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Democratic Consolidation in Poland: Support for Democracy, Civil Society and the Party System

Abstract: Democratic consolidation is a complex problem area. In this article it is analyzed, first, from the perspective of the concept of support for democracy, originally conceptualized by David Easton and then elaborated by Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Russell Dalton. Second, since democratic institutions and procedures do not operate in a void, the social context of civil society, social engagement and political parties are analyzed. As far as possible, the empirical analyses are conducted according to a complex and ramified theoretical model based on these concepts. Eleven European countries are analyzed including seven established democracies, three of which are historically Catholic countries (Spain, Italy, Ireland). In light of the importance of the communist legacy, the data for Germany are presented separately for western and eastern lands. The data presented in this article are derived from the most recent, publicly accessible research containing comparable information on all 11 countries, with a few minor exceptions.

Keywords: democracy, democratic consolidation, diffused and specific political support, civil society, political parties, social trust

When we say "consolidated democracy," the most rudimentary intuition which comes to mind is this: a country in which democracy is safe, will not die or be subverted. Consolidated democracy leads to stability and persistence. If so, then our job would be very easy, were we to be asked whether Polish democracy was a consolidated democracy. In his book "Democracy and Development" based on extensive empirical material covering well over a hundred countries over the period 1950–1990, Adam Przeworski (2000:98) says:

…the probability that a democracy would die in a country with an income above $4,000 was almost zero. Indeed, no democracy has ever been subverted, not during the period we studied [1950–1990] nor even before or after, regardless of anything else, in a country with a per capita income higher than that of Argentina in 1975: $6,055. There is no doubt that democracy is stable in affluent countries: the probability of it collapsing is almost zero.

The basic problem facing consolidation researchers is how to identify the processes or, technically speaking, the independent variables leading to consolidation: stability and persistence of a particular democracy. Consolidation is usually understood as the final link in a longer process, democratic transformation, which has three phases: liberalization of the nondemocratic (authoritarian, totalitarian) regime, transition to democracy (institutional change) and consolidation. Consolidation must always precede the institutionalization of democracy. Only when the basic institu-

tions of democracy are functioning can we speak of consolidation processes and their outcomes.

There are many different conceptualizations of consolidation but they all have several things in common. They refer to attitudes and behaviors of both the elite and the citizens.[1] If democracy is to be stable and permanent it must be based on the values, attitudes and behaviors of individuals who make up the political community. This way, attention is drawn to cultural factors. These factors were systematically discussed for the first time in *The Civic Culture* by Almand and Verba (1963).[2]

The concept of "democratic consolidation" is multidimensional. Many works discussing the theoretical and empirical problems of democratic consolidation were published in the 1990s. Summaries of the theoretical and empirical findings can be found in Linz and Stepan (1996: 5) and the book by Larry Diamond (1999, 2001). In their analysis of the concept of consolidation of democracy, Linz and Stepan emphasize the importance of cultural legitimization: "by a 'consolidated democracy' we mean a political regime in which democracy as a complex system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives and disincentives has become, in a phrase, 'the only game in town'." Both researchers are referring to the famous phrase coined by Giuseppe di Palma.[3] In their elaboration of the definition of consolidation Linz and Stepan (1996) place the main accent on behaviours and attitudes.[4] They distinguish five arenas which must be present if we are to speak meaningfully about a consolidated democracy and which are mutually supportive and reinforcing: civil society (freedom of association and communication), political society (free and inclusive electoral contestation), rule of law (constitutionalism), state apparatus (rational-legal bureaucratic norms), and economic society (institutionalized market).[5]

Larry Diamond (1999: 65) in turn, writes:

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[1] This has been pointed out by the guest editors (Dieter Fuchs, Edeltraud Roller and Krzysztof Zagórski) of two issues of *The International Journal of Sociology* (2006, vol. 36, nos. 2 and 3) entirely devoted to consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe on the basis of research conducted in eleven countries in 1990–1992 and fifteen countries in 1998–2001.

[2] Fuchs, Roller and Zagórski refer to Almond and Verba (1963) directly when they quote their belief that "the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends on orientations that people have to the political process—upon the political culture. Unless the political culture is able to support a democratic system, the chances for the success of that system are slim" (Almond & Verba, op. cit.: 498).

[3] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996: 5).

[4] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan. "Toward consolidated democracies." *Journal of Democracy*, 7.2 (April 1996), p. 15. Their ramified definition covers three dimensions: behaviours, attitudes and constitution (institutions): "Behaviorally, a democratic regime in a territory is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a nondemocratic regime or by seceding from the state. Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion, even in the midst of major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with incumbents, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or more-or-less isolated from prodemocratic forces. Constitutionally, a democratic regime is consolidated when governmental and nongovernmental forces alike become subject to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process," p. 16.

[5] Cf. pp. 7–15, especially the table on p. 14.

At bottom, I believe consolidation is most usefully construed as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. Political competitors must come to regard democracy (and the laws, procedures, and institutions it specifies) as "the only game in town," the only viable framework for governing the society and advancing their own interests. At the mass level, there must be a broad normative and behavioral consensus—one that cuts across class, ethnic, nationality, and other cleavages—on the legitimacy of the constitutional system, however poor or unsatisfying its performance may be at any point in time.

He adds, however, that one cannot understand consolidation without considering political culture. Diamond distinguishes two dimensions of consolidation: norms and beliefs, and behaviors, which he analyzes at three levels: elite, organization and mass public (1999: 69). At all three levels it is important to believe in the legitimacy of democracy and respective behaviors, e.g. at the organization level this will mean support (in statutes, declarations, and other documents) for legitimacy of the constitution and specific institutions, and at the behavioral level, this will mean refusal to use nonconstitutional and nondemocratic methods of achieving political goals and striving for power. Diamond thinks that three tasks are particularly important if new democracies are to consolidate: democratic deepening, political institutionalization and regime performance, Diamond also thinks that there is an intimate connection between these three processes and democratic consolidation (1999: 74–77).

