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Department of Psychology of Development and Socialization Processes
PhD Program in Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and Educational
Research
Curriculum in Migration Studies: Psychological, Social, and Educational Issues
XXXVIII Cycle

Motivated by Significance:

Exploring the Role of the Quest for Significance in
Collective Actions Toward Migrants

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2024-2025

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Introduction

The migratory phenomenon constitutes one of the most complex challenges of our time, as it intertwines demographic, social, political, and symbolic dynamics (Castles et al., 2014; Ambrosini, 2020). It is not merely the movement of individuals across borders, but rather a discursive and relational field in which memberships, norms, and boundaries are constantly negotiated, contested, and redefined (Giorgi & Vitale, 2017).

Within this contested social space, host societies respond with profoundly divergent and polarized reactions: on the one hand, solidaristic mobilizations and prosocial claims in defense of migrants' rights, dignity, and inclusion emerge (e.g., Della Porta, 2018; Bloemraad & Voss, 2020); on the other, defensive practices and hostile forms of mobilization develop, aimed at protecting the status and privileges of the majority group by restricting access and hospitality toward those perceived as outsiders or threats (e.g., Górska et al., 2022; Guvensoy et al., 2025). Migration thus becomes a powerful catalyst of personal and collective meaning, an arena in which individuals and communities elaborate on and renegotiate their identity, sense of belonging, and role within the broader social and political community.

These dual responses are far from marginal phenomena: large-scale mobilizations have taken place throughout Europe and the United States, both in support of and in opposition to migrants. Pro-migrant demonstrations – including mass solidarity marches, humanitarian mobilizations, and campaigns advocating for the protection of migrants' rights and safe reception – have repeatedly generated widespread public engagement and visibility in various Western countries.

Conversely, anti-immigration mobilizations – ranging from far-right street protests to nationwide campaigns demanding stricter border control, reduced immigration, and expanded

deportation policies – have similarly mobilized large segments of the population and exerted substantial influence on public debate and political agendas across multiple national settings.

These dynamics illustrate the societal significance, scale, and political impact of collective mobilizations surrounding migration.

It is from these divergent reactions that the central question of the thesis arises:

What psycho-social factors motivate people to engage in collective actions in response to migration?

To address this question, the thesis investigates how the quest for significance – conceptualized through the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022) – functions as a motivational force driving majority-group members to engage in various forms of collective action in response to the presence of migrants. According to the SQT, the universal need to be perceived as significant, respected, and socially relevant represents a fundamental driver of human action (Kruglanski et al., 2019). This motivational drive can be triggered both by experiences (real or perceived) of significance loss and by experiences of significance gain, and the trajectory that it follows depends primarily on the narratives available, the social networks of reference, and the perceived opportunities (Da Silva et al., 2024). In this perspective, migration becomes a privileged contextual background for examining how the quest for significance may orient collective engagement along deeply divergent pathways, given that public debates on this issue are highly emotional (Esses et al., 2017), strongly moralized (Giorgi & Vitale, 2017), and marked by ambiguous and contested group boundaries (Wimmer, 2013) that amplify significance-related motives.

Building on this theoretical framework, the thesis explores how the activation of this motivational drive translates into different forms of peaceful collective action, with a specific

focus on the responses of majority and advantaged groups (i.e., natives) to the migratory phenomenon. The analysis examines psychological processes – such as prejudice, identity dynamics, moral orientations, moral attributions toward the outgroup, and perceptions of threat – as mechanisms that may moderate or mediate the relationship between the quest for significance and forms of collective action toward migrants. The underlying assumption is that this motivational drive does not operate uniformly or in a predetermined way; rather, its effects depend on how it is activated and filtered through these processes, which channel significance-restoration efforts along trajectories that range from solidaristic mobilization to defensive exclusion.

The thesis first develops a theoretical framework structured into three chapters. Chapter 1 examines migration not only as a global process but also as a psychosocial phenomenon, highlighting the structural factors that shape it, the cultural and political representations that accompany it, and the collective responses it elicits in host societies. Chapter 2 introduces the SQT, illustrating the psychological foundations of the need for significance, the conditions under which this motivational dynamic is activated, and the divergent trajectories through which such a need can be fulfilled. Chapter 3 integrates these perspectives by placing the SQT in dialogue with research on collective action: it traces the theoretical evolution of the field, presents the main interpretative models of collective actions, and frames migration as a particularly emblematic case of polarization, in which the quest for significance emerges as a fundamental motivation underlying divergent forms of collective response.

On these theoretical bases, the empirical work unfolds in two distinct sections, dedicated respectively to the personal and collective dimensions of the quest for significance, and conducted in three national contexts.

The first section of the thesis investigates the personal dimension of the quest for significance across six studies, five of which were carried out in Italy and one in the United States. The initial studies (Studies 1-3) examine how experiences of loss of value, recognition, or inclusion can activate the quest for significance and how this drive intersects with attitudinal and moral processes. Special attention is given to the role of prejudice and the moral foundation of Proportionality as potential mediating and moderating mechanisms in translating this motivational force into collective action. Specifically, prejudice may function as a motivated form of ingroup protection when personal significance is threatened and individuals turn to their group membership as a primary source of value and meaning (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Leander et al., 2020). Proportionality, in turn, reflects a merit-based moral orientation that not only shapes judgments of deservingness, responsibility, and appropriate treatment of social groups, including migrants, but also provides a powerful interpretive lens through which individuals assess what counts as fair, justified, and legitimate in intergroup relations (Rai & Fiske, 2011; Haidt, 2012; Atari et al., 2023).

The subsequent studies (Studies 4a-4b) shift the focus toward the possibility that the quest for significance, once activated, may be directed toward collective trajectories in favor of migrants, analyzing the role of identification with pro-migrant activist groups as a channel for mobilization. Overall, this section of the thesis combines correlational and experimental approaches to clarify the mechanisms through which personal significance needs shape divergent forms of collective engagement toward migrants.

The second section of the thesis (Study 5 and Study 6) extends the analysis to the collective dimension of the quest for significance through two studies conducted in Spain. Study 5 focuses on dispositional associations between collective significance needs, support for exclusionary political responses, and intentions for pro-migrant collective action. Study 6 adopts an

experimental design to examine how recalling experiences of collective loss or gain influences key intergroup processes – such as perceived threat and moral attributions toward the outgroup – and how these, in turn, are reflected in mobilization intentions.

These sections outline an integrated model of the quest for significance as a motivation underlying different forms of normative collective action in the migratory context. The thesis contributes to clarifying the psychosocial processes that fuel the polarization of responses to migration, demonstrating that the quest for significance is not intrinsically oriented in one direction but, instead, represents a dynamic and flexible motivational force whose outcomes depend on ideological narratives, social and relational contexts, and the very conditions of activation. Migration thus emerges as a fertile ground for observing how needs for significance are negotiated, redefined, and fulfilled through collective action.

Chapter 1.

Migration and Society: From Global Transformations to Collective Responses

Mobility has accompanied the development of societies since their origins. Migration represents a constitutive condition of collective experience, poised between the desire for stability and the tension toward elsewhere. The history of humanity is a history of journeys, crossings, and resettlements (Castles et al., 2014). As Bauman (1998) observed, modern identity is profoundly marked by a condition of “permanent mobility” that constantly questions the boundaries between rootedness and uprootedness, belonging and alterity.

According to Simmel (1908/1992), the migrant represents a *boundary figure*, at the same time a “stranger” and an integral part of the social system, capable of making visible the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that run through intra- and intergroup relations.

The migratory phenomenon, however, does not concern only those who move. Those who remain, those who “receive,” are also active participants in the process: host communities are called upon to rework identities, belongings, and practices of coexistence, considering the encounter with the other, redefining social norms and collective representations (De Haas et al., 2019). This encounter can generate cooperation and cultural innovation, but also mistrust, perceptions of threat, and closure (Esses et al., 2001; Stephan et al., 2016; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Accordingly, migration becomes a shared transformative event in which common meanings are constructed, and both conflicts and opportunities for social cohesion are managed.

From this perspective, migration is not merely a movement across space but a complex psychological and cultural phenomenon involving subjective experiences, social relations, and symbolic constructions (Cormoş, 2022). It is simultaneously the consequence of global transformations and a driver of further change, affecting both countries of origin and

destination, as well as individual and collective trajectories (De Haas, 2021). This dual process involves, on the one hand, the break and reconfiguration of social and institutional ties in contexts of origin, and on the other, the redefinition of economic, normative, and cultural structures in host societies. As a result, migration reshapes values, roles, and models of participation, fostering new forms of coexistence and redefining the boundaries of belonging (Rapoport et al., 2020).

It is within this complexity that the trajectory of the chapter unfolds: it first examines the global dimensions and social representations of migration as a multidimensional phenomenon, and then turns to the collective responses it generates in host societies, together with the motivational processes that shape these dynamics.

1.1 Dimensions, Causes, and Consequences of Migration at the Global Level

In recent decades, international migration has grown constantly, both in absolute terms and as a phenomenon crucial to the redefinition of global equilibria (WMR, 2024). Fifty years ago, in 1970, the number of international migrants was estimated at around 70 million. By 2023, this statistic had risen to approximately 281 million, equal to 3.6% of the world's population, confirming a stable and persistent trend of growth over time (WMR, 2024).

This increase reflects an interaction between structural and contingent dynamics: socioeconomic inequalities, demographic transitions, climate crises, armed conflicts, and political instability represent some of the main drivers of international mobility (WMR, 2024; IDOS, 2024). De Haas (2010) distinguishes, in this regard, between *push factors* (poverty, violence, instability) and *pull factors* (employment opportunities, diasporic networks, institutional stability), highlighting how migratory movements are co-determined by both origin and destination contexts. In recent years, especially in the post-pandemic period, these pressures have intensified within a global scenario marked by growing geopolitical and environmental

vulnerability, generating large-scale forced displacements from regions such as Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America (WMR, 2024). At the same time, the number of victims along migratory routes has also increased, particularly in the Central Mediterranean, where crossings often take place under conditions of extreme precarity and risk (WMR, 2024).

It is evident that immigration acts as a true “barometer” of the internal tensions of contemporary societies, which are reflected not only in political governance and collective narratives but also in public and institutional arenas: it is precisely in these spaces that migration elicits differentiated social responses (Castles et al., 2020).

1.2 Opportunity or Threat? The Narrative Frames of Migration

In Western countries, migration has become one of the most central and divisive issues in public and political debate (Giorgi & Vitale, 2017). On the one hand, the economic, demographic, and social contributions of migrants are recognized (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014; IDOS, 2024; Zanfrini & Pasini, 2025); on the other hand, security and culturalist narratives have spread, often fueled by emergency rhetoric and alarmist media representations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2013; Ragazzi, 2015; Esses, 2021; Steinmann, 2023).

The opposition between these two poles makes immigration a contested arena that shapes public policies, resource allocation, and governance strategies (Esses, 2021). Collective perceptions directly affect opportunities for integration and participation, influencing the quality of reception, access to rights, and the definition of who belongs to the social community. Accordingly, representations of immigration revolve around two general frames (Kollias et al., 2025): (a) migration as an opportunity for host societies and (b) migration as a threat to the existing social, cultural, and political order.

Migration as Opportunity. One of the most widespread positive readings of migration is the utilitarian approach, which emphasizes its functional role in contemporary economic systems (e.g., Todea, 2010). In this perspective, migrants are considered a resource to fill labor market shortages, sustain pension systems in low-birthrate contexts, and foster economic and cultural innovation (Reitz, 2002; IDOS, 2024). Historically, migration has played an adaptive role, providing flexible labor often employed in highly intensive and socially undervalued sectors (Castles et al., 2020). The most recent data confirm this view: migrants generate around 10% of global GDP and are essential in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, construction, and caregiving (WMR, 2024).

This narrative, however, is far from neutral. In official discourse, migration is often framed as a “conditional” resource, whose value depends on migrants’ ability to contribute to national development. Such discourse clearly distinguishes between “useful” migrants (high-skilled, employable) and “problematic” ones (irregular, asylum seekers), with direct effects on access to rights (Benson & Lewis, 2019). This approach risks promoting an instrumental view of inclusion, overshadowing dimensions such as social justice, citizenship, and cultural recognition.

Alongside this functionalist view, a broader perspective has developed, emphasizing migrants’ contributions also on cultural, civic, and ethical grounds. This narrative highlights migration as a resource for the renewal of societies, the promotion of diversity, and the redefinition of collective belonging (Esses, 2021). The International Organization for Migration (WMR, 2024) similarly highlights migrants’ role in economic and cultural regeneration: integration is understood as a reciprocal and transformative process grounded in recognition, dialogue, and civic participation.

Migration as Threat. In contrast to the previous frame, the security/threat perspective portrays migration as a danger to national cohesion, internal security, and the cultural identity of host societies (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2013; Bloom et al., 2015). This frame is grounded in psychosocial threat mechanisms, whereby migrants are perceived as competitors for material resources (jobs, welfare, security) or as destabilizing elements with respect to the values and norms of the host society (Stephan et al., 2005). These dynamics intensify in contexts of economic downturn, social strain, or institutional instability, fostering *scapegoating* processes that transform migrants into collective targets.

This rhetoric makes ample use of terms such as “invasion,” “uncontrolled flow,” “emergency,” or “threat to public order,” fueling a widespread sense of alarm and vulnerability (Wodak, 2015; Kaçar, 2017; Mudde, 2019). According to the International Organization for Migration (WIR, 2024), 68% of policymakers worldwide consider migration a risk to internal stability, often associating it with economic and social insecurity.

Psychological research shows how such representations activate intergroup biases, rigid categorizations, and identity polarization, reinforcing demands for order, control, and cultural homogeneity (Esses et al., 2001; Cisneros, 2014). This frame not only legitimizes restrictive measures – from the criminalization of irregular migration to border enforcement – but also fosters hostile attitudes toward migrants, which can translate into social exclusion, support for nationalist political parties, and, in extreme cases, acts of violence (Esses et al., 2013; Pettigrew, 2016; Pellegrini et al., 2021).

The Role of the Media. The performative power of frames resides not only in their content but also in the channels and contexts through which they are conveyed (Zaklaman, 2025). Mainstream media plays a central role in constructing the meanings associated with migration, acting as active agents through editorial choices, figurative language, and criteria of

newsworthiness (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Coverage focused on security or ethnic conflict tends to exacerbate negative attitudes toward migrants (Esses et al., 2013), whereas more humanizing or inclusive narratives, though less frequent, can reduce perceived threat (IDOS, 2024). Some studies show, for instance, that discourse emphasizing intercultural contact or highlighting migrants' individual stories can reduce stereotypes and foster empathy (e.g., Sari & Alkar, 2023).

In general, however, media tend to amplify polarization and disinformation, giving disproportionate visibility to hostile content and reinforcing intergroup biases through stereotypical representations of social insecurity, economic costs, and crises of reception capacity – especially when politicized in conservative and sensationalistic terms (Dzilenski, 2017).

In the digital context, social media further amplify these dynamics. Anti-migrant content generates more interactions than neutral or positive content, fueling polarized “echo chambers” and normalizing hostile discourse (Müller & Schwarz, 2021). Within these spaces, migration is framed through networked partisan dynamics that sustain ideological boundaries and turn the issue into a symbolic arena of political conflict (Radicioni et al., 2021). Recent studies show that online anti-immigration campaigns can shape the public agenda and even voting intentions (e.g., Chen et al., 2023), while the spread of online disinformation hampers intergroup dialogue and reinforces the image of migrants as “dangerous others” (Komendantova et al., 2023). Similarly, exposure to tweets or posts with threat frames is associated with heightened negative perceptions of migrants, whereas informative or empathetic messages have a weaker impact (Eberl et al., 2018). Nonetheless, some research highlights that the diffusion of inclusive narratives online – such as campaigns emphasizing solidarity or intercultural cooperation – can

stimulate positive engagement and encourage practices of support for migrants (Pizarro et al., 2023).

Building on this, the framing of migration emerges as a communicative and ideological arena in which opposing visions of society confront one another: open and inclusive, or closed and defensive. The dominant narrative, amplified by both traditional and digital media, has real effects on policies, public opinion, and opportunities for inclusion, contributing to the drawing of symbolic boundaries between those considered legitimate members of the community and those left outside (Anderson, 2013).

1.3 Collective Responses to Migration

The arrival and presence of migrants in national contexts do not merely generate abstract opinions or debates; they also produce concrete social responses that unfold along a broad spectrum of collective attitudes and behaviors (Roblain & Green, 2021). The figure of migrants takes on a symbolic function: they can be constructed as an enemy to be rejected, a victim to be assisted, or a citizen to be included, depending on the dominant narrative legitimized by members of the host society (Ramírez Plascencia, 2017; Blasetti & Garzonio, 2022; Bloemraad et al., 2023). Such representations shape attitudes (prejudice, stereotypes, perceptions of threat or openness) and translate into collective behaviors (e.g., demonstrations, petitions, community and associative activities) that both reflect and reshape intergroup relations (Ataç et al., 2016; Esses, 2021; Manekin et al., 2024).

Migration thus emerges as a mobilizing issue, a salient arena in which individuals and groups enact their social relevance, redefine belonging, and structure systems of coexistence. Host societies' responses range from hostile forms of mobilization, oriented toward defending the social and cultural order perceived as threatened (e.g., Shepherd et al., 2018; Hasbún López et al., 2019; Górska et al., 2022; Besta et al., 2025), to practices of organized solidarity aimed

at protecting the rights and dignity of migrants (e.g., Lantos et al., 2020; Sankaran, 2023; Górska et al., 2023). These two poles – exclusionary and solidaristic – reflect deep motivational processes rooted in individuals’ need to affirm value, belonging, and agency within their community (Prilleltensky et al., 2025; Webber, 2025). In this sense, migration can be understood as a catalytic context: it provides a space where individuals and groups project and reinterpret the meaning of their presence in the social world. Emerging narratives, activating perceptions of threat or opportunity, push people to take a stance and, often, to mobilize collectively. Collective action, whether exclusionary or solidaristic, thus becomes a means of restoring coherence, reaffirming belonging, and attributing meaning to one’s social existence (Reynolds et al., 2025).

The Italian context offers a particularly significant example of this ambivalence. Public opinion is stratified and oscillates between solidarity and mistrust, openness and perceptions of danger. According to Dixon et al. (2018), three major segments can be distinguished: the *Hostile Nationalists*, characterized by authoritarian orientations and a rigid conception of national identity, who support closure and rejection policies; the *Security Concerned*, more ambivalent, who recognize migrants’ fundamental rights but express concerns about security and social cohesion; and the *Catholic Humanitarians*, who ground their positions in ethical and religious motivations, conceiving reception as a moral duty and supporting integration practices. These differences show how public opinion constitutes a contested field, shaped by the interplay of political narratives, structural conditions, and individual experiences.

Consequently, migration can be considered a psychosocial mirror that reflects host societies’ needs, fears, and values. At the same time, it triggers divergent collective responses: building walls or opening spaces of encounter, excluding or including, reinforcing identity closures or promoting new forms of citizenship. Within this dialectic of reception and exclusion, the gap

between reality and narrative makes the Italian case particularly insightful for understanding how migration shapes processes of multicultural coexistence.

These responses, however, should not be understood solely as political or social behaviors, but also as strategies of signification: ways through which individuals and groups seek to restore, consolidate, or expand their sense of value. In this perspective, the link between migration and collective agency leads directly to the theoretical framework of the Significance-Quest Theory (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), which will be employed in the following chapters to analyze how the quest for significance can orient divergent trajectories of engagement toward migrants.

Chapter 2.

The Significance-Quest Theory

“Man’s main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain, but rather to see a meaning in his life”

– Frankl, 1946

Pursuing meaning in life represents one of the deepest existential concerns of human beings. While it has been at the center of philosophical reflection for centuries, the issue of meaning has also progressively gained centrality in psychology. Numerous authors have emphasized that the motivation to perceive one’s life as valuable, purposeful, and socially relevant constitutes an organizing principle of human experience and behavior (Allport, 1955; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Crocker & Park, 2004).

Although labeled differently and often fragmented into specific sub-constructs, the impulse toward significance cuts across various theoretical orientations and research fields: from self-affirmation and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965; Steele, 1988; Sherman & Cohen, 2006), to achievement motivation (McClelland, 1985), the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Other relevant strands include studies on normative influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), inclusion and exclusion (Williams, 2007), relative deprivation (Stouffer et al., 1949), and minority influence (Moscovici et al., 1985; Pettigrew, 2001). Despite their heterogeneity, these contributions converge on the idea that individuals are motivated to feel and to be recognized as significant, valued, and connected to others.

It is precisely this motivational core that the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022, 2025) systematizes, conceptualizing the tension toward personal relevance

as a universal need: the need for significance, that is, the desire to feel like “someone” in the eyes of others. Unlike related concepts such as recognition, prestige, dignity, or self-esteem, “significance” is defined here with a strong emphasis on the individual’s social value (Kruglanski et al., 2025). This need is inherently relational and stems from the desire to be part of a social network in which one is perceived as important and morally valid. In this sense, it assumes the status of a primary social motive, capable of profoundly shaping thoughts and behaviors through the quest for recognition and collective relevance (Kruglanski et al., 2025). The striving to satisfy this need – the quest for significance (QFS) – emerges as a specific motivational state, activated in situations of imbalance where the restoration or acquisition of meaning becomes a priority over other needs (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022).

Originally developed to explain the psychological dynamics underlying radical behaviors such as suicide terrorism or adherence to extremist groups (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2018), the SQT has since expanded beyond this research field. In its recent developments, it has evolved into a general theory of social motivation, capable of accounting for violent and destructive conduct and normative forms of collective engagement. As Kruglanski et al. (2025) note, violence is not the inevitable consequence of the QFS: the desire for mattering can be fulfilled by love as well as by aggression.

This chapter will explore the psychological basis underlying the need for significance and its conceptualization within the SQT, examining the conditions that trigger the quest for significance, the processes that guide its development, and the divergent trajectories it may follow.

2.1 Psychological Basis of the Need for Significance

The need for significance represents one of the fundamental drives of human behavior, expressed as the desire to integrate experiences, values, and relationships into a coherent and

purposeful narrative. This need motivates individuals to provide direction and significance to their lives, constructing a view of the self that is comprehensible, justified, and socially recognized (Baumeister, 1991; Martela & Steger, 2016; King & Hicks, 2021).

The first theoretical elaborations on meaning can be traced to humanistic and existential psychology. Frankl (1946) introduced the concept of the “will to meaning” as a primary impulse to find purpose and direction in life, contrasting it with the state of “existential vacuum,” a condition of lack of meaning associated with apathy and maladjustment. Similarly, Maslow (1943, 1954) located meaning at the top of his hierarchy of needs: self-actualization, understood as the full expression of one’s potential, depends not only on the satisfaction of material or social needs but also on the integration of deep aspirations into a coherent life project. The self-actualized individual is one who follows authentic values, cultivates creativity, and often lives *peak experiences* characterized by unity with reality and inner fulfillment.

More recent frameworks have emphasized that the need for significance is not confined to the top of the hierarchy but instead cuts across different motivational levels. Being loved, belonging to a socially relevant group, or performing a recognized job are all ways in which significance can be realized (Kruglanski et al., 2025). In this view, meaning becomes a fundamental social need, underlying numerous motivational constructs identified in psychological literature. Established models such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Fiske’s taxonomy of needs (2003), and Higgins’s theory of three fundamental motives (2019) converge on the idea that human beings deeply aspire to feel important, appreciated, and capable of contributing to the value of their group. A similar emphasis on the social dimension of significance is found in Rosenberg and McCullough’s (1981) theory of Mattering, which identifies four main sources of personal relevance: attention (being noticed by others), importance (believing that one’s actions matter to others), dependence (arising from reciprocal

ties and obligations), and ego-extension (the awareness that others invest emotionally in us and are affected by our successes or failures). In other words, significance may be realized either through the perception of being recognized (feeling appreciated) or through the experience of contributing to something meaningful (adding value) – two core dimensions that structure the human experience of significance and reflect the need to be regarded as valuable and worthy by others (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021; Kruglanski et al., 2022).

These perspectives converge in viewing meaning as an essential element in the construction of identity. It is not only about knowing who one is, but also about assigning narrative coherence to one's choices, aspirations, and values, thereby building a self-perception that is stable over time. Each individual develops a "life story," a narrative that integrates fragmented events, significant relationships, and future projects into a coherent representation of the self, allowing recognition as intentional and valued agents (McAdams, 1993). In the absence of such a framework, identity risks becoming fragile, incoherent, or fragmented (Baumeister, 1991); conversely, when experiences are embedded within a meaningful narrative, the self appears cohesive, future-oriented, and capable of acting in the world with comprehensible and motivated intentions. In this sense, the need for significance is not an accessory element but a fundamental organizing force of identity: it provides structure to the self, sustains its continuity over time, and serves as an existential compass, orienting action and transforming experiences and relationships into a coherent narrative that makes life understandable and worth living (McAdams, 1993).

2.2 The Need for Significance in the Significance-Quest Theory

According to the SQT (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), the need for significance reflects the fundamental need to feel important, respected, and valued within one's social context, that is, to perceive one's life as meaningful. This sense of relevance largely depends on recognition

from significant others, often members of one's ingroup, who establish the criteria of value and serve as normative references.

Significance takes shape through dedication to shared values, expressed by acts of commitment, sacrifice, or conformity to group expectations (Kruglanski et al., 2018). It reflects what the culture regards as worthy of appreciation, such as valued competences or socially recognized achievements (Kruglanski et al., 2013). Significance increases in proportion to the importance of the value being promoted and the visibility of behaviors consistent with it, resulting in different criteria of significance across social contexts (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

In line with the SQT, the need for significance can take a dual form: at the individual level, it concerns the desire to feel important and recognized as a valuable person through the attainment of goals or the expression of appreciated qualities; at the collective level, it manifests as a striving for the valorization, recognition, and defense of one's group. Although rooted in a social dimension, significance can thus derive both from individual achievements and from collective dynamics, such as group prestige, inclusion, or protection in contexts perceived as threatening (Jasko et al., 2020; Bélanger et al., 2022; Eldor, 2023).

Individuals vary in their need for significance due to both individual predispositions and the influence of socialization and cultural environment (Kruglanski et al., 2025). Some people may have a higher need for significance than others, appearing more ambitious, more attentive to status, or more achievement-oriented; in such cases, the need for significance may manifest chronically, leading to frequent impulses to engage in behaviors perceived as meaningful. Others appear more moderate and less recognition-oriented. Nevertheless, most individuals are particularly sensitive to experiences of exclusion or devaluation, which are rarely met with indifference and are perceived as powerful threats to one's sense of significance (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

Although individual differences may be relatively stable, transient situational influences can temporarily increase the need for significance (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Jasko et al., 2017). The SQT distinguishes between global significance, that is, the subjective sense of desirable purpose and value, and situational significance, referring to meaning experienced in a specific moment or context. Events that generate discrepancies between these two levels activate the quest for significance (QFS), a motivational drive aimed at restoring significance (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022).

The QFS can emerge at both the personal level, when individuals seek relevance and recognition as singular agents, and the collective level, when the need arises from social identity and the value attributed to the ingroup (Jasko et al., 2020; Bélanger et al., 2022; Eldor, 2023). In the latter case, it constitutes a shared motivation aimed at reaffirming or strengthening the social relevance of the group. At both levels, for QFS to result in action, it must be activated and take priority over other concurrent concerns (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

2.3 Awakening the Quest for Significance

As with other motivational forces, the QFS is not always dominant in an individual's life. No one pursues significance incessantly: even highly ambitious individuals may invest their energies in alternative goals such as health, survival, or material well-being (Kruglanski et al., 2013, 2014).

According to the SQT, the activation of the QFS can occur in three main ways (Kruglanski et al., 2014): (1) significance loss (*deprivation*), for example following exclusion, failure, or humiliation; (2) threat or anticipation of a loss (*avoidance*), such as fear of social downgrading or devaluation; (3) opportunity for a significance gain (*incentive*), linked to the prospect of achieving greater recognition, status, or belonging.

These conditions can operate at both the individual and the collective level. Collective QFS tends to be more easily triggered in contexts marked by intergroup conflict, perceptions of injustice, or threats to ingroup dignity, where the defense or promotion of the group becomes a primary source of relevance (Jasko et al., 2020; Eldor, 2023). At the same time, personal achievements in culturally valued domains – such as work, education, attractiveness, courage, or moral integrity – may serve as powerful triggers of personal significance (Kruglanski et al., 2022, 2025).

Moreover, social transformations, collective narratives, or identity transitions may amplify or diminish the perception of significance, prompting behaviors aimed at its restoration or reinforcement (Kruglanski et al., 2025). It should be noted that individuals differ in their sensitivity to events that threaten their sense of significance (Downey et al., 1994; Kernis et al., 2008), as well as in their responsiveness to opportunities for gaining social recognition (Higgins, 1997).

2.3.1 Significance Loss

One of the main pathways through which QFS is activated is deprivation, understood as significance loss – the perception of having lost, or being at risk of losing, one’s social value and relevance.

This loss may occur at the individual level, following personal failures, rejection, exclusion, unemployment, trauma, or stigmatization, which create the perception of no longer being able to “add value” or to be worthy of appreciation and recognition within one’s community (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Kruglanski & Bertelsen, 2020). It may also occur at the collective level, when social identity is devalued or threatened in intergroup contexts, for example, through lack of respect for the ingroup or conflicts in which the group is perceived as humiliated

or excluded (Jasko et al., 2020; Eldor, 2023). In both cases, the experience of insignificance functions as a powerful motivational trigger.

According to the SQT, this process is not necessarily tied to a single event but can also derive from cumulative experiences, which over time generate a deep sense of insignificance and elicit the need to restore dignity and social recognition (Jasko et al., 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2018). A specific form of significance loss is conditional deprivation, or potential loss, in which individuals perceive that they may lose significance unless they act in a certain way; here, it is the anticipated rather than the actual loss that serves as a motivational incentive (maintenance of non-loss; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013, 2014).

A substantial body of empirical and experimental studies has documented the association between significance loss and behaviors aimed at restoring meaning. Research on detainees involved in extremist organizations (Jasko et al., 2020), samples from different cultural contexts (Webber et al., 2018), and individuals engaged in ideological crimes (Jasko et al., 2017) have shown that personal failures, relational exclusions, abuse, or humiliation increase the likelihood of supporting or engaging in violent actions.

Experimental evidence supports this relationship: significance loss, manipulated through experiences of social exclusion (Bäck et al., 2018), recall tasks of humiliating events (Webber et al., 2018), negative feedback (Kruglanski et al., 2014), or the induction of guilt (Bélanger et al., 2019), has been shown to strengthen radical identification, intentions of self-sacrifice, social interdependence, and the motivation to commit to causes perceived as meaningful.

The meta-analysis by Da Silva et al. (2024) synthesized these findings, showing that loss or threat of significance systematically predicts extreme attitudes and behaviors, particularly when the loss is experienced in relation to one's group and attributed to collective injustice. In such

cases, defending or promoting the ingroup becomes a primary source of significance, channeling motivation along identity-based and restorative pathways.

However, significance loss does not inevitably lead to violent or destructive outcomes (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021; Kruglanski et al., 2025). Although still limited, growing evidence suggests that it may also activate normative responses of a prosocial, civic, or transformative nature, depending on the cultural narratives available, contextual opportunities, and the social networks to which individuals are exposed (Da Silva et al., 2024). In this sense, it is not the loss itself that determines the outcome but rather how it is interpreted and channeled (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

2.3.2 Significance Gain

Beyond the experience of significance loss, individuals may also be driven by the prospect of significance gain: in this case, the drive for significance is not reactive but promotional, linked to the possibility of increasing relevance, respect, and social admiration, that is, of “becoming someone” (Kruglanski et al., 2019, 2022).

At the personal level, the prospect of significance gain activates the QFS when experiences of success or recognition strengthen perceptions of competence, prestige, or positive self-evaluation. Exposure to admired models, for example, increases aspirations to pursue high-level goals and makes them appear more attainable (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997, 1999); reflecting on a “personal hero” heightens the desire for significance (Hasbrouck, 2020). Even indirect manipulations, such as reading articles on the value of meaning in personal achievement, have been shown to increase willingness to engage in demanding peaceful actions (Molinario et al., 2025).

The QFS may also be fueled by the aspiration to engage in causes perceived as greater than the self. When individuals attribute deep personal importance to political values embodied in a political cause, the resulting sense of significance can inspire their willingness to sacrifice and sustain long-term commitment (Jasko et al., 2019). This drive is not limited to defending one's own group: the opportunity to contribute to socially relevant missions – such as movements for justice or equality – can awaken the quest for significance by embedding individual lives in broader collective struggles (Kruglanski et al., 2025). In some cases, this investment reaches beyond immediate group boundaries. A striking historical example is that of foreign volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War: although they had no direct ties to the parties in conflict, they derived a sense of significance from committing themselves to a cause they deemed worthy (Webber et al., 2017).

Alongside these dynamics, experiences of recognition and admiration of the ingroup – such as sporting or cultural successes, international prestige, or positive contributions in times of global crisis – can generate collective significance gain. These events strengthen collective pride and the perception of the group's moral virtue (Leach et al., 2007; Ellemers, 2017), reducing the need for defensive reactions and, in some cases, fostering more positive attitudes toward outgroups and supportive actions (Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1999; Vázquez et al., 2022). However, studies specifically conducted within the SQT framework on these processes remain scarce, and the connection between ingroup valorization and the activation of the QFS remains a largely unexplored research area.

It should also be noted that significance gain may, in some cases, predict commitment and willingness to sacrifice more strongly than loss alone: the experience of significance acquired through engagement in a cause has emerged as a stronger predictor of future participation than significance loss (Jasko et al., 2019; Molinario et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the literature

indicates that experiences of loss or threat generally represent faster and more powerful triggers than opportunities for gain, in line with the principle of loss aversion (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Baumeister et al., 2001). Thus, whereas the aspiration for significance gain may foster dedication and engagement, it is often the perception of a loss – real or anticipated – that constitutes the most decisive trigger of the QFS.

Overall, the SQT suggests that the QFS may be triggered both by experiences of deprivation and opportunities for significance gain, and that these dynamics may unfold at either the personal or the collective level. In this regard, the theory aligns with Higgins' Regulatory Focus Theory (2012), according to which human motivation may be oriented toward either prevention or promotion. The perceived distance between the present condition and the aspired state of social value constitutes the key motivational lever: when this gap is perceived as bridgeable, the QFS is strongly activated, directing individuals toward commitment, excellence, and participation.

2.4 The “How” of the Quest for Significance: Needs, Narratives, and Networks

To satisfy the drive for significance, individuals must identify socially appropriate means to obtain recognition and value (Kruglanski et al., 2019). These means are expressed through dedicated and committed acts to shared values, which define what a community considers admirable and worthy, thereby contributing to the construction of a “shared reality” (Higgins, 2019). Cultural narratives play a crucial role in this process: they establish the link between values and behaviors, indicating which actions or attributes allow individuals to acquire significance and prestige. Since such value references are neither universal nor immutable, significance is a dynamic construction shaped by social changes, such as the evolution of norms, collective expectations, and available opportunities (Kruglanski et al., 2019, 2022).

In this perspective, the SQT brings together different contributions that identify the need for significance as a central motivational force and elucidates its functioning through the 3N model. This model highlights three interconnected pillars at the core of the quest: needs, narratives, and social networks (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2019; Bélanger et al., 2019).

The attribution of significance depends on the alignment between relevant values and behaviors, enabled by shared narratives and sustained by reference networks. Once the QFS is activated, individuals rely on these networks, which provide the legitimizing narrative and indicate which actions are “worthy” of significance – that is, the most effective means of closing the gap between the current state and the desired state of social relevance (Kruglanski et al., 2019, 2022).

2.4.1 Narratives

Research on the meaning in life highlights that cultural and ideological narratives provide interpretive frameworks through which individuals attribute significance to themselves and the world (Baumeister, 1991; McAdams, 1996). Such narratives do not merely describe reality but establish what is desirable, worthy, and morally justified, thereby defining meaningful goals (Kruglanski et al., 2018; Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014). By pursuing these goals, individuals affirm their identity and confer value upon their existence (Steele, 1988; George & Park, 2016).

For significance-oriented motivation to translate into behavior, it is necessary to identify a culturally legitimized means. Experiences of loss or gain may activate the QFS, but it is the cultural narrative that provides the “map” indicating how significance can be restored or acquired.

Narratives are inherently ideological, rooted in the shared reality of the ingroup and reinforced by social bonds and cultural norms (Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014). As collective systems of belief, ideologies guide choices and behaviors, particularly when the ingroup perceives itself as threatened (Kruglanski et al., 2014). In such circumstances, defending the group may be redefined as a primary mission, turning engagement into a means of restoring or enhancing significance (Zartman et al., 2011). Values tied to the group's existence and well-being are often perceived as sacred, and their protection ensures maximum respect and recognition (Atran, 2010). Consistently, Jasko et al. (2019) show that the greater the personal relevance of central ideological values, the stronger the individual's commitment.

The normative content of narratives plays a decisive role, as the same motivational drive can lead to opposite outcomes. Narratives that valorize peaceful resistance channel the QFS into civic and solidaristic forms of activism – for instance, in racial justice movements (Cole-Dixon & Winston-Proctor, 2025) – whereas narratives rooted in honor or intergroup conflict may orient it toward extremism, political violence, or non-violent practices of exclusion (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

Cultural narratives thus operate as interpretive filters that legitimize certain courses of action as appropriate means of satisfying the need for significance, showing how different ideologies can justify profoundly divergent behaviors – violent or non-violent, prosocial or hostile – based on the same experience of QFS activation.

