

## Detailed description

### Scientific goal of the project

Research into democratic values is at an impasse. On the one hand, citizens in democratic countries apparently maintain a preference for democracy over other forms of government, and declare a preference for pluralism protected and enforced by independent institutions. On the other hand, the rise in many countries of populist challengers to the liberal democratic model suggests that there is more of a tolerance for illiberal, monistic forms of democracy than standard survey questions allow us to measure. The unresolved intellectual puzzle that inspires this project has been concisely articulated as *"Why do voters who routinely profess a commitment to democracy simultaneously support leaders who subvert it?"* (Svolik, 2019, p. 23).

This is a puzzle particularly relevant to the young democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). If the first quarter-century since transition to democracy was defined largely by the pursuit of an approach to democratisation in which countries of the region sought to become "normal" by copying Western political systems, economic models and cultural values (Krastev & Holmes, 2018, p. 118), then during the last decade several countries of the region have broken with this "imitative" path, explicitly rejecting the liberal model of democracy in favour of an "illiberal democracy" or "democracy without adjectives".

While there have been signs of discontent with the institutional and normative strictures of liberal democracy in many CEE countries, Hungary and Poland - both previously considered among the forerunners of post-communist democratisation - have moved significantly away from the liberal-democratic model in recent years, as illustrated by both countries' substantial decline on the *V-Dem* indicators of democracy (Coppedge et al., 2020). If Hungarian governments have been able to rely upon constitutional majorities in their reshaping of their country's political system, in Poland the process of departure from liberal democracy has required outright breaches of the constitution, politicisation of independent institutions, and bending of ordinary legislation in a manner contrary to its intended spirit (Sadurski, 2019). That this has been able to occur since 2015 without - as yet - any electoral punishment for the incumbent Law and Justice party is puzzling in light of the absence, prior to 2015, of any significant opposition to liberal democratic principles and institutions (Markowski, 2016, p. 1320; Tworzecki, 2019, p. 99), and in the stability after 2015 of approval for normative principles of democracy and actually-existing democracy in Poland (CBOS, 2020).

These considerations give rise to two possibilities: either we have been asking Poles the wrong questions about their attitudes to democracy, or we have been asking questions in the wrong way. Both of these things may be true. The aim of this project is to discover whether they are. In a recent article, Svolik (2019, pp. 21-23) identifies three potential ways to answer the question of why pro-democratic voters fail to punish political elites who depart from liberal-democratic norms: one, that "voters have not had enough time or clarity to recognize a subversion of democracy for what it is"; two, that they "do not care much about democracy in the first place"; and finally, that "[d]eep social cleavages and acute political tensions ... undercut the public's ability to curb the illiberal inclinations of elected politicians."

Svolik (2019, p. 23) opts for the latter explanation, arguing that political polarisation is often in conflict with democratic values to the extent that even pro-democratic citizens are sometimes willing to tolerate breaches of democratic principle if upholding those principles would conflict with their partisan interests. Yet while such a conclusion may be warranted in the case of more mature democracies, it remains unclear to what extent citizens in relatively new democracies genuinely do hold pro-democratic views, and to what extent they recognise departures from the orthodox model of liberal democracy as "subversion" of democracy.

The case of Poland provides an excellent opportunity to test these distinct (and potentially reinforcing) explanations of the apparently paradoxical tolerance for acts of democratic backsliding amid substantial approval for democracy. The three research questions this project seeks to answer are:

1. Do Polish citizens *genuinely* value liberal democracy as a set of principles and as a political system, and to what extent?
2. Do Polish citizens view the post-2015 changes as a subversion of liberal democracy, the pursuit of a *different* democratic model, or as “more of the same”?
3. Does political partisanship inhibit the capacity of Polish voters to hold illiberal political elites to account?

In the first stage of the project (see section *Research plan* for details) the principal investigator will specify more detailed hypotheses for investigation, and subsidiary research questions as appropriate. However, in general terms we expect to find that levels of “actually-existing” democratic values - which we define as those which correlate with pro-democratic actions, rather than those which are simply a declarative commitment to democracy - are lower than those typically declared in standard survey questions, but that they remain stable over time. However, we expect to find that political polarisation interferes (a) with the extent to which Polish citizens view post-2015 changes as legitimate or illegitimate from the perspective of democratic values, and (b) with their capacity to ‘punish’ political elites for taking illiberal and undemocratic actions.

