Corruption during Transformations of Polish Society: Survey Data Analysis of Perceived Changes and their Determinants[1]

Ilona Wysmułek[2]

Introduction

Corruption is currently perceived as 'one of the greatest evils of our times' (Hough, 2013). It is the enemy of democratic system with which politicians declare a reckless fight and international organizations proclaim thorough tackling of the effectiveness of this fight. Regardless personal experience of giving or not giving an unoffical payment to public official for private gains, most Poles have an opinion about the level of corruption in the country. The literature investigating the causes and consequences of the perception of corruption establishes that a) depending on the context, corruption perception might be different from the experience and behavior b) corruption perception, although being an abstract phenomenon which may not be reflecting the reality, has a direct influence on the attitudes of citizens and their political trust (Heidenheimer, 2002). Thus, corruption appearance is critical with respect to the legitimacy of the political systems and quality of governance. In some respect, the perception of corruption may have a more devastating effects that the corruption experience itself, while it has a potential to generate a 'culture of distrust' in the society (Melgar at al, 2010).

Although corruption is the problem of all European countries, regardless their economic development (Kaufmann 2005), the high level of perceived political and administrative corruption have been often understood as the distinctive disease of the countries 'in transition' (Gong, 2002; Melgar et al 2010). Poland, as the largest Central-Eastern European country which has gone through the number of political, social, and economic changes is a particularly interesting case for analysis. Since 1989 Poland has transformed from 'the authoritarian state with planned economy to a democratic, prosperous country at the heart of European Union' (Hough, 2013, p84). If we take the GDP growth as a measure, researchers call Poland 'a miracle' due to its rapid economic success (Kolodko 2005; Lehmann 2012). If we take the measures of democratization, Freedom Houses annual report on global political rights and civil liberties classifies Poland as a fully free country (score 1 in *Freedom in the World* 2014) with consolidated democracy (score 2,18 in *Nations in Transition* 2014). If we check the indexes of the quality of life and access to knowledge, we will find that Poland gets the maximum scores on the *Human Development Index* (score in

---

HDI 2014: very high). Although we can argue whether such general aggregated indexes measure what they intend, we need to admit the fact that they show the overall improvement of the situation in the country. How does it relate to the level of satisfaction of citizen with their government and evaluation of the effectiveness of its policies?

In this paper I will investigate the perceptions and hopes of citizens on reducing corruption level in Poland. First, I plan to present the prospective and retrospective evaluations of corruption level in Poland in the eyes of Polish citizens. Second, I will present the dynamics of change in evaluation of the government effectiveness in fighting corruption. Third, I will concentrate on the relationship between trust and corruption, examining what determines or what influences the perception of corruption in Poland now.

My analysis are based on the Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 1988-2013, which offers the unique information on the opinion of Poles since the days of the People's Republic of Poland through the transformation period and up to the present. The panel format of the data, with same respondents asked every five years the same questions, offers the new angle in the analysis of corruption and enriches the understanding of changes that Poland has gone through.

Perception of Corruption in Poland: tracing public opinion in POLPAN

If we analyze the questions asked in Polish panel survey as the indicator of research interests and as the subject of study in itself, it seems important to start the story about corruption in Poland from the observation that in the questionnaire from 1988 there was no questions covering neither attitudes towards corruption nor perception of corruption in current government. Is it a coincidence? Although this is not to claim that researchers had absolutely no freedom to ask about corruption, however there is the theory presented in number of previous studies that in the communist period corruption was "swept under the carpet" (Krastev, 2004; Hough, 2013). Generally, public did not have access to the information about the grand level political corruption, which might have led to the "corruption paradox" described by Krastev, that independently from the expert evaluation of corruption level (TI CPI), based on the public opinion surveys citizens in post-communist countries perceive post-communism as more corrupt than communism (Krastev, 2004). On the other hand, Hough (2013) argues that despite little access to formal information, people living in communist times knew through their personal experience that political connections and bribery can solve the number of their everyday problems. Poles prior to 1989 also suspected government of active involvement in a series of corrupt relationships (Hough, 2013). However, in the eyes of Polish citizens, did the situation improve after the regime change? Did the radical change of government lead to changes in perception of the level of corruption of those in power?

