

Poland



Facts & Figures

Population

38.2m

Political system

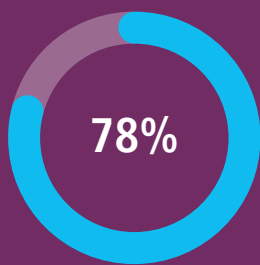
**Unitary
parliamentary
republic**

Varieties of Democracy
regime type

**Electoral
democracy**

Varieties of Democracy
Liberal Democracy Index
ranking (2021)

80



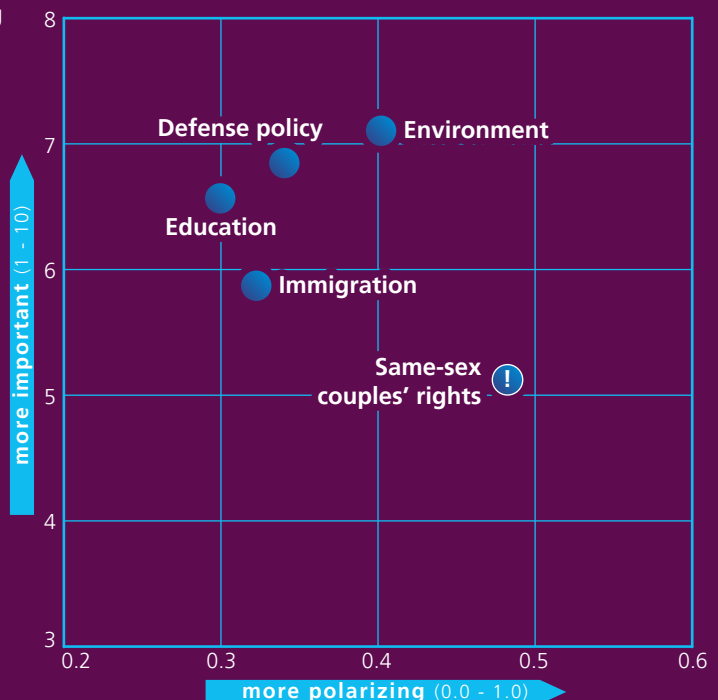
Democratic competence of Polish respondents

Percentage of respondents who on average rate the four democratic items as more democratic than the ten undemocratic items in our survey

Which issues let politicians get away with undemocratic behavior?

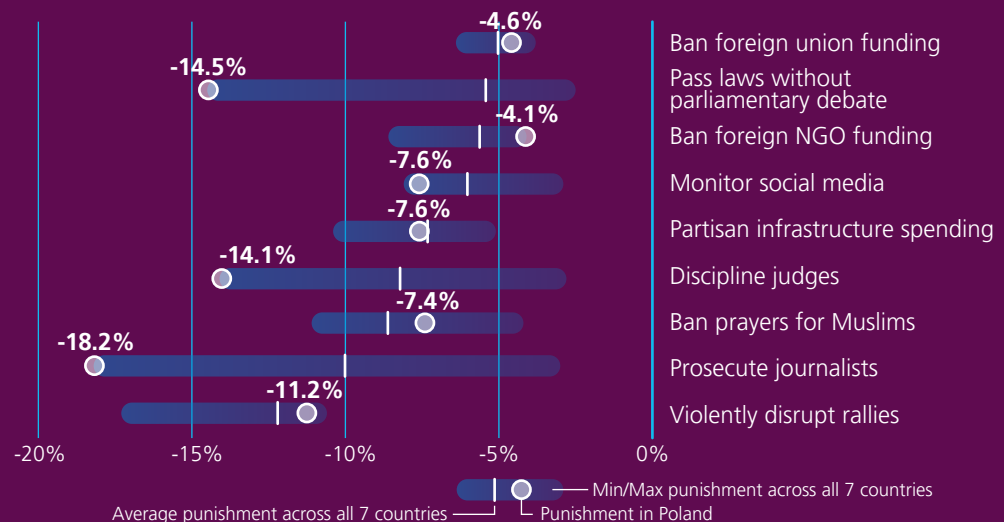
Issues displayed according to their importance to voters and degree of polarization

! Issues for which voters forgive undemocratic behavior



How much are key elements of liberal democracy valued?

