

Partitioned Poland (1795–1918)

Armed resistance (1795–1864)

Napoleonic wars



The death of Józef Poniatowski, Marshal of the French Empire, at the Battle of Leipzig



The three Partitions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, and 1795)

Although no sovereign Polish state existed between 1795 and 1918, the idea of Polish independence was kept alive throughout the 19th century. There were a number of uprisings and other armed undertakings waged against the partitioning powers. Military efforts after the partitions were first based on the alliances of Polish émigrés with post-revolutionary France. Jan Henryk Dąbrowski's Polish

Legions fought in French campaigns outside of Poland between 1797 and 1802 in hopes that their involvement and contribution would be rewarded with the liberation of their Polish homeland.^[49] The Polish national anthem, "Poland Is Not Yet Lost", or "Dąbrowski's Mazurka", was written in praise of his actions by Józef Wybicki in 1797.^[50]

The Duchy of Warsaw, a small, semi-independent Polish state, was created in 1807 by Napoleon in the wake of his defeat of Prussia and the signing of the Treaties of Tilsit with Emperor Alexander I of Russia.^[49] The Army of the Duchy of Warsaw, led by Józef Poniatowski, participated in numerous campaigns in alliance with France, including the successful Austro-Polish War of 1809, which, combined with the outcomes of other theaters of the War of the Fifth Coalition, resulted in an enlargement of the duchy's territory. The French invasion of Russia in 1812 and the German Campaign of 1813 saw the duchy's last military engagements. The Constitution of the Duchy of Warsaw abolished serfdom as a reflection of the ideals of the French Revolution, but it did not promote land reform.^[51]

The Congress of Vienna

After Napoleon's defeat, a new European order was established at the Congress of Vienna, which met in the years 1814 and 1815. Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, a former close associate of Emperor Alexander I, became the leading advocate for the Polish national cause. The Congress implemented a new partition scheme, which took into account some of the gains realized by the Poles during the Napoleonic period.

The Duchy of Warsaw was replaced in 1815 with a new Kingdom of Poland, unofficially known as Congress Poland.^[49] The residual Polish kingdom was joined to the Russian Empire in a personal union under the Russian tsar and it was allowed its own constitution and military. East of the kingdom, large areas of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth remained directly incorporated into the Russian Empire as the Western Krai. These territories, along with Congress Poland, are generally considered to form the Russian Partition. The Russian, Prussian, and Austrian "partitions" are informal names for the lands of the former Commonwealth, not actual units of administrative division of Polish–Lithuanian territories after partitions.^[52] The Prussian Partition included a portion separated as the Grand Duchy of Posen.^[49] Peasants

under the Prussian administration were gradually enfranchised under the reforms of 1811 and 1823. The limited legal reforms in the Austrian Partition were overshadowed by its rural poverty. The Free City of Cracow was a tiny republic created by the Congress of Vienna under the joint supervision of the three partitioning powers.^[49] Despite the bleak from the standpoint of Polish patriots political situation, economic progress was made in the lands taken over by foreign powers because the period after the Congress of Vienna witnessed a significant development in the building of early industry.^[52]

Economic historians have made new estimates on GDP per capita, 1790–1910. They confirm the hypothesis of semi-peripheral development of Polish territories in the 19th century and the slow process of catching-up with the core economies.^[53]

The Uprising of November 1830

The increasingly repressive policies of the partitioning powers led to resistance movements in partitioned Poland, and in 1830 Polish patriots staged the November Uprising.^[49] This revolt developed into a full-scale war with Russia, but the leadership was taken over by Polish conservatives who were reluctant to challenge the empire and hostile to broadening the independence movement's social base through measures such as land reform. Despite the significant resources mobilized, a series of errors by several successive chief commanders appointed by the insurgent Polish National Government led to the defeat of its forces by the Russian army in 1831.^[49] Congress Poland lost its constitution and military, but formally remained a separate administrative unit within the Russian Empire.^[54]



Napoleon Bonaparte establishing the Duchy of Warsaw under French protection, 1807



The capture of the Warsaw arsenal at the beginning of the November Uprising of 1830



Chopin, a Romantic composer of piano works, including many inspired by Polish traditional dance music

