

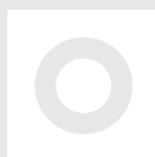


Political
Accountability
Foundation



Voices of Central and Eastern Europe

Poland Country Report



About this report

The fragility of democracies is an increasing concern amid a period of global instability and insecurity reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, a shared belief in good governance, a reliable and trusted news media and government institutions, and an engaged civil society are now all crucial for democratic societies to get back on their feet, overcome societal and economic challenges of today and the near future.

GLOBSEC's new report, [Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: Perceptions of democracy & governance in 10 EU countries](#), provides unique insight into public satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and governance in ten Central and Eastern European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Taking note of the links between citizen support for liberal democracy (rather than autocracy), satisfaction with governance and life, and predispositions towards conspiracy theories and misinformation, the report, in its entirety, reveals fragile spots and pinpoints areas for further discussion.

This report focuses specifically on Poland and provides further insights into how people in the country perceive democracy and governance and media in their country and explores the most prevalent fears in the society.

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Key findings

In countries with higher rankings in democracy quality indexes, respondents are more satisfied with their current governance system. Support for liberal democracy is not straightforward in the region. Only in 5 of 10 countries, more than 50% of respondents would choose liberal democracy over an autocratic leader.

Poland, however, belongs to those countries where majority prefer liberal democracy. Together with Hungary, Poland has been dubbed the problem child of Central Europe, however according to this data, 66% of Poles and 81% of Hungarians believe liberal democracy is the right form of government for their countries.

Trust in the media in the region averages around 44%. At the same time, more than 70% of respondents in Austria, Czechia, Romania, and Slovakia perceive the media as rather or completely free of influence.

In Poland, 57% of the population believes that their country's media are not free, the lowest score across all countries in the region.

Only a minority, 28%, of CEE respondents agree, on average, with the narrative that their values are under threat due to the "West".

In Poland, 23% agree with such notion. Even if Poles are strong supporters of membership in the EU and the community of Western democracies, 43% believe in a "Brussels dictate". Such a higher number could result in a growing feeling of imposition of Western values over Poland, if European institutions continue to intervene by protecting rule of law and human rights in Poland, be it by sanctioning the reforms of the judiciary or by imposing migrant quotas over Poland.

Respondents susceptible to believing conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives demonstrate a particular propensity for favouring autocratic leaders over liberal democracy and are more willing to trade away democratic freedoms for other social and financial benefits.

On average 34% of Poles believe in conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives, placing the country in the middle of the pack when compared to its neighbours. Such belief fluctuates between age groups and across different levels of education attainment, with younger generations and people with either low or high levels of education being less susceptible to conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives.

Democracy & Governance

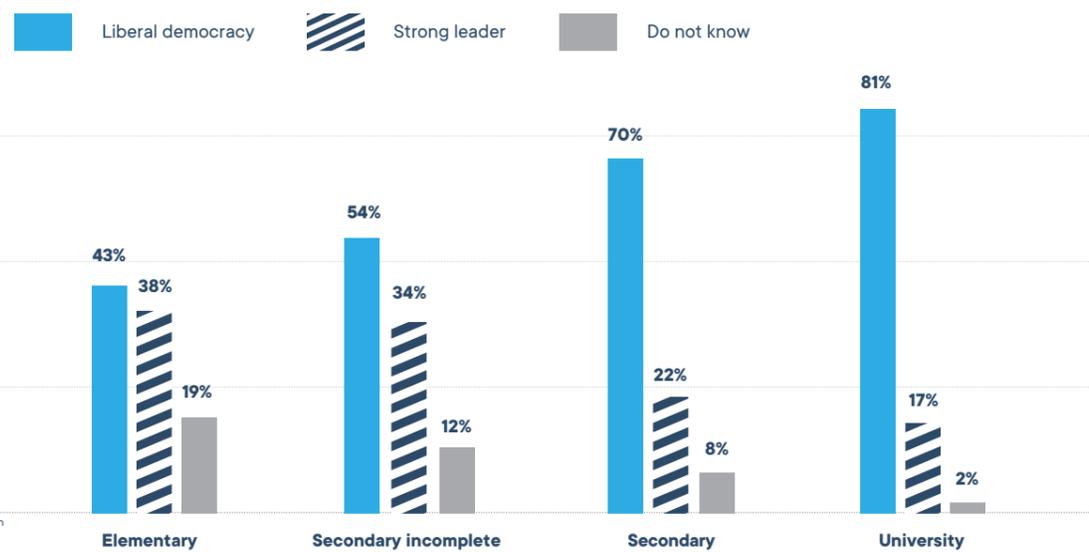
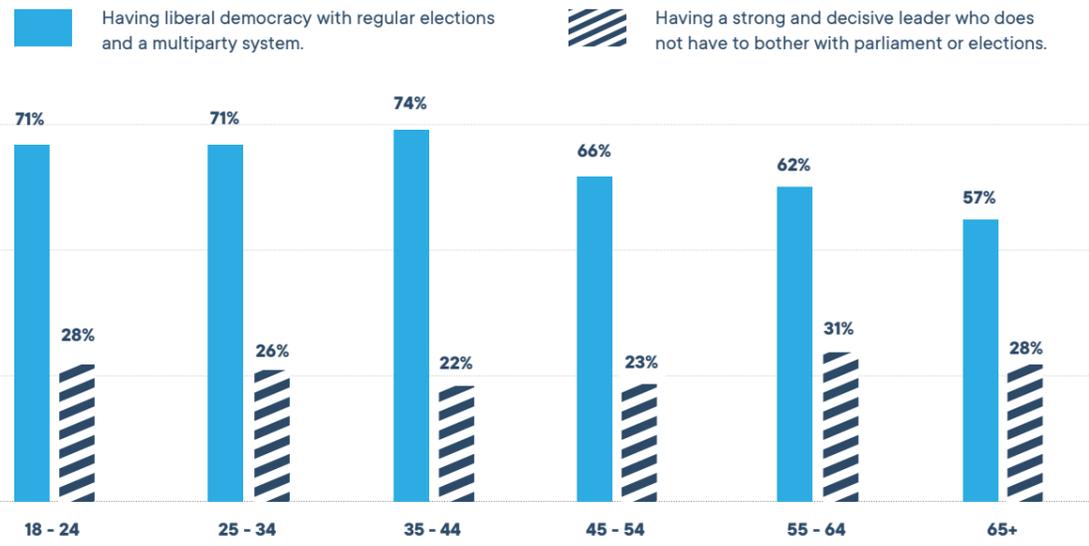
The data indicates that despite Poland's recent democratic backslide¹, support for liberal democracy is still relatively high. Even though Poles are among some of the strongest supporters of liberal democracy in

