



How to become an engaged citizen?

A GUIDE FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT LIKE POLITICS

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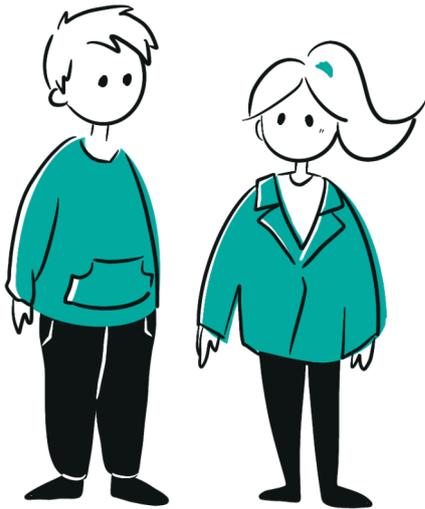
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What is a citizen?

This handbook offers tips to help you become an engaged citizen, even if you are not interested in politics at all. This is not just about being a citizen, meaning someone permanently residing in a country, but about being a citizen who is active in developing their country.



CITIZIEN

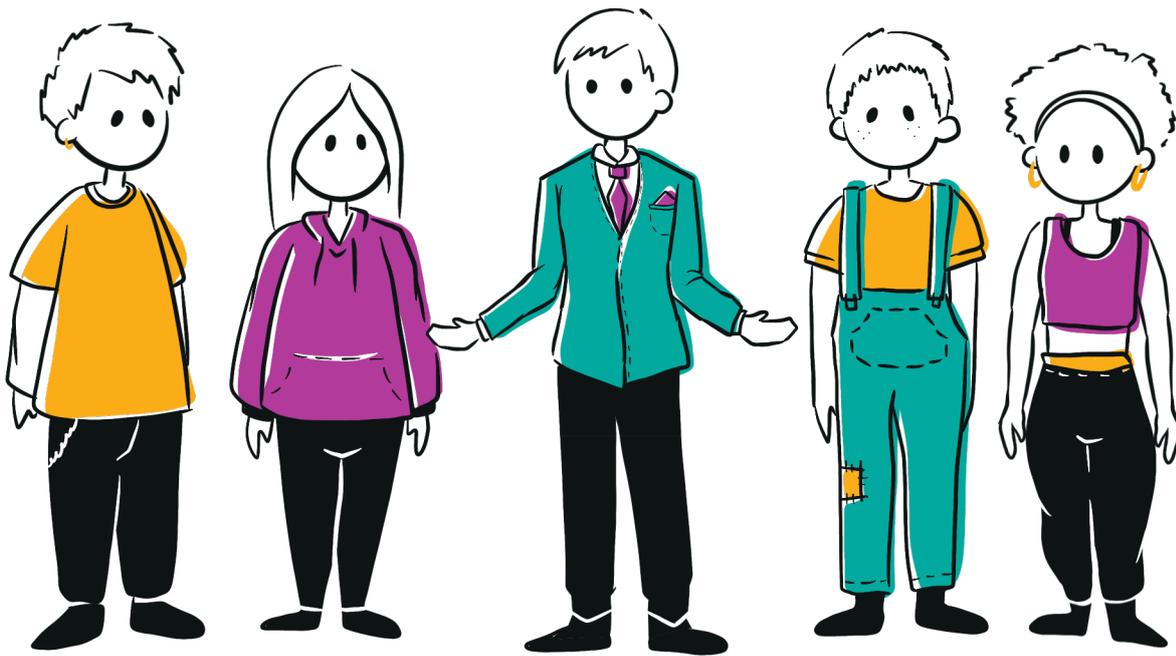
Member of society of a particular state, with specific rights and obligations provided for by the constitution.

(Translated from a definition in the PWN Polish Language Dictionary)

The above definition has three parts. Firstly, we are talking about a member of society of a given country – with high probability you meet this condition from birth (according to the Constitution, the basic form of obtaining citizenship in Poland is blood right, so it can be said that citizenship is inherited). Secondly, the definition of citizenship talks about the rights of a citizen, and thirdly – about his/her duties.

Among civil rights, we distinguish personal rights and freedoms (e.g. personal inviolability or the right to privacy), political rights (e.g. rights related to participation in public life: the right to vote, stand for election, or submit petitions), economic rights (the right to private property) and social and cultural rights (the right to education or to information on the condition and protection of the environment).

But with rights come responsibilities. Some of them are written directly into the Constitution (including allegiance to the Republic of Poland, compliance with the law, care for the common good or care for the state of the environment). Others relate to activities for the common good and cooperation within the community. They include activities and attitudes related to democratic governance and social participation (political participation, volunteering, membership in various organisations, etc.). It is these responsibilities that we will examine in more detail in this publication.



[Part One](#) contains some ideas for you in terms of civic activities. Each one includes examples of successful initiatives to show you how they work in practice. This section also includes practical tips for planning more complex civic activities: To Do List, Activist’s Planner, and Planning Tips that you can use for other types of projects as well.

[Part Two](#) discusses the competences that a citizen must have, according to research: interest in public affairs and a sense of political agency. This section is based on research findings; you will find here not only the definitions of these competences, but also information on their level in society.

[Part Three](#) provides some information about citizenship and civil society. This section introduces the theories and scientific ideas that describe these two concepts. Reading it is not necessary to become a good citizen, however, such knowledge may interest you or be useful to you during civics or history lessons.

Each of the three parts ends with a “Test your Knowledge” summary, where you can check your knowledge in a given area. Answering these questions will let you compare your answers with the results obtained by your peers in large social surveys, discussed in the sections “What does research say?”.

PART I



WHAT DO CITIZENS DO?

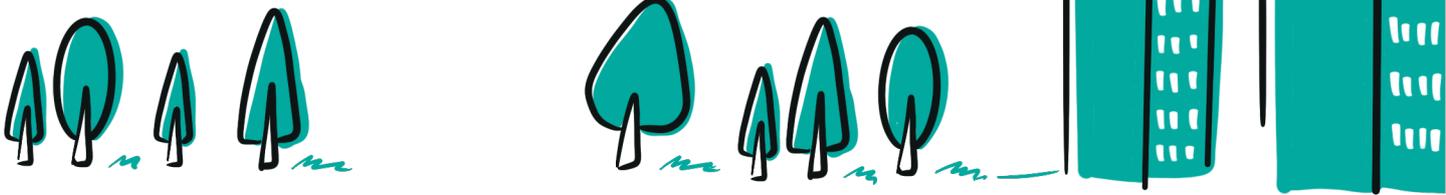
Common good

Being a good citizen does not require a lot of work, time or money from us. The first step to good citizenship (extremely important, because it is described in the Constitution) is taking care of the **common good** (i.e. pavements, parks, school buildings or the natural environment).

PUBLIC GOOD

Good which being consumed by one person can be consumed by others at the same time.

(PWN Encyclopaedia)



Our government is responsible for producing and delivering public goods (and we all contribute to them in the form of taxes or additional small fees). However, the fact that we can use public goods, regardless of whether we pay for them or not, gives rise to freeloaders – people who use public goods without incurring costs (for example, they travel by public transport without buying tickets).

Another example of misuse of public goods is using them to increase one's own individual benefit. This was illustrated by Garrett Hardin in an article published in 1968 in which he described **the problem of the common pasture**. Imagine the villagers sharing a common pasture. They agree that – in order not to disturb the balance of the ecosystem – each inhabitant may only bring one cow there. One day one shepherd starts bringing two cows. Others, encouraged by the benefits and inconsistencies, quickly follow suit. As a result, the profit made by individual inhabitants turns out to be short-term, the pasture becomes sterile and soon no one can use it.



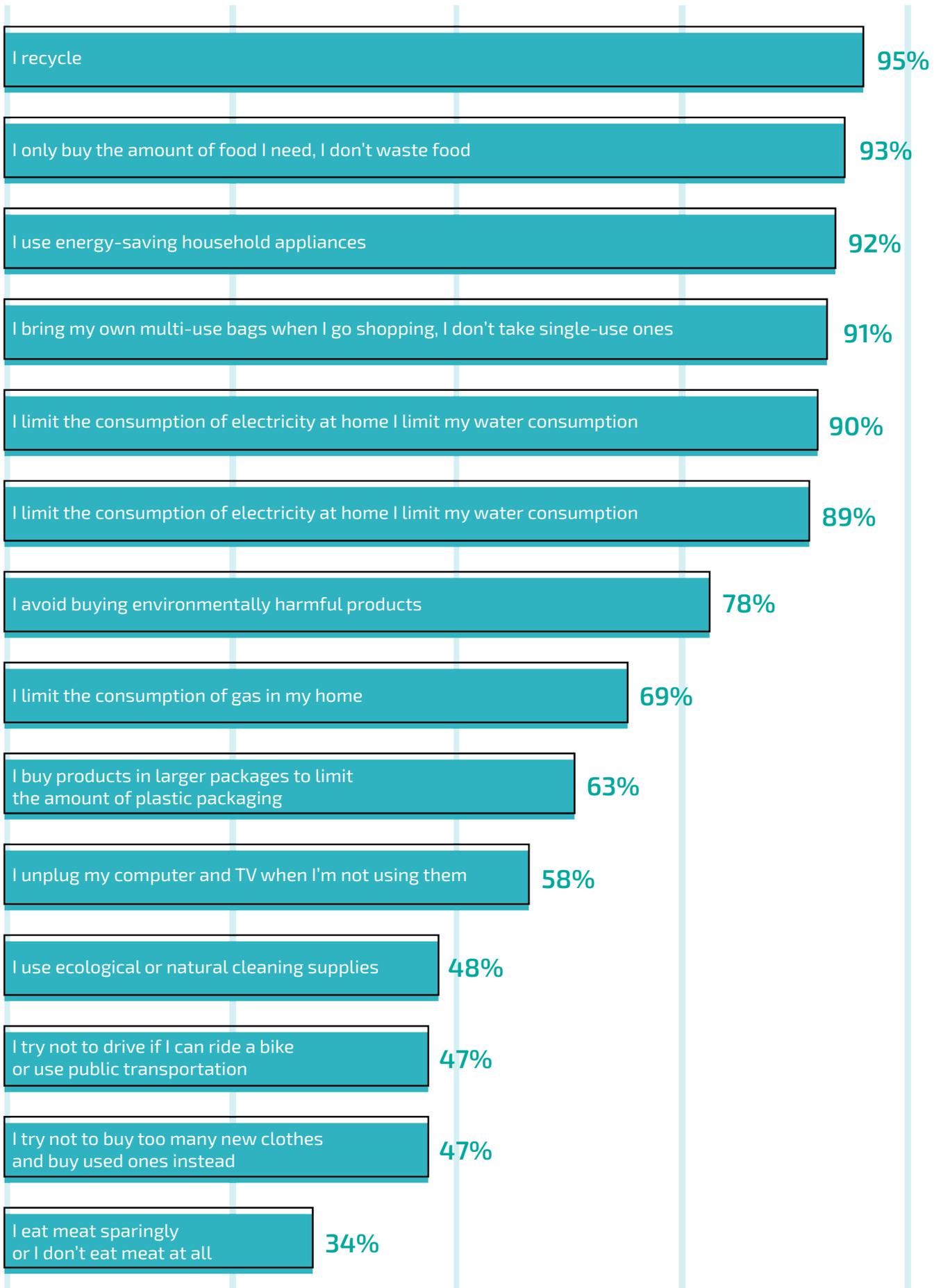
All around us there are plenty of examples of not caring for the common good. Take a look at the list below:

