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Public Opinion in Poland's Transition to Market Democracy

David S. Mason

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**TITLE: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLAND'S TRANSITION TO MARKET
DEMOCRACY**

AUTHOR: DAVID S. MASON, BUTLER UNIVERSITY

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AUTHOR: David S. Mason

CONTRACTOR: Butler University

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: David S. Mason

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Public Opinion in Poland's Transition to Market Democracy

Public opinion research has changed dramatically in the last ten years in Poland, in terms of its methodology, scope, and role in political change. During the "first" Solidarity era (1980-81), the genie of public opinion was let out of the bottle, and even martial law could not entirely put it back. Public opinion polling in the 1980s became more sophisticated and more common, and began to tackle increasingly sensitive political issues. Public opinion came to play a role in the political process, and to give the Polish population a sense of its own purpose and values. It also revealed the depth of antipathy to the communist regime and leadership and, in doing so, further eroded the already fragile legitimacy of the regime. When, in the late 1980s, the regime realized it could not succeed at winning back the allegiance, or at least acquiescence, of the Polish population, it agreed to negotiate with the opposition. The result was the emergence of the first non-communist regime in Eastern Europe.

The Emergence of Public Opinion in the 1980s

In a classic study of public opinion in the United States, V.O. Key contended that "all governments. . . must concern themselves with public opinion. They do not maintain their authority by brute force alone; they must seek willing acceptance and conformity from most of their citizens."¹ Public opinion in democracies, therefore, often acts as a negative factor; it sets the boundaries for political action but does not necessarily assure that action will be taken by decision makers. In the state socialist societies of Eastern Europe, however, even this boundary setting function was often absent. The regimes may not have relied only on brute force, but they also paid scant attention to the voice of public opinion. Rather,

public opinion became part of the process of political socialization. It was used to shape public attitudes, or to demonstrate popular conformity with official regime norms, rather than as a mechanism of determining how to respond to such attitudes.

In some countries, and in some periods of unusual openness (such as Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring), pressure from social scientists or the regime's needs to broaden the base of legitimacy led to an expanded role for public opinion research. But the impact of public opinion on policy was always limited by the absence of independent interest groups and competitive parties to aggregate and process alternative demands and to pressure the authorities to act on them.²

In Poland, public opinion research was always more developed than in the other countries of Eastern Europe, partly due to the rich sociological tradition in the country and partly to the relatively open atmosphere in Poland, especially in the academy. In Poland too, though, the openness of public opinion research coincided with the openness of the political system. The "thaw" after the death of Stalin, for example, led to the formation of a number of new sociological research centers. But this renaissance of public opinion research began to fade in the early 1960s, just as Gomulka's reform program did. With the advent of the new Gierek leadership at the end of 1970, there were renewed hopes for political change, and Stefan Nowak, the dean of public opinion researchers in Poland, appealed for a revitalization of public opinion research as well, in an article that appeared in the Party's monthly theoretical journal.³ But Nowak's advice was largely ignored. There was some increasingly interesting research being conducted, some of it demonstrating a public opinion that was increasingly at odds with the demands and expectations of the authorities. But by the end of the 1970s, as the director of the official public opinion center OBOP put it, most

of the more revealing surveys ended up "on the shelf, forgotten."⁴

After the strikes of the summer of 1980 and the formation of Solidarity, the whole of Polish society became more open, pluralistic, and critical. This was also true of academic researchers and during 1980 and 1981, public opinion research was more openly pursued, discussed and published, and conducted by a greater variety of institutions, than ever before. The openness of survey research in Solidarity's Poland was unprecedented for any communist country, as even Solidarity formed its own public opinion research centers. In fact, Solidarity became the necessary vehicle for public opinion to have influence. As Zvi Gitelman and others had pointed out, in order for public opinion to have an impact, there need to be autonomous groups to aggregate and process societal demands into a program that can serve as an alternative to those in power. Solidarity performed this function, which contributed to the power and influence of both Solidarity, the medium, and public opinion, the message.⁵

During 1981, public opinion research also became a weapon in the country's political battle. It was the implicit recognition of the power of public opinion, in fact, that led Solidarity to create its own public opinion research centers, and to issue its own reports, sometimes based on the same questionnaire items used by government research centers. By the end of the year, both the regime and Solidarity were able to use public opinion surveys to bolster their positions. Solidarity could point to the continued strong support for the union and for its most important demands. The regime, on the other hand, could point to the populations's declining support for Solidarity, its willingness to assign Solidarity part of the blame for the country's continuing crisis, and the significant degree of support for more "law

and order" in society.

