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## MIXED OPINIONS: PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE WELFARE STATE IN POLAND

### OPINIE MIESZANE: POSTAWY WOBEC PAŃSTWA OPIEKUŃCZEGO W POLSCE

This paper examines public opinion in Poland towards welfare policies and structures. We start by outlining the main research into welfare state models, in particular drawing on the welfare state typologies of Esping-Andersen. We then outline the existing contradictory research that exists on whether a distinct welfare state model is identifiable in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), including Poland. We use this as a context to analyse the opinions of Poles towards the welfare state. Our research uses original quantitative data garnered from a survey carried out on a representative sample in Poland. There is particular strong support for aspects of the social democratic welfare state model within Polish society. Furthermore, large sections of Polish society remain supportive of some of the welfare structures that were existent during Communism. Concurrently, there is significant support for a liberal welfare state model within the most privileged sections of society. The analysis therefore finds that the opinions of Polish society are mixed, which to some degree reflects the hybrid nature of its welfare state.

Keywords: welfare state; Poland; post-socialist; de-commodification; public opinion; liberal; social democratic; conservative

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Niniejszy artykuł analizuje opinię publiczną w Polsce w odniesieniu do polityki i struktur państwa opiekuńczego. Rozpoczynamy od przedstawienia głównych badań nad modelami państwa opiekuńczego, w szczególności opierając się na typologii państwa opiekuńczego Espinga-Andersena. Następnie przedstawiamy istniejące sprzeczne badania dotyczące tego, czy w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej (EŚW), w tym w Polsce, można zidentyfikować odrębny model państwa opiekuńczego. Wykorzystujemy to jako kontekst analizy opinii Polaków na temat państwa opiekuńczego. Nasze badania wykorzystują oryginalne dane ilościowe uzyskane z badania przeprowadzonego na reprezentatywnej próbie w Polsce. W polskim społeczeństwie istnieje szczególnie silne poparcie dla aspektów socjaldemokratycznego modelu państwa opiekuńczego. Co więcej, duża część polskiego społeczeństwa nadal popiera niektóre struktury opiekuńcze istniejące w czasach komu-

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nizmu. Jednocześnie w najbardziej uprzywilejowanych grupach społecznych istnieje znaczne poparcie dla liberalnego modelu państwa opiekuńczego. Z analizy wynika zatem, że opinie polskiego społeczeństwa są mieszane, co do pewnego stopnia odzwierciedla hybrydowy charakter państwa opiekuńczego.

Słowa kluczowe: państwo opiekuńcze; Polska; postsocjalistyczny; dekomodifikacja; opinia publiczna; liberalny; socjaldemokratyczny; konserwatywny

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## I. STRUCTURES AND RIGHTS

The question of the future of the welfare state has come to the fore in recent years, particularly in light of the global financial crisis in 2008,<sup>1</sup> the COVID-19 pandemic and global rise in inflation. These discussions reach back to earlier debates about the nature of the welfare state and whether they are compatible with the development of a modern capitalist economy. The welfare state is defined in this paper as referring to a government's social security programmes introduced in order to protect the population from a range of different social risks. These include social security benefits (e.g. pensions, maternity leave payments and unemployment benefits) as well as public services (e.g. health, housing and education) designed to prevent future social risks.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past few decades a large body of literature has been produced analysing the diversity of existent welfare states.<sup>3</sup> The most famous and widely cited of these, and therefore a necessary reference point in this field, has been that constructed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen. He argued that differences in welfare states are rooted in the type of political and class coalitions constructed in a country and compared welfare states according to the dimensions of decommodification and stratification. Esping-Anderson identified three main welfare state ideal types, which he then deployed in order to compare and contrast the existing welfare states in different countries. These are:

– *Liberal Welfare States* (e.g. the UK) – benefits are modest, means tested and entitlement rules are strict. The benefits are mainly targeted at low earners and the structured around the ideals of individualism and the primacy of the market. Accordingly the level of decommodification is low and social rights depressed. Meanwhile, targeted benefits to the poor reduced some stratification, although the majority are reliant upon market solutions which enhances inequalities.

– *Conservative (Corporate) Welfare States* (e.g. Germany) – concerned with preserving status divisions and centred on traditional institutions such as the Church (particularly Catholicism) and the family (upholding traditional family roles and gender inequalities). The state should therefore only intervene

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<sup>1</sup> Diamond, Lodge (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Kuitto (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Bonoli (1997); Esping-Andersen (1985); Korpi, Palme (1998).

when the Church or family is unable to meet people's needs. Such welfare states deliver moderate degrees of decommodification, although they have a very negligible impact upon reducing social inequality

– *Social Democratic Welfare States* (e.g. Sweden) – providing high quality universal benefits and services. Social rights were extended to all, and a welfare state pursued that promotes an equality of high standard benefits and services. The expansion of social rights both increases decommodification and reduces social inequalities. The social democratic welfare model relies upon the existence of near full employment, with large emphasis placed on pro-employment policies.

Esping-Andersen's model has been criticized for such things as ignoring the position of women on the labour market and not incorporating other welfare state models such as that dominant in southern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless his approach has dominated comparative welfare state analysis for nearly three decades, with some deploying it to analyse whether there exists a distinctive the welfare state model in Central and Eastern Europe.

## II. THE WELFARE STATE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Attention has turned in recent decades to the issue of the welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe, and whether these are converging with the western welfare state models or rather a distinct 'post-Communist' welfare state regime is forming. Esping-Andersen believed that the post-Communist welfare states would most likely move towards having minimalist, liberal systems of welfare, due to the neo-liberal character of the post-Communist transitions.<sup>5</sup> As the Central and Eastern European states have been incorporated into the structures of the European Union, others have assumed that institutional and policy standardization will lead to a convergence of the region's welfare states with the welfare typologies dominant in Western Europe.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, those advocating the path dependency approach have postulated that the CEE welfare states will continue along divergent national trajectories, due to their different origins and unique historical institutional frameworks, which reach back before the 'Communist' period.<sup>7</sup> Myant and Drahokoupil have suggested that it is impossible to fit the post-Communist countries into the existing welfare regimes due to the historical uniqueness of the legacies left from the Communist period, when many welfare services and social protections were provided directly by state-owned productive enterprises.<sup>8</sup> These historically distinct universalist and egalitarian welfare structures, inherited from Communism, have been partly transformed by the liberal transition to capitalism

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<sup>4</sup> Ferrera (1996); Saint-Arnaud, Bernard (2003).