After the defeat of the November Uprising, thousands of former Polish combatants and other activists emigrated to Western Europe. This phenomenon, known as the Great Emigration, soon dominated Polish political and intellectual life. Together with the leaders of the independence movement, the Polish community abroad included the greatest Polish literary and artistic minds, including the Romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Cyprian Norwid, and the composer Frédéric Chopin. In occupied and repressed Poland, some sought progress through nonviolent activism focused on education and economy, known as organic work; others, in cooperation with the emigrant circles, organized conspiracies and prepared for the next armed insurrection.^[55]

Revolts of the era of the Spring of Nations

The planned national uprising failed to materialize because the authorities in the partitions found out about secret preparations. The Greater Poland uprising ended in a fiasco in early 1846. In the Kraków uprising of February 1846,^[49] patriotic action was combined with revolutionary demands, but the result was the incorporation of the Free City of Cracow into the Austrian

Partition. The Austrian officials took advantage of peasant discontent and incited villagers against the noble-dominated insurgent units. This resulted in the Galician slaughter of 1846,^[49] a large-scale rebellion of serfs seeking relief from their post-feudal condition of mandatory labor as practiced in *folwarks*. The uprising freed many from bondage and hastened decisions that led to the abolition of Polish serfdom in the Austrian Empire in 1848. A new wave of Polish involvement in revolutionary movements soon took place in the partitions and in other parts of Europe in the context of the Spring of Nations revolutions of 1848 (e.g. Józef Bem's participation in the revolutions in Austria and Hungary). The 1848 German revolutions precipitated the Greater Poland uprising of 1848,^[49] in which peasants in the Prussian Partition, who were by then largely enfranchised, played a prominent role.^[56]

The Uprising of January 1863

As a matter of continuous policy, the Russian autocracy kept assailing Polish national core values of language, religion and culture.^[57] In consequence, despite the limited liberalization measures allowed in Congress Poland under the rule of Tsar Alexander II of Russia, a renewal of popular liberation activities took place in 1860–1861. During large-scale demonstrations in Warsaw, Russian forces inflicted numerous casualties on the civilian participants. The "Red", or left-wing faction of Polish activists, which promoted peasant enfranchisement and cooperated with Russian revolutionaries, became involved in immediate preparations for a national uprising. The "White", or right-wing faction, was inclined to cooperate with the Russian authorities and countered with partial reform proposals. In order to cripple the manpower potential of the Reds, Aleksander Wielopolski, the conservative leader of the government of Congress Poland, arranged for a partial selective conscription of young Poles for the Russian army in the years 1862 and 1863.^[49] This action hastened the outbreak of hostilities. The January Uprising, joined and led after the initial period by the Whites, was fought by partisan units against an overwhelmingly advantaged enemy. The uprising lasted from January 1863 to the spring of 1864,^[49] when Romuald Traugutt, the last supreme commander of the insurgency, was captured by the tsarist police.^{[58][59]}



Romuald Traugutt, the last supreme commander of the 1863 Uprising

On 2 March 1864, the Russian authority, compelled by the uprising to compete for the loyalty of Polish peasants, officially published an enfranchisement decree in Congress Poland along the lines of an earlier land reform proclamation of the insurgents. The act created the conditions necessary for the development of the capitalist system on central Polish lands. At the time when most Poles realized the futility of armed resistance without external support, the various sections of Polish society were undergoing deep and far-reaching evolution in the areas of social, economic and cultural development.^{[49][59][60]}

Formation of modern Polish society under foreign rule (1864–1914)

Repression and organic work

The failure of the January Uprising in Poland caused a major psychological trauma and became a historic watershed; indeed, it sparked the development of modern Polish nationalism. The Poles, subjected within the territories under the Russian and Prussian administrations to still stricter controls and increased persecution, sought to preserve their identity in non-violent ways. After the uprising, Congress Poland was downgraded in official usage from the "Kingdom of Poland" to the "Vistula Land" and was more fully integrated into Russia proper, but not entirely obliterated. The Russian and German languages were imposed in all public communication, and the Catholic Church was not spared from severe repression. Public

education was increasingly subjected to Russification and Germanisation measures. Illiteracy was reduced, most effectively in the Prussian partition, but education in the Polish language was preserved mostly through unofficial efforts. The Prussian government pursued German colonization, including the purchase of Polish-owned land. On the other hand, the region of Galicia (western Ukraine and southern Poland) experienced a gradual relaxation of authoritarian policies and even a Polish cultural revival. Economically and socially backward, it was under the milder rule of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and from 1867 was increasingly allowed limited autonomy.^[49] Stańczycy, a conservative Polish pro-Austrian faction led by great land owners, dominated the Galician government. The Polish Academy of Learning (an academy of sciences) was founded in Kraków in 1872.^[49]



