

DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING: LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM POLAND

Andrada Elena DĂNILĂ

University of Bucharest and the National University of Political Studies and
Public Administration
Bucharest/Romania

Quentin LAUNAI

Political Science Institute of Grenoble Alpes University
Grenoble/France

Larisa Nicoleta PĂTRAȘCU

The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
Bucharest/Romania

Abstract

Democratic erosion, also referred in the academic literature as democratic backsliding, occurs when the democratic institutions, instruments, and mechanisms that a state possesses start to lose their functionality, thus resulting in weaker democracies, making them vulnerable to become an authoritarian or illiberal regime. Considering the rise of populist and nationalist tendencies displayed throughout Europe in recent years, this article focuses on Poland, addressing three principal aspects: What changes can be identified and traced in Poland that led to democratic erosion? Were there any precursors or facilitators to this erosion? How does the opposition respond to the process of democratic erosion? In order to answer these questions, we turned to the existing literature, as it offers the necessary complex understanding of the current dynamic. We analysed different democratic indexes that allowed us to compare multiple

indicators and we followed the chain of events that contributed to creating the context for illiberal actors to enter the political scene. Some of the problems this article addresses are related to the effect Poland's democratic backsliding has in matters such as the electoral process, government functionality, civil society, individual rights, school system, justice and media, and the overall welfare of the population. Our research brings forward the role that the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of the population have in the tailoring of Poland's political path centred around the changes between 2015 and 2021.

Keywords

Civil society; democratic erosion; election; nationalism; Poland; populism.

1.INTRODUCTION

The process of democratic erosion has been steadily becoming a great concern across the international political community, with the far-right populist discourse gaining territory (Löfflmann 2022). The protection of essential democratic rights and values, which should be the core of every state that presents itself as being a democracy and every government that draws its power and legitimacy from the fact that it was elected, is crossing over into the opposite sphere.

Democratic erosion and populism are deeply interconnected, considering that a liberal democracy could turn into an illiberal one if the socio-political and economic context push towards this transformation, favoured by populist ideologies, which could benefit from a shift such as this in order to gain momentum. (Plattner 2019)

Poland represents an example of populist success, where the Law and Justice party imposes its national-conservative agenda thanks to a certain popular support in peripheral and rural areas. Using a protective and traditionalist discourse, the PiS is building an illiberal Polish state since 2015, overcoming both internal opposition and the European Union. This article aims to analyse,

following a structural approach, the factors that paved the way for this win and the effects it had in the years that followed.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

The backsliding of a democracy can be analysed from a multitude of different perspectives, as the existing literature offers us a complex theoretical framework to use and build upon (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). To understand the lengths reached by erosion in the case of Poland, we must first establish the direction it follows. There are many ways in which a country could slide into illiberalism, each tailored to suit the specific dynamic of said country.

Firstly, we must acknowledge Poland's status as a post-communist state. Although the threat posed by the rise of populism is a global one, the democratic erosion process is heavily influenced by the recent history of a state. In Poland's case, the democratization process that started after the fall of the communist regime has been heavily influenced by the aspiration to become a member of the European Union. (Cameron 2007) However, even after reaching this goal by joining the European Union in 2004, maintaining a democracy comes with many challenges. Post-communist countries are prone to democratic backsliding by losing the balance of the separation of powers, for example by the concentration of political power in the chief executive (Fish 2002), and the Law and Justice party in Poland could present a risk in this instance. Instability, either social or political is an opportunity for a power grab, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the Parliament strengthened the power the executive had in situations of crisis, raising concerns of executive aggrandizement. (Guasti 2021)

Secondly, public confidence in political institutions is an indicator of their performance but also an indicator of how well the democracy is functioning. Some of the most important factors that influence confidence are: the level of income, the level of education, the culture, and history. (Cho 2015) The lack of trust regarding democratic institutions could lead to the question of democratic values, thus paving the way for populist parties to gain voter sympathy by

promising decisive action centred around the interest of the people. (Howe 2017) In Europe almost every country has representants of populist parties in the Parliament, attesting the increasing level of trust that people have in their capacity. (Ivanov 2023) Populist leaders tend to gain public trust by cultivating the similarities in sentiment between them and the people, profiting from the public self-trust. (Vitale and Girard 2022)

Moreover, there are two main perspectives used for explaining and analysing different aspects of democratic erosion: the structural approach and the agency-related approach. (Solska 2020) This study suggests a perspective closer to the structural approach, as it focuses on economic performance, the political trends and ideologies, and the historical influences that Poland manifests. While aspects of the agency-related approach must be addressed by detangling the behaviours displayed by key actors in the social and political spheres, the research is oriented towards portraying how their decisions influence the country's policies, the civil society and the everyday life of Poles.

Lastly, there have been two models theorized that a country could follow in the event of becoming non-democratic: an opposition-based model and a crisis-based model (Tomini and Wagemann 2017) Considering these aspects, this research implies that in Poland there is more likely to identify an opposition-based one, as the government grows more authoritarian when faced with civil unrest and resistance towards the implemented policies, bringing forward once more the risk of executive aggrandizement. Certainly, the crisis generated by the pandemic contributed to the erosion of certain democratic aspects, but the backsliding process it accelerated started a few years prior.

3. THE RISE OF THE LAW AND JUSTICE PARTY AMID THE CHALLENGES DEMOCRACY FACED IN POLAND FROM 2000 TO 2015 AND THE BEGINNING OF THE DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

When Poland liberated itself from the communist dictatorship in 1989, a large process of liberalization both institutional and economic was launched. Mitchell A. Orenstein and Hilary Appel analyse the economic transformation in their book "From Triumph to Crisis" through the concept of competitive signaling, meaning a neoliberal race between all the former communist countries to attract the most of foreign capital they desperately needed. The economic liberalization went hand in hand with democratic liberalization. In 1994, Poland officially announced its candidature for the European Union. Therefore, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria, Poland must fulfil some conditions to join the EU bloc. These conditions can be summarized by democracy, rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities. As such, Poland must implement, amongst other measures, free elections, secret ballots, freedom of the press, free trade unions, a government framed by written rules, the declaration of human rights. In this way, coupled with Maastricht's economic criteria, Poland was able to enter the EU in 2004. By that time, Poland had a set of institutions supposed to avoid authoritarian drifts: a parliamentary system, proportional scrutiny, Constitution with a heavy check and balance system. (Tworzecki 2019)

If we examine the Democracy Index, created by the journal *The Economist* which rates all countries in terms of democracy, we notice that in 2006 Poland had a score of 7.30. It was quite a high score if we compare it with France (8.07) or Italy (7.73) for the same period (*The Economist* 2006). In 2006, the political process of democratization realized by Poland could be qualified as successful. In truth, despite 50 years of communism, the political elites have interiorized the democratic norms and all the elections were peaceful and respectful. The same observation can be made from the people's perspective and in 2015, according to a survey, 76% of the population preferred democracy over all other systems. (Tworzecki 2019)

