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## Political Participation of Poles – Structure and Trends

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*political participation, political sociology, violent forms of political participation, non-violent forms of political participation, legitimacy of the political system, democracy*

The evaluation of the structure and trends of political participation of Poles requires a multidimensional approach that enables the assessment of as many aspects as possible, as well as a synthetic one – focusing on the key elements necessary for a democracy to function and develop. Such an analysis is made possible thanks to the most popular approach in the study of political participation called the *Political Action Approach*<sup>1</sup>. It emerged in the 1960s in American political science and is strongly associated with behaviourism, in particular with the works of Sidney Verba and his associates. The Political Action Approach – in the simplest terms – focuses on the observation and analysis of repetitive and characteristic patterns of activity of a particular political culture directed at influencing political processes. Typical activities under

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from the *Political Action Approach*, political science also applies (although marginally) the *Institutional Approach* and the *Problems Approach*. *The Institutional Approach* focuses on studying the political activity of individuals in institutions, such as the workplace, trade union, religious and other voluntary organizations, as well as local community groups. *The Problems Approach*, on the other hand, focuses on the study of problems, issues and needs that motivate individuals to take up actions which influence policies. More on the topic: H.E. Brady, 'Political Participation', [in:] J.P. Robinson, P.R. Shaver and L.S. Wrightsman (eds.), *Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes*, Vol. 2, San Diego 1999, pp. 742–796.

analysis, called forms of political participation, include participation in elections and referendums, petition signing, political demonstrations, strikes and boycotts. The repertory of forms of participation as well as their frequency is highly diversified even in the 'old' democracies<sup>2</sup> and constitutes an important measure of the degree of the legitimacy of the democratic system and the condition of civic society. Moreover, it determines the idiosyncratic political culture of a given country.

The concept of political participation is multidimensional, which Jan W. Van Deth so aptly characterized as tending 'towards a theory of everything'<sup>3</sup>. Political participation is an umbrella-concept that embraces numerous and incomparable activities whose only common denominator is that they are intended to influence politics<sup>4</sup>. Paradoxically this is the analytical advantage of this concept – it legitimizes the arbitrary selection of activities considered by the researcher as political participation for the needs of solving a particular research problem. The analysis of structures and trends can be made by indicating those forms of political participation that are of key importance to the democratic system – both its consolidation and deconsolidation, in other words, those with the greatest potential to maintain social order or to contribute to its destruction. This is important in that the intensity and type of political participation chosen by citizens is currently considered in political science in the context of the legitimacy of the political system<sup>5</sup>. It is these key areas of political activity that are identified by Pippa Norris, the American political scientist and lecturer at Harvard University.

First on her list is voting turnout, which includes citizen participation in elections at different levels and in referendums. The second key area

<sup>2</sup> The first to take up comparative studies on the differentiation of the range of forms of political participation were Samuel H. Barnes and Max Kaase in their seminal work: *Political Action. Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, S.H. Barnes and M. Kaase (eds.), London 1979. More recently Dieter Nohlen similarly drew attention to strong differences in the repertory and frequency of forms of political participation: D. Nohlen, *Political Participation in New and Old Democracies*, [in:] R.L. Pintor and M. Gratschew (eds.), *Voter Turnout Since 1945. A Global Report*, Stockholm 2002.

<sup>3</sup> J.W. van Deth, *Studying Political Participation: Towards Theory of Everything?*, paper prepared for the symposium organized by the European Consortium for Political Research, *Electronic Democracy: Mobilisation, Organization and Participation via new ICTs*, Grenoble, 6–11.04.2001.

<sup>4</sup> S.P. Huntington and J.M. Nelson, *No Easy Choice. Political Participation in Developing Countries*, Cambridge 1976, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> J.A. Booth and M.A. Seligson, *Political Legitimacy and Participation in Costa Rica: Evidence in Arena Shopping*, "Political Science Quarterly" 2005, No. 58 (4), pp. 537–550.

of participation is, according to Norris, civic activism. Here, she includes membership in organizations of the third sector: ecological, charitable, artistic, music, educational, professional, sports, hobby and religious organizations as well as trade unions and political parties. The two types of activism are collectively referred to in the literature on the subject as *conventional political participation*, where ‘conventional’ means complying with the rules, laws and moral norms. The third area of activism is that which is linked with protest activism, which includes acts such as: participation in peaceful demonstrations, boycotts, illegal strikes, signing petitions, squatting and terrorism<sup>6</sup>. Actions of this sort are described in the literature on the subject as *unconventional political participation*. This concept was introduced into the political science discourse by Max Kaase and Alan Marsh who defined it as actions defying, both, legal and/or moral norms regulating political participation in a given political system<sup>7</sup>. Within the framework of protest-related activism, Norris distinguishes two major subtypes of action: non-violent forms of political participation and violent ones. This type of distinction is increasingly being used in the literature on the subject where such forms of action as terrorism, assassinations, kidnappings and bomb attacks are seen as having a major influence on politics<sup>8</sup>. The areas of activity identified by Norris, crucial in the context of maintaining democratic order, determined the structure of this article.

## Structure and trends of conventional political participation of Poles

In the literature on the subject, the high levels of civic engagement in conventional forms of political participation are empirically linked with high levels of legitimacy of the democratic system<sup>9</sup>. Two key groups of forms of participation in politics have been analysed: electoral participation, including civic participation in elections and referendums,

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<sup>6</sup> P. Norris, *Democratic Phoenix. Reinventing Political Activism*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 188–212.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kaase and A. Marsh, *Political Action. A Theoretical Perspective*, [in:] *Political Action*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> P. Norris, *Democratic Phoenix...*, pp. 190–191. More on the topic: D. Mider, *Partycypacja polityczna w Internecie. Studium politologiczne*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 169–188.

