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The Meaning of Democracy: Diverse Understandings of the Concept of Democracy in Poland and Other European Societies

Abstract: This paper analyzes the way democracy is perceived and understood in Poland and other European societies. Citizens usually assess political systems from the perspective of their everyday experience. This experience is then reflected both in their expectations of democracy and in their evaluation of the system's performance. The present article focuses on the conditioning of citizens' commitment to democracy. Is the notion of democracy understood in the same way across Europe? Or, if it has some regional flavors, what are the key dimensions of the differences? Additional attention is paid to Poland, where a two-dimensional pattern of perceiving democracy is described. Each dimension is connected with a different level of important resources—economic, social, and cultural—and related to a separate set of values and expectations. The universality and specificity of the Central European perception of democracy is discussed. The analyses are based on the data of the European Values Study.

Keywords: perception of democracy, values, Poland, Central and Eastern Europe

Introduction

Various manifestations of citizens' dissatisfaction with the way the political system works [1] have recently been encountered not only in so-called newly democratic states but also in established democracies (Ágh 2016; Adler 2018; Chopin 2019). A number of studies have looked for reasons for this regress of democratization in economic or cultural factors, or in the institutional design of democratic states. A comprehensive overview of such studies is provided by Cianetti at al. (2018: 246). Comparative studies have noted significant differences in the level of support for a democratic form of government along the East-West axis, which has been explained by the longer experience of democracy in the West and a substantially shorter experience in Eastern Europe (Toka 1995; Klingemann, Fuchs and Zielonka 2006).

Although the word "democracy" has been used in surveys, the meaning attached to the word has not frequently been discussed by researchers. Dalton, Sin, and Jou, who took this issue into consideration, came to the conclusion that people most often

[1] Among other phenomena, these are the growing support for populist parties in many countries, as well as the results of elections suggesting that some citizens could be ready to abandon democracy and to prefer various forms of authoritarian rule or "illiberal democracy" (see, e.g., Brusis 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Bustikova and Guasti 2017).

think of democracy in terms of the civil liberties and rights that it conveys (2007: 152). They provided evidence from the World Values Survey and other international research projects, where respondents were asked open-ended questions about their understanding of democracy. These findings were challenged by Schaffer, who referred to his studies in the Philippines and presented examples illustrating that in many cases even open-ended questions do not solve the problem, as the real meaning can be lost in translation between languages and cultures. He concluded that the consistency in understanding democracy revealed by other researchers was not something that was discovered but that was "subtly manufactured" by way of the questions asked (Schaffer 2014: 327).

The problem of an ambiguous understanding of the word "democracy" might affect the results of surveys in Europe as well, where the cultural differences are not so striking but where societies differ considerably in terms of historical experience and particularly in the experience of living under a democratic form of government. There is a discussion among researchers over whether or to what extent the evaluation of a political system's performance (experience with democracy) affects support for the idea of democracy. Klingemann (1999) as well as Fuchs and Roller (2006) claim that citizens have enough cognitive competence to distinguish between the idea and the practice of democracy (the real political system). Przeworski (1991) and Toka (1995) point to the economic performance of the system, which—in their opinions—could be an obstacle for the consolidation of democracy, particularly in Eastern Europe. This suggests that there might be connections between various aspects of the practical performance of the system and the strength of pro-democratic attitudes.

The focal point of this article is the conditioning of citizens' commitment to democracy, including people's expectations of the system, evaluations of the performance of the system, and, most importantly, the meanings which are attributed to the concept of democracy as such. I analyze the categories in which democracy is perceived in European societies using the data provided by the European Values Study: is the notion of democracy understood in the same way across Europe? Or, if it has some regional flavors, what are the key dimensions of the differences?

Additional attention is given to the case of Poland. Recent results of elections in this country (the parliamentary elections in 2019 and the presidential election in 2020) make the meanings that citizens attach to the concept of democracy especially interesting. The results of the elections suggest that there are polarly different—in a sense even antagonistic—perceptions of democracy in Polish society. To what extent is this in fact the case? Are these meanings convergent with the patterns of understanding prevailing in Western Europe, where democracy has a longer tradition?

The first part of the paper demonstrates what the essential characteristics of democracy are in the eyes of European citizens. The analysis reveals several patterns of perceiving democracy in Europe, in particular, a distinct Central European pattern, which is described in detail. In the second part of the article, the case of Poland is considered. I refer to the two-dimensional image of democracy revealed by the data and show how different representations of democracy are connected with different expectations in regard to the political system.

Democracy as a Value

Charles Taylor expressed the view that "democracy is an inescapable aspiration, that there is a sort of pressure towards democratization in contemporary world civilization, even though this movement is blocked and even reversed in many parts of the world" (2017: 3). In Europe, democracy has been proclaimed to be one of the fundamental values of the European Union—together with freedom, human dignity, and equality (see the Treaty on European Union)—and is referred to in the constitutions of probably all the European states (including Belarus and Russia[2] whose democratic character is often questioned). These are arguments for deeper research into the image of democracy in the eyes of citizens living in countries that call themselves democratic but are nevertheless quite undemocratic.

