# MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

## "Organizing Resistance against Neoliberalism in Poland with Left Populism or through a Revival of Social Democracy? Case Study *Razem* 2015-2019"

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Abstract

This thesis provides an analysis of how the political party Razem (Together) organized resistance to neoliberalism in Poland between 2015 and 2019. In order to better understand the politico-economic context in which Razem operates, I use theories of uneven development to analyze the consequences of the neoliberal transformation since 1989. The policies of the reformers were heavily influenced by neoliberal ideas. Labor relations fundamentally changed, and many households experienced increased insecurity, unemployment, poverty, and inequality. I analyze the politics of the neo-nationalist party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice) as a possible renunciation of neoliberalism. The economic and social policies of PiS present a clear break with the past, while its reactionary history politics, the attacks on institutions such as high courts or the media, and the conservative backlash on women's and LGBTQ rights offer a neo-nationalist alternative to the individualism of the neoliberal era.

For the empirical part of the thesis I interviewed nine members of Razem during two field trips to Poland in 2018 and 2019. These interviews were interpreted utilizing a Critical Realist Grounded Theory approach and offer unique insights into how Razem views itself as an actor for alternative development, and what challenges arise in the resistance to neoliberalism and to a strengthened far-right. I compare Razem's organizing approaches with theories of left populism, social democracy, and social movements. Razem was founded in early 2015, presenting itself as a new left party in the spirit of Podemos or SYRIZA. The interview partners view Razem instrumentally. The party's self-described major function is to push the political discourse in Poland to the left, mostly via media politics and through participating in electoral politics. The party did not arise out of a social movement, yet it instigated, supported, and benefited from social movements once PiS came to power in the fall of 2015. Razem played a leading role in the feminist social movement that became known as "Czarny Protest" (black protest) and has also supported LGBTQ movements, anti-racist struggles, movements against the climate crisis, and labor struggles. Razem's vision for Poland focuses on the idea of an inclusive social democratic welfare state. I characterize Razem as a project that has revived social democracy in Poland with a left populist approach, but has failed to become the leading party of the left.

Key Words: neoliberal transformation, neoliberalism, Poland, Razem, Partia Razem, Lewica Razem, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, left politics, left populism, social democracy

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Masterarbeit wird untersucht, wie die politische Partei Razem (Gemeinsam) zwischen 2015 und 2019 Widerstand gegen den Neoliberalismus in Polen organisiert hat. Um den polit-ökonomischen Kontext besser zu verstehen, in dem sich Razem bewegt, analysiere ich die Folgen der neoliberalen Transformation seit 1989 mithilfe von Theorien der ungleichen Entwicklung. Die Politik der Reformer:innen war stark von neoliberalen Ideen geprägt. Im Zuge der Transformation kam es zu einem grundlegenden Wandel der Verhältnisse am Arbeitsmarkt. Viele polnische Haushalte waren von gesteigerter Unsicherheit, Arbeitslosigkeit, Armut und Ungleichheit betroffen. Die Politik der neo-nationalistischen Partei Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Recht und Gerechtigkeit) kann als eine mögliche Abkehr vom Neoliberalismus gelesen werden. Erstens stellt die Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik der PiS einen klaren Bruch mit der Vergangenheit dar. Zweitens sind ihre reaktionäre Geschichtspolitik, Angriffe auf Institutionen wie Höchstgerichte oder die Medien und die Einschränkung von Frauen- und LGBTQ-Rechten Teil einer neo-nationalistischen Politik, die eine Alternative zum Individualismus des Neoliberalismus bietet.

Für den empirischen Teil dieser Masterarbeit habe ich im Rahmen von zwei Forschungsreisen in den Jahren 2018 und 2019 neun Mitglieder Razems interviewt. Die Interviews wurden mithilfe eines Critical Realist Grounded Theory-Ansatzes ausgewertet. Sie bieten Einblicke, wie sich Razem selbst als Akteurin alternativer Entwicklung sieht, und welchen Herausforderungen sie im Widerstand gegen den Neoliberalismus und gegen eine erstarkte neo-nationalistische Rechte gegenübersteht. Ich vergleiche Razems Organisationsansätze mit Theorien des linken Populismus, der Sozialdemokratie und sozialer Bewegungen. Razem wurde Anfang 2015 gegründet und präsentierte sich als neue Linkspartei im Sinne von Podemos oder SYRIZA. Die Interviewpartner:innen betrachten Razem instrumentalistisch. Die Hauptaufgabe der Partei bestehe darin, den politischen Diskurs in Polen nach links zu verschieben. Dafür konzentriert sich Razem hauptsächlich auf Medienpolitik und die Beteiligung an Wahlen. Die Partei ist nicht aus einer sozialen Bewegung hervorgegangen, dennoch hat sie diverse soziale Bewegungen mitinitiiert, unterstützt und profitiert von ihnen, insbesondere seit der Machtübernahme von PiS im Herbst 2015. Razem kam eine tragende Rolle bei der Entstehung der feministischen Bewegung „Czarny Protest" (schwarzer Protest) zu, ebenso hat die Partei LGBTQ-Bewegungen, antirassistische Kämpfe, Bewegungen gegen die Klimakrise und Arbeitskämpfe unterstützt. Razems Vision für Polen baut auf der Idee eines inklusiven sozialdemokratischen Wohlfahrtsstaates auf. Ich charakterisiere Razem als ein

Projekt zur Wiederbelebung der Sozialdemokratie in Polen mit linkspopulistischen Ansätzen. Razem ist es jedoch nicht gelungen, die führende Partei der Linken in Polen zu werden.

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| CEE | Central and Eastern Europe |
| EU | European Union |
| FDI | Foreign direct investment |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| LGBTQ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer |
| PiS | Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) |
| PO | Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform) |
| PPS | Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party) |
| PSL | Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party) |
| PZPR | Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party) |
| Razem | Partia Razem/Lewica Razem (Together Party/Left Together) |
| RSS | Ruch Sprawiedliwości Społecznej (Social Justice Movement) |
| SEZ | Special Economic Zone |
| SLD | Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance) |
| Solidarność | Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy „Solidarność" (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union „Solidarity") |
| SYRIZA | Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás – Proodeftikí Simachía (Coalition of the Radical Left – Progressive Alliance) |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UP | Unia Pracy (Labor Union) |

# 1    Introduction

> F: The transformation was like really getting everything from Milton Friedman, from the neoliberal guys from the Chicago University. Entrepreneurship is the only way, no industrial policy; we have to get capital from abroad. Freedom means freedom to make money, not freedom to unionize, not freedom to have a house, to have some security and these kind of things.

> J: [I]t's not enough to be just an activist. To organize protest. But you have to have parliamentary representation. […] This parliamentary representation has to be new and fresh and not connected to people who built the post-communist left in Poland.

The two quotes above from interviews with members of the political party Razem (Together) lay out the two major themes for this thesis. Poland was the first post-socialist country to use 'shock therapy' to try to switch from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist market economy in 1989. The policies of the reformers were heavily influenced by neoliberal ideas, and the transformation went on far beyond the initial years of transition. Neoliberal transformation led to a complete overhaul of the Polish economy and society, and to changes in attitudes and values. While social democratic and left parties offered opposition to neoliberalism in the early years, their resistance faltered over time or became ineffective. From 2005 onwards, the political landscape of Poland has been dominated by the liberal-conservative party Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform) and the neo-nationalist party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice). In protest against this status quo, a new party emerged ahead of the 2015 Polish parliamentary elections: Razem. Razem looked like a Polish incarnation of Podemos, a left populist party that presented itself as a third option, positioning itself outside the prevailing two political camps led by PO and PiS. However, the emergence of Razem was also the result of failures of the traditional left camp—most importantly by the party Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD, Democratic Left Alliance)—to offer inclusionary class-based left politics.

Razem did not receive enough votes to enter the Sejm (the Polish lower house of parliament) that year, yet they have continued to build up party structures and have engaged with a variety of social movements and local initiatives. The goal of Razem remained to become a party represented in parliament, to represent people that have been previously left behind, and to push the political discourse in Poland to the left. The emergence of Razem poses several interesting questions: how can a credible left party be built in a country with both a state socialist past and a social democratic party that, until recently, supported neoliberal transformation? How does Razem view this neoliberal transformation, and what political visions and demands does it propose instead? Furthermore, has Razem adapted its approach to politics since PiS took over the government?

This thesis provides an analysis of how Razem organized resistance to neoliberalism in Poland between 2015 and 2019. I interviewed nine members of Razem—from ordinary members to members of the national board—during two field trips to Poland in 2018 and 2019. These interviews offer unique insights into how Razem views itself as an actor for alternative development, and what challenges arise in the resistance to neoliberalism and to a strengthened far-right. Following a Critical Realist Grounded Theory approach, I transcribed and coded these interviews to conceptualize what motivated Razem members to develop a new party, to characterize the political approach of Razem, and to analyze the different strategies and tactics employed by Razem.

The thesis is structured as follows. In chapter two, I describe my research framework, first by discussing how the research for this thesis contributes to the field of development studies and how I conducted and analyzed the interviews. Second, I provide an overview of theories on how to evaluate the rise of new political movements. Chapter three deals with neoliberal transformation. More specifically, I offer a brief history of the socioeconomic preconditions for transformation in Poland, discuss different theories about transformation and provide stylized facts about the development of macroeconomic indicators, measures of poverty and inequality, and public opinion. The chapter closes with a section on how the politics of PiS have influenced the development path of Poland, potentially challenging neoliberalism from the right. Chapter four presents the insights from the empirical research on Razem conducted for this thesis. The case study shows how the persons I interviewed became politically active, how they view the transformation process and the PiS government and, most importantly, how and why Razem has organized resistance against neoliberalism from the left. Chapter five closes the thesis by offering concluding thoughts and ideas for further research.

## 2    Research Framework

The research framework for this thesis is based on a qualitative social research approach following Critical Realist Grounded Theory. This approach is particularly helpful to discover the reasons and describe the contexts of social actions. Critical Realist Grounded Theory focuses on the relationship between agency and structure, which helped me to explore both the individual perspectives of members of Razem and the structural roots of contradictions of left politics in the contexts of neoliberalism and a post-socialist political arena.

The data collection for this thesis took place during two field trips to Poland in November 2018 and May 2019. I conducted nine interviews with members of Razem and visited party offices, as well as a campaign kick-off. In the following sections, I present the methodological approach of this thesis and describe the research process in more detail. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss literature that helps evaluate the political approach and the content of the politics of Razem.

### 2.1    Research Question

In this thesis, I explore how and why the political party Razem has organized political resistance against neoliberalism in Poland. The research interviews, which are the primary data source for the empirical analysis, were conducted in 2018 and 2019. The investigation is therefore limited to the time span of 2015 to 2019. This period spans the months of Razem's foundation shortly before the 2015 Polish parliamentary election to the time shortly before the 2019 Polish parliamentary election.

The articulation of this research question was influenced by several considerations at the beginning of the research project. In grounded theory approaches, rigid theoretical preconceptions should be avoided to allow the researcher to discover important themes and theoretical building blocks during the research. Nevertheless, researchers always bring their own knowledge and experiences with them.

First, my assumption was that the economic, social, and political overhaul of Poland after 1989 was deeply influenced by neoliberal ideas. While the transformation from state socialism to a capitalist market economy has led to high economic growth rates (after years of crises, beginning in the early 1980s), it has also led to precarious work relations, periods of high unemployment, rising income inequality and the privatization of social costs. At the time of Razem's establishment, there were high levels of dissatisfaction among parts of the Polish population with the outcomes of this transformation process. My research interests thus included the question of how members of Razem evaluate the transition period of the 1990s,

and more generally the economic and political transformation of Poland. I wanted to find out which factors and narratives influenced the political approach of Razem and its members.

Second, the electoral success of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice) in 2015 had meant that Razem was operating in a political arena that was now dominated by a neo-nationalist party, not a liberal-conservative party as in the years before with a government led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform). PiS won the elections with an economic and social policy agenda that was addressing the social costs of neoliberal transformation, while also putting forward a nativist and far-right vision of society, attacking women's rights, the LGBTQ community, and the legal system, and influencing education and history politics. I hypothesized that for a new left party such as Razem, this must have raised several questions: how does the party evaluate social policy from a political opponent that helps address the fallout of neoliberal transformation? How much does the party shift its resources to support social groups that are most under attack by PiS? To what extent is the party threatened by PiS, which took over control over the police and other security institutions to potentially attack political opponents? These questions added another layer to my research interest: How does Razem organize political resistance not only against neoliberalism, but also against a strengthened neo-nationalist camp?

Third, I assumed that a new left party in Poland has to deal with certain constraints connected to the post-socialist legacy of the country. Razem's aesthetics and public communication style suggested that it associated itself with other new left parties appearing on Europe's political scene at the time, such as Podemos and SYRIZA. These new left parties had been building diverse coalitions—some rooted in social movements—and were associated with a political strategy based on left populism. My assumption was that the left parties in post-socialist countries face different challenges than those in Western Europe. My hypothesis was that this was due to a deeper engraining of capitalist ethics and concepts of justice in society, caused by the dominance of neoliberal thought in post-socialist countries, but also due to the public perception of socialism. In public narratives, the era of socialism in Poland is portrayed negatively. Contemporary left parties face the challenge of reformulating socialist or communist ideas to reach and convince people that have experienced the crisis periods of late state socialism in the 1980s. In addition, parties of the post-communist left had facilitated the neoliberal transformation in Poland, especially in the early 2000s, further diluting what the public considered to be left politics. Based on these last assumptions, my research interest was to find out how Razem organizes politically, how the party reaches out to different social

groups, and how it interacts with other left parties. I wanted to find out in what ways Razem related to various left ideologies, specifically to socialism, social democracy, and left populism.

## 2.2 <u>Relevance to the Field of Development Studies and Transdisciplinary Research</u>

The research conducted for this thesis contributes to the field of development studies in several ways. My starting point is the analysis of the development of Poland from a state socialist economy to a capitalist market economy. Based on my research I call this development a *neoliberal transformation*. Development strategies are the outcome of political deliberations, and different actors continuously contest and challenge the current development models. During the last years of state socialism in the 1980s, neoliberal reformers— most prominently the circle around Leszek Balcerowicz—reached a hegemonic position within Solidarność (Solidarity) with their ideas of how to transition Poland from socialism to capitalism. Their main ideas were to reduce the role of the state and to let private market forces develop more freely, in the spirit of the so-called Washington consensus. The neoliberal transformation was not completed after the initial transition period. Poland's EU membership, which began in 2004, led to a further integration of the country into global value chains and led to additional labor market flexibilizations and rising inequalities. I view the foundation of Razem in 2015 as a form of resistance to these developments.

My research approach is rooted in a transdisciplinary tradition that views development as a multi-faceted and complex process that has economic, social, and political implications. Transdisciplinary research is a research practice between and beyond disciplinary borders to reach a holistic understanding of reality (Novy and Howorka 2014, 22). The research is conducted in exchange with the subjects that are affected by this reality. This approach is especially useful in the context of development studies: A multi-perspective and multi-method approach is necessary to comprehend development as the totality of conflicting processes. I do not view the members of Razem that I interviewed as objects of my research, or as victims of a development process external to them. Rather, they are experts that have shared their analysis with me and actors that have shaped development processes.

In this thesis, I facilitate and weave together theoretical contributions and ideas from different disciplines to contextualize the views of my interview partners. I use research from political science to evaluate the politics and strategies of Razem, and to characterize the political opponents of Razem such as PiS. Research from economics, political economy, and history helps me tell a more complete story of past and present socioeconomic conditions that characterize the neoliberal transformation. Finally, I use contributions from anthropology and

sociology not only to gauge the social effects of transformation, but also to interpret how the biographies of my interview partners have influenced their activism. The thesis thus contributes not only to the understanding of neoliberalism in the context of development in Poland, but also to the research on and with actors for alternative development.

## 2.3   Critical Realist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an interpretative qualitative research approach focused on "the discovery of theory from data systemically obtained from social research" (Glaser and Strauss 2006, 2), rather than having pre-specified categories that are applied to data. This originally meant an approach in which theoretical preconceptions should be given up in favor of the 'discovery' of theory in raw data. Theory obtained through such a process should be viewed as an "ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product" (Glaser and Strauss 2006, 32). Before Critical Realist Grounded Theory was developed, Kathy Charmaz and others have place grounded theory within social constructivism and post-modernism. Charmaz (2006, 130) juxtaposes what she calls the objectivist grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss deriving from positivism with a constructivist grounded theory as part of the interpretative tradition. Theorists following the constructivist grounded theory approach study how and why study participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations, with the theory depending on the researcher's view. More recently, several authors have put forward the case for a Critical Realist Grounded Theory (Belfrage and Hauf 2017; Lee 2016; Looker, Vickers, and Kington 2021; Oliver 2012). This grounded theory approach is rooted neither in the naïve realism of Glaser nor in the radical constructivism of Charmaz, but the epistemological position of critical realism. Critical realism, founded by Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s,

> […] presupposes an objective reality which exists independently of our thoughts and whose discovery is one purpose of knowledge acquisition. However, it also holds that all description of that reality is mediated through the filters of language, meaning-making and social context. (Oliver 2012, 375)

When combining critical realism with grounded theory, *retroduction* becomes a central tool of inquiry. During the work with data, the researchers asks "what must be true for this to be the case?" or "what makes this possible?" (Oliver 2012, 381). Critical Realist Grounded Theory focuses on the relationship between agency and structure, exploring individual perspectives, but also structural roots of contradictions.

Figure 1 illustrates an example of a research process using Critical Realist Grounded Theory as conceptualized by Belfrage and Hauf. After choosing a societal problem to be investigated, the researcher seeks "an understanding of how the problem is discursively construed and represented in hegemonic discourses" (Belfrage and Hauf 2017, 259). In this research project,

the societal problem was how an emancipatory and progressive political party such as Razem resists neoliberalism in Poland in the context of post-socialism and strengthened neo-nationalist movements.
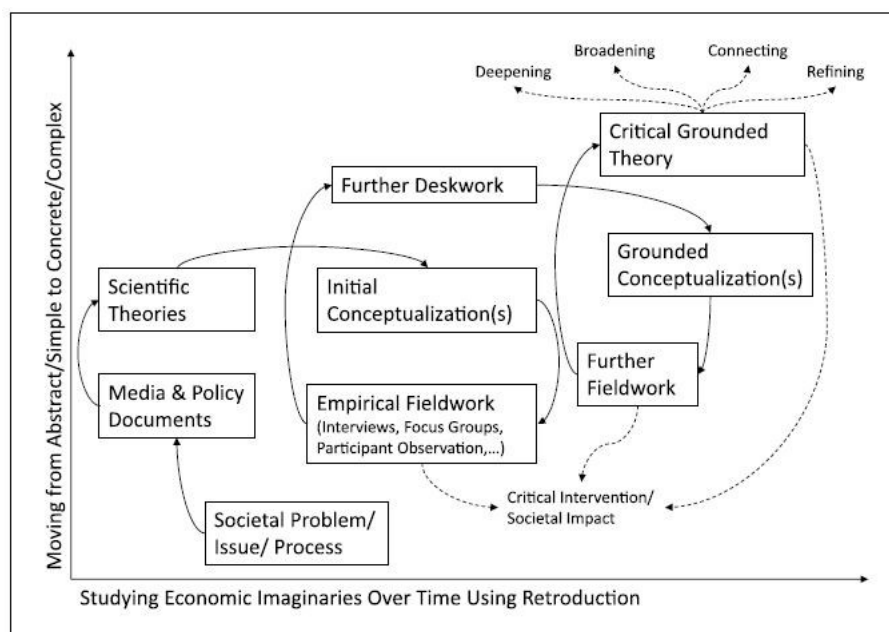


Figure 1: Example of a research process in Critical Realist Grounded Theory

(Belfrage and Hauf 2017, 261)

Before starting this thesis, I wrote two seminar papers during my studies, which can be viewed as part of the phase of initial conceptualization. In the first paper I presented empirical data on rising inequalities in the 1990s and how economists from different theoretical schools interpreted this data. In the second paper I analyzed the rise of PiS from a Marxist perspective. This initial conceptualization "gently guides the researcher through the subsequent phase of ethnographic fieldwork and retains space for her to be surprised in the field" (Belfrage and Hauf 2017, 259).

The first phase of empirical fieldwork was conducted during a field trip to Kraków and Katowice in November 2018. After the first fieldwork, the researcher "revises, reconstructs or develops the initial pre-concepts in the light of empirical findings" (Belfrage and Hauf 2017, 259) and returns to the field. At the time, I developed my first hypotheses laid out previously in this chapter and undertook a second field trip to Warsaw in May 2019. During these two field trips, I had the chance to conduct eight interviews with members of Razem personally. A ninth interview was conducted via an online conference tool shortly after the second field trip. During this entire process, the researcher is "subjective and socially positioned, yet reflexive. Retroduction, thus articulated, describes a continuous, spiral movement between the abstract

and the concrete, between theoretical and empirical work, involving both an interpretive and a causal dimension of explanation" (Belfrage and Hauf 2017, 260).

In a Critical Realist Grounded Theory approach, the choice of a research problem is "explicitly driven by moral and/or social concerns in an ambition to produce critical knowledge to enable social emancipation" (Belfrage and Hauf 2017, 259). Critical qualitative social research demands reflectivity from the beginning of the research process (Englert and Dannecker 2014, 242): Who is the research for? With whom do we cooperate? Whom do we research? Why do we research this topic? What knowledge is produced from which perspective?

My aim is that this thesis not only contributes to the academic discussion within development studies but also to political discussions about the possibilities and constraints of emancipatory politics in the face of neoliberalism and rising authoritarianism. I do not believe that a researcher can completely distance themselves from their own socioeconomic or political backgrounds. I have lived in Poland for a year in 2014, and I have been engaged in left politics and activism myself, which I made transparent to my interview partners. This has helped me gain the trust of my interview partners and gave me access to party offices and events.

My objective throughout this research process has been to depict my interview partners' statements and views without unnecessary distortions, which is why I chose to include extended passages of the interviews in this thesis. As a researcher, I analyze, contextualize, and theorize these statements with the goal to build a Critical Realist Grounded Theory of what contemporary resistance to neoliberalism in Poland looks like based on the case study of Razem.

2.4    Sampling Strategy, Conduct of Interviews, and Coding Process

Methodically, grounded theory relies on theoretical sampling, data generation (through interviews, participatory observations), the coding of data, and the emergence of theory.

Theoretical sampling is a key element during the research process, yet not so much at the start. In this qualitative research approach, there is no requirement to construct a 'representative' sample of interview partners before going into the field. Instead, grounded theory starts with initial sampling to get a first sense of what themes and discourses are important in the field, "whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go" (Charmaz 2006, 100).

The first interviews were conducted with local activists and regional board members of Razem in Southern Poland. After the first interviews were completed, I realized that a complementary perspective of national board members was necessary to better understand certain strategies, tactics, and conflicts within the party. In addition, I wanted to include perspectives from

younger and older members as well as from members from other regions of Poland. Theoretical sampling guided me to find these interview partners before and during my second field trip.

In November 2018, the first round of interviews was conducted in Kraków (n=3) and Katowice (n=2). During the first field trip I was able to join members of Razem Śląsk (Silesia) in a march in remembrance of the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in Katowice and visit their party offices in town. In May 2019, I conducted the second round of interviews in Warsaw (n=4) and online (n=1). During the second field trip to Warsaw, I observed the election campaign kick-off event for the election to the European Parliament and visited the federal office of Razem.

Appendix A provides a summary of information about the interview partners. Five interview partners are male and four are female. At the time of the interviews, the respondents were 17 to 42 years old, with an average age of 30 years. One respondent was still in school and two respondents' highest educational attainment was secondary education, while six interview partners held a tertiary degree. During the research process I aimed at reaching theoretical saturation rather than statistical representativeness. This meant choosing an appropriate number of interviews necessary to answer my research questions based on how much new information additional interviews would have provided me. After the nine interviews I felt I had a thorough enough understanding of Razem from different perspectives and levels; adding more interviews would not have added much more to the analysis. Snowball sampling was used to contact the first respondents, while further interviewees were selected based on age, region, and diversity in their engagement with the party, encompassing one regular member, members of regional boards and the national council, one regional coordinator, and two members of the national board.

The interviews lasted between 46m and 1h40m. I conducted semi-guided interviews. This means I used a general interview guideline with broad opening questions about the respondents' interpretation of the transformation of Poland in the 1990s, their previous and current political engagement, their perception of the current PiS government, the activities and strategies of Razem, and their political outlook. The interview setting allowed for follow-up questions and room for topics and questions I previously did not anticipate.

The interviews were conducted in English, with the interview partners using a few Polish expressions or statements if they wanted to clarify a phrase. I transcribed all interviews word-by-word, preserving the sequence of words and sentence structure as much as possible, and only correcting minor grammar mistakes to increase the readability. For the transcription and coding process I used the software MAXQDA Plus 2022. The names of my interview partners

have been redacted in this thesis to focus on the content of the interviews and to protect the interview partners from any potential disadvantages in their political struggles.

The coding process began with open coding to identify preliminary conceptual categories. This meant identifying latent meanings of what my interview partners told me, as well as finding useful summarizing categories. Initially, the open coding process led to many new and different codes. After coding one or two interview transcripts this variety of codes included many duplicates or similar codes, which were then combined if necessary. The open coding process was augmented by a constant comparative approach to slowly reach saturation—the point where no more meaningful codes were created through open coding. At this point axial coding was used to interconnect codes and forming categories, exploring the relationship of categories and making connections between them. In a final step each category was characterized in more detail.

The following example illustrates this process. In a segment about public outreach of the party and their involvement as a board member, one interview partner stated:

> A: And that demanded very I'd say very quick response and 24 hour availability and that was very hard for me because I didn't have previous experience, it's not pretty much the way I work. And it's pretty hard.

In another interview, a different interview partner discusses internal disputes about a political issues within the party and comments on how it made them feel:

> B: Of those two groups, it's really for both of them to talk, and that's also very frustrating and probably also one of the reasons why I decided to resign cause I didn't really see any civility for any constructive dialogue.

The two interview partners talk about different aspects of political work within the party, and what personal effects it had. For A, the voluntary party work was very demanding. For B, the culture of debate frustrated them, which B states influenced their decision to resign. I combined the initial open codes for these two and similar statements into the category *"A5 – Personal struggles with political engagement"*. This category was used for all segments in which interviewees describe struggles with their political engagement. This entails skepticism before they joined Razem, exhaustion or health problems during their engagement, or reasons why they might leave the party.

The collection of all categories and codes can be found in the codebook in Appendix B. Every category has a brief description and anchor examples. These are statements or short segments from the interview that illustrate the categories. In chapter four of this thesis, the categories are interpreted and combined into a coherent theory.

2.5    Evaluating the Rise of New Political Movements

In using Critical Realist Grounded Theory my goal was to learn more about the political approach of Razem through the eyes of members of the party themselves. I thus tried to avoid categorizing Razem's political approach beforehand. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that two ideological approaches are highly important in understanding Razem: left populism and social democracy. First, the party was founded at a time when other new left parties challenged the status quo in other countries, most notably Podemos in Spain and SYRIZA in Greece. These parties and the social movements associated with them have been heavily influenced by ideas of left populism (Boos and Opratko 2016, 31). Throughout the research project, I reflected on the similarities and dissimilarities of Razem compared to these other new left parties emerging in Europe. Second, Razem was founded as a political project by left activists that felt unrepresented by the traditional post-communist left parties or believed these parties were unable to organize resistance to neoliberalism in Poland. The foundation of Razem thus signifies a break with previous left politics in Poland. However, the interview partners self-described Razem as both a left and a social democratic project and thus locate the party within an ideological family of parties with a long history.

In this section, I will first discuss literature on left populism, social democracy, and feminist social movements that will help contextualize the self-description of my interview partner later on. The political landscape of Poland has been highly dynamic since 1989. From 2005 onwards, Polish politics have been dominated by competition between PiS and PO. PiS took over government shortly after Razem was founded, ending eight years of PO-led majorities. As part of this research project, I discussed the consequences of such a strengthened right for left politics with my interview partners. Since the politics of PiS are a relevant part of this thesis, I present approaches that explain the rise and dominance of right-wing parties in the last part of this section, arguing why I find it most useful to label PiS as a national-conservative neo-nationalist party.


2.5.1    Left populism

In the aftermath of the Eurozone debt crisis, new left-wing movements and parties had emerged. Two prominent examples are SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain. In Greece, SYRIZA turned from a coalition of radical left-wing parties into a single party in 2012. After receiving 36.3 percent of the vote in the 2015 Greek general elections, SYRIZA formed a government under Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, who was in office until 2019. In Spain, Podemos was formed in 2014 in the aftermath of the 15-M movement and reached 20.7 percent in the 2015

Spanish general election. After the November 2019 Spanish general election, Podemos entered a governing coalition. Both parties have built strong ties with social movements. They put forward political programs and have facilitated strategies of communication that have been labeled as *left populism*. Razem does not call itself a left populist party, but was created as a new left party in the wake of the success of SYRIZA and Podemos, emulating much of the style and language.

Discussion about left populism are heavily influenced by the writings of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Boos 2018, 20). Laclau argues that populism is "a way of constructing the political" (Laclau 2005, xi). In *On Populist Reason*, he bases his theoretical approach on three central "sets of categories" (Laclau 2005, 68): discourse, empty signifiers and hegemony, and rhetoric. Rooted in constructivist thought, Laclau defines discourse as "any complex of elements in which *relations* play the constitutive role. This means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it" (2005, 68). Hegemony is the process, or operation, of taking up "an incommensurable universal signification" (2005, 70) within the discourse. Rhetoric includes figures and devices that can be used to characterize hegemonic operations. Laclau argues that the "political construction of 'the people' is […] essentially catachrestical" (2005, 72), or a distortion of meaning, to express something that would otherwise be unnamable. Populism, in Laclau's definition, is not "the mobilization of an *already* constituted group" but "one way of constituting the very unity of the group" (2005, 73). The 'people' is a social construction—a political category, rather than a given—that arises from a plurality of heterogeneous socio-political demands. Hegemony arises when a certain demand in a chain of demands "acquires a certain centrality" and "popular identity" can be constructed out of the plurality of the demands (Laclau 2005, 95). Populism does not have to be authoritarian; it can be a democratizing force if the unmet demands are coming from a broad range of social movements that are excluded or left behind by currently dominant political forces.

Chantal Mouffe uses the theoretical body of work she and Laclau developed and analyzes the current state of social democracy, the left, and social movements. Mouffe (2018, 1) argues that older socialist and social democratic parties were unable to adapt and update their conception of politics and political organization. Thus, they could not incorporate social movements that have resisted various forms of discrimination that could not strictly be formulated in class terms, such as the second wave of feminism, the LGBTQ movement, anti-racist struggles, and movements against the climate crisis. While social democratic parties either were in decline or embraced neoliberalism in the 1990s and 2000s, right-wing populists were on the rise.

According to Mouffe, the 2008 economic crisis "brought to the fore the contradictions of the neoliberal model and today the neoliberal hegemonic formation is being called into question by a variety of antiestablishment movements, both from the right and from the left", a period she calls the "populist moment" (Mouffe 2018, 11). She describes the necessity of left populism to recover and deepen democracy. Mouffe defines left populism as a strategy to implement counter-hegemonic practices against neoliberalism, in which a political frontier needs to be constructed:

> According to the left populist strategy, this frontier should be constructed in a 'populist' way, opposing the 'people' against the 'oligarchy,' a confrontation in which the 'people' is constituted by the articulation of a variety of democratic demands. This 'people' is not to be understood as an empirical referent or a sociological category. It is a discursive construction resulting from a 'chain of equivalence' between heterogeneous demands whose unity is secured by the identification with a radical democratic conception of citizenship and a common opposition to the oligarchy, the forces that structurally impede the realization of the democratic project. (2018, 41)

Boos (2018, 23–24) argues that the strength of Laclau's theory of populism lies in its critique of conceptions of rationalistic politics, and less in its "rigid conceptual universe". It is less important to find the best or most rational explanation that helps constitute democratic demands or to use a different communication policy that speaks the language of 'ordinary people.' Instead, the goal is to politically organize emancipatory politics from below.

Is there a difference then between left and right populism aside from the emancipatory character of demands? One strand of comparative political science research provides a further distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary populism, attributing the first to left-leaning parties and the second to right-leaning parties (Filc 2010; Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika 2021; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013). This strand distinguishes between three dimensions of exclusion/inclusion: a material, a political, and a symbolic dimension. The material dimension refers to which groups are beneficiaries of transfers once a populist party is in power, both monetary and in kind, and who is allowed to access state resources. The political dimension includes both political participation and representation of certain groups, and how much certain groups are ignored and marginalized even if they are legally allowed to participate. The symbolic dimension is about the definition of 'the people' and 'the elite' and the process of othering. Some groups are included in the 'Us'-group, while other groups are rhetorically positioned in the 'Them'-group. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) apply this scheme to label European right-wing populists Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN, France) and Jörg Haider (FPÖ, Austria) as exclusionary, while Latin American left-wing populists Evo Morales (MAS, Bolivia) and Hugo Chávez (PSUV, Venezuela) are labeled as inclusionary. Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika (2021) apply the framework to investigate the politics of SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and Movimento

5 Stelle in Italy. Methodologically, they combine quantitative text analysis of party manifestos with qualitative content analysis of manifestos and speeches. They find that both SYRIZA and Podemos frequently mention a variety of outgroups they want to include in their policies: workers, women, the unemployed, the young, the poor, immigrants, and people with disabilities. In the material dimension, they find that SYRIZA and Podemos both focus on rights and equality, proposing egalitarian and universalist welfare reforms. In the political dimension, SYRIZA stresses social movements and the parliamentary arena while Podemos argues for more direct democracy. Both SYRIZA and Podemos call for the full inclusion of all outgroups. In the symbolic dimension, they emphasize dignity, with SYRIZA arguing for a patriotic nationalism that includes outgroups, while Podemos refers more to identity.

### 2.5.2  Feminist social movements

Tens of thousands of women took to the streets in 2016 as part of the protests against new anti-abortion legislation put forward by the PiS-led government. Razem played a leading role in this feminist movement that became known as "Czarny Protest" ("black protest"). Why is it that this movement arose outside traditional left parties? Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser offer a thorough analysis of contemporary feminist movements. Their book "Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto" (2019) is a political pamphlet, yet it also analyzes the resurgence of radical feminist mobilizations and offers a theoretical interpretation of current struggles against capitalism. The authors postulate both a weakness of left parties and a failure of liberal feminism when it comes to women's liberation. They criticize social democracy for their retreat from social welfare policies and their acceptance of the market as a sovereign. The authors argue that in recent years, feminist movements have reclaimed and reinvented strikes as a political weapon as a reaction to both neoliberal hegemony and a conservative backlash. These movements show that women's power to strike is not confined by the status of belonging to the class of wageworkers. At the same time, the demands of women strikers broaden the concept of what counts as labor issues.

In the book, the authors distinguish between two types of feminism—one that has been absorbed by the neoliberal mainstream, and one that positions itself more radically against the system. Liberal feminism became mainstream by not challenging capitalist exploitation and refusing to address socioeconomic inequality that makes freedom and empowerment impossible for most women. Liberal feminism "outsources oppression" (2019, 11) and projects feminism as a stand-alone movement, disassociating it with the struggles against capitalist and racist oppression. Radical feminist movements on the other hand are envisioned as a

revolutionary subject fighting not only for traditionally defined women's issues but also for all who are exploited, dominated, and oppressed.

