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## INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE GOVERNMENT'S REMEMBRANCE POLICY\*\*\*\*\*

### ABSTRACT

The paper presents results of the experimental study on the government's remembrance policy, attitudes towards it, and the influence of remembrance narratives. It discusses individual differences of participants on three different grounds: (1) interest in history or politics, and level of historical knowledge, (2) features of cognitive motivation measured by the need for closure questionnaire: preference of order, desire for predictability, discomfort with ambiguity, closed mindedness and decisiveness, and (3) response to the presented narrative, including inspired emotions and an assessment of a story. Collected data and research observations offer an interesting and valuable insight into relationships between various factors and citizen's support for the remem-

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brance policy. They also lead the team to formulate three conclusions which may be used to develop theoretical understandings of this aspect of politics within political science and related disciplines.

*Keywords:* government's remembrance policy, political attitudes, emotions, need for closure, knowledge on history, interest in history, interest in politics

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we discuss which individual differences in citizens' interests, personality and response to presented narratives may influence their support for the government's remembrance policy. Observation of these relationships was possible thanks to designing an innovative experimental study which merged different scientific approaches: political science, social and cognitive psychology, and memory studies. The realized project was a very first attempt to measure attitudes towards management of collective memory by a government, and to investigate which factors may influence them. Thus, we were not able to consult previous studies to state our research predictions. Moreover, existing theoretical discussions were rather educated speculations than conclusions based on research evidence.

In theoretical frameworks of the study we used our own definition of the government's remembrance policy, that has been established with reference to features of the political role of narratives on past experiences of the nation (Assmann, 2008, pp. 47–58; Crawford, 2006, p. 226; Hoskins, 2007, pp. 246–247; Kattago, 2001, pp. 28–30; Koczanowicz, 1997, pp. 259–260; Labanyi, 2008, pp. 120–121; Maruszewski, 2001, pp. 117–118; Misztal, 2010, p. 26; Westen, 2008, pp. 41–49). We considered it as an intentional narrating past events and interpretation of them by a government, which objective is an influence on a society's political identity, social-shared knowledge (beliefs, ideal, values) or political attitudes and behaviors, thanks to a management of collective memory's contents and/or recipient's emotional involvement. We also recognized that the policy includes two basic strategies: remembering and forgetting of experiences, and a selection of narratives is essential for a government's influence on shared visions of the present and the future (Singer, Conway, 2008, pp. 279–285).

Moreover, on the basis of literature's review, we specified five basic features of the remembrance policy. Firstly, we assumed that it is "myth-motoric", so its main goal is to inform citizens in terms of uncertainty (Assmann, 2008, pp. 86–95). Secondly, we considered it as "non-scientific", because its authority is not based on scientific recognition, but it results from an act of story-telling (Le Goff, 2007, pp. 286–287; Szacka, 2003, p. 12). Thirdly, we called the policy emotional, as its effectiveness is related to an arousal of recipient's emotions (Boyatzis et al., 2013; Fredrickson, Losada, 2005; Landau et al., 2009; Snyder, 2000). Fourthly, we recognized it as based on commitment of recipients to an act of story-telling, so it has to involve citizens in a symbolic reenactment of the past (Kiesler, 1971; 1977; Burke, Stets, 2009; Joule, Azadia, 2003). Finally, we argued that it is a government's instrument of social influence (Cialdini, 2003). This complex understanding of the remembrance policy was used by the team to design and realize the experimental study.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretical investigations of the management of collective memory enabled the team to create an innovative research tool: the attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy questionnaire. Its construction was also based on a pretest procedure which included 449 participants in Toruń and Kraków, and an assessment of items' relevance by ten experts in fields of political science and history. As a result, we created two parallel versions of the tool which enable a researcher to measure attitudes and their change after exposure to a narrative. Both versions had 17 items, including two reversed items. Participants were asked to assess their support for presented statements on the seven-level Likert scale (where: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – rather disagree, 4 – neither agree, nor disagree, 5 – rather agree, 6 – agree, and 7 – strongly agree). Therefore, the minimal score in a measurement was 17 points and the maximal score in a measurement was 119 points.

