

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Explaining immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions through issue-specific moral conviction and general need for closure: The case of the US–Mexico border wall

Valeria De Cristofaro¹  | Valerio Pellegrini¹  | Stefano Livi¹ | Martijn van Zomeren²

¹Department of Social and Developmental Psychology, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy

²Department of Social Psychology, Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences, Groningen, The Netherlands

Correspondence

Valeria De Cristofaro, Department of Social and Developmental Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. Via dei Marsi 78, 00185 Roma. Email: valeria.decrisofaro@uniroma1.it

Abstract

This research aimed at explaining immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions through moral conviction regarding the construction of the US–Mexico border wall and general need for closure (NFC). Among independent samples of Democrats and Republicans, we found that NFC (measured in Study 1, manipulated in Study 2) was negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions through enhanced immigrant threat perceptions when moral conviction was low. Instead, when moral conviction was high, Democrats were more motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through reduced immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC, whereas Republicans were less motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through enhanced immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC. These results suggest that moral conviction offers a powerful moral and issue-specific motivation that can psychologically buffer against the negative influences of general NFC. We discuss how these results complement and advance the literature and open up new research avenues.

KEYWORDS

collective action, moral conviction, need for closure, threat perceptions

1 | INTRODUCTION

Discrimination against immigrants is a major societal issue of our time. Although it produces negative consequences for the immigrant group as well as for the host nation (see Stephan et al., 1999), this has not stopped political parties from pursuing anti-immigrant policies aimed at restricting immigration to the host nation and driving out undocumented immigrants (see Vargas et al., 2017). A major argument underlying the pressure for anti-immigrant policies depicts immigrants as a

threat to the national majority population (Green et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2010; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). Such immigrant threat perceptions can arise from anticipated competition between immigrants and the national majority for tangible resources (such as jobs and housing), from perceiving them as taking unjustified advantage of welfare benefits and committing more crimes than the national majority (Coenders et al., 2001), and from perceiving the presence and arrival of immigrants as threatening the dominant worldview and cultural values due to supposed differences in norms and traditions (Stephan &

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Stephan, 1996; Stephan et al., 1999). Against this backdrop, we ask how immigrant threat perceptions can be reduced and how individuals can become motivated to act for immigrants' rights.

To answer this question, we focus on two key variables. First, we focus on a general individual difference factor associated with higher threat, namely *need for closure* (NFC). Individuals with high NFC, or need for epistemic certainty, are usually more rigid in their thinking and less motivated to process information thoroughly (Kruglanski, 2004). In the context of immigration, high NFC people demonstrated higher tendency to embrace conservative ideologies (Chirumbolo & Leone, 2008; Leone & Chirumbolo, 2008), higher levels of anti-immigrant prejudice (Dohnt et al., 2013; Roets & Van Hiel, 2011) and higher immigrant threat perceptions (Baldner & Pierro, 2019). We extend this work by examining whether an issue-specific individual difference variable, namely *moral conviction* (i.e., strong, and absolute beliefs on a specific issue that motivate people to think, feel, and behave in accordance with such beliefs; Skitka, 2010), can psychologically buffer against this negative influence of NFC on immigrant threat perceptions. Moral convictions may have such a buffering power because these are experienced as non-negotiable beliefs on a specific issue that tolerate no exceptions (Skitka et al., 2008). In fact, because moral convictions must be actively defended to protect one's values (Skitka et al., 2005), holding moral convictions may not only buffer against NFC's negative influence on immigrant threat perceptions, but also motivate one to act to protect immigrants' rights (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021; De Cristofaro et al., 2021). This suggests that (1) for those with low moral conviction, NFC should be negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions because of increased immigrant threat perceptions, but that (2) for those with high moral conviction, this relation should not be found (i.e., psychologically buffered), and instead their moral conviction should explain their immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. As far as we know, no research has examined and tested these hypotheses.

Across two empirical studies that used cross-sectional and experimental methods, we aimed to explain individuals' immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions through their general NFC and issue-specific moral conviction. We conducted these two studies in the context of immigration in the US at the time of the Trump presidency, as this context allowed us to examine a specific issue that individuals may moralize: the plan to construct a wall on the US-Mexico border to ward off immigrants. This was a highly politicized and polarized issue in the US when we designed and conducted this research, as it sharply divided public opinion and political parties. We therefore surveyed both Democrats (commonly opposing the border wall) and Republicans (commonly favouring the border wall) in both two studies.

1.1 | General NFC

As noted, NFC refers to the general need for a definite and firm answer, as opposed to uncertainty and confusion (Kruglanski, 2004). When making a judgment, individuals with high NFC tend to quickly seek

and find closure, seizing the most available information and/or freezing their past knowledge without considering alternative interpretations. Previous studies have shown that a general NFC leads people to engage in an effortless cognitive process, which is schematic, simplistic, and heuristic (Brizi et al., 2016; Chajut & Algom, 2003; Roets et al., 2015). This promotes a general inclination to make more stereotypical judgments (Dijksterhuis et al., 1996) and to preserve already achieved knowledge. High NFC people tend to classify objects into well-defined categories that enable them to reach certainty, cognitive consistency, and to avoid aversive ambiguity (Di Santo et al., 2020; Kruglanski, 2004). Such category-based processing style reflects a prejudice-prone cognitive style which has detrimental consequences for minority groups such as immigrants (Kossowska et al., 2018). For example, those with high NFC tend to exhibit social responses aimed to extol conformism including outgroup derogation (Kruglanski et al., 2006) and opinion uniformity among ingroup members (Roets et al., 2015), prefer homogeneous over diverse groups (Pierro et al., 2003), and support conservative policies and resolute leaders that guarantee the maintenance of tradition, social order, and well-defined roles (Orehek et al., 2010).

