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Social Norms Misperception Among Voters in the 2020 US Presidential Election

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Author Note

Carina Hoerst is a second-year PhD student at the School of Psychology, University of Sussex (UK) under the supervision of Prof John Drury. Her research examines the social-psychological processes that empower perpetrators of hate crimes and far-right violence after events of socio-political relevance. John Drury is a Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Sussex. His research focuses on collective behaviour – in protests, riots and social movements; emergencies; and less dramatic crowd phenomena such as at festivals, music and sports events. His findings on collective resilience in mass emergencies have informed the training of crowd safety managers and the UK Civil Contingencies Secretariat’s National Risk Assessments. He is a former editor of the British Journal of Social Psychology.

Please note that throughout the manuscript we will be using words that refer to race. We thereby want to strongly distance ourselves from any narratives that discuss this in a biological or phenotypical way, and rather refer to the identities and intergroup relations behind the construct of race. We will be using capital letters for the word (or word stem) “Black”, and lower cases for the word (or word stem) “white” which we will also write in italics. This should differentiate groups of people that can (Black people) and that cannot (white people) experience racism.

The pre-registration from November 2, 2020, can be found at https://osf.io/9qfnj/. Datasets are available at https://doi.org/10.25377/sussex.13721512, R code at https://github.com/carinah1408/US_survey.

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Abstract

We aim to explain the dynamics enabling spikes in hate crimes by examining the underlying social-psychological processes behind it. We see these as captured in empowerment processes amongst racist who see themselves as “victims” and their position strengthened by majority support from the public for their actions. Building on previous research, we investigated the role social norm misperception (false consensus and pluralistic ignorance), following elections plays as a possible, generally occurring mechanism, which particular focus on Republican Party supporters. In a two-wave panel study, we surveyed Democrat and Republican supporters on social norms misperception, as well as collective empowerment, and xenophobic behavioural intentions. While we could replicate and strengthen our arguments and establish robust group-dependent effects for social norms misperception and illustrate that an unexpected outcome of the election led to disempowerment amongst Republicans, we found null effects for changes in social norms misperception, and behavioural intentions. Our study contributes to understanding social norms misperception as associated with group membership. Deriving from that, the study results indicate that the perception of a majority agreeing with one’s approval is potentially less influenced by external factors, in contrast to feelings of joy and group efficacy – collective empowerment. Practical implications of group differences regarding post-election collective actions are discussed.

Keywords: social norms misperception, election, group differences, collective empowerment, collective narcissism
Introduction

Events of socio-political importance and subsequent spikes in hate crime

The Southern Poverty Law Center recorded over 400 racist incidents immediately after the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump in the US (SPLC, 2016). In New York, 34% of all reported hate crimes throughout the year were reported around the 8\textsuperscript{th} of November – the election day (Farivar, 2017). Swastikas painted on walls were framed by labels like “Make America White Again” (Wendling, 2016) and increased racist street activism was observed (e.g., Charlottesville, “Unite the Right” rally, 2017).

In the UK, the Brexit referendum in 2016 was followed by a sudden increase in reported racist and religiously motivated hate crimes of 57% (Home Office, 2017; Snowdon, 2016). In contrast to a typically witnessed proportion of around 33% in “violence against the person” offences, the National Police Chiefs Council reported that after the referendum, 63% of recorded offences were categorized as such (NPCC, 2016). This indicates that the stark increase in hate mainly related to interpersonal violent attacks, and that against EU citizens, particularly amongst the Polish community, living in the UK and individuals presumed to be not “truly British” (e.g., Clarke, Kommenda & Lewis, 2019, point 7/13; Davies, 2019; Luczak, n.d.).

Three years later, following the UK General Election and the victory of the Conservative Party whose campaign sought to “get Brexit done”, migrants not only see themselves confronted with the introduction of a controversial “points-based immigration system” aiming to keep “lower-skilled workers” and migrants that “do not speak English” out (Home Office, 2020), but they also faced increased verbal abuse (e.g., BBC, 2020, ‘Happy Brexit Day’).

All these illustrations reflect spikes in hate crimes and speech arising subsequently to electoral events. This is significant considering the impact hate crimes not only have on the
victims but also on wider society; hate crimes automatically send threatening signals out to the community the victims are perceived to belong to (e.g., Paterson, Walters, Brown & Fearn, 2018).

While predictors, motivations, and types of hate crimes have widely been addressed (e.g., Walters, Brown & Wiedlitzka, 2016; Walters & Krasodomski-Jones, 2018), this largely focused on its patterns, however not on the dynamics that enable the spikes in hate crimes (occurring after elections, or any other public events). We aim to close this gap by examining the underlying social-psychological processes behind this, that we see as captured in empowerment processes that have consequences for the behaviour of racist groups who see themselves as “victims” and their position strengthened by a shift to the right by the electorate. In the current study, we, therefore, investigate the role of social norm misperception following elections as a possible, generally occurring mechanism. We carried this investigation out through a two-wave survey (before and after the US election) for which we set out the theoretical underpinnings below.

**The role of social norms (perception)**

Traits and individual attitudes have been a recurrent focal point in the discussion around the motivation behind hate attacks (e.g., Santos, Briñol, Petty, Gandarillas & Mateos, 2019; Žemojtel-Piotrowska Sawicki & Jonason, 2020; Zmigrod & Goldenberg, 2020). As we have been witnessing a shift from covert to overt racism over recent years (e.g., Bursztyn Fiorin & Egorov, 2017; Mondon & Winter, 2020a; Ortiz, 2020), the question which derives from this way of argumentation would be: “Have people´s attitudes become more racist?” At this point, we must not forget that racism goes beyond individual prejudices; racism is characterised by the combination of prejudice and power (e.g., Ray & Fuentes, 2020; Salter et al., 2018; see also: Noor Kteily, Siem & Mazziotta, 2019). Explanations for racist attacks that are based on individualism alone have to be taken with caution since they easily neglect structural issues. Thus, when looking at hate motivation, we need to consider the social
context. In our study, we focus on social norms since they determine what is socially accepted and what punished (e.g., Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Zitek & Hebl, 2007).

In identifying the social norm, individuals are influenced by their “beliefs about shared beliefs” (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011, p. 740), hence, by how they perceive their surroundings to think (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). In this way, increasing awareness of social categorization and the thoughts others might have, can drive social and political behaviour so that it becomes a reflection of what people think others think (Elcheroth et al., 2011).

Following the 2016 US election, for example, Crandall, White, and Miller (2018) examined whether the unexpected win of Donald Trump evoked a norm shift towards prejudice, given his racist electoral campaigning. They found that the acceptability of prejudice had indeed increased towards targeted groups, with no effect on untargeted groups. However, Crandall et al. (2018) concluded that instead of people actually changing their own norms, they perceived norms to had changed. Thus, social norm perception (including norms and values around other groups) is not only selective but also vulnerable to external events.

**Social norm misperception**

Research has repeatedly shown that, when instructed to compare their own opinion to the opinion of others, people often show signs of what is considered social norms misperception (Berkowitz, 2004; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Perkins, 2003; Prentice & Miller, 1993). Misperception, perhaps counterintuitively, does thereby not necessarily mean wrong, but rather reflects a mismatch that arises when the perceptions of two entities are compared. Henry, Dymnicki, Schoeny, Meyer, and Martin (2013), for example, found that school students estimated their peers to be more supportive of aggression than themselves, a phenomenon described as *pluralistic ignorance* (PI). PI, in this way, reflects mismatching
actual\(^1\) (attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of group members) and perceived ingroup norms (assumption of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of other group members, cf. Prentice & Miller, 1993). PI is group-based and own norms therefore always have to be measured in the context of perceived norms from a meaningful ingroup (cf. Sargent & Newman, 2021).

Social norms misperception is, however, not entirely disconnected from individual attitudes: While PI effects can occur amongst individuals that do not necessarily hold extreme opinions (Bjerring, Hansen & Pedersen, 2014), another form of misperception – false consensus (FC), typically occurs when dealing with controversial topics (van der Plitt, van der Linden & Ester, 1982), and, more importantly, it dominantly occurs amongst people holding minority opinions and that are engaged in less socially desirable behaviour (Sanders & Mullen, 1983). FC thereby refers to the process by which people (mis)perceive others to share their own (extreme or controversial) attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Ross, Greene & House, 1977). Though, the literature is somewhat inconsistent about how to measure FC: Since FC is considered individual-based (cf. Sargent & Newman, 2021), some scholars see FC as present when own approval and perceived approval from others are associated (cf. Luzsa & Mayr, 2021), while others refer to the “traditional way”, comparing the strength of agreement perception between opposing stances (between-group measurement; cf. Bauman & Geher, 2002; Ross, Greene & House, 1977; Watt & Larkin, 2010). Watts and Larkin (2010) for example “operationalized [false consensus] as existing when individuals rate the incidence of their own opinions and behaviors in the wider community more highly than those who do not share those opinions and behaviors.” They further explain that they did so by using a “t test to determine whether participants with negative attitudes […] would estimate more agreement for their views than those with positive attitudes […] would estimate disagreement” 2 (p.

