

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MATERIAL STATUS FOR ELECTORAL CHANCES AND PERCEPTION OF POLITICIAN: DELEGITIMIZATION OF WEALTH AS POST-TRANSITION SPECIFICITY?

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## ABSTRACT

In presented research the impact of a politician's economic status on his/her assessment and electoral chances was tested. In study 1 ( $N=90$ ) a politician with a high status was assessed as less moral and more competent than a low-status politician. In study 2 ( $N=120$ ) participants from Ireland and Poland were compared. Irish participants assessed a low-status politician as more moral and competent than the high-status one, whereas Polish participants assessed a high-status politician as more competent than the low-status one. Polish subjects generally assessed politicians' morality lower than the Irish. The results suggest higher legitimization of wealth among Polish participants than the Irish, contrary to predictions. These results are discussed in reference to the system justification theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and legitimating myths (Jost, & Kay, 2003).

**Key words:** legitimating myths, delegitimization of wealth, cross-cultural research.

## SYSTEM LEGITIMIZATION AND LEGITIMATING MYTHS

Every political system operates more efficiently when the society believes in its legal validity. This conviction includes, among other things, the view that the power is in the hands of the people who work for the benefit of the whole society, not just for themselves and their interests (Wojciszke, 2012). People are guided by different beliefs regarding the social world and often create their own theories that legitimize the social order. According to Melvin Lerner (1980), people are motivated to believe in justice of the world; he even calls this belief a "fundamental delusion" because it is so strong. According to him, people believe that they get what they deserve – that if they do the right thing, they will be rewarded, whereas their bad behaviour will lead to their punishment. On the other hand, John Jost, Mahzarin Banaji, and Brian Nosek (2004) claim in their theory of system justification that

there is a general tendency to legitimize the status quo. According to them, people legitimize existing social rules, even at the expense of personal and group interests (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). One way of legitimizing the social order, especially the existing social and economic inequalities, is the so-called legitimizing myths and stereotypes (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). In a series of experiments Aaron Kay & J. Jost (2003) demonstrated that exposure to the following stereotypes - poor but happy and poor but honest - leads to the increase in perceiving the society as fair and law-abiding. We use such myths every day, they are the so-called legitimizing myths which validate the existing social order as "socially shared values, attitudes and beliefs that assign more value and validity to the representatives of the social groups that are higher in the hierarchy" (Wojciszke, 2012, p. 477).

### LEGITIMIZATION OF WEALTH IN POLISH AND IRISH SOCIETY – CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

Although the theory of system justification has a large empirical basis, it seems that it applies only to countries with established democracies. In Poland, as in other post-communist countries, people do not try to justify the existing order, on the contrary, they delegitimize it (Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007). Henryk Domański (2004) claims that the lack of trust in politicians is one of the characteristics of public awareness in post-communist countries. In Poland, after the transformation, opposition movements had to deal with the allegations of a lack of competence, and the politicians associated with the Social Democrats were accused of transferring patterns from the previous system. Both groups were accused of careerism and the fact that they did not take into account the good of the country, only their own interests (Offe, 1999, cited in Domański, 2004). Ireland is a country with an established democracy. Poland is a relatively young democracy. Several decades of communism significantly influenced not only our country but also the attitudes of Poles towards authority. Poles do not believe in the justice of the social world (Doliński, 1991). In our country negative stereotypes are common, not only about authority and wealth but also about how to acquire them. According to Bogdan Wojciszke (2012) Poles construct myths delegitimizing the system. One of such myths is the belief in the immorality of wealth. As many as 75% of Poles believe that wealth is achieved by being dishonest, and 71% - due to corruption (Cichomski, 2007, cited in Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007). A study conducted by Artur Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) indicates how Poles delegitimize the political system. The examined group was presented with the descriptions of people with high or low social status that were rich or poor. The researchers assumed that high status evokes a positive attitude because of the high level of competence assigned to that person and large wealth triggers negative reactions because of the high level of harmfulness assigned to that person. They also assumed that if people judge the system as hardly fair and the reason for others to become wealthier is corruption and dishonesty, they will believe that wealthy people do harm to others. The results confirmed these assumptions: as status was based on the assessment of competence, it was not delegitimized, however, as wealth was associated