- Not cleaning up after your dog outside.
- Littering.
- Disturbing your neighbours by making noise between 22:00 and 6.00.
- Crossing the street at a red light.
- Not paying the fare on a bus, tram or train.
- Not returning books to the library on time.
- Cheating during a test¹.

These are just a few examples that you may have noticed around you. As you can see, these activities do not require significant amounts of resources (knowledge, time, or money). **Consider what you can change in your behaviour to better care for the common good and use it wisely.** Think about how you can convince others to do so.

One thing you can do immediately is take steps to benefit the common good that is the natural environment (this civic duty is also included in the Constitution). As research shows, the percentage of people who are convinced that climate change is an increasingly serious threat is growing (in Poland, for example, this is shown by [the Humans Attack](#) study). But to change reality it's not enough to know it – you have to feel that something needs to be done about it. And start acting.

¹ More examples of the lack of care and consent to the common good can be found in the [CBOS report](#).

Fig. 1. Which of these pro-ecological actions do you take on regular basis?

In [Figure 1](#) you will find a list of actions taken by Poles, together with the percentage of people implementing them. How many of these activities do you engage in every day?

In his book “We are the Weather” Jonathan Foer suggests adding activities to this list that are aimed at informing others (parents, friends) about the problem and encouraging them to take specific actions. He also mentions the need to exert influence on politicians who make climate decisions, or on companies producing, for example, food or energy.

Below you will find some ideas on how you can influence others (parents, friends, politicians), not only on environmental issues, thereby taking the next step on your way to becoming a good citizen.

Various forms of activity

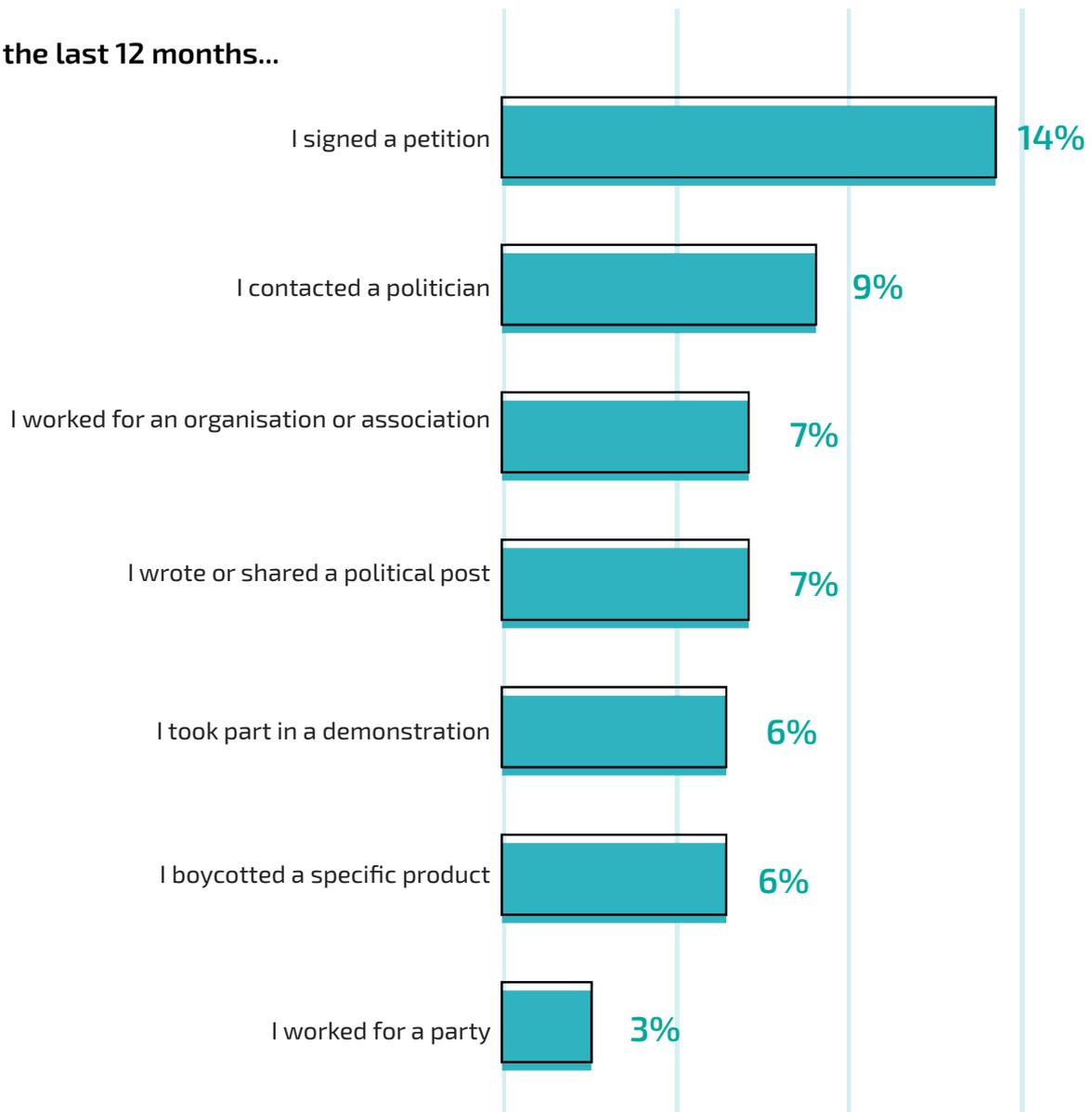
To be a good citizen you just need to take responsibility for the common good: take care of it, use it wisely and not avoid the costs necessary to create it. However, there are also other forms of civic activity aimed primarily at drawing the attention of the public (i.e. all people) and officials (both at the local level and those at the national and even European Union level) to specific problems and to persuade them to act.



To begin with, let's take a look at which political and civic activities are popular in Poland (Figure 2). The European Social Survey shows that the level of civic activity in Poland is very low – less than one in 10 Poles is involved in this type of activity. Signing petitions is the most popular (although only 14% of respondents undertake this activity), followed by contacting politicians (one in ten people), volunteering and being active on social media (7% each), participating in demonstrations and boycotting products (6% each). The least frequent activity is working for a party (not very popular, especially at times outside the election campaign).

It is worth mentioning that activities that require devoting one's own time are of particular interest – another CBOS² (Public Opinion Research Center) study shows that offering financial help is much easier for us. In the last year, 59% of respondents donated money to a charity, 45% donated goods, such as clothes or books – and only 15% of respondents donated their time.

Fig. 2. In the last 12 months...



Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018). Own calculations.

2 More examples of the lack of care and consent to the common good can be found in the [CBOS report](#).

Petition

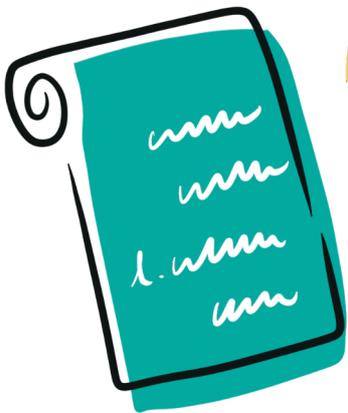
The previously cited ESS study from 2018 shows that the most frequent civic activity is submitting or signing petitions. Thanks to the universal access to the Internet, signing petitions has become extremely easy. It is also a simple activity, which is why it is relatively popular.



PETITION

A request submitted to a relevant public authority. It may relate to changes in law, taking a decision or other action in the matter relating to the entity submitting the petition, collective life or values requiring special protection in the name of the common good.

(Translated from a definition in the PWN Polish Language Dictionary)



A petition can be submitted by an individual (i.e. you) or a non-legal entity (e.g. an association). They can be submitted to the appropriate public institution in Poland, if the matter concerns the national level (detailed information on how to do this can be found [here](#)), as well as to the European Parliament if the matter falls within the competence of the European Union (a [website](#) for this was recently launched).

Petitions aimed at drawing public attention to important social or political problems are also becoming more and more popular. They show the scale of the problem, facilitating the interest of decision-makers and starting a dialogue with them (signatures can be collected via websites, e.g. petycjaonline.com or openpetition.eu. On these sites you can also view the petitions already submitted and waiting for signatures).

Boycott

A relatively easy and increasingly more popular way to draw public attention to important issues is to boycott a product whose producer breaks the rules of social coexistence (e.g. it does not care for the natural environment, exploits employees or tests products on animals). It is worth publicizing the reason for the boycott so as to inform as many people as possible about it (see one of the following subsections on how to do it). Not buying a product causes the company to lose profits. And the more people know about the boycott, the greater the loss and the greater the pressure to change behaviour.

