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## **IS NEOLIBERALISM ALIVE? PRINCIPLES AND THE WASHINGTON CONSENSUS\***

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### **Abstract**

The following article presents the concept of neoliberalism and examines its popularity among researchers. This study references the neoliberal socio-economic doctrine, reflected in the ten Washington Consensus principles.

First, the author presents and analyzes the neoliberal doctrine of economics. On this basis, he has formulated a survey, aimed at research economists. So far, there has been no such empirical research on the principles of the Washington Consensus. The survey responses have allowed to create a list of economic principles according to personal preferences.

The most popular principles include 1) freedom to invest funds; 2) protection of the private property; 3) independent central bank system; 4) the public debt not exceeding 60% of GDP; 5) the public finance deficit not higher than 3% of GDP; 6) moderately low taxes and social transfers; 7) economic development as the priority objective of the economic policy; 8) value added tax as the most important source of budgetary revenue; 9) employment growth as the priority objective of the economic policy.

Most of the chosen in the survey economic principles, on the one hand, are related to the Washington Consensus. On the other hand, they reflect the current economic problems and personal aspirations.

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**Introduction**

This article draws its inspiration from the Washington Consensus, which includes the basic principles recommended for the healthy functioning of the economy. This article takes into consideration the principles of the “healthy” functioning of the economy as recommended by the Washington Consensus. It was used to create a list of recommendations that should be implemented in the economy. Relevant statements have been included in the survey directed to all the researchers of the Poznań University of Economics and Business. Their responses were then used to determine the basic recommendations for economic policy. These were used to assess the degree of neoliberalism among Poznań researchers.

Many researchers analyse neoliberalism in many contexts [4, pp. 1-18; 5, pp. 128-140; 23, pp. 304-323; 25, pp. 27-38; 26, pp. 1-8] and it is probably one of the most often analysed macroeconomic problem of the economy. Simultaneously, economists from different universities hold to different principles of the economy [22, pp. 23-25; 24, pp. 652-654; 29, pp. 29-39].

The main aim of this paper is to analyze neoliberal principles and to assess the principles respected by researchers. We used literature in English, Polish, and Russian on macroeconomics and neoliberalism (EBSCO, Emerald, BazEkon, ProQuest, ACM Digital Library). A survey of 612 professors of Poznan University of Economics and Business was also carried out.

The most important premises of neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus have been characterized in this article. Next, the results of the survey directed to the researchers of the Poznań University of Economics and Business have been presented. It has allowed the author to determine the principles and recommendations for the economy most popular among the researchers.

**The neoliberal doctrine of economics**

It is difficult to speak of only one integrated neoliberal theory or doctrine of economics (Table 1). This popular trend consists of a number of schools and authors<sup>1</sup>. D. Harvey believes that

“neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating

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<sup>1</sup> This article is not concerned with the history of neoliberalism, and a proper discussion of its premises would require a more extensive analysis. For the purposes of this article, only the most characteristic aspects of neoliberalism were considered. W. E. Murray and J. D. Overton conclude that “Neoliberalism has dominated the discourse on progress in the last twenty-five years” [19, p. 307].

individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. <...> State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit” [6, p. 2].

Another representative of neoliberalism was L. von Mises. He believed that by serving the society one is awarded economically. Mises was therefore in favour of privatizing many areas of life, and he blamed the state intervention for economic failures. He argued that there is no alternative to the free market economy and that state intervention results in corruption and reduced economic effectiveness.