with doing harm to others, it was delegitimized (Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007). B. Wojciszke (2012) indicates that high social status is conducive to positive conclusions about agency and high economic status does not influence it. As far as the results concerning morality are concerned, poor people were perceived as more moral than the rich. This effect was enhanced if at the same time the poor had low social status (Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007). Also in the research of B. Wojciszke and Magdalena Dowhyluk (2006) it was shown that people succeeding in politics or business, although they are seen as more competent, are also judged as less moral and less popular.

Although Poland has long aspired to becoming a "second Ireland", these are two very different countries. Everything separates us: history, culture, and different levels of development on which we now find ourselves. Nonetheless, a lot of similarities can be found as well. Both are Catholic countries that ended their way to independence only in the twentieth century, after years of struggles and uprisings. The Irish remained under the influence of Great Britain for a long time. This was reflected in much of their history and culture. Ireland is a country much more developed economically than Poland. The Human Development Index (HDI) from 2011 ranks Poland as the 39th, with a score of 0.813, while Ireland is on the 7th place with a score of 0.908. GDP per capita (data for 2011) puts Ireland in the ranking on the 15th place, while Poland is on the 44th (World Bank, 2011). Poles are driven by materialistic values to a much greater extent than people in richer countries of Western Europe (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart, Basáñez, Díaz-Madrano, Halman, & Luijkx, 2004).

The Irish, though they probably gained the most after joining the European Union, started to fritter away their money, and the scale of corruption in the country and the waste of resources proved to be too vast. The dissatisfaction of the Irish with the current socio-political situation is also related to corruption scandals that have been revealed over the past few years. They significantly decreased the confidence in politicians. For instance, the public opinion was shocked by the abuse case in the Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) in which over the years 2004 to 2008 the management team together with their families participated in a number of foreign trips at the expense of the state. This resulted in forcing the Director General of the institution to resign and he received €1.4 million compensation (Sunday Independent, 2009).

During the development of the political system in Ireland it was clearly shown that the main criteria for the divisions were not class or social issues, but national ones (Płachecki, 2010). In addition, the Irish have experienced a severe economic crisis. The economic crisis is an important factor contributing to the popularity of politicians Parker (Parker, 1977, cited in Cwalina, & Falkowski, 2005). The poor state of the country's economy lowers the ratings of authority, however, interestingly enough, the economic growth does not result in an increase of support (Cwalina, & Falkowski, 2005). All this indicates that also in Ireland, despite the lack of experience of communism, delegitimization of wealth of the authorities as a response to the economic crisis is possible. On the other hand, the Irish have not experienced a crisis of the socio-political system, and Ireland is still a wealthy co-

untry with an established democracy, thus the overall legitimization of the system is higher than in the post-communist countries.

## THE CURRENT STUDY

Delegitimization of wealth is usually prescribed to postcommunist societies as a broader syndrome of system delegitimization (Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke, 2012). Legitimizing myths, based partially on complementary justice (like “poor but honest”, “poor but happy”) serve as a method of system justification, especially when economic (and political) inequalities start to be visible (Kay, & Jost, 2003). Szymon Czapliński (2007) indicated that especially the myth “poor but honest” is used for legitimizing the system by the Polish participants of his research. Despite interesting results of past research, the problem of generalization of the obtained results and their possible cultural limitations still remain. For example, participants in the A. Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) experiment were recruited from social sciences’ (probably psychology) students, the majority of whom were women. Moreover, their political identification was not controlled. A further problem is the cultural specificity of delegitimization of wealth, especially as a factor influencing perception of the political class. A. Mikiewicz & B. Wojciszke (2007) proved that only material wealth results in lower assessment of politician morality, whereas the power status did not influence morality assessment. However, status connected to position is quite often related to wealth (despite of some problems with this relationship in postcommunist societies, see Wojciszke, 2011), so this distinction seems to be to some extent artificial.

