CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLAND
Case study

Research design: Grzegorz Ekiert, Jan Kubik
Polish study preparation and supervision: Jan Kubik and Michał Wenzel
Report: Michał Wenzel and Jan Kubik

Prepared for international conference
The Logic of Civil Society in New Democracies:
East Asia and East Europe

Taipei, June 5-7

1. Periodization of the transformation years

The Polish transformation commenced with the Round Table negotiations between the Communist government and oppositional Solidarity movement in the early 1989. As a result of these negotiations, semi-free elections to Parliament were held on June 4, 1989. Although the electoral law guaranteed the Communist Party (Polish United Workers' Party) and its allies the majority and thus the prerogative to form the government, the magnitude of the opposition victory and the subsequent defections of two minor partners from the government camp opened the way for the formation of the first non-communist government in the East Central Europe since the 1940s. The government, led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a long-time Solidarity activist, was sworn in on August 24, 1989. It introduced deep systemic reforms in virtually all areas of public life. Arguably, the most important was the comprehensive economic reform that went down in history as the *Balcerowicz Plan* (from the name of its chief architect, then the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance). The 1989/90 period is a turning in Polish history in all areas of social life, including economy, politics, and culture.

Politics

In politics, the transformation years can be characterized, first and foremost, by the pronounced volatility of the party system. In the years 1989-2009, only one party (*PSL*, Peasant Party) participated in all parliaments. This does not mean, however, that the party system was formed anew each time the elections were held. Rather, new parties were reconfigurations of the old ones, with "old" politicians creating new structures out of fragments of groupings that had disappeared from the political scene.

Two dominant "streams" may be distinguished, i.e. two sets of parties that shared broadly defined ideological similarities albeit within constantly evolving organizational re-configurations. The parties that originated from the Solidarity social movement-trade union constitute the first group. In the first semi-free elections in 1989, the opposition ran as *Citizens' Committee*, a broad movement that had its cells practically in all municipalities and communities of the country. It took all freely contested seats except one, i.e. one-third of Sejm (where the bulk of the legislative power resides), and 99 out of 100 in Senate (which has an oversight function). It was led by Lech Wałęsa and composed of opposition activists of all ideological orientations (from socialist to Christian Democratic to nationalist) and trade unionists. Already in 1990, this loose movement began dividing into different factions: social-democratic, liberal, and Christian-National. Soon, they gave rise to political parties that subsequently merged, changed names, and sometimes disappeared. Interestingly, the leaders of each faction from the early 1990s, still play leading roles both in the main government party (*PO*, Citizens' Platform) and the largest opposition party (*PiS*, Law and Justice).

The second "stream," much more stable, comprises the parties that descended from the disbanded Polish United Workers' Party (Communist). After its dissolution in January 1990, initially two successor parties were formed, but only one survived. It gained power (in a coalition with the "peasant" party, *PSL*) in 1993, lost in 1997, regained control over the government again in 2001, lost in 2005 and entered a period of serious organizational and ideological crisis. After the initial defeat (1989), already in 1991 the regrouped party (now

SdRP – Social-democracy of the Polish Republic) formed a left-leaning coalition with the ex-communist trade unions (*OPZZ*) and various civic organizations. The coalition, the Alliance of the Democratic Left (*SLD*), became a unitary party, under the same name, in 1999. As of May 2009, it is a minor opposition party experiencing a serious crisis.

Apart from these two dominant "streams," two peasant parties are major political players. Polish Peasant Party (*PSL*), claiming a distinguished political lineage going back to 1903, is the party that descends directly from the Communists' official coalition partner during the Polish People's Republic (1944-1989). *Samoobrona* (Self-defense) is a populist radical protest party formed in the mid-1990s. It was in government in 2005-2007, but now is hardly surviving after a series of personal and political scandals.

Essentially, two sub-periods can be delineated in the post-communist Polish politics: 1989-2001 was characterized by the instability of the party scene, with new entrants emerging at each electoral cycle. In 2001-2009, the party system began stabilizing. Several parties left the political stage, but no new entrants appeared. This, among other reasons, is due to new laws regulating the financing of political parties. It is important to note that without exception the party in power always lost the elections. In brief, the periodization of the party scene can be summarized in two points:

- 1989-2001 Instability of the party scene
- 2001-2009 Consolidation: no new entrants

Names of parties in Table 1:
KO 'S' – Solidarity Civic Committee, anti-communist opposition
KL-D - Liberal-Democratic Congress, liberal
PC – Center Alliance, right-wing
PSL – Peasant Party
UW – Union of Freedom, liberal
SLD – Alliance of the Democratic Left, post-communist left-wing
SRP – Social-democracy of the Polish Republic, post-communist left-wing
UP – Union of Labor, left-wing
AWS – Solidarity Electoral Alliance, coalition of Solidarity Trade Union and right-wing parties
PiS – Law and Justice, nationalist right
Samoobrona – self-defense, populist peasant
LPR – League of Polish Families, national Catholic
PO – Civic Platform – centre-right

Table 1.

Parliament			Government			President	
Year	Parl. term	Coalition	Prime minister (party aff.*)	Start of term in office	End of term	Name	Polit. orient.
1989	IX	Solidarity with Communist	Tadeusz Mazowiecki (KO „S")	24 VIII 1989	4 I 1991	Wojciech	Communist
1990		ministers and with Comm.				Jaruzelski	
1991		Allies	Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (KL-D)	4 I 1991	6 XII 1991		
	I	right wing Solidarity	Jan Olszewski (PC)	6 XII 1991	5 VI 1992		
1992		centre-right Solidarity	Hanna Suchocka (UW)	11 VII 1992	25 X 1993	Lech	Solidarity
1993	II	SRP-PSL, post-	Waldemar Pawlak (PSL)	26 X 1993	6 III 1995	Wałęsa	
1994		communist-peasant					
1995		Party	Józef Oleksy (SLD)	7 III 1995	7 II 1996		
1996			Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz (SLD)	7 II 1996	31 X 1997		
1997	III	AWS-UW, later					
1998		AWS only	Jerzy Buzek (AWS)	31 X 1997	19 X 2001	Aleksander	left-wing
1999		centre-right post-				Kwaśniewski	
2000		Solidarity					
2001	IV	SLD-UP-PSL,	Leszek Miller (SLD)	19 X 2001	2 V 2004		
2002		later SLD-UP only					
2003		post- communist-					
2004		peasant party	Marek Belka (SLD)	2 V 2004	31 X 2005		
2005	V	PiS-Samoobrona-LPR	Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PiS)	31 X 2005	14 VII 2006		
2006		National-populist	Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS)	14 VII 2006	16 XI 2007	Lech	
2007	VI	PO-PSL	Donald Tusk (PO)	16 XI 2007		Kaczyński	right-wing
2008		liberal-peasant party					
2009							

