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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Czuba, M., & Muster, R. (2024). Is the Young Precariat a Problem of Modern Democracy? A Case Study of Poland. *Politics and Governance*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7697>

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Is the Young Precariat a Problem of Modern Democracy? A Case Study of Poland

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Submitted: 20 October 2023 **Accepted:** 16 January 2024 **Published:** 27 March 2024

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Considering Future Generations in Democratic Governance” edited by Yasuko Kameyama (University of Tokyo) and Tomohiro Tasaki (National Institute for Environmental Studies), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i379>

Abstract

This article addresses the issue of the role and importance of the young precariat for the functioning of the democratic system. Based on scenario planning, it presents three possible directions for the development of democracy in the context of meeting the needs of the young precariat. The first scenario assumes a continuation of the measures applied so far by democratic governments towards young precarious people related to social policy and the low representation of the young generation in politics. The second involves a move away from democracy towards non-democratic systems, where the needs of precarious people are irrelevant. The third assumes a new approach among democratic governments to the needs of young precarious workers and the shaping of new social policies, as well as the creation of incentives for young precarious workers to be more widely involved in these policies. The empirical context for these considerations is an attempt to determine the possibility of the occurrence of each of these scenarios in Polish conditions, based on the results of qualitative studies conducted via asynchronous interviews with representatives of the young Polish precariat. The research relates to Poland and takes into account the characteristics of the Polish precariat. The article uses a mixed research methodology, combining different methods for solving research problems, including collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting quantitative and qualitative data.

Keywords

democracy; Poland; precariat; scenario planning; social policy; young workers

1. Introduction

This article aims to identify the weaknesses of democracy that directly and indirectly contribute to the phenomenon of precariousness, which largely affects young people entering the labor market. It also aims to identify potential directions of action for governments (politicians) to contribute to greater political and social involvement among young, precarious people. These considerations take into account their social context. The practical objective is to identify possible courses of action in this area based on scenarios for governance with regard to young, precarious people. This article also has a theoretical goal related to the application of scenario planning methodology, mainly used in business, to another sphere of functioning: politics. The added value of the article is an attempt to determine which of the indicated scenarios in this area has a chance of being realized in Poland.

The precariat can be understood as those holding “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky from the employee’s point of view” (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 17). It consists of people hired for individual jobs or commissions; after completing these, they become unemployed, at least temporarily. They constitute a separate social and working group (Standing, 1999). This understanding of the precariat was used in the direct research involving asynchronous interviews with young Polish precarious people, presented in the final part of this article.

Due to the conditions in which they operate, members of the precariat are generally aware of their relative deprivation; they feel a combination of anxiety, anomie, alienation, and anger (Standing, 2014). Their existence is largely the result of a neoliberal economic and political structure that has allowed employers to demand flexibility from workers through unfair remuneration practices, attacks on trade union membership, and the dismantling of an already underdeveloped social safety net. This has led to an inevitable increase in precarity over the last four decades (Greenstein, 2020). Those in the precariat have no professional identity or positive narrative to bring to their lives. This causes existential uncertainty. For the first time in history, many university graduates are overeducated for the work they do or compared to people employed on permanent contracts. Another unique feature is that the precariat does jobs or work that is neither socially recognized nor well rewarded (Standing, 2016).

Due to the size of the precariat, which in many countries constitutes 20% of working people, it has aroused the interest of politicians, and its problems are becoming relevant for the continuing endurance and development of democracy. One of the consequences of the precariat phenomenon is low political involvement among this group. Research conducted by Kiersztyn (2018) with regard to Polish precarious people confirmed their low interest in politics and their skepticism towards the principles and mechanisms of democracy.

The presented analysis of phenomena related to the precariat focuses on Poland; this was due to the possibility of conducting direct research and the availability of respondents. Moreover, in Poland, there is a noticeable deficit of research on the phenomenon of the precariat, especially the political consequences of labor market instability for the young generation. Therefore, the research was innovative and is worth continuing, especially considering the growing importance of neo-populist movements or extreme political groups. Taking into account similar indicators of the quality of democracy and society’s wealth, it seems

justified to hypothesize that similar results would be obtained in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. However, this is an assumption that should be verified by comparative research, preferably not only covering the countries of this region.

