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No: 359/Un.14/IV/TV-CP/06/2023

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https-
_doi.org_10.1080_00224545.20
21.1935678.pdf
by

Submission date: 29-Jun-2023 08:31PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2124335618

File name: https-_doi.org_10.1080_00224545.2021.1935678.pdf (982.16K)

Word count: 13073

Character count: 75439



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To cite this article: Ali Mashuri, Idhamsyah Eka Putra, Christopher Kavanagh, Esti Zaduqisti, Fitri Sukmawati, Halimatus Sakdiah & Selviana Selviana (2021): The socio-psychological predictors of support for post-truth collective action, The Journal of Social Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/00224545.2021.1935678

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2021.1935678>



Published online: 02 Aug 2021.



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The socio-psychological predictors of support for post-truth collective action

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3 ABSTRACT

Politics in the current era are replete with unreliable media stories which lack evidence, sometimes disparagingly dubbed “fake news”. A survey on a sample of Muslims in Indonesia ($N = 518$) in this work found that participants’ endorsement of collective action in of support issues with little to no empirical evidence (i.e., post-truth collective action) increased as a function of their belief in fake news and prejudice against the outgroup (i.e., non-Muslims). Belief in fake news stemmed from participants’ generic and specific conspiratorial thinking, whereas prejudice was positively predicted by relative Muslim prototypicality, denoting how much Muslims in Indonesia view that their group is more representative than non-Muslims of the superordinate Indonesian identity that encompasses both groups. Additionally, our findings revealed that generic conspiratorial thinking and relative Muslim prototypicality were positively predicted by collective narcissism, which in turn spurred participants’ support for collective action by augmenting belief in fake news.



ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 July 2020
Accepted 25 May 2021

4 KEYWORDS

Post-truth collective action; fake news; prejudice; conspiratorial beliefs; relative ingroup prototypicality; collective narcissism

In the current era, material presented on the internet exerts a substantial influence in persuading people to engage in collective action (Jost et al., 2018; Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). However, the digital age also has given birth to so-called ‘post-truth politics’ (Myers, 2019). Post truth politics is a label that has recently gained popularity and signifies a prevalent phenomenon in which people’s opinions on societal issues are shaped more by fake news and its derivatives, including hoaxes and rumors, than reliable evidence and data (Glăveanu, 2017). Related to this phenomenon is the paradox of collective action enabled in part by the internet (Breindl, 2010a, 2010b): on the one hand, collective action is an integral part of the democratic process through which people are given the right to express dissent (Thomas & Louis, 2013). However, when collective action is driven by fake news, as is often the case, this phenomenon poses a formidable threat to democratic processes through enabling large groups of people to be misguided by inappropriate information (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Pereira & Van Bavel, 2018). The present work, then, aimed to examine further the social-psychological antecedents of a phenomenon that we describe as ‘post-truth collective action’, referring to collective

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action which is conducted in support of issues and views which are contradicted by reliable, factual data.

Collective action is commonly defined as any action carried out together by group members whose goal is to achieve shared objectives, such as social change (Van Zomeren et al., 2018). As a social phenomenon, collective action has received wide attention from social psychologists (Van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). However, the mechanism by which post-truth politics provokes collective action remains empirically understudied within the existing social-psychological literature. To help fill this gap, the present work proposed a structural model suggesting that belief in fake news and prejudiced views are the most proximal antecedents of people's support for post-truth collective action. We also show that belief in fake news stems from conspiratorial thinking and collective narcissism, whereas prejudice is positively predicted by relative ingroup prototypicality. To examine these ideas, we used collective action in Indonesia as a contextual background.

2 The context of the present study

Indonesia is the fifth-largest country in the globe when it comes to the number of users of key social media platforms, including: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Barker, 2019) and is also the world's third-largest democracy and the largest Muslim country. Within the country, the prevalence of "fake news" – popularly termed hoaxes – has been on the rise for the last seven years, with stories being transmitted via social media platforms deepening existing ethnic and religious divisions among Indonesian people (Lamb, 2019a). During the political campaigns running from 2012 to 2014 fake news content came to be widely circulated. One notorious example was a widely shared accusation that the current Indonesian President Joko Widodo was not upholding his duties as a Muslim and a Javanese person representing the religious and ethnic majority group in Indonesia. The accusation cast Joko Widodo as being ethnically Chinese and a secret Christian, two identities that represent ethnic and religious minority statuses in Indonesia (Hui & Prakash, 2019).

The spread of fake news has continued to run rampant in Indonesia, becoming especially severe in the months leading up to the presidential election held on April 17, 2019. The content of the fake news that spread was mostly the same in content as with previous periods, in that it related to identity politics and was intended to discredit either of the two candidates: Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. Joko Widodo, who was seeking a second term in the April 2019 election, was accused of clandestinely collaborating with China in order to revive the long-debunked Indonesian Communist Party (Indonesian: Partai Komunis Indonesia/PKI). Here it is important to note that communism is officially banned in Indonesia and there is a common social narrative that presents affiliates of communism as being atheist and evil (Putra, Holtz, Pitaloka et al., 2018). Alternatively, Prabowo Subianto was depicted as a radical Islamist planning to establish a new caliphate in Indonesia (Potkin & Da Costa, 2019). In addition to stories targeting the candidates there was also a hoax report that containers at the port in Jakarta were storing millions of marked ballot papers that were shipped from China. This hoax quickly went viral and served to delegitimize the electoral process (Lamb, 2019b).

