariates.** IRD was measured using the following two items adapted from Abrams and Grant (2012): “I’m frustrated by what I earn relative to other people in NZ” and “I generally earn less than other people in NZ” ( $r = .44$ ). Patriotism was measured using the following two items adapted from Kosterman and Feshbach (1989): “I feel a great pride in the land that is our New Zealand” and “Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to New Zealand always remains strong” ( $r = .58$ ). Ethnic Identification was measured using the following three items adapted from Leach et al. (2008): “I often think about the fact that I am a member of my ethnic group”, “The fact that I am a member of my ethnic group is an important part of my identity”, “Being a member of my ethnic group is an important part of how I see myself” ( $\alpha = .73$ ). All of the above items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

We also adjusted for objective socio-economic status using the following indicators: educational status, occupational status, the logarithm of household income and neighborhood-level deprivation. Neighborhood-level deprivation was assessed by matching each participant’s neighborhood (obtained via their address) with a measure of deprivation calculated by the Ministry of Health (NZDep2013; Atkinson, Salmond & Crampton, 2014). The NZDep2013 index assigns a ranked decile score (1 = most affluent; 10 = least affluent) to each local neighborhood in New Zealand (each neighborhood consists of roughly 100

people). The mean deprivation index for our participants was 4.72 (SD = 2.75). Finally, we adjusted for Age and Gender (0 – women, 1 – men).

### **A note on item selection**

The NZAVS questionnaire includes over 200 items assessing a broad range of constructs including, personality, ideology, prejudice, policy preferences, wellbeing and health, among many others. As such, it is important to explain why particular constructs were selected over others, to test the hypotheses in the current study. The items included in our model were carefully chosen to speak to our particular hypotheses and rule out the most theoretically relevant confounds. For example, our theorizing started from the premise that White people in White-majority countries often hold a particular belief about intergroup relations that conflicts with reality – that their own group is losing out to minority groups (e.g. Norton & Sommers, 2011). The best measure of this idea available in our survey was group-based relative deprivation (GRD).

Choosing GRD as the focal predictor necessitated including individual relative deprivation (IRD) simultaneously in the model because these two perceptions of deprivation are positively correlated (e.g., see Osborne, Sibley, Smith & Huo, 2015). Moreover, including subjective perceptions of deprivation meant that we also needed to include objective indices of deprivation to show that perceptions matter over and above people's objective situation (a core premise of relative deprivation theory; Smith et al., 2012). For this purpose, we included a broad range of indicators of objective social status – age, gender, income, area-level deprivation, education and occupation.

The next step in our argument was that majority-group members are able to draw on their national identity to buffer themselves against the negative psychological consequences of GRD. Thus, we needed to include measures of national identification. There were two constructs in the survey that related to national identification – Nationalism and Patriotism.

We expected GRD to be associated with Nationalism but not Patriotism, for reasons outlined in the preceding section. We therefore included both these measures in our model, to demonstrate the specificity of the psychological process we are hypothesizing. Moreover, the theoretical impetus for our model was the rejection-identification model, which proposes that that ethnic identification buffers people against the negative effects of perceived disadvantage (Branscombe et al., 1999). We sought to establish that Nationalism buffers minority groups in a different way than ethnic identification (i.e., fulfilling the need for positive ingroup distinctiveness rather than the need for affiliation, as outlined in the preceding section). Therefore, we included ethnic identification as an additional mediator in our model.

Finally, to test our buffering hypothesis, we needed to select a global measure of people's satisfaction with their lives. There were two constructs in the survey that were suitable for this purpose. A two-item short form of Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin's (1985) 'Satisfaction with Life Scale', and a four-item version of Tiliouine, Cummins & Davern's (2006) 'Personal Wellbeing Index'. We selected the longer of the two measures because longer scales have several psychometric advantages over shorter ones (e.g., they are less prone to both sign and magnitude errors; Bakker & Lelekes, 2018). Therefore, our overall model includes the most appropriate combination of relevant constructs for testing our hypotheses that were available in the current survey.