At the roots of the problem of democratic consolidation lies the question of the sources of its persistence.[6] The point of departure is the already existing institutional framework. Institutions affect the persistence of democracy. More important for consolidation, however, is multilevel support for democracy which includes support for democracy as value and particular politicians. This is why the point of departure for the analyses in this article will be the concept of types and logics of political support originally formulated by David Easton (1975). Easton's model was modified and analytically elaborated by Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1999) and Russell Dalton to meet the needs of empirical analysis of support for democracy. I use this elaborated version of the analytic model in the first part of my text to analyze support for democracy in Poland vis-à-vis 11 European countries using a variety of empirical indices. In the second part I shall analyze two institutions which are important for the persistence of democracy: civil society and political support.

Support for Democracy

Democracy is different in every nation state because it is a form of governance which derives from a specific social and cultural substrate. Each democracy is different because it is stamped with the given society's specific history. It is only the philosopher, sociologist or political scientist who applies universal categories to it and hence the

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[6] This is basically what distinguishes it from recent research on the quality of democracy, see: Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino (eds) (2005); Guillermo O'Donnel, Jorge Vargas Cullell and Osvaldo M. Iazetta (eds) (2004).

never ending discussions on procedural democracy, substantial democracy, participant democracy etc. For the citizen, democracy is a practical task, for the society of which he or she is a member, it is a way of life. And if it is a way of life, this means that it is resistant to erosion by critique based on instrumental or utilitarian criteria. Way of life is a value in itself and cannot be reduced to either the former or the latter.

The question of attitude to democracy as a value is also important from another point of view. Changes—reduction or increase—in satisfaction with a particular democratic government are understandable. These may be caused by better or worse economic performance, the social consequences of implementation of government programs which may evoke approval or disapproval, or intensity of political conflict. But, as it was observed long ago, longstanding democracies do not collapse even in the face of serious social or economic crisis or military failure. So why does dissatisfaction, even very serious and generalized, in specific government seldom leads to withdrawal of support for democracy? Why have older (the 1970s) and more recent (the 1990s) diagnoses of the crisis of democracy in western countries never materialized into withdrawal of support for democratic governance? Although the "crisis of democracy" discourse has been going on for many decades, the level of support for democracy as a value is higher than ever in western countries (Pharr & Putnam, 2000: 7). Why do we not observe withdrawal of support for democracy as a value in new democracies where the condition of basic institutions and regime performance are highly dissatisfactory? These questions (and empirical findings) suggest the limited value of explanations in terms of an intrinsic relation between consolidation of democracy and deepening of democracy, between institutionalization and the effects of governance, as Larry Diamond argued emphatically.

To explain the lack of correlation between regime performance and support for democracy, David Easton suggested that we make a distinction between diffuse and specific political support. Easton asked if

Without discrimination in some way between specific and diffuse support, could we explain adequately the occurrence of extreme political tension, conflict and discontent in some systems, especially democratic ones, without all these giving rise to serious threats to the stability of the regime or political community? As I have suggested, this is a transparent and universal phenomenon the explanation for which is not intuitively known (1975: 443–444).

Diffuse support is important because it serves as an anchor to stabilize the political system. According to Easton's conception (1965: 273), diffuse support consists of a "reservoir of favourable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their wants." And adds: "Outputs and beneficial performance may rise and fall while this support, in the form of generalized attachment, continues" (1975: 444). Specific support, Easton claims, has the following properties:

It is directed towards the political authorities and authoritative institutions. It assumes that members [of the political community] have sufficient political awareness to be able to associate satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the perceived behavior of these authorities, whether the behaviour is in the form of identifiable actions or some attributed general performance. Specific support is possible only under conditions in which the culture permits the members to entertain the notion that the authorities can be

held responsible for what happens in society. Finally, this kind of support varies with perceived benefits or satisfactions. When these decline or cease, support will do likewise (1975: 439).
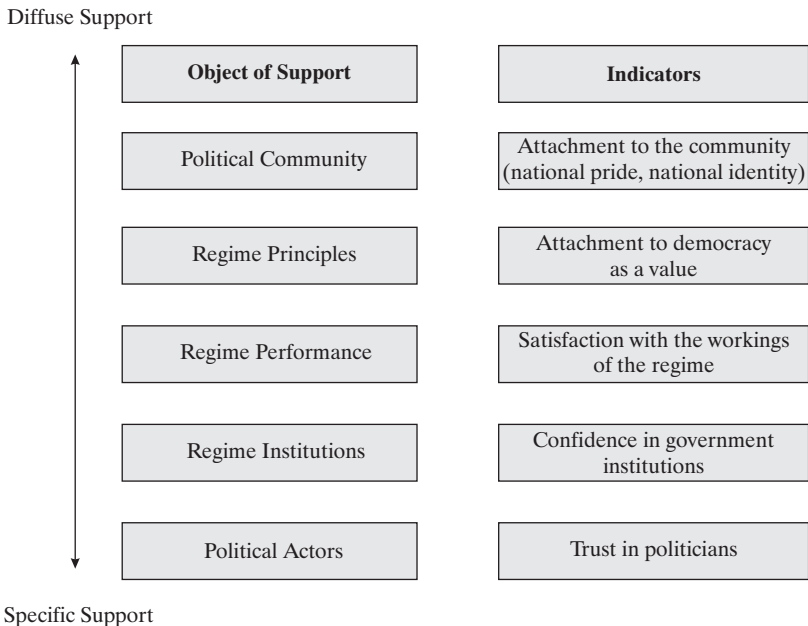
Easton distinguished three objects of political support: the political community, the political system and the current government. But his really important distinction is between diffuse and specific support. And although theoretically this distinction is clear and important, it is difficult to measure in practice. In their edited book *Critical Citizens* (1999: 31–77), Klingemann and Dalton proposed a far-reaching development of Easton's model hoping that it would help to overcome the obstacles concerning choice of indicators for the two types of support and conduct empirical analyses. Instead of three objects they suggest a five-object model (Figure 1) and instead of a dichotomous division they suggest a continuum from the most diffuse support (for the political community) to the most specific support (for concrete political actors). Support for the political community means basic attachment to the national community and very general willingness to cooperate politically (usually indicated by sense of belonging to the community, national pride and national identity). The second level of this continuum comprises the principles of the system—the basic values of the democratic system and the democratic system as a value (usually indicated by acceptance of specific democratic values and the democratic idea as such). At the third level we have regime performance (usually indicated by level of satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system). At the fourth level of political support we have specific institutions (parliament, the government, political parties) and this level of support is usually measured in terms of level of trust. After the fifth level, the most specific support, we have support for political class and particular political leaders measured by level of trust (Norris 1999: 9–13).

