

SOCIAL DIAGNOSIS 2013

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN POLAND

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WARUNKI I JAKOŚĆ ŻYCIA POLAKÓW

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6.5. Political activity and identification

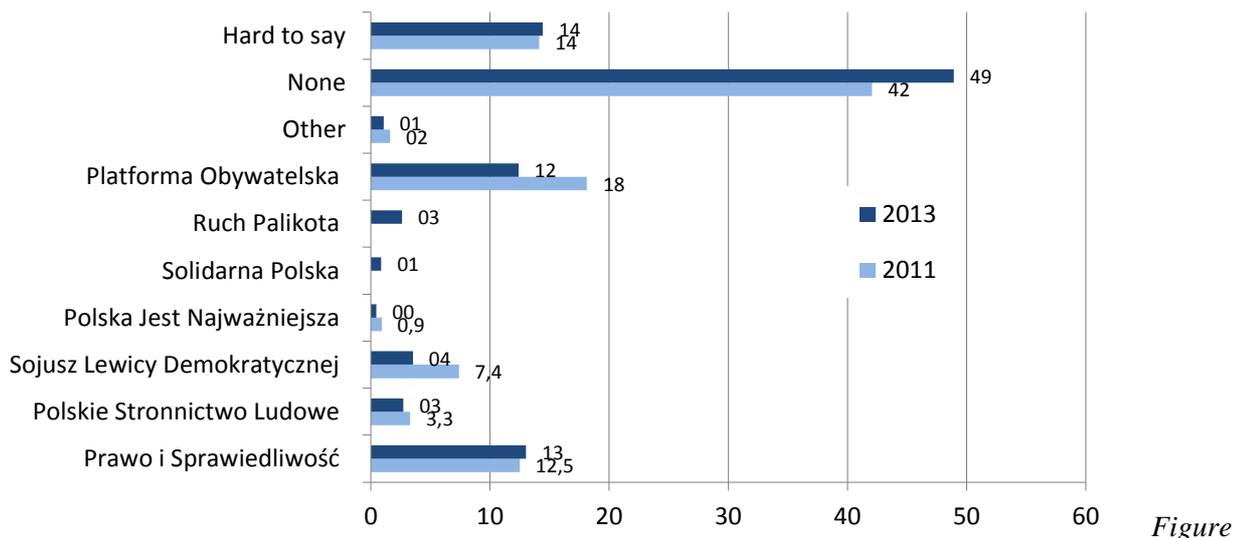
Janusz Czapiński

In the *European Social Survey* 2010, the Poles ranked below the European average in terms Political interest and involvement. Our results concerning electoral participation, be it parliamentary, local government or presidential, were even worse. Even in the case of the turnout for the European Parliament elections in 2009, we ranked third to last position despite being among the greatest EU enthusiasts and trusting the European Parliament as the institution almost twice as much as the Polish national parliament as results from this year's edition of *Social Diagnosis* (see chapter 9.1) indicate. Even if we leave out the countries where participation in elections is a statutory obligatory (such as Belgium and Luxembourg), the political activity of Polish people and – in general – their civil activity (as shown by the indices of social capital) is still very low. In this respect, we are much more similar to the countries that also experienced real socialism than those from the north-west Europe, and Scandinavian countries in particular.

Declared involvement in elections is of course considerably higher. In the *European Social Survey*, like in the subsequent editions of *Social Diagnosis*, the difference between the declared and the actual participation in elections (this most important expression of civil existence) amounts to 20 pp. In the 2011 edition of *Social Diagnosis*, more than 66 per cent of respondents declared that they had taken part in the 2010 local government elections, while the data from the National Electoral Commission indicate the turnout at 47.3 per cent. In this year's edition 64.6% claimed they voted in the parliamentary elections of 2011, while the real voting frequency was 48.92% of those entitled to vote.

Only 0.3% of 16 year olds and over stated they were they were active on behalf of a political party, though it is worth noting that only 10% of Poles declared activity for any kind of organisation whatsoever.

Just like two years ago, in this year's edition of *Social Diagnosis* we asked respondents to indicate the political party with which they identify the most (Annex 1, individual questionnaire, Question 98). The distribution of answers is shown in fig. 6.5.1 and may be treated as an indicator of political identification. They show that more than half of Poles aged 16+ cannot find (49.2%), or have trouble finding (14.3 per cent), a political representative for their beliefs or interests. This means that more than a half have no political identity. Among these who in March and April indicated their representatives, 33.8% per cent identified with the Civic Platform (PO), 35.5% Law and Justice (PiS), 7.4% the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), 7.4% with the Polish Peasant's Party (PSL), 7.1% with Ruch Palikota, 2.4% Solidarna Polska, 1.2% with Poland Comes First (PjN) and 2.9% (table 6.5.1). Compared to 2011, a lot has happened to the structure of support, as the Civic Platform and SLD have shown marked losses⁸⁷, PiS has gained⁸⁸ and PSL has remained at the same level.