\(^1\) We argue that trying to base our own study on “actual” norms is problematic since our focus is on the subjective evaluation of norms. We assess “own comfort” (instead of “actual norms”) in this study to capture the level to which people feel comfortable as an indicator of norm perception (cf. Prentice & Miller, 1993).
In this way, the researcher found that individuals who held stronger prejudices against indigenous Australians perceived a higher percentage of Australians to agree with them in their opinion (consensus estimation) than individuals that were nonprejudiced. Some criticism regarding the traditional way, as well as practical guidance for using FC in regressions, comes from Krueger and Zeigler (1993) who see the “true false consensus effect” as covered when actual consensus is minused from the perceived agreement.

While Berkowitz (2004) argues that the phenomenon of false consensus serves to “maintain an individual’s denial that his or her attitudes or behaviour are problematic or unusual” (p. 7), we must not forget the importance of social context as outlined in the previous section. How this might interact with social norms misperception, we discuss in the next section.

**Social norm misperception and group membership**

It was originally proposed that cognitive estimation errors caused social norms misperception effects (Ross et al., 1977). However, as we have already mentioned, misperception does not necessarily mean wrong. In fact, social-psychological processes seem to be involved in the way that a strong social knowledge – that is “information about the opinions or behaviours of a reference group[,] can influence individuals´ perceptions of group norms” (Tankard et al., 2016, p. 189; see also: Spears & Manstead, 1990). The reference group could thereby be based on a given categorization (e.g., sex, nationality) or on one that is clearly self-chosen, e.g., “opinion-based” (McGarty, Lala & Douglas, 2011). Psychological groups connect individuals that share the same preferences and values, and thus the same social identity. In political contexts, Federico (2020) argues that people’s traditional values and their preference for uncertainty avoidance and cognitive closure makes them more likely to be supporters of parties that are conservative, while progressive values and preferences for openness and uncertainty tolerance, makes them more likely to be supporters of parties that
are liberal. Now, the more strongly people identify with an ingroup, the more likely they are to endorse the rhetoric used by its leaders, its norms, and its policies (e.g., Bauer & Hannover, 2020; Golec de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazar & Lantos, 2019; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011; Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Turner & Reynolds, 2011). We consequently assumed that individuals who hold racist values and attitudes would support a conservative party. In the British political context, one’s stance and the influence of a party whose shift rightwards has created a hostile environment for immigrants and for those not perceived as a “true” member of the British ingroup (e.g., Mondon & Winter, 2020a; Rhodes, 2010), we assumed, might lead to the perception that xenophobic norms are widely supported, especially following an event that, presumably, reinforces one’s values – an electoral victory in favour of hostile anti-immigrant policies. In a pilot study that we conducted, examining social norms misperception following the UK General Election 2019, we found that Conservative Party voters showed significantly higher approval for racist remarks compared to Labour Party voters, and an FC effect for racist remarks approval; Conservative Party voters showed significantly higher agreement estimation from the British nation for their approval than Labour Party voters did.

In the US political landscape, Lührmann et al. (2020) found that the Republican Party increasingly resembles an autocratic party, which has been particularly evident in the presidency of Donald Trump since his “election […] has come to represent both the mainstreaming of the far and extreme right and the radicalisation of the mainstream” (Mondon & Winter, 2020b, p. 59). In 2016, Trump was particularly popular for his racist campaign amongst neo-Nazi movements, for example, the Alt-right (e.g., Neiwert, 2020). But support in 2016 not only came from the fringe: A profiling study of the Alt-right (Forscher & Kteily, 2019) has shown that Alt-Right-Trump-voters and non-Alt-Right-Trump-voters strongly overlapped in many areas such as social dominance orientation, nationalism, Muslim Ban and Mexico wall support, and opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement, while
they coherently and significantly differed from non-Trump voters in these regards. Although support for Trump’s 2020 campaign seems to decline, it was still strongly driven by white Christians who make up a significant part of the electorate (Smith, 2020), and whose racist attitudes and preferences become clear when we consider studies that, for example, showed that amongst white Christians, religious conservatism, and the willingness to confront white privilege as well as the awareness of it were negatively correlated (Todd, McConnell & Suffrin, 2014), and that individuals’ own prejudice and endorsement of Christian nationalism lowered their hate crime perception (i.e., the motivation behind it as seen as hatred of others and prejudice, instead of as justified due to perceived white victimhood, Leander et al., 2020).

Finally, in last year’s presidential debate, Trump refused to condemn the white supremacist group the Proud Boys and told them to “stand back and by” instead, which was highly celebrated in the group as a response (e.g., DeCook, 2020). Thus, like in our UK sample, we assumed that Trump supporters’ norms perception might similarly be influenced by how their pre-existing attitudes and identification with the Republican Party, i.e., their group membership, have shaped their realities.

**Why misperception matters**

Why should we be concerned about how individuals (mis)perceive social norms and how their group membership fosters that? The behavioural consequences of social norms misperception have been demonstrated in, for example, drinking behaviour, punitive parenting styles, violence, as well as in the expression of prejudice (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman & O’Brian, 2002; Ganz, Neville, Kassanjee & Ward, 2020; Henry et al., 2013; Korcuska & Thombs, 2003; Prentice & Miller, 1993; Watt & Larkin, 2010). This is significant when we consider that “[o]verestimations of anti-social […] and underestimations of pro-social […] norms can increase and decrease such behaviours, respectively” (Ganz et al., 2020, p. 3).
Although not explicitly a social norms misperception study, Bursztyn et al. (2017) experimentally tested whether, after Donald Trump had been nominated as president, individuals were more willing to openly donate to anti-immigration organizations, compared to before. This was indeed what the researchers found. Importantly, Bursztyn et al. (2017) argue that “[the outcome] did not casually make […] participants more xenophobic, but instead made the already more-intolerant ones more comfortable about publicly expressing their views” (p. 3). This is also in line with recent findings arguing that pre-existing hostile attitudes and repeated exposure to hate speech increased hostility expression, support for harsh immigration treatment, and physical violence (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020).

Those individuals that engage in misbehaviour typically do so in a highly visible and “loud” way. They are described as “advocates of the [presumed] truth” (Berkowitz, 2004, p. 8). This, we argue (and discuss below), might have contributed to the stark increase in public hate-motivated attacks after the recent election events since it can distort the picture of reality a “silent majority” holds.

In this context, Portelinha and Elcheroth (2016) refer to the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) in their study taken place following the 2012 French presidential election. In this election, Marine Le Pen gained a significant proportion of the electorate, and the researchers observed that the perception of agreement with the xenophobic agenda of the formerly marginalized Front National amongst other school peers had increased in those previously willing to speak out against it. Although this was an experimental study, it took place in a real-life social context and, therefore, could potentially illustrate how counteractions against xenophobic attacks are undermined (cf. Nelson, Dunn & Paradies, 2011).

In our pilot study, we witnessed PI effects for comfort with violence, which display a similar effect; Labour Party voters consistently estimated “the wider British people” to be
significantly more comfortable with violence in four out of four cases than themselves (in contrast to Conservative Party voters that only showed a significant difference in two out of four cases). Along with a lower ingroup identification as “British” amongst Labour Party voters (compared to Conservative Party voters), this, we assumed, could indicate that they perceived a greater detachment from “the British people” and which could similarly undermine counteractions.

