

Poland

**How state formation process influence
modern politics**

Jagiellonian Poland-Lithuania, 15th century



Summary of older history

- Poland is a country with a long state tradition (since the Middle Ages).
- End of the 18 century: the partitions of Poland caused the interruption of independent existence for more than one century.
- Three parts: Russian, Prussian (later Germans) and Austrian.
- However, long state tradition and successful nation-building on the level of Polish aristocracy (*szlachta*) had influence on the idea of **revitalisation** of the Polish state.
- Nation-building process influenced the peasantry and the modern nation was gradually created in 19th century.

Different situation in individual parts in 19 century

- **Russian part**
- Polish-Russian relationship was similar to British – Irish relationship.
- Bad situation of the Roman Catholic Church (the only Polish national institution in all three parts).
- Russia: total submission of the citizen to the ruler (*Tzar*).
- In these conditions liberals or the democrats could never win.
- Russia tried to russify the Poles.

- **The German part** (Prussian state), also the assimilation of Poles, Prussian approach close to Russian.
- However, Prussia/Germany differed from Russia: *Rechtstaat* (rule of law) and gradual democratisation.

Austrian Poland (*Galicia*)

- The Austrian partition: very different case.
- No religious persecution.
- *Galicia*: administrative and cultural autonomy.
- Poles were also represented in the empire government in Vienna (important aristocratic ties).
- Universities in Krakow and Lvov.
- Even after the restoration of independence, many residents of southern Poland retained a touch of nostalgia for the days of the Austria.
- **Heritage: three different political traditions and culture at individual partitions.**



Interwar Poland

- The Polish republic was established in November 1918. Context of rebuilding of Polish state is very important for understanding of **legend of Józef Pilsudski** in Poland during the inter-war state.
- Historian Norman Davies wrote: "Anarchy threatened. Then, the unexpected happened. Pilsudski, released from Magdeburg Castle (where he was as prison) on 10 November, arrived at Warsaw Station. He was the one man whose reputation was big enough to save the situation. His Socialist past promised a measure of influence over the leftist workers: his military experience gave a chance that he could deal with the German Command. On 11 November, the day of the Western Armistice, he took office as Commander-in-Chief (...later) gave the title of Chief-of-State (*Naczelnik Państwa*). (...) Thus began the attempt, to build Poland while Russia and Germany slept".
- Pilsudski was Chief-of-State until 1922.



Conflicts with neighbours

- The borders of new Polish Republic were not established until 1921.
- Disputes with all neighbours: Czechoslovakia, Germany, Lithuania etc.
- In the east a chaotic situation (Russian revolution and civil war, unstable Ukrainian states).
- 1920: „Miracle on the Vistula“ – other important factor for creation of Pilsudski legend,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNkWsLo572g>



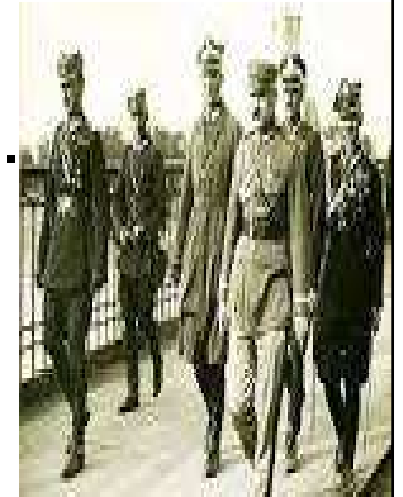
Fragile parliamentary democracy 1921 - 1926

- Poland faced major challenges: war damages, devastated economy, the need to reintegrate three different parts.
- One-third of the population consisted of national minorities.
- 1921: adoption of the Constitution that designed Poland as a parliamentary democracy.
- The conservative National Democrats (ND) rejected creation of a strong presidency (Pilsudski was natural candidate).
- Short-lived cabinets (impact of big polarization between the left and the right), economic depression and social animosities (strikes, workers manifestations etc.)
- The ND fanatic assassinated the president Gabriel Narutowicz.



