

Liberal-democratic hypocrisy? Stability and change in Polish citizens' attitudes towards liberal democracy

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A little context

- PiS (Law and Justice) – radical-right party that governed from 2015 to 2023.
- KO (Koalicja Obywatelska) – centrist coalition, main party in current coalition government.
- TD (Trzecia Droga) – centre-right coalition, junior party in current coalition government.
- Lewica – social-democratic / socialist coalition, junior party in current coalition government.
- Konfederacja – radical-right / libertarian party.

The post-illiberal trilemma

- Fundamental problem faced by the new Polish government
- It is expected to act
 - ▶ (a) effectively, to deal with the consequences of illiberalism;
 - ▶ (b) quickly, to satisfy popular demands for change and justice;
 - ▶ (c) legally, to ensure that the rule of law is restored.
- However, in many cases it can do only two of these things at once.

Research question

- Do Polish voters hold stable attitudes to liberal democracy regardless of who holds power, or are they democratic hypocrites, condemning and punishing illiberal actions when their favoured parties are in opposition, but failing to do so – or even rewarding these actions – when their favoured party is in power?

Hypotheses

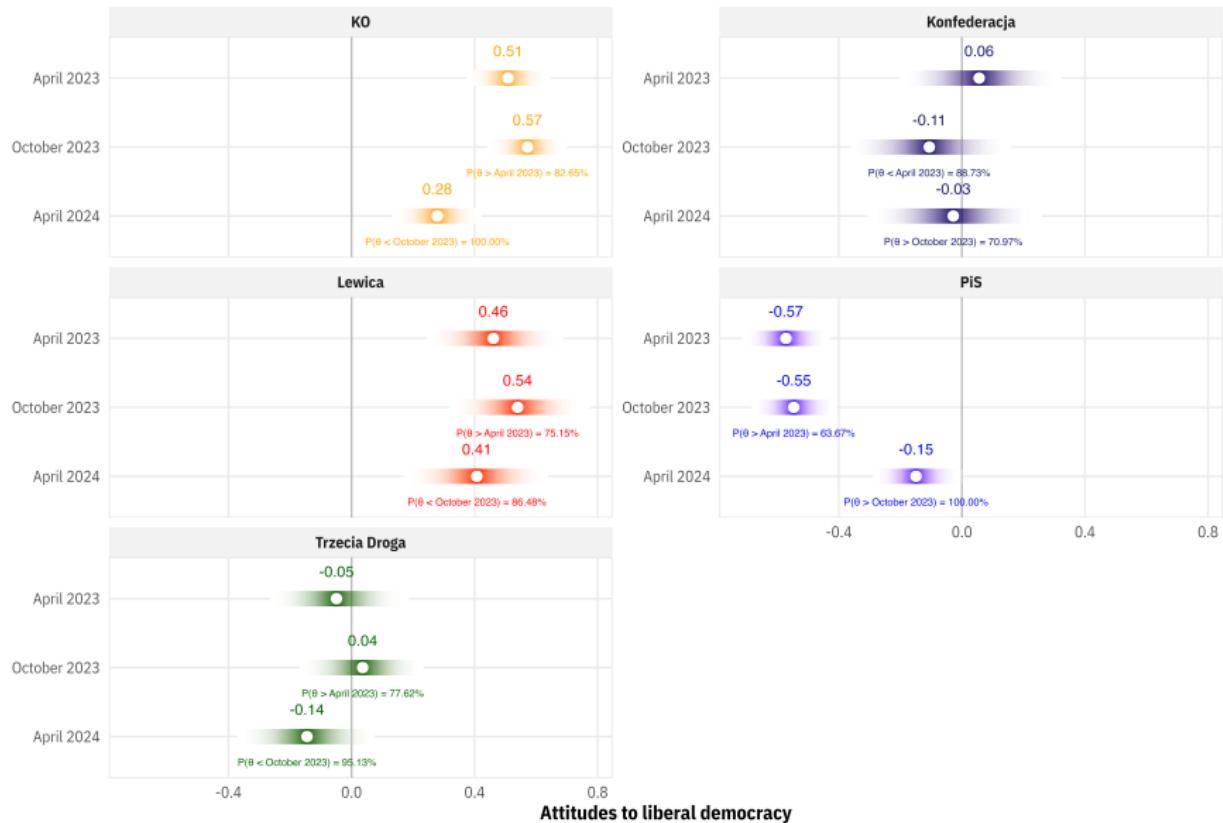
Compared with waves 1 and 2 of the survey...