The following empirical analyses follow this five-level model of support for democracy as far as possible. Eleven European countries were analyzed empirically. Seven of them were established democracies, including 3 historically Catholic countries (Spain, Italy and Ireland). Because of East Germany's specific communist legacy, the data for this country are presented separately for the western and eastern lands. The remaining countries are Poland and three post-communist countries usually compared with Poland. All the data come from the most recent publicly accessible data sets containing comparable data for all eleven countries with just a few exceptions.

a) Support for the Political Community

The indicators of support for the political community used in the analysis of the strength of attachment to the political community come from the Eurobarometer studies which enable us to situate Poland in the context of other countries (Table 1). Eurobarometer systematically studies level of identification with one's nation. Attitude towards one's own political community is measured with the following item: "Are you proud to be Polish (Czech, German, French etc.)?" responses to this item can also be interpreted as an indicator of support for one's own political community. Poles are European leaders as far as level of identification with their own nation is

Figure 1

Continuum of Political Support

Diffuse Support

Object of Support	Indicators
Political Community	Attachment to the community (national pride, national identity)
Regime Principles	Attachment to democracy as a value
Regime Performance	Satisfaction with the workings of the regime
Regime Institutions	Confidence in government institutions
Political Actors	Trust in politicians

Specific Support

Adapted from: Norris 1999, p. 10.

concerned—53% declare that they are "very proud" to be Polish—together with the Irish (71%) and the British (59%).

Germany is quite anomalous compared with other European countries. Compared with European standards, Germans declare exceptionally low pride in their own nation—25% of the inhabitants of western lands and 15% of the inhabitants of eastern lands are "very proud." This is not an accidental finding. Earlier work in the 1990s also showed that two countries, Germany and Japan, had very low support for their own political community (Klingemann, 1999: 38–40). This is interpreted in terms of the very persistent effects of World War II.

b) Support for Democracy as a form of Government (Diffuse Support)

One of the two indicators most frequently used to measure diffuse support which regularly turns up in research is the following item: "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government." In the 1999 *European Values Study* (Table 2) the proportion of Poles who "strongly agreed" with this statement was relatively low compared with Western countries. Communism has left its mark: post-communist countries have much lower percentages of "strongly agree" responses. The effect of communist history is particularly clear when we compare western and eastern German lands (65% vs. 32%). However, in all four post-communist countries the percentage of respondents endorsing support ("strongly agree" and "agree") for

Table 1

Would you say you are very proud, fairly proud, not very proud, not at all proud to be (nationality)? (%)

	Very proud	Fairly proud	Not very proud	Not at all proud	DK
France	46	44	7	2	2
The United Kingdom	59	30	7	2	2
Germany (West)	25	47	17	6	5
Germany (East)	15	53	20	9	3
The Netherlands	29	58	10	2	1
Spain	44	42	7	3	4
Italy	42	42	11	4	1
Ireland	71	24	2	1	2
Poland	53	38	7	1	1
Slovakia	38	48	11	2	2
Czech Republic	38	49	10	2	1
Hungary	42	42	12	2	2

Source: Eurobarometer 66 (Autumn 2006).

democracy as a system of governance exceeds 70% and therefore meets Diamond's criteria for consolidated democracy on the "norms and beliefs" dimension at the mass public level. [7]

In recent years the attitude toward democracy as a value has hardly changed in Poland. This question was asked in the 2001, 2005 and 2007 PGES [8] (Table 3) and the results hardly differed from those obtained in 1999. The only category which increased from 2005 to 2007 was the category of respondents strongly convinced about the superiority of democratic government. We would think that, as level of education increase and a new generation takes the place of the old one, affirmation of democracy will definitely increase. This is not the case, however. There is practically no difference between young people (under 29) and older people.

We also have another indicator of support for democracy as a value in a different format. Instead of asking respondents to rate their position on one statement they are requested to choose one of three statements (Table 4). If diffuse support for democracy can be measured in terms of the proportion of respondents endorsing the statement "democracy is preferable to any other regime" then this proportion in Poland in 1992–2004 was within the 31–40% range and not only is it much smaller than in western democracies (65–93%; Dalton 1999: 70), it is also lower than in Latin American countries, many of which have recent experience with various forms of

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[7] Diamond wrote: "More than 70 percent of the mass public consistently believes that democracy is preferable to any other form of government for the country," cf. p. 69.

[8] PGES—Polish General Election Study: a representative survey conducted just after each parliamentary election since 1997.

Table 2

Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government (%)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DK
France	58	30	5	1	6
The United Kingdom	45	29	5	16	4
Germany (West)	65	30	2	0	2
Germany (East)	32	53	6	1	9
The Netherlands	47	48	3	0	1
Spain	41	45	5	2	7
Italy	42	49	5	1	4
Ireland	35	49	6	1	8
Poland	**21**	57	8	1	13
Slovakia	29	48	12	3	9
Czech Republic	39	51	7	1	3
Hungary	23	48	14	3	12

Source: European Values Study 1999.

Table 3

Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government (%)

Poland					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DK
PGES 2001 (Total)	**23**	**46**	11	3	17
Younger than 29	25	44	11	3	17
Older than 29	23	47	10	3	17
PGES 2005 (Total)	**24**	**40**	12	3	22
Younger than 29	22	44	13	3	18
Older than 29	24	39	11	3	23
PGES 2007 (Total)	**30**	**41**	9	2	19
Younger than 29	29	42	10	1	18
Older than 29	30	41	8	2	19

Source: Polish General Election Study 2001–2007.

authoritarian government. In 2004 the respective data were: Mexico 53%, Argentina 64%, Chile 57%, Brazil 41%, and Uruguay 78%.[9]

One cannot explain the difference between the level of support for democracy presented in Table 3 and the data in Table 4 in terms of the different response formats because no differences were found for other countries. In 1985 (Linz & Stepan 1996:

[9] Latinobarómetro; after "The Economist," 14 August 2004, p. 41.

