

ILONA URYCH

## THE FAMILY IN CREATING THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF POLAND: CRISIS OR EVOLUTION?

**Abstract.** The aim of this article is to discuss the importance of the family in creating the national security of Poland, taking into account its contemporary transformations, known as “crisis” and “evolution.” In order to achieve this, the image of the family in research on creating the national security of Poland presented in the literature was characterised. Then, based on the analysis of the National Census data, the results of research conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research and reports of the Central Statistical Office, as well as legal acts, the crisis of the modern family and its evolution were described. The results of the research carried out allow us to conclude that the construction and strengthening of the national security of Poland is fostered by the socialisation process that takes place in the family, as well as by its proper fulfilment of the functions ascribed to it. Moreover, the transformations of the modern family are related to dynamic social changes. They do not threaten the institution of the family, although they cause its gradual transformation. These trends, deviating from the traditional forms of family communities, cannot be stopped. Therefore, in order to change the pro-family policy of the state in accordance with the needs of the modern family, it is necessary to know and understand it.

**Keywords:** family; national security; society; change; crisis; evolution; reform

### INTRODUCTION

The image of the modern family has been shaped by the civilisational changes initiated in the 19th century and the transformation of traditional customs. Thus, the contemporary family is the product of changes occurring in the general social, cultural, and economic spheres. The quality, direction and strength of these processes continue to directly and indirectly impact the functioning of the family

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(Kwak, Bieńko, and Szluz, 2024, p. 76). In turn, the increased geographical and social mobility of the population in the late 20th and early 21st centuries as well as the heterogenisation of societies and communities have resulted in a loosening of family ties. In Poland, moreover, since the changes resulting from the political transformation in 1989, the living standards of Polish families have risen on the one hand, their level of health has increased, and the functioning of households has improved thanks to the introduction of material and service technology. On the other hand, however, the sphere of social exclusion increased in such areas and environments that could not keep up with the changes taking place (Więckiewicz, 2010).

Despite various transformations of the contemporary family, what remains unchanged is that the family constitutes the basic educational and, more broadly, socialisation environment in which the existential needs of its members, including the need for security, should be satisfied. The family therefore occupies an important area of exploration in research on creating the national security of Poland. This mainly concerns analyses in the field of social security, which forms part of national security (Kitler, 2011).

The above observations have led to the aim of this article, which is to discuss the importance of the family in creating the national security of Poland, taking into account its contemporary transformations, known as “crisis” and “evolution.” Three research problems were posed in connection with the objective thus adopted:

1. How is the image of the family portrayed in research on creating the national security of Poland?
2. What is the crisis of the modern family?
3. How does the evolution of the modern family manifest itself?

The research used methods such as analysis, synthesis, inference, and abstraction, to which the literature was subjected (Pelc, 2012, pp. 55-78). In addition, content analysis, with its variant in the form of document analysis, was applied (Jemioło and Dawidczyk, 2008, p. 53). This method was adopted to the analysis of National Census, Centre for Public Opinion Research and Central Statistical Office reports, as well as legal acts. Considering the methodological basis, the conducted research concerned the field of social sciences in the discipline of “security sciences” (Misiuk, 2018).

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**The family is important in research on creating the national security of Poland because of its primary nature as regards other social groups.** It is the family that serves as

[...] the primordial educational institution, and its role as a natural educational environment is evidenced by the fact that it is the first source of transmission of knowledge, common relations and behaviour of the offspring. It is in the family that the child first learns correct behavioural norms and is introduced to functioning in the social roles that await them. The elementary information passed on in the family forms the core of the child's knowledge of the nearest cultural circle and the value system preferred in it (Urych, 2015, p. 167).<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the family indicates the goals and values for children to pursue and thus contributes to the formation of specific needs and interests (Szaładzińska, 2008). In summarising the reflections on the family in research on creating the national security of Poland, it should be stated that **the family is the natural environment and, above all, the first institution that contributes to the upbringing and socialisation of children.** It also exerts a significant influence on the behaviour of individuals, their attitude to the perception of other people, the world of values, the system of norms, and patterns of behaviour.

