

Democracy as a factor of political stability according to Robert A. Dahl democratic dimension's philosophy: case study of Poland

Sarah Adeeb Rasheed

Department of Political systems & public policies, Collage of Political Science, Baghdad University, Iraq

Email: sarra.adeeb1201c@copolicy.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract

In this study the researcher take the concept of democracy with an aim to test the efficiency of democratic system as an essential requirement for political stability, especially by taking case of political system which has already been adopting a democracy system since 1989. So, this study focus on the four dimensions of (Dahl, 1998a; Dahl, 1998b) definition of what the democracy does mean, he finds that democracy has a five standards at least, " Effective political participation, Voting equality, Enlightened understanding, Control of the agenda and Inclusion of adults", if we take these standards as a basic ground of what the democratic system does really mean, beside considering democracy as a basic alternative of all political systems nowadays, as much as democracy experiments are always depending on internal elements of the each one of these experiment itself, which makes the arguments of its feasibility increasing with a multi-pointed views & opinions, this could provide uncertainty sometimes & we could say that this uncertainty about democracies comes from multiple experiments that have a different outputs of this process, so the outcomes will not be the same either, which lightening the importance of each experiment separately, so the researcher tries to detect how much the political stability is depending on democracy (with these five standards), and how each one of them are influencing the stability of political system, and that's will be measuring upon Poland after its democratic transformation since 1989 and which kind of changes came up on these elements .. political system, party structure, public behavior of individuals & their tendencies towards political system throughout the elections process, public media control and judicial accountability. We take these dimensions in a period from 1989 until the last recent changes on the democratic system in Poland with by using a descriptive analytical methodology.

Keywords

Democratic Transformation, Political stability, Political Participation, democracies index, democracy standard, Poland.

To cite this article: Sarah Adeeb Rasheed (2021) Democracy as a factor of political stability according to Robert A. Dahl democratic dimension's philosophy: case study of Poland. *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO)*, 11(8), 2523-2630. doi: 10.48047/rigeo.11.08.245

Submitted: 09-10-2020 • **Revised:** 11-12-2020 • **Accepted:** 13-02-2021

Introduction

Democracy as an element of political stability is important especially when the system consider itself as a democratic system, maybe we take democracy among too many other elements that helps the political system to be stable, but the thing about democracy is it the most related system nowadays, and that brings up a debt that had been extend through the last decades of twentieth century until today, beside that analyzing the dynamics of democratic systems may detect how does democracy actually works by the waves of the process itself, all along the democratic experiment, and how the democracy actually works could answer too many questions about political stability, though its more than adopting a democratic system and expect the same result between too systems, and we take this aspect of democracy according to [Dahl \(1998b\)](#) standards of democracy, which concentrate on political participation, the competition between parties, voting, controlling of agenda and the judicial accountability, which in somehow help us to know more about the connection between the citizens and the political system, and these sub-factors could give us a framework of stability in that system. The researcher here tries to analyze these sub-factors and how these dealing with democracy in return, in a brief way of studying the polish democracy especially for the last two decades. Moreover, by focusing in two sides that change recently (judicial accountability and free media), also by depending on some of international inductors of efficient democracy and more its quality.