Table 4

Affirmation of democracy as preferred polity—as a value, an idea (%)

	Poland					1985		
	1992	IS 1995	IS 2001	2003	2004	Spain	Portugal	Greece
Democracy is preferable to any other regime	**31**	**35**	**40**	**31**	**34**	**70**	**61**	**87**
In some cases an authoritarian regime, a dictatorship is preferable	13	16	17	19	14	10	9	5
For people like me it is all the same	40	37	32	40	40	9	7	6
Don't know/no answer	16	13	11	10	12	11	23	2

Source: CBOS 1992, 2003, 2004; IS 1995, IS 2001. [CBOS—Public Opinion Research Centre which conducts public opinion polls every month; IS 1995–2001—Institute of Sociology (University of Warsaw) Surveys from 1995 and 2001.]

136) support for democracy as a form of government (Table 4) was 87% in Greece, 70% in Spain, and 61% in Portugal. Four years later (Dalton 1999: 70) it was 92% in Greece, 78% in Spain and 84% in Portugal. It is hard to explain such a great difference between two different indicators (Table 3 and 4) of support for democracy as a value convincingly in Poland when in other countries, including countries with recent authoritarian pasts, no such differences emerged.

c) Satisfaction with Regime Performance (Specific Support)

Although Easton's distinction between diffuse and specific support is theoretically clear and convincing, it causes a lot of trouble at the level of specific indicators. It is impossible to deduce unequivocal criteria from this model to solve the problem of which indicators signify diffuse support and which ones signify specific support. The basic problem in studies of political support in Poland is the lack of sufficiently long time series. Of all the publicly accessible research only the 1992–2008 PGSS[10] contains an indicator which may be used to analyze political support in Poland. The PGSS project consists of a series of nine surveys conducted over a period of sixteen years. The following question was repeated: "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with democracy as it exists in Poland?" The answer to these question is hard to interpret because respondents are asked about their satisfaction, not about the functioning of democracy (this would clearly indicate specific support, i.e., satisfaction with the functioning of democracy at a specific moment) but about satisfaction with democracy as a political system in the form in which it has developed in Poland. We may only guess that respondents thought they were being questioned on their current satisfaction with

[10] PGSS 1992–2008—Bogdan Cichomski (Programme Director), Tomasz Jerzyński and Marcin Zieliński. Polish General Social Survey: a cumulative computerized database 1992–2008. Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2009.

Table 5

Satisfaction with democracy as it exists in Poland (%)

	Satisfied	Not satisfied	There is no democracy in Poland	I don't know
1992	22	65	4	8
1993	29	61	2	7
1994	35	55	3	7
1995	35	57	2	6
1997	59	29	2	10
1999	47	42	3	8
2002	38	51	2	9
2005	41	51	2	7
2008	59	32	1	8

Source: PGSS 1992–2008.

the condition of democracy at the time of study (i.e., about its functioning). Therefore, this is a boundary finding, leaning perhaps toward specific support.

Only in 1997 and 2008 were the majority of adult Poles (59%) satisfied with Polish democracy; nearly half in 1999 (47%) and a minority in remaining years. However, in 2002 and 2005 level of satisfaction was much higher than in 1992 and 1993, that is in the early days of the new Polish democracy. We can easily explain the rise and fall of satisfaction with Polish democracy in terms of the social and economic situation at the time of study. The social situation improved in Poland in 1993–97 (unemployment dropped) and so did the economic situation (national income increased rapidly). In 1999–2002, on the other hand, two negative processes could be observed: the unemployment rate increased and there was a major drop in the dynamic of national income. It was not until 2003 that economic growth speeded up and 2008 is the last year with a high rate of increase of national income, followed by a rapid drop in 2009.

Satisfaction with the way democracy is developing in Poland in the late 1990s was higher than in other post-communist countries with which Poland is usually compared (Table 6).

Level of satisfaction in Poland was not very different from what it was in established democracies (France, United Kingdom) and even higher than in Italy (35%). However, the difference between satisfaction in western democracies and democracies in post-communist countries is evident and considerable and Italy is an exception to the rule.

d) Confidence in Institutions

The next object of political support which clearly approximated the polar point of the scale of specific support is the state institution category. Attitude toward institutions is usually measured in terms of citizens' level of confidence in the most important state institutions.

Table 6

Satisfaction with the way democracy is developing in your country (%)

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	DK/NA	Satisfied
France	4	42	37	11	6	46
The United Kingdom	5	41	29	9	16	45
Germany (West)	9	66	17	5	3	76
Germany (East)	11	51	30	6	3	62
The Netherlands	6	67	24	2	1	73
Spain	6	51	32	6	5	58
Italy	2	33	51	11	3	35
Ireland	9	50	28	6	7	59
Poland	**2**	39	37	12	10	**41**
Slovakia	1	22	50	23	5	22
Czech Republic	1	36	49	13	2	37
Hungary	2	30	53	11	4	32

Source: European Values Study 1999.

Table 7

Confidence in government institutions in Poland (%)

	A great deal of confidence	Quite a lot of confidence	Not very much confidence	None at all	DK	Confidence
Parliament—Sejm and Senat	3	26	48	15	8	29
Government	5	31	42	14	8	36
State Administration	3	25	48	15	9	28
Armed Forces	25	43	21	6	6	**68**
Police	12	42	34	9	4	**54**
Courts	7	28	42	17	7	35
Central Bank	10	44	26	9	12	**54**
Political Parties	1	15	54	21	10	16

Source: IS 2001.

One Pole in three declares confidence in the state's most important institutions—parliament, the government and the courts. Only three institutions enjoy the confidence of the majority of respondents: the army, police and central bank. Political parties enjoy very little confidence. Only 16% of the respondents declare confidence in political parties yet parties are one of the most important institutions in democratic regimes.

Thanks to the European Social Survey,[11] we can compare the level of confidence (an indicator of specific support) in the most important state institutions in Poland and a selection of European countries, including established democracies and post-communist states (Table 8).