Coup d'état and new authoritarian regime

- May 1926: Pilsudski assumed power in a coup.
- In his opinion it was necessary to "save the country".
- Pilsudski coup was welcomed by all non-communist left, by Poland's industrials, and even many Jewish organizations.
- The main motto/aim of new regime - *sanacja* (healing/recovery).
- Pilsudski: formally minister of war and the General Inspector of the army, but de facto the most important person of regime, he used his authority through followers, he nominated the PM, the chairman of *Sejm* ...
- Pilsudski formed own political formation: Non-Party Bloc of Co-operation with the Government (BBWR); this formation was based on service to the state and loyalty to Pilsudski.



Harder version of authoritarian regime

- September 1929, the parties of the left and centre formed an alliance which wanted to restore parliamentary democracy; before election 1930, opposition leaders were arrested and the BBWR won elections.
- After Pilsudski's death in 1935, his successors drifted towards open authoritarianism.

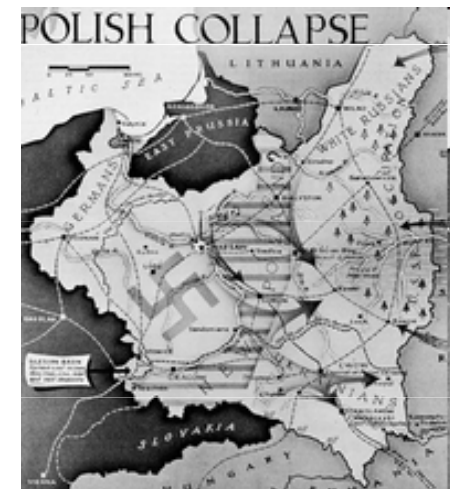
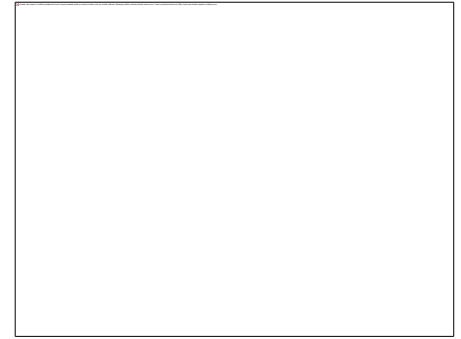


Poland's international situation before 1939: between Germany and Soviet Union

- Pilsudski's main foreign policy aim was balancing Poland between powerful neighbours: the Soviet Union and Germany. Poland signed nonaggression pacts with both states in the early 1930s.
- Poland's policy of equilibrium between potential enemies was failing at the end of 1930s.
- On August 23, 1939 Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression treaty (so called **Molotov-Ribbentrop pact**).

Poland's international situation during WWII: between Germany and Soviet Union

- Secret supplement of the M.- R. pact: division of East-Central Europe including Poland.
- The Hitler's invasion into Poland in September 1939.
- The Great Britain and France declared war to Germany, but they did not provide any effective help to Poland.
- The Soviet Union started invasion from the East after German attack.
- New division of Poland: Moscow occupied the eastern regions, Germany incorporated the rest of Poland.



German occupation and Polish-Soviet relationship

- Germany started quickly large-scale repressions of Poles and Polish Jews; integral part of German *Lebensraum*, Poland also became the main killing ground of the Nazi Holocaust (death camps, including Auschwitz, Majdanek, or Treblinka).
- Poland lost one-fifth of its population during WW II (approx. 6 million of people).
- The Soviets moved many Poles into labor camps all over the Soviet Union, *Katyń Massacre*.
- Mid-1941: beginning of German-Soviet war, revitalisation of Soviet-Polish relationship: big question – the future of eastern Polish territories occupied by Soviet Union in 1939.
- 1943: Stalin broke relations with the exile Polish government led by General Wladyslaw Sikorski (discovery of Katyń Massacre), the Soviet Union formed the Union of Polish Patriots, led by Polish communists in the Soviet Union.