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics and correlations between all observed variables.

|                        | 1.    | 2.    | 3.    | 4.    | 5.    | 6.    | 7.    | 8.    | 9.    | 10.   | 11.   | 12.   | 13.  | 14.   | 15.   | 16.   | 17.   | 18.  | 19.  | 20.  | 21.  |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Gender              | -     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 2. Age                 | .13*  | -     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 3. NZDep2013           | -.04* | -.06* | -     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 4. Income (log)        | .06*  | -.09* | -.33* | -     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 5. Occupational status | -.08* | -.01  | -.17* | .32*  | -     |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 6. Educational status  | -.07* | -.15* | -.15* | .27*  | .58*  | -     |       |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 7. IRD Item 1          | -.07* | -.09* | .14*  | -.27* | -.17* | -.13* | -     |       |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 8. IRD Item 2          | -.07* | -.02* | .17*  | -.41* | -.27* | -.20* | .43*  | -     |       |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 9. GRD Item 1          | -.02  | -.04* | .17*  | -.15* | -.09* | -.08* | .27*  | .22*  | -     |       |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 10. GRD Item 2         | .00   | -.04* | .20*  | -.15* | -.13* | -.14* | .20*  | .22*  | .48*  | -     |       |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 11. Nationalism Item 1 | .05*  | -.01  | .08*  | .00   | -.04* | -.06* | .05*  | .01   | .07*  | .06*  | -     |       |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 12. Nationalism Item 2 | .01   | .02   | .06*  | -.06* | -.10* | -.14* | .11*  | .07*  | .17*  | .16*  | .27*  | -     |      |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 13. Patriotism Item 1  | -.05* | .10*  | -.02* | .06*  | .01   | -.04* | -.07* | -.06* | .02   | .00   | .18*  | .23*  | -    |       |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 14. Patriotism Item 2  | .02*  | .18*  | -.03* | .08*  | .03*  | -.02* | -.10* | -.08* | -.07* | -.05* | -.16* | .20*  | .56* | -     |       |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 15. EID Item 1         | -.01  | -.08* | .14*  | -.08* | .01   | -.05* | .13*  | -.11* | .37*  | .35*  | .08*  | .09*  | .00  | -.03* | -     |       |       |      |      |      |      |
| 16. EID Item 2         | -.07* | .09*  | .09*  | -.07* | .01   | .01   | .09*  | .07*  | .29*  | .25*  | .10*  | -.15* | .14* | .10*  | .44*  | -     |       |      |      |      |      |
| 17. EID Item 3         | -.06* | .10*  | .10*  | -.08* | -.02* | -.02* | .09*  | .07*  | .32*  | .25*  | .13*  | .18*  | .15* | .13*  | .43*  | .76*  | -     |      |      |      |      |
| 18. Wellbeing Item 1   | -.02* | .03*  | -.22* | .35*  | .16*  | .13*  | -.42* | -.30* | -.20* | -.19* | .03*  | -.01  | .18* | .18*  | -.08* | -.01  | -.01  | -    |      |      |      |
| 19. Wellbeing Item 2   | -.01  | -.06* | -.14* | .19*  | .10*  | .12*  | -.23* | -.18* | -.16* | -.16  | .02*  | -.02* | .14* | .12*  | -.07* | -.02  | -.01  | .44* | -    |      |      |
| 20. Wellbeing Item 3   | .00   | .09*  | -.20* | .28*  | .11*  | .09*  | -.38* | -.26* | -.18* | -.18* | .08*  | -.03* | .17* | .19*  | -.11* | -.03* | -.02* | .58* | .44* | -    |      |
| 21. Wellbeing Item 4   | -.03* | .05*  | -.11* | .22*  | .07*  | .04*  | -.19* | -.12* | -.08* | -.08  | .01   | .01   | .17* | .16   | .06*  | -.03* | -.03* | .40* | .34* | .37* | -    |
| M                      | .38   | 47.65 | 4.72  | 11.31 | 53.23 | 5.03  | 3.41  | 3.43  | 2.52  | 2.47  | 4.09  | 3.53  | 6.02 | 5.86  | 2.72  | 3.93  | 3.83  | 7.23 | 6.85 | 6.15 | 7.77 |
| SD                     | .47   | 13.59 | 2.75  | .76   | 15.94 | 2.83  | 1.74  | 1.89  | 1.61  | 1.74  | 1.37  | 1.67  | 1.10 | 1.17  | 1.75  | 1.94  | 1.97  | 2.09 | 2.31 | 2.40 | 2.23 |

Note. \*p < .01

## Results

We tested a Structural Equation Model in which GRD simultaneously predicted the three potential mediators – Nationalism, Patriotism and Ethnic Identification. Further, these three mediators were modelled as simultaneous predictors of subjective wellbeing. We also allowed the three mediators to covary with each other. Due to our large sample size, we selected a more conservative alpha level of .01 for all analyses. Because we were interested in comparing the direct and indirect effects of GRD on wellbeing, we also included the link between GRD and subjective wellbeing. The model also included links from GRD, IRD, gender, age, neighborhood-level deprivation, the logarithm of income, occupational status and educational status with all three mediators and wellbeing, and therefore adjusted for the effects of these critical covariates. We used multiple imputation to estimate missing values for all variables. The focal model is depicted in Figure 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between all observed variables in the model are presented in Table 1.