Table 1

Таблица 1

## Statements referring to neoliberalism

## Высказывания о неолиберализме

Author	Statement
M. and R. Friedman	“Minimal payment regulations constitute another set of government means of forcing payment rates. They are defended as a form of help for people whose earnings are not high, but in fact they are harmful for those people”.
D. Harvey	“Neoliberalization has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances (as in Russia and China) creating, the power of an economic elite”.
D. Harvey	“A wave of innovations occurred in financial services to produce not only far more sophisticated global interconnections but also new kinds of financial markets based on securitization, derivatives, and all manner of futures trading. Neoliberalization has meant, in short, the financialization of everything”.
F. A. von Hayek	“Governments actively joined in the money controlling and that was both the cause and effect of its instability”.
L. von Mises	“The biggest mistake of liberalism is that it has nothing to offer to man’s deeper and more noble aspirations”.
L. von Mises	“This is the role which liberal doctrine attributes to the state: protection of property, freedom and peace. A German socialist, Ferdynand Lasalle, was trying to ridicule the concept of government limited to those spheres, by naming the state operating on liberal premises ‘the night-watchman state’”.

Source: [3, pp. 2, 228; 6, pp. 19, 21, 33, 64-65; 7, pp. 70; 8, pp. 316; 14, pp. 17, 59, 111, 119, 123, 158; 15, pp. 10, 18; 16, pp. 7, 120]

Источник: [3, с. 2, 228; 6, с. 19, 21, 33, 64-65; 7, с. 70; 8, с. 316; 14, с. 17, 59, 111, 119, 123, 158; 15, с. 10, 18; 16, с. 7, 120]

A practical aftermath of neoliberalism was Thatcherism and Reaganomics<sup>1</sup>, during which any evidence of statism<sup>2</sup> was being eradicated, including ineffective state-owned coal mines, the significance of trades unions was limited, many spheres of economic life were deregulated and the welfare state was reduced. Some politicians and economists considered such measures necessary, a belief which found expression in the acronym TINA: “there is no alternative” [12, p. 29; 18, pp. 21-26]. In D. W. Hursh and J. A. Henderson’s assessment, that was when the institutionalization of neoliberalism on a national level began [9, p. 174]. Undoubtedly, such harsh political measures made it possible to solve problems that other politicians could not overcome. The opponents of this economic policy point to the negative consequences of neoliberalism, such as mass redundancies or mistreating people as economic tools. They also pose a question whether the market is at the service of people, or, perhaps, it is the other way round — people are at the service of the market.

### **The Washington consensus**

The Washington Consensus originated at the end of 1980s as a response of an American researcher J. Williamson to the problems of Latin American countries. He analyzed the reform programs recommended by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the US Treasury Department to the countries in crisis. On that basis, he formulated ten principles to be implemented for the economy to achieve good results [21, pp. 112-113]. The Consensus includes [1; 2; 10; 27, pp. 3-4; 28]

- 1) fiscal discipline aimed at balancing the public finance budget,
- 2) redirection of public spending with its major part directed towards health care, education, and infrastructure,
- 3) tax reform aimed at broadening the tax base,
- 4) liberalization of interest rates to be determined mainly by the supply and demand for money,
- 5) competitive exchange rates favouring the economic growth,
- 6) trade liberalization,
- 7) liberalization of inward foreign direct investment,
- 8) privatization favouring competitiveness of the market,
- 9) deregulation including the reduction of market entry and exit barriers.

### **The research methodology**

In order to assess the extent of neoliberal ideas among researchers, a survey was used. The questions in the survey reflect the issues raised in the Washington Consensus and the economic issues essential for the development of the economy. The actual survey was preceded by a pilot study. It allowed for the fine-tuning of the survey. The pilot study was directed to 107 students and then (once the questionnaire was

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to expectations, under R. Reagan’s government, an increase in the public sector deficit was observed [13, p. 114].

<sup>2</sup> Statism is broadly understood as “the expansion of the state” [17, p. 127].

corrected) — to 25 academics of the Poznań University of Economics and Business (PUEB). The proper survey was directed to all<sup>1</sup> the academics (612) at PUEB. The survey was anonymous. Afterwards, reminder emails were sent to all the PUEB academics. After several weeks, e-surveys were sent via email with a request to be fulfilled by those who had not done it yet. Eventually, 246 questionnaires were collected, 6 of which were rejected on account of low reliability and incomplete answers. The response rate was 39,22%. Due to the professional character of the target group, the research has the characteristics of the Delphi method<sup>2</sup>. The tables below show the structure of employment at PUEB and the structure of the group surveyed. As follows from Tables 2 and 3, the structure of the surveyed group is parallel to the structure of the population.

