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Culture of Poland

Culture Name

Polish

Alternative Names

Polanie, Polen, Poliane, Pologne, Polonia, Polska, Republic of Poland, and Rzeczpospolita Polska

Orientation

Identification. Polanie was derived in the tenth century from the name of a Slavonic tribe near Poznan. It means dwellers or people of the field, meadow, or plain.

There are five Polish regional cultural traditions with associated dialects. Poles residing abroad could be considered as a sixth group. Regional cultural differences, identification, and dialects are becoming increasingly less noticeable and less important.

Location and Geography. Poland is located in Central Europe. It covers 120,700 square miles (312,680 square kilometers). On the north Poland is bordered by the Baltic Sea, Russia, and Lithuania; on the east by Belarus and Ukraine; on the south by Slovakia and the Czech Republic; and on the west by Germany. Originally, the capital was Cracow (Kraków), but in 1611 it was moved to Warsaw (Warszawa), the current seat of government.

Seventy-five percent of the land lies below 650 feet (200 meters). The Baltic Sea forms a natural northern border, and the Sudetes and Carpathians form the southern border. Poland does not have any natural borders on the east or west. Polish wars and large scale changes in the borders, both ethnically and politically, have been to the east and west while the northern and southern borders have changed little over the past one thousand years.

Demography. In 2000, the estimated population was about 39.4 million. Of this, 38.1 to 38.5 million were ethnic Poles. Worldwide there are an additional 13 million Poles who live abroad. Due to Poland's history of shifting borders and the changes over time in the

ethnic policies pursued by both foreign and Polish governments, it is difficult to establish the exact size of ethnic groups. Many individuals have the right to claim membership in several groups while others may not wish to have their ethnic affiliation recorded.

The largest ethnic minorities include approximately 400,000 Germans and perhaps an equal number of Ukrainians, followed by 275,000 Belarussians, then 25,000 Roma (Gypsies), and 13,500 Lithuanians. The over three million people of the Jewish population that inhabited Poland before World War II has been reduced to some six thousand to ten thousand people.

Linguistic Affiliation. Polish belongs to the west Slavic group of languages of the Indo-European language family, which in turn is part of the Nostratic macrofamily. Poles use the Latin alphabet. Literary Polish developed during the sixteenth century and is based on the speech of educated city people, upper class usage, and the Great Polish and Little Polish Dialects. Starting in the nineteenth century, technological and cultural changes introduced a new vocabulary. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was an attempt to coin and introduce a Polish-derived vocabulary for the newly diffused technology. Otherwise, the new vocabulary is taken from German, Latin, Russian, and English. The spelling of diffused words is changed to reflect the Polish alphabet.

Geographical areas have distinct speech patterns. Most Poles can identify people's places of origin by their speech. The major dialects are: Great Polish in the northwest centered on Poznań; Kuyavian, east of "Great Poland"; and Little Polish, around Cracow. Kashubian, with about 200,000 speakers along the Baltic coast, has its own orthography and literature. The Slovincian dialect of Kashubian could be considered a separate language.

A similar linguistic separation can be made regarding the Górale, or "Highlanders," of Podhale. The Mazurians and Silesians, in areas that before World War II were politically separated from Poland, spoke an archaic Polish with many words and expressions borrowed from German. Starting in 1918 with the regaining of Polish independence, the leveling influences of school, the military, mass media, urbanization, and mass migration of population have reduced the differences between regional dialects so that spoken and written language is nearly standardized.

Symbolism. Poland's flag consists of two equal-sized horizontal bars. The upper bar is white and the lower red. The coat-of-arms is a white eagle on a red field. Legend has it that while hunting the first king of the Poles encountered a huge white eagle making a strange cry and hovering over a nest of young. Such white birds were not known in the land and the King took it as an omen. The national anthem, *Jeszcze Polska nie Zginęła* ("Poland Has Not Yet Perished"), was written in 1797 by an émigré soldier-poet, Józef Wybicki, serving in the Polish legions of Napoleon Bonaparte's army in Italy. It was adopted in 1918.