the region, after Austria and Hungary, with 66% of the population generally favouring liberal democracy over a strong authoritative leader. The largest support for liberal democracy at nearly 74% is among those

aged 35-44, followed by 71% among the two youngest groups surveyed.

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/nations-transit/2020>

Which of the following forms of government is, according to you, better for Poland?

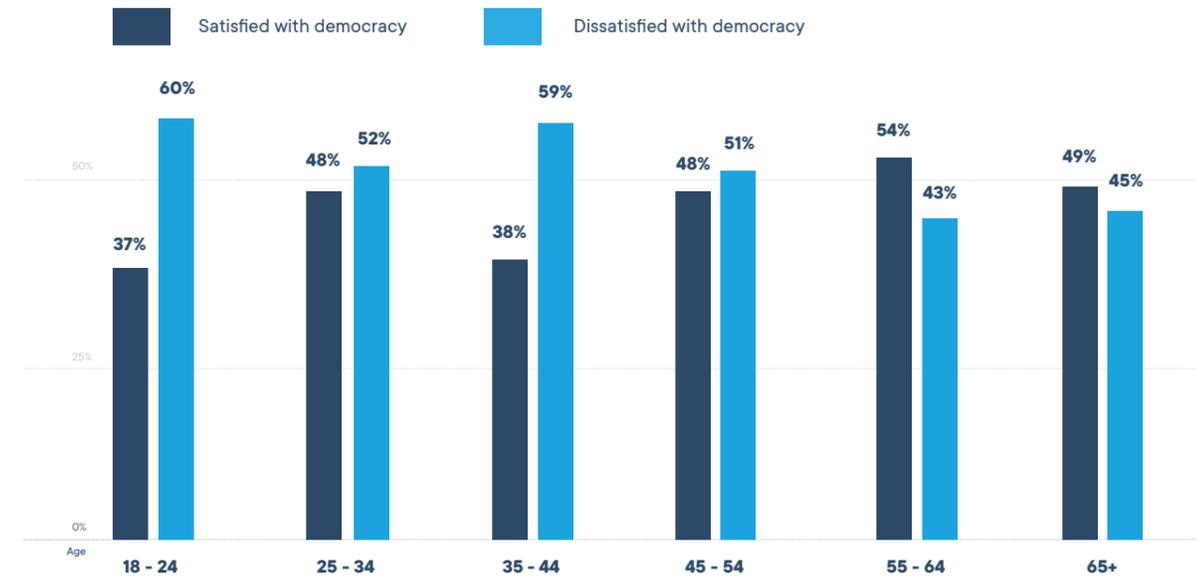


Poland's score of -18 in the Satisfaction with the System of Governance Index, an indicator of respondents' level of dissatisfaction towards governance in their countries, puts the nation in the bottom of 10 surveyed

countries. On average, 50% of Poles are not satisfied with how democracy works in their country. However, unlike in other countries in the region, dissatisfaction decreases proportionally with age – young people aged

18-24 and those aged 35-44 are the most dissatisfied with how democracy works in Poland with 60% and 59% respectively; while respondents aged 55 and older are the least dissatisfied.

If you take all circumstances into account, to what extent are you overall satisfied with how democracy works in Poland?



The above figures, combined with the high levels of support for liberal democracy among Polish youth, show that despite dissatisfaction with the current state of democracy, Poles are still convinced that in the long run democracy is a better system for Poland. This data can also indicate that at least some of those who believe in democracy as a system have generally higher expectations of how liberal democracy should work and their dissatisfaction with the current state of democracy in Poland only reinforces their desire for a better democratic system. In fact, 77% of those currently dissatisfied with how democracy works in the country would prefer liberal democracy, compared to 56% of those satisfied with the democracy's functioning at the moment.

Index of Satisfaction with the System of Governance

Austria	82
Estonia	22
Czechia	4
Lithuania	-1.5
Hungary	-2
Slovakia	-11.5
Latvia	-12
Poland	-18
Romania	-32
Bulgaria	-46