The economy

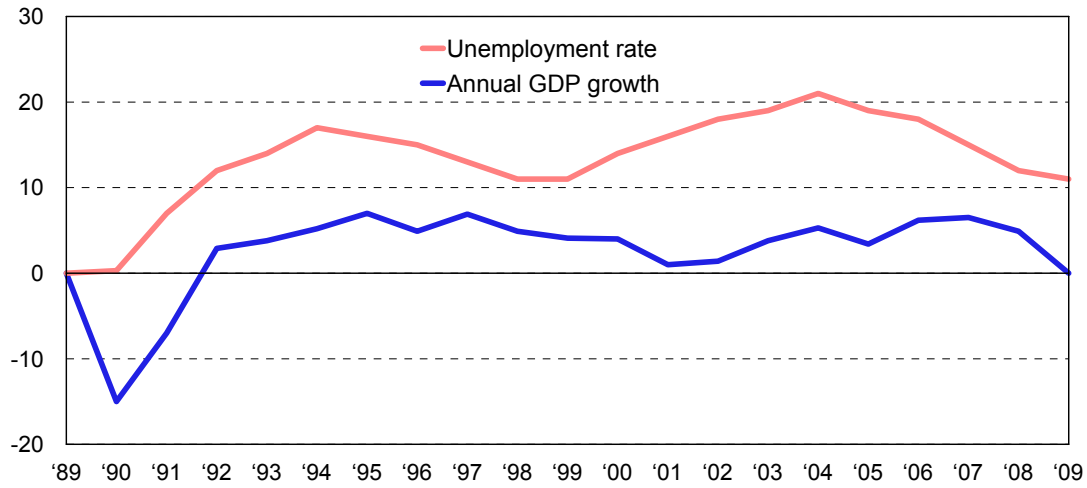
The end of Communism coincided with a severe economic crisis. The crisis dates back to the 1980s, when the deepening inefficiency of the state-socialist system led to serious market shortages. Popular dissatisfaction with the system, expressed increasingly vocally by all groups of the society, particularly the workers, led to the emergence of well-organized, transparent dissident movement and, eventually, Solidarity. This movement-cum-labor union emerged from the massive strikes of the summer 1980 and survived legally for over a year (August 1980 – December 1981). During that time, the country experienced political and cultural liberalization, but the inefficient economy was not reformed. Solidarity was made illegal when Martial Law was declared on December 13, 1981, and its leaders were interned or arrested. The authorities attempted to introduce some market mechanisms after Martial Law was lifted in 1983, but these attempts were inconsistent and adversely affected by the international constraints, primarily by the Soviet requirement to comply with the principles of state socialism, although the selection of Michail Gorbachev as the Soviet leader began changing the political dynamic within the communist camp.

The last Communist government introduced partial economic reform in 1988. It involved limited freedom of economic activity, permission to form companies with foreign capital, and lifting of many price controls. However, these moves led to hyperinflation and a high budget deficit. The truly revolutionary (so called "shock therapy)" systemic reforms were introduced at the beginning of 1990 in a package of legislative measures known as the *Balcerowicz plan*. They included: the introduction of equality between private and publicly-owned enterprises with regard to tariffs and credit, convertible currency, abolition of state monopoly of foreign trade, and the introduction of state support for the unemployed.

Inflation continued to rise during the initial months of the reform period, but soon began to drop and market shortages ended. The initial negative results of the reform included: the general recession (remarkably short-lived, however: already in 1992 the GNP grew by 2.5%) and a fast rise in unemployment caused by the wave of bankruptcies by inefficient state enterprises. It is important to remember, however, that the magnitude of change in the labor market is not fully captured by the unemployment rate, because labor force shrank. The government introduced early retirement schemes, and made it easier to claim disability benefits, pushing marginal workforce out of the market.

The mid-1990s brought stabilization on the labor market and fast economic growth that lasted until the global crisis of 2001-2002. Subsequent years brought another round of economic growth that slowed down in 2009 due to the present global crisis. So far the Polish economy avoided recession: on May 29, 2009 the figures for the first quarter of 2009 were announced: Polish economy grew during this period at the annualized rate of 0.8%.

FIG. 1.



Annual GDP growth (data of Central Statistical Office). Projections for 2009 vary

Unemployment rate (Rounded. Pct. of economically active population. January results for each year. Data of Central Statistical Office)

The analysis of societal evaluations and macro-economic data reveals the existence of four distinct post-communist periods:

- 1989-1992 Transformation shock
- 1993-2000 Sustained growth
- 2001-2002 Crisis
- 2003-2008 Pre- and post-EU accession boom

Civil society and the state

The crucial period in the establishment of the new order, both politically and economically, was the beginning of 1990. The government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki introduced the far-reaching reform of local governments that constitute the basis of local public life. The basic unit of local government, *gmina*, was considerably empowered, assuming many governmental functions previously controlled by the central government. Its *gmina* council is elected in separate elections, it controls communal property, has its own revenue base, and it is free to structure its executive within limits set by law. In 1998, a second round of reform of local government was implemented. In addition to *gmina*, two more levels of local government were introduced: *powiat* (county) and *województwo* (province). They took over tasks (for instance in education and healthcare) formerly performed by the state institutions.

At the same time as the second de-centralizing administrative reform was taking place, the state was re-organized in other respects as well. It was the so-called "**four reforms**" program of the center-right government in the years 1997-2001. The reforms were prepared in 1998 and implemented in 1999. They were designed to change:

- healthcare: replacing the centralized state system with publicly funded but independent system of financing
- administration: decentralizing and creating additional levels of self-government
- pensions: replacing state pay-as-you-go pension system with a mixed system with part of the pension covered by individual pension funds with obligatory membership
- educational system: creating additional level of schooling and new types of schools

The permission to form NGOs became truly effective in mid-1989. Even within the framework of the old system at its final stage, civil society started to develop at a very fast pace. The freedom of association was restored in 1990. In 2003, a separate law regulating NGOs was passed, setting them apart from other types of organizations. They received certain additional prerogatives, such as employing volunteers. Each taxpayer can donate 1% of their tax bill to a specific NGO.

In brief, the two key turning points in the de-centralization of the state and the introduction of freedom of association are:

- 1989-1990: Effective and legal freedom of association. Introduction of self-government
- 1999: De-centralization reforms

International constraints

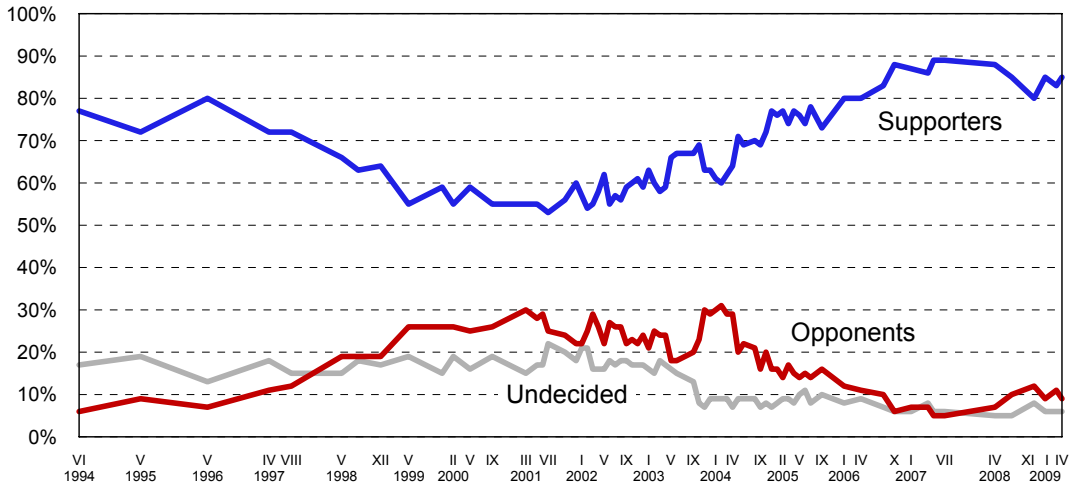
As far as international constraints are concerned, the transformation years were defined by the eventually project of entering the Western political, military and economic structures: NATO and the EU. The societal approval of membership in these two organizations has been consistently very high.

During the first years of transformation, the Soviet (later Russian) forces were still stationed on the Polish territory. They finally left in 1993. Poland entered NATO in 1999.

In early 1994 Poland signed an association treaty with the EU, which was the first step in negotiations leading to accession. The negotiations were completed in 2002, in 2003 referendum was held, and Poland entered the EU on May 1, 2004. On December 21, 2007 Poland entered also the Schengen zone, which allows trans-border movement among the member states without passport controls. The accession negotiations brought significant legal and institutional changes on many levels. In the years 2001-2003 Polish law had to be harmonized with European regulations. In many instances, this was done automatically, without public debate.