<sup>9</sup> See: K. Newton, *Social and Political Trust in Established Democracies*, [in:] *Critical Citizens: Global Support For Democratic Government*, Oxford 1999, p. 185; P. Norris, *Conclusions: The Growth of Critical Citizens and its Consequences*, [in:] P. Norris (ed.), *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford 1999, pp. 258–264.

and civic participation, within the framework of which we distinguish membership in third sector organizations and in political parties.

## Electoral Participation

Participation in elections is considered a constitutive principle in a democratic system. It is particularly underscored in the, classic by now, procedural concept of democracy of Robert Alan Dahl<sup>10</sup>. Participation in general elections is the clearest indicator of the legitimacy of a political system: the lack of electoral participation on a mass scale or the support for anti-system groups is a clear sign of the reduced or declining legitimization of government.

The intensity of electoral turnout among Poles raises concern. About half or less of those entitled to vote turn out for parliamentary elections, and the levels of voter participation over two decades of the Third Polish Republic have slowly, but steadily, decreased. The 2007 parliamentary elections were an exception where voter turnout reached 53.9%, the best result since 1989. These elections, however, took place at a time of strong negative political polarization, which mainly resulted from the style in which the election campaign was run. It was a non-issue, negative campaign without important questions being raised. It focused on image building issues. Such negative election campaigns affect the way opinions are formed and deepen the awareness of existing sociological and political divisions, especially during a time when the political scene is dominated by two parties<sup>11</sup>. During the 2007 election campaign the media concentrated on the contest between the two potentially biggest beneficiaries and, as such, political rivals: the Civic Platform (PO) and the Law and Justice (PiS) parties<sup>12</sup>. As a result of the

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<sup>10</sup> The recognition of elections as a defining feature of democracy is present in the earliest publications of R.A. Dahl (R.A. Dahl, *A Preface To Democratic Theory*, Chicago 1956). The author has consistently upheld his convictions throughout his academic career, presenting them also in his latest, most mature works (R.A. Dahl, *On Political Equality*, New Haven 2006).

<sup>11</sup> S. Trzeciak, *Kampania wyborcza. Strategia sukcesu*, Poznań 2005, p. 199; M. Żmigrodzki, Ł. Wojciechowski, *Polityczna reklama negatywna w Polsce*, „Zeszyty Naukowe WSEI” 2011, No. 1 (1), pp. 101–117.

<sup>12</sup> M. Borowicz, *Analiza negatywnej reklamy wyborczej na przykładzie kampanii PO przeciwko PiS w 2007 roku*, „Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska” 2008, XVI (1), pp. 219–229. The atmosphere around the campaign is best illustrated by the election ads and slogans. For example, the Civic Platform emitted a series of spots ‘You’ve

bitter campaign and election results, political columnists began talking of the existence of two Polish States, as it were, in reference to the division along social and political lines across all of Polish society: on the one hand, a conservative and traditional Poland identifying itself with PiS, and on the other, a liberal, modern and pro-European Poland identifying itself with PO<sup>13</sup>. A somewhat higher, yet still unsatisfactory participation was recorded in Polish presidential elections – voter turnout in the first three presidential elections was slightly above 60%, but declined significantly in the last two elections, reaching 49.8% in 2005, and 54.9% in 2010. Similarly, citizens took little notice of the opportunity to express themselves directly in referendums. The referendums on privatization and enfranchisement, which were held in 1996 drew the interest of less than one third of those entitled to vote. The 1997 referendum on the constitution, however, failed to draw even half of eligible voters to the ballot box – only 42.9% of citizens decided to express their will. The best results in terms of attendance were registered in the referendum on the accession to the European Union in 2003, when 58.9% of eligible voters cast their votes. It is not an impressive result when compared to other European democracies. Turnout levels in similar referendums were: 71% in Ireland, 89% in Norway, 90% in Denmark, 74% in Finland, 83% in Sweden, 82% in Austria, and a record 91% in the accession referendum in Malta. Poland's comparison with other countries of the former Eastern Bloc is not too favourable either. Poland was ahead of only three countries in the region: Hungary (45.5%), Slovakia (52%) and the Czech Republic (55%), but came behind Slovenia (60%), Lithuania (63%), Estonia (67%) and Latvia (72.5%). The situation at the local level was even worse where voter turnout was below the required minimum for the results to be binding. The press is full of reports about such cases. Low civic engagement is often accompanied by the low activity of those in office. Furthermore, there are no attempts at stimulating conventional political participation, especially when it comes to elections and referendums.

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Been Conned', 'Contempt and Aggression', 'PiS in power brings shame to Poles', as well as parodies of election spots broadcast by PiS entitled 'Pact'. The smaller parties of the election campaign were well aware of the negative atmosphere and tried to use it to their benefit (for example, the Polish Peasants Party (PSL) used the slogan 'PSL = NORMALITY', 'Coalition serves the people', while the Left and the Democrats chanted 'Wise government instead of stupid wars').

<sup>13</sup> See for example: M. Janicki, W. Władyka, *Dwie Polski*, „Polityka” 2007.11.03, No. 2627, pp. 26–30.

Trends in Polish electoral participation are best visualized in a comparative perspective – against other democracies. Especially significant is the comparison of average values for electoral participation in countries of the European Union, countries of the former Eastern Bloc and countries of the so-called ‘new’ and ‘old’ EU Member States.