Answering these three questions will serve three main project objectives, each of which contribute to the broader comparative literature on democratic values and voting behaviour. The first is to contribute empirical insights from the Polish case to emerging comparative literatures (see subsection *State of the art* for further details) on the causes and characteristics of democratic backsliding, the role of democratic values and populist attitudes in influencing vote choice, and the impact of affective polarisation on exacerbating the strains experienced by contemporary democracies.

The second objective is methodological in character. The development of new questions for the measuring of attitudes towards liberal democracy and liberal-democratic institutions will contribute to a broader literature on question design that seeks to address the social desirability biases inherent in many standard questions on these issues. The use of a research design based on survey experiments (see sections *Concept and work plan* and *Research methodology* for further details) will provide an opportunity to confirm the utility of these methods for identifying what respondents *really* think about democracy and how they respond to the often-conflicting imperatives of adherence to democratic values and support for their preferred party. The use of a panel survey design will move beyond existing cross-sectional studies to explore the nature and consequences of persistence and changeability in these attitudes over time, allowing us to draw conclusions about the stability (or otherwise) of democratic values, the “pernicious consequences for democracy” of deepening polarisation (McCoy, Rahman, & Somer, 2018, pp. 34-35) and potentially to explore the dynamics of a pre- and post-election situation on the relationships we observe (Ahlquist, Ichino, Wittenberg, & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 910).

Both the empirical findings and the methodological innovations will enable this project to contribute to the building of theories about the causal and interactive relationship between democratic values and polarisation on the one hand, and voting behaviour on the other. Most research in this area so far concerns the case of the United States, but the theoretical intuitions that lie behind that research are of global applicability and importance. It is imperative that these ideas be tested in other contexts, particularly where for historical reasons democracies, their institutions, and the values that underpin them may be expected to be more fragile than elsewhere. The findings of this research project will confirm, challenge or nuance the US case in ways that will have comparative implications for other countries of the CEE region, and for European democracies more broadly.

## Significance of the project

### *State of the art*

The proposed project emerges from, and will contribute to, an extensive theoretical and empirical literature on the related topics of democratic backsliding, democratic values, affective polarisation and populism.

The increased prominence and electoral success of populist parties in recent years and the pursuit by parties in power of explicitly or implicitly illiberal agendas has led to diagnoses of “autocratisation” (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), “democratic backsliding” (Bermeo, 2016), or “democratic decay” (Daly, 2019). While accounts vary in terms of the agency they ascribe to political actors and the emphasis they place on particular factors such as electoral malpractice or abuse of constitutional process, each makes the basic claim that liberal democracy is under significant challenge.

In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, the dominant post-1989 understanding of democratic transition centred on the consolidation of key liberal democratic institutions through the actions of political elites. Consistent with this tendency, much of the recent literature aimed at conceptualising and understanding cases of de-democratisation has conceived of this process as strategic and agent-led (Ganev, 2012; Sitter & Bakke, 2019). These approaches posit a leading role for an over-powerful executive through the nullification of institutions of accountability (Landau, 2013, p. 189), strategic manipulation of electoral processes instead of outright fraud (Bermeo, 2016, p. 13) and gradual, cumulative repression of civil society and the media (Huq & Ginsburg, 2018, pp. 137-138).

It is certainly true that cases of backsliding in the region have been driven by the decisions of political elites. Yet for executive aggrandisement to be possible, it requires not only a powerful executive with the will to pursue significant change in the teeth of often substantial domestic and international elite opposition, but also propitious contexts such as ‘fading conditionalities, corruption, and economic crisis’ (Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 23) and crucially the consent, or at least indifference, of the governed. The challenge of understanding democratic backsliding thus requires us to attend not only to the intentions and actions of de-democratising executives, but also to the nature of public attitudes regarding democracy and democratic institutions, and the extent to which those attitudes influence their responses to the actions of political elites.

Scholarly interest in cases of democratic backsliding has also drawn attention to the question of democratic values. Against studies that offer an optimistic picture of a rise in pro-liberal-democratic values (Norris, 2011; Welzel, 2013), some have argued that these values are in decline in consolidated democracies (Foa & Mounk, 2016, 2017a) and that this decline has contributed to the increased success of anti-establishment parties and the authoritarian political solutions they offer (Foa & Mounk, 2017b).

