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## DEMOCRACY EVALUATION AND ITS SELECTED DETERMINANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2014 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN POLAND

The local elections that were held in November 2014 stirred up considerable controversy in Poland. The article is an attempt to describe how Poles evaluated the overall functioning of democracy in the context of these elections and what determinants significantly contributed to that evaluation. We examined three levels of democracy evaluation: general beliefs (Jost's system justification), the current state of democracy (Dahl's democratic institutions), and specific events connected with the functioning of the democratic system (the quality of the elections and the level of trust in the elected representatives). We also tested the extent to which these levels of democracy evaluation were explained by sociopolitical determinants, such as the general level of trust in people, patriotism and nationalism, or the experience of security. The study was conducted shortly after the second round of the election on a sample of 524 subjects. The obtained results show a low quality of democracy (particularly on the level of general beliefs and trust in the newly elected authorities) and reveal associations between aspects of evaluation and the investigated determinants.

**Keywords:** democracy evaluation; 2014 local elections; system justification; trust; patriotism; experience of security.

### **THE UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY: LEVELS OF DEMOCRACY EVALUATION**

A person needs to understand the world he or she lives in (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002), including the sociopolitical reality. The importance of the world of politics to man stems from the very nature of a social creature (Aristotle, 2003; Reykowski, 2000), which implies engaging in intellectual activity in order to explore and give meanings to political phenomena. This activity results in the development of a comprehensive mental model that makes it possible for the individual to find his or her bearings and make the most beneficial decisions (Reykowski, 2002).

A general category of the understanding of sociopolitical phenomena may be democracy. This term covers a broad class of political events that are reflected in the mind in the form of representations, theories, and judgments (Jaśko & Kossowska, 2008; Skarżyńska, 2005). It is used to refer not only to the form of existence of a state but also to methods of holding power or ways of making decisions. As a term describing political phenomena, it is an important point of reference for individuals in building knowledge of the sociopolitical reality.

Democracy is characterized by complexity and ambiguity (Dahl, 2005; Reykowski, 2000). In Poland, psychological research on the understanding of democracy was conducted shortly after the political transformations by Reykowski and colleagues (1995), and later by Jakubowska (2005), Jaśko and Kossowska (2008), and Korzeniowski (2010). Reykowski's study revealed two basic standards of the understanding of democracy: freedom and welfare (welfarism). Subsequent research, based on the same set of characteristics attributed to Polish democracy, allowed Jakubowska (2005) to distinguish three factors: Catholic nation-state, democratic state, and welfare state; Jaśko and Kossowska (2008) also distinguished three factors, but slightly different ones: welfare state, rule of law, and strong nation-state; the factors distinguished by Korzeniowski (2010) are as follows: populist state, confessional state, and nation-state. These results suggest that statistical categorization of the ways of understanding democracy leads to diverse solutions. In the present study, we adopted the theory proposed by Robert Dahl (2000, 2005), well-known in political science and outlined below, as the point of reference for the evaluation of democracy.

In the present paper, we used a complex model of evaluation. The model consists of three levels, differing in the level of generality. The first level is general beliefs justifying the social order, referred to as system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003; Wojciszke, 2010). This is a widespread subjective belief, understood

as an “ideological motivation” to support the sociopolitical order. The authors of the system justification theory describe the functions that justification performs in the social functioning of individuals and groups; generally, the aim is to maintain the status quo (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Kay & Jost, 2003). In Poland, the level of system justification is very low (Skarżyńska, 2012; Wojciszke, 2010; Wojciszke & Borkowska, 2007) and attests to the citizens’ negative evaluation of the sociopolitical order.

The second level of democracy evaluation concerns its current state – the appraisal of selected characteristics. This level of evaluation had been analyzed in the studies mentioned above. In our study, we used the institutions of a democratic state distinguished by Dahl (2000, 2005) as evaluation categories. These are: (1) elected officials, controlling the government’s activities and being a condition of real participation in power; (2) free, fair, and frequent elections, in which representatives are elected; (3) freedom of expression, which consists in every citizen having the right to present his or her views on political issues as well as the right to criticize the government, the system, the dominant ideology, and the socioeconomic order without any penal consequences; (4) alternative sources of information, in which citizens have the right to look for independent and diverse information from experts, in newspapers, or in the electronic media, these sources not being controlled by the government or a political group; (5) associational autonomy, affording citizens the right and possibility to establish relatively independent organizations, associations, or political parties; (6) inclusive citizenship, meaning that no adult person can be deprived of the rights that other people have and that are necessary for the functioning of the political institutions listed above. The above classification has a normative character and contains the factors that are indispensable for a state to meet the requirements of democracy. The psychological perspective presupposes the context of subjective evaluation of the degree to which each institution is respected.

