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Wybrane zależności między poziomem klasy
politycznej i fenomenem populizmu

**Populism and political class features:
selected dependencies**

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Populism and Political Class ...

The leading thesis here may be formulated as, namely: **the rise of populism is stimulated significantly not only by current transnational and intranational challenges but also by the political class members' arrogant and careless performance of their public roles.**

Populist slogans gain social response when two interrelated processes occur at the same time, namely: 1/ *the growing alienation of society from the rulers* and 2/ *the increased oligarchic tendencies within the political class, within the power elite, and the legal opposition.*

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- In regard to Central Europe, namely the region with still relatively fresh experiences in regard to democratic rule these two above features are indeed noticeable in Polish and other countries' political realities. Additionally in the Czech Republic (or Czechia), and in Hungary and Slovakia in particular an indigenous ethno-national factor seems to be currently very significant for the populism's rise either.

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- Thus the political activities inspired by populist-like values are on the rise in Europe, playing on ethnically exclusivist nationalism, xenophobia, and/or anti-minorities views in particular. They are expressively rooted in society thus breeding on the sense of omnipresent threat and long-lasting crisis.

Populism and Political Class ...

Two academic notions of populism:

- a concrete formulated ideology containing right- or left-wing designates but is also able to adapt depending on the socio-economic-political character of a given country;
- a combination of a rhetoric based on a specific and concrete axiology combined with a form of activities or simply political behaviour considered as useful in rather shorter than longer perspective.

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The author's notion of populism:

A collection of deliberately selected values of an anti-elitist nature, emerging from various ideologies (and not from only one separate and cohesive ideology) and applied in practical activity in order to achieve political influence on society and state institutions, including the possession of power, however not for a longer time.

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Two perceptions of a notion *political class*:

- positive one – a group of politicians who are to a great extent 1. an emanation of their electorate and keep responsibility for creating models legitimating them as rulers or 2. opposition in the eyes of the society. However as political practice shows such a belief may be alien to a large majority of the political class in some countries;

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- negative one - a group combining both above categories, which is distinguished only according to the stratification principle and not as a group of *people with class*, i.e., the ones verified by a positive social response. This negative opinion is an outcome of a prolonged observation of behaviour and statements made by the people involved in political activities.

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- The analysis of the common methods of making politics allows to distinguish its several specific factors which may have a direct influence on the populist rhetoric firstly, and transforming it into populist movements thereafter. They are very common but their presence has had a particularly broad impact in Central Europe. However, their nature and significance is diversified and depends on the specific features occurring in the countries belonging to this region.

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Contemporary Poland remains a transparent example of the political class negative perception in the eyes of electorate what is proved by the very dramatic decline of politicians' reputation as a group of professionals (only 17 % due to data from 2014). The latter stimulates the processes of delegitimisation of the system of power and even the whole political class, and thus results in the populism's rise.

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The tendency towards delegitimation as mentioned is characterized by several factors, e.g.:

- the *political rentierism*, i.e., the profit-oriented, mercantile approach of politicians - from the national as well as the local level - towards their current public activities;

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- the ***pollocracy***, i.e., excessive subordination by politicians of their activities to the results of current public opinion polls at the expense of earlier formulated promises, eg. their tactical approach to their mission as public representatives;

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- the ***re-election obsession***, accompanied by strongly motivated loyalty towards the political party as effective machinery, which is the crucial one for politicians' re-election. Obsession as such remains the outcome of the two former phenomena.

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An additional factor here is the existence of two types of political parties:

- ***a party-cartel***, i.e. – due to Klaus von Beyme, Peter Mair and Richard Katz - one directed at gaining as much profits from the widely understood state resources as it is possible. The approach as such to politics is examined mainly by governing party for longer period. Thus in the Polish circumstances of last decade this role was performed by the *Civic Platform* (PO);

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- a ***doctrinarian party***, mainly in opposition, hence inclined to express highly ideologised and strongly critical assumptions of public sphere with special negative reference to the governing parties' role. The Polish *Law and Justice* (PiS) party – in opposition until 2015 and currently ruling party - reflects the above image in most transparent way.

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The rhetoric used by both above mentioned types of political parties significantly hinders the political dialogue, strengthening at the same time the *oligarchic* and also *tribal* image of modern Polish politics.