The result of the election based on quick counts conducted by various independent, credible polling agencies were in favor of Jokowi Widodo, placing the incumbent president at around 55% of the vote, whereas Prabowo Subianto received around 44% of the vote (Regan et al., 2019). This early vote tally was consistent with the final actual counts announced by the General Elections Commission (Indonesian: Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU) which on May 21, 2019 officially declared Joko Widodo as the winner of 2019 election, with a 55.5% share of the vote while Prabowo Subianto secured 44.5% (Ghaliya, 2019). However, some supporters of Prabowo Subianto rejected the results reported by both the quick counts and real counts, claiming that KPU and the Election Supervisory Board (Indonesian: Badan Pengawas Pemilu/Bawaslu) committed systematic electoral fraud. Inflamed by the results, some of Subianto's supporters took part in a violent protest lasting from May 21 to May 22, 2019 in the capital city Jakarta, which killed six people and injured 350 (Lamb, 2019b).

In this paper, we consider the protest as a case of *post-truth collective action*. In particular, we operationalize post-truth collective action as collective action directed against political outgroups that are perceived to be in conflict with the ingroup based on beliefs that are derived from fake or inaccurate claims about a variety of issues. Ingroup members believe that the issues identified are real and they are accordingly motivated to undertake action to demonstrate their serious concerns about the issues. Alternatively, the outgroups tend to recognize the issues identified as being false, lacking supportive empirical data, and evidence. We examine this phenomenon, in regard to several related constructs, including belief in fake news, conspiratorial thinking, Muslims' prejudice toward non-Muslims, Muslims' relative ingroup prototypicality, and Islamic collective narcissism. It should be noted that within the Indonesian context the label "non-Muslims", although officially referring to five religions (i.e., Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism), is also applied to other categories which some Indonesian Muslims also hold negative sentiments toward, including the Chinese minority group, communism, and the Western world, particularly the U.S. (Mashuri et al., 2016; Osman & Waikar, 2018). Accordingly, some Indonesian Muslims have accused the Indonesian government of being compromised by these groups. Negative sentiments against non-Muslims in this regard may afford some Indonesian Muslims a means of displaying their opposition to the Indonesian government by disguising their overt expression.

To test these ideas, we recruited a sample of university students as research participants. We chose this sample due to convenience and because students have played a significant role in affecting the political history of Indonesia (Lane, 2019). Furthermore, during the last seven years, Indonesian radical Islamists have demonstrated recalcitrant opposition to the Indonesian government (Beech & Suhartono, 2019), and there has been concern growing over the influence of Islamic radicalism among students (Purwaningsih, 2018).

Fake news and conspiratorial thinking

Fake news is fabricated information, violating the standards of editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and legitimacy of information, which imitates regular news media content in such a way to make the fake news appear indistinguishable from real news (Lazer et al., 2018; Tandoc et al., 2018). Fake news is closely linked to the post-truth era and the current social media-driven world in which deception is prevalent and there is a growing tendency of people to regard fake stories as an acceptable part of life rather than something inexcusable (Keyes, 2004). Fake news is considered to corrode the legitimacy of evidence-based decision-making on various important societal issues (Roozenbeek & Van Der Linden, 2019). This generates alarming consequences as people are starting to rely more on misinformation, instead of facts or real data to determine their views on topics like climate change, vaccinations, and international relations (Lazer et al., 2018; Van Der Linden et al., 2017).

There are copious examples in recent years demonstrating how online fake news can easily provoke violent collective actions or protests. For example, in Germany, fake news stories shared on social media were recognized as a triggering factor in the "Chemnitz riots": which involved large demonstrations by right-wing groups, including Neo-Nazi supporters, which called for the eradication of Muslim immigrants (Dikov, 2018). In India, child-abduction and organ harvesting hoaxes spread via WhatsApp messages have triggered mob lynching, resulting in seven people being killed (Phartiyal et al., 2018). Another recent example from Indonesia occurred when fake news concerning a high school teacher's supposedly racist comments about a student sparked a riot in Wamena, West Papua, Indonesia, resulting in the deaths of at least twenty-seven people (West Papua: Day of violence sees at least 27 dead, 2019). Jost et al. (2018) suggest that social media platforms enable messages to be circulated easily and rapidly and can thus serve as conduits to generate collective protests channeling feelings of anger, social identification, group efficacy, as well as a sense of injustice and deprivation. The diffusion of the messages may be even more likely when the content of the social media platforms comprises fake news instead of real news as fake news has been found to spread faster, farther, and

deeper (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Based on such features it seems likely that fake news will help to facilitate collective action. We, therefore, predicted that the more participants believed in fake news the more they would support post-truth collective action (*Hypothesis 1a*).

Previous studies (Bronstein et al., 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2019a, 2019b) have demonstrated that people who believe in fake news display lower levels of analytic or reflective thinking. A similar path has been found regarding the endorsement of conspiracy theories (Swami et al., 2014), suggesting that lower levels of analytic thinking are one of the underlying features of conspiratorial ideation. Van Prooijen and Van Vugt (2018) contended that conspiracy theories involve allegations of secret coalitions or collaborations by certain groups with the deliberate intention to harm another group. Whereas, Brotherton et al. (2013) differentiate between generic conspiratorial thinking and specific conspiratorial thinking. The first has to do with the propensity of people to believe in general conspiracies about nonspecific historical events, i.e., events that extend beyond any particular locality or specific communities. Examples of such events are the spread of viruses or diseases, acts of terrorism, and assassinations of public figures, without focusing on detailing the specifics of relevant events. However, when the details of events are salient and the conspiracies are focused on specific real-world events, such as the spread of HIV, the 9/11 attacks, the death of Princess Diana or the assassination of President John F. Kennedy (Drinkwater et al., 2020), then this is specific conspiratorial thinking.

