

2019-6
MIDEM-Report

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN POLAND 2019

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SUMMARY

- As predicted in the polls, Law and Justice (*PiS*) secured a second term in government, winning 43.59 % of the votes and 235 seats (the same amount as 2015), which constitutes an absolute majority.
- *Civic Coalition* (*KO*) remains the strongest opposition party, having secured 27.40 % of the votes. The *Left* returns to national politics with 12.56 %. The peasants' party *PSL* and the far-right *Konfederacja* also managed to enter parliament.
- Voter turnout, at 61.16 % was exceptionally high, which continues the turnout trend that started with the last local elections in October 2018.
- As opposed to the 2015 electoral campaign, migration has played little to no role in mobilisation attempts prior to the elections. Instead, LGBT issues were made the central axis of political conflict. Nonetheless, immigration remains an identity marker for the right.

1. THE POLISH POLITICAL SYSTEM

Political system in transformation

Poland's transition to democracy since 1989 was long perceived as one of the most successful in the post-communist region. The country was considered a consolidating democracy¹ and a role model for the region, in particular due to its eagerness to join the EU and its blooming economy in the last decade. However, violations of the rule of law by those in power have tarnished this image in recent years (see INFOBOX).

INFOBOX – Constitutional Tribunal Crisis of 2015 and the subsequent crisis of the rule of law

The Constitutional Tribunal (CT) crisis started in October 2015, after PO – facing electoral defeat – appointed five judges to the CT. President Duda (PiS) refused to swear in these judges claiming their appointment was “contravening democratic principles”. In November the new Sejm, controlled by PiS, passed an amendment to the existing law in order to appoint five new judges and set new term limits. A petition by PO resulted in the law being challenged at the Tribunal, which ruled in December that only the election of two of the five judges was unconstitutional. However, President Duda had already sworn in the five newly elected judges and refused to take any further action, arguing that installing more judges would be against the constitution. In late December PiS passed further laws reorganising the Tribunal and limiting its independence.

These acts prompted both domestic and international protests, not only due to the contents of these laws but also to the manner they were passed – behind closed doors, in unannounced night sessions, with no access for the press and with attempts to limit the opposition's influence on the new laws. The street pro-

tests gathered unprecedented crowds in numerous cities and towns, not seen in Poland since the mid-1990s. They lasted for several months despite harsh weather conditions. Both the Supreme Court of Poland and the National Council of the Judiciary issued statements deeming the reforms unconstitutional, and so did numerous Polish district courts of appeal, law faculties at universities, and legal and human rights organisations.

International reactions were predominantly negative, reaching from the European Parliament, to the Council of Europe, as well as member countries, including Germany. However, the PiS government did not retreat and continued with further reforms of the judiciary system, effectively paralysing the CT and de facto waiving independence of all courts. In January 2016, the European Commission launched a formal rule-of-law assessment, and in September 2017 the second stage of infringement procedures on the rule of law was initiated. This could result in Poland losing its voting rights in the EU. As of autumn 2019, the Polish government did not back away from its controversial reforms, and the EU procedure is still ongoing. Poland is backed only by Hungary and the three Baltic states, who expressed solidarity and understanding for Warsaw.

Until 2005, Poland's party system was dominated by two blocs: the post-communist one, consisting mainly of the *Social Left Alliance* - *SLD*, the successor to the communist party - and the post-Solidarność one. The latter was deeply divided into a conservative and a liberal group represented mostly by *Porozumienie Centrum*, a direct predecessor to *Law and Justice* - *PiS*, and *Unia Wolności*, indirectly preceding *Civic Platform* - *PO*, with each being further divided into small factions. The post-Solidarność bloc was characterised by constant conflict. Every time the camps united, they won power. However, the union never lasted, and thus, subsequent elections were mostly lost. As a result, the two main blocs took turns in

1 Poland still scores higher than Hungary and South-Eastern countries on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, despite a decrease in recent years, particularly in the governance aspect (https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2018/pdf_regional/BTI_2018_Regionalartikel_ECSE_Web.pdf, p. 4).