The above-enumerated phenomena help considerably to strengthen *the social, economic and stricte political consequences*, unfavourable for the image of the state and its major political players.

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The *social anomomy* and *alienation* signals the occurrence of the *passive social contestation* process with respect to the political elites – both the ruling one and the opposition. The constant high level of *electoral absenteeism* remains the statistical proof of such a contestation. For a long time Poland has held an inglorious record in this respect among the European states.

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The *active social contestation*, i.e., some form of the revolt of the masses against the elites – to quote José Ortega y Gasset – is a next consequence here.

A revolution directed at overthrowing the existing system of power would be its extreme expression. However, a more realistic manifestation of such a revolt, but one consciously and deliberately using the democratic mechanisms, is precisely populism.

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Populism then becomes a direct answer to the career of many mediocre people in the political class. The phenomenon of such people was strongly underlined more than fourteen years ago, in February 2003 by the former president of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker, who used – in the article published by the German journal „Die Zeit“ - the expression of the *rule of political mediocrity* in manifold contemporary democratic systems.

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This results in an evident shortage of true statesmen (and stateswomen) in current modern politics, both at the local and global scale. The outcome is that the two processes enhance one another: *the apathetic society observing the mediocrity of its representatives loses interest in elections and its formally elected representatives, seeing this apathy, feel exempt from the duty of increasing the quality of their work.*

Populism and Political Class ...

The statistically high and prolonged in time electoral influence of populism depends on the level of sensitivity to the populist slogans of exactly that, so far apathetic, but numerous part of the electorate, i.e., the people who, colloquially speaking, "vote with their legs". Their mobilisation by a skilled leader using socially catchy slogans may be the reason why populism as a movement questioning the *status quo* at a scale earlier unheard of may gain importance.

Populism and Political Class ...

The Polish experiences with populism were so far associated with predominantly right-wing (and so far less ethnically based) *Law and Justice* party and *League of Polish Families*, ideologically eclectic *Self-Defence* (Samobrona), and left-wing the *Janusz Palikot's Movement* (Ruch Palikota). However the populism in Poland has not reached its apogee.

Populism and Political Class ...

The populist phenomenon of strong anti-elitist and far-right attitude has got its momentum in last European Parliament elections, in May 2014. The Janusz Korwin-Mikke party, *Congress of New Right* (Kongres Nowej Prawicy, KNP) became especially popular among young generation of Poles (ca. 28,5 % of support in the 18-25 age-group). Depending on the further socio-economic and political situation such a tendency may be seen as significantly dangerous one for the political mainstream parties.

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- The populist tendencies in the activities and rhetoric are demonstrated currently by two influential political entities in particular. The first one is the Law and Justice, a currently ruling right-wing party with two smaller partners (*Just Poland* and *Poland Together*). The *Kukiz'15 Movement*, a right-wing in fact (with some ideologically eclectic features) political movement established and led by alternative rock musician, Paweł Kukiz is the second one. Kukiz was surprisingly third during the last presidential elections' first round of 2015 winning 21 % of the vote. This result motivated him to form his own political movement.

Populism and Political Class ...

Conclusions:

Populism feels its best as a reviewer of the democratic principles applied by the political class. More short-sighted this class is more dangerous populism may become. Its animators do not, however, hesitate to use its instruments for their extemporary purposes, including gaining power, even for a short time. All in all everyone likes the taste of power.

Populism and Political Class ...

The populism may be awakened due to two frequently appearing factors, namely: the self-repeating errors of the political class - its arrogance in particular - and/or ethnic revitalization due to the influx of migrants. The first factor fits neatly to Poland's experiences during the systemic transformation period although on a limited scale so far. The second remains currently salient and non-influential but may be awakened suddenly.

Populism and Political Class ...

- In Central (and Eastern) Europe populism may be rooted in some predominantly: 1. communal, and also 2. ethnonationalistic (ethnically exclusivist) traditions against the background of the latest history. It has modern historical origin and is placed rather within the right-wing option or at least the ideologically eclectic one than the evidently left-wing.

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- As for today and within the Central Europe countries the second tendency is manifested by the radical nationalist *Jobbik the Movement for a Better Hungary* (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom) and/or the far-right *People's Party Our Slovakia* (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, LSNS). Both seem to be the most expressive examples here.