### Model Fit

Our hypothesized model provided an excellent fit to the observed data according to a range of indices of model fit:  $\chi^2(129) = 4204$ ,  $p < .001$ ; standardized Root Mean Square Residual (sRMR) = .031, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .045. The sRMR and RMSEA values indicate that the model provided a reasonably parsimonious summary of the observed covariance matrix according to the rules-of-thumb proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999; i.e., an RMSEA less than .06 and a sRMR less than .08).

### Parameter Estimates

As shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4, after adjusting for covariates, GRD was positively associated with Nationalism ( $b = .16$ ,  $se = .01$ ,  $\beta = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Ethnic Identification ( $b = .33$ ,  $se = .01$ ,  $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but was not associated with Patriotism ( $b = -.03$ ,  $se = .01$ ,  $\beta$

= -.04,  $p = .024$ ). As shown in Table 5, Nationalism ( $b = .19$ ,  $se = .05$ ,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $p < .001$ ), ethnic identification ( $b = .14$ ,  $se = .03$ ,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Patriotism ( $b = .39$ ,  $se = .03$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were, in turn, positively associated with wellbeing.

Tests of indirect effects<sup>5</sup> indicated that GRD predicted increased wellbeing via its positive effect on Ethic Identification ( $b = .05$ ,  $se = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ , 99% CI [0.024, 0.068]). Crucially, GRD also predicted increased wellbeing via its positive effect on Nationalism ( $b = .03$ ,  $se = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ , 99% CI [0.009, 0.052]), but not Patriotism ( $b = -.01$ ,  $se = .01$ ,  $p = .029$ , 99% CI [-0.024, 0.002]). Nevertheless, the direct effect of GRD on wellbeing was negative and significant when adjusting for Nationalism, Patriotism and Ethnic Identification ( $b = -.08$ ,  $se = .03$ ,  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .006$ ). This supported our hypothesis that GRD would exert opposing effects on wellbeing – a negative direct effect, and positive indirect effect via Nationalism (but not via Patriotism). These findings also demonstrate that Nationalism can buffer the wellbeing of majority-group members in response to perceptions of group-based deprivation, over and above the buffering effects of Ethnic Identification identified in the literature on the rejection-identification model.



Table 2

Standardized parameter estimates for the model Nationalism

|                     | $\beta$     | se         | 99% CIs    |            | z            |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
|                     |             |            | low        | high       |              |
| <b>GRD</b>          | <b>.29*</b> | <b>.02</b> | <b>.24</b> | <b>.34</b> | <b>13.99</b> |
| IRD                 | .03         | .03        | -.03       | .10        | 1.29         |
| Gender              | .02         | .01        | -.01       | .05        | 1.86         |
| Age                 | .03         | .01        | -.01       | .06        | 2.06         |
| NZDep2013           | .00         | .01        | -.04       | .03        | -0.32        |
| Income (log)        | .07*        | .02        | .03        | .12        | 4.20         |
| Occupational Status | -.02        | .02        | -.06       | .02        | -1.28        |
| Educational Status  | -.15*       | .02        | -.19       | -.11       | -9.54        |

Note. Focal variable shown in bold. \*p &lt; .01

Table 3

Standardized parameter estimates for the model Patriotism

|                     | $\beta$     | se         | 99% CIs     |            | z            |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
|                     |             |            | low         | high       |              |
| <b>GRD</b>          | <b>-.04</b> | <b>.02</b> | <b>-.08</b> | <b>.01</b> | <b>-2.25</b> |
| IRD                 | -.11*       | .02        | -.15        | -.05       | -5.46        |
| Gender              | -.10*       | .01        | -.12        | -.07       | -10.19       |
| Age                 | .20*        | .01        | .17         | .22        | 20.24        |
| NZDep2013           | .00         | .01        | -.02        | .03        | 0.21         |
| Income (log)        | .08*        | .01        | .05         | .12        | 6.17         |
| Occupational Status | -.01        | .01        | -.04        | .03        | -0.50        |
| Educational Status  | -.06*       | .01        | -.09        | -.03       | -4.61        |