Moreover, we created the test of knowledge on Communist Crimes in Poland and their remembrance, which included 11 questions. This tool

was pretested on 101 participants. As well, we directed three short movies on the 1945 Augustów Roundup, which were used to present a narrative to participants of experiments – the first version showed emotionally neutral story, the second one inspired recipient's pride, while the third one included additional arousal of sorrow. Applications of these innovative research tools made possible observation of participants' attitudes and their change after watching short movie (5' to 7').

The study was realized in December 2014 and January 2015 at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and its Medical School in Bydgoszcz. In the study participated 364 female and male students (age: 18–29, average age: 21 years old) with different academic majors: accountancy, biotechnology, cognitive studies, computer science, economy, education studies, journalism, international relations, management, mathematics, pharmacy, philology, security studies and social work. The selection of sample was accidental, because the employed recruitment procedure was based on a voluntary participation in the study – thus, final results of it are not representative for the population, but they present observation realized in conditions similar to the government's remembrance policy.

In the experimental study we used one scenario. Firstly, we asked participants to share basic information (sex, age, academic major) and to assess their interest in history and politics. Secondly, they completed first copy of the attitude questionnaire (17 items), the need for closure questionnaire (Kossowska, 2003, Kossowska et al., 2014) and the test of knowledge. Thirdly, we projected a movie<sup>1</sup>. Fourthly, we asked participants to fill out the manipulation check form and to answer four simple questions about contents of the presented narrative. Fifthly, they were randomly assigned to write a short informative or a short persuasive text related to the narrative<sup>2</sup>. Finally, we asked participants to complete second copy of the attitude questionnaire (17 items). This research procedure and research

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<sup>1</sup> Participants were randomly assigned to watch one of three movies. Particular versions inspired different emotions and various levels of arousal, and they were used in the experimental study to observe an influence of emotions on remembrance narratives' effectiveness. These results are discussed in our other papers.

<sup>2</sup> This assignment was used to inspire participants' low commitment (persuasive text) or to not commit them (informative text), and we used it to observe an influence of

tools were used to collect data about presented in this paper relationships between variables.

In general, Polish students expressed their moderate support for the government's remembrance policy in the first measurement (average: 73.90 points). However, presentation of the narrative caused a noticeable shift to rather positive attitude towards it (average: 75.82 points). Thus, in the research sample we observed an average increase of support by 2.60% (+1.92 points), which occurred in less than half an hours (and after just watching a short movie and writing a short text). We also noticed that the most effective strategy was concurrent using the narrative which inspired positive emotions and the presence of a committing act (average increase by 4.60%; +3.42 points), while the least favorable was using the narrative which inspired negative emotions without arousal of recipient's commitment (average increase by 0.66%; +0.48 points).

## INTEREST IN HISTORY AND POLITICS

In the study, we discovered an important relationship between a level of support for the government's remembrance policy and participants' interest in history (see: Table 1). In both measurements we noticed that higher interest in past events influences more favorable attitudes towards the management of collective memory by a government. Participants who recognized themselves as highly interested in history had the highest average results in both measurements (85.75 points, 90.00 points), while those who expressed strong lack of interest in it had the lowest average results (59.59 points, 57.91 points). Moreover, collected data show that students interested in past events have rather positive attitudes towards the remembrance policy. However, the influence of narrative's presentation was not limited to this group of participants – the second highest increase of support occurred in a group which expressed their lack of interest

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commitment on remembrance narratives' effectiveness. These results are also discussed in our other papers.

in history, and only in the case of highly not interested participants the average result was lower in the second measurement.

