

Bilewicz, M., **Cichocka, A.**, Górska, P., & Szabó, Z.P. (in press). Is liberal bias universal? An international perspective on social psychologists. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

Comentary on: Duarte, Crawford, Stern, Haidt, Jussim, and Tetlock.

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Title: Is liberal bias universal? An international perspective on social psychologists.

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Abstract

Based on our comparison of political orientation and research interests of social psychologists in capitalist Western countries vs. post-Communist Eastern-European countries we suggest that Duarte et al. claim of liberal bias in the field seems Americanocentric. We propose an alternative account of political biases which focuses on the academic tendency to explain attitudes of lower status groups.

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“The field is shifting leftward” claim Duarte and colleagues. Their analysis suggests that the social psychological research is conducted by politically homogeneous environment that includes mainly political liberals and lacks a conservative voice. In this commentary we would like highlight some limitations of an Americanocentric view on social psychology and present an alternative explanation of psychologists’ political skew—based on their opposition to the attitudes prevalent in their societies, particularly among the low-status groups.

Duarte and colleagues’ analysis relies mainly on unidimensional understanding of political ideology, in which political orientation in terms of economic issues is highly correlated with political orientation in terms of social issues (see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). This overlap of economic and political liberalism seems more prevalent in the Western capitalist countries, particularly in the US. In other parts of the world, such as the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, free market economic worldviews are often linked to social liberalism (Golec, 2001; Kossowska & van Hiel, 2003). By ignoring the differences between economic and social attitudes, Duarte and colleagues inaccurately generalize the political leanings of American social psychologists to the rest of the world (see Henrich et al., 2010).

The claim about psychological field “shifting leftward” comes from Haidt’s observation during the 2011 SPSP annual meeting , as well as Inbar and Lammers’ (2012) analysis of SPSP members’ political attitudes. SPSP is an American non-profit institution, holding its meetings in US, with 72.5% of members being American. Indeed, more than 80% of psychologists participating in both studies by Inbar &

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Lammers (2012) were American. Duarte and colleagues' observation about psychologists' liberalism might then be a local American specificity rather than a universal phenomenon. , We decided to examine this phenomenon with a more internationally diverse sample.

For international comparison we selected two Western traditionally capitalist countries (UK and US) and two East-European post-communist countries (Hungary and Poland). We focused on comparing these countries due to their diverse political-economic history , as well as differences in support for state interventionism in economy. Indeed, support for state interventions tends to be higher in Hungary and Poland than in UK and US, and this difference is particularly strong among people of lower socio-economic status (World Value Survey Association, 2014).

In a recent online study of 132 social psychologists from the UK, US, Hungary and Poland, we asked participants to indicate their political views with respect to social issues (e.g. religion or gender roles) and economic issues (e.g. taxes or welfare state) (Figure 1).

