

Framing Economic Inequality Through Collective Identities: Confronting or Maintaining Inequality

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Supplementary Materials: Code, Data, Materials, Preregistration [see [Index of Supplementary Materials](#)]



Abstract

The political context can shape the collective identities through which economic inequality is understood and politicised. Using representative public domain samples from five European countries in Study 1 ($N = 5,980$) and newly collected samples from the UK and Spain in Study 2 ($N = 803$), we examine how identity frameworks relate to attitudes toward inequality (intolerance), political participation, and collective action aimed at both confronting inequality and maintaining the status quo. Identification with common people was associated with greater intolerance of inequality and higher political participation in Study 1 but showed a more ambivalent pattern in Study 2. National collective narcissism was linked to lower intolerance and lower political participation (Study 1) and, together with national identity, to a greater support for collective actions that maintain the status quo (Study 2). In contrast, identities centred on inequality (i.e., the 99% and the working class) were more consistently associated with challenging inequality. These findings suggest that the way inequality is framed through identity—whether populist, national, or wealth-based—shape responses that either confront or maintain economic inequality across contexts.



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Keywords

working class, the 99%, the common people, national collective narcissism, economic inequality, collective actions, politicised identity

Resumen

El contexto político puede moldear las identidades colectivas a través de las cuales se entiende y se politiza la desigualdad económica. Utilizando muestras representativas de dominio público procedentes de cinco países europeos en el Estudio 1 ($N = 5.980$) y muestras recién recopiladas del Reino Unido y España en el Estudio 2 ($N = 803$), examinamos cómo los marcos identitarios se relacionan con las actitudes hacia la desigualdad (intolerancia), la participación política y la acción colectiva destinada tanto a hacer frente a la desigualdad como a mantener el statu quo. La identificación con la gente común se asoció con una mayor intolerancia hacia la desigualdad y una mayor participación política en el Estudio 1, pero mostró un patrón más ambivalente en el Estudio 2. El narcisismo colectivo nacional se relacionó con una menor intolerancia y una menor participación política (Estudio 1) y, junto con la identidad nacional, con un mayor apoyo a las acciones colectivas que mantienen el statu quo (Estudio 2). Por el contrario, las identidades centradas en la desigualdad (es decir, el 99% y la clase trabajadora) se asociaron de forma más consistente con el desafío a la desigualdad. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la forma en que se enmarca la desigualdad a través de la identidad —ya sea populista, nacional o basada en la riqueza— determina las respuestas que, según el contexto, enfrentan o mantienen la desigualdad económica.

Palabras Clave

clase trabajadora, el 99%, gente común, narcisismo colectivo nacional, desigualdad económica, acciones colectivas, identidad politizada

Non-Technical Summary

Background

Economic inequality has become one of the most pressing issues in contemporary public debate. Growing gaps between the wealthy and the rest of the population have fuelled widespread discontent, giving rise to social movements such as Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados in Spain, and the “yellow vest” protests in France, as well as the growth of populist and nationalist movements across Western societies. Understanding why some people mobilise against inequality while others accept or defend it requires examining how people define themselves as members of social groups, and what those identities means for political action.

Why was this study done?

People respond to economic inequality not as isolated individuals, but as members of groups—and group identity shapes what they perceive as unjust, who they hold responsible, and what action feels legitimate. Some identities are built explicitly around economic hierarchy: identifying as working class or “the 99%” frames inequality as the central injustice defining one’s group. Others, such as “the common people”, are broader and more fluid, carrying populist message that can point either at economic elites or at vulnerable outsiders. National identity adds further complexity: while some forms may foster solidarity, collective narcissism—the belief that one’s nation is exceptional and perpetually under threat—may redirect grievances away from economic structures toward national status defence. This research examined how these identities relate to intolerance of inequality and willingness to take collective actions across several European countries.

What did the researchers do and find?

Two studies were conducted across five European countries: the UK, Spain, Greece, Hungary, and Poland. Study 1 examined identification with the common people, national identity, and collective narcissism. Study 2, focused on the UK and Spain, extended this to include wealth-based identities—the working class and the 99%—measuring both intentions to confront inequality and to maintain the existing economic order. Key findings were:

- Wealth-based identities support action for social change. Identifying with “the 99%” in the UK or “the working class” in Spain was consistently linked to greater intolerance of inequality and stronger intentions to act against it. Notably, the identity that fulfilled this role differed by country: in Spain, the working class carries a long history of protest mobilisation, while in the UK it has been historically stigmatised, making the 99% a more politically salient alternative.
- “Common people” identity plays an ambiguous role. In the UK, it was associated with greater intolerance of inequality, but in Spain it tended to align with maintaining the status quo. Because this identity does not define the group primarily through economic position, its political meaning is fluid and easily shaped by surrounding discourse — it can take on a progressive, anti-elite character, but can equally be channelled into narratives that blame outsiders rather than targeting structural inequality.
- Collective narcissism undermines economic protest. Across both studies, people endorsing a defensive and exalted sense of national identity were less likely to oppose inequality and more likely to support actions maintaining the existing order, redirecting frustration toward intergroup competition rather than economic structures.

What do these findings mean?

Whether an identity mobilises people against inequality or leads them to defend it depends on how central economic hierarchy is to that identity, as well as the broader cultural and political context. Wealth-based identities provide the clearest basis for collective action

targeting economic change. Broader populist identities like "common people" are more malleable and can be co-opted by exclusionary narratives. Collective narcissism consistently works against economic protest, reinforcing the existing order even when it perpetuates inequality. Political actors and movements seeking to address economic injustice should be attentive to the identities they invoke: promoting defensive nationalism channels energy away from redistribution, while identities that make shared economic disadvantage visible appear more reliably linked to demands for structural change.

The rise in economic inequality in recent decades has had far-reaching social and political consequences (OECD, 2021). Beyond its material effects, inequality shapes how people interpret social hierarchies, assess social justice, and define collective interests (Jetten et al., 2017). Recessions or periods of high economic inequality have fuelled discontent with political institutions, the rise of populist and nationalist movements, and widespread protest mobilisation (Aslanidis, 2016; Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022; Poli, 2017; Solt, 2008; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). In Western societies, economic discontent has been central to events such as the Occupy Wall Street movement, the Brexit referendum, the Indignados movement in Spain, and the "yellow vest" protests in France (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Piketty, 2020; Schmidt, 2020). These episodes illustrate that economic demands are framed within collective identities that define group boundaries, signalling who is responsible for inequality and which forms of action are legitimate.

Research on social identity has shown that collective identification plays a fundamental role in political mobilisation and protest by transforming individual experiences into shared group concerns (Turner et al., 1987; van Zomeren et al., 2008). This process can lead to the development of politicised identities based on perceptions of injustice (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). However, identities do not necessarily lead individuals to the same political responses, as they may highlight economic inequality as a central concern of the group or draw attention to alternative social divisions, including concerns related to group recognition and entitlement (i.e., collective narcissism; Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2021), which may reduce opposition to inequality or contribute to its acceptance. As a result, identities can orient individuals towards progressive social change or toward maintaining the status quo (De Cristofaro et al., 2025; Thomas & Osborne, 2022).

Contemporary political discourse invokes several collective identities in relation to economic inequality. Although they differ in content and in how they interpret inequality, they share one central feature: they allow inequality to be perceived as a shared group experience (Jetten et al., 2017). Some identities are explicitly based on perceptions of economic hierarchy, such as identification with the working class or with "the 99%" (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2024; Kraus et al., 2011). Others reflect broader populist constructions of "the people" in opposition to elites, such as identification with the common people

(Hameleers et al., 2021). National identities, by contrast, may channel responses towards comparisons between groups that are not primarily defined by economic inequality (Fritzsche et al., 2017). Within this domain, scholars distinguish between different ways of being attached to the national group (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Schatz et al., 1999), including more defensive forms of group attachment such as collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), which has been associated with exclusionary and status-defensive attitudes (Cichocka et al., 2016; Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Cislak et al., 2021).

