



Project
MUSE®
Scholarly journals online

Problems of Postcommunism

FROM SOLIDARITY TO FRAGMENTATION

Krzysztof Jasiewicz

Krzysztof Jasiewicz directs electoral studies at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In the 1980s, he was coauthor of a series of political attitude surveys known as The Poles of '80, '81, '84, '88, '90. He is currently a visiting professor of sociology at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

“The complex political situation in Poland stems from a misguided and ill-designed electoral law.” This diagnosis of Poland’s political problems came from Zbigniew Brzezinski a few days before the parliamentary elections of 27 October 1991. According to *Gazeta wyborcza*, Brzezinski told President Lech Walesa that Poland’s legislators had made a fundamental error by adopting a system based on proportional representation (PR) for elections to the Sejm (the lower house of Parliament). “This electoral law will disperse the will of the people and will not provide a basis for the emergence of a democratic majority [in the Sejm],” he added.¹

Subsequent events seemed to reveal the accuracy of Brzezinski’s warnings, as Polish voters elected candidates from some 30 different political parties or groupings to the Sejm; the strongest party controls a mere 62 out of the 460 total seats, and no majority coalition of fewer than five parties is possible. Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that it took two months to form a weak, three-party minority government. The crowning irony was that this happened just two years after Solidarity—seemingly a unified, if not homogeneous, political movement—swept the communists virtually out of power in the historic elections of June 1989.

Of course, a bad electoral law alone could never explain such a striking turn of events, as Brzezinski well knew. As early as 1990, a deep split had begun to appear in Solidarity, which had never been perfectly united in the first place. From its sudden emergence in the summer of 1980, Solidarity was a multidimensional phenomenon: a trade

union struggling to protect the interests of all employees (not merely manual workers); a social movement striving to vindicate civil and human rights; and a political movement seeking democracy and national independence. As such, Solidarity attracted individuals of an enormously wide range of social, economic, and political persuasions. They had almost nothing in common except their belief that Poland's government should be made accountable to the Polish people and a commitment to pursuing this goal by nonviolent means only.

As early as the fall of 1981, even this minimal consensus seemed as if it might fade away. Solidarity's first congress yielded no agreement on economic issues, while "fundamentalists" quarreled with "pragmatists" and the public began to show the first signs of disillusionment. Diverse political groupings were starting to develop their own distinct identities and agendas under Solidarity's protective umbrella when the regime struck back with its declaration of martial law on 13 December 1981.

Paradoxically, martial law saved Solidarity. Most Poles, too hobbled by passivity or conformism to undertake clandestine activities, looked to Solidarity throughout the 1980s as *the* symbol of all those hopes that the regime was trying to crush. Meanwhile, the Solidarity underground managed to achieve a remarkable unity, sustained by the constant threat of being wiped away by the regime, by memories of the 1980-81 glory days, and by the leadership of Lech Walesa. Thus Solidarity was able to enter the Roundtable talks of 1989 as a cohesive group with nothing to lose and everything to win. At the Roundtable it secured the regime's agreement to a "contract" calling for semi-free parliamentary elections in June 1989 in which Solidarity candidates could run for 35 percent of the seats in the Sejm and all 100 seats in the newly reestablished Senate.

Solidarity won all but one of the seats it contested. It ran an official "all-Solidarity team," with a small committee of Walesa's associates handpicking a candidate or slate of candidates for each contested constituency. This strategy alienated some prominent Solidarity leaders, who saw it as the sort of undemocratic maneuver best left to the communists. Some dissenters even decided to run against official Solidarity candidates, but none were successful. Although people voted in droves for the Solidarity candidates, it is important to remember that these were mainly protest votes, ballots cast less *for* Solidarity than *against* communist rule. Moreover, neither in this election nor in any subsequent election did Solidarity gain the support of a majority of the Polish electorate: in June 1989, almost 40 percent of eligible voters stayed home, and only about two-thirds of those who cast ballots supported Solidarity's candidates. Thus at the peak of its popularity, a united Solidarity enjoyed the active support of no more than two-fifths of Poland's adult population, but by 1989 that was enough to end the communists' monopoly on power.