In the last wave of the EVS (2017–2020), the respondent's attachment to democracy was measured by two questions: "(1) I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country? Having a democratic political system[3]: (2) How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is 'not at all important' and 10 means 'absolutely important.'" The evaluation of system performance was also measured by two questions: "(1) On a scale from 1 to 10 where '1' is 'not satisfied at all' and '10' is 'completely satisfied,' how satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in your country these days? (2) And how democratically is this country being governed today? Again, using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that it is 'not at all democratic' and 10 means that it is 'completely democratic,' what position would you choose?" The first questions of each set were asked in previous EVS waves as well, thus they can be used for studying the dynamics of attitudes.

The question regarding the extent to which a certain political system is considered to govern the respondent's country well can be used to determine how the level of support for democracy has changed between the last two EVS waves. Klingemann (2014) noted the relative stability of this support between 1999 and 2008. A comparison of 2017 and 2008 shows that pro-democratic attitudes stayed relatively stable till 2017 (Figure 1).[4]

Figure 1 confirms the findings of Klingemann (2014: 122) that the proportion of democrats in Western Europe is substantially higher than in the East of the continent. It also shows that Central European countries (Visegrád countries) are in a "cloud" created mostly by Western European societies. In all the Eastern European countries except Slo-

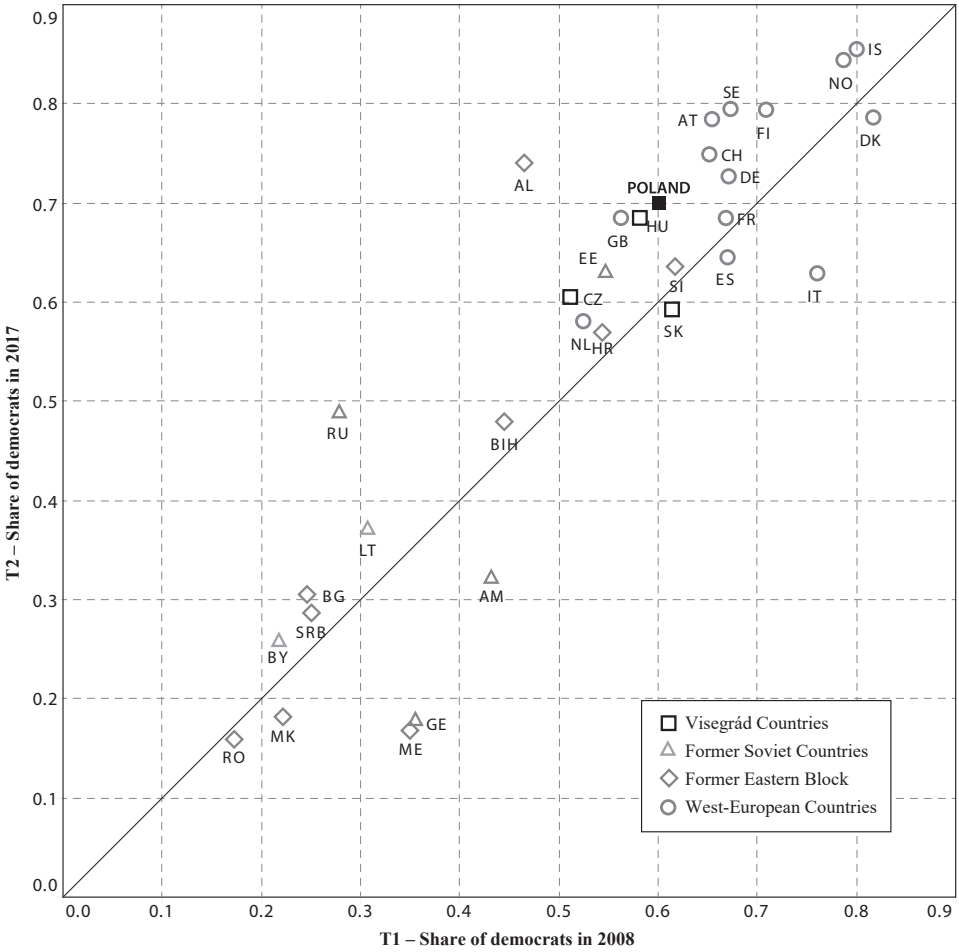
[2] The Constitution of Belarus: https://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/konstitutsiya-respubliki-belarus/; the Constitution of the Russian Federation: http://www.constitution.ru/10003000/10003000-3.htm

[3] One of the other systems that could be chosen was "having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections."

[4] Due to changes in the EVS questionnaire, I could not calculate the democracy–autocracy index in a way that would repeat Klingemann's analysis based on previous EVS waves (index construction—see Klingemann, 2014 p. 120). Instead, I calculated the proportion of democrats in each country as the share of those who see a democratic system as being "very good" or "good" for their country and simultaneously consider an autocratic system (a "strong leader") to be a "very bad" or "bad" way of governing it. The Pearson's correlation between 2008 and 2017 on the country level was .89 (N = 32 countries).