In Polish panel survey in 1993 there appears the question, asking respondents to evaluate on the 11 point scale whether the current government is corrupt or honest. It asks about the respondent's feeling about the situation in Poland five years ago (in 1988), currently (in 1993) and in five years[3]. In the Table 1 there are presented the results of the distribution of

---

[3] Question wording in POLPAN 1993 questionnaire: Below there are twelve pairs of antagonistic/contrasting features. Below each pair there is an eleven-point scale showing whether we are getting nearer the feature on the left or on the right hand side. Taking into account your feelings, on each scale please indicate the point where:
-Poland was 5 years ago, i.e. in 1988 -Poland is currently situated - Poland will be in 5 years
Corruption of the ruling power/government – honesty of the ruling power/government

answers to this question. We can see that despite the lack of information, generally, Poles considered government in 1988 as very corrupt and majority of the answers fall in the negative evaluation side. It is interesting, that despite the regime change, the opinion about the corruption level of those in power did not change. We can observe that the distribution of answers about the retrospective evaluation of government as compared to the evaluation of current government is almost identical. However, it should be underlined, that Poles expressed the certain level of hope in change of this situation in the future. When asked about the evaluation of the scale of corruption of the ruling government in five years, respondents tended to answer more optimistically and believed that government will become more honest (see Graph 1).
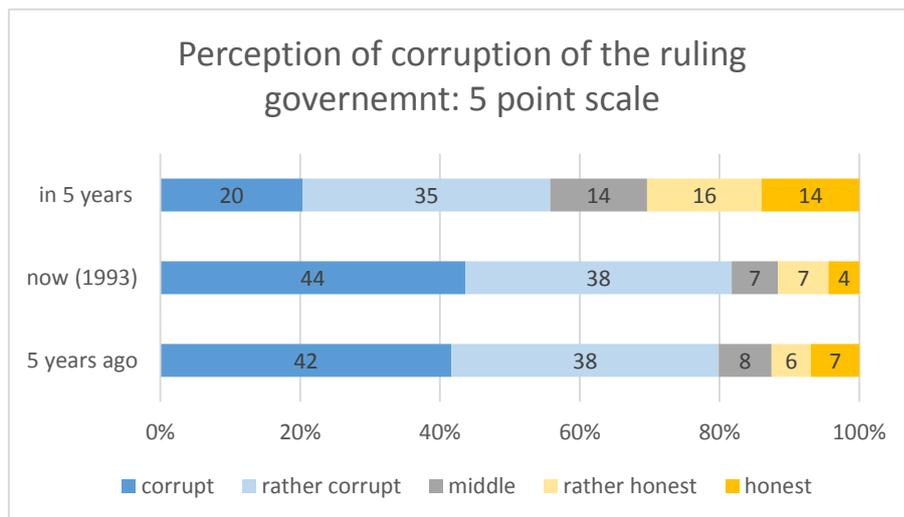
Graph 1. Perception of corruption of the ruling government in Poland (11 point scale, where -5 is corrupt and 5 is honest).
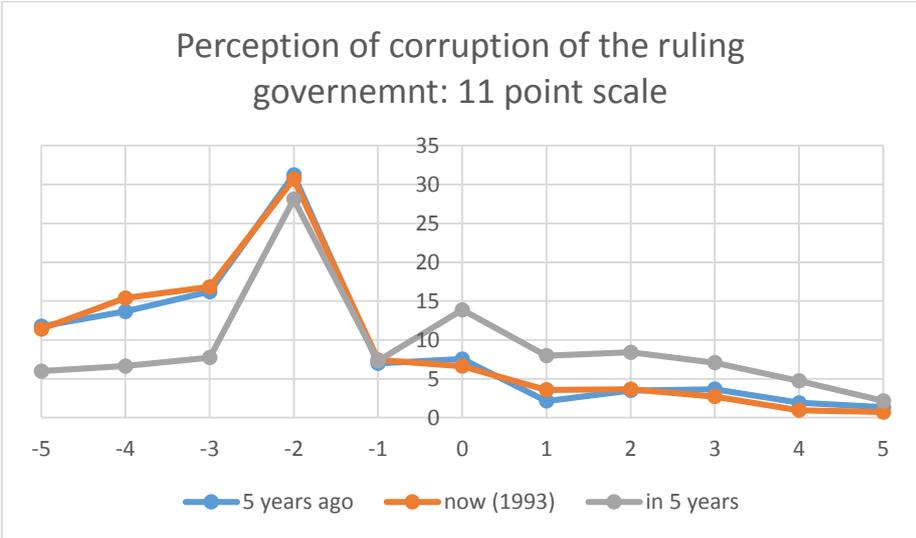
Source: Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 1993