Although previous research has linked wealth-based identities such as identification with the working class or with the 99% to opposition to inequality—mainly in the Spanish context (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2023, 2024)—less is known about how these identities, across different socio-political contexts, compare with broader identity frameworks, such as identification with the common people and national identity processes, including collective narcissism, in their association with responses to economic inequality (e.g., De Cristofaro et al., 2025; van Noord et al., 2025). Examining these identities within a common framework allows us to assess how different ways of defining the collective self in relation to economic inequality are associated with orientations towards challenging or maintaining economic inequality.

In the European context—where demands related to economic inequality and identity-based mobilisation have intensified—we examine these dynamics through two complementary studies. Study 1 draws on cross-national samples from Greece, Hungary, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Spain to investigate how broader identity frames that may not be primarily based on economic divisions—identification with the common people, national identification, and collective narcissism—are associated with intolerance towards economic inequality and political participation. Study 2 builds on this framework, focusing on Spain and the United Kingdom and maintaining these same identities while expanding the battery of measures to include identifications in which economic hierarchy is more explicitly central: identification with the working class and with “the 99%”. In addition, Study 2 broadens the scope of the findings by examining intentions to take action related to economic inequality, both to confront it and to support actions that maintain the status quo.

The Role of Identity in Promoting Social Change to Target Economic Inequality

Wealth is a key category for understanding the social world, as it encourages categorisations based on wealth, such as “the haves” and “the have-nots” (Jetten et al., 2021), and therefore plays a central role in the formation of social identities related to inequality and class consciousness. These identities place individuals within the social structure, transforming economic inequality into a group boundary through which individual experiences can be interpreted as collective (Jetten et al., 2017, 2021).

Research on social identity has highlighted that it is not only the existence of boundaries between groups that determines political outcomes, but also the subjective meaning attributed to group membership and its connection to perceived injustice (Huddy, 2001; Klandermans, 2014). When differences in income and wealth become more salient and perceived as unfair, the way in which boundaries between groups are defined—including perceived permeability—becomes relevant in determining whether inequality is challenged or accepted (Jetten et al., 2021). In this context, collective identities can be understood as forms of politicised identity that define group boundaries around economic inequality, raise awareness of shared grievances, and encourage participation in collective struggle as conscious members of a group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). This process involves attributing responsibility to specific political actors or groups and formulating demands for change (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Consequently, politicised identities should be associated with greater intolerance of inequality and a stronger willingness to support collective action to challenge it (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Following this line of reasoning, the present work examines different collective identity frameworks through which economic inequality can be interpreted and politicised. Rather than representing conceptually disconnected categories, these identities can be conceptually placed on a continuum according to the centrality of economic inequality in their definition of the group. This continuum reflects differences in how identities frame inequality as a relevant group concern, and, consequently, in how they orient responses toward either challenging or maintaining existing economic arrangements. At one end of this continuum are identities in which economic inequality is explicitly central to the definition of the group. Identification with the working class has its historical roots in structural position within the economic system and has played an important role in class struggle and political movements aimed at reducing economic inequality (Easterbrook et al., 2020; Manstead, 2018; Marx & Engels, 1848/2004).

A broader framework, but one still explicitly focussed on inequality, is provided by identification with “the 99%”. Emerging from movements such as Occupy Wall Street, this identity constructs a boundary between a large majority and a small economic elite, thus bringing economic distribution to the fore as the main axis of group differentiation (Stiglitz, 2012). Although more inclusive than traditional class categories, identification with the 99% similarly frames economic inequality as a collective injustice. Research has shown that identifying with the 99% or with the working class is associated with intolerance of inequality and with the intention to take action to confront it (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2023, 2024).

Further along the continuum are broader populist constructs, such as identification with the “common people” (often also referred to as “ordinary citizens”). Unlike working-class identity, this category is not based on a specific structural position within the economic system. Instead, it constructs a moral boundary between “common people” and the perceived “corrupt” or privileged establishment (Hameleers et al., 2021; Mudde

& Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017), a distinction that is central to many definitions of populism and lies at the core of its people-versus-elite logic (Mudde, 2004). This framing provides a shared identity through which inequality can be interpreted. Economic inequality may form part of this narrative—especially in contexts of visible wealth concentration—but it does not necessarily constitute the defining basis of group membership. Instead, group membership is oriented toward opposition to a perceived privileged establishment, rather than being defined by extreme levels of wealth (Mols & Jetten, 2016; Shayegh et al., 2022). This intergroup dynamic was exemplified in movements such as the Yellow Vest movement (Jetten et al., 2020). The relative deprivation derived from the comparison between “the people” and “the elite”, together with a shared politicised identification among the “yellow vests”, was associated with engagement in the protest (Adam-Troian et al., 2021; Lüders et al., 2021).

Based on these considerations, our first research aim is to examine how three identity frameworks that differ in the extent to which they frame economic inequality—identification with the working class, identification with the 99%, and identification with the common people—are associated with the willingness to redress economic inequality. While previous research has linked wealth-based identities to opposition to economic inequality, much less is known about the role of broader populist identities such as identification with the common people (e.g., van Noord et al., 2025). By examining these identities within a common framework, we extend existing research and clarify how different identity frameworks relate to responses to economic inequality.

National Attachment: Identity and Collective Narcissism in Promoting the Maintenance of Economic Inequality

While the previous section focused on identity frameworks that highlight economic inequality as a distributive injustice, collective identities can also drive responses to maintain the existing economic order. The rise of populism due to economic uncertainty in a more polarised Europe has fostered not only progressive but also reactionary movements (Gozgor, 2022; Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). Although research on collective action has focused primarily on analysing protests that aim to change systems of inequality (i.e., progressive movements; Thomas et al., 2020), the positive relationship between identification with a group and support for a movement that benefits the group is theoretically consistent for both disadvantaged and advantaged groups. Therefore, collective action perspectives can also explain reactionary social movements that aim to maintain the economic status quo (Jost et al., 2017; Marinthe et al., 2022; Osborne et al., 2019).

Economic inequality reinforces identification with the nation (Solt, 2011). In turn, national identification may mobilise collective action in defence of the group's interests, but it can also shift distributive conflict by reframing economic claims as a threat between groups and fostering ethnocentric attitudes (Fritzsche et al., 2017; Fritzsche & Jugert, 2017). In contexts of economic insecurity, the rise of populist movements—such as those in the

United Kingdom or France—has been associated with reinforced national identification among some citizens (Caiani & Graziano, 2019; Jay et al., 2019). Under these conditions, economic grievances can be interpreted less as an internal distributive injustice and more as threats posed by external actors, which legitimises inequality and diverts attention towards protecting the national group. Consistent with this, national identification has been linked to system justification, which mediates its negative association with collective action (De Cristofaro et al., 2025; Owuamalam et al., 2023). This shift channels responses towards protecting the national group, leaving economic inequality secondary. Reactionary movements, often characterised by anti-democratic rhetoric and resistance to redistributive policies (e.g., cultural backlash; Inglehart & Norris, 2016), illustrate how economic concerns can be integrated into defensive national narratives.

Previous research on national attachment has distinguished between patriotism—an affective attachment to the nation (e.g., love and pride)—and nationalism, defined as the belief in national superiority and the drive to dominate others (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Patriotism has also been conceptualised as blind—an unquestioning, idealised view of the nation—or constructive, which encourages critical reflection and accountability (Schatz et al., 1999). For example, blind patriotism has been associated with political disengagement and increased sensitivity to external threats (Schatz et al., 1999). These distinctions suggest that national identification is not monolithic and can vary in its political implications, particularly in more problematic expressions by right-wing movements that seek to protect and reinforce the national group at all costs (Gronfeldt et al., 2021).

