The Fragmentation of Poland’s Political Party System

When Solidarity’s grand political coalition that had led the movement to its triumph in 1989 began what would be an irreversible process of disintegration by the end of the same year and when in 1990, the Mazowiecki and Walesa factions’ attempts to rebuild something resembling a scaled down version of a grand coalition failed, the Polish political party system began to take shape. The inability of the dominant post-Solidarity political factions to arrive at a compromise and to forge a governmental coalition resulted in the emergence of a rather paradoxical political arrangement. After a decade of spearheading political change in the Soviet-bloc countries, Poland’s transitional political institutions now seemed to lag behind developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Although the new president, Lech Walesa, gained office after winning a popular democratic election, the powers of his office were largely undefined or were roughly outlined by “round table” agreements that quickly became obsolete because of the collapse of the communist system and the subsequent dissolution of the communist party (PZPR) that was a signatory to the agreements. Moreover, it had been on the basis of these agreements that the partially pre-arranged and only partially democratic June, 1989, parliamentary elections had been conducted. As a reflection of these developments, already in 1990, the parliament had begun to be contemptuously labeled the “contract” parliament and was considered absolutely unsuitable for the task of designing a new constitution that would solve the fundamental questions of governance. Consequently, the “contract” parliament was a very weak institution, and was malleable in the hands of Poland’s dominant political quarters, including the president, his prime minister, the church and even the more dynamic of the emerging political parties. Moreover, since it had been the president and not parliament that had provided the true
backing for the 1991 Bielecki government, the Polish political system remained ill-defined during that period and the divisions of power blurred.

Such a situation was unacceptable for those who yearned for a truly democratic system and for those whose nationalistic pride was hurt by comparisons to political developments in neighboring countries. Above all, it was unacceptable from the point of view of the rapidly proliferating new political parties. While the “contract” parliament was filled by representatives of the already non-existent or disappearing parties and by representatives of coalitions that had already evaporated such as Solidarity’s “Lech’s Team,” many of the new emerging parties were either not represented at all or considered themselves to be insufficiently represented. Consequently, demands emerged for a new parliamentary election that would provide genuine representation and would serve as a legitimate forum for deliberations on a new constitution. For some, however, including the presidency and the presidency-backed government, this rather docile and, on balance, obedient parliament was viewed as a very convenient institution. Thus, although the president and his government had to pay some lip service to this condemnation of the “undemocratic” situation and had to try to appear to be pressing for new elections, in reality they procrastinated as much as they were able. The parliamentarians themselves seemed to enjoy their moment at the apex of political power—a position to which most of them were very unlikely to return—and so were not in any rush to dissolve their institution.

While in the short run it was possible to engage in procrastinating tactics to delay the new election, in the long run, the “contract” parliament was indefensible—in particular, because even its staunchest supporters politically could not afford to defend it too eagerly or too openly. The popular social desire for a “normal” democratic parliament and the pressure from the new parties were both so strong that even those among the new political elites who benefitted from the existence of the “contract” parliament found it necessary to engage in some ritual condemnations of this remnant of the communist past. Thus, two and a half years after its emergence and a year after the presidential election, the “contract” parliament was scheduled for dissolution and new parliamentary elections were to be held.

The decisions taken at this point concerning the rules governing the foundational parliamentary election were inevitably to influence greatly the early development of the post-communist political party system. This paper will explore the circumstances surrounding, and the reasons for, these fundamental political decisions, and their consequences for the emerging party system and Poland’s democracy.


What Kind of Election Rules?

Poland faced a political Rubicon: if the issue of calling the new parliamentary election was a foregone conclusion, the type of electoral system to be adopted remained a key problem to be solved. Superficially, the choice was rather limited: society could opt for either the American style, “winner-take-all,” parliamentary districts (such as the model used for the 1989 Senate elections), or a proportional system, or some combination of the two. Since Poland’s new elites were very strongly influenced by Western society, and in particular many new leaders outwardly considered themselves to be connoisseurs of and experts on the intricate workings of Western political systems, the most immediate reaction was an attempt to imitate the most successful among them.

Thus, in the early stages of the debate on the future political system, there were many proponents of the Anglo-Saxon, winner-take-all district system. Not only would such a system have put an effective brake on the rapid proliferation of political parties, but, above all, it would have reversed this process, resulting in the emergence of a stable two (or a very limited in number) party system. The temptation was strong since the Polish leaders feared not only the immediate consequences of the rapid proliferation of political parties, but also Poland’s memory of its own brief bitter and sobering experience with a system of proportional representation in the aftermath of World War I with its consequent political fracturing and instability. Moreover, the post-World War II Italian and Greek experiences with such a system were also considered to be a warning.

However, no matter how compelling the reasons for instituting a “winner-take-all” system, support for the approach quickly ebbed and the idea was eventually abandoned altogether. The reasons were twofold. First, the theme was stressed repeatedly that such a system would have excluded most of the newly formed parties from parliament. Were this to have occurred, some of these entities would have perhaps refused to fold and instead would have been likely to opt for some kind of extra-legal activity as a means of advancing their agendas, an outcome that was judged to be potentially very destabilizing and pernicious for Poland’s new democracy. This reason for dismissing the single member district option was repeated virtually as a canon of unshakeable belief, but it was in fact extremely speculative in nature as there was no real evidence to either prove or disprove such speculation at the time. The repeated insistence on this reason appeared thus to serve as a smokescreen for other motives rather than a genuine expression of political conviction.

The second reason for rejecting the single member district system was less openly touted, but instead tended to surface during the more jaundiced political debates and mutual exchanges of insults between the competing new elites. This reason was that in 1991, during the early stages of the party formation process when the new parties were beginning to emerge in a very chaotic and intrinsically insecure atmosphere, it was extremely difficult to judge the real electoral potential of these
Most of them believed that they were just entering a path of rapid and
dynamic expansion. Thus, even if the polls in a given month indicated that they
had only a smattering of popular support, the hopes were that with a few months
of rapid organizational advancement they would become substantial political
entities. Moreover, even those new parties that already were considered to be
relatively significant endured a roller coaster existence in the polls, in some months
appearing to be gaining ground and in others suffering substantial setbacks.16
Understandably, given the volatility of the political environment and the degree of
uncertainty facing all of the participants, many feared that a winner-take-all system
would be likely to push most of them prematurely off the political stage.

Many of these new leaders had already come to view themselves as permanent
and independent fixtures in Poland’s politics.17 In addition, it was difficult to
imagine that this large, diverse, atomized, and individualistic milieu would accept
absorption into a few large, disciplined and hierarchical parties. In this setting, the
almost unanimous, matter-of-fact, abandonment of the idea of embracing a system
that had a high probability of leading to their own political extinction was a logical
and predictable choice for Poland’s new political elites.

For most of the emergent parties, the system of proportional representation offered
reassurance that they would be likely to survive the parliamentary election. Initially,
Poland’s leaders indicated their desire to institute some kind of proportional system
that would emulate the most stable proportional systems, such as for example, the
German system that established a 5 per cent threshold, dramatically reducing the
number of parties capable of entering the parliament. However, the idea of instituting
a discriminating threshold was quickly discarded for basically the same reasons as those
behind the rejection of the single member district system.18 Since perhaps only the
Democratic Union (the UD) seemed confident of being able to clear such a threshold,
while virtually all of the rest—even the seemingly largest of them—might be excluded
from the new parliament, then the specter of extra-parliamentary political activity
conducted by excluded frustrated political parties was again resurrected to provide a
kind of ideological fig leaf for new elites eager to continue their political careers.