<sup>5</sup> Esping-Andersen (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Lendvai (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Inglot (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Myant, Drahokoupil (2015).

from 1989 and integration into the European Union from 2004.<sup>9</sup> This Historical Institutional approach, states that the welfare systems in Central and Eastern Europe have therefore developed in a complex and often ad-hoc manner, creating hybrid structures and institutional layers, which are difficult to fit into existing welfare typologies.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequent research into the CEE welfare states has tended to reveal that they do not fit easily into existing welfare models, whilst some significant differences remain between the CEE welfare states themselves.<sup>11</sup> Lauzadyte-Tutliene, et al revealed that the post-Communist countries were divided into two clear clusters: an Eastern European cluster (the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania and Ireland) and Central European cluster (Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary).<sup>12</sup> These both share many features, although are separated by there being greater inequalities, less temporary workers and lower government expenditure in the Eastern European cluster. The authors of this paper carried out a study which found that a distinct post-Communist welfare model seems to be consolidating within the European Union welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe, encompassing nearly all of the member states from Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> The common features of the countries belonging to this welfare cluster are the strong liberalization of public services, high social stratification and the retention of some large public infrastructure (e.g. hospitals). Finally an extensive study by Kati Kuitto concluded that the CEE welfare states do not match any of the western European welfare state models, although there is also not a clearly identifiable single CEE welfare model.<sup>14</sup> Despite the variation of the results of these studies, they all found that some of the strongest welfare clusters inside the European Union are made up of 'post-Communist' countries and that these do not match easily with the existent welfare models in western Europe.

### III. WELFARE STATE IN POLAND

The Polish welfare state contains many features close to the liberal model (e.g. low government spending, progressive taxation, fertility rates, life expectancy and political participation, and high social inequality and poverty rates), often exceeding those in countries from the liberal welfare states themselves. However it also possesses particular features that distinguish it from the liberal welfare model (e.g. higher public investment and greater public service infrastructure in certain areas, such as the availability of places in

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<sup>9</sup> Cerami (2009).

<sup>10</sup> Inglot (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Deacon (2000); Fenger (2007); Ferge (2001).

<sup>12</sup> Lauzadyte-Tutliene et al. (2018).

<sup>13</sup> Piotrowska, Rae (2018).

<sup>14</sup> Kuitto (2016).

hospitals measured through the number of hospital beds).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Polish welfare state displays some specific features, that result from its own distinct historical evolution, particularly during the period of Communism. The Polish People's Republic (pl: PRL – *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*) had a number of distinguishing characteristics, when compared to other Communist states in CEE. These included the relative strength and autonomy of the Catholic Church); the continual existence of a large number of private farms, with the collectivization of land restricted; and the growth of small private businesses during the final decade of the PRL.<sup>16</sup>

The hybrid nature of Poland's welfare state has resulted from its particular development as a 'post-Communist' country. On the one hand, it has inherited certain universal institutions and structures from the PRL, although parts of these were then liberalized or dismantled by successive governments. The welfare state was often seen by policy makers as being a burden, with the neo-liberal consensus dominating public discourse for more than two decades.<sup>17</sup> Concurrently, however, Poland's welfare state contains some conservative features. The growth of social benefits, ahead of investment in public services, after the transition to capitalism, has entrenched some Bismarkian characteristics of Poland's welfare system. Also, the strength and influence of the Catholic Church grew exponentially after the fall of Communism This is observable in the policies of the present Law and Justice party (pl: PiS – *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) government, which has, for example, introduced a new child benefit: 500+<sup>18</sup>. This is a conservative social benefit, aimed at bolstering the traditional family model, through encouraging women to stay at home and raise children and (so far unsuccessfully) increase the birth-rate in Poland. However, despite such reforms, the PiS government has also maintained many of the liberal fundamentals of Poland's welfare state, such as its more regressive taxation system, flexible labour laws and low spending on social services like health.

Previous research has shown that there is a higher level of support within Polish society for such things as state ownership and reducing social inequalities, than in most other European Union countries.<sup>19</sup> However, Jakobsen, in his study of the relationship between welfare regimes and public opinion, found that there is strong support for liberal 'pro-competition' welfare policies in Poland, in contrast, for example, to Hungary and Slovakia where the populations tend to be more pro-welfare in their attitudes.<sup>20</sup> Public opinion research carried out in Poland has consistently shown that large majorities

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<sup>15</sup> Rae (2016).

<sup>16</sup> Golinowska (2009).

<sup>17</sup> Woźniak (2013).

<sup>18</sup> The 500+ child benefit was introduced at the beginning of the PiS government's first term in office. 500 Polish zloty was provided monthly for every second child and above, with the benefit also given to the first child after means testing. The government then expanded this benefit to all children regardless of income.

<sup>19</sup> Wenzel, Zagórski (2005).

<sup>20</sup> Jakobsen (2011).

support policies such as state ownership of the major industrial and financial sectors, free public health care and education, that the state should secure its citizens work and that taxes should be progressive.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it has been shown that there is a strong correlation between those holding positive attitudes towards the Communist system and support for the ideal of a de-commodified welfare state.<sup>22</sup>

In this paper we analyse the opinions of the Polish population towards welfare state structures and policies. In doing so we aim to identify whether Polish society holds opinions that are close to the welfare state typologies outlined above. We have chosen questions that particularly relate to the two most distinct and identifiable welfare state models: the social democratic and liberal models. Simultaneously, we have also examined whether public opinion in Poland is close to the dominant features of the welfare states in CEE, that existing empirical studies have identified.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

This research analyses opinions in Poland towards issues related to the social welfare state. The survey was conducted in Spring 2016 by the Public Opinion Research Centre (pl: CBOS – *Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej*) on a nationwide random sample of 932-adult Poles. The sample was selected using the sampling frame of personal identity numbers (pl: PESEL – *Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności*). The details of sample construction may be found at: <[https://www.cbos.pl/EN/about\\_us/sample\\_design.php](https://www.cbos.pl/EN/about_us/sample_design.php)>.<sup>23</sup> Data was collected in an omnibus survey conducted using the face-to-face interview method.

All the analyses were prepared using a IBM SPSS (v 24 and 25) package and carried out on data weighted (to adjust for the discrepancies between the sample and the population) using poststratification weight including gender, age, place of residence (city/village) and education level distributions calculated by CBOS (see details of sample in Table 1).

Due to the cost we were able to include only a limited number of our own questions in the survey. However, because the questions prepared by us were a part of an omnibus survey, we have used all of the questions associated with attitudes towards the welfare state, that were included in the survey, in our analysis.

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<sup>21</sup> Zagórski et al. (2015); CBOS (2019).

<sup>22</sup> Rae (2017).

<sup>23</sup> The research was a part of a project ‘Welfare state models and the integrated socio-economic development indicators in the European Union and Central and Eastern European countries belonging to the EU’ – a grant for young scientists and participants in doctoral studies co-financed by funds from Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and Kozminski University.