The necessity for radical feminist movements to be anticapitalistic, the authors argue, emerges from the destructive forces unleashed by capitalism that are particularly felt by women. Capitalism is internally contradictory and endogenously produces crises of economy, ecology, politics, and care by exploiting wage labor and by free-riding on nature, public goods, and social reproduction. Neoliberalism as a globalized, financialized stage of capitalism has intensified these contradictions. Capitalism separated "the making of people from the making of profit, to assign the first job to women, and to subordinate it to the second" (2019, 19).

The definition of class is expanded by the authors from the classical notion of relations of wage labor exploitation to include all relations that "produce and replenish [labor]" (2019, 24). Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Frazer offer an intersectional perspective by pointing out that social reproduction "is shot through at every point by the fault lines of class, race, sexuality, and nation" (2019, 22). The subordination of women includes the subordination of women by more advantaged female (wage) workers, or the coercion of racialized women to provide care work. Capitalism also creates spaces and dynamics that produce gender violence as part of the system, as it inherently produces dichotomies such as private vs. public and people-making vs. profit-making.

### 2.5.3 Social democracy and the dissatisfaction with mainstream parties

In many Western democracies, there has been a significant trend leading to a reversal of the voting profile of left parties (labor, social democracy, communists, radical left, Greens). In the period from 1950 to 1970, these parties attracted workers with less education, voters from socially marginalized groups, and fewer voters with higher education. This relationship slowly shifted and turned from 1990 to 2020, in which left parties were much more likely to attract highly educated voters, transforming them from workers' parties to parties of the highly educated (Piketty 2019, 1058–64).

The traditionally strongest left party in most countries of the West has been social democracy. Social democracy can be defined as

> […] an ideology which prescribes the use of democratic collective action to extend the principles of freedom and equality valued by democrats in the political sphere to the organization of the economy and society, chiefly by opposing the inequality and oppression created by laissez-faire capitalism. (Jackson 2013, 348)

Jackson divides the history of social democracy into three distinct eras: the emergence before World War II, the so-called 'golden age' between the end of World War II and the 1970s, and

the period until the global financial crisis of 2008. In the third era a 'neo-revisionist' social democracy evolved, which attempted to accommodate the new reality of neoliberal capitalism:

> The ruling neoliberal mentality—which stipulated that certain economic 'laws' ruled out intervention in the market—was absorbed in a diluted form into the social democratic bloodstream. Social democrats came to believe that economic credibility—in the eyes of both the electorate and the global financial markets—ruled out significant increases in progressive taxation, or the use of deficit financing, to pay for social benefits, while the pursuit of a rigorous anti-inflationary policy would have to be prioritized ahead of full employment. This was alternately presented as an immutable result of global economic integration, or a matter of political strategy to win the support of skeptical centrist voters and powerful economic elites. (Jackson 2013, 360)

Jackson focuses on Western social democracy in his description. However, as will become clearer later on, the development of the post-communist left in Poland shares many similarities with this process.

New left parties benefit by mobilizing voters which they might attract from voting pools of more established parties, like traditional social democratic parties. Alvarez, Kiewiet, and Núñez (2018) distinguish between two types of voting in this scenario: If voters choose to tactically vote for a far-left party to convey dissatisfaction with some of their preferred party's positions, their vote can best be described as "tactical protest voting" (2018, 141). These voters believe their preferred party will win or advance in an election but hope that support for another party will push their preferred party to adopt or change certain policies. The authors assume, however, that this type of voting is not widespread. A different type of voting behavior is that of "insurgent party protest voting" (2018, 137). This voting pattern can be observed when voters choose a party that is seen as coming from outside the establishment, as unorthodox, or ideologically extreme. Alvarez, Kiewiet, and Núñez express skepticism of the idea that support for insurgent parties automatically qualifies as protest voting. This is because even though voters are often motivated by the rejection of the choices presented by the mainstream parties, they also identify with the policy platforms of the insurgent parties. These voters are often dissatisfied with the status quo and blame the mainstream parties. They might have first tried other mainstream options, but if their hopes were disappointed they then turned to the insurgent or fringe party.

Studies about Western European countries such as Spain, as well as Eastern European countries, support these findings. Rodon and Hierro (2016) show that the success of new parties, such as Podemos on the left and Ciudadanos on the right, in the Spanish local and regional elections in 2015 was the result of dissatisfaction with the two mainstream camps. First, Prime Minister Rajoy's conservative government led by Partido Popular introduced harsh austerity measures. Second, the traditional social democratic Partido Socialista Obrero Español was affected by corruption scandals.

Pop-Eleches (2010) offers a comprehensive study of unorthodox parties that rose to prominence across Eastern Europe in the late 1990s and early 2000s. His findings show that in the transition to democracy, researchers should pay attention to election sequence and election generations. Support for unorthodox parties ("insurgent parties" in Alvarez, Kiewiet, and Núñez's typology) became widespread in the third generation of post-communist elections. In the first two generations (the founding elections as well as the "normal years"), most voters opted for untried mainstream alternatives to incumbent parties they were dissatisfied with. In a third-generation election, voters lack additional mainstream camps and instead opt to vote for unorthodox parties "to punish mainstream elites for their often incompetent and corrupt governing style" (Pop-Eleches 2010, 255).

For Poland, Pop-Eleches classifies 1989 as the initial election, 1991 and 1993 as second-generation elections and 1997, 2001, and 2005 as third-generation elections. Far-right or far-left parties were not necessarily the beneficiaries of these voting patterns, as a new breed of centrist-populist parties emerged. However, these centrist-populist parties in turn are faced with dwindling support in the subsequent elections if they are recognized as becoming part of the system. Either they can embrace becoming a mainstream party, adopting a moderate and broad party platform, or they can decide to evolve towards more radical positions to reclaim the status as being unorthodox. According to the author, the latter strategy was chosen by PiS in the years between 2005 and 2007, becoming increasingly national-populist.

Bagashka, Bodea, and Han (2022) expand on the question of why voters are dissatisfied with traditional left parties in post-communist countries. They find that incumbent ruling left-leaning parties who have embraced pro-market, neoliberal policies that are traditionally identified as right-wing suffer at the ballot box if voters directly link them to these neo-liberal reforms. Right-wing incumbents do not suffer similar losses for neoliberal policy reforms; rather, they gain votes for implementing policies that are viewed as consistent with their programmatic approach. The authors explain the vote loss of incumbent left parties with the "economic vulnerability of the left's core constituency" (Bagashka, Bodea, and Han 2022, 148–49). When enacting neoliberal policies, the left usually deviates from its electoral policies. The results of the authors are consistent with the fate of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) in Poland in the 1997 and 2005 elections.

Lindner et al. (2020) show that in Poland there was little class voting until the emergence of the competition between PiS and PO from 2005 onwards. This means that there was little evidence for an income gradient for SLD before 2005; SLD was not a clear working-class party by its voting base. After 2005, a distinct difference between PO and PiS has developed, with lower

income people more likely to vote for PiS, and higher income people more likely to vote for PO, while support for left-leaning parties has more or less collapsed. Parties of the left tend to rely on a more educated electorate with higher incomes, opening up space for what the authors call "nativist populism." Figure 2 shows the support for left and right camps in Poland in national elections, further underpinning the finding that electoral support for the left has collapsed.
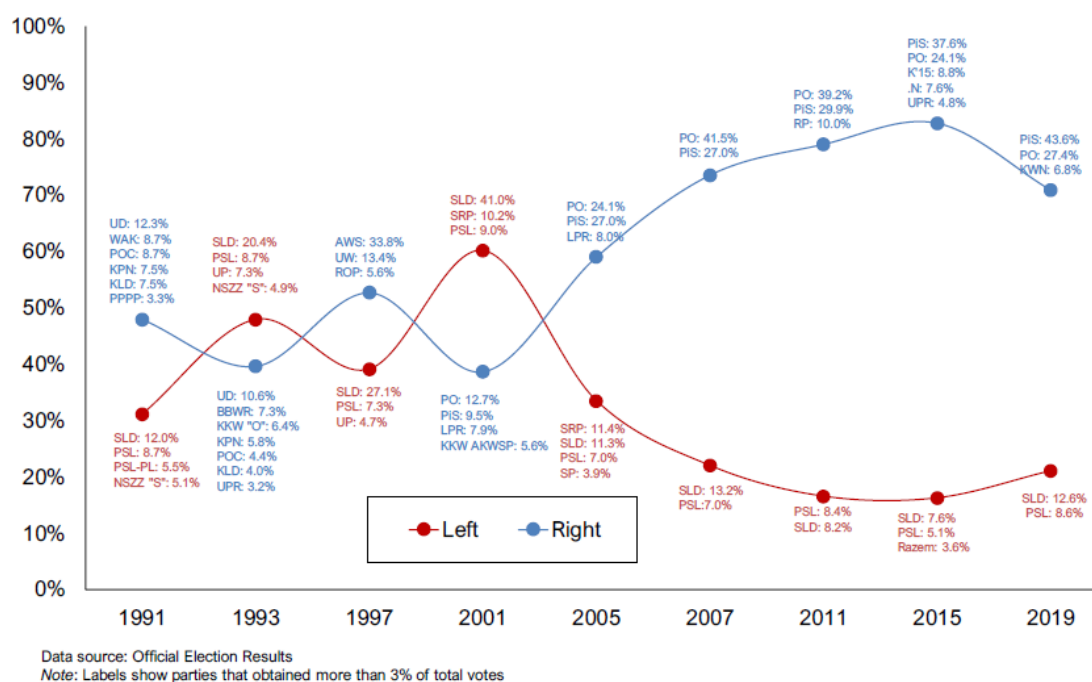


Figure 2: Support for left and right parties in national elections in Poland

(Lindner et al. 2020, 29)

### 2.5.4    Theories that explain the rise and strength of the PiS

The emergence of Razem in 2015 coincided with the success of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) in both the presidential and parliamentary elections. I will show in this thesis that Razem's creation was more of a reaction to the failures of the post-communist left in enabling neoliberal transformation than a reaction to the rise of PiS. However, the electoral success of PiS meant that the political landscape in Poland further shifted to the right at the time of Razem's creation. The politics of PiS since taking over government has drawn scrutiny from the foreign press and has been labeled a threat to Poland's liberal democracy. Pundits have described the party as "far-right nationalist" (Traub 2016), "far-right populist" (Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier 2017), a "socially conservative group with a nationalist agenda" (The Jerusalem Post 2018) or simply "national conservative" (Puhl 2015).

In this thesis I follow Becker's characterization (2018) that PiS is a neo-nationalist party with a national conservative current. Table 1 offers a systematic comparison of this school of thought with three other explanations of the rise and dominance of right-wing parties: populism, radicalized conservatism, and Bonapartism. Before going into details of Becker's approach I will lay out the strengths and weaknesses of the other three approaches, and why these are not apt to explain the rise and dominance of PiS.

Müller's often discussed essay "What is Populism?" (2016) is a good example of a current within populism research that in Europe has traditionally focused on the right, at least before the rise of new left parties like Podemos. He argues that populism should not be defined based on potential voters or their socioeconomic status but on the political program of populists. Specifically, he argues that populism is a "moralistic imagination of politics" (Müller 2016, 19). Populists differentiate between the people, "morally pure and fully unified," and elites that are deemed corrupt or morally inferior. However, criticizing the elites alone is a necessary but not sufficient condition for Müller. In his conception of populism, populists are anti-pluralists—they claim not to represent a part of the population, but 100 percent of the 'true people'. Not every resident of a country is part of this people. Müller argues that right-wing populists claim to identify a "symbiotic relationship between an elite and marginal groups that are also distinct from the people" (Müller 2016, 23). In the case of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), he gives the example of post-communist elites and ethnic groups such as the Roma, who are both vilified. Yet Müller also cautions against assuming populism will inevitably lead to or be part of a form of nationalism or ethnic chauvinism.

Populists in power have a specific understanding of political representation. They claim to represent the popular will, yet are not interested in identifying that popular will through democratic participation of the people. Rather, they rely on a "*symbolic* representation of the 'real people'" (Müller 2016, 27). Instead of representing actual people, they represent a noninstitutionalized notion or true spirit of the people.

| | Right-wing Populism | Radicalized Conservatism | Bonapartism | Neo-Nationalism |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Authors (examples)* | Müller (2016) | Strobl (2021) | Marx (1852); Thalheimer (1928), Bauer (1936) | Becker (2018) |
| *Focus of analysis* | Political programs of populists | Renewal of traditional right-wing parties | Emergence of fascism as a result of tipping class balances | Politics of governing far-right parties |
| *Actors of interest* | Populists | Major conservative parties, the media, far-right social movements (New Right) | Organized labor movement, bourgeoisie, fascist movement, state bureaucracy | Neo-nationalist parties |
| *Explanation for rise of the right* | Populists offer a vision of the people as morally pure and unified, defending them against corrupt and morally inferior elites | Transformation of the communicative playing field to reach discursive hegemony | Tipping class balance between bourgeoisie and strong worker's movement leads to crisis of liberal democracy, bourgeoisie supports fascist movements to restore higher profit rate growth | Nationalist forces use ethnicity and ethnic competition as a focus of their campaigning and politics, either by preferring domestic capital or by making the welfare state more exclusively attuned to groups defined by nationality or ethnicity |
| *Explanations for the right staying in power* | Colonizing and occupying the state; mass clientelism, silencing civil society | Permanent campaigning and media staging, creating social echo chambers with radicalized followers | Establishment of a fascist dictatorship that leads to the political rule of fascism and the destruction of the organized labor movement; socioeconomic rule by the traditional upper-class elites | Re-politicization of the state; economic nationalism supporting domestic capital factions; social policy that strengthens conservative social welfare state |

Table 1: Comparison of theories that explain the rise and strength of the (far) right

Once in power, populists will employ certain techniques for governing. First, they will try to "colonize or 'occupy' the state" (Müller 2016, 44). In the case of Poland, PiS moved against the independence of the courts by appointing new judges, amending procedures, or paralyzing the judicial system. PiS has attempted to capture media authority and to bring the secret service under their control. Second, populists tend to engage in "mass clientelism" (Müller 2016, 46). In the case of CEE, funds from the EU may be used to buy support or keep citizens quiet. Third, populists in power move to silence civil society protests or NGOs that criticize them by arguing they are controlled by outside powers. Theories of right-wing populism focus on political programs but have little to say about the political economy these parties operate in, and what consequences populist politics have for various social groups and classes.

Political scientist Natascha Strobl introduces the concept of "radicalized conservatism" to explain the renewal of traditional right-wing parties in recent years. Strobl (2021) analytically differentiates between conservatism, the New Right, and radicalized conservatism. According to Strobl, conservatism is typically comprised of anti-egalitarian, anti-revolutionary, class-harmonious sentiment with order and property as the highest values and a religious worldview. She describes conservatism as an ideology of the ruling class to secure existing structures of ownership. The New Right is comprised of groups and movements within the far-right that have adopted new strategies to win over popular support. In its official communication, the New Right has severed any direct linkage to national socialism. It bases its political strategy on Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Gramsci argued that taking over formal power alone—either through elections or revolution—was not sufficient to keep power in complex industrial societies. Left parties have to build and popularize working-class culture. They have to build coalitions based on organic intellectuals coming from the working class and traditional intellectuals as well as with other social forces. This union of social forces constitutes a 'historic bloc,' forming the basis for cultural hegemony. The New Right has adapted this political strategy, throwing out all democratic and emancipatory elements. Instead, they focus on the aspects of discursive hegemony to dominate the communicative sphere with their framing and narratives. The New Right attempts to connect conservative and fascist milieus. Modern representatives of the New Right are the Identitarian movement in Europe and the Alt-Right-movement in the US.

Radicalized conservatism is the phenomenon of the recent transformation of existing conservative major parties (Strobl 2021, 30). Strobl describes a necessary underlying sociological phenomenon for this process: the existence and propagation of authoritarian attitudes, which are initially hidden by a thin layer of civilized manners. Social solidarity is

replaced with an ideology of toughness, emphasizing individual responsibility, efficiency, and social Darwinism. If conservative milieus are pushed by these dynamics, Strobl argues, they open up towards the far-right, transforming themselves into parties of radicalized conservatism. How do radicalized conservative parties come to power? Radicalized conservative parties consciously break both formal and informal campaigning rules to signify a break from their past and appear as an outsider to the establishment. New communication strategies and unfair financial advantages slowly transform the communicative playing field, allowing radicalized conservatives to push the discourse. Radicalized conservative parties work to polarize between 'Us' and 'Them.' Publicly, this imagery may come across as pro-working class, positioning hard-working nationals against the globalized capital and migrant workers. The opposition, critical media outlets or pundits, culture worker, or NGOs are all labeled to belong to an opposing political force, i.e., the deep state. The opposition is framed as an explicit enemy, while other political or social groups are identified as a diffuse enemy. The party leader is particularly strengthened within radicalized conservative parties. Parties are restructured to serve the politics and visions of the leader better, with a close inner circle of loyal followers surrounding the leader. In addition, the media as the fourth estate is sabotaged, journalists are personally discredited, and public subsidies and government ads for private media outlets are redirected towards networks with friendly coverage.

Once in power, radicalized conservative parties will try to engage in permanent campaigning and media staging. Some media outlets profit from this modus operandi, engaging in the "business of outrage" (The Economist 2016). One strategy when constantly operating in a campaign mode employed by radicalized conservatives is to overwhelm liberal media outlets by "flooding the zone with shit," as Trump advisor Steve Bannon put it. Radicalized conservative parties aim at creating and strengthening social echo chambers. Radicalized conservative party leaders have a substantial following. This group of people can be fed with fake news. Political problems are invented that only their leader can solve, while the party and its leader are constantly portrayed as under attack.

Strobl bases her analysis on the transformation of ÖVP under Sebastian Kurz in Austria and the Republican Party under Donald Trump in the US. She connects insights from populism research with research on the far-right. While these insights are helpful to understand campaigning strategies and the impact of echo chambers in social networks, the drawbacks in using this approach to characterize right-wing parties are similar to populist research. Strobl says little about economic or social policies of radicalized conservative parties in power. In addition, the party landscape of post-communist countries like Poland is much more fluid compared to

Western democracies, where conservative parties have operated for decades longer than their counterparts in Eastern Europe.

A third strand of research is much more class-based. Bonapartist theories have their origins in Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx 1852). Marx analyzes the consequences of the 1848 revolution in France and the establishment of the Napoleon III regime. Marx wanted to analyze "how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part" (1852). The divided bourgeoisie was not in a position to exercise political power in the French National Assembly. The industrial proletariat was perceived as a threat but was unable to assume political power itself due to low membership and weak leadership. This resulted in an accumulation of power by the state bureaucracy and the self-abandonment of political rule by the bourgeoisie to secure social rule in the form of the existing capitalist production relations. The bourgeoisie allied themselves with a bonapartist ruler, who relied on the political support of the lumpenproletariat and the peasantry.

Marxist theorists Otto Bauer, August Thalheimer, and Leon Trotsky used this approach to analyze the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 30s, offering an alternative to the Comintern approach. Bauer first offered his analysis in the Linz program of Austrian Social Democracy, adopted in 1926. The program declared that fascism becomes a threat when the class balance between a democratically active socialist party and the bourgeois camp shifts to the detriment of the latter. In such a situation, the maximization of profit is made more difficult. The fascist counterrevolution is not reduced to a sociology of the ruling class but is interpreted as the result of class constellations in society as a whole. In a later analysis, Bauer argues that the capitalist class and the big landlords "have surrendered state power to the fascist mob […] not to suppress revolutionary socialism, but to smash the achievements of reformist socialism" (1936, own translation).

Thalheimer (1928) argues that a bonapartist regime emerges in bourgeois society when the bourgeoisie is in a state of weakness in the face of an imminent proletarian revolution. Parts of the bourgeoisie choose to support fascists in the political sphere to retain control in the economic sphere. Both bonapartist and fascist regimes have in common that their politics are marked by contradictions. They are forced to constantly make society appear under threat. The executive power becomes independent; the masses are politically subjugated under a fascist state power, while socioeconomic rule falls to the bourgeoisie and the large landowners. Thalheimer views the 'national idea' as a tenet of fascist ideology, with the fascist leader in a mock fight against parliamentary and bureaucratic corruption. However, Thalheimer

emphasizes that the open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is bound to specific class relations and situations of the class struggle. Therefore, concrete class analysis is particularly important.

In summary, bonapartist-theoretical interpretations of fascism assume that fascism represents a third force between the bourgeoisie and the organized labor movement (Saage 2007, 71). Fascism is based on a mass movement. A tipping class balance in which neither the bourgeoisie can achieve higher profit rates nor the workers' movement can carry out a successful revolution leads to the crisis of liberal democracy. The establishment of a fascist dictatorship leads to the political rule of fascism, the destruction of the organized labor movement, and the socioeconomic rule of the traditional upper-class elite.

While bonapartist theories are much more rooted in political economy than populist or radicalized conservatism approaches, they are not a well-suited tool to investigate current conditions in Eastern Europe. Unlike the interwar period, we cannot diagnose any class balance today. Wiegel, who applies the bonapartist framework to contemporary Poland concludes that "[…] in the more than quarter-century of neoliberal hegemony, the balance of power between labor and capital has been fundamentally shifted in favor of the latter" (2018, 68, own translation). Nevertheless, elements of today's rise of the far-right show similarities to what bonapartist theorists analyzed: The voting potential among debased classes, the petty bourgeoisie, and the peasantry; the strengthening and independence of executive power; and the theatrical style of politics aimed at attacker of the nation. In Poland, PiS understands national sovereignty in bonapartist fashion as a "permanent plebiscite 'for or against' the nation" (Wielgosz 2018, 197). Under the slogan "dobra zmiana" (good change), PiS aims to take over the state apparatus and establish a nationalist conservative hegemony, legitimized by a cultural counterrevolution.

A more useful theoretical framework for the analysis of the right in Eastern Europe is provided by Becker, who analyzes current right-wing parties based on their ideology and politics once in power, and not based on their election and communication strategies. He developed a typology of what he coins "neo-nationalism" to describe the surge of new right parties in the EU (Becker 2018). Becker differentiates between three different currents of neo-nationalism, based on their socio-economic approaches: a neoliberal, a national-conservative, and a fascist current. He prefers the use of the concept of nationalism over populism. The focus lies on the content of politics, not its form in the political sphere. Right-wing movements in the nationalist spectrum have been increasingly successful in naturalizing and stabilizing social inequalities. Nationalist forces use ethnicity and ethnic competition as a focus of their campaigning and politics, either by preferring domestic capital or by making the welfare state more exclusively attuned to

groups defined by nationality or ethnicity. Categories of ethnicity and nationality function as social fault lines that are sideways of class conflict. Neoliberalism, national-conservatism, and fascism can be separated by their different approaches to the state, economic policy, social policy, and nationalism (Becker 2018, 5).

Neoliberal neo-nationalism strengthens technocratic structures within the states, excluding traditional interest groups such as unions from executive decisions. The economic focus is on the private sector, with policies of low or regressive taxation and regulatory authorities that are not under any democratic control. Social policy is oriented toward a liberal social welfare state with minimum protection for the poor who are at the same time stigmatized. Social welfare systems are commercialized. Exclusionary social policy forms a basis for the economic aspect of nationalism, rather than protectionist economic measures.

National-conservative neo-nationalism re-politicizes the state from the right. Parties of this current draw legitimation for changing the state from an imagined mandate from the people, while other actors are delegitimized as not belonging to the nation. Economic policy is more flexible than in the neoliberal current, with initiative-taking and state-based economic policies that support domestic companies. Social policy is oriented towards a conservative social welfare state. Social protection is increased, and at the same time status differences and traditional gender relations are reinforced. Social insurance plays a key role. The concept of nationalism focuses on economic nationalism, supporting domestic capital factions and excluding certain groups, such as foreigners or asylum seekers, from welfare systems.

Fascist neo-nationalism transforms the state into an authoritarian system, praising a cult of violence and open racism. While there is no economic policy attached to this current other than a focus on economic nationalism the social policy is broadly oriented towards the conservative social welfare state with more rigid exclusion mechanisms.

In this chapter, I have laid out not only the research framework I used for this thesis, but also presented a discussion of literature that helps contextualize the self-description of Razem's political approach in chapter four, and a theoretical approach to characterize the politics PiS. In the next chapter, I will expand on my hypothesis that that the economic, social, and political overhaul of Poland after 1989 was deeply influenced by neoliberal ideas, and what consequences this transformation brought about for Polish society.

## 3    Neoliberal Transformation

> [T]he 'transition' from communism to capitalism in [Central and Eastern Europe] represents perhaps
> one of the boldest experiments with neo-liberal ideas in the world today. (Stenning et al. 2010, 2)

Poland was the first post-socialist country to use 'shock therapy' to try to switch from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist market economy in 1989. This transition led to a short transformation shock, after which Poland enjoyed high growth rates until the late 1990s. On the surface, this new Poland offered not only political but also economic freedoms after years of suffering. However, this switch or transition was part of a bigger process that I call neoliberal transformation. Neoliberal transformation on the one hand means that the policies implemented in Poland since 1989 have been influenced by neoliberal ideas about society, the market, and the role of the state. This is true not only for the economic reforms of Balcerowicz, which followed the general contours of the Washington consensus at the time, but also for the liberalization of labor and capital markets in the context of Poland joining the European Union. On the other hand, neoliberal transformation has led not only to different economic policies but also to changed attitudes and values in society. As David Harvey puts it:

> The process of neoliberalization has, however, entailed much 'creative destruction', not only of prior
> institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also
> of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and
> thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart. (Harvey 2005, 3)

The social consequences of the transformation, as bad as they might be, are viewed as justified by policymakers. To the extent that neoliberal ideas about justice reached hegemony in different spheres of life, the outcomes of the transformation are also accepted by large parts of society.

In this chapter, I will first lay out a short history of modern Poland until 1989 for readers unfamiliar with Poland. I will then discuss how theorists from different schools of thought view and evaluate the transformation. In the third section I present stylized facts about transformation, covering macroeconomic indicators, poverty and welfare, economic inequalities, and public opinion. In the final section I will return to PiS, and how their political approach can be seen as a challenge to neoliberalism from the right.

### 3.1    A Brief History of Modern Poland until 1989

Polish romantic literature tells us that Poland's history is marked by tragedy and sacrifice, but also full of resistance movements, like the Kościuszko Uprising. A short recap of modern Polish history gives us an appreciation of the many transformations the Polish population endured. The 123 years of partitions of Poland—in which Polish territories were divided up among the Habsburg monarchy, Prussia, and Russia—ended in 1918 when Polish nationalism reclaimed

state sovereignty after World War I. Józef Piłsudski's authoritarian and militaristic *Sanacja* regime replaced the young Polish parliamentarian democracy after only eight years in 1926. Piłsudski was able to mobilize the disappointed peasant masses, while the bourgeoisie was still too weak to form a strong political organization (Thalheimer 1928).

The German invasion of Poland in 1939 kicked off not only World War II but also years of suffering for Poles. The Nazi occupation led to the destruction of Polish Jewry during the Shoah, mass-killings of Poles, and other atrocities, including the destruction of the capital Warsaw. The initial occupation by Soviet forces in Eastern Poland included the infamous Katyn massacre of more than 20,000 members of the Polish intelligentsia in 1940. A taboo during socialism, Katyn has become a tenet of (anti-communist) memory politics in modern Poland. Polish resistance during World War II was fierce. Polish Jews instigated the doomed Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. The *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army) was one of the largest underground resistance movements in Europe, and the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 was one of the largest military actions taken by an underground resistance in Europe (Davies 2005, 344).

After World War II, Poland was rebuilt and industrialized within new borders. The country underwent a socialist transformation under the directive of the USSR, which handed official power to the Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR, Polish United Workers' Party), established in 1948. Ideologically, socialist states at the time followed a program of overcoming capitalism with united Marxist-Leninist parties at the helm of the state following Lenin's organizational principles (Lenin 1902, 70–80). Socialism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, were supposed to eventually lead to a communist utopia, to "overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence" (Marx 1970 [1843], 137). Before the Russian Revolution, few revolutionaries believed this to be an attainable goal in countries of the periphery. The world revolution was supposed to spread to other countries, especially to highly industrialized countries where class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was more developed than in rural Russia (Hobsbawm 2014, 83). However, the revolutions against hunger and war in Western Europe at the end of World War I did not lead to lasting socialist revolutions. Western powers appeased some revolutionaries by granting nationhood to several new countries in CEE following Wilson's Fourteen points, other revolutions were struck down by military or counterrevolutionary forces (2014, 92–95). The Soviet Union survived, but had to rethink its strategies. When Stalin's faction prevailed after Lenin's death, the policy of socialism in one country was put forward (Stalin 2020 [1924], 32). Trotsky opposed this policy, while still believing that socialist revolutions were possible in peripheral countries (Trotsky 2010 [1930], 310–15). State socialism became a form of catch-up development: "In retrospect,

the social and political upheavals that began as a socialist revolution appear more as a way of (partially successful) modernization of the societies of Eastern Europe" (Segert 2009, 101).

This modernization process was coupled with a highly centralized mode of economic and political control. After World War II, this specific Soviet model of state socialism was imposed on new members of the socialist block in Eastern Europe. Only Stalin's death in 1953 opened up the possibilities of alternative implementations of state socialism in CEE. The Polish People's Republic was ruled in a Stalinist authoritarian fashion until 1956, after which a more native national communist regime took over and provided relative stability for around two decades under First Secretary Gomułka. In Czechoslovakia, the alternative implementation of state socialism culminated in Dubček's reform program during the Prague Spring. However, the political and military intervention of several Warsaw Pact countries (including Poland) in 1968 violently and prematurely ended the Czechoslovakian approach. The international student protest of 1968 also swept across Poland; their political resolve included an anti-Semitic campaign by the socialist government, forcing many intellectuals to flee the country (Davies 2005, 442–43). In 1970, spikes in food prices resulted in strikes and protests that were violently crushed by the government (2005, 444).

First Secretary Gierek, who replaced Gomułka after the December 1970 protests in Poland, eased censorship and pushed for a new development strategy based on import-led growth. In the last two decades of state socialism, a specific form of socialist society formed in CEE. Political elites entered a competition with Western countries regarding the consumption possibilities of their citizens, in what Segert coins "consumption socialism" (Segert 2009, 107). This phase was characterized by the de-ideologization of the population and retrenchment of bureaucratic centralization in the state control of the economy. This strategy at first led to rising standards of living and the construction of new industries, including the start of the production of Fiat 126p cars in Silesia. However, Poland's increased integration into the global economy also made it more vulnerable to external shocks, specifically in the aftermath of the first global recession after World War II, the 1973 "oil crisis". In 1976, food prices were raised, with the resulting protests again violently crushed by the government. The prices of imported consumer goods increased, and foreign debt skyrocketed. One of the domestic reactions was to expand working hours, while at the same time the underground economy grew. Hardy concludes that for Poland, "the most significant outcome of its strategy of import-led growth was not that it managed to become more efficient, but that the economy was increasingly stagnating, and debt-ridden" (Hardy 2009, 21).

The economic recession and an increase in food prices in 1980 (coinciding with the second global recession after WWII 1980-82) caused a strike wave in Poland that eventually led to the formation and official recognition of the non-governmental union Solidarność (Solidarity). The first incarnation of Solidarność—which operated in legality until First Secretary Jaruzelski introduced martial law in December 1981—was a social movement encompassing millions of people, including workers, intellectuals, Catholics, and dissident Communists alike (Davies 2005, 481–508). Solidarność presented a serious threat to the ruling communist party, as it represented an "independent working-class movement organized against the very state that was supposed to embody the power of the working class" (Hardy 2009, 23). The government was aware of the transformational power and threat of Solidarność not only within Poland but also for the Warsaw Pact as a whole. Solidarność's members encompassed later politicians from across the political spectrum: From the leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, to the leader of PO, Donald Tusk; neoliberals like Leszek Balcerowicz as well as Marxists like Tadeusz Kowalik. The Catholic Church also played a crucial role in instigating and supporting political opposition in the 1980s, with Polish Pope John Paul II making his first of several visits to Poland in 1979. Martial law lasted from December 1981 to 1983, during which Poland was governed by a military junta headed by the Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego (WRON, Military Council of National Salvation) under First Secretary Jaruzelski. Many aspects of civil life were militarized, and Solidarność was forced underground. The military coup of General Jaruzelski and the stagnation in the years after martial law discredited the socialist system. Opposition against the PZPR was further galvanized when three agents of the Ministry of the Interior murdered Jerzy Popiełuszko, a priest and Solidarność member, in October 1984. Hundreds of thousands attended the funeral, and First Secretary Jaruzelski was forced to initiate a trial against the agents, a first in the socialist state.

Many market reforms were introduced in the 1980s, but the economy stagnated. The regime's hope of reaching political consensus through economic success remained unfulfilled. For many workers and their families, queuing and official shortages led to engagements in secondary activities in the informal sector, a practice revisited during the transformation. The main beneficiaries of the reforms were state enterprise managers and the elite:

> During the 1980s managers were able to take advantage of the loosening control of enterprises and call for private enterprises to gain control and ownership of state assets. Typically, these so-called spontaneous nomenklatura privatizations involved the selling of non-core operations such as a computer center, repair facilities or a sales center to a group of insiders that included managers and party members. State Owned Enterprises were often stripped of their most profitable operations, and their new owners could make a profit by selling the good or service on the black market. [...] [T]he number of firms in the private sector increased from 351,000 in 1981 to 572,400 in 1988. (Hardy 2009, 24–25)

Segert (2013, 179) argues that late socialism in CEE first brought de-ideologization followed by a process of re-ideologization. Socialism and communism lost their ideological appeal, while the rise of neoliberal hegemony and a national reawakening strengthened the ideological discourse to delegitimize the previous socialist system, its values, and elites. Eventually, in 1988, strikes broke out again in Poland. The regime was unable to maintain its grip on power and was forced to negotiate with the resurgent Solidarność. On February 6, 1989, the first 'round table' took place, at the beginning of which the hardliners within the ruling PZPR did not intend to give up their power. Some of them considered South Korea as a model for Poland that combined a capitalist economy with authoritarian politics. However, their position of power eroded too quickly to put these considerations into action. On 4 June 1989, the semi-free elections to the Contract Sejm took place which brought a landslide victory for Solidarność— on the same day as the Tiananmen Square massacre was committed in Beijing. The support of the voters for the PZPR amounted to about three to four percent (Davies 2005, 503). After the Soviet Union announced its non-interference on 16 August of the same year, Tadeusz Mazowiecki was proclaimed the first non-Communist prime minister on 24 August 1989. At the beginning of the transformation, Mazowiecki promoted a gradual approach to a social market economy modeled after Western Germany. The galloping hyperinflation in September 1989, however, led the government to carry out a 'shock therapy'. The PZPR disbanded in January 1990.

3.2    Theories about Transformation

In the 1990s, the countries of CEE underwent systemic changes. While there is consensus in the literature that these changes deeply affected not only the economy but also politics and society as a whole, there are many differences in the evaluation of the nature and implications of these changes. Many researchers view the transformation as a process of unevenly integrating CEE into a global capitalist division of labor, which has led to new forms of exploitation, increasing poverty, and inequalities (Hardy 2009, 2014; Kowalik 2012). The reformers, on the other hand, who developed the policies and helped put them in place, view the transformation as a necessary transition to both a market economy and a liberal democracy. In their view, both the initial transition and the overall transformation have been a success story (Balcerowicz 1994, 2000, 2002; Lipton et al. 1990; Rostowski 2007).