This article deals with the precariat in the context of its impact on the shape of democracy due to the underestimation of this group by politicians. As a result, precarious people do not have representatives who will try to solve their problems and better meet their needs. If this situation persists, precarious voters may support populists or anti-democratic parties. It can also be assumed that the number of young, precarious people will continue to grow: Job losses due to increasing automation and robotization contribute to the increasing insecurity of the younger generation in the labor market. This uncertainty is exacerbated by the young generation's challenges in gaining independence; here, one may point to high real estate prices and problems with obtaining creditworthiness. Deficits in stabilizing the young generation in a world of dynamic change may result in them supporting neo-populistic groups or voting for extreme (left or right) political groups that challenge the current economic and political order.

2. Problems of Democracy

In the ancient understanding of the word, democracy meant rule by the people. Referring this idea to present times, it should be stated that the effectiveness of democracy depends on its five basic pillars: free and fair elections, a multi-party system, power sharing, the rule of law, and protection of human rights (Barr, 2020). According to Diamond (2004), there are four basic elements of democracy: (a) a political system that allows the election and replacement of governments through free and fair elections, (b) active participation of people as citizens in politics and civic life, (c) protection of the rights of all citizens, and (d) the rule of law, where rules and procedures apply equally to all citizens. From this standpoint, it can be seen that modern democracy includes institutions as well as procedural solutions—elements (a) and (b)—along with the protection of human rights and the observance of the law (Diamond, 2004).

Modern democracy is experiencing problems. Opinions about its future are skeptical (Bartels et al., 2023). There is resignation and doubt regarding the democratic resources of the present day and civic readiness to participate in political decisions (Frühbauer, 2013). These beliefs are expressed in many scientific publications that describe the so-called “fragility of democracy” or “deranged democracy” (Braun & Geisler, 2012). Also, young people belonging to Generation Z trust democracy and politics less and less and are more susceptible to populist voting than previous generations (Lewsey, 2020).

The marginalization of work is not divorced from the state of modern democracy. In circumstances of globalization, the disproportion between labor and capital widens, to the detriment of labor (Dybus, 2016). Work per se is more immobile than capital, especially financial capital. As a consequence of this state of affairs, phenomena such as unemployment and underemployment arise, along with difficulties in finding potential employees in the labor market, especially young people. Nowadays, the phenomenon of the “working poor” is becoming increasingly palpable (Kalugina, 2013).

Eurostat (2023) statistical data reveal particularly significant increases in the number of young people (aged 15–34) classified as NEET (not in employment, education, and training) in 2006–2015 in the following countries: Greece (a 57.6% increase), Cyprus (55.8%), Denmark (55.5%), Spain (48.2%), the UK (44.6%),

Ireland (39.7%), Italy (32.5%), and Slovenia (35.9%; Muster, 2020). Looking at Eurostat data for 2009–2022, a downward trend can be observed in the total number of persons in temporary employment in the EU, both absolutely and as a percentage of all those employed. However, the situation is much worse for young people, that is, those in the 15–29 age group. For the EU as a whole, in 2022, the fixed-term employment rate for this age group was 25.1%. In Poland, this figure was in the range of 20%–25%; for comparison, in Spain and Italy, it was more than 30% (Eurostat, 2023).

The stable employment relations of the industrial era, regulated by permanent employment contracts and supervised by social partners, are becoming a thing of the past. A feature of modern economies is servitization, accompanied by the employment of workers on a mobile basis on so-called “junk contracts” that do not offer any social security. The coronavirus pandemic has also brought changes to the labor market and made it more flexible (Adamowicz, 2022). A hybrid work model, whereby employees commute to the office two or three days a week and work remotely the rest of the time, is a commonly implemented solution in companies today (Kelly, 2021). The proportion of people forced into short-term precarious jobs is growing rapidly in some sectors and is a threat to working conditions. It is widely expected that non-standard jobs will multiply and new forms will emerge as a result of digitization and robotic technology (“The gig economy and the precariat,” 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1. Initial Considerations

In researching the question of whether the young precariat is a problem of modern democracy, a mixed research methodology was used, whereby the researcher, bearing in mind the research goal, may use different approaches to discover the truth and/or expand knowledge. Mixed-method research is a research methodology that includes multiple methods for solving research questions in an appropriate and principled way, including the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Clark, 2011). This approach includes the method of triangulation, based on the assumption that no single method can grasp, explain, or facilitate the understanding of human experience and the phenomena of life in its various dimensions. The triangulation strategy expresses the search for solutions that help to obtain the most comprehensive, thorough, and critical understanding of the studied phenomena. This is achieved by combining various methods, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers (Carter et al., 2014; Furmanek, 2016).