**By fulfilling its basic functions, the family in research on creating the national security of Poland promotes the persistence of society.** In addition to the socialising-educational, material-economic, caring-securing, or emotional-expressive functions (Tyszka, 2002, p. 84), which support the persistence and development of society, the family provides its members with a universally understood need for security – from the satisfaction of existential needs to the possibility of development. These functions intermingle, as the family satisfies the subsistence, caring, or emotional needs of its members and at the same time teaches them to care for others, as well as to experience care. The parental needs realised in the process of raising children are linked to the socialising function fulfilled for society (Szaładzińska, 2008).

**The family in research on creating the national security of Poland is a coherent system requiring its members (above all, the parents) to be united and to strive towards jointly set goals,** which stem from a sense of internal necessity and are undertaken voluntarily for the benefit of the family.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by the author.

The basis of proper relationships in the family is primarily the relation between the parents, their emotional bond, and the sense of responsibility. In a well-functioning family, the relationship between the parents is founded on the collectively agreed rules on how to bring up the children and on the division of responsibilities (Cudak, 2012).

**Such a multifaceted view of the family is extremely relevant to analyses in the field of security sciences, when the exercise of family functions by its members contributes to the strengthening of society as a whole and, more broadly, the nation and the state. The opposite situation, i.e. the dysfunctionality of families, results in their weakening.** However, the failure of families to fulfil their duties or their fragmentary performance not only does not create conditions for the sustainability and development of family members, but it also contributes to the destabilisation of the social order (Izdebska, 2000, p. 34).

**In the context of analyses of the family in security sciences, it is also worth noting the progressive changes in the everyday life culture, changes in social roles, as well as the increase in work opportunities and the area of tolerance of the social roles performed.** These trends affect the family, especially the organisation of family life, the arrangement of intra-family roles, and the position of power. There is also an increase in social risks due to a further loosening of social contacts and a decline in opportunities for social control (Nowotka, 2007). In other words, **contemporary socio-cultural changes have contributed to changes in family relationships, often to their development (called “evolution”), but also to their disorganisation or dysfunction (called “crisis”).**

#### THE CRISIS OF THE MODERN FAMILY

The transformations taking place in the contemporary family are described by many researchers as a crisis (Grabowski, 2019; Klimek and Więckiewicz, 2012; Gawęcka, 2009). An argument confirming such a point of view is the phenomenon of **family shrinking through the numerical reduction of its members**, and thus the shift from multi-generational families, in which at least three generations (most often grandparents, parents, and children) live in a common home, to nuclear-type families, consisting only of parents and children. This is confirmed by the results of the 2021 National Census (Główny Urząd Statystyczny/GUS, 2021). According to them, the most common family type in Poland is a married couple with children. In 2021, there were around 4.24 million

such families, and they accounted for 41.8% of the total number of families. In both urban and rural areas, the share of households with four people or more has decreased significantly. It was 25.4% in urban areas in 2021, and this figure lessened by 3% compared to 2011.

Research by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Bożewicz, 2019) shows that almost half of Poles (49%) prefer the nuclear family model, which is a slight increase as opposed to 2013. There has been virtually no change in the percentage of people living in a large, multi-generational family (22%) or in a marriage without children (11%). Regardless of the type of relationship that Poles currently live in, when asked about the most desirable one, they indicated a small family consisting of parents and children (55%).

Another trend described as a crisis of the family is **delaying the birth of the first child and, consequently, of subsequent children**. The 2019 statistics from the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Bożewicz, 2019) show that among the youngest respondents (18-24 years old), the decision not to have children was widespread (99% of indications), while as recently as in 2013, the percentage of interviewees declaring this reached 87%. It demonstrates very clearly the delay in having the first child. In the group of people between the ages of 25 and 34, 45% of citizens have no children, which is also a higher number than in 2013 (41%). A similar percentage of Poles aged 25-34 as then have one child (30%), and a slightly smaller percentage have two (18% compared to 23% in 2013). One may think that this arises from a common trend – if Polish women are starting to have children later in their lives, the age at which they give birth to each subsequent child is higher than even six years ago.