The last level of democracy evaluation is the evaluation of particular events connected with the functioning of the democratic system. An important sign of the quality of the democratic system is the way elections are held (cf. Reykowski, 1995); therefore, we decided that evaluation should concern the quality of elections and citizens’ trust in the elected representatives.

For many Poles, the peculiar situation connected with the local elections held in November 2014 evoked questions about the quality of democracy in their country; the situation involved the breakdown of the new computer system used by the National Electoral Commission resulting in the prolonged counting of votes, numerous irregularities in manual vote counting and the submission of

minutes, and a much higher number of blank or invalid votes compared to previous elections. Citizens, institutions, and opposition parties (PiS – Law and Justice, and SLD – Democratic Left Alliance) voiced serious reservations about the manner of counting the votes. The parties of the government coalition (PO – Civic Platform, and PSL – Polish Peasants' Party) as well as the president admitted that there had been mistakes but maintained that they affected neither the election results nor the quality of democracy. Reports prepared by various institutions, e.g., *Local Government Elections in Poland in 2014 in the Light of European Union Standards* (2014) or *Elections: Credibility and Efficiency* (Stefan Batory Foundation, 2014) pointed out serious mistakes. Poles reacted to that situation. In a December poll by CBOS (2014) 58% of respondents indicated that the provincial assembly elections had been reliable (including 19% who indicated *definitely yes*), but a considerable proportion of respondents (22%) indicated that the results of the elections were unreliable and 17% did not give a clear answer, which also amounts to a lack of positive evaluation.

Another significant predictor investigated as pertaining to election evaluation was trust in the elected local authorities. The level of trust in the authorities in Poland is one of the lowest in Europe (Nyćkowiak, 2009; Skarżyńska & Radkiewicz, 2007). Also trust in the legal system is almost the lowest (of the 23 countries examined, it was lower only in Bulgaria and Ukraine; Van de Walle, 2008). The situation connected with the 2014 local elections may have additionally influenced the evaluation of the newly elected officials.

All the levels of democracy evaluation mentioned above contribute to the complex construct of subjective understanding and evaluation of the democratic system. The quality of the meanings of political phenomena developed by people depends on many causes, diverse in their nature: emotional, cognitive, and social (Jaśko & Kossowska, 2008; Nęcka, Orzechowski, & Szymura, 2006; Reykowski, 2002).

## DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRACY EVALUATION

Democracy evaluation is determined by many factors connected with the understanding of the sociopolitical reality in the country. These include: (1) factors building the citizens' ideological attitudes, their social identity, and attachment to their country; (2) basic attitudes to other people; (3) general beliefs concerning personal security (Bar-Tal & Jacobson, 1998; Dahl, 2000; Klamut, 2014; Lewicka, 2009; Reykowski, 1995; Skarżyńska, 2005; Skarżyńska & Chmielewski,

2007; Skarżyńska & Radkiewicz, 2007). Of the broad array of determinants taken into account in the presented studies, we examined the following: (1) national attitudes, (2) general trust in people, and (3) experience of security. Although they seem to belong to different areas of human functioning, all of them define the way of relating to sociopolitical and civic reality (Bar-Tal & Jacobson, 1998; Klamut, 2014; Skarżyńska, 2005; Yamagishi, 2011).