More specifically, a general NFC is associated with increased anti-immigrant prejudice (Cunningham et al., 2004; Dhont et al., 2013; Roets et al., 2012; Van Hiel et al., 2004), negative attitudes towards immigrants (Chirumbolo et al., 2004), and perceptions of immigrants as a threat for the national majority security and stability (Baldner & Pierro, 2019). Accordingly, NFC is associated with reduced sympathy towards immigrants and willingness to engage in helping behaviours towards them (Baldner et al., 2020). In addition, those higher in NFC demonstrated less willingness to act collectively in support of immigrants (De Cristofaro et al., 2019), presumably because they perceived immigrants more as a threat. In three studies conducted in Italy, these authors found that as NFC increases, people are less likely to engage in collective action intentions and actual behaviour for the arrival and integration of immigrants. Thus, general NFC should be positively related to immigrant threat perceptions and negatively to pro-immigrant collective action intentions. However, we propose that moral convictions offer a powerful moral and issue-specific motivation that can psychologically buffer against these negative influences of general NFC.

1.2 | Issue-specific moral conviction

Moral convictions are defined by Skitka et al. (2005) as strong moralized beliefs for or against a given issue, which powerfully influence the way in which individuals process information, build judgments, and decide on their actions. As theorized by Skitka et al. (2008), individuals believe that their convictions are readily observable as factual data of the world, objective, and universal truths that everyone should possess. Moral convictions are experienced as non-negotiable and absolute beliefs that remain stable over time (Skitka, 2010). Once individuals have developed moral convictions, they tend to focus on the way they personally believe things should be done without being dependent, for

example, on the duty to comply with authorities or to conform to group norms (Skitka et al., 2008). As such, individuals who ground an issue-specific attitude in their core values are motivated to defend and protect them, independent of externalized sources of threat (Skitka et al., 2004). This confers on moral convictions a unique motivational power.

Indeed, individuals' moral convictions on a specific issue can motivate collective action participation to protect their moral stance (for a meta-analysis see Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021). For example, Van Zomeren et al. (2012) found that students' moral conviction against increased tuition fees motivated their willingness to engage in collective action against this proposal. In another study, these authors found that moral convictions about the "right to know" motivated individuals' willingness to sign a Greenpeace petition against the non-visible use of genetically modified meat in consumer products. Two other studies by Van Zomeren et al. (2011) demonstrated that advantaged group members with strong moral convictions against social inequality were more likely to act collectively in support of disadvantaged outgroup members because of increased identification with them. Thus, and in line with Skitka et al. (2008), the unique motivational power conferred by issue-specific moral conviction applies even independent of group membership.

We develop this line of thought into specific predictions for those low versus high in moral conviction. Consistent with work on general NFC, we expect that (1) for those with low moral conviction, NFC should be negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions because of increased immigrant threat perceptions, but that (2) for those with high moral conviction, this relation should not be found, and instead their moral conviction should explain their immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. This is because once people have developed moral convictions for or against a specific issue, no exception and/or violation can be tolerated (Skitka, 2010). For people with high moral convictions, the effects of general variables (such as NFC) should be buffered by their moral convictions on the issue.

1.3 | Overview of studies

Across two studies, we aimed to examine whether moral conviction about a specific issue related to immigrants (i.e., the US–Mexico border wall issue in the time of the Trump presidency) has a unique motivational power that can buffer the association of general NFC with immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. Specifically, Study 1 (with a correlational design) and Study 2 (with an experimental design) tested the two-way interaction between general NFC and issue-specific moral conviction on perceived immigrant threat and pro-immigrant collective action intentions, among independent samples of Democrats and Republicans.¹

¹ Although NFC's emphasis on the maintenance of security and tradition matches with conservative worldviews (Chirumbolo & Leone, 2008; Leone & Chirumbolo, 2008), existing evidence suggests that NFC may also be adopted by liberals and individuals with progressive worldviews. For example, in the research by De Cristofaro et al. (2019; Study 3), NFC was found unrelated to political conservatism. As documented by Kossowska and Van Hiel (2003), this could

We predicted that NFC would be associated with reduced pro-immigrant collective action intentions through increased immigrant threat perceptions when moral convictions are low (Hypothesis 1). When moral convictions are high, however, we predicted that Democrats would be *more* motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through *reduced* immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC (Hypothesis 2), whereas Republicans would be *less* motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through *enhanced* immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC (Hypothesis 3).

Please note that we describe in the [supplemental materials](#) an additional study we conducted that confirmed the relevance of the context and the measures we used in the reported studies, and we disclose additional information about these studies for the purpose of transparency.

2 | STUDY 1

2.1 | Participants and procedure

The power analysis for the interaction was performed with G*power. Cohen (1988) suggested that effect sizes (f^2) of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 can be considered as small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. We based our power analysis on a f^2 value of 0.037. We computed the minimal sample size by assuming a multiple regression model with 1 tested predictor (i.e., the expected two-way interaction) on a total of seven predictors (i.e., two main effects, one interaction effect, and four covariates). By setting a conventional statistical power of 0.80 and an error probability of 0.05, analysis revealed a minimum sample size of 215 participants.

Study 1 consisted of two independent samples that summed to a total of 285 participants. They were recruited online via Amazon's M-Turk, setting as eligibility criteria that their country of origin and residence was the US, and that they identified as Democrats or Republicans (i.e., the required response to the "US political affiliation" item was "Democrat" for the Democratic sample, whereas "Republican" for the Republican sample). Participants were assured about the anonymity of their responses and received 0.60 \$ for the completion of a 10-minutes questionnaire. Data were collected in September 2018. The samples were composed by 158 Democrats, 44.3% male aged 19–71 years ($Mage = 38.54$, $SD = 12.67$) and 127 Republicans, 44.9% male aged 22–82 years ($Mage = 40.11$, $SD = 12.99$).² Among Democrats, the educational level varied from high school to PhD as follows: 30.4% high school, 52.5% bachelor's degree, 14.6% master's degree, 2.5% PhD. Concerning ethnicity, most of Democrats were white Caucasian

be due by the fact that NFC leads individuals to support not only conservative ideologies, but also progressive ideologies, depending on the predominant view present within a given political context. Although related to political ideology, being Democrat is not mutually exclusive with high NFC nor is being Republican mutually exclusive of low NFC.

