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Changes in Class Structure in Poland, 1988–2003: Crystallization of the Winners—Losers' Divide*

Abstract: This paper builds on the work of Słomczyński and Janicka (2005) and examines changes in the social structure in Poland, and the role of social classes on public opinion formation. The main hypothesis is that the divide between winners and losers crystallizes over time, as the social distance that separates these categories solidifies, and their reaction to economic and political transformation becomes increasingly divergent. Using data from the Polish panel survey POLPAN, conducted in 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003, we find that the main changes in the class structure in Poland occurred between 1988 and 1993. Following 1993, the patterns of the post-communist social structure start to settle, becoming, by 2003, typical of a capitalist society. Results further show substantial and significant differences between the privileged and the disadvantaged in evaluation of socialism, as well as in their subjective assessment of changes in life, and active and passive support for the institution of elections.

Keywords: social classes, social status, post-communist transition, winners–losers divide, public opinion formation, voting attitudes and behavior

Researchers on Eastern Europe use the metaphor of winners and losers to identify the segments of the post-communist societies that have been located on opposite poles of the well-being scale due to their differentiated adjustment to the post-communist

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transition.¹ Recently, Słomczyński and Janicka (2005) developed the hypothesis of the broken social structure, which specifies a growing distance between the top and the bottom of the post-1989 social hierarchy in Poland, marked in the different dimensions of social inequality. Status consistency, as captured by the close relation between education, occupation and income, is strong only within the groups of winners and of losers, while for the rest of the social hierarchy, status inconsistency is an important feature. This paper builds on the 2005 article by Słomczyński and Janicka, and shows that in late-communist Poland the polarization of the class structure strengthened as the positions of winners and losers crystallized, and the social distance between them significantly increased.

Using data from the Polish panel survey POLPAN conducted in 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003, we examine the role of class membership in public opinion formation. We investigate the extent to which social classes differ with respect to evaluation of socialism, subjective assessment of changes in people's life during 1988–2003. Subjective views of social life are linked to the individuals' interests implied by their location in the social structure. We assume that, depending on social class, different types of interests and experiences during the radical social transformation may have reduced or enhanced the individual's positive opinion on social change. Along the same lines, it seems reasonable to expect that social classes differ in the subjective evaluation of their position in society. Additionally, we focus on class-related passive and active support for the basic institution of democracy—that is, elections.² By passive support for elections we understand a state of consciousness, a conviction that elections are a desirable institution; active support of elections means voting. We will examine the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged with respect of voting attitudes and behavior.

In this paper, *social classes* are defined through economic power, which in turn implies specific political and ideological functions in society. We assume that classes are distinguished on the basis of certain *relations*, rather than attributes, and considered as *social groups*, in contrast to aggregates. Ownership of the means of production, control over the work process and economic resources are constitutive class relationships. They form the base upon which the political and cultural identity of classes is established.

Social stratification means the existence of inequality among persons with respect to generally desired goods. Formal education, occupational rank, and job income are

¹ The notion of winners and losers has become very popular as indicated by its usage in the titles of scholarly articles and books (cf. Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Graham and Pettinato 2002; Orazem and Vodopivec 1995; Tang 2000; Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002; Wasilewski 1995).

² Elections are the means of delegating authority that constitutes the essence of representative democracy (cf. Dahl 1989; Held 1987; Sorensen 1993; Przeworski et al. 1995). Such democracy creates the government in the name of *demos*—the people. The question of who is *demos*—the people—is therefore a vital one, especially in countries undergoing radical social change. Referring to Poland, Edmund Mokrzycki (2000, 2001) justifiably posed this question in a straightforward manner. If democracy is supposed to indicate what is in the interest of the people—he argued—then it is essential to know who belongs to the people and how their group interests are represented. We entirely agree with this position. The support that various groups in society give to democratic institutions, elections in particular, is central to understanding the relationship between social structure and politics.

the main dimensions of social stratification. According to modern sociological theory, the degree of social inequality is, in a statistical sense, strongly determined by class position. In our framework, stratification can be identified as a *secondary characteristic of class structure*.

Unquestionably, class structure and social stratification have much in common. Are they, nonetheless, sufficiently distinct to differentiate them in empirical analysis? What is the hierarchy of social classes according to average indices of formal education, occupational rank, and job income? To what extent are social classes consistently stratified? These are the initial questions we focus on before proceeding with the core of the analyses.

Empirical assessment of the location of social classes in the stratification system, as well as assessment of the extent to which attitudes on social transformation and elections differ significantly will provide critical knowledge on changes in the social structure in Poland 1988–2003. Our main hypothesis is that the divide between winners and losers crystallizes over time. We expect the social distance that separates these categories to deepen, and their reaction to economic and political transformation to become increasingly divergent.

Data: POLPAN, 1988–2003

The initial survey, which later became the basis for the POLPAN study, was originally conducted before the 1989 fall of communism. The random sample, consisting of 5,817 men and women ages twenty-one to sixty-five, was surveyed at the end of 1987 and the beginning of 1988. The 1993 wave, *Social Changes in Poland*, was based on a random sample of 2,500 respondents previously interviewed in 1987–1988 and focused primarily on attitudinal and behavioral aspects of radical social change that had taken place in the period between the two studies. The third wave, conducted in 1998, comprised 1,752 men and women ages thirty-one to sixty-five who had previously been interviewed in both 1987–88 and 1993, and a renewal sample of those ages twenty-one to thirty ($n = 383$). In 2003, the fourth wave of the POLPAN study was conducted. The sample consisted of those who took part in the previous waves ($n = 1,474$) as well as those from the younger cohort, age twenty-one to twenty-five in the year of the study ($n = 225$). Table A1 in Appendix A provides the basic information about the samples.