Bolesław Prus (1847–1912), a leading novelist, journalist and philosopher of Poland's Positivism movement

Social activities termed "organic work" consisted of self-help organizations that promoted economic advancement and work on improving the competitiveness of Polish-owned businesses, industrial, agricultural or other. New commercial methods of generating higher productivity were discussed and implemented through trade associations and special interest groups, while Polish banking and cooperative financial institutions made the necessary business loans available. The other major area of effort in organic work was educational and intellectual development of the common people. Many libraries and reading rooms were established in small towns and villages, and numerous printed periodicals manifested the growing interest in popular education. Scientific and educational societies were active in a number of cities. Such activities were most pronounced in the Prussian Partition.^{[61][62]}

Positivism in Poland replaced Romanticism as the leading intellectual, social and literary trend.^{[61][63]} It reflected the ideals and values of the emerging urban bourgeoisie.^[64] Around 1890, the urban classes gradually abandoned the positivist ideas and came under the influence of modern pan-European nationalism.^[65]

Economic development and social change

Under the partitioning powers, economic diversification and progress, including large-scale industrialisation, were introduced in the traditionally agrarian Polish lands, but this development turned out to be very uneven. Advanced agriculture was practiced in the Prussian Partition, except for Upper Silesia, where the coal-mining industry created a large labor force. The densest network of railroads was built in German-ruled western Poland. In Russian Congress Poland, a striking growth of industry, railways and towns took place, all against the background of an extensive, but less productive agriculture.^[66] The industrial initiative, capital and know-how were provided largely by entrepreneurs who were not ethnic Poles.^[67] Warsaw (a metallurgical center) and Łódź (a textiles center) grew rapidly, as did the total proportion of urban population, making the region the most economically advanced in the Russian Empire (industrial production exceeded agricultural production there by 1909). The coming of the railways spurred some industrial growth even in the vast Russian Partition territories outside of Congress Poland. The Austrian Partition was rural and poor, except for the industrialized Cieszyn Silesia area. Galician economic expansion after 1890 included oil extraction and resulted in the growth of Lemberg (Lwów, Lviv) and Kraków.^[66]



Many Jews emigrated from the Polish–Lithuanian lands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but most remained to form a large ethnic minority

Economic and social changes involving land reform and industrialization, combined with the effects of foreign domination, altered the centuries-old social structure of Polish society. Among the newly emergent strata were wealthy industrialists and financiers, distinct from the traditional, but still critically important landed aristocracy. The intelligentsia, an educated, professional or business middle class, often originated from lower gentry, landless or alienated from their rural possessions, and from urban people. Many smaller agricultural enterprises based on serfdom did not survive the land reforms.^[68] The industrial proletariat, a new underprivileged class, was composed mainly of poor peasants or townspeople forced by deteriorating conditions to migrate and search for work in urban centers in their countries of origin or abroad. Millions of residents of the former Commonwealth of various ethnic groups worked or settled in Europe and in North and South America.^[66]

Social and economic changes were partial and gradual. The degree of industrialisation, relatively fast-paced in some areas, lagged behind the advanced regions of Western Europe. The three partitions developed different economies and were more economically integrated with their mother states than with each other. In the Prussian Partition, for example, agricultural production depended heavily on the German market, whereas the industrial sector of Congress Poland relied more on the Russian market.^[66]

Nationalism, socialism and other movements

In the 1870s–1890s, large-scale socialist, nationalist, agrarian and other political movements of great ideological fervor became established in partitioned Poland and Lithuania, along with corresponding political parties to promote them. Of the major parties, the socialist First Proletariat was founded in 1882, the Polish League (precursor of National Democracy) in 1887, the Polish Social Democratic Party of Galicia and Silesia in 1890, the Polish Socialist Party in 1892, the Marxist Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania in 1893, the agrarian People's Party of Galicia in 1895 and the Jewish socialist Bund in 1897. Christian democracy regional associations allied with the Catholic Church were also active; they united into the Polish Christian Democratic Party in 1919.