Although conceptually distinct, defensive forms of national attachment overlap with the concept of collective narcissism, defined as the belief in the greatness of the ingroup that depends on external recognition (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). From an intergroup perspective, collective narcissism differs from secure national identification in that it reflects a defensive and protective orientation toward status (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Marinthe et al., 2022). Empirical evidence has highlighted the role of collective narcissism in supporting reactionary and in-group-favouring social movements, along with weaker support for progressive movements. For example, it has been associated with a lower willingness to participate in collective actions in favour of refugees (Górska et al., 2020), and with greater support for Brexit to limit immigration (Golec de Zavala et al., 2017). It is important to note that previous research has shown that associations between collective narcissism and support for actions that legitimise the system tend to persist when national identification is statistically controlled for and, in some cases, cause the latter to lose relevance (De Cristofaro et al., 2025). This pattern suggests that collective narcissism captures a distinct dimension of national attachment (Marchlewska et al., 2022). However, further research is needed to examine whether this differentiation holds consistently in the economic domain.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while some identity frameworks emphasise economic inequality as a basis for collective action to challenge it, national identification—particularly its more defensive expressions, such as collective narcissism—may orient individuals toward maintaining the status quo. Accordingly, our second research question aims to explore whether national identity and national collective narcissism—as different ways of understanding national group processes (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009)—can promote collective action to maintain the status quo, that is, the persistence of economic inequality.

The Present Research

Study 1 is based on data from five countries—Spain, the United Kingdom, Greece, Poland, and Hungary—selected for their theoretical and contextual relevance to the study of identity processes in the face of economic inequality. All five have experienced economic shifts in recent years, but their political narratives and exposure to economic threats differ. Spain and Greece, which were severely affected by the 2008 financial crisis, illustrate contexts of intense mobilisation around inequality (Muro & Vidal, 2017; Petkanopoulou et al., 2018; Romanos et al., 2023). Poland and Hungary, on the other hand, experienced lower levels of politicisation and less evident economic threat, partly due to their post-communist trajectories and relative isolation from the 2008 crisis. Nonetheless, both countries show weak democratic traditions and a rise in populist politics linked to processes of national identity (e.g., Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Lantos & Forgas, 2021). The United Kingdom presents a different case, in which Brexit intensified divisions between those who benefited from globalisation and those who felt left behind, with economic grievances mobilised through national identity and opposition to political elites (Hobolt, 2016). Furthermore, our selection of countries was informed by the availability of publicly accessible data. With all this in mind, Study 1 explored identification with the common people, national identification, and collective narcissism (i.e., the tendency to exaggerate the importance of one's national group; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) as predictors of intolerance towards inequality and political participation.

Study 2 focuses on Spain and the United Kingdom. These countries showed the most similar results in Study 1, along with Hungary, but were chosen for both theoretical and practical reasons. While the United Kingdom and Spain offer relevant contrasts in terms of class structure and the historical and contemporary salience of social class, the Hungarian case is marked by a different legacy and current authoritarian dynamics that make it less comparable. Furthermore, data collection in Hungary was not possible due to infrastructural limitations.

Both Spain and the United Kingdom have also witnessed strong traditions of protest. For example, the Indignados movement in Spain and Occupy London were aligned with the European protests against austerity and inspired by Occupy Wall Street in the United States, with demands related to economic inequality and social justice (Peterson et al.,

2015). These movements framed their demands in terms of “the 99%” or “the common people” versus “the 1%” or “the elites”, politicising both traditional identities (i.e., working class) and emerging identities based on wealth (i.e., 99%) and populist narratives (i.e., the common people). Therefore, Study 2 expanded on Study 1 by contrasting identification with the working class, the 99%, and the common people in parallel to examine whether each identity predicts intolerance of inequality and intentions to confront it. Furthermore, Study 2 considered system-stabilising processes. While previous research links collective narcissism to support for reactionary movements (Marinthe et al., 2022), evidence on its relationship to economic inequality remains scarce (e.g., De Cristofaro et al., 2025). Therefore, we included measures of collective action aimed at confronting economic inequality but also maintaining the status quo. Based on previous findings and Study 1, we expected national collective narcissism to be negatively associated with intolerance of inequality and collective action to address it but positively associated with intentions to maintain the status quo.

Study 1

In Study 1¹, we examined three group-based antecedents of attitudes toward economic inequality and political participation. Specifically, we explored the role of identification with the common people, national identity, and national collective narcissism. The results were compared across the United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, Hungary, and Poland.

We included age, gender, and educational level as covariates to control for their impact on our criterion variables (e.g., perceptions and beliefs of inequality; García-Sánchez et al., 2020), as these factors are associated with the importance individuals place on different types of identities within their self-concepts (Easterbrook et al., 2020).

Method

Participants and Procedure

We used the existing data collected by NORFACE UNDPOLAR consortium (<https://www.norface.net/project/undpolar/>). The overall sample consisted of 11,217 respondents. Three attention check items were applied (e.g., “To demonstrate that you are paying attention, select strongly agree for this item”); 1,274 participants failed all three and were excluded. The final sample included in Study 1 consisted of 5,980 participants.

1) Study 1 was preregistered <https://osf.io/x3knd/> after data collection, as we relied on publicly available data. Consequently, we had no influence on the data collection process or on the variables included. The original model was more complex and included additional variables; however, as these did not yield interpretable results, we focused on simplified associations to better examine the groups processes underlying political participation and inequality attitudes.

For the purposes of this study, we focused on the subsamples from Spain, Greece, Poland, Hungary and the United Kingdom, as only in these cases were all variables of interest measured.

The UK sample combined a pilot study ($n = 499$) and the main study ($n = 990$), for a total of $N = 1,489$ (898 women, 583 men, 2 non-binary and 6 who preferred not to say), aged 18-95 years ($M = 52.2$, $SD = 14$). The Spanish sample consisted of $N = 958$ (488 women, 467 men, 1 'prefer not to say' and 2 who identified as 'other'), aged 18-92 ($M = 50.20$, $SD = 13.10$). The Greek sample included $N = 1,041$ (550 women, 487 men, 2 non-binary and 2 who preferred not to say), aged 18-86 ($M = 47.00$, $SD = 12.10$). The Hungarian sample consisted of $N = 1,047$ (552 women, 494 men and 1 'prefer not to say'), aged 18-88 years ($M = 48.80$, $SD = 14.40$). Finally, the Polish sample consisted of $N = 1,445$ (746 women and 699 men), aged 18-83 years ($M = 48.70$, $SD = 14.90$).

We conducted a sensitivity analysis using the *pwr* package in R (Champely, 2020) to determine the minimum detectable effect sizes (f^2) for our five-predictor regression models ($\alpha = .05$, $1 - \beta = .80$) in each country. Given sample sizes of $N = 1,489$ (UK), 958 (Spain), 1,041 (Greece), 1,047 (Hungary), and 1,445 (Poland), the analyses indicated that our models could reliably detect effects sizes as small as $f^2 = .008$, .011, .012, .012, and .009, respectively, corresponding to increases in R^2 of less than 1%.

Measures

We used the publicly available UNDPOLAR dataset (<https://www.norface.net/project/undpolar/>) and reported here only variables relevant to our research questions. Complete information about the survey including, original item sources and adaptations, is available (<https://osf.io/d4pba/>). In addition, a full list of the original items can be found in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

Group Identification (Common People and National Identity) — Identification with the common people (i.e., I identify with the common people, as a group) and national identity (i.e., I identify with [country]) were each measured with a single item each on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree)². The items were adapted from Leach et al. (2008).

National Collective Narcissism — Collective narcissism was measured with three items (e.g., People from [country] deserve special treatment, UK: $\omega = .84$, Spain: $\omega = .86$, Greece: $\omega = .84$, Hungary: $\omega = .87$, Poland: $\omega = .88$) from the short version of the

2) In the United Kingdom, the measures of national identity, common people identity, and collective narcissism were assessed on a 1-6 scale in the pilot study and on a 1-5 scale in the main data. This difference was accounted for in the analyses by using standardised scores.

Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Responses were given on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

(In)tolerance Towards Economic Inequality — This construct was measured with a single item (i.e., Incomes should be made more equal... We need larger income differences; Standard survey question, ISSP) on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10.