Democratic representation in Poland

We could measure how actually democracy works or the efficiency of the democratic system in a country, by studying the basis of procedures and substantive outcomes, we could say that the procedures used to know which decision is made & to highlight these important measures, then the second approach is substantive outcomes which focus on the outputs which measures the quality of democracy, & this shaping on the concept of democracy by Dahl's, which makes it concentrating on these sides of democratic process (Representation, Political Participation, Party Competition, Judicial accountability ([Gwiazda, 2015](#))). First of all representation is related process between interest & outcomes & to be more specific we may say that it's that kind of signals which could be able accurately in reflect interest are rational, or that policies that bring up the intended outcomes are "effective", and these signals may include : public opinion, polls, various form of direct political action, including demonstrations letter campaign which is like : during elections & voting for particular platforms ([Przeworski et al., 1999](#)). In Poland as a start we could notice that democracy quality of representing its people depend on a several criteria one of them is a permanent criterion which its political culture, so the quality of democracy in Poland according to democracy index [Economist Intelligence Unit \(2016\)](#) shows up the poorness in democracy index in latest years held back by the lack of political culture that based on the trust of popular disenchantment with transition from communism. Moreover, this statistics shows that Eastern Europe region is characterized by low level of popular support for democracy, which list up the political culture as the second-worst political culture category according to this organization counting, where the adult population in most countries of the region shows only a moderate or low interest in following up politics, there is also a widespread cynicism towards state institution and political parties which make the roots among voters & parties even more poor functioning of many government ([Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016](#)). As a clue, we can take the party representation during the period of that comprise changing the electoral law of the sejm, the results was like that:

Table 1

Unrepresented votes in Polish Sejm from 1991- 2011

Unrepresented Votes	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
	7.33%	34.53%	12.44%	9.37%	10.93%	4.12%	4.12%

Source: [Gwiazda \(2015\)](#)

According to the table data above, we could notice the highest number of unrepresented votes was in 1993, more than 34.5% of votes were not represented, where was more than 4.7

million votes excluded. However the representation rate start rising until it reached its best level in 2007 & 2011 with the a new electoral law which is still active so far (Gwiazda, 2015). Moreover, Duverger (1959) finds that the issue of electoral representation is represents the electors as much as the voting process is free, secrecy, & passing without pressure as much its express the public opinion, & also the expression of the election for public opinion may it does not applying the public opinion completely, because this process is always open to modification in few or many proportions depending on the voting method & the party system, beside the role of political polarization, which is also an illustrates the reflection of the voting method on public opinion (Duverger, 1959) ⁽¹⁾. One of the common polarized ways is that voters often take a hint from parties, when they put up a popular attractive personalities with no political agendas (other than a shallow commitment to root out corruption) on ballots to conceal the true donors, who will operate in a background with ulterior business motives & control politics through proxies, as an example in Poland, the prime minister Beta Szydlo was put up in front as a candidate for Law and Justice party (PIS) in 2015, due to the unpopularity of its leader, Jarslaw Kaczynski at that time, this strategy could also providing its successfulness with the presidential election, when Andrzej Duda (who is also from PIS party) won the presidency who managed to defeat a very popular president Komorowski (Bustikova & Zechmeister, 2017).

Political participation and democratic quality.

There is also, the second dimension which it's the participation, this control on the quality of democracy, by involving in politics either from citizens or the parties, one of the issues that influencing on the transition countries or newer democracy is that apparently it's very difficult to apply a simple left-right classification to parties in these countries, which often it's unclear where the new parties stand on the relevant issues, and even if they declare themselves sometimes in a will to stand on one end of the political spectrum, the voters still have the lack of the years of experience with the parties, which it necessary to build up confidence that the parties will behave as they promised (Tucker, 2006). In other hand, there is more about voting process that makes it more complicated is that the political behavior is always volatile in almost every election since 1991, which may explain that voting behavior is purely functional with everyday political events, since the political context of every election is different so the results well be different as well, we could point into the first post-communist election (1989-1990-1991) as an examples, so the 1989 & 1990 election was largely interrupted as a reaction against the communist rule, in the next election of 1991 the defeat of (solidarity) came as a social reaction to the unexpected cost of reforms beside the rising influence by the Catholic Church in sphering the public opinion, which could tell us that the political behavior is situational & reactive, so we cannot expect a stable structure of voting involvement (Zarycki & Nowak, 2000).

We could highlight more on the political participation by public share in voting in election, by the next table, with a period contained data from 2001-2020.

Depending on the turnout data we could notice the low participation although the rate raised in the last presidential election of 2020, which it's likely to be a matter that open to manipulating as we mentioned previously, but we could notice the dissimilarity between the registered votes & voters' number which point up the weakness of popular participation among polish citizens.