**Collective psychological empowerment of a (perceived) victim identity**

One answer as to how social norms (mis)perceptions are transferred into actions, we argue, is through collective empowerment processes that relate to the ingroup, specifically, to one that views itself as disadvantaged (and as a minority in terms of its opinions). The empowerment model which we build on in this study derives from collective action research. Drury and Reicher (2009) defined collective psychological empowerment in this context as “that positive social-psychological transformation, related to a sense of being able to (re)share the social world, that takes place for members of subordinated groups who overturn (or at least challenge) existing relations of dominance.” (p. 708). In other words, a subordinated group understands that it now has the power to improve a situation in its favour, which is the basis of (new) identity-realising actions (in particular against outgroups), a process known as collective self-objectification (Drury & Reicher, 2005). The novel sense of collective efficacy and/ or realization of one’s ingroup values over an opponent is experienced positively and is grounded in the perception of a new consensus for shared goals and the expectation that other ingroup members will support one in enacting ingroup norms and values (Becker, Tausch, & Wagner, 2011; Drury & Reicher, 2005; Drury, Reicher & Stott, 2003). While the endurance of collective empowerment depends on maintaining the aspired change in social relations (Drury & Reicher, 2005), a defeat can lead to disempowerment and reduce the likelihood of further action (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Drury & Reicher, 2005).
We argue that this framework can help explaining processes underlying the sudden rises in hate crimes after the recent elections, which are carried out by perpetrators that think their group has become disadvantaged. In contrast to the focus in previous work on progressive social change movements aiming to achieve equality and fairness, the concern here is with people that belong to the (white) majority, not a genuinely subordinated group. Denial of structural inequalities and claiming victimhood for themselves, on the one hand, justify retaliatory actions and reframes xenophobic violence as “self-defence”, and on the other hand, serves to keep and restore the status and impermeability of ingroup boundaries which serves to limit upward mobility of people in socially disadvantaged groups (cf. Blazak, 2009; Jetten, 2019; Rhodes, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In line with this, it makes sense that although support for xenophobia has long been linked to times of crisis, this can also arise in times of economic prosperity. Jetten (2019) argues that anti-immigration sentiments are better described by a U-shaped function of wealth: While immigration, pictured as a threat to national employment, security, and health care, particularly concerning groups with a low SES background, fuels xenophobia during uncertain times, it is the threat to cultural values and traditions, hence, to the status and “order”, that motivates wealthy and/or prestigious groups to oppose immigration, and which can occur during prosperous times. Mols and Jetten (2017) coined this phenomenon the wealth paradox.

Thus, by perceiving the “white race” as threatened by marginalized groups (i.e., Blacks, Muslims, immigrants, refugees etc), we propose that after the presented electoral events, a minority of individuals became empowered to commit racially motivated crimes or engage in hate speech through a false consensus assumption that these crimes were socially acceptable, caused by perceiving the wider (white) public as sharing and supporting their xenophobic views and actions. Thus, in perceiving the election result as an endorsement of their views, xenophobic whites saw their ingroup extended and expected support for actions
hostile to anyone that was not a “true” member of the ethnic ingroup (cf. Drury & Reicher, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, 1985). In this way, the election outcomes in 2016 and 2019, served to realize xenophobes’ social identity, which could have been accompanied by a joyful feeling, in turn increasing the likelihood for further xenophobic actions. In contrast, perceiving a majority to be increasingly xenophobic (opposed to one’s own views, cf. PI effects), might have led to perceived powerlessness amongst the defeated camps (i.e., Remain, Clinton, and Labour voters) regarding counteractions.

Both 2016 election events were highly unanticipated and sparked an unprecedented number of xenophobic outrages. This calls attention to the unexpectedness factor, which, in collective action terms, could be viewed as the equivalent of a novel change in social relations (see above), and explain the sudden shift in feelings of support and empowerment. Novelty, in either a favourable or unfavourable direction, might lead to significantly stronger reactions, compared to having an outcome expected.

A model of collective psychological empowerment for perceived “victim” identities

We have described the general empowerment process, yet only a minority amongst xenophobes commits hate crimes. A social identity approach would suggest that for identity-related empowerment, a shared social identity, and the strength of identification with the relevant social category moderates these processes (Reicher 2004; Turner et al., 1987). While we believe that we can apply the collective psychological empowerment model to the group of hate crime perpetrators, the mentioned moderators might not be specific enough. An American study (Hamer, Paterson, Drogosz, & McFarland, 2019) showed that individuals high in collective narcissism not only expressed schadenfreude towards Muslim victims of hate crimes but also supported the perpetrators. Like its individual-level counterpart,
individual narcissism, collective narcissism is invested in image protection, in constant validation seeking, and, consequently in looking out for (presumed) threats. Unlike individual narcissism, the subject of collective narcissism is the (in)group (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson & Jayawickreme, 2009). And, as already elaborated, the more an individual is invested in the ingroup, the stronger is the influence of (xenophobic) rhetoric, which does typically interact with pre-existing societal and individual prejudices (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020). It is therefore hardly surprising that collective narcissism is also associated with feelings of, for example, being disadvantaged, and negative outgroup attitudes (Dyduch-Hazar, Mrozinski & Golec de Zavala, 2019; Marchlewska, Cichocka, Jaworska, Golec de Zavala & Bilewicz, 2020). Interestingly, the previously mentioned profiling study of the Alt-right (Forscher & Kteily, 2019), found that non-Alt-Right-Trump-voters and Alt-Right-Trump voters only differed in the way in which the latter strongly supported white collective action. In line with this, while collective narcissism can be applied to any psychological group, it has mainly been studied in the context of politics. The research team around Golec de Zavala, for example, has established collective narcissism as the best predictor for Trump support in the US and the Leave vote in the UK (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018; Golec de Zavala, Guerra & Simão, 2017). Thus, by defining a narrow social identity, collective narcissism might serve well as a moderator when we examine the impact an unexpected (vs expected) election outcome has on FC effects and intentions to publicly support xenophobia.

Similar to accounting for non-narcissistic self-esteem in research around individual narcissism, collective narcissism, as defensive ingroup positivity, has a non-narcissistic counterpart – ingroup satisfaction, a secure form of ingroup positivity. The two concepts have the positive evaluation of the ingroup in common; however, while narcissistic ingroup positivity can lead to outgroup hostility, ingroup satisfaction is associated with pro-sociality and can even lead to outgroup solidarity (Cichocka, 2016; Dyduch-Hazar et al., 2019;
Marchlewksa, Cichocka, Jaworska, Golec de Zavala & Bilewicz, 2020). It is, therefore, important not to blur the unique contributions and to investigate the “pure” concept of collective narcissism. While a direct measurement for ingroup positivity has yet to be found, traditionally, the shared variance of ingroup investment – comprising satisfaction, centrality, and solidarity with the ingroup, is partialled out (cf. Marchlewksa et al., 2020). We adopt this approach, however, focus on assessing the residual form of collective narcissism only (referred to as “collective narcissism (net secure ingroup identification)”).

**Pilot study**

Our pilot study following the 2019 UK General Election investigated voter groups (Conservative Party and Labour Party voters) and highly xenophobic individuals that were assumed to be amongst those groups. The study gives us the confidence to continue examining social norms misperception differences between groups (for a detailed description of the study, see Supplementary Material, Appendix 1). Group-dependent social norms misperception patterns (see above) along with findings that showed that Conservative Party voters and xenophobes scored higher on collective narcissism and collective empowerment (the latter was directly associated with the UK General Election result) indicates that the group differences in social norm misperception are not random but connected to the outcome of the election.

**Aims**

While the current study aims to build on previous examinations of election effects on social norm perception (e.g., Bursztyn et al., 2017; Crandall et al., 2018; Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016), it is the first, to our knowledge, that combines social norms misperception, collective empowerment, behavioural intentions, and collective narcissism, in a cross-sectional panel design. Through measurements at two points in time – before and after the
election, our study aims to illuminate election effects on public opinion more clearly. In this way, we are confident to contribute and further the examination of how hostile intergroup conflicts can arise and how xenophobia becomes empowered – or disempowered.

**The present study**

By surveying voter groups (Democrat and Republican supporters) before and after the US presidential election 2020, our study examines the impact an (unexpected) electoral outcome has on social norms misperception, collective psychological empowerment, approval for violence and racist remarks, and on the willingness to publicly express xenophobic hostility amongst voter groups. The latter was examined amongst Republican Party voters exclusively. Our pilot study showed that Conservative Party voters and highly xenophobic individuals scored significantly higher on collective narcissism than Labour Party supporters and non-xenophobic individuals. Building on this, we test for the possibility of a moderating effect of collective narcissism (in the case of a Republican victory).

**Hypotheses**

Hypotheses H1 and H2 serve to replicate the findings that we established in our pilot study, aiming to broaden our findings to another sample and population and with a superior (panel) design.

**Social norms misperception**

H1) FC: (Time 1) Republican supporters will show significantly higher approval than Democrat supporters for xenophobic statements and agreement estimation from “the wider American public”.

H2) PI: (Time 1) Democrat supporters will perceive “the average American” to be significantly more comfortable with violence than themselves, while Republican supporters
will not perceive the average American to be significantly more comfortable with violence than themselves.