Most conspiracy theories in history are proven to be false, but some conspiracies have turned out to be true, such as Watergate and the Iran–Contra scandals (Keeley, 1999; Pipes, 1997). Consequently, even conspiracy theories which turn out to be false, should not be automatically dubbed as fake news if they are covered and reported with appropriate journalistic integrity (Mukerji, 2018). It is thus not simply that stories turn out to be incorrect that qualifies something as fake news. Instead, it is content that provides false and misleading claims made without concern for their veracity or the quality of evidence that supports them. Similarly, while it is a prevalent theme not all fake news contain conspiracy theories as the term also refers to content that presents blatant lies, propaganda content, and even entertainment (Kalsnes, 2018). For example, a fake news story might present an inaccurate account that ascribes some achievement to a figure who was not responsible for it, or could simply report inaccurate statistics related to some topic.

Goertzel (1994) argued that conspiratorial thinking reflects “a monological belief system”, denoting that when endorsing certain conspiracy theories, people are more likely to believe in other, unrelated conspiracy theories. In support of the monological belief system, related work (Brotherton et al., 2013; Bruder et al., 2013; Swami et al., 2011) found that generic conspiracy thinking positively predicted specific conspiracy thinking. Considering the previous research, it seems that a lack of analytic thinking is one defining characteristic of susceptibility to conspiracy theories and that this similarly may make people more likely to believe in fake news. Thus, it is logical to expect that conspiratorial thinking may serve as a precursor to the endorsement of fake news. Relatedly, Edelson et al. (2017) found that conspiratorial thinking increased people’s belief in fake news about election fraud and, in a similar vein, Halpern et al. (2019) found that among a sample of Chileans with internet access, conspiratorial thinking increased belief in and willingness to share fake news. We accordingly hypothesize that both generic conspiratorial thinking and specific conspiratorial thinking would be positive predictors of belief in fake news (*Hypothesis 1b*).

Prejudice and relative ingroup prototypicality

2 In recent years, there has been a wave of a new strand of populism that is sometimes referred to as post-truth populism: an ideology that aims to challenge the established political elites and institutions that back-up them, using deceitful information propagandized through social media (Speed & Mannion, 2017). The Brexit and Donald Trump election campaigns have been noted as two high profile examples of post-truth populism (De Cleen, 2018). Supporters of post-truth populists tend to perceive of themselves as a marginalized group. The post-truth populists encourage this, promoting

fear and hostility against targeted outgroups, and often endorse a zero-sum worldview that suggests for their supporters to improve their imagined disadvantageous status requires they support discriminatory movements or policies directed at the outgroups (Speed & Mannion, 2017). Characterized as such, post-truth populism reinforces its supporters' prejudices against target outgroups (De Cleen, 2018), and promotes the position that hate speech should be protected under freedom of speech as it represents an important and legitimate part of societal discourse (White & Crandall, 2017)

Prejudice promotes intergroup antipathy, which is manifest in people's negative evaluations (e.g., disliking) and emotions (e.g., hatred) against certain outgroups (Putra, 2014; Stephan & Stephan, 2013). Simon and Klandermans (2001) held that prejudice constitutes the emotional underpinnings of so-called politicized collective identity, that is, the form of collective identity that underlines people's deliberate willingness to become involved in a power struggle. A study conducted by Putra, Holtz, Rufaedah et al. (2018) has shown that when the perpetrators of hate crimes are considered as ingroup members and the victims as members of a heretical group, the victims will likely be blamed: the assault is justified due to the heretical group's existence.

Likewise, politicized collective identity has also been found to be a strong predictor of collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). The emergent ingroup model of social change (Ferguson et al., 2019) suggests that prejudice exacerbates the dichotomous categorization of "us versus them", which elicits ingroup members' to mobilize to challenge the outgroups. Previous research has also revealed that the more ingroup members are prejudiced against a particular outgroup, the more likely it is that the first group is willing to undertake collective action against the latter outgroup (Kteily et al., 2016; Shepherd et al., 2018). Building upon these empirical findings, we hypothesize that the more participants hold prejudiced views toward non-Muslims the more they will support post-truth collective action (*Hypothesis 2a*).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) posits that prejudice originates from people's attempt to enhance the reputation of their group by viewing their group in a more positive light in contrast to outgroups. Capturing this biased social comparison, Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) coined the term "relative ingroup prototypicality", describing the perception that the norms, values, and ideology of an ingroup better represent a specified superordinate group encompassing both groups than those of an outgroup. This subjective claim fuels ingroup members' devaluation of the outgroup which results in the first group's prejudice against the latter group rising. Verifying this basic tenet of relative ingroup prototypicality, Kessler et al. (2010) found that the more Germans endorsed the view that their ingroup was more prototypical relative to an outgroup (i.e., immigrants) that both exist within the superordinate category of all people living in Germany, the more the first group harbored prejudiced views against the latter group. Applying this empirical finding to the context of the current research, we expected that greater relative ingroup prototypicality would result in higher levels of prejudice in Muslims toward non-Muslims (*Hypothesis 2b*).

Relative ingroup prototypicality mirrors ingroup-serving motives such that it motivates people to legitimize the perceived advantageous status of their group vis-à-vis another group (Weber et al., 2002). As a result, relative ingroup prototypicality elevates hostile, unfavorable behavioral intentions (Reese et al., 2012) and otherwise attenuates reconciliatory tendencies toward the outgroup (Mashuri et al., 2018). Taking into account these empirical findings in the context of the current research, we argue that when deeming their group as more prototypical relative to non-Muslims, there is a strong likelihood that Muslims will support post-truth collective action. Hence, we predict that relative ingroup prototypicality will enhance participants' support for post-truth collective action (*Hypothesis 2c*).