In the early months of martial law, public opinion research was much more circumscribed and the results were not always made public. As before 1980, the regime could once again control all aspects of public opinion research, and use the data, sometimes selectively, to bolster its own position. But in several respects the situation after December was not the same as before August. Public opinion had been unleashed in 1981, and the regime would have to deal with it. At first, it tried to control it, by establishing yet another public opinion research center, the Center for Research on Societal Opinion (CBOS), under the direction of Colonel Dr. Stanislaw Kwiatkowski, and by squelching some of the more independent centers of public opinion research.

The Jaruzelski regime, however, seemed to recognize the force of public opinion, and Jaruzelski himself asserted in a Sejm speech in 1982 that the authorities must become accustomed to the systematic use of public opinion research. Similarly, Col. Kwiatkowski stressed the importance of providing the public with "knowledge about itself" and admitted that public opinion was not well reflected in "individual talks and peoples' pronouncements at public meetings."⁶ The authorities were viewing public opinion in a different way than before 1980—it was providing both the authorities and the public with knowledge about popular attitudes. In the absence of genuine representative political institutions, public opinion became a surrogate for democracy.

During the 1980s, the Jaruzelski regime tried all sorts of measures to elicit popular participation and acquiescence, short of allowing the re-emergence of Solidarity. The government created new "mass" organizations (such as PRON), formed governmental

advisory councils, sent more bills through the Sejm, allowed multi-candidate elections, and held a number of referenda. Like public opinion research, however, these formulas were empty without the activating presence of autonomous representative institutions and political parties, and could only be temporary expedients.

Because of the open political environment of 1980-81, and the revelations of public opinion, everyone now knew what Poles thought, and in particular the extent of disaffection with the ruling Polish United Worker's Party. The fragile legitimacy of the Jaruzelski regime could be held together by compulsion for only so long. The advent of the Gorbachev leadership in Moscow in 1985, and the declining willingness of the Kremlin to support the hardliners in Eastern Europe, increasingly left Warsaw with only one option—to deal with Solidarity. The renewed workers' strikes in the summer of 1988 forced the issue, led to the Roundtable negotiations, the elections, and the formation of the first non-communist government in Eastern Europe.

The increasingly more open political atmosphere in Poland has allowed more open discussion of the role, methodology, and influence of public opinion. It has also led to a reconsideration of sampling techniques, questionnaire design, reliability and validity, all issues that continue to confront public opinion researchers in the United States as well. The democratization of the political system has also raised some new concerns about the results of public opinion surveys; in particular, the extent to which the beliefs, values and attitudes of Polish citizens are conducive to a political and economic environment that will require participation, tolerance, compromise, competition and patience. The reforms of the new Mazowiecki government also entail a reduced commitment to policies promoted by the

previous communist government, including social welfare, full employment, and a relatively egalitarian structure of personal incomes. Popular acceptance of the new policies and political orientations are crucial to the success of the new government. Public opinion surveys can help to reveal the extent of such commitment.

Critiques of Public Opinion Methodology

Serious criticisms of the reliability of Polish public opinion surveys began to surface even before the momentous changes of 1989. Criticisms were raised about both the methodological problems of surveys, especially in authoritarian societies, and about the political manipulation of surveys. An article by Krystyna Lutynksa of the Academy of Sciences in a 1987 issue of the Polish Sociological Bulletin, for example, while focussed on the issue of refusal rates in Polish surveys, went much beyond this issue in questioning the reliability of surveys conducted in Poland.⁷

The issue of refusal rates itself is serious enough however, in that a large percentage of non-responses in a survey can distort the sample and therefore seriously affect the accuracy of the survey. Non-response rates are routinely recorded and reported in scientific surveys in Western countries. Until 1982, according to Lutynska, refusal rates were rarely even recorded in Poland, and though it has been required in most surveys since then, many still do not do so. For those where records were kept, refusal rates in the 1960s and 1970s appeared to be relatively low, ranging from about 2% to 12%. (American surveys generally experience refusal rates between 10% and 30%). After the implementation of martial law, however, refusal rates soared, sometimes to 50%, though these rates were still often not reported with the results. For surveys conducted in 1982-1985, the most important variable

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in response rates was sponsorship of the survey. Refusal rates for surveys conducted by official survey centers (e.g. OBP in Krakow and CBOS and OBOP in Warsaw) ranged from 16-50%; while those for surveys conducted by academic institutions were only 3-14%. Obviously many people were refusing to participate in official surveys, either out of aversion or fear.

Lutynska was skeptical, however, of the validity of the results for even those who did respond. She contended that people who do give interviews (at least in this post martial-law period) do so for one of four reasons: fear of refusal, good manners, a sense of civic duty, or "to have their say and to tell the truth regardless of the consequences."⁸ She argues that only those in the last category are likely to give honest answers to sensitive political questions. The others are likely to give answers which they believe are officially acceptable or expected of them by the interviewer.

