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**Axiological Sources of Democratic Transformations
of Political Systems into Illiberal Democracies –
On the Example of the Republic of Poland (2015–2019)**

Keywords: illiberal democracy, matrix of meta-values, transformation of democracy, changes of social values

Słowa kluczowe: demokracja nieliberalna, macierz metawartości, transformacja demokracji, zmiany wartości społecznych

Abstract

The present paper aims to demonstrate that the political changes observed in some countries of Western civilization, including Poland, questioning some of the principles of liberal democratic order, originate from the reconfiguration of the systems of social values. Axiological reshuffles result from emerging threats to existential (right-wing) values. The theoretical basis of the analysis is the model of social values developed by the author based on the matrix of basic human values by Shalom H. Schwartz.

Streszczenie

**Aksjologiczne źródła transformacji demokratycznych
systemów politycznych w kierunku demokracji nieliberalnej –
przykład Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (2015–2019)**

Celem artykułu jest wykazanie, że przemiany polityczne, które można zaobserwować w niektórych państwach cywilizacji zachodniej, w tym w Polsce, a które polegają na kwes-

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tionowaniu części zasad, na których opiera się liberalny ład demokratyczny, mają swoje źródła w rekonfiguracji społecznych systemów wartości. Aksjologiczne przetasowania są funkcją pojawienia się zagrożeń dla wartości egzystencjalnych (prawicowych). Teoretyczną podstawą analizy jest autorski model wartości społecznych skonstruowany na bazie macierzy wartości podstawowych Shaloma H. Schwartza.

I.

Changes toward the system referred to as illiberal democracy have been occurring in some countries of Western civilization. This term was used by an American political scientist Fareed Zakaria in the 1990s². Liberal democracy emphasizes balance between democratic and liberal components³, whereas illiberal democracy puts emphasis on the democratic component in the form of majority rule. Therefore, majority rule, legitimized only by an electoral act, is decisive in the illiberal system. Liberal approach to the rights of an individual and minorities (national, sexual, linguistic, religious) becomes insignificant in this case.

Elements of the illiberal democracy arise in the political systems of the European countries of both to the 'new' and 'old' European Union (EU). Viktor Orbán, the forerunner in the 'new' EU, explicitly declared the implementation of this concept in Hungarian reality. During his rule, reconfiguration of the political system included strengthening of the executive power, changes in the judiciary system, restructuring of the media system, a change of relations between the state and non-governmental organizations, adoption of a new constitution, and renaming the state.

The principles of liberal democracy have also been redefined in the case of the 'old' EU. The principle of equality is put in question – this rule is aban-

² F. Zakaria, *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*, "Foreign Affairs" 1997, Nov/Dec, pp. 22–43.

³ A. Antoszewski, *Demokracja nieliberalna jako projekt polityczny*, [in:] *Zmierzch demokracji liberalnej?* eds. K.A. Wojtaszczyk, P. Stawarz, J. Wiśniewska-Grzelak, Warsaw 2018, p. 51; J. Jaskiernia, *Władza sądownicza w warunkach kryzysu demokracji liberalnej*, [in:] *Zmierzch demokracji liberalnej?*..., p. 218.

doned in various areas which becomes legally sanctioned. Parties referring to right-wing values are modifying welfare state in the direction of *welfare nationalism* or *welfare chauvinism*, introducing restrictions on access to social benefits for people who are not citizens. Such a restriction of social offer has already been introduced i.e. in Denmark⁴. Changes regarding equality principle are visible in the sphere of religion. In Austria, a ban on wearing religious headgear in primary schools was introduced in 2019⁵; similar restrictions had already been implemented in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy or Spain.

The axiological source of democratic transformations into illiberal democracies was the emergence of existential threats, which led to the reconfiguration of social value systems. This mechanism is explained in the following parts of the paper: the second part provides its theoretical basis – the matrix of basic human values by Shalom H. Schwartz. The third part presents the model of social meta-values created on its basis. The following part defines the relationship between meta-values and Ronald Inglehart's socialization and scarcity hypothesis. The fifth part provides the context of axiological changes in Poland, while the last one focuses on their impact on the political system.