H3) FC: Republican supporters whose expectations at time 1 do not match the election outcome, will show i) a significant increase in agreement estimation from the ‘wider American public’ for xenophobic statements if the Republican Party wins the election; ii) a significant decrease in agreement estimation from the “wider American public” for xenophobic statements if the Republican Party loses the election, at time 2.

H4) PI: Democrat supporters whose expectations at time 1 do not match the election outcome, will show i) a significant increase in perceived comfort with violence of “the average American” if the Democratic Party loses the election; ii) a significant decrease in perceived comfort with violence of “the average American” if the Democratic Party wins the election at time 2.

Collective empowerment

H5) Voters whose expectations at time 1 do not match the election outcome, will show i) significantly higher collective empowerment (group efficacy & joy at success) if their party wins the election; ii) significantly lower collective empowerment (group efficacy & joy at success) if their party loses the election, at time 2.

Behavioural intention

H6) Republican Party voters whose expectations at time 1 do not match the election outcome, will show i) significantly higher behavioural intentions to a) sign a petition promoting xenophobic views; b) donate their participation reward to support this petition; c) publicly share that they supported it if their party wins the election; ii) significantly lower
behavioural intentions to a) sign the petition; b) donate their participation reward to support this petition; c) publicly share that they supported it if their party loses the election, at time 2.

**Mediation and moderation**

H7: An unexpected vs expected electoral victory for the Republican Party will positively predict behavioural intentions, mediated by FC and collective empowerment (group efficacy & joy at success) whereby the direct path on behavioural intentions and the indirect path on FC are moderated by collective narcissism (net secure ingroup identification), see Figure 1.

H7a: FC positively predicts collective empowerment (group efficacy & joy at success).

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual model for hypotheses 7 and 7a: The effect an unexpected vs expected victory of the Republican Party (established by comparing time 1 expectations of Republicans with the actual election result) has on subsequent behavioural intentions, false consensus, and collective empowerment (joy at success and group efficacy).*

**Method**

**Statistical power and intended sample size**

Our pilot study gave us the confidence to analyse group-based differences in social norm perception in light of electoral effects; however, it did not allow us to calculate a sample size for the present study. The pilot study was conducted at one time point only, thus, would
only allow being used as a template for H1 and H2. Instead, we used Crandall et al. (2018) as a template paper for estimating the sample size, since the researchers used a similar (albeit not completely comparable) pre-/post design in a comparable domain. Considering potential attrition, we aimed to sample 200 participants. Participants were recruited online on Prolific Academic using the custom screening tool for nationality and political affiliation. In this way, we aimed to sample US Americans, split 50:50 between those affiliated with the Democratic and those with the Republican Party, and of 18 years of age or above. (See Supplementary Material, Appendix 2 for sensitivity analyses).

Participants

After assessing our exclusion criteria (see Supplementary material, Appendix 3), we established a total of \( N = 139 \) participants for both times whose data was used for further data analyses. Eighty-one women participated, 57 men and one participant identified as non-binary. The majority of participants \( (N = 113) \) identified as “White or European American”. Eighty-seven participants supported the Democratic Party and 52 supported the Republican Party. In the Democrat sample, there were more women than men (57 vs 29), while the support for the Republican Party was relatively equally distributed (24 vs 28).

Measures

**Predictor variables**

**Vote.** To check whether party affiliation (on Prolific Academic) aligned with party support, a single item at each time point assessed i) participants' party support at time 1, and ii) their actual vote at time 2, respectively (t1: “Which party are you planning to support in the US presidential election 2020?”; t2: “Which party did you vote for in the US presidential election 2020?”). Participants had the option to say: “I did not vote.” The items were created for the study. (See Supplementary Material, Appendix 3 for further information).
(Un)Expectedness of outcome. A single item, created for the study, asked participants at time 1 to what extent they expect the party they supported to win the election (“How likely is it that the party you are voting for will win the election?”). This was then compared to the actual outcome of the election (see below).

Outcome variables

Collective empowerment. Items measuring joy at success (time 1 and 2, e.g., “The US presidential election 2020 makes me feel joyful.”) and group efficacy (time 1 and 2, e.g., “Thinking about the US presidential election 2020, I believe that we Americans can change society.”) served as proxy measures for collective empowerment. Item wording was based on items previously used by Drury, Choudhury, Evripidou, Bransgrove and Sumner (2018 study 1 and 2, see Supplementary material, Appendix 4 for further information about the item wording). The variables were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”.

Pluralistic ignorance. Comfort with violence, although relating to two different entities (own vs perceived in others), had to be assessed in a single measure, by comparing participants’ own comfort with violence with their perceived comfort with violence in others. To do so, we paired two items each for two types of violence (e.g., “How comfortable do you feel with carrying a weapon if you lived in a diverse neighborhood?”, compared to “How comfortable does the average American feel with carrying a weapon if they lived in a diverse neighborhood?”). The item wording was based on items by Funk, Elliott, Bechtoldt, Paold, and Tsavoussis (2003), Prentice and Miller (1993), and Ganz et al. (2020). Both variables were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = “very uncomfortable” to 7 = “very comfortable”.
**False consensus.** In our pilot study, we found that particularly those items that mirrored previous ongoing social issues showed the clearest differences between groups. In the current study, we not only captured support for xenophobic violence and anti-immigration but also anti-Black sentiments (cf. the killing of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and the shooting of Jacob Blake in 2020, and the Black Lives Matter movement). Approval for a xenophobic statement was paired with the estimated percentage of “the wider American public” that agree/disagree with the participant (e.g., “Social policies such as affirmative action discriminate unfairly against White people.”, compared to “Please estimate the percentage of people amongst the wider American public that agree/disagree with you.”). The item wording was based on items by Watt & Larkin (2010). Approval was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = “strongly agree” to 7 = “strongly disagree”. Estimated agreement and disagreement were assessed on a continuous scale from 0 – 100%.

**Behavioural intention.** Participants were presented with a fictitious petition promoting a xenophobic ideology, which served as a proxy for hate crimes. The petition was created by the researchers using Gimp 2.10.20 (see Supplementary material, Appendix 5b, Figure 1). Participants were asked whether they would sign it and when they indicated to do so, they were asked how much of their participation reward (“£0.84”/ per survey, which equalled to $1.09) they would donate to support this petition and whether they would publicly share their support for it. When they stated that they would not sign this petition, they were automatically forwarded to the next item in the questionnaire. The idea was inspired by Bursztyn et al. (2017) and the wording by information about the American Freedom Party (American Freedom Party, n.d.) and by Hochschild (2018). Willingness to sign the petition was assessed with a dichotomous scale (“Yes”/”No”), the willingness to share one’s support was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = “strongly agree” to 7 = “strongly disagree”, and the donation was assessed on a continuous scale from £0 to £0.84.
Moderators

**Collective narcissism.** National (“American”) collective narcissism was assessed with the 5-item *Collective Narcissism Scale* (e.g., “Americans deserve special treatment.”), Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka & Bilewicz, 2013) with 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”, $\alpha = 0.84$.

**Xenophobia.** Xenophobia was measured with four items taken from the *Racial Tolerance assessment* (Ipsos, 2020, e.g., “To be truly American you have to be white.”). The measurement was assessed on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 4 = “strongly agree”. Three items were reversely worded and recoded so that higher expression reflects higher xenophobia, $\alpha = 0.77$ (see Supplementary material, Appendix 3 for further information about the xenophobia scale).

Covariates

**Secure ingroup identification.** Secure ingroup identification was assessed through “group-level self-investment” comprising the subscales satisfaction (e.g., “I am glad to be American.”, $\alpha = 0.95$), centrality (e.g., “I often think about the fact that I am American.”, $\alpha = 0.85$), and solidarity (e.g., “I feel committed to Americans.”, $\alpha = 0.91$) with the ingroup by using the *Social Identification Scale* (Leach et al., 2008). It was assessed on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”, $\alpha_{total} = 0.96$.