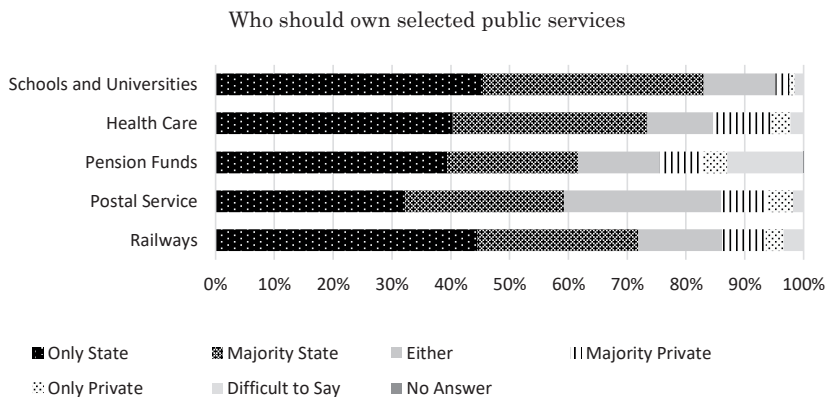
## V. RESULTS – OPINIONS ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF WELFARE STATE

The first part of our analysis, into the opinions of Poles towards the welfare state, involves a description of the attitudes of a representative sample of Poles towards different features of the welfare state. These are: public/private ownership, government intervention, poverty, countering unemployment, and the role of trade unions. We shall look at each of these in turn.

### 1. Public/Private Ownership

The issue of state ownership is important, as within a social democratic welfare state public services tend to be held in government hands, whilst in a liberal welfare state they are either wholly or partly privatized. Graph 1 presents the attitudes of Poles towards the ownership of a number of selected public services. As we can see Poles overwhelmingly believe that these should all be owned by the state, with over 80 percent believing that the state should own or partly own schools and universities, over 70 percent the health service and railways and around 60 percent the pension system and postal service. Only a small minority of the sample, in all of these questions, believe these services should be owned privately. We can conclude from these answers that the vast majority of Polish society would prefer the country's major public welfare services to be run by the state and therefore their opinions are closer to a Beveridge style social democratic model. Graph 2 also shows how a large majority of Polish society believes that public higher education should be provided free of charge, with over 70 percent agreeing with this statement. This indicates very high support for decommodified universal public services, amongst Polish society.

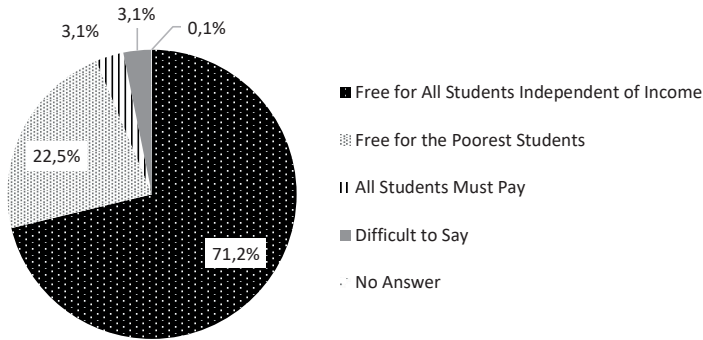
Graph 1



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

Graph 2

Should studying at a public higher education institution be free?



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

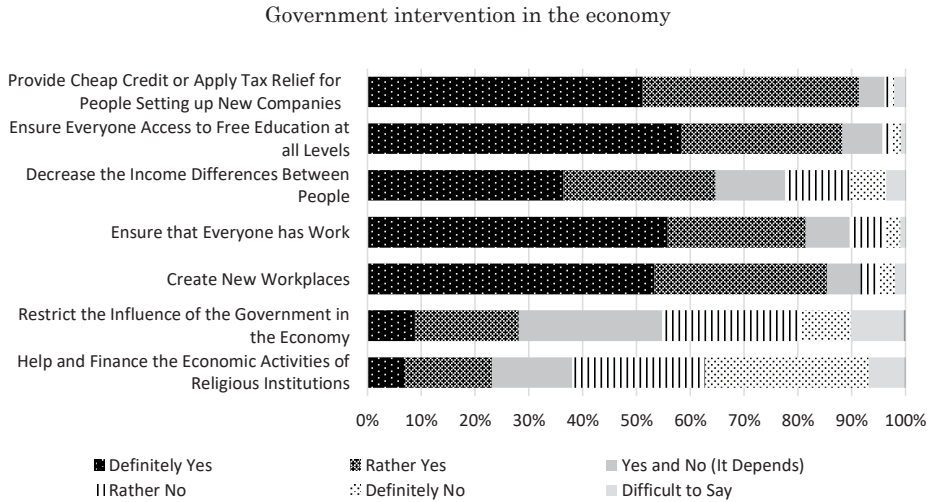
## 2. Government Intervention

The second groups of questions concerns opinions towards government intervention.<sup>24</sup> We can see in Graph 3 that there is large support for the government intervening in the economy to create jobs and reduce social inequalities. The most popular options for creating jobs in Poland are to provide cheap credits to those creating new businesses and ensure free training to employees. These may be considered to be closer to the liberal welfare state model, as they provide means and skills to people operating within a free-market economy. However, over 80 percent of respondents also believe that the government should ensure that everyone has work and create workplaces themselves. These are policies that are not only close to the social democratic model but are actually similar to the policies employed by governments during the period of the PRL. Around two-thirds of society also feel that the government should intervene to reduce social inequalities. In contrast there is little support for the liberal conception of the government reducing economic influence, nor the more conservative concept of the government funding religious institutions. Graph 4 also shows how there is significant support for the government intervening to protect state companies (around 50 percent) and hospitals (over 60 percent) that are facing bankruptcy and closing down. We can therefore conclude that a significant majority of Polish society is in favour of a strong state that intervenes in the economic and social life to create jobs, reduce social inequalities and protect struggling companies and public services.

<sup>24</sup> Questions in this section were created by Prof. Krzysztof Zagórski and used in previous research. For the results, see e.g. Zagórski (2018): 149–170.

