

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

THE DEFEAT OF POPULISTS IN POLAND

Behind the Scenes of the 2023 Election Campaign

Max Brändle, Barbara Szelewa-Kropiwnicka (Eds.)



In a head-to-head race, the democratic opposition managed to defeat the illiberal governing party in the 2023 Polish parliamentary elections.



A strong mobilisation of the population, especially of young women, was of central importance, resulting in a historic voter turnout of 74.4%.



This volume aims to unravel the background to the Polish parliamentary election campaign and tries to figure out, what can be learnt from this defeat of populists.

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INTRODUCTION

Election day in Poland, 15 October 2023, turned out to be a good day for democracy. It provides the opportunity for a fresh start. After eight years of the coalition Zjednoczona Prawica [United Right] led by Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice] in power, with polls months and even weeks before the elections indicating that government and opposition camps are at best even, nothing was certain until the last moments. But on election night, it was already clear that PiS will have to take the role of opposition. The outcome of the parliamentary elections in Poland was in favour of the former opposition parties. Although PiS remained the strongest force in Polish politics, it could not form a majority. The coalition Koalicja Obywatelska [Civic Coalition] led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform], Trzecia Droga (TD) [Third Way] and Nowa Lewica (NL) [New Left] won enough seats in parliament that allowed them to form a new governing coalition. The record turnout of 74,4 percent was crucial for this defeat of populists in Poland.

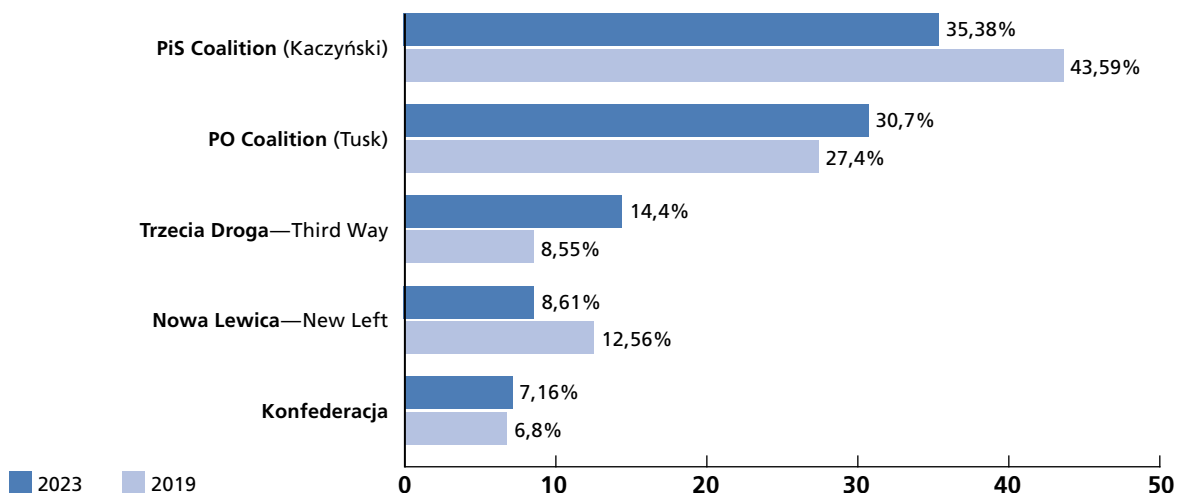
With this collection of short essays, we want to look behind the scenes of the 2023 parliamentary election campaign in Poland to try to understand how PiS was eventually defeated. In many Western countries, we are faced with similar threats to the democratic order, or have actors on the political scenes who would eagerly follow the steps

of PiS and demolish democracy. And many of these actors are getting stronger and stronger. These essays have been written by experts and political advisors on this specific election campaign in Poland. Some tell the story of hard work and determination with which all democratic actors, including civil society, paved the path to victory in a very uneven fight. Others analyse the sociological background and the parties' strategies in the elections campaign in order to explain the outcome of the election, some also cast a shadow of doubt on the persistence of this alleged defeat of populism in Poland.

A closer look at the five voting-options in the Polish electorate 2023 reveals much more diversity; each option is already a coalition of several parties or streams in itself. Most importantly, Trzecia Droga had only been established in 2023 out of the Polska-2050 Party of Szymon Hołownia and the traditional Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) [Polish Farmers Party]. After the elections, these two parts have formed separate parliamentary clubs in the Polish parliament. These dynamics, and the wide spectrum of political options in the new governing coalition—ranging from social democratic to liberal and conservative—will play a crucial role in understanding the workings of the new government in Poland. But in these essays, our interest is not so much to delve into the details of the Polish party spectrum, but rather to

Figure 1:

Polish Parliamentary Elections



provide explanations for the outcome of the 2023 elections and make them available to an international audience interested in the struggle against populists and in the defence of democracy and the rule of law.

The first essay follows up on the thesis that it was **women who won the elections** for the opposition. Indeed, not only women's rights issues were more than ever present in the campaign, but also many of the numerous civic campaigns to convince people to go out and vote were addressed to women. **Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek** explains why the voter turnout was so record high and shows the connection to the salience of women's rights issues in the campaign.

Bartosz Machalica gives us a picture of the **Nowa Lewica-campaign**. Based on surveys commissioned to get to know the electorates, the party developed a strategy that focused on addressing their voters' demand as well as mobilizing them not to abstain from voting in those crucial elections.

Karolina Ziolo-Puzuk analyses another aspect of the Nowa Lewica-campaign, the **campaign-slogans of Nowa Lewica-candidates**. In order to reach voters, candidates have to present their main message in one sentence. Karolina Ziolo-Puzuk describes how this campaigning tool has changed with respect to the candidates and target groups.

This election campaign took place in a different media environment than any previous elections. Since most public media had turned into government propaganda instruments, the campaign managers focussed on **social media**. All parties devoted significant budgets to this, but not all of them were equally successful. Although PiS had the largest budget for this purpose, other parties were more effective, using various different methods. In his essay, **Wiktor Wojchowski** digs deeper into this topic, revealing the strategies, most effective tools, and reasons for stronger and weaker impacts.

One of the biggest surprises of the 2023 elections was the relatively **weak result for "Konfederacja"**. In spring 2023, at the outset of the election campaign, the liberal democratic camp not only worried about the possibility of losing against PiS, but also about the rising popularity of the right-wing radicals of "Konfederacja". **Michał Sutowski** analyses the reasons for the sudden drop of

support for "Konfederacja" in the final stage of their campaign. The high turnout among women, he argues, gave the ultimate blow to the right-wing radicals.

Polish-German relations had significantly deteriorated during the two long terms of PiS in power. Jarosław Kaczyński believed that arousing fear of Germany would gain votes for PiS. With the Russian war of aggression against neighbouring Ukraine, people in Poland were to believe that Germany was just as dangerous as Russia. But this fearmongering did not work. **Agnieszka Łada-Konefał** analyses opinion polls on Polish-German relations and describes the role of the anti-German campaign in the 2023 elections.

Immediately after the elections, **Przemysław Sadura** conducted sociological research on **voting behaviour and motivation** as well as the perception of key campaign issues. His analysis curbs the enthusiasm over a total defeat of populism in Poland. He argues that PiS supporters did not in fact abandon their party, and that the democratic opposition's campaign itself resorted to populist tools, including presenting anti-immigrant views. Also, the extraordinary mobilization of voters might not be a permanent change in the Polish society.

One year before the Polish elections, in 2022, all eyes were on Hungary. To the disappointment of the liberal world, Viktor Orbán came out on top. **Poland and Hungary** have often been put in the same basket of "illiberal democracies", with Orbán and Kaczyński embodying the ideal types of right-wing populists. **Ernst Hillebrand** analyses the election campaigns in Hungary 2022 and Poland 2023 and tries to explain why the Polish opposition managed to accomplish what Hungarian opposition forces failed to do.

The Polish parliamentary elections have been a success for the democratic opposition forces. Their struggle as the new government in Poland to repair democracy, restore the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law has begun. Their mission is also to make Polish democracy more resilient against the adversaries of liberal democracy and against populists. We hope that with this collection of short essays, we can provide some insight into their strategy, campaign and electoral success in Poland in 2023.

Warsaw, March 1, 2024

Max Brändle and **Barbara Szelewa-Kropiwnicka**

THE VOICE OF WOMEN, THE CHOICE OF POLAND

By **Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek**, *Institute of Public Affairs*

The election night surprised the Poles not only with the results, but also, or maybe even more so with the turnout. Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek analyses the uneven conditions of competition that the ruling party created ahead of the elections in the situation of very sharp polarization. She notices that PiS, despite those advantages, did not manage to dictate, which issues would become most resilient, lost touch with voters' real problems and expectations, and lost the "battle for the undecided". Women's rights became one of the most visible issue in the campaign, and became even more important, when numerous voter mobilization campaigns were organized by non-governmental actors. Those campaigns turned out to be surprisingly successful and eventually significantly contributed to the defeat of PiS. Małgorzata Kopka-Piątek is director of the European and Migration Policy Program and senior analyst at the Institute of Public Affairs, Germanist and Political Scientist. For 25 years she has held various roles in European and international policy projects. For several years she has been a researcher of women's social and political activism and feminist foreign policy. Małgorzata is the co-founder and president of the board of the FemGlobal association Women in International Politics.

The 15 October 2023 elections to the Polish Sejm and Senate will go down in the history of Polish democracy due to the record participation of 74.4 percent of eligible voters. This is almost twelve percentage points more than the 62.7 percent recorded in the 1989 elections and the 61.74 percent recorded in the 2019 election. In many previous elections, only about half of authorised voters showed up at the polls. Researchers and politicians have long contemplated how to change this state of affairs, how to encourage those eligible to vote, and thus to increase the legitimacy of the government in office.

Sharp polarization ahead of elections

The uniqueness of Poland's 2023 parliamentary elections was evident even before the official start of the election campaign. Eight years of rule by Zjednoczona Prawica [United Right], with the dominant role of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice], has resulted in profound changes in the state system: in the judiciary and public media, in relations with foreign partners, especially important ones like Germany, France and Israel, and in respect for the rights of social groups like women and LGBT+ people. High rates of inflation, one of the highest and longest-lasting in Europe, and overpricing, especially of basic goods

like groceries, have affected not only the poorest in Poland. The middle class as well has seen a decline in quality of life, the likes of which it has not experienced since the transition. In the perceptions of an increasingly broad range of social groups, these changes have marked a departure from the vision of a pro-European, modern, economically developing Poland. Those in power have enjoyed considerable support—usually well over 30 percent according to polls—with their voters supporting the policy of social transfers and “getting up from the knees” vis-à-vis Berlin and Brussels. The governments in power were supported further by those who benefited from the widespread acquisition of positions and sinecures in the public administration and state-owned companies, as well as the beneficiaries of generous state subsidies to often newly established foundations and institutions.

Another term of PiS would mean the completion of harmful political changes and a definitive turn to the East

The leaders of both the PiS and anti-PiS camps succeeded in creating the impression that the upcoming parliamentary elections could decide Poland's social model and its place on the international stage for a long time

to come. PiS warned of the catastrophe that would result from the return of Donald Tusk, the embodiment of the Polish elite's betrayal and servility to Brussels, and even more to Berlin. His government would mean the reign of a 'leftist dictatorship' over the Vistula which would threaten the sexuality of Polish children and lead to an uncontrolled influx of culturally alien migrants. The opposition demonstrated an equal conviction that another term of PiS would mean the completion of harmful political changes, an even harsher policy toward political opponents and a definitive turn to the East.

Political divisions between supporters and opponents of PiS led to sharp social polarization which was often compared to the polarization of American society. Of course, not all voters fit into this black-and-white divide, but it did (and still does) set the tone for debate and public sentiment. We will return to the role of emotions after outlining the form and content of the campaign.

In the way it wields power, the PiS party has been repeatedly and rightly criticised for equating the party with the state with regard to its control over state institutions and resources, including financial resources. During the election campaign, the ruling party did not hesitate to use the entire state apparatus in its own favour, creating a very uneven political playing field for the opposition. The once-public government media, private media lavishly sponsored by and therefore favourable to the authorities, state-owned companies with their money and foundations, and the military and other state services have all been instrumentalized as campaign tools.

During the election campaign, the ruling party did not hesitate to use the entire state apparatus in its own favour, creating a very uneven political playing field for the opposition

To add to their already existing advantage, PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński hoped to boost voter turnout by announcing in June 2023 a referendum to be held on the same day as parliamentary elections. The referendum was specifically designed to mobilize its voters by focusing on questions of migration, protection

of state-owned companies from alleged foreign economic influence, and the retirement age. Introducing the migration questions was a surprising move, given that in a pre-election Eurobarometer poll citizens rated socio-economic issues such as inflation to be more important than migration. The inspiration for this came partly from a similar move used by Viktor Orbán in Hungary. The opposition strategy of advising voters to abstain from participating in the referendum proved successful, however, with the overall 40 percent participation rate failing to reach the minimum validity threshold of 50 percent.