**Social desirability.** Although the surveys were entirely anonymous, we prepared for the possibility that participants would want to present themselves favourably due to the sensitivity of topics. We used the “impression management” subscale of the *BIDR-16* (Hart, Ritchie, Hepper & Gebauer, 2015; e.g., “I sometimes tell lies if I have to.”, with 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) to assess and control for social desirability.
COVID-19. The global pandemic has elicited different interpretations and behaviours amongst the US electorate (e.g., Farias & Pilati, 2020; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018; Van Bavel et al., 2020). While the Asian community has been construed by some as responsible for the outbreak of the virus (e.g., Motta, Stecula & Farhart, 2020; Tessler, Choi & Kao, 2020), it was socially disadvantaged communities as a whole that eventually suffered most, not only from COVID-19 but also from shaming and blame (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2020; SAGE, 2020; The COVID Tracking Project, 2020). To account for this influence, we used two items taken from Kachanoff, Yochanan, Bigman, Kapsaskis and Gray (2020) Realistic and Symbolic Threat of COVID-19 Scale (“How much of a threat, if any, is the coronavirus outbreak for a) symbolic threat: American values and traditions; and b) realistic threat: The health of the U.S. population as a whole?”). The variables were assessed on a 4- Likert scale from 1 = “No threat at all” to 4 = “Major threat”.

Other measures

Awareness of the election. We asked participants on a 4-point Likert scale (from 1 = “Not at all closely” to 4 = “Very closely”) to what extent they followed the news coverage on the 2020 US presidential election (“How much have you followed the news about the US presidential election 2020?”), inspired by Pew Research Center (2016).

Distractors. To conceal the real purpose of the study, distractor items were added to the empowerment, PI, and FC items (e.g., “I welcome it that the US presidential election 2020 takes place on a weekday.”).

Careless responding. To avoid careless responding, two questions were added, one of which asked the participant to leave the question unanswered, and the other assessed participants’ honest opinion on whether we should use their answers in our study (“It is vital to our study that we only include responses from people that devoted their full attention to this
study. Otherwise, years of effort could be wasted. In your honest opinion, should we use your
data in our analysis in this study?”), see Supplementary material, Appendix 3 and 4 for
further information on careless responding.

**Demographics.** Demographics comprised age, identified gender and ethnicity, educational level, the annual income before taxes, and employment status. Demographics, vote, and expectedness at the beginning, as well as behavioural intention and careless responding (as to whether participants suggest using their data) at the end of the survey, were presented in a set order across participants. All remaining measures were presented in a randomized order using *Qualtrics* randomization. The items for collective narcissism, xenophobia, secure ingroup identification, social desirability, and collective empowerment were additionally randomized each within their blocks.

See Supplementary material, Appendix 5a and b for an overview of all main measures.

**Procedure**

The study was conducted over two waves. Data for time 1 was collected 2020, October 5, thus, roughly a month before the 2020 US presidential election. We only invited those participants to time 2 survey that had completed survey one. Data collection for wave 2 took place between November 17 – 23, see Supplementary material, Appendix 6 for further information on the procedure.

**Confirmatory factor analysis**

Confirmatory factor analyses were used to assess the construct validity for the following scales: Collective narcissism, xenophobia, and group-level self-investment (secure ingroup identification). We thereby used the results of the comparative fit indices (CFI) which
can fall between 0 and 1, with values greater than 0.90 considered good fitting models, and the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) with values equal to or less 0.08 indicating a good model fit. All three scales showed good model fits (collective narcissism: CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.02; xenophobia: CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.02; group-level self-investment: CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.07). Due to its two-item only structure, we cannot calculate the CFI for the empowerment concepts joy at success and group efficacy and instead calculated Spearman inter-item correlations ($r_{joy} = 0.69, r_{efficacy} = 0.65$). (see Supplementary Materials, Appendix 4 for further information about validity and reliability testing).

**Results**

**Preliminary steps**

The statistical analyses were conducted with R 4.0.2. All reversed items were re-coded before the analyses. Preliminary steps included dummy coding of the variables party support (Democrats/Republicans), (un)expectedness of outcome (expected/unexpected)$^2$, gender (female/male), and petition signing (yes/no). Furthermore, in line with Hart et al., (2015), we transformed our social desirability measure in the way that the individual items were dummy coded to 0 (= 5 and below) and 1 (= 6 and above), with the final measure reflecting the sum of the individual eight-item values (i.e., min. 0 to max. 8). Assumption tests for normality were performed visually as well as by inspecting skew and kurtosis. To deal with violations, we chose non-parametric (e.g., Spearman correlation) and robust (e.g., 10,000 bootstraps) measures in later analyses. (See Supplementary Material, Appendix 7 for further information on preliminary steps.)

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$^2$ Expected electoral victory was assessed by scoring 1 = “Extremely likely” to 3 = “Slightly likely”; and expected defeat by scoring 5 = “Slightly unlikely” to 7 = “Extremely unlikely”. Estimated electoral victory, followed by an actual victory, and estimated electoral defeat, followed by an actual defeat were categorized as “expected”; in contrast, an estimated electoral victory, followed by an actual defeat, and estimated electoral defeat, followed by an actual win, was categorized as “unexpected”. 
Descriptive statistical analyses and intercorrelations

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelation matrix (based on scores from t1 and t2), as well as results from partial and biserial correlation analyses. Voting Republican and unexpectedness of the outcome were significantly associated with own comfort and approval, however, not with the perception of others in this regard. Nor was voting Republican and unexpectedness of the outcome associated with empowerment (joy at success or group efficacy). While joy at success was significantly associated with the perception of harsh measures against immigrants and refugees, as well as petition signing, group efficacy was only significantly related to the former. Both, collective narcissism, and xenophobia were significantly associated with petition signing. No correlation reached a value close to $r = 0.80$ so that no signs for collinearity were found after the correlational analyses. See Appendix 8 for further elaborations. Results from a Chi-square test of association furthermore revealed a significant association between vote and unexpectedness ($X^2 (1, N = 252) = 178.19, p < .001$), party support significantly influenced whether the outcome was perceived as expected or unexpected: Republicans perceived the outcome as unexpected rather than expected. Furthermore, party support significantly influenced whether the petition was signed or not ($X^2 (1, N = 278) = 9.71, p = .002$): While the majority across parties decided not to sign, signing the petition was observed more often among Republicans. Finally, unexpectedness influenced petition signing ($X^2 (1, N = 252) = 5.49, p = .019$): While the majority decided not to sign the petition, to whom the election outcome came unexpectedly signed the petition more often than those who expected the outcome.
Table 1

*Descriptive statistic and Spearman intercorrelations matrix (scores from t1 and t2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.556***</td>
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<td>0.408***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.142*</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.693***</td>
<td>0.607***</td>
<td>0.697***</td>
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<td>(0.512***</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
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<td>0.291***</td>
<td>0.497***</td>
<td>0.396***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.336***</td>
<td>-0.080</td>
<td>0.408***</td>
<td>0.227***</td>
<td>0.210***</td>
<td>0.089</td>
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<td>Secure Ingroup Identification</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.227***</td>
<td>0.210***</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.116*)</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>0.176**</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.014</td>
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<td>Xenophobia</td>
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<td>0.46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.176**</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.525***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.181**)</td>
<td>0.116*</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>0.525***</td>
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<td>Joy at Success</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.82</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.176**</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.525***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.181**)</td>
<td>0.116*</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>0.525***</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.176**</td>
<td>0.250***</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.525***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.181**)</td>
<td>0.116*</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>0.525***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrying weapon Own Comfort</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.491***</td>
<td>0.461***</td>
<td>0.466***</td>
<td>0.484***</td>
<td>0.374***</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.204***</td>
<td>(0.251***</td>
<td>0.251***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrying weapon Perceived Comfort</td>
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<td>1.45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.165*</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.191**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.160**)</td>
<td>(-0.123*)</td>
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<td>Self-protection Own Comfort</td>
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<td>1.88</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.480***</td>
<td>0.478***</td>
<td>0.459***</td>
<td>0.599***</td>
<td>0.413***</td>
<td>0.102</td>
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<td>0.191**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>(0.153**)</td>
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<td>Self-protection Perceived Comfort</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.157*</td>
<td>0.121*</td>
<td>0.160**</td>
<td>0.175**</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.149*</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.474***</td>
<td>0.417***</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harsh measures Own approval</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.592***</td>
<td>0.540***</td>
<td>0.505***</td>
<td>0.500***</td>
<td>0.511***</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
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<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.487***</td>
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<td>Harsh measures Perceived Agreement</td>
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<td>15.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.148*</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.182**</td>
<td>0.203***</td>
<td>0.138*</td>
<td>0.191**</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Pearson's r (p-value)</td>
<td>Partial Correlation (p-value)</td>
<td>Note</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Affirmative action</td>
<td>Own approval</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>0.580</strong>*</td>
<td>(0.260)**</td>
<td>*p &lt; .05, **p &lt; .01, ***p &lt; .001. Values in brackets represent results from partial correlation controlled for secure ingroup identification and collective narcissism, respectively. Values in bold are based on biserial correlation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Affirmative action</td>
<td>Perceived Agreement</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td><strong>0.221</strong>*, <strong>0.244</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.198</strong>*, <strong>0.284</strong>*</td>
<td>(0.208)**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Petition signing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>0.345</strong>*</td>
<td>(0.206)**</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Hypotheses examinations

Hypothesis 1)

We predicted that at time 1, Republican supporters showed significantly higher approval than Democrat supporters for xenophobic statements and agreement estimation from “the wider American public”. To approach this, we first examined within effects (cf., Luzsa & Mayr, 2021; Sargent & Newman, 2021) by plotting and calculating the correlation between own approval and estimated agreement per party, followed by examining between-group effects (cf., Watts & Larkin, 2010).