In 2005, the PiS party won both legislative and presidential elections. They pursued a lustration process to limit the political and civil participation of former communists and especially informants of the communist secret police. This process led to some drifts, resulting in faked charges being filed. The changes made by the PiS party when it came to implementing their view went even further. Another instance, in 2006 the director of the National Teaching Agency has been dismissed for accepting a standard Council of Europe manual on anti-discrimination. The proxy who replaced him declared that homosexuality is contrary to human nature. (Amnesty International 2006)

Democracy, which had been strengthening, was then weakened. Other events have further weakened it, for example, the Eurosceptic stance of the PiS government, a will of the president to restore the death penalty (Amnesty International 2006), or the creation of the Central Anticorruption Bureau under the PM's rule and endowed with large power. All of this contributed to downscale the Polish grade on the Democracy Index from 7.30 in 2006 to 7.12 in 2010 mainly under PiS rule. Poland participated in the CIA's rendition and secret detention programs whose objective was to fight terrorism. Polish services collaborated with the CIA to torture some suspects, as the American Senate's report of 2012 proves. (Amnesty International 2013) However, Amnesty International deplores the lack of transparency on these human rights violations. The Polish government of Donald Tusk argued that it was a state secret to avoid further explanations.

Despite its favourable position in the Democracy Index, events tend to point to a democratic stagnation or even a slight decline. Even after the displacement of the PiS party in 2010, the democratic process continued to deteriorate or at least to stagnate. In 2015, Poland was still a well-rooted democracy even though some troubles started to show. According to the Democratic index of The Economist in 2015, Poland received a score of 7.09, meaning that, despite stopping democratic consolidation, Poland stays a healthy democracy with a score close to its European homologs. According to an opinion poll of PGSW (Polish National Election Survey), the proportion of people who agreed on "Democracy in Poland is Performing Well" increased from 35% in 2001 to 55% in 2015 (5% strongly agree, 50% agree) (Santora 2020).

4. THE EVOLUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC EROSION AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL FROM 2015 TO PRESENT

The failure of the Civic Platform and the return of the PiS to power in 2015 via President-elect Andrzej Duda, the elected majority in the Sejm (the Polish legislature), and the Senate gave the PiS a free hand to implement their policies. Donald Tusk was a liberal, both economically and politically, and wanted to maintain strong relations with international institutions and the West, which he looked up to. In many ways, he appeared to be a technocrat. In the face of this, the PiS set itself up as the defender of the real people, against the establishment. Kaczynski's promise was one of community, strong identity, leadership, a grounding in Polish tradition, and the restoration of dignity to people who were confused or concerned about the rapidly changing environment and uncertain future.

Described as populist, right-wing, national conservative, the Law and Justice Party thus has an iron grip on the elected state bodies. Kaczynski, a prominent PiS member, succeeded in imposing his vision, which could be described as follows, according to Piotr Buras, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations in Warsaw: "In his conviction, liberal democracy, famously fragile and vulnerable, is an outdated political structure in this globalized and complex world". Instead, he believes that what is needed is a strong government that acts efficiently on behalf of the democratic majority and, when necessary, can take drastic measures to carry out the majority's will without being permanently hobbled by the liberal system of "checks and balances". (Buras 2019)

The coming to power of PiS in 2015 and its continuation in the 2019 elections is therefore crucial for understanding the causes and ways in which democratic erosion is taking place in Poland. This change in Poland was part of a wider European populist context in response to the migration crisis. However, the rise of populism stagnated, notably with the election of Emmanuel Macron in 2017, the continuation of Angela Merkel in Germany, the end of the Ligua/M5S coalition in Italy or the election in Romania of a liberal president and in Croatia of a social democrat. (Schott 2021)

Despite the decline in populism in Europe, the PiS is not changing its line, and since 2015, when the PiS's ambitions were implemented, Poland's democratic index according to The Economist has fallen from 7.09 in 2015 to 6.85 in 2020. The country thus falls into the category of imperfect democracies. The Venice Commission, an advisory body of the European Union, issued a warning in 2017 about the legal abuses of the PiS: "enable the legislative and executive powers to interfere in a severe and extensive manner in the administration of justice, and thereby pose a great threat to the judicial independence as a key element of the rule of law". Thus, since 2015, using the familiar 'salami' tactic (i.e. by taking it one step at a time) the PiS has managed to implement its populist, national-conservative agenda. (Commission 2017)

The supporters of the PiS policy are also geographically identifiable. The former Russian and Austro-Hungarian regions in the east are the ones who offer massive support. (The Economist 2018) According to the Center for Insights' survey research, 68% of the inhabitants of the North-East identify themselves as conservatives against 21% in the center (Warsaw region). The electoral map also speaks for itself, showing a clear split between the west (formerly German) and the east. It is in the east that we find the "LGBT free zones" (Hume 2019), which were partially withdrawn when the EU threatened sanctions in September 2021. These areas are in the same ideological vein as the PiS, seeing "LGBT ideology" as a danger to the family and the moral order.

5.THE CONTEXT THAT FACILITATED THE DEMOCRATIC EROSION PROCESS - PRECURSORS THAT COULD HAVE ALERTED TO THE DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

Political polarization is a recurring phenomenon that can be observed in societies all around the globe, and it is damaging essential democratic institutions. (Carothers and O'Donohue 2019) The topics at the center of the public debate that split families and friends into opposing groups (left-right,

pro-anti, etc.) are the obvious proof that something in our societies might not function properly.

Poland is no stranger to this phenomenon, as its history and recent events show. It is yet again sliding into the populist rhetoric, distancing itself from the western values that managed to influence it for some time. But how is this happening specifically?

The rise of populism has its roots planted into the conflict between provincial and urban areas, which is precisely the reason populism appears in countries that are unequally developed, where the principle of equality of chance is not applicable. (Protzer and Summerville 2022) A closer look into the dynamics of the regional level will show that the existence of economic peripheries creates an unbalanced distribution of wealth, playing straight into the hands of populist leaders, whose narrative promises a change to the long-forgotten provincial voters who see hope when they hear this type of discourse, even though many are probably aware of the illiberal tendencies.

The PiS party, being a long-standing actor on the Polish political scene, already had the loyalty of the electorate well before it made its power play. It is also important to mention the kind of electorate PiS attracted: conservative, traditional, and attached to religious and national values. The promises made regarding social assistance programs won over the rest of the votes necessary and the ulterior support came from the fear that these programs that PiS implemented delivering on its promises will be cut if the Civic Platform politicians regain power (Sierakowski 2019).

How did political polarization reach a level that created the perfect context for Poland to fall down the trap of the backsliding of its democracy? What is the precedent set by the PiS party?