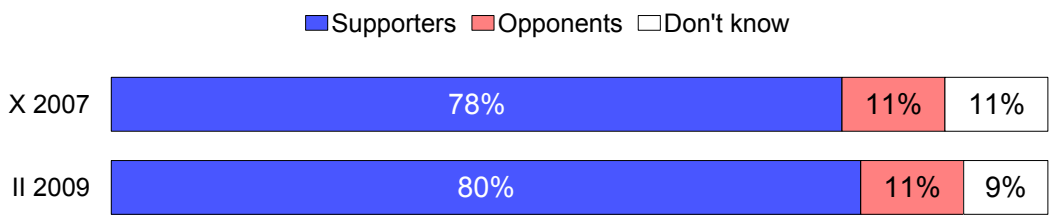
CBOS

FIG. 2. Attitude to Poland's membership in EU.



CBOS

FIG. 3. Attitude Poland's membership in NATO



Key dates:

- 1989: Independence
- 1994: Start of the EU accession negotiations
- 1999: NATO membership
- 2002-2004: Final stage of negotiations, referendum, EU membership

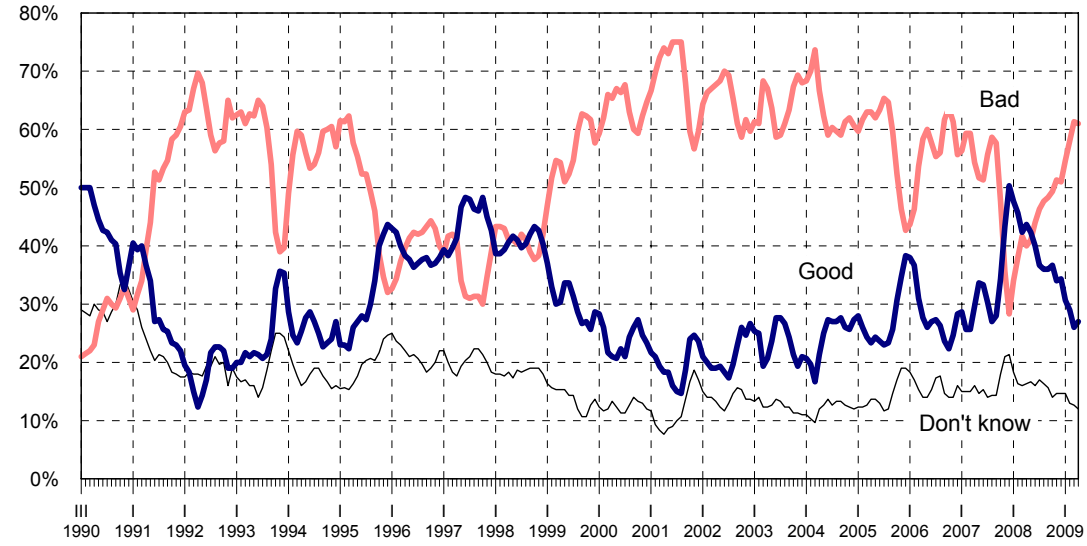
How people see it: evaluation of current situation 1989-2009

The longitudinal picture of people's evaluation of the twenty-year period of transformations completes the analysis of "contextual" data needed to frame our own results. There is no room here to discuss the factors that influence people's opinions, but it is prudent to remember that when people form an opinion about the current situation in their country, they consider not only economic conditions, but are also influenced by the political situation and the way it is (culturally) framed by various actors of the political scene, including the media.

As the data presented in Figure 4 demonstrate, satisfaction with the current situation matches economic cycle pretty closely for the years 1990-2001, but later the two become increasingly independent. The 2001-2008 sentiments seem more closely related to domestic political situation. In 2004-2005, the economic growth strongly influenced by the EU accession is not at all reflected in opinions. The 2005 elections brought optimism for a short time, but soon the evaluations returned to very low level in spite of very fast economic growth. Again, the 2007 elections changed that trend.

CBOS

FIG. 4. Evaluation of current situation in Poland (3-month moving average)



The following periods can be distinguished

- 1990-1992 Disenchantment with changes
- 1993-1995 Gradual return of optimism
- 1996-1999 Sustained positive evaluations
- 1999-2001 Continuing slide
- 2002-2007 Crisis in the collective sense of well-being, with a brief return of hope in early 2006
- 2007-2008 Return of optimism, checked by the crisis

2. Protest events during transformation

Perhaps the most striking finding of our study is the fact that protest becomes more intense during good times. There is a strong correlation between the evaluation of current situation in a year and the number of protests: revolution/challenge is initiated when improvements are noted and a change seems to be within reach. The two periods with highest number of protests are 1989-93, when the society was (gradually less and less) enthusiastic about systemic transformation (though the macro-economic situation was improving), and the high-growth, low-unemployment 1996-1998 period. As Ekiert and Kubik observed in their earlier analyses (1999), Polish data strongly supports the rejection of theorizing inspired by the relative deprivation theory.

Table 2

Year	Average pct. of positive evaluations of current situation	No. of protests	
1989		313	
1990	42	307	good, high protest
1991	31	292	good, high protest
1992	19	308	bad, high protest
1993	25	256	bad, medium protest
1994	25	260	bad, medium protest
1995	31	185	good, low protest
1996	39	308	good, high protest
1997	44	236	good, medium protest
1998	41	368	good, high protest
1999	30	185	good, low protest
2000	24	277	bad, medium protest
2001	20	146	bad, low protest
2002	21	230	bad, medium protest
2003	24	162	bad, low protest
2004	24	187	bad, low protest
2005	27		
2006	28		
2007	32		
2008	40		

Correlation r=0,46

Protest intensity is related to the point in time (and the related stage of transformation), rather than the political orientation of government. In the first years of transformation, the monthly rate of protest was at its highest. In the 1994-2001 period, in which both the post-communist left and post-Solidarity right were in power, monthly rates were the same for both terms. After 2001, the rate fell (Table 3).

Table 3

Parl. term	Government coalition	No. of protests	
		Total	Per month
IX 1989 – XI 1991	Solidarity with Communist and Communist-allied ministers	665	24.6
XII 1991 – X 1993	post-Solidarity right wing	550	23.9
XI 1993 – X 1997	post-communist left wing	982	20.5
XI 1997 – X 2001	right wing	992	20.7
XI 2001 – X 2005	left wing	598	15.7

Organizers

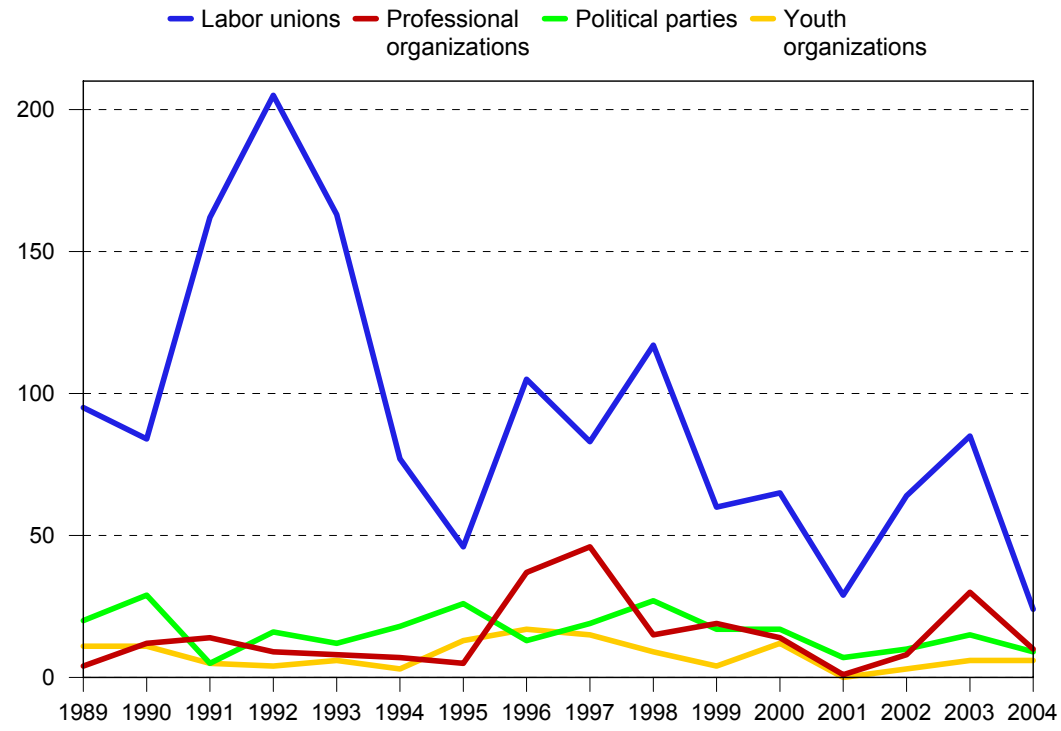
Trade unions were by far the most active organizers of protest events. The Solidarity Trade Union was the most involved and active union. The second most common category of events are spontaneous protests that have no clear organizational sponsor. Perhaps surprisingly, events organized by farmers' unions, which were well-publicized and became springboards for spectacular political careers (the *Samoobrona* leader Andrzej Lepper being the best example) were not numerous.

