Original Research

Liberals Versus Communitarians: Psychosocial Sources of the Conflict Over Democracy in Today’s Poland

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Abstract
This article refers to the concept of collective mentality, which consists of the mental patterns most typical of a given community. The authors show some psychosocial reasons why Poland’s political system may shift from liberal to illiberal forms of democracy in recent years. This process is accompanied by an increasing sociopolitical polarization of the society, gradually becoming an expanded and destructive conflict. Previous research has shown that the Polish sociopolitical polarization’s primary psychosocial reason could be the collision of two competing value systems—purely individualistic and purely collectivist. In this article, the authors argue that both mental patterns determine two different political community visions—liberal and communitarian. In-depth empirical analyses show anti-egalitarian characteristics of the liberal orientation and traditional-conservative characteristics of the communitarian one. Furthermore, the authors show that both orientations’ followers quite differently define the proportions between individual autonomy and social identity and cohesion. These differences are particularly evident in their attitudes toward democracy and patterns of involvement in public life. Finally, the article provides empirical evidence that the division into supporters of the liberal and communitarian political community directly appears in the Polish electorate’s political preferences.

Keywords
democracy, political conflict, antagonistic values systems, liberalism, communitarianism

Introduction
In the opinion of many researchers, the financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008 triggered a spiral of phenomena and processes that fundamentally changed Europe’s political landscape over the past decade (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Mudde, 2011; Pytlas, 2018). The rise of populist and anti-liberal sentiment has not bypassed Poland, the sixth largest country by population in the European Union (EU). As many observers have seen Poland as an example of a successful transformation from the authoritarian communist regime to liberal democracy, the intense anti-liberal backlash visible since 2015 can surprise many observers. Furthermore, the deeper reasons for this phenomenon are still unclear.

After the systemic change in 1989, the liberal doctrine dominated the Polish economy and social policy, accompanied by apparent mental change toward liberal cultural values. The 2015 parliamentary elections won by the right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS; Law and Justice) suddenly stopped this general trend. PiS took power by presenting the election program called “Good change.” It contained a diagnosis of weaknesses of the national economy and state institutions caused, in their opinion, by the implementation of liberal dogmas regarding the state and the economy. The anti-liberal remedy was the central pillar of PiS’s parliamentary victory. It included, among other things, radical increase of financial transfers for social and demographic purposes, strengthening and centralization of the state structures, a faster and more effective justice system, better use of domestic capital resources in the economy, a more active government policy for modernization, and innovation of the economy.

The parliamentary campaign in 2015 coincided with the culmination of the immigration crisis in Europe. Strong opposition to EU policy in this area (mechanism of quota allocation of refugees) and strong opposition to the former government’s consent to accept 7,000 refugees to Poland

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became the second pillar of PiS’s electoral victory. A sharp anti-immigration campaign directed at Polish society accompanied these events, in which a lot of nationalist and xenophobic content appeared. PiS’s refusal to fulfill the previous government’s commitments became the first of a relatively long list of reasons for the sharp conflict of the PiS government with both internal political opposition and central EU institutions. Other spectacular episodes of this conflict included disputes about the legality of changes in the Constitutional Court and parliamentary laws changing the Supreme Court’s organization. In both cases, the compliance of legal acts with the Polish constitution and separation of powers principle became a vital issue. In the international dimension, a remarkable effect of the ruling party’s policy was the launch of the so-called procedure for protecting the rule of law, initiated by the European Commission.

This short summary of the most critical events in 2015–2019 may lead to interpreting political change in Poland in terms of a populist right-wing revolt that took over thanks to (a) criticism of liberalism and (b) rhetoric of defending national interests. This kind of interpretation is even more justified because the seizure of power in 2015 was accompanied by very harsh criticism of the political and socioeconomic establishment. PiS’s propaganda contrasted “the will of the people” with “the elites’ will.”

Aside from the political opposition, many researchers and experts see the political events in Poland after 2015 as a systematic dismantling of liberal democracy toward a façade democracy with visible elements of an authoritarian doctrine (e.g., Fukuyama, 2018; Krekó et al., 2018; Rohac, 2018). However, it seems that these alarmist voices vastly diverge from dominant social feelings and moods. Polish society has decided to extend the ruling party’s mandate to rule the country for another 4 years. Parliamentary elections were held in October of 2019, in which the ruling party PiS, won again with a 16% advantage over the largest opposition party. Then, in July 2020, PiS candidate Andrzej Duda defeated the opposition candidate in the second round of the presidential election. These parliamentary and presidential victories show that the spectacular change in Polish politics after 2015 was not a one-off deviation. The results of elections in 2019 and in 2020 are also a forecast of further escalating the conflict over the Polish democracy.