Of course interviewer effects are also a problem in the United States, and there have been numerous studies of the impact of age, sex, race, appearance, and institutional affiliation on the response rate and honesty of responses. Lutynska's assessment may be overly pessimistic, but it does raise the question of the validity of public opinion surveys conducted, first of all, in extraordinary conditions (e.g. martial law) and secondly, by an institution that is perceived as responsible to the political authorities.

A similar kind of criticism was raised by a Warsaw University sociologist, Antoni Sulek, who compared the responses to similar questions posed by the official CBOS and by the Academy of Sciences and the University in their series of "Polacy" surveys.⁹ Sulek found considerable differences in the surveys of these institutions, for example in confidence

in public institutions; the CBOS surveys showed higher confidence in the PZPR, and lower confidence in Solidarity, than did the Polacy '88 national survey. The ranking of the fifteen institutions, however, was almost exactly the same. (This author found the same patterns in surveys conducted by the government and Solidarity in 1981¹⁰). Sulek attributes the differences not to deliberate distortion, but to bias in the way questions were designed, in the inaccuracy of samples, and to the intimidation effect of CBOS interviewers, almost all of whom were from either the army propaganda apparatus or the state bureaucracy.

Criticism of official surveys became even more blunt and hard-hitting after Solidarity's astonishing sweep of the parliamentary elections in June 1989. Numerous articles chastised Kwiatkowski's CBOS for underestimating Solidarity's support in pre-election surveys, and even for deliberately distorting the results to influence voters. Maciej Kozłowski, writing in the independent Catholic weekly Tygodnik Powszechny, said of CBOS:

For years we have lived in an artificial world in which the ruling party apparently enjoyed mass support, with the opposition having only a very narrow margin. Such a picture of Poland was presented to us by Colonel Kwiatkowski only a few months ago, and even after the August 1988 strikes he assessed support for Solidarity at only 18.9%¹¹

Others complained that CBOS's surveys had made the authorities overly confident, self-satisfied, and isolated from society's real feelings. Kwiatkowski responded by arguing that the polls only measure attitudes and affiliations at a particular point in time, and that people may well have changed their minds as the elections approached. There is probably some truth to both the criticisms and the defense. Even many non-official surveys showed relatively low levels of support for Solidarity in the year before the election. The

overwhelming support for Solidarity in the elections was due in part, at least, to a vote against the Party. After forty years of rule by a single party, this was the first opportunity for Poles to "throw the rascals out" (to use a phrase from the American political lexicon). The election's plebiscitarian character led Walesa to admit that people had cast votes as a way of "getting even" with the communists rather than as a deliberate choice between political and economic platforms.

This more open discussion of the reliability and validity of surveys is a most healthy phenomenon, however, and will lead to increasing refinement of Polish survey methods. The more open political climate, on the other hand, is likely to have a mixed impact on public opinion research. On the one hand, it will allow inquiry into more sensitive political issues, the proliferation of independent public opinion research centers, and a greater willingness of respondents to answer sensitive political questions. At the same time, the emergence of independent interest groups and political parties will allow public opinion to be translated into political muscle. On the other hand, with the emergence of a more open and competitive political atmosphere, public opinion surveys will no longer have to act as a surrogate for genuine political participation and representation. This may well remove public opinion somewhat from the political arena, allowing it to develop along more scientific lines.

The Lessons of Public Opinion for Poland's Future

The Shallow Impact of Political Socialization

The most astounding feature of the 1989 changes in Poland (and Eastern Europe) was

their thoroughness and rapidity. First in Poland, but later in elections in Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, the communists were overwhelmingly defeated, despite their advantages of incumbency and their last minute efforts to change their images, policies, and even names. The scope of this popular hostility is especially surprising given the forty years of political socialization pursued so deliberately by the communist regime.

Even before 1980, however, it was apparent that the ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism had little acceptance in Poland. In 1958, only 13% of Warsaw students identified themselves as Marxists; twenty years later, still only 18% did.¹² Despite the rejection of Marxism, though, most Poles, before 1980, seemed to accept the general commitment to socialism, even if they felt the regime had not lived up to those ideals. Stefan Nowak reported widespread social acceptance of the nationalization of industry, agrarian reform, economic planning, and the transformation of the prewar class structure.¹³ Poles also evidenced a strong egalitarianism, particularly regarding incomes.

