

PAŃSTWO I SPOŁECZEŃSTWO

STATE AND SOCIETY

E-ISSN 2451-0858 ISSN 1643-8299

ROK XXIV: 2024, NR 1

DOI: 10.48269/2451-0858-pis-2024-1-001

Data wpłynięcia: 30.09.2023

Data akceptacji: 26.04.2024

THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GENERATION Z: AN ATTEMPT TO DEVELOP A RESEARCH TOOL AND THE FIRST PILOT STUDY

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Abstract

Civic engagement and the civil society remain essential components of a democratic system. Using the theories of Karl Mannheim concerning the existence of generations, the authors of this text have undertaken to develop a research tool (a questionnaire), which will enable them to verify the extent to which civic engagement is prevalent among representatives of generation Z, that is, individuals born between 1995 and 2008. The text contains information about how the questionnaire was created, describing the process of selecting the questions in detail, and presents the results of pilot studies conducted in June 2023.

Key words: generation Z, generation, pilot study, civic engagement

Introduction

It is difficult for us to admit it, but the basic reason why we undertook, firstly, to create our own Questionnaire on the Civic Engagement of Representatives of Generation Z, and subsequently, to write this text is the fear (undoubtedly somewhat exaggerated) that democracy in Poland may have reached crisis point. In our view, the reasons for this are both the decline in individual agency and civic engagement and an abandonment of moral responsibility for one's own fate, one's immediate surroundings and for the community (including the political community¹). The many possible causes of this state of affairs include – and this has often been mentioned in the literature – a weakness in civil society, and this emerges from such factors as the lack of citizens who possess a high degree of civic political competence.² For the same reason, our attention is diverted towards that social group that is still in the process of forming civil attitudes, since it is on the formation of this group that very soon the fate of the whole community will depend. Our aim is to verify the thesis – which has already been tested many times – that young people's attitudes point to “a fall in interest, engagement, a growth in political cynicism as well as a change in forms of activity – from political to social.”³ It turns out that, although young people are better educated, they have a lower level of knowledge of politics, typically participate less in political organisations and vote in elections less often.⁴ Young people – particularly in Poland – do not have a particularly good opinion of their own civic engagement. In a 2019 study of their political preferences new fewer than 36.7% of respondents claimed that their involvement in social life was low (23.4%) or very low (13.3%). As the main reason why they do not engage in social life, young people stated a critical attitude towards politics, politicians and public debate.⁵

¹ A.J. Chmielewski, *Rola kompetencji poznawczych w demokratycznych systemach politycznych*, “Przegląd Politologiczny” 2019, nr 2, p. 113, <https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2019.24.2.8>.

² D. Plecka, A. Turska-Kawa, W. Wojtasik, *Obywatelskie kompetencje polityczne*, “Kultura i Edukacja” 2013, nr 3, p. 74.

³ P. Pawełczyk, B. Jankowiak, *Studenci a polityka. Badanie komponentu emocjonalnego postaw*, “Studia Edukacyjne” 2013, nr 27, p. 326.

⁴ E.M. Uslaner, *Social Capital, Television, and the “Mean Word”*: Trust, Optimism, and Civil Participation, “Political Psychology” 1998, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 441–467; E.S. Smith, *The effects of investment in the social capital in youth on political and civic behavior in young adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis*, “Political Psychology” 1999, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 553–580; M.X. Delli Carpini, *Gen.com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Informational Environment*, „Political Communication” 2000, vol. 17, issue 4, pp. 341–349; R.D. Putman, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York 2000; R. Marzęcki, *Depolityzacja jako element stylu życia młodzieży*, “Przegląd Politologiczny” 2015, nr 1, pp. 57–72; P. Pawełczyk, K. Churska-Nowak, B. Jankowiak, *Struktura i uwarunkowania efektywnego komponentu postaw politycznych studentów*, “Przegląd Politologiczny” 2012, nr 4, pp. 7–16.

⁵ A. Kądziała, *Preferencje polityczne młodych Polaków w 2019 roku*, “Studia Politologiczne” 2020, vol. 55, pp. 328, 332, <https://doi.org/10.33896/SPolit.2020.55.15>; *idem*, *Polityczny portret*

Civic engagement – the topic of this text – will henceforth be understood by us as political involvement and political participation. Although they are similar and are close in meaning in political science and administration, these terms are treated as different forms of activity.⁶ What they have in common is interest and activity in the public sphere: involvement in civil organisations, willingness to cooperate, a feeling of trust, doing voluntary work and, finally, participation in elections (passive or active).⁷ Crucially, civic engagement does not suddenly appear when one reaches adulthood, rather it is a postponed effect of activities undertaken in earlier periods.⁸ By the same token, we hold that the question about willingness or lack thereof to be publicly involved should be asked at the stage where attitudes are forming, when one can assume that we are dealing with the first civic inclinations. Confirmation of this includes the findings of psychologists who claim that “[...] the periods of youth and early childhood are critical times for activating the internal resources conducive to civic engagement.”⁹ Therefore – aiming to verify anew the thesis stated previously – we have set ourselves the task of developing a research tool (a questionnaire) in order to subsequently attempt to answer the question as to whether, and if so how, civic engagement manifests among representatives of generation Z. However, right at the outset our intuition encourages us to doubt unambiguously negative opinions regarding the social engagement of this specific age group.

Civic engagement as a theoretical construct

Reflecting on the issue of civic engagement is very strongly tied to the concept of social capital. This is treated as an essential factor that explains the variety in political attitudes and the ways in which people behave in the public sphere.

młodych Polaków 2023, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung–Centrum Badań Marketingowych Indicator, https://opolityce.ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/06/VII_1-To-nam-sie-w-glowach-nie-miesci_material-pomocniczy-_skrot-raportu-Portret-polityczny-Mlodych-Polakow-2023.pdf [accessed: 25.02.2024].

⁶ Ł. Scheffs, *Kolektywizm i indywidualizm. Zachowania wyborcze w Polsce w latach 2001–2011*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Politycznych i Dziennikarstwa UAM, Poznań 2016.

⁷ P. Czakon, *Zaangażowani czy obojętni? Aktywność społeczna i polityczna młodych Polaków*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2016, z. 95, p. 76.

⁸ D. Szaban, K. Lisowski, *Strategie zachowań politycznych młodzieży w dobie kryzysu (polskiej demokracji)*, “Rocznik Lubuski” 2014, t. 40, cz. 2a, p. 260; A. Kaniewska-Sęba, P. Pawełczyk, *Temperatura uczuć młodych Polaków wobec wybranych polskich polityków*, “Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne” 2020, nr 28, p. 91, <https://doi.org/10.19195/1643-0328.28.6>.

⁹ B. Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, *Aktywność obywatelska jako zadanie i wyzwanie rozwojowe – znaczenie okresu dzieciństwa i adolescencji*, “Psychologia Rozwojowa” 2019, t. 24, nr 3, p. 10.

[...] social capital is grounded in interpersonal relationships and creates a ‘network of civic engagement’ which forms an axis for the development of societal trust, social values and cooperative norms, as well as a willingness to participate in social activities for the benefit of the community.¹⁰

And it is precisely in research on social capital that the topic of civic engagement among children, young people and relatively young adults is brought up. Here, it is most frequently considered in three dimensions. One “concerns the essence of citizenship – what it is, what it consists in and why it is important. Another considers its scope, which means the type of [...] civil activities that young people are willing to undertake in the domain of citizenship.”¹¹ In what follows, this dimension will be a particular focus of our investigations. The other dimension “relates to the opportunities that young people have to take part in civic actions, in terms of both formal and developmental aspects.”¹²

Of course, our deliberations on the formation of participatory attitudes among young people will naturally be linked to other – extremely broad – concepts, such as political culture and political socialisation. However, we are clearly not in a position to address these perspectives in just one article. Researching the developmental processes that result in an individual acquiring a political identity, convictions, values, attitudes and models of behaviour would extend far beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, this is a crucial issue, as confirmed by the rich body of literature and extensive theoretical perspectives that have already been gathered.¹³ We personally assume that civic engagement is one of the basic factors in shaping affirmative attitudes, which are especially desirable in democratic systems.

For our own explanatory purposes, we accept that

[...] public engagement is the realisation of activities that reflect interests and involvement in governance and democracy, such as membership of political parties and trade

¹⁰ D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, *Kapitał społeczny młodzieży jako podstawa socjalizacji politycznej oraz rozwoju społeczeństwa obywatelskiego – sprawozdanie z badań niemieckich*, “Studia Edukacyjne” 2012, nr 22, p. 258.

¹¹ B. Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, A.M. Zalewska, *Aktywność obywatelska polskiej młodzieży w relacji do innych Europejczyków i w zależności od fazy adolescencji*, “Psychologia Rozwojowa” 2015, t. 20, nr 4, p. 11, <https://doi.org/10.4467/20843879PR.15.019.4462>.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ E. Rokicka, *Postawy polityczne młodzieży szkolnej i studenckiej*, “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Sociologica” 1991, nr 21, pp. 73–86; P. Pawełczyk, K. Churska-Nowak, B. Janowski, *Zachowania wyborcze młodych dorosłych w wyborach parlamentarnych i prezydenckich. Ocena wpływu podmiotów socjalizacji politycznej – na podstawie badań własnych*, “Studia Edukacyjne” 2012, nr 21, pp. 233–248; D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, *op. cit.*; G. Piwnicki, *Socjalizacja i edukacja polityczna jako ważne determinanty kultury politycznej*, “Cywilizacja i Polityka” 2018, nr 16, pp. 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.15804/cip201802>; L. Szczegółka, *Rodzina w perspektywie studiów nad socjalizacją polityczną*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 2021, t. 64, nr 4, pp. 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.31743/znkul.13212>.

unions (professional associations), holding a position in clubs and associations, contacting MPs and participating in meetings and public consultations.¹⁴

Civic engagement means not only political activity, but also extra-political activity.¹⁵ The catalogue of such activity is extremely broad and difficult to define precisely. There exists both educational and emancipatory activity, for example in the domains of care for the environment, respecting animal rights, as well as tolerance for any differences from the norm (LGBT and feminist movements etc.), promotion of specific attitudes and beliefs (e.g. anarchist, nationalist, pro-life and pro-choice movements) and cultural activity (organising exhibitions, concerts, and non-commercial and integrational events). There are also activities undertaken within small neighbourhood communities, which may aim to improve the living conditions of residents, introduce changes in the surroundings and encourage residents to collaborate in various ways. Civic engagement may ultimately take on the form of protests, public discontent, and even disobedience.¹⁶

In an attempt to define civic engagement more precisely (what its components are) we use the ideas proposed by Ryszard Klamut. He claims that civic engagement can be defined as “the social activity of individuals (citizens) that results from individual motives or grassroots social initiatives, intended to serve the public interest [...]”¹⁷ Presenting the ideas of other researchers, who either deal with the issues of social activity understood as collective conscious activity directed towards a particular group, address spontaneous and organised civil activity, or examine passive, semi-active and active forms of engagement, he comes to the conclusion that civic engagement can be operationalised on four levels. To this end he points out archetypes, such as commitment to the community, social participation, individual political activity and political participation.¹⁸ A characteristic of commitment to the community is that a person provides others with help in the form of temporary activities (for example voluntary work in a hospice) or action-orientated activities, namely, helping people in need financially, offering to do some sort of work, or offering one’s time etc. Social participation is cooperation with others in helping in NGOs, associations, help groups and parish groups, etc. Individual political activity is

¹⁴ W. Stypułkowski, *Aktywność obywatelska – pojęcie, pomiar i jej wpływ na rozwój regionalny* “Zeszyty Naukowe WSEI. Seria: Ekonomia” 2012, t. 5, nr 2, p. 159.

¹⁵ B. Martela, *Aktywność obywatelska w ramach inicjatyw nieformalnych. Przyczynek do refleksji*, “Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Sociologica” 2011, nr 38, pp. 105–120.

¹⁶ H. Zboroń, *Aktywność obywatelska we współczesnych społeczeństwach demokratycznych*, “Sensus Historiae” 2017, t. 29, nr 4, p. 155.

¹⁷ R. Klamut, *Kwestionariusz aktywności obywatelskiej (KAO) – narzędzie do badania różnych rodzajów aktywności obywatelskiej*, “Psychologia Społeczna” 2015, t. 10, nr 1, p. 68, <https://doi.org/10.7366/1896180020153205>.

¹⁸ *Idem*, *Aktywność obywatelska jako rodzaj aktywności społecznej – perspektywa psychologiczna*, “Studia Socjologiczne” 2013, nr 1, pp. 192–194.

both activity that raises the level of the conscious understanding of socio-political reality, and allows one to

influence what laws will be enacted and what democratic representation will govern the individual and the community (signing petitions, citizens' bills, participation in demonstrations, etc.), and political participation – influence on enacted laws and procedures by which the state functions [at the local, national or European level – J.R., Ł.S.] within the organisational structures of parties, associations and political organisations. [What is important about this idea is that the different – J.R., Ł.S.] [...] types of civic engagement are connected and activity in one area may influence activities undertaken elsewhere.¹⁹

In other words, the boundaries between types of activity are somewhat blurred. At this juncture it should be added that Klamut's Civic Activity Questionnaire (CAQ)²⁰, to which we shall return later, can be considered a summary of his theoretical considerations.

The social profile of representatives of generation Z

Although it is difficult to believe, particularly from the perspective of the already established 'theory of generations', interest in young people as an autonomous socio-political category has actually only been observed since the middle of the 20th century. The postwar economic boom in the United States and the process of the middle and working classes becoming wealthier gave rise to a situation where young people from these social classes began to possess their own capital, involuntarily becoming a target group. Firstly, industrial conglomerates began to show their interest in this group, and, ultimately, all the other social and political concerns did so as well. Science also observed and implemented this phenomenon, adapting it to its own research needs as early as the turn of the 1950s and introducing the term 'teenager' to describe the same group. At a later stage, this group became known as 'young adults.'²¹

Just as quickly as young people emerged as a separate group and a category appeared to describe them, professionals (academics) began to reflect on the meaning of this change. In particular, sociologists, who in order to explain it began to use the term 'theory of generations', believed that what is constitutive of a given group can be defined as a "particular event during a specified period of time."²² This event is of a formative nature for the group and also concerns social

¹⁹ J. Miluska, J. Kuświk, *Preferencje typów ładu państwowego a aktywność polityczna młodzieży szkół średnich*, "Przegląd Psychologiczny" 2020, t. 63, nr 1, p. 83.

²⁰ *Idem*, *Kwestionariusz...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–72.

²¹ M. Brylczak, *Szkola demokracji – młodzież w świecie społeczno-politycznym. Wykluczenie, czy zaniedbanie?*, "Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne" 2012, nr 1, p. 322.

²² N.D. Glenn, *Cohort Analysis*, Sage Publications, London 1977, p. 2.

and political issues. Different generations experience political socialisation in different contexts and enter into the political arena or the public sphere at different moments in history. Generational experiences can, and most often do, influence the characteristics of cohorts and generations.

A war, an uprising, a repatriation, a significant societal shift, a political system change, the threat of hunger or unemployment, an economic crisis – all these events and processes can leave lasting traces in the social consciousness, contributing to the creation (or destruction) of the resources, predominantly cultural ones, which are essential for participation.²³

Essentially seminal for the generation issue

was an essay by Karl Mannheim: *The problem of generations*. He considered the issue of generations as both a biological and cultural phenomenon. A generation is a group of people who come into the world in a particular generational location, that is, in a specific time and place. The succession of generations enables each new generation of young people to look at the world in a fresh light, which can (and [...] usually does) vary from how their predecessors saw it.²⁴

Each generation is shaped by the configuration of social moods that are predominant in the particular socio-historical context.²⁵

Since Mannheim's essay the generation issue has recurred in the work of other scholars. Here it would suffice to mention José Ortega y Gasset²⁶, Maria Ossowska²⁷, Jan Garewicz²⁸ and Barbara Fatyga.²⁹ These authors have claimed independently of each other that what creates a generation is a specific event, experience (positive or negative), and sometimes also the need to rebel, to resist, while at other times the need for continuity of the *status quo*.³⁰ A not insignificant role in shaping the image of individual generations is played by the system of values and beliefs, which at once pertains to the work environment, political and religious views and practices, as well as consumption patterns and notions

²³ M. Czeńnik, P. Zagórski, *Wiek a uczestnictwo wyborcze w Polsce: cykl życia, okres, kohorta*, "Studia Socjologiczne" 2022, nr 4, p. 46, <https://doi.org/10.24425/sts.2022.143582>.

²⁴ M. Folta, X, Y, Z. *Teoria cykli pokoleniowych Straussa-Howe'a w świetle wcześniejszych teorii*, "Konteksty Społeczne" 2020, t. 8, nr 2, p. 24, <https://doi.org/10.17951/ks.2020.8.2.23-37>.

²⁵ K. Mannheim, *The Problem of Generations*, [in:] K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. P. Kecskemeti, Routledge & K. Paul, London 1952, pp. 292, 299, 319.

²⁶ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Zadanie naszych czasów*, [in:] J. Ortega y Gasset, *Po co wracamy do filozofii?*, wybór i wstęp S. Cichowicz, tłum. E. Burska, M. Iwańska, A. Jancewicz, Spacja, Warszawa 1992, pp. 17–28.

²⁷ M. Ossowska, *Koncepcja pokolenia*, "Studia Socjologiczne" 1963, nr 2, pp. 47–51.

²⁸ J. Garewicz, *Pokolenie jako kategoria socjofilozoficzna*, "Studia Socjologiczne" 1983, nr 1, pp. 75–87.

²⁹ B. Fatyga, *Pokolenie* [headword], [in:] *Encyklopedia socjologii. Suplement*, red. H. Kubiak et al., Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2005, p. 195.

³⁰ M. Folta, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

of the family and collective life. In turn, these are connected to the economic and societal diversity of the conditions of existence, which translate into differences in life opportunities.³¹

Taking into account the problem of the succession of generations, the most cohesive theory is probably Strauss and Howe's theory of generational cycles. William Strauss and Neli Howe believe that

in relation to the shaping of generations there is a feedback loop: history shapes generations, and generations shape history – all of this is said to take place according to a model that repeats in cycles. The basis of this assumption is the secular cycle. [...] this term itself is taken from the Etruscan *saeculum*, which refers to the length of a human life. For Strauss and Howe, the secular cycle, which they estimate to be a period of eighty to a hundred years, is an ideal way of dividing history into periods. Every secular cycle begins and ends with a crisis, a great catastrophe. Then there are four fundamental phases: High, Awakening, Unravelling and Crisis. The authors term the transition between one phase and the next a Turning. The last, fourth Turning in the cycle is a shock, because after Crisis the old order collapses, out of the debris arises a new world, a new *saeculum* begins and the cycle repeats itself.³²

According to Strauss and Howe, in each phase a key aspect is the predominant style of bringing up children, because this affects their behaviour and needs in adult life and drives the cycle: neglected children grow up to be overprotective parents, after which the pendulum swings in the opposite direction.³³

Of the many attempts to describe different generations, one of the last is a suggestion that has found permanent anchorage in the theory of organisation and management, where a distinction is made between

1) the Silent Generation – those born between 1922 and 1944, the so-called builders of modern Europe; 2) Baby Boomers – those born between 1945 and 1964, the so-called generation of demographic and economic boom; 3) generation X – those born between 1965 and 1980 and who grew up during the economic crisis of the 1970s; generation Y [...], born after 1980s [between 1981 and 1994 – J.R., Ł.S.]” and who were brought up in an era of globalisation and widespread access to the internet³⁴,

and generation Z, which is of interest to us: those born after 1995.³⁵ In the literature the upper limit for the birth of this cohort varies greatly; there are cases

³¹ K. Messyas, *Pokolenie Z na rynku pracy – strukturalne uwarunkowania i oczekiwania*, “Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Sociologica” 2021, nr 76, p. 103, <https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-600X.76.06>.

³² M. Folta, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

³⁴ W. Gzowska, S. Gęgotek, *Zarządzania współpracą międzygeneracyjną pracowników. Uwarunkowania współczesnego rynku pracy oraz zróżnicowanie pokoleń*, “Humanum. Międzynarodowe Studia Społeczno-Humanistyczne” 2017, t. 26, nr 3, p. 103.

³⁵ B. Hysa, *Zarządzanie różnorodnością pokoleniową*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2016, z. 97, p. 387.

where the end date for this generation is the early years after the year 2000³⁶, the year 2010³⁷, or 2012.³⁸ As has been observed, “setting generational boundaries in terms of the year of birth is arbitrary – there are no precise scientific data or official consensus concerning the issue as to which year groups belong to which generation.”³⁹

Representatives of the last age group are very often defined as generation C (i.e. Connected) – connected to the internet⁴⁰, but also “the net generation”, and even generation M (i.e. Multitasking) or the internet generation.⁴¹ For these individuals, “the virtual and real worlds are one and the same. They cannot function without the internet or electronic [social] media because for them they are commonplace and part of their everyday lives.”⁴² At the same time, the world without the internet is an abstraction for them, while cyberspace is an example of reality.⁴³ However, as a consequence they experience difficulties in functioning without the internet.⁴⁴ Representatives of this cohort are more ethnoculturally diverse than previous generations, and more open to diversity and differences. Furthermore, they are characterised by being less materialistic and less trusting in people.⁴⁵

According to studies of the work market (here researchers were the first to draw attention to generation Z)⁴⁶, generation Z is made up of people who

want to embark on a dazzling career immediately, without any effort. For them, it is difficult to accept the idea of a professional career built over a long period by taking

³⁶ *Generation Z* [headword], Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Generation%20Z> [accessed: 17.11.2023].

³⁷ *Generation Z* [headword], Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/eng-lish/generation-z?q=generation+z> [accessed: 17.11.2023].

³⁸ J.M. Twenge, *iGen. Dlaczego dzieciaki dorastające w sieci są mniej zbuntowane, bardziej tolerancyjne, mniej szczęśliwe i zupełnie nieprzygotowane do dorosłości – i co to oznacza dla nas wszystkich*, tłum. O. Dziedzic, Smak Słowa, Sopot 2019.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁴⁰ B. Jamka, *Wyzwania związane z charakterystyką młodych na rynku pracy: potencjał interpretacyjny neuronauk*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Poznańskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2019, nr 80, p. 104.

⁴¹ J.M. Twenge, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴² B. Hysa, *op. cit.*, pp. 389–390.

⁴³ M. Popiołek, *E-kompetencje cyfrowego pokolenia w świetle badań własnych. Eksploracja zagadnienia na przykładzie wybranych e-umiejętności*, “Zarządzanie Mediami” 2014, t. 2, nr 2, pp. 77–90, <https://doi.org/10.4467/23540214ZM.14.006.3568>; J.M. Twenge, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ J. Gajda, *Oczekiwania przedstawicieli pokolenia Z wobec pracy zawodowej i pracodawcy*, “Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu” 2017, nr 491, p. 161.

⁴⁵ V.-A. Mahéo, E. Bélanger, *Generation Z: Portrait of a New Generation of Young Canadians and How They Compare to Older Canadians*, Eletons Canada 2021, p. 8.

⁴⁶ G.D. Stunża, *Edukacja wersja beta. Pokolenie Z i pokolenie Alfa a kompetencje uczestnictwa w kulturze*, “Kultura Popularna” 2017, nr 1, p. 89, <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0010.0046>; A. Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, B. Chomałowska, *Pokolenie „Z” na rynku pracy – wyzwania dla zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi*, “Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu” 2014, nr 350, pp. 407–409, <https://doi.org/10.15611/pn.2014.350.36>.

small steps. [...] typical of them is mobility and a knowledge of foreign languages. In addition, what poses a threat for older generations, for generation Z is an object of fascination and provides them with scope for experimentation. They are not interested in stability at work, they look for diversity and avoid routine. They enjoy communicating with other cultures, they want to go abroad for internships, constantly change and perfect established processes and try new work methods. They value group work more than working independently. They are capable of doing many things at once and it is difficult for them to concentrate on one activity.⁴⁷

In the journal “Inżynieria & Utrzymanie Ruchu” (Engineering and Maintenance), Agnieszka Hyla states that

The computer, telephone and tablet are their third, fourth and fifth hand. When doing research they are more inclined to trust results found in Google than their university lecturer. They pour out their sorrows and regrets not on their Facebook page but on Snapchat and Instagram. Generation Z have no illusions. They are fed stories of superheroes that possess special powers and abilities, they look in the mirror and know that they will never be like them. Although the cinema and music give them support, they know professionally what hopeless situation they have found themselves in. After all, it is more and more difficult to find a good job which will allow them to combine making a living with real life – realising their passions, forming relationships, travelling around the world. And that is precisely what generation Z wants – to experience and see as much as possible.⁴⁸

In questions of politics, generation Z differ from previous generations. In Canada a study was carried out that shows that young people there typically have greater trust in their government, less political cynicism, but at the same time identify much less with political parties, which the authors attempt to justify by referring to their having less experience with state authorities. Furthermore, they conclude that those who took part in the study were characterised by less involvement, interest in and knowledge of politics, that they watch world news less frequently and – like generation Y – that they are less sure of their own ability to understand the world of politics.⁴⁹ Similar results can be found in a report of research carried out in the United States. Generation Z describes itself as the most diverse and most educated of cohorts that have so far been identified, and also as having liberal views and being open to emerging social trends.⁵⁰ However, this trend is imperceptible in Europe, where the increase in

⁴⁷ B. Hysa, *op. cit.*, p. 390; R. Muster, *Pokolenie „Z” na współczesnym rynku pracy w opiniach pracodawców*, “Humanizacja Pracy” 2020, nr 1, p. 133; K.M. Czyczerska, A.J. Ławnik, E. Szlenk-Czyczerska, *Współczesny rynek pracy w Polsce a generacja. Różnice między pokoleniami X, Y oraz Z*, “Rozprawy Społeczne” 2020, t. 14, nr 3, pp. 112–113.

⁴⁸ A. Hyla, *X, Y, Z. Alfabet zmian społecznych*, “Inżynieria & Utrzymanie Ruchu” 2017, p. 86, <https://utrzymanieruchu.pl/x-y-z-alfabet-zmian-spolecznych> [accessed: 17.10.2023].

⁴⁹ V.-A. Mahéco, E. Bélanger, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

the number of young people taking part in elections is accompanied by a growth in support for right-wing parties, and it is precisely young people who declare their support for these parties.⁵¹

The above suggestion for how the generations born at the turn of the 21st century should be divided up is not a generally accepted paradigm and does not lack critics. Nevertheless, it is becoming more and more prominent in the literature. The number of studies that attempt to describe each of these generations in full is also increasing systematically.⁵² What should not be surprising is that studies concerned specifically with generation Z are the fewest in number. However this generation – especially in the context of a socio-political description – is referred to as people who are currently reaching voting age. Significant for this generation is also the constant need not to miss anything, to take part in it, to watch it, to see it and, of course, to document it (for example with their smartphone).⁵³

The first attempts to conceptualise the political activity of generation Z make reference to a conventional level (taking part in elections) and a non-conventional one (readiness to protest). Incidentally, it is assumed that a characteristic feature of the general activity of this generation is, for example in Poland, a “rejection” of the order established during the period of political transformation and the constant search for a new stability. This generation is more demanding of itself, other people and their institutional-organisational surroundings. However, at the same time they are characterised by courage in making decisions, individualism, and they place importance on creating their own identity. In general this generation is rather unpredictable. People from this generation often make decisions on the basis of their own emotions, which are often linked to information they have acquired online. In their choices, values such as family, love and friendship, money and work are almost equally important for generation Z. They are socially and ecologically engaged, but mostly online and on the basis of the desire to

⁵¹ *The 2019 European elections: A pro-European – and young – electorate with clear expectations*, European Parliament, 12.07.2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190710IPR56721/2019-eu-elections-a-pro-european-and-young-electorate-with-clear-expectations> [accessed: 17.11.2023].

⁵² E. Bombiak, *Zarządzanie pokoleniami wyzwaniem dla współczesnych menadżerów*, [in:] *Bezpieczeństwo i wyzwania współczesnych organizacji w obliczu gospodarki XXI wieku*, red. J.T. Toruński, M. Chrzęścik, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego, Siedlce 2016, pp. 65–76; D. Kukla, M. Nowacka, *Charakterystyka podejścia do pracy przedstawicieli pokolenia Z – praca w systemie wartości młodych*. Cz. 1, “Polish Journal of Continuing Education” 2019, nr 3, pp. 120–130, <https://doi.org/10.34866/j3z5-5633>; A. Wasiluk, M. Bańkowska, *Przesłanki dotyczące wyboru miejsca pracy przez pracowników pokolenia X, Y, Z*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa w Zielonej Górze” 2021, nr 14, pp. 138–159, <https://doi.org/10.26366/PTE.ZG.2021.197>.

⁵³ A. Kądziała, *Partycypacja wyborcza młodych Polaków – uwarunkowania i wyzwania*, “Prawo i Polityka” 2019, t. 9, pp. 107–108; *Od funu do zakochania. Sposób na dotarcie do pokolenia Z*, Agencja Twożywo, 2019, <https://nowymarketing.pl/i/fmfiles/od-funu-do-zakochania-sposob-na-dotarcie-do-pokolenia-z.pdf> [accessed: 17.10.2023].

participate, because their level of declared interest often does not translate into the real, low statistics concerning their actual involvement.⁵⁴

In a more general – global – characterisation of generation Z it has been shown that representatives of this age group throughout the world want governments to treat economic stability, quality of education and access to jobs as priorities. 51% of generation Z are in favour of nationalist politics, while 32% prefer a global approach. For this generation, career priorities are a stable career path (89% believe that this is important or very important), a competitive salary and motivational incentives (87%) as well as a work/private life balance (84%). However, the least interest is shown in the chance to become a leader (64%), work abroad (63%) and influencing a business strategy (63%).⁵⁵

Theoretical assumptions and practical research tools

There is no lack of studies concerning e.g. issues linked to the experiences and aspirations of young Poles in various fields, namely, education, employment, participation in political life, attitudes and values. When these are reports of research, they contain responses to issues such as reasons for disillusionment with politics, possible areas of political involvement and even opinions regarding the structure of the state and the economic and social policies realised within it. In studies of this type there is also no lack of questions linked to political views, respondents' personal political preferences and trust in public institutions.⁵⁶ The Batory Foundation enquired about the attitude of young people to democracy. However, this question was directed towards activists, i.e. a particular group of people whom one can suspect *a priori* of being more willing to participate in socio-political processes, even if their activism concerns first and foremost general social issues, rather than involvement in institutions, associations and political parties.⁵⁷

Special attention – in studies including national ones – is paid to the political beliefs of young people. Here an excellent example may be the attempt to describe their political beliefs with special reference to the left-wing right-wing

⁵⁴ E. Dąbrowska-Prokopowska, G. Nowacki, *Młodzi, gniewni i zagubieni, czyli o aktywności politycznej pokolenia Z we współczesnej Polsce*, "Trzeci Sektor" 2020, nr 51–52(3–4), pp. 65–66, <https://doi.org/10.26368/17332265-51/52-3/4-2020-4>.

⁵⁵ *Zróbmy miejsce dla pokolenia Z: Co naprawdę ma znaczenie dla nowego pokolenia*, tłum. Stowarzyszenie Księgowych w Polsce, Międzynarodową Federację Księgowych 2018, https://www.skwp.pl/files/zg/IFAC_Make_Way_for_Gen_Z.pdf [accessed: 17.10.2023].

⁵⁶ *Młodzi ludzie w Polsce. Między rozczarowaniem państwem a nadzieją na lepsze życie 2020/2021*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn 2022, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/19433.pdf> [accessed: 17.10.2023].

⁵⁷ J. Kajta, S. Barakeh, P. Marczewski, P. Pustułka, *Demokratyczny paradoks w praktyce: Doświadczenia młodych aktywistów i aktywistek*, "Youth Working Papers" 2022, nr 1, <https://doi.org/10.23809/15>.

dimension, and also in relation to cultural and economic issues⁵⁸, while another example is the directly formulated claims made above regarding right-wing leanings among the youngest voters.⁵⁹ There are also studies on the political knowledge of Poles⁶⁰, as well as on the influence of social-media campaigns on young voters.⁶¹ Even closer to our way of thinking about the social activity of young people is a study by Joanna Stepaniuk, in which the author enquires who school volunteers are. In this way she attempts to create a short description of generation Z in terms of their values, expectations, attitudes, character traits and motivation to do voluntary work.⁶² And it is precisely this final topic that encouraged us to attempt to answer the question as to the scope of the social activity of young people, with special reference to generation Z.

We begin our investigations by defining what is and what essentially constitutes civic engagement. Our questionnaire is based on a theoretical suggestion as to what civic engagement is, formulated by the previously referred to Klamut.⁶³ Like Klamut, we assume that civic engagement is essentially activity within the community, social participation, individual political activity and political participation. In the first place we generated a pool of test questions pertaining to these four areas of activity. Then these questions were verified by competent judges in terms of face validity, i.e. in terms of how participants could perceive individual questions; whether – from the perspective of the participants – the questions are appropriate and have a specific aim, i.e. to obtain data essential for explaining an issue that interests us, and then whether they are comprehensible. The role of competent judges was played by four employees of the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, who otherwise study social influence, marketing analysis, social psychology and political communication, respectively. Having evaluated the questions, we rejected the controversial ones (those on which the judges could not agree), restocked the pool of test questions and again asked the judges to evaluate them. After the second round of evaluations, we again rejected the controversial questions (those regarding which the judges again could not reach a consensus),

⁵⁸ G. Czarnek, P. Dragon, P. Szwed, B. Wojciszke, *Kwestionariusz przekonań politycznych: własności psychometryczne*, "Psychologia Społeczna" 2017, t. 12, nr 2, pp. 205–222, <https://doi.org/10.7366/1896180020174108>.

⁵⁹ K. Szafraniec, J. Grygieńć, *Prawicowość młodych Polaków. Kontekst wyborów parlamentarnych z 2015 roku*, "Studia Socjologiczne" 2019, nr 2, pp. 5–35.

⁶⁰ M. Żerkowska-Balas, M. Cześniak, M. Zaremba, *Dynamika wiedzy politycznej Polaków*, "Studia Socjologiczne" 2017, nr 3, pp. 7–31.

⁶¹ A. Ceglińska, K. Kopeć-Ziemczyk, *Wpływ kampanii politycznej w mediach społecznościowych na zachowania wyborcze młodych Polaków*, "Studia Medioznawcze" 2016, t. 1, pp. 57–70, <https://doi.org/10.33077/uw.24511617.ms.2016.64.490>.

⁶² J. Stepaniuk, *Kim są młodzi szkolni wolontariusze? Pokolenie Z – w obliczu wolontariatu szkolnego*, "Praca Socjalna" 2021, vol. 36, nr 4, pp. 177–192.

⁶³ R. Klamut, *Kwestionariusz...*, *op. cit.*; *idem*, *Aktywność...*, *op. cit.*

restocked the pool of test questions and once again had the competent judges evaluate them, only this time rejecting the controversial ones but not adding new items to the questionnaire. Furthermore, while developing the tool we decided to differentiate the test questions into those to which we expected potential respondents to give relatively unambiguous responses, for example regarding participation in social actions or membership of political organisations. Additionally, we included their assessment of prosocial and asocial behaviours from the perspective of participants' own approach to these problems, determining, for example, how sensitive they are to social issues or acts of vandalism. As a consequence, the questionnaire contained questions with a nominal response scale, balanced scales and unbalanced scales. However, taking the nature of the questions into account, we decided to abandon the originally planned Likert scale.

As a result of this procedure, we ultimately obtained a questionnaire consisting of twenty-four key questions, two entirely metric ones as well as four questions concerning the position of the respondents within society. The twenty-four key questions were arranged in a logical order, and included, in different configurations, references to commitment to the community, questions about social participation, individual political activity and ones linked to political participation. The metric questions (25–26) concerned only the sex and date of birth (within a specified range). This was to allow us to observe any tendencies within specific year groups of generation Z relating to responses given to specific questions. Questions 27 to 30 concerned participants' assessment of their own material situation, a description of the school the respondent goes to, any emigration plans and their current employment situation (if they have a job). The last stage of this complicated process was to carry out a pilot study. We treated it as an initial procedure, intended to test and assess the tool itself.⁶⁴

Pilot study

Building a good questionnaire is an art. Therefore a responsible researcher should not use this tool without first carrying out a pilot study on a small group of respondents, similar to those for whom the actual questionnaire is intended. The pilot study answers the question as to whether the survey is well formulated and understandable for the participants, and also gives us – the researchers – another chance to make some final improvements.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ K. Grzeszkiewicz-Radulska, *Metody badań pilotażowych*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Sociologica" 2012, nr 42, pp. 113–141.

⁶⁵ R. Bäcker, L. Czechowska, G. Gadomska, J. Gajda, K. Gawron-Tabor, M. Giedz, D. Kaspro-wicz, M. Mateja, B. Płotka, J. Rak, A. Seklecka, W. Szewczak, M. Winclawska, J. Wojciechowska, *Metodologia badań politologicznych*, Polskie Towarzystwo Nauk Politycznych, Warszawa 2016, p. 122.

Following these guidelines, we decided that it would be necessary to carry out a pilot study as early as the stage of planning our research. The aim of the pilot study was to obtain answers to the following questions:

1. Are the questions in the questionnaire formulated in a way that is comprehensible for recipients?
2. Are there any mistakes in the questionnaire, e.g. grammatical or orthographical ones, that were not previously noticed?
3. Are the questions in the questionnaire formulated appropriately, allowing the truth of the hypotheses to be verified?
4. Do the answers obtained from the questionnaire allow the research problem to be solved and the research questions to be answered?

The pilot study was comprehensive and was conducted as follows: the respondents, who were in the same room as the person conducting the study, received a link to the questionnaire. While filling in the questionnaire, they had the opportunity to ask questions or report anything they did not understand. Then the group had the opportunity to make a comment or indicate whether some elements of the questionnaire remained unclear to them or needed to be explained in greater depth. It should be mentioned that only representatives of generation Z were selected to participate in the pilot study (like the target group).

Our own research methodology

The research was conducted between 12th and 21st June 2023, and 135 people took part in it, who were students of the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and WSB Merito University in Poznań. The sample selection was deliberate. A questionnaire, which was available online, was used in the research. The respondents answered 20 or 22 research questions (the additional two questions depended on their answer to a previous question), two metric questions and four questions concerning their position within society. Since the research was aimed at representatives of generation Z, 16 of the 135 questionnaires received were removed, since they had been filled in by representatives of other generations.

The results of the pilot study

119 questionnaires completed by representatives of generation Z were analysed. The first demographic variable that the participants stated was their age. This question allowed us to distinguish between forms that had been filled in by people who were older or younger than the generation under investigation. These answers were not analysed further. For the question about the year of birth, the

categories 1995–1998, 1999–2004 and 2005–2008 were used. These categories made it possible to replicate, albeit imprecisely, the educational stages of the participants. The youngest year groups (2005–2008) were studying at higher education institutions, while the next ones (1999–2004) were students or individuals of higher education age who were assumed to have begun their studies at the age of 19. Finally, there were higher education graduates (1995–1998) or people who would finish their studies at the age of 25 (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants (119 questionnaires)

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
Year of birth	1995–1998	28	23.5%
	1999–2004	83	69.7%
	2005–2008	8	6.7%
Sex	Female	95	79.9%
	Male	24	20.1%
	Other	0	-
Financial situation	Poor	2	1.7%
	Average	31	26.1%
	Good	59	49.6%
	Very good	24	20.2%
	I prefer not to answer	3	2.5%
Current stage of education	Primary school	0	-
	Secondary school	7	5.9%
	University/college	106	89.1%
	I've already graduated	6	5%
	I'm not in education	0	-
If you are still studying or have finished your studies, do you intend to leave Poland: permanently and/or to work?	I'm no longer studying	0	-
	Probably not	33	27.7%
	Probably	22	18.5%
	It's difficult to say	42	35.3%
	Definitely not	17	14.3%
	Definitely	5	4.2%
Do you work or earn money? (You may choose more than one answer.)	From time to time (when I need to, when I feel like it)	4	3.4%
	From time to time (when I need to, when I feel like it), job contract (full or part time)	2	1.7%
	I don't work at all	9	7.6%
	Seasonally (e.g. during the holidays)	9	7.6%
	Seasonally (e.g. during the holidays), from time to time (when I need to, when I feel like it)	1	0.8%
	Seasonally (e.g. during the holidays), from time to time (when I need to, when I feel like it), I don't work at all	1	0.8%

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
	Seasonally (e.g. during the holidays from time to time (when I need to, when I feel like it), freelance/service contract	2	1.7%
	Seasonally (e.g. during the holidays), I don't work at all	2	1.7%
	Seasonally (e.g. during the holidays), freelance/service contract	2	1.7%
	Job contract (full or part time)	41	34.5%
	Freelance/service contract	43	36.1%
	Freelance/service contract, job contract (full or part time)	3	2.5%

Source: self-developed questionnaire.

The largest number of respondents were born between 1999 and 2004. This was the response of 83 participants. 28 people who filled in the questionnaire were born between 1995 and 1998. Only eight answered that they had been born between 2005 and 2008.

The question about the respondents' sex was accompanied by three possible answers: "woman", "man" or "other". No one chose the last option. Women made up 79.9% of those surveyed, 20.01% were men.

The respondents were also asked to describe the financial situation of the household in which they live. 59 (49.6%) people said the situation was "good", 31 (26.1%) chose the answer "average", and 24 (20.2%) "very good". Two people (1.7%) described the financial situation of their households as poor, while three people (2.5%) chose not to answer this question.

The largest proportion of participants were students. This answer was selected 106 times, which made up 89.1%. Seven individuals (5.9%) said they were at secondary school, while the least frequent response (5%) was "I've already graduated". Only six people chose this answer. No respondent said they were at primary school or that they were not in education at all.

The next question that intended to characterise the respondents concerned whether they planned to emigrate after finishing their studies. The most frequently selected response was "it's difficult to say" (42 times), then "probably not" (33 times) and "probably" (22 times). The option "definitely not" was chosen by 17 respondents. The smallest number of respondents answered "definitely" (five times) – Table 1.

Table 2. Attitudes towards civic engagement and participation of the respondents

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
Do you help others by contributing money to collections, and supporting foundations, associations and charities financially?	Very often	7	5.9%
	Often	18	15.1%
	Sometimes	84	70.6%
	Never	10	8.4%
Are you a member of a foundation, association or charity?	Yes	22	18.5%
	No	97	81.5%
What prompted you to become a member of this organisation? (You may choose more than one answer.)	The aim of the organisation	5	22.7%
	The aim of the organisation, my views and beliefs	10	45.5%
	The aim of the organisation, my views and beliefs, my friends are members and encouraged me	1	4.5%
	My views and convictions	5	22.7%
	My views and beliefs, my friends are members and encouraged me	1	4.5%
What sort of organisation are you involved with? (You may choose more than one answer.)	An animal shelter	1	4.5%
	A foundation, an association	15	68.2%
	A foundation, an association as an altar server/in a church choir	1	4.5%
	A foundation, an association, a school/student council	4	18.2%
	A humanitarian organisation	1	4.5%
You go for a walk, or are on your way home from school or university, and you see litter thrown all over the park, the street or in a roadside ditch etc. What do you do?	I ignore it, it's the council's job to remove it	8	6.7%
	I feel sorry, but I just walk on	42	35.3%
	I think disapprovingly about who did this	39	32.8%
	I try to pick it up, especially if there isn't very much and if it's safe	29	24.4%
	I call the relevant people and inform them about what's happened because there's a special application for this etc.	1	0.8%
You walk past a vandalised bus shelter, or the wall of a building that has been scribbled on (definitely not graffiti), an overturned rubbish bin, or see some other act of vandalism. What do you do?	I take part in occasional community initiatives to paint over acts of vandalism, do repairs etc.	1	0.8%
	I ignore it, it's the council's job to repair such damage	13	10.9%
	I feel sorry, but I just walk on	43	36.1%
	I think disapprovingly about who did this	52	43.7%
	I call the relevant people and inform them about what's happened because there's a special application for this etc.	10	8.4%

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
Do you think that we should help war refugees, e.g. from Ukraine and Syria, give them shelter, a roof over their heads, allow them access to schools, colleges, and give them jobs?	I don't know	17	14.3%
	Probably not	4	3.4%
	Probably	51	42.9%
	Definitely not	3	2.5%
	Definitely	44	37%
Do you think that climate change is a serious problem of our times?	I don't know	1	0.8%
	Probably not	4	3.4%
	Probably	39	32.8%
	Definitely not	2	1.7%
	Definitely	73	61.3%
Do you follow the social media profiles of associations, foundations and other social organisations?	No	37	31.1%
	Yes	82	69%

Source: self-developed questionnaire.

Table 2 presents the answers to individual questions in the research tool we prepared. A positive answer to question 2 was the condition for answering questions 2a and 2b, while a negative answer meant that questions 2a and 2b were skipped; the online questionnaire immediately switched to question 3.

On the basis of the data presented in Table 2 it is possible to conclude that, as far as social activity is concerned, those who took part in the research try to support different types of organisations and charitable initiatives financially (“very often – seven people; “often” – 18 people, “sometimes” – 84 people). A significant proportion of respondents are not members of any association, foundation or charity (97 people), while individuals involved in such organisations (22 people) most frequently work with foundations and associations (15 people) with both the aim of the organisation and their own views in mind (10 people).

In terms of the sensitivity of representatives of generation Z towards damage to property and vandalism in public places, they most frequently claim that they feel sorry or that they think disapprovingly about those who do this. Empathy was also shown towards Syrian refugees. When answering the question as to whether war refugees from Ukraine and Syria should be offered help, most respondents answered “definitely” (44 times) and “probably” (51 times). They were even more decisive in their responses to the question about climate change as a serious problem of our times: “definitely” – 73 people; “probably” – 39 people.

Regarding the question “Do you follow the social media profiles of associations, foundations and other social organisations?”, the most frequent response was “yes” (82 times), while 37 people answered “no”.

Table 3. Individual political attitudes and political participation of the respondents

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
Define your interest in politics:	I'm not interested at all	7	5.9%
	I'm rarely interested	15	12.6%
	I'm averagely interested	44	37%
	I'm interested sometimes	27	22.7%
	I'm always interested	26	21.8%
Where do you obtain information about politics? (You may choose more than one answer.)	Social media	15	12.6%
	Traditional media (television, print media, radio)	2	1.7%
	Traditional media (television, print media, radio), social media	25	21%
	Family	2	1.7%
	Family, social media	4	3.4%
	Family, traditional media (television, print media, radio)	3	2.5%
	Family, traditional media (television, print media, radio), social media	12	10.1%
	Family and friends	1	0.8%
	Family and friends, social media	6	5%
	Family, friends, church, traditional media (television, print media, radio), social media	1	0.8%
	Family, friends, traditional media (television, print media, radio)	2	1.7%
	Family, friends, traditional media (television, print media, radio), social media	24	20.2%
	Friends, social media	14	11.8%
	Friends, traditional media (television, print media, radio)	1	0.8%
	Friends, traditional media (television, print media, radio), social media	7	5.9%
Do you follow social media in which you comment on political events?	Never	6	5%
	Rarely (from time to time)	75	63%
	Always	38	32%
Do you comment on political events in social media?	Never	79	66.4%
	Rarely (from time to time)	34	28.6%
	Always	6	5%
Do you create memes or other materials of a political nature?	Never	98	82.4%
	Rarely (from time to time)	16	13.4%
	Always	5	4.2%

You are at a family gathering, with friends, or in a different social situation and someone suddenly starts a discussion about politics. An argument breaks out about views on a particular issue. Does this annoy you?	At family gatherings or meetings with friends we don't talk about politics	8	6.7%
	Probably not	16	13.4%
	Probably	35	29.4%
	It's difficult to say	22	18.5%
	Definitely not	6	5%
	Definitely	32	26.9%
You are at a family gathering, with friends, or in a different social situation and someone suddenly starts a discussion about politics. Do you take part in such political arguments yourself?	At family gatherings or meetings with friends we don't talk about politics	5	4.2%
	Probably not	36	30.3%
	Probably	31	26.1%
	It's difficult to say	11	9.2%
	Definitely not	19	16%
	Definitely	17	14.3%
You are watching, intentionally or completely by chance, a programme featuring politicians. Suddenly an argument about politics breaks out. Do arguments among politicians of different factions annoy you?	Probably not	28	23.5%
	Probably	28	23.5%
	It's difficult to say	23	19.3%
	Definitely not	11	9.2%
	Definitely	29	24.4%
Are you a member of a political party (the youth wing of a political party)?	No	104	87.4%
	Yes	11	9.2%
	I don't want to answer	4	3.4%
You are in church and during the sermon you hear the priest referring to current political affairs/ You don't go to church but someone tells you about such an incident. Should the church involve itself in political issues?	Probably not	17	14.3%
	Probably	3	2.5%
	It's difficult to say	6	5%
	Definitely not	93	78.2%
	Definitely	0	-
In the media you hear about the official position of bishops on the issue of abortion and euthanasia legislation, etc. Should the church involve itself in political issues?	Probably not	9	7.6%
	Probably	1	0.8%
	It's difficult to say	6	5%
	Definitely not	103	86.6%
	Definitely	0	-

Source: self-developed questionnaire.

Table 3 presents the answers to the questions concerning the political attitudes of the participants. Most of them stated that they were averagely interested in politics (44), are sometimes interested (27) or always (26). At the same time,

the most common answer to the question concerning where the respondents obtained information about politics was traditional media and social media (25). For 24 respondents, apart from these sources, the family, friends, traditional media is also important. Then for 15 participants the only source of such information is social media, and for 14 people it comes from both friends and social media. 12 answers concerned the family, traditional media and social media as the basis for obtaining information about politics. The remaining answers were selected considerably less often.

When it comes to the next question, which concerned social media in which users can comment on political events, 75 people stated that they do this “rarely (from time to time)”, 38 that they “always” write comments and just six that they “never” do this. The next question was about commenting on political events in social media. Here the respondents could select from the same options as before. 79 answered “never”, 34 “rarely (from time to time)”, and just six answered “always”. In the case of the question about memes and other materials of a political nature, the majority (98 people) answered “never” and “rarely (from time to time)” – 16 people. The least common answer was “always” – just five people.

In the case of the next question, respondents were asked to choose an answer which would describe their emotions when they are at a family gathering or meeting with friends or another social situation and somebody suddenly starts a political discussion. As a consequence an argument breaks out about views on various issues. The participants had to decide if such a situation would annoy them. Most people (35) selected the answer “probably” or “definitely” (32). 22 answered “it’s difficult to say”, 16 “probably not” and six “definitely not”. The answer “At family gatherings or meetings with friends we don’t talk about politics” was ticked eight times. The following question was formulated in a similar way, although it concerned a different social situation: “You are at a family gathering, with friends, or in a different social situation and someone suddenly starts a discussion about politics. Do you take part in such political arguments yourself?” Here the range of answers was as follows: “At family gatherings or meetings with friends we don’t talk about politics” – five people, “probably not” – 36 people, “probably” – 31 people, “it’s difficult to say” – 11 people, “definitely not” – 19 people and “definitely” – 17 people.

The next question asked about participants’ emotions when they are watching television: “You are watching, intentionally or completely by chance, a programme featuring politicians. Suddenly an argument about politics breaks out. Do arguments among politicians of different factions annoy you?” The answer to this question most frequently selected was “definitely”, which was chosen 29 times, although the answers “probably not” and “probably” were only selected one time fewer. “It is difficult to say” was chosen 23 times, while the answer that respondents chose least frequently was “definitely not” (11 people).

Participants in the pilot study were also asked about their involvement in political parties. No fewer than 104 stated that they were not members of such an organisation, 11 selected the contrary answer, while on four occasions respondents chose not to answer this question.

In the last questions of this part of the questionnaire participants answered questions on the relationship between the church and political power. Here there were two questions, of which the first was: “You are in church and during the sermon you hear the priest referring to current political affairs/You don’t go to church but someone tells you about such an incident. Should the church involve itself in political issues?” The most commonly selected answer was “definitely not”, which was chosen 93 times. “Probably not” was chosen 17 times, “it’s difficult to say”, six times, “probably”, three times and “definitely” was selected by no-one. The second question was formulated as follows: “In the media you hear about the official position of bishops on the issue of abortion and euthanasia legislation, etc. Should the church involve itself in political issues?” The answers were similar to those of the previous question. “Definitely not” was selected 103 times, “probably not”, nine times, “it’s difficult to say”, six times, and “probably”, once. Here, too, no-one answered “definitely”.

Table 4. Opinions and views of the participants

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
Do you want Poland to continue its membership of the European Union?	Probably not	3	2.5%
	Probably	28	23.5%
	It’s difficult to say	8	6.7%
	Definitely not	0	-
	Definitely	80	67%
Will you take part in the next elections?	If elections take place in 2023 I will be under 18 years old and will be unable to take part in them	5	4.2%
	Probably not	6	5%
	Probably	9	7.6%
	It’s difficult to say	2	1.7%
	Definitely not	1	0.8%
	Definitely	96	80.6%
Describe your views on a simple scale: left-wing – centre – right-wing:	Left-wing	42	35.3%
	Centre	22	18.5%
	Right-wing	8	6.7%
	This classification doesn’t take my views/beliefs into account	47	39.5%

Question	Answer	Number of instances	Percentage
How would you describe your level of religious commitment?	I don't believe	43	36.1%
	I believe and go to church rarely	19	16%
	I believe and don't go to church	36	30.3%
	I believe and go to church regularly	10	8.4%
	I don't want to answer	11	9.2%

Source: self-developed questionnaire.

The information in Table 4 allows us to conclude that the representatives of generation Z that took part in this study are in favour of Poland remaining in the European Union. To this question, no fewer than 80 people answered “definitely” and 28 people “probably”. Just three people selected the answer “probably not”. However, nobody answered “definitely not”. “It’s difficult to say” was ticked by eight people.

The people who took part in this study declared that they will “definitely” (96 responses) or “probably” (9 responses) take part in the next elections. Just a few people answered “probably not” (six times) or “definitely not” (once). Of the 119 questionnaires analysed, in just two cases were the participants not sure if they would vote in the elections.

The representatives of generation Z who took part in the study most frequently stated that the left-centre-right axis did not take their views/beliefs into account (47 responses). However, when “forced” to choose in the next question, they identified their views as left-wing (42 responses). Many fewer people positioned their views in the centre of this axis (22 responses), and out of all the respondents the smallest number defined their views as right-wing. Only eight people described them as such.

As far as religious commitment is concerned, the largest number described themselves as non-believers (43) or believers who do not go to church (36). 19 of the respondents said that they were believers but rarely go to church. However, ten people admitted that they believe and regularly go to church. In 11 cases the respondents elected not to answer this question.

An initial characterisation of generation Z

In no way does the group we studied constitute a representative sample of the generation that we are interested in. Nevertheless, on the basis of the data we gathered we can assert that of the 119 representatives of generation Z, most were born between 1999 and 2004, and in the same sample women are overrepresented. The participants’ own assessment of their financial situation ranged from very good (20.2%), through good (49.6%) to average (26.1%), which

allows us to claim that in general this assessment is rather optimistic. Unlike previous generations, generation Z surveyed by us do not have their hearts set on emigration. Very interesting is the fact that the majority of them study and work at the same time, either on the basis of a freelance or service contract, or a job contract (the study was carried out among both day students and weekend students).

The social attitudes that are essential for a study of generation Z are as follows. A general commitment to helping others, whether in the form of collections or charitable actions, prompts us to claim that occasional involvement is declared by 70.6% of participants. However, only 18.5% of our respondents declared that they were members of a foundation, association or charity, which is nevertheless a good result, taking into account the general level of social engagement of Polish society.⁶⁶ It is comforting that if such participation is already taking place, as many as 90.5% of respondents cite the purpose of the organisation and/or their own beliefs as reasons for their activity. The entities with which the respondents prefer to work are foundations and associations, as well as school and student councils. The sensitivity of the participants is encouraging, both with regard to neglected urban spaces (litter) and acts of vandalism. They not only think disapprovingly about such actions, but even declare their willingness to clean up and intervene in the matter (by making a call to the relevant bodies). Willingness to help war refugees is also high, regardless of their country of origin. Sensitivity to deepening climate changes is also on an unusually high level (“definitely” – 61.3%, “probably” – 32.8%).

From a cognitive point of view, the individual political and participatory attitudes of the respondents are interesting too. Interest in politics itself spans a similar range, from rarely interested to always interested. A total lack of interest in politics was declared by only 5.9% of our respondents. The answers to the question regarding the source of information about politics is intriguing because for our participants this was not only traditional media and social media, but also other forms of political influence, including family and friends. Research has also considered politicians and their activity on social media, but they themselves are not necessarily active, particularly as they mostly do not comment on events online, and do not create materials of a political nature. The respondents' declarations regarding emotions felt towards politics and political events, especially if they are the subject of family conversations and arguments, are also varied. Decidedly negative is the respondents' attitude towards membership of political parties and the involvement of the Church in matters of a political nature.

⁶⁶ M. Feliksiak, *Aktywność w organizacjach obywatelskich*, “Komunikat z Badań CBOS” 2022, nr 41, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_041_22.PDF [accessed: 17.10.2023].

Conclusion

The reasons why we not only undertook a theoretical attempt to conceptualise the category of civic engagement and generation Z, but also attempted to create a tool intended to measure this variable in this section of society, arose from fears about the state of democracy, or rather the condition of civil society in Poland. However, the pilot study and trial-run of the questionnaire itself do not entitle us to formulate any far-reaching conclusions at all in this regard. Certainly, however, the assumption of a decline in subjectivity and civic engagement, or a moral resignation from responsibility for one's own fate, is not a particular feature of the representatives of generation Z that we studied. Even the claim that interest in politics and political involvement have fallen in favour of purely social activities does not find unequivocal confirmation. It is true that in this group the majority declared that they did not belong to any formal political entities (parties, associations), although the question of an interest in politics is not so straightforward. At least initially, we know that young people declare occasional social activity (collections, charity events), as well as involvement, motivated by their world view, in the activities of third sector organisations. Typical of our participants is sensitivity to social issues, both on a purely emotional level (disapproval for harmful activities and acts of vandalism), and in their readiness to get involved and counteract them (the willingness to clean up or intervene). The representatives of generation Z surveyed by us pay attention to their external surroundings, as well as issues concerning both the climate and help for the victims of armed conflict. Paradoxically, as opposed to previous findings, they are interested in politics, they follow political news, but they do not necessarily comment on it, let alone create materials of a political nature. They take part in political discussions at home, but their attitude to ongoing disputes is not straightforward (ranging from approval, through partial approval to disapproval). It is surprising that they draw their knowledge and news about politics from various sources, from traditional media, through social media, to primary and secondary socialisation agents. Generation Z are moderately religious and very sceptical about the political involvement of the Church.

However, with reference to the issue of the research tool itself, it must be pointed out that at the stage of conducting our pilot study we did not encounter difficulties connected with its use. Neither the questions themselves, nor the technical aspects, raised any doubts among our respondents. We did not notice linguistic and grammatical errors, let alone orthographic ones. The answers we obtained also suggest – initially of course – that if we increase and professionalise our sample selection we will be able to obtain satisfactory data that will allow us to answer our basic research questions, thus bringing us closer to solving the research problem at hand. This, however, will require us to repeat the study, this time with a substantially larger sample obtained in a standardised manner.

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