One starting point suited for this analysis would be the fall-out between the EU and Poland. After having been accused of not imposing the rule of law, Poland found itself in a delicate spot with the EU. The latter has acted against the threats posed by Poland falling out of the line by sending a formal notice announcing that if the rule of law will not be respected, it may face financial penalties. (DW News 2021) In the past, Poland proceeded to ignore the warnings, and in the context created by the climate conferences earlier in the fall

of 2021, Poland, as a country that is coal dependent, conditioned the talks regarding the EU's climate pact on access to the bloc's recovery package, to which it had no access because of the rule of law concerns. The Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said that what the EU was doing was called "financial blackmail", while Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the leader of the country's ruling Law & Justice party referred to the EU's intention to cut carbon emissions during an energy crisis as being "ridiculous". (Martewicz 2021)

We can, however, notice a change in the attitude the EU has when it comes to Poland during the immigration crisis. After the conflict culmination in October 2021, when Poland's Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the EU's laws come after the country's national laws (a decision that undermines the EU), Poland was somewhat saved by the Belarusian migration crisis. By justifying that the measures taken at the border were not only to defend itself, but also to defend the EU from irregular migration, Poland got the support of the EU, despite having a conflict with the bloc at the same time. The focus shifted: from the threat to the rule of law to the threat that is Russia in the East. (Coakley 2021) The EU fell into the trap: the violation of the rule of law is not that big of a problem at the border because it suits its interests, while the violation of the rule of law in Poland is a problem as it goes against its interests.

The polarization inside the European Union between Brussels and Warsaw is probably only getting deeper, but what about inside Poland? Are the opinions different? Is society split in half? Is the government working against the interests of the Polish people? One study from 2016 shows that 60% of the respondents believe the new government "cares more about the poor, the weak, the excluded", but 56% don't believe that the new government respects the rule of law. (Pacewicz 2016)

One theory is that polarization in Poland begins with the elites, and it spreads among the electorate, as the PiS party had to get its support from somewhere. What this points to is that the liberal-democratic consensus and the goal of "westernization" were already starting to lose their public support, creating the perfect context for pushing forward a rhetoric that delegitimizes the current system and weakens the trust in media and national institutions. This allowed a certain part of the political class to ascend to power using the image of "radical

populist anti-establishmentarianism” to gain support from the average Polish person, the one that felt like the political class could be doing more for the Polish people, who might feel like their needs are not being heard. (Tworzecki 2018) This point is also proven by a study published in July 2021, which shows there is a connection between socio-economic status and political orientation. The popularity of right-wing governing parties and people's responsiveness to populist rhetoric is higher in rural areas, where people have a lower socio-economic status. “In order to build up a liberal opposition network there, politicians must understand the needs, fears, and desires of their voters from such small rural communities. As this study suggests, they are oftentimes driven by different motives when it comes to elections than residents of more industrialized areas and greater cities, on whom national politics tend to focus on.” (Keszthelyi n.d.)

Polish mass media is another area that is worth being researched as a precursor for Poland's democratic backsliding. Does Polish media respect the standard of being a source of independent, unbiased, and balanced news that delivers facts to people for them to form their opinion? What is the level of trust? Is there a free and open space for independent agencies? Does the opposition have a voice?

From a legal point of view, Poland's 1997 Constitution guarantees freedom of the press and prohibits preventive censorship, with the National Broadcasting Council having the power to protect the freedom of speech, the right to information, and the public interest in radio and television broadcasting. (The Constitution 1997)

The main broadcaster in Poland is TVP, a state company that receives financial resources straight from the government, from the taxpayers' money. (Gipson 2019) It has gained itself the reputation of being the propaganda channel that the Law and Justice party uses to influence public perception, while independent agencies or journalists often face threats of legal action being taken against them. (Makarenko 2020) Although TVP is known for being the least trusted, as it has become heavily politicized, it maintains its influence, since 70% of the country's population watches the news on tv, with 48% of the population saying that they trust most news most of the time. (Tilles 2021)

We can see the polarization even at this level of analysis manifested as the discrepancy between the different socio-economical statuses. It may even be one of the main factors that drove polarization to become as dangerous as it is today. While the Polish population from urban areas has access to different news sources and is usually better informed, the poorer regions of the country, where people are more prone to populism usually rely on TVP as the main news channel, where they get their information from, without comparing it to other sources that are not as biased. (Gurgul 2020) According to Freedom House, the polarization became more acute since the 2015 elections, with a PiS influenced TVP actively working to diverge attitudes regarding equal rights for LGBT people, potential refugees from the Middle East, and the EU. In this context, media pluralism is becoming a characteristic of the past in Poland, with the governing party working towards obtaining even more influence and control over both public and private media outlets either by offering incentives or by different means of coercion such as wrongful prosecution of news outlets that oppose the perception of the Law and Justice party in any way. (Chapman 2017) Media illiteracy is still a great problem that Poland faces, or more specifically that the Polish population faces because the government bettered itself in taking advantage of this and weighing the scales in favour of the ruling party's narrative. Technology makes it easier for people to have access to more information, but the downside is that it also makes it easier for misinformation to spread. Political entities are perfectly aware of this fact and their strategies for gaining power or maintaining the position they have are based on these vulnerabilities. In the case of Poland, this has been achieved by financing favourable news outlets and by appointing the right people in the right positions to push the right wing's agenda to the public.

The rise and fall of democracy are also closely connected to the economy of a state. In the case of Poland, a closer look at its recent history is needed in order to correctly assess the level of economic inequity and the impact it has on the democratic backsliding witnessed today.

The collapse of the Soviet Union affected the development of the economy as the demand for Polish products in the former Soviet countries decreased. This resulted in high unemployment rates from 1990 to 1993. As the transition

evolved, unemployment started to decline in 1994, but it began to rise again from 1998 to 2002, when the unemployment rate hit 18,1%. This period of economic uncertainty can be considered one of the early signs that the rural areas and the urban areas are unequally developed, and that the poverty distribution is uneven among socio-economic groups, as the unemployment rate in rural Poland hit 42.1% in 2002. (Gardawski 2002)

After this uncertain starting point in the transformation from communism to market capitalism, Poland's unemployment rate began to drop, reaching 3.84% in 2018. However, the economic equity ideal has not been reached. Poland is now facing discrepancies regarding the age of the unemployed citizens, the most affected group being the youth, whose unemployment rate is higher than the national one. One of the sources of the youth problem is the popularity of temporary contracts, with 27% of the employed citizens being subjects of this specific type of social and economic insecurity in 2014, risking poverty. (Yi 2020) Overall, Poland has made significant progress regarding poverty in the last two decades by reducing the number of Poles living in extreme poverty, the number of children living in extreme poverty, the number of extremely poor elderly people and by reducing the gap between the extent of extreme poverty in households with and without disabled people through different social programs like the National Programme for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 and through increasing the real average salary and the real minimum wage. Nevertheless, there are a lot of improvements to be made and Poland seems to be prioritizing this aspect, with the government confirming its support for the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2020 and its interest to implement the framework for the necessary policies. (EAPN Polska 2020)

By listening to what worries the Poles and acting upon it, the PiS party maintains its popularity among the electorate. These types of policies are the ones that gain sympathy from the rural population and from the lower socio-economical sector. In other words, economic inequity gives populist leaders an opportunity to offer a solution to the people from these areas which are characterized by significant depopulation, low and weak industrialization, relatively lower efficiency and competitiveness of fragmented agriculture, and

limited access to services through the implementation of programs and policies that offer financial support.