The diagnosis of a decline in pro-liberal-democratic values has been strongly disputed (Norris, 2017; Voeten, 2017; Zilinsky, 2019). However, the persistence of democratic backsliding and the relative absence to date of punishment for its most egregious practitioners has prompted questions about the adequacy of standard measures of democratic attitudes. For example, McCoy et al (2020, p. 3) have speculated that the normatively positive associations of democracy in liberal-democratic polities may lead social desirability bias to inflate the proportions of respondents who genuinely hold pro-democratic attitudes and who act in accordance with those attitudes.

The intuition that standard measures of democratic values are insufficient for understanding the demand-side drivers of democratic backsliding has driven a recent line of research into populist attitudes. The broad message of an extensive literature on populism that has emerged over the last few years is that contemporary liberal democracies are moving away from moderation and pluralism towards a zero-sum monism (Rovira Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, & Ostiguy, 2017). While populism is not opposed to democracy *per se* (Mudde, 2004), the anti-elite, manichean and anti-pluralist character of populist discourse is certainly compatible with the cultivation of attitudes that run contrary

to liberal-democratic values. Castanho Silva et al (2019, p. 11) find that while a number of proposed populist attitude scales have limitations with respect to validity and conceptual breadth, some of them are indeed predictive of identification with populist parties. While this literature remains at a relatively early stage of development, it raises the possibility that a “*pro-forma*” approval for liberal-democratic values may be undercut by a less socially desirable but more politically efficacious “disposition” towards populism that is activated in propitious contexts (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2019, p. 7).

Recent developments in the literature on affective polarisation also point in a similar direction. The authors of an influential recent overview of the field posit a causal chain linking societal polarisation to democratic backsliding: where crises or perceptions of injustice foster resentment, a populist “us versus them” rhetoric organises interests, loyalties and group identifications around a quasi-tribal cleavage, leading to a deepening of mutual antipathies and perceptions of the “Other” as a threat to the nation, to acceptance of actions incompatible with liberal democratic values, and ultimately to the normalisation of such actions (McCoy et al., 2018, p. 26).

This self-reinforcing dynamic has the potential to be highly destructive for democracy. Traditional social cleavages helped stabilise democracies by channelling class, confessional and ethnic differences into more or less predictable patterns of interaction that fostered pluralism and moderation. In these circumstances, polarisation may serve positive ends by increasing the palette of policy options on offer to the electorate (Dalton, 2008) and thereby making party competition about issues rather than party identification (Lachat, 2011). However, if polarisation leads to excessive policy bifurcation, voters may become *more* entrenched in their partisan bias (Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013), to the extent that “inter-party animus” becomes a matter of affect rather than ideology (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012). A radical “us versus them” polarisation in which identity-based ideology overwhelms policy orientations as a locus of difference between competing groups (Mason, 2018) threatens to destabilise democracies. Such polarisation destroys consensus over the legitimacy of neutral democratic institutions, infuses politics with a “winner-takes-all” logic (Vegetti, 2019, p. 88), disrupts social cohesion (McCoy et al., 2018, p. 17) and collapses the mechanisms of winners’ magnanimity and losers’ consent (Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan, & Listhaug, 2005) that are crucial to the continued functioning of democracy.

The hypothesised mechanisms behind this destabilisation draw on insights from social psychology and the study of communication. Klar (2013) finds that voters commonly resort to motivated reasoning, a process by which people access evidence and evaluate arguments in a biased fashion to reach a preferred conclusion. Bolsen, Druckman and Cook (2014, p. 236) have argued that priming citizens to pay attention to the need to be consistent with a partisan identity leads to acts of ‘partisan motivated reasoning’, in which the consumption of information is undertaken to protect that identity, with partisans “interpret[ing] information in ways that conform with their pre-existing partisan commitments rather than updat[ing] their beliefs about political actors” (Ahlquist et al., 2018, p. 907). The presence of acute polarisation in democracies, argues Svolik (2019, p. 24), enables would-be authoritarian leaders to exploit this mechanism. If punishing departures from democratic norms means supporting a party or a person on the other side of the partisan divide, many ostensibly pro-democratic voters may see the cost of sanctioning undemocratic actions as too high a price to pay. Furthermore, perceptions of what is and what is not a breach of democratic norms may also vary in accordance with partisan attachments, particularly where there is fundamental disagreement over the legitimacy of the norms and institutions of the political regime itself (Ahlquist et al., 2018, p. 908).