Figure 1

Proportion of democrats in 32 European countries—changes between 2008 and 2017



vakia, the share of democrats has increased since 2008. The results for Albania, where the increase in the share of democrats between the two EVS waves was one of the greatest, is in line with the findings of Hooghe et al. (Hooghe, Marien and Oser 2016) who noted an especially numerous group of citizens with a deep normative commitment to democratic ideals in Albania and Kosovo (p. 8). It can also be seen that Poland has the greatest share of democrats of the four Central European countries.

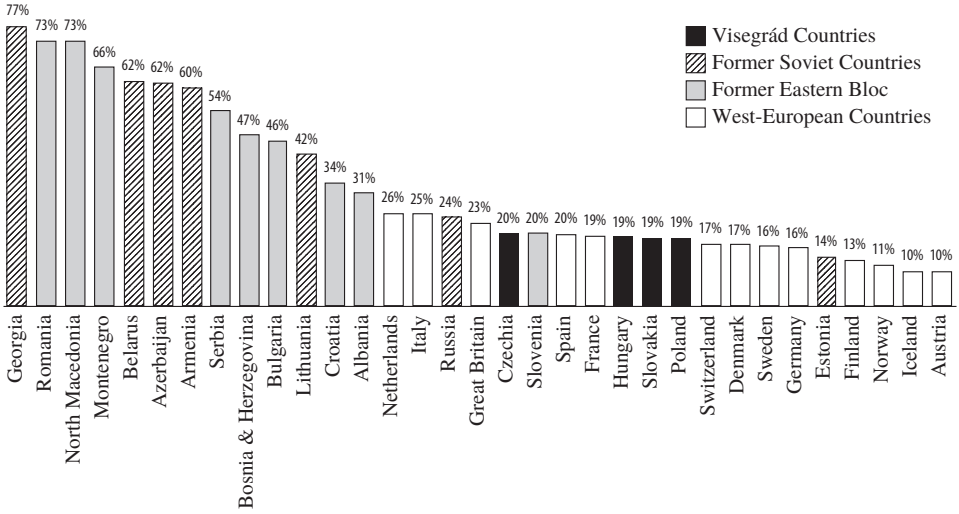
In the survey of 2017, the respondents could also declare how important it is for them to live in a democratic country. In most of the countries that took part in the study, the share of those attaching the highest importance[5] to democracy exceeded 60% and only in four countries (Belarus, Russia, Serbia, and Slovakia) was the proportion smaller than 50%. However, not all supporters of democracy are consistent in their views. Some are

[5] This is the proportion of those who assessed the importance of democracy as 9 or 10 on a 1–10 scale.

of the opinion that an autocratic system (a strong leader or army governing the country) would also be good for governing their country. These "inconsistent democrats" combine supporting a democratic and autocratic system and say that it is very important for them to live in a democratic country. The share of such respondents by country is presented on Figure 2.[6] The highest percentages of inconsistent democrats are in the former Soviet republics and in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, while in Western Europe or the Visegrád group these percentages are substantially lower.[7]

Figure 2

Proportion of "inconsistent democrats" in democrats



Such an inconsistency in opinions about the desired way of governing the country may result from dissatisfaction with the system's performance—an individual may be convinced that democracy is good, but observing its failure in his or her country, may yearn for the efficiency of a strong leader (this could be the case for many countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc). On the country level there is a correlation ($r = 0.51$) between the proportion of inconsistent democrats and dissatisfied[8] citizens, but on the individual level the hypothesis that inconsistent democrats tend to be dissatisfied with the system could not be confirmed.

It is also possible that inconsistency comes as a result of a specific understanding of democracy that is not contradictory with autocratic power. The researchers analyzing satis-

[6] An "inconsistent democrat" is a person who says that having his or her country governed by a strong leader or the army is good ("very good" or "good") and who assesses the importance of living in a democratic country as 9 or 10.

[7] The percentage of "democrats" in all the countries under study—see the table in the Appendix. Obviously, the Visegrad countries are also part of the "former Eastern bloc," but were placed in a separate category because of their distinct perception of democracy, which is presented in the following section of the article.

[8] "Dissatisfied citizens" are those who assessed their satisfaction with the current political system as 1 or 2 on a 1–10 scale.

faction with democracy were aware that its level may depend on how the individual respondents define democracy (e.g., Toka 1995; Klingemann 2014), but they didn't have adequate data to include this issue in their analyses. The EVS 2017 data allows the question to be analyzed.

What Are the Essential Characteristics of Democracy?