With the crushing of Solidarity in 1981, and the continued deterioration of the economy in the 1980s, even this limited commitment to socialism began to wither away. This was recognized and admitted even by the regime. At a 1983 Party conference on ideological problems, one eminent ideologist bemoaned an "ideological crisis" manifested in "the undermining of the faith of a large part of the Polish society in the value of socialist ideals and socialism itself."¹⁴ Official publications complained of the lack of commitment from young people, especially given the resources lavished on their political education: "What has happened to the hundreds of millions of zlotys that were spent on seminars,

camps, conferences, competitions, meetings and all of the other forms of political training? All that money seems to have been completely wasted."¹⁵

Support for Marxism, particularly among young people, had practically disappeared by the mid-1980s. A survey of Gdansk high school students in 1984 found only 2% declaring themselves Marxists; and support was not much higher among university students.¹⁶ The shift in attitudes was not restricted to young people. In a cross-national survey conducted in east and west Europe in early 1990, only West Germans (81%) reacted more negatively to the term "communism" than did the Poles (80%). And of all the countries, the Poles had by far the most positive response to "capitalism." Indeed, East Europeans in general responded more favorably toward capitalism than did respondents in the capitalist countries!¹⁷ The Polish attitudes toward capitalism and communism are a culmination of a trend that began in 1980, with increasingly large numbers of people favoring a market-oriented approach to the economic system, and a shift in emphasis from favoring equality toward favoring freedom. These tendencies will be discussed further below.

State socialist societies are sometimes referred to in the West as "mobilized" societies, in that the regimes in those countries attempt to foster high degrees of political awareness and political participation, albeit controlled participation. Thus in Poland as in other East European states, there were numerous mass-membership organizations, such as the party itself but also youth organizations and other special interest groups. Furthermore, formal participation in the political process, both in terms of voting and in the number of people who serve in elected office, was very high compared to pluralist societies.

Despite the regime's efforts at political mobilization, however, such participation by Poles has been ritualistic, at best. Poles neither participated much in politics, nor even evinced much interest in politics, and this abstention from political activity increased during the 1980s. Even in "normal" times, a surprisingly large number of Poles were not aware of even major political issues and events. Surveys done in the mid-1970s showed that less than 20% of the residents of six cities could name the president, the first party secretary or a single representative in their electoral district.¹⁸ An official poll in 1985 found that only 15-17% of adult citizens were "interested in politics" and about half of those were party members.¹⁹ This lack of political interest and involvement turned into a major embarrassment for the regime in a November 1987 referendum on the economic reforms. Too few people voted to enable the government to win the required majority of all eligible voters. The government proceeded with the reforms anyway.

This political disinterest continued even through the remarkable events of 1988 and 1989. In August 1988, during the second wave of strikes which forced the government into talks with Solidarity, as many as 44% of people admitted to being unaware of this decision; a third of the respondents admitted to apathetic attitudes toward political developments, and to not paying any attention to them.²⁰ And during the Round Table talks, despite extensive media coverage, most Poles had little knowledge of the participants. Even supposedly well known opposition figures like Jacek Kuron (62%) and Adam Michnik (49%) were recognized by less than two thirds of the respondents. Future Prime Minister Mazowiecki was known by only 20.9% of the respondents.²¹

There are many ways to explain this political apathy and erosion of acceptance for the

regime's norms. The most straightforward, perhaps, is simply the frustration and disgust that most Poles felt at the regime's martial law crackdown on Solidarity. For many people, this was the last straw and proved that the regime was incapable of reforming itself; fewer and fewer people believed in "state-controlled democratization of the state."²² There was also increasing recognition and rejection of the privileges and corruption associated with the political leadership. But there are longer term, more fundamental, reasons as well. Lena Kolarska-Bobinska, a sociologist at the Academy of Sciences, argues that in the 1970s, people came to depend on the state as a provider of basic economic, social, and educational needs. By the 1980s, as the economy continued to deteriorate, many perceived the state as failing at this function, and gave up on it, often trying to fulfill these needs outside the public sector, either legally (the private market) or illegally (the black market).²³

The Decline of Political Legitimacy

No political regime, democratic or authoritarian, can last long without a political socialization process that breeds at least some support for the government's basic values and institutions. In Poland, as we have seen, the political socialization process seems to have broken down altogether, particularly after the declaration of martial law at the end of 1981. This led to a further erosion of the already debased legitimacy of the communist regime. In Poland, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, political legitimacy had increasingly come to rest on the satisfaction of basic economic and social needs. There was a kind of "social contract"²⁴ or "social accord"²⁵ in which the populace left politics to the politicians and in return the state provided economic growth and social services and did not demand much in the way of

commitment or effort from the population. Indeed, some surveys suggested that Poles accepted this as the proper, even desirable, function of the state. Though the population may not have expected much from the regime in terms of political rights, it did hold sizeable expectations in the economic and social realm. As Stefan Nowak put it in 1981, most Poles held the state responsible for "the equalization of life opportunities, for the development of the potential of all citizens, as well as for the satisfaction of their basic needs."²⁶ In addition, in the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a high degree of social mobility (both real and perceived) in the country that allowed a sense of constant improvement. With the slowdown in social mobility in the 1970s, and then the slowdown in the economy itself, the government became increasingly unable to deliver on its part of the "compact." By 1980, polls showed that Poland had three times as many dissatisfied people as there were, on average, in eight western nations. Ironically, Poles had especially bad ratings for social services (which is supposed to be the strength of socialist societies), such as medical care, housing, the environment, and egalitarian policies.²⁷ An analysis of the "Polacy" surveys in the mid-1980s concluded that only about a quarter of the population could be counted as "pro" regime.²⁸