Collective narcissism

Populist movements in the current post-truth politics are marked by supporters' anti-elitism and their unilateral confidence in defining what it means to be a *genuine* citizen of a nation. Populism in this regard involves a sense of ideological superiority. Defined as such, support for populist

movements, such as the 2016 campaigns for Brexit and Donald Trump, have been found to be positively predicted by collective narcissism (Federico & de Zavala, 2018; Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018; A. Golec de Zavala et al., 2017; Marchlewska et al., 2018). Reflecting insecure, defensive ingroup positivity, collective narcissism is an inflated, unrealistic belief in the importance and greatness of a given ingroup that also includes the conviction that this truth should be recognized by other groups (A. G. Golec de Zavala et al., 2009). Thus, we argue that if Muslims report high levels of collective narcissism in viewing their own religion or group then it is likely that they will be more supportive of collective action aimed at challenging a government that is perceived as representing the elite or status-quo. Based on this logic, we predicted that Islamic collective narcissism would be associated with participants' support for post-truth collective action (*Hypothesis 3a*).

Collective narcissism reflects the conviction that the greatness of people's own group is not adequately appreciated by others (Cichocka, Marchlewska, Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). This perceived lack of the external validation of ingroup greatness may spur conspiratorial thinking. Conspiracy theories in this sense provide people with an external explanation for why other groups do not give adequate recognition to their preferred group (Cichocka et al., 2016). Supporting this position, previous research has revealed that collective narcissism positively predicted general conspiratorial thinking (e.g., events over the course of the 2016 US presidential election: Golec de Zavala & Federico, 2018). We accordingly posited that Islamic collective narcissism could foster Muslims' generic conspiratorial thinking. Hence, we hypothesize that Islamic collective narcissism would positively predict generic conspiratorial thinking (*Hypothesis 3b*).

The identity-based model of political beliefs (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018) suggests that people endorse fake news in so far as the misinformation bolsters their chosen political ideology. Harper and Baguley (2019), for example, recently found that among Liberals, collective narcissism enhanced support for fake news particularly when it was favorable to their ideological views. In the present work, we argue that Muslims' Islamic collective narcissism will trigger stronger belief in fake news that feature content that purports to delegitimize the government since they perceive the current government as hindering their group's vested goals. Combining this insight with Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 3b, we hypothesize a mediation model in which the role of Islamic collective narcissism in fostering support for collective action would be mediated via levels of belief in fake news (*Hypothesis 4*).

Given that collective narcissism is characterized in part by the perceived exceptionality of the ingroup, it may induce feelings of an ingroup's superiority as compared with other groups (Golec de Zavala, Dyduch-Hazr, & Lantos, 2019). Using this rationale, it can be argued that collective narcissism could serve as a catalyst for relative ingroup prototypicality, denoting how ingroup members perceive that the norms, values, and ideology of their group are superior to those of the outgroup in representing a relevant superordinate group. In the context of the current study, we contend that Islamic collective narcissism may augment relative ingroup prototypicality among Muslims and thus predict that Islamic collective narcissism would be a positive antecedent of Muslims' relative ingroup prototypicality (*Hypothesis 5*).

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 518 undergraduate students from four universities in Indonesia (329 were females, 143 were males, 46 did not indicate their gender; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.57$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.49$). All participants self-reported as Muslims, and they took part in the current research voluntarily, in return for no monetary rewards. We designed the current research as a cross-sectional correlational survey wherein all variables were measured simultaneously during a single session.

Procedure and measures

From May 01, 2019, until May 15, 2019, research assistants approached participants in the classroom and distributed a questionnaire which was compiled of all the materials relevant to the present study. This survey was administered after protests against the results of the 2019 Indonesian general election released by quick count agencies on April 17, 2019 (Suci, 2019) and those against the General Elections Commission [Komisi Pemilihan Umum: KPU] accused of committing massive election fraud (Prireza, 2019). The questionnaire itself consisted of a series of questions on which participants were asked to confirm their agreement using a five-point Likert-type response scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Scores for relevant constructs were created by averaging the items of each scale.

After signing an informed consent at the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were presented with brief information about the meaning of the term “non-Muslims”. In the present research this was defined as referring to followers of the five religions other than Islam that have officially been recognized by the Indonesia government, i.e. Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism (Heriyanto, 2017). Following this information were nine items to assess *Islamic collective narcissism* (e.g., “Muslims deserve special treatment”; “It really makes me angry when non-Muslims criticize Muslims”; $\alpha = .81$). This scale was based on the research by Mashuri et al. (2020), who adapted the original measures from A. G. Golec de Zavala et al. (2009). *Generic conspiratorial beliefs* was assessed with 15 items (e.g., “A small, secret group of people is responsible for making all major world decisions, such as going to war”; “Groups of scientists manipulate, fabricate, or suppress evidence in order to deceive the public”; $\alpha = .89$), adapted from Brotherton et al. (2013). Representing very popular conspiracy theories in Indonesia (e.g., Mashuri et al., 2016; Putra et al., 2015; Stahl, 2008), *specific conspiratorial beliefs* was assessed with four items (e.g., “Followers of Ahmadiyah in Indonesia who believe in Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as an apostle of Allah after the Prophet Muhammad were in fact created by British and its allies”; “The 2004 tsunami in Aceh was not caused by natural factors, but as a result of an Underwater Nuclear Bomb made by the United States and Israel”; $\alpha = .68$).

The next part of the questionnaire comprised four items intended to assess Muslim prototypicality (e.g., “Muslims are a prototypical religious group in Indonesia”; “Islam is a religion that represents the people of Indonesia”; $\alpha = .82$), followed by another four items to assess Non-Muslim prototypicality (e.g., “Non-Muslims are a prototypical religious group in Indonesia”; “Religions other than Islam are religions that represent the people of Indonesia”; $\alpha = .79$). Both scales were adapted from previous studies in Indonesia (i.e., Mashuri, Zaduqisti, Alroy-Thiberge et al., 2017; Mashuri, Zaduqisti, Ula et al., 2017). Following a recommendation from previous research (Waldzus et al., 2003), *relative Muslim prototypicality* was calculated by subtracting non-Muslim prototypicality from Muslim prototypicality. *Belief in fake news* was assessed by asking participants to indicate their agreement with five major fake news stories (e.g., “The Indonesian Communist Party [Indonesian: Partai Komunis Indonesia/PKI] has been revived”; “Indonesian human and natural resources are being controlled by foreign countries”; $\alpha = .75$). The five stories used were categorized as fake news as both the Indonesian government and mainstream Indonesian media have officially confirmed these stories to be hoaxes, and yet some portion of the Indonesian public still believe them to be true.