The higher the vote loss for an undemocratic policy proposed by a political candidate, the more a certain democratic element is valued.



Polish parties presented in the survey



English name	Law and Justice	Civic Platform	Poland 2050	Confederation	The Left
Polish name	<i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)</i>	<i>Platforma Obywatelska (PO)</i>	<i>Polska 2050</i>	<i>Konfederacja</i>	<i>Lewica</i>
European affiliation	ECR	EPP	ALDE	ID	S&D
Currently governing					

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

On average, Polish respondents have a very good understanding of what democracy is and show a fairly high support for democracy; yet, there are some surprising findings when we have a closer look.

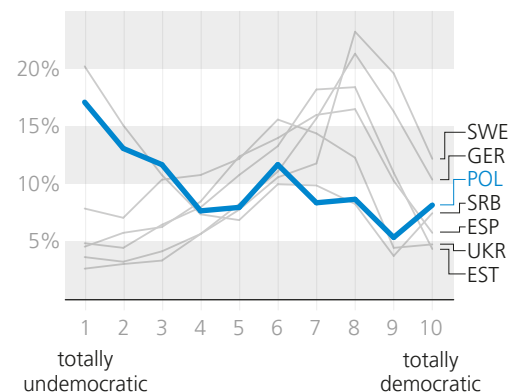
89.2% of Poles “agree” or “strongly agree” that “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.” This means that Poles are certainly less convinced of democracy than Germans, Swedes and Spaniards. Moreover, 42.7% of Poles rate the statement “Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections” as “very bad” and 32.2% still rate it as “fairly bad.”

A clear majority of Poles (45.6%) find it “rather good” to have “experts, not the government, make decisions for the country.” On the one hand, as is the case in other countries, the pandemic experience may have normalized the idea of being governed by experts among the Polish population, rather than by an elected government. On the other hand, this could be interpreted as a lack of confidence in the political elite, as Poles are the second most unsatisfied with democracy in their own country – only the Serbs are more unsatisfied. It is also noteworthy that a majority of Poles think that their country is not being governed democratically at all, with 41.8% giving it a rating between 1 to 3²³ on a scale from 1 to 10. And 44.8% of the people are “not satisfied” or “not at all satisfied” with the way democracy works in Poland.

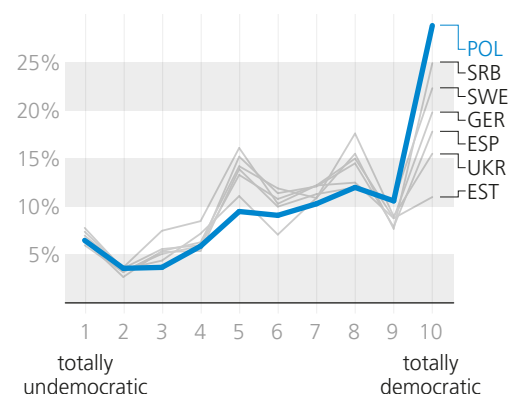
Compared to the other countries under investigation, Poles do trust their high court a lot (only Germans are more trusting), viewing the statement “The country’s high court ruled that a government policy was unconstitutional” as more democratic than other citizens do. This finding is remarkable, particularly in light of the recent politicization of courts in Poland.²⁴

Moreover, more Poles than respondents in all other countries (26.4%) rate journalists who frequently disagree with the president’s policies as completely democratic. Additionally, Poles are the most sympathetic to the democratic practice of the opposition organising protests against the government, with almost 28.8% of Poles giving it the highest rating on the 1-10 scale.

“How democratically is your country being governed today?”



“How democratic do you find the practice of opposition parties organizing protests against the government?”



²³ 1 (meaning “not at all democratic”) was chosen by 17.07%, a rating of 2 by 13.08% and a rating of 3 by 11.65% of all the people asked.

²⁴ Giving it a rating between 1 and 3 on the scale from 1 to 10.