In the EVS of 2017 respondents were presented with a number of characteristics potentially related to democracy, and the following instruction: "Many things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy." The list of characteristics was the following (each to be assessed on a 1–10 scale, where 1 means "not at all an essential characteristic of democracy" and 10 means it definitely is "an essential characteristic of democracy"):

— "Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor."
— "Religious authorities ultimately interpret the laws."
— "People choose their leaders in free elections."
— "People receive state aid for unemployment."
— "The army takes over when government is incompetent."
— "Civil rights protect people from state oppression."
— "The state makes people's incomes equal."
— "People obey their rulers."
— "Women have the same rights as men."

These characteristics were analyzed country by country using exploratory factor analysis.[9] The main goal was to find out whether the way of understanding democracy is in any sense universal for European countries or whether there are some specific patterns. Welzel (2009: 81) argued that since democratization in the world developed in waves, this suggests the process has rather an international than a domestic nature, so democracy could potentially be understood in the same way within European societies. However, the analysis revealed not one but several patterns of perceiving democracy.

One of the patterns represented in Western Europe (France, Austria, Italy, Norway, and to some extent in Great Britain and the Netherlands) was a two-dimensional pattern where the first dimension combined acceptance of civil liberties ("civil rights protect people from state oppression," "women have the same rights as men," "people choose their leaders in free elections") as essential features of democracy with a denial of all the features that could be associated with authoritarian rule ("religious authorities ultimately interpret the laws," "the army takes over when government is incompetent," "people obey their rulers"). The second dimension then had a social flavor: "people receive state aid for unemployment," "governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor," "the state makes people's incomes equal."

[9] The number of factored variables was 9; the extraction method used PAF (principal axis factoring) with varimax rotation. The factors that met the criteria of eigenvalue > 1 explained from 30% to 40% of the variance (Thompson and Daniel 1996).

Thus, in Western Europe, democracy is first of all a non-authoritarian system of governing the country. It's purpose is to guarantee the citizens' rights and liberties and deny any signs of authoritarianism. This way of perceiving democracy was also shared by Lithuanians and—to some extent—by Estonians.

Scandinavian societies, with the exception of Norwegians, represented a three-dimensional pattern, which distinguished the aspect of civil and political rights ("civil rights protect people from state oppression," "women have the same rights as men," "people choose their leaders in free elections"), an order-making function ("religious authorities ultimately interpret the laws," "the army takes over when government is incompetent," "people obey their rulers"), and a social dimension ("people receive state aid for unemployment," "governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor," "the state makes people's incomes equal"). Such a model of understanding democracy was found in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden.

In Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia the pattern was two-dimensional but different from the one found in the Western European societies. The four Central European countries were diverse in terms of factor loadings, but the structure of factors was the same in all of them. In their view of democracy, civil rights and liberties are distinguished from the features related to power. The first dimension combined elections ("people choose their leaders in free elections") with rights' protection ("civil rights protect people from state oppression," "women have the same rights as men"). The second dimension grouped "social" aspects ("governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor," "the state makes people's incomes equal") with those emphasizing authority ("religious authorities ultimately interpret the laws," "the army takes over when government is incompetent," "people obey their rulers"). "People receive state aid for unemployment" correlated with both dimensions.

Such a composition of the two dimensions of democracy has already been described for Poland in the analysis presented by Marody (2019: 18). She labeled the first dimension "political" and the other "social." This is one of the possible interpretations of these latent dimensions. An alternative would be to point to the fact that the second dimension contains characteristics related to the active role of the state and other (religious, military) authorities. Thus, the common element of the five (potential) features of democracy is the indication of an external authority that maintains social order: the state takes care of the proper distribution of wealth, and the religious authorities are concerned with the shape of the law. It should be emphasized here that these were elements picked as essential characteristics of "democracy"—as was clearly stated in the question—not of "a political system."

The "political" dimension can in turn be viewed from the perspective of civil rights: in two statements they appear explicitly ("civil rights protect people from state oppression," "women have the same rights as men"), and the statement "people choose their leaders in free elections" can be understood as the implementation of these rights. In "receiving state aid for unemployment" (this is a feature related to both dimensions), citizens' exercise of their rights can be seen.

Taking all these into consideration I suggest labeling the first dimension "civic" and the other "order-seeking." This way of perceiving democracy seems to be specific for Visegrád

countries and is distinct from other parts of the continent. In the first dimension the citizens and their rights are the central issue, while in the "order-seeking" one the main issue is establishing and maintaining order in a society.

Extracting an order-seeking dimension of democracy, related to power, may seem counter-intuitive, as democracy is more about the decentralization of power and giving it to the people. However, as Thomassen points out (1995: 385) it is in line with the historical development of Western liberal democracy. Western democracies seek a balance between the sovereign power exercised by the state in the name of the people and the civil liberties which are to protect citizens against that power. In the perception of the inhabitants of Central Europe, the liberty-related dimension of democracy is separated from its order-maintaining function. The former is to a certain extent shared by the majority of the population (with different intensity), while the second aspect is acknowledged less frequently and with greater diversity within the societies. Thomassen names the former "individualist" and the latter a "collectivist" dimension of democracy.