A new line of research uses conjoint experiments to examine the consequences of the acute version of polarisation for attitudes towards democracy and the sanctioning of those who breach democratic principles. Graham and Svolik (2020, p. 407) find that only around 10-13% of American voters “value democracy enough to punish otherwise favored candidates for violating democratic principles” such as ignoring court rulings, closing polling stations, or gerrymandering constituencies. Using similar methods, Carey et al (2020, p. 6) find that while Democrats were willing to punish politicians for

supporting voter ID requirements that would disproportionately disenfranchise racial minorities, Republicans were likely to *reward* candidates for such a stance. However, on the questions of obeying or disregarding court decisions or supporting independent rather than partisan investigations of politicians and their associates, partisan groups punished politicians who transgress democratic norms regardless of which side of the political divide they represent (Carey et al., 2020, p. 7). McCoy et al (2020) build on these studies by introducing power and opposition as a variable. They find that not only do a significant minority of Americans actively encourage, rather than just tolerate, policies and actions that erode democratic norms, this support is significantly greater when respondents' favoured parties are in power, and this "democratic hypocrisy" is more pronounced the stronger a respondent's partisan identity is. This last finding is obversely echoed in Svobik's (2019, p. 27) observation that centrist moderates tend to "punish undemocratic candidates more severely".

Although the majority of this nascent strand in the literature refers to the US case, there is evidence to suggest that similar dynamics may obtain elsewhere. Hungary is a prominent case of a polity in which acute polarisation has resulted in an "electoral immobilism" with supporters of the dominant Fidesz party and those of opposition parties devolving into two distinct affective and organisational camps (Vegetti, 2019, p. 92). Using a panel survey with experiments, Ahlqvist et al (2018) find that this partisan structure strongly conditioned attitudes to the legitimacy of controversial and broadly unpopular electoral reforms around the 2014 parliamentary elections. While information about the nature of the reforms themselves did not have an impact on people's opinions, partisan cues about Fidesz's sponsorship of the reforms led opponents of Fidesz to express much more negative views, while supporters of Fidesz did not change their minds. This outcome suggests that in situations of acute partisanship, partisan motivated reasoning may impede the capacity of voting publics to express common dissatisfaction with suboptimal reforms, and produce "perverse incentives for de-democratization." (Vegetti, 2019, p. 79)

### ***Justification for tackling the research question***

Cumulatively, these lines of enquiry highlight an important but still underdeveloped research agenda. The literature on democratic backsliding focuses predominantly on the supply side, with little consideration as yet of the role played by voter demand either in providing electoral incentives for backsliding, or in sanctioning the protagonists of such changes. Recent studies of democratic values remain inconclusive about the direction in which attitudes are moving, but suggest that consolidated democracies may be more vulnerable than previously assumed to democratic backsliding at the citizen level. This is a conclusion supported by research into populist attitudes and affective polarisation, which highlights the potential for democracy to be undermined through hyper-polarisation and failure to punish backsliding elites for their actions, even when those actions are contrary to the pro-democratic values a majority still purport to hold.

However, as yet we have little insight into these questions in some of the countries at the forefront of democratic backsliding. Poland in particular poses a puzzle on this front: as Tworzecki (2019, p. 98) observes, it "lacks any of the major risk factors identified by previous literature" for departures from democratisation. Attempts to theorise the phenomenon of backsliding with reference to Poland have focused primarily on elite-level factors such as the collectively irrational outputs of autocratically governed parties (Markowski, 2018) or an "autocracy trap" created by a perverse set of incentives at the EU level which discourages EU intervention to counteract backsliding while maintaining errant regimes with funding and investment (Kelemen, 2020). However, the demand-side drivers of these processes - in particular, the linkages between *actually-existing* democratic values, awareness of political developments and political polarisation in creating a climate of indifference toward backsliding, remain under-theorised.