The most concerning finding is that more than 33.3% of Poles regard it as rather or completely democratic²⁵ if the military removed a corrupt president. This is the highest support among all countries under investigation.

Also, more than 40% of Poles find it “not at all democratic” to pass a law in parliament without debate. This percentage is only surpassed by the Serbs. And Polish respondents hold the same very critical view when rating the practice of staffing the country’s judiciary with judges loyal to the governing party: almost 40% of Poles rate this scenario with a 1 (on the scale from 1 to 10), which is in fact more than in Germany or even Sweden.

It is also noteworthy that far more Poles than any of the other countries’ citizens find it “not at all democratic” if the “government banned civil society organizations that receive funds from abroad from operating inside the country”: over 35.6% of the Polish people chose this rating compared to just over 20% in Germany or just over 25% in Sweden. Poles are also significantly more critical if the “country’s security agencies collect data on their citizens’ internet activity”: Over 33% of the Polish survey responders rated this practice with a 1, a percentage that is only exceeded by the Serbs (40.4%), while Germans, Spaniards or Estonians scored significantly lower (with around 25%).

WHAT KIND OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR DO POLES PUNISH?

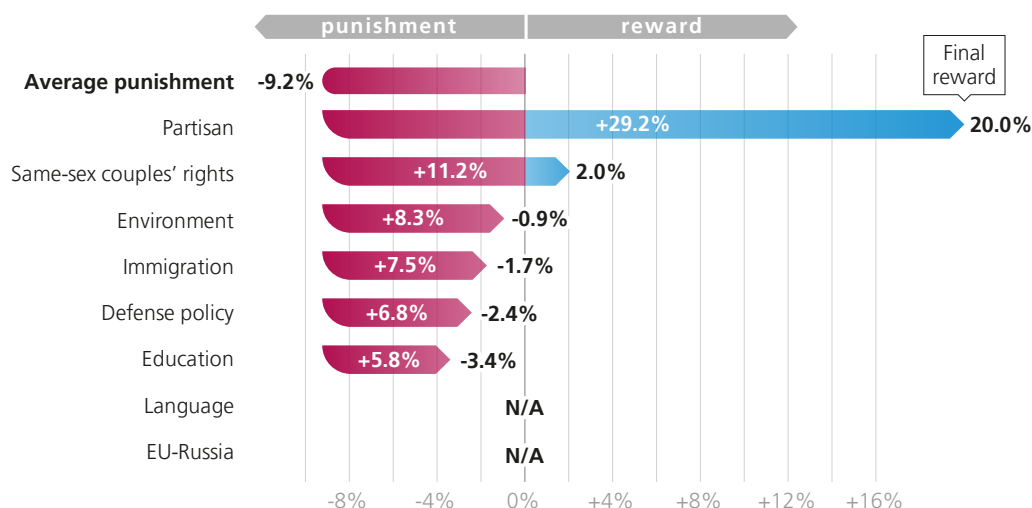
Poles are willing to punish candidates with undemocratic positions, as such behavior results in an average of a -9.2% loss of votes for these candidates. This rate of vote loss is the second highest just behind Sweden and is also above the average rate of punishment of the entire country sample (-7.8%). At first glance, this comparatively high punishing rate of the Polish respondents seems surprising, especially when considering that the currently ruling government of the Law and Justice (PiS) party has undertaken several steps that have weakened the country’s democracy and rule of law (justice reform, restrictions on the media and civil society). The reaction to the government’s restrictions from within the country (by politicians of the opposition, civil society, the independent media etc.) as well as from the EU may actually have raised more awareness of undemocratic practices than in other European societies.

The issues that Poles find worth punishing most are issues

of civil rights and checks and balances: A candidate saying that the government should prosecute journalists who accuse the prime minister of corruption is punished with a vote share loss of -18.2%, while a candidate who thinks that “the government should discipline judges who publicly criticize it” loses -14.1%. These are the highest percentages among all countries under observation. Poles also punish a candidate who suggests to “pass laws without parliamentary debate if criticized by the opposition” with a vote loss of -14.5%. Interestingly, established Western democracies have a comparatively low punishing rate for this issue (Sweden -4.9%, Germany -3.3% and Spain -2.5%).

