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The Civic Culture:
Between Analytical Category and Normative Ideal

Introduction

The question of the sources and causes of the stability of democratic political systems is one of the fundamental issues of American research in the sphere of politics.[1] Since the 1950s, this subject has been an area of constant interest for researchers. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba were among the pioneers of research on the stability of democratic political systems, the relationship between cultural patterns characteristic of a given society and the functioning of political structures and institutions. To this day, almost all works on a similar subject contain very similar

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1   The popular works by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba: *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (1963); Robert Putnam: *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993); Samuel Huntington: *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991); Lawrence Harrison: *Who Prospers? How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success* (1992) and Francis Fukuyama: *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (1995) have been devoted to the question of what determines the stability of democratic institutions and social development.

themes, which are largely derived from the comparative research initiated by Almond and Verba.

Almond and Verba assumed that the stability of a political system requires a balance (adequacy) between political structures and the accompanying cultural patterns (values, attitudes). Therefore, the evolution of political institutions also requires the evolution of attitudes and the sphere of values. The aforementioned researchers pointed out that modern democratic institutions require civic participation, and thus the development of specific attitudes defined by them as the civic culture. It was not an original concept because the central role of the civic culture in the stability of the democratic system was emphasised in the tradition of liberal Enlightenment political thought defined by such philosophers as John Locke, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Paine, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and Alexis de Tocqueville. In the works of these thinkers, the conviction was formed that no system of laws can maintain a political community by itself because without maintaining civic virtue, the strength and vitality of society can easily be eroded. Even the best institutions are not a sufficient tool for the effective functioning of a society if they are not accompanied by the political 'manners' and public service of citizens.[2]

Referring to the tradition of liberal political philosophy, Almond and Verba focused in their research on the problem of cultural patterns characteristic of a given society shaped by historical processes. In the conceptual grid they created, the main role was played by the category of 'political culture' – as a term synthetically reflecting the problem of cultural patterns relating to the sphere of politics. They also popularised the category of the civic culture in scientific circulation and linked its presence with the stability of democratic socio-political systems. Since the works of Almond and Verba, the notion of the civic culture has been inseparably linked to discussions on the development of democratic societies.

A lot of misunderstandings and simplifications have arisen around the concept of political culture. It should be emphasised that the studies

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2   D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, *Idea społeczeństwa obywatelskiego: współczesna debata i jej źródła*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004, pp. 59, 75.

by Almond and Verba were not devoted strictly to political culture. Their publication entitled *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes in Five Nations* (1963) was not devoted to the study or classification of political cultures, but was a report on research involving the use of survey techniques and examining the attitudes and values of citizens of five countries to explain the macro-political problem of the stability of democratic systems. The research focused on those social processes and values that strengthen this stability. The work was, therefore, devoted to the dynamics of social transformation and the evolution of socio-political structures aimed at understanding the evolution of political systems, the processes of political modernisation and the emergence of modern values/orientations that support the development and stability of democratic systems. The commonly known classification of the 'pure' types of political cultures was developed by Almond and Verba in the research operationalisation phase and was only to be the axis of the conceptual grid for analysing the main research problem, that is, the causes of the stability of democratic systems. As the authors themselves write, *The Civic Culture* contains an analysis and description of the role that culture plays in maintaining a democratic political system,[3] and political culture itself was not a theory but only a variable that could be used to build a theory explaining political processes.[4]

Almond and Verba's main area of interest was, therefore, not so much political cultures but the variables conducive to the stabilisation of democratic institutions and the processes of historical transformations and the transition from one type of political culture to another. The American researchers tried to understand the processes of cultural modernisation and transformation that are associated with the emergence of more open and specialised democratic systems. They looked for answers to the question why and under what conditions stable democratic systems can develop and what are the sources of their collapse. All classifications

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3   G. Almond, S. Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes in Five Nations*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 31.

4   G. Almond, *The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept*, in: G. Almond, S. Verba (eds.), *The Civic Culture Revisited,* Boston – Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1980, p. 26.

of political cultures, including the category of the civic culture, were developed from this research approach.

The research and publications by Almond and Verba have had a strong influence on the way political analysis is done. In political science, it is assumed to this day that no credible explanation of why liberal democracy (polyarchy) exists in some systems and not in others can ignore the central role of political culture.[5]

The goal of this article is to analyse the concept of the civic culture and to indicate its dual nature. On the one hand, it is an analytical category with great heuristic possibilities. On the other hand, it is a normative concept, the emergence and popularity of which is the result of political and ideological needs. It is impossible to understand the problems related to the so-called civic culture without a critical analysis of the sources of this category's formation and paying attention to the achievements of Gabriel Almond. I attempt to analyse the role and significance of the concept of the civic culture in American socio-political thought and point to the importance of Almond's works for the spread of analytical categories used to analyse the stability of democratic political systems. I also draw attention to the fact that, in addition to the high heuristic value of Almond's concept, it has a very important normative aspect, the existence of which strongly influences the directions and methods of analysing social reality.

The concept of the civic culture as an element of the modernisation theory

All social theories can be placed in a spatial and temporal context. This also applies to the works by Almond and Verba devoted to the civic culture. In order to fully understand Almond's theory, attention must be paid to the socio-political context in which key works on political culture emerged.