National attitudes are citizens' attitudes to their country. They are associated with specific emotions, beliefs, and behaviors (Radkiewicz, 2009). Their significance to identity is so great that they constitute the content of the education of young people in many European countries (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) and determine the sense of being part of the nation. They can be described as patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is characterized by the love of one's homeland and manifests itself in expressing affection for it, as well as in engaging in activities for its benefit. It is a kind of social identity manifesting itself in attachment to one's nation. As distinct from it, nationalism is an ideology defining not only the current state but also ideas concerning the ideal state. It involves not only the love of one's homeland but also the belief in the superiority of one's nation – particularly moral superiority – and a tendency to see it as having a dominant position (Skarżyńska & Radkiewicz, 2011; Wojciszke, 2011). In democracy, these attitudes are important predictors of political preferences and attitudes. They are associated with a general positive evaluation of Poles, their abilities and activities (Skarżyńska, 2005), while nationalism is also associated with political paranoia (Korzeniowski, 2010). Identification with the nation and its positive evaluation may also result in a positive evaluation of the country's current sociopolitical system.

General trust in people is named as one of the main factors behind social attitudes (Putnam, 2000; Yamagishi, 2011); it is believed to be an important element of citizens' social capital and psychological strength. The objects of trust are of various kinds. They can be the government, politicians, or democratic institutions, but they can also be family and friends, work colleagues, etc. Trust may be a general attitude to the world and other people (Lewicka, 2009; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). General trust in people is often treated as a kind of faith in people – a belief that they are good and that positive attitudes can be expected from them. The opposite, negative pole is caution rather than lack of trust (Lewicka, 2009). In Poland, the level of general trust is one of the lowest in Europe (Wojciszke, 2011). This positive social attitude should play a significant role in the evaluation of various aspects of the sociopolitical system. However, Uslaner and Brown (2005) showed that trust was a predictor of social involvement and

engagement in volunteer work, but its associations with political participation are weak. Skarżyńska (2005) writes about the relationship (at the cognitive level) between trust and positive attitude to democracy. Trust has also been used in explaining the perception of political situation – for example, by Skarżyńska and Chmielewski (2007).

Security is a category relating to the basic conditions of human life. Defined as an objective state consisting in a lack of danger, subjectively perceived by individuals and groups (Korzeniowski, 2000). In the psychological perspective, the usual practice is to refer to the sense of security (Bar-Tal & Jacobson, 1998). Apart from the sense of security, understood as a subjective state of experiencing peace, certainty, and no threats, what should also be considered is reflection on security. It is a kind of intentional cognitive activity – reflection stemming from an interest in one's own security as well as in the security of one's family and friends. Its important characteristics are the awareness of the importance of security and a focus on security (Klamut, 2012). The experience of security, comprising the sense of and reflection on security, plays an important role in civic activity, particularly in individual political activity aimed at understanding the sociopolitical reality (Klamut, 2014). The category of security has turned out to be a significant factor in explaining the understanding of the sociopolitical situation (social threats) and behavior in the inhabitants of Israel (Bar-Tal & Jacobson, 1998). It should also be significant as a factor conditioning democracy evaluation.

In the present study, we formulated two main research aims. The first one was to examine specific aspects of democracy evaluation within the distinguished levels in the context of the 2014 local elections. The second aim was to determine the significance of the investigated determinants of democracy evaluation. The study was exploratory, and we posed the following research questions:

- (1) What was the evaluation of democracy after the 2014 local elections on each of the evaluation levels?
- (2) On which level is democracy evaluated the least positively?
- (3) What are the determinants of each aspect of democracy evaluation?

As elements of a general mental model concerning the understanding of sociopolitical issues (Reykowski, 2002), the distinguished aspects of democracy evaluation are interrelated. In the present study each of them is treated not only as a dependent variable but also as an explanatory variable for other aspects of evaluation. Therefore, apart from the determinants mentioned above: general trust, national attitudes, and the experience of security, aspects of democracy evaluation are also treated as predictors.