Glossary: Political Parties with names, abbreviations and profiles

PiS

Prawo i Sprawiedliwość
(Law and Justice)

National-conservative, right-wing populist, soft Eurosceptic

PO

Platforma Obywatelska
(Civic Platform)

Liberal-conservative, centrist, pro-EU

.N

Nowoczesna
(The Modern Party)

(Neo)liberal, pro-EU

PSL

Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe
(Polish People's Party)

Conservative, agrarian

SLD

Sojusz Lewicy
(Democratic Left Alliance)

Social democratic, pro-EU

Razem

Partia Razem
(Together)

New Left, democratic socialist, progressive

W

Wiosna
(Spring)

Social liberal, social democratic, pro-EU

K'15

Kukiz'15
(Kukiz'15)

Right-wing populist, anti-establishment

Konfederacja

Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość
(Confederation Freedom and Independence)

Nationalist, far-right, xenophobic

winning elections and assuming governmental responsibility (post-Solidarność: 1989-1993, 1997-2001, *SLD* with *PSL* (*Polish Peasants' Party*): 1993-1997, 2001-2005).

The early 2000s brought first signs of a paradigm shift in Polish politics. The uniting goal of EU accession was about to be completed², and the left-wing government was weakened to a large degree by two large corruption scandals³. This caused diminishing support for the social democrats (further facilitated by a split within the party) resulting into a landslide defeat in 2005, from which *SLD* never recovered. The scandals activated the right-wing camp of the political spectrum. *Civic Platform* (*PO*) gained further public support as the biggest opposition party, who led the Sejm investigative committee. The scandals also gave momentum to the *Law and Justice* party (*PiS*), whose defining theme was the fight against crime and corruption. The parties, both newcomers in 2001 (even though run by seasoned politicians), turned into main political forces within a few years and were preparing to take over power in 2005. *PO* occupied more liberal,

urban and pro-business positions, while *PiS* focused on traditional values, fighting crime and corruption, and was supported by rural and more religious voters. As such, they were perceived as natural coalition partners, with many overlaps in their programmes and with complementary voter bases.

The current axis of political conflict

The conflict between the two parties started when *PiS* unexpectedly came first in the elections, ahead of the frontrunner *PO*. To add insult to injury, a month later, *PO* leader Donald Tusk, narrowly lost the presidential elections to Lech Kaczyński⁴. Mostly due to personal ambitions and resentments the coalition talks collapsed. Instead, *PiS* formed a government with two smaller parties: the agrarian populist *Samoobrona* and the ultraconservative and nationalistic *League of Polish Families* (*LPR*). The government, which lasted until 2007, was marked by conflicts and controversies. From internal disputes

² Accession negotiations were completed in December 2002, the accession treaty was signed in April 2003, and the membership referendum was held in June that year.

³ The so-called *Rywin* and *Orlen* affairs.

⁴ The president is elected every five years directly by the people by absolute majority. His role is the state's official representation, while the prime minister is the actual head of government.

to international antagonisms, their most prominent issues were with Germany and the EU. During this time *PiS* shifted further to the right, took over voters from its two coalition partners, and deepened the conflict with *Civic Platform*. In the snap elections of 2007, *Law and Justice* won additional votes assuming 32 % in total as opposed to 27 % in 2005. However, due to higher turnout and increasing polarisation, this was not enough to stay in power, as *Civic Platform* managed to gain 41.5 %. Donald Tusk became prime minister of a government formed in a coalition with *PSL*. His first term was characterised by low-key administrative-style governance and silent obstructionist conflict with Lech Kaczyński's presidential office, which was still in the hands of *PiS*. The conciliatory and moderate style of Tusk's government secured ongoing support for the party, which in 2011 translated into the first re-election of a ruling party in Poland since 1989.

However, the time of moderate politics in Poland did not last long. After the presidential plane crashed near Smolensk in April 2010, killing the incumbent Lech Kaczyński and several other prominent politicians and state officials, the rift between the two parties and their electorates deepened even further. This rift was fuelled by the distrust of *PiS* and its supporters regarding the way Tusk's cabinet handled the situation. Lech Kaczyński's twin brother Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of *PiS*, deepened this distrust by spreading conspiracy theories and raising suspicions that *PO* was collaborating with Moscow in a political assassination plot. After losing the presidential election of June 2010 to *PO*'s Bronisław Komorowski, Jarosław Kaczyński started a strategy of 'total opposition', sabotaging and incessantly criticising the government in all its activities, further polarising the political climate in the country. This antagonistic behaviour solidified the electoral base of the party but alienated moderate voters. In 2011, *PiS* secured only 29.9 % of the votes against *PO*'s 39.2 % – and continued the 'total opposition' line.