Polish identity is rooted in its past. Some see Poland as the bulwark of Christendom. If the Poles had not defeated the Muslim Crimean Tatars and Turks during King Jan III Sobieski's raising of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, Christianity would have been supplanted by Islam. Poland's role as guardian of western European civilization against

the Russians and later the Bolsheviks is commemorated by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the center of Warsaw.

Others view Poland as the suffering Christ among nations raising the torch of liberty and independence for themselves and others. This position is exemplified in the slogan "For your freedom and ours" and popularized by Polish romantics such as authors Zygmunt Krasiński, Adam Mickiewicz, and Juliusz Slowacki, as well as musician Frédéric Chopin and political leaders such as Józef Pilsudski.

There is an emotional bond between the Catholic Church and Poles. This bond was formed because for the last several centuries Poland's main enemies were Orthodox Russians and Protestant Germans. In this context, a Pole was a Catholic and a Catholic was a Pole. The bond was strengthened because individuals persecuted by the authorities could seek succor and solace from the Church. Further, during communist times, the Church was the one institution that presented an independent voice.

History and Ethnic Relations

Poland is an example par excellence of the imagined community and of the ability of nationalism to shape the world. Poland exists because individuals voluntarily fought for a free and united Poland. History is one of the themes used to create a commonality and a feeling of pride. Poles consider themselves to be members of a community.

Emergence of the Nation. No one knows when or where the ancestors of modern Poles originated. It is clear that they were living somewhere on the Eurasian continent and diverged from other Slavs. However, there is no certainty regarding their presence east of the Elbe and Oder Rivers before the eighth century.

The traditional date for the founding of the Polish state is the beginning of written Polish history in 956 C.E. , when Prince Mieszko I married a Bohemian princess and accepted Christianity. Mieszko's son, Boleslaw Chrobry (Boleslaw the Brave), was the first crowned Polish king. His armies reached Prague and Kiev and exemplified the next one thousand years of Polish history. At times, the Poles fought with the Swedes and Balts to the north, and the Czechs and Turks to the south, but there was almost constant strife with the Germans to the west and the Russian states to the east. Sometimes the wars were between only two enemies, and sometimes two would join in attacking the third. In 1226, Prince Conrad of Mazovia, Poland, invited the Teutonic Knights, a primarily German crusading order, to help fight the Prussians, a group of Balts living in what eventually became East Prussia. In 1382, the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jagiello (Jogailo) married Jadwiga of Anjou, a Polish princess who was crowned king [sic] in Cracow in 1385. This marriage joined Lithuania and Poland in a personal union, wherein one individual rules two states. The Treaty of Lublin, 1569, created the Republic of Poland-Lithuania. At its peak in 1634–1635, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth stretched from the Baltic to the Black Seas and encompassed Latvia, Lithuania, and much of present day Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Estonia, as well as scattered territories in some other countries. Political and territorial decline then set in.

The nobility held absolute power of life and death over the serfs tied to their land. The clergy, merchants in the cities (the burghers), and the Jews were protected by royal charters, but were a minuscule portion of the population. After 1572, Poland's kings were elected *viritem* ; that is, they were voted upon directly by the mounted assembly of the entire nobility. The kings acted more like managers than rulers. In 1652, the *Sejm* , Poland's parliament, introduced the *liberum veto* , which mandated that all legislation had to pass unanimously. The country lost independence and unity when Austria, Prussia, and Russia divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth among themselves. The country was divided on three occasions, in 1772, 1793, and 1795.

For brief periods, there were two small Polish states under foreign domination. The first Polish state was the Duchy of Warsaw, 1807-1813, created by Napoleon from Prussian territory inhabited by Poles. The second, with limited territory and sovereignty, was established at the Congress of Vienna. The Congress Kingdom, 1815–1864, was ruled by the Russian czar in a personal union. After an unsuccessful insurrection, it was incorporated into Russia as a province.