## METHOD

### Participants

We conducted the study within one month after the second round of the 2014 local elections. The participants were 524 people from five areas of Poland (full-time and part-time students as well as adult non-students from the regions of Lublin, Rzeszów, Słupsk, Tarnobrzeg, and Warsaw). Paper-and-pencil questionnaires were given to groups during university classes and individually to seniors by the authors and by their associates, university staff members<sup>1</sup>. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 80 ( $M = 24.32$ ,  $SD = 8.58$ ); 23 individuals (4.8% of the sample) did not state their age. The sample consisted of 384 women and 127 men (73.3% : 24.2%); 13 participants (2.5%) did not provide information about their gender. Elementary education was reported by one person (0.20%), vocational education – by 10 people (1.91%), secondary education – by 269 participants (51.34%), and higher education – by 227 participants (43.32%); 17 participants (3.24%) gave no information about their education. The sample included 69 participants (13.16%) with an income up to 500 zloty per person; 182 participants (34.73%) reported an income of 501 to 1,000 zloty, 99 participants (18.89%) declared a monthly income between 1,001 and 1,500 zloty per person, 65 participants (11.40%) indicated an income between 1,501 and 2,000 zloty, and 51 participants (9.73%) reported a monthly income above 2,000 zloty per person; 58 participants (11.07%) did not report the level of their income. Right-wing views were reported by 107 participants (20.41%), centrist views – by 42 participants (8.01%), and left-wing views – by 29 participants (5.53%); 302 subjects (57.63%) indicated no particular world view (*hard to say*), and 44 subjects (8.40%) did not give any answer.

### Measures

We used seven instruments in our study. To measure democracy evaluation, we administered four tools:

**The System Justification Scale** (Kay & Jost, 2003) consists of eight items rated on a 7-point scale. In Polish studies, it has been used, among others, by Skarżyńska (2012) and Wojciszke (2010). Example items: “In general, the Polish

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political system operates as it should”; “Poland is the best country in the world to live in.” In the present study, Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .77$ .

**The Democracy Evaluation Questionnaire (DEQ; experimental version)** consists of 16 items rated on a 5-point scale. It was meant to refer to the six institutions distinguished by Dahl (2000). Validation was performed on the results of the present study. We performed a confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method in the AMOS 23 package. The basic model that we tested was a six-factor model based on the assumptions of Dahl’s theory, consisting of 27 items. For comparison, we adopted a three-factor model obtained in the exploratory factor analysis on the set of 27 items and a simplified model consisting of the strongest items of the scale. CFA showed that the best fitted model was the three-factor model, with each factor composed of items concerning two of Dahl’s institutions. The obtained parameters: SRMR = .046, RMSEA = .063, [.055 : .072], GFI = .93, CFI = .91;  $\chi^2(101) = 302.68$ ,  $p < .01$ , make it acceptable<sup>2</sup> (Bedyńska & Książek, 2012). The first factor – *Elections* – consisted of five items relating to the institutions of *elected officials* and *free, fair, and frequent elections*;  $\alpha = .78$ . Example items: “Every citizen has real influence on the quality of life by electing his or her representatives to the authorities”; “Elections in Poland are fully fair.” The second factor – *Freedom* – was composed of five items relating to the institutions of *freedom of expression* and *associational autonomy*;  $\alpha = .72$ . Example items: “Both the ruling camp and the opposition have opportunities to present their perspectives on the country’s current problems”; “The state supports the functioning of non-governmental organizations.” The third factor – *Involvement* – was composed of five items relating to two institutions: *alternative sources of information* and *inclusive citizenship*;  $\alpha = .76$ . Example items: “Poles are strongly involved in activities aimed at improving the quality of their fellow citizens’ life”; “The level of citizens’ control of the authorities is sufficient to ensure the high quality of democracy.”

**Local Election Evaluation (experimental version)** is a scale consisting of five items, rated on a 7-point scale. The items concern the quality of the 2014 elections and the acceptance or nonacceptance of the style of holding the election; high scores indicate positive evaluation of the election. Example items: “The way of holding the 2014 local elections lowered my evaluation of democ-

<sup>2</sup> The remaining models had the following parameters: the six-factor model: SRMR = .055, RMSEA = .063 [.058 : .067], GFI = .88, CFI = .86,  $\chi^2(309) = 912.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ; the three-factor model based on the set of 27 items: SRMR = .060, RMSEA = .066, [.061 : .071], GFI = .87, CFI = .84;  $\chi^2(321) = 1014.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . The values of GFI and CFI were below the acceptable level of .90 (Bedyńska & Książek, 2012).



racy in Poland” (-); “Mistakes in the course of the elections are natural and stem from objective difficulties.” Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the one factor solution fitted the data. The values of SRMR = .03 and RMSEA = .075 [.041, .113] as well as  $\chi^2(5) = 19.09$ ,  $p < .01$ , reached a level attesting to a good fit of the model to the data (Kline, 2011). This is also confirmed by the values of GFI = .99 and CFI = .97 (Kline, 2011);  $\alpha = .75$ .