The defeat of *PO* in 2015 was mostly its own undoing. Following Tusk's election as President of the European Council in late 2014, *PO* lacked charismatic leadership and fell victim to internal fights over the party's programmatic direction. Additionally, it began to be perceived as elitist and detached from ordinary people's lives. This was especially true after illegal recordings of private conversations of *PO* politicians in posh restaurants had been made public (the so-called 'Waitergate' affair), as well as during the presidential campaign of incumbent Bronisław Komorowski in early 2015. Komorowski lost dramatically against a lesser-known Andrzej Duda from *PiS*, despite starting with a high level of initial support. Kaczyński repeated this strategy of hiding behind less antagonistic politicians in the parliamentary elections later that year, designating Beata Szydło for prime minister. Promising 'good change' and several reforms, *PiS* secured 37.6 % of the votes and defeated *PO* (24 %) by a large margin. Since a record of nearly 18 % of the votes

went to parties who failed to reach the threshold, *PiS* secured a narrow majority of 51 % of seats and was able to build a majority government.

INFOBOX – Electoral system in Poland after 1989

Bicameral parliament consisting of:

Sejm – the larger, more powerful house with 460 deputies, elected by proportional representation every four years, seats allocated via the D'Hondt method (i.e. favouring larger parties); uses a 5%-threshold (8 % for coalitions) since 1993

Senat – upper house, 100 deputies elected by first-past-the-post procedure (plurality bloc voting until 2010) every four years, elected simultaneously with *Sejm*.

Law and Justice managed to maintain popular support despite weakening the division of powers, along with several other highly controversial decisions. Moreover, *PiS* appears to be immune to political scandals. The cause of their continuous support remains a puzzle for many political commentators. Two reasons are often named: the broad social transfers initiated by the party (e.g. child benefits), and framing controversial decisions as examples of the government's effectiveness (combating the – in Kaczyński's words – 'legal impossibilism').

The long election year

Since last summer, Polish politics have been in a state of permanent electoral campaign. It began with local elections in late October 2018, and lasted through European and general elections in May and October 2019, respectively. It will end with the presidential elections in April or May 2020.

The dominant position of *Law and Justice* was confirmed by its victory in the elections to the European Parliament in May 2019, after moderate success in the local elections of October 2018, in which, despite winning popular support, the party failed to secure mayorship of any major city. The party also managed to continue its strategy to marginalise and neutralise parties on its right (such as the populist *Kukiz'15*) and it remained the frontrunner for the general elections in autumn 2019."

During the four years of *PiS* rule, *PO* remained the main opposition party. Led by former general secretary Grzegorz Schetyna it engaged mostly in political scheming rather than reinventing itself. Instead of reworking the programme and strategy, Schetyna focused on eliminating internal opposition and marginalising or incorporating competitors of the political centre: *PO* managed to win over members from the new, liberal *Nowoczesna* par-

ty (.M), contributing to its demise, and recruited Barbara Nowacka, the leader of the *United Left* coalition of 2015 and a prominent centre-left politician. *PO* gained mostly symbolic victories in the local elections (e.g. mayorship of Warsaw) and moderate gains in the European elections with an alliance dubbed *European Coalition* including *N*, *PSL*, *SLD* and a few other minor actors. *PSL*, the former coalition partner of *PO*, had faced marginalisation as well, as it had been losing voters to *PiS* in rural areas and in the small towns of Eastern Poland, its former strongholds.

In 2015, for the first time since 1989, there were no left-wing parties represented in the Polish parliament, due to electoral defeat of all left-wing parties (on the one hand the *United Left* coalition, which consisted among others of *SLD* and *Your Movement*⁵, and on the other hand the newly established, Podemos-inspired *Razem* party). Banned to extra-parliamentary opposition, the left was fragmented and divided, further antagonised by Grzegorz Schetyna's actions but also by conflicts within the left camp itself. After a crushing defeat in the 2018 local elections, the remaining parties embarked on different paths for the European elections: *SLD* aligned itself with *PO* in a grand anti-*PiS* coalition whereas *Razem* cooperated with some minor partners. However, the emergence of a new player, *Wiosna* (*W*, *Spring*) led by Robert Biedroń, the successful mayor of the middle-sized town of Słupsk with a background in both *SLD* and *Your Movement*, reshuffled the left bloc. Although the initial support for *W* was in a two-digit range, strategic mistakes made the party gain only 6 % of the votes in the European elections. Some of these mistakes included focusing on old, familiar politicians instead of young, fresh faces, and unclear campaign finance practices. The other parties scored even worse. Fearing repeated demise in the 2019 general elections, the leaders of the three groups started negotiations, and in July they announced that they would run as a united front.