In capitalist democracies, the government is not always held responsible for economic slowdowns, which are often seen as an inevitable consequence of the market. In state socialist societies, however, since the government controls the economy, the government gets the blame when the economy falters.²⁹ As long as the economy was improving, legitimacy was preserved. With the collapse of the economy, even this source of legitimacy disappeared. The Jaruzelski regime searched desperately for alternative sources of

legitimacy, for example in appeals to Poland's national traditions³⁰ and by seeking support from the Soviet Union. But with the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to the Soviet leadership in 1985, even this external legitimation began to dry up. The Polish communist party regime was doomed.

The declining faith in the system was reflected in more concrete ways in diminished trust in official institutions and public figures, in increasingly outspoken resentment about privileges and corruption, and in increasing support for a more pluralistic political environment. The most obvious aspect of this was in declining confidence in institutions. When the government, and then Solidarity, first began publishing such polls on trust in institutions in 1981, these consistently showed that the unofficial institutions, especially the Church and Solidarity, were much more highly rated than official ones. The Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) always fared badly in such polls, usually ending up in last place. In the 1980s, however, the levels of trust in virtually all institutions, official and unofficial, steadily declined, though the relative rankings remained about the same. While the Party continued to fare poorly (with only about a quarter expressing trust in the Polacy '88 survey), the regime's newly created institutional structures didn't do much better: the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth (PRON) had the confidence of only 40% in the 1988 survey, and the new trade unions of only 34%.³¹ Confidence in the Party was even lower among urban workers. A December 1988 survey of 1200 persons in seven industrial enterprises in Warsaw showed only 6.8% expressing trust in the PZPR—probably less than the total number of party members in those enterprises! These results and others led the authors of this Warsaw study to conclude that "the political system is questioned or even

rejected at all its levels: at the level of the main organs of the state, at the level of industrial organizations in which the respondents work, and at the level of individual behavior."³²

This lack of trust in the party, and the party's sharply decreasing legitimacy, led Poles to increasingly question the necessity of maintaining the Party's "leading role" in society. The Polacy '81 survey showed that over half of the sample were in favor of a system without such a role for the party, and followup Polacy surveys in the 1980s showed similar results.³³ The Polacy '88 poll, conducted at the end of 1987 and the beginning of 1988, revealed only about a third of the respondents favoring maintaining the power of the party. Another third was in favor of reducing the power of the Party, and the remaining third were undecided or uninterested.³⁴

Curiously, though, this antipathy toward the party did not, through much of the 1980s, translate into a desire to fundamentally transform the system. Even during 1981, according to the Polacy '81 survey, only a quarter of the respondents favored constituting new political parties, apart from the PZPR and its satellite parties, the Social Democratic Party and the United Peasant Party. There was also little support for the proposition that Solidarity should create a political party to operate alongside the union. Only 20% of the overall sample, and 23% of Solidarity members, favored this idea.³⁵ During the middle-1980s, similarly, most people seemed to be more interested in improving the economic situation rather than fundamental political change. When asked in CBOS polls about what was the main thing need to be done to improve the country's situation, the largest numbers of people mentioned "inducing people to work better" (50-60% in various polls) or to "reform the economy (40-57%). Many fewer suggested "changing the government" (5-17%)

or "changing the political system" (5-15%).³⁶ This "apolitical" response was probably due to the resignation and apathy that characterized Polish society after the imposition of martial law.

In the latter half of the 1980s, however, this attitude began to change, and Poles came increasingly to favor democratizing and pluralizing changes in the political system. A survey conducted by the Academy of Sciences in 1985 found overwhelming support for "respecting freedom and the political rights of the citizen" (90.5%) and for "participation by citizens in the making of basic state decisions" (82%).³⁷ This began to be translated into more concrete demands as well. In this same sample, 65% agreed that elections must involve "competition of various political parties." By 1988, support for a similar proposition, that "citizens should be able to choose between candidates of various political views", was even stronger, supported by over 72%. In the 1984 Polacy survey, the sample was about evenly divided on whether opposition groups should be legalized. By 1988, many more Poles favored a legal opposition (47.3%) than opposed it (26.1%).³⁸

As Krzysztof Jasiewicz points out, a whole series of surveys during the 1980s points to a "slow but steady shift in societal preferences from 'equality' . . . to 'freedom'--an acceptance of various forms of economic, social and political activity and the differing consequences of that activity."³⁹ A similar conclusion could be drawn from the survey of workers in Warsaw enterprises. When asked in which type of society they would prefer to live, the most frequent response was "a free society" (36.5%) and a "rich society (21.1%). The responses for the kind of society promoted by the communist regime were much lower: for a "just" society, 20%; for one "based on friendship and solidarity," 12%; for one that

