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## Political Culture of Polish Society

**KEY WORDS:**

*Poland, political culture, dynamics, society*

### Introduction

The concept “political culture” is defined in a variety of ways. The American sociologists of politics claim that thinking about the political reality in the manner that situates the centre of attention on the relations of the features of political institutions with the citizens’ customs and the manner in which the society refers to political decisions and activities undertaken by the authorities is very important, and the beginnings of such an approach can already be sought in the concepts of ancient philosophers. In Poland, one of the first to use the concept *political culture* was Józef Siemieński. In 1916 he read a paper at the University of Warsaw on the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of the first European constitution. The paper was about the political orientations of the Polish society at the time of the Four-Years Sejm. In the paper entitled *The 3 May Constitution as a reflection of the Polish political culture*<sup>1</sup>, J. Siemieński introduced the notion of “political

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<sup>1</sup> J. Siemieński, *Konstytucja 3 Maja 1791 jako wyraz polskiej kultury politycznej. Odczyt wygłoszony na uroczystym obchodzie rocznicy 3 Maja w UW*, published by „Koła Prawników” studentów UW, Warszawa 1916.

culture”<sup>2</sup>. Political culture all the time has been an important field of studying politics. The views of some sociologists and political scientists that since the category of “political culture” was scientifically defined and used in research by American scientists in the middle of the 1960s, it has not been applied in studies on political orientations and the public activity of the citizens proved wrong. Without referring to the category of political culture it is difficult to explain the political phenomena and the manner of functioning of democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is political culture and its traditions that constitute an important basis of transformations of the political systems in the countries that regain sovereignty and a possibility for self-determination after the fall of communist states. Consolidated democracy cannot be created without political culture, which enables pluralism, which is characterized by the involvement of at least a part of the citizens in public life and which forms democratic models of behaviour in the sphere of politics and the manner of conducting political disputes that are open but set within definite cultural frameworks. Democracy is not only a system of institutions but also a set of values, customs and mechanisms of functioning of the society which are accepted by the majority of citizens and which mark certain cultural models of behaviour and activity in the sphere of politics<sup>3</sup>.

The character and course of the process of system reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, called the transformation of the system, were influenced by a number of factors. Some of them are certain “universal irreversible processes”<sup>4</sup>. Others include specific phenomena and processes which had a different course in different countries of the old block of communist countries. Scientists frequently showed and argued that the principal changes usually proceed on a few levels, which – on the one hand – gives them a deep and irreversible character, but – on the other – gives rise to a number of complications, leads to a social and cultural trauma and determines the strong differentiation of changes in particular countries. This differentiation is largely determined by the differences in the models of political culture in various countries. For this reason the

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<sup>2</sup> J. Garlicki, *The Political Culture of Polish Society*, [in:] S. Sulowski (ed.), *The Political System of Poland*, Warsaw 2007, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> J. Garlicki, *Traditions and Dynamics in the Political Culture of Polish Society*, [in:] J. Błuszkowski, S. Sulowski (eds.), *Dilemmas of Polish Transformation*, Warsaw 2010, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Ziółkowski, *Cztery funkcje pamięci społecznej (przypadek Polski)*, [in:] A. Kodera, K.Z. Sowa (ed.), *Los i wybór. Dziedzictwo i perspektywy społeczeństwa polskiego*. Pamiętnik XI Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Socjologicznego, Rzeszów 2003, pp. 444 ff.

cultural basis of changes is often not uniform in different societies and it contributes to more willing acceptance of certain changes or limitations or blocking other kinds of transformations. Claus Offe stated that the process of transformations is realized in Eastern and Central Europe on three levels, namely the political, economic and socio-cultural ones<sup>5</sup>. Robert Putnam, who analyzed the model and functioning of democracy in Italy, formulates a thesis that the shape of the system and its changes were defined by the three constituents, namely the state, or in other words, the political system, the market, or the economic system, and the society, or the political culture<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, different concepts contain a similar way of characterizing the elements important both for the implementation of system reforms itself and for the later functioning of the democratic system. It can be said that political culture usually constitutes the content of the process of creating and functioning of what sociologists and political scientists usually call the civic society.

It is worth pondering on what features of political culture understood as "(...) the whole of orientations of a society, a social group (...) towards politics (...) which are reflected in concrete and verbal behaviours"<sup>7</sup> can contribute to the creation of a mature civic society. It is also important if the very process of transformation of the political system introduces significant changes in the society's political culture, and if so, what the direction of these changes is. It also should be established if the political culture of the Polish society is pluralistic and if it has the features of a democratic culture characteristic of a civic society.

## Traditions and historical basis of the political culture of Poles

No analysis of changes in the political culture of the Polish society in the course of transformations of the political system can be reliable without showing the traditions, which means the historical basis of the political culture in Poland. This is important since patterns of ideological values and political behaviours may have, and usually do have, a significant effect on the character and formation of the types of political culture in contemporary society.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. Offe, *Drogi transformacji. Doświadczenia wschodnioeuropejskie i wschodniemieckie*, Warszawa–Kraków 1999, pp. 39 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. R. Putnam, *Demokracja w działaniu*, Kraków 1996, p. 284.

<sup>7</sup> J. Garlicki, *Kultura polityczna młodzieży studenckiej*, Warszawa 1991, p. 26.

