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POLITICAL SCIENTISTS' PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND THE MEANINGS OF DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: CRITICAL QUESTIONS FROM POLAND

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The populist wave has not spared Poland. Since 2015, the United Right coalition, under the Law and Justice (PiS) party leadership, has subjugated key state institutions. It targeted the judiciary, media, and education system (Cervinkova and Rudnicki 2019). This can be perceived as an attempt at not only taking over key governmental positions but also shifting the political culture toward illiberal democracy—or even a soft authoritarianism with a significant conservative outlook (Bonet and Zamorano 2020; Hidalgo 2019; Markowski 2019; Nyssönen and Jussi Metsälä 2020; Sajó 2019; Szczepański and Kalina 2019). Whereas responses came from various dissenting civil-society actors, including academics, the voice of political scientists as an organized community has been weak. Individual expert commentators provide critical analyses; however, compared to other social sciences, political science organizations contributed little in defense of democratic values. In this Spotlight, we explore political scientists' public engagement and link it to the question of political science's role in fostering democratic education in both academia and society at large. We begin with a brief history of the right-wing populist rule in Poland.

Since its founding in 2001, the PiS has exploited social resentments and fears, defending victims of the capitalist transition and condemning those who benefited from it. Although the early PiS cabinets in 2005–2007 implemented rather neoliberal policies (e.g., effectively dismantling the progressive tax system), they remained committed to populism coupled with conservative propositions, including restrictions on reproductive rights, expanding "traditional values" in education (e.g., promoting the Catholic religion and suggesting that schools should instill traditional gender roles in girls and boys), and occasional suggestions that capital punishment should be restored. The party also used the politics of history by promoting uncritical nationalism—that is, "affirmative patriotism" based on an idealized vision of Poland's and Poles' history, which downplays discrimination and violence toward the country's ethnic and religious minorities in the twentieth century (Forecki 2018)—and ignoring difficult topics such as

antisemitism in modern Poland. During the 2015 electoral campaign, parallel to the international humanitarian crisis, the PiS portrayed refugees as a threat to the country. It won the parliamentary elections in 2015 and 2019, and its presidential candidate also was reelected in 2020. The party's control over the state-owned media is a critical factor in securing its successes. However, for its current supporters, the anti-neoliberal turn in social policies—unprecedented in post-transition history—as well as nationalism boosted by the PiS party's rhetoric of sovereignty in the European Union and politics of history seem to overshadow the subjugation of the judiciary, neglect of the environment, decline of public services (e.g., health care and schooling), and hatred of LGBTQ people. Last but not least, the PiS party attempts to capture universities for its political purposes. Most recently, on state-owned television, the sitting Minister of Education and Science labeled participants of the gay-pride march "abnormal" and denied them "the same rights as normal people" (Sitnicka 2021).

In this context, little intervention by the political science community is striking. Political scientists are present every day in the media, organize conferences, and publish studies on the Polish variant of authoritarian populism. Nevertheless, as a community organized in autonomous institutions and learned societies, political scientists seem to avoid direct involvement in protecting democratic political culture. We note that none of the major non-university institutions—the Polish Political Science Association (PPSA) and the Political Sciences Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PSCPAS) (not to be confused with the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of Political Studies, a research institution)—issued a statement on the destruction of Poland's democracy. The websites for both institutions do not show any trace of these activities. Moreover, the PPSA board meeting in late September 2015—during the anti-refugee campaign instigated by right-wing politicians—confirmed that the PPSA website should publish "only information on scholarly events" (Polish Political Science Association 2015). The board discussed the populist threat only at the February 2016 meeting: it decided on petitioning the government of Turkey in solidarity with the repressed Turkish political scientists, and it launched "a discussion on the political science community's position on changes in Poland after the October 2015 elections. As a result of the discussion, it was proposed that the local chapters of the PPSA organize contradictory debates on the current political themes" (Polish Political Science Association 2016). In fact, this was the last PPSA board-meeting report displayed on the association's website (as of February 2022). Among more than 150 news entries published by the PPSA between November 2015 and February 2021, only three are public statements. Two expressed the PPSA's support for the PSCPAS's intervention on the classification of political-science-related disciplines (e.g., political science, media and communication, and public policy) in the governmental reform of higher education and science (Polish Political Science Association 2018a, 2018b), and one was the PPSA board's critical statement on predatory journals (Polish Political Science Association 2022). The PSCPAS website (knpol.pan.pl) contains several opinions on this reform. These interventions focus on the community's self-interest, not on broader societal problems.