The Aims and Scope of the Article

The conflict between two rival political camps is the “daily bread” of democratic societies. Even if it causes some strong social divisions, it does not have to challenge social cohesion or threaten the political system. Such danger can appear more likely when politics activate rivalry between large social groups that form one social organism but have different cultural identities. The last thesis was the starting point to argue (Radkiewicz, 2017a) that the nature of Polish political conflict has many features of conflicts described by Deutsch (1973) as expanded and destructive. Many researchers argue that the expanded and destructive conflict’s psychological basis lies in the sharp collision of two antagonistic value systems (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1990; Deutsch 1973; Reykowski, 2005). Based on such premises, Radkiewicz (2017a) referred to the very influential theory of human values developed by Shalom Schwartz and colleagues (Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2012). Human values express the diversity of human motives. According to Schwartz, values should be seen as beliefs determining personal life goals and providing the essential conduct rules. In his model, Schwartz distinguished 10 fundamental values underlying two higher-level dimensions: Openness to change versus Conservation and Self-enhancement versus Self-transcendence. Openness includes self-direction and stimulation (self-expression), and its opposite is values that express the needs of belonging, order, and security (strengthening community). Self-enhancement versus Self-transcendence opposes values of power, achievement, and hedonism to benevolence and universalism—values expressing care for other peoples and harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

Extensive research using Schwartz’s theory has shown that Polish society’s collective mentality was predominated by two widespread value patterns (see Figure 1). The first one consists of the covariance of individualistic values (Openness to change and Self-enhancement). The second one reflects the covariance of communal values (Self-transcendence and Conservation). This fundamental opposition between individualistic and communal characteristics was interpreted as a key psychosocial reason for Polish society’s polarization. However, the described empirical findings cannot be equivalent to the statement that the cultural differences are directly reflected in different political community visions. Whether or not this is the case, we will present in the first part of the empirical analyses.

The second research problem concerns political community views and their relations with democracy. Suppose the mental profiles of “double individualists” and “double collectivists” actually correspond to a distinct and coherent political community’s visions. In that case, it means different views on the freedom and identity of the individual. It also means a different view of the relationship between the individual and other society members and the relationship between the individual and state institutions. We can assume that both orientations share many similar normative and institutional standards of the democratic state. However, they should also show significant differences in understanding democracy and involvement in a democratic society’s public life. There is no doubt that an orientation referring to individualism, and not to collectivism, should place a much stronger emphasis on the ideals and values that are key to liberal democracy. We will show it in the second part of analyses.
Finally, we want to discount yet another aspect of previous research (Radkiewicz, 2017a). It shows that the mental profiles of “double individualists” and “double collectivists” are related to the social basis of the polarized electorates of the two largest parties, Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform) and PiS, respectively. Our previous research showed that compared with a typical PO voter, a typical PiS voter values obedience, order, modesty, and discipline (Conservation values) and justice and compassion toward others (Self-transcendence values) much more. The features that are much more appreciated by a typical PO voter are curiosity, assertiveness, and independent thinking (Openness to change values), and effectiveness, leadership, and ambition (Self-enhancement values). Therefore, assuming that both main mental profiles—individualistic and collectivist—are reflected in preferences for different visions of the political community and democracy, we would like to know if this also applies to political preferences. We supposed that the hypothesized worldview division would directly appear in the Polish electorate’s political polarization and voting preferences. The third part of the empirical analyses will be devoted to the verification of these assumptions.

**Does Cultural Division Determine Different Visions of the Political Community?**

Some studies show that basic human values correspond with complex and strongly interrelated political beliefs (Caprara et al., 2006; Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). At the political ideology level, the dimension “Openness to change versus Conservation” describes fundamental differences between cultural liberalism and conservatism. Simultaneously, “Self-enhancement versus Self-transcendence” refers to fundamental differences between economic liberalism and egalitarianism. If so, the classical distinction into left-wing and right-wing worldviews suggests two relatively strong covariances of preferred values: Openness to change and Self-transcendence (leftist views), and Conservation with Self-enhancement (right-wing views). However, most studies show that the divisions of the Polish electorate go across the classic distinction (Radkiewicz, 2017b; Skarżyńska, 2005b). The views of the cultural right (Conservation) positively correlate with the economic leftism (Self-transcendence), whereas cultural left (Openness) goes hand in hand with economic right (Self-enhancement). Such ideological “mixes”

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**Figure 1.** Dominant patterns of personal values in the Polish electorate (the axes show magnitudes of r-Pearson correlation).
are consistent with the empirical findings of “double individualists” and “double collectivists.” They suggest that the competitive models of the political community may not fit into the classical understanding of the left and right.

The Concept of Liberal and Communitarian Orientation

We decided that the optimal tool to describe the Polish political community’s competitive forms would be to distinguish the liberal and communitarian orientation. This choice was the result of a combination of two theoretical premises drawn from political science. First, we referred to communitarianism—a trend in contemporary political philosophy, which emerged in the 1980s, in the form of a polemical debate with several fundamental works of liberal thought (mainly John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* and Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*). Although the views of the leading representatives of communitarianism may often seem quite distant, there seems to be a common denominator in them. In the communitarian way of thinking, the citizen is a product of socialization, and she or he cannot fulfill individual life needs and potential without being embedded in the community. It is a society that creates individual identity (e.g., Etzioni, 1993; MacIntyre, 1981; Taylor, 1989; Walzer, 1990). Without values, social norms, history, and culture, the individual would be an undefined biological being.

Communitarians believe that the condition of individual freedom is freedom of the political community, based on the authority of law, customs, and/or religion. Civil society is a community of people who accept group values and norms and actively care for the common good (Brzechczyn, 2019; Śpiewak, 2004; Szahaj, 2006).

Exemplary communitarianism stands in stark contrast to exemplary liberalism. According to the liberal way of thinking, the political community citizen is free, rational, and morally autonomous. The well-being of the individual has priority over the needs of the community. By the very fact of being human, a citizen has inherent rights and freedoms that do not require justification. Liberals emphasize that societies are communities of free individuals of different world views and religions. Such individuals coexist within the law and respect each other. Civil society is built to protect its members’ freedom and property and ensure their security and peaceful coexistence. According to liberals, civil society built on a liberal basis is the only way to balance the state’s power in its relations with the citizen.