Marie Curie, discoverer of radioactive elements



Rosa Luxemburg, leader of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania

The main minority ethnic groups of the former Commonwealth, including Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belarusians and Jews, were getting involved in their own national movements and plans, which met with disapproval on the part of those Polish independence activists who counted on an eventual rebirth of the Commonwealth or the rise of a Commonwealth-inspired federal structure (a political movement referred to as Prometheism).^[69]

Around the start of the 20th century, the Young Poland cultural movement, centered in Austrian Galicia, took advantage of a milieu conducive to liberal expression in that region and was the source of Poland's finest artistic and literary productions.^[70] In this same era, Marie Skłodowska Curie, a pioneer radiation scientist, performed her groundbreaking research in Paris.^[71]

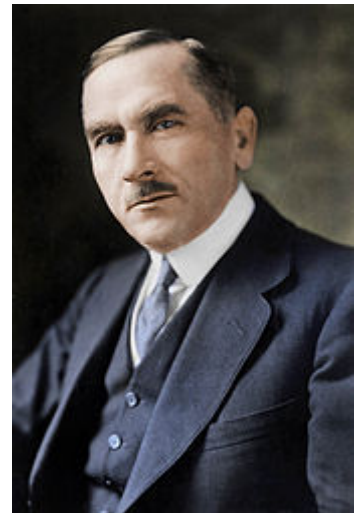
The Revolution of 1905

The Revolution of 1905–1907 in Russian Poland,^[49] the result of many years of pent-up political frustrations and stifled national ambitions, was marked by political maneuvering, strikes and rebellion. The revolt was part of much broader disturbances throughout the Russian Empire associated with the general

Revolution of 1905. In Poland, the principal revolutionary figures were Roman Dmowski and Józef Piłsudski. Dmowski was associated with the right-wing nationalist movement National Democracy, whereas Piłsudski was associated with the Polish Socialist Party. As the authorities re-established control within the Russian Empire, the revolt in Congress Poland, placed under martial law, withered as well, partially as a result of tsarist concessions in the areas of national and workers' rights, including Polish representation in the newly created Russian Duma. The collapse of the revolt in the Russian Partition, coupled with intensified Germanization in the Prussian Partition, left Austrian Galicia as the territory where Polish patriotic action was most likely to flourish.^[72]

In the Austrian Partition, Polish culture was openly cultivated, and in the Prussian Partition, there were high levels of education and living standards, but the Russian Partition remained of primary importance for the Polish nation and its aspirations. About 15.5 million Polish-speakers lived in the territories most densely populated by Poles: the western part of the Russian Partition, the Prussian Partition and the western Austrian Partition. Ethnically Polish settlement spread over a large area further to the east, including its greatest concentration in the Vilnius Region, amounted to only over 20% of that number.^[73]

Polish paramilitary organizations oriented toward independence, such as the Union of Active Struggle, were formed in 1908–1914, mainly in Galicia. The Poles were divided and their political parties fragmented on the eve of World War I, with Dmowski's National Democracy (pro-Entente) and Piłsudski's faction assuming opposing positions.^{[73][74]}



Roman Dmowski's National Democracy ideology proved highly influential in Polish politics. He favored the dominance of Polish-speaking Catholics in civic life without concern for the rights of ethnic minorities, in particular the Jews, whose emigration he advocated.

World War I and the issue of Poland's independence



"The Commandant" Józef Piłsudski with his legionaries in 1915

The outbreak of World War I in the Polish lands offered Poles unexpected hopes for achieving independence as a result of the turbulence that engulfed the empires of the partitioning powers. All three of the monarchies that had benefited from the partition of Polish territories (Germany, Austria and Russia) were dissolved by the end of the war, and many of their territories were dispersed into new political units. At the start of the war, the Poles found themselves conscripted into the armies of the partitioning powers in a war that was not theirs. Furthermore, they were frequently forced to fight each other, since the armies of Germany and Austria were allied against Russia. Piłsudski's paramilitary units stationed in Galicia were turned into the Polish Legions in 1914 and as a

part of the Austro-Hungarian Army fought on the Russian front until 1917, when the formation was disbanded.^[49] Piłsudski, who refused demands that his men fight under German command, was arrested and imprisoned by the Germans and became a heroic symbol of Polish nationalism.^{[74][75]}

