

From Protesters to Parliamentarians: Dissidents and Electoral Competition in New Democracies.*

Dominika Kruszezewska[†]

Abstract

Do former dissidents have an electoral advantage in new democracies and if so, what are its sources and how long does it persist? In this paper, I use the case of Solidarity in Poland to argue that the history of pro-democratic struggle gives activists a reputational advantage under conditions of uncertainty common in post-transition elections, increasing their chances of winning political office. This electoral advantage diminishes over time as politics becomes more routinized but is substantively meaningful in the first few elections. I show support for these arguments using a dataset that combines information about over 46,000 political candidates across 9 elections with new data on about 5,000 Solidarity activists. I provide evidence for a reputational advantage conferred by dissident past as the mechanism using a survey experiment, in which I show that voters across the political spectrum continue to reward political candidates for costly Solidarity activism.

*Draft: Please do not cite or circulate without permission of the author. The experimental component was pre-registered at EGAP: ID 20161227AA. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the Institute for Quantitative Social Science. For their excellent feedback throughout the development of this project I thank Melani Cammett, Joan Cho, Colleen Driscoll, Grzegorz Ekiert, Peter Hall, Dana Higgins, Connor Huff, Amaney Jamal, Andrew Leber, Aseem Mahajan, Gwyneth McClendon, Olena Nikolayenko, and participants at the NYU CESS Experiments Conference, Annual Meeting of Midwest Political Science Association, Northeast Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Conference, and the Comparative Workshop at Harvard.

[†]Department of Government, Harvard University, dkruszezewska@fas.harvard.edu

1 Introduction

In post-transition elections, voters often face a confusing landscape of many new parties without clearly formulated platforms, and – lacking experience with democratic politics – can neither articulate their own interests nor identify parties likely to represent them. New political parties struggle with facilitating this process: uncertain about voter preferences, they may not know around which cleavages to structure political competition, which constituencies to target, and how to establish more permanent bases of support. Until both voters and parties crystallize their positions and durable party-voter linkages are formed, politics is likely to remain highly personalistic and voters will rely on heuristics to make their decisions. The regime/opposition divide is often the only readily identifiable cleavage, making activism in the democratic opposition a potentially powerful cue. Do former dissidents have an electoral advantage in new democracies and if so, what are its sources and how long does it persist?

In this paper, I use the case of Solidarity in Poland to argue that the history of pro-democratic struggle gives activists a reputational advantage under conditions of uncertainty common in post-transition elections, increasing their chances of winning political office. This electoral advantage diminishes over time as politics becomes more routinized but is substantively meaningful in the first few elections, allowing those who precipitated the transition to shape the subsequent nature of political competition. I show support for these arguments using a dataset that combines information about over 46,000 political candidates across 9 elections with new data on about 5,000 Solidarity activists. I provide evidence for a reputational advantage conferred by dissident past as the mechanism using a survey experiment, in which I show that voters across the political spectrum continue to reward political candidates for costly Solidarity activism although, over 25 years after the transition, these effects are now small.

These findings contribute to the literature on democratization and democratic consolidation by providing insight into who shapes the nature of democratic institutions after the

transition. Political actors elected in early post-transition years write the formal rules of electoral competition, decide which pre-existing cleavages to (de-)emphasize, set up new institutions, and create opportunity structures for both parties and movements (Elster et al., 1998). All of those decisions have a profound impact on political competition in new democracies. For example, in Poland in January 1990, members of parliament elected in the transitional elections passed legislation about political parties, including the rules governing their financing, which influenced initial party system formation and consolidation.

It is therefore important to know whether pro-democracy activists can obtain positions of power in the democracy they fought for or whether it will fall to former authoritarians to write the rules of the game. The literature has shown that authoritarian successor parties have a “usable past” (Grzymala-Busse, 2002), which allows them to transform into competitive democratic actors (Pop-Eleches, 2008; Loxton, 2015). This paper argues that dissident past can initially be a powerful advantage as well but – rooted in reputation instead of resources – it is much more ephemeral.

This study also puts in dialogue literatures on contentious and electoral politics – two fields that are too often studied in isolation (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010) – by claiming that in “open moments” (Gourevitch, 1986), in which actors re-negotiate and re-configure political arrangements, activists who emerge from social movements can form part of the new political elite. Thus, institutional politics may become intertwined with movement politics through actors whose biographies bridge the two forms of political activity.

2 Theory

2.1 Reputational Advantage of Dissident Roots

In countries, where a successful social movement precipitated the transition, history of pro-democracy activism should have a positive effect on candidate’s electoral prospects. However, this is not the case because of the movement’s organizational capacity. Although mobiliza-

tion for protest requires a creation of movement structures and a network of committed activists on the ground (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; McAdam et al., 2003), the resources political candidates of opposition movements have at their disposal often pale in comparison to those of former regime officials. Communist successor parties, like authoritarian successor parties around the world, went into the post-transition elections with strong party organizations, sizeable membership, widespread local presence and politically experienced cadres (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Kostecký, 2002; Van Biezen, 2003; Lewis, 1994; Loxton, 2015). Organizationally, post-Solidarity parties in Poland were at a disadvantage. The peak of movement’s activity was in 1980 and around the 1989 transition, Solidarity forces were emerging from years of underground activity, without any prior access to state resources.

I argue that instead, the source of electoral advantage enjoyed by pro-democracy activists is reputation. This is because dissident credentials have important moral value,¹ increasing the perception of a candidate as a respectable, courageous person with high integrity. Opposition activists are not only untainted by collaboration with the authoritarian regime (Lust & Waldner, 2016) but also have a record of mobilizing for democracy, which often includes sacrifices such as persecution and imprisonment (Kim et al., 2013). This past serves as a strong signal of commitment to democratic values. Voters who rely on information about candidate’s character to select a “good type” and choose a representative that is the most deserving of the “honor of political authority” should be sensitive to aspects of candidate’s past, which reveal them to be principled (Fearon, 1999; Dewan & Shepsle, 2011).

A cross-cutting, inclusive, coalition for democracy, often built around a common identity (e.g. a national one) or a set of values or rights (e.g. freedom of speech), should also mean that the electoral advantage of pro-democracy activism is not limited to those with particular ideological beliefs.² Reputational effects allow candidates to garner public support beyond

¹However, this might not be the case for violent pro-democracy or pro-independence movements. Previous research has shown that nonviolent movements, like Solidarity, are more effective in garnering public support (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Huff & Kruszewska, 2016).

²Poland’s “Solidarity” was a broad-based movement, including both left-wing intellectuals and conservative Catholics.

their direct networks and their ideological constituency (Cammett & Luong, 2014). Thus, a candidate with a history of pro-democracy activism should enjoy a valence advantage as someone who “possesses non-policy characteristics that are, in effect, universally desirable” (Dewan & Shepsle, 2011, p.315). Based on this discussion, I expect that:

Hypothesis 1: Dissidents have a reputational advantage, which increases their probability of getting elected in post-transition elections.

2.2 Voting in New Democracies

However, I posit that there is a temporal dimension to the value of this candidate attribute. In new democracies, especially those with brand new party systems such as post-communist countries in East and Central Europe, voters face conditions of high uncertainty, where it is “unclear where new parties stand on the relevant issues” (Tucker, 2006, p.40). In such low information environments with many new actors, voters are often unable to associate parties with specific policies. Since parties do not yet have governing experience or reputations for (in)competence, voters cannot have confidence that parties will not shift their alignments or succeed at implementing programs. The opposition often has very little time to organize since outgoing authoritarian governments tend to insist on quick elections to take advantage of their privileged access to resources and media. Classical cleavage-based party competition might also not emerge automatically if the authoritarian regime attempted to suppress traditional social divisions (Tavits, 2013). For example, this was the case with socioeconomic class in communist societies, making the left-right dimension to this day less relevant in the post-communist world (Tucker, 2006; Jasiewicz, 2009). Moreover, voters themselves, having been deprived of political agency and vote choice for decades, might not have well crystalized positions and a “poor understanding of the democratic process” (Tavits, 2013, p.2).

As previous research shows, in low information environments, voters are likely to rely on informational shortcuts, which often take a form of candidate cues, in making decisions (Conover & Feldman, 1982, 1989). Since acquiring political information is costly, voters

“economize by making political judgments according to knowledge they already have about politics and the world in general” (McDermott, 1998). In post-transitional contexts, that knowledge is based largely on who supported or formed part of the regime and who opposed it.³ Until voters figure out their positions and parties decide which cleavages to emphasize/de-emphasize, the most salient and readily identifiable cleavage is around the transition to democracy: between the former regime and former democratic opposition. But party names are new, brands unknown,⁴ so voters look to the faces they recognize from the authoritarian period – faces of the authoritarian government and faces of the protest leaders.