Pre-election polls did not actually predict a clear winner until the very end, but rather pointed to a sizable group of undecided voters. And it was for them that the fiercest battle was fought until the last moment

While the referendum failed, it contributed significantly to social polarization. Voters felt discouraged by politics, leading to increased participation in the parliamentary elections. Pre-election polls did not actually predict a clear winner until the very end, but rather pointed to a sizable group of undecided voters¹. And it was for them that the most fierce battle was fought until the last moment. Undecided voters had many hesitations about whether to vote, and for which party. Along with discouragement and desire to move away from polarized politics, many expressed the belief that the democratic opposition parties offered no real alternative.

Voters driven by emotions

Post-election surveys indicated that emotions largely guided voters to the polls, often only in the last straits of the campaign². These were primarily negative emotions like anger, frustration and disagreement. The economic situation, the arrogance of power, the disregard for women's rights all motivated opposition voters. Voting against the PiS party was also

¹ Bendyk E., Jaworska-Surma A., *Undecided on Election Day*, Stefan Batory Foundation.

² Jaworska-Surma A., (cooperation Bendyk E., Gutkowski S.), *Phenomenon of electoral mobilization Causes of record turnout during the 2023 parliamentary elections—conclusions from research*, Stefan Batory Foundation.

a protest against the restriction of freedom, the interference with privacy and the imposition by those in power of a way of life. Emotional distance and dissatisfaction with PiS power were ultimately stronger than the unsatisfying offer of opposition parties. For young voters in particular, PiS had proven incapable of responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The frustrations accumulated over many months, with the revelation of more corruption scandals like the visa scandal (officials selling Polish visas in African and Asian countries) just before the elections intensifying the desire for change.

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However, it was not only negative feelings that influenced voters. A strong sense of community and awareness of how many people had similarly had enough was also a mobilizing factor. These sentiments were facilitated by marches organized by Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform]. The first was held in June 2023, but the more significant march, the most numerous in Poland's history, was the Million-Hearts-March in Warsaw two weeks before the elections. The impression of the uniqueness of these elections was reinforced by signals of great mobilisation among Poles living abroad, in the country record numbers of certificates of eligibility to vote outside their place of residence being collected. On election day itself, these were seen with their own eyes or in television reports in long queues to the polling stations.

This sense of community resonated particularly with women. It was reminiscent of the slogan of the women's strikes: 'You will never walk alone'. In the spirit of community, protesters in many places gathered en masse in 2021 after a Constitutional Court ruling tightened the already strict abortion law. Women voters felt that they were not alone in their disagreement with the current party's rule. After mass protests in small and large Polish cities, their voices were not heard. Instead, the public learned of yet another death of a pregnant woman whose doctors failed to provide timely medical assistance for fear of ultra-restrictive abortion laws. For those taking part in the demonstrations,

this was the first opportunity after 2021 to show their opposition to the treatment of women also through the act of voting.

Battle for the undecided

The long lines to the polls could also be attributed to the unprecedented number of pro-frequency campaigns. Civil society organisations organized countless protest actions, demonstrations, proclamations and online petitions over the past eight years. Faced with the uniqueness of the elections and the large number of undecided voters, many organizations and initiatives made another effort and engaged in a campaign to increase voter participation. A report by the Stefan Batory Foundation counted as many as 27 such campaigns³.

*The 'Go to the polls' hashtag
was used approximately
3.75 billion times*

Pro-frequency activities were carried out mainly on the Internet, social media and in the form of online ads, with a few ads also aired on radio and television. The campaigns urged people to vote in the elections and explained how to avoid voting in the referendum ordered by the authorities. Some were aimed at women and young people, some specifically at young women, though most addressed the general electorate. Everyone could find a content, form and message to suit their own taste, resonating with their feelings and motivations. A few of the most well-known campaigns are 'Don't Sleep or You'll Be Overheard', 'Women to the Polls and Girls to the Polls'; 'We've Been Quiet. We are the ones with 52% of the vote'. Let one figure attest to these campaigns' reach: the 'Go to the polls' hashtag was used approximately 3.75 billion times. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in post-election surveys said that pro-frequency campaigns contributed to their decision to participate in the elections. Those influenced by pro-frequency campaign were more likely to be young people, have a college education and live in towns with populations over 200,000.

³ Jaworska-Surma A., (cooperation Bendyk E., Gutkowski S.), *Phenomenon of electoral mobilization Causes of record turnout during the 2023 parliamentary elections—conclusions from research*, Stefan Batory Foundation.

In addition to these organized campaigns, many people, especially opposition supporters, were increasingly active on their individual social media accounts. They shared official messages from election leaders and committees and made their own posts encouraging participation in the elections. Information about government corruption, scandals and other facts that could not be found in the government-leaning public or private media was shared widely.

The high participation level of women voters in the election had several determining factors. The importance of women as electoral subjects in 2023 was evident by the record 43.8 percent of women candidates on parliamentary lists. No election to date has had so many female politicians at the top of the electoral lists—24.9⁴. Every campaign referenced women's rights and women's participation in the public sphere, even ultra-conservative parties like Konfederacja which do not normally address the problems of this group.

Women's issues in the campaign

Nowa Lewica (NL) [New Left] presented the most comprehensive programme of women's issues, which not only addressed reproductive rights, but also made demands for specific solutions related to the labour market, family policy, countering violence and increasing women's participation in science. It was also the first committee to hold an election convention strictly on women's rights in June 2023.

PO also raised awareness of these issues among its constituents and its own activists. This was especially true of the demand to legalize abortion up to the twelfth week of pregnancy. The larger programme was not as thorough as NL's however, containing mainly pro-family solutions and no specific demands related to gender-based violence. Donald Tusk, however, persuasively emphasised in almost every public speech how women's rights would be a key issue for his future government.

The Trzecia Droga (TD) [Third Way] electoral committee, which is less liberal in its worldview—especially regarding the abortion law—also addressed reproductive

rights such as access to in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and gynaecological care. Its programme raised new areas of importance for women in Poland, such as the situation of rural women, the wage gap and professional support for victims of sexual violence.

Thanks to high turnout among undecided voters, women and young people, the opposition won the 2023 parliamentary elections

Under pressure from opposition actions, PiS had to address the topic of women's rights as well. Traditionally, PiS narratives address the demands of women who are mothers, and therefore presents mainly the family policy achievements of its own government. In the 2023 campaign, however, disavowals of feminists and women fighting for abortion rights occurred much more frequently. Elżbieta Witek, the Speaker of Parliament, became the main face of this narrative about 'vulgar, aggressive women who take to the streets and deprave children.'

Konfederacja's women politicians picked up on the importance of the female electorate, albeit during the final straight of the campaign. The party had scant mention of women in its programme, but Konfederacja women candidates appeared at the election convention and encouraged other women to vote for the party.

Thanks to high turnout among undecided voters, women and young people, the opposition won the 2023 parliamentary elections. Due to the programmatic difference of the governing coalition, implementation of these groups' demands will not be easy. Reproductive rights were almost the main electoral topic, but the coalition partners differ on the extent of laws on abortion legalization. The same is true regarding solutions to issues like housing access which are important for young people. However, those in power will have to find a way to do so in the upcoming local elections in April and the European Parliament elections in June. Repeating the voter turnout record will not be easy, but it is not impossible.

⁴ Druciarek M., Nizyńska A., Przybysz I., *Election Campaign 2023 from a gender equality perspective: women's rights in media discourse and election programs*, Institute of Public Affairs.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE “NOWA LEWICA” ELECTION CAMPAIGN

By **Bartosz Machalica**, *Historian and Political Scientist, Nowa Lewica, Ignacy Daszyński Centre*

Polish social democrats aimed at winning at least as many votes, as in previous elections. Bartosz Machalica, himself engaged in the campaigns, tells the story of how the campaign was planned and implemented. Nowa Lewica learned that key to success was to address specific social groups that were potential voters. Those were especially young women, disappointed with attacks on women’s rights by the PiS government. The main competitor was the extreme right Konfederacja—a natural target for progressive party advocating human rights and social face of capitalism. Crucial was participation of the Million-Hearts-March, during which the values proclaimed by social democrats were clearly expressed and met with positive response of the public. Also the fact that female leaders joined male leaders as the faces of the campaign. Although in the end the New Left lost seats in the parliament in comparison to previous elections, the party became a member of the governing coalition, gaining for the first time in 18 years, possibility to deliver on electoral promises. Bartosz Machalica is historian and political scientist, advisor to the Nowa Lewica leader Włodzimierz Czarzasty.

The Polish social democratic party Nowa Lewica (NL) [New Left] entered the 2023 election year with support at 8.4 percent.¹ At the beginning of the year, the National Council of NL decided that NL co-chairman Włodzimierz Czarzasty would lead the election staff. The statutory bodies of NL and Razem decided that Razem candidates would run in the parliamentary elections on the NL lists. The Polish Socialist Party and “Unia Pracy” decided to also run their candidates on the NL lists. This meant that all left-wing circles in Poland found their candidates running on the NL list. Journalists speculated during this time that all the democratic opposition parties might run on a single list as a united front against the incumbent Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice] government, but this ultimately did not materialize. Instead, a decision was made to continue on the “Senate Pact” for the simultaneously held elections for the second chamber, the Senate. Only for these elections, all democratic opposition parties and local government officials agreed on joint candidates in all 100 single-mandate constituencies.

Segmentation and Voter Profiles

In the first months of 2023 the election campaign preparation team prepared social research, the implementation

of which was commissioned to the Institute for Social and Market Research (IBRiS). In the first quarter of 2023 IBRiS carried out survey research on a targeted sample of several thousand respondents who did not exclude voting Left in 2023. The survey, which used the Shalom Schwartz Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ), asked questions regarding acceptance of the Left’s key proposals. A range of related questions was used to segment the potential electorate of the Left to whom the Left should direct its message during the election campaign.

*Progressive Reformers,
Liberal Individualists,
and Feminists*

In the end, five segments, other than the hard Left electorate, were identified. The ‘hard Left’ electorate refers to voters who voted for the Left in 2019 and declared to vote for it again in 2023. The other five segments identified as potential Left voters were named as the ‘Progressive Reformers’, ‘Liberal Individualists’, ‘Feminists’, ‘Social Conservatives’, and ‘Conservative Contrarians’. The latter two segments—the Social Conservatives and Conservative Contrarians—were subsequently excluded from the targeted messaging group in line with the recommendation of experts from IBRiS. Both groups were considered to have conservative worldviews in opposition to the Left agenda, and the Conservative Contrarians appeared to lack

¹ January 2023 average calculated by ewybory.eu portal.

strong views or even hold contradictory views on many issues, which would make it difficult to effectively target political communications towards this group.

The remaining three segments—the Progressive Reformers, Liberal Individualists and Feminists—were rated as having high potential to vote for the Left. These groups, like the hard Left electorate, were characterized by their left-wing worldviews, including agreement on limiting the privileges of the Catholic Church and its participation in public life, support for gender equality, and progressive stances on bodily autonomy issues such as legalization of abortion and reimbursement for contraception and assisted reproduction services like in-vitro fertilization. However, voters from these segments held much more diverse views on other state policies such as immigration, the 500+ children benefit, climate protection measures, the tax system, pension reform, and foreign policy issues like attitudes towards the EU and Germany's role in the EU.

Each segment had a distinct socio-demographic profile. Progressive Reformers tended to be older (40 percent aged 50-69, one in three were retirees) with higher education levels, tended to reside in large cities, and due to the older age of the group most did not have young children. Liberal Individualists similarly resided in large cities and had no children but were younger overall than the Progressive Reformers. Nearly 80 percent of the so-called Feminists were women, mostly under the age of 40, but unlike the other segments, many resided in medium-size and smaller urban centers and had school-age children.

*Anti-abortion Law and
Patriarchal Discourse
Pushed Women to the Left*

The three segments also differed in their professed values. Progressive Reformers were closest to the hard-Left electorate in their worldviews. In the case of the hard electorate, approximately half were religious non-believers, while for the Reformers this ratio was slightly lower. Both groups considered social justice, equal opportunities for all, openness to people, including those with different beliefs, and concern for the environment as important values. Strong support for freedom of expression and democracy, as well as contact with culture and the arts were other identified values. Liberal

Individualists were found to support the welfare state and its benefits but did not fully support redistribution of resources to reduce social inequality, preferring an entrepreneurial approach. The Liberals demonstrated relatively high levels of social conformity and little willingness to make personal sacrifices, for example related to climate justice. Feminists were pushed toward the Left by PiS and Party's anti-abortion law and patriarchal discourses. The Feminists were not radical, however, but women who want to live in a system that allows them to live comfortably and realize their ambitions without being reduced to the role of mothers and wives only. This group was characterized by high levels of concern about both physical security (Poland's military, aversion to immigrants) and social security (retirement, health care).