As the research conducted by Dominika Maison³, has shown, this method is not very popular in Poland. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, **lack of faith** that the customer has any chance against large corporations, and secondly – **conformism** and **indifference** (if we like a product, its quality and price, we don't look at other factors).

We should mention that **boycotts are effective in the fight against both corporations and smaller entities**. One example is the boycott of BP gas stations in the US after the oil spill on the company's platform. The boycott forced BP to take decisive action to prevent the effects of an environmental disaster⁴. We should also recall the victory of Chicago high school students who by boycotting buying lunches forced the catering company to improve the quality of the meals offered⁵.



³ Report presented at the Nienieodpowiedzialni (Not Irresponsible) conference.

⁴ https://wyborcza.pl/1,75399,7978888,Ameryka_nienawidzi_BP.html.

⁵ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/dining/ct-student-boycott-school-lunch-chicago-theodore-roosevelt-high-story.html>.

Taking part in a protest

Another form of civic activity are protests, which can take many different forms.

It could be a **demonstration** where participants protest against something. One example of an extremely successful demonstration is the protest organised by Karolina Farska from Slovakia. In response to the numerous corruption scandals in which politicians were involved, she organised a protest march along the streets of Bratislava. It all started with an event on Facebook, and the outcome exceeded the organiser's wildest expectations – 10,000 people took part in the march. The success of the first march encouraged Karolina to organise subsequent ones, joined by more and more people who wanted to express their dissatisfaction with the actions of the authorities. Mass protests had the desired effect – they led to the resignation of the prime minister and a change of government.

Another type of protest is a **strike**. Sometimes a strike involves the seizure of a building (e.g. a factory or workplace) – at which point it is called an occupational strike or protest. In 2019, the Teachers' Strike took place in Polish schools. Teachers refused to conduct lessons in protest against reforms and fought for pay rises.

STRIKE

Collective, voluntary, periodic cessation of basic activities in the process of work or study by a group or community in order to force the implementation of its demands by a superior authority or a group managing its activities.

(PWN Encyclopaedia)



A special example of protest is **civil disobedience**, that is, a situation in which the participants of the event deliberately break the law in the name of higher moral principles. Civil disobedience is the main method of operation of the Extinction Rebellion group, which blocked the streets of Polish cities in defence of the climate⁶.

Contacting decision makers

Changing the world often requires taking important and binding decisions (for example, building a bicycle path is an administrative decision that requires local authority representatives to be convinced, and encouraging a foundation to take a specific action requires talking to its management board). Sometimes it is necessary to seek help “at the top” and attract the interest of people who can take a specific action. These can be the school headmaster/headmistress, parents’ council, authorities of a company operating in your town, local councillor or your district’s Sejm or Senate representative.

Think about who could deal with the problem you see. Choose the best form of communication (handwritten letter? E-mail? Or maybe a meeting in person?). Next, prepare the appropriate arguments, present your case and wait for a response.

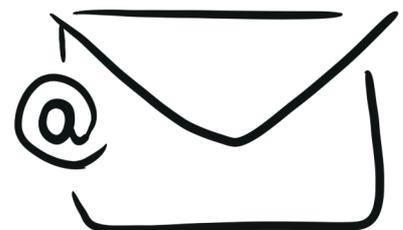
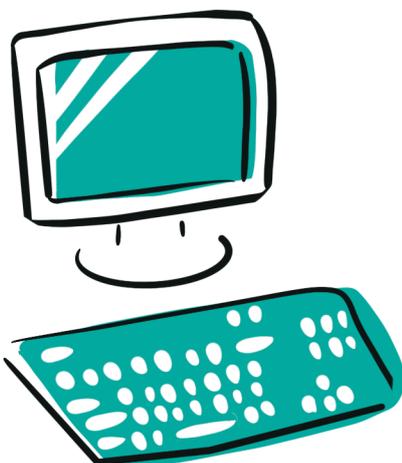


⁶ <https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,26829431,aktywisci-extinction-rebellion-blokuja-al-jerozolimskie.html>.

Publicizing the issue in local or social media

The support of one person (even the most important one) will not always be sufficient, and you will not always win his or her favour. At this point you must bring the problem to a wide audience. The most effective way to reach a wide audience is by using the media. Today, the easiest way to do this is through the Internet, or more precisely – through social media. This type of medium offers many possibilities:

- You can **set up a website** dedicated to the cause you are involved in (a social media profile/fan page seems to be the most effective, but a regular website is also not a bad idea). Thanks to this, you have a chance to build a community of people who share your interests and want to get involved in a specific activity. Working together is easier.
- You can **write a post** informing about the problem or calling for action. The post may contain text, but you can also record a video or take a photo that says more than a thousand words. Your message (text or image) may be neutral informative, but messages that amuse, amaze or shock are much better. This type of post has the potential to go viral (content that gains popularity because everyone shares it – for example, via social media, messaging or e-mail).
- You can **organise an event** (for example, a protest, boycott, global clean-up action or a meeting with an important person), thanks to which other people interested in a similar problem will be able to support you.
- You can **get a local influencer interested in the topic**. He or she could then use their channels to help you publicize the issue and find allies.



Social media (or more broadly – the Internet) offers practically unlimited possibilities to promote activities, but remember that only certain people use them (for example, you will not find your grandparents or neighbours who don't have a computer on TikTok or Discord), so it is worth considering to whose attention you want to bring the problem. If your target group is not only your peers, it is worth using the help of traditional media. It is extremely difficult to reach national media, but the issue that concerns you may be of interest to local media. Try to contact the publisher of your local newspaper, radio or TV station. Journalists working in this type of media often use the help of residents to find interesting material, and thanks to this, you will inform a significant number of people about your action or problem that needs to be solved.



Unique actions

Actions that go beyond standard civic activities are becoming more and more popular. Below you will find three examples of **happenings**.

- 17-19-year-olds from London – Liv Francis-Cornibert, Shiden Tekle, Bel Matos da Costa and Kofi Asante – founded the Legally Black group in 2017, which fights the low representation of black people in the media. Their idea was simple – they changed posters of popular films in which only white actors appeared (including “Titanic” or “Harry Potter”), replacing the main characters with their black counterparts. The posters bore the slogan “If you’re surprised, it means you don’t see enough black people in major roles.” The campaign not only drew attention to the serious problem in an interesting way, but also encouraged other people suffering from racial discrimination to share their experiences⁷.
- In November 2005, the Marbayassa Theater in Burkina Faso organised a special performance promoting the participation of women in public life. The performance consisted of three parts. In the first, viewers watched a play aimed at shocking the audience and provoking reflection on the problem (e.g. in one of the scenes the husband does not allow his wife to vote, in another he tells his wife who to vote for). The second part featured a character named Jocker who asked the audience to rate the positive and negative aspects of the first part, and then invited them to co-create the play: viewers played roles from the first scene, showing how they would have behaved. In the third part, the actors, questioning the audience’s arguments, forced the viewers to reflect more deeply⁸.
- In October 2016, in New York’s Union Square, 200 women dressed in colourful jackets and T-shirts with pro-female slogans danced to Justin Timberlake’s song “Can’t stop the feeling”. The **flash mob** (a short-term event that involves a group of people gathering in an unexpected public place) was to “dance the road to the White House for Hillary Clinton.” The participants also drew attention to the climate catastrophe and expressed solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement⁹.

These kinds of actions are extremely effective when it comes to attracting people’s attention. They act a bit like virals on the Internet. They fascinate, entertain, and shock. Perhaps they will help you attract the attention of others to a problem that is important to you.

7 <https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/activism-2/teenage-activists-protest-worldwide-agents-of-change/>.

8 <https://www.isp.org.pl/pl/publikacje/aktywizowanie-wyborcow-inicjatywy-z-roznych-krajow-swiata>.

9 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/oct/05/hillary-clinton-flashmob-pantsuit-power>.

Volunteering

If you want to do more, offer your help to an organisation (association, foundation) that works for a good cause. Information about volunteer work (and not only) can be found on [the website](#) that brings together non-governmental organisations or directly on the websites of the institutions you are interested in. It is also worth contacting the organisation you want to work with directly. This will make it easier to find the type of cooperation that is satisfactory for both parties.

Remember that volunteering is not just about fixing the world. By working for a good cause, you also gain experience that will surely pay off in the future.



Test yourself!

What is the level of your civic activity? Which of these actions have you taken in the last six months, and which are you planning to take in the next six months?

	Completed in the last 6 months	Planning to complete in the next 6 months	Completed	Describe how...?
Caring for the common good	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Taking action to protect the environment	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Submitting or signing a petition on an issue that's important to me	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Bringing an important issue to the attention of a decision maker <small>local politician, journalist, opinion leader, organisation representative</small>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Publicizing an issue in local media	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Publicizing an issue on social media	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Boycotting a product	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Taking part in a protest	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteering for an organisation dealing with an issue that is important to me	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Other activities:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Planning civic (and other) activities

To be a good citizen you need to take action. It's a good idea to start small. Your school or local community is a great place to take the first steps in this area.

For starters, all you need to know is what you want to do. So, **diagnose the problem that needs to be solved**. Think about what others should know, what problem should be solved. Maybe you need to take some initiative at school? Or maybe there is something to be done in your local community? Or there is a global problem you're worried about?

The next step is to **gather information about the problem**. Nowadays, access to knowledge and information is extremely easy – all you need to do is do an online search, talk to people, visit the appropriate institution (for example a government office). This way, you will be sure to find not only the information you need, but also a lot of inspiration (just remember to use reliable sources and check your information. Also, learn to distinguish between facts and opinions!).



To be successful, each action should be planned. The next step is to **create an action plan** ([the Activist's Planner](#) will help you with this). Surely you already know what kind of problem you want to deal with, but now you must determine your goal – what you really want to achieve. Your goal should be specific (one that you can clearly explain to others). A goal that is too general makes it difficult to plan. The goal should also be achievable. However, it cannot be too easy (then it will not bring you satisfaction) or too ambitious (then you will get discouraged if you don't see much progress). It also has to have a specific time frame – that is, you must be able to complete it within a specific scheduled time. For example, a goal that is too general is to protect the environment, a specific goal is to organise an action to promote the segregation of rubbish or to clean up the neighbourhood park.