### 3.2.1 Neoliberal transformation as uneven development

Poland was not the only country affected by neoliberal transformation, as most post-socialist countries in CEE underwent a deepened integration into a global capitalist division of labor. This integration was achieved via a neoliberal transformation of these countries in a process of uneven development. In Poland, this transformation did not start with the implementation of the Balcerowicz reforms in 1990. Late state socialism was not a tabula rasa, or ruins, upon which a capitalist market democracy was built. Rather, the period from the 1970s to 1989 was an arena in which the forces and goals that facilitated and shaped, drove, or hindered future change developed. The introduction of martial law in 1981 and the further disillusionment with socialism had a major impact on the ideological development of Solidarność. In its early days, many activists within the movement argued for the need for democratic socialist reform and competed with ideas that were more liberal. By the end of the 1980s, the liberal wing dominated:

> The social democratic element of Solidarity had been routed when the organization as a mass movement had been destroyed by martial law, repression, and the imprisonment of its best activists. By the late 1980s, Solidarity came to be represented by a small number of individuals such as Wałęsa, and intellectuals, such as Balcerowicz, who were proponents of the free market. (Hardy 2009, 28)

By the early 1990s, the introduction of capitalism was characterized by the "fundamental contradiction between the expectations of the majority of the population of the transformation and its results" (Segert 2013, 177). People expected freedom and economic growth, not the social insecurities caused by the transformation shock. Shock therapy targeted social policy as well as economic policy, even though socialism was not rejected for its social policy, but because of its lack of political freedom and economic efficiency.

The policies of the reformers were heavily influenced by neoliberal ideas. Neoliberalism as a politico-economic paradigm superseded the prevailing post-World War II consensus of a mostly Keynesian economic orthodoxy in the 1980s (Jacobs and Laybourn-Langton 2018, 114). This paradigm shift occurred not only in the domestic political arenas of countries of the West— such as in the US under President Reagan or in the UK under Prime Minister Thatcher—but also in the international development policy arena. In most general terms, neoliberalism follows a laissez-faire doctrine of the primacy of the market and a different and limited role of the state:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. […] State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state

cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit. (Harvey 2005, 2)

The political economic practice of neoliberalism consists of "a set of institutional initiatives that have reconfigured the relationship between the state, labour and markets" (Hardy 2009, 3). How can we conceptualize this process of reconfiguration? Hardy (2014, 143–55) offers us a theory of combined and uneven development, based on a critical appraisal of Trotsky and Marx. Uneven development is viewed in the Marxist tradition as a process in which more and more regions are included in the sphere of capitalist production while at the same time producing new spatial hierarchies (Weissenbacher 2008, 97–100): Rosa Luxemburg argued that capitalist economies continually expand markets through imperialism, transforming pre-capitalist societies into capitalist societies by introducing commodity production, creating and coercing a labor force into service, separating agriculture and industry and eventually disintegrating non-capitalist organizations. As soon as capitalism has spread everywhere, accumulation ends as there are no non-capitalist customers left. Lenin put a larger emphasis on the formation of monopoly capitalism in his analysis, viewing imperialism as a stage of capitalism in which excess capital that lacked utilization was exported. Trotsky offered a different analysis by developing a theory of uneven and combined development, trying to explain the developments in Russia in the early 20th century. Russia was lagging behind Western Europe economically. Exposed to more advanced capitalist countries, a backward country "assimilates the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries. But this does not mean that it follows them slavishly, reproduces all the stages of their past" (Trotsky 1930). Instead, backward countries are compelled to adopt "whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages." However, these leaps are not absolute, as systems of exploitations—such as serfdom in Russia before the Russian Revolution—may be strengthened in the process.

Hardy similarly understands the integration of CEE within the world economy after 1990 as a leap incorporating partial and full changes. This leap was compressed into a few years and did not resemble an incremental evolutionary economic and social process. The transformation of CEE followed a combined development pattern during the growth, stagnation, and disintegration of socialist economies and the subsequent reintegration of the economies after 1990. In the context of the dynamics of the global economy, technical, financial, organizational, and labor management innovations were imported and combined with existing institutional arrangements. FDI and transnational corporations played a key role in this process, not only in

providing technology and capital but also in changing attitudes and instilling "a new set of institutions deemed compatible with competitive markets" (Hardy 2006, 146).

Shock therapy had varying effects on different countries and regions within countries. Certain sectors that provisioned Western European countries with raw materials or manufactured components were favored, while others were destroyed, exacerbating unevenness between and within CEE economies. This process, however, was not straightforward, as "competing interests of different sections of the ruling class, and the struggles of organised labour, made the processes protracted and the outcomes a political compromise, particularly regarding privatisation and welfare" (Hardy 2014, 9). Nevertheless, the result of this compromise was a transformation characterized by uneven development.

Another contribution to understanding this theory of uneven development is provided by Arrighi and Piselli (1987), who analyzed the process of capitalist development in Calabria, Southern Italy. Their main insight from their case study is that different ways of organizing economic life (i.e. subsistence farming vs. large-scale production of goods) have "no necessary relation to economic progress. They are neither stages leading to greater economic command nor attributes of lesser/greater command. Rather, they are alternative forms of social life and social change within an evolving world-economy" (1987, 736). Arrighi and Piselli show that the distribution of material wealth among regions or states is not primarily determined by how economic life is organized within a certain region. Instead, it is determined by how different regions and states are connected through time and space, and by random processes. While social change does not determine a region's share of wealth compared to other regions, it does influence the distribution of wealth within the region itself. Arrighi and Piselli also highlight the key role of social conflict in the process of social change:

> [S]ocial conflict is an integral part of developmental processes, and […] its role lies not so much in determining the economic regress (progress) of the locale in which it occurs as in determining the distribution of the costs (benefits) of economic regress (progress) among the residents of that locale. Social conflict, however, is not the only weapon available to peasants and proletarians in their struggles against exploitation and peripheralization. The historical experience of Calabria is instructive also because it shows the importance of migration as a substitute for and a complement of social conflict in shaping developmental processes. (Arrighi and Piselli 1987, 737)

While social conflict is a central theme in Razem's political approach, the last point made about migration should not be downplayed. After unemployment numbers reached a peak of 20 percent shortly before Poland joined the EU, many Poles took advantage of the freedom of movement as soon as they were EU citizens. The stock of temporary migrants from Poland in other EU countries reached 2.2 million in early 2008, out of a population of 38 million (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008, 603).

Neoliberal politics in practice led to a redistribution of income and wealth in Poland. Kowalik (2012) considers shock therapy as an instrument that was used to create a new capitalist social structure in a process that resembled primitive capital accumulation (2012, 13). The capitalist transformation shifted income and possessions from the poor to the rich. Three million workers had been made redundant with little chance of finding work again (2012, 140). The backbone of the working class had been broken, unions weakened, and a precarious low-pay sector was promoted for many years. Kowalik also points out that in privatized companies labor laws had been massively disregarded, accidents at work had increased, and minimum wages had not been met.

Hardy comes to similar conclusions:

> In Poland, as elsewhere, the aim is to manage capitalism in order to restore profitability, raise the rate of exploitation in the workplace and secure a wider range of opportunities for accumulation by capital. […] The experience of neoliberalism in Poland has been similar to that of other countries, with a polarization of income, resulting from a redistribution of income and wealth to those at the top end of society, and the majority of people facing increasing insecurity in the workplace and more precarious access to services as welfare is commodified. (2009, 3)

Privatization also meant that the best productive assets were sold to foreign owners. In 2003, 39 percent of listed companies in Poland had foreign owners, while 30 were still in public ownership (Mencinger 2007, 22). Trade union density in Poland dropped from around 38 percent in 1987 to around 10 percent in 2013, even as Polish unions have tried various tools and tactics to expand their membership basis and activities. Yet the rise of atypical and precarious employment combined with the high share of employment in small enterprises that are hard to reach for unions have posed major difficulties for union organizing in Poland (Czarzasty and Mrozowicki 2014, 122).

The transformation profoundly changed the way people in post-socialist countries live, work, and survive. Everyday life has been dramatically reshaped in CEE during the transformation period. Stenning et al. (2010) find that households have borne the increasing burdens of neoliberalism. She and her team conducted an extensive anthropological study in the Nowa Huta neighborhood in Kraków, Poland, and in the Petržalka neighborhood in Bratislava, Slovakia. To enable social reproduction, households had to employ diverse economic practices in work, housing, food production, and consumption. Poverty in cities is often hidden by the context of dynamic economic growth, but cities are also at the forefront of post-socialist transformation, with employment, income, and access to work increasingly polarized. While unemployment is typically lower in urban areas compared to the country average, the cost of living had been rising, with high increases in property prices. At the same time, bad jobs with low pay and insecure conditions emerged.

Under state socialism, the workplace served as the main axis of the organization of social life, providing high employment security. Stenning et al. quote one of their interview partners, Ms. Kielak, to illustrate this finding:

> At Polmos when I worked there, I had it very good because I had a nursery on site, so I could take [my daughter] and leave her, and collect her later. And I had lunches; there was a canteen. And I could take loans; that was a huge comfort. (quoted in Stenning et al. 2010, 88).

During the transformation, urban labor markets changed from providing secure and singular employment in the state-owned economy to market segmentation and employment uncertainty. Women were often the first to lose their jobs. Unemployment was high among young and old, with the problem of long-term unemployment emerging. Long-term unemployment was linked to increased poverty rates as unemployment benefits were only paid in the first six months. Labor market policy reforms aimed at the so-called employability of workers. Unemployment rates were to be reduced by cutting wages, incentives to work should be provided, and labor markets liberalized through labor code reforms that made it easier to hire and fire workers. Low pay and job insecurity led to the emergence of in-work poverty and informal work. To secure social reproduction, many households combined multiple jobs—formal and informal, full-time and part-time, local and international. In the observed households in the study, 12 percent of 'other jobs' (additional jobs beyond main jobs) were located in the homes of households (Stenning et al. 2010, 107).

Ghodsee and Orenstein (2021) provide findings similar to Stenning et al. They stress that the transformation has brought new personal freedoms and increased opportunities to study, travel, work, and migrate. However, their main findings are bleaker:

> Our review of the economic, demographic, public opinion, and ethnographic evidence shows that the economic reform programs implemented in Eastern Europe proved to be deeply insensitive to the human costs of transition. In line with Western economic theories, the transition process seemed to treat people as rational economic actors making decisions to maximize their personal utility; but not only did it do grievous harm to their utility in many cases, it also paid insufficient attention to their beliefs, expectations, and desires. It treated those brought up under communism as bearers of harmful and outmoded socialist ideas. It overestimated their willingness to endure economic pain for a promised bright capitalist future and the proportion who would benefit from it. By implementing policies previously field tested in Latin America, the international financial institutions failed to account for the local East European context, failed to prevent widespread poverty, and ignored cultural expectations of what transition would bring. Most important, reformers in the region ignored or downplayed the severity of the pain inflicted on helpless populations who had been promised a rapid transition to freedom and prosperity. (Ghodsee and Orenstein 2021, 190)

In summary, neoliberalism gained a hegemonic status in reform movements like Solidarność and influenced the way the transformation was implemented. Countries in CEE leaped into a new integration into global capitalism, experiencing combined and uneven development. Labor

relations fundamentally changed, and many households experienced increased insecurity, poverty, and inequality.

### 3.2.2  The view of the reformers

How did the neoliberal reformers themselves view the transformation period? First and foremost, these reformers believed that capitalism could be built on the ruins of socialism, with a leap forward "from 'bad boys' socialism' to 'good girls' capitalism'" (Altvater 1998, 591). Many writings from neoliberal reformers follow a binary logic, proposing the transition from one system to the other. They define the transition from socialist to post-socialist states as "no more than the implantation of market mechanisms and of the functioning mode of money […], the building of political institutions of the nation state for making democratic participation possible and, last but not least, the development of a pluralistic civil society" (Altvater 1998, 592). This dual transition of the economy (from state socialism to capitalism) and the political sphere (from a totalitarian dictatorship to a liberal democracy) had to be done at a rapid pace were the transitions to be successful. In the case of Poland, the writings of neoliberal economists Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton (advisors to Solidarność and the Polish government at the time) as well as Leszek Balcerowicz[1] and Jacek Rostowski (both Polish economists and Ministers of Finance in Poland) provide good illustrations of this line of thinking.

Economically, countries of CEE suffer from a "Stalinist Legacy" (Lipton et al. 1990, 80) with differing degrees of central planning, central allocation, and state enterprises. This created financial problems because state enterprises are prone to pay excessive wages and make poor investment decisions based on managers' desire to increase their power. The state sector "is not disciplined by being part of a larger market economy" (1990, 81). Socialist countries suffered from distorted relative prices, with energy, food, and rent subsidized. The "Stalinist model" emphasized the growth of heavy industries and capital goods, produced with Soviet raw materials and then exported again to the Soviet Union. There was excess demand for consumer goods caused by systemic failures of the "Stalinist model." The systemic failures included "the planners' fear of unemployment; and the communist regime's lack of legitimacy to impose strong austerity measures with public support and its unwillingness or inability to do so by brute force" (1990, 86). This excess demand—the "shortage economy"—is the cause of queuing

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[1] Leszek Balcerowicz was one of the key architects of Poland's neoliberal transformation. The bundle of laws that introduced a market economy on January 1, 1990, is commonly known by his name as the 'Balcerowicz Plan' in Poland. Balcerowicz had worked on proposals for economic reforms already in the early 1980s. He became Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister in the first non-communist government in 1989 and was again Minister of Finance from 1997 to 2000, later becoming the president of the Polish Central Bank from 2001 to 2007.

(which decreases utility in consumers' utility functions in the microeconomic models of these economists), hoarding, anti-export bias, and anti-private sector bias. In addition to the "Stalinist Legacy", countries of CEE faced economic crises at the end of the 1980s that further exacerbated the economic transition problem (1990, 86).

The reforms proposed at the beginning of the transition period followed the general scheme of the 'Washington consensus,' a term coined by economist John Williamson.[2] Initially, three steps were proposed (Balcerowicz 1994, 24; Lipton et al. 1990, 100): First, macroeconomic stabilization had to end excess demand through fiscal and monetary austerity. Second, microeconomic liberalization should introduce a competitive market economy through the deregulation of prices, the introduction of free trade and currency convertibility, and the liberalization of the legal framework for the private sector. Third, institutional restructuring should lead to privatized state enterprises and a reorganized bureaucracy. The privatization of state industries might take longer than the first two steps. In the meantime, wages should be controlled, and investment curbed in these industries to battle the financial problems created by state-controlled enterprises. With unemployment rates expected to rise, labor market policies needed to be introduced, such as unemployment insurance and job retraining.

With these reforms in place, the neoliberal mainstream expected both inflation to be low and growth to be high, the later fueled by economic integration with Western Europe. Lipton et al. predicted that "the region will provide an enormous opportunity as a production site for European, Japanese, and U.S. firms selling mainly in the West European market" (1990, 102). Former communist economies had different initial conditions at the beginning of the transition period, i.e., various levels of foreign debt, dependency on exports to the former Soviet Union, hyperinflation, stock of physical and human capital, geographical location, resources, etc. These varying inherited conditions played a key role in the growth performance during the transition. However, looking back Balcerowicz argues that different policies—specifically the extent of market-oriented liberalization reforms—better explain differences in long-term growth performance: "[T]he larger the extent of structural reforms leading away from the communist institutional system towards a rationally limited state and market economy, the better the growth performance" (Balcerowicz 2002, 44).

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[2] The term 'Washington consensus' achieved a broader meaning over the years. In its original formulation, the Washington consensus was a list of ten policy reforms that were, as Williamson argued, "widely held in Washington to be needed in most or all Latin American countries as of 1989" (Williamson 2004, 3). In its original formulation, the list offers narrow policy descriptions. Stiglitz argues that the Washington consensus was an "oversimplified rendition of policies recommended by international financial institutions and the US Treasury, especially during the period of the 1980s and early 1990s, before they became such a subject of vilification in both the north and the south"(Stiglitz 2008, 41). These policies are usually understood to be based on privatization, liberalization, and macro stability with a minimal role for the state.

According to the reformers, the economic transition of Poland was a success story (Balcerowicz 2000): The moderate recovery in 1992-94 was replaced by robust growth in 1995-1999, and Polish GDP was 20 percent higher in 1999 than in 1989. Poland had become more resilient to withstand international financial crises compared to the Czech Republic or Russia. Balcerowicz attributes this success to balanced and consistent macroeconomic policy, structural reforms, and a strong and transparent financial system. The integration of the Polish economy into the world economy resulted in a more efficient allocation of resources as well as an inflow of desperately needed FDI to close the gap between investment and savings. Still, Balcerowicz saw big challenges for the Polish economy in the years after 2000. To battle the current account deficit, he proposed deregulation and labor market flexibility to improve the competitiveness of Polish products in the medium run. According to Rostowski, the main steps to consolidate the transition were the introduction of an independent central bank in 1997 as well as fiscal legislation that guaranteed budgetary discipline and restricted the ability of parliament and the government to address crises through deficit spending (Rostowski 2007). He argues that politicians pursuing Keynesian economic policies threaten democracies, as these would benefit the public in the short term but the costs would be passed on to future voters. If the Keynesian economic policy were financed through "excessive" debt, it would be nothing short of a "political Ponzi scheme" (Rostowski 2007, 17).

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the reformers were not only concerned with the economic transition, but also with the political transition to liberal democracy. Overcoming the communist one-party rule was seen as the precondition for an effective transition. As soon as democracy was established, the reforms had to be done swiftly and sharply. Otherwise, the economic transition might be in jeopardy from populist currents:

> Only decisive actions by a reformist government can keep these populist pressures in check. In most countries, stabilization by itself will require a sharp cutback in budget subsidies and a rise in unemployment. The restructuring of industry will also impose costs on particular groups. The urgent need to address the deteriorating infrastructure (including the environment) may also require a reduction in current consumption. (Lipton et al. 1990, 87)

Reformers like Lipton and Sachs did not fear the return of communism but political and social backlash from workers and bureaucrats in declining sectors, who might frustrate and draw out the needed adjustments. They did not deny that there will be losers in the transition process.

In retrospective, Balcerowicz describes the communist system as one in which the party-state attempts to have total control over the individual's activities. The state achieves this by banning private entrepreneurship, centrally planning state-owned enterprises, restricting the availability of financial assets to enterprises and individuals, suppressing civil society, banning opposition

political parties, restricting foreign travel, censoring media and applying state propaganda, subordinating the juridical system to the requirements of the command economy, and the suppression of individual's political activity (Balcerowicz 2002, 28–29). The expansive education and health sector, social protection, low prices for food and energy, and low housing rents are described as an "overgrown communist welfare state"; together with the controls described above the communist state is "hugely overextended" (Balcerowicz 2002, 29).

Balcerowicz's characterization of state socialism as totalitarian was in line with the general *Transition to Democracy* approach, which views all former communist-led governments as totalitarian dictatorships. The interpretation of the political systems of state socialism as totalitarian was dominant in political sciences in the 1950s[3] and underwent a renaissance in the 1980s and 1990s, even though it left little space for the analysis of the social order and the different paths socialist systems took in the 1960s (Segert 2009, 98–100). Segert explains the resurgence in popularity after 1989 through political and biographical reasons. Dissidents and reform groups could juxtapose the vital yet powerless civil society with an omnipotent state. The political right preferred the concept to discredit a system they had always rejected. For the political mainstream, the concept of totalitarianism legitimized the opportunism of most politicians and immunized them against critical inquiries about their responsibility before and during the transition. In the *Transition to Democracy* approach, the transition in CEE is the third wave of democratization after the periods following 1918 and 1945. The main driver of the political transition is not social change, but political factors influenced by how elites behave in certain historic situations (Segert 2013, 151–54).

The reformers argued that the political and institutional system was in need of radical restructuring: the extension of civil, economic, and political liberties; dismantling of controls, bans, censorship, and central planning; and reducing tax burdens. To Balcerowicz, the only public goods that are not distorting the market are judicial systems that protect individual rights and liberties (such as private property). Yet even when the communist rule was abolished, reformers were still faced with opposition from a bureaucracy, which was unreliable to implement a market order after spending a lifetime in state planning. Similarly, the judicial system was inept to deal with the change. Rostowski argues that the courts initially failed to

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[3] Originally, totalitarianism was characterized as a system with several structural features. These structural features included (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965, 22): an ideology that is focused on a "perfect final state of mankind"; a single mass party led by a dictator and encompassing around ten percent of the population as members; a system of terror control of the party and secret police exploiting techniques of modern science; a near-complete monopoly of control through the party or the government of mass communication and the press; a near-complete monopoly of weapons; central control and direction of the entire economy through the bureaucratic coordination of formerly independent corporate entities.

grasp key concepts of the market economy, hampering the functioning of newly founded limited liability corporations (Rostowski 2007, 14).

In summary, the neoliberal reformers viewed the transformation as a sequence from totalitarianism, an overextended communist welfare state, and a command economy to a liberal society with free elections, a minimal state that protects private property, and a market economy. The policies enacted to achieve this followed the Washington consensus, had to be implemented swiftly, and were without alternatives. The reformers view the transformation as a success story. In hindsight, Balcerowicz explains the low popularity of the reform through the trade-off between insecurity and opportunity. Certain groups could not take advantage of this trade-off:

> In addition to turning disguised unemployment into open unemployment, radical economic reform also increased discontent simply by broadening the scope of general economic freedom. Since only some people can directly take advantage of the new opportunities, others may feel resentment, especially if they view the new winners as undeserving. Rapid shifts occur in the relative pay and prestige of various occupations and professional groups as markets replace the planned socialist economy. Miners, heavy-industrial workers, and other groups that see themselves as 'losers' – even if only in relative terms – are likely to be dissatisfied. There is, moreover, an unavoidable trade-off between opportunity and security. This hard truth may be poorly understood and bitterly disliked, especially by those who experience a much larger increase in insecurity than in perceived opportunities. (Balcerowicz 2002, 50–51)

## 3.3 Stylized Facts about Neoliberal Transformation in Poland

The economic and social transformation after 1989 had various impacts on Poland's population. This section allows the reader to become more familiar with stylized facts about the transformation period, from macroeconomic indicators, to measures of poverty and inequality, to public opinion, thereby also providing context for the analyses of the previous sections.

### 3.3.1 Macroeconomic indicators

Figure 3 shows the evolution of GDP per capita at constant prices from 1970 to today. The time series indicates that the Polish economy was already severely affected by the global recession 1980-82 and the military crackdown from which it did not fully recover until the time the transition began. When the Balcerowicz Plan was put into effect in 1990, real GDP per capita was again dropping dramatically. GDP per capita levels recovered by the mid-1990s.
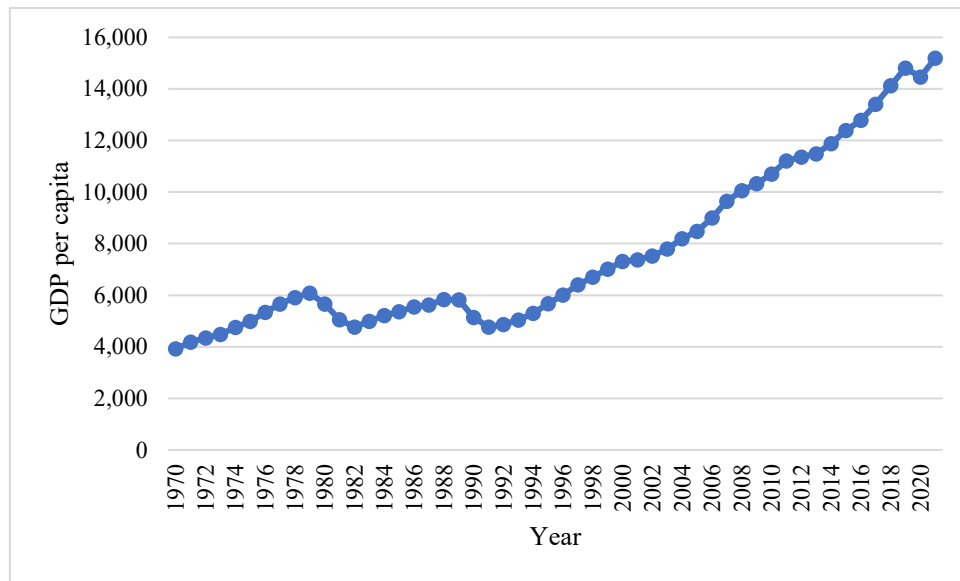
Figure 3: GDP per capita in US dollars at constant prices (2015)

(UNCTAD 2023a)

Figure 4 depicts annual real GDP per capita growth rates beginning in 1971, again showing the severity of the crises both in the early 1980s and the early 1990s. GDP growth increased from 1992 to 1995. From 1997 to 2001, GDP growth rates per capita declined to a low of 0.8 percent per year. Poland achieved high but fluctuating growth rates after joining the EU. Even during the Global Recession, growth rates remained positive in Poland. Following Mencinger, the transformation in CEE can be distinguished into three periods—a transformational depression until 1993, a short and strong recovery until 1997, followed by decreased growth rates until 2003. It took CEE countries on average nine years to surpass the GDP levels of 1989 (Mencinger 2007, 22).
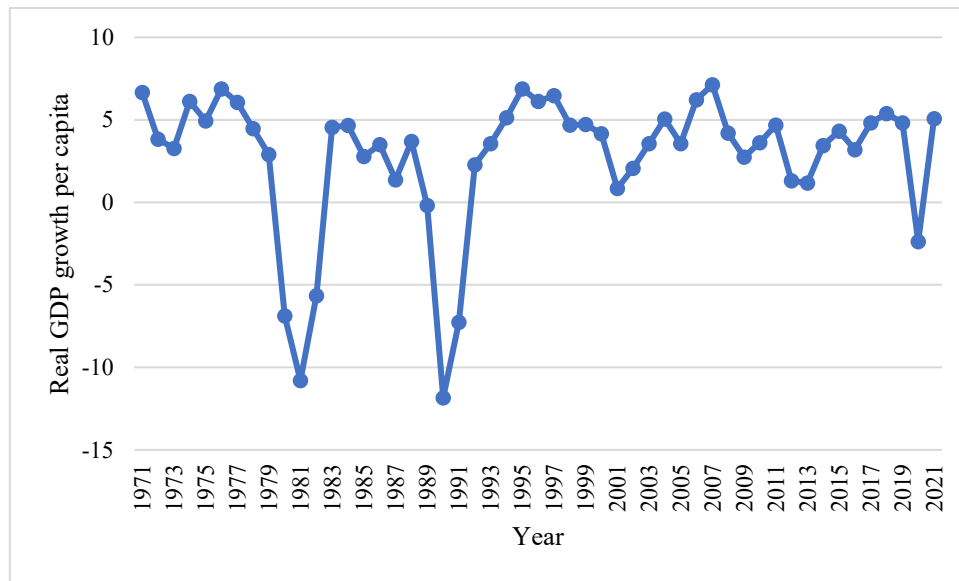
Figure 4: Real GDP growth per capita

(UNCTAD 2023b)

Unemployment rates have swung dramatically during the transformation. Figure 5 shows the evolution of registered unemployed persons in Poland between 1990 and 2020. The left vertical axis depicts registered unemployed persons in thousands, and the right vertical axis the official unemployment rate. Before 1990, the official policy and ideology of the socialist government aimed at full employment, and unemployment was consequently not defined or reported (Socha and Weisberg 1999, 10). After the transformation started, privatization and lay-offs led to the first spike in unemployment, reaching 16.4 percent in 1993. After a recovery period, unemployment rates started to rise again in 1997, reaching a peak in 2001 and 2002 at around 20 percent, after which the official figures started to drop.

The steep decline after 2002 can be partly explained by the migration outflow after Poland joined the European Union in 2004. The stock of temporary migrants from Poland increased from 786,000 in May 2002 to over 2.2 million in early 2008, with the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ireland as the main destination countries (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008, 603). Among Polish citizens, younger and higher educated people coming from structurally weaker regions that offered limited employment opportunities had a stronger propensity to migrate (2008, 621). Unemployment increased again in the aftermath of the Great Recession in 2008 but had been dropping after 2012 to record lows before the beginning of the COVID crisis.

Figure 5: Registered unemployed persons, 1990-2020, in thousands

(Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2022)

The above figure does not account for all forms of unemployment, as hidden unemployment in the forms of early retirements, by farmers, or by people who choose not to register is not included in these figures. In 1992, the Polish government reported official unemployment rates of 12 percent, yet according to UNDP calculations, this number was closer to 20 percent due to early retirement and people with a job, but without work. In addition, one third of the unemployed were under 24 (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1993, 47). Regional distributions of unemployment are also hidden when looking at national rates. According to the UNDP, the benefits of privatization during Poland's transformation were unevenly distributed:

> Most of the private sector growth has been in the big cities, where the young and better-educated people have benefited most. Smaller towns have done less well, and in many agricultural regions, unemployment is more than 20%. (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1993, 62)

Macroeconomic stabilization prioritized getting inflation rates under control in the early 1990s. The annual officially measured inflation rate of consumer prices stood at 251 percent in 1989 and 586 percent in 1990. Figure 6 shows that inflation rates were brought down to below 10 percent until 1999. After the ascension to the EU in 2004, inflation rates reached a maximum of 4.3 percent in 2011. In 2015, Poland entered a brief deflationary period. Poland is a sovereign currency issuer, using the Polish Złoty, and was able to devalue its currency during the Great Recession (Gadomski 2019).
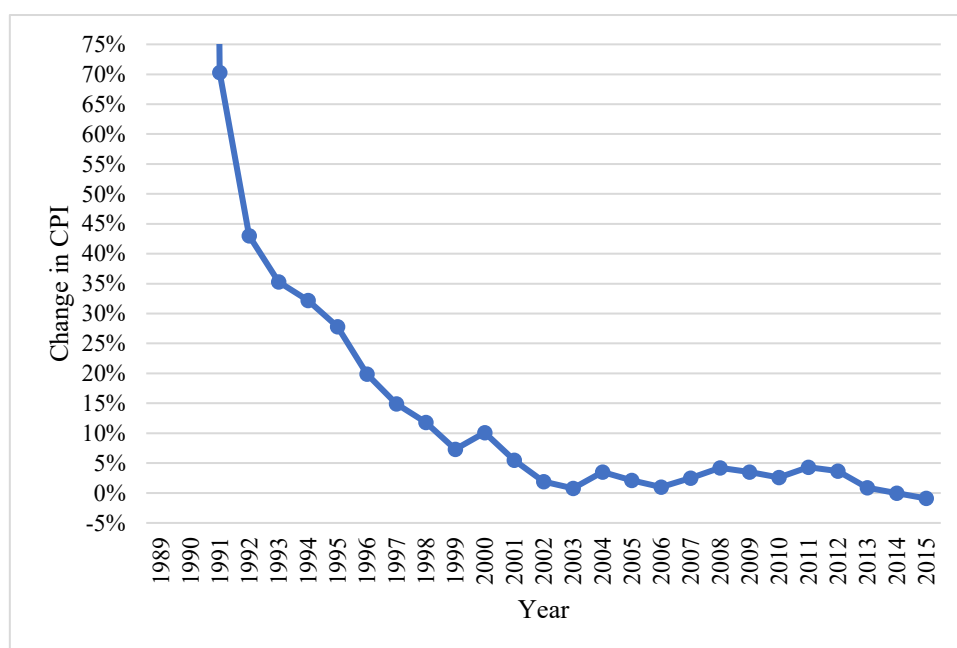
Figure 6: Price indices of consumer goods and services, annual indicator

(Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2022).