II.

At first, primary assumptions concerning values are defined:

1. They are aspirations that set supra-situational human goals⁶ and may have individual or collective (social) character. Throughout the paper, the first ones are referred to as basic axioms, while supra-individual as meta-values. The aforementioned Schwartz matrix concerns basic

⁴ S. Keskinen, *From Welfare Nationalism to Welfare Chauvinism. Economic Rhetoric, Welfare State and the Changing Policies of Asylum in Finland*, "Critical Social Policy" 2016, No. 36 (3), pp. 352–370.

⁵ It does not apply to skullcaps or Sikh headgear – thus, it is restricted only to the Muslim minority, *Austria zakazała noszenia chust muzułmańskich w szkołach podstawowych*, <https://www.polskieradio24.pl> (28.06.2019).

⁶ M. Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values*, London 1973; J. Ciecuch, *Kształtowanie się systemu wartości od dzieciństwa do wczesnej dorosłości*, Warsaw 2013, p. 29.

axioms, while the model of social values constructed on its basis involves meta-values.

2. Meta-values occur in the public sphere in a form of a conflict or a compromise. The conflict form results from the antinomy of values (their orientation toward achieving opposing political goals). An example of a conflict of values is the leftist pursuit of decentralization of the political system, which is contrasted with right-wing concepts aiming at its centralization (strengthening state power, mainly executive one). Compromise values are the domain of the centre and consist in limiting conflict by seeking solutions combining opposing axioms.
3. Meta-values are of special character. They are collective and set goals that the community strives to achieve; they are also spatially conditioned and differ in particular civilization areas, but their source is antinomy inherent in the universal, circular structure of the system of basic values. Explanation of the relationship between meta-values and basic values requires discussion of the essence of the psychological theory of Shalom H. Schwartz.

Based on the results of empirical research, the mentioned author developed a model of basic human values, explaining not only the mechanism of choosing values by individuals, but also their conflicting structure⁷. Schwartz considered the structure of the system of basic human values to be universal assuming the form of a circular motivational continuum. Graphically, it can be presented in the form of a matrix in which the axioms are selected on the basis of the rules of compliance and conflict. Figure 1 presents letters A and K which symbolize different types of values, and each type may be assigned the opposite value. Opposites form a continuum – between them there are values less and less similar to one segment of the opposite, and increasingly similar to the other. Axioms can be arranged side by side in such a way that the value of A is similar to the value of B, which is similar to the value of F, which is also less similar to the value of A. In addition, one can point to more detailed values, located between the axioms A,

⁷ S.H. Schwartz, *Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries*, [in:] *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. M.P. Zanna, New York 1992, pp. 1–65.

B and F – in this way a continuum is formed. The values located in a matrix opposite to each other are impossible to be achieved at the same time, because they lead to conflicting goals.

Figure 1. The principles underlying the matrix of values by Shalom H. Schwartz

Source: J. Ciecuch, *Kształtowanie się systemu wartości od dzieciństwa do wczesnej dorosłości*, Warsaw 2013, p. 46.

The distribution of values in the Schwartz model has been developed since the late 1980s. The classic and most widespread version covering the system of ten axioms was modified in 2012 by dividing the basic values into more detailed ones as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Circular structure of values according to Shalom H. Schwartz

Source: developed on the basis of S.H. Schwartz, J. Cieciuch, M. Vecchione et al., p. 669.

The featured values were organized into four main types: 1) 'self-transcendence', co-created by the values of universalism and benevolence; 2) 'self-enhancement' consisting of power and achievement; 3) 'openness to change', in which Schwartz included self-direction and stimulation, and 4) 'conservation' consisting of conformity, tradition and security. Hedonism, humility and face are boundary values that are a part of neighbouring groups of values.

In the Schwartz model, the hierarchy of values of an individual has circular structure and results from giving high rank to axioms located near the

highest rated value⁸. For example, a person with conservative views may have a hierarchy of tradition > power > security > conformity. In the given example, tradition is the highest rated value. The compliance rule makes a person choose values that are close to the one that is considered a priority, while the most distant (according to the conflict rule) are rated lower. In the circular model one may notice that tradition and stimulation are located at a considerable distance from each other, which explains why stimulation, in the case of a conservative, is of low rank. Moreover, these two values are in conflict as the desire to consolidate tradition is at odds with the need for novelty and change.