**Table 1. Participants' interest in history and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Interest in history	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Highly not interested	59.59 points	57.91 points	-2.82%
Not interested	62.61 points	65.47 points	4.58%
Rather not interested	70.26 points	71.95 points	2.40%
Neither interested, nor not interested	73.13 points	75.42 points	3.14%
Rather interested	80.90 points	82.41 points	1.86%
Interested	84.79 points	87.61 points	3.32%
Highly interested	<b>85.75 points</b>	<b>90.00 points</b>	<b>4.96%</b>

We observed similar relationship in the case of interest in politics (see: Table 2), however we noticed that participants interested in politics had slightly higher average results in both measurements (80.11 points, 82.27 points) than those who emphasized their high interest in it (76.78 points, 80.11 points). Students who considered themselves as interested in politics had rather positive attitude towards the remembrance policy, while others

**Table 2. Participants' interest in politics and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Interest in politics	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Highly not interested	63.78 points	63.73 points	-0.08%
Not interested	68.93 points	73.00 points	<b>5.91%</b>
Rather not interested	74.21 points	74.48 points	0.37%
Neither interested, nor not interested	74.62 points	75.61 points	1.33%
Rather interested	77.30 points	81.42 points	5.31%
Interested	<b>80.11 points</b>	<b>82.27 points</b>	2.70%
Highly interested	76.78 points	80.11 points	4.34%

were less supportive. However, the most significant increase of the average result occurred in groups not interested in it, rather interested in it and highly interested in it. Observed relationships support an educated assumption that the government's remembrance policy cannot be oriented only to citizens already interested in history or politics, but its objective should be presentation of narratives also to these citizens who express their lack of interest in those fields (as they are also prone to persuasion).

Final results of the test of knowledge on Communist Crimes were less unambiguous. In both measurements we noticed that participants with more developed knowledge tended to express more support for the remembrance policy, but only in the case of the second measurement this relationship was linear. Collected data (see: Table 3) suggest that citizens with more extensive historical knowledge have rather positive attitudes towards narrating the past by a government, while others were less supportive. Again, we noticed that the most favorable attitude change is not limited to a group of the most educated participants, but also it occurs in the case of students with basic knowledge – moreover, again the support decreased only in the group with the lowest average result.

**Table 3. Participants' results in the test of knowledge on Communist Crimes in Poland and their remembrance and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Result in the test of knowledge	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
0–1 / 11 points	71.40 points	64.20 points	-10.08%
2 / 11 points	70.48 points	73.59 points	4.42%
3 / 11 points	72.94 points	73.92 points	1.35%
4 / 11 points	72.25 points	74.85 points	3.59%
5 / 11 points	74.60 points	77.08 points	3.32%
6 / 11 points	76.31 points	77.77 points	1.91%
7 / 11 points	76.76 points	80.24 points	4.53%
8–11 / 11 points	<b>80.82 points</b>	<b>82.64 points</b>	2.25%

## NEED FOR CLOSURE

In the experimental study, we asked participants to complete Polish translation of the need for closure questionnaire (Kossowska, 2003, Kossowska et al., 2014), which measures five aspects of personality related to cognitive motivation – preference for order (average for the sample: 12.15 points per 18 possible), desire for predictability (10.66 points), discomfort with ambiguity (13.83 points), closed mindedness (7.41 points) and decisiveness (10.03 points). Individuals with higher need for closure tend to be less prone to persuasion and they are more prone to share simplified understandings of the reality, including stereotypes. Moreover, they have more stable attitudes and opinions (Kossowska, 2003, p. 356).

The analysis of relationships between preference for order lead us to two interesting observations (see: Table 4). Firstly, we noticed that the support for the remembrance policy – in both measurements – was stronger in groups with higher preference of order. Secondly, participants who had lower scores in this aspect of need for closure experienced more significant change of attitudes. Moreover, results of the study showed that preference of order does not influence interest in history or politics, however they also demonstrated that participants with higher results of preference had lower scores in the test of knowledge, but they better memorized information presented in a movie.