In the years 1999-2004, the number of events organized by unions slowly declined, reaching a low point in 2004. Political parties, as protest organizers, also lost their importance. The rise in the number of events organized by professional associations in 1996-97 may be an indicator of the debates surrounding the impending reforms in the educational and medical fields.

Table 4

Organizations leading or sponsoring the event	N	Pct. of cases
Labor unions	1751	43.5%
out of which: Solidarity Trade Union	775	19.2%
Domestic social movements	312	9.3%
Political parties	260	7.8%
Professional organizations	239	7.1%
Radical political movements	216	6.5%
Strike committees. employees councils	158	4.7%
Regional. local organizations	130	3.9%
Youth organizations	125	3.7%
Domestic alternative-culture	85	2.5%
Peasant/farmer organizations	48	1.4%
Ethnic or minority organizations	34	1.0%
Transnational advocacy networks	32	1.0%
Roman-Catholic Church	25	.7%
Other churches or religious organizations	4	.1%
Other	252	7.5%
None	504	15.1%
Data unavailable	949	28.4%

FIG. 5. Organizations leading or sponsoring the event (no. of events)



Protesting groups

Workers are by far the most common participants. Groups of neighbors and youth are relatively common categories as well.

The analysis of the trends reveals notable covariance between waves of events staged by certain groups and stages of transformation. Events staged by workers rose in importance throughout the 1990s, but this trend ended in 1999-2000, and since then, the number has continued to fall. 2004 was the year with the second-lowest number of events with workers' participation. This is a reflection of the falling number of controversial privatization cases, and also, perhaps, the diminishing role of the government in managing the economy. The state has largely shed its role as owner and manager and restricted itself to the role of regulator. It seems that the workers have yet to learn how to organize in private enterprises and how to challenge private owners.

Farmers were exceptionally active in the first years of the transformation, and again in 1997-2000. They were the first casualties of the "shock therapy." State-owned farms went bankrupt at the beginning of the 1990s and their employees largely became redundant, their situation aggravated by residence in areas of very high unemployment. Private farmers also suffered due to very high interest rates. Loans became too expensive and many fell into debt trap. The 1998-2000 intensification of "rural" protest coincides with the turn-of-century crisis. It

brought into public life the radical-populist farmers' union and political party *Samoobrona* (Self-defense).

Public sector employees and healthcare specialist were especially active in 1996-97. At that time, the early preparations for the 1998-99 reforms might have already played a role in mobilizing people and generating protest among the people who concluded that their basic interests were threatened.

Table 5

Protesting groups	N	Percent of Cases
workers	1562	39.5%
neighborhood or local	407	10.3%
youth. students	393	9.9%
farmers	262	6.6%
transport	257	6.5%
health or welfare	229	5.8%
public sector (unspecified)	189	4.8%
service industries	187	4.7%
education or science	167	4.2%
arts or media	148	3.7%
employers. managers	87	2.2%
local govt.	75	1.9%
police or army	65	1.6%
retired or disabled	62	1.6%
women	45	1.1%
unemployed or homeless	41	1.0%

Table 6. **Protesting groups (no. of events)**

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
workers	112	35	113	131	88	117	66	148	123	207	67	106	44	92	73	40
farmers	14	34	20	21	27	17	9	3	14	29	15	23	6	19	6	5
service industries	44	14	23	31	9	0	11	14	9	8	11	3	0	7	2	1
public sector	9	13	7	23	12	3	4	35	40	10	0	7	1	3	20	2
health or welfare	7	1	9	12	9	6	8	22	46	22	10	32	8	14	13	9
youth. students	35	44	24	34	17	9	32	38	30	20	14	21	21	17	15	22
neighborhood or local	22	23	18	19	12	17	3	44	34	46	10	56	38	28	18	18

Marked: 30 or more protests by group in a year

Methods

Demonstrations and open letters/appeals were the most common methods of protest in the years 1989-2004, followed by strikes and threats to undertake protest action (often so-called "strike alerts"). Disruptive or violent methods (road blockades, occupations of buildings, riots, etc) were less common. Interestingly, strike as a method or protest was gradually losing its dominance: it was the most common method in 1989, but the 5th most frequently used method in 2004.

Disruptive methods, such as occupations of public buildings and street riots, were comparatively common in early 1990s, but the frequency of this usage diminished in the later years. Street blockades were common in early 1990s and late 1990s, when farmers were active.

Table 7

Methods of protest	N	Percent of Cases
Demonstration, march, rally	1294	32.6%
Open letters, statements and appeals	1020	25.7%
Strike	664	16.7%
Threat to undertake protest action	653	16.4%
Blockade of road, picket	441	11.1%
Symbolic manifestation	327	8.2%
Occupation of public buildings	311	7.8%
Hunger strikes	210	5.3%
Legal action	154	3.9%
Rallies. meetings in traditional gathering places	105	2.6%
Riots	84	2.1%
Boycotts	77	1.9%
Refusal to acknowledge legal decision	62	1.6%
Attack on property	54	1.4%
Use of force against management	45	1.1%
Confrontation	42	1.1%

FIG. 6. Methods of protest (most common)

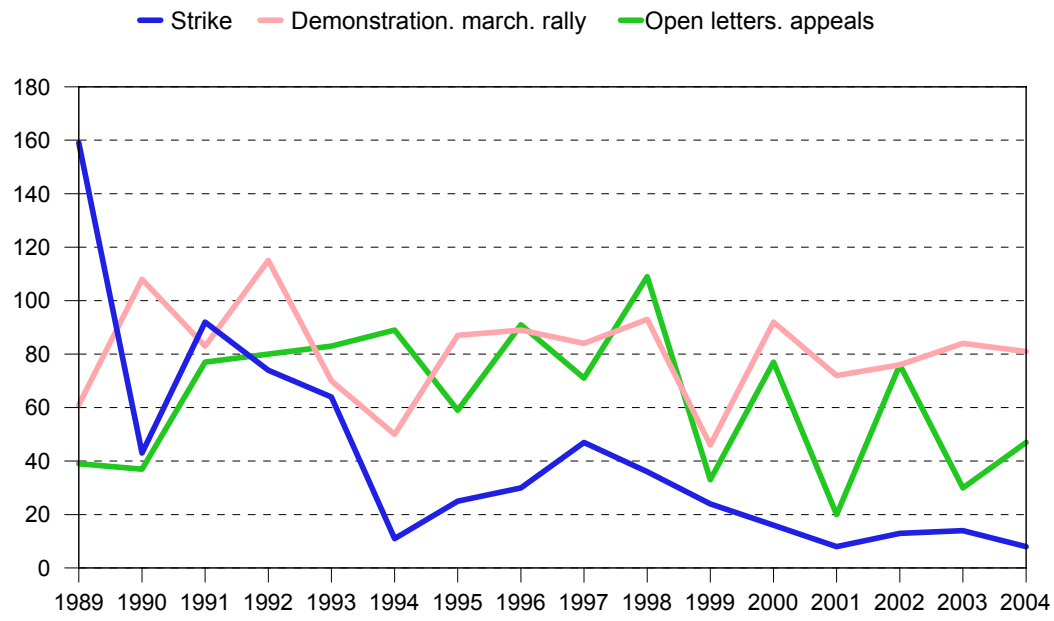
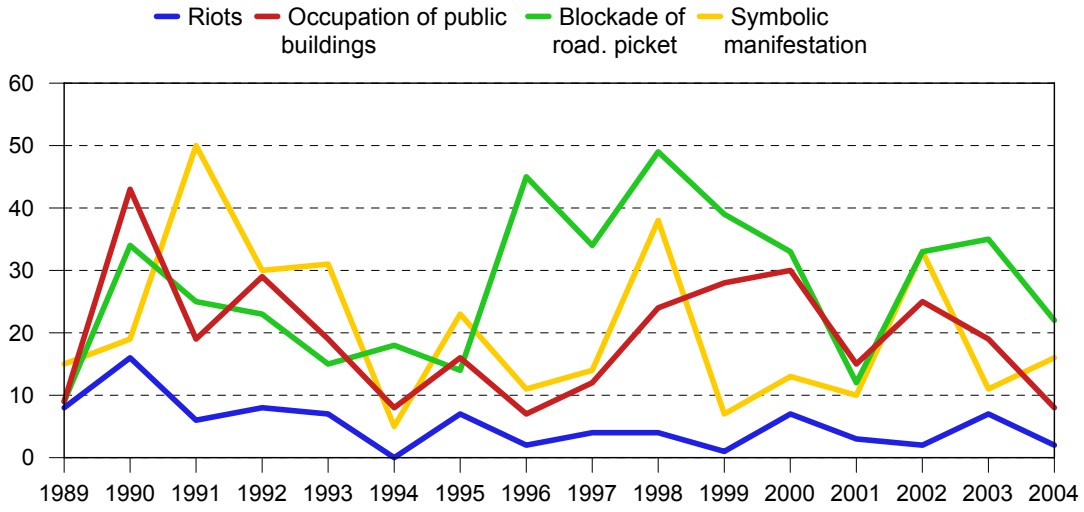


