



# Creating Authoritarian Clientelism: Poland After 2015

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## Abstract

Since the 2015 elections, Poland has ‘enjoyed’ the attention of social sciences—political science in particular—to an extent greater than at any time since the period of “Solidarity” in the early 1980s. In contrast to that period, Poland’s idiosyncratic development over the last two and a half years can hardly be said to play the function of a normative role model. Political developments in Poland in recent times devolve into two stories: one of profound civilizational, economic and social development prior to the 2015 elections; the other of an unexpected and sudden shift toward the dismantling of the liberal democratic system after the Law and Justice (PiS) party came to power in late 2015. The first part of this article describes the most important features of pre-2015 political developments in Poland and identifies key determinants of vote choice in the 2015 parliamentary election in Poland. In brief, this analysis shows two things: that there was no ‘demand’ for systemic change at these elections, and that support for the winning party was mainly determined by socio-cultural factors rather than economic ones. The second part of the article aims to answer the question of why the PiS government has embarked on a course of political action that violates both the abstract principles of liberal democracy and concrete, binding provisions of Poland’s 1997 Constitution. Several theoretical and speculative ideas are offered in answer to this question.

**Keywords** Authoritarian clientelism · Elections · Political legacies · Theories of transition

## 1 Introduction

The Polish October 2015 parliamentary election resulted in the victory of a single party, Law and Justice (PiS), that has returned to power after 8 years in opposition. For the first time in the history of democratic Poland, the winning party was able to create a single-party government, avoiding negotiations, and compromises

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with coalition partners. This result however was not due to significant switches in the preferences of voters, but rather a result of a very high number of wasted votes (almost 17% of active voters). Lack of coordination among leftist parties was of utmost importance in this instance—these parties alone wasted approximately 12% of the vote. As a consequence, Gallagher's disproportionality index surged to 11%. Let us recall that in three of the seven previous parliamentary elections, the victorious parties have attracted a higher percentage of active voters than that achieved by PiS in 2015 (37.6%), but were unable to form a single-party government (Markowski et al. 2015, pp. 19–23).

The Polish developments since October 2015 are one of those unexpected processes that raise legitimate questions about the predictive capabilities of the political sciences. In a nutshell, compared to other CEE cases, Poland has been a real success story in terms of political stability and democratic consolidation (for details see Markowski 2016; Markowski and Kotnarowski 2016). Yet, right after their instalment as incumbents in the late 2015 the PiS government starts well planned assault at the Polish democratic infrastructure and as of late 2018, it is in the midst of a democratic decay. Moreover, in Poland the destruction of the democratic foundations came—quite unexpectedly—not from the allegedly politically unsophisticated and democratically unprepared ordinary citizen, but from part of the elites. In October 2015 in a free and fair election, rather accidentally, the 18.6% of the eligible (or 37.5% of the active) voters supported PiS (Law and Justice) party, which turned out to be enough to form a single-party parliamentary 51% majority.

## 1.1 The Polish Parliamentary Election of 2015

The Polish 2015 parliamentary election resulted in the victory of a single party, Law and Justice (PiS). The senior coalition partner in the 2011–2015 government, the Civic Platform (PO) lost a significant share of the vote. Yet, if the newly established party *Nowoczesna* (Modern) is considered to be a direct heir of the liberal policy platform proposed by the early (i.e. 2001) PO, then the centre-liberal camp together obtained 32% of the vote. It should also be borne in mind that the 2015 PiS party list also contained candidates from two other parties, *Polska Razem* (PR) and *Solidarna Polska* (SP), and was in point of fact a three-party coalition. Two additional phenomena are worth mentioning: the absence of parties of the left in the new parliament, and the poor result of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL). The poor result of the agrarian PSL in the countryside has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to PiS's victory.

The 2015 election had a number of specific features. Above all, it was not primarily about the economy: by the end of 2015, 70% of Poles were satisfied with their jobs and 80% were satisfied with their household situation and lives in general (CBOS 2015, 2016) but remained dissatisfied with many aspects of the political domain: distrusting elites, parties and parliamentarians, and expressing a preoccupation with alleged threats to Poland and the Polish way of life emanating from wider global forces (Markowski and Tworzecki 2016).

This mood of political distrust and suspicion played a significant role in the campaign. PiS, the major opposition party during the 2007–2015 period sought to persuade voters that Poland is in the hands of a corrupt elite; that Polish economic development, while good, is nevertheless proceeding more slowly than it might have; that Poland is a ‘German-Russian condominium’ and has been left ‘in ruins’ by the maladministration of previous government; and that former prime minister Donald Tusk and ex-President Bronisław Komorowski are ‘traitors’ who deliberately conspired to bring about the death of former President Lech Kaczyński in the Smolensk plane crash of April 2010. The relentless repetition of these narratives worked to demobilize part of the electorate of the governing coalition, which came to believe in the existence of widespread corruption.

PiS also benefited from offering a number of irresponsibly costly but popular pledges: a universal child benefit; reversing the PO-PSL government’s unpopular but necessary plan to increase the retirement age to 67 for people of both sexes; and increasing the tax-free income thresholds. These and other less significant promises were aimed at attracting those who had, even if relatively, lost out as a result of the otherwise successful modernization of Poland. Alleged corruption scandals attributed to government personalities plus the unexpected defeat of the President B. Komorowski in the May 2015 Presidential elections in which former president lost by a small margin (48.5–51.5%), were also contributory factors.

Finally, the Catholic Church also played an important role, conveying clear partisan preferences. According to a poll conducted after the 2011 election, of those respondents who reported that parish priests had openly indicated the party for which a Catholic should vote, 9 out of 10 said that the party in question was PiS. In the 2015 election, the political interference of the Church was more overt, including open mobilization of the electorate of their favoured party as well as assisting voters in getting to the polls.

Journalistic accounts of the 2015 election have tended toward the interpretation that this was a landslide victory for PiS, and indicative of a fundamental change in the political preferences of Poles. However, this is not borne out by the overall figures. In fact PiS as a sole party<sup>1</sup>, gained—compared to the 2011 election—only about 2 percentage points of votes (increase from 30 to 32%). Compared to the result of PO and its splinter—new liberal competitor—Nowoczesna—is almost equal; about 31–32%. as well (for details see Markowski 2016). Briefly, the Polish parliamentary election of 2015 has been—unexpectedly and somewhat procedurally—lost by the governing coalition rather than won by the contenders.

