

Research Reports

Conservation Motivation, Social Equality and Left-Right Ideological Preferences in Western and Eastern Europe

Márton Hadarics*^a

[a] Political Psychology Research Lab, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary.

Abstract

We investigated how attitudes towards social equality can influence the relationship between conservation motivation (or openness) and personal ideological preferences on the left-right dimension, and how this relationship pattern differs between Western and Central & Eastern European (CEE) respondents. Using data from the European Social Survey (2012) we found that individual-level of conservation motivation reduces cultural egalitarianism in both the Western European and the CEE regions, but its connection with economic egalitarianism is only relevant in the CEE region where it fosters economic egalitarianism. Since both forms of egalitarianism were related to leftist ideological preferences in Western Europe, but in the CEE region only economic egalitarianism was ideologically relevant, we concluded that the classic “rigidity of the right” phenomenon is strongly related to cultural (anti)egalitarianism in Western Europe. At the same time, conservation motivation serves as a basis for the “rigidity of the left” in the post-socialist CEE region, in a great part due to the conventional egalitarian economic views.

Keywords: conservation, openness, social equality, left-right, ideology, European Social Survey

Europe's Journal of Psychology, 2017, Vol. 13(2), 336–351, doi:10.5964/ejop.v13i2.1334

Received: 2016-11-03. Accepted: 2017-03-04. Published (VoR): 2017-05-31.

Handling Editors: Vlad Glăveanu, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark; Sandra Obradovic, London School of Economics, London, United Kingdom

*Corresponding author at: Department of Social Psychology, Institute of Psychology, Eötvös Loránd University, 1064 Budapest, Izabella utca 46., Hungary. E-mail: marton.hadarics@ppk.elte.hu



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The integration of the formerly socialist Eastern European countries within the EU has been an ongoing process since the collapse of communism. On the other hand, this process seems not to be entirely flawless, with more and more signs indicating that the political culture of post-socialist countries is not completely compatible with the Western European one. Although the main party families in the European Parliament are organized primarily on an ideological base, it seems that these ideological cleavages can be overwritten by an East-West cleavage. We could recently observe this in reference to the currently ongoing migrant crisis for instance, where countries of the Visegrad Group showed a unified and firm anti-quota standpoint regardless of the ideological position of their governments. If we assume that a community established upon an ideological base can function effectively only to the extent as this ideological base means the same to the members of the community, then it can be a source of serious anomalies if the content of a certain ideological label is interpreted differently by the individual members of this community.

As the theory of 'ideology as motivated social cognition' argues, one can gravitate to a certain political ideology due to well-defined personal motivational needs (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). But if the specific content of a particular political-ideological label differs within two separate societal environments, the motivational background behind the acceptance of that ideology may differ as well, what might be a highly relevant factor regarding the deviations between the political cultures of older and newer EU members.

Conservation Motivation, Ideology, and Social Equality

It has been in the centre of inquiry for a long time how individual-level psychological characteristics determine people's political and ideological preferences. Conservation motivation seems to be of high priority in this regard. Conservation motivation can be defined as motivation to follow traditional and normative practices that preserve the status quo and deliver a personal sense of stability and predictability (see Schwartz, 1994, 2003). Previous research suggests that individual difference variables fostering personal resistance to change, or motivation to conserve, make people identify themselves with rightist and conservative ideological standpoints. Cognitive style indicators and personality traits, such as (low) integrative complexity (Tetlock, 1983), need for closure (Chirumbolo, 2002), dogmatism (Rokeach, 1960), authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1998), conscientiousness and (low) openness from the Big Five personality traits (Caprara et al., 2006; Vecchione et al., 2011), or personal values related to conservation (Pioro, Schwartz, & Davidov, 2011) have all been shown to relate to rightist conservative ideological preferences in Western democracies. Jost and his colleagues (Jost, Federico, et al., 2009; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003) offer a motivational explanation for this relationship arguing that by emphasizing social norms, traditions and conventions, and by approving the existing status quo, rightist ideologies are effective mental tools to reduce uncertainty and to create the sense of stability and predictability in the social sphere.

Since personal motivation to conservation enhances conventional norm-adherence, people with a higher level of this motivation tend to be more hostile and prejudiced towards nonconventional outgroups like ethnic minorities or immigrants, because they perceive these groups as a threat to the existing social hierarchy and status quo (e.g. Duckitt, 2001; Feather & McKee, 2008). Besides cultural conservatism, tolerance of social inequalities is also considered to be an important element of the ideological right in the Western world, because people with a rightist or conservative ideological preference tend to be sceptical about any policy solutions that aim to decrease social inequalities. These policies are often perceived by conservatives as artificial social experiments that modify the traditional social hierarchy and order (Bobbio, 1996; Giddens, 1998).

If we think about social equality, there are at least two important aspects of the concept that should be considered. These two aspects are in accordance with the two-dimensional taxonomic systems of political ideologies. This two-dimensional classification approach argues that most political ideologies can be classified along two dimensions: one based on social-cultural issues, and another based on economic preferences (e.g. Nolan, 1971; Slomp, 2000). In this regard we can make a differentiation between beliefs about cultural inequality indicating our attitudes towards nonconventional outgroups, and beliefs about economic equality showing our personal preferences regarding the distribution and redistribution of material goods and resources. As it seems, the ideological left-right spectrum splits across this two equality dimensions in Western democracies, the right side being less tolerant towards non-conventional outgroups and more sceptic about direct redistributive policies aiming to moderate economic inequalities. (e.g. Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Baslevent

& Kirmanoglu, 2011; Bean & Papadakis, 1998; Scheepers, Gijssberts, & Coenders, 2002; Semyonov, Rajiman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006).