In Poland pluralistic traditions are centuries-long. For example, in the period of the “gentry democracy” (from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.) and Poland before the partitions (the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.) the country was differentiated on many levels. First of all, that was nationality pluralism because the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c. Republic of Poland was a home to a few nations. Besides the ethnically Polish population, there were Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews. Cultural pluralism was also a fact. In addition, the society was differentiated in terms of religion. The Roman-Catholic religion dominated among the ethnically Polish population but there were also religious communities of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, and even Muslims. The Greek-Catholic and Orthodox religions were also widely spread in the eastern parts. Nationality pluralism and cultural as well as religious pluralism were accompanied by the political system that had a lot of polycentric features. The continuity of the existence of independent and pluralist gentry in the Republic of Poland was definitely stopped by the 3<sup>rd</sup> partition of Poland (1795). However, the traditions of independent and rebellious spirit helped the Polish survive more than a hundred years of lack of independence and sovereign existence of the state. In the period of the partitions, an important weapon in the fight for independence was the national consciousness of Poles supported and created by outstanding literary works. The period of the partitions showed that the Poles were capable of rising for independence (November Uprising 1830-1831 and January Uprising 1863-1864). Those traditions created a culture of disobedience on the one hand, whereas on the other, the national integration. The picture of the social self-organization of Poles looked worse, although at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the positivist models cultivating “work from basis” were popular with a part of the society. That was a model emphasizing the efforts for the benefit of local communities and for the development of entrepreneurship.

In the years 1944–1989, the times when a monocentric system existed in Poland within the frameworks of the state called the Polish People’s Republic, the Polish society was not uniform in their convictions and attitudes. In the second part of the 1940s the society adopted a monistic form, which followed the change of borders and the creation of a new type of state. That monism, however, was in many respects only superficial. The political system under the communist rule certainly became a monocentric system. The national pluralism of the society disappeared because after the change of borders a great majority in the area of the whole country was composed by the ethnically Polish population. Poland

was to become a country *of one nation, one ideology and one religion*, and it was to be governed in a centralistic manner. Nevertheless, the above assumption shows the illusive nature of this unification. The contradiction was, for example, in the sphere of ideological life. The communist ideology proved to be incompatible with the Roman Catholic religion. National minorities did not disappear although ethnic groups different from the Polish constituted a negligent part of our country's society. Cultural pluralism did not cease to exist. In the political life, a relative variety of organizations and orientation also still existed. That was shown both in attempts to create new organizations, especially after the social protests, and the activity of opposition groups, which in some periods was open though not legalized. However, the social consciousness and the political culture became the most important carriers of diversity besides the culture, and especially literature, striving to resist the totalitarian tendencies.

It was just in the consciousness of Poles that democratic values and plurality of political orientations were transferred to the monocentric system. Models of political culture from earlier periods were a basis of the formation of anti-establishment movements and programs of the political opposition. The task of preserving the values was a significant element of the *ethos* of the Polish intelligentsia. Models of organization of social life and the ideas that came up in that environment frequently contributed to changes and reforms of the country.

The country's political culture in the period of the Polish People's Republic was shaped under the effect of two groups of factors. Firstly, those were the models from the past, which – as mentioned above – contained a lot of deeply internalized pluralistic traditions. Secondly, the political culture was shaped and changed under the influence of the political system of *real socialism*, which was a monocentric system. The essence of that system was to eliminate, or at least limit, the existence of institutional alternative structures. This meant a policy of specific rationing of the possibilities of the existence of any organizational structures. It led to reduced possibilities of creating political parties, or other political organizations, or even *quasi* political ones, which would create programs competitive to the dominating model. Social behaviours were regulated by one political decision-making centre, actually not subject to any social control. G. A. Almond analyzed the conditions of the creation of political culture within the countries of *real socialism* in Central and Eastern Europe and he found out that the governments and above all the leadership of the communist parties tried to *establish an organizational*

monopoly and a monopoly of mass media... ideological conformism [was] rewarded and deviation severely punished. Local and neighbourhood communities [were] subject to the control of party activists<sup>8</sup>. This brief characterization of the functioning of the monocentric systems of *real socialism* aptly shows the essence of their effect on the society. Attempts to transform political culture made within such a system are usually only partly effective. While studying the phenomenon of political culture it should be remembered that a significant role is played by historical experiences. The original, years-long system of orientations and attitudes will remain in some form and for a remarkable period of time in a certain degree it can resist attempts at transformations, or, possibly, it will succumb to them for a considerable period of time, either partly or superficially. ...*However huge the attempts and the repressive structure will be – as rightly noticed by G.A. Almond – however monopolist and convincing the media and tempting the system of stimuli, political culture will set serious limitations to changes in the structures and behaviours due to the fact that the key attitudes will have a tendency to survive in a considerable degree and for a remarkable time*<sup>9</sup>. An adequate example confirming the validity of G.A. Almond's theses is the process of shaping the political culture of the society in Poland in the period of the Polish People's Republic. It is not possible to characterize the period of nearly 50 years (from 1945 to 1989) in just a few words, but we can point to a few specific features that are common to the political culture of different groups of the Polish society in the period of *real socialism*. One is dimorphism of political culture. It consists in adopting different norms and values regulating the sphere of public and private life. Models formed by the monocentric political system were adopted in the external, public and – as can be said – declarative sphere of collective life. On the other hand, the private, family and environmental spheres were governed by completely different rules as models of the political culture from the past were frequently preserved there<sup>10</sup>. The phenomenon of divergence between what one considers important in public life and what one is inclined to support in a declarative sense, on the one hand, and the practical models of behaviour in everyday life, on the other, does not only occur in monocentric systems and this has been frequently described by sociologists of politics. However, dimorphism of different

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<sup>8</sup> G.A. Almond, *Communism and Political Culture Theory*, "Comparative Politics" 1983, vol. 15, No. 2, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> J. Garlicki, *The Political Culture of Polish Society...*, p. 175.

reactions of the same persons depending on whether they are in a *school* situation, whether they freely express their relation to a definite matter in the environment of their family or a circle of friends was petrified by the customs of public life in *real socialism*. That was based on what George Kennan, for example, aptly called the *culture of appearances*. This situation from the period preceding the collapse of the eastern block was emphatically characterized by Ralf Dahrendorf. He stated, for example, that few people in the 1970s believed in the state ideology but *it was still taught in schools and day by day millions of people were exposed to the acid rain of the ageing newspeak*<sup>11</sup>. The real mechanisms of everyday life were usually more prosaic. Small collectivism, the impersonal concrete was developing under the ideological façade of large collectivism created by the monocentric system in Poland. In other words, realization of collectivism spread by the official party and state structures encountered a real barrier of personal relations, connections and a complicated tangle of informal dependencies. The phenomenon of microstructures bound by a strong direct and personal link occurred both in the groups of informal political opposition threatened by repressions and within the political elites themselves.