Prejudice was assessed by asking participants the degree to which they viewed non-Muslims as having six characters on a bipolar adjective option (i.e., “threatening – trustworthy,” “hostile – friendly,” “slothful – industrious,” “evil – good,” “stupid – clever,” and “undignified – dignified”; $\alpha = .89$). Adapted from prior studies conducted in Indonesia (Putra, 2014; Putra & Wagner, 2017), participants’ responses on this scale were all reversed such that high scores indicated high prejudice. *Support for collective action* was assessed with three items (e.g., “I support demonstrations to protest the fraud of the General Elections Commission [Indonesian: Komisi Pemilihan Umum/ KPU] in the 2019 presidential election”; “I support demonstrations to close down quick count survey institutions in the 2019 presidential election”; $\alpha = .88$). The actions denoted some Indonesians’ denial of the results

of the 2019 presidential election as released by reputable quick count survey institutions, as they were counter to the protesters' expectations. Finally, the participants were debriefed, thanked for completing the questionnaire, and asked to self-report their age and gender.¹

Results

Descriptive statistics

As shown in Table 1, each of the predictor variables (i.e., belief in fake news, prejudice, prejudice, generic conspiratorial beliefs, specific conspiratorial beliefs, relative Muslim prototypicality, and Islamic collective narcissism) were significantly correlated with support for collective action.

Analytic strategies

We tested hypotheses in the current research by means of path model using *Mplus* version 7.4 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998–2015). The data in the current research contained some missing values.² We also found that the data did not meet the assumption of multivariate normality (*Skewness* = 2.72, *M* = 0.98, *SD* = 0.16, $p < .001$; *Kurtosis* = 73.87, *M* = 62.83, *SD* = 0.94, $p < .001$).³ We accordingly used MLR as an estimator, as this is considered suitable for dealing with missing values data which violates the assumption of multivariate normality (Muthen & Muthen, 1998–2015).

2 Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among variables in the current research.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Islamic collective narcissism	3.47	.70	–	.15**	.10*	.48**	–.10*	.39**	.31**	.09*	.34**
(2) Generic conspiratorial beliefs	2.86	.73		–	.53**	.12**	.09*	.02	.40**	–.05	.15**
(3) Specific conspiratorial beliefs	2.74	.80			–	.11*	.09*	.01	.32**	.03	.19**
(4) Muslim prototypicality	3.98	.82				–	–.06	.71**	.14**	.13**	.20**
(5) Non-Muslim prototypicality	3.033	.88					–	–.75**	–.01	–.26**	–.18**
(6) Relative Muslim prototypicality	.94	1.24						–	.10*	.26**	.26**
(7) Beliefs in fake news	2.96	.90							–	–.05	.51**
(8) Prejudice	2.75	.88								–	.16**
(9) Support for collective action	2.92	1.24									–

Note. *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

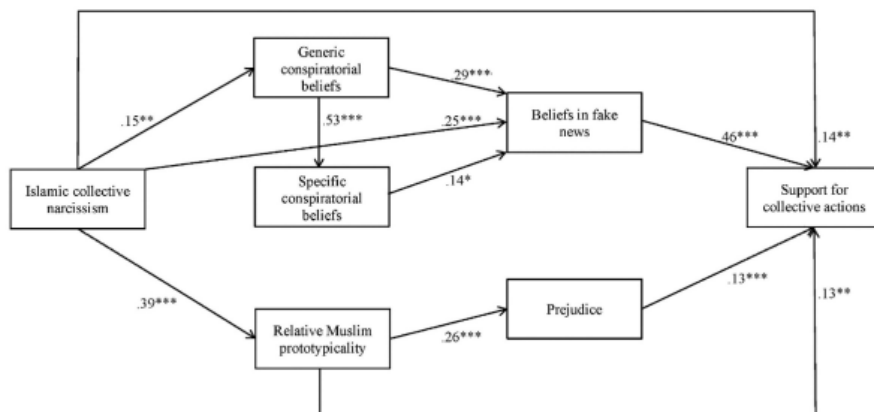


Figure 1. Results of the hypothesized path model. Numbers in the model are standardized path coefficients. Note. All variables within the model were analyzed in terms of their observed scores. For figure simplicity, the correlation between specific conspiratorial beliefs and relative Muslim prototypicality ($\beta = -.01$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .782$, 95% CI = $[-.09, .07]$; $\beta = -.01$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .782$, 95% CI = $[-.11, .09]$) was not displayed. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The hypothesized model

Figure 1 presents the hypothesized path model, which fitted the data, Chi-square ($\chi^2 [9] = 11.41$, $p = .249$, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .02 (95% Confidence Interval [CI] = .00, .06), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.00, Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.99 (for a review of the goodness of fit of the model, see Hu & Bentler, 1999). The path model accounted for 34% variance of support for post-truth collective action ($SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$), 7% variance of prejudice ($SE = 0.02$, $p = .003$), 23% variance of belief in fake news ($SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), 15% variance of relative Muslim prototypicality ($SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), 28% variance of specific conspiratorial beliefs ($SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$), and 2% variance of generic conspiratorial beliefs ($SE = 0.01$, $p = .128$).