The comparison of Polish electoral participation levels with those in other countries is definitely to the disadvantage of Poland. The average electoral turnout in Poland after 1989 was a mere 49.3%, and is definitely small in comparison to the average of 70.9% for all the 27 EU Member States. Identical differences apply in elections to the European Parliament: in all of the EU nearly half of eligible voters (49.2%) cast their votes, whereas in Poland less than a quarter (22.7%). The differences become even more unfavourable when we compare the average voter turnout values in Poland with those for the countries of the ‘old’ EU. Electoral participation levels in Poland also leave much to be desired in comparison to the already low levels of the ‘new’ EU Member States, lagging much behind the others (49.3% versus 58.9%). Table 1, below, presents the average electoral turnout values systematically.

**Table 1. Average electoral turnout values in parliamentary and presidential elections and to the European Union, in the years 1989–2012**

	Parliamentary elections (in the years 1989–2012)	Presidential elections (in the years 1989–2012)	Elections to the European Parliament (in the years 1989–2012)
Average electoral turnout in Poland	49.3	57.7	22.7
Average electoral turnout in the ‘old’ EU Member States <sup>a)</sup>	75.2	74.7	51.8
Average electoral turnout in the ‘new’ EU Member States <sup>b)</sup>	58.9	59.0	28.3
Average electoral turnout in 27 European Union Member States	70.9	67.4	49.2
Average electoral turnout in former Eastern Bloc countries	62.3	69.9	27.5

<sup>a)</sup> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Luxemburg, Germany, Portugal, Sweden, United Kingdom and Italy.

<sup>b)</sup> Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary.

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of data available from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (<http://www.idea.int/>).

Poland also presents itself unfavourably in terms of electoral participation in comparison with former Eastern Bloc countries – with only Estonia (49.1%) and Lithuania (43.3%) lagging behind it. A somewhat comforting fact may be that the top positions on the electoral turnout scale are occupied by countries with strong autocratic tendencies where the high voter turnout may be more of a sign of a culture of political subordination than democratic participation. Table 2 depicts average electoral turnout by country in the former Eastern Bloc countries.

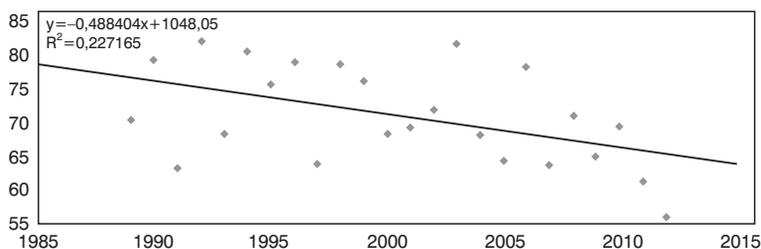
**Table 2. Voter turnout in parliamentary elections in former Eastern Bloc countries (in the years 1989–2012)**

Country	Average voter turnout in parliamentary elections in the years 1989–2013
Tadzhikistan	90.5
Uzbekistan	89.6
Turkmenistan	86.9
Slovakia	78.0
Czech Republic	75.3
Belarus	71.4
Latvia	71.4
Kazakhstan	68.9
Ukraine	67.6
Moldavia	67.2
Georgia	63.9
Russia	59.5
Romania	59.0
Armenia	56.9
Hungary	56.8
Azerbaijan	56.0
Kirgizstan	51.4
Poland	49.3
Estonia	49.1
Lithuania	43.4

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of data available from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (<http://www.idea.int/>).

It is also worthwhile to take a closer look at the trends in political participation after 1989. Among the 27 EU Member States one can detect a slight, yet significant from the point of view of statistics, decline in levels of electoral participation over the last twenty-five year period, namely, since 1989 ( $R^2 = 0.23$ ;  $p < 0.05$ )<sup>14</sup>. This decline applies to the 'old' EU Member States ( $R^2 = 0.27$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) even to a slightly higher degree than to the 'new' EU Member States ( $R^2 = 0.13$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Poland has not been immune to this negative tendency (however, there was an insufficient number of elections to accurately apply the regression analysis in this case; nevertheless, for indicative purposes, I am providing an estimate result,  $R^2 = 0.1$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). The declining trend is observable throughout the European Union and remedial measures are being taken up at that level<sup>15</sup>.

**Diagram 1. Regression line illustrating the voter turnout trend in 27 European Union Member States (in the years 1989–2012)**



Source: compiled by the author on the basis of data available from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (<http://www.idea.int/>).

An important issue when characterizing the voter participation structure is the stability of voter behaviour. The absence of fluctuations in the number and type of participants in elections guarantees democratic stability. Unfortunately, participation of Polish citizens leaves much to be desired in this respect. Data collected by the Polish National Election

<sup>14</sup> Linear regression analysis was applied. Compiled by the author on the basis of data available from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) (<http://www.idea.int/>, 1.2.2013).

<sup>15</sup> For example, commissioned by the Council of Europe, Philippe C. Schmitter and Alexander H. Trechsel proposed changes in the functioning of modern democracies, which would, among other things, raise participation among voters. P.C. Schmitter and A.H. Trechsel, *The Future of Democracy in Europe. Trends, Analyses and Reforms, A Green Paper for the Council of Europe*, [http://www.thefutureofrepresentativedemocracy.org/files/pdf/resources/schmitter\\_thefutureofDemocracyinEurope.pdf](http://www.thefutureofrepresentativedemocracy.org/files/pdf/resources/schmitter_thefutureofDemocracyinEurope.pdf), 2004, pp. 86–118.