Most communitarian thinkers take a compromise stance toward liberalism, claiming that its most important achievements, including first and foremost individual rights and freedoms, should be preserved, but without destroying interpersonal solidarity and social responsibility. One can use this last remark for linking philosophical disputes and our second premise. It refers to the last 40 years of Polish history, with two key moments: the emergence of the great social movement Solidarity in 1980 and the subsequent takeover of political power in 1989 by Solidarity. Many scholars see Solidarity in the period 1980–1989 as a kind of political melting pot in which opposing concepts of liberal and communitarian ideal social order clashed with each other (e.g., Brzechczyn, 2019; Dudek, 2005; Gawin, 2002; Mason, 1989). Generally speaking, the most critical issues concerned selecting optimal policies on four disputed dimensions: proceduralism versus common good, economic reductionism versus autonomism, ahistoricalism versus traditionalism, and cosmopolitism versus patriotism (see Brzechczyn, 2019). As Brzechczyn (2019) proves, numerous elements of liberalism and communitarianism have been present since 1980 in the main program postulates of the Solidarity. He writes,

In the program of a self-governing republic created by Solidarity one can find ideas characteristic both of the communitarian and liberal political philosophy. However, the liberal ones—including, primarily, the guarantee of human and citizens’ rights, and individual liberties—were subordinated to the postulate of reconstructing the national and social community. (p. 124)

Basic Human Values as Predictors of Liberal and Communitarian Orientation

With so defined two forms of thinking about the political community, we could clarify our general hypothesis. Thus, we expected the preference of liberal orientation to be closely related to the expression of two sets of individualistic values: Openness to change and Self-enhancement. Whereas, the communitarian orientation preference should be closely related to the expression of two sets of collectivist values: Conservation and Self-transcendence.

We have verified the above general hypothesis on a random-quota, nationwide sample of adult Poles (N = 800). The instrument for measuring both orientations (LIB-COM Questionnaire) was created in several stages. First, based on a review of the literature describing the essence of the dispute between liberals and communitarians (Bartyzel, 2015; Brzechczyn, 2019; Śpiewak, 2004; Szahaj, 2006), we have compiled a list of 84 (2 × 42) characteristics of both orientations. The initial pool of items was verified in pilot studies, which resulted in a 32-item (2 × 16) instrument containing the statements with the best discriminatory power. Both subscales present different beliefs about correct and preferred ways of building a political community. We distinguished four categories of beliefs that differentiated liberal and communitarian orientations most clearly: civic freedom, citizen’s identity, relations between individuals and society, and views on the state. Exemplary items for liberal orientation divided into four categories are as follows: civic freedom—“Human freedom is the most important goal of the civil society, no top-down ideas of good life can be more important than freedom”; citizen’s identity—“Who we are does not depend on our family ties, circle of friends or belonging to different
social groups. If they were not, we would still be who we are”; relations between an individual and society—“We are a group of private individuals who only share a conscious agreement to create a collective government”; and view of the state—“The state has no right to enter into worldviews and moral views of citizens, or to judge whether what people do privately is good or bad.” Exemplary items for communitarian orientation are as follows: civic freedom—“Freedom and sovereignty of the whole society are the condition for the freedom of individual citizens”; citizen’s identity—“It is hard to imagine a good life without feeling that you are a resident of a specific place, region or country and that you have a nationality”; relations between an individual and society—“Without the norms, values, history and culture that come from society, man would only be a biological organism and nothing more”; and the view of the state—“The state is a historically formed national community that gives citizens moral support and a sense of security.” The full version of LIB-COM Questionnaire has been attached as supplementary materials.

In many cases, the comparison of claims characteristic of liberal orientation with those expressing communitarian one may suggest mutual contradiction. Therefore, one would expect their measurements to be negatively correlated. However, this is not the case. In subsequent studies, we received quite strongly correlated results ($r$-Pearson coefficients from .32 to .53), which means that LIB and COM sub-scales shared from 10% to 28% of the common variance. Indeed, it is partly due to some methodological flaws in the measurement based on the questionnaire self-description. On the contrary, the fact that positive correlation persists in various studies and different groups of respondents argues that many respondents consider some liberal and communitarian beliefs as compatible or even complementary. In the analyses presented below, we will use partial correlation coefficients that allow statistical control of the common variance.

The second issue that may be controversial from a psychometric point of view is the understandability of the LIB-COM measurement for the average respondent. Indeed, in light of what we know about the cognitive processes involved in the survey methodology (e.g., Schwartz, 2010), some items in the LIB-COM questionnaire may seem too theoretical or ideological in relation to the actual self-awareness of many respondents. As a result, some respondents may provide answers rather intuitively, constructing their views ad hoc, or by marking the middle of the scale. We are aware of such potential shortcomings; however, we believe that our instrument does not deviate significantly from most other commonly accepted instruments measuring similar constructs.

Having the measurement instrument, we could verify our hypothesis. We used Schwartz’s (2006) Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) to measure personal values. All 41 PVQ items (descriptions) referred to the views and behavior of an unknown person. The respondent’s task was to assess her or his similarity to the person presented in the descriptions (from 1—entirely unlike me to 6—completely like me).

