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Egoistic Relative Deprivation and Support for Populism in Days of Democracy Crisis: the Case of Poland

Abstract: According to the social psychological literature, egoistic relative deprivation impairs well-being but has at most little impact on political protest and engagement. We considered this view incomplete and over-simplifying. It was predicted that egoistic relative deprivation itself may impair democracy by increasing support for populism, and that the postulated relationship will be mediated by dysphoric affect, political alienation, and political paranoia.

The empirical basis of the article were three studies carried out on nationwide random-quota samples of adult Poles: in 2002 (N = 1500), in 2010 (N = 800), and in 2017 (N = 2000). It was found that support for populism systematically depends directly on dysphoric affect and political paranoia, which are strengthened by egoistic relative deprivation. In 2017, with populist political groupings in power in Poland, the role of political alienation turned out to be ambiguous. Political alienation slightly strengthened political paranoia but directly lowered support for populism.

In conclusion it was noted that in Poland's history and in the contemporary Polish mentality there is a great potential for negative affect, pessimism and bitterness. Relative deprivation experienced today successfully maintains this potential.

Key words: *relative deprivation, dysphoric affect, political alienation, political paranoia, support for populism*

INTRODUCTION

Studies on relative deprivation (RD) started in the 50's after observing in some soldiers the emergence of frustration from the perception of their peers' faster rate of promotion (cf. Stouffer et al., 1949). Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, and Bialosiewicz (2012) define relative deprivation as "the judgment that one is worse off compared to some standard accompanied by feelings of anger and resentment" (p. 203). Feather (2015, p. 8) stressed two central elements of this process: "deservingness and justice-related affect".

In 1966 Runciman distinguished between egoistic (individual) RD and fraternal (group) RD (Runciman, 1966). The distinction lies in that a person may feel deprived as an individual (compared to e.g. another advantaged individual), or as a representative of his or her group (when this group is perceived as worse off compared to another, reference group). The distinction between individual/egoistic and group/fraternal RD resulted in the formulation of the differential effect hypothesis, which states that "GRD leads to group-based reactions and IRD leads to individual-based reactions"

(Smith and Pettigrew, 2014, p. 759) and consequently "fraternal relative deprivation causes protest but not stress; egoistic relative deprivation causes stress but not protest" (Schmitt et al., 2010, p. 123). Schmitt and Maes formulated this idea in more pragmatic language: "some scholars have suggested and some studies have found that egoistic deprivation is a risk factor for emotional well-being while fraternal deprivation is a risk factor for social peace" (Schmitt and Maes, 2002, p. 322). This reasoning delights and captivates with its simplicity. It would be great if it turned out to be true. Some studies have shown that egoistic RD was more closely related to well-being deficits and fraternal RD to protest (cf. Abeles, 1976; Crosby, 1976; Smith and Ortiz, 2002). From the newer studies we can learn e.g. that egoistic RD is related to mental health deficits (Eibner, Evans, 2005; Callan et al., 2015), depression (Abrams and Grant, 2012), and paranoid ideation (Wickham et al., 2014), while fraternal/group RD predicted (via nationalist beliefs) voting for the antiestablishment nationalist party (SNP) (Abrams and Grant, 2012).

Other studies however have presented different or opposite results. Foster and Matheson (1995) showed that

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fraternal RD predicted collective actions only when egoistic RD was strong. Grant et al. (2015) analyzed the cognitive and affective components of fraternal RD. The authors concluded: “The results suggested that the latter positively influenced participation in protest actions but, unexpectedly, the former had the opposite effect” (p. 76). De la Sablonnière et al. (2010) found that collective RD relates to personal well-being. In their well-known first study, Schmitt and Maes (2002) discovered that “fraternal deprivation does not only provoke protest, but also is a risk factor for mental health” (p. 322). In their next work based on longitudinal research, the authors concluded: “Contrary to the differential effect hypothesis, we did not find a direct causal effect of fraternal relative deprivation on protest. Rather, we found that protest depended on mental health, which in turn was caused by egoistic and fraternal relative deprivation” (Schmitt et al., 2010, p. 129). Pettigrew et al. (2008) found a relationship between individual RD and prejudice, and have shown that individual RD’s effects on prejudice were largely mediated through group RD. The authors quoted significant relationships of both individual and group RD with political alienation, less interest in politics (in general and European politics specifically), and political inefficacy (2008, p. 389). These results serve as an example of how individual RD may be related to socio-political attitudes and potentially affect political behavior. It seems that the individual and social consequences of both individual and group RD are much more complex than the differential effect hypothesis predicts. Let us add that Smith et al. (2012) with the use of meta-analysis did not confirm the differential effect hypothesis (called “fit hypothesis” – p. 209).

