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Need for closure effect on collective action intentions and behavior toward immigrants in Italy: The mediation of binding foundations and political conservatism

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Abstract

Why are people (de)motivated to mobilize in favor of immigrants? Addressing this question, we investigated the role of individuals' epistemic motivation (i.e., need for closure) in influencing the process of becoming motivated to participate in collective action in favor of immigrants in Italy. Specifically, the mediational role of binding moral foundations and political conservatism in explaining the relationship between need for closure and collective action in favor of immigrants was examined in three studies. It was hypothesized that a heightened need for closure would be indirectly and negatively associated with collective action in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism. We found support for this prediction when either dispositional measure (Study 1 and Study 2) or an experimental induction (Study 3) of need for closure were used, and when both collective action intentions (Study 1 and Study 3) and behavior (Study 2) were assessed. The results suggest that need for closure constitutes a powerful motivational force that leads individuals to engage in uncertainty-reducing evaluations and actions. We discuss these results regarding how they are related with previous work and their implications for research and practice.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The social phenomenon of immigration represents a significant reality of our times because it touches nearly all areas of the globe. In today's world, the large movements of immigrants steadily raise challenges for the political, educational, and economic systems of the host countries. The number of immigrants has grown in recent years. About 258 million individuals worldwide reside in a country of which they are not natives, up from 220 million in 2010 (United Nations, 2017).

As previous research suggests, the growth rhythm of immigration is likely to constitute a source of insecurity for receiving societies (Esses, Dovidio, & Hodson, 2002; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). This is

because host community members fear that their group's privileges will be damaged. Several studies have documented that many natives perceive immigrants as a threat to their economic interests—that is, they develop the view that the presence of immigrants can reduce their access to valued resources such as employment opportunities or housing assistance (Coenders & Scheepers, 1998; Quillian, 1995, 1996). At the same time, the arrival of immigrants is often perceived as culturally threatening. Host community members feel that immigrants jeopardize the dominant worldview and the cultural values due to their intrinsic differences in norms and beliefs (Grant, 1992; Grant & Brown, 1995). As a result, members of the dominant group oppose immigration (McLaren, 2003; Scheepers, Felling, & Peters, 1990; Semyonov & Glikman, 2008) and express a desire for immigration restrictions (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Florack, Piontkowski,

Rohmann, Balzer, & Perzig, 2003; Jackson, Brown, Brown, & Marks, 2001; McLaren, 2003; Ward & Masgoret, 2008).

The present article focuses on the amount of rigidity with respect to the social phenomenon of immigration, addressing the question what triggers opposition to immigration. Specifically, we propose that natives' levels of need for closure—or the desire for epistemic certainty—can play a role in undermining their willingness to engage in actions in favor of immigrants. Prior research suggested that need for closure engenders support for one's group and out-group derogation (Dechesne, Janssen, & van Knippenberg, 2000; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006). Of present relevance, Orehek and colleagues (2010) found that the salience of a threatening out-group (i.e., Muslims) instills in natives (i.e., Dutch citizens) a sense of insecurity translated into a heightened need for closure. In turn, high need for closure enhances attitudinal responses aimed to restore certainty like in-group identification, out-group derogation, and the endorsement for decisive and rigid leadership (Orehek et al., 2010).

Based on this line of research, we first examined the relationships between need for closure, binding moral foundations, political conservatism, and collective action in favor of immigrants, and then we developed a sequential mediational model by integrating these links. We argue that need for closure would reduce natives' willingness to mobilize in favor of immigrants because of the increased tendency to bind to the one's group and, in turn, the greater adherence to a conservative political orientation perceived as more likely to promote certainty for the in-group.

The present research intends improve our understanding about sociopsychological factors that (de)motivate natives to act collectively in favor of immigrants. This has important theoretical implications in that, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first attempt to link need for closure to collective action and it contributes to explain reasons that lead natives to oppose immigration. In addition, we think this also has important practical consequences for both natives and immigrants as well as for the society as a whole. Indeed, opposition to immigration could lead to negative outcomes like interethnic divisions and conflicts.

1.1 | Need for closure

Imagine an impatient person who feels discomfort in the face of cognitive uncertainty, intrinsically motivated with avoiding ambiguity through quick formulation of judgments and the use of crystalized information. This person will very likely be characterized by high need for closure (NfC)—that is, a desire for “a firm answer, any firm answer, as opposed to confusion and/or ambiguity” (Kruglanski, 2004, p. 6). When making a judgment, high need for closure individuals seize closure quickly, considering the most available information without taking in account additional information (*the urgency tendency*), and/or perpetuate closure, freezing one's past knowledge (*the permanence tendency*). Given that not all individuals need cognitive closure, a continuum is assumed to exist ranging from a strong need to attain closure at one end and a strong need to avoid closure at the other end (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The individuals'

standing on this continuum is determined by the (perceived) benefits and costs of closure relative to those of lacking closure. These benefits and costs can vary across individuals and represent stable dimensions of individual differences, but they can also be situationally induced (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals with high need for closure desire to quickly get new knowledge on matters that are important to them as well as to keep this knowledge in the future, or as long as they can still be characterized by this need. Accordingly, they tend to seek social consensus (Kruglanski & Webster, 1991) and to display conformism (De Grada, Kruglanski, Mannetti, & Pierro, 1999; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Each of these behaviors reflects different strategies to arrive at, and keep, pieces of knowledge that they perceive to be important.

