







# Weekly Briefing

**Poland Social briefing:  
Social Changes in 2018  
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## China-CEE Institute

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The ongoing political changes in Poland brought the issue of social approaches to the democracy, freedom of speech or free elections. This month CBOS presented its report on the citizens understanding of democracy. The core questions discussed by the Polish public opinion was related the good and bad sides of democracy, approval for democracy as the best political system, relations between nondemocratic and democratic systems, and satisfaction with the current political system in Poland.

In the above discussed context democracy is understood narrowly as the citizens' choice of their political representation. Moreover the democracy is defined as the certain values, norms and principles defining the way the state functions, as well as the conditions of social activity are attributed to it. In this short introduction the

The first assumption discussed by the Polish society is the statement that democracy has an advantage over other forms of government, seven out of ten Poles now agree (71%), while on the contrary one is sixth (17%). Since 1992 majority of the Polish society agreed that democracy is a good form of the government (between 50% in 1992 and 75% in 2008) (see annex graph no 1). What should be noted the approval for democracy as the best political solution is more often expressed by respondents with right-wing and center-minded rather than left-wing views. Taking into account the potential electorates of the largest political groups, it can be said that the most pro-democratic ones are supporters of Nowoczesna and Kukiz'15. The electorate of the current governments (United Right Parties) considers democracy as a good form of the government only by 77%. But what should be noted 15% of the electorate of the Civic Platform considers other form of the government as better form for Poland. The biggest rate of skepticism about democracy is most pronounced among those who do not intend to vote in the parliamentary elections (see table no 1).

On the other hand Polish society see the importance of nondemocratic form of government needed. From 1992 to 2007 more Poles considered

nondemocratic form of government needed for the country. In 2007 more Polish citizens started to perceive democratic government as having advantaged over other form of governments. This situation changed in 2010, but since 2011 onwards Poles perceives democracy as having more advantages. The number of people supported democracy grew after the Law and Justice took power in 2015 (see graph no 2).

The most critical of non-democratic rule are respondents from 35 to 44 years old, with better education background, with higher salary, satisfied with their own financial situation and identifying themselves with the left parties. Undemocratic solutions arouse slightly more approval among persons identifying with the right wing than those with leftist or centrist views. In the electorates of the parties, undemocratic practices are allowed by the supporters of the Kukiz'15 movement, while the potential voters of Nowoczesna and Civic Platform are against his practices.

The superiority of authoritarian governments over democratic is indicated by the youngest respondents, who have basic, middle or basic vocational education, from households with low, and especially lowest per capita incomes, assess their own material situation as average and identify with the right. The opposite position is favored above all by higher education, high economic status, lack of commitment to religious practices and left-wing political orientation. Taking into account party preferences, it can be said that the majority of the Law and Justice supporters are the most superior of governments based on strong leadership over democratic practices and principles, while the electorate of Nowoczesna and Civic Platform are against it. But still what should be notice more supporters of the Law and Justice still believe in democratic principles (48%), while 37% prefer the strong leadership over democracy (see table no 2).

Moreover after the Law and Justice formed government in 2015 more and more Poles have considered themselves as democrats. In 2015 40% called themselves as democrats as well as no democrats. Since 2015 onwards the percentage of considering themselves as democrats grew to 50%, while

considering themselves as non democrats dropped down to 31% (see graph no 3). But contrary to this survey the functioning of democracy in Poland was negatively assessed by more than half of the respondents (52%, an increase of 7 percentage points), and positively - two fifths (40%, a decrease by 5 points) (see graph no 4).

The oldest respondents, rural residents, with junior or basic education, with lower incomes per capita and those participating in religious practices (like Sunday service) have perceived positive assessments of the functioning of democracy in Poland. The highest rate of dissatisfaction is characterized by the inhabitants of the largest cities, the best-educated respondents, receiving the highest per capita income, and not involved in religious practices or participating in them only a few times a year.

Although people in bigger cities present their dissatisfaction in the state of democracy in Poland at least seven in ten Poles consider the responsibility of the state for the economic life of the country as important for democracy. Majority of respondents consider also the independent courts that control government actions, open activities in public life, regular public consultations as the important part of democracy. According to two-thirds of respondents, political pluralism, that is, the possibility of choosing between different political groups, and the rule of law, are of fundamental importance to democracy. Moreover democracy is seen as decentralization of power, that is translated into the transfer of the central government to self-governments and social organization, and minimization of state intervention in the lives of citizens and protection of minority rights. But apart from the political rights, as discussed above, more than 50% of Poles consider the role of the government in limiting economic inequalities as the key issue.

The next issue is the willingness to participate in elections. Between 1995 and 2017 the willingness to participate in the elections was declared from 40% to 70% of Poles, while that they would not participate in a hypothetical vote from 10% to 40%. The lowest value of potential participation in elections (41%)

was registered in July 2004. This marked the only moment when the unwillingness to vote (42%) prevailed over declarations of participation in it. In turn, the highest willingness to participate in the elections was observed in June 2010 (72%) and May 2015 (71%). In both cases it was related to the presidential election.

