

Poland

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Introduction

The Polish Republic was formally created by the Treaty of Versailles after Polish territories had been part of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia before. The creation of the newly independent state had already begun in the last month of World War I as the German Empire and Austria-Hungary were losing influence over the Polish territories. While the Treaty of Versailles guaranteed the establishment of an independent Polish State the year 1919-1921 were shaped by border conflicts with Ukraine, Lithuania, Germany, and most importantly the Soviet Union. Soviet Russia tried to spread the socialist revolution into the west in a war with Poland over mostly Ukrainian areas. With the Polish state's favorable Peace of Riga in 1921 the Polish state and its borders were set.

During the whole democratic period, the Polish state had a strong parliament which led to many government changes and multiple prime ministers in only a few years. That was partly due to the difficult economic situation the new state faced in the interwar years. The former general and politician Józef Piłsudski led a coup d'état which de facto ended democracy in May 1926.

Elections

Before the Coup d'état in 1926 only two general elections were held in Poland. Poland used a system of multi-member constituencies in which seats were distributed by proportional representation. All citizens from the age of 21 had suffrage. In the 1919 elections 394 members of parliament were elected in 44 constituencies. In the 1922 elections after the passing of the new constitution 444 members were elected as members of the Sejm. 372 members were elected through the now 64 constituencies while another 72 were elected through national list. The distribution of the national lists followed the ratio of seats from all constituencies looking at all parties which had won seats in six or more constituencies. With the new constitution, members were officially elected for a five-year term (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1480-1481).

26 January 1919

The 1919 elections were held to create a constitutional assembly. The election was won by an alliance of right-wing parties known as **Popular National Union** (Związek Ludowo-Narodowy). While the party got 28.86 % of the votes and 140 of the 394 seats, it was not able to govern alone. The **Polish People's Party - Wyzwolenie** received 15.05 % of the votes and 59 seats. It was the more left-wing of the two important wings of the Polish People's Party. The other wing of the party, **Polish People's Party - Piast** got 46 seats with only 4.17 % of the votes. The **Socialist Party** received 35, **Workers' Union** 32, and the radical left wing of the **Polish People's Party** 12 seats. The Polish communists had boycotted the election. The **United Party** reached 35 and parties of minorities like the **Jewish National Council** (11) or the **German Minority** (2) became also part of the new parliament. This election led to the first cabinet led by Padrewski (non-party aligned) which was supported by multiple parties. In those times of political instability governments changed 6 times in total with changing majorities. The last three cabinets were made up of non-partisans who were regarded as experts. The March Constitution passed in 1921 was mainly supported by the right-wing parties (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1500).

05 November 1922

The only democratic election after the passing of the March constitution was won by the **Christian Union of National Unity** an electoral alliance dominated by the **Popular National Union** that had won the pre-constitutional elections which won 163 out of 444 seats with 29.12 % of the votes. The right-wing of the agrarian party **Polish People's Party - Piast** won 70 seats, giving those parties together a majority. The center-left agrarian party **Polish People's Party Wyzwolenie** reached 49 seats. Other important left-wing parties in the Sejm were the **Polish Socialist Party** with 41 or the **National Workers' Party** with 18 seats. Compared with the 1919 elections the minorities were better organized and the **Bloc of National Minorities** including politicians with Ukrainian, German, Belarusian, and Jewish backgrounds was represented with 66

votes in the new Sejm. In the aftermath of the election, another non-partisan government was formed under the lead of Władysław Sikorski. His government was succeeded by two coalition governments under the lead of Wincenty Witos. The governments were supported by the Parties of the **Christian Union of National Unity** and the center-right agrarian **Piast** party. After a conflict in the **Piast** party, the government was dissolved in December 1923 and followed by a cabinet led by Władysław Grabski. While Grabski was a member of the **Christian Alliance**, multiple ministers were non-partisans. Therefore this cabinet cannot be seen as a follow-up coalition government. The Grabski government initiated the currency reform. The government was dissolved in 1925, and followed by two short-lived governments under Skrzynski, supported by multiple parties. The last democratic government, only in power for a few days was another coalition government under Witos. Pilsudski, who had much support for society and the left staged a coup against the government and ended Polish democratic rule on the 12th of May 1926 (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1500).