Before you start working on your goal, **ask yourself a few questions:**



What is my goal?

What steps must I take to achieve my goal and in what time frame?

What benefits will it bring?

What obstacles may I encounter in achieving my goal?

Who do I need to convince to achieve this goal?

What may hinder or prevent me from achieving it?

Who can help me with this?

What skills and tools do I need?
Where to get financing?

ACTIVIST'S PLANNER

Problem I want to solve:

Goal I want to reach:

Benefits of reaching the goal:

Decision-makers that must be convinced:

Allies that will help me:

Obstacles on the way to the goal:

Action plan:

-
-
-
-
-
-

Other important issues:

PART II



CIVIC COMPETENCES

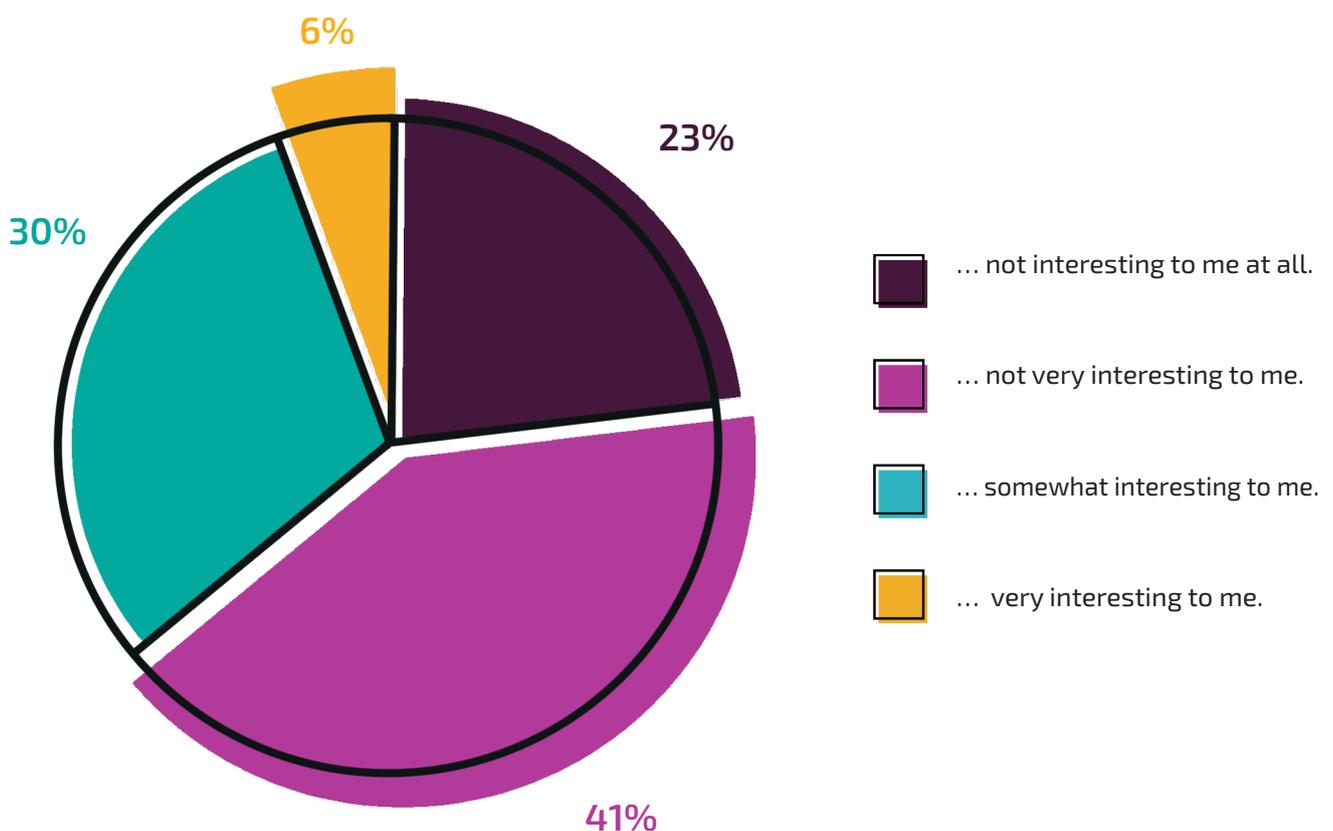
Knowledge and competences

Effective participation in public life requires knowledge and competences that are within the reach of every citizen. It is primarily about an interest in public affairs and a sense of political agency.

An interest in public affairs is nothing more than an interest in matters that go beyond our private life and our private interest. It is about active searching (and critical processing) of information about what is happening in your neighbourhood, in your country and around the world. It may also involve taking actions aimed at influencing what is happening in your local community, solving problems in the immediate vicinity or helping those in need.

In Poland, the level of interest in public affairs is not particularly high (see [Figure 3](#), prepared on the basis of data from the ninth wave of the European Social Survey of 2018, obtained from a representative sample of adult Poles). Only 6% of all respondents are very interested in politics, while over 60% have little or no interest in it.

Fig. 3. How would you describe your interest in politics? The politics are...



An interest in public affairs certainly makes it easier to be a citizen, but the most important competence seems to be a **sense of political agency**. It is the citizens' trust in those in power (especially in the rulers, but not only), supported by the belief that they understand social and public processes (i.e. what, how and why happens in politics) and have an impact on them.

Two kinds of factors influence our belief that we can participate in politics. The former come from ourselves (it is the **internal sense of political agency**, our subjective belief that we understand the world of politics and can influence it), while the source of the latter is the political system in which we function (**external sense of political agency**, i.e. how we assess the opportunities to participate in politics, provided to us by the political system and the laws and mechanisms operating in it).

Fig. 4. How confident are you in your own abilities and opportunities to participate in politics?

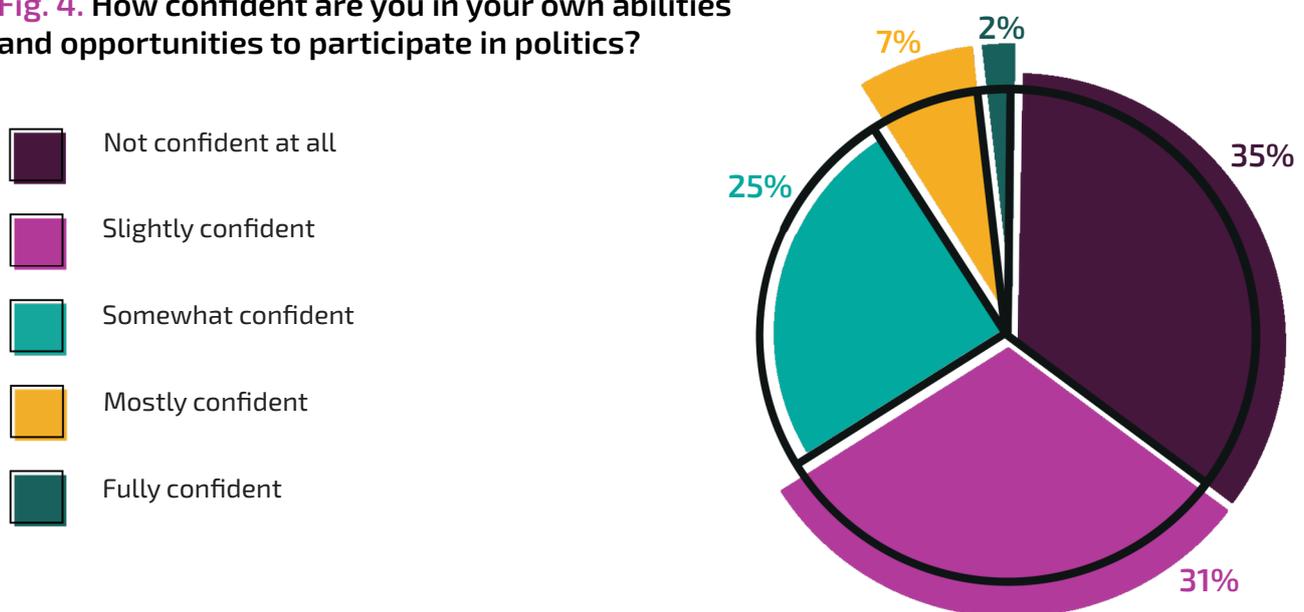
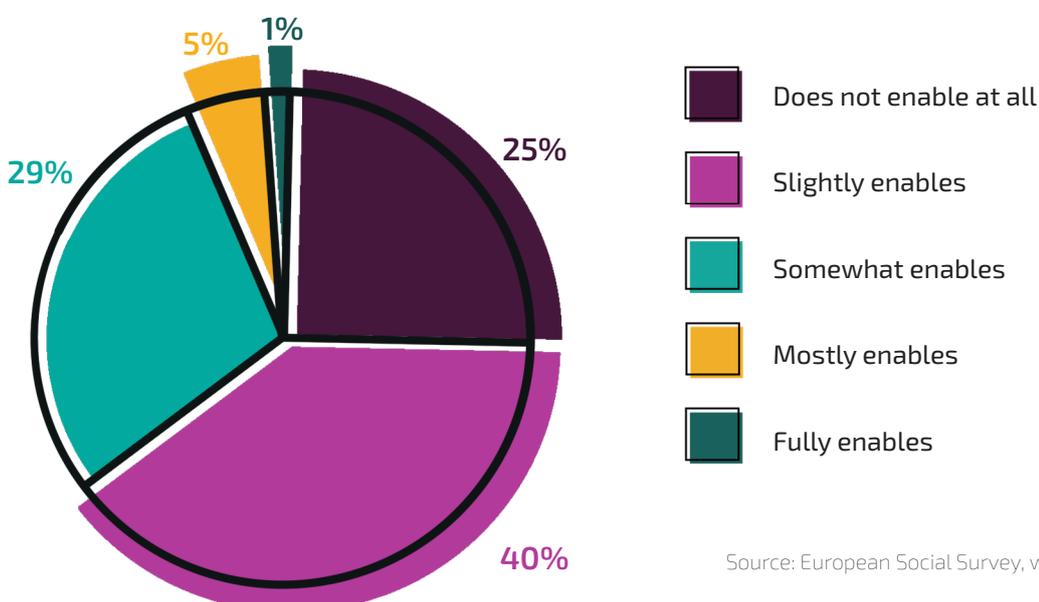