In addition, **young people are postponing their decision to get married**. This tendency is socially understood and accepted, especially by those in younger age groups (Kotowska-Wójcik, 2024). According to the Central Statistical Office, the average age of the first marriage in Poland is approximately 28.7 for men and 26.6 for women. These figures indicate a trend towards marrying at a later age compared to earlier decades. The increase in the age of newly married couples is the result of several factors, including an increase in education levels, careers as well as social and cultural changes. These changes are also influenced by the increasingly widespread aspirations of completing higher education and the desire for financial stability before marriage. The young generation of Poles is progressively choosing to achieve its professional ambitions and gain relevant work experience before starting a family. Increased awareness of the importance of financial and emotional stability also plays an important role in delaying the decision to legalise a relationship.

Postponing the decision to get married or completely rejecting the possibility of formalising a relationship are increasingly common and quite widely socially approved approaches. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) accept that young people are temporarily or definitively forgoing marriage. Only one in three interviewees (32%) do not understand this phenomenon. Furthermore, the number of marriage supporters is declining – only 14% of Poles are in favour of the unconditional legalisation of the relationship (Bożewicz, 2019).

The family crisis also includes an **increase in the quantity of informal relationships and people living alone**. Figures from the Central Statistical Office show that almost 146,000 marriages were contracted in 2023 (GUS, 2023) – this is the second time in the entire post-war period that such a low number of marriages has been recorded (in comparison – only 145,000 marriages in 2020 due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic). There has been a decrease of almost 10,000 marriages contracted as opposed to 2022.

Additionally, based on the results of the 2021 National Census (GUS, 2021), it may be concluded that the number of couples staying in an informal relationship rose significantly (by more than 74%), with 552,800 couples in 2021 (316,500 in 2011). According to the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Bożewicz, 2020), more than a quarter (26%) of all adult Poles did not have a partner. It should be added, however, that two-fifths (41%) of those claiming to be single were in an informal relationship.

Statistically, every tenth Pole (10%) lives alone. Almost half of Poles (49%, up by 5% since 2013) accept living alone, while more than two-fifths (45%, down by 4% since 2013) are prejudiced against it. In addition, there has been a significant increase in the belief that both men and women do not get married due to their need for freedom and lack of commitment (Boguszewski, 2019a).

**The increasing number of divorces is worrying.** According to the Central Statistical Office data from 2021 (GUS, 2021), 35.6 in every 100 marriages ended in divorce. This was 18.6% more than in the year before. However, it is worth noting that in 2020 the number of divorces fell compared to previous years due to the pandemic and the limited work of courts. Between 2005 and 2019, the courts in Poland decreed approximately 65,000 divorces on average every year. The median age of those divorcing was 42.6 years old. Divorce petitions were more often filed by women – since the 1990s, they already initiated two-thirds of divorces. In 2020, this was more than 66% of the petitions, but as many as 80% of such cases ended without an adjudication of fault (the husband's fault was adjudicated in less than 15% of the cases). Poles most often divorce for the following reasons: incompatibility of character (46.3% of cases), marital

infidelity (20.6%), and alcohol abuse (14.1%). These three issues account for 81% of divorces in Poland. They are followed by financial disagreements (7.3%) and a reprehensible attitude towards family members (4.9%).

According to the Centre for Public Opinion Research data from 2019 (Boguszewski, 2019c), in Poland, strong supporters of divorce constitute a group almost three times greater in number than its fierce opponents. Currently, only less than one in eight respondents (12%) do not advocate divorce, while one in three (32%) assumes that if both spouses decide to divorce through court proceedings, they should have no obstacles to them doing so. Still the largest group of respondents (52%) are moderate supporters of divorce, who, although they do not entirely support it, consider it acceptable in certain situations. Only a few respondents are unable to take a stance on the permissibility of divorce (2%) or have yet another opinion on the subject (2%). Significantly, the percentage of those in favour of divorce has increased by more than half in the last decade (from 20% to 32%).