The important trend is observed after 2014. In 2015 (the year of presidential and parliamentary elections), the average value of the willingness for taking part in the elections reached the highest level from 1997 (64%), and in 2016 it exceeded and was grew to 67%. Preliminary data from 2017 indicate that this trend may continue (the average value from surveys conducted from January to July was 68%) (see graph no 5).

Political views also significantly influence political participation. Understandably, respondents who have defined political beliefs more often declare their willingness to participate in elections. In the first seven months of 2017, more than four-fifths (83%) of right wing supporters said they would vote. The same declarations were made by three-quarters of the respondents with left-wing views (75%), two-thirds of respondents identifying themselves with the political center (65%). We observed a slightly different situation only in the years 1999-2001, when respondents with left-wing views most often declared willingness to participate in elections. It is worth recalling that it was also the period of the left's advantage. The result of this mobilization was Aleksander Kwasniewski's victory in the presidential election in 2000 and the Democratic Left Alliance-Worker Union coalition in the parliamentary elections in September 2001.

Apart from the issue of participation in elections, majority of Poles critical opinions about the majority of political parties in our country. 91% believe that political parties cause quarrels and confusions. Furthermore, the respondents support the thesis that the parties are essentially cliques of politicians whose only goal is to gain power (87%). Two-thirds of respondents (66%) agree with the statement that the goals of most parties are not clear and it is not really clear

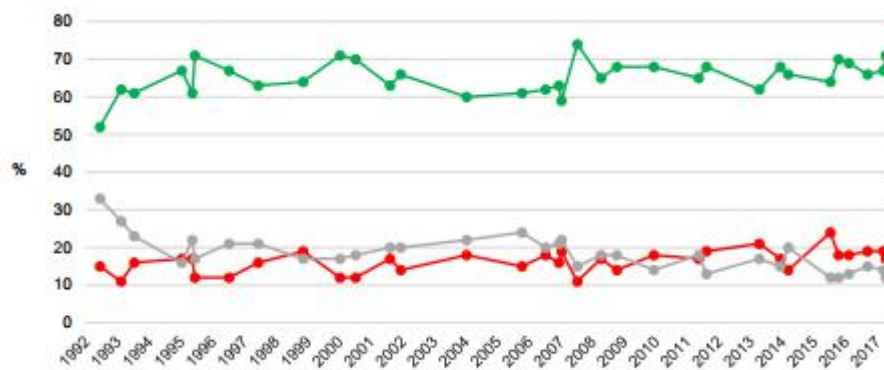
what they mean. At the same time, more often, but mostly, Poles share positive opinions - they believe that political parties collect postulates and demands of voters (55%) and that they propose solutions to important problems of the country (54%). The opposite opinion on these issues is given by 33% and 37% respectively. The vast majority of respondents (64%) do not agree with the statement that parties try to deal with ordinary people, only 28% accept this opinion. In fact 66% do not know what the political parties are talking about.

### **Conclusions**

The discussed subject is important to the extent that the latest changes in the Law and Justice government: new Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, new Minister of Foreign Affairs Jacek Czaputowicz or new Minister of Defences Mateusz Blaszczak were driven by the public opinion shift. The right wing electorate, however, has the highest percentage of willingness for voting. Contrary the center parties electorate has the lowest rate. It implies that in the upcoming parliamentary elections the Law and Justice party is expected to win for the second time. What should be noticed that young people see the non-democratic form of government superior to the democratic government. Since 2015 more and more Poles declared as democrats, and more and more hope to take part in the upcoming elections. On the other hand the government need "to be close to the people" because the further regular public consultations are seen as the important part of democracy. This might open the next round of discussion over the concept of consultative democracy in Poland.

## Annex

**Graph no 1. Do you agree that democracy is good form of the government**

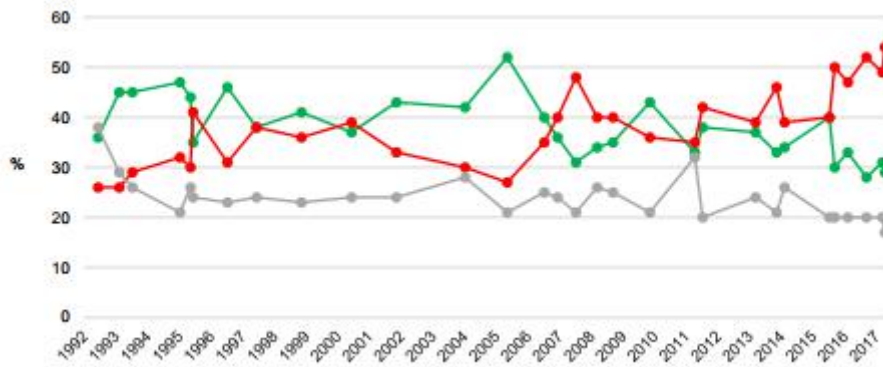


**Green line-YES, red line-No, grey line-hard to say**

**Table no 1. Do you agree that democracy has advantages over other form of governments**

Electorate of political parties	Do you agree that democracy has advantages over other form of governments (in %)		
	I agree	I do not agree	Hard to say
Nowoczesna	86	12	2
Kukiz 15	86	11	2
Civic Platform	81	15	4
Law and Justice	77	11	12
Undecided whether to take part in elections	67		
Not intended to vote	48	27	24