For the purposes of this study, the sources were triangulated. This involved using and comparing data from various representatives of the Polish precariat, who participated in the research conducted by the author of this study via asynchronous interviews, and research by other Polish authors related to the political involvement and expectations of young members of the precariat. On the basis of the available scientific publications, the essential characteristics of the young Polish precariat were established. Both direct research and desk research were used in this study.

Section 4.1 presents data on the characteristics of the Polish precariat from direct research conducted by the corresponding author of this article in 2021 on a sample of 1,000 precarious workers. This study used a quantitative sample that reflected the percentages in Poland of people performing work on the basis of

commission agreements or a work contract, those employed informally, and trainees employed for a maximum period of one year with no guarantee of further employment. The survey was thus representative. Respondents were over 18 years of age.

Section 4.3 presents the results of direct research conducted by the author of this article on the basis of the aforementioned asynchronous interviews. The invitation to participate was sent electronically to 2,000 potential respondents, all of whom were former and current students at the University of Silesia, with whom the corresponding author of this article had had classes. Invitations were sent using ready-made lists of students with e-mails assigned to their names and surnames. When sending e-mails, the mailing list was classified.

This study used a deliberate selection of respondents: It was assumed that the students to whom invitations to participate in asynchronous interviews were sent would belong to a group of young, precarious people. The aim was to obtain at least 30 complete interviews; this was achieved. Taking into account the number of invitations sent, the surveys revealed some obstacles to conducting them in this form. These include the general reluctance of young people and students in Poland to participate in social or market research. The current situation of the labor market in Poland, which is associated with a surplus supply of full-time employment in relation to the number of people willing to take up such employment for an indefinite period, also had an impact on the relatively low rate of return for the invitations sent for such surveys.

Based on the conditions related to the challenges and weaknesses of contemporary democracy, which were presented in Section 2 of this article and the results of asynchronous interviews, taking into account the methodology of scenario planning contained in Section 3.2, hypothetical scenarios of government actions were presented, taking into account to various extents the needs of young precarious people in terms of social and political activity. An attempt was then made to determine which of them had the best chance to be realized in Poland.

3.2. Scenario Planning: An Overview of the Method

Scenario planning is a method of examining situations that might affect the implementation of a specific strategy. It forces decision-makers to look at possible future states that may occur beyond conventional extrapolations of current trends. This method enables the exploitation of unexpected opportunities as well as protection against unfavorable situations and exogenous shocks. Scenario planning is therefore seen as a method of corporate planning, or as a policy tool to be used in conjunction with decision impact simulations (Barma et al., 2015). Scenario planning is the art of juxtaposing current trends in unexpected and anticipated combinations to formulate a surprising yet plausible future (Asal, 2005; Barma, 2016; Tetlock, 2005). The scenario planning process begins with the divergence phase, which serves to develop thoughts about how a given institution functions, with the aim of inspiring and identifying new opportunities (Ramen, 2020). The individual phases of scenario planning are detailed in Figure 1.

The planning process includes leadership and specific lines of action that may be implemented. The knowledge gained in the divergence phase is used to inform practical action. The convergence phase involves selecting a specific scenario to implement and then monitoring.