- PiS voters' level of agreement with liberal-democratic principles will increase (H1a), while KO, Lewica and Trzecia Droga voters' level of agreement with liberal-democratic values will decrease (H1b).
- PiS's voters will become more negative in their evaluations of the state of Polish democracy (H2a), and KO-Lewica-TD voters will become more positive (H2b).
- PiS voters will be more likely to punish illiberal candidates (H3a), while KO, Lewica and TD voters will become less lenient (H3b).

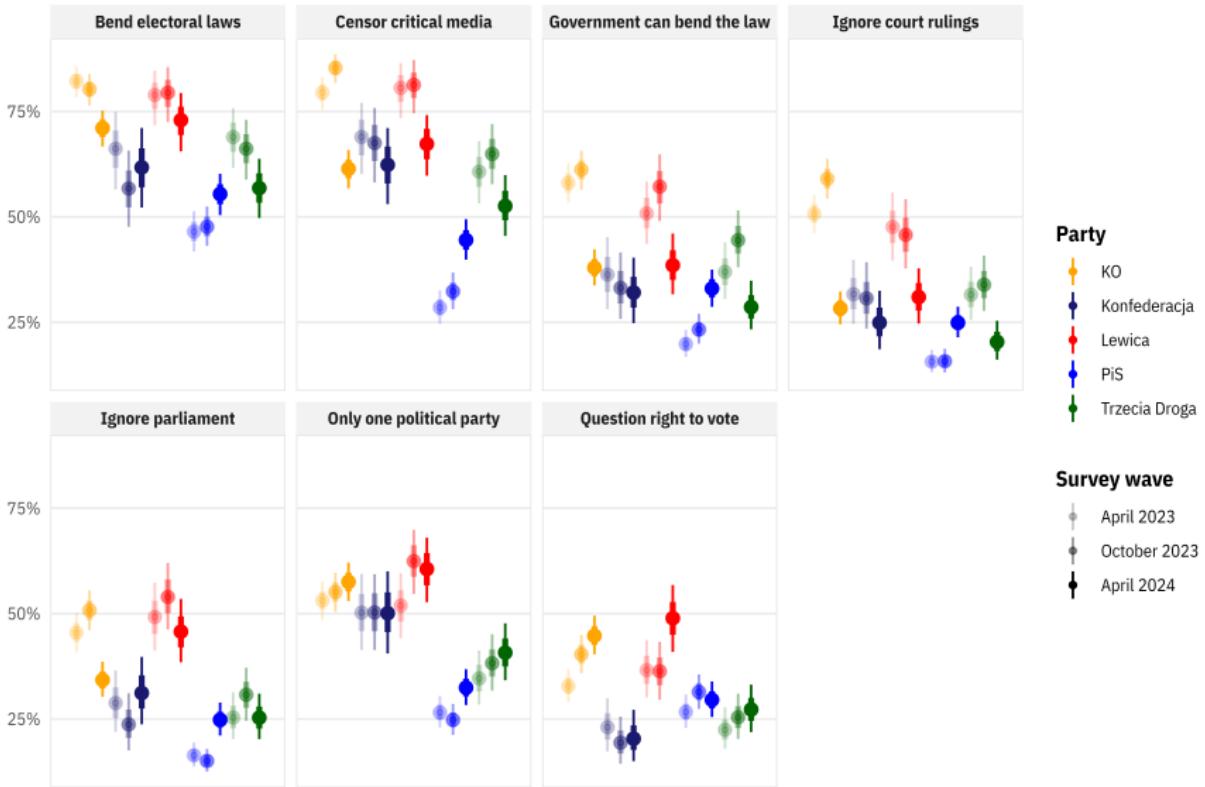
Data and methods

- Three-wave panel survey (April 2023, October 2023, April 2024) - funded by the Polish National Science Centre (*Narodowe Centrum Nauki*), grant no. 2020/39/B/HS6/00853.
- H1 & H2 – ordinal logit / OLS, focus on strongest pro-liberal stances.
- H3 – forced-choice conjoint analysis, focus on probability of selecting candidates who endorse illiberal policies / ideas.