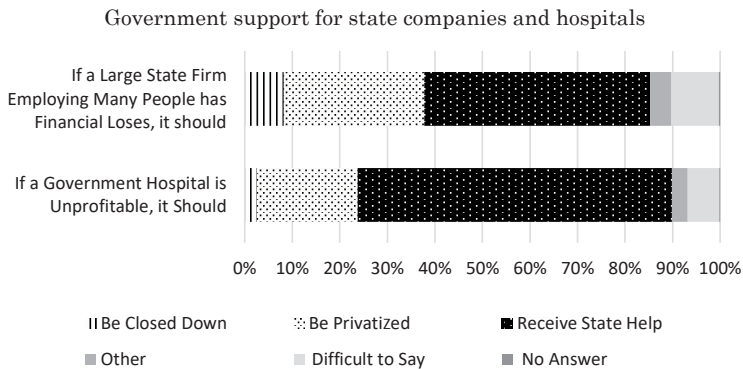


Graph 3



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

Graph 4



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

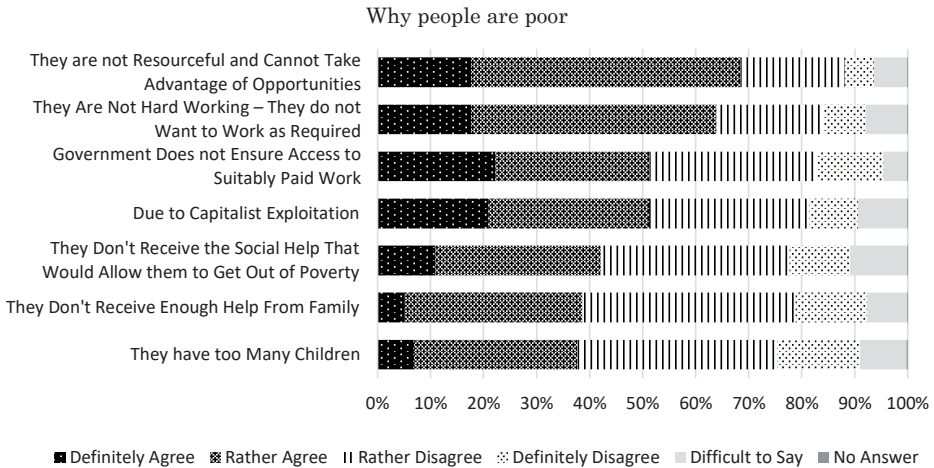
### 3. Poverty

The next set of questions concerns opinions as to why people are in poverty. The answers to these questions tells us much about the social attitudes of Polish society towards poverty and therefore informs us about what actions they may believe the government should take to counteract it.

As we can see in Graph 5, the two most popular opinions as to why there is poverty refers to the characteristics of those in poverty. Therefore, almost 70 percent of respondents believe that people are poor because they are unable to take advantage of opportunities, whilst more than 60 percent feel that it is be-

cause they are not hardworking and do not want to work as they should. These opinions reveal the economic liberal values of a large section of Polish society, which blames the individual failings of the poor for their material situation. Simultaneously, however, more than a half of Poles also believe that poverty exists because the government does not provide jobs or is due to capitalist exploitation. Again, these are opinions that do not just correlate with the values of a social democratic welfare state, but can be considered to be close to those associated with the former ‘Communist’ system. Also, more than 40 percent agree that people are poor because they have not received sufficient social benefits, slightly above the number of those that believe that it is due to lack of family support or having too many children.

Graph 5



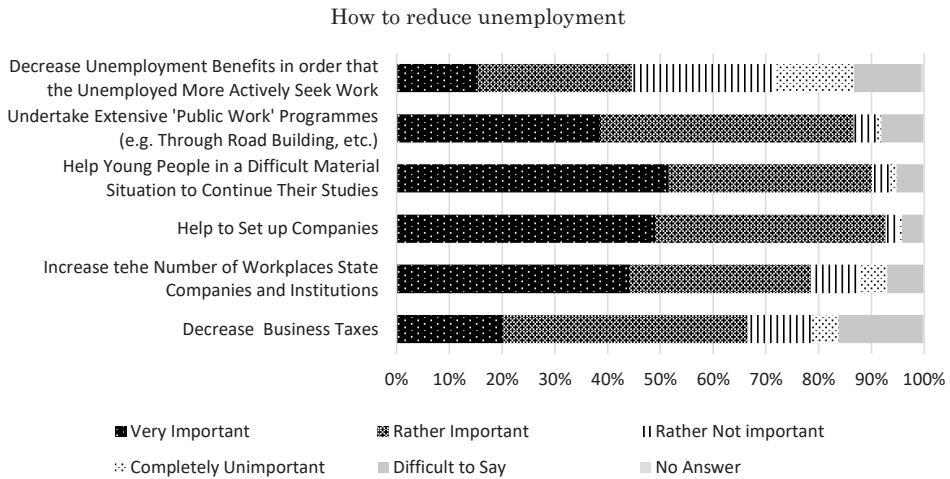
Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

#### 4. How to reduce unemployment and help families

The next set of questions concerns the policies that Poles believe would most effectively help to reduce unemployment and help parents that have many children. Graph 6 reveals very large support for the state actively intervening to create public work such as road building; providing material support for those in need to continue their studies; helping people to set up companies; or increasing the amount of workplaces in state companies and institutions. In contrast only a minority of respondents agreed with the proposal to cut unemployment benefits in order to encourage people to seek employment and although a majority agreed with reducing taxes for business, this was significantly less popular than the other options outlined above. This reveals again the Polish society tends to prefer more interventionist government policies, rather than the liberal option of trying to create the conditions for the free market to resolve social problems such as unemployment.

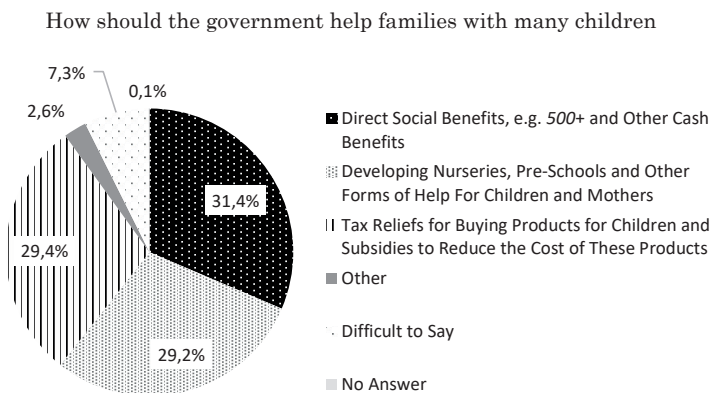
The question on helping families with large families is a pertinent issue in Poland, due to the huge attention that the government’s flagship welfare policy for families, 500+ has received. Graph 7 shows that despite the declared successes of 500+, Polish society remains divided over what the best policy should be to help large families. It is almost evenly divided between providing direct benefits, investing in infrastructure such as nurseries or providing tax relief or subsidies to hold down the costs of certain products.