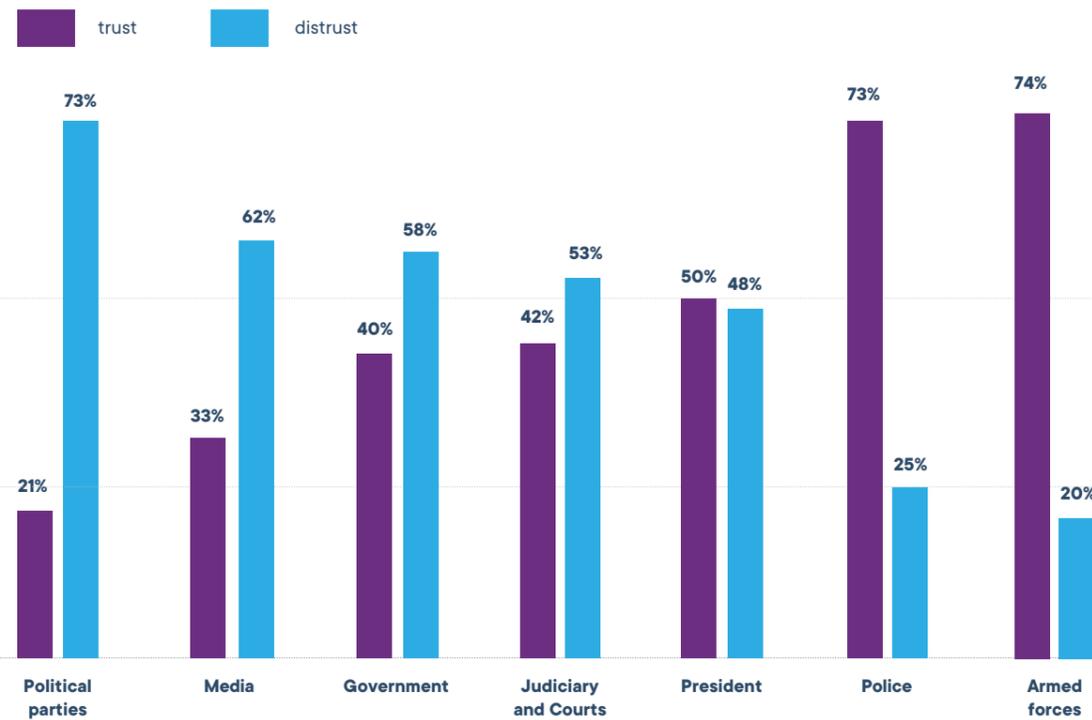
Trust nobody, unless your life depends on it?

A closer examination of the level of trust and distrust in institutions in Poland reveals a split, with a trust-gap observed between different institutions. While a majority of

Poles trust the police and the armed forces, only 21% trust political parties and 40% trust the government.

Do you personally trust or distrust the following institutions in Poland?

Levels of trust and distrust displayed from the least trusted institution to the most trusted ones.



The judiciary and the media, which have been subject to government influence in the recent years, are generally less trusted. Interestingly, the judiciary is much more distrusted (71%) by those who declared voting for Law and Justice which introduced radical reforms of the judiciary since 2015, than by

those who vote for the main opposition party (31%). This might be the result of a narrative pushed by Law and Justice, in which those in government justified the overhaul of the judiciary by saying that there is a "caste" in the judiciary which does not want to let go if the power it amassed over the years.²

² <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/07/05/polands-government-sacks-a-third-of-its-supreme-court>

Support for liberal democracy is the highest (77%) among those Poles who are dissatisfied with the current state of democracy in the country.



Inclusion in the system

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your country and the world?

■ The needs of people like you are well taken into account by the political system in Poland ■ If you take all circumstances into account, to what extent are you overall satisfied: With your life?



The above data show that the already high levels of satisfaction are even higher for those with higher level of attained education. However, there is a negative correlation between the level of education and the feeling of that the political system responds to one's needs, with those with secondary or university education feeling on average 15 percentage points less included than those with primary education.

Furthermore, the significant gap between the general level of life satisfaction and the feeling of the political system's responsiveness to one's needs can suggest that the life of ordinary Poles became less and less dependent on the political system and the welfare state. Recent studies³ by Polish economists and social scientists only confirm that in recent years Poland has seen a growing privatisation of public life and those Poles with higher disposable income increasingly live their lives without any contact with the Polish state.

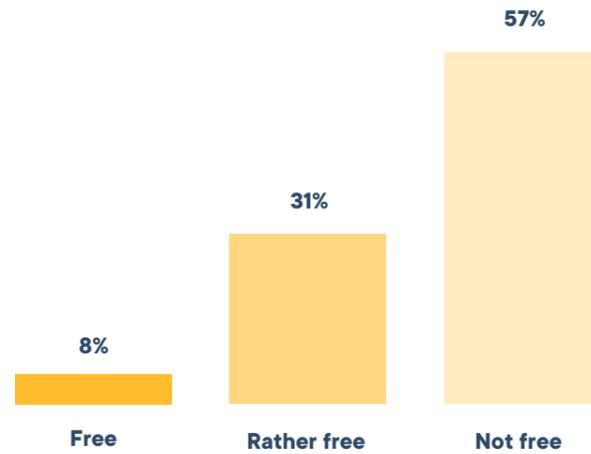
³ <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2019/05/07/pawlowski-druga-fala-prywatyzacji-bunt-klasa-srednia/> and <https://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/Programy%20Operacyjne/Forum%20Idei/Komunikat%20z%20badania%20prywatyzacji%20edukacji.pdf>

While 91% of Poles are satisfied with their lives, 55% are convinced that the needs of people like them are NOT taken into account by the political system in Poland.

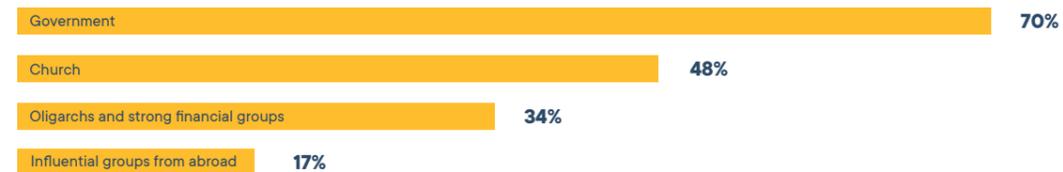


Control Over the Media

A total of nearly 57% of Poles believe that the media in their country are not free and only 39% of respondents said that they trust mainstream media. These are the worst figures in CEE.



Who do you believe has the strongest influence over the media in your country?