Immediately after World War II and the victory over fascism, Americans considered themselves to be the world leader of democracy and freedom. The unique traditional values of American culture pursued

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5   Cf. R. Dahl, B. Stinebrickner, *Modern Political Analysis*, New York: Prentice Hall, 1984.

by the American people and its republican institutions (manifest destiny) were strengthened by the establishment of the United States as a global power and the leader of the 'democratic world' during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The sense of uniqueness, strong economic growth and social stability built the atmosphere of optimism and self-confidence.

The basic question that social scientists began to ask at that time was why some societies become democratic while others become authoritarian or totalitarian (fascist or communist). Therefore, the issues raised were concentrated around the conditions necessary for the development of political democracy and modern society. The so-called modernisation theory was the basic research programme in this area. There were three main elements that fostered the emergence of the modernisation theory of development. Firstly, the United States became a global superpower after World War II. Other Western European countries, such as Great Britain, France and Germany, were weakened by the war, and the United States became a world leader thanks to the Marshall Plan, which was implemented to rebuild war-torn Western Europe. Secondly, after the end of the war, the Western Allies faced the problem of growing influence and competition from the Soviet Union, which extended its influence to Eastern Europe, as well as from Asian countries such as China and Korea. Thirdly, the colonial empires in Asia, Africa and Latin America collapsed, giving rise to many new nation states in the so-called Third World. These nascent independent states sought a development model to promote their economy and increase their political independence.

Attention should be paid to the impact of the Cold War and the rivalry with the Soviet Union, as well as the simultaneous emergence of so--called Third World societies as important international actors following the collapse of the European colonial empires. It is against this socio--political background that interest in researching Asian, African and Latin American societies increased significantly in the United States. In the two decades after the war, American scientists, with generous support from the government and private agencies, began to pay increasing attention to the issues of economic development, political stability and social and cultural change in these societies. Thanks to this, the modernisation theory began to take shape in the United States. The early concepts of

this theory were designed as a research programme clearly aimed at the non-Western world, that is, they were largely devoted to the 'export' of Western institutions and values.

Originally, the modernisation theory tried to reconstruct the development processes that developed countries had undergone. It was based on the liberal belief in the inevitability of social modernisation processes and the universality of liberal values. The popular model combined political development (state and nation building, political participation, redistribution of goods), economic growth and cultural mobilisation with cultural rationalisation, changes in attitudes and international transformation. The researchers mainly tried to answer the question of how societies become 'modern'. It must be remembered that modernisation was clearly identified (which later became one of the objections to the modernisation theory) with the path that Western European countries had gone through. Modernisation theory researchers sought to understand the processes of the evolution and modernisation of societies. Therefore, Walter R Rostow in his works did not so much analyse sectoral economic changes (the five stages of growth), but created a comprehensive theory of development leading inevitably to the modernisation of the state and society.[6] Similarly, Seymour Lipset did not so much build a model of socio-economic development, but presented a theory of endogenous transformation that would explain the socio-political development of nations.[7] The research by David Lener,[8] who understood modernisation as a macrosocial process consisting of three

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6   Perhaps the most famous version of the modernisation theory was formulated by Walt Rostow. The author argued that modernisation is a process that goes through several stages as individual societies emulate more developed countries and their economies begin to develop. Starting from the traditional agrarian form, societies can modernise, abandon traditional values and institutions, and invest in infrastructure and new branches of the economy. Continuous investment in technology development leads to the achievement of higher levels of production and triggers the pursuit of mass consumption, which activates a stable mechanism of economic growth and development. Cf. W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth. A Non-Communist Manifesto,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.

7   S.M. Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy. Economic Development and Political Legitimacy', *The American Political Science Review*, 1959, vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 69–105.

8   Cf. D. Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society, Modernizing the Middle East,* Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958.

separate phases which transformed traditional societies into modern ones, was also interesting. It started with urbanisation which led to a growing demand for education and technology, which in turn created a demand for mass communication and a more efficient media sector. Lerner's phase theory ended with one of the earliest characteristics of modernity based on institutional explanations. Namely, according to him, modern society is one that, in the course of its development, had modern institutions facilitating political participation.[9]

Generally speaking, the modernisation theory concerned the study of the processes of social evolution and the problems of social development. The research programme initiated by Gabriel Almond was also included in this inclusive modernisation theory. In his research, he focused not so much on the analysis of political cultures but on the analysis of the processes of socio-political evolution and the issue of the stability of democratic political systems. Almond's research assumptions referred to the subject matter of the modernisation theory. While undertaking comparative research with Sidney Verba, he assumed that modernisation processes involve the creation of modern political institutions increasing the subjectivity of an individual and enabling them to actively participate in social and political life. At the same time, these researchers recognised that modernisation processes are not one-dimensional and linear and that there are periods of regression (this issue was later discussed by Samuel Huntington). Reflecting on the stability of modern political systems, Almond and Verba assumed that their functioning depends not only on institutional changes, but also on cultural transformations. This assumption referred to the tradition of liberal political philosophy and its development.

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9   Lerner's modernisation theory was clear in its position that any nation and any society can become 'modern'. No society is 'genetically' backward and incapable of development. To become modern, however, it needs to assimilate the experiences and ideas characteristic of the Western world, which has previously abandoned the patterns of traditional society. Communities that are unable to conform to the Western model are not 'naturally' incapable of change, but are slowed down by traditional cultural practices or, as Everett M Rogers later put it, by the 'subculture of the peasantry' Cf. E.M. Rogers, *Modernization among Peasants. The Impact of Communication,* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969.