Figure 2 shows the results for 12 categories of values. In general, the results confirmed that individualistic and collectivist mental patterns are related, as expected, to the preferred type of political community. Holders of the individualistic motives of Openness to change (stimulation, hedonism) and Self-enhancement (power, domination, achievement) tend to prefer the liberal orientation. In contrast, holders of collectivist motives of Conservation (security, conformity, tradition) and Self-transcendence (benevolence, universalistic care for other people) tend to prefer the communitarian orientation. It also turned out that the two categories of personal motives do not differentiate both orientations. Surprisingly, liberalism and communitarianism seem to be correlated positively with equal strength to self-direction and universalistic openness to other people.

**Do Liberals and Communitarians Differ in Their Views on Democracy?**

The results described above made us sure that Polish society’s two dominant mental profiles not only refer to very antagonistic sets of personal values, but they are also related to different visions of the political community. As both liberal and communitarian orientations imply a different understanding of citizenship and civil society, it was natural to expect them to predict opposite ways of understanding democracy and alternative forms of and motives for public affairs involvement. Our next study was devoted to analyzing expected differences.

The study was conducted on a sample composed of 1,477 respondents aged 18 to 65 years. It was an online survey carried out on Nationwide Research Panel, where about 70,000 Polish consumers were registered. We recruited respondents who were relatively active in the public domain, that is, they selected at least two from a list of 10 public activities during the last 12 months (the list included contact with a politician/official at the state or local government level, activity in a political party or organization, activities in any other type of organization or association, signing petitions; participation in a public legal demonstration; boycott, deliberate nonbuying of specific goods, products; intentionally buying specific products, goods for political, ethical or environmental reasons; giving money donations to an organization or a political group; wearing or placing in a visible place badges/stickers promoting any social campaign or action). The sample included 50.5% females and 49.5% males and was very diverse in terms of education (1.1%—primary and lower, 8.7%—vocational, 32.2%—secondary, 26.2%—postsecondary, 32.2%—higher). Overall mean age amounted to $M = 37.5$.

**Attitudes Toward and Understanding of Democracy**

Liberal and communitarian orientation are alternative concepts of a democratic political community. Therefore, we
expected that both would be related to the democratic government’s preference over other forms of political systems and the conviction that democracy has many more advantages than disadvantages. This general preference results from the shared belief that legitimized authorities should be elected in free elections and verified after their office term expiry. Furthermore, we expected liberals and communitarians to share similar normative and institutional standards of the democratic state. In line with these standards, democracy primarily refers to civil rights and principles, building its political institutions. The most important of them should be free elections, freedom of economic activity, freedom to form political parties, equality of voting rights, independent courts, and a lawful state.

Apart from similarities, we expected both orientations to differ in preferred citizen–authorities relationships and expectations concerning the state’s role. The primary reason for differences results from the community’s cognitive representation (which implies individualistic or collectivist norms and values). This difference should be noticeable in attitudes toward some key democratic principles. Compared with communitarians, liberals should emphasize more respect for human rights and tolerance for social diversity. They should also be more disapproving than communitarians for repressive actions exerted by authorities (e.g., suspending civil rights). Whereas, communitarians should more often incorporate into democratic standards two types of norms and values: (a) social care and services provided by the state and (b) the idea of national sovereignty combined with strong national ties.

To measure liberal and communitarian orientation, we applied the LIB-COM Questionnaire described in the previous paragraphs. Figure 3 shows partial correlations linking both orientations with attitudes and beliefs about democracy. In the upper part of the graph, we present correlations with four measures regarding the approval of democracy and related principles. High scores on the first scale express general support for democracy as an optimal political system (e.g., “Democracy has an advantage over all other forms of government”). The second scale, developed by Kaase (1971), contains attitudes toward basic values, rights, and principles of the democratic systems (e.g., “Every citizen has the right to take his convictions to the street if necessary,” “Everyone should have the right to express his or her opinion even if he or she differs from the majority”). The third scale measured unconditional support for human rights (e.g., “Human rights are universal and binding everywhere,” “Our country should not do business with countries that systematically violate human rights”). The fourth instrument, the Repression Potential scale developed by Marsh and Kaase (1979), expresses support for the following activities of the political authorities: the police use of force against demonstrators, severe court sentences for protestors, making laws forbidding protest demonstrations, and the use of troops to break strikes (e.g., “The police use force against demonstrators,” “The government by law prohibits all public protests and
demonstrations”). Besides, we used an extended version of the instrument measuring Democracy Markers (Reykowski, 1995). Scores on this scale show to what extent respondents assess each of the 16 characteristics presented to them as an essential criterion of democracy. Both in earlier studies and the current study, these characteristics form four coherent categories that we have named: civil rights and freedoms (e.g., “Majority must respect minority rights”), social benefits (e.g., “The state supports the poor and the low paid”), the rule of law (e.g., “Courts and judges are independent of political authorities,”), and affirmation of national and catholic identity (e.g., “For all Poles, the nation is the supreme value”). Finally, we asked respondents about the qualities that “an ideal citizen of our state’ should possess.” We provided them with a list of 12 characteristics, including respect for diverse views and values, openness to people, tolerance, effectiveness, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, helpfulness, generosity, sensitivity to the harm of others, loyalty to people, respect for social norms, and authorities, and respect for the national tradition.

The smallest difference between liberals and communitarians appeared in general support for democracy. Both are inclined to recognize democracy as the best political system, although communitarians’ support is weaker than liberals. On the contrary, we have striking differences in support for various detailed beliefs forming the democratic worldview. Liberals strongly accept the basic principles of liberal democracy—they are quite principled in respect of human rights and reject authoritarian governments’ political solutions. For communitarians, all of these views do not seem to be a priority, that is, they approve and reject them equally often.