*Faces for the
Main Campaign Messages*

After segmentation, dozens of focus-group interviews (FGIs) were conducted to refine the appropriate campaign message and to select leaders who would best communicate the values held by the electorate and the benefits the electorate would gain through implementation of the Left's programme. In the end, the staff chose six leaders to communicate the campaign message. In 2019, three leaders from each party of the unifying Left led the campaign: Robert Biedroń (Wiosna), Włodzimierz Czarzasty (SLD), and Adrian Zandberg (Razem). For the 2023 campaign, three women were added to this group: Magdalena Biejat (Razem), Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk (NL, SLD faction), Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus (NL, Wiosna faction). Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk was replaced by Anna-Maria Zhukowska (NL, SLD faction) during the campaign at selected election events. This change was due to the strong presence of women in the electorate of the Left, which became particularly evident after the protests of women following the tightening of anti-abortion laws in Poland by the action of the Constitutional Court in October 2020.

Setting Up the Core Campaign Issues

The Left's 2023 campaign was based on six priority, programme, and communication pillars: public services, construction of 300,000 low-cost rental housing units, labour, women's rights, senior citizen policy and pensions, and secular state.

*Polarization with the
Polish right-wing extremist
Party “Konfederacja”*

Criticism of Polish rightwing-extremist Party “Konfederacja” [Confederation] was also an important element of the Left’s narrative in late August and September. During the holiday period, the far-right recorded an average support level of 12.5 percent (this number was higher in individual polls) and was assured the third place on the electoral podium, which would have likely resulted in a parliamentary majority for PiS and the Konfederacja. The focus group data showed that many of the Left’s women voters were terrified by this scenario, leading the Left’s election staff to build the polarisation with the Konfederacja. The Left’s basic message could be summarized as follows: ‘In this election we are going for a win—for a win against PiS, for a new government. Today it is already clear that real victory, that is, who will form a governing majority, will be determined by who is on the podium. Only the Left is a force that has a real chance of beating the Konfederacja and getting on that podium.’ The rivalry between the Left and the Konfederacja was a competition for the younger generation of Polish women and men. The bastion of support for the Left was young women, for the Konfederacja, young men. The Left ultimately gained more votes than the Konfederacja.

*Momentum of the
Million-Hearts-March*

During the campaign, the Left presented its programme priorities at election events, beginning and concluding with two large election conventions. Smaller thematic conventions which presented the election programme and the six priorities were organized on other weekends. The Left held a separate convention in Vienna and presented its plan to construct 300,000 low-cost rental units, which was based on the experience of the Viennese housing programme. Following the success of the 4 June march which gave momentum to the Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform] campaign, the Left joined the ‘Million-Hearts-March’ on 1 October in Warsaw. The October march featured well-received speeches by NL leaders Robert Biedroń and Włodzimierz Czarzasty. Włodzimierz Czarzasty’s speech, in particular, achieved record social media reach.

After the march the Left increased its share in the polls that was accompanied by a decline in the polls for Trzecia Droga (TD) [Third Way]—a coalition of the Polish People’s Party and Szymon Hołownia’s Poland 2050. Some polls at this time even showed TD not meeting the 8 percent electoral threshold for coalitions. When the poll results were converted into seats, TD failure to cross the electoral threshold would result in PiS winning a majority of seats in the Sejm and the continuation of Jaroslaw Kaczynski’s rule. Media outlets sympathetic to the opposition subsequently increased TD’s exposure. Szymon Hołownia performed well in the debate organized by TVP, as did Left representative Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus. In the final days of the campaign, Donald Tusk’s positive assessment of opposition voters voting for TD was crucial. Former President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, an enduring authority for Left voters, made similar comments.

The Left’s Return to Government after 18 Years

The election results reflected these factors, as well as the record voter turnout of 74 percent. The Left gained 26 parliamentary and nine senatorial seats, allowing the Left to enter the government and take governing responsibility for the first time in 18 years. A coalition agreement was signed which included most of the Left’s programme proposals. Krzysztof Gawkowski became Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digitization, Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk became Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Dariusz Wiczorek, Minister of Science, and Katarzyna Kotula became Poland’s first-ever Minister of Equality. Razem, which forms the Coalition Parliamentary Club of the Left with NL, the “Unia Pracy” and the Polish Socialist Party, did not enter the government based on a decision of the party’s National Council.

The stated reason was the lack of financing guarantees for left-wing programmes in the coalition agreement, but it should be emphasized that the text of the agreement does not include any provisions on financing the demands submitted by any coalition party. During the 13 December 2023 vote of confidence, all members of the Parliamentary Club voted in favour of the government of Donald Tusk, a coalition comprised of PO, PSL, Poland 2050 and the Left.

VALUES OF THE LEFT

By **Karolina Ziolo-Puzuk**, *Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Nowa Lewica, Ignacy Daszyński Centre*

This contribution is an analysis of the values represented in the campaign slogans of social democratic candidates. The slogan coined by the Nowa Lewica election committee to accompany the national campaign referred to heart and thus emotions. Individual candidates added to this a modern take on patriotism, speaking most often about Poland, while also underlining local identity and focusing on the future, equality, youth, women and care. Karolina Ziolo-Puzuk is a researcher and lecturer in linguistics at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and is politically engaged with Nowa Lewica.

During the 2023 parliamentary election campaign, the Nowa Lewica [New Left] election committee used the slogan '♥ I have on the left', referencing the well-known saying indicating a speaker's leftist sympathies while also implying that the current parliamentary elections were more about values, or heart, than rationality. In addition to this main slogan, candidates included individual slogans on their materials (e.g., leaflets, posters, banners or in social media posts) to distinguish themselves from other candidates and indicate their identification with the values of the Polish left. This essay will analyse 107 Nowa Lewica candidate slogans from across Poland.

Trends in election slogans

The form, content and purpose of election slogans have changed significantly over the past thirty years. In the first elections of 1989, slogans relied heavily on rhymes, aphorisms, rhetorical questions and other mnemonic tools in order to surprise and be memorable to voters. Over time, slogans became increasingly programmatic and ideological while the importance of interesting forms diminished. Contemporary election slogans overwhelmingly consist of three words on average and are generally single sentences or sentence equivalents. In 2023, only 10 of the 107 slogans analysed used a linguistic play on words or joke based on a candidate's name. However, even these slogans contained programmatic or ideological overtones. Some examples from the campaign include: 'BO CHodzi o Polska' (the candidate's surname is Boch); 'Kulaga helps' (Kulaga is the candidate's surname); 'Running for the Poland of our dreams' (Dorota Pędzwiatr's slogan—Pędzwiatr has a close meaning to 'fast runner'); 'I will grind your

problems' (Emilia Młynek-Bartkowska's slogan—the surname Młynek means 'mill'). A particularly noteworthy slogan came from Silesian candidate Michał Gęsiarz ('gooseherd'), who promoted himself using a well-known quote from Renaissance literature. The slogan 'Silesians are not geese, they have their own language', refers to Mikolaj Rey's maxim 'Poles are not geese, they have their own language' and plays on the candidate's surname. This slogan is not only a strong declaration of Silesian identity and distinctiveness but is also the only slogan analysed which uses elements of a language other than Polish, in this case Silesian.

Jacek Dehnel, a prominent Polish writer running in Warsaw, referenced pop culture in his slogan 'Let's Go Medieval on This Reality' and another 'We Demand All Life' recalls the 1907 declaration of young writer Zofia Nałkowska at the Congress of Polish Women. This slogan, demanding rather than wishing for equal rights and opportunities, appeared first during the abortion protests, drawing a strong line between historic and modern Polish feminism. It also presents a diagnosis of the situation of Polish women and the lack of respect for their rights, illustrated by the tightening of the already restrictive abortion law in recent years. Left-wing activists in 2023 do not merely wish for, but strongly and unequivocally demand all life.

An analysis of concepts and values

A corpus, or frequency analysis of the slogans indicates which concepts and values were considered central to candidates and the leftist electorate. The words that appeared most frequently in the analysed slogans, and thus indicate the most central values for candidates,

Figure 1:

Graphic showing the frequency of keywords from the corpus analysis (corpusomat.pl)



were 'Poland' (11 slogans), 'youth' (9 slogans), 'future' (8 slogans) and 'humanity', 'equality' and 'woman' (each in 6 slogans). One of the pillars of the left, the secular state, appears in only two slogans: 'The secular state'; 'Secular, green, equal Poland'. This second slogan is the only one in which the environment, understood in any way, appears. The most frequent word pairings are the adjective-noun phrases 'young candidate' (4 slogans), 'equal opportunity' (2 slogans), 'your neighbour' (2 slogans) and 'your vote' (2 slogans).

Based on the slogans analysed, it appears that 'Poland' and 'youth' (along with associated qualities mentioned in the slogans of candidates like energy, readiness to act, thinking about the future, progress) are the core values of the candidates of the left. The idea of 'Poland' is frequently accompanied with ideas of community, joint action and freedom. This is illustrated, for example, by the following slogans: 'Together for a Better Poland'; 'Together for the Future'; 'Together We Will Change Poland'. Slogans that symbolised 'youth' included: 'Energy and efficiency'; 'Young point of view'; 'Youth to politics'; 'Equality, youth, dignity'. Many slogans emphasised both youth and community: 'Together we change Poland'; 'Invest in Poland, Invest in the young'; 'Together we rejuvenate the Sejm'. This indicates that leftist patriotism is identified with community, equality, freedom, but also a focus on the future and the young. Candidate slogans in 2023 did not focus on the past and the achievements of the left after 1989. Also absent are references to authorities or party figures who could bolster a candidate's credibility; it appears that candidates wanted to stand on their own merit without additional support. Slogans were frequently straightforward descriptions of the candidate, emphasising their attributes like activity and diligence:

'The most active Podlasie MP'; 'The most active and hard-working of the MPs in their district'; 'Defender of your causes'; 'Last on the list, first in action'; 'First to work, second on the list'. Left-wing politicians clearly aimed to demonstrate their diligence, activity, concern, and to a lesser extent, their effectiveness. Interestingly, while industriousness stands out as important, labour, historically an important point of leftist programmes, appears in only one slogan: 'For a Silesia of good and decent work'.

Local origins, or being 'from here', was also important for candidates. In addition to the aforementioned slogan referencing Silesia, other slogans include: 'I'm from here'; 'Candidate from Mokotow for Mokotow'; 'We're from Kutno'; 'Your boy from Opole'; 'Together for Warmia and Mazury'; 'Radom my home'; 'Your neighbour, your MP'; 'Your neighbour on the left'. Demonstrating local origin helps candidates build credibility, indicates their knowledge of regional issues, and implies that the solutions they propose come from the experience of living and operating in the area. While fifteen years ago the idea that 'we are all Europeans' or 'citizens of Europe' was regularly emphasised, that is a song of the past. Today, candidates use their local origins as their trump card in the campaign.

Leftist patriotism is identified with community, equality, freedom, but also a focus on the future and the young

Care and concern for others also turned out to be important values, as expressed in slogans emphasising the fight against exclusion ('Dignity without barriers';

'Dignity to women, support for the vulnerable'; 'I am running because women's rights are not subject to negotiation or bargaining'; 'A person first'; 'People count, not profits'), but above all in slogans where candidates present themselves as advocates of voters' issues, for example by standing firm against human rights violations: 'Courage and Concern'; 'Will Never Walk Alone' (an extension of the popular anti-abortion protest slogan 'You Shall Not Walk Alone'); 'Defender of Your Issues'; 'With You and for You'; 'In Your Name'. Many slogans also referenced key individual rights, implying that a vote for that candidate will guarantee and strengthen those rights. This is expressed directly in the slogans: 'Your Vote for Equality'; 'Together for Equal Opportunity'; 'Freedom, Equality, Dignity'; 'Freedom, Equality, Solidarity'. If candidates sought to demonstrate concern for voters' issues, act as their advocate and protect individual rights, one could wonder whether these candidates see themselves on an equal footing with the voter or as representatives of the community with a certain advantage over them, a mission to fulfil from the top-down.

Nowa Lewica candidates as missionaries

Scholar Katarzyna Kłosińska posited that politicians either take on the role of expert or missionary.¹ An expert is a person who acts instead of talking. In communications they use words related to competence, effectiveness and experience. The relationship between politician-expert and voter is one of equality, though they expect activity from citizens. A political missionary can be a leader, similar to a romantic bard, who builds up the nation, or can act as a father of the nation, expressing concern for citizens and caring for them. In this case, the relationship between the citizen and the politician-missionary is not equal. In addition,

the missionary's message is dominated by pathos and frequent references to moral values. On the basis of this classification and the analysis of Nowa Lewica slogans, it appears that Nowa Lewica candidates wanted to present themselves as missionaries who are not fully professional but make up for it with youth and diligence. They are not necessarily fathers of the nation, but rather older siblings ready to take care of and give support to citizens.