As a result, my main argument on the ‘supply side revolution’ that took place in Poland after the fall of 2015—presented in detail elsewhere (Markowski 2016, 2017a, b)—is based on the fact that hardly any evidence existed prior to 2015 of a social ‘demand’ for radical change.

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<sup>1</sup> In the election their electoral committee was composed of three parties, among which obviously PiS was the dominant actor, yet the two other parties contributed at least 700 K votes to the overall figure of 5.7 mln voters supporting them, out of almost 31 mln eligible.

### 1.1.1 Selected Determinants of the 2015 Vote Choice

At this point, results of the analyses aimed at interpreting the vote choice in the 2015 election in Poland is presented. The aim of this part is to check the extent to which economic factors did play a role. From the previous part we know that the overall economic context has been extremely favourable for incumbents (the PO/PSL coalition in power since 2007). Both when analysing the macro-results as well as household evaluations and other individual level satisfactions. So far however, the direct link between the economic situation and the vote has not been tested. In what follows, I test two broad expectations: (a) that economic factors did not play an important role in the party choice in 2015, in particular for the winning party, and (b) if anything it was rather a macro-evaluation of the economy as a whole, rather than an individual subjective evaluation of individuals' household. Briefly—and somewhat paradoxically—because the individual fortunes of Poles (*en masse*) had been significantly improving, both during the whole quarter of a century since the transformation as well as during the last 8 years (relative to other EU countries in particular) it is expected that egotropic, subjective evaluations of what one knows best—his/her economic lot—should only play a minor role in their vote choice (for theoretical explanation, see Kotnarowski and Markowski 2014). However, because of an enormous effort made during the 2007–2015 period by the then opposition party to persuade Poles that their “country is in ruins” (their main slogan repeated over and over again), one can expect that evaluations of macro-economic fortunes of the country might play a role in their vote choice.

The results are presented below in three tables, plus graphs. The first displays the impact of classical socio-demographic factors, some of them closely related to economy, others—to socio-cultural domain. The second shows the impact of selected issues (again divided into economic and non-economic ones) on the vote, in terms of voters' policy preferences as determinants of the vote choice. The third reveals a general model of the vote choice between two main parties, with numerous controls aimed at decontaminating the blurring effects of partisanship, former vote, social position of an individual, individuals' political sophistication and so on.

Table 1 is interesting for our story only as far as comparison of the impact of economic vs cultural factors is concerned. Support for Law and Justice (PiS) comes mostly from variance in socio-cultural (religiosity, education, age, sex and being a pensioner) rather than from economic factors such as income or position on the labour market—being unemployed or a supervisor.

Another approach to testing the extent to which economic factors have contributed to PiS's taking over power in Poland, is to look at their issue/policy preferences as determinants of voting. Table 2 shows the issue positioning of individuals as determinants of the vote.

For the sake of simplicity I present only the two main parties and the new splinter from the governing PO—Nowoczesna. The main message is lucid—what matters for support of PiS are exclusively the socio-cultural issues of religion in public life, abortion and EU integration (the latter in Poland—and for PiS electorate in particular—is more about cultural autonomy, state sovereignty, defence of traditional/family values rather than purely economic issues). Economy-related issues do not

**Table 1** The impact of social status of individuals on their vote choice in the 2015 parliamentary election in Poland (multinomial logistic regression; reference category—non-voters). Source: Polish NES 2015

	Law and justice PiS	Civic platform, PO	Peoples party, PSL	United left, ZL	Kukiz' 15	Nowoczesna
Age	0.05***	0.06***	0.04	0.04*	-0.01	0.03*
Sex	0.53**	0.26	-0.17	0.73	0.98**	0.45
Religiosity	1.26***	0.23	0.93*	-0.93	1.17***	-0.30
Education	0.49***	0.96***	0.79**	1.14***	0.5**	1.05***
Pl of Residence	-0.01	0.17*	-0.44*	0.00	-0.05	0.295**
Income	0.17	0.26***	0.44**	0.37**	0.17	0.40***
Supervisor	-0.10	0.30	0.83	-1.63	0.11	-0.12
Unemployed	-0.27	-0.08	1.13	0.94	-0.58	-0.38
Pensioner	-0.60*	-0.41	0.58	-0.22	-0.54	-0.65

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

**Table 2** The impact of socio-cultural and economic issues on vote choice in 2015 parliamentary elections (multinomial logistic regression; reference category—non-voters). Source: Polish NES 2015

Issues/policies	Parties' electorates					
	PiS		PO		Nowoczesna	
State-church	0.22**		-0.13		-0.05	
Abortion	0.16***		-0.11		-0.22*	
Tax policy		-0.05		-0.04		0.18**
Social network		-0.01		0.15		0.08
EU integration	0.14**		-0.27***		-0.40***	
Privatization		0.10		-0.22***		-0.33***
Const	1.88***	-0.50	1.00***	0.67	0.23	-0.98

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

matter for the PiS electorate, as far as their vote choice is concerned. To be sure: PiS propaganda about the “country in ruins” did play a marginal role in mobilizing their voters, in rural areas in particular, but the slogan contributed mainly to the demobilization of the PO/PSL governing coalition supporters.

Finally, the test of direct evaluations of: (a) the state of the country’s economy and (b) the state of the household situation on the vote choice, which is part of the theory of economic voting, sociotropic vs egotropic voting, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 results show several things: (a) in 2015 Poles’ electoral choices were driven by sociotropic evaluations of the economy, whereas the egotropic evaluations did not play a role whatsoever.<sup>2</sup> This result points to a clear stability among Polish electorate, as a similar result was obtained in the 2011 election (see Kotnarowski and Markowski 2014). (b) Many control variables were applied to test the robustness of this result, among the most important ones was individuals’ previous vote, which allows us to claim that the relationship between economic evaluations and vote choice in 2015 accounts for the contamination of partisan effects. (c) The same logic was applied to arrive at the net effects after controlling for the impact of education and SES.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence the unveiled link between the evaluation of the economic situation and vote decision accounts for the effects of an individual’s social position. (d) The discrete model of economic voting hypothesis depends on the cost of obtaining and processing of information. The hypothesis assumes that the higher the level of political sophistication (knowledge) the higher the probability to vote sociotropically than egotropically (data not shown—available upon request). In case of the 2015 parliamentary election this expectation has been confirmed. This means that political knowledge does not influence subjective egotropic evaluations. The interactions of sociotropic evaluations and political knowledge level however show

<sup>2</sup> In the study of the impact of economic factors, empirical political science has invented two ontologically different ways of depicting peoples evaluations of the economy, first—sociotropic—pertains to the macro evaluation of the country’s economy), and second—egotropic—to the individual respondent’s household situation (for details see Gomez and Wilson 2006).