For these reasons the two main aims of our research are: (1) conceptual replication of the A. Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) experiments on other than social sciences and humanities students and non-student population (with more a balanced number of the representatives of the genders and with a control of the political identification of participants) and (2) conducting research on population from a country without a communist past. In our studies we concentrated exclusively on material status (wealth) of politicians, as social status was not related with the delegitimization phenomenon (see Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007).

As we chose for this comparison Ireland, it allowed for the testing of alternative hypotheses about delegitimization of wealth as a result of problems with national economy, not as general distrust to political class caused by experience of communism.

## STUDY 1

As mentioned above, the main aim of Study 1 was a conceptual replication of A. Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) studies on a more gender balanced sample. Political identification and family status of subjects were also controlled, as potentially important factors influencing legitimization of wealth. S. Czapliński (2007) indicated that in the Polish students samples right-wing ideology is not related to dissonance elicited by exposure to delegitimize myths (as rich and happy, rich and

honest), suggesting that only left-wing ideology could be related to adopting legitimate myths (as poor, but happy) as a way of system justification. Neutral condition was included in experimental design in aim to check how the information about economic status of a politician affects his assessment. The lack of control groups in past research did not allow for stating if a high status of politicians decreased the assessments of politicians' morality or rather a low status increased them.

Basing on the A. Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) research in the present research we expect: (1) higher assessment of a low-status politician morality in comparison to a high-status one (Hypothesis 1); (2) no differences in the assessments of politicians' competence as a function of their economic status (Hypothesis 2), and (3) lack of differences in voting declaration as a function of a politician's economic status (Hypothesis 3).

**Participants.** In Study 1 there were 90 individuals recruited from the local community of Tricity, 45 men and 45 women aged 20 to 30 ( $M_{age} = 23,73$ ,  $SD = 2,84$ ). The data were collected in spring of 2011 year, before the September 2011 parliamentary elections. Participants were recruited in the street. They did not receive any financial gratification for participating in the research.

**Measures and procedure - experiment design.** Experiment was based on 3 (economic status of a politician: high, low, or control group: without information about status)  $\times$  2 (gender of participants). The status of a politician was the between-subject factor. Preliminary analyses indicated that the gender of participants did not influence the dependent variables, thus it was not included in the analyses. The dependent variables were the assessment of a politician's morality and competence and voting declarations (willingness to vote on a politician).

**Stimulus materials, manipulation, and procedure.** There was a random selection of participants, however, there were two criteria of selection to the study: age between 20 and 30, and gender (in order to balance the number of both sexes as important independent variable). People walking around the streets or living at the university campus (University of Gdansk and Technical University of Gdansk) were asked by our research assistants to read a short leaflet presenting a particular local politician who considered being a candidate in the nearest parliamentary election (held in September 2011). After reading the presented short biography of candidates (one description per participant) the participants were asked to assess a politician on several levels. They were also asked to answer the questions about willingness to vote on the candidate (on scale ranged from 1 - *definitely no*, to 5 - *definitely yes*).

The biography of a candidate prepared for this study contained information about his age (35 years old), family status (wife, two children), education (management and foreign trade), place of living (Gdańsk), and past political experience (two-time position in the city council). There was also provided information on his interests and work place (transport company) with position. Manipulation of a politician's economic status was based on information about his salaries and position in the company. In the high-status condition a politician was described as earning 290 thousands of Polish zloty and being an owner of transport company. In the low-status condition a politician was described as earning 40 thousands of Polish zloty per year and being a

worker of a transport company. In the control condition there was no information on a politician's salary and position, only about place of work. The level of salaries was specified on two sources: the low-status salary - on the basis of the annual report on regional distribution of salaries in 2010 as average annual salary in the Pomeranian district (calculated on the basis of Sedlak & Sedlak, 2011), whereas the high status one - on the basis of the rank list of the most affluent politicians in Poland and official annual tax testimony of Polish parliamentary (see *The rank of the most affluent politicians in Poland*, 2001, & *Annual tax testimony of Polish parliamentary*, n.d.).

