

# Anti-Semitism in Poland and Ukraine: The Belief in Jewish Control as a Mechanism of Scapegoating

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# Anti-Semitism in Poland and Ukraine: The Belief in Jewish Control as a Mechanism of Scapegoating

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Systemic transition in post-communist Eastern Europe resulted in high inflation, rapid economic changes, and increased lack of control in everyday life. At the same time, anti-Semitic incidents were reported in this region after 1989. The ideological model of scapegoating (Glick 2002; 2005) might serve as an explanation of anti-Semitic prejudice in post-transition Eastern Europe. The model predicts that the ideology defining Jews as powerful, cunning, and dangerous would gain popularity in times of crises and would lead to greater discrimination against Jews. In two nationwide representative sample studies of anti-Semitism, in Poland ( $n = 1098$ ) and Ukraine ( $n = 1000$ ), we applied the ideological model of scapegoating to study various forms of anti-Semitism (conspiracy-based belief in Jewish control and discriminatory intentions toward Jews). In both samples, economic deprivation led to increased discriminatory intentions toward Jews; however, only in the Polish sample was deprivation linked with higher beliefs in Jewish control (scapegoat-defining ideology). In Poland the rise of conspiracy beliefs about Jewish control partially explained the effect of deprivation on discriminatory intentions toward Jews. The implications of these results are discussed.

The problem of anti-Semitism has drawn attention from social psychologists for decades (Adorno et al. 1950; Allport 1954; Cohen et al. 2009). Early research on anti-Semitism focused on the perception of Jews as threatening, immoral, and significantly different from the non-Jewish majority (Adorno et al. 1950; Allport 1954). Anti-Semitism was perceived by psychologists as caused by rather stable personality characteristics (Adorno et al. 1950; Dunbar and Simonova 2003; Frindte, Wettig, and Wammetsberger 2005). What seemed missing in such analyses is the understanding of situational causes of anti-Jewish prejudice.

Recent psychological studies provide more insight into situational factors responsible for anti-Semitism; however, most of them use American and West European student samples (Imhoff and Banse 2009; Cohen et al. 2009). Acknowledging the differences between such samples and the rest of

the world population (Henrich, Heine, Norezayan 2010), one could ask for more studies testing causal explanations of anti-Semitism in regions where prejudice against Jews is still a significant social problem. Social issues such as anti-Semitism have not been sufficiently studied in countries facing rapid systemic or economic transitions. It seems obvious that different cultural contexts might generate different causes for anti-Semitic beliefs and attitudes. Thus it is crucial to conduct comparative research on social-psychological phenomena, and on such culturally sensitive issues as stereotyping, prejudice and violence in particular (Heinrich, Heine, Norezayan 2010).

The main aim of the present paper is to apply one of the widely discussed causal theories of anti-Semitism, the ideological model of scapegoating, to the context of two post-Communist nations: Poland and Ukraine. Both

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Ukraine and Poland had large Jewish populations in the prewar period, and both countries witnessed the tragedy of the Holocaust (Krzemiński 2004; Michlic 2006). Currently the Jewish population in these countries is relatively small: estimates of the Jewish population in Poland ranges from around 1,000 to 50,000 people (Bilewicz and Wójcik 2010), and there are about 100,000 Jews currently living in Ukraine. However small the Jewish communities may be, anti-Semitic incidents still occur in both of these countries. Overt anti-Semitism is often expressed by football hooligans, Nazi signs and anti-Semitic slogans are painted on Jewish historical sites, politicians use anti-Semitic rhetoric, and several Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated in recent years (ADL 2009). Such incidents pose important questions of the causes and mechanisms of anti-Semitism in post-transitional Eastern Europe – in the part of the world where even absent Jews remain significant others.

### 1. The Ideological Model of Scapegoating

The scapegoating model of anti-Semitism is one of the psychological concepts that is most frequently referred to by researchers of anti-Semitism from other disciplines, such as history (e.g., Pok 1998), political science (e.g., Howard and Gibson 2007) and sociology (e.g., Bergmann 2008). Among contemporary psychologists, on the contrary, it has been very rarely mentioned after the wave of criticism targeting the concept in the 1950s (Stagner and Congdon 1955; Zawadzki 1948; Allport 1954).