Table 2

Structure of employment at PUEB

Таблица 2

Структура трудоустройства в Познаньском экономическом университете

	Master		Ph. D.		Doctor (habilitation)		Associate Professor		Full Professor		Everybody
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Everybody											
Everybody	165	27%	308	50%	9	1%	75	12%	55	9%	612
Female	81	31%	140	53%	6	2%	24	9%	11	4%	262
Male	84	24%	168	48%	3	1%	51	15%	44	13%	350
Faculty of Economics											
Everybody	38	24%	85	54%	3	2%	18	11%	13	8%	157
Female	23	33%	35	51%	3	4%	6	9%	2	3%	69
Male	15	17%	50	57%	0	0	12	14%	11	13%	88
Faculty of International Business and Economics											
Everybody	21	26%	42	52%	0	0	9	11%	9	11%	81
Female	10	28%	20	56%	0	0	5	14%	1	3%	36
Male	11	24%	22	49%	0	0	4	9%	8	18%	45

<sup>1</sup> Full-time doctoral students were also included.

<sup>2</sup> “The Delphi method consists in repeated surveying of a selected group of experts, working independently. The experts should have a broad factual knowledge of the subject surveyed and, at the same time, should have broad horizons, display independence of thought and represent varied experience” [20].

Table 2 (end)

Окончание таблицы 2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
Faculty of Informatics and Electronic Economy											
Everybody	37	39%	37	39%	3	3%	10	11%	8	8%	95
Female	9	33%	13	48%	1	4%	3	11%	1	4%	27
Male	28	41%	24	35%	2	3%	7	10%	7	10%	68
Faculty of Commodity Science											
Everybody	21	26%	44	54%	0	0	7	9%	9	11%	81
Female	15	31%	30	61%	0	0	4	8%	0	0	49
Male	6	19%	14	44%	0	0	3	9%	9	28%	32
Faculty of Management											
Everybody	48	24%	100	51%	3	2%	31	16%	16	8%	198
Female	24	30%	42	52%	2	2%	6	7%	7	9%	81
Male	24	21%	58	50%	1	1%	25	21%	9	8%	117

Source: author's own research

Источник: авторское исследование

Table 3

**Structure of PUEB employees who answered survey questions**

Таблица 3

**Сотрудники Познаньского экономического университета, участвовавших в опросе**

	Master	Ph. D.	Doctor (habilitation)	Associate Professor	Full Professor	Everybody					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
Everybody											
Everybody	63	26%	118	49%	6	3%	26	11%	19	8%	240
Female	27	30%	50	55%	1	1%	6	7%	4	4%	91
Male	34	26%	61	47%	3	2%	17	13%	14	11%	130
Field of science: economics											
Everybody	40	28%	67	48%	6	4%	15	11%	11	8%	141
Female	21	35%	33	55%	1	2%	3	5%	1	2%	60
Male	19	25%	34	45%	3	4%	9	12%	9	12%	75

Table 3 (continued)