Study (PGSW) reveal serious lability<sup>16</sup>. Polish citizens demonstrate considerable inconsistency when it comes to participation in elections: for nearly one third of them participation in national elections is irregular, they do not participate in all of them. Electoral stability in Poland is significantly lower than in the ‘new’ EU Member States, concludes Mikołaj Cześnik, on the basis of data collected in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Project<sup>17</sup>. Cześnik carried out a comparison of successive elections in Poland in the years 1997–2007 and found significant levels of instability in electoral participation. Around 25–30% of Poles chose to participate or to abstain or *vice versa*, from one election to another<sup>18</sup>. Electoral instability is a permanent feature of Polish political culture. An in-depth analysis by Mikołaj Cześnik, Paweł Grzelak and Michał Kotnarowski indicates that unstable voters are situated, in terms of socio-demographic and psycho-demographic profiles, ‘midway’ between citizens who regularly vote and those who abstain on a regular basis. The only (although not very strong) characteristic of this group and its correlatives are: centrism of political views, moderate populism in the economic sphere and – if they vote in elections – higher likelihood of casting their vote on the winner<sup>19</sup>.

The socio-demographic structure of voters and non-voters as well as the determinants of participation are similar in Poland and in the EU Member States. Differences in electoral participation between sexes are analogous: men are more likely to vote than women, and the difference is significant in the sense that it exceeds the maximum standard margin of error. Poland also shows similarity to EU Member States in terms of the correlation between voters’ age and participation in elections – younger and older generations are less likely to vote than the middle generations. In terms of electoral participation, Polish society also confirms the empirically well-grounded hypothesis of the socioeconomic status of the individual (SES – *socioeconomic status* or SERL – *socioeconomic resource status*) which indicates that the higher the education and income of the individual, the greater the likelihood of his or her involvement in politics, including participation in elections. Data collected by PGSW indicate

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<sup>16</sup> *Polskie Generalne Studium Wyborcze*, (PGSW), <http://www.isppan.waw.pl/subpage/pgsw/index.html>, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> M. Cześnik, *Partycypacja wyborcza Polaków*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, [in:] <http://www.isp.org.pl/files/20145849250174351001263374709.pdf>, 2007, p. 10–12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–15.

<sup>19</sup> M. Cześnik, P. Grzelak, M. Kotnarowski, *Niestabilność uczestnictwa wyborczego w Polsce*, [in:] M. Cześnik, *Niestabilność wyborcza w Polsce*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 13–40.

statistically significant differences between persons with basic education, among whom electoral participation in general does not exceed 50%, and persons with higher education, among whom electoral participation remains above 75%. It should also be noted that electoral activity of Poles is diversified regionally – and replicates the 19<sup>th</sup> century map of partitioned Poland. The highest voter turnout is observed consistently in areas of the former Austrian partition, the lowest in areas formerly under Russian rule and in the territories recovered in 1945. The place of domicile also affects the electoral participation of Poles: considerably more people in urban areas participate in elections than those living in rural areas. The same phenomenon has been noted for a long time now in democracies all over the world<sup>20</sup>.

The above data are clearly indicative of moderate political apathy in a key area of democratic life – elections and referendums. The lack of interest in participating in elections among more than half of Polish voters, the persistence of the largest Polish party – ‘the non-voters’ party’ – can be explained by a number of factors. First of all, it reflects a strong anti-institutionalism rooted in Polish historical tradition. Patterns of the political engagement of Poles had already been shaped during the First Polish Republic. Broadly speaking, two contradictory forms of behaviour come from that period. On the one hand, it is a pattern of treating politics instrumentally, not for the good of the public, but for egoistic personal gains. It was then that negative labels used to this day in the sphere of public activity were coined to denote putting private interest ahead of the common weal, such as ‘brawling’, ‘jobbery’, ‘treachery’, ‘Targowica’ (referring to the Targowica Confederation and synonymous with ‘an act of treason’). On the other hand, the First Polish Republic provided patterns of direct democracy culture; they took shape among the nobles as well as among the peasants, though strictly controlled by the landowners, and the burgher class. Similarly, Poland readily adopted elements of direct democracy from Western Europe, such as the institution of a confederation and ‘hooded’ assemblies. Also not without influence on the shape of political culture was the parliamentary practice of the Second Republic, which led to the depreciation of the institution of the *Sejm* and in effect the partial devaluation of the institution of elections. We can also find recent sources of negative influence which bred political apathy in the times of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL). The national plebiscite of 1946 and the first parliamentary elections

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<sup>20</sup> P.A. Sorokin, C.C. Zimmerman, *Principles of rural-urban sociology*, New York 1929.

(to the Legislative *Sejm*) held a year later were rigged. The high voter turnout in elections to the *Sejm* in the PRL era also raises suspicions of manipulation, since between 1952 and 1985 it averaged 94.4%<sup>21</sup>. The impact of certain modern-day phenomena cannot be discounted, for instance politics-fatigue caused by the low political culture of the Polish elites and the pauperization of a large part of Polish society, as well as the, as yet, low percentage of people with higher education.

## Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is considered to be one of the key elements of democracy. Some researchers state bluntly that a small number of non-governmental organizations means little democracy, while higher numbers indicate more democracy<sup>22</sup>. These organizations form the ‘soft’ sphere of democracy, the indispensable complement to the ‘hard’ sphere – elections and referendums.

In the literature on the subject, there is a thesis regarding a crisis in non-governmental organizations in modern democracies that in consequence may even lead to the collapse of democratic systems. A third sector crisis and a possible negative fallout for democracy were aptly characterized in the mid-1970s by Michel J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki in *The Crisis of Democracy*<sup>23</sup>. They point out that at the bottom of the crisis lies the lessening of inter-personal relations brought about by increased vertical and horizontal mobility of individuals and social groups. Similar concerns were raised by Richard Stivers when he introduced the concept of a culture of cynicism<sup>24</sup>.

Levels of participation of Poles in third sector organizations for the years 2002–2010 are relatively low when compared with other EU Member States, according to data from the European Social Survey (ESS). Merely 5.8% of Poles declared working for third sector organizations, while the

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<sup>21</sup> According to estimates compiled by the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR), voter turnout in the 1980 elections came to approximately 75–85%.