**Trust in the Newly Elected Authorities** is one item (statement) with a 7-point rating scale: “What is your level of trust in the current local authorities elected in the 2014 elections?”

We measured the chosen determinants using the following instruments:

**The General Trust Scale** (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994) consists of six items with a 5-point rating scale. It has been used in Polish studies (e.g., Skarżyńska & Henne 2012; Wiśniewska-Juszczak, 2013). Example item: “In principle, people are honest.” In the present study,  $\alpha = .68$ .

**The National Attitudes Scale** (Skarżyńska, 2005) measures two attitudes: patriotism and nationalism; it consists of 12 items with a 7-point rating scale. Example items: “I am proud to be Polish” (for *Patriotism*) and “Other countries should learn a lot from Poland” (for *Nationalism*). For *Patriotism*  $\alpha = .91$ , and for *Nationalism* –  $\alpha = .69$ .

**Safety Experience Questionnaire** (Klamut, 2014) measures the level of the sense of security as well as the level of reflection on one’s own security and that of one’s family and friends. The example items are: “I do not feel secure in the current reality” (for *Sense of Security*) and “I often think about the security of my family” (for *Reflection on Security*). The measure consists of 10 items, with a 7-point rating scale; Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .86 for *Sense of Security* and .71 for *Reflection on Security*.

Some data were missing in the present study. They constituted from 1.14% for the *Involvement* scale to 0.00% for the *System Justification Scale*. In this context, the rate of missing answers in the *Trust in the Newly Elected Authorities* scale is surprising, with as many as 53.7% of the participants choosing not to indicate their response. This high proportion of missing data may stem from the graphic form of the question being different than in the remaining measures (a scale of answers between extreme categories of *very low* and *very high*). Another explanation may be the participants’ reluctance to answer this question. However, the comparison of scores in all the scales administered between the group of participants who did and did not indicate their answers to the question concerning trust in the newly elected authorities, performed using Student’s *t*-test, did not reveal significant differences. For this reason, we decided to re-

move missing data in pairs in statistical analyses including the *Trust in the Newly Elected Authorities* scale.

## RESULTS

### Democracy evaluation after the 2014 local elections

First, we computed the scores concerning democracy evaluation on each level and the correlations reflecting the relationships between the examined aspects of evaluation (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between the Aspects of Democracy Evaluation*

	Rating scale	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
System justification (1)	1–7	2.72 (0.88)		.44	.49	.42	.33	.30
Election (2)	1–5	2.88 (0.78)			.61	.59	.43	.47
Freedom (3)	1–5	3.05 (0.68)				.54	.33	.30
Involvement (4)	1–5	2.58 (0.66)					.36	.30
Trust in the local authorities (5)	1–7	3.32 (1.52)						.33
Evaluation of the election (6)	1–7	3.54 (1.31)						

In all aspects of evaluation, the scores were comparable to or lower than the theoretical mean. The scores were the lowest on system justification and election evaluation, and only the scores on the *Freedom* scale reached a moderate level. Data concerning the variance in scores are interesting. Scores in scales relating to the evaluation of current events (the third level of evaluation) were much more varied than scores in the remaining scales.

All correlations between the aspects of evaluation were positive and significant at  $p < .01$ . Correlations were the strongest among scales measuring the evaluation of Dahl's institutions (from  $r = .61$  to  $r = .54$ ), between these scales and *System Justification* (from  $r = .49$  to  $r = .42$ ), as well as between the *Election* scale and the *Election Evaluation* scale ( $r = .47$ ).

### Determinants of democracy evaluation

Regression analyses made it possible to establish which factors significantly contributed to a particular evaluation of democracy. For each aspect of evaluation, we entered the investigated determinants and aspects of evaluation from different evaluation levels as predictors. To separate the two categories of predictors we applied the hierarchical regression model. Taking into account all the above correlations between aspects of democracy evaluation, we measured VIF (multicollinearity) and the tolerance coefficient. The level of VIF = 2.24 was the highest for the *Election* scale in the analysis of *System Justification*, all the remaining scales had VIF values below 2.0, and the lowest tolerance coefficient was 0.45 for the same scale (i.e., *Election*). Both statistics showed that the predictors were not correlated at a level significantly affecting regression analyses and could be included in the analyses (Bedyńska & Książek, 2012). The results of regression analysis for system justification are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for System Justification, Trust in the Local Authorities, and Election Evaluation; Input Method*