**Table 4. Participants' preference of order and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Preference of order	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Low preference (3–7 points)	71.78 points	74.83 points	4.25%
Moderate preference (8–13 points)	73.26 points	75.33 points	2.81%
High preference (14–18 points)	75.32 points	76.75 points	1.90%

In the context of desire for predictability, we noticed that participants with higher results of it tended to express more support for the remembrance policy in both measurements (see: Table 5). However, interesting

fact is that they also experienced more significant increase of this support than students with lower desire for predictability. They also better memorized information included in the narrative and were slightly more interested in history than others (while it was not related to interest in politics and a level of historical knowledge).

**Table 5. Participants' desire for predictability and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Desire for predictability	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Low desire (3–7 points)	70.83 points	71.68 points	1.21%
Moderate desire (8–13 points)	74.27 points	76.10 points	2.47%
High desire (14–18 points)	75.63 points	78.79 points	4.17%

Even more interesting observations we made as a result of the analysis of discomfort with ambiguity (see: Table 6). We noticed significant difference between participant who had higher preference of ambiguity and other two groups – lowest discomfort was related to rather negative attitude towards the remembrance policy in both measurements. Moreover, in this group we observed a decrease of the support for it, while in group with moderate and high discomfort the endorsement increased. We also noticed that low discomfort was also related to lack of interest in politics (on average it was 2.29 points per seven possible, while average for the sample was 3.77 points), but at the same time results of the study show

**Table 6. Participants' discomfort with ambiguity and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Discomfort with ambiguity	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Low discomfort (3–7 points)	59.71 points	58.29 points	-2.39%
Moderate discomfort (8–13 points)	73.62 points	76.09 points	3.36%
High discomfort (14–18 points)	74.54 points	76.21 points	2.24%

that this group had more developed historical knowledge and its members better memorized information.

In the case of closed mindedness only one participant of the study had a score which suggested high level of this feature, thus, we considered only difference between its low and moderate levels. We noticed that less closed-minded participants expressed more support for the remembrance policy in both measurements, however, in the group with its moderate level the exposition to narrative had more positive influence on participants' attitudes. Interesting fact is that students with lower level of closed mindedness tended to be more interested in both, history and politics.

**Table 7. Participants' closed mindedness and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Closed Mindedness	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Low closed mindedness (3–7 points)	74.68 points	76.35 points	2.24%
Moderate closed mindedness (8–13 points)	73.07 points	75.28 points	3.04%

Finally, in the context of decisiveness collected data were less unambiguous (see: Table 8). In both measurements, the highest support expressed participants with moderate decisiveness, while the lowest – with high level of this feature. At the same time, students with low level of it were a group in which we observed slightly more significant increase of support for the remembrance policy. Moreover, this group of participants was

**Table 8. Participants' decisiveness and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Decisiveness	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Low decisiveness (3–7 points)	73.14 points	75.15 points	2.75%
Moderate decisiveness (8–13 points)	74.91 points	76.88 points	2.63%
High decisiveness (14–18 points)	71.63 points	73.28 points	2.31%

characterized by the best memorization of information, even though they had the lowest result in the test of historical knowledge. Alike it was in the case of discomfort with ambiguity, decisiveness cannot be recognized as directly related to attitudes towards management of collective memory by a government.