From the formation of the first Solidarity government under Prime

Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki in September 1989 through early 1990, Solidarity's political structures (both the local Citizens' Committees and the Civic Parliamentary Caucus, or OKP) maintained a high level of integration. Solidarity acted as a politically united force for the last time in the May 1990 municipal elections. The Citizens' Committees collected 74 percent of the seats in urban areas (where a version of PR was adopted), and 38 percent of the seats in rural areas (where a first-past-the-post system was in place), while an additional 43 percent of the rural seats went to independent candidates, most of them with backgrounds in Solidarity.

Yet even in these elections, the appearance of unity concealed growing divisions. In several places, moreover, they rose to the surface. The city of Lodz, for instance, witnessed two Citizens' Committees battling over the Solidarity label. Personal animosities aside, there was an ideological dimension to this feud, which pitted one group that could be roughly described as Christian-nationalist against another that might be called liberal-democratic. The former garnered 60 percent of the vote, while the latter got 30 percent. This case proved to be prophetic.

Solidarity Splits in Two

Throughout the 1980s, Solidarity was held together by the constant threat of annihilation at the hands of the communist regime. But after the wave of anticommunist revolutions had swept across Eastern Europe, it became clear that neither a Soviet intervention nor an internal communist coup would materialize to threaten Poland's young democracy. By the summer of 1990, ideological and political differences could be expressed freely and openly.

Lech Walesa—the man who had led the entire movement through both its days of glory and its dark night, the statesman of international stature, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate—was now just the chairman of a trade union. He had decided in 1989 to stay out of electoral politics, assuming that from 1989 to 1993 Poland would be at best a “35-percent democracy,” and that he would be most comfortable and influential as the leader of a powerful trade union, a man without constitutional powers or responsibilities. But by the summer of 1990, only a year after the historic 1989 elections, he had become an outsider. Power had shifted first from the communists to Solidarity, and then from Solidarity to the newly democratized government. Knowing that he had played a crucial role in the downfall of communism and the rise of democracy, and clearly not content to fade into obscurity, Walesa decided to step in and force President Jaruzelski (elected legally for a four year term in July 1989) out of office.

To no one's surprise, Walesa found ready allies among Solidarity leaders who were critical of Prime Minister Mazowiecki. The Walesa

group formed its own political structure, the Center Alliance, which ultimately came to dominate both the OKP and the Citizens' Committees. Mazowiecki and his camp objected to Walesa's bid for the presidency on the grounds that such a campaign threatened to destabilize an already unsteady political system and erase the first achievements of economic reform. They also believed that a new constitution (to be drafted by the "contractual" parliament and subjected to a referendum), followed by new parliamentary elections, should precede any presidential balloting.

Walesa, however, had no wish to wait that long. He and his camp were resolved to channel the growing popular discontent caused by the austerity measures against both the holdovers from the old system and the Mazowiecki government, which they charged with being too slow in implementing reforms. The Mazowiecki camp worried that this campaign, with its call for "acceleration," was fostering unrealistic expectations; they feared that a disappointed public would soon turn against the newly elected president, Solidarity, and the reforms. With great reluctance, Mazowiecki decided to run against Walesa. Solidarity had split openly into two factions.

The results of the first round of presidential voting (held on 25 November 1990) were a shock. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the prime minister of the first noncommunist East European government in almost 50 years, was knocked out in the first round of presidential balloting by one Stanislaw Tymiński, a previously unknown businessman who had made his fortune in Canada but still held Polish citizenship. They received 18 percent and 23 percent of the popular vote respectively. Moreover, Walesa's 40 percent (achieved with a voter turnout of a 60.6 percent) was a most unpleasant surprise for both Solidarity's erstwhile leader and his supporters. The negative campaigning introduced by Walesa and perfected by Tymiński had undermined the proreform consensus, which held that there was no alternative but to accept the temporary austerity required by Deputy Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz's plan for economic recovery. Tymiński's message was simple: "Do away with the establishment (any establishment, new or old), and I will get you whatever you want." The old Solidarity hands, now divided into Mazowiecki and Walesa camps, realized suddenly that yesterday's winners can become today's losers. In the runoff of 9 December 1990, Walesa collected 74.3 percent to Tymiński's 25.7 percent. The turnout was 53.4 percent, meaning that some 40 percent of Poland's electorate voted for Walesa in the runoff—almost exactly as many as had supported Solidarity's candidates in the 1989 parliamentary elections.