For further analyses, measures (indices) of both dimensions of democracy have been created. They are simple sums of the scores the respondents gave in assessing the extent to which the above-mentioned features are essential characteristics of democracy.[10] The sums were then rescaled in order to obtain the measures ranged from 0 to 1. In Poland, the mean values of the indices measuring the two dimensions of democracy are 0.83 for the civic dimension and 0.42 for order-seeking; in Hungary, 0.81 and 0.49 respectively, in the Czech Republic, 0.73 and 0.36, and in Slovakia, 0.72 and 0.50. This means that in all four countries democracy is understood first of all through its rights-related dimension while the order-seeking one is expressed less intensively.

The meaning behind each of the above-described dimensions of democracy can be revealed by correlations between the indices and the respondents' attitudes to various types of political system, as well as their assessment of the extent to which their own country is governed democratically.

The set of correlations presented above shows that respondents with higher scores on the civic dimension of democracy tend to disagree that a strong leader or army rule are good systems of government for their country (negative coefficients); they prefer a democratic system (a positive coefficient), and it is important to them to live in a democracy. At the same time those with higher scores on the order-seeking dimension of democracy have a propensity to support authoritarian systems (a strong leader and the army) and many of them express doubts regarding the democratic political system. These suggest that the index of the order-seeking dimension measures the degree to which the respondent expects a rule-establishing function from the political system. Although the index was created from the answers given to the question about the essential characteristics of democracy the correlations presented demonstrate that to some citizens the word "democracy" simply means "the political system" and is not necessarily related to any kind of political liberties or rights.

In Poland—which is currently criticized by other EU members for violating the democratic standards enshrined in the EU's founding treaty—the belief that the respondent's own

[10] The indices were then validated using the method described by Likert (Likert 1932). If the mean values of each component are growing with the growth of the whole index it means that the index is internally coherent.

Table 1

Two ways of perceiving democracy and preferences regarding the way of governing the country—Spearman's correlation coefficients

	Perception of democracy	
	Civic	Order-making
Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections[a]	–.233**	.235**
Having the army rule the country[a]	–.213**	.326**
Having a democratic political system[a]	.287**	–.086*
How democratically is Poland being governed today?[b]	.050	.303**
How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?[c]	.365**	–.014

[a] The possible answers were: 1 "very bad"; 2 "fairly bad"; 3 "fairly good" and 4 "very good."

[b] The respondents were to use a 1–10 scale, where 1 meant it is "not at all democratic" and 10 meant "completely democratic."

[c] The respondents were to use a 1–10 scale, where 1 meant it is "not at all important" and 10 meant "absolutely important."

* $p < 0.005$
** $p < 0.001$

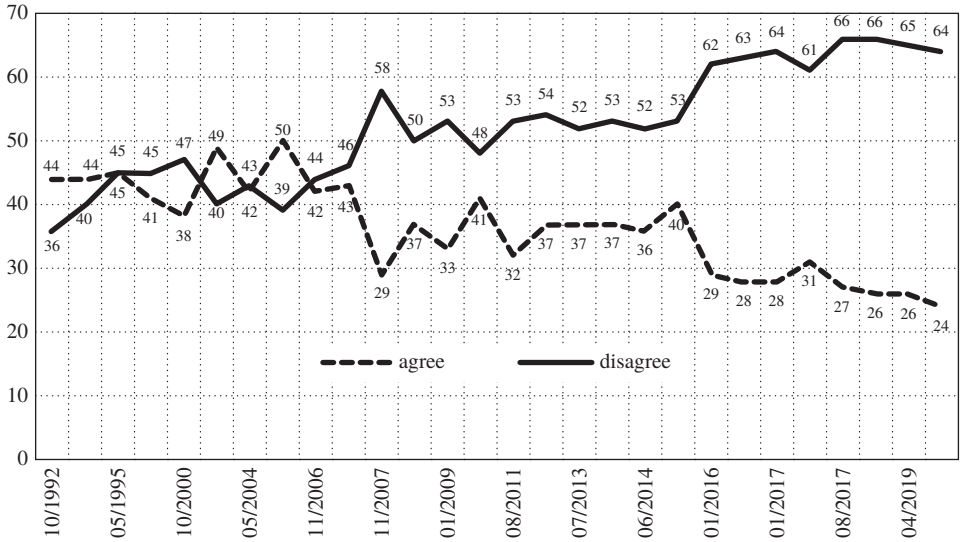
country is governed democratically correlates positively with the order-seeking dimension of democracy. At the same time, there is no correlation between the intensity of this belief and the civic dimension of democracy. These results demonstrate that in Poland there is a group of citizens who have a specific understanding of democracy that is different, if not contradictory, to the definitions presented by political science textbooks. The results of the elections show that this group is influential enough to win elections.