<sup>22</sup> J. Paley, *Toward Anthropology of Democracy*, “Annual Review of Anthropology” 2002, No. 31, p. 482.

<sup>23</sup> M.J. Crozier, S.P. Huntington, J. Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy. Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, New York 1975.

<sup>24</sup> R. Stivers, *The Culture of Cynicism*, Oxford 1994.

average for European countries is over twice that number (13%)<sup>25</sup>. In most cases, Poles engage in social work when it promises direct or immediate profit – in parent committees, parent councils and other organizations working in the area of school support and education. They participate on a much lesser scale in various associations, sports clubs and unions, charities and faith-based community work<sup>26</sup>. Levels of conventional, legal political participation are good indicators of citizens' political party affiliations. ESS provides quantitative data on this subject, although somewhat limited in terms of the time period (five rounds in the years 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010). There is an observable and steady, although only minor (and only slightly above the maximum value of the margin of error), decline in the numbers active within the framework of the third sector. This trend appears not only in Poland, but also in the other European countries surveyed by ESS. In 2002, 1.7% of Polish respondents declared membership in a political party, but only 0.7% in 2010. During the subsequent survey rounds, a similar falling trend was noted in the other European countries taking part in the survey: in 2002 membership in political groups was declared by 5.7% of respondents, while in 2010 – only by 4.2%<sup>27</sup>. Poland clearly stands out when compared with the average for the other European countries surveyed by ESS. Karl Pearson's chi-squared test for one sample clearly indicates that the differences are statistically important<sup>28</sup>. Poles are also less likely than other Europeans to contact politicians. The declared average for Poles is barely 7.8% and for all those surveyed by ESS – 13.7%.

<sup>25</sup> The ESS survey included a five round study of 22 to 30 surveys from the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Island, Israel, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Latvia, Germany, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, Hungary, United Kingdom, Italy. ESS Round 1-5: European Social Survey Round 5 Data (2002–2010). Data file edition 3.0, 4.1, 3.4, 3.3, 6.3. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

<sup>26</sup> *Aktywność Polaków w organizacjach obywatelskich w latach 1998-2010*, BS/16/2010, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K\\_016\\_10.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2010/K_016_10.PDF), 2010.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that the decline in both cases – in Poland (difference calculated for 2002 and 2010:  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 1748) = 10.176;  $p \leq 0.01$ ), and all European countries (calculation for 2002 and 2010:  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 52339) = 250.527;  $p \leq 0.01$ ) is statistically important in accordance with Karl Pearson's chi-squared test for one sample.

<sup>28</sup> The test results were as follows: 2010 –  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 1748) = 53.832;  $p \leq 0.01$ ; 2008 –  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 1611) = 45.942;  $p \leq 0.01$ ; 2006 –  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 1721) = 63.526;  $p \leq 0.01$ ; 2004 –  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 1712) = 61.053;  $p \leq 0.01$ ; 2004 –  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 2106) = 66.693;  $p \leq 0.01$ .

The above conclusions of sociologists and political scientists apply to Poland to a greater extent than to societies of Western Europe. In comparison to the times of the Solidarity opposition movement, the present period can only be perceived as a dramatic collapse of social cooperation and self-organization. Civic and social engagement in Poland is of a niche and short-term nature, involving only a minor part of society, as evidenced by the empirically acquired results. Polish activism is specific when compared with the countries of Western Europe; its patterns are different; it rests on formalized cooperation only to a small extent; there is a lack of will and skill for organized and stable cooperation<sup>29</sup>. When speaking about Polish society, the labels *social immobility*, *sociological vacuum* or *culture of distrust* are used to express a pathology in social ties which breeds widespread generalised suspicion of other individuals and institutions. This, in turn, demands constant monitoring and control of their activities for fear of fraud, misuse of power, deceit, dishonesty, scheming and conspiracy, which in effect leads to the disappearance and malfunctioning of social organizations at the supra-family level<sup>30</sup>. Especially noticeable is the lack of infrastructure, the institutions which could meet the human need for participation, as well as the lack of a sense of agency on the part of the citizens, empowered enough to wish to become engaged. This is most frequently attributed to Polish society having to live for a long time in an authoritarian society administered from above<sup>31</sup>.

## The structure and trends of the unconventional political participation of Poles

The intensity and range of unconventional political participation is vitally important for sustaining political order; it is a clear indicator of the obstruction of traditional channels of interest articulation on the part of the citizens. This assertion relates to the now-classic hypothesis of Maurice Duverger that the weaker the legitimacy of the political system and its components such as the government, parliament and other

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<sup>29</sup> P. Gliński, *Trzeci sektor w Polsce. Dylematy aktywności*, [in:] *Czy społeczny bezruch...*, p. 58; M. Nowak, M. Nowosielski, *Pytanie o społeczny bezruch*, [in:] *Czy społeczny bezruch...*, pp. 14, 18.

<sup>30</sup> P. Sztompka, *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*, Kraków 2002, pp. 316 and 326.

<sup>31</sup> J. Bartkowski, *Tradycje partycypacji w Polsce*, [in:] A. Olech (ed.), *Partycypacja publiczna. O uczestnictwie obywateli w życiu wspólnoty lokalnej*, Warszawa 2011, p. 44.

central offices, the more frequent the acts of disobedience by citizens who more readily resort to protest action, including acts of violence<sup>32</sup>.

## **Unconventional non-violent political participation**

Unconventional political participation results from the blockage of the formalized and institutionalized avenues of political participation in the political system. It consists of numerous and diverse forms of participation, including taking part in political demonstrations (demonstrations, pickets, marches, rallies, meetings, happenings, flash mobs, political theatre); communicating to express one's political views or to influence political choices; communicating one's beliefs or political demands by ridiculing the norms by which institutions function; organising or participating in boycotts of individual persons and political, economic and social institutions for political reasons; as well as disrupting or preventing the work of institutions or social processes in order to influence politics.