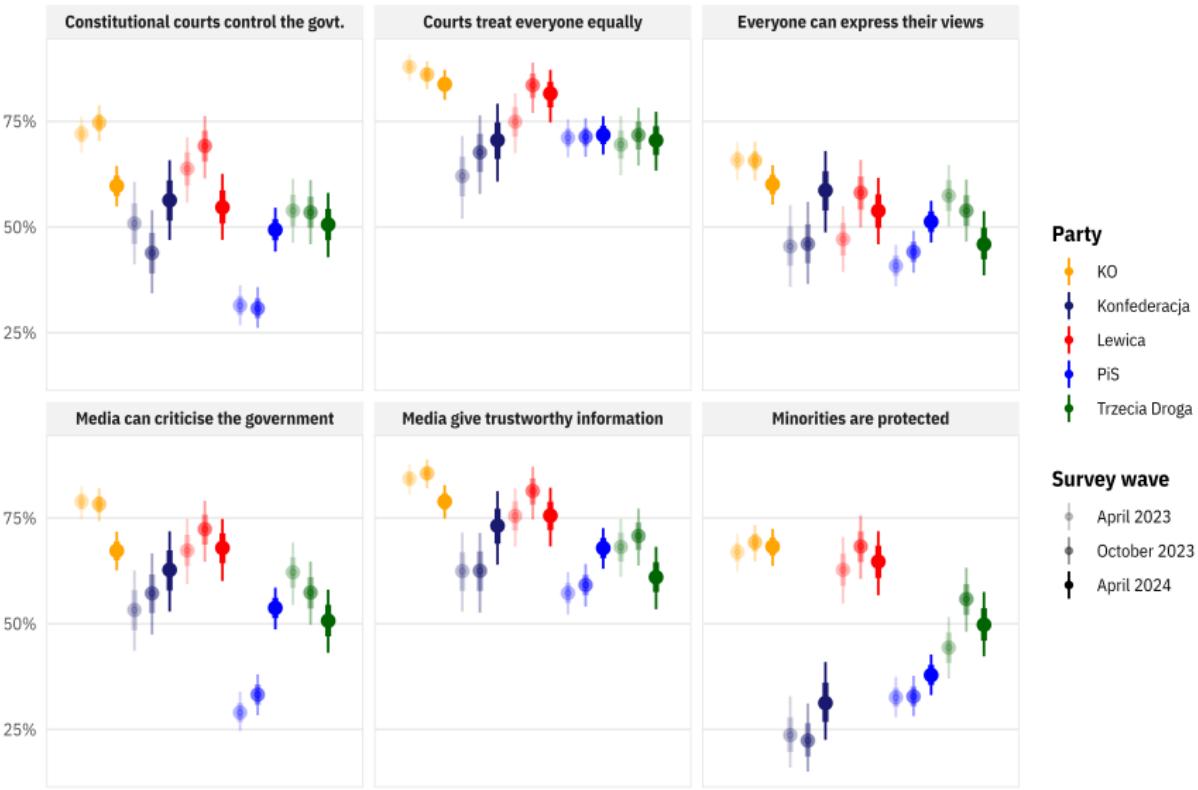
Support for liberal democracy (Claassen et al. 2024)



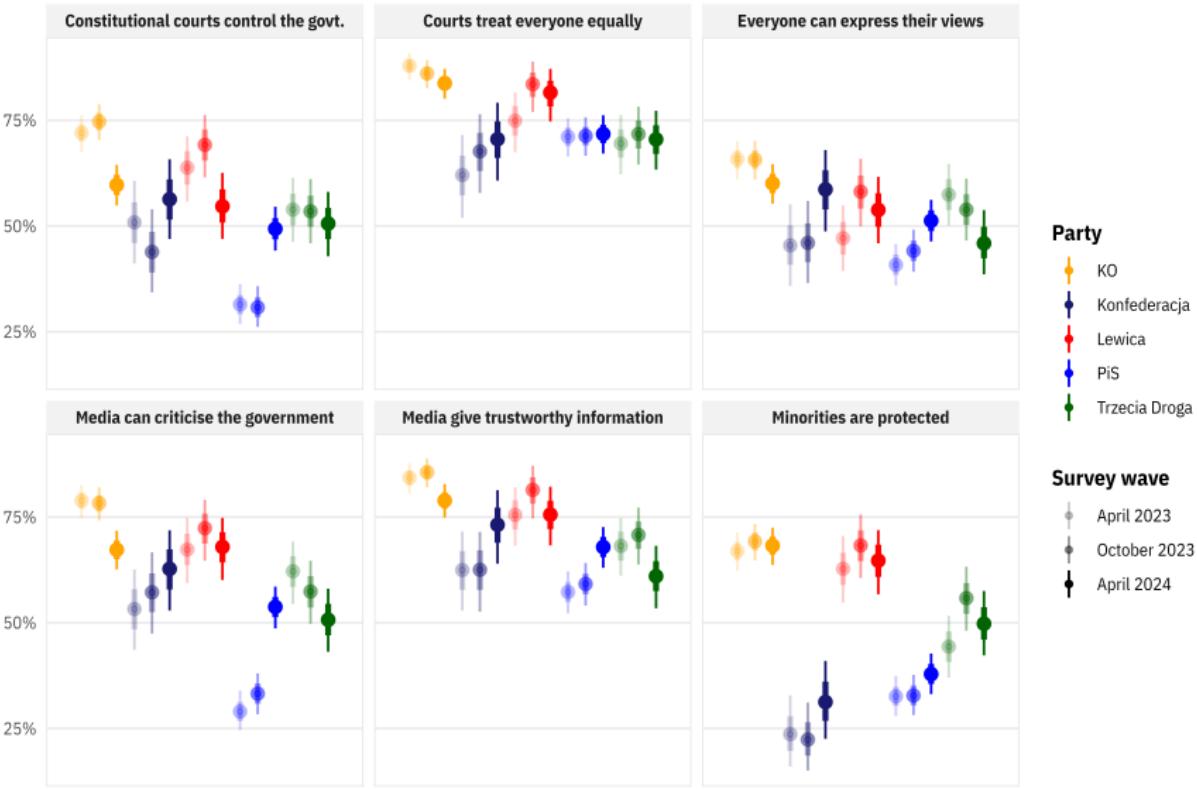
Support, disaggregated (Claassen et al. 2024)