The strength of association between approval for the necessity of harsh measures against immigrants and refugees and estimated agreement was stronger (and significant) for Republicans ($r = .30, p = 0.03$) than for Democrats ($r = .07, p = 0.51$), Figure 2A. As Figure 2

Correlation between own approval for harsh measures against immigrants and refugees (A), own approval for the perception that white people are unfairly affected by affirmative action (B) and estimated agreement from the wider public by party support.

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3 See Supplementary Material, Appendix 9 for further information on these analyses.
RUNNING HEAD: GROUP DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSE TO 2020 US ELECTION

expected, at time 1, Republican supporters expressed significantly greater approval for the necessity of harsh measures against immigrants and refugees \((M = 4.13, SD = 1.70)\), than Democrat supporters \((M = 1.83, SD = 1.23)\), \(t(83.02) = -8.52, p < .001, r = .68\), (see Figure 3A). Thus, since Democrats were rather dismissive of the statement, the agreement estimation reflects their estimated agreement from others with their own dismissal. To account for that, we examined the group differences in agreement (Republicans; \(M = 61.6, SD = 13.5\)) and disagreement perception (Democrats; \(M = 43.4, SD = 14.9\)) which was significant, \(t(51) = 9.67, p < .001, r = .80\).

**Figure 3**

*Approval for harsh measurements against immigrants and refugees by party support (A), and for the perception that white people are unfairly affected by affirmative action (B). Error bars represent 95% CI.*

As Figure 2B let assume, neither correlation (Republicans: \(r = -17, p = 0.23\); Democrats: \(r = .14, p = 20\)) between own approval for the perception that *white* people are unfairly affected by affirmative action was significant. However, Republicans showed a significantly stronger approval \((M = 5.19, SD = 1.44)\) than Democrat supporters \((M = 2.77, SD = 1.60)\), \(t(116.55) = -9.18, p < .001, r = .65\), (Figure 3B) and we, therefore, again compared Republicans´ agreement estimation \((M = 60.6, SD = 15.0)\) with Democrats´ disagreement estimation \((M = 45.6, SD = 16.5)\), which was significant, \(t(51) = 7.22, p < .001, r = .71\). Thus, while the within-group results are inconsistent, we illustrated that the *difference* in the
perception of public approval (and disapproval, respectively) for one’s opinion between groups was significant, with Republicans scoring significantly higher.

**Hypothesis 2)**

We predicted that at time 1, Democrat supporters perceived “the average American” to be significantly more comfortable with violence than themselves, while Republican supporters perceived the average American not to be significantly more comfortable with violence than themselves. Democrat supporters perceived the “American people” to be significantly more comfortable with carrying a weapon if they lived in a diverse neighbourhood ($M = 4.24, SD = 1.59$), than themselves ($M = 2.60, SD = 1.83$), $t(86) = -8.39, p < .001, r = .67$, as well as to be significantly more comfortable with doing whatever it takes to protect themselves and other Americans ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.46$), than themselves ($M = 3.77, SD = 1.80$), $t(86) = -6.39, p < .001, r = .57$. In contrast, we did not find a significant difference between own and perceived comfort for being comfortable with carrying a weapon if living in a diverse neighbourhood amongst Republican Party supporters (perceived comfort: $M = 4.58, SD = 1.35$; own comfort: $M = 4.98, SD = 1.87$, $t(51) = 1.55, p = .13, r = .21$); however, Republicans expressed significantly higher own comfort ($M = 5.62, SD = 1.31$) for doing whatever it takes to protect oneself and other Americans than they perceived “the average American” to be ($M = 5.25, SD = 1.27$), $t(51) = 2.00, p = .05, r = .27$. While the latter does deviate from our hypotheses, we do not observe Republican supporters perceiving others to be more comfortable than themselves, which is in contrast to Democrats (see Figure 4). Thus, we
can partially reject the null hypothesis in H2 as well as replicate the findings from our pilot study. (See Supplementary Material, Appendix 1.)

Figure 4

Own comfort vs perceived comfort for violence split by party support (error bars represent 1x SEM).

Hypothesis 3)

We predicted that Republican supporters whose expectations at time 1 did not match the election outcome, showed a significant decrease in agreement estimation from the “wider American public” for xenophobic statements if the Republican Party lost the election, at time 2. Although Republican supporters for whom the election outcome came unexpectedly (N = 44), on average, estimated greater agreement for the necessity of harsh measures against immigrants and refugees at time 1 (M = 63.40, SD = 13.20) than at time 2 (M = 61.40, SD = 14.20), this difference was not significant t(43) = 0.98, p = .34, r = .15. Similarly, Republican supporters, on average, estimated almost the same level of agreement at time 2 for the perception that whites are unfairly affected by affirmative actions (M = 62.68, SD = 16.01) as

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4 See Supplementary Material, Appendix 9 for further information on these analyses.
RUNNING HEAD: GROUP DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSE TO 2020 US ELECTION

at time 1 ($M = 62.41, SD = 13.76$), $t(43) = -0.10, p = .92, r = .02$. Figure 5A and B and Table 2 illustrate the change in agreement estimation (Republicans) and disagreement estimation (Democrats). The gap between Republicans’ agreement perception and Democrats’ disagreement also remains relatively stable with Republicans perceiving stronger agreement from the wider public than Democrats perceive disagreement. Overall, we cannot reject the null hypotheses for either agreement estimation changes among Republicans from before to after the election.

Table 2
Change and difference in estimation (Democrats: Disagreement; Republicans: Agreement) from before to after the election by party support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (relative to election)</th>
<th>Party support</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Estimation</th>
<th>$\Delta$ Before -after</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>Harsh measures against immigrants and refugees.</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Harsh measures against immigrants and refugees.</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>Harsh measures against immigrants and refugees.</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Harsh measures against immigrants and refugees.</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>White people are unfairly affected by affirmative action.</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>White people are unfairly affected by affirmative action.</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>White people are unfairly affected by affirmative action.</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>White people are unfairly affected by affirmative action.</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on N = 44 Republicans’ (to whom the election outcome came unexpectedly), and on N = 87 Democrats.
Exploratory analyses\textsuperscript{5}

We could not test hypotheses 4 to 7 as stated. Considering only those Democrats to whom the election outcome came unexpectedly (cf. H4 and H5), resulted in a sample size of four. We consequently dropped the unexpectedness factor and considered all Democrats ($N = 87$). For H6, the sample size was also too small to conduct any meaningful analyses for all three behavioural measures. We, therefore, focused on petition signing and report descriptive statistics for the other behavioural measures in the Supplementary material, Appendix 9. Since the Republican Party was not declared victorious, we could not analyse expected vs unexpected victory amongst its supporters (H7/ H7a), and present alternative analyses instead. Finally, the level of xenophobia was much lower than expected (based on the pilot study), so

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
that we could not investigate a subgroup of highly xenophobic individuals (with a xenophobia score higher than five).

**Hypothesis 4** We predicted that Democrat supporters whose expectations at time 1 did not match the election outcome, showed a significant decrease in perceived comfort with violence of “the average American” if the Democratic Party won the election at time 2. Using data from all Democrats ($N = 87$) showed that they perceived significantly greater comfort in others for carrying a weapon if living in a diverse neighbourhood at time 2 ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.43$), compared to time 1 ($M = 4.24, SD = 1.59$), $t(86) = -2.02, p = .05, r = .21$; although the difference was small, this direction was against our hypothesis. There was no significant difference in the perception of comfort in others with doing whatever it takes to protect oneself and other Americans at time 1 ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.46$), compared to time 2 ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.47$), $t(86) = 0.21, p = .83, r = .02$. Overall, we cannot reject the null hypotheses for either violence comfort perception changes over time.