Poland declared independence in 1918. World War I was ending and the partitioning powers were collapsing. Austria disintegrated and Imperial Germany was weakened. Russia had survived two revolutions and was in the midst of a civil war. The Poles defeated the Germans and the Federal Socialist Republic of the Russian Soviets, the precursor of the Soviet Union. Between 1918 and 1939, the Polish government worked to unify the country economically, politically, socially, and ethnically.

On 1 September 1939, Germany attacked Poland and, seventeen days later, so did the Soviet Union. The zones of occupation had been demarcated in the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 23 August 1939. Most of the Polish military personnel became prisoners of war. However, some escaped to neutral countries, and others were able to reach England or France where they continued fighting against the Germans. Some stayed in Poland and became guerilla fighters, forming the nucleus of the Home Army (AK) with allegiance to the government in exile in London.

Both occupying powers ruled harshly. The Germans attempted to kill all Roma, Jews, and educated Poles. The Nazi intent was to reduce Poles to unskilled laborers. The Soviet killed twenty-two thousand Polish officers and deported 1.5 million civilians, primarily the educated and business people, to Siberia.

After Germany attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the Soviets raised a Polish army. Two divisions totaling seventy-five thousand men transferred to the Middle East in 1942 and eventually fought in Italy. Others founded the army of Communist Poland.

In 1944, the Polish Home Army staged an uprising in Warsaw. Receiving no Soviet assistance, the uprising was crushed. The Germans then razed much of Warsaw, singling out structures of historical importance.

In 1945, Poland regained political unity, albeit as a Soviet satellite. The country had to cede some of its eastern territory to the Soviet Union and, as compensation, acquired territory that had been German in 1939. Poland, for the first time in its history, did not have significant ethnic and religious minority populations. In 1989, the Soviets no longer

supported the Polish Communist government, and the Poles began a shift to democracy and a market economy.

National Identity. Polish nationalism fed on the country's history of deprivation and want. It has a militant and even truculent attitude. There is a feeling that Poles have been suffering unduly.

The first manifestation of Polish nationalism was during the Confederation of Bar in 1768 when there was an attempt to reform the political system. In the Constitution of 3 May 1791, the burghers were enfranchised to expand the definition of the nation. General Tadeusz Kościuszko's Manifesto of Polaniec in 1794 took the first steps to include the largest group of the population, the peasants.

Until 1795, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had to integrate and unify a state made up of many ethnic and religious groups. The term nation was used to refer only to the politically powerful multi-ethnic nobility. Since the nobles constituted some 8 to 12 percent of the population, this meant that the vast majority was excluded.

In 1795, the issue became how to leave multiethnic empires, on what basis to form and determine the boundaries of the reconstituted state, and how to govern it. Because of repression and unsuccessful revolts, many Poles, in order to escape imprisonment or to obtain a university education, went abroad and were exposed to French and German ideas. Many adopted the position that a nation is like a kin group with common descent, language, and culture, and that it has a right by primordial occupancy to its native soil. They adopted the ideology that ethnic groups have a right to an independent state, that a state's population should be composed of members of a single nation, and that a state should encompass all members of the ethnic group.

The Nationalists, led by Roman Dmowski, conceived the nation as a distinct ethnic community which had an inalienable right to its ancestral territory. They saw the German empire as the principal enemy and were prepared to accept national autonomy under Russian suzerainty. Domestically they were strident, harsh, and intolerant, especially to other ethnic groups.

The independence camp, led by Pilsudski, conceived the nation as a spiritual community united by culture and history. They were prepared to fight all who stood in the way of Polish independence. They saw Russia as the principal enemy and were prepared to cooperate with Austria and Germany. Domestically they were relatively mild and tolerant.