**Graph no 2. Do you agree that nondemocratic government is more needed than the democratic government?**

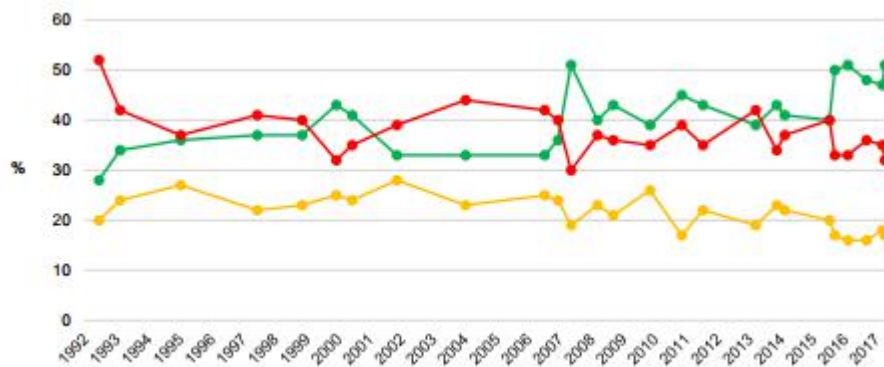


**Green line-I agree, red line- I don't agree, grey line-hard to say**

**Tabel no 2. Do you agree with the statement: the government based on the strong leadership are better than on democratic principles**

Electorate of political parties	Do you agree with the statement: the government based on the strong leadership are better than on democratic principles		
	I agree	I do not agree	Hard to say
Law and Justice	37	48	16
Kukiz 15	24	76	0
Civic Platform	14	80	7
Nowoczesna	0	95	5
Undecided whether to take part in elections	67		
Not intended to vote	48	27	24

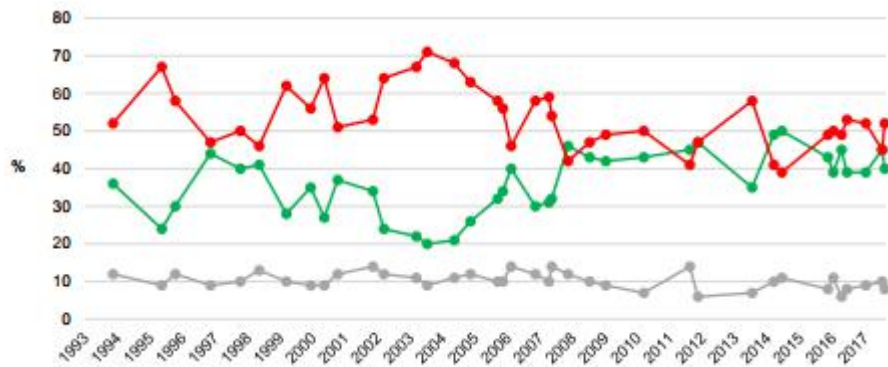
**Graph no 3. Are you democrat?**



**Green line –YES, Red Line- NO, yellow line – neither democrat, nor not democrat**

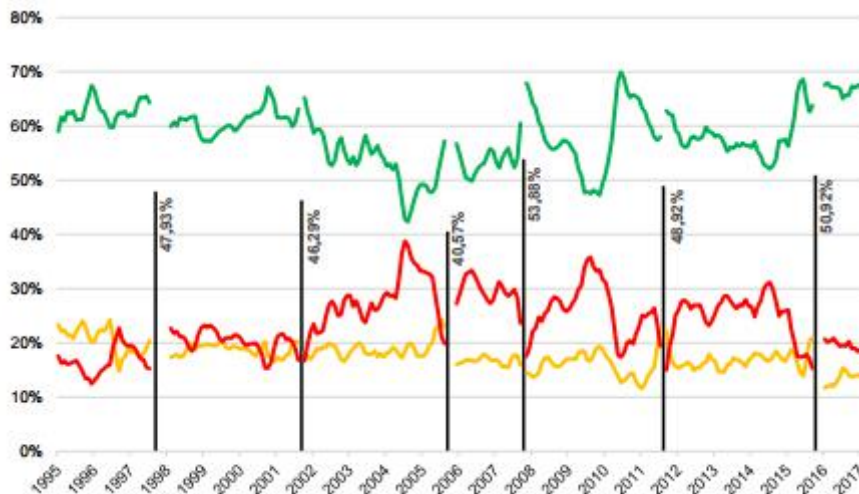


**Graph no 4. Are you satisfied with democracy in Poland?**



**Green line –YES, Red Line- NO, grey line – hard to say**

**Graph no 5. Would you like to take part in the elections?**



Green line: for sure yes, red line: no, yellow line: I do not know yet, black line real participation rate in elections