Due to a series of German victories on the Eastern Front, the area of Congress Poland became occupied by the Central Powers of Germany and Austria;^[49] Warsaw was captured by the Germans on 5 August 1915. In the Act of 5th November 1916, a fresh incarnation of the Kingdom of Poland (*Królestwo Regencyjne*) was proclaimed by Germany and Austria on formerly Russian-controlled territories,^[49] within the German Mitteuropa scheme. The sponsor states were never able to agree on a candidate to assume the throne,

however; rather, it was governed in turn by German and Austrian governor-generals, a Provisional Council of State, and a Regency Council. This increasingly autonomous puppet state existed until November 1918, when it was replaced by the newly established Republic of Poland. The existence of this "kingdom" and its planned Polish army had a positive effect on the Polish national efforts on the Allied side, but in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918 the victorious in the east Germany imposed harsh conditions on defeated Russia and ignored Polish interests.^{[74][75][76]} Toward the end of the war, the German authorities engaged in massive, purposeful devastation of industrial and other economic potential of Polish lands in order to impoverish the country, a likely future competitor of Germany.^[77]



Ignacy Paderewski was a pianist and a statesman



The Regency Council of the Kingdom of Poland in 1918. The "Kingdom" was established to entice Poles to cooperate with the Central Powers.

The independence of Poland had been campaigned for in Russia and in the West by Dmowski and in the West by Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Tsar

Nicholas II of Russia, and then the leaders of the February Revolution and the October Revolution of 1917, installed governments who declared in turn their support for Polish independence.^{[75][d1]} In 1917, France formed the Blue Army (placed under Józef Haller) that comprised about 70,000 Poles by the end of the war, including men captured from German and Austrian units and 20,000 volunteers from the United States. There was also a 30,000-men strong Polish anti-German army in Russia. Dmowski, operating from Paris as head of the Polish National Committee (KNP), became the spokesman for Polish nationalism in the Allied

camp. On the initiative of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, Polish independence was officially endorsed by the Allies in June 1918.^{[49][74][75][c1]}

In all, about two million Poles served in the war, counting both sides, and about 400–450,000 died. Much of the fighting on the Eastern Front took place in Poland, and civilian casualties and devastation were high.^{[74][78]}

The final push for independence of Poland took place on the ground in October–November 1918. Near the end of the war, Austro-Hungarian and German units were being disarmed, and the Austrian army's collapse freed Cieszyn and Kraków at the end of October. Lviv was then contested in the Polish–Ukrainian War of 1918–1919. Ignacy Daszyński headed the first short-lived independent Polish government in Lublin from 7 November, the leftist Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland, proclaimed as a democracy. Germany, now defeated, was forced by the Allies to stand down its large military forces in Poland. Overtaken by the German Revolution of 1918–1919 at home, the Germans released Piłsudski from prison. He arrived in Warsaw on 10 November and was granted extensive authority by the Regency Council; Piłsudski's authority was also recognized by the Lublin government.^{[49][b1]} On 22 November, he became the temporary head of state. Piłsudski was held by many in high regard, but was resented by the right-wing National Democrats. The emerging Polish state was internally divided, heavily war-damaged and economically dysfunctional.^{[74][75]}



Ignacy Daszyński

Second Polish Republic (1918–1939)

Pisudski p. 6 and below

Securing national borders, war with Soviet Russia

After more than a century of foreign rule, Poland regained its independence at the end of World War I as one of the outcomes of the negotiations that took place at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.^[79] The Treaty of Versailles that emerged from the conference set up an independent Polish nation with an outlet to the sea, but left some of its boundaries to be decided by plebiscites. The largely German-inhabited Free City of Danzig was granted a separate status that guaranteed its use as a port by Poland. In the end, the settlement of the German-Polish border turned out to be a prolonged and convoluted process. The dispute helped engender the Greater Poland Uprising of 1918–1919, the three Silesian uprisings of 1919–1921, the East Prussian plebiscite of 1920, the Upper Silesia plebiscite of 1921 and the 1922 Silesian Convention in Geneva.^{[80][81][82]}