III.

Fundamental analogies between the basic human values in the Schwartz model and the axioms functioning at the levels of state and society facilitate the application of the circular model to analyze the values present in politics⁹. Basically, meta-values that are axioms of the community present in public debate are a derivative of the circular system of basic human values, and first of all – their conflict structure.

Political values present in public discourse in democratic states of Western civilization can be positioned in the matrix according to the four main types indicated by Schwartz (self-enhancement – self-transcendence and conservation – openness to change). Social conflicts, manifesting with exceptional power during the election period, result from the antinomy of leftist meta-values (located within the types of openness to change and self-transcendence) and right-wing values (including the types of conservation and self-enhancement), as shown in Figure 3.

The upper side of the model is reserved for leftist axioms. Leftism is determined by the meta-values of: equality, society, individual liberty, self-authority, plurality of value systems, progressivity and rationalism. Their simplified meaning is as follows:

⁸ J. Cieciuch, S.H. Schwartz, *Values*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, eds. V. Zeigler-Hill, T. Shackelford, Cham 2017, pp. 2–3.

⁹ P. Maj, *Lewicowość, centrowość i prawicowość w nauce o polityce*, Rzeszów 2018, pp. 143–146.

- *equality* is an axiom present in the economic, political and social dimensions, on the basis of which derivative values are created – social programs, proposals for limiting social privileges, ideas related to the social sense of justice etc.;
- *society* is a vision of equal citizens, individuals showing social and political activity; belonging to the society is of subjective character, after meeting formal criteria;
- *individual liberty* is defined as broadly as possible; its boundaries are marked by the good of others; citizens have a wide range of rights, including personal and decision-making;
- *self-authority* is the strive to authority decentralization, directing it downwards – toward citizens, based on the conviction that the content of decisions should also be made people themselves;
- *plurality of value systems* is the strive to a state in which many different value systems can freely function in the public sphere; by recognizing them as equal, the state should not favor or discriminate any of them;
- *rationalism* means that there are no supernatural events or processes, and reality can only be explained in relation to scientific knowledge; religion is a private matter of citizens and as such it should not affect the public sphere in any way;
- *progressivity*, the content of which is faith in inevitable development – civilizational, technological and economic progress, which often requires changing existing laws, customs and in general – a certain part of the tradition.

The southern side of the model includes: ‘self-enhancement’ and ‘conservation’ and in politics it is utilized by right-wing meta-values of: inequality, community, liberty within the community, authority, unitary system of values, tradition and religion.

Figure 3. Circular structure of meta-values

Source: P. Maj, op.cit., p. 148.

The basic meaning of the indicated meta-values is as follows:

- *inequality* relies on recognising the differences between people as natural and resulting from features of individuals, their social abilities and position;
- *community* is understood as a historically shaped, cultural ethnic group (nation);
- *liberty within a community* is not absolute, it is limited by the individual's participation in the community; the boundaries are socially recognized

- norms, tradition, and obligations to the community (nation);
- *authority*, in the case of which hierarchy is a natural feature, associated with the traditional division of individuals into those with predispositions to govern, and those who lack such abilities; the subjective scope of authority is limited, and the catalogue of competences is concentrated;
 - *unitary system of values* – in the public sphere, axioms belonging to the hierarchy of values of a given community, constructed through historical experience, are highly rated; the values may have religious foundation; one specific value system is clearly indicated, while opposing one is regarded as a potential threat to continuity of community;
 - *religion* is an element of the natural order, a source of hierarchy of values, also in the public sphere;
 - *tradition* is understood as attachment to the natural order, heritage and care for the historical memory of the community.

The conflict rule in the matrix leads to distinction of the seven pairs of values and anti-values. These are the following dichotomies: equality-inequality, society-community, individual liberty-liberty within a community, self-authority-authority, plurality of value systems-unitary system of values, rationalism-religion and progressivity-tradition.