So we could notice that election process in Poland failed to mobilize its population, which create a perennial issue of low turnout, the abstention of large numbers of voters in successive elections confirmed Poland's low position in European turnout ranking beside a constitutional issue that concern the polish politicians & political scientists is that the polish voters never matched 'normal' level of European voter turnout (comparative studies shows that turnout is generally higher in presidential election), we can notice the highest turnout is 62% (Except for 2020 presidential election turns out) which actually came in the semi-free election of 1989, which is like presidential elections had 'gladiatorial' element : Solidarity against the communist establishment, therefore two years later turnout in the first fully free election fell to 43 per cent, this a perennial problem of non-voting, so, as a result, a few polish voters voted all the time (or even as often as possible), which detect that polish citizens did not acquire the habit of voting

⁽¹⁾ The researcher must point at this reference by Duverger that is taken from a translated Arabic version of the essential book which published in 2011, translated by Ali mukld & abd al-mohsen saad, p 378.

(Millard, 2009). Moreover to know point at how does democracy actually works in Poland democracy process in through the last two decades by depending on the data of The economist intelligence unit (EIU), which classified democracy efficient into four types, to be like: full democracies (points = 8.00 or above), flawed democracies (under 8 & more than 6 overall score), hybrid regimes (under 6 & more than 4), authoritarian regimes (under than 4), this democracy index approaching with Dahl's standards, we can notice that by pointing out to the indictors that this index classify democracy type by measuring it, which its : electoral process & pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. So, in the next table we'll provide these measured data in period of the last two decades.

Table 2

Electoral turnout of voting in Poland 2001-2020

Elections	Date	Votes	Registered Votes	Turns out
Polish Sejm	2001/9/23	13,591,681	29,364,445	%46.29
Polish Senate	2005/9/25	12,262,311	30,229,031	%40.56
Polish sejm	2005/9/25	15,051,157	30,338,316	%40.4
President 1 st Round	2005/10/9	15,051,157	30,260,027	%49.74
President 2 nd Round	2005/10/23	15,439,684	30,279,209	%50.99
Polish senate	2007/10/21	16,475,672	30,615,471	%53.81
Polish Sejm	2007/10/21	16,477,734	30,615,471	%53.82
President 1 st Round	2010/6/20	16,932,832	30,813,005	%54.92
President 2 nd Round	2010/7/4	17,050,417	30,833,924	%55.3
Polish sejm	2011/10/9	15,050,027	30,762,931	%48.92
Polish senate	2011/10/9	15,050,027	30,762,931	%48.92
President 1 st Round	2015/5/10	15,023,886	30,688,570	%48.96
President 2 nd Round	2015/5/24	16,993,169	30,709,281	%55.34
Referendum	2015/9/6	2,383,041	30,565,826	%7.8
Polish senate	2015/10/25	15,597,073	30,629,150	%50.92
Polish sejm	2015/10/25	15,597,073	30,629,150	%50.92
Polish senate	2019/10/13	18,678,930	30,253,556	%61.74
Polish sejm	2019/10/13	18,678,930	30,253,556	%61.74
President 1 st Round	2020/6/28	19,483,760	30,204,792	%64.51
President 2 nd Round	2020/7/12	20,636,635	30,868,543	%68.18

Source: IFES (2021)

Table 3

Democracy index [EIU] of Poland 2003-2020

Year	Rank	Overall Score	Electoral process & pluralism	Functioning of Government	Political Participation	Political Culture	Civil Liberties
Classified as flawed Democracy throughout these years							
2003	46	7.30	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.63	9.12
2007	46	7.30	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.63	9.12
2008	45	7.30	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.63	9.12
2010	48	7.05	9.58	6.07	6.11	4.38	9.12
2013	44	7.12	9.58	6.43	6.11	4.38	9.12
2015	48	7.09	9.58	5.71	6.67	4.38	9.12
2016	52	6.83	9.17	5.71	6.67	4.38	8.24
2017	53	6.67	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	7.65
2020	50	6.85	9.17	5.71	6.67	5.63	7.06

Source: by the researcher, depending on the data of annual reports by EIU for the mentioned years above.