*Candidates of Nowa Lewica
present themselves as missionaries
who are not fully professional,
but make up for it with
youth and diligence*

Only one of the analysed slogans reminded voters of when to go to the polls. This could mean that candidates see their electorate as politically engaged and informed, so reminding them of their civic duty is not necessary. In addition, it could mean that candidates see their electorate as already adequately motivated to vote. Thus, there is little need to develop slogans directly requesting votes: 'A vote for me is a vote to build accessible rental housing'; 'Your good shot at the top' (candidate number 10 on the list); 'Your vote for the future'; 'Your vote for equality'. But even in these slogans, values or specific programme proposals come first.

So, what values were most important to Nowa Lewica candidates in the 2023 elections? Based on analysis of the collected election slogans, it can be summarised that industriousness, youth, future, localism, concern and Poland come first. Nowa Lewica is patriotic, looks forward to its own youth and industriousness for inspiration rather than the past. And it wants to act locally.

¹ Katarzyna Kłosińska, "Missionary" and "Expert"—two figures implied by the broadcasting "I" in Polish political texts after 1998, in *Oblicza komunikacji*, 7/2014, pp. 115-125.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLAND'S 2023 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

By **Wiktor Wojciechowski**

In 2023, social media necessarily had to be one of the most important campaign tools for all electoral committees. Social media spots focused on polarisation and people's emotions. Each committee based on surveys and analytical tools to target their audiences. The narrative of PiS in social media based mainly on awakening negative emotions, presenting Donald Tusk as a great threat for the country, among other things. The advantage of the democratic opposition—writes Wiktor Wojciechowski—consisted on the variety of messages the committees conveyed, and the fact that the spots played on positive emotions as well. The campaign in social media was also successful due to the Million-Hearts-March, and the personalities of opposition leaders, who knew how to address the youth. Wiktor Wojciechowski is political strategist and campaigner.

The digital dimension of the 2023 parliamentary election campaign was record-breaking in every respect, including number of ads run, election committee spending and outreach to women voters. The relative share of committee budgets allocated to internet campaigning was also record-breaking. Clearly the political establishment in Poland has understood the value of reaching voters, especially those under the age of 60, through smartphone screens.

Voters in Poland get the largest share of their information from the internet. Nearly 25 million adult Poles, or more than 80 percent of eligible voters, are users of at least one digital platform. YouTube has the most users (27 million Poles, including those under 18), followed by Facebook, (26.5 million users), Instagram (16 million users) and TikTok (13 million users). The highest-ranking news portals are Wp.pl (10.5 million users), Onet.pl (9.5 million users) and tvn24.pl (8.5 million users).

According to surveyed voters, online news portals are their main source of information about politics, followed by social media and television. A far lower share get their political information from print media or radio. The importance of online media for Poles was why political parties saw it necessary to communicate their messages effectively using online platforms. Advertisement spending, candidate presence and relationship building online, and adapting and optimising messages

for social media algorithms indicate that all nationwide electoral committees were well aware of this.

Mobilisation of young people and women

Voter turnout in this election was a record high, with a particularly large increase in turnout among young women. Social media is the primary source of political information for voters under 30, leading several pro-frequency campaigns to exclusively target young people and young women.

The aim of the pro-frequency campaigns was to pick up the momentum of the women's protests of 3 years ago

Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice] lost young voters on 22 October 2020 through Julia Przyłębska's Constitutional Tribunal verdict which tightened abortion laws in Poland. This verdict led many of the youngest voters to view PiS as a backward-looking party from a previous era. For young women in particular, this was a formative moment of political awakening and engagement.

The role of the pro-frequency campaigns, both party-led and external, was to rekindle this fire of rebellion three years later, only this time leading people to the polls rather than the protests. The campaigns targeting young voters appeared to be a success, with turnout among this age cohort increasing 25 percent from the 2019 elections.

Targeted messaging

Each of the electoral committees segmented the voter population online based on demographic data—primarily age, gender and place of residence—then targeted their messages and appealed to emotions based on those deemed to be most favourable to their potential voters. Available research revealed that, while most committees evenly targeted the population, Lewica [Left] directed a disproportionate amount of its resources towards appealing to young women and Konfederacja [Confederation] for young men. Subsequently, Lewica focused heavily on women’s rights issues while the coalition led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform], for example, focused on economic issues.

Each electoral committee appealed to a specific set of emotions in their messaging: PiS catered to the fears and anxieties of voters, PO focused on hopeful messaging about change and also on settling wrongs, Lewica emphasised its voters hopes for change and fears of Konfederacja rule, Trzecia Droga (TD) [Third Way] focused on moderate, not revolutionary change, while Konfederacja spoke to anger and fear about rule by the ‘gang of four’ (PiS, PO, Lewica, TD).

Campaign messaging across mediums

Another unique aspect of the digital campaign was how the national media picked up narratives broadcasted by the election committees online, relaying them in the main editions of television news programmes or as major stories on national news websites. A prominent example of this transmission across mediums were narratives about the referendum questions on accepting refugees. PiS and PO released spots on their social media channels about the referendum refugee questions, using content and editing appropriate for social media and appealing to negative emotions. These

spots, which generated significant commentary and divided the public into those defending or attacking the respective messages, became a campaign event in itself comparable to a party convention. The spots released on X (formerly Twitter) were the most important as far as the entire referendum campaign was concerned.

The spots released by election committees were not the only ones going viral. Candidates from further down the lists and with fewer resources were able to make it to the national media thanks to an ingenious spot released on social media. The reality of the campaign was that ‘news is news’ and was replicated across mediums regardless of the distribution channel.

*Social media was helpful
for candidates from
down the list*

This campaign was the first time voters used platforms like YouTube on such a large scale, acting as a replacement for television, and requiring committees to adapt their ads technically and in terms of content. The trend for reaching the classic ‘TV viewer’ appears paradoxically to lead through social media platforms and streaming services rather than strictly through TV stations.

Polarisation and the role of algorithms

A striking element of this campaign was the influence of digital algorithms in terms of the form and content of spots. The materials that received the most coverage were very similar. Unlike previous election campaigns, where spots primarily consisted of videos without subtitles, this format was virtually non-existent in the 2023 online campaign. Scaled-down video footage with pre-titles, energetic audio backing, sharpened editing and short frames reigned supreme. This content often relied on strong emotions, usually based anger and fear. This, of course, fit the mould that the algorithms were feeding at the time.

*The entire PiS campaign had
essentially one goal: to arouse
fear among voters of Donald Tusk’s
return to power*

Polarising content aroused the most emotion. The entire PiS campaign had essentially one goal: to arouse fear among voters of Donald Tusk's return to power. The PO campaign was much more nuanced in this regard. In addition to stirring up anger against PiS for malfeasance during its eight years in office, the campaign also aimed to stimulate positive emotions related to hope for a better tomorrow. The best example of this was the Million-Hearts-March, which was the highlight of the campaign.

Other parties also recognised the impact of emotions and polarising messages. Like PO, Lewica based its narrative on the two legs of hope and fear, in this case the fear of Konfederacja's coming to power. A PiS and Konfederacja government would be even worse, a world not much different from the world of the Handmaid's Tale. This polarisation was necessary to utilise the algorithms in such a way that committees could maximise their reach.

Money is not everything

Funds allocated for social media advertising increased reach. However, unlike in the case of physical, television or radio advertisements, funding for social media advertising was not the only factor contributing to digital reach.

PiS spent by far the most campaign funds on internet advertising, often spending several times more than its next competitor. This included paid campaigns from state-owned companies which alluded to the incumbent government's achievements. Foundations favourable to the ruling party also ran campaigns supporting participation in the referendum. These combined efforts meant that PiS had a significant advantage over PO, not to mention other parties when it came to campaign spending online.

However, despite their much smaller budget, PO achieved a lower CPM (cost per thousand impressions) than PiS, which may reflect the greater spontaneous spread of KO's spots. KO's 1 October 2023 Million-Hearts-March was covered extensively online and was the event with the most reach during the campaign and most online coverage in the history of Polish politics.

The structure of the digital campaign

The digital campaign was carried out on a more general, nationwide level, through more narrow, paid campaigns targeted at specific voters, and at the local levels where messages were spread directly by candidates.

The nationwide campaign was broadest in reach, including messages from party leaders and party spots or ads, spread mainly on YouTube and aimed at the general electorate. These messages generally conveyed the most important information to voters, and due to this were generally the messages that made it to national news headlines, news portals or television programmes.

The next, more narrow component of the campaign was the paid campaigns targeting a specific group of voters. With the exception of PiS, electoral committees generally targeted medium-size demographic groups ranging from a few hundred thousand to a few million voters. Committees targeted demographic groups deemed through survey research and analytic tools like the Facebook pixel to be favourable to their messages. At the central level, the committees did not generally enter the smaller segments.

At the local level—which included districts and counties—candidates themselves reached out to voters with party messages. One exception to this was the PiS county campaign, which relied on more than 370 targeted ads addressed to voters in counties with critical seats.

As a result of this structure, voters received political messages on three levels that were generally presented by different parts of the campaign: political leaders delivered the main messages, committees targeted voters on issues important to the campaign, and candidates presented their personal brand as well as spoke to local issues.

The role of individual politicians

During the campaign two politicians communicated particularly well and directly with voters: PO leader Donald Tusk and Konfederacja leader Sławomir Mentzen.

*Tusk: successful communication
by decreasing distance
and disseminating hopeful
messages*

Despite his age, Donald Tusk communicated well with voters of younger generations. Tusk's social media team generated content that aligned with current trends, and Tusk decreased the 'distance' between himself and voters through naturally-delivered statements that showed his sense of humour. He achieved the highest follower growth rate on the Meta [Facebook and Instagram] and TikTok platforms, and together with Mentzen led in monthly reach. Tusk's communication strategy appeared to borrow a few tactics from the American Obama or Biden campaigns, disseminating a hopeful message that distinguished him from the party spots.

Looking at the election data and exit polling, PO achieved its best ever result with the 18-29 age group. It was feared before the campaign began that junior politician Rafał Trzaskowski would attract younger voters, but this did not materialise. The voting preferences of younger voters likely had many factors, but it is clear that Tusk actively created good communication with the younger and older generation of female voters.

*Mentzen: changing to
a mainstream party image,
catching mistakes
made by opponents and
presenting visions*

The other strong political personality during the campaign was Sławomir Mentzen, who has built his popularity online over the past several years. He is known for his brilliance, strong oration skills and ability to adapt his content to the audience.

His communication style was different from Donald Tusk's, focusing on catching mistakes or absurdities of opponents in a confrontational style. However, he also presented a vision of change, particularly related to tax policy. Mentzen's law firm specialises in tax optimization, and on this basis, he established himself as an authority on economic issues.

Mentzen's audience has historically consisted of young men and people whose desire for simple solutions to complex problems can make them susceptible to conspiracy theories. Mentzen's well-planned communications served this need very effectively. In the process, he changed the image of Konfederacja from a fringe and extreme group personified by its former leader Janusz Korwin-Mikke to a relatively mainstream party. Despite his personal appeal, however, Mentzen could not overcome his party's anti-women programme, leading Konfederacja to lose voters in the final stretches to PO and also to TD.

Why did the democratic opposition prevail?

A combination of political and structural factors in the digital campaign led to the success of the democratic opposition in the elections. The first factor of importance was the decision of the opposition parties to not run on a single list. PO, Lewica, TD and Konfederacja all 'played a different piano' so to speak, targeting their communications to different and smaller segments of voters, or 'internet bubbles'. In contrast, PiS directed its message to a much larger 10 million voter segment.

The ability of opposition parties to differentiate their messages, emotions or visuals to a target group was also more cost effective. This targeted messaging allowed them to mobilise many groups that may not have voted for a single list with more homogenous messages.

The second factor was the ability of the opposition parties to appeal to voters' emotions. After eight years in government, PiS put everything on the line, relying almost entirely on fears of a Donald Tusk government to mobilise unconvinced voters. However, the absence of a positive vision of the future associated with hope meant that PiS did not capture voters who were tired of the agitations of politics. This ability to utilise both positive and negative emotions in the digital campaign was a success of the opposition parties.

The third factor was the success of the opposition's campaign events, demonstrated by the record-breaking digital spread of the Million-Hearts-March organised by PO with the participation of Lewica. This

event had the most digital reach in the history of Polish politics and reached twice as many people as the next most viral campaign event. Messaging from the march dominated the web for several days, both organically and through the use of paid ads on social media and Google.

*Effective (online)
communication completes
the three prerequisites
of differentiation,
positive visions and
successful events*

Finally, opposition politicians like Donald Tusk, Szymon Hołownia or the leaders and women leaders of Lewica were more effective communicators than PiS leaders. Their ability to humanise themselves and appear natural online was an invaluable resource that translated into increased reach. Jarosław Kaczyński had no direct communication with voters on social media, and Mateusz Morawiecki tried, but was less effective than Donald Tusk.

These combined factors allowed the democratic opposition parties to fully 'spread their wings', so to speak, in their digital campaigns, which were broadly more effective than the competitions.