Today the popular feeling is that a Pole is anyone who has Polish ancestry and exhibits Polish cultural traits, speaks Polish, and acts according to Polish norms.

Ethnic Relations. After 1939, due to the Soviet and German genocides, changes in the country's boundaries, migration, and the expulsion of ethnic peoples by the Communist government of Poland, the country became an almost monoethnic society. Current estimates of the combined non-Polish ethnic populations range between less than one million to more than two million, or between 2 and 5.5 percent of the country's inhabitants.

Some fifteen ethnic groups are numerous enough to be recognized and to appear in statistics. The Germans, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Jews have states where members of their nationality are the majority and can be appealed to for political help.

The Belarussians and Lithuanians are the indigenous people in Poland's northeast. Both groups have adjacent states where their ethnic group constitutes the majority. Both groups have schools that teach in their respective languages. Because of a history of emigration, many Lithuanians have relatives in the United States.

For the past one thousand years, Germans and Poles have at times fought wars and ruled one another. In 1945, the Poles expelled five million Germans living in areas which were formerly part of Germany. The Germans remaining in Poland are the largest physical presence and most important political minority in the country.

For centuries, the Poles have ruled territories inhabited by the Ukrainians. In 1947, as a way of crushing the Ukrainian resistance movement, the majority of the population was transferred from their homeland in southeastern Poland to scattered locations in the western territories taken over from Germany. As a result, many Ukrainians assimilated into Polish society.

The Roma came to Poland in the sixteenth century. They were one of the groups the Nazis attempted to exterminate. In 1994, the Association of the Roma in Poland organized an observance of the Nazi actions at the Auschwitz concentration camp. A growing number of Roma have entered Poland since 1990.

The earliest record of a Jew in Poland is in a letter written in 977 C.E. from the Pope instructing the king not to be overly friendly to a Jew. The first ghetto in Poland was created in the fourteenth century when Jews from Spain and Western Europe immigrated and asked for a sector of the city where they could live according to their religion and laws. The request was granted by King Kazimierz III. Until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was tolerant toward the Jews and even invited them to come and settle. The relationship deteriorated as the fortunes of the Commonwealth declined, and there was a massive immigration of Jews from Germany, and later, from Lithuania and Russia. Relations were exacerbated by the Russian czarist policy of discrimination against Jews and stirring up ethnic antagonisms. The first organized anti-semitic pogrom was in 1881. The last one was on 4 July 1946 in Kielce when forty-two Jews were killed. During World War II, the Soviet Union deported people to central Asia and the Nazis operated death camps. Of the more than three million Jews in Poland in 1939, ninety thousand were left by the end of the war. The government-sponsored anti-semitic campaign of 1968–1969 drove out most of those who remained.

Prior to 1989, the Communist government at times denied the very existence of national minorities in Poland. When minorities were recognized, each acknowledged minority could be represented by only one organization and with one publication. As a result, between 1956 and 1981, there were only six organizations. After 1989, the right to free association resulted in the establishment of approximately two hundred ethnic organizations. There is legislation establishing the right to study and be taught in one's

native language. Likewise, minorities have the right to access mass media, including local public radio and television, and to use their native language in broadcasting.

Since 1993, minority parties are exempt from the requirement that political parties must get a specified percentage of votes to obtain membership in the Sejm. On the local level, minorities have the right to participate in self-government. Little is known about how the laws and regulations are actually implemented.

As of 1995, there are a half million illegal aliens in Poland. Most of them came from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Urbanism, Architecture, and the Use of Space

The vast majority of the urban population lives in apartments and relies on mass transportation. The increasing ownership and use of private automobiles has produced associated traffic and parking problems.