Graph 6



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

Graph 7

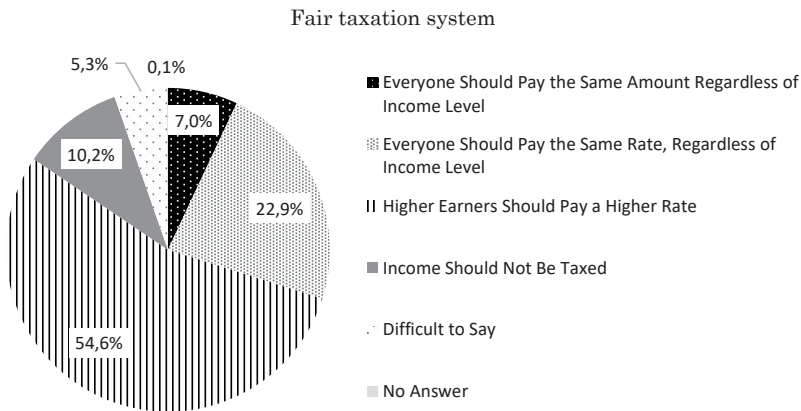


Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

## 5. Taxation

The next set of questions concerns government revenue, and what type of taxation system would be considered the fairest. The options provided range from the most regressive income tax system where people pay the same amount; to one where people pay an equal percentage of their income; to a progressive taxation system where those earning more pay a greater percentage of tax on their income. As we can observe in Graph 8, a significantly larger section of respondents agree with the third progressive income tax option, with only around ten percent believing that everyone should pay the same amount of tax. Therefore, according to this question, the opinions of Poles towards taxation is in line with those present in a social democratic welfare state model.

Graph 8



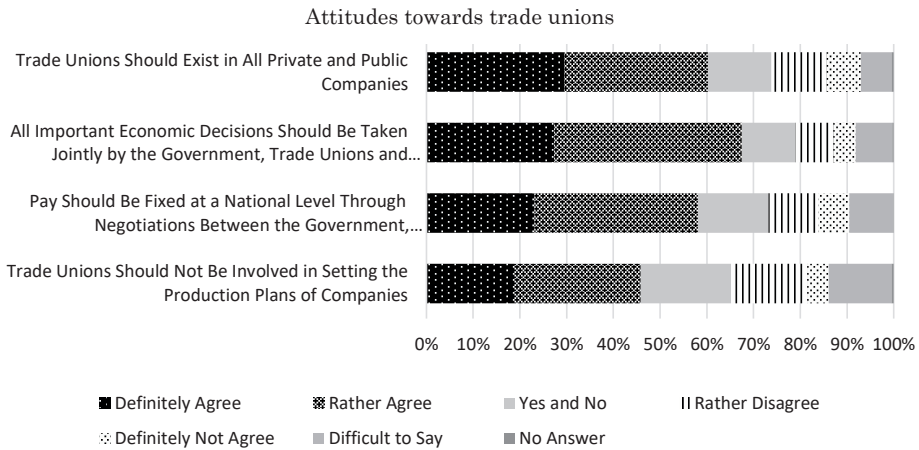
Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

## 6. Role of Trade Unions

Finally, we come to the issue of trade unions and their influence and role in economic and social life. These questions are relevant to the welfare state, as they indicate to what extent Poles support a strong countermovement against the market in the economy. As noted above, trade unions are very weak in Poland, with only around 8 percent of workers belonging presently to a trade union. Graph 9 highlights, however, how there is strong support amongst Poles for such things as trade unions existing in every public and private company; that the trade unions should be involved with the government in the making of important economic decisions and that pay should be fixed at a national level through negotiations that would involve trade unions. From these questions we may deduce that a discernible majority of Poles would support strong trade unions being present in most companies that are involved in negotiations with employers and the government over such things as pay.

Such a situation would be close to the social democratic welfare state existent in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark. Also, whilst a majority of society does not support the view that trade unions should be involved in decisions concerning the production plans of companies, this is still generally supported by over 45 percent of society. This again shows how a significant section of society continues to hold opinions that go further than a classical social democratic welfare state model and are actually similar in content to the planned economic system existent during the PRL.

**Graph 9**



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

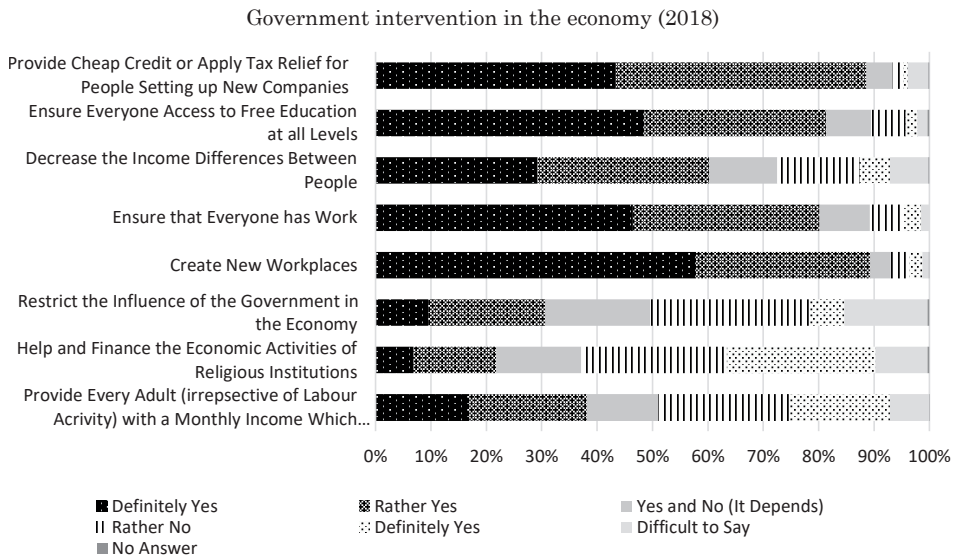
## 7. Changes from 2016 to 2018 and universal basic income

We were able to repeat some questions concerning government intervention in 2018, which was two years after the original research was carried out and three years into the first term of the PiS government.<sup>25</sup> We also included a question on the provision of a universal basic income as this has become a prominent topic of public discussion, taking on an added importance after the introduction of the 500+ child benefit. We identified no significant change in the opinions of Poles on these selected questions. There remains therefore very high support within Polish society for active government policies aimed at reducing social inequalities and creating or guaranteeing new workplaces; and very low support for restricting the influence of the government in the

<sup>25</sup> The survey was again carried out by CBOS, this time on the sample of 1092 adults and the sample selection procedure as well as the weighting procedure were the same as described above. The sample consisted of 515 men (47.1%) and 577 women (52.9%) with an average age of 49.4 (SD = 17.3). Almost 40% (39.8%) of the respondents lived in villages and only 9.7% in big (500K and more inhabitants) cities. 18.9% of the people included in the analyses had a lower than secondary level of education, whereas ¼ of the respondents (26.2%) had completed a higher education.

economy or supporting religious institutions. On the question about a universal basic income, less than 40 percent of the respondents supported such a proposal with a slightly higher proportion opposing it. This is not in line with the high support that we have found in our representative sample for most other interventionist and universal welfare policies, although it is similar to attitudes towards the 500+ child benefit. We may speculate that this is because both of these policies are a new type of welfare policy which have not been socially embedded to the same degree as those related to inherited structures and programmes from the past. Similarly, it may be the case that there is more support for investments in universal welfare structures and services and the provision of benefits for those who are unable to work. However, there is not such high support for providing people with money irrespective of their activity and position on the labour market. This would suggest that most Polish respondents believe that welfare policy should be related to work and one's situation on the labour market.