The attitude of a lot of citizens to socialism officially spread by the state was multi-dimensional and it was characterized by the following features:

- negative assessment of the practical functioning of *real socialism* in the state,
- pejorative reception of the concept of *socialism* and the terminology using the adjective *socialist* as a slogan,
- conviction about a need to rebuild socialism or to implement far-reaching system reforms,

and, at the same time, acceptance of a range of values introduced by the doctrine of socialism and spread in the monocentric political system<sup>12</sup>.

In the course of the formation of a system of social organizations in the period of the Polish People's Republic, the monocentric model was disturbed in practice. In different periods a number of youth and social organization appeared which did not fully realize the principles of the monocentric system. They created the possibilities for those who did not identify themselves with the socialist system to, at least potentially, undertake some activity. Various organizations, clubs and associations

<sup>11</sup> R. Dahrendorf, *Rozważania nad rewolucją w Europie*, Warszawa 1991, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> J. Garlicki, *The Political Culture of Polish Society...*, p. 176.

connected with the Catholic Church worked all the time in a greater or smaller range. The Church structures themselves were active in social matters and, not infrequently, in political ones as well.

Then, it can be seen that in the time when Poland belonged to the Eastern block the models of political culture were dominated by the rules of activity and structures of the monocentric system only in a superficial way. The effect of models established in different earlier historical periods was still strong.

In the period of the monocentric system existing in Poland between 1945 and 1989, and especially in the 1970s and 1980s, a considerable part of the citizens represented the type of political culture reflected in subordination and participation. The barriers that limited active participation in political activity, and even made it impossible, had both objective and subjective character. The objective ones included no possibility of opposition work or a rationed possibility of creating different kinds of organizations. In addition, some citizens were not convinced about the sense of activity within the existing institutions of the system. Some consciously avoided any public activity and they closed themselves within the circles of their family and friends.

## **Transformation of the political system and the political culture of Poles**

The period of the turn and the beginning of the system transformation in Poland is also an interesting moment of transformations in political culture. One of the most important events accelerating the system reforms in Poland was a wave of social protests in August 1980, and the formation of a trade union, or in fact a social movement, called *Solidarity*. The workers' strikes which took place at the beginning of the 1980s were another wave of protests in post-war Poland. A number of factors contributed to it. Those included lack of trust in communist governments and the society being tired with the system based on declarations of a better future and justice for all but ineffective in the economic sense. This lack of economic effectiveness was painfully felt by the citizens in the second half of the 1970s, when after a period of increased consumption at the beginning of the decade the development was checked and the chances to satisfy the growing aspirations decreased, which was enhanced by worse market conditions in Western Europe. Direct causes of protests were, on the one hand, worse material conditions of life and, on the other,

increasingly irritating limitations on the freedom of speech and expression as well as religious practices. The social protests, where different and numerous groups of society participated, were an expression of political culture. To a great extent, they had their basis in the models of the past. They expressed the feelings of a big part of the society, which did not want any more to bear that form of government which did not correspond to the social aspirations, needs and cultural patterns solidified in the past.

It deserves to be mentioned at this point that political culture of the ruling elites was not a monolith. We can clearly notice the reformative inclinations of a part of them, which was shown, for example, in different attitudes of the government apparatus and the party apparatus to the protests. What can be regarded as a significant determinant of the views and political culture of groups connected with the monocentric government is the fact that every third member of the ruling party became a member of the reformative social movement of *Solidarity*.

The events from August 1981, besides sending a message of dignity in life, symbolized a moral protest against the restrictions and deviations of the monocentric system. They brought humanistic values into the traditions of the Polish political culture: *dignity and respect towards the partner, the feeling of subjectivity and trespassing the border of group claims*<sup>13</sup>.

Transformations of the system and in political culture, initiated by the August protests, were checked by martial law introduced at the end of 1981. It can be said that those events *hibernated* the transformations which were started after some time again together with the positive transformations in the international environment of Poland, especially in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.

At the turn of the years 1988 and 1989, a concept appeared within the ruling elites of Poland to lead to talks between the government and the groups of the political opposition, which were not legal but still active. As a result, after initial consultations at the beginning of 1989, the Round Table Talks were initiated between representatives of the ruling party and the government on the one hand, and representatives of the opposition groups, on the other, with *Solidarity* at the fore. The role of members of the Catholic Church hierarchy in Poland should be emphasized as they initiated and took part in the Round Table Talks. The active participation of the Church in public matters is also a characteristic feature of the Polish political culture. The Round Table Talks resulted in

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<sup>13</sup> K.B. Janowski, *Kultura polityczna Polaków u progu XXI wieku*, [in:] K.B. Janowski (ed.), *Kultura polityczna Polaków*, Toruń 2010, p. 22.

legalization of *Solidarity* again, the elections, where the opposition groups were allowed to take part, although in a limited degree, and in breaking up the monopoly of the party and the state in the media. Those events were certainly a breakthrough in the process of system reforms in Poland. The consensual style of political culture overweighed the confrontational one. The process of system transformation began.