Note. Focal variable shown in bold. \*p &lt; .01

Table 4  
Standardized parameter estimates for the model Ethnic Identification

|                     | $\beta$     | se         | 99% CIs    |            | z            |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
|                     |             |            | low        | high       |              |
| <b>GRD</b>          | <b>.48*</b> | <b>.02</b> | <b>.44</b> | <b>.52</b> | <b>31.72</b> |
| IRD                 | -.10*       | .02        | -.15       | -.05       | -5.35        |
| Gender              | -.09*       | .01        | -.11       | -.07       | -10.22       |
| Age                 | .16*        | .01        | .14        | .18        | 17.47        |
| NZDep2013           | .00         | .01        | -.02       | .03        | .15          |
| Income (log)        | -.03        | .01        | -.06       | .01        | -2.08        |
| Occupational Status | .01         | .01        | -.02       | .04        | .76          |
| Educational Status  | .08*        | .01        | .05        | .10        | 6.63         |

Note. Focal variable shown in bold. \*p < .01

Table 5  
Standardized parameter estimates for the model predicting subjective wellbeing.

|                              | $\beta$      | se         | 99% CIs     |             | z            |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
|                              |              |            | low         | high        |              |
| <b>Nationalism</b>           | <b>.07*</b>  | <b>.02</b> | <b>.02</b>  | <b>.11</b>  | <b>3.66</b>  |
| <b>Patriotism</b>            | <b>.19*</b>  | <b>.02</b> | <b>.15</b>  | <b>.23</b>  | <b>12.90</b> |
| <b>Ethnic Identification</b> | <b>.06*</b>  | <b>.01</b> | <b>.03</b>  | <b>.09</b>  | <b>5.48</b>  |
| <b>GRD</b>                   | <b>-.05*</b> | <b>.02</b> | <b>-.10</b> | <b>-.01</b> | <b>-2.75</b> |
| IRD                          | -.55*        | .02        | -.60        | -.50        | -29.66       |
| Gender                       | -.04*        | .01        | -.07        | -.02        | -5.05        |
| Age                          | -.03*        | .01        | -.05        | -.01        | -3.33        |
| NZDep2013                    | -.11*        | .01        | -.13        | -.09        | -12.51       |
| Income (log)                 | .10*         | .01        | .06         | .13         | 7.53         |
| Occupational Status          | -.07*        | .01        | -.10        | -.05        | -6.79        |

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|                    |     |     |      |     |      |
|--------------------|-----|-----|------|-----|------|
| Educational Status | .02 | .01 | -.01 | .05 | 1.52 |
|--------------------|-----|-----|------|-----|------|

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Note. Focal variables shown in bold. \*p < .01.