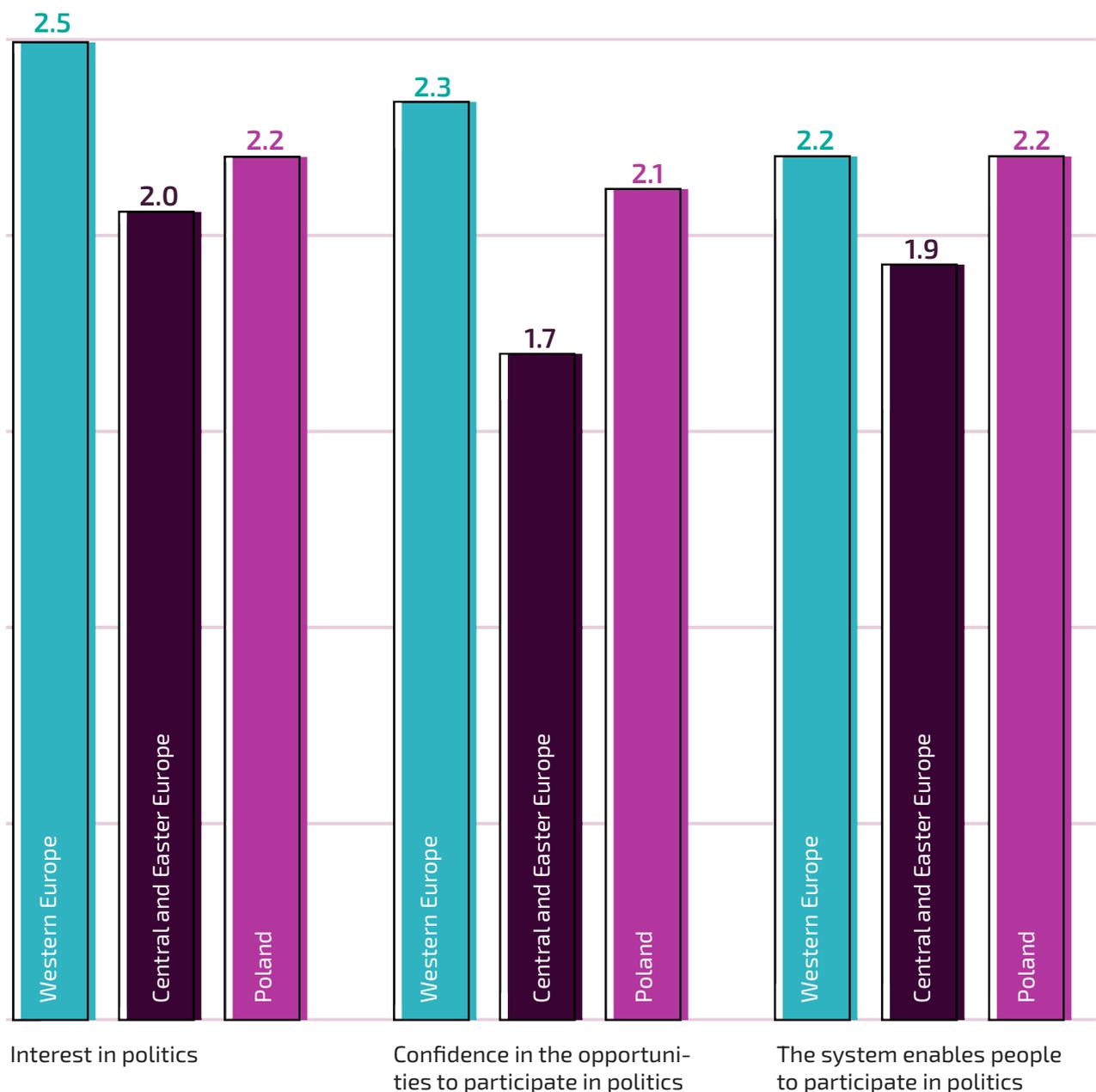
Fig. 5. To what extent, in your opinion, does the political system in Poland enable young people like you to influence politics?



The level of political agency – both internal ([Figure 4](#)) and external ([Figure 5](#)) – in Poland is rather low. In both cases, 65% of respondents are not convinced that they have the opportunity to participate in politics, resulting from their own competences and the political system. Less than one in ten respondents believe that they can participate in politics (to a large extent or fully).

The level of these indicators depends on various factors. For example, it varies from country to country. Take a look at [Figure 6](#), showing the average level of interest in politics and the internal and external sense of political agency in Poland, Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe (the higher the average value, the greater the interest and the higher the level of agency, the minimum index is 1, maximum 4 for interest in politics and 5 for both measures of the sense of political agency).

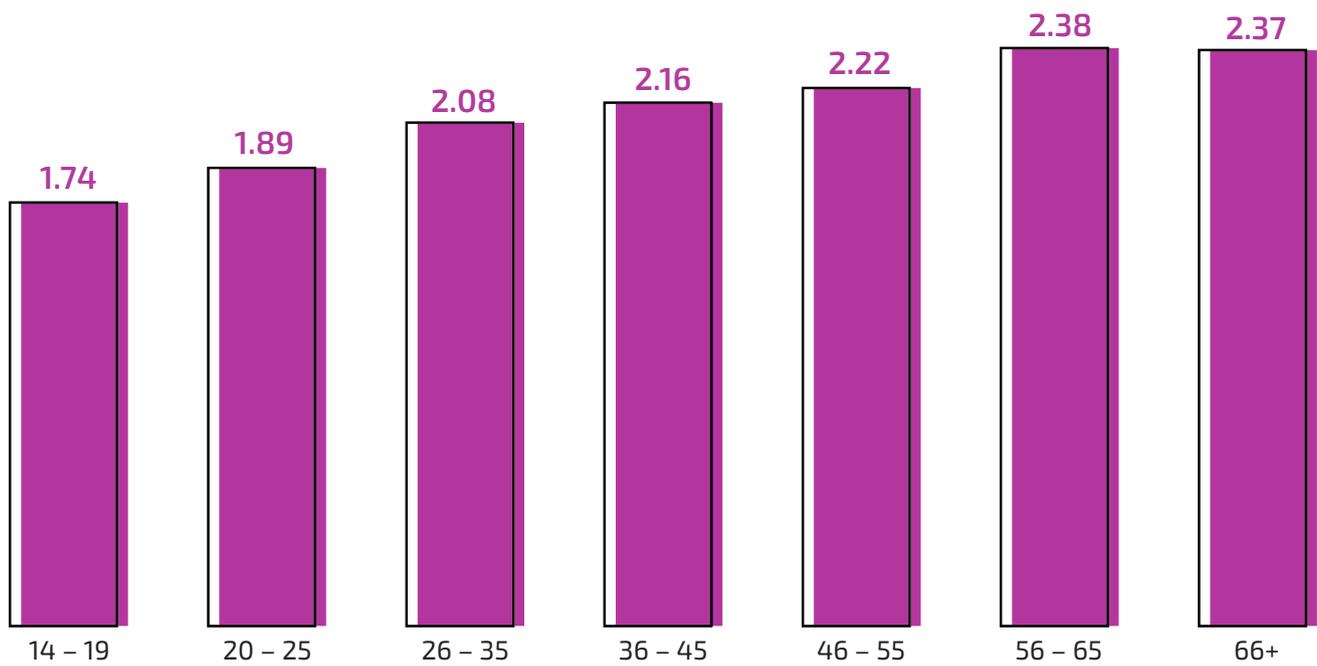
Fig. 6. Average level of civic competences



The level of interest in politics and the belief in the possibility of participating in it are the highest in Western Europe, where democracy has been functioning much longer than in Poland or other post-communist countries. Its longer democratic tradition gave people in Western Europe more time to learn to participate in politics. Therefore, they have greater knowledge about political matters and greater experience, and also know better how to participate, which comes easily to them. Longer history of democracy also contributes to a greater sense of civic duty (remember that citizenship is not only rights – everyone should contribute to building democracy). Internalized civic attitudes are also passed on to future generations (active civic parents pass on a sense of civic duty to their children).

Another important variable influencing our civic competences is age. [Figure 7](#) shows the values of individual indicators for different age groups.

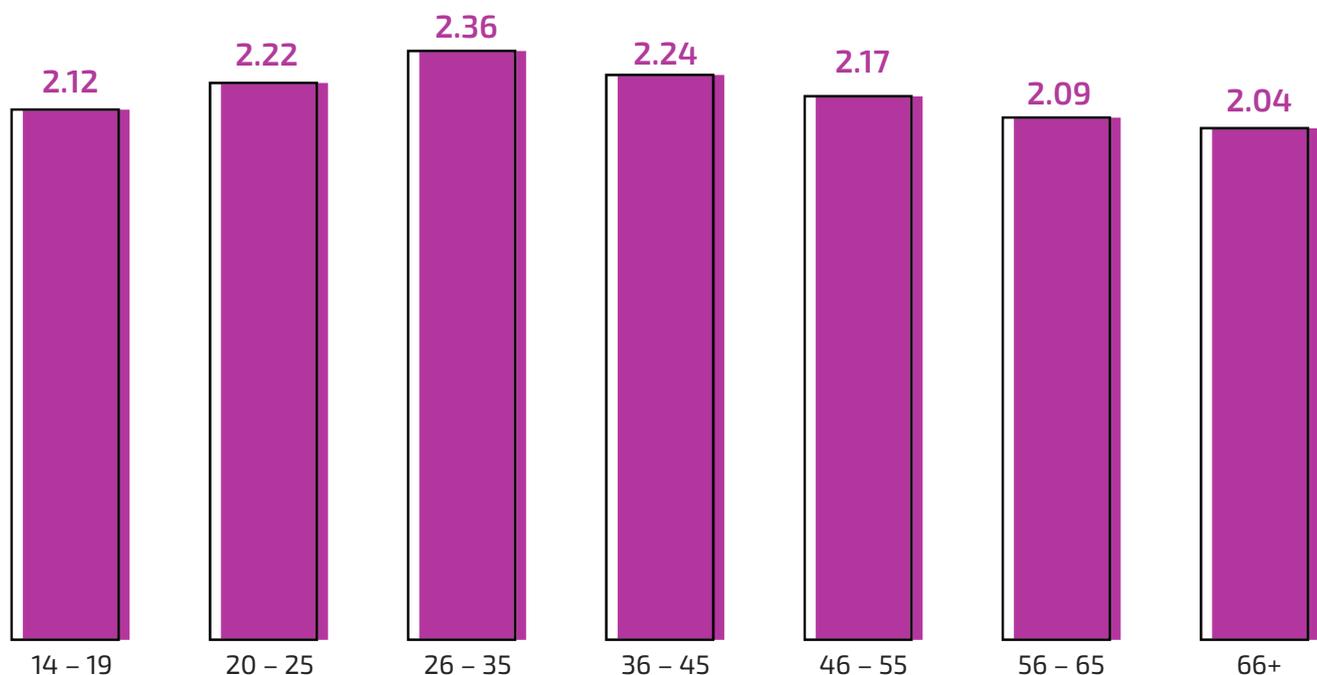
Fig. 7. Average level of interest in politics in Poland by age



Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018). Own calculations

As you can see, interest in politics clearly grows with age. The older the group of respondents, the more regularly and more willingly they follow current political events. Age also affects the content of your interests. Each stage of life is characterized by different needs and challenges, which to some extent determine what we pay special attention to. Young people like you are interested in school-related issues (you certainly know if the authorities intend to introduce any changes in the education system; if so, you also know what they're supposed to entail), but several years from now you will pay attention to housing prices or the level of unemployment. Your parents keep track of topics such as the amount of taxes, changes in labour law or the tax-free amount, while your grandparents are interested in the amount of pensions and health care. Of course, regardless of your age, you can follow each of these topics (perhaps you are also interested in economics, public policies, foreign policy or climate policy).

Fig. 8. Average level of internal sense of political gency in Poland by age

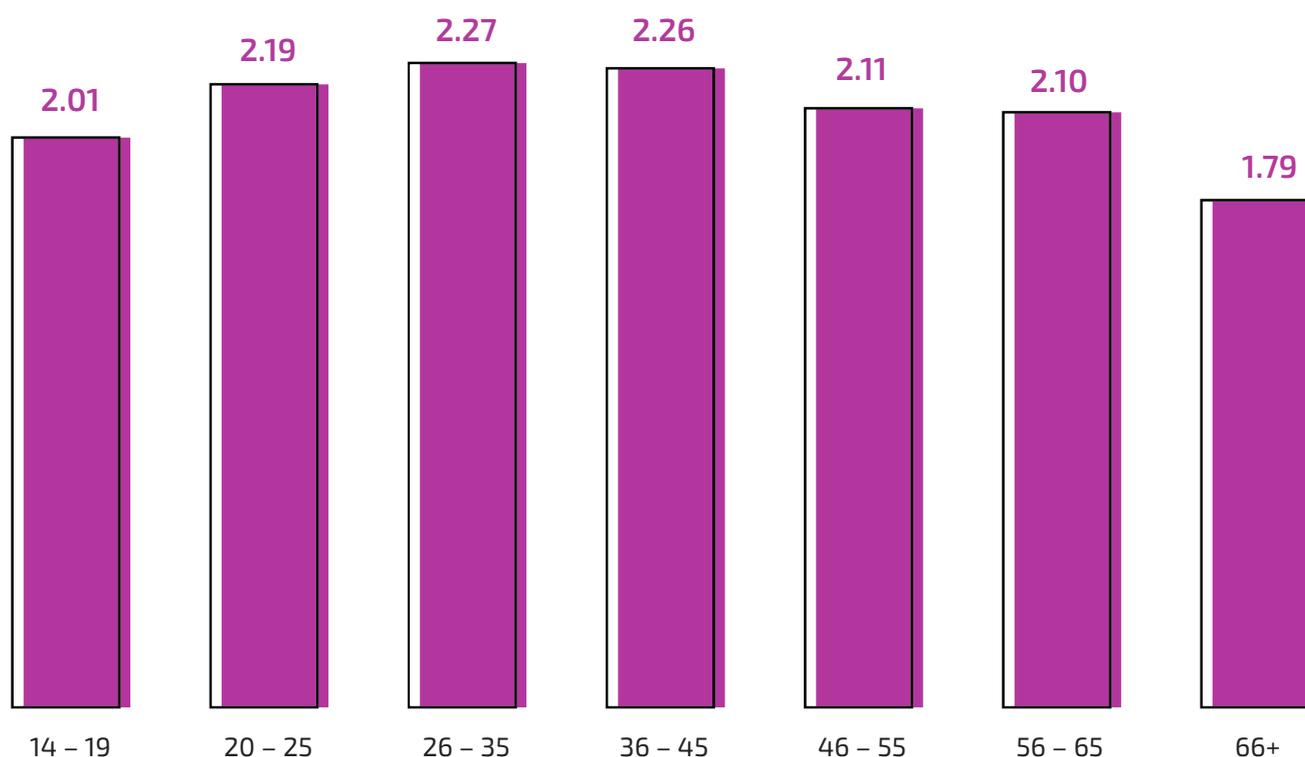


Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018). Own calculations

The relationship between the average level of internal political agency and age is curvilinear (that is, the value of this indicator increases to a certain point and then decreases – [Figure 8](#)). The reason for this is again the life cycle. With age, we gain experience in participating in politics (we vote, go to demonstrations, act for the benefit of the district, etc.). In this way, we gather knowledge and experience that facilitate subsequent actions. We also find out that the effort we make makes sense. At some point, however, age-related difficulties come to the fore (deteriorating health and fitness become a real obstacle in undertaking civic actions). Therefore, the sense of political agency declines.

We can observe a similar dependence in the case of the external sense of political agency (Figure 9). The barrier for young people in the case of this variable, however, is the lack of familiarity with the system (lack of knowledge of the rules of the game), and for the older ones – the lack of systemic solutions that would eliminate the negative impact of age-related limitations in participation.

Fig. 9. Average level of external political agency in Poland by age



Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018). Own calculations

Knowledge of politics, interest in politics and a sense of political agency make citizens more willing to participate in politics. They know what to do and how to participate, and they are convinced that their actions will be effective. So people with a higher than average level of political knowledge, more interested in politics and convinced that they can participate in politics, more often vote in elections and engage in other types of civic activities (they protest, sign petitions, or participate in the local community). They are also more often involved in politics, for example at the local government level.

Test yourself!

Political agency is measured using several questions relating to its different aspects. Below you will find three questions asked in important political and social polls (for example, in the Polish General Election Survey or the European Social Survey). Compare your results with those of your peers from Poland and the European Union, discussed under the questions.

1. How would you describe your interest in politics? Do politics:

- not interest you at all
- not interest you much
- somewhat interest you
- interest you very much

2. How confident are you of your own abilities and opportunities to participate in politics?

- not confident at all
- slightly confident
- somewhat confident
- mostly confident
- fully confident

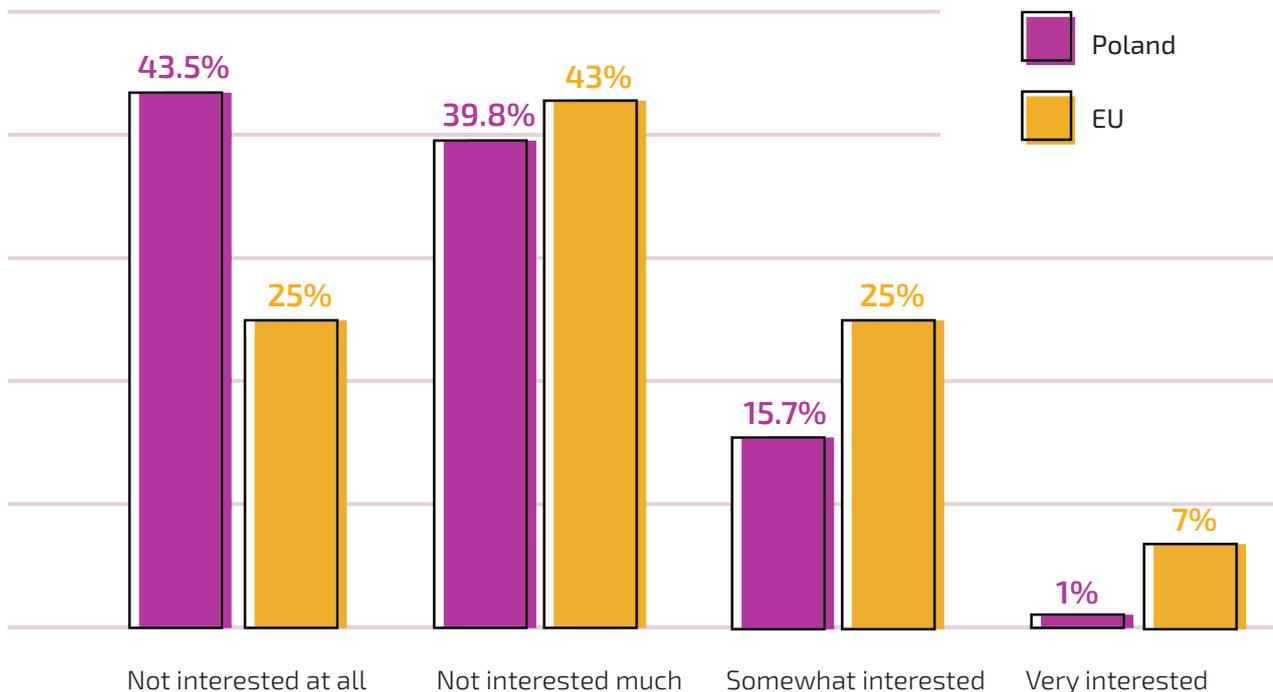
3. To what extent, in your opinion, does the political system in Poland enable young people like you to influence politics?

- does not enable at all
- slightly enables
- somewhat enables
- mostly enables
- fully enables

What does research say?