Why has the differential effect hypothesis failed to be consistently and clearly confirmed? Primarily, it seems to be incomplete and over-simplifying. Firstly, the statement “fraternal relative deprivation causes protest but not stress; egoistic relative deprivation causes stress but not protest” seems doubtful, since perceiving one’s ingroup as worse off compared to another (reference) group may be stressful (which was supported by the cited research), and perceiving one’s own situation as unfairly worse off compared to the situation of their peers may cause an active social reaction (see above citations). This means that egoistic and fraternal RD have a lot in common. Not only they are usually found to be correlated (cf. Pettigrew et al., 2008), but in both these states: (a) “people obviously must care about what they lack”, (b) “people must believe that the current situation is unlikely to change without intervention”, (c) “people must *not* see themselves as responsible or to blame for the deprivation”, and (d) “people must view the process that produced the deprivation as illegitimate” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 208). That is why they may both cause these same or similar negative affective states: dysphoric mood, resentment, or anger with all their sociopolitical consequences (cf. Brader and Marcus, 2013).

It seems plausible to ask **how** egoistic RD may predict political engagement. We deliberately do not ask

if egoistic RD may evoke political engagement, because there are sufficient theoretical reasons, empirical evidence as well as every day observation of political life (e.g. in Poland). What are these sufficient theoretical reasons? Egoistic RD, which is perceived as unfair or illegitimate, on the one hand leads to negative affect (bitterness and resentment), and on the other to powerlessness or, more broadly, alienation (lack of control over reality and estrangement) (cf. Pettigrew et al., 2008). People used to ask “Why?” and looked for an answer. Let us remain with the self-serving bias that is typical in Western culture, inclining us to attribute external, uncontrollable factors to our negative outcomes (failures) (cf. Miller and Ross, 1975). It is highly probable that people who feel personally relatively deprived will not blame themselves for this situation, but will look for external factors that are responsible for it. Sense of alienation and dysphoric mood make for the most convincing, simplest answers. This opens the way for a unique political reasoning, namely conspiratorial thinking and – as a consequence – to populism (cf. Krasodomski-Jones, 2019; Pipes, 1997; Robins and Post, 1997). Generalized conspiratorial thinking, belief that the most important (dominant) mechanism of politics are hostile plotted conspiracies, called political paranoia, was found to depend on negative affect and to lead to simple, populist preferences (Korzeniowski, 2010). Populism is a very broad term, as often used as often misused. It is not easy to define populism precisely, but we may point out its central features, such as recognition of so called the people’s will as crucial source of legitimacy, undermining democratic principles (e.g. rights of minorities), leftist economical and rightist ideological views, appealing to national(ist) stereotypes and myths, and isolationism (cf. Canovan, 1981; Gerber, 1999; Held, 1996; Ionescu and Gellner, 1970; Meny and Surel, 2002). Populism is understood here as a political project with ochlocracy [ὄχλοκρατία – “rule of crowd”; ὄχλος – “crowd, rabble” and κρατος – “rule, power”] as its core; quasi-democracy consisting in “tyranny of majority” and “will of the people”, accompanied by the undermining of minority rights and of the rule of law. Here we will refer to the toughest measure of populism: identification with populist political groupings, their programs, and slogans.

The objective of this paper is to answer the question regarding how egoistic RD leads to support for populism. The predicted mediators of the postulated relationship will be negative, dysphoric affect, political alienation, and political paranoia. Additionally we will test if the mentioned variables form a time-stable explanatory model.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The answer to our research questions is based on the results of three empirical studies. They were carried out in 2002 (N = 1500), 2010 (N = 800) and 2017 (N = 2000) on nationwide random-quota samples of adult Poles by means

of a survey study. The internal structure of our samples reflected the composition of the Polish population aged 18 years and above in terms of geographical region, size of the place of residence, sex, age, and education. Studies were conducted in respondents' homes by trained interviewers, applying questionnaires in the form of face-to-face computer assisted personal interviews (CAPI). In three studies, a set of the same methods was used to measure the variables of interest.