**Morality and competence.** The morality and competence of politicians were measured by a set of traits comprising the Self-Report Questionnaire developed by B. Wojciszke and colleagues (see Wojciszke, Szlendak, 2010; Wojciszke, 2010 for details): 7 adjectives comprising the morality scale (e.g., fair, justice, honest), and 7 the competence scale (e.g. intelligent, well-organized, smart). The measure was modified in order to describe a politician. The participants were asked for indicating to what extent a politician could be characterized by the provided features (scale ranging from 1 - *definitely not* to 7 - *absolutely yes*). In the present research the reliability of the scale measuring morality was .90 and for the assessment of competence .88 (Cronbach's alpha).

**Control variables.** In order to control of the variables potentially influencing the impact of a politician's status on his assessment the economic status of respondents' families and their political identification were regarded. The participants were asked to describe the economic status of their families on a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 - *significantly below average* to 7 - *significantly above average*). The average level of status among the sample was  $M_{\text{status}} = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ . The participants were also asked to indicate their political identification on a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 - *extremely left-wing*, by 4 - *central*, to 7 - *extremely right-wing*). The average level of political identification was  $M_{\text{political orientation}} = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Correlational analyses.** Correlations between dependent and independent variables are presented in Table 1. Competence and morality assessments were uncorrelated. Political identification and status did not correlate with dependent variables (only with the exception of a weak correlation between voting declarations and the economic status of respondents families).

**Table 1.** Intercorrelations of Variables in Experiment 1.

	Morality	Competence	Voting declarations	Political identification	Family status
Morality	-	.19	.35***	-.11	.13
Competence		-	.26**	.03	.04
Voting			-	-.15	.21*
Political ident.				-	.11

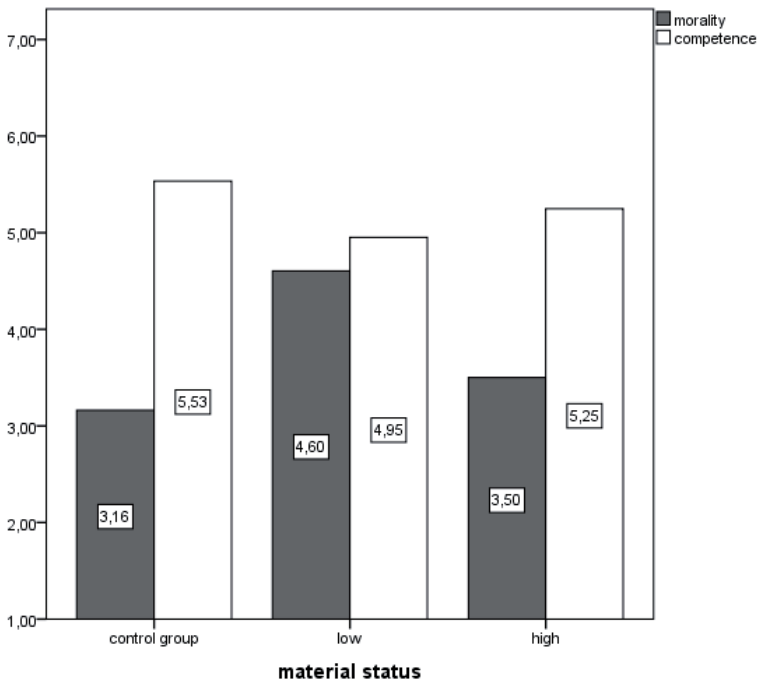
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , (1-tailed)

Source: Own Table.

To assess the impact of status on the assessment of a politician a politician's status general linear model (GLM) was used on the competence and morality level, respectively. To MANOVA analysis we introduced the status of respondents' families and their political orientation as a covariance.

**The assessments of politicians' morality and competence.** Mean scores for morality and competence assessments are presented in Figure 1. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, there was a significant main effect of a politician's status on the morality assessments, [ $F(2,89) = 25.25, p < .001, \eta^2 = .38$ ]. Bonferroni post-hoc tests indicated that the low-status politician was assessed as more moral than the high-status politician ( $M = 4.60, SD = 0.80$  and  $M = 3.50, SD = 0.90$ , respectively), [ $t(58) = -5.03, p < .001$ ]. The low-status politician was assessed as more moral also in comparison to the neutral condition ( $M = 3.16, SD = 0.80$ ), [ $t(58) = 6.99, p < .001$ ].