This is reflected at the empirical level. On the one hand, there have been important recent studies pointing to the interactions of political knowledge, polarisation and partisanship in the behaviour of Polish voters. Tworzecki and Markowski's (2014) 2014 study of the cumulative effects of partisan

bias and political knowledge in evaluating policy outcomes foreshadows the distorting effects of increased polarisation on democratic accountability. Stanley's (2018) study of the determinants of partisanship and the vote at the 2015 election suggests that populist and anti-populist attitudes correlate significantly with allegiances to the two sides of Poland's main political divide. Tworzecki's (2019, pp. 111-113) study of attitudes to democracy concludes that there is no partisan gap with respect to normative commitments to democracy, but that there *was*, prior to the 2015 election, such a divide on the question of overturning rather than maintaining the political order. In the light of the comparative literature discussed above, these studies identify a number of factors that may plausibly contribute to an explanation of why subversions of democracy have as yet gone unpunished. However, they do not warrant the drawing of firm conclusions.

This highlights a third issue, which is methodological in nature. Thus far, studies of Polish voting behaviour, party affiliation and democratic values have predominantly relied on observational data, in particular the long-running Polish National Election Study (2015). While these surveys contain a wealth of information on affective polarisation, declared normative orientations towards democracy and evaluations of actually-existing democracy, they do not measure *actually-existing democratic values* in ways that avoid the aforementioned social desirability biases. Furthermore, the observational character of these data do not allow us to isolate the causal impact of those values (or the absence of such) on acceptance for or rejection of illiberal actions. To answer this research puzzle, we need to ask different questions, and to ask them differently.

The justification for the proposed research is thus threefold, and relates to the aforementioned gaps in the literature. To recall the original research problem, while we know that Polish voters *say* they value democratic values and institutions, we do not know why, that being the case, at least some of them are willing to tolerate departures from those norms rather than punishing them. Research conducted in the US context suggests that polarisation may account for this, but the relative youth of CEE democracies is a reason to be cautious about ruling out other explanations, such as insufficient *genuine* attachment to democratic values in the first place. The first justification, then, is empirical: to understand why it has been possible for political elites in one of the frontrunners of the CEE region to depart so swiftly and decisively from liberal democracy, we need to have better measures of democratic attitudes and to model the links between the values and actions of Polish citizens in ways hitherto impossible with the data we have at our disposal. Recalling the second research question, we also need to ensure we have a better understanding of Polish voters' *awareness* of transgressions of democratic norms. As Ahlquist (2018, p. 907) observes, to punish such transgressions, voters must be aware of them in the first place, and view them as illegitimate. Existing data on democratic values and contentment with Polish democracy do not furnish information on the extent to which Poles consider the events of the last five years to consist in a breach with the liberal-democratic order, or which other conceptions of democracy they might consider more compelling.

This brings us to the second justification, which is methodological. The data available to researchers of the Polish case are insufficient to answer the research questions in several respects. First, questions about democratic values and institutions in existing surveys are susceptible to the social desirability bias discussed above. It is therefore necessary to test (in a pilot survey) and collect new data about democratic values that are less affected by these biases. Second, current data are only tractable for observational analyses. These datasets - in particular the aforementioned PNES - allow us to identify relationships between key variables of interest, but cannot be used to explore the theorised causal relationships between democratic values, political partisanship and approval for (or opposition to) non-democratic outcomes. Third, the cross-sectional nature of existing datasets makes it impossible to observe changes over time. As explained in more detail below (see section *Concept and work plan*) the project will use a panel survey to observe patterns of stability and change over time in the context of what is likely to be a politically volatile period, thereby permitting retesting of hypotheses and improving the robustness of our conclusions. While there is a long-running panel survey conducted by the POLPAN project at the University of Warsaw, it does not contain the key variables of interest, nor does it employ the experimental element we require.

The third justification for this project concerns its contribution to theory. The purpose of this project is not simply to explain the relationship between democratic values, polarisation and political behaviour in the Polish case, but also to generate concepts and hypotheses for further comparative investigation. While the choice of Poland is motivated in part by pragmatic considerations concerning the realisability of the project, in particular the adjacency of Poland to the research team and the expertise of the principal investigator in that area, the primary reason for the choice of country is its potential as a crucial case study.