Since the 5 per cent threshold was absolutely unacceptable, a lengthy and very intricate
debate began on a more suitable threshold. In the course of the debate, the
participants entered a peculiar slippery slope: the 4 per cent threshold held basically
the same disadvantage as the 5 per cent level and was therefore similarly unacceptable;
however, a further lowering of the threshold to 3 per cent would be likely to
include a group of parties that were by now quite sure of clearing this barrier along
with an even larger group of parties that were in striking distance of the threshold.
This latter group began a dramatic clamor for still further lowering of the threshold
to ensure their participation in the future parliament.19 An inducement to this further

17. See also, Mariusz Janicki, “Troche Jasniej Na Słonie,” Polityka, No. 23 (June 8, 1991), p. 3; Bronisław
19. See also, Tadeusz Skutnik, “Znak Pylistej Rozpuchy,” Tygodnik Gdańsk, No. 45 (November 10,
Downacki, “Sojusze Prasowe,” Przegląd Tygodniowy, No. 23 (June 9, 1991), p. 4; and Janina Paradowska,
lowering was the fact that, as the number of “significant” players thus increased, so the larger of the parties involved could begin to look for potential allies among some of the smaller parties. Consequently, due to the obvious implications, even those larger parties that already felt assured of a role in the future parliament had some interest in supporting calls by the apparently more marginal parties to lower the threshold. However, the more the threshold was lowered, the larger grew the circle of marginal and insecure interests issuing demands for an even more inclusionary threshold. In turn, as more potential alliance configurations emerged, there was ever more reason for the larger of the parties to lobby on behalf of the widening circle of weaker parties. In the end, as a result of this process, the threshold was abolished entirely, clearing the way for parliamentary representation of even one deputy parties and ensuring most of Poland’s new parties a realistic hope of a political future.20

Throughout the period that the slippery slope of the proportional representation debate had been traversed, various paramount political leaders issued dramatic appeals for some kind of “mixed” system that would combine the advantages of both the “winner-take-all” and the proportional systems.21 However, it was significant that these calls never led to any serious debate of this possibility, a result that instead suggested that the political elites were actually more interested in fine-tuning a system of proportional representation to favor certain parties. For example, although the status and social recognition of Solidarity’s heroes had undergone a certain leveling off,22 there was still a general popular expectation that the paramount Solidarity leaders would act to influence the political building process in a way congruent with their past achievements, helping to create the legal foundations for a stable political system. Thus, while in reality developing a proportional system that was commonly understood as one inducing political instability,23 nonetheless, the paramount leaders from time to time issued dramatic statements expressing their desire to develop some kind of “mixed” system of representation that would be more likely to stem the tide of progressive political fragmentation.24 On the other hand, some parties, especially the UD, with its large number of popular leaders,25 tried to adulterate the basically straightforward proportional system with a peculiar quirk that would allow the voter to check individual names on the voting lists and hence allow the parties to cash in on the popularity of some of their leaders without, however, losing the reassuring benefits of the proportional system.26

As a result of a complex interplay of various interests, parliament’s electoral commission prepared a most unusual and peculiar set of electoral rules for the

upcoming parliamentary election that dramatically reflected, and at the same time contributed to further increasing, Poland’s political fragmentation. Beyond the lack of a threshold that would have modified this extreme proportional system, complex mathematical formulas were custom designed to, so to speak, “punish” the strongest parties in the election—ensuring that they would need a relatively larger ratio of votes to win seats than would the weaker parties. Thus, the curve according to which each of the seats would be distributed was flattened at the top and hence, tended to somewhat diminish the relative scope for victory of the strongest parties.

The Campaign

While the national debate on the merits and demerits of the “contract” parliament and the type of suitable electoral law provided the prelude to the upcoming parliamentary campaign, with the conclusion of these debates and with the setting of the date for the dissolution of the “contract” parliament, all those involved began to realize that this campaign would fundamentally differ from the previous year’s presidential campaign. To begin with, Walesa, now the president, had begun to dramatically alter his political role. In 1990 he had led a powerful political faction that included what would become in the following year a whole host of political parties. While, the issue of Walesa’s personal attributes and his suitability for office had been one of the key elements of the 1990 campaign during the 1991 campaign, this theme simply lost its relevance. Moreover, in the previous campaign, Walesa behaved as a quintessential coalition maker—actively working to bring various parties and movements into his coalition. However, in 1991, Walesa began to develop a completely different political posture—that of the ultimate political loner, a “master politician” who stood above the fray of mundane party politics. Although he could have easily formed a so-to-speak “presidential” coalition for the parliamentary election, he steadfastly rejected the persistent overtures from some candidates for a place in such a coalition. Instead, he isolated himself within a small group of increasingly more insular inside advisors and behaved as if he thrived amidst the growing political fracturing—attempting to play the various


parties against one another as pieces on a chessboard. All in all, Walesa apparently did not intend to be an active participant in the crystallization of the political party system and in the conduct of this parliamentary campaign. Consequently, the leaders of the incipient political parties had very few reasons to make Walesa a serious issue in the campaign. In 1991, only a very few political circles, especially that of Gazeta Wyborcza, sought to revive the previous year’s campaign, sometimes even bashing Walesa with escapist zeal and analysing his allegedly authoritarian actions with a somewhat paranoid preoccupation.

The other two key issues from the 1990 campaign—the collapse of Solidarity’s grand political coalition, and the belief in the rule of the best and brightest or the natural right of intelligentsia rule in post-communist Poland—also held very little relevance for the parliamentary campaign. The former was simply dying a natural death, while in the case of the latter issue, the 1990 crushing electoral defeat of the Mazowiecki faction that had in part based its bid for power on the belief in the rule of the best and brightest, led the faction’s inheritor, the UD, to instead represent itself as a purely managerial/pragmatic party. Still discreetly espousing a belief in rule by the best and brightest, the UD nonetheless opted to soft peddle the issue.

As a result, ideological matters became key components of the campaign. Increasingly, Poland’s crystallizing party system appeared to be distinctively ideologically based. Almost all significant political parties claimed strong allegiance to some kind of established ideology. Even the UD that proclaimed itself to be an anideological pragmatic/managerial coalition incorporating diverse ideological milieus, was in reality much more ideologically based than it fancied itself to be. Its anideological pose was mostly a pose designed to hide the fact that it was dominated by socialist/social-democratic milieus. Given the UD’s attempt to become a dominant mainstream party, its leaders calculated that an open espousal of leftist ideologies would constitute an electoral handicap.