<sup>3</sup> SES variable is comprised of—profession, income and supervisory position.

**Table 3** Discrete choice model.  
DV: (1) = voting for PO; (0)  
= voting for PiS in 2015, Beta  
coefficient (S.E.)

Index of political knowledge (IPK)	-0.53 (0.29)
Sociotropic evaluation	-0.70 (0.41)
Egotropic evaluation	0.23 (0.38)
IPK * sociotropic evaluation	0.14* (0.06)
IPK * egotropic evaluation	-0.001 (0.05)
Previous vote: other parties:	0.12 (0.65)
Previous vote: PiS (ref cat → N-voters)	-2.88** (0.63)
Previous vote: PO (ref.cat → N-voters)	2.33** (0.37)
Previous vote: PSL (ref cat → N-voters)	-0.94 (1.05)
Issue: state–church relationship	-0.21* (0.12)
Issue: progressive vs linear tax	-0.01 (0.07)
Issue: Poland’s independence from EU	-0.22** (0.07)
Issue: approval of settlement of immigrants	-0.19* (0.08)
Issue: social safety net generosity	0.02 (0.12)
Issue: privatization of state enterprises	-0.11 (0.09)
Issue: abortion	-0.07 (0.08)
Sex: male	-0.44 (0.38)
Age: 25–39 (ref cat → 18–24)	-0.28 (0.88)
Age: 40–60 (ref cat → 18–24)	-0.09 (0.84)
Age: 61+ (ref cat → 18–24)	0.60 (0.88)
Education: vocational (ref cat → primary)	1.08 (0.66)
Education: high (ref cat → primary)	1.160 (0.68)
Education: University (ref cat → primary)	1.81* (0.81)
SES	-0.001 (0.01)
<i>Constant</i>	2.58 (2.42)
N =	591
Log likelihood	-155.315
Akaike Inf. Crit.	360.629
McFadden pseudo R2	0.68
<i>Sign level</i>	*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

clear effects, in that with the decline of political knowledge voters are more inclined to evaluate negatively the sociotropic evaluation of the macro-economic standing of the country and move away from voting for the main governmental party. An important result combined with the overall results presented before.

**1.1.2 Partial Conclusions**

The overall picture thus looks as follows: in terms of objective macro-economic data and its contextual consequences, Poland’s performance has been considerably more impressive than any other country of the CEE region. Not surprisingly, the general social mood concerning many aspects of life, including economic ones, has been pretty positive among Poles. Moreover, the general message from direct testing of

the links between economic factors and evaluations and vote choice points to a similar relationship.

Selected empirical results presented so far clearly suggest that economic concerns and economic issues were definitely not the decisive ones underpinning the support for PiS. And most importantly, if any of the economic evaluations matter, it is definitely rather the more abstract sociotropic macro-economic evaluations (“country in ruins”), than the personally experienced, everyday household assessments. This latter result happened to be correctly predicted.

Let me reiterate: The Polish elections of 2015 are hardly indicative of a “demand side revolt” of the voters. Poles supported PiS only marginally more than on previous electoral occasions. The data presented show that, if anything, it was not the economy that contributed to the defeat of the incumbents in Poland. However, once in power PiS launched a radical package of changes that has altered the prevailing political reality from which the party itself emerged. We are witnessing a classical “supply side” nationalistic/authoritarian/conservative revolution. The social reaction of the liberal-democratic camp—even if widespread and determined—so far was unable to stop the deep and prevalent destruction of liberal democratic norms and values. As a consequence, although PiS’s standing in public opinion polls is more or less the same as at the time of the election, it is still ahead of its main competitor, PO, by at least clear 10–15 percentage points.

This calls for an explanation of what are the deep foundations of support of such a party, in a society that is (still) the most pro-European<sup>4</sup> among the CEE countries and normatively massively attracted by democracy as a regime type? On the other hand, it seems that PiS’s readiness to stick to their illiberal solutions and continue towards authoritarian clientelism (in the making) is grounded in their deep conviction that indeed the one-fifth of Poles eligible to vote, which—at times—can translate into about 35–40% active support for them at elections is the absolute maximum they can count on given their programmatic (and emotional-clientelistic) appeal. In a nutshell, their deeds witness that they are not ready to treat (and accept) democracy—in Przeworski’s parlance—as an “institutionalized uncertainty” of stable rules of the electoral game and uncertain results. If anything, the reverse relationship

<sup>4</sup> Space does not allow for an in-depth explanation about the causes of this strong pro-EU sentiment in Poland, as it would need a separate analysis. At this point let me just mention few determinants: (1) it is the political affiliation of voters that matters much more for the pro-/anti-EU attitudes than basic socio-demographic factors, among which religiosity is the most important, and to a certain extent also education and income; (2) the economic factors, most of which are positive and as such are subjectively evaluated by Poles, certainly contribute to the positive attitudes towards EU, yet—with the passage of EU membership and consumption of the structural funds they became a “normal” state of the economic reality, while the threats and challenges, especially the ones of national sovereignty, cultural and religious norms and the other elements of the socio-cultural package are considered to be deliberately aimed at dismantling the Polish cultural elements; (3) that is why the religiosity matters most in terms of negative impact on EU attitudes, however the vast majority of the better educated, wealthier, adult parts of population do not consider these threats to be serious. All in all, Poles are very Euroenthusiastic because of a mixture of economic, procedural-logistic (free movement, opportunity to work abroad etc.) and cultural factors (access to education, civilizational innovations and the like).

between the two is being implemented, that is, destabilization of the existing, binding rules in order to achieve predictable results.

As a consequence—and apart from PiS’s skillful manipulative electoral tactics—one has to be able to explain the deeply rooted phenomena determining this support. For this we need to focus on Polish historical–cultural legacies, in particular on the peculiarities of the Polish communist period.

## 1.2 Theoretical Assets and Tentative Explanations

This part of the chapter is mostly speculative, with glances at selected available empirical results.