First, Poland has experienced a sustained process of democratic backsliding in recent years, as evidenced by the V-Dem measures of democratisation (Coppedge et al., 2020). Against the backdrop of other democracies in CEE (the exception being Hungary), it can be treated as a case of a country in the vanguard of democratic backsliding, and one whose experiences may foreshadow more general tendencies in the coming years. Second, the process of backsliding has been accompanied by significant polarisation on both sides of the political divide (Leszczyński, 2019). Unlike Hungary, the opposition in Poland remains relatively coherent and viable as an alternative power holder. This makes the case for treating Poland as a crucial case study more compelling, as it will be possible to observe not only the consequences of polarisation over Law and Justice, but also of attitudes to a credible alternative executive. Third, the choice of a case in which there is a recent history of democratic backsliding allows us to explore the impact of the memory of *actual* political events, rather than relying only on hypothetical breaches of democratic norms. This will add to the realism of our experimental manipulations and improve the external validity of our findings. Finally, until now, the majority of research in the area of our research questions has been conducted in the context of the US. While these findings are suggestive with respect to the cases of other democratic countries, it ought not to be assumed that the concepts and theories thus generated can simply be transferred to European contexts. A crucial case study approach such as the one proposed here will help generate hypotheses and confirm and infirm theories for more contextually adjacent cases.

### ***Justification for the pioneering nature of the project***

As the foregoing discussion suggests, this project has significant potential to open up new lines of enquiry in the study of European democracies, party politics and voting behaviour. The proposal is pioneering in three respects. First, it applies emergent theories of the trade-off between democratic values and political partisanship to a key European case where these questions have not yet been adequately investigated. The findings of the project will advance our knowledge of the political dynamics at work in contemporary European democracies hitherto assumed to be on a smooth teleological path to ever more consolidated democracy. Second, the use of experimental and panel survey methods will move forward the investigation of political causality in a case where research remains dominated by observational data. By using conjoint experiments (see *Research methodology* for more details), the project will allow us to move beyond monocausal explanations of the political consequences of polarisation and actually-existing democratic values, while the use of panel surveys will make it possible to explore the impact (or non-impact) of changing political circumstances on the relationships we observe. Thirdly, the project will lead to new ways of measuring democratic values, advancing the re-conceptualisation of demand-side aspects of the study of democracy in a field where most rethinking currently concerns the supply side of parties, movements and elite institutions.

## **Concept and work plan**

### ***General work plan***

The research project will consist of four distinct stages, although there will be some elements of overlap between them. The first is a preparatory stage to be undertaken by the principal investigator. During this period, the PI will develop the conceptual and methodological instruments to be used in the research project, focusing in particular on the creation of scenarios for the conjoint analysis aspect of the surveys. The second key task during this period will be to recruit a post-doctoral student to join the research team. This stage will take place during the period October 2021 - December 2022.

The second stage of the project, lasting from January 2022 to June 2022, will focus on survey design. The first major task here will be the creation of new survey questions measuring attitudes to democracy. This will be undertaken by the PI together with the co-investigator, who will join the research team at the beginning of this stage. The second key task will be the fielding of a pilot survey in March 2022, in which the new questions on attitudes to democracy will be tested. On the basis of the results of the pilot survey, the PI and co-investigator will prepare the survey questionnaire for the first panel survey.

The third stage of the project, from July 2022 to December 2023, will consist in the implementation of the panel surveys. The first panel survey will be put into the field in the third quarter of 2022, followed by the second in the second quarter of 2023, and the final panel survey in October or November 2023. These dates are provisional, as the intention is to carry out one of the surveys in the immediate aftermath of a general election, if possible. The next scheduled election is for the autumn of 2023, but there is a non-negligible possibility that snap elections may be called earlier. During this period, the PI, co-investigator and post-doctoral student (whose tenure on the project will cover the period of the implementation of the surveys) will work on data cleaning, initial interpretation of the data, and any corrective work that may be necessary.

The fourth stage of the project, from January 2024 to September 2024, will be dedicated to analysis and interpretation of the data and the writing of publications. During this stage, the PI and co-investigator will create an integrated dataset incorporating all panel waves, and a data codebook and associated documentation.

### ***Specific research goals***

The main output of the project, aside from the dataset itself, will be several journal articles to be submitted to peer-reviewed journals both nationally and internationally. The number of articles to be written and the specific journals to be targeted will be determined at a later stage. The PI will take the lead for the writing of articles for international publications, while the co-investigator will take the lead for Polish-language publications. While the majority of the articles will be written after the period of employment of the post-doctoral student has come to an end, co-authorship will be offered on all project outputs.