The decline (as the inductors shows) clearly starts since 2013, but the decline goes faster in 2015 at the year of PIS party took the rule.

Judicial independency: is it an element that undermine democracy in Poland?

we also could witness another slip in Poland democracy which it's the disruption of judicial framework and it's independency, which marked its largest point in the last five years according to [Notes from Poland \(2020\)](#). This judicial fall led to launch a formal investigation by European Commission in to the rule of law for one of its members (Poland), and that's essentially was about the muddle laws to overhaul the polish constitutional tribunal (TK) and its curb media freedom ([Bustikova & Zechmeister, 2017](#)). This roots of disrupted judicial framework came from the (Lustration Law) that was passing by the sejm in October 2006, under this law the ministry of justice has given a temporary authorization that allows dismissal of any chief justice within 6 months, this legislation, so far came as a result of another law which is the law of National Broadcasting Council (NBC) which was modified on 29 December 2005, in order to hold public media under more rough supervising body with a tighter government, but the last law mentioned, has defined journalist as (Public Figures), so in 2007 the constitutional tribunal ruled against this definition as a profound & uncertain to defined who else could be embody of these public figures, after all by returning into (Lustration Law) which was call again in 2017, but with an emendation, so according to the new amendment the ministry of justice has the right to control more in dismissing & appointing judges, with also a new sentence that included a pension cuts in rate of 5% to 50% and in the time range starts with three month to two years. Moreover, the ministry of justice has the right to nominate the disciplinary judges which makes judicial independence in real danger ([Śledzińska-Simon, 2018](#)). Recently, in late of 2019 the polish sejm approved another judiciary law, that known among the local popularity as a " Muzzle Law" , this new law allows the polish government to fire judges or cut their salaries just for speaking out against legislation or for questioning it. In Poland the mechanism of nominate judges even who works in the supreme court, are largely handled by facially independent body, the National Council of the Judiciary (KRS), this council composed of 25 members : 15 judges from Poland's different courts, four members of the sejm appointed by the sejm itself, two members appointed by the senate, two members appointed by the president of supreme administrative court, two members appointed by the minister of justice & the last member appointing by the president of the republic. however , in 2017 the president Andrzej Duda gave the authority of appointing judicial members to the sejm, which allows sejm to quickly replace 15 members of the body of its own appointees, as much the ruling party (PIS) used its power to undermine public confidence (Specially attacks on Twitter) beside advertising to discredit judges ([Duncan & Macy, 2020](#)). Despite the importance of this judicial relapse, however, it was not the only obstacle issue to the democratic system in Poland, therefore the media also got as an obstacle element to the democratic system, the media impartial coverage of political corruption & on the abuse of power too, indicated the fragility of democratic system, and this policies is rising since PIS take the power in 2015.

So, which kind of democracy is that?

We could say that the roots of controlling PIS rule type back to the rising populism for the past two decades & also into the draft back of the leftist parties generally, which come back to the Lew Rewin case that happened while the ruling government contain a leftist coalition with Leszek Millar as prime minister. Since, back then, we could notice how the political tendency shifting into extremely rightist ideologies, & into populist ideology to be specific ([Albertazzi & Mueller, 2013](#)). Moreover, the last presidential elections was originally scheduled for May 2020, but politically there was a debt about hold the voting during COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, which end up in canceling the election by Jarslaw Kacynski the chief of PIS party & the prime minister at the same time, although he hadn't a constitutional authority to do so, as a result, May election was abandoned not postponed & the new election was call in June with a second round in July. Observers noted that the government had failed to correctly use their constitutional obligations by abandoning May election without any formed procedure, besides