² We used political party identification as a grouping variable: being Democrat or Republican was an eligibility criterion on M-Turk. That is, only participants who met eligibility criteria for country of origin and residence (i.e., the US) and for political party identification (i.e., Democratic or Republican) were invited to complete the questionnaire. Given budget constraints, these samples achieved less power than anticipated. When taken together with Study 2, however, the pattern of results seems clear and similar.

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations for scores on dispositional Need for Closure (NFC), Moral Convictions (MC), Immigrant Threat perceptions (TH), pro-immigrant Collective Action intentions (CA), Gender, Age, Education, and Ethnicity, among Democrats

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 NFC	2.79	0.78	-							
2 MC	5.45	1.75	-0.16†	-						
3 TH	1.97	1.02	0.39***	-0.45***	-					
4 CA	4.71	1.70	-0.34***	0.48***	-0.43***	-				
5 Gender	-	-	-0.08	0.25**	-0.20**	0.18*	-			
6 Age	38.54	12.67	-0.16*	0.05	-0.08	0.06	0.07	-		
7 Edu	-	-	-0.13	0.12	-0.06	0.18*	-0.06	-0.01	-	
8 Ethnicity	-	-	0.008	0.007	0.08	-0.02	-0.007	0.11	0.05	-

Note. Gender = Male coded as 1 and Female coded as 2; Ethnicity = white Caucasian coded as 1 and other coded as 0.

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

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations for scores on dispositional Need for Closure (NFC), Moral Convictions (MC), Immigrant Threat perceptions (TH), pro-immigrant Collective Action intentions (CA), Gender, Age, Education, and Ethnicity, among Republicans

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 NFC	3.33	0.88	-							
2 MC	4.93	1.62	0.17	-						
3 TH	4.25	1.44	0.27***	0.33***	-					
4 CA	1.69	1.16	0.06	-0.06	-0.31***	-				
5 Gender	-	-	-0.02	-0.03	0.01	-0.09	-			
6 Age	40.11	12.99	-0.03	-0.04	0.11	-0.30***	0.11	-		
7 Edu	-	-	-0.08	-0.03	-0.06	0.06	0.03	-0.14	-	
8 Ethnicity	-	-	-0.06	0.04	0.20*	-0.08	-0.02	-0.04	-0.11	-

Note. Gender = Male coded as 1 and Female coded as 2; Ethnicity = white Caucasian coded as 1 and other coded as 0.

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

(63.9%), 7% African American, 12.7% Chinese, 8.9% Hispanic, 7.6% other. Among Republicans, the educational level varied from high school to PhD as follows: 29.9% high school, 51.2% bachelor's degree, 18.1% master's degree, 0.8% PhD. Concerning ethnicity, 46.5% of participants were white Caucasian, 2.4% African American, 12.6% Chinese, 7.1% Hispanic, 31.5% did not indicate their ethnicity.³ In the questionnaire, we first measured moral convictions. The following pages contained measures of NFC, immigrant threat perceptions, and collective action intentions to support immigrants.⁴ All measures employed 7-point response scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), except for the NFC measure which responses were made on 6-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Tables 1 and 2 for Democrats and Republicans, respectively.

³ We acknowledge that the percentage of Republicans who did not indicate their ethnicity is high. However, we have no explanation for this, and we do not believe there are aspects of the procedure that would explain this.

⁴ The measures described below were part of a survey designed in September 2018 for several purposes. Therefore, additional measures were included and will not be reported here. Specifically, following the collective action literature, additional measures were included such as positive (proud, hopeful, excited) and negative (angry, anxious, worried) emotions, efficacy beliefs, identification with the advantaged (Democrats and Republicans) and disadvantaged (immigrants). In line with Brader et al. (2008), we also tried to manipulate immigrant threat per-

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | Moral conviction

Participants completed three items developed by Skitka et al. (2008) to measure moral convictions about the border wall. The items are: "To what extent is your opinion on the border wall a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?" "To what extent is your opinion on the border wall connected to your beliefs about fundamental right and wrong?" and "To what extent is your opinion on the border wall based on moral principle?" The Cronbach's alpha was 0.95 in the Democratic sample and 0.90 in the Republican sample.

2.2.2 | NFC

The 14-item Revised Need for Closure Scale (Rev NFC; Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005) was used to measure individual differences in NFC. Examples of items are: "In case of uncertainty, I prefer to make an

ceptions by describing immigrants as threatening or enriching for the host society. The manipulation was not effective in both the samples. See the supplemental materials for all details.

immediate decision, whatever it may be” and “When I find myself facing various, potentially valid, alternatives, I decide in favour of one of them quickly and without hesitation.” The internal consistency of this scale in the Democratic ($\alpha = 0.85$) and Republican ($\alpha = 0.87$) samples was satisfactory.

2.2.3 | Immigrant threat perceptions

Participants filled out the Perceived Ethnic Threat Scale (Scheepers et al., 2002). This is a seven-item measure which assesses to which extent ethnic minorities such as immigrants are perceived as threatening for the host society (e.g., “In schools where there are too many children from these minority groups, the quality of education suffers” and “People from these minority groups abuse the system of social service”). The internal consistency of this scale in the Democratic ($\alpha = 0.86$) and Republican ($\alpha = 0.88$) samples was satisfactory.

2.2.4 | Collective action in support of immigrants

Participants completed six items adapted from previous studies of Van Zomeren et al. (2011) to measure intentions to participate in collective action against the construction of the border wall (e.g., “I would like to participate in a demonstration against the construction of the border wall” and “I would like to sign a petition against the construction of the border wall”). The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.95 in both the Democratic and Republican samples. Among Democrats, an exploratory factor analysis revealed a unique factor (eigenvalue = 4.72), which explains 79% of variance with items factor loadings ranging from 0.71 to 0.92. Among Republicans, an exploratory factor analysis revealed a unique factor (eigenvalue = 4.86), which explains 81% of variance with items factor loadings ranging from 0.81 to 0.94.