Mapping Social Classes

Commonly accepted conceptualizations of the class structure of a socialist society rely on the presumption that control of the economy by the state reduces the importance of the defining distinction involving ownership of the means of production. In this (strict) sense, classes based on the criterion of ownership of the means of production, such

as the working class, represent former classes, i.e. should be regarded as remnants of the previous socioeconomic period, that is, capitalism.

In the 1950s and 1960s Marxists built on the assumption of the “modernizing” changes in the early communist period, namely agricultural reform, nationalization, and rapid industrialization, to posit that only three classes survived the post-revolutionary period: the working class, white-collar workers, commonly called “intelligentsia,” and the peasantry.³

Past empirical research shows that this division of the population captured some social inequalities expressed in terms of education, occupation, and income. However, it did not reflect the structure of socialist societies adequately, because it did not account for interclass differences. In the early 1970s it was documented that the interclass variation of basic stratification variables was not greater than intraclass variation (Słomczyński 1972; for a review of the issue of interclass differentiation see Wesołowski and Słomczyński 1977). The hypothesis that three basic classes to a great extent determine, in a statistical sense, social stratification was rejected, which prompted further studies to focus on the socio-occupational basis of stratification.

Criteria of Class in a Centrally Planned Economy

To develop a class structure that stemmed directly from the predominant features of the mode of production in socialist countries in the late 1970s, that is, social organization of the production, central planning, and state control of the economy, Słomczyński and Kohn (1988; see also Kohn and Słomczyński 1990) used the following criteria:

1. *Control over utilization of the means of production* was a crucial class criterion in the nationalized and centralized economy. Decision making over what was to be produced and what specific methods were to be involved in the production process distinguished managers from other state employees. Managers formed the most influential and decisive group involved in the process of economic planning; they can be seen as an extension of the state-power apparatus. In contrast to other socioeconomic systems, managers in the socialist system implemented ideological goals and could not subjugate them to a technical or economic rationale. The importance of political goals in administering the economic system affected the class interests of managers and their relation to other classes.

2. In the socialist economy, *immediate control over labor* separated supervisors from supervisees in such a way that the former had to defend their actions not only with respect to the latter but also with respect to managers. In socialist enterprises first-line supervisors exercised their power on the basis of an organization of production in which the coordination of work was delegated to them while they had very limited means of executing power. They were distinguished from managers since they did not make any decisions concerning what should be produced and how the work should

³ On the early studies on social classes in Poland, see e.g., Szczepański 1976, Matejko 1974; Wesołowski 1979; For review of early studies, see Wesołowski and Słomczyński 1977.

be done; however, their immediate control over labor identified them as a class that exercised control over others.

3. *The mental component of performed work* is a criterion used to distinguish non-manual subordinates from all manual workers in a nationalized economy. This criterion is understood here in both absolute and relative terms: first, the mental component of work is an asset associated with the autonomy of a job; second, it is a “capital” used in contacts with people to demonstrate one’s value on the labor market. Non-manual subordinates constituted a class that did not have an antagonistic counterpart. This class appeared alongside the other classes and tried to avoid confrontation with them.

4. *Production and non-production work* divided all manual workers of a nationalized economy into manual factory workers, i.e. the core of the working class, and the rest. There are two reasons for conceiving manual factory workers as a separate class; these reasons are political and economic. In Poland, factory workers were the main force in the immediate bargaining process with the state government because of their concentration and the established means of struggle available to them, such as strikes and demonstrations. Economically, manual factory workers were the main force of socialist industrialization.

5. *Ownership of the means of production*, the basic category of Marx’s theory of social classes in the so-called antagonistic formations, did not differentiate people in the socialist economy, neither as state or cooperative forms of ownership. Outside of agriculture, the only class owning the means of production was the petty bourgeoisie. This was a residual class in any socialist country. However, it should be included in the class scheme because it completed the division of the population into classes, and also because it formed a link with traditional forms of economic activity.

Based on these criteria, Kohn and Słomczyński (1990), and Słomczyński and Shabad (1997) distinguish the following classes of the communist period: Managers, first-line supervisors, non-manual subordinates, factory workers, non-production workers, petty bourgeoisie, and farmers.

The Social Class Schema for the Post-Communist Period

For post-communist Poland, we use a class schema that retains the basic class distinctions for the late 1980s, but introduces certain modifications for specific categories. We differentiate employers from the self-employed to capture the emerging capitalist class. In addition, we introduce the distinction between skilled and unskilled manual workers to reflect a new social division among workers following economic restructuring. As the privatization of the Polish economy progressed, having specialized skills increased workers’ chances of avoiding layoffs and/or getting jobs in the private sector, placing them in a more favorable position than that of unskilled workers. Thus, the class schema we apply to post-communist Poland is the following:

1. Employers;
2. Managers;
3. Experts;

4. Supervisors;
5. Self-employed;
6. Technicians and office workers;
7. Skilled manual workers;
8. Unskilled manual workers;
9. Farmers.