That 40 percent—or about 11 million people—represented what was probably the highest level of active popular support that Solidarity could ever mobilize. But this peak mobilization was doomed to be short-lived. The fragmentation of Solidarity, both on the level of the political elites and that of popular attitudes, was unavoidable. On the elite level, many

factors contributed to this fragmentation: personal ambitions, friendships, and feuds, as well as diverse ideas about the best policies to pursue. The ideological dimension of the original Walesa-Mazowiecki split was rather vague, but resembled the above-mentioned Lodz case: groups and individuals whose beliefs could be described as nationalistic or Christian democratic tended to follow Walesa, while those with liberal democratic or social democratic leanings tended to support Mazowiecki.

The Post-Solidarity Era

The presidential election of 1990 marked the end of the Solidarity era and the opening of a new post-Solidarity chapter in Poland's history. Mazowiecki (who immediately after the election resigned from the premiership) managed with some difficulty to unite two major groupings supporting him (the Forum of the Democratic Right, or FPD, and the Civic Movement-Democratic Action, or ROAD) and his individual followers into a new political party—the Democratic Union (UD).

No similar process occurred in the other post-Solidarity camp. It was a loose coalition that brought together devoted followers of Walesa, determined foes of Mazowiecki, ambitious politicians hoping to manipulate Walesa after the elections, and opportunists angling for place and preferment. Shortly after his inauguration, Walesa nominated Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Center Alliance (PC), to be chief of the presidential chancellery. While several other Center Alliance activists got nominations to the president's staff, Walesa's choice for prime minister was Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, a leader of another pro-Walesa party, the tiny Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD). Bielecki named four members of his own party to the cabinet, but included only two members of the PC. Moreover, he retained Mazowiecki's foreign minister, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, and minister of finance, Leszek Balcerowicz. Both these men, Balcerowicz in particular, had been the objects of violent criticism by some of Walesa's supporters during the campaign; Balcerowicz had come to symbolize to the public all the negative aspects of the pro-free market policies. The new government that many had expected to implement "acceleration" would, in fact, continue the major policies of its predecessor.

From early 1991 on, politics in Poland was marked by an ongoing rivalry between the presidential chancellery and the cabinet. The chancellery staffers continued to hope that the Center Alliance could become the presidential party, though Walesa preferred to present himself as (and honestly wanted to be) the president of all Poles.

The problem was, however, that the Poles were not happy with their president. As early as February 1991, public-opinion polls were showing a significant decline in Walesa's popularity—the boomerang effect of unfulfillable promises. Some of the blame for preventing the acceleration

from materializing also belonged to that relic of the *ancien régime*, the contractual Parliament, where communist nominees still held 65 percent of the seats in the Sejm. Walesa himself, once elected president, could perhaps have come to terms with this legislative fossil, but his supporters, already divided and frustrated, pressed strongly for new parliamentary elections. There was some obstruction on the part of the ex-communist deputies, but everybody in Poland understood that the parliament had become obsolete and that elections were unavoidable.

Then came a long, complex, and very heated debate on the electoral law. In the end, the former communists who dominated the Sejm opted in favor of a PR system. (Some post-Solidarity groups such as the Christian National Union [ZChN] also called for PR.) Eventually such a system was adopted, though not in pure form. The country was divided into 37 districts, each of which contained 7 to 17 seats. The allocation of seats within each district was based on the Hare-Niemeyer system, with no threshold.² Out of a total of 460 seats, 69 were to be awarded on a nationwide basis to those parties which: a) registered their national list (to achieve this a party had to register its list in at least five districts by collecting 5,000 voter signatures in each, or to collect 50,000 signatures nationwide); b) surpassed the threshold of 5 percent of the total nationwide vote; or c) managed to have their candidates elected in at least five districts.

Interestingly, a totally different system was adopted for the Senate, which was to be chosen through a version of the plurality system: first-two-or-three-past-the-post in two-or-three-member constituencies. The system was almost identical to that of 1989, with one significant difference: the runoff round was abolished, and a mere plurality would suffice for election. The senators, 92 percent of whom had been elected in 1989 on the first ballot, themselves insisted on doing away with the runoff. In 1991, however, things were quite different. Only one candidate, Senator Andrzej Celiński, running for reelection in Plock, got more than 50 percent of the votes.