Political Participation — Political involvement was measured with five items (e.g., During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following... Contacted a politician, government, or local government official? UK: $\omega = .85$, Spain: $\omega = .85$, Greece: $\omega = .76$, Hungary: $\omega = .86$, Poland: $\omega = .85$) on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 3 (Often).

Sociodemographic Measures — Gender, age, and level of education were assessed. Gender was measured with the question “Are you...” (1 = woman, 2 = man, 3 = prefer not to say), although only data referring to women and men were included in the analysis. As national education systems differ in range (e.g., Spain 1–8; United Kingdom 1–9; Greece 1–8; Hungary 1–10; Poland 1–14)—with the minimum reflecting the lowest qualification available in that country (e.g., no formal qualification) and the maximum reflecting the highest qualification (e.g., doctorate)—we standardised the index within each country and used country-specific *z*-scores in all analyses. Higher values indicate a higher level of education.

Analysis Plan

A cross-sectional design was employed. To address our research questions of whether common people identity is related to redressing economic inequality, while national identity and collective narcissism are not, we initially examined the identification with common people, national collective narcissism, national identity, and their relationship with intolerance towards economic inequality and political participation

First, we calculated Pearson’s bivariate correlations and assessed multicollinearity among predictors using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values (Thompson et al., 2017) to verify assumptions prior to estimating regression/SEM model. Second, we estimated a multigroup SEM across five countries (Greece, Hungary, Spain, UK, Poland) using maximum likelihood with robust standard errors and scaled test statistics. The model specified common people, national identity, and national collective narcissism as exogenous predictors, with intolerance towards inequality and political participation as endogenous outcomes. Age, gender, and education were included as covariates, and the residuals of intolerance and political participation were allowed to covary. Paths were freely estimated across countries, allowing Wald omnibus tests to be conducted for cross-country differences; *p*-values for pairwise contrasts were Holm-adjusted for multiple comparisons (Haynes, 2013). We evaluated model fit using common benchmarks:

comparative fit indices (CFI) above .90 (preferably $\geq .95$) were considered acceptable to good, and RMSEA and SRMR below .06 (with RMSEA 90% CI) were taken to indicate good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011), with values around .08 considered acceptable, and values between .08 to .10 considered marginal (Fabrigar et al., 1999). Robust versions of all fit statistics are reported.

All analyses were conducted using R v4.0.2 (R Core Team, 2020). All data and analysis code are publicly available in (<https://osf.io/d4pba/>).

Results

Correlational and Multicollinearity Tests

Pearson's correlation tests (see Table 1) showed that identification with the common people was positively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality and political participation in all countries except Poland, where the relationship with political participation was non-significant. In contrast, collective narcissism was negatively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality in Greece, Hungary, Spain and the UK, but positively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality in Poland. Collective narcissism was negatively associated with political participation in Hungary, Spain, the UK, and Poland, but was not significantly associated with political participation in Greece.

Multicollinearity tests revealed that the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below 2 for all predictors variables, indicating that the variance of the regression coefficients was not inflated by multicollinearity (Midi & Bagheri, 2010). Similarly, tolerance values were above 0.1, further suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern (Table 2).

Testing Multigroup SEM

A multigroup SEM model was estimated for the five countries (Greece, Hungary, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Poland; see Table 3). Overall model fit was $\chi^2(4) = 38.47$, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .96, robust RMSEA = .09, 90% CI [.06, .11], SRMR = .01. As is often the case with large samples, the χ^2 statistic was significant. The CFI indicated adequate fit ($\geq .95$), whereas the RMSEA fell within a marginal range of acceptability ($< .10$). The low SRMR value (.01) supported a good residual fit.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations Between Variables by Country (Study 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Panel A. Greece (N = 1,041)					
1. Common id.	–	.18***	.13***	.10**	.18***
2. National id.		–	.36***	-.06*	.07*
3. Collective narcissism			–	-.18***	-.03
4. Intolerance towards EI				–	.11***
5. Political participation					–
Panel B. Hungary (N = 1,047)					
1. Common id.	–	.04	.16***	.19***	.11***
2. National id.		–	.33***	-.13***	.03
3. Collective narcissism			–	-.07*	-.07*
4. Intolerance towards EI				–	.08**
5. Political participation					–
Panel C. Spain (N = 958)					
1. Common id.	–	-.04	-.02	.23***	.24***
2. National id.		–	.49***	-.13***	-.06
3. Collective narcissism			–	-.18***	-.10**
4. Intolerance towards EI				–	.09**
5. Political participation					–
Panel D. UK (N = 1,489)					
1. Common id.	–	.07**	-.04	.21***	.21***
2. National id.		–	.27***	-.13***	-.08**
3. Collective narcissism			–	-.20***	-.13***
4. Intolerance towards EI				–	.14***
5. Political participation					–
Panel E. Poland (N = 1,445)					
1. Common id.	–	.29***	.20***	.09***	.04
2. National id.		–	.48***	.04	.05
3. Collective narcissism			–	.09***	-.10***
4. Intolerance towards EI				–	-.18***
5. Political participation					–

Note. Id. = identification; EI = economic inequality.
p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 2
Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Predictor Variables (Study 1)

Predictor	Greece VIF (Tolerance)	Hungary VIF (Tolerance)	Spain VIF (Tolerance)	UK VIF (Tolerance)	Poland VIF (Tolerance)
Collective narcissism	1.15 (.87)	1.15 (.87)	1.31 (.76)	1.08 (.92)	1.31 (.76)
National id.	1.17 (.85)	1.12 (.89)	1.31 (.76)	1.08 (.92)	1.37 (.73)
Common id.	1.04 (.96)	1.03 (.97)	1.00 (1.00)	1.01 (1.00)	1.09 (.92)

Note. VIF = variance inflation factor. Id. = identification.

Table 3
Standardised Effects (β) and Standard Errors (SE) of Predictors on Outcomes (Study 1)

Predictor → Outcome	Greece	Hungary	Spain	UK	Poland
Common id. → Intolerance	$\beta = .13^{***}$ (.09)	$\beta = .21^{***}$ (.08)	$\beta = .23^{***}$ (.08)	$\beta = .20^{***}$ (.06)	$\beta = .04$ (.07)
National id. → Intolerance	$\beta = -.03$ (.09)	$\beta = -.11^{***}$ (.08)	$\beta = -.06$ (.09)	$\beta = -.09^{***}$ (.06)	$\beta = .04$ (.08)
Collective narcissism → Intolerance	$\beta = -.18^{***}$ (.09)	$\beta = -.06$ (.08)	$\beta = -.15^{***}$ (.09)	$\beta = -.17^{***}$ (.07)	$\beta = .01$ (.08)
Common id. → Political participation	$\beta = .20^{***}$ (.01)	$\beta = .13^{***}$ (.01)	$\beta = .23^{***}$ (.01)	$\beta = .22^{***}$ (.01)	$\beta = .08^{**}$ (.01)
National id. → Political participation	$\beta = .03$ (.01)	$\beta = .02$ (.01)	$\beta = .01$ (.02)	$\beta = -.07^*$ (.01)	$\beta = .05$ (.01)
Collective narcissism → Political participation	$\beta = -.05$ (.01)	$\beta = -.08^*$ (.01)	$\beta = -.09^{**}$ (.02)	$\beta = -.07^*$ (.01)	$\beta = -.08^{**}$ (.01)

Note. Id. = identification.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Identification with the common people was positively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality and political participation in Spain, the UK, Hungary, and Greece; in Poland, these associations were not significant or markedly smaller in comparison. By contrast, collective narcissism was significantly and negatively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality in Greece, Spain, and the UK. Similarly, it was also negatively associated with political participation in all countries except Greece (with no differences between them, see Table 4).