Historical-political Context of Research

In 1989, after 44 years of belonging to the Soviet bloc, Poland started a process of democratization. Basic democratic principles (division of powers, rule of law, civil liberties etc.) were restored. Poland joined international organizations of the democratic West (1999 – NATO, 2004 – EU). Since 1990, free elections have regularly taken place to appoint the two houses of parliament. In 2002 the government was formed by left-wing parties that won elections in 2001 – SLD-UP and peasant party – PSL. They realized politics of democratization and openness to the world (in 2004 Poland became a member of the EU). The opposition formed populist parties: PiS, LPR, and Samoobrona. The president was A. Kwaśniewski (a prominent SLD politician). In 2010 (after the 2007 elections) PO and PSL were in power, with B. Komorowski (a PO politician) as president. Since 2015 PiS holds a majority in the Polish parliament. The current president is A. Duda (a previous candidate of PiS). PiS (Law and Justice) is a party well-known for promoting anti-democratic and populist program and slogans (cf. Greven, 2016, Guiso, et al., 2017, Hooghe and Reeskens, 2007, Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

Since the 2015 new authorities undertook numerous attempts to change the ruling political status quo. Their *signum specificum* were the adulating tastes and beliefs of the crowd (called “the sovereign”), such as nationalism and conservatism, and undermining democratic values and principles (e.g. rights of minorities) and the rule of law. During two years of PiS's governance the independence of the judiciary was limited. The government refused to publish rulings passed by the Constitutional Tribunal that were unfavorable towards them, which caused the paralysis of law-abidingness. A fusion of the positions of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General was performed. Additionally, the powers of secret services were increased. Reactions to some of these actions were published by the Venice Commission of the EU¹. In June 2016, the European Commission issued a critical opinion concerning the state of law and order in Poland. In July, the Parliament enacted a new law which gave control over

the Constitutional Tribunal and National Media Council to the government. As a consequence of the latter law, the public television station (TVP) became entirely subordinated to the ideological demands of the ruling party (PiS).

In 2014, “Democracy index” gave Poland a rank of 40 (in the world), but in 2016 this position dropped to 52 (see: Democracy Index, 2014, 2016). The reports of another agencies (e.g. Freedom House – Schenkan, 2017, 2018) concerning the current political situation in Poland seem to indicate a rising crisis of democracy in Poland.

Measures

Relative deprivation. Cantril's (1965) Self Anchoring Scale was used to measure relative deprivation. Respondents used four 11-rung ladders to mark the position of their present, past (three years ago), future (three years later) life, and position that their life deserves. Differences between the “deservingness” rung and the rung corresponding to present, past, and future life were indices of present, past, and future deprivations. A global index of relative deprivation was computed as a mean of these three fragmentary indices. The internal reliability of this 3-item scale amounted to Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$ (in 2002), $.82$ (in 2010), and $.78$ (in 2017).

Depression. Depression was measured with the use of five items taken from the well known Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al., 1961). They were as follows (extreme statements are quoted): “I am so sad and unhappy that I can't stand it”, “I feel the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve”, “I am dissatisfied or bored with everything”, “I can't make decisions at all anymore”, “I can't do any work at all”. The internal reliability of the scale amounted to Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$ (in 2002), $.89$ (in 2010), $.89$ (in 2017).

Resentment. Resentment was measured by nine items expressing social negativism and sense of grievance, taken from Lewicka's (2004) L Scale. They were as follows: “Generally I am underappreciated”, “I regret that my life did not go a different way”, “I am one of those who fate treated unjustly”, “In the future corruption in Poland will be much bigger”, “People become more and more immoral”, “The world is going in the wrong direction”, “In Poland there are many more people thinking only about themselves than people ready to selflessly help others”, “In my closest circle others are treated better than I am”, “Everybody can be bought – you must know their price”. The internal reliability of the scale amounted to Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$ (in 2010) and $.77$ (in 2017); resentment was not measured in 2002.

Political alienation. A shortened scale of political alienation was used. It consisted of six items diagnostic for political powerlessness and estrangement (Korzeniowski, 1994). They were as follows: “We are all meaningless cogs in the political machinery”, “When they make decisions, politicians never ask us ordinary people”, “People like me have no influence on what the government does”, “I often have a feeling that present politics of the authorities are my politics” (reversed), “I have nothing

¹ See: “Opinion on amendments to the Act of 25 June 2015 on the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 106th Plenary Session” (Venice, 11-12 March 2016) [[http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2016\)001-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2016)001-e)] and “Opinion on the Act of 15 January 2016 amending the Police Act and certain other Acts, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 107th Plenary Session” (Venice, 10-11 June 2016) [[http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2016\)012-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2016)012-e)].

in common with the so called political class”, “In our socio-political system I feel more and more strange and uneasy”. The internal reliability of the scale amounted to Cronbach’s $\alpha = .72$ (in 2002), $.68$ (in 2010), and $.65$ (in 2017).