No fewer than 111 parties, groupings, and organizations participated in the elections to the Sejm; 27 of these managed to register their national lists. The results are presented in Table 1.

The actual distribution of the seats has changed slightly since 1991 due to some mergers and splits, but the major actors remain the same. They are briefly described below:

Post-Solidarity organizations

1) *Democratic Union (UD)*. The party of Tadeusz Mazowiecki and several other very able and popular leaders: Jacek Kuroń, Bronisław Geremek, Władysław Frasyniuk. Ideologically, the party covers a very broad spectrum ranging from the liberal right to West European-style social democrats. What brought the members together was their

Table 1 — Results of the Elections to the Sejm, 27 October 1991

PARTY	VOTES			SEATS	
	Number	Percent of:		Number	Percent
		Valid Votes	Eligible Voters		
UD	1,382,051	12.32	5.02	62	13.48
SLD	1,344,820	11.99	4.89	60	13.04
KPN	996,182	8.88	3.62	51	11.09
PSL	1,033,885	9.22	3.76	50	10.87
WAK	1,007,890	8.98	3.66	50	10.87
POC	977,344	8.71	3.55	44	9.57
KLD	839,978	7.49	3.05	37	8.04
PL	613,626	5.47	2.23	28	6.09
Solidarity	566,553	5.05	2.06	27	5.87
PPPP	367,106	3.27	1.33	16	3.48
Germans	132,059	1.17	0.48	7	1.52
ChD	265,179	2.25	0.96	5	1.09
SP	230,975	2.06	0.84	4	0.87
PChD	125,314	1.12	0.46	4	0.87
UPR	253,024	2.25	0.92	3	0.65
Party X	52,735	0.47	0.19	3	0.65
Other	537,710	4.79	1.95	9	1.96

commitment to the Mazowiecki government's policies (in particular the anti-inflationary measures of Balcerowicz), a similar political style (moderate and somewhat elitist), and shared hope of becoming the political voice of all reform-minded Poles. These hopes were not realized: a clear front-runner in the preelection polls, the party gained only a bare plurality of the popular vote. Most probably, UD's poor showing was a result of its firm commitment to the austerity policies, though some analysts suggest that as a coalition of moderate leftist, moderate rightist, and centrist groupings it suffers from the lack of a distinct ideological profile. In the public-opinion polls, people speak favorably of the UD; in the voting booth, however, they may prefer a party with a stronger ideological stance.

2) *Catholic Electoral Action (WAK)* is the electoral *nom de guerre* of the Christian National Union (ZChN). The party represents Catholic conservatism and traditional Polish nationalism, but without chauvinistic overtones. Its leaders in the 1989-91 Sejm (Stefan Niesiolowski, Jan Lopuszański, Marek Jurek) became widely known for their advocacy of strict antiabortion legislation. With quasi-official endorsement from the Roman Catholic Church (intensive campaigning during some church services), WAK enjoyed relatively strong support in rural areas. Its leader, Wiesław Chrzanowski, was elected Speaker of the Sejm.

3) *Civic Alliance "Center" (POC)*. A coalition of the Center Alliance and the remnants of the Citizens' Committees. A self-described center-right party that cites "Christian values" as its ideological base, the Center Alliance was hoping to lead a broad coalition of Solidarity forces and become a presidential party. It failed to gain Walesa's endorsement, however, and its leaders lost their jobs in the presidential chancellery. Despite this setback and an unimpressive electoral showing, Jarosław Kaczyński became a central figure in the coalition-building process, and another leader of the party, Jan Olszewski, overcame Walesa's resistance and acquired the premiership.

4) *Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD)*. The party of former prime minister Bielecki—low in membership, but during its leader's tenure very influential—was the only party except UD to advocate the continuation of anti-inflationary, free-market policies. Walesa wanted to see Bielecki reassume the premiership, believing that his return to power would be perceived in the West as a guarantee of continuity in economic reform.