	System justification	Trust in the local authorities	Evaluation of the election
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Trust	0.14*	0.11#	0.01
Patriotism	0.09	0.16*	-0.06
Nationalism	0.15*	-0.13	-0.08
Sense of security	0.06	-0.02	-0.08
Reflection on security	-0.18**	0.11	-0.14*
	$R^2_{cha} = .22$ $F_{cha}(5, 234) = 13.28***$	$R^2_{cha} = .10$ $F_{cha}(5, 234) = 5.31***$	$R^2_{cha} = .05$ $F_{cha}(5, 234) = 2.50*$
System justification		0.12	0.10
Election	0.11	0.19*	0.39***
Freedom	0.21**	-0.02	0.03
Involvement	0.11	0.14#	-0.01
Trust in the local authorities	0.10		0.17**
Evaluation of the election	0.08	0.18**	
	$R^2_{cha} = .17$ $F_{cha}(5, 229) = 12.57***$	$R^2_{cha} = .19$ $F_{cha}(5, 229) = 11.89***$	$R^2_{cha} = .26$ $F_{cha}(5, 229) = 16.94***$
	$R^2_{adj} = .36$ $F(10, 238) = 14.57***$	$R^2_{adj} = .26$ $F(10, 238) = 9.22***$	$R^2_{adj} = .28$ $F(10, 238) = 10.15***$

Notes. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , #  $p < .06$  (trend).

The theoretical model was fitted to the data at the significance level of  $p < .001$  and explained 36% of variance in scores concerning the justification of the democratic system currently functioning in Poland. Social determinants explained 22% of variance, and the aspects of evaluation explained 17%. The factors significant to support for the system were: *General Trust* in people ( $\beta = 0.14$ ), *Nationalism* ( $\beta = 0.15$ ), and lack of reflection on security ( $\beta = -0.18$ ). The overall belief that the sociopolitical system worked well was also positively influenced by the rating of freedom as an aspect of democracy evaluation ( $\beta = 0.21$ ).

Moreover, the examined set of predictors explained variance in scores on the scales measuring respect for democratic institutions: 40% of the variance in the case of *Election*, 34% in the case of *Freedom*, and 28% in the case of *Involvement* (Table 3). *Election* scores were explained mostly by other aspects of evaluation, *Freedom* – by the examined determinants, and *Involvement*—by both categories of predictors to a similar extent. Of the examined social determinants, the significant ones were *Sense of Security* (from  $\beta = 0.21$  to  $\beta = 0.26$ ) and all the remaining aspects of evaluation. The explaining factors significant in the case of all democracy evaluation scales were *System Justification* ( $\beta = 0.23$  to  $\beta = 0.30$ ) and *Election Evaluation* ( $\beta = 0.14$  to  $\beta = 0.34$ ). In the case of the *Election* and *Involvement* scales, *Trust in the Authorities* was also significant ( $\beta = 0.20$ ).

Table 3  
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the State of Democracy Evaluation Scales; Input Method

	Election	Freedom	Involvement
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Trust	-0.03	0.05	-0.03
Patriotism	-0.08	-0.02	-0.12
Nationalism	0.07	0.07	0.09
Sense of security	0.21***	0.26***	0.26***
Reflection on security	0.08	0.03	-0.01
	$R^2_{cha} = .13$	$R^2_{cha} = .21$	$R^2_{cha} = .14$
	$F_{cha}(5, 234) = 7.04***$	$F_{cha}(5, 234) = 12.09***$	$F_{cha}(5, 234) = 7.79***$
System justification	0.23***	0.30***	0.25***
Trust in the local authorities	0.20***	0.10	0.20**
Evaluation of the election	0.34***	0.17**	0.14*
	$R^2_{cha} = .29$	$R^2_{cha} = .15$	$R^2_{cha} = .29$
	$F_{cha}(3, 231) = 38.10***$	$F_{cha}(3, 231) = 18.46***$	$F_{cha}(3, 231) = 17.62***$
	$R^2_{adj} = .40$	$R^2_{adj} = .34$	$R^2_{adj} = .28$
	$F(8, 238) = 20.78***$	$F(8, 238) = 16.17***$	$F(8, 238) = 12.51***$

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

As regards the evaluation of the quality of the elections (the third level), 28% of it was explained (Table 2). Of the examined external determinants, the only one that explained election evaluation was the lack of reflection on security ( $\beta = -0.14$ ), and the aspects of evaluation that explained it were *Election* ( $\beta = 0.39$ ) and *Trust in the Newly Elected Authorities* ( $\beta = 0.19$ ).