It should be reiterated that Polish democracy experienced a critical juncture of sorts in the fall of 2015. However, there are two ways in which this juncture can be understood. According to the first of these stories, Poland’s immense developmental success over the last quarter of a century came to an end as the result of a “procedural incident” in which 18.6% of the popular will was translated into a 51% parliamentary majority. The second of these stories focuses on the post-2015 developments themselves, requiring us to explain support for the current incumbent political camp and to explain how the selective demobilization of centrist, liberal-democratic forces came about and continues to persist.

Before I submit a selection of theoretical explanations of the Polish post-2015 case, it is necessary to offer a few caveats. Firstly, social sciences in general—and political science in particular—are rather impatient and insistent on the immediate generation of universal theoretical explanatory paradigms. Yet in most cases—and the Polish case is certainly one of them—this is rarely feasible: for these kinds of broad clarifications to be possible, a period of time much longer than 2 years is needed to track events and observe theoretically relevant developments. Secondly, it should be kept in mind that political science is not particularly good at predicting future trends, as it traditionally—and to a greater extent than the other social sciences—focuses on stability rather than change and because it tacitly values the former over the latter. Thirdly, contemporary debates about democratic decay, challenges to democracy and attendant phenomena are—often with an absence of critical discernment—all placed into the ‘populist basket’. In my view, this category is too broad and is liable to collapse under the weight of all antidemocratic and illiberal phenomena placed into it. Only some of these phenomena are truly indicative of populism. Finally, Polish developments of the last 2 years can only partly be explained by the concept of populism, which clearly manifested itself during the electoral campaign but is only of marginal relevance in the governing and policy implementation phase.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Again, space does not allow to elaborate on the topic of why I consider the “populist basket” to be too overloaded with all kinds of aliberal/ademocratic phenomena, let me just mention the few most important features of the authoritarian clientelism being constructed in Poland. First, unlike in the classical approach to populism, the Polish developments are not indicative of a grass-root new contenders to power, quite to the contrary, the PiS leadership has been on the Polish political arena since the late 1980s, present at the Round Table talks, having for a quarter of a century access to the “spoils” of the democratic system either as an opposition party or a governing one (in 2005–2007). Second, the party does not represent “The People”, neither “The People—what is expected in populist theory—is a homo-

### 1.2.1 Theoretical Legacies and Patterns of Transition in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

It is not the aim of this article to elaborate on the details of the *travelling capacity* problem of transitological theories, at this point let me just emphasize that a revision of the theoretical assumptions of the transformation/consolidation literature is needed.

In what follows, an attempt is being made to answer the question of why the PiS government has embarked on a political action that disregards the basic principles not only of an abstract liberal democracy, but as well on a route that violates very concrete, binding constitutional provisions (for details, see Sadurski in this issue of HJRL). In other words, why would political insiders, representatives and leadership of a well-established party benefiting for the last quarter of a century from access to state resources, democratic security, public sector jobs and relative prestige among part of the population decide to abandon a low-risk political democratic behaviour and embark on a very hazardous strategy of a—de facto—coup against the binding constitution? The rationale behind such a decision is weakly explored by theories of democracy, in particular in the literature on political responsiveness and accountability, as well as in conceiving electoral democracy as a regular a chance for the losers of the electoral game to win next time around following the same rules of the game. Przeworski's (2005) dictum that democracy is an "institutionalized uncertainty" is the crux of the matter. Moreover, democracy allows political conflicts to

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Footnote 5 (continued)

geneous entity; quite the opposite, Polish society has never been so deeply divided as after the 2015 election. Third, the division into two camps is not vertical between the masses and elites, it is clearly horizontal with possible cleavage freeze to come about soon; in both camps present are elites and "their" masses. Fourth, in terms of the democratic institutional infrastructure, the lip service demagogic narrative offered by PiS is aimed at criticizing the—alleged—malfunctioning of the political and judicial institutions, yet they are not substituted by other institutions or erased altogether; in particular not a single serious plan (nor a deed) of solving key political problems via referendum has occurred so far. Instead the existing institutions have been captured by the PiS sinecural entrepreneurs and loyal apparatchiks, a phenomenon coupled with selective, yet widespread nepotism and corruption. The new system in the making is thus much more of an (authoritarian) clientelism than populism proper. Fifth, the "core populist" elements—belief in superiority of 'the people', contempt for the allegedly corrupted elite, disbelief in representative institutions—are present as its' constitutive features, yet mostly during electoral campaigns and/or among smaller, irrelevant parties that are unlikely to form part of governing coalitions. Sixth, the really important new phenomenon that best explains the dominant trait of this clientelism is, what I call, "simplicism"—a wisely constructed narrative offered by the ruling party that the world is simple, that elites might not be corrupted but they unnecessarily complicate the plain relationships that exist in reality. What is needed is a political will of the good new elites able to easily solve these—allegedly complex—problems. Simplicism (operationalized in the Polish National Election Study (PNES) 2015 as agreements with statements: (1) "solving the problems our country faces is very easy; it is simply necessary to give power to those who want to do this"; (2) "everything in politics is either good or evil; the choice is a simple one") correlates highly with the "core of populism" and it unveils much higher linkages than core of populism does with other (to-be-)populist phenomena like authoritarianism, nationalism, conspiracy theories usage, intolerance and disrespect for pluralism as well as conviction about representative institutions' failure. But most importantly, it explains much better the vote choice of PiS supporters than do the remaining attitudinal phenomena mentioned above (for details see Markowski 2018).

be solved in a moderate way and avoids transferring them into uncontrollable political violence that creates victims, imprisonment of enemies and restoring permanently to coercion. To be sure, as I've indicated in the previous parts of the article, this decision can hardly be attributed to an alleged political demand by the people.

Some of the proposals discussed below evidently fall into the category of 'theories', other belong to a well-tested empirical findings, still other are—for the time being—hypothetical speculations. In some cases, discussed below, the key question pertains to the phenomenon of discretion, namely whether a given action, decision or development should be attributed to one of the broad categories of "fate" or "choice". This distinction, so far neglected or overlooked in the literature on transitions and consolidations, should—in my view—be given its proper, important place in the approaches such as the one this chapter is pursuing.

In what follows, I present six approaches that seem plausible as potential explanations of the Polish political developments.