In order to capture the differences between the prospective and retrospective evaluation of the ruling government, the opinions were combined in five categories, presented in Graph 2. Such rescaling allows us to better illustrate and compare the radical opinion as well as the direction of change of the opinion. We can observe that there is a great percent of respondents considering government as very corrupt now (44 %) and a very similar percent of respondents thinking that government was very corrupt in 1988 (42%). As speaking about the situation in five years, the group of respondents that evaluated the future government as honest compared with the current government evaluation increase by 29% (11% in 1993 compared to 30% in five years from 1993). It is also worse mentioning that the number of respondents who have chosen the answer in the middle of the scale have increased twice (up to 14 percent), which shows the uncertainty although a general hope to the more honest government in future.

Graph 2. Perception of corruption of the ruling government – rescaled illustration.

Perception of corruption of the ruling governemnt: 5 point scale

	corrupt	rather corrupt	middle	rather honest	honest
in 5 years	20	35	14	16	14
now (1993)	44	38	7	7	4
5 years ago	42	38	8	6	7

Source: Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 1993

Influence of government on corruption: dynamics of change

The similar hope of the potential to improvement of the corruption situation we can observe in opinions of the POLPAN respondents in the following 2003 and 2008 waves of the survey. Although in the succeeding waves of the research respondents were not asked to evaluate the corruption scale of the past, present and future ruling government. We can get the insight, though, how the same people evaluated in 2003 ability of the government as an institution to influence the reduction of the level of corruption[4]. The similar question was repeated in 2008[5].

With the general decline of trust in government depicted in other empirical studies, fastened with the corruption conflicts around the main ruling party SLD[6], we would expect that people did not see government as an institution capable to fight corruption effectively. However, when asked about the potential of such influence, 76 % of Poles replied that theoretically this influence may be very high. The hope that government can change the corruption level in the country is also expressed in the responses in 2008, where only 27% of respondents said that government can have low influence on the overall fight with corruption.

Graph 3. Influence of government of corruption.

---

[4] Question wording in POLPAN 2003 questionnaire: We are interested in people's views on corruption. In your opinion, is the influence of the government on corruption (1) very significant (2) somewhat significant (3) negligible, or (4) practically nonexistent?

[5] Question wording in POLPAN 2008 questionnaire: How do you evaluate the influence of the government on corruption. In your opinion, the influence of the government on corruption is (1) very high (2) somewhat high (3) somewhat low (4) very low (5) practically none.

[6] The Democratic Left Alliance party (SLD) was accused in 2004 of corruption and incompetence and its popularity went into a rapid decline and further on it led the party into the split. For more information check for example: Frances Millard (2008) Party politics in Poland after the 2005 elections in: Myant, M. R., & Cox, T. *Reinventing Poland: Economic and Political Transformation and Evolving National Identity*. Routledge.