HIGH HOPES, BIG DISAPPOINTMENT— RIGHT WING RADICALS IN THE POLISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

By Michał Sutowski, Krytyka Polityczna

In spring 2023, at the outset of the election campaign, the liberal democratic camp not only worried about the possibility of losing against PiS, but also about the rising popularity of the right-wing radicals from Konfederacja. Although the party declared to be against PiS, it was not excluded that in case of a good enough result, Konfederacja would at least support another PiS-led government after the elections. Michał Sutowski, political scientist, author at Krytyka Polityczna, analyses the reasons for the sudden drop of support for Konfederacja during the key last phases of the campaign. He points to several factors, mainly in the political environment, that contributed to this defeat, and notices that the high turnout among women gave the ultimate blow to Konfederacja's hopes for a good result.

The victory of Poland's coalition of democratic opposition parties was not a foregone conclusion until election night on 15 October 2023. Polls indicated an almost certain first place for the coalition led by Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice] and second place for the coalition led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform] leaving the results of the three remaining lists—Trzecia Droga (TD) [Third Way], Nowa Lewica (NL) [New Left] and Konfederacja [Confederation]—to determine the balance of power in parliament. Above all loomed the possibility of Jarosław Kaczyński's party to form a coalition and thus extend the rule of the right-wing-populist camp and perhaps 'close' the semi-authoritarian model of government.

Kaczyński's hope?

The change in government resulting from the elections was ultimately determined by the unexpected performance of the Trzecia Droga, the right-wing of the liberal democratic parties. For several months of the campaign, however, it was the far-right Konfederacja that was seen as the dark horse of the election. Although Konfederacja leaders declared—as their voters expected—that they would 'turn the tables' of the establishment and maintain an equal distance from both sides of the political conflict, there were many indications that PiS could win its support. Whether through the takeover of Konfederacja's deputies by the

Kaczyński camp, through tacit support of the government for various benefits, or simply through the Konfederacja's entry into the government, it would have meant an even further shift right of power in Poland, an intensification of anti-Ukrainian and anti-German messages in domestic and foreign policy, a broadening of the influence of radical nationalist and traditionalist circles and a further erosion of the rights of women and minorities.

*For several months
of the campaign it was
the far-right Konfederacja
that was seen as the dark horse of
the election*

This threat seemed very real; support for the Konfederacja in the polls bounced above the 5 percent electoral threshold in early 2023, began to approach 10 percent in the spring, and reached 12.5 percent in mid-summer, three months before the elections and just before the intensive phase of the election campaign. This would have translated into dozens of seats in the Sejm, making the Konfederacja the kingmaker of the new governing arrangement and would have given its leaders a powerful lever of influence over the other parties. The leadership of the Konfederacja's hopes for this or an even greater result were evident in the statements of the leadership and the voices of

numerous commentators, but also by the limitations on new member enrolment as the polls became more promising.

Disappointment

The election night mood on 15 October, however, was already quite different. Even before the exit polls were made public, one of the leaders of Konfederacja's nationalist wing, Witold Tumanowicz, spoke about the powerful resentment of all forces against a party that speaks 'hard truths' and refuses to accept 'the race of social promises.' When the results turned out to be less than half of what was expected (Libertarian wing leader Sławomir Mentzen lamented: 'We were supposed to have a double-digit result and 40 deputies. We got 7.16 percent and 18 deputies'), the reaction of those gathered turned from expectant celebration to disappointment. Soon after the settlements and public search for culprits of the defeat began.

The reasons assumed for Konfederacja's poor showing depended on the interpretations of the various wings in the party. Prominent far-right libertarian Janusz Korwin-Mikke—known for his misogynistic, anti-Semitic and other outrageous statements—blamed those party leaders who ordered him to limit his media presence. In other words, the party's failure was due to a shortage of right-wing radicalism and succumbing to 'political correctness'. Supporters of the more 'moderate' wing, on the other hand, argued that it was Korwin-Mikke scandalous statements relativising paedophilia that scared off so-called 'normie' voters. Other leaders like Sławomir Mentzen suggested that the overrepresentation of eccentric personalities—anti-vaccination advocates, conspiracy theorists, Russophiles—was behind the poor result. Even the removal of some of the most extreme politicians from the lists—like anti-vaccine activist Justyna Socha, anti-Ukrainian political scientist Leszek Sykulski, and even a supporter of dog meat production—did not help the party.

While there may be certain truths in the statements of Mentzen, as well as the assessment by Konfederacja spokeswoman Anna Bryłka that 'the high election turnout swept us off the stage', an analysis of campaign discourses points to a number of other factors that prevented the Konfederacja from gaining the expected support. Notably, these factors affected virtually every

wing of the party and touched on almost every major theme of the party's messaging.

To recount, Konfederacja entered the elections as a formation comprised of three main wings. First was Sławomir Mentzen's New Hope, which toned down its message from the 2019 general election ('We don't want Jews, homosexuals, abortion, taxes or the European Union') in favour of a more mainstream libertarian populism (criticism of social transfers, taxes, EU climate policy, 'political correctness', etc.). Mentzen sought to present himself as a brilliant economist-technocrat, while at the same time "good sort" inviting a mostly young and male audience to beer meetings. The second wing, headed by Krzysztof Bosak and Witold Tumanowicz, is comprised of nationalists associated with the National Movement. This wing is focused on criticising pro-Ukrainian state policies, including alleged 'privileges' for war refugees. Its members are radically anti-immigrant, proponents of libertarian economic nationalism, critical of pandemic restrictions, highly Eurosceptic, opposed to minority rights and are highly patriarchal. The final wing is the so-called 'Crown of Poland', a milieu centred around film director and publicist Grzegorz Braun. This group can be generally characterised as anti-Semitic, anti-EU, anti-American and anti-Ukrainian, extremely homophobic, supporting the values of pre-Vatican II Catholicism in social and family life, opposed to the state's worldview neutrality, and advocates of numerous conspiracy theories, especially the conspiracy of the COVID-19 pandemic as a plot by global elites to enslave society.

Of these three wings, the first two were most strongly represented on Konfederacja's electoral lists and in the leaders' official messages reaching the mainstream media. Paradoxically, however, the campaign was most successful for Grzegorz Braun, despite being 'silenced' for the duration of the campaign, having some of his supporters removed from the lists, and whose initial starting position in the campaign was inferior. He managed to bring in, in addition to himself, three deputies (out of a total of 18 Konfederacja seats). This should be attributed to the practical lack of competition in the field of anti-vaccine and overtly anti-Semitic messaging. Another contributing factor was Braun's use of communication channels, organising his few but determined supporters around YouTube channels and other media which are largely outside the reach of mainstream media gatekeepers who could filter the most extreme and hateful content.

Konfederacja pointed to several areas of consensus in Polish politics, important at the time to numerous groups of voters, for which it was the sole advocate

Regarding the libertarian and nationalist wings, it is important to emphasise the collapse of Konfederacja's 'uniqueness' narrative, the exposure of the deeply misogynistic nature of its leaders' ideology, as well as the credibility damage the party suffered related to lack of economic expertise. These three points more than any other contributed to the underwhelming electoral performance of Konfederacja. To a certain extent, these depended on mistakes by specific Konfederacja politicians, but to a much greater extent was due to changes in the political environment for which they were unprepared.

As a party seeking to 'turn the tables' on the establishment, Konfederacja pointed to several areas of consensus in Polish politics, important at the time to numerous groups of voters, for which it was the sole advocate. These included low tax policies, support for entrepreneurship (especially small enterprises), and criticism of generous social transfers. It also included scepticism or outright hostility toward helping refugees from Ukraine and a rejection of the strong political commitment to support Ukraine in its war with Russia. Also significant was the fact that the democratic opposition ran with as many as three lists, ranging from the left (NL) through the centre (PO) to the centre-right (TD), each of which differed programmatically. This made it difficult to present the elections as a binary in which Konfederacja was the only alternative.

Regarding economic policies, Konfederacja long managed to present itself as the sole opponent of the statist consensus, represented by the race between PO and PiS regarding the generosity of family benefits and promise of raises for various professional groups. In the final weeks of the campaign, however, TD emerged as a clear competitor for Konfederacja in this realm, promising no increases in value added tax (VAT), corporate income tax (CIT) and personal income tax (PIT) for the entire term, as well as favourable changes in insurance premiums for small businesses and lower taxes for large families.

Long before the elections, PiS also began to intensively seek Konfederacja voters on the issue of Poland's Ukraine policy. The friendship between Presidents Duda and Zelensky ended, and in the spring of 2023 the PiS government unleashed a conflict in the European Union over its ban on Ukrainian grain imports to Poland and competition in the transport market. This political turnaround—aimed at rural Polish voters—quickly erased the image of PiS as a party of pro-Ukrainian consensus, and, detrimental to the Konfederacja, accompanied a narrative of PiS as a tough 'defender of Polish interests'.

Male candidate, male voter

Konfederacja's strongly masculine orientation had long been evident in its voter demographics and in the personalities of its leaders and activists. For instance, Karina Bosak, Krzysztof Bosak's wife, turned out to be the only female deputy in the 18-member club after the elections. The gender disparity was even greater among the younger generation, the decisive group of Konfederacja supporters. Only 26.3 percent of men and 6.3 percent of women in the 18-29 age group supported the party. These figures remained significantly low for the 30-39 age group (15.7 percent of men and 5.8 percent of women supporting the party) and the 40-49 age group (6 percent of men and 3.3 percent of women). These results can easily be explained by the image of male leaders inviting voters for a beer, but also by Konfederacja's association with the 'masculine' Independence March and the overt misogyny of party leaders like Korwin-Mikke.

Just a few months before the election, less than half of Polish women under the age of 34 declared their intention to vote. Eventually, more than 70 percent went to the polls.

While the gender disparity among Konfederacja voters is not a new phenomenon, the election outcome was ultimately determined by voter turnout and its change over time. Just a few months before the election, less than half of Polish women under the age of 34 declared their intention to vote. Eventually, more than 70 percent went to the polls.

Such a significant mobilisation, especially among the younger age cohorts, was in part the result of numerous pro-frequency initiatives aimed at this group. Campaigns such as 'It's your choice', organised by the Voice of Women Initiative and the Batory Foundation, 'Let's get elected' by Krytyka Polityczna and 'Women to the polls' accentuated different political issues but all mobilised women. While in the end, PiS won a majority of female voters, these women were invariably less inclined to vote for Konfederacja than their male counterparts.

Finally, the lack of economic expertise of Konfederacja leaders dealt a powerful blow to its credibility. The popularity of Sławomir Mentzen in particular as a brilliant economic stand-up, 'ploughing through' the socialists of the world in his YouTube monologues, did not hold when challenged by experts in the mainstream media and at open meetings. His discussions with the otherwise very liberal TD candidate Ryszard Petru went viral after Petru used simple tricks to expose Mentzen's incompetence. While Mentzen's most faithful supporters

were not deterred, his slip-ups discouraged many mainstream voters (referred to as 'normies') interested in a free-market economic programme, particularly as TD emerged with an alternative programme.

In conclusion, Konfederacja failed to become the third force in Polish politics during the 2023 elections not so much through the mistakes and excesses of party extremists, but by deeper processes related to the social environment and the discourse of political competitors. Most gratifying among these was that feminist mobilisation over abortion rights translated into electoral mobilisation thanks to the active work of non-governmental circles. Most worrying is that anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, despite the context of the war, has finally found its way into the largest party of the Polish right, PiS. However, a more general and uplifting conclusion to draw from the experience of this election is that nationalism and fascism are most effectively contained by social mobilisation and pluralism among democrats, rather than unity enforced by moralists and technocrats.

THE ROLE OF ANTI-GERMAN MESSAGES IN THE ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN

By Agnieszka Łada-Konefał, *Deutsches Polen-Institut*

Two terms of PiS government led to unprecedented weakening of Polish-German ties at the level of national authorities. For Jarosław Kaczyński, Germany was one of a few crucial scapegoats he used especially when he wanted people to look away from internal problems or political scandals. Agnieszka Łada-Konefał writes about this anti-German rhetoric and juxtaposes it with results of surveys on Polish perception of Germany and Germans. According to the surveys, only a small margin of Poles shares anti-German attitudes with PiS. The persistence of the rhetoric and its strong presence in the by PiS dominated public media, might have however already impacted how Poles look at Germany, and the trend in respondents' answers is to trust Germany a little less than earlier. If the anti-German message of PiS will continue to be spread, the new government will have to act with cautious determination in order to restore good relations between the two countries. Agnieszka Łada-Konefał is political scientist, expert in Polish-German relations and vice director of the Deutsches Polen-Institut.

In the last few years and during the 2023 parliamentary election campaign, politicians and experts close to the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice] party have expressed anti-German statements which portray Germany as a country which threatens Polish sovereignty and Germans as Polish enemies. These statements are aimed at a hardline anti-German electorate which readily accepts aggressive rhetoric and needs a clear, known enemy. However, analysis of surveys from the Polish-German Barometer series indicates that such hardline anti-German voters are relatively few in Poland, with only a few percent of respondents answering negatively to most questions asked about Germany. It would be reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the anti-German narratives of right-wing politicians and media represent attempts to create anti-Germanism, rather than a response to existing, widespread anti-Germanism among voters.