The Greater Poland Uprising, a war with Germany, erupted in December 1918

Other boundaries were settled by war and subsequent treaties. A total of six border wars were fought in 1918–1921, including the Polish–Czechoslovak border conflicts over Cieszyn Silesia in January 1919.^[80]



Polish–Soviet War, defenses near Warsaw, August 1920

As distressing as these border conflicts were, the Polish–Soviet War of 1919–1921 was the most important series of military actions of the era. Piłsudski had entertained far-reaching anti-Russian cooperative designs in Eastern Europe, and in 1919 the Polish forces pushed eastward into Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine by taking advantage of the Russian preoccupation with a civil war, but they were soon confronted with the Soviet westward offensive of 1918–1919. Western Ukraine was already a theater of the Polish–Ukrainian War, which eliminated the proclaimed West Ukrainian People's Republic in July 1919. In the autumn of 1919, Piłsudski rejected urgent pleas from the former Entente powers to support

Anton Denikin's White movement in its advance on Moscow.^[80] The Polish–Soviet War proper began with the Polish Kiev Offensive in April 1920.^[83] Allied with the Directorate of Ukraine of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the Polish armies had advanced past Vilnius, Minsk and Kiev by June.^[84] At that time, a massive Soviet counter-offensive pushed the Poles out of most of Ukraine. On the northern front, the Soviet army reached the outskirts of Warsaw in early August. A Soviet triumph and the quick end of Poland seemed inevitable. However, the Poles scored a stunning victory at the Battle of Warsaw (1920). Afterwards, more Polish military successes followed, and the Soviets had to pull back. They left swathes of territory populated largely by Belarusians or Ukrainians to Polish rule. The new eastern boundary was finalized by the Peace of Riga in March 1921.^{[80][82][85]}

The defeat of the Russian armies forced Vladimir Lenin and the Soviet leadership to postpone their strategic objective of linking up with the German and other European revolutionary leftist collaborators to spread communist revolution. Lenin also hoped for generating support for the Red Army in Poland, which failed to materialize.^[80]

Piłsudski's seizure of Vilnius in October 1920 (known as Żeligowski's Mutiny) was a nail in the coffin of the already poor Lithuania–Poland relations that had been strained by the Polish–Lithuanian War of 1919–1920; both states would remain hostile to one another for the remainder of the interwar period.^[86] Piłsudski's concept of Intermarium (an East European federation of states inspired by the tradition of the multiethnic Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth that would include a hypothetical multinational successor state to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania)^[87] had the fatal flaw of being incompatible with his assumption of Polish domination, which would amount to an encroachment on the neighboring peoples' lands and aspirations. At



Wojciech Korfanty fought for a Polish Silesia and was the leader of the Polish Christian Democratic Party

the time of rising national movements, the plan thus ceased being a feature of Poland's politics.^{[88][89][90][a]} A larger federated structure was also opposed by Dmowski's National Democrats. Their representative at the Peace of Riga talks, Stanisław Grabski, opted for leaving Minsk, Berdychiv, Kamianets-Podilskyi and the surrounding areas on the Soviet side of the border. The National Democrats did not want to assume the lands they considered politically undesirable, as such territorial enlargement would result in a reduced proportion of citizens who were ethnically Polish.^{[82][91][92]}



Wincenty Witos (right) and Ignacy Daszyński headed a wartime cabinet in 1920. Witos was an agrarian party leader and a centrist politician, later persecuted under the Sanation regime.

The Peace of Riga settled the eastern border by preserving for Poland a substantial portion of the old Commonwealth's eastern territories at the cost of partitioning the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Lithuania and Belarus) and Ukraine.^{[82][93][94]} The Ukrainians ended up with no state of their own and felt betrayed by the Riga arrangements; their resentment gave rise to extreme nationalism and anti-Polish hostility.^[95] The Kresy (or borderland) territories in the east won by 1921 would form the basis for a swap arranged and carried out by the Soviets in 1943–1945, who at that time compensated the re-emerging Polish state for the eastern lands lost to the Soviet Union with conquered areas of eastern Germany.^[96]