**Hypothesis 5** We predicted that voters whose expectations at time 1 did not match the election outcome, showed i) significantly higher collective empowerment (group efficacy & joy at success) if their party won the election; or ii) significantly lower collective empowerment if their party lost the election, at time 2. As expected, Republicans to whom the election outcome was unexpected, expressed significantly lower joy at success and group efficacy at time 2 (joy at success: $M = 3.22, SD = 1.68$; group efficacy: $M = 4.72, SD = 1.68$) than at time 1 (joy at success: $M = 4.10, SD = 1.72$, $t(43) = 2.82, p = .01, r = .40$; group efficacy: $M = 5.40, SD = 1.25$, $t(43) = 2.84, p = .01, r = .40$). Using data from all Democrats ($N = 87$), we observed that they expressed significantly greater joy at success and group efficacy at time 2 (joy at success: $M = 4.61, SD = 1.63$; group efficacy: $M = 5.36, SD = 1.17$) than at time 1 (joy at success: $M = 2.55, SD = 1.50$, $t(86) = -12.05, p < .001, r = .88$; group efficacy: $M = 4.70, SD = 1.40$, $t(86) = -3.87, p < .001, r = .51$). Thus, we can only partially
reject the null hypotheses; those whose party lost the election unexpectedly also reported a decrease in joy and group efficacy.

Hypothesis 6) We predicted that Republican Party voters whose expectations at time 1 did not match the election outcome, showed significantly lower behavioural intentions to a) sign a xenophobically worded petition; b) donate their participation reward to support this petition; c) publicly share that they supported it if their party lost the election, at time 2. Table 3 provides an overview of the distribution of willingness to sign from before to after the election. At time 1, six Republicans who expected their party to win the election indicated that they would sign the petition. Amongst these participants, four participants indicated they would sign again at time 2. While this trend would be in accordance with our hypothesis, three further Republican supporters that had previously not indicated to sign the petition, were willing to do so at time 2. The results from a Chi-square test with Yates' continuity correction on time (before vs after the election) and the willingness to sign the petition (yes vs no) showed that the relation between these variables was not significant, $p = 1$. Because of the low number of people that indicated to sign the petition, we were unable to conduct any further analyses based on that. Overall, we cannot reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for petition signing among Republicans to whom the election outcome came unexpectedly, grouped by time and willingness to sign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Willingness to sign</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypotheses 7 and 7a) Hypotheses 7 and 7a) We predicted that in the case of an unexpected vs expected electoral victory for the Republican Party, this would positively predict behavioural intentions, mediated by FC and collective empowerment (group efficacy
RUNNING HEAD: GROUP DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSE TO 2020 US ELECTION
& joy at success), whereby the direct path and the indirect path on FC would be moderated by collective narcissism (net secure ingroup identification), as well as that false consensus would positively predict collective empowerment (cf. Figure 1). Since the Republican Party was not declared the victorious party in the presidential election, we could not conduct this analysis. Alternatively, and based on previous research (e.g., Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018) and our pilot study, we investigated the occurrence of group differences in the expression of collective narcissism. To factor in time dependency, we conducted a 2 (vote: Republicans vs Democrats) x 2 (time: before vs after the election) repeated measures ANOVA on collective narcissism. The results revealed that there was a significant main effect for party support ($F(1,137) = 62.38, p < .001, \eta^2_p = 0.31$), while the within-participant variability across time was non-significant (i.e., interaction effect between ID and time was non-significant, $F(1, 138) = 0.52, p = .47, \eta^2_p = 0.00$). The latter, we believe, illustrates collective narcissism’s stable effect over time. Subsequent independent t-tests (based on grand means) showed that Republican supporters expressed significantly higher collective narcissism ($M = 3.99, SD = 1.09$) than Democrats ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.10$), $t(218.07) = -10.54, p < .001, r = .58$ (see Figure 6).

Figure 6
Collective narcissism by party support.
Having established a significant difference in collective narcissism amongst party supporters, we exploratively investigated the initially proposed model, but by breaking it down into single regressions. We used data from all Republican supporters ($N = 52$) at time 2 and controlled for their t1 answers. First, we tested whether collective narcissism (net secure ingroup identification) would predict false consensus and petition signing. To use Republicans´ estimated agreement for this analysis most efficiently, in line with the “true false consensus” score calculation (cf. Bauman & Geher, 2002, Krueger & Zeigler, 1993), we calculated actual consensus for both statements based on the percentage of people who approved the statements (by scoring 4 or higher) across both parties. Subsequently, we minused the actual consensus from Republicans´ agreement estimation per point in time to create, what we termed, an elaborated agreement estimation. We did not find collective narcissism to significantly predict either of these elaborated agreement estimations ($B = -0.09, p = .52, CI = [-0.10; 0.41]; B = 0.06, p = .71, CI [-0.24; 0.35])), but its prediction on petition was of marginal significance ($B = 1.04, p = .09, OR = 2.84, CI [0.96; 11.40])). We then investigated whether either elaborated agreement estimation would predict joy at success and group efficacy (collective empowerment), as well as petition signing. None of these regressions turned significant. Finally, we investigated whether joy at success and group efficacy would predict petition signing. While group efficacy did not significantly predict hostile behaviour ($B = 0.12, p = .78, OR = 1.12, CI [0.52; 2.85], the prediction of joy at success on petition signing was of marginal significance ($B = 0.79, p = .09, OR = 2.19, CI [0.93; 5.97]).

Discussion

Our study aimed to extend previous research on social norms perceptions in the context of electoral events (e.g., Bursztyn et al., 2017; Crandall et al., 2018; Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016) by investigating the occurrence of social norms misperception, based on
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group comparisons, before and after the US Presidential Election 2020. In a two-wave panel study, we surveyed Democrat and Republican Party supporters on social norms misperception – operationalized as false consensus and pluralistic ignorance, as well as on collective empowerment, and xenophobic behavioural intentions. We sought to shed light on the impact an (unexpected) electoral outcome could have on the aforementioned variables. A particular focus was on Republican Party supporters in the event of an electoral win for their party. Furthermore, we aimed to explore the moderating role of collective narcissism in this case (see Figure 1).

Hypotheses H1 and H2 sought to strengthen our argument made in the pilot study, namely that we would find an FC effect for xenophobic statements when comparing Republicans and Democrats supporters, and a mismatch between own and perceived comfort with violence (PI) in Democrats (but not Republicans). While the occurrence of false consensus effects within groups was inconsistent, we successfully replicated previous findings, namely that the difference in perception of public approval between Democrats and Republicans was significant and skewed towards stronger agreement perception amongst Republicans (H1). We also successfully replicated the occurrence of a mismatch between own and perceived social norms amongst Democrats, with no such mismatches found amongst Republicans (H2). Finally, we found partial support for the notion that an unexpected outcome of the election would lead to either an empowering or disempowering effect, depending on whether one’s party won or lost the election (H5).

However, we could not find support for our main hypothesis, namely that electoral processes would have a significant impact on agreement/disagreement estimation amongst Republicans (H3). Instead, these plateaued with a slight trend towards decreased agreement perception amongst Republicans after the election (and increased disagreement perception amongst Democrats) for harsh measures against immigrants and refugees, and a slight
increase in agreement and disagreement perception amongst both party supporters regarding affirmative action unfairly affecting white people.

We also could not support our hypothesis that perceived comfort for violence in others amongst Democrats (H4) would decrease from before to after the election (in case of a Democrat victory). Furthermore, although we witnessed a decrease in petition signing intention amongst those Republicans that initially indicated to do so (H6), overall, we recorded an increase in the total number after the election. The overall conceptual model (Figure 1), along with H7 and H7a, was designed to explain the effects of an (unexpected) electoral victory for the Republican Party. Since the Republicans did not win the election, the exploration of its psychological effects was not possible. Instead, we observed that Republicans expressed collective narcissism to a significantly greater extent than Democrats, which is in line not only with previous research (Federico & Golec de Zavala, 2018) but also with our pilot study. Subsequently, we found that amongst Republicans, collective narcissism and joy at success predicted petition signing (however, marginally), while all remaining regressions were found to be non-significant. Finally, the level of xenophobia was much lower than expected, so that we could not investigate a subgroup of highly xenophobic individuals.