The phenomenon of attributing non-democratic characteristics to democracy has already been noted by Reykowski (2019) in his research conducted in Poland in 1992–1995, and by Skarżyńska (2019), who commented on the findings of 2018. Reykowski described a two-dimensional model of democracy. He called one of the dimensions "liberal-democratic," and he said the other, the "welfare state," had an "ideological variant" according to which democracy was understood as a state that protects Christian values and ensures the religious formation of youth (pp. 184–186). Skarżyńska noted that Poles, after 20 years of living in a democracy, tend to define the system very broadly, as a subjectively "good system." This sometimes leads to interpreting a clearly undemocratic policy as meeting the democratic entitlement of the majority to govern the country (p. 25).

Nevertheless, Poles demonstrate their attachment to the idea of democracy in the long-term perspective—especially when they feel that democracy is threatened. The Public Opinion Research Center has been measuring attitudes to democracy since 1992 by asking whether the respondent agrees or not with the statement "for people like you it generally does not matter if the government is democratic or not." In 1992, 44% agreed and 36% disagreed with this statement. Around 2005 the opponents of the statement started to prevail over the supporters, and they continued to prevail up to the last measurement in 2020. The difference in percentages between the supporters and opponents grew substantially in 2016, after Law and Justice came to power. In 2020, 64% disagreed with the above statement and only 24% agreed (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Attachment of Poles to the Concept of democracy. Attitudes toward the statement "For the people like you it generally does not matter whether the government is democratic or not"



Data source: Public Opinion Research Center, Report no. 95/2020.

The Two Aspects of Democracy in Poland

In order to better understand what meaning Poles attach to each of the dimensions of democracy revealed in the EVS, I have analyzed the relations of these dimensions to three basic groups of factors: axiological orientations, interest in public life, and trust in people and institutions.

Axiological orientations are described by moral rigorism, (in)tolerance of otherness and attitude to gender roles. Moral rigorism was considered to be the respondent's refusal to accept such types of behavior as homosexuality, abortion, divorce, casual sex, and artificial insemination.[11] Intolerance of otherness was expressed by the respondent's refusal to accept Muslims, people of a different race, immigrants, or homosexuals as neighbors. The attitude to fixed gender roles was measured by acceptance or rejection of the statement "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family."[12]

Interest in public life is described by three variables: the variety of media sources where the respondents follow politics (at least several days a week), liberty aspirations, defined in accord with Welzel (2007), and political participation that challenges the system, measured

[11] Based on the above-mentioned types of behavior an index of moral rigorism has been created. It is a simple count of the types of behavior that the respondent refuses to justify (i.e., answered 1–3 on a scale, where 1 means the behavior can never by justified and 10 that it can always be justified).

[12] The possible answers were from 1 "strongly disagree" to 4 "strongly agree."

on the basis of the respondent's declaration that he or she has already or might in the future sign a petition, attend a demonstration, or join a boycott or strike.[13]

Trust in people and institutions was expressed in the responses to direct questions.

Table 2

Values and attitudes related to two dimensions of political system (Poland, 2017)—Spearman's correlation coefficients

	Perception of political system	
	Civic	Order-making
Axiological orientation		
Moral rigorism	−.081**	.247**
Intolerance of otherness	−.074*	.216**
Acceptance of fixed gender roles[a]	−.088**	.229**
Interest in public life		
Following politics in media (no. of different sources)	.137**	−.028
Liberty aspirations	.067*	−.212**
System-challenging political participation	.135**	−.128**
Trust[b] in people and institutions		
Trusting people (personally unknown)	.104**	−.074*
Self-confidence[c]	.101**	−.021
The Government	.058	.288**
Police	.081*	.148**
Army	.026	.185**
Political parties	.038	.194**
Catholic Church	.026	.282**
Ecological organizations	.095**	.011
Other NGOs	.140**	.036

[a] Measured by the respondent's reaction to a statement *A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family*. Possible responses were: 1 "disagree strongly", 2 "disagree", 3 "agree" and 4 "agree strongly".

[b] Trust in institutions was measured on 1–4 scale where 1 means the lowest and 4—the highest level of trust.

[c] Self-confidence is the respondent's assessment of how much freedom of choice and control he/she feels to have over the way his/her life turns out (scale: from 1—none at all to 10—a great deal).

* $p < 0.005$
** $p < 0.001$

The correlations form quite a coherent pattern according to which a higher propensity to perceive the political system through its order-making function coexists with expectations that the state authority will provide not only socio-political but also axiological order. The former is represented by positive correlations with trust in state institutions, such as the government, police, or army. The latter is represented by positive correlations with moral rigorism, intolerance of otherness, and acceptance of fixed gender roles. Statistically significant correlations of this dimension with trust in political parties and the Catholic Church mean that these institutions are perceived as legitimate parts of the state order-making system.

[13] These activities have sometimes been called "elite-challenging" activities (Welzel, Inglehart and Deutsch 2005: 126).

The civic dimension of democracy correlates negatively with moral rigorism, intolerance of otherness, and with acceptance of fixed gender roles. It is meaningful, however, that all these correlations not only have opposite directions to those of the order-making dimension but they are also weaker (though still statistically significant). This means that the civic-rights dimension of democracy does not have a well-expressed moral component, as in the case of those who desire a rule-establishing function for the political system.