This conceptualization of need for closure appears to fit with the emphasis from previous research on the sense of collective threat as explanation of opposition to immigration. We propose that natives with an elevated need for closure are less likely to engage in actions in favor of the immigrant out-group, in a process that would be accompanied by strategies involving certainty concerns for the native-born in-group—specifically, the adherence to binding moral foundations and the support for political conservatism.

Pertinent to that view, previous research showed that a heightened need for closure induces quest for groupness (Brizi, Mannetti, & Kruglanski, 2016; Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2002; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Roets, Kruglanski, Kossowska, Pierro, & Hong, 2015; Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998), which is secured by a cluster of features pertaining to group interaction, including preferences for self-similar groups, pressures to opinion uniformity among in-group members, identification with in-group members, in-group favoritism, and loyalty to own in-group qualified by the degree to which it constitutes a secure reality provider.

1.2 | Binding moral foundations

The moral system has been defined by Haidt and colleagues (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) as an interlocking set of values, practices, institutions, virtues, and norms that work together to regulate social life. According to the *Moral Foundations Theory* (MFT; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004), individuals' behavior, their judgments, and their perceptions of right and wrong can be regulated by psychological mechanisms, which are innate but modifiable over time and across cultures. These psychological mechanisms refer to five moral foundations upon which people create and express their moral system (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). The first foundation refers to concerns about the suffering of others and to the tendency to protect those more vulnerable (*harm/care*). The second foundation includes virtues of reciprocity and justice in relation to concerns about how others should be treated (*fairness/reciprocity*). The third foundation pertains to obligations of group membership more generally as well as virtues of loyalty, patriotism and self-sacrifice for own in-group (*in-group/loyalty*). The fourth foundation pertains to obligations of hierarchical relationships such as obedience and respect to authority (*authority/respect*). The fifth foundation refers to concerns

about physical and spiritual contagion and includes virtues of chastity and control of desire (*purity/sanctity*). Whereas *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* have been described as *individualizing* foundations due to their focus on the rights and welfare of individuals, *in-group/loyalty*, *authority/respect* and *purity/sanctity* have been described as *binding* foundations due to their adherence to sources of authority, social and group hierarchies, and cultural and group norms (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004).

It is the binding foundations that are relevant to the present research. Indeed, recent studies have found a robust association between the need for closure and the binding, but not the individualizing, moral foundations (Baldner & Pierro, 2018; Federico, Ekstrom, Tagar, & Williams, 2016; Giacomantonio, Pierro, Baldner, & Kruglanski, 2017). Individuals with elevated levels of binding moral foundations tend to adhere and conform to the group to which they belong. Whenever these individuals are presented with a question to which they do not have an answer (e.g., “is it worthwhile to help immigrants?”), they turn to the norms within the in-group and support the conclusion reached by its members (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Because high need for closure individuals are more likely to endorse the norms and conclusions shared by the in-group members (Brizi et al., 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2002, 2006; Roets et al., 2015; Shah et al., 1998), they are more likely to display greater scores on the binding moral foundations as well.

1.3 | Political conservatism

The traditional left–right political dimension has proven to be a useful concept in discerning the differences in attitudes and behavior toward immigrants. Parties operating on the right—our focus here—are particularly preoccupied with defending the socioeconomic and cultural status quo. Their main concern is to maintain social order and to protect the societal security to which the arrival of immigrants would represent a potential threat. A substantial amount of research has provided evidence for the key role of political conservatism in predicting opposition to immigration across countries with different immigration histories and policies (for a review, see Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2007). In Italy, immigration has become a central theme in the political agenda and a core election issue on which parties attempt to mobilize support and to reaching consensus. The far-right Lega party and populist Five Star Movement captured more than 50% of the vote in the elections on March 4, 2018 by promising an administration with hardline immigration measures and more restrictive demands upon immigrant minorities. In their rhetoric, framing immigration as a cultural invasion of foreign traditions and a threat to national welfare implies the need to protect “us” from “them” (Giuffrida, 2018). This is a very important point because it invokes the tendency to maintain strong group ties and to conform to its members—a tendency that is emphasized by the binding moral foundations as well. In this respect and consistently with the present research, it has been shown that political conservatives tend to construct their moral systems primarily upon binding foundations (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007).

1.4 | Research overview and hypothesis

The main aim of the present research is to examine the role of need for closure in the process of becoming motivated to participate in collective action in favor of immigrants in Italy.

Collective action is a complicated phenomenon for which numerous explanations have been explored by many different disciplines, including psychology, sociology, history, political science, and economics. In general, collective action refers to an action taken by a group of people as response to undesirable circumstances (Hovland & Sears, 1940). People who decide to act believe that the only way to improve such circumstances is together by means of a variety of strategies, such as attending a group meeting, signing a petition, participating in protest demonstrations or riots (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004).

