

LEFT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM AND DANGEROUS AND COMPETITIVE WORLDVIEWS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY IN A SLOVAK SAMPLE

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Abstract: Left-wing authoritarianism (LWA) remains a relatively understudied construct in political psychology, particularly in post-communist contexts where the historical legacy of left-wing authoritarian regimes and the strains of societal transformation create specific conditions for its emergence. This study examined the relationship between LWA and dangerous (DWV) and competitive worldviews (CWV) within the Dual Process Model of Ideology and Prejudice (DPM), while also considering the role of subjective socioeconomic status (SSS). The sample comprised 122 adult participants from Slovakia (64 men, 58 women; $M = 36.4$ years), who completed the Specter of Left-wing Authoritarian Views Scale (SLAV; Petrović & Ninković, 2025), the Frequency Estimation Index of Social Worldviews (Perry & Sibley, 2010), and the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000). Correlational analyses revealed statistically significant positive relationships between LWA and both DWV ($r = .26, p = .005$) and CWV ($r = .25, p = .007$), with Steiger's Z-test indicating no significant difference between the two effect sizes. Dimensional analysis revealed that three of the four SLAV dimensions — anticapitalist sentiment, anticonventionalism, and antihierarchical aggression — were significantly correlated with both worldviews, whereas censorship of right-wing ideas showed no significant relationship with either worldview. A significant negative relationship between SSS and LWA was found ($r = -.24, p = .009$); however, bootstrap mediation analyses did not support a mediating role of SSS in the relationship between worldviews and LWA. These findings suggest that LWA is associated with a generalized perception of threat rather than an ideologically specific worldview, thereby challenging a straightforward extension of the DPM to left-wing forms of authoritarianism and empirically supporting calls for a reconceptualization of the construct's motivational homogeneity.

Keywords: left-wing authoritarianism, dangerous worldview, competitive worldview, subjective socioeconomic status, dual process model, post-communist context

INTRODUCTION

In Central and Eastern European countries where left-wing authoritarian regimes have left a profound historical imprint, the question of the psychological underpinnings of left-wing authoritarianism (LWA) takes on particular urgency. Slovakia represents a paradigmatic case: collective memory of the socialist regime coexists with enduring skepticism toward neoliberal capitalism, the socioeconomic strains of the post-1989 transformation created deep societal fractures, and contemporary political polarization manifests in ways that cannot be explained solely by right-wing extremism (March & Mudde, 2005; Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013). Despite this, research on authoritarianism in this context — and especially on its left-wing forms — remains markedly underdeveloped. This gap is not merely geographical: it reflects a deeper asymmetry within the discipline itself, where authoritarianism has been studied almost exclusively as a right-wing phenomenon since the seminal work of Adorno et al. (1950), leading to the systematic neglect of its potential manifestations on the political left (Conway et al., 2018; Duarte et al., 2015). This one-sidedness has consequences for the validity of the entire research program: if authoritarianism as a psychological construct is not inherently right-wing, but rather represents a cognitive style or motivational orientation that can take on different ideological forms (Rokeach, 1960), then its selective measurement necessarily distorts conclusions about its nature, causes, and consequences.

Early systematic attempts to conceptualize LWA as a distinct construct demonstrated that it is a measurable phenomenon with real psychological and social consequences (Conway et al., 2023; Costello et al., 2022). Conceptually, LWA can be understood as a structural counterpart to right-wing authoritarianism (RWA): both forms share formal characteristics — submission to authorities, aggression toward perceived deviations from norms, and conventionalism — but differ in their ideological content. Whereas RWA directs hostility toward groups perceived as threatening the traditional order and favors submission to established authorities, LWA legitimizes aggression toward economic elites, rigidly adheres to progressive norms, and orients submission toward left-wing ideological authorities (Costello et al., 2022). Nilsson (2024) further argues that left-wing antidemocratic tendencies are not simply a mirror image of their right-wing counterparts — they do not stem from adherence to established norms but from a progressive zeal for values that may override democratic principles. Despite these conceptual differences, both forms share key psychological mechanisms, including cognitive rigidity, moral absolutism, and low tolerance for dissent (Zmigrod et al., 2021). In post-communist contexts, LWA is assessed using the Specter of Left-wing Authoritarian Views Scale (SLAV; Petrović & Ninković, 2025), which — unlike scales developed in American contexts — explicitly incorporates anticapitalist sentiment as a distinct dimension, thereby capturing the economic axis of radical left-wing attitudes that is particularly relevant in countries with a legacy of socialist regimes.