**There is a decline in fertility at the level of Polish society, and thus negative natural growth** is another phenomenon confirming the thesis of the crisis of the modern family. This is demonstrated by the Central Statistical Office data from 2023 (GUS, 2023). Based on them, it may be concluded that the population has been declining since 2012 (except for a slight increase of less than 1,000 in 2017). The population change in recent years is mainly influenced by the birth rate, which has been negative since 2013. In 2023, the number of births fell by almost 33,000 compared to 2022. This is the lowest figure recorded in the entire post-war period, and the number of births was also almost 137,000 lower than the number of deaths. The natural growth rate (per 1,000 population) was -3.6‰ and decreased by 0.2‰ compared to 2022. The situation in 2023 was mostly influenced by very small numbers of births and large numbers of deaths at the same time. The latter exceeded the average annual value since 1970 by almost 35,000 (409,000 to 374,000). Interestingly, high mortality of Polish population in 2023 affected both women and men to a similar extent. Negative value of natural increase was almost four times higher than in 2019, when a loss of nine people per 10,000 population was recorded. This compares with an increase of around 200 people for every 10,000 people during the baby boom of the 1950s, and around 100 during the 1980s.

## EVOLUTION OF THE MODERN FAMILY

The changes taking place in the modern family are also referred to as evolution (Urych and Smuniewski, 2015; Kwak, 2005; Slany, 2002). The argument supporting this position is that **the family invariably remains the basic cell of social life, supported by the state**. It is worth citing here, for example, the results of the 2021 National Census as a confirmation. According to them, there were 10,159,300 families in Poland (GUS, 2021), so the family still constitutes the basic social cell.

Moreover, as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997, the family is guaranteed with protection and care, and the state considers the welfare of the family in its social and economic policies. At the same time, families in a difficult material and social situation (especially those with many children, and single-parent families) are entitled to special assistance from the public authorities. The legislation also prescribes that the state adopt certain solutions as to strengthen the bonds between the persons forming the family, especially the bonds existing between parents and children, and between spouses. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland also obliges the state authorities to take positive measures to strengthen the bonds between family members rather than to weaken them.

There is a clear positive attitude towards the family, **as family happiness is regarded as one of the core values and a life goal for many Poles**. This is confirmed by the results of a 2019 survey conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Boguszewski, 2019b). They show that as many as four-fifths of the general public (80%) rank family first among the most important values that Poles are guided by in their daily lives. Invariably, the vast majority of Poles (87%) held the view that a person needs a family to be fully happy. Most respondents (84%, an increase of 3 percentage points since 2013) indicated that a person needs a family to be happy. In addition, 84% of respondents indicated that family is of the greatest value to them in their daily lives. Due to the widely emphasised major importance of the family in the daily lives of Poles, the average values are only slightly differentiated by socio-demographic variables.

**The term “family” is understood more and more broadly, indicating a change – a liberalisation rather than a crisis.** One may observe a shift in the definition of family. Traditionally, it meant a formal marriage between a man and a woman, with children, while nowadays, there is a systematic increase in the view that a family is also constituted by people in an informal relationship and raising shared children. The so-called patchwork model, namely



persons staying in an informal relationship raise children from previous relationships together, is also more often considered to be a family. According to 2019 research conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Boguszewski, 2019b), Poles invariably have no doubt that a family consists of spouses with children (99% of indications). The vast majority of interviewees (91%) also identified a mother or father raising at least one child alone as a family. Besides, there is a fairly widespread conviction that a family is made up of people in an informal relationship raising children from this relationship (83% of indications). More than three quarters of the respondents (78%) also considered people in an informal relationship (cohabitation) raising children together from previous relationships to be a family, and two-thirds (65%) defined a married couple without children as a family.

Other types of relationships are far less frequently described as a family. Only less than one in three respondents (31%) regarded an informal relationship between two people without children as a family, and an even smaller number of respondents (23%) identified a same-sex couple raising the child/children of one of them as a family or, even more so, a gay or lesbian couple not raising children (13%).

One may also note that the broader understanding of the concept (as evidenced by the higher-than-average value of the standard indicator) is mainly fostered by the younger age of respondents, a higher level of education, residence in a larger town, higher per capita income, less frequent participation in religious practices, and left-wing political orientation.