The Polish schema retains the basic class distinctions for late socialism, but introduces modifications for specific categories to account for the post-communist change. This renders it more appropriate for analyzing the social structural characteristics of Poland in 1988–2003 than either the Wright (WRI; 1997) or Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP; 1979) schemas, which were developed as means for capturing the class structure of advanced capitalist societies. Appendix B provides the comparison of our class schema with both the WRI and GPS schemas.

Measuring Social Status

Table 1 presents the measurement of social status and the distribution of its components for the whole sample and for the panel sample. Across all waves, factor loadings for education and occupation are high, ranging from 0.854 to 0.914, which indicates a strong correlation between each of these variables and the factor. While the factor loading for income is lower, its correlation with social status is still substantially and statistically significant.

Comparing results across waves, it is interesting to note that although changes over time are small, they involve an increased balance between factor loadings: for education and occupation there is a slight decrease, while the factor loading for income increases a little. Since the eigenvalue associated with the factor is around two, and the variance explained is above 62 percent, we conclude that the measurement model for social status fulfills the basic statistical requirements for constructing complex variables.

The Relationship between Social Class and Social Status

We examine the relationship between social class and social inequality in Poland over the fifteen-year time span that comprises the periods of late socialism, the early stage of post-communist transition, and the so-called late phase of the transformation. Table 2 and Table 3 (below) present the results for 1988–1993 and for 1998–2003, respectively.

Late Socialism and the Early Stage of Post-communist Transformation

Confirming prior research on the role of class in socialist societies (Bauman 1994; Słomczyński and Shabad 1997), the 1988 results show that class matters in communist Poland. The high and statistically significant eta coefficient between social

Table 1
Measurement of Social Status, 1988–2003

Components of social status	Factor loadings	
	Full sample	Panel sample
1988		
Education (years)	0.910	0.918
Occupational rank (SEI score)	0.909	0.918
Income (zlotys)	0.449	0.475
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>1.857</i>	<i>1.910</i>
<i>% of variance</i>	<i>61.91</i>	<i>63.67</i>
1993		
Education (years)	0.914	0.914
Occupational rank (SEI score)	0.897	0.892
Income (zlotys)	0.500	0.495
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>1.890</i>	<i>1.876</i>
<i>% of variance</i>	<i>62.98</i>	<i>62.53</i>
1998		
Education (years)	0.909	0.909
Occupational rank (SEI score)	0.905	0.905
Income (zlotys)	0.471	0.471
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>1.867</i>	<i>1.867</i>
<i>% of variance</i>	<i>62.23</i>	<i>62.28</i>
2003		
Education (years)	0.902	0.902
Occupational rank (SEI score)	0.854	0.854
Income (zlotys)	0.610	0.610
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>1.915</i>	<i>1.915</i>
<i>% of variance</i>	<i>63.85</i>	<i>63.85</i>

class, and status and its components, indicates that people enjoy different advantages in terms of distribution of valued goods depending on their class membership. Managers are at the top of the status hierarchy, followed by experts and supervisors. The self-employed, technicians, and office workers are in the middle, while manual workers and farmers are at the bottom of the stratification ladder (Table 2).

The early years of post-communist transition in Poland have brought little change in the overall relationship between class and status, although the economic and political context is undergoing major restructuring. For 1993, the eta coefficients between social class and social status remain high and statistically significant. Their values are very similar to those in 1988, only slightly higher, a clear indication that class membership continues to play an important role in people's access to valued resources. Moreover, while at this point the process of transition to capitalism is still in an initial phase, one can already see that social classes feel its effects differently. The position of certain "old" classes, manual workers and farmers in particular, has declined; other "old" classes, such as managers, experts, and supervisors, have successfully maintained their advantages. At the same time, the new class of entrepreneurs has moved relatively rapidly into a "privileged" position.

Table 2

Relationship of Social Class to Social Status and Its Components, 1988–1993

Social classes	Social status	Status components			N
		Formal education	Occupational rank (SEI)	Income	
	Means ^a (Standard deviations)				
1988^b					
Managers	2.199 (0.623)	1.649 (0.709)	2.447 (0.727)	0.932 (0.671)	130
Experts	2.024 (0.498)	1.847 (0.604)	2.135 (0.472)	0.399 (0.816)	265
Supervisors	0.921 (0.885)	0.707 (0.940)	0.945 (0.907)	0.578 (0.778)	328
Self-employed	0.312 (0.503)	0.341 (0.935)	-0.125 (0.056)	0.950 (0.848)	130
Technicians and office workers	0.466 (0.714)	0.576 (0.783)	0.488 (0.670)	-0.091 (0.830)	987
Factory workers	-0.272 (0.436)	-0.332 (0.543)	-0.270 (0.294)	0.197 (0.934)	1295
Manual workers other than factory	-0.693 (0.462)	-0.527 (0.518)	-0.765 (0.299)	-0.180 (0.299)	686
Farmers	-0.697 (0.424)	-0.721 (0.614)	-0.836 (0.000)	0.333 (1.129)	835
<i>F(df)</i>	<i>1,396.3 (df = 7)</i>	<i>806.7 (df = 7)</i>	<i>2,683.8 (df = 7)</i>	<i>100.5 (df = 7)</i>	
<i>Eta</i> ²	<i>0.707</i>	<i>0.560</i>	<i>0.809</i>	<i>0.148</i>	
1993^b					
Employers	0.400 (0.917)	0.562 (0.826)	-0.224 (0.167)	1.926 (3.104)	58
Managers	1.749 (0.692)	1.565 (0.613)	1.995 (0.616)	1.153 (2.463)	49
Experts	1.542 (0.338)	1.711 (0.380)	1.810 (0.431)	0.271 (0.656)	116
Supervisors	0.842 (0.825)	0.909 (0.896)	1.018 (0.829)	0.454 (0.814)	100
Self-employed	-0.029 (0.613)	0.239 (0.900)	-0.094 (0.325)	0.359 (1.164)	83
Technicians and office workers	0.264 (0.607)	0.507 (0.782)	0.399 (0.569)	0.039 (0.522)	228
Skilled manual workers	-0.588 (0.284)	-0.429 (0.469)	-0.448 (0.085)	0.063 (0.657)	252
Unskilled manual workers	-0.963 (0.396)	-0.540 (0.600)	-1.034 (0.423)	-0.184 (1.099)	134
Farmers	-1.028 (0.347)	-0.628 (0.613)	-0.923 (0.000)	-0.359 (0.470)	250
<i>F(df)</i>	<i>375.1 (df = 8)</i>	<i>238.3 (df = 8)</i>	<i>1,013.4 (df = 8)</i>	<i>28.2 (df = 8)</i>	
<i>Eta</i> ²	<i>0.738</i>	<i>0.584</i>	<i>0.856</i>	<i>0.175</i>	