Table 8

Trust in government institutions
(mean values on the scale 0–10*)

	Parliament	Legal System	Police	Political Parties
France	4.27	4.77	5.66	3.40
The United Kingdom	4.29	5.12	6.12	3.68
Germany (West)	4.32	5.68	6.59	3.24
Germany (East)	3.80	4.98	6.01	2.94
The Netherlands	4.67	5.50	5.97	4.80
Spain	5.09	4.72	5.91	3.67
Italy	4.41	4.92	6.36	3.24
Ireland	4.71	5.21	6.59	3.97
Poland	2.40	3.01	4.58	1.89
Slovakia	3.05	3.58	4.35	2.66
Czech Republic	3.19	3.72	4.23	2.74
Hungary	3.63	4.43	5.17	2.71

* The polar points of the scale: 0—no trust at all, 10—complete trust.

Source: European Social Survey 2004/2005.

Trust in political parties is much lower than in other institutions (parliament, the legal system, the police) in all the studied countries (Table 8) but it is lowest in Poland. Trust in political parties is also much lower in Poland than in other post-communist countries. Generally speaking, trust in all four institutions (Table 8) is higher in established European democracies than in new democracies (the four post-communist countries). Poles have the lowest trust in institutions (police is an exception) compared with other post-communist countries.

e) Trust in politicians

Trust in politicians is closest to the polar point of the scale of specific support for democracy.

Generally speaking, trust in politicians in all countries, both established and new democracies, is lower than trust in state institutions. Once again, trust in politicians in post-communist countries is much lower than in established democracies. And once again, Poland is an exception: of all the compared countries Poles are least willing to

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[11] European Social Survey Round 2 Data (2004). Data file edition 3.1. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway—Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

Table 9

**Trust in politicians
(mean values on the scale 0–10)**

	ESS 2004	ESS 2006*
France	3.49	3.29
The United Kingdom	3.59	3.41
Germany (West)	3.28	3.41
Germany (East)	3.02	2.82
The Netherlands	4.69	5.04
Spain	3.68	3.50
Italy	3.23	na
Ireland	3.92	3.82
Poland	1.92	2.10
Slovakia	2.53	3.57
Czech Republic	2.73	na
Hungary	2.68	2.53

*European Social Survey Round 3 Data (2006). Data file edition 3.2.Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway—Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

Source: European Social Survey 2004 and 2006.

trust their politicians. We may say that trust in politicians is low in every country but it is so low in Poland that it is nearly absent: 1.92 on the average in 2004 and not much more (2.10) after the change of government in 2005. We can easily see that trust in politicians is closely linked to trust in political parties. The differences in means "trust in political parties" and "trust in politicians" in the different countries is extremely low (from 0.01 to 0.13).

In other words, although support for democracy in Poland varies and depends on the level of analysis, permits the judgment that it is consolidated democracy although one that does not evoke enthusiasm. Democratic institutions and procedures do not operate in a void, however. They affect society but society also affects them. This is why we shall now analyze the wider context in which democracy functions: social trust, civic engagement and civil society, and political parties and their placement in left-right ideological space.

**Civic Engagement, Civil Society and Social Trust**

The most global indicators of the condition of civil society and the magnitude of social capital in post-1989 Poland are hardly optimistic. Even the first free elections in June 1989 were a warning signal. The turnout was only 62%. Today we know that the turnout in parliamentary elections under democratic regime (1991–2007) in Poland

ranged from 41% (2005) to 54% (2007) and the mean turnout for 1991–2007 was 47%.
Is this a lot or a little? A little in comparison with the average turnout in developed
Western countries in 1961–1999, which was higher by 26–48 percentage points (with
the exception of the United States of America and Switzerland) (Franklin 2002: 150).
More important, the electoral turnout in a given country depends less on individual
characteristics such as level of education (even if all adult Poles had higher education,
the turnout at the last election would have been 75%, i.e., the same as the average
turnout in the United Kingdom) than on a country's electoral culture.

When we compare the turnout in parliamentary elections in the five post-
communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe from the early 1990s we see
that it is lowest in Poland and lower by 10–15 points than in the other countries.

Figure 2

Turnout in Parliamentary Elections in Post-communist Countries (1990–2007)*
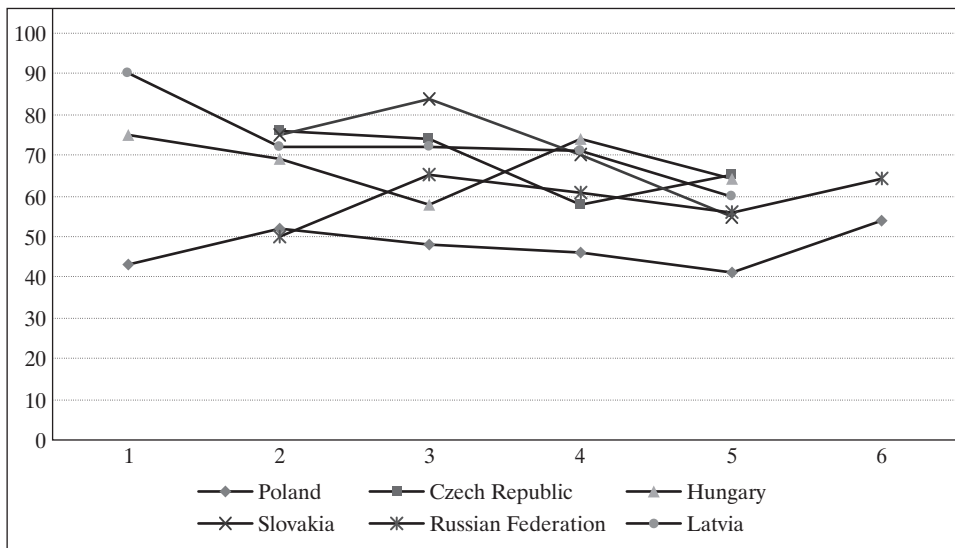
* Data from the following election years: Poland (1991, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007), Czech Republic
(1996, 1998, 2002, 2006), Hungary (1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006), Slovakia (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006), Russian
Federation (1993, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007), Latvia (1993, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006).

Only 19% of respondents in 1995 and 16% in 2001 declared that they had taken
an active part in the electoral campaign in Poland by supporting a particular politician
or party.[12] This means that involvement in electoral campaigns has hardly changed
at all (the difference is smaller than the measurement error) within the span of six
years. But if we ignore such forms of support as "signing support lists" or "financial
support," i.e., activities which do not require any significant personal engagement,
and if we consider only activities which really require personal involvement (handing
out leaflets, collecting signatures and money) then the proportion dropps to 4% in

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[12] The data for 1995 are from the IS 1995 study and the data for 2001 are from the IS 2001 study.

