

Illiberalism as a Culture

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Abstract:

Illiberalism is examined here as a specific form of common sense or ethos, while anti-liberalism is approached as an ideology. The latter will be studied not through an examination of written works but through a close reading of two artistic exhibitions. They differ in their treatment of such topics as women's rights, criticism of the European Union, and most prominently in their understanding of liberty. The analysis reveals several key ideological differences between liberal and anti-liberal modes of artistic representation. The contrast between liberal and illiberal types of ethos is illustrated by a comparison of political cultures in different locations in Poland. They are compared to show systematic association of illiberalism and liberalism with different types of social capital, conceptions of individualism, and models of authority. Challenges to liberalism are seen not as mere expressions of rebellion against an externally imposed call for imitation of the "West" but as components of the historically shaped illiberal forms of ethos in some areas that are amplified by the systematic propagation of anti-liberal ideologies.

Keywords: culture; communication; visual arts; Poland; common sense; ideology

“. . . even though political regimes can be overthrown, and ideologies can be criticized and disowned, behind a regime and its ideology there is always a way of thinking and feeling, a group of cultural habits, of obscure instincts and unfathomable drives." Umberto Eco, "Ur-fascism," June 22, 1995.

Culture and Political Culture

The goal of this chapter is to explore the idea of treating illiberalism, and thus also liberalism, as cultures, not just ideologies, philosophies, or features of political systems. Though I share Holmes's (1989) insight that "anti-liberalism is more a mind-set than a theory. It is more a 'culture' or cluster of shared prejudices than a closely argued system of thought" (228),¹ I propose to reserve the term anti-liberalism for "a closely argued system of thought," however underdeveloped it may be, and treat illiberalism as "a cluster of shared prejudices." Likewise, I agree that liberalism "is often manifest in sensibilities and predispositions more than in doctrines" (Krygier 2022, 533).

I will offer several observations on how anti-liberal and liberal ideas clash at the level of ideologies, but also how illiberal and liberal sensitivities collide in more quotidian realms of culture often referred to as common sense. An additional impetus for this study comes from the observation that many people see growing tensions in today's world as a culture war rather than a mere conflict of ideologies. This is consistent with an intuition that the clash we observe

touches “deeper” layers of people’s identities and engages them in a more intense way than would an ideological confrontation between various political programs.

Two Approaches to Culture: Culture as Communication

The concept of “culture” refers to a multifaceted and complex dimension of social reality that is hard to define, yet it clearly has something to do with three types of phenomena: meanings, values, and norms (scripts of action). In modern social science, two main strategies of studying these phenomena have emerged: socio-psychological and semiotic (for a more elaborate presentation see Kubik 2019). According to the former, dominant in political science, culture “consists of attitudes, beliefs, values and skills which are current in an entire population, as well as those special propensities and patterns which may be found within separate parts of that population” (Almond and Powell 1966, 23). The concept of ethos has a very similar denotation. In Cherniss’s (2021) words, it “bridges cognitive and habitual, intellectual and affective, doctrinal and dispositional elements” (33). (Politically) relevant attitudes or “subjective political orientations” are attributes of individual minds and are composed of cognitive, evaluative, and emotive elements. They are usually studied via surveys, interviews, or ethnographic participant observation.

Adherents of the semiotic strategy instead conceive culture as a web of meaning, “. . . an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz 1973, 89; see also Gramsci 1971, 323–343). The study of the relationship between culture and politics in this approach consists primarily of the systematic interpretation of politically relevant texts, images, and performances produced in a given society and accessible in public spaces. Of particular interest are meanings associated with evaluations of the world (values), as their job is to justify scripts (scenarios, norms) of/for action. Within the semiotic tradition, “a nonredundant concept of political culture refers to the meaning systems that are culturally available for talking, writing, and thinking about political objects: the myths and metaphors, the language and idea elements, the frames, ideologies, values, and condensing symbols” (Gamson 1988, 220). Various versions of interpretive work and content or discourse analysis are used to study this dimension of (political) culture.

What can bridge the two approaches is an assumption that culture forms individual minds (attitudes) via communication. In the most basic model, an act of communication is composed of three elements: sender, message, and receiver. As semiotic approaches deal with meaning and its formation, they focus on the first two elements: message(s) and sender(s). The third element of the communication triad, receiver(s)—or to be more precise, the “content” of their minds—can be studied in many ways, the most popular and influential being via surveys of attitudes (views, opinions, etc.) or ethnographic studies, often focusing on people’s common sense (Geertz 1983, 73–93). If we want to comprehend how culture works, we need to focus on all three elements to describe and explain how meanings are generated, transmitted, and internalized to become motivators of (political) actions. Studies of political culture in political science that tend to focus only on common sense or ethos are incomplete; they provide no information about producers of

cultural messages and the meaning of messages themselves. They do not show how culture “works”; they only reveal effects of cultural production whose mechanisms remain unexamined.

Communication between builders of culture (suppliers) and people who inhabit cultural worlds without necessarily participating in their creation (consumers) transpires at many levels and in many institutional locations, but in the simplest conceptualization it can be modeled as iterative interactions between ideology and common sense. The first concept refers to the deliberate endowing of the world with meaning—that is, constructing a meaningful world; the second relates to the mode of existing in a world, to habitual and largely unreflective inhabitation in one or more “constructed worlds” that people reproduce—usually unreflectively—in their daily lives. It is in this area that researchers usually look for patterns of *longue durée*, based on the assumption, central to sociological institutionalism, that habits tend to “stick” and changing them takes some effort. Surveys are the crudest tool for studying common sense, while ethnographic participant observation is a more sophisticated method, which greatly reduces the number of observed cases, but allows for the study of phenomena like fascism, for example, “at ‘eye level’” that “is manifest in the predicaments of everyday life, in the intimacies and antagonisms of interpersonal relations, in the crosscurrents of community and livelihood” (Holmes 2019, 63).

Ideology, the most political province of the semiotic dimension of culture, contains a purposeful arrangement of meanings, values, and scripts that is designed to influence people’s minds and actions. I define it as a system of ideas or configurations of political concepts, sometimes organized into coherent narratives, that constitutes an attempt to: (1) develop an explicit, elaborate, comprehensive, and coherent portrayal of the world; (2) justify or challenge a specific configuration of power; and (3) provide blueprints (scripts, norms) for sustaining or changing the political system and/or changing the world. There are at least four major ideologies that selectively organize and articulate illiberal sentiments: conservatism, fascism, communism, and populism.² But as Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes (2022) note, “religious fundamentalism, radical nationalism, and communitarianism are also commonly traveled paths” of articulating illiberalism (xxii).