that, an administrative court ruled that the prime minister had broken the law in attempting to transfer the election administration to the post office- the observers from (OSCE)- the organization for security and cooperation in Europe concluded that election in 2020 was competitive and well-organized by giving it three points of four, also the political involvement achieve good points while the openness transparency & independent Media was less fortunate & the independent judiciary even worse than the last two ones, which achieved one point of completely four points, according to the freedom house data base of [FreedomHouse \(2021\)](#) in Poland which it published on their site. The democratic institutions was taking root since the start of its transition in 1989, rapid economic growth and other societal changes has benefited some segments of the population more than others, and that was contributing in create a deep divide gap between liberal, pro-European parties & the ones who defined on the national interest and ' traditional' polish catholic values, but generally, since 2015 PIS party has enacted numerous measures that increase political influence over state institutions and threaten the democratic process ([FreedomHouse, 2020](#)).

Finally, as we mentioned before, the researcher tried to concentrate on the democratic efficiency by depending on Robert A. Dahl's dimensions of democracy, (Democratic representation, effective political participation, party competition and judicial accountability), which each one of this standards helped by studying it, in answer the question how do we know that democracy is actually works somewhere, which makes it as a system, so much farther than just adopting a market economy or allowing election in the state freely, and other surface things that usually use in defining the democratic systems, as [Dahl \(1998b\)](#) found that it's so much farther than these standards itself , it's not self- evident to satisfy these standard, a political system would necessarily have to insure its citizens certain rights, as an example : to participate effectively in political matters, or consider what the creation of voting equality requires : or citizens must have a right to vote and to have their votes counted fairly, so [Dahl \(1998b\)](#) democratic standards assume that citizens must have the right to investigate alternatives, a right to participate in how and what should go on the agenda, and so on, so these rights inherent in it must actually be available to citizens, to promise democratic rights in law, or even in a constitutional document is not enough, but it must be effectively available to citizens in practice. In Poland, the representation process was good overall, at least in the beginning until the last few election, despite that it faced a political polarization to its people, beside many cases in the first decades of the twenty-first century left-wing into the right-wing, as populist to be specific, although the public involvement in election was always wavering and unclear through each election since 1989, so we could see how many issues were influencing such as (Polarization, Political Corruption, Economic Voting and so on ...), as an clue we could point to the last presidential election in 2020 which was clearly invalid constitutionally. From another hand, the whole party structure was change by 2015, when PIS successes in sejm election and took the rule without forming any coalition, which increase the control of the right populist, beside that the parties in opposition had to fight from the outside, with a more slightly ways to pressure the government, the thing that give more power to the extreme populist, in front of the so left back leftist-parties which it used to had a popular ground through the years of transition, but it is almost close to has a weak or even scattered into parts by now, which show how it hasn't any impact in political event by now, moreover, the political competition of parties became between right parties so, the whole party structure is changed from what it used to be earlier.

Lastly, we could say that the efficacy of democracy in Poland today has a real danger that threat the democratic system or which the democratic system should ever mean, and also it stumbling a block in the way of achieving political stability.

Conclusion

Maybe this study cannot give an obvious result, due its short & focusing on the what does had an impact on the democracy process in negative way, more than what is really helped democracy in Poland such as the economic growth, or the effective civil society, so, the research aims to point to that question; which always been asked, why that democracy as an element of political stability doesn't always had to bring a stable system, and that what we find in the polish political system, despite of the growth & other elements, there were always things relates democracy into political stability but politically it's not like that, not in every case at least,

so we could see that, there was an election which been done as the constitution order, but we could see also, polish people doesn't involve in politics at all, at least since the political event became blurred between parties whose depend on economic matters beside its almost had success in political polarization every time, which could be relate to the kind of connection that links between the party and the polish citizens, its looks like weak connection, and that return to the novelty of the democracy as a system that process its democracy by following a political pluralism, and to its newness for the citizens who does not know democracy as well as people in modern democracies like most of western democracies for example. So we could conclude that democracy doesn't a sustainable element to the political stability, and that doesn't just relay on political system or on the individuals who practice their rights and do their obligation or not, it also extend into historical roots which impact on the lifestyle of its people, political and religious legacies, so those may effect on political and civil culture. Moreover, Machiavelli Miljkovic and Rimal (2008) think that Republic (democracy here) hasn't owe the ability to achieve political stability, and to do so, it has to be wide middle class in society and it has to increase always, and the popular power must be intuitional power, beside that people in the country always have to realize what is going on, so, governments have much or less goodness as much its encourage on these aspects.