Political culture and the evolution of political systems

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba emphasised that the classification of the three types of political culture (the parochial political culture, the subject political culture and the participant political culture) is only a preliminary stage of research because it omits what is most important, that is, aspects of political development and cultural changes. They pointed out that the political culture may or may not be compatible with the existing structure of a political system. A properly adjusted political structure should be appropriate to a given culture. In general, the parochial, subject and participant cultures are the most appropriate for traditional, centralised and authoritarian, and democratic political structures. However, culture and structures often do not fit together. Particularly in times of rapid social changes, a large number of political systems can be included in the category of those that have not achieved cultural and structural cohesion or shift from one form of state to another. The cultural and structural mismatch may be an element of systemic changes and the transition from simpler to more specialised forms of the functioning of a political system. The fact that political cultures are 'mixed' leads to inevitable tensions between structure and culture, and thus can cause instability in political structures.[10]

The identification of the three 'pure' types of culture was only an introduction to more advanced analyses that were intended to help explain the dynamics of political processes and the stability of political systems. Almond and Verba proposed that in addition to the 'pure' types of political culture, three types of 'mixed' political culture should be distinguished: (1) the parochial-subject culture; (2) the subject-participant culture; and (3) the parochial-participant culture. Thanks to this, they were able to analyse the historical processes of the transformations of individual communities and indicate the main problems related to the processes of political modernisation. They believed that, along with socio-political development, one type of 'pure' political culture is not simply replaced with another type of 'pure' political culture, but the interpenetration of different

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10   *Ibidem*, p. 22.

attitudes occurs. The emergence of attitudes characteristic of the subject culture does not eliminate parochial attitudes related to functioning in small rural communities, family groups and religious communities, but adds a new element to them related to the formation of specialised subject attitudes relating to specialised government structures. Likewise, the participant culture does not replace parochial and subject orientations. The participant culture is an additional layer that can be combined with the parochial and subject cultures. Thus, a citizen who participates in political life is not only oriented towards active participation, but is also subject to law and authority and is a member of more scattered primary groups. Moreover, it must be remembered that the evolution of political culture is a systemic process. The emergence of new participant attitudes does not leave the previous orientations unchanged. Parochial attitudes need to adapt as more specialised political orientations emerge. Similarly, parochial and subject attitudes must adapt as more specialised political systems and the related participant attitudes emerge.[11]

The essence of Almond and Verba's analyses did not concern the 'pure' types of political culture, but rather the processes of socio-cultural transformation and the overlapping of various attitudes towards the world of politics. The division into the three ideal types of political culture – parochial, subject and participant – discussed many times in the Polish literature on the subject was not the result of the research conducted, but a certain preliminary theoretical and methodological assumption created for the purposes of the research. These 'pure' types were only formulated to designate certain points allowing for the analysis of the historical trajectory of social development running from the parochial culture through the subject culture to the participant culture. The basic element of the analysis of the complex processes of the transformation of political systems was the introduction of the three types of mixed/transition cultures: parochial-subject, subject-participant and parochial--participant, to the classification of political cultures. It is these categories that were to illustrate the dynamics and complexity of the processes of cultural change.

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11   *Ibidem*, p. 20.

1. *The parochial-subject culture* is a type of political culture resulting from gradual socio-political development, in which a significant part of the population has rejected the exclusive claim of local authorities (clan, rural, feudal) to dominate and have developed loyalty and ties with more specialised and complex political structures with a separate central administration and government structure. As Almond and Verba emphasised, the history of most states covers this early stage of transition from the local-tribal organisation of the structures of political life to the formation of centralised centres of power. However, this transition may stop and not fully develop more complex political attitudes. The problem of shifting from parochial to subject patterns is particularly complex, and the unstable processes of their development and regression are common in the early history of European nations. It is also not a uniform category, but its 'subtypes' can be distinguished and ordered on a continuum. The political culture in Prussian absolutism, which went far in eradicating parochial attitudes, can be located at one end of the continuum. The political culture in the Ottoman Empire, which never went beyond patrimonial relations with the constituent parts that were responsible for organising order at the local level, can be located at the other end.

When discussing the parochial-subject culture, the American researchers made several remarks reflecting their way of analysing the transformations of political systems and their stability. They compared the Prussian and English versions of the parochial-subject culture, paying attention to the fact that in the orientations analysed at the individual level (micro level), there is a mixture of attitudes. Similarly, political culture analysed at the level of social attitudes (macro level) is a mixture of various individual orientations. They wrote that, at the level of individual attitudes, there was a difference between the Prussian *Kadavergehorsam*[12] and an independent and self-confident English nobleman, merchant or even a peasant who rented land. In the case of political culture analysed at the collective level, Almond and Verba pointed out that in the case of Prussian political culture there was a very strong polarisation between parochial

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12 In this context, the concept is pejorative and refers to 'blind obedience' to authority. Historically, it was used in polemics and criticism of Prussian militarism, among others.

attitudes, characteristic primarily of the peasant class, and the dominant subject attitudes in groups strongly influenced by Prussian absolutism, that is, state bureaucracy and the army. By contrast, the distribution of attitudes in England was more balanced. Thus, the parochial-subject culture does not constitute a uniform category as it may have different variants related to the conditions prevailing in a given society, but this country-specific mixture had a great influence on the stability and functioning of the political system.[13]

2. *The subject-participant culture.* Almond and Verba believed that the way in which problems related to the transition from the parochial culture to the subject culture were resolved in a given society greatly influenced the way it moved from the subject culture to the participant culture. The development of a sense of national loyalty and identity, as well as a tendency to obey the law established by the central government was the first and fundamental problem of modern nation states. In the process of transforming the subject culture into the participant culture, traditional local communities, if they have survived the processes of modernisation, can contribute to the development of the democratic infrastructure. The researchers concluded that this was exactly what happened in Great Britain. Local authorities, municipalities, religious associations and commercial corporations were the first groups that were interested in the development of British democracy. The balanced nature of the British cultural mix, as well as the maintenance of traditional communities and the associated parochial attitudes and social ties made it possible to modify and transform them into a network of associations whose members became competent citizens. In the case of Prussia, due to the state's relegation of traditional structures to the private sphere or their inclusion in the structures of the absolutist--militarist bureaucracy, the period of democratisation in Germany was marked by a huge gap between the private and public spheres. Therefore, it was impossible to build stable 'bridges' between individuals, families, local communities and government institutions, which had a negative impact on the entire process of Germany's democratisation and thus on the stability of the democratic political system.

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13   G. Almond, S. Verba, *The Civic Culture…*, p. 24.

In the 'mixed' subject-participant culture, the dominant part of the population has acquired specialised attitudes targeting the input elements of the political system and the related individual activist/participant attitudes (self as an object), while the rest still focus on the output elements of the political system and have a passive 'on self' orientation. In the case of Western European countries, which are examples of this type of mixed political culture (France, Germany and Italy), there was a characteristic structural instability with alternating 'waves' of democratisation and authoritarianism. This type of mixed culture can result in more than just structural instability. Structural instability affects cultural patterns. As more specialised patterns of attitudes spread to only a part of population and their dominance is questioned by the subject culture and 'suspended' in their development during periods of authoritarian regression, groups oriented towards modern democratic values cannot become competent and self-confident groups of citizens. Rather, they remain 'aspiring' to the role of active citizens. This means that they accept the norms of the participant culture, but are unable to develop sufficient competences based on experience and trust. Moreover, the lack of satisfaction of their aspirations and the ineffectiveness of democratic and governmental institutions contribute to the growing sense of alienation among democratically oriented groups. This kind of 'cultural stalemate' can produce a syndrome of idealistic aspirations and simultaneous alienation from the political system.[14] The mixed subject-participant culture – if it lasts long enough – changes the character of the subject culture. During periods of democratisation, authoritarian-oriented groups must compete with democratically oriented groups within a democratic framework of political competition. So, they have to adapt and create new strategies to protect their interests. This does not entail the transformation of the subject culture into the participant culture, but its far-reaching change. It is no coincidence that authoritarian regimes that arise from the subject--participant culture are usually populist. Moreover, during the development of totalitarianism, these regimes even took over democratic structures in their distorted form.

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14   *Ibidem*, p. 26.

3. *The parochial-participant culture.* In the case of this category, Almond and Verba emphasised that it is a problem of many contemporary societies undergoing a rapid process of political modernisation. In such countries, the parochial culture is the dominant political culture, while the introduced structure of the political system and the associated norms of behaviour are generally democratic/participant and require the participant culture for structural and cultural coherence. Therefore, the problem is the simultaneous development of specialised attitudes towards both the input process and the output process, which is not the case in the parochial culture. It is no wonder then that most of these systems are threatened with instability and are as unstable as rope acrobats, tending hesitantly towards authoritarianism or democracy. There are no appropriate structures on either side, based on which a democratic society could be developed: neither bureaucracy nor central administration can rely on the actions of loyal citizens, nor is there an infrastructure which would help responsible and competent citizens operate. The problem is how to transform and integrate traditional power structures into the construction and operation of a modern democratic society.

The concept of the civic culture by Almond and Verba and the research on five societies

The civic culture was to be one of the varieties of mixed political cultures, crucial for the proper functioning of democratic systems. The concept of the civic culture was derived from the deliberations of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba on the historical trajectory of political modernisation and the development of democratic societies. The researchers found that while the parochial-participant culture is the main problem in developing countries, the subject-participant culture is a contemporary problem in the West. A successful and stable transition from subject attitudes to the participant culture requires the dissemination of positive attitudes towards democratic structures and institutions, the acceptance of civic norms, and the development of civic competences in a significant part of the population. Participant attitudes can be combined with parochial and subject attitudes, or they can conflict with them, generating tension and instability.

Almond and Verba argued that the civic culture is something different from the rationality-activist model of citizenship often described in articles, which is supposed to be the basis of a democratic society. This model emphasises primarily the participant aspects of political culture. Citizens are expected to be politically active and involved. Moreover, such citizens should be rational in their approach to politics, guided by reason and not emotions. They should be well informed and make decisions, for example on how to vote, based on a careful calculation of the interests and principles they would like to be implemented in state policy. In the civic culture model, emphasis is also put on the participation of individuals in the processes of shaping politics and caring for public affairs. At the same time, however, it is more than that. Firstly, the civic culture is not only a 'committed' political culture but also an 'allegiant' one, which means that individuals are positive not only towards political activity but also towards the political structures and processes through which standards of civic engagement are implemented. It is, therefore, in the participant political culture where there is harmony between culture and political structures. Secondly, in the civic culture, participant attitudes are combined with parochial and subject attitudes, and do not replace them. The civic culture is a mixed culture, and the rationality-active citizen model is only a part of it. In the civic culture, many people are active in the sphere of politics, but there are also many who take more passive roles. Participant attitudes are added to parochial and subject attitudes. This type of balanced mixture of attitudes allows construction of the stable structures of a democratic state. Parochial and subject attitudes are important elements of the civic culture because the 'pure' participant political culture carries the risk of some kind of democratic 'overload'. Too many citizens trying to bring about change through mass participation can create instability that can undermine the normative ideal of democratic stability. The existence of more traditional political orientations (parochial and subject) limits individual involvement in political participation at all levels and softens the democratic 'overload'. Parochial and subject attitudes manage and sustain participant orientations, thus creating a more balanced political culture that makes the entire administrative-political system more stable.[15]

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15   *Ibidem*, pp. 32, 474–475.

Maintaining the right balance between the effective exercise of power and the implementation of public policies and the government's accountability to citizens for the decisions taken is among the main problems of democratic systems. On the one hand, a democratic government must be able to govern, have power and be able to make and enforce decisions. On the other hand, it must be accountable to citizens for its actions. This means that the government elite must somehow respond to the desires and demands of citizens. The need to maintain a balance between the exercise of power and accountability to citizens, and to find a balance between socio-political consensus and existing socio-political divisions, between active citizenship and neutrality, helps explain how mixed patterns of political attitudes are appropriate to maintain the stability of a democratic political system. The existence of the mixed civic culture maintains a balance between the exercise of power and the system of enforcing accountability for the decisions taken. Therefore, it is the main element in ensuring the effectiveness and stability of democracy.[16]

Almond and Verba tested the hypothesis that the political civic culture is the most appropriate for maintaining the stability of democratic systems by researching five democratic states: the United States, Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Mexico. Their book entitled *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* includes a report on this research. The selection of countries was not accidental, but resulted from the adopted questions and research goals. The American researchers asked whether the countries of continental Europe, after the experiences of fascism and communism, would be able to maintain the stability of democratic state institutions (hence the choice of Germany and Italy). They also wondered what the future of democratic political systems would be in developing countries (hence the choice of Mexico). As a point of reference, they chose countries with the most enduring traditions of democracy, in which there was no 'departure from democracy' (the United States and Great Britain).[17]

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16   *Ibidem*, pp. 476–477.
17   *Ibidem*, pp. 3–4, 36–40.

The research by Almond and Verba was primarily devoted to the problem of the scope and the way in which various orientations combine and mix with each other within individual countries and communities. Above all, they were to show the problems that selected countries have to deal with on the way to stabilising democratic systems. The conceptual grid created by the American researchers, and in particular the classification of political cultures, was to enable empirical research and testing of the hypothesis put forward, and to draw conclusions about the stability of democratic systems. Each of the societies of the five countries studied was analysed in terms of their characteristic attitudes and their impact on the functioning of the entire democratic political system.

The American researchers described the dominant set of political attitudes in Italy as 'an alienated political culture', stressing that the image that emerges from the collected data presents a perceptible political alienation, social isolation and distrust. Italians have a low level of loyalty to the state, membership of political parties and participation in local affairs. Almond and Verba considered this to be an effect of the political history of Italy as, before unification, the country was fragmented and subject to the rule of external forces. Under such conditions, attitudes of loyalty to the political system and activist attitudes could not develop. After the unification of Italy, efforts were made to forge Italian nationalism, democracy and constitutionalism, but these were ineffective. The experiences of fascism reinforced negative tendencies and Italians perceive their own government as unpredictable and threatening rather than as an institution accountable to its citizens. This kind of political culture does not support the development of a stable and effective democracy. At the same time, however, the American researchers found that rapid post-war economic development offered hope for changes in the social structure and traditional attitudes towards politics. It weakened Italian traditionalism and, by raising the standard of living, increased trust in the state.[18]

Regarding Mexico, Almond and Verba wrote about a political culture that is a mixture of alienation and, at the same time, high expectations and

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18   *Ibidem*, pp. 402–403.

aspirations for the political system. A characteristic feature is therefore the imbalance and inconsistency of attitudes. They pointed out that citizens in Mexico rate the impact and importance of the government the lowest, have a low level of expectation about the caring role of the government and the equal and fair treatment of citizens by the state bureaucracy and police, while showing a higher pride in their political system than citizens in Germany and Italy. The object of this pride is primarily the memory of the Mexican Revolution. Participant attitudes and the perception of oneself as a competent subject of the political system are independent of the evaluation and satisfaction with the government's activities (the system as a whole). The researchers explained the Mexican specificity by referring to the country's political history. Mexico's pre-revolutionary political system was primarily built on violence and exploitation. The parochialism of attitudes was not only based on traditional social patterns, but was also a defensive reaction against the central regime, local landowners and guerrilla groups. These historical and personal experiences support alienation attitudes and are in line with authoritarian tendencies in Mexican social institutions. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was supposed to be a break with the past, but corruption and authoritarianism survived. This led to the formation of ambivalent attitudes. Mexicans regard the government and administration as corrupt, wilful and ruthless. On the other hand, there is the myth of the Revolution and *presidencialismo* – the charisma attributed to the office of the president. A high sense of competence is accompanied by a low level of political and social activity. This is the source of the authoritarian syndrome and the high instability of democratic structures.[19]

In the case of Germany, Almond and Verba wrote about a culture characterised by a high level of detachment from the political system combined with a high level of socio-political competence. According to the American researchers, this mixture was the result of high civilisation, technological advancement and a traumatic political history. Due to the high level of social development, Germans are politically knowledgeable and competent. They participate in the functioning of the political system.

19   *Ibidem*, pp. 414–415.

Participation in elections is high, as is the belief that the act of voting is a manifestation of civic responsibility. There is also a high level of trust in government administration bodies. Due to the traumatic history of the first half of the twentieth century, political activity is rather passive and formal. Admittedly, electoral participation is high, but other forms of political organisation remain at a low level. The norms and patterns supporting political activity remain poorly spread. Many Germans believe that the very act of voting is all that the political system requires of citizens. Orientations are passive rather than active. There is a fairly high level of satisfaction with the government's activities and decisions, but there is no strong loyalty to the system at a symbolic level. System orientations are very pragmatic. The intense involvement in politics characteristic of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich has been replaced by a more pragmatic, even cynical, approach to politics. Hostility between supporters of major political parties remains high and is not softened by social norms of trust. Therefore, the possibilities of cooperation in building a democratic political community are limited.[20]

The examples of Italy, Germany and Mexico are intended to show societies which, for various reasons, have been unable to achieve the civic culture, and thus there is a gap between the political structure and the political culture generating instability of the democratic system. On the other hand, the United States and Great Britain serve as examples of societies in which a structural and political balance has been achieved. In the case of the United States, we deal with the participant civic culture. American cultural patterns are very close to what can be described as the civic culture. There are several important characteristics here. Firstly, participant attitudes are highly developed and very widespread. American citizens are open to politics, participate in political discussions, engage in public affairs, have a sense of obligation to actively participate in the affairs of their communities and a sense of competence to influence the policies implemented by the government. They are active participants in social associations and are also emotionally attached to the political system: they engage emotionally during presidential campaigns and

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20   *Ibidem*, pp. 428–429.

show a high sense of pride in the American political system. Moreover, they have the ability to cooperate with others, which is the result of a general sense of trust that permeates the socio-political system. Even those who are highly emotionally involved in politics do not reject their political opponents. The American problem, however, is the fact that the political cultures are a mixture of various attitudes. In the civic culture – in addition to participant attitudes – there are subject and parochial attitudes that stabilise political behaviour. In the case of the United States, participant attitudes definitely dominate over others, and subject attitudes are underdeveloped. Thus, the American political culture is characterised by a lack of balance between individual attitudes. Americans often feel more responsible and competent than the government and government administration. This is the result of their political history that began with distrust and rebellion against the British monarchy. Therefore, in the United States, there is a tendency to subject all public and government institutions – including the judiciary and administration – to the direct control of citizens.[21]

British political culture is also close to the civic culture model. Participant attitudes and roles are highly developed and widespread, being among the basic elements of the political system. Openness to politics, interest, commitment and a sense of competence and agency are very high. There are norms – both formal and informal – supporting political activity, there is emotional involvement in participation in the political system, as well as a sense of real influence on public affairs. The sense of belonging and loyalty is balanced: there is both a general feeling of pride in the functioning of the system as a whole and satisfaction with the way the government and central administration work in solving public affairs. As in American political culture, British culture is a mixture of parochial, subject and participant attitudes. Large social groups are open to participation in politics and use their resources to support the political system which is permeated with a sense of social trust. British culture presents a more effective combination of various political attitudes than the American one. Participant orientations have not eliminated subject attitudes and,

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21   *Ibidem*, pp. 440–441.

therefore – regardless of the spread of participant attitudes – the British have a deeply rooted respect for the authority of political institutions that symbolise the tradition of the state. This political culture is distinct from the American one. Almond and Verba called it 'a deferential civic culture'.

Between analytical concept and normative ideal

The work by Almond and Verba and their theses on the relationship between culture and the development and stability of political structures met with great interest, but they have also been criticised.[22] Much of this criticism has involved questioning the rather one-dimensional claim that political culture has shaped political structures without taking the reverse relationship into account. Responding to the allegations, the American researchers pointed out that their position that beliefs, feelings and values significantly influence political behaviour, and that these beliefs, feelings and values are a product of experiences from socialisation, has been supported by a lot of evidence. They admitted, however, that their work *The Civic Culture* was an early attempt to research such issues, and that their concept of political culture is open to criticism and supplements which are supported by the results of other studies.[23]

It seems that, in addition to the culture-institutions relationship, a bigger problem is the fact that Almond and Verba took a certain normative Anglo-Saxon ideal as the starting point for their model of the civic culture. It is not without significance that the concept of the civic culture has been created by the American researchers and refers primarily to American cultural experiences and the Anglo-Saxon model of the political system. In their method of analysing the phenomenon of democracy, the authors adopted a vision typical of American socio-political thought, derived from the writings of Enlightenment thinkers and journalists such as Thomas Paine or Adam Ferguson, and from the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville,

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22 Cf. A. Lijphart, 'Comparative Politics and Comparative Method'*, American Political Science Review*, 1971, vol. 68, pp. 682–691; *idem*, *Democracy in Plural Societies. A Comparative Exploration,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977; C. Pateman, 'Political Culture, Political Structure and Political Change'*, British Journal of Political Science*, 1971, vol. 1(3), pp. 291–305.

23 G. Almond, *The Intellectual History…*, p. 29.

who saw the United States as a model of a democratic society, emphasising in particular the importance of civic participation and the development of independent political and civic associations. It is, therefore, a kind of 'silent assumption' accompanying the concept of the civic culture. By accepting it uncritically, we accept specifically American cultural patterns and the American socio-political model as a universal model for the evaluation of other political and social models. Moreover, this American model itself has the characteristics of an ideal type and is rather a certain normative model used to assess the degree of democratisation of selected societies.

The problem with all analyses related to the so-called civic culture also stems from the fact that their popularity was largely the result of political demand. The works by Almond and Verba, which introduced the concept of the civic culture into the scientific circulation, were created during a specific period in the development of political research in the United States. Most contemporary researchers (primarily those related to the so--called modernisation theory) agreed that the development of democracy was simultaneous with the emergence of a modern capitalist economy and the development of a middle class replacing the former political elite. It was recognised that democracy required open institutions and the development of values supporting the mass participation of citizens in public life. It was recognised that democracy could only function where the existence of a large middle class was combined with modern values and the appropriate type of political institutions. This debate has been probably best summed up by the American sociologist Lewis Coser, who wrote that, historically, democracy is closely related to a relatively high standard of living, urbanisation, industrialisation and mass education. However, the correlation between these factors is not automatic because if society does not have independent forces – local, religious, group – independently pursuing the same goal, the democratisation of modern society is not inevitable.[24] It is one of the most enduring beliefs in American political science. Robert Dahl wrote that, historically, polyarchy (liberal democracy) has been closely linked to a society with

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24   Cf. L. Coser, *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict,* New York: The Free Press 1967, pp. 203–205.

interconnected characteristics such as relatively high levels of per capita income and wealth, long-term economic growth, a low and declining share of the agricultural population, a lack of illiteracy, universal education and a variety of relatively independent organisations.[25]

In the era of the Cold War rivalry for influence in the world (primarily in the countries of the so-called Third World), this type of research and analysis had not only cognitive and scientific value, but also played a practical role in the planning of American politics towards the outside world in the face of the necessary political and ideological rivalry with the Soviet Union in the Third World. The works by Almond and Verba on the civic culture were part of this research trend, driven primarily by political demand. The most important work by these authors – *The Civic Culture* – which is a report on research conducted in the late 1950s, was published in 1963. The American researchers stated in the introduction to this book that it is a study of political culture in a democracy, as well as of the social structures and processes that sustain democratic systems. They pointed out that the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, equality and democracy were put to an enormous test in recent decades. The development of fascism and communism after World War I called into question the inevitability of democracy in the West and it was still uncertain whether the countries of continental Europe would find stable forms of democracy. Moreover, the processes of decolonisation and national rebirth in Asia and Africa that gave rise to new sovereign states raised the question of the form of government that these countries would adopt in the face of the ideological and political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Almond and Verba wrote that in the coming decades the most important question would be whether these new countries would become part of the modern world and would be able to adopt modern democratic values.[26] They did not conceal that the failure of the Enlightenment political project and the liberal expectations of political development was a problem to which research into political culture responded. Therefore, their theories about the relationship between culture and political structure were very popular.[27]

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25   Cf. R. Dahl, B. Stinebrickner, *Modern Political…* .

26   G. Almond, S. Verba, *The Civic Culture…*, p. 3.

27   G. Almond, *The Intellectual History…*, p. 6.

To understand Almond's idea of the civic culture, one must place it in the context of the research that he carried out with Sidney Verba, because only in this way can the meaning of the concept be understood. Almond's research on political culture was largely in line with the trend related to the modernisation theory. The development of this theory and its research programme were related to the response of American political elites and intellectuals to the challenges posed by the international environment after World War II. Therefore, in addition to its high heuristic and analytical value, the concept of the political culture developed by Almond and Verba also has a normative aspect. The idea of the civic culture can be treated as a normative or analytical category. As a normative category, the concept of the civic culture aims to indicate a certain ideal of social order, an answer to the nature of good socio-political order. In the former sense, the civic culture is therefore a category in the field of political philosophy, and in the latter, it may be a political science (sociological) category. That is why, only thanks to a critical attitude is it possible to effectively apply the American research concepts from the late 1950s and early 1960s to the analysis of the complex contemporary socio-political reality. The history of the development of research on political cultures and the creation of the ideal of the civic culture is in itself an interesting social phenomenon showing how deeply social sciences are entangled in the reality in which they arise.

Conclusion: the reception of the concept of the civic culture

Research on the civic culture and its role in the functioning of stable democracies has become one of the most popular areas of inquiry in political science. The themes initiated by Gabriel Almond have been developed by, among others, Benjamin Barber, Robert Putnam, Ronald Ingelhart, Samuel Huntington and, finally, Francis Fukuyama. All of these researchers have focused on the same problem that inspired Almond's research into political culture: what are the social conditions necessary for the development of stable democracies? The concepts of strong democracy, social capital, social trust and values conducive to expression are a creative extension of Almond's ideas, but their meaning remains the same. At the same time, all these considerations are burdened with

the same 'original sin' as Almond's research: they are often motivated by political demands and set the normative ideal associated with the American political tradition as an example.

Among other things, in the case of Robert Putnam's research in Italy, it must be remembered that in Western Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the importance of the liberal-conservative concepts of the socio-economic order, which supported the reorganisation of the socio-political system, increased. This was related to the crisis of the European welfare state. The welfare state was accused of excessive regulation of the free activity of individuals on the part of the state (primarily in the market sphere), expansion of the legal system, which is *de facto* a tool for controlling civic activity and, finally, the disappearance of the sense of individual responsibility and traditional liberal virtues constituting the foundation of a 'free system'. Neoliberal and conservative criticism of the existing social consensus – which brought Margaret Thatcher to power in Great Britain, among others – resulted in the gradual limitation of the role of the state in social life through the policy of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. In the new model of organisation of political institutions, an important role was assigned to a participant individual, who was brave, educated, entrepreneurial and law-abiding in making decisions. The ideal of the civic culture became a strong slogan not only within an analytical dimension, but also within a propaganda dimension.

Referring to the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville's political thought and the research conducted by Almond and Verba, Robert Putnam reformulated the problem they posed and asked the question: under what conditions can responsible, effective and representative political institutions be created? Putnam conducted research on the functioning of local government institutions in Italy. As the adopted institutional solutions were the same throughout the territory of the Italian state, he could analyse their functioning and look for variables contributing to their success or failure. He analysed twenty Italian regions, which differed in their historical and social contexts. Italy was a very diverse country in terms of culture, economy, society and politics. These differences led to different functioning of local government institutions in the regions, and the level of their effectiveness decreased as they moved from north to

south. Analysing the history of Italy, Putnam argued that there is hard evidence that economic development and the quality of governance depend on whether there are traditions of self-organisation and civic involvement in a given local community. He believed that the existence of social networks and norms of reciprocity contributes to the development of social trust, and these three elements constitute the so-called social capital, which is conducive to economic development and good governance. Therefore, economic development and the effectiveness and stability of democratic institutions require the development of social capital (commitment, reciprocity and trust).

The conclusions Putnam made based on his research were repeated by successive American researchers. For example, Ronald Inglehart pointed to the relationship between trust and the durability of a democratic system. He believed that this relationship is inseparable. Social trust shapes civic attitudes and thus contributes to building a political culture. A high level of social trust positively influences the consolidation of democratic values, as well as the stability and durability of the political system.[28] Research on the relationship between structure and political culture became popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The changes that took place in the world under the influence of the so-called third wave of democracy led to the emergence of a global social and political consensus based on liberal-democratic values.[29] Researchers began to be interested in the processes of socio-institutional transformation. The basis for the analysis of the transition towards a democratic and free-market society was the conviction derived from the American tradition that consolidation of the democratic system is conditioned by social recognition of democratic norms and procedures.

With the dissemination of Putnam and Inglehart's research, it became common to believe that economic and social development requires the development of an appropriate set of modern values.[30] Thus,

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28 Cf. R. Inglehart, *Trust, Well-being and Democracy*, in: M. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust*, New York – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 88–120.

29 Cf. F. Fukuyama, *The End of History, and the Last Man,* New York: The Free Press, 2006.

30 Cf. D. Landes, *Culture Makes Almost All the Difference*, in: L. Harrison, S. Huntington (eds.), *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, Boulder, CO: Basic Books, 2001.

the supporters and advocates of various variants of the modernisation theory could argue that the basic factor determining economic success and the quality of operation of democratic institutions is the cultural pattern dominating among members of a given community. Observers of the processes of political transformation in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and East Asia concluded that their problems with democratisation were largely caused by cultural factors. For example, the practice of transforming post-communist societies shows that institutional solutions alone are not a sufficient basis for the development of democracy – they work and develop well only when they are accompanied by the democratic-liberal political culture common to its members, that is, the civic culture. The syndrome of trust and tolerance is of particular importance here. Most researchers, including those from countries undergoing transformation, adopted this point of view. Thus, alternative explanations for complex processes of systemic transformation, such as the dependency theory and the world-systems theory, were outside the mainstream of the debate.

Research on the stability of democratic systems – initiated in the 1950s by the American researchers – has remained one of the most interesting trends in contemporary research on the sphere of politics to this day. The current collapse of faith in the universality of liberal ideas and values, as well as the collapse of hope for the 'end of history' as a result of the global liberal-democratic consensus, has brought the question of the sources of stability and effectiveness of democratic systems back to the centre of academic and political debates. This debate is largely ideological in nature. This is the result of the uncritical adoption of categories created by the American researchers referring to the Anglo-Saxon cultural ideal. The problem is that works such as *The Civic Culture* by Almond and Verba contain valuable analyses, and the categories they created have a lot of heuristic power. At the same time, however, one must remember the normative element they contain and be aware of the historical and social contexts in which they emerged.

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The Civic Culture:
Between Analytical Category and Normative Ideal

Political culture is one of the most popular research areas related to the functioning of the sphere of politics. Contemporary research on political culture was initiated in the 1950s by American researchers Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. Their research was characterised by the assumption that the stability of a political system requires a balance between political structures and the accompanying political patterns. They pointed out that modern democratic institutions require civic participation and thus the development of a specific type of attitudes towards the sphere of politics referred to as the civic culture. In this article, the author analyses the social context in which the concepts of Almond and Verba arose, noting that they strongly influenced the way the concept of the civic culture was conceptualised. The author draws attention to the normative aspect of the theory of the American researchers, the consideration of which is necessary for a full understanding of the concept of the civic culture.