Parties

The Polish Party system was mainly divided along the lines of ethnicity and occupation. The former united agrarian **Polish People's Party** had split into three parts before the establishment of the new Polish republic. The parties differed mainly in their position towards Church-State relations and economically. Aside from the agrarian parties the Christian Democratic parties on the right wing and multiple left-wing parties were important in Polish Politics. As Poland was a republic with multiple minority groups, making up about 30 % of the population, the party system was completed by minority parties. Parties like the **Bloc of National Minorities** focused on regional autonomy.

National People's Union

The **Nationalist People's Union** was a right-wing party coming out of the right-wing National-Democratic Party from pre-independent times. The party was close to the church, supporting majority Polish nationalism, and therefore restricting the minorities in the country. Economically it supported private over state ownership. The party was successful in the constitutional elections with 140 of 394 seats. In the 1922 elections, the party formed in alliance with other right-wing, Christian movements as the **Christian Union of National Unity**. The Chejno-Piast coalition governments of 1923 and 1926 were made up of the Christian Union and the Piast Party of Wicently Witos who led the governments of this coalition. The parties' powers were overthrown in the coup d'état of Pilsudski (Lerski, 1996: 467).

Original Name	Zwizek Ludowo-Narodowy
Other Names	National People's Union, Endecja
Abbreviation	ZLN
Factions	Member of Christian Union of National Unity

Polish People's Party - Piast

The **Piast** was the strongest of the agrarian PPS parties. Compared to the PPS-Wyzwolenie and Lewica, it was closer to the Catholic Church and less radical in its

agrarian reform demands. That explains why a coalition with the ZLN-dominated Christian Union in the Chejno-Piast coalitions was possible. The party was mainly supported by farmers with small or medium-sized farms. Even though the Christian Union had been the stronger party in the election, those coalition governments were led by Wincenty Witos, the shaping figure of the PPS - Piast. Witos and the PPS-Piast were also in power when democracy ended in the May coup of 1926 (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 717) (Wende, 1981: 490-491)

Original		Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe "Piast"
Other Names		Polish Peasant Party "Piast"
Abbreviation		PSL Piast
Factions		

Polish Socialist Party

The **Polish Socialist Party** was a leftist party whose aim was the establishment of a socialist republic within the democratic system. It was anti-clerical and close to the labour unions. It not only opposed the National Democratic Christian parties but also the Polish Communist Party. The party had only minor success in the two democratic elections of 1919 (35 of 394 seats) and 1922 (41 of 444). The Socialist Party supported some of the all-party governments between 1919 and 1926 but opposed the Chejno-Piast governments, mainly because of their economic policies. It supported the Pilsudski coup for partisan reasons, although the leadership hoped to restore democracy. (Wende, 1981: 486-487) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 718-719).

Original		Polska Partia Socjalistyczna
Other Names		Polish Socialist Party
Abbreviation		PPS
Factions		

National Minority Bloc

The **National Minority Bloc** had the main aim of supporting the status, autonomy, and rights of the minorities within the Polish state. Important minorities were Jews,

Germans, Belarussians, and Ukrainians. Aside from that the positions on topics within the party differed massively, therefore, creating no clear right/left course. Not all groups and political positions were integrated leading to additional smaller minority parties. Still, the National Minority Bloc was successful in the 1922 elections winning 66 of 444 seats and being the second-strongest party (Wende, 1981: 479).

Original	Blok Mniejszości Narodowych
Other Names	Блѣк нацыянальных меньшасцьяў, Блок національних меншин, Block der Nationalen Minderheiten
Abbreviation	BMN
Factions	Belarussians, Germans, Jews, Ukrainians

Polish People’s Party - Wyzwolenie

The **Polish People’s Party - Wyzwolenie** was to the left wing of the two larger parts coming out of the former united PPS. Opposed to the PPS - Piast, it supported greater redistribution and focused on the poor peasantry. It also was critical of the church and cooperated with the Polish Socialist Party. The party was more successful in the first years of the second republic, receiving the second most votes in the 1919 elections. Gabriel Narutowicz, the first elected president of Poland in 1922 was also mainly supported by the party but was killed after five days in office. As close to the Socialists the party did not oppose the May coup of Pilsudki, even though the party was not against the democratic system (Wende, 1981: 486-487) (McHale and Skowronski, 1983: 716-717).

Original	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe "Wyzwolenie"
Other Names	Polish People’s Party - Wyzwolenie/Liberation, Polish Peasant Party - Wyzwolenie
Abbreviation	PSL - Wyzwolenie
Factions	

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