As shown in Figure 1, belief in fake news positively predicted support for collective action ($B = .63$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.52, .74]; $\beta = .46$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.38, .53], power = 1.00), so did prejudice ($B = .19$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.08, .29]; $\beta = .13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.06, .21], power = 0.95).⁴ These results corroborated Hypothesis 1a. In support of Hypothesis 1b, both generic conspiratorial beliefs ($B = .36$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.23, .48]; $\beta = .29$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.19, .39], power = 1.00) and specific conspiratorial beliefs ($B = .15$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .021$, 95% CI = [.02, .28]; $\beta = .14$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .021$, 95% CI = [.02, .25], power = 0.85) were positive antecedents of belief in fake news. Prejudice positively and significantly predicted support for post-truth collective ($B = .19$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.08, .29]; $\beta = .13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.06, .21], power = 0.95), supporting Hypothesis 2a.

Substantiating Hypotheses 2b and 2c, relative Muslim prototypicality was a positive predictor of either prejudice ($B = .19$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.12, .25]; $\beta = .26$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.18, .35], power = 1.00) or support for collective action ($B = .13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .003$, 95% CI = [.05, .21]; $\beta = .13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .002$, 95% CI = [.05, .21], power = 0.89). Islamic collective narcissism was a positive antecedent of support for collective action ($B = .25$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .001$, 95% CI = [.10, .39]; $\beta = .14$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .001$, 95% CI = [.06, .22], power = 0.93). Islamic collective narcissism was also found to significantly give rise to generic conspiratorial beliefs ($B = .15$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .003$, 95% CI = [.05, .25]; $\beta = .15$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .002$, 95% CI = [.05, .24], power = 0.92). These findings were in line with Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b. In turn, belief in fake news significantly mediated the role of Islamic collective narcissism in augmenting support for collective action (Indirect effect: $B = .20$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.13, .27]; $\beta = .11$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.08, .15], power = 1.00), supporting Hypothesis 4. Finally, Islamic collective narcissism positively predicted relative Muslim prototypicality ($B = .69$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.54, .84]; $\beta = .39$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [.31, .47], power = 1.00), which corroborated Hypothesis 5.

Alternative models

We compared the hypothesized path model in the current research with two alternative models, in order to conduct robustness checks on the plausibility of the hypothesized path model. Following Burnham and Anderson (2004), the model comparison is based on the difference of chi-square for nested models and that of Akaike information criteria (AIC) for non-nested models. As a rule of thumb, to qualify its significance, the difference of AIC should be 4.00 or greater wherein a model with a smaller AIC indicates better fits to the data (Burnham & Anderson, 200).

Alternative model 1

The first alternative model was nested within the hypothesized model. Derived from the research by Jolley et al. (2019), we added the paths from generic conspiratorial beliefs and specific conspiratorial beliefs to prejudice (see Figure S2 in the supporting information). Jolley et al. (2019, Study 3) found that exposure to anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, more than a control condition, triggered British participants' prejudice not only toward Jewish people but also a number of unrelated outgroups such as Asians, Americans, Irish, and Australians. We found that the chi-square of the first alternative

model, $\chi^2(7) = 7.97$, was not significantly lower than that of the hypothesized model, $\chi^2(9) = 11.41$, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 4.26$.⁵ The hypothesized model was hence more parsimonious than the first alternative model in explaining the relationships among variables in the data.

Alternative model 2

The second alternative model was not nested within the hypothesized model. We refer to it as the 'reverse model' in which collective narcissism was positioned as a direct antecedent of either belief in fake news or prejudice (see Figure S3 in the supporting information). Across three studies, Marchlewska et al. (2018) found that collective narcissism positively predicted support for a range of populist issues (e.g., Brexit) strongly associated with hoaxes and fake news. Moreover, Federico and de Zavala (2018; see also Marchlewska et al., 2018, Study 3) reported that collective narcissism was a significant predictor of Americans' decision to vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 election, a candidate whose campaign heavily relied on hoaxes or fake news. These findings suggest that collective narcissism can be thought of as a positive predictor of belief in fake news. Regarding the relationship between collective narcissism and prejudice, Cichočka et al. (2017, Studies 2 & 3) found that the majority group's collective narcissism was positively and significantly related to prejudice toward a minority group (i.e., Black people). Based on this observation it makes sense to argue that collective narcissism can be construed as a direct antecedent of prejudice. We found that the AIC (7770.58) of the hypothesized model was significantly lower than that of the second alternative model (8014.67), $\Delta AIC = 244.09$. In summary then, our primary hypothesized model also fitted the data significantly better than the second alternative model.⁶

Discussion

This study focused on specific collective actions in the Indonesia context conducted in support of post-truth politics and populist movements. The main goal of the current research was to gain a better understanding of the socio-psychological factors that predict this phenomenon. The findings were in line with our expectations in demonstrating that support for post-truth collective action was positively predicted by belief in fake news which itself stemmed from tendencies toward conspiratorial thinking. Another predictor of support for post-truth collective action was Muslims' prejudice against non-Muslims which stemmed from the first group's relative prototypicality in perceived contrast with the latter group. The final results showed that collective narcissism triggered both conspiratorial thinking and relative ingroup prototypicality, as well as support for post-truth collective action. Relationships among these variables were specified in a structural model which was found to fit the data significantly better in comparison with two theory-driven alternative models.

Theoretical implications

The adaptive-conspiracism model (Van Prooijen & Van Vugt, 2018) suggests that conspiratorial thinking can elicit protest behaviors as an approach-oriented response through which people deal with perceived threats originating from alleged conspirators. Hence, Imhoff and Bruder (2014) observed that people who display a conspiracy mentality, i.e., endorse conspiratorial thinking, give rise to collective action efforts that are intended to overthrow the status-quo. The present work revealed that generic conspiratorial thinking and specific conspiratorial thinking alike positively predicted belief in fake news, which in turn led to increased support for post-truth collective action. This observation may help to extend the adaptive-conspiracism model, wherein belief in fake news is theorized to provide the reason why conspiratorial thinking provokes support for post-truth collective action.