If anti-liberalism/illiberalism is a culture, it needs to be studied at various levels of articulation and traced in a variety of semiotic practices, some political, others not. In this study, I search for cultural expressions of liberalism and anti- or il-liberalism in two contexts rarely examined via standard approaches of political science. First, while attending to the semiotic dimension of culture, I study the production of meaning by two nonpolitical institutions, both of them major art galleries. This can be seen as a study of an anti-liberal ideology and its production, but in the area of non-political supply side, which has too often been left unexamined, although we intuit that much of politically relevant content is constantly generated by religious and artistic institutions. Next, I switch to the psychosocial level of culture (the demand side of the process), which I conceptualize as common sense, and examine the materials collected through ethnographic fieldwork conducted by myself and other ethnographers or sociologists. In doing so, I follow Alexander and Smith’s (1993) instruction that “detailed, thick description tends to be the most persuasive in cultural studies; one must fight against the tendency (tempting in comparative work) for interpretation to engage in a broad brushstroke portrayal of general themes” (161).

Liberalism and Illiberalism in Art (and Politics): Two Polish Exhibitions

The relationship between art and politics has recently been a subject of at least three major exhibitions in Poland, generating heated public debates.³ The Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków (MOCAK) prepared “Politics in Art” (April 28, 2022–February 26, 2023), while the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCCA) in Warsaw presented “Political Art” (August 27, 2021–January 16, 2022) and “The Influencing Machine” (June 24–November 6, 2022).

In 2018, The Ujazdowski Castle Centre became the subject of public controversy when the right-wing government appointed a director widely viewed in artistic circles as the government’s ideological ally and a person excessively partisan for this role. MOCAK, by contrast, since its inception in 2010–2011, has largely avoided being politically labeled, but most observers would agree that it is a liberal institution, in the broadest meaning of the term, and thus roughly consonant with the dominant official public culture until 2015.⁴ It is therefore tempting to see these two institutions as warriors and their exhibitions as weapons in the culture war between liberal and anti-/il-liberal tendencies in Polish public culture.

The MOCAK exhibition had six sections: Opposition and Protest, Subverting Systems and Borders, Democracy and Its Corruption, Nationalism, European Union, and Political Mediality.⁵ The first section chronicled—via many gripping photographs—major anti-government protests that took place in Poland in 2021. They included protests against the introduction of the highly restrictive anti-abortion laws, violations of the rule of law and the freedom of the media, fascism, anti-LGBTQ policies, and the inadequate response to climate change and environmental issues. The “Subverting Systems and Borders” section expressed protest against all forms of dividing people by borders and barriers, ranging from the Berlin Wall to the walls separating Palestinian territory from Israel. “Democracy and Its Corruption” criticized political passivity, governmental manipulation, and arrogance of power, but among the most powerful works of this section were those that protested the brutality and violations of human rights in nondemocratic regimes. Arguably, the most moving work was a photograph that appeared also on the official poster of the exhibition, Pyotr Pavlensky’s “Seam,” featuring the artist’s face, with his mouth sewn shut as a gesture of protest against Putin’s authoritarianism in Russia. The “Nationalism” section constituted—in the words of the catalog—a “warning against the reprehensible conviction that the assumed superiority of one’s own nation justifies contempt for and aggression towards others” (Potocka, Sachar, and Sobczyk 2022, 210). Through various media, including several vivid videos, it illustrated various manifestations of far-right politics, particularly extreme nationalism and its affinity with fascism.

“The European Union” was presented in two ways. A collection of everyday objects painted blue and decorated with the EU stars suggested that pervasive Europeanization may be dangerous by generating excessive uniformity, but is also beneficial by creating an easily accessible common space for all people living within the Schengen borders. But the show also points out the exclusionary effects of the EU’s border policy. By entering a container full of mannequins, a spectator could “get a taste of the inhuman condition—the noise, darkness and claustrophobic cramped confinement” (Potocka, Sachar, and Sobczyk 2022, 250), the condition under which many people desperately trying to flee to Europe travel or rather are transported. The sign

“European Only,” photographed in Pretoria, South Africa, is another evocative reminder of how the EU may be experienced by others. A series of powerful pictures in which people hug faint shadows of their loved ones is designed to decry a rarely considered effect of Brexit: the separation of binational couples.

The Ujazdowski “Political Art” exhibit was not divided into sections, but several dominant thematic groups could be easily distilled from the catalog descriptions of the displayed works. Several themes were treated in roughly the same way in both exhibitions. Criticism of nondemocratic and oppressive regimes is, arguably, the area of strongest congruence. Both exhibitions included works expressing condemnation of Putin’s Russia and Lukashenko’s Belarus. The UCCCA exhibition included, furthermore, works criticizing the oppressive nature of the current Iranian theocracy (particularly in its treatment of women), the North Korean dictatorship, and Communist China’s gradual demolition of Hong Kong’s democracy. Several works portray violence against women and the molestation of children by Catholic priests. But there are significant differences, and analyzing them will help not only to grasp the philosophical fissure that separates the two shows and the institutions that mounted them, but also to study how the curators and artists represent liberal or anti-liberal themes. Differences between the shows are particularly pronounced in three areas: women’s rights, immigration, and the portrayal of the European Union.

Violence against Women

Both shows include works that condemn violence against women, but they do so in markedly different ways. While the MOCAK artists work to expose the right-wing government’s curtailment of women’s reproductive rights in an EU member state ruled by a right-wing populist party, the UCCCA exhibition portrays the horrors of women being attacked by an immigrant mob, including during the 2015 New Year’s celebrations in Cologne (Brenner and Ohlendorf 2016; different framings of these and similar events and their political consequences are discussed in Garraio 2021), and the violence against women in non-European autocracies such as Iran or Yemen. The concern for women’s well-being is similar, but while MOCAK emphasized the curtailment of women’s rights in European democracies, UCCCA-invited artists stressed the lack of safety for women, both in Middle Eastern autocracies and in the EU. In the latter case, women’s lack of safety is attributed to the presence of aggressive immigrants and refugees, mostly Muslims, but also to the unwillingness of the liberal state to prosecute them. In this narrative, the culprits are “undesired” people who come from outside of Europe, while in meting out justice EU states are immobilized by their liberal ideology.