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, (de)legitimization of wealth is not related to lower assessment of competence. In line with this assumption, politician status affected competence assessments, [ $F(2,89) = 3.19, p = .046, \eta^2 = .07$ ]. Bonferroni post-hoc tests indicated lower assessment of the low-status politician's competence ( $M = 4.95, SD = 0.80$ ) in comparison to the neutral condition ( $M = 5.53, SD = 0.67$ ), [ $t(58) = 3.05, p = .030$ ]. However, there were no differences between assessments of the high-status politician ( $M = 5.25, SD = 1.16$ ) and the neutral condition ( $M = 5.53, SD = 0.67$ ), [ $t(46,486) = 1.17, p = .248$ ].



**Figure 1.** Mean scores for morality and competence assessments as a function of material status of a politician.

Source: Own Figure.

**Voting declarations.** GLM for voting declarations did not reveal a main effect of a politician's status, [ $F(2, 88) = 1.47, p = .236$ ].

Study 1 partially replicated the original results of the A. Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) research. Also in our study higher material status negatively influenced morality assessment. This result remains significant even with controlling the political identification and economic status of the participants. Including the neutral condition (with a lack of information about status) allowed for additional findings: it seems that information about low salaries positively influenced morality assessments (as there were no differences between the high-status condition and the neutral condition). Information about wealth was related to a higher assessment of a politician's competence in comparison to the low-status and the neutral condition. In this case also the factor influencing the assessment of competence was low economic status. Economic status did not influence voting declarations, proving a weak practical impact of economic status on (declarative) voters' decisions.

## STUDY 2

The main aim of this study was testing the hypotheses about cultural differences in delegitimization of wealth. Poland and Ireland are different in two main aspects: 1) political past – Poland is a new democracy, with a communist past, Ireland is a relatively established democracy (with origins in the 19th century), without the experience of communism; 2) experience of the economic crisis – Ireland was seriously experienced by it, whereas in Poland the impact of the economic crisis on national economy was one of the lowest in the EU. Due to it, these cross-cultural comparisons allow for testing competitive mechanisms of delegitimization of wealth and delegitimization of political class as related to a communist past or as caused by a poor condition of economy and failure in competent management of country.

As Ireland is an established democracy, and Irish society is characterized by lower level of social cynicism (Boski, 2009; Boski, 2010; Leung, & Bond, 1989; Leung, & Bond, 2009), lower belief in life as a zero-sum game (Różycka, 2012) and higher level of interpersonal trust (Różycka, 2012) in comparison to Poland, we could expect a higher assessment of politicians' morality (independent of their economic status) in Ireland than in Poland (Hypothesis 1). As Ireland experienced severe effects of the economic crisis influencing the assessment of politicians' competence, we could expect lower assessment of politicians' competence in the Irish sample in comparison to the Polish one (Hypothesis 2). Due to the cultural differences described above we also expected delegitimization of wealth in Poland, expressed in lower assessment of politicians' morality as a result of politicians' status, i.e. lower assessment of morality for politicians with high economic status in relation to politicians with low economic status (Hypothesis 3). We do not expect such effect in the Irish sample (Hypothesis 4).

**Participants.** In Study 2 participated 120 individuals: 60 Polish (38 women, 22 men) and 60 Irish (36 women and 24 men). All participants were above 25 years



of age (meaning the age of the total sample was  $M = 35.69$ ,  $SD = 12.11$ , meaning the age of the Polish sample was  $M = 31.63$ ,  $SD = 9.54$ , and the Irish  $M = 39.75$ ,  $SD = 13.08$ ). Education level of samples was distributed as follow: 1.7 % of Polish participants had elementary education (5.0 % in the Irish sample); undergraduate: 40.0% Polish, 38.2 % Irish, and high level education (BA or MA): 58.3% in the Polish sample, and 56.7 % in the Irish one. The Polish participants lived in Tricity (Gdansk, Gdynia, and Sopot), the Irish in Galway. Participants did not receive any financial gratification.

