

Memories, normative ideals and empathic solidarities in Europe in the aftermath of refugee arrivals in 2015–16

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Anti-refugee rhetoric as a tool for mobilizing pro-governmental electorate

The Migration crisis in Europe, which was the result of wars, political and economic instability in North Africa was one of the hottest topics of public debate in the European Union. In Poland, this debate was and still is very emotional although Poland so far didn't accept any refugees from the region. In addition, research indicates that anti-refugee rhetoric is an influential tool in politics and the use of such messages did influence the election results in 2015 (Winiewski, Jurczyszyn, Bilewicz, Beneda 2015).

Opinion polls shows that extremely negative attitudes toward migrants were not constant in time. Attitudes toward accepting refugees in Poland were fairly neutral in 2015 than after crisis erupted it rapidly started to worsen (CBOS 2018). However recent studies show that the trend reversed in second half of 2018 (IBRiS 2018). Therefore, the question arises what psychological mechanisms influence such a strong polarization and dynamics of attitudes towards a foreign group with virtually no contact. Previous studies and collective violence studies (eg. Staub 1989) point out to ideology as a key factor.

In two nationwide representative surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017 we found that indeed political stance and, more importantly, ideological orientations (RWA and SDO) predict support for negative action of government toward migrants (e.g. using violence to protect borders, invigilation). Most interesting findings show that models from 2016 and 2017 differ substantially – both in explanatory power and importance of particular predictors. We explain this with dynamic of anti-refugee rhetoric used by government related politicians as a mean to contain problems of Poland–EU relations.