In this research, we focus on the social phenomenon of immigration and test a sequential mediational model in which a heightened need for closure would be indirectly and negatively associated with collective action in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism. Specifically, we hypothesize that individuals with high need for closure would be less likely to participate in collective action favoring immigrants because of their high binding moral foundations and, in turn, high political conservatism. Results of three studies using either dispositional measure (Study 1 and Study 2) or an experimental induction (Study 3) of need for closure and assessing either collective action intentions (Study 1 and Study 3) or behavior (Study 2) corroborated our hypothesis.

2 | STUDY 1

In Study 1, we first explored the relationships between need for closure, binding moral foundations, political conservatism, and collective action intentions in favor of immigrants, and then examined a sequential mediational model by integrating these links. Specifically, we examined whether need for closure is indirectly and negatively associated with collective action intentions in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding foundations and then political conservatism. To test the proposed serial multiple mediation model (Hayes, Preacher, & Myers, 2011), we conducted a serial mediation analysis with the SPSS macro PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Model 6; Hayes, 2017). In the model (Figure 1), need for closure was the independent variable (X), binding moral foundations and political conservatism were the mediators (M1 and M2, respectively), and collective action intentions was the dependent variable (Y). This procedure uses an ordinary least squares path analysis to estimate the coefficients in the model in order to determine the direct and indirect effects of the predictor on the outcome variable. Bootstrapping, a method that does not rely on the assumption of a normally distributed sampling distribution of the indirect effect, was implemented in this analysis to obtain bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for making statistical inference about specific and total indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

FIGURE 1 Hypothesized serial mediation model

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants and procedure

One hundred and sixty-four individuals living in Italy, 62% female aged 18–67 years ($M = 28.92$, $SD = 12.07$), were recruited online and participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Participants first completed the Italian version of the *Revised Need for Closure Scale* (Rev NfCS; Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005). Afterward, they filled out the *Binding Scale* of the *Moral Foundation Questionnaire* (MFQ; Graham et al., 2009) and then, answered one item for their political conservatism (i.e., “Thinking on your own political view, how would you classify yourself?”; Pettigrew et al., 2007). Finally, participants were asked to rate their willingness to take part in collective action in favor of immigrants, through five items developed by van Zomeren and colleagues (2008, 2004; see the *Measures* section below). At the end of the questionnaire, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | Need for closure

To assess the need for closure, participants responded to the Italian version of the *Revised Need for Closure Scale* (Rev NfCS; Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005). This measure is a 14-item self-report scale that assesses the construct as dispositional trait, that is, as a stable dimension of individual differences related to individuals' motivation with respect to information processing and judgment. The Rev NfCS requires respondents to rate the extent to which they agree with statements reflecting high need for closure (e.g., “Any solution to a problem is better than remaining in a state of uncertainty,” “In case of uncertainty, I prefer to make an immediate decision, whatever it may be”) on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). A composite need for closure score was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .77$).

2.2.2 | Binding moral foundations

To measure the binding moral foundations, we used the 18-item *Binding Scale* of the *Moral Foundation Questionnaire* (MFQ; Graham et al., 2009). Participants were first asked to rate the perceived relevance of the binding moral foundations (e.g., “Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group,” “Whether or not

someone showed a lack of respect for authority,” “Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency”) on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all relevant*) to 5 (*extremely relevant*). Therefore, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements reflecting high binding moral foundations (e.g., “People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong,” “Respect for authority is something all children need to learn,” “Chastity is an important and valuable virtue”) on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A composite binding moral foundations score was computed by averaging the responses to each item of the *Binding Scale*. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .86$).

2.2.3 | Political conservatism

Following Pettigrew and colleagues (2007), we measured participants' political conservatism by asking them to rate where they politically classified themselves on a scale that ranged from 1 (*extreme left*) to 6 (*extreme right*).

2.2.4 | Collective action intentions

Participants' willingness to take part in collective action in favor of immigrants was measured through five items developed by van Zomeren and colleagues (2008, 2004). These items were adapted for the purposes of this study. The items are: “I would participate in a demonstration in favor of immigrants,” “I would participate in raising our collective voice in favor of immigrants,” “I would do something together in favor of immigrants,” “I would sign a petition in favor of immigrants,” and “I would participate in some form of collective action in favor of immigrants.” Ratings were reported on a 1 (*not at all willing*) to 7 (*strongly willing*) scale. A composite score of collective action intentions in favor of immigrants was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .96$).

2.3 | Results

2.3.1 | Correlations

According with the literature (Baldner & Pierro, 2018; Federico et al., 2016; Giacomantonio et al., 2017), need for closure was found to be positively related with binding moral foundations. No significant association between need for closure and political conservatism was

found. Moreover, need for closure and collective action intentions in favor of immigrants were negatively associated. Binding moral foundations were positively related with political conservatism and negatively related with collective action intentions in favor of immigrants. Also, political conservatism was found to be negatively related with collective action intentions in favor of immigrants. Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables are presented in Table 1.