Tangent values are located on the northern and southern boundary of the model; they are similar to each other and they are also borrowed by the entities referring to left-wing and right-wing values. In the eastern part the tangent values are *rationalism* and *inequality*, while in the western part – *religion* and *equality*.

Centrist axioms are constructed on the basis of the distinguished seven pairs of meta-values, therefore they are always derivative. Their goal is to limit the antinomy of the value system, which often assumes the form of a compromise.

The element of the model are the antinomy perspectives on human nature, functioning in politics and philosophy. Their task is to justify (rationalize) the individual's choice of northern (left-wing) or southern (right-wing) meta-values. The starting point in the positive concept is the conviction that an individual is good by nature and that the source of evil is always external. People should be free and equal to each other, while various external factors are barriers that make this difficult.

The right-wing assumes a negative perspective on human nature, recognizing it as flawed and unchangeable. This pessimism results from the conviction that evil is also a part of humanity, and that it is endogenous in nature and occurs when a person consciously chooses it. Therefore, certain restrictions, which can be reduced in certain situations, should be imposed on the individual in advance. Both visions are antithetical and are elements of a circular meta-value model because they justify the selection of a set of axioms.

IV.

Ronald Inglehart attempted to define changes of socially accepted values by formulating two hypotheses. The first one, referred to as the 'scarcity hypothesis' was based on the presupposition that individuals place the greatest value is what they lack. Ensuring existential security results in opting for post-material values – they become important. The second one was the 'socialization hypothesis', in which the author assumed that the carriers of values were largely generations. This results from various situational contexts – the conditions in which the process of socialization took place¹⁰. For example, for the generation raised in Europe during World War II, existential values were important, and post-material values were important for the American generation socialized after the economic boom.

As one can notice, post-material values may be found in the northern part of the meta-value matrix, while existential ones in the southern part (Schwartz described these categories as 'growth' and 'self-protection'. Assuming that Inglehart's theory corresponds to the division into the meta-values of the left and the right wing in a circular matrix, it allows to analyze the processes of change occurring within political systems in a specific way. The essence of that is:

1. Value orientation as the main goal of political competition;
2. Perspective of electoral processes considering the basic determinants that are meta-values dominant in the society;

¹⁰ R. Inglehart, *Wartości postmaterialne oraz przejście od wartości związanych z przetrwaniem do wartości związanych z wyrażaniem własnego „ja”*, [in:] *Zachowania polityczne*, vol. 1, eds. R.J. Dalton, H.-D. Klingemann, Warsaw 2010, pp. 280–282.

3. Recognition that social preferences regarding values are variable in time and there is no set of constant values in a given society. Changes in the hierarchy of the value system imply a shift of the worldview toward leftist, centrist or rightist values. The results of this shift are visible in electoral decisions, which are influenced mostly by the scarcity hypothesis. Briefly, it can be stated that voters experience either a lack of existential values (southern, right-wing) or post-material values (northern, left-wing);
4. Adoption of a medium- or long-term perspective. The biggest differences in the hierarchy of values of a given society concern particular generations and depend on the conditions of socialization. Due to the fact that changes of values are clear in generational cycles, differences in attitudes toward meta-values in particular age groups should be observed.

It should be noted that reaching a certain level of development by a society (after which a natural stage is the transition from existential to post-material values) is not tantamount to maintaining support for these values. Even in highly developed societies, a turn toward existential values is possible, as there are no mechanisms that permanently secure implementation of post-material values. Looking at Europe and the United States of America reveals that the severity of various types of crises has been visible since the beginning of the 21st century. These concern particularly, escalation of terrorism, intensification of migration processes, economic crises, the growing number of religious conflicts and military threats. These are the factors that, according to the hypotheses of lack and socialization, shape preferences toward values among the youngest generation of voters.

V.

Changes in social values in the context of Poland should be analyzed based on public opinion polls, which indicate the scale and nature of these re-evaluations. Their results, provide explanation to the electoral changes that took place in the period between 2015 and 2019, and the consequence of which was a new direction in the evolution of the political system.