Polish Resistance and Warsaw uprising

- the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*).
- One of the largest underground movements of World War II. It functioned as a guerrilla force, conducting sabotages, and as a means of social defense - the Home Army became the main component of the Polish *underground state*. By 1944 the Home Army claimed approx. 400 thousands soldiers.
- When Soviet forces were approaching Warsaw in the summer of 1944, the Home Army started a rebellion against the German troops in the capital. However, the Soviets halted its forces just short of Warsaw and Germans crushed the uprising after several weeks of intensive fighting.
- The Germans completely demolished Warsaw.
- <http://www.warsawuprising.com/movies.htm> - first and

ANNIHILATION

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx3aGiurRbQ>

The way towards communist monopoly of power

- The Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), later the new official authority in liberated territories – a provisional government.
- The Yalta conference (begin. of 1945) confirmed the formation of Polish coalition government composed of communists and several democratic politicians.
- The communists: advantages of direct Soviet support (army, secret service), and control over crucial ministries.
- Potsdam conference (summer 1945): the Allies awarded Poland over 100 thousand square kilometers of German territory, but Polish eastern territories were incorporated by the Soviet Union.
- Post-war Poland: without big national minorities, almost 100 hundred per cent of population were Catholics (and Poles). Poland after 1945 was first true nation-state in Polish history.

Poland's old and new borders (after 1945)



Communist way to power monopoly



- The Polish People's Party (PSL), leader Stanislaw Mikolajczyk: main **legal** competitor of communists.
- By January 1946, the PSL had over million members (much more than the communists): the barrier against the communists. The program PSL called for respect for the law, judicial independence, local self-government and democracy.
- After 1944/1945, strong **illegal** opposition operated (rests of AK).
- Falsification of elections in January 1947: wave of terror and fraudulent procedure against PSL started just before elections.
- The new government: fully controlled by the communists.

Short totalitarian Stalinist period of the late 1940s and early 1950s

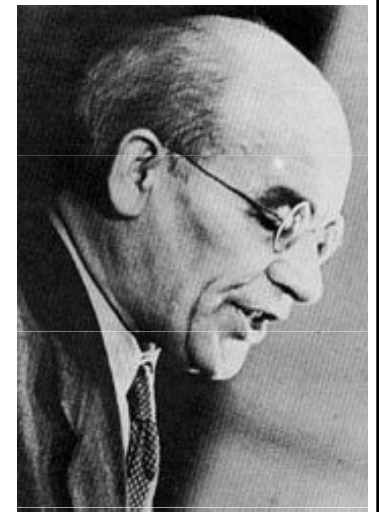
- Poland: similar experience as Czechoslovakia and other East-Central European countries.
- Stalinist time: repressions, destruction of social structures, rigid command economy, and culture influence -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UluOQQsTEqQ>
- Konstanty Rokosowski: Polish minister of defense.
- The Soviet advisers acted in intelligence service.
- However, Stalinist period relatively short: 4-5 years.

Collectivisation and Church

- Polish communist regime was not able to fully control Church in spite of many repressions.
- The Polish head of the Catholic Church Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was kept under the home arrest, but his authority among believers survived.
- The church generated resistance of the big part of Polish society and created distance between "us" (Polish nation) and "them" (Soviet-supported-party-state).
- The collectivization met with great difficulties (strong resistance of village).



Polish "road to socialism"



- Władysław Gomułka, post-war leader of Polish communists, had vision of specific "Polish road to socialism", which in **some** aspects differed from the Stalinist ideas.
- Although Gomułka accepted leading role of the Soviet Union, he was clearly a *national communist*. He realized strong anti-Soviet and anti-Russian resistance of Polish society (heritage of past).
- Gomułka also rejected quick collectivization and he wanted coexistence with the Roman Catholic Church.
- It was not surprising that Gomułka was denounced for right-wing deviation and was arrested in 1951. However he survived purges.

De-Stalinization and 1956

- Changes of regime started after Stalin's death (1953) and also death of the key figure of Polish Stalinists Boleslaw Bierut (1956).
- The call for reforms and internal conflict inside leadership of the PZPR (communist party).
- Poznań uprising: workers in this town - "Bread and Freedom", "Russians go Home" etc.
- October 1956: the Central Committee of PZPR chose Gomulka as new first secretary, this decision was made in spite of the Moscow's disagreement.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3bjaj6vy4U>



Revitalization of "Polish road to socialism"

- During several months Gomulka achieved to stabilize the communist regime.
- The steps of liberalisation: returning most collective farmland to private ownership, loosening censorship, liberation of political prisoners, improving relations with the Catholic Church (including the possibility of teaching religion in public schools), Polish intellectuals received significant degree of freedom.
- Classics of research of non-democratic regimes Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan: Poland shift from "mini-stalinism to the relative tolerance and Polish nationalism of Gomulka's (...) authoritarian regime."
- Later the authoritarian shape of the regime did not change, only its leaders.