2.3.2 | Serial mediation analysis

As mentioned above, a serial mediation analysis (PROCESS; Model 6; Hayes, 2017) was conducted with bootstrap methods (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The total effect of the model was not significant, $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% $CI [-0.29, 0.16]$. Although this approach has been widely popular, research suggests that it is low in power to detect mediation and is no longer considered best practice (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Instead, researchers are encouraged to examine the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009). According with previous findings, need for closure positively predicted binding moral foundations, $b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 3.53$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.12, 0.43]$, showing that participants who were high in need for closure tended to have elevated scores on the binding moral foundations. No main effect of need for closure on political conservatism was found, $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = -0.43$, $p = .66$, 95% $CI [-0.25, 0.15]$. The indirect effect of need for closure on collective action through political conservatism was thus not significant, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% $CI [-0.17, 0.26]$. Binding moral foundations positively predicted political conservatism, $b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 4.93$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.29, 0.68]$, indicating that participants with high binding moral foundations tended to show high adherence to political conservatism. No main effect of binding moral foundations on collective action intentions in favor of immigrants was found, $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 0.47$, $p = .63$, 95% $CI [-0.26, 0.43]$. The indirect effect of need for closure on collective action through binding moral foundations was thus not significant, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% $CI [-0.07, 0.14]$. Additionally, political conservatism negatively predicted collective action intentions, $b = -0.89$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -6.89$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [-1.15, -0.64]$, showing that the greater political conservatism, the less was the willingness to participate in collective action in favor of immigrants. The analysis showed a negative direct effect of need for closure on collective action intentions, $b = -0.45$,

$SE = 0.17$, $t = -2.65$, $p = .008$, 95% $CI [-0.79, -0.11]$, indicating that participants with high levels of need for closure were less willing to mobilize in favor of immigrants. This also implies a partial mediation model (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The total direct effect had attained statistical significance, $b = -0.51$, $SE = 0.18$, 95% $CI [-0.88, 0.14]$. Importantly, the indirect effect of need for closure on collective action intentions was significant, $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% $CI [-0.25, -0.05]$. As expected, need for closure was indirectly and negatively associated with collective action intentions in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism.

3 | STUDY 2

In Study 2, we replicated and extended the results of previous study by means of a behavioral measure of collective action (i.e., signing a petition). Given the practical consequences of collective action in social contexts, surprisingly most research in this field has not assessed behavior but instead relied on self-reported intentions (but see Lodewijx, Kersten, & van Zomeren, 2008). Addressing this issue, in this study we examined whether need for closure is indirectly and negatively associated with collective action behavior in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism. Again, we tested the proposed serial multiple mediation model (Hayes et al., 2011) by conducting a serial mediation analysis with the SPSS macro PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Model 6; Hayes, 2017). In the model (Figure 1), need for closure was the independent variable (X), binding moral foundations and political conservatism were the mediators (M1 and M2, respectively), and collective action behavior was the dependent variable (Y). The statistical procedure used to determine the direct and indirect effects of the predictor on the outcome variable was the same of Study 1. Bootstrapping was implemented in this analysis to obtain bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants and procedure

One hundred and eighty individuals living in Italy, 65% female aged 18–65 years ($M = 37.52$, $SD = 13.06$), participated in the study on a voluntary basis. As in Study 1, participants answered to the 14-item *Revised Need for Closure Scale* (Rev NfCS; Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005), the 18-item *Binding Scale* of the *Moral Foundation Questionnaire* (MFQ; Graham et al., 2009), 1 item for political conservatism (Pettigrew et al., 2007), and 5 items for collective action intentions in favor of immigrants (van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2004). Then, they were asked if they wanted to sign a petition in favor of the construction of humanitarian corridors in Italy (see *Measures* section below). Finally, participants were fully debriefed and thanked for their participation.

TABLE 1 Summary for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales ($N = 164$)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. NfC	3.28	0.71	–			
2. BMF	2.85	0.74	0.26**	–		
3. PC	3.13	0.97	0.06	0.36**	–	
4. CAI	4.42	1.75	–0.20**	–0.19*	–0.49**	–

Abbreviations: BMF, binding moral foundations; CAI, collective action intentions; NfC, need for closure; PC, political conservatism.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | Need for closure

To assess the need for closure, participants responded to the Italian version of the 14-item *Revised Need for Closure Scale* (Rev NfCS, Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005). As in the first study, a composite need for closure score was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .77$).

3.2.2 | Binding moral foundations

To measure the binding moral foundations, participants completed the 18-item *Binding Scale* of the *Moral Foundation Questionnaire* (MFQ; Graham et al., 2009). Again, a composite binding moral foundations score was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .85$).

3.2.3 | Political conservatism

Participants' political conservatism was measured with one item (Pettigrew et al., 2007): "Thinking on your own political view, how would you classify yourself?". Ratings were reported on a 1 (*extreme left*) to 6 (*extreme right*) scale, as in Study 1.