**Materials and procedure - experiment design.** Experiment was based on 2 (Economic status of a politician: low or high)  $\times$  2 (participants nationality: Polish or Irish)  $\times$  2 (politician's sex). These variables were the between-subject factors. Dependent variables were the assessments of a politician's morality and competence and voting declarations (willingness to vote on a politician).

**Stimulus materials, manipulation, and procedure.** Participants were recruited from the local communities of Tricity (Poland) and Galway (Ireland). They were presented the short leaflet with a description of a candidate to parliament. The descriptions of the candidates were the same as in Study 1 for the Polish participants. There were no control groups, but to control the possible impact of a politician's sex we prepared two versions of the descriptions with a female or a male candidate. The Irish participants received a description of a candidate adopted to Irish cultural specificity. After reading a presented short biography of the candidates (one description per participant) the participants were asked to assess a politician on several dimensions. They were also asked to answer the questions about willingness to vote on the candidate (on scale ranged from 1 - *definitely no* to 5 - *definitely yes*).

The Irish version of the candidate biography was prepared to respect cultural differences between the compared populations: apart from the same information about a candidate's family name, gender, age, family status, education, and political experience, we changed the place of his living (Galway). There was also provided information on his/her interests and work place (transport company) with position, similar to Study 1. Manipulation of economic status of a politician was the same as in Study 1. In the Irish high-status condition a politician was described as earning 210 thousand Euros and being an owner of a transport company. In the low-status condition a politician was described as earning 41 thousand Euros per year and being a worker of a transport company. The level of the salaries was based on two sources: the low-status salary was specified on the basis of the annual report on average Irish salaries in 2011 year (Central Statistic Office, 2012), whereas the high-status one was specified on the basis of the Irish prime minister's salary in 2011 (*Ile zarabiają premierzy?*, n.d.). In the female version the name of the candidate was Marta Lewandowska or Ann Murphy, in the male version the name of candidate was Adam Lewandowski or John Murphy, for Polish and Irish versions respectively.

**Morality and competence.** Morality and competence of politicians were measured by the same method as in Study 1. The 2-factor structure of the scale was checked by EFA with orthogonal rotation (Varimax). Scree-plot and eigenvalue

criteria confirmed a 2-factoral structure. 2-factoral solution allowed for explaining 62% of the total variance. In the present research the reliability of the scale measuring morality was .92, and for the assessment of competence .89 (Cronbach alpha). Both scales correlated positively, but the strength of correlation indicates their relative independence ( $r(90) = .65, p < .001$ ).

**Control variables.** In order to control the variables potentially influencing the impact of a politician's status on his/her assessment the economic status of the respondents' families and their political identification were regarded, similar to Study 1. The average level of status among the total sample was  $M_{\text{status}} = 4.32, SD = 1.10$ . The average level of political identification in the total sample (on 7-point scale described in Study 1) was  $M_{\text{political orientation}} = 4.12, SD = 1.10$ .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Intercorrelations of variables in Polish and Irish samples.** Table 2 presents correlations of independent and dependent variables in both samples. Generally, the strength of correlations is comparable in the Irish and the Polish ones.

**Table 2.** Intercorrelations of Variables in Experiment 2.

	Morality	Competence	Voting declarations	Political identification	Family status
Morality	-	.60***	.32**	-.02	-.30**
Competence	.75***	-	.45***	-.13	-.19
Voting	.52***	.63***	-	-.19	-.06
Politicalident.	-.02	-.25*	.03	-	.05
Family status	.11	-.00	.02	-.09	-

Note. Correlations in the right part of Table 2 represent the Polish sample, in the left part - the Irish.

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , (1-tailed)

Source: Own Table.

**The assessments of politicians' morality and competence.** Mean scores for morality and competence assessments are presented in Figure 2. The mean scores for morality and competence assessment were introduced to MANOVA analysis for 2 (politician's status)  $\times$  2 (nationality of participants). As preliminary GLM analyses revealed that the gender of a politician did not interact with the politician's status and with the interaction between a politician's status and the nationality of participants, this variable was not regarded in the analyses. Preliminary analyses indicated no effect of political identification and economic status of the participants' families on morality and competence assessments.