2.4.2 Network

Once individuals adhere to an ideological narrative that defines the appropriate means to attain significance, a fundamental requirement arises: the search for social validation. As Bélanger et al. (2019) observe, people tend to affiliate with others who share their beliefs and worldviews, since the meaning ascribed to a narrative remains fragile without recognition from

a reference community. The validity of an ideology itself depends on the collective consensus that sustains it (Webber et al., 2018; Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

Social networks can range from informal circles of friends, peers, and family to structured religious or political organizations, both of which supply a strong and coherent normative framework (Sageman, 2004). Networks function as epistemic authorities, indicating not only “how the world works” but also which behaviors are deemed valid and worthy of recognition (Kruglanski et al., 2005). They perform two primary functions: (1) making a narrative accessible and salient, legitimizing it through repetition and collective approval; and (2) conferring status and prestige on those who embody the group’s core values (Anderson et al., 2015; Bendersky & Pai, 2018; Buss et al., 2020; Levine & Kruglanski, 2022). In this way, the network becomes both an incubator and an amplifier of the narrative, safeguarding its “sacred” values and reinforcing the behavioral norms necessary to satisfy the need for significance (Kruglanski et al., 2018).

Networks and narratives are thus deeply interdependent: the former transmit and strengthen specific ideological contents, while the latter legitimize the means through which individuals and groups affirm and defend their values (Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014).

Empirical evidence supports this dynamic. For instance, Leander et al. (2020) showed that significance loss predicts adherence to prejudicial narratives: in a sample of U.S. adults, existential frustration was associated with support for the Christian nationalist movement, which in turn correlated with antisemitic beliefs and reduced condemnation of hate crimes. Similarly, Dugas et al. (2016) demonstrated that after experiences of social exclusion or personal failure, participants were more inclined to engage in personal sacrifice when such sacrifice was promoted or legitimized by a significant group.

Field studies have further highlighted the role of networks. Webber et al. (2018) observed that personal significance loss increased susceptibility to radicalism only in the presence of cohesive networks endorsing strongly shared extreme narratives, whereas this effect diminished in the absence of social support. Likewise, research on non-violent activism has shown that social networks are crucial in sustaining significance motivation and channeling it toward prosocial engagement (Klein & Kruglanski, 2013; Jasko et al., 2019; Molinario et al., 2022).

Overall, this evidence confirms that the QFS requires a social anchor to translate into action: networks and narratives not only legitimize the means but also shape the direction of behavior, determining how motivation will develop.

2.5 From Motivation to Action: Agency and the Collectivistic Shift

The activation of the QFS represents a critical moment in the individual's motivational dynamics; however, as discussed, activation alone does not automatically translate into action. For the QFS to result in concrete behavior, it must take precedence over other goals, be supported by culturally legitimized narratives, and receive reinforcement from social networks capable of validating it (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2019, 2022; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018). In this perspective, agency functions as the bridge between motivation and action, reflecting the capacity to transform needs and aspirations into concrete choices through intentionality and control over the environment (Bandura, 2001; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Kruglanski et al., 2022).

Emotionally, success in attaining significance generates pride, social value, and personal satisfaction, reinforcing future willingness to sacrifice (Jasko et al., 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2022). Conversely, failure may elicit shame or frustration and foster the search for alternative strategies (Steele, 1988). This reflects a degree of flexibility: when one path to significance fails, individuals often replace it with alternatives perceived as more effective, consistent with research on self-affirmation (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981; Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

This adaptive logic also extends to the identity level, as highlighted by the collectivistic shift – the redirection of motivational focus from the self to the group (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013). According to the SQT, when individuals experience the activation of the QFS, they may restore or enhance significance by reinforcing their orientation toward the ingroup, redefining the self in interdependent terms, and deriving dignity and value from the defense of collective ideals (Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Orehek & Kruglanski, 2018). Beyond offering belonging and recognition, the ingroup also functions as a normative container prescribing which behaviors are regarded as valuable. Thus, individuals guided by the QFS tend to prioritize collective over individual goals and are motivated to engage in concrete actions for the group’s benefit, actions that acquire lasting value and reinforce individual reputation within the social network (Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014). For instance, in a large-scale investigation conducted across twelve Arab countries, as well as Pakistan and Indonesia, Kruglanski et al. (2012) found that participants reporting lower personal success were more likely to identify as members of the collective than those who were more satisfied. Similar findings emerged in other studies (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Orehek et al., 2011), where experiences of failure or negative feedback increased national identification, self-interdependence, and the preference for collective over individual tasks.

When personal significance falters, individuals often turn to the group as a reservoir of meaning, deriving value from acting on its behalf. This interdependent orientation, however, is highly flexible: under inclusive ideological frames it fosters solidarity and mutual support, whereas in exclusionary contexts the same drive can legitimize hostility toward outgroups, restrictions of rights, or even political violence (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011, 2012; Orehek et al., 2011).

2.6 Trajectories of the Quest for Significance: The Polarization of Outcomes

The QFS is a powerful motivational force capable of directing human behavior along profoundly divergent paths: the same motivation can lead to building or destroying, to sacrificing oneself for others, or to attacking others to restore the self (Kruglanski et al., 2025). It may therefore find expression either in prosocial forms of engagement, such as solidarity and cooperation, or in antagonistic dynamics characterized by hostility and violence. In both cases, individuals act on the basis of values perceived as sacred and non-negotiable, undertaking behaviors considered instrumental to restoring, consolidating, or enhancing their sense of significance.

This ambivalence lies at the heart of the SQT: the need for significance has no inherent or univocal direction (Kruglanski et al., 2022). Outcomes depend on the ideological narratives embraced, the social networks that reinforce them, and the means considered legitimate for restoring or enhancing significance. The QFS thus offers a lens to understand the full spectrum of collective behavior, from violent radicalization to civic participation and activism. The following sections examine (1) its role in violent extremism and (2) its transformative potential when channeled into non-violent collective actions.

2.6.1 The Role of the Quest for Significance in Violent Extremism

Extensive research within the SQT shows that violent extremism can represent a behavioral response to the activation of the QFS (for a systematic review, see Da Silva et al., 2024). Experiences of humiliation, marginalization, loss of status, or perceived powerlessness may intensify the drive toward extreme violent conducts, particularly when two conditions converge: the availability of an ideological narrative that identifies an enemy and legitimizes violence as a noble means, and the presence of a radicalized social network that sustains such a narrative, provides resources, and rewards commitment (Kruglanski et al., 2019; Ellenberg & Kruglanski,

2024; Webber & Kruglanski, 2016; Webber et al., 2018). One of the most extreme and dramatic manifestations of this process is terrorism, defined as the deliberate use of violence (often involving personal sacrifice) for political, religious, or ideological purposes (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018).

In a large-scale study on individuals involved in ideological crimes in the United States, Jasko et al. (2017) found that economic or social strains significantly increased the likelihood of violence, especially in radicalized network contexts. Similarly, Webber et al. (2017) observed that suicide attackers reporting higher levels of QFS inflicted greater damage than those with weaker motivational drives. Experimental studies further confirm causality: Bélanger et al. (2014), for instance, showed that enhancing significance needs increased acceptance of violence when framed as a pathway to social redemption.

The collective dimension of the QFS further explains how extremist groups operate as motivational multipliers, offering meaning, belonging, and recognition. Through dynamics of polarization, internal selection, intergroup competition, and radicalizing social interactions, networks legitimize sacrifice and reframe it as heroic (Ellenberg & Kruglanski, 2024). Importantly, individuals do not always internalize extremist ideologies prior to joining; many are initially attracted by the promise of recognition and only later adopt the group's worldview.

The communicative dimension also plays a crucial role. Analyses of extremist propaganda reveal how it draws on the QFS by emphasizing sacrifice, honor, and the struggle for the group (Zmigrod et al., 2021). The strategic use of such narratives and conspiracy theories strengthens internal cohesion and channels the need for significance into hostility against outgroups perceived as threats, reinforcing a rigid “us versus them” dichotomy (Rousis et al., 2020). In particular, *honor talk* – discourse centered on restoring respect – translates personal frustration into a moral code that justifies violence (Di Cicco et al., 2025).

The need for significance is not pathological in itself; its consequences depend on sociocultural conditions. When polarizing narratives are reinforced by networks that reward extremism, violence may appear as a legitimate path to restore self and group.

2.6.2 The Quest for Significance as a Driver of Nonviolent Collective Action

Beyond violent radicalization, the QFS can also foster nonviolent forms of collective engagement (e.g., Jasko et al., 2019; Vestergren et al., 2017). The underlying motivation remains constant, but its behavioral expression varies depending on ideological framing legitimized through moderate or democratic social networks that provide opportunities and resources (Kruglanski et al., 2022). For many individuals, violence is neither viable nor a desirable option: under these circumstances, collective engagement takes socially accepted forms, such as peaceful protests, civic campaigns, political participation, or support for public policies (Kruglanski et al., 2013, 2018; Cole-Dixon & Winston-Proctor, 2025).

However, nonviolent collective action is not a unitary phenomenon. It may be intragroup-oriented, aiming to protect or enhance the ingroup (e.g., labor mobilizations or cultural recognition movements), or intergroup-oriented, directed toward other groups. In the latter case, engagement may be solidaristic – such as activism for human rights or social justice – or defensive and exclusionary, including xenophobic mobilizations or support for exclusionary measures (Reicher et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2009; Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021). In all cases, collective action serves as a means of reaffirming personal value and identity, demonstrating commitment to a meaningful cause, and responding to loss of control or social uncertainty through forms of agency that restore coherence and purpose to individual experience (Fritsche et al., 2013; Cole-Dixon & Winston-Proctor, 2025).

A growing body of empirical evidence supports the role of QFS in nonviolent collective engagement. For example, Mahfud and Adam-Troian (2021) found that in the French *Yellow*

Gilet movement, feelings of anomie and loss of significance triggered heterogeneous collective behaviors, some peaceful yet primarily oriented toward ingroup protection and outgroup delegitimization. A similar mechanism emerged in minority identity contexts: Górska et al. (2024) showed that among LGBTQ+ individuals, collective narcissism – used as a proxy of the collective quest for significance – was linked to greater support for normative but potentially polarizing or hostile collective actions.

In the field of environmental and prosocial activism, Molinario et al. (2019) demonstrated that QFS functioned as a shared motivation among individuals engaged in costly forms of participation, such as ecological volunteering or civic mobilizations. In this case, the key determinant was not loss of significance but the ideological orientation guiding behavior. Consistently, Jasko et al. (2019) found that willingness to undertake peaceful action and personal sacrifice increased when the cause was perceived as fundamental, with engagement producing enhanced personal significance. Nonviolent political activism was thus primarily predicted by significance gains associated with the cause and by the readiness to invest personal resources.

Comparable dynamics have also been documented in polarized political contexts. In a series of studies conducted before and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Jasko et al. (2020) observed that QFS could stimulate nonviolent action among both Clinton and Trump supporters. Yet, the direction of engagement – more hostile or more inclusive toward the outgroup – depended on the significance attributed to electoral victory or defeat and on the dominant ideological framing within the ingroup.

Despite these insights, empirical research remains limited in examining how QFS translates into specific nonviolent actions, particularly in intergroup contexts. Most studies have focused on extremism and violence, overlooking the normative forms of participation that characterize

everyday democratic life (for a systematic review, see Da Silva et al., 2024). Moreover, although scholarships have emphasized the role of protective factors – such as moderate networks or inclusive ideologies – that can channel QFS into peaceful engagement and reduce the appeal of extremism (Ellenberg & Kruglanski, 2024), the possibility that this motivational drive may also underpin collective actions directed toward other groups has received little attention.

Furthermore, as noted by Webber et al. (2017), opportunities to acquire significance are not limited to the struggles of one's ingroup but may also arise from injustices faced by other groups or even from events unrelated to one's collective identity. This suggests that QFS can extend beyond the boundaries of group membership, opening a promising line of inquiry into intergroup processes.

To date, however, two key gaps remain insufficiently addressed in the literature. First, while SQT research has extensively examined how the QFS fuels violent extremism (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2019; Jasko et al., 2017; Webber et al., 2018), much less is known about the mechanisms through which this motivation can give rise to prosocial and nonviolent collective actions. Existing studies highlight that significance needs can be channelled into peaceful engagement under certain ideological and normative conditions (e.g., Molinario et al., 2019, 2025), yet systematic theorization and empirical testing of how and when this occurs remain limited (Da Silva et al., 2024).

Second, despite growing interest in the collective dimension of significance (e.g., Jasko et al., 2019; Eldor, 2023), research has not yet systematically examined how a collective quest for significance operates within intergroup contexts. Existing contributions have mainly addressed intragroup dynamics – for instance, collective narcissism as a form of group-level significance striving (Jasko et al., 2019) – or mobilizations centred on protecting or enhancing the ingroup.

Yet, while research on collective action has shown that struggles for recognition and group-based identity concerns can motivate both protective and exclusionary mobilizations (van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2024; Tausch et al., 2011), the specific role of collective significance concerns in shaping attitudes and collective actions toward other groups remains largely unexplored, especially in the context of migration.

This thesis is situated within this largely unexplored research area: the application of the SQT to nonviolent intergroup engagement. Its central aim is to examine how the activation of the QFS may orient individuals toward divergent collective actions – ranging from inclusive solidarity with migrants to exclusionary mobilizations against them – within the polarized field of migration.

Chapter 3.

Significance and Collective Action: An Integrative Framework for Understanding Responses to Migration

We live in an era marked by the global intensification of social protest. From mobilizations for racial justice and climate action (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Fridays for Future), to pro-democracy movements, reactions against migration policies, and waves of solidarity and contestation sparked by international conflicts, collective participation has returned to the center of the contemporary political and cultural arena.

Individuals and groups increasingly seek to publicly affirm who they are and what they believe in, mobilizing to defend shared values or to challenge norms perceived as unjust (van Zomeren et al., 2018). Collective action, in this context, appears not only as a relevant phenomenon but also as a transformative and symbolically rich process (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022).

Acting collectively often means more than opposing what is rejected: it entails affirming a vision of the world, repositioning oneself in the social landscape, reaffirming identity, and feeling part of something larger. In this sense, collective engagement represents a response to the need to confer meaning on individual and collective experience, and to affirm a coherent and socially relevant self (Duncan, 1999; van Zomeren, 2013; Kruglanski et al., 2022). Collective action thus becomes a means of constructing and negotiating significance: through it, individuals actively shape a world aligned with their values, beliefs, and needs, thereby securing identity confirmation and social legitimacy (Radke et al., 2020; Petkanopoulou et al., 2025).

When participation is anchored in narratives that frame the cause as noble and is sustained by a socially validated sense of moral legitimacy, it assumes a form that is simultaneously political, relational, and existential (van Zomeren et al., 2011; Louis et al., 2020).

In contemporary societies, social transformations – such as increasing cultural diversity and debates on boundaries and belonging triggered by migration – become occasions for members of host communities to question who they are, what they fear, and what they aspire to become. Some mobilize to reaffirm values of justice, inclusion, and solidarity; others to defend norms, identities, and boundaries perceived as threatened. In both cases, collective action reflects an attempt to restore a coherent sense of self and world.

This thesis builds on this perspective, examining collective action toward migrants through the lens of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022; Jasko et al., 2020). Protesting, joining a movement, or even signing a petition are not merely political or ideological acts; they are actions motivated by the need to feel significant, to matter to oneself and to others. The quest for significance (QFS) does not simply accompany collective action: it generates it, directs it, and endows it with meaning. Collective engagement thus becomes a means through which personal and collective significance can be recovered, reaffirmed, or constructed, particularly in times of crisis, disorientation, or social change.

The present chapter begins with a reflection on the concept of collective action and on the reasons why it has become central to the study of contemporary social dynamics. It then traces the development of the main theoretical models that explain when and why individuals choose to participate in collective efforts. Finally, the focus shifts to migration as a particularly salient case of polarization, where collective action can take either solidaristic or exclusionary forms. In this context, the quest for significance intersects with intergroup and intragroup processes, channeling majority-group engagement in opposite directions

3.1 What Is Collective Action?

Traditionally defined as “any action undertaken by one or more individuals on behalf of a group, with the aim of promoting or resisting social or political change” (Wright et al., 1990; Klandermans, 2002; van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009), collective action has progressively acquired a more complex connotation. Recent definitions highlight its duality: on the one hand, collective action can serve as a force for change in favor of disadvantaged groups; on the other, it can be expressed as the defense of the identity, boundaries, and values of one’s ingroup (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021).

Unlike individual forms of protest or deviance, collective action is grounded in a shared sense of belonging and a common perception of injustice, purpose, or threat. However, it does not necessarily require a “visible” or co-present collective. As argued by Klandermans (2002) and van Zomeren and Iyer (2009), what defines an action as collective is its goal rather than the number of participants or the simultaneity of their behaviors. In this perspective, collective action includes not only mass political activities, such as demonstrations and strikes, but also seemingly individual acts, such as signing a petition, expressing support for a cause, or endorsing a party or organization representing one’s group interests. Its collective dimension thus lies in its purpose – social change or the protection of a social order – rather than in its external form.

Protests in recent decades illustrate that collective actions do not share uniform goals or motivations. A central distinction concerns the direction of collective engagement, that is, the target of its orientation (Petkanopoulou et al., 2021; Smeekes et al., 2022; Choma et al., 2024): in favor of the ingroup (*ingroup protection*), against an outgroup (*outgroup rejection*), or in support of an outgroup (*outgroup protection*). This tripartition captures the diversity of collective engagement: some mobilizations aim to defend the status and values of the ingroup

from external threats (e.g., nationalist movements); others are explicitly directed toward excluding, stigmatizing, or restricting the rights of an outgroup perceived as deviant, dangerous, or inferior (e.g., xenophobic demonstrations, anti-minority campaigns, opposition to inclusive policies); still others are oriented toward supporting vulnerable or stigmatized groups (e.g., refugee advocacy, anti-discrimination campaigns, public defense of minorities). In all cases, collective action constitutes an expression of agency and reflects a worldview grounded in what is considered just.

At the same time, collective actions may be interpreted in opposite ways depending on the observer's ideological or cultural standpoint (e.g., Moreira et al., 2018; Abou-Ismaïl et al., 2024): what some view as a solidaristic gesture can be perceived by others as a threat to national identity, while anti-immigrant mobilization may be framed as legitimate ingroup protection. Accordingly, collective actions embody social narratives about who we are, who we aspire to be, and who we choose to include or exclude in shaping our collective horizon (van Zomeren, 2013; Petkanopoulou et al., 2025).

Another distinction concerns the normative or non-normative form of collective action (Louis et al., 2020; Shuman et al., 2021): the former complies with social and legal norms (e.g., authorized marches, signature campaigns), whereas the latter may violate formal rules and directly challenge the established order (e.g., road blockages, occupations, sabotage).

This multiplicity of directions and forms – normative or non-normative, inclusive or exclusive, transformative or defensive – reflects different worldviews and modes of attributing social meaning. These are not contingent variations but expressions of deep psychosocial motivations that guide individuals in deciding whether, how, and for whom to act. Understanding such dynamics requires careful analysis of the underlying processes, a purpose that has driven the main theoretical models of collective action developed over the past decades.

3.2 The Evolution of Models of Collective Action

What drives people to participate in collective actions? Numerous theoretical answers have been offered to this question. Only in recent decades, however, has the psychological understanding of collective action undergone a significant shift: from approaches focused on single motivations to more integrated and dynamic models capable of capturing its complexity.

One of the earliest attempts is represented by Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT; Stouffer et al., 1949; Runciman, 1966; Crosby, 1976), which shows how the perception of an unjust disadvantage, arising from comparisons with other individuals or groups perceived as more favored, generates a sense of relative deprivation that can stimulate collective action aimed at redressing the perceived injustice (Walker & Smith, 2002). A crucial development concerned the role of intergroup emotions in the transition from perceived injustice to action: subsequent studies demonstrated that it is not merely the perception of inequality, but the negative emotional activation associated with it – particularly collective anger – that constitutes the primary driver of collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2004; Iyer et al., 2007).

In parallel, research inspired by Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) emphasized the central role of ingroup identification in explaining the propensity for collective engagement. According to this perspective, when intergroup boundaries are perceived as impermeable, ingroup disadvantage as illegitimate, and the social order as unstable, individuals tend to reinforce ingroup identification and engage in social competition, of which collective action is a central expression (Wright et al., 1990). Further developments introduced the concept of politicized identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), defined as identification with a structured social movement oriented toward change. This identity provides a shared normative framework and generates an inner sense of obligation to participate. Politicized identity thus links

individual experience to a collective project of transformation, making mobilization not only possible but also necessary.

A third contribution came from Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), which focused on perceptions of collective efficacy, that is, the belief that one's group can effectively bring about the desired change (Klandermans, 1984; Mummendey et al., 1999). Beyond highlighting the role of resources, this approach underscored the importance of organizational structures and leadership in sustaining mobilization, showing that collective action requires not only shared grievances but also the coordination and capacity to transform them into effective strategies.

Building on the integration of these three perspectives, van Zomeren et al. (2008) proposed the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), a theoretical and meta-analytical framework identifying three "core motivations" underlying collective engagement: group identification, the psychological bond between the individual and the ingroup; group-based anger, an emotion arising from the perception that the ingroup has been treated unfairly; and group efficacy beliefs, the shared conviction that the group is capable of producing concrete change through action. Social identity is the cornerstone of SIMCA: as a system of shared meaning (Turner, 1991), it functions both as a direct predictor of collective action and as a lens shaping perceptions of injustice, by making group-based grievances more salient (Branscombe et al., 1999), and perceptions of efficacy, by reinforcing a sense of collective power (Drury & Reicher, 2005).

Over the years, SIMCA has been the subject of numerous refinements, extensions, and reformulations (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2009; Abrams & Grant, 2012; Thomas et al., 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2012; Becker & Tausch, 2015). However, these developments did not explicitly

integrate morality as a fourth, distinct motivation for collective action, nor did they systematically account for structural constraints that may shape or limit such motivations.

A turning point came with the inclusion of moral convictions – deep, absolute, and non-negotiable beliefs about what is right or wrong (Skitka et al., 2005; Skitka, 2010) – recognized as a powerful driver of mobilization, particularly when perceived injustices violate fundamental ethical values (van Zomeren et al., 2012). This extension was first formalized by van Zomeren (2013), who proposed a model in which morality is considered alongside the other three core motivations. The inclusion of morality made SIMCA more theoretically inclusive and applicable not only to disadvantaged groups but also to advantaged group members mobilizing for principled reasons. In this way, the model bridged the gap between identity-based mobilization and morally motivated mobilization, where action is grounded in a sense of ethical obligation rather than group interests (van Zomeren et al., 2013).

These insights were further developed in the Dual Chamber Model of Collective Action (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), which integrates morality and politicized identity into the motivational process. The model distinguishes between two “motivational chambers”: the chamber of injustice, fueled by moral emotions such as anger, indignation, and disgust, oriented toward restoring a violated order; and the chamber of efficacy, guided by strategic evaluations and the perception of being able to effect tangible change. Each chamber can be activated independently or simultaneously, and their interaction not only produces a stronger and more persistent motivation but also determines the form of collective action undertaken. With the Dual Chamber Model, the focus shifts from explaining whether people participate to understanding how, why, and in what ways they mobilize, in light of the interplay between personal, social, and cultural factors.

In conclusion, the evolution of models of collective action reflects a shift from fragmented approaches focused on single predictors to integrated and multidimensional frameworks capable of explaining the diversity of collective trajectories. Nevertheless, these models often overlook the deeper motivational driver of engagement: the need to restore, affirm, or attain a sense of personal and social significance. Political participation, mobilizations, and even radical forms of protest can thus be understood as situated practices of meaning-making, in which individuals respond to a perceived rupture between what is and what they aspire to be. From this perspective, the SQT (Kruglanski et al., 2009; 2022) offers a unifying framework that traces the multiple forms of collective engagement back to a primary motivational engine: the quest for significance.

3.3 The Polarization of Collective Engagement Toward Migrants

Collective action has long been understood as the primary means through which disadvantaged groups can challenge the existing order and claim improvements in their social status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright et al., 1990; Klandermans, 2002). Over the past two decades, however, scholarship has broadened this perspective, recognizing that members of dominant groups may also participate in collective actions not directly concerning their own interests, aimed at influencing the conditions of other social groups (Subašić et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2011; Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021).

Collective mobilizations toward other groups may take prosocial forms, most notably solidaristic ones, in which social actors support minority or stigmatized groups by embracing causes perceived as morally relevant and by challenging inequalities seen as unjust (Saguy et al., 2009; Louis et al., 2020). Recent examples include large-scale pro-migrant demonstrations across Europe during the 2022-2024 humanitarian corridors campaigns, as well as the widespread pro-Palestine mobilizations observed across Western cities following the escalation

of violence in Gaza. Other precedents further illustrate the magnitude of solidaristic engagement: the Day Without Immigrants protests in the United States (May 1, 2006), which mobilized over one million participants in cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Dallas, and the humanitarian solidarity rallies supporting sea-rescue NGOs – including the *Seebrücke-Schafft sichere Häfen* demonstrations in Germany (over 240,000 participants between 2018 and 2019); and the large gatherings in support of Sea-Watch documented in Rome, Milan, Berlin, and Barcelona (2018-2019). In Italy, the “*Marcia delle donne e degli uomini scalzi*” (September 11, 2015) involved around 60 cities and the adhesion of over 300 associations (e.g., Amnesty International, Emergency, Médecins Sans Frontières). Between 2015 and 2017, numerous grassroots initiatives by NGOs, faith-based groups, and volunteer networks also provided humanitarian assistance to migrants in transit or stranded in reception bottlenecks.

At the same time, they may unfold in the opposite direction, promoting exclusionary actions designed to restrict rights, reinforce social and symbolic boundaries, and maintain privileged status. This is exemplified by far-right anti-immigration marches such as the PEGIDA demonstrations in Germany, which gathered tens of thousands of participants at their peak in 2015. In Italy, numerous local protests have targeted reception centers: for instance, the demonstrations in Goro and Gorino (Italy, 2016), against the arrival of asylum-seeking women and minors. According to a Lunaria report (2017), dozens of protests occurred nationwide against the opening or presence of migrant reception facilities, often accompanied by petitions and signature campaigns demanding their closure. Similar dynamics have emerged across other Western contexts, including anti-immigration rallies during the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom (2016) and large marches supporting stricter border-control and deportation policies in Italy and the United States during the 2017-2019 America First mobilizations.

In both cases, collective action functions as a mechanism for negotiating one's position within the social system and for expressing values and beliefs (van Zomeren et al., 2024).

Migration offers a particularly salient context for examining majority-group mobilizations (e.g., Verkuyten, 2017). The presence of migrants elicits a plurality of collective responses, often coexisting within the same environment, making migration a fertile ground for analyzing both the dynamics that drive action in support of or against lower-status groups and the polarization of responses to diversity and the psychological processes that sustain them.

Hostile collective actions toward migrants include protests against reception, anti-immigration campaigns, and support for exclusionary policies (Verkuyten et al., 2022). Such mobilizations are reinforced by perceived ingroup norms (Postmes & Smith, 2009), authoritarian ideologies, and zero-sum views of resources (van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009; Shepherd et al., 2018; Smeekes et al., 2022). These processes intertwine with exclusionary rhetoric that legitimizes opposition and strengthens ingroup cohesion (Giorgi & Vitale, 2017).

A crucial factor is the perception that migrants threaten national identity, social cohesion, or access to material resources (Stephan et al., 1999; Esses et al., 2013). Such perceptions trigger emotional escalation – fear, anger, and disgust – that legitimizes hostile attitudes (prejudice) and increases willingness to engage in anti-migrant collective action (Shepherd et al., 2018). In this context, collective action against migrants is perceived as a legitimate response to threats to collective identity and perceived loss of ingroup control (Jetten et al., 2004; Outten et al., 2012). These processes are further reinforced by defensive national identifications, fueled by narratives of cultural decline or “ethnic replacement,” which harden intergroup boundaries (Smeekes et al., 2022).

Dispositional traits and ideological orientations also predispose individuals toward oppositional action. Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Social Dominance Orientation

(SDO), Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC), and adherence to binding moral foundations of loyalty, authority, and purity consistently predict anti-migrant mobilizations (Kruglanski et al., 2006; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011; De Cristofaro et al., 2019).

Such actions are also rooted in a logic of “inverted injustice,” the belief that migrants receive excessive protection or undue advantages at the expense of natives. This perception fosters feelings of relative deprivation and a sense of violated meritocracy, in which citizens’ status appears threatened by a presumed overturning of the social order (Walker & Smith, 2002; Jetten & Wohl, 2012).

Taken together, these dynamics can be effectively interpreted through the lens of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022). From this perspective, intergroup hostility becomes a means of restoring and enhancing personal and collective significance. Aggressive defense of the ingroup serves to reestablish order and prestige in contexts perceived as unstable, offering a sense of agency and redemption, especially when status or control appears threatened.

At the same time, a growing body of research investigates the motivations that lead majority-group members to mobilize in support of migrants, even in the absence of direct benefits (e.g., Louis et al., 2019; Saab et al., 2015). Such actions include prosocial engagement in human rights movements, volunteering, signing petitions for inclusion, or campaigning against discriminatory migration policies.

This solidaristic commitment often arises from perceptions of moral injustice, where migrants are depicted as innocent victims of an unfair system. Such representations activate moral emotions – such as sympathy, indignation, and collective guilt – together with convictions and perceptions of collective efficacy, the belief that coordinated action can generate positive change (Thomas et al., 2009; Saab et al., 2015). A further key factor is

identification with migrants as vulnerable individuals, fostered by empathic processes (Batson et al., 2002) and reinforced by universal justice values and inclusive moral orientations (Skitka, 2010; van Zomeren et al., 2011). Therefore, this form of collective action serves as an expression of the moral self and underlying value system; when consistent with one's identity and worldview, it gains legitimacy, sustainability, and motivational force (Reimer et al., 2025).

Intergroup allyship research further shows that members of high-status groups may support disadvantaged groups when they perceive their action as legitimate, effective, and compatible with their social identity (Subašić et al., 2008). Such involvement is reinforced by politicized identification with pro-migrant movements (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), cosmopolitan views of citizenship (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), and universalist moral orientations that emphasize human dignity (Hadarics & Kende, 2018; van Zomeren, 2013). However, motivations remain heterogeneous: Radke et al. (2020) distinguish four main orientations – outgroup-focused (genuine desire for social change), ingroup-focused (defense of identity and privilege), personal (seeking approval, recognition, or consistency with the ideal self), and moral (internalized duty and alignment between moral convictions and public actions).

Within this framework, pro-migrant collective action can also be interpreted through the SQT (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022). For majority-group members, support for migrants is not merely an empathetic or altruistic act but a means of restoring and affirming significance: it allows them to feel part of a shared cause perceived as relevant and capable of generating concrete change. Solidarity thus emerges as a specific form of collective prosociality, whereby natives act on behalf of migrants not only to promote their well-being but also to defend universal values and principles of justice. Thus, prosocial collective engagement serves to reaffirm efficacy, foster a coherent and committed identity, and position oneself within a global narrative of justice that values participatory action (e.g., Pica et al., 2025; Lui et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this perspective allows us to understand collective engagement as an expression of the quest for significance (QFS), coherence, and belonging, where shared agency becomes the means by which individuals reaffirm their value in the social world. The ambivalence of responses to migration can thus be clearly understood considering the SQT: the same motivational drive – the desire to matter and be relevant – can lead to profoundly divergent outcomes, depending on the ideological narratives and social networks that channel it. The QFS has no intrinsic direction; it functions as a neutral force shaped by how individuals interpret social reality, perceive other groups, and define their role within the system. In the migration context, this translates into divergent trajectories of collective engagement, ranging from solidarity to ingroup defense, from openness to exclusion.

Research Questions and Overview of the Empirical Chapters

After examining the migratory phenomenon in its global and national dimensions as a structural, political, and psychosocial issue that generates opposing representations and polarized social reactions (Esses, 2021), the thesis outlines the conceptual framework of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022). It highlights how the quest for significance (QFS) can orient individuals into different outcomes depending on ideological narratives, social networks, and intergroup dynamics (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2019). The integration of this perspective into major motivational models of collective action is still at an early stage, laying the groundwork for the empirical investigation of the QFS as a driving force behind social responses to the presence of migrants. These responses constitute ways through which individuals and groups translate deep motivational needs into social practices (Cabaniss & Cameron, 2017).

The literature has shown how the SQT has made a major contribution to clarifying the processes underlying violent radicalization (for a systematic review, see Da Silva et al., 2024); however, its explanatory potential with regard to forms of nonviolent collective action remains underexplored. In particular, to our knowledge, it has not been sufficiently examined how the loss or gain of significance, and the consequent activation of the QFS, intersect with identity, moral, and intergroup processes to channel majority-group members toward divergent trajectories of mobilization in relation to migrants. This theoretical and empirical gap appears even more relevant given that migration today represents one of the most polarizing issues in the global public sphere, within national and international contexts (Giorgi & Vitale, 2017).

From these observations emerges the central research question guiding this thesis:
What determines the divergent forms of collective action – ranging from inclusionary to exclusionary – undertaken by members of host societies?

Building on this, the dissertation also addresses a broader theoretical question: *How is the quest for significance – at the personal or collective level – activated and directed in ways that channel the same motivational drive into either inclusive or exclusionary forms of collective action?*

To address these questions, the thesis is organized into two broader sections, each composed of a series of cross-sectional and experimental studies, which investigate the role of the QFS – at both the personal and collective levels – as a psychological driver of majority-group members' participation in pro- and anti-migrant collective actions.

The first empirical section focuses on the personal dimension of the quest for significance. Across five studies conducted in Italy and one study in the United States, it investigates how individual experiences of loss of value, recognition, or social inclusion activate QFS, which can unfold along two divergent trajectories: one leading to exclusionary mobilization against migrants (Studies 1-3), and the other fostering solidaristic engagement in their favor (Studies 4a-4b). Which trajectory prevails depends on the attitudinal, moral, and identity-related processes at play.

An exploratory study (Study 1; Italy) tested the basic motivational model, showing that perceptions of significance loss increase the QFS, which in turn was associated with a stronger propensity toward anti-migrant intentions of collective engagement. This initial evidence suggested an asymmetry: in the absence of further orienting factors, the motivational drive was more easily channeled into exclusionary rather than solidaristic outcomes.

To extend this model, subsequent studies introduced mediating and moderating processes. Study 2a (Italy), based on a cross-sectional design, examined prejudice toward migrants as an attitudinal mechanism connecting personal QFS to collective action. Findings showed that significance loss fostered prejudice against migrants, which in turn promoted intentions and

behaviors of exclusionary mobilization (e.g., signing petitions against migrants) while simultaneously reducing solidaristic engagement. Study 2b (U.S.) implemented an experimental design: participants were randomly assigned to recall autobiographical experiences of social exclusion, social inclusion, or a neutral event. These findings provided causal support for the hypothesized pathway previously tested cross-sectionally: the exclusion condition successfully induced perceived loss of significance, which increased QFS, heightened prejudice, and, consequently, amplified anti-migrant action tendencies.

Study 3 (Italy) focused on the moderating role of morality, with particular attention to the moral foundation of Proportionality (Atari et al., 2023), which guides judgments and actions by balancing costs, merits, blame, and corresponding rewards or punishments. The analyses tested the interaction between prejudice and Proportionality, showing that this moral principle functions as a normative filter: among participants high in Proportionality, the prejudice-mediated path toward exclusionary mobilization was weaker, while the negative indirect path toward solidaristic action became stronger. Thus, morality did not eliminate the motivational impact of QFS but regulated how it translated into collective engagement through prejudice, underscoring the central role of moral frameworks in channeling significance-restoration efforts.

The next two studies explored an alternative trajectory in which QFS can promote solidarity rather than hostility. Study 4a (Italy, cross-sectional) revealed that QFS, triggered by personal loss, increased identification with pro-migrant activist groups, which in turn predicted both intentions to engage in collective action and actual petition signing in support of migrants. Study 4b (Italy, experimental) corroborated this pathway by using the *Cyberball* paradigm (Williams et al., 2000, 2007) to induce significance loss via social exclusion. Findings confirmed that exclusion increased QFS, reinforced identification with pro-migrant activists,

and strengthened intentions for solidaristic collective mobilization. Taken together, these studies provide both correlational and causal evidence that personal QFS can lead to positive engagement when the social context offers such opportunities.

The second empirical section shifts the focus from the individual to the intergroup level, analyzing how the need for significance is elaborated collectively. In two studies (Study 5 and Study 6) conducted in Spain, we examined how shared perceptions of loss or gain of status, relevance, or prestige by the ingroup (i.e., the Spanish country) – and the consequent activation of the collective quest for significance (CQFS) – can motivate divergent attitudes and behaviors toward migrants. Study 5 (cross-sectional) found that higher CQFS was associated with stronger support for exclusionary policies, suggesting that CQFS may orient toward defensive mobilization. Following, Study 6 manipulated collective significance through a recall task of collective loss, collective gain, or neutral events at the national level. Findings showed that recalling collective loss heightened perceived threat and diminished the moral worth attributed to migrants, thereby reducing support for inclusive actions and increasing endorsement of exclusionary policies. In contrast, participants in the control condition did not exhibit these defensive patterns, suggesting that exclusionary reactions emerge specifically in response to the loss of collective significance. Theoretically, however, the collective quest for significance is not inherently exclusionary: depending on how collective experiences are framed, it holds the potential to unfold into trajectories of either hostility or solidarity.

SECTION 1

Dual Pathways of Significance: From the Personal Quest to Collective Action Toward Migrants

Throughout history, human beings have not merely sought to survive; they have continually strived to matter, to leave a mark, and to be recognized and valued within their social context. This striving for significance – the desire to be seen as important, worthy of respect, and socially valued – represents a fundamental driver of human behavior (Baumeister, 1991).