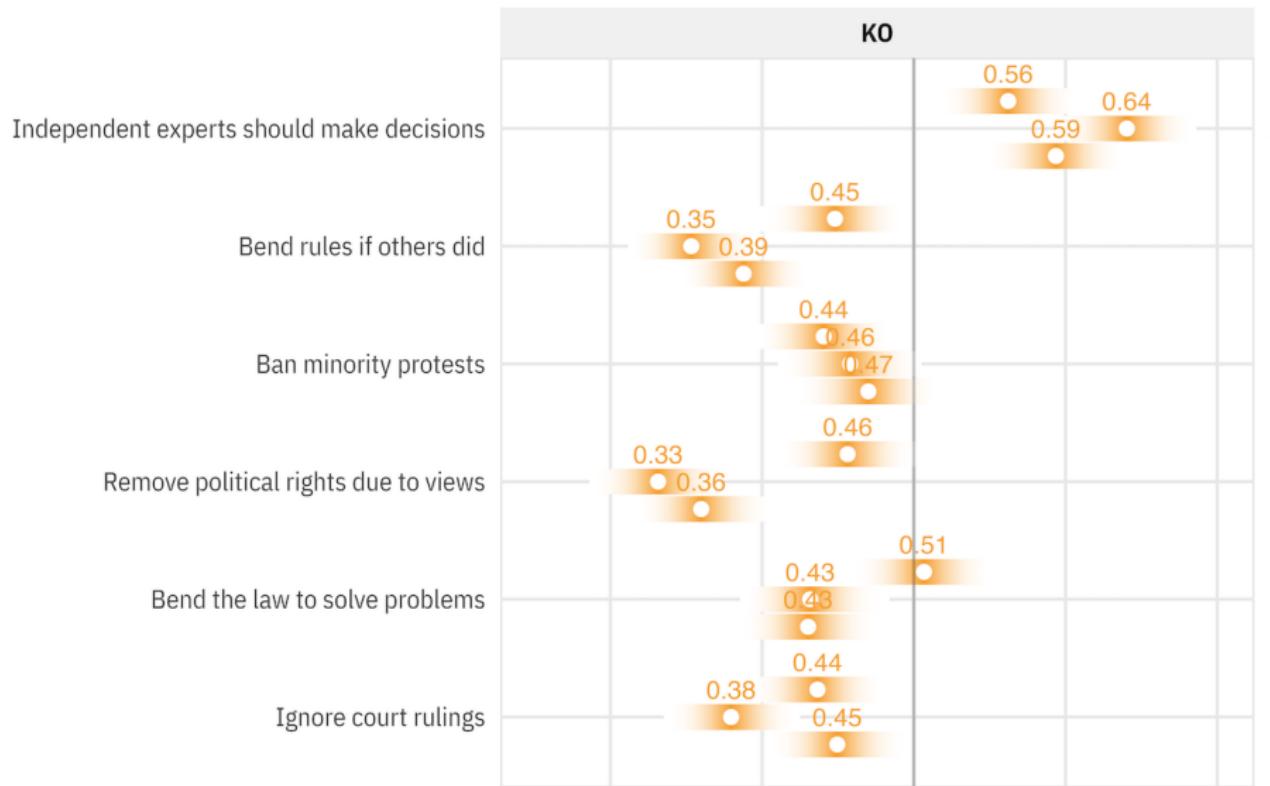
Importance of liberal-democratic principles (ESS-derived)