Collective narcissism and relative ingroup prototypicality in the present work were equally consequential in augmenting support for post-truth collective action. These findings imply that collective narcissism and relative ingroup prototypicality may be closely associated with radicalism. This is likely

a result of collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala et al., 2019) and relative ingroup prototypicality (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999) to some extent both being characterized by a sense of group superiority; an aspect of radical beliefs that has been found to induce unfavorable, hostile behavioral attitudes and intentions against the outgroup (Doosje et al., 2013, 2012).

The conspiracy theories and fake news used in the current research consisted of controversial topics that did not explicitly target the Indonesian government. However, we found that both constructs were positively and significantly related to support for post-truth collective action aimed at delegitimizing the current Indonesian government (see Table 1). This finding is noteworthy, implying that conspiratorial thoughts and suspicions can serve as the foundation for a generalized political attitude (Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Conspiratorial thinking and belief in fake news in this regard are related to distrust or negative attitudes directed against the government as it is considered to be an institution of the elite or other high-power groups.

The existing research literature (e.g., Ellemers, & Barreto, 2009; Shepherd et al., 2018) typically links prejudice to collective action against a particular outgroup that becomes the object of prejudice. Prejudice against non-Muslims in this research significantly explained greater support for collective action targeting the Indonesian government. This finding is particularly noteworthy because prejudice against one group (i.e., non-Muslims) provokes collective action against another distinct group (i.e., the Indonesian government). We speculate that this empirical finding may resonate with the theories of generalized prejudice, denoting that prejudice against a certain group may spill over into attitudes directed toward other groups believed to be associated or connected with the initial target group (Akrami, Ekehammar, & Bergh, 2011). As described in the introduction, it was select segments from amongst radical Muslims in Indonesia who were the primary protagonists in the post truth collective action which aimed to delegitimize both the process and the outcome of the presidential election. What can be derived from these explanations is that there may be a close association between radicalism and generalized prejudice. Indeed, some existing literature (Ellis, 2004; Trip, Bora, Marian, Halmajan, & Drugas, 2019) suggests that violent radicals tend to hold overgeneralized mindsets and emotions, which drive them to justify their violence not only against some specific despised outgroup but rather multifarious despised outgroups.

Limitations and follow-up studies

In our research, the target group of Muslims' negative sentiments were non-Muslims, which were assessed in terms of Islamic collective narcissism, relative ingroup prototypicality, and prejudice. As mentioned in the introduction, some Indonesian Muslims attribute the label non-Muslims to other groups. These groups include the Chinese minority, communists, and the Western world which some Indonesian Muslims regard the Indonesian government to have been compromised by (Mashuri et al., 2016; Osman & Waikar, 2018). It thus may be reasonable to expect that Muslims' negative sentiments directed against non-Muslims would generalize to other group definitions. To examine this possibility, future studies should explicitly examine the extent of Indonesian Muslims' negative sentiments directed toward the Chinese minority, communists, or the Western world more broadly and whether these also translate into the adoption of an oppositional perspective toward the Indonesian government. A perspective that may manifest as greater levels of support for post-truth collective action. This would be an important result if verified as it would conceptually replicate the empirical findings reported in the current study and help to identify the relevant group boundaries.

Another concern relates to how we have operationalized support for post truth collective action. In this paper the construct refers to participants' favorable attitudes toward mass demonstration by other Muslims in Indonesia in protest at the Indonesian government. As such, our study focused on attitudes and beliefs rather than on personal intentions to act or actual behaviors. However, the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) postulates that attitudes play an important role as a positive antecedent of intention and eventually behavior. Applying this rationale in the context of our work, it makes theoretical sense to propose that support for collective action may in turn translate into

intentions to participate in collective action and potentially behavior. However, we did not focus on the issue of translating attitudes into intentions and behavior when planning the study and so these relationships need to be explored in greater depth (see Fielding et al., 2008, as well as Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995, for some related examples). This limitation can be tackled in future studies by assessing collective action intentions and behaviors and verifying the extent to which this construct is predicted by expressed support for collective action.

Another potential limitation of the current study is that the sample was confined to student populations. To enhance the generalizability of the present work, future studies that recruit non-student samples are needed. This is important as previous research (Guess et al., 2019) has revealed that, for instance, older people are more likely than younger people to share fake news, even controlling for other strong predictors, such as ideological beliefs and identification with political party.

Based on our structural model, collective narcissism appears to be a foundational motivator on perceptions of group relative prototypicality, conspiratorial beliefs, prejudice, and support for post-truth collective actions. However, the present study did not include other factors which might show an alternative relationship with collective narcissism. To elaborate, we see two productive avenues for future research. The first is to consider how to tackle people who have high levels of collective narcissism. If high levels of religious fundamentalism are prevalent among Indonesian Muslims (Yustisia et al., 2019) and religious fundamentalists tend to have high levels of collective narcissism, further research concentrating on how to respond to people with high levels of collective narcissism will be very important. Here one possibility concerns ongoing efforts to promote perceptions of human commonality (Moghaddam,) and tendencies to see others as part of a broader human family (McFarland et al., 2012) in experimental settings. The second avenue is to include other factors that could be treated as equal antecedents alongside collective narcissism. For instance, the role of support for universal moral values (Curry et al., 2019) or human commonality. By considering such concepts, future research can avoid becoming preoccupied with confirming anticipated negative relationships and outcomes but also examine positive factors and test the robustness of the relationships identified.