## RESPONSE TO THE NARRATIVE

In the manipulation check form we asked participants to assess if watching a movie caused arousal of thirteen emotions, including pride, sorrow and anger (in which influence we were interested). Collected data (see: Table 9) support our research predictions – experiencing pride or sorrow was related to more significant increase of support for the remembrance policy, while experiencing anger was less effective than not experiencing it (Fredrickson, Losada, 2005; Boyatzis et al., 2013); moreover, results of the study show that participants whose attitudes were more favorable tended to experience stronger emotions when they were watching a movie. These

**Table 9. Emotional response to the narrative and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Emotion	Level of arousal	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Pride	not experienced	69.85 points	71.14 points	1.84%
	neither experienced nor not experiences	70.99 points	72.39 points	1.97%
	experienced	<b>78.46 points</b>	<b>81.13 points</b>	<b>3.14%</b>
Sorrow	not experienced	70.37 points	71.76 points	1.93%
	neither experienced nor not experiences	69.78 points	70.91 points	1.63%
	experienced	<b>76.77 points</b>	<b>79.17 points</b>	<b>3.13%</b>
Anger	not experienced	70.66 points	73.12 points	<b>3.48%</b>
	neither experienced nor not experiences	72.15 points	73.94 points	2.48%
	experienced	<b>81.27 points</b>	<b>82.36 points</b>	1.34%

observations initially corroborate a hypothesis that arousal of emotions is essential for the effectiveness of remembrance narratives, but they also prove that more positive attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy influence more emotional responses to a remembrance narrative, which strengthen and intensify these attitudes. Both observations show that emotions are a decisive in construction and promotion of interpretations of past experiences.

Moreover, in the manipulation check form we asked participants to assess how touching and how interesting was the presented narrative. The analysis of relationships between these variables with average results in two measurements of attitudes (see: Table 10) lead us to similar observations as it was in the case of emotional responses to a movie. We noticed that participants who recognized the narrative as touching or interesting tended to experience higher increase of support for the remembrance policy. At the same time, we again observed that higher level of this support was related to more favorable assessment of a movie, thus a response strengthen and intensified already positive attitudes.

**Table 10. Participants' assessment of the narrative and average results in the first and the second measurement of attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and attitude change**

Assessment	Level of arousal	1 <sup>st</sup> measurement	2 <sup>nd</sup> measurement	Attitude change
Touching	not touching	63.35 points	64.35 points	1.58%
	neither touching nor not touching	71.52 points	73.48 points	2.74%
	touching	<b>77.75 points</b>	<b>79.93 points</b>	<b>2.80%</b>
Interesting	not interesting	62.60 points	62.49 points	-0.17%
	neither interesting nor not interesting	66.25 points	67.38 points	1.70%
	interesting	<b>77.52 points</b>	<b>79.97 points</b>	<b>3.15%</b>

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we presented data collected in the experimental study on attitudes towards the government's remembrance policy and factors which may influence their change. We discussed relationships between these attitudes and three groups of individual differences – interest in history or politics, features of cognitive motivation measured by the need for closure questionnaire and participants' response to the presented narrative. We recognize presented observations as a valuable insight into the effectiveness of using the remembrance as a source of political mobilization and support for government's actions.

In general, we noticed that citizens who are more interested in history or politics and who have more developed historical knowledge tend to express higher support for the remembrance policy; however, the increase of endorsement is not limited to a group with the most significant interest, but it also occurs in a group which stated their lack of interest. Moreover, results of the study show that – in general – citizens with higher need for cognitive closure are more likely to support the remembrance policy; however, these relationships are less unambiguous and they are not so clear in the case of decisiveness and closed mindedness. As well, we observed interesting relationships between emotional and cognitive response to a presented narrative and a level of support for the remembrance policy – citizens who experienced arousal of emotions and who recognized a movie as touching or interesting tended to more significantly increase their support for the management of collective memory by a government; however, at the same time, participants who had more favorable attitudes towards the remembrance policy (since the very beginning) were more likely to experience emotional arousal and to recognize the presented narrative as touching or interesting.

It is obvious, that discussed results are not final and conclusive. In this study, we entered into a new research field which has not been investigated before. The paper presents part of our observations that may influence theoretical understandings of the government's remembrance policy shared within political science. However, we also believe that our investigations

will be an inspirations for fellow researchers who are interested in narrating past events or the management of collective memory by a government.

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