Thus, while the scene was set for the parliamentary campaign to be dominated by in-depth debates and multifaceted ideological competition, the outcome was quite different. Attempts to seriously debate the ideological issues rapidly dwindled into exchanges of ideological name calling and otherwise very shallow, simplistic exchanges. This rather paradoxical situation resulted from the fact that the political leaders who were capable of engaging in ideological debates either chose to refrain from them or did not have serious opponents with whom to conduct such


38. See also, Antoni Szewd, “Czy Partie Polityczne Sa Polsce Potrzebne?” Tygodnik Powszechny, No. 6 (February 10, 1991), p. 3.


exchanges. More specifically, with the collapse of the Soviet system, both the post-communist leftists (SdRP) and the numerous Western style socialist/social democrats shied away from discussing the fundamental Marxist basis of their ideology, fearing the loss of their potential supporters. Instead, they either preferred to dwell on policy issues—such as the necessity for the state to support the social welfare network, to own certain industries, or to somehow control the market mechanism—or persistently tried to obfuscate their ideological stands.41

On the other hand, the debate on the other side of the ideological spectrum took on a peculiar character. To begin with, the fundamental ideological premises of conservative thought—such as the belief in the principles of the free market and free enterprise, a limited state role in socio-economic affairs, and the desire to imbue the society with Christian values—were apparently widely accepted.42 With no significant party openly questioning any of these fundamental principles, consequent efforts to engage in ideological debate tended to rapidly dissolve into policy disputes where the discussion of particular policy details took precedence over the more fundamental ideological issues. Moreover, the rapid proliferation of the self-proclaimed right wing, centrist, and Christian democratic parties crowded the right side of the political spectrum and even further oriented the campaign towards limiting the discussion to particular policy issues. Thus, given that these parties tended to routinely profess their adherence to the general and abstract cannons of right wing ideology, and the left either somehow accepted or did not dare to question these principles, the focus remained entirely fixed upon a narrowed set of policy options.

At the same time, this consensus on the fundamental ideological premises contributed to an increasing exchange of shallow and generalized political insults and accusations. The parties of the right urgently needed some formidable ideological adversary to help them anchor and solidify their own ideological platform, but the left’s failure to advance an agenda or to attack the conservatives denied the right wing parties their opposite pole—a formidable adversary. In addition, the repeated harangues directed against the former communist system—the great ideological adversary that had been useful until very recently—rapidly lost its appeal. Since a great lurking adversary was urgently needed and since the left was not of itself willing to play this role, the right wing parties nonetheless tried to force the left to play it. Exaggerated verbal attacks, outright insults, and tales of outlandish conspiracies were the main avenues used in an attempt to get the left to play the role of a hated adversary.43 In short, to give Poland’s political right wing a general sense of purpose, the enemy had been invented.

However unwittingly, the behavior of Poland’s right wing seemed to paraphrase Stalin’s theorem that held that the more a revolution becomes triumphant, the more the defeated class enemy must be curbed because of its intensified attempts

to restore the old system. Ultimately, however, no matter how energetic the exhibitions of anti-left animus, only modest responses were elicited from the left. Unnurtured by critical exchanges, these attacks soon became very shallow and ritualistic.

Another factor weakening the ideological crystallization of Poland's new party system lay in the apparent inability of most political leaders to properly discern the subtle and not so subtle differences between different ideologies. As a result, the parties stumbled into various ideological inconsistencies that rendered their party platforms either ideologically eclectic or outrightly confused.\(^4^4\) Thus, for example the apparently ultra-nationalistic, rabidly anti-communist, professedly right-wing KPN at the same time espoused a social agenda that included a whole host of social–democratic features.\(^4^5\) The incipient Christian-democratic parties and especially the PC and ZChN tended to support a similar fine mixture of political right wing ideals together with a nearly socialistic socio-economic agenda.\(^4^6\) Generally speaking, Poland's emergent version of conservative thought emphasized several political and cultural issues including anti-communism, nationalism, and proclamations of attachment to Catholicism, while the socio-economic agenda often had very little in common with conservatism or was outrightly imbued with socialist ideals.\(^4^7\) At the same time, the openly leftist parties tended to promote the capitalist system—with only limited modifications—as the goal of Poland's transformation, while focusing their efforts on the defense of the social welfare system and on a strong role for an activist government in the new Polish society.\(^4^8\) The importance of these issues on their own merits notwithstanding, the debate over them occurred in an ideologically confused and shallow, in fact virtually rootless, atmosphere.

In the absence of a convincing ideological debate and with the key issues of the 1990 campaign losing their relevance, the campaign began to be dominated by discussion of several hotly contested and difficult to resolve policy issues and by a search for various political scapegoats. One of the most heatedly debated policy issues was the question of revealing and somehow "punishing" the members of the former nomenclatura and the confidants of the communist secret police—policies that together were described by the right wing parties as a program of "decommunization."\(^4^9\) Another important issue was the speed and scope of privatization of state owned industries, with dramatic pleas from both right and left wing parties for the state to somehow save and reinvigorate crumbling and often obsolete branches of industry. Seldom, however, did these industrial debates establish more precise scenarios for such spectacular state-driven acts of economic


\(^4^7\) See also Teresa Bogucka, "Skrzek Rzeczywistosci," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, No. 262 (November 9, 11), pp. 8–9.

Still another keenly divisive issue was the role of Christian values and of the Catholic church in the new society. In addition, the permanent preoccupations of Poland’s intelligentsia, such as the place of Polish society in a united Europe, Poland as a bridge between the East and West, possible Western reactions to various Polish developments, and variations on themes concerning Poland’s socio-economic backwardness in comparison to Western achievements, continued to be richly debated during the campaign.

The Scapegoat

With the communist party relentlessly receding in time, Leszek Balcerowicz and his economic plan, implemented during the Polish post-communist transition, began to emerge as the favorite scapegoats of Polish politics. Indeed, Balcerowicz and his program became such favorite scapegoats during the campaign that, beside Walesa and his entourage, only one significant political party, prime minister Bielecki’s neo-conservative KL-D, supported this program. Even the former prime minister Mazowiecki’s UD (whose political circles had initially elevated Balcerowicz to the position of vice-prime minister and who had supported his plan) had by now developed “serious reservations” towards it. All other political parties used Balcerowicz as a whipping boy and engaged in more or less vociferous attacks on his plan.

Depending on the intellectual and educational level of the critics, and often on the level of their cynicism as well, these attacks took three basic forms. In the first, the very extreme of Poland’s politics has been traditionally reserved for rabid anti-Semites and these tended to conceptualize the Balcerowicz plan as the tool of an international Jewish conspiracy. Accordingly, Balcerowicz, viewed either as a Jew himself or in the service of such a conspiracy, had designed his plan to ruin Polish society and thus enable international Jewish capital to take it over. The second form of attack was akin to certain primitive conspiratorial theories of international political economy. In this image, Balcerowicz was depicted as an agent of international imperial capital—again his plan was designed to ruin the Polish economy, this time so that international financiers could move in and then seize control for a song.

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The third form of attack was both the most widely accepted and the most complex. According to this view, Balcerowicz was simply some kind of oaf whose foolishly incompetent plan had caused tremendous problems for the Polish economy. However, Balcerowicz’s detractors were hardly of one mind concerning the mistakes made: some charged that the process of privatization had proceeded too rapidly, while others complained that it had moved too slowly. This allegedly either too rapid or too slow course of privatization was said to be the cause of economic depression and of growing unemployment. To further complicate matters, privatization was either said to have proceeded too fast because the government was selling valuable state industries too cheaply, thus wasting the nation’s inheritance, or it was said to have proceeded too slowly because the foolish government was pricing worthless enterprises too high, thus preventing the infusion of vital private or foreign capital that would save them from their final demise. Moreover, the plan’s stringent monetarist policies, the government’s tariffs on foreign imports, its agricultural policies, and virtually all other aspects of its socio-economic program were criticized in a similarly contradictory vein.