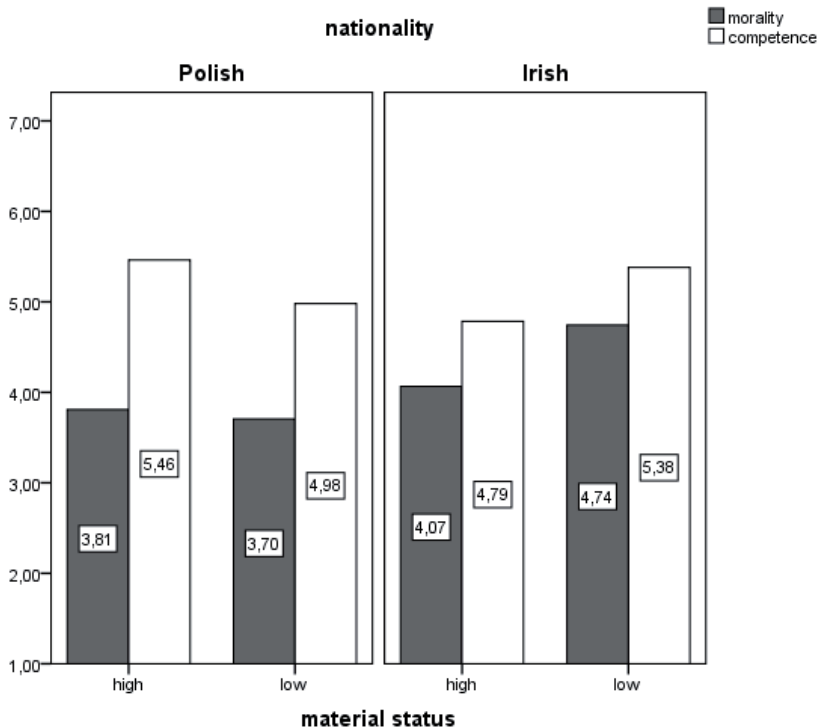
The status of a politician affected neither the assessments of his/her morality, [ $F(1, 119) = 1.58, p = .212$ ] nor the competence assessments, [ $F(1,119) = 0.07, p = .788$ ].

The nationality of the participants influenced the assessments of morality, [ $F(1,119) = 8.11, p = .005, \eta^2 = .07$ ]. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, the Irish subjects assessed morality of a politician higher ( $M = 4.40, SD = 1.31$ ) than the Polish ( $M = 3.76, SD = 1.21$ ), [ $t(118) = -2.82, p = .006$ ]. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, the Irish

subjects did not assess politicians' competence lower than the Polish ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.07$  in the Polish sample,  $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  in the Irish sample, respectively), [ $F(1, 119) = 0.42$ ,  $p = .517$ ].

Interaction of a politician's status and the participants' nationality for assessment of a politician's morality was only marginally significant, [ $F(1,119) = 2.95$ ,  $p = .089$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ ]. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, in the Polish sample the high-status politician was not assessed as less moral ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.20$ ) than the low-status politician ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), [ $t(58) = 0.33$ ,  $p = .740$ ]. Contrary to Hypothesis 4, the Irish participants assessed the high-status politician as less moral ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than the low-status one ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ), [ $t(58) = -2.05$ ,  $p = .045$ ].

The interaction of a politician's status and nationality of the participants for competence assessments were significant, [ $F(1,116) = 6.42$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ]. The high-status politician was perceived as more competent ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) than the low-status politician ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), in the Polish sample [ $t(58) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .043$ ]. The high-status politician was generally perceived as less competent ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) than the low-status politician ( $M = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) in the Irish sample [ $t(58) = 1.83$ ,  $p = .073$  (2-tailed)].



**Figure 2.** Mean scores for morality and competence assessments as a function of a politician's material status and nationality of participants.

Source: Own Figure.