Although the Polish economy is generally stable at the moment, the turmoil faced by the society in the years it took to reach this point left a mark. One sphere that has been greatly affected is represented by the family. The word family has two meanings in this case: the first is the cultural one, considering that the family is at the center of the Polish norms and values, historically carrying a special significance in their hearts and view of life; the second is the more sociological one, where family is traditionally viewed as an institution that serves a purpose in the society, primarily to reproduce both biologically (by bringing children into the world) and socially (through socialization). An impact can be seen regarding both of these meanings. But how exactly have they been affected? What happened to the importance of the family?

The wave of economic changes between 1990 and 2000 led to an increase in economic and social inequities, which then led to the lack of social security as poverty rose, social stratification deepened, combined with the social exclusion of specific groups. All these changes contributed to the growing vulnerability of the family. The unemployment rate contributed to changes in household welfare and the new requirements of the labour market increased the difficulties to reconcile work and family. As a result, Poles had to prioritize work. This trend in family-related behaviour impacted the fertility patterns through a decreasing propensity to marry, postponement of marriage, and an increasing frequency of divorces and separations. (Kotowska 2008) Poland aligned itself with the century's tendency of prioritizing one's career over family life, accepting the consequences this shift in mentality has at a cultural level and adapting to the newly introduced norms and values.

An intriguing aspect is the recurrent theme of polarization between the rural areas and the urban areas. Family related behaviours and their changes over time differ between urban and rural populations, and while the rural population represents a great part of the Polish population it tends to follow the behaviour dictated by the urban areas. Both meanings of the family are starting to fade, as this institution slowly loses the importance it once had inside society. Fertility slowly detaches itself from the traditional notion of family that presumed the

existence of marriage as out-of-wedlock births become a thing of the present. (Wilczek 2021) However, despite different programs designed to increase the birth rate that the national-conservative ruling coalition implemented since coming to power in 2015, the policies and schemes have failed to reach their goal. The birth rate in Poland is yet to become one that sustains the population.

One last item that is worth mentioning on the list of precursors of the democratic backsliding in Poland is the emigration that Poland, like most of the ex-Soviet countries faces. Since joining the European Union, the emigration rate has been growing at an alarming rate, creating yet another threat that addresses the demographic decline. Emigration can be considered a precursor because it contributed to the fears that Polish people already have regarding the demographic aspect of their country, and it motivates and nurtures the nationalist sentiment of the Poles that did not want to leave, accentuating the social polarization even more. The PiS party implemented an income tax cut, which eliminates any taxes for the young Poles under 26 earning under 22.000\$ annually to pursue them to remain in the country. (Lindsay 2019) In a way, this tax cut also contributes to solving the problem of economic inequity affecting young people. Since 2015, when PiS came into power, the emigration rate has decreased drastically, from 28.1 in 2015 to 8.8 in 2020. (Sas 2021)

Considering everything presented above, it could be said that the most dangerous precursor is a job well done. Whether we like it or not, the PiS party implemented policies that benefited both Poland as a state, as well as the Poles. By doing a little bit of good and playing its cards right, it gained more support and more power. The chosen approach of effectively influencing the media narrative and strategically taking advantage of international conflicts is another reason why the PiS party is steadily winning over the political scene. This popularity could allow the PiS party to create the means necessary to seize the power to do as it pleases, to completely silence the opposition, and eventually to start implementing radical, extremist policies that ultimately will affect the population's rights and freedoms.

6.SYMPTOMS - THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING THROUGHOUT THE POLITICAL SPHERE

As seen, in 2015, the electoral victory of the PiS party gave birth to a democratic threat and Poland joined the ranks of the democratic backsliding countries. Since then, an increase in the misuse of executive power can be observed, a raise of public discriminatory speeches, emancipation from constitutional barriers, a crumbling of the separation of powers. However, even if the Polish can deplore a democratic backsliding, that did not prevent them to re-elect a PiS majority in the chamber in 2019 and re-elect Andrzej Duda as their president in 2020.

As such, the last presidential election allows us to study one of the symptoms of the Polish democratic erosion: the electoral process. The presidential election of 2020 opposed Andrzej Duda of the PiS (right) and Rafał Trzaskowski (left), consecrating the victory of the first one with 51%. The government tried, for sanitary reasons, to hold the election exclusively by postal ballots but without clear legislation framing it. The electoral commission refused, and the election was postponed from May to July. (Tworzecki 2019) So, although the PiS Party has a stranglehold on the democratic institutions, there still remain some barriers against its hegemony.

During the presidential election of 2020 between Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski (Warsaw's mayor), the opposition denounced the political interference of the executive power into the electoral process. For example, the accusation of non-counting of Polish expatriate's votes such as 30 000 ballots coming from the UK that have supposedly disappeared or extra ballots sent to polling stations without proper documentation. The electoral code has also been changed before the election, trying to favour the incumbent. This modification reduced the delay to take legal action denouncing electoral fraud from 14 days to 3. At the same time, electoral complaints could only be made after the second round of voting, leaving the first round without a juridic barrier (Santora 2020). The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) concluded that although the election was competitive and well-organized, it was unfair in

terms of the candidate's media coverage (Freedom House 2021). However, despite all these problems, Freedom house rated with a 4/4 the freedom and fairness elections. According to this, the conclusion is that the elections are still formally free: opponents can be candidates, every citizen has the right to vote, even the minorities. In practice, the incumbent is supported not only by the PiS but also by the state structure, used by this party to indirectly favour his candidates.

Considering the functioning of the Government, Poland also faces some issues. PiS tries to avoid the legislative control of the chambers by introducing legislation unexpectedly or limiting the possibility of the opposition to amend or question the legislation. Therefore, although there is still real opposition in Parliament, the executive power tries to suppress it. The PiS also viewed the Coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to vote unpopular laws such as the anti-abortion one, profiteering the lack of vigilance of the civil society. At the same time, the Government limits public access to documentation such as the names of judges, supporting criticized nominations and reinforcing its power over the state (Santora 2018). Freedom House rates the functioning of Government from 2 up to 3 which is an average note, meaning that Poland is still a relative democracy though.

Concerning civil society, the right to demonstrate is respected, as recently seen. Even the LGBT community can demonstrate, thanks to courts that prevented authorities from stopping the organizers. When it comes to individual rights, liberty of circulation, of expression, of property are guaranteed and the Constitution is generally respected. Freedom of speech is also guaranteed and it represents, according to a survey's open-ended question, 21% of people's most important reason why democracy is functioning well in Poland. (Polonia 2021) However, concerning the activity of the NGOs, the government has reinforced its power over them via a National Freedom Institute, indirectly attached to the prime minister's office, which centralizes the funds destined to them.