Consequently, in Western democracies people with a higher motivation to conserve tend to gravitate to the ideological right, at least partly because of their attitudes towards social equality. Regarding economic equality that can happen because of two reasons. First, since several nonconventional outgroups (e.g. immigrants or other ethnic minorities) are in a disadvantaged economic position, opposition to large-scale income redistribution can serve as a tool to keep these groups in their underdog position (Gilens, 1999). Secondly, social norms and conventions can be applied to economic distributional principles and processes as well. If certain beliefs about the redistribution of resources can be considered as normative in a given society, its citizens with a high level of conservation motivation tend to accept those beliefs. In Western countries (especially in the USA) beliefs related to free market capitalism have this kind of strong normative nature due to their deep embeddedness within the public thinking (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Furthermore, these beliefs are important parts of the right side of the ideological spectrum, contrary to the egalitarian economic preferences of voters with a left-wing identification.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, citizens of Western democracies with a higher level of conservation motivation (and with personality characteristics that foster this motivation) tend to tolerate inequalities both culturally and economically, and to show rightist ideological preferences, partly due to their attitudes towards these two forms of social equality (for a review see Jost et al., 2003).

Conservation Motivation, Ideology and Social Equality in Eastern Europe

But how do these relations between conservation motivation, beliefs about social equality, and left-right ideological preferences appear in the context of the post-socialist CEE region? Recent attempts have failed to find consistent associations between left-right ideological preferences and psychological traits related to conservation motivation in this region. Although some results from Poland suggest that traits like (low) openness (Van Hiel, Kossowska, & Mervielde, 2000), right-wing authoritarianism (Korzeniowski, 2006), and need for closure (Kossowska & Van Hiel, 2003) are related to rightist preferences, regional level comparisons between Eastern and Western Europe showed no consistent relationship between the openness-conservation motivational dimension and personal left-right ideological preferences in the post-socialist region (Barni, Vieno, & Roccato, 2016; Piurko, Schwartz, & Davidov, 2011; Roets, Cornelis, & Van Hiel, 2014; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, & Shrout, 2007).

As we have seen, attitudes towards cultural and economic equality play an important role in the way conservation motivation determines ideological preferences in Western Europe. We expect a more transparent pattern in this regard also in the case of Eastern Europe, if these two equality-related attitude dimensions were taken into account as integral parts of the interplay between the psychological and the ideological level. Since economic egalitarianism has a strong historical embeddedness in the post-socialist public thinking, social psychological research carried out in Eastern Europe revealed that psychological characteristics fostering conservation motivation tend to correlate with the support for income equality, large-scale redistribution, and governmental economic intervention (e.g. Barni, Vieno, & Roccato, 2016; Duriez, Van Hiel, & Kossowska, 2005; Golec, 2002; Hadarics, 2016; Korzeniowski, 2006; McFarland, Ageyev, & Abalakina-Paap, 1992). But if this kind of economic egalitarianism is related to leftist ideological preferences also in Eastern Europe, we can assume that conservation motivation might influence ideological preferences in a more complex way in the

CEE region compared to the Western European one, having a mixed effect on rightist (vs. leftist) preferences: a fostering one through cultural antiegalitarianism, and an attenuating one through economic egalitarianism.

Our Study

Our main goal was to understand how conservation motivation predicts left-right ideological preferences in Western and Eastern Europe, and to reveal the role of attitudes towards the two main forms of equality as potential mediators in this relationship. In accordance with the results of former studies presented above, we assumed that in Western Europe conservation motivation is related to rightist ideological preferences, partly mediated by anti-equality beliefs regarding both cultural and economic issues. But conservation motivation is expected to have a mixed relationship with personal left-right identification in Eastern Europe, strengthening rightist preferences through anti-equality attitudes towards nonconventional outgroups, and, at the same time, moderating it by the acceptance of pro-equality economic views (see [Figure 1](#)).

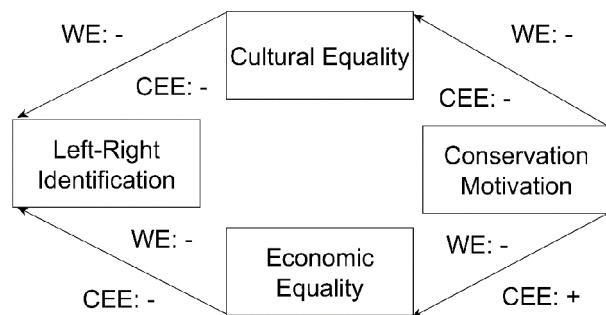


Figure 1. Hypothesized relationships.

Note. WE = Western Europe; CEE = Central Eastern Europe.

Method

Sample

To explore the associations between the motivational, attitudinal, and ideological variables on a regional level, we relied on the 6th round (2012) survey database of the *European Social Survey Programme (ESS)*. On the basis of the database we created a Central Eastern European (CEE) ($N = 7768$) and a Western European sample ($N = 7968$), each including data of the representative samples of 4 countries. When the specific countries were selected to represent the two groups, it was an important consideration to select EU-member countries that share main characteristics regarding historical experiences and societal conditions. Accordingly, the post-socialist CEE sample included data from the countries of the Visegrad Group, which is one of the main political cooperation platforms for the CEE countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, while the Western European sample consisted of the national samples of four traditional Western European democracies with a long past of political pluralism and free market capitalism: Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Measures

All variables were taken directly from the questionnaire of the 6th (2012) round of the ESS research programme. A number of ESS items have an inverse scoring, in case of such items the scoring was reversed so that the higher scores mark the greater extent of agreement with the content of the given item (see Table 1).

Conservation Motivation

Conservation motivation was measured by 4 items from the *Human Values Scale* of the ESS survey, which assesses the so called motivational value types defined by Schwartz (2003). From the 4 items 2 measured the higher-order value of conservation (*“Tradition is important to her/him. She/he tries to follow the customs handed down by her/his religion or her/his family.”*; *“She/he believes that people should do what they're told. She/he thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching.”*), and 2 other items measured the higher-order value of openness (*“Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her/him. She/he likes to do things in her/his own original way.”*; *“She/he likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. She/he thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life.”*). As Schwartz (2003) argues, the conservation-openness dimension in his value system captures the individual motivational preference of preservation and stability opposed to change. When the specific items were selected, our aim was to stick to this definitional distinction as close as possible. Respondents were asked to indicate how much the presented items described them personally on a 6-point scale (1 = *Very much like me* - 6 = *Not like me at all*). As suggested by Schwartz (2003), in order to control for individual response tendencies all responses were centered around the respondents' mean response to all 21 items of the *Human Values Scale*.

Cultural Egalitarianism

Attitudes towards cultural and group-based equality were captured by three indicator items of the ESS questionnaire. One of these items asked about respondents' opinions regarding homosexuals where answers had to be marked on a 5-point scale (*“Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish.”*; 1=Agree strongly – 5=Disagree strongly). The second indicator showed personal opinion about immigrants (*“Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?”*; 0=worse – 10=better), while the third item asked respondents about the importance of minority rights (*“How important do you think it is for democracy in general that the rights of minority groups are protected?”*; 0=Not at all – 10=Extremely). In order to neutralise agreement response bias, responses for this third item were also centered around the respondents' mean response to other 15 items regarding the subjective importance of different political characteristics for democracy.

Economic Egalitarianism

Economic egalitarian preferences were operationalized in the form of the approval of small income differences, which was measured by two indicator items: *“How important do you think it is for democracy in general that the government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels?”* (0=Not at all – 10=Extremely); *“The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.”* (1=Agree strongly – 5=Disagree strongly). Since the first item was the part of the same questionnaire block as the third item for cultural egalitarianism, responses for this question were also centered in the same way as we have described the process above.

Left-Right Ideological Preferences

Personal ideological preferences were measured in the ESS questionnaire by the following question: „*In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*”

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Western Europe			Central Eastern Europe		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Placement on left-right scale	7350	5.104	2.147	6712	5.294	2.416
Government should reduce differences in income levels	7860	3.693	1.086	7585	4.021	1.030
Important to reduce income differences	7136	-0.365	1.924	6414	-0.038	1.776
Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish	7907	4.240	0.960	7193	3.232	1.271
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	7850	4.805	2.224	7143	4.687	2.311
Importance of minority rights	7136	0.183	1.318	6414	-0.333	1.662
Important to think new ideas and being creative	7907	4.439	1.223	7649	4.376	1.239
Important to try new and different things in life	7917	4.099	1.316	7642	4.087	1.324
Important to follow traditions and customs	7903	4.120	1.407	7665	4.665	1.162
Important to do what is told and follow rules	7896	3.697	1.415	7627	4.276	1.241

Data Analysis

In order to reveal the association pattern between conservation motivation, attitudes towards cultural and economic equality, and ideological preferences, we applied the method of structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 22. Based on the covariance between variables (see Table 2) a pathway model was set up for both the CEE and the Western European samples.

As a first step, we checked the adequacy of our measurement models. The variables of cultural egalitarianism, economic egalitarianism, and conservation motivation were operationalized as latent variables in the models, and were based on the indicator items presented in the section describing the measures. Our measurement models showed an adequate fit in the case of both samples (Western Europe: $\chi^2 = 296.48$; $df = 24$; CFI = .947; RMSEA = .038; Eastern Europe: $\chi^2 = 444.27$; $df = 24$; CFI = .909; RMSEA = .047). As a counterpoint, we also checked the adequacy of a model where only one general egalitarianism latent variable was applied operationalized by all the five indicator items regarding egalitarianism. These measurement models showed a substantially worse fit, indicating that the conceptual differentiation between cultural and economic egalitarianism is relevant (Western Europe: $\chi^2 = 913.50$; $df = 26$; CFI = .829; RMSEA = .065; Eastern Europe: $\chi^2 = 598.19$; $df = 26$; CFI = .887; RMSEA = .053).

As a second step, a structural model was created for both samples where conservation motivation served as an independent variable, and we examined its impact on the two clusters of views about social inequality, and on the left-right ideological preference. Associations between egalitarian attitudes and ideological preferences were also taken into account (see Figures 2 and 3).

Table 2

Variances and Covariances of Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Placement on left right scale	<i>E: 5.770</i> <i>W: 4.627</i>	-.407***	-.514***	.044	.444***	.109	.186***	.335***	.005	.017
2. Government should reduce differences in income levels	-.611***	<i>E: 1.100</i> <i>W: 1.194</i>	.870***	-.043***	-.411***	-.184***	-.047***	-.036***	.052**	.129***
3. Important to reduce income differences	-.713***	1.203***	<i>E: 3.180</i> <i>W: 3.730</i>	-.246***	-.515***	-.621***	-.113***	-.088***	.050	.158***
4. Gays and lesbians free to live life as they wish	-.267***	.052**	-.090***	<i>E: 1.584</i> <i>W: .871</i>	.410***	.147***	.185***	.181***	-.024*	-.132***
5. Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	-.737***	-.008	-.238***	.325***	<i>E: 5.180</i> <i>W: 4.647</i>	.650***	.018	.156***	-.013	-.001
6. Importance of minority rights	-.231***	-.047*	-.326***	.138***	.532***	<i>E: 2.703</i> <i>W: 1.697</i>	-.033	.023	.091**	.058*
7. Important to think new ideas and being creative	-.039	-.020	-.115***	.082***	.081***	.014	<i>E: 1.394</i> <i>W: 1.441</i>	.679***	.086***	.062**
8. Important to try new and different things in life	-.032	-.044	-.093**	.076***	.096***	-.008	.581***	<i>E: 1.646</i> <i>W: 1.693</i>	.130***	.068**
9. Important to follow traditions and customs	.416***	-.095***	-.094**	-.131***	-.125**	-.071**	.042*	.115***	<i>E: 1.490</i> <i>W: 1.992</i>	.452***
10. Important to do what is told and follow rules	.460***	-.014	.111**	-.207***	-.272***	-.107***	.065***	.108***	.589***	<i>E: 1.280</i> <i>W: 1.932</i>

Note. Covariances for the Western European sample are reported in the bottom triangle, variances are reported in italics on the diagonal, and covariances for the CEE sample are reported in the top triangle.

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

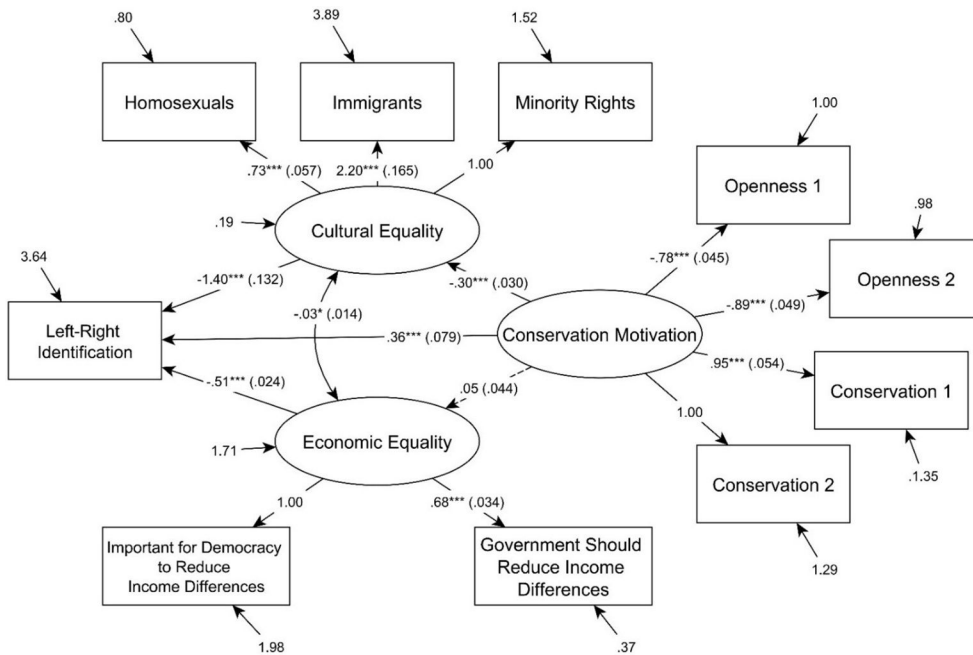


Figure 2. Pathway Model Explaining Left-Right Ideological Preferences – Western Europe.

Note. Unstandardized regression weights are followed by standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardized residual variances are displayed for every variable. ($\chi^2 = 523.54$; $df = 30$; CFI = .920; RMSEA = .045).

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

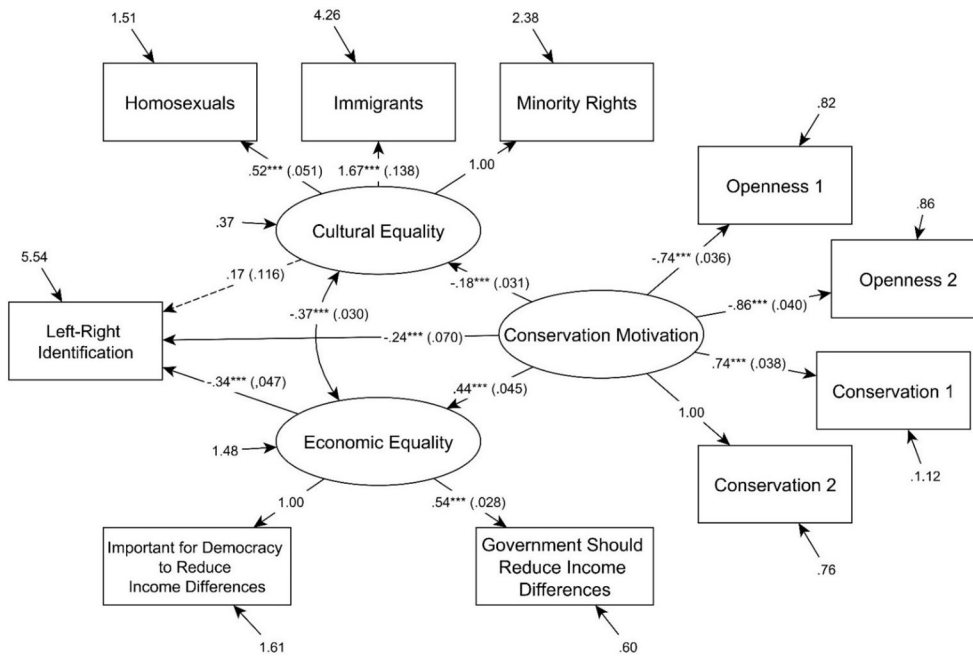


Figure 3. Pathway Model Explaining Left-Right Ideological Preferences – CEE Countries.

Note. Unstandardized regression weights are followed by standard errors in parentheses. Unstandardized residual variances are displayed for every variable. ($\chi^2 = 509.99$; $df = 30$; CFI = .902; RMSEA = .045).

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

Results

According to the results of our SEM analysis both models showed a good fit (Western Europe: $\chi^2 = 523.54$; $df = 30$; CFI = .920; RMSEA = .045; Eastern Europe: $\chi^2 = 509.99$; $df = 30$; CFI = .902; RMSEA = .045). As the models indicate, conservation motivation is related to attitudes towards cultural equality in the same direction within the two samples by showing a negative relationship with it in both cases ($b_{W-Eu} = -.303$; S.E. = .030; $p < .001$; $b_{E-Eu} = -.184$; S.E. = .031; $p < .001$). At the same time, its effect on economic egalitarianism differs between the two models. Conservation motivation enhances the approval of economic equality in the CEE sample, while there is no significant relationship between the two variables in the Western European sample ($b_{W-Eu} = .050$; S.E. = .044; $p = .253$; $b_{E-Eu} = .442$; S.E. = .045; $p < .001$). There is also a difference between the two models in the way conservation motivation is related to ideological preferences, since it shows a reverse connection with the left-right ideological self-placement within the two samples, a positive one within the Western European model and a negative one within the CEE model ($b_{W-Eu} = .365$; S.E. = .079; $p < .001$; $b_{E-Eu} = -.249$; S.E. = .070; $p < .001$).

If we examine the association between left-right self-placement and attitudes towards social inequalities, we can see that more egalitarian views made left-wing self-placement more likely in the Western European sample, and this was true in the case of economic equality ($b_{W-Eu} = -.517$; S.E. = .024; $p < .001$) and cultural equality too ($b_{W-Eu} = -1.402$; S.E. = .132; $p < .001$). On the other hand, while the direction of the relationship between economic egalitarianism and left-right ideological preferences was the same in the CEE sample as in the Western European sample ($b_{E-Eu} = -.340$; S.E. = .047; $p < .001$), there was no significant relationship between cultural-intergroup egalitarianism and personal ideological preferences within the CEE sample ($b_{E-Eu} = .178$; S.E. = .116; $p = .124$).

In order to validate our findings on the regional level, the same models were created also for the national samples constituting our two regional samples. Most relevant regression coefficients from these models seem to support our results presented above (see [Table 3](#)), however we also found some country level differences. While the relationship between conservation motivation and the approval of cultural equality is significantly negative within all the national samples with the exception of Hungary, the relationship between conservation motivation and economic egalitarianism is equivocal. This connection, in accordance with our expectations, turned out to be significantly positive within three out of the four national CEE samples. At the same time, two Western countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) were also identified showing a similar but more moderate positive relationship between these variables.

Associations between attitudes regarding social equality and ideological preferences show a complex pattern as well. The relationship between economic egalitarianism and the left-right dimension looks relatively homogeneous, since there is a negative relationship between these variables in all national samples except for Slovakia. At the same time, associations related to cultural egalitarianism seem to be much more diverse, especially among the CEE countries, where we can find two significant associations between these variables, in the cases of Poland and the Czech Republic. But while cultural-intergroup egalitarianism fosters leftist ideological preferences in Poland, it is related to rightist identification in the Czech Republic. The pattern is much more univocal among the Western European countries, where the approval of cultural equality is related to leftist preferences in each investigated country.

Table 3

Relevant Coefficients From the National Models

Country	Conservation - Economic Equality			Conservation - Cultural Equality			Economic Equality - Left-Right Identification			Cultural Equality - Left-Right Identification			Conservation - Left-Right Identification		
	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p</i>
Belgium	.410	.125	.001	-.193	.066	.003	-.290	.053	***	-1.073	.281	***	.024	.151	.872
France	-.030	.086	.731	-.263	.048	***	-.560	.056	***	-3.464	.505	***	.132	.196	.501
Netherlands	.288	.084	***	-.254	.051	***	-.673	.059	***	-4.018	1.244	.001	.048	.346	.889
United Kingdom	-.064	.066	.331	-.506	.085	***	-.412	.045	***	-.587	.171	***	.611	.167	***
Czech Republic	.721	.097	***	-.197	.056	***	-.530	.068	***	.814	.255	.001	-.830	.148	***
Hungary	-.001	.031	.967	-.023	.017	.190	-.910	.184	***	.480	.297	.107	-.118	.138	.392
Poland	.748	.119	***	-.443	.069	***	-.288	.076	***	-1.310	.385	***	.547	.221	.013
Slovakia	.455	.075	***	-.233	.070	***	-2.360	3.420	.490	-3.256	5.410	.547	-.488	.406	.230

*** $p < .001$.

Mediational Analysis

As the results presented above indicate, beyond its direct effect, conservation motivation presumably has also a mediated indirect effect on ideological preferences through cultural and/or economic egalitarianism. To reveal these indirect relationships, a mediation analysis was conducted with the bootstrapping technique suggested by [Macho and Ledermann \(2011\)](#), where we requested 95% confidence intervals using 2000 resamples. According to this mediation analysis, a significant indirect effect of conservation motivation was channelled by cultural egalitarianism (.40; $p = .002$) but not by economic egalitarianism (-.03; $p = .154$) in the Western European sample, while in the CEE sample conservation motivation showed a significant indirect effect via economic egalitarianism (-.15; $p = .002$), but not cultural egalitarianism (-.04; $p = .124$).

Discussion

The results show that conservation motivation makes people susceptible to the belittlement of nonconventional groups both in the Eastern and Western European contexts. Irrespective of the cultural and historical background, the very same process seems to work on both sides of Europe. The greater importance is set by someone to insisting on the dominant norms of the given society, the more negative becomes her opinion about the groups that do not comply with these norms.

At the same time, such norms can be applied to economic and income distribution axioms as well, and from this point of view there is a considerable difference between the two parts of Europe. Our result indicate, that since economic egalitarianism is a deeply embedded element of the public thinking in the post-socialist states, in this region conservation motivation is accompanied by the desire for the reduction of income differences merely on account of its normative nature. This relationship was much less characteristic in the Western European data, but was nonetheless identifiable to a moderate level in Belgium and in the Netherlands. It is worth noting that these two countries are regarded as so called hybrid conservative-social democratic welfare regimes, with stronger egalitarian preferences and traditions than other Western European countries, like the United Kingdom or France (e.g. [Kammer, Niehues, & Peichl, 2012](#)). But as another possible explanation for this

later result, it is worth referring to the notion of Malka and her colleagues (Malka & Soto, 2015; Malka, Soto, Inzlicht, & Lelkes, 2014), who argue that conservation motivation can be related to rightist economic preferences only within ideologically constrained countries with a highly polarized political landscape, but much more likely to be related to leftist economic views within ideologically less constrained societies, like Belgium and the Netherlands were in our Western European dataset.

The weak relationship between economic egalitarianism and conservation motivation in the Western European sample is not surprising considering that the appropriate level of governmental redistribution has been a matter of continuous debate for a long time in Western European countries. On the other hand, this sort of debate was not possible during the socialist era in the CEE region. For this reason, egalitarian economic views became undisputable normative ideological elements in these countries, and support for small income differences remained normative in post-socialist CEE countries. Therefore, such economic attitudes seemingly still serve as important orientation points in the ideological and political opinion formation for people with a higher level of conservation motivation.

Due to the associations between attitudes towards social equality and conservation motivation described above, it seems justified to put also these egalitarian (or anti-egalitarian) attitudes in the equation as potential mediators when considering how conservation motivation affects left-right ideological preferences. Furthermore, on the national level, a direct relationship between conservation motivation and ideological preferences was identified only in one Western European and two CEE countries, and the direction of the relationship was different in these two post-socialist countries.

Of course, attitudes towards social equality can affect the relationship between conservation motivation and ideological preferences only to the extent that they are connected to these constructs, namely that they function as an object for motivated social cognition, and also function as an integral part of the left-right ideological distinction. Examining the ideological embeddedness of the attitudes towards social equality, we can see that both economic and cultural egalitarianism makes leftist ideological preferences in Western Europe more probable. We can therefore conclude that tolerating inequalities in general can be regarded as a rightist ideological characteristic in Western Europe. It seems to be also true that conservation motivation (or low openness) fosters rightist preferences in the Western European region mainly via the rejection of nonconventional outgroups, and not because of the higher tolerance of inequalities in general.

The pattern is essentially different in the CEE region, where only economic egalitarianism is related to the left-right dimension out of the two forms of egalitarianism. This difference supports the view of Knutsen (1995), who argues that the left-right dimension possesses the potential to absorb any kind of content which is related to the main political cleavages in a given society. That is why the precise meaning of the ideological left and right can vary from one society to another, and from one period of time to another within a particular society. Presumably, that is why we were not able to identify a clear regional pattern about the relationship between cultural egalitarianism and the left-right dimension among the CEE countries. At the same time, economic egalitarianism showed the same association with leftist preferences among the CEE countries as in the case of Western Europe. The latter result is particularly important if we consider how conservation motivation is related to ideological preferences in the CEE region, because, although this motivation enhances economic egalitarianism and reduces cultural egalitarianism at the same time, only the former seems to be ideologically relevant. This means that in contrast with the Western European pattern, conservation motivation makes

people identify with the ideological left in the CEE region, and makes them do that at least partly via the acceptance of egalitarian economic preferences. The motivational force of conservation leads people to accept conventional post-socialist economic beliefs, which beliefs in turn can serve as the basis for formulating political-ideological (left-right) preferences.