As discussed in the previous chapters, within the framework of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), the quest for significance (QFS) represents a motivational process triggered by experiences of loss or threat to one's personal value and relevance. This section focuses on its personal dimension, examining how such experiences can activate the drive to restore significance, agency, and belonging through engagement in collective actions toward migrants. According to the 3N model (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018; Bélanger et al., 2019), this process unfolds dynamically through the interaction of need, narrative, and network – that is, the motivation to regain significance, the ideological frames that channel it, and the social environments that legitimize and sustain it.

From this perspective, collective actions become a situated practice of significance-making (Drury & Reicher, 2009; van Zomeren, 2013): taking a stance, mobilizing, or even simply signing a petition constitutes an act of self-affirmation, a way to align oneself with a cause perceived as noble or morally urgent (Thomas et al., 2022). Importantly, the QFS operates as a neutral motivational force: it does not predetermine the direction of action but rather triggers it, making opposing outcomes possible (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022).

Migration represents a particularly salient ground on which to observe these dynamics. The presence of migrants offers majority-group members a symbolic context in which to redefine

their relevance and social position (Esses et al., 2021), eliciting divergent collective responses: from solidarity in support of migrants to hostility aimed at excluding them. Both trajectories can be understood as expressions of the same motivational tension. On the one hand, pro-migrant activism provides an avenue to embody values of justice and inclusion; on the other, anti-migrant mobilization offers a defensive response that reaffirms norms, boundaries, and ingroup belonging (Webber et al., 2017; Kruglanski & Bertelsen, 2020).

This section, therefore, examines how the personal QFS can fuel either inclusive or exclusionary forms of collective action toward migrants. Specifically, it is proposed that subjective experiences of significance loss activate a compensatory motivation that may be directed toward contrasting collective behaviors, depending on individual dispositions and interpretive contexts. To investigate these dynamics, the section is divided into two subsections, corresponding to two primary pathways.

The research opens with an exploratory cross-sectional study conducted in Italy (Study 1), which examined the associations between significance loss, QFS, and intentions for both pro- and anti-migrant collective action. This study provided initial evidence of the link between personal QFS and different forms of collective engagement toward migrants, laying the groundwork for more integrated models tested in subsequent studies.

The first subsection (Studies 2a, 2b, 3) analyzes the role of prejudice toward migrants as a mediator of the relationship between personal QFS and collective action. Here, prejudice is not conceived merely as a negative attitude toward the outgroup but as a motivated response with a specific function within the SQT. When individuals experience significance loss, a strong tension emerges toward its restoration. Under these conditions, the ingroup becomes not only more salient but also the primary vehicle for regaining relevance and status (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Leander et al., 2020). Defending and reasserting the ingroup – especially when

it holds a dominant position – serves as a way to restore a perceived legitimate order and, with it, one's own social importance (Jost et al., 2017).

From this perspective, prejudice against migrants can be understood as a means of redefining the self through the protection of the ingroup and the delegitimization of an outgroup perceived as threatening (Esses et al., 2001; Stephan et al., 2005). Personal QFS may thus be channeled into oppositional forms of collective engagement: prejudice would function as the central mechanism that transforms individual motivation into exclusionary mobilization and encourages adherence to movements emphasizing ingroup superiority, thereby reinforcing hostile and discriminatory narratives against migrants (Shepherd et al., 2018; Leander et al., 2020).

Within this pathway, Study 3 also examines the moderating role of the moral foundation of Proportionality (Rai & Fiske, 2011; Haidt, 2012; Atari et al., 2023). This moral orientation reflects a meritocratic conception of justice, grounded in the proportionality between effort, contribution, and reward. The study investigates how this moral lens shapes the relationship between prejudice and collective action, influencing the direction and intensity of responses toward migrants within the model where QFS operates through prejudice.

The second subsection (Studies 4a and 4b) explores a possible prosocial outcome of the personal QFS, asking how significance loss may not necessarily lead to opposition toward the outgroup but may instead activate processes of identification with groups engaged in inclusive causes, such as those supporting migrants. In this perspective, identification with pro-migrant movements is examined as a mediator between personal QFS and intentions to engage in solidaristic collective action.

The central idea is that, when confronted with experiences of devaluation or failure, individuals actively seek recognition, purpose, and belonging. Groups embodying significant

and larger-than-self causes provide opportunities to restore personal worth, thereby becoming objects of identification. As the literature suggests, the QFS strengthens the tendency to seek belonging in groups that provide meaning and direction (Hogg, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2025), and identification with activist movements is a well-established predictor of collective engagement (van Zomeren et al., 2008). In particular, politicized identification with solidarity movements may channel personal QFS into prosocial directions, offering an ideological narrative that legitimizes engagement and aligns personal motivations with collective values (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Thomas et al., 2009; Webber et al., 2017).

This section shows that personal QFS represents a dynamic and flexible motivational force: rooted in experiences of loss, yet capable of being directed toward divergent trajectories depending on the moral, narrative, and identity frames through which it is elaborated and expressed in action.

a. Study 1

This first exploratory study is situated within the framework of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), which conceives the quest for significance (QFS) as a universal motivational process, activated by experiences of loss or threat to one's personal and social value. As a means of restoring or acquiring significance, the QFS can translate into profoundly divergent forms of collective participation, whose direction depends on the ideological narratives that provide meaning and the social networks that legitimize and sustain action (Webber et al., 2018; Bélanger et al., 2019; Jasko et al., 2019). To date, most research on the SQT has focused on extreme and violent behaviors, while little attention has been devoted to how personal QFS may translate into normative, daily, and socially accepted forms of intergroup collective action, particularly in mobilizations related to migration.

The Italian migration context offers a particularly relevant ground for investigating this link. Over the past decades, Italy has undergone a profound transformation from a country of emigration to one of Europe's main immigration destinations, becoming a receiving and transit society embedded in complex Mediterranean routes (IDOS, 2024). The presence of migrants has increasingly occupied the center of political and media debate, where migration is frequently framed as a 'permanent emergency' and associated with deviance, insecurity, and crisis – even in the absence of real increases in flows (Maneri & Pogliano, 2024; Ambrosetti & Miccoli, 2025). This discursive landscape, dominated by alarmist narratives and highly polarized rhetoric, has turned migration into an ideological battleground and a tool for political mobilization, shaping public perceptions and legitimizing restrictive policy shifts (Radicioni et al., 2021; IDOS, 2024).

Within this polarized climate coexist contrasting interpretative frames: sovereignty-security perspectives emphasizing control and exclusion, paternalistic-assistentialist narratives that

humanize while reproducing asymmetries, and more marginal universalist frames advocating for rights and participation (Fani, 2025; Giorgi & Vitale, 2017). These competing narratives structure the social meanings attributed to migrants and contribute to divergent collective responses – ranging from solidaristic engagement during humanitarian crises to local protests against reception centers and exclusionary mobilizations fueled by security rhetoric.

In this context, migration represents an empirical setting ideally suited for observing how the same motivational drive can be channeled in opposite directions, providing a unique opportunity to examine the social and psychological mechanisms that orient individuals toward either support for or opposition to migrants (Voci & Pagotto, 2010; Maneri et al., 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present exploratory cross-sectional study represents a first step toward examining how perceived loss of personal significance (LOS) is associated with the activation of QFS and, through it, with intentions to engage in normative forms of collective action both supporting or opposing migrants. To this end, we proposed a simple mediation model specifying LOS as the independent variable, QFS as the mediator, and intentions toward pro-migrant and anti-migrant collective actions as two separate dependent variables (see Fig. 1). The aim is to provide preliminary empirical support for the plausibility of this motivational pathway, testing whether individuals who perceive greater loss of significance also report a stronger drive to restore it via QFS, and whether this drive translates into divergent forms of engagement – ranging from solidaristic to exclusionary collective actions.

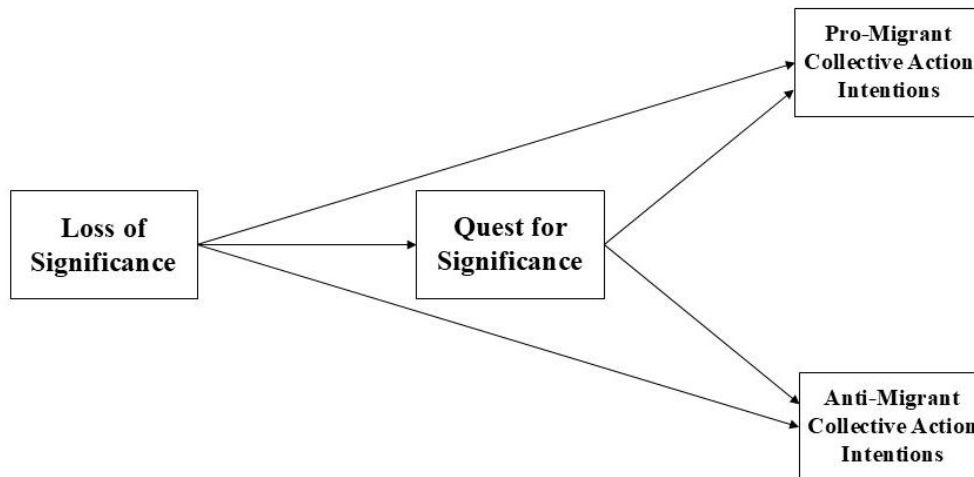


Figure 1. Conceptual path model.

i. Method

Participants

We determined the required sample size through an a priori power analysis based on a Monte Carlo replication approach (Schoemann et al., 2017). The analysis assumed a conservative medium-small effect size ($r = .25$; Cohen, 2013) and a desired statistical power of $1 - \beta = .80$. Following Schoemann's recommendations, we conducted 5,000 replications with 20,000 Monte Carlo draws per replication. Results indicated that a minimum of 224 participants was required to achieve a power of $1 - \beta = .81$ (95% *CI* [.80, .81]).

The final sample consisted of 282 Italian adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 28.72$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.16$; 61.3% women). Sociodemographic variables collected included age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, and political orientation (assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 = extreme left, 7 = extreme right; $M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.53$). Full sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling procedure. Psychology students were instructed to invite non-student adults to participate in the study in exchange for extra course credits. After reading and providing informed consent, participants completed an online questionnaire administered via Qualtrics. At the end of the survey, they received a brief written debriefing.

The questionnaire included measures of the key constructs under investigation, presented in a fixed order: dispositional personal loss of significance, personal quest for significance, and collective action intentions both in favor of and against migrants. In the final section, participants reported sociodemographic information.

Perceived personal loss of significance (LOS) was measured with the Loss of Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021), consisting of 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Totally disagree,” 5 = “Totally agree”). The items included both positively and negatively worded statements (e.g., “I feel insignificant,” “I feel important,” “I feel humiliated”), which were reverse-coded when necessary. A composite score was computed, with higher values indicating greater perceived loss of significance ($\alpha = .76$; $\omega = .77$; $M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.64$).

Personal quest for significance (QFS) was measured with the Significance Quest Scale (SQS; Şahin & Derin, 2023), comprising 26 items translated into Italian and rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Not at all true for me,” 5 = “Completely true for me”). Example items include: “I want everyone around me to like me” and “I want everyone to approve of what I do.” In line with the theoretical approach and previous studies using this measure (Şahin, 2022, 2025; Şahin & Derin, 2023), the overall QFS score was calculated as the mean of all items, with higher values reflecting stronger QFS ($\alpha = .91$; $\omega = .91$; $M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.71$). Details of the

confirmatory factor analyses conducted to support the use of the scale as a unidimensional measure are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Collective action intentions were measured using an adaptation of items from van Zomeren et al. (2004, 2008), designed to assess participants' willingness to engage in actions both supporting and opposing migrants. The scale consisted of 10 items (five pro-migrant and five anti-migrant), rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Not at all willing," 5 = "Very willing"). Example items included: "I would participate in a demonstration in favor of immigrants" (pro-migrant) and "I would do something together with others against immigrants" (anti-migrant). Two composite indices were computed: intentions toward pro-migrant collective action ($\alpha = .95$; $\omega = .96$; $M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.19$) and intentions toward anti-migrant collective action ($\alpha = .86$; $\omega = .86$; $M = 1.49$, $SD = 2.55$), with higher scores indicating greater willingness to engage in the respective actions.

ii. Results

Preliminary analyses

Before testing the hypotheses, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the main study variables were examined (see Tables 1-2).

<i>Factor</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Loss of Significance</i>	2.21	0.64	0.60	0.02
<i>Quest for Significance</i>	2.45	0.71	0.21	-0.29
<i>Pro-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	3.59	1.19	-0.54	-0.61
<i>Anti-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	1.49	2.55	1.63	-0.54
<i>Political Orientation</i>	2.96	1.52	0.05	-0.93

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. LOS	-					
2. QFS	0.21***	-				
3. CAP	0.02	-0.05	-			
4. CAN	0.10	0.18**	-0.59***	-		
5. AGE	-0.14*	-0.23***	-0.07	-0.04	-	
6. PO	-0.05	0.08	-0.05	-0.02	0.06	-

Table 2. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Note. LOS = Loss of Significance; QFS = Quest for Significance; CAP = Pro-Migrant Collective Actions; CAN = Anti-Migrant Collective Actions; PO = Political Orientation

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Mediation Analysis

To test the hypothesized mediation model, we conducted a path analysis using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Indirect effects were estimated using a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. Political orientation was included as a covariate. The tested model is presented in Figure 2.

R^2 values indicated that the model explained 5.1% of the variance in QFS, 0.5% of the variance in pro-migrant collective action intentions, and 3.6% of the variance in anti-migrant intentions.

Results showed that LOS was significantly and positively associated with QFS ($\beta = 0.21$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.098, 0.328]$). In turn, QFS was significantly and positively related to anti-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = 0.17$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .003$, 95% $CI [0.063, 0.294]$), but not to pro-migrant intentions ($\beta = -0.06$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.40$, 95% $CI [-0.183, 0.072]$).

The direct effect of LOS on collective action intentions was not significant, either for anti-migrant ($\beta = 0.06$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.29$, 95% $CI [-0.049, 0.166]$) or pro-migrant actions ($\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.67$, 95% $CI [-0.094, 0.146]$).

The indirect effect via QFS was significant only for anti-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .02$, 95% $CI [0.005, 0.066]$), but not for pro-migrant actions ($\beta = -0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .43$, 95% $CI [-0.041, 0.017]$). This suggests that perceived loss of significance does not directly increase willingness to engage in hostile collective actions but may do so indirectly by activating a motivational drive to restore significance. No such mechanism was observed for pro-migrant collective actions.

Finally, the total effects were non-significant for both pro-migrant ($\beta = 0.01$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.81$, 95% $CI [-0.100, 0.129]$) and anti-migrant actions ($\beta = 0.09$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.10$, 95% $CI [-0.017, 0.205]$), consistent with full mediation.

Political orientation, included as a covariate, was not a significant predictor of either dependent variable.

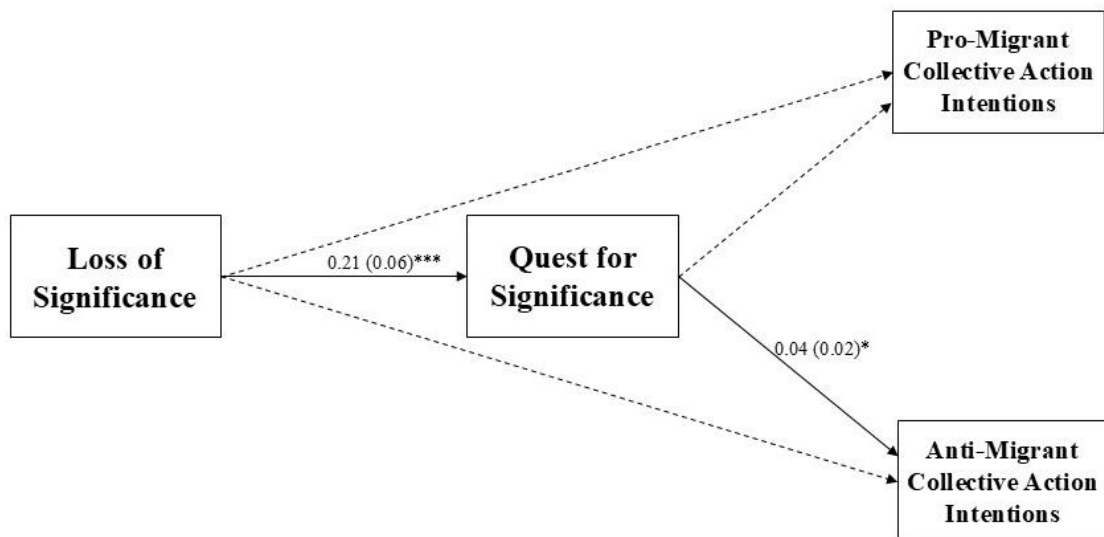


Figure 2. Path model testing the role of the quest for significance as a mediator of the relationship between loss of significance and collective action intentions toward migrants (pro-migrant and anti-migrant). Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Notes. β (SE) for each path; Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

iii. Discussion and Limitations

This exploratory study aimed to examine whether perceived loss of significance (LOS) was associated with the personal quest for significance (QFS) and, through it, with intentions for pro- and anti-migrant collective action.

Consistent with the SQT (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), findings confirmed a positive association between LOS and QFS: the more participants experienced a sense of insignificance, the more they reported a motivation to restore their personal relevance, rooted in the fundamental need to be valued and recognized by oneself and by others (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski & Bertelsen, 2020). Loss of significance disrupts the individual's motivational balance, activating the tendency to seek “appropriate vehicles of significance” as defined by the sociocultural context (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022; Webber et al., 2017).

However, this motivation was not symmetrically linked to the two forms of collective action investigated. QFS was positively associated with anti-migrant intentions but not with pro-migrant intentions. This asymmetry suggests that, in this context, the drive to restore significance was more readily directed toward defending the ingroup than toward openness to the outgroup. According to the SQT, the trajectory of QFS depends on the ideological, normative, and relational frames that provide meaning and define legitimate ways of restoring significance (Webber et al., 2018; Bélanger et al., 2019; Jasko et al., 2019). When narratives emphasize threats to security or cultural identity, perceived ingroup injustice, or vulnerability, and when social networks legitimize exclusionary strategies, QFS is more likely to find expression in collective actions against the outgroup (Kruglanski et al., 2018; Webber et al., 2020). By contrast, inclusive and solidaristic forms of collective action require contexts that highlight prosocial values, helping norms, and superordinate identifications that frame engagement as a meaningful and desirable response (Thomas et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al.,

2012). Under such conditions, an ideological orientation toward openness and prosociality can channel QFS into cooperative and inclusive outcomes (Kruglanski et al., 2021). The absence of an association with pro-migrant actions may therefore reflect, in the Italian context examined, the limited accessibility of shared normative frameworks and cultural repertoires capable of directing QFS toward intergroup solidarity. In the absence of such frames, the motivational drive to restore significance is more immediately expressed in oppositional rather than solidaristic engagement.

Methodologically, the analysis revealed full mediation in the case of anti-migrant actions, indicating that the effect of significance loss was entirely conveyed through the activation of QFS. The absence of a parallel effect for pro-migrant actions raises questions about the social and psychological conditions under which the same motivation may be redirected toward inclusive trajectories.

Overall, the findings of this exploratory study offer initial evidence for the link between personal QFS and divergent forms of collective action toward migrants, thereby opening avenues for further investigation on the factors that shape whether natives' motivational drive is channeled into solidarity or exclusion.

Some limitations should be acknowledged: cross-sectional design, non-probability sampling, and sample composition reduce the possibility of drawing causal inferences and limit the generalizability of results. Moreover, the relatively small proportion of explained variance points to the likely role of additional factors not included in the model. Even so, the tested mediation provides preliminary support for the plausibility of the proposed pathway and lays the groundwork for the subsequent empirical studies in this thesis, which aim to address these limitations and further unpack the dynamics underlying the orientation of collective engagement toward migrants.

SECTION 1.1

The Dark Side of Significance: The Role of Anti-Migrant Prejudice and Proportionality in Motivating Collective Actions Toward Migrants

a. General Introduction

According to the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), when individuals experience a loss or diminution of personal significance, a motivational tension arises aimed at restoring relevance. Under such conditions, the ingroup becomes the primary reference point, as it provides belonging, status, and identity continuity (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011). Appeals to protect the ingroup and reject the outgroup thus offer an immediate and shared narrative through which individuals can re-establish coherence and personal worth (Leander et al., 2020; Stephan et al., 2005). This dynamic is particularly evident in the migratory context, where demographic and social changes are often imbued with symbolic meanings that transcend their material dimension. Migrants become symbolic figures through which boundaries of belonging are redefined and cultural order renegotiated, with the outgroup assuming the role of a “target” through which individuals and groups seek to restore centrality.

In line with these premises, the first study showed that personal QFS, activated by perceived loss, was selectively associated with intentions to engage in anti-migrant, but not pro-migrant, collective action. This suggests that, at least in some contexts, the most immediate and effective avenue for restoring significance lies in defensive mobilization aimed at protecting the ingroup and rejecting the migrant outgroup, rather than in prosocial or solidaristic forms of action.

Building on this preliminary evidence, the present subsection examines the mechanisms underlying this process, with a primary focus on prejudice toward migrants. When migrants are perceived as culturally distant or as a potential threat to collective well-being, prejudice can be internalized as a strategy for re-establishing relevance and reinforcing belonging (Leander et

al., 2020). It operates by legitimizing discriminatory behaviors, framed as consistent with the defense of social order and cultural values, and deployed to promote, sustain, and defend the ingroup (Shepherd et al., 2018; Rullo et al., 2022).

At the same time, the SQT emphasizes the importance of normative and moral frames provided by the social environment in determining the legitimacy of means for restoring significance (Kruglanski et al., 2018; Bélanger et al., 2019). These frames define which responses are perceived as just, proportionate, or socially acceptable (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018). In other words, significance is not reconstructed in a vacuum, but shaped within shared value systems that delineate what appears morally defensible or condemnable.

The orientation toward proportional justice – where rewards and punishments correspond to individual effort and contribution – represents a key normative principle in how people judge the legitimacy of social relations. This orientation has recently been conceptualized as the moral foundation of Proportionality, now integrated into the Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Haidt, 2012; Atari et al., 2023). Unlike other conceptions of justice, such as Equality, Proportionality emphasizes the link between individual responsibility and outcomes (Deutsch, 1975). This moral principle becomes especially salient in intergroup contexts marked by perceived scarcity of resources or symbolic competition, as in the case of migration, where relations are often framed through zero-sum logics and distributive justice concerns (Esses et al., 2013, 2017). Within these contexts, Proportionality may shape how anti-migrant prejudice – activated by QFS – translates into collective action. It can amplify exclusionary mobilization when hostility is perceived as a fair and proportionate response, or, conversely, it can dampen mobilization when the disadvantage of the outgroup is deemed already justified within the existing social order, making further action unnecessary.

Analyzing these processes helps clarify how the motivation to restore personal significance can be channeled into trajectories leading to predominantly exclusionary intergroup collective actions. At the same time, it opens the way to a broader reflection on the dynamics underpinning the polarization of social responses to migration, showing how individual motivational needs, intergroup attitudes, and shared moral frames intertwine in shaping the pathways of collective mobilization.

The Role of Prejudice Toward Migrants in the Relationship Between the Quest for Significance and Collective Actions Toward Migrants

Migration processes and the marginalization of ethnic minorities in host societies represent crucial issues for collective well-being and social cohesion (Esses, 2021). Host-society members' attitudes play a decisive role, as they influence not only the orientation and severity of migration policies but also the quality of intergroup relations, shaping the degree of inclusion and social harmony (for a review, see Albarello et al., 2023). These attitudes affect, for instance, support for migration management measures – ranging from the number of entries allowed, to the severity of policies, to the type of support granted to newcomers (Reyna et al., 2013) – as well as the treatment of immigrants, with significant consequences not only for their well-being and life opportunities but also for the social climate of host communities and for broader processes of social and cultural integration, thereby defining the overall tone of intergroup relations (Christ et al., 2014; Fussell, 2014).

At the same time, migration is also one of the main drivers of polarization in public debate. A substantial portion of the population perceives migrants as a threat to economic resources, stability, and cultural cohesion, a perception that fuels prejudice and discriminatory behaviors (Esses, 2021; Nese, 2023). In recent decades, overt prejudice against migrants has partly given way to subtler or ambivalent expressions, manifesting as avoidance or lack of respect in public

spaces, targeted surveillance in shops, paternalistic attitudes, or bullying in schools (Dovidio et al., 2013; Quillian, 2006; Bayram Özdemir et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2019; Alivernini et al., 2019). This does not mean, however, that more severe forms of discrimination have disappeared: migrants remain exposed to social exclusion, isolation, and hate speech (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020).

Social-psychological approaches to prejudice have highlighted how individual differences, ideological orientations, and motivational needs can explain variation in attitudes toward stigmatized groups. Personality traits (e.g., authoritarianism), ideological positions (e.g., social dominance orientation), and epistemic motivations (e.g., need for cognitive closure) contribute to shaping perceptions and evaluations of the outgroup (for a review, see Albarello et al., 2023).

Within this perspective, the SQT provides a useful framework for understanding the conditions under which hostile attitudes toward migrants develop. Prejudice should not be understood merely as a set of negative evaluations, but as a motivated response through which individuals seek to satisfy the need for significance (Leander et al., 2020). When people perceive a loss of personal or collective relevance – stemming from exclusion, marginalization, or loss of status – prejudice against culturally distinct groups can function as a means of reasserting status and importance. In this way, it addresses deep needs for identity and belonging, offering a narrative that defines who belongs to “us” and who is relegated to “them,” and relocates the individual and the ingroup into a position of superiority, often at the expense of the outgroup (Dixon et al., 2012; Leander et al., 2020).

This dynamic is especially salient when the threat is symbolic – linked to identity, values, or cultural belonging – rather than material. As Stephan et al. (1998, 2005) demonstrated, hostile reactions toward migrants more often stem from perceptions of value incompatibility than from competition over tangible resources. In such circumstances, prejudicial narratives

offer a rapid means of restoring worth and recognition, as they provide a justification for defending the symbolic boundaries of the ingroup and maintaining a social order perceived as legitimate. In this way, the motivational drive for significance may be channeled into collective goals supported by the representation of the outgroup as a threat to the ingroup's system of values, thereby legitimizing discriminatory conduct and exclusionary practices (Dixon et al., 2012; Rullo et al., 2022).

In the present research context, prejudice is thus conceived as a motivational hinge that potentially links the activation of QFS to forms of collective mobilization against migrants, translating individual needs for relevance into orientations and behavioral intentions. Although the literature remains limited, some evidence indicates that prejudice constitutes a significant antecedent of participation in collective action against minority groups, in some cases even more influential than collective emotions (Shepherd et al., 2018). Majority groups may engage in reactionary forms of collective action, mobilizing anti-migrant prejudice as a motivational resource to protect privileges and status, justify exclusionary policies, or even encourage episodes of violence (Dixon et al., 2012). From this perspective, prejudice plays a dual role: it is both an obstacle to intergroup coexistence and a lever of collective mobilization that shapes the contours of social conflict. It may provide a justification, grounded in the restoration of significance, that renders support for exclusionary mobilization socially acceptable while simultaneously reducing endorsement of inclusive or solidaristic initiatives.

Examining this dynamic is therefore fundamental for understanding the polarization of collective responses to migration.

The Role of Proportionality in the Relationship between Quest for Significance, Intergroup Attitudes, and Collective Actions toward Migrants

Morality can be understood as a set of shared principles and norms that guide judgments, attitudes, and behaviors in collective life. As a system of rules, it not only facilitates coexistence and coordinates group interactions but also serves as a compass for evaluating and treating outgroup members (for a systematic review, see Ellemers et al., 2019; Argüello-Gutiérrez et al., 2024). According to Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Graham et al., 2009; Atari et al., 2023), moral intuitions stem from innate foundations rooted in evolution but shaped by the sociocultural environment. They are articulated into six main domains – Care, Fairness, Proportionality, Loyalty, Authority, and Purity – which constitute the basis of moral reasoning and guide the interpretation of social situations and intergroup relations (van Leeuwen & Park, 2009; Skitka, 2010; Hatemi et al., 2019; Strupp-Levitsky et al., 2020).

Applied to the migration context, moral foundations contribute to shaping perceptions of migrants, fostering either inclusive representations or, conversely, perceptions of threat (Brambilla et al., 2013). They influence the interpretation of native-migrant dynamics, sustaining attitudes that range from solidarity to hostility (e.g., Leach et al., 2015; López-Rodríguez & Zagefka, 2015; Hadarics & Kende, 2018; Nicol & Rounding, 2018; Monroe & Plant, 2019; Petrović, 2019; Mobayed & Sanders, 2022). A substantial body of research has distinguished between individualizing foundations (Care and Fairness), oriented toward the protection of rights and well-being, and binding foundations (Loyalty, Authority, and Purity), centered on defending community ties and social order (Graham, 2013). Individualizing foundations are associated with greater openness toward the outgroup and support for equality-oriented collective movements (Smith et al., 2014; Nilsson et al., 2016; Milesi, 2017; Wilhelm

et al., 2020). By contrast, binding foundations are often linked to lower prosocial intentions toward the outgroup and higher levels of prejudice (Nilsson et al., 2016; Low & Wui, 2016; Baldner & Pierro, 2019; Bianco et al., 2021; Bianco & Kosic, 2023). Strong endorsement of binding foundations, combined with low valuation of individualizing ones, is associated with perceiving migrants as a cultural threat and with support for discriminatory practices against them (Smith et al., 2014; Kugler et al., 2014; Hadarics & Kende, 2017).

MFT thus provides a useful framework for studying collective action, showing how different moral orientations can foster involvement in inclusive movements – grounded in justice and equality – or in exclusionary mobilizations, rooted in adherence to community ties and defense of social order (Milesi & Alberici, 2018). To further enrich this theoretical framework, the moral foundation of Proportionality has recently been integrated into MFT (Atari et al., 2023). This foundation introduces a principle of proportional justice, whereby rewards and punishments should correspond to individual contributions, efforts, or responsibilities (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Unlike Equality, which implies the equal distribution of resources regardless of individual merit, Proportionality emphasizes the correspondence between merits or faults and their respective outcomes, rewarding effort and penalizing negligence or harmful behavior (Haidt, 2012). In this sense, Proportionality thus resonates strongly with the principle of meritocracy, which applies the same logic to the distribution of social rewards (Skurka et al., 2020). Recent studies confirm its conceptual and empirical distinctiveness from other foundations, as well as its cross-cutting position between individualizing and binding domains (Meindl et al., 2019; Skurka et al., 2020; Atari et al., 2023; Frisari et al., 2025).

Although meritocracy has often been associated with conservatism (Jost et al., 2017), Skurka et al. (2020) showed that Proportionality is valued across the political spectrum:

conservatives consider it highly relevant, even more than traditional binding foundations, while liberals do not reject its importance, though they prioritize individualizing foundations. This supports Haidt's (2012) observation that "everyone – left, right, and center – cares about proportionality, but conservatives care more" (p. 5), suggesting that this foundation may represent a basic moral criterion in social and political evaluations.

The importance attributed to proportional justice becomes particularly salient in contexts of inequality (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Reay, 2018; Roex et al., 2019). Meritocratic and proportional beliefs can shape intergroup attitudes and resource allocation decisions (McCoy & Major, 2007; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009; Testé et al., 2012). In such contexts, these beliefs not only persist but often reinforce themselves (Mijs, 2021; Morris et al., 2022), functioning as a mechanism of system justification (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost et al., 2017; Bonora et al., *unpublished manuscript*), and reducing support for redistributive policies (McCoy & Major, 2007). From the perspective of natives, the perception of a meritocratic society can strengthen the legitimation of inequalities, especially toward migrants. This often results in a form of "selective solidarity," in which redistribution is supported only when it benefits majority-group members, perceived as more deserving (Magni, 2020). Adherence to meritocratic principles may thus sustain exclusionary attitudes and behaviors, feeding the belief that migrants are unfairly advantaged or undeserving (Hedegaard, 2019). In this framework, migrants' disadvantage is not interpreted as the result of structural barriers, but as the natural and legitimate outcome of presumed lack of effort or conformity to rules, thereby reframing structural inequalities as deserved differences (Ledgerwood et al., 2011; Littler, 2017).

The effect of meritocratic beliefs thus extends beyond social representations, shaping orientations toward collective action against migrants by influencing how negative attitudes translate into mobilization. In interaction with prejudice, Proportionality can serve as a moral

frame legitimizing anti-migrant collective actions: a strong orientation toward proportional justice may amplify the impact of prejudice, justifying mobilization in defense of the ingroup or against the outgroup as a morally correct response consistent with principles of justice and social order (“acting is right because the group has not contributed enough” or “because it deserves it”; Ho & Kteily, 2020). At the same time, the same meritocratic frame may encourage passive justification of inequalities, interpreted as natural outcomes not requiring intervention (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; McCoy & Major, 2007).

In this regard, Proportionality does not directly determine mobilization but modulates its likelihood: it can strengthen the link between prejudice and anti-migrant collective action when exclusion is perceived as deserved, or weaken it when disadvantage is already viewed as legitimate and sufficient to discourage further opposition. From this perspective, the importance attributed to proportional justice can be conceived as a normative filter that amplifies or attenuates the pathway from prejudice – activated by the QFS – to collective actions against the outgroup.

b. The Present Section

Building on these theoretical premises, this section develops a research program articulated across three studies conducted in Italy and the United States. The first study (Study 2a), carried out in the Italian context with a cross-sectional design, investigates the mediating role of prejudice in the relationship between QFS and collective actions toward migrants, including not only intentions but also a concrete behavioral measure (petition signing). The second study (Study 2b), conducted in the United States with an experimental design, manipulates the antecedents of QFS through a recall task in order to causally examine its effects on QFS, prejudice, and intentions of hostile mobilization. The third study (Study 3) returns to the Italian context with a cross-sectional design and introduces Proportionality as a moderating factor,

exploring how adherence to proportional justice may amplify or attenuate the role of prejudice in translating QFS into collective action.

Together, these studies integrate correlational and experimental approaches, compare different national contexts, and combine intentional and behavioral measures, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial processes that connect personal QFS to collective actions toward migrants.¹

c. Study 2a

Study 2a, based on an Italian sample, tested two serial mediation models within a cross-sectional design. In both, loss of significance (LOS) was conceptualized as an antecedent of quest for significance (QFS), which in turn led to the outcomes through anti-migrant prejudice. In the first model, the dependent variables were intentions of pro- and anti-migrant collective action (see Fig. 3); in the second, the outcome was a behavioral indicator, namely the signing of a pro- or anti-migrant petition (see Fig. 4). The inclusion of this behavioral measure made it possible to examine whether the observed processes extended beyond intentions to also predict concrete behaviors.

Consistent with the proposed models, we first expected that personal LOS would be positively associated with QFS, reflecting individuals' attempts to restore their relevance following experiences perceived as devaluing. We further hypothesized that QFS would be positively related to anti-migrant prejudice, which, in turn, would be associated with greater support for anti-migrant collective action and lower support for pro-migrant collective action. Within this framework, we expected prejudice to serve as a strategic mediator between QFS and collective action: specifically, positively mediating the relationship between significance

¹ All studies in the present section were approved by the Ethics Committee of Sapienza University of Rome (protocol number: CERT_188868DE58A).

loss and anti-migrant mobilization intentions, and negatively mediating the relationship with pro-migrant mobilization intentions. Finally, we expected these same pathways to emerge when collective action was assessed in terms of actual behavior, namely, the signing of a pro- or anti-migrant petition.

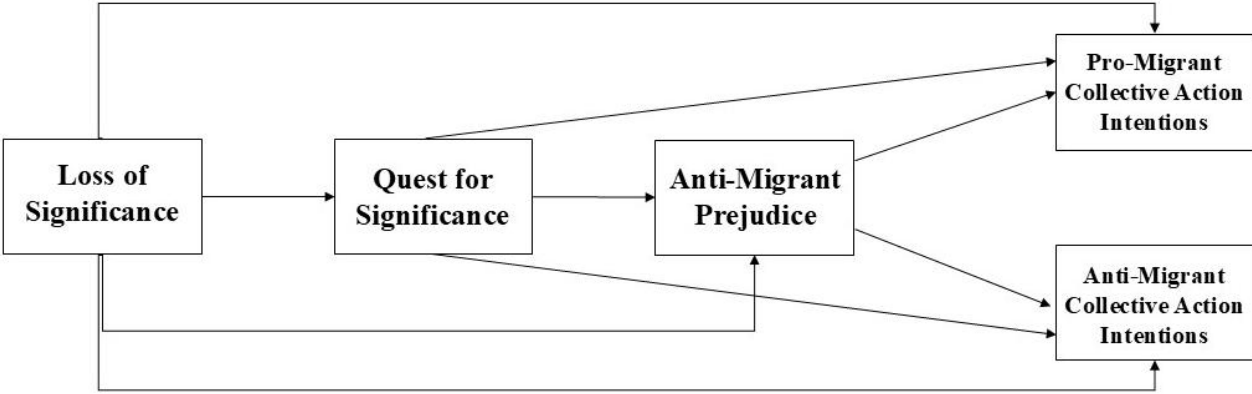


Figure 3. Conceptual serial mediation model 1 with pro- and anti-migrant collective action intentions as outcomes.