**1.2.1.1 Legacies 1: *Homo Sovieticus* or Creative Response to the Communist Blueprint?** In the case of the Polish real-existing socialism (its important idiosyncrasies have been described elsewhere—see Markowski 2017a), I submit that partial causes of the current democratic decay do not stem directly from the socialist system's blueprint and its allegedly lasting legacy in the form of Polish *Homo Sovieticus*—as many researchers and commentators claim—but rather indirectly from the enduring effects of the Poles' successful subversion of real-socialism through various forms of "adaptive resourcefulness". These adaptations ranged from entrepreneurial activities in the shadow economy, to the construction of social support networks based around close-knit groups of family and friends, to turning to the Catholic Church as an ideological (also political) alternative to the socialist party-state. Polish civil society of the 1970s and 1980s was fairly well organised. Virtually all spheres of societal activity were covered by grass-root, informal institutions of the 'alternative, second' society, 'shadow economy', etc. (Ramet 1991; Staniszkis 1991). Precisely this trait—their lack of formal legitimacy yet strong social foundations—proved to be the source of its viability and para-political power, crucial in times of authoritarian backlashes (i.e. under the martial law).

And still another phenomenon needs to be emphasised. The 16 months of Solidarity's official existence in 1980–1981 marks an unprecedented period for Poland and for communism in general. The experience gained by Solidarity leaders during this period proved important later. It was an experience of a non-violent movement that started off as a classical trade union concerned with job-related and redistributive issues, later forced to become a social movement fighting for civil and political rights that ultimately had to play the role of a national liberation force aimed at dismantling ties to the Soviet Bloc. Two lessons derive from this experience, first of a strong 'path-dependence' of a vibrant movement aimed at changing the social and political life, and second, that 'context' (in this instance geopolitical one) matters in general and for the distinction between 'fate' and 'choice' that actors follow or create.

These experiences and adaptations mentioned before played a part in the breakdown of the old system, yet they simultaneously left, as their legacy, a number of

traits and dispositions uncondusive to high-quality democratic governance: widespread and deep individualism, low trust, low bridging social capital, an almost exclusive focus on the family as a supreme value (combined with indifference to the public realm), and resulting ethical dualism concerning the public versus private spheres—all related to the high trust in Church under communism and the experience of operating in a significant and widespread private sector in the economy.

Selected empirical results have been shown elsewhere (Markowski 2017b), and can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Generally, findings—present also in other countries—indicating that, if anything, high religiosity and catholic denomination are uncondusive, i.e. no positive impact detected, to the level of all three aspects of social capital under scrutiny in our study. The three aspects comprise of: (a) trust in institutional norms and infrastructure; (b) participation in social institutions; (c) axiological bases of social capital—tolerance, deliberation and individualism as values. Moreover, there is clear evidence of the negative impact of religiosity on selected aspects of social capital. And contrary to the frequently articulated expectations, Polish NES 2011 data documents that links to the communist past (operationalized as Communist party membership) seem to be positively related to social capital; of course, after controlling for all usual suspects—education, income, place of residence. In particular there is a clear relationship between party membership and participation in social networks and in cherishing individualistic values (Markowski et al. 2015: pp. 191–212).
- (b) A distinct pattern occurs linking the three values, key constitutive elements of social capital—high levels of tolerance, individualism and deliberativeness—that coincide with low religiosity and vice versa.
- (c) The test of the relationship between trust and religiosity shows a weak (a bit curvilinear), though significant relationship—nonbelievers unveil considerably higher trust than the most numerous group of moderate believers, yet nonbelievers do not differ significantly (in statistical terms) in this respect from devout believers.

Our main interest however is in the linkage between social capital (in this part and Tables 4 and 5 a cumulative index of the three dimensions is taken into account)<sup>6</sup> and political reality—party choice, individuals’ parents family ideological traditions and selected attitudes towards democracy.

Entries of Tables 4 and 5 based on simple analyses indicate that (1) social capital is lowest among the most numerous group of Poles—the non-voters, but also among the electorate of the governing party—PiS; (2) and is clearly negatively related to another dominant group in Polish society—those who claim to be raised in the “national-catholic” traditions at their parental home, as well as

<sup>6</sup> Due to collinearities and other purely statistical problems composed, as a factor score, of—trust, membership in organizations and dogmatism-deliberativeness scale.

**Table 4** Mean scores of the composite index of social capital among Polish electorates 2011 (ANOVA variance analysis). Source: Polish NES 2011

Vote for	Mean	SD	N
1. PO	0.214	0.924	456
2. PIS	0.041	1.257	267
3. RP	0.054	0.687	102
4. PSL	0.272	0.862	88
5. SLD	0.218	0.940	65
6. N-V	-0.204	0.972	703
Total	0.005	1.013	1681

*F* = 12.34, *p* > 0.000, *eta* = .19, *eta-sq* = 0.04

**Table 5** Mean scores of the composite index of social capital among citizens raised under different ideological traditions at parental home. Source: Polish NES 2011

	Mean	SD	N
1. National-catholic	-0.027	1.112	789
2. Socialist/socialdemocratic	0.373	1.116	52
3. Patriotic	0.112	0.989	91
4. Atheist	-0.101	1.728	13
5. Communist	0.240	0.796	36
6. Liberal	0.178	0.667	48
7. Conservative	-0.049	0.628	19
8. Christian-democratic	-0.038	0.883	372
9. Peoples'	0.046	0.558	41
10. Feminist	-0.079	0.140	4
11. Other	0.114	0.910	20
12. Unspecified	0.012	0.820	210
97 DK—hard to say	-0.139	1.169	120
Total	-0.000	0.996	1816

*F* = 1.34; *sign* = 0.19; *eta* = 0.09; *eta-sq* = 0.01

“Christian-democratic” and “conservative”.<sup>7</sup> These groups are linked either directly (the first one) or more loosely (the remaining two) to the Catholic church and are juxtaposed in this respect to those who claim being raised under “social-social-democratic”, “liberal” or “communist” traditions at home.

(d) Finally, general normative evaluation of democracy as an ideal<sup>8</sup> is—as expected—strongly and positively related to the level of social capital. Numerous, more detailed, tests of the link between certain normative expectations towards constitutive elements of democracy, in particular concerning the rule

<sup>7</sup> The other negatively related to high scores of social capital groups are two small (“feminist” and “atheist”) to take their results for granted.

<sup>8</sup> The classical wording “Democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government”.

of law and the role of constitutional tribunals in democracies (another hot potato in Poland today), responsiveness of governments to peoples' preferences as well as securing appropriate levels of inequalities, all indicate a positive relationship between high support for these democratic foundations and higher levels of social capital than in the reverse case.