Serious Anti-German Messages from PiS

However, the effects of these anti-German messages are serious. The tone and style of statements about Germany and Germans by the elites of PiS and Solidarna Polska (member of Zjednoczona Prawica [United

Right]) have become more vitriolic over the years. The so-called 'anti-German card' has played a role in more than one election campaign, and the political right has demonstrated distrust to the point of hostility toward Germany between election years.

These messages persist even as European unity, mutual trust and cooperation have become more important for Poland than ever. German investors' sense of security in Poland cannot be overestimated in importance given the deepening economic problems associated with the war in Ukraine, and before that, the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the German minority was the only one of Poland's national minorities to be deprived of its members' entitlement to two out of three hours of German as their mother tongue at school, and the German ambassador has been juxtaposed on posters with Hitler. Speaking of the German coalition agreement, titled 'German responsibility for Europe and the world', the party chairman of PiS alluded to German attempts to build a 'Fourth Reich', despite the positive reception of the agreement in most other European circles. Similarly, in a June 2022 interview with *Gazeta Polska*, PiS party chairman Jarosław Kaczyński claimed that Germany's strategic goal is to control Europe, and that Germany itself is an extremely destructive element in Europe.

There was no shortage of similar statements during the 2023 election campaign. Jarosław Kaczyński repeatedly claimed that it is in the national character of the Germans to dominate at all costs, saying further that ‘this attitude towards Poland as a country that should take into account German interests continues.’¹ As an example, he cited Germany’s opposition to Polish efforts to regulate the Oder River. The PiS chairman argued that Germany treats Poland and Poles with an attitude of superiority.² In turn, he wrote in a letter to his supporters: ‘A strong, modern, dynamically and evenly developing Poland, aspiring to play a role in Europe and the region commensurate with its potential, is not to Berlin’s taste.’³

The Demand for War Reparitions

During this time, the question of war reparations to Poland was raised again, with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau signing a 3 October 2022 diplomatic note to Germany on the question. PiS based these discussions on the belief that Germany does not want to acknowledge or take responsibility for its crimes during World War II, and, having enriched itself as a result of the war at Poland’s expense, wants to continue to dictate its direction. At election rallies and in the media, politicians and commentators associated with PiS constantly emphasized the damage done to Poland, the sums Poland is demanding from Germany and Germany’s rejection of these demands. Inflaming this topic was a conscious move, addressed not to Germany or international public opinion, but rather was aimed at their own electorate to divert attention from the domestic political and economic situation. By creating a simple dichotomy between enemy and victim, PiS was able to portray itself as the only political force advocating for a German confession of the deeds committed against Poland. This logic also portrayed the opposition, led by Donald Tusk, as passive for not standing up to Germany and demanding reparations and accountability.

The rhetoric of the right placed progressive political forces, especially Donald Tusk’s party, in a difficult position. Germany’s initially slow decision-making on the supply of heavy weapons to Ukraine and years of turning a blind eye to Russian energy expansion was met with understandable criticism in Polish government, opposition and various media circles. Even though the PiS’ rhetoric on the issue of reparations was rejected by the opposition (not the demands for reparations payments themselves)⁴, it as well as a significant number of Poles recognised that Germany had insufficiently acknowledged and compensated Poland for its peoples’ suffering during World War II and that knowledge on the subject in Germany was similarly lacking. This is corroborated by the Polish-German Barometer 2023, which showed that half of Polish respondents believed that the suffering and sacrifices experienced by Poles in their history had not been sufficiently recognized, and 56 percent said that Germany had done far too little in terms of reparations.

At the time, therefore, the opposition did not want to defend Germany or emphasise its intimate relations with German partners, as this could be misconstrued by voters as being too pro-German. The substantive criticisms and doubts raised by the opposition, however, were quite different from the hostile and insulting statements made against Germany by the PiS party and Solidarna Polska.

Polish perceptions of Germany in social research

The Polish-German Barometer series has for years studied perceptions of Poles in Germany and Germans in Poland.⁵ For the Barometer, survey respondents are asked to review general statements about the other country and rate them on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In 2023, as in previous years, of the majority of Poles surveyed expressed positive opinions about Germany. These respondents felt that the German economy is developing well and that

1 <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/prezes-pis-niemcy-niezaleznie-od-wojny-beda-dazyly-do-ponownego-porozumienia-sie-z>

2 <https://www.rp.pl/wyborry/art39235821-jaroslaw-kaczyński-niemcy-sa-regionalnie-silnym-panstwem-niczym-wiecej>

3 <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,29854702,kaczyński-uderza-w-niemcy-silna-i-nowoczesna-polska-nie-jest.html>

4 Resolution of the Sejm on seeking compensation by Poland for damage caused by Germany during World War II from 14.09.2022, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm9.nsf/komunikat.xsp?documentid=320B5562E9925DBBC12588BD005B6276>

5 <https://www.barometr-polska-niemcy.pl/>

women's rights and the rights of various minorities are accepted in Germany. A slightly smaller number of respondents agreed that German democracy and the rule of law are doing well, and that Germany is worth investing in. A relatively lower percentage of positive responses concerned the treatment of foreigners and the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures. In each of these cases, however, the percentage of negative responses was significantly lower than positive responses, ranging from 7 to 12 percent. Thus, it can be said that a positive image of Germany still prevails in Poland, although a sizable percentage of respondents expressed neutral opinions (rating 3 on the scale) or were unable to provide an answer.

Respondent attitudes toward Germans as a society can be described similarly. The latest results showed that 50 percent of Polish respondents sympathized with Germans, while only 15 percent indicated an aversion to them. The results are even more optimistic regarding attitudes toward Germans in specific social roles. More than 80 percent of Poles would not mind if a German was their work colleague, neighbour or lived nearby. Even in roles associated with hierarchy, such as the head of a company or a direct superior, a similar percentage of Poles would accept a German. This is also true of emotionally close familial or friendship roles like son-in-law/daughter-in-law or friend, in which 80 percent of Poles expressed openness to a German.

Where are anti-German attitudes in Poland?

Across years of research, we have been looking for an answer to the question of whether there is a group of people in Poland that could be called 'anti-German', to which PiS or other right-wing parties would direct their anti-German messages. To determine the extent of negative attitudes, we extracted the survey results which indicated an aversion to Germany, its policies or its society. Importantly, none of the survey question-answer pairs suggest extremely negative attitudes such as hatred, but rather disagreement or disapproval. For example, respondents could disagree or strongly disagree to the statement 'The German economy is developing well', 'The rule of law is respected in Germany' or 'Poland should cooperate closely with Germany'.

*Only
a Very Small Group
of Anti-German
Respondents*

In the 2022 survey, that is, before the start of the actual election campaign, there were 19 statements in the survey that were analysed. We were interested in how many Polish respondents gave a strong negative response about Germany in all 19 cases. Among the thousand Polish respondents there was only one person. Next, we determined what percentage of respondents chose mostly negative answers (meaning a negative response to at least 10 out of 19 questions). Only 4.5 percent of respondents met these criteria.

However, if one observed the slogans and tone of PiS's rhetoric, those few percent of anti-German voters appear nevertheless crucial to the shape and messaging of PiS campaign (and its communications more generally). There are reasons for this. For years, PiS has been trying to ensure that no significant political force grows to the right of the party. In recent years, meanwhile, both Solidarna (later renamed Suwerenna, Sovereign) Polska, PiS' coalition partner, and Konfederacja have become competitors on the right.

Hence, PiS politicians and their competing Solidarna Polska counterparts outdid themselves with anti-German rhetoric, which in turn was eagerly picked up by the PiS-friendly public media.

The impact of public media on respondent perceptions is supported by data collected on respondent sources of knowledge. Among those who watched TVP INFO regularly, the percentage who evaluated Germany negatively in at least 10 out of 19 cases was 7 percent, compared to less than 3 percent of those who rarely watched TVP INFO.

The impact of anti-German messaging

Since the percentage of Polish respondents who criticised or expressed negative attitudes toward Germany was so small in the most recent survey, one might ask about the overall impact of the anti-German messaging

campaign, as it appears to only affect a small group of Poles. On the contrary, however, the effects of this messaging, which is driven by an intra-political rationale, should clearly be regarded as dangerous.

First, anti-German political messages effectively discourage representatives of Poland's most important partner in the European Union from entering into dialogue and taking joint initiatives with Poles. Second, even if the percentage of 'anti-German' Poles is currently marginal, regular attacks and vilification of Germany will ultimately influence long-term perceptions. According to the Polish-German Barometer, television

(42%) and statements by politicians (40%) are, next to school (46%) and conversations with family (41%), the most frequently indicated sources of Poles' knowledge about Germany. Therefore the messages coming from these sources have a real impact on the image of Germany in Poland. Over the past few years, the percentage of Polish respondents expressing positive views of Germany has decreased in favour of no or neutral perceptions. If anti-German messages persist, these neutral views of Germany may in time become actively negative. Consequently, this will hinder cooperation and openness toward solving emerging problems through dialogue.

THREE ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE DEFEAT OF POPULISM IN POLAND

By **Przemysław Sadura**, *University of Warsaw, Krytyka Polityczna Institute*

Supporters of liberal democracy all over Europe celebrated the defeat of PiS by a coalition of opposition parties. Poland proved that it is not impossible to remove populists with authoritarian tendencies from power. Przemysław Sadura's analysis curbs this enthusiasm by busting three popular myths. A great majority of PiS supporters did not abandon their party, and to win over new electorates, democratic opposition's campaign also resorted to populist tools, including presenting some mildly anti-immigrant views. Opposition managed to win and form a coalition government despite the fact that it went to elections separately. The differences between coalition partners might emerge most strongly around the issues that are most important for the young and women. Finally, the extraordinary mobilization of voters cannot be seen as permanent change. Sustaining their interest in politics and elections will remain a great challenge for the new coalition. Przemysław Sadura is professor of sociology at the University of Warsaw, and head of the Krytyka Polityczna Institute.

Several months have passed since the memento when more than 11 million Polish citizens indicated that they wanted a new government in Poland to be formed by democratic parties standing in opposition to the right-wing populist Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice]. This is still too little time to fully realise what actually happened on 15 October 2023. But, what we might think had happened is just an illusion. In this text, I want to focus on the meaning of the recent elections in a sociological perspective. Does the opposition's victory mean that we are overcoming the fever of populism, or does it herald a completely new turn of events?

The fact of the October 2023 elections

First, let us recall what we know from the Polish National Electoral Commission data and exit-polls results. In the parliamentary elections on 15 October 2023, the ruling PiS party received the highest support of 35.4 percent of voters. However, it was the democratic parties that won the majority of seats in the Sejm. Donald Tusk and his coalition led by Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform] convinced 30.7 percent of voters, the moderate conservative Trzecia Droga (TD) [Third Way] composed of peasants' party and Polska 2050 with Szymon Hołownia) 14.4 and Nowa Lewica (NL) [New Left] 8.6. This translated into 248 seats in the 460-seat Sejm, making it possible to form a majority

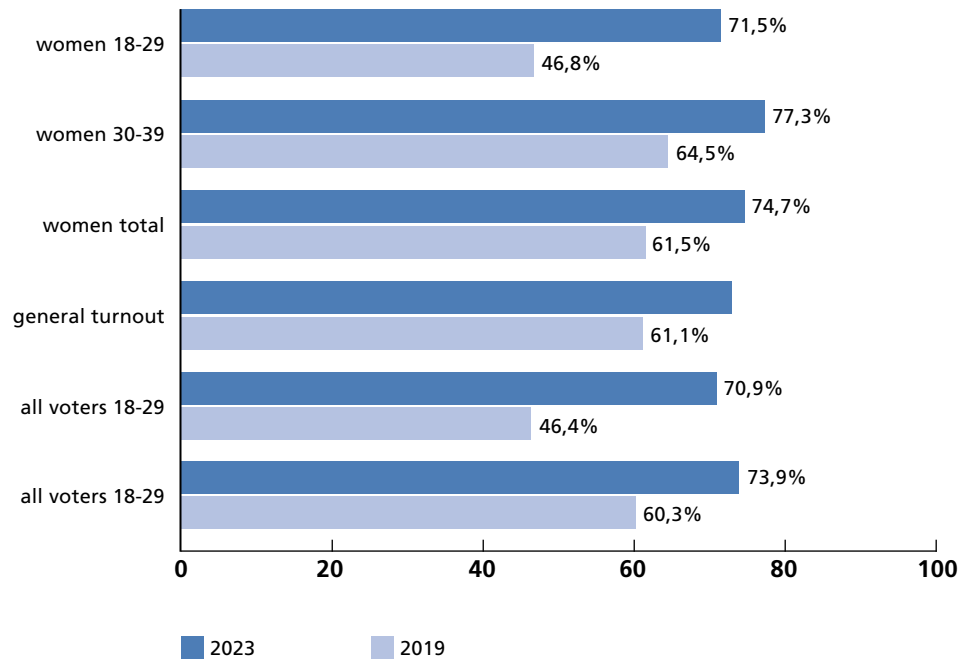
Democratic Coalition government. Going separate way far-right Konfederacja [Confederation]—a motley coalition of misogynists, neoliberals, catholic fundamentalists and regular morons—got only 7,14 percent.