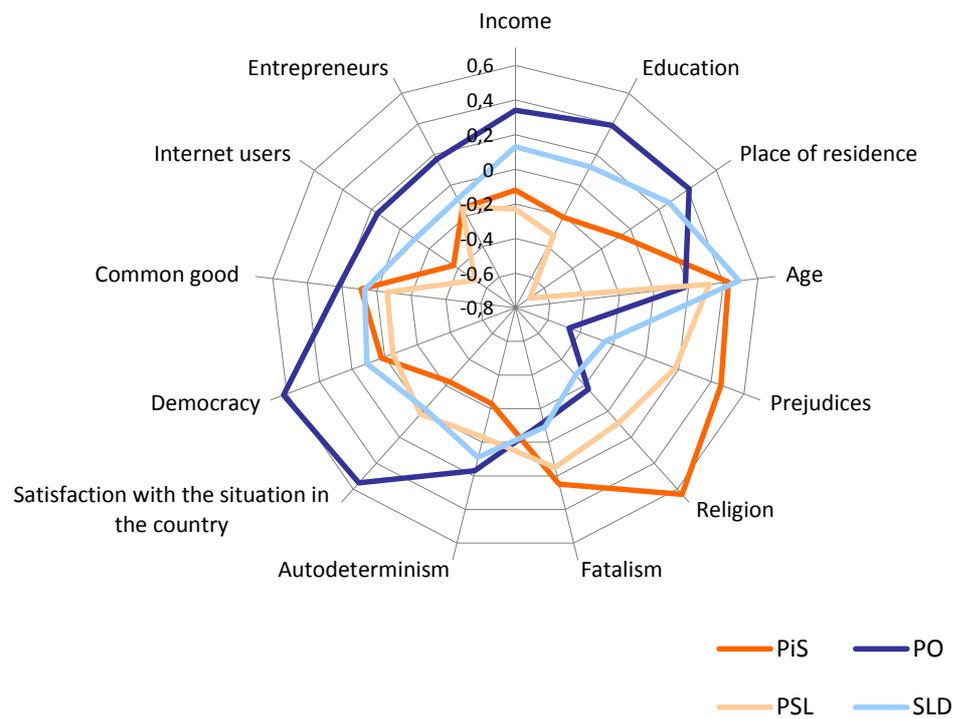


6.5.1. Percentage distribution of answers to "Which party do you feel closest to?" in 2011 and 2013. (no PjN and RP in the choice of answers in 2011)

⁸⁷ A great part of then SLD supporters voted for Ruch Palikota in the parliamentary elections and today's level of SLD support has yet to recover fully, though it is greater than its election result.

⁸⁸ This is a relative gain resulting from the marked 7 p.p. fall in Poles who declared identification with any party.

2013



2011

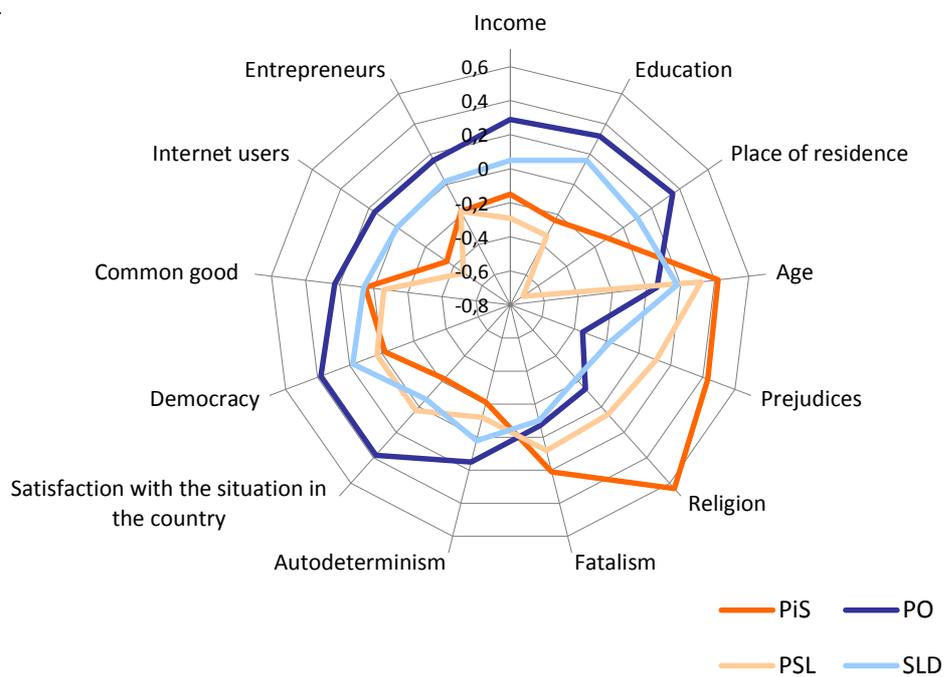


Figure 6.5.2. Age, level of education, personal income, place of residence class, entrepreneurship, percent of internet users, positive attitude to democracy, sensitivity to the common good, autodeterminism and fatalism⁸⁹, religiousness (frequency of religious practice and indication of God as a condition of a successful

⁸⁹ Autodeterminism is the ascribing of last year's course of events to one's own agency, and fatalism is the belief that the course of matters depended on fate (provenance).

life), satisfaction with the situation in the country, level of prejudice against homosexuality and foreigners among supporters of the four main parties (standardised values) in 2011 and 2013

Political identification or its lack depends on socio-demographic features and life situation. Some of the most important determining features are age, level of education and personal income level.