In most Polish cities, there are three types of areas or "cities." The "socialist city" was constructed after World War II to accommodate the influx of people caused by industrialization. The general appearance of this city was heavily influenced by what was in practice in the Soviet Union. The city has broad streets and large public spaces. Housing consists of four- or five-story apartment buildings. Typically, construction was shoddy. Apartments commonly consist of two or three rooms plus a kitchen and a bathroom. All apartments have access to gas, electricity, and municipal water and most have central heating. There is minimal space for parking and children's play. The center of the city is devoted to government buildings, not to commercial outlets and the service sector. Places of employment, especially industry, are located some distance from dwellings.

The "capitalist/industrial city" was constructed during the nineteenth century and up to 1939. Architecturally, western European influences are noted. One difference from the "socialist city" is that the buildings represent a great variety of architectural characteristics. The interior space is much less standardized. Much space is devoted to commercial activities and, in the older parts of the city, industrial plants abut residential areas.

The "medieval city" was built during the feudal period. Building styles and town plans reflect practices and theories current in western Europe at that time. Most of the surviving structures are palaces or public buildings. Only a very few houses of merchants or people of modest means still exist.

Polish cities suffered heavy damage during World War II. Some, such as Gdańsk, Szczecin, and Wrocław, were heavily damaged by fighting, and the Germans deliberately razed most of Warsaw. Consequently, buildings and areas that appear ancient are often products of post-World War II construction. This was done by the Communist government to emphasize the nation's will to survive despite attempts to destroy it.

Food and Economy

Food in Daily Life. The mainstays of the Polish diet are meat, bread, and potatoes. For many Poles, dinner is not dinner without meat, primarily pork. Bread is consumed and treated with reverence. In the past, if a piece of bread fell on the ground, it was picked up with reverence, kissed, and used to make the sign of a cross. Peasants trace a cross on the bottom of a loaf of bread with a knife before slicing it. Poles consume three-hundred pounds of potatoes per capita per year. Vegetables consumed are local cool weather crops such as beets, carrots, cabbage and legumes (beans, peas, lentils). Another important source of nutrition is milk in various forms such as fresh or sour milk, sour cream, buttermilk, whey, cheese, and butter.

The Polish daily meal sequence is dependent upon the family and the season; however, typically it starts with a substantial breakfast eaten between five and eight A.M. . Eggs, meat, bread, cheese, and cold cuts may be served. Between nine and eleven in the morning, people may have a second breakfast similar to an American bag lunch. Dinner, the main meal of the day, is served between one and five in the afternoon and contributes 40 to 45 percent of the calories for the day. It consists of a large bowl of soup, a main course, and dessert. Salads, when served, are eaten with the main course. On Sundays, appetizers may start the meal. The last meal of the day is a light supper eaten between six and eight in the evening. It may be a repeat of the breakfast menu or include cold fresh water fish, aspic dishes, and cooked vegetable salads. Additionally, there may be a sweet dish such as pancakes or rice baked with apples or other fruit.

Tea and coffee are served after meals. People differentiate between tea made from tea leaves and that made from herbs or fruits. In many dialects, the two types of teas have different names. Tea is consumed more frequently and coffee is viewed as slightly special. Vodka was first distilled in Poland in the sixteenth century and is consumed with food, commonly sausage, dill pickles, or herring, as a chaser.

Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions. Namedays and weddings center on individuals. Because common first names are noted in published calendars along with holidays, people know when to acknowledge an individual's nameday. Such celebrations typically feature poultry, cakes, and other party foods. At weddings, the bride and groom are greeted with bread and salt (the essentials of life) upon their return from church.

The Christmas season is the traditional time for baking cookies, honey-spice cakes, and cheese-dough apple cakes. Among the oldest and most traditional Christmas treats are honey-rye wafers and poppy seed or nut crunch. *Babka* , a cake, is another traditional dish that must be taller than it is wide and it must be narrower at the top than at the bottom.

The most solemn family gathering of the year is the Christmas Eve supper. Family gather to share the *oplatek* , a thin white wafer sometimes called angel bread, followed by an odd number of meatless dishes. However, fish is permitted. Traditional dishes include noodles with poppy seeds and wheat pudding.