Продолжение таблицы 3

1	2	3	4	5	6	7					
Field of science: management											
Everybody	15	24%	34	55%	0	0	6	10%	6	10%	62
Female	3	15%	11	55%	0	0	2	10%	3	15%	20
Male	12	29%	21	51%	0	0	5	12%	3	7%	41
Field of science: science of commodity											
Everybody	2	20%	6	60%	0	0	1	10%	0	0	10
Female	1	17%	4	67%	0	0	1	17%	0	0	6
Male	1	33%	2	67%	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Field of science: sociology											
Everybody	1	25%	2	50%	0	0	0	0	1	25%	4
Female	0	0	1	100%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Male	0	0	1	50%	0	0	0	0	1	50%	2
Field of science: psychology											
Everybody	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	0	0	1
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100%	0	0	1
Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Field of science: other											
Everybody	6	38%	7	44%	0	0	1	6%	1	6%	16
Female	2	50%	2	50%	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Male	3	30%	5	50%	0	0	1	10%	1	10%	10
Working experience at the universities (totally) years											
<5 years	59	80%	15	20%	0	0	0	0	0	0	74
(5-10> years	3	7%	38	88%	1	2%	0	0	0	0	43
(10-15> years	0	0	41	87%	1	2%	4	9%	0	0	47
(15-20> years	0	0	13	59%	1	5%	6	27%	0	0	22
(20-25> years	1	10%	2	20%	1	10%	5	50%	1	10%	10
(25-30> years	0	0	1	10%	2	20%	5	50%	2	20%	10
(30-35> years	0	0	3	30%	0	0	1	10%	4	40%	10

Table 3 (end)

Окончание таблицы 3

1	2		3		4		5		6		7
(35-40> years	0	0	5	29%	0	0	2	12%	10	59%	17
>40 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	100%	0	0	3
Business experience (totally) years											
Extensive experience <sup>1</sup>	30	32%	47	51%	2	2%	7	8%	6	7%	93
- Female	8	33%	13	54%	0	0	1	4%	1	4%	24
- Male	21	34%	29	48%	1	2%	5	8%	5	8%	61
Little experience	29	24%	62	50%	2	16%	16	13%	10	8%	123
- Female	17	30%	34	60%	0	0	4	7%	1	2%	57
- Male	11	19%	27	46%	1	2%	11	19%	8	14%	59

Source: author's own research

Источник: авторское исследование

### The most popular principles

The analysis of the collected responses allowed for the formulation of the principles, which the vast majority of PUEB academics agree with. The recommended principles are presented below (according to the degree of support)<sup>2</sup>.

- 1) People should have the freedom to invest their funds (232 people agreed<sup>3</sup> — 97%, “I strongly agree” — 54% of all responses).
- 2) Private property should be protected (229 people agreed — 95%, “I strongly agree” — 52% of all responses).
- 3) The central bank should be independent of the government in the implementation of the monetary policy (220 people agreed — 92%, “I strongly agree” — 52% of all responses).
- 4) The public debt should not be higher than 60% of GDP (214 people agreed — 89%, “I strongly agree” — 50% of all responses).

<sup>1</sup> A person who has worked in practical economy more than half of the period of work at university, has been acknowledged as a person with a lot of experience. At the same time, it is the proportion close to the average in the group surveyed. On average, a respondent has worked 13,74 years at university and 6,13 years in practical economy.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the principles 1-6, the respondents addressed the statements by assessing them on a scale from -3 (I strongly disagree) to +3 (I strongly agree). For points 7-10, the respondents selected their responses from among a number of options.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to people who responded “I strongly agree”, “I agree” and “I rather agree”.



- 5) The public finance deficit should not exceed 3% of GDP (205 people agreed — 85%, “I strongly agree” — 43% of all responses).
- 6) Corruption cannot be beneficial for the economy<sup>1</sup>.
- 7) Taxes (175 responses — 73%) and social transfers (136 responses — 57%) should be moderately low.
- 8) The priority objective of the economic policy should be to ensure the economic development (146 responses — 61%).
- 9) The value added tax should be the most important source of budgetary revenue (141 responses — 59%).
- 10) The priority objective of the economic policy should be to ensure employment growth (136 responses — 57%).
- 11) State expenditure on research and development (134 responses — 56%) and education (130 responses — 54%) should be given priority.