**Social norms misperception and group membership**

Although we witnessed such a low level of xenophobia in our sample, we found high approval for the xenophobic statements amongst Republicans. Interestingly, those showing sympathy for the notion that whites were unfairly affected by affirmative action (and for harsh treatment of immigrants and refugees, though to a weaker extent) also expected over 60% of the US population to agree with them in this regard which equals to around 200M people. That (shocking) number does not come unexpectedly, since those participants in our pilot
We outlined earlier that we must not forget that racism is characterised by a combination of prejudice and power. People do not automatically express their prejudices but look for signs around them, for instance, for social norms – a process, as we explained, that is influenced by the perception of how people’s surrounding might think (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher; Spears & Manstead, 1990; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). This, we argued, is particularly guided by social psychological processes such as belonging to a group that connects individuals that share the same preferences and values, thus the same social identity (McGarty, Lala & Douglas, 2011). We, furthermore, argued that perceiving xenophobic norms as widely supported (or not), might be particularly affected by events that reinforce one’s own and the group’s values. While in the UK the case was clear (the Conservative Party officially won the General Election 2019), in the US, this was somewhat ambiguous: Against psephological predictions, the gap in votes for Joe Biden and Donald Trump on election day was relatively small. Absentee votes were counted in some states over weeks after election day, which was used by Trump to claim that an electoral win had been stolen from him. This not just sparked pro-Trump street action and violence (e.g., nationwide riots to “stop the steal”, leading up to a peak in the storm of the Capitol on January 6 e.g., Barry & Frenkel, 2021; Blest, 2020), but we suggest that this may have also influenced participants´ perception of the political landscape, and more importantly, of public opinion – after all, around 74M voters supported Trump. Thus, the current study examining the US context, although somewhat unclear, replicates the dynamics seen in our pilot study.

This is further reinforced by the (replicated) findings that Democrat supporters rated “the average American” to be more approving of violent behaviour than themselves (observed as a general phenomenon since even those that were optimistic about a Democrat victory
perceived “the average American” to be more comfortable with violence than themselves, see Supplementary Material, Appendix 9). This was in contrast to Republicans for whom we did not find such effects, and who were consistently more comfortable with violent behaviour. Again, this was a pattern comparable to what we found in the pilot study in which Labour Party supporters saw “the average British person” to be more comfortable with violent behaviour than themselves, while we only witnessed this amongst Conservatives in two out of four cases. Thus, we have not only successfully replicated the findings from our pilot study and found robust patterns for social norms misperception – false consensus and pluralistic ignorance, across two countries and four groups of party supporters, but we have also contributed to understanding social norms misperception as associated with and different across group membership.

**Change in social norms misperception and unexpectedness of the outcome**

Nonetheless, we need to respond to the fact that neither social norms misperception changed from before to after the election in our study. This, at first sight, seems to contradict previous research establishing social norms as malleable and prone to influence (Bursztyn Fiorin & Egorov, 2017; Crandall, White, & Miller, 2018; also see: Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016). Thus, the question arises whether the observed null effects in the current study occurred despite or perhaps because of the ambiguity of the outcome. We believe that several factors could be at play: First, the effects of previous studies were established in the context of investigating the consequences of the 2016 election which had introduced a significant novelty to the political landscape. In contrast, Donald Trump had already been president for four years as the 2020 presidential election happened. This could explain why social norms misperception rather plateaued. Second, the tight gap between Joe Biden and Donald Trump after election day allowed Republicans to construct the notion that a victory had been “stolen” from them, and to ignite retaliatory action. This, most likely, affected Republicans’ as well as
Democrats’ perceptions of social norms in the way that the immediate situation was not dissimilar to before election day. Both points are complementary to the notion that social norms misperception is associated with group membership (see above); a group persistently exposed to its values’ reinforcement might express these more solidly over time, and a leader constructing the situation in the ingroup’s favour might keep this perception further alive.

**Change in empowerment and unexpectedness of the outcome**

Novelty (either in one’s favour or against one’s expectations) also plays a strong role in empowerment processes, and disempowerment respectively (Drury & Reicher, 2005). Our model had initially been formulated to test the effects of an *unexpected victory*. Here we must not forget that, in the current study, those Republicans to whom the election outcome (i.e., the fact that their party was confronted with potential defeat) came unexpectedly, had initially expected their party to win! In contrast to social norms misperceptions, we observed that these supporters showed a significant drop in empowerment, which is important considering that joy at success (as part of the empowerment experience) predicted the hostile behaviour proxy.

It remains unclear at this point, whether changes in social norms misperception and empowerment are in fact subjects to different processes.

**The role of collective narcissism**

Another aim of our study was to test the role of collective narcissism as a moderator of the effect an unexpected vs expected outcome, as well as agreement estimation, had on behavioural intention building. This was based on collective action research that established the strength of social identity amongst protestors as moderator for subsequent empowerment processes and experiences (e.g., Neville & Reicher, 2011; Reicher, 2004; Turner et al., 1987). While we believed the overall framework to translate well to empowerment processes amongst hate crime perpetrators, we proposed to narrow the moderator to a defensive form of
INGROUP POSITIVITY – COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM. DUE TO THE DEFEAT OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, WE COULD NOT TEST THIS ASSUMPTION, HOWEVER, IT REMAINS SOMewhat QUESTIONABLE WHETHER COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM WOULD, IN FACT, QUALIFY AS A MODERATOR ON AGREEMENT PERCEPTION DUE TO LACKING PREDICTIVE INFLUENCE ON ELABORATED AGREEMENT ESTIMATION (IN LINE WITH THE “TRUE FALSE CONSENSUS EFFECT”) IN THE CURRENT STUDY. THE FACT, HOWEVER, THAT WE FOUND IT TO INFLUENCE JOY AT SUCCESS (AS PART OF THE EMPOWERMENT EXPERIENCE) AND THE DECISION AS TO WHETHER TO SIGN A PETITION MIRRORING THE “WHITE VICTIM” NARRATIVE, CORRESPONDS TO THE DENIAL OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES, AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE AS “SELF-DEFENCE” (CF. BLAZAK, 2009; JETTEN, 2019; RHODES, 2010). WE BELIEVE THIS IS ALSO IN LINE WITH WHAT ARMALY AND ENDERS (2021) REFER TO AS “SELF-DEFINED EGOCENTRIC VICTIMHOOD”. THIS, THE RESEARCHERS FOUND, JUSTIFIED CLAIMING DESERVED, BUT WITHHELD ATTENTION, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, SUPERIORITY AND WAS ALSO ESTABLISHED TO BE RELATED TO COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM.

LIMITATIONS


THE CURRENT STUDY WAS UNDERPOWERED (SEE SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL, APPENDIX 2), WHICH WAS PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN THE SMALL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS I) THAT INDICATED TO SIGN THE PETITION (AND SUBSEQUENTLY QUALIFIED AS POTENTIALLY EXPRESSING PUBLIC AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR
Finally, we cannot make assertions about causality since our study is correlational. However, this also means that the null effects, that we observed could be due to the reasons outlined above rather than to an actual missing impact of socio-political events.

**Practical implications**

Perceived illegitimacy can lead to anger which in turn can motivate collective action (Drury & Reicher, 2005; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Trump´s rhetoric of betrayal, fraud, and a stolen election, therefore not surprisingly, fuelled retaliatory street action amongst angry Trump supporters including extreme right-wing groups as a response (e.g., Baird & Sacks, 2020; Barry & Frenkel, 2021). In our study, we witnessed a predicted drop in the experience of joy and group efficacy amongst Republican Party supporters from before to after the election. These, as outlined, are important elements of empowerment (or the lack thereof) and the likelihood of future action taking (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Drury & Reicher, 2005). Thus, we suggest, Trump´s defeat must be widely and actively promoted by public figures. It is thereby particularly important that Republicans need to acknowledge the victory of Joe Biden in the US Presidential Election 2020 since the perception of “defeat” and “majority agreement” might be skewed by group membership.

**Future studies**

As mentioned, our model was intended to test the effects of an unexpected right-wing victory, and we believe that situations for which it was initially formulated can provide a better test of its usefulness. However, we think that the potential differences in change processes between social norms misperception and empowerment need further examination. Similar studies, conducted at a later time could potentially shed light on this question as well.
as whether the differences between groups are still as big. Nonetheless, we think that future studies might do well examining the identity expression of Trump supporters that could have potentially arisen from these differences. Finally, we think we need to allow the question of whether collective narcissism’s moderating role has to be altered, and if it rather plays a preliminary role in explaining victimhood perception.

Conclusion

Our study set out to extend previous research on social norms perception in the context of events of socio-political importance. We measured social norms misperception amongst Democrats and Republicans before and after the 2020 US presidential election. We were particularly interested in change in the befoermentioned, as well as in empowerment and xenophobic behaviour. While we could not find effects of change in social norms misperception and behaviour, we did find effects on empowerment. We believe that our results are not in contrast to previous research but rather show the consequences of group membership and xenophobic rhetoric over time (of a presidency).

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