1995 and remains at that level in 2001. Is this a little or a lot? In absolute figures 4% equals 1,160 thousand people—quite an impressive number. But for example the proportions of unpaid volunteers in the campaigns of political parties in other countries were: USA 5%, Canada 4%, Germany 3%, United Kingdom 2%.[13] These data cannot be directly compared with the Polish ones because in projects IS 1995 and IS 2001 we asked about involvement in all the electoral campaigns (besides, respondents were not asked to say whether they had been paid or not). But we can draw the cautious conclusion that Poles' political involvement in electoral campaigns in 1995–2001 did not differ significantly from similar involvement in other democratic countries.

One of the important components of social capital is social trust. Generally speaking, do the Poles trust their compatriots?

Table 10

Social trust: "most people can be trusted"
(mean values on the scale 0–10)

	ESS 2004	ESS 2006
France	4.53	4.45
The United Kingdom	5.18	5.37
Germany (West)	4.90	4.83
Germany (East)	4.49	4.43
The Netherlands	5.84	5.76
Spain	4.89	5.10
Italy	4.36	na
Ireland	5.84	5.36
Poland	3.59	4.07
Slovakia	4.02	4.29
Czech Republic	4.28	na
Hungary	4.11	4.33

Source: European Social Survey 2004 and 2006.

The level of social trust in Poland, which is the most important component of social capital, is the lowest among the compared European countries. If we take into account the more precise measurement over time (table 11) and instead of means on an 11-point scale we take into account the percentage of those who agree with the statement "most people can be trusted," then the results for Poland are confounding.

In 2002 14% of the Polish people agreed that "most people can be trusted." In 1992–1997 the proportion of those agreeing was basically stable. Since 1997 we can see a slight improvement in the level of social trust. This may be a symptom of a more permanent trend. Data from ESS 2004 and 2006 surveys allow such a conjecture to be made. The data from Table 11 show that the younger generations (18–24 years

[13] Cf. the 1990 World Values Survey quoted in Lipset, Seymour M. (1996: 279).

Table 11

Social trust: "most people can be trusted" (%)

	Poland			
	18–24 years old	25–29	30 and more	Total
1992	8	5	11	**10**
1993	7	6	10	**9**
1994	9	4	9	**8**
1995	7	5	9	**8**
1997	10	9	10	**10**
1999	10	13	12	**12**
2002	8	15	14	**14**

Source: Polish General Social Survey 1992–2002.

old) are even less endowed with social trust than older generations. Social relations in Poland during the 1990s were not conducive to the emergence of social trust on a wider scale.

When respondents in other countries were asked the same question, the proportions of positive answers were: Americans 36% (in 1995),[14] Britons 30%, Spaniards 39%, Italians 33% (all in 1999). It is here that we see how nations with relatively high and low social capital differ. Poles do not trust one another. As a rule, their first reaction is distrustful caution.

Probably the most interesting question, however, is the question concerning Poles' engagement in civil society, i.e. their membership in voluntary organizations. To what extent do Poles participate in civil society organizations? The data are presented in tables 12 and 13.

In 1995 one Pole in three (35%) belonged to at least one organizationbut only one in four (26%) belonged in 2001. If we exclude trade union membership, which is different from membership in other organizations, the respective proportions drop still further to one third (1995) and one fifth (2001) respectively. Two-thirds of all Poles remain completely uninvolved in civic organizations which places Poland at the very end of the rank among developed countries (cf. Table 12). It is also worth remembering that although 35% of the Poles belonged to at least one voluntary organization in 1995, only 3% indicated that "being a member of an association or society" was important and was part of their personal identity.

In comparison with developed countries, Poland has the lowest participation in voluntary organizations. The definite leaders in civil involvement are the United States of America—92% of adult citizens belonged to at least one voluntary organization in 1995.[15] De Tocqueville's diagnosis made a hundred and fifty years ago is still valid. Other relatively highly involved countries in Europe include Germany, Italy and France. Poland is in the group of countries where civil involvement is low.

[14] World Values Survey 1995–1997 (WVS 1995–1997).
[15] Source: WVS 1995–97.

Table 12

Membership in voluntary organizations (%)

	Member in:	
	At least one	None
France	39	61
United Kingdom	34	66
Germany (West)	52	48
Germany (East)	44	56
The Netherlands	93	7
Spain	31	69
Italy	42	58
Ireland	57	43
Poland	**26**	74
Slovakia	65	35
Czech Republic	59	41
Hungary	29	71

Source: European Values Study 1999.

Table 13

**Membership in voluntary associations
Poland: 1995–2001**

	Total		Without trade unions	
	1995	2001	1995	2001
None	65	74	71	79
1 (one)	24	15	20	13
2 (two)	8	6	6	4
3 (three)	3	2	3	2
4 (four)	1	1	1	1

Source: IS 1995–2001.

Our neighbours from the south (Czechs and Slovaks) are much more involved in associational life than we are.

The difference between 1995 and 2001 is very evident (table 13). Membership in voluntary organizations (at least one) dropped in Poland by 9 percentage points. Other repeated studies corroborate this finding. Piotr Gliński found a similar drop in 1995–1999 (Gliński 2000: 365). When interpreting this drop of global self-organization in Poland (indicating a serious drop in the level and quality of social capital), it is worth drawing attention to two types of factors. The first type is the nature of the changes in social and economic space in the nineties. Some factors belonging to this type may have facilitated spontaneous association, others may have hindered it. But we must also take another factor into account: the gradual burning out of the "old pre-1989

forms of organization" which may have lived on due to inertia for at least the first half of the nineties or even longer. By the end of the nineties, involvement in voluntary organizations and associations in Poland may well have reached the "natural level" which is the product of two processes: extinction of pre-1989 forms of organization and the dynamics of new, spontaneous developments after 1989.

In terms of numbers, the picture of civil society in Poland is far from optimistic. The overall level of participation in voluntary associations is rather low in comparison with developed countries.