Like respondents in other countries, Poles do not punish much if a candidate wants to ban foreign funding for labour unions (-4.6%) or foreign non-governmental organizations (-4.1%).

Existence of trade-offs/compensation for undermining democracy



²⁵ Rating it with an 8, 9 or 10 on a scale from 1 to 10.

PARTY LOYALTY AND POLICY INTERESTS: WHICH ISSUES ARE

MORE IMPORTANT THAN UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS?

First and foremost, Poles accept a violation of democratic norms if this means their favorite party wins: the average loss in votes of -9.2% of a candidate who proposes an undemocratic action is compensated with a +29.2% in vote boost if the candidate belongs to the party that the voter supports, which means the candidate still ends up with a +20% win in vote shares. All other interests play a significantly lower role. Only the voters' favorite position on an identity policy compensates entirely for the undemo-

cratic position, resulting in a +2% win for the voters' favorite position on marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples. All other policies cannot entirely compensate: The voter's favorite tax policy in combination with a favored environmental policy leads to a -0.9% loss and in combination with a favored position on education spending to a loss of -3.4%. The favorite immigration policy still results in a -1.7% vote loss, and the favorite defense policy results in a -2.4% vote loss for the undemocratic position.

ARE SUPPORTERS OF A CERTAIN POLICY INTEREST²⁶ MORE FORGIVING

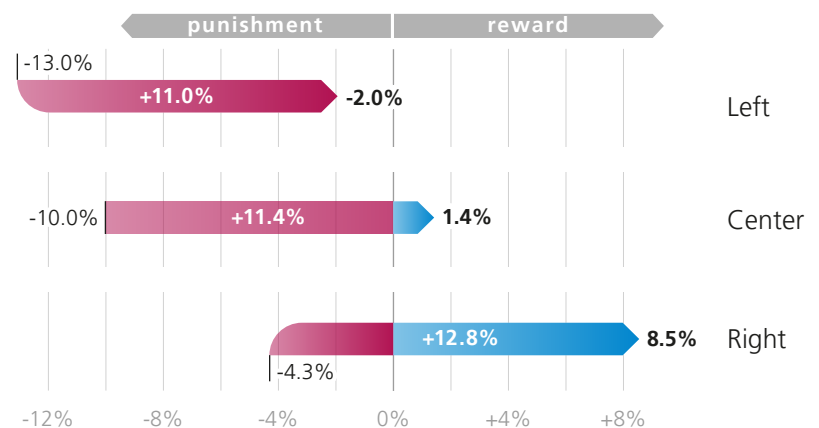
OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THAN OTHERS?

If we have a closer look at the voters' preferred policy position on sexual minorities we find the following interesting correlation for Poland: Voters who are in favor of an extension of rights for sexual minorities punish a candidate generally above average with a loss of -13.0%, while voters who support equal marriage rights but are against adoption rights still punish slightly above average (-10.0%). Conservative voters (who are against both marriage and adoption rights) punish less than half of the average, namely with a loss of -4.3%.

When voters are confronted with a candidate that holds their favorite position on sexual minorities' rights and an undemocratic position at the same time, however, the liberal voters punished less, resulting in a mere -2.0% vote share loss, compared with a +1.4% win for the voters in favor of only marriage equality and a +8.5% win for the voters against any equal rights for same-sex couples.

In general, left-leaning voters on immigration punish undemocratic behavior at the ballot box with a -11.6% loss of the vote share as opposed to right-leaning voters who punish it with -5.8%, less than average. When presented with their favorite policy on immigration, however, left-leaning respondents punish significantly less than before: -2.7%, whereas right-wing voters end up punishing by just as much as

Same-sex couples' rights: shift in punishment when presented with favored policy



mid-left voters, -0.7%.