^a In standardized metric $N(1,0)$.

^b Number of cases included in the analysis varies with respect to status dimensions; average N for the three status components is reported.

The 1998–2003 Period

Ten years into the post-communist transformation of the Polish society, the relationship between class and social inequality, as expressed in terms of eta coefficients, continues to be strong and statistically significant (Table 3). The same holds for 2003. Overall, the class hierarchy for the 1998–2003 period—that is, the period of post-communist stabilization, resembles considerably the one of the early stage of post-communist transition. Managers and experts are in the most privileged position, followed by employers and supervisors, while manual workers and farmers find themselves at the bottom of the stratification ladder. The self-employed, technicians, and office workers continue to remain in the middle of the distribution.

In light of the theoretical debate over the “death of class” thesis (for a summary of the argument of the death of class, see Pakulski and Waters 1996; for a thorough discussion of the thesis’ applicability to Poland, see Domański 2000), the results in Table 2 and Table 3 are of special interest: they show that class is not only conceptually but also empirically distinct from social stratification. Confirming Słomczyński and Shabad’s findings (1997), the descriptive statistics demonstrate that for all waves, the relations between social class and status components are not consistent. For example, while employers are at the top of the economic (income) dimension, they rank lower than managers, experts, and supervisors in the educational dimension and on the occupational scale; experts rank highest in the education hierarchy, followed by managers, but score much lower on the income scale; the self-employed rank lower than supervisors on the occupational scale, but not on the income scale. It is noteworthy that the social classes at the bottom of the stratification hierarchy also fail to be consistently arranged across all dimensions of social inequality. These kinds of rank shifts support the argument that classes are discrete categories rather than categories consistently arranged along a multidimensional stratification continuum.

The results of our analyses show that in terms of social stratification, privileged classes comprise employers, managers, and experts; disadvantaged classes consist of skilled manual workers, unskilled manual workers, and farmers. In further analyses, we will denote privileged classes by P and disadvantaged classes by D , assuming that P and D are dummy variables. Their relation to social status is very strong. To demonstrate this, we employ regression analysis in which social status S is a standardized dependent variable, ranging from -1.5 to 3.2 , with mean value 0 , and standard deviation 1 . The regression equation is $S = 0.271 + 0.955P - 1.070D$, with adjusted $R^2 = 0.595$. Thus the average distance between people belonging to opposite classes is more than two standard deviations since a person from the privileged classes would get 1.226 points and a person from the disadvantaged classes would get -0.799 points. Although it is obvious that being in the privileged class does not guarantee that persons from these classes would be at the very top of status hierarchy, it puts them far ahead of all others. In contrast, being in the disadvantaged class locates people more than halfway to the very bottom of the status hierarchy.