The classic formulation of the scapegoat theory of prejudice is to link aggression toward minorities with the frustration of the aggressor by other sources: constitutional and personal factors, family relations, societal-level issues (Allport 1954). Anti-Semitism was usually described as resulting from widespread frustration and insecurity in times of economic depression, postwar readjustment, or other rapid social change. In the classic formulation of the scapegoating, (1) frustration generates aggression; (2) aggression is displaced toward relatively weak and defenseless minority groups; and (3) the displaced hostility is justified and rationalized by prejudiced attitudes, stereotypical beliefs, and so on. The main arguments against the classic formulation were: the difficulty of predicting the choice of scapegoats (Zawadzki 1948); that aggression is not always displaced and frustra-

tion does not always lead to aggression (Allport 1954); and, finally, that empirical findings did not support the claim that experimentally induced frustration (failure in a task) changes attitudes toward minorities (Stagner and Congdon 1955). One of the further developments in this area, the relative deprivation theory, suggested that ethnic prejudice arises not from an individual's relative deprivation (subjective perception of lower personal status), but rather from a group's relative deprivation (subjective perception of lower group status) (Pettigrew et al. 2008). Another insight into the link between frustration and prejudice, the cue theory of aggression, suggested that there are crucial individual differences (like anti-Semitic beliefs) that moderate people's reactions to frustrating conditions (Berkowitz 1959).

The ideological model of scapegoating proposed recently by Peter Glick (2002; 2005) overcomes many of these problems by suggesting that in times of shared frustration, majority members become more committed to ideologies that point to certain groups as responsible for the frustration. Warmth and competence are the key dimensions of stereotyping (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick and Xu 2002) – people perceive other groups in terms of their warmth (being good-natured, trustworthy, tolerant, friendly, and sincere) and competence (being clever, competent, creative, efficient, foresighted, ingenious, intelligent and knowledgeable). Minority groups that have high socioeconomic status are the usual targets of envious prejudice, and are depicted as very competent (ambitious, clever), but cold (manipulative, arrogant). Such a stereotype represents the group as combining high abilities with harmful intentions (Glick 2002).

The ideological model of scapegoating suggests that the envious stereotype becomes an ideology serving the heightened needs of groups in trouble who seek an explanation of their fate. The need for such ideology may be observed among majority groups that face relative deprivation and loss of control: notable historical instances include the German population of the depression-era Weimar Republic, Hutu in Rwanda before the genocide of Tutsi people, the Young Turks in the early-twentieth century (crime against Armenians), and in some aspects in the recent economic crisis in the United States that enhanced a need for conspiracy theories and anti-Semitism (Glick 2005).