Empirical data from quantitative surveys on unconventional non-violent forms of political participation are rather meagre. ESS barely provides information about declarations of participation in legal demonstrations within the last 12-month period, as well as in boycotts. When it comes to participation in demonstrations, Poles present themselves much less favourably in comparison with other countries covered by the survey. Participation in demonstrations was declared by a mere 1.5% of respondents, whereas the average for European countries is over four times that and amounts to 6.5%. Similar proportions can be observed for the declared participation in boycotts: for Poland it is a mere 4.3% and for Europe – 14%. The unavailability of a larger number of empirical data from studies of unconventional political participation can be supplemented with case studies. For some parts of Polish society, periodically held demonstrations provide the means of expressing their opinions. One of the most important regularly held demonstrations since 2010 has been the annual Independence March on 11 November to commemorate Independence Day. It was first organized by nationalist groups, the All-Polish Youth and the National Radical Camp, which in 2011, formed the Independence Day Association. Since 2003 similar Independence Parades have been taking place in Gdańsk and Wrocław.

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<sup>32</sup> M. Duverger, *The Idea of Politics*, London 1966, p. 159.

Increasingly often, they serve not only to symbolically commemorate the regaining of independence, but they are also instrumental in voicing dissatisfaction with those currently in office. Moreover, there is also a wide media coverage of regularly held demonstrations of sexual minorities. Since 2005, an event called the Equal Rights Parade has taken place each year in Warsaw. The Equal Rights March has been held in Poznań since 2004, as part of the celebrations of the Days for Equal Rights and Tolerance. A similar march has been held in Cracow since 2004, called the March for Tolerance (from 2010 under the name of Equal Rights March). Various anti-discriminatory slogans were raised on the occasion. Invariably, these events have been accompanied by counterdemonstrations in the form of Marches for Life and Family (since 2006), which in 2012 were staged in 40 Polish towns and cities, as a manifestation of the commitment to traditional family values. In Poznań, in turn, in 2005 a mocking counterdemonstration was held called the March of Onanists, its participants demanding – in a sarcastic and mocking tone – the right to adopt children by onanists, and financial support from the authorities for a ‘Campaign Against Ignorance’, to raise awareness among the public that onanism is a sexual orientation just like any other. Cyclists regularly stage their demonstrations to remind everyone of their presence on the roads, their rights and their needs. They also try to force specific changes in the local organisation of traffic or investment in the infrastructure for cycling. Their demonstrations are held mainly in Warsaw and Łódź. They are called Critical Mass (and take on various names, such as: Night Critical Mass, Tourist Mass and Rebellious Mass) and take the form of cycling through public roads along a pre-planned route. They usually assemble from several hundred to several thousand participants. Since 2009 there have been 43 such events in Łódź and since 2002 several hundred in Warsaw. Similar events take place in other Polish towns and cities: Opole, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Lublin, Szczecin, Wrocław, Radom and several others. Regularly occurring in different parts of Poland (such as Warsaw, Olsztyn, Wrocław, Łódź, Cracow and Poznań) ever since 2000 has been a feminist demonstration called the Manifa, held on Women’s Day, 8 March. The Manifas (as in ‘manifestation’), generally calling for an end to the discrimination of women, have taken place under such banners as: ‘Democracy without women is half a democracy’ (2001), ‘Our bodies, our lives, our rights’ (2003), ‘We want freedom’ (2008), ‘Governments change, nothing else changes’ (2009), or ‘Crèches, not stadiums’ (2010). A separatist movement called the Movement for the Autonomy of Silesia is also worth noting. Since 2007, the group

has organised annual Marches in Katowice calling for the Autonomy of Silesia, gathering from hundreds to thousands of participants. They have demanded autonomy for Upper Silesia along similar lines as provided in Germany or Spain. Of significant importance is the considerable potential for spontaneous, bottom up protest in Poland. It came to light in 2012 when Poles reacted sharply against the *Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement*, ACTA. Protests were held in several towns and cities all over Poland: Cracow, Wrocław, Tarnów and Bydgoszcz, to name but a few. In total, tens of thousands people took part in the protests.

On the side-lines of Polish participation in politics, there are also unconventional actions, which take on the form of specific political jokes or aim at ridiculing political ills afflicting Polish politics. The first Polish satirical party during the Third Polish Republic was the Polish Beer-Lovers' Party founded in the 1990s. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, the party won 16 seats in the Sejm (the lower house), joining the line of similar humorous enterprises that spring up in most democracies. At present, two similar groups are still active. The Orange Alternative, which operated in the 1980s and was reactivated in 2002, when its founder ran in elections for President of Warsaw within the framework of 'The Merrier and Competent Warsaw' election committee, and has been active politically ever since. In its actions, the Orange Alternative uses 'soft' forms of protest: happenings, parodies, pastiches and travesties. A typical example of its activity is the happening it organized during the 2007 parliamentary elections by registering as the 'Bumpkins and Dwarfs' election committee. A March of the Educatees (a derogatory term used to describe members of the so-called intelligentsia) was organized under the slogan 'We want to be terrorized'. During the march, passers-by were handed out metal hooks. This was the symbolic criticism of the 'dirty' election campaign aimed at discrediting political opponents by finding and using 'hooks' (or compromising materials) on them. The Alternative Action 'Naszość' is a right-wing group founded in the late 1980s, which takes up extremely unconventional political actions and is known for its organization of happenings; since 2000 it has organized 16 of them. Among the most famous happenings were: 'Czarzasty Stop'; detaching (the unwilling) Prime Minister Leszek Miller from his stool with a saw; and a May 1 happening 'Rescuers'. This happening was organized, as explained by the leader of the organization Piotr Lisiewicz, to help rescue the sinking Democratic Left Alliance in order to protect the big, fat fish, the small fish and the little fish that make up the party. The happening included an attempt to thrust lifebuoys on left-wing activists laying

wreaths at a monument, and offering them flippers. The organizers also shouted catchy slogans, such as: 'Hey, Łybacka, where's your swimming card?!' (using the name of a left-wing politician whose name happens to rhyme with 'swimming card' in Polish), or: 'It suits us to kiss commies on their lips', 'Place a red swimming cap on your commie's little head' (always rhymed in Polish).