Only 40 of the 1500 survey respondents chose the right-leaning position that declared that "Defense policy for Poland should be decided by Polish institutions alone." Respondents with the view that defense policy should be a common task of Poland and the EU together generally tolerate undemocratic behavior more than respondents who prefer sole EU responsibility (-7.6% punishment rate vs. -9.4%). And when presented with their preferred defense policy, respondents with a cooperative view become significantly more forgiving of undemocratic behavior (rewarding it with +2.1%) than respondents who want to see de-

Environment

Only in Poland an issue that is both polarizing and salient could be identified for which voters do not forgive undemocratic behavior: environmental policy.

Immigration

Only in Poland voters do not forgive undemocratic behavior for immigration-related interests.

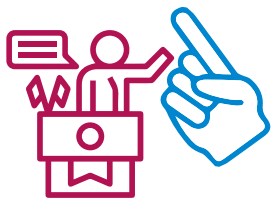
²⁶ Please find an overview of all tested policy positions on pg. 13.

fense policy in the hands of the EU alone (-6.0%). This could indicate that defense policy is a less important topic for supranationalists.

Respondents with a libertarian view are the most forgiving of undemocratic behavior of candidates in our survey, but they nevertheless vote less for undemocratic candidates (-6.5%). Undemocratic candidates lose -9.9% of the votes from people who want to keep the income tax rates and the education budget the way they are; and the same candidates lose -10.9% of their vote share of people with a more left-wing economic position. When presented with their favorite policy on taxes and education, however, all groups become very forgiving of undemocratic behavior, but with slight differences: left-leaning people still make the candidates lose -6.5% of the votes, people with a position in the middle -4.9% of the vote, and people

with a libertarian position do not make the candidates lose any votes (0.0%).

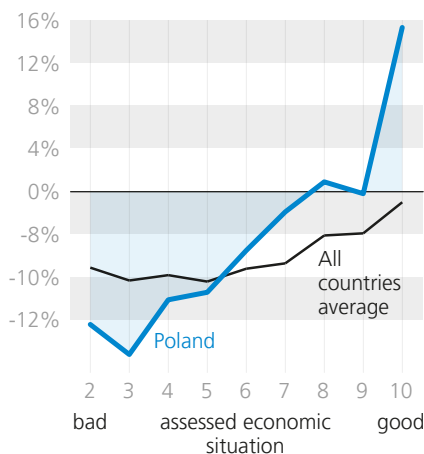
Green voters generally punish undemocratic behavior more than conservative voters (-12.6% vs. -7.7%). But when presented with their respective favorite policy on renewable energies, conservative voters become twice as tolerant towards undemocratic candidates than green voters: They reward the candidate with +3.1%, while green voters still punish by -7.3%.



-9.2%

This is the average punishment corresponding to the share of Polish voters willing to defect from an otherwise favored candidate once they adopt an undemocratic position.

Average electoral punishment by assessment of the country's economic situation



WHAT ROLE DOES POLARIZATION PLAY?

We find that in Poland the most polarizing issue is which rights to grant to same-sex couples. As we have seen above, this is also an issue that voters disregard undemocratic behavior for. Hence, for this particular issue we can observe a correlation between an in-

creased polarization and the willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior. Moreover, only in Poland we can identify a polarizing and at the same time salient issue for which, however, voters do not forgive undemocratic behavior: renewable vs. fossil energies.

WHO ARE THE MAIN 'DEFENDERS OF DEMOCRACY'

IN POLAND?

As in most of the other countries under investigation, women, students, and the more educated punish undemocratic behavior more than comparative sub-group members. The same holds true for those who are more interested in politics and have more political knowledge, those who are democratically competent, those who are less religious and those who lack an authoritarian personality. Notably, whether a person is trustworthy of other people does not influence the punishment rate of undemocratic behavior in any way.

Just like in Spain, Estonia and Sweden, the youngest voter group (18-29 ys.) defends democracy more strongly than young people in Germany, Serbia and Ukraine.

Poland moreover stands out from all other countries in another interesting way: Voters who assess their country's economic situation worse punish undemocratic behavior significantly more than people with a more positive view with regards to Poland's economy. The former also punish by far more than citizens of all other countries who hold a similarly bleak assessment of their country's economy. And the same correlation can be found for voting behavior and the assessment of the economic situation of one's family in Poland.