Beyond ideological attitudes, subjective socioeconomic status (SSS) — defined as the individual's perception of their own position in the social and economic hierarchy (Adler et al., 2000) — plays an important role in shaping political radicalization. Unlike objective socioeconomic indicators, SSS captures the cognitive and emotional processes through which individuals interpret their

standing relative to others, and has been shown to be a stronger predictor of political attitudes than objective socioeconomic measures (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015). Individuals who perceive themselves as lower in the social hierarchy tend to view the social order as unjust and to express greater willingness to support radical change (Zhao et al., 2025), thereby predisposing them toward the core attitudinal content of LWA — specifically anticapitalist sentiment and antihierarchical aggression (Petrović & Ninković, 2025).

The Dual Process Model of Ideology and Prejudice (DPM; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009) provides an established framework for investigating the motivational bases of authoritarianism. The model posits that RWA is rooted in the dangerous worldview (DWV) — a perception of the social environment as threatening and chaotic, which activates a motivation for safety and order — whereas social dominance orientation (SDO) is rooted in the competitive worldview (CWV) — a perception of society as an arena in which groups compete for scarce resources. Although the DPM was primarily developed and validated for RWA and SDO, its extension to LWA remains an open research challenge (Osborne et al., 2023). SSS may play a mediating role in this relationship: DWV undermines the sense of sociopolitical control, which in turn leads to an underestimation of one's own status (Torres-Vega et al., 2021; Lachman & Weaver, 1998), and lower SSS subsequently amplifies dissatisfaction with the existing hierarchical order — a mechanism that could help explain the association between worldviews and LWA. Empirical evidence for this pathway in a post-communist context, however, is lacking.

The present study pursues four interrelated objectives: (1) to examine whether LWA is significantly associated with both DWV and CWV; (2) to determine whether LWA's relationship with CWV is stronger than its relationship with DWV, in line with the theoretically predicted ideological specificity; (3) to analyze whether the individual dimensions of LWA differ in their associations with the two worldviews; and (4) to investigate the role of SSS in the relationship between worldviews and LWA, including its potential mediating function.

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised 122 participants (64 men, 52.46%; 58 women, 47.54%) aged 18 to 70 years ($M = 36.4$; $SD = 13.0$). Participants were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling via online distribution of the questionnaire, which constitutes a limitation with respect to the generalizability of findings. Of 123 collected responses, one record was excluded due to incomplete completion of the SLAV scale (more than 60% missing responses). In terms of educational attainment, the largest group consisted of participants with a secondary school leaving certificate ($n = 46$; 37.70%), followed by those with a master's degree ($n = 38$; 31.15%). The majority of participants were employed full-time ($n = 81$; 66.39%).

Measures

Left-wing authoritarianism was assessed using the Specter of Left-wing Authoritarian Views Scale (SLAV; Petrović & Ninković, 2025), developed and validated on a Serbian post-communist sample.

The scale comprises 46 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and measures four dimensions: anticapitalist sentiment (ACS), anticonventionalism (AC), antihierarchical aggression (AHA), and censorship of right-wing ideas (CRW). Internal consistency was excellent: total scale $\alpha = .96$; ACS $\alpha = .95$; AC $\alpha = .87$; AHA $\alpha = .92$; CRW $\alpha = .90$.

Dangerous and competitive worldviews were assessed using the Frequency Estimation Index of the Dual Process Model's Social Worldviews Component (Perry & Sibley, 2010). Participants estimated the percentage of Slovak residents who would engage in various forms of dangerous (9 items, DWV) or competitive behavior (9 items, CWV) purely out of their own volition, on a scale from 0 to 100. Internal consistency was excellent too: DWV $\alpha = .94$; CWV $\alpha = .96$.

Subjective socioeconomic status was assessed using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000), comprising two single-item subscales measuring perceived standing within Slovak society and within one's local community, respectively (10-rung ladder). As single-item measures, internal consistency estimates are not applicable; prior research has demonstrated adequate test-retest reliability and convergent validity (Adler et al., 2000). All three instruments were translated into Slovak in collaboration with the authors, with both language versions compared and adjusted where necessary.

Procedure

Data collection took place from December 2025 to March 2026 via Google Forms. Participants received information about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the full anonymity of data collection, and provided informed consent before proceeding. The questionnaire was administered in a fixed order: demographic questionnaire, MacArthur SSS scale, Frequency Estimation Index, and SLAV scale. The estimated completion time was 20 minutes.