### **Pluralism of political culture vs. changes in the models of behaviour and types of activity of the citizens of the Third Republic of Poland**

Parliamentary elections in June 1989 determined the direction of further reforms in Poland. They led to the appointment of the first non-communist government in Poland after World War II. During those elections, civic committees were created, which were an emanation of political orientations that had no reflection and representation in the political parties that existed then – The Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), The United Peasant Party (ZSL) or The Alliance of Democrats (SD). Later, new groups began to appear which were transformed into political parties. When the first free parliamentary elections were held in 1991, nearly sixty parties and groups announced their tickets. As a result, deputies from 29 tickets entered the Sejm of RP, who then established 17 parliamentary clubs in the first chamber of the Parliament. This is very expressive evidence of political pluralism of the Polish society. This is also a sign of political culture in Poland, which for many centuries has been characterized by fragmentation of the political scene.

Recreation of the pluralistic model of the Polish political scene led to an increase in the public activity of the citizens. It can be said that new models of participation in the political life of a democratic state started to get shaped. Wider circles of citizens adopted the attitudes that can be called the participant model of political culture. However, the activity of Poles increasingly began to focus on economic issues. For some, professional activity or their own economic activity became the main goal of their life, creating a chance for material advancement. Others – through the reform of the economic system and the changing economic conditions – were forced to defend their economic standard. The idea of economic growth became the central value determining the goals of collective activity. A part of the citizens did not even assimilate this idea fully. Problems associated with the sphere of the economic

standard of life and consumption, which was an extension of these spheres of activity, absorbed the citizens' energy. That caused limitation of their public activity. At the beginning of the 1990s, the views on what was important and valuable in life also started to evolve. Family is traditionally regarded important in Poland. However, such values as professional career, one's personal economic situation started to be ranked higher, while less attention was paid to the general social matters and political freedoms<sup>14</sup>.

Interesting data on certain aspects of political culture of Poles are provided by the results of cyclical studies. Their source are e.g. surveys systematically conducted by the Foundation of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS). Results concerning at least five key issues provoke thought and are important for the analysis of the dynamics of political culture of the Polish society, namely trust in political institutions, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (evaluative-affective component of political culture)<sup>15</sup>, attitude to democracy and political preferences (axiological component), as well as political participation (behavioral component).

An important determinant of the condition of political culture of the society, and especially the citizens' attitude to the system as a whole and to what is called the initiating objects, is the level of trust in political institutions in a given system. What is of importance is the degree of trust in institutions or, in other words, whether there exist the subjects that arouse more trust than doubts concerning their character and usefulness of their activities. The issues of trust may be viewed in symbolic categories. In the citizens' consciousness certain institutions become the symbols of the state's existence, independence or national identity.

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<sup>14</sup> J. Garlicki, A. Noga-Bogomilski, *Kultura polityczna w społeczeństwie demokratycznym*, Warszawa 2004, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> According to the definition formulated by J. Garlicki, **four components of political culture** can be distinguished. These are: 1) *interest in politics, knowledge about it and knowledge about political facts (cognitive component)*; 2) *values considered to be important and desired referring to the political system and mechanisms of functioning of its institutions (axiological component)*; 3) *assessment of political phenomena and evaluative judgments about political institutions (evaluative-affective component)*; 4) *acknowledged models of behaviour in the sphere of politics and tested types of political activities (behavioral component)*. The definition of political culture extending the approach represented by G.A. Almond and G.B. Powell with the axiological component (recognized values) and the behavioral component (political behaviours and activities) is published by the Author of the present article in: J. Garlicki, *Kultura polityczna młodzieży studenckiej*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 26–30.

After 1989 changes began to take place in the Poles' trust in political institutions. In the first period of the process of system transformation, the trust in the Sejm increased, while trust in the Roman Catholic Church – an institution where a high level of trust was placed in the conditions of the monocentric system – decreased. One of the more important events was the establishment of the second chamber of the Polish Parliament, namely the Senate. Trust in the Senate was also high in the beginning. However, the years 1998–2001 bring a drop of the high evaluation of the activities of both houses of the Parliament.

Chart 1. Opinions on the activity of the Sejm

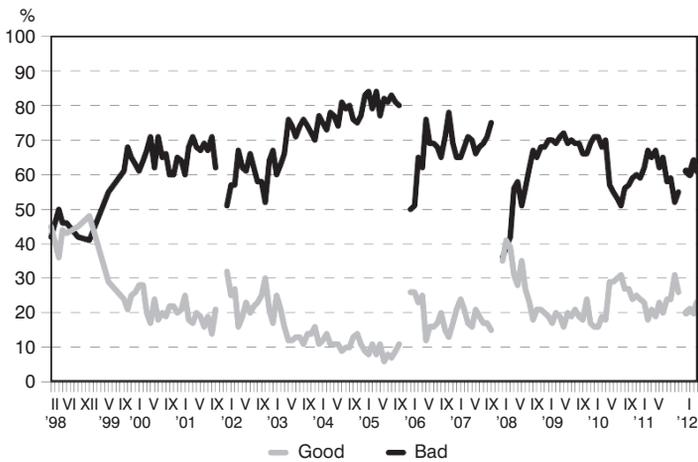
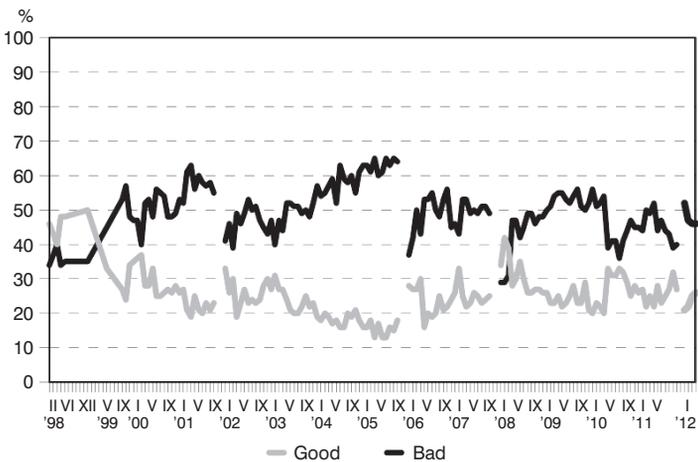


Chart 2. Opinions on the activity of the Senate



Source: *Oceny instytucji publicznych*, a communique by CBOS, Warsaw 2012.

At the end of 1989 the number of people who had good opinions about the Sejm exceeded 40% and was slightly bigger than the group of citizens with negative opinions. At the beginning of 2003 three times as many people assessed the Sejm negatively as those who had positive opinions. That tendency increased. A similar process takes place in the case of the Senate; however, the range between the negative and positive opinions is not that big. Observation of the phenomena concerning political culture in Poland shows, however, that this is not an irreversible process. It is rather the effect of the citizens being tired with the conflicts between different political groups that take place on the forum of the Parliament, as well as the conflicts and splits within the government coalitions. The citizens do not only assess the activity of both houses, especially the lower one, negatively, but they have a critical attitude to the deputies representing them. A lot of revealed abnormalities and affairs that took the form of scandals contributed to this. The citizens now have a possibility to watch the work of the Parliament members by means of the mass media and they have high requirements concerning the standards of that work. Both these phenomena are important and good elements of political culture that is being shaped in the conditions of system transformation. It can also be said that the critical assessment of the practical functioning of the Parliament was based on what can be called the defectiveness of certain mechanisms of the activity of representation organs, or – more broadly – the standards of political culture of a part of the ruling elite which did not correspond to the requirements of parliamentary democracy. This increase of negative opinions is a phenomenon of temporary character and it does not have to remain long. On the other hand, this tendency will not get reversed in a short time, especially without some clear signals testifying to a breakthrough in the very objects of politics that are subject to assessment. It should also be mentioned that the system reforms in Poland aroused personal aspirations but also high expectations towards the functionality of the system and transparency of democratic mechanisms. These are the next signs of changes that can have a positive impact on the development of civic political culture and on the reinforcement of the participant element in it. After the period of satisfaction with the free elections and the fact of having the pluralistic representation in the Parliament, now is the time to give opinions, and these are according to very rigorous principles. Bad opinions on the work of the Parliament are, on the other hand, not a good basis to build a social capital founded on trust. Especially, if we add the information that Poles rather do not trust each other, they do not have the feeling

of having any influence on public matters and they doubt if the state authorities are trying to realize the citizens' interests.

Criticism refers not only to both chambers of the Polish Parliament. Political parties, trade unions or the government also do not enjoy much trust.

**Table 1. Trust in the institutions of public life**

Institutions	Generally, do you trust the institutions enumerated below?						
	Decisively, I do	I rather trust them	Total trust	I rather don't	Deci- sively I don't	No trust totally	It is hard to say
	In percentage						
Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity	48	41	89	5	2	7	4
Polish Red Cross	22	59	81	7	3	10	10
Caritas	29	51	80	9	4	13	7
The army	17	56	74	11	4	15	11
Scout movement	16	54	70	7	2	9	21
Roman Catholic Church	24	46	69	17	9	26	5
Police	8	57	65	20	8	28	7
Ombudsman	10	49	60	11	5	16	24
City/ Commune local authorities	6	52	58	23	7	31	11
European Union	7	51	58	19	7	26	16
NATO	8	48	57	15	5	20	23
UNO	9	48	57	13	4	17	26
Institute of National Remembrance	12	43	55	15	7	22	23
Courts	5	40	45	31	13	44	11

Institutions	Generally, do you trust the institutions enumerated below?						
	Decisively, I do	I rather trust them	Total trust	I rather don't	Decisively I don't	No trust totally	It is hard to say
	In percentage						
Public administration officials	2	43	45	30	12	41	14
TV	3	41	44	38	11	49	8
Government	2	37	39	32	17	49	12
Big enterprises	2	33	35	26	9	35	30
Newspapers	2	32	34	40	15	55	11
Churches of other denominations	3	27	30	30	11	41	29
Trade unions	2	27	29	26	10	36	35
Sejm and Senate	1	28	29	37	19	55	15
Political parties	1	19	20	41	25	65	15

Source: *Zaufanie społeczne*, a communique CBOS, Warsaw 2012.

The data presented above allows for the statement that charity institutions enjoy almost universal trust. Most frequently, the Poles point to the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, which is not a formalized structure but a social movement that is revived once a year with the aim of raising money for important charitable goals. High in the hierarchy of social trust are the Polish Red Cross and Caritas, and next the army. The Roman Catholic Church also enjoys considerable trust but this is not the level of trust that this institution had within the monocentric system.

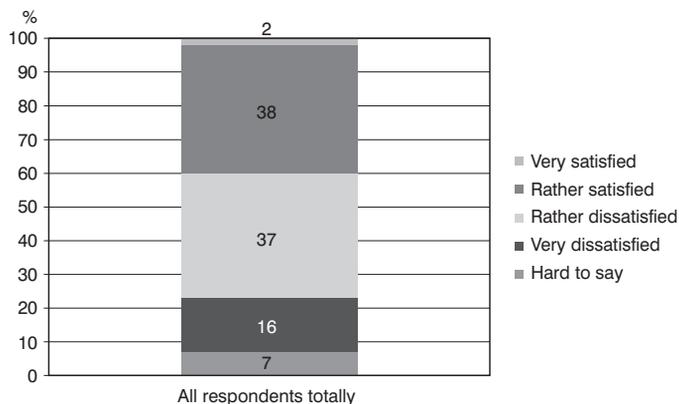
It is for quite a long time that the Poles have not been satisfied with the way that democracy functions in Poland. It was perceived in the relatively best manner in the years 1996–1998 but still there more people who feel dissatisfied.

In 2012 more than a half (53%) of the respondents stated that they were not satisfied with the way that democracy functions in Poland. A question should be asked whether these data are not an indicator of the actual, though concealed in some degree, lack of acceptance of the democratic order. Or maybe, they are rather “only” an indication of lack of satisfaction with the quality of the governments and political elites,

which is a phenomenon occurring in many European states. Declarations on whether life is better in the present system and above all, opinions on democracy as a system of governing are helpful in providing the answer.

**Chart 3. Level of the Poles' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy**

Generally, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy functions in our country?

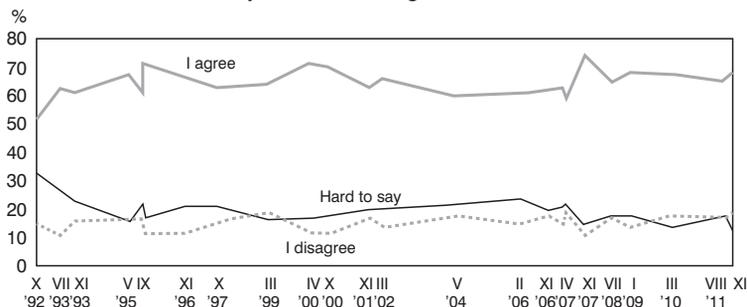


Source: *Afiliacje polityczne sprzed roku 1989 a stosunek do przemian ustrojowych i poczucie wpływu na sprawy publiczne*, a communique by CBOS, Warsaw 2012.

Two thirds of Poles are convinced that life is better in the Third Republic of Poland than in the previous system. Regarding, on the other hand, the fundamental issue of the attitude to democracy as a form of government, the opinions are changing in some degree but practically throughout the period of the democratic system in Poland the majority of its citizens are convinced about the superiority of democracy over other political systems.

**Chart 4. Dynamics of opinions on democracy as a governing system.**

Do you agree with the statement that democracy has superiority over any other forms of government?



Source: *Opinie o demokracji po wyborach parlamentarnych*, a communique by CBOS, Warsaw 2011.

Recent studies show that over two thirds of Poles are convinced that democracy is superior to other forms of government. Therefore, it can be stated that acceptance of the democratic system is fairly common within the frameworks of the component of political culture called the axiological one.

Political preferences – results of studies and the results of the last parliamentary elections indicate a shift in political orientations towards the right wing. However, that is what happens in the political sphere and in the sphere of political declarations, whereas regarding the function of the state, the orientations that can be called pro-social are still strong. The citizens want the social functions of the state to be preserved, or even developed, and they are attached to the state's welfare role. Hence, it is not certain if the shift to the right is permanent or rather declarative. While analyzing the citizens' opinions in various questions concerning the system solutions, and reviewing the programs of two right-wing or centre-right political parties that dominate the Polish scene (i.e. Civic Platform and Law and Justice) one can draw a conclusion that we have to do with a phenomenon of quite permanent incoherence in the orientations represented by both the citizens and the politicians, which is reflected in different attitudes to the ideological-political sphere and different ones in the socio-political sphere.

Political participation – a significant determinant of the behavioral component of the society's political culture – is shaped at rather a low level if we estimate it through the light of attendance in the elections (though a certain degree of mobilization on a part of the voters has been recently observed, for example in parliamentary elections in 2007). It follows from the studies that 60-70% of the respondents claim to participate in the elections, while a part does not do it systematically. This is a rotating model of participation, which deepens the episodic character of this form. However, there are a lot of forms of participation. A number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been formed in Poland. Here, participation, which is important in creating a civic society, is growing. It can be concluded from research that from 20% to 25% of Poles usually declared to be working in civic organizations. In 2012 this percentage increased to 32%. It can be said basing on the presented data that the range of this activity is not very broad yet but it has a clear, though slight, increasing tendency.

**Table 2. Participation of Poles in civic organizations**

In Poland there are different possibilities of social activity.

Do you devote your time to the activity in any of these organizations, associations, movement, club or foundation? It is about work in (these) organizations and not only the fact of belonging to them.

	Percentage of positive answers among the total number of respondents							
	II 1998	XII 1999	I 2002	I 2004	I 2006	I 2008	I 2010	I 2012
Organizations working for schooling and education, e.g. parent-teacher association, parent board, school association, university association, Social Educational Society	4.5	5.5	3.2	4.2	4.8	4.8	8.0	6.9
Charity organizations working to support children in need	1.2	2.9	1.0	2.4	3.5	2.4	5.1	5.6
Religious and church organizations and movements, parish communities	3.6	3.9	2.0	3.9	3.4	2.8	4.5	5.4
Charity organizations working to support people in need – old, poor, homeless, sick or disabled people, victims of disasters, war victims, etc.	1.5	2.8	1.3	2.4	2.1	2.4	4.0	4.8
Sport organizations (unions, associations, clubs)	2.2	3.1	2.7	4.8	3.5	2.8	5.8	4.0
Associations and unions of garden owners, breeders, anglers and hunters	2.4	3.1	1.8	2.9	2.5	1.6	3.3	4.0
Volunteer Fire Department, Mountain Volunteer Search and Rescue, etc.	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.2	3.4	1.4	2.7	3.2
Artistic organizations and associations, e.g. choir, orchestra, dancing group, theatre group	0.9	1.8	0.9	1.9	1.6	0.8	2.6	2.9