As regards the evolution of the family, it should also be emphasised that **family ties in Poland are really strong and stable**. This results not only from territorial concentration, characteristic of most families in our country, but also from the frequency of meetings with relatives (maintained at a high level) and the scale of intimate, friendly relations between relatives.

Statistics from the Centre for Public Opinion Research from 2019 (Feliński, 2019) show that more than seven in ten Poles (72%) said that most of their immediate family members live close to each other – in the same village or municipality, or in different but not distant localities. One fifth (20%) indicated that their closest relatives are scattered around Poland, and seven in a hundred (7%) stated that they are scattered around the world. Both since the previous survey in 2013 and over the past 20 years, little has changed in this regard – most families were and still are territorially concentrated. The majority of Poles maintain intensive contact with immediate family members. Meetings with parents are the most common, with nearly three quarters of respondents (73%)

declaring a meeting at least once a week. Six in ten respondents (62%) saw their grandchildren at least once every seven days and almost as many saw their adult children living separately (59%). Personal contact with in-laws (45% of interviewees visited them at least once a week), friends and close acquaintances (43%), siblings (37%), and grandparents (35%) is also frequent, although less intense, with a significant proportion of respondents seeing the latter once a month (39%). Compared to 2013, the scale of close family contacts did not change significantly.

The evolution of the family is also evidenced by **the state's pro-family policies, according to which certain schemes are used to increase fertility rates, with the reconciliation of various life roles and the introduction of gender equality in the family.** To this end, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (2024) has introduced the following benefits:

- the “Family 500+” programme – a monthly pecuniary benefit of PLN 500 per child, increased to PLN 800 per child in 2024,
- the “Good Start” programme – financial support of PLN 300, which is provided on a one-off basis to each pupil starting the school year,
- the “Large Family Card” programme – a system offering benefits and privileges to families with many children. It operates both in the public sector and in private companies, and it creates a network of discounts and additional entitlements available to families with three or more children,
- family social capital – a benefit to which the second and each subsequent child in the family is entitled from the month in which the child turns 12 months old until the end of the month in which the child turns 35 months old; the total amount of PLN 12,000 is paid out as PLN 500 per month for two years or PLN 1,000 per month for one year,
- subsidies for stays in crèches, children's clubs or day-care centres – up to PLN 400 per month for children who are not covered by the family social capital, i.e. the first and only child in the family or children younger or older than the assumed criterion,
- personal income tax exemption for 4+ families – the PIT-0 programme is intended for all parents who raise four or more children, regardless of whether they are employed or self-employed, raising children together or as single parents,
- extension of parental leave and introduction of paternity leave – maternity leave is now 20 weeks. In addition, parents are entitled to parental leave, which lasts a further 41 weeks. Every father is also eligible for paternity leave – 14 days off to spend time with his recently born child. Besides, the father

may take up to another 6 weeks as a part of the maternity leave that the mother may give to the father.

**There is a strengthening of the position of the family and investment in health, upbringing and education of children and young people, which results in an increase in the quality of life of the next generation.** In the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the importance of the family declined significantly. Since 2008, its ratings have started to rise again, and it now occupies a leading place in the hierarchy of values of Poles (GUS, 2005, 2010, 2020). In the health care system, children are covered irrespective of the insurance status of their parents/guardians or their residence in institutions with care functions. Therefore, children who are Polish citizens and are under 18 have the right to benefit from publicly financed health care services, i.e. the right to free health care funded by the National Health Fund (*Act of 27 August, 2024*). In addition, legal arrangements have been introduced to enable children and young people up to the age of 18 to receive free medications. The current list contains over 2,800 items (*Obwieszczenie Ministra Zdrowia, 2023*).

The Education Law stipulates that the education system guarantees every citizen of the Republic of Poland access to education as well as upholds the right of children and young people to the upbringing and care appropriate to their age and achieved development. Furthermore, the educational system supports the upbringing of the child in the family, i.e. in his/her development towards full maturity in the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and social spheres, which is reinforced and complemented by measures for the prevention of children's and adolescents' problems (*Act of 14 December, 2020*).