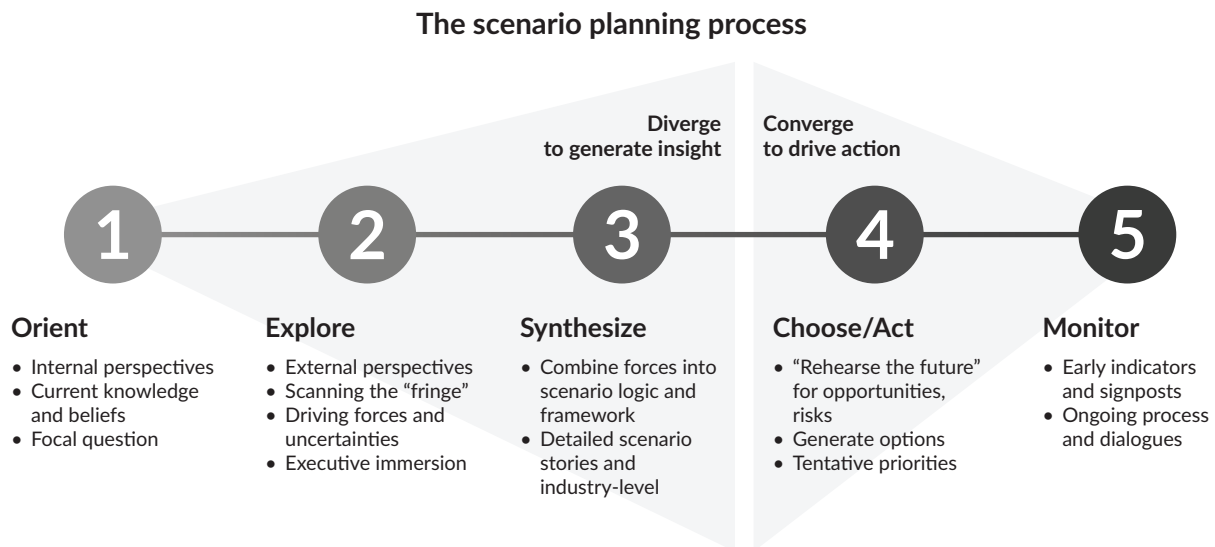


Figure 1. The scenario planning process. Source: Ramen (2020, p. 3).

4. Research Results

4.1. A Portrait of the Young Precariat in Poland

The concept of the precariat combines several co-occurring themes: young age, low income, temporary employment or lack of it, lack of life prospects and financial plans for the future, lack of housing, and often lack of a family and reluctance to start one due to lack of life stability (Knapińska, 2014). These attributes, most of which relate to young people aged 18–30, are confirmed in Polish conditions. In this study, it is assumed that the Polish precariat consists of people living in Poland who have precarious employment, perform individual jobs or assignments based on commission agreements or work contracts, work in an informal (undeclared) way, or are volunteers or trainees employed for a limited period, usually less than a year, with no guarantee of further employment.

Topics related to the Polish precariat have been analyzed by Polish researchers. Their analyses have focused on how the situation of being precarious affects the sense of security of the individual. People in precarious situations feel less secure than those in permanent employment (Kiersztyn, 2017). Interesting research on the Polish precariat was carried out by Mrozowicki (2017). It delved on the extent of acceptance of this phenomenon by Polish, young precarious people. Taking into account the profiles of Polish precursors presented in this research, young people who are just entering the labor market are at greater risk of this phenomenon; some of them are not satisfied with this situation and have doubts about how their lives will turn out, including their further professional careers. Other young people with part-time jobs feel comfortable in this situation, treating it as their life choice. They are convinced that they have the potential to get a job under an employment contract. For now, however, they want to gain professional experience and enjoy life. In Poland, there is also a third group of people forming the precariat. They treat the need to earn extra money or work under civil law contracts as a bad phenomenon that negatively affects their lives and self-esteem. They believe that a large role in strengthening this phenomenon is played by employers who have high expectations of new, young employees and expect high motivation from them, but this does

not translate into their subsequent employment on contracts for indefinite periods. This causes an increase in the number of people dissatisfied with this type of employment practice (Mrozowicki, 2017).

Members of the Polish precariat have their own specific expectations of politicians and the government. The scope of assistance received by this social group is assessed to be insufficient and is perceived negatively. Of the precariat, 17–21% positively evaluate government aid. From the point of view of the precariat's level of social security, the scope of the assistance they expect from the Polish government is relevant. Their main expectation is state support to help them open their own businesses and a permanent basic living allowance. Another expected form of assistance is education and training to become an entrepreneur: 26% of the precariat would like to receive this type of state aid. The final form of expected support is an education voucher to be used for self-development in line with their interests: 21% of the Polish precariat would like to receive this form of help from the government. Of the Polish precariat, 18.9% expect nothing from the state. Women express a greater need for support: They are potentially more willing to use material assistance from the state to start up their own businesses, as well as a permanent basic living allowance and an education voucher. Men, to an even greater extent than women, expect financial support from the state to set up their own businesses, but are more likely to declare that they do not need any state aid to improve their living conditions or change their professional situation (Czuba & Muster, 2023).