Table 3

Relationship of Social Class to Social Status and Its Components, 1998–2003

Social classes	Social status	Status components			N
		Formal education	Occupational rank (SEI)	Income	
	Means ^a (Standard deviations)				
1998^b					
Employers	0.648 (0.955)	0.475 (0.828)	0.416 (0.000)	2.145 (3.940)	47
Managers	1.677 (0.517)	1.646 (0.361)	1.957 (0.450)	0.907 (2.099)	50
Experts	1.498 (0.395)	1.663 (0.339)	1.749 (0.484)	0.308 (1.090)	86
Supervisors	0.232 (0.641)	0.503 (0.864)	0.254 (0.555)	0.254 (0.787)	99
Self-employed	0.229 (0.555)	0.575 (0.971)	0.196 (0.334)	0.285 (0.815)	75
Technicians and office workers	0.145 (0.592)	0.521 (0.799)	0.199 (0.616)	-0.044 (0.405)	223
Skilled manual workers	-0.768 (0.355)	-0.454 (0.542)	-0.710 (0.376)	-0.066 (0.415)	219
Unskilled manual workers	-0.817 (0.284)	-0.536 (0.446)	-0.724 (0.292)	-0.156 (0.317)	105
Farmers	-1.016 (0.367)	-0.534 (0.617)	-1.091 (0.000)	-0.144 (0.890)	131
<i>F(df)</i>	309.6 (<i>df</i> = 8)	147.8 (<i>df</i> = 8)	626.3 (<i>df</i> = 8)	25.2 (<i>df</i> = 8)	
<i>Eta</i> ²	0.744	0.562	0.812	0.158	
2003^b					
Employers	0.518 (0.764)	0.606 (0.906)	-0.432 (0.124)	1.560 (1.682)	43
Managers	1.350 (0.960)	1.379 (0.798)	1.221 (0.940)	0.977 (1.366)	45
Experts	1.550 (0.412)	1.879 (0.405)	1.802 (0.680)	0.471 (0.520)	72
Supervisors	0.444 (0.914)	0.954 (0.968)	0.815 (0.971)	0.518 (0.928)	67
Self-employed	0.013 (0.871)	0.332 (1.036)	-0.373 (0.614)	0.639 (1.673)	59
Technicians and office workers	-0.109 (0.662)	0.310 (0.764)	-0.015 (0.802)	-0.372 (0.390)	192
Skilled manual workers	-0.690 (0.290)	-0.510 (0.429)	-0.547 (0.429)	-0.291 (0.359)	172
Unskilled manual workers	-0.999 (0.303)	-0.483 (0.576)	-1.089 (0.107)	-0.541 (0.210)	41
Farmers	-0.733 (0.411)	-0.522 (0.555)	-0.557 (0.108)	-0.389 (0.792)	98
<i>F(df)</i>	161.9 (<i>df</i> = 8)	118.6 (<i>df</i> = 8)	161.7 (<i>df</i> = 8)	44.3 (<i>df</i> = 8)	
<i>Eta</i> ²	0.630	0.546	0.622	0.317	

^aIn standardized metric $N(1,0)$.

^bNumber of cases included in the analysis varies with respect to status dimensions; average N for the three status components is reported.

The Role of Class Membership for Public Opinion Formation

Social Class and Evaluation of Socialism

In the four POLPAN waves the questionnaire item asks: “Do you think that the socialist system brought to the majority of people in Poland: (1) gains only, (2) more gains than losses, (3) as many gains as losses, (4) more losses than gains, or, (5) losses only?” Since we are interested in a clear-cut distinction between outlooks on the past, we regroup the five-choice answer to distinguish *positive assessment* of socialism, comprising ‘gains only’, and ‘more gains than losses’.

In a previous analysis on the 1988–1998 POLPAN data, Słomczyński and Wilk (2002) have shown that despite an overall stability in positive evaluations of socialism over the 1988–1998 period, significant change was occurring at the individual level. Comparing responses across the 1988–1993, 1993–1998, and 1998–2003 intervals reveals a considerable degree of stability, but also substantial change in peoples’ evaluations of the past. Table 4 shows that among the privileged, there is a regular and substantive decrease in positive assessment of socialism. For the disadvantaged, we observe an overall increase of positive attitudes towards the past regime. This finding provides support for the hypothesis about increasingly divergent opinions of winners and losers.

Table 4

Social Class and Positive Evaluation of Socialism

Social class	Positive assessment of socialism				Description of the trend
	1988	1993	1998	2003	
	in percentages				
Employers	—	17.2	16.6	8.8	Regular and substantive decrease
Managers	48.8	35.4	26.3	23.5	Regular and substantive decrease
Experts	34.9	22.0	16.3	15.4	Regular and substantive decrease
Supervisors	32.9	23.8	24.7	25.5	Decrease in 1988–1993 and then stabilization
Self-employed	16.6	18.8	30.8	29.9	Stabilization in 1988–1993 and then increase
Office workers	26.2	21.1	22.4	24.3	Insignificant fluctuations
Skilled manual workers	24.9	31.4	26.3	36.4	Increase, with exception of 1998
Unskilled manual workers	21.5	28.6	32.2	35.4	Regular and substantive increase
Farmers	25.9	39.8	42.4	49.5	Strong increase in 1988–1993 and some increase thereafter
Total	27.9	29.3	31.2	36.3	Regular increase

Social Class and Subjective Assessment of Changes in People’s Lives

Do people from different social classes assess changes in their lives differently? To answer this question we analyze two items from the 2003 questionnaire. The first item reads: Would you say that you have achieved success in your life? The context of this item in the questionnaire indicates that the timeframe for achieving success is at least the past ten years. In the analyses, the respondents’ answers were scored to reflect

the percentile distribution: 95 for *decisively yes*, 75 for *rather yes*, 55 for *difficult to say*, 35 for *rather no*, and 15 for *decisively no*.⁴

The second item considers people's lives in the context of the changes Poland underwent following 1989. It reads:

Changes in our country brought new opportunities and new threats. In your case, have these changes brought (1) more opportunities than threats, or (2) more threats than opportunities? Respondents who answered more opportunities than threats were also asked: Have these changes allowed you to fulfill your plans and goals?

A positive answer to this question indicates that respondents perceive the impact of societal change on their lives in positive terms.

In Table 5 we depict the relationship between social classes, and subjective assessment of success and realization of plans/goals. We provide the mean values of both dependent variables in two forms: raw and adjusted. The adjusted form takes into account interclass differences in gender and age composition.⁵ The results are consistent for both forms. Social class explains above 10 percent of the variance of each dependent variable, a little more for the adjusted values than for raw values. On average, employers, managers, and experts express a much higher level of perceived success than skilled manual workers, unskilled manual workers, and farmers. The privileged and disadvantaged are also strongly divided with regards to the perception of fulfillment of plans/goals.