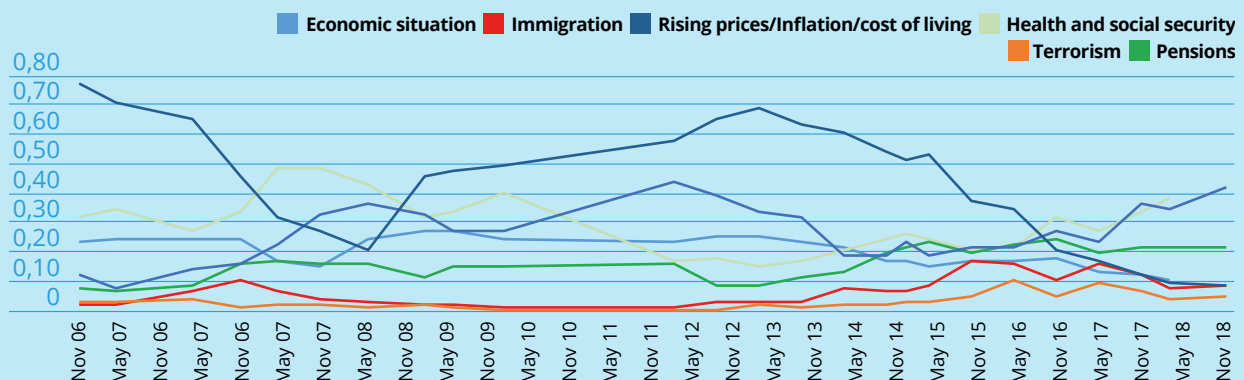
2. IMMIGRATION AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

Traditionally, Poland is a country of emigration causing political parties' focus to be limited to Poles leaving the country and suggesting possible strategies for attracting some of them back. Only in recent years has the trend shifted. Not only has the emigration of Poles slowed since 2013, but also is the country experiencing an unprecedented surge of immigration since 2014. The last couple of years has seen a huge influx of labour immigrants, predominantly from Ukraine, estimated at 1.5-2 million people, followed by much smaller groups from some Central Asian and former Soviet countries. There is no official data for 2018 yet, but the estimation is that for the first time in history the net migration to Poland was positive, i.e. more people migrated to Poland than out of the country.

Labour and education are the dominant motives for immigration, with only a tiny fraction of people immigrating for humanitarian reasons. There are hardly any immigrants and asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa, as Poland refused to participate in the EU's relocation program (the so-called refugee quota). Since 2014 there were less than 400 immigrants from Syria and a few dozen from Iraq applying for asylum directly in Poland (Statistical Year Book 2017: 448).

For a long time, immigration has not been considered an important issue (Fig. 1). Poles were far more preoccupied with economic matters, in particular, high unemployment and – in recent years – rising prices and cost of living, as well as social and health issues. The so-called refugee crisis increased awareness of the issue of immigration, which reached its peak as a major concern for Poles at 17 % in November 2015. Simultaneously, the number of terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016 (i.a.