Influence of government on corruption

Year	Somewhat low and very low	High and somewhat high
2008	24	76
2003	27	73
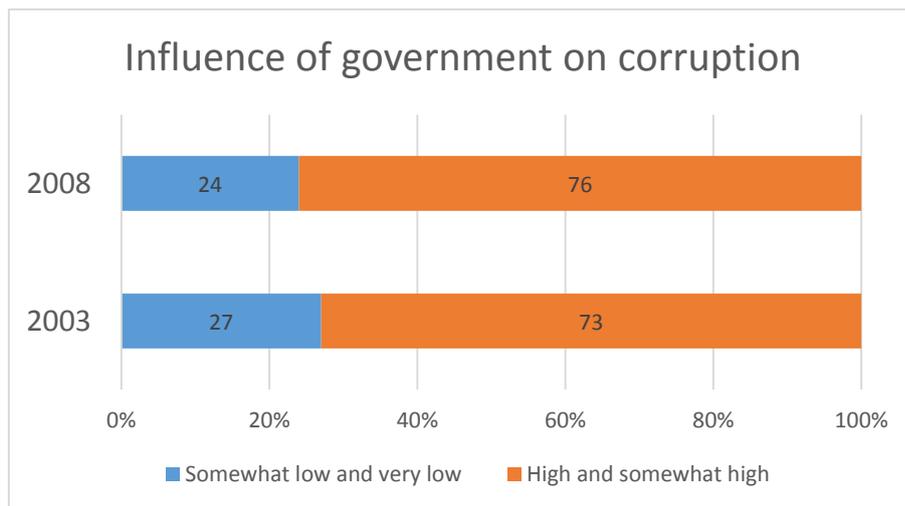
Source: Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 2003 and 2008

However, if we analyze the responses deeper, we can trace the slight tendency of the increase of political trust in Poland, when asked about the potential but not real influence of government on corruption. In table 1 there is presented the correlation of the opinion of the same respondents that took part in POLPAN wave 2003 and 2008. It shows that out of all 264 respondent having a negative opinion about the potential influence of government on corruption in 2003 - 70% have changed their opinion into a positive one in 2008. If we look at the positive opinions in 2003 we can observe that out of all 816 responses only 20% have changed their opinion into a negative one. Thus, if we look at the overall results, the distribution of opinions between 2003 and 2008 are very similar, however if we trace the changes of opinion, we can observe the bigger movement into the positive rather than negative site.

Table 1. Correlation of the opinion on influence of government on corruption in 2003 and 2008.

|	Low influence 2003	High influence 2003	Total
Low influence 2008	79 (30%)	166 (20%)	245
High influence 2008	185 (70%)	650 (80%)	835
Total	264 (100%)	816 (100%)	1080

Determinants of government corruption policy evaluation

The optimism and hope for the effective governance reflected in the previous POLPAN waves change dramatically if we ask respondents to evaluate the fight with corruption of current government. In the opinion of the majority of respondents, the effectiveness of the actions undertaken by the current Polish government towards the reduction of corruption is somewhat low (30 %) or very low (29 %)[7]. Only 13 % of all respondents consider the actions undertaken by government in this field as satisfactory. The

---

[7] Question wording in POLPAN 2013 questionnaire: Many countries experience such problems as unemployment and corruption. Do you evaluate the effectiveness of actions undertaken by the current government towards reducing corruption as very high, somewhat high, average, somewhat low or very low?

question arises: what determines peoples opinion about the effectiveness of current government fighting corruption? How is this opinion about current government related to the evaluation of the potential capacity of government as an institution to cope with corruption? What are the characteristics of the group of individuals that negatively evaluate the actions of current government and its specific anti-corruption policy in Poland?

Graph 4. The effectiveness of current government in fighting corruption
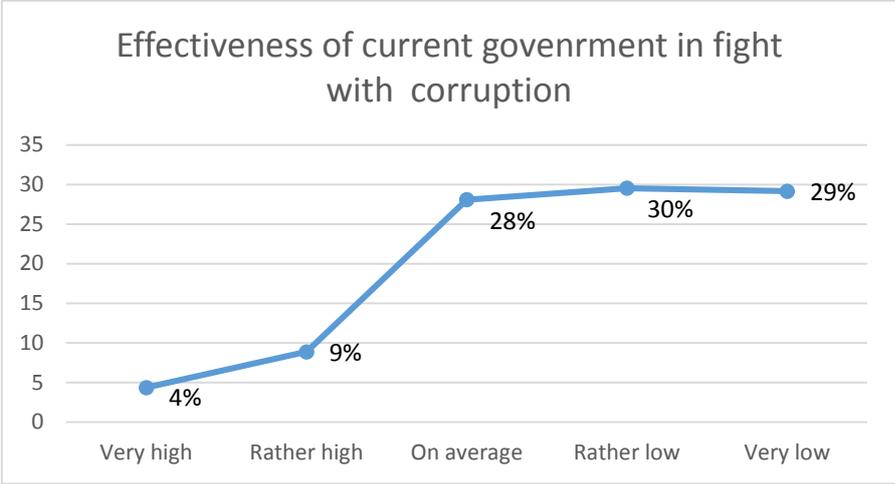
Source: Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 2013