Polish foreign trade has increased in the past three decades, while financial flows have been fluctuating dynamically. Figure 7 depicts the current account balance as a percentage of GDP. Poland has run current account deficits for most years, with an upward trend since 2008 and running surpluses in 2019 and 2020.
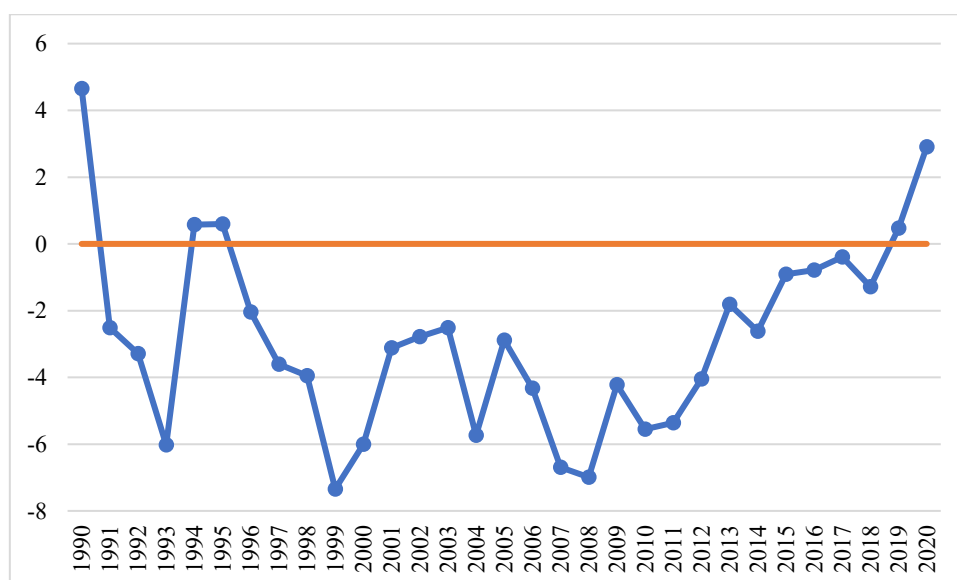


Figure 7: Current account balance (% of GDP)

(World Bank 2022a)

Interestingly, figure 8 shows that the current account deficit before 2019 had not correlated with a trade deficit since 2013. While Poland had a negative trade balance in goods and services from 1996 to 2012, exports have been larger than imports ever since.
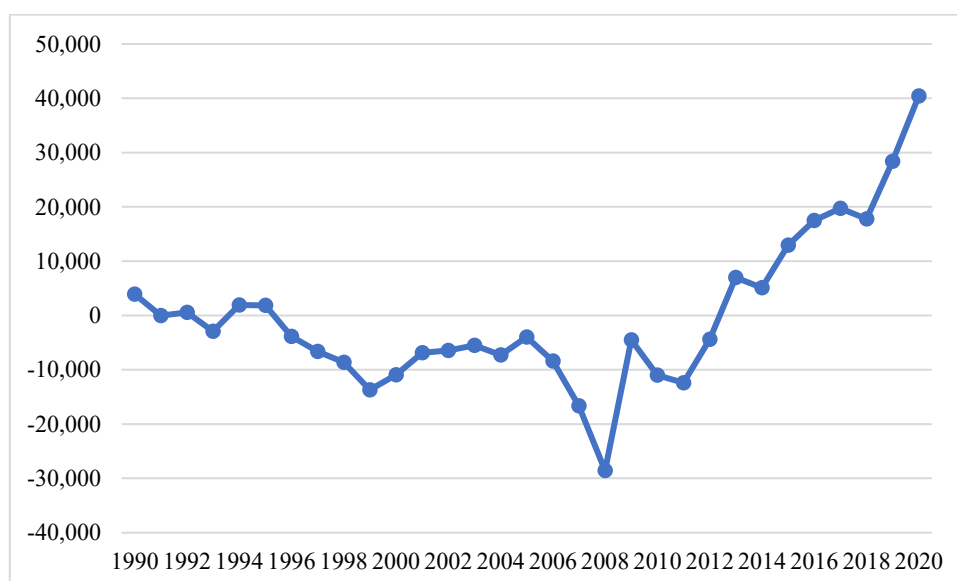


Figure 8: Net trade in goods and services (current US$), in million $

(World Bank 2022c)

Figure 9 shows the driver of the current account deficit: net primary incomes have had a stark negative trend since joining the European Union, indicating a growing outflow of capital incomes to foreign investors.
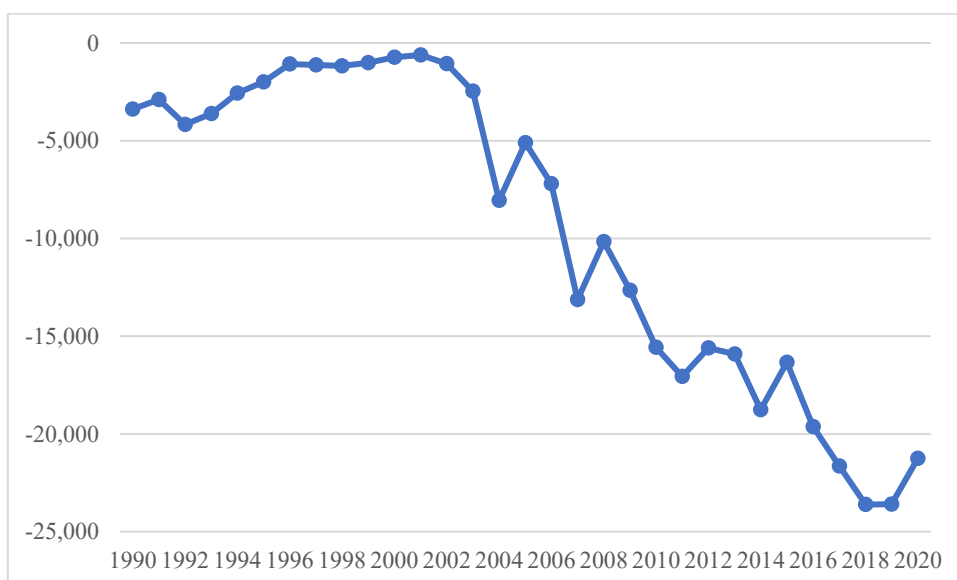


Figure 9: Net primary income (current US$), in million $

(World Bank 2022b)

The steep increase in the stock of temporary migrants from Poland in other countries after 2004 resulted in a spike in remittances flowing to Poland around the years 2006 and 2007. Figure 10

shows that during these two years, personal remittances received reached almost 2.5 percent of GDP. Since then, remittances have been declining, but are still at a higher level than during the 1990s.
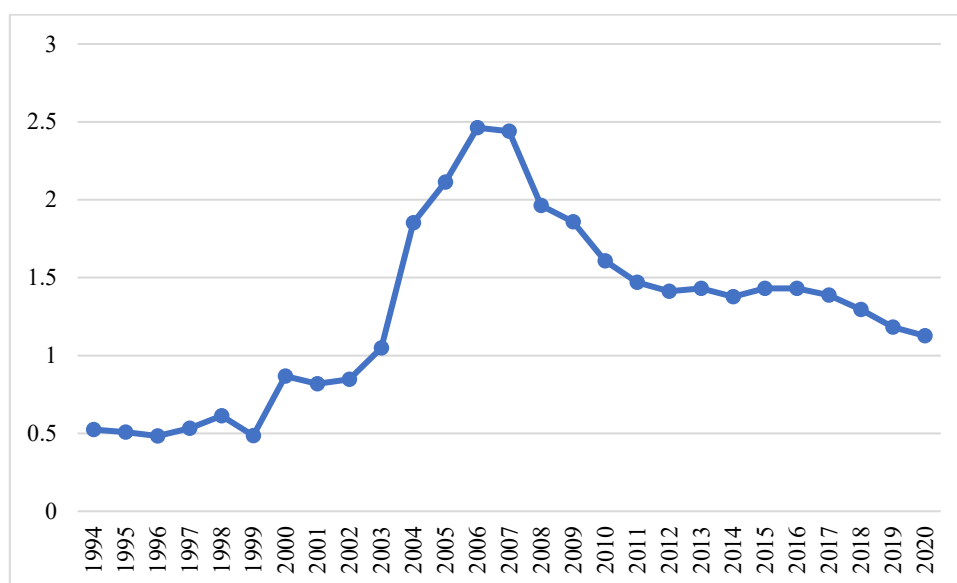


Figure 10: Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)

(World Bank 2022d)

How did the imports and exports of goods and services evolve? Figures 11 to 14 depict the development of exports and imports, both in relative composition and in absolute terms at constant prices broken down by sector. Manufacturing sectors have traditionally been important sectors of Polish exports and have increased their importance in recent years. While the service sector has increased in absolute terms as well, its relative importance has not changed dramatically. Imports grew faster than exports after 1995, yet the main surges for both started when Poland joined the EU. During the 2008 Great Recession, trade volumes decreased, but rebounded until 2015. Aside from manufacturing, chemicals and fuels are important import goods. Germany is by far the most important trading partner for Poland. Relative to other European economies, the transformation has not led to a prolonged decline in industrial production. By 2021, Poland has become the fifth biggest industrial producer within the EU after Germany, Italy, France, and Spain, producing six percent of the value of sold industrial production in the EU (EUROSTAT 2022). Poland has integrated itself in EU value chains, linking itself to German manufacturing. Domestic industry output has remained high, yet Poland has also experienced increased outflows of profits (see section 3 in this chapter), indicating its subordinate position within the value chain.
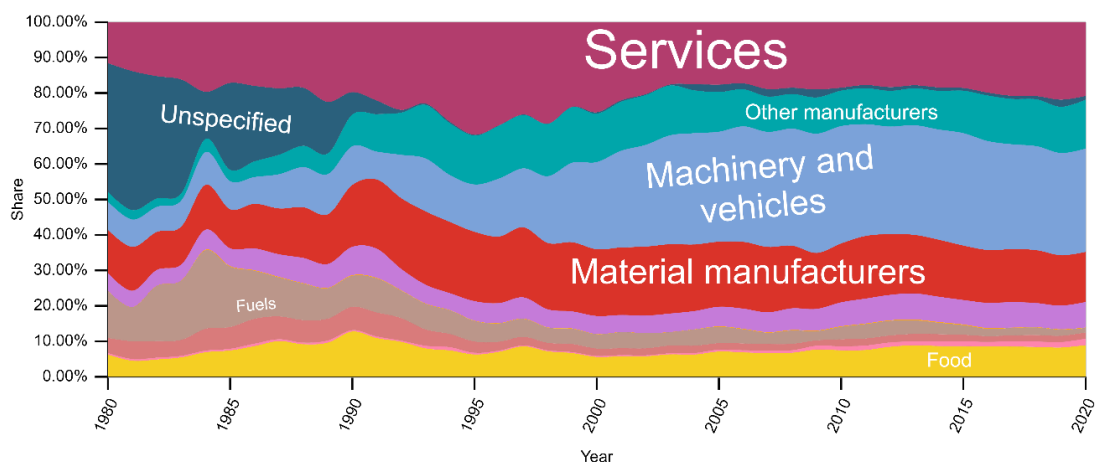
Figure 11: Polish gross exports, 1980-2020, shares at constant 2010 US$

(The Growth Lab at Harvard University 2022)
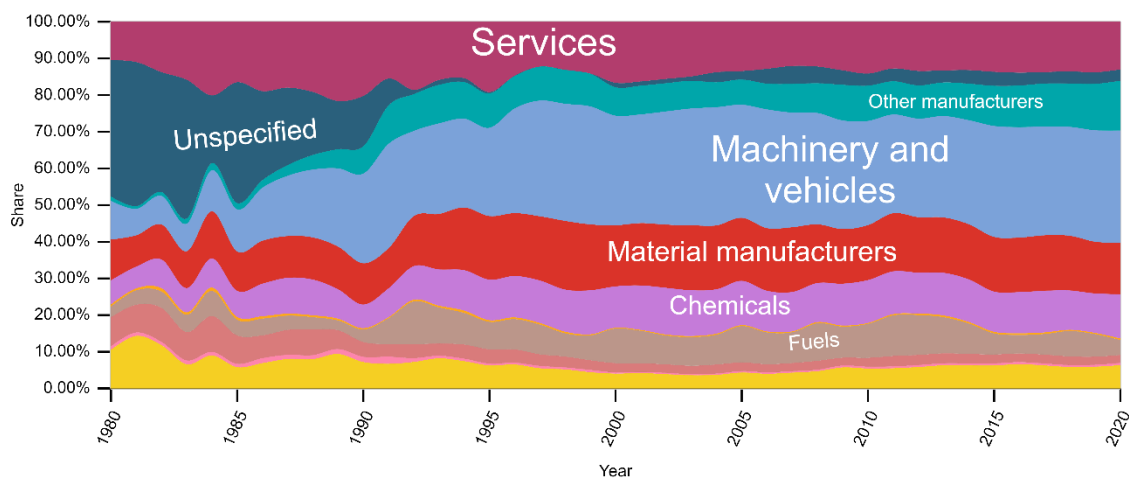


Figure 12: Polish gross imports, 1980-2020, shares at constant 2010 US$

(The Growth Lab at Harvard University 2022)
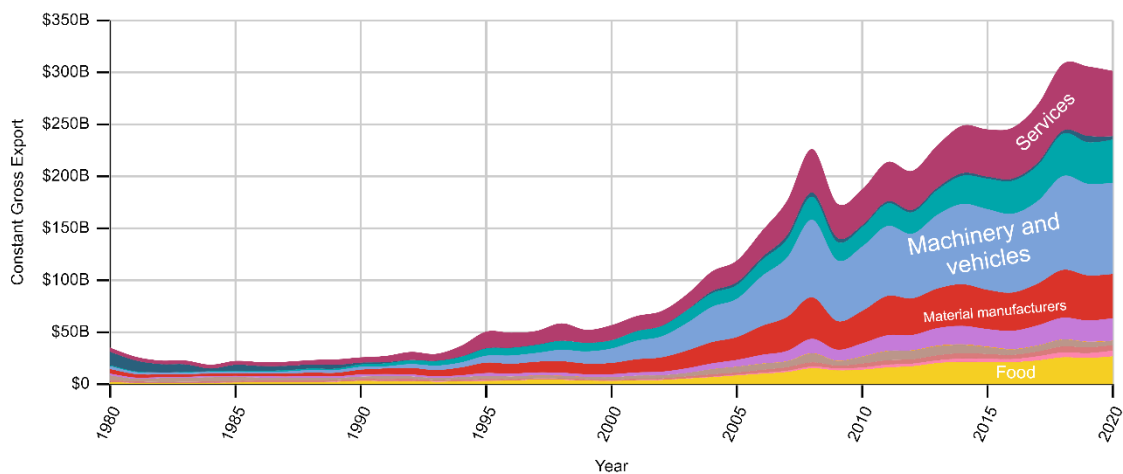


Figure 13: Polish gross exports, 1980-2020, total value at constant 2010 US$
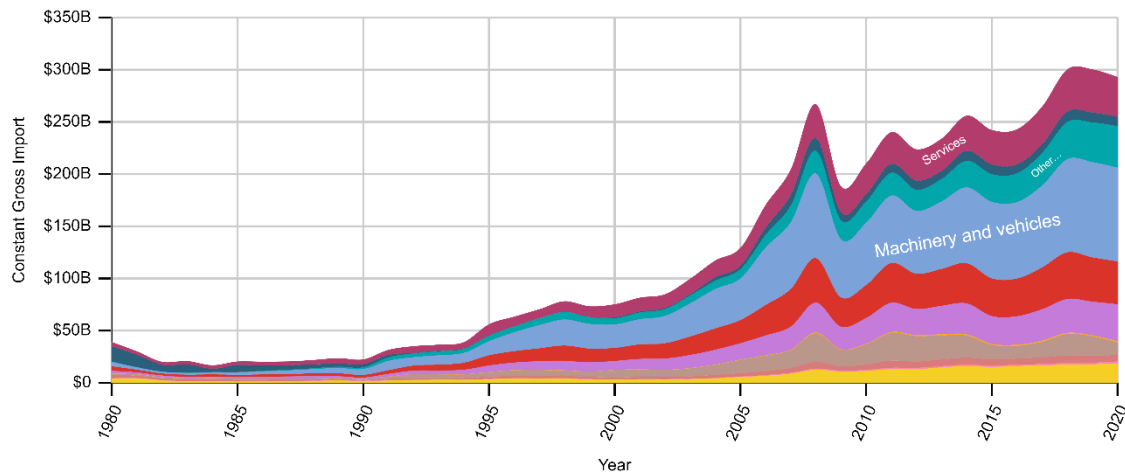
Figure 14: Polish gross imports, 1980-2020, total value at constant 2010 US$

(The Growth Lab at Harvard University 2022)

### 3.3.2  Poverty and welfare

The evolution of poverty during the transformation is hard to measure and depends on choices of poverty concepts (absolute vs. relative poverty), the poverty threshold, and what equivalence scales to apply. Szulc (2006) compares different methods that measured poverty in Poland during the 1990s. The share of households with incomes and expenditures below the absolute poverty line increased between 1992 and 1994 and started to decline in the second half of the 1990s due to robust growth rates. For example, using the OECD household equivalence scale[4] and applying an absolute poverty line at the social minimum, poverty headcounts increased from 22.5 percent of all persons in 1990 to 38.5 percent in 1994 and dropped back to 27.2 percent in 1999 (2006, 431). Relative poverty rates, on the one hand, increased between 1993 and 1999, with more households below the relative poverty line due to rising median well-being and the existence of a small but growing group of extremely poor. Using a relative poverty threshold of 60 percent of median incomes, relative income poverty among households increased from 12.5 percent in 1990 to 14.4 percent in 1999 (2006, 432).

Szulc finds that "[h]ouseholds with unemployed people, with at least two children, those headed by low educated people or social welfare recipients, and rural households all face higher than average risk of poverty regardless of the method applied" (2006, 446). Szulc also finds a downward trend in self-reported satisfaction with income among the income and expenditure poor, arguing that in 1999, "the poor were less optimistic than the poor in previous years. This

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[4] Weights of 1 for first adult, 0.7 for any other person aged 14 and older, 0.5 for the rest.

can be explained by some macroeconomic factors […], as well as changes in the 'moods' of popular media preceding the economic stagnation in succeeding years" (2006, 440).

Brzezinski (2012, 13) finds that between 1998 and 2005, absolute poverty increased in Poland by 12 to 22 percent due to stagnant wages and pensions as well as due to growing unemployment. Between 2005 and 2008, absolute poverty rates dropped by 34 to 50 percent due to rapid economic growth, which led to fast growth in wages, higher pensions, and large decreases in unemployment rates.

A more comprehensive poverty measure is the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI covers three dimensions: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The index is calculated by taking the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions, which are based on several indicators (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022): "The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. The standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita."

Figure 15 depicts the evolution of the HDI in Poland with Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Austria as reference countries. Since 2014, countries with a value greater than 0.8 have been assigned to the category "Very high human development", and countries with a value between 0.700-0.799 to the category "High human development" (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2016). According to the UNDP, Poland developed from 1990 to 2003 from a country with "high human development" to a country with "very high human development".
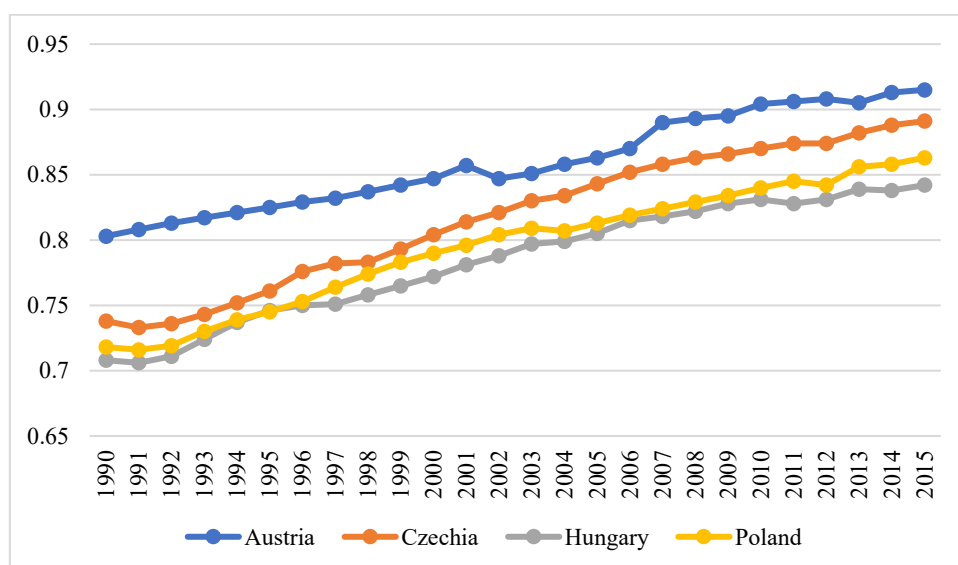


Figure 15: Human Development Index in CEE

(United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022)

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According to more in-depth reports by the UNDP, poverty in transition countries in Eastern Europe increased in several areas during the early 1990s. Groups that were especially affected by income poverty were the working poor, unemployed people, children, and single mothers. The human costs of the transformation also include the increase in suicides and homicides, which had increased dramatically in transition countries between 1989 and 1994. In Poland, suicides increased by more than 25 percent, while homicides increased by more than 50 percent during those five years (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1997, 35). By the late 1990s, suicide rates had aligned to non-transition countries like Austria: the statistical suicide rate per 100,000 persons per year was 24.1 men and 4.6 women in Poland in 1998, compared to 30 men and 10 women in Austria (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2000, 251).

### 3.3.3  Economic inequalities

Income inequality has increased during the transformation, mostly driven by increases in income shares by the top groups within the top decile of the income distribution (cf. Novokmet 2017, 108–218). The substantial and steady rise of top incomes places Polish income inequality at the level of more unequal European countries. The highest increase in income shares of these groups happened after Poland joined the EU: Between 2003 and 2008, almost half of the real income growth was obtained by the top 5 percent. Rising top income shares have been driven by both earnings dispersion and the growing concentration of business income. In the period after EU accession, capital-augmenting technological change contributed to falling labor shares (rising capital shares).

Unadjusted Household Budgets Survey data shows that the Gini coefficient for household equivalized disposable income has stayed stable in Poland in the period from 1994 to 2015, hovering around 30 percent. Correcting for underreported top incomes, the Gini index grew from slightly below 34 to above 38, showing that the transformation was associated with more than just a modest rise in income inequality (Brzezinski, Myck, and Najsztub 2022, 9). The increase in the Gini index after 2005 was higher than in other top-corrected findings from other EU countries.

Grimm et al. (2010, 199) decompose the HDI of Poland for quintiles of the income distribution. The overall HDI in 1999 (calculated with an older concept of the HDI than above) stood at 0.875; it varied however between 0.790 for the lowest to 0.945 for the highest quintile.

In terms of gender inequalities, Grajek (2003, 42–43) finds that the gender pay gap decreased significantly between 1987-1996. Rising relative skills of women and rising returns to skills

explain half of the fall. However, Grajek also finds that 1989 saw the most spectacular change, mostly driven by falls in employment and wages in male-dominated industries, like manufacturing, mining, construction, and agriculture. Gender gaps therefore did improve because of positive developments for women as well as due to negative labor market developments for men.

Figure 16 shows the evolution of the labor force participation rates in the decades before and after the transformation (employment-to-population ratios were only available after 1991). The changes in labor force participation are hard to compare over time, as data sources and surveys differ in scope. The time series has a break between 1995 and 1996, after which lower numbers are reported. However, the time series shows a decrease in the labor force participation rate for both men and women in the two decades before the transition. In the immediate transition years, the labor force participation rate for women increased more than the rate for men.
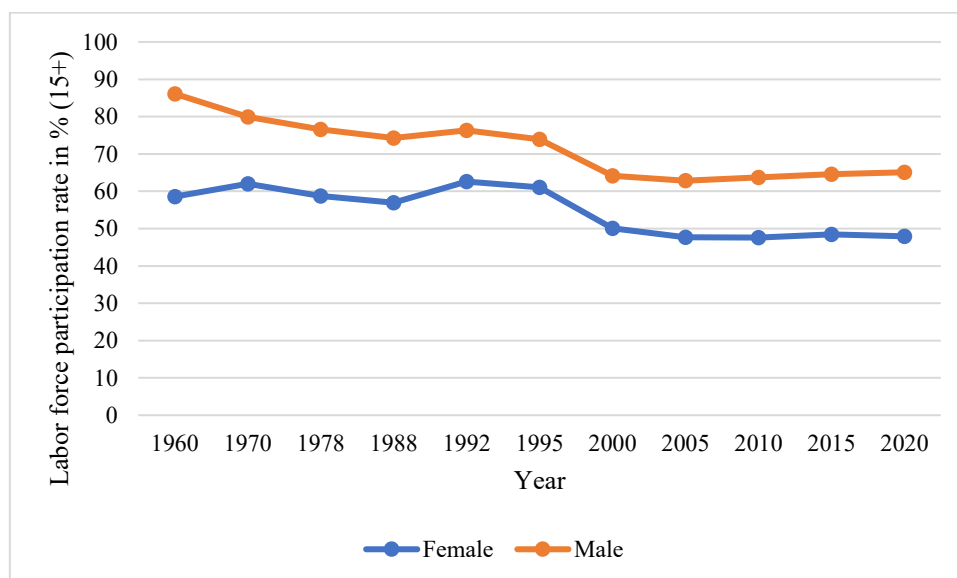


Figure 16: Labor force participation rate in % (15+)

(World Bank 2023)

Another indicator of gender inequalities is how unpaid care work is shared within households over time. Unfortunately, there is a large gap in time use surveys conducted by the Polish Statistical Office. Time use surveys were conducted in 1984, 2003/04, and 2013. Large gender gaps can be observed in the most recent study. In 2013, women spent on average 4.24 hours a day on unpaid household and family care (including childcare), while men spent on average 2.23 hours. These numbers changed only slightly from 2003/2004 when women performed 4.22 hours a day and men performed 2.13 hours of unpaid household and family care work on average (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2015). A local household survey conducted by Stenning et al. in Nowa Huta, Kraków in 2005-6 (2010, 183) shows that reductions in state-provided

childcare and eldercare meant that these tasks were mainly substituted by women in households. Women's share of unpaid childcare in households was 85 percent, and their share of looking after elderly or disabled people who require care was 73 percent compared to men.

### 3.3.4    Public opinion on transformation

Attitude surveys try to grasp public opinion. Over a longer period, this helps us understand shifting attitudes towards the transformation. Pew Research Center (Wike et al. 2019) has found that the share of people who approve of the change to a multiparty system has changed from 66 percent in 1991 to 70 percent in 2009 to 85 percent in 2019. The share of people who approve of the change to a market economy has shifted from an initial 80 percent in 1991 to 71 percent in 2009 to 85 percent in 2019.

When asked if the economic situation for most people today is better than it was under communism, the numbers shifted more dramatically in recent years: In 2009, only 47 percent of the surveyed people agreed with this statement, while in 2019, the share was up to 74 percent. There are significant differences between age cohorts when asked if ordinary people have benefited not too much or not at all from the changes since 1989. The share of people that agree with this statement is 18 percent in the age cohort 18-34, 31 percent in the age cohort 35-59, and 37 percent in the age cohort 60+.

They survey found that in 2019, more than two thirds of Poles thought that changes that have taken place since 1989 have had a good influence on the standard of living (81 percent agree), education (72 percent agree), pride in their country (72 percent agree), and law and order (72 percent agree). A majority, though a smaller share, agree that the changes have had a good influence on health care (63 percent agree), family values (60 percent agree), and spiritual values (59 percent agree). The share of people who say the changes that have taken place since 1989 have had a good influence on the standard of living in Poland has increased from 14 percent in 1991 to 81 percent in 2019, the highest value among all polled post-socialist CEE countries. Poles are also quite satisfied with EU membership compared to most other countries in the region (both new and old EU member states). 84 percent hold a favorable view of the EU, 67 percent think their country's membership in the EU has been a good thing, and 71 percent agree that the economic integration of Europe has strengthened the Polish economy. Ekman and Linde (2005) combine several surveys to investigate the phenomenon of communist nostalgia, defining it as a wish by people in CEE to return to socialism. They analyze surveys from 1993 to 2001 that asked respondents the item "Our present system of government is not the only one that this country had. Some people say that we would be better off if the country

was governed differently. What do you think?" The respondents were then asked whether they agreed to different alternatives. The share of people approving of a return to communist rule in Poland initially dropped from 17 percent (1993) to 8 percent (1995) but rose again to 23 percent (2001). The authors conclude that the rise of this sentiment is a multidimensional phenomenon indicating general discontent with the perceived output of the transformation, combined with nostalgia and memories of past economic securities by older respondents.

The increased share of people approving of a return to communism in 2001 compared to 1995 as well as the high number of people disagreeing with the statement that the economic situation for most people today is better than it was under communism in 2009 indicate that many people were either disappointed with or not benefitting from the outcome of the transformation in the 2000s. This is consistent with the reformers' view of a trade-off between opportunity and security.

In the 2010s, poverty and unemployment decreased while growth rates stayed strong. Correspondingly, public opinion had improved until 2019. However, the stylized facts of this section also support the arguments put forward by the Marxist critics quoted in the first section of this chapter. The human costs of transformation in the 1990s were immense, and the redistribution of wealth and income was significant. This process happened not only within Poland, but in a European context, as Poland has been integrated into European value chains in a process of uneven development.


### 3.4    Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS): Challenging Neoliberalism from the Right?

Before turning to the case study of Razem, I want to close this chapter with a closer look at PiS. PiS won both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015, the year Razem was founded. The politics of PiS since taking over government has drawn scrutiny from both domestic observers and many governments from EU countries who argue that PiS has establish an illiberal democracy similar to Hungary under Prime Minister Orbán. Are the politics of PiS also a challenge to neoliberalism?

The roots of PiS lie in right-wing protest movements against the system change in the 1990s (Bachmann 2016, 44). Jarosław Kaczyński founded the small party Porozumienie Centrum (PC, Center Alliance) in the early 1990s, with his twin brother Lech Kaczyński involved in the same party. Among other things, they demanded a radical break with communism and professional bans for former members of the nomenclature as well as criminal prosecution for the leadership of the People's Republic of Poland. In 2001, Lech Kaczyński, then Minister of Justice in a right-wing minority government, founded the PiS party. As Minister of Justice, he

already pursued a right-wing populist law-and-order policy (2016, 44). In 2005, the Kaczyński brothers won both important national elections: Jarosław won the parliamentary election as PiS party leader and was prime minister from 2006-2007; Lech won the presidential election and remained president of Poland until he died in the crash of the presidential plane near Smolensk on April 10, 2010.

The PiS government of 2005-2007 was characterized by a shift in power from the judiciary to the executive. Public broadcasting was politically influenced, and history and education policy were dominated by propaganda. Lech Kaczyński won the 2005 presidential election against Donald Tusk, when PiS framed the campaign as a struggle between a 'liberal' Poland (portrayed as socially cold) and a 'social' Poland (portrayed as warm-hearted and showing solidarity) (Bachmann 2016, 39). PiS succeeded in attracting a sizable proportion of left-wing voters after the post-communist left faltered under corruption scandals. Instead of the opposition between post-communists and anti-communists a new cleavage appeared between the neo-nationalist PiS and the liberal PO. The coalition of PiS with smaller radical parties broke up in 2007 and PO won the snap elections. Jarosław Kaczyński lost the 2010 presidential election.

In May 2015, PiS candidate Andrzej Duda surprisingly defeated incumbent president Bronisław Komorowski in the Polish presidential elections. During the election campaign, Duda focused on social issues and presented himself as an advocate of necessary changes for those who had been neglected and ignored in previous years (Pilawski and Politt 2016, 17–18). Duda's voters came mostly from rural areas. While farmers, workers, administrative employees, pupils, students, the unemployed, and pensioners were more likely to vote for the PiS candidate, landowners, private entrepreneurs, freelancers and executives were more likely to vote for Komorowski (Vetter 2016, 29).

In October 2015, PiS won the Polish parliamentary elections. PiS received 5,711,687 votes for the Sejm (National Electoral Commission 2015). Turnout was at 50.92 percent of the 30,629,150 eligible voters, which constituted an average turnout in comparison to previous elections (IFES 2023). Due to the election arithmetic, PiS received an absolute majority of 235 out of 460 seats in the Sejm, even though their vote share was only 37.58 percent of the cast votes. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, PiS expanded its majority (National Electoral Commission 2019b).

During the campaign, the introduction of a family allowance called 'Rodzina 500+' (Family 500+) was a main campaign promise of PiS. The PiS-led government introduced the program on 1 April 2016 as a national child allowance scheme in the form of a tax-free cash transfer, conditional on having children. From 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2019, the scheme consisted of

monthly payments of PLN 500 per child for the second and any consecutive child a family had until they are 18 years old. Allowances for first children were means-tested for families with a monthly income of under PLN 800 per month per family member. In comparison, the equivalized median monthly disposable income per person in 2015 was PLN 2,052 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2017, 148). On 1 July 2019, the government expanded the program to include first children without means tests, granting universal access for families. The explicit goals of the program were to increase the number of births in Poland, reduce poverty, especially among children, and invest in families. 500+ is a de-commodified social transfer, as Polish families do not rely on the market to receive the benefits—the state directly transfers the money to eligible households. However, they do not automatically receive it and all parents and/or caretakers have to apply every year to receive the benefit (Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej 2023).

The program has been successful in reducing both poverty and inequality (Paradowski, Wolszczak-Derlacz, and Sierminska 2020, 24). Following the introduction of 'Rodzina 500+', poverty was reduced both by changes in the distribution and income growth. People also reported that their economic situation improved, that they needed to watch their daily budget less carefully, and that they had more money for daily basic needs. An OECD study found that "the labour force participation rate of mothers would have been 2-3 percentage points higher in the absence of the reform. The effect set in earlier for partnered women and within this group, it was highest among those with lower levels of educational attainment and thus generally lower incomes" (Magda, Kiełczewska, and Brandt 2018, 6). However, Kaźmierczak-Kałużna (2018, 104–7) found that employment by these women was often temporary, low-paid, and offered no fulfillment, even though it helped with the mothers' self-image and their social inclusion. 'Rodzina 500+' weakens the employment aspirations of poor mothers, but they also state that a job would be important after their children leave home.

To sum up, PiS has successfully exploited new political cleavages, branding itself as a social party and implementing social policies that—while ideologically conservative and natalist— have reduced poverty and inequality.

Becker and Weissenbacher (2016, 5–6) show how PiS also positioned itself as an alternative to euro liberalism. PiS's economic policy includes strengthening the domestic banking sector and calls for a more pro-active national industrial policy. PiS exhibits much less hostility towards unions compared to other nationalistic right-wing parties in Europe. PiS is not completely against the EU. While it argues against introducing the Euro and denounces German domination within the EU, it counts on EU funding for its development scheme. PiS has been in a stand-off

with the European commission about the judicial system and the state of democracy, emphasizing its national sovereignty. However, compared to FIDESZ in Hungary, PiS is at times more conciliatory towards the EU, as it is more dependent on core Europe economically and on the EU financially (Buras and Vegh 2018, 107–14).

Becker argues that PiS falls mainly in the current of national-conservative neo-nationalism (Becker 2018, 97–120): PiS's approach to the state is characterized by a right-wing re-politicization. The party tries to expand its influence on the state apparatus, particularly the security apparatus and the judicial system. Similarly, PiS uses its power to bring public TV in line while also changing the legal framework for private media to reduce influences from abroad. In history and culture politics, PiS perpetuates nationalist views through funding certain institutions and by curtailing funding to critical NGOs. Economic policies have focused on strengthening domestic capital, i.e., in the banking sector. While changes in the taxation system have remained limited, PiS has introduced far-reaching social policy initiatives by introducing the child allowance 'Rozina 500+' and by lowering the retirement age. Concerning labor relations, the PiS government has revived tripartite consultation structures with trade unions and business associations. However, PiS has often pushed ahead with important legislative projects without sufficient use of these structures. PiS maintains a close bond to the contemporary Solidarność union; PiS has also raised the minimum wage. Becker argues that social policy is central to stabilizing the voting potential for PiS.

My conclusion is that Prawo i Sprawiedliwość has challenged neoliberalism in Poland from two sides. First, the economic and social policies of PiS present a clear break from the past. PiS introduced a major social transfer scheme with the child allowance 'Rodzina 500+', raised the minimum wage, and attempted to strengthen the position of domestic capital. Second, the neo-nationalist policies of PiS aim at replacing the individualist attitude of neoliberalism with collectivism based on nationalism. This explains the importance of reactionary history politics, the attacks on institutions that work against 'the people' (such as high courts), and the conservative backlash on women's and LGBTQ rights.

4    Case Study *Razem*

Since its inception, Razem (Together) has organized resistance to neoliberalism in Poland in various ways. The following sections outline a theory of the why and how, based on the interviews I held with nine members of the party in 2018 and 2019. The foundations of the why lie in the personal backgrounds of the members, how they view Poland before 1989, their thoughts on the transformation and the development of the left after 1989, and what changed since Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice) has taken over the government in 2015. The how is explained by taking a closer look at the party itself: Where do its roots lie, what is the political approach of Razem, and how do visions translate into policies, strategies, and tactics? Finally, what are the struggles and the impact of Razem?

## 4.1    Personal Background of Interview Partners

Many Razem members are young and highly educated. Of the nine interview partners, four hold a Ph.D. or doctoral degree, and another four have at least started a tertiary degree. According to theorists of the transition to market economy approach, they should have been the winners of transformation, profiting from the European integration of Polish labor and capital markets, enjoying both mobility and political freedoms. In reality, the majority of them have experienced poverty and precarious work relations, either personally or within their family. Existing parties have not met their demand for political change; their experiences with NGOs or civil society organizations have left them unsatisfied. Many started their political journey with a human rights agenda. During their political activism, they became more radical and shifted more towards traditional left issues. Their political engagement can be characterized by high intensity: The participatory democratic elements of Razem and the approach of trial-and-error in experimenting with a range of tactics have meant that many have invested a lot of time and energy, at times at the cost of personal health.

### 4.1.1   Experiences with poverty and precarious work relations

Several interview partners talk about or reflect on experiences with poverty and precarious work relations. These experiences have come from their family history, firsthand experiences, or witnessing poverty and inequality through their professional or political work. For many, these experiences have been a major influence on their decisions to become politically active and have informed their political identity. The range of experiences is wide. In terms of poverty, there are cases of absolute poverty felt recently as well as the descent into poverty from a more

privileged position during the time of transformation. In the case of E, there is a link between the retreat of the state and fathers who are not effectively sanctioned for not paying alimony.

> E: I was born in a poor family. I was raised only by my mother […] and my father doesn't pay aliments. And that's the problem in Poland. It's very, very common that fathers don't pay on their children. Because women's rights are in Poland in bad condition. They [are] worsening since [PiS] are […] ruling. I want the people to have equal chances in life. I... for example, it's some sort of my, from my life experiences... I was studying normally, not on weekends, five days a week, but I had no money for food. So I had to go to work and start studying weekends when I have money to pay for weekends in my […] university.

In the case of G, the transformation period led to the state privatizing or closing previously state-owned factories in Łódź, a former center of industry in central Poland.

> G: I was a witness of the transformation in Łódź after 1989. Because my parents were working in a cooperative, and then when the transformation came they had to struggle with new capitalism in Poland. It was very brutal and savage. […] When I was a child, my parents had jobs. Both of them. And we could afford, you know, family vacations in summer and family vacations in winter. And, well, we just could afford anything. Living off quite a living wage. And then when transformation came, we had to struggle with, you know, with me going to the university, and well, there was no vacation anymore. So that's my, you know, very personal view of this.

J retells a comparable situation. Although she did not witness material deprivation within her family, the transformation period brought a heightened sense of insecurity to her family.

> J: I was raised not in Opole or Wrocław, but in a smaller city in the South of Poland, in Mielec. When there was a very large public industry of building planes. Airplanes. And that was [during the era of the] Soviet Union. So it [had] a few decades tradition. And a lot of, a lot of people worked, were hired there. Also my parents. Both of my parents. And they, when I was a kid, this huge, I don't know, a few thousand people, they started to let them go and to privatize it. And to share this huge factory into pieces. So my father with his friends started a company with programming and computers, and he got a job there. My mom worked quite long, but she then lost her job. And she soon found some. Maybe for me it wasn't so bad. But a lot of my friends and colleagues in the class, their parents lost their jobs. And I think I didn't realize until I was an adult how that affected us. But we as a kid, there was this sense of instability, of fear, what would happen next.