Political paranoia. Political paranoia was measured by an original scale, which consisted of six items (Korzeniowski, 2010): “It is not the government that we are governed by, those who control us are altogether unknown”, “Those who claim that there are powerful, secret forces in the world that conspire against Poland make a lot of sense”, “The present-day political and administrative chaos is caused by purposeful activities”, “All political events result from secret activities and agreements of which the man in the street has not the slightest idea”, “We will never find out who our actual rulers have been, are, and will be”, “Nothing that really happens in politics is transparent, all key political decisions are made in secret”. The internal reliability of the scale amounted to Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$ (in 2002), $.89$ (in 2010), and $.75$ (in 2017).

individual indications. In 2002, the value of the Cronbach’s α coefficient for this measure was $.86$, in 2010 Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$, and in 2017 the coefficient value equaled to $.83$.

As the index was calculated only for respondents who declared willingness to vote, the final analyses were carried out on smaller samples of $n = 949$ (2002 study), $n = 457$ (2010 study), $n = 1630$ (2017 study).

RESULTS

In the first step we will show the results of correlation analyses from the three studies. The second step will be path analyses with egoistic RD as the exogenous variable and support for populism as the explained variable. The mediators in the models were: depression, resentment (not included in 2002 study), political alienation, and political paranoia.

Correlation Analyses

Results of initial correlation analysis of the first study (realized in 2002) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Relative deprivation, depression, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations – 2002 (N = 949)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	M	SD
Relative deprivation (1)					-0.04	.83
Depression (2)	.10**				1.80	.65
Political alienation (3)	.16**	.32**			3.25	.50
Political paranoia (4)	.13**	.35**	.60**		2.73	.65
Support for populism (5)	.13**	.13**	.20**	.20**	1.81	.92

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

Support for populism. Support for populism was operationalized as the intention of voting (in imaginary parliamentary and presidential elections) for parties and politicians promoting populist programs and slogans. Examples of populist parties were e.g. PiS (Law and Justice) LPR (Polish Families League), Samoobrona (Self-Defense), Porozumienie (Agreement), Kukiz’15. On the opposite side of the Polish political scene were the democratic parties, e.g. PO (Civic Platform), SLD (Democratic Left Alliance), Nowoczesna (Modern), and PSL (Polish People’s Party). Such categorizations were based on cited above analyses (cf. Greven, 2016, Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, and Sonno, 2017, Hooghe and Reeskens, 2007, Inglehart and Norris, 2016). The index of support for populism was created as follows: A declaration to vote for “democrats” was coded as “1”, a declaration to vote for “populists” was coded as “3”, while declaration of a lack of preference or declaration to vote for yet another (difficult to categorize) political groupings or politicians were coded as “2.” The respondent were asked twice, for parties (parliamentary elections) and for politicians (presidential elections) and the points were assigned separately for the parties and politicians. The final indicator of support for democracy was the average of two such

The results presented in Table 1 show that all variables are positively and significantly interrelated. In accordance with our expectations, the more intense the relative deprivation the stronger the depression, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism. Additionally, the level of the latest variable was higher when depression, political alienation, and political paranoia were stronger.

Correlation coefficients computed in 2010 are presented in Table 2. Let us keep in mind that resentment was additionally measured in this study.

The pattern of results shown in Table 2 seems similar to that presented previously in Table 1, except for one case: relative deprivation and support for populism turned out to be uncorrelated. Relative deprivation and support for populism remained according to our expectations, albeit positively and significantly correlated with all variables that were expected to mediate the relationship between them. These variables – resentment, depression, political alienation, and political paranoia – turned out to be positively and significantly correlated.

The results of comparable analysis of 2016 data are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Relative deprivation, resentment, depression, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations – 2010 (N = 457)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M	SD
Relative deprivation (1)						.64	1.39
Resentment (2)	.16**					2.45	.58
Depression (3)	.15**	.46**				1.45	.53
Political alienation (4)	.24**	.27**	.14**			3.03	.52
Political paranoia (5)	.10*	.39**	.24**	.57**		2.81	.57
Support for populism (6)	.07	.16**	.25**	.12*	.18**	1.74	.84

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

Table 3. Relative deprivation, resentment, depression, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations – 2017 (N = 1630)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	M	SD
Relative deprivation (1)						2.35	4.11
Resentment (2)	.09**					2.27	.56
Depression (3)	.07**	.37**				1.40	.52
Political alienation (4)	.11**	.27**	.09**			2.78	.41
Political paranoia (5)	.06*	.34**	.07**	.46**		2.70	.54
Support for populism (6)	.05*	.02	-.07**	-.21**	-.02	2.15	.72

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

Similarly as in previous analyses, relative deprivation, resentment, depression, political alienation, and political paranoia were positively and significantly correlated with each other. Support for populism turned out to be only marginally interrelated with relative deprivation and correlate negatively with political alienation and depression. Correlational analysis did not show any linear relationship of support for populism with resentment and political paranoia. Thus in 2017 well known (and expected) pattern of correlational relationships of support for populism with its potential predictors was not confirmed.