Table 5

The Impact of Social Class on the Perception of Achieved Success and Fulfillment of Plans/Goals

Social class	Perception of achieved success		Perception of fulfillment of plans/goals	
	Mean value		Percent	
	Raw	Adjusted ^a	Raw	Adjusted ^a
Employers	58.9	59.1	68.9	70.1
Managers	55.9	56.1	60.0	61.6
Experts	60.8	60.1	50.0	49.8
Supervisors	44.7	44.5	40.8	39.6
Self-employed	46.0	46.5	37.1	38.7
Technicians and office workers	40.1	41.6	26.0	24.2
Skilled manual workers	32.0	31.4	20.3	19.9
Unskilled manual workers	28.6	29.2	9.8	15.6
Farmers	28.7	28.1	12.9	14.6
<i>Total</i>	42.0	42.0	31.5	31.5
<i>Eta</i> ²	0.118	0.119	0.131	0.145

^aCorrected for interclass differences in gender and age composition.

⁴ We do not claim that these scores ideally correspond to the midpoints of the cumulative percentile distribution but take them as reasonable adjustment that preserves equal distances between precatagorized answers.

⁵ Adjusted values utilize unstandardized residuals, R , obtained from the regression of the dependent variable Y on gender and age. These values are computed as $\bar{U}_c = \bar{Y} + \bar{R}_c$ where \bar{U}_c stands for the mean adjusted value for a given class c , \bar{Y} denotes the total mean value of Y , and \bar{R}_c denotes the mean value of unstandardized residuals R computed for a given class c .

Let us now consider the regression of perception of success on privileged and disadvantaged classes: $Y = 46.5 + 9.0P - 14.5D$, with standard errors for coefficients for P and D equal to 3.2 and 2.7, respectively. According to this equation, those who belong to the reference category—that is, to supervisors, self-employed, and technicians and office workers—receive 46.5 points; those who belong to privileged classes receive 55.5 points; and those who belong to disadvantaged classes receive 32.0 points. Standard errors are relatively small indicating that the distance between those who belong to privileged classes and disadvantaged classes is, on average, significant both substantially and statistically. Generally, privileged and disadvantaged classes explain slightly less than 10 percent of the variance of perceived success (adjusted $R^2 = 0.095$).

We performed a similar analysis for perception of realization of plans/goals, treating this variable as a dummy. The logistic regression coefficient for P is 0.983, which in its exponential form shows that those belonging to the privileged classes feel 2.7 times more frequently that they have been able to fulfill their plans/goals than people from the reference category—that is, those who are supervisors, self-employed, or technicians and office workers. As expected, for D the coefficient is negative, -0.807 . Taking the exponential form, we can say that the disadvantaged are around 50 percent less likely to claim the fulfillment of their plans/goals than people from the reference category. Once again, empirical results indicate a large distance between people of opposite classes.

In our analysis, we also include the subjective evaluation of one's social position. In 2003 respondents were asked: "Comparing various groups in our country, people believe that some of them are located higher on the social ladder than are others. On the scale the top point, denoted by one, refers to groups located the highest, and the bottom point, denoted by ten, refers to groups located the lowest. Please indicate where on the scale would you locate yourself?" We ranked respondents on a percentile scale, with a higher value indicating a higher position. Table 6 shows the results of the regression of this variable on gender, age, privileged classes, disadvantaged classes, and evaluation of one's position in 1993.⁶ This latter is retrospective information. For participants in both the 1993 and 2003 waves, the correlation between their evaluations of their social position provided in 1993, and retrospectively in 2003 for 1993 is relatively high ($r = 0.581$), showing a good degree of consistency in people's assessments.

As indicated by the unstandardized coefficients in Table 6, the effect of social class on evaluation of social position is strong and significant. Since prior subjective assessment of one's location is controlled for, results give us insights into the dynamics of evaluation of social position by class membership. Individuals belonging to the privileged classes get a 5.856-point premium, whereas members of the disadvantaged classes get a -8.850 -point penalty. The standardized coefficients show that the effect of the past evaluation is strongest but the effect of disadvantaged classes is still substantial. Premium and penalty refer to increase and decrease in peoples' subjective

⁶ Analyses are performed on all 2003 respondents who in 1993 were working or of working age.

Table 6

Regression of Evaluation of Actual Social Position on Gender, Age, Privileged and Disadvantaged Social Classes, Controlling for Evaluation of Social Position in the Past

Independent variables	B	SE	Beta
Gender (male = 1, female = 0)	1.557	1.216	0.028
Age (years)	-0.286*	0.038	-0.160
Privileged classes ^a (yes = 1, no = 0)	5.856*	1.925	0.075
Disadvantaged classes ^b (yes = 1, no = 0)	-8.850*	1.427	-0.155
Perception of social position in 1993 (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.451*	0.021	0.452
Constant	44.244*	2.238	1.703

^aEmployers, managers, and experts.

^bSkilled manual workers, unskilled manual workers, and farmers.

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.281$.

* $p < 0.01$.

assessments. Therefore, results demonstrate that between 1993 and 2003 the interclass gap in evaluation of social position widened.