Unlike the PPSA, the Polish Sociological Association (PSA) maintains a separate statements section online with 17 documents issued between May 2016 and May 2021. Statements included interventions against propagandistic abuse of the state-controlled

media (Polish Sociological Association 2016a, 2016c) and undermining of the judiciary (2017a); critiques of the higher education and science reform (2017b, 2018c); condemnation of antisemitism (2018a); support for the schoolteachers' national strike (2019) and for women's reproductive rights (2020b); protest against police harassment of college students (2020a); and solidarity with sociologists in Russia (2016b) and gender studies in Hungary (2018b). Representatives of other social science disciplines also took action. In November 2016, a special congress titled "Anthropology against Discrimination" was organized in Poznań, at which scholars and activists protested the rising tide of hate crimes and nationalism (Special Meeting of Polish Ethnologists and Anthropologists 2016). During the Pedagogical Congress in September 2016, the Polish

gravity of the current situation in Poland is about not only power grabbing by the parliamentary majority but also, perhaps more significantly, about dividing society and distorting the very notion of democracy. When the Minister of Education and Science called for political and historical research to "show truth about Poland and Poles" (Zakolska 2021), implicitly suggesting that historical national wrongdoings should not be explored by researchers, political scientists did not protest. If the purpose of the political science community is to study not only patterns of political socialization but also what constitutes a socialization factor (i.e., a model of political awareness for students and the general public), we may question whether the nonconfrontational stance promotes civic involvement or renders it insignificant.

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Educational Research Association (PERA) board protested early steps of the new government's educational reform (Polish Educational Research Association 2016); the criticism of education policies continues by the Polish Academy of Sciences' Committee of Pedagogical Sciences (2021a), which also issued two letters in solidarity with the refugees confined to the Poland–Belarus border. One of the letters addressed the President of Poland (Polish Academy of Sciences' Committee of Pedagogical Sciences 2021b) as well as other educators and other professions in defense of the rights of refugee children (Polish Academy of Sciences' Committee of Pedagogical Sciences 2021c). Local PERA chapters supported the teachers' strike and protested homophobia, highlighting the plight of LGBTQ+ youth (Polish Educational Research Association 2019, 2020).

The only major intervention by the political science community occurred in May 2020: an open letter signed by 18 scholars from three universities questioned the bill for postal voting in presidential elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. They argued that the extraordinary law would undermine the constitutional principles of equal, secret, universal, and direct elections (Polish Press Agency 2020). The uniqueness of this action in the political science community leads us to ask: When are political scientists inclined to intervene in public? Is it only when the formal procedural features of the electoral system are threatened? As reports have shown (Freedom House 2020, 2021), elections are not the only component of democracy; civil rights, religious freedom, and the condition of women, families, and minorities are no less important.

Although Polish political scientists address these themes in depth in scholarly outlets and venues (Jaskiernia and Spryszak 2020; Pierzchalski and Rydliński 2017; Stępińska and Lipiński 2020), the nature of their public presence beyond academia suggests a more timid attitude. Their daily comments on party politics provide vital insight but stay within the logic of spectacle- and consumption-oriented media (Bourdieu 1998). When institutions and political culture are attacked, do experts and organizations provide the general public with new critical knowledge or instead continue with formulaic descriptions of political reality? The

Perhaps the role of scholars and the model of academic learning need rethinking beyond academia and self-contained disciplinary microworlds. There are many ways in which science—particularly political science—and politics can productively collaborate in service of the public sphere. Reflection on citizens' agency, global economic challenges, climate crisis, multiculturalism, and health and food security needs axiological commitment as much as impartial expertise. More interaction with and inspiration from other fields—beyond rigid disciplinary divisions that are a product of the nineteenth century (Wallerstein 2001)—can be beneficial for knowledge and its meaningful use. Poland has a rich tradition of modern Deweyan-style progressivist thinking about education; however, this experience remains a domain of pedagogical enthusiasts in alternative, mostly informal settings such as non-governmental organizations (Rudnicki 2016) and parental quasi-schooling initiatives at the elementary level (Gawlicz and Starnawski 2020). The future of democracy requires scholars to assume the role of democratic educators and propagators of democratic values inside and outside of academic spaces. ■

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ACADEMIC SOLIDARITY AND THE CULTURE WAR IN ORBÁN'S HUNGARY

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Recently, it has become customary to be concerned about the impact of the culture wars on academic freedom in established liberal democracies. In fact, the contexts in which culture wars can inflict the most profound damage are autocratizing settings. In these contexts, the supporters of liberal democracy are treated as traitors and can no longer count on the solidarity of those colleagues whose priority is to fight globalization and stop progressive cultural change.

This logic is well illustrated by the debates that followed the Hungarian government's decision to force Central European University (CEU) to move its educational programs to Austria.¹ In 2017, the license for operation of foreign universities in Hungary was made dependent on the existence of intergovernmental treaties (Enyedi 2018). Because the government was unwilling to sign such an agreement with the State of New York (where the university originally had been registered), CEU was forced to