Limited prospects for living independently, lack of professional development, low wages, and problems achieving professional stability frustrate the young generation. Such people are particularly susceptible to the arguments of populist groups that contest the existing democratic order (Kryńska, 2017). A thesis may, therefore, be formulated that the more precarious workers there are in the labor market, the greater the likelihood of strong populist movements striving for revolutionary changes in the economic and political order.

4.2. Possible Scenarios of Government Action for the Young Precariat

Considering the overview presented earlier, it is possible to speculate on the courses of action that politicians might potentially take to limit the harm caused by the precariat phenomenon and to better include its younger representatives in political life. Possible scenarios in this regard are presented below.

4.2.1. Scenario 1

This scenario assumes no new measures are taken by states and governments to reduce the size of the precariat. This might result from the belief that the free market will deal with this phenomenon on its own, giving the precariat better job opportunities and social advancement over time. This scenario also assumes that social policies counteracting poverty and social stratification will be pursued at current levels, without introducing new solutions in these areas. This might be due to a lack of ideas about how to solve the problem of the precariat sensibly, as well as a lack of sufficient financial resources. Governments may also choose this option due to the passivity of the precariat and their inability to organize associations or political movements. Older representatives of the precariat are often embittered yet reconciled to their lot; they are offended by politics, or their lives revolve around existential problems. In this scenario, the government may face a problem with Millennials and Generation Z precariat members with their own specific expectations of

employers and governments, who have grown up in an educational model that grants them more and more rights over teachers, and who are also knowledgeable about the concept of human resource management, which grants significant rights to employees and emphasizes their empowerment. The young precariat may be disappointed by the gap between their expectations regarding the job they would like to do or their prospects of starting a family and their current life situation in which the pursuit of basic needs takes center stage. This situation may lead to a rebellion by this group, who may then be joined by other social groups—for example, public sector employees or the so-called working poor. In the current reality, the factor preventing the occurrence of the analyzed scenario and the possible social rebellion of the young precariat is their lack of social commitment and leadership. History, however, teaches us that in circumstances of poverty and lack of life prospects, young precariat leaders may emerge, wanting to act on the political scene and influence politics. They will be particularly active in election years.

4.2.2. Scenario 2

The second scenario assumes governments may gradually drift away from democratic principles, in favor of transforming democracy into an authoritarian system. Various “emergency situations” similar to the Covid-19 pandemic, when citizens were temporarily deprived of their rights in the name of the general health and safety of the public, may be conducive to this state of affairs. Restrictions were introduced with the intention of being temporary, but some are still in place, even though the pandemic has now slowed down. An example of this in Poland is that many offices still have plexiglass shields separating officials from clients, even though formally they do not need to be maintained. These emergency situations may deprive citizens of their existing democratic rights in the name of the so-called greater social good. Over time, these rights may become so eroded that existing democracies may be closer to non-democratic states that function well in economic terms, even though democracy has vanished. One example might be China, where the economy is largely based on the capitalist philosophy, although the political system is far from a democracy as understood by Western or EU countries. In this scenario, the precariat is not a problem for those in power, because, in the event of a rebellion, they can be easily pacified: treated as rebels or as enemies of society.

4.2.3. Scenario 3

In the context of democracy, a scenario whereby states and governments play a more active role in limiting the precariat phenomenon is also possible. This is associated with the reconstruction and strengthening of existing social policies and possibly with greater direct involvement of states/governments in the economy, perhaps by renationalizing private enterprises or making wider use of public–private partnerships. Private companies involved in such projects could be obliged to create permanent jobs; there could also be state investment in certain branches of the economy to generate opportunities to create new state-owned enterprises offering permanent employment. This type of action may create opportunities for sustainable, non-precarious jobs and allow states to provide a minimum level of products or services for society. This is relevant for the abovementioned emergency situations related to pandemics, wars, and disruptions to supply chains.

In this scenario, governments should also encourage the precariat to participate in elections. This is, after all, a way to elect representatives who care to some extent for their interests. These representatives should have a real impact, in terms of social policy, on the level of social assistance offered to the precariat. This type of aid,

addressed to all or some of the precariat, seems to be a better solution than the unconditional basic income introduced as a pilot in some countries. At least, the former option would appear to be less expensive. It could potentially take the form of vouchers, which members of the precariat who meet certain criteria could use to buy products and various types of services to meet their needs. Potentially, vouchers from Sodexo, or other institutions issuing them could be used for this purpose. Further forms of state support for the precariat could include state-funded health insurance, financial assistance for holiday leave, or possibly subsidized utility bills. Measures of this kind, using an income criterion, would contribute to equalizing the standard of living between the precariat and employees with permanent jobs.