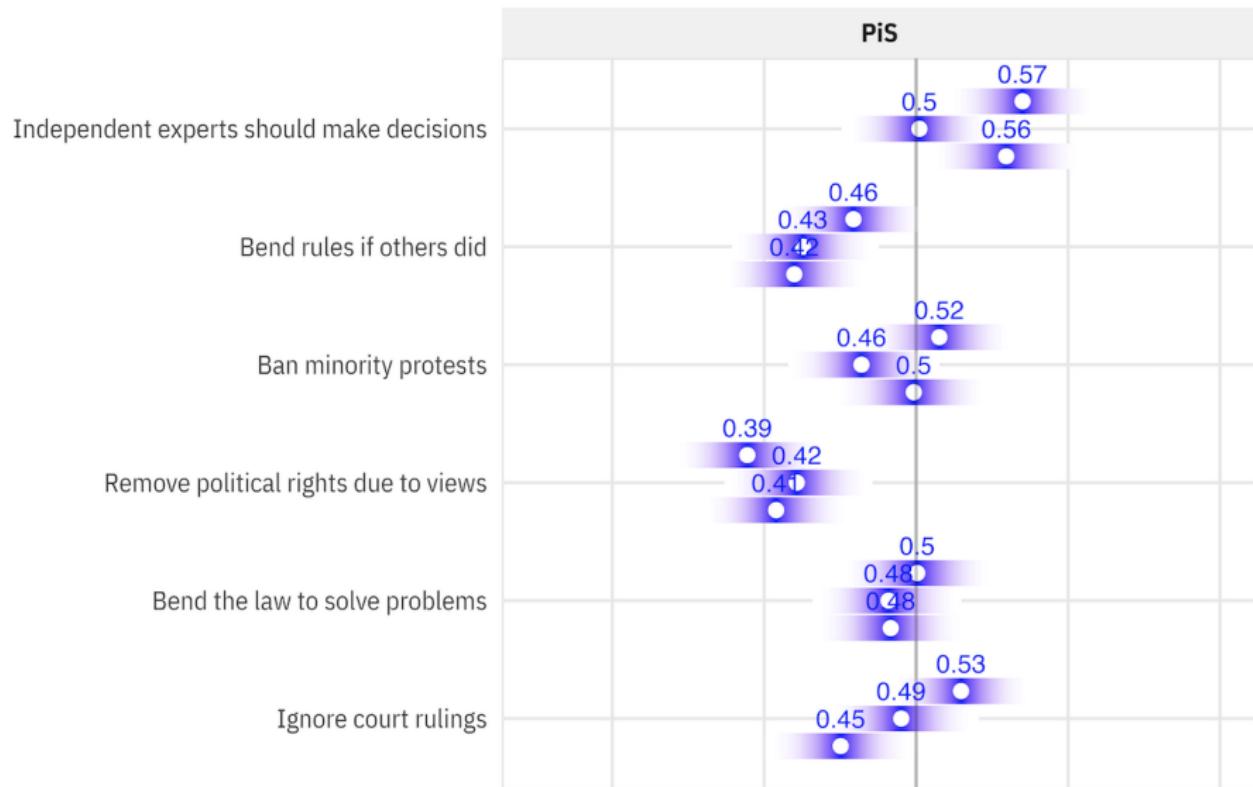
Realisation of liberal-democratic principles (ESS-derived)



Probability of voting for illiberal candidates



Probability of voting for illiberal candidates



Probability of voting for illiberal candidates

Independent experts should make decisions

Lewica

0.58

0.63

0.6

Bend rules if others did

0.38

0.37

Ban minority protests

0.49

0.43

0.48

Remove political rights due to views

0.39

0.4

0.37

0.41

Bend the law to solve problems

0.41

0.37

0.41

Ignore court rulings

0.43

0.46

0.43

Conclusions

- Poles' agreement with fundamental liberal democratic principles is prone to change in ways that may facilitate backsliding.
- When their party was in power, PiS voters were less critical of illiberal actions, but they became much more critical when PiS entered opposition, particularly with respect to the media and judiciary.
- The post-election decrease in enthusiasm for liberal-democratic principles among supporters of the current governing parties, and their tendency to evaluate actually-existing liberal democracy more positively despite the paucity of tangible reforms to date, suggests that pragmatism may come to trump pro-democratic principle.