The Role of Class Membership for Voting Attitudes and Behavior

The POLPAN data contain several items concerning democratic values that allow us to construct a scale of support for democratic values, a scale well grounded in the research tradition of political sociology (Słomczyński and Shabad 2002). One of the relevant questions reads: "Elections are not necessary if political leaders represent the interests of citizens." In Table 7 we provide percentages of undemocratic answers as either "I entirely agree" or "I somewhat rather agree."

The privileged classes—employers, managers, and experts—less often than other classes declare that elections are unnecessary and have fewer absentees. This result is hardly surprising since the privileged classes provide stronger support for democratic values than the disadvantaged classes, particularly the unskilled workers in cities and the countryside (Evans and Whitefield 1995). Although in our original class schema the supervisors and the self-employed constitute separate categories, in Table 6 we have combined them with two other categories because of the similar distribution of all dependent variables.

In the most recent wave of our panel study—that is, in 2003—we asked the respondents whether they had participated in the 2001 parliamentary elections. Even though the respondents could have deliberately, or unconsciously, provided answers inconsistent with their actual behavior, it must be noted that negative attitudes toward elections are consistent with the declared absenteeism. In the 2001 elections, as well as in three other recent elections—1993, 1997, and 2003—taken together, the privileged classes displayed lower voting absenteeism than other social classes.

Table 7

Proportion of People Declaring that Elections Are Unnecessary and Proportion of People Abstaining from Elections by Social Class

Social Classes ^c	Opinion: Elections are unnecessary ^a	Declared electoral absenteeism in 2001 ^a	Declared absenteeism in three elections ^b
	Proportions for social classes		
Employers	0.28	0.04	0.03
Managers	0.18	0.03	0.01
Experts	0.23	0.03	0.01
Supervisors and self-employed ^d	0.46	0.11	0.07
Technicians and office workers	0.56	0.12	0.07
Manual skilled workers	0.58	0.24	0.14
Manual unskilled workers	0.68	0.23	0.17
Farmers	0.61	0.21	0.12

^a Response provided in the 2003 wave of the panel study.

^b Elections in 1993, 1997, and 2001. Responses provided in the 1998 and 2003 waves of the panel study.

^c Classes established for 1998.

^d Two categories combined due to almost identical values of the dependent variables.

Table 8 presents an estimated regression equation, in which participation in elections is the explained variable, while gender, age, social class, and opinion that elections are unnecessary are the explanatory variables. This estimate was obtained by defining the explained variable as a logarithm of the ratio of likelihood of participating in elections to the likelihood of behaving otherwise. The exponential values of the equation parameters reveal how many times—or, in what proportion—the likelihood of participation in elections increases when the explanatory variable changes its state. Estimates provided in Table 8 allow for two important conclusions: the declared participation in elections depends—first—on opinions about the importance of elections as a democratic institution, and—second—on variables characterizing social structure. People belonging to social classes that lost in the process of transformation less often take part in elections than do people from other segments of the social structure.

Conclusions

In this paper we used a social class schema that mirrors well social inequality in the Polish society. The data for 1988–2003 show that social class explains a considerable proportion of variance of basic stratification variables. In the hierarchy of social status—indicated by formal education, occupational rank, and job income—employers, managers, and experts are located at the top; supervisors, self-employed, and technicians/office workers are located in the middle; and skilled manual workers and unskilled manual workers are located at the bottom. The distance between the privileged and the disadvantaged is substantial.

According to social status measured as factor in relative terms, the privileged classes—employers, managers, and experts—do not assume a higher position as compared to the population average. However, over time members of this group become

Table 8

**Regression of Relative Chance of Taking Part in Elections on Gender, Age, Social Class,
and Opinion on Elections**

Independent variables	Dependent variable: $\log [w / (1 - w)]^a$		
	B	SE	Exp(B)
Gender (male = 1, female = 0)	0.194*	0.101	1.214
Age (years)	0.002	0.003	1.002
Privileged classes (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.326*	0.170	1.385
Disadvantaged classes (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.305**	0.120	0.737
Opinion: elections unnecessary (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.250**	0.103	0.779
Constant	0.532**	0.184	1.703

^aw—proportion of people declaring their participation in elections.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

more similar to each other. Regarding the disadvantaged, we note some fluctuation, with unskilled manual workers and farmers consistently lower on the social scale than skilled manual workers.

Our analyses indicate that the main changes in the class structure in Poland occurred between 1988 and 1993. Following 1993, the patterns of the post-communist social structure start to settle, becoming, by 2003, typical of a capitalist society. With reference to our hypothesis, we could say that the crystallization of the winners–losers divide consists primarily of the solidification of the social distance between the top and bottom of the stratification hierarchy, rather than a growing gap.

Results in this paper further show that people belonging to the privileged classes distance themselves from socialism, assess their situation as successful, and feel that they have realized their plans/goals. In addition, they support the main institution of democracy, elections, both actively and passively. By contrast, members of the disadvantaged classes more often evaluate socialism positively, assess their situation as unsuccessful, and do not feel to have fulfilled their plans/goals. Also, among the disadvantaged support for elections is at a much lower level. Overall, these findings lend considerable support to the hypothesis regarding the crystallization of the winners—losers divide.