**Graph 10**



Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

## VI. COMPOSITE MEASURES OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS WELFARE REGIMES

In order to assess the opinions of the welfare state, their closeness to existent welfare state regimes and analyse what socio-demographic characteristics are associated with attitudes towards these regimes, we first created the three composite measures. The questions that were used in the

construction of the composite measures, as well as the answers included in each of the indices, are presented in the table in the Appendix 1. The indices are created from the same questions that were analysed in the previous section. The choice of items was based on literature but also constrained by the number and type of questions included in the survey. Due to the differences in measuring scales (categorical and ordinal variables with different numbers of levels) the composite measures were calculated as a sum of the answers showing support towards the aspects of each of the welfare state regimes. This means that for every question listed in the table a dummy variable was created and the answer(s) listed in the last column were coded as 1 and all the others as 0. Basing our research on the literature on welfare state regimes, we decided to check how public opinions in Poland relate to the broadly defined liberal or social democratic welfare state models. We chose this approach, as both of these models are used nearly ubiquitously in the different studies on welfare state regimes and also because features of both of these welfare types are present in the hybrid welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe, due to the historical legacies of Communism and the transition to capitalism. Moreover, it was difficult to identify questions and answers that would easily fit, for example, into the conservative welfare state model and we found that often the answers from the questionnaire tended to reveal opinions that were either closer to the social democratic or liberal welfare state regimes. Therefore, issues such as trade union membership, private/public ownership and free/paid public services more clearly measure attitudes towards either the liberal or social democratic welfare state model than the conservative one. We have also not applied directly a 'post-Communist' model in our analysis. This is because there is currently no agreement within the literature as to the character of such a welfare state model. Moreover, the welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe are largely hybrid, meaning they contain different aspects of the dominant welfare state models present in Western Europe. We have therefore decided to measure the attitudes of the welfare state in Poland in accordance with the three main welfare state models constructed by Esping-Andersen. This better allow us to analyse the possible contradictory nature of public opinion in Poland towards the welfare state.

The composite indices were obtained by summing up the values of the dummy variables, the results of each scale were presented in percentages to allow for comparisons. For each respondent a share of 1's in all the values of dummy variables for each scale was calculated; 0 indicates the lowest possible support for the features of a given welfare state and 100 – the highest.

Due to the very little number of items (6) and very low internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.266$ ; while for the support for the social democratic and liberal welfare state it was:  $\alpha = 0.737$  (28 items) and  $\alpha 0.777$  (27 items) respectively) the composite measure of support for the conservative welfare state, was not included in the regression models presented later in this paper.

As we can see in Table 1 the characteristics of the social democratic welfare state model gained the highest support and these of the liberal welfare

state the lowest.<sup>26</sup> However, the average support for this model is only 57 (on a scale of 1 to 100), meaning that, in general, there is not very high support for the social democratic welfare state model within Polish society.

**Table 1**

## Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean (SD)	Median (Q1, Q3)	Min, Max	%
Support for SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC w.s.	932	57.2 (17.1)	60.7 (46.4, 71.4)	0, 96.4	
Support for LIBERAL w.s.	932	33.7 (15.4)	33.3 (22.2, 40.7)	0, 2.6	
Support for CONSERVATIVE w.s.	932	43.2 (19.2)	33.3 (33.3, 50.0)	0, 100	
Age	932	47.6 (17.7)	47.0 (33.0, 63.0)	18, 85	
Income pc in household <sup>a</sup>	526	1345.2 (1341.7)	1000 (625.0, 1600.0)	0, 15000	
Gender (% of female)	932				52.8%
Education level (% of higher)	932				24.8%
Size of the town/city (% city 500k +)	932				11.4%
Political views (% of left wing <sup>^</sup> )	670				19.8%
Political views (% of right wing <sup>^^</sup> )	670				40.3%

<sup>^</sup> declared political views: 1–3 on the scale: 1-left wing, 7-right wing

<sup>^^</sup> declared political views: 5–7 on the scale: 1-left wing, 7-right wing

<sup>a</sup> Due to the high positive skewness of the income distribution and the logarithmic nature of the relationship between income and many other variables (as an example see the diminishing marginal utility of income), in further analyses the natural logarithms of income were included.

Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

The attitudes of Poles towards these welfare state models can be further understood when we look at their association with the selected socio-demographic characteristics. As we can see in Table 2, support for a social democratic welfare state model is positively although weakly correlated with age, meaning that elder respondents are marginally more likely to be favourable towards policies that are most closely related to the social democratic model. Meanwhile, attitudes about issues connected to the social democratic model are negatively correlated with higher education ( $M_{HigherEdu} = 49.04$ ,

<sup>26</sup> As in some cases agreeing with a given statement was an indicator of the support for one welfare state regime and disagreeing with the same statement indicated support for another model, the differences between support for the three models were not tested.



$SD_{HigherEdu} = 18.45$  vs.  $M_{NOHigherEdu} = 59.92$ ,  $SD_{NOHigherEdu} = 15.79$ ,  $t_{(348)} = 8.05^{27}$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) residence in large cities ( $M_{LargeCities} = 47.64$ ,  $SD_{LargeCities} = 19.54$  vs.  $M_{TownVillage} = 58.46$ ,  $SD_{TownVillage} = 16.41$ ,  $t_{(125)} = 5.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and income. This therefore means that for those with a higher level of education, living in a larger city and having a higher income it is more probable that they would not support welfare policies that are close to the social democratic welfare state model. As we can observe, this trend is largely reversed when it comes to the liberal welfare state model. Therefore, the social demographic groups that are most likely to be supportive of this type of welfare state are younger people, men ( $M_{Male} = 36.23$ ,  $SD_{Male} = 17.00$  vs.  $M_{Female} = 31.36$ ,  $SD_{Female} = 13.49$ ,  $t_{(834)} = 4.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), those with a higher education ( $M_{HigherEdu} = 42.31$ ,  $SD_{HigherEdu} = 16.31$  vs.  $M_{NOHigherEdu} = 30.81$ ,  $SD_{NOHigherEdu} = 14.02$ ,  $t_{(349)} = -9.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), residents in large cities ( $M_{LargeCities} = 43.52$ ,  $SD_{LargeCities} = 17.96$  vs.  $M_{TownVillage} = 32.39$ ,  $SD_{TownVillage} = 14.61$ ,  $t_{(124)} = -6.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and people on higher incomes. However, there is less of a clear pattern for the conservative welfare regime, with the only noticeable result being a weak negative correlation for opinions supporting this model with education and income (meaning that those with a lower education and income are slightly more likely to be supportive of conservative welfare state policies). Interestingly, however, when it comes to those who define themselves as either left-wing or right-wing, the only discernible correlation of attitudes is with the conservative welfare model. Support for the conservative model is weakly positively correlated with holding right-wing opinions, whilst it is weakly negatively correlated with left-wing views.