"provides personal safety, 8%; and for one "with a good welfare system", only 3%.⁴⁰

There are two sides to this movement: one away from equality; and the second toward freedom. As to the former, Poles exhibit a dramatic move away from egalitarianism during the 1980s. One sees this most clearly in the Polacy surveys, where from 1980 to 1988 there is a dramatic decline in those "decisively" favoring limiting the highest earnings (from 70.6% to 27.5%) and in those strongly favoring a policy of full employment (50.6% to 25.3%) and a sharp increase in those favoring high differentiation in wages based on qualifications (from 25.8% to 40.4%). There is also an increase from 1984 to 1988 in those favoring expanded possibilities for the private sector, from 59.5% to 73%.⁴¹ Ewa Gucwa-Lesny refers to this as a shift "from supporting the equity in poverty policy toward one of supporting a just inequality based on the clear criteria connected with the efficiency of work."⁴² These changes in popular consciousness are reflected in the policies and stances of Solidarity, which became increasingly less egalitarian by the time of the Roundtable talks in 1989.

This increasing commitment to the principles of democracy was connected with a revival in support for and confidence in Solidarity. In the early 1980s, Solidarity, like all institutions, suffered a sharp drop in popular confidence; from over 90% support in 1981 to only 11-13% in 1984 and 1985. But by 1988, this started to pick up, with the Polacy '88 survey showing confidence in Solidarity up to 25%.⁴³ Solidarity's approval rating increased sharply over the next year, to 75% in March of 1989.⁴⁴ In the same period, the perception of Solidarity as an institution beneficial to society grew from 18.2% to 67.2%.⁴⁵

There seem to be numerous reasons for the turnaround in Polish public opinion the

late 1980s. First of all, the period of frustration and apathy caused by the martial law crackdown had begun to mellow a bit, as Poles, especially younger ones, increasingly came back into the political arena. Many of the strike leaders in 1988, for example were different, and younger, than those who had led the strikes in 1980. Secondly, there was increasing popular frustration and disillusionment with the reform efforts of General Jaruzelski and his government. The "Second Stage" of the economic reform was continuously revised and delayed, and meanwhile the Polish economy, and Poles' standards of living, continued to decline. While Poles had seemingly put their hopes in a non-political approach to change, this no longer seemed to work. This leads to the third point, which is an increasing awareness that serious economic changes were not possible without accompanying changes in the political realm. Fourth, despite the lack of real success with the market-oriented economic reforms, the population came increasingly to accept the regime's own rhetoric in support of the market in the economy and democratization in the polity. Finally, there is the impact of Gorbachev. At an increasing pace, especially from 1987, the Gorbachev leadership began to introduce reforms in the Soviet Union, some of which were ahead of change in Central Europe. Increasingly, too, Moscow began to back away from the principles of the Brezhnev Doctrine, to pressure the East European leaders to push ahead with their own reforms, and to promise noninterference in the internal affairs of those countries. This had the effect of reducing the element of fear of change in Poland, and of undercutting the strength of the conservatives in the leadership who resisted change. It greatly widened the "limits of the possible" in Poland.

The Obstacles to Democratization and Stability

The changes in public opinion in the late 1980s in Poland were part of a thoroughgoing rejection of the existing system of "real socialism." The elections of June 1989 gave the population the opportunity, for the first time, to demonstrate this in a legal and irrefutable fashion. The combination of attitudinal change and structural change (with the formation of a non-communist government) marked a revolutionary transformation in Poland: the old system, its values, policies and institutions, was swept away. This provided a kind of clean slate on which the new Mazowiecki government could write its economic and political revolution.

There is, however, a darker underside to these changes. The old system having been swept away, a new system needs to be put in place. This requires the rebuilding not only of the political and economic structure, but also of the structure of values, attitudes and patterns of behavior. In normal circumstances, in any society, these are passed down from one generation to the next, at least partly through the process of political socialization. As we have seen, however, this process had already broken down, even before 1989, and it may take a while before a new process takes its place. This entails, among other changes, the restructuring of the educational system, the rewriting of textbooks, and a new role for the mass media.

Thus, as in any revolutionary situation, the necessary changes are complex, deep, and wide, and they will not be accomplished within just a few months or years. Just looking at the political system, for example, students of the process of democratization suggest that it

takes twelve years or more for authoritarian states to make the transition to a "consolidated" democracy.⁴⁶ The transitions from state socialist to market economy and from "subject" to "participant" political cultures may take even longer. In the meantime, the fledgling democratic government in Poland, lacking the stability and legitimacy that is purchased by time, will have many challenges and obstacles to overcome.

