

DISCUSSION PAPER 3/2018

History and Geography is not Destiny

Poland's lesson for Africa

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Strengthening Africa's
economic performance



Executive Summary

Despite the absence of a state for 123 years until 1918, the horror of the Second World War when it lost 85 per cent of its capital and one-third of its population, and the trauma of the Soviet period, since 1990 Poland has become a normal country, and quickly. In so doing Poland has proven three things: First, it is possible to overcome bad geography. The method of doing so has in part been down to an iron will, sound economic policy decisions, and high-levels of education. Second, no matter how traumatic and devastating, history is thus not necessarily destiny. And finally, third, democracy is not just about the ends, even though it provides the tool to ensure the rule of law, efficient government, fairness, freedoms and rights including sound governance and development. It is also important in terms of the means itself, the inclusive manner in which the processing of choice is conducted.

Introduction

The great shipyards of Gdańsk on the Baltic gave birth to the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland in 1980. Despite its banning and the systematic state persecution of its members, by June 1989 the movement had triumphed over the Soviet-backed Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in the first partially free elections after the Second World War.¹

The union leader Lech Wałęsa, instantly distinguishable by his walrus moustache, became president of Poland in 1990. He did not exaggerate when he said that, 'By knocking the teeth out of the Soviet bear, we helped other nations win their freedom.' Solidarity's victory precipitated the fall of the Berlin Wall and widespread political and economic change across the Soviet-controlled East bloc.

Today Gdańsk is the home of a revitalised shipping industry. Poland is the second biggest manufacturer, after the US, of motorised yachts. At the Northern Shipyard, now under private ownership, ocean going trawlers, Thames River ferries, oil platform tenders and shiny red Arctic supply vessels are under various stages of construction.

Outside the famous 'Gate Number Two' to the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard, the scene of much strike action in the 1980s, is a memorial to the workers who lost their lives in the fight for democracy. Just inside the gate is the European Solidary Centre,



comprising a library, memorial and museum to the movement, built to resemble a rusting ship under construction. Conference goers and bands of schoolchildren are among the half a million annual visitors enjoying a cutting-edge presentation of Polish and Soviet history. Nearby is the similarly ultra-modern museum to the Second World War, a detailed reminder of Poland's catastrophic 20th century of totalitarianism, widespread destruction and dictatorship, but one which ended relatively well and has continued in that vein.

Józef Górzyński arrived at the adjacent Lenin Shipyard in July 1980 as a trainee naval engineer. 'I worked in the Fabrication Building,' he says, pointing to a tall single-story brick structure 100 metres away. 'Wałęsa also worked there. On 14 August, less than a month later after I arrived, the strike started.' Wałęsa, who had been



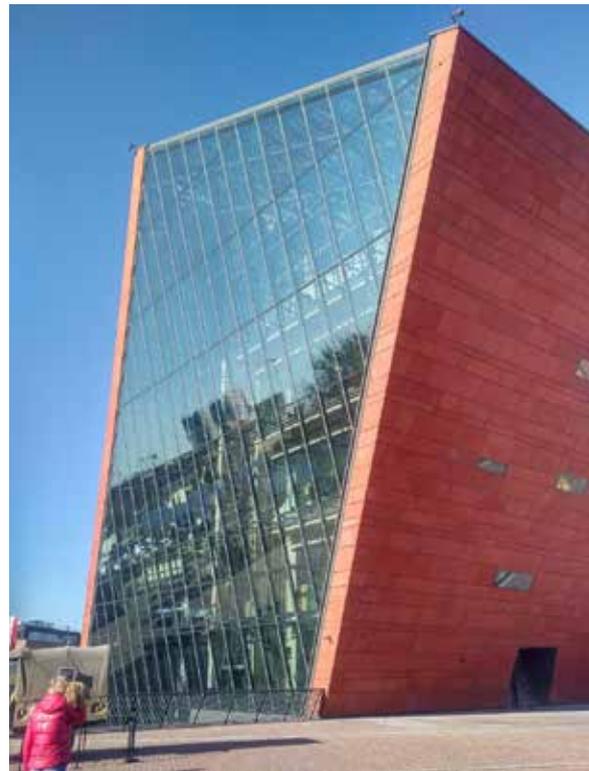
dismissed from his job on account of his political activities, famously scaled the gate to organise the workers. The strike eventually took in one-quarter of the country's workforce, paralysing an economy already hard-hit by the failures and inefficiencies of a centrally planned economy, including food shortages and falling production. The strike ended two weeks later with the recognition of Solidarity. But this was a false dawn of change. In December 1981 martial law was imposed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski during which many of Solidarity's leaders were detained for long periods, including Wałęsa.



When Józef joined, the yards employed their peak of 16 000. Today it is down to around 1 500, though with several thousand more sub-contractors depending on demand. It's a tougher business with competition from China and elsewhere, though the yard has found its niche in the European market.

But there is much more to the city now. The old harbour houses a sensitively renovated waterfront, housing top-class hotels and restaurants, and St Mary's Cathedral, one of the largest brick churches in the world. Gdańsk's distinctive skyline of cranes at the dockyard has given way to glass and steel of a services economy, driven by high-tech skills, tourism and finance.

Downtown is Gdańsk Science and Technology Park. Set up in 2006 in one of the 14 Special Economic Zones countrywide, it houses 80 start-ups, mostly in the sectors of ICT, biotech and energy. Inspired by visits to Silicon Valley and Seattle, this technology 'eco-system' aims at connecting bright minds with the necessary capital and experience to translate good ideas into sustainable businesses. To facilitate this process, the cost of rentals is subsidised by as much as half. Warsaw recently unveiled a further €800 million incentive scheme for start-ups.



Gdańsk's €100 million Second World War Museum

Overall there is an ambitious plan to turn Poland, now the sixth largest economy in the EU, into one giant SEZ. Currently 241 000 work in the Business Services Sector across 1 100 centres, around 50 of them with more than 1 000 employees. The government has its eye on attracting a big slice of the 'KPO' (Knowledge Process Outsourcing) market, given its advantages especially of location and the widespread use of English. Poland enjoys 1.35 million tertiary students, graduating nearly 350 000 annually, 90 per cent of whom possess a proficiency in English, even though Poland's BSS sector operates today in 42 languages. This is but

one aspect of its internationalisation. Poland's airports serviced 34 million passengers in 2017, more than twice as many as Romania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Hungary. The road and rail network has radically increased in three decades, with the road budget alone nearly €20 billion for 2016–2018.

All this is a long way from the shadows of the bombed out city of Danzig.

Poland regained its independent statehood after 123 years under Russian, Austrian and Prussian control at the end of the First World War, when the disputed port which, due to its multi-ethnic make-up, had been placed under the League of Nations control. The Nazis used their limited access to Danzig as one pretext for attacking Poland on 1 September 1939, so kicking off the Second World War. As the war drew to a close, the port became the site of the desperate plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the Soviet advance. The Russian port of Kaliningrad, formerly the German Königsberg, nestles just 170 kms away between Poland and Lithuania.



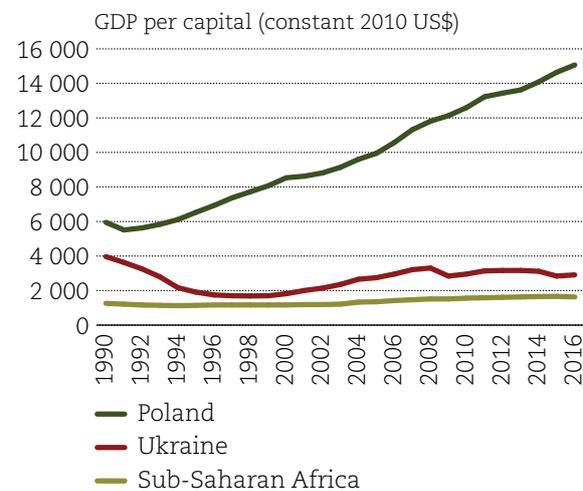
Northern Shipyard in Gdańsk, known now as *Remontowa*, has a diverse order book

The revitalisation of Gdańsk is a metaphor for Poland's transformation over the last quarter-century. After 1990 it quickly stabilised the economy, growing at an annual average of 3.6 per cent since then. Following its membership of the European Union in 2004 it has enjoyed the highest rate of growth among the 28 EU countries. It now ranks in the top 25 largest economies worldwide.

The effect on the standard of living of the last three decades has been staggering.

The average wealth of Poles has vaulted nearly three-fold (in real terms; seven in nominal amounts) in 30 years, to over US\$14 000, driven by a young, well-educated workforce and policy to match. Little wonder that Poles repeat over and again: 'We have progressed more in the last 30 years than the previous 300.' The transformation has been impressive, the net effect of sustained economic growth, moving the country a long way from the Poland described by PG Woodhouse during his internment during the Second World War in Toszek, to Krakow's west: 'If this is Upper Silesia, what must Lower Silesia be like?' he asked.

Vaulting Ahead



While inequality concerns, no Pole would exchange the present for the past.

This turnaround story would be remarkable for any country, the more so for one which had 'lost' one-third (an estimated 11.5 million people) of its population in the Second World War and its aftermath, including those Germans expelled (1.5 million), the annihilation of 2.9 million of the once 3.5 million-strong Jewish community, and three million additional deaths from combat, starvation and disease. No country suffered proportionately more.

At the start of the war on 1 September 1939 there were 1.3 million Varsovians. By 1 August 1944, on the eve of the Warsaw Uprising, there were 900 000, with virtually all the city's Jews having been sent away to the concentration camps. By the end of the war in May 1945 there were just 1 000 left living in the city's centre. Around half of

the country's infrastructure and industrial capacity was destroyed in the conflict, including an estimated 85 per cent of the old city centre.



On the wall of the foyer at the Parliament in Warsaw is a tablet, above, with a list of more than 300 names of parliamentarians who lost their lives in the Second World War. The place of death is a rollcall of historical infamy: nearby Treblinka, Katyń (where Stalin's forces executed more than 20 000 Polish officers in cold blood), Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Monte Cassino in Italy (where the Polish Armed Forces in the West suffered over 4 000 casualties in trying to dislodge the German defenders in a particularly bloody 1944 battle), and the centre of the horror, Auschwitz-Birkenau, just outside the historic city of Kraków, where a million Jews were exterminated.

The horror of the war defines the past. The Warsaw Uprising is symbolic of this awfulness. With the Germans in full retreat from the advancing Soviets in 1944, the Polish resistance prepared for the liberation of the city. On 1 August 1944 an anti-German uprising started. On learning of the uprising, Stalin halted his forces in the city on the other bank of the Vistula. Although supplied from the air by the Allies (including a contingent of South African pilots), which kept the uprising alive for 63 days, eventually it collapsed with the deaths of 150 000 Poles.

In an echo of the failed Warsaw Ghetto uprising the previous year, German retribution was brutal. The capital was to be razed to the ground and every inhabitant killed or expelled on Hitler's order. The Soviets only marched into the city in January 1945.

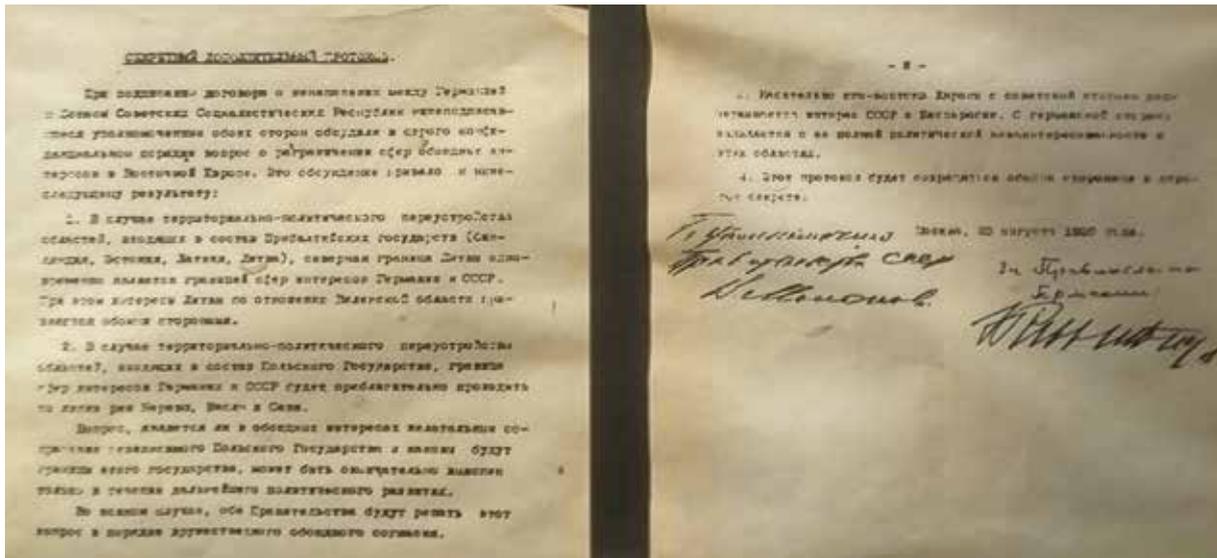
Some 300 000 of Warsaw's Jews were transported from the Ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp 80 kms north-east of the capital, this decision sparking the original uprising by the remnants of this community in April 1943. They had nothing to lose. Today a monument in the style of a cattle truck marks the Umschlagplatz, the railway station in the Ghetto from which they made their journey to Treblinka, now surrounded by Soviet era blocks of flats. Carved with more than 3 000 Jewish forenames, it includes a chilling verse from Job: 'O earth, cover not thou my blood, And let my cry have no resting-place.'

Treblinka operated between July 1942 and October 1943 as part of the Nazi's Final Solution. More Jews, as many as 900 000, were killed there than at any other Nazi extermination site apart from Auschwitz-Birkenau. Unlike Auschwitz-Birkenau, west of Krakow, there are no buildings remaining at Treblinka. With Warsaw's Jews murdered, the camp was dismantled and the ground ploughed over in an attempt to hide the evidence of the genocide.



As many as 900 000 Jews, mostly from Poland, were killed at Treblinka

Treblinka was only a death camp. There was no other purpose in being sent there. The men and women and children were separated on arrival from Warsaw at the rail-siding. They would be stripped immediately, walked a short distance on a cobblestone path built by the prisoners to have their hair cut, and then it was just another 100 metres just to the gas chambers. A small number of Jewish men were detailed as slave-labour



The Soviet-Nazi non-aggression pact signed on 23 August 1939 which sealed Poland's fate. (Gdańsk Second World War Museum)

units or Sonderkommandos, forced to bury the bodies from the gas chambers in mass graves. With the Nazis increasingly concerned as to the physical record of their depravity, the bodies were exhumed in 1943 and cremated on large open-air pyres. A nearby penal labour camp supplied the wood. The remains were buried in large pits dug by giant mechanical shovels. At its peak, Treblinka processed 15 000 daily arrivals.

In an austere scene today Treblinka is surrounded by serenely beautiful fir tree forests, almost providing scale to those murdered, the only sound the wash of wind. The site of the gas chamber is marked by a memorial, the area marked by thousands of jagged rocks depicting the victims, some stencilled with the names of their villages: Tłuszcz, Solec nad Wisłą, Końskie, Sandomierz, Mordy, Srarżysko-Kamienna Warsaw's Jewish population had increased to 450 000 as refugees flocked from other areas.²

Hitler's plan was to eliminate the Polish nation. Then, following the disaster of the war, Poland exchanged one uninvited totalitarian system for another: the hated Soviets who had invaded Poland two weeks after the Nazis under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Poland was long a victim of bad geography. 'We say the Germans wanted to kill our bodies,' observes Wojciech Romejko, a Gdańsk historian, 'and the Soviets our spirit.' The Soviet plan was to maintain Poland as a bulwark against the West,

a territorial centrepiece of a military alliance signed at the then Governor's (now Presidential) Palace in the capital in 1955, hence the term 'Warsaw Pact'.

Although Poland has enjoyed a tremendous contemporary period of prosperity, the past continues to shape the politics of the present. Despite its obvious comparative benefits, there is today a crisis of democracy in Poland, with an increasing lack of respect for constitutional niceties, an absence of dialogue, polarisation and nascent xenophobia.

Polarising Politics

Since taking power in 2015, the Law and Justice (PiS) party has enacted numerous measures to increase political influence over institutions of state, including highly controversial judicial reform bills put forward by PiS, allowing executive authority over judicial appointment, which have forced about 40 per cent of incumbent Supreme Court justices into retirement, a law on restrictions on public gatherings, and another to create an agency to centralise control over public and European Union funding for Non-Governmental Organisations. As a result, in December 2017, the European Commission launched proceedings against Poland under Article 7.1 of the Lisbon

Treaty, citing the judicial reforms as a 'clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law in Poland'.³

Zofia Romaszewska is a senior adviser to Poland's President Andrzej Duda. An early member of the KOR in the 1970s, a committee set up to defend workers' rights, a forerunner of Solidarity, she believes that the root of the current political instability is in the deviation from Solidarity's original goals. 'The remnants of elites from the old [communist] time have remained in control, of the economy, the media and the judiciary. They are now challenged,' she admits, 'by those who feel they were deceived by this change. The roots of the ruling Law and Justice Party is a descendant of Solidarity, moving on issues to the national interest.' She cites the '500-plus' programme designed to incentivise larger families as one example of this positive change. Another concerns the changes to the composition of the national judiciary council, given that 'the judiciary previously operated in the pocket of the elites' she claims.



Politics under scrutiny. Kornel Morawiecki, the Polish Parliament's 'Senior Marshal'

These views are backed up by Kornel Morawiecki, the 'Senior Marshal' of the SEJM, the lower-house of parliament, and the father of the current prime minister. A physicist by training, he is the former leader of the 'Fighting Solidarity', the militant wing of the union, who refused any dealings with the communists, which aimed for a revolution. 'Today there is a basic division between the poor and those who have something, between those who have to endure unemployment and those who have enjoyed success. We are, like in Africa, divided into these two tribes – those more or less

fortunate. Those who have been sidelined now have a voice in government.'

Both, like others around the ruling party, express disquiet over the link between finances and democracy. 'Money has a disproportionate influence in politics' says Andrzej Łupina, Poland's former Ambassador to Algeria, and now head of the Polish-Africa trade chamber. This camp sees the European Union as interfering in Poland's social policy preferences, and is increasingly vocal over the role of foreign companies which it sees as 'depriving' Poles of their wealth.

Yet few politicians have clear thoughts on how to resolve the crisis they identify. They are happy being members of the European Union, given the benefits, though are not happy about the rules of the club they joined. Having your cake and eating it comes immediately to mind.

An African Perspective

Killion Munyama has an unusual vantage. A Zambian, born in the southern province of Monze and brought up on a farm, he came to Poland on a scholarship in 1981 to study finance. Returning briefly to Zambia in 1988 he worked in the government, but returned to Poland four months later to study for a PhD in Poznan on the effects of IMF policies in Zambia. Well known in his region on account of the language school he runs and his role lecturing at the local university, he drifted into politics as delegate to his local council of Grodzisk Wielkopolski in 2002. In 2006 he joined the Civic Platform centre-right party, and was elected to the Greater Poland Regional Assembly. In the 2011 national elections he was elected to parliament, being re-elected in 2015. He now serves on the public finance committee and is a delegate to the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

The shift to the right in contemporary Polish politics, he says, is down to a number of factors. 'First, we have had coalition governments since 1990, until 2015.' This is because the left made a strategic blunder in attempting to put together a coalition, which required a minimum of eight per cent of the vote to take up seats in parliament.

They got 7.9 per cent. ‘Second, while we [in Civic Platform] would have made an alliance with the left to form a government, the Law and Justice party had to make a pact with parties on the right. This has, third, given opportunity to a long-held desire among the majority of Poles to ‘eliminate leftists from politics’.



The Zambian Pole, Killion Munyama

This partly reflects the experience with communism. ‘It did a great deal of damage to people and has shaped their way of thinking,’ observes Munyama. ‘During the 1980s there was a very big economic crisis when I was a student. There is a Polish saying from those times: “Whether you are standing up or lying down in communism, you will have a salary.” But this took away initiative from the individual. You could hardly buy anything in the shops. What you see now is a reaction to those times, and to the deep social and religious conservatism of the society.’ And fourth, there is a deep-seated nationalism. ‘Previously the desire for independence kept Poles together, and communism had the same effect. While divisions are appearing now among Poles, there is still a feeling among many that they don’t want to be under the influence of anyone – whether this be the Germans, Soviets or even the European Union. What they don’t realise,’ he notes, ‘is that these rules that they are against are partly of their own making. This is a process of voluntary integration, not totalitarianism.’ While Poland wears its many charms lightly, there is a heavy history, which occasionally is vented in irrational outbursts, notably against Germany, Europe, Russia or Jews.

Poland’s political wobbles have to be put into a global context of course. Killion’s native Zambia is one of those which has slipped down the global democracy rankings, ranked partly free in its politics and not free in its media environment by Freedom House, a US-based watchdog and advocacy organisation for liberties, in 2018, with a score of 55/100 (where 100 is most free). Poland was adjudged by Freedom House to be ‘free’ in terms of its politics, but ‘partly free’ in terms of press freedoms, with an overall score of 85/100.⁴

There are peculiarly Polish dimensions to this political unease.

Poland lacks a tradition of institutionalised political parties with clearly defined ideological or policy distinctions, operating in a rational democratic system. They keep chopping and changing, loyalties are weak, and personalities and old grudges play a big role. There is also a yawning generational gap: the older ones tend to be parochial in outlook and struggle to understand the modern world, while the born-frees speak English and are global citizens. Add a touch of apathy and cynicism, and you have a situation that defies simple explanation. Its politics – and its extremes – have less to do with authoritarian rumblings than they are an expression of deep nationalism, its roots in 123 years of independence struggle and the experience of the Second World War and its Cold War aftermath. No country suffered more.

The only thing that can be said for certain about Polish politics, is that most contests happen on the right-end of the political spectrum, between centrist and right-wing parties. Still, things are confused. The ruling Law and Justice Party, while politically conservative, is socially progressive, promoting a wider and better funded welfare system. Such contradictions are not a recent phenomenon. Solidarity, a trade union, came to the struggle with an interest in workers’ rights, but overturned a communist government. Indeed, all that most Polish politicians and the public seem to agree on is their dislike for the left, which gathers less than ten per cent of the vote, a legacy of the recent communist past.

The concerns of Poles about the divergence between its politics and economic direction reflects, however, a wider, global crisis of democracy.

As Freedom House put it in its 2018 report:⁵ ‘Democracy is under assault and in retreat around the globe, a crisis that has intensified as America’s democratic standards erode at an accelerating pace ...’ The 2018 edition of its *Freedom in the World* found that 2017 was the 12th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. Some 71 countries suffered net declines in political rights and civil liberties in 2017, with only 35 registering gains. ‘Once-promising states such as Turkey, Venezuela, Poland, and Tunisia,’ the report notes, ‘were among those experiencing declines in democratic standards.’ It also observes how China and Russia ‘have taken advantage of the retreat of leading democracies both to increase repression at home and to export their malign influence to other countries. To maintain power, these autocratic regimes are acting beyond their borders to squelch open debate, pursue dissidents, and compromise rules-based institutions.’

Despite the notion that the end of the Cold War would see the ‘end of history’ in terms of ideological rivalry, the three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall has instead seen the emergence of a more contested, competitive, conflicted and contested world, more diverse and with multiple alignment options. Instead, of the once seemingly inevitable spread of a liberal order, interests have appeared to increasingly delink from values.

And there is too a new enthusiasm, it seems, for authoritarianism as a model to ‘get things done’, the sort of ‘benign dictator’ who is not corrupt but efficient, who maintains a paternalistic but admirable benevolence. Yet the reality of such a model is, for the most part, quite different. Few of Africa’s dictators have proven benign or developmentally astute. Most end their rule badly, usually fatally so. Even the high growth models, such as Ethiopia, which are held up as examples of good if stern governance, have stumbled with political unrest caused by their lack of legitimacy.

Moreover the experience from apparent models elsewhere is at best mottled and their lessons mixed.

Politics as the Reform Variable

Where politics – or political systems – is the variable, there are two types of authoritarian states: those that have developed fast, a group that includes China, Taiwan and South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Chile under Pinochet, and a number of the Gulf states.

These states have not, however, followed a cut-and-paste template of a one-person or one-party state. Far from it. Although Singapore, like others in the region – including South Korea, China, Indonesia and Taiwan – developed and modernised under a system of rigid political control, the image of its founding father Lee Kuan Yew as the all-powerful ‘Big Man’ lacks sufficient nuance.

Singapore’s economic development involved much more than one person and fundamentally relied on the establishment of robust institutions with strong and honest leadership and commitment. Although Lee presented the articulate public face and adroitly managed the politics and personalities, his was a formidable team, where decisions were argued over.

Similarly, the political systems in South Korea and Taiwan evolved as full democracies by the 1990s. Chile grew much faster under a democratic government after 1988 than during the preceding era of General Pinochet, even though the *junta* had done a lot of the hard reforms. China’s leadership after Mao Tse Tung enjoyed clearly defined periods in office, at least until Xi Jinping’s ‘reforms’ which, in March 2018, removed term limits for the President and Vice President.

Francis Fukuyama insists that democratic institutions are only ever one component of political stability. According to his view, two other building blocks are required: a strong state and the rule of law. He argues that it matters to get the sequence right. Without a strong state first, he believes that democracy will only amplify weakness since it is subjected to many competing and conflicting demands, eating away at its capacity to deliver and exert authority. Yet, the paradox in this view

is that without democracy, there is not a strong or at least a legitimate state capable of reforming, as in the case of Poland, moving in the direction of a majority. People who rule themselves have far greater opportunities to complain about governments they don't like.⁶

Unsurprisingly, then, there is a second, much larger group of economic reformers, including Africa, Eastern and Central Europe after the Soviet period, and nearly all of the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and much of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, which involved the abandonment of a one-party system, competitive elections and the removal of a state monopoly. In these cases democracy preceded economic reform; indeed, the introduction of a competitive system of government made possible the opening up of the economy and establishment of an independent judiciary, streamlined bureaucracy, and a policy regime attractive to private investors.

Shock Therapy: Poland's Economic Reforms

Leszek Balcerowicz was a 41-year old economics professor in 1988, 'with a hobby of economic reform. We all thought,' he says from the Warsaw School of Economics, 'however that Poland would persist as it was.' However, the basic conclusion we reached was that economic liberalisation matters for results from reform; the variable is whether the political regime allows the necessary reforms to happen. Without political liberalisation there could be no changing the economic structure.

'When I was asked by the Prime Minister in 1989 to take over the reform project, I was on my way to take over a visiting post in the UK. I agreed because it was my hobby,' he smiles, 'because we had a team of ten people assembled, we could take a radical and risky approach, and I would also have a say in the ministers chosen.'

His group took over 'the commanding heights' of the economy, starting the project in September 1989 amidst hyperinflation and falling production. With a deadline of 1 January 1990, the team

produced a ten-step plan 'which sought to answer two basic questions: what are your targets, and what is your model.'

'The first was clear. We had been diverging from the West for years. We needed to catch up. That could only happen through faster economic growth, and that demanded open markets, moderate taxation, and private investment. To do this, we needed to be very fast and move on a broad front.'

Balcerowicz and his team realised that they could use the political moment to their advantage. 'We also relied on psychology, never believing that Homo Sovieticus would not change, and that incentives could work.'

On reflection, the Professor would 'change some things faster, such as 'the inherited welfare system, which became a drag. We should also have done a flat tax quicker.' But he is, overall, 'very happy. We have enjoyed the best period in our history because for the first time we began to adapt the Western model of competitive elections, the rule of law, and market economics. This has resulted in us converging with the West for the first time in our history.'



The relationship with the Soviets was apparently close, at least between the elites. Leonid Brezhnev and Polish leader Edward Gierek get personal

In his 'shock therapy', prices of consumer goods were freed, state-sector wages frozen, the Zloty was made convertible, state-owned enterprises sold via a voucher system. 'We had to innovate with vouchers since we lacked the developed capital markets' notes Balcerowicz.

The Warsaw Stock Exchange, below, started with five listings in 1991, housed presumably with



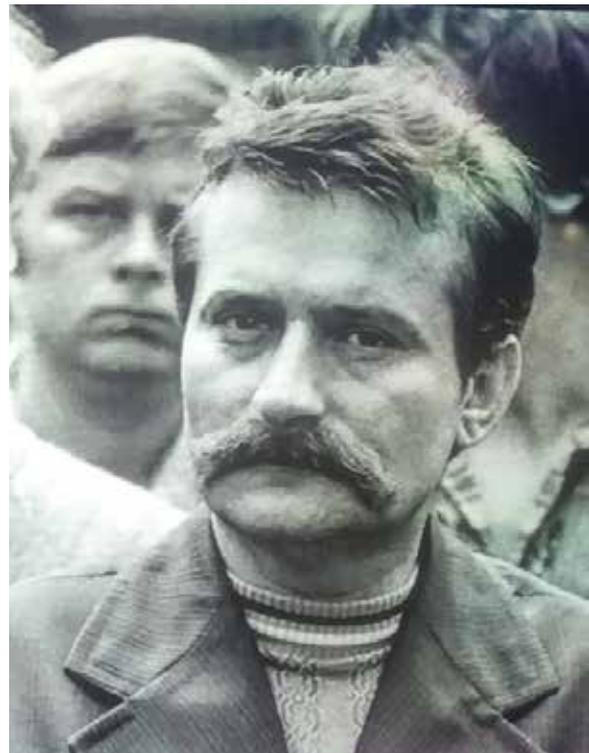
a Polish sense of humour in the old PZPR Workers' Party HQ. Today it is in a bespoke glass and steel building nearby, with 488 listings on the main exchange and more than 400 on a 'New Connect' market designed for small- and medium-sized businesses where there is a minimum capital requirement of €30 000. In 2017 the bourse enjoyed 28 per cent growth, the fastest in Europe.

Conclusion: A Man and Some Lessons

As wealth has increased, politics has changed. For example, the membership of Solidarity was once ten million strong. It has halved to just 12 per cent in 20 years.

The domestic political career of Lech Wałęsa, the man who headed up this extraordinary period of change, quickly disintegrated. His five-year government had seven prime ministers, losing the 1995 election to a candidate from the post-Soviet camp. 'His government was unstable,' says Dr Munyama, 'which is to be expected perhaps from a broad-based movement like Solidarity.' Wałęsa was then wiped out in the 2000 election with just one per cent of the vote. 'He was like [Nelson] Mandela for Poland,' says Łukasz Jasina of the Polish Institute of International Affairs. 'He remains a hero to us, after [Pope] John Paul II, Chopin and Copernicus. He played a very important revolutionary role, and was a symbol of divine intervention' he observes of a country where 95 per cent of the population is Catholic. Wałęsa's was a story of hardship and struggle, whose father had been interned in a German concentration camp,

with little formal education, and who progressed from the village to a big factory. He put Poland on the map, both internationally and through its economic reforms, though, says Jasina, he was 'more cherished abroad than in Poland, where his reputation is definitely not helped by the controversy over his state role as a spy in the early 1970s for the SB security police. But,' he adds, 'the majority remember him for the good that he did, and forgive him, but want him in the past.'



Whatever his detractors, the folk-hero Wałęsa is still going strong, however, shifting his political influence behind the centrists in the Civic Platform, the 1983 Nobel laureate, proving a popular speaker especially abroad. He expresses concern about the direction of Poland's current politics. 'The whole world is looking for new solutions ... which is why they choose strange politics; in Poland like in the US and France where Macron was elected even without a party. People are dreaming about finding new solutions because the current political structures did not solve their problems.' To do so, he stresses the need, 'in opposition as in government,' for a combination of 'the right words, personal spirit, values, peaceful means and a constant belief in God', the same formula that

'we used to defeat the Communists despite their great military strength.'

Balcerowicz, who worked closely with him, notes that 'Wałęsa's style was certainly worse than his substance. He got a lot done.' Now, like his former boss, the professor cautions against 'backsliding' on democracy and its benefits. 'We have to realise that things don't simply fall like manna from heaven, only stay with hard work, should never be taken for granted. To do this, we need to frighten those who seek to backslide as much as they want to frighten us.'

Whatever its challenges, Poland has become a normal country, and quickly. This is evident in Wałęsa still having a voice, and there being intense competition across the political spectrum from the likes of (European Union head of council) Donald Tusk who founded Civic Platform and the leader of the ruling PiS Jarosław Kaczyński, who clearly cannot abide each other. No wonder than more than 80 per cent of Poles say they are satisfied with their lives, up from only half in 1990.⁷

In so doing Poland has proven three things:

1. It is possible to overcome bad geography. The method of doing so has in part been down to an iron will, sound economic policy decisions, and high-levels of education.
2. History, no matter how traumatic and devastating, is thus not necessarily destiny.
3. Democracy is not just about the ends, even though it provides the tool to ensure the rule of law, efficient government, fairness, freedoms and rights, including sound governance and development. It is also important in terms of the means itself, the inclusive manner in which the processing of choice is conducted. The words of Pope John Paul II, illuminated at the European Solidarity Centre, have relevance in this regard: 'To look into the eyes of the other person and to see in them hope and anxieties of brother or sister, is to discover the idea of solidarity.'

Endnotes

1. This section is based on a research trip to Poland in April 2018. Thanks, in particular, are expressed to Grażyna Koornhof at the Polish Embassy in Pretoria and Patrycjusz Piechowski for their kind assistance in arranging the itinerary.
2. The Nazis forcefully put them into the Ghetto, thus eliminating smaller concentrations of Jews. This also occurred in the other major Ghettos as well such as Kraków and in Łódź.
3. At <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/poland>.
4. At <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/poland>.
5. At <https://freedomhouse.org/article/democracy-crisis-freedom-house-releases-freedom-world-2018>.
6. See Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalisation of Democracy*. London: Profile, 2014. See its review, too, at <https://www.ft.com/content/67b8f490-4269-11e4-9818-00144feabdc0>.
7. At <http://www.diagnoza.com/index-en.html>.