The campaigning parties almost never offered any kind of comprehensive alternative economic program to replace the Balcerowicz plan. Instead, most commonly the attacks on the plan were supported by anecdotal reporting of individual examples of “missed” or “mishandled” chances followed by a promise that a given party’s leaders would be able to quickly remedy the situation by undertaking various dramatic alterations of the Balcerowicz plan. However, besides plentiful generalities and abstract statements, no details of such economic remedies were ever forthcoming. The only exception was the KPN’s calls for vigorous money-printing to induce a mega-inflation as a panacea (sic!) for Poland’s economic ills.

The Campaign and the Proliferation of the Small Parties

The generalistic tone of the campaign’s policy debate and the inherent ideological confusion that characterized the campaigning of the more established political parties provided a tremendous equalizer for the smallest and the newest parties. Neither a substantial party organization nor a lengthy political experience were needed to engage effectively in this type of campaigning. Any of the leaders from the newly emerging parties would be able to concoct a convenient ideological hodgepodge of borrowed ideals to serve as the party’s platform and to pontificate about general and abstract topics. Moreover, sharp criticism of various governmental policies and a line of attack on Balcerowicz would always find an eager listener. Finally, such a campaign would be easy to round out with the promise of a general socio-economic panacea that if applied by the party’s leader would invariably solve all of society’s problems.

Nonetheless, there was one important difference between the more substantial and significant parties and the new small ones: Poland’s roughly speaking approximately 15 larger parties typically could count upon devoted cadres, organizational

networks, experience, financial resources, and a more or less definite milieu of followers. As a result, they had the capacity both to deliver their message to their voters and to participate in the campaign debates. By contrast, most of the new rapidly proliferating tiny parties were derisively known as “couch parties,” i.e., they could organize their party congresses in someone’s private living room. Thus, with the exception of a few of those small parties that were led by some famous individuals who on their own were able to participate in national debates, many of these parties simply had no way of effectively delivering their message to their potential followers, nor did they have the resources or connections to participate in any kind of mass media debate.

It could be argued, therefore, that the process of Poland’s political fracturing and party proliferation had its natural limits in the material resources of the emerging political parties, e.g., the number of individuals capable of either becoming party leaders or activists, the amount of financial and material resources that could be attracted by political parties, and, finally, the number of significant milieus to be represented. Amidst Poland’s near extreme political fracturing and with each substantial constituency—the social-democratic, neo-conservative (at this time, in Poland usually called “liberal”), Christian-democratic, nationalistic, or peasant—represented by a number of significant parties, the human and material resources needed to create new viable parties began to be exhausted.

However, instead of bringing an inevitable end to most of these tiny new parties, paradoxically the parliamentary election actually gave them a new lease of life in that it offered them free access to a vital campaign resource that would otherwise have remained completely outside of their reach. This resource was an access to national TV: an equitable allotment of national TV time was assigned to each party that managed to register in any of the electoral districts. Of course such a crucial concession could not have been forced upon the government by the newly-formed tiny parties for they indeed were very weak and were usually without representation in the “contract” parliament or in the top governmental agencies. Instead, as was the case with that other factor vital for the survival of the tiny parties, the lack of a threshold in the proportional system, their free of charge access to national TV was the result of the approximately ten or so top parties having arrived at a workable agreement concerning the role of TV in the campaign.

Although the ten or so among Poland’s larger and more significant parties had the ability to marshall sufficient financial resources to allow them to purchase television airtime during the campaign, the state-run television was considered to be thoroughly controlled by the government. Accordingly, the political forces in the government were considered to have, and indeed did have the ability to influence television coverage of political events toward their own particular advantage. It was considered that since the prime minister was able to hire and fire top officials in the television bureaucracy, television tended to offer, on balance, a rather congenial
vision of governmental actions and of the parties that backed it. Under normal circumstances this was perceived as a gnawing annoyance and even a blatant unfairness, but during the campaign it could have been translated into a substantial advantage for the parties that controlled the government and hence television.

Thus those political circles that did not benefit from this situation, resented the unfair advantage given to their competitors and bitterly criticized and ridiculed this status quo. Consequently, all the significant parties united in their efforts to ensure some kind of equalizer with the "governmental" parties and the President who enjoyed *de facto* free access to television during the campaign. Thus the other significant parties pressed for and won an important concession—an allotment of free campaign time on national TV. At this point, however, the party system again stepped onto the "slippery slope" that had led it to avoid instituting a threshold in the proportional system. Specifically, the problem became that of setting some kind of discriminating limits for those parties that would and those that would not be allowed free access to television. Unable to establish such limits, the political elites decided to allow all parties able to get on the ballot in any of the districts to have an equal bloc of time on television for campaigning.

As was argued above, the kind of political debate and campaigning engaged in by the leaders of Poland’s significant parties could easily be imitated by most of the leaders of the plethora of tiny parties. Equal access to television further allowed them to appear, “shoulder to shoulder,” with the leaders of the major parties and permitted them to appear, for the less discriminating viewer, as if they were indeed somehow equal to the more established and substantial parties. Since their television appearances undoubtedly led some voters to cast their ballot in favor of some of these tiny, micro-parties, the situation contributed to the further fragmentation of Poland’s party system.

The Extremists and the Cranks

The free access to television not only helped many tiny parties to anchor themselves on the political stage, but also, produced a major embarrassment for Poland’s emerging democracy. Just as in established democracies, Poland’s emerging democracy provided a convenient stage for the so-to-speak politically psychopathic elements to convene organized activities. Whether harmless political cranks (such as the case with the initial version of the Polish Party of the Friends of Beer before it was hijacked by entrepreneurial elements, or some “parties” devoted to sexual matters), or harmful ones (such as the fascist, chauvinist, or anti-Semitic groupings) these parties tended to be very tiny and with extremely limited organizational possibilities. Normally, it was the wildly extravagant political rhetoric that put them on the political map by causing either social amusement or revulsion.


67. Such as for example the “Police Party” that was organized by a splinter group within the Police Labor Union (sic)—Marcin Meller, “Partia Policyjna,” *Polityka*, No. 37 (September 14, 1991), p. 3.
Usually, however, except at times of general social upheaval and transition when fascistic or xenophobic movements may gain wide popularity, they involve tiny groupings of frustrated or psychotic individuals. While vast sectors of Polish society yearned for some exotic political 'savior," such as Stan Tyminski, and appeared to be prone to swallowing various demagogical arguments, there was still no substantial clientele to support well defined extremist ideologies such as fascism or chauvinist nationalism. Although certain substantial parties such as the Party X and the KPN did smuggle some elements of the extremist ideologies into their programs, when confronted about it they tended to hotly deny such accusations. All in all, the openly declared programmatic extremists emerged in Poland just as they emerged in other democratic systems, but they have remained confined to the remote social margins populated by tiny and poorly organized groupings.