Table 4
Multigroup Comparisons (Wald Tests) of Predictor Effects (Study 1)

Comparison	χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i> (Holm)	Difference
Common id. → Intolerance				
HU vs. PL	14.5	< .001	< .001	HU > PL
SP vs. PL	18.9	< .001	< .001	SP > PL
UK vs. PL	13.5	< .001	.002	UK > PL
National id. → Intolerance				
HU vs. PL	9.5	.002	.021	HU < PL
UK vs. PL	8.1	.004	.040	UK < PL
Collective narcissism → Intolerance				
GR vs. HU	7.9	.005	.034	GR < HU
GR vs. PL	18.5	< .001	< .001	GR < PL
SP vs. PL	11.2	< .001	.006	SP < PL
UK vs. PL	14.6	< .001	.001	UK < PL
Common id. → Political participation				
GR vs. PL	8.2	.004	.030	GR > SP
HU vs. SP	10.1	< .001	.012	HU < SP
SP vs. PL	16.1	< .001	.001	SP > PL
UK vs. PL	10.7	.001	.010	UK > PL
National id. → Political participation				
UK vs. PL	6.6	.010	.103	n.s.
Collective narcissism → Political participation				
—	—	—	—	n.s.

Note. Id = Identification. The table shows Wald $\chi^2(1)$ tests of equality of paths between countries, with Holm-adjusted *p* values. Only comparisons with significant or marginal differences are reported; n.s. = not significant after correction.

National identity was negatively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality in Hungary and the UK, and with political participation only in the UK.

When national identity and national collective narcissism were assessed using separate models, the overall direction of the associations did not change. Furthermore, all results remained similar when covariates were excluded from the model. Detailed results are reported in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

Discussion

Our results show a broadly similar pattern across countries, with some nuances. Identification with the common people was positively associated with intolerance of economic inequality and with political participation in Spain, the UK, Hungary, and Greece; in

Poland, these associations were not significant. Overall, this pattern suggests that individuals identifying with the common people generally adopt a progressive stance on economic justice across countries, in line with inclusive populism (e.g., favouring mass welfare programmes; [Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013](#)). However, in Study 2, we sought to contrast other identities based on inequality (the 99% and the working class) with identification with the common people to robustly and simultaneously test their possible inclusionary or exclusionary functions.

National collective narcissism was associated with lower intolerance in Greece, Spain, and the UK, and non-significantly in Hungary, but not in Poland. It was negatively related to political participation in Hungary, Spain, the UK, and Poland. National identity showed a less consistent pattern across countries; only in the UK was it negatively correlated with both outcomes. Taking together, these findings suggest that national identity—and particularly national collective narcissism—may be linked to orientations that do not favour reducing economic inequality, consistent with prior evidence that collective narcissism undermines social change above and beyond the effects of national identity ([Golec de Zavala et al., 2017](#)). At the same time, it is important to note that the measure of political participation used in Study 1 captured general political engagement rather than actions specifically aimed at combating economic inequality. For this reason, Study 2 extends the analysis by distinguishing between collective actions aimed at reducing inequality and those aimed at maintaining the status quo, allowing for a more precise examination of how national identification and collective narcissism relate to redistributive versus system-maintaining forms of mobilisation.

Study 2

Our aim in Study 2 (<https://osf.io/mp6wf/>)³ was to confirm the roles of common people identity and national collective narcissism, as well as to extend the model by testing other politicised identities. To this end, we included the working-class and 99% identities to examine whether the associations observed for common people identity remain stable or lose their transformative potential. In addition, we analysed whether the role of collective narcissism differs significantly from that of national identity, building on the results found in Study 1.

In this way, we investigated group mechanisms that may either foster or, conversely, contribute to maintaining inequality. To capture this distinction, in Study 2 we employed specific measures of collective action that differentiated between actions aimed at confronting economic inequality and those aimed at maintaining it.

3) Study 2 was preregistered, although the protocol included additional measures beyond the current manuscript's scope.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The UK sample was collected through the Prolific platform. The study was hosted on a Qualtrics web link, and participation was rewarded at £6 per hour. The Spanish sample was collected through incidental sampling via a mailing list disseminated by the University of Granada, which is mainly accessed by undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students, as well as teaching staff. The study was also conducted through the Qualtrics platform. To encourage participation, €50 was raffled off. The preregistered requirements for participating in the study were to be a citizen of the United Kingdom or Spain, be over 18 years of age, and to have English/Spanish as their first language.

We planned to recruit 400 participants per country. After applying exclusion criteria and removing incomplete data, the final sample consisted of 412 participants in the UK (246 women, 159 men, 6 non-binary and 1 “prefer not to say”) aged between 18 and 78 years ($M = 41.26$; $SD = 13.67$), and 391 participants in Spain (261 women, 109 men, 21 non-binary), aged between 18 and 74 years ($M = 25.58$; $SD = 8.80$).

We conducted a sensitivity analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the smallest effect size detectable with the current samples. Results indicated that, with these sample sizes ($N_{UK} = 412$; $N_{Spain} = 391$), $\alpha = 0.05$ and power = 0.80, the minimum effect size for a multiple regression analysis with five predictors was $f^2 = 0.03$ in both countries.

Measures

We used the same measures in both countries.

Group Identification (Common People, 99%, Working Class and National Identities) — First, participants read the definitions of these identities. For common people identity: “Common people are about those people who identify with ordinary or everyday people”. For 99% identity: “The term 99% represents the majority of the world's population (the 99%) against a very small percentage (1%) that owns half of the planet's wealth (if wealth were a pie cut in two, the 1% richest gets one half while the other corresponds to 99% of the world's inhabitants)”. For working class identity: “The term working class designates the group of workers who work in exchange for a salary in opposition to the ruling class that owns the majority of the property of economic resources”. For national identity (English/Spanish)⁴ “National identity belongs to the collective of a country or a nation”.

After reading the descriptions participants indicated the extent to which they identified with common people (UK: $\omega = .90$, Spain: $\omega = .87$), 99% (UK: $\omega = .86$, Spain: $\omega = .86$),

4) In the case of the UK sample, we also measure other national identities (i.e., Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish), but we only considered the English identity because it is representative of the sample ($N = 356$)

working class (UK: $\omega = .92$, Spain: $\omega = .92$) and English/Spanish (UK: $\omega = .90$, Spain: $\omega = .89$). Each of them was assessed using three centrality items (e.g., “I often think about the fact that I am [common people/99%/working class/English/Spanish]”) and a general item (i.e., “I identify with [common people/99%/working class/English/Spanish] as a group”) from the Multicomponent In-group Identification Scale (Leach et al., 2008; Postmes et al., 2013) rated on a Likert Scale (1 = Completely disagree; 7 = Completely agree).

National Collective Narcissism — Measured using the same items as in Study 1 (UK: $\omega = .79$, Spain: $\omega = .84$).

(In)tolerance Towards Economic Inequality — Assessed using the Support for Economic Inequality Scale (Montoya-Lozano et al., 2023; Wiwad et al., 2019; e.g., “Economic inequality is causing many of the problems in Spain”, UK: $\omega = .90$, Spain: $\omega = .80$) using a Likert scale (1 = “Completely disagree”; 7 = “Completely agree”).

Collective Action Intentions — We measured collective action intentions in two ways:

- a) Collective actions to confront inequality: Eleven items measuring to participate in actions challenging economic inequality (Becker et al., 2013; del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2023; e.g., “I would participate in peaceful demonstrations demanding the reduction of economic inequality”; UK: $\omega = .94$, Spain: $\omega = .93$), rated on a Likert scale (1 = “Never”; 7 = “Very often”).
- b) Collective actions to maintain the status quo: four items developed for this study (e.g., I would support political parties that benefit large and recognized companies with fiscal advantages; UK: $\omega = .73$, Spain: $\omega = .84$), rated on a Likert scale (1 = “Never”; 7 = “Very often”).

Sociodemographic Measures — We measured subjective socioeconomic status using the Scale of Subjective Social Status (SES; Adler et al., 2000), objective economic status, educational level (UK: 1 = GCSE/O-levels/CSE, or no formal qualifications; 2 = A-levels; 3 = Undergraduate degree; 4 = Graduate and postgraduate degrees; 5 = Doctoral degree (PhD); Spain: 1 = Primary studies; 2 = Secondary studies; 3 = Professional training; 4 = High school graduates; 5 = Unfinished undergraduate degree; 6 = Undergraduate degree; 7 = Postgraduate degree; 8 = Doctoral degree (PhD)), and political ideology on economic and social issues with two items (“Radical left”, “Center left”, “Center”, “Centre right”, “Right” and “Radical right”). We also measured gender, age, language and nationality. Gender and educational level were treated in the same way as in Study 1 (binary coding for gender and country-specific z-scores for educational level).