The above principles received the highest average ratings and a vast majority of respondents agrees with them. Most of them are associated with the neoliberal principles. Principles “The public debt should not be higher than 60% of GDP” and “The public finance deficit should not exceed 3% of GDP” reflect the first principle of the Washington Consensus — “Fiscal discipline aimed at balancing the public finance budget”. Principles “Taxes and social transfers should be moderately low” and “The value added tax should be the most important source of budgetary revenue” could be considered as the third principle of the Washington Consensus — “Tax reform aimed at broadening the tax base”. Principle “State expenditure on research and development and education should be given priority” reflects the second principle of the Washington Consensus — “Redirection of public spending with its major part directed towards health care, education and infrastructure”. These are either the issues that were hard-won by the Polish in the process of the regime change or issues conforming to the rules of business practice or to the commonly respected principles. The three principles 3-5 find confirmation in legal regulations<sup>2</sup> significant for economists and can be said to have been institutionalized; to the extent that they are frequently quoted in academic textbooks as the boundaries of economic rationality.

When assessed in the context of the neoliberal economy, the results show that the respondents support the principles postulated by this doctrine. On the other hand, those principles which do not stem directly from the Washington Consensus do, in fact, coincide with it. The least coincident with the Washington Consensus is the principle concerning VAT as the main source of budgetary revenue. This principle to a great extent results from the economic practice in the Republic of Poland or is the result of being accustomed to a particular status quo that has persisted since the first years of the socio-economic transformation [11, pp. 395-397].

<sup>1</sup> The sixth principle requires further comment. The respondents were to address the statement “Corruption may be beneficial to economy”. A vast majority of them (209 people — 87%) disagreed with the statement and 60% of the surveyed disagreed strongly.

<sup>2</sup> i. a. the Public Finance Act and the Maastricht Treaty.

### Conclusion

The basic assumptions of the neoliberal doctrine have been examined in this article. Neoliberalism does not have a uniform set of principles or economic recommendations, and its various representatives held slightly differing views on the question of liberties and the limiting of those by the state. However, they generally support the idea of reducing state interference. One example of the neoliberal approach to economy is the concept of the Washington Consensus. Despite the objections from the author of the Washington Consensus, J. Williamson himself, they have become the quintessence of neoliberalism.

The search for the perfect model of economy, the popularity of the Washington Consensus result from the pursuit of universal, timeless solutions whereas national economies are different, they undergo changes in the course of time, going through the next stages of their development. It can hardly be expected therefore that one model of economy will become a recommendable pattern to follow by all countries and in all situations and even if it so happens, the consequences of such application are commonly known as in the example of the Washington Consensus.

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Ежи КАЗЬМЕРЧИК<sup>1</sup>

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## НЕОЛИБЕРАЛИЗМ ЖИВ? ПРИНЦИПЫ И ВАШИНГТОНСКИЙ КОНСЕНСУС\*

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### Аннотация

В данной статье представлена концепция неолиберализма и изучаются причины ее популярности среди исследователей. Это исследование опирается на неолиберальную социально-экономическую доктрину, отраженную в десяти принципах Вашингтонского консенсуса.

В начале исследования автор представляет и анализирует неолиберальную доктрину экономики. Исходя из этого, он сформулировал опрос для экономистов-исследователей. Таких эмпирических исследований принципов Вашингтонского консенсуса на данный момент почти не проводилось. Результаты данного опроса позволили составить список экономических принципов в соответствии с предпочтениями опрошенных.

Чаще всего выбирали следующие принципы: 1) свободу инвестирования средств; 2) защиту частной собственности; 3) независимую централизованную банковскую

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систему; 4) государственный долг не больше 60% ВВП; 5) дефицит государственных финансов не больше 3% ВВП; 6) умеренно низкие налоги и социальные выплаты; 7) экономическое развитие как приоритетную задачу экономической политики; 8) налог на добавочную стоимость как основной источник бюджетных поступлений; 9) рост занятости как приоритетную задачу экономической политики.

Большинство экономических принципов, за которые проголосовали в опросе, относятся к Вашингтонскому консенсусу. Тем не менее они также отражают текущие экономические проблемы и личные устремления опрошенных.

#### Ключевые слова

Вашингтонский консенсус, доктрина, неолиберализм, защита, государственное финансирование, налоги, государственные расходы.

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