In talking about interest in public life, it can be seen that perceiving the political system in terms of its order-making aspect coexists with a rather passive civic position: there is no correlation with following politics in the media and a negative one with liberty aspirations and political participation that challenges the system.

On the other hand, those who emphasize the civil-rights dimension of democracy tend to follow politics in several media sources and are ready to participate in political system-challenging actions. Moreover, the correlation with liberty aspirations is positive (even if weak). It is worth noting that perceiving democracy from the civil-rights perspective is connected with a higher level of social capital—trust in other people and self-confidence—than in the case of the order-making dimension.

Generally speaking, the pattern of correlations suggests that the civic dimension of democracy coexists with expectations that the political system will give citizens the space for civic activity (e.g., in NGOs) and participation in public life. Emphasis on the order-making dimension means a preference for having some external force (e.g., the state authorities) organize the individual's life.

Who Sees What Kind of Democracy in Poland?

When discussing the differences between various segments of Polish society in terms of the meaning they attach to the word "democracy" it seems relevant to refer to the concept of individuals' resources—the equivalent of "human capital" in the economy (Giza-Poleszczuk, Marody and Rychard 2000: 45–46). The intensity with which each of the above-described dimensions of democracy is expressed is related to the existence or lack of certain types of resources at the citizens' disposal.

According to the approach proposed by Giza Poleszczuk, each member of a society has at his or her disposal a number of institutional resources provided by the state and/or the political system. These are the rules and norms a person uses in everyday functioning in the society as well as the formal institutions, social networks, and public goods that can be mobilized in order to achieve one's goals. These resources are (potentially) available to everyone in a society. There are, however, also individual resources—an individual's sort of "private property" which in many cases facilitates or even enables access to public resources. Individual resources affect the position people have in their interactions with others—more individual resources make people confident of their own agency, reliable, and trustworthy, and thus they create more social ties and involve themselves in various types of social and/or political cooperation. Citizens need to have a certain level of individual resources to make use of such properties of a democratic political system as full participation in public life. Christian Welzel also pointed to the issue, stating that resources increase

"the masses' capabilities to launch and sustain collective actions for common demands, mounting effective pressures on state authorities to respond" (Welzel 2009: 81).

Hernando de Soto (2000) argued with regard to property rights and relationships in the market that assets made people open to transactions with the outside world, by making them accountable. Those with nothing to lose were not taken seriously by their potential partners of transactions and could only trade with their immediate family or neighbors, which constrained their development. This seems to be true in the area of social interactions as well. Lack of important resources makes people less trusting and trustworthy, and constrains their cooperation with others, which in turn limits their confidence in the possibility of a spontaneously created social order.

The factors affecting perception of democracy are numerous and diverse. In this study it was only possible to consider a few of them: the level of education, economic position, cultural capital inherited from family, and life experience. As the indicator of economic position I used the level of the respondent's current income and also his or her declaration in respect to whether his or her parents had problems making ends meet. Cultural capital was measured by counting the affirmative reactions to six statements describing the respondent's parents when the respondent was around 14 years old: "My mother liked to read books"; "I discussed politics at home with my mother"; "my mother liked to follow the news"; my father liked to read books"; "I discussed politics at home with my father"; "my father liked to follow the news." The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The relationship between respondents' individual resources and perception of democracy—Spearman's correlations

	Perception of political system	
	Civic**	Order-making
Level of education	.144**	–.217**
Belonging to income group (1—the lowest; 10—the highest)	.110**	–.207**
When I was about 14, my parents had problems making ends meet[a]	–.053**	.101**
Interest in public life inherited from family	.129**	–.051**

[a] The scale was: 1—no; 2—a little bit; 3—to some extent; 4—yes
** $p < 0.001$

Education and income are the resources that have the strongest effect on the way the respondents perceive democracy. Those with a higher level of education and higher income were inclined to emphasize the civic dimension of democracy and consider its order-making features inessential. The latter dimension is more important (more often indicated as essential) for those with a lower level of individual resources. It is worth emphasizing that the absolute values of correlations of educational and economic resources with the order-making dimension of democracy are greater than the one with the civic dimension, although the correlations are negative. The only resource that is more strongly related to the civic dimension of democracy than the other one is cultural capital (an interest in public life inherited from the family).

This supports the previous hypothesis that those lacking some of the important individual resources have higher expectations of the political system in terms of structuring the

world—a task they are not ready to accomplish on their own. A deficit of resources makes people vulnerable and afraid of a constantly changing world, so they seek a sort of anchor in the political system.

Concluding Remarks

My analysis has focused on the meaning of democracy in Poland as compared with the perception of this notion in other European countries. It has revealed the specificity of some parts of Europe in accord with citizens' experience of political developments. Citizens usually assess political systems based on their everyday experience and thus they formulate their expectations of the system. These expectations influence their evaluation of the system and are also reflected in the meaning attached to the word "democracy."