For Christmas Day dinner, many feel that game adds a special touch of the outdoors and make a special effort to obtain half a hare for the pâté.

Pączki (Polish style donuts) are the traditional pastry eaten on Shrove Tuesday and on Fat Thursday (the beginning of the pre-Lenten Mardi Gras season). At Easter the tradition is to consume food blessed on Holy Saturday. One standard item is hard-boiled eggs. Easter breakfast features fresh meat, game, and smoked meats. There is a tradition of roasted suckling pig with a red egg in its snout.

During fall harvest festivals, the fruits of the fields are blessed, and cereals and bread made from freshly threshed wheat are eaten as well as placed on graves on All Saint's Day. On Saint Martin's Day, the traditional food is a goose.

Basic Economy. Poland is changing from an economy where the state sector, dominated to one where the economy is controlled privately. In 1989, 95 percent of those employed were in the state sector, which generated 90 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and received 85 percent of individuals' investment funds. By 1997, 67 percent of those employed were in the private sector, which was producing 63 percent of the GDP. In 1999, the private sector, generated about 70 percent of economic activity.

In 1996, 44 percent of those employed were in service occupations, 30 percent in industry and construction, and 26 percent in agriculture. The latter produces only 5 percent of the GDP. Polish farms are small, inefficient, lack capital, and have surplus labor. The main products are potatoes, fruits, vegetables, wheat, poultry, eggs, pork, beef, milk, and cheese. The average farm sells most of its products and buys about a fourth of the food consumed by the family.

Land Tenure and Property. While a few state farms remain, the vast majority of farm land is privately owned. City apartments are being privatized. Most of the industrial enterprises in the politically "sensitive sectors" such as coal, steel, telecommunications, aviation, and banks are still owned by the government.

Commercial Activities. Poland produces agricultural products, minerals, coal, salt, sulfur, copper, manufactured, goods, glass, textiles, beverages, machinery, and ships.

Major Industries. Between 1945 and 1989, the government's centralized planning system mobilized resources but could not ensure their efficient use. It made huge strides in helping to develop heavy industry but neglected farming, consumer goods, and housing. Their efforts also hurt the environment. After 1989, there was a reduction of the state-owned sector balanced by the development of the private. Poland has privatized medium and small state-owned enterprises and passed a liberal law for the establishment of new companies. The major industries are machine building, iron and steel, coal mining, chemicals, shipbuilding, food processing, glass, beverages, and textiles.

Trade. Since 1989, the main effort has been to shift Poland's international trade from countries that were part of the Soviet Union and its erstwhile satellites to other countries, especially member states of the EU.

By 1997, Poland exported mainly to Germany, Russia, Italy, Ukraine, the Netherlands, and France. Its main exports are manufactured goods, chemicals, machinery and equipment, food, and live animals, and mineral fuels. It imports primarily from Germany, Italy, Russia, France, United Kingdom, and the United States. Poland's main imports are manufactured goods, chemicals, machinery and equipment, mineral fuels, food, and live animals.

Division of Labor. In the cities, both men and women are employed outside the home. However, there is a male bias in employment. Proportionately, more women are unemployed than men. In rural areas, women participate fully in farm work, both in the fields and in the house. Additionally, women operate a large number of farms.

Polish women perform "the second shift"; the phenomenon of simultaneously managing an external job and a household. Shopping, especially for groceries, and housework are considered women's jobs. A man will do almost anything not to cook, wash dishes, or clean house.

Social Stratification

The strong and rigid social stratification that marked Poland prior to 1939 has all but disappeared. This has happened because during World War II, both the Nazis and the Communists deliberately killed educated Poles. At the end of the war, the intelligentsia was greatly reduced in numbers. For forty-five years, the Communist government pursued policies intended to reduce social classes. They fostered education and the economic and educational advancement of peasants and workers. With the government's success in creating industrial jobs, there has been a great movement of rural people to cities.