If one looks at how people understand democracy, differences between the two orientations are, in most cases, not as visible as one would expect. In general, we do not see much difference in understanding democracy in terms of civil rights and freedoms or the rule of law. A more considerable difference appears when we consider social benefits from the state. It is a relatively important element of democracy for communitarians, whereas for liberals, the state’s active social policy has nothing to do with a democratic order. However, the critical difference lies in the national and Catholic identity of the Polish society. Communitarians seem to think that cultivating national bonds and Catholic traditions in public should be guiding principles of democracy. For liberals, these claims seem to be unacceptable.

### Figure 3

**Relationships of liberal and communitarian orientation with beliefs about democracy (bars represent partial correlation coefficients).**

| Support for democracy                      | **0.28** | **0.10** | **0.45** |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Democracy as the best system              | -        | -0.01    |          |
| Principles of liberal democracy           |          | -0.02    |          |
| Human rights                              |          | 0.02     |          |
| Support for authoritarian government       |          |          |          |

| Understanding democracy as ...            |          |          |          |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Civil rights and freedoms                 |          |          |          |
| Welfare state                             |          |          |          |
| National and religious values             |          |          |          |
| The rule of law                           |          |          |          |
| An ideal citizen should ...               |          |          |          |
| respect social norms and authorities      |          |          |          |
| respect tradition and history of the country |       |          |          |
| be tolerant                               |          |          |          |
| be open to others                         |          |          |          |

*p ≤ 0.01  **p ≤ 0.001  □ Liberal orientation □ Communitarian orientation*
The biggest differences between liberals and communitarians correspond very well with their perceptions of the ideal citizen. Of the 12 features to choose from, four proved to be differentiating, and only these features were shown in Figure 3. Liberals emphasized tolerance and openness to others, whereas communitarians systematically chose to respect the tradition of the own country and, in particular, respect for social norms and authorities.

Sociopolitical Activity and Motivation to Engage in Public Affairs

Based on the differences in mental profiles, we supposed that communitarians, more often than liberals engage in public activities focused on promoting/protecting the local community (e.g., cultivating local traditions), national community (e.g., cultivating patriotism and national history), and so-called traditional values (e.g., “pro-life” organizations). On the contrary, we supposed that liberals, more often than communitarians, engage in public activities aiming to promote/protect social diversity (e.g., ethnic and sexual minorities) and individual liberties (e.g., secularism of the state institutions, soft drugs legalization). Thus, in general, we hypothesized that communitarians tend to promote/protect communal values, whereas liberals tend to focus on individualistic values.

Analyzing similarities and differences in forms of participation and motivation to engage in public affairs, we also referred to Schatz and Lavine (2007) concept, who distinguished between two patterns of involvement: symbolic and instrumental, based on different motivational mechanisms. This first means an involvement expressed in the manifestation of positive feelings toward national symbols and attachment to ritual and ceremonial behavior. The authors contradict symbolic involvement to instrumental involvement, which has utilitarian and prosocial character and is concerned with whether state institutions ensure specific instrumental benefits to all group members. We expected communitarians to be higher on symbolic involvement, and liberals to be higher on instrumental involvement.

The first two coefficients in Figure 4 show the relationship of both orientations with symbolic and instrumental involvement. Symbolic involvement was measured with the statements like “Respect for our national symbols, such as the flag, should be one of the basic responsibilities of Polish citizens”; instrumental involvement included such statements like “I want the Polish legal system to be fair and effective.” The next two coefficients in Figure 4 concern potential motives for undertaking various public activities (e.g., participation in demonstrations, signing petitions). We asked respondents to assess the likelihood of their public involvement for 12 different reasons, half of which we chose to be more important for the liberal orientation or the communitarian orientation. Among the liberal activities were “protest against the violation of national or ethnic minorities’ rights,” “protest against restriction of freedom of speech,” “defense of the rights of sexual minorities.” Communitarian activities included “commemoration of important events in our history,” “defense of Poles living abroad against persecution by the local government,” “protest against the admission of immigrants/refugees.”

As shown in Figure 4, what liberal and communitarian orientation have in common is a noticeable and comparable relationship with instrumental involvement, expressing

**Figure 4.** Relationships of liberal and communitarian orientation with sociopolitical involvement and motivation for public activity (bars represent partial correlation coefficients).

* p ≤ .01  ** p ≤ .001
Does Different Visions of the Political Community Relate to Political Preferences?

From the very beginning, the anti-communist elites gathered in the Solidarity movement showed significant internal ideological differentiation, encompassing the factions of unionists, socialists, social democrats, liberals, Christian Democrats, and national Catholics. Over time, most of these factions crystallized into two main and strongly competing political camps, center-liberal and conservative-social, which since 2001 have found primary political representation in PO and PiS, respectively (Dudek, 2016). In 2019, as a result of the consolidation and increasing polarization of the electorate, PO and PiS might feel representative of nearly therefore of Poles voting in elections. However, we should remember that both parties initially cooperated closely with each other, and their electorates—apart from their level of religiousness—did not differ much. Over time, they began to attract various groups of voters. “From the post-Solidarity nebula that previously existed mainly as an opposition to the post-communist forces, two Polands gradually emerged, differing in education, income level, place of residence, worldview, ideological and political sympathies” (Pankowski, 2017, p. 15). There is no doubt that this description applies to more liberal (PO followers) and more communitarian (PiS followers) Poland. So, in addition to our previous research results, we had much more reason to believe that the hypothesized division into supporters of the liberal and communitarian political community directly appears in the Polish electorate’s political polarization and voting preferences.