Predictors explained 26% of trust in the newly elected local authorities; this variable was mainly explained by *Patriotism* ( $\beta = 0.16$ ), *Election* ( $\beta = 0.19$ ), and the positive evaluation of the election ( $\beta = 0.18$ ) (Table 2). Also general trust in people and the evaluation of social involvement opportunities had trend-level significance.

## DISCUSSION

The point of departure for our exploratory study was a specific event. The event was the basis for questions concerning the quality of Polish democracy and the psychological factors determining the evaluation of the examined aspects of democracy. These issues are not very frequently addressed in psychological research (cf. Jaško & Kossowska, 2008). Democracy evaluation concerned three levels: general beliefs about the sociopolitical system, the state of respect for institutions constituting the democratic system, and a specific event. The obtained results make it possible to answer the research questions that we posed.

In the study conducted after the local elections held in November 2014, the quality of democracy in Poland was evaluated as low. The scores in most aspects of the evaluation were below the theoretical mean. The level of sociopolitical system justification was very low. As regards the second level, concerning the features of the democratic system, the scores were close to the theoretical mean. However, in Poland, a country in which the basic formal requirements for the existence of democracy are met (cf. Dahl, 2000), their evaluation could be expected to be higher. The third level concerned the evaluation of the local elections. On this level, the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the way the elections were held. They also showed low trust in the newly elected authorities. The scores were very diverse, however, which attests to a wide range of opinions from strong agreement to strong disagreement. This diversity of ratings is an empirical confirmation of political polarization among Poles, existing even before the elections and visible also in the post-election realities (and currently) in the high support for the ruling party on the one hand as well as in the establishment of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy and the building of “total

opposition” on the other. The results concerning the second and third levels can hardly be compared with other data at present. Further research conducted by the authors, with the same instruments used, will make it possible to compare democracy evaluations in the examined area in the future.

Democracy was evaluated the least positively at the level of general beliefs: system justification. It can even be stated that the sociopolitical system in Poland is unlawful and unjust. Our results are similar to those obtained in many Polish studies (Skarżyńska, 2012; Skarżyńska & Henne, 2012; Wojciszke, 2010) and definitely lower than the results obtained in the USA or even in Hungary (Van der Toorn, Berkics, & Jost, 2010). The evaluation of trust in the newly elected local authorities was negative too. This evaluation, however, was not unambiguous, since there was a high diversity of scores and some respondents reported a high level of trust.

Various determinants were significant for specific aspects of democracy evaluation. On the level of general beliefs it was social factors that were more significant, while other aspects of election evaluation made greater difference on more specific levels.

The existing sociopolitical system was justified to a greater degree by individuals exhibiting higher general trust in people, which is confirmed by the already known associations between trust in people and a more positive attitude to the social reality (Putnam, 2008; Yamagishi, 2011). What is interesting is that general trust in people played a significant role only in the context of this particular level of democracy evaluation. In the case of system justification, also nationalism played a significant role. It is individuals whose attitude to the nation is based on ideological assumptions (Skarżyńska, 2005; Wojciszke, 2011), marked by a lack of criticism in the evaluation of their nation (Radkiewicz, 2009), who perceive the sociopolitical reality more positively. What plays an important role in system justification is the lack of reflection on security, which points to the interesting context of unreflectiveness in evaluating the sociopolitical order and confirms the pragmatic role of evaluation (Jost et al., 2004; Kay & Jost, 2003) rather than to the rational and reflective context of building objective knowledge about the world. A positive evaluation of the level of civil liberty is also significant for system justification. Consequently, negative evaluation of the sociopolitical reality is characteristic of cautious people, with a higher tendency to engage in reflection, and negatively evaluating the context of freedom (cf. Skarżyńska & Chmielewski, 2007).