2.3 | Results and discussion

We tested our hypotheses that when moral conviction is low, NFC would be associated with increased immigrant threat perceptions and reduced pro-immigrant collective action intentions (H1). When moral conviction is high, Democrats would be *more* motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through *reduced* immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC (H2), whereas Republicans would be *less* motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through *enhanced* immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC (H3).

Two separate moderated mediation analyses, using Hayes’s (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 7) with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals, were conducted for Democrats and Republicans. Participants’ gender, age, education, and ethnicity were included as covariates.

Among the Democratic sample, we checked for potential multicollinearity among the predictors, but the analyses of Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) did not support multicollinearity (values resulted, respectively, 0.98 and 1.03). In line with predic-

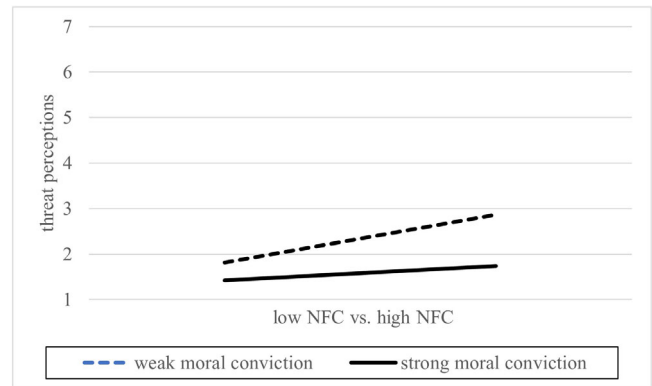


FIGURE 1 Interaction between dispositional NFC and Moral Convictions on Immigrant Threat perceptions controlling for participants’ gender, age, education, and ethnicity, among Democrats

tions, the two-way interaction between NFC and moral convictions was significant and negative, $B = -0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -2.73$, $p = .007$, 95% CI $[-0.2422, -0.0388]$. The simple slopes analysis (Figure 1) revealed that NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions when moral convictions were weak, $B = 0.67$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 5.27$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.4181, 0.9201]$, whereas no significant relation between NFC and immigrant threat perceptions was found when moral convictions were strong, $B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = 1.73$, $p = .09$, 95% CI $[-0.0287, 0.4397]$. The expected negative relation between immigrant threat perceptions and collective action intentions in support of immigrants was found, $B = -0.54$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -4.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.7956, -0.2811]$. Thus, moderated mediation analysis showed that immigrant threat perceptions were a significant mediator for Democrats with weak moral convictions, $B = -0.36$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI $[-0.6441, -0.1348]$, but not for Democrats with strong moral convictions, $B = -0.11$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.2503, 0.0039]$.

More generally, NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 4.78$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.2483, 0.5984]$, and negatively to collective action intentions in support of immigrants, $B = -0.41$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -2.45$, $p = .016$, 95% CI $[-0.7481, -0.0800]$. Democrats’ moral convictions were *negatively* related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = -0.23$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -5.70$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.3097, -0.1503]$. The overall moderated mediation model did not achieve statistical significance, $Index = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.0003, 0.1731]$.

Among the Republican sample, we checked for potential multicollinearity among the predictors, but the analyses of Tolerance and VIF did not support multicollinearity (values resulted respectively between 0.97 and between 1.03). Once more, the two-way interaction between NFC and moral convictions was significant and negative, $B = -0.22$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -2.84$, $p = .005$, 95% CI $[-0.3694, -0.0661]$. The simple slopes analysis (Figure 2) revealed that NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions when moral convictions were weak, $B = 0.73$, $SE = 0.18$, $t = 4.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[0.3749, 1.0799]$, whereas no significant relation between NFC and immigrant threat perceptions was found when moral convictions were strong, $B = 0.02$,

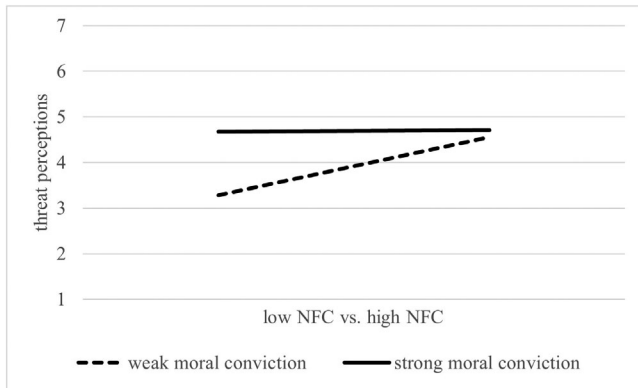


FIGURE 2 Interaction between dispositional NFC and Moral Convictions on Immigrant Threat perceptions controlling for participants' gender, age, education, and ethnicity, among Republicans

$SE = 0.18$, $t = 0.13$, $p = .90$, 95% CI $[-0.3397, 0.3864]$. The negative relation between immigrant threat perceptions and collective action intentions in support of immigrants was also found, $B = -0.26$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -3.61$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.3975, -0.1158]$. Thus, moderated mediation analysis showed that immigrant threat perceptions were a significant mediator for Republicans with weak moral convictions, $B = -0.19$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.3505, -0.0596]$, but not for Republicans with strong moral convictions, $B = -0.01$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI $[-0.1305, 0.0999]$.

For Republicans, NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = 0.38$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 2.85$, $p = .005$, 95% CI $[0.1147, 0.6360]$, and unrelated to collective action intentions in support of immigrants, $B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 1.57$, $p = .12$, 95% CI $[-0.0470, 0.4048]$. Moral convictions were positively related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = 0.24$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 3.35$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[0.0980, 0.3809]$. The overall moderated mediation model achieved statistical significance, $Index = 0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI $[0.0060, 0.1134]$.⁵

2.3.1 | Discussion

In sum, these findings corroborated our line of thought that issue-specific moral convictions may buffer the association of general NFC with immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. Among both Democrats and Republicans with weak moral convictions, we found that NFC was negatively related to collective action intentions in support of immigrants through increased immigrant threat perceptions (H1). Instead, when moral convictions were strong, people were motivated to behave in accordance with those

convictions, independent of NFC: Democrats—who commonly oppose the border wall—were more motivated to act collectively in support of immigrants through reduced immigrant threat perceptions (H2), whereas Republicans—who commonly favour the border wall—were less motivated to act collectively in support of immigrants through increased immigrant threat perceptions (H3). The aim of Study 2 was to replicate findings of Study 1 by using an experimental manipulation of NFC.