As the percentage of people declaring voting for small political parties in single studies is relatively small, we decided to combine the results of Study 1 and Study 2 (Study 2 was carried out about 6 months later). We took into account only parties indicated by at least 3% of voters who wanted to participate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. After combining the respondents from both studies, the analysis included 1,775 people. Figure 5 depicts the level of liberalism and communitarianism in those parties’ electorates that exceed the 3% threshold.

The most spectacular finding is the distance separating the electorate of currently ruling PiS (44% voters) from other parties’ electorates, including the main opposition party PO (25% voters). What causes such a noticeable distance is the combination of a high level of communitarian orientation and a low level of liberal orientation. PiS followers want to live in an expressive and unified political community, and they expect actions from the ruling party and state institutions to stop political forces promoting liberal orientation. However, the polarization of the political scene is certainly not symmetrical. On one hand, the ruling party’s electorate stands out clearly from all the rest. It is most internally coherent. On the other hand, compared with the PiS electorate, opposition parties’ electorates are much more diverse in their location on the axes of communitarianism and, especially, liberalism. The level of liberalism in the electorate of the largest opposition party, PO, is relatively high. However, its communitarianism is not at the opposite pole of PiS, but close to the center. If we were to identify the most polarized electorates concerning PiS’s electorate, we would have to indicate the respondents of two smaller parties, Nowoczesna and Razem (the highest liberalism and the lowest communitarianism).

The data presented in Figure 5 come from 2018. The opposition parties’ visible dispersion was not a good prediction of...
their union into a strong opposition bloc. Indeed, opposition parties went to the parliamentary elections in 2019 as several blocs: (a) Koalicja Obywatelska (PO + Nowoczesna − 27.4%), (b) Lewica (SLD + Razem + Wiosna − 12.6%), and (c) Koalicja Polska (PSL + Kukiz’15% − 8.5%). These three coalitions were completed by the ultra-right Konfederacja (6.8%), formed from the fusion of the libertarian Wolności–Korwin and the nationalist Ruch Narodowy. Opposition coalitions won more votes (55.3%) than the ruling party (43.6%). However, it was PiS, thanks to the unity bonus, that won an absolute majority in the lower house of parliament (235 out of 460 deputies), allowing to rule independently.

Summary and Discussion

Referring to the concept of collective mentality, in our previous studies, we described two typical mental patterns dominating Polish society: “double collectivists” and “double individualists.” It turned out that they also mostly coincide with the mental characteristics of polarized electorates of the two largest political parties—PiS and PO. In this article, we looked for the more profound sociopolitical implications of the previous findings. According to our research hypothesis, being a “double individualist” or “double collectivist” may imply different political communities’ preferences—liberal and communitarian, respectively. In general, liberal orientation prioritizes individual autonomy and defines the political community as a set of independent individuals with different value systems, beliefs, and attitudes. As an emanation of the community, the state should be ideologically neutral and assure ideological pluralism. Quite the opposite, for communitarian orientation, the key to building a community is implementing a specific concept of “common good.” Its priority is to strengthen and develop the community derived from tradition and history, based on socially sanctioned norms and values.

Each society must answer how to balance the needs of the individual and the group (Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2012). Should the priority be individual autonomy or rather social order and cohesion of the community? Proponents of liberal and communitarian orientation answer this question differently. Then, they process these differences into socio-political beliefs and activities in various areas of social life. People with a high level of liberal orientation pay more attention to the principles of liberal democracy, human rights, and opposition to various forms of authoritarianism. Liberals are particularly sensitive to attempts to force all community members into a uniform national or religious identity. Most of what is crucial to liberals is somewhat secondary for communitarians. Therefore, we supposed that if the most common personal values patterns predict preference for a liberal or communitarian orientation, they should also be an essential mental subsoil of the political conflict between the liberal and illiberal vision of democracy, quite visible in today’s Poland. Finally, we expected that differences between liberals and communitarians should have visible consequences at the level of voting preferences.

Our results showed that liberal and communitarian orientation rather unexpectedly correlated positively with self-direction and universalistic openness to a similar degree. Besides, the liberal orientation turned out to be anchored almost exclusively in the individualistic values of self-expansion and self-expression. The communitarian orientation was primarily related to the collectivist values of conservation and self-transcendence. In further analyses, liberals and communitarians did not differ much in general support for democracy. However, we can easily see significant differences on specific issues relating to democracy. Liberals, unlike communitarians, strongly emphasize the commitment to human rights and opposition to authoritarian policies of the government. On the contrary, unlike liberals, communitarians support an active social policy of the state and, in particular, are vigilant to care for society’s national and Catholic identity, which, as they believe, guarantees social stability and cohesion. Similar discrepancies are evident in images of the ideal citizen. For liberals, an ideal citizen should, above all, be tolerant and open to others as only these attributes ensure the broadest possible independence for other members of the community. For communitarians, it is crucial to respect the country’s tradition, social norms, and authorities.