Fig. 1: Main concerns of Polish citizens, 2005-2018



Source: Standard Eurobarometer (European Commission 2019a) / own representation

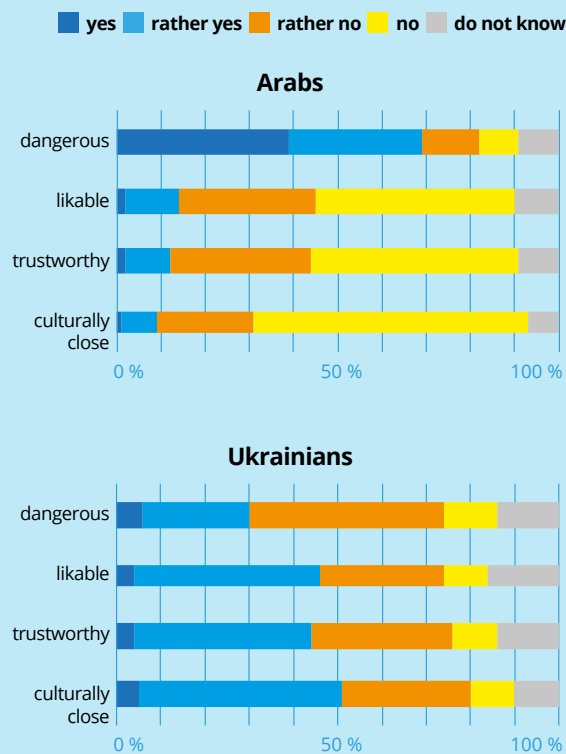
⁵ *Your Movement* (*Twój Ruch*, also known as *Ruch Palikota*, *Palikot's Movement*) was a short-lived left-liberal party founded by Janusz Palikot from dissenters from *PO*'s left-liberal wing and other left-wing parties. It won 10.2 % in the 2011 elections. For the 2015 elections it formed a coalition with *SLD* under the name *United Left*. The coalition narrowly failed to reach the 8 % threshold. The party disintegrated in 2016. In 2018 many of its former members engaged in the newly formed *Wiosna*.

Manchester, Paris, Berlin) and similar events such as the 2015/16 New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Cologne, have quickly increased concerns about terrorism. However, both issues remained less important than economic and social issues, and subsequently fell back to single-digit values in 2018.

The way immigration is framed in the Polish public discourse is somewhat paradoxical. The last couple of years has seen a significant amount of labour migrants to Poland, and though most have come from the Ukraine, the media has predominantly focused on immigrants and asylum seekers from the Middle East. This was clearly triggered by the refugee crisis of 2015, which was met with polarizing reactions (see Kozłowska (2018) for a more detailed account). There was a clear mismatch between the attention on migration issues and the actual number of migrants coming to the country. One of the main reasons for such a disparity between actual immigration and its perception is likely the emotional attitude Polish citizens have towards different groups of immigrants. While Ukrainians are mostly perceived as culturally similar and non-threatening, people from the Middle East are regarded a threat (Fig. 2). Other studies also put Poland firmly among the countries where public discourse about migration is clearly dominated by matters of security over humanitarianism, identity, demographics, or economy (Fig. 3).

This fear-driven discourse between 2015 and 2016 on the issue of refugees was reflected in media coverage. Migration has been given a lot of attention and it quickly became an object of media polarisation. Right-wing media were able to impose their narrative on moderate and (left) liberal coverage within a few months (Krotofil and Motak 2018: 63; Bertram und Jędrzejek 2015). Thus, the narrative of a cultural and social threat to (Christian) Europe became dominant in the media (Bertram, Puchejda and Wigura (2017), and terms such as 'waves of migrants', 'invasion', 'clash of civilizations', 'hybrid war', 'breeding grounds of jihadists', 'ideology of multiculturalism', 'suicide of the (liberal) elites' and 'suicide of Europe' became dominant frames and metaphors for the topic (ibidem, p. 13-36). As a result, the image of a refugee from the Middle East merged in the Polish media with an image of a 'Muslim man', or even 'Arab man'. Words such as 'Muslims', 'Arabs', 'migrants' and 'refugees' were for the most part used as synonyms, and – on top of that – often associated with topics like terrorism, Islamism, and fundamentalism. Thus, this phenomenon called "cluster thinking" (Ciecierski 2017), emerged in the Polish media, where all these complex and diverse topics conflated into a single, overtly simplified idea. Survey data support the claim that such cluster thinking spread in the general public as well. This is most clearly visible in the dynamics of anti-refugee resentments in Poland (Fig. 4). The increase in rejection of refugees clearly coincides with the emergence and development of anti-refugee rhetoric in the media.

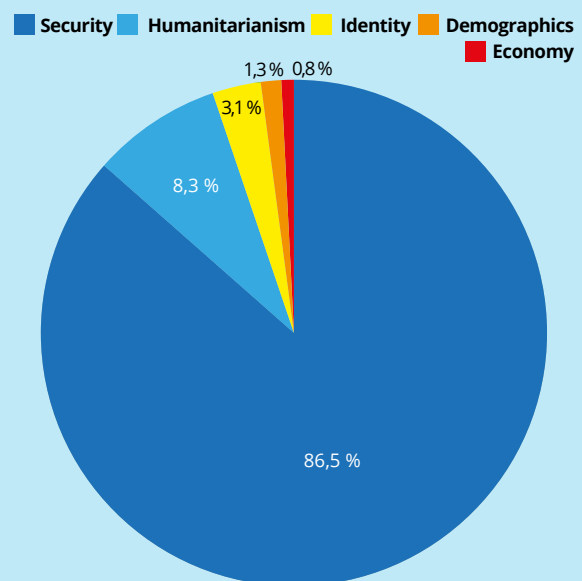
Fig 2: Attitudes of Poles towards Ukrainians and Arabs, September 2016.