Immigration

The works that deal with immigration and the treatment of refugees in the EU presented in both institutions reflect two different understandings of the problem and dissimilar sensibilities. The most striking feature of the section devoted to the European Union in the MOCAK exhibition is its focus on the treatment of immigrants and refugees. In several works, ranging from photographs to installations, the EU is criticized for its inhuman treatment of refugees, its inability to create humane conditions in refugee camps, and its categorization of people into those who belong and those who do not belong to the privileged category of “EU Citizens.” In

general, MOCAK's treatment of these two topics is permeated by the spirit of liberal universalistic tolerance and openness: the two values that underlie the harsh critique of the official EU policies.

The tone of the UCCCA exhibition is strikingly different. The works that deal with the topic of immigration and the influx of refugees focus on violence and crimes committed by some of them. Many newcomers are defined through their religion, Islam, and are portrayed as a threat to Europe. For example, in a commentary on her work, the artist Mimsy talks about a new ideological war, "a war in which our police and establishment are committed to a kind of cowardly attempt to gloss over the threat that Islamic fundamentalism poses to our democracy" (Sztuka 2021, 58). Jana Zimova, whose works reference the Cologne 2015 events, invokes the trope of deceptive immigrants whose true goal is the destruction of Europe; one of her paintings is titled "Wolves in Sheep Clothes: Preparations of the Trojan Horse." Another artist whose work is featured in the UCCCA show is Agnieszka Kolek, a curator and cofounder of the "Passion for Freedom" competition for artists who face censorship around the world (Farrington n.d.). Kolek is an outspoken critic of the EU's immigration policy, which she sees as excessively liberal.

The EU and Liberty

The analysis of the concept of liberty—through artistic means, of course—is at the center of both exhibitions. The concept is obviously indispensable in liberalism, but it also figures prominently in anti-liberal thought. The differences between them may sometimes be subtle, but a close analysis reveals very different sensibilities and hierarchies of concern. The two Polish art exhibitions illustrate well the two understandings—quite different, to my mind—of liberty. I will sidestep a long and complex debate on the various conceptions of liberty and the role they play in liberal and anti-liberal discourses in order to engage in a close reading of the exhibitions, related materials, and ensuing debates to develop an understanding of how these different discourses deal with a thorny issue of potential limits a society may want to impose on the realization of liberty, including the deservedness of liberty.

As both exhibitions demonstrate, liberals and their adversaries both consider restrictions on liberty, but they construe them differently. Liberals have developed a rich discourse on axiological restrictions on liberty, arguing that it cannot be absolute, because actors who want to exercise freedom must take into consideration the existence of a moral space that also includes other values, such as the dignity of another human being or the civility of public discourse. As Boykin (1994) put it in his review of Holmes's 1993 book, liberalism "is a philosophy of limits as well as a philosophy of freedom" (162).

The adherents of anti-liberalism tend to absolutize liberty and reject axiological restrictions on it—at least rhetorically—but they often promote sociological restrictions, although these are rarely explicitly articulated. The essence of their position, rare or absent in modern liberal thought, is that some categories of people do not deserve the same measure of liberty as others. Anti-liberal arguments often propose sociological sorting devices (of religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) that can be used to determine the purity and thus deservingness of various categories of people to be included in the polity, whose members are "naturally" endowed with some valuable property, such as liberty. Such sorting devices are usually collective stereotypes. For example, after noting a transgression committed by a group of

Muslims or an unacceptable (in their view) action by the government of a predominantly Muslim country, anti-liberals tend to argue that all Muslims are undeserving to be members of “Western” polities with their considerable liberty, and to regard them as deserving only shows that the liberal-democratic governments are dramatically misguided (Hawley 2019; Elbanowska 2015). The claimed purity of, say, a specific race/ethnicity or religious faith provides a reason for excluding people who are assigned to impure, and thus undeserving, categories.

The second issue related to the limits of liberty may be called eligibility for liberty. “Whose liberty?” is the question. While the Kraków exhibition emphasizes liberals’ concern with the condition of liberty in general, a universalistic concern with the freedom for all, also “others,” the discourse generated around the Warsaw exhibition by its right-wing supporters focused to a considerable degree on the freedom of the organizers, the artists they invited, and their supporters. In a nutshell, while in the first case the condition of liberty was interrogated from a universal perspective, in the second case a particular concern was emphasized.⁶ The worry might have been the overall condition of liberty, but the cases selected for display and discussion were mostly about “our liberty.”

This was particularly clear in the discussion that accompanied the “Machine of Influence” exhibition. The participants positioned themselves as victims who were forced to fight for their freedom in the public space from which—in their view—they had been shut out by the dominant liberals. They expressed a particular concern about the limitation imposed on their freedom of expression by the prevalent standards associated with “European values” and epitomized by such concepts as “wokeness” or “political correctness,” which they saw as excessive if not ridiculous.⁷

While the MOCAP artists saw the European Union—often critically—as a complex and imperfect construction site, the participants of a discussion accompanying the “Machine of Influence” exhibition regarded it as a crumbling—albeit increasingly intolerant—controller (Furedi, Richardson, and Ziemkiewicz 2022). The sociologist Frank Furedi opined: “Now, there is obviously a difference between the Stalinist depiction of reality and the European Union, although sometimes I think the difference is not as much as you think” (video, 26:05). The discussants argued that their conservative or right-wing views were often suppressed and unrepresented in establishment institutions dominated by liberal elites. To make their case, they singled out what they saw as unjust liberal restrictions on the freedom of self-identified right-wing artists to show their work, even if these artists were indicted in their countries for public promotion of neofascist movements and ideologies. One of them was Dan Park, known for his aggressive Islamophobia and support for such far-right groups as German Pegida and Hungarian Jobbik, the author of the poster “Free Breivik” (the mass murderer Anders Breivik) and of an image in which Hitler wears a crown of thorns with the inscription “He too died for our sins.” Park was twice found guilty of hatred in Sweden and served jail sentences. The second was Uwe Max Jensen, a member of the far-right Stram Kurs in Denmark and the author of caricatures of Muhammad and the painting “Playing Ball with the Koran.”

The contrast between the exhibition philosophies of the two institutions could not be more startling. Whereas one of the UCCCA’s exhibitions included the works of two fascist sympathizers, MOCAP displayed works that either warn the public against the growing danger

of far-right radicalization or show people who have renounced their (neo)fascist sympathies (a good example is a series of photographs documenting the process of removing tattoos featuring far-right symbols). The manner of presentation was not critical and seems to have signaled support for an unconstrained understanding of liberty—liberty to display content that amounts to targeted symbolic violence sometimes referred to as “assaultive speech” (Matsuda et al. 1993, 7; Krook 2021). People with liberal sensitivities either censor such works or show them accompanied by critical commentary. As Holmes (1993) observes, liberals do not see such restrictions as unjust, as for them “group identity is morally welcome when it supports the universalistic distribution of individual rights to all individuals regardless of the place of birth, race, ethnic group, religion, gender, and so forth. It is unwelcome when it inhibits such a liberal distribution of rights” (297).