APPENDIX A

Table A1

Sample Sizes of the Consecutive Waves of the Polish Panel Survey, POLPAN 1988–2003

Samples	Panel waves			
	First (1987–1988)	Second (1993)	Third (1998)	Fourth (2003)
	Number of cases			
Raw sample	5,817	2,259	2,135	1,699
Panel sample	—	2,259 ^a	1,752	1,474 ^b
Renewal sample	—	—	383 ^c	225 ^d

^a Contains 2,092 cases from the randomly selected subset of the 1988 sample and 167 cases from the same sample overrepresenting people with higher education and involved in self-employment (in 1988). The composition of the total 1993 sample ($n = 2,259$) mirrors the 1993 population better than the 2,092 cases from the randomly selected subset of the 1988 sample.

^b Contains 225 cases from the 1998 renewal sample.

^c Random sample of those who were age 21–30 in 1998.

^d Random sample of those who were age 21–25 in 2003.

APPENDIX B

Comparison of the Polish Class Schema with the Wright and the Erikson-Golthorpe-Portocarero Schemas

In Table B1 we indicate what categories of the Wright WRI and the Erikson-Golthorpe-Portocarero EGP schemas correspond to the Polish schema. In the case of some classes the correspondence is almost perfect. For example WRI “petty bourgeoisie” and EGP “small proprietors without employees” match “self-employed.” Similarly, WRI “nonskilled workers” and EGP “semi- and unskilled manual workers (not in agriculture)” correspond to our “unskilled manual workers.”

However, neither WRI nor EGP utilize the full range of criteria used in our schema. For example, WRI lacks the division of type of work, and, consequently, it does not distinguish between manual and non-manual work, or between agricultural and nonagricultural work. As a result, for our categories of “technicians and office workers” and “farmers” we could not find unique categories.

The main problem with the EGP schema is that in distinguishing class categories it does not use the criterion of control over the work of others. Thus, EGP has no specific categories equivalent to our managers, and, in contrast to our schema, supervisors are lumped together with technicians.

In Table B1 we put the names of some WRI and EGP classes in parentheses since they correspond to more than one category in our schema. However, to investigate the practical overlap of these classifications with the Polish schema, we performed a separate analysis in which each person from the POLPAN survey was coded according to WRI, EGP, and our classification; we used the algorithm of coding, based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88), provided by Leiulfstrud, Bison, and Jensberg (2005). See also Domanski and Sawinski (1996) on measures for international comparisons.

Table B1

**Polish Social-Class Schema as Compared with Two Major Schemas: the Wright Schema
and the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero Schema**

Polish schema	Wright schema ^a	Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero schema ^a
Employers	1. Capitalists 2. Small employers	I. Upper service class IVa. Small proprietors with employees
Managers	4. Expert managers 5. Skilled managers 6. Nonskilled managers	(I. Upper service class) (IIIa. Routine nonmanual employees, higher grade)
Experts	(4. Expert managers) 10. Experts (7. Expert supervisors)	II. Lower service class IIIa. Routine nonmanual employees, higher grade
Supervisors	(6. Non-skilled managers) 7. Expert supervisors 8. Skilled supervisors 9. Nonskilled supervisors	(V. Technicians and supervisors) (IIIb. Routine nonmanual employees, lower grade)
Self-employed	3. Petty bourgeoisie	IVb Small proprietors without employees
Technicians and office workers	(11. Skilled workers)	IIIb. Routine nonmanual employees, lower grade V. Technicians and supervisors
Skilled manual workers	11. Skilled workers	VI. Skilled manual workers
Unskilled manual workers	12. Nonskilled workers	VIIa. Semi- and unskilled manual workers (not in agriculture)
Farmers	(2. Small employers) (11. Skilled workers) (12. Nonskilled workers)	IVc. Farmers and self-employed workers in primary production VIIb. Semi- and unskilled manual workers in agriculture

^aPartial correspondence of class categories is noted by parentheses (...).

Table B2 provides the measures of association between distributions of people coded according to WRI, EGP, and our schema, for 1993 and 2003. The results support the assertion that our class categories capture social inequality in Polish society considerably better than those of the Wright and the Erikson-Golthorpe-Portocarero schemas, which are presently often used in cross-national studies (see Leiulfstrud, Bison, and Jensberg 2005). Our country-specific class schema explains a larger proportion of the variance of the composite measure of status, and while the differences are not large, they are statistically significant.

Additionally, our approach allows for a much clearer identification of winners and losers. Although in all three schemas the privileged and the disadvantaged classes can be distinguished, our aggregated categories explain the highest percentage of variance in social status. To check this, we took into account the three top and three bottom classes of the WRI and EGP schemas and regressed social status on these aggregated categories. The adjusted R^2 coefficients ranged from 0.489 to 0.504, with values lower than 0.595 in the case of the privileged and the disadvantaged classes in our schema.

Table B2

**Relationship of the Wright Schema (WRI) and Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero Schema (EGP)
to the Polish Social-Class Schema and to Social Stratification Variables, 1993 and 2003**

Coefficients	WRI	EGP	WRI	EGP
	1993		2003	
A. Association with the Polish social-class schema				
Cramer's V	0.683	0.756	0.660	0.748
Uncertainty	0.649	0.716	0.612	0.705
B. Association with social status				
Eta ²	0.615	0.718	0.509	0.606
Eta ² /Baseline ^a	0.833	0.973	0.808	0.961

^a Baseline refers to the eta² coefficient computed for social classes distinguished according to the Polish schema (cf. Table 2 and 3).

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