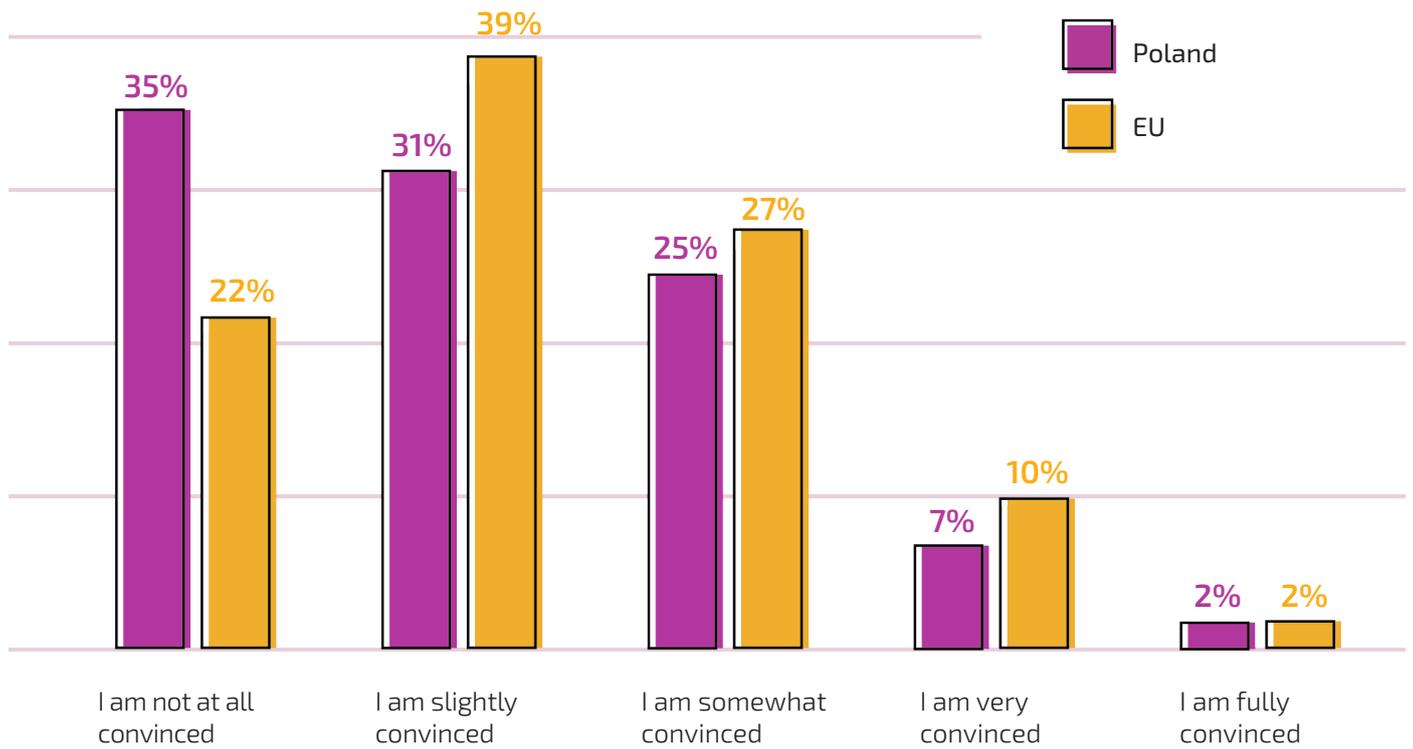
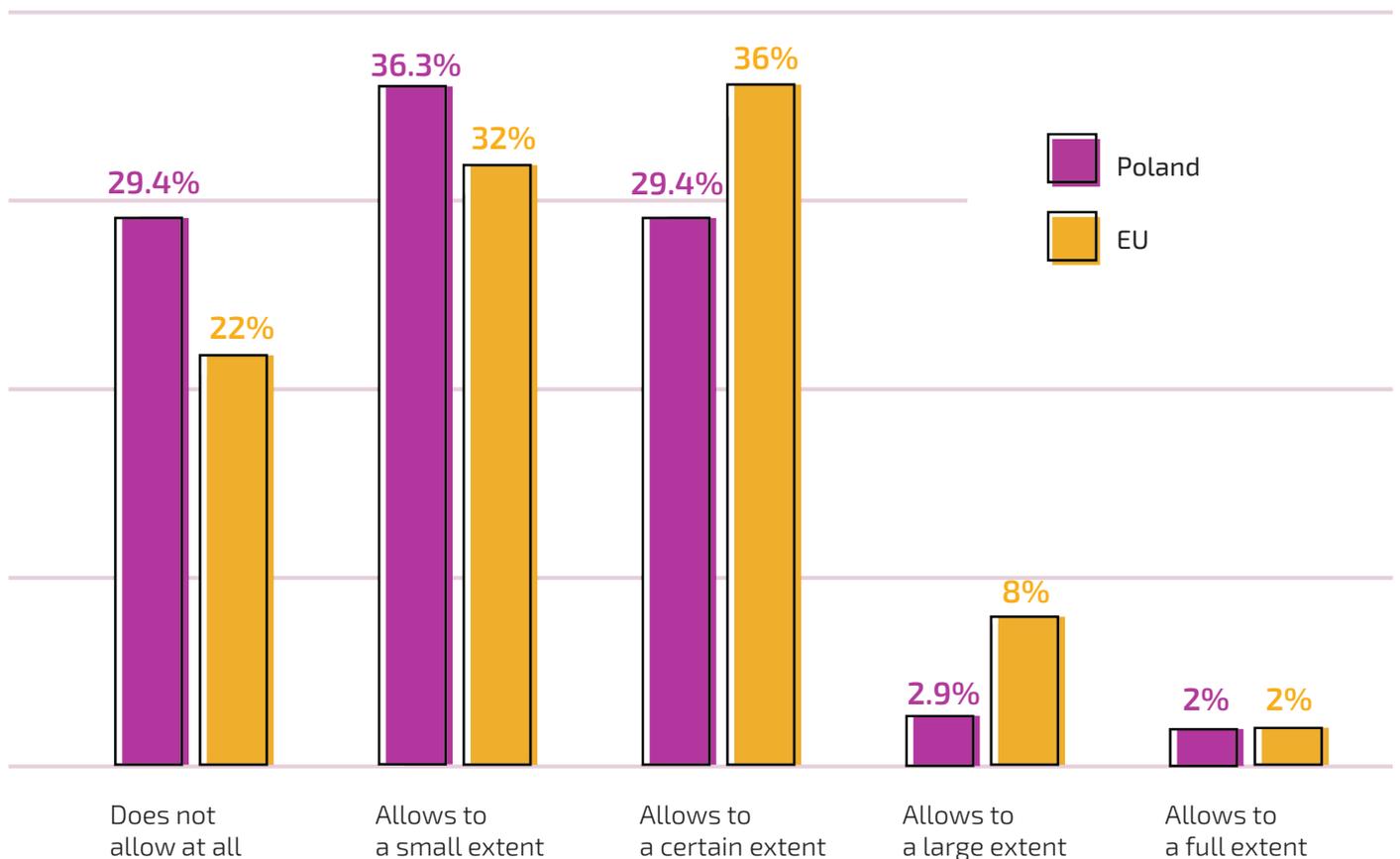
You already know that the interest in politics among your peers is much lower than in the case of the elderly (you also know why that is). See [Figure 10](#): Polish youth is much less interested in politics than their peers from other European Union countries. Think about what to do to change it?

Fig. 10. Interest in politics among people aged 14–19



Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018). Own calculations

We can observe similar dependencies in the case of the internal and external sense of political agency ([Figures 11 and 12](#)). Poles aged 14-19 are less confident about the possibility of participating in politics and influencing the world around them, although in the case of this variable the difference is not as big as in the case of interest. Even smaller is the difference between you and your peers in the European Union regarding the level of inner sense of political agency. Note that the measurement error in this type of survey is $\pm 3\%$, which means that the difference of 3 percentage points between the results for Poland and the European Union, for example in the first and second bars of [Figure 12](#) ("does not allow at all"), does not really exist. We consider differences only above this value.

Fig. 11. Inner sense of political agency among people aged 14–19**Fig. 12. External sense of political agency among people aged 14–19**

PART III



DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

Civil society

The tradition of civic attitudes started in antiquity. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, wrote about three spheres in which human life unfolds: the first one, *oikos* (family, household) is a *private territory where we meet face to face every day, talk and negotiate ways of sharing life with friends and others*, the second is *ecclesia* – the public sphere, where elected representatives make decisions about public matters. At the junction of these two spheres is *agora* – a place of negotiation between what is private and what is public. It is there that citizens act, translating *private problems into public issues and transferring public prosperity into private projects and tasks* (Bauman 2008, p. 241).

CIVIL SOCIETY

A special structure of activities, social and cultural ties, as well as moral and political beliefs created by members of a specific society in a sense of self-determination, responsible care for the common good and quality of public life.

(PWN Encyclopedia)



In other words, civil society is a sphere including family, state and market in which institutions, unions, social groups and communities interact independently of the state.

Civil society is a civic space that occupies an intermediate place between the state power and the private sector. It is not here that we vote and it is not here that we sell and buy, but talk to our neighbours about taking children across the road, we plan a charity event for the school, we wonder if our parish could create a shelter for the homeless, we organise summer sports competitions for children. (...) This society is formed by freely associated individuals and groups striving to create a common ground for action (Barber 2001, p. 360-361).

There have always been disagreements as to the nature of the definition of civil society. Traditional political thought distinguishes two approaches to the community: **republican citizenship**, according to tradition, based on a sense of community to which the citizen belongs “from head to toe”, fully accepting its traditions and recognised institutions, and **liberal citizenship**, treating citizens as private persons outside the state, contributing to its reproduction through participation in elections and taxes in order to receive benefits in return (individualism and instrumental approach to civic actions are important here). These two concepts of citizenship are well summarized by Charles Taylor (1989, p. 178):

One [model – ed.] focuses mainly on individual rights and equal treatment, as well as a government performance which takes account of the citizen’s preferences. This is what has to be secured. Citizen capacity consists mainly in the power to retrieve these rights and ensure equal treatment, as well as to influence the effective decisionmakers (...). Only in the spirit of this model, these institutions have an entirely instrumental significance (...). That means that no value is put on participation in rule for its own sake (...). The other model, by contrast, defines participation in self-rule as of the essence of freedom, as part of what must be secured. This is thus also seen as an essential component of citizen capacity (...). Full participation in self-rule is seen as being able, at least part of the time, to have some part in the forming of a ruling consensus, with which one can identify along with others. To rule and be ruled in turn means that at least some of the time the governors can be “us”, not always “them”.