Large Flows of Voters with in the Democratic Bloc

As predicted by sociologists, it was not the flow of voters between PiS and the democratic opposition parties that had a decisive impact on the ruling party's removal from power. Although ruling party lost almost 12 percent of its 2019 voters (the most 3.5 percent to the TD), much larger flows were recorded within the democratic bloc. For example, the New Left lost more than 40 percent of the 2019 left electorate, which fed primarily into Tusk's PO and TD. The Left performed less well than in 2019 when it won 12.56 percent and had 49 seats against the current 26. Its success lies in becoming part of the ruling coalition after nearly twenty years of being in opposition.

The real political game changer in the Polish election was the record voter turnout. It stood at 74.38 percent in 2023, compared to 61.74 percent in 2019, the best result in the history of elections in Poland. In the last election, 3,125,964 more votes were cast than four years earlier. This attraction of non-voters in 2019 gave victory to the Democrats. PO lead by Donald Tusk

Figure 1:
Polish Parliamentary Elections



convinced more than 30 percent of them, TD 18 percent, whereas PiS only 15.5 percent. In the final tally, the Democrats had 2,640,266 more voters than four years earlier, while Kaczyński's national populists got 411,000 fewer votes than in 2019.

Record Voter Turnout was the Game Changer

The biggest jump in turnout was recorded among the youngest (18-29 years) male and especially female voters. Over the course of four years, the percentage of voters in this age group rose from 46 to 71 percent (sic!). Although older generations were more willing to go to the polls, and 50-year-olds broke the absolute record, the increase in voting is greatest precisely in the group of the youngest voters. Moreover, the percentage of the youngest voters is higher than in the oldest group (60+), which was a bastion of PiS. For the first time in a parliamentary election in Poland, women's voter turnout was higher than men's in all age groups except the 60+. There was particularly high

mobilisation among 30- and 40-year-old women. Compared to men, women were much more likely to vote for PO and NL, but were significantly less likely to vote for the far-right Konfederacja. PiS lost handily among male and female voters under 40.

Illusion #1: populism ended in Poland on 15 October of 2023

The thesis that populism ended in Poland on 15 October because people woke up and abandoned the PiS party, choosing democratic parties, does not stand up to confrontation with reality. The awakening was not massive, and populism is doing well.

The overwhelming majority of national populist voters stayed with the party, accepting its governing style. This style consisted of the gradual dismantling of democratic institutions, violating the constitution and the independence of the judiciary, conflating Poland with the EU and its neighbours, violating the rights of minorities, abusing force in its relationship with unruly

male and female citizens, and spreading nepotism and corruption. As I showed in the book “Populist Society”¹ published together with Sławomir Sierakowski just before the elections, some persisted with PiS because they are its fanatical followers, others because that was their rational calculation (“they steal like everyone else but at least share like no one”). PiS lost, and some of these hitherto less ideological supporters of Kaczyński’s party are slowly shifting their support to the new parties in power.

*The Opposition
Put on the
Mask of Populism*

Voters did not unequivocally reject a campaign based on hate language and promises of generous electoral gifts. They voted for the Democrats, who by necessity resorted to a populist style of campaigning. Opposition politicians put on the mask of populism for tactical reasons. The democratic opposition did not hesitate to appeal to the anti-immigrant mood and to attack the people in power and their backbenchers in very brutal and aggressive way. The difference was that the closer we got to the end of the campaign, the more willing the democratic parties were to intertwine the politics of hate with the politics of love. In the battle on the promises of the Coalition Citizenship overflowed PiS guaranteed that “nothing that is given will be taken away”, and additionally promising new election commitments.

The Democrats won the battle but not the war. PiS remains a strong and brutal opposition entrenched in many institutions. It hinders the liberal-democratic transition by forcing the new majority to play on the edge of the law, and sometimes beyond it. Even if the danger of an imminent return to power by PiS is not great, the risk of a return to populist-style governance remains high.

Illusion #2: the democrats won because they went to the election separately

Another myth is the belief that the democratic opposition won the elections because, unlike in Hungary, they did not unite but went to the elections separately. We are not in a position to know what it would have been like if a one electoral list of democratic opposition had been formed. Pre-election surveys showed that it gave a better chance of success. The only fact is that the Democrats managed to win the election despite they were not united.

*Democrats Won Despite
the Fact that They Were
not United*

Polling showed that the joining forces of democratic parties was in line with voters’ expectations, gave a premium in converting votes into seats using the D’Hondt method, and on top of that it allowed the so-called ‘leader effect’ (voters joining those leading in the polls) to be triggered. However, its greatest advantage was that it appealed to the greatest emotion mobilising voters resulting from political polarisation: PiS and anti-PiS, at the same time safeguarding against the scenario of a fratricidal struggle within the democratic camp for the votes of anti-populist voters.

Luckily, towards the end of the campaign, the leaders of the democratic opposition found a way other than a single electoral list to lower the level of aggression within the democratic camp. They showed that multiplicity in unity does not threaten cohesion. They stuck to the rules of fair play without allowing the rivalry between close parties to turn into a devastating war.

Whether unity on such a precarious basis will be enough in the future remains an open question. Local elections, European elections and next year’s presidential elections are just around the corner. Will the democratic coalition manage to maintain cohesion and a high mobilisation of the younger and older voters? We know that the attitudes of the young are quite different from those of the older generation. The young who went to the elections, who voted for the democratic opposition and gave it a majority, are much more progressive on worldview issues. They expect the

¹ Source for „Populist Society” Przemysław Sadura, Sławomir Sierakowski, Społeczeństwo populistów, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2023.

liberalisation of abortion laws, normal, i.e. as in the rest of Europe, access to contraception, respect for LGBT rights in line with the European standard. It remains to be seen whether the new majority will be consistent in implementing these changes.

Illusion #3: behind electoral victory is an unexpected change in values and a sustained mobilisation of the democratic electorate

The increase in voter turnout and mobilisation, particularly among women and youth, is interpreted as a permanent inclusion of these people in politics. Until now, they were not interested in public affairs but have finally joined the ranks of democrats. This leads one to believe in the fundamental change in values that gave victory to the democratic parties. Prime Minister Donald Tusk has proclaimed the creation of a new social entity, which is to be the “15 October generation”.

Two Distinct Groups of New Voters

If this were the case, victory in the next election would be certain. However, this is not true. In the last weeks of December, my team at the Institute of “Krytyka Polityczna” conducted research into the electorate of the democratic parties. We conducted most of the focus with the youngest male and female voters. Their attitudes are very different. Roughly speaking, however, it is possible to speak of two distinct groups of new voters.

1. The first of these are primarily young women. A formative event for them was their participation in the protests following the announcement of the Constitutional Court ruling by Julia Przyłębska that harshly limited the right to abortion. It is these protests that they describe in interviews as their political awakening. For the young people who then took to the streets en masse, not only in large cities but also in small towns, it was a great lesson of democracy. They saw each other, they counted themselves and felt their power. Youngsters of this group often distance themselves to Donald Tusk. For them, he and other leaders of the democratic

and anti-democratic camps (Hołownia, Duda and Morawiecki) are a generation of older guys with differences, but these differences are not huge in the face of similarities. For this group of female voters, the key issues are abortion, women’s and LGBT rights, mental health and climate. This is more the generation of the Women’s Strike than the generation of 15 October Election.

2. The second group of voter-activated women and young people are those who were drawn in by public awareness and pro-turnout campaigns and the fashion for taking part in voting. Research published by the Batory Foundation², but also an Ipsos poll³ I have commissioned, show that campaigns rising the frequency in election had a large reach and a significant impact on voters. The Ipsos poll shows that people who are the main target of these campaigns (i.e. young people aged 18-29 and women aged 18-39) are clearly more likely to declare that they have come into contact with these campaigns. This is further confirmation of their good targeting (they were visible to those groups they were targeting and not to others).

No Guarantee for Repetition of High Voter Turnout

However, one should not conclude from this that here, with one successful mobilisation, we have made up for years of neglect in civic education and we have got it over with. The results of research conducted by Ipsos provide a clear answer as to whether the high voter turnout means a guarantee of repetition of these results in the local and Euro-elections. The turnout in the group of women aged 18-29 was 71.5 percent, and in the group 30-39 77.3 percent, and was higher than four years ago, in the group 18-29 by as much as a half (25 percentage points). Counted a few weeks later, the willingness to participate in local and European Parliament elections is closer to what it was

² Aleksandra Jaworska-Surma Współpraca: Edwin Bendyk, Szymon Gutkowski Fenomen wyborczej mobilizacji. *Przyczyny rekordowej frekwencji podczas wyborów parlamentarnych 2023—wnioski z badań*, Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, Warszawa 2024.

³ Sondaż Ipsos przeprowadzony na zlecenie Uniwersytet SWPS i Fundacja Pole Dialogu, raport w przygotowaniu.

before. For example: 33 percent of 18-29-year-olds declare a definite willingness to take part in the Euro-elections, while 25 percent say they would “rather take part”. A high or very high interest in politics is declared by 26% of young people. Plus, men declare an interest in politics twice as often as women.

Re-mobilisation of women and young people without which there would be no success for the democratic parties is the challenge set for the ruling coalition. It will be a big job and a big test. The new government has been given trust on credit but for now it looks like a one-off loan.

Summary: What to expect from the next elections

There are many indications that the TD—the most conservative part of the democratic coalition—does not intend to support projects moving towards the legalisation of abortion and LGBT equality. This should not shake the unity of the democratic coalition in the local and European parliamentary elections to be held in April and June 2024. The dominant conflict will be that between anti-PiS and PiS. However, in the long term, liberal democracy will be more served by a dispute among today’s allies than by a pretence of unity.

Differences within the Democratic Camp Need to Be Articulated

Liberal democracy is a system that allows citizens to express the differences that divide them: different values, conflicting interests and different visions of social order. These differences need to be articulated. It is only important that they are articulated while respecting the rules. This means treating the rival as an opponent, not as a mortal enemy. Political competition takes place within the limits of the law, which neither side violates. Spheres that are sensitive to the continuation of a democratic state and society are excluded from confrontation.

The 2025 presidential election will be a great opportunity to remind ourselves of these principles. Thanks to the two-round rule, democratic forces can field multiple candidates there and, if necessary, close ranks in the second round. If, in the second round, Democratic candidates with differing attitudes to issues important to women and young people face each other and PiS candidate will be marginalised, Poles will be able to decide what kind of President they want. Only then will it be possible to say that the stage of populism in Poland has closed.

POLAND AND HUNGARY: A TALE OF TWO ELECTIONS

By Ernst Hillebrand, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest

In 2022 all eyes were on Hungarian parliamentary elections. To the disappointment of the liberal world, Viktor Orbán won again. Poland and Hungary have often been put in the same basket of “illiberal democracies”, with Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński embodying the ideal types of right wing populists. How come that Polish opposition managed to accomplish, what Hungarian opposition failed to do? This essay takes a close look at both election campaigns to compare them, at the same time explaining why “Poland is not Hungary” and Kaczyński is indeed a very different type of leader than Orbán. Dr Ernst Hillebrand is currently the head of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung office in Budapest. He was previously Head of the foundation’s International Policy Analysis Unit, the Central and Eastern Europe Unit and Head of the Warsaw, Paris, London and Rome offices.

In many respects, the spring 2022 parliamentary elections in Hungary and the autumn 2023 elections in Poland were held under similar auspices. In both cases, the war in Ukraine, high inflation and general economic slowdown were influencing public moods. Also, both governments up for re-election were decidedly critical of EU institutions. Despite these similarities, the outcomes were fundamentally different. While the Polish opposition celebrated a clear victory, Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Fidesz) [Hungarian Civic Alliance] and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán triumphed in Hungary, even gaining a two-thirds majority in parliament.

Similar auspices, fundamentally different outcomes

While comparisons of this kind are always difficult—every country, to paraphrase Tolstoy, is unhappy in its own way—it is nevertheless interesting to compare these two elections, as Western European public opinion regularly lumps Poland and Hungary together under the label of ‘right-wing populism’ and ‘authoritarianism’, speculating whether democratic change is still possible at all. But Poland and Hungary are very different countries, not least in the extent of ‘state capture’ by ruling (or formerly ruling) parties. So, what explains the different election outcomes?