FIG. 7. Methods of protest (less common)



Public demonstrations are the most common method of protest for all major types of organizers. As far as industrial protest is concerned, strikes were employed in only one-fifth of union protests. Threats to undertake protest action were more common. Clearly, labor unions do not use industrial action recklessly.

Table 8.
Methods of protest by type of organization leading or sponsoring (% of events)

Labor unions*	Political parties	Youth organizations	None (spontaneous events)
Demonstration, march, rally 30.4%	Demonstration, march, rally 59.6%	Demonstration, march, rally 75.2%	Demonstration, march, rally 34.4%
Threat to undertake protest action 26.6%	Open letters, statements and appeals 23.5%	Open letters, statements and appeals 32.0%	Open letters, statements and appeals 25.3%
Strike 20.9%	Blockade of road, picket 14.6%	Threat to undertake protest action 8.0%	Threat to undertake protest action 17.7%
Open letters, statements and appeals 20.6%	Occupation of public buildings 9.2%	Symbolic manifestation 8.0%	Strike 17.2%
Blockade of road, picket 14.0%	Strike 8.5%	Blockade of road, picket 7.2%	Blockade of road, picket 10.7%

*Data for years 1994-2004

Demands

Economic demands were by far most frequent. Demands regarding change in policy on various levels, and demands for compensation were almost equally common.

However, in a diachronic perspective, the frequency of economic demands declined. 2004 was the year with the fewest number of events involving economic demands, and they also constituted a relatively low proportion of all events that year. Only once was the proportion lower, but that was in 1998, the year with the highest recorded number of protest events.

Table 9.

Demands	N	Percent of Cases
Change domestic economic policies	920	22.8%
Material compensation	860	21.3%
Change domestic policies	762	18.9%
General dissatisfaction with policies	391	9.7%
General economic demands	303	7.5%
Increased influence in decision making	140	3.5%
Change external/foreign policies	128	3.2%
Ecological demands	121	3.0%
Recognition of identity	60	1.5%
Abortion debate	48	1.2%
Problems of ethnic minorities	36	.9%
Religious demands	26	.6%
Other demands	840	20.8%

FIG. 8. Economic demands

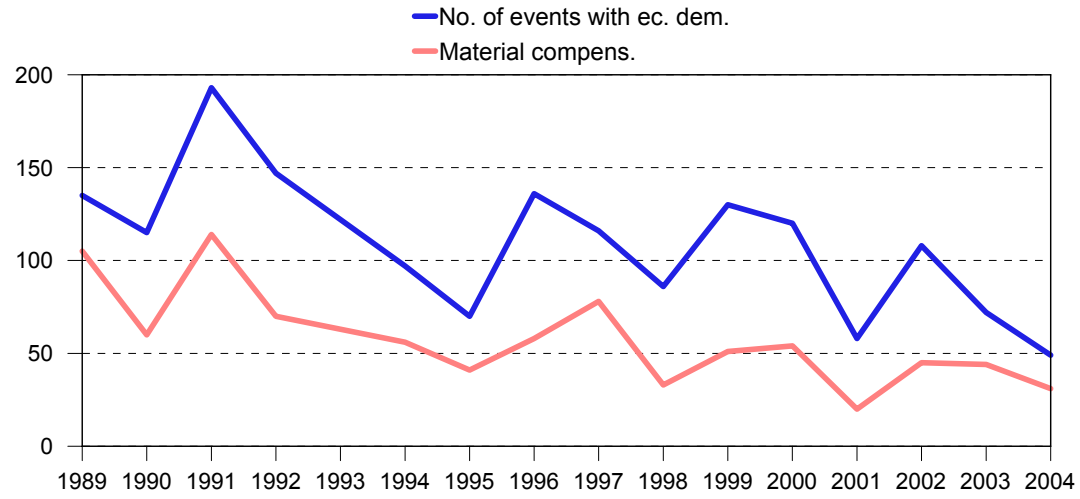
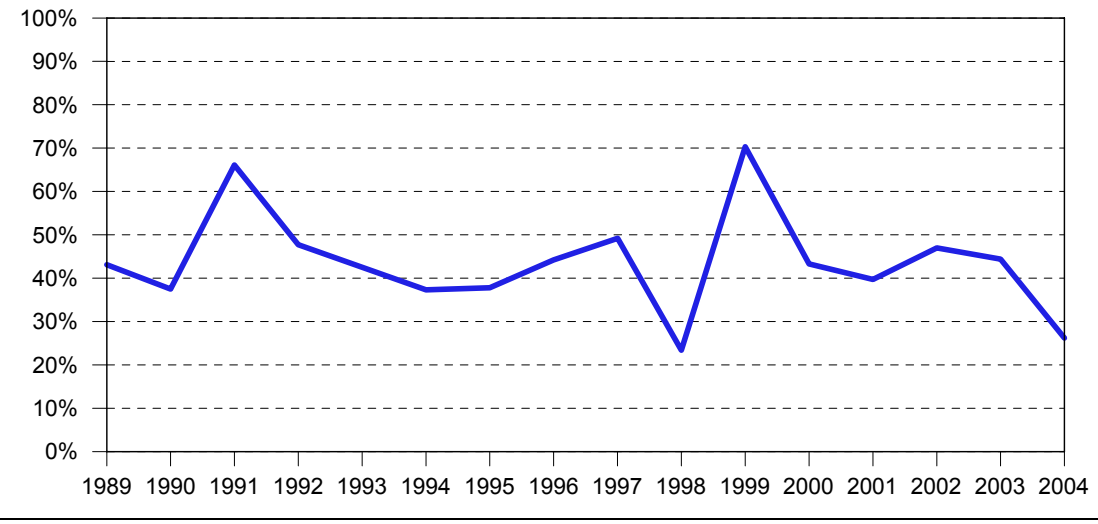