In order explore the impact of some attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics on the probability of negative evaluation of the effectiveness of current government in fighting corruption I have used in the analysis the binary logistic regression.

The <u>dependent variable</u> in the regression models presented in Table 2 is the evaluation of the effectiveness of current government in fighting corruption, where 1 stands for low and somewhat low effectiveness and 0 stand for high and rather high effectiveness.

The <u>independent variables</u> in the model were selected on the basis of the previous research in the field, and include a) variable measuring <u>political trust</u> (specifically trust to political parties) b) variables identifying <u>party affiliation</u> of the respondent through the declared voting behavior and general <u>attitude to the current government coalition</u> c) basic <u>socio-demographic variables</u>, such as age, gender and education. Below I present the assumptions connected with each set of the independent variables.

The level of political trust and satisfaction with government's policy are tightly interconnected (Blind, 2006). People become trustful or distrustful because they are "satisfied or dissatisfied with government policy alternatives" (Miller in Blind, 2006). It means that the low effectiveness of actions of government may cause the decrease of trust over time. Similarly a low level of political trust may have an influence on the dissatisfaction with policy, independently of its effectiveness (Porte and Metlay 1996). I perceive in this research political trust as "a central indicator of public's underlying feeling about its [government's] polity" (Newton and Norris, 2000, p. 53). Thus, among other things, I expect that people with

the higher level of general trust to political parties tend to be satisfied with the actions undertaken by the current government.[8]

The other set of the hypothesis come from the assumptions that people tend to be satisfied with the actions of the political party if they identify themselves with this particular party (see for example Keele 2005). Thus, I hypothesize that the positive evaluation of the attempts of current Polish government to fight corruption are related to the political affiliation with the ruling party "Platforma Obywatelska" ("Civic Platform"). In the model I have used two questions that measure the political affiliation of respondents. First, I am checking whether the respondent voted for the "Platforma Obywatelska" party in the last elections in 2011 (in the regression this is a dummy variable where 1 is voted for "Platforma Obywatelska"). Second, I also include in the model the overall evaluation of the PO-PSL coalition[9] that was introduced in Poland since 2007 (in the regression this is a dichotomous variable were 1 stands for the opinion that the PO-PSL coalition have brought more losses than gains)[10].

In the model I also control for basic socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age and education. Especially interesting seems to be the relationship between age and evaluation of government effectiveness. In previous researches we can find the empirical evidence that political trust and evaluation of government have a strong and significant correlation with age. However, the direction and character of this correlation can be different. In the study of Espinal and Hartlyn (2006) on trust in government in Dominican Republic, for example, we find that older generations tend to be more tolerant of the attempts of democratic government to fight corruption. The authors assume that it might be due to the experience of older generations of authoritarian institutions and, in comparison, bigger political trust in democratic ones. However, such positive association of age and evaluation of government is not observed in industrialized countries, were together with age the level of satisfaction with government policies and political trust decreases (Blind, 2006; Inglehart, 1997)[11].

Table 2. Main determinants of the evaluation of the effectiveness of government in fighting corruption. <u>Dependent variable</u>: low effectiveness of current government fighting corruption

		Model 1	Model 2
2007_more losses	OddsRatio	2,017	2,284
	Std.Err.	0,309	0,455
	P>|z|	0,000	0,000
trust in parties_low	OddsRatio	2,628	2,197
	Std.Err.	0,515	0,562
	P>|z|	0,000	0,002
voted_PO	OddsRatio	0,587	0,614

---

[8] Question wording in POLPAN 2013 questionnaire measuring <u>trust in political parties</u>: Now, I will list various institutions. Please indicate to what extent you have trust in them. To what extent do you trust ... political parties? To a very high extent, to a high extent, to a moderate extent, to a low extent, very little or not at all?