Classes and Castes. Currently there are six strata or groupings: peasants, workers, intelligentsia, *szlachta* (nobles or gentry), the *nomenclatura* (the ruling group during the existence of the communist government), and a nascent middle class. The workers and intelligentsia have increased both numerically and proportionately. The ruling class that held power during Communist rule is fighting to regain political power and maintain economic power. The *szlachta* may still constitute some 10 to 15 percent of the population, but their significance has been practically eliminated. People starting businesses are just beginning to differentiate themselves.

Symbols of Social Stratification. During Communist rule, the general population assumed many of the customs of the *szlachta*. Thus, the common way of addressing someone is as *pan* (male) or *pani* (female), terms that formerly were used among and toward members of the *szlachta*. For people who are above the peasant and worker classes, men kiss women's hands and follow current fashions in dress. Since social status does not necessarily correlate with high income, there is a discrepancy between status and consumption. The educated and the *szlachta* stress politeness and social graces to differentiate themselves from the uneducated and the newly rich.

Political Life

Government. The highest law is the Constitution of 16 October 1997. The Polish government is divided into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch includes a president, a prime minister, two deputy prime ministers, and a cabinet or council of ministers. The president, who is the chief of state, is elected by a popular vote for a five-year term. The prime minister and the deputy prime ministers are appointed by the president and confirmed by the *Sejm*. The prime minister nominates and the president appoints the members of the council of ministers who are then approved by the *Sejm*.

The legislative branch consists of two houses: the one hundred seat Senate whose members are elected for four-year terms by a majority vote from the provinces, and the four hundred sixty-seat *Sejm* whose members serve four years and are elected to ensure proportional representation. Four seats are constitutionally reserved for ethnic German parties.

Leadership and Political Officials. There are a great many political parties. Most of them are still in the process of being formed, developing ideologies, and establishing a solid basis among the voters. Ideologically some are successor parties of the Communist party and others are post-Solidarity parties. In addition, there are a great many minor parties; some have an ideological basis and some reflect the ambitions of a popular individual.

Social Problems and Control. The Polish legal system is a combination of the continental system of law (Napoleonic Code) and holdovers from Communist legal theory. Under the continental civil law, interpretation of the law by judges is not a major factor and the rule of precedent is not an important element.

Since 1989, the Polish legal system has undergone significant transformation as part of a larger democratization process. There is some judicial review of legislative acts and court decisions can be appealed to the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg, France. Poland has a commercial code that meets the European Union (EU) standards and, on 26 May 1981, Poland ratified The United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG).

A still controversial issue is the treatment of former Communist government officials, especially the members the secret police. Debate centers around barring them from holding public office or positions of trust and whether Communist government officials who committed crimes should be held accountable now.

An issue gaining in importance is the treatment of people with different sexual orientation. The legal system, the society, and especially the Catholic Church are intolerant toward them. Yet there is a world-wide trend to legitimize these types of minorities and incorporate them into society with full civil and legal rights.

Military Activity. Poland is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It has an army, a navy, and an air defense force. In 1998, Poland spent 2.2 percent of its GDP (3.3 billion dollars) on the military. At the end of the twentieth century Poland had no serious military threats or international disputes.

Etiquette

There is great stress on being polite and courteous. Men are expected to kiss ladies' hands and to behave with decorum. An acceptable gift for women is an odd number of flowers, regardless of whether a woman is the recipient or presenter. Most men consider themselves judges of a fine drink, and for men the standard gift is alcohol. One must always drink from a glass, never directly from a bottle.

Religion

Religious Beliefs. Approximately 95 percent of Poland's inhabitants are Roman Catholics, with about 75 percent attending church services regularly. The other 5 percent are Eastern Orthodox, Protestants and other Christian religions. Judaism and Muslim are the largest non-Christian religions.