Strong control of the ruling elite over public media has been an issue in Poland ever since the country's democratic transition. However, recently, under the Law and Justice government, this problem has only been exacerbated⁴. Another important player in Poland's media market is a private media company owned by one of Poland's priests, Father Rydzyk. His media emporium includes a TV station and a radio station. Even if those stations do not have a big market share, Father Rydzyk's friendly relations with the Law and Justice government influence public perception. Moreover, the direction in which the country is developing, as chosen by the government, is seen to be very much in line

with the church's will, thus the perception of church influence over the public sphere (including media) is high.⁵

However, one might wonder whether Poles when asked about influence over 'mainstream media' did not automatically refer to 'public media'. This would explain the belief shared by 70% of Poles who think that media are influenced by the government (which is not the case for most private media). The data collected within this polling shows that respondents who supported the ruling party during the last elections are the only ones whose majority trusts mainstream media (60%), whereas respondents who

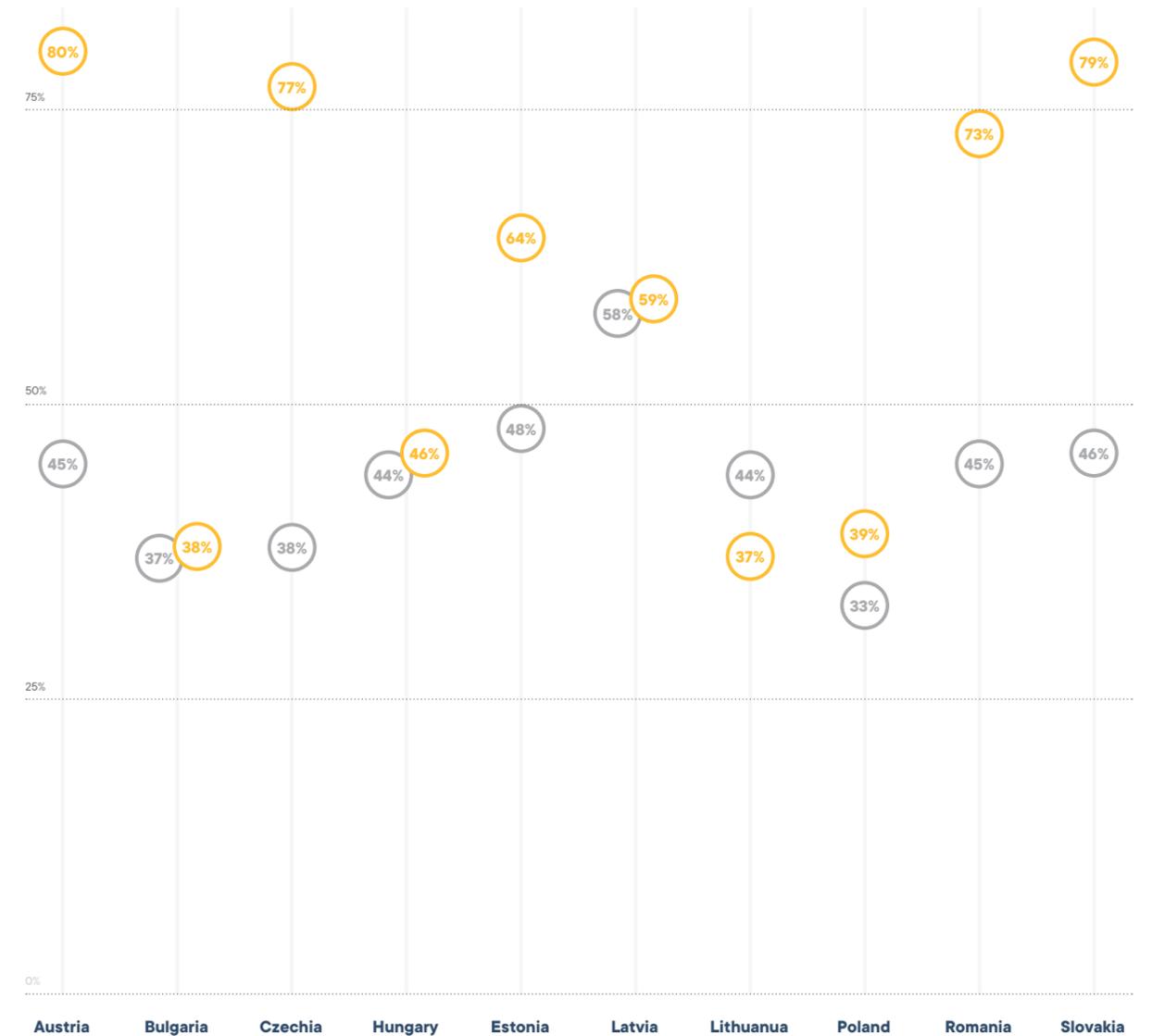
supported opposition parties declared radically lower level of trust in mainstream media - 75% of those who voted for Civic Platform and 87% of those who voted for Lewica Razem distrust mainstream media. This is especially visible if linked with the strong criticism towards private mainstream media presented by the ruling coalition in recent years.

⁴ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/25/poland-public-television-law-and-justice-pis-mouthpiece/>

⁵ <https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/trojka-z-3-3-proc-udzialu-w-sluchalnosci-wyprzedzily-ja-rmf-maxx-i-vox-fm>

Trust in media and perceptions of being free-of-influence

● Those who trust standard mainstream media ● Those who think that media are rather or completely free



⁶ Reporters Without Borders, 2020 World Press Freedom Index, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