The differences in emphasis on individual autonomy and community cohesion are also visible in social involvement patterns. Communitarians aim to maintain the community’s uniformity and strength, whereas liberals want to engage in activities to increase or defend individuals or minority groups’ freedom. However, the most characteristic seems to be the difference in symbolic involvement. For communitarians, the symbolic forms of maintaining a sense of belonging and shared identity are essential. Simultaneously, people with liberal orientation tend to limit their social activities to instrumental involvement, that is, activities that help meet citizens’ pragmatic expectations. Furthermore, liberals’ reserve against symbolic involvement is relatively easy to understand because, in their way of thinking, such activities pose a threat to individual autonomy. It is also worth noting that different pictures of an ideal citizen and civic activity determine different socialization and education priorities.

Finally, analyses of political preferences show that forces of communitarians and liberals seem very balanced today. However, communitarians are more consolidated and, in fact, have only one representative on the Polish political scene—PiS. The core electorate of PiS seems to be entirely coherent in terms of worldview—it is communitarian and anti-liberal. Konfederacja (a new right-wing party that appeared in 2019) refers to an electorate culturally even more conservative than the PiS electorate, but, on the contrary, much more liberal in economic views. Apart from economic liberalism, another crucial issue for supporters of Konfederacja is strong opposition to European integration.
(which is not a typical view of PiS supporters). The political programs of PiS and Konfederacja and their supporters’ views differ significantly regarding the state’s social policy. After winning the 2015 elections, PiS implemented the vast majority of promised social transfers for families bringing up children, pensioners, and some underprivileged groups. Thanks to this, PiS gained credibility with its voters and many new supporters. At the moment, PiS has monopolized communitarians’ support. In parliamentary elections, this gives a special bonus for unity. To the surprise of many analysts, despite many controversial actions, support for the ruling party in the 2019 parliamentary elections not only did not fall but even increased from 38% to nearly 44%. As many as 71% of potential PiS voters declare they have no second-choice party. It is a striking statistic compared with 35% of voters of the largest opposition party, PO (Sadura & Sierakowski, 2019).

This article was not written by political scientists, but by social psychologists interested in political phenomena. It was written with the conviction that in such phenomena as socio-political polarization or controversy over a liberal versus illiberal vision of democracy, a psychological perspective may help political science explanations. This belief is in line with the interdisciplinary postulates of the so-called societal psychology approach (Himmelfit & Gaskell, 1990), which demands that the subject of interest in social psychology is not an isolated individual but a holistic social, economic or political phenomena. People, being elements of complex social phenomena, are also their constructors. Man and the social community cannot be separated, and human behavior should be studied in a sociocultural context, maintaining a historical perspective. Among other things, by taking into account worldview beliefs, social and cultural norms, and political preferences. Following societal psychology, we believe that all analyses presented in this text may complement political science explanations. Those that focus on the history of the Polish sociopolitical transformation after 1989 and those that concern more general phenomena occurring in contemporary Europe.

From the perspective of the past 30 years of Polish history, one can see the change of power in 2015 as an element of the dispute between two visions of the country’s development that have been going on for several dozen years. Searching for these disputes’ sources, many sociologists and political scientists pointed to the significant impact of the economic, institutional, and legal solutions adopted at the dawn of the system transformation in 1989–1990 (e.g., Barkowski, 2018; Grabowska, 2013; Jasiewicz, 2009; Król, 2015). Apart from undoubted achievements, they also noticed numerous disadvantages of the transformation, like the impoverishment of many social and professional groups, unemployment, reckless privatization of the state economy, weak public institutions. Most researchers saw the main problems of transformation in implementing an excessive dose of economic neoliberalism and unrealistic ideas about liberal democracy’s functioning. As to the potential remedy, critics saw it either in a significant correction of liberal policies (e.g., Król, 2015; Szahaj, 2006) or preferably in the renewal of the republican ethos and the ideals of the Solidarity (e.g., Krasnodebski, 2005).

The two competing recipes, liberal and communitarian, show that both forms of thinking about the Polish political community have ideological supporters and a long tradition. There is no significant dispute that after the systemic change in 1989, if the governing formations referred to Solidarity’s ideological heritage, it was primarily its liberal part. Communitarian elements, especially those relating to economic solidarity, were generally overlooked. The ideas of solidarity and self-governance, based on communal values, certainly did not gain enough support. Regarding this issue, Brzechczyn (2019) concludes, “It is difficult to say how the idea of the common good would be compatible with personal enrichment because no one seriously tried to discuss its assumptions” (p. 125). However, apart from utopian ideas (as ubiquitous self-governance), liberal and communitarian ideas of the Solidarity (1980–1989) and the ideological tensions between them survived in the programs of many political formations originating from this movement. Their echoes are still audible, among others, in the central political division between PO and PiS, lasting continuously since 2005 (e.g., Dudek, 2016). Moreover, as we argue in our article, they are noticeable in both parties’ psychosocial profiles (although our results indicate that communitarian voters are much more consolidated around PiS than liberal voters around PO).