Table 2

Bivariate correlations (Pearson's  $r$ )

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
<b>1. Support for SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC w.s.</b>								
<b>2. Support for LIBERAL w.s.</b>	-0.64**							
<b>3. Support for CONSERVATIVE w.s.</b>	0.21**	-0.05						
<b>4. Age</b>	0.13**	-0.21**	0.07*					
<b>5. Gender (female, 0/1)</b>	0.04	-0.16**	-0.07	0.03				
<b>6. Higher education (0/1)</b>	-0.28**	0.32**	-0.11**	-0.13**	0.05			

<sup>27</sup> All the values of t-tests presented here are the values of Welch's t-test for unequal variances and unequal sample sizes.

<b>7. Large cities (500k +, 0/1)</b>	-0.20**	0.23**	-0.02	-0.03	0.04	0.27**		
<b>8. Income pc in household (ln)</b>	-0.23**	0.26**	-0.10*	0.07	-0.08	0.30**	0.19**	
<b>9. Left wing (0/1)</b>	0.02	0.01	-0.14**	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.08*	0.08
<b>10. Right wing (0/1)</b>	0.04	-0.02	0.16**	0.04	-0.11**	-0.01	-0.04	-0.08

\*\* p < 0.01 (2-tailed) \* p < 0.05 (2-tailed)

Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

We built linear regression models (OLS) (see Table 3) in order to observe the relationship between support for the social democratic and liberal welfare state with all of the individual characteristics together and then check which of them (controlling for others) are the strongest predictors for the analysed attitudes.

Socio-demographic characteristics explained only about 10–12% of variance of the support for the features of a social-democratic welfare state.<sup>28</sup> In line with the bivariate analyses presented above, not having a higher education occurs to be the strongest predictor of support for this type of welfare regime (highest betas in models 1–3). The level of support for the features of socio-democratic welfare state is predicted to be lower, depending on the model, by 9.02, 7.08 or 8.84 on the scale from 0 to 100 for people that had completed higher education in comparison to those without higher education (*ceteris paribus*). Another important predictor was income – the lower a respondent's wage, the higher their support was for social democratic welfare state characteristics. Attitudes in favour of the features of this type of welfare state were stronger among the people not living in big cities, than for others by between 6.06 and 7.54 on average, depending on the model (*ceteris paribus*).

Support for the features of the liberal welfare state (models 4–6) were explained by socio-demographic characteristics to a greater extent than these of the social democratic regime. Again having a higher education is the strongest predictor of support, but contrary to the models discussed above, this relationship is positive. Predicted support for the liberal welfare state features was higher among people holding an academic degree, by 9.47, 6.77 and 7.24 (in models 4, 5, 6 respectively) *ceteris paribus*, Age, gender and living in a big city seem to be more important predictors of the support for the features of liberal welfare state than they were in case of social democratic support models, with younger people, males and residents of big cities manifesting more positive attitudes towards the characteristics of this model. The level of support for

<sup>28</sup> It is worth emphasising, that the models including income were built only for the observations for which the data on the value of income was provided and this meant that people who did not want to share information about their income, or did not have any income at the time of the study, were dropped in models 2–3 and 5–6.

the liberal welfare state model characteristics was predicted to be higher for people living in big cities than for those living in cities below 500k inhabitants by 7–8 points on the scale from 0 to 100 (depending on the model) and also to go down by around 0.15 with every year of life. At the same time the role of income in predicting the support for the features of liberal welfare state is lower than for the social democratic welfare state.

**Table 3**

OLS regression models predicting the support for the features of social democratic and liberal welfare state models. Unstandardized coefficients are reported (standardized coefficients, betas in brackets).

	Support for SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC w.s.			Support for LIBERAL w.s.		
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5	MODEL 6
Age	<b>0.09**</b> (0.09)	<b>0.10*</b> (0.10)	<b>0.12*</b> (0.12)	<b>-0.14**</b> (-0.16)	<b>-0.15**</b> (-0.19)	<b>-0.16**</b> (-0.19)
Gender (female)	1.94 (0.06)	1.37 (0.04)	<b>4.02*</b> (0.12)	<b>-5.29**</b> (-0.17)	<b>-3.78**</b> (-0.13)	<b>-5.32**</b> (-0.18)
Higher education	<b>-9.02**</b> (-0.23)	<b>-7.08**</b> (-0.19)	<b>-8.84**</b> (-0.24)	<b>9.47**</b> (0.27)	<b>6.77**</b> (0.21)	<b>7.24**</b> (0.22)
Big city (500k+)	<b>-7.54**</b> (-0.14)	<b>-6.06**</b> (-0.12)	<b>-6.23**</b> (-0.13)	<b>7.83**</b> (0.16)	<b>7.82**</b> (0.18)	<b>7.26**</b> (0.18)
Income per capita in household (ln)		<b>-3.18**</b> (-0.15)	<b>-4.50**</b> (-0.20)		<b>2.87**</b> (0.16)	<b>3.13**</b> (0.16)
Political views (left wing)			1.55 (0.04)			-0.47 (-0.01)
Political views (right wing)			3.20 (0.09)			<b>3.30*</b> (-0.11)
Intercept	<b>54.97**</b>	<b>77.76**</b>	<b>84.68**</b>	<b>40.01**</b>	<b>20.55**</b>	<b>21.83**</b>
R squared	10.5%	12.6%	21.6%	18.4%	22.3%	25.4%
Adjusted R squared	10.1%	11.7%	20.2%	18.0%	21.5%	24.0%
N	932	522	384	932	522	384

\*\*p < 0.01 (2-tailed) \*p < 0.05 (2-tailed)

Source: CBOS (2019) and own calculations.

## VII. DISCUSSION

In this article we have analysed public opinion in Poland towards the welfare state, against the background of previous research carried out into the welfare state in Poland and CEE. Earlier research tended to reveal the hybrid

nature of the CEE welfare state, which does not fit easily into any of the welfare state models dominant in western Europe.

