

Taking It Personally: Leader Narcissism and Status Dissatisfaction in the International System

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August 21, 2023



Greek economic crisis,
2007-2008



US withdrawal from
Afghanistan, 2021

Motivation

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- ▶ Status threats are common
- ▶ How do status threats affect leaders?

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- ▶ Narcissism
 - ▶ **The desire for higher status is a key aspect of narcissism**
 - ▶ **Narcissism is prevalent among politicians** - although there is variation

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- ▶ Genetics and upbringing
- ▶ Narcissism is normally distributed in the community

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- ▶ Research shows that narcissistic individuals often have higher self-satisfaction and life satisfaction (Rohmann, Hanke, and Bierhoff 2019; Rose 2002)
- ▶ Narcissism in the absence of ego threats corresponds to more satisfaction

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Leaders high in narcissism will be more satisfied with the status of their country in the international system in the absence of a status threat

Narcissism and Status Dissatisfaction

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(e.g., leaders talking publicly about their perceived superior IQ)
 - ▶ Evaluating others' intentions (Ames and Kammrath 2004)
 - ▶ Beliefs about charisma (Judge, LePine and Rich 2006)

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 - ▶ Beliefs about charisma (Judge, LePine and Rich 2006)
- ▶ **More attentive to ego threats and negative evaluations** (Gu, He, and Zhao 2013; Hardaker and Tsakanikos 2021) and **status cues** (Grapsas et al. 2020)

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 2: Leaders high in narcissism will become more dissatisfied with the status of their country in the international system in the presence of status threats while leaders low in narcissism will not be affected

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 - ▶ **Narcissistic leaders focus on relative gains - emerging as a high status actor requires the destruction and devaluation of others**
 - ▶ **Narcissistic rage**
 - ▶ **Beliefs about superior competence leading to optimism**
 - ▶ **Narcissistic mind-reading**
 - ▶ **Risk-acceptance**
 - ▶ **Dismissing advice**

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 3: Leaders high in narcissism will be more likely to use military force to increase their country's status than other leaders.

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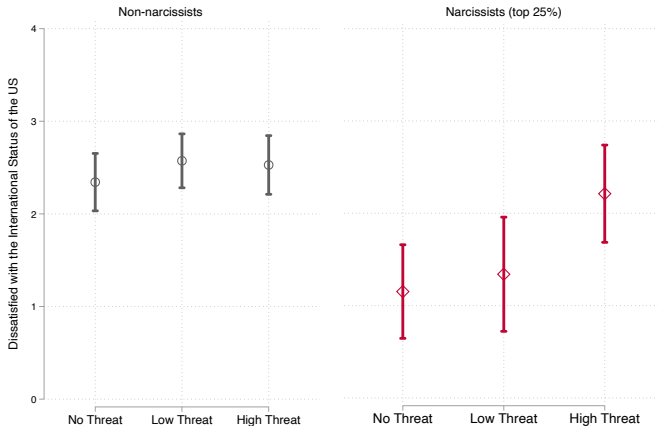
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High level status threat

- ▶ An additional paragraph elaborating on the criticism
- ▶ **“Disastrous picture of a nation that has long seen itself as a global leader and guardian of democracy, human rights, and humanitarianism”**
- ▶ A foreign newspaper said **“This is a clearer demonstration of US impotence than the Vietnam War - the US ran away from Afghanistan in defeat, leaving its partners behind”**

How satisfied are you with the status or prestige of the United States in the world?



► H1 and H2 are supported

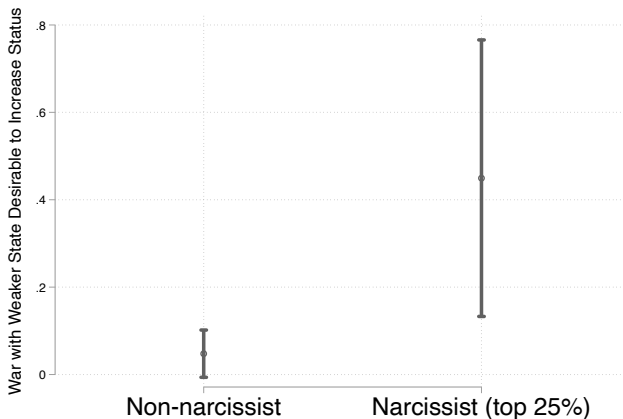
Preferences for Status Enhancing Strategies

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 - ▶ Winning a war against a weaker state
 - ▶ Winning a war against a major rival
 - ▶ Giving foreign aid to poorer countries
 - ▶ Coordinating global responses to threats
 - ▶ Growing the size of US economy

Pursuit of Status - War with a Weaker State



- **H3 is supported, but narcissism does not lead to belligerence in the presence of status threats**

Conclusions

- ▶ Status threats are experienced differently depending on one's narcissism level - status threats increase status dissatisfaction in narcissistic individuals
- ▶ Narcissism seems explain the pursuit of status through conflict, but status threats do not seem to make them more aggressive
- ▶ Narcissistic individuals may prefer to use conflict to increase status even in the absence of status threats

Thank you! Questions?