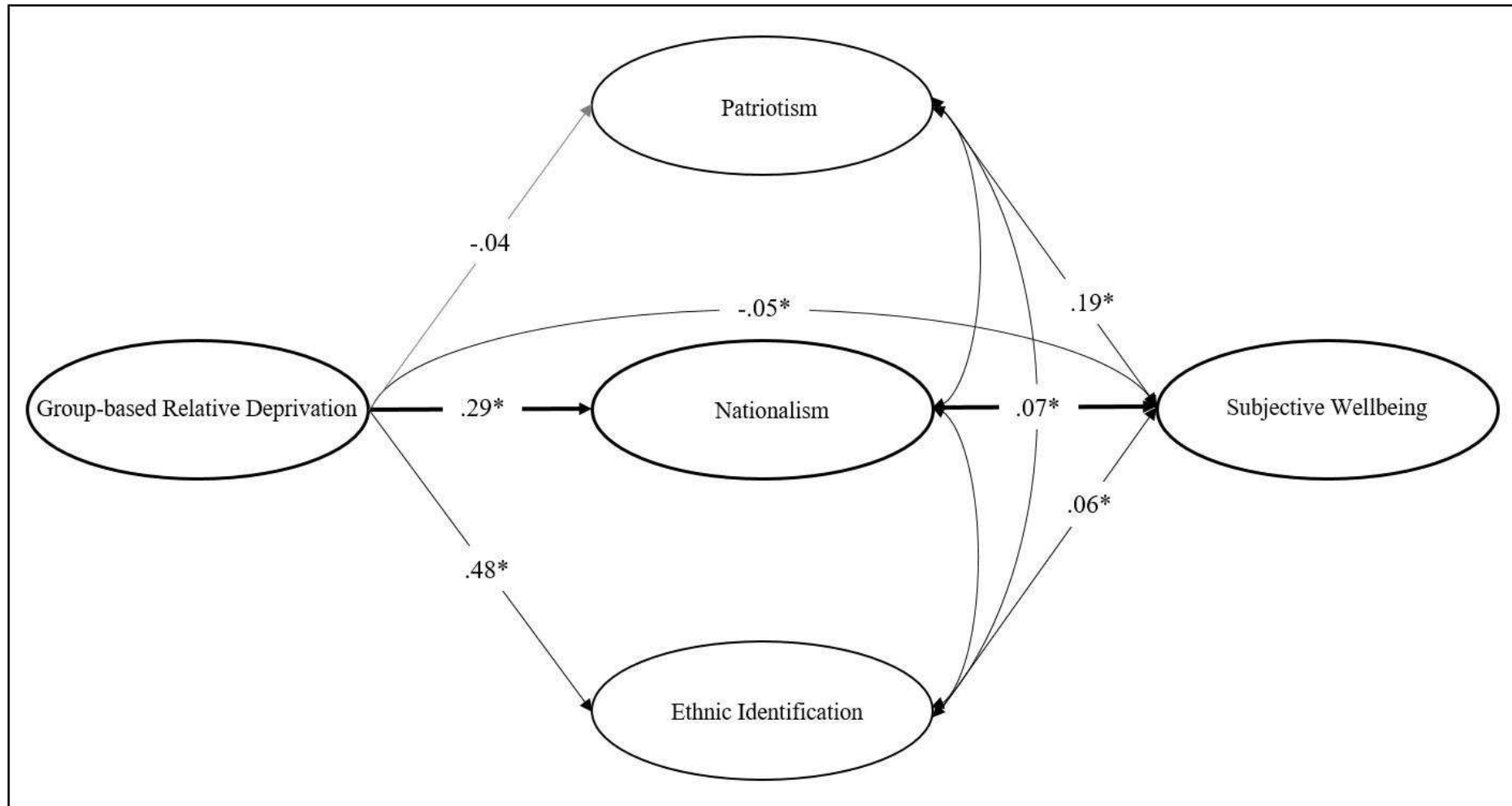


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the key paths in the Structural Equation Model with standardized parameter estimates (for simplicity, covariates included in the model, as well as paths from latent variables to manifest indicators are not shown).

Note. Fit indices for the model are as follows:  $\chi^2(129) = 4204$ ; sRMR = .031; RMSEA = .045. \* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

White people in White-majority countries enjoy not only a numerical advantage over other ethnic groups, but also myriad political and economic advantages. However, Relative Deprivation Theory has shown that perceptions are more important than reality (Walker & Smith, 2002). Despite their objective advantages as a group, a discourse that White people are losing out relative to other ethnic groups has emerged in several of these countries (Mols & Jetten, 2015; Pai, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Journalists documenting this discourse have noted that it seems particularly prevalent among those who support Nationalistic political candidates (Ball, 2016; Sergant, 2016). For the first time, we have demonstrated that, at least in New Zealand, perceptions of group-based deprivation among the ethnic majority are associated with endorsement of Nationalism.

We have also advanced an explanation for this link. The idea that one's group is losing out can be uncomfortable (Schmitt et al., 2014). Previous research has shown that to cope with this type of discomfort, people identify more strongly with their ingroup (Stronge et al., 2016). We extended this work to show that ingroup identification can buffer wellbeing not only against perceived discrimination, but also against perceived deprivation. However, ingroup identity within the superordinate category of the nation (in this case ethnic identity) fulfills one particular need – the need for belongingness in the face of perceived societal rejection (see Branscombe et al., 1999). To the extent that GRD fosters a feeling that amongst White majorities that society is 'against them', they can gain a sense of belongingness from their ethnic identity. This identity does not protect people from the loss of positive distinctiveness (or competitive ingroup advantage) that is also implied by GRD. Indeed, it is the very category that they see as conferring a disadvantage.