4.3. How Realistic Are These Scenarios, Taking Into Account the Role of the Young Precariat in Public and Political Life in Poland?

To discover the feasibility of the scenarios presented in the previous section related to the role of the young precariat in political and social life in Poland, in May–June 2023, the corresponding author of this article conducted qualitative research based on asynchronous interviews. An asynchronous e-mail interview is a qualitative research method whereby information is collected and exchanged online between the researcher and the participant within a specific time frame. These data are not shared with other participants, as is often the case with virtual focus groups (Hawkins, 2018; Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). The research included an asynchronous dialogue based on the idea of time flexibility from the perspective of the participant (Hamza-Lup & Goldbach, 2019). Respondents were sent an invitation to participate in an asynchronous interview, specifying a two-week deadline for responses. Participants had to enter the link provided in the e-mail, directing them to the interview in Google Forms. In case of doubt, those participating in the interviews could contact the researcher by e-mail. In practice, none of the participants in this research asked for clarification on specific issues.

The use of this research method was justified by the fact that the young Polish precariat, as representatives of Generation Z, are well acquainted with the internet and digital means of communication. In addition, the research method used was conducive to reaching young people not permanently employed at the time of the research. Current and former students at the University of Silesia in Katowice aged 20–29 were invited to participate. The university's e-mail system was used to distribute the interviews. The researcher used lists of the e-mail addresses of current and former student groups with whom he had had classes in 2017–2023. The participants were professionally active students working flexibly and without a permanent job at the time of the study. The interview questionnaires were sent electronically to 2,000 potential respondents; the goal was to obtain at least 30 completely filled-in questionnaires. This was achieved: 34 such responses were received. The interview questionnaire consisted of a record containing data on the respondent's gender, age, place of residence, and current form of part-time work. The main part of the interview consisted of eight groups of open-ended questions. The answers to these questions would provide data on the possibility of one of the scenarios proposed above occurring in reality.

The participants consisted of 35% men and 65% women. The largest proportion of respondents, 32%, were aged 21–23. Those aged 23–25 and 25–27 each made up 26% of respondents, while 9% were aged 27–29. The smallest group (6%) were aged 18–20. With regard to forms of employment, the majority of respondents (71%) declared they were employed on a contract of mandate, 15% were working illegally, 9% were currently employed on a fixed-term internship, and 6% were formally employed as volunteers. The participants were

also asked about their place of residence. The largest group (38%) stated they lived in a town, 35% lived in a city, 15% in small towns, and 12% in villages.

The first group of questions asked whether democracy mattered to the young Polish precariat or whether they were indifferent. Most responded that this was a fairly important issue for them; however, there were a fairly substantial number who felt indifferent. This indifference resulted from the feeling of having no influence on politics and political life in Poland. This is well illustrated by one of the responses:

It doesn't matter much to me because I don't feel this democracy. There are elections every few years and that's that. What kind of democracy is this, where we can only choose the government that will govern us? It would mean much more to me if important decisions were made by popular vote, or if someone at least took into account the results of such a vote.

The second point raised in the research was the weakening of democracy and governments slowly moving towards economically efficient systems in which experts play an important role, while citizens have fewer and fewer rights. Most of the respondents agreed that democracy is weakening and citizens have fewer and fewer rights, while, at the same time, experts are beginning to play a significant role in political life.

Some young Polish precariat appeared indifferent to the weakening of democracy. This approach is illustrated by the following response:

It seems to me, judging from conversations with my peers and guys younger than me, that all issues related to democracy are losing some relevance among young people (and not only). More and more people are putting their own good financial situation ahead of who rules and how, which is sad because these things are inextricably linked, in my opinion.

Participants were also asked whether they thought future Polish governments would pursue similar policies towards the young precariat—approaches that do not fully meet their needs. They could also comment on whether they saw any chance of these policies changing, and assess their current direction. In principle, all the respondents believed that whatever kind of government rules Poland, its policy towards the young precariat will remain the same—not taking into account their needs and expectations:

I think that politics will continue in the direction in which it is currently going. The powers that be, regardless of the options, will focus on “handing out” more than the competition and trying to buy votes through various types of programs like apartment+, highway+, XYZ+. And this is not what young people expect. In my circle, there is a belief that the only thing the government should give us is the chance to work honestly for decent wages, so all those social allowances won't be needed.