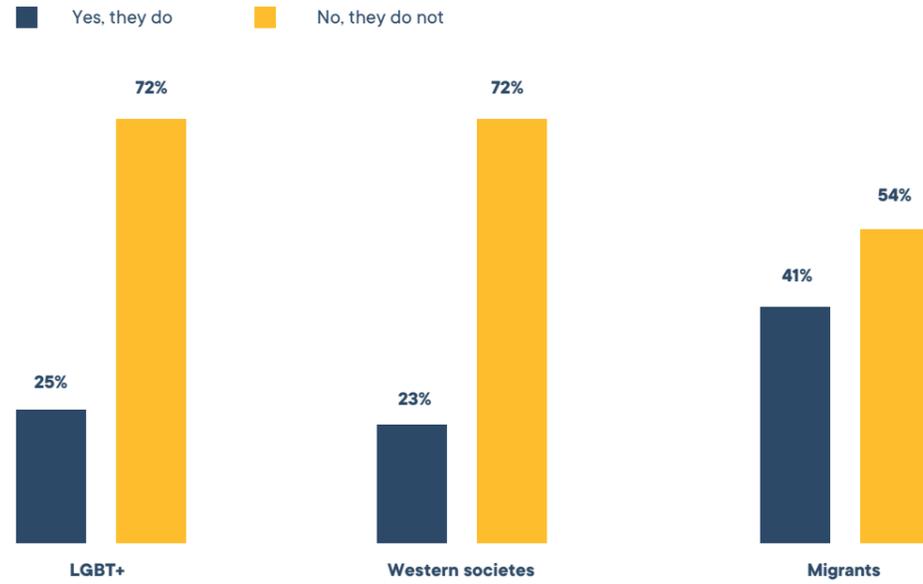
2020 World Press Freedom Index⁶

Country	Ranking number 2020
Estonia	14
Austria	18
Latvia	22
Lithuania	28
Slovakia	33
Czechia	40
Romania	48
Poland	62
Hungary	89
Bulgaria	111

Perception of Threats



Some people claim that there are certain groups of people and countries that threaten our own identity and values. Do you personally think any of the following groups or countries threaten your identity and values or not?



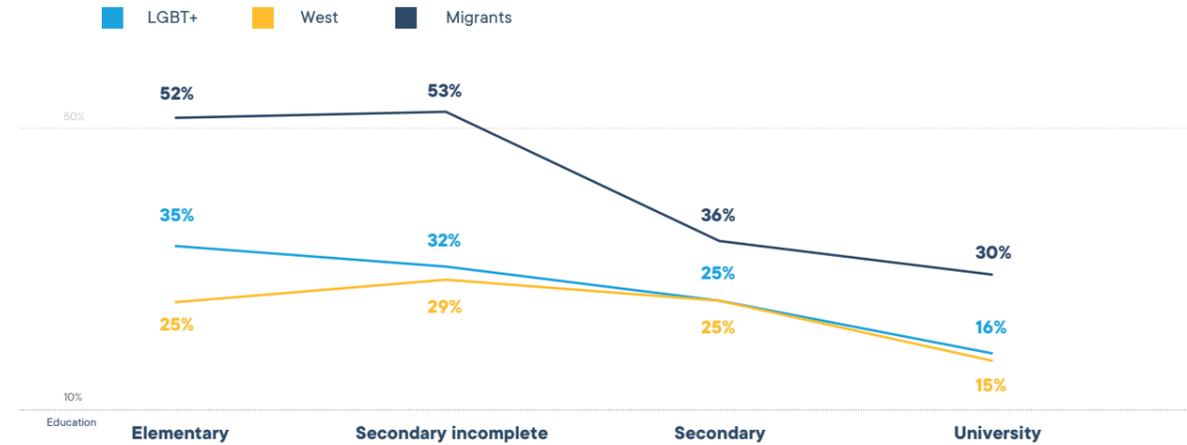
The high degree of tolerance for LGBT+ community is somewhat surprising, as Poland is generally regarded as a more conservative society. The first explanation can be linked to a realisation that the government and church strongly influence and control the media (as seen earlier). While distrusting the government, Poles also distrust the narratives the government tries to push forward. Another explanation can be linked to Poles' tendency to focus on personal development and on the wellbeing of their nuclear families and small businesses. Even though they feel as a part of a bigger nation, they are very much attached to their freedoms and refuse others limiting them even for the sake of preservation of conservative values. This attitude could be most easily described as 'let me and others be'.

Poles' high level of distrust towards migrants can, on the other hand, be a result of the anti-refugee campaigns launched by the Law and Justice party in recent years (namely ahead of the 2015 and 2019 elections)⁷. However, it has to be said that Poland welcomed a larger share of economic migrants (mostly from Ukraine and Belarus) in the recent years, thus leading us to think that the above data might be a result of a general lack of distinction between migrants and refugees among Polish society.

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/23/poland-election-law-and-justice-party> or <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/26/world/europe/immigration-poland-ukraine-christian.html>

The strongest correlation observed was based on level of educational attainment:

Affirmative answers of respondents to three individual questions as above



As can be seen above, the higher the level of education, the lower the level of mistrust towards certain social groups. People with higher education usually live in bigger cities with a high chance of encountering migrants on the streets or in shops. Such frequent encounters give Poles a chance to start perceiving migrants as a valuable part of Polish society and normalise their presence in Poland. As for LGBT people, higher education is an important socialising factor since, despite the rise of different higher education institutions in recent years - universities are still more diverse milieus where there is a high propensity for liberal ideals.