Another important issue is the link between clientelism and a set of political and socio-demographic features of Poles. Clientelism is conceived here—following Stokes (2007, p. 605)—as “*the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?*” Polish 2011 NES includes a battery of five items concerning clientelism. They range from a simple question regarding (1) citizens' perception of the scope of clientelistic relationships offered by parties in their immediate social milieu or (2) community as a whole, via (3) issues pertinent to the alleged capacity of political parties to monitor citizens' voting behaviour to (4) questions aimed at evaluating parties' ability to punish voters for disloyal electoral behaviour as well as (5) the assessment of the social institutions network's capacity to perform the controlling functions.

The objective of the simple analyses has been to answer the following questions:

1. Do Polish party electorates differ in their exposure to clientelistic phenomena?
2. Do parties' electorates differ in this respect more than major socio-demographic (age, educational etc.) groups? In other words, is the subjectively perceived exposure to clientelism more of a political phenomenon or more of a social one?
3. Are we right to expect this clientelism to be systematically related to particular political-cultural (ideological) traditions, in which individuals were raised during their childhood rather than other traditions?

Overall analyses (data not shown available upon request from the author) permit us to convey the following:

1. The electorate of the governing PiS party shows a significantly higher composite index of clientelism<sup>9</sup> than the remaining four parliamentary parties in the 2011–2015 parliamentary term.<sup>10</sup>
2. A higher composite clientelistic index is detected among the youngest generation (up to 35) and among the poorest quantile of the population. Comparing these two social aggregates to electorates the differences are more pronounced among the former. Yet, if one concentrates on religiousness, education and place of residence, party electorates differ more in their clientelism than social groups distinguished by the latter three criteria. As a result there is no simple answer to

<sup>9</sup> By composite index of clientelism I mean here a simple additive score of the five items concerning clientelism quoted above.

<sup>10</sup> Even when among the latter the peasant/peoples party, PSL is included with as high a clientelistic index as that of PiS.

the broad question—whether political or social aggregation of citizens unveils higher clientelism, yet it is clear that the level of clientelism differs significantly once PiS is juxtaposed vis a vis electorates of other mainstream democratic parties in Poland.

3. Among the political–cultural traditions of parental home, the one that has been our ‘usual suspect’—the “national-catholic one (“narodowo-katolicka”)<sup>11</sup>—indeed shows a very strong relationship with the composite clientelistic score, and is only slightly lower than the most closely related “communist/atheist” tradition (0.21 and 0.24, respectively). By comparison the composite clientelistic index for “liberal”, “patriotic-independent” or “socialist/social-democratic” scores are 0.15, 0.19, 0.19, respectively.

These selected initial analyses of past electoral studies confirms my expectation that a thorough test of the support for the clientelistic authoritarian project in Poland stems not so much from the heritage of communism as from either the deep historical traditions or from recent reactions to the socialist blueprint in the form of distrust towards institutions, negligible participation in social institutions and their axiological foundations in the form of low tolerance, dogmatism and paternalism in social relations. All these traditions are detrimental to high social capital and are at the same time closely linked to the dominant religious legacies and their normative foundations, in particular the almost exclusive concentration on private and family life at the expense of public sphere concerns.

Political clientelism seems also to correlate strongly with social consequences of religious dogmas dominant among those who were raised in nationalist/authoritarian/catholic traditions. This clientelism happens to be distinctly associated with low social capital and is related to partisan attachment, and moreover, seems to be more a politically than socially driven phenomenon.

The current, post-2015 election, developments and the gradual emergence in Poland of a system I tentatively call *authoritarian clientelism*, are thus not a reproduction of the socialist blueprint, but rather an effect of accumulated societal, cultural and institutional reactions to this blueprint; reactions which once so powerfully contributed to socialism’s demise, now are proving harmful to democracy as well.

**1.2.1.2 Legacies 2: Peculiarities of the Transition Itself—the Overlapping of the Three Phases of Transition** At this point, it is necessary to reiterate the importance of Poland’s status as a ‘first-comer’ in the transition, and in consequence the prolonged period of transition to what appeared to be the consolidation of democracy. Analytically, it is useful to distinguish the three distinct phases of this process as described by Samuel Huntington (1991): (1) the ‘mode of the authoritarian exit’; (2) the creation of a particular ‘political institutional infrastructure’; and (3) the development of specific traits of ‘consolidation’. Poland—in contrast to other CEE countries, with

<sup>11</sup> The ‘national-catholic’ is the tradition that is absolutely prevailing among Poles and is indicated by almost 60% of all traditions mentioned as the one that dominated in their parental homes.

the exception of Hungary—saw each of these phases implemented over a prolonged period, and their significant overlapping.

Moreover, the majority of events before, during and after the Round Table negotiations of early 1989 were very fluid and their ultimate consequences unpredictable. When the Round Table commenced on February 6, 1989, the two parties to the negotiation—and representatives of the Catholic Church in their role as mediators—began with agendas and objectives that were substantially different to the ultimate Round Table accord, to say nothing of the final results of the June election and its further consequences. At the beginning of the negotiations, the key elements of the agenda were: (a) re-registration of the “Solidarity” trade union; (b) vague ideas about economic liberalization; (c) media freedoms and freedom of association; (d) worker self-government and self-management; (e) obscure ideas about democratization of the political system that fell short of full democracy.

As the Round Table (hereafter: RT) subcommittees started working, very soon it became clear that the communists were ready to give up much more than that expected and predicted by the opposition, especially in the economic domain. Limited space prevents me from an in-depth analysis of the Round Table procedures; I rather refer to some of the RT interpretations (for more details see Markowski 2006; Elster 1996; Dubinski 1990). Since the certainty that the Soviets would remain neutral to the events going on in Poland was pretty low, RT negotiators had to design a political system that accounted for this fact. And even at the end of the RT talks what was agreed upon could have been called, as many did, a ‘historical compromise’, yet it was certainly an experiment that was supposed to take at least a few years before Poland enjoyed full-blown liberal democracy and a real, unconstrained market economy. Put simply: the contract was fairly vague, very dynamic, its consequences unpredictable and very path-dependent. Numerous examples of unexpected turnabouts happened during RT negotiations. To name just a few: a sudden proposal by the communist side to allow for the creation of a bi-cameral parliament with a Senate elected through a fully free election; L. Walesa’s Civic Committee decision to allow 33 communist politicians running from the so-called “National List” (that did not clear the 50% threshold of support necessary to win a seat) to enter the June post-1989 parliament in order to stick to the main agreement of the Round Table that the Lower House is dominated by the representatives of the *ancient regime*; active support by the same Civic Committee of selected communist candidates in the second round of the Sejm elections, in order to enhance the more reformist political composition of the Lower House and the like.