Mobilisation made the difference

The most apparent factor in the elections was voter turnout and its impact on the government and opposition camps. In Poland, the 2023 election drew a record percentage of eligible voters, increasing to 74.4 percent from 61.74 percent in the previous elections. These additional 3.2 million votes were almost exclusively cast in favour of the opposition, while Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) [Law and Justice] received roughly the same absolute number of votes as it did four years ago. In Hungary, on the other hand, voter turnout remained relatively stable at 70.21 percent and the ruling Fidesz party received a similar number of votes as in the previous elections. The number of votes cast for the left-wing and centrist opposition parties, running on a joint list, fell by 757,000 votes. More than a quarter of the votes gained in 2018 were lost. While the Polish opposition was able to mobilise new voters, the Hungarian opposition lost a considerable proportion of its previous voters.

Three factors appear to explain these variations between countries in voter mobilisation: the form of cooperation of the opposition forces, the personalities of the leading candidates and the ability of parties to interpret and cater to the mood of the population.

A unified opposition list in Hungary

In Hungary, the opposition forces ran on a unified list, 'Together for Hungary'. The spectrum in this coalition ranged from relatively left Green party to the centre left Magyar Szocialista Párt (MSZP) [Hungarian Socialist Party] and Demokratikus Koalíció (DK) [Democratic Coalition] to the relatively right Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Jobbik) [Movement for a Better Hungary]. The logic behind this broad spectrum of parties running on a unified list was to undermine Fidesz's strength in the single-mandate constituencies that are decisive in the Hungarian electoral system.

In Poland too, liberal media and Platforma Obywatelska (PO) [Civic Platform] had pushed for the creation of an anti-PiS united 'democratic opposition' front to take advantage of the characteristics of the electoral system. However, this joint list did not come about as the smaller parties saw it as a Platforma Obywatelska strategy to subordinate them. The resulting pluralism of lists most likely paid off on election day. The existence of alternative (but cooperating) opposition parties offered voters the chance to cast their votes according to their political and ideological preferences.

In Hungary, the idea of having to vote for representatives of political forces for which they may have had a deep aversion all their lives in the name of an overarching goal—voting Fidesz out of power—proved unattractive to many potential opposition voters. Constituencies where Jobbik had been strong in 2018 saw an especially significant decline in voter turnout. Left-wing voters also stayed at home.¹ Many did not want to support right-wing candidates, and the joint opposition campaign had hardly addressed left-wing voters and their concerns at all. Unsurprisingly, the programme of the joint opposition played a minor role for those opposition voters who actually cast their vote. By far the most dominant motive was the simple desire to vote Fidesz out of power.² In Poland, the desire to vote PiS out of power was also a strong

motivating factor for opposition voters, but it was combined with strong programmatic motives as well.³

Candidates matter

Another important factor was the opposition's top candidates. Recent elections have been increasingly decided by the profiles of leading candidates rather than party profiles. In Poland, the potential Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, was clearly seen as the lead candidate for the opposition side. Tusk's reputation as a man with a long political career, including as Prime Minister and President of the European Council, well-connected in European and international politics and with a liberal-conservative centrist background made him 'a safe pair of hands', so to speak. His distinguished career could easily compensate for any advantage in office of his PiS opponent, the incumbent Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

The situation in Hungary was completely different. During the opposition primaries neither of the two candidates originally considered favourites prevailed. Instead, an outsider won: Péter Márki-Zay, a conservative mayor of a small municipality in southern Hungary. In a structurally conservative country like Hungary, the argument went, a candidate perceived as conservative was more likely to mobilise swing voters and draw disappointed Fidesz supporters into the opposition camp. In the midst of a complicated and multi-faceted crisis, the Hungarian opposition presented voters with a choice between (a) a provincial mayor without party, power base or government experience and (b) one of the longest-serving (and most cunning) politicians in Europe, operating from the position of incumbent. It takes a lot of optimism to believe that something like this could work, and it didn't. According to Policy Solutions, a relatively left Hungarian think tank, the opposition campaign was a widespread flop. 'The opposition campaign lacked coordination, unity of purpose and messaging, while it hammered away at issues that passed by the everyday realities of many voters. [...] the major flaw was lacking focus on the issues that truly matter to many demographics outside the core opposition electorate.'⁴

¹ Andras Biro-Nagy, 'Lessons to be learned from Hungary's Opposition Alliance' (2022), *Policy Solutions*, Budapest.

² Rezsicsökkentés, adó-visszatérítés, háború, Orbán szeretete—ezért szavaztak a Fideszre, Telex.hu, 3.6.2022, (übersetzt mit DeepL), <https://telex.hu/belfold/2022/06/03/enyedi-zsolt-szabo-andrea-po-stelection-kutatasi-elemzes-sorozat-harmadik-resz>

³ CBOS, Polish Public Opinion, Nr. 10/2023.

⁴ 'Hungarian Politics in 2022' (2023), *Policy Solutions*, Budapest, pp.23, 26.

*Donald Tusk's
tough stance
on immigration*

Donald Tusk did far better, not least because he spoke to issues that truly mattered to voters outside the core opposition electorate. He also managed to defuse the immigration issue, the most important mobilising issue of right-wing populism. His relatively tough stance on immigration combined with the loss of credibility that PiS suffered as a result of the visa-selling scandal in the Polish Foreign Ministry was, I assert, an important element for the asymmetrical mobilisation/demobilisation of government and opposition supporters in the Polish elections.

Reading the mood of society

However, these factors alone do not explain the election result in Poland. PiS lost the election much earlier than in the ups and downs of the campaign. The key moments of these elections lay not in autumn 2023, but in autumn 2020.

On 23 October 2020, the PiS-loyal Constitutional Court further tightened the already very restrictive abortion laws in Poland, making it almost impossible to have a legal abortion, even in the case of 'severe and irreversible foetal defect or incurable illness that threatens the foetus' life'. The Court's definition of human life protected by the Constitution mirrored the teachings of the Catholic Church, which defines the beginning of human life as the very moment the sperm attaches to the ovum. The judgement drove hundreds of thousands of people across all social backgrounds and throughout the country to the streets for weeks. Approximately 1,100 abortions per year were carried out in Poland in recent years on the basis of the paragraphs overturned by the Constitutional Court, but these protests were not about abortion per se, but rather the fundamental values of individual self-determination and freedom and the limits to which state and church institutions can interfere in private life. Young voters in particular did not forgive PiS for this interference in their personal sphere. Within a few weeks of the autumn 2020 ruling voting intentions for PiS plummeted from 44 to

36 percent and have not since recovered.⁵ The reckoning finally came on 15 October 2023 when young people voted massively in favour of the anti-PiS camp.⁶

No country for an old man

Somehow, PiS became a victim of its own success. The social and economic record of its time in government is quite impressive and was accompanied by a correspondingly rapid cultural change. According to Mateusz Morawiecki in his last speech in the Sejm as Prime Minister, Poland's economy had grown by a whopping 33 percent during PiS's eight years in power. Thanks to active distributional and fiscal policies, this growth also profited poorer parts of the Polish society. The Gini index of social inequality fell by 10 percent in the same period, a decline rarely seen in Europe's recent history.⁷ But with this rising prosperity not only the skyline of Warsaw changed rapidly. Polish society changed as well, becoming more secular, more individualistic, more Westernised. Poland is still rather conservative and religious by European standards, but the basic social and cultural trends are similar to the Western world in general.⁸

*A more secular,
individualistic and Westernised
Polish society*

PiS, led by 73-year-old Jarosław Kaczyński, did not have a message for this modernising country, not in terms of personal liberties or other topics. The party's traditional mobilisation topic, drawing on historic traumas of the past, resonates less and less with a forward-looking society. This is also true for Kaczyński's obsessive distrust of Germany and the EU, his railing against alleged post-communist power-cliques, the warnings of an anti-Polish 'Berlin-Moscow axis' as well as for his

⁵ 'Poland 2023—The general election', Politico, <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/>. The development in Poland is by no means singular. In the USA as well, the Supreme Court's decision to overturn its judgement in *Roe v. Wade* led to an electoral backlash against the Republicans in the 2022 mid-term elections.

⁶ Łukasz Pawłowski: Wyborcy bali się poexitu, Plus Minus/Rzeczpospolita, 17.11.2023.

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tessi190/default/table?lang=en>

⁸ Przemysław Sadura 'Liberalisation and Secularisation in Poland 1989-2020—A sociological analysis', *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, Warsaw.

allegiance to a conservative Catholic state church, in which questions about misuse of authority and sexual abuse are still not admitted. Young Poles are not afraid of Germany and they do not fear a 'Fourth Reich' in Berlin. For them, the EU is first and foremost an area of personal opportunity and not an anti-Polish empire. The permanent confrontation with neighbours and European partners seems rather absurd to this generation and the idea that the church should determine their private and sexual lives is becoming less and less acceptable to the majority of them.⁹

Lessons learned

It is important to understand that it was not modern right-wing populism that was defeated in Poland, but rather a sort of paleo-conservatism, mentally stuck in the last century. PiS lost power because of its growing intellectual and moral disconnection from a rapidly changing society. In truth, PiS never has been a 'populist' party, perhaps populist in style but not in substance. Putting aside Jarosław Kaczyński's personal obsessions and idiosyncrasies, PiS has always been a national-conservative 'programme party' with a consistent ideological and programmatic core, quite close to the positions of Christian Democratic parties of the 1950s and 1960s in Western Europe.

Disconnection from a rapidly changing society

Viktor Orbán, on the other hand, with his serpentine political path from liberal student leader and Open Society scholar over EPP party leader to an advocate of an 'illiberal' democracy flirting with non-Western

authoritarian governments, is much more a representative of modern right-wing populism than Kaczyński.¹⁰ Despite Fidesz's repeated two-thirds majority in parliament, for example, it has never seriously challenged the liberal abortion law that is been in force in Hungary since 1992.¹¹ As a seasoned populist, Orbán immediately placed the concerns of the Hungarian population about the consequences of the war in Ukraine at the centre of his election campaign, smearing the opposition forces as bellicose warmongers.¹² Orbán is definitely not free of ideology, but compared to Kaczyński he is a much more flexible, opportunistic and, in the true sense of the word, 'populist' politician, able to read and willing to adapt to the political 'lay of the land'.

So perhaps the most obvious lesson that can be drawn from these two elections is the relatively banal one that right-wing governments can be electorally defeated, as long as their opponents do not commit errors of their own, stay in touch with broader public opinion and manage to defuse the core mobilisation issues of their opponents. This is a significant challenge for many progressive parties in Europe. But the Polish case might also point to another lesson. If the electoral backlash against PiS was indeed triggered by its overstep into the private sphere, then the Polish elections might contain an important warning for the more 'progressive' elements of the European left. There are many indicators that liberal and progressive 'wokeism' is increasingly perceived by ordinary people as an intrusive ideology interfering in their private lives, trying to impose on people how to speak, what to eat, how to travel and commute, what to read and watch and how to interact with other people. If blatant disrespect of the boundaries between public and personal spheres is really a red line, 'progressive' liberalism, as well as old-fashioned conservatism, has a problem.

⁹ For the values and interests of young people see Justyna Kajta, Adam Mrozowicki, *MŁODZI LUDZIE W POLSCE MIĘDZY ROZCZAROWANIEM PAŃSTWEM A NADZIEJĄ NA LEPSZE ŻYCIE*, FES, Bonn, 2022.

¹⁰ For a comparison of the two parties see also the respective chapters in Ernst Hillebrand (ed.), *Rechtspopulismus in Europa—Gefahr für die Demokratie*, Bonn 2017, Dietz-Verlag.

¹¹ Also in the USA, Donald Trump, the quintessential modern populist, has tried to stay clean of the religious wars over the abortion issue.

¹² Policy Solutions, *Hungarian Politics in 2022*.

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THE DEFEAT OF POPULISTS IN POLAND

Behind the Scenes of the 2023 Election Campaign



In the parliamentary elections in Poland in October 2023, three opposition parties managed to end the rule of the national-conservative PiS-party in Poland. This volume of essays sheds light on the happenings behind the scenes of the election campaign. Thanks to a huge mobilisation of voters, especially young women, and a very competitive communication strategy the democratic opposition was able to defeat the populists in Poland.



The essays look specifically at the role of women and their mobilisation. We also look at the unravelling of the potential left-wing electorate and its values. As a consequence of the biased public media scene in Poland, social media played a significant role in campaigning. One of the essays analyses the different social media strategies of the opposition parties. On the other side of the party spectrum, a strong radical right-wing extremist party, Konfederacja, emerged over the summer of 2023, but ultimately fell well short of its electoral forecasts. We look at possible reasons for this.

In the last years it could be repeatedly observed how Germany was played up as a threat to Poland, above all to mobilise the PiS electorate. A further essay therefore examines the significance of anti-German messages in the election campaign. A sociological analysis of voter behavior casts some doubt on the defeat of populism in Poland, especially with an eye on the role of the migration issue in the election campaign. Finally, a comparison between the election campaigns in Hungary 2022 and Poland 2023 tries to explain why the Polish opposition managed to accomplish what Hungarian opposition forces failed to do.

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