3.2.4 | Collective action intentions

Collective action intentions in favor of immigrants were measured through the same five items used in Study 1 (van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2004). A composite score of collective action intentions was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .97$).

3.2.5 | Collective action behavior

To measure participants' behavior of collective action in favor of immigrants, we used a mock petition requesting the construction of humanitarian corridors in Italy. The humanitarian corridors facilitate the arrival of immigrants on Italian territory with humanitarian visa

and open to them the possibility of applying for asylum. The project is for all immigrants in vulnerable conditions, regardless of their religious or ethnic background. Once in Italy, immigrants are welcomed in private houses and receive legal assistance by local operators. The construction of humanitarian corridors aims to prevent deaths at sea and human trafficking, to allow immigrants to enter in Italy in a safe way, and to support them in the integration process in the host country. Thus, participants who did not sign the petition (coded 0) expressed the opposition to the arrival and integration of immigrants in Italy. As opposite, participants who signed the petition (coded 1) expressed their willingness to welcome and integrate immigrants in their home country.

3.3 | Results

As in Study 1, a serial mediation analysis (PROCESS; Model 6; Hayes, 2017) was conducted with bootstrap methods (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Given that in Study 2 we used a dichotomous dependent variable (i.e., no signature vs. signature), the serial mediation analysis was run through a logistic regression model (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables are on Table 2.

3.3.1 | Serial mediation analysis

The total effect of the model was not significant, $b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% $CI [-0.44, 0.04]$. According with the literature, need for closure positively predicted binding moral foundations, $b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 2.85$, $p = .004$, 95% $CI [0.06, 0.33]$, indicating that participants who were high in need for closure tended to have elevated scores on the binding moral foundations. We did not find a main effect of need for closure on political conservatism, $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 1.35$, $p = .17$, 95% $CI [-0.05, 0.32]$, consistently with the previous study. The indirect effect of need for closure on collective action through political conservatism was thus not significant, $b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% $CI [-0.33, 0.04]$. The analysis showed a positive effect of binding moral foundations on political conservatism, $b = 0.58$, $SE = 0.10$, $t = 5.67$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [0.38, 0.79]$, indicating that the greater binding moral foundations, the more was the adherence to political conservatism. Again, no main effect of binding moral foundations on collective action behavior in favor of immigrants was found, $b = 0.26$,

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. NfC	3.55	0.78	–				
2. BMF	3.05	0.73	0.20**	–			
3. PC	3.31	1.08	0.17*	0.41**	–		
4. CAI	3.70	1.87	–0.12	–0.24**	–0.56**	–	
5. CAB	–	–	0.003	–0.56**	–0.29**	0.53**	–

Abbreviations: BMF, binding moral foundations; CAB, collective action behavior; CAI, collective action intentions; NfC, need for closure; PC, political conservatism.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

TABLE 2 Summary for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales ($N = 180$)

$SE = 0.28, z = 0.91, p = .36, 95\% CI [-0.30, 0.83]$. The indirect effect of need for closure on collective action through binding moral foundations was thus not significant, $b = 0.05, SE = 0.06, 95\% CI [-0.03, 0.22]$. As in Study 1, political conservatism negatively predicted collective action behavior, $b = -0.85, SE = 0.22, t = -3.83, p < .001, 95\% CI [-1.29, -0.42]$, showing that participants who were high in political conservatism tended not to sign the petition requesting the construction of humanitarian corridors in Italy. No direct effect of need for closure on collective action behavior in favor of immigrants was found, $b = 0.12, SE = 0.24, z = 0.51, p = .60, 95\% CI [-0.35, 0.60]$. This implies a perfect mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) that highlights the key role of the mediators (i.e., binding moral foundations and political conservatism) in explaining the relationship between need for closure and collective action behavior. The total direct effect had attained statistical significance, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .15, p < .001$. Importantly, the indirect effect of need for closure on collective action intentions was significant, $b = -0.09, SE = 0.05, 95\% CI [-0.24, -0.01]$. As expected, need for closure was indirectly and negatively associated with collective action behavior in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism.

4 | STUDY 3

Study 3 aimed to examine whether the experimentally induced need for closure elicits similar anti-immigration responses as have been found by means of dispositional need for closure. Thus, we manipulated participants' need for closure and tested its causal effect on participants' reactions toward immigration. The hypothesis was the same as Studies 1 and 2, so that in condition of high (vs. low) need for closure, participants were expected to be less willing to mobilize in favor of immigrants because of their high binding moral foundations and, in turn, high political conservatism. The proposed serial multiple-mediation model (Hayes et al., 2011) was tested by conducting a serial mediation analysis with the SPSS macro PROCESS (Model 6; Hayes, 2017). In the model (Figure 1), the manipulated need for closure was treated as the independent variable (X), binding moral foundations and political conservatism as the mediators (M1 and M2, respectively), and collective action intentions as the dependent variable (Y). To determine the direct and indirect effects of the predictor on the outcome variable, we used the same statistical procedure as previous studies. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals were employed, and 5,000 bootstrap samples were run (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants and procedure