5) *Agrarian Alliance (PL)*. This loose coalition of post-Solidarity peasant groupings has already split into two factions in the Sejm: the Polish Peasant Party "Solidarity" (PSL "Solidarność," led by Józef Ślisz) and a faction composed of "Rural Solidarity" (a trade union representing farmers and peasants) and the Polish Peasant Party "Wilanów" (PSL "Wilanowskie").

6) *Solidarity*. The trade union decided to seek its own separate representation in the parliament, declaring that it would not join any coalition but rather play the role of a proworker pressure group.

7) *Solidarity of Labor (SP)*. A group with strong social democratic leanings.

8) *Party of Christian Democrats (PChD)*. A small, Poznań-based group.

Communist successor organizations

1) *The Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD)*. The leading coalition of one-time communists. Its main component is the Polish United Workers' Party (or PUWP, as the ruling communist party was called), now operating under a new name as Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP), under the leadership of Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leszek Miller. The still formidable communist trade union federation OPZZ and some independent former PUWP members are also important players. Finishing a strong second in the 1991 balloting, the SLD aroused considerable fear in Poland and abroad of a successful communist resurgence. Such fears are not well-founded: the SLD legislative candidates collected only about 5 percent of the total vote, approximately the same percentage that the party's presidential candidate drew a year earlier. Also, the former communists failed to mobilize support where they were seeking it most urgently, among the working class. Their

following remained restricted to the old *nomenklatura* and other beneficiaries of the *ancien régime*, with some support also coming from retirees badly hurt by price decontrol. It is unlikely that the SLD's support will ever go much above the level of 5 percent (or about 1.5 million individuals).

2) *Polish Peasant Party (PSL)*. A reformed version of the former United Peasant Party (ZSL), which was a loyal communist satellite party from 1947 to 1989, the PSL now claims the legacy of the 1944-47 PSL, the only party opposing the communists at that time.

3) *Christian Democracy (ChD)*. Based on the structures of PAX, a procommunist Catholic organization sponsored by the old regime. Wladyslaw Sila-Nowicki, a very prominent member of the old anticommunist opposition, also belongs to ChD, however.

Other organizations

1) *Confederacy for an Independent Poland (KPN)*. This non-Solidarity opposition party, organized in the late 1970s, scored a major coup by more than doubling its support in just a year. While its presidential candidate, Leszek Moczulski, garnered less than half a million votes (2.5 percent) in 1990, KPN legislative candidates won nearly a million in 1991. KPN organized its campaign around two seemingly contradictory themes: strong anticommunism and protection of workers employed in state-owned enterprises facing bankruptcy due to privatization and market-based reforms. The message was not ignored—workers (in particular skilled workers) supported KPN more than any other party.

2) *The Beer-Lovers' Party (PPPP)*. This was a joke that got out of hand—a party organized by a few comics and journalists as an antidote to an overly grim economic situation and overly serious politicians that apparently resonated with the public's antiestablishment mood. The Beer Lovers' campaign was financed in part by a group of businessmen who got their names on the ballot in return for their contributions. They also proved overly serious and, once elected, formed a separate parliamentary faction.

3) *German Minority*. The representatives of ethnic Germans from Silesia.

4) *Union of Real Politics (UPR)*. A conservative-libertarian group.

5) *Party X*. Organized by Tymiąski after his defeat in the presidential runoff election, Party X was prevented from registering nationwide because in some districts it allegedly presented forged signatures; it eventually competed in only four districts.

Is there any way to make sense of this swarm of parties, groupings, and organizations? The answer, regrettably, is no. All but three of these parties (the exceptions being the Democratic Union, the Liberal Democratic Congress, and the Party of Christian Democrats) had one

thing in common: harsh criticism of both (Mazowiecki's and Bielecki's) Solidarity governments. Otherwise, their positions on the political spectrum vary depending on the issue. Parties that are poles apart on one issue may take an identical position on another. There is no one yardstick to measure how far apart or close together they are. The traditional left-right dimension seems irrelevant. Is a strong advocate of free-market reforms, like the Democratic Union, really the left wing of the post-Solidarity camp, as the Center Alliance charges? Is the Confederation for an Independent Poland leftist because it demands protection of workers in state-owned enterprises, or rightist because it is nationalistic and fervently anticommunist? When the parties were asked where they actually want to sit in Parliament, the Alliance of the Democratic Left indicated the left side and the Christian National Union the right, but all the others insisted on being seated in the center!