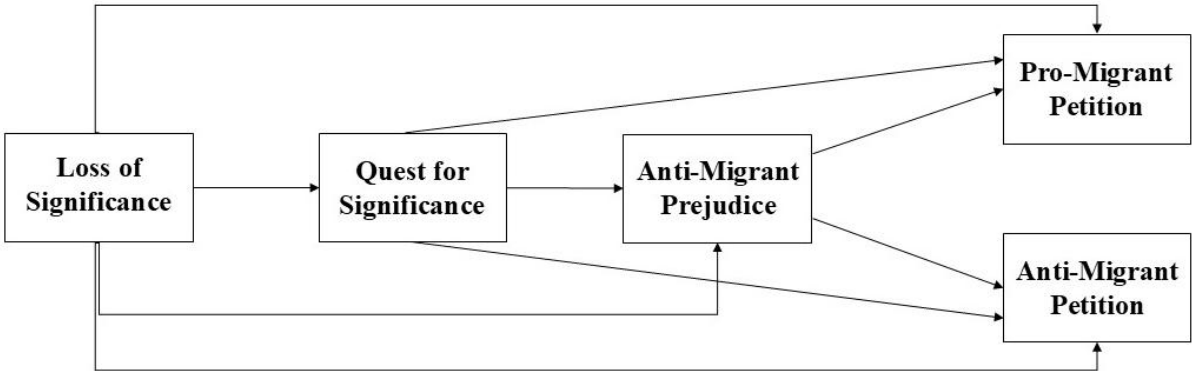


Figure 4. Conceptual serial mediation model 2 with pro- and anti-migrant petitions as outcomes.

i. Method

Participants

The required sample size was determined through an a priori power analysis designed for mediation models, using a Monte Carlo simulation approach (Schoemann et al., 2017). Power was estimated for a serial mediation model, setting a high-power threshold of .80 and assuming

medium-small effect sizes ($r = .25$) among the predictor, mediators, and outcome (Cohen, 2013). To ensure stability of the estimates, we conducted 5,000 replications with 20,000 coefficient draws per replication. Results indicated that a sample size of approximately 305 participants was required to achieve a statistical power of .80 (95% *CI* [.82, .84]).

The final sample consisted of 330 Italian adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.47$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.38$; 65.2% women). Sociodemographic information collected included age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, perceived socioeconomic status (MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status, Adler et al., 2000; $M = 6.16$, $SD = 1.48$), and political orientation (measured on a 7-point Likert scale, from 0 = far left to 6 = far right; $M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.11$). Complete sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Procedure and Measures

Data collection followed the same procedure as in the exploratory study, recruiting a convenience sample through a snowball technique, primarily among students of the Social Psychology course at Sapienza University of Rome. After providing informed consent, participants completed an online questionnaire in Italian via Qualtrics, which took on average about 10 minutes to complete.

The self-report questionnaire included a series of Likert-type scales presented in a fixed order, designed to measure perceived LOS, personal QFS, explicit prejudice toward migrants, intentions of pro- and anti-migrant collective action, as well as a measure of actual collective action, assessed through the opportunity to sign both a pro-migrant and an anti-migrant petition. To ensure data quality, an attention check was included. In the final section, sociodemographic information was collected, and upon completion, participants were thanked and given a written debriefing.

Perceived LOS was assessed with the Loss of Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021), as in Study 1. Personal QFS was measured with the Significance Quest Scale (Şahin & Derin, 2023). In this study, however, we used a reduced 11-item version of the scale, excluding all items belonging to the “impressiveness” (e.g., “I try to show my worth by talking about my family elders”) and “difference” (e.g., “I enjoy answering questions that no one knows”) subdimensions. This decision was based on both theoretical considerations within the SQT framework and recent evidence from a systematic review of meaning-related assessment tools (Alsaadi et al., 2025), which highlighted conceptual and psychometric issues associated with these two factors. Composite scores were computed for both measures, with higher values indicating greater perceived loss of significance or stronger quest for significance, respectively (LOS: $\alpha = .91$; $\omega = .90$; $M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.75$; QFS: $\alpha = .90$; $\omega = .90$; $M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.85$).

Prejudice toward migrants was measured using a 16-item Italian scale from Bianco and Kusic (2023) and Bianco et al. (2021), rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 5 = Totally agree). Example items included: “Italy is a country invaded by migrants,” “Italians and immigrants will never be able to feel comfortable with each other,” and “Most immigrants work and pay taxes”. Reverse-coded items were recoded prior to analysis. Consistent with previous studies supporting its use as a unidimensional measure (Bianco & Kusic, 2023; Bianco et al., 2021), we computed the global mean score, with higher values reflecting higher levels of prejudice ($\alpha = .92$; $\omega = .92$; $M = 2.03$; $SD = 0.93$).

Collective action intentions were measured by adapting items from Smeekes et al. (2022) to assess participants’ willingness to engage in different forms of social participation related to the migration issue in Italy. Two parallel six-item scales were developed, each referring to the same types of actions but with opposite goals. The items (pro- and anti-migrant) were fully randomized in their presentation. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all

willing, 5 = very willing). The first scale (6 items) measured intentions of pro-migrant collective action, reflecting willingness to support or defend immigrants' rights in Italy through behaviors such as joining an association, signing or organizing petitions (including online), making donations, participating in or organizing demonstrations, joining online groups, or sending protest emails to the government. The second scale (6 items) measured intentions of anti-migrant collective action, assessing willingness to undertake the same actions but aimed at restricting or opposing immigration in Italy (e.g., joining an association to reduce immigration, participating in protests against migrants). Two composite scores were thus computed: pro-migrant collective action ($\alpha = .89$; $\omega = .89$; $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.98$) and anti-migrant collective action ($\alpha = .96$; $\omega = .96$; $M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.17$), with higher values indicating greater willingness to participate in the respective form of action.

Finally, participants were given the real opportunity to voluntarily sign one petition in favor of migrants and one against them. Signatures were coded as dichotomous variables (0 = not signed, 1 = signed) and treated as distinct behavioral outcomes in the models.

An attention check was included in the questionnaire; although this item did not target any specific section, it ensured a minimal level of attentiveness throughout the survey.

ii. Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before testing the hypotheses, descriptive statistics and correlations among the main study variables were examined (see Tables 3 and 4).

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Loss of Significance</i>	2.30	0.75	0.62	0.31
<i>Quest for Significance</i>	2.54	0.85	0.51	0.08
<i>Anti-migrant Prejudice</i>	2.03	0.67	0.97	0.75
<i>Pro-migrant Collective Actions</i>	3.12	0.98	-0.12	-0.43
<i>Anti-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	1.92	1.17	0.93	-0.49
<i>Political Orientation</i>	2.46	1.11	0.32	0.70

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. LOS	-								
2. QFS	0.29***	-							
3. PREJ	-0.05	0.19***	-						
4. CAP	0.26***	0.06	-0.48***	-					
5. CAN	0.08	0.01	0.20***	-0.11* ²	-				
6. PETP	0.14*	-0.10	-0.44***	0.46***	-0.02	-			
7. PETN	0.04	-0.01	0.18**	-0.03	0.16**	-0.01	-		
8. AGE	-0.36***	-0.18***	0.05	-0.19***	0.03	-0.16**	-0.10	-	
9. PO	-0.11*	0.08	0.53***	-0.48***	0.14*	-0.38***	0.11	0.02	-

Table 4. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Note. LOSS = Loss of Significance; QFS = Quest for Significance; PREJ = Anti-migrant Prejudice; CAP = Collective Action (Positive); CAN = Collective Action (Negative); PETP = Pro-migrant Petition Signing; PETN = Anti-migrant Petition Signing; PO = Political Orientation

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Serial Mediation Analyses

To test the hypothesized mediation models, a path analysis was conducted using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). In the first step, a serial mediation model was tested in which LOS served as the independent variable, and QFS and anti-migrant

² The weak correlation between the two collective action scales may reflect both differences in participants' general propensity to engage in collective actions (Leach & Pedersen, 2006) and the fact that attention was not specifically probed for this section.

prejudice as serial mediators. We then consider two dependent variables: intentions to engage in pro-migrant collective action and intentions to engage in anti-migrant collective action. Indirect effects for this model were estimated via nonparametric bootstrapping (5,000 resamples; 95% CIs).

In a second model, we used the same serial mediation structure but replaced the outcomes with two binary variables: signing a pro-migrant petition and signing an anti-migrant petition. Because the outcomes are categorical, this model was estimated treating them as ordered and using a WLSMV estimator with a probit link. For this categorical model, standard errors and confidence intervals (95%) were obtained via the delta method.

Serial Mediation Model 1 – Collective Action Intentions Toward Migrants

To test the hypothesis that QFS and prejudice toward migrants mediate the effect of LOS on collective action intentions, we tested a serial mediation model including political orientation as a covariate (see Fig. 5).

R^2 values indicated that the model explained 9.4% of the variance in QFS, 29.7% in anti-migrant prejudice, 36.3% in pro-migrant collective action intentions, and 5.5% in anti-migrant collective action intentions.

Results showed that LOS was positively associated with QFS ($\beta = 0.30$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.183, 0.417]), which in turn was positively associated with anti-migrant prejudice ($\beta = 0.16$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.067, 0.247]). Anti-migrant prejudice was negatively associated with pro-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = -0.34$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.448, -0.239]) and positively associated with anti-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = 0.19$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [0.064, 0.319]).

Direct effects of LOS on the outcomes were significant and positive for pro-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = 0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.103, 0.289]$) but non-significant for anti-migrant intentions ($\beta = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.060$, 95% $CI [-0.005, 0.231]$).

The indirect effects were summarized in Table 5.

Finally, total effects were significant for both pro-migrant ($\beta = 0.18$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.085, 0.275]$) and anti-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.043$, 95% $CI [0.004, 0.241]$).

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow CA_Pro	.03	.01	.049	.000	.055
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow CA_Anti	-.02	.02	.338	-.054	.018
LOS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow CA_Pro	.01	.02	.488	-.021	.043
LOS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow CA_Anti	-.01	.01	.494	-.024	.012
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow CA_Pro	-.02	.01	.011	-.029	-.004
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow CA_Anti	.01	.004	.044	.001	.018
TOT _{CA_Pro}	.18	.05	<.001	.085	.275
TOT _{CA_Anti}	.12	.06	.043	.004	.241

Table 5. Indirect effects of Loss of Significance (LOS) on pro-migrant (CA_Pro) and anti-migrant (CA_Anti) collective action intentions through Quest for Significance (QFS) and Prejudice (PREJ).

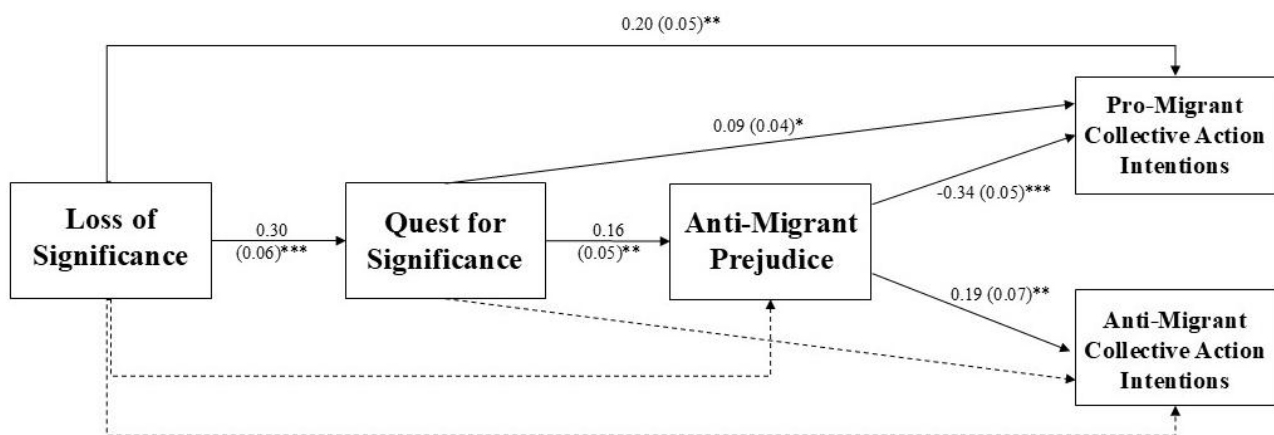


Figure 5. Serial mediation model 1: indirect effect of loss of significance on anti- and pro-migrant collective action intentions through the quest for significance and prejudice. Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Notes. β (SE) for each path; Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Serial Mediation Model 2 – Petition Signing

To examine whether the processes observed for collective action intentions also extended to concrete behaviors, we estimated a serial mediation model with pro-migrant and anti-migrant petition signing as dependent variables (see Fig. 6).

The model explained 8.4% of the variance in QFS, 4.5% in anti-migrant prejudice, 31.9% in pro-migrant petition signing, and 5.1% in anti-migrant petition signing.

Consistent with the previous model, LOS was positively associated with QFS ($\beta = 0.29$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.210, 0.371]$), which in turn was positively associated with anti-migrant prejudice ($\beta = 0.22$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.109, 0.323]$). Anti-migrant prejudice was negatively related to pro-migrant petition signing ($\beta = -0.50$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [-0.601, -0.389]$) and positively related to anti-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.22$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .001$, 95% $CI [0.088, 0.361]$). Direct effects of loss of significance on the outcomes replicated the pattern of the first model: positive and significant for pro-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.22$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.096, 0.334]$) and non-significant for anti-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.08$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .310$, 95% $CI [-0.074, 0.232]$).

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PET_Pro	-.03	.02	.122	-.071	.008
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PET_Anti	-.02	.02	.380	-.067	.025
LOS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow PET_Pro	.05	.03	.062	-.002	.094
LOS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow PET_Anti	-.02	.01	.085	-.052	.003
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow PET_Pro	-.03	.01	.001	-.050	-.012
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow PET_Anti	.01	.01	.017	.002	.026
TOT _{PET_Pro}	.11	.06	.036	.007	.221
TOT _{PET_Anti}	.07	.06	.216	-.041	.181

Table 6. Indirect effects of Loss of Significance (LOS) on pro-migrant (PET_Pro) and anti-migrant (PET_Anti) petition signing through Quest for Significance (QFS) and Prejudice (PREJ).

About indirect effects, they were summarized in Table 6. As for total effects, the effect was significant for pro-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .036$, 95% $CI [0.007$,

0.221]), but non-significant for anti-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .216$, 95% $CI [-0.041, 0.181]$).

When political orientation was included as a covariate, the serial indirect effect on anti-migrant petition signing was no longer significant³.

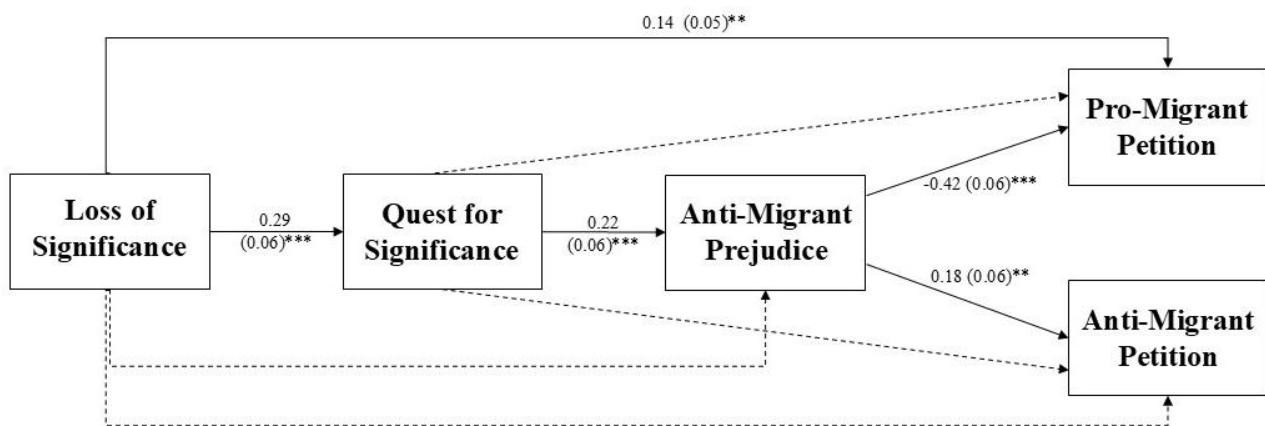


Figure 6. Serial mediation model 2: indirect effect of loss of significance on anti- and pro-migrant petition signing through the quest for significance and prejudice. Notes. β (SE) for each path; Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

iii. Discussion and Limitations

Building on the findings of Study 1, which highlighted an asymmetric association between personal quest for significance (QFS) and collective action intentions – significantly related to anti-migrant but not pro-migrant trajectories – Study 2a sought to clarify the processes underlying this pattern. Specifically, we examined the role of prejudice as a potential motivational mechanism linking QFS to collective engagement toward migrants.

³ Serial mediation Model 2 analyses, including political orientation as a covariate, are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Consistent with the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT), findings confirmed that perceived loss of significance was associated with an increase in QFS (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022). In turn, QFS was positively correlated with anti-migrant prejudice, supporting the notion that prejudice can serve as a functional response to the need for significance (Leander et al., 2020; Rullo et al., 2022). This association indicates that QFS may find in prejudice a strategic vehicle of legitimation, providing a narrative that repositions the individual and the ingroup at the center, often at the expense of the outgroup (Dixon et al., 2012; Esses, 2021).

The observed indirect effects provide further evidence that prejudice functions as a strategic mediator: significance loss predicted increased QFS, which in turn heightened prejudice, ultimately reducing support for pro-migrant action and increasing support for anti-migrant mobilization. By fostering greater adherence to prejudicial narratives, QFS was channeled toward exclusionary engagement while weakening solidaristic involvement, thereby serving as a means to restore personal and collective relevance. These findings align with prior research showing that prejudice does not merely reflect negative attitudes but may also operate as a legitimizing frame for discrimination and ingroup defense, extending to collective action against the outgroup (Dixon et al., 2012; Shepherd et al., 2018).

The replication with petition signing indicates that these processes extend beyond intentions to actual behavior: once activated and routed through prejudice, QFS can translate into reduced concrete support for migrants and increased opposition to their cause. However, the weaker effects observed for behavioral compared to intentional outcomes are consistent with the literature on the intention-behavior gap (Sheeran & Webb, 2016), which emphasizes that translating intentions into action requires additional facilitating factors such as opportunities for participation, supportive group norms, or situational incentives.

At the same time, the finding of a direct positive effect of significance loss on pro-migrant intentions, together with a small indirect effect via QFS, suggests that the motivation to restore significance is not intrinsically hostile. Rather, it is the interposition of prejudice that steers collective engagement toward exclusionary outcomes, leaving open the possibility that through different processes, the same motivational drive could fuel prosocial collective mobilization toward outgroups (Kruglanski et al., 2014).

Overall, Study 2a extends the framework established by the exploratory analysis, identifying prejudice as a key mechanism through which individual motivational needs, such as personal QFS, are transformed into intergroup orientations and behaviors. In doing so, it further clarifies the processes through which QFS fosters polarization in social responses to migration and contributes to addressing a gap in the SQT research, which has predominantly focused on violent radicalization, by showing that significance dynamics are also relevant to more “ordinary” forms of mobilization, such as petition signing.

Nevertheless, Study 2a presents some limitations. Its cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the reliance on a convenience sample – predominantly young and left-leaning – limits generalizability. In addition, the use of self-report measures for most variables raises the possibility of social desirability bias. This may be particularly relevant when investigating attitudes and intentions related to a sensitive and polarizing issue such as migration, where participants may be inclined to provide socially acceptable responses rather than authentic ones.

These limitations underscore the importance of employing experimental designs and considering broader contextual variables. Accordingly, Study 2b was designed to address some of these issues by experimentally manipulating the antecedents of QFS and examining its causal effects on QFS, prejudice, and anti-migrant mobilization.

d. Study 2b

To consolidate and extend the findings of Study 2a, Study 2b employed a between-subjects experimental design based on a *recall task* (Dugas et al., 2016; Troian et al., 2019) to manipulate the antecedents of the QFS. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: recalling an experience of exclusion or rejection (significance loss), recalling an experience of inclusion or acceptance (significance gain), or recalling a neutral experience (control condition).

Based on the theoretical model and the findings of Study 2a, we expected participants in the significance loss condition to report higher levels of personal significance loss compared to those in the significance gain or control conditions. Moreover, relative to the control condition, we hypothesized that the significance loss condition would yield higher scores on the QFS, which would in turn be positively associated with anti-migrant prejudice and, subsequently, with greater intentions to engage in hostile collective action toward migrants and stronger support for anti-immigration policies. In other words, we predicted an indirect effect of the manipulation of significance loss on oppositional mobilization intentions, mediated by QFS and prejudice. We did not anticipate significant differences between the significance gain and control conditions.

Unlike previous studies, which were conducted within the Italian context, Study 2b was carried out with a U.S. sample. Although Italy and the United States differ in terms of migration history and demographic composition, both contexts are characterized by a strong politicization of migration and the presence of polarizing narratives opposing inclusive views to restrictive or hostile positions toward migrants (Esses, 2021). In the United States, migration has been one of the central points of political conflict between Republicans and Democrats (Hajnal & Rivera, 2014; Krogstad et al., 2023). During the first Trump presidency, the security and identity-based

dimensions acquired particular salience, with symbolic and restrictive policies such as the “Muslim Ban,” the revocation of the DACA program for Dreamers, and the rhetoric of “Build the Wall,” which reinforced nativism and reframed migration as an existential threat to the “American nation” (Pew Research Center, 2025). These dynamics polarized public opinion, fueling highly visible anti-immigration mobilizations, often supported by nativist and white supremacist movements. Thus, the United States represents an ideal setting to test the generalizability of the model observed in Study 2a and to examine whether the relationship between significance loss, QFS, prejudice, and hostile collective action also emerges in a sociopolitical environment that is different, yet comparable in terms of the salience and divisiveness of migration.

i. Method

Participants

As in the previous study, the required sample size was determined through a power analysis for serial mediation models using a Monte Carlo simulation approach (Schoemann et al., 2017). Assuming medium-small effect sizes ($r = .25$; Cohen, 2013) and a power threshold of .80, the analysis (5,000 replications with 20,000 coefficient draws) indicated that approximately 305 participants were needed to reach a power of .80 (95% *CI* [.82, .84]).

The final sample consisted of 310 U.S. adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 39.39$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.69$; 49.7% women). Sociodemographic information collected included age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, perceived socioeconomic status (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.75$), and political orientation (measured on a 7-point Likert scale, 0 = far left, 6 = far right; $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.83$). Full sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Procedure and Measures

To recruit a more balanced sociodemographic sample than in Study 2a, participants were recruited through Prolific. They completed an online questionnaire in English via Qualtrics, presented as a study investigating how descriptions of different types of situations relate to people's opinions on social and political issues. The questionnaire lasted on average about 8 minutes and included the experimental procedure and a post-manipulation section. In this phase, participants completed measures of the manipulation check, quest for significance, prejudice, support for anti-immigrant policies, and items assessing intentions of anti-migrant collective action. To ensure data quality, an attention check was included. All scales were adapted and contextualized to the U.S. setting.

To manipulate perceptions of significance loss or gain, we employed an experimental paradigm based on the recall task, widely used in research on the quest for significance to induce experiences of loss or gain of meaning (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Dugas et al., 2016; Troian et al., 2019). In this procedure, participants are asked to recall and describe in detail personal experiences consistent with the experimental condition to which they are assigned, thereby activating relevant experiences and emotional states.

After reading the information sheet and providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions:

- Significance Loss condition ($n = 101$): participants described an episode of significant rejection by people important to them, which made them feel excluded, lonely, or humiliated (e.g., being treated unfairly, excluded from a group, or not recognized as a member).

- Significance Gain condition ($n = 102$): participants described an episode in which they felt fully accepted and part of a group or community, such as being chosen for an activity or receiving care and attention from significant others.
- Control condition ($n = 107$): participants described the steps involved in performing a simple everyday task, avoiding any reference to emotions or personal evaluations.

To assess the effectiveness of the manipulation, we administered the Loss of Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021), consisting of seven items measuring the extent to which participants perceived a loss of personal relevance and value. Sample items included “I feel insignificant” and “I feel important” (reverse-coded). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = Totally disagree, 6 = Totally agree). Positively worded items were reverse-coded, and a composite score was computed by averaging the items’ scores, with higher values indicating greater loss of significance ($\alpha = .90$; $\omega = .89$; $M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.37$).

Subsequently, participants completed the main study measures on 7-point Likert scales (0 = Totally disagree, 6 = Totally agree).

Personal QFS was measured using the reduced version of the Significance Quest Scale (SQS; Şahin & Derin, 2023), as employed in Study 2a, using the English items provided by the authors. A composite index was computed ($\alpha = .95$; $\omega = .96$; $M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.56$).

Anti-migrant prejudice was assessed with 13 items inspired by the scale used in Study 2a (Bianco et al., 2021; Bianco & Kosic, 2023). No items were reverse-coded; sample items included “The United States is being overrun by migrants” and “Migrants and Americans will never feel truly comfortable with each other.” An exploratory factor analysis, using maximum likelihood extraction with Oblimin rotation, indicated excellent sampling adequacy ($KMO = .97$) and a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity, $\chi^2(78) = 3658$, $p < .001$, yielding a clear one-factor solution – consistent with the eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion, as only the first

eigenvalue exceeded 1 – explaining 64.3% of the variance, with factor loadings ranging from .564 to .925 (Hair et al., 2019). A composite score was then computed ($\alpha = .96$; $\omega = .96$; $M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.36$).

Support for anti-immigration policies was measured using 12 items inspired by López-Rodríguez et al. (2020) and contextualized to the U.S. setting. The items assessed agreement with restrictive immigration measures; sample items included “Deporting undocumented immigrants to their countries of origin,” “Strengthening national borders,” and “Closing radical religious centers, including fundamentalist mosques.” An EFA (maximum-likelihood extraction, oblimin rotation) showed excellent sampling adequacy ($KMO = .94$) and a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity, $\chi^2(66) = 2466$, $p < .001$. The analysis yielded a single-factor solution, consistent with the eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion, which accounted for 54.1% of the variance. Factor loadings ranged from .398 to .910 (Hair et al., 2019). A composite score was computed ($\alpha = .94$; $\omega = .94$; $M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.58$).

Intentions of anti-migrant collective action were measured using the same six items employed in Study 2a, inspired by Smeekes et al. (2022) and adapted to the U.S. context. The items assessed participants’ willingness to engage in actions such as “Taking part in an association that opposes immigration,” “Participating in or organizing a demonstration against immigration,” or “Signing or organizing a petition against immigration.” A composite score was computed ($\alpha = .94$; $\omega = .94$; $M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.60$).

At the end of the questionnaire, participants received a debriefing explaining the actual purpose of the study and providing contact information for further inquiries.

ii. Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before proceeding with the main analyses, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among all key variables were computed (see Tables 7 and 8).

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Loss of Significance</i>	2.78	1.37	0.82	0.06
<i>Quest for Significance</i>	3.84	1.56	-0.13	-0.83
<i>Anti-migrant Prejudice</i>	2.68	1.36	0.65	-0.46
<i>Support for Anti-Immigration Policies</i>	3.37	1.58	0.27	-0.85
<i>Anti-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	2.26	1.60	1.13	0.23
<i>Political Orientation</i>	3.72	1.83	0.18	-1.11

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. LOSS	-						
2. QFS	0.24***	-					
3. PREJ	0.13*	0.21***	-				
4. SUPP	0.04	0.22***	0.79***	-			
5. CA	0.10	0.27***	0.74***	0.75***	-		
6. AGE	-0.08	-0.07	0.03	0.06	-0.04	-	
7. PO	-0.004	0.13*	0.54***	0.54**	0.44***	-0.04	-

Table 8. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Note. LOSS = Loss of Significance; QFS = Quest for Significance; PREJ = Anti-migrant Prejudice; SUPP = Support for Anti-migrants Policies; CA = Anti-migrant Collective Action's intentions; PO = Political Orientation. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Subsequently, preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation. A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare perceived loss of

significance across the three experimental conditions (Significance Loss, Significance Gain, Control).

The analysis revealed a statistically significant main effect of condition, $F(2, 307) = 17.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .100$, indicating that participants reported different levels of significance loss depending on their assigned condition. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test showed that participants in the Loss condition reported significantly higher loss of significance than those in the Control ($Mdiff = 1.03$, $SE = .18$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.604, 1.454]$) and Gain conditions ($Mdiff = 0.73$, $SE = .18$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.302, 1.162]$). No significant difference emerged between the Control and Gain conditions ($Mdiff = -0.30$, $SE = .18$, $p = .225$, 95% $CI [-0.721, 0.127]$).⁴

Direct Effects of the Experimental Manipulation

To examine the effects of the experimental manipulation on the main variables (QFS, prejudice, anti-migrant collective action intentions, support for anti-immigration policies), a series of ANCOVAs was conducted with condition (Loss, Gain, Control) as the independent variable⁵ and political orientation as a covariate.⁶

A significant effect of condition emerged for the QFS, $F(2, 306) = 3.50$, $p = .032$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni correction revealed that participants in the Loss condition reported significantly higher QFS than those in the Control condition ($Mdiff =$

⁴ The non-significant difference between the Control and Gain conditions suggests that the Gain manipulation did not induce the personal QFS. Only contrasts involving the Loss condition can be meaningfully interpreted, while comparisons including the Gain condition are retained for transparency but not used to draw theoretical conclusions.

⁵ Although included in the analyses for transparency, effects involving the Gain condition cannot be theoretically interpreted (see Preliminary Analyses), and only the Loss vs. Control contrast is considered meaningful.

⁶ Political orientation was included as a covariate because ideological positioning has been found to correlate with significance-related motivations in this study and in previous research within the Significance-Quest Theory framework (e.g., Altungy et al., 2025). Controlling for this variable ensured that differences in QFS could be attributed to the experimental manipulation rather than to pre-existing ideological differences among participants.

0.55, $p = .031$, 95% $CI [0.04, 1.07]$). No significant differences emerged between the Loss and Gain conditions ($Mdiff = 0.18$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = 1.00$, 95% $CI [-0.344, 0.697]$) or between the Gain and Control conditions ($Mdiff = 0.38$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = .237$, 95% $CI [-0.137, 0.887]$).

No significant effects of condition were found for prejudice toward migrants, $F(2, 306) = 0.38$, $p = .685$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$, for support for anti-immigration policies, $F(2, 306) = 0.73$, $p = .665$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, or for anti-migrant collective action intentions, $F(2, 306) = 0.06$, $p = .940$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$.

Serial Mediation Analyses

To test the mediation hypotheses, a path analysis was conducted using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Indirect effects were estimated via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

In all models, the experimental condition was treated as the independent variable and contrast-coded, with the control condition as the reference category (X1 = Loss vs. Control; X2 = Gain vs. Control).

In the first analysis, we tested a serial mediation model in which the experimental condition was entered as the independent variable, QFS and anti-migrant prejudice were specified as serial mediators, and intentions to participate in anti-migrant collective action served as the dependent variable. Subsequently, the same serial mediation model was replicated by replacing the dependent variable with support for anti-immigration policies. Political orientation was included as a covariate in both models.

Serial Mediation Model 1 – Anti-Migrant Collective Action Intentions

To test the hypothesis that QFS and prejudice toward migrants mediate the effect of the manipulation on anti-migrant collective action intentions, we tested a serial mediation model including political orientation as a covariate (see Fig. 7).

R^2 values indicated that the model explained 3.6% of the variance in QFS, 30.4% in anti-migrant prejudice, and 59.4% in anti-migrant collective action intentions.

The direct effects of the experimental manipulation were not statistically significant. Specifically, neither the Loss vs. Control contrast (X1: $\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .561$, 95% $CI [-0.356, 0.192]$) nor the Gain vs. Control contrast (X2: $\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .693$, 95% $CI [-0.231, 0.339]$) directly affected anti-migrant collective action intentions.

However, participants in the Loss condition reported significantly higher QFS than those in the Control condition (X1: $\beta = 0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .015$, 95% $CI [0.031, 0.283]$), whereas the Gain condition did not significantly differ from the Control condition (X2: $\beta = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .085$, 95% $CI [-0.015, 0.237]$). In turn, higher QFS was associated with greater anti-migrant prejudice ($\beta = 0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.101, 0.301]$), and anti-migrant prejudice strongly predicted higher anti-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = 0.71$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.618, 0.804]$).

The indirect effects were summarized in Table 9. Finally, the total effects of the experimental manipulation on anti-migrant collective action intentions were not statistically significant (X1: $\beta = -0.001$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .977$, 95% $CI [-0.083, 0.081]$; X2: $\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .453$, 95% $CI [-0.052, 0.117]$).

These results suggest that experiencing a loss of significance can indirectly increase intentions to engage in anti-migrant collective action, but only when it triggers higher QFS that, in turn, elevates anti-migrant prejudice.

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
X1 → QFS → CA	.01	.01	.101	-.002	.028
X2 → QFS → CA	.01	.01	.171	-.004	.022
X1 → PREJ → CA	.003	.04	.943	-.074	.080
X2 → PREJ → CA	-.02	.04	.572	-.096	.053
X1 → QFS → PREJ → CA	.02	.01	.039	.001	.044
X2 → QFS → PREJ → CA	.02	.01	.130	-.005	.036
TOT _{X1}	-.001	.04	.977	-.083	.081
TOT _{X2}	.03	.04	.453	-.052	.117

Table 9. Indirect effects of Loss vs Control (X1) and Gain vs Control (X2) on pro-migrant collective action intentions (CA) through Quest for Significance (QFS) and Prejudice (PREJ).

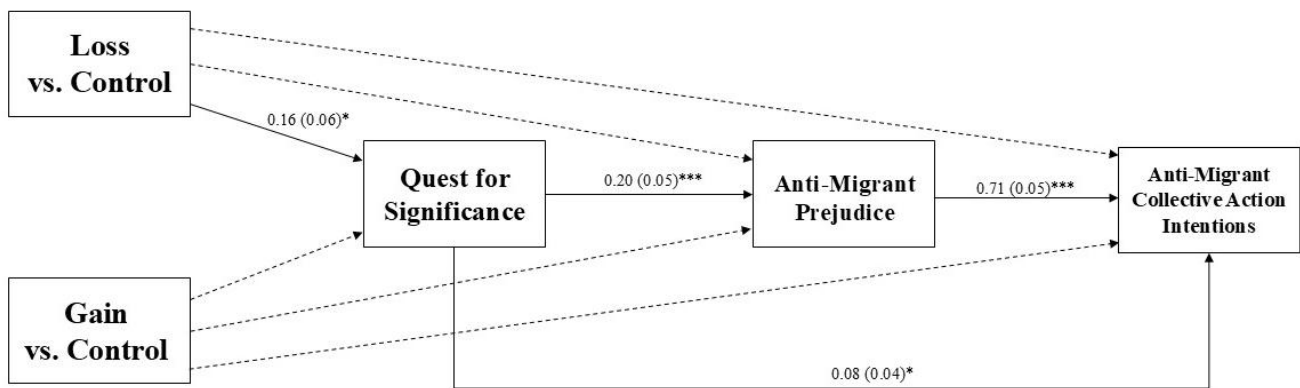


Figure 7. Serial mediation model 1: quest for significance and anti-migrant prejudice as mediators of the effect of experimental conditions on anti-migrant collective action intentions. Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Notes. β (SE) for each path. Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Serial Mediation Model 2 – Support for Anti-Immigration Policies

A second serial mediation model was tested in which support for anti-immigration policies was entered as the dependent variable, with QFS and anti-migrant prejudice specified as sequential mediators (see Fig. 8).

The model accounted for 3.6% of the variance in QFS ($R^2 = .036$), 30.4% of the variance in anti-migrant prejudice ($R^2 = .304$), and 66.5% of the variance in support for anti-immigration policies ($R^2 = .665$).

In line with the results for anti-migrant collective action intentions, the direct effects of the experimental manipulation were not statistically significant. Specifically, neither the significance Loss vs. Control contrast (X1: $\beta = -0.03$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .490$, 95% $CI [-0.101, 0.048]$) nor the significance Gain vs. Control contrast (X2: $\beta = -0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .284$, 95% $CI [-0.111, 0.033]$) directly affected support for anti-immigration policies.

As in the previous model, participants in the significance Loss condition reported significantly higher QFS than those in the Control condition (X1: $\beta = 0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .015$, 95% $CI [0.031, 0.283]$), whereas the significance Gain condition did not significantly differ from the Control condition (X2: $\beta = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .085$, 95% $CI [-0.015, 0.237]$). In turn, higher QFS was associated with greater anti-migrant prejudice ($\beta = 0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.101, 0.301]$), and anti-migrant prejudice strongly predicted higher support for anti-immigration policies ($\beta = 0.71$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.633, 0.784]$).

The indirect effects mirrored those observed for collective action intentions (see Table 10).

Also in this model, the total effects of the experimental manipulation on support for anti-immigration policies were not statistically significant (X1: $\beta = -0.004$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .919$, 95% $CI [-0.081, 0.073]$; X2: $\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .538$, 95% $CI [-0.098, 0.051]$).

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
X1 \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow SUPP	.003	.01	.576	-.008	.015
X2 \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow SUPP	.002	.004	.585	-.006	.011
X1 \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow SUPP	.003	.04	.943	-.074	.080
X2 \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow SUPP	-.021	.04	.574	-.096	.053
X1 \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow SUPP	.02	.01	.036	.001	.043
X2 \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow SUPP	.02	.01	.128	.005	.036
TOT _{X1}	-.004	.04	.919	-.081	.073
TOT _{X2}	-.02	.04	.538	-.098	.051

Table 10. Indirect effects of Loss vs Control (X1) and Gain vs Control (X2) on support for anti-immigration policies (SUP) through Quest for Significance (QFS) and Prejudice (PREJ).