Narcissism and Pursuit of Status When Facing Status Threats

	DV: Wage War Against Strongland		DV: Use Sanctions Against Strongland	
	(1) NARQ (top 25%)	(2) NARQ (top 10%)	(3) NARQ (top 25%)	(4) NARQ (top 10%)
High Level Status Threat	0.985 (0.644)	1.092** (0.528)	-0.920** (0.412)	-1.086*** (0.365)
NARQ	0.905 (0.780)	1.948** (0.819)	-0.531 (0.595)	-1.688** (0.778)
High Level Status Threat*NARQ	-0.961 (0.936)	-2.413** (1.189)	0.348 (0.720)	2.003* (1.100)
Constant	-1.221 (1.406)	-1.106 (1.419)	0.966 (0.990)	0.873 (0.981)
Observations	175	175	175	175

Hypothetical Scenario - Low Level Status Threat

Scenario

It is the year 2050. The United States is facing a serious international crisis. Strongland and Weakland are two countries in South America. Strongland attacked Weakland out of the blue.

The US president demanded that Strongland withdraw its troops from Weakland. Strongland refused the US demand and continued the invasion. The US president did not make any further efforts to stop Strongland's invasion.

Weakland is important to US economic and national security interests, and it is in the best interest of the US for the invasion to end immediately.

The aggressor country, Strongland, is militarily stronger than the target country, Weakland. It would take a major military effort for the US to push Strongland's military forces back.

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In a news conference this week, the spokesperson of Strongland said, *"We will be continuing our invasion and we are not afraid of the United States. The United States is not as powerful as Americans think it is."*

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Afghanistan Scenario - Low Level Status Threat

Scenario

In August 2021, the United States completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, which marked the end of its 20-year-long military presence in the country. In a press conference, the US President said that the United States had “no vital interest in Afghanistan other than to prevent an attack on America’s homeland.”

The US has attracted domestic and international criticism regarding the way the withdrawal was handled. The withdrawal was chaotic and poorly planned. Americans and local allies abandoned the country in a mad rush to the airport as the Taliban took over the capital. US forces evacuated US personnel but left many of its allies and their families to the hands of the Taliban.

The US withdrawal led to the collapse of Afghan security forces that had been funded and trained by the US for years. Shortly after the US withdrawal, the Taliban took the Afghan capital with a speed that shocked the world.

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Many think that the imagery coming from Afghanistan paints a disastrous picture of a nation that has long seen itself as a global leader and guardian of democracy, human rights and humanitarianism. A foreign newspaper said *“This is a clearer demonstration of US impotence than the Vietnam War — the US ran away from Afghanistan in defeat, leaving its partners behind.”*

Study 2 - DV: Initiating War

	(1) NPI	(2) Lead/Auth	(3) Grandiose	(4) Ent.
Narcissism	1.299*** (0.244)	0.630*** (0.181)	0.829*** (0.206)	0.729*** (0.174)
Status Threat	-0.103 (0.132)	-0.129 (0.121)	-0.139 (0.100)	-0.087 (0.090)
Status Threat × Narcissism	-0.030 (0.339)	0.064 (0.256)	0.042 (0.286)	-0.073 (0.254)
Constant	0.630*** (0.094)	0.813*** (0.087)	0.861*** (0.070)	0.894*** (0.063)
Observations	972	972	972	972

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Study 2 - DV: Using Nuclear Weapons

	(1) NPI	(2) Leade/Auth	(3) Grandiose	(4) Ent.
Narcissism	1.381*** (0.292)	0.559*** (0.217)	1.013*** (0.246)	0.863*** (0.206)
Status Threat	-0.093 (0.158)	-0.100 (0.146)	-0.060 (0.119)	-0.074 (0.106)
Status Threat × Narcissism	0.284 (0.405)	0.288 (0.307)	0.167 (0.340)	0.404 (0.301)
Constant	0.767*** (0.113)	1.005*** (0.104)	0.980*** (0.083)	1.027*** (0.075)
Observations	970	970	970	970

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Study 2 - DV: Sanctions

	(1) NPI	(2) Lead./Aut.	(3) Grandiose	(4) Ent.
Narcissism	-0.818*** (0.271)	-0.214 (0.199)	-0.985*** (0.226)	-0.438** (0.191)
Status Threat	-0.512*** (0.146)	-0.417*** (0.133)	-0.453*** (0.109)	-0.326*** (0.098)
Status Threat × Narcissism	0.627* (0.376)	0.288 (0.280)	0.644** (0.312)	0.076 (0.278)
Constant	2.797*** (0.105)	2.610*** (0.095)	2.763*** (0.076)	2.626*** (0.069)
Observations	971	971	971	971

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