Participants were one hundred and sixty-five individuals living in Italy, nine of which were excluded from the analysis for failing to respond appropriately to the experimental manipulation's instructions

(e.g., responding "I don't know" or "no"). This resulted in a final sample of one hundred and fifty-six participants, 40% female aged 18–62 years ($M = 28.46, SD = 9.47$). They were recruited online (i.e., via Prolific Academic) and received monetary compensation for participating. We first manipulated need for closure by a modified version of the Avnet and Higgins's (2003) behavioral recall paradigm (see the *Measures* section below). After the manipulation, parallel to Studies 1 and 2, we measured participants' levels of need for closure (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005), binding moral foundations (Graham et al., 2009), political conservatism (Pettigrew et al., 2007), and collective action intentions in favor of immigrants (van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2004). Finally, participants read a debriefing form and were thanked for their participation.

4.2 | Measures

4.2.1 | Need for closure

To manipulate need for closure, we used a modified version of the behavioral recall paradigm developed by Avnet and Higgins (2003). Participants were randomly assigned to either the condition of high ($N = 80$) or low ($N = 76$) need for closure. Specifically, they were asked to write about three memories designed to experimentally induce high need for closure (i.e., "Think back to a time in which you felt uncomfortable because you didn't understand the reason why an event occurred in your life," "Think back to a time in which you quickly became impatient and irritated when you did not find a solution to a problem immediately," and "Think back to a time in which you felt irritated when one person disagreed with what everyone else in a group believed") or low need for closure (i.e., "Think back to a time in which, even after you made up your mind about something, you were eager to consider a different opinion," "Think back to a time in which, when thinking about a problem, you considered as many different options on the issues as possible," and "Think back to a time in which you disliked the routine aspects of your work or studies").

4.2.2 | Manipulation check

To verify our manipulation of need for closure, we asked participants to answer the same Italian version of the 14-item *Revised Need for Closure Scale* (Rev NfCS, Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005) used in Studies 1 and 2. The overall score on the scale was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .76$).

4.2.3 | Binding moral foundations

To measure the binding moral foundations, participants completed the same 18-item *Binding Scale* of the *Moral Foundation Questionnaire* (MFQ; Graham et al., 2009) as in Studies 1 and 2. The overall score on the scale was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .87$).

4.2.4 | Political conservatism

Participants responded to the same item of political conservatism as in Studies 1 and 2 (i.e., "Thinking on your own political view, how would you classify yourself?"; Pettigrew et al., 2007).

4.2.5 | Collective action intentions

Participants' willingness to mobilize in favor of immigrants was measured through the same five items used in Studies 1 and 2 (van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2004). The overall score on the scale was computed by averaging the responses to each item. The internal reliability of this scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .97$).

4.3 | Results

For the need for closure manipulation, we performed a univariate analysis of variance to compare ratings on the 14-item *Rev NfCS* (Pierro & Kruglanski, 2005) across the two conditions of high and low need for closure. Then, a serial mediation analysis (PROCESS; Model 6; Hayes, 2017) was conducted with bootstrap methods (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), as in Studies 1 and 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables are on Table 3.

4.3.1 | Manipulation check

The one-way ANOVA demonstrated that the manipulation was effective, showing a significant main effect on the participants' levels of need for closure, $F(1,154) = 7.616, p = .006, \eta^2 = 0.04$. Participants reported higher levels of need for closure when they were asked to write about memories designed to induce high need for closure (High NfC coded 1; $M = 3.50, SD = 0.07$), whereas they reported lower levels of need for closure when they were asked to write about memories designed to induce low need for closure (Low NfC coded 0; $M = 3.21, SD = 0.07$).

4.3.2 | Serial mediation analysis

The total effect of the model was significant, $b = -0.42, SE = 0.20, 95\% CI [-0.86, -0.04]$. Consistent with previous studies' results, need

for closure positively predicted binding moral foundations, $b = 0.26, SE = 0.12, t = 2.08, p = .03, 95\% CI [0.01, 0.51]$, showing that in condition of high need for closure participants tended to have higher scores on the binding moral foundations. Again, no main effect of need for closure on political conservatism was found, $b = 0.18, SE = 0.15, t = 1.24, p = .21, 95\% CI [-0.10, 0.48]$. This is in line with previous findings that an elevated need for closure can lead people to support both conservative and progressive ideologies, depending on the predominant view present within a given political context (Kossowska & Van Hiel, 2003). The indirect effect of need for closure on collective action through political conservatism was thus not significant, $b = -0.21, SE = 0.18, 95\% CI [-0.58, 0.12]$. Binding moral foundations positively predicted political conservatism, $b = 0.67, SE = 0.09, t = 7.17, p < .001, 95\% CI = [0.49, 0.86]$, indicating that participants with high binding moral foundations tended to be high in political conservatism. Regarding participants' collective action intentions, once again no main effect of binding moral foundations on collective action intentions in favor of immigrants was found, $b = 0.01, SE = 0.16, t = 0.09, p = .92, 95\% CI [-0.31, 0.34]$. This reflects the fact that natives' choice to mobilize in favor of immigrants is not determined by their tendency to bind to the one's group, per se, but rather it results from a broader sociopsychological process involving diverse attitudinal responses related to each other. The indirect effect of need for closure on collective action through binding moral foundations was indeed not significant, $b = 0.004, SE = 0.05, 95\% CI [-0.09, 0.15]$. Furthermore, political conservatism negatively predicted collective action intentions, $b = -1.16, SE = 0.12, t = -9.40, p < .001, 95\% CI [-1.41, -0.92]$, meaning that the greater political conservatism, the less was the willingness to mobilize in favor of immigrants. As in Study 2, need for closure did not predict collective action intentions in favor of immigrants, $b = -0.01, SE = 0.23, t = -0.05, p = .95, 95\% CI [-0.47, 0.44]$, providing evidence for a perfect mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Also, the total direct effect did not attain statistical significance, $b = -0.43, SE = 0.30, 95\% CI [-1.03, 0.15]$. As expected, there was a significant indirect effect of need for closure on collective action intentions, $b = -0.20, SE = 0.11, 95\% CI [-0.47, -0.01]$. These results support our hypothesis that need for closure is indirectly and negatively associated with collective action intentions in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism.