Yet, the ultimate result of this prolonged period of transition via institution-building to consolidation did create a culture of ‘rules negotiability’, ‘norms flexibility’, the growth of pragmatic instrumentalization of the political domain and—if you will—a mood of ‘temporariness’ of the enacted solutions. Ultimately it seems that the likely simple answer to the question whether *ruptura* or *pactada* is a more promising way out of authoritarianism is complicated by the fact that average citizens need to see a clear ‘critical juncture’, separating the Old from the New. The blurring of such political thresholds seems uncondusive to the ultimate success of democratic consolidation. Both the Polish and Hungarian cases are clear indications of the problem.

All these factors contribute today to the poor level of already moderate—to say the least—public virtues of the Poles.

**1.2.1.3 Culture and Social Disorganization** Almost a century ago William Ogburn (1922) offered us a broad theoretical explanation of the cultural determinants of social disorganization. Briefly and oversimplifying his insightful proposal, the content of his theory suggests there are four universal steps in technological development: (1) invention, (2) accumulation, (3) diffusion, and (4) adjustment. Technological inventions—material culture—are rapid and come first. Non-material culture lags behind; it takes time to catch up with innovations, especially if this happens predominantly via diffusion. Cultural lag is a common societal phenomenon, as material culture is ontologically innovative, whereas non-material culture is resistant to change. Cultural lag theory suggests that a period of maladjustment occurs when the non-material culture is struggling to adapt to new material conditions and that this is typical. The real problem arises however when the lag is too big, in other words, when the adjustment of the non-material culture lags behind too much, the gap becomes too wide and social disorganization results. Periods of maladjustments could be shorter or longer, but are always a threat to smooth social development. Due to the conflicting nature of these two aspects of culture, adaptation of new innovations usually proves rather difficult.

Now, I submit that we can treat the political infrastructure of contemporary liberal democracy as a set of “technological innovations”, invented in the North Western part of the globe and transplanted by way of diffusion to an area of the world where the political culture has only partially been conducive to its smooth implementation. There are numerous examples: Polish semi-presidentialism has typically been misconceived equally by both the elites and by citizens, the “openness” of the proportional (PR) electoral rules are hardly exploited by non-partisan political actors to their benefit, the very essence of the idea of separation of powers is far from being widely supported and the current inability to successfully defend the demolition of the Constitutional Tribunal are only few of the numerous examples of this wider phenomenon.

Briefly, the essence and the logic of the institutional opportunity structure of democracy have evidently failed to become ‘nested’ in the public mind-set and political culture at large. In other words, the mechanical and the psychological effects (Duverger 1954) of institutional design have become temporally detached from one another. Alternatively, and in David Easton’s (1965) parlance, the *diffuse political support* for liberal democracies has obviously not been deeply embedded and still remains contextually determined.

Another, similar yet more economically-based phenomenon has to do with the generosity of EU structural funds. Underdeveloped regions, the poor and the excluded, unsuccessful on the labour market and inhabitants of rural areas in particular have benefited disproportionately from these funds. Very little conditionality and too fast a change of people’s lives occurred without a proper understanding of the mechanisms of how typically affluence has historically been created. These funds have not been utilized for socializing the beneficiaries to the culture of contract, professional responsibility and an entrepreneurial culture of cooperation for

the public benefit. To be sure, the EU funds have positively changed peoples' lives and improved the social environments they live in, nevertheless they have simultaneously contributed to strengthening their beliefs in economic miracles and have allowed irresponsible outbidding (promising even more of such unconditional avalanches of funds) by the political contenders in order to be rewarded in the form of electoral support, which in return strengthens the already widespread clientelistic mechanisms at work.

The above described phenomenon coupled with the cultural foundations of (Polish) Catholicism—its disrespect for empirical proof, disbelief in causality, mistrust in science in general, profound belief in miracles and the like—lie at the heart of the problem of the support for a political camp that is ready to embark on unconstrained, unrealistic socio-economic pledges.

**1.2.1.4 Parties as “Social Coalitions” (Bawn et al. 2012)** An ontological approach to political parties identifies them in a number of ways, from the classical Rokkanian proposal of treating them as outbursts of social conflicts and divisions that (due to the talented political agency of party entrepreneurs) materialize in stable organizational structures to classical office-seeking institutions in the hands of professional politicians. The idea that parties are organizations widely and deeply rooted in relationships with the socio-economic environment they happen to operate in has been—if not totally overlooked—certainly neglected. From their nascent period of separation, be it from trade unions, churches or parishes, to the subsequent phases of organizational development from mass and cadre and other forms. In a nutshell, additionally, parties ought to be treated as extended networks that include not only politicians as office-seekers and their apparatus, but also should include financial sponsors of different pedigree, organized interests, professional associations, media outlets and other groups of organized citizens.<sup>12</sup>

As a results of such an approach, the current Polish developments can be defined as—known from the past—another conservative revolt against modernity, in which the Catholic Church happens to be the main social coalition partner. Current Polish politics cannot be described properly and explained without accounting for the role of the Catholic Church, which influences it indirectly and directly, from their profound impact on the educational system via direct assistance during voting to blackmailing particular MPs.<sup>13</sup> In the last quarter of a century the prestige of the Polish Catholic Church has declined significantly, Sunday church attendance has dropped from very high in the early 1980s by about 20 percentage points, down to below 37% in 2017 (official statistics of the Catholic Church); similar to other more subjective indicators of secular upsurge. Briefly, traditional and religious values are in decline. In contemporary Poland we witness a phenomenon present in other settings

<sup>12</sup> I owe this point to Professor Hubert Tworzecki.

<sup>13</sup> The examples of direct and indirect, personal and collective blackmailing with for instance excommunication of those MPs who are supporting *in vitro* fertilization procedure is only a single one out of numerous such examples in the history of democracy since 1989 (see: Polish Press Agency on the topic <https://www.deon.pl/wiadomosci/polska/art,5168,gras-kosciol-tylko-straszy-i-szantazuje.html>).

in which the hitherto majority envisages that soon it will become a minority, which creates a sort of “revolting neurosis” against the to date binding rules of the game. As a consequence, the current governing party PiS has decided to embark on an assault against the constitutional order. This leads us to the main question.