Our findings suggest that to regain their sense of ingroup advantage, majority-group members turn to their national identity, and specifically, the type of national-identity content

that connotes superiority over other groups (i.e., Nationalism, but not Patriotism). This is made easier by the fact that the content of national identity is already highly aligned with the ethnic identity of majority groups (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008). In other words, by simultaneously identifying more with their ethnic ingroup and subscribing to an ideology that frames their national ingroup as superior to other groups, ethnic majorities can accrue different benefits from different levels of intergroup comparison (see also, Brewer, 1991). This idea is supported by our finding that both ethnic identification and Nationalism simultaneously mediate the relationship between GRD and wellbeing.

Overall, our study adds to the vast literature on Relative Deprivation Theory by pointing to a previously undocumented consequence of GRD – majority-group Nationalism. Previous research had revealed a link between GRD and separatist Nationalism (Abrams & Grant, 2012; Guimond & Gubé-Simard, 1983). However, the distinction between separatist and majority-group Nationalism is important here. Separatist Nationalism is similar to other kinds of collective action in which a superordinate political entity is challenged by one of its constituent groups. What our model shows, for the first time, is that it is possible for a group to feel unfairly treated within a larger political entity (in this case, the nation), and simultaneously identify strongly with that entity, as long as doing so fulfills some psychological function (in this case, regaining a sense of ingroup advantage).

While these might seem like contradictory positions to hold in relation to the same attitude object, this contradiction – the simultaneous denigration and elevation of the nation – is very evident in the rhetoric of nationalistic politicians. For example, Winston Peters, New Zealand’s most prominent Nationalist political figure, often likens New Zealand to a “third world” country as a way of highlighting the supposed victimization of ethnic-majority New Zealanders, while simultaneously advocating for the primacy of New Zealand on the world stage (Peters, 2001). Similarly, Donald Trump’s campaign rhetoric often painted a grim

picture of American society, while at the same time rousing sentiments of national superiority (Cohen, 2017).

Our study also provides some data towards a highly topical debate among social analysts about the reasons for the appeal of nativist nationalism. Broadly, this debate can be summarized as a disagreement over whether White people's concerns about their personal economic circumstances or about their group's position in society is a better predictor of their support for a nationalistic brand of politics (Casselman, 2017; Robinson, 2017). Our findings provide more support for the latter position than for the former. White New Zealanders' perceptions and frustrations about their own personal status relative to others were not related to their beliefs about national superiority, whereas their perceptions of their *group's status* was positively related to such beliefs. Moreover, GRD had a much stronger association with Nationalism than did any of the objective indices of SES included in our model (area-level deprivation, income, etc.).

### **Caveats and Future Research**

Our interest in investigating the psychological function of Nationalism stemmed, in part, from a desire to understand the rise of Nationalism in White-majority countries around the world. However, our data are drawn from a single country: New Zealand. Moreover, New Zealand has not seen the same sharp rise in Nationalistic sentiments as the United States and Western Europe. The political party that was in power for most of the past decade in New Zealand, and that still enjoys high levels of support, is pro-immigration, pro-trade, and generally centrist, with a right-leaning economic platform (NZ National Party, 2018). The recently elected Labour-led government has a similarly centrist political platform, with a slightly more left-leaning economic agenda (NZ Labour Party, 2018). Thus, it could be argued that data from New Zealand cannot speak to the rise of Nationalism elsewhere.

Indeed, it remains an open question whether the psychological processes examined in the present study are generalizable beyond the New Zealand context. A conservative interpretation of our findings is that Nationalism buffers White New Zealanders against feelings that their ethnic group is deprived. This in itself represents a novel contribution to the literature on the psychological function of political ideologies, adding to the cultural diversity of this literature (see Osborne, Sengupta & Sibley, in press). However, a broader interpretation is that the link between GRD and Nationalism results from a general psychological process in which members of societally dominant groups buffer their subjective wellbeing against perceived deprivation by clinging to beliefs about national superiority.

Indeed, New Zealand is ethno-politically very similar to those Western nations that have experienced a rise in Nationalism. For example, it has a highly developed free-market economy (Heritage Foundation, 2017), is deeply embedded in international trade networks (MFAT, 2018), and has experienced increasing levels of immigration from countries that are both culturally dissimilar and economically less developed (e.g. the Pacific Islands, India and China; Statistics New Zealand, 2017). Therefore, we consider it likely that the psychological function of nationalism revealed in the present study will also be observed among ethnic majorities in other countries that share a similar socio-political context. Thus, the current findings indicate a worthwhile avenue for future research on the complex and topical issue of the rise in Nationalism in White-majority countries.