3 | STUDY 2

3.1 | Participants and procedure

We replicated the power analysis for the interaction performed in Study 1 ($f^2 = 0.037$, $1-\beta = 0.80$, $\alpha = 0.05$), which revealed a minimum sample size of 215 participants.

Study 2 consisted of two independent samples that summed to a total of 472 participants. Participants were recruited online via Prolific, setting as eligibility criteria that their country of origin and residence was the US, and that they identified as Democrats or Republicans. Participants were assured about the anonymity of their responses and received 0.60 \$ for the completion of a 10-min questionnaire. Data were collected in May 2019. Six participants were excluded for failing to report their political party identification, and 27 for failing to respond appropriately to the experimental manipulation's instructions (e.g., responding "I don't know" or "no"). The final Democratic sample was composed by 221 participants, 34.8% male aged 18–73 years ($Age = 35.15$, $SD = 12.19$). Their educational level varied from middle school to PhD as follows: 0.5% middle school, 35.3% high school, 40.3% bachelor's degree, 18.1% master's degree, 5.9% PhD. We obtained a final Republican sample of 218 participants, 51.4% male aged 17–76 years ($Age = 41.05$, $SD = 14.97$). Their educational level varied from high school to PhD as follows: 38.5% high school, 49.5% bachelor's degree, 8.7% master's degree, 3.2% PhD. All participants were white Caucasian. We first measured moral convictions and then we manipulated NFC by written instructions. The following pages of the questionnaire contained measures of NFC, immigrant threat perceptions, and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. All measures employed 7-point response scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Only responses to the NFC scale were made on 6-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Tables 3 and 4 for Democrats and Republicans, respectively.

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | Moral conviction

Participants completed three items as in Study 1. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.92 in the Democratic sample and 0.91 in the Republican sample.

⁵ We also conducted a moderation analysis with the SPSS PROCESS macro with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (Model 3; Hayes, 2013), in which political party identification (Democrats coded as 0 and Republicans coded as 1) was the independent variable (X), moral convictions and NFC were the moderators (M1 and M2, respectively), and immigrant threat perceptions were the dependent variable (Y). The three-way interaction was not statistically significant, $B = -0.08$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -0.86$, $p = .39$, 95% CI $[-0.2554, 0.0995]$.

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics and correlations for scores on manipulated Need for Closure (NFC), Moral Convictions (MC), Immigrant Threat perceptions (TH), pro-immigrant Collective Action intentions (CA), Gender, Age, and Education, among Democrats

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 NFC	-	-	-						
2 MC	5.66	1.53	-0.10	-					
3 TH	1.69	0.88	0.19**	-0.38***	-				
4 CA	4.92	1.79	-0.09	0.43***	-0.39***	-			
5 Gender	-	-	0.06	0.06	-0.09	-0.04	-		
6 Age	35.15	12.19	0.10	0.06	0.20**	-0.11	0.08	-	
7 Edu	-	-	0.06	-0.11	-0.05	-0.05	0.21**	0.03	-

Note. Gender = Male coded as 1 and Female coded as 2.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics and correlations for scores on manipulated Need for Closure (NFC), Moral Convictions (MC), Immigrant Threat perceptions (TH), pro-immigrant Collective Action intentions (CA), Gender, Age, and Education, among Republicans

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 NFC	-	-	-						
2 MC	5.26	1.51	0.11	-					
3 TH	4.30	1.46	0.15*	0.47***	-				
4 CA	1.45	1.13	-0.09	-0.10	-0.16**	-			
5 Gender	-	-	-0.05	0.11	0.03	-0.06	-		
6 Age	41.05	14.97	0.04	0.31**	0.20**	-0.13†	0.19**	-	
7 Edu	-	-	-0.009	-0.12	-0.16**	0.22***	-0.09	0.02	-

Note. Gender = Male coded as 1 and Female coded as 2. † $p = .05$, * $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

3.2.2 | Manipulation of NFC

We manipulated NFC through a modified version of the Avnet and Higgins's (2003) behavioural recall paradigm. Participants were randomly assigned to either the condition of high or low NFC, in which they were asked to answer three items designed to experimentally induce high NFC (e.g., "Think back to a time in which you felt uncomfortable because you didn't understand the reason why an event occurred in your life") or low NFC (e.g., "Think back to a time in which, even after you made up your mind about something, you were eager to consider a different opinion"). This procedure has been successfully used in previous studies to manipulate participants' NFC (Baldner & Pierro, 2019; De Cristofaro et al., 2019).

3.2.3 | Manipulation check

Participants completed the same 14-item Rev NfCS used in Study 1. The internal consistency of this scale in the Democratic ($\alpha = 0.83$;

$M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.72$) and Republican ($\alpha = 0.86$; $M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.80$) samples was satisfactory.

3.2.4 | Immigrant threat perceptions

Participants filled out the seven-item Perceived Ethnic Threat Scale as in Study 1. The internal consistency of this scale in the Democratic ($\alpha = 0.85$) and Republican ($\alpha = 0.88$) samples was satisfactory.

3.2.5 | Collective action in support of immigrants

Participants completed the same six items of Study 1. The Cronbach's alpha for these items was 0.96 in both the Democratic and Republican samples. Among Democrats, an exploratory factor analysis revealed a unique factor (eigenvalue = 4.99), which explains 83.15% of variance with items factor loadings ranging from 0.82 to 0.96. Among Republicans, an exploratory factor analysis revealed a unique factor

(eigenvalue = 5.13), which explains 85.54% of variance with items factor loadings ranging from 0.86 to 0.95.