Conspiracy Theories & Misinformation



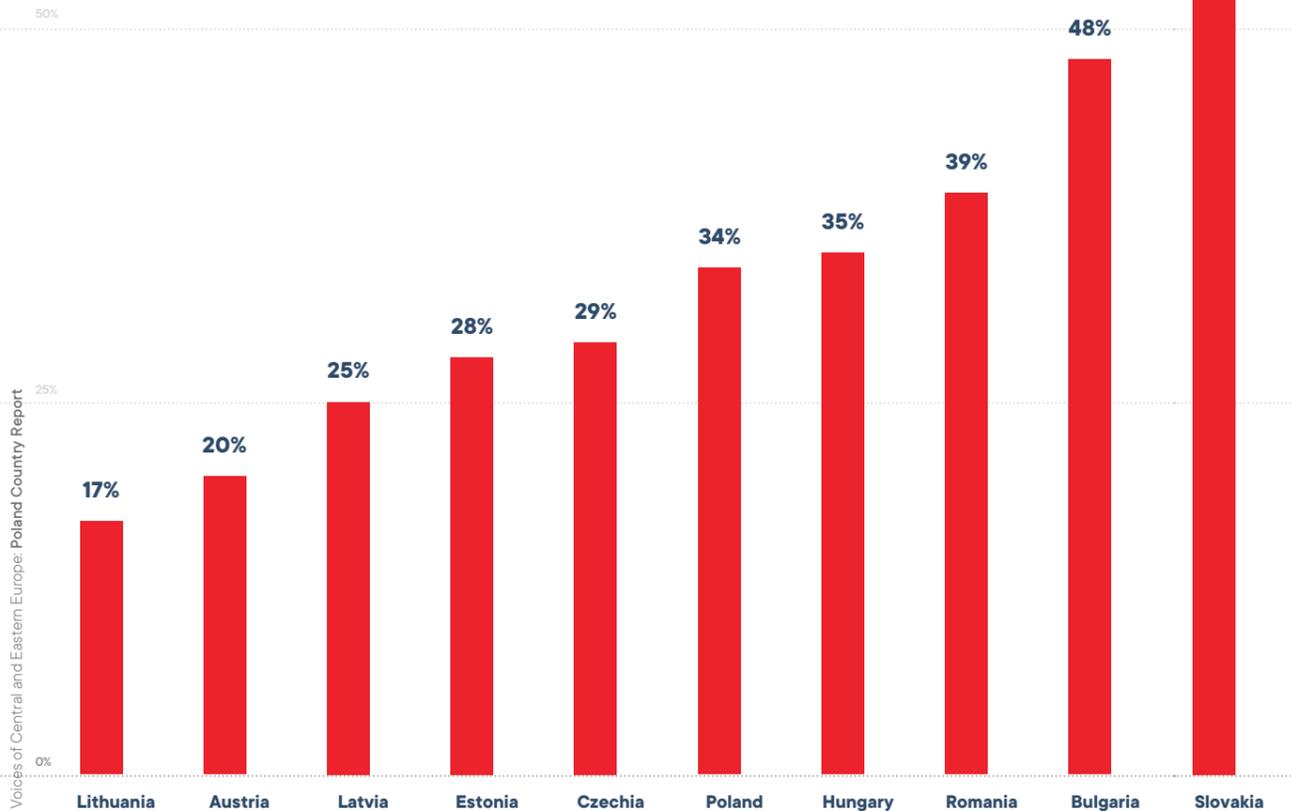
Who believes in conspiracy theories?

As mentioned by the authors of the Voices of Central and Eastern Europe Slovak report⁸, a logistic regression analysis applied on data from 10 countries identified five key factors contributing to people's proneness to believe in conspiracy theories and misinformation: willingness to trade away freedoms for other benefits; support for an autocratic leader; belief that the media is not free; dissatisfaction with the system; and dissatisfaction with life.

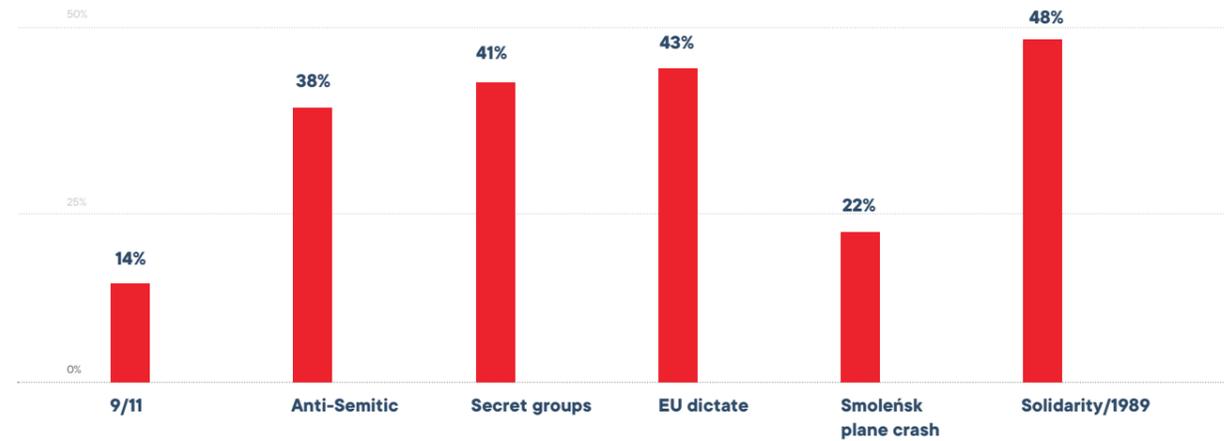
Poles cohere with two of these five factors, namely belief that the media are not free and dissatisfaction with life; and are in the middle of the pack when it comes to belief in conspiracy theories and misinformation across the region with 34% of respondents, on average, susceptible to believing statements that include conspiratorial thinking and misinformation.

⁸ <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-Slovak-country-report.pdf>
⁹ The percentage scores were calculated based on an average of responses in agreement with 3-4 conspiracy statements. The respondents were asked around 5-6 conspiracy statements, of which three were identical for all countries covered and the rest country-specific and selected by analysts from the respective countries. The statements with the lowest and highest percentage were excluded from the average to remove narratives that might have been strongly influenced by recent political events or by analysts' miscalculation of the predominant narratives.

Degree of belief in conspiracy theories and misinformation narratives⁹



What conspiracies and misinformation dominate among Poles?