FIG. 9. Events with economic demands as pct. of all events in a year



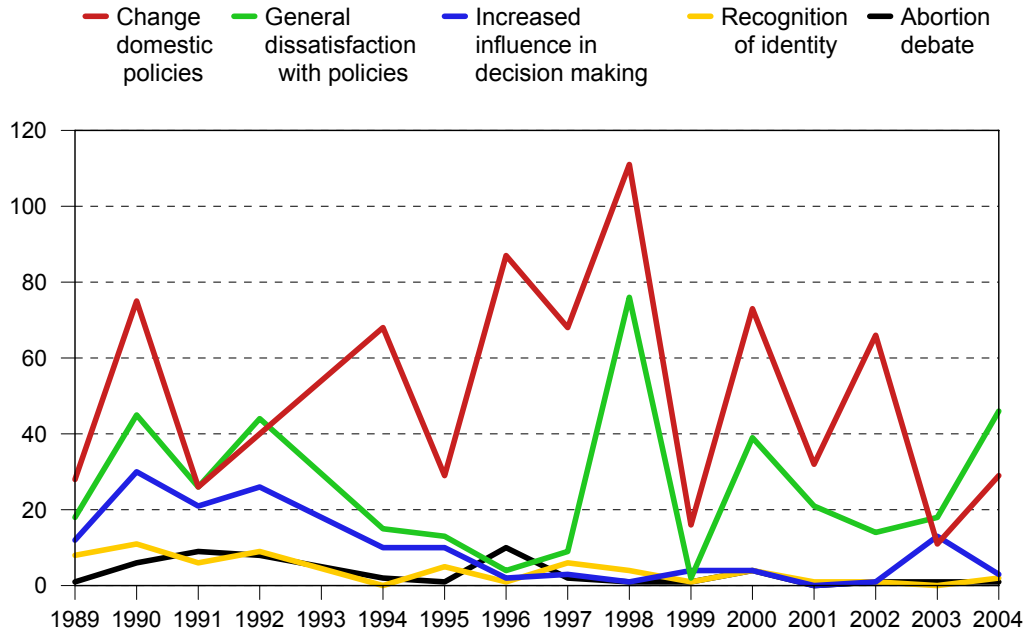
The number of protest events during which economic demands were voiced is apparently unrelated to the economic condition of the country (as measured by major macro-economic indexes). It continued to decline over time, regardless of the ups and downs of the economic situation.

Table 10.

Period	Average yearly no. of events **with economic demands**
1989-1992 Transformation shock	148
1993-2000 Sustained growth	108
2001-2002 Crisis	83
2003-2004 Pre- and post-EU accession boom	61

The demand for a change in domestic policies peaked in the 1998, as did the dissatisfaction with the government policies. Note, however, that during that period the level of satisfaction with the situation in Poland was very high. At that time, the government's call for systemic reform generated tensions and concerns that were articulated in numerous protest actions. The period in which the most comprehensive and complex institutional reforms were proposed and implemented was also the period of the most intense contentious mobilization. This shows that at the moment of major institutional reform, many Poles decided not stay on the sidelines and tried to get engaged in policy-making.

FIG. 10. Demands (non-economic)



Size of protest events

Small events predominate. The majority of events for which size was recorded had up to 200 participants. In reality, the margin is much higher. Our preliminary analysis of descriptions of events for which size was not recorded suggests that many of them involved small numbers. Labor unions were able to mobilize the largest numbers of participants for the vents they sponsored (Table 11b).

Table 11. Size

No. of participants	Pct. of cases (only events for which data is available)
0-20	16.4
21-200	37.0
201-500	17.2
501-1000	7.6
1001-2000	7.2
2001-10.000	9.4
over 10.000	5.2

Data are available for 45.3% of events

Table 11b: Size by type of organization leading or sponsoring (% of events for which size is recorded)

	Labor unions	Political parties	Youth organizations	None (spontaneous events)
0-20	5.2%	14.8%	10.8%	30.1%
21-200	21.2%	34.2%	39.2%	39.8%
201+	63.6%	51.0%	50.0%	30.1%

Intervention by the authorities

The authorities intervened in 10% of cases. Over time, the attitude of authorities to protests changed, but there is no clear trend. The most intriguing finding is the fact that the most frequent targets of the official interventions were the young people. Events in which they participated were twice as likely to cause intervention than other events, and they were three times more likely to be forcefully dispelled.

Table 12

Intervention (% of events)	
Intervention without force	4,0%
Intervention with force	5,7%
No intervention	42,2%
Data unavailable	39,6%

FIG. 11. Intervention (% of events)

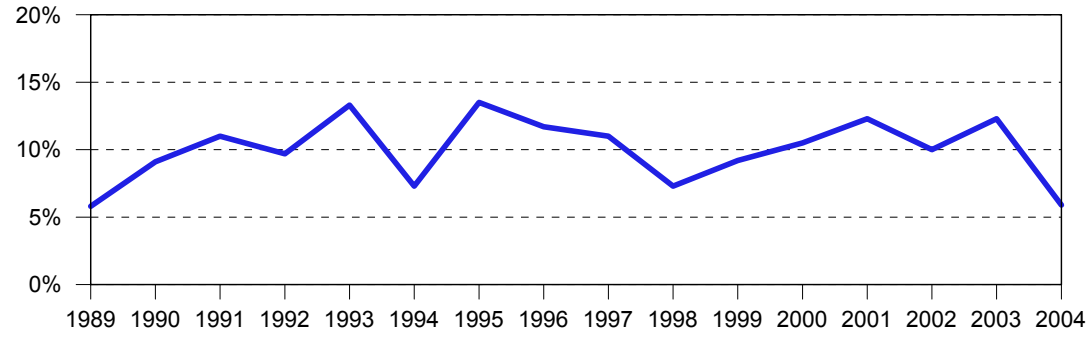


Table 13.
Intervention by protesting groups (% of events in which intervention was recorded)

	Protesting groups					
	workers	service sector	neighborhood, local	youth	farmers	health or welfare
Intervention without force	4.0%	2.1%	4.7%	5.3%	5.0%	3.1%
Intervention with force	4.7%	2.7%	6.6%	16.5%	6.9%	4.4%

3. Indicators of civil society: other data

In a comparative perspective, Eastern Europe is characterized by relatively weak civil society (see, for example, Howard). This holds true regardless of the indicator.

Protest activities

In comparison with other EU countries, protest activities are not widespread in Poland and Hungary. As far as participation in legal demonstrations is concerned, Poland is at the bottom of the ranking, with Hungary very close. Polish people are slightly more eager to sign petitions.

Table 14.

Protest activities (last 12 months) ESS data 2002-2007; % adults	Signed petition	Taken part in lawful public demonstration
Spain	23,2%	22,4%
Luxembourg	24,1%	17,3%
France	32,7%	14,5%
Italy	16,1%	11,2%
Germany	30,7%	9,3%
Belgium	28,9%	7,5%
Denmark	31,1%	7,1%
Austria	24,1%	7,0%
Sweden	44,6%	6,3%
Ireland	24,2%	5,8%
Greece	3,9%	4,5%
United Kingdom	38,6%	4,2%
Czech Republic	13,9%	3,7%
Portugal	5,2%	3,7%
Netherlands	22,3%	3,4%
Slovakia	21,6%	3,3%
Slovenia	10,5%	2,8%
Hungary	**4,9%**	**2,8%**
Estonia	5,2%	2,1%
Finland	27,1%	2,0%
Poland	**7,4%**	**1,5%**

Activity in organizations

Poland and Hungary are at or near the bottom of the European ranking of membership in non-political organizations and associations.

Table 15.

Worked in non-political organization or association in last 12 months (ESS data)	% adults
Finland	31,9%
Sweden	25,2%
Denmark	22,1%
Belgium	21,5%
Netherlands	21,4%
Austria	21,2%
Luxembourg	20,9%
Germany	19,6%
France	16,1%
Spain	15,5%
Ireland	12,9%
Czech Republic	9,8%
United Kingdom	8,8%
Italy	8,7%
Slovakia	8,4%
Poland	**5,5%**
Greece	5,4%
Portugal	3,7%
Estonia	3,6%
Slovenia	2,1%
Hungary	**1,9%**

While the ESS data reveal that in comparative European perspective Central European countries are characterized by low rates of membership, they do not give the correct idea about the exact proportion of the population that is active in NGOs. The definition of organization proposed by ESS appears restrictive. Apparently, for the CEE respondents it means only formal, official structures. Other data sources reveal that if different wording is used, the number of self-identified participants and activists is higher.