Political participation on the Internet is a particular and fully acceptable case of participation in politics. Polish society presents a different profile from those of Western societies, and as an area of study it has been quite well investigated in Poland. The limited scope of this paper prevents me from citing the research findings. In short, political participation of Poles on the Internet is described as supersaturated with strong verbal aggression and indicates political polarization. Indeed, people with extreme views engage in various forms of political activity on the Internet more often than those holding more moderate opinions<sup>33</sup>.

Such forms of unconventional political participation as analysed above have been occurring increasingly often in most democracies, which gives reason enough to use such labels as *demonstration democracy* or *protest society* in order to characterize these political systems. In the case of Poland, to this more or less general trend, we need to add a Polish specificity resulting from its history. Poland carries the burden of a strong tradition of anti-institutionalism, which is manifested by a strong negative attitude and suspicion towards all legitimate authority; a preference for disagreement over dialogue. An attitude of defiance towards authority can be traced back to as early as the First Republic. It transpired in the works of writers hailing from the nobility and burgher class; the institution of the medieval carnival; or the specific moderate contestation of Polish politics, the so-called Babin Republic: an informal social and literary organization of Polish nobles who used sarcasm to criticise the shortcomings of Polish politics, a prototype of a *watchdog organisation*. The traditions of underground activity and conspiracy which evolved at the time when Poland was partitioned played a decisive role in the shaping of the attitudes of Polish society. Numerous independence organizations functioning outside the imposed political system had their roots in that period, among them the National Patriotic Association,

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<sup>33</sup> More on the subject: J. Garlicki (ed.), *Kultura polityczna internautów w Polsce*, „Studia Politologiczne” 2011, Vol. 21; D. Mider, *Cyberentuzjaści, cybermaruderzy czy cybermal-kontenci? Badanie postaw polskich internautów wobec zastosowań Internetu w polityce*, [in:] J. Garlicki, D. Mider (eds.), *Elity polityczne a internauci*, „Studia Politologiczne” 2012, Vol. 26, pp. 41–80.

the Kosynierzy (Scythemen) Union and the Union of Free Poles. This 'tradition' of unconventional, outside-the-system or even anti-systemic political participation was continued by some organisations during the Second Polish Republic – such as the communists, among others. The period of the Polish Peoples' Republic made a significant contribution to the preservation of the protest potential, as from the time of its inception until 1989 it saw the emergence of at least fifty opposition organisations.

## **Unconventional violent political participation**

It seems that the entrenched patterns of activities which use violence are particularly incriminating to Polish political culture. The history of Poland's partitions and the German occupation provide some legitimacy or justification, even glorification, to such activity, as the authorities then were synonymous with the enemy. The time of the Second Polish Republic left its legacy as well. To name a few examples: the assassination of President Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922; the terrorist attack in the Warsaw Citadel in 1923; the coup d'état of 1926; the activities of the 'unknown perpetrators' dealing out 'justice' to opposition activists; the unresolved (to this day) disappearance of general Włodzimierz Zagórski in 1927; the Brest trials and imprisonment in the Brest Fortress; the detention camp in Bereza Kartuska; the assassination of interior minister Bronisław Pieracki; numerous excesses of ultra-left and right-wing groups. The authorities of the Polish Peoples' Republic had no objections to the use of violence, considering it a convenient summary measure of fighting the opposition. The list of acts of violence is unfortunately long, including acts of collective violence (such as the use of force in the 1956 Poznań revolt and the 1970 December revolt, the effects of which were in both cases dozens of protesters killed and hundreds wounded), and acts of violence against individuals (particularly infamous were the tragic deaths of Emil Barchański, Piotr Bartoszcze, Tadeusz Fraś, Jerzy Popiełuszko and Stanisław Pyjas, not to mention the numerous kidnappings and torture, repression and political court murders in the years 1944–1956). These acts in a particular way socialized Polish society to violence. We can attempt to explain and justify each and every act of political violence as the consequence of political and social tension, defects in the political system or flawed patterns of political culture, a historical necessity, a tragic incident or the effect of individual pathology. Regardless of the motives and rationale of these acts, their consequences cannot be avoided – they

leave a lasting impression, a permanent imprint on society, become an element of its collective identity. In the light of historical experience that moulded Polish collective identity, each and every act or signal of the use of violence must raise serious concern in the new Polish democracy, as it cannot be considered as a chance and separate accident, but a phenomenon with its roots in political culture, a manifestation of an existing pattern in that culture. Such phenomena have occurred during the Third Polish Republic. In that category were the assassinations of politicians, which in all likelihood were politically motivated: first of all, that of Marek Rosiak, assistant to Janusz Wojciechowski, member of the European Parliament from the Law and Justice (PiS) party; or the knife attack on Paweł Kowalski, assistant to Jarosław Jagiełło, PiS MP, by Ryszard C.; as well as the assassinations of Marek Papała, Chief of Police in 1998 and of Jacek Dębski in 2001; or – as reported by the media – the planned bomb attack by Brunon K., a scientist and teaching staff member at one of the universities. Collective acts of violence also occur, especially during Independence Day celebrations or the various demonstrations held by sexual minorities.