3.3 | Results and discussion

3.3.1 | Manipulation checks

Two ANOVAs were conducted to verify our manipulation of NFC among Democrats and Republicans. Results showed that there was a significant main effect on NFC of both Democrats, $F(1, 219) = 7.91$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$, and Republicans, $F(1, 216) = 8.78$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$. This means that the manipulation was effective in both the samples. Democrats in condition of high NFC (coded 1; $N = 109$; $M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.06$) reported higher levels of NFC relative to those in condition of low NFC (coded 0; $N = 112$; $M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.06$). Similarly, Republicans in condition of high NFC (coded 1; $N = 108$; $M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.76$) reported higher levels of NFC relative to those in condition of low NFC (coded 0; $N = 110$; $M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.76$).

3.3.2 | Moderated mediation analyses

We tested the hypotheses that when moral conviction is low, both Democrats and Republicans in condition of high (vs. low) NFC would perceive immigrants as more threatening and then they would be less motivated to act collectively in support of immigrants (H1). When moral conviction is high, Democrats would be *more* motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through *reduced* immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC (H2), whereas Republicans would be *less* motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through *enhanced* immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC (H3).

Two separate moderated mediation analyses, using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 7) with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals, were conducted for Democrats and Republicans. Participants' gender, age, and education were included as covariates.

Among the Democratic sample, we checked for potential multicollinearity among the predictors, but the analyses of Tolerance and VIF did not support multicollinearity (values resulted, respectively, 0.99 and 1.01). As in Study 1, the two-way interaction between NFC and moral convictions was significant and negative, $B = -0.184$, $SE = 0.069$, $t = -2.659$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [-0.319, -0.048]. Replicating Study 1, the simple slopes analysis (Figure 3) revealed that NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions when moral convictions were weak, $B = 0.519$, $SE = 0.149$, $t = 3.468$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.224, 0.815], whereas no significant relation between NFC and immigrant threat perceptions was found when moral convictions were strong, $B = -0.009$, $SE = 0.141$, $t = -0.061$, $p = .952$, 95% CI [-0.286, 0.268]. The negative relation between immigrant threat perceptions and collective action intentions to support immigrants emerged, $B = -0.787$, $SE = 0.133$, $t = -5.91$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.05, -0.524]. Thus, moderated mediation analysis showed that immigrant threat perceptions were a significant mediator for Democrats with weak moral convictions, $B = -0.409$, $SE = 0.147$, 95% CI [-0.699, -0.108], but not for Democrats

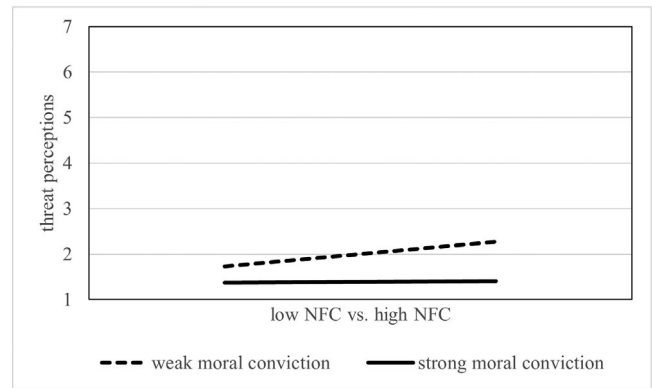


FIGURE 3 Interaction between manipulated NFC and Moral Convictions on Immigrant Threat perceptions controlling for participants' gender, age, and education, among Democrats

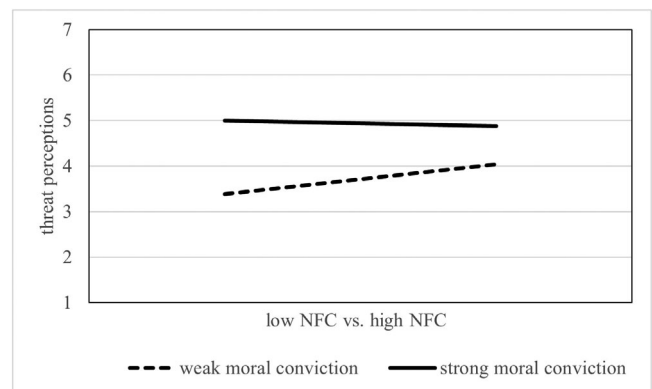


FIGURE 4 Interaction between manipulated NFC and Moral Convictions on Immigrant Threat perceptions controlling for participants' gender, age, and education, among Republicans

with strong moral convictions, $B = 0.007$, $SE = 0.097$, 95% CI [-0.205, 0.185].

For Democrats, NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = 0.239$, $SE = 0.106$, $t = 2.26$, $p = .025$, 95% CI [0.031, 0.448], whereas it was unrelated to collective action intentions to support immigrants, $B = -0.029$, $SE = 0.229$, $t = -0.125$, $p = .901$, 95% CI [-0.481, 0.424]. Moral convictions were negatively related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = -0.214$, $SE = 0.035$, $t = -6.138$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.283, -0.145]. The overall moderated mediation model achieved statistical significance, $Index = 0.144$, $SE = 0.061$, 95% CI [0.016, 0.257].

Among the Republican sample, we checked for potential multicollinearity among the predictors, but the analyses of Tolerance and VIF did not support multicollinearity (values resulted, respectively, 0.98 and 1.01). Replicating Study 1, the two-way interaction between NFC and moral convictions was significant and negative, $B = -0.257$, $SE = 0.116$, $t = -2.219$, $p = .027$, 95% CI [-0.485, -0.029]. As in Study 1, the simple slopes analysis (Figure 4) revealed that NFC was positively related to immigrant threat perceptions when moral convictions were weak, $B = 0.659$, $SE = 0.247$, $t = 2.674$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [0.173, 1.146], whereas no significant relation between NFC and immigrant

threat perceptions was found when moral convictions were strong, $B = -0.115$, $SE = 0.246$, $t = -0.468$, $p = .64$, 95% CI [-0.599, 0.369]. In this sample, the inclusion of the covariates in the proposed model made the relation between immigrant threat perceptions and collective action intentions to support immigrants not statistically significant, $B = -0.072$, $SE = 0.053$, $t = -1.358$, $p = .179$, 95% CI [-0.177, 0.033]. Thus, moderated mediation analysis showed that immigrant threat perceptions did not mediate the link between NFC and collective action intentions to support immigrants among Republicans with weak moral convictions, $B = -0.048$, $SE = 0.038$, 95% CI [-0.133, 0.016], and Republicans with strong moral convictions, $B = 0.008$, $SE = 0.023$, 95% CI [-0.037, 0.061].