However, since most of these groupings were able to secure the relatively limited number of signatures required to qualify for ballot registration, even if in only one or a few of the electoral districts, then, under the TV-sharing agreement, they also were entitled to their slice of time on national TV. As a result, those parties of extremists and harmless cranks that would otherwise be organizationally and financially incapable of reaching the average voter, were given an opportunity to deliver their message. Thus, an already difficult campaign was saddled with three rather surreal elements: the outrageously hateful, the comic, and the pathetically incompetent.

Predictably, the hate groups delivered their paranoid miasmas. The comic element induced an assortment of political pranksters arguing that Poland's solutions could be found in beer, sex, or perhaps holistic healing. The pathetically incompetent element consisted of tiny ad hoc, de facto leaderless parties created just before the election that neither had any sufficiently qualified individuals to speak in public nor even a coherent message to be delivered. Thus, for example, voters were treated to some overwhelmed individuals who nervously muttered incoherent arguments, and in another instance to someone who had absolutely nothing to say but instead waved pieces of bread and sausage as a testimony of the merit of his party's agricultural program.

All in all, what belonged on, and under normal circumstances would have remained on, the most obscure, esoteric and distant margins of political life was brought into center stage. Predictably, the public reacted variously with outrage, amusement, or boredom, but more importantly, the lingering effect of this spectacle was to tarnish the social image of democratic politics, an outcome that undoubtedly contributed to the growing fractiousness on the Polish political scene. After all, while the plethora of more significant lesser political parties earnestly campaigned to bring their message to the electorate, their leaders plowing through the various ideological inconsistencies of the parties' platforms, and while they tried to cope with both their political opponents and the overwhelming difficulties of the historical transition, they also had to perform shoulder to shoulder with political cranks, buffoons, and lunatics. As a result, in the general social perception, the campaign was somewhat cheapened and even took on some comical overtones. More ominously, a few serious voices expressing doubt about the future of Poland's

democracy began to be heard, reflecting the gradual erosion of social respect for democratic institutions.

Finally, this political fractiousness began to systematically feed on itself and hence to produce further increasing fractiousness. A phenomenon described in Sartori’s model of an extreme multi-party system had begun to materialize. Each major ideological position was represented by a number of parties of varying importance. With a cluster of ideologically similar parties competing for the same voter, they began to perceive of themselves as each others’ main adversaries. As a result, parties within the same ideologically camp began to viciously attack each other, while attempting to lure potential voters to their particular banner. Altogether, instead of forming even loose Christian democratic, neo-conservative, or social-democratic coalitions that would perhaps serve as a basis for forming large national parties in Poland, the campaign tended to deepen divisions among the ideologically similar parties.

The Fragmented Political System

The 1991 parliamentary election and campaign resulted in a deeply divided and fragmented parliament. The system of extreme proportional representation allowed 29 parties to send their representatives to parliament’s most important lower chamber, the Sejm. The two so-to-speak co-winners of the election, the UD and the post-communist SdRP, achieved approximately 12 per cent of the seats each, and the eight remaining significant parties averaged from 3 per cent to 8 per cent of the seats, while an array of even smaller parties counted victories that ranged from one seat to up to 3 per cent of the Sejm’s seats. The consequences stemming from this could be divided into two categories: the immediate “operational” consequences, and the long-term “structural” consequences.

The most apparent immediate consequences of the political fractiousness was the difficulty in arranging a workable governing coalition. Not only were the memories of the bitter and divisive campaign still very fresh and the wounds scarcely healed, but also at the time, the two largest parties in parliament, the UD and the SdRP, were de facto shunned by the rest. For all significant parties, it was unacceptable at that time, and continued to remain unacceptable, to enter into any open alliance with or even to officially cooperate with the SdRP as the heir to the defunct communist party (PZPR). Instead, with only limited sub rosa and ad hoc voting alliances occurring from time to time, the SdRP became a political pariah.


The animus of most other political party leaders against the UD, on the other hand, was caused by a combination of hurt feelings, resentment, envy, and general political insecurity that seemed to be prevalent among the callow elites of the new parties. To begin with, although the UD with its 12.3 per cent of the vote, seemed to be the relative “winner” of the electoral contest, it had in fact suffered a devastating defeat. Throughout the campaign, the UD had expected to win at least a quarter of the vote and had expected to become a dominant political party able, in the conditions of political fragmentation, to forge a limited governmental coalition. Hoping for such an electoral victory, the UD underplayed its ideological left-wing social-democratic character and brandished its tiny right-wing faction to represent itself as a broad coalition capable of attracting diverse social milieus.77 Thus, while underplaying its ideological roots, the UD instead tried to represent itself as a party of purely pragmatic and meritocratic social interests, a source of competent leadership that would be capable of leading society through its historical transformation. At the same time, however, the UD openly disclaimed the political and managerial ability of its competitors, and depicted itself as the bastion of competence and merit, the leaders of other parties being dismissed as overambitious upstarts.78

Moreover, many among the most famous and outstanding leaders of the former Solidarity’s intelligentsia wing had joined the UD, strengthening the party’s claim to be the undisputed heir to Solidarity’s most lofty intellectual traditions. The leaders of competing parties were cast either as isolated malcontents and dispersed remnants of the grand movement or as unknown upstarts with little if any connection to the Solidarity struggle. To add insult to injury, in what proved to be a major political liability, the UD implicitly represented, and also was commonly perceived to be the representative of, the traditional Warsaw political elite and its Warsaw-centrism in a society where Warsaw comprised only about 5 per cent of the total population and where its elites tend to be distrusted in the provinces. Consequently, throughout the campaign, the UD was resented by all other parties and attacked with gusto for all its real or imaginary sins, such as leftism, elitism, intellectualism, appropriation of the Solidarity mythology, Warsaw-centrism, anti-Catholicism, and so on.

Thus, by the conclusion of the campaign, resentment of the UD was so strong that in the aftermath of the election virtually all other parties refused to include it in a governmental coalition even though on the face of it the UD’s commitment to a centrist, anideological pose could have made it an ideal candidate for inclusion in a coalition.79 Moreover, the original anti-UD animus was so strong that the other significant political parties sought not only to shun and isolate it but indeed to openly humiliate it in public. Such a humiliation was delivered in December, 1991, when President Lech Walesa asked Bronislaw Geremek, one of the key UD leaders, to form a government coalition. The other parties officially refused to negotiate with him thus forcing Geremek to resign his mission after only three days.80

77. See also, Voytek Zubek, “The Rise and Fall of the Rule by Poland’s Best and Brightest” op. cit., note 37.
While for the time being the assorted party-leaders achieved moral and political satisfaction by putting the UD in its place so-to-speak, the arithmetic of potential governing coalitions proved to be quite peculiar. Not only were the two largest parties de facto shunned, but also the third largest party, the peasant-based PSL was not considered at the time to be an appropriate member of a governmental coalition. As the heir of the ZSL, a subservient member of the former communist PZPR-led ruling coalition and also as a party of distinctively non-Solidarity background, the PSL was eyed with suspicion by the post-Solidarity parties. Thus, if to the 33 per cent of parliamentary seats that were controlled by these three marginalized parties there is added another approximately 15 per cent of seats that were occupied by small parties considered either so extreme that they could not be invited into a governmental coalition at all or (as was the case with the KPN that actually won 7 per cent of the vote) considered to be extremist in its nationalism and ideologically erratic to the point that it could be a member of a coalition as long as its representatives agreed not to aspire to significant ministerial positions in return for a party’s support, then it is clear that only about half of the parliamentary representatives were deemed truly capable of forming a governmental coalition. However, even among this “capable” half of the parliament, the political rivalries were so strong and the ideological differences so wide that the formation of a government seemed an unlikely proposition.