Initially, various crises that potentially strengthened the sense of threat to the meta-values of the southern part of the model (existential values) occurred between 2014 and 2015. The Russian aggression on Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea (2014), followed by the war for Donbas, should be emphasized here. In the same year, the Islamic State Caliphate was proclaimed, and religious-motivated terrorist attacks intensified in Europe since 2015¹¹.

These events had a noticeable impact on the Polish society. In 2014, the percentage of the respondents who gave a positive answer to the question about the existence of a threat to Polish independence definitely increased (a raise from 18% in 2013 to 47%, with a simultaneous decrease in the percentage of the responses denying such a threat – from 74% in 2013 to 41% in 2014). In addition, the number of respondents who considered that there was a real threat of terrorism in Poland increased from 32% in 2010 to 50–60% in 2015–16¹².

Based on the results of psychological study, a conclusion may be drawn that voters who prefer ‘parties of existential values’ do so due to the low threshold of reaction to the threat¹³. This is confirmed by the analyses of those who voted for Civic Platform and the Law and Justice parties as they assessed the scale of the threat differently. In 2016, 53% of the Law and Justice voters perceived the threat of terrorism, while in the case of Civic Platform supporters this percentage was 41%. These differences translated into electoral mobilization and election results in 2015 – victory of Andrzej Duda in the presidential election, and in the parliamentary election of the Law and Justice party.

Secondly, the migration and refugee crisis erupted in Europe, one of the consequences of which were the European Commission’s proposals regarding the mechanism for relocating immigrants and refugees. These proposals raised fears of violating the identity of the community in Poland and some

¹¹ The number of terrorist attacks in Europe has increased many times since 2015. In 2014, two attacks were carried out (4 victims), in 2015 there were 17 of them (150 victims), in 2016 – 13 (135 victims), 33 (62 victims) in 2017, and 24 bombings (13 victims) in 2018. *Terroryzm w UE: ataki, ofiary śmiertelne i zatrzymania*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu> (25.07.2019).

¹² *Zagrożenie terroryzmem*, Komunikat z badań CBOS 2016, No. 127, <http://www.cbos.pl> (13.05.2019), p. 1.

¹³ D.R. Oxley, K.B. Smith, J.R. Alford, M.V. Hibbing, J.L. Miller, M. Scalora, P.K. Hatemi, J.R. Hibbing, *Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits*, “Science” 2008, vol. 321, No. 5896, pp. 1667–1670.

other states, and again contributed to the increase in support for groups declaring attachment to existential values¹⁴.

Changes in this area can be noticed by comparing surveys preceding the migration crisis and those after its escalation. Research conducted as a part of the World Value Survey (2010–2014) indicates that over 90% of the respondents from Poland did not present attitudes that perceived as xenophobic. Moreover, there were differences between respondents from different age groups – younger people (groups up to 29 years old and 30 to 49 years old) represented views that could be described as more tolerant¹⁵.

A lot changed between three studies in 2015. The percentage of people declaring support for admitting refugees from areas affected by armed conflicts decreased from 72 to 56%, while the percentage of opponents doubled (from 21 to 40%). The age of the respondents clearly differentiated their attitudes toward this issue in such a way that the youngest respondents (18 to 34 years old) were much more likely than older people to be against this group of people. Fear was the most common reason for resentment (52% of respondents' responses in the 18–34 age group). In the same study conducted by CBOS polling agency, respondents were asked about the European Commission's proposal regarding relocation of refugees and immigrants from Greece, Italy and Hungary. In 69% of cases, the respondents were critical, stating that in the case of Poland the number of 9,000 people was too high (59% of responses) or that Poland should not admit refugees at all (10%).

Similarly to the study on terrorism, there were also differences between Civic Platform and the Law and Justice voters in the case of the immigration issue. In 2015, the question of whether Poland should admit some refugees was answered positively by 70% of those who supported Civic Platform and 42% among those declaring their votes for the Law and Justice¹⁶. Therefore,

¹⁴ At the end of September 2015, despite objection of several member states, it was decided to relocate 120,000 refugees in the EU among almost all the countries that constitute the Community. *O uchodźcach w przededniu unijnego szczytu Poświęconego kryzysowi migracyjnemu*, Statement from CBOS study, 2015, No. 133, www.cbos.pl (9.05.2019), p. 1.