Statistical Analysis

Relationships among LWA, DWV, CWV, and SSS were examined using Pearson product-moment correlations. The difference in the strength of LWA's correlations with DWV and CWV was tested using Steiger's Z-test (Steiger, 1980). Mediation analyses were conducted using bootstrap resampling (5,000 samples) following Hayes (2018). All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for all primary variables are presented in Table 1. Participants' LWA scores clustered near the midpoint of the scale, and they perceived the world as more competitive than dangerous. Subjective socioeconomic status indicated a slightly above-average self-appraisal within the social hierarchy.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations of Primary Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. LWA	3.77	1.04	—							
2. ACS	3.88	1.25	.87**	—						
3. AC	3.52	1.10	.88**	.77**	—					
4. AHA	3.75	1.09	.97**	.75**	.81**	—				
5. CRW	3.96	1.32	.76**	.41**	.53**	.83**	—			
6. DWV	27.11	19.14	.26**	.26**	.26**	.24**	.14	—		
7. CWV	42.20	23.39	.25**	.27**	.20*	.22*	.13	.77**	—	
823. SSS	5.95	1.59	-.24**	-.24**	-.24**	-.23*	-.08	-.17	-.05	—

Note. LWA = total left-wing authoritarianism score; ACS = anticapitalist sentiment; AC = anticonventionalism; AHA = antihierarchical aggression; CRW = censorship of right-wing ideas; DWV = dangerous worldview; CWV = competitive worldview; SSS = subjective socioeconomic status. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Associations Between LWA and Social Worldviews

LWA was significantly and positively associated with both worldviews (see Table 1). The two correlation coefficients were of comparable magnitude, and Steiger's Z-test revealed no statistically significant difference between them ($Z = -0.095$; $p = .924$). The hypothesis that LWA would be more strongly associated with CWV than with DWV was not supported.

Dimensional Analysis

Analysis at the level of SLAV dimensions revealed a differential pattern of associations (see Table 1). Three of the four dimensions — ACS, AC, and AHA — showed significant positive correlations with both worldviews. ACS exhibited the strongest and most consistent associations with both DWV and CWV. AC correlated more strongly with DWV than with CWV. AHA showed significant but somewhat weaker correlations with both worldviews. CRW showed no significant association with either worldview, suggesting that it operates on distinct psychological foundations relative to the other LWA dimensions.

Subjective Socioeconomic Status

SSS was significantly and negatively associated with LWA — participants who perceived themselves as lower in the social hierarchy reported higher levels of left-wing authoritarianism (see Table 1). The associations between SSS and both DWV and CWV were negative in direction but did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Mediation Analyses

Bootstrap mediation analyses (5,000 samples) did not support a mediating role of SSS. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Results of Mediation Analyses

Path	B	β	SE	p	95% CI
Model 1: DWV → SSS → LWA					
a: DWV → SSS	-0.016	-.172	0.007	.038	[-.030, -.001]
b: SSS → LWA	-0.126	-.192	0.058	.031	[-.240, -.012]
c: total effect DWV → LWA	0.015	.255	—	.005	—
c': direct effect DWV → LWA	0.013	.213	0.005	.010	[.003, .022]
a × b: indirect effect	0.002	—	0.001	—	[-.000, .005]
Model 2: CWV → SSS → LWA					
a: CWV → SSS	-0.003	-.047	0.006	.607	[-.016, .009]
b: SSS → LWA	-0.147	-.224	0.057	.011	[-.259, -.035]
c: total effect CWV → LWA	0.011	.245	—	.007	—
c': direct effect CWV → LWA	0.010	.235	0.004	.008	[.003, .018]
a × b: indirect effect	0.001	—	0.001	—	[-.001, .003]

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient; SE = standard error; 95% CI = bootstrap confidence interval (5,000 samples). Values in bold red require completion from SPSS output. The indirect effect is non-significant when the CI includes zero.

In Model 1, both constituent paths were statistically significant; however, the indirect effect did not reach significance, as its confidence interval included zero. In Model 2, the path from CWV to SSS was non-significant, thereby precluding mediation. The direct effects of both worldviews on LWA remained significant in both models.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the motivational underpinnings of left-wing authoritarianism in a Slovak post-communist context through the lens of the Dual Process Model of Ideology and Prejudice. The findings reveal that LWA is comparably and positively associated with both dangerous and

competitive worldviews, challenging the assumption of ideological specificity in its motivational bases. Dimensional analysis further uncovers internal heterogeneity within the construct, with censorship of right-wing ideas constituting a notable exception to the overall pattern. Subjective socioeconomic status emerged as a direct predictor of LWA, rather than as a mediator of the relationship between worldviews and authoritarianism.

Symmetry in LWA's Associations with Social Worldviews

The central finding of this study is that LWA is comparably associated with both DWV ($r = .26$) and CWV ($r = .25$), with Steiger's Z-test yielding no significant difference between the two. The magnitude of these effects is comparable to correlation coefficients reported by Sibley et al. (2007) for the RWA \times DWV relationship within the DPM, suggesting that, despite their unexpected symmetry, these associations are not trivial.

This finding stands in direct contrast to the theoretical prediction that left-wing authoritarianism — with its emphasis on class conflict and economic inequality — would be primarily motivated by the competitive worldview. Instead, our results suggest that LWA is associated with a generalized threat sensitivity that is not ideologically specific. This pattern is consistent with Zmigrod et al. (2021), who found that cognitive rigidity characteristic of authoritarian thinking across the ideological spectrum is linked to an undifferentiated reactivity to threat, and with Conway et al. (2023), who demonstrated that LWA predicts endorsement of a dangerous worldview to a degree comparable to RWA.

