



CREaTE

Canterbury Research and Theses Environment

Canterbury Christ Church University's repository of research outputs

<http://create.canterbury.ac.uk>

Please cite this publication as follows:

Köker, P. (2016) Book review: Democracy in Poland: representation, participation, competition and accountability since 1989. *East European Politics*, 32 (3). pp. 401-402. ISSN 2159-9165.

Link to official URL (if available):

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2016.1184145>

This version is made available in accordance with publishers' policies. All material made available by CReaTE is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

Contact: create.library@canterbury.ac.uk



Democracy in Poland. Representation, participation, competition and accountability since 1989, by Anna Gwiazda, Abingdon, Routledge, 2015, 176pp, £90.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0415493505

Poland features prominently in the study of third wave democracies and democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, to date there have been hardly any book-length studies of Polish democracy which analyse the developments since the fall of Communism. Presenting Poland as a successful example of democratisation, Anna Gwiazda's book provides one of the first comprehensive empirical studies of Polish democracy between 1989 and 2011. Gwiazda argues that by evaluating four key dimensions of democracy – representation, participation, competition and accountability – over time, we can not only gain valuable insights into the state of Polish democracy but also draw valuable lessons for studies of democratic development and attempts of democratic reform in other parts of the world.

The book consists of seven chapters including a concise introduction and conclusion. Following a brief review of existing scholarship, Gwiazda uses the first content chapter to present her analytical framework and deduce the empirical indicators of democracy on which the remainder of her study is based. She argues that rather than focusing on results produced by a political system, an evaluation of the quality of democracy should take a procedural approach, focussing on the quality and functioning of political processes and their development over time. Defining quality of democracy as “the extent to which democracy meets its goals” (p.17), Gwiazda posits that this can best be accomplished by focussing on four dimensions: representation, participation, competition and accountability. The following four chapters then chart the performance and development of Polish democracy on these dimensions by disaggregating them into sets of quantifiable indicators. The concluding chapter sums up the findings and discusses remedies for alleviating some persistent weaknesses of Polish democracy.

Each of the four empirical chapters contains useful empirical information, much of which was previously unavailable in a systematic and accessible format. Particularly noteworthy examples of this are a socio-demographic breakdown of Sejm deputies and senators and an overview of women's representation in parliament and individual parties by legislative periods (chapter 3). The innovative measurement of party system institutionalisation as the degree of party switching by deputies as well as a detailed overview of state funding for political parties (chapter 5) are equally worth mentioning. All indicators are complemented by an informative narrative on political developments and include other useful elements such as brief portraits of

the 15 main political parties since 1989 (chapter 3; N.B. the BBWR obtained only 16 seats in 1993, not 90) and a summary of investigative committees in the Sejm (chapter 6).

The overall usefulness of the systematically presented data notwithstanding, at times the volume seems to fall short of its analytical aim to assess the quality of democracy and could benefit from a more in-depth discussion of its findings. While Gwiazda clearly goes beyond a mere presentation of facts, more space could have been devoted to addressing the substantive meaning of the scores on the various indicators and their consequences for the overall quality of democracy. Furthermore, although Gwiazda already frequently relates the Polish context to other (Central and East) European democracies, there are a number of indicators where comparative data on other countries would have been useful (most prominently with regard to the number of citizens' legislative initiatives where other countries' regulations are discussed at some length). Last, Gwiazda admits that her chosen focus on the government in examining accountability mechanisms means that she does not address the role of the president. Admittedly, a full-scale study of the impact of Polish presidents on the quality of democracy would have been beyond the scope of this volume. Yet given the overall importance of presidents and the significance of conflicts between presidents and government and/or parliament for the functioning and development of Polish democracy – particularly in its early years – this omission is a potential drawback.

In summary, Anna Gwiazda's book does exactly what it says on its cover – it provides an insightful and comprehensive empirical overview of democracy in Poland. Given that recent political developments have brought Poland and the state of its democracy to the forefront of scholarly and public attention once again, the volume is very timely (although only covering the period 1989-2011). It contains wealth of information previously unavailable in systematic form; furthermore, regardless of the drawbacks discussed above, the book presents the first book-length study of Polish democracy in English and will surely be used as a benchmark for comparison with other countries and future developments in Poland alike.

ORCID

Philipp Köker <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2529-6947>

Philipp Köker

University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UK

p.koecker@ucl.ac.uk