Path Analyses

Let us remember that we predicted that (a) relative deprivation will increase support for populism and (b) this relationship will be mediated by negative affect (depression and resentment), political alienation, and political paranoia. These expectations were tested by means of path analysis using IBM SPSS Amos 24.0. The appropriate results are presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

The model presented in Figure 1 turned out to have a satisfactory goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 6.48$ ($df = 2$, $p = .039$); $FMIN = .01$; $RFI = .93$; $RMSEA = .05$. It explained 6 percent of support for populism variance.

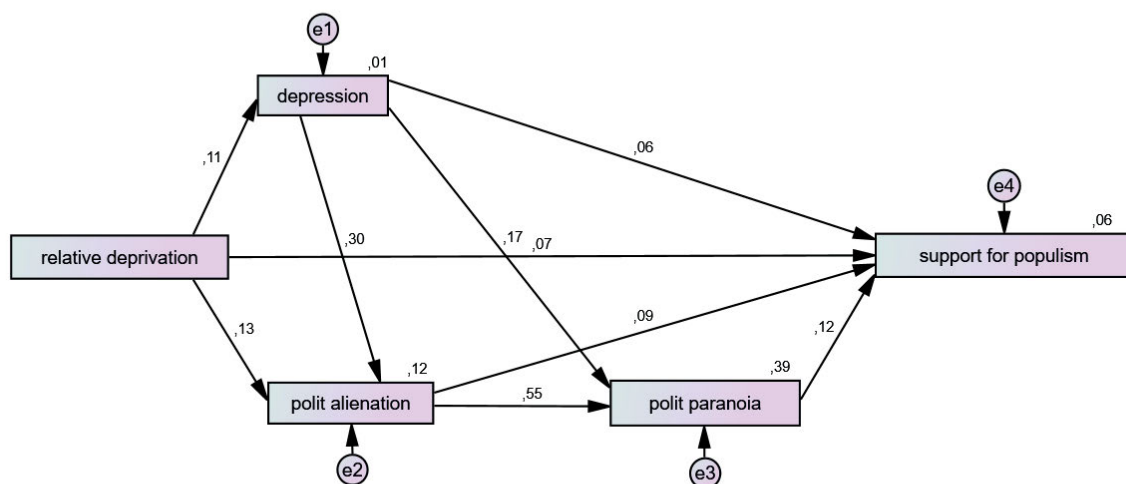


Figure 1. Path model linking relative deprivation, depression, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism (N = 949) in 2002. Only statistically significant path coefficients (at least $p < .05$) are shown.

Relative deprivation directly increased depression, political alienation, and support for populism and indirectly (via political alienation) increased political paranoia and support for populism. The intensity of support for populism directly depended on depression, political alienation, political paranoia, and relative deprivation. Generally speaking, the presented results obtained in 2002 confirmed our expectations.

In the 2010 study a measurement of resentment was included. Results of the path analysis are presented in Figure 2.

The model presented in Figure 2 also met a satisfactory goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 10.23$ (df = 7, p = .18); FMIN = .02; RFI = .95; RMSEA = .03. It explained 8 percent of the support for populism variance.

It turned out that relative deprivation directly increased resentment and political alienation, and indirectly depression (via resentment), political paranoia (via

resentment and political alienation), and support for populism. Support for populism directly depended on depression and political paranoia. The verified model also confirmed our expectation.

Figure 3 shows the model obtained in the 2017 study.