The massive impacts of transformation on labor relations have also meant that in contemporary Poland, neither higher education nor working in a job usually attached with high societal prestige may serve as a guarantee against poverty or precarious work relations. Here is an example of J, whose criticism of the Polish healthcare system later translates to her political engagements.

> J: I started working as a young physician in 2013. And in 2014 I started my specialty. And it was very hard. You know. The Polish public healthcare system is very underfunded, underfinanced. And even... there are a lack of doctors, lack of nurses. So when you start working there, almost immediately you get very much, very big load of work and responsibility. […] [Y]oung doctors in Poland earn not much and since 2009 there was no raise at all. So... it was about 70% of... from the medium wage in Poland.

C recollects the time in 2015 when he first joined Razem.

C: And yeah I was absolutely broke at that time. That was just after my post-doc ended. So I was quite frustrated. So I was happy to work in the initiative, taking care of people like me. So I just found a flyer, but I had no money. And with the support of my boyfriend I joined the first meeting, did the first official founding meeting in Warsaw.

The youngest interview partner, H, is a 17-year-old student. Like many of his peers in high school, he has worked part-time, experiencing precarious work relations early on.

H: [Y]ou will have some money, but you are working at the night and in the middle of the week. You need to go to work, for example for two hours. You sleep, for example, just sleep for two hours and later you go to school. So. It was a pretty hard moment. And a really hard job for me.

### 4.1.2   Previous political engagement

None of the interview partners had been a member of a political party before joining Razem. Nevertheless, the majority of them had been politically active and had various experiences valuable for their later engagement with Razem. Only J mentioned that she was not interested in politics before joining the party, as her studies were consuming both her time and energy. C's first political activity was in 2004 when he helped organize the first March of Tolerance in Kraków in Southern Poland. He helped organize the next few marches as well and ran a queer art festival with friends. Similarly, H helped organize a local pride in Lublin in Eastern Poland. A participated in reading circles of a left movement. F joined a political movement that edited a journal in 2007 and coordinated the movement in the Greater Poland Voivodeship. In this early political engagement, we can already witness the dissatisfaction with discussions "going nowhere" and wanting to have a larger impact.

F: So I was very active in this field, and we wanted to make political critique something like more, direct. In this sense that we do something in real politics, not only talk about books. And we also wanted to democratize the movement, and that was not what the leaders wanted. So we decided to split out of the organization, and we created theoretical practice, that's a journal. That's an academic journal, a Marxist one. [I]t was a group of PhD students in University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. Mainly. Also other places in Poland, but mainly in Poznań. And our decision was ok, political critique is going nowhere, we have to do the class struggle, and we can do the class struggle in academia. So let's do what we can do now. So that was my line of development.

During a stay abroad, he later became engaged in the international basic income movement. B was involved with several NGOs but was unsatisfied with the lack of impact. She became more interested in left politics and first joined a revolutionary choir and later a cooperative, which, in her words, led her to Razem. Personal connections also played a significant role.

B: So, it's been, like, quite a natural path for me, like from this, like pre-political engagement, and when Razem appeared, and also probably there was also... there was also this, like, private thing for me. Because I started dating a guy who was also a member of this crew that started creating this stuff, so.

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D became a member of Ruch Niej, a movement connected to a newspaper, in her teenage years but did not participate in activities. Before joining Razem, she was thinking about becoming engaged with Amnesty International. A friend asked her if she was interested in joining the list for the upcoming elections for Razem.

> D: Because in fact my boyfriend who wasn't my boyfriend at that time, asked me, I think it was in late August, if I would join the list to the parliament because they needed some women. He knew me, he knew I was interested in Razem and in fact, I didn't want to. I have always been interested in politics, but I didn't want to be involved. But I agreed. And after I agreed for that I started thinking that if I did that, maybe I should join the party.

Several interview partners mention this initial skepticism about joining a party. What convinced them was the authenticity of other party members, low entry barriers and high agency to help build a new and appealing party, and the tangible energy in the early days of the party.

### 4.1.3 Personal political identity

During the interviews, some interview partners labeled their own approaches and political identity. H describes himself as "more like a social democrat." G became "a leftist" in the 1990s. A talks about his interest in and focus on left populist politics that can be implemented locally. D joined Razem because she was interested in left and anti-discriminatory politics, which includes feminist politics. She has always been "interested in cultural and ethnical diversity, in Poland and in Europe." She also reasons why she joined a left party in the following statement.

> D: People, many women say they don't want to do anything which is political. But if you don't do it, you cannot change the law, you cannot fight for your rights. So, well, I think if the situation in Poland were different, if there was legal abortion, if we had gay marriages, I wouldn't be in politics because I wouldn't need to do that. There would be other people who did it for me.

Three of the interview partners talk about how they shifted from a more liberal human rights approach to a more radical left approach during their process of joining Razem. B's political interests before joining Razem lay in human rights and feminist activism, but during her time with Razem she shifted more towards labor and economic issues. However, she became unsatisfied with Razem's political development and resigned from her council position to co-establish a chapter of the trade union Inicjatywa Pracownicza, which follows a more radical democratic and anarchist approach, at her workplace. Similarly, before joining Razem, J already knew she agreed with the human rights positions of Razem. She was initially unconvinced by the economic program of the party. Her opinion changed while joining the party. Her political approach radicalized. Already being a member of Razem, she joined the protests of young doctors who were fighting for a pay rise, increases in public healthcare spending to the

European average, and changes in the training of doctors. She recalls the intense labor dispute that followed.

> J: [F]irst we had demonstrations on the streets of Warsaw and in other cities. Then we had a three weeks hunger protest, I took part in that for a few days. Because then I had to go back to work […]. It was huge, that was very media... there was a lot of media coverage. You can google that. So... but even then, we didn't get a satisfying offer from the government. But what worked is that not everyone but about 10% of [us] physicians limited our hours. Because when there is a lack of physicians, we usually work a lot, for example 300 hours a month. [S]o a bunch of doctors began to work less. And it was such a problem for the public system that the government bent. Gave us a raises for young doctors but also for specialist. But also promised things that we wanted. But it didn't... the government has violated this, our agreement. And now on the first of June then will be, we are again, young doctors are walking on the street, and that will be just, like mostly, about underfunding. No, we don't want raises anymore, but it is mostly about underfunding and about working conditions.

### 4.1.4 Personal struggles with political engagement

In some instances, interview partners describe struggles with their political engagement. This entails skepticism before they joined Razem, exhaustion or health problems during their engagement, or reasons why they might leave the party. For example, F was initially reluctant to join Razem, which he thought lacked the popular support necessary for a successful left party.

> F: In fact, when Razem was being created, I was in one of my scholarships in Barcelona, and in the beginning, I was quite skeptical. Like, seeing how Podemos works, how first they have like huge social movement on the streets, like thousands of people. And then the party was created because of that. And then I heard about Partia Razem, the same colors, the same style, trying to copy some things, and without a social movement. Like let's do the party first and create... and I was like 'no, you can't to this like this, it's the other way around, you can't create it like that.'

All the interview partners dedicate a lot of time and energy to their political activities. For some interview partners, this has come at the cost of personal exhaustion. C describes feelings of self-anger about his continued engagement in an official capacity.

> C: I was just a bit angry at myself that I just had to run again, I mean for the second term. I shouldn't have. But I did. And I was just, I just, I had just too many things on my shelf. So I thought that I would do what I can and I would support the region until the elections. And when the elections were done and I was a member of organizing the election in the region. So when it was done, when it finished, I resigned. […] I was just tired.

A talks about how the local board has to be reelected after elections because members are exhausted and talks about the challenge of political work. He agrees with the approach taken by Razem but feels he cannot contribute as much.

> A: And that demanded very I'd say very quick response and 24-hour availability and that was very hard for me because I didn't have previous experience, it's not pretty much the way I work. And it's pretty hard. So yeah.
>
> Interviewer: So that's why you decided not to go for reelections before the local elections here?

A: Yeah, yeah. Because, well, probably, at that point it was the only or maybe not the only, but the most reasonable way of doing politics. There are of course some alternatives but they are difficult, so if it's the only way, then I couldn't have given very much help in that way.

At the time of the first field trip, Razem had just received low popular support in the regional elections. As a result, the national board of Razem announced in a press conference the necessity to seek out potential coalition partners and start negotiating with older left parties, from which Razem had previously distanced itself. Some party members who thought that such a strategical move should have been discussed and voted on before criticized the approach taken by the board. Some members believed the actions by the board were not up to the standards of internal democracy and the debate culture that distinguished Razem from other movements and parties. B resigned from her post in the national council. In this segment, she recollects an argument between two factions within the party.

B: Of those two groups, it's really for both of them to talk, and that's also very frustrating and probably also one of the reasons why I decided to resign because I didn't really see any civility for any constructive dialogue. And there's also this, I would say that also national board out-drifted and that alienation of power—at least for some of the people there, yeah, it's a fact. And that's really sad, because you know, like, we've been talking so so so much about democracy, and how to form democratic institutions and how to make everything work as we would like to. And, you know, we are trying to create this like a safe space party. And that was a disaster, really. I'm afraid that it's just not possible to create, to make political party a safe space, yeah. Although like, my heart is really bleeding as I am saying that.

She believes her activism in the local trade union chapter at her workplace to be a better use of her time and energy.

## 4.2 Poland before 1989

When discussing the ills of the transformation period, several interview partners make comparative statements about the system that came before. A major theme that emerged across the interviews is how the socialist system provided social security and stability, especially against the backdrop of uncertainty in the years that followed. At the same time, the interview partners criticize the state and the political system of socialism. B provides a good example of such a comparison in the following segment.

B: Obviously, the state before 1989 wasn't that nice. Although there has been massive social progress done in this time. Like, this period after the war until 1989. And also the level of social security was much much much higher. And so we're not like trying to say we want these things back, although we're not fully 100% criticizing the system that used to be.

G mentions the advances made under socialism in terms of reproductive rights, an area that has seen drastic change after 1989, and how different the views were before.

G: Because I was raised in the opinion that, you know, I am a woman, and I am deciding what to do with my own body and what to do. And it's my decision if I want to be a mother or something like

that. My grandma had abortions and she was talking about it without shame because there was no shame those days.

J mentions that the public industries in the place she grew up in the 1980s had decades of tradition and employed many people, including both of her parents. G also recalls that when she was a child, the industries of her town employed both of her parents. The pay was enough to enjoy niceties.

> G: And we could afford, you know, family vacations in summer and family vacations in winter. And, well, we just could afford anything. Living off quite a living wage.

H, who is too young to have experienced living in socialism himself, also stresses the stability connected to paid jobs and housing provided by the former socialist system. D's assessment of social security during the time is more pessimistic

> D: Because we've never had a welfare state in communism, in fact it was complicated. Because people maybe weren't very poor, but they weren't rich. They just had what they needed to have and no more.

She also points out that many people did not trust the state at the time, and that many people were members of the ruling socialist party not because they wanted to, but because they had to become members in order to reach a certain professional position. She interprets this as a legacy of the era that explains why people in Poland still do not like to be party members.

One interview partner stresses the extent of social modernization and economic achievement accomplished under socialism.

> C: [T]he country was modernized. It was rebuilt after the war. There was the... like the first plan of rebuilding Polish economy, it was like the first four-year-plan. Like even at that time was regarded as one of the best in the world. So they like, within four years they built up the country. Which was taken down. Which is amazing. They rebuilt the major cities, which didn't happen in the West, in Western Europe. They just built new cities. I mean here they rebuilt Warsaw, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Lublin and Poznań. Well Lublin just partially because it hasn't been destroyed and it escaped bombing. This is incredible, for that was done, so this is a really cool aspect of communism. And when you just read the history of Polish architecture and how Poland was designed, I mean from after the war this is really impressive. So this is...
>
> Interviewer: Can people relate to that?
>
> C: In a way. Like the, I don't know if... I don't know if you're aware of this huge communist plan, it was called 'A thousand schools for a thousand years of Poland' in the sixties. So they build like actually 1,500 schools within ten years. So this... the very first project of alphabetization of Poland. So this was really cool and those schools are, they are here, they're still here. I mean I was... my primary school was one of those schools built in the 60s as a part of this big project. Like 1,500 schools within like eight or nine years.

Again, politically, the interview partner has a more negative assessment of the system and criticizes the Polish state's practice of keeping people's passports, denying them any travel abroad, and perpetrating violence, including in the form of shooting people. Still, praising economic modernization and stability is already a more positive assessment than that felt by

most political actors in Poland. In the public, the era of communism is still heavily condemned, both politically and economically.

## 4.3    Thoughts on the Transformation, Poland after 1989

All interview partners view the transformation period as negative, emphasizing the immense social costs of the economic transformation. The transformation is also viewed as a period in which attitudes shifted towards more conservative or individualistic values. The interview partners see the transition to representative democracy ambivalently. Finally, most interview partners condemn the role of the old left during the transformation period, specifically the role of the party Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD, Democratic Left Alliance).

### 4.3.1    Neoliberal transformation

The interview partners describe the process and consequences of the transformation after 1989 in many ways. Ideologically, the program of transformation is neoliberal. F describes the ideological roots coming from the "Chicago boys."

> F: The transformation was like really getting everything from Milton Friedman, from the neoliberal guys from the Chicago University. Entrepreneurship is the only way, no industrial policy; we have to get capital from abroad. Freedom means freedom to make money, not freedom to unionize, not freedom to have a house, to have some security and these kind of things. So it was quite harsh and until now we have the most quickly rising inequalities in Europe, […] Piketty showed that [recently].

B mentions that many younger Razem members might have witnessed the transformation but had not been politically active at the time. Her verdict on the period is representative of all interview partners.

> B: Majority of us didn't really have... we didn't really have any possibility to influence that because we were like, you know, either children or teenagers then. And we also think that it wasn't really necessary to leave so many people behind. There is like huge number of people who really lost like seriously lost on transformation in a way it was done. Also, the scale of privatization of public services, of like nationally owned companies, […] it shouldn't have been done in this way. So we're not fans of Leszek Balcerowicz.

Three common themes connected with neoliberal transformation emerged during the interviews: the changing role of the state; changes in labor relations and unemployment as a new mass phenomenon; and the rise in poverty and inequality.

The retreat of the state—a core dogma of Washington consensus-style neoliberal reform—has continued well into the 21$^{st}$ century. According to C, this retreat is far-reaching and has led to the implementation of free market mechanisms and a downscaling of the state. A equates this retreat to dysfunctionality. The state has become weak, a "state made of carton board" (A), and

neoliberal governments like the one led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform) until 2015 had "a program of [a] cheap state".

In the 1990s, many state-owned factories were privatized or shut down. Neoliberal transformation meant that market dynamics had primacy over state intervention. This is illustrated by dogmas like "there is no better industrial policy than no industrial policy." According to F, this led to unemployment rates of 30-40% and many people becoming homeless.

Some of the interview partners who had lived or worked in industrial centers like Mielec, Łódź, or Zagłębie Dąbrowskie (the Dąbrowa Coal Basin) observed these processes firsthand. One result was the appearance of mass unemployment. This affected some interview partners directly, like J, whose father started his own company after the main employer in the city was broken up and let many people go. Her mother's employment lasted longer, but she was eventually fired as well. In G's family, her aunt and her uncles were out of jobs immediately after privatization began.

D illustrates the far-reaching impact of the economic transformation of towns that were reliant on a single industrial enterprise.

> D: [The] team I worked with; we did some research in one settlement. It was Ksawera in Będzin, and people used to say that about 80% of people were somehow linked to [the] coal mine. Some of them were of course miners, but many of them were just wives, children, people working somewhere or using the coal mines' infrastructure. So it was a big shock for people.

The affected parts of the population are viewed as victims of transformation who were left without any kind of help. D argues that it was obvious that there would be unemployment but many people "were told they would be rich, they would be free." E argues that many of the people fired either "moved to the West, to Germany, to England" or are still unemployed. The low minimum wages further aggravated the situation and increased pressures to migrate.

The position of employees also changed for the worse. Labor regulations were loosened to attract foreign investment, making the position of employees more precarious. Unions "ended up approximately non-existing in [the] private sector" (A). The power of labor inspectorates was also decreased, leaving them with "no tools to fight with" as work inspections must tell companies months in advance before they visit a company, according to E.

Another feature of neoliberal transformation was the introduction of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in 1995. SEZ were introduced as a policy measure to boost investment and employment by granting preferential treatment to private businesses through public funding and tax exemptions. By 2022, there were 14 SEZ in Poland (Eurofound 2023). J grew up in Mielec, an area that was previously dominated by a single state-owned industry (PZL Mielec, Polish

Aviation Works). The industry in her hometown underwent a crisis when exports to the Eastern bloc faltered, which initially led to unemployment and more insecurity in the job market. PZL Mielec was eventually sold in 2007 to Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation, which is now owned by Lockheed Martin (PZL Mielec 2009). In Mielec, the company mainly produces Black Hawk helicopters today. As a reaction to the initial crisis of PZL Mielec, the first SEZ in Poland was created in 1995. The SEZ in and around Mielec now has 33 locations, covering more than 17 km². The Special Economic Zone has attracted companies in the aviation, metallurgical, automotive, wood processing, plastics and IT industries (Agencja Rozwoju Przemysłu 2021).

> J: So I think [from a] transformational [perspective], [we were] a city that was […] dependent on this factory that was hit. And then […], because the region was hit so hard, this special economic zone [was started]. So then, I also observed a huge influence of great factories. But, that bring jobs, but not quality jobs.

One of the companies that set up a production site was Kronospan, an Austrian-owned wood-panel producing company. While this brought jobs to the region, the factory of Kronospan also increased pollution, leading to public protests and demonstrations.

> J: And I think it was the biggest demonstration so far in Poland regarding institution that pollutes air, environmental issues. So... Mielec, for me, in the history of this town you can see with the jobs, how that evolved. That first, we were dependent on big factory. It will get hit. Then we were dependent on big corporations, but they are polluting us.

The demonstrations, in which Razem also participated, attracted 12-15,000 people in a town with a population of 60,000 (gazeta.pl 2018).

One of the reasons for the rise in poverty is the retreat of the state in welfare, including the healthcare sector. In this segment, J talks about the consequences of the underfunded health sector for her patients.

> J: You have a lot of, you know, dilemmas, you have to not only make medical decisions but also I had to talk to my patient, if they can afford to buy certain drugs. Or if they... if there is a family that could take care of them if their health got rapidly worse. And also, there is also a huge gap. That there are not a lot of institutions [for] older […] people. Or like in Germany, I worked in Germany for a little bit when I was studying. When there is a lot of professional nurses that come to the house of, for example, elderly people to help to wash, to clean, to give injections. In Poland there is almost none, there is very little of that.

What the interview partners illustrated in this section shows a picture of dependent integration. The state's role in social policy had been reduced, while conditions for foreign private investors were improved. The special economic zones have allowed companies to pay less taxes and produce goods and services mainly for exports, further integrating Poland into European value chains.

4.3.2  Change in attitudes

The transformation period has led to various changes in attitudes, mentalities, and values. On an individual level, neoliberal ideas of freedom and justice became widespread. At the same time, a noticeable conservative backlash has occurred. In the political and media landscape, a polarization of worldviews emerged.

During the transformation period, certain views about the economy and society became dominant. A neoliberal "mentality" (A), "neoliberal thinking" (J), and an "absolute hegemonic situation of neoliberal ideology" (F) emerged. J had internalized these views.

> J: [M]y mind was, you know, full of these few or five economic golden truths, that I thought, yeah, that's how the world works because everyone says it works that way.

J does not expand on what the golden truths are. F describes these golden truths as the "individualization of thinking about people." If a person does not have work or is poor, it is his or her fault. E has a similar description.

> E: [I]t is a popular opinion in Poland that there are winners and losers. […] And these people who are not doing well in Poland, who are rather poor, it's them to blame, […] because they are lazy, or whatever.

C calls it the "individualistic language of the 90s" that is still taught in schools and that would not be overcome if Razem were just to win the elections.

> C: I mean if kids are taught at schools that they should start their own business, they should care about themselves, that the state is the enemy, the less state the better, little government is the best government, you can't just change something with only elections. Because you have, you have no language to describe, I mean there is no language […] that would describe your political proposal.

A recalls how hard the interaction with potential voters had been due to "some neoliberal idea of justice engrained in minds," which made it almost impossible to talk about policies aimed at reducing inequality, like a wealth tax.

F traces the change in attitudes back to the leaders of Solidarność, who originally were fighting for better working conditions and changed their mindset after the transformation started.

> F: Mainly, the Polish transformation was definitely a neoliberal one. Like, this is the, like, the opposition inside of the former regime was workers' opposition. Mainly it was the Solidarity movement, which was fighting for better working conditions, better social services, these kind of things. And afterwards, 1989, most of the leaders just [turned] 180 degrees. It changed their attitude. And they decided ok, now, let's build only capitalism here. And there is only, there's no alternative. TINA. In a complete sense. Balcerowicz, very harsh reforms.

In politics, media, and the population, several interview partners have witnessed a dichotomy in worldviews. This is, however, not the traditional dichotomy between left and right, but a new cleavage between liberalism (with heavy neoliberal tendencies) and nationalist-conservativism.

In terms of political camps, the two worldviews are associated with a polarization between a nationalist-conservative right-wing camp with PiS as the strongest party and a (neo)liberal camp with PO as the strongest party. According to the interview partners, these two camps seem to operate like bubbles that have interacted less frequently with each other over the past years. For a party like Razem, this polarization is hard to overcome, as J describes.

> J: And I think that we [Poles] began to talk less to each other. Because there is this strong polarization between PiS and PO. That even, even in families people are talking less to each other because they don't want to... they don't want to fight. They want family events to be nice and peaceful. So there is this wall when you talk and [many people get] news only online […], and there is no exchange of thoughts. […] But yeah, it's, you know, people are, and it's harder to convince someone to... it's harder, you know, to spread this seed of doubt, that maybe neither PO or not PiS or maybe that in general there is something wrong in this world because there is very strong polarization.

In Polish media, the polarization is between a pro-PiS-government, pro-conservative camp, and a second anti-government camp, which is "mainly liberal" (F). There are few to no left media outlets with outreach.

The conservative backlash started early on in the 1990s. G describes how the framing of anti-abortion activists from the United States that fetuses are 'unborn children', who deserve protection from a woman's right to make decisions about her own body, found its way into the Polish discourse.

> G: The other thing of transformation was that in 1993 we had this huge debate about reproduction rights and the right to legal abortion. I was 16 then, so I quite well remember it. And it was, you know, very very, it was a huge impact. Because I was raised in the opinion that, you know, I am a woman, and I am deciding what to do with my own body and what to do. And it's my decision if I want to be a mother or something like that. My grandma had abortions and she was talking about it without shame because there was no shame those days. And then […] there was this huge debate, and these unborn children were put into the debate. From the very absurd subject of his, it became, you know, quite mainstream. It has changed during the last 20 to 25 years.

A mentions that the worldview supportive of the conservative backlash is "connected to the role of the Catholic Church and its biopolitical policies, there are stances on family, on women rights, on, yeah, biopolitics."

### 4.3.3   State of democracy

The interview partners talk about the development and state of democracy in Poland from two perspectives—one is the transition to representative democracy, which had major flaws, and the other is the potential threat to this form of democracy coming from the PiS government. From the first perspective, Poland has introduced a liberal form of democracy. Yet the transition to a neoliberal market economy that came with the introduction of a liberal democracy led to the exclusion of some parts of the population from the democratic process, as B describes.

> B: So of course we've gained much more democracy. Although for me, the situation when lots of people can't really participate in this democracy, because they're like really, well, that they're really, like economically somehow burdened. It's like, not full democracy. And also the majority of the governments were, more or less conservative, so for example weren't really encouraging women's participation. […] Basically, I think that the governments since 1989 could have done lots, like a lot more than they have done in terms of facilitating democratic processes.

C goes as far as to say that the institutions that were introduced were "typical neoliberal democracy, where politics is replaced with post-politics."

In terms of democratic participation, D does not believe that the genuine level of participation has changed over the years. Before the transformation, more people used to vote, not because they necessarily wanted to but because they felt they should do it. The share of people that vote has dropped significantly after transformation, with older age cohorts more prone to vote. Voter turnout in Poland averages at around 50 percent (IFES 2023), not so different from voter turnout in the US.

E sees the difference between PiS and previous governments before 2015 not necessarily in the fact that PiS passes laws and policies in disagreement with the constitution, as previous ruling parties had often broken the constitution as well. However, PiS "have no respect for some democratic standards," and they "don't even try to hide it." This relates to Müller's concept of populists in power and their attempt to colonize the state. He argues that populists "can undertake such colonization openly and with the support of their core claim to moral representation of the people" (Müller 2016, 45) as the state rightfully belongs to the 'true' people.

D thinks that PiS is a danger to "free open society" and that it respects neither democracy nor the constitution. Similarly, B believes that "harder times will come," with the spread of phone surveillance a sign of worsening conditions.

### 4.3.4   Actors other than PiS or Razem

The subsequent two sections are dedicated to Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) and Razem. However, the interview partners named and described several other actors, including other political parties, institutions, or single persons that have had a certain influence on the political landscape, which I will cover in this section.

At the time of the first field trip, Razem had just begun to reflect on the results of the local government elections of 2018 (Wybory Samorządowe, elections to the voivodeship assemblies, county councils, and municipality councils). Razem was one of ten electoral committees that competed in all 16 voivodeship elections. The results were meager, ranging from 0.77 percent of the vote share in Województwo świętokrzyskie (Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship in

Southeastern Poland) to 2.31 percent of the vote share in Województwo warmińsko-mazurskie (Warmian–Masurian Voivodeship in Northeastern Poland) (National Electoral Commission 2019a). One highlight of the local elections was the election of Razem member Szymon Surmacz as mayor of Leśna, a town of 4,368 in Lower Silesia. After the election, Surmacz resigned from his Razem membership, as he wanted to serve as mayor for all people without party affiliation.

The disappointing results led to internal debates about the necessity to form new or broader coalitions with other parties to fare better in the upcoming two elections of 2019 (European Parliament election in May, Polish parliamentary election in October). In the fall of 2018, discussions were held about what other parties to join forces with, with frequent mentions of SLD and a potential new movement surrounding Robert Biedroń. Biedroń had been initially associated with Ruch Palikota (Palikot's movement, a liberal party founded by former PO member Janusz Palikot) and was the first openly gay member of the Sejm. From 2014 to 2018, he was the mayor of Słupsk, a city of 90,000 in Northern Poland, becoming the first openly gay mayor in Poland. Biedroń eventually founded the party Wiosna (Spring) in February 2019.

At the time of the second field trip in May 2019, Razem had decided against forming a coalition with SLD and Wiosna for the European Parliament election. Instead, they formed the election committee coalition Lewica Razem (Left Together) with the small left parties Unia Pracy (UP, Labor Union) and Ruch Sprawiedliwości Społecznej (RSS, Social Justice Movement). However, the results for the European Parliament elections were even worse than for the local elections. Lewica Razem received 168,745 votes, or 1.24 percent, while Biedroń's Wiosna received 6.06 percent and reached thee mandates (National Electoral Commission 2019b). SLD on the other hand had joined the broad liberal opposition election committee coalition Koalicja Europejska (European Coalition) together with PO, the agrarian centrist party PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, Polish People's Party), the liberal party Nowoczesna (Modern), and Partia Zieloni (The Greens). This broad opposition coalition came in second behind PiS.

Before the 2019 Polish parliamentary elections, Razem officially changed its name from Partia Razem to Lewica Razem (Left Together) and joined the new election committee coalition Lewica (Left), which initially consisted of SLD, Wiosna, Lewica Razem, and Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party, PPS). However, this coalition had not been formed at the time of the interviews.

The interview partners discussed the differences between Razem and other parties in the left camp. RSS and UP, the two parties that joined Razem in a coalition for the European Parliament election, are mentioned as left parties that have better connections with elderly groups and

workers, and that represent a different generation than Razem. A coalition with them was believed to help broaden the electoral appeal to older voters and voters from smaller cities. With regards to differences in political programs, J mentions that the other two parties are "more focused on social and workers' situations," but are not as concerned with the climate crisis, global economics, and inequalities. Politicians from RSS and UP are viewed as trustworthy. Piotr Ikonowicz, the founder of RSS, had been fighting for the rights of tenants and against evictions in Warsaw. They have proven themselves a reliable force in local fights against injustices. The interview partners hope that this trust would transfer to the election committee coalition.

> Interviewer: People trust Ikonowicz?
>
> F: Yes, yes. They definitely do. He's kind of a symbol for every... For fighting against evictions because he is a very trustworthy. And for many people I feel like, from the left, old ones, they don't know us. And they didn't really, as I told you today, [know] we almost exist. And now they note. They start to learn. And of course, [UP] has many, like, old regional politicians. Like small ones. But in a small cities. They just know people. Like Jan Orkisz, he is the first one [on the list] in Małopolska. And he's been fighting against privations of healthcare for 20 years almost now. And people in his small city, Olkusz, forty, fifty thousand people there, living, they really trust him. Because he is like doing a good job since the 1990s. And we didn't have it. We're always, like, ok, oh, we are nice, young, energetic, but what have you all achieved? How trustworthy you are. You just get into parliament and do the same as the others. Now we can say, no, just look, we are with those guys. We have this kind of different face now, a little bit.

However, UP is also seen as a party that has lost a lot of influence. The Polish Socialist Party (PPS) is often mentioned as historically important and a strong influence on Razem. The interviewees make a distinction though, between the current iteration of PPS and the historical PPS, especially the PPS from between the world wars, which is seen as a model for left politics for Razem.

The opinions on SLD were very ambivalent at the time of the interviews. SLD is viewed as post-communist, as a descendent party from Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (PZPR, Polish United Workers' Party), which ruled Poland from 1948 to 1989. The support for SLD from the 1990s until the early 2000s was highlighted; one interview member also mentions the strong local structures and the number of members. In the public, they are still associated with left politics and receive votes from sympathizers for the left. They have a stable voting base. However, the interview partners make no secret of their dislike of several aspects of SLD.

First, some interview members identify a major difference in the internal culture between Razem and SLD. While Razem is seen as having a culture of involving people in the decision-making processes, SLD is seen as hierarchical with a leader telling the other party members what to do, or as bureaucratic. The interview partners describe the membership base of SLD as older and male, and not as appealing to younger activists as Razem is.

D: [S]ometimes we laughed that SLD are mainly middle-class men over 50, men who used to be people in charge somewhere. And local directors, some entrepreneurs, some of, maybe not now, because a lot of time [has passed] since transformation. But many of them were just members of communist party and people, I don't want to say they have problem with democracy, but sometimes they don't understand how it works. And they believe they are somehow the chosen ones. So that is a problem. And people used to laugh that in SLD people who are forty are said to be the young ones. And I think it's true. I know, I have a colleague who has been a member of SLD, I don't know, since she was 15 or something like that. She has never been a candidate to any kind of elections because there were also more important people. She was sometimes given some money just to put posters on the wall.

Second, several interview partners mentioned their disappointment about the missed opportunities of previous SLD-led governments and the neoliberal turn of SLD. They "did nothing for women's rights, they did nothing for gay rights" (D), "they compromised. They ran politics that was neoliberal" (J), "during the governments they could have done some left things and they didn't […] They didn't do anything like with right to abortion, with partner, like with same-sex marriage, like, nothing." (B). From a programmatic perspective, Razem sees itself as more inclusive and progressive, especially on women's rights, LGBT, and taxation.

Third, SLD is viewed as having a lot of baggage, not only relating to their neoliberal turn. Their government involvement is associated with corruption and scandals. The SLD government supported the Iraq War in 2003, which led to Polish soldiers being sent there as part of the 'Coalition of the Willing'. Poland was one of only four countries providing troops for the invasion force (the others being the US, the UK, and Australia). During the War on Terror, the SLD government allowed the CIA to run a secret black site prison on Polish territory in which terror suspects were held and tortured, a crime for which the European Court of Human Rights ordered Poland to pay the victims compensation (BBC News 2014).

This pessimistic evaluation was common among the interview partners, with one person commenting, "being anti-SLD was part of the roots of Partia Razem." The assessment of the failures of SLD from a left perspective is one of the major reasons Razem was founded.

The evaluation of Robert Biedroń is vaguer, marked with uncertainty about his political objectives, especially during interviews in the period before Wiosna was founded.

E: But he doesn't talk about his program. This is one big mystery. What does he want to do, yes. Does he want to do some stuff like us, or he wants to do some Macron stuff. He often says he's inspired by Emmanuel Macron.

Biedroń's long-standing support for human rights and LGBTQ communities, in particular, are beyond controversy. His movement supports gay rights, and women's rights, and was anticlerical, all positions Razem holds as well. The ideological foundation for his program is viewed more ambivalently, with one interview partner calling it neoliberal, another one characterizing it as "neat, nice politics." G on the other hand mentioned that left-wing thinkers

and experts helped write the program of Wiosna, but that their communication style was marked by "liberal language," talking to the middle class. F mentions that Wiosna is "definitely not trustworthy in case of housing, taxes, they don't say anything about taxes. In the, like social, solidarity things. And healthcare."

During the European Parliament election campaign, Biedroń was more successful in getting money and media attention. The former is seen from a critical standpoint as a lot of that money "was money from the business. Bigger and smaller and medium. And as you get the money from the business; the business is waiting for return" (F). However, Wiosna was also seen as a chance for Razem to be "real leftist" and not to wash down their election program to appeal to liberal middle-class voters.

The interview partners also talk about other actors that play a significant role in the political landscape or their political work. A mentions the more agrarian party Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) as the party with the strongest membership base in Poland at an estimated 100,000 and strong local structures. D views Partia Zieloni as a party that looks and works similar to Razem. There are some connections between Razem and the Greens, as D mentions that "it's not a secret that about one third of our members are from Green party." One prominent Green member that helped found Razem was Marcelina Zawisza, who is now one of the six Razem parliamentarians in the Sejm. On policy issues, D and E point out that Razem is favoring nuclear energy, which the Greens are against. Razem also believes there needs to be a slower transition from coal than the Greens propose to find employment opportunities first for displaced workers. The liberal camp—or the liberal right, as F calls them—is one of the two big camps that has dominated Polish politics over the last years. While the interview partners do not talk much about PO it is clear that PO is ideologically opposite from Razem, and that they offered many opportunities to attack them for their policies. At the time of the interviews it was thus clear that Razem would not enter coalitions lightheartedly, excluding liberal or centrist parties, and debating extensively if older left parties (SLD, PPS, UP) or newer parties at the time (Wiosna, RSS) were trustworthy partners.

Several interview partners mention the strength of the far-right, and the influence it can exert. There are fascist parties gaining strength, but also regular people exhibiting more xenophobic behavior, even if they vote liberal. The far-right has seats in parliament. More importantly, the complete political discourse has shifted to the right, as E explains.

> E: [The right have gained] power to talk to [the] people. […] It never was before, in television some people talking about some fascist agenda, yes? Some talking about that immigrants, […] should be locked [up], that the leftist should be locked [up]. And no-one even has problems with these... these people. The people who hear that stuff they, it's, it is normalizing for them, yes? [The] population [is

shifting] to the right, yes, politically, so that's worrying, that's... this aggression, yes? In politics, it's worrying.

D mentions that the far-right has taken over both the Independence March on 11 November in Warsaw as well as the commemorations on the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August. She criticizes the role of PiS, which pretends that all participants in these public gatherings are Polish patriots, even though everyone knows that there are nationalists "or even Nazis."