The successful outcome of the Polish–Soviet War gave Poland a false sense of its prowess as a self-sufficient military power and encouraged the government to try to resolve international problems through imposed unilateral solutions.^{[88][97]} The territorial and ethnic policies of the interwar period contributed to bad relations with most of Poland's neighbors and uneasy cooperation with more distant centers of power, especially France and Great Britain.^{[82][88][97]}

Democratic politics (1918–1926)



Bier of Gabriel Narutowicz, the first President of Poland, who was assassinated in 1922

Among the chief difficulties faced by the government of the new Polish republic was the lack of an integrated infrastructure among the formerly separate partitions, a deficiency that disrupted industry, transportation, trade, and other areas.^[80]

The first Polish legislative election for the re-established Sejm (national parliament) took place in January 1919. A temporary Small Constitution was passed by the body the following month.^[98]

The rapidly growing population of Poland within its new boundaries was $\frac{3}{4}$ agricultural and $\frac{1}{4}$ urban; Polish was the primary language of only $\frac{2}{3}$ of the inhabitants of the new country. The minorities had very little voice in the government. The permanent March Constitution of Poland was adopted in March 1921. At the insistence of the National Democrats, who were concerned about how aggressively Józef Piłsudski might exercise presidential powers if he were elected to office, the constitution mandated limited prerogatives for the presidency.^[82]

The proclamation of the March Constitution was followed by a short and turbulent period of constitutional order and parliamentary democracy that lasted until 1926. The legislature remained fragmented, without stable majorities, and governments changed frequently. The open-minded Gabriel Narutowicz was elected president constitutionally (without a popular vote) by the National Assembly in 1922. However, members of the nationalist right-wing faction did not regard his elevation as legitimate. They viewed Narutowicz rather as a traitor whose election was pushed through by the votes of alien minorities. Narutowicz and his supporters were subjected to an intense harassment campaign, and the president was assassinated on 16 December 1922, after serving only five days in office.^[99]

Corruption was held to be commonplace in the political culture of the early Polish Republic. However, the investigations conducted by the new regime after the 1926 May Coup failed to uncover any major affair or corruption scheme within the state apparatus of its predecessors.^[100]

Land reform measures were passed in 1919 and 1925 under pressure from an impoverished peasantry. They were partially implemented, but resulted in the parcellation of only 20% of the great agricultural estates.^[101] Poland endured numerous economic calamities and disruptions in the early 1920s, including waves of workers' strikes such as the 1923 Kraków riot. The German–Polish customs war, initiated by Germany in 1925, was one of the most damaging external factors that put a strain on Poland's economy.^{[102][103]} On the other hand, there were also signs of progress and stabilization, for example a critical reform of finances carried out by the competent government of Władysław Grabski, which lasted almost two years. Certain other achievements of the democratic period having to do with the management of governmental and civic institutions necessary to the functioning of the reunited state and nation were too easily overlooked. Lurking on the sidelines was a disgusted army officer corps unwilling to subject itself to civilian control, but ready to follow the retired Piłsudski, who was highly popular with Poles and just as dissatisfied with the Polish system of government as his former colleagues in the military.^{[80][99]}



Władysław Grabski reformed the currency and introduced the Polish zloty to replace the marka

Piłsudski's coup and the Sanation Era (1926–1935)

On 12 May 1926, Piłsudski staged the May Coup, a military overthrow of the civilian government mounted against President Stanisław Wojciechowski and the troops loyal to the legitimate government. Hundreds died in fratricidal fighting.^[104] Piłsudski was supported by several leftist factions who ensured the success of his coup by blocking the railway transportation of government forces.^{[105][b1]} He also had the support of the conservative great landowners, a move that left the right-wing National Democrats as the only major social force opposed to the takeover.^{[80][106][1]}

Following the coup, the new regime initially respected many parliamentary formalities, but gradually tightened its control and abandoned pretenses. The Centrolew, a coalition of center-left parties, was formed in 1929, and in 1930 called for the "abolition of dictatorship". In 1930, the Sejm was dissolved and a number of opposition deputies were imprisoned at the Brest Fortress. Five thousand political opponents were arrested ahead of the Polish legislative election of 1930,^[107] which was rigged to award a majority of seats to the pro-regime Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR).^{[80][100][108]}



Piłsudski's May Coup of 1926 defined Poland's political reality in the years leading to World War II