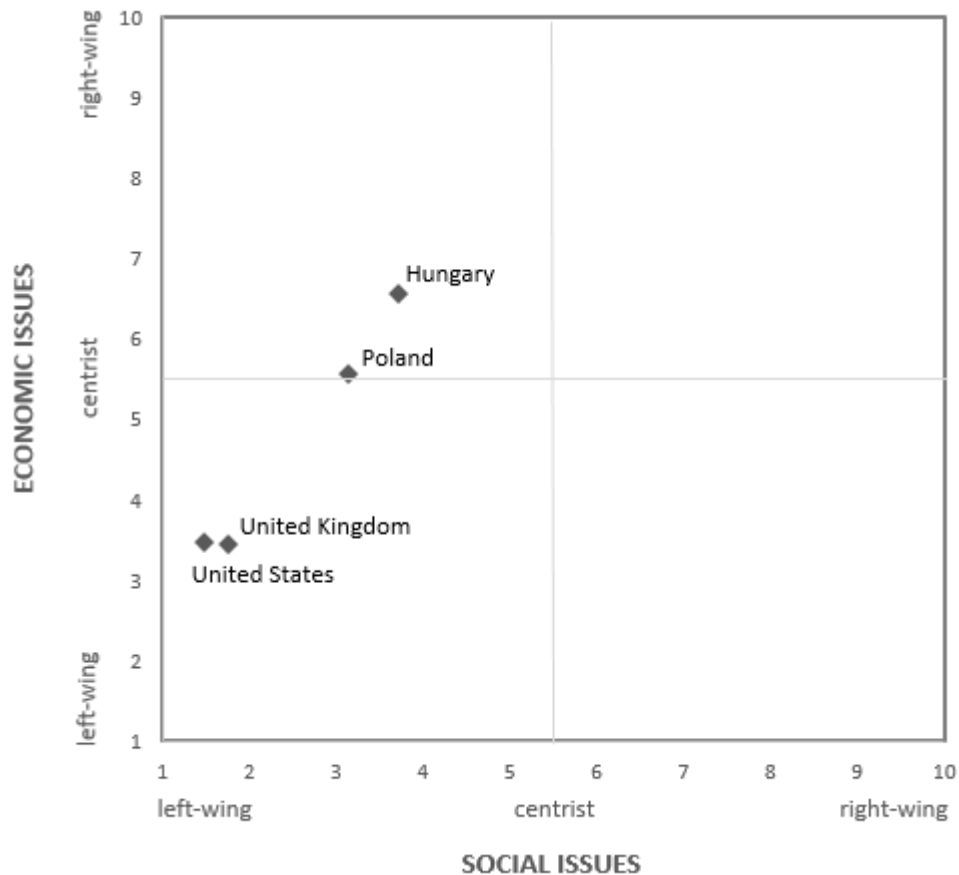


Figure 1. Political orientation of social psychologists in Western and Eastern-European countries (USA $N = 52$, UK $N = 22$, Hungary $N = 32$ from Hungary, Poland $N = 26$).

Social psychologists working in the post-communist East-European (countries expressed rather right-wing attitudes in economic dimension and left-wing social attitudes, whereas Western social psychologists expressed left-wing orientation on both dimensions. Although East-European social psychologists were overall more right-wing than Western social psychologists, this difference was more pronounced for economic than social issues. Despite a relatively small sample size, this study

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serves as a preliminary illustration of the differences between Western and Eastern social psychology.

It then seems that Duarte and colleagues' conclusions of about "the field" might be limited to Western countries with long tradition of free-market economy and liberal democracy. Moreover, by overseeing situational context of political opinions and focusing on self-selection and hostile climate as main reasons of liberal bias, they essentialize psychologists' political opinions. s . We propose an alternative explanation of dominant political leanings in psychology.

American and British social psychologists function in societies in which support for state interventions in economy is relatively low, even among low status groups. In Hungary and Poland, however, low status groups support economic interventions (WVSA, 2014). We suggest that psychologists – usually forming part of the middle-class – tend to accentuate their political attitudes in opposition to attitudes prevalent among low-status groups in their societies. Such accentuation is a typical distinction strategy of middle-class, allowing for reproduction of cultural and social capital in opposition to working-class rather than in opposition to higher classes (Bourdieu, 1984). This opposition seems to be reflected in the research interests of social psychologists.

In case of Western social psychology some of the commonly studied topics are: ethnic prejudice, climate change denial or system justification (Duarte et al., this issue). All of them can be attributed to the political right rather than left. However, in

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the case of East-European social psychology, most commonly studied topics include: complaining, belief in an unjust world, entitlement attitudes, conspiracy theories, nationalism or uncompetitiveness (Bilewicz & Olechowski, 2014). These issues combine anti-capitalism and social conservatism—a mix common among the low-status groups in post-communist countries. East-European social psychologists tend to perceive these topics in terms of pathologies. This stigmatizes negative evaluations of current economic and political order as well as delegitimizes collective action.

Another good illustration of regional differences in research topics is the use of implicit association test, a measure of unconscious attitudes (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). This method, originally developed in the USA to explain stereotyping, discrimination and racial biases (see Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; McConnell, & Leibold, 2001), has been used by Polish social psychologists as a tool for measuring consumer attitudes toward corporate brands (e.g. Maison, Greenwald, Bruin, 2001; 2004). The same technique can then be used in the interest of discriminated groups (in the West) or in the interest of the market and power-holders (in the East). This example seems to further illustrate differences in economic worldviews of social psychologists.

Social identities of social psychologists are construed in opposition to the 'participants' – the low-status out-group members worth studying (Hegarty & Bruckmüller, 2013). Thus, social psychological research might not be biased because

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of liberal political inclinations but rather by the opposition between a researchers and the values of the low status groups in their societies.

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