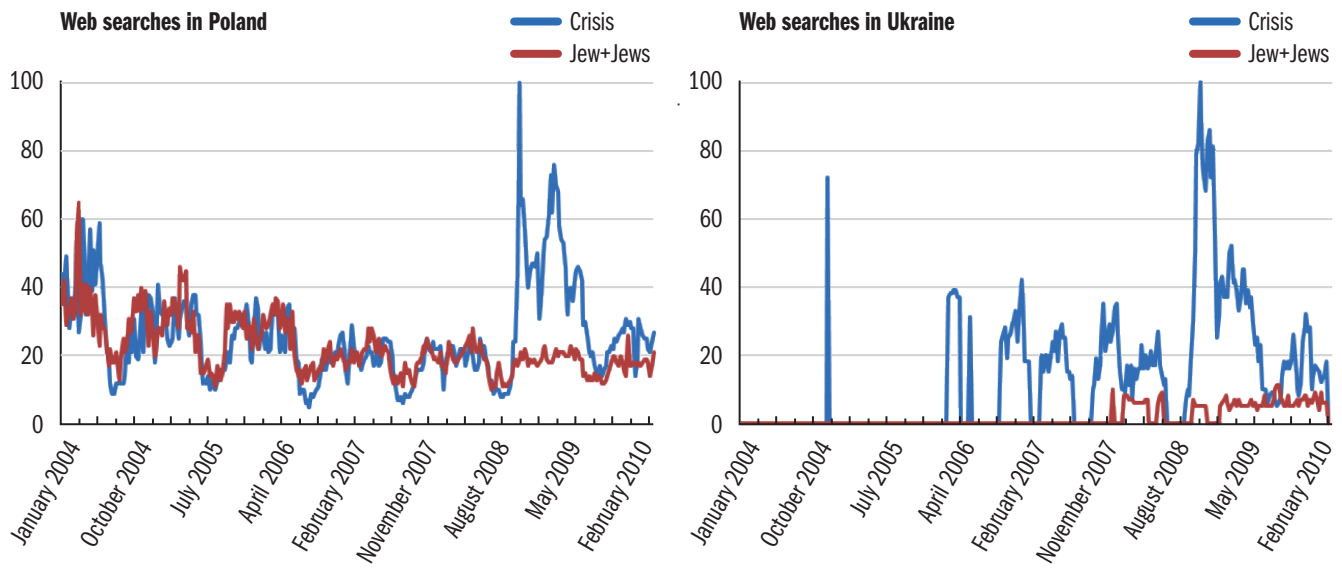
Recent survey research in Poland suggests that in the post-transition era, Jews were often perceived as a group that conspires against Poles (Krzemiński 2004; Kofta and Sedek 2005). Widespread belief in Jewish conspiracy in Poland in the 1990s led to distrust of other ethnic groups. People who believed in Jewish conspiracy also entertained other paranoid ideas about politics: that NATO and Russia were in coalition against Poland, or that foreign entrepreneurs conspired against Polish companies (Kofta and Sedek 2005). Nevertheless, the core of the belief in Jewish conspiracy seems to correspond with Glick's concept of envious prejudice – it treats Jews as a highly competent group with harshly negative intentions toward the majority group.

At the same time, political science research found no evidence for scapegoating of Jews in the former Soviet countries, such as Ukraine. Jews were rarely blamed for the countries' misfortunes, and economic crises did not lead to a rise in anti-Jewish crimes (Howard and Gibson 2007).

Political scientists and psychologists who study this issue suggest that before the collapse of communism in Russia, anti-Semitic beliefs were not widespread enough to be successfully used by key political actors in their propaganda efforts. Economic frustration led to increased authoritarianism, but not directly to prejudice and scapegoating (McFarland, Ageyev, and Abalakina-Paap 1992). Marc Howard and James Gibson (2007), however, claim that other groups might serve as the main scapegoats in this region: Chechens and other nations of Caucasus were blamed for misfortunes more often than Jews in recent years.

A first glance at Internet searches in Poland and Ukraine in the past six years supports this opinion (fig. 1). In periods of intense interest in the source of current crises we observed increased interest in Jewish issues, as represented by the increasing number of Internet users searching for "Jews" and "crisis" in Poland. The relation between these trajectories among Ukrainian Internet users seems to be more complex.

Figure 1: Average search traffic of "crisis" and "Jew/Jews" through google.com in Poland and Ukraine



The cross-correlation in two Internet search samples revealed that the number of searches for “Jews” was related to the number of searches for “crisis” in a Polish sample (0 time lag: .11; –3 month time lag: .10; +3 month time lag: .10); however, there was no relation between the two in an Ukrainian sample (0 time lag: .02; –3 month time lag: –.04; +3 months time lag: .02).

The main aim of the current research was to empirically test the model of scapegoating as an explanation of anti-Semitic prejudice in Poland and Ukraine, using the nationwide sample data collected in both countries in the post-transition period (2002). The two countries selected for analysis share a similar history in recent years: both countries experienced systemic and economic transition, and both faced new phenomena such as unemployment and income inequality (Milanovic 1993). Economic problems related to job loss and inflation led many citizens of Poland and Ukraine to experience shared relative deprivation and loss of control. This in turn raised the level of authoritarianism in the years following the systemic transition (Korzeniewski 2006).