It is worth recalling the quantitative study results regarding attitudes of Poles towards violence<sup>34</sup>. They seem to provide an accurate picture of the feelings among the Polish public about violence in politics. In the survey, respondents were asked about their opinion on the act of which Brunon K. was accused of, namely, making preparations for a bomb attack targeting the highest authorities of the Republic of Poland. Respondents had an eleven-point rating scale on which to mark their response, where: -5 meant that the respondent had a decidedly negative attitude towards the planned act (according to media reports), 0 (zero) meant a neutral attitude and +5 meant a decidedly positive attitude. Nearly half of the respondents condemned the act of which Brunon K. was accused (49%) and nearly one-third (28.6%) of them did so unequivocally (selecting - 5 on the scale). The next two groups stand out and raise concern: those remaining neutral (33%) and ... those sympathetic to the idea of a bomb attack (18%). These results may be interpreted in the category of a research artefact or as a negative (and more precisely – hostile)

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<sup>34</sup> The study was conducted by the Centre for Marketing Research 'Indicator' on 23–25 November 2012 using the *online* questionnaire method (CAWI) on a sample of 245 mature Internet users. Despite the small number of respondents and their specificity (as Internet surfers differ – although not as much nowadays – from the general Polish population) the results provide an interesting and, it seems, accurate material for consideration when discussing Polish society.

attitude towards the authorities. However, when asked directly about the admissibility of violence in politics, the vast majority of Poles condemn it. Over three-fourths of them, that is, 78.8%, have declared that its use is unacceptable from the ethical point of view. Moreover, one in four of the respondents (26.1%) claimed that the use of violence has no justification in any circumstances whatever. Almost three-fourths of respondents (73.9%) do not believe that violence could be an effective means of influencing politics. Condemnation of violence, although clear, is not unambiguous. One in ten respondents (11.6%) believes that violence can be an effective instrument in the sphere of politics. There is also a small group of those who are undecided: 14.3% hesitate between the approval and condemnation of violence. However, in a very few cases, Internet surfers admit that the use of violence is an acceptable form of behaviour, namely when it involves striking against one of the following: an occupying force (58.8), extremists responsible for acts of violence (48.2%), and anyone who uses violence (42.4). The survey results do not indicate revolutionary or radical moods, nevertheless, the uncertain condemnation of violence may raise concerns, especially when combined with low levels of involvement in conventional forms of political participation.

### **Conclusions. The spectre of political apathy?**

The above observations allow us to identify the following four determinants of the low intensity of political participation among Poles. Firstly, we are dealing with a tendency which is similar to that which occurs in Western democracies, that is, the waning interest in engaging in conventional, formal, electoral political participation, and in its place, engaging – although only by the very few – in unconventional participation. Attempts to explain this phenomenon are being made using the conceptual category of post-politics understood as the definite end of all ideological disputes in favour of ad hoc politics aimed at winning elections, and transforming politics into a pop-culture game and a happening, while transforming the citizens into consumers. In consequence, the political process is treated as a sphere of entertainment designed to deliver an exciting spectacle. In effect, citizens become passive observers, of their own accord, rather than active subjects who share responsibility for the common good. Entertainment is, after all, voluntary in nature and so precludes a sense of duty or obligation.

Secondly, levels of participation in politics are as low as in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, which can be explained as the authoritarian legacy which shaped the culture of strong political subordination. Thirdly, levels of political participation are conditioned by typically indigenous factors, resulting from earlier historical circumstances, especially the partitions of Poland, followed by the interwar twenty-year period and the Second World War. And fourthly, we can finally attribute the reluctance to participate in politics to the current condition of Polish democracy, especially the growing disappointment of Polish society with the way political elites function. There is a growing number of people who perceive the Polish political system as being in a state of complete chaos and disarray, while the number of those who associate it primarily with human freedom is falling<sup>35</sup>. Objective outside surveys confirm this presumption: Polish democracy is an immature democracy. According to the democracy index of 'The Economist', Poland is in a group of the so-called *flawed democracies* and ranks behind countries such as Lithuania, Chile, Botswana, Jamaica and Brazil<sup>36</sup>.

The synergistic effect of the four factors may lead to the realisation of a scenario of a deepening political apathy on a mass scale. It could be triggered by the vast majority of people withdrawing from the sphere of politics, leaving it to the political elites and treating it, at the most, as part of entertainment. This form of political apathy, called *the fatalism of the multitude*, is understood as mass-scale social attitudes, which are not anti-democratic or anti-systemic, but the sporadic participation which does take place is not transformed into stable functioning in a democratic system and the monitoring of those in power<sup>37</sup>. In the Polish context, this could even inhibit the process of democratic consolidation and leave Poland in the company of the flawed, and even façade, democracies should the asymmetry deepen between the more advanced dimension of institutional consolidation and its less advanced social dimension.

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<sup>35</sup> *Stosunek Polaków do demokracji. Komunikat z badań*, Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, BS/194/2005, 12.2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Democracy index 2010. Democracy in retreat. A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit*, 'The Economist', [http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy\\_Index\\_2010\\_web.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf), 2010.

<sup>37</sup> J. Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, Vol. II, Indianapolis 1888, Chapters 84–85 (unnumbered pages).

**ABSTRACT**

The analysis of the structure and trends in Polish political participation was conducted in four dimensions, vital to the functioning of the democratic system: conventional political participation, which includes electoral participation and civic engagement, as well as unconventional political participation – both violent and non-violent (protest, boycott, demonstration and happening). The analysis took into account elements which determine the functioning of democracy: the aspect of the consolidation and legitimisation of the political system, as well as the historical dimension.

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