The model presented in Figure 3 turned out to have comparable goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = 8.40$ (df = 4, p = .08); FMIN = .01; RFI = .97; RMSEA = .03. It explained also similar percentage of variance of support for populism ($R^2 = .07$). Relative deprivation increased support of democracy directly as well as indirectly – via (a) resentment, (b) resentment and political paranoia (c) resentment, political alienation and political paranoia. There were however paths new and not predicted. Namely support for populism turned out to be directly and distinctively decreased by political alienation ($\beta = -.27$) and depression ($\beta = -.10$). Thus, in 2017 support for populism depended – the old way – on resentment (directly and via political

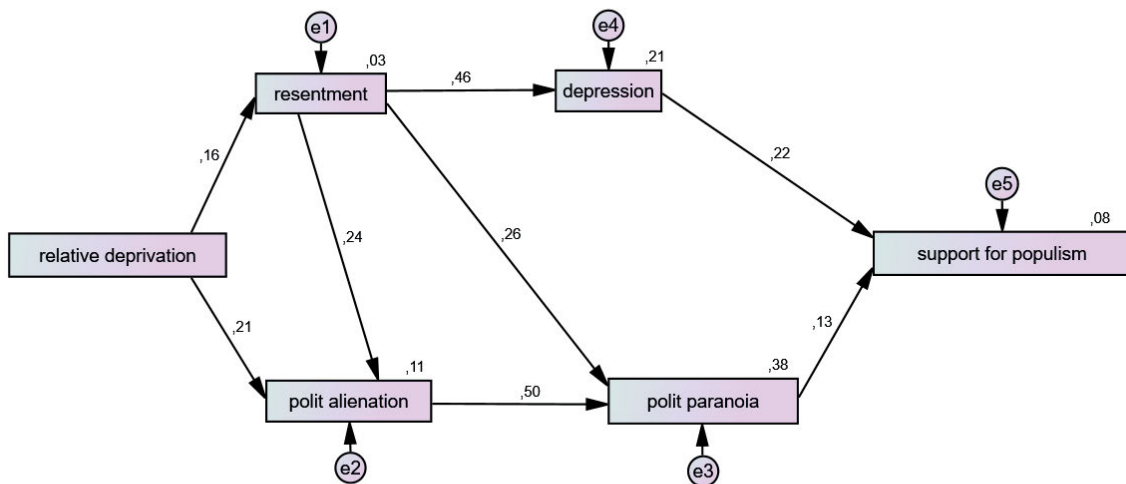


Figure 2. Path model linking relative deprivation, depression, resentment, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism (N = 457) in 2010. Only statistically significant path coefficients (at least p < .05) are shown.

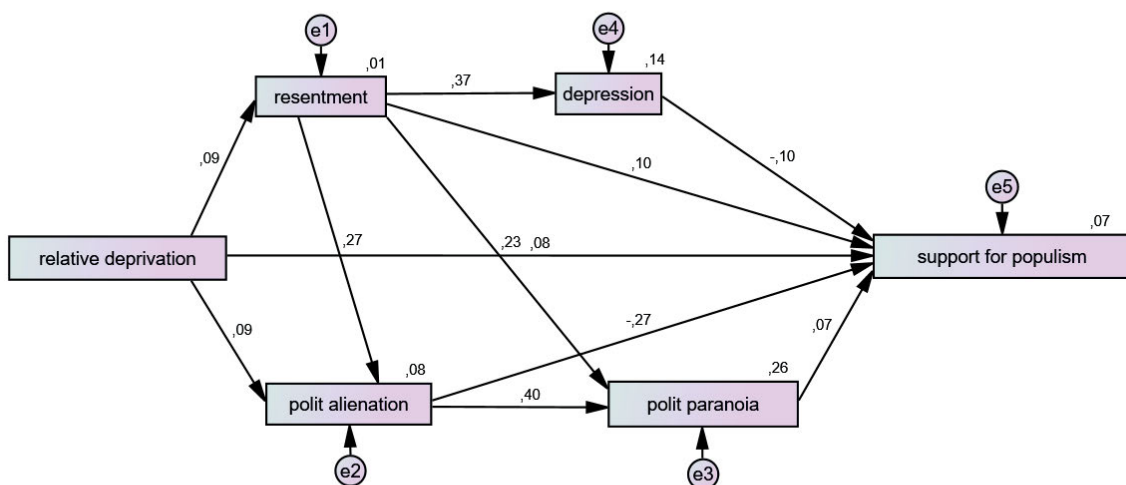


Figure 3. Path model linking relative deprivation, resentment, political alienation, political paranoia, and support for populism (N = 1630) in 2017. Only statistically significant path coefficients (at least p < .05) are shown.

paranoia) but also depended – the new way – on feeling familiar with and at home in the ruling (populist) political system and being in good (at least not depressed) mood.