The debates regarding the controversial subject of abortion are other symptoms of the democratic backsliding in Poland. In October 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal declared that abortion, in case of a congenital disorder was illegal. This type of intervention represents 98% of abortions (Iwaniuk 2020). The only causes

left remain those of rape, incest, or health threat to abort legally in Poland. Although there were a lot of protests, which proved the freedom to demonstrate this statement, the constitutional changes have not been retracted. As a result, a woman died in November 2021 due to the refusal of a doctor to abort her malformed fetus (Ravier-Regnat 2021). This fight against abortion is accompanied by a withdrawal of sexual education from the scholar manual. The government rules state that sexual education is the responsibility of the family and not of the state through school.

The abortion controversy is just one facet of a wider movement sustained by the Government to impose its moral vision. It has recently become more pronounced with the central Government's takeover of schools, with the passing of the bill allowing Government oversight of the curriculum on 13 January. Until then, communes, teachers, and pupils' parents had some leeway in setting the curriculum. The government will be able to censor extracurricular activities that it deems not to be in line with its vision, and civic education classes will be replaced by history classes. The PiS has a specific vision of history that it wishes to impose. In a nationalist mode, the PiS intends to put an end to the 'pedagogy of shame'. It does this by emphasizing Polish nationalism, by exonerating Poles accused of massacring Jews in 1941 and 1946, by using the example of the cursed soldiers of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising who opposed the communist regime after the war, and by highlighting the links between Walesa and the communist police. More recently, the plane crash of Lech Kaczynski is being blamed on Donald Tusk. It is becoming clear that the PiS is using Polish history and rewriting it to suit its vision and try to impose it, particularly through school.

Concerning justice, since 2015, PiS has increased its capability on the judicial power. The Government arrogates the right to name and revoke presidents and vice-presidents of courts and create a Disciplinary Chamber able to sanction the magistrate. However, these reforms faced the hostility of Brussels, and thanks to several resolutions of the Commission, the Parliament, and the Justice Court of the European Union, Poland accepted to abandon its Disciplinary Chamber dreams. In terms of the justice process, defendants' rights are respected most of the time. However, since 2016, foreigners' movements can be observed and

metadata can be accessed without court order translating into a slight reinforcement of repression on specific subjects.

Regarding media, the research shows a form of democratic backsliding. Most of the Polish media is private, so, formally independent. However, pro-government is more subsidized by the state than others. Otherwise, concerning the public media, TVP, has been purged from PiS hostile members and publicly supports Duda's policy. In August 2021, a law on media prohibiting non-European capital to own more than 49% of Polish media stocks was enforced. Officially, this law aims to fight against Russian and Chinese influence, but in fact, it is made against the American group Discovery which owns a lot of TV channels, TVN24, a continuous information chain and opponent of the PiS. It forced Discovery to sell its stocks in the channels group. (International Press Institute 2021) According to a survey, in 2021, 41% of respondents think that a majority of the media outlets are not free, about 21% of the respondents think that media outlets are controlled by leftists and illiberal media outlets are not free and 38% believe they are influenced by right-wing and conservative interests. However, on the Reporters Without Frontiers press freedom ranking, Poland has passed from 54 in 2017 to 64 in 2021. Therefore, Poland loses eight places in the world ranking of freedom of the press, out of 180 countries indicating there is indeed a democratic backsliding in Poland since 2015.

The illiberal policy of the PiS is thus reflected in concrete effects: obstruction of the opposition, the PiS's attempt to influence the judiciary, restrictive measures against abortion and LGBT people, and a breach of equality between the incumbent president and his opponents. This observation is corroborated by the ranking of the democracy index of the British newspaper "The Economist", which evaluates each country on the basis of 60 indicators. According to this ranking, Poland has dropped from 7.30 in 2006 to 6.85 in 2020, which makes it a flawed democracy.

7. RESISTANCE - HOW CIVIL SOCIETY AND EU TRY TO COUNTER THE PIS'S DYNAMIC

Over the last six-seven years, much has been written about Poland's illiberal shift. More is on the way as the debate over the rule of law heats up in Brussels. The focus of academic and news articles alike is frequently on the populist, xenophobic, and homophobic ideologies among Poland's institutions, parties, and political elites. Less has been said about Polish civil society and the massive wave of anti-illiberal protests that began in 2015. The revitalization of Polish civil society, with the resurrection of social movements and the emergence of new forms of civic involvement, has been all too often disregarded outside of Poland's borders. (Dobler 2020)

This tendency of civic disengagement has dissolved since PiS took power in 2015, and each passing year adds to a rising kaleidoscope of civic involvement. In response to PiS attacks on the independence of the judiciary, particularly the reforms of the Constitutional Tribunal and later the Polish Supreme Court, grassroots groups fought to establish and consolidate KOD - Komitet Obrony Demokracji, a citizen-owned civic organization (Committee of Defense for Democracy). The name is a direct reference to KOR - Komitet Obrony Robotników (Committee of Workers Defense), a civilian movement created in opposition to the communist regime in the late 1970s.

Shortly after, the legislative initiative "Stop Abortion" was registered with the Polish Parliament on 14 March 2016. The Ordo Iuris Institute, an ultra-conservative Catholic legal body with strong worldwide ties, aggressively fought for the proposed legislation, which intended to outlaw abortion in cases of serious fetal harm and mandated up to five years in prison for women who had abortions. Fetal harm is one of three circumstances under which abortion is lawful under Polish law, and it provides the legal basis for the great majority of legal abortions in Poland. Between April 2016 and March 2018, Poland saw unprecedented levels of female mobilization, including marches, demonstrations, pickets, public discussions, and social media campaigns in response to a planned total ban on abortion rights. The protests peaked on 3

October 2016 with the Polish Women's Strike (hence "the Strike"), which gathered 150 thousand women in 200 cities and towns around the country under the hashtag #BlackMonday. With moving visuals – pictures of a "sea of umbrellas" in Warsaw's Castle Square, faces of countless angry women in black, and radical banners with memorable symbols – the so-called Black Protests gained international attention and became a major reference point a year later during the International Women's Strike on the eight of March 2017. Scholars who have studied mobilization as a social phenomenon say that this was the start of feminism in Poland as an intersectional, inclusive, and internally diverse movement. Prior to 2016, feminism was a politically marginal phenomenon, based primarily on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), university gender studies programs, and the predominantly middle-class Women's Congress. (Dietze 2020)

A poll conducted a month after the Strike revealed the striking resonance and popularity of the protests: 90% of the population was aware of the strike; 64% of women and 52% of men expressed interest and support; 17% of women and 6% of men said they wore black on the third of October to show their support, and 4% of women said they had participated in in-person demonstrations (CBOS 2016). According to a separate study, 2016 had the highest level of public protest involvement in 28 years. The Strike was also a political success: the "Stop Abortion" bill was removed from parliamentary proceedings. It was the first time the PiS (Law and Justice) government capitulated in the face of public pressure. (Dietze 2020)

But in 2020 it is back on track, not content with its 2016 retreat. The demonstrations that began in the autumn of 2020, however, dwarfed the 2016 Black Monday Protest. One of the most notable elements of the latter was the leaders' remarkable ability to extend beyond their regular circles in support of feminist agendas, interact with broader audiences, and engage a huge percentage of the Polish populace in various ways. The Women's Strike and the protests of 2020/21 in Kraków are exceptional in many ways. The mass mobilization covered here is Poland's largest civil resistance movement since the 1980s' Solidarity Movement, which played an important role in the country's political democracy and power transition. (Motak D 2021) But despite the

widespread mobilization, the government eventually succeeded in banning abortion.