A final actor that was mentioned by several different interview partners as an important political influence is the Catholic Church. The Church is viewed as having power and strong bonds to formal political powers, influencing or preventing social policies. The Church's stances on family and women's rights are mentioned as examples in which the Church has a major influence on "biopolitical polices" (A). The Church receives money from the government. The transformation period led the Catholic Church to become a dominant official player, with Catholicism the only religion influencing public life.

Indeed, ruling PiS politicians and the Church have shared close ties. PiS politicians have been guests and supportive of the controversial religious radio station, Radio Maryja. After the death of President Lech Kaczyński in the Smolensk air disaster in 2010, the Archbishop of Kraków, Cardinal Dziwisz, granted the request of the Kaczyński family to bury Lech and Maria Kaczyński in a crypt in the Wawel Cathedral, sparking controversy (Newsweek Polska 2010). In 2016, the Archbishop of Kraków crowned Jesus Christ King of Poland. President Duda and several MP were attending the mass (gazeta.pl 2016a).

Summing up, Razem views the neoliberal transformation of Poland similar to how the researchers discussed in chapter three view the transformation: as a process of unevenly integrating Poland into a global capitalist division of labor, which has led to new forms of exploitation and increased poverty and inequality. Attitudes shifted towards more conservative or individualistic values, and democratic participation in terms of voter turnout has stayed relatively low. Other parties, specifically SLD, are viewed with skepticism.


4.4   Razem's Evaluation of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS):

A substantial part of the interviews focused on Prawo i Sprawiedliwość and its performance since taking over the Polish government in 2015. This section focuses on how Razem views PiS, its politics, and potential dangers of a PiS-led government for Razem.

### 4.4.1 Policies of PiS

On policies, all interview partners highly praise several elements of PiS's social and economic policies, while being more critical of PiS climate and energy policies, EU relations, and their approach to history politics. The interview partners condemn PiS's attacks on women's rights but are more ambivalent about PiS's political initiatives regarding the justice system. These latter two controversies will be discussed in the next subsections.

On economic and social policies, the interview partners mention several positive PiS policy initiatives, i.e., raising minimum wages, reducing the extent of so-called junk labor contracts, or establishing trade-free Sundays. J recalls what raising the minimum wage meant in her work environment.

> J: I think that PiS also made a few good things. So I think it's also worth mentioning, that, when I talk [at] my work, not just with physicians but also talked with nurses, with women who clean. And I know that their salaries went up because of PiS introducing, our, also Partia Razem program, that, so setting a minimum hourly wage. Because […] when there was PO there were a lot of people that were working for two or three or four Zlotys per hour, this is very very very low. And when they said that the minimum is 13, that's a huge improvement. So, in hospital they worked about eight or nine an hour, Zlotys, and now they earn 13 or 14, so it's, I think it's a good thing.

The by far most-praised policy is the introduction of the family allowance system 'Rodzina 500+', which the interview partners view as a game changer in Polish social politics.

> B: So for sure in terms of economic or social policies in terms of like, for example distribution, I think that what they've done is like the biggest reform that is really impressive. I mean, 500+. And obviously the rationale behind it isn't like, crystal clear and so good and also there's some specific limitations that affect, for example, families that have only one child or single parents etc. So that's not ideal, although, I'm impressed, personally. That was like a really important move. And I think it's in a way groundbreaking. So, I believe that even if they lose the next elections […] no-one will dare to take [the reform] back. And in terms of redistribution and left politics, I mean, you know, on this level that's great. Or at least that's really good.

> E: [I]t was the biggest social program since, I don't know, I don't remember that big social spending in Poland. And people liked it, yes, because we never had, and it is quite popular in the West, yes? Kindergeld in Germany for example. And we never had something like that. And it was changed for the better.

> G: Of course 500+ changed some things, because when I was collecting signatures for our start in this election, I was talking to young mothers and they were talking like 'You know, I have a job, I want to work, but if I have this 500+ I can afford to go to the vacation or I can afford to go to the dentist'. So that's, that's what changed. People are safe economically.

> C: This famous program. Well, actually, it's the first Polish transfer, large first social transfer after the fall of communism.

The introduction of a policy that is considered leftist and in line with Razem's political approach meant that Razem members had a harder time attacking PiS on economic or social policy. The PiS government was remarkably successful in its implementation of social transfers. Razem only criticized minor aspects of the program—that only families with two children or more

could receive the money at the beginning (a condition that has been changed since the introduction), or that certain groups and families were excluded from the payments initially. PiS's initiative to start a similar program for housing called 'Mieszkanie Plus,' however, was mentioned by one interview partner, who described it with a lot of skepticism.

> F: Because they tried to make something about housing. And it's about House+, but in fact they instead of building a lot of social housing, a lot of municipal housing, they are building a little bit of housing which is not more affordable than the normal market ones. And at the same time they implemented a law that can allow the governors to throw people out of their houses if they don't pay. So evictions are now unfortunately in this program. And they are possible. Which is a disgrace.

On other policy issues, the interview partners are more critical. The controversy surrounding one of the last and largest primeval forests in Europe, the Białowieża Forest, emerged as the PiS government supported large-scale logging. Two interview partners commented on the deterioration of the Polish position in international relations. Finally, several interview partners commented on the reactionary history politics of the ruling party. As an example, G mentions the PiS-led government's support of the remembrance of the Żołnierze wyklęci (doomed soldiers), underground soldiers that fought communism at the end and after World War II, and their support for nationalists.

### 4.4.2   Controversies and threats by PiS

The interview partners focus on four key issues when asked about what changed under the PiS-led government or what Razem currently perceives as a threat by PiS. These were, first, the conservative backlash in the fields of women's rights and concerning the LGBTQ community; second, the rise in nationalism and racism; third, corruption and attempts to expand control in institutions; and fourth, the reform of the justice system.

The backlash in the field of women's rights reached a boiling point when PiS first attempted to restrict legal access to abortions. PiS is identified as a threat to women's rights, but also a threat to the safety of the LGBTQ community.

> G: But I think we are very less, less safe with this, you know, human rights. Because there is a huge anti-LGBT agenda nowadays. And, you know, we are talking about abortion again and again and again. So that's what changed.

As mentioned earlier, the ideological foundations of this backlash have several roots: the family ideology of the far-right, the influence of the Catholic Church, and the change in attitudes during the 1990s. G also mentions the appeal of these policies to young boys who are "buying it because they are searching for some scapegoat to acknowledge what has gone with their lives, why it doesn't get better. Well, people of LGBT or women are quite a good scapegoat."

The majority of interviewees mention the rise in nationalism, racism, and antisemitism. PiS's major contribution appears to be the racist framing of immigrants and refugees.

> J: One of their topics in campaign was [being] anti-immigrant, anti-Islam. And they shifted the whole public opinion because of that. A few years ago when there were polls about 'what do you think what Poland should do, we should help the immigrants and people who escaped the war?,' the vast majorities said yes, that we should. And after these stories there is just the opposite.

> E: And they're scaring people by immigrants, yes? By some sort of Soros stuff.

> B: Obviously, they've been doing like lots of really awful awful stuff in terms of fueling like nationalism and some and really anti-refugee attitudes and that has been really bad.

The interview partners do not go into more detail on the issue of anti-refugee policies. Later policies have shown that PiS is following a two-fold strategy. On the one hand is the support for Ukrainian refugees, hundreds of thousands of which entered Poland after the Russian annexation of Crimea, and many more after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. On the other hand, PiS escalated its policy towards refugees from non-European countries during the 2021–2022 Belarus–European Union border crisis, enforcing push-backs of migrants and refugees at the border with Belarus (Reuters 2021).

The attempts to expand control over institutions stretch across all fields of public life. F contextualizes this political strategy as an attempt by PiS to control more aspects of social life, similar to Becker's description of national-conservative neo-nationalist parties and their attempt to re-politicize the state.

> F: At the same time [PiS is] attacking the citizens' freedoms. [They] are taking more and more institutions, controlling tribunals, controlling courts, controlling media, controlling institutions, controlling financing cultural events and these kind of things. So getting kind of more… totalitarian is too much, of course, but more like controlling every part of your social life.

E describes a similar pattern.

> E: [PiS] […] tries to own every institution in Poland. The judges, yes, the Supreme Court, and they try to grab every institution that's not, that parliament doesn't own, yes? And they explain to people that it is necessary to change for the better, yes?

A and E describe two examples of how Razem reacts to these attempts, one focusing on media strategy, and one showing solidarity with a local struggle.

> A: We try to criticize PiS on being corrupt, we try to—apart from the more worldview issues—we try to attack them on, say, I don't know, things connected to salaries of government members, things connected now to the scandals connected to banks and supervisory board of banks and so it was kind of a connected corruption proposal that one of these members made. So those are the issues we try to attack.

> E: Partia Razem was defending our city theater. […] Our government, when [PiS] came to power they changed the people, they changed people who worked in our theater in Gliwice. They changed it from

musical theater to just theater. And Razem was defending workers and actors who worked in that theater.

The interview partners evaluate the reform of the justice system from two perspectives. Similar to the coverage in Western media, several interview partners view the attempts to control the judicial system as a danger. The independence of the courts is threatened; PiS tries to control or own the courts. At the same time, Razem members felt like the courts had not served the majority of the people in the past, and some interview partners found it difficult to defend them. C argues that there should be social control over the Supreme Court, and even though he disagrees with PiS's political approach, he had not been keen on organizing the protests in defense of the Polish Supreme Court either. B points to this ambivalence in the following segment.

> B: All these things connected with constitution and courts, that's really destabilizing the situation. Although like I would say for a big faction of society... Like people don't really care. And personally, I mean, I was attending some of those protests, even like leading some of them. But, like, deep in my heart, I haven't felt that it's like that important. Because courts have been ruling, like, they weren't that great. And I think what PiS like recognized really well is that people really have bad experiences with courts. The majority of people had some, you know, some kind of bad experiences with courts. So, just taking some power from them, just fuels just some, like, sentiments.

### 4.4.3   A break with neoliberalism?

The PO-led government from 2007 to 2015 had been continuing the neoliberal development model introduced in the 1990s. One of my research interests was thus to investigate if Razem thought of the change in government as a break with neoliberalism as well. How much transformative power does the PiS-led government have, and how anti-neoliberal are the policies of the ruling party?

The social and labor market policies advanced by PiS indicate a major break with neoliberalism in the policy arena. Major policy initiatives like 'Rodzina 500+', the introduction of minimum wages, or the attempts to make housing affordable are all indications that support this finding. This promised change was a voting motive for many voters, as pointed out by H in the following segment.

> H: PiS changed that. Before, most of us weren't thinking about something like that. Something like social benefits… We couldn't get something like this. People like Balcerowicz were [telling] us [such policies would] ruin our economy. And we have a crisis, you know. I think, on the other hand, in this [2015] election, people didn't really vote for PiS. But they voted for an end of neoliberalism, for an end of Platforma Obywatelska, neoliberalism, you know. And they really want to see a change in our system.

After introducing 'Rodzina 500+', PiS did not implement any other major social policy reform. E describes two phases in the PiS-led government between 2015 and 2019. The first phase with

Beate Szydło as prime minister saw the introduction of 'Rodzina 500+'. In 2018, Mateusz Morawiecki became prime minister; a move that, according to E, showed that PiS was close with the banking sector. Morawiecki used to be chair of Bank Zachodni WBK, one of Poland's biggest banks, from 2007 to 2015. C evaluates this change in personnel as a populist strategy, to do different things at the same time. PiS offers both social policies and a continuation of economic policies considered neoliberal. On the one hand they cut taxes to court private companies, and expand the scope of special economic zones. On the other hand they introduce social transfers and push for ideas like providing a warm meal for every student at school.

A has a similar analysis, saying, "the line of this government is not as consequently neoliberal as it's used to be [during the rule of] PO, although it is still very much neoliberal."

Razem members share the analysis that PiS was voted into office because voters denounced neoliberalism. In power, PiS introduced far-reaching social and economic policies, showing that the break with neoliberalism was not only election rhetoric. However, in its later governmental practice its course became more ambiguous. At the same time, PiS extended its power to state and local institutions.


## 4.5 Organizing Resistance against Neoliberalism

The main body of data gathered through the interviews is about how Razem tries to organize resistance against neoliberalism. The answers and segments provided by the interview partners can be clustered into six categories: (1) The structure and development of the party; (2) the political approach and the meaning of left politics; (3) policies and topics; (4) strategies and tactics; (5) struggles and challenges; (6) political successes.


### 4.5.1 Structure and development of Razem

Razem emerged in May 2015 in Warsaw as Partia Razem. In June 2019, the party officially changed its name to Lewica Razem (Left Together); the shortened version Razem is still used in official communication.

The following overview of the structure is based on the party statues, adopted in October 2021 (Lewica Razem 2021). The national structure of Razem consists of a Kongres (congress), a Rada Krajowa (national council), a Zarząd Krajowy (national board), a Krajowa Komisja Rewizyjna (national audit committee), and a Krajowa Komisja Wyborcza (national election committee). Additionally, a Partyjny Sąd Koleżeński (party peers court) works as a Court of Arbitration for party members.

The congress meets once a year and is the highest body of the party, deciding on the by-laws, policy platforms, and the main directions of the party, as well as electing the other bodies. Participants of the congress are delegates, the number and selection of which are determined by resolutions of the national council.

The national council is the second highest body, responsible for developing and supervising the implementation of program documents, supervising thematic circles, developing positions and financial documents for the party, supervising and potentially overruling or dismissing the national board, examining appeals against the national board, and supporting and approving candidates' lists and coalition negotiation teams. The national council consists of sixteen representatives of the voivodeships, one representative of foreign districts, additional councilors elected by congress, members of the national board, and members of the Sejm, the Senate, or the European Parliament who are members of Razem during the duration of their terms.

The national board is the executive body of Razem. The national board is acting as spokespersons for Razem, implementing resolutions and policies adopted by the congress and the national council, conducting the day-to-day political business, managing the party's activities, coordinating and supervising local bodies, managing finances and properties, employing people, overruling or suspending local councils, appointing a Secretariat, and managing the media policy. The current statutes state that the national board consists of at least three members. There are no provisions in the statute defining certain positions within the national board.

The local structures consist of Okręgi (districts), Koła (circles), and Struktury wojewódzkie (voivodeship structures). Districts are the basic organizational unit; all members of Razem belong to a district. A district covers the territory of a least one powiat (county) and should have at least 15 members. Districts have their own general assembly and district boards with at least three members. If it is not possible to elect a district board, a district coordinator may be appointed for one year. Districts may elect a district council if they have at least 60 members, consisting of at least six people.

Circles are auxiliary organizations to improve the operations within a district, creating and supporting local initiatives. Voivodeship structures exist in voivodeships with more than one district organization to coordinate activities. They consist of voivodeship councils, composed of members of district boards, delegates, and councilors of voivodeship parliaments, powiat councils, municipal councils, and mayors. Razem also has instruments of direct democracy, namely referenda, where all party members can participate in major decisions.

The main financial sources of the party are membership fees and state funding. Every member determines their membership fee by the capacity they are able and willing to pay. According to E, when comparing the different parties and what share of their budget is coming from membership fees (relative to other sources), Razem is in second place, only behind PiS. State funding was the major source of finance for the party during the period of research (2015-2019). Because the party received more than 3 percent of the votes in the 2015 parliamentary elections, Razem became eligible for party funding for the subsequent legislative period. This amounted to close to 800,000 Złotys per quarter, according to one board member, or around 3.2 million per year (around € 736,000 in 2019). Because many activities of the party are financed by state funding—which is dependent on the electoral success—the respondents were discussing the importance of winning elections in the fall of 2019. Without proper funding afterward, the party would need to change.

> J: But in order to grow we need people and we need money. So that's why these elections now and in fall are so important. Because it will be very hard—if we lose public funding, to still do the work that we are doing.

How do these formal structures on paper relate to the actual development of the party? Razem developed through open meetings, culminating in a founding congress from 16 to 17 May 2015. The interview partners who co-founded Razem recall the energy and progress made in building momentum early on.

> J: In 2015 and 2016 we were rising. We had then about 3,000 members I think, so we thought we were, we will be, we would be spreading and spreading and spreading.

> A: [I]n the first year it was easier to have more and more activities, more enthusiasm, maybe, but at first it was, like, very enthusiastic. I think that it was. Very very full of energy.

The first elected national board consisted of nine people (5 women, and 4 men), including the later members of the 2019-2023 Sejm Maciej Konieczny, Adrian Zandberg, and Marcelina Zawisza. The first national council consisted of 21 people (10 women, 11 men), including the future major of Leśna, Szymon Surmacz (Partia Razem 2015b). At the time of writing this thesis, the national board consists of five people (3 women, 2 men); the national council consists of 46 people (24 women, 22 men) (Lewica Razem 2023).

The interview partners report varying sizes and activities of local structures. D reports that in the beginning Razem had 41 district organizations, but the number shrunk over time. In June 2019, Razem consisted of 38 district organizations, most of them in bigger cities and more concentrated in Western Poland. In the Województwo opolskie (Opole Voivodeship) in Southwestern Poland there were around 40 members organized in one district organization in May 2019. Razem Lublin in the East of Poland consisted of only around five to six active

members. In Województwo małopolskie (Lesser Poland Voivodeship) in Southern Poland, the first meetings of Razem brought around 100 people together in Kraków in 2015. Since then, the numbers have stagnated. At the end of 2018, there were two district organizations in Kraków and Tarnów, as well as circles in Nowy Targ and Nowy Sącz in the South of the district. In the Województwo śląskie (Silesian Voivodeship), there were four district organizations at the time of the interviews: Razem Częstochowa, Razem Podbeskidzie, Razem Śląsk, and Razem Zagłębie. There used to be five district organizations. Razem Śląsk had around 70 party members, 20 to 30 of which were considered active by one interview partner. Razem Częstochowa and Razem Podbeskidzie were reported to have around 30 members each. Razem Zagłębie had around 5-7 active members left. Altogether, E estimated that Razem had around 200-220 members in the whole voivodeship.

Initially, Razem did not have its own youth organization. A remembers that many people in Razem did not think it would make sense to form a separate youth with considering the low average age of party members, which for many meant that the party already represented young people. Several young people got together in early 2019 to found Młodzi Razem (Young Together), the now official youth wing of Razem, as one founding member of the youth wing describes.

> H: We are activists in Razem. And we were thinking, you know, we are meeting, we text with [each other]. […] We [thought] there should be more spaces for young people in Razem. We meant we should organize us in some way. […] Within two months, we created [Młodzi Razem]. So our almost ready to work youth wing. In the party, we are almost a hundred activists. […] This needs to be a Razem youth. And we are in Razem. But we need our space and we need to have a space to make our own decision. […] I think the function of the youth movement is motivating young people to join us and showing them about politics isn't as scary as they say about it. And showing them about who we should be, we should take a part in our political lives, you know.

Razem's structures also allows for working groups to form. However, A observed some fluctuations in their functionality.

> A: We have some sort of working groups on different topics. So that's how this diversification looks like. We have like in Kraków we have a working group on feminist issues which is pretty strong, pretty, I'd say, autonomous, we have like work group that is focused on city issues. More like about, I don't know, urban planning, the city council and so on, which is the group I am pretty much interested in. We used to have a working group about like economics, not functional anymore, and probably that is also how it is organized in bigger cities while in smaller ones it's more like ad hoc projects.

One the national level, working groups can be in charge of developing the program, especially in the period between 2015 and 2018, when there were no elections to campaign for. The working groups were open for members to join and participate. J took that chance and eventually became coordinator of her working group for a year, which developed Razem's

healthcare platform. To her, the working group experience was positive, with the mandate ending in a successful unanimous vote in favor of the party's new healthcare platform.

Interview partners recollect that the national council usually meets once a month and regularly communicates online via platforms like Slack. In the fall of 2018, it consisted of around 40 people, but it had shrunk the year before from a high of 50 people. The national board meets once a week. The district council of Razem Śląsk also meets every week.

One example of the participation rates in referenda is one held in the fall of 2018 after the local elections. The party members were asked if Razem should enter coalition talks with parties like SLD and a future movement of Biedroń. Around 800 members participated in the vote, with around 500 party members in favor of exploratory talks.

An interesting phenomenon in Razem is how the party deals with name recognition. Adrian Zandberg is by far the most recognized leadership figure publicly. His publicity is rooted in a political TV debate in the 2015 Sejm elections for which he received favorable reviews. At the same time, Razem's formal structures do not allow for a party leader within the national board. The interview partners reflect on this, arguing that the party can make use of his public perception without him demanding a greater leadership role internally.

> F: And in the beginning, we […] thought that we are definitely not the leader-based organization. We don't want it.
>
> J: I like Adrian but I also know from within that he represents us. He is very smart and has a lot of great ideas. But I know that as it goes to our internal functioning and [decision-making processes], he does not have such an authority to convince everyone to command 'I want it like this' and everyone votes or agrees.
>
> F: Of course, no one imagines the managerial board without him. And of course, he's important. But internally he […] is not the boss. […] That's also kind of division of labor, if you are in the media all the time, you can't really do the internal politics well. And of course, when he says something, writes on our forums or something, or says in a meeting, of course, it is important. It has kind of more weight. But he's not, he's not perceived as a leader for the inside, he's a leader for the outside. When you, for example, financial stuff. And he doesn't know anything about how the party works financially. But it's not his job.
>
> G: I'm not... I'm not troubled about it anymore. Because Adrian says, well, I'm the face, that's it. You tell me what to do. So it's not like he makes his own decision without consulting each other. So that's ok. So, well, this is how media works, so. They have to have this leader, and ok, let it be somebody, because he is good at it.
>
> A: They [the board] divide their tasks internally. [I]n practice there are people that are doing more political work and more organizational work but more of the people that do political work they also do some organizational stuff, maybe apart from Adrian Zandberg because he is well-known, he has to do a lot of media stuff, but yeah.

In terms of membership, there has been some fluctuation over time. Initially, Razem was well received and built up a strong membership base of around 2,500 quite quickly. In June 2019, Razem had 2,013 paying party members, according to a national board member. Razem also

has supporters who register their personal data with the party but are not official members. Combining members and supporters, Razem had about 3,000 people supporting it in mid-2019. G explains the decline in membership is due to many reasons, among them that people were tired and that they had their hopes disappointed after Razem did not make the 5 percent threshold in the 2015 parliamentary elections. All interview partners confirm that there had been a stagnation in membership numbers after the initial energy of the early months transformed into political daily business. While the party brands itself as a feminist party and has been deeply involved with feminist protests, the majority of its members are men. D mentions, "we are a feminist party but I think less than one fourth of our members are women." In June 2019, a third of the members were women. One reason why Razem is attractive to members is that they can participate in many party activities. As J puts it, "In Razem you can do plenty of stuff when you are not in any board. Just as a member."

When Razem was founded, the founding members introduced party structures that facilitate both representative and participatory democratic elements. In 2022, the term period for national bodies was two years, for all local bodies one year (Lewica Razem 2021), and the decision structures demand a high level of cooperation from the local to the national level. These high democratic standards emerged out of a belief that many parts of society need to be democratized. In terms of historic or contemporary models, many members could draw on experiences from grassroots organizations, while others had no previous experience.

> A: And the difference [of Razem to] SLD is like also pretty visible, that it […] has pretty grassroots origins. I mean, of course there are for instance a lot of people that used to be a part of activist left on various organizations in the past, but it also has succeeded to politicize a lot of people that were previously politically non-active. So that's pretty much a success. And there is also a huge difference of habitus, of way of being in a party.

When directly asked about historic or contemporary parties that Razem has used as models, one interviewee responds that it "doesn't model itself after anything. It's more some sort of commonplace leftist ideas of direct democracy". However, two interview partners also talk about the obvious links to Podemos. PPS and its values from before World War II are mentioned several times as the major historic model. In addition, some members came from the Młodzi Socjaliści (Young Socialist Movement) and the Partia Zieloni (Green Party).

The habitus mentioned by A seems unique in Poland in how internal democracy within the party functions, and how the debate culture evolved. G mentions that the interaction with social movements led to Razem taking over the "culture of doing politics" of social movements. Razem members hold themselves and their party to exceedingly high standards. At the same time, these standards at times are frustrating when they are not reached or when they come into

conflict with the day-to-day challenges of running a party. J for example was skeptical at the time of the interview of the effectiveness of the national board and the national council, considering each body's size.

> J: I think that our collective national board is not working as well as we thought it would be. I think it's too big. So if I were now to create my perfect national board I think it would be three to five people at most. And I would like them to be known as leaders. I don't have a problem with that. And I would like them to be responsible for... more personally responsible for the party. Because with our structure now we have a national board, which is more executive. And media representation. And we have a national [council] that decides about program and long-term strategy. And it's too many people. And I don't want a dictatorship or one leader which is main, great. But I think that about 50 people deciding, it's too much.

As mentioned in earlier sections there were disagreements within the party about entering new coalitions for the upcoming elections (which Razem eventually did). For one thing, this led to the national board disagreeing with the national council. During the second research trip, the disagreements subsided because of the uniting spirit of campaigning, as G describes in the following segment.

> G: There are two things, because one thing is that, when we were talking half a year ago, we were very divided. Because of this fractions, and the national [council] not agreeing with the executive board. And not following the voice of the people. And then we had, you know, this pre-campaign, collecting signatures for the start in the elections. And it quite united the people of Razem. Because, you know, there was this issue to do. A task to do. It was real, it was quite close to do. To make. And I think these divides now are not so big. We had agreed about the general goal of Razem. And we are moving forward, so. Now it's good. But I think it's not a question of Razem, it's a question of leftist groups anywhere in the world, that when we don't have this close and real goal we are starting to judge each other. What happened that we are not succeeding? Maybe we are not pure enough? We are not trying enough. So that was, that's what was happening in Razem.

To B, the episode in the fall of 2018 revealed to her the threat of "alienation of power" with people in leadership positions. She also missed civility in the discussion within the party after the lost local elections, concluding that it is impossible to create a political party with safe spaces with appreciative communication between its bodies and among its members. H on the other hand mentions that factions within the party provide safe spaces, at least internally, to discuss and share openly one's political stance. While the factions are small, H argues they try to push certain ideas about the course of the party, i.e., a more moderate social democratic stance, or a more radical socialist stance. C, on the other hand, argues that while the factions exist, they do not interfere too much with how the party functions.

> C: [T]here is no link between those factions and the party politics and the party program. So they are two different things. On the one level there are some discussion, there are some factions that people label themselves this or another way. But it has nothing to do with the way of how party act. And the party acts like typical social democracy. It actually doesn't know what it wants to be.

The flat hierarchy within the national board has its advantages and disadvantages. G describes how every tactical decision within the board has to be discussed, with all members having an

equal voice. However, she also describes the utopian nature of non-hierarchical boards, and the limits to it when applying them in reality. Some board members might be more decisive, show more initiative, have stronger opinions or more ideas, and try to talk others into joining their opinion. Similarly, there are limits to open and equal discussions when decisions have to be made quickly.

On the local level, the slow speed of decision-making is also prevalent. The opinions on these processes among the interview partners vary. E stresses the positives about their approach.

> E: We have kind of a free hand in […] in Razem Śląsk. It is the most democratic organization I have ever been in; everything is voted [for]. It's kind of slow, but it's, I think it's justified by the things we do. I think […] it's the first organization I have something to say. And it is heard, yes. By every other members in Silesia, or in upper management. We often discuss, not always we agree with each other, there are some arguments, yes, but it's how it works, yes. I think it's how democracy works. [I]n most of the parties in Poland there is some sort of leader, one, he or she tells people what to do. And […] we do this another way.

A makes the comparison of how he perceives Razem to be different, in this aspect, from SLD.

> A: I mean I don't have like good knowledge of the internal structure, of internals of SLD, but I imagine it as being pretty much like a bureaucratic and formal organization [compared to Razem], at least when it comes to ways of being pretty democratic. I mean it's a different question how this [democratic approach] can be converted into how to mend influence in party politics, it's pretty difficult, but for sure it's something different to the [activists] in Razem party.

C has a more critical stance, stressing the last point A makes about how internal democracy relates to political influence.

> C: We meet a lot... This is what we are famous for. We just meet a lot, we talk a lot, we meet a lot. Which is really cool that we're quite a talkative party. But when it comes to action there is no consensus and there's always pressure that the consensus should be [reached] democratic[ally]. But this is not what a party is about, being democratic, well it can be democratic to a certain degree and then you just have to start thinking politically. And just use all your means and resources to achieve, to achieve what you can.

### 4.5.2  Political approach of Razem, meaning of left politics

The interview partners talk at length about the political approach of Razem, from which we can infer the purpose and meaning of left politics and the characterization of left politics by the respondents.

All interview partners consider Razem to be a left party, and believe that it represents something new for left politics in contemporary Poland, as exemplified by this statement by J.

> J: [I]t's not enough to be just an activist. To organize protest. But you have to have parliamentary representation. […] This parliamentary representation has to be new and fresh and not connected to people who built post-communist left in Poland.

J also argues that Razem was built because building a grassroots movement did not work. Nevertheless, she also mentions that Razem is not solely focusing on electoral politics.

> J: And I think that for every local left movement that is a challenge now. To build, to change people's hearts and minds. And I think, you know, we have small resources and we have to make profit whenever we can. We are not in some comfortable position to say that we only do parliamentary politics. We... we do what we can and we have to do. And hope for the best.

F provided a bit more context as to why Razem focuses more on elections and became a party in the current political system rather than, for example, building up social support or revolutionary movements.

> F: The decision was made […] by small actions. That we will concentrate more on the electoral side. In a sense, ok, we have those three elections. And we have to concentrate on that, so we have to concentrate on campaigning, we have to concentrate on the media and this kind of things. That's why we didn't create street based social center based organization. […] If we went the other way around, of course we could say ok, these elections are not so important because we are doing some for twenty years, we're building something. And in fact, you can't really in this small organization do both. And yes, the decision to some extent was made that we will be a political party, not a social movement organization. And that means that if it didn't work and we will lose this elections and next elections, we will have to, like… the organization collapses and we will have to invent it again in a different way. Maybe then take the other, the other route, the other way. I don't know. But if it will be a success in the sense that we will get some members from the European Parliament and some members of the national parliament, then we will probably have this possibility of making possible the same, because then we will be bigger to do both. So, that's a risk, that's always a choice you have to make.

In comparing Razem to the old left, Razem connects social and labor issues with issues about the climate crisis and inequalities in an inclusionary populist style. H considers Razem a "real left party" because it does not spare a topic—Razem connects social and labor issues with LGBTQ rights and women's rights issues as well as climate change. G argues that Razem's mission was to renew leftist politics in Poland and to frame left politics as more than identity politics, which she says dominated leftist discourse in Poland for several years. There is also a multiplier motive in the way Razem approaches politics and how it politicizes new activists who had never been engaged with party politics before.

> J: Now in parliament there are mostly people in their 50s and 60s, and our activists are 20, 30, 40. So we have, we personally have time to learn to grow, to spend a few years building connections. I don't know if our planet has got the time, but we personally have and I don't think that will go away. I think that it's a good place to start to build on it again.

The previous statement indicates the pragmatism and realism some activists exhibit, despite the urgency of their political approach.

Most interview partners consider Razem to be a social democratic party. C argues that Razem is "the very first Polish social democratic party after 1989". B argues that in the beginning, Razem wanted Poland to become a "decent, like Nordic social democracy." Members of Razem use the term social democracy to relate to the welfare states of Nordic countries or Germany

positively. The connections some interview members draw to PPS of the interwar period, and how left politics are discussed in general, also show that they disconnect their usage of the term social democracy from how many social democratic parties in Western European countries have evolved into more neoliberal parties. The following statement by E illustrates this point.

> E: [I]t's some kind of mix of political vision in Scandinavia, yes? In Europe, in Canada. […] We look at […] social democratic states, yes, where Social Democracy has some kind of power I guess. And we're picking the best solution from each of them. And we're trying to implement this in Poland. Yes, that's our program. And this plus our historical social democratic parties like PPS, Polish Worker Party, yes it was party from, between wartime. And that's our vision. We want to make a country, which... which is helping people. Which is helping people that are in need. Which is not ruled by the Church or the rich people, yes, where rich people, buying laws and are higher than the justice system.

When comparing other countries and parties, several people state they position Razem close to Podemos, SYRIZA, or die Linke. However, F also observes that Razem is different from Podemos. It does emulate Podemos' style, colors, etc., but it did not originate from a broad social movement. There was no social base to create a big leftist party in Poland. However, F stresses many leftist-minded people like him wanted to become active. E, F, C, and J also all argue that politics are local, are carried out in a national context, and that Poland is different and is not comparable to Spain or Greece. To Razem, leftist politics has to be understood as relational to the existing political power blocs and class relations.

> F: So yes, we have to, we still have this narrative that we are not the liberal right, not the authoritarian right, we are the left and we are... we can give you the social reforms without taking your basic freedoms.

Compared to old leftist parties, the main differences are the democratic approach lived internally and the lack of baggage. The former includes both the democratic culture mentioned in the previous section as well as the decision to not become a leader-centric party. The latter is connected to the criticism of SLD.

In their daily work, Razem at times pursues a strategy of a 'useful left.' This means the party tries to give support to local movements, strikes, or protests by providing infrastructure, media attention, social media support, or just solidarity. The party also experimented with giving legal support and council to people. In supporting people locally, Razem wants to gain trust, to become a trustworthy force, similar to local phenomena like Piotr Ikonowicz, the founder of RSS who supports tenants who are threatened to be evicted.

> E: But we must take our long run. We must slowly show people that there's an alternative, yes. That we are not the evil, some evil people that the Church and the conservatives tell that we are.

To C, being a leftist today has not changed much over the past decades.

C: Like within the political spectrum, being left hasn't changed so much since, like, 19th century. I mean, we're still fighting for the same things. So this whole bullshit about like lifestyle politics, Tony Blair and bla bla bla. It's simply not true. Of course, we are fighting under the different conditions. Which are far better than it was like 250, 150 years ago. I don't deny that. But it's still about the conflict between labor and capital.

Several respondents talk about radicalism. H wants Razem's communication to be more revolutionary and to be less moderate. G argues that the system cannot fundamentally be changed without revolution and that she would like to see a change beyond capitalism. However, she decided to join a political party to fight for reforms, not become a revolutionary. F argues that many members of Razem are socialists, in the form of social democrats that fight for a better system within the parliamentary democracy of Poland today. The activists of Razem argue for progressive policies. C stands out a bit in saying that Razem should reconcile with communism "as a sort of project for the future. But it will be different communism. Fully automated." B argues that she radicalized a lot in the previous years. At the time of the interview, she was not longing for social democracy anymore but for democratic socialism. She argues Razem could have been more populist, by putting forward postulates that are more radical. A also argues that Razem has many opportunities to develop a populist left program. However, he also makes a more fundamental point relating to radicalism.

A: I would say that in a context of Polish political discourse most of our ideas are radical. […] [O]ur ideas on wealth distribution are radical in the context of Polish discourse. Or as it comes for example to the role of the state in providing housing, given Polish housing markets, which is very much focused on private ownership, it is pretty radical. As it comes to say, body autonomy or women's rights in a context of what are the laws in Poland it used to be radical though here we see some success we observe in public opinion, in some polls, people do change their minds about say what's acceptable. So yeah. The thing is the ideas are perceived as radical and that may also be a problem, because if we are perceived as radical plus we have problems with connecting to social base that may be problematic. I mean there is nothing wrong with being radical if you have a good connection to a social base. But it's difficult.

F has a similar approach.

F: And of course we are not, let's say, we are not a very radical party in the sense that we are saying about throwing out, destroying capitalism. In fact, a lot of us would like to do that. But we just don't feel we are strong enough to prepare something like that, so we are doing what we can in the fields and with the tools we are having near. […] Now we are a little bit more anti-capitalist. We can use those... of course we are not saying, we are not saying, you can't in Poland say you are a Marxist, or you can't say these things. You can't say literally you are anti-capitalist. But you can say you are against corporations, against oligarchs, against the rich. And we do that.