We believe that in the Polish electorate analyses, one should consider some characteristic features sharpening the differences between people with a high level of liberal orientation and people with a high level of communitarian orientation (as these orientations were measured in our research). Different preferences in the domain of personal values are not the only psychosocial factors underlying the intensity and durability of the conflict between these groups. Some other studies—using a theoretical approach called Moral Foundations Theory (see Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Joseph, 2007)—point to moral preferences as the second important factor (Radkiewicz, 2019). These studies suggest that both mental patterns relate to different moral systems. “Double collectivists” base their moral judgments on the ethics of community (such as ingroup loyalty and respect for group authorities) and the ethics of individual welfare (care for others, fairness and reciprocity). In contrast, for “double individualists,” the only essential moral premise seems to be the ethics of personal freedom. The anti-egalitarian characteristics in Polish liberal electorate are also visible when they are set together with the research of Jonathan Haidt (2012) conducted in the United States. In American studies of liberals and conservatives, it turned out that the conservative worldview draws upon all five moral codes distinguished within the Moral Foundations Theory. For the liberals, only two
moral codes were necessary: care for others and fairness. Thus, American liberals moralize only the welfare of the individual, and the community’s welfare is, at most, a matter of social convention. In Polish research (which included the sixth moral code—personal freedom), communitarians revealed the same pattern of results as American conservatives (Radkiewicz, 2019). They showed a tendency to moralize in all possible dimensions of moral judgments. However, in contrast to the communitarian orientation, being highly on liberal orientation was only related to moralizing in the dimension of personal freedom, and unrelated to care for others and fairness. We can refer for a moment to two flagship works on liberalism that emerged in the 1970s, Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974). In our opinion, the empirical data we have collected suggest that the Polish liberal ethos is much closer to Nozick’s libertarian concept of liberalism than to the egalitarian concept postulated by Rawls.

The differences in moral preferences mean that various behaviors (e.g., criticism of traditional authorities or national history) can be seen as morally neutral by “double individualists” but as immoral and worthy of condemnation by “double collectivists.” On the contrary, many behaviors perceived as neutral by collectivists can meet with violent opposition from individualists, treating such behaviors as an attack on their freedom (e.g., displaying religious symbols in public spaces). Groups that operate in such different moral realities tend to enter into conflicts in which verbal, symbolic, or political “annulment” of the opponent (luckily not physical, yet) becomes a goal in itself (Haidt, 2012). The conflict is an even more natural consequence, as the Polish communitarian ethos seems firmly filled with traditionalist–conservative content. This version of communitarianism involves demonizing liberalism as a force that destroys a healthy and orderly Western civilization. Conservative traditionalists accuse liberals of promoting individualization, cosmopolitanism, and rationalism that destroy interpersonal bonds. In their eyes, liberals’ ideological pluralism, questioning of authorities, and rejection of divine laws lead to moral confusion and widespread anomy.

This traditionalist–conservative nature of Polish communitarianism is also noticeable in international research. In the theory of cultural change, Inglehart and Welzel (2005, 2010) distinguish two fundamental dimensions of cultural values: survival versus self-expression and tradition versus secularization-rationalism. Suppose one looks at the world’s map of cultural values developed based on Inglehart’s World Values Survey. Subsequent measurements show that from 1997 to 2014, Polish society’s position shifted remarkably toward postmaterialistic culture (self-expression). Speaking in the language of Inglehart’s theory, this means growing pressure on values that accentuate the quality of life, well-being of the individual, and personal self-realization. On the contrary, the same look at the map shows that Poland is one of the very few European countries where the so-called traditional values (religion, strong family ties, attachment to the national community) still play an authentic, culture-forming role.

However, this was still happening at a relatively high level of poverty, economic inequality, and social exclusion. The doctrine of financial discipline, savings, deficit reduction, and attracting foreign capital thanks to low labor costs was the dogma. To win the presidential and parliamentary election, PiS, as the main political force representing traditional cultural values, had to offer something no one had ever submitted. It was an egalitarian offer of large financial transfers to many social groups, combined with the promise of a significant increase in wages and consumption. What is more, in 2015–2019, the promised turn toward welfare has become a fact very much. In many Poles’ minds, welfare and social security began to be associated with the political community’s traditionalist–conservative form. The cases of the leftist parties (like Razem) that tried to combine economic left program (including social transfers to many disadvantaged groups) with socially progressive ideas (emphasizing the cultural diversity of society) fit well with this argument. Culturally and economically coherent leftist programs gain incomparably less support than the PiS program. In Polish reality, social security and assistance to underprivileged groups have been linked with traditionalist–conservative beliefs.

Finally, though our analyses focus on a psychological perspective, in our opinion, we can link them to some of the current political science debates. For example, recently, many political scientists (e.g., Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Teney et al., 2014) argued that profound social changes resulted from globalization (increasing of economic competition, international trade, and cultural diversity) and expanded EU authority met different reactions among EU citizens. Some people perceive these processes as broadening individual freedom and increasing the range of development opportunities. In contrast, others tend to see the same processes as a threat to national identity and a source of economic insecurity. Different reactions easily result in new conflicts that can deepen existing sociopolitical divisions, primarily when such divisions refer to so highly competitive political community models as in Poland.

Furthermore, Hooghe and Marks (2018), based on the cleavage theory (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), argued that expanded EU authority and increased international trade and migration resulted in the deep reconstruction of the political scene in many European countries. This reconstruction’s effect was emerging new political forces, putting the existing parties in the face of new cleavages. We believe this logic can be applied to our analysis as well. Different reactions to transnational policies might be the trigger that intensified the clash between liberal and communitarian orientations. Although the conflict between these visions of society was noticeable at the very beginning of the transition to democracy, over the years, it was rather subcutaneous and, in a way, covered by other, more cooperative goals of the main
political parties (headed by fairly concerted efforts to join the EU). As a result of debates on Poland’s position and future in the international geopolitical order, the hidden conflict gradually emerged as a front-line conflict. It created the power of the two most massive political formations today, PiS and PO (collecting a total of 70%–75% of electoral votes). PiS, at the end of the second decade of the XXI century, became a real hegemon among the more communitarian oriented people. In contrast, the PO should still be considered the most vital representative of a more liberal part of society.

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Supplemental Material
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