Another important moment during the next months was the mobilization of suppressed sexual minorities. As attacks targeting the LGBTQI+ community predate the 2020 presidential race, the LGBT rights organization Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (Campaign Against Homophobia) had been active for some time. Its annual Tczowy Pitek ("Rainbow Friday") initiative, which was launched in 2016, aims to empower LGBTQI+ students in the school environment. In 2019, the event's significant response, fuelled by PiS's anti-LGBT rhetoric, drove the LGBTQI+ community out of schools, gay-rights activist circles, and the LGBTQI+ community. This resistance movement has spread to the streets and public squares of Warsaw, around the city's renowned sculptures, local cafés, and even within the Sejm, Poland's parliamentary chamber. (Dobler 2020)

All of these events point to a renewed vigour in Polish civil society and convergence toward new kinds of citizenship that have previously been observed in western and southern democracies – a phenomenon that French historian Pierre Rosanvallon has dubbed "counter-democracy." Counter-democracy is not the opposite of democracy; rather, it is the democracy of a vibrant civil society that is organized to counterbalance electoral and representative democracy.

On the other hand, while The Law and Justice party has managed to convince some Polish lawyers to be architects of reforms, to serve as judges in the Constitutional Court, to serve as new presidents of common courts, or to become members of the National Council of Judiciary, most lawyers do not agree with the ruling party changes. Furthermore, these lawyers have begun to collaborate. They developed solidarity among lawyers of various professions: judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and legal consultants, with the assistance of members of academia, by harkening back to the traditions of the Polish Solidarity movement. There were various types of solidarity actions. The "March of One Thousand Gowns," a rally organized by the Polish legal community to safeguard judicial independence, was the most exemplary form. Polish judicial groups staged a public demonstration on 11 January 2020, supported by attorneys, prosecutors, and legal consultants, which was also attended by judges

from other countries who came to Warsaw to express sympathy. This event had a huge impact on public opinion and was widely covered by worldwide news outlets. (Bodnar 2021)

As an EU member state, Poland was monitored by the UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Universal Periodic Review, the UN Special Rapporteur on Judicial Independence, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, GRECO, the Venice Commission, and the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe between 2016 and 2020. However, the Polish authorities simply ignored the vast majority of recommendations coming from these institutions to respect the rule of law. Nonetheless, such recommendations undoubtedly contributed to the legitimacy of the EU's various involvement and operations in Poland. (Bodnar 2021)

An important step that the EU has made was toward activating the so-called conditionality mechanism, which permits the EU executive to withhold EU money from member states due to concerns about the rule of law. The timing of the Commission's letter was likely no coincidence, considering that the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice presented a legal judgment on the legitimacy of this new rule of law mechanism on 2 December 2021. The recent agreement on the future EU budget for the years 2021–2027 represents a significant step forward in the EU's rule of law protection. For the first time, the EU is implementing a conditionality policy for EU budget spending to member states. As a result, if an EU member state fails to comply with EU rule of law criteria, the EU will be able to block the flow of budget funds. There is a possibility that this new legal instrument, in combination with the CJEU's developing case-law and the yearly report on the rule of law, will help to reinforce EU rule of law norms. (Edit Inotai 2021)

8.PERSPECTIVES - POLAND AT THE CROSSROADS

Officials must utilize their political authority properly to safeguard democracy, in addition to helping the development of conditions conducive to democratic consolidation and adopting regulations that protect democratic practices. In

theory, politicians who fulfil their institutional responsibilities will adhere to two key political norms: "institutional forbearance" and "mutual toleration." They can protect themselves, their parties, and their democracies from authoritarians by doing so. (Eisen 2019)

Keeping power out of the hands of extremist leaders is one approach of ethical-political action. Political leaders and parties have a substantial ability to limit the influence of political extremists for example by forming coalitions and assigning leadership positions. History indicates that pro-democracy establishment politicians make a mistake by allowing radical leaders to grow in the hopes of benefiting from their popularity and being able to restrain their worst tendencies. (A. K. Norman Eisen 2019) In 2021, Poland's ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) had a popularity rating of around 30% in polls. That is not a historically significant figure for the party, but it isn't disastrous either. While that level of support is insufficient for the party to govern on its own, it appears that if it joins forces with the far-right Confederation, it will be able to maintain power in the future, as the next elections are not due until the autumn of 2023. On the other hand, not much has changed in Poland's political landscape since the ruling party regained its power in 2015: PiS continues to poll above 30%, while the opposition is divided, and it is lacking a charismatic leader. The opposition is made up of four major parties or coalitions, whose combined polling support would almost definitely result in a majority. As a result, it appears self-evident that they should band together. (Ciobanu 2022)

Two potential future outcomes for Poland emerge depending on a variety of conditions (EU reaction, Polish society resistance, political election results). In the worst-case scenario, Poland could see the gradual emergence of an authoritarian government or a competitive authoritarianism system. Although these systems would allow for the functioning of various institutions, this is merely a ruse because those institutions are powerless to alter the authoritarian system's operation. Opponents are unable to successfully compete with those in positions of power. Discriminatory legalism, such as court actions and inspections, would be widely employed against anyone who doubts the ruling party's legitimacy. Judges would be required to recognize and respect the boundaries they cannot exceed while adjudicating issues, particularly when

dealing with political cases. As the EU is founded on democratic, rule-of-law, and human-rights values, such a situation could cause Poland's membership in the EU to be called into doubt. Finally, such a situation might have an impact on transatlantic relations as well as Poland's geopolitical position as a crossroads between East and West. (Bodnar 2021)

There is, however, a positive scenario. Poland may resume its democratic path. However, this democracy would be very different from the one that existed before the coming to power of the Law and Justice party. Poland would have to rebuild its legal system and reverse the Law and Justice Party's policies. It could take a generation to complete. In order to ensure stability and strengthen conformity with the rule of law, Poland's new democratic leadership would have to reassure citizens about a return to continuity in terms of the country's future growth. Faced with this unpredictability, Polish democrats and civil society may be the only hope for the country's future: there is a need to work hard to resist the Law and Justice party's changes, to defend liberal democracy's principles, and to use new communication, transnational networks, and creativity. Certainly, now is not the time to remain silent and complacent in the face of changing political trends. (Bodnar 2021)

The problem in today's climate is that the Law and Justice Party could further strengthen its grip on power, feeding into the Eurosceptic tendencies by implementing measures that resonate with most people affected by the global instability, offering artificial solutions for the ordinary people whom are more preoccupied with making it through the turmoil rather than with concern for the long-term consequences of supporting a party that represents a risk for the democracy. For a real change to take place and for the backsliding to be turned around, one step the Polish people would have to make can be found in their history. As a nation that overcame all the challenges it was faced with by staying strong and united in their spirit, the same attitude has the potential to be the salvation it needs today. The rhetoric used by the PiS party uses that very spirit against the citizens, slowly eroding key components of the democracy.