It seems that in 2017 (see results presented in figure 3) we have met the existence of opponent processes (cf. Solomon, 1980). First, resentment directly increased and indirectly decreased and second, political alienation directly decreased and indirectly increased support for populism. It is therefore not surprising that comparison of results of correlational and path analyzes (table 3 and figure 3) reveals the occurrence of suppression effect (cf. Miller et al., 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2000; Paulhus et al., 2004; Sibley and Perry, 2010; Zagefka, et al., 2010). We can observe the enhancement effect: path analysis showed – not observable in correlational analysis – significant relationships of resentment and political paranoia with support for populism. Thus path analysis contributed to the enhancement of the role of egoistic relative deprivation in increasing of support for democracy.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Existing knowledge on relative deprivation does not seem coherent and may elicit ambivalent impressions. On the one hand we found a large number of results that are not theoretically integrated or at least elaborated (despite some sophisticated efforts: cf. Crosby, 1976). For instance, the nature of the psychological mechanism of both egoistic and fraternal relative deprivation are not precisely identified. In the literature we come across a wide range of possible mediators or moderators of the studied relationships, e.g. social identity, ingroup identification, normlessness, egalitarian values and beliefs, perceived social inequality, (collective) efficacy, personal ideologies (e.g. conservatism), (negative) affect, warmth toward ingroups and outgroups, group respect etc. (cf. Bernburg et al., 2012; Crosby, 1976; Corning, 2000; Grant et al. 2015; Leach et al. 2007; Osborne et al., 2015; Osborne and Sibley, 2015; Zagefka et al., 2013). The prevailing view is that RD is an aversive state but data convincing that it may be in some way beneficial are also to be found (Damburn et al., 2006; Turley, 2002). The theory of relative deprivation seems far from precise and consistent (cf. Smith and Pettigrew, 2014). A special form of this state of affairs is persistently repeated differential effect hypothesis (also called “fit hypothesis”) (Smith and Pettigrew, 2014, p. 759, Schmitt et al., 2010) which still have not been conclusively confirmed. Above we expressed a nagging doubt if the differential effect (or fit) hypothesis may be considered a plausible theoretical proposal at all. According to it, fraternal relative deprivation causes protest and political action but has little impact on well-being, while egoistic relative deprivation impairs well-being but has at most little impact on political protest and engagement. Such a view may mean that egoistic relative deprivation has nothing in common with political cognition, attitudes, and activity. We considered this view incomplete and over-simplifying. There is no well-founded reason to deprive individual, egoistic relative deprivation

of the possibility to affect political cognition or to cause politically oriented action. Appealing to basic consequences of both egoistic and fraternal deprivation, we predicted that egoistic relative deprivation may impair democracy by promoting support for populism. Before answering our essential research question let us make an important methodological remark.

The measure and nature of relative deprivation used in the presented research demands a few comments. When we speak about deprivation, the question of which need deprivation we mean arises. We used Cantril’s ladders to assess discrepancies between the position of an individual’s quality of life (present, past, and future) and the position that his or her life deserves. It is worth noting that Smith et al. (2012, p. 207) expressed objections as to whether Cantril’s Self-Anchoring Scale may be a proper method for measuring relative deprivation, because “it does not measure discrepancies between their (people’s – K.K.) expectations as to what they *deserve* and their current situation”. It should be stressed that our measure was not a simple assessment of life quality but it was focused on deservingness (the core of relative deprivation – cf. Feather, 2015), and more precisely on the discrepancy between life considered as deserved and perceived (and expected in the future) life. Probably in our research we deal with the deprivation of need of a good life in peace and dignity. We do not deal with the deprivation of any concrete need (e.g. economic, like work and labor, salary, housing, etc.), but with the diffuse appraisal of life quality. Let us note on the margin that measures of relative deprivation based on direct comparison between the situation of an individual and another person (or persons) provides a lot of methodological and theoretical troubles (cf. Callan et al., 2015; Eibner and Evans, 2015; Feather, 2015).

Has our rationale concerning relative deprivation and support for populism interdependence found conformation? It is clearly visible that the influence of relative deprivation on support for populism is not imposing – standardized total effect of relative deprivation on support for populism was: .10 (2002), .04 (in 2010), and .06 (in 2017). It is hard to say that relative deprivation strongly determines support for populism. We may easily say that relative deprivation contributed to the complex mechanisms responsible for support for populism. Generally speaking, support for populism systematically depended directly on negative affect (resentment or depression) and political paranoia, which were increased by relative deprivation. It seems that support for populism was a function of the embittered Polish soul and faith that politics are ruled by conspiracies. These relationships were strengthened by political alienation, but only when the political system respected democratic principles. However, when populist political groupings came into power in Poland the role of egoistic relative deprivation changed. Admittedly support for populism still depended on resentment and political paranoia (explained by relative deprivation), but support for populism much more strongly was explained by identification with the populist political order which indicators might be low political alienation

and low depressive mood. The level of political alienation and depression depended more strongly on current politics of the government and the president, which suited support for populism. It means that the sources of variance of support for populism and especially of political alienation and depression that were external to the model played a prominent role. This result shows the importance of macro-social phenomena for populism, which are not very often included in psycho-political studies.