Having analyzed the conflict between liberalism and anti-liberalism in the artistic field, I now turn to the clash between liberalism and illiberalism at the level of common sense or ethos.

Illiberal Common Sense (Ethos)

There are disagreements over which ideas belong to the canons of liberal and anti-liberal thought, but both systems of ideas are relatively clearly articulated and coherent, as is typically the case with ideologies. Tracing the ideological influences of liberalism and anti-liberalism in the visual arts is more demanding, and any reconstruction of such influences is of course a fair target of criticism, as all interpretive work is. But detecting liberal and illiberal tones and proclivities at the level of common sense or an ethos of a group of people is even more challenging, as this cultural system is notoriously poorly articulated and amorphous (Geertz 1973). It is expected that the lines separating liberal and illiberal meanings, values, and scripts are going to be blurred. Nonetheless, it is also clear that some communities and certain socio-economic categories tend to be more liberal than others, and in some cases the illiberal tenor of local cultures is strongly articulated. It is enough to think about red and blue, not purple, electoral districts in the United States (see, for example, Kalmoe and Mason 2022 or Darmofal and Strickler 2019).

A cultural formation has many layers, ranging from well-organized ideological treatises and philosophical exegeses to less articulated areas of culture referenced by such concepts as common sense or ethos. Matthew Continetti’s (2022) study of American conservatism is organized around this opposition. As he writes: “My framework is the endless competition and occasional collaboration between populism and elitism. . . . In its quest to change America, the Right has toggled between an elite-driven strategy in both content and constituencies and a populist strategy that meets normal people where they are and is driven by their ambition, anxieties, and animosities. A successful movement must incorporate both elites and the people” (Continetti 2022, 15).

Much has been written about the rise of support for right-wing populism as a reaction to various woes that people associate with what they assume to be the undue power of liberal and cosmopolitan elites (Hochschild 2016). The task I set for myself is to isolate at least some sociological and cultural features that make certain communities more inclined to see their predicament in such a manner. In a word, I want to identify the broader sociocultural correlates

of illiberalism. The ambitions, anxieties, and animosities Continetti writes about are not the same everywhere; they are molded and channeled through cultural meanings, values, and scripts that provide people with cues about ambitions they should have, anxieties they should feel, and objects they should hate. Most studies of these phenomena are sociological and give us panoramas of relevant factors. But since I want to investigate the contrast between the features of common sense in places that vote liberal and those that vote illiberal, I decided to rely on the results of “deeper” ethnographic studies. Limited by the size of this chapter, I will focus only on one country, Poland, which not only provides at this moment a perfect laboratory for the study of liberal and illiberal kinds of ethos, but is also the place I know best.

To start looking for liberal and illiberal cultures at the level of common sense, I turned my attention to political geography, beginning with an examination of maps illustrating the distribution of voting preferences in post-1989 Poland. A hit not only among political geographers, such maps show stunning differences in the spatial distribution of political allegiances, economic development, and cultural orientations (Grabowski 2023; Kisilowski 2020). What is particularly striking is the nearly perfect correspondence of borders between different voting areas and maps of imperial partitions of Poland (1795–1918), implemented in three waves by the neighboring powers of Russia, Prussia, and the Habsburg Empire. Since the fall of state socialism in 1989, most electoral districts in the northwestern part of the country (former German partition and the territories obtained from Germany after World War II) have voted for various liberal or centrist parties in higher numbers than districts in the southeast (former Russian and Austrian partitions).

Guided by the premise that the study of cultural contexts of politics is best conducted at the local level, the level of relatively coherent local communities, I decided to construct paired comparisons between various regions of Poland that have very strongly articulated regional identities and very different political sympathies. All of them have been extensively studied through long-term sociological and ethnographic projects.

Social Capital and Trust in Liberal and Illiberal Cultures

As John Stuart Mill ([1859] 1974) put it in an oft-quoted definition, “The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it” (72). Who are the “others” in this definition? Are they people around me, in my community, here and now, or all people everywhere and at all times? This is the question of universalism versus particularism. The tenor of *On Liberty* leaves little doubt that Mill was a universalist, but let us try to imagine how this conception of freedom may work in practice, in societies that are composed of various groups and ridden by socioeconomic or cultural cleavages. As massive evidence shows, people show a strong tendency to divide themselves into groups (Lieberman, Woodward, and Kinzler 2017) and develop collective identities that make the implementation of universal principles difficult. But as Van Bavel and Packer (2021) argue, we may want to focus also on the norms prevalent in various groups, not just on the strength of their in-group identity. Depending on whether such norms are more liberal-inclusive or illiberal-exclusive, people’s behavior will vary. For example, people whose cultures are predominantly illiberal-exclusive will be more likely to attempt to deprive others of their freedom if they are not like them and do not belong to the “proper” group.

By contrast, people in groups in which liberal-inclusive norms prevail will tend to limit others' liberty on the basis of axiological, not sociological, criteria.

To study the difference between these two types of culture, we may want to rely on the concepts of social capital and trust. Social capital can be categorized into two broad types on the basis of its role in (1) defining and sustaining groups and (2) forging links between groups. Social capital developed through and for fortification of in-group bonds, particularly if they are constructed in a zero-sum fashion through a powerful “friend-enemy” distinction, is designated bonding social capital. Social capital that facilitates cooperative relations between groups or between individual members of different groups is designated bridging social capital.⁸

Putnam articulates the difference between the two types as a same-other distinction. Bonding social capital “brings together people who are like one another in important respects (ethnicity, age, gender, social class, and so on), whereas bridging social capital refers to social networks that bring together people who are unlike one another” (Putnam and Goss 2002, 11). Woolcock (1998, 172) and Woolcock and Narayan (2000) provide a more elaborate, three-part distinction:

- Bonding: connects individuals inside of groups, communities, networks;
- Bridging: connects individuals and groups “laterally” with other groups or individuals who belong to other groups;
- Linking: connects individuals inside of a group with the “wider institutional environment (state institutions, the economy, etc.)” (Bahovec, Potočnik, and Zrinščak 2007, 179).