With the growing possibility of some extraordinary solution, such as Presidential rule—Walesa as both the President and prime minister—or the formation of an extra-parliamentary cabinet of “experts” that would be underwritten by the President, or the calling of a new election, a new prime minister-nominee, Jan Olszewski, supported by a coalition that was not able to secure even 50 per cent of parliamentary support, virtually bluffed his way into parliamentary acceptance. Capitalizing on his fame as an historical figure in Poland’s dissident movement, as the most famous lawyer-defender of the many political trials, and taking advantage of the extreme political fractiousness of the new parliament, Olszewski managed to obtain a supportive vote for his government based on a minority parliamentary coalition.

Born amidst political risk-taking and high stakes gambling, the new government was anchored on a weak, shifting, and insecure coalition, and political bluffing and posturing became its virtual trademarks. The driving force of this minority coalition was the relatively small, nationalist and Christian-democratic ZChN that had actually won merely 8 per cent of the electoral vote. However, despite its weakness, the ZChN leaders began to behave as if they had achieved a massive electoral victory and in fact possessed a mandate to lead Poland’s transformation.
relatively small party neither possessed adequately trained cadres to staff the ministries dealing with matters of economic transformation nor, in fact, did its activists seem particularly interested in such matters. Instead, these ministerial positions were "farmed out" to other parties of the governing coalition, while the ZChN itself began to focus its attention on the social and cultural aspects of Poland’s transformation.86

As a result, the new government exhibited a passive attitude towards, and a rather limited resolve to deal with, economic matters. At the same time, the deeply fractured parliament showed no likelihood of becoming a source of strong economic leadership. Consequently, the dynamic of Poland’s economic transition began to fizzle away during the half-year tenure of the Olszewski government. On the other hand, however, despite its electoral campaign threats in the autumn of 1991, the new government was both too weak and managerially too inept to actually substantially alter or derail the Balcerowicz program of economic reform. Instead, Poland’s markedly slowed economic transformation seemed set to continue, fueled by the sheer force of the dynamic that had been acquired in the previous period.87

With ZChN energies focused on social and cultural matters, governmental officials began to spearhead in parliament and in the mass media heated debates on assorted moral, social and cultural issues such as abortion, divorce, religious instruction in school, the nature of the church and state division, the obscenity laws, the role of women in the family and society, and, with growing intensity, the issue of "decommunization," i.e. the appropriate administrative and legal restrictions and controls to be imposed on former members of the nomenclatura and secret police.88

While the ZChN-led government seemed to be on its way to readying society for a fundamental cultural revolution,89 resentment of its policies and leadership began to grow among the non-governmental parties. Alarmed either by ZChN’s aggressive socio-cultural designs or by its economic ineptitude or by both these factors, the non-governmental parties began to shift politically. First, the anti-UD animus began to subside, in part because other parties had been satisfied with the performance of the UD within its marginal political role and in part because their prior resentment of the UD had begun to be overshadowed by the current exploits of the ZChN.90 Second, with the UD gradually returning from political “banishment,” an anti-ZChN coalition began to take shape. Consequently, the ZChN-led government position began to be politically precarious. In Poland’s parliamentary system, a no-confidence vote could bring the instant collapse of a government that, like the Olszewski government, was supported by merely a minority coalition to begin with. Thus, possessing enough votes to be able to dispose of the Olszewski government,

the incipient opposition coalition waited only for an opportune moment to accomplish its goal.

Unable to extend the governmental coalition, Olszewski and the leaders of ZChN tried to save their government by attempting to intimidate the opposition through a peculiar political campaign—the government decided to bank its future on instigating a widespread “decommunization” campaign that would somehow implicate most of the government’s opponents as former communist activists, sympathizers or police confidants. Although in principle all quarters agreed that former secret police agents should be prevented from holding administrative positions, an operational definition of a secret police agent or confidant was not easy to establish. While a substantial portion of the secret police archives were purposefully destroyed during the 1989 transition, the remaining files either implicated unimportant members of the secret police establishment or revealed statements signed by former dissidents during their past imprisonment promising responsible behavior and cooperation. However, since in most cases such promises had been coerced, they had failed to result in any serious cooperation with the secret police by these individuals. On the other hand, many members of the new political elites—including a whole host of the most prominent of Solidarity’s leaders—were in the past either pedestrian party members or even middle-level activists.

Thus, the Olszewski government decided to launch an extensive “decommunization” campaign that would cow its political opponents and prevent them from challenging the government. The government’s orchestration of this growing campaign of psychological intimidation galvanized the opposition parties. With the President, Lech Walesa, and the leaders of the parliamentary opposition becoming increasingly more hostile toward the government, a powerful anti-governmental coalition had consolidated even further, and the political position of the government became even more precarious.

All in all, the immediate consequence of the political fragmentation was to create an atmosphere of political insecurity and fluidity. The weak minority-based parliamentary governing coalition was created only with great difficulties and soon faced an emerging challenge from a large opposition coalition that appeared to have sufficient strength to topple the government at any time. However, at the same time, the opposition coalition itself was rife with internal competition and political intrigue, with its own constituent elements engaged in virtually day-by-day realignments and political infighting.

The New Weltanschauung

If the immediate consequence of the political fragmentation was the emergence of a new political world in Poland, one bustling with political insecurity, shifting political coalitions, and a marked weakening of political leadership over Poland’s economic transformation, then it also began to produce some structural changes within the body of Poland’s politics that promised to solidify and perhaps institutionalize the political fragmentation into a permanent feature of society. The most

vital, although at first sight seemingly least dramatic, development was a gradual change in the *weltanschaung* of Poland’s new elites. With the disintegration of the communist system, the new post-Solidarity political elites considered this period of rapid socio-economic change to be an excellent opportunity to build new solid socio-economic foundations for Poland’s future and sought as well to erect a democratic system in Poland that would best serve the long-term goals of Poland’s transition.

Since it was intrinsic in the ethos of Poland’s intelligentsia to consider itself a “westernizing” milieu—its leaders invariably tended to view themselves as the ultimate connoisseurs of Western democracy—the desire of Poland’s new post-communist elites was to import and transplant into Poland the best aspects of the established Western democratic systems. The goal of this borrowing and transplantation was to create a stable, preferably two party or limited multi-party, system that would be anchored in a new state-of-the-art constitution that would clearly delineate a division of powers and define the most basic political institutions. During the 1989–1991 period, Poland’s elites engaged in extensive debate on the creation of such a political system and on the merits and demerits of various well-established Western political systems.