TABLE 3 Summary for means, standard deviations, and correlations between scales ($N = 156$)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Condition	–	–	–			
2. BMF	2.65	0.80	0.16*	–		
3. PC	3.11	1.08	0.17*	0.51**	–	
4. CAI	4.05	1.88	–0.12	–0.33*	–0.66**	–

Note: Condition: 0, low need for closure; 1, high need for closure. Abbreviations: BMF, binding moral foundations; CAI, collective action intentions; PC, political conservatism.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this article, we proposed that opposition to immigration can be explained by the epistemic motivation of need for closure that leads individuals to engage in strategies involving security concerns for the in-group (Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). This opposition, which can quickly become exaggerated by right-wing political rhetoric (Ropeik, 2017; Trilling, 2018), can lead to many forms of anti-immigrant sentiment. We predicted that natives with high levels of need for closure would be less likely to engage in actions in favor of immigrants due to their preference

for self-resembling groups (Brizi et al., 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2002, 2006; Roets et al., 2015; Shah et al., 1998) and conformity pressures (De Grada et al., 1999; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Specifically, a heightened need for closure was expected to be indirectly and negatively associated with collective action in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism. We found support for this hypothesis when either dispositional measure (Study 1 and Study 2) or an experimental induction (Study 3) of need for closure were used and when both collective action intentions (Study 1 and Study 3) and behavior (Study 2) were assessed.

In Study 1, we examined the relationships between individuals' need for closure, binding moral foundations, political conservatism, and collective action intentions in favor of immigrants, and then we tested a sequential mediational model that was developed by integrating these links. As expected: (a) the need for closure was linked to increased support for the binding moral foundations, consistently with previous research (Baldner & Pierro, 2018; Federico et al., 2016; Giacomantonio et al., 2017); (b) binding moral foundations were linked to increased political conservatism, as this tends to be associated with political beliefs that maintain social order and protect the societal security; (c) political conservatism was strongly and negatively associated with pro-immigrants collective action intentions, to the extent that politically conservative thought tends to be opposed to many forms of immigration; (d) the indirect effect of need for closure on collective action intentions was significant. Specifically, individuals with high need for closure were found to be less willing to participate in collective action favoring immigrants, because of their high levels of binding moral foundations and, in turn, high adherence to political conservatism. With regard to the direct effect, need for closure was found to predict collective action intentions, so that the greater need for closure, the less was the willingness to mobilize in favor of immigrants.

In Study 2, we replicated and extended these results by means of a behavioral measure of collective action. Although research on collective action is abundant (e.g., van Zomeren et al., 2008; van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, & Bettache, 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2004), behavioral measures are rare (but see Lodewijkx et al., 2008). To fill this methodological gap and to increase construct validity, we asked participants to sign a (mock) petition requesting the construction of humanitarian corridors in Italy. As expected, individuals with high need for closure were less likely to sign, because of their high levels of binding moral foundations and, in turn, high adherence to political conservatism. In this study, we did not find a direct effect of need for closure on collective action.

In Study 3, we examined the mediational role of binding moral foundations and political conservatism on the relationship between manipulated need for closure and collective action intentions in favor of immigrants. Following Avnet and Higgins's (2003) procedure, we manipulated need for closure by asking participants to write about memories reflecting high or low need for closure. We found support for our hypothesis that high need for closure reduces collective action intentions in favor of immigrants due to greater binding moral foundations and, in