We have to stress also that although our focus was on the issue of social equality as a potential mediator between the motivation of conservation and ideological preferences, we can assume that several other issues might influence the conservation-ideology relationship, which ones were ignored in our present study. As it was mentioned above, a certain belief or issue can influence this relationship only if it is related to conservations motivation and the left-right ideological cleavage at the same time, and it is far from being a necessity that the very same issue is present in a wide range of countries. Political-ideological cleavages can be based on a great variety of social issues, and this variety cannot be ignored when we investigate ideology as motivated social cognition within a particular social environment.

Of course, we have to mention some additional considerable limitations of our study, mostly ensuing from the nature of the analysed dataset and the selected research methods. While we have to stress that analysing ESS data is a perfect tool to maximise the external validity of our results, we also have to admit that construct validity is not the most significant strength of such a large-scale international survey programme. Most of the selected variables were measured only by a very limited number of items selected from the ESS questionnaire, and not by thoroughly constructed and carefully validated attitude and personality scales. We have to emphasize also that our study was a correlational one, consequently, we can not be completely certain about the causal relationships between the investigated variables.

Conclusion

As we have seen, by adding attitudes towards social equality to the equation, a substantially clearer pattern was revealed regarding how conservation motivation (or openness) is related to our political-ideological preferences. It has been a broadly shared idea that conservation motivation makes people lean to rightist and conservative ideologies because of becoming overly suspicious of large-scale societal changes (for a review see [Jost et al., 2003, 2009](#)). Furthermore, since the level of social equality has continuously increased in the course of the long process of democratization in Western Europe, it seems to be somewhat a necessity that those with a higher level of conservation motivation (or a lower level of openness) might be more sceptical about the idea of social equality. But social equality can be considered to consist of two dimensions, namely cultural and economic equality. And while these two dimensions have been interrelated in most Western democracies, the two dimensions became more independent from each other in Eastern Europe during the socialist era.

Consequently, if conservation motivation fosters the acceptance of socially normative beliefs and opinions, we have to consider what kind of opinions can be regarded as conventional when we talk about the different forms of social equality. The post-socialist CEE countries are in a specific situation in this regard, because the normative power of the two dimensions points to opposite directions. It is for this reason that conservation motivation has directly the opposite effect on cultural and economic egalitarianism, a negative one to the former and a positive one to the later.

When we look at the interplay between conservation motivation and ideological preferences, we also have to bare the ideological relevance of these conventional beliefs in mind. Conservation motivation (and openness) can influence our left-right ideological preferences only to the extent that it is associated with beliefs and opinions that are attached to the main political and ideological cleavages in a certain society. Social equality seems to be such an issue. While it contributes to the classical phenomenon of the “rigidity of the right” in Western Europe through cultural (anti)egalitarianism, it seems to serve as the basis of the post-socialist “rigidity of the left” in Eastern Europe through economic egalitarianism.

Notes

i) Unstandardized indirect effects are presented with significance levels.

Funding

The author has no funding to report.

Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The author has no support to report.

References

- Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York, NY, USA: Harper.
- Altemeyer, R. A. (1998). The other “authoritarian personality.” In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 30, pp. 47-91). New York, NY, USA: Academic Press.
- Arts, W., & Gelissen, J. (2001). Welfare states, solidarity and justice principles: Does the type really matter? *Acta Sociologica*, 44, 283-299. doi:[10.1177/000169930104400401](https://doi.org/10.1177/000169930104400401)
- Barni, D., Vieno, A., & Roccato, M. (2016). Living in a non-communist versus in a post-communist European country moderates the relation between conservative values and political orientation: A multilevel study. *European Journal of Personality*, 30, 92-104. doi:[10.1002/per.2043](https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2043)
- Baslevant, C., & Kirmanoglu, H. (2011). Discerning self-interested behaviour in attitudes towards welfare state responsibilities across Europe. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 20, 344-352. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2397.2010.00751.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2397.2010.00751.x)
- Bean, C., & Papadakis, E. (1998). A comparison of mass attitudes towards the welfare state in different institutional regimes, 1985–1990. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 10, 211-236. doi:[10.1093/ijpor/10.3.211](https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/10.3.211)
- Bobbio, N. (1996). *Left and right: The significance of a political distinction*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.