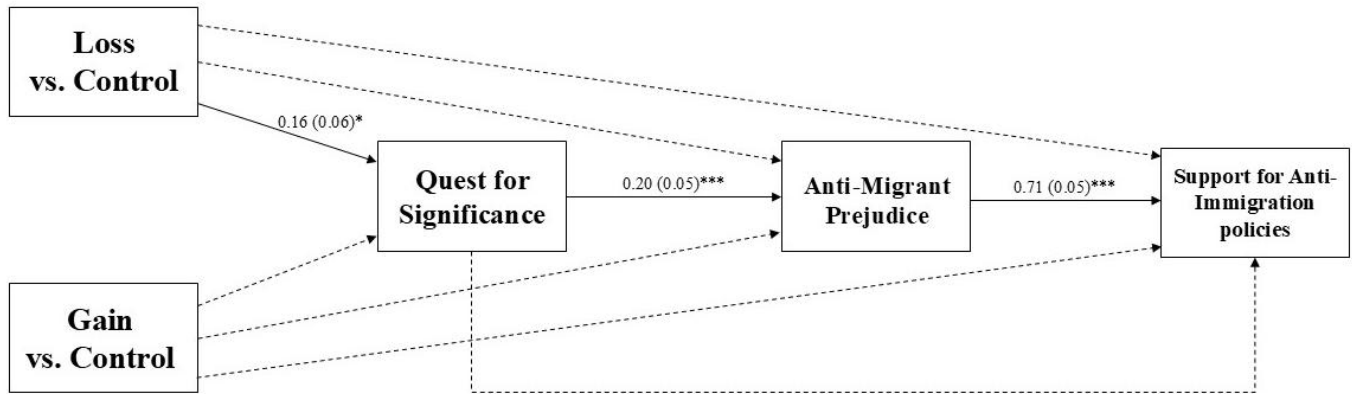


Figure 8. Serial mediation model 2: quest for significance and anti-migrant prejudice as mediators of the effect of experimental conditions on support for anti-immigration policies. Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Notes. β (SE) for each path. Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Taken together, the two models show a consistent pattern: experiencing a loss of significance indirectly predicts both greater intentions to engage in anti-migrant collective action and greater support for anti-immigration policies, through increased QFS and heightened prejudice.

iii. Discussion and Limitations

The results of Study 2b are consistent with those of Study 2a, confirming and at the same time extending its findings. As hypothesized, the manipulation of significance loss resulted in a significant increase in QFS, whereas significance gain had no effect. QFS was then associated with higher levels of anti-migrant prejudice, which in turn predicted both intentions to engage in hostile collective actions and support for restrictive immigration policies.

The mediation analyses confirmed an indirect pathway in which significance loss increased QFS and, through heightened prejudice, channeled collective engagement toward anti-migrant outcomes. This pattern was replicated across both dependent variables (intentions of anti-migrant collective action and support for anti-immigration policies), indicating the stability of

the proposed mechanism. The absence of significant direct and total effects is consistent with a full mediation model, in which prejudice acts as a narrative filter that translates individual motivational needs into hostile collective intentions.

These results offer several important contributions. First, they replicate the associations observed in the Italian sample in a different sociopolitical context – the United States – suggesting that the link between significance loss, QFS, prejudice, and anti-migrant mobilization is not limited to a single national setting. In line with Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022), the need for significance emerges as a basic motivation capable of orienting action across societies, provided that the issue at stake is salient and polarizing.

Second, by employing an experimental design, the study provides causal evidence for the link between perceived loss and QFS activation, demonstrating how such activation can lead to exclusionary mobilization through prejudice. In continuity with Study 2a, these findings also align with literature that views prejudice as a functional tool for reaffirming personal relevance and ingroup status (Leander et al., 2020; Rullo et al., 2022), confirming its role as a consistent antecedent of collective action against outgroups (Shepherd et al., 2018).

Finally, the results underscore the role of prejudice as a device of interpretive simplification: it provides individuals with a readily available frame to situate their personal experience of loss within an intergroup context, transforming feelings of irrelevance into collective responses aimed at ingroup defense. This is consistent with studies emphasizing the value of prejudice as a “cognitive resource” and narrative capable of explaining and channeling subjective experiences of frustration and uncertainty (e.g., Dixon et al., 2012; Jost et al., 2017).

Study 2b nevertheless presents several limitations. The manipulation relied on an autobiographical recall task, which, although widely used, may introduce variability linked to

individual differences in memory retrieval and vividness. Moreover, the control condition involved recalling a neutral experience devoid of emotional or motivational content. While this choice, consistent with prior studies (e.g., Troian et al., 2019; Schumpe et al., 2020; Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2021; Bélanger et al., 2022), was effective in avoiding unwanted activations, it may have made the control condition less directly comparable to the experimental ones.

A further methodological limitation concerns the design of the Gain condition. Although the manipulation was consistent with previous studies employing autobiographical recall to induce significance gain (e.g., Dugas et al., 2016), asking participants to recall episodes in which they already felt accepted and valued may not have created a meaningful opportunity for significance acquisition. Within the SQT framework, gain implies the prospect of increasing one's value or recognition; in contrast, the recalled scenarios may have reflected fulfilled rather than potential significance. Consequently, the manipulation may not have been sufficiently strong to activate the motivational processes underlying the QFS.

Another limitation concerns the predominant use of self-report measures, which exposes the results to the risk of social desirability bias. In addition, the outcomes considered – intentions of collective action and support for restrictive policies – are meaningful indicators of exclusionary mobilization, but they remain attitudinal and intentional measures. It thus remains an open question whether and to what extent these processes translate into concrete forms of collective participation. Finally, although the Prolific sample was more heterogeneous and better balanced than that of Study 2a, it still represents a convenience sample, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

It also remains to be clarified how the observed mechanism may be shaped by broader value frameworks or moral principles that influence how individuals interpret outgroups and assess the legitimacy of collective actions against them. In this direction, Study 3 expands the

analytical framework by introducing the moral foundation of Proportionality, examined as a potential moderator of the relationship between QFS, prejudice, and collective action intentions toward migrants.

e. Study 3

Study 3 employed a cross-sectional design with an Italian sample to examine the role of Proportionality (Atari et al., 2023) in shaping the relationship between the QFS, prejudice, and collective action intentions toward migrants. The contribution of this study lies in testing Proportionality as a potential moderator of the prejudice-mediated link between QFS and collective actions. Proportionality is conceptualized as a moral criterion that balances costs and rewards, potentially amplifying or attenuating the influence of prejudice in channeling collective engagement.

The outcomes included intentions to engage in both pro- and anti-migrant collective actions, tested in two separate models (see Figs. 9 and 10).

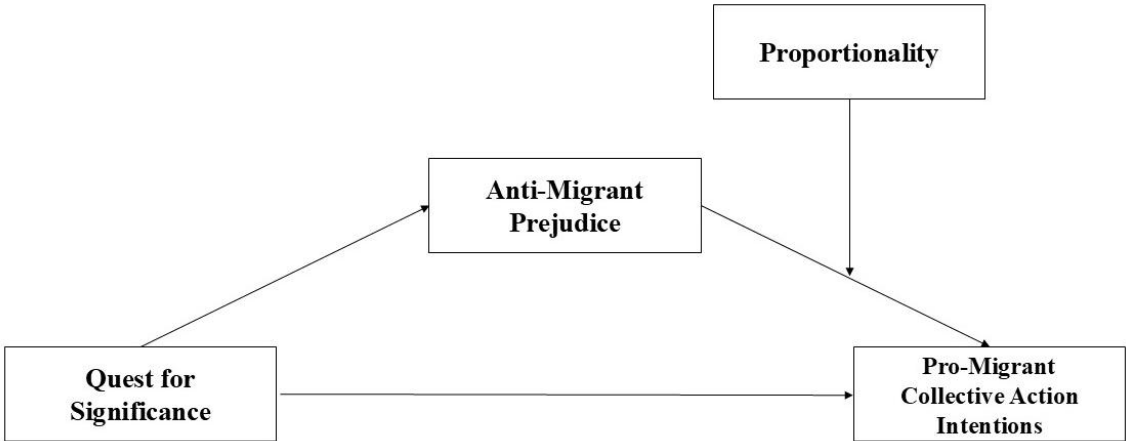


Figure 9. Conceptual moderated mediation model 1 with pro-migrant collective action intentions as outcome.

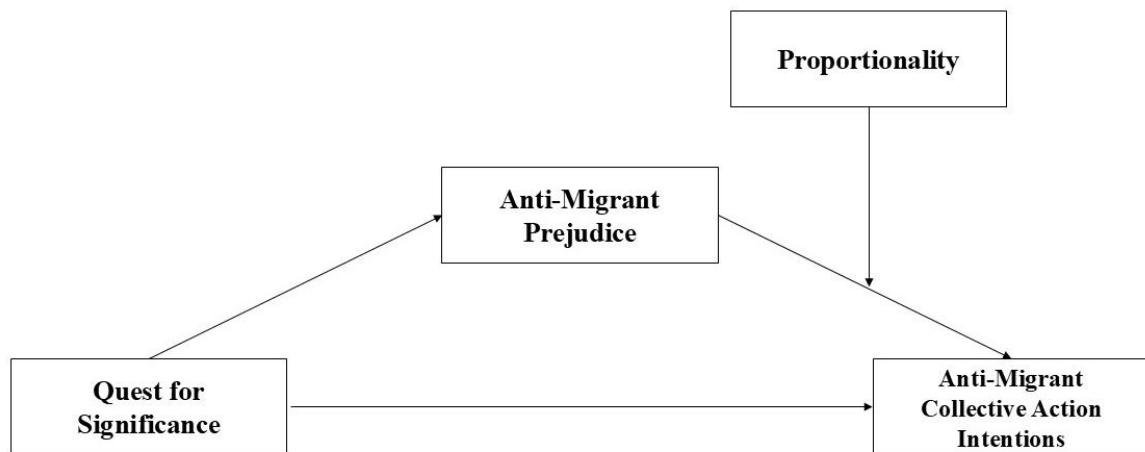


Figure 10. Conceptual moderated mediation model 1 with anti-migrant collective action intentions as outcome.

We hypothesized that Proportionality would moderate the association between anti-migrant prejudice and collective action intentions. Specifically, higher levels of Proportionality were expected to reduce the willingness to engage in pro-migrant action, as support for the outgroup would be perceived as less justified and their conditions as legitimate consequences of their recognized merits or contributions. Regarding anti-migrant collective action, two alternative trajectories were considered: Proportionality could either strengthen exclusionary mobilization, by framing the outgroup’s lack of effort or responsibility as a fault warranting punitive action, or attenuate exclusionary intentions, if migrants’ disadvantaged condition were interpreted as an already proportionate form of punishment that lessens the need for further hostile engagement.

i. Method

Participants

For the current study, the required sample size was determined a priori using both Monte Carlo simulations (Schoemann et al., 2017) and G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009). To ensure sufficient statistical power, we based our calculation on the most conservative estimate,

selecting the larger sample size indicated by the two approaches. Specifically, for the regression model including four predictors (three main effects: quest for significance, proportionality, and prejudice, plus the interaction term proportionality x prejudice), the G*Power analysis assumed an $\alpha = .05$, power $(1-\beta) = .80$, and a small effect size ($f^2 = .02$; Cohen, 2013). This analysis indicated a minimum required sample of 602 participants, yielding an actual power of .80.

The final sample consisted of 646 Italian adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 30.90$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.40$; 59.6% women). Sociodemographic information included age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, and political orientation (assessed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = far left to 6 = far right; $M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.11$). Full sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling among psychology students. After providing informed consent, they completed an online questionnaire in Italian via Qualtrics, lasting approximately 10 minutes. The survey included measures of personal QFS, Proportionality, anti-migrant prejudice, and intentions for pro- and anti-migrant collective action, followed by sociodemographic items. At the end, participants were thanked and provided with a brief written debriefing.

As in Study 2a, personal QFS was measured with the short version of the Significance Quest Scale (SQS; Şahin & Derin, 2023; $\alpha = .92$; $\omega = .92$; $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.75$), while anti-migrant prejudice was assessed using a 16-item scale adapted from Bianco et al. (2021) and Bianco and Kosic (2023) ($\alpha = .92$; $\omega = .92$; $M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.65$).

Proportionality was assessed with six items from the Italian adaptation of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire 2 (MFQ-2; Frisari et al., 2025; Atari et al., 2023). The MFQ-2 is an

updated version of the original MFQ (Graham et al., 2011), in which the Fairness foundation was reformulated and two new foundations – Equality and Proportionality – were introduced. Participants rated the extent to which each statement reflected their own views on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 5 = Totally agree). Example items for Proportionality: “I think people who are more hardworking should end up with more money,” and “I think people should be rewarded in proportion to what they contribute” ($\alpha = .73$; $\omega = .73$; $M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.56$).

Pro- and anti-migrant collective action intentions were measured by adapting items from van Zomeren et al. (2008) to three custom scenarios. For each scenario, participants indicated their willingness to engage in four pro-migrant and four anti-migrant collective actions, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all willing, 5 = very willing). Example items include “Would you participate in a solidarity demonstration in support of migrants?” (pro-migrant, Scenario 2) and “Would you sign a petition to prevent the allocation of public housing to migrants?” (anti-migrant, Scenario 2). Two composite indices were computed: pro-migrant intentions ($\alpha = .95$; $\omega = .95$; $M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.20$) and anti-migrant intentions ($\alpha = .94$; $\omega = .94$; $M = 1.51$, $SD = 0.80$).

ii. Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before testing the main hypotheses, descriptive statistics and correlations among the key study variables were examined (see Tables 11-12).

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Quest for Significance</i>	2.48	0.75	0.18	-0.24
<i>Anti-migrant Prejudice</i>	2.19	0.65	0.55	-0.20
<i>Proportionality</i>	3.98	0.56	-0.52	0.48
<i>Pro-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	3.12	1.20	-0.13	-0.78
<i>Anti-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	1.51	0.80	1.81	2.87
<i>Political Orientation</i>	2.97	1.53	0.04	-0.97

Table 11. Descriptive statistics of the variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. QFS	-						
2. PREJ	0.08***	-					
3. PROP	-0.02	-0.03	-				
4. CAP	0.05	-0.57***	-0.03	-			
5. CAN	0.09*	0.52***	-0.13**	-0.07	-		
6. AGE	-0.341***	0.09*	0.13***	-0.15***	0.01	-	
7. PO	0.03	-0.01	-0.09*	-0.09*	-0.04	0.05	-

Table 12. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Note. QFS = Quest for Significance; PREJ = Anti-migrant Prejudice; PROP = Proportionality; CAP = Pro-Migrant Collective Action Intentions; CAN = Anti-migrant Collective Action Intentions; PO = Political Orientation. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Moderated Mediation Analyses

To test the hypotheses of moderated mediation, a path analysis was conducted using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). In the first analysis, we tested a mediation model in which the quest for significance (QFS) was specified as the independent variable, anti-migrant prejudice as the mediator, and pro-migrant collective action intentions as the dependent variable. The same model was then replicated with anti-migrant collective action intentions as the dependent variable. In both models, the moral foundation of Proportionality was included as a moderator of the path linking prejudice to collective action.

Political orientation, gender, and age were entered as covariates in all analyses. Indirect effects were estimated using a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples and 20,000 Monte Carlo draws.

Moderated Mediation Model 1 – Pro-migrant Collective Action Intentions

In this tested model, the QFS was specified as the independent variable, prejudice toward migrants as the mediator, Proportionality as the moderator, and pro-migrant collective action intentions as the dependent variable.

R² values indicated that the model explained 2.7% of the variance in anti-migrant prejudice and 37% of the variance in pro-migrant collective action intentions.

The direct effect of QFS on pro-migrant collective action intentions was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .028$, 95% $CI [0.008, 0.146]$). QFS was also significantly associated with anti-migrant prejudice ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .003$, 95% $CI [0.043, 0.212]$).

Results further revealed a significant negative interaction between Proportionality and prejudice in predicting pro-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .015$, 95% $CI [-0.163, -0.017]$). The indirect effect of QFS on pro-migrant collective action intentions through prejudice, moderated by Proportionality, was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.01$, $SE = 0.005$, $p = .036$, 95% $CI [-0.022, -0.001]$).

A simple slopes analysis was conducted to examine changes in the indirect effect across levels of Proportionality. The analysis showed that the indirect effect of QFS on pro-migrant

collective action intentions via prejudice was significant and negative at all levels of the moderator (see Table 13).

	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
QFS → PREJ → CA_Pro					
Low (-1 SD) Proportionality	-0.06	.02	.003	-.102	-.021
Average (Mean) Proportionality	-.07	.02	.002	-.119	-.026
High (+ 1 SD) Proportionality	-.08	.03	.002	-.139	-.030

Table 13. Indirect effects of Quest for Significance (QFS) on pro-migrant collective action intentions (CA_Pro) via Prejudice (PREJ) by Proportionality levels.

The total effect of QFS on pro-migrant collective action intentions was not significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .066$, 95% *CI* [-0.004, 0.136]).

Overall, these findings reveal a consistent pattern: as Proportionality increases, the indirect effect of QFS through prejudice is associated with lower intentions to engage in pro-migrant collective action. In other words, when individuals strongly endorse the moral principle of proportionality, prejudice plays a more decisive role in channeling the quest for significance away from solidaristic engagement.

Moderated Mediation Model 2 – Anti-migrant Collective Action Intentions

In this model, the variable structure remained the same, but anti-migrant collective action intentions were specified as the dependent variable.

R^2 values indicated that the model explained 2.7% of the variance in anti-migrant prejudice and 29.9% of the variance in anti-migrant collective action intentions. The direct effect of QFS on anti-migrant collective action intentions was not significant ($\beta = 0.05$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .274$, 95% *CI* [-0.037, 0.129]). By contrast, QFS was significantly associated with anti-migrant prejudice ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .004$, 95% *CI* [0.041, 0.215]).

Results further revealed a significant negative interaction between Proportionality and prejudice in predicting anti-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = -0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .003$, 95% $CI [-0.217, -0.044]$). The indirect effect of QFS on anti-migrant collective action intentions through prejudice, moderated by Proportionality, was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.007$, $p = .014$, 95% $CI [-0.030, -0.003]$).

A simple slopes analysis was then conducted to examine changes in the indirect effect across levels of Proportionality. The analysis showed that the indirect effect of QFS on anti-migrant collective action intentions via prejudice was significant and positive at all levels of the moderator (see Table 14).

The total effect of QFS on anti-migrant collective action intentions was not significant ($\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .485$, 95% $CI [-0.054, 0.113]$).

Overall, these findings indicate a consistent trend: although the indirect effect remained positive and significant at all levels, it progressively decreased as Proportionality increased. In other words, endorsement of the moral principle of proportionality appears to limit the extent to which the quest for significance is channeled into hostile forms of collective mobilization, thereby reducing exclusionary tendencies.

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
QFS \rightarrow PREJ \rightarrow CA_Anti					
Low (- 1 SD) Proportionality	.08	.03	.002	.029	.134
Average (Mean) Proportionality	.07	.02	.002	.024	.107
High (+ 1 SD) Proportionality	.05	.02	.004	.016	.081

Table 14. Indirect effects of Quest for Significance (QFS) on anti-migrant collective action intentions (CA_Anti) via Prejudice (PREJ) by Proportionality levels.

iii. Discussion and Limitations

Study 3 aimed to investigate the role of the Proportionality moral foundation (Atari et al., 2023) in the relationship between QFS, anti-migrant prejudice, and collective action intentions toward migrants. Specifically, it examined whether Proportionality moderated the association between prejudice and pro- and anti-migrant mobilization, thereby shaping how QFS is channeled into divergent forms of collective engagement.

Consistent with Studies 2a and 2b and with prior research on the Significance Quest Theory (SQT; Leander et al., 2020; Rullo et al., 2022), the findings confirmed that the activation of QFS is associated with higher levels of anti-migrant prejudice. This supports the view that prejudice functions as a motivated response through which QFS directs individuals toward exclusionary collective orientations, reinforcing ingroup status and, in turn, personal significance.

The novel contribution of Study 3 lies in showing that this process is further shaped by a moral filter represented by Proportionality. In the model predicting pro-migrant collective actions, the indirect effect of QFS through prejudice was consistently negative and significant across all levels of Proportionality, with an increasing trend: as adherence to proportional meritocratic principles strengthened, prejudice became stronger in inhibiting solidaristic engagement. This finding aligns with evidence that proportional meritocracy reduces support for redistributive policies and legitimizes social inequalities (McCoy & Major, 2007; Mijs, 2021).

This dynamic can be understood through two complementary frameworks. First, the Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1980) posits that individuals tend to see the world as fundamentally fair, interpreting inequalities not as structural barriers but as proportional outcomes of individual effort or behavior. Second, the System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 2005;

Jost et al., 2017) emphasizes the tendency to defend and legitimize the status quo, perceiving social hierarchies as fair and functional to maintaining social order. Applied to migration, these frameworks explain how adherence to meritocratic criteria amplifies the negative impact of prejudice: negative stereotypes of migrants – for instance, the perception that they contribute little or exploit resources – provide cognitive and moral grounds to deem them “undeserving.” Their disadvantaged condition is thus interpreted not as an injustice requiring correction but as a proportionate outcome of their actions (or presumed inactions), reducing willingness to engage in pro-migrant mobilization, as support is perceived as an undue and unjustified allocation of resources (Bonora et al., *unpublished manuscript*).

In the model predicting anti-migrant collective actions, the indirect effect of QFS via prejudice was positive and significant across all levels of Proportionality, but weakened as Proportionality increased. This suggests that while prejudice remained a driver of exclusionary engagement, its impact diminished among those who more strongly endorsed proportionality. One interpretation is twofold: on the one hand, Proportionality can legitimize exclusion by reinforcing the view that migrants “have not contributed enough” or “do not deserve” resources (Ho & Kteily, 2020); on the other, it may attenuate hostility if migrants’ disadvantaged condition is seen as an already proportionate punishment. In this latter perspective, anti-migrant mobilization becomes unnecessary, costly, and redundant: if migrants already “get what they deserve,” there is no reason to oppose them actively. The data seem to reflect this second mechanism, suggesting that for individuals with strong proportionality beliefs, the drive toward exclusionary action is weakened. Consistent with the System Justification Theory, this pattern also reflects the belief that upward mobility is possible: in a system perceived as meritocratic, migrants will succeed – or fail – based on their own merits.

Overall, Study 3 advances prior evidence by identifying Proportionality as a moderator of how prejudice channels QFS into collective mobilization to restore significance. In this sense, Study 3 contributes to integrating the Significance-Quest Theory with the Moral Foundations Theory in the study of collective actions toward migrants.

Several limitations should be acknowledged, partly shared with previous studies. Cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, leaving open the possibility of reverse or bidirectional associations. Moreover, although relatively large and balanced, the convenience sample limits generalizability. The exclusive reliance on self-report measures may also have introduced social desirability bias, highlighting the value of future research using behavioral or implicit indicators. Finally, while the focus on Proportionality represents an innovative contribution, the potential role of other moral foundations remains unexplored.

Despite these limitations, the results provide a valuable contribution to understanding the conditions under which QFS fosters divergent trajectories of collective engagement, demonstrating how meritocratic principles of proportional justice shape the relationship between motivational needs, intergroup attitudes, and social mobilization.

f. General Discussion

The studies presented in this section provide initial evidence supporting the integration of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022) into the study of collective action toward migrants, particularly regarding exclusion and ingroup defense as means of restoring personal significance.

Study 2a, based on a cross-sectional design, showed that perceived loss of significance was associated with an increase in the quest for significance (QFS), which in turn was linked to higher levels of prejudice. Indirect effects confirmed that prejudice functioned as a strategic

mediator, providing a narrative frame through which the QFS oriented natives toward greater anti-migrant mobilization and reduced support for pro-migrant initiatives, with consequences also at the behavioral level (e.g., petition signing). At the same time, a small direct positive effect of significance loss on prosocial intentions emerged, suggesting that the motivational drive is not inherently hostile, but becomes exclusionary when filtered through prejudice.

Study 2b, using an experimental design, provided causal evidence of this mechanism: unlike the significance gain condition, the manipulation of significance loss increased QFS, which, through higher prejudice, predicted support for anti-immigration policies and intentions for hostile collective action. Taken together, the first two studies converge in showing that QFS tends to be channeled toward exclusionary outcomes when coupled with prejudicial narratives about the outgroup. These findings contribute to the debate on trajectories of significance, that is, the different pathways through which the need for significance can be reaffirmed depending on the available narratives (Kruglanski et al., 2025). Replicated across two different sociopolitical contexts, these results confirm the cross-cultural validity of the observed mechanism and underscore the role of prejudice as a legitimizing device for exclusion, including through collective action (Shepherd et al., 2018).

Study 3 enriched the framework by incorporating the moral foundation of Proportionality, introducing this moral orientation as a moderator of the relationship between prejudice and collective action intentions toward migrants. Findings showed that Proportionality amplified the impact of prejudice in reducing support for pro-migrant actions, while it tended to attenuate its role in predicting anti-migrant mobilization. This dynamic reflects the functioning of meritocratic principles – closely tied to the Proportionality framework - as normative lenses that passively legitimize inequalities and negative stereotypes, thereby reducing solidarity while simultaneously limiting the need for active hostility against migrants, who are perceived as

already “punished” in a fair and proportional manner (Lerner, 1980; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Jost et al., 2017).

Overall, the three studies advance research on collective actions toward migrants by enriching, on the one hand, the SQT, confirming QFS as a central motivational engine and prejudice as one of its main channels of expression, with predominantly exclusionary outcomes; and, on the other hand, the Moral Foundations Theory, showing that Proportionality operates as a moral filter capable of shaping the propensity for collective engagement and defining its legitimacy.

g. Practical Implications

The findings of this section offer several important practical implications. First, the personal QFS may constitute a psychosocial risk factor when it relies on prejudice as a narrative that legitimizes exclusion as a means of restoring significance. From this perspective, interventions aimed at preventing or mitigating experiences of loss of significance – such as educational programs, social inclusion initiatives, or well-being promotion – together with practices and policies designed to reduce intergroup prejudice – through positive contact, awareness campaigns, or narrative interventions – could not only foster more inclusive attitudes but also act as protective barriers, preventing the fulfillment of fundamental needs such as the need for significance from being channeled into exclusionary trajectories.

At the same time, the role of the moral foundation of Proportionality highlights that public policies and institutional discourses emphasizing a strictly proportional view of rights and resources risk, whether intentionally or not, reinforcing the link between prejudice and reduced solidarity. Conversely, communication strategies that emphasize migrants’ actual contributions to society or deconstruct merit-based stereotypes may attenuate the impact of such a moral frame and promote more inclusive forms of mobilization.

h. Conclusions

Overall, the studies of Section 1.1 demonstrate that the personal QFS can serve as a powerful yet potentially risky motivational driver: when anchored in prejudice as a guiding narrative, it tends to be channeled into exclusionary trajectories and ingroup defense. At the same time, the analyses indicate that QFS is not inherently hostile, leaving open the possibility that, under alternative frames, it may also translate into solidaristic forms of collective mobilization.

Building on this premise, the next section of the thesis focuses on how the motivation for significance can guide natives not only toward closure and hostility, but also toward prosocial pathways of collective actions in support of migrants.

SECTION 1.2

Restoring Significance Through Pro-Migrant Collective Action: The Mediating Role of Identification with Activist Groups

a. General Introduction

So far, the focus has been on showing that the personal quest for significance (QFS), when activated by perceived loss, may orient individuals toward hostile forms of collective action against migrants, with prejudice serving as a mediating mechanism that constrains opportunities for solidaristic engagement. However, the findings from previous studies reveal a more nuanced picture.

In the exploratory Study 1, personal QFS activated by perceived loss was selectively associated with intentions to engage in anti-migrant collective action, without effects on pro-migrant intentions. In contrast, Study 2a revealed a different outcome: loss of significance directly and significantly predicted both intentions for pro-migrant collective engagement and the concrete behavior of signing a pro-migrant petition, with no corresponding effects on exclusionary mobilization. Similarly, in Study 3, QFS was positively associated with intentions for pro-migrant collective action, without any significant relation to anti-migrant intentions.

These results suggest that personal QFS, though arising from perceived loss, does not necessarily lead to exclusionary outcomes: under particular social and identity conditions, it may also sustain prosocial pathways and inclusive forms of collective action. This interpretation is consistent with the theoretical framework of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), which conceptualizes the QFS not as a unidirectional motivational force implying a fixed orientation, but as a tension that can be directed toward divergent outcomes depending on the ideological narratives internalized and the social networks that legitimize its expression (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2022).

In contexts dominated by alarmist discourses focused on security and threat, the quest tends to fuel prejudice and hostile mobilization; conversely, in environments characterized by legitimized narratives that value inclusion and human rights, the same motivational tension may orient individuals toward collective engagement in support of migrants.

Although QFS has traditionally been investigated primarily as a driver of extreme, violent, or antisocial behaviors (Da Silva et al., 2024), this section is situated within the more recent and still limited literature that interprets personal QFS as a motivational force capable of also sustaining prosocial conduct, particularly when such conduct involves personal cost. It is precisely sacrifice that confers depth to the behavior, transforming it into a powerful source of meaning. Individuals in search of significance appear more willing to bear the material and symbolic costs of actions that promote the common good, as these provide a concrete opportunity to reaffirm personal relevance and contribute to shared values.

Dakin et al. (2022) demonstrated that prosociality represents one of the most powerful sources of meaning: “costly” acts – demanding time, resources, or energy – do not diminish its appeal but rather amplify it, since sacrifice itself becomes a privileged channel for reaffirming or protecting personal significance (Bélanger et al., 2022). Activities such as volunteering, demanding donations, or sustained support for high-cost social causes not only strengthen social connectedness and coherence with moral values of benevolence and universalism but also directly increase the perception of meaning in life.

From this perspective, anti-mafia activism represents a paradigmatic case of extreme yet prosocial behavior: the willingness to incur personal risks and engage in dangerous activities against criminal organizations can be interpreted as stemming from an anticipated significance loss – that is, the fear of losing dignity and respect by remaining passive in the face of the mafia threat (Pica et al., 2025). This dynamic leads certain individuals to endorse altruistic values

(social justice, equality, honesty) and affiliate with anti-mafia activist networks, which together sustain the willingness to accept personal sacrifice. These findings illustrate how the 3N model – Need, Narrative, and Network – (for a systematic review, see Da Silva et al., 2024) can also account for radical, nonviolent, and civically relevant forms of mobilization directed toward the collective good as a means of restoring significance.

An additional contribution comes from the study by Lui et al. (2022), which showed that, among young people, both the presence and the search for meaning mediate the relationship between future orientation and prosocial behavior. Thinking about the future fosters greater awareness of present meaning and intensifies the motivation to pursue it, processes that in turn support prosocial conduct even under adverse conditions.

These elements clearly parallel pro-migrant activism, which rarely reduces to symbolic gestures of low involvement but typically demands energy, time, and resources, as well as the willingness to confront social and political opposition. Participating in demonstrations, organizing awareness campaigns, providing legal or material support to migrants, or even publicly signing petitions in their favor can thus be understood as forms of costly prosociality: actions that, beyond contributing to the collective cause, enable individuals to strengthen their personal significance through sacrifice and the connection with universal values of justice, inclusion, and human dignity.

In this perspective, the present subsection focuses on the processes through which the motivation to restore personal significance can be channeled into forms of collective engagement in support of migrants. Identification with pro-migrant activist groups emerges as a key psychological process: it offers a sense of belonging, identity continuity, and the possibility of transforming a personal loss of significance into a shared commitment to inclusion.

Whereas the previous section highlighted prejudice as the central mechanism channeling QFS toward exclusionary mobilization, the current section turns to an alternative pathway: QFS, when framed within prosocial networks, may foster identification with those mobilizing for migrants, thereby promoting solidaristic forms of collective engagement. This subsection thus aims to demonstrate that personal QFS does not produce only exclusionary outcomes but can also sustain inclusive commitments, highlighting the ambivalence of this motivation in collective responses to migration.

From the quest for significance to pro-migrant collective action: The role of social identification

Group membership plays a crucial role in sustaining and directing the quest for significance (QFS; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2009). The need for significance can be fulfilled by adhering to a cause perceived as larger than oneself (Seligman, 2002), through attachment and identification with “valued” collectives and by acting in their name (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014). Social identification provides not only belonging and shared status, but also symbolic continuity and recognition, strengthening the perception that individual contributions have lasting relevance (Swann et al., 2010).

In this perspective, collective identification – understood as the degree of psychological connection with a group to the point of including it in the self-concept – further reinforces QFS, especially when personal identity is closely intertwined with collective identity (Jasko et al., 2017). At the same time, it serves as a psychological resource capable of buffering experiences of significance loss and enhancing personal relevance (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2014). This process aligns with the *collectivistic shift hypothesis* (Kruglanski et al., 2013): when faced with experiences of insignificance, the motivation to restore personal value translates into identification with groups that provide purpose, recognition, and moral coherence.

Experimental evidence shows that significance loss, induced by personal failure or negative feedback, increases collectivistic orientation and willingness to engage in group-supportive activities (Orehek et al., 2011). Identification thus becomes a functional response to the need for significance, capable of transforming individual anxiety into a sense of belonging to a collective that restores dignity and mitigates even profound existential anxieties, such as fear of death (Greenberg et al., 1994; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2014).

Group identification, however, does not merely provide symbolic protection: it also fosters willingness to accept risks and make concrete sacrifices on behalf of the ingroup. Experimental studies have shown that activating collective identity, for example, through identity-salience manipulations, increases the propensity to support the group's cause even at the expense of personal costs (Swann et al., 2010; Orehek et al., 2011). QFS, therefore, does not remain confined to the individual level but tends to be translated into social identifications that orient action in collective terms (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2014).

These dynamics are consistent with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), which conceptualize social identity as a source of self-esteem and behavioral orientation. In contexts of exclusion or injustice, group identification enables individuals to transform personal frustrations into collective motivations (Branscombe et al., 1999). However, this process is not univocal: depending on ideological narratives and the surrounding social context, it can predispose both to hostile strategies against outgroups and to solidaristic, pro-outgroup trajectories. When the group promotes values of justice, rights, and inclusion, motivation may translate into prosocial and civically relevant actions (Elad-Strenger, 2016). In this sense, identification with groups that support inclusive causes, such as pro-migrant collectives, becomes a powerful channel of prosocial mobilization. In light of the SQT, such identification could provide a framework for restoring personal

relevance through the defense of outgroups' rights and dignity. Collective engagement thus represents not only a means of supporting altruistic causes but also a strategy to reframe significance loss in prosocial terms, anchoring it to shared goals and forms of collective agency (van Zomeren et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2012).

According to the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008) and its subsequent developments, such as the Dual Chamber Model (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), identification with a group engaged in a cause represents a central mechanism of mobilization: it provides psychological belonging while activating motivational resources linked to shared perceptions of injustice, collective efficacy, and alignment with moral values.

It is in this space that the SQT offers an important integration: personal QFS – especially when activated by experiences of loss – may drive individuals to identify with collectives that provide recognition and dignity (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2014). Group identification is therefore not only a reaction to status threats but also a vehicle for reworking profound existential needs, transforming individual tension into collective orientation. This perspective helps address a significant gap: while the literature on collective action has emphasized social identity as a predictor of mobilization, it has paid less attention to how personal needs for significance may fuel identification and, through it, collective commitments. The studies presented here are situated within this theoretical space, exploring how personal QFS, when activated by real or perceived loss, may strengthen identification with pro-migrant groups and, in turn, foster prosocial trajectories of collective action.

b. The Present section

This subsection explores the prosocial potential of the personal QFS, highlighting how real or perceived significance loss does not necessarily lead to opposition toward outgroups but may also foster identification with collectives engaged in inclusive causes, such as pro-migrant

activism. Studies 4a and 4b test this perspective by focusing on identification with pro-migrant movements as a psychological mechanism through which QFS can direct individuals into intentions for solidaristic collective action.

Study 4a aims to examine, in a cross-sectional design, whether personal QFS activated by perceived loss is associated with natives' stronger identification with pro-migrant activist groups, and whether such identification functions as a pathway linking QFS to intentions for collective action in support of migrants, as well as to concrete behaviors such as petition signing.

Study 4b adopts an experimental design using the *Cyberball* paradigm (Williams et al., 2000, 2007) to simulate social exclusion. Its aim is to test causally whether ostracism-induced significance loss activates QFS and, through enhanced identification with pro-migrant groups, increases intentions for collective action directed at defending the dignity and rights of the outgroup.⁷

c. Study 4a

Study 4a, based on an Italian sample, tested two serial mediation models within a cross-sectional design. In both, perceived loss of significance (LOS) was conceptualized as an antecedent of personal QFS, which in turn led to the outcomes through identification with pro-migrant activists. In the first model, the dependent variable was the intention to engage in pro-migrant collective action (see Fig. 11); in the second, the outcome was a behavioral indicator, namely the signing of a pro-migrant petition (see Fig. 12).

Consistent with the proposed models, we first expected that personal LOS would be positively associated with QFS, reflecting individuals' attempts to restore their relevance

⁷ All studies in the present section were approved by the Ethics Committee of Sapienza University of Rome (protocol number CERT_1965D6260AC)

following perceptions of devaluation. We further hypothesized that QFS would be positively related to identification with pro-migrant activists, which, in turn, would predict stronger intentions of solidaristic collective action and greater likelihood of signing a pro-migrant petition. Within this framework, we expected identification to serve as a mediator between QFS and the two forms of collective engagement: specifically, positively mediating the relationship between significance loss and both pro-migrant mobilization intentions and actual behavior.