G argues that what is radical in the Polish context also changed over the previous years, citing how the introduction of 'Rodzina 500+' also made it possible to talk about basic income as something that is now not as utopian as before. On the other hand, Razem talking about climate change or marriage inequality became more radical, as PiS specifically targeted the LGBTQ community.

When talking about visions and utopias, some respondents again argue that the goal is to have a proper welfare state. This welfare state is envisioned as an idealized social democratic system, which guarantees both social and human rights. To G, Razem would be successful if Poland had legal abortions, a progressive taxation system, a well-funded healthcare system, cheap flats and houses for everyone, and marriage equality. To E, Poland will be like a Western country, with equal rights, stable incomes, and people regaining hope. D hopes Poland becomes more like Germany or Ireland, more multicultural, less homophobic, with a broad welfare state. Others stress the problem of inequality and poverty.

> J: Because I think that the core structure of the global system is wrong. That for me, the main concern is that we have vast inequality, and we have a majority of people that are poor, that working, living conditions might get worse because of climate crisis. And there is this small group that is greedy and very very rich. And I would like the left to make them a little bit less rich so the rest of us could survive. So that's the main goal for me, but it's, you know, it's very global, very general.

> F: I would say that definitely we won't be such an unequal country [if Razem succeeds], like the inequality is something you feel. But also it will be, it will be a country where you have this kind of security in all those social services, like you really don't have to think about basic needs. Because they are fulfilled. And if they are fulfilled then you can also be more productive, more active in a democratic sense. So, yeah, then I imagine it would be a country that is definitely more secure and democratic in the sense that everyone has where to live, has a decent wage, and good healthcare, and that means that also can engage in the, in the political life.

### 4.5.3   Policies and topics of Razem

This thesis does not provide a comprehensive review of the political platform of Razem. Nevertheless, analyzing which policies and topics are prominently mentioned on the website, on leaflets, and during the interview provides insights into how Razem envisions alternative development paths for Poland. During the founding period, the initial coordination group that organized the founding congress proposed five tenets for a future program (Partia Razem 2015a, own translation):

- Fair taxes. Tax the richest and big corporations. Significantly increase the tax-free amount. Among several propositions, this included a marginal tax rate of 75 percent for those earning more than 500,000 PLN a year and the support for a Tobin tax on capital transactions on the European level.

- Stable job, decent pay. No more junk jobs. Higher minimum hourly wage. The program called for a minimum hourly wage of 15 PLN for permanent contracts and 20 PLN for all temporary contracts to make junk contracts unprofitable for companies as well as a 35-hour work week, strengthening the labor inspectorate and workplace democracy.

- A country that works. Efficient health service, good schools, low-cost housing, and convenient public transport.

- Rebuilding democracy. Reduction of the privileges of power. Equal rights for all. This tenet included term limits, elements of direct democracy, and marriage equality.
- Active economic policy of the state. New green industry, new jobs. This tenet included the goal of full employment and supporting cooperatives.

Most elements of this founding program reappear in the interviews. Several respondents mention the topic of inequality and taxation. J mentions redistribution of wealth from the rich to the working people, and E talks about the problem of the wealthy becoming wealthier and wealthier, with the middle class shrinking and poverty rising. Razem put forward a progressive tax plan, with a marginal tax rate of 75 percent for earnings above half a million Złoty a year while raising the tax bracket for tax-free incomes at the lower end of the income distribution.

The topic of workers' rights, with stable jobs and stable pay, appears in several interview segments. Razem supported workers in several labor disputes, arguing for better working conditions, more regular pay, and more stable jobs. H talked about a press conference in his hometown Lublin about the problems that young workers face. E talks about further raising the minimum wage, getting rid of junk work contracts, and having access to good pension plans, paid vacation, and social security. A mentions strengthening unions and ending flexible work contracts.

J, a medical professional herself, helped develop the vision of Razem's healthcare program, without going into the details of the policies. F juxtaposes Razem's healthcare plan with that of Biedroń, who was "doing healthcare very very wrong, trying to give money to the private sector." In both the local and European elections, housing and public transport became more central. G mentions that Razem proposed solving homelessness in Warsaw by either taxing or socializing empty buildings, since there were twice as many empty buildings as homeless people according to their estimate. Razem criticizes the 'Mieszkanie Plus' housing program of PiS because it has allowed for easier evictions. The progressive taxation system previously mentioned should increase the tax base to fund better public services and to provide public transportation in rural areas as well.

The social democratic vision described in the previous subsection plays a significant role in the policy prescription. Razem argues for a broad welfare state founded on a rights-based approach, arguing for a combination of social and economic rights that protect people from poverty and insecurity. Having fulfilled basic needs, Razem believes people can become not only more productive but also more democratically active. Some Razem members believe that introducing a basic income needs to be part of such a program. More importantly, the role of the state should be strengthened to reduce social differences in Poland. As A puts it,

> A: [Razem argues for an] active role of the state in providing some most basic common goods who are most important. Those were ideas connected to some improvements in healthcare, some improvements in education, but also pretty strongly connected to, say, housing politics.

This, again, is one of the reasons Razem is in favor of the 'Rodzina 500+' child allowance program, even though it is also criticized for its initial natalist approach, which left out several family forms. In the 2018 local elections, Razem ran on the campaign slogan "Polska – wygodny dom dla wszystkich" ("Poland—a comfortable home for everyone/all"). One of the campaign flyers described this vision in more detail.

> Imagine that the local government will provide a place in a nursery for every toddler. No months in line, no fiddling or fees–no matter if you live in a big city or a small town. Your children will receive free dental care at school. A modern vaccination program will cover them. Each mother will receive help in returning to the labor market after maternity and childcare leave. The local government will support women—regardless of what life decisions they make. High curbs and stairs will not impede the movement of disabled people parents with baby strollers. In vitro infertility treatment will be reimbursed from voivodeship funds. Families wanting children will not be left alone. The local government will provide decent conditions in the delivery wards, as well as free prenatal tests and a birth classes. Comfortable Poland. For everyone. (kw razem 2018)

In terms of the state of democracy, several interview members highlighted the need to curtail the political power of the Church, to have a neutral and secular state. The properties of the Church were also a topic in a campaign in Kraków, where Razem proposed the idea to open all private gardens of churches to the public.

J mentions that she was initially drawn to the human rights and LGBTQ rights aspects of the program. Two central policy fields that emerged in the interviews were women's rights and LGBTQ rights, which go beyond equal rights for all. With the PiS-led government came a conservative backlash. The right to abortion—already one of the strictest in Europe—came under further attacks, first from the Sejm, later from the PiS-controlled Constitutional Tribunal. In addition, PiS has pursued a nationalist strategy of agitating against an imagined LGBTQ lobby, declaring LGBT-free zones in several districts and towns in Poland (Foster 2019). The fight against this nationalist-conservative backlash became a central policy issue for Razem. Razem fights for access to abortion and against anti-abortion protests in front of gynecological clinics. Razem proposes marriage equality and protection for the LGBTQ community. For most interview partners, these two topics are a central feature of Razem's program. H's statement is exemplary of this view.

> H: [W]e are also a pro-LGBT party […] and we are very very feminist party.

J connects the topics of poverty and the climate crisis, as the climate crisis might make living conditions worse. Climate and energy policies are also connected to social policy because of the heavy dependence of Polish energy production on coal. Transitioning out of coal means

finding suitable work for miners and taking care of miners' families. On the topic of energy politics, Razem heavily emphasizes the use of nuclear energy as a replacement for coal plants, as nuclear energy is viewed as a clean and "pure" energy. Eventually, nuclear energy should be phased out according to G, but in the meantime "there is no other way" than to use nuclear energy for the energy transition. E and D stress the importance of a reliable energy source as well and believe that nuclear energy helps reduce the problem of polluted air and smog.

In terms of international policies, F mentions the vision of a European United States that becomes a social union, rejecting the Maastricht criteria and the Stability and Growth Pact. Razem considers itself pro-European and pro-EU, but heavily criticizes how the EU currently functions (Smoleński 2019).

### 4.5.4 Strategies and tactics of Razem

The strategies and tactics of Razem that the interview partners name, describe, and evaluate show the range of tools Razem tries to apply to challenge neoliberal transformation. The major strategies are to push the discourse in politics to the left and to renew the left and make it credible again. To achieve these goals, Razem facilitates a broad and creative variety of tactics. The following statements offer a good account of the first strategy, to push the discourse to the left.

> A: [M]any of our programs are more considered […] as some sort of populist vehicles to push the discourse in some direction and not necessarily as projects of complete state organization because in the next five years we probably won't be ruling Poland. […] Yeah so this idea of shifting discourse toward the left would be, I don't know as some sort of slogan, it would be acceptable to all the fractions [of the party].

> J: I think it's important to try to build an independent left, because our political scene is very very towards the right. So as I said before, some views that should be perceived as radical are for us just common bread. And that we need left strong voice, maybe not in the government, but as a political party to show that other views are possible to change the narrative. […] And I think that maybe… we have to make room and space for the left.

> H: I think it's our goal […] to move our political scene to the left side. And reduce, to the minimum, neoliberal voices.

> F: We can try to push other big parties to do […] one reform or not to do this reform […]. Second, constant fight about the, like, hegemony in the ideological sphere. Like, to show, we, like, without us the center of the debate would be in a different place. Because we are here, the center is a little a bit more left. And this is something we can do. [T]rying to push [the media] in a way that gives a chance for a leftist narrative, kind of a discourse.

> B: [W]e thought that we'll try—even if not by getting some seats or some like formal representation— that we would like somehow to push the discourse. And that we will, you know, make some things more acceptable and more mainstream.

To achieve this strategy, there have been discussions internally if Razem should focus more on grassroots politics or electoral politics. Originally, the party was founded as an electoral vehicle

a few months before a national election. While some interviewers juxtapose these two options, others see them as more complementary and contingent on each other. Nevertheless, most interview partners agree that Razem more or less consciously decided to focus on media-oriented and electoral politics. Here is an example from G.

> G: I'm struggling, because my idea of party was this building from the bottom. But I now see again that it doesn't have to work to win the elections. To be successful, to be, you know, to make things real. To make these dreams come true. So now, I'm thinking about focusing more and more on elections and campaigns. But it's a compromise.

First, this meant that the party gave itself a fresh and modern look. Razem chose a name that was unconnected to previous left parties and uses aesthetics and colors similar to Podemos. Razem invested in a modern website, stickers, and social media appearance. This was also very visible during my second field trip when I attended the kick-off event for the campaign for the elections to the European Parliament. The event followed stage directions, the audience consisted of party members that held up pre-fabricated signs with party slogans, and the speakers were placed in the center of the hall. The campaign videos became more candidate-centered compared to the more program-centered campaign videos in previous campaigns. In a magazine interview, candidate Maciej Konieczny reasons that Razem pushes for more relatability than before.

> Our task is to effectively convince people of social solidarity; that it is worth fighting for higher work standards and higher salaries. We want to show that these are not abstract slogans that are difficult to focus on. Therefore, I am talking about my own experience of junk employment. Like many young people in Poland, for many years I had a constant fear of whether I would have a job in a month or two, or whether they would have enough money to pay the rent. (Konieczny, quoted in Smoleński 2019, own translation)

Second, the party chose to focus on media-oriented politics. This means many actions and party activities are planned and designed to reach as much media coverage as possible. Many statements illustrate this approach.

> J: [W]e don't miss any invitation from local TV or radio station.

> H: [Razem Lublin] organizes a lot of […] conferences. In [the] past week we had a conference about workers and we [were] in the public TV and then I was talking about young workers and their problems.

To a degree, this also means accepting how liberal and conservative media work in Poland.

> F: In fact, we don't have any left media. So, we have to play in a way that allow us to be there. [L]ast couple of months the government media are more sympathetic, or more eager to invite us than the liberal ones. Because we are not like the total opposition in the sense that we are not saying the government is doing everything badly and we will have to first regain the democracy they took us and then we will do something. […] When for example in this campaign, we are attacking European Union, because it's not democratic enough, it's not social enough. And in some part the government is saying the same. Of course they are not, our proposals are completely different. Criticizing Merkel,

> criticizing Tusk, criticizing Juncker is something they like when we say it. Now it's easier to go there. Before it was more like the black protest [Czarny Protest], more the feminists against government, against anti-abortion laws. So, of course then the liberal ones were eager to invite us. And we are balancing like all the time to be somewhere there.

This strategy does not always work. E recalls that in Silesia, they were trying to contact TV stations and newspapers, but received negative responses because they were perceived as leftists.

When talking about the fame of one board member at the time, Adrian Zandberg, and why he is talking to many TV stations even though he is not the only spokesperson for the party, G and F give examples of why Razem chooses to embrace this.

> G: So, well, this is how media works, so. They have to have this leader, and ok, let it be somebody, because he is good at it.

> F: [I]t was very popular debate. And he performed very well. And that made him very popular. And afterwards it's just like some media, they just invite only him. You can't, ok, we can't say, no no, now we will [send someone else]. No no no, [the media] just want him or no one. That means we can't really control that. It's not us that we are playing. Of course we are player. But in fact the whole game is created in a way that we don't control many things. And unfortunately this is something we have to accept to some extent. We have Adrian, and we have to use him as a possibility, because he is known, because he is a good spokesperson in a sense, performing well in the media.

Not every Razem activist is happy with or suited for the course taken. Media-oriented politics also comes with drawbacks, as the following, more critical statements show.

> B: I think that in both like locally but also on this central level, we somehow started to care too much about what media say or not say about us. Whatever. And we somehow forgot how to, you know, what our true values are, what we really want. And functioning in the, you know, the logic of evening news.

> A: [I]t turned out that most of our activities are actually media oriented, so well it was a problem of how to gain interest of people and we've decided for media-oriented politics. So we organized a lot of press conferences for example. And that demanded very I'd say very quick response and 24 hour availability and that was very hard for me because I didn't have previous experience, it's not pretty much the way I work.

> A: [T]here is also an issue of task division between council and board. Because in theory board should have more like executive functions, more function of media interpretation, but when they do so many media-oriented politics it's hard to split like political decisions and like media decisions

Razem chose electoral politics as the main tactic to achieve its strategic goals. Razem wanted to achieve parliamentarian representation of a "new and fresh" left party unconnected to the people who built the post-communist left, but also a left that represented the diversity of left activists and NGOs that work in the country. Achieving electoral success would result in more resources available for grassroots work, and a better national public stage to frame issues and use the media to push the discourse to the left. Some interview partners also hope to be able to influence the legislature. On the other hand, the interview partners were quite realistic before the 2019 parliamentary elections that if they did not receive enough votes to secure state

finances, they would need to either stop working, build something else, or change their strategy more fundamentally.

> J: But if we fail now in doing electoral politics, we don't have any other option. We have to do grassroots. But I think that the goal should be on elections and getting influence and parliamentary politics.

At the same time, the interview partners also know that if they were elected, they would not play a major or governing role within the country.

> F: If we are in Poland and we are building a left party you can't think we will be ruling party in four years. We won't. That's an obvious thing.

Campaigning during elections means focusing on a clear and definable goal, uniting the party and its members. J mentions that after a period of internal struggles, running an election campaign invigorated "determination and willingness to fight."

In the contemporary political system in Poland, a party needs to decide if it runs for the election as a single election committee ("komitet wyborczy partii politycznej (KW)") or as part of an alliance ("koalicyjny komitet wyborczy (KKW)"). In national parliamentary elections, the electoral thresholds for the two are different: For a single party KW, the threshold is five percent, and for an alliance KKW, the threshold is eight percent. Razem competed in all electoral constituencies in the 2015 parliamentary elections but failed to reach the five percent threshold to enter the Sejm. Nevertheless, the 3.62 percent reached were enough to be eligible for state funding for the subsequent years. However, the SLD-led election alliance only achieved 7.55 percent, missing the eight percent threshold. Combined, the left parties received more than eleven percent of the vote, but no seats in the Sejm.

In the local government elections in 2018, Razem achieved 1.55 percent of the vote. This led to internal debates on whether it was necessary to update Razem's electoral tactics, and if it was necessary to start making compromises and forming alliances with other parties on the national level. On the local level, these alliances and talks were already happening. H gives the example of Lublin, were Razem entered the newly created Ruch Miejski (City Movement), working together with greens and liberals. F gives an example from Poznań.

> F: [I]n regional elections I was for talking with some people of SLD. In Poznań for example. Because those particular people were not so bad as for example [the former prime minister Leszek] Miller.

The interview partners display pragmatism that if the party were to fail in the 2019 election cycle, it would need to completely reorient itself and its strategy. After the poor results of the local election in 2018, Razem held an internal referendum on whether the board should enter coalition talks with other parties, like SLD. With around 800 members participating, around

500 approved. Coalition talks with Biedroń, SLD, and other parties began shortly after, which drew criticism from some party members who identified Razem as a party founded in explicit opposition to what SLD stood for. For the European parliamentary elections, the party chose to enter a coalition with the two small left parties UP and RSS, but only received 1.24 percent of the votes. Newsweek Poland called the results a "massacre on the Left" (Newsweek Polska 2019), while Polityka wondered if the poor results meant the end of Razem (Rojewski 2019). For the 2019 Polish parliamentary elections, Razem eventually entered a coalition with social democratic SLD, Biedroń's new liberal/left party Wiosna, and socialist PPS. This alliance received 12.6 percent and 49 of the 460 seats in the Sejm; Razem was able to secure six seats in the Sejm.

The second strategy, to renew the left and make it more credible, is a more diffuse strategy not explicitly stated by the interview partners. Many activities and tactics fall under this umbrella strategy. Most importantly, Razem engages with local and national grassroots movements and labor struggles. The interview partners give numerous examples: In Opole, Razem supported local movements that fought against the incorporation of their villages and towns into the city of Opole. In Leśna, Symon Surmacz is known for his work and commitment to the community for years. Razem supported the workers in a crystal glass factory in Zawiercie who were not paid regularly. They assisted medical doctors who went on strikes because of abhorrent working conditions in the medical sector, supported pilots of the Polish airline LOT that went on strike, and supported teachers and physiotherapists who entered labor struggles. E recalls how Razem defended workers and actors who worked in the city theater in Gliwice when PiS changed the personnel at the theater. Razem views itself in an important supportive role.

> G: I think they [people involved in the strikes and social movements] know that we are huge supporters. They know they can, they can count on us.

> F: And third, of course it's the real fight, and fights on the streets against evictions, against... very local things sometimes. And defending schools, I mean, being part of the teacher's strike last couple of weeks. And of course you need to be very effective in that way. You need to have a lot of people. And of course we can, and we are doing I think a good job in some places. So, of course people that meet us in a specific place, we can help, we can do something together.

Razem played a leading role in the feminist social movement that became known as "Czarny Protest" ("black protest"). The movement formed in the fall of 2016 when the Sejm rejected liberalizing the abortion law and instead opted to discuss a tightening of the already strict legislation. Razem coined both the slogan "Czarny Protest" and initiated the first demonstrations, which then grew and culminated in nationwide protests on 'Black Monday' on 3 October 2016, in which several tens of thousands of people participated (gazeta.pl 2016b). The demonstrations were called black protests because participants wore black clothing. A

stresses that while the idea for the protests originated with Razem, the scope of the outrage was grassroots and bottom-up, growing organically. Of the different social movements and labor struggles Razem supported, the black protests were the most important in terms of party development, with Razem attracting new members along the way.

> F: [I]n fact technically [black protest] was invented by one of our members. It was a huge feminist protest. [Maybe] not feminist in a sense how we use this word in the Polish culture. Because it's like, always feminists are radical something. But no, a lot of women just went out on the streets to protest against this anti-abortion law. And we were quite amazed by how many unpoliticized women were there. And they became, during the protest, they became politicized.

> B: Yes, so actually this hashtag, #czarnyprotest was like founded by one of our members. And we were like organizing lots of those demonstrations in different places. Then we had this Czarny Piątek [Black Monday]. And that was like made by this Polish Women on Strike. And also the strike itself, but it wasn't Razem. So that for sure was something like very important for us and for forming our identity. And recently when we started running some studies concerning our, like how we are seen, we're perceived as like feminist party, also fighting for rights for abortion.

Razem also helps organize other feminist marches and demonstrations, i.e. in Silesia on International Women's Day. In the case of the teachers' strikes, F argues because Razem's membership base consists of relatively many teachers compared to other parties, many activists were involved, but Razem was not as visible as, for example, Biedroń. This meant Razem did not gain a lot from the protests, but F also stresses, "of course we were from the beginning to the end there."

When PiS started transforming the judicial system, protests emerged in Poland intending to defend the constitution. Razem initiated a protest camp in the center of Warsaw and supported demonstrations across the country. However, Razem had an ambivalent attitude towards these protests, as described in the section about PiS. Razem also felt that the protests came from the liberal camp and could not be connected with other left issues.

> A: The thing is for example in Kraków; we made a very big effort to win some people on the highest court issue. We started to make some educational meetings for supporters of Komitet Obrony Demokracji - KOD, that wasn't a very big success. It was huge loads of people in those meetings but actually, it didn't convert into winning those people or even persuading them into like more left-leaning politics. They just came and argued and discussed things.

Organizing local events is another approach by Razem. The party was founded in an open congress, and open meetings have been organized in many places to offer a low-barrier entry to new activists. However, regular party meetings now mainly serve the purpose of educating local activists and party members. This includes lectures, discussions, meetings with book authors, movie projections, and political seminars. Razem Śląsk also started a small library in their offices. Meetings for other purposes have not been as successful, as the previous and the following statements describe.

> A: Most of our events are in Kraków and we have tried to organize some events in smaller towns with no great success actually. I mean there were a few people mostly form our organizations
>
> J: We don't organize our meetings when people have to come to us. Because in Poland it usually ends with there are only the same group every time of local activists.

A further tactic to renew the left is to reclaim left history. Razem positively relates to the history of Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party) from the interwar period. It observes and explains Labor Day on May 1 in short video clips. Some activists are interested in retelling the history of communist Poland, about the achievements in re-industrialization after World War II, Polish modernist architecture, advances in education, and women's rights.

Aside from the alliances formed due to elections, Razem also tries to cooperate with unions, even though this process has been difficult on the local level.

> A: From the bigger organizations, we mostly try to cooperate with OPZZ [Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions]. So a left-leaning union federation traditionally connected to SLD and with ZNP, that's a teachers union, being a part of OPZZ, but pretty autonomous cause it's a huge sector. And we've cooperated with ZNP, the teachers union on the occasion of strikes against reform of education. But we actually don't do very much cooperation now. It's pretty much about very differing ways of being and ways of organizing in our party and in the unions. For the unions are very centralized, they are very offline, it's pretty hard to have even have a meeting with some people that are decisive, that can make decisions, not to speak about having some conclusions.

Internationally, Razem has engaged with different organizations and parties. For the elections to the European Parliament in 2019, Razem joined the 'DiEM25 - Democracy in Europe Movement 2025', which competed in the elections under the name 'European Spring'. A joint congress took place in Warsaw in June 2018 (DiEM25 2018).[5]

The feeling among some Razem members is that eventually, Razem will become part of something new and bigger on the left and that the activities of Razem today will have positive effects on the future, even if the party itself fails.

> F: And of course, of course the thing is to organize and to educate people for longer periods. So every protest, every eviction, protest against eviction, every strike, every manifestation is meeting with people and trying to struggle for some, their interest, their situation. In this case you are of course building some connections, you are building movements, you are building something that will have effects in ten, twenty, thirty, you never know.
>
> C: I think like the biggest hopes are concentrated about becoming a part of something larger which is happening at the moment. And only when it happens we can discuss what the next step will be. So, building an alliance is the first step that has to be done and then we can start thinking what should be done next. […] I have a feeling that Partia Razem might be a necessary project within a longer process. But it must fail. So it must fail so something new come up.

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[5] In March 2022, Razem decided to leave both the Progressive International and DiEM25 because of the "absence of an unequivocal declaration recognizing Ukraine's sovereignty and an absolute condemnation of Russian imperialism by the Progressive International and the Democracy in Europe 2025 Movement" (Lewica Razem 2022a).

### 4.5.5 Struggles and challenges for Razem

In their daily political work, the party and members of Razem face many struggles and challenges. Some of these have to do with being a new party that is not yet popular, some appear in the context of doing left politics, and some are connected to the dynamics of internal disputes and the elevated expectations that members of the party have of their political activism.

As a relatively new party, Razem was not very popular at the time of the interviews. This also means Razem constantly has to decide how to reach more people, and in what way they are communicating with people on the streets. This leads to struggles over how moderate or radical the language should be, with Razem deciding to be radical in positions, but more moderate and pragmatic in its language. Even though Razem had initial success and found popularity through media outings, like the aforementioned TV debate Adrian Zandberg engaged in, some interview partners lament that many people in Poland had not heard of Razem. This leads to vicious circles, especially when trying to establish Razem in more rural parts of Poland.

> F: And unfortunately, of course, we are still mainly based in big cities. That means that people in smaller cities and especially in the countryside just don't know who we are. […] But the problem is that like, three fourth of the Polish population never heard of us. And like it's a, it's circle. You can't get to the countryside, if you are not a big organization, and you can't be a big organization if you don't go there.

E also reports that on the streets, people often do not recognize Razem.

> E: People must know what we offer them, yes. We must work on that. We must talk more with people. We must focus less on us, on program, on democratic structure, we must focus more on people on the streets. We must talk to them. We must think about ways to get to them.

One interview partner mentions that as a small party, even if people agree with Razem's program, voters might decide not to vote for Razem as they believe other parties to be stronger. To this day, Razem is mainly based in urban areas. In the energetic beginnings, there were plans to establish local structures in every district and to draw the majority of members from rural areas. This vision remained unfulfilled.

> A: The very optimistic idea was to have like one organization in every powiat, district. Of course, it didn't happen.

To C and A, this urban-rural divide in popularity is related to the socioeconomic background of many members, leading to a certain language and habitus.

> C: I guess it's because of our background. So it's, for most of us it's way easier to communicate with more, even not with liberal, but with more central public. If I can say that. Like, while working within rural areas requires speaking simple sometime different language and recognizing different problems which you might not see from the perspective of a large city.

A: Yeah, we know that there are actually two groups of people that are supportive toward our ideas. And there are on the one hand social leaning liberals from urban area, but also there is a group of people with lower income, without higher education, mostly from middle-sized towns. But... yeah, we know that. There is a discussion. There is this recurring motive of winning those, this second group, or like gaining more support in this second group. […] But the problem is that we don't really have good ideas of how to do it. Because most of the well-developed ideas for activities are very much urban-concentrated, very much about like some political habitus, so you make conferences, you make demonstrations, you make meetings with discussions and this all actually appeals to a certain group of people, but not to all. There is some problem with finding new ways of doing politics.

Several challenges for Razem arise from doing left politics in a capitalist society. Left positions have become marginalized in Poland. One reason for this is how post-socialist societies deal with their past, and how official history and politics demonize communism and socialism. The other reason is the general marginalization of left politics in many European countries, in which both the media and the general public are skeptical about left proposals, and anti-left sentiments are widespread.

One example is the election of Symon Surmacz as mayor of Leśna. During the campaign for the runoff elections, the town of Leśna was flooded with flyers tying Surmacz to Razem, and arguing that Razem stood for "abortions, euthanasia, […] adoption of children by homosexuals" (Anonymous 2018, own translation). Surmacz still won the election. He reacted to the flyer in a Facebook post, summarizing the program of Razem for the municipal elections which he also thought offered good policy options for Leśna. It is common for mayors to remain party members, yet Surmacz also announced his resignation from party membership. He argued that he wanted to "represent all the residents of the town and to strive to build unity and a culture of cooperation" (Surmacz 2018, own translation), but also stressed that this is how he understood the duties of a mayor, putting aside political views. His resignation from Razem was thus not directly tied to the attacks on his membership, but the incident shows the animosity Razem members face when running for an office. J reflects on this in the following statement.

J: He argued that his presence in Razem might be a factor that divides the community and that he didn't want that. It's, it was his choice, but I know, that a little bit he was in Razem shouldn't reflect or influence the years for his community. And I know, I think it's the responsibility from, when we are in a party in Razem, we should propose and want people like Szymon to join us. And it shouldn't be a burden for them. And now it sometimes is, I think when we are as huge as PO and PiS that maybe... but now, that's hard.

Other interview partners offer examples of attitudes in the population about certain proposals and how many people tie social democratic ideas to a communist system, and the difficulties in public perception.

H: The biggest difficulty is our society. Because most people think about the left, it's of course just communism, yes, as our comrades said before... people don't really understand what the left truly is. They don't know that there is a Social Democracy or Democratic Socialism or Social Liberalism. For most of the people, most of the people think about for example social benefits are something of, like,

a part of a communist country, you know. Changing it, changing people's thinking is the most difficult now.

F: Of course we are not saying, we are not saying, you can't in Poland say you are a Marxist, or you can't say this things. You can't say literally you are anti-capitalist.

E: We are a post-communist country, yes. People are not very friendly to leftist idea. They think if it is leftist, it is communism, Gulag, Stalin, etc. So and this is, this is fault on Polish education, yes. In the nineties, they changed history. So everything what's with left ideas, yes. It's shown kind of badly in history books. When I was in middle school I saw in a history book that Marx was some evil guy who invented communism, yes. And people thought about this that way. So when they heard that 'Oh Razem is a socialist, social-democratic leftist party,' so they are often not, not, not super-friendly with us.

D: Yeah, many people say that anything that is leftist is just communist or post-communist.

C: But yes, I mean they just call us, they call us 'commies' when it comes to... when they want to discredit us they just call us 'communists.'

A: Our board members, for example, sometimes say in interviews that we are a social democratic party as an answer to accusations of, I don't know, being a communist party.

A related struggle is the treatment by the media. As there are no left media outlets with large audiences, Razem is dependent on being invited by either conservative or liberal media outlets. The ideas Razem puts forward are often not recognized because Razem is a small and leftist party.

J: I was shocked about how the media worked in Poland, or works in Poland. [W]e have some idea, some project, and when it's good and starting to grow then a larger party comes, says the same, but and no-one in the media is talking about it with us.

E: Some liberal and conservative TVs and radios don't like us. It's problematic to talk to journalists from the liberal side. And with conservative side. It must be some big, big thing that they come to us.

When PiS took over the government in 2015 and started to introduce measures which Razem agreed with, it became more difficult to develop a clear profile. As described in previous sections, Razem is very much in favor of social policies like 'Rodzina 500+'. However, this meant a right-wing party was introducing policies they as a left force wanted to popularize.

G: The politics in Poland are turned upside down. Because when we are thinking about social things, about economical things, we think about right wing in Poland. We think about PiS, we think about some other parties that were right wing but they talked about, you know, economic security and so on. And the left wings were for many many years very liberal about economics. And so one of the biggest challenges for us is to talk about, you know, when we are left wing, we talk about, you know, security, about dignity. About this safety to live, you know. [...] This is a huge threat, because one thing is that they are, you know, stealing our ideas about social and economic security.

F: [I]t was easier to attack the liberal right. Because [...] it was during the crisis, all the social reforms [by PO] were not in a good direction. And now PiS as a right, far-right, something like more state-based, more solidarity-based in the sense of thinking about a community. They implemented for example this 500+. So this is child benefit for every second child. They raised the minimum wage quite significantly. And made these couple of small changes. And of course the changes were in a good direction but it's harder to... It's like more difficult to explain.

C: For Partia Razem it's quite a tricky situation, because a lot of arguments we could play out within like, political debate, were stolen by the ruling party. I mean the social transfers, and they did it. They transfer money to people. So they don't promise, they do it. So like a lot of like key arguments that could be used by a social democratic party, these politics are actually being done by the ruling party.

Faced with poor election results and the social policies of PiS, disagreements within the party appeared. These struggles can be categorized as the dynamics of internal disputes. The party tries to live up to its high democratic standards, which also means that many members and activists have high expectations and strongly voice their opinions. To G, some of the internal struggles are universal among leftists lacking success.

G: [W]hen we're talking half a year ago [in 2018], we were very divided. Because of these fractions, and national board not agreeing with the executive board. And not following the voice of the people. […] But I think it's not a question of Razem, it's a question of leftist groups anywhere in the world, that when we don't have this close and real goal we are starting to judge each other. What happened that we are not succeeding? Maybe we are not pure enough? We are not trying enough. So that was, that's what was happening in Razem.

In the discussions about political strategy, Razem has had to bridge the expectations of leftists and feminists expecting the program to be radical while also trying to reach new parts of the Polish population that traditionally would not identify with these parts of the program.

F: But, of course, there is a problem. If you now try to merge those feminist things with agenda of minimum wage. Social solidarity. These kind of things. It's not so easy. Because a lot of women there on the streets [during black protests] were apart from that a little bit, like liberal. And of course on the streets they changed. They changed from liberal to being more leftist. So there was a process, a very good process that happened there. But still, now, it is a part of our program. Like, all the hard feminist or women's rights. It's an important part of our program. But we are not concentrating only on that, and we can't. We can't. If we want to have less big cities, less young people, then we have to try to... let's say, not to go too hard in this direction. Not to be another Women's party, if we want to be a leftist party.

A argues that some of the struggles result from the fact that Razem is "too often […] too much attached to our ideas. And we don't really get into dialogue with people." C, on the other hand, argues that many of the internal struggles are not because of real ideological differences, but because of how people interact with each other.

C: But it's all because all these people are friends, and they shouldn't be. So I mean those fractions do exist, but it has like, there is no link between those factions and the party politics and the party program. So they are two different things. On the one level there are some discussion, there are some factions that people label themselves this or another way. But it has nothing to do with the way of how party act. And the party acts like typical social democracy. It actually doesn't know what it wants to be. […] It should be like less like a company of friends but like a political party with certain political vision. Which is going to be achieved by all political means that are, like required and possible. If it means that we have to build an ally with someone we don't like I don't find that problematic.

C mentions the challenges that arose during the coalition talks. The disappointment about the election results, combined with the plan to talk to the once heavily criticized SLD led many

party members and activists to leave Razem. Others left earlier due to lack of motivation or because they expected Razem to fare better in the elections.

> J: There, after the local election in autumn there was a bunch of activists and politicians who left [Razem]. And it was bad.
>
> G: People were tired, people had these hopes up because of our success in the election in 2015 and then, you know, we are, we were looking at the polls, we hadn't, we didn't have this five percent anymore, we had one percent or two percent. So the support for us was, you know, lower and lower, so some people just resigned.

E, on the other hand, argues that while he had issues with entering a coalition with SLD for the election, he views it as a necessity if the left were to prosper in Poland.

> E: Yes, yes, it's divided our party. I think. Some sort of people are 'no, we don't, we cannot unite with some, with SLD, yes, because some CIA stuff and there are other scandals' and some people said 'we must do this if we want to survive, yes.' I think I kind of understand both sides, yes. Yes, I am not, I feel not good that we probably will be working with people which done some unethical stuff in past. But if we, this will be our only chance, yes, kind of unite left on, in Poland, yes, it's, that will be last chance to show people the left alternative from them, that if the talks between party leaders will be acceptable for both sides.

This statement summarizes to a degree how Razem deals with many of the struggles and challenges it faces. There are intense debates internally. Many members have high expectations, and hold strong, at times radical, positions. Yet in the bigger picture of Razem's strategy, pragmatism often prevails.

### 4.5.6 Successes of Razem

The diversity and creativity in Razem's activities leads to the interesting phenomenon wherein the interview partners give quite different examples of successes in their political work. While there was little electoral success between 2015 and 2019—aside from reaching the three percent threshold in 2015 that guaranteed a substantial party budget and Symon Surmacz's municipal election victory in Leśna—the respondents were proud of other political activities.