	Percentage of positive answers among the total number of respondents							
	II 1998	XII 1999	I 2002	I 2004	I 2006	I 2008	I 2010	I 2012
Trade unions	3.2	4.8	3.3	3.8	3.9	3.2	2.1	2.8
Youth organizations, e.g. scout movement, youth clubs, student unions and associations	1.5	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.3	1.8	3.2	2.7
Pensioners' organizations, senior clubs	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.2	1.8	2.6
Local self-governments of city districts and housing estates, e.g. residents' councils, house committees	1.0	1.2	0.3	1.0	1.2	0.9	1.6	2.3
Committees dealing with one specific case (e.g. a parking place), protest groups	0.5	1.2	0.3	0.4	1.0	0.4	1.3	1.7
Self-help organizations, e.g. associations of disabled people, single fathers, anonymous alcoholics or unemployed people	0.6	1.1	0.4	1.0	1.3	0.8	2.5	1.6
Organizations working for the natural environment	0.9	1.5	0.3	1.2	1.8	0.9	1.5	1.6
Occupational associations and self-governments	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.6
Societies of animal friends, animal welfare societies	1.1	1.1	0.7	0.8	1.6	0.3	2.3	1.5
Scientific societies	0.6	1.4	0.8	1.4	1.2	0.5	2.3	1.4
Commune self-governments	1.1	1.3	0.2	1.1	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.4
Organizations supporting health care centers	0.7	1.2	0.6	0.8	1.5	0.9	1.7	1.2
Organizations of veterans, war victims	1.4	1.3	0.9	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.6	1.2
Workers' self-governments (workers' councils)	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.8	1.1	0.4	0.6	1.2

	Percentage of positive answers among the total number of respondents							
	II 1998	XII 1999	I 2002	I 2004	I 2006	I 2008	I 2010	I 2012
Associations promoting friendship with other countries and nations	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.7	0.6	0.4	1.1	1.1
Political parties and associations	0.3	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.7	1.1
Tourist organizations and associations	1.6	2.0	0.6	1.3	0.9	1.1	1.7	1.0
Female organizations, e.g. rural women's circles	1.0	1.5	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.0	0.8	1.0
Associations of city or region lovers, e.g. dealing with monument protection, development of regional culture	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.9	0.9
Collectors' and hobbyists' associations and clubs	0.5	0.7	0.7	1.2	0.7	1.0	1.5	0.7
Province and province self-governments	-	0.4	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.7	0.5
Other organizations, association, movements, clubs or foundations	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.3	0.9	1.7	1.4	1.7

Source: *Aktywność społeczna w organizacjach obywatelskich*, a communique by CBOS, Warsaw 2012.

The greatest increase refers to participation in such forms of activity as organizations for education, charity organizations and religious organizations. Within the last four years the group of people who work in three or even more organizations has increased from four to eight people. If this tendency remains, it will prove the development of a civic society through the bottom-up movements, associations and organizations. This would also be the evidence of a wider spread of the participant type of political culture. It deserves to be added that the popularity of different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) among the youth has grown. Most frequently, these are organizations working in such fields as education (it is the same in case of results of research conducted on an adult sample), social welfare, health protection and ecology. This is

another symptom of the changes taking place in the political culture of the Polish society.

In general terms, during the system transformation the subject-participant model became again predominant in the Polish political culture. This does not mean that no changes have taken place as compared to the period of *real socialism*. A lot has changed. Today, the structure of the institution of the monocentric system does not make a barrier for active participation in political life. The political system is democratic and pluralistic. On the other hand, the barrier is an increase in the citizens' interest and involvement in the economic sphere of life. A part of the citizens have become disillusioned with the mechanisms of democracy. The feeling of having an influence on political decisions has increased only to a slight extent. The multitude of political parties caused difficulty for the Polish people, who are concerned with everyday matters, in recognizing their programs and making the choice. The effect of those phenomena is the liability of the voters, who shift their support from one party to another. Nevertheless, certain signs of the spread of the participant model of political culture can be noticed. This is shown in greater participation in civic organizations.

## **Political culture – tendencies and perspectives**

In order to assess the perspectives for transformations in political culture it will be necessary to consider the development of the Internet and new possibilities of political communication, or even political participation by means of the mass media. It is also interesting to compare the political culture of the Internet users and the political culture of the whole society. Such an analysis is possible thanks to the results of many studies<sup>16</sup>. The collected data allow for a conclusion that the Polish Internet users are a group more active not only in different areas of everyday life but they are more interested in politics than the society in general. The level of this interest frequently changes

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<sup>16</sup> The source includes the research conducted by the Institute of Political Sciences of the University of Warsaw in the years 2010–2011. 1) A study *Political culture of Poles in the Internet in the presidential campaign in 2010 on-line surveys* (CAWI) between 10–14 June 2010 on a sample of 720 Polish Internet users of age. 2) A study *Political culture of Polish Internet users on-line surveys* were realized (CAWI). The measurement was conducted between 27 September – 5 October 2011 on a Polish sample of 757 individual respondents.

or fluctuates. Some animation is clearly visible during the electoral campaign. In the period between the campaigns the interest in politics decreases. Excessive stimuli from the new media cause weariness. The analyses show that the activity of political parties, election headquarters and particular candidates in the new media is growing; however, this does not mean improvement in the quality of communication. The election headquarters do not realize the convergence of communication channels. If any discussion, including in the Internet, on political matters does take place, it is often not about important matters but those that “sell” well. A specific autism of election headquarters can be noticed. Most of them lose the advantage of the Internet. Messages of political parties in the new medium resemble a monologue. These are the circumstances that do not facilitate engagement of the Internet users in politics or a discussion about it.