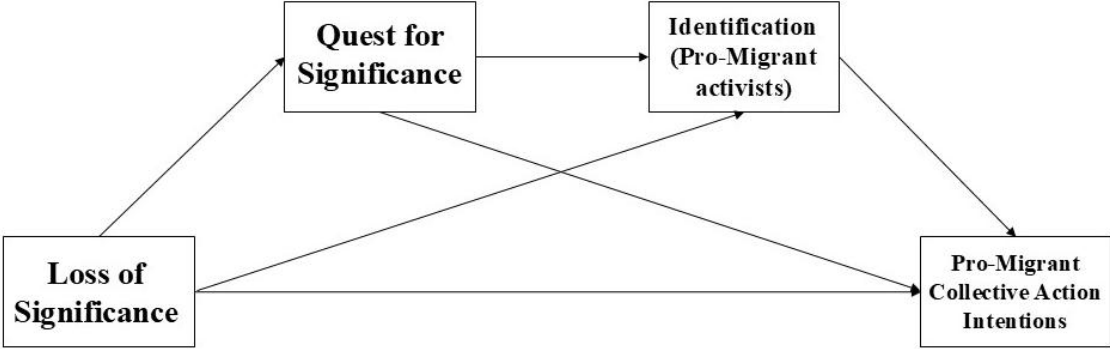


Figure 11. Conceptual serial mediation model 1 with pro-migrant collective action intentions as outcomes.

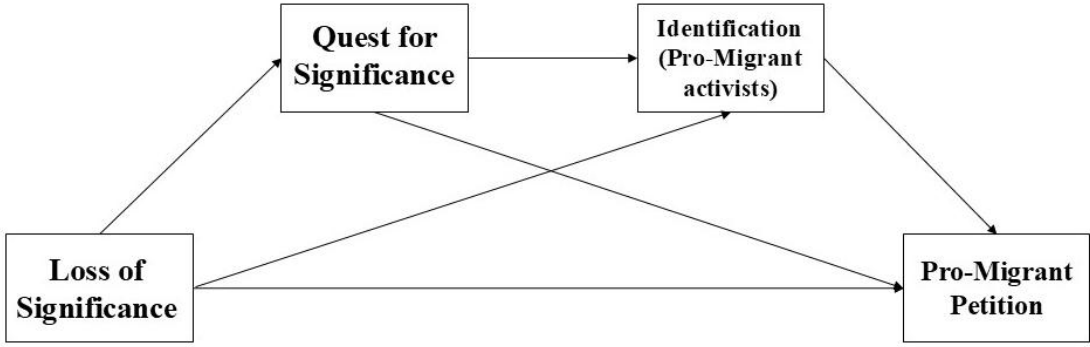


Figure 12. Conceptual serial mediation model 2 with pro-migrant petition as outcomes.

i. Method

Participants

As in the previous studies, the required sample size was determined through an a priori power analysis for serial mediation models using Monte Carlo simulations (Schoemann et al.,

2017). Assuming medium-small effect sizes ($r = .25$; Cohen, 2013) and a power threshold of .80, the analysis indicated that approximately 305 participants were needed to achieve adequate statistical power.

The final sample consisted of 352 Italian adult participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 30.12$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.01$; 70.2% women). Sociodemographic information collected included age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, perceived socio-economic status (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.43$), and political orientation (measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = far left to 6 = far right; $M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.14$). Complete sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using a snowball technique among psychology students. After providing informed consent, they completed an online questionnaire in Italian administered via Qualtrics, which took on average approximately 10 minutes. The survey included measures of perceived LOS, personal QFS, identification with pro-migrant activists, and both intentions and behavior related to pro-migrant collective action. The final section of the questionnaire collected sociodemographic information. At the end, participants received a brief written debriefing.

Personal LOS was assessed using the Loss of Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 5 = Totally agree), which had also been employed in previous studies ($\alpha = .81$; $\omega = .82$; $M = 2.37$, $SD = 0.74$).

Personal QFS, unlike in previous studies, was measured with the Italian version of the Quest for Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021). The scale consists of six items evaluating the desire to obtain respect, recognition, and social relevance, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =

Totally disagree, 5 = Totally agree). Example items include “I would like to be more respected” and “I would like to be more important to others.” A composite score was computed, with higher values indicating a stronger QFS ($\alpha = .93$; $\omega = .93$; $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.06$).

Identification with pro-migrant activists was assessed through four items adapted from established instruments (Leach et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2012; Lindström et al., 2024). Participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 5 = Totally agree). Example items included “Being someone who fights for immigrants’ rights is an important part of how I see myself” and “I identify with other people who fight for immigrants’ rights.” A composite score was computed, with higher values indicating stronger identification with pro-migrant activists ($\alpha = .88$; $\omega = .88$; $M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.99$).

Intentions of pro-migrant collective action were assessed, as in previous studies, by adapting items from Smeekes et al. (2022) to measure participants’ willingness to engage in different forms of social participation related to the migration issue in Italy. The scale included six items referring to outgroup-protection behaviors such as joining an association, signing or organizing a petition (including online), making donations, participating in or organizing demonstrations, joining online groups, or sending protest emails to the government. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all willing, 5 = very willing). A composite mean score was computed, with higher values indicating stronger willingness to engage in pro-migrant collective action ($\alpha = .90$; $\omega = .90$; $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.00$).

Finally, participants were given the real, voluntary opportunity to sign an actual petition in support of migrants. Responses were coded dichotomously (0 = not signed, 1 = signed) and treated as a behavioral indicator in the tested model.

ii. Results

Preliminary analyses

Before testing the main hypotheses, descriptive statistics and correlations among the key study variables were examined (see Tables 15-16).

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Loss of Significance</i>	2.37	0.74	0.38	-0.29
<i>Quest for Significance</i>	3.03	1.06	-0.09	-0.78
<i>Identification with Pro-Migrant Activists</i>	3.18	0.99	-0.14	-0.51
<i>Pro-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	3.06	1.00	-0.13	-0.59
<i>Political Orientation</i>	2.53	1.14	0.23	0.13

Table 15. Descriptive statistics of the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. LOSS	-						
2. QFS	0.63***	-					
3. ID	0.09	0.14*	-				
4. CA	0.19***	0.16**	0.58***	-			
5. PET	0.13*	0.15**	0.40***	-0.46***	-		
6. AGE	-0.28***	-0.32***	-0.07	-0.20***	-0.19***	-	
7. PO	0.06	-0.05	-0.52***	-0.44***	-0.44***	-0.16**	-

Table 16. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Notes. *LOSS* = Loss of Significance; *QFS* = Quest for Significance; *ID* = Identification with Pro-Migrant Activists; *CA* = Pro-Migrant Collective Action Intentions; *PET* = Pro-migrant Petition Signing; *PO* = Political Orientation. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Serial Mediation Analyses

To test the hypothesized mediation models, we conducted a path analysis in R (R Core Team, 2023) using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). In the first model, perceived LOS was

specified as the independent variable, personal QFS and identification with pro-migrant activists as serial mediators, and intentions of pro-migrant collective action as the dependent variable. Indirect effects were estimated with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

In the second model, the same serial structure was applied, but the outcome was replaced with a binary indicator of whether participants signed a pro-migrant petition. Given the categorical nature of this outcome, following the same analytic approach adopted in Study 2a of the previous subsection, the model was estimated by treating the dependent variable as ordered and using a WLSMV estimator with a probit link. For this categorical model, standard errors and 95% confidence intervals were derived using the delta method.

Serial Mediation Model 1 – Intentions of Pro-Migrant Collective Action

To test the hypothesis that QFS and identification mediate the effect of loss of significance on pro-migrant collective action intentions, we tested a serial mediation model including political orientation as a covariate (see Fig. 13).

R^2 values indicated that the model explained 39.1% of the variance in QFS, 28% of the variance in identification with pro-migrant activists, and 38.3% of the variance in intentions of pro-migrant collective action.

Results showed that LOS was positively associated with QFS ($\beta = 0.63$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.564, 0.685]$), which in turn was positively associated with identification ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .038$, 95% $CI [0.006, 0.233]$). Identification was further positively associated with intentions of pro-migrant collective action ($\beta = 0.47$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.382, 0.560]$).

The direct effect of loss of significance on the outcome was also significant and positive ($\beta = 0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .008$, 95% $CI [0.037, 0.246]$).

About the indirect effects, they were summarized in Table 17.

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow CA	-.003	.03	.936	-.069	.063
LOS \rightarrow ID \rightarrow CA	-.01	.03	.765	-.062	.045
LOS \rightarrow QFS \rightarrow ID \rightarrow CA	.04	.02	.044	.001	.070
TOT	.18	.06	.002	.067	.287

Table 17. Indirect effects of loss of significance (LOS) on pro-migrant collective action intentions (CA) through quest for significance (QFS) and identification with pro-migrant activists (ID).

Finally, the total effect was significant ($\beta = 0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .002$, 95% $CI [0.067, 0.287]$).

This pattern suggests that personal LOS does not foster inclusive collective engagement solely through QFS or solely through identification with pro-migrant activists. Rather, the process takes shape when these two steps operate sequentially. In other words, loss of significance increases QFS, which in turn – albeit weakly – enhances identification with those fighting for migrants’ rights; identification then emerges as the crucial factor channeling the pathway toward intentions of solidaristic collective action. The presence of a significant serial effect, alongside the non-significance of the single indirect effects, indicates that QFS alone is not sufficient to produce prosocial outcomes but requires anchoring in collective identification consistent with inclusive values and goals.

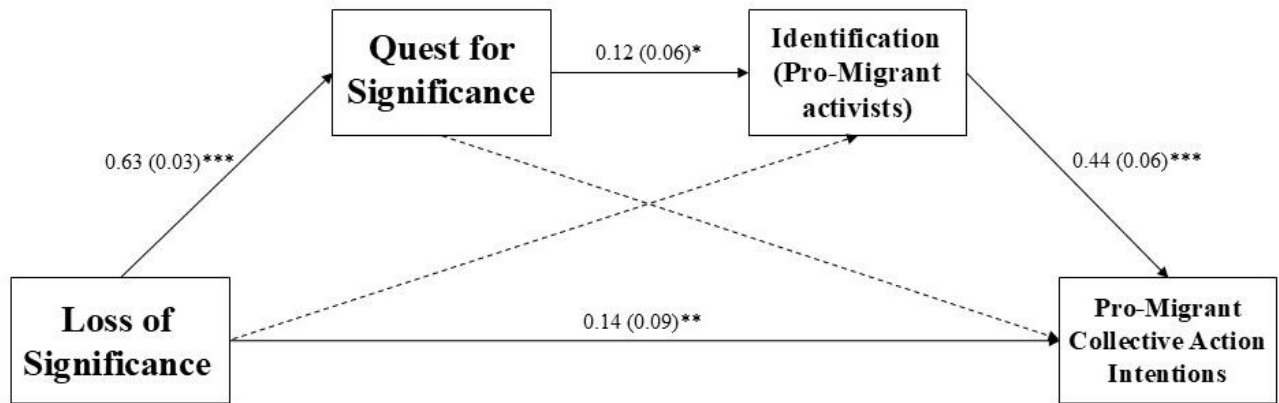


Figure 13. Serial mediation model 1: indirect effect of loss of significance on pro-migrant collective action intentions through the quest for significance and identification.

Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Notes. β (SE) for each path. Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Serial Mediation Model 2 – Pro-Migrant Petition Signing

To examine whether the processes observed for collective action intentions extended to actual behavior, we estimated another serial mediation model with pro-migrant petition signing as the dependent variable (see Fig. 14). The model explained 39.2% of the variance in QFS, 1.8% of the variance in identification with pro-migrant activists, and 31.0% of the variance in petition signing.

Consistent with the previous model, LOS was positively associated with QFS ($\beta = 0.63$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.571, 0.680]). QFS was in turn significantly associated with identification ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .031$, 95% CI [0.012, 0.251]). Identification was further significantly associated with signing the pro-migrant petition ($\beta = 0.52$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.405, 0.628]).

The direct effect of LOS on the outcome, however, was not significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .414$, 95% CI [-0.094, 0.229]). Regarding the indirect effects, they were summarized in Table 18.

	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
LOS → QFS → PET	.06	.06	.261	-.047	.174
LOS → ID → PET	.003	.03	.922	-.059	.065
LOS → QFS → ID → PET	.04	.02	.042	.002	.083
TOT	.11	.08	.186	-.053	.272

Table 18. Indirect effects of loss of significance (LOS) on pro-migrant petition signing (PET) through quest for significance (QFS) and identification with pro-migrant activists (ID).

Finally, the total effect was non-significant ($\beta = 0.11$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .186$, 95% *CI* [-0.053, 0.272]).

In line with the previous model, the results suggest that the same sequential process linking LOS to collective engagement also emerged when considering a behavioral outcome. The serial indirect pathway through QFS and identification was again significant, indicating that the process observed at the level of intentions also holds when considering actual behavior.

However, important differences emerged. Both the direct and total effects of LOS on petition signing were non-significant, and the serial indirect effect also disappeared once political orientation was included as a covariate. This suggests that, although the motivational sequence resembled the one observed for intentions, its explanatory power for concrete behavior was weaker and did not hold when ideological factors were controlled for⁸.

⁸ Complete results and detailed explanations concerning the role of political orientation as a covariate are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

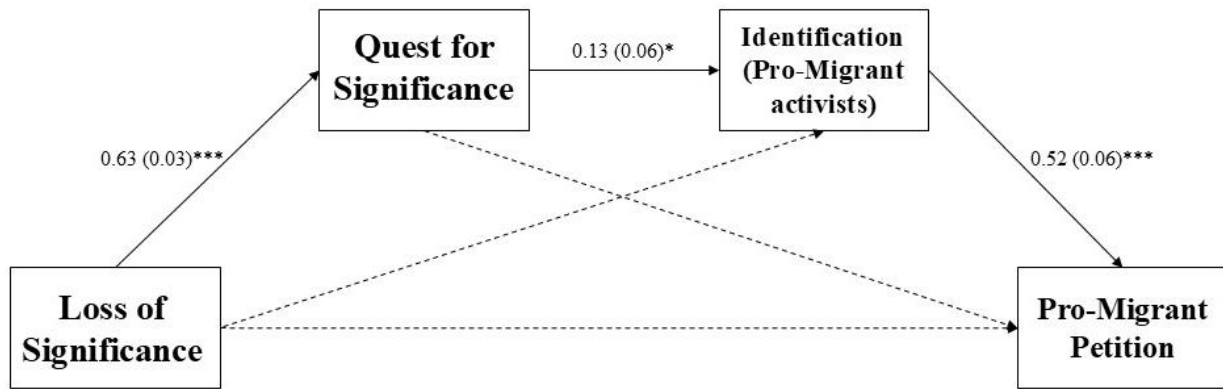


Figure 14. Serial mediation model 2: indirect effect of loss of significance on pro-migrant petition signing through the quest for significance and identification.
 Notes. β (SE) for each path. Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

iii. Discussion and Limitations

The aim of Study 4a was to examine whether and how personal loss of significance (LOS) and the resulting quest for significance (QFS) could foster collective engagement on behalf of migrants through identification with pro-migrant activists, distinguishing between intentions and concrete behavior.

The two tested models, focused respectively on collective action intentions (Figs.11 and 13) and on pro-migrant petition signing (Figs. 12 and 14), both revealed a significant serial pathway: loss of significance was positively associated with QFS, which in turn promoted identification with pro-migrant activists; identification was then positively related both to intentions of collective action and to a greater likelihood of signing the petition in support of migrants' rights.

The finding that only the serial pathway, and not the simple indirect effects, reached significance suggests that QFS alone is not sufficient to produce prosocial outcomes, but requires anchoring in a specific identity process. Consistent with the *collectivistic shift*

hypothesis (Kruglanski et al., 2013), motivation stemming from loss translates into collective orientation only when it is channeled through groups that provide purpose, moral legitimacy, and dignity. This result supports the neutral nature of personal QFS, which does not determine in advance the means through which significance is restored, but can orient action toward either exclusionary or inclusive trajectories depending on the narratives and social networks available (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022).

Important differences nonetheless emerged between the two models. In the first, LOS was directly associated with intentions of pro-migrant collective action; in the second, concerning actual petition signing, this association disappeared. This pattern indicates that motivational processes linked to the need for significance may be particularly influential at the attitudinal and intentional level, but lose strength when translated into behavior. The result is consistent with Study 2a, in which the effects on intentions extended only partially to behavior. Study 4a, therefore, reinforces the idea that the transition from intention to action requires additional conditions beyond the subjective willingness to restore significance, such as higher perceived costs or strong normative support (Sheeran, 2002; Sheeran & Webb, 2016).

From this perspective, petition signing – while involving political positioning and potential social costs – remains less demanding than other forms of activism. It is therefore not surprising that collective identification, rather than individual motivational needs, emerged as the decisive mediator. In line with major models of collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008; Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), identification with a group involved in a specific cause provides both a sense of belonging and motivational resources, such as perceived shared injustice and collective efficacy, which are essential to overcome the barriers separating intentions from behavior.

These findings also align with the literature on “costly” prosociality (e.g., Dakin et al., 2021; Pica et al., 2025), which posits that prosocial actions involving personal sacrifice constitute

privileged channels through which QFS can be satisfied. Petition signing may be interpreted as such an act, but given its relatively low political and social cost, future research should examine whether more demanding forms of activism – requiring greater investment of time, resources, or personal risk, or more strongly legitimized at the normative level – might more directly activate motivational needs for significance and thereby facilitate the transition from intention to action.

Overall, Study 4a confirms that QFS can orient individuals toward both intentions and behaviors in support of the outgroup, but also shows that, particularly at the behavioral level, this occurs only when motivation is channeled through identification with groups committed to inclusive causes, which serves as the crucial bridge between individual need and actual engagement.

Study 4a also presents some limitations: the use of a convenience sample, predominantly composed of politically progressive students, limits generalizability; reliance on self-report measures raises concerns about social desirability bias; and the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding the observed relationships. To address this latter limitation, Study 4b employed an experimental design, directly manipulating the experience of social exclusion to test the hypothesized processes.

d. Study 4b

Building on the evidence from Study 4a, Study 4b aimed to experimentally test whether, and how, the experience of social exclusion, simulated through the Cyberball paradigm (Williams et al., 2000, 2007), could activate similar psychological processes by strengthening identification with pro-migrant activists and increasing intentions to engage in collective action on their behalf (see Fig. 15). To test this model, a between-subjects experimental design with two conditions (social exclusion vs. inclusion) was employed.

It was hypothesized that excluded participants would report higher levels of significance loss compared to included participants, thereby confirming the effectiveness of the manipulation. The exclusion experience was further expected to trigger an increase in the quest for significance, which in turn would foster stronger identification with pro-migrant activists. Finally, through this enhanced identification, excluded individuals were expected to show greater willingness to participate in collective actions in support of migrants.

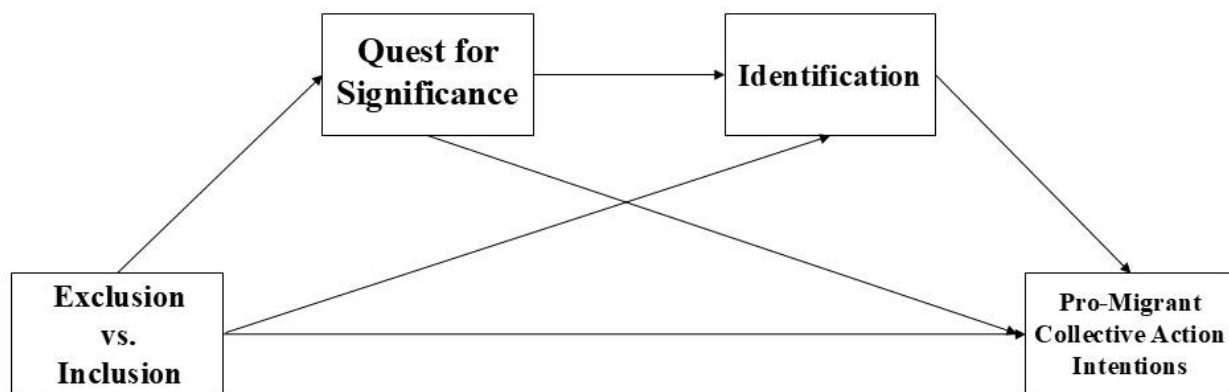


Figure 15. Conceptual serial mediation model with the experimental manipulation of social exclusion (vs. inclusion) as the independent variable.

The Cyberball Paradigm and the Quest for Significance: From Social Exclusion to Collective Action

Cyberball is an experimental paradigm introduced by Williams et al. (2000, 2007) to study the experience of ostracism – that is, the subjective perception of being excluded or ignored by others – in a controlled setting. It consists of a simple computerized ball-tossing game in which participants believe they are interacting online in real time with other players, who are in fact computer-controlled avatars. The game dynamics are fully pre-programmed, allowing the experimenter to manipulate variables such as the number of passes received, the perceived identity of the other players, and the duration of the session, thereby enabling precise analysis of psychological reactions to social exclusion.

The task is presented as a visualization exercise and includes two experimental conditions: a) an inclusion condition (control), in which ball tosses are distributed equitably among players, and b) an exclusion condition, in which, after a few initial throws, the participant ceases to receive the ball and experiences virtual ostracism.

The Cyberball paradigm has been extensively validated and has been shown to elicit emotions and cognitions comparable to those triggered by real-life experiences of social exclusion, such as anger, frustration, sadness, and reduced self-esteem (Williams & Zadro, 2005; Williams, 2007), with robust and enduring effects over time (for a meta-analysis, see Hartgerink et al., 2015).

From the perspective of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009; 2022), social ostracism induced through Cyberball can be understood as a form of significance loss – a deprivation of personal value and social recognition that undermines fundamental psychological needs for belonging, self-esteem, social relevance, and control. Even though the interaction takes place with avatars, participants perceive the exclusion as authentic, experiencing its consequences in a genuine and immediate way. In this sense, ostracism is not merely a source of negative affect but a motivational trigger capable of activating the QFS. Following an experience of significance loss, individuals' primary goal becomes the restoration of personal value and control, which may drive them to seek alternative pathways of belonging, recognition, and social validation (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

Several studies have confirmed this dynamic. Bäck et al. (2018), for instance, demonstrated that social exclusion can promote positive attitudes toward groups offering reintegration, particularly among individuals high in rejection sensitivity, provided that re-inclusion occurs in ideologically compatible contexts. Consistent with the SQT, these findings suggest that such engagement may not reflect genuine ideological alignment, but rather a motivated strategy to

regain significance and personal dignity. Yet, as noted by the authors themselves and by Da Silva et al.'s (2024) systematic review, the absence of a shared and standardized measure of significance leaves open the question of whether, and to what extent, ostracism should be considered a form of significance loss.

Similarly, Renström et al. (2018) found that exclusion can increase willingness to conform to political participation norms, especially among individuals with a strong need to belong. In this case, the threat posed by exclusion becomes a motivational lever, heightening readiness to engage in protest and political action when such behaviors are perceived as normative within one's social environment. Likewise, Knapton et al. (2022), in the context of Brexit, showed that exclusion by a political outgroup (Leave supporters) strengthened identification with the ingroup (Remain supporters) and, through this, political engagement. In line with the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999), exclusion was interpreted as discrimination based on group membership, reinforcing ingroup bonds and fostering collective action in its defense.

Taken together, this body of research demonstrates that ostracism can produce significance loss while simultaneously serving as a motivational lever that channels individuals toward new forms of affiliation and collective action. However, the two research strands – one examining the QFS and the other exploring the consequences of social exclusion for mobilization – have largely developed in parallel. It therefore remains unclear whether and how ostracism, as an experience of significance loss may translate into prosocial forms of collective action through the mediating role of identification with groups engaged in inclusive causes.

Addressing this gap, Study 4b set out to experimentally test whether social exclusion induced through the Cyberball paradigm activates the QFS and, via identification with pro-migrant activists, promotes solidaristic forms of collective action on their behalf.

i. Method

Participants

The final sample consisted of 209 Italian adult participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 24.30$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.70$; 75.1% women). Sociodemographic information was collected on age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, perceived socioeconomic status (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 6.31$, $SD = 1.32$), and political orientation, assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = extreme left, 6 = extreme right; $M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.92$). Full sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

As in the previous studies, sample size was determined through a power analysis for serial mediation models, conducted using Monte Carlo simulations (Schoemann et al., 2017) under conservative effect size assumptions ($r = .25$; Cohen, 2013). This analysis estimated that approximately 305 participants would be required to achieve a statistical power of .80. The final sample ($N = 209$) fell short of this threshold, a limitation attributable to the experimental methodology adopted – which constrained the number of participants per session – and to the exclusion of individuals who did not meet the inclusion criteria (adult age, Italian nationality, both parents of Italian origin, correct completion of the attention check) or failed to complete the full protocol ($n = 59$). Nevertheless, the sample was deemed adequate for testing the proposed model, though results should be interpreted with caution.

Procedure

Data collection relied on a snowball sampling strategy, which initially involved psychology students and was subsequently extended to their acquaintances and family members. Participation was voluntary.

The entire experimental protocol was conducted via Google Meet. Each participant attended a live group session, during which they could simultaneously view the other supposed players and the experimenter. At the beginning of each session, the experimenter briefly introduced the study (including the experimental deception) and requested that they read and sign the informed consent form. Participants were assured of data confidentiality and informed of their right to withdraw at any time, in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Once consent was obtained, the experimenter informed participants that they would be taking part in an online ball-tossing game. Following a short introduction and explanation of the session's phases, the experimenter initiated the Cyberball game. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: inclusion ($n = 107$) or exclusion ($n = 102$). In the inclusion condition (control), the ball was passed equally among all players, including the participant, ensuring a balanced interaction. In the exclusion condition (experimental), after a few initial passes, the virtual players ceased interacting with the participant, systematically excluding them from the game.

After completing the Cyberball, participants were directed to a questionnaire assessing the psychological variables of interest. Once the survey was completed, they rejoined the online video session for a thorough debriefing. In this phase, the experimenter disclosed the nature of the manipulation, explained the use of the simulated game (experimental deception), and addressed any questions. Participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw their data or request additional information about the study.

Measures

All psychological constructs of interest were assessed post-manipulation using self-report instruments on 5-point Likert scales (1 = Totally disagree, 5 = Totally agree). Sociodemographic characteristics were collected at the end of the questionnaire.

As a manipulation check, perceived social exclusion was measured with a 4-item scale adapted from previous studies (Williams et al., 2000; Zadro et al., 2004; van Beest & Williams, 2006). Example items include: “I felt ignored” and “I felt part of the group” (reverse-coded). Internal consistency was excellent ($\alpha = .96$; $\omega = .96$; $M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.46$).

Perceived loss of significance (LOS) and quest for significance (QFS) were assessed using the Loss of Significance Scale and the Quest for Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021), both previously employed in related research (LOS: $\alpha = .93$, $\omega = .93$; $M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.88$; QFS: $\alpha = .93$, $\omega = .93$; $M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.11$).

Identification with the pro-migrant activist group was measured using a 3-item scale adapted from prior work (Leach et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2012; Lindström et al., 2024). Example items include: “Sharing this group’s ideas and values is important to me,” and “I think this group says something about who I am.” ($\alpha = .78$; $\omega = .79$; $M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.82$).

Intentions to engage in collective actions in line with the pro-migrant activist group were assessed using a 9-item scale adapted from Cervone et al. (2023). Sample items include: “I would sign a petition promoted by the group” and “I would take part in a demonstration, march, or protest organized by the group.” ($\alpha = .87$; $\omega = .87$; $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.81$).

Last but not least, an attention-check item was included to ensure participants’ attentiveness during survey completion.

ii. Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before testing the main hypotheses, descriptive statistics and correlations among the key study variables were examined (see Tables 19-20).

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Manipulation Check</i>	3.23	1.46	-0.09	-1.55
<i>Loss of Significance</i>	2.46	0.88	0.75	-0.15
<i>Quest for Significance</i>	3.06	1.11	-0.06	-0.73
<i>Identification</i>	3.82	0.82	-0.58	0.14
<i>Pro-Migrant Collective Actions</i>	3.12	0.81	-0.14	-0.34
<i>Political Orientation</i>	3.09	0.92	0.24	0.10

Table 19. Descriptive statistics of the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. MC	-						
2. LOSS	0.60***	-					
3. QFS	0.40***	0.64***	-				
4. ID	0.12	0.15*	0.22**	-			
5. CA	0.12	0.19**	0.25***	0.57***	-		
6. AGE	-0.15*	-0.14*	-0.24***	-0.06	-0.05	-	
7. PO	-0.01	-0.04	-0.08	-0.29***	-0.40***	-0.10	-

Table 20. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Notes. MC = Manipulation Check; LOSS = Loss of Significance; QFS = Quest for Significance; ID= Identification with Pro-Migrant Activists; CA = Pro-Migrant Collective Action Intentions; PO = Political Orientation. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

To assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted with experimental condition (0 = inclusion, 1 = exclusion) as the independent variable and manipulation check scores and loss of significance as the dependent variables. These analyses aimed to confirm whether the experience of social exclusion produced a significant increase in perceived exclusion and loss of significance.

Results showed that participants assigned to the exclusion condition reported significantly higher manipulation check scores than those in the inclusion condition, $F(1, 207) = 449.30, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .685$, indicating a strong effect of the experimental condition on perceived exclusion. A significant effect also emerged for loss of significance, $F(1, 207) = 67.88, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .247$, confirming that perceived ostracism substantially increased participants' sense of significance loss.

Specifically, excluded participants reported significantly higher means both on the manipulation check compared to included participants ($M_{diff} = 2.41, SE = 0.11, p < .001, 95\% CI [2.19, 2.63]$), and on loss of significance ($M_{diff} = 0.85, SE = 0.11, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.67, 1.08]$).

Overall, these results indicate that the experimental manipulation was effective in inducing the intended experience of social exclusion and the associated perception of significance loss.

Direct Effects of the Experimental Manipulation

To assess the direct effect of the experimental manipulation on the main psychological variables under investigation, three one-way ANCOVAs were conducted with experimental condition (0 = inclusion, 1 = exclusion) as the independent variable, QFS, identification with the prosocial group, and collective action intentions as the dependent variables, and political orientation as a covariate.

Results indicated that the experimental condition had a significant impact on all three variables. Specifically, participants in the exclusion condition reported higher levels of QFS compared to those in the inclusion condition ($M_{diff} = 0.63, SE = .15, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.341, 0.924]$), $F(1, 206) = 18.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .082$. Similarly, identification with the pro-migrant group was significantly stronger among excluded participants than included participants (M_{diff}

= 0.25, $SE = .11$, $p = .021$, 95% $CI [0.038, 0.465]$), $F(1, 206) = 5.38$, $p = .021$, $\eta_p^2 = .025$. A similar pattern emerged for pro-migrant collective action intentions, with participants in the exclusion condition reporting higher scores than those in the inclusion condition ($M_{diff} = 0.25$, $SE = .10$, $p = .020$, 95% $CI [0.039, 0.450]$), $F(1, 206) = 5.50$, $p = .020$, $\eta_p^2 = .026$.

Serial Mediation Analysis

To test the main mediation hypotheses, a path analysis was conducted using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Indirect effects were estimated with a bootstrap procedure of 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

A serial mediation model was tested, including two mediators in sequence: personal QFS and identification with a group of pro-migrant activists. The experimental condition (0 = inclusion, 1 = exclusion) was entered as the independent variable, while intentions to engage in pro-migrant collective action served as the dependent variable. Political orientation was included as a covariate (see Fig. 16).

R^2 values indicated that the model explained 8.3% of the variance in QFS, 13.1% of the variance in identification with the pro-migrant group, and 39.8% of the variance in pro-migrant collective action intentions.

The exclusion condition significantly predicted an increase in quest for significance ($\beta = 0.28$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.156, 0.405]$), which in turn was significantly associated with identification with the prosocial group ($\beta = 0.18$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .013$, 95% $CI [0.038,$

0.322]). Identification was further positively and significantly associated with intentions of pro-migrant collective action ($\beta = 0.47$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.351, 0.582]$).

The direct effect of the experimental condition on the outcome was not significant ($\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .783$, 95% $CI [-0.098, 0.130]$).

The indirect effects were summarized in Table 21.

	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
EX vs INC → QFS → CA	.04	.02	.032	.003	.068
EX vs INC → ID → CA	.04	.03	.259	-.025	.095
EX vs INC → QFS → ID → CA	.02	.01	.039	.001	.046
TOT	.13	.09	.040	.009	.421

Table 21. Indirect effects of condition (Exclusion vs. Inclusion) on pro-migrant collective action intentions (CA) through quest for significance (QFS) and identification with pro-migrant activists (ID).

The total effect was significant ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .040$, 95% *CI* [0.009, 0.421]).

These findings support the hypothesis of a serial mediation: social exclusion activates a motivational process aimed at restoring significance, which materializes in identification with a socially engaged group and ultimately in the willingness to act in support of that cause.

In sum, the experience of ostracism induced by Cyberball, as opposed to the control condition, produced a significant effect on collective behavioral intentions through the mediation of motivational and identity-related dynamics.

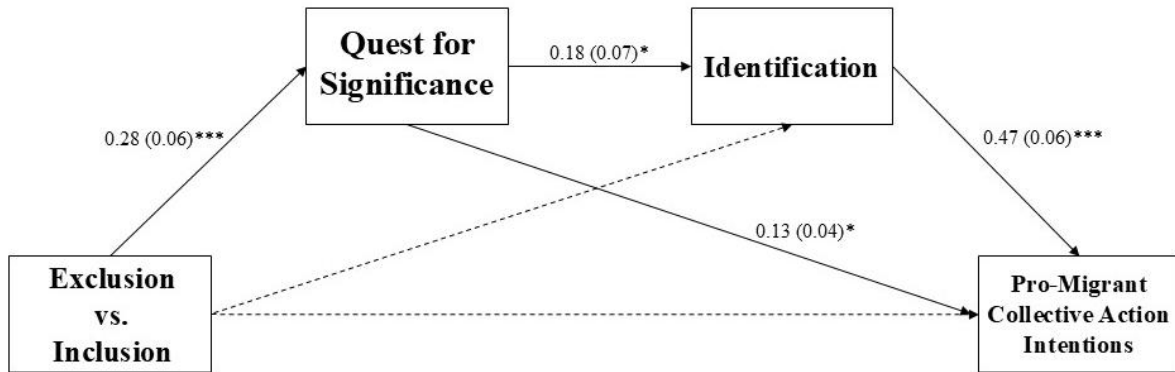


Figure 16. Indirect effect of manipulation (0 = inclusion; 1 = exclusion) on pro-migrant collective action intentions through quest for significance and identification with pro-migrants activist group. Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Note: β (*SE*) for each path. Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

iii. Discussion and Limitations

Study 4b aimed to experimentally examine whether and how the experience of social exclusion, induced through the Cyberball paradigm (Williams et al., 2000, 2007), could activate QFS and, through the strengthening of identification with a pro-migrant group, promote forms of solidaristic collective engagement. Consistent with the hypotheses, excluded participants reported higher levels of significance loss (manipulation check), QFS, identification with the pro-migrant group, and intentions for solidaristic collective action compared to included participants.

The serial mediation analysis confirmed that the effect of the experimental condition on intentions to participate in pro-migrant collective action was mediated first by QFS and subsequently by collective identification. In other words, perceived ostracism strengthened the quest for significance, which in turn fostered stronger identification with pro-migrant activists, which was in turn associated with collective engagement intentions.

This finding provides causal evidence for what emerged in Study 4a, experimentally demonstrating that experiences of personal significance loss, such as ostracism, activate the need to restore significance. This process motivates individuals to seek groups able to provide purpose, belonging, recognition, and value (Kruglanski et al., 2013). In line with the *collectivistic shift hypothesis*, this confirms that QFS does not remain an individual drive but translates preferentially into an orientation toward a collective, as identification with groups offering purpose, belonging, and recognition represents a privileged means to restore significance after exclusion (Kruglanski et al., 2013).

While the manipulation did not directly influence the outcome – indicating that merely experiencing social exclusion is not sufficient to elicit a prosocial collective orientation – this study, unlike the previous one, revealed a significant indirect effect through QFS.

Ostracism not only activated a motivational process oriented toward collective identification but also increased pro-migrant collective action intentions directly through QFS. This suggests that, at least in this experimental context, the drive to recover significance after exclusion can orient individuals toward prosocial engagement even in the absence of strong collective identification, which therefore does not represent the only channel through which QFS translates into action. At the same time, the salient theme of integration and solidarity toward migrants may have rendered engagement in pro-migrant initiatives an immediate and accessible route to restoring personal value. Overall, these findings reinforce the idea that, once activated, QFS directs the search for significance according to the narrative opportunities provided and supported by the environment (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018).

The study also contributes to linking two lines of research: the effects of ostracism on QFS and the consequences of social exclusion on collective engagement. Consistent with the results of Hartgerink et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis, Cyberball proved effective in inducing both feelings of exclusion and perceptions of significance loss (Bäck et al., 2018).

The results extend those of previous studies (Renström et al., 2018; Knapton et al., 2022), showing that not only normative conformity or strengthened political identification, but also collective action in support of migrants can serve as a means of restoring significance. This study thus contributes to integrating the SQT with major models of collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008; Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), highlighting how existential individual needs can serve as a decisive engine for identification and collective mobilization.

However, the study presents some limitations. The use of an artificial task such as Cyberball, although validated and widely used (Williams et al., 2000, 2007; Hartgerink et al., 2015), does not fully reproduce the complexity of real-life exclusion dynamics. Moreover, the

outcome considered exclusively concerned intentions rather than concrete behaviors, with the risk that the observed effects may not necessarily translate into actual mobilization – a question already raised in Study 4a and still to be further explored. In addition, the relatively small sample size further constrains the robustness of the findings and calls for replication with larger and more heterogeneous populations. Finally, the non-probabilistic sample, composed mainly of young students with progressive political orientations, may have facilitated the association between exclusion and identification with a pro-migrant group, limiting the generalizability of the results.