The majority of post-Soviet republics and Eastern Bloc countries are characterized by a substantial proportion of "inconsistent democrats" who tend to support both a democratic political system and one based on a strong leader or army governing the country. This probably comes first of all from the experience of the inefficiency or poor performance of the political and economic systems that appeared after the collapse of the USSR and called themselves "democratic." The systemic failures strengthened the already deeply entrenched belief in those societies that democracies are unable to maintain order. In former Soviet republics, where democratization took place in parallel with the decomposition of the Soviet state and the process of reshaping the national identities of its former citizens, the word "democracy" could even be associated with a kind of nihilism. A pronounced illustration of the phenomenon was a book by Aleksander Tsipko, published in Russia in 2005, entitled "*Why I Am Not a Democrat: A Critique of the National Nihilism of Russian Liberals*" (Tsipko 2005), in which the author expressed the belief that liberal democracy in Russia was a synonym for dismantling statehood and undermining the spiritual foundation of the nation. The presence of such thinking fifteen years after the collapse of the USSR suggests that the Eastern European version of democracy failed to create trust and emotional ties between the citizens and the system. Some authors call this combination of political distrust and dissatisfaction with the performance of the system "political disaffection" (see, e.g., Torcal and Montero 2006).

A longing for order is also reinforced by growing economic uncertainty and rapid cultural changes. The processes of global transformations create a changeability that is especially difficult for people with limited resources. These resources also include what, after Bellah et al. (1996), we may call the "habits of the heart"—a kind of everyday experience that tells the citizens that the social order does not have to be created from outside but emerges as a result of citizens' cooperation and strong institutions. In Poland, which is a relatively young democracy, the proportion of inconsistent democrats is not higher than in Western European countries with longer democratic traditions and the declared attachment to democratic ideals is quite high. The study has shown, however, that a certain part of Polish society expects the political system to introduce order not only in social and economic life, but also in the axiological world. Such expectations were previously found by researchers at the beginning of the Polish transition

(Reykowski 1995). The current analysis demonstrates the persistence of this kind of expectations.

Another part of the analysis that should be emphasized is the presence of the social dimension in the perception of democracy. It was particularly salient in the Scandinavian countries, but some elements of perceiving democracy as a system that guarantees basic social rights were also present in other countries. This aspect seems to have gained importance recently and may become a stable element of the European understanding of a democratic order.

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Appendix

Table A1

Distribution of answers to the question How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is "not at all important" and 10 means "absolutely important" (row percentages)

	not at all important				absolutely important
	1–2	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Albania	0.6	0.6	2.6	3.9	92.3
Armenia	5.9	4.5	13.5	24.6	51.5
Austria	0.8	1.7	4.8	15.9	77.0
Azerbaijan	0.8	1.6	7.6	23.9	66.1
Belarus	1.5	3.0	18.0	28.7	48.8
Bosnia & Herzegovina	2.1	3.9	10.6	24.0	59.5
Bulgaria	4.0	3.8	12.9	22.8	56.5
Croatia	3.4	1.6	10.8	19.8	64.4
Czechia	4.8	2.8	11.4	25.2	55.9
Denmark	0.4	0.3	2.3	7.7	89.3
Estonia	1.0	0.9	11.0	22.0	65.0
Finland	0.9	0.7	4.1	13.6	80.8
France	1.8	1.7	8.3	19.5	68.7
Georgia	3.5	2.1	7.4	10.9	76.1
Germany	0.9	0.7	3.3	10.5	84.7
Great Britain	1.9	1.5	8.8	16.8	71.0
Hungary	1.1	1.8	8.7	15.4	73.0
Iceland	0.2	0.3	2.5	10.2	86.8
Italy	0.3	0.6	4.8	18.5	75.8
Lithuania	0.4	1.2	10.2	28.9	59.2
Montenegro	3.9	1.9	20.6	19.1	54.6
Netherlands	0.6	0.9	5.8	22.7	69.8
North Macedonia	2.9	1.3	6.6	15.3	73.6
Norway	0.2	0.6	2.6	8.5	88.1
Poland	1.4	0.8	5.6	13.0	79.0
Romania	3.4	3.4	16.1	16.2	61.0
Russia	4.2	4.1	24.1	31.9	35.7
Serbia	6.7	7.4	19.9	27.0	38.9
Slovakia	2.3	2.6	21.3	30.9	42.8
Slovenia	3.4	2.9	14.1	26.8	52.8
Spain	1.0	0.8	5.2	23.0	70.0
Sweden	3.7	0.2	1.9	8.3	85.9
Switzerland	0.4	0.7	4.9	13.5	80.6

Data: EVS 2017.

Table A2

Country codes used in the figures

Code	Country
AL	Albania
AM	Armenia
AT	Austria
BG	Bulgaria
BIH	Bosnia & Herzegovina
BY	Belarus
CH	Switzerland
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
GB	Great Britain
GE	Georgia
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IS	Iceland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
ME	Montenegro
MK	North Macedonia
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
PL	Poland
RO	Romania
RU	Russian Federation
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SRB	Serbia