¹⁵ Over 90% of respondents asked to indicate the category of people they would not like to have in their neighborhood did not indicate people belonging to another race. A similar situation occurred in the case of questions about immigrants or foreign employees. World Value Survey data (WVS from 2010–2014), <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org> (13.07.2018).

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 4.

it can be concluded that the level of the perceived threat differentiated again voters of these two groups.

Interestingly, in the analyzed period changes in the age structure of voters supporting the Law and Justice and the Civic Platform (or Civic Coalition) occurred. Both in the parliamentary elections in 2015 and four years later, the Law and Justice became the party of first choice among young people¹⁷. This change was significant because the support structure was different in the 2011 parliamentary election – the younger electorate segment chose Civic Platform in the first place¹⁸. This can be explained using the concept of Inglehart: the reason for this shift are changes of values of the young generation of voters, socialized in the context of threat to the existential values.

Concluding, the polling results indicate that between 2014–15 a threat to the values found in the meta-value matrix within the types of ‘self-enhancement’ and ‘conservation’ was observed in Poland. A coalition of groups declaring to defend these values won the elections in 2015. The United Right (the Law and Justice party) promised to restore security by renewing the institution of the state (strong state – the meta-value of *authority*), stopping the plans of European Commission for relocation (defense of the meta-value of *community*). Actions were announced to defend other southern meta-values – *tradition* (redefining historical policy) and *religion* (support for the Catholic Church)¹⁹.

VI.

Electoral shifts have been observed more and more frequently in the countries with political systems meeting the criteria of liberal democracy in which southern values have been threatened. The parties described by their opponents as ‘right-wing populist’, ‘extreme’ or ‘authoritarian’ are gaining

¹⁷ Wyniki exit poll. Frekwencja według wieku. Jak głosowały konkretne grupy wiekowe? <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl> (15.10.2019).

¹⁸ Jak głosowali młodzi – refleksje powyborcze, Statement from CBOS study, 2011, No. 148, <https://www.cbos.pl>, p. 4.

¹⁹ Nowoczesna, solidarna, bezpieczna Polska, webpage of the Law and Justice party, archive version, <http://old.pis.org.pl> (19.10.2017).

support. Regardless of the adjectives used, the changes being made by these groups are the fulfillment of the demand on the side of the voters. Parties such as the Law and Justice in Poland or Fidesz in Hungary (striving to reconstruct the political system based on southern meta-values) have won elections again. The executive power in the illiberal system is supposed to be strong, and liberty and rights are to be enjoyed by members of the community defined in an exclusive way. As it has already been mentioned, fulfillment of these intentions requires neutralization of the elements securing liberal democracy.

Analyzing the liberal democracy in Poland from the perspective of a circular matrix, one of the goals of this system is to secure post-material values, located within the types of 'self-transcendence' and 'openness to change'. The regulations of the Polish constitution guarantee plurality of value systems and ideological neutrality of the state (the meta-value of *rationalism*)²⁰. The idea of state decentralization is implemented through local governments and supported by non-governmental organizations (the meta value of *self-direction*). *Individual liberty, equality and plurality of value systems* are systematically guaranteed by the existence of various types of institutions. In Poland these include the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court and the Ombudsman. At the same time, the procedure for amending the Polish constitution is rigid, which limits any axiological changes.

The evolution of the political system in Poland is accomplished by neutralizing restrictions, which until now has been noticeable in the ruling party's approach to the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court. The Law and Justice bypasses liberal safeguards not so much by abolishing the existing institutions, but in the 'Hungarian way' – by taking control over them and depriving them of the possibility to block decisions. It allows the rulers for a limited departure from the axiology of the liberal democracy. The current political practice indicates that the possibilities in this area are not great, because the institutions of the European Union are an effective inhibitory factor – mainly the Commission and the Court.

²⁰ Article 25 item. 2 Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997 (Dz.U. No. 78, item 483).

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