Political Parties

Political parties are one of the most important institutions in democratic regimes. Elmer E. Schattschneider (1942: 1), the classic political scientist, wrote: "…the political parties created democracy and […] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties. As a matter of fact, the condition of the parties is the best possible evidence of the nature of any regime. […] The parties are not therefore merely appendages of modern government; they are in the centre of it and play a determinative and creative role in it." In post-1989 Poland the role of institutions such as political parties in the development and consolidation of the democratic system has not been sufficiently appreciated.

If we are to conduct a rational discourse on stability and consolidation of the party system in Poland we must appreciate the importance of the left-right division and the capacity of these two concept-symbols to organize political space. Both concepts continue to be very topical despite repeated efforts to eliminate them from public discourse. It has been argued that the changes which have taken place in Western countries over the last few decades and in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 have rendered the two concepts obsolete. Such well-known writers and politicians as Bronisław Geremek, Adam Michnik or Vaclav Havel thought that reality had outgrown the capacity of the two concepts forcing us to bid them farewell. Yet it was this same reality which always called them back, time and again. In Poland, after the 1993 and 2001 September elections, the popular catchphrase was "the left has won, the right has lost." And in 1997 and 2005 it was "the right has won, the left has lost." Both catchphrases were "validated" in public discourse in the 1990s and became legitimate descriptors of the political scene. This validation was far from accidental because in face of the complexity of politics, the frequent fuzziness of the political scene, the rapid changes of scene, it is functionally necessary to have generalized orienting and communicating, complexity-reducing instruments. The "left" and "right" categories reduce complexity and give meaning to political phenomena thus helping people to find their bearings and communicate in political space. Second, both concepts continue to be topical because one cannot introduce alternative orienting concepts to public circulation in a planned and intentional way because complex processes are involved which do not succumb easily to control or deliberate manipulation. Third, these concepts are deeply rooted in social consciousness. Systematic research

spanning 1992–2007 has shown that at least 80% of adult Poles are able to define their believes in left-right terms. What is more, the tendency to call one's opinions rightist or leftist correlates clearly and systematically with different approaches to the past (organizational affiliation in communist Poland and attitude toward the People's Republic of Poland, socialism and communism), problems which emerged after 1989 (faith and the Church in the public sphere, vetting and de-communization, evaluation of post-1989 changes) and value orientation (religiosity, ideological conservatism, democratic institutions). On a mass scale, left-right identifications are systematically and consistently encased in social meaning.[16]

Figure 3

Dynamic of Left-Right Identifications in Poland: 1992–2007 (%)
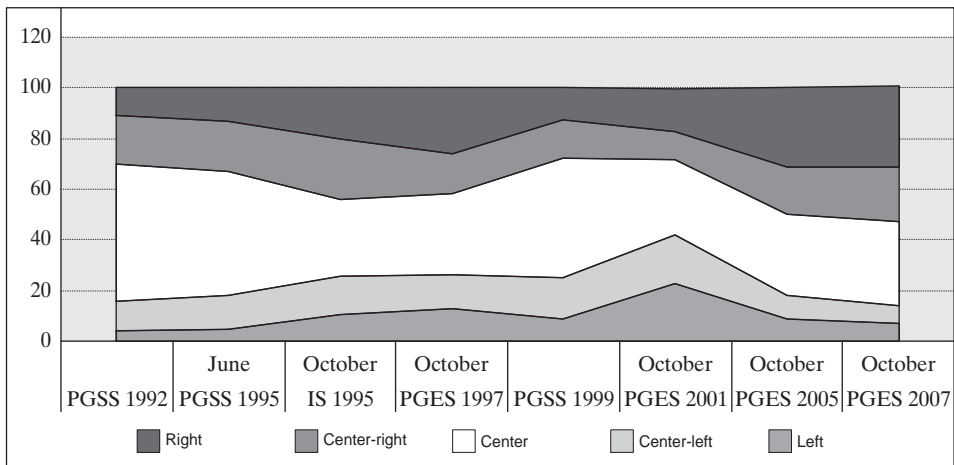
In 1992–95 nearly half of the respondents (Figure 3) were located in the centre (PGSS) whereas the polarization which took place during the presidential campaign in autumn 1995 diminished the centre by one-third (to 30%—IS 1995) and this tendency persisted for another two years. Polarization was very stable: left, centre or right identity remained practically unchanged in 1995–1997. Leftist self-identification practically did not budge in 1997–99 whereas rightist identification diminished. Rightist self-identification stabilized in 1999–2001 but at the same time the "centre" was reduced and the "left" increased. In autumn 2001 the left had 38–42% of the political cake and the right had 26–28%, an almost mirror reversal compared with 1995–97 (left 25–26%, right 41–44%). The situation changed once again in 2001–2005. Left identification shrank and right identification swelled. This dynamic can be interpreted in political process terms: autumn 1997 was a time of triumph for the centre-right camp united in AWS,[17] the next two years were years of increasing disappointment

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[16] For a more detailed discussion see Szawiel 1999, 2001, 2002.

[17] The English names of the Polish political parties are: SLD—Democratic Left Alliance; SdPl—Polish Social Democracy; PSL—Polish Peasants' Party; Samoobrona—Self-Defence; UD-UW-PD—Democratic

with centre-right government (shift of identification toward the centre) and the next two years witnessed a further shift from the centre to the left. The 2001 parliamentary election was the greatest success of the leftist SLD-UP coalition after 1989. The public discrediting (the "Rywin affair") and disintegration of SLD in 2003–2005 led to a significant drop in left identification to the 1995 pre-presidential election campaign level. Meanwhile, right identification in autumn 2005, achieved a level comparable to the polarization which was observed during the presidential election in autumn 1995 and persisted until the autumn election in 2007.

Clearly, the political process, parties and actors present on the political arena were decisive determinants of the shift in identification from right to centre and from centre to left or vice versa. Presumably, part of the respondents who declared identification on the right-left scale (about 20–25% each) are permanently located either on the left or on the right whereas the centre either swells or shrinks in concert with the political process, the successes or failures of either the left or the right.