Source: IPSOS for IOM (2016). Representative sample, N=1011 / own representation

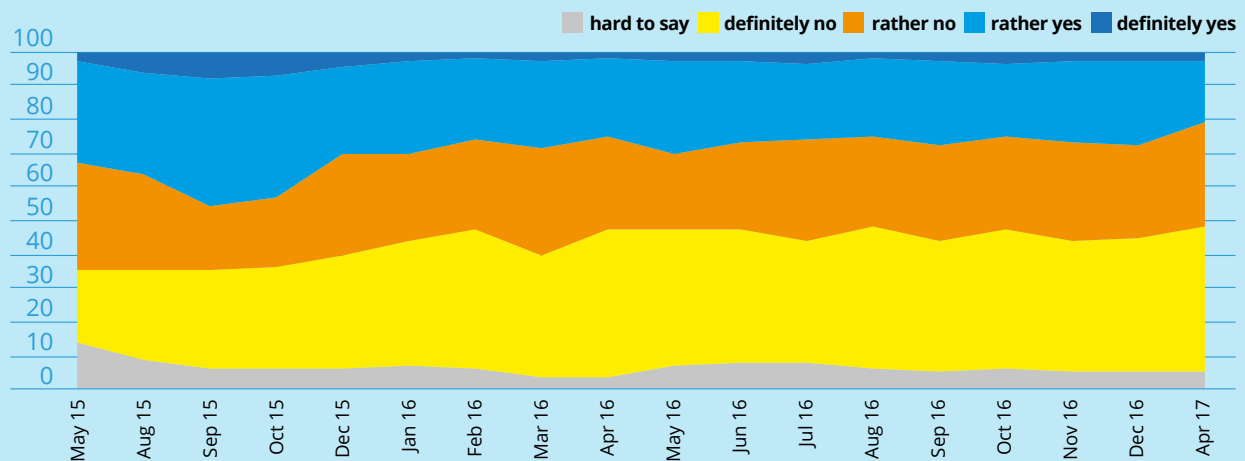
As there were hardly any Middle Eastern refugees and no terrorist attacks in Poland, the amplification of the issue relied on fear mongering and anxiety induction. Once the peak of the so-called refugee crisis and thus, the immediate threat was over (and further weakened by the lack of major terror attacks in Europe since 2017),

Fig 3: Main frames for migration in public social media comments in Poland, 2017-2018.



Source: Bakamo for FES 2019 / own representation

Fig. 4: Should Poland accept some of the refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa? May 2015-April 2017 (in %)



Source: CBOS: Stosunek do przyjmowania uchodźców. Komunikat z badań 44/2017 / own representation

so was the intensity of reactions to the topic. Today, the matter is mostly relegated to right-wing media, who still try to revive it, but it is no longer of concern to mainstream media outlets. The infrequent attempts of expanding the anti-immigration rhetoric to Ukrainian immigrants by the far-right – both in the media and by social actors alike – has thus far failed to bear any fruit.

Labour migration and migration from Ukraine (which to a large degree denote the same group) are approached by the Polish press very differently. The issue has never been central to the public discourse and rarely made front pages. It was also largely neglected during the so-called refugee crisis. But once the issue of refugees ceased to aggravate the public, labour migration has become more visible, even though still not central. The way this is described in the media differs strikingly from the coverage of refugees. The dominant frame underlines the positive impact of labour migration on the Polish economy with recently raising concerns of losing Ukrainian workers to Germany, due to the planned opening of the German market to Ukrainian labourers (e.g. Deneka 2019). Additionally, liberal and left-wing media cover instances of mistreatment of migrants – both in terms of infringements of labour rights (e.g. Nowak 2019) and in terms of ethnic discrimination (e.g. Zdanowicz 2019). Less frequently, the heart of the issue is addressed: the lack of a coherent immigration policy. Proposals for a new policy have been scrutinised for an exclusive focus on short-term migration in the interests of the market (e.g. Dziennik 2019) and criticised for lacking any measures that help migrants integrate into Polish society (e.g. Puto 2013). At the same time, both ends of the media spectrum alike praise the Polish employment rates of migrants, which are one of the highest in the EU (Eurostat 2019).