Repeated crisis: 1968 and 1970

- Gomulka's leadership more orthodox and and began to experience a crisis.
- March 1968: students and intellectuals, inspired by the idealism of the Czechoslovak Prague Spring – the main slogan "Poland is waiting for its Dubček".
- Turbulent situation inside PZPR connected with anti-Gomulka's attacks, but Gomulka survived this crisis.
- Gomulka was replaced by a new party leader Edward Gierek in 1970. The reason was the mass workers demonstrations which started after drastic price rises on basic goods (bloody suppression).



Short period of Edward Gierek: failed "Consumer Communism"

- New leader Edward Gierek: new economic program. Background: the large-scale loans from the West to buy new technologies.
- The Gierek vision supposed raising living standards of Poles: the loans were use also for buying of foreign goods.
- However, Gierek's ambitious plans crashed: effect was only big state debts and destruction of state finances.
- In mid-1970s, Poland was facing economic catastrophe. Another attempt to raise food prices in 1976 failed after an additional round of worker protests.

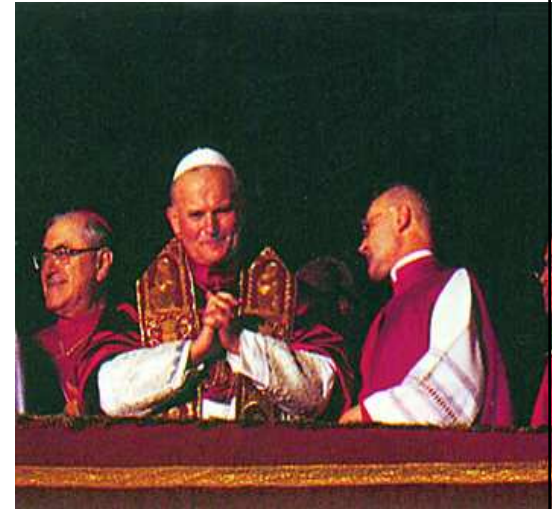


The rise of opposition movement

- After workers protests of 1976 changed: opposition intellectuals formed organization called the Committee for the Defence of Workers (KOR) to help workers punished for strike activities.
- Since 1976, opposition activities received permanent character including samizdats and formation of anti-regime opposition groups.
- 1979: new Pope, Jan Pavel II visited Poland. This event had an electrifying effect on the Poles.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peT3-xSzj08&feature=related> (beginning)

- Several months after the visit workers protests started again. Workers protests led by Lech Walesa were supported by civil society groups (intellectuals, the Church etc.).
- Government had to negotiate with workers, formation of the huge movement Solidarity.



Solidarity and Jaruzelski

- 1980 – 1981: "dual power" in Poland – semi-collapsed communist party versus Solidarity with strong people legitimacy but without **formal** power.
- The important factor: existence of East Bloc and Soviet hegemony.
- Situation resolved by the army (and police) which remained the only strong force of the regime.
- December 1981: general Wojciech Jaruzelski introduced the martial law.
- Until 1989, the regime was directed by the military (officers were the members of the Communist Party).
- The Solidarity illegal.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peT3-xSzj08&feature=related>: since 8 minute

- Would the USSR have invaded in 1981?

The end of communist regime

- Jaruzelski was not able to stabilize regime for longer time: growing economic problems.
- At the beginning 1989, Polish "Round Table" started (negotiation Solidarity and government camp). The main result was decision about semi-competitive election in June 1989.

<https://www.dw.com/en/poland-the-round-table-revisited/a-17683916>

- Elections victory of Solidarity: new government was headed by Catholic activist Tadeusz Mazowiecki.
- Installation of non-communist prime minister was strongly influenced by international power relationships. The Soviet intervention in Poland would have ended Gorbachev's good relationship with the West and his perestroika project.
- Gorbachev decided to tolerate Polish road to democracy. This step was very important for all other Central-East European countries. It started snow-ball/domino effect in the Soviet Bloc.
- Polish historical contribution to the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe is very important.



