

The economic mainstream is biased: who'd have thought i..

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Mohsen Javdani, who is Associate Professor of Economics at the University of British Columbia, and Ha-Joon Chang is Professor of Economics at the University of Cambridge have a [fabulous article on Brave New Europe](#). I strongly recommend it. The summary is as follows:

Mainstream (neoclassical) economics has always put a strong emphasis on the positivist conception of the discipline, characterizing economists and their views as objective, unbiased, and non-ideological. This is still true today, even after the 2008 economic crisis exposed the discipline to criticisms for lack of open debate, intolerance for pluralism, and narrow pedagogy. Even mainstream scholars who do not blatantly refuse to acknowledge the profession's shortcomings still resist identifying ideological bias as one of the main culprits. They often favor other "micro" explanations, such as individual incentives related to academic power, career advancement, and personal and editorial networks. Economists of different traditions do not agree with this diagnosis, but their claims have been largely ignored and the debate suppressed.

Acknowledging that ideology resides quite comfortably in our economics departments would have huge intellectual implications, both theoretical and practical. In spite (or because?) of that, the matter has never been directly subjected to empirical scrutiny.

In a [recent study](#), we do just that. Using a well-known experimental "deception" technique embedded in an online survey that involves just over 2400 economists from 19 countries, we fictitiously attribute the source of 15 quotations to famous economists of different leanings. In other words, all participants received identical statements to agree or disagree with, but source attribution was randomly changed *without the participants' knowledge*. The experiment provides clear evidence that ideological bias strongly influences the ideas and judgements of economists. More specifically, we find that changing source attributions from mainstream to less-/non-mainstream figures significantly reduces the respondents' reported agreement with statements. Interestingly, this contradicts the image economists have of themselves, with 82% of participants reporting that in evaluating a statement one should only pay attention to its content and not to the views of its author.

Moreover, we find that our estimated ideological bias varies significantly by the personal characteristics of economists in our sample. For example, economists' self-reported political orientation strongly influences their ideological bias, with estimated bias going up as respondents' political views move to the right. The estimated bias is also stronger among mainstream than among heterodox economists, with macroeconomists exhibiting the strongest bias. Men also display more bias than women. Geographical differences also play a major role, with less bias among economists in Africa, South America, and Mediterranean countries like Italy, Portugal, and Spain. In addition, economists with undergraduate degrees in economics or business/management tend to show stronger ideological biases.

I strongly recommend the whole article, but there are a number of important things to note.

The first is that, as the authors note, this outstanding and original research has not been published by an academic journal. It's clear it has been rejected from the comments the authors make. The reason is not hard to imagine: the authors have challenged the right-wing economic mainstream and shown it to promote ideas based on methodologies that are themselves based on falsehoods. That will never do! The myth of economic objectivity must be maintained at all times.

Second, what they show is that bias is more likely on the right-wing than the left-wing. And amongst men than women. And in the USA than in developing countries.

This is not just heterodox: this is heresy. It may be true, but that does not matter: heresy must be suppressed.

I salute the authors for proving what we always knew: the economic hegemon is biased.