The opposition needs to learn to embrace this spirit, instead of solely condemning it for its association with the populist values. Unity against adversity is one of the defining characteristics of the population, and by

acknowledging this aspect the opposition might gain a new fragment of the electorate's support. Furthermore, the fight for power in Poland is an ideological one. The PiS party has the potential to become extremist and it does not intend to change its path. The opposition could benefit from positioning itself in the middle, willing to make compromises, such as supporting certain policies implemented by the PiS party (e.g. those related to social assistance and different economic measures that people appreciated) as that would represent a solution to a greater number of voters, instead of becoming the other extreme, thus deepening the polarization already present in the society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank for the support and coordination received from Alina Dragolea, lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science, The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, as her guidance made this article possible. The course Democratic Erosion brought the authors together and offered the necessary understanding of the complex subject.

REFERENCES

- Amnesty International. 2006. *Poland: Call for restoration of Death Penalty*. 28 August. <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/poland-call-for-restoration-of-death-penalty/>.
- Amnesty International. 2006. *Poland and Latvia. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Poland and Latvia*. 15 November. <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/lgbt-rights-in-poland-and-latvia/>.
- Amnesty International. 2013. *Poland: reveal the truth about secret CIA detention site*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2013/06/poland-reveal-truth-about-secret-cia-detention-site/>

- Amnesty International. 2006. *LGBT rights in Poland and Latvia*. London: European Institutions Office. <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/lgbt-rights-in-poland-and-latvia/>.
- Amnesty International. 2013. *Poland: reveal the truth about secret CIA detention site*. 12 July. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/06/poland-reveal-truth-about-secret-cia-detention-site/>.
- Aslund, Anders. 2013. "Poland: Combining Growth and Stability." *CESifo Forum*, vol. 14(01): 3-10. March. <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/forum1-13-focus1.pdf>.
- Bartkowski, Maciej. 2009. *Poland's Solidarity Movement (1980-1989)*. December. <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/polands-solidarity-movement-1980-1989/>.
- BBC News. 2018. "Poland profile - Timeline." *BBC News*. 28 May. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512>.
- Bodnar, Adam. 2021. "Polish Road toward an Illiberal State: Methods and Resistance." *Indiana Law Journal*, Volume 96, Article 3. <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11423&context=ilj>.
- Britannica. 2020. "History of Poland." *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/History>.
- Buras, Piotr. 2019. "How Poland drift away from liberal democracy." *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*, 135-143.
- Cameron, David R. 2007. "Post-Communist Democracy: The Impact of the European Union." *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 23 (3): 185-217.
- Carothers, Thomas, and O'Donohue, Andrew. 2019. *Democracies Divided*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Chapman, Annabelle. 2017. "Pluralism under Attack: The Assault on Press Freedom in Poland." *Freedom House*. June. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FH_Poland_Media_Report_Final_2017.pdf.
- Chen, Peter C. 2007. *Poland in World War II*. <https://ww2db.com/country/poland/>.

- Cho, Seo-Young. 2015. *Does gender equality promote social trust? An empirical analysis*. Marburg: MAGKS.
- Ciobanu, Claudia. 2022. *Poland in 2022: Can the Opposition Make Inroads Into PIS's Popularity?* Warsaw, 10 January. <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/10/poland-in-2022-can-the-opposition-make-inroads-into-piss-popularity/>.
- Coakley, Amanda. 2021. *Poland's Twin Crises*. 1 December. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/01/poland-crisis-european-union-immigration-democracy-law/>.
- Commission, Venice. 2017. "Venice Commission, Opinion No. 904." Strasbourg.
- Dietze, Gabriele, Roth, Julia. 2020. *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*. Transcript Verlag.
- Dobler, Camille. 2020. "Poland's civil society awakening – when stones turn political." *Open Democracy*, 8 September. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/polands-civil-society-awakening-when-stones-turn-political/>.
- DW News. 2021. *EU starts new legal action against Poland over rule of law*. 22 12. <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-starts-new-legal-action-against-poland-over-rule-of-law/a-60220102>.
- EAPN Polska. 2020. "Poverty Watch 2020 Poland." *EAPN*. 17 October. <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-Poverty-Watch-2020-Poland-4744.pdf>.
- Eisen, Norman, Kenealy, Andrew, Corke, Susan, Taussig, Torrey, and Polyakova, Alina. 2019. *The Democracy Playbook: Preventing and Reversing Democratic Backsliding*. Governance Studies: Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-democracy-playbook-preventing-and-reversing-democratic-backsliding/>
- Fagin, Helen N. 1977. "Adam Mickiewicz: Poland's National Romantic Poet." *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 103-113.

- Fish, Steven M. 2002. "The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion." In *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy*, 54-95. Princeton University Press.
- Freedom House. 2021. *Poland: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report*. 21 decembre. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/freedom-world/2021>.
- Frey, Lindsay. 2019. "Poland's Emigration Rate Is Falling But People Are Still Worried About The "Brain Drain" Bogeyman." *Forbes*. 9 August. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2019/08/09/polands-emigration-rate-is-falling-but-people-are-still-worried-about-the-brain-drain-bogeyman/?sh=3f2feaf9792e>.
- Gardawski, Juliusz. 2002. *The dynamics of unemployment from 1990 to 2002*. 28 October. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2002/the-dynamics-of-unemployment-from-1990-to-2002>.
- Gidron, Noam, and Bonikowski, Bart. 2013. "Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda." *Weatherhead Working Paper Series*.
- Gipson, Abigail. 2019. *News report: Poland's public media serve as propaganda tool*. 8 July. <https://ipi.media/new-report-polands-public-media-serve-as-propaganda-tool/>.
- Gomulka, Wladyslaw. 1960. "The Policy of the Polish People's Republic." *Foreign Affairs*, 402-418.
- Guasti, Petra. 2021. "Democratic Erosion and Democratic Resilience in Central Europe during COVID-19." *Czech Journal of International Relations*, 56 (4): 77-90.
- Gurgul, Aleksander. 2020. *Public media and the crisis of trust in Polish journalism*. 10 August. <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/public-media-and-the-crisis-of-trust-in-polish-journalism>.
- Howe, Paul. 2017. "Eroding Norms and Democratic Deconsolidation." *Journal of Democracy*, 28 (4): 15-28.
- Hume, Tim. 2019. *More Than 80 Polish Towns Have Declared Themselves 'LGBTQ-Free Zones'*. 3 January.