However, the intellectual and idealistic inclinations of the intelligentsia leaders were not congruent with the dynamics of Poland’s socio-economic transformation which actually pushed the system in the opposite direction, i.e. toward political fragmentation. Even during the 1991 parliamentary campaign that further heightened the degree of political fragmentation, many post-solidarity leaders still expressed hopes and desires for a stable, balanced political party system that would be based upon a few large parties. Despite the rapidly unfolding process of political fragmentation, these leaders hoped that the election would bring victory only to a few parties and that this new status quo would be somehow institutionalized. The outcome of the electoral contest, however, shattered such hopes. Instead, the Solidarity leader’s worst nightmare was being realized—a fragmented political system, similar to the one that had plagued the early years of post-World War I Poland and that had emerged in many poor capitalist societies, was now crystallizing in Poland. The hope of emulating the best ideals of Western society was being abandoned.

As the shock and recognition of these depressing developments set in, the political elites responded not only with disgust and resentment, but also with a promise to push for radical change. Calls were heard for a new parliamentary election based on different rules in order to create a new constitution that would reverse the process of fragmentation and perhaps to form some broader political coalitions that would be capable of reversing the trend.

However, the initial post-electoral explosion of disgust yielded little effect and as time wore on the political elites apparently became more and more reconciled to it. Consequently, debate about reforming the political system subsided, largely as a result of the realization that the systemic process of political fragmentation was

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not going to be reversed merely because of the disapproval of even the most prominent of leaders. Moreover, it became increasingly apparent that the political elites had begun to become accustomed to the new reality and that they had found that they could function and even thrive in it.

The New Institutions

Beside the gradual change in the weltanschauung of Poland's new elites—their apparent stoic reconciliation with the permanence of political fragmentation—the political process began to institutionalize itself through the emergence of new political institutions that were both spawned by the political fragmentation and strengthened it even further. For example, leadership positions in the new parliament and in the government began to rapidly proliferate to satisfy the need to reward the numerous small parties' elites with appropriate positions in return for their participation in various coalitions. Thus, in addition to the speaker of the parliament, five vice-speakers positions were created to satisfy virtually every significant party. The number of officially sponsored and supported parliamentary clubs increased so rapidly as to allow even the smallest parties to develop a strong bureaucratic anchor in parliament. Even more drastically, the number of ministries, vice-ministries, and other important governmental positions multiplied dramatically. In fact, Poland had developed one of Europe's largest governments which included a number of ministries that had virtually doubled their spheres of competence and even included ministers without ministerial offices. As a result, every party that wanted to join the governmental coalition could be richly rewarded with "important" governmental positions.

Altogether, the Sejm and Senate with their extensive bureaucratic staffs and the bloated government were able to absorb virtually all the leaders of the significant parties, i.e. those capable of winning parliamentary representation, and hence to afford them substantial full time remuneration and the assorted perks that came together with these offices. Thus, the fragmented political system proved capable of an extensive distribution of political power and material perks and of satisfying the participating elites to the point that yearnings for a different, more concentrated political system largely dissipated, becoming only ritualistic in character.

The Fragmented System's Baptism of Fire

The true test of the working of the fragmented political system, and its "baptism of fire," came during the politically turbulent summer of 1992. The economic ineptitude of the Olszewski government, combined with its growing activism in orchestrating a kind of right-wing cultural revolution in Poland, encouraged the hostility of the other political quarters toward the government to grow and soon a formidable coalition was formed, supported in principle by Walesa, which waited for an opportune moment to stage a vote of non-confidence. At the same time, the initially weak party coalition which had supported the government shrank even further.


because of the many defections caused by the political controversies stirred by the increasingly more confrontational government.

Attempting to prevent its inevitable parliamentary ouster, the dominant faction in the government (which included Olszewski himself, interior minister Macierewicz, the defense minister, vice-ministers Parys, Szeremietiew, and Sikorski, and the state security chief Naimski, among others) decided to play *va banque* by cowing their opponents into submission. As explained above, they began to imply that on the basis of the contents of the former secret police archives they had detected a monstrous communist conspiracy present among Poland’s elites. These elites allegedly had been infiltrated by former secret police agents and confidents who were now getting ready to take over. Since the first step toward such a takeover would be the dismissal of the Olszewski government, it was implied that behind the political coalition readying itself to dismiss the government were just such sinister forces. In the same vein, Walesa, now implied to be one among such former policy confidents, was alleged to be prepared himself to stage a military *coup d’état*.97

However, instead of cowing their opponents, this psychological assault only speeded up the dismissal of the Olszewski government. Walesa himself appeared in parliament to lead the vote of non-confidence that ended the tenure of the Olszewski government.98 At the same time that the government’s ouster proved to be a political triumph for the new governing coalition and for Walesa, it also posed a challenge to Poland’s incipient democracy in that the isolated Olszewski group that had by then begun to lose even the support of the divided ZChN itself attempted to cling to power through extra-legal means and, in fact, itself tried to stage a kind of *coup d’état*. On June 4, while desperately trying to postpone the inevitable vote of no-confidence, the defense minister ordered the Warsaw military garrison into battle readiness, and the government began to spread rumors about various suspicious events such as the supposed arson of forests in the vicinity of the capital that would require some special governmental action. In addition, the interior minister began to chaotically circulate even the most irrelevant and dubious information gathered from the archives of the former secret police that would vaguely implicate a number of prominent politicians as former confidents of the police.99 Further, this so-to-speak “jacobin” faction of the government began to behave in a most bizarre and menacing way in parliament—typified by Macierewicz’s roaming the chambers accompanied by a slew of his bodyguards.100

When even these demonstrations did not succeed in stemming the no-confidence procedures, prime minister Olszewski abruptly left parliament to deliver (simultaneously on both channels) a nationally televised speech to the nation calling for popular demonstrations of support for his government. Although one may concur with Jacek Kuron’s observation that this particular attempt at a *coup d’état* was a farce, for it was based on pure bluff without even the slightest chance of success,101 nonetheless it could be argued that it was the strength of Poland’s political system

100. See also, Miroslaw Cielemecki, “Te Oczy...,” *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, No. 31 (August 2, 1992), p. 8.
that made this attempt so pathetically weak and buffoonish. After all, the commander of the Warsaw military garrison simply disregarded the bizarre order calling for “battle readiness,” while most of the mass-media ridiculed the alarmist information about various conspiracies and the population itself completely ignored Olszewski’s last minute appeal for extra-legal support. Finally, even the guard in the interior ministry refused to allow the just dismissed Macierewicz to enter the gate, despite his banging on the door and his imploring and threatening.

The next challenge to the fragmented political party system came from Walesa himself who decided to weaken the post-Solidarity elites’ virtual lock on the government by trying to force the prime ministerial candidacy of the post-communist peasant party, the PSL leader Pawlak. Again despite Pawlak’s youthful appeal, his non-involvement with the previous system, his commonly acknowledged managerial skills, and the importance of his relatively large party together with the support of Walesa himself, the coalition of the post-Solidarity parties prevented him from forming a government\(^\text{102}\) and subsequently put together a coalition arrangement to gain parliamentary approval for Halina Suchocka as a new prime minister.