In Poland, according to *Diagnoza Społeczna* 2007 survey, **15% of adult population belongs to organizations, associations, parties, trade unions or religious movements** (in 2005 and 2003, 12%). Surveys conducted by *Klon/Jawor* association, SMG/KRC and *Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wolontariatu* indicate that **14% of Polish people declare membership in an NGO, social or religious movement, trade union or charity**. The Klon/Jawor assesses that between 14-20% of adults volunteer in NGOs.

Table 16.

Volunteers (% adults)	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
	10%	11.1%	17.7%	18.3%	23.2%	21.8%	13.2%

Source: Klon/Jawor, SMG KRC A Millward Brown Company, Stowarzyszenia Centrum Wolontariatu

CBOS surveys indicate that around 20% of adults claim to be performing some type of civic activity in organizations, many in more than one area.

Table 17.

Civic activity in organizations	II 1998 (N=1167)	XII 1999 (N=1522)	I 2002 (N=973)	I 2004 (N=1057)	I 2006 (N=1007)	I 2008 (N= 890)
	%					
Inactive	77	76	79	76	77	80
Active	**23**	**24**	**21**	**24**	**23**	**20**
- one	15	13	15	14	14	12
- two	4	5	4	5	4	4
- three or more	4	6	2	5	5	4

Source: CBOS

In comparison to other organizations, CBOS reports higher numbers. This seems to be the result of the different wording of the question(s). The listing of the types of organizations is very detailed and allows respondents to identify civic activity they might not have otherwise understood in these categories (PTAs, hobby groups, etc.)

Table 18.

Civic activity (types of organizations)	% adults					
	II 1998	XII 1999	I 2002	I 2004	I 2006	**I 2008**
Educational, PTAs, school foundations	4.5	5.5	3.2	4.2	4.8	**4.8**
Trade unions	3.2	4.8	3.3	3.8	3.9	**3.2**
Church and religious organizations	3.6	3.9	2.0	3.9	3.4	**2.8**
Sports clubs	2.2	3.1	2.7	4.8	3.5	**2.8**
Children's charities	1.2	2.9	1.0	2.4	3.5	**2.4**
Charities (not for children)	1.5	2.8	1.3	2.4	2.1	**2.4**
Youth and students' organizations	1.5	2.0	2.1	2.3	2.3	**1.8**
Anglers', hunters' and gardeners' clubs	2.4	3.1	1.8	2.9	2.5	**1.6**
Volunteer firefighters	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.2	3.4	**1.4**
Seniors' and pensioners' clubs	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.8	1.8	**1.2**
Countryside and tourists' associations	1.6	2.0	0.6	1.3	0.9	**1.1**
Veterans' associations	1.4	1.3	0.9	1.4	1.2	**1.0**
Regional associations, town and local culture clubs	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.6	0.8	**1.0**
Women's organizations	1.0	1.5	0.8	1.2	0.8	**1.0**
Hobby clubs	0.5	0.7	0.7	1.2	0.7	**1.0**
Environmental organizations	0.9	1.5	0.3	1.2	1.8	**0.9**
Healthcare foundations	0.7	1.2	0.6	0.8	1.5	**0.9**
Local government on lowest level (neighborhood council)	1.0	1.2	0.3	1.0	1.2	**0.9**
Artistic (choir, musical band, theatre group)	0.9	1.8	0.9	1.9	1.6	**0.8**
Self-help, e.g. AA, unemployed	0.6	1.1	0.4	1.0	1.3	**0.8**
Self-government on *gmina* level	1.1	1.3	0.2	1.1	0.9	**0.8**
Self-government on county and voivodship level	-	0.4	0.1	0.5	0.2	**0.7**
Scientific associations	0.6	1.4	0.8	1.4	1.2	**0.5**
Professional associations	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.5	**0.5**
Employee representation, works councils	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.8	1.1	**0.4**
Political parties	0.3	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.7	**0.4**
Organizations promoting friendship with other countries	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.7	0.6	**0.4**
Single-issue groups, protest groups	0.5	1.2	0.3	0.4	1.0	**0.4**
Animal protection groups	1.1	1.1	0.7	0.8	1.6	**0.3**
Others	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.3	0.9	**1.7**

Source: CBOS

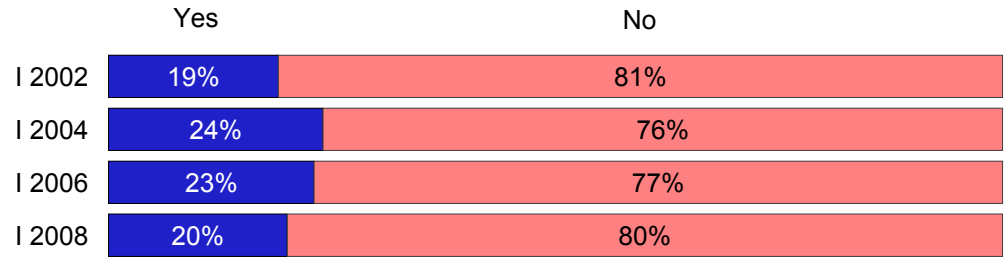
Community service

According to the *Diagnoza Społeczna* 2007 survey of adult population, **14% of Polish people** claim to have been **active on behalf their community (town, neighborhood).** There is a slow but systematic increase in this type of activity: 8% in 2000, 12.9% in 2003, 13.6% in 2005.

Participation in public meetings rises very slowly: **20% of adults attended a public meeting in 2007**, 19% in 2005, and 18% in 2003. 57% of participants spoke at the meeting. CBOS surveys confirm this data. About 20% of adults declare that they have performed volunteer, unpaid work for the benefit of their environment, church, neighborhood, town, village, or for the people in need.

CBOS

FIG. 12. Volunteer, unpaid work for the benefit of their environment, church, neighborhood, town, village, or for the people in need.



Membership in trade unions

Trade unions are specific organizations that constitute a separate sector of civil society. Comparative work on the type and level of unionization is hampered by the frequently considerable differences in national laws and regulations impacting this sphere. Each country has its own system of incentives and organizational rules that strongly influence levels and institutional designs of unionization. Nonetheless, the union membership is a good measure of a certain type of socio-economic capital and the ability to self-organize to struggle for economic and political goals.

Both Poland and Hungary belong to the weakly unionized EU members. However, union membership is falling throughout the industrialized world and low union density in the CEE countries is a part of this trend. The weakness or strength of unions is also influenced by such factors as the coverage of workforce by collective bargaining or the type and the robustness of social dialogue (bi- and tripartite). Poland has weakly covered workforce (30% at the level of enterprise, 10% at the sector level – ETUI data), and social dialogue has little influence on the development and implementation of government policies.

Table 19.

Membership in trade unions (ESS data)	Current (employees)	Ever (all adults)
Denmark	81,9%	84,5%
Sweden	74,4%	78,8%
Finland	68,1%	69,6%
Belgium	43,6%	47,1%
Luxembourg	42,2%	36,9%
Slovenia	39,6%	53,3%
Ireland	33,8%	43,0%
Austria	28,8%	38,4%
Netherlands	27,1%	33,2%
United Kingdom	25,9%	44,8%
Italy	23,6%	26,2%
Greece	19,8%	17,1%
Germany	16,3%	38,4%
Hungary	**15,9%**	**52,0%**
Slovakia	15,1%	47,5%
Portugal	14,1%	16,7%
Czech Republic	14,0%	54,6%
Poland	**14,0%**	**31,0%**
Spain	13,5%	15,8%
France	11,0%	22,2%
Estonia	10,2%	59,8%

The decline of union membership in Poland has been faster than in the countries of Western Europe or US. This is due to many different factors: country-specific, system-specific, and global. The basic system-specific factor is the changing role of trade unions in post-transformation economies. Under socialism, union membership was essentially automatic, with density close to 100%. The basic role of unions in state enterprises was the distribution of certain in-kind benefits and support for employees in difficult economic situation. Unions were hardly ever challenging the management. The high membership figures are therefore misleading: membership did not signal the ability or willingness to self-organize.