This unique hybrid character of the welfare state is also evident in the opinions of Poles. Previous research into this topic is contradictory, with some studies highlighting strong support for pro-welfare statist policies and others revealing high agreement with more pro-market welfare solutions. In this paper we have tried to examine this dichotomy in greater depth, thus choosing questions that test the extent to which the opinions of Poles are more 'pro-social' or 'liberal'. Firstly, we discovered that there exists very strong support for such things as public ownership, government intervention, reducing social inequalities and progressive taxation. These are features close to a social democratic welfare state model. However, within the exceptional post-communist framework, they can also be regarded as attitudes related to inherited features from the previous system: for example state ownership and guaranteed employment. It should be remembered that positive attitudes towards such features of the PRL were not restricted to supporters of this system or its ruling party. The huge large opposition movement, organized around the Solidarity trade union, in the latter period of the PRL, also largely supported these structural elements of the Communist system. Therefore, it could be argued that the current high support for trade unions being involved in fixing pay and even decisions involving production, is reminiscent of the demands put forward by Solidarity for workers' self-management of workplaces.

Simultaneously we can identify some strong liberal opinions within Polish society on certain issues. This includes attitudes such as blaming the poor or unemployed for their situation due to individual failings; or supporting the government prioritizing giving help to businesses as a way of countering unemployment. We can observe here how liberal attitudes of individual self-sufficiency combine with demands for governments to provide support for businesses as a means to counter the negative consequences of the transition to a capitalist economy. Such support for liberal government spending exceeded that for more conservative policies, such as the pro-family 500+ child benefit or providing financial support for religious institutions'

The dichotomy within Polish public opinion, identified above, can be further understood when we look at the opinions of particular social groups. Despite the strong support within Polish society for a universal decommodified form of welfare state, some social groups hold opinions that are closer to a free-market model. The strongest liberal opinions are held by younger, male and wealthy respondents living in large cities. This can be explained, as these social groups tend to be the least socially disadvantaged and excluded, favouring more free-market and individualistic social welfare solutions. Therefore, although liberal welfare opinions are held by a minority of Polish society, they are relatively deeply entrenched within such social layers.

What we have also found is that there is no clear difference in the opinions of left-wing and right-wing voters. This may also be due to the legacies

of the communist system and transition in Poland. The mainstream social democratic left is chiefly derived from the former ruling party during the PRL. Moreover, it is also associated with some of the liberal economic policies introduced during the 1990s and early 2000s. In turn, the conservative right has become recognized by many as best as protecting and promoting government social welfare policies. Since being elected in 2015, the PiS government has introduced some significant new welfare reforms. However, these are generally of a conservative nature and are not consistent with the more social democratic policies supported by the majority of society. However, as Esping-Andersen pointed out, welfare state regimes are constructed upon particular class and political alliances. It would currently be very difficult to introduce a social democratic welfare state model when the social democratic left in Poland is weak and a significant section of its electorate is supportive of more liberal economic policies. This is also compounded by the extremely low level of trade union membership, meaning there is an inadequate countermovement to market forces both inside and outside of the workplace. It is therefore likely that there will remain a large discrepancy between the social welfare policies of Polish governments and the opinions of society and that the welfare state will continue to be built in an *ad hoc* manner, deepening its hybrid 'post-Communist' character.

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## APPENDIX 1

The list of items included in the three composite measures of the attitudes towards the welfare state models with the information on specific opinions (answers) that were treated as attitudes' indicators

		Opinions indicating support for the particular type of welfare state		
		SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC	LIBERAL	CONSERVATIVE
Public/private ownership	Schools and Universities	<i>Only state owned or Majority state owned</i>	<i>Only private owned or Majority private owned</i>	
	Health Care			
	Pension Funds			
	Postal Service			
	Railways			
Studying at public higher education institution		<i>Free for all students independent of income</i>	<i>All students must pay</i>	<i>Free for the poorest students</i>
Government intervention in the economy (government should...)	Provide cheap credit or apply tax relief for people setting up new companies		<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>	
	Ensure everyone access to free education at all levels	<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>		
	Decrease the income differences between people	<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>	<i>Definitely no or Rather no</i>	
	Ensure that everyone has work	<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>	<i>Definitely no or Rather no</i>	
	Create new workplaces	<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>		
Restrict the influence of the government in the economy	<i>Definitely no or Rather no</i>	<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>		
Help and finance the economic activities of religious institutions			<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>	<i>Definitely yes or Rather yes</i>

Government support for state companies and hospitals	If a large state firm employing many people has financial losses...	Should receive state help	Should be privatized or Should be closed down		
	If a government hospital is unprofitable...				
Causes of poverty (people are poor because...)	They are not resourceful and cannot take advantage of opportunities	Definitely not agree or Rather disagree	Definitely agree or Rather agree		
	They are not hard working – they do not want to work as required	Definitely not agree or Rather disagree	Definitely agree or Rather agree		
	Government does not ensure access to suitably paid work	Definitely agree or Rather agree	Definitely not agree or Rather disagree		
	Due to capitalist exploitation	Definitely agree or Rather agree	Definitely not agree or Rather disagree		
	They don't receive the social help that would allow them to get out of poverty	Definitely agree or Rather agree	Definitely not agree or Rather disagree		
	They don't receive enough help from family			Definitely agree or Rather agree	
	They have too many children			Definitely not agree or Rather disagree	
	How to reduce unemployment (in order to fight unemployment how important are the following state actions?)	Decrease unemployment benefits in order that the unemployed more actively seek work	Rather not important or Completely unimportant	Very important or Rather important	
		Undertake extensive 'public work' programmes (e.g. through road building, etc.)	Very important or Rather important		
		Help young people in a difficult material situation to continue their studies			Very important or Rather important
Help to set up companies			Very important or Rather important		
	Increase the number of workplaces state companies and institutions	Very important or Rather important	Rather not important or Completely unimportant		
	Decrease business taxes	Rather not important or Completely unimportant	Very important or Rather important		



<p>How do you think the state could best help families with many children?</p>	<p>Developing nurseries, pre-schools and other forms of help for children and mothers</p>	<p>Tax reliefs for buying products for children and subsidies to reduce the cost of these products</p>	<p>Direct social benefits, e.g. 500+ and other cash benefits</p>
<p>What is a fair and effective taxation, from a social perspective?</p>	<p>Higher earners should pay a higher rate</p>	<p>Everyone should pay the same amount regardless of income level or Everyone should pay the same rate regardless of income level or Income should not be taxed</p>	
<p>Attitudes towards trade unions</p>	<p>Trade unions should exist in all private and public companies</p>	<p>Definitely agree or Rather agree</p>	
<p>All important economic decisions should be taken jointly by the government, trade unions and employers</p>	<p>Definitely agree or Rather agree</p>		
<p>Pay should be fixed at a national level through negotiations between the government, employers and employees</p>	<p>Definitely agree or Rather agree</p>		
<p>Trade unions should not be involved in setting the production plans of companies</p>	<p>Definitely not agree or Rather disagree</p>	<p>Definitely agree or Rather agree</p>	

Source: CBOS (2019).