**Conclusion: The Triumph of the Fragmented System**

The formation of the Suchocka government signified the stabilization and maturation of Poland’s fragmented political system. Both the person of the prime minister herself and the make-up of her cabinet were the products of very complex bargaining and a mutual accommodation process that ultimately satisfied the demands of, as well as strengthened and further institutionalized, the fragmented political system. Thus, to participate in the governing coalition, each party had to offer significant concessions to placate the other coalition partners. To begin with, the largest and the most envied party of the coalition, the UD, was given the prime ministership but this was not to be occupied by any of its most famous leaders such as Mazowiecki, Kuron, Geremek, or Hall. Instead, the little known Halina Suchocka from the small Christian-democratic faction of the party became prime minister. In a similar vein, the ZChN rid itself of its most militant leaders such as Macierewicz and, brandishing a new image, re-entered the governing coalition. For its part, the business-oriented KL-D had to modify its stand on economic matters under pressure from organized labor interests and the peasantry.

Suchocka’s government in many ways reflected the growing institutionalization of Poland’s political fragmentation and the increase in government employment rolls to satisfy patronage requirements.\(^\text{103}\) While the managerial and political merits of Suchocka herself were loudly and proudly touted by the coalition,\(^\text{104}\) the distribution of political positions in the new government was guided by distinctive political, and not merit, considerations.\(^\text{105}\) Moreover, the broad mosaic of ideologically

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\(^{103}\) See also Jolanta Makowska, “Ruchome Piaski,” *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, No. 35 (August 30, 1992), p. 3.

\(^{104}\) For example, Stanislaw Podomski, “Dama z Busola,” *Polityka*, No. 29 (July 18, 1992), p. 3; Andrzej Zieba, “Dama Na Scenie,” *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, No. 29 (July 19, 1992), pp. 1 and 5.

disparate political parties that formed the coalition behind the Suchocka government was inherently fluid and rife with latent conflicts. Consequently, while the modest and professional behavior of the new prime minister and her cabinet did not seem to cause much additional resentment either outside the governing coalition or within it, as had been the case with the Olszewski government, nonetheless, support for the government was shallow and depended on the durability of a broad and inherently unstable coalition.

The weaknesses of the Suchocka government and the coalition behind it notwithstanding, the relative stability and effectiveness of this government even further strengthened the new weltanschauung of Poland's political elites, one that was stoically reconciled with the state of political fragmentation. Most importantly, political fragmentation had not led to the dreaded political chaos. Governments with complex and shifting coalitions of small parties behind them proved capable of discharging their basic administrative duties and a balanced and predictable political equilibrium had gradually crystallized. Moreover, the fragmented system proved capable of absorbing or coopting those political movements that originally were threatening to stability. Thus, from what was once a powerful extremist movement, Tyminski's Party X was transformed into another small party with the potential to at best become a medium-sized party—one that in the politics of the new Poland amounted to potentially 5 to 7 per cent of electoral support. In a similar vein, the extremely nationalistic and ideologically eclectic KPN with its militaristic yearnings began to lose the capacity to ever become more than a medium-sized party. Further, the Olszewski group of latter-day right wing jacobins was quickly reduced from a powerful governmental role to merely another small—but very vocal—party of the extreme right. Finally, the extremist-revolutionary parties of the right and left remained hopelessly divided and tiny, and without any real potential to challenge the system.

With the collapse of Solidarity's grand political coalition, the post-Solidarity leaders yearned to form another powerful movement capable of providing Poland with a strong government. In the opinion of most political leaders, Poland needed a strong government not only to lead it through the unfolding historical socio-economic transformation, but also to protect it from what was originally perceived as assorted international and domestic dangers: to the East, Poland's new elites feared a rapid revival of Russian or Soviet imperialism that would threaten to subjugate the society again; also, to the East, the elites feared that the progressive disintegration of the Soviet empire would lead to civil wars, to instability, and to massive migrations from Ukraine, Byelorussia and Lithuania that would "swamp" Poland; to the West, on the other hand, the Polish elites feared the unrestrained economic competition that could eventually lead to a permanent state of dependency; finally, on the domestic front, it was feared that the fragmented political system might invite chaos and eventual dictatorship from either the left or the right. However, while Poland's political fragmentation proceeded, this feared assortment of other dangers did not materialize and virtually withered away. Without either profound

106. See also, Janina Paradowski, "Gra W Zalozenia," Polityka, No. 42 (October 17, 1992), p. 5.
108. See also, Piotr Kwiatkowski, "Wylamwanie Palcow," Przegląd Tygodniowy, No. 42 (October 18, 1992), p. 10–11.
international or domestic challenges to spur the post-Solidarity elites to undertake
dramatic efforts to form a powerful government, the process of political fragment-
tation came to be viewed de facto as a permanent fixture of Poland's politics.

The growing permanence of the political fragmentation seemed to be confirmed
by the failure of recent attempts to build larger political coalitions. While virtually
all of Poland's significant parties could be divided into three ideological groups—
social-democratic, peasant, and Christian-democratic/nationalist—and while within
these groups the parties would be virtually ideologically indistinguishable, some of
the respective political leaders were understandably tantalized by the prospect of
uniting these groups into massive powerful parties. At the same time, however, the
mutual hostility and rivalries between the leaders of those small parties that could
conceivably be united within such groups seemed to be very strong. Thus, the few
efforts launched to build party-like coalitions (blocs) within these groups were
somewhat akin to Szwejk's going to war—the efforts produced results that were the
opposite of what was intended and unification efforts themselves bred further splin-
tering and spawned the emergence of new small parties. For example, on the left
of the ideological spectrum, the tiny social democratic parties that attempted to
unite themselves into a larger bloc ended up creating another small party while
splintering some tiny ones even further and failing to attract the interest of the
main social-democratic parties, the SdRP and the UD.\textsuperscript{110} On the other hand, to build
a foundation for a large right-wing coalition, Aleksander Hall left the UD with a
part of his small right wing faction and by attracting some splinter groups from the
PC and other right-wing parties managed merely to add another small party to that
side of the spectrum.\textsuperscript{111}

Finally, the permanence of Poland's political fragmentation was also confirmed
by the virtual abandonment of serious debate about an electoral law that could
move the system toward greater political concentration. Not only was the idea of
having the winner-take-all district virtually forgotten, but the elite showed less and
less inclination to create a substantial threshold for proportional representation,
since such a qualifying threshold could be threatening to most of the already well
entrenched parliamentary parties. Thus, the talk of new parliamentary elections
under new rules that was so loudly heard among Poland's elites in the aftermath
of the November, 1991, parliamentary election subsided almost entirely and instead
the view circulated that new elections were not necessary because they would likely
not change much and would be organized under a system of extreme proportion-
ality that would lead to the election of as fragmented a parliament as the present
one.

Arguably then, in the absence of dramatic international developments or an
unexpected domestic economic collapse, Poland's system will persist as a very
fragmented mosaic with the ability to form only relatively weak and unstable
governments based on broad, diverse, and shifting coalitions.

\textsuperscript{110} See also, Marian Turski, "Propozycja Z Lewj," \textit{Polityka}, No. 24 (June 13, 1992), p. 5.
\textsuperscript{111} See also, Piotr Sembka, "Igrzyska Hallowe," \textit{Tygodnik Solidarnosc}, No. 34 (August 21, 1992), p. 4
and 7.