Since the role of the state or government as the guarantor of the rule of law is central in the liberal concept of liberty, the relationship between social groups and the state is of utmost importance. How is the linking between “durable networks” (as loci of bonding social capital) and larger social organizations, such as states (in which most such networks are embedded), structured and performed? This is the problematic that animates Charles Tilly’s later work. He introduced the concept of trust networks (Tilly 2005, 2007), arguing that their integration into the state is a critical aspect of democratization (Tilly 2007, 80–105) and—what is particularly relevant for this analysis—that it is crucial for strong compliance with the rule of law (Tilly 2005; Braithwaite and Levi 2003). The key issue is the nature of such trust networks. What are the proportions between different types of social capital, bonding, bridging, and linking in them? For example, the dominance of bonding social capital and underdeveloped linking capital usually indicates weak integration of the group into the state and its system of laws and regulations, which in a liberal democracy should protect liberty in a manner consistent with the principle of transparent universalism.

To flesh out these theoretical distinctions, I now turn to empirical studies that show the region-dependent differences in types and intensities of social capital. Tomasz Zarycki (2002; 2007) collected rich empirical data on the social and cultural capital in two towns, representing two different mega-regions of Poland: Iława⁹ (formerly German Western and Northern Territories) and Nowy Targ in the Podhale region, where support for anti-liberal politicians is particularly high.¹⁰ During the period of Zarycki’s study, 71 percent of his respondents in Iława were born elsewhere—typical for the shallow rootedness of people in this region. By contrast, 74 percent of Nowy Targ residents said they were born there. This difference in the depth of rootedness, measured by the number of generations, is even more pronounced when people are asked about

their grandparents: in Nowy Targ, 53 percent had at least one grandparent born there; in Hława, only 11 percent!

An informative set of answers was generated by the question “Do you think that the residents of your town and region differ from residents of other regions according to the following characteristics [a list comes here]?” Thus, while only 15 percent of Nowy Targ residents declared that they were “more open to the world and novelties” than people elsewhere, in Hława 29 percent expressed this opinion about themselves. Nowy Targ was also more nationalistic—43 percent of respondents believed that they were more patriotic than others, while in Hława such belief was shared by only 11 percent of the respondents. A huge difference was discovered in the level of respect for tradition. In Nowy Targ, 74 percent claimed to have higher respect for tradition than others; in Hława, it was 21 percent. These results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of the type of social capital in Nowy Targ and Hława, Poland¹¹

	Nowy Targ	Hława
More patriotic than people in other regions of Poland	43%	11%
More tolerant of difference than others	9%	18%
More open to the world and novelties	15%	29%
More respectful of regional traditions	74%	21%

Furthermore, the respondents in Nowy Targ believe they trust each other more than people in other regions of Poland: 15 percent say so, contrasted with 7 percent in Hława. But this information—combined with Nowy Targ’s much stronger inward orientation—seems to indicate the dominance of bonding over bridging or linking social capitals. Moreover, bonding social capital in Nowy Targ tends to be informal.

When people were asked about the most influential individuals, groups, and institutions in their respective towns, in both places municipal councils and mayors were ranked at the top. In the fourth place, however, were “familial interest groups—local clans”—an indubitable sign of the significance attributed to informal social capital in both locations. But a closer look at the data shows a very telling difference between the two towns. In the Galician Nowy Targ, only 8 percent of respondents claimed that such groups have “no significant influence.” In Hława support for this view was three times higher—27 percent! This is an indication of the significant difference in the type of bonding social capital. As Zarycki (2002) notes, the significance of families and kinship networks (“family clans”) in Galicia is much more pronounced than in the more individualistic former German partition and the Western Territories (165).

To summarize, people in Nowy Targ lay a greater claim to being (1) more patriotic, (2) less tolerant, (3) less open to the world, (4) and more respectful of regional traditions than people in Hława, a quintessential town in the post-German Western Territories. They are also: (5) less trusting, (6) more networked via informal mechanisms, (7) more intensely attached to their locality, and (8) more religious. Such a set or syndrome of sociocultural features reveals a relatively “closed,” most likely illiberal community. To test this hypothesis, we can look at the results of elections in both areas. Since 1989 they all have shown similar patterns, which I

illustrate in Table 2 only with the results of the 2020 presidential election, in which the staunchly anti-liberal Andrzej Duda faced the quintessentially liberal Rafał Trzaskowski.

Table 2: The results of the 2020 presidential election in Hława and Nowy Targ¹²

	Anti-liberal Andrzej Duda	Liberal Rafał Trzaskowski
Hława county (strong bridging social capital)	52.5	47.5
Hława town	44.3	55.7
Nowy Targ county (dominant bonding social capital)	72.5	27.5
Nowy Targ town	56.6	43.4

Since the urban-rural divide works in Poland in the same way as in most places around the world, with urbanites being more liberal than their rural compatriots (Cramer 2016), paired comparisons between respective rural and urban electoral districts of Hława and Nowy Targ are particularly telling. The comparison of urban electoral districts shows Duda’s 12-percentage-point advantage in illiberal Nowy Targ, while the difference between the rural counties grows to 20 percentage points.

Clearly, these are two different social locations, with differently formed cultures, different dominant types of social capital, and differently constructed networks of trust. Hława is a place where bridging social capital is relatively strong, anti-liberal ideology does not gain much support, and a large number of residents vote for liberal parties and politicians. By contrast, Nowy Targ is an area where bonding social capital seems to predominate, the level of acceptance of anti-liberal ideology is high, and national elections are routinely won by illiberal candidates. The Podhale Górale natives often talk about being mere pawns on the board controlled by more powerful individuals and forces. “They [the politicians] get together, every day they sit down and deliberate how to screw up someone! And they always screw up a worker or a farmer! They are not going to screw themselves, right?” (Malewska-Szałygin 2008, 102). This alienation is discursively amplified by invoking the omnipotent “Jews”: “They always controlled everything. They still do today. Simply, the largest capital in the world is held by the Jews” (Malewska-Szałygin 2008, 112). Quite a few respondents seem to believe that “The government today [2000] is Jews! People not from our country! People who care only about the interest of their own nationality. This is such a greedy nationality that they would not allow others to develop, gospodarzyć!” (Malewska-Szałygin 2008, 112).¹³ Distrust of the outside world, particularly the world of politics, is strongly articulated and thus the development of linking social capital is difficult. As a result, local networks, whose ethos tends to be illiberal, are reluctant to be incorporated into the state, and this contributes to political polarization in the country, particularly when liberals control the levers of central power.