The ideological model of scapegoating predicts that people who experience relative deprivation are more willing to act against a minority group that is perceived as cold and competent (such as Jews) by discriminating against them in various fields of economic and social life. This process should be mediated by an increased commitment to ideology that portrays the minority group as powerful and as conspiring against the majority group. The current study examines whether the relative deprivation experienced on the collective and individual levels leads to an increased willingness to discriminate against Jews, and whether this link is mediated by the increased belief in Jewish conspiracy. We present the results of two surveys in order to test the ideological model of scapegoating, first from Poland and then from Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Survey 1: Poland

The nationwide representative sample survey was performed in Poland in 2002 with 1,098 participants (random-quota sample) by the PBS research agency (Sopot). Three items addressed relative deprivation on the individual and collective levels: “Please evaluate the economic situation of your family – did it become worse, better, or not change in the last year?”; “Please evaluate the economic situation of our country – did it become worse, better, or not change in the last year?”; and “Please evaluate the economic situation of our country – did it become worse, better, or not change in the last five years?” Responses were scored on a 3-point scale ranging from “worse” to “better,”  $\alpha = .75$ . Two items diagnosed the willingness to discriminate against Jews in two aspects of economic life: “Do you think that Jewish people should be allowed to buy Polish land?” and “Do you think that Jewish people should be allowed to buy companies in Poland?” Responses were scored on a 3-point scales ranging from “not at all” to “definitely yes,”  $\alpha = .73$ . Three items measured belief in Jewish control, a subscale of a belief in Jewish conspiracy (Kofta and Sedek 2005): “Do you think that Jews control the media in Poland?”; “Do you think that Jews control the economy in Poland?”; and “Do you think that Jews control politics in Poland?” Responses were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “definitely yes,”  $\alpha = .91$ .

### 2.1 Results

All items selected for the model were significantly positively intercorrelated. Table 1 presents the results of the correlations between items measuring discrimination, belief in Jewish control, and willingness to discriminate against the Jews.

<sup>1</sup> The Polish and Ukrainian models are analyzed separately because of the differences in factorial structure of the latent variables between Poland and Ukraine,  $\Delta CFI = .005$ ;  $\Delta c2 (5) = 45.74, p < .001$ . This is mostly due to dif-

ferences in measurement of belief in Jewish conspiracy,  $\Delta CFI = .005$ ;  $\Delta c2 (2) = 41.19, p < .001$ , and to some extent due to differences in measurement of discriminatory intentions against Jews,  $\Delta CFI < .001$ ;  $\Delta c2 (1) = 8.22, p < .01$ .

**Table 1: Correlation matrix between latent variables of a study in Poland (nationwide representative sample survey, 2002, N = 1,098)**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Discrimination (prohibit buying Polish land)	2.27	.88	1						
Discrimination (prohibit buying Polish companies)	2.56	.76	.583**	1					
Belief in Jewish control in politics	3.20	1.32	.327**	.242**	1				
Belief in Jewish control in economy	3.14	1.30	.306**	.209**	.845**	1			
Belief in Jewish control in media	2.86	1.25	.254**	.163**	.723**	.768**	1		
Deprivation (family situation)	2.30	.65	.106**	.123**	.142**	.121**	.102**	1	
Deprivation (country situation, last year)	2.47	.65	.152**	.155**	.162**	.174**	.168**	.547**	1
Deprivation (country situation, last 5 years)	2.40	.75	.123**	.114**	.086**	.100**	.097**	.422**	.538**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