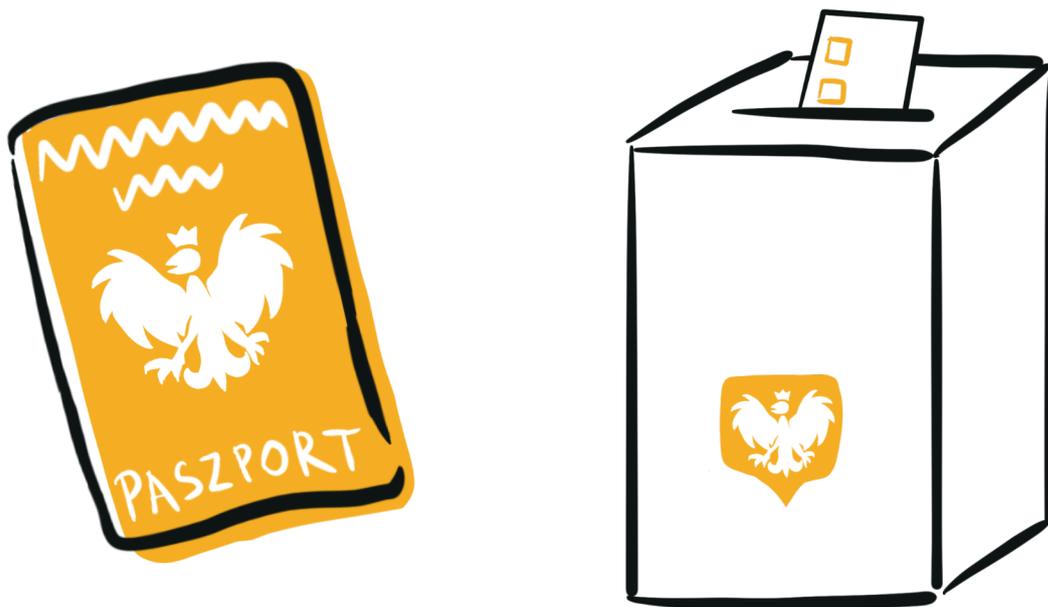
The dual nature of citizenship is also emphasized by Jacek Raciborski (2011). The first type of civil society (which the author calls type A) is made up of citizens who communicate and associate to induce the government to profitably distribute the goods that it has at its disposal or to defend its goods (or freedoms) from the state. A key element here is the ability of civil society to influence the state. Within the A society, it is citizens who co-create the law and influence its application (for example by choosing representatives or exerting influence on governing institutions). A type A society is made up of trade unions, voluntary professional associations, environmental movements, business associations, institutionalized interest groups (associations, foundations), regional associations, etc. One example of a type A civil society are environmental organisations trying to change the regulations on the treatment of pets or watchdog groups, controlling compliance with certain standards in public life.

While in the A society the focus is on assessments and postulates related to the activities of the government, in the B society the local nature of activities is emphasized. Type B civil society is a sphere of private interests (often selfish and conflicting). Its basis are individuals who associate voluntarily and cooperate to effectively meet their needs and pursue private interests (economic, but not only). Individuals in a type B society operate within the legal framework set by the state (and therefore do not change the law). Institutions implementing the interests of individuals are often of a less formal nature. They include, for example, tourist clubs, hobby associations, choirs, neighbourhood self-help, various corporations, cooperatives (including small ones), business clubs, or guilds. One example of a type B civil society are actions taken during a pandemic to help the elderly who are in isolation (shopping, taking out the rubbish or walking the dog).



Dimensions of civil society

If we look at being a citizen from the perspective of individuals, it turns out that this concept cannot be reduced only to the state-society relationship, and a dual concept is not sufficient. An alternative approach to society is proposed by T.H. McLaughlin (2008), who argues that civil society should be described in terms of four dimensions: **civic identity, civic virtues, political commitment, and the inclusiveness of citizenship**. Each of these dimensions is a continuum ranging from the minimum to the maximum level of the phenomenon, creating a four-dimensional space in which individuals are placed depending on the internalized concept of citizenship. The positions taken in each of the dimensions allow to describe various, parallel definitions of citizenship.



For example, the minimum level of civic identity is limited to the formal and legal perspective resulting from the status of a citizen and related rights (the proverbial passport and voting rights). The maximum level of citizenship is a sense of psychological, social and cultural belonging to a community with which democratic values are shared, along with a complete set of rights and obligations, and a sense of responsibility for the common good. The scope of civic virtues is related to the level at which the individual has a sense of responsibility for the community:

in a minimal approach, it is limited to the local community or even the immediate vicinity and the community that inhabits it; and maximally, the sense of community also encompasses higher levels, including abstract ones, relating to social justice and empowerment of citizens. As for the level of civic involvement, the minimum level is related to the election of representatives, and the maximum level involves comprehensive participation in the democratic process. Community inclusiveness, on the other hand, is related to the principles on which an individual is incorporated into the community of citizens (granting civil rights in the minimum concept), including obstacles that may hinder the full realisation of citizenship (concern for disadvantaged groups in the maximum concept).

Citizenship Dimension	Minimum concept of citizenship	Maximum concept of citizenship
Civic identity	Citizenship and voting rights	A sense of psychological, social and cultural community
Civic virtues	A sense of responsibility for the immediate surroundings	General sense of responsibility for society
Engagement level	Electing representatives	Comprehensive participation in politics
Inclusiveness of citizenship	Granting of citizenship	Inclusion in the community

Source: Based on McLaughlin 2008

In summary, **the minimum concept of citizenship describes citizens who treat their belonging only in formal terms** (legal status of citizenship), are involved to a small extent and only at the local level. **On the other side of the continuum there are individuals aware of their belonging to the community, sharing with it a democratic culture, rights and obligations, in the fulfilment and redefinition of which they actively participate** (characterized by their high level of participation also on behalf of the macro-environment), thus influencing the content of citizenship. The minimum concept of citizenship involves acceptance of applicable rules and exercise of citizens' rights; the maximum concept is a process of becoming, a constant debate leading to a redefinition of the role of the citizen.

Test yourself!

Individual dimensions of citizenship can be expressed on a 10-point scale, where the extreme ends mean the minimum (1) and maximum (10) citizenship in a given dimension. Consider where do you situate yourself in each dimension? Where would you like to be? What needs to be done to get there?

For me, being a Pole means having a passport and living in a certain territory.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Being a Pole is a sense of belonging to a nation, pride in its traditions, history and culture.

6 7 8 9 10

Not everyone has to get involved in civic activities, it is enough for them to vote in elections every few years.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

It is important that the citizens of a given country engage in all kinds of civic activities, democracy is the rule of the people.

6 7 8 9 10

I am interested in what is happening in my immediate surroundings.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am interested in both local issues and what is happening in Poland and around the world, if the topic concerns me.

6 7 8 9 10

People should solve their own problems.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Society should support the weakest.

6 7 8 9 10

Now calculate the average of your answers (just like you calculate the average grade in school).

An average between 1 and 2 means that your citizenship is close to the minimal concept. Think about what you can do to change it.

An average between 3 and 5 means your citizenship is minimal, although you are more active in some areas. However, you still need to work on your beliefs. Think about what makes you choose these and not other answers.

An average between 6 and 8 means that your citizenship is close to the maximum, in most areas you see the need for action. Check which areas still require your work.

An average between 9 and 10 means your citizenship is close to the maximum concept. Congratulations!

What does research say?

Qualitative research conducted in Poland has shown that **Poles are closest to the minimum concept of citizenship**, regardless of the analysed dimension. Polish citizens stand in passive opposition to the state that is the domain of the class of politicians acting in their own interest. The activity of citizens is also limited to the pursuit of their own interests, as far as possible in the local arena, although more often it takes the form of a demanding and critical attitude towards the state. Citizenship consists primarily in the implementation of civil rights and activities within the framework set by the state – no attempts are made to influence the shape and content of the community. There is lack of will (or maybe the ability) to cooperate, which is necessary for realising interests (including particular ones) and for a fuller citizenship. Surveys show that people know how democracy works, but they do not fully identify with its values and do not put them into practice, while *constitutional freedoms are only worth as much as the people who are accustomed to the “we” perspective and to the practice of self-determination can extract from them.* (Habermas 1993, p. 16).

We can see the reasons for this state of affairs in the process of democratic transformation. McLaughlin's (2008) concept of civil society discussed above is based on the assumption that citizens differ in terms of knowledge and beliefs about a democratic citizen and the definition of democracy itself. These differences result from **socialization** and **education** (different social and political traditions) and from the content of current debates in the public space. Minimum citizenship is practiced by those who have experienced *thoughtless socialization into the political and social status quo* (McLaughlin 2008 p. 238); and maximum citizenship is the result of a complex and broad-based educational program geared towards understanding and critical reflection on the concept of citizenship, civic virtues and dispositions.

In Poland, a consensus on new, post-transformation solutions was achieved in a short time without the participation of citizens who had no chance to assimilate and accept democratic beliefs and thus become part of a democratic community on the level of identity. As a result, citizens have theoretical knowledge but lack commitment to specific aspects of citizenship. The solution to this problem is **civic education**, which includes not only knowledge, but also a thorough understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures, and the development of predispositions necessary for their implementation (McLaughlin 2008, Lee, Fouts 2005).

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"Youth in Action +" is a nationwide educational program aimed at inspiring young people to undertake unconventional activities for their homeland. In this edition, students will be able to learn to debate about local issues, create a report about their neighbours, or plan the development of the nearest neighbourhood together with its inhabitants.



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