The research also referred to the young Polish precariat's lack of self-organization, the lack of leaders among them, and their lack of appropriate social and communication skills to convey their expectations to politicians. The responses to these questions fell into three categories. Some emphasized how the young precariat felt discouraged from active political involvement; others pointed to the marginalization of such activities or attempts to do so by the current government. The third group of answers indicated problems with the young precariat's self-organization in Poland.

Next, the respondents were asked to indicate any factors that might make politicians in Poland listen to the voice of the young precariat and meet their needs. Their answers, as with the previous question, could be divided into three groups. The first group saw no chance of changing the approach of Polish politicians. The second group mentioned the need for a new political group to emerge that would listen to the needs of young people or indicated that generational changes in Polish politics would mean the needs of young Poles were taken more seriously. The third group stated that there was a chance for change in this regard if the young precariat put pressure on the authorities in the form of protests. The answers revealed a group of people who are disappointed with the political situation in Poland and believe that only emigration can make local politicians take more account of the needs of the young precariat.

The young respondents were asked whether they would like the Polish government to appoint appropriate bodies composed of representatives of the young precariat and how feasible it would be to meet this expectation. The answers obtained can be classified into several groups. Some respondents believed that such bodies already exist; however, the problem is that Polish politicians tend not to take their voices into account when making decisions. Others saw little chance of establishing and effectively running such bodies. This belief is evidenced by the following statement:

Perhaps it would be a good solution. Knowing how life works, however, any advice given by similar committees that might strive for some deep socio-economic changes would be ignored—The national and international systems defining the shape of the Polish economy are too strong.

Nevertheless, some respondents were enthusiastic about this idea. One such opinion states: “Yes, I wish such opportunities existed, because young people know what’s going on and should have an impact on running the country where they’re building their own future.” With regard to this issue, some respondents refuted the need to create advisory bodies for the Polish government composed of representatives of the young generation. This is evidenced by the following statement: “I don’t think that we need to create these kinds of structures.”

The respondents were also asked about the actions they ought to take to make their voices heard by politicians and society. The answers to this question, as before, can be divided into three groups. The first mentioned that young people should be more active on social media and present their point of view there. Other respondents think the young generation should organise protests to grab politicians’ attention. The young Polish precariat also points out the need to participate in elections and choose politicians who can meet their expectations.

Finally, the respondents were asked about the importance of the young Polish generation being visible in politics. The respondents were provocatively asked whether perhaps this issue did not matter to their generation. There were two types of answers to this. One group believed that for some, visibility in political and social life is important, but for a significant section of the young precariat, such matters are of little significance. The second group believed that quite a large number of people from their generation are active in their communities and in social life. When answering this question, the respondents indicated various limitations regarding their social activity. They pointed out, *inter alia*, that politicians do not take their opinions into account, which makes it difficult for them to join parties as a new generation of politicians. Some respondents expressed discouragement and pessimism regarding the possibility of this change.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Considering these responses, the young Polish precariat mainly seemed to appreciate the fact that they live in a democracy. Such views may indicate that if the second of the presented scenarios were implemented—that is, a move from democracy in Poland towards a non-democratic system—these people would potentially defend democratic values. However, quite a large group of respondents appeared indifferent to the system under which they would like to live in Poland, provided they could satisfy their aspirations and life needs.

They were also asked about the possibility that the government in Poland might change its approach to be more aligned with the perspective and needs of the young precariat. Most stated there was little chance for change in this respect. This conviction may be a premise for the occurrence of the first of the proposed scenarios in Poland, assuming the same social policies and attitudes towards people from the young generation entering politics.

The research also explored the Polish precariat's poor self-organization. Some respondents emphasized that young, precarious people are discouraged from any active involvement in politics. Others pointed out the marginalization of such activities or attempts by the current rulers to do so, while a third group indicated specific problems with the self-organization of the young precariat in Poland. Despite the differences in the responses to these questions, the phenomena they reveal are conducive to the realization of the first or second of the proposed scenarios.