Finally, we can said that the political system in Poland as a democratic system, it always seem to relay on the economic growth in practicing its function and to in somehow it cover the flaws of public policies, which maybe support the fluctuating in political stability and the wavering in quality of democracy all along the time.

References

- Albertazzi, D., & Mueller, S. (2013). Populism and Liberal Democracy: Populists in Government in Austria, Italy, Poland and Switzerland. *Government and Opposition*, 48(3), 343-371. doi: [10.1017/gov.2013.12](https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2013.12)
- Bustikova, L., & Zechmeister, E. J. (2017). Voting in new (er) democracies *The Sage handbook of electoral behaviour* (Vol. 2, pp. 92-133). London: Library of Congress Control. Retrieved from <http://bustikova.faculty.asu.edu/lbs/papers/lbez.pdf>.
- Dahl, R. A. (1998a). Justifying democracy. *Society*, 35(2), 386-392. doi: [10.1007/BF02838167](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02838167)
- Dahl, R. A. (1998b). *On democracy*. London: Yale university press. Retrieved from: https://old.tsu.ge/data/file_db/anthim/29.eng.pdf.
- Duncan, A., & Macy, J. (2020). The Collapse of Judicial Independence in Poland: A Cautionary Tale. *Judicature*, 104(3), 40-50. doi: <https://judicature.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DUNCANv2-compressed.pdf>
- Duverger, M. (1959). *Political parties: Their organization and activity in the modern state*. Cairo: Methuen & Co. Ltd. Retrieved from: <http://digilib.fisipol.ugm.ac.id/handle/15717717/12090>.
- Economist Intelligence Unit. (2016). An annual Report by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.gapminder.org/data/documentation/democracy-index/>
- FreedomHouse. (2020). Freedom in the World 2020: Poland. Retrieved from: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/freedom-world/2020>
- FreedomHouse. (2021). Freedom in the World 2021: Poland. Retrieved from: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/freedom-world/2021>
- Gwiazda, A. (2015). *Democracy in Poland: Representation, participation, competition and accountability since 1989* (1 ed.). London: Routledge doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315680118>.
- IFES. (2021). International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Election guide: Poland. Retrieved from: <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/173/>
- Miljkovic, D., & Rimal, A. (2008). The impact of socio-economic factors on political instability: A cross-country analysis. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 37(6), 2454-2463. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2008.04.007>
- Millard, F. (2009). *Democratic elections in Poland, 1991-2007* (1 ed.). London: Routledge doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203872727>.
- Notes from Poland. (2020). Poland no longer rated as a full Democracy in new freedom House Index. Retrieved from: <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/05/06/poland-no-longer->

[rated-as-full-democracy-in-new-freedom-house-index/](#)

Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. C. S., Stokes, S. C., & Manin, B. (1999). *Democracy, accountability, and representation* (Vol. 2). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: http://web.stanford.edu/~jrodden/oslo/prz_stokes_manin.pdf.

Śledzińska-Simon, A. (2018). The rise and fall of judicial self-government in Poland: on judicial reform reversing democratic transition. *German Law Journal*, 19(7), 1839-1870. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2071832200023257>

Tucker, R. W. (2006). *The law of war and neutrality at sea* (Vol. 50). Washington: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd. Retrieved from: <https://core.ac.uk/reader/236336360>.

Zarycki, T., & Nowak, A. (2000). Hidden dimensions: the stability and structure of regional political cleavages in Poland. *Communist and post-communist studies*, 33(3), 331-354. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X\(00\)00010-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(00)00010-6)