Religious Practitioners. There is a hierarchy of priests, monks, and nuns as appropriate in the Roman Catholic Church along with ministers of other Christian denominations. On rare occasions, one may still encounter witches and fortune tellers.

Rituals and Holy Places. The Catholic church has formal religious services and practices, and it encourages preservation of folk culture, such as the common roadside shrines built and maintained by the people and the large annual pilgrimages to shrines such as Częstochova, Kalwaria, Lanckorona, and Piekarnie Śląskie. Traditionally on the Feast of the Purification, 2 February, the priests bless the *gromnica*, the candle used to ward off lightning, sickness, and general misfortune.

In rural areas, there are religious practices based on the annual cycle of the growing seasons and associated farming practices and to ensure good luck. When cleaning house in preparation for Christmas, a corner is left unswept lest some happiness is thrown out. There are many local variations of Christmas activities, but one common thread is bringing samples of crops into the house and sharing food with animals. The ubiquitous custom is the evergreen, or fir tree, found even in Orthodox Jewish homes during the feast of Hanukkah.

Easter was the time of Resurrection both of Christ and of nature. A common rural custom is to sprinkle water on the ground to ensure a bountiful harvest. A popular extension of this practice is the dousing of people with water. In many areas, there are follow-up festivities on Easter Monday, *dyngus* day.

In celebration of the shortest night of the year on Saint John's Eve, 23 June, people build bonfires and jump over them to gain purification and protection from evil. In many areas, people float flower garlands in rivers. Traditionally, haying also starts about this time and 29 June was a time for fairs.

In the fall, 28 October is devoted to Saint Jude, the patron of things most difficult to achieve and solutions to problems that seem hopeless. During World War II, Saint Jude was the patron of Underground Poland and is still considered the protector of Polish exiles and homeless wanderers worldwide. On All Saints' Day, 1 November, and All

Souls' Day, 2 November, people place candles in cemeteries and at places of torment and execution.

Death and Afterlife. Death is visualized as a tall, slender woman dressed in a white sheet and carrying a scythe. Nothing could stop her, but animals could warn of her approach. People preferred that death be speedy and painless and that it come as a result of illness rather than without warning. The dying individual was placed on the ground, and doors and windows were opened so that the soul could go to heaven. The dead may be buried in their Sunday best.

Traditionally, a house where someone died was considered unclean and was marked with a cloth nailed to the door, black if the deceased was an older married man or woman, green if a young man, and white if a young girl. White cloth and flowers were considered symbols of mourning. Survivors did not wear red. The casket was made from boards with no knots from an evergreen tree. The deceased was placed on a plank or in the coffin between two chairs in the main room of the house. Coins were placed in the hand, mouth, or left armpit so that the deceased has been paid and has no reason to return. Candles were lit and left burning, especially the first night. It was believed that the soul stays around the body so food and drink were left in the open. The wake *pusta noc* involved singing and wailing to keep away any bad spirits. It was the beggars' job to do the majority of lamenting. If an enemy came to the wake, it was considered to be a pardon.

At the funeral, people said goodbye, women by putting their hand on the coffin and men by placing their cap on it. The coffin was closed with wooden pegs. The coffin was taken out of the house feet first, and the cattle and bees had to be notified of their master's demise. Once the coffin was in the grave those present (except family members) threw dirt in the grave. The soul went to the Creator then returned to the body until the priest threw dirt on the coffin. At that point, the soul went to Saint Peter to find out its fate— heaven or hell.

Tombstones were for important people. The common marker was a birch cross giving the name, date, and prayer requests as well as a shrub or a plant. *Kasza* (porridge) was featured at the funeral feast along with vodka with honey. Beggars were fed as well. Masses were said for the dead on the third, seventh, ninth, and fortieth day after death. On the first anniversary of death, there was a large meal for relatives, friends, and beggars.

Secular Celebration

The national holidays are Constitution Day, 1 May (1791) and Independence Day, 11 November (1918).