The culture of Cieszyn Silesia, the region I studied ethnographically, provides an instructive contrast (Aronoff and Kubik 2013).¹⁴ One of its constitutive features is a strongly articulated sense of control over one's environment, achieved through hard, disciplined work. The outside world does not need to be seen as alien or hostile, as Protestantism teaches that the state is not necessarily evil. As if echoing Max Weber, people can be heard sharing a maxim that one's duty is to be an obedient citizen, regardless of the source of authority, and they regard participation in public affairs as a duty. In fulfilling this duty, one is expected to act with measured moderation and not to interfere with more basic duties of every "serious" person: hard work, reliability, and respect for others. These virtues are epitomized by the term *spolegliwość*, coined in local dialect and later adopted by the influential Polish philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński as a cornerstone of his ethical system. This can be roughly rendered as "reliability combined with trustworthiness and sensitivity to the needs of others," and thus seems to approximate intuitions associated with the concept of generalized trust.¹⁵ In turn, as Lewenstein and Theiss (2008) observe: "A higher level of generalized social trust is associated with the more 'modern' model of local society, based on the associational type of social bonds. The lower level of generalized trust is associated with a more traditional model, in which communal ties constitute the basic social bond" (313–314). What needs to be examined next are cultural scripts used to define the individual and dominant models of authority in "modern" and "traditional" communities.

Agency and the Concept of the Individual

The discussion of the relationship between individualism and liberalism is complex, as there is no one version of either of these phenomena (Środa 2003). In his masterly study on the rise of democracy in post-1989 Poland, Grabowski (2023) argues that the key factor that explains the predominance of voting for liberals in the post-German western and northern territories and the successes of anti-liberals in the east and south of the country is the much stronger culture of individualism in the former. He has amassed convincing historical and sociological evidence to support his thesis and carefully considered competing explanations. For example, he compares two subregions formerly belonging to Germany for long stretches of time, the Western Territories and the Midwest,¹⁶ and concludes:

The Western Territories are ahead of the Midwest on several measures of liberal-democratic and capitalist development, yet the two areas are indistinguishable in most respects. The Territories have no edge over the Midwest in the degree of socioeconomic modernization. . . . The main element that differentiates the two regions seems to be the greater individualism [emphasis added] of society in the Western Territories. And so, individualism and its main cultural alternative, corporatism, are neither neutral nor the epiphenomenon (or by-product, or mere supplement) of other, more basic structures or processes that have resulted in the different trajectories of Poland's regions after 1989. Rather, they emerge as a crucial causal factor in their own right (Grabowski 2023, 140–141).

Grabowski follows a long line of scholars who argue or show that individualism tends to be associated with liberalism, while anti- and illiberalism show elective affinity for collectivism or corporatism (Beetham 1989; Fawcett 2018; Holmes 1993, 258–259). While I agree with Holmes that liberal individualism is not necessarily asocial (2022, 5), I want to contrast it with illiberal

individualism. It can be articulated and practiced in collectivistic-illiberal cultures, but its cultural form and thus its mode of expression are different than in liberal cultures, and this contrast illuminates another important difference: the type of preferred social order.

The autonomous individual is a key building block of the liberal social order based on a social contract.¹⁷ Individualism can, however, coexist with illiberal cultures that tend to be collectivistic or corporatist; it just needs to be expressed in a specific cultural idiom. So, for example, in cultures where social life is mostly organized according to the idiom of kinship, the articulation of the concept of the autonomous individual is difficult and individualism is not supported by the dominant group values and norms. In Podhale, individuals are seen primarily as components of their kinship groups and/or households, as the house is an indispensable building block of social imagery and practice in the region (Pine 1996; Buzalka 2022). In such predominantly illiberal-collectivistic cultures, people who want to assert their autonomous individuality can do so, but either outside of their groups or on its margins, according to a culturally prescribed rebellious form. By contrast, in predominantly liberal cultures, particularly those that contain also norms of social responsibility (see Fawcett on Hoover [2018, 268]), the individual's autonomy is expected to be realized inside of the rule-governed liberal social order. For example, the mythologized "rugged" individualism of the American frontier or the Polish Western Territories was quintessentially illiberal; it only became a part of a liberal-leaning culture and social order once it became disciplined (Grabowski 2023, 254).

This generalization is borne out by another ethnographic comparison. Residents of Podhale (including the Nowy Targ region) see themselves as "hard-working people" who "want to work because they want to achieve something" (Malewska-Salygin 2008, 53), but their self-stereotype rates "individualistic, entrepreneurial skills much higher than regular waged labor" (Pine 1997, 66). Their culture includes the figure of the entrepreneurial trickster (Pine 1997; 1999), who achieves their goals through craftiness that takes them to the limits of the legal order or even beyond. By contrast, in the prevalent, if somewhat idealized, self-reconstruction of the regional Cieszyn Silesian ethos, the essence of life is seen in labor (*robota*) that is often tedious but nevertheless defines one's humanity. "The man lived to labor, that is to do the work he was assigned. Labor constituted the most essential content of life" (Szczepański 1984, 32–33). In such a culture, individualism and creativity are valued, but they need to be expressed in harmony with the rationally ordered and religiously legitimized rhythm of social life.¹⁸ The spirit of moderation and the assumption that one's environment is controllable through an even, sustained effort permeates Cieszyn's culture, which also values specifically articulated individualism and self-discipline.¹⁹ Jan Szczepański (1997), a distinguished Polish sociologist and a Protestant born in the region, wrote in his *Social Reality of Protestantism*: "Protestant religions emphasize one creative factor that is able to transform the world, namely human individuality. . . . Individuality thus defined may radiate original creativity, inimitable, even if it is small-scale creativity in everyday matters, since there is no other person that could create ideas, inventions, or works that have been already developed or will be developed in the future" (14). Such rhythm of social life is quite consistent with a liberal ethos, as the community-building bonding social capital is sufficiently balanced by bridging and linking social capitals underpinned by a solid level of trust and anchored in strongly articulated disciplined individualism.

Illiberal Model of Authority

While the exact composition of liberalism's core is under dispute (Bell 2014), liberals tend to agree that the state should be held in check and cut to size, although its minimal scope is hotly debated, as excessive curtailment of the state is also unacceptable. This is because liberalism is based on fear (Shklar 1984) or distrust (Fawcett 2018) of power, and thus liberals have come to believe that "rulers must be constrained to operate in accordance with an overarching legal ideal, the framework ideal for law known as the rule of law" (Krygier 1999, 69; 2022). But the rule of law requires a legislature that creates laws and an administrative apparatus that enforces them; in short, it is hard to conceive of it without a state (Holmes 1995, 269–70; Krygier 2022, 68). And this generates a paradox: liberals realize—however reluctantly—that they need to support an institution that they distrust as a matter of principle. By contrast, fair provision of liberty under the auspices of state-guaranteed rule of law is not a pressing concern in an illiberal worldview.

