

## **Democratic principles and their fulfilment in Poland**

Understood narrowly, the term democracy refers to the way citizens choose their political representation. In general, however, especially in the current context, the definition of democracy is more extensive and far exceeds the procedural criterion.

In public opinion, the key features of democracy are the procedural aspects, such as free and fair elections (92% consider them very important for the state to be democratic), universal suffrage (86%), and the selection of the best people to govern (85%). Among the other fundamental attributes are: personal freedom (86%), freedom of expression and organization (76%) and equality, which includes not only equality before the law (88%), but also equal opportunities for education (87%). Responses indicate that the economic dimension of the functioning of a democratic state is also very important: financing of such areas as health care, education, culture (83%), government concern with well-being of citizens (80%) and the provision of adequate living conditions for the poorest (77%). The overwhelming majority of Poles recognize the responsibility of the state for the economic life of the country (75%), control of the government by independent courts (73%), civic participation in public life (72%), regular public consultation of important state decisions (70%) and parliamentary representation (70%). According to about two thirds of respondents, political pluralism is the cornerstone of democracy, that is, the ability to choose between programs of different groups (67%) and the rule of law (69%).

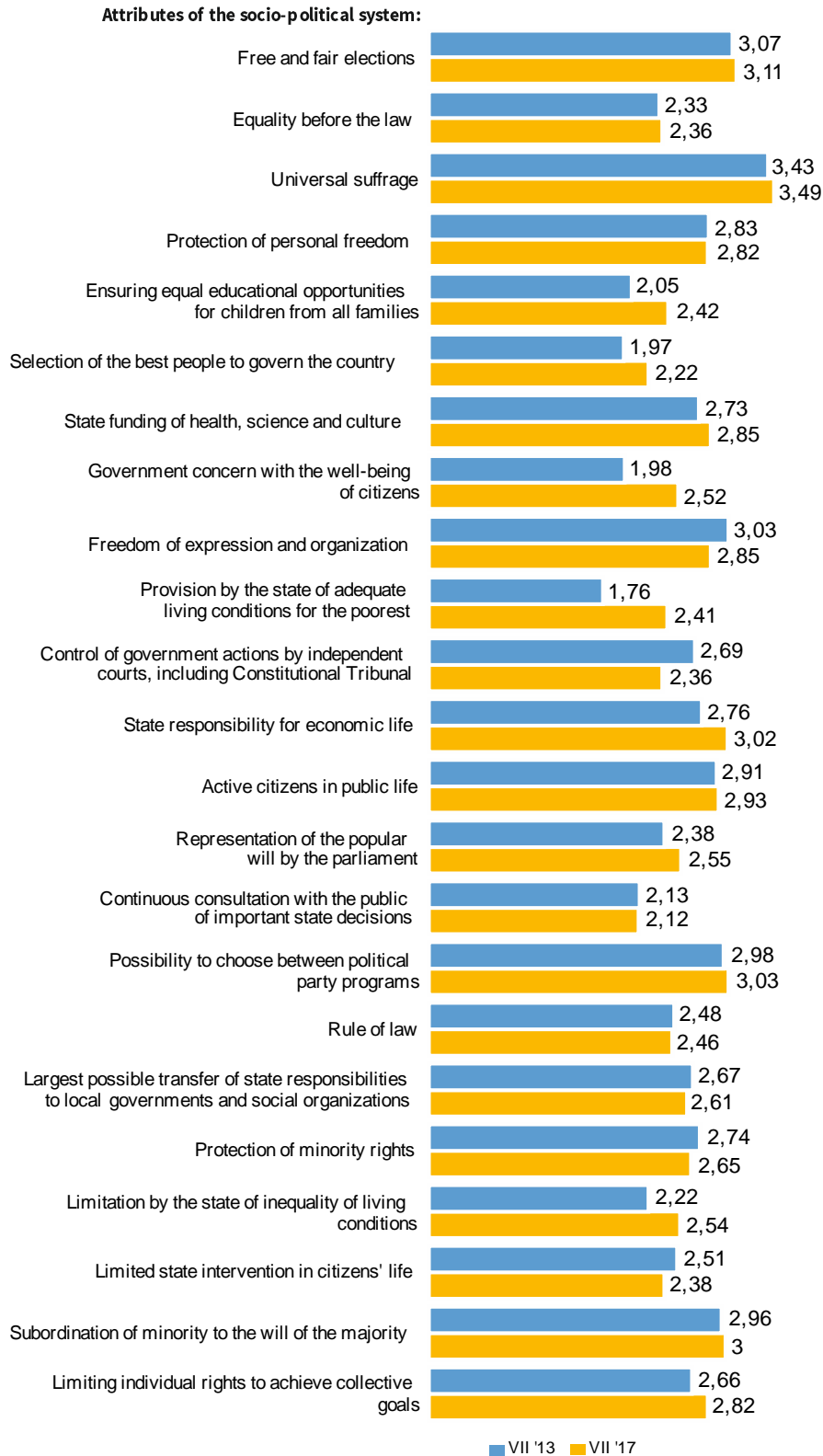
Not all the principles of democracy, in public opinion, are fulfilled in Poland. The following principles of democracy in Poland are insufficiently fulfilled: equality in the face of the law (55%), equal opportunities for education (52%), proper social policy towards the poorest (47%), selection of the best people to govern the country (55%), and consultation of important political decisions with the public (61%). A lot of people have reservations about the implementation of such principles as: controlling the activities of government by independent courts (42%), and the rule of law (46%).