Nevertheless, Study 4b represents a significant step forward in understanding the processes through which personal QFS can orient individuals toward collective actions in support of outgroups such as migrants. By showing that ostracism can activate QFS and, through it, foster solidaristic engagement both via collective identification and directly, the findings confirm the flexibility of QFS and open new questions regarding the role of narratives and social contexts in shaping its trajectory.

e. General Discussion

The studies presented in Section 1.2 expand the application of the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2022), showing that personal QFS can orient individuals not only toward exclusionary collective actions but also toward intentions to engage in solidaristic mobilization, particularly among majority-group members confronted with migration. Building on the idea that, once activated, the quest for significance directs the choice of means for restoring it according to legitimized narratives and available social networks (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022; Webber & Kruglanski, 2018), and in line with the *collectivistic shift hypothesis* (Kruglanski et al., 2013), which posits that significance loss pushes individuals toward collective orientations, the studies examined here highlight the role of identification

with pro-migrant groups as a mediator channeling the drive for significance restoration into solidaristic collective engagement.

Study 4a, using a cross-sectional design, showed that significance loss is associated with increased QFS, which in turn fosters identification with pro-migrant activists and, through this, supports both intentions for collective action and observed behavior (petition signing). No simple indirect effects were found: QFS alone was not sufficient to induce prosocial outcomes, highlighting that its motivational potential must be mediated through collective identification to promote positive collective actions. Moreover, significance loss was directly associated with intentions but not with behavior, suggesting that the transition from intention to mobilization requires additional conditions, situating the results within the broader debate on the *intention–behavior gap* (e.g., Sheeran & Webb, 2016). In this context, petition signing may be considered a relatively low-cost act materially, but not devoid of social and political exposure. Consistently, collective identification emerged as the decisive bridge between individual motivational needs and effective mobilization, confirming its central role in major models of collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008; Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021). These findings also intersect with the literature on “costly” prosociality, which argues that prosocial actions involving personal sacrifice constitute privileged channels for satisfying QFS (Bélanger et al., 2018; Dakin et al., 2021; Pica et al., 2025). This suggests that significance-driven motivation may find a direct pathway primarily in more demanding or normatively legitimized forms of activism, while for low-cost actions, it is collective identification that provides the resources necessary to bridge the gap between intention and action.

Study 4b, employing an experimental design based on the Cyberball paradigm (Williams et al., 2000; 2007), provided causal confirmation of this model: social exclusion induced significance loss, which, via QFS, strengthened identification with a pro-migrant group and,

consequently, intentions for collective action in their favor. Additionally, a simple indirect effect via QFS emerged for intentions: in a context where inclusive narratives were salient and legitimized, QFS could autonomously foster willingness to engage, even without strong identification. In this way, the study contributes to bridging two lines of research that had remained partly separate: on the one hand, the effects of ostracism on the activation of QFS, showing explicitly that social exclusion is accompanied by perceived significance loss; on the other, the consequences of such loss for engagement in pro-outgroup collective action as a means of restoring significance. This allows the SQT to be integrated with the literature about collective action, showing how existential needs can serve as a predictor of identification and mobilization. At the same time, the study connects to the ostracism literature, suggesting that experiences of significance loss may be transformed not only into defensive or hostile responses, but also into opportunities for solidaristic engagement.

Taken together, the two studies converge in showing that QFS, while a “neutral” motivational force (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022), can be directed toward inclusive trajectories when channeled through identification with prosocial groups, but can also operate directly, in specific contexts, as a driver of solidaristic engagement. These findings enrich the *trajectories of significance* (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2025), underscoring that the restoration of significance does not necessarily lead to exclusionary pathways: when inclusive narratives and opportunities for prosocial affiliation are available, the QFS can foster solidarity and support for migrants.

f. Practical Implications

From a social and political perspective, the findings of Studies 4a and 4b suggest that promoting participation in support of migrants may benefit from narratives that frame such engagement not only as an ethical or political duty, but also as a means of achieving personal recognition, belonging, and dignity. Collective narratives emphasizing how solidarity generates

social value and confers individual status may serve as effective tools to counter exclusionary or xenophobic tendencies, offering prosocial alternatives to satisfy the same underlying motivational needs.

Public campaigns, educational programs, and community initiatives could highlight the link between personal well-being and the construction of an inclusive society, showing how pro-migrant mobilization contributes to a shared sense of purpose and relevance. Initiatives that publicly acknowledge individual contributions or create participatory spaces where solidarity is rewarded and valued may act as particularly powerful catalysts.

At the same time, the fact that QFS can operate independently of collective identification opens avenues for interventions at the individual level, making salient the connection between the quest for significance and solidaristic engagement. Awareness-raising efforts or psychological programs could, for instance, help individuals recognize prosocial action as an immediate source of relevance and self-realization. This is particularly important in contexts where identification with inclusive groups is weak or not yet consolidated: in such cases, directly reinforcing the perception that solidarity restores personal significance may represent an alternative pathway to foster engagement.

More broadly, these implications suggest that migration policies and integration programs should not only aim to reduce perceived threat or deconstruct negative stereotypes but also actively engage motivational needs for significance, demonstrating how intergroup support and cooperation can become opportunities to enhance the self and contribute to a broader collective project.

g. Conclusions

Overall, the studies presented in Section 1 demonstrated that the personal quest for significance (QFS), activated by real or perceived experiences of significance loss, constitutes a motivational force capable of orienting individuals both toward exclusionary pathways and toward solidaristic engagement in the collective actions of majority-group members toward migrants.

On the one hand (Section 1.1), prejudice emerged as a mechanism through which the quest channels individuals into defensive collective actions, legitimizing exclusionary practices and reinforcing ingroup protection. At the same time, Study 3 highlighted the importance of the moral framework within which this motivation unfolds – particularly the moral foundation of Proportionality – which functions as a normative filter, moderating the impact of prejudice in translating personal QFS into social mobilization toward migrants.

On the other hand (Section 1.2), identification with prosocial groups and pro-migrant activists emerged as an alternative process, capable of directing the same drive for significance restoration into inclusive and solidaristic engagement, oriented toward the defense of the outgroup's rights and dignity. In line with the SQT and the 3N model (Kruglanski et al., 2019, 2022; Da Silva et al., 2024), personal QFS does not represent a unidirectional and deterministic motivational force but a dynamic process whose orientation depends on the narrative and relational frameworks available.

These findings open the way to extending the motivational model beyond the individual level, examining how the need for significance is experienced not only as a personal condition but also as a shared reality of ingroup membership. Whereas in the first part of the thesis, significance loss and QFS were conceptualized as individual states capable of activating divergent mobilization pathways, the following section shifts attention to their collective

dimension. The collective quest for significance represents an additional level of analysis of responses to migration: no longer simply the sense of being deprived of significance as individuals, but the subjective experience of a significance loss or gain affecting one's group of belonging, which renders the QFS salient in a collective key.

This perspective enables a deeper understanding of the interplay between existential motivations and intergroup dynamics, clarifying why the same drive for significance may lead to divergent collective trajectories. The perception that the ingroup has been devalued or humiliated can become a powerful source of social mobilization, as it is embedded in narratives that transcend the individual self and tie personal experience to collective destiny. Experiences of loss affecting the group are thus rooted in social identity and in the narrative frameworks that define the group's position in society, generating motivational forces that can be channeled into different forms of collective action.

Section 2 therefore aims to examine how the collective quest for significance may orient majority-group members either toward the hostile defense of the ingroup's symbolic and material boundaries or toward solidarity with the outgroup, and how moral frameworks and intergroup perceptions – such as the moral worth attributed to the outgroup or the perception of collective threat – contribute to shaping the direction of this motivational drive.

SECTION 2

Is National Significance a Gateway to Exclusion? The Role of Collective Quest for Significance in Shaping Attitudes and Collective Actions Toward Migrants

The first empirical section of this thesis examined the quest for significance (QFS) at the individual level, showing how this motivational drive can orient individuals toward divergent pathways of collective action in relation to migrants. However, the QFS is not merely an intrapsychic process: it also develops within a collective dimension, where the need to attribute value, centrality, and recognition to one's ingroup plays a crucial role. Accordingly, the collective quest for significance (CQFS) reflects individuals' desire, as group members, to reaffirm or enhance their group's social relevance, protect its status, and consolidate a positive identity within an intergroup context (Jasko et al., 2019; Kruglanski, 2018).

Differently from processes at the individual level, CQFS is shaped by perceptions of the group's social standing and by how it is treated or evaluated in relation to others: elements such as status, power, and the group's social value become central in defining the significance perceived at the collective level (Doosje et al., 2013; Obaidi et al., 2023; Kruglanski et al., 2025). This dynamic is consistent with the *collectivistic shift hypothesis*, which posits that individuals often re-anchor themselves in their ingroup in order to gain or restore significance, thereby reinforcing collective bonds and increasing their willingness to act on its behalf (Kruglanski et al., 2013; Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014).

Despite its theoretical grounding, the operational distinction between individual and collective significance has not yet been fully consolidated (Da Silva et al., 2024; Eldor, 2023). Most of the available evidence within the Significance-Quest Theory (SQT) has focused on the individual level of the quest, treating its antecedents (experiences of significance loss or gain) as personal experiences, although socially situated and influenced by intergroup dynamics

(Dugas et al., 2016; Jasko et al., 2017; Webber et al., 2018). In a recent meta-analysis, Da Silva et al. (2024) highlighted both the scarcity of studies directly addressing CQFS and the prevailing focus of existing research on violent extremism. They suggested that, in this context, the collective dimension of significance may exert a specific, and at times even stronger, influence than its individual counterpart. Furthermore, most of these studies have relied on indirect operationalizations, conceptualizing CQFS through related constructs such as perceptions of collective oppression (Victoroff et al., 2006), social alienation (Bélanger et al., 2019), negative emotional states (Webber et al., 2018), or collective narcissism (Jasko et al., 2020).

Within the SQT literature, a recurring tendency has been to consider collective narcissism as a proxy of CQFS, defined as the belief that one's group deserves greater recognition and respect than it actually receives – that is, a grandiose image of the ingroup coupled with a constant need for external validation (de Zavala et al., 2009, 2024). Collective narcissism entails a strong emotional investment in the presumed greatness of the ingroup and, paralleling narcissistic processes at the individual level, involves ingroup idealization and heightened sensitivity to perceived threats to its image (Hornsey, 2003; Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005). Along these lines, Jasko et al. (2020) suggested that collective narcissism may function as a quest for significance, as it entails the perception of group devaluation and the need to reaffirm its position. This highlights a point of contact with CQFS: both constructs revolve around the ingroup's need for recognition and the tension to reaffirm its value.

However, considering collective narcissism as a proxy for CQFS may be problematic conceptually and methodologically (Da Silva et al., 2024). While both emphasize demands for recognition and ingroup defense, leading to reaffirming behaviors, CQFS is not limited to this dynamic. It may also emerge from aspirations of collective affirmation and success not

necessarily tied to experiences of devaluation or humiliation, and it is not reducible to the belief that the ingroup is exceptional but unjustly unrecognized. Rather, CQFS represents an autonomous motivation to recover or expand shared significance (Eldor, 2023). Moreover, in some studies, collective narcissism has been used as a control variable rather than an indicator of CQFS (e.g., Bélanger et al., 2019), further underscoring the ambiguity of its theoretical function.

From this perspective, the present section aims to fill gaps in the literature by integrating the SQT with psychosocial models of collective action and intergroup relations. Specifically, it examines the role of CQFS, at the national group level, as an autonomous and distinct motivational factor in shaping non-violent collective responses to migration. Focusing on the national group highlights how CQFS, rooted in national identity, can orient intergroup attitudes, policy support outcomes, and non-violent forms of collective action toward outgroups.

a. General Introduction

Compared to the Italian case, the migration debate in Spain has been more articulated. The country has historically maintained relatively open attitudes – the so-called “Spanish exceptionalism” – avoiding for a long time a massive recourse to the anti-immigration frame in political rhetoric (Lahusen & Grasso, 2018). As recently as 2020, more than 60% of the population still considered ethnic diversity a positive societal element (Silver et al., 2021). However, migration has also become increasingly politicized and polarized in Spain in recent years. A crucial turning point was the sudden rise of Vox, a far-right party that since 2019 has established itself as one of the main national political forces. Its electoral success reflects a broader trend not only in Europe but also in other Western contexts, where nationalist and populist parties have built part of their support on narratives critical of immigration, often portrayed as a source of insecurity, crime, and depletion of resources for citizens (Schain, 2018;

Laffan, 2021; Yerly, 2022; Baro & Todal Jenssen, 2024). Disseminated and amplified by traditional media and social networks (Ernst et al., 2017, 2019), these frames have reshaped public perceptions of migrants, questioning their morality and reinforcing their representation as a threat to the ingroup.

Migration narratives operate not only at the political level but also touch deeper dimensions of identity and recognition. In terms of the SQT, they directly address the collective need for recognition and valorization of the national group, which is expressed in the CQFS. In this sense, the migration context provides a symbolic framework in which natives may perceive themselves as defending or restoring the dignity and prestige of their ingroup.

The way in which collective experience is “framed” is therefore crucial to understanding how CQFS is activated and in which direction it is oriented (Kruglanski et al., 2022). As collective narcissists are hypersensitive to signals of unacknowledged recognition of their group and respond with defensive strategies of reaffirmation (de Zavala et al., 2009, 2013, 2016), so too can the need to restore the ingroup’s value and significance be triggered by narratives emphasizing the loss of collective relevance (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022).

The literature has extensively documented how collective narcissism is linked to hostility toward outgroups and the legitimization of social inequality (de Zavala, 2024). This dynamic, often associated with perceptions of competitive victimhood and conspiratorial views of outgroups (Marchlewska et al., 2019; Bertin & Delouvée, 2021), easily translates into hostile or exclusionary responses, both at the attitudinal level and in collective engagement (Górska et al., 2019; Cichońska & Cislak, 2020). In particular, it fuels the preference for anti-immigrant rhetoric and, more generally, for exclusionary political orientations (de Zavala et al., 2017; Federico & de Zavala, 2018; Marchlewska et al., 2018; Cislak et al., 2020). Consistently, collective narcissism has been systematically associated with prejudicial attitudes, support for

punitive and restrictive policies, and collective actions against migrants and refugees, as well as with lower willingness to engage in solidaristic actions (Cai & Gries, 2013; Cichocka et al., 2017; Górska et al., 2020, 2022).

However, according to the SQT, the motivation for collective significance may stem not only from experiences of significance loss but also from opportunities for significance gain (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022). Whereas experiences of collective loss may activate defensive dynamics of ingroup protection and outgroup devaluation, experiences of recognition and admiration of the ingroup – such as sporting or cultural successes, international prestige, or positive contributions in global crises – may strengthen the perception of the group’s moral virtue, foster shared pride and dignity, and in some cases promote more favorable evaluations of outgroups. As Allport (1954) already emphasized, preference for the ingroup does not necessarily imply hostility toward the outgroup, while Brewer (1999) showed that positive attachment to one’s group can exist independently of negative attitudes toward others. Consistent with this view, a meta-analysis by Rivera et al. (2024) showed that higher self-esteem is strongly associated with ingroup liking but not necessarily with outgroup derogation, and can even relate to more favorable outgroup evaluations. When the ingroup’s morality is acknowledged and shared, it can serve as a source of pride and identity security (Leach et al., 2007; Ellemers, 2017), reducing the need for hostile defenses. Experimental evidence confirms that affirmation of the ingroup’s morality promotes more favorable attitudes toward outgroups and increases willingness to engage in collective action in support of immigrants’ rights (Vázquez et al., 2022).

In other words, CQFS can be triggered by both conditions of devaluation and conditions of valorization (e.g., Jasko et al., 2020), and its direction depends on both antecedents and the

ideological narratives available, which channel the motivation toward specific means of restoring significance (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

Within this framework, an initial exploratory cross-sectional study examined the relationship between CQFS – understood as the quest for recognition and social relevance for one’s country (Spain) – and different forms of collective response to migration, laying the groundwork for the subsequent experimental study. The latter aimed to test causally how manipulating perceptions of collective significance affects both native Spaniards’ support for anti-immigration policies and their willingness to engage in collective actions in favor of migrants. Particular attention was given to two mediating dimensions: perceived outgroup morality, which defines who is considered legitimate or worthy of inclusion/exclusion, and intergroup threat perception, which translates such judgments into concrete orientations of exclusion or solidarity.

The Role of Perceived Morality and Intergroup Threat

Intergroup relations research has shown that negative stereotypes play a fundamental role in shaping attitudes and behaviors toward minority groups, including immigrants (Stephan et al., 2005). Traditionally, two dimensions have been considered central to social judgments: warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002). However, subsequent research has demonstrated that warmth is not a unitary construct but rather consists of two subdimensions: sociability and morality, with the latter emerging as the most relevant component in intergroup dynamics, particularly in the formation of social impressions (Leach et al., 2007; Brambilla et al., 2012, 2013). Morality makes it possible to determine whether a group is perceived as honest, trustworthy, and respectful of shared social norms, and thus whether it represents a potential resource or a threat to the ingroup (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Ellemers et al., 2019).

The centrality of this dimension has been widely documented: morality weighs more than competence or sociability in shaping overall impressions of outgroups (Brambilla et al., 2012), influences emotional and prosocial responses toward unfamiliar targets (Pagliaro et al., 2013), and guides willingness to engage in cooperative and solidaristic behaviors (Brambilla et al., 2013). Conversely, attributions of immorality fuel negative responses and exclusionary attitudes, particularly when they concern culturally distinct outgroups (López-Rodríguez et al., 2014; Sayans-Jiménez et al., 2017).

To our knowledge, research has not yet directly examined how CQFS and its antecedents – namely, collective significance loss or gain – relate to moral judgments about outgroups. Previous studies have shown that morality is fundamental to identity processes: when the ingroup’s image is questioned, members tend to reaffirm its integrity by delegitimizing the outgroup and attributing traits of immorality to it (Leach et al., 2007; Ellemers et al., 2017; Sacchi et al., 2021). Similar dynamics emerge in studies on collective narcissism, which indicate that perceptions of the ingroup’s grandiosity and lack of recognition trigger defensive strategies based on externalizing blame and morally excluding other groups (Hadarics et al., 2020). Within this framework, the outgroup is placed “outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply” (Opatow, 1990, p. 1), and thus regarded as undeserving of respect or cooperation (Hadarics & Kende, 2019). From this perspective, the characteristics attributed to outgroups become a mechanism through which their moral exclusion and delegitimization are justified (Opatow, 1990; Bandura, 2016).

At the same time, although still scarcely explored within the SQT framework, experiences of recognition and admiration of the ingroup may strengthen perceptions of its moral virtue, fostering pride and identity security (Leach et al., 2007; Ellemers, 2017) and, in some cases, opening the way to greater openness toward outgroups (Vázquez et al., 2022; for a meta-

analysis, see Rivera et al., 2024). Such experiences of significance gain may reduce perceptions of outgroups as threatening and encourage their recognition as legitimate and deserving of social inclusion.

Overall, assessing the morality of outgroups appears to be a crucial step in understanding how the collective quest for significance – activated both by conditions of devaluation/loss and valorization/gain – translates into divergent intergroup processes.

From this perspective, intergroup threat perception may represent the psychological mechanism through which perceived morality links experiences of collective (in)significance to relations between the national ingroup (natives) and the outgroup (migrants). Moral judgments have a direct impact on perceived threat: when migrants are considered immoral, they are not only seen as violators of shared norms and values, but also as a symbolic threat to cultural identity and a realistic risk to the material resources of the ingroup (Stephan et al., 1999; Brambilla et al., 2012; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2013). Consistently, numerous studies have shown that negative stereotypes – in particular, attributions of immorality – serve as antecedents of perceived threat, which in turn heightens hostility and social rejection (Stephan et al., 2016; López-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Perceived threat thus plays a crucial role in shaping collective behavioral intentions: several studies have shown that perceiving migrants as a source of threat is associated with greater support for exclusionary and punitive policies, such as strengthening borders or expelling asylum seekers, and with lower willingness to engage in inclusive and solidaristic collective actions (Górska et al., 2019, 2022; Hasbún López et al., 2019; López-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

In sum, the morality attributed to outgroups and the resulting perception of threat are central variables for understanding how CQFS is associated, on the one hand, with support for

exclusionary migration policies and, on the other, with intentions to engage in collective action in support of migrants.

b. The Present Section

Building on the theoretical framework previously outlined and within the context of the migration phenomenon in Spain, the present section examines the role of the collective quest for significance (CQFS), understood as the desire to obtain respect, recognition, and social relevance for one's country, in shaping natives' collective responses toward migrants.

Two studies were conducted in the Spanish context. The first exploratory study (Study 5), based on a cross-sectional design, investigated whether dispositional CQFS was associated with both support for restrictive and punitive immigration policies and intentions to participate in collective actions in favor of migrants.

The second study (Study 6) extended this analysis by introducing an experimental manipulation of the need for collective significance through a recall task. In this case, the focus was on the role of outgroup morality attributions and intergroup threat perception as potential serial mediators of the relationship between the manipulation of collective significance and collective responses toward migrants.⁹

c. Study 5

The exploratory study represents a first attempt to examine the relationship between the collective quest for significance (CQFS) and collective responses to migration in a sample of Spanish natives. The aim was to assess whether, and in what ways, CQFS was associated with support for restrictive immigration policies, taken as an indicator of exclusive mobilization, and

⁹ All studies in the present section were approved by the Ethics Committee of Sapienza University of Rome (protocol number: CERT_19550FC14BF)

with intentions to engage in collective actions in favor of migrants, considered as an indicator of inclusive mobilization.

In line with the literature on collective narcissism (e.g., de Zavala, 2024; Marinthe et al., 2025), often employed as a proxy for CQFS (e.g., Jasko et al., 2020), it was expected that CQFS would show a stronger association with exclusionary outcomes, while its link with inclusive actions would be weaker or less consistent.

i. Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected through a convenience sample recruited using a snowball procedure. Specifically, psychology students enrolled at the National University of Distance Education were given the opportunity to recruit participants for the study in exchange for extra course credits. Participation in this activity, however, was entirely voluntary. Respondents completed an online questionnaire administered via Qualtrics, which took on average approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The final sample consisted of 168 Spanish adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 42.80$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.80$; 51.80% female). Sociodemographic variables included age, gender, nationality, perceived socioeconomic status (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.59$), and political orientation (measured on a 7-point Likert scale, from 0 = far left to 6 = far right; $M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.25$). Full sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Measures

After reading the information sheet and providing informed consent, participants completed an online questionnaire in Spanish, presented as a study on perceptions related to Spain and social issues. Unless otherwise specified, all measures were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale

(0 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Sociodemographic information was collected at the end of the survey.

Collective Quest for Significance (CQFS) was measured using a Spanish adaptation of the Quest for Significance Scale (Molinario et al., 2021). The scale consisted of 6 items assessing the desire for respect, recognition, and social relevance for one's country (Spain). Example items include: "I wish my country were considered more important by others" and "I wish others regarded my country as more relevant." A composite index was computed, with higher scores indicating stronger levels of collective quest for significance ($\alpha = .96$; $\omega = .96$; $M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.60$).

Intentions to engage in collective action in support of migrants were assessed through 6 items adapted from Smeekes et al. (2022), measuring willingness to take part in supportive activities such as "Signing a petition" or "Participating in a demonstration." A composite index was created, with higher scores reflecting stronger collective action intentions ($\alpha = .89$; $\omega = .89$; $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.56$).

Support for anti-immigration policies was measured using 7 items adapted from López-Rodríguez et al. (2020), assessing agreement with restrictive measures proposed by the Spanish far-right party (e.g., "Strengthen borders"; "Expel imams who promote fundamentalism, contempt for women, or jihad"). A composite index was calculated, with higher values indicating greater support for these policies ($\alpha = .87$; $\omega = .87$; $M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.55$).

To ensure data quality, one attention check item was included, requiring participants to select a specific response. At the end of the survey, participants were provided with a debriefing explaining the actual purpose of the study and contact details for further information.

ii. Results

Firstly, descriptive statistics and correlations among the main study variables were examined (see Tables 22-23).

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Collective Quest for Significance</i>	3.48	1.60	-0.16	-0.59
<i>Pro-migrant Collective Actions</i>	3.05	1.56	-0.36	-0.68
<i>Support for Anti-Immigration Policies</i>	3.43	1.55	-0.27	-0.60
<i>Political Orientation</i>	2.40	1.25	0.03	-0.28

Table 22. Descriptive statistics of the variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. CQFS	-				
2. CA	-0.14	-			
3. SUPP	0.56***	-0.43***	-		
4. AGE	0.18*	-0.13	0.26***	-	
5. PO	0.46***	-0.40***	0.54***	0.15*	-

Table 23. Correlations (Pearson's *r*)

Notes. CQFS = Collective Quest for Significance; CA = Pro-Migrant Collective Action's Intentions; SUP = Support for Anti-Immigration Policies; PO = Political Orientation.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In a second step, two linear regressions were conducted using jamovi (Version 2.4; The jamovi project, 2023) to examine the contribution of CQFS in predicting the two forms of collective responses considered: pro-migrant collective action intentions and support for anti-immigration policies.

For pro-migrant collective action intentions, the simple linear regression was marginally significant ($F(1, 166) = 3.51, p = .063$), accounting for only 2% of the variance ($R^2 = .02$). CQFS did not emerge as a significant predictor ($\beta = -.14, p = .063$).

By contrast, the second regression predicting support for anti-immigration policies was significant ($F(1, 166) = 76.7, p < .001$), explaining 32% of the variance ($R^2 = .32$). In this case, CQFS was a positive and significant predictor ($\beta = .56, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of CQFS were associated with stronger support for restrictive measures toward migrants.

Overall, these findings support the exploratory assumption that dispositional CQFS is more closely linked to exclusionary outcomes toward migrants than to inclusive ones.

iii. Discussion

The exploratory study, conducted on a sample of Spanish natives, aimed to analyze how the collective quest for significance (CQFS), referred to the national ingroup, was associated with different forms of collective response to migration. The findings showed that higher levels of CQFS were significantly related to stronger support for anti-immigration policies, but not to intentions of collective action in favor of migrants. This pattern suggests that, at a dispositional level, CQFS predominantly orients individuals toward outcomes of ingroup protection and defense and hostility toward the outgroup, rather than toward solidaristic mobilization in support of migrants.

This dynamic echoes the results of the first exploratory study presented in the previous section, which examined personal-level QFS and intentions of pro- and anti-migrant collective action. In both cases, the quest for significance appears to be more easily fulfilled through strategies of distinction and opposition to other groups rather than through inclusive orientations (Jasko et al., 2020).

Moreover, the findings of the present study are consistent with the literature on collective narcissism, which has shown that perceptions of ingroup under-recognition, combined with a

grandiose view of the group, fuel defensive dynamics of hostility and exclusion toward outgroups (de Zavala et al., 2013; Marchlewska et al., 2019).

At the same time, the absence of an association between CQFS and pro-migrant collective actions can be interpreted by considering the relational and social dimension of this motivation: the need to affirm the status and recognition of one's group reinforces its centrality and relevance for the individual, but does not provide incentives to engage on behalf of external groups. In this sense, mobilization to improve the condition of migrants falls outside the boundaries of collective significance primarily due to a dynamic of disinterest or irrelevance. A similar pattern emerges in the study by Marinthe et al. (2025), which shows that among members of advantaged groups, collective narcissism is associated with stronger pro-ingroup engagement but displays no link with support for movements aimed at promoting the rights of other disadvantaged groups (such as women or LGBTQ+ people). This convergence suggests that motivations like CQFS, when activated within majority and privileged groups, tend to reinforce ingroup defense and status rather than extend to the promotion of others' well-being.

From this perspective, CQFS tends to focus attention on the boundaries and protection of the ingroup, activating defensive logics that can foster competitive victimhood (Bertin & Delouée, 2021) and a stronger emphasis on ingroup interests at the expense of broader societal integration.

To further investigate and expand on these findings, the next study introduces an experimental manipulation of the antecedents of CQFS and examines the role of two key mediators in intergroup processes: perceived outgroup morality and intergroup threat.

d. Study 6

The experimental study aimed to extend the findings of the exploratory investigation in two main directions. First, an experimental design was developed using a *recall task* to manipulate the antecedents of CQFS related to the national group, introducing three conditions: collective significance loss, collective significance gain, and a control condition. Consistent with prior research within the SQT framework (Dugas et al., 2016; Mahfud & Adam-Troian, 2021; Bélanger et al., 2022), this manipulation was intended to evoke in participants the perception that their country's status and social recognition were either threatened or reinforced.

Second, the study examined the role of two core variables in intergroup dynamics, considered as potential mechanisms through which the manipulation could influence collective mobilization: outgroup morality attributions and perceived intergroup threat.

Based on the results of the exploratory study and the literature discussed above, we hypothesized that participants in the collective significance gain condition, compared to those in the significance loss condition, would attribute greater morality to migrants, leading to reduced perceptions of intergroup threat, lower support for anti-immigration policies, and stronger intentions to engage in pro-migrant collective action. Similarly, we expected participants in the control condition, compared to those in the significance loss condition, to display higher morality attributions, lower perceived threat, reduced support for anti-immigration policies, and stronger pro-migrant collective action intentions.¹⁰

¹⁰ In this study, the control condition was not treated as the baseline, since our main focus was to test the specific effects of collective significance loss and gain. The neutral task in the control condition does not directly activate the quest for significance and was therefore used only as a secondary point of comparison. For this reason, the main hypotheses were formulated with the loss condition as the primary theoretical reference.

i. Method

Participants

The sample size was determined through an a priori power analysis. In line with the previous studies, we relied on Monte Carlo simulations for serial mediation models (Schoemann et al., 2017), assuming conservative effect sizes ($r = .25$; Cohen, 2013) and a power threshold of .80. This analysis indicated that approximately 305 participants were needed to achieve adequate statistical power.

The final sample consisted of 538 Spanish adults (45.5% women; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.79$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.08$). Sociodemographic variables included age, gender, nationality, perceived socioeconomic status (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.37$), and political orientation (measured on a 7-point Likert scale, from 0 = far left to 6 = far right; $M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.49$). Full sample characteristics are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. As part of a course activity, psychology students received academic credit for inviting four non-student acquaintances to voluntarily complete an online questionnaire. After reading the information sheet and providing informed consent, participants accessed the survey, which was administered entirely in Spanish and presented as a study on perceptions of Spain and social issues.

Firstly, participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: collective significance Loss ($n = 185$), collective significance Gain ($n = 185$), or control ($n = 168$).

In the significance Loss condition, participants were asked to recall and describe an event in which Spain was collectively humiliated, denigrated, or discredited at the international level. Examples of reported events included situations such as:

The 2008 crisis, when Spain was labeled as a country that needed help and charity from others in order to survive. We were called irresponsible and included in the group of countries pejoratively referred to as ‘PIGS’, using the initials of Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain to literally call us pigs, especially by the British;

The moment I felt my country was humiliated was during the 11M attacks. I felt humiliated both by the attackers (whoever they were) for targeting innocent people and by the politicians, who were more concerned with saving face than with supporting the people who were actually suffering.

In the significance Gain condition, participants were asked to describe an event in which Spain was respected, appreciated, or admired by other countries. Examples included events such as “When the COVID pandemic happened, and we all came together to meet our neighbors’ needs;”

During the flood in Valencia on October 29th, I witnessed the greatest spirit of solidarity I have ever seen in person. [...] Seeing so many people united, without distinctions, with a single purpose: to help. It filled me with deep admiration and respect. The whole world witnessed this solidarity.

In the Control condition, participants were asked to describe some objective characteristics of Spain, such as its geographical, political, or administrative aspects, explicitly avoiding subjective evaluations.

To assess the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants completed a six-item bipolar scale measuring perceptions of Spain's collective significance. Participants rated, on a scale from 0 to 6, the extent to which they believed Spain stood between two opposing poles on six dimensions: Insignificant–Important, Irrelevant–Influential, Despised–Respected, Weak–Powerful, Detested–Admired, Ignored–Recognized. Higher scores reflected a more positive and meaningful perception of Spain. A composite index was computed by averaging all six items, with higher scores indicating a greater perceived collective significance ($\alpha = .89$; $\omega = .89$; $M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.12$).

After the manipulation check, participants proceeded to the remainder of the questionnaire. Unless otherwise specified, all measures were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = Totally disagree, 6 = Totally agree).

Perceived outgroup morality was assessed using three positive adjectives (sincere, honest, trustworthy), adapted from Sayans-Jiménez et al. (2017). Participants indicated how many migrants they did not personally know possessed each characteristic, using a scale from 0 (none) to 6 (all). A composite index was calculated, with higher scores indicating that migrants were perceived as more moral ($\alpha = .94$; $\omega = .94$; $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.50$).

Perceived intergroup threat was assessed through 14 items, including six for realistic threat and eight for symbolic threat, adapted from Stephan et al. (1999). Example items included: “Immigration is undermining Spanish culture” (Realistic Threat), “The values and beliefs of immigrants regarding family issues and socializing children are basically quite similar to those of most Spaniards” (Realistic Threat, reverse-coded), “Immigrants get more from this country than they contribute” (Symbolic Threat), and “Immigrants are not displacing Spanish workers from their jobs” (Symbolic Threat, reverse-coded). To support the unidimensionality of the scale, a confirmatory factorial analysis was conducted (details are reported in the

Supplementary Materials). A composite threat index was computed, with higher scores reflecting a stronger perception that migrants pose both realistic and symbolic threats to the ingroup ($\alpha = .89$; $\omega = .89$; $M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.20$).

Pro-migrant collective action intentions were measured using six items inspired by Smeekes et al. (2022), assessing participants' willingness to engage in collective actions in favor of migrants, such as "Signing a petition" or "Participating in a demonstration." Responses ranged from 0 (Not at all willing) to 6 (Extremely willing). A composite index was calculated, with higher scores indicating a greater willingness to engage in such collective actions ($\alpha = .92$; $\omega = .92$; $M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.69$).

Support for anti-immigration policies was measured with seven items adapted from López-Rodríguez et al. (2020), assessing endorsement of restrictive immigration measures promoted by the Spanish far-right party (e.g., "Strengthening borders," "Expelling imams who promote fundamentalism, contempt for women, or jihad"). A composite index was computed, with higher scores reflecting stronger endorsement of restrictive immigration measures ($\alpha = .85$; $\omega = .86$; $M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.43$).

Finally, sociodemographic information was collected. To ensure data quality, an attention check was included in the questionnaire, requiring participants to select a specific response. At the end of the study, participants were fully debriefed, informed about the actual objectives of the research, and provided with contact details for any questions or concerns.

ii. Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before proceeding with the main analyses, preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation.

To assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare manipulation check scores across the three experimental conditions (Loss, Gain, and Control). The analysis revealed a statistically significant effect of condition, $F(2, 535) = 3.65, p = .027, \eta_p^2 = .013$, suggesting that participants perceived the manipulation differently depending on the assigned condition. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test showed that participants in the Loss condition perceived significantly lower national relevance ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.10$) than those in the Control condition ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.12$), $p = .023$. No other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant.¹¹ In addition to checking the effectiveness of the manipulation, descriptive statistics (see Table 24) and bivariate correlations (Pearson's r ; see Table 25) between all key variables were calculated.

<i>Factor</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
<i>Manipulation Check</i>	4.54	1.12	-0.15	0.21
<i>Outgroup Morality</i>	3.15	1.50	-0.40	-0.06
<i>Perceived Threat</i>	2.94	1.20	-0.04	-0.33
<i>Pro-migrant Collective Action</i>	2.06	1.69	-0.50	-0.68
<i>Support for anti-immigration policies</i>	3.95	1.43	-0.61	-0.29
<i>Political Orientation</i>	2.83	1.49	0.11	-0.49

Table 24. *Descriptive statistics of the variables*

¹¹ This pattern indicates that the Gain manipulation did not successfully induce the intended psychological state of increased collective significance. For transparency, the Gain condition is retained in the descriptive and correlational tables; however, given the failed manipulation, contrasts involving the Gain condition are not theoretically interpreted in the mediation analyses. Only the Loss vs. Control contrast is considered meaningful within the causal framework.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. MC	-						
2. OM	0.05	-					
3. PT	-0.03	-0.47***	-				
4. CA	0.04	0.40***	-0.57***	-			
5. SUP	0.01	-0.37***	0.68***	-0.53***	-		
6. AGE	-0.02	-0.08	-0.09*	-0.05	0.14**	-	
7. PO	0.04	-0.36***	0.61***	-0.42***	0.57***	0.03	-

Table 25. Correlations (Pearson's r)

Note. MC = Manipulation Check; OM = Outgroup Morality; PT = Perceived Threat; CA = Pro-Migrant Collective Action's Intentions; SUP = Support for Anti-Immigration Policies; PO = Political Orientation. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Direct Effects of the Manipulation on Intergroup Perceptions, Support for Anti-Immigration Policies, and Pro-migrant Collective Action Intentions

To examine the effects of the experimental manipulation on key intergroup outcomes, four ANCOVAs were conducted with condition (Loss, Gain, Control) as the independent variable¹² and political orientation as a covariate.¹³

The manipulation had a significant effect on perceived morality of the outgroup, $F(2, 534) = 4.82$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .018$. Estimated marginal means indicated that participants in the significance Loss condition perceived the outgroup as significantly less moral ($M = 2.90$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% $CI [2.70, 3.10]$) than those in the significance Gain condition ($M = 3.28$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% $CI [3.08, 3.48]$) and the Control condition ($M = 3.30$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% $CI [3.09, 3.51]$). Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons confirmed that both differences were statistically

¹²Although included in the analyses for transparency, effects involving the Gain condition cannot be theoretically interpreted (see Preliminary Analyses), and only the Loss vs. Control contrast is considered meaningful.

¹³ Given the uneven distribution of political orientation across the sample, and in light of extensive literature showing its strong association with attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014), political orientation was included as a covariate in all relevant analyses. This statistical control allowed us to account for baseline ideological differences that could otherwise confound the effects of the experimental manipulation.

significant: Gain vs. Loss ($p = .026$); Control vs. Loss ($p = .020$). No significant difference was observed between the Gain and Control conditions ($p = 1.00$).

No significant main effects of condition were found for perceived ingroup threat ($F(2, 534) = 2.54, p = .080, \eta_p^2 = .009$), pro-migrant collective action intentions ($F(2, 534) = 0.33, p = .970, \eta_p^2 = .000$), or support for anti-immigration policies ($F(2, 534) = 0.90, p = .406, \eta_p^2 = .003$).

Serial Mediation Analysis

To examine the indirect effects of the experimental manipulation, serial mediation models were tested using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). The experimental condition was the independent variable, contrast-coded with the significance Loss condition as the reference group ($X1 = \text{Gain vs. Loss}$; $X2 = \text{Control vs. Loss}$).

Importantly, given the failed Gain manipulation (see Preliminary Analyses), effects involving the Gain vs. Loss contrast must be considered non-interpretable. All analyses including the Gain condition are retained for transparency, but theoretical interpretation is limited exclusively to the Loss vs. Control contrast.

The model specified positive outgroup morality as the first mediator (M1) and perceived intergroup threat as the second mediator (M2), with pro-migrant collective action intentions and support for anti-immigration policies as the outcome variables (see Fig. 17). Political orientation was included as a covariate. Indirect effects were estimated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples, with 95% confidence intervals.

The R^2 values indicated that the model explained 14.4% of the variance in morality attributions toward the migrant outgroup, 44.5% in perceived threat, 35.6% in pro-migrant collective action intentions, and 49.6% in support for anti-immigration policies.

Direct effects of the experimental manipulation were not significant. Specifically, neither the Gain vs. Loss contrast (pro-migrant intentions: $\beta = -0.06$, $SE = 0.4$, $p = .103$, 95% $CI [-0.145, 0.013]$; support for anti-immigration policies: $\beta = -0.002$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .954$, 95% $CI [-0.072, 0.068]$) nor the Control vs. Loss contrast (pro-migrant intentions: $\beta = -0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .378$, 95% $CI [-0.117, 0.045]$; support for anti-immigration policies: $\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .465$, 95% $CI [-0.054, 0.088]$) showed significant direct effects on the outcomes.

However, both the Gain (vs. Loss) and Control (vs. Loss) conditions led to significantly higher attributions of positive morality to the outgroup (X1: $\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .007$, 95% $CI [0.033, 0.210]$; X2: $\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.035, 0.216]$). In turn, greater morality attributions significantly reduced perceived threat ($\beta = -0.28$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [-0.361, -0.201]$). Perceived threat was negatively associated with pro-migrant collective action intentions ($\beta = -0.43$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [-0.516, -0.346]$) and positively with support for anti-immigration policies ($\beta = 0.51$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.418, 0.593]$).

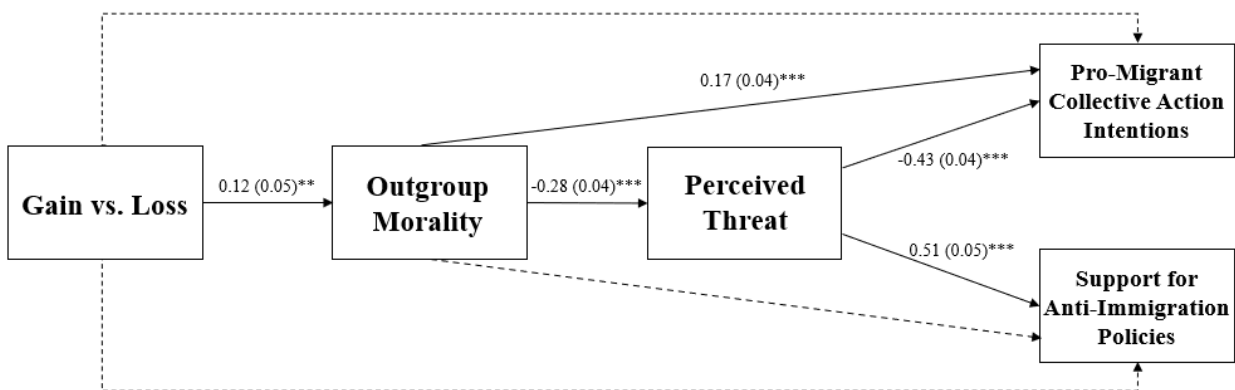
Indirect effects confirmed this mediation pathway (see Table 26).

	β	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
X1 → MOR → CA_Pro	.02	.01	.029	.002	.038
X2 → MOR → CA_Pro	.02	.01	.023	.003	.039
X1 → MOR → SUP	-.01	.01	.258	-.017	.004
X2 → MOR → SUP	-.01	.01	.251	-.017	.004
X1 → THR → CA_Pro	.02	.02	.153	-.009	.056
X2 → THR → CA_Pro	.01	.02	.768	-.027	.036
X1 → THR → SUP	-.03	.02	.146	-.065	.010
X2 → THR → SUP	-.01	.02	.768	-.042	.031
X1 → MOR → THR → CA_Pro	.02	.01	.017	.003	.027
X1 → MOR → THR → SUP	-.02	.01	.013	-.032	-.004
X2 → MOR → THR → CA_Pro	.02	.01	.012	.003	.027
X2 → MOR → THR → SUP	-.02	.01	.013	-.032	-.004
TOT _{X1_CA_Pro}	-.05	.04	.211	-.131	.029
TOT _{X1_SUP}	-.02	.04	.597	-.091	.052
TOT _{X2_CA_Pro}	-.02	.04	.605	-.102	.059
TOT _{X2_SUP}	-.001	.04	.981	-.075	.073

Table 26. Indirect effects of significance Gain vs Loss (X1) and Control vs Loss (X2) on pro-migrant collective action intentions (CA_Pro) and support for anti-immigration policies (SUP) through perceived outgroup morality (MOR) and perceived threat (THR).

Total effects were not significant for either pro-migrant collective action intentions (X1: $\beta = -0.05$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .208$, 95% $CI [-0.130, 0.028]$; X2: $\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .610$, 95% $CI [-0.103, 0.060]$) or support for anti-immigration policies (X1: $\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .589$, 95% $CI [-0.090, 0.051]$; X2: $\beta = -0.001$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .980$, 95% $CI [-0.073, 0.071]$).

Panel A



Panel B

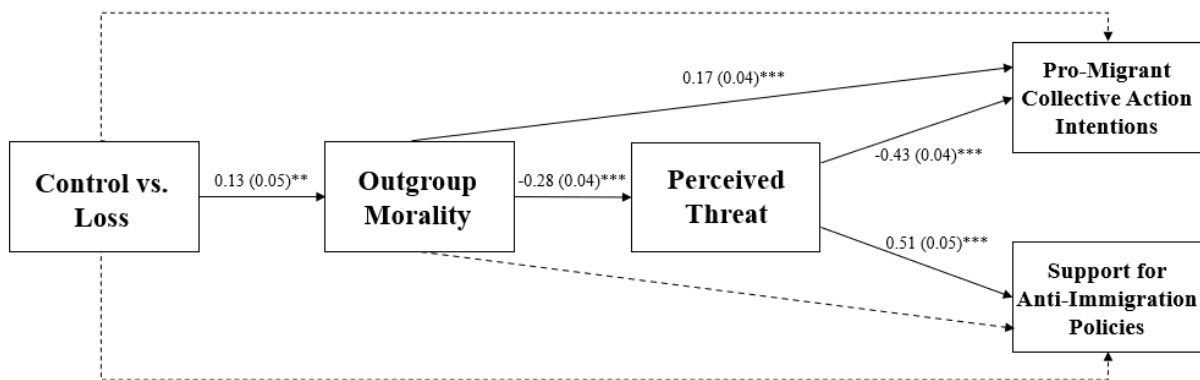


Figure 17. Tested serial mediation pathway model. Panel A shows standardized coefficients when considering the significance Gain vs. Loss comparison. Panel B shows the same coefficients for the Control vs. Loss comparison. Political orientation was included as a covariate.

Notes. β (SE) for each path. Continuous lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Overall, once the failed Gain manipulation is taken into account, the results indicate that only the contrast between Loss and Control provides a theoretically meaningful pattern. Specifically, experiencing collective significance loss led to lower moral evaluations of the outgroup, which in turn increased perceived intergroup threat and subsequently reduced pro-migrant collective action intentions while increasing support for anti-immigration policies.

iii. Discussion and Limitations

Study 6 examined how experiences of collective significance loss or gain influence divergent collective responses of Spanish citizens toward migrants, focusing on the mediating role of perceived morality and intergroup threat. Although the study was designed to contrast both collective significance loss and gain, the manipulation check indicated that the Gain condition failed to induce a greater perception of collective significance. Consequently, only the comparison between Loss and Control can be meaningfully interpreted.

Consistent with the hypotheses, the findings show that experiences of collective significance loss – evoking feelings of humiliation, devaluation, and reduced national status – activate defensive and exclusionary intergroup processes, expressed through lower moral attributions to migrants, higher perceived threat, and greater support for restrictive immigration policies. The pattern aligns with the findings from Study 5, where dispositional CQFS was more strongly associated with exclusionary outcomes (support for anti-immigration policies) than with inclusive ones (pro-migrant collective actions). In contrast, the Control condition, compared to the Loss condition, reinforced a positive image of the ingroup, leading to higher moral attributions to migrants, lower perceived threat, and stronger intentions for collective mobilization in their favor.

Another element concerns the nature of the control condition. Although it was designed to be neutral, the manipulation check suggests that participants' responses in this condition more

closely resembled those in the gain group than those in the loss condition. One possible explanation is that some descriptions of Spain – although requested in “objective” and “neutral” terms – may nevertheless have evoked mildly positive or identity-affirming associations. In this scenario, the control condition may have operated not as a fully neutral baseline, but rather as a state of slight affirmation of the ingroup’s image, thereby distancing itself further from the loss condition.

The mediation analyses further clarify the psychological mechanisms underlying these intergroup responses. Specifically, perceived outgroup morality emerges as a central pathway through which collective significance loss shapes intergroup orientations. Lower moral attributions to migrants increase both symbolic and realistic perceptions of threat, which in turn strengthen exclusionary attitudes. This is consistent with research showing that morality is a fundamental dimension guiding intergroup judgments and behavioural intentions (Leach et al., 2007; Brambilla et al., 2012, 2013), and that threat mediates the impact of negative stereotypes on collective responses (Stephan et al., 1999; López-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

Within the Spanish socio-political context, these findings gain further relevance. Public discourse on migration has become increasingly polarized, and narratives portraying migrants as a danger to the nation’s moral or cultural fabric have gained visibility (Cea D’Ancona & Valles, 2015; López-Rodríguez et al., 2020). The collective loss manipulation used here mirrors such real-world narratives, where framing Spain as humiliated or downgraded heightens defensive motivations, strengthens threat perceptions, and reduces willingness to support inclusive policies. The results thus align with the asymmetry described by SQT, whereby significance loss exerts a stronger and more immediate motivational force than significance gain (Kruglanski et al., 2014), and highlight that collective responses to migration are particularly sensitive to experiences that undermine the ingroup’s perceived value.

Furthermore, this dynamic is consistent with the literature on collective narcissism, which suggests that groups perceiving insufficient recognition of their importance react with defensive strategies of reaffirmation and hostility toward outgroups (de Zavala et al., 2024). From this perspective, collective loss, by activating the need to restore group value, fuels negative moral judgments and heightened threat perceptions, leading to stronger support for exclusionary policies and reduced intentions to act in favor of the outgroup (e.g., migrants). Conversely, the Control condition (vs. the Loss condition) did not trigger defensive motivation, resulting in a reduction of identity-defensive needs and greater openness toward outgroups.

Theoretically, these findings extend SQT by showing that collective significance loss not only predicts extreme outcomes, such as violent radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Jasko et al., 2017, 2020), but can also shape normative forms of social exclusion in intergroup contexts, such as migration. Second, it clarifies the psychological processes – perceived outgroup morality and perceived threat – through which collective significance loss translates into divergent collective orientations. The findings demonstrate that the nature of the antecedent that activates CQFS is crucial: experiences of collective devaluation push mobilization toward exclusion, whereas neutral conditions do not elicit defensive responses.

Despite these interesting findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the manipulation of collective significance gain was unsuccessful, preventing a meaningful comparison between gain and loss conditions. Future research should therefore refine the operationalization of collective significance gain by employing procedures that more effectively capture the experience of acquiring collective worth. This may include, for example, multi-step or repeated priming techniques that build a cumulative sense of collective appreciation, or stimuli grounded in real socio-political events (e.g., international recognition, cultural achievements, national successes) rather than relying solely on memory-

recall tasks. More broadly, future studies should pretest gain manipulations to ensure that they reliably elicit the intended psychological state. In addition, future research would benefit from a systematic content analysis of participants' written responses across all experimental conditions. Such analyses would help verify the fidelity of the manipulations, clarify the psychological processes activated by each condition, and strengthen the internal validity of subsequent studies.

Furthermore, data were collected through snowball sampling, which was exclusively conducted within the Spanish context, thereby reducing the representativeness of the sample and limiting the generalizability of the findings to other national and cultural settings. A further limitation concerns the reliance on self-report measures, which are susceptible to social desirability biases and cannot distinguish between self-reported attitudes and actual behaviors. Finally, the experimental manipulation relied on a single recall task procedure, which, although effective, does not fully capture the complexity of the processes through which collective significance is constructed and negotiated in real-world contexts.

e. General Discussion

Whereas Section 1 focused on the relationship between the personal quest for significance and divergent trajectories of collective action, the studies in Section 2 examined the collective quest for significance (CQFS) as a driver of majority-group members' collective responses toward migrants, clarifying how the need for significance elaborated at the level of the national ingroup shapes intentions for mobilization and support for immigration policies. The findings suggest that CQFS can motivate responses in various directions, depending on the experiences that trigger it.

The exploratory study (Study 5) showed that the dispositional CQFS was associated with greater support for restrictive immigration policies but not with intentions to engage in pro-

migrant mobilization. This pattern suggests that high levels of CQFS anchor motivation in the defense and valorization of the ingroup, functioning primarily as a drive to reinforce national boundaries and group protection at the expense of the outgroup. At the same time, this motivation appears insufficient to promote outgroup inclusion, as migrants remain largely peripheral, perceived as irrelevant to the restoration of collective significance. In this sense, CQFS directs attention to the priorities of the ingroup, fostering attitudes of closure rather than opening to integration and solidarity with the outgroup.

The experimental study (Study 6) confirmed and extended the exploratory findings, highlighting the exclusionary and defensive consequences of collective significance loss. Consistent with the literature on collective narcissism (de Zavala et al., 2009, 2024), experiences of collective loss of significance have fueled hostile responses toward migrants, expressed as greater support for anti-immigration policies and less intention to engage in pro-migrants collective action, which are sustained by the moral devaluation of this outgroup and heightened perceptions of intergroup threat. By contrast, participants in the control condition did not exhibit these defensive patterns: compared to the loss condition, they attributed more positive moral qualities to migrants, perceived them as less threatening, and expressed greater willingness to support pro-migrant collective actions.

However, because the manipulation check showed that the gain condition did not successfully induce the intended psychological state, no conclusions can be drawn about the potential effects of collective significance gain. Thus, the only interpretable comparison is between the Loss and Control conditions. As discussed in Study 6, it is also possible that the control condition – although designed to be neutral – may have elicited mild identity-affirming associations, further distancing it from the loss condition and contributing to its comparatively more positive intergroup responses.

The study further shows that CQFS is closely tied to core processes in intergroup judgments – particularly the perceived outgroup morality (Brambilla et al., 2012, 2013) and intergroup threat (Stephan & Stephan, 1996) – which emerge as key mechanisms in translating collective recognition needs into divergent trajectories of collective action toward migrants.

In conclusion, this section demonstrates that the quest for significance, also at the collective level, functions as a crucial motivational force for understanding majority responses toward migrants, marking an initial step in integrating CQFS research with the broader literature on collective action and intergroup processes.

f. Practical Implications

This section provides important insights into how CQFS can be translated into resources for social and political coexistence, aimed at improving intergroup relations in host societies.

Since collective significance loss reliably activates defensive and exclusionary reactions, public narratives that emphasize national decline, humiliation, or loss of prestige may inadvertently increase support for restrictive immigration policies.

From a practical standpoint, institutions, media, and political actors should avoid dramatizing national “loss,” especially in discussions about migration, as such framings directly heighten threat perceptions and moral devaluation of migrants.

Although the gain manipulation did not produce specific effects, the control condition clearly showed that, in the absence of collective loss, defensive reactions do not emerge. This suggests that neutral and balanced communication can help prevent the activation of exclusionary dynamics.

Given that moral devaluation is a central driver of hostility, public institutions should refrain from rhetoric portraying migrants as dishonest, dangerous, or norm-violating. By contrast,

promoting accurate information and moral recognition (such as fairness, reciprocity, and respect) can reduce defensive postures and improve the intergroup climate.

Targeted programs that enhance everyday interactions—such as intercultural mediation, shared community activities, or visible cooperation between residents and migrants—can reduce symbolic and realistic threat, indirectly weakening exclusionary attitudes that arise under conditions of collective loss.

Because cues of collective decline activate exclusionary responses, policymakers should avoid political communication that frames migration as a threat to national status, economic prestige, or international reputation. Alternative framings focused on problem-solving, pragmatic management, and mutual benefit are more likely to produce constructive outcomes..

g. Conclusions

Section 2 highlights how the drive for significance, even when expressed at the collective level, constitutes a key motivational force underlying majority-group responses toward migrants. The collective quest for significance (CQFS), rooted in processes of belonging and collective identity, has the potential to reshape intergroup boundaries within host societies: experiences of collective devaluation can be transformed into defensive strategies of closure, fueling exclusionary logics and reinforcing moral derogation and perceptions of threat toward the outgroup. At the same time, when collective recognition is not undermined – as in neutral or non-threatening conditions – collective significance concerns do not appear to activate defensive reactions, allowing for more open and less exclusionary orientations.

This implies that the CQFS should not be understood as a fixed predictor of hostile attitudes toward the outgroup, but rather as a dynamic process that, depending on the conditions of activation and the ideological and symbolic narratives available in the public sphere. Its most

salient feature lies in its plasticity: depending on contextual cues and collective meaning-making processes, the need for collective significance may contribute to the reinforcement of intergroup boundaries or, conversely, remain neutral and compatible with more open intergroup orientations.

General Conclusions and Future Directions

The studies presented in this thesis were designed to address the overarching question of what drives members of host societies to mobilize, either in supportive or hostile ways, toward migrants, showing that the quest for significance (QFS) is a crucial motivational force underlying the divergent trajectories of majority-group members' collective responses to migration.

Section 1 examined the personal dimension of the QFS, triggered by real or perceived experiences of significance loss. The results highlighted the ambivalent nature of this motivational drive: on the one hand (Section 1.1), prejudice emerged as a mechanism through which the personal quest directs individuals toward oppositional collective actions, legitimizing exclusionary practices and reinforcing ingroup protection at the expense of the outgroup. Furthermore, Study 3 underscored the importance of moral frames, showing how the moral foundation of Proportionality acts as a normative filter capable of moderating the impact of prejudice in translating the personal QFS into social mobilization against migrants. On the other hand (Section 1.2), identification with groups of pro-migrant activists emerged as an alternative process, able to channel the same motivation into collective engagement oriented toward defending the rights and dignity of the outgroup. In line with the Significance-Quest Theory and the 3N model (Kruglanski et al., 2019, 2025), the findings indicate that the personal QFS is not a unidirectional or deterministic force, but rather a dynamic process whose orientation depends on the narrative and relational frames available.

These findings paved the way for extending the motivational model beyond the individual level, examining how the QFS is experienced not only as a personal condition but also as a shared experience rooted in group membership. Section 2, therefore, focused on the collective dimension of the QFS – the collective quest for significance (CQFS) –, in which experiences

of significance loss affecting one's ingroup become central. The perception that one's group has been devalued, humiliated, or stripped of its status proves to be a powerful source of collective mobilization, as it is embedded in narratives that transcend the individual self and connect personal experiences to collective destiny. Empirically, Section 2 demonstrated that collective significance loss can drive majority-group members toward defensive and exclusionary responses, reinforcing symbolic and material boundaries and heightening perceptions of threat. These findings illustrate one expression of the CQFS: when activated through collective devaluation, it tends to steer mobilization toward boundary maintenance and ingroup protection. Theoretically, however, the CQFS remains an ambivalent and context-sensitive motivational force. Depending on the conditions under which it is activated and the broader ideological and symbolic narratives available, it holds the potential – though not demonstrated empirically in this dissertation – to unfold into more cooperative or inclusive orientations when collective recognition is affirmed rather than undermined.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis addresses a gap in the SQT, which has traditionally focused on extreme or violent outcomes (Da Silva et al., 2024), by demonstrating that the QFS can also channel into normative and non-violent forms of collective mobilization toward outgroups. Furthermore, this work contributes to the integration of the SQT with the literature on collective action and intergroup relations, showing how the salience of the need for significance – at both the personal and collective level – translates into divergent social configurations, oriented either toward social change or toward the preservation of existing order and status quo. This perspective opens a dialogue with the Intergroup Value Protection Model (IVPM; van Zomeren et al., 2024), which interprets individuals as social regulators committed to protecting their social embeddedness. In this view, the threat of losing significance or, conversely, the necessity of maintaining it under fragile conditions, compels individuals to

constantly monitor the social context, intervening to safeguard their sense of value and belonging – even through collective mobilization toward outgroups as a possible outcome.

At the social and political level, this framework helps explain why host societies oscillate between closure and openness in response to migration. Public policies, political discourses, and media frames thus play a crucial role in transforming migration from a ground of identity conflict into a resource for mutual recognition and social cohesion. These collective dynamics, however, do not remain abstract: they translate directly into the everyday experiences of migrants, who become the concrete object of the actions through which majority members seek to restore significance. As Kruglanski et al. (2022) have emphasized, the actions of one group toward another have direct effects on the sense of value and dignity of those who are targeted. In this sense, migration is not only a terrain through which majority members seek significance, but also concerns the lived experience of the outgroup, which may feel devalued or, conversely, respected and included.

This awareness highlights an important limitation: the dimensions of the QFS cannot be fully understood if analyzed exclusively from the perspective of the majority. It is necessary to include the standpoint of those who bear the consequences of these dynamics – the migrants – whose social value is continuously contested in public discourse, institutional practices, and collective responses of the host society (Battistella, 2017; Perrin, 2025). When majority narratives and behaviors deny recognition, migrants experience a loss of social significance that erodes dignity and security, heightening dependence on external judgment and approval (Turtiainen, 2018). Conversely, practices of support and recognition strengthen self-esteem and a sense of belonging, fostering more symmetrical intergroup relations grounded in respect and cooperation (see Berry, 2011).

In this perspective, the QFS emerges as a relational nexus linking the experience of the majority group with that of migrants. Only by acknowledging this interdependence – where the need for significance of one group is sustained by the value attributed to the other – does it become possible to fully grasp intergroup dynamics within societies and to orient them toward pathways of more equitable and inclusive coexistence.

While offering a novel theoretical and empirical framework, this dissertation also opens up several challenges that define avenues for future research. A key task will be to investigate more interactively the perspectives of both majority and minority groups, exploring how their respective needs for significance intertwine in social and political processes, and how they may be channeled into forms of mobilization capable of promoting justice and mutual recognition.

A further direction concerns the role of the QFS among individuals who remain in the country of origin when others migrate (Düvell, 2025). Migration can alter local social hierarchies, economic expectations, and community membership (King & Vullnetari, 2006; Schewel, 2020), potentially triggering shifts in perceived significance among those who stay behind. Future studies could explore whether significance loss in this context leads to compensatory processes – such as derogating those who leave, reinforcing ingroup boundaries, or seeking new sources of recognition within the community (e.g., Marques et al., 2001; Pinto et al., 2010). Investigating these dynamics would broaden the scope of the SQT by connecting significance-related processes to the social transformations produced by migration itself.

Alongside this theoretical challenge, several methodological limitations suggest concrete directions for further research. First, most of the studies relied on non-probabilistic recruitment strategies (snowball sampling), with samples largely composed of young and politically progressive participants. This composition reduces representativeness and calls for broader

recruitment across socio-demographic dimensions (age, gender, cultural background, political orientation).

A second limitation concerns the heterogeneity of national contexts across the empirical sections. While the studies on the personal QFS were conducted in Italy and the United States, the collective-level studies were carried out in Spain. These countries differ in cultural norms, political climate, migration histories, and public discourse surrounding immigration – all factors that may shape both the experience of significance loss and the forms of collective mobilization available or perceived as legitimate. This inconsistency limits the extent to which findings from the personal and collective levels can be directly compared or integrated within a unified framework, and it may reduce the generalizability of the overall model. Future studies should adopt coordinated cross-national designs to systematically test whether the same motivational processes unfold similarly across different societal contexts.

Third, the studies relied predominantly on self-report measures, both for the outcomes (largely self-reported intentions, except for the inclusion of petition signing in some studies) and for the psychological and motivational predictors. This leaves open the question of whether, and under what conditions, the QFS translates into actual behaviors. A related methodological limitation concerns the experimental strategy adopted across the studies. Although the manipulations were effective in activating the quest for significance, only this motivational state was experimentally manipulated. Directly manipulating theoretically relevant mediators or moderators – such as perceived injustice, intergroup threat, or moral frames – would have enabled a more rigorous assessment of the causal mechanisms and alternative pathways linking the QFS to collective actions. The exclusive focus on manipulating significance thus constrains the strength of the causal inferences that can be drawn.

Future research should address these limitations by integrating more behavioral and implicit indicators alongside self-reports (e.g., donations, participation in collective initiatives, spontaneous behavioral choices), thereby capturing forms of engagement less susceptible to social desirability. At the same time, implementing multi-step experimental designs that manipulate not only significance but also key mediators and contextual moderators would provide a clearer understanding of how, and under what conditions, the QFS leads to concrete forms of collective action. Manipulating the perceived costs and benefits of engagement may further clarify whether the motivational drive for significance is sufficient to overcome practical or psychological barriers to real mobilization.

Another promising direction concerns the expansion of mediators and moderators considered, in order to clarify whether and how the QFS translates into collective mobilization through pathways beyond those explored so far. In line with principal models of collective action, it would be important to investigate the role of processes such as perceived injustice or collective efficacy. Likewise, individual-level variables such as rejection sensitivity, adherence to specific moral foundations, membership in normative networks, or political ideology may decisively shape the translation of QFS into collective engagement.

A transversal limitation concerns the conceptualization of the outgroup as an undifferentiated category of “migrants.” Future studies should systematically distinguish between different targets (e.g., economic migrants vs. refugees/asylum seekers, or groups perceived as culturally “close” vs. “distant”), to clarify whether and how the quest for significance directs toward exclusion or solidarity depending on the specific target of collective action. Moreover, it will be valuable to extend the analysis to other collective domains – such as environmentalist, feminist, or populist movements – in order to assess whether the

mechanisms observed are specific to migration or reflect a broader dynamic across diverse forms of mobilization.

In conclusion, from a methodological perspective, most of the studies employed cross-sectional designs and two types of experimental manipulations (recall tasks and the Cyberball paradigm). While effective, these strategies do not exhaust the complexity of the processes through which the quest for significance is activated in real-life contexts. The use of more ecological paradigms – such as social feedback in laboratory settings, realistic online interactions, or virtual reality environments – would enhance the external validity of the findings, testing whether the observed dynamics also hold under less artificial conditions. Likewise, the development of longitudinal designs would make it possible to observe the evolution of motivational and identity processes over time, clarifying whether the effects of significance loss remain stable or dissipate in the short term.

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Supplementary Materials

SECTION 1

Study 1

Table S1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample ($N = 282$), including age, gender, and educational attainment.

	$N = 282$	%
<i>Age ($M_{age} = 28.72$; $SD_{age} = 15.16$)</i>		
18-24 years	197	69.9%
25-34 years	22	9.5%
35-44 years	7	2.2%
45-54 years	24	9%
55 years and older	32	9.4%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	104	36.9%
Women	173	61.3%
Other	5	1.8%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
1. No diploma	10	3.5%
2. Secondary school diploma	201	71.3%
3. Bachelor's degree	37	13.1%
4. Master's degree	22	7.8%
5. Postgraduate degree	12	4.3%

Supplementary Analysis 1. Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the Significance Quest Scale (SQS)

To support the use of the scale as a unidimensional measure in the present context, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were conducted using R (R Core Team, 2023) and the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012). Employing the DWLS estimator, the results indicated an overall acceptable model fit ($CFI = .940$; $TLI = .935$; $RMSEA = .066$, 90% CI [.059, .072]; $SRMR = .092$; $\chi^2(299) = 659.77$, $p < .001$), consistent with commonly suggested thresholds in the literature (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Chen, 2007).

Study 2a

Table S2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample ($N=330$), including data on age, gender, perceived income level, and educational attainment.

	$N = 330$	%
<i>Age ($M_{age} = 31.47$; $SD_{age} = 16.38$)</i>		
18-24 years	193	58.5%
25-34 years	30	9.1%
35-44 years	19	5.8%
45-54 years	39	11.8%
55 years and older	49	14.9%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	109	33.03%
Women	201	60.91%
Other	6	1.82%
<i>Perceived Income Level (SES)</i>		
1. Low income	46	13.94%
2. Middle income	227	68.79%
3. High income	57	17.27%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
1. No diploma	8	2.4%
2. Secondary school diploma	216	65.5%
3. Bachelor's degree	36	10.9%
4. Master's degree	47	14.2%
5. Postgraduate degree	23	7.0%

Notes. Socioeconomic status (SES) levels were grouped into three categories: low income (levels 1–4), middle income (levels 5–7), and high income (levels 8–10).

Supplementary Analysis 2. Serial Mediation Model 2 (Petition Signing with Political Orientation as Covariate)

The serial mediation model with pro- and anti-migrant petition signing as dependent variables was re-estimated, including political orientation as a covariate. Compared to the

model tested without the covariate, the most notable change concerns the serial indirect effect: the pathway through QFS and anti-migrant prejudice was negative and significant for pro-migrant petition signing ($\beta = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .023$, 95% $CI [-0.028, -0.002]$), but not significant for anti-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.01$, $SE = 0.004$, $p = .084$, 95% $CI [-0.001, 0.015]$). This pattern suggests that significance loss may reduce support for concrete pro-migrant initiatives (pro-petition signing) through increased QFS and, in turn, heightened prejudice. By contrast, no equally robust evidence emerged for an analogous pathway leading to greater support for anti-migrant initiatives (anti-petition signing).

As for total effects, the effect was significant for pro-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.108$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .045$, 95% $CI [0.002, 0.214]$) but non-significant for anti-migrant petition signing ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .219$, 95% $CI [-0.041, 0.181]$).

The attenuation of the indirect effect on anti-migrant petition signing once political orientation was controlled for is consistent with the predominantly left-leaning distribution of the sample, an ideological stance typically associated with lower prejudice and reduced willingness to endorse exclusionary initiatives (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2009). In this context, political orientation likely absorbed part of the variance otherwise attributed to the indirect pathway from significance loss to anti-migrant mobilization, weakening the association with observed behavior. This indicates that the predictive role of QFS for hostile collective action may be contingent upon participants' ideological alignment, and potentially weaker in politically unbalanced samples.

Study 2b

Table S3. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample ($N=310$), including data on age, gender, perceived income level, and educational attainment.

	$N = 310$	%
<i>Age ($M_{age} = 39.39$; $SD_{age} = 10.67$)</i>		
18-24 years	27	8.71%
25-34 years	87	28.06%
35-44 years	88	28.39%
45-54 years	77	24.84%
55 years and older	31	10.0%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	155	50.0%
Women	154	49.7%
Other	1	0.3%
<i>Perceived Income Level (SES)</i>		
1. Low income	44	14.2%
2. Middle income	238	77.1%
3. High income	28	9.1%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
1. Less than high school	4	1.3%
2. High school diploma or equivalent	31	10.0%
3. Some college or associate's degree	73	23.5%
4. Bachelor's degree	133	42.9%
5. Master's or professional degree	57	18.4%
6. Doctoral or postgraduate degree	12	3.9%

Notes. Socioeconomic status (SES) levels were grouped into three categories: low income (levels 1–4), middle income (levels 5–7), and high income (levels 8–10).

Study 3

Table S4. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N=646), including data on age, gender, and educational attainment.

	N = 646	%
<i>Age ($M_{age} = 30.90$; $SD_{age} = 16.40$)</i>		
18-24 years	357	55.26%
25-34 years	64	9.91%
35-44 years	22	3.41%
45-54 years	69	10.68%
55 years and older	134	20.74%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	252	39.0%
Women	385	59.6%
Other	9	1.4%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
1. Less than high school	37	5.7%
2. High school diploma or equivalent	431	66.7%
3. Some college or associate's degree	77	11.9%
4. Bachelor's degree	64	9.9%
5. Doctoral or postgraduate degree	37	5.7%

Study 4a

Table S5. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample ($N=352$), including data on age, gender, perceived income level, and educational attainment.

	$N = 352$	%
<i>Age ($M_{age} = 30.12$; $SD_{age} = 15.01$)</i>		
18-24 years	223	63.35%
25-34 years	27	7.67%
35-44 years	11	3.13%
45-54 years	48	13.64%
55 years, and older	43	12.22%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	95	27.0%
Women	247	70.2%
Other	10	2.9%
<i>Perceived Income Level (SES)</i>		
1. Low income	15	4.3%
2. Middle income	289	82.2%
3. High income	48	13.7%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
1. No diploma	9	2.6%
2. Secondary school diploma	254	72.2%
3. Bachelor's degree	37	10.5%
4. Master's degree	39	11.1%
5. Postgraduate degree	13	3.7%

Notes. Socioeconomic status (SES) levels were grouped into three categories: low income (levels 1–4), middle income (levels 5–7), and high income (levels 8–10).

Supplementary Analysis 3. Serial Mediation Model 2 (Petition Signing with Political Orientation as Covariate)

The serial mediation model with pro-migrant petition signing as the dependent variable was re-estimated, including political orientation as a covariate. Compared to the

model tested without the covariate, the most notable change concerns the serial indirect pathway: the effect through QFS and identification with pro-migrant activists, which had previously emerged as significant, was no longer significant once political orientation was controlled for ($\beta = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .065$, 95% $CI [-0.001, 0.043]$). Similarly, neither the simple indirect effect via QFS ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .201$, 95% $CI [-0.034, 0.164]$) nor the simple indirect effect via identification ($\beta = -0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .758$, 95% $CI [-0.036, 0.026]$) reached significance.

This attenuation of effects suggests that the pathway from significance loss to concrete prosocial behavior (petition signing) is less robust once political ideological factors are taken into account. In a predominantly left-leaning sample, political orientation likely absorbed variance otherwise attributed to QFS-driven processes, weakening the overall association with observed behavior. This indicates that the predictive role of QFS for solidaristic collective action may be contingent on participants' ideological alignment, and more difficult to detect in politically unbalanced samples.

Study 4b

Table S6. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N=209), including data on age, gender, perceived income level, and educational attainment.

	N = 209	%
<i>Age (M_{età} = 24.30, DS_{età} = 10.70)</i>		
18-24 years	161	77.0%
25-34 years	25	12.0%
35-44 years	6	2.90%
45-54 years	5	2.40%
55-66 years	12	5.70%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	50	23.90%
Women	157	75.10%
Other	2	1.0%
<i>Perceived Income Level (SES)</i>		
1. Low income	20	9.6%
2. Middle income	153	73.2%
3. High income	36	17.2%
<i>Educational Attainment</i>		
1. Less than high school	6	2.9%
2. High school diploma or equivalent	152	72.7%
3. Some college or associate's degree	23	11.0%
4. Bachelor's degree	17	8.1%
5. Doctoral or postgraduate degree	11	5.3%

Notes. Socioeconomic status (SES) levels were grouped into three categories: low income (levels 1–4), middle income (levels 5–7), and high income (levels 8–10).

SECTION 2

Exploratory Study

Table S7. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N=168), including data on age, gender, and perceived income level.

	N = 168	%
Age ($M_{age} = 42.80$; $SD_{age} = 51.80$)		
18-24 years	16	9.50%
25-34 years	29	17.30%
35-44 years	51	30.40%
45-54 years	40	23.80%
55 years, and older	32	19.10%
Gender		
Men	80	47.60%
Women	87	51.80%
Other	1	0.60%
Perceived Income Level (SES)		
1. Low income	14	8.30%
2. Middle income	89	53.0%
3. High income	64	38.10%

Notes. Socioeconomic status (SES) levels were grouped into three categories: low income (levels 1–4), middle income (levels 5–7), and high income (levels 8–10).

Supplementary Analysis 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Perceived Threat Scale

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the DWLS estimator, showing a satisfactory fit for the one-factor model (CFI = .979; TLI = .976; RMSEA = .059, 90% CI [.050, .068]; SRMR = .070; $\chi^2(77) = 222.50$, $p < .001$), following commonly cited thresholds (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Chen, 2007).

Experimental Study

Table S8. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N=538), including data on age, gender, and perceived income level.

	<i>N</i> = 538	%
<i>Age (M = 34.79, SD = 15.08)</i>		
18-24 years	202	37.50%
25-34 years	115	21.40%
35-44 years	69	12.80%
45-54 years	78	14.50%
55 years, and older	74	13.80%
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	280	52.0%
Women	245	45.50%
Other	13	2.40%
<i>Perceived Income Level (SES)</i>		
1. Low income	21	3.90%
2. Middle income	296	55.0%
3. High income	221	41.10%

Notes. Socioeconomic status (SES) levels were grouped into three categories: low income (levels 1-4), middle income (levels 5-7), and high income (levels 8-10).