Adherents of illiberalism—in contrast to liberals—do not see the state as the necessary tool for administering constraints on the exercise of liberty. They take the defense of liberty—as they understand it—into their own hands, at least rhetorically, and define the key task of the state as the provision of an institutional scaffold for "natural communities," most importantly the nation. In other words, devotees of illiberalism tend to assess the state's utility in terms of its ability to enhance national prowess rather than its institutional capacity to protect the rule of law. Moreover, this elevated concern with protecting the nation is combined with a specific construal of authority. It has little or nothing to do with the conceptual apparatus developed by liberals, with its formal definitions of roles and explicitly delineated constraints on the power of officeholders. In Weberian terms, the justification of power consistent with liberal principles is best approximated by legal-rational legitimacy, while illiberal justifications of power rely on invocations of tradition (Beetham 1989). Communities organized on the basis of organic and hierarchical models of kinship, family, or household that have at their apex a leader endowed with what is best seen as traditional authority, are more likely to have a high level of distrust of the state and its institutions, distrust often based on a conviction that the central government—certainly any government not controlled by anti-liberals—is corrupt, inept, and out of sync with the people.

To illustrate these processes, I again use an example from the area around Nowy Targ. At the center of the "proper" structure of power in this region, and for that matter in many other areas with dominant peasant or post-peasant cultures, is the figure of *gospodarz* (see also Buzalka 2021; 2022), whose full meaning in English can be rendered by a combination of several terms, including "farmer," "homesteader," "landlord," "householder," "host," "manager," and "master." It is an image of a male who is in charge of a household, particularly the one who is engaged in agricultural production. He is older, experienced, savvy, and possessed of both leadership skills and practical economic knowledge. A good *gospodarz* is demanding, economically prudent, and protective of his *gospodarstwo* (household) and the people who live and work there. He rules in an autocratic fashion. He is also a guardian of local or even national traditions. When the locals affirm that they expect their politician to be a *gospodarz*, they do not mind that such a position comes with power that may be nondemocratic or unconstrained by the liberal rules of checks and balances. In conversations, they often make it clear that they prefer authoritative (or authoritarian) efficiency to liberal democratic accountability (Malewska-Szałygin 2008, 88–98).

In their view, the country needs effective gospodarze²⁰ more than accountable state or regional functionaries.

Such preferences indicate the desire to continue or revive traditional structures of authority. They rely on informal and “self-understood” rules of “natural” hierarchies that are usually paternalistic. The dominant forms of social control in such arrangements of authority are known in the community but usually are not transparent to outside observers or state functionaries, in sharp contrast to liberal systems of checks and balances that call for transparency and whose absence is dangerous for democracy (Tilly 2005).

Summary and Conclusions

Illiberalism is approached in this study as an ethos, while anti-liberalism is treated as an ideology. If culture is conceptualized as a gigantic communication apparatus, its simplest model includes senders, messages, and receivers. In the study of politics and power we are particularly interested in senders whose ideological messages are intended to influence people’s politically relevant beliefs, ideas, or sentiments, in short their common sense or ethos.

Most students of anti-liberalism engage with written works, ranging from major philosophical treatises to mere political pamphlets (Holmes 1993; Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes 2022) but this study has looked elsewhere: to the field of artistic production and local cultures. To reconstruct the workings of illiberalism at the level of ethos or common sense, I have relied on sociological or ethnographic case studies, including my own. My goal was not to analyze how anti-liberal ideology and illiberal ethos reinforce each other; had I decided to study their interactions, I would have focused on politics or religion (in this case, Catholicism in Poland). I decided to write about the arts, since expressions of anti-liberalism in the artistic field, being rather unexpected and certainly understudied, were expected to yield new insights.

My study of two artistic exhibitions, one liberal and one anti-liberal, has demonstrated dramatic contrasts in the treatment of such topics as women’s rights, criticism of the European Union, immigration to Europe, and, most prominently, the understanding of liberty. When the liberals consider limitations on liberty, they examine axiological tradeoffs, while anti-liberals tend to search for criteria of sociological exclusion. In the first approach, the mutually constraining relations between liberty and other values are considered; in the second, the worthiness of various categories of people to be accepted in a social order based on liberty is examined.

In the study of liberalism and illiberalism as components of common sense, I focused on their three features and found out that:

- Social capital that underpins the illiberal ethos tends to be predominantly bonding, while the liberal ethos is more at home in communities in which bridging and linking social capitals are present and valued. Different types of social capital are systematically related to different conceptions of trust: bonding social capital tends to be related to particularized trust, while bridging social capital is more frequently associated with generalized trust. The predominantly illiberal region of Nowy Targ, strong on bonding social capital associated with a well-articulated “traditional” and inward-looking culture, shows a relatively low level of generalized trust. The regional trust network built on a

rich soil of bonding social capital and relatively underdeveloped linking capital cannot be easily integrated into public politics, and this is a problem for (liberal) democracy, as Tilly (2005) argues.

- The well-established generalization that liberalism shows strong elective affinity with individualism, while illiberalism is usually coupled with collectivism or corporatism, holds. It is not surprising, therefore, that since liberalism and democracy have become tightly intertwined, individualism is shown to be a major factor contributing to democratization (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2021). But as the ethnographic studies reviewed here demonstrate, there are at least two different types of individualism: disciplined individualism, more common in at least some liberal cultures (for example, those influenced by Protestantism); and rebellious individualism, more compatible with illiberalism and its attendant penchant for “natural” communities and hierarchies, as well as conformity with conservatively understood traditions.
- The informal, organic, and hierarchical model of authority is incompatible with formalized and transparent mechanisms of accountability, without which liberal democracy is hard to conceive. Such a model is embedded in the political culture of the Nowy Targ region, which also shows one of the highest levels of support and voting for illiberal parties and politicians.²¹ By contrast, it is much less accepted in Cieszyn Silesia, a region where the vote for liberal parties and politicians is higher than the national average.²²