An important final limitation to acknowledge is that this research was based on a cross-sectional correlational study, which prevents us from establishing causative effects when interpreting the empirical findings. We have offered interpretations of the likely causal relationships amongst the variables examined based on our theoretical model, but it will be necessary for additional confirmatory research to be conducted before any firm conclusions about causative relationships can be adduced. One suggestion to overcome the shortcoming with our present data would be that future studies interested in replicating or expanding the empirical findings we report could implement a directed acyclic graph (DAG). This alternative method is deemed to be of use for assessing causality in observational data (Hernán & Robins, 2006) and has also been applied in structural equation modeling (acyclic SEM; Shipley, 2000). Finally, we relied on a post-hoc power analysis and did not conduct an a priori power analysis. We acknowledge this oversight and the limited inferences that can be drawn from post-hoc power calculations (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). We agree with the arguments that a priori power analysis is a much stronger approach to establish and is necessary to accurately estimate the appropriate sample size to achieve a desired level of power (Zhang et al., 2019). Future studies should thus avoid post-hoc power calculations.

Practical implications

The practical implications of this research relate primarily to potential strategies to combat belief in fake news. Belief in fake news in our data was a strong predictor of endorsing post-truth collective action, although, as discussed above, questions remain about whether this would translate into actual behavior. Nevertheless, identifying applied strategies to tackle the potential damage done by belief in fake news is highly relevant to ensure that the results of democratic general elections in Indonesia are respected in the future. One potential strategy to help combat the effects of fake news is to enhance

critical thinking skills, which have been found to be effective in reducing people's receptivity to fake news (Lutzke et al., 2019). Critical thinking can be encouraged by providing people with relevant guidelines on how to accurately identify fake news (Van Der Linden, 2017). Government and educational programs utilizing multiple media formats could be used to help disseminate such information to wider segments of society. However, given that mainstream, government supported, initiatives are also likely to be regarded as untrustworthy and biased these kinds of interventions can only serve as part of the solution.

Similarly, educational interventions are likely to fall short in combating vulnerability to fake news, given the greater receptivity found amongst older populations who have already completed their education. This is especially the case when politically motivated reasoning is present, as in such cases the issue is not due to issues with identifying the quality of information provided but rather stems from deeper ideological motivations (Badrinathan, 2020). Critical thinking interventions could, for instance, be complemented with new regulations and laws, that grant governments or legal systems with additional powers to punish those who create or spread fake news (Hacıyakupoglu et al., 2018). However, such efforts run the risk of infringing on civil liberties and could also be abused by repressive or anti-democratic leaders and institutions. To overcome such challenges is thus a thorny issue with no simple solutions. It is clear then that there is a need for careful, nuanced efforts to explore how best to combat the damage done by fake news from researchers and policy makers.

Conclusion

There has been a widely acknowledged, unprecedented trend in recent years that misinformation and dubious news stories which contradict known facts or empirical evidence nevertheless prove to be potent catalysts for motivating segments of the public toward collective action. One salient recent example of this was the storming of the US Capitol buildings in part due to belief amongst protesters in the unsubstantiated claims that the 2020 election results were due to widespread fraud. This illustrates how these issues are not restricted to any specific national context and can have significant impacts on both developing countries and high-income democracies. In this research we explored this kind of social phenomenon under the term of post-truth collective action and examined the relationships with possible predictors. The results emphasized the importance of two key predictors: the first is a suspicious mind-set as implicated through the role of belief in fake news, stemming from conspiratorial thinking, in fostering support for post-truth collective action. The second key predictor is negative intergroup sentiments as reflected in how Muslims' Islamic collective narcissism, feelings of being more prototypical than other groups, and prejudice against non-Muslims evoked greater support for post-truth collective action.

Notes

1. After Islamic collective narcissism, we assessed Islamic glorification (eight items; $\alpha = .79$). The item-wording for variables in this research is presented in the Supplemental Information, along with the figures for the alternative models and the covariance matrix of the relationships among variables.
2. We used Expectation maximization (EM) method in SPSS 21 for Windows to assess missingness of our data. By entering Islamic collective narcissism, general conspiratorial beliefs, specific conspiratorial beliefs, relative Muslim prototypicality, beliefs in fake news, prejudice, and support for collective action as quantitative variables, the results revealed that the data contained 0.74% of missing values. This percentage is far less than the standards of 5% (Schafer, 1999) or 10% (Bennett, 2001) cutoff of missing value percentages that may substantially bias the data. Moreover, the EM analysis revealed that the distribution of missing values in our data was at random (Little MCAR's test: $\chi^2 [14] = 14.02, p = .448$).
3. Following a well-cited procedure by Korkmaz et al. (2014), we run Mardia's multivariate normality test. This test was conducted online (<http://www.biosoft.hacettepe.edu.tr/MVN/>) and the results revealed that the data violated a multivariate normality assumption, $\chi^2 = 233.69, p < .001$.
4. Power was calculated by means of Monte Carlo simulation using Mplus version 7.4 in which the data was resampled 10,000 times (Muthen & Muthen, 1998–2015). We note that there are substantial limitations to the

inferences that can be drawn from post-hoc power analyses and we thus provide the statistic for transparency but caution against over-interpretation (see the limitations section for further discussion).

5. As recommended by Satorra and Bentler (2010), the chi-square difference testing for robust estimator (i.e., MLR) was done by rescaling the chi-square of the hypothesized path model and that of the first alternative model (The chi-square table can be checked at <https://web.ma.utexas.edu/users/davis/375/popecol/tables/chisq.html>).
6. The raw data (in spss and csv), *Mplus* syntax, and Supplemental Information in this research are freely accessible at <https://osf.io/x3ad8>

1 Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/x3ad8>.

Open scholarship



This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data and Open Materials through Open Practices Disclosure. The data and materials are openly accessible at <https://osf.io/x3ad8>.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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