Another caveat is that our measure of GRD asked people to rate how their ethnic group compares to other “groups” in New Zealand, rather than to other “ethnic groups”. This phrasing means that we cannot rule out the possibility that people were comparing their ethnic group to other types of social groups (e.g., groups based on occupational/social class) rather than to other ethnic groups specifically. However, there are several reasons to expect



that although our GRD items do not explicitly refer to a comparison with other ethnic groups, most participants would be making exactly this type of comparison.

First, having referred specifically to their own ethnic group in the first part of each item statement, we feel that it is highly probable that participants would interpret the second reference to “groups” in a way that is consistent with ethnic-group membership. The items prime participants to think about ethnicity as the relevant dimension of group differentiation. Indeed, research on self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) shows that people engage in the particular type of intergroup comparison that matches the social category with which they have been primed to identify (e.g., when primed to think about ethnicity people compare their ethnic group to other ethnic groups and when primed to think about nationality people compare their nation to other nations; see Brewer, 1991). Second, ethnicity is a highly salient feature of New Zealand’s political landscape. For example, heated political battles are fought over ethnicity-based affirmative action, as well as over ethnic-minority immigration into the country (e.g., Brash, 2004; Tarrant, 2017). This salience of ethnicity-based politics increases the likelihood that participants are comparing their ethnic group with other ethnic groups rather than other social groups more generally. Finally, this same measure of GRD has been used extensively in prior research with the NZAVS dataset, yielding expected associations with a variety of ethnicity-specific outcome variables (e.g., ethnic political attitudes; Osborne & Sibley, 2013; Sengupta, Barlow, Milojev & Sibley, 2015; Osborne, Sengupta & Sibley, 2015). This demonstrates the construct validity of the current measure.

We must also acknowledge that although we have drawn a distinction between Patriotism and Nationalism in order to illustrate the specificity of the psychological mechanism being proposed, this distinction is not universally agreed upon. For example, some theorists have questioned whether these two constructs are psychologically

distinguishable (Billig, 1995; Parker, 2010). However, several studies have documented differences in how Nationalism and Patriotism operate psychologically, that are consistent with Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) conceptualisation of these ideologies. For example, Osborne, Milojev & Sibley (2017) showed that the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999), which indexes a preference for ingroup superiority, was negatively related to Patriotism over time, but positively related to Nationalism over time. This aligns with our claim that it is specifically Nationalism that connotes beliefs about ingroup superiority. Moreover, Nationalism and Patriotism have been shown to have differential effects on various socio-political outcomes, including attitudes towards multiculturalism (Spry & Hornsey, 2007), flag-display behaviour (Skitka, 2006), and prejudice (Wagner, Becker, Christ, Pettigrew & Schmidt, 2012; see also Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, Mueller, & Melewar, 2001; Mummendey, Klink & Brown, 2001). Thus, while we acknowledge that distinguishing between these two constructs may not be always be straightforward, there is considerable evidence that Nationalism and Patriotism are distinct ideologies that have different psychological antecedents and political consequences.

A final caveat is that our data are cross-sectional, and so the usual cautionary note about inferring causality applies. For example, it could be argued that people who are more Nationalistic are more sensitive to perceived loss of ingroup status more generally, and therefore more prone to experiencing GRD. However, there is some indication that the direction of causality follows our hypotheses. As already noted, our model is similar to the 'Rejection-Identification Model' in that it involves a similar form of group-based disadvantage, and a similar identification-based mechanism buffering wellbeing. Longitudinal tests of this model support our hypothesized causal direction. For example, Stronge et al. (2016) found that perceived group discrimination predicted ethnic identification more strongly over time than vice versa. Thus, it is also likely that group deprivation predicts

national identification more strongly over time (although a reverse causal path might also exist). This conclusion is also supported by the observation that perceptions of ethnic-group disadvantage among Whites in America have been on the rise since long before the emergence of the current nationalistic political discourse (see Norton & Sommers, 2011).