NFC was unrelated to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = 0.272$, $SE = 0.174$, $t = 1.567$, $p = .119$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.615], and collective action intentions in support of immigrants, $B = -0.171$, $SE = 0.151$, $t = 1.131$, $p = .259$, 95% CI [-0.467, 0.127], whereas moral convictions were positively related to immigrant threat perceptions, $B = 0.407$, $SE = 0.061$, $t = 6.637$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.286, 0.528]. The overall moderated mediation model did not achieve statistical significance, $Index = 0.019$, $SE = 0.016$, 95% CI [-0.006, 0.056].⁶

3.3.3 | Discussion

These results provided further support for our line of thought that the unique motivational power of moral convictions on a specific issue can buffer the association between general NFC, perceived immigrant threat, and collective action intentions in support of immigrants. Among Democrats, we replicated findings of Study 1 that NFC undermined collective action intentions through increased immigrant threat perceptions when moral convictions were weak (H1). Instead, when moral convictions were strong, Democrats were more motivated to act collectively to support immigrants through reduced immigrant threat perceptions (H2). Among Republicans, we did not find support for our proposed model given the lack of significant relation between immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action. Nevertheless, the interaction between NFC and moral convictions was significant and negative, showing that Republicans with strong moral convictions perceived immigrants as more threatening independent of NFC, whereas NFC increased immigrant threat perceptions among Republicans with weak moral convictions.

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research investigated the role of moral conviction on a relevant and specific issue (i.e., the construction of the US–Mexico border wall) and general NFC in explaining perceived immigrant threat

and collective action intentions to support immigrants. We conducted two studies, focusing on the construction of the US–Mexico border wall at the time of the Trump presidency. Results obtained with a correlational design (Study 1) were replicated in an experimental setting (Study 2). Table 5 summarizes the key findings obtained from Studies 1 and 2.

Specifically, we tested whether and how the motivational strength of issue-specific moral conviction may interact with general NFC (measured in Study 1 and manipulated in Study 2), on perceived immigrant threat and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. We reasoned that the conceptualization of the US–Mexico border wall as a solution to security concerns can fit well with the core tenets of NFC which advocate security for the ingroup and preference for stability over change (Kruglanski, 2004; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). This is consistent with the proposal of the border wall as a physical boundary designed to separate the US—the category of “us” (i.e., the ingroup)—from Mexico—the category of “others” (i.e., the outgroup)—which translates into a significant improvement in ingroup’s security (D’Apollonia, 2012). Therefore, NFC should be negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions because of enhanced perceptions of immigrants as threatening. This is supported by past findings that NFC is associated with higher perceptions of immigrants as a threat (Baldner & Pierro, 2019) and reduced collective action intentions and behaviour in favour of immigrants (De Cristofaro et al., 2019).

The present research proposed that moral convictions, because of their unique motivational role (Skitka et al., 2005), may have a buffering power against these negative influences of NFC. Specifically, in line with literature on NFC (Chirumbolo et al., 2004; Cunningham et al., 2004; Dhont et al., 2013; Roets et al., 2012; Van Hiel et al., 2004), we expected NFC to be negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions through increased immigrant threat perceptions when moral conviction is low. Instead, NFC was expected to be unrelated to immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions (i.e., psychologically buffered) when moral conviction is high. We discuss the implications of our findings below.

4.1 | Implications

To the best of our knowledge, no studies to date have examined the interaction between moral conviction and NFC in the context of immigration. In this research, we examined whether issue-specific moral conviction may buffer the association of general NFC with perceptions of immigrants as threatening and intentions to engage in pro-immigrant collective action. This implies new insights into the motivational forces behind evaluative and behavioural responses towards immigrants. Indeed, the interaction between moral conviction and NFC signals issue-specific limits to the effects of general NFC, and at the same time confirms the importance of moral motivations for collective action—in this case in support of immigrants (see Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021). As such, this research uncovered a psychological source of the societal problem (NFC) and a potential psychological solution (moral conviction).

⁶ We also conducted a moderation analysis with the SPSS PROCESS macro with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (Model 3; Hayes, 2013), in which political party identification (Democrats coded as 1 and Republicans coded as 2) was the independent variable (X), moral convictions and NFC were the moderators (M1 and M2, respectively), and immigrant threat perceptions the dependent variable (Y). The three-way interaction was not statistically significant, $B = 0.042$, $SE = 0.138$, $t = 0.302$, $p = .763$, 95% CI [-0.229, 0.313].

TABLE 5 The interactive effect between NFC (measured in Study 1, manipulated in Study 2) and moral convictions on immigrant threat perceptions

Study 1	TH					
	Democrats			Republicans		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
NFC	0.42	0.09	<.001	0.37	0.13	.007
MC	-0.23	0.04	<.001	0.25	0.07	<.001
NFC*MC	-0.14	0.05	.008	-0.21	0.08	.007

Study 2	TH					
	Democrats			Republicans		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
NFC	0.239	0.106	.025	0.272	0.174	.119
MC	-0.214	0.035	<.001	0.407	0.061	<.001
NFC*MC	-0.184	0.069	.008	-0.257	0.116	.027

Note. MC, moral convictions; NFC, need for closure; TH, = threat perceptions.