Elevated levels of generalized trust, combined with moderation, confidence in one’s formally protected agency, trust in rationality, and sustained effort, as well as individualism in everyday matters, predispose people to support liberal policies and politicians. This is borne out by empirical evidence. The 2020 presidential election in Poland was very close at the national level, with 51 percent of the vote going to the candidate associated with the anti-liberal Law and Justice Party (PiS, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), Andrzej Duda, and 49 percent to Rafał Trzaskowski, the candidate of the liberal Civic Platform (PO, Platforma Obywatelska). In Nowy Targ county, Duda received 77 percent of the vote and 57 percent in the town of Nowy Targ. In the town of Ustroń in Cieszyn Silesia, a place with a sizable Protestant population where I conducted my own fieldwork, Duda received 38 percent of the vote, while in neighboring, predominantly Protestant Wisła he received just 27 percent. These results indicate the existence of very different political cultures, predominantly illiberal in the area of Nowy Targ and liberal in Cieszyn Silesia (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of liberal and illiberal cultures

	High level of pro-liberal vote (exemplars: Iława, Cieszyn Silesia)	Low level of pro-liberal vote (exemplars: Nowy Targ, Podhale)
Bridging and linking social capital	Strong	Weak
Dominant social ethos	Disciplined individualism	Collectivism and/or rebellious individualism

Generalized trust	Strong	Weak
Dominant model of authority	Formal, strong external transparency	Informal, weak external transparency

The existence of persistently liberal and illiberal regions and localities in Poland is well documented. Moreover, the country’s electoral map is divided along lines remarkably close to the borders of the nineteenth-century partitions, indicating that this pattern has been largely shaped by historical processes of *longue durée*. This finding constitutes a powerful challenge to Krastev and Holmes (2019), who attribute the failure of liberalism in Central Europe to the rejection of what they see as the arrogant imposition of this ideology on this part of Europe by the West. As I have argued elsewhere (Kubik 2020), “the people” of East-Central Europe did not reject the Western dictum to imitate it; some of them did, others did not. In many parts of East-Central Europe, most clearly perhaps in Poland, challenges to liberalism are not mere expressions of rebellion against an externally imposed call for imitation, but result primarily—in my view—from the historically shaped illiberal ethos in some areas and communities of the region, recently amplified by the systematic propagation and heightened social visibility of anti-liberal ideologies.

The ensuing ideological and political conflict between these two orientations is arguably the most important feature of the political, social, and cultural landscape in many countries of the region. As the Polish case vividly exemplifies, this conflict is hard to bridge and its intensification threatens liberal democracy.

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1 In a similar vein, Oklopcic (2022) sees illiberalism as “a set of perceptions, inclinations, and dispositions” (218).

2 For more on conservatism, see the chapter by Fawcett in this volume. For more on populism, see the chapter by Pappas.

3 For a summary of some of the debated issues in English, see Szymanski (2022).

4 The emotional intensity of the Polish debates that I tried to follow, and my own liberal proclivities, make it difficult to approach these exhibitions in an “objective,” detached manner. My goal is to reconstruct two different ways of presenting such topics as liberty or violence against women, as they reveal two different systems of thought.

5 This is how this section is referred to in the catalog. “Mediatization of Politics” may sound more natural than “Political Mediality” to the native ear.

6 For the seminal distinction between universalism and particularism in sociology, see Parsons and Shils (1951).

7 Furedi described leaflets he first saw in Hungary. According to him, they announced that “we in Hungary and the European Union believe in important European values . . . number one was diversity, which means like the many. Number two—inclusion, . . . number three was the environment, who does not believe in the environment, . . . and number four was about gay liberation and LGBTQ. . . .” Furedi continued: “I know Hungarians and I know that most Hungarians, you know, most ordinary, normal Hungarians would not support these ‘European’ values.” Then he reported that he saw the same leaflets in Catalonia and France and concluded: “it is a bit like when the Soviet Union was dominating East Europe. . . .” (This statement starts at minute 23:08 of Furedi et al. 2022.)

8 Parts of this section are based on my earlier work with Amy Linch (Kubik and Linch 2009).

9 Ława (Eylau in German) was founded in 1305 as a Prussian town. In 1701 it became a part of the Kingdom of Prussia. After the Treaty of Versailles (1919), the decisive majority of the residents voted in a plebiscite to remain in Germany. After 1945 (and as a result of the Potsdam Conference), Ława was incorporated into Poland, its German population was expelled, and the town was resettled with ethnic Poles.

10 Podhale was settled in the thirteenth century as a land controlled by the Polish crown. In 1772 (the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), it became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was reincorporated into Poland after World War I, in 1918.

11 Data from Zarycki 2002, 93–99.

12 Data from the National Electoral Commission: <https://pkw.gov.pl/>.

13 The meaning and significance of this verb and the related noun *gospodarz* are explained below.

14 Cieszyn Silesia is a typical Central European borderland where the meeting of various social and cultural influences has culminated interchangeably in cross-fertilization or violent clashes. It is the only region of Poland where Protestants (Lutherans) constitute a significant portion of the population, exceeding 50 percent in several towns and villages. The region was politically separated from the lands united under the Polish crown in 1327. After World War I, its eastern part was incorporated in the resurrected Polish state; the western part became a province of the new Czechoslovak state.

15 In survey studies, the level of generalized trust is measured with the question “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in

dealing with people?” Nannestad (2008) provides a useful review of the literature on generalized trust.

16 The Midwest are the lands that were controlled by Germany/Prussia during the partitions of Poland (1795–1914) and returned to Poland after 1918, while the Western Territories were part of Germany for much longer and only incorporated into Poland after 1945.

17 As Fawcett warns, liberals “meant so many different things by ‘individualism’ that anyone who used the term was bound to mislead somebody” (2018, 268). My generalization, however risky, seems to capture the spirit of one of the most important assumptions of liberalism.

18 As Holmes (1995) writes: “Liberal individualism is misunderstood as a celebration of egoism or the callous lack of social conscience. On the contrary, the essence of liberal individualism is best expressed in the double imperative to take moral responsibility for oneself and to treat others as individuals, rather than as members of a group” (269). As for the religious (Protestant) justification for tedious daily labor, consider the following feature of the Cieszyn Silesian culture: “Each daily chore had in it some element of the cross and Lord’s suffering, so one had to follow Jesus’ example” (Szczepański 1984, 108).

19 Gorski (1993) emphasizes the significance of Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, for the development of the idea and practice of self-discipline. See also Grabowski (2023, 85–88).

20 Plural of gospodarz.

21 See, for example, the results of the 2020 presidential election:

<https://prezydent20200628.pkw.gov.pl/prezydent20200628/pl/wyniki/2/pow/121100>.

22 See <https://prezydent20200628.pkw.gov.pl/prezydent20200628/pl/wyniki/2/pow/240300>.