J mentions the protests against shaming people seeking medical support for abortions. Razem ran a national campaign called "Szantaż z dala od szpitala" ("Extortion away from the hospital"). Razem activists filed suits in court across the country against radical anti-abortion protesters who hung up graphic and disturbing imagery in front of gynecological hospitals. J recalls how the lawsuit in Opole was successful, which was then covered in national news. A judge ruled that protests depicting disturbing imagery directly outside are illegal, and fined the involved people (Gazeta Wyborcza 2018; Onet Opole 2018).

Several respondents remembered the role of Razem in a local labor dispute in Zawiercie in Silesia. Zawiercie had been famous for its crystal glass factory "Huta Szkła Zawiercie," which

was passed into the hands of private investors in 2009. After a take-over by a new owner, the company filed for bankruptcy in 2016, after which the owner started a new company. Several reports came out that employees either were not paid their wages and salaries or were compensated in kind by receiving glass themselves, a procedure deemed illegal by the ILO. Razem organized protests in Zawiercie together with other left organizations and unions and started an auctioning website for the glass to help employees get their wages. However, the protests were not enough to save the factory, which was shut down in early 2018 and was planned to be demolished as of 2022 (Gazeta Wyborcza 2017; Gazeta Wyborcza Katowice 2022). G thus reports an ambivalent feeling when talking about the involvement of Razem.

> G: And we mobilized people from Razem, but not only, from other left organization to go down there and to put a huge demonstration. So we had this bond […] with the people from Zawiercie for many many months. But, you know, now we don't struggle [with] what happened to them [anymore]. So, I don't think this was a huge success. But, well, for... then we thought, you know, we came there, we talked with these people, we showed our respect, on which side we are, and so.

F argues that one of the successes of Razem is its social media appearance, which he considers one of the best among Polish parties, "mainly because a lot of us are young people that just understand how it works." However, he also contextualizes this by arguing it is not important when it comes to elections. In terms of political actions, he remembered the protest Razem organized in the struggle between the Constitutional Tribunal and the PiS government. Razem projected a judgment of the Constitutional Court that was withheld by the PiS government onto the outer walls of the Prime Minister's office in Warsaw (Gazeta Wyborcza 2016), and also publicly displayed the constitution. While the action was remarkably successful as "a lot of people talked about that," he also argued that it was expensive for the party.

A and B argued that the biggest success was the role of Razem in the feminist black protest, both initiating it and supporting it while it was growing.

5    Conclusions

> C: [W]ithin the political spectrum, being left hasn't changed so much since, like, 19th century. I mean, we're still fighting for the same things. […] Of course, […] we are fighting under different conditions. […] But it's still about the conflict between labor and capital.

> C: The biggest hopes are concentrated [on] becoming a part of something larger [than what] is happening at the moment. And only when it happens we can discuss what the next step will be. So, building an alliance is the first step that has to be done, and then we can start thinking what should be done next. […] I have a feeling that Partia Razem might be a necessary project within a longer process. But it must fail. It must fail so something new come up.

I draw several conclusions from the case study of Razem (Together). First, Razem was founded in early 2015, after a period during which the liberal governments led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform) further intensified the neoliberal reconfiguration of the relationship between the state, labor, and markets in Poland that started in 1989. The way Razem views the neoliberal transformation of Poland is very much in line with how the researchers discussed in chapter three view the transformation: as a process of unevenly integrating Poland into a global capitalist division of labor, which has led to new forms of exploitation, and increased poverty and inequalities. All interview partners viewed the transformation period as negative, emphasizing the immense social costs of the economic transformation and the changes in people's attitudes. The interview partners highlighted the role of neoliberal reformers in the process, like Leszek Balcerowicz or the 'Chicago boys.'

From a sociological standpoint it is interesting to see that the majority of the interview partners have personally experienced the social consequences of neoliberal transformation either themselves, within their families, or in their communities. While the majority of the interview partners holds a tertiary educational degree, this does not mean Razem is a party of only affluent intellectuals. The personal experience of witnessing the neoliberal transformation has had a major influence on my interview partners' approach to politics and their conceptions of justice. Most interview partners highlighted and condemned the role of the old left during the transformation period, specifically the role of the post-communist party Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD, Democratic Left Alliance). Razem presents itself as a new, fresh left party and wants to be associated with other relatively new parties on the left in Europe, like Podemos or SYRIZA. The members of Razem I spoke to voiced deep mistrust against SLD, which also explains the heated internal debates within Razem about entering potential new coalitions before the parliamentary elections of 2019.

The interview partners view Razem instrumentally. For most, its major function is to push the political discourse in Poland to the left, mostly via media politics and through participating in electoral politics. However, in the process of organizing resistance Razem does not reduce its

role to performing empty media politics. While the party did not arise out of a social movement, it instigated, supported, and benefited from social movements once Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice) came to power at the end of 2015.

I have analyzed the politics of the neo-nationalist party PiS as a possible renunciation of neoliberalism. The economic and social policies of PiS present a clear break with the past, while its reactionary and conservative politics offer a neo-nationalist alternative to the individualism of the neoliberal era. Razem partly agrees with the view that PiS has also challenged neoliberalism in Poland. PiS has introduced a major social transfer scheme with the child allowance 'Rodzina 500+', raised the minimum wage, and attempted to strengthen the position of domestic capital. The interview partners pointed out how radical the social transfer scheme is in the context of neoliberal transformation. Yet PiS is also a neo-nationalist party, which aims to replace the individualist attitude of neoliberalism with a collectivism based on a nativist nationalism. PiS has instituted reactionary history politics, attacked institutions that work against their definition of 'the people' (such as high courts, liberal media networks), and has unleashed a conservative backlash against women's and LGBTQ rights.

While Razem retained a class perspective in their political approach after PiS took over the government, the resistance against the neo-nationalism of PiS has also led to the support of diverse protests and social movements. Razem played a leading role in the feminist movement that became known as "Czarny Protest" (black protest). In the years that were within the scope of my analysis, Razem has supported feminist protests, the LGBTQ movement, anti-racist struggles, movements against the climate crisis, and labor struggles. Razem has tried to connect diverse demands and has clearly been influenced by theories of left populism. However, it has not become the "popular identity," to speak in Laclau's terminology.

In terms of my hypothesis that a new left party in Poland has to deal with certain constraints connected to the post-socialist legacy of the country, it is true that Razem refrains from articulating a political vision of democratic socialism or communism. Instead, Razem puts forward a vision of a social democratic welfare state. However, to quote the first statement at the beginning of this chapter: It's still about the conflict between the labor and the capital. The neoliberal transformation has been thorough, and SLD—the party closest to social democracy before Razem was founded—has had a legacy of implementing neoliberal policies as well. In a sense, Razem is a project to revive social democracy in Poland with a left populist approach. The interview partners openly discussed the limits of such a reformist program, but also insisted that the majority of people would benefit if Poland became a social democratic welfare state similar to Scandinavia. This social democratic reformism is not necessarily attributable to a

specific post-socialist condition of the political arena, in which socialist or communist ideas are not communicable, but to the degree to which the state has retreated during neoliberal transformation. Establishing a broad social welfare state is already a radical break with neoliberalism in Poland.

In the early phase of building the party, Razem quickly established a membership base of more than 2,000 people and introduced party structures with high democratic standards. Razem has not been a top-down project of people coming from other parties. None of the activists interviewed for this thesis had been engaged in a political party before, although many had made political experiences outside of parties. The high internal democratic standards of Razem and the approach of trial-and-error in experimenting with a range of tactics have meant that interview partners have invested a lot of time and energy into their political activism within Razem, at times at the cost of personal health.

The activities of Razem have not translated into broad electoral success for the party. In 2019, when faced with low electoral turnout, the party decided to join an election coalition with SLD, Wiosna, and Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (PPS, Polish Socialist Party). After the coalition managed to receive 12.6 percent of the votes and won 46 out of the 460 seats in the Sejm, Razem was able to fill six of these seats. In the interviews, Razem members were quite realistic about their success changes. They hoped Razem would eventually become part of something new and bigger on the left and that the activities of Razem today would have positive effects in the future, even if the party itself failed. The second quote at the beginning of this concluding chapter speaks to that commitment—Razem might be a necessary project to reorient the left in Poland in general, even if Razem itself does not have electoral success in the process.

In chapter three, I presented the toll of neoliberalism in Poland. While macroeconomic indicators like GDP and trade have grown (although from low levels after years of crises), many other indicators have evolved more ambiguously. Labor relations fundamentally changed, and many households experienced increased insecurity, poverty, and inequality. Unemployment peaked in 1993 and 2001-2. In the process of joining the EU, the neoliberal integration was further intensified, and Poland experienced a massive outflow of temporary migrants in the years after. Profits and returns on investments have increasingly flown to foreign investors. Absolute poverty peaked in 1994 and increased again in the period between 1998 and 2005. Since then, absolute poverty markedly decreased due to rapid economic growth, which has led to fast growth in wages, higher pensions, and large decreases in unemployment rates. Relative poverty, on the other hand, increased. Income inequality has also increased during the transformation, driven by rising top-income shares that mainly consist of capital incomes.

During the early years of the transformation, gender pay gaps decreased, partly due to the deterioration of wages in male-dominated sectors. The double burden for women has not decreased, however. Reductions in state-provided childcare and eldercare have led to women performing these tasks unpaid inside the household. The division of unpaid care work in Poland is deeply unequal and has not changed between 2003/04 and 2013.

My research question was how and why the political party Razem has organized political resistance against neoliberalism in Poland. Razem views the transformation of Poland from state socialism to capitalism as a process that has caused economic hardships and conservative backlashes. From a development studies perspective, Razem is aware that the neoliberal transformation has led to an uneven integration of Poland into Europe. In this process, state assets were privatized and often sold to foreign investors, labor conditions within Poland deteriorated, and inequalities increased. However, Razem is not against European integration. Rather, it proposes a more social integration, with a progressive tax system and a comprehensive welfare state within Poland. The main motivation for many members of Razem to become politically active in party politics has been the feeling that other parties—and specifically the old social democratic party SLD—were complicit in the neoliberal transformation. Razem presents itself as a left populist party, trying to shift the public discourse to the left and amplifying the demands of social movements. While the early months of Razem looked promising, the party has not fulfilled the promise of becoming a strong left party that is capable of fundamentally changing Poland. Razem has successfully supported diverse groups in their struggles, but their left populist strategy has not led to Razem becoming a major political force in Polish politics. The party has not been able to integrate social movements into a larger left project. Razem has stayed a small, albeit effective party when it comes to media politics. Nevertheless, it has made inroads in renewing social democracy, and has pushed other left parties to renew themselves to become more inclusive and class-oriented, broadening the alliance that resists neoliberalism.

This thesis offers a limited glimpse into the struggles against neoliberalism in Poland. I conducted nine interviews with members of Razem from 2018 to 2019 and have focused my analysis on the period from 2015 to 2019. Using a Critical Realist Grounded Theory has helped me overcome preconceptions I had at the beginning of the research project and allowed me to thoroughly investigate how Razem works and how its members think. The thesis offers new insights into the challenges the contemporary left faces in Poland. However, the views expressed in the empirical part of this thesis reflect only the views of the interviewed members of Razem, and none of any other left actors within Poland. I do not claim to give a full picture

of left politics in Poland. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in English. Similar studies or further research might benefit from broadening the sample and using interpreters to allow interview partners to express their thoughts and feelings in their native language.

Further research into this topic may investigate the impact Razem has had on other progressive and emancipatory parties and movements in Poland in more detail. The left is in flux in Poland. In 2021, Robert Biedroń's Wiosna dissolved and merged with SLD to form a new left party called Nowa Lewica (New Left). While Razem has not joined this new party, the two closely cooperate (Lewica Razem 2022b). The impacts of both COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have remained outside this thesis. Razem—and other parts of the Polish left—condemn Russian imperialism, and have been vocal about the failure of other European left parties to univocally condemn it too (Lewica Razem 2022a). Another strand of further research may explore how PiS's government policies have evolved since 2019, and how Razem and other left actors have dealt with these multiple crises.

Neoliberalism in Poland—and elsewhere—is both being challenged and undergoing changes at the moment. Before the COVID-19 crisis, this change did not amount to a complete paradigm shift, although the economic conditions were similar to periods in the 20th century when the last paradigm shifts occurred (Jacobs and Laybourn-Langton 2018, 118). This case study has shown that organizing resistance against a hegemonic paradigm from below is a difficult and challenging task, but it is not an impossible one. Razem has demonstrated how class-oriented politics in Poland can be inclusionary, feminist, and organized democratically.

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# 7 Appendices

## 7.1 Appendix A: Overview of Interview Partners

| Interview | Length | Age | Gender | Highest educational attainment | Professional background | Province | Date of joining Razem | Current/previous positions within Razem |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 1h40m | 26 | M | Tertiary | Student | Lesser Poland | 2015 | Regional council, local board |
| B | 1h3m | 30 | F | Tertiary | Employed by university | Lesser Poland | 2015 | National council (Rada Krajowa) |
| C | 53m | 34 | M | Tertiary | Employed by university | Lesser Poland | 2015 | Local board |
| D | 46m | 37 | F | Tertiary | Employed by party | Silesia | 2015 | Regional coordinator |
| E | 1h14m | 24 | M | Secondary | Electrician/student | Silesia | 2017 | Local board |
| F | 1h01m | 33 | M | Tertiary | Employed by party | Mazovia/Greater Poland | 2016 | National board (Zarząd Krajowy) |
| G | 55m | 42 | F | Secondary | Employed by party | Mazovia/Łódź | 2015 | National board (Zarząd Krajowy) |
| H | 55m | 17 | M | Primary | High school student | Lublin | 2018 | Member, founding member of party youth wing Młodzi Razem |
| J | 1h10m | 30 | F | Tertiary | Physician | Silesia | 2015 | National council (Rada Krajowa) |

Table 2: Overview of interview partners

## 7.2    Appendix B: Code Book

**Code system**

| | |
|---|---|
| A - Personal background of interview partner | 0 |
|   A1 - Basic information | 0 |
|     Age | 9 |
|     Current/previous position within Razem | 17 |
|     Date of joining Razem | 10 |
|     Educational/professional background | 8 |
|   A2 - Experience with poverty and precarious work relations | 9 |
|   A3 - Previous political engagement | 9 |
|   A4 - Political identity | 10 |
|   A5 - Personal struggles with political engagement | 10 |
| B - Poland before 1989 | 11 |
| C - Thoughts on the Transformation, Poland after 1989 | 2 |
|   C1 - Neoliberal transformation | 12 |
|     Change in labor relations, unemployment | 7 |
|     Migration | 4 |
|     Rise in poverty, inequality | 5 |
|   C2 - Change in attitudes | 0 |
|     About reproductive rights | 2 |
|     Attitude towards socialism | 1 |
|     Neoliberal mentality | 14 |
|     Polarization of world views | 11 |
|   C3 - State of Democracy | 7 |
|   C4 - Actors other than PiS or Razem | 1 |
|     Biedroń/Wiosna | 15 |
|     Far-right | 4 |
|     Green party | 6 |
|     Left camp | 6 |
|     PO/liberal camp | 4 |
|     Catholic Church | 6 |
|     SLD | 15 |
| D - Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) | 0 |
|   D1 - Policies | 0 |
|     Economic policy | 2 |
|     Social policy, program 'Rodzina 500+' | 13 |
|     Climate and energy policies | 2 |
|     EU, international relations | 2 |
|     History politics | 3 |
|   D2 - Controversies, threats | 0 |
|     Attacking women's rights | 5 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Corruption, expanding control over institutions | 4 |
| Nationalism, racism | 5 |
| Reform of justice system | 5 |
| D3 - Neoliberal or not? | 10 |
| E - Razem | 0 |
| E1 - Structure and development of Razem | 8 |
| Structure, sub-organizations | 18 |
| Finances, funding | 8 |
| Membership base | 24 |
| Historical models | 6 |
| Internal democracy, debate culture | 33 |
| Voters of Razem | 3 |
| E2 - Political approach, meaning of left politics | 48 |
| New left | 8 |
| Populist left | 6 |
| Radical | 5 |
| Social democratic | 11 |
| Useful left | 4 |
| E3 - Policies and topics | 0 |
| Active state, welfare state | 6 |
| Climate and energy policies | 17 |
| Economic policy, labor relations | 8 |
| EU, international relations | 2 |
| Feminism | 12 |
| Fighting conservative backlash | 4 |
| Housing | 5 |
| Human rights, LGBTQ+ | 8 |
| Inequality and taxation | 13 |
| Position on PiS | 2 |
| Secularism | 3 |
| Social policy | 8 |
| Ukraine | 1 |
| E4 - Strategies and tactics | 1 |
| Appealing appearance, modern looks | 3 |
| Becoming part of something bigger | 5 |
| Electoral politics, entering coalitions | 36 |
| Grassroots activism, engaging with protests, Czarny Protest | 33 |
| International cooperation | 3 |
| Library | 1 |
| Local politics | 12 |
| Media-oriented politics | 18 |
| Organizing meetings and events | 14 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Pushing the discourse | 19 |
| Reclaiming left history | 6 |
| Supporting strikes, cooperation with unions | 11 |
| E5 - Struggles and challenges | 8 |
| Degree of popularity, not reaching the right people | 13 |
| Demonization, public perception | 11 |
| Internal arguments about visions, policies, target groups | 20 |
| Lack of motivation, problems with mobilization | 9 |
| People leaving because of alliance with SLD | 8 |
| PiS taking over positions | 12 |
| Treatment by media | 7 |
| Urban-rural divide | 8 |
| E6 - Political success | 12 |
| F - Voivodeships | 0 |
| Województwo łódzkie | 1 |
| Województwo lubelskie | 2 |
| Województwo małopolskie | 7 |
| Województwo opolskie | 3 |
| Województwo śląskie | 9 |
| Województwo wielkopolskie | 1 |

## A - Personal background of interview partner

### A1 - Basic information

The subcodes of this category are used to record sociodemographic data, i.e., the age of interviewees, the current or previous position within Razem, the date of joining Razem, and educational/professional backgrounds.

Anchor example:
"So I'm 30 years old, I will be 31 soon, but I'm still 30."

"Yeah, executive board of Razem Śląsk and also regional coordinator. We have 16 people who are employed by the party. So I am the only person in this region who is employed."

"Interviewer: And how long have you been with Razem?

B: Since the very beginning. So three and a half years."

"E: I work as electrician and I study computer science.

Interviewer: You are still studying?

E: Yes. Part-time. In weekends."

### A2 - Experience with poverty and precarious work relations

This code is used for segments in which interviewees talk about or reflect on experiences with poverty and/or precarious work relations. These experiences may come from family history, personal experience, or witnessing poverty and inequality through their professional or political experience.

Anchor example:
"I was born in a poor family. It, I was raised only by my mother because, and my father doesn't pay aliments, yes. And that's the problem in Poland. It's very, very common that fathers don't pay for their children, yes. Because women rights are in Poland in bad condition, yes. They... in worsening since Law and Justice are in, are ruling. I want the people to, people to have equal chances in life. I... for example it's some sort of my, from my life experiences, yes, I doesn't... I was studying normally, not weekend, five days in week, but I have no money for food. So I must go to work and next start to studying weekends when I, I have money to pay for weekends in my, for my university."

## A3 - Previous political engagement

This code is used for descriptions and recollections of previous political engagements, i.e., with political organizations, NGOs. The code is also applied in instances where the interview partner was not politically engaged and describes why that was the case.

Anchor example:
"Interviewer: Were you politically engaged before that?

C: Yeah I was member of campaigns against homophobia. The one Robert Biedroń founded like 20 years ago. So it's quite funny to meet him again, just years later. And the, so my friends and me, we organized the first march of tolerance, which is now called, it's called now, we call it march. First Kraków in 2004, twenty years ago, so this is like how I got myself for the first time. And I continued until 2009. So following five or six years. So we organized like three or four more marches. And we also ran quite big queer art festival. And we, my friends and I used to run it until 2009. Yeah. 2009."

## A4 - Political identity

This code is used for segments in which interview partners describe their political interests, or how they categorize themselves politically.

Anchor examples:
"And yeah, so, my interests were in local politics, mostly about housing politics. But the thing is that I mean, my idea of activity was more research focused, because I don't have like great experience of organizing or some media work, but it turned out that most of our activities are actually media oriented, so well it was a problem of how to gain interest of people and we've decided for media-oriented politics."

"Interviewer: You mentioned the different groups that are within Partia Razem. How would you consider yourself, like how would you position yourself?

H: It's a really hard question. Because when I was joining I think I was... wait I need to check a word. I think I was moderate social democrat, not too radical. And later for a long time I was a Socialist. Some time ago I have a moment where I was social democrat. And now in this moment I [laughs] really don't know. I... more like a social democrat with a, you know, rynek... the focus on the market and not everything needs to be public, you know. There can be a little a bit of a private property. But of course public people, there need to be more public people and a lot of corporations I think they should be socialized."

## A5 - Personal struggles with political engagement

This code is used for segments in which interviewees describe struggles with their political engagement. This entails skepticism before they joined Razem, exhaustion or health problems during their engagement, or reasons why they might leave the party.

Anchor example:
"In fact when Razem was being created I was in one of my scholarships in Barcelona, and in the beginning I was quite skeptical. Like, seeing how Podemos works, how first they have like huge social movement on the streets, like thousands of people. And then party create, like was created because of that. And then I heard about Partia Razem, the same colors, the same style, trying to copy some things, and without a social movement. Like let's do the party first and create... and I was like 'no, you can't to this like this, it's the other way around, you can't create it like that'."

"And that demanded very I'd say very quick response and 24 hour availability and that was very hard for me because I didn't have previous experience, it's not pretty much the way I work. And it's pretty hard."

## B - Poland before 1989

This code is used for segments in which interview partners talk about the period before 1989. The code is used for positive, negative, or neutral assessments of that period and its political system.

Anchor examples:
"Because we've never had welfare state in communism, in fact it was complicated. Because people maybe weren't very poor, but they weren't rich. They just had what they needed to have and no more."

"But when in Poland, like after almost no victims of communism. It was... the country was modernized. It was rebuilt after the war. There was the... like the first plan of rebuilding Polish economics, it was like the first four-year-plan. Like even at that time was regarded as one of the best in the world. So they like, within four years they built up the country. Which was taken down. Which is amazing. They rebuilt the major cities, which didn't happen in the West, in Western Europe. They just built new cities. I mean here they rebuilt Warsaw, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Lublin and Poznań. Well Lublin just partially because it hasn't been destroyed, and it escaped bombing. This is like incredible, for that was done, so this is a really cool aspect of communism. And when you just read the history of Polish architecture and how Poland was designed, I mean from after the war this is really impressive."

## C - Thoughts on the Transformation, Poland after 1989

### C1 - Neoliberal transformation

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which interview partners describe the process and consequences of neoliberal transformation.

Anchor examples:
"The transformation was like really getting everything from... from Milton Friedman, from the neoliberal guys from the Chicago University. Entrepreneurship is the only way, no industrial policy, we have to get capital from abroad. Freedom means freedom to make money, not freedom to unionize, not freedom to have a house, to have some security and these kind of things. So it was quite harsh and until now we have the most quickly rising inequalities in Europe, last Piketty showed that."

"And they, when I was a kid, this huge, I don't know, a few thousand people, they started to let them go and to privatize it. And to share this huge factory into pieces. So my father with his friends, his friend, friends started a company with programming and computers and he got a job there. My mom worked quite long, but she then lost her job. And she soon found some. Maybe for me it wasn't so bad. But a lot of my friends and colleagues in the class, their parents lost their jobs. And I think I didn't realize until I was an adult how that affected us. But we as a kid, there was this sense of instability, of fear, what would happen next. So I think in transformational way, as a city that was dependent from, dependent on this factory that was hit. And then, we, on this place because the region was hit so hard. Then it started this special economic zone. So, then I also observed a huge influence of great factories. But, that bring jobs, but not quality jobs."

### C2- Change in attitudes

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which interview partners describe changes in attitudes, mentalities, and values during and after the transformation. This includes the polarization of world views.

Anchor examples:
"So on the other hand there is some neoliberal idea of justice engrained in minds. And of course it's not something like that you can't discuss with. But if you combine those two things you got some reaction as 'Oh you shouldn't take three quarters of someone's income' although we would only take half. It's a technical detail, here. It's some sort of mentality. And you can't really, I don't know, just get mad at it. You should somehow get into dialogue with. And it's not always easy. It's I'd say we too often are kind of too attached to our ideas. And we don't really get into dialogue with people."

"J: And I think that we began to talk less to each other. Because there is this strong polarization between PiS and PO. That even, even in families that people are talking less to each other because they don't want to... they don't

want to fight. They want family events to be nice and peaceful. So there is this wall when you talk and getting news only online and from, and there is no exchange of thoughts, so it's very…

Interviewer: Do you experience that also within your family?

J: No because my mom... I wanted, I had that, you know, that thing, one of our family members I know that he identified it, himself as nationalist. And when I knew we would see him I fought with him in the past, so I didn't want to get into that anymore. But in the Christmas Eve my mother asked him again. 'What are exactly your political views?' so the next hours we talked, but I won [laughs].

Interviewer: [laughs]

J: And I even made him think that's why I think he even, he agreed with me in some points, so. But yeah, it's, you know, people are, and it's harder to convince someone to... it's harder, you know, to spread this seed of doubt, that maybe neither PO or not PiS or maybe that in general there is something wrong in this world because there is very strong polarization."

## C3 - State of Democracy

The code is used for segments in which interviewees talk about the development and state of democracy in Poland.

Anchor examples:
"We have in Poland problem with participation in general, but I think it's not like it's changed after transformation. Because before transformation of course people used to vote, but they didn't do because they wanted but we felt we should do it. And now if we compare data from elections, we see that most the elderly people go to vote. And I'm not sure if over one third of people between I think between 18 and 25 or 30 didn't vote in last election we had a month ago."

"So of course we've gained much more like democracy, although for me the situation when lots of people can't really participate in this democracy, because they're like really, well, that they're really, like economically somehow burdened. It's like not full democracy."

## C4 - Actors other than PiS or Razem

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which interview partners name and describe actors other than Razem or Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. This includes other political parties, institutions, or single persons that have had a certain influence on the political landscape.

Anchor examples:
"There's also Robert Biedroń, he is trying to make a party, yes. He's famous gay mayor from Poland. But he doesn't talk about his program. There are, this is one big mystery. What do he want to do, yes. Do, he wants to do, some stuff like us, or he wants to do some Macron stuff. He often says he's inspired by Emmanuel Macron. And that that's, we don't know what he will do in the future, yes. Actually he is building structures, and there are... we don't know, yes."

"J: Because SLD, as a, they had a huge, in 90s until the middle of the 2000s they had a very large support. But they compromised. They ran politics that was neoliberal. They had a lot of corruption and they were not trustworthy."

## D - Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)

### D1 - Policies

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which policies of the ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość are named, discussed and evaluated.

Anchor examples:
"But what has, I think that PiS also made a few good things. So I think it's also worth mentioning, that, when I talk work, in my work, not just with physicians but also talked with nurses, with women who clean. And I know

that their salaries went up because of PiS introducing, our, also Partia Razem program, that, so setting a minimum hourly wage. Because in, when there was PO there was a lot of people that were working for two or three or four Zlotys per hour, this is very very low. And when they said that the minimum is 13, that's a huge improvement. So, in hospital they worked about eight or nine an hour, Zlotys, and now they earn 13 or 14, so it's, I think it's a good thing, it's better, it's even better for me than 500+ because the treatment of the workers was horrible. Is it, that's horrible."

## D2 - Controversies, threats

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which interviewees describe controversies or threats they perceive connected to the ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość.

Anchor examples:
"The other thing human wise, as I said earlier, because they are anti-LGBT, they are anti-Women, anti-Feminist, and they are pushing big backlash about it. And I think the young people, that the young boys, are buying it because they are searching for some scapegoat to acknowledge what has gone with their lives, why it doesn't get better. Well, people of LGBT or women are quite a good scapegoat."

"And second you... at the same time you are attacking the citizen freedoms. You are taking more and more institutions, controlling tribunals, controlling courts, controlling media, controlling institutions, controlling financing cultural events and these kind of things. So getting kind of more totalitarian is too much, of course, but more like controlling every part of your social life."

## D3 - Neoliberal or not?

This code is used for segments in which interviewees discuss the transformative power of the ruling party's government, and in which the politics of the current party are characterized.

Anchor examples:
"And this is also what is quite interesting about PiS that they use this language of individualism although they claim to be anti-individualist party. And they use it to secure the same system they are fighting. They say they fight with. So while on the one hand lower taxes for companies and making whole Poland, like special economic zone, on the other hand social money transfers to citizens."

## E - Razem

## E1 - Structure and development of Razem

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which interviewees discuss the structure and development of the party. This encompasses formal structures (sub-organizations, committees, finances) as well as informal structures (factions, internal debate cultures). Statements about the members of Razem and its voters are included in this code. In addition, the subcodes encompass segments about what ideas and historical models have been influential when building and developing Razem. The category is also used for segments that describe periods of growth or stagnation.

Anchor examples:
"Interviewer: You have nationally a board of nine people, right, and a council of 50 people?

E: Actually it's 40, it was shrunk last year, yes. It, actually it's nine and forty there.

Interviewer: And they are both for two year terms or one year?

E: Two. I think two. Two years."

"So you know, it's really hard because on one hand like we're, we have those values and we're not really open for discussing with people who are somehow different from us. And you know that someone says something that is 'Ok, yeah maybe it's not entirely, like, you know politically correct.' And probably majority of the reactions would be like 'Oh you're homophobic, sexist' or whatever. And like does it help? No. And, or 'Oh you are not left enough.' Does it help? No. I mean at least in my opinion. So.

Interviewer: Do you think the meetings or party organization turned into that?

B: I think it was quite like that from the beginning. Or at least it is like that now."

"So for sure in terms of contemporary models Podemos was, like, this quite obvious link. In terms of like historical it would be probably like referring to Polish Socialist Party. So PPS. Their values. And yeah. So. That would be like two probably most like the biggest referrals I would say."

"J: Yes, yes. But now I think that we... the... in Poland there was a really hard election calendar for us. Because between 2015 and autumn of 2018 there were no elections. So we spent the time, this three years, working on our program and learning. And getting a lot of different skills. But since the election campaign started the writing the program is now in the background because there is not really time and space for this kind of work now, so."

## E2 - Political approach and visions

This code and its subcodes are used for segments in which the political approach of Razem, the purpose and meaning of left politics, and the characterization of left politics are discussed.

Anchor examples:
"I: From what I have understood the main, from activists who created Razem, was that there were, they were act... from years the left in Poland, there were a lot of small organizations, a lot of NGOs. And their actions weren't efficient. And they decided that they need a political representation. That it's not enough to be just an activist. To organize protest, but you have to have parliamentary representation. So, that's the first one. The second one that this parliamentary representation have to be new and fresh and not connected to people who built post-communist left in Poland."

## E3 - Visions, utopias

This code is used for segments in which interviewees discuss visions or utopias of Razem.

Anchor examples:
"Interviewer: If Partia Razem in next Sejm elections not only got into the Sejm but had the majority. Imagine for a second. And also in Śląsk, in other regions. Gained substantial political power. Where would Poland be like in thirty years in your opinion?

D: Thirty years. I think it can be compared to, I hope, maybe not to German; it would be I think it's impossible. But maybe like Ireland. Definitely more multicultural. I think it's important. More neutral. Less homophobic. More diverse. And of course more... and of course as a welfare state I think. This is an important thing. Because we've never had a welfare state in communism, in fact it was complicated. Because people maybe weren't very poor, but they weren't rich. They just had what they needed to have and no more."

## E3 - Policies and topics

The subcodes of this category are used for segments in which interviewees talk about policy proposals or topics Razem addresses.

Anchor examples:
"G: Hmm... I'm not sure, I'm thinking about building. About... accommodation programs. Because we talk about, in the European elections, we talked about when... we have in Warsaw homeless people. And twice as many empty buildings. And like of the things we are talking about this, you know, just make these buildings not empty, you know. But for living people. So one of the things is, you know, the flat, the house is, doesn't have to be a property. People have to have a place for the living.

Interviewer: So you propose expropriating private buildings to make them public? Or...

G: Mhm.

Interviewer: Like, what is the way to get there?

G: [Laughs]

Interviewer: Is it... do you propose a tax for accommodations that stay empty? Do you propose that private property buildings need to be socialized?

G: Private buildings to be socialized.

Interviewer: Ok.

G: Now we are thinking about taxes, but there was this idea about socializing these buildings, yes."

## E4 - Strategies and tactics

This category and its subcodes is used for segments in which interviewees name, describe, and evaluate strategies and tactics of Razem.

Anchor examples:
"We have to grow enough so they have to listen to us. But in order to grow we need people and we need money. So that's why these elections now and in fall are so important. Because it will be very hard if we lose public funding to still do work that we are doing. And I think that maybe... we have to make room and space for the left. And when we are not getting help from, you know, the media, then we have to go into grassroots politics. But, you know, that also requires people and money."

"And third of course it's the real fight, and fights on the streets against evictions, against... very local things sometimes. And defending schools, I mean, being part of the teacher's strike last couple of weeks. And of course you need to be very effective in that way. You need to have a lot of people. And of course we can, and we are doing I think a good job in some places. So, of course people that meet us in a specific place, we can help, we can do something together."

## E5 - Struggles and challenges

This code and its subcodes is used for descriptions of struggles and challenges faced by Razem.

Anchor examples:
"And it's because we are not, rozpoznawalny, people doesn't know us. I was walking in the streets and talking with people and they don't, they didn't recognize Partia Razem. Some liberal and conservative TVs and radios doesn't like us. It's problematic to talk to journalists from the liberal side. And with conservative side. It must be some big, big thing that they come to us, yes. So people doesn't recognize us. And that's the, that's the key to our result. We must become more recognized...

Interviewer: Recognized.

E: Yes. To people. People must know what we offer them, yes. We must work on that. We must talk more with people. We must focus less on us, on program, on democratic structure, we must focus more on people on streets. We must talk to them. We must think about ways to get to them."

"They will remember us. But we are not enough to make it also on a very big effect on a national scale. And unfortunately, of course, we are still mainly based in big cities. That means that people in smaller cities and especially in the countryside, just don't know who we are. We have very, like, I don't know, Adrian Zandberg has like 40, 50% of people in Poland know who Adrian, know that Adrian Zandberg exists. But, like, 20, 25% only knows that Partia Razem exists. So, in fact, if you see how many people from those that know us vote for us it's not so bad [laughs]. But the problem is that like, three fourth of the Polish population never heard of us. And like it's a, it's circle. You can't get to the countryside, if you are not a big organization, and you can't be a big organization if you don't go there. And so yeah, it's.."

## E6 - Political success

This code is used for segments in which political successes or victories of Razem are discussed.

Anchor examples:

"And then one of, biggest successes was to coin the idea of black protest."

## F - Voivodeships

The subcodes of this category are used to record in what province (Voivodeships) activities described by the interview partners take place in. Voivodeships are an administrative unit corresponding to NUTS level 2.

Anchor examples:
"In a Małopolska Voivodeship we got two local organizations, one in Kraków, one in Tarnów. And then you can also have local clubs, so if you don't have, like if you have a small group of people that is not able to have like permanent structures you can have this club, and such clubs we have for example in Nowy Targ, or in Nowy Sącz. Yeah. And those clubs, they don't have local structures while in local organizations we have, we can have a council, we don't have it in Kraków, because it wasn't clear what its functions should have. And that is connected to this problem of very media-oriented politics. So you have to, it's more necessary to have people who are very, that are responding to do a Q and meet, making conferences, it's more like doing administrative media work, that is performed by a local board. In theory there is also an intermediate level on the voivodeship level, but it's only coordinating local organizations if there is need, for example, to have common lists or local elections. It's not very important."