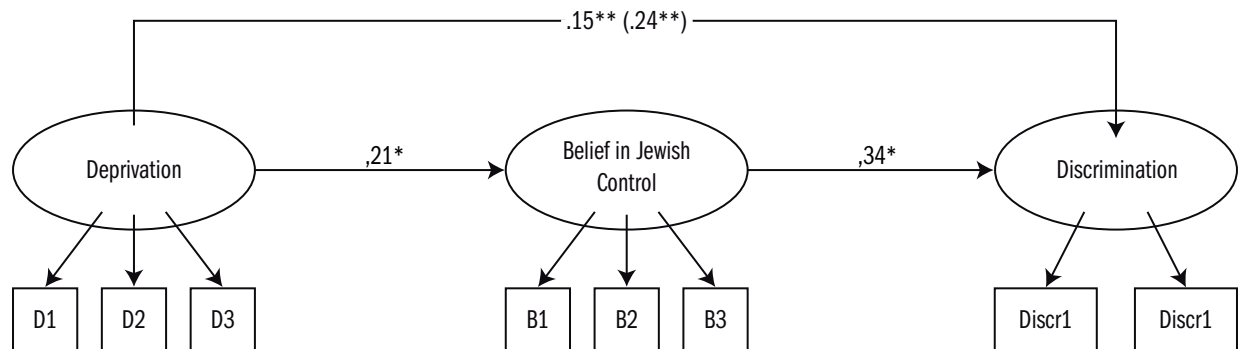
The whole model was tested as a structural equation model (SEM) with AMOS 7.0 software. The solution obtained for the whole sample is shown in Figure 2. The fit of the mediational model was good:  $\chi^2(17, N = 1089) = 27.61, p < .05$ ; RMSEA = .024, RMR = .014, CFI = .997.

Relative deprivation positively predicted willingness to discriminate against Jews ( $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ) and belief in Jewish control ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ). When relative deprivation and belief in Jewish control were entered simultaneously into the model, belief in Jewish control significantly predicted

willingness to discriminate against Jews ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ) and the impact of deprivation on discrimination was lower, but still significant ( $\beta = .15, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of deprivation on discrimination was  $\beta = .07, CI = (.05, .10), p < .001$  (2000 bootstrap samples).

After removing the direct link from deprivation to discrimination, the model fit was still acceptable:  $\chi^2(18, N = 1089) = 42.98, p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .036, RMR = .024, CFI = .993. This suggests that the belief in Jewish control partially mediated the impact of deprivation on discrimination.

**Figure 2: Impact of deprivation (perceived negative situation of family/country) on support for discriminatory practices against Jews mediated by perceived Jewish control (of politics/economy/media) in Poland (nationwide representative sample survey, 2002)**



Note: \*\*  $p < .001$ .

### 3. Survey 2: Ukraine

A similar nationwide representative sample survey was performed in 2002–03 in Ukraine with 1,000 participants (random-quota sample) by the Socioinform research agency (Lviv). Three items addressed the relative deprivation on individual and collective level: “Please evaluate the economic situation of your family – did it become worse, better, or not change in the last year?”; “Please evaluate the economic situation of our country – did it become worse, better, or not change in the last year?”; “Please evaluate the economic situation of our country – did it become worse, better, or not change in the last five years?” Responses were scored on a 3-point scale ranging from “worse” to “better,”  $\alpha = .79$ . Two items diagnosed the willingness to discriminate against Jews in two aspects of economic life: “Do you think that Jewish people should be allowed to buy Ukrainian land?” and “Do you think that Jewish people should

be allowed to buy companies in Ukraine?” Responses were scored on a 3-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “definitely yes,”  $\alpha = .69$ . Three items measure belief in Jewish control: “Do you think that Jews control the media in Ukraine?”; “Do you think that Jews control the economy in Ukraine?”; “Do you think that Jews control politics in Ukraine?” Responses were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “definitely yes,”  $\alpha = .90$ .

#### 3.1 Results

Most of the items selected for the model were significantly intercorrelated; however, there was no significant correlation between several items measuring country-level deprivation and the belief in Jewish control. Table 2 presents the correlations between items measuring deprivation, belief in Jewish control, and willingness to discriminate against Jews.