turn, greater political conservatism. As in Study 2, there was no direct effect of need for closure on collective action. This is consistent with prior claims that high levels of need for closure do not necessarily lead to out-group derogation (Kossowska, Bukowski, Guinote, Dragon, & Kruglanski, 2016). Specifically, the authors showed that high need for closure individuals, compared to low need for closure individuals, are less likely to develop stereotypical evaluations of the out-group's members when their self-image is threatened by negative feedback (Study 1) or immoral behavior (Studies 2 and 3). The lack of the direct influence of need for closure on collective action could be also due to our focus on collective action as dependent variable. Acting collectively implies capacities to communicate and implement action plans, public expression of own interests, coordination of resources, and mobilization efforts. High need for closure individuals could be thus reluctant to mobilize because of the high information-processing demands that participation in collective action requires. Moreover, even if protestors engage in actions, they are unable to predict the effectiveness of their actions or how long it takes to achieve the desired outcomes. Given the aversion of high need for closure individuals for uncertain knowledge, they could be unwilling to mobilize, even when they recognize a social condition being problematic. Following this line of reasoning, we proposed that the link between need for closure and collective action may be explained by other factors—specifically, binding moral foundations and political conservatism. Studies 1, 2, and 3 produced, indeed, similar results that high need for closure reduces natives' collective action in favor of immigrants because of their tendency to bind to the native group to which they belong and, in turn, to support political conservatism. Although this research provides evidence for a critical socio-psychological process underlying opposition to immigration, we encourage future researchers to investigate both direct and indirect links more thoroughly.

Future research could also examine the role of the ethnic identity cues on opposition to immigration. It is possible that natives' reactions toward immigration depend on which ethnic identity is salient, specifically their willingness to engage in actions could be higher when immigrants are from an Asian than an African background. Similar differences in natives' reactions could be obtained controlling for immigrants' length of stay in the host country and for their recognition as refugees.

Moreover, future studies are needed to strengthen the generalizability of our results in two ways. First, it would be desirable to examine the impact of need for closure on diverse outcome variables that measure key indicators of opposition to immigrants, such as ethnic segregation (Semyonov & Glikman, 2008), ethnic exclusionism (McLaren, 2003), and the support for violence against the immigrant out-group (Webber et al., 2018). Second, it would be useful to test our proposed model across other countries. Because the present research focused on the phenomenon of immigration in the Italian context, we cannot be sure whether the interpretation of our results can be applied to different samples. The focus on diverse social and political contexts could enable us to obtain a more comprehensive understanding about the mediating mechanisms for the effect of need for closure on reactions toward immigrants among host community members.

5.1 | Implications

From a theoretical point of view, the present research advances our understating about reasons why natives oppose immigration. It has been demonstrated that need for closure is associated with negative attitudes toward immigrants (Brizi et al., 2016; Chirumbolo, Areni, & Sensales, 2004). Because high need for closure individuals prefer stable conditions and dislike change (e.g., Kruglanski, Pierro, Higgins, & Capozza, 2007; Livi, Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & Kenny, 2015), they are more likely to hold negative views toward immigrants who represent agents of change in the host countries. However, previous studies have not specifically tested whether high need for closure individuals are motivated to (dis)engage in actions—our dependent variable here—on behalf of their beliefs. Addressing this issue, this research provides evidence that individuals' levels of need for closure can influence their collective action intentions and behavior. Building on previous findings, we proposed that natives with high need for closure are less likely to mobilize in favor of the immigrant out-group because of their increased tendency to bind to one's in-group (i.e., binding moral foundations) and, in turn, their greater support for political conservatism. The results for the proposed serial mediational model suggest there is an indirect effect, providing new insights on the motivational role of need for closure in driving individuals' evaluations and actions.

As mentioned above, the present research has practical consequences for both natives and immigrants as well as for the society as a whole. High need for closure natives were found to be less willing to mobilize in favor of the immigrant out-group by implementing strategies that address certainty concerns for their native-born in-group. Immigrants could be thus less likely to be welcomed and helped in their integration process into the host countries. It would be particularly troubling for them if political leaders are high in need for closure. Also, there could be important negative outcomes like interethnic divisions and intergroup conflicts, especially in places where large-scale immigration is common, and the presence of (threatening) immigrants is salient.

As they stand now, these results could be taken as a starting point to develop interventions aimed at fostering social progress. For instance, priming natives with the sense that group members from diverse cultures have much in common could reduce their hostility toward immigrants. We suggest that increasing the perceived similarity between members of different groups could lead individuals to expand the inclusiveness of their in-group to include members of the similar groups. Specifically, if natives are exposed to information suggesting that they share some basic human similarities with immigrants, then they could be more willing to categorize immigrants as members of their in-group. As a result, an elevated need for closure and the support for binding moral foundations could encourage positive collective action in support of immigrants and immigration.

5.2 | Conclusion

The present research provided evidence for the role of the need for closure in undermining willingness to mobilize in favor of immigrants

among the Italian public. In the first study, we demonstrated that a heightened need for closure is indirectly and negatively associated with collective action in favor of immigrants, sequentially mediated first through binding moral foundations and then political conservatism. In the second study, we replicated and extended these results by assessing collective action via a behavioral measure (i.e., petition signing). In the third study, we demonstrated that an experimental inducement of the need for closure produces the same effects as have been found in Studies 1 and 2 by means of dispositional need for closure. Future research should further investigate the relationships between the constructs of need for closure, binding moral foundations, political conservatism, and collective action to better understand the nature of socio-psychological processes underlying opposition to immigrants.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have 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. This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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