It is small wonder, given these circumstances, that it took so long to form a coalition government. At a certain point a majority coalition of five parties (PC, KPN, ZChN, KLD, and PL) emerged, but soon the KLD and the KPN broke away. Eventually, Jan Olszewski formed a minority government based on the Christian National Union, the Center Alliance, and the remnants of the Agrarian Alliance, with conditional support from the PSL, Solidarity (the union), Solidarity of Labor, and some of the minor groupings. But everybody understands that such support may be withdrawn by any party at any moment, and that the alliances within the Sejm will shift kaleidoscopically, as the debate moves from subject to subject.

The Impact of the Electoral System

Brzezinski was clearly right in predicting a "dispersed will of the people, providing no basis for the emergence of a democratic majority." But was he also right to blame PR for these shortcomings? The advantages and disadvantages of PR versus plurality elections for new democracies have been discussed in the pages of this journal.³ What kind of evidence for this debate does the Polish case provide? On the surface, it appears to devastate Arend Lijphart's arguments in favor of PR, and fully to support the criticisms offered by Guy Lardeyret and Quentin Quade (who agree with Brzezinski). But should the proponents of plurality elections declare unconditional victory? Not necessarily.

On the very same day as the Sejm elections, there were also elections for the Polish Senate; these were conducted on a plurality basis. The results are presented in Table 2.⁴

In Poland in October 1991, two strikingly different electoral systems produced similarly fragmented legislative bodies. This is not to suggest that the choice of electoral systems does not matter. On the contrary, it matters very much to particular parties which may expect better or worse

Table 2 — Results of the Elections to the Senate, 27 October 1991

PARTY	NUMBER OF SEATS
Democratic Union (UD)	21
Solidarity	11
Civic Alliance "Center" (POC)	9
Catholic Electoral Action (WAK)	9
Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	7
Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD)	6
Agrarian Alliance (PL)	5
Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD)	4
Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN)	4
Party of Christian Democrats (PChD)	3
Other Parties and Independents	21
Total	100

results from one system than from the other. In this case, the Democratic Union and Solidarity were better off under the plurality system, while the ex-communists profited (as they had expected) from PR. The fragmentation generated by the plurality system could have been (and by some had been) predicted: Where there are no established political structures and patterns of voting behavior, and where widespread feelings of deep social and economic crisis prevail, plurality voting gives an edge to local demagogues, Tymiński-like figures who run against the "establishment." The assumption that the "winner-takes-all" principle eliminates weaker parties does not hold in situations where all parties are weak. The strongest party, the Democratic Union, did somewhat better in plurality voting for the Senate than in PR voting for the Sejm, but still acquired only 21 percent of the Senate seats. An equal proportion of seats went to a congeries of independents and one-candidate parties. Many of these ran on demagogic, populist platforms, a tactic aped by some candidates from "established" parties like the Agrarian Alliance, KPN, WAK/ZChN, and POC/PC. Demagoguery paid off especially well in the areas hardest hit by the pain of economic transition. Poland's Senate is no less fragmented than the Sejm.

Some experts—Lijphart among them—argue that the negative consequences of extreme PR may be avoided by adopting certain measures like applying PR in rather small districts (as was done in the Sejm elections), establishing a threshold (usually from 3 percent to 5 percent of the total vote, either nationwide or in each district) that parties must surpass to receive parliamentary seats, or using methods of seat allocation (like the d'Hondt or Sainte-Lague systems) that favor stronger parties.⁵ On the basis of data from the Sejm elections, Stanislaw Gebethner has simulated results for five hypothetical situations: a 3-

percent cutoff and a 5-percent cutoff (in each case on the district level); a 4-percent cutoff nationwide; the d'Hondt system; and the Sainte Lague system.⁶ His simulations showed that none of these methods would have generated a significantly less fragmented parliament. Under each system, at least nine parties would be represented in the Sejm, and it would take at least four parties to form a majority coalition.