Politics is likely to be highly personalistic at this time and a history of involvement in the democratic opposition is likely to provide one of few reliable cues. When policy positions of political actors are uncertain, valence issues play a critical role in voting decisions (Enelow & Hinich, 1982; Stokes, 1992) and as I argued in Section 2.1, former dissidents have an advantage on this dimension. Over time, however, the public acquires new information about candidates’ and parties’ issue positions and performance in office and becomes less reliant on initial values-based heuristics. Even though voters in new democracies and countries with younger party systems show lower levels of partisan identification (Huber et al., 2005; Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007; Dalton & Weldon, 2007), partisanship tends to strengthen with age and stability of a party system (Brader & Tucker, 2001; Brader et al., 2013). As it does, the focus shifts to policy considerations and interest representation and both candidate’s personal characteristics and the regime/opposition cleavage should decline in importance, decreasing the effect of dissident credentials. From this discussion, I expect that:

Hypothesis 2: The positive effect of dissident past declines over time.

³Which can be compared to relying on incumbent/challenger status as a heuristic in an established democracy.

⁴In a 1991 poll conducted by CBOS, the Public Opinion Research Center, when asked which of the 23 party organizations they would vote for if parliamentary elections were to take place next Sunday, nearly half of respondents marked organizations with a word “Solidarity” in the name (Chimiak, 2010, p.123). General party recognition or familiarity with programs – which were often poorly articulated by the parties – was low; the word “Solidarity” served as a valuable heuristic.

To summarize, the observable implications of the theory are the following: first, dissident past should have a positive effect on candidate’s probability of getting elected in early post-transition elections conducted under conditions of uncertainty. Second, the source of this advantage is reputation rather than resources. Third, following the foundational elections, as politics becomes less personalistic and parties develop platforms and performance records, this effect should decline.

3 Data

In order to test these hypotheses, I leverage the East European Parliamentary and Candidate Data (EAST PaC) and combine it with newly collected data on about 5,000 Solidarity activists. The EAST PaC dataset covers 9 elections between 1985 and 2011 to both the lower (Sejm) and upper (Senate) houses of the Polish Parliament and includes 46,426 unique political candidates.⁵ I combine this dataset with new text data from the Encyclopedia of Solidarity, a project led by Poland’s Institute for National Remembrance (IPN). To this end, I scraped 4,888 biographies of opposition activists included in the Encyclopedia to create a corpus of documents. Next, I matched the names of candidates from the EAST PaC datasets to the activist database from IPN’s Solidarity Encyclopedia using both first and last names⁶ and year of birth and created a new variable, **activist**, which took on a value of 1 if this person appeared in the IPN’s database and 0 otherwise. Figure 1 shows the percentage of dissident candidates and dissident MPs in both Houses of Parliament for each election year since the transition. In early years of Polish democracy, as much as 20-25% of each House was made up of Solidarity activists.

I focus on the Sejm, the Lower House, because on average, only about 500 candidates competed for 100 Senate seats in each election since transition. In contrast, across the 7 elec-

⁵The main source of the data is the National Electoral Commission in Poland. The data collection in the EAST PaC project was funded by Poland’s National Science Centre (decision number 2012/05/E/HS6/03556).

⁶Middle names were excluded because their use is inconsistent between the two databases, leading to false negatives.

tions I include, on average, almost 8,000 candidates ran for the 460 Sejm seats. The results of analysis for the Senate are shown in Section 8.4 in the Appendix and are comparable to those in the Sejm. Elections to the Sejm have a proportional representation format but they are open list: in each constituency, parties allocate seats obtained based on aggregate votes for their list to candidates with highest vote totals. This increases the value of candidates' personal reputations (Carey & Shugart, 1995). Poland's candidate-centered electoral system (Carroll & Nalepa, n.d.) and personalistic flavor to politics – most new party formation has occurred through elite defections and voters often follow party leaders as much as programs (Jasiewicz, 2007) – underlines the importance of studying individual political candidates. This is the case especially in the early years of Polish democracy when the party system was not yet institutionalized.

For all of the analyses, I use data starting from the 1991 election, which was the first fully free and thus foundational election in Poland, through the 2011 election for a total of 7 elections. However, I use data from two earlier elections (1985, 1989) to create additional control variables. First, I incorporate data from the 1989 transitional, partially-free, election to create an incumbency measure for the 1991 electoral competition to control for effects of office-holding and political experience. Using the data for the 1985 (pre-transition) election, I also create a variable `communist`, which takes a value of 1 if a political candidate competed in 1985 elections, before the transition to democracy. Although not all candidates ran on the lists of PZPR, the communist party,⁷ and they might have been members of e.g. the Catholic Caucus, which at times sympathized with the opposition, it serves as an indicator of political experience under communism and co-optation by the regime. The resulting dataset is a panel dataset with candidate-election as a unit across seven elections for a total of over 53,000 observations.

⁷This information is unfortunately unavailable in the data.

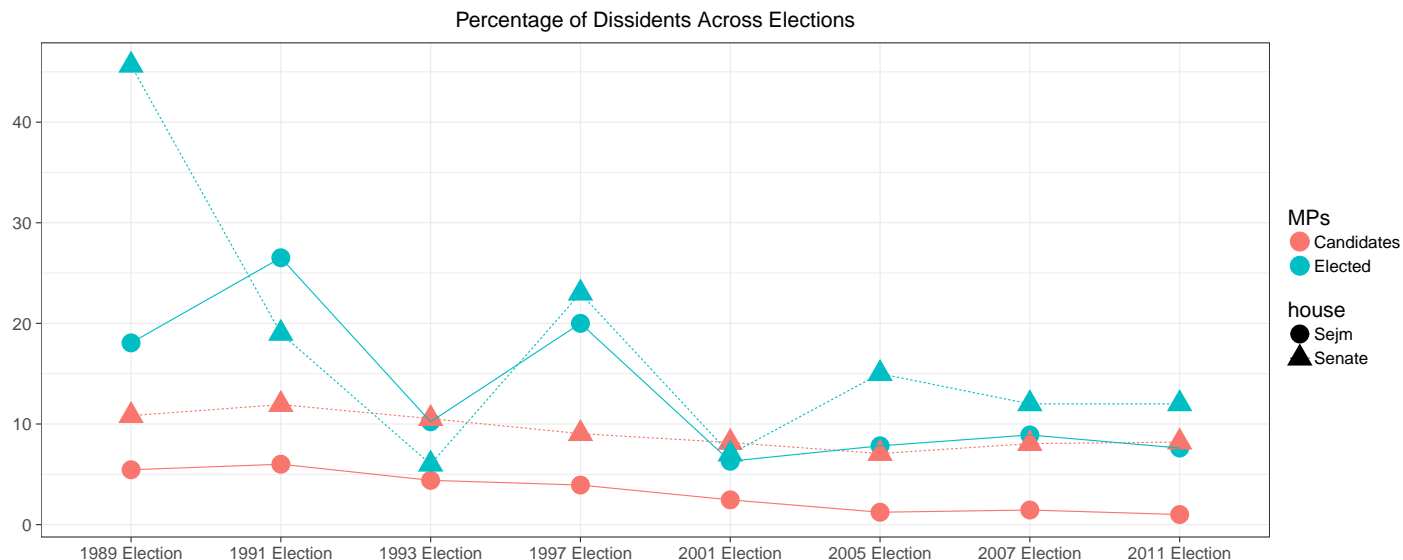


Figure 1: Percentage of Dissident Candidates and Parliamentarians Across Elections

4 Transitional elections

As a result of the negotiated transition – the Roundtable Agreement, the June 1989 election in Poland was a compromise: the opposition was allowed to compete for 35% of mandates or 161 seats in the Lower House of Parliament (Sejm). The compromise also established the Upper House (Senate) with one hundred senators elected in completely free elections.⁸ In order to win a mandate, candidates had to receive over half of the votes in the first round or a plurality in the second round. The negotiations concluded in April, leaving the opposition only about two months to organize (Elster, 1996). The electoral rules were complicated – there were no party labels next to candidates’ names and voters indicated their choice not by marking the selected candidate but by crossing out all the others. To do so, voters had to remember the name(s) of candidates supported by Solidarity’s Citizens’ Committee (KO) and endorsed by movement’s leader, Lech Wałęsa, who posed for a campaign poster photograph with nearly every Solidarity candidate, making it a very personalistic election.

The elections were a landslide victory for Solidarity: candidates backed by the movement

⁸Senators were elected using an American model: two senators from each of 49 voivodships in Poland and three from two biggest cities for a total of one hundred (Elster, 1996).

secured all of the seats for which they were allowed to compete in the Sejm and 99 of the 100 seats in the Senate, with an independent local entrepreneur winning one mandate. As Figure 1 shows, following this election, 18% of new parliamentarians in the Lower House were dissidents and 13.5% former political prisoners.⁹ In the Senate, 46% were dissidents and 29% had been imprisoned for opposition activity.¹⁰ Henryk Wujec, a prominent Solidarity activist, expressed how surreal the victory felt to the dissidents by saying: “Virtually straight from prison, we find ourselves in the ‘palaces of power’” (Ost, 2010, p.218). The 1989-1991 transitional parliament, with a large presence of former dissidents, passed a series of legislation critical for the new democracy ranging from economic reforms, through welfare, to electoral rules and political party regulations.

5 Elections in a New Democracy

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, I analyze the effect of dissident past on the likelihood of getting elected to the Sejm from the first completely free elections in 1991 to 2011. This provides a harder test than beginning with the transitional elections in 1989, which could be considered a protest vote against the communist regime. By 1991, political parties emerged on the opposition side, differentiating themselves from both post-communist and post-Solidarity competition, designed programs, and built party organizations. However, the party system

⁹To obtain these numbers, I use the corpus of dissident biographies to generate a term-document-matrix (TDM) and create a variable, **imprisoned**, that takes a value of 1 if the activist is described as having been jailed at least once, and 0 if not. This is a crude method but it is effective for the following reasons: first, the word “internowany” or interned is used in Polish almost exclusively to describe politically-motivated arrests under the martial law intended to demobilize Solidarity. Second, I also include words such as “arrested,” “convicted,” “held” in male and female forms to account for different phrases used in biographies to describe political imprisonment. This method accounts even for influential activists, for instance Władysław Frasyniuk or Zbigniew Bujak, who were able to hide underground, avoiding internment under the martial law but came in contact with the repressive apparatus at some point during dissident activity. Nearly 62% of candidates identified as activists in the dataset were also described as having been interned under the martial law or imprisoned during communism in their biographies, probably because those were the prominent dissidents in the movement – both more likely to be detained and to be included in the Encyclopedia.

¹⁰All of the candidates endorsed by Solidarity in the transitional elections belonged to Solidarity – at the peak of movement’s popularity in 1980, Solidarity’s membership was around 10 million people – but not all were activists with a role in the movement central enough to be included in the IPN’s Solidarity Encyclopedia. This means that not all of them are classified as dissidents in my data. Some, like for example, Andrzej Wajda, a film director elected Senator, were well-known for other reasons.

was not consolidated and voters still operated in a low-information environment, dominated by the regime/opposition cleavage, and without sufficient information on actors' performance in office. Under these conditions, we would expect the reputation of Solidarity activists to translate into an electoral advantage.

Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of winning a Sejm seat for activist v. non-activist candidates over time with 95% confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are simulated based on a logistic regression model (model 2) presented in Table 5. The model controls for electoral district, political party, incumbency status, and position on the electoral list, and as shown in Table 5, is robust to inclusion of additional control variables. As Figure 2 illustrates, dissident candidates performed better for the first few elections following the transition but their advantage declined over time. By the seventh election (in 2011), the expected values for activist candidates are no higher than for non-activist candidates.

During the foundational election, however, the difference between expected values for dissident candidates and other candidates was about 19%. This is substantively meaningful considering that – as Figure 6 shows – in that year, the predicted probability of winning was about 21% higher for incumbents than for new politicians. In contrast to the dissident advantage, however, the incumbent advantage did not diminish over time.

Finally, the electoral advantage of activists shaped the composition of the parliament between 1991 and 1993: nearly 27% of MPs in Sejm were dissidents and 19% former political prisoners. Therefore, I find support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 that dissident past had a positive effect on candidate's likelihood of getting elected in early post-transition elections but that this effect declined in magnitude over time.

6 Sources of Dissidents' Electoral Advantage

In this section, I test the mechanism behind the electoral advantage enjoyed by pro-democracy activists. First, I provide evidence for a reputational advantage in support of Hypothesis 1.

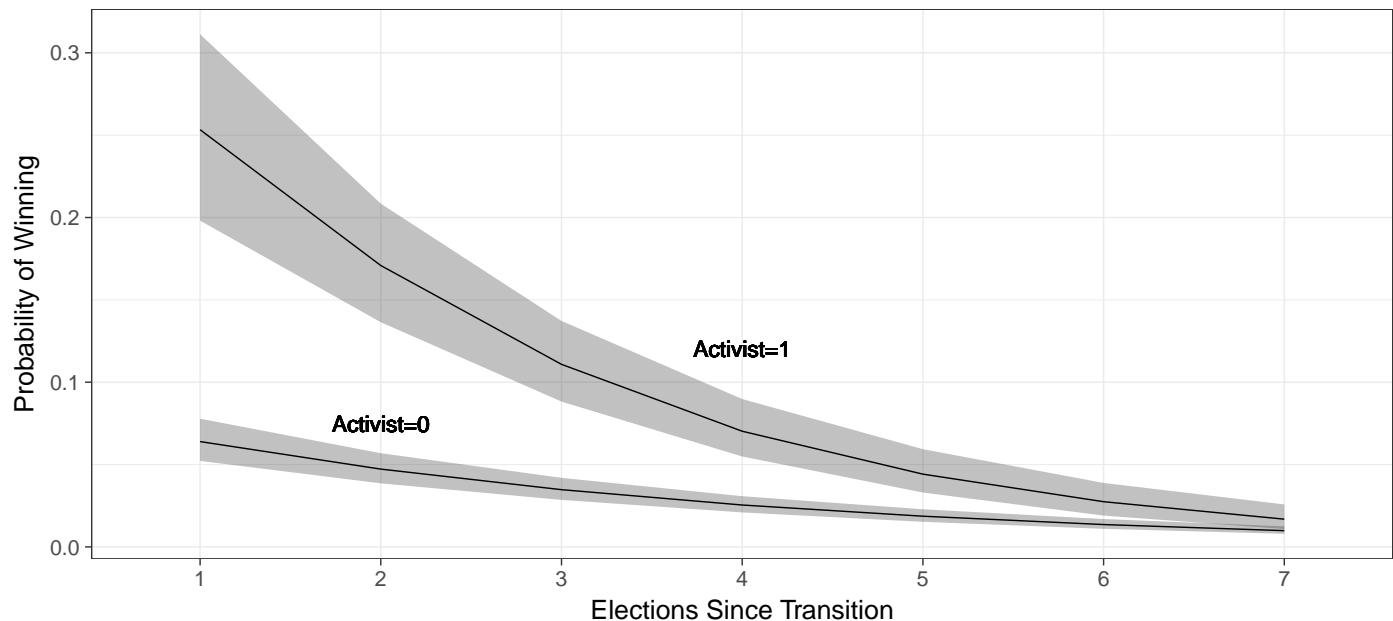


Figure 2: Predicted probability of winning a Sejm seat for activist v. non-activist candidates at each election after the transition.

Then, I rule out potential alternative explanations based on access to resources. Specifically, I show that activists do not hold more power within their parties or at the national stage and that they do not benefit from stronger party organizations.

6.1 Reputation

To test whether a reputational advantage explains why voters are more likely to elect former dissidents I use an original survey experiment conducted in Poland in January 2017. The experiment allows me to test the public opinion mechanism posited by my theory by measuring public perceptions of pro-democracy activists and to address selection issues, which may affect the observational results presented above. In his research on Solidarity, [Grodsky \(2012\)](#) finds that individuals who “left the social-movement organizations for the state (...) were not inherently different” neither “older or younger, more or less educated, or – worth emphasizing – more radical or more moderate than their former peers” (p. 12). Yet, it is possible that dissidents who ran for office differ from those who did not run or those

who dropped out early on a number of observable and unobservable dimensions. For example, some Solidarity leaders, such as Zbigniew Bujak or Bogdan Borusewicz, felt they were needed in labor union structures and did not initially enter politics.¹¹ For instance, Borusewicz explained his decision not to run in 1989:

The role of the trade union for us was very big, which is why I did not move to the parliament, because I thought the union had such a political capital that it was important for some politicians to stay. People who had experience, the ability to analyze which direction we wanted to go and who were leaders. We could not leave it to the second or third tier.¹²

Moreover, some of those activists, who did not thrive in the institutional sphere, selected out and decided to leave politics early. For instance, Adam Michnik, a dissident since the 1968 student protests and currently an editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a major Polish newspaper created at the moment transition, did not see himself as a politician. As he described, after activists enter politics, “natural selection happens. I was a man completely ill-suited for politics. So I cleverly, quickly, ran away from it (...) I would rather be a bad newspaper editor than a bad minister.”¹³ Therefore, a survey experiment, in which candidate’s background in Solidarity is randomly assigned, makes it possible to assess public perceptions of former dissidents running for office independent of their other characteristics, as well as separate the effects of activism from other potential attributes such as name-recognition, ties to constituents, expertise etc.

6.1.1 Experimental Design

To test whether candidate’s past influences vote choice through public opinion, I use a conjoint experiment, in which voters were asked to choose between two hypothetical candi-

¹¹Although by 1991 they both were running (and winning) in parliamentary elections.

¹²Interview with Author, Warsaw, July 22, 2016.

¹³Interview with Author, Warsaw, December 20, 2016.

dates.¹⁴ Certain aspects of candidate’s background were randomized to identify the causal effect of a candidate’s past and position on the transition to democracy on voters’ willingness to vote for them (Hainmueller et al., 2014). In this candidate choice experiment, survey respondents were presented with short bios of two hypothetical candidates running for a political office displayed side-by-side and asked which one they’d be more likely to vote for.¹⁵ Within each candidate’s biography, I randomly varied six characteristics: candidate’s political party, occupation/profession, Solidarity experience, accusations of collaboration with the communist regime’s security apparatus, assessment of the pacted transition, and involvement in current protests against policies introduced by PiS government. Table 1 lists all attributes and levels. Sample profiles and a task example are provided in the Appendix. In this paper, I do not explore attitudes towards involvement in the recent mass mobilization against actions of PiS government or the politics of memory surrounding the transition and allegations of collaboration.¹⁶

An important advantage of a conjoint experimental design is that it allows the researcher to vary many candidate attributes simultaneously, instead of limiting the analysis to one or two factors. This makes it possible to evaluate which aspects of candidate’s biography make them more likely to be elected and by extension, to compare the relative explanatory power of distinct hypotheses, from those highlighting the importance of partisanship to those which privilege candidate’s past. Randomizing numerous attributes in a single experiment allows to identify and compare the unique effects of each of candidate’s characteristics – for example, dissident activity relative to party affiliation. Moreover, such a set-up more accurately reflects the multidimensional choice faced by voters who express preferences over combinations of partisanship, occupation, and experience of potential candidates for public office (Meyer & Rosenzweig, 2016).

¹⁴Pre-registered hypotheses are listed in the Appendix

¹⁵Prior to seeing the profiles, respondents were asked standard background questions. At the end of the survey, in order to avoid priming effects, respondents were asked about their own experience under communism and their assessment of both the democratic transition and the current situation in the country.

¹⁶I find that participation in KOD protests is perceived as highly partisan – decreasing support among PiS voters and increasing it among PO and Nowoczesna (main opposition parties’ voters).

Table 1: Conjoint Study Attributes and Levels. Baseline levels italicized.

Attributes	Attribute Levels
Party	<i>Candidate of Law and Justice (PiS)</i> Candidate of Civic Platform (PO)
Occupation	<i>Worker</i> Lawyer
Solidarity	<i>Not politically involved prior to transition</i> Solidarity activist under communism Imprisoned for activism in Solidarity during martial law
Collaborator	<i>Never accused of collaboration with the communist security apparatus</i> Accused of collaboration with the communist security apparatus
Roundtable Position	<i>Compromise necessary; opposes lustration and decommunization</i> Too much of a compromise; supports lustration and decommunization
KOD	<i>Criticizes KOD and recent protests</i> Criticizes current government but does not participate in protests Has participated in protests organized by KOD and actively supports it

Each of the six attributes of each candidate was independently randomly assigned.¹⁷ Each respondent saw five pairs of profiles presented side-by-side, with each pair of profiles on a separate screen.¹⁸ On the same screen as each candidate pairing, respondents were asked to choose between the two candidates, a question which resembles real-world voter decision making. After the last pair of profiles, respondents were asked to assign importance to considerations behind their choices throughout the tasks such as candidate’s trustworthiness, moral integrity, ability to represent interests of people like them, candidate’s service to the country, and candidate’s qualifications or competence.¹⁹ They were also asked to write a few sentences explaining their choice in the last pair of candidates. These questions were intended to provide some descriptive information about what was driving respondents’ decisions.

I focused on two parties – Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS) – even though

¹⁷A constraint was placed on randomization in one case: a PiS politician who participated in KOD demonstrations. This was necessary because there are no known examples of such behavior and it would be seen as highly unusual. Such an unrealistic combination could elicit bizarre reactions from respondents. Other attribute levels were carefully specified so that they are plausible in each combination. While some combinations such as for example PiS politicians who oppose decommunization or former SB collaborators who support lustration are not typical, they are not completely implausible.

¹⁸This is a conventional number of tasks in conjoint experiments (Hainmueller et al., 2014), low enough to alleviate concerns about respondent fatigue.

¹⁹Results are presented in Figure 9 in the Appendix.

Poland is a multi-party system for two reasons. First, they have dominated Polish politics for at least the last decade and together their electorates encompass nearly half of Polish voters, making them most important parties in terms of vote concentration and media salience. Even voters who prefer other, smaller, parties are familiar with a choice between a PO and a PiS candidate – for instance, in a run-off in a presidential election. Second, they both derive from post-Solidarity political formations. For this reason, most of the levels of the attributes are plausible for candidates from both of these parties. Both parties have had prominent dissidents, but also politicians accused of collaboration with the communist security apparatus, in their ranks. I excluded SLD, the communist successor party, because of a central interest in candidates’ Solidarity background, an existing possibility to explore the relative costs of association with the communist regime even within the post-Solidarity camp, and growing irrelevance of the left on the Polish political scene.²⁰ I also excluded new political formations such as liberal Nowoczesna, left-wing Razem, or a populist party founded by a rock singer (Kukiz ’15), because most of their politicians are too young to have been politically involved on either side under communism and because these parties are only a few years-old and mostly unlikely to survive.²¹

I included occupation to benchmark the effects of contentious experience against objective qualifications for office. I used a worker and a lawyer for a simplified distinction between the working class and intelligentsia, which also signals level of education. I presented voters solely with male candidates because – despite women’s critical involvement in the opposition movement – politicians who came out of Solidarity were predominately male,²² as well as for a more mundane reason: the rules of Polish grammar enforce a declination and conjugation based on gender, making it too complex to vary attributes and levels while maintaining the

²⁰SLD-led coalition did not meet the 8 percent electoral threshold required for coalitions and failed to gain seats in the last parliamentary election.

²¹Additionally, Razem did not clear the electoral threshold of 5% in the 2015 parliamentary elections and failed to gain representatives in the legislature.

²²Only one woman took part in Roundtable negotiations on the opposition’s side (Grabowska & Szawiel, 1993). In my dataset, only about 7% of activist candidates are female, even though women make up about a quarter of all candidates between 1991 and 2011.

match between randomly assigned gender and other elements of the biography.

I included different levels of involvement in Solidarity to explore the importance of the extent of engagement. Thus, I varied dissident activity from no involvement prior to transition (as a baseline) through “activist” to a sacrifice for the democratic movement – arrest and internment under the Martial Law in the 1980s when many Solidarity activists were imprisoned or driven underground. As one of the most famous Solidarity activists, Bronisław Geremek, put it: “Solidarity’s people, before they got to parliament, typically went through a prison education” (Geremek, 1990). In my data, over 3,000 or nearly 62% of Solidarity activists are described in their biographies as arrested for opposition activity. Imprisonment signals both sacrifice for the democratic cause and an important role in the movement structures as the state targeted central opposition figures for arrest to de-mobilize the movement.

The survey was fielded on a sample of about 800 Polish adults²³ recruited from Qualtrics partner panels. The survey was implemented online via Qualtrics in January 2017.²⁴ The sample is not a probability sample, but its characteristics make it particularly well suited to analyze the theoretical questions of interest. As Table 1 in Section A.1 in the Appendix shows, the sample is roughly representative of the general population in terms of observed demographic characteristics of age and gender. Yet it is both more educated and more politically active. This is because the type of respondents who are likely to self-select into an online survey, educated and urban, with higher levels of political interest and knowledge (Berinsky et al., 2012),²⁵ are also more likely to turn out to vote (Sondheimer & Green, 2010; Verba et al., 1995; Powell Jr, 1986; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Deutsch, 1961), including in Poland (Markowski & Tucker, 2005; Pacek, 1994; Wade et al., 1993).

Nearly 81% of the sample said they had voted in the last parliamentary election, compared

²³N=807 after participants who declined to consent (n=28), under 18 (n=3), and those who failed a pre-treatment attention check (n=30) were screened out or excluded. Dropping respondents who were not paying attention prior to experimental treatment alleviates concerns that experimental uptake differed between individuals, for example by educational level.

²⁴I used software by Strezhnev et al. (2013) to design and implement the survey in Qualtrics.

²⁵Citizens with low levels of education are often underrepresented also in international online samples, see for example (Anduiza et al., 2013).

to about 51% actual turnout in 2015, typical for Poland, where turnout has ranged from about 41% to about 54% since the first democratic election.²⁶ Even though respondents tend to overreport voting (Belli et al., 2001), it is well established that self-administered online questionnaires are much less vulnerable to social desirability bias (Berrens et al., 2003; Kreuter et al., 2008; White et al., 2018). By focusing on how likely *voters*, as opposed to all adults eligible for voting, choose political representatives, this study sheds light on the effects of cues provided by candidate’s past on decisions made at the voting booth. Although within the limits of this study, I am unable to determine whether candidates’ past or their views affect turnout itself, the analysis provides insights into what drives political choices among those individuals who are most likely to have an effect on political outcomes in Poland – the voters.

6.1.2 Analysis and Results

The quantity of interest is the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE), or the treatment effect of any one of the profile characteristics. The AMCE represents the average difference in the probability of being the selected candidate when comparing two different attribute values – for example, a candidate who was a pro-democracy activist to a candidate who was not involved in politics – where the average is taken over all possible combinations of the other candidate attributes. Due to random assignment of attributes, on average, profiles with a pro-democracy activist have the same distribution for all other attributes as profiles with a non-activist, allowing for a straightforward comparison of means.

Hainmueller et al. (2014) show that the AMCE is non parametrically identified given the conditionally independent randomization of the attributes and can be estimated by regressing the binary outcome variable, *Candidate Selected*, on sets of indicator variables measuring the levels of each attribute. The unit of analysis is the rated candidate profile. Because each of

²⁶The first free election had a turnout of nearly 64% (Heyns & Bialecki, 1991), presidential elections also typically have slightly higher turnout than parliamentary elections. Turnout data come from PKW (National Electoral Committee).

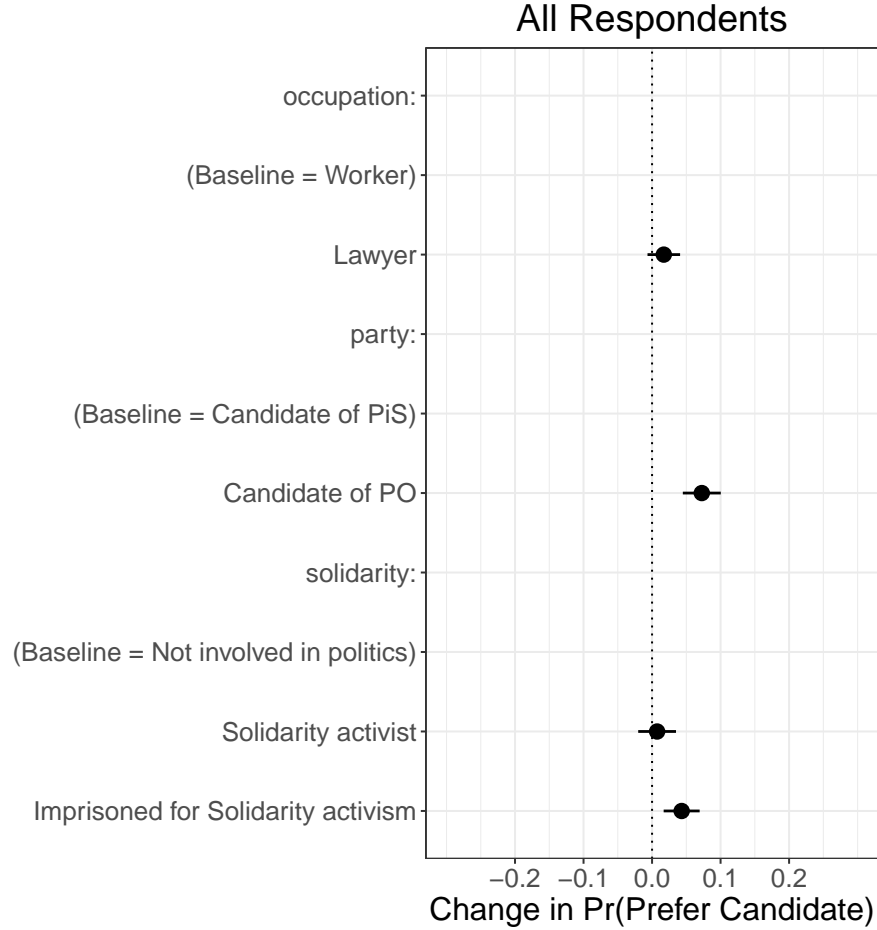


Figure 3: Effects of Candidate Attribute Values on Probability of Being the Preferred Vote Choice. Estimates are based on OLS model with standard errors clustered by respondent. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Levels described as baselines are the reference category for each attribute. Number of observations=8,070. Number of Respondents=807.

807 respondents rated five pairings, with two candidate profiles per pairing, there are up to 8,070 observations in some models. Because observed choice outcomes are not independent across the profiles rated by a single respondent, standard errors were clustered by respondent to obtain accurate variance estimates.

As Figure 3 shows, over 25 years after the transition, on average, respondents do still reward activism in Solidarity, but only when it was costly and central – in the case of imprisonment. Candidates with a history of imprisonment for Solidarity activism are over 4% more likely to be selected ($p < 0.001$).²⁷ These effects hold across the political spectrum: for Law

²⁷The effect for activism is positive but small - under 1% - and not statistically significant.

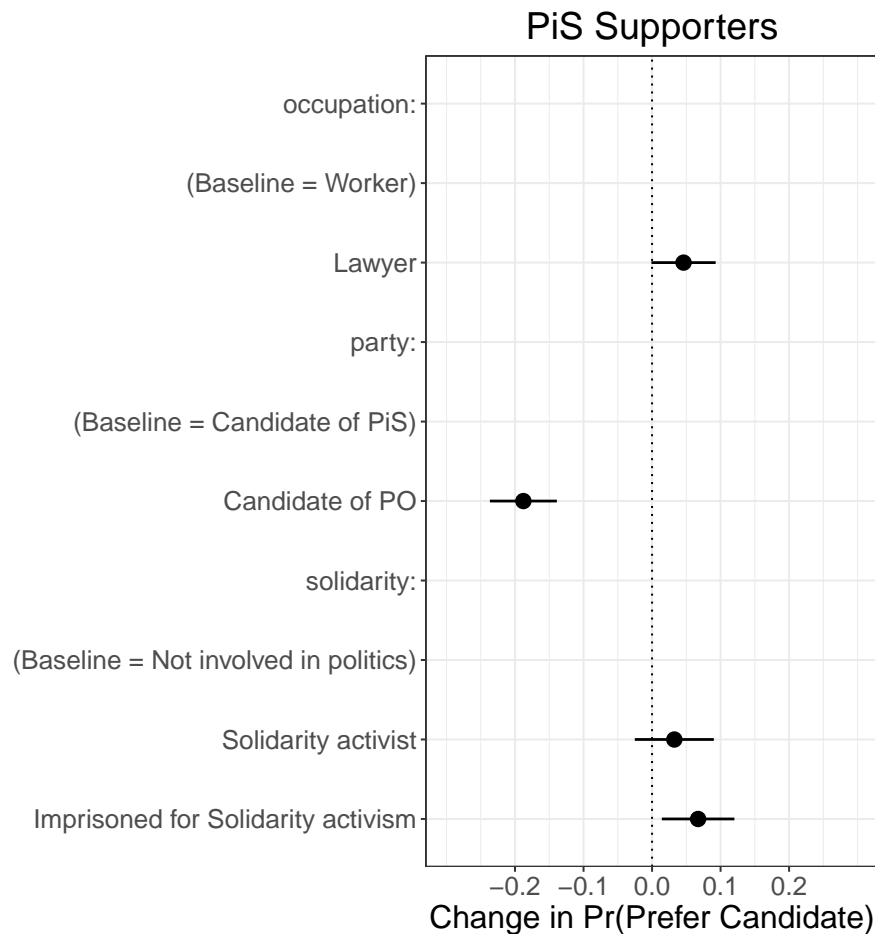


Figure 4: Number of Respondents=192

and Justice (PiS) supporters (Figure 4) and opposition supporters²⁸ (Figure 5). The one exception are sympathizers of the post-communist left (Figure 8).²⁹ These results suggest that the electoral advantage documented in previous sections may in fact be considered a reputational advantage and can be attributed to public opinion broadly favorable to Solidarity activists. Moreover, the magnitude of party effects – for example, a 20% decrease in the likelihood of voting for a Civic Platform (PO) candidate among Law Justice (PiS) sympathizers – relative to activism effects, indicates that once party systems institutionalize, partisan considerations tend to dominate voting behavior.

²⁸This groups all parties that are not in government except the post-communist SLD.

²⁹However, it's possible any existing effect was not detected due to the small size of this group in the sample.

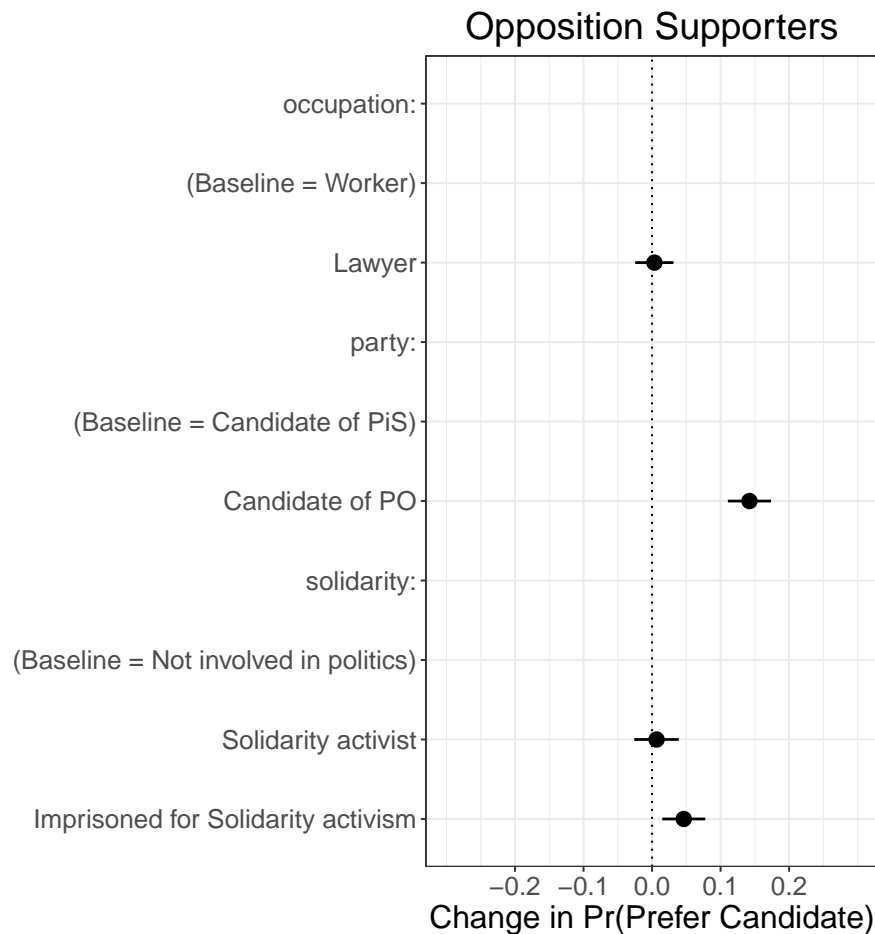


Figure 5: Number of Respondents=558

6.2 Alternative explanations: power and resources

First, I test whether the observed electoral advantage can be explained by dissidents' power within their parties. I leverage the information in the EAST PaC dataset on candidate's position on the ballot in the Sejm elections to test whether Solidarity activists were more likely to be placed higher on party lists in post-transition elections. As Table 2 shows, on average between 1991 and 2011, Solidarity activists were in fact positioned almost 2 spots higher on party lists, indicating that they are central figures in their parties though their advantage pales in comparison to that of incumbents (over 7 spots higher on average). However, analyses in section 5 control for list placement, suggesting this explanation is not sufficient.

Next, I use a dataset constructed by [Tavits \(2011\)](#) on members of parliament in Poland between 1997 and 2007 and combine it with information on politicians’ activist backgrounds to test a resource-centered explanation. Specifically, I test 1) whether dissidents-turned-politicians are more likely to hold national offices and 2) whether they invest more heavily in party-building efforts or are supported by more robust organizational structures i.e. whether party organization is stronger in areas where activists hold office. Unfortunately, the timeframe of the dataset does not include the first two post-transitional elections in 1991 and 1993. However, the dataset includes four subsequent elections, when as [Figure 2](#) shows, activists still enjoyed an advantage. Moreover, in this timeframe, parties formed on the opposition side should have even more robust party organizations than they did before 1997.

The variables that serve as dependent variables on which the activist past is regressed are national politician (cabinet position, parliamentary secretary or speaker of the lower house, currently or previously held), local politician (mayor or councilor), and subunit organizational strength (“the share of local governments in a given national electoral district where a party runs its candidates in the local government election under the party label” ([Tavits, 2011](#), p.927)), which ranges from 0 to 1. I find that dissidents are no more likely to hold national or local offices (see [Table 4](#) in the Appendix).³⁰ As [Table 3](#) shows, parties are also not stronger in those subunits where dissidents are in office. This provides some suggestive evidence that the advantages enjoyed by dissidents running for office are not based on resources but are likely reputational and driven by public opinion.

7 Conclusion

This paper argues that in the low-information environment of post-transition elections, former dissidents enjoy an electoral advantage that helps them gain access to political influence in the new democracy by becoming part of its nascent political elite. Yet the reputational

³⁰The positive effect of activism on likelihood of holding national office is comparable in size to having served an additional term in office but is only significant at $\alpha = 0.1$ level.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Position on the party list
Solidarity activist	-1.950*** (0.408)
Incumbent	-7.594*** (0.119)
Woman	0.519*** (0.059)
District fixed effects	✓
Party fixed effects	✓
Election year fixed effects	✓
Constant	3.481*** (0.453)
Observations	53,588
R ²	0.324
Adjusted R ²	0.321
Residual Std. Error	5.437 (df = 53370)
F Statistic	117.951*** (df = 217; 53370)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2: Solidarity activism and placement on party list. OLS model with party, district, and election year fixed effects.

advantage enjoyed by pro-democracy activists declines over time as voters gain democratic experience required to form political positions and political parties become more predictable and permanent organizers of collective interests.

Poland is a paradigmatic case of a successful democratic transition in the Fourth Wave of democratization. Yet the argument laid out in this paper should apply more broadly in cases, in which a successful mass movement precipitated a democratic transition. The conditions of uncertainty about voters' ideological positions and party platforms and the salience of the regime/opposition divide in early post-transition elections are common in new democracies. Dissidents were initially overwhelmingly voted into political offices in countries as distinct as Brazil, South Korea, Tunisia, and Czechoslovakia.

Highlighting dissident credentials can be a central part of electoral campaigns, especially around the transition, when movement and party politics intersect. For example, in post-transition South Korea candidates with roots in the opposition movement frequently discussed the sacrifices (e.g. number of times arrested) they made during the contentious

Table 3: Solidarity activism and strength of party organization

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Party subunit organizational strength
Activist	−0.008 (0.016)
Party voteshare	0.484*** (0.050)
AWS	−0.305*** (0.017)
KPN	−0.035 (0.060)
LPR	−0.368*** (0.031)
PiS	−0.765*** (0.022)
PO	−0.721*** (0.023)
PSL	0.119*** (0.019)
SO	−0.266*** (0.020)
UP	−0.017 (0.037)
UW	−0.213*** (0.023)
Committee leadership	0.027*** (0.010)
Defection rate	0.355*** (0.107)
National office	−0.007 (0.015)
Number of competitors	−0.002 (0.003)
Local office	−0.011 (0.010)
Parliamentary term 2001-2005	0.052*** (0.017)
Parliamentary term 2005-2007	0.440*** (0.021)
Parliamentary terms served	−0.003 (0.005)
District fixed effects	✓
Constant	0.102 (0.074)
Observations	1,242
R ²	0.731
Adjusted R ²	0.712
Residual Std. Error	0.145 (df = 1159)
F Statistic	38.344*** (df = 82; 1159)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

phase in the electoral campaign preceding the first democratic election (Kim et al., 2013; Shin & Chang, 2011). In many countries in post-communist Europe, including Poland (Chimiak, 2010), Czech Republic (Mink, 2013), Slovakia (Leff et al., 2014), and more recently Croatia (Rupnik, 2016), political and cultural elites have engaged in biographical battles over moral credentials; in “political credentialing and de-credentialing of politicians because of their relationship – biographical or attitudinal – to the past” (Larson, 2010, p.107). Dissident past can also be commemorated. For example, in Portugal members of left-wing parties with origins in the Carnation Revolution to this day wear red carnations on its anniversary to celebrate their dissident roots (Fishman, 2011).

This paper also shows that the intersection between social movements and political parties, particularly pronounced at a moment of party system fluidity, can become a fixture of a political landscape when activists benefit from the legitimacy of the social movement inside the political sphere. In this way, it synthesizes the fields of contentious and electoral politics, which are typically studied in isolation but often overlap in practice. Finally, the finding that the primary source of dissidents’ electoral advantage is reputation, not resources, has important implications for new democracies. An advantage based on reputation is less robust than one rooted in organizational capacity. As a result, parties emergent out of pro-democracy movements cannot solely rely on the dissident credentials of their leaders but need to invest in party structures lest they start losing to better organized authoritarian successor parties and political newcomers.

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8 Appendix

8.1 Activism and Office holding

Table 4: Solidarity activism and office-holding

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	National office	local office
	(1)	(2)
Activist	0.651* (0.365)	−0.167 (0.286)
Party voteshare	−2.138 (1.372)	1.422 (0.976)
AWS	−0.027 (0.516)	−0.005 (0.333)
KPN	−18.329 (3,955.606)	−14.583 (850.260)
LPR	−17.499 (1,640.580)	−1.756*** (0.577)
PiS	−1.254 (0.857)	−2.185*** (0.598)
PO	−2.014** (0.925)	−1.673*** (0.589)
PSL	−0.014 (0.433)	−0.206 (0.362)
SO	−2.304** (1.097)	−1.776*** (0.397)
UP	0.198 (0.837)	−1.367* (0.822)
UW	0.159 (0.536)	0.996** (0.437)
Committee leadership	−0.326 (0.259)	−0.260 (0.177)
Defection rate	−0.836 (3.857)	1.304 (1.694)
Party subunit organizational strength	0.159 (0.717)	−0.811 (0.571)
Number of competitors	0.082 (0.072)	0.124** (0.052)
Local office	−2.393*** (0.535)	
National office		−2.333*** (0.531)
Parliamentary term 2001-2005	0.076 (0.380)	1.260*** (0.316)
Parliamentary term 2005-2007	−0.063 (0.590)	2.391*** (0.485)
Parliamentary terms served	0.541*** (0.103)	−0.537*** (0.089)
District fixed effects	✓	✓
Constant	−20.432 (5,114.539)	−15.942 (1,144.790)
Observations	1,242	1,242
Log Likelihood	−282.260	−618.846
Akaike Inf. Crit.	730.520	1,403.693

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

8.2 Logit Models

The models in Table 5 use logistic regression to analyze the relationship between dissident background and candidate success in Sejm elections between 1991 and 2011. Candidate controls used in Models 3-4 are the following: gender, class, age, having competed under communist elections in 1985 (i.e. political experience prior to transition). Models 1-3 include dummy variables for main parties: PO, PiS, AWS, PC, UD/UW, PSL, SLD, NSZZ, LPR, Samoobrona. Model 4 controls for all parties, which fielded more than 500 candidates between 1991 and 2011 (above the mean). Results are robust to including all 111 parties, which fielded lists over those 7 elections but some of those parties ran as few as 3 candidates. In all models, effects of activism decline in subsequent elections. Predicted probabilities in Section 5 are based on Model 2. Results are substantively and statistically similar when robust standard errors clustered at electoral district are used.

Table 5: Logistic regressions: Sejm 1991-2011

	<i>Outcome: Won an Election</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Activist	1.759*** (0.169)	1.736*** (0.173)	1.809*** (0.170)	1.866*** (0.170)
Time	−0.321*** (0.016)	−0.314*** (0.017)	−0.296*** (0.018)	−0.343*** (0.019)
Incumbent	3.004*** (0.053)	2.973*** (0.056)	2.882*** (0.054)	2.913*** (0.055)
List position	−0.025*** (0.002)	−0.025*** (0.002)	−0.025*** (0.002)	−0.026*** (0.002)
Activist*time	−0.176*** (0.047)	−0.170*** (0.047)	−0.190*** (0.047)	−0.185*** (0.047)
Candidate controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Party controls	Main	Main parties	Main parties	All > 500 cand.
District controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	53,588	53,588	52,863	52,863
Log Likelihood	−8,417.354	−8,401.628	−8,298.064	−7,997.989
Akaike Inf. Crit.	16,866.710	16,951.260	16,762.130	16,197.980

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

8.3 Incumbency advantage

See Figure 6.

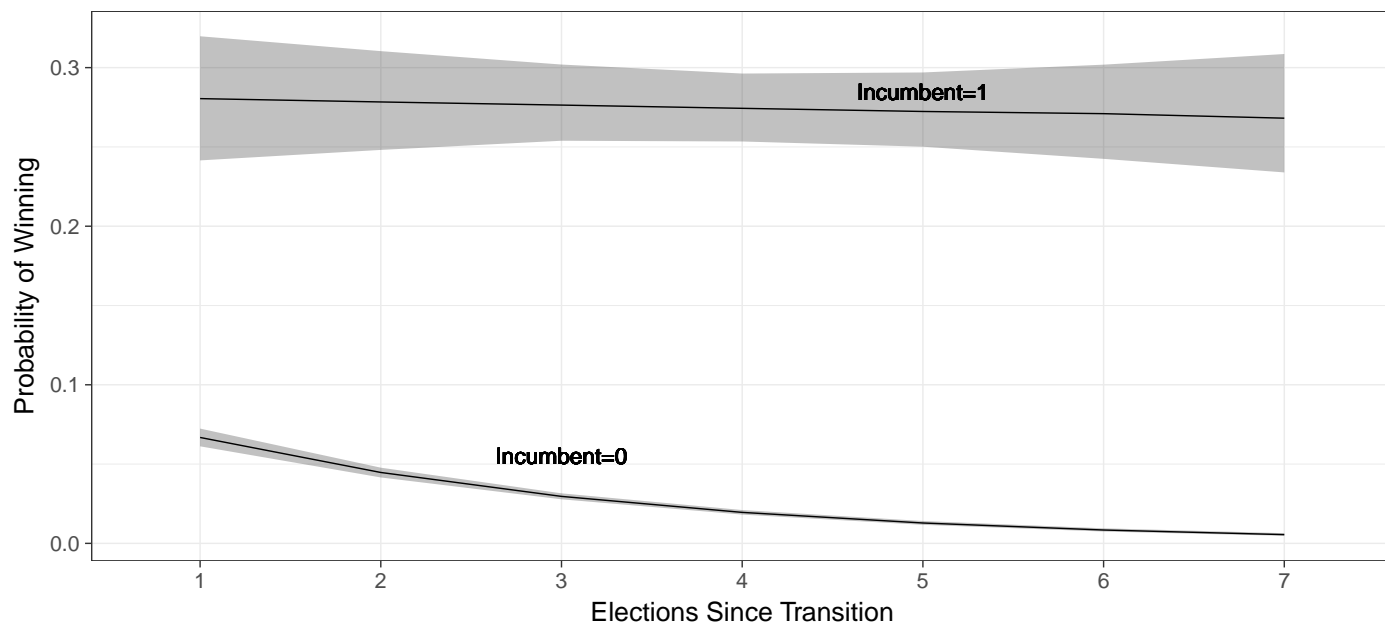


Figure 6: Predicted probability of winning a Sejm seat for incumbents at each election post-transition.

8.4 Analysis for Senate

Note that activist background does not have a statistically significant effect probably because of the landslide Solidarity victory in 1989 elections, which left the movement with 99 out of a hundred seats. The effect of activism is positive and statistically significant if the model does not control for incumbency status in 1991.

8.5 Hypotheses pre-registered on EGAP for the experiment

Hypothesis 1A (activism): Candidates will be rewarded for activism in the pro-democracy movement and sacrifices they made (imprisonment).

Hypothesis 1B (collaboration): Allegations of collaboration with the communist security service will decrease support, especially among supporters of populist right parties.

Hypothesis 1C (collaboration and activism): Activism in the pro-democracy

Table 6: Logistic regressions: Senate 1991-2011

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	elected
Activist	0.489 (0.310)
Time	−0.260*** (0.037)
Incumbent	1.327*** (0.123)
Activist*time	−0.003 (0.076)
Main parties controls	Yes
District controls	Yes
Constant	−2.116*** (0.503)
Observations	3,753
Log Likelihood	−1,421.674
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,995.349

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

movement will have a negative, not positive, effect when appearing *in combination with* accusations of collaboration with the communist security apparatus.

Hypothesis 2 (transition): Denouncing the pacted transition and advocating for decommunization and lustration will increase support among populist right’s supporters, but will not have an effect among other respondents.

Hypothesis 3 (partisanship): Partisanship identities are strong; candidate’s party will be more important than any aspect of their biography or stance taken on the past.

Hypothesis 4 (recent protests): Participation in protests against erosion of democratic institutions and criticism of the government will decrease support for a candidate among ruling party’s supporters, but increase it for respondents who identify with opposition parties or disapprove of the government’s actions.

Table 7: Characteristics of the Sample: Comparison of the Study Sample to Poland’s Adult Population.

	Study Sample (N=807)	2011 Census
Gender		
Man	48%	48%
Woman	52%	52%
Education		
Primary	0.6%	19.7%
Secondary 1st / Middle school	2%	0.9%
Vocational education	8.6%	23.7%
Secondary 2nd / High school	45%	34%
University / Higher Education	43.9%	18.8%
Age		
18-44	48.7%	49%
45-64	37.5 %	34%%
65 and up	13.8%	17%
Voted in 2015 Election	81%	Turnout: 51%

8.6 Experimental design

8.6.1 Sample Characteristics

As Table 7 shows, the sample is roughly representative of Poland’s adult population in terms of observable characteristics of gender and age although it is more educated and more politically active.

8.6.2 Sample Profiles

The profiles were modeled after different biographies of current and former Polish politicians. Order of attributes was randomized to avoid primacy and recency effects.

#4

Gdyby miał(a)by Pan(i) podjąć decyzję tylko na podstawie tych informacji, na którego z tych dwóch kandydatów by Pan(i) zagłosował(a)?

Kandydat A	Kandydat B
Oskarżony o współpracę ze służbami bezpieczeństwa PRL.	Oskarżony o współpracę ze służbami bezpieczeństwa PRL.
Krytykuje działania obecnego rządu, ale nie bierze udziału w protestach.	Krytykuje działania obecnego rządu, ale nie bierze udziału w protestach.
Uważa obrady Okrągłego Stołu za zbyt wielki kompromis i opowiada się za lustracją oraz dekomunizacją.	Uważa obrady Okrągłego Stołu za zbyt wielki kompromis i opowiada się za lustracją oraz dekomunizacją.
Kandydat PiS.	Kandydat PO.
Prawnik.	Prawnik.
Przed przełomem niezwiązany z polityką.	Działacz Solidarności w czasach komunizmu.

A

☐

B

☐

Figure 7: Sample Task

Candidate A

Candidate of Civic Platform. Lawyer. Solidarity activist under communism. Never accused of collaboration with the communist security apparatus. Considers the Roundtable Agreement to be a necessary compromise and opposes lustration and decommunization. Has participated in protests organized by the Committee in Defense of Democracy and actively supports it.

Candidate B

Candidate of Law and Justice. Worker. Imprisoned for activism in Solidarity during martial law. Accused of collaboration with the communist security apparatus. Considers the Roundtable Agreement as too much of a compromise and favors lustration and decommunization. Criticizes KOD and recent protests.

8.6.3 Task Example (in Polish)

See Figure 7.

8.7 Additional Experimental Results

8.7.1 SLD supporters

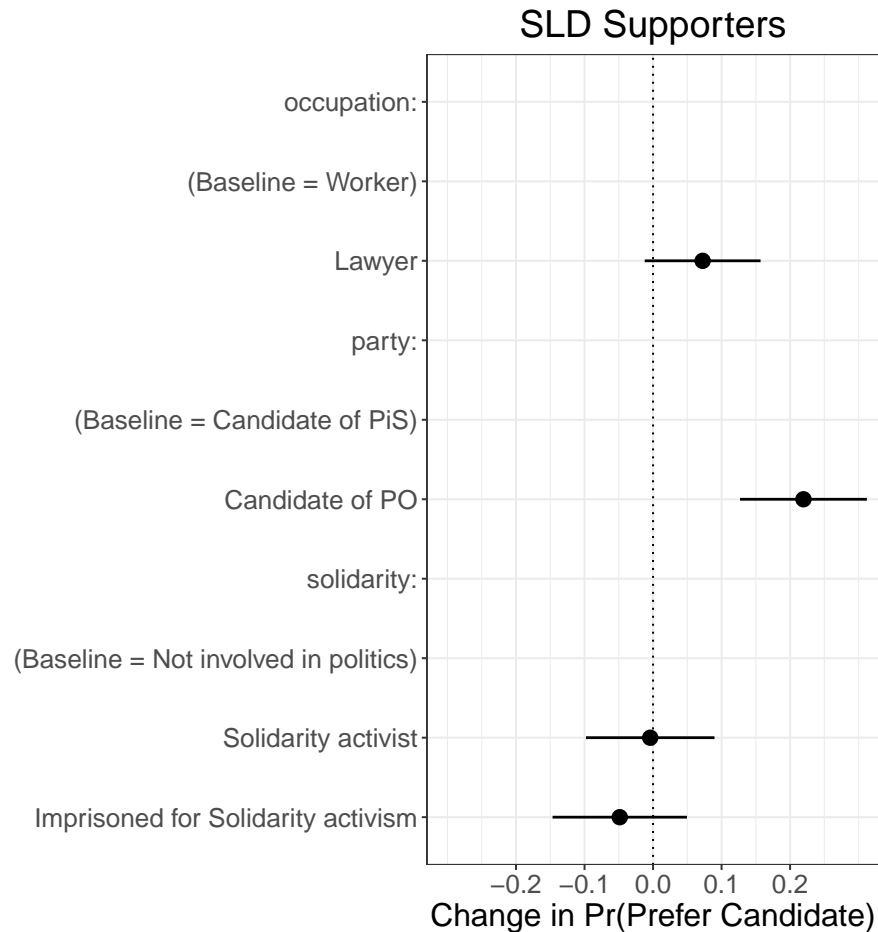


Figure 8: Number of Respondents=57

8.7.2 Reasons for choosing candidates

Descriptive evidence from a question asking respondents to check what they considered important as they made their choices throughout the tasks also suggests selections were driven by a presence or absence of “warm feelings” for a candidate (Campbell, 1980). Faced with options like candidate’s trustworthiness, ability to represent interests of people like them, candidate’s service to the country, and candidate’s qualifications or competence (respondents were asked to check all that apply), as Figure 9 shows, respondents were significantly more

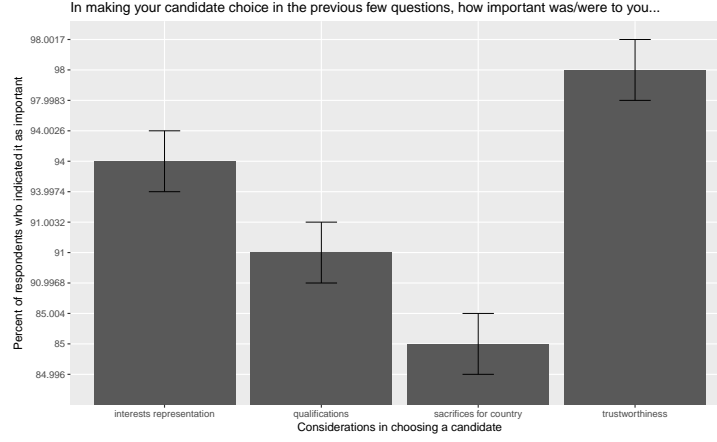


Figure 9: Respondents’ motivations for choosing the candidates.

likely to select “trustworthiness” than any other explanation.³¹

³¹Open-ended responses were not classified into categories as described in the pre-analysis plan since the vast majority of respondents who provided a meaningful answer simply mentioned one or a few elements of the profile as an explanation e.g. “because he didn’t collaborate with SB” or “Solidarity activist” or “I (do not) support PiS/PO” etc. without detailing *why* that mattered to them - information already obtained in a more rigorous way through estimates of the effects of different attributes.