Table 14

Mean values on the left-right scale 1992–2007
(scales standarized to 10 points scale)

	Mean	N	SD
PGSS 1992	5.94	1471	1.88
PGSS 1993	5.77	1440	1.84
PGSS 1994	5.60	1490	1.97
PGSS 1995	5.99	1493	2.09
IS 1995	6.06	1288	2.62
PGES 1997	6.00	1819	2.45
PGES 1997	6.25	1175	2.22
PGSS 1999	5.70	1071	2.27
PGES 2001	5.15	1395	2.48
IS 2001	5.06	1300	2.47
PGES 2005	6.42	1881	2.30
PGES 2007	6.54	1580	2.20

Source: PGSS 1992–1995; IS 1995–2001; PGES 1997–2007.

Analysis of the means (table 14) supports this observation. Polish society in the 1990s was very stable as far as global left-right "temperature" is concerned. In 1992–1999 mean positions on the identification scales did not change very much although a systematic shift toward the right in 1993–97 can be observed. We may say that the mean at that time was systematically skewed to the right but never to the left, i.e., it never dropped below 5.5, the median of the scale. A clear shift took place in 1998–99

Union, Freedom Union, Democratic Party; PiS—Law and Justice; PO—Civic Platform; LPR—League of Polish Families; AWS—Solidarity Election Action; AWSP—Solidarity Election Action—of the Right.

with the increasing disappointment with the centre-right coalition government (AWS-UW). An evident effect of this process can be seen in autumn 2001. The mean on the left-right scale now drops below 5.5 for the first time, moving toward the left (5.1–5.2). Public discrediting of SLD in 2003–2005 led once again to the now historically largest shift of social mood and identification toward the right (M = 6.42 in autumn 2005). If we compare the standard deviations (SD) we can see two polarization periods: the first one in 1995–97 (related to the 1995 presidential election campaign) and a second one in 2001 (related to the significant shift toward the left).

The left-right polarity serves an orienting function for actors on the political arena: political parties and their potential voters. Left-right identifications of the party electorates and their temporal dynamics are important from this point of view. Lack of institutional continuity of political parties in Poland is a serious problem for the researcher of identification dynamics. In 1991–2007 only two parties maintained their institutional continuity, PSL and SLD (SdRP).

Table 15

Mean values on the left-right scale for party electorates—11 points scale (1997–2007)

	PGES 1997		PGES 2001		PGES 2005		PGES 2007	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
SLD	**3,33**	262	**3,30**	389	**3,22**	98	**3,41**	84
SdPl	*	*	*	*	4,48	35	*	*
Self-Defence	*	*	5,53	98	6,23	93	6,33	7
PSL	5,51	68	5,55	74	6,31	62	6,20	85
UP	5,64	40	*	*	*	*	*	*
KPER	6,33	27	*	*	*	*	*	*
Civic Platform	*	*	6,88	121	7,07	283	6,65	548
UW (2005—PD)	6,48	152	7,06	18	6,35	17	*	*
ROP	7,10	53	*	*	*	*	*	*
Law and Justice	*	*	7,15	83	7,64	356	7,82	313
League of Polish Families	*	*	7,51	61	8,00	59	8,42	11
AWSP	*	*	7,65	33	*	*	*	*
AWS	8,03	416	*	*	*	*	*	*

Source: PGES 1997–2007.

Our attention is drawn to the *stable level* of left-right identification of the most important party electorates in 1997–2007. This is all the more important that this was found in four independent surveys conducted at various moments, and very different ones in many aspects. The pattern of electorates in 1997–2007, from left to right, is also relatively stable. It is consistent with the self-definitions of the interested parties themselves and with the way these parties are perceived by the public opinion and the mass media, i.e., left (SLD, SdPL), centre-right (PO, PiS) or right (LPR) respectively.

The SLD electorate was certainly phenomenal during this period. Whatever its electoral outcome (27% in 1997, 41% in 2001 and only 11% in 2005) it maintained a practically identical ideological identity. Beginning with the first election in autumn 1991 the SLD electorate has identified itself as definitely left and this electorate has systematically increased in number from election to election but always maintaining its steadfast left identification. In 1997–2001 SLD was doubly effective: on the one hand it managed to attract the support of the left electorate and on the other hand it managed to strengthen its left identification or even impose it on its new voters and adherents.

Conclusion

The theoretical scheme presented in this article is complex. The problem of democratic consolidation has been analyzed from the perspective of the support for democracy concept developed by Easton, Klingemann and Dalton and the perspectives of civil society and political parties. Eleven European countries were submitted to empirical analysis: 7 established democracies, Poland and three other post-communist countries.

The analyses suggest that Polish democracy is consolidated, stable and persistent. However, support for democratic government is hardly enthusiastic. This form of government leaves a considerable fraction of Poles indifferent and some are even willing to seriously consider the advantage of authoritarian government in certain situations.

However, the vast majority of Poles are convinced that there is no better alternative to democratic government and most of them are happy with the Polish rendering of democracy. This satisfaction increases when the basic indicators of social prosperity and economic growth are positive.

Support for democracy has been analyzed at many levels. Although it is much lower in Poland than in established European democracies, it does not differ significantly from other post-communist countries.

Three indicators are unique in Poland, however, one of which lies at the core of democratic policy and two of which are contextual: very poor electoral turnout (but not any worse than in the USA or Switzerland), low social trust and poor membership in associations (despite the vitality of civil society in Poland, only one Pole in four is a member of at least one voluntary organization, much fewer than in other countries).

Systematic public opinion polls have found a systematic increase in various indicators of social satisfaction since the early 1990s. The Poles have increasingly positive opinions of themselves, their situation and their chances for the future. This self-satisfaction does not translate into more positive ratings of governments and public institutions or more active civic participation, however. Perhaps this takes time. Some indicators of support for democracy, social trust and civic participation in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century are higher than they were a decade earlier but we do not know whether this is the beginning of a positive trend or a fleeting

fluctuation. Neither do we know if Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 will have any effect and if so, how powerful it will be.

To conclude, let me present one final finding. The dimensions and arenas of consolidation of democracy presented in this article are independent of generation change. Young Poles are no different than the older generation. It seems as if the level of support for democracy and relevant social attitudes have now stabilized at a certain level and are being transmitted from generation to generation. A political culture has emerged. It is pro-democratic but critical of democratic institutions and politicians. Political participation is low and so are political and civic engagement, and social trust.

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