An alternative interpretation is that the symmetry reflects contextual specificity. The strong correlation between DWV and CWV in our sample suggests that in post-communist Slovakia, both worldviews may form an interconnected cognitive complex — a consequence of a historical experience in which economic insecurity and a sense of societal threat emerged concurrently and mutually reinforced each other during the post-1989 transition (Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013; March & Mudde, 2005). This interpretation is, however, constrained by the cross-sectional design and cannot be separated from the first explanation without comparative data from other contexts. Finally, the symmetry may partly reflect the limited statistical power of Steiger's Z-test to detect small differences between correlation coefficients in samples of $n = 122$ (Steiger, 1980) — future research with larger samples could reveal subtle differentiation that remained undetected in the present study.

Dimensional Heterogeneity: The Exceptional Status of CRW

Analysis at the level of SLAV dimensions reveals that LWA is not a motivationally homogeneous construct. Whereas ACS, AC, and AHA all show significant positive associations with both worldviews, CRW shows no significant relationship with either — despite having the highest mean score of all dimensions in our sample ($M = 3.96$). This dissociation suggests that support for the censorship of right-wing ideas is not activated by perceiving the world as dangerous or competitive, but is instead rooted in moral absolutism or in-group conformity within an ideological reference group (Conway et al., 2016; Brandt et al., 2014).

This finding carries theoretical weight in the context of the ongoing debate about the conceptual status of LWA. Petrović and Ninković (2025) questioned, on the basis of SLAV validation studies, whether the scale measures authoritarianism in the classical sense, given that SLAV showed predominantly negative or non-significant associations with right-wing authoritarianism and ideologically neutral authoritarianism measures. Our finding that the most explicitly 'authoritarian' SLAV dimension stands outside the worldview pattern predicted by the DPM empirically strengthens this challenge. Treating LWA as a unidimensional construct when testing motivational models may obscure important internal distinctions.

Subjective Socioeconomic Status

The findings confirmed a significant negative relationship between SSS and LWA, consistent with the proposition that subjective social deprivation predisposes individuals toward more radical political attitudes (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2025). Mediation analyses, however, did not support SSS as a mediator of the worldview–LWA relationship. Torres-Vega et al. (2021) demonstrated that DWV mediates the relationship between low SES and authoritarian tendencies via a reduced sense of sociopolitical control — our results are partially consistent with this model in that both DWV and SSS independently predict LWA, yet SSS does not function as a mediator. In Model 1, the bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect was just above zero, which does not rule out a small mediating effect that remained statistically undetectable at $n = 122$ (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). The absence of mediation in Model 2 is theoretically more consequential: the non-significant path from CWV to SSS suggests that perceiving the world as a competitive arena and subjectively evaluating one's own position within that arena are relatively independent psychological processes.

Theoretical Contributions

These findings offer three interrelated theoretical contributions to the authoritarianism and political psychology literatures. First, they provide the first empirical evidence on the associations between LWA and DWV and CWV in a post-communist context, demonstrating that the motivational logic of the DPM does not apply straightforwardly to LWA. Extending the model to left-wing forms of authoritarianism requires not only the addition of a new motivational pathway, but likely also a reconceptualization of the assumption that authoritarian constructs form motivationally coherent wholes — for two reasons: LWA is simultaneously associated with both types of perceived threat, which does not align with the specific motivational profiles posited by the DPM; and the dimensional analysis shows that LWA itself is not motivationally homogeneous. Second, the dimensional analysis empirically supports calls for a conceptual reappraisal of LWA (Petrović & Ninković, 2025; Nilsson, 2024) by demonstrating that different SLAV dimensions have distinct psychological underpinnings. Third, the identification of SSS as a direct predictor of LWA, independent of worldviews, opens a question about its role in a broader motivational model of political radicalization that merits systematic investigation.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications

The cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions about the directionality of relationships among worldviews, SSS, and LWA — longitudinal research is necessary to clarify temporal sequences. The non-probability sample (n = 122) limits generalizability to the broader population and reduces statistical power for detecting small effects. Future research should include a direct comparison of LWA and RWA within a single sample to test whether their motivational profiles are indeed symmetrical, and should examine alternative mediators including the need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 1989) and perceived social injustice (Zhao et al., 2025).

The finding that LWA shares with RWA not only a formal structure but also an association with a generalized perception of threat suggests that the mechanisms of political radicalization at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum may be psychologically closer than ideologically specific models assume. This has implications for research on deradicalization and the prevention of political extremism, where ideologically neutral approaches targeting the reduction of generalized threat perception may prove more effective than interventions focused exclusively on the content dimension of political beliefs.

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