The mobilisation potential of immigration as a voting strategy is rather limited, too. There are numerous reasons contributing to the decline of the topic's relevance. One important factor is the sharp decline in irregular immigration to Europe, in particular from the Middle East

and North Africa. As a result, it is no longer perceived as an urgent matter. The topic ceased to be a central line of conflict for the government with the EU as well – in part because the crisis is over, and to a large extent, the EU complied with Central European countries' demands for a strict course on border and coastline control. Moreover, the matters concerning the rule of law in Poland became more dominant. The feared 'Muslim-Arab-fundamentalist-migrants' did not come, at least not to Poland – and the power of fear mongering against them weakened over time. Furthermore, for the last two years, there have not been any major terrorist attacks in Europe, especially none conducted by people from North Africa or the Middle East. All of this has contributed to an increased perception of control and safety, and to the near elimination of the issue from public discourse. Since the majority of Poles from across the political spectrum reject or are at least reluctant to support humanitarian migration from the region (Fig. 4), it seems largely futile to use this issue for mobilisation purposes. The mobilisation potential of labour/Ukrainian migration is minimal as well, albeit for different reasons. While Middle Eastern refugees were confronted with deep fears and strong opposition leading to strong and aggravated negative reactions, labour migration from the Central and post-Soviet East predominantly encountered neutral, indifferent, or affirmative reactions – regardless of political leanings. Even if the reasons for such attitudes differed between political camps, the issue is simply not polarising enough to be used by the parties effectively to win votes.

3. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

The campaign before the general elections started officially on 9th August 2019 with the formal announcement of the election date. Unofficially, the spring campaign for the European elections dragged into the summer. The actual start was sluggish. In August, the parties merely compiled and presented their electoral lists, and announced plans for co-

operation (a list of final coalitions is presented in the INFOBOX). Neither PiS nor PO officially published their programs before early or mid-September. Only the newly united Left did so in August. As a result, media coverage was mostly limited to coalition talks and commenting on party lists and candidates. Despite the high stakes of the elections, the impression was that both the parties and the voters were already tired of the ongoing campaign. High approval rates of the Cabinet of Mateusz Morawiecki and of PiS itself (above 40 %) further contributed to the impression that the stage was already set. Hardly anyone believed that PiS could be defeated. Both KO and the Left accepted their position as the second and third largest party and decided to directly confront PiS only in the Senat vote. In the upper house elections the first-past-the-post method is employed, meaning that only a single opposition candidate could stand against PiS in each of the constituencies. KO, the Left and PSL came to an agreement about a single opposition candidate in every Senat constituency. They ran on separate ballots to the Sejm.

Some mobilisation began in September. *Civic Platform* felt the pressure to protect its role as the main opposition party, once The Left started a united campaign and proved to secure a solid support of 10-14 %, according to opinion polls. Grzegorz Schetyna, who was generally mistrusted, copied the 2015 manoeuvre of Jarosław Kaczyński. In order to win the election, Kaczyński forfeited the opportunity to be prime minister and picked the more popular Beata Szydło as the top candidate instead. Similarly, Schetyna announced Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska as KO's top candidate instead of pursuing the position himself. Kidawa-Błońska, MP since 2005 and current Deputy Marshall of the Sejm, is known for her expertise on media policy as well as sponsoring the bill on public funding for IVF procedures between 2011 and 2015. Despite being regarded as a competent and thorough politician (e.g. she has been repeatedly listed in the semi-annual ranking of outstanding parliamentarians by the Polity-

ka weekly), she has thus far not been perceived as a leadership figure. Nonetheless, her designation has been received mostly favourably by the media and the party electorate, although it failed to increase the party's ratings. Law and Justice designated the incumbent Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki as their top candidate. Yet, the party continues to remain openly in the iron grip of Jarosław Kaczyński.

Key issues of the campaign

Five committees managed to register nationwide ballots: Law and Justice, Civic Coalition, the Left, Polish Peasant Party/Kukiz'15, and Confederation Freedom and Independence. By mid-September all main political players published their manifestos (summarized in the INFOBOX).