And who shows less willingness to punish politicians who violate democratic principles? Those with a more positive economic assessment of the country and their family.

WHICH PARTY'S VOTERS PUNISH

UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THE MOST?

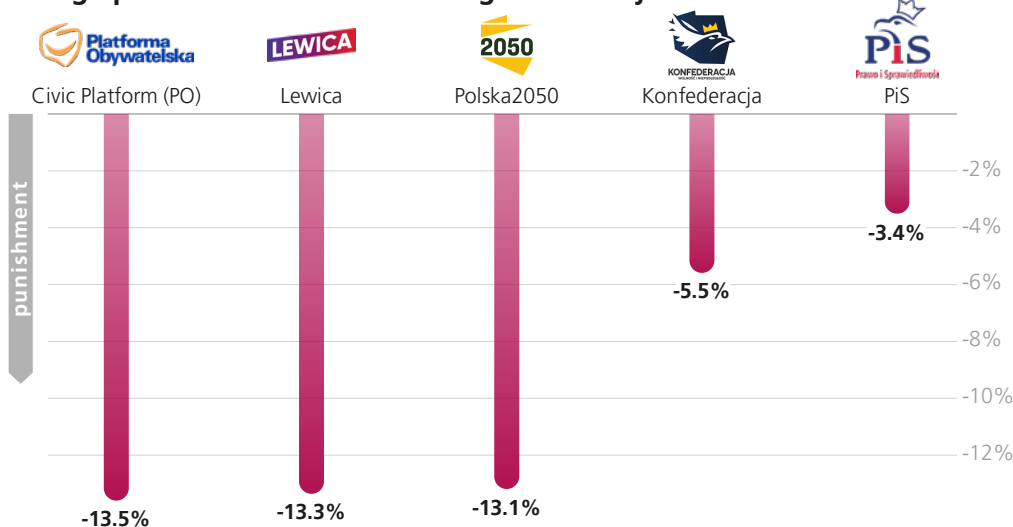
Voters of all Polish parties punish undemocratic behavior, yet to a very different extent: A candidate with an undemocratic position loses -13.5% from voters affiliated with the social democratic Lewica, closely followed by -13.3% from voters of the conservative Civic Platform (PO) and -13% from voters of the centrist Poland2050. Among voters of the far-right Konfederacja party, the very same candidate loses -5.5%, while among voters of the other far-right party (PiS) they lose even less, -3.4%. Interestingly, the latter voters also reward several

undemocratic positions: "to ban foreign NGO funding" with +4.3%, "to prosecute journalists" with +20.8%, "to pass laws without parliamentary debate" with +26.2% and "to discipline judges who criticize the government" with a +29% vote share increase. The fact that attacks on judicial independence enjoy such popularity among PiS voters sheds new light on the reasons for the successful undermining of the rule of law in Poland. Voters who vote for "other" parties punish with a loss of -10.8% of the vote share, whereas non-voters punish with

PiS

PiS voters showed the least willingness to punish undemocratic behavior across the entire sample.

Average punishment for undermining democracy



Summary for Poland

A large majority of Poles value the various facets of democracy comparatively highly. However, they are quite critical of the democratic system, and especially of the way democracy functions in their own country. Compared to the other countries under investigation, they regard the judicial system and freedom of the media as highly important. Poles express their high regard for democratic standards and the rule of law not only in their responses to the direct questions, but also in the candidate choice experiments: they show more strongly than most other countries (except Sweden) that they would punish undemocratic behavior at the ballot box. Poles are most likely to defend checks and balances and the freedom of the press.

As in all other countries under investigation, however, party loyalty is an important determinant of voting behavior. Poles completely forgive a candidate their undemocratic behavior if they are from their favorite party. In some respects, also identity issues and polarization influence voting decisions: regarding the question of rights for same-sex couples, a voter's preferred position on this issue is placed above the motivation to punish undemocratic behavior. In Poland we also found an issue (environmental protection) that, while polarizing and salient, is nevertheless not a decisive factor when it comes to forgiving undemocratic behavior.