The post-communist property transformations meant bankruptcy of inefficient enterprises, privatization, and green-field investment. The average size of workplace fell, and services replaced manufacturing as the dominant sector of the economy. All these factors undermined the position of unions, which tend to be strongest in big industrial plants, mining, public administration, and education.

Table 20.

Trade union membership 1989-2008	V 1989	III 1990	IV 1991	VI 1992	XII 1993	III 1994	IX 1995	VI 1996	III 1999	V 2000	VII 2001	VII 2002	X 2003	IX 2004	IX 2005	II 2006	XI 2007	XII 2008
	% adults in Poland																	
Total	22	22	19	16	10	14	11	11	11	9	8	6	8	8	9	7	6	6
- Solidarity	7	15	10	6	5	5	6	5	5	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2
- OPZZ	15	6	6	6	3	5	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1
- Forum of Trade Un.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1
- other	-	1	3	4	2	4	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2

CBOS data

Trust

It seems rather uncontroversial to assume that strong civil society is built on trust (Putnam and Goss 2002). Trust in others is a pre-requisite of co-operation to achieve common goals. In this respect, both Poland and Hungary, but especially Poland, rank very low (Table 21).

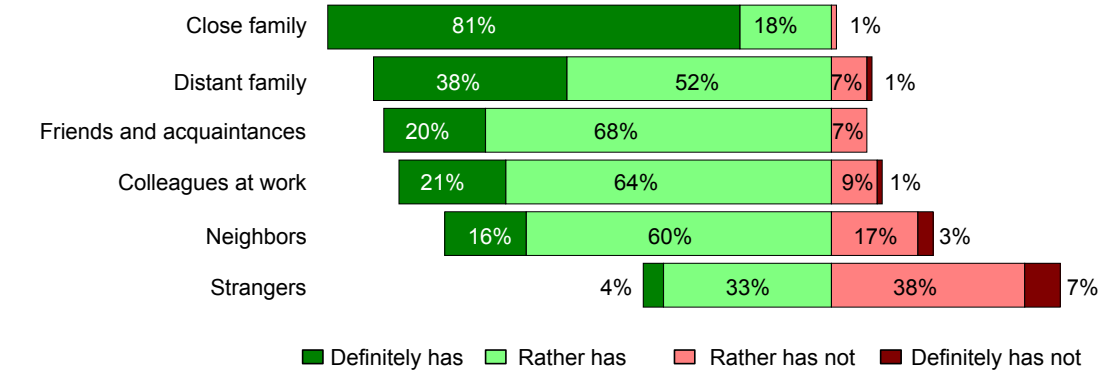
Table 21.

Generalized trust (ESS data) Most people can be trusted OR You can't be too careful (10-point scale)	Mean	Std. dev.
Denmark	6,92	2,079
Finland	6,51	1,885
Sweden	6,14	2,173
Netherlands	5,74	2,095
Ireland	5,59	2,459
Estonia	5,25	2,172
United Kingdom	5,21	2,195
Luxembourg	5,11	2,385
Austria	5,09	2,415
Spain	4,96	2,162
Belgium	4,86	2,329
Germany	4,69	2,328
France	4,47	2,254
Italy	4,41	2,319
Czech Republic	4,19	2,406
Slovakia	4,17	2,360
Hungary	**4,12**	**2,415**
Slovenia	4,06	2,555
Portugal	3,99	2,272
Poland	**3,79**	**2,360**
Greece	3,77	2,482

In 1970s, Stefan Nowak, a renowned Polish sociologist, proposed a hypothesis about the existence of "social vacuum" in Poland. In this conception, Polish society is a "federation of families and friendship groups united in a nation." The family ties are strong, but voluntary relations are weak. Group activity tends to be defined by kinship and each such family network acts in opposition to, and has interests incompatible with the others. The data presented and analyzed in this paper indicate that this holds true at present as well.

CBOS

FIG. 13. Trust in:



4. Summary and conclusions

Many Polish sociologists and political scientists diagnose the end of the transformation period. The revolutionary reforms introduced in 1989/90 changed the economic, social, and political life. They created a new system that was consolidated before or around the time Poland entered the EU. Therefore, our protest event database encompasses the whole transformation period.

The preliminary results of our analyses can be summarized in seven points:

1. From 1989 to 2004 protest intensity diminished. The further from the commencement of the 1989 reforms, the fewer events are recorded in our database. This trend was particularly pronounced in reference to economic demands. At the beginning of the transformation, the stakes were higher, as new rules were, to some extent, negotiated. At the grass roots level, the outcomes of market reform and property transformation for enterprises were unclear, and power and ownership could be changed by collective action. As situation stabilized, such motives lost their relevance. Another wave of protests in the second half of the 1990s confirms this observation. As the major reforms of the state were introduced, for many groups the stakes rose again and some of their members engaged in collective action.

2. This regularity was complemented by another: as the satisfaction with the situation in the country increased, so did the intensity of protest activity. The latter peeked twice. First, during the early transformation, when optimism prevailed and the first benefits of the transformation became apparent (hyperinflation was checked, market shortages disappeared), but the negative consequences did not yet affect the population. The second period of increased protest activity was the high-growth, low-unemployment period 1996-98. This correlation signals that political (government policies and their public perception), cultural (ideological framing of events, political opponents, etc.) and psycho-social (transformational fatigue, periods of optimism) factors must be taken into account as potential explanatory variables.

3. Trade unions were the most active organizers of protests, and manual workers were the most active social group. However, the intensity of labor mobilization steadily decreased. This trend may be attributed to the consolidation of the economic system on the one hand, and to the weakness of labor unions on the other. Trade unions were involved in the early economic transformation in many roles: Solidarity provided a “protective shield” for the reforms in its first months on the national level. On the level of enterprises, it often participated in selecting new management. In the following years, Solidarity ceased to be the key actor, and all unions lost members. This loss coincided with the decrease in the number of labor-sponsored protest events.

4. During the early transformation years, the protesting groups were largely defined by their professional status (workers, service sector employees, white collars). This changed towards the end of the period under study. Protest by employees diminished, but young people and groups of neighbors continued their engagement in contentious politics. As a result, they became (in relative terms) major players. This signals the possibility that a civil society based on post-material values was slowly emerging.

5. Interestingly, protest events serving as vehicles for the formation of new identities (ethnic, gender, sexual, religious etc.) were rare, and occurred almost exclusively during the early transformation period. Similarly, the "protest" debate over abortion practically stopped in the 21st century. One can hypothesize that the early 1990s were formative also in the cultural sphere. As historical institutionalists would predict, early events pre-determined certain long-term trends in the formation of collective identities and basic definitions of the post-communist situation. For instance, the restrictive Polish abortion law (it is only allowed when the mother's health is in danger, when serious defects are detected in the fetus, or in cases of rape or incest), which caused strong controversies after it was introduced, is now largely accepted by the public opinion.

6. Generally accepted and broadly used indicators show that civil society in East Central Europe is weak in comparison with other EU or OECD countries. Moreover, it shows no signs of improvement. Some indicators indicate stability (membership in NGOs, community activities, trust), while others (e.g. volunteer work, protest density) even show some weakening.

7. It is, however, argued by some sociologists that these indicators do not capture the specificity of Polish or East European civil society, because they tend to focus on established formal organizations, rather than informal networks which constitute the civil society's core in the region. NGOs may be unpopular, and they are associated in public opinion with state institutions, to which they are often tied. However, low membership in such organizations does not mean that citizens are inactive. They operate through informal or semi-formal networks, dubbed "home-made civil society" in a recent study (Giza Poleszczuk 2009). What needs to be investigated is the impact of this **individualized** and **informal** civil society on the performance, consolidation, or quality of democracy.