The relation between the age and identification with PiS, PSL and SLD is visibly linear (the older the age group, the more often these parties are indicated), similarly to that between age and identification with an other party or the lack of such identification, which is reversely linear (the older the age group, the lower the percentage of answers). However, there is no clear dependency between age and identification with PO, although there is a considerable difference between the two groups at the opposite extremes (in the oldest age group, 21% indicated this party and in the youngest less than 13%). Only in the 25-44 age group were there more PO voters than PiS.

In the case of educational level, the dependency pattern is similar with some exceptions. Identification with PiS and PSL decreases, while identification with PO and SLD increases with level of education. The higher the education, the less difficult it is for respondents to indicate political identification.

The smaller the place of residence, the smaller the percentage of PO supporters and the supporters of "other parties", and the higher the percentage of PiS and PSL supporters, as well as of persons who do not identify with any party or cannot decide which one to choose.

Political involvement in a democracy is strongly connected with the attitudes towards democracy. Only the supporters of PO have unambiguously positive attitude towards democracy. The supporters of all other parties and the persons without political identification perceive the democratic system more sceptically or even negatively.

The characteristics of the supporters of four main political parties in terms of the socio-demographic variables (age, level of education, place of residence size and personal income level), selected indices of value system (religious belief, respect for the common good, acceptance of democracy), social attitudes (the level of prejudice towards homosexuals and foreigners), entrepreneurship and attitude to control over own life (self-determinism v. fatalism) generally indicate two large groups that differ significantly and two smaller subgroups (fig. 6.5.2). Those two large groups are the supporters of PO and PiS. The supporters of SLD in many ways are similar to the supporters of PO and PiS supporters are characterised by many features shared with PiS supporters. This was the case in 2011 as it is this year. The only difference concerns PO and SLD voters, as the average age of SLD voters increased from 48 to 55, which is 4 to 6 times more than for the voters of the remaining parties. Current PO supporters are even more pro-democratic and satisfied with the country's situation than they were in 2011 (Table 6.5.2).

Table 6.5.1. Percentage of respondents accepting various explanations for the Smoleńsk disaster by political identification

Political identification	Most likely cause of the Smoleńsk disaster					
	Pilot/air traffic control error	Assassination /plot against the president	Pressure on the pilots	General poor organisation	Other reason	Difficult to say
PiS	12.0	48.9	10.7	29.5	4.1	18.8
PSL	21.1	17.1	27.8	30.9	4.4	21.6
SLD	37.5	7.3	41.1	27.9	4.0	17.4
PJN	33.1	24.6	13.6	28.0	9.3	18.6
Solidarna Polska	14.7	28.0	15.6	46.2	8.0	22.2
Ruch Palikota	27.2	17.8	34.1	23.1	5.6	18.8
PO	45.0	4.5	43.1	24.7	4.7	16.4
Other party	22.3	18.3	23.3	36.6	14.0	22.9
No party	17.7	13.1	23.1	26.1	5.3	35.1
Difficult to say	15.5	11.5	20.8	22.5	4.1	45.6
General	21.1	16.7	24.6	26.2	5.0	30.5

A specific test of the correspondence between a party's message and its supporters' beliefs is the distribution of the opinions on the causes of the Smoleńsk catastrophe among the groups of different political identification. The belief that the catastrophe was a conspiracy to assassinate the President of the Republic of

Poland can be treated as the most conclusive. The PiS leaders have more or less openly propagated this theory, while that of other political parties supported less “conspiracy-like” causes. The distribution of the respondents’ answers on the most probable cause of the Smoleńsk catastrophe broken down by political identifications is presented in table 6.5.1. Indeed, the highest support for the conspiracy theory is the PiS supporter group. However, what may be a surprise is that even in this group, only half accept the conspiracy theory (in 2011 there was even less at 39%) despite the fact that two different causes could be indicated.

Belief in the conspiracy theory of the Smolensk air disaster is currently slightly more widespread than two years ago, though the disorientated that could not indicate any cause also increased in number.

Table 6.5.2. Percentage of respondents accepting various explanations for the Smoleńsk disaster in 2011 and 2013 in panel samples

Causes of disaster	Year of study	
	2013	2011
Pilot/air traffic control error	20.4	21.7
Assassination/plot against the Polish President	16.4	12.3
Pressure on pilots to land regardless of the conditions	25.4	36.0
General poor organisation	26.9	32.2
Other reasons	4.9	6.1
Hard to say	29.7	25.5