The most “active” mediator of the relationship between relative deprivation and support for populism turned out to be negative affect (depression in 2002, and resentment in 2010 and in 2017). Resentment increased support for populism and the political alienation and political paranoia mediators. We must remember, however, that in 2017 the influence of resentment was ambivalent. It strengthened support for populism first directly and then indirectly, strengthening political paranoia, and decreased support for populism, strengthening political alienation, which ultimately decreased support for populism. This phenomenon is clearly visible when we compare the values of standardized total effect (STE) of resentment on support for populism: .01 in 2017 and .21 in 2010 (with a STE value of .13 for depression in 2002). It seems that positive and negative indirect influences of resentment neutralized each other in 2017 when populism prevailed².

What is the nature of negative affect and especially resentment in the presented studies? Resentment – in accordance with Scheler’s (1972) ideas on “ressentiment” – was operationalized as a syndrome of social negativism and sense of grievance. Many empirical analyses show Poles as pessimists and mistrustful, and the “Polish soul” as embittered (cf. Czapiński and Panek, 2009, 2015; European Social Survey, 2012, 2014). Resentment finds its roots in the long history of Polish partitioning, occupations, and lost uprisings, and these roots are strong, well developed, and officially cultivated (cf. Davies, 1981). There is great potential for negative affect, pessimism and bitterness in Poland’s history and contemporary Polish mentality. Relative deprivation experienced today successfully maintains this potential.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The main aim of this paper was to show how egoistic relative deprivation favors support for populism. Generally speaking, we found two ways in which this happens. Relative deprivation consistently and directly strengthens dysphoric affect and indirectly (via dysphoric affect) strengthens political paranoia. Support for populism directly depends on dysphoric affect and on political paranoia. We may conclude that support for populism turned out to be a function on the one hand of negative mood, social negativism, and a sense of grievance, and on the other of a naïve theory of political reality saying that the most important (if not the only) mechanism of politics are hostile

plotted conspiracies. The role of depression and political alienation turned out to be ambiguous and seems to depend on current political order (democratic vs. populist). The ascertained results suggest that the predicted model “works” above all in a democratic system where support for populism is a form of expression of distrust in and protest against the polyarchic political order. Faith in conspiratorial theories saturated with negative affect may be interpreted as the most distinctive and salient form of undermining the legitimacy of the democratic order. Such a view places our results in the tradition of analyses of relationships between egoistic relative deprivation and protest behavior. What is worth stressing is that (in democracy) one of a wide range of antecedents of political distrust and protest turned out to be egoistic relative deprivation, and may be, more broadly, deficits of well being (cf. Marchlewska et al., 2018).

These conclusions may serve as a point of departure for further research. It seems appropriate to find out if the observed relationships can be replicated in countries with a predominance of democracy or populism. It should not be difficult to find populist states (quasi-democracy systems consisting in “tyranny of majority”, accompanied by the undermining of minority rights and of the rule of law) in the contemporary world.

However, the most important suggestion for future research concerns the role and place of group (fraternal) relative deprivation in the discussed relationships. We started with a nagging doubt if the differential effect (or fit) hypothesis may be considered a plausible theoretical proposal. Then we showed that egoistic relative deprivation itself may be responsible for a specific political engagement, namely support for populism. Now the question arises if the ascertained role of egoistic relative deprivation for support for populism is a specific one; in other words, if it may be independent of fraternal relative deprivation. The first step should be to check how fraternal relative deprivation may evoke support for populism when the same list of possible mediators would be left and considered. The second step would be devoted to investigate how egoistic and fraternal relative deprivation lead to support for populism together. Still, the collected data suggest that there are three possibilities. Firstly, both forms of deprivation may affect support for populism independently; secondly, one may moderate the influence of the other; and thirdly, one may mediate the influence of the other (cf. Pettigrew et al., 2008; Schmitt and Maes, 2002; Schmitt et al., 2010). The planned research project will enable us to decide which possibility is real.

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² It may be worth noting that in 2017 positive and negative influences of political alienation almost completely neutralized each other.

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