Level of fulfilment in Poland	Significance of system attributes for defining it as democracy	
	Very important	Less important
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free and fair elections</li> <li>• Universal suffrage</li> <li>• Protection of personal freedoms</li> <li>• State funding for health, science, culture</li> <li>• Authorities concerned with the welfare of citizens</li> <li>• Freedom of expression and organization</li> <li>• State responsibility for economic life</li> <li>• Active citizens in public life</li> <li>• Representation of the popular will by the parliament</li> <li>• Choice between political party programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largest possible transfer of responsibilities to local governments and social organizations</li> <li>• Protection of minority rights</li> <li>• Limitation by the state of inequality of living conditions</li> <li>• Subordination of the minority to the will of the majority</li> <li>• Limiting individual rights to achieve collective goals</li> </ul>
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality before the law</li> <li>• Ensuring equal educational opportunities for children from all families</li> <li>• Selection of the best people to govern</li> <li>• Provision by the state of adequate living conditions for the poorest</li> <li>• Control of government activities by independent courts, including Constitutional Tribunal</li> <li>• Continuous consultation with the public of important state decisions</li> <li>• Rule of law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited state intervention in citizens' life</li> </ul>

Understanding democracy has not changed significantly in the last four years. Significant changes, not only in relation to the previous measurement but also to earlier ones, have been observed in the assessment of the implementation of certain democratic principles in our country. The economic involvement of the state and social policy are more often appreciated. The belief has strengthened that equal educational opportunities for all citizens are guaranteed, that the state finances important areas of life, reduces social inequalities, is concerned with the well-being of citizens, cares about the worst off and takes responsibility for the economy. Competence of the authorities and the representation of the popular will by the legislature are evaluated better than in previous years. Moreover, in the opinion of respondents, now more than previously individual interests are subordinated to pursuing collective goals, although this does not belong to the most essential criteria defining the democratic system. Compared with previous measurements, respondents less often believe that freedom of expression and association are protected in Poland, that the rights of minorities are protected, the state is trying to minimize interference with citizens' life and that government action is controlled by independent courts.

## Evaluation of the fulfilment of attributes of democracy in Poland

Average on a scale from 1 to 4. The higher the value on the scale, the better the perceived performance



More information about this topic can be found in CBOS report in Polish: "Principles of Democracy and Their Implementation in Poland", August 2017. Fieldwork for national sample: July 2017, N=977. The random address sample is representative for adult population of Poland.