[9] This is parliamentary coalition of center-right Civic Platform (PO) party and the Polish Peasant Party (PSL).

[10] Question wording in POLPAN 2013 questionnaire: In your opinion, changes introduced in Poland since 2007 – that is, since the PO-PSL coalition came to power – brought most people in Poland… only gains/only loses?

[11] In the model age is measured in years; gender is coded as 1 for male and 0 for female; and education is coded as 1 for tertiary education of respondent and 0 for any other level of education.

	Std.Err.	0,089	0,119
	P>|z|	0,000	0,012
edu_tertiary	OddsRatio	1,106	1,122
	Std.Err.	0,180	0,238
	P>|z|	0,538	0,586
gender	OddsRatio	1,138	1,269
	Std.Err.	0,169	0,240
	P>|z|	0,386	0,208
age	OddsRatio	1,023	1,019
	Std.Err.	0,004	0,007
	P>|z|	0,000	0,004
govcorr2008_low	OddsRatio	-	1,781
	Std.Err.	-	0,607
	P>|z|	-	0,090
Number of obs.		1160	635
Wald Chi2 (7)		90,57	52,02
Prob > chi2		0,000	0,000
Pseudo R2		0,08	0,08
Log pseudolikelihood		-745,15	-458,56

Source: Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 2013

In the Table 2 there are two logistic regression models presented. In the first model I explain the negative evaluation of effectiveness of current government fight with corruption by such factors as a) attitude to PO-PSL coalition b) trust in political parties c) voting behavior d) education e) gender and d) age. It is estimated on the sample of respondents who took part in 2013 wave of panel survey. In the second model, there are the same determinants included with the addition of the evaluation of government effectiveness in 2008, which means that the estimation is made on the sample of respondents that took part in both 2008 and 2013 wave of panel survey.

Based on the Model 1 (table 2) we can say that *ceteris paribus* the respondents that expressed the low level of general trust to political parties are two times more likely to evaluate government effectiveness of fighting corruption negatively. However, voting for PO during the last elections (with all other things being equal) decreases the odds of negative evaluation of corruption policy by 41%. The opinion that PO-PSL coalition had brought Poland more losses than gains increases the odds of evaluation of current government effectiveness with fighting corruption negatively in three times. We can also observe in the data that the negative evaluation of government increases together with age of respondent by 2,7% with every year (which gives 27% for respondents that are 10 years older compared to younger respondents and controlling for other factors in the model)[12]. Gender and tertiary education appear to be not significant in evaluating current government, although controlling for this factors seems to be reasonable for the clarity of interpretation.

Speaking about model 2, it should be mentioned that the evaluation of government potential to fight corruption, although suggestive of an association with evaluation of current

---

[12] In public perception, there are among older generations of Poles more partisans of Law and Justice party (PiS), than Civic Platform, which, in contrary, is associated with 'younger, educated, from big cities' voters.

government effectiveness in fighting corruption, did not achieve statistical significance (p-value = 0.09). However, we see that controlling for the respondents opinion in 2008 did not change the level of significance of the other factors in the model, such as political trust, party affiliation and age.

Conclusions

Fighting corruption level in Poland, being one of the most sensitive issues in public debate and important point of reference in political campaigns, is the process accompanied with many hopes and expectations. In this paper, I analyze the perception of Polish citizens of the corruption level in Poland since 1988 and the effectiveness of government in reducing corruption. My main aim was to highlight the dynamics of change of this perception in Poland and to investigate the characteristics of the group that is not satisfied with the current government effectiveness in fighting corruption, with the special attention to the relation of corruption and political trust.

The results of the analysis of the responses to survey question on prospective, current and retrospective evaluation of the level of corruption in government in Poland have shown, that the majority of Poles considered government as very corrupt (44%) both in 1989 and in 1993, despite the regime change. We can trace, though, the hope for more honest government in the future, which is expressed in the prospective question asked in 1993 survey wave about the corruption level in five years, where only 20% of respondents state that the future government will be very corrupt.

