

Cognitive underpinnings of patriotism: How do nationalists and constructive patriots think?

Patriotism is usually understood as love and attachment to one's country and nation. However, these patriotic feelings can manifest themselves in different ways. One of them is nationalism, also known as blind patriotism. This attitude is characterized by a belief in the superiority of one's own nation over others and a lack of tolerance for criticism towards the country and the nation. On the other hand, love for the country can take the form of benevolent, constructive criticism towards one's own country and nation. We call this attitude constructive patriotism. This project examines how different ways of thinking affect different types of patriotism.

People use two types of thinking: intuitive and reflective. This project examines the relationship of these types of thinking with patriotism. It is theorised that for people a positive assessment of their own group and protecting it from criticism are intuitive, automatic reactions. Therefore, intuitive thinking should be responsible for nationalistic attitudes. On the other hand, constructive patriotism requires reflective thinking. These assumptions will be checked in this project.

Twenty experimental studies will be conducted in this project. During these studies, the participants' intuitive or reflective thinking will be activated. Four different methods of inducing intuitive and reflective thinking will be used. Then the level of nationalism and constructive patriotism will be measured. Various aspects of patriotism will be measured, such as beliefs, attitudes, and actual behaviour. This will allow testing whether the type of thinking people rely on in a given situation affects the type of patriotism. Moreover, it will be possible to study the influence of thinking on various aspects of patriotism. Additionally, some of the planned studies include repeating the measurements every few weeks, which will allow assessing how long the effects of activating reflective thinking last.

The general predictions are as follows. On the one hand, activating intuitive thinking should make people more nationalistic and less inclined to criticize their country and people. On the other hand, activating reflective thinking should reduce nationalism and make people exhibit more constructive criticism of their country.

So far, little is known about how the way people think and process information influence patriotism. This project will investigate these relationships and provide new data on how people function in society. However, a better understanding of how thinking influences patriotism is not only important for theoretical reasons. It is also important for society. We can very often observe conflicts between social and political organizations with nationalist views and those presenting a more critical attitude. An example of such a conflict is the dispute over the reform of the justice system in Poland. The planned changes in the judicial system have triggered a lot of controversy and concerns about the preservation of the rule of law. Therefore, the Polish opposition reported the problem to external control institutions. This action was a manifestation of constructive patriotism and was probably driven by good intentions. However, Polish political parties and groups with more nationalistic views interpreted these actions as treason. Disputes of this type between nationalists and critical patriots occur frequently. Understanding how the sides of such conflicts think can improve communication between them, lead to a constructive resolution of political disputes and help promote positive national attitudes.

This project will answer the question of whether and how the way of thinking influences patriotism. Moreover, we will find out exactly what ways of activating intuitive or reflective thinking affect which aspects of patriotism. This will be an important complement to existing theories of social and political psychology. Moreover, the research results will help to understand certain social mechanisms and may prove useful in solving real socio-political problems.