## CONCLUSIONS

The importance of the family in creating the national security of Poland should take into account its contemporary transformations, known as "crisis" and "evolution." Based on the results of the conducted research, certain observations can be made.

1. In this article, the fundamental reference point of the family is national security. Its subject is the nation, hence the concept of the family has a communal dimension, referring to the human collectivity whose form of political organisation is the nation-state. Its construction and strengthening is fostered by the socialisation process taking place in the family, as well as by the proper fulfilment of the functions imposed on it.

2. Nowadays, the family is dynamically transforming as a result of socio-cultural changes. These transformations – according to some researchers – affect the development of the family, known as “evolution,” and – in the opinion of others – its disorganisation or dysfunction, known as “crisis.” These changes, regardless of their value, must become the subject of state policy in such a way that they simultaneously strengthen Poland’s national security.

3. The crisis of the modern family is characterised, among other things, by such trends as shrinking of the family by reducing the number of its members, delaying the birth of the first child and, consequently, of subsequent children, postponement of the decision to get married among young people, the increase in the number of informal relationships and in single life, the decline in the fertility rate, and thus the negative birth rate. The crisis of the modern family weakens Poland’s national security, threatening its entities.

4. The evolution of the modern family is characterised, among other things, by the fact that the term “family” is understood more and more broadly, family ties in Poland are really strong and stable, the state pursues pro-family policies, the position of the family is systematically strengthened, as well as investments are made in health, upbringing and education of children and young people, resulting in an increase in the quality of subsequent generations. The evolution of the modern family has the potential to strengthen Poland’s national security by building a new model of family security.

5. The trend of family change cannot be stopped because change is a part of how the social world functions, and the results of these processes are increasingly unpredictable. Therefore, it is more difficult to pinpoint the various consequences of the events that Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2013) called the Black Swan – namely those that cannot be prevented but can be prepared for. This makes it all the more worthwhile to understand the gradual changes in the Polish family, which are creating forms of family communities deviating from the traditional ones as an answer to an increasing number of individuals and groups. It seems that getting to know and understand the contemporary family forms the basis for changes, in accordance with its needs, in the pro-family policy of the state, addressed also to young people “on the brink of parenthood” (Racław, 2024).

Although the content presented in this article does not exhaust the complex issue of the role of the family in creating the national security of Poland, it does highlight certain trends in its contemporary transformations and thus tones down the one-sided interpretation of the changes of the modern family, hence – in the author’s mind – inspiring further research.

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#### RODZINA W KREOWANIU BEZPIECZEŃSTWA NARODOWEGO POLSKI: KRYZYS CZY EWOLUCJA?

##### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest omówienie znaczenia rodziny w tworzeniu bezpieczeństwa narodowego Polski z uwzględnieniem jej współczesnych przeobrażeń, zwanych „kryzysem” i „ewolucją”. W związku z tym scharakteryzowano obraz rodziny w badaniach dotyczących tworzenia bezpieczeństwa narodowego Polski przedstawiony w literaturze przedmiotu. Następnie na podstawie analizy danych Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego, wyników badań przeprowadzonych przez Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej i raportów Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego oraz aktów prawnych opisano, czym odznacza się kryzys współczesnej rodziny, a także jej ewolucja. Wyniki tych badań pozwalają stwierdzić, że budowie i wzmacnianiu bezpieczeństwa narodowego Polski sprzyja proces socjalizacji, który odbywa się w rodzinie, a także prawidłowe wypełnianie przez nią przypisanych jej funkcji. Ponadto przekształcenia współczesnej rodziny są związane z dynamicznymi zmianami społecznymi. Nie zagrażają instytucji rodziny, chociaż powodują jej stopniowe przekształcenie. Tendencji tych, odbiegających od tradycyjnych form wspólnot rodzinnych, nie da się zatrzymać. Wobec tego, żeby zmieniać politykę prorodziną państwa zgodnie z potrzebami współczesnej rodziny, trzeba ją poznać i zrozumieć.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina; bezpieczeństwo narodowe; społeczeństwo; zmiana; kryzys; ewolucja; reforma