That said, future research that tests our hypothesized model longitudinally and experimentally will enable stronger inferences of causality to be made. Although beyond the scope of the current study, perceptions of GRD could be manipulated (e.g., by providing false information about income distribution across groups) to test whether this produces higher endorsement of Nationalism. Future research could also more directly test our claim that the function of Nationalism is to compensate for the perceived loss of ingroup advantage implied by GRD. One way of doing this would be to test if SDO moderates the effects of GRD on Nationalism. SDO indexes a general preference for ingroup dominance. Therefore, if our account of the psychological mechanism explaining the link between GRD and Nationalism is accurate, those higher in SDO should be more prone to the negative effects of GRD, and should have more to gain from the positive group distinctiveness that Nationalism offers. Finally, our model suggests that, in order to understand the rise of Nationalism, it is important to investigate the antecedents of GRD among majority groups, especially because these perceptions of deprivation are not an accurate reflection of the social reality.

## **Conclusion**

The current paper attempted to provide an explanation for the rise of Nationalism starting from the observation that majority-group members who supported Nationalistic candidates seemed to do so because they felt their group was losing out to other groups. We found that this observation reflected a true empirical relationship – perceptions of group-based deprivation were positively associated Nationalism among White New Zealanders in a large, nationally representative sample. We also found that one reason why this might be the

case is that Nationalism buffers wellbeing against the negative psychological consequences of perceiving one's group to be deprived. These findings imply that the rise of Nationalism in White-majority countries might be, in part, a reaction to a perceived loss of ingroup status experienced by White people in these countries.

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<sup>1</sup> To the extent that the ideology of 'Nationalism' has appeared in the Relative Deprivation literature, it has been to examine separatist Nationalism among minority groups within a larger political entity (e.g. Québécois Nationalism, Guimond & Gubé-Simard, 1983; Scottish Nationalism, Abrams & Grant, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> The idea that IRD might spill over into GRD and vice versa has been alluded to previously in the literature on 'double deprivation' – i.e., that some people feel deprived relative to other individuals and also feel that their group is deprived relative to other groups (Runciman, 1966). However, this literature focusses on the potential interactive effects of IRD and GRD on political outcomes (e.g., prejudice, collective action; Conant, 1968, Pettigrew, 2002), whereas our argument relates to the additive effects of IRD and GRD on wellbeing. Rather than IRD spilling over into GRD or vice versa, we are referring to the effects of GRD spilling over into a domain they are not usually considered to affect – i.e., the wellbeing of individuals. Moreover, several studies have failed to find an effect of double deprivation on various outcomes (Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972; Pettigrew et al., 2008). Indeed, the very existence of an identifiable subgroup of people who are simultaneously high on individual and group-based deprivation has been called into question (Osbourne, Sibley, Smith & Huo, 2015). Therefore, we consider the effects of IRD and GRD on wellbeing to be additive (rather than interactive, as the 'double deprivation' hypothesis might suggest).

<sup>3</sup> One reason for this focus on disadvantaged groups is due to the early claim by proponents of the Rejection-identification Model that perceived discrimination should not have a negative effect on wellbeing among advantaged groups (see Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). However, this claim has since been called into question (see Major, Kaiser & McCoy, 2003), and a meta-analysis showed that perceived discrimination does indeed have a negative effect on wellbeing even among the advantaged (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes & Garcia, 2014). Although the effect is weaker than among disadvantaged groups, the reason for this asymmetry is that it is easier for the advantaged to view discrimination against one's group as not being pervasive. Thus, it is the very type of perceived discrimination that has the most conceptual overlap with GRD that negatively impacts wellbeing. This is consistent with our central argument that GRD should negatively affect wellbeing among advantaged groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Full details of the NZAVS, including sampling procedure and all technical documentation can be found at <https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/new-zealand-attitudes-and-values-study.html>

<sup>5</sup> Because we used multiple imputation for missing data, Mplus 7.4 did not allow us to simultaneously use bootstrapping for the confidence intervals of the indirect effects in the model. We therefore ran the model again without using multiple imputation, to estimate confidence intervals with 5000 bootstrapped resamples, for the sake of completeness. Consistent with our hypotheses, this analysis showed that GRD had a significant indirect effect on wellbeing via Nationalism (indirect effect = .03, se = .01,  $p = .001$ , 99% CI [.008, .058]), and ethnic identification (indirect effect = .05, se = .01,  $p < .001$ , 99% CI [.023, .069]), but not via Patriotism (indirect effect = -.01, se = .01,  $p = .064$ , 99% CI [-.026, .003]).