Findings of the project will be disseminated at national and international conferences, with the budget assuming three international conferences and one domestic conference for the PI, two international conferences and two domestic conferences for the co-investigator, and one international and one domestic conference for the post-doctoral student.

### ***Results of preliminary research***

Given the novelty of the research questions, there is no preliminary research that the project can draw on at this stage. However, the creation of the pilot survey questions will be informed by the results of the PI's recent study of populist attitudes and the importance to voters of the authenticity of political leaders (NCN Miniatura 2018/02/X/HS5/03339).

### ***Risk analysis***

There are two main risks with respect to the realisation of the research plan outlined above. The first of these concerns the aforementioned possibility of a snap election being held. There is little that can be done to mitigate this risk, but in any case the post-election survey is not central to the research design. While it would be substantively interesting for the panel surveys to incorporate a general election, and the research plan has been set out with this possibility in mind, it is not an absolute prerequisite of the panel design, which has been set up primarily to examine change over time.

The most significant risk faced by the project concerns the dropout of panel survey participants over the three waves. This creates two potential problems for the successful realisation of the project. First,



it will be impossible to measure change over time for those respondents who drop out of the survey. Second, selective dropout will potentially bias our findings with respect to the remaining participants (de Leeuw & Lugtig, 2015). To mitigate this problem, we will recruit a larger sample for the first wave and add replacements that replicate the socio-demographic profile of the dropouts for the two subsequent waves. This will ensure that we retain at least 1250 respondents over the three waves of the survey. The addition of replacements will maintain the overall representativeness of the sample for cross-sectional analyses, and will also enable us to measure change between at least two waves for many of those recruited at wave 2.

## **Research methodology**

### ***Underlying scientific methodology***

The proposed project employs a quantitative approach utilising both observational and experimental elements. The underlying assumption driving the observational element of the research project is that democratic values measured by standard observational surveys deviate from “actually-existing” democratic values due to the distorting impact of social desirability bias, and that more accurate measures of these values can be obtained by asking questions that are less prone to this bias. The experimental element of the project is driven by the hypothesis that democratic values have an important causal impact on voting behaviour, although this may be moderated by partisanship.

### ***Methods, techniques and research tools***

The key research tool that will allow us to collect the data needed to answer our research questions will be a three-wave internet-based (CAWI) panel survey of a representative sample of the Polish population, with embedded survey experiments. An additional research tool will be the fielding of a separate CAWI pilot survey to develop new questions measuring democratic values. As the success of our main analyses depends on the use of less positively-biased measures of attitudes to democracy, this is a crucial first research step that will allow us to test, accept and reject new survey questions on democratic values prior to the panel research wave.

The observational aspect of the pilot and main surveys will consist in a range of standard variables concerning political and social attitudes, voting behaviour and socio-demographic characteristics. Many of these variables will be drawn from the long-running NCN-funded Polish National Election Study (PNES) survey, thereby ensuring that the novel elements of our survey will be grounded in a set of measures that conform to validated international standards of measurement and data quality (the Polish National Election Study has provided the Polish data for all five modules of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems to date). The PNES measures of normative attitudes to democracy and evaluations of actually-existing democracy in Poland will also be important points of comparison for the new survey items in the pilot study. By repeating these questions alongside putative new measures, it will be possible to control for shifts in attitudes attributable to changes over time in the social desirability of certain responses. The linkage of our data to the PNES survey will also contribute to further iterations of that study by developing questions that better measure some of its key variables.

The experimental aspect of the surveys will consist in the administration of conjoint survey experiments. This method will allow us to measure the causal impact of attitudes to democracy and political partisanship on the decision to reward or to punish political elites for acts of democratic backsliding. While observational methods can identify whether democratic values and evaluations of the actions of politicians are correlated with specific types of voting behaviour, they cannot unambiguously identify causal relationships. To understand whether political partisanship inhibits the capacity of voters to hold political elites to account in spite of their commitment to democratic values, a causal design is needed.