The young respondents were asked whether they would like the Polish government to appoint appropriate commissions composed of representatives of the young precariat. They were also asked to assess the likelihood that this expectation would be met. The answers obtained can be classified into several groups. Some respondents believed that committees composed of young representatives of Poles already exist. The problem, however, is that Polish politicians tend not to take their voices into account when making decisions. Other respondents were very interested in such initiatives. Another group of respondents refuted such ideas, considering them unnecessary. Taking into account these opinions on the matter, it can be concluded that they are diverse and sometimes contradictory. This means that the first or second of the presented scenarios are more feasible in Polish circumstances.

The study participants were asked about the actions they should take to make their voices heard by politicians and society. Their responses lead to the conclusion that the young precariat should be more active on social media, express their opinions through protest campaigns and consciously participate in parliamentary elections, voting for candidates who are willing to meet their needs. The answers to this question may be an opportunity for the third of the proposed scenarios to emerge in Poland, which would involve taking into account the needs of the young precariat and creating the right conditions for them to enter politics.

The respondents were asked about the importance of the young Polish generation being visible in politics. A significant number of the respondents believed that for some of the younger generation, visibility in political and social life is important, but for a major section of the young precariat, such matters are of little importance. This type of approach to the political involvement of the young precariat represents, on the one hand, an opportunity to implement the third of the proposed scenario, provided that the group of young

people involved in political issues is large. On the other hand, the passivity and indifference towards this issue observable in the respondents' answers is a premise for the first or second scenarios to occur in Poland. With regard to the involvement of the young precariat in political life in Poland, a large number of respondents stated that a significant number of people from their generation are active in their communities and in social life. This factor would be conducive to the implementation of the third scenario in Poland. Some statements, however, indicated discouragement and pessimism regarding the possibility of wider participation of young people in political life.

Although the conducted research was qualitative and preliminary, its results are largely consistent with the findings of previous research on the political beliefs of young Poles. Similar conclusions to those presented above are shown by the results of a study entitled *Youth 2020—In Search of Identity* conducted by the Batory Foundation in Poland (Boni, 2021). The studies cited here show, analogously to previous ones, tremendous diversity among the young generation. They may be divided into “traditionalists” and “innovators”: This shows that the young generation of Poles is significantly polarized. This study also referred to the issue of young Poles' political involvement, finding an increase in the number of young people participating in presidential elections since 2015. This suggests that politics is of interest to the young generation. On the other hand, they tend to distance themselves from membership in certain political parties. They are pessimistic about whether any action taken by parties existing in Poland could possibly meet their needs (Boni, 2021).

The shifting mobilization of young people to vote in elections does not go hand in hand with a conviction that democracy is not worth the effort or a feeling that their voice does not matter. The latest survey of attitudes towards democracy, published by CBOS in May 2021, shows that in the 18–24 age group, the belief that democracy has an advantage over other forms of government is shared by 65% of respondents (Fundacja CBOS, 2021). The simplistic thesis about the apathy of the young generation is therefore not confirmed. This does not mean, however, that young citizens hold the key to solving the problems facing Polish democracy. It is often mentioned in debates that Polish politics needs “new faces”—people who are not embroiled in long-term conflicts between rival groups and who are not shackled by political careers, networks of dependencies, privileges, and favors built over the years. However, young people are not at all eager to play this role. They usually scorn action taken by the Sejm and the Senate, and they do not want to join political parties as an organized group. Their involvement takes other forms: They prefer crowdfunding campaigns. The popularity of this form of involvement among young Poles is much greater than among their peers in other countries in the region. As many as 40% of young Poles questioned by the National Democratic Institute declared that they had been involved in crowdfunding in 2018–2019, compared to 23% of Slovaks, 9% of Hungarians, and 7% of Czechs. They might also go on demonstrations or volunteer in social initiatives (Pazderski, 2019).

The emerging pessimism and discouragement felt by the young precariat are factors conducive to the implementation of the first or second of the proposed scenarios in Poland. However, it seems that due to the history of Poland and the love of freedom, the second scenario, involving a move away from democracy, would be difficult to implement and encounter widespread social resistance. In the context of such considerations, the first of the proposed scenarios is most likely to be implemented in Poland, with some modifications taking into account some elements of the third scenario, which may include the introduction of an unconditional basic income in Poland. This is a possibility because the pilot form of this solution is currently being tested in selected communes in Poland.

Funding

The funds from which research related to this article and its publication were financed come from the University of Silesia in Katowice and are allocated to the research of its employees.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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