One could argue that adding a threshold provision to the electoral law would force the weaker parties to form preelection coalitions and thus reduce the number of groups represented in the Sejm. But such ad hoc coalitions are often short-lived (two such groupings in the current Sejm have already split). Also, an overly broad coalition may discourage rather than encourage voters looking for clear policy stances (as might have been the case with UD). Perhaps a majority system with a runoff round, or a mixed one that awards some seats according to plurality and others according to PR, would give an edge to the strongest parties; still, it remains more than doubtful that fragmentation could have been avoided.

Why Parties Are So Weak

It was not a bad electoral law that spoiled the results of the 1991 elections. The law is far from perfect, but the real problem lies elsewhere—in the novelty and instability of fledgling democratic institutions and practices, and even more so in the very nature of the change that Poland has been undergoing since 1989. We can attempt here only the briefest outline of how these circumstances affect the electoral process.

When Lijphart, Lardeyret, and Quade debated constitutional choices for new democracies, all three implicitly assumed that democracies have well-established political parties and crystallized (or at least clustered) interests. But in Poland, as in other postcommunist countries, such is not the case. The parties are not really parties in either the American or the West European sense. With the exception of the renamed communists and a few veteran opposition groups (KPN, UPR), the parties are brand new. They have no tradition, no apparatus, no organizational history, no established rules of conduct. (No one found it odd, for instance, when a member of the central body of one party appeared publicly as an advisor to the leadership of another party.) Many are what Poles call “couch parties” (because all the members can sit on one couch), organized less according to policy choices than personal feuds and friendships.

No matter how critical one may be of Polish political elites, it is not entirely their fault that parties have no established constituencies. Neither of the two major mechanisms explaining voting behavior—party identification and rational choice—either operates or possibly could operate in Poland today. Why the voters failed to establish firm party-

identification patterns should be obvious from the preceding paragraphs. Only in the case of ex-communist organizations can voter commitments be traced back to pre-1989 Poland—and indeed, the ex-communists have the most stable electoral following. None of the post-Solidarity groupings can claim to be *the* successor of Solidarity; they must fight one another for votes. Solidarity itself (not a successor, but simply the same organization) is a labor union, not a party, and for that reason (as well as others) its appeal to the voters is limited.

Rational choice theory, alas, is not of much help either. One can make a more or less rational choice when one knows what options are available and can assess the costs and benefits associated with each. But in Poland today there are too many factors beyond the ken or the control of even a well-informed, active, and self-confident citizen. Your state-owned enterprise may lay you off; your savings bank may turn out to be a scam; a change in tariffs or unfair competition may drive the small business you own into bankruptcy. You live in a totally new and rapidly changing world—on what basis can you evaluate party programs and policy propositions?

Polish parties stand accused of failing to articulate group interests, but are there any interests stable enough to be articulated and aggregated, as is the case in established market-oriented democracies? The only well-articulated interests in Poland today, ironically, are the residua of the *ancien régime*: the interests of the workers employed in the mammoth, uncompetitive state enterprises, and the interests of “socialist private farmers.” Under communism, people in these groups lived in what most Westerners would consider poverty, but they enjoyed the benefits of the “socialist safety net,” which guaranteed workers full employment and peasants purchase of their produce, regardless of its quality. Now the workers face unemployment, and the peasants must compete in the market not only with one another, but also with farmers from the European Community. Both groups demand special protection from the state: the workers want subsidies for their bankrupt enterprises, while the peasants want cheap credit, price floors, and protective agricultural tariffs. In a certain sense, the fragmentation of the parliament is a blessing rather than a curse, for had one or two parties been able to collect the whole worker-peasant vote, economic reform would have come grinding to a halt.

The groups that have an interest in pursuing further economic reforms are too small and too poorly organized to form a politically potent movement. There is an abundance of entrepreneurs in Poland, but they operate as loose cannons, free riders, hit-and-run businessmen; there is no cohesive middle class. The entrepreneurs will need a generation to develop a sense of common interests and a group identity. The social group most consistently supportive of reform is the intelligentsia—the well-educated were significantly overrepresented among Mazowiecki’s

followers in the 1990 presidential race. Some intellectuals seem to be motivated in their support for reforms by political rather than economic interests. Many of the educated see their mission as a continuation of the traditional role of the Polish intelligentsia. They believe that they should sacrifice their own personal economic interests and contribute to reforms that will benefit the nation as a whole. But will they keep this up when the pain and dislocation associated with reforms really begin to mount up, when there is no more money in the state budget to pay teachers, doctors, and lawyers?