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgq8mq/european-parliament-tells-poland-to-stop-declaring-lgbtq-free-zones>.

- Inotai, Edit, Gosling, Tim, Szekeres, Edward, Ciobanu, Claudia. 2021. *Democracy Digest: Loss of EU Funds a Step Closer for Poland and Hungary*. 26 November. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/11/26/democracy-digest-loss-of-eu-funds-a-step-closer-for-poland-and-hungary/>.
- International Press Institute. 2021. *Poland: Independent media under attack again as PiS moves against TVN24*. 14 July. <https://ipi.media/poland-independent-media-under-attack-again-as-pis-moves-against-tvn24/>.
- Kotowska, Irena, Jozwiak, Janina, Matysiak, Anna, Baranowska, Anna. 2008. "Poland: Fertility decline as a response to profound societal and labour market changes?" *Demographic Research*. 01 July. <https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol19/22/19-22.pdf>.
- Ivanov, Denis. 2023. "Economic Insecurity, Institutional Trust and Populist Voting Across Europe." *Comparative Economic Studies*.
- Iwaniuk, Jakub. 2020. *Abortion becomes almost illegal in Poland after court ruling*. 22 October. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/10/22/pologne-le-tribunal-constitutionnel-rend-illegal-l-avortement-pour-malformation-grave-du-f-tus_6057023_3210.html.
- Keszthelyi, Aliz. n.d. *Minding the Gap: Deepening Polarisation in Poland and Hungary*. <https://www.freiheit.org/central-europe-and-baltic-states/minding-gap-deepening-polarisation-poland-and-hungary>.
- Library of Congress. 2020. "A Brief Timeline of Modern Polish History." *Library of Congress*. <https://guides.loc.gov/poland-manuscripts/timeline>.
- Löfflmann, Georg. 2022. "Introduction to special issue: The study of populism in international relations." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*.
- Makarenko, Vadim. 2020. *Poland*. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/poland-2019/>.
- Martewicz, Maciej. 2021. *Poland Threatens to Block EU Climate Talks Over Access to Funds*. 20 October.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-20/poland-wants-deal-on-eu-funds-before-starting-climate-talks>.

- Motak D, Krotofil J, Wójciak D. 2021. *The Battle for Symbolic Power: Kraków as a Stage of Renegotiation of the Social Position of the Catholic Church in Poland. Religions*. Kraków: religious. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080594>.
- Pacewicz, Piotr. 2016. *Polska buźka dla dobrej zmiany! Sondaż „Oka”*. <https://oko.press/dobra-zmiana-minimalnie-wygrywa-pis-sie-troszczy/>.
- Plattner, Marc. 2019. “Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 30, Issues 1:5-19.
- Polonia, Center for insight in survey research GFK. 2021. “Public Opinion Survey in Poland.”
- Protzer, Eric, and Summerville, Paul. 2022. *Reclaiming Populism: How Economic Fairness Can Win Back Disenchanted Voters*. Polity.
- Ravier-Regnat, Samuel. 2021. *Abortion: Poland in shock after woman dies in hospital*. 3 November. https://www.liberation.fr/international/avortement-la-pologne-sous-le-choc-apres-la-mort-dune-femme-a-lhopital-20211103_QYX2UI3CDFFXPOKZIP33LYMSPQ/.
- Santora, Marc. 2018. *Poland Purges Supreme Court, and Protesters Take to Streets*. 3 July. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/03/world/europe/poland-supreme-court-protest.html>.
- Santora, Marc. 2020. *Opposition challenge Poland's presidential election results*. 16 July. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/world/europe/poland-election.html>.
- Santora, Marc. 2020. *Opposition challenges Poland's presidential election results*. 16 July. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/16/world/europe/poland-election.html>.
- Sas, Adriana. 2021. “Emigration from Poland 2000-2020.” *Statista*. 27 July. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/957135/poland-emigration/>.
- Schott, Cyril. 2021. *The International Backlash of the Far-Right Populist Wave*. 3 August. <https://www.latribune.fr/opinions/tribunes/le-reflux-international-de-la-vague-populiste-d-extreme-droite-890084.html>.

- Sierakowski, Slawomir. 2019. *Why Poland's Populists Keep Winning*. 9 October. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/09/polands-populism-winning-welfare-state/>.
- Solska, Magdalena. 2020. "Democratic Erosion? One Dominant Party and Ineffective Opposition." *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 58 (S1): 105-120.
- Stachura, Peter. 2004. *Poland 1928-1945: An Interpretative and Documentary History of the Second Republic*. 1st. London: Routledge.
- Szawiel, Tadeusz. 2009. "Democratic Consolidation in Poland: Support for Democracy, Civil Society and the Party System." *Polish Sociological*, 483-506.
- The Constitution. 1997. *Chapter IX*. <https://www.senat.gov.pl/en/about-the-senate/konstytucja/chapter-ix/>.
- The Economist. 2006. *Economist Intelligence Unit democracy index*. The Economist. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index.
- The Economist. 2018. *Imperial borders still shape politics in Poland and Romania*. Accessed 01 10, 2022. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/11/21/imperial-borders-still-shape-politics-in-poland-and-romania>.
- Tilles, Daniel. 2021. *State TV is Poles' least trusted news source, finds Oxford University study*. 23 June. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/06/23/state-tv-is-poles-least-trusted-news-source-finds-oxford-university-study/>.
- Tomini, Luca, and Wagemann, Claudius. 2017. "Varieties of contemporary breakdown and regression: A comparative analysis." *European Journal of Political Research* 57 (3): 687-716.
- Tworzecki, Hubert. 2018. "Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization." *Sage Journals*. 20 December. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0002716218809322>.
- Tworzecki, Hubert. 2019. "Poland a case of top-down polarization." *the annals of the American academy of political and social science*, 681, n°1, 1 January: 97-119.
- Vitale, David, and Girard, Raphael. 2022. *Public trust and the populist leader: A theoretical argument*. Cambridge University Press.

- Wilczek, Maria. 2021. "A quarter of children in Poland born out of wedlock as Poles increasingly marry later or not at all." *Notes from Poland*. 8 February. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2021/02/08/a-quarter-of-children-in-poland-born-out-of-wedlock-as-oles-increasingly-marry-later-or-not-at-all/>.
- Yi, YongJin. 2020. *The State of Poverty in Poland*. 26 July. <https://borgenproject.org/the-state-of-poverty-in-poland/>.