Poland in the 1990s – and later

- Political struggle between post-Solidarity parties and the ex-Communist left (the Union of the Democratic Left).
- Solidarity broke up into a number of smaller parties in the early 1990s, which helped the ex-communists win the 1993 elections.
- 1997: a coalition of post-solidarity parties won the elections, but broke up again during the term, the ex-communist left has returned to government power in 2001.
- A series of corruption scandals caused the ex-Communist Union of the Democratic Left to lose the following elections again (2005).
- 2005: the success of two political forces rooted in Solidarity, but over time sharply opposed to each other: the Law and Justice party (PiS) and the Civic Platform (PO) - a long-lasting competition with deep consequences.
- The PiS victory in the 2015 elections: a series of interventions in the shape of liberal democracy, Poland's shift towards illiberal democracy.
- Extreme polarisation linked also to some cultural issues (most visibly abortion).

Twins



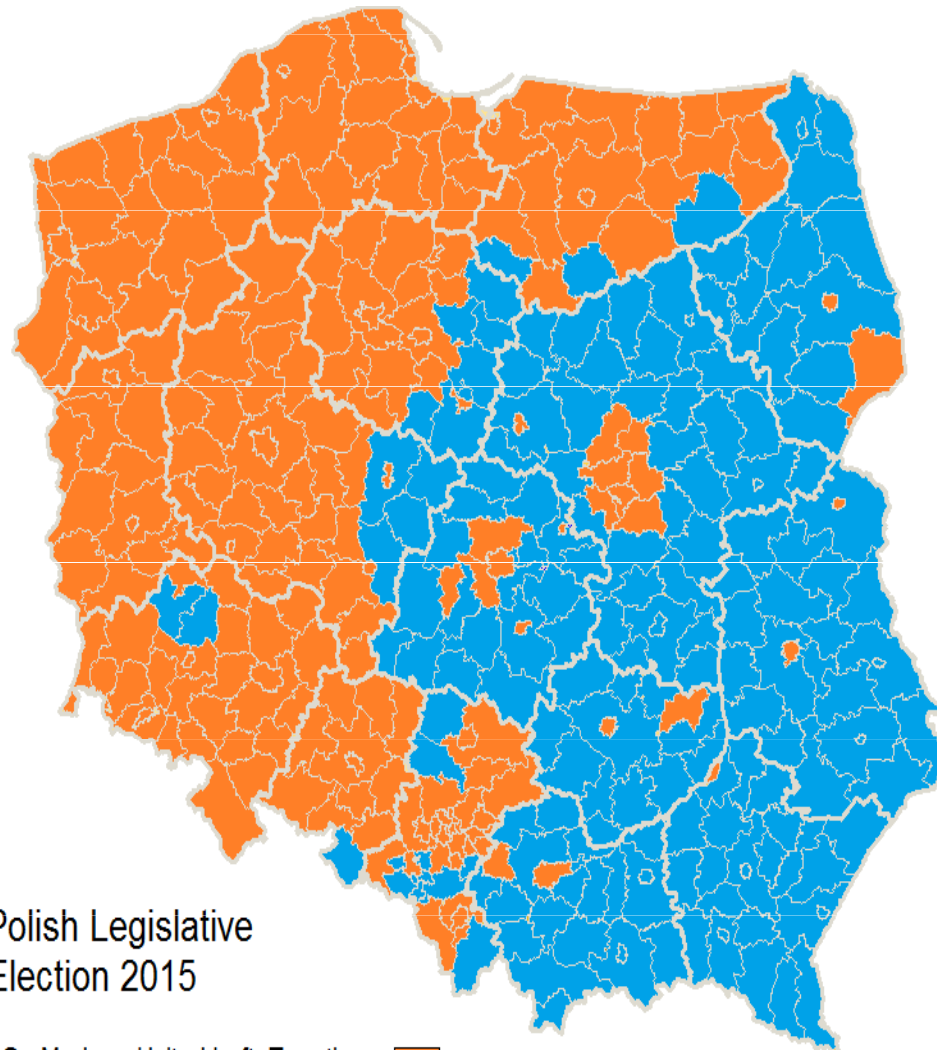
PiS: Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczyński





PO: Donald Tusk



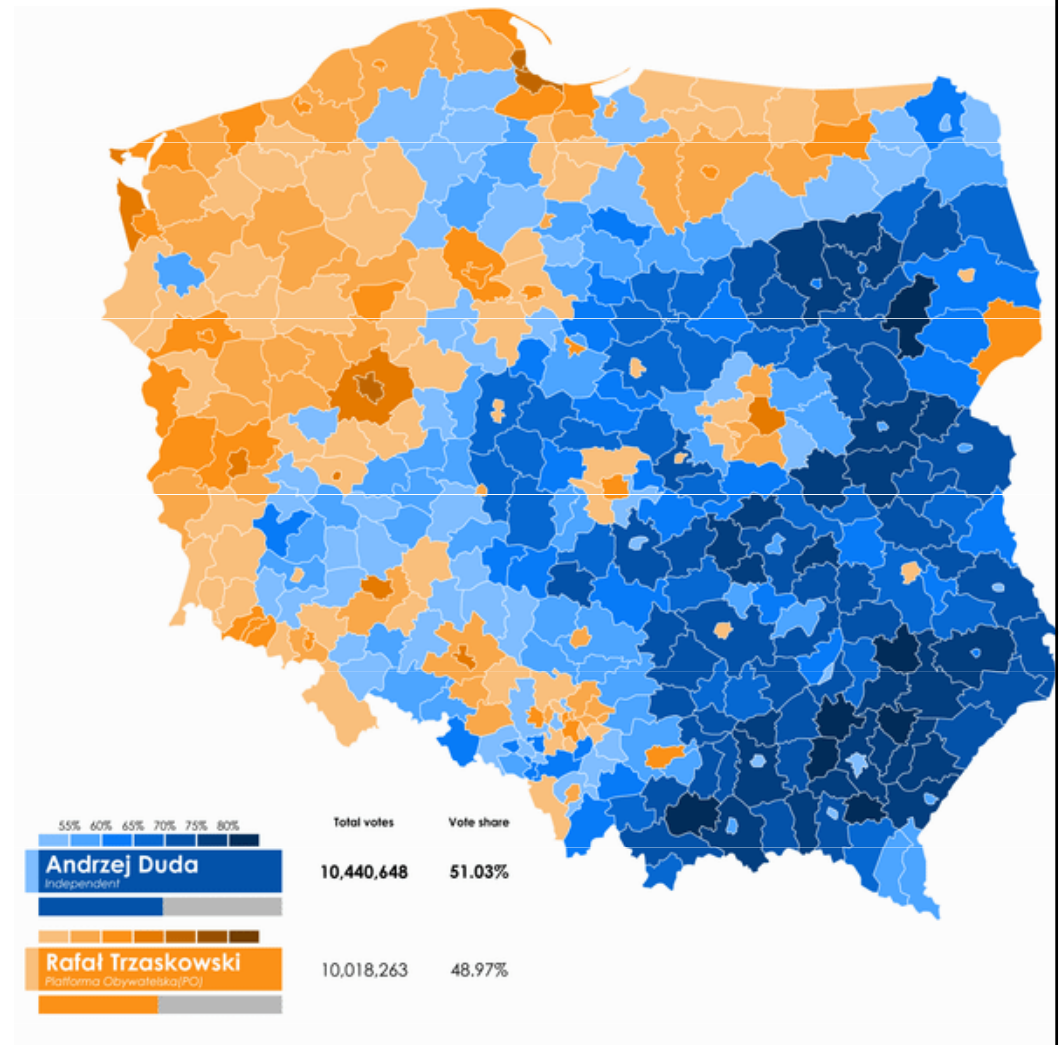
Parliamentary (2015) and presidential (2020) elections



Polish Legislative Election 2015

PO+Modern+United Left+Together 
Law and Justice 

 ElectoralGeography.com



Parl. elections of 2023

(KO – a coalition led by the Civic Platform)

Zwycięzcy w okręgach do Sejmu