Others among the broadly defined intelligentsia, however, seem moved to support reforms by more selfish interests. Perhaps the bulk of Poland's white-collar professionals—well-educated, highly skilled, usually young—see the emerging new order as an environment in which they can successfully compete and eventually win prosperity for themselves and their country. In the 1970s and 1980s, such people would have emigrated at the first chance; today they stay in Poland, for they see it as a land of opportunity. In the recent elections, they voted for either UD or the Liberal Democratic Congress. They are the potential constituency for economic reform, but they are a tiny minority.

The majority of voters could find no guidelines in either interest or tradition to help them make their choice. It is no wonder, then, that most eligible voters stayed home: the turnout in the October 1991 elections was a mere 43.4 percent, almost 20 percent less than in the first round of presidential balloting a year earlier. The silent majority today seems to be simply confused, but tomorrow their confusion may harden into rejection, not merely of this or that actor in the democratic political process, but of the very process itself.

The Choices Ahead

To reaffirm the basic principles of democracy will be one of the major duties of the newly elected Parliament and the new Polish government. Among other tasks, Parliament must draft a new constitution. This constitution must address such problems as the relationship between the Parliament and the presidency, the current powers of which were tailored for a different incumbent—General Jaruzelski—and are concentrated in the areas of defense and foreign policy. President Walesa had hoped that the election of a weak, fragmented Parliament would boost public support for a strong presidency and allow him to engineer his preferred constitutional outcome: an American- or at least a French-style presidency. His hope, however, has been realized too well by half: Parliament is so weak that almost all its factions want to prevent the president from gaining enough power to turn the legislature into a rubber stamp. In his dealings with the old, contractual Sejm, Walesa had limited formal powers but an

extraordinary authority. The new, freely elected Sejm has already successfully challenged this authority. Walesa did not want Jan Olszewski to become prime minister, but had to bow to the will of an ad hoc parliamentary majority.

Since January 1992, Walesa has been desperately attempting to cobble together a broad post-Solidarity, proreform coalition. He seems to be genuinely concerned about the fate of the reforms, but he remains a statesman of colossal ambitions with no intention of being reduced to ceremonial status. If his presidential powers are curtailed, he may try to bring popular discontent to bear against democratic institutions, especially Parliament. If, on the other hand, the presidency is granted broad constitutional powers, many who see an authoritarian streak in Walesa fear that he will abuse those powers. Indeed, Walesa's habit of relying on personal favorites rather than elected or regularly chosen officials to make decisions is a legitimate cause for concern. The presidential chancellery often seems more like a monarch's court than the staff of a democratically elected officeholder. The new constitution must clearly outline not only the president's own powers and responsibilities, but also those of his staff.

Poland's new democracy is about to confront many constitutional choices. Among these, two stand out as crucial: whether to opt for parliamentary as opposed to presidential government, and whether to select PR as opposed to a system of plurality elections. Arend Lijphart's case for proportional representation is not quite convincing, but he is surely correct to warn that the least promising constitutional option of all is a Latin American-style system that teams presidentialism with a legislature elected on the basis of proportional representation. Let us hope that Poland will avoid this unhappy combination.

NOTES

1. *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw), 23 October 1991, 1.
2. For an explanation of the Hare-Niemeyer system, as well as the d'Hondt and Sainte-Lague systems mentioned later in this article, see Rein Taagepera and Matthew Soberg Shugart, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989).
3. Arend Lijphart, "Constitutional Choices for New Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Winter 1991): 72-84; and Guy Lardeyret, "The Problem with PR"; Quentin L. Quade, "PR and Democratic Statecraft"; Arend Lijphart, "Double-Checking the Evidence," all in *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Summer 1991): 30-48.
4. Since the districts in the Senate elections were based on geography (provinces), not population, the distribution of votes is omitted as not relevant.
5. Lijphart, "Constitutional Choices for New Democracies," 73.
6. Stanislaw Gebethner, "Podział mandatów w okręgach przy zastosowaniu odmiennych metod ustalania wyników wyborów," unpublished manuscript.