Among these problems are some aspects of the existing Polish political culture that may not be favorable to the years of patience, tolerance, and compromise necessary for the consolidation of democracy and the market. These phenomena include a continuing sense of cynicism, pessimism and apathy, a remaining commitment by many to egalitarianism and socialism, and a relatively weak sense of, and experience with, democracy.

We have discussed above the long-term and increasing sense of apathy and frustration that characterized Polish society in the 1980s. The events of 1989 and 1990 temporarily reversed this trend, but despite the formation of a Solidarity-led government in the fall of 1989, there remains a surprisingly high degree of apathy and pessimism. The signature of the Roundtable agreements in April 1989 occasioned little celebration or popular fanfare, and the streets of Warsaw on the following day were surprisingly normal. Polls in March 1989 showed only about 30% of the population willing to join Solidarity, and 47% saying they had no such intention.⁴⁷ When Solidarity was finally legalized after the Roundtable Agreements, only about 2.2 million people joined the union by the summer, far short of the nine and a half million members in 1981. In the June 1989 elections, turnout was far lower than expected. Both sides had thought 80% would participate, but only about 62% did so. The runoff elections two weeks later attracted less than 15% of the electorate.⁴⁸ In the first

completely open and contested elections, for local government councils in May 1990, only 42% of eligible voters participated. This was not the same fervor and activism seen in 1980-81.

This continued political apathy and lack of participation was due in part to the continuing frustration and pessimism regarding the economy. Negative evaluations of the economy and pessimism regarding its future had grown sharply during the 1980s, becoming almost universal by the end of the decade. This trend, too, seems to have been reversed, at least temporarily, with the election of a Solidarity government. Initially, people overwhelmingly supported the new Mazowiecki government and expected it to improve the economy. But in a December 1989 poll, only about a quarter of the respondents expressed hopes for improvements, with 30% having more fears than hope for the future, and 29% expecting Poland to sink further into chaos and crisis. Almost 60% of the respondents expressed a willingness to take a job in the West.⁴⁹ During the first half of 1990, monthly public opinion polls showed a steady decline in public confidence for all political leaders and institutions.⁵⁰ These were not hopeful signs, and indicate how thin was the reservoir of support for the new government. Further economic difficulties were likely to lead to a revival of pessimism, apathy and withdrawal.

This political apathy, which is due in part to the many years of suffering authoritarianism, is linked to a relatively weak sense of democracy, also due in part to the lack of experience with democratic processes and institutions. The 1985 study on popular understandings of democracy found much higher levels of support for civil rights and even equal access to material goods than for institutional and procedural aspects of democracy

such as a multiparty system, contested elections and a critical opposition. On this last issue, only 36% "decisively" agreed that the Sejm should have a "legal opposition criticizing the government." Overall, the authors of this study found that only about 55% of the sample had a "decisively pluralistic orientation."⁵¹ The flip side of this weak commitment to democracy is a disconcertingly strong degree of support for "law and order" in Poland. The Polacy '88 survey, for example, found almost 78% of the sample agreeing that Poland needed a "strong leader who would bring order to the country."⁵² In fact, more respondents agreed with this statement than with the proposition that voters should be able to choose between candidates of various political views (73%).⁵³ These data led Krzysztof Jasiewicz to characterize the Polish political culture as "sharply polarized" between "two contradictory syndromes of values: authoritarian-populist and democratic-liberal."⁵⁴ Of course, these surveys were conducted before the 1989 revolution, but it remains to be seen if these syndromes have significantly changed since then.

Another potential challenge to the Mazowiecki government, though this more in terms of economic policy than politics, is the continuing strong strand of egalitarianism in Polish society. Numerous studies, including some alluded to above, point out the sharp decline in egalitarian attitudes among Poles. Furthermore, some have contended that the egalitarianism of the 1980s was primarily political in character--a reaction to the corruption and privileges of the political elite.⁵⁵ Other studies, both national and local, have pointed to the increasing acceptance of the market, and especially of inequalities in wages and incomes.⁵⁶

However, the other side of this issue is that the majority of Poles still (at least as of 1988) support some key egalitarian principles, especially regarding wages, incomes and

prices. The Polacy '88 survey showed that 57% supported limiting the highest wages and 60% favoring a policy of full employment. These figures were far below what they had been in the early 1980s, but they were still high enough to suggest some opposition to the "shock" of the market introduced in January 1990. On the other hand, there is strong popular support for other important aspects of the reforms, including private ownership of property.⁵⁷

Commitment to the market is stronger in some sectors of society than in others: as might be expected, unskilled manual workers, clerical workers and (to a lesser extent) farmers remain fairly egalitarian. Indeed, Poland's official trade unions (OPZZ) leadership tried to capitalize on this sentiment at the time of the January price increases: "we cannot agree to the policy of free prices and frozen incomes for working people," Miodowicz declared, that would lead to "further impoverishment of a considerable part of society."⁵⁸ Perhaps the key question here is the following: if Polish egalitarianism was primarily directed against those in power, and those in power are increasingly being replaced, will Poles return to the more traditional economic egalitarianism of the 1960s and 1970s, which would stymie the market reforms, or will they be brought over to the economic inegalitarianism of the market? Again, time will tell.