**1.2.1.5 Why Revolt Against Democratic Principles? Is it Fate or Choice?** Why would part of a well-established political elite take such a risky course of action? The PiS party has long been benefiting from access to state and public sector jobs and other resources in a system that had already witnessed several electoral changes of power. Why would they abandon the relatively safe political functioning under democracy for an extremely risky strategy of a constitutional coup? The answer is complicated and multi-layered, yet could be summarized as follows.

Personalized loyalty to a leader is a well-known political phenomenon, more prominent and common however in an authoritarian rather than a democratic setting. In communist underground activity such personalized relationships based on interpersonal trust and loyalty had been the most typical binding relationships. It had however a clear spillover effect on the early post-communist political culture and in some instances—as PiS party and its leader witness—at times pretty durable. These legacies are accompanied by a lack of public transparency and malfunctioning of institutions as designed by law and regulations. Instead key political decisions are taken in closely trusted circles, hidden from public supervision.

In more detail, the subjective device behind this is the autocratically run party and its internal mechanism which turn individually rational behaviour of the within-party competition and the hierarchical advancement in its’ structures into a collectively irrational trail of radicalization. Ultimately, it leads to a transfer of the radical authoritarian mechanism from the internal party mechanism to state and governmental policies (Hardin 1968; Huntington 1991).

On the other hand—as described at the beginning—the barely 19% of eligible votes attracted during the 2015 election and its “incidental” translation into 51% of parliamentary seats, indicated that the party might never again be in a position to form a single-party government. Consequently, the decision—as it seems—has been made to start manipulating the rules of the game. So far changes have been introduced to the fall 2018 local elections’ electoral rules, and changes are envisaged to the electoral rules to the European Parliament violating the proportionality principle, both clearly favouring PiS. Moreover, a law limiting the autonomy and independence of the members of the Electoral Commission has been adopted.<sup>14</sup>

Taken all of the above together, one still remains puzzled whether the deeds and policies of PiS fall into the category of choice or fate?

**1.2.1.6 Winners and Losers** More than a decade ago we were attracted by a new interpretation of the interaction between winners and losers in democracies offered by Anderson et al. (2005). Its convincing argument that democracies are working

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-europe-andrzej-duda-vetoes-change-brussels-parliament-voting-rules/> or <https://www.ft.com/content/f3e1a81a-e19c-11e7-8f9f-de1c2175f5ce>.

because of “losers’ consent”, can be traced also in the new democracies of the CEE region, Poland in particular. Specifically the idea that the losers of the electoral game are unaware that they are de facto in a majority and the reason why they cannot turn this fact into a majoritarian force is due to their higher heterogeneity (than that of the winners) and consequently their inability to mobilize themselves around a single programmatic appeal. I submit however that there are other equally powerful mechanisms that might allow them to win elections.

Losers of the transformation differ from the winners in two fundamental ways: (a) they perceive their lot typically as a collective fate and not an individually-driven one, and (b) they attribute (they blame) this lot on ‘external’ forces, not themselves. The reverse is—most of the time—true for winners: they consider their success to be a result of their own activities and they are convinced that their (what Rotter calls) ‘internal locus of control’ is at work. As a corollary losers face a situation that is intellectually easier and behaviourally more conducive to mobilization by political entrepreneurs. Since their lot is perceived as collective, and once a talented political force decides to attract them, alongside the fact that there is someone out there to be blamed for it (and moreover there are potent institutions—church, trade unions, media—keen to support this interpretation) their readiness to mobilize and self-organize themselves increases and is understandable from a psychological point of view. In the Polish 2015 elections this did not contribute to the landslide change, yet it certainly helped the winning party enlarge its electoral support by 2–3%, which turned out to be enough to form a single-party parliamentary majority.

## 2 Conclusions

This article is mostly, though not exclusively, a theoretical-speculative one. What is ahead are reliable empirical tests of the ideas presented above. Nevertheless few cautious generalizations can be offered:

First, the Polish case—unlike its’ Hungarian counterpart where a clear majority of the population supports either nationalist or clearly xenophobic political options manifested, respectively, by the governing Fidesz or the oppositional Jobbik parties—shows that electoral accidents happen and that an evident minority of barely 1/5 of the eligible electorate can grant a majoritarian parliamentary position to a single party. In other words, in Poland the PiS government and its’ subsequent anti-liberal, clientelistic, anti-constitutional changes introduced have not resulted from a ‘demand’ of Poles, rather the dire developments indicate a clear ‘supply’, ideologically-driven conversions that are being installed from above.

Second, backsliding into authoritarianism in the CEE region, in Poland in particular, is typically mistakenly interpreted as a manifestation of the vitality of the *Homo Sovieticus* deeply entrenched in their citizens. The Polish case and the data available shows that the sources of the current democratic decay is rather to be found either in its’ cultural religious legacies of the pre-communist past or in its’ “adaptive resourcefulness” under real existing socialism and not in the socialist blueprint itself. In Poland, a particularly important political role is played by the Catholic Church, which is the foundation for treating PiS party as a social-coalition

based party. Moreover, *cultural lag theory* directs our attention to the challenges effective familiarization with the new politico-institutional inventions (democratic infrastructure) faces and short-term inability of the newly democratized citizens to fully adapt to their opportunities and constraints.

Third, low social capital of Poles plays a significant role in the current democratic malfunctioning and allows for clientelistic mechanism to thrive.

Forth, the mode of exit from authoritarianism matters. The classical assumption that the “pacted” transitions are more likely to be conducive to successful consolidation of democracy might overlook however that the lack of a clear “critical juncture” that separates the *ancient regime* from the new one causes confusion among the population as to the rules of the new game, creates a mood of temporariness, rules flexibility and consequently instrumentalization of politics that easily translates into volatility of institutions and disrespect for constitutional norms.

Fifth, the main question of whether the de facto coup against the constitutional order in the post-2015 period in Polish political history is to be treated ontologically more as a result of “a fate or a choice” at this point remains unanswered, due to both, on the one hand contradictory developments and their likely causes, and on the other, due to—so far—limited reliable empirical data.

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