**Voting declarations.** GLM analysis for voting declarations did not reveal the effect of a politician's status [ $F(1, 119) = 2.26, p = .136$ ], or the effect of the participants' nationality [ $F(1, 119) = 0.06, p = .813$ ]. The interaction of a politician's status and the participants' nationality was insignificant [ $F(2, 116) = 1.41, p = .238$ ].

Cross-national comparison revealed some interesting results. Only Hypothesis 1 about lower assessment of a politician's morality in the Polish sample than in the Irish was confirmed. It is congruent with the reported in many works perception of the political class as immoral and corrupt (Kostadinova, 2003; Skarżyńska, 1999; Wojciszke, & Mikiewicz, 2007). The other hypotheses were not supported by data. Moreover, there were some unpredicted results – such as a lower perception of the rich politician's morality in comparison to the poorer counterparts in the Irish sample, opposite to the assumed relations between status and assessment of a politician's competence in the Irish and the Polish samples. Similar to Study 2, information about a politician's status did not affect voting decisions.

## DISCUSSION AND FINAL REMARKS

The current research replicates to some extent the effects of delegitimization of wealth reported by the A. Mikiewicz and B. Wojciszke (2007) study. Confirmation Hypothesis 1 about the negative impact of wealth on morality assessments was confirmed only in Experiment 1. In Experiment 2, conducted on a non-students sample, this effect was not observed. Our participants assessed the politician with high material status as more competent than the lower-status one, which was not contradicting Hypothesis 2. In fact, low status resulted in a lower assessment of competence (also in comparison to neutral condition). Given this result one could assume that probably the participants in our study legitimated to some extent wealth, or at least linked it with competence, what is a basic assumption of meritocratic ideology (see Heywood, 2002). Probably the participants in our research could have been more experienced in earning money (contrary to psychology students) and could legitimating higher salaries of the politician, especially assuming that his economic position was a result of his business activity (as the owner of a transport company). The cross-national comparison between the Polish sample and the Irish one, constituted by people living in established democracy, revealed some additional effects. The hypothesis about a general delegitimization of political class in post-transition societies was confirmed by the lower assessment of the politician's morality (generally, irrespectively of status) by the Polish participants in comparison to the Irish. However, the Irish participants assessed the wealthy politician as less moral and less competent than his poorer counterpart. These results indicate delegitimization of wealth in the Irish sample. In the Polish sample the wealthy politician was assessed as more competent than the poorer one, and the politician's status did not influence morality assessment.

These results contradict the assumption stating that the delegitimization of politicians' wealth is specific to the post-communist countries. Poles, as citizens of a post-communist country, should according to previous research (see Mikiewicz, & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke, & Dowhyłuk, 2006) delegitimize wealth, whereas

among Irishmen, the citizens of a country with an established democracy, this effect should not occur. However, as mentioned earlier, Ireland is now in a crisis that decidedly affects the public mood. Over the past few years, the trust in politicians in this country has been shaken by corruption scandals (see O'Toole, 2009). Probably this distrust could be focused especially on these politicians who additionally to political activity were engaged in business. The inflated level of global (both moral and competence) assessment in the Irish sample is in fact limited to the wealthy politician, and general differences in morality assessment indicate that the political class is perceived as less moral by the Polish participants in comparison to the Irish.

### LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The presented research are not free from several limitations. The first one is the relatively weak size of the effects observed in Study 2. Moreover, status of a politician did not influence voting declarations. It is probably caused by the artificial descriptions of politicians used in the experiments. For this reason it would be recommended to use actual descriptions of politicians in possible replication. The second limitation is caused by the compared samples. As we chose for comparison only two countries, it is impossible to state what is the source of the observed differences. In fact, communist past was confounded with the differences in experiencing the economic crisis. To further investigate the possible impact of the economic crisis vs. communist past it will be necessary to include other countries in the comparison. Finally, we purposely did not distinguish economic status and position. In fact, economic status was directly linked to business success. We chose this option to provide ecological validity of studies, however, the source of high/low income (i.e. related with business vs. political activity) is a possible important factor influencing morality and competence assessment of politicians.

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