**Table 2: Correlation matrix between latent variables of a study in Ukraine (nationwide representative sample survey, 2002–2003, N = 1,000)**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Discrimination (prohibit buying Ukrainian land)	2.39	.86	1						
Discrimination (prohibit buying Ukrainian companies)	2.18	.91	.525**	1					
Belief in Jewish control in politics	2.87	1.17	.205**	.196**	1				
Belief in Jewish control in economy	3.15	1.16	.163**	.177**	.717**	1			
Belief in Jewish control in media	2.88	1.15	.171**	.170**	.767**	.748**	1		
Deprivation (family situation)	2.12	.74	.139**	.101**	.064*	.064*	.070*	1	
Deprivation (country situation, last year)	2.11	.77	.150**	.109**	.072*	.057	.079*	.576**	1
Deprivation (country situation, last 5 years)	1.97	.82	.111**	.122**	.025	-.008	.028	.498**	.590**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

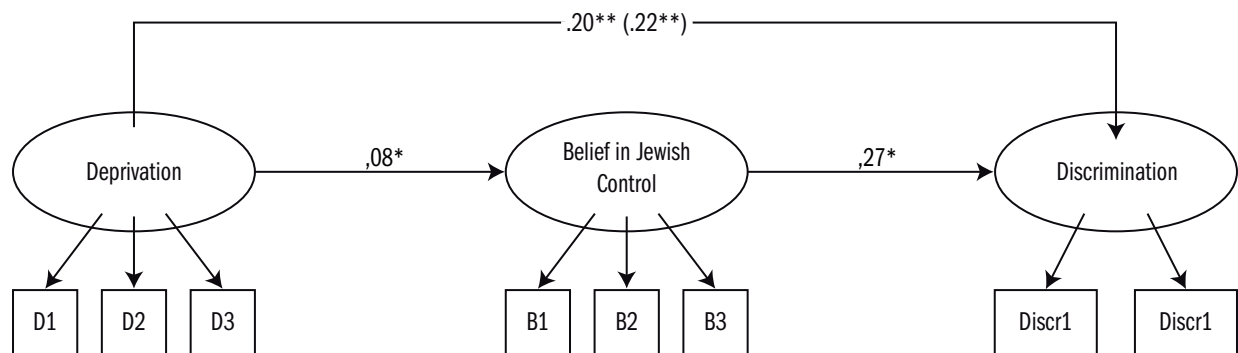
This model was also tested as a structural equation model (SEM). The solution obtained for the whole sample is shown in Figure 3. The fit of the mediational model was very good,  $\chi^2 (17, N = 1000) = 17.69, p = .41$ ; RMSEA = .006, RMR = .015, CFI = 1.000.

Relative deprivation positively predicted willingness to discriminate against Jews ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ) and weakly predicted belief in Jewish control ( $\beta = .08, p < .05$ ). When relative deprivation and belief in Jewish control were entered simultaneously into the model, belief in Jewish control significantly predicted willingness to discriminate against Jews ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ) and the impact of deprivation on discrimination was significant ( $\beta = .20, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of deprivation on discrimination was

very small but significant,  $\beta = .02, CI = (.01, .04), p < .05$  (2000 bootstrap samples). After excluding the direct path, the fit of the model became worse, but still acceptable,  $\chi^2 (18, N = 1000) = 41.60, p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .036, RMR = .034, CFI = .99.

Relative deprivation positively predicted willingness to discriminate against Jews, and belief in Jewish control predicted willingness to discriminate against Jews; however, relative deprivation was not related to belief in Jewish control. A very weak direct link between the independent variable and the mediator – as well as very weak indirect effects – suggest that conspiracy theories about Jews do not act as a statistical mediator in this equation (Baron and Kenny 1986).

**Figure 3: Impact of deprivation (perceived negative situation of family/country) on support for discriminatory practices against Jews mediated by perceived Jewish control (of politics/economy/media) in Ukraine (nationwide representative sample survey, 2002–2003)**



Note: \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$ .



#### 4. Discussion

The ideological model of scapegoating proposes that the belief in Jewish control (and by extension, conspiracy) would mediate the impact of relative deprivation on discrimination: people whose situation deteriorates would seek an explanation and would displace their aggression onto the group that could be accused of causing the deprivation – a group stereotyped as high in competence and low in warmth. Examination of the model's fit with the data gathered in two post-transitional democracies, Poland and Ukraine, only partially supports this claim.