Interesting seem to be the results from the next 2003 and 2007 waves of surveys, which reveal that around 76% of Poles declare the belief in the capability of government as an institution to fight corruption effectively. In the context of the general decline of political trust in Europe and growing number of publicly discussed corruption scandals, this high percent of the support of the potential of government to fight corruption in unexpected. The deeper analysis of the panel responses show even the slight tendency of the increase of satisfaction in effectiveness of government in 2008 as compared to 2003. It might be related to the fact that corruption is understood here as the sphere limited to authorities and the view that government can fight it is rather not the support of the government but strong criticism underlining the unfulfillment of clear expectations.

When asked in 2013, only 13% of respondents considered that the actions undertaken by current government in fighting corruption are satisfactory. The results of logistic regression analysis have shown that *ceteris paribus* there is the positive correlation between the low level of political trust and evaluation of current government in fighting corruption. The negative evaluation of the PO-PSL coalition in 2007 also significantly increases the likelihood of having an opinion that current government in not effective. There is also a strong negative correlation observed between the opinion of low effectiveness of government corruption policy and voting for PO, which can be explained that respondents tent to support parties that they identify with. The older respondents tent to perceive government as less effective in fighting corruption as compared to younger respondents. The characteristics of the group dissatisfied with the actions of current government against corruption are presented here in a brief manner and need a deeper analysis of possible explanations of the observed tendencies.

Bibliography

Blind, P. K. (2007). Building trust in government in the twenty-first century: Review of literature and emerging issues. In *7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government Building Trust in Government*, Vienna, Austria

Espinal, R., Hartlyn, J. (2006) Performance Still Matters Explaining Trust in Government in the Dominican Republic, *Comparative Political Studies* 39/2, pp. 200-23.

Freedom House (2014) *Freedom in the World* Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/poland#.VVzs4Pl_Oko

Freedom House (2014) *Nations in Transition* 2014 Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/poland#.VVztAvl_Oko

Gong, T. (2002). Dangerous collusion: corruption as a collective venture in contemporary China. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *35*(1), 85–103. http://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(01)00026-5

Heidenheimer, A. J., & Johnston, M. (2002). *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts.* Transaction Publishers.

Hough, D. (2013). *Political Corruption and Governance : Corruption, Anti-Corruption and Governance*. Basingstoke, GBR: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from http://www.ebrary.com

Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Journal of Politics 67/3, pp. 873-886.

Kaufmann, D. (2005). *CHAPTER 2.1 Corruption, Governance and Security: Challenges for the Rich Countries and the World*. Global Competitiveness Report 2004/2005, Chapter 2.1, pp. 83–102

Keele, L. (2005). The Authorities Really Do Matter: Party Control and Trust in Government,

Kolodko, G. W. (Ed.). (2005). *The Polish Miracle: Lessons for the Emerging Markets.* Aldershot, Hampshire, England ; Burlington, Vt: Ashgate Pub Co.

Krastev, I. (2004). *Shifting Obsessions: Three Essays on the Politics of Anticorruption*. Central European University Press.

Lehmann, H. (2012). *The Polish Growth Miracle: Outcome of Persistent Reform Efforts* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 2034846). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. Retrieved from http://ftp.iza.org/pp40.pdf

Melgar, N., Rossi, M., & Smith, T. W. (2010). The Perception of Corruption. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *22*(1), 120–131. http://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edp058

Newton, K. & Norris, P. (2000). Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance? in *Disaffected Democracies: What's troubling the Trilateral Democracies?* S. J. Pharr and R.D. Putnam (eds.) New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 52-73.

Porte, T.R. & Metlay D.S. (1996). Hazards and Institutional Trustworthiness: Facing a Deficit of Trust, *Public Administration Review* 56/4, pp. 341-347.

Transparency International (2014) *Corruption Perception Index.* Retrieved from http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview

United Nations Development Programme (2014) *Human Development Index* Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi