



# Employment change, attitude evolution and voting during Poland's transition: Longitudinal evidence

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Received 24 August 2004; received in revised form 24 February 2005; accepted 7 October 2005

Available online 19 December 2005

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## Abstract

Data from a longitudinal study of Polish workers interviewed in 1988, 1993 and 1998 are used to test propositions about the connections between employment, attitude, and voting changes during the transition to a market economy. The results show that changes in attitudes about the reforms are associated with changes in voting, with those coming to favor reforms and their consequences voting for liberal parties, and vice versa for those coming to oppose the reforms and/or their consequences. Individuals making a successful transition and residents in areas with more employment in new firms are more likely to switch their attitudes to favor the reforms and vice versa for those who lose their jobs or who live in areas without new firms.

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*JEL classification:* P26

*Keywords:* Political economy of transition; Voting; Poland

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## 1. Introduction

Poland and the other Central and Eastern European transitional countries experienced enormous economic and political changes during the 1990s as they established market economies and democratic polities. These experiences are heroic, both for their accomplishments and for the consequent personal and social trauma. Scholars and public officials are learning important lessons about economic and political behavior and institutions from these

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accomplishments and traumas. These lessons begin to correct some of the excessive, and naïve, views held at the beginning of the transitions. The assumption that stabilization, liberalization, and privatization by themselves are sufficient to create a growing market economy is now widely questioned. Studies of job destruction and job creation in East Central European countries clearly show that economic growth and the successful establishment of a market economy follow a Schumpeterian path, requiring the rapid creation of new firms to replace the old and outmoded enterprises. See [Bilsen and Konings \(1998\)](#), for evidence from Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary; [De Loecker and Konings \(2005—this issue\)](#) on Slovenia; [Jackson et al. \(1999, 2005\)](#), and [Jackson and Mach \(2002\)](#), for evidence from Poland; and [Jurjada and Terrell \(2001\)](#), on the Czech Republic and Estonia. The orderly political transitions in many of these countries following intensely contested elections held during economically difficult periods of extensive job destruction attest to the success of the political reforms. These successful transitions refute the predictions of some political scientists and economists that the trauma associated with the economic transition would create such an anti-reform backlash that an open political system might not be able to resist efforts to return parts of the old regimes. In fact, where the economic reforms are most successful, political parties begin to compete for the constituents arising from the new enterprises and in the process even the former Communists became more liberal in their policies (see [Grzymała-Busse, 2002](#)).

This paper contributes to our understanding of the connections between economic and political transitions by examining hypotheses about how individual and regional employment changes are associated with changes in attitudes about economic policies as well as about how attitudes and changes in attitudes, in turn, are related to changes in how people vote. To test our hypotheses we use a unique set of data from a panel study of Poles first interviewed in 1988, a year before the transition formally began, and then re-interviewed in 1993 and 1998. Appendix A describes these data in detail.

We are in the envious position of being able to measure employment changes during two critical periods of the Polish transition, political attitudes at two important junctures in the transition, and vote choices during the three important parliamentary elections in 1991, 1993 and 1997. Analyses of these data provide evidence about the evolution of these dimensions of Poland's political economy that are unavailable from the aggregate and cross-sectional data usually available.

The paper is organized into three major sections. The first section describes our propositions about how employment changes are associated with attitude changes, which are then related to vote changes. We build on the existing literature on the political economy of transitions and explicitly add the attitudinal component. This attitudinal component provides both an important conceptual link between employment change and voting, which is missing from many economic models, and an important connection between the consequences of economic reforms and people's voting choices. The next section is an analysis of how attitude changes vary with individual and regional economic changes. This section is followed by a statistical analysis of the association between these attitudes and their changes and the dynamics of voter choice from one election to the next. We conclude with observations about some of the theoretical questions in political economy and about some of the substantive questions of how governments might manage transitions.

## **2. Employment change, attitudes and voting: propositions and evidence**

There are a number of different models and propositions predicting how various segments of the workforce are likely to vote during the early and extended periods of a transition. One set of

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