The choice of conjoint analysis over classical experimental designs is motivated by the multidimensional character of decision-making over this issue. As Hainmueller et al (Hainmueller, Hopkins, &

Yamamoto, 2014, p. 2) observe, traditional survey experiments that vary only one aspect of an experimental treatment at once have two major drawbacks: they lack realism in circumstances where respondents are being asked to consider scenarios in which multiple attributes may potentially be of relevance, and as a result they often yield limited findings given the cost outlay of implementing survey experiments. In the present case, our interest is in determining the causal impact of polarisation and democratic values on willingness to sanction democratic backsliding, while also accounting for other aspects that influence electoral choices both from the demand side (e.g. socio-demographic characteristics, issue preferences, contextual influences such as media consumption and the behaviours of close personal networks) and the supply side (e.g. the perceived competence and trustworthiness of leaders, the status of parties as incumbents or in opposition).

Conjoint analysis offers a methodological paradigm that is much more advantageous for multidimensional analyses of this nature. Most importantly, by allowing the researcher to vary a number of factors in a single experiment, conjoint analysis makes it possible to estimate the impact of multiple components of an experimental treatment in the determination of an outcome, enabling the simultaneous testing of competing hypotheses (Hainmueller, Hopkins, et al., 2014, p. 3; Knudsen & Johannesson, 2018, p. 260). For example, rather than only varying whether a party has or has not violated a particular democratic norm we can also vary whether that party is currently in power or in opposition, allowing for the estimation of the interactive impact of incumbency and norm-breaching on the actions of voters. Conjoint analysis also addresses some of the problems identified above. By replicating real-world choice processes more realistically conjoint designs improve the external validity of survey experiments (Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Yamamoto, 2015), and by giving respondents a variety of reasons to justify their choices they mitigate the social desirability problems that often afflict experiments where the sole treatment concerns a variable susceptible to such problems (Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Yamamoto, 2014, p. 3). Finally, conjoint analyses are a more cost-effective use of resources. The multidimensional character of the experiments conducted in this project will mean that they will be of use not only for the purposes of addressing the hypotheses in this study, but also for answering other hypotheses that do not directly pertain to the research questions.

The use of CAWI panels is preferred over traditional face-to-face (CAPI) and telephone (CATI) modes for three reasons. The first is the availability of panel-survey infrastructure. An increasing number of survey companies are moving to CAWI panels, as an online infrastructure with user-friendly mobile applications and easy disbursement of incentives facilitates the retention of respondents. The second reason is the ease with which conjoint experiments - which often involve thousands of configurations of the vignettes seen by respondents - can be administered using CAWI surveys, and response times accurately monitored to filter out satisficers. CAPI and CATI survey infrastructures are more unwieldy in this regard. The third reason for choosing CAWI panels is that they are more cost-effective: in those cases where CAPI and CATI panels were offered, the quoted cost was higher than the equivalent CAWI surveys.

### ***Methods of analysis and presenting results***

The key empirical material for our analyses will be the datasets generated by our surveys. Three broad types of quantitative analysis will be undertaken using these data. First, confirmatory factor analysis will be used to identify latent attitudes to liberal democracy among respondents elicited by our observed variables. Second, multivariate regression modelling will be used to measure the impact of key independent variables of interest on dependent variables relating to democratic attitudes, party identification, party political polarisation and vote choice. Third, the results of the conjoint experiments will be analysed using estimations of the average marginal component effect (AMCE), which gives the effect of the value of interest after taking into account the effects of the other attributes, and the conditional AMCE, a measure which gives this effect conditional on a characteristic of the survey respondent. These quantities of interest will allow us to assess the extent to which democratic values affect preferences conditional on the level of partisanship.

All analyses will be carried out within the framework of Bayesian inference, as this approach allows the incorporation of prior information from previous studies into our analyses (Gelman, Hill, & Vehtari, 2020, p. 15). The Bayesian framework also handles missing data more flexibly, which is an important consideration when analysing data which previous experience suggests are likely to contain high rates of missingness on some variables.

### ***Equipment to be used in research***

With data collection outsourced to a survey organisation, the only equipment necessary to carry out research is the computers available to the project team. Quantitative analyses will primarily be carried out using the free statistical programming language *R*, which offers the most powerful and flexible implementation of Bayesian modelling via the *brms* implementation of the *Stan* programming language and, in the form of the *tidyverse* packages, a highly flexible set of routines for data management, calculation of quantities of interest, and data visualisation. Supplementary analyses, particularly those requiring the use of structural equation modelling and latent variable analysis, will be conducted using the proprietary software *Mplus*, for which SWPS University already holds a licence.

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