In Poland, participants who felt deprived were more willing to discriminate against Jews. Belief in Jewish control (conspiracy stereotype) was the mechanism partially responsible for the discrimination against Jews among deprived people. Frustration led to the increased commitment to ideology that defined the scapegoat (conspiracy beliefs), and that ideology led to aggression toward the scapegoat (discriminatory intentions). At the same time there was also a direct effect on willingness to discriminate, suggesting that under frustrating conditions people also express discriminatory intentions regardless of ideological beliefs.

The attempt to replicate the model in the Ukrainian setting did not lead to the same conclusions. In Ukraine, participants who were deprived were also more willing to discriminate against Jews; however, this link was not mediated by the conspiracy stereotypes. Discriminatory reactions against Jews in the Ukraine sample were caused by both conspiracy stereotypes of Jews and by economic decline. By contrast with the results in Poland, relative deprivation in this country did not strongly increase belief in Jewish control. Thus, the main point of the ideological model of scapegoating – namely, greater belief in scapegoat-defining ideology under frustrating living conditions – does not seem to explain the phenomenon of anti-Semitism in Ukraine.

It might be also possible that, currently, different groups are being blamed for the economic crises in Ukraine (e.g., Caucasian ethnic groups) and the role of Jews as scapegoats is limited. A similar situation was recently observed by political scientists in post-Soviet Russia (Howard and Gibson 2007). Thus the issue of the choice of the scapegoat group remains

crucial in understanding contemporary reactions to social shared frustration (Zawadzki 1948). The difference might be also attributed to the prevalence of conspiracy-based anti-Semitism in Poland, well described in the psychological and sociological literature (Kofta and Sędek 2005; Krzeminski 2004), that was an important part of prewar nationalist ideology. At the same time, comparisons between the results of the Polish and Ukrainian studies could be limited by measurement differences: it is plausible that the factorial structure of anti-Semitic beliefs, discriminatory intentions, and deprivation is different between Poland and Ukraine.

The ideological model of scapegoating seems to be a good explanation of anti-Semitism only in countries where Jews are still targets of envious stereotypes. Recent research suggests that other groups (e.g., Asian Americans in the United States) may be currently perceived in that manner to an even greater extent than Jews (Fiske et al. 2002). The present study had an important limitation in the way envious stereotypes were measured: participants in our studies were not asked about the perceived warmth and competence of Jews, as in the original studies, but instead were asked to indicate their support for conspiracy theory about Jews (belief in Jewish control over media, politics and economy). Although the study is based on theoretical accounts of the ideological model of scapegoating (Glick 2005), it is not a direct translation of the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 2002).

There are numerous other theoretical accounts of anti-Semitism (Cohen et al. 2009; Dunbar and Simonova 2003; Frindte, Wammetsberger, and Wettig 2005; Imhoff and Banse 2009). Some of them stress the role of guilt-driven processes among historical perpetrators that drive secondary forms of anti-Semitism (Imhoff and Banse 2009). Other focus broadly on individual differences and authoritarian personality traits as direct causes of anti-Semitic beliefs (Dunbar and Simonova 2003; Frindte, Wammetsberger, and Wettig 2005), or even on the situationally induced fear of death (mortality salience) that leads to support for anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes (Cohen et al. 2009). All of these explanations seem plausible when it comes to the situation in Eastern Europe. Most of these historically traumatized societies are without doubt prone to mortality salience and different forms of victimhood competition (Krzeminski

2004). Authoritarian attitudes also seem to be quite widespread in East European countries (Korzeniowski 2006).

Scapegoating theory adds another important explanation of anti-Semitism. In the Polish and Ukrainian studies, we presented some correlational evidence for its validity. Studies applying experimental or longitudinal designs, could shed more light on scapegoating processes as a basis

of anti-Semitism. Examination of the perception of Jews on the dimensions of warmth and competence could verify whether conspiracy-based anti-Semitism is another form of envious stereotypes known from the past (Glick 2005). With the development of experimental and survey research in this field, social psychology might contribute to better understanding of the anti-Semitic attitudes that have so often caused violence in this part of the world.

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