An important factor that could support the creation of consolidated democracy and the participant model of political culture is the capital of social and political trust. Actually, it is hard to speak about the capital of political trust. The majority of the Internet users, like most of the general society, do not trust political parties. The level of trust in most political parties is also low. What is more, a decreasing tendency can be observed. The group of people who trust the major institutions of the system is getting smaller. It can be argued whether the lack of trust in the state’s organs is a bad phenomenon and a disturbing signal, like was stated for example by Piotr Sztompka<sup>17</sup>, or – as claimed by such authors as Geert Bouckaert and Steven Van de Walle<sup>18</sup>, a sign of a healthy civic reaction, which prevents authoritarian tendencies of the government and facilitates the functioning of social control. Nevertheless, there are no premises to claim – at least in the sphere of politics – that a capital of trust is being shaped. The tendency of decreasing trust testifies to the erosion of legitimization of the capital of trust. Satisfaction of all Poles, including the Polish Internet users, with the way democracy is functioning is going down as well. Sharp political conflicts, on the one hand, and the structural predictability of the Polish political scene, on the other, contribute to this

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<sup>17</sup> P. Sztompka, *Zaufanie, nieufność i dwa paradoksy demokracji*, [in:] P. Sztompka, P. Kucia (eds.), *Socjologia. Lektury*, Kraków 2005, pp. 401–402.

<sup>18</sup> G. Bouckaert and S. Van de Walle, *Comparing Measures of Citizen Trust and User Satisfaction as Indicators of Good Governance: Difficulties in Linking Trust and Satisfaction Indicators*, “International Review of Administrative Sciences” 2003, Vol. 69, No. 3, s. 329 ff. Those Authors stated, for example: *low trust is often regarded as a reflection of a healthy democratic attitude, while a high level of trust can facilitate the formation of a repressive government.*

situation. A decreasing percentage of people satisfied with the real shape of democracy does not necessarily indicate lack of legitimization of the political system in Poland, but it reflects the conviction that a lot of issues must be changed and improved.

Regarding the tendencies within the behavioral component of political culture, it has to be stated that the level of political participation in the environment of the Internet users is not growing. On the contrary, certain symptoms pointing to a drop in activity can be seen. Although a bigger group of the Internet surfers use this medium to find information on politics; however, they do it in a rather lukewarm way. The percentage of those who use a wider range of the Internet sources is decreasing. The number of people who become broadcasters and use the Internet to spread information of political issues is also decreasing. Increased criticism of the functioning of the system is accompanied by a tendency for more radical opinions on unconventional forms of participation. The number of people who are willing to accept various forms of protest is growing, both among the society in general and among the Internet users. It can be expected that an increased tendency to take part in those protests ensues as a result. A very clear and spectacular example was a wave of protests after Poland signed the ACTA treaty. Signing it aroused protests among a lot of the Internet users, and the debate that followed then was treated by a considerable part of the Internet users as insincere and as a propaganda trick rather than an attempt at a real dialogue<sup>19</sup>.

While considering the perspectives of political culture and political communication, one should ascertain that the possibilities created by the new media are now enormous and they will be still growing. It can be argued whether the politicians and ordinary citizens are keeping pace with those possibilities. The analysis conducted on the use of the Internet in electoral campaigns, in holding a dialogue with various subjects and in participating in politics provokes the conclusion that the sphere of politics in Poland has not reached the level of development of the new media yet. Both the elites and the Internet users are now experimenting with the new media. Communication between the elites and the voters *via* the Internet in most cases lacks professionalism and this is not only in the technical dimension but in the content-related dimension as well. The majority of people using the Internet, on the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Garlicki, D. Mider, *Wykorzystanie Internetu w komunikowaniu politycznym elit z wyborcami*, „Studia Politologiczne” 2012, Vol. 25, pp. 203–204.

other hand, are not convinced that they can become the creators and broadcasters of political contents by means of the new medium. The Internet does not determine the results of elections in Poland. Politicians have understood that activity on its forum is necessary but it is not the predominant means in political communication. In our country it is treated as a supplement.

## ABSTRACT

New phenomena have appeared in the political culture of the Polish society and they have both good and bad sides. Certain values and models of behaviour are the factors that stimulate the system reforms and promote the formation of consolidated democracy, while some have dysfunctional effects. It can be said on the example of trust in public institutions that changes in political culture have occurred within the axiological and evaluative-affective component. The citizens' demands towards politicians increased and criticism in assessing them grew. This can be a factor stimulating the quality of democracy. A certain temporary crisis in social trust in Polish parliament can be felt. This is the worse side of the ongoing processes. However, this does not mean that Polish society rejects pluralistic democracy and its mechanisms. On the other hand, a considerable part of the political elites are assessed negatively since – in the opinion of many citizens – they do not meet the standards required by developed parliamentary democracy.

The role of the new media in political communication is growing and this is going to be a factor affecting political culture. The new possibilities should potentially facilitate the processes of improving the way of the functioning of the democratic system, if only through stimulating the public debate. However, at present it is more likely that the growth of the Internet use in the sphere of politics and the development of political culture will proceed according to a scenario called *technorealism*<sup>20</sup>. It means that people who are active in various domains of social life, including the sphere of politics, and who use the Internet will have bigger and better chances to acquire and create information on political subjects. The possibilities of the Internet, on the other hand, will not make people who are not very active and who are not interested in politics get interested in this sphere of social life and participate in it. Besides, a considerable part of the citizens do not use the Internet. This group can be called a group of digital marginalization. For them, the possibilities of information and political participation created by the new media are still a utopia.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. A.G. Wilhelm, *Democracy in the Digital Age. Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*, Nowy Jork–Londyn 2000, pp. 14 ff.

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