- Caprara, G. V., Schwartz, S., Capanna, C., Vecchione, M., & Barbaranelli, C. (2006). Personality and politics: Values, traits, and political choice. *Political Psychology, 27*(1), 1-28. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2006.00447.x
- Chirumbolo, A. (2002). The relationship between need for cognitive closure and political orientation: The mediating role of authoritarianism. *Personality and Individual Differences, 32*(4), 603-610. doi:10.1016/S0191-8869(01)00062-9
- Duckitt, J. (2001). A dual-process cognitive-motivational theory of ideology and prejudice. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 33*, 41-113. doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(01)80004-6
- Duriez, B., Van Hiel, A., & Kossowska, M. (2005). Authoritarianism and social dominance in Western and Eastern Europe: The importance of the sociopolitical context and of political interest and involvement. *Political Psychology, 26*(2), 299-320. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2005.00419.x
- Feather, N. T., & McKee, I. R. (2008). Values and prejudice: Predictors of attitudes towards Australian Aborigines. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 60*(2), 80-90. doi:10.1080/00049530701449513
- Giddens, A. (1998). *The third way: The renewal of social democracy*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.
- Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media and the politics of antipoverty policy*. London, United Kingdom: The University of Chicago Press.
- Golec, A. (2002). Need for cognitive closure and political conservatism: Studies on the nature of the relationship. *Polish Psychological Bulletin, 33*(4), 5-12.
- Hadarics, M. (2016). Motivational and ideological underpinnings of welfare preferences in Eastern and Western Europe. *Europe's Journal of Psychology, 12*, 169-190. doi:10.5964/ejop.v12i1.1045
- Jost, J. T., Federico, C. M., & Napier, J. L. (2009). Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60*, 307-337. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163600
- Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*(3), 339-375. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.339
- Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of system-justifying ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*, 260-265. doi:10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00377.x
- Kammer, A., Niehues, J., & Peichl, A. (2012). Welfare regimes and welfare state outcomes in Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy, 22*(5), 455-471. doi:10.1177/0958928712456572
- Knutsen, O. (1995). Value orientations, political conflicts and left-right identification: A comparative study. *European Journal of Political Research, 28*(1), 63-93. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.1995.tb00487.x
- Korzeniowski, K. (2006). Authoritarianism in Poland in the days of system transformation. In A. Golec de Zavala & K. Skarzynska (Eds.), *Understanding social change: Political psychology in Poland* (pp. 71-86). New York, NY, USA: Nova Science Publishers.
- Kossowska, M., & Van Hiel, A. (2003). The relationship between need for closure and conservative beliefs in Western and Eastern Europe. *Political Psychology, 24*(3), 501-518. doi:10.1111/0162-895X.00338

- Macho, S., & Ledermann, T. (2011). Estimating, testing, and comparing specific effects in structural equation models: The phantom model approach. *Psychological Methods, 16*, 34-43. doi:10.1037/a0021763
- Malka, A., & Soto, C. J. (2015). Rigidity of the economic right? Menu-independent and menu-dependent influences of psychological dispositions on political attitudes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 24*, 137-142. doi:10.1177/0963721414556340
- Malka, A., Soto, C. J., Inzlicht, M., & Leles, Y. (2014). Do needs for security and certainty predict cultural and economic conservatism? A cross-national analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 106*, 1031-1051. doi:10.1037/a0036170
- McFarland, S. G., Ageyev, V. S., & Abalakina-Paap, M. A. (1992). Authoritarianism in the former Soviet Union. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*(6), 1004-1010. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.63.6.1004
- Nolan, D. (1971). Classifying and analyzing politico-economic systems. *The Individualist, 1*, 5-11.
- Piurko, Y., Schwartz, S. H., & Davidov, E. (2011). Basic personal values and the meaning of left-right political orientations in 20 countries. *Political Psychology, 32*(4), 537-561. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00828.x
- Roets, A., Cornelis, I., & Van Hiel, A. (2014). Openness as a predictor of political orientation and conventional and unconventional political activism in Western and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 96*(1), 53-63. doi:10.1080/00223891.2013.809354
- Rokeach, M. (1960). *The open and the closed mind*. New York, NY, USA: Basic Books.
- Scheepers, P., Gijssberts, M., & Coenders, M. (2002). Ethnic exclusionism in European countries: Public opposition to civil rights for legal migrants as a response to perceived ethnic threat. *European Sociological Review, 18*, 17-34. doi:10.1093/esr/18.1.17
- Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Are there universal aspects in the structure and contents of human values? *The Journal of Social Issues, 50*, 19-45. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x
- Schwartz, S. H. (2003). A proposal for measuring value orientations across nations. *Questionnaire Package of the European Social Survey* (pp. 259-290). Retrieved from https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/core_ess_questionnaire/ESS_core_questionnaire_human_values.pdf
- Semyonov, M., Rajzman, R., & Gorodzeisky, A. (2006). The rise of anti-foreigner sentiment in European societies, 1988-2000. *American Sociological Review, 71*, 426-449. doi:10.1177/000312240607100304
- Slomp, H. (2000). *European politics into the twenty-first century: Integration and division*. Westport, CT, USA: Praeger.
- Tetlock, P. E. (1983). Cognitive style and political ideology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 118-126. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.45.1.118
- Thorisdottir, H., Jost, J. T., Liviatan, I., & Shrout, P. E. (2007). Psychological needs and values underlying left-right political orientation: Cross-national evidence from Eastern and Western Europe. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 71*(2), 175-203. doi:10.1093/poq/nfm008

Van Hiel, A., Kossowska, M., & Mervielde, I. (2000). The relationship between openness to experience and political ideology. *Personality and Individual Differences, 28*(4), 741-751. doi:[10.1016/S0191-8869\(99\)00135-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(99)00135-X)

Vecchione, M., Schoden, H., Castro, J. L. G., Cieciuch, J., Pavlopoulos, V., & Caprara, G. V. (2011). Personality correlates of party preference: The Big Five in five big European countries. *Personality and Individual Differences, 51*, 737-742. doi:[10.1016/j.paid.2011.06.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.06.015)

About the Author

Márton Hadarics is an assistant professor at the Institute of Psychology, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary. He has obtained his PhD in 2015 at the ELTE Doctoral School of Psychology. His interests center around social and political psychology. His basic research involves the study of motivated social and political cognition, attitudes towards social inequalities, and postsocialist system justification in Central and Eastern Europe.