Furthermore, this research suggests that general individual difference variables such as NFC may be relevant for theory and research on collective action more generally—particularly in the absence of moral convictions. This is consistent with recent research documenting similar interaction patterns for moral conviction and system justification (defined as the general tendency to justify the status quo; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Recent studies (De Cristofaro et al., 2021) found that general system justification reduced identification with women and collective action against gender inequality *only* when moral convictions against gender inequality were low. Instead, when moral convictions were high, general system justification was unrelated to identification with women and collective action against gender inequality. These results suggest a more general power of moral conviction to overrule more general individual difference variables with respect to collective action.

However, we note that our findings were not perfectly consistent. Results did consistently show that (1) when moral convictions were low, NFC was negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions through increased perceptions of immigrants as a threat, among Democrats and Republicans; and (2) when moral convictions were high, Democrats perceived immigrants as less threatening and were more motivated to act collectively in support of immigrants independent of NFC (H2). By contrast, Study 1 (but not Study 2) showed that Republicans perceived immigrants as more threatening and were less motivated to act collectively in support of immigrants, independent of NFC (H3). Thus, Study 2 did not replicate our proposed model among Republicans because of the lack of significant relation between immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action. Caution is warranted in interpreting this particular finding.

Interestingly, one reason for this was suggested by the analyses. When Republicans' socio-demographics (i.e., gender, age, and education) were included as covariates, immigrant threat perceptions did not channel the NFC–pro-immigrant collective action (negative) link. Given the small sample size of Study 1, we are hesitant in interpret-

ing the (non-)significant relation between immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. These results are consistent with literature showing that socio-demographics are important drivers of social responses towards immigration (see Pettigrew et al., 2007, for a review) that should be taken into consideration by scholars when tailoring studies. Therefore, future research is needed to more deeply investigate when and how socio-demographics influence immigrant-related outcomes.

5 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are some limitations associated with our studies that warrant some caution in interpreting the results. First, all instructions and measures were administrated online. Online platforms such as M-Turk and Prolific enable rapid access to a pool of research participants who cover a wide range of age, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and countries of origin and residence (e.g., Berinsky et al., 2012; Callison-Burch, 2009). Through these platforms, researchers are provided with the opportunity to obtain information from subpopulations that can be hard to reach. Moreover, the anonymity afforded participants may make it easier to obtain information from individuals who might otherwise try to conceal their identity or provide incorrect responses (e.g., some participants may be hesitant about divulging their anti-immigrant sentiment). However, despite these platforms' utility as recruitment tools for studying social phenomena among hard-to-reach subpopulations, their use entails some concerns (Smith et al., 2015; Stritch et al., 2017). Chandler et al. (2014) found that many participants watch TV or listen to music while participating. This could provoke a reduction in their attention and dedication, resulting in biased data. It would be desirable to replicate these studies in the laboratory or to analyse data among representative populations.

It would also be desirable to replicate these studies across different immigrant-related outcomes than perceived immigrant threat. For

example, future studies could focus on measure of ethnic segregation (e.g., Semyonov & Glikman, 2009) and exclusionism (e.g., Pellegrini et al., 2021), or from a more positive side, helping behaviour towards immigrants (e.g., Baldner et al., 2020). Future research should also seek to generalize the validity of our findings to different countries, samples, and other inequality-related issues. This would enhance the generalizability of our findings as well as their theoretical and practical relevance.

Also, we encourage future researchers to test our predictions by considering individuals' motivation to engage in *conservative* collective action (Osborne et al., 2019). Given the negative outcomes of discrimination of immigrants, our intent in the present research was to advance knowledge about factors and processes that may motivate (or inhibit) collective action in support of immigrants. This is important for understanding what may be needed towards enhancing support for immigrants in contesting their mistreatments, thereby towards increasing mutual support and solidarity between social groups. Within a conceptual framework of outgroup *favouritism*, we operationalized our dependent variable as collective action against the border wall. Future research could similarly apply a conceptual framework of outgroup *derogation* and focus on collective action *in favour* of the border wall. In this case, we would formulate the same predictions that NFC would positively relate to collective action through increased immigrant threat perceptions among Democrats and Republicans with low moral convictions. When moral convictions are strong, Democrats would be expected to be less motivated to act collectively through decreased immigrant threat perceptions independent of NFC, whereas Republicans would be expected to be more motivated to act collectively through increased immigrant threat perceptions, independent of NFC.

Finally, it should be noted that NFC reflects a broader need to reach closure—the 14-item Rev NfCS (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005) refers to individual differences in the general desire for certainty. Moral convictions are instead domain specific: they reflect specific fundamental moral beliefs about the construction of the US–Mexico border wall. In the present research, we reason that such mismatch between the conceptualizations, together with the moral connotation of moral convictions and their associated unique motivational power, may explain why moral convictions better predict immigrant threat perceptions and actions in support of immigrants than does NFC (see Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011). However, we encourage future researchers to replicate our findings by using an issue-specific NFC's scale—that is, by measuring the extent to which people are closed in their positions on the construction of the US–Mexico border wall.

6 | CONCLUSION

The present research aimed at explaining individuals' immigrant threat perceptions and their pro-immigrant collective action intentions through their general NFC and moral conviction regarding the construction of the US–Mexico border wall. Two studies tested whether the motivational strength of issue-specific moral conviction

may interact with general NFC (measured in Study 1 and manipulated in Study 2) and buffer its association with perceived immigrant threat, and pro-immigrant collective action intentions. Among independent samples of Democrats and Republicans, we found that (1) when moral convictions were low, NFC was negatively related to pro-immigrant collective action intentions through increased perceptions of immigrants as a threat; but that (2) when moral convictions were high, NFC was unrelated to immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions (psychologically buffered). Future research should pick up on these results and further investigate processes underlying pro-immigrant attitudes to advance our understanding of reasons why people are more (or less) inclined to support immigrants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The article does not refer to any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, and all measures.

ORCID

Valeria De Cristofaro  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4904-785X>

Valerio Pellegrini  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5735-9239>

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How to cite this article: De Cristofaro, V., Pellegrini, V., Livi, S., & van Zomeren, M. (2022). Explaining immigrant threat perceptions and pro-immigrant collective action intentions through issue-specific moral conviction and general need for closure: The case of the US–Mexico border wall. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2853>