Agreement with the following conspiracy theories:

- The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 was planned and conducted by the American government, not Al-Qaeda.
- Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world.
- World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.
- EU and Brussels dictate to Poland what to do without Poland having a chance to influence it
- The Smolensk plane crash was staged. The former Prime Minister Donald Tusk made a deal with Russia to kill the then President Kaczyński and the elite.
- The "Solidarity" made a deal with the communists during the roundtable negotiations of 1989, and Poland is still ruled by the people who were in power in a socialist regime

The extent Poles believe in the EU/Brussels dictate is worrying given the collision course between the Law and Justice government and the European institutions on the issue of rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. 67% of those who voted for Law and Justice believe in an EU dictate, compared to only 14% among those who voted for the largest opposition party, the Civic Platform. The Polish government has used the "protection of Polish sovereignty" discourse

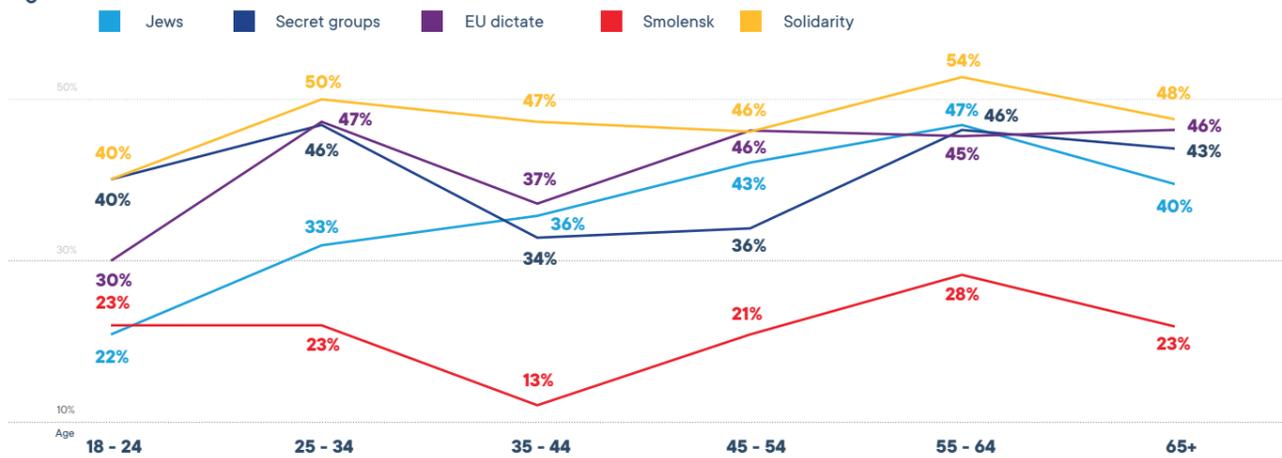
in response to any and all comments from Brussels on its judicial reform proposals, as well as with regards to the rights of LGBT+ community in Poland. Recent ideas to link the allocation of EU funds to a country's state of the rule of law might result in alienating a significant portion of Polish society which believes Brussels is interfering in Poland's domestic affairs and punishing Warsaw for audaciously creating its own path within Europe.

Belief in conspiracy theories according to age

A somewhat positive correlation was observed between susceptibility to conspiracy theories and age of respondents. On average, 44% of those aged between 55 and 64 years and 40% of those aged 65 and more years agreed with the conspiracy

statements posed to them. While belief in conspiracy theories is widespread among all age groups, there are sizeable differences in responses to different conspiracy theories within the age groups. There is a 35% difference, for example, between

buy-in to the Smolensk conspiracy and the Solidarity/1989 misinformation narrative among those aged 35-44.



The percentage scores represent an average of responses in agreement with 5 conspiracies:

EU and Brussels dictate to Poland what to do without Poland having a chance to influence it.
 The Smolensk plane crash was staged. The former Prime Minister Donald Tusk made a deal with Russia to kill the then President Kaczyński and the elite.
 The "Solidarity" made a deal with the communists during the roundtable negotiations of 1989, and Poland is still ruled by the people who were in power in a socialist regime.
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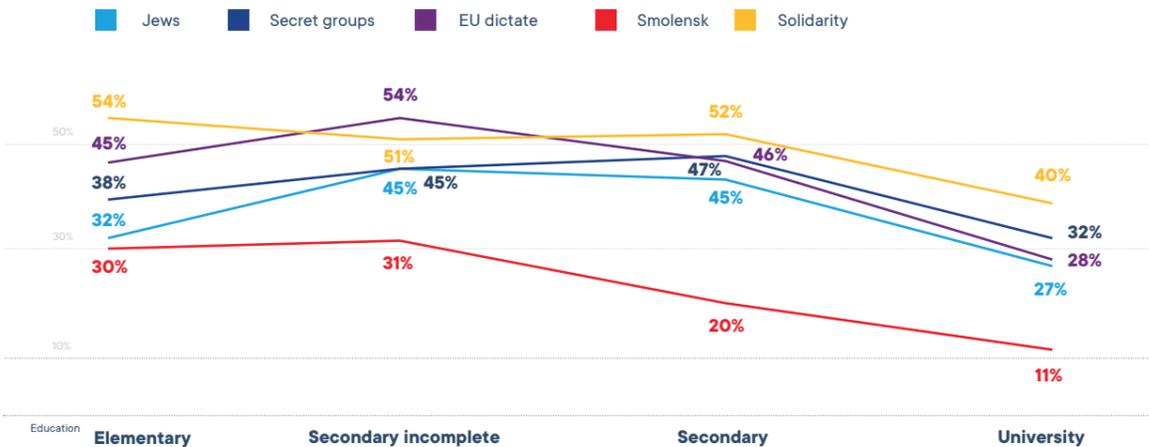
Belief in conspiracy theories according to education

While, on average, 41% of Poles believe in conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives, the propensity of such belief varies according to the level of achieved education. Interestingly, those with the lowest and the highest level of education are the least prone to believe in conspiracy theories. However,

that also varies between different conspiracy theories.

Around 45% of Poles with incomplete secondary education believe in conspiracy theories yet "only" 27% of university educated individuals share this inclination.

In the case of the "Brussels dictate" narrative, there is a nearly 26 percentage points difference in responses between those with incomplete secondary education/ apprenticeship and a university degree.