In the evaluation of democracy on the level of the quality of respect for its basic institutions, the only social factor that played a significant role was the

sense of security. Perhaps it is the focus on the sense of security, the experience of peace, and confidence about one's life situation that replaces the level of trust in others as the factor that explains building a positive picture of the social situation (cf. Wojciszke, 2011). All the remaining aspects of democracy evaluation – system justification, election evaluation, and trust in the authorities – were also significant in explaining the positive evaluation of the state of democracy. Trust in the authorities was not significant only for the evaluation of the level of freedom. This aspect of the state of democracy seems not to be associated with a positive attitude to the selected specific contexts of the representatives of authorities. It can therefore be said that the evaluation of respect for the basic institutions of democracy is the outcome of specific feelings (the sense of security) and a positive evaluation of the sociopolitical reality. People who feel fine create a more positive picture of the conditions they live in (cf. Nęcka et al., 2006). What is surprising is the low significance of national attitudes. The results show that the examined aspects of evaluation and national attitudes are disjunct phenomena. Perhaps the reason is that national attitudes are emotional ones, connected with attachment to the nation (Radkiewicz, 2009; Skarżyńska, 2005), whereas the examined aspects of evaluation are cognitive schemas concerning the description of the features of democracy.

National attitudes were more significant in areas where internal support of the evaluation is needed: nationalism for justification of the sociopolitical system (cf. Jost et al., 2004) and patriotism for trust in the newly elected authorities. The most significant determinants of this aspect of democracy evaluation (trust in the newly elected authorities) were: positive evaluation of elections as an element of the democratic system and the evaluation of specific elections as well as patriotism. When explaining these relationships, it is possible to assume the pragmatic context of building trust in authorities that were elected in a not fully reliable way. High identification with one's own nation and a positive evaluation of elections result in a more positive evaluation of the elected representatives, in order for the overall picture of one's homeland to be positive (cf. Skarżyńska, 2005).

The last examined aspect of democracy evaluation – the evaluation of the local elections – depends to the greatest degree on the positive evaluation of elections as an instrument of democracy, but also on trust in the authorities and the lack of reflection on security. If a voter assumes that elections in his or her country are properly held, this also refers to specific elections. It is easier to evaluate them positively when the voter also trusts the elected authorities. The need to have a consistent picture of the world is enough. By contrast, reflection – thinking about the possible threats – is associated with higher criticism and interferes

with the development of a positive evaluation of the election that have been held. In this case, it is more difficult to reduce the cognitive dissonance resulting from the observed irregularities concerning the election and from the lack of proper action on the part of state institutions (cf. Wojciszke, 2011). Bar-Tal and Jacobson (1998) reported a similar phenomenon of increased criticism in the evaluation of the sociopolitical situation due to perceived threat. This may explain why the evaluation of the local elections in Poland was so negative.

### CONCLUSION

The obtained results can be placed in the context of research describing Poles' dissatisfaction with the situation in the country (cf. Skarżyńska, 2005). The presented data show that, on each level, the evaluation of democracy after the 2014 local elections is not positive, and that its formation has a defensive character, focused on building a positive status quo, though the mechanism of justification is different in different aspects of this evaluation. It is difficult, however, to unambiguously determine whether the associations found are a reaction to the post-election situation or whether they have a more stable nature. Many earlier studies pointed to the stability of the associations described (Wojciszke & Borkowska, 2007), and our study revealed further significant factors. The contexts of security experience, system justification, and the specificity of national attitudes seems to be interesting.

The study has certain limitations, however. There were many cases of missing data in the Trust in the Newly Elected Authorities scale. Although additional analyses revealed no differences with regard to other investigated phenomena between individuals answering and not answering the question about trust in the authorities, there remains some ambiguity in the treatment of the obtained results. The sample is not representative, either. This means that the results are more error-burdened when it comes to making generalizations.

Studies addressing current social problems in a new context and by means of new instruments have numerous limitations that concern relating the obtained results to the broader empirical research context. Democracy evaluation is generally low; only further studies will enable comparisons revealing whether this stems from the realities of particular elections or from a broader sociopolitical perspective. The present study yielded results that are a point of reference for further research. They seem interesting enough to deserve presentation.



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