Conclusions: Polish Political Culture in Comparative Perspective

The previous pages may have painted an overly pessimistic view of Poland's chances for the consolidation of democracy and the transition to the market. It has been customary

for both Polish and Western social scientists to point to data on Polish public opinion and call attention to the high degree of cynicism and apathy, the continuing strands of authoritarianism, and the conflicting attitudes held by the same people. In the past, it may have been appropriate to view Poland in isolation from Western countries, partly because the system was so different, and therefore the political context of public opinion was so different from the West, and partly because the nature of survey research in Poland made it difficult to compare to surveys in the West. But as Poland moves more toward the West, these differences diminish and it becomes more important to place Poland in a Western context. It becomes more appropriate, and more relevant, to compare the political culture of Poland with that of Western countries: to compare, for example, the social conditions for acceptance of the market and democratic institutions. Such a comparison would shed further light on the potential for Poland's successful transit.

Such comparisons are beyond the scope of this paper, but a few examples may illustrate the point. In the section above, we addressed some of the obstacles to change in Poland, including the widespread sense of apathy and pessimism, the low degree of political participation, and the continuing support for both egalitarianism and the market. But there are similar phenomena in Western democracies. Political apathy and low levels of participation, for example, are a continuing source of concern in the United States. Only about one half of Americans vote in presidential elections, and only about a third cast ballots for the highest state offices (such as governor) or in Congressional midterm elections, when the presidency is not at stake. Less than 10% of Americans are active enough politically to attend party meetings or work in political campaigns. Americans are also abysmally ignorant

about their political system: only about 40% can name their two U.S. Senators, and less than a third know that the term of a U.S. House member is two years.⁵⁹ By these standards, Polish political awareness and participation is quite high.

Similarly, we discussed above the cynicism and pessimism that is characteristic of the Polish political culture, and raised the question of whether this would eventually be directed at the non-communist government as well. It may well happen, but Western democracies are also characterized by high degrees of cynicism and mistrust. In the United States, for example, only 39% believe that government is run for the benefit of all, while 55% believe that government is run pretty much for a few big interests. A majority of Americans feel that the government wastes a lot of money and that you cannot trust the government to do right most of the time.⁶⁰ Despite all this, most Americans express feelings of pride in the country and the system of government.

We also saw above that Poles have been highly concerned about what they perceive as excessive privileges and corruption within the political elite, but also about the degree of inequality within society generally. Here too, though, Polish sensitivities are not out of line with those in other societies. In the United States, over 40% of the population thinks that "quite a few people running the government are a little crooked." In Inglehart and Siemienka's comparison of Poland with western countries, they found that while 72% of Poles thought (in 1980) that some groups had unduly privileged positions in society, this figure was lower than in any western societies in the study.⁶¹ Another comparison of 3 socialist and 7 capitalist countries found that popular perceptions of inequalities were relatively high in Poland, but at levels similar to those in France and Yugoslavia.⁶² And

while it seemed paradoxical that Poles would favor both a more market oriented economy and a commitment to full employment policies, the same is true in the United States, where 81% favor guaranteed jobs so people could earn a decent income.⁶³

In the end, the key task for the new government in Poland is to convince the population, either by rhetoric or action, that the new order is a just one, both legitimate and fair. In the past, justice has been promised, and to some extent delivered, by the polity, and people came to expect justice from the regime. When these expectations were shattered in the 1980s, people lost both confidence and hope. With the transition to a market economy, the government no longer will satisfy all the demands for justice--now the market will share some of that burden. In the United States, as Robert Lane has pointed out in his article, "Market Justice, Political Justice," people see the market as just, but have low expectations of political justice. Most people believe that in both market and polity people are animated by self interest: "in the market, however, self-interest is thought to be both fruitful for the common good and policed by competition, while in the polity self-interest is seen as neither fruitful nor properly constrained."⁶⁴ Since in the United States, expectations for the political system are not high, the widespread apathy, cynicism and distrust is not particularly threatening to the system.

In some ways, Poland is in an advantageous situation in that expectations have not traditionally been very high, and the Mazowiecki government has tried to keep expectations under control with constant reminders of the difficult days ahead. Most of the warnings by Mazowiecki and his government, however, have been about the state of the economy. It may also be necessary to temper expectations for democracy. A democratic government will

not cure all of Poland's problems, just as it has not cured all of the problems in North America or Western Europe. Furthermore, democracy is not a fact, but a process. It requires continuous work and adjustment. Poland still has a long way to go, in creating both a new government and a new economy. But it has begun, and Poles now have the chance to build the kind of society they want.

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