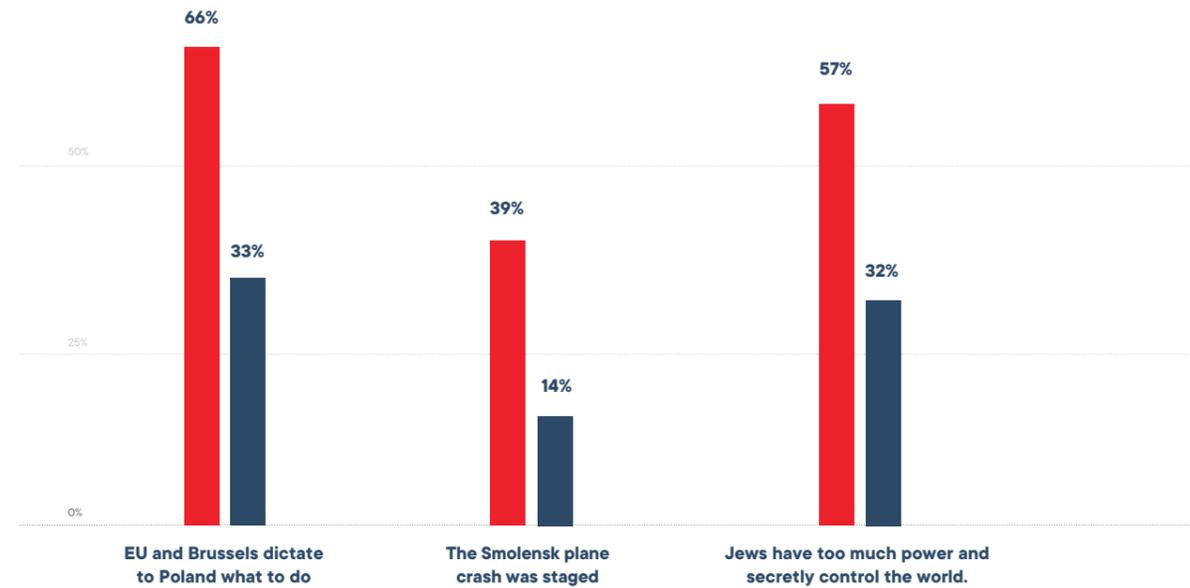
Conspiracy theories and democracy

Interestingly, those who tend to support a more authoritarian government and are more satisfied with how democracy works in Poland, believe in conspiracy theories to a

much larger degree than those who favour a liberal democratic government and are less satisfied with the present state of democracy.

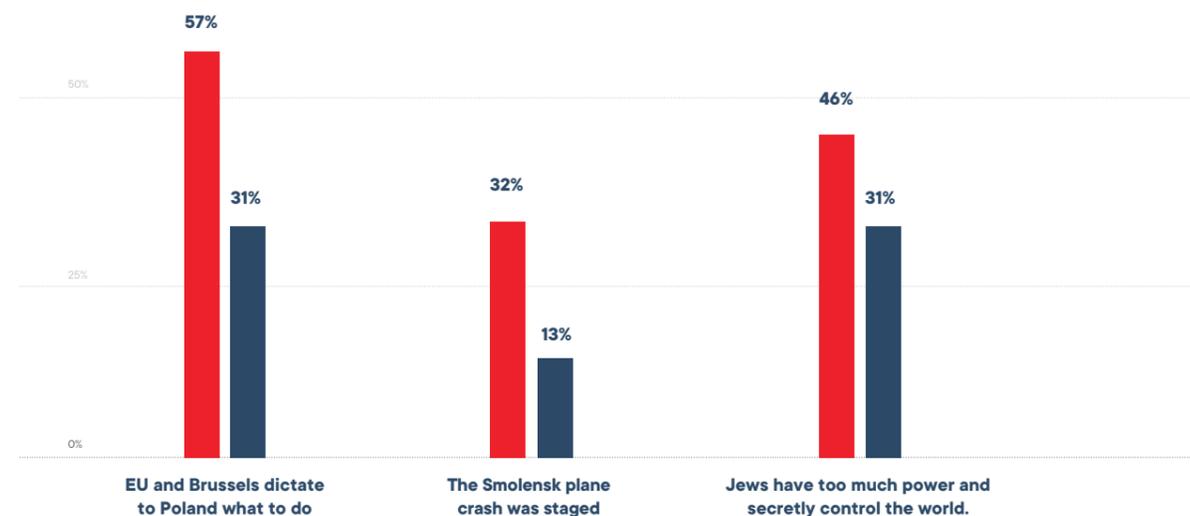
Those who agree with the following statements: Best form of government for our country.

Strong and decisive leader who doesn't have bother with parliament or election
 Liberal democracy with regular elections and multiparty system



Satisfaction with how democracy works in our country.

Satisfied with democracy
 Dissatisfied with democracy



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Methodology

The outcomes and findings of this report are based on public opinion poll surveys carried out in March 2020 on a representative sample of the population in ten EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. The surveys were conducted on a sample ranging from 1,000 to 1,047 respondents using stratified multistage random sampling in the form of computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) or computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI).

In all countries, the profiles of the respondents were representative of the country by gender, age, education, place of residence and size of settlement. For the purpose of graphical data visualisation in this report, the results were rounded to full numbers.

To improve the readers' experience, the responses in closed questions with a scale were generalised. For example, a question with options definitely agree/ rather agree/ /rather disagree /definitely disagree, was merged to agree / disagree for the purpose of both data visualisation.

More about the methodology can be found in the comparative report **Voices of Central and Eastern Europe**.

Collection of opinion polls in each country was coordinated by FOCUS, s.r.o.

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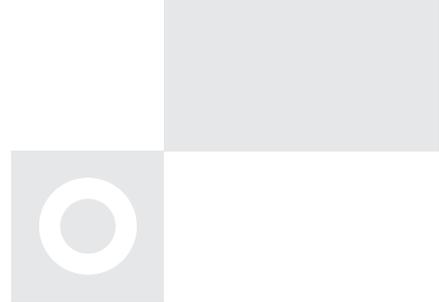
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