

Objective of the project

„Solidarity with all humanity”, read the banner held by the protestors who attended a „Refugees welcome” rally held in September 2015 in Warsaw. The event aimed to express support for Poland’s active role in solving the refugee crisis – its participants wanted to show that, contrary to the popular belief, Polish society is ready to accept a few thousands of asylum-seekers fleeing the civil war in Syria. At the same time, elsewhere in the city another event took place. More than 10,000 people marched against the relocation of refugees to Poland. „Today refugees, tomorrow terrorists!”, they chanted.

What motivated the participants of these two events to abandon their daily routines and take to the streets? Did the engagement in a public gathering affect the protestors in any way? If so, how? The present project aims to answer these questions by investigating two classes of engagement undertaken by the members of high-status groups: solidarity-based collective action and collective action against the low-status out-group. By solidarity-based collective action we understand the efforts made by the members of privileged groups to benefit the disadvantaged (e.g. Refugees Welcome movement). By contrast, we define collective action against the out-group as the engagement undertaken by the members of high-status groups to secure their privileged position through impairing the position of low-status out-groups (e.g. Stop Islamisation of Europe movement). We propose two models of out-group related engagement (solidarity-based collective action and collective action against the out-group, respectively) that involve contextual, structural and psychological antecedents of activism as well as the psychological and structural effects of collective action.

Research to be carried out

The project involves five parallel lines of research and nine studies. Line 1, including a single, longitudinal survey examines the antecedents and consequences of outgroup-related engagement in the population of Poles. In this study, respondents would declare their attitudes toward 4 out-groups: Jews, Muslims, refugees and homosexuals. On the other hand, two field studies comprising Line 2 are devised to investigate the psychological results of engagement. Using data collected from the real-life activists (e.g. participants of the Independence March) and unengaged individuals, we plan to check the stability of changes that follow from participation. Line 3 involves four experiments and aims to rigorously test the psychological processes implied by the proposed models. Line 4 includes the quantitative synthesis of studies on different types of prejudice. Finally, Line 5 relies on the quantitative synthesis of the research on the prejudice-reduction potential of empathy.

Reasons for choosing the research topic

First of all, the project responds to the gaps in the collective action, prejudice and empathy literatures. The lion’s share of collective action research tries to identify conditions under which members of the low-status groups challenge social hierarchies. At the same time, collective action of the advantaged seems to generate much less interest. If the dominant groups’ activism is investigated at all, it is made tantamount to solidarity-based collective action, that is engagement designed to benefit the underprivileged. However, as illustrated by the case of the anti-refugee movement, members of the high-status groups may also take actions aimed to impair out-group’s situation. The current project recognizes this lacuna. Besides, we acknowledge and intend to deal with the lack of quantitative syntheses of research on empathy and the two types of prejudice. Second, our project responds to the contemporary events and social processes taking place across Europe. The refugee crisis, terrorist attacks and the up-surge of the far-right movements require close attention of social sciences. In our project we want to find out, why some people respond the wave of asylum-seekers from the Middle East and Africa with prejudice, while other manifest openness. We also want to check, what are the consequences of engagement in support of and against refugees.