Analysis Plan

We tested our research questions regarding whether common people, 99% and working class identities are related to redressing economic inequality, while national identity and collective narcissism are not, and may even promote inequality. Specifically, we tested the relationship between group identities and intolerance towards economic inequality, as well as intentions for collective actions to either confront or maintain the status quo.

We followed the same analytical approach as in Study 1. First, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test whether identification with common people, the 99%, and working class represented independent factors. Two models were tested: Model 1, which specified three distinct factors (one for each identity using the observed measures for identification: common people identity, working class identity and 99% identity), and Model 2, which specified a single factor capturing all identification indicators. Additionally, to ensure cross-sample comparability, measurement invariance across the UK and Spanish samples was tested using multigroup CFA. Metric invariance was supported according to conventional criteria (Chen, 2007), indicating comparable measurement properties across groups for the purpose of comparing structural associations. Full invariance results are reported in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

Second, a two-country multigroup SEM (the United Kingdom and Spain) was estimated. Common people identity, national identity, national collective narcissism, 99% identity and working class identity were specified as exogenous variables; intolerance towards inequality and the two types of collective action intentions (i.e., confronting economic inequality and maintaining the status quo) were specified as endogenous outcomes. Age, gender (restricted to men and women) and educational level were introduced as covariates. Given the trivial differences between countries in terms of covariates, their regression effects were constrained to be equal across countries, which reduces model complexity and avoids overfitting, while all focal structural paths were freely estimated. Between-country differences in the focal structural paths were evaluated using omnibus Wald tests, which directly test whether the magnitude of coefficients differs across countries. Holm-adjusted p values were used to account for multiple comparisons.

Model fit was evaluated using robust χ^2/df , CFI, RMSEA (90% CI), and SRMR, consistent with Study 1. All analyses were conducted using R v4.0.2 (R Core Team, 2020) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). All data and analysis code are publicly available at (<https://osf.io/d4pba/>).

Results

Correlational and Multicollinearity Tests

Bivariate Pearson's correlations between the main variables, along with descriptive statistics, are presented in [Table 5](#). Multicollinearity tests indicated no multicollinearity problems in either the UK or the Spanish samples (see [Table 6](#)).

Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations Between Variables (Study 2)

Variable	UK		Spain		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Study 2a	Study 2b	Study 2a	Study 2b										
	<i>N</i> = 412	<i>N</i> = 403	<i>N</i> = 412	<i>N</i> = 403										
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)										
1. Common Id	3.93 (1.49)	4.53 (1.47)	3.93 (1.49)	4.53 (1.47)	–	.42***	.44***	.18***	.01	.22***	.24***	.01	.13*	-.01
2. 99% Id	3.88 (1.70)	4.49 (1.60)	3.88 (1.70)	4.49 (1.60)	.52***	–	.51***	.07	-.04	.29***	.34***	-.17***	.04	-.23***
3. Working class Id	4.31 (1.56)	4.93 (1.64)	4.31 (1.56)	4.93 (1.64)	.55***	.44***	–	-.01	-.10*	.40***	.46***	-.23***	.21***	-.27***
4. National Id	4.31 (1.56)	4.21 (1.67)	4.31 (1.56)	4.21 (1.67)	.33***	.15***	.21***	–	.50***	-.21***	-.22***	.38***	.01	.15**
5. Collective narcissism	1.86 (.95)	2.17 (1.21)	1.86 (.95)	2.17 (1.21)	.03	-.02	.07	.41***	–	-.37***	-.24***	.50***	-.12*	.04
6. Intolerance EI	5.65 (1.21)	5.74 (1.16)	5.65 (1.21)	5.74 (1.16)	.24***	.27***	.18***	-.16***	-.36***	–	.59***	-.51***	.11*	-.09
7. CA confront EI	3.49 (1.44)	4.08 (1.53)	3.49 (1.44)	4.08 (1.53)	.25***	.30***	.23***	-.10	-.24***	.55***	–	-.29***	.11*	-.20***
8. CA maintain the status quo	2.40 (1.08)	2.34 (1.37)	2.40 (1.08)	2.34 (1.37)	.07	.03	.15**	.35***	.31***	-.32***	-.07	–	-.16**	.12*
9. Education level	2.72 (1.03)	5.44 (1.29)	2.72 (1.03)	5.44 (1.29)	-.12*	.03	-.18***	-.19***	-.06	.05	.11*	-.11*	–	.02
10. SES	5.09 (1.58)	5.54 (1.51)	5.09 (1.58)	5.54 (1.51)	-.22***	-.16**	-.26***	-.06	.01	-.16**	-.15**	.03	.32***	–

Note. Id. = identification; EI = economic inequality; CA = collective action. Correlations for the UK sample are presented below the diagonal and correlations for the Spanish sample are presented above the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6
Multicollinearity Diagnostics for Predictor Variables (Study 2)

Predictor Variable	UK		Spain	
	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance
Collective narcissism	1.24	.80	1.45	.69
National identification	1.40	.71	1.42	.71
Common identification	1.77	.57	1.38	.73
99% identification	1.50	.66	1.44	.69
Working class identification	1.54	.65	1.52	.66
Gender	1.04	.96	1.09	.91
Age	1.07	.93	1.16	.86
Educational level	1.09	.92	1.20	.83

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In the UK data, results showed that Model 1 ($\chi^2 = 327.251$, $df = 51$, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .93, robust TLI = .91, robust RMSEA = .13; SRMR = .05) showed better fit indices than Model 2 ($\chi^2 = 1834.010$, $df = 54$, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .51, robust TLI = .40, robust RMSEA = .32; SRMR = .16). A chi-squared difference test (ANOVA) was conducted to compare Model 1 and Model 2, which showed significant differences ($\Delta\chi^2 = 895.04$, $p < .001$). We further examined the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) values: Model 1 (AIC = 15827; BIC = 15984) and Model 2 (AIC = 17739; BIC = 17883). Both the BIC and AIC were lower for Model 1, suggesting that it provided a better fit to our data.

In the Spain data, results showed that Model 1 ($\chi^2 = 327.727$, $df = 51$, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .90, robust TLI = .87, robust RMSEA = .13; SRMR = .06) showed better fit indices than Model 2 ($\chi^2 = 12767.623$, $df = 54$, $p < .001$, robust CFI = .53, robust TLI = .43, robust RMSEA = .28; SRMR = .15). The chi-squared difference test indicated significant differences between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2 = 504.86$, $p < .001$). AIC and BIC values were again lower for Model 1 (AIC = 15906; BIC = 16061) than for Model 2 (AIC = 17200; BIC = 17343), supporting the better fit of Model 1.

Therefore, Model 1 in both countries is both theoretically and statistically the most appropriate for subsequent analyses.

Testing Multigroup SEM

Multigroup SEM indicated acceptable overall fit, $\chi^2(23) = 49.23$, $p < .001$; Robust CFI = .97, Robust TLI = .91, Robust RMSEA = .06, 90% CI [.04, .08], SRMR = .02 (see Table 7). Due to missing data in exogenous variables, the effective sample sizes were 366 (UK) and 351 (Spain).

Table 7

Standardised Effects (β) and Standard Errors (SE) of Predictors on Outcomes (Study 2)

Predictor → Outcome	UK	Spain
Common id. → Intolerance	$\beta = .16^* (.08)$	$\beta = .03 (.06)$
99% id. → Intolerance	$\beta = .18^{***} (.07)$	$\beta = .10 (.06)$
Working class id. → Intolerance	$\beta = .06 (.07)$	$\beta = .29^{***} (.07)$
National id. → Intolerance	$\beta = -.12^* (.07)$	$\beta = -.10 (.06)$
Collective narcissism → Intolerance	$\beta = -.31^{***} (.08)$	$\beta = -.28^{***} (.06)$
Common id. → CA confront EI	$\beta = .12 (.10)$	$\beta = .03 (.09)$
99% id. → CA confront EI	$\beta = .23^{***} (.09)$	$\beta = .12^* (.09)$
Working class id. → CA confront EI	$\beta = .12 (.09)$	$\beta = .36^{***} (.10)$
National id. → CA confront EI	$\beta = -.12 (.09)$	$\beta = -.20^{***} (.09)$
Collective narcissism → CA confront EI	$\beta = -.18^{***} (.08)$	$\beta = -.08 (.08)$
Common id. → CA maintain the status quo	$\beta = -.13 (.08)$	$\beta = .10 (.07)$
99% id. → CA maintain the status quo	$\beta = -.01 (.07)$	$\beta = -.15^{**} (.07)$
Working class id. → CA maintain the status quo	$\beta = .10 (.07)$	$\beta = -.16^{**} (.08)$
National id. → CA maintain the status quo	$\beta = .30^{***} (.07)$	$\beta = .18^{***} (.06)$
Collective narcissism → CA maintain the status quo	$\beta = .20^{***} (.08)$	$\beta = .39^{***} (.07)$

Note. Id. = identification; CA = collective action; EI = economic inequality.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Because statistical significance within each country does not directly test whether effects differ across countries, multigroup Wald tests were conducted to evaluate cross-national differences in effect size. Accordingly, differences in statistical significance should not be interpreted as evidence of differences in effect size.

Identification with common people was significantly positively related to intolerance towards economic inequality in the UK but not in Spain. In both countries, it did not reliably predict intentions for collective action to either confront economic inequality or maintain the status quo. Comparisons suggested that identification with common people was more strongly associated with collective actions to maintain status in Spain, although this difference did not remain significant after correction (see Table 8).

Collective narcissism was negatively related to intolerance towards inequality in both countries. In the UK, it also predicted lower intentions to confront economic inequality, whereas this association was not significant in Spain. By contrast, collective narcissism positively predicted collective action intentions to maintain the status quo in both countries. Wald tests indicated no reliable UK–Spain differences in these effects after Holm correction.

National identity was negatively related to intolerance towards economic inequality in the UK but was non-significant in Spain. It was negatively associated with collective action to confront economic inequality in Spain but not in the UK. By contrast, national

Table 8
Multigroup Comparisons (Wald Tests) of Predictor Effects (Study 2)

Path	χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i> (Holm)	Difference
Working class id. → Intolerance	6.88	.009	.113	n.s.
Working class id. → CA confront EI	9.58	.002	.029	SP > UK
Common id. → CA maintain the status quo	6.83	.009	.113	n.s.
Collective narcissism → CA maintain the status quo	4.06	.044	.484	n.s.
99% id. → CA maintain the status quo	3.90	.048	.484	n.s.
Working class id. → CA maintain the status quo	9.46	.002	.029	SP < UK

Note. Wald $\chi^2(1)$ tests comparing path coefficients between the UK and Spain. Holm-corrected *p* values are reported. Paths with nominally significant uncorrected differences (*p* < .05) are shown for completeness; n.s. = not significant after correction. Id. = identification; CA = collective action; EI = economic inequality.

identity positively predicted collective action intentions to maintain the status quo in both countries. Wald tests indicated no reliable UK–Spain differences.

When national identity and national collective narcissism were assessed using separate models, both were negatively associated with intolerance towards economic inequality and actions to confront economic inequality and positively associated with actions to maintain the status quo (see [Supplementary Materials](#)).

Extending the results of Study 1, identification with the 99% was positively related to intolerance towards economic inequality in the UK but not in Spain. Yet, identification with the 99% was positively associated with collective action intentions to confront inequality in both countries. However, identification with the working class positively predicted intolerance towards inequality and collective action intentions to confront it only in Spain, not in the UK. Furthermore, identification with both the 99% and the working class negatively predicted collective action intentions to maintain the status quo only in Spain. The multigroup Wald tests showed relatively greater effects in Spain for identification with the working class: specifically, they confirmed stronger effects in Spain for collective action intentions to confront economic inequality, and a more positive association in the UK for collective action intentions to maintain the status quo.

All results remained similar when covariates were excluded from the model. Detailed results are reported in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

Discussion

The results of Study 2 show that identification with the common people was associated with rejection of economic inequality only in the UK, and even there it did not translate into intentions to confront it. In Spain, this association disappeared once other politicised

wealth-based identities (the 99% and the working class) were considered and even shifted towards maintaining the status quo rather than confronting inequality. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from Study 1 regarding the progressive role of the common people identity could not be confirmed.

Conversely, collective narcissism was associated with less intolerance towards inequality and positively associated with intentions to take collective action aimed at maintaining the status quo in both countries. Similarly, national identity was also positively associated with actions aimed at maintaining the status quo in both the United Kingdom and Spain. Although some associations did not reach statistical significance (e.g., the relationship between national identity and intolerance in Spain, or between collective narcissism and actions to address inequality in Spain), the direction of the effects was consistent. Furthermore, formal contrasts between countries did not indicate statistically significant differences in coefficients, suggesting that the observed variations reflect differences in magnitude rather than substantially different patterns. Taken together, these results indicate that, in the economic domain analysed, both national identity and collective narcissism show parallel associations with the outcomes considered.

Importantly, the findings highlight the transformative potential of more explicitly inequality-based identities. Identification with the 99% was positively associated with intentions for collective action to confront inequality in both the UK and Spain. In Spain, working class identification also predicted intolerance of inequality and willingness to confront it—rather than to maintain it—suggesting that traditional class-based identities can still mobilise resistance to inequality in some contexts. These results suggest that while inclusive populist identities such as the 99% may foster mobilisation across contexts, the salience of the working class remains particularly relevant in Spain, whereas in the UK its mobilising role appears weaker.

General Discussion

Across two studies conducted in different socio-political contexts, we advanced the literature on identity and economic inequality by examining how multiple collective identity frameworks are associated with attitudes towards inequality and with intentions to engage in collective action. Extending prior work that examined wealth-based politicised identities within a single national context (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2023, 2024), the present research adopts a cross-national and integrative approach that compares these identities within the same study, conceptualising them along a continuum based on the centrality of economic inequality to group definition. In Study 1, using data from five countries (the UK, Spain, Greece, Hungary, and Poland), we focused on identification with the common people, national identity, and collective narcissism, capturing broader identity frameworks through which economic inequality may be interpreted. In Study 2,

conducted in the UK and Spain, we extended this model to include more explicitly wealth-based politicised identities—the 99% and the working class—allowing us to test in parallel whether different identities are associated with resistance to inequality, or conversely, with its maintenance. Taken together, these findings support the idea that collective identities differ in the extent to which economic inequality constitutes a central component of group identification, and that this difference is associated with whether they orient individuals towards challenging or maintaining inequality. A summary of the main findings is provided in [Table 9](#).

Table 9
Summary of Key Findings Across Outcomes, Identities and Countries

Outcome	Key patterns
Intolerance towards inequality (Study 1 and 2)	• In Study 1, identification with the common people was positively associated with intolerance in most countries (4 out of 5). • In Study 2, this pattern varied depending on the context: ◦ UK: common people and 99% identification ◦ Spain: working class identification
Political participation (Study 1)	• Identification with the common people was consistently and positively associated across all countries (5/5) • National identity and collective narcissism showed weak or negative associations
CA to confront inequality (Study 2)	• Associations varied by national context: ◦ UK: 99% identification ◦ Spain: working class identification
CA to maintain the status quo (Study 2)	• National identity and collective narcissism were positively associated in both countries. • 99% and working class identities showed weaker or negative associations, with negative effects particularly in Spain

Note. Between countries differences are reported in [Tables 4](#) and [8](#). CA = collective action.

The results indicated that intolerance for inequality and political participation were positively predicted by identification with the common people in Study 1. This suggests that identification with common people can encompass features of a politicised identity ([Simon & Klandermans, 2001](#)), characterized by a shared grievance among those who are not part of the economic elite, thereby relating to motivations to confront them. However, in Study 2, intentions for collective action were not significantly associated with common people identification. At the same time, in Spain there was a tendency for intentions to maintain the status quo to be more strongly associated with this identity—compared with the UK—rather than with intentions to confront inequality. More broadly, the pattern of associations differed depending on the outcome considered and the national context. In line with this, intolerance for inequality was positively predicted

by identification with the common people and the 99% in the UK, suggesting that these identities capture a more politically oriented stance than working class identification in that context. However, in Spain, intolerance for inequality was more strongly associated with working class identification than with identification with the common people and the 99%. This pattern suggests that such a broad and unspecific identity may, in some contexts, possess a populist nature that can hinder progressive social change (e.g., conservative populism; Muis & Immerzeel, 2017). Taken together, the findings of Study 2 further qualify the role of common people identification, particularly in relation to its variable association across outcomes, compared to other, more clearly defined politicised identities. This is consistent with the idea that identities in which economic inequality is less central to group definition may provide a weaker basis for collective action targeting inequality.

Research on populism suggests that such identities can be constructed and employed strategically to serve political goals (Shayegh et al., 2022). Consequently, common people identification has fluid characteristics in terms of politicisation (a “thin ideology”; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Mudde, 2004) and it is deeply anchored in the social and cultural context. This raises the question: what is the sense of disadvantage felt by those who identify with the common people? The common people group does not appear to be in a state of anomie or objective economic deprivation. Rather, they adopt a populist narrative that emphasises the divide between the virtuous people and the corrupt elite, as a consequence of discourse around an unjust society (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). As a result, the content of their grievances can take on an “anti-system” form, targeting the economic elite, or an “exclusionary” form, seeking external groups to blame (e.g., migrants; Hameleers et al., 2021; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Thus, this group may simultaneously hold negative attitudes towards economic inequality and attitudes that perpetuate it.

Additionally, our results showed that the intention to maintain the status quo was positively associated with both collective narcissism and national identity in the economic domain. This is consistent with identity frameworks in which group definition is based on national recognition and status rather than economic hierarchy. In Study 1, collective narcissism presented a more consistent pattern; in Study 2, both constructs showed parallel associations: intolerance of inequality and actions to confront it were negatively related to these identities, whereas actions aimed at maintaining the status quo were positively related to them. These findings are consistent with the literature linking collective narcissism to defensive responses to intergroup threats and exclusionary attitudes (Bertin et al., 2022). Although collective narcissism is conceptualised as an explicitly defensive and status-oriented form of national attachment (Cichocka & Cislak, 2020; Marchlewska et al., 2020), our results suggest that a broader national identity may also align with system-maintenance tendencies in the economic context. However, given that national identity has been described as potentially ambivalent, future research

should examine under what conditions its more reflective forms—such as constructive patriotism (Schatz et al., 1999)—can promote redistributive orientations, for example, by reinforcing support for taxation or public institutions such as education and healthcare when they are understood to be beneficial to the nation as a whole.

The positive role of social identities in confronting inequalities is supported by the finding that intentions to confront inequality were positively predicted by wealth-based identities such as the 99% and the working class, in line with previous findings (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2023, 2024). The 99% has the potential to unite people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and mobilise them against a situation perceived as illegitimate (van Zomeren et al., 2008), more unambiguously than the common people identity. This may be because identification with the 99% explicitly highlights an unequal distribution of resources as the cause of experienced grievances and is framed within an inclusive populist framework (Caiani & Graziano, 2019). However, cultural context matters. In Spain, intentions to confront inequality were more strongly associated with working class identity, whereas in the UK, they were more strongly associated with the 99%. The Spanish working class has historically spearheaded numerous protests (e.g., anti-austerity protest in Europe, Peterson et al., 2015; marches for dignity, Sabucedo et al., 2017), which underlines its important role in promoting collective actions. This can be seen, for instance, in the case of Galician farmers, whose collective identity promoted that they were more likely to participate in collective actions than their Dutch counterparts (Klandermans et al., 2002). By contrast, the British working class has been stereotyped and marginalised within the political and social context, being demonised as part of the legacy of Thatcherism (Jones, 2011). Moreover, there is evidence that in the UK many people identify with the working class, even if they do not objectively belong to it (Evans & Mellon, 2016). Both arguments could help explain why in the UK working class identity is not strongly associated with confronting inequalities, and instead more specifically political identities—in this case the 99%—take this role.

One important limitation of our studies is their correlational nature, which restricts our ability to make causal inferences. In addition, the samples used—particularly in Study 2—differ in recruitment procedures and are not nationally representative, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, they provide valuable explanatory insights regarding associations observed across diverse cultural contexts. In future studies, we aim to address this limitation by experimentally manipulating antecedent variables of identity and politicisation, such as economic threat or relative deprivation. We also plan to examine their potential effects on populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014). In addition, future work could disentangle whether different forms of nationalism—such as national identity versus common people identity—reflect distinct motivational orientations (e.g., civic vs. ethnic nationalism, Halikiopoulou et al., 2013). This would help explain why some identities legitimise inequality while others mobilise resistance against it.

Our findings have not only theoretical implications but also practical ones, as they shed light on the complex interplay of identities in the context of economic inequality. It is therefore crucial to recognise that promoting nationalism in an idealised and exalted manner through narcissism, at the expense of other identities that explicitly address the distribution of resources, can hinder efforts to tackle economic injustices. This may result in the dominance of discourse that exalts the nation and scapegoats vulnerable groups for economic grievance, rather than discourses that focus on financial strategies to resolve the problems derived from a capitalist system. Moreover, it is worth noting that while different class-based identities may share common goals, their functions and meanings may vary across cultural contexts, as we observed in the case of Spain and the United Kingdom.

Overall, our findings show that the extent to which economic inequality is central to group identity determines whether identities function as drivers of social change or of system maintenance. Identification with the 99% in the UK and with the working class in Spain emerged as a clear group-level correlate of orientations towards social change and economic justice. In contrast, identification with ‘common people’ revealed a more ambivalent role, as it can mobilise resistance but also align with exclusionary populist narratives. Finally, more defensive forms of national attachment, particularly collective narcissism, consistently undermined efforts to combat inequality and instead oriented people towards maintaining the existing economic order.

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Data Availability: The raw data, questionnaires, and R code for Studies 1 and 2 are openly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) website: <https://osf.io/d4pba/>

Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials contain the following items:

- **Preregistration for Study 1** (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2022S-a)
- **Preregistration for Study 2** (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2022S-b)
- **Raw data, questionnaires, and R code for Studies 1 and 2** (del Fresno-Díaz, 2025S)
- **Additional information:** Detailed descriptions of the measures used in Studies 1 and 2, together with additional analyses not reported in the main article, including measurement invariance analyses, alternative multigroup structural equation models examining national identification and collective narcissism separately, and models estimated without covariates (del Fresno-Díaz et al., 2026S)

Index of Supplementary Materials

- del Fresno-Díaz, Á., Kesberg, R., & Easterbrook, M. J. (2022S-a). *Economic inequalities as triggers of collective identity and narcissistic processes for the populist attitudes* [Preregistration for Study 1]. OSF Registries. <https://osf.io/x3knd/>
- del Fresno-Díaz, Á., Kesberg, R., & Easterbrook, M. J. (2022S-b). *Economic distress and identity* [Preregistration for Study 2]. OSF Registries. <https://osf.io/mp6wf/>
- del Fresno-Díaz, Á. (2025S). *Economic distress and identity* [Raw data, questionnaires, and R code]. OSF. <https://osf.io/d4pba/>
- del Fresno-Díaz, Á., Kesberg, R., Willis, G. B., de Lemus, S., & Easterbrook, M. J. (2026S). *Supplementary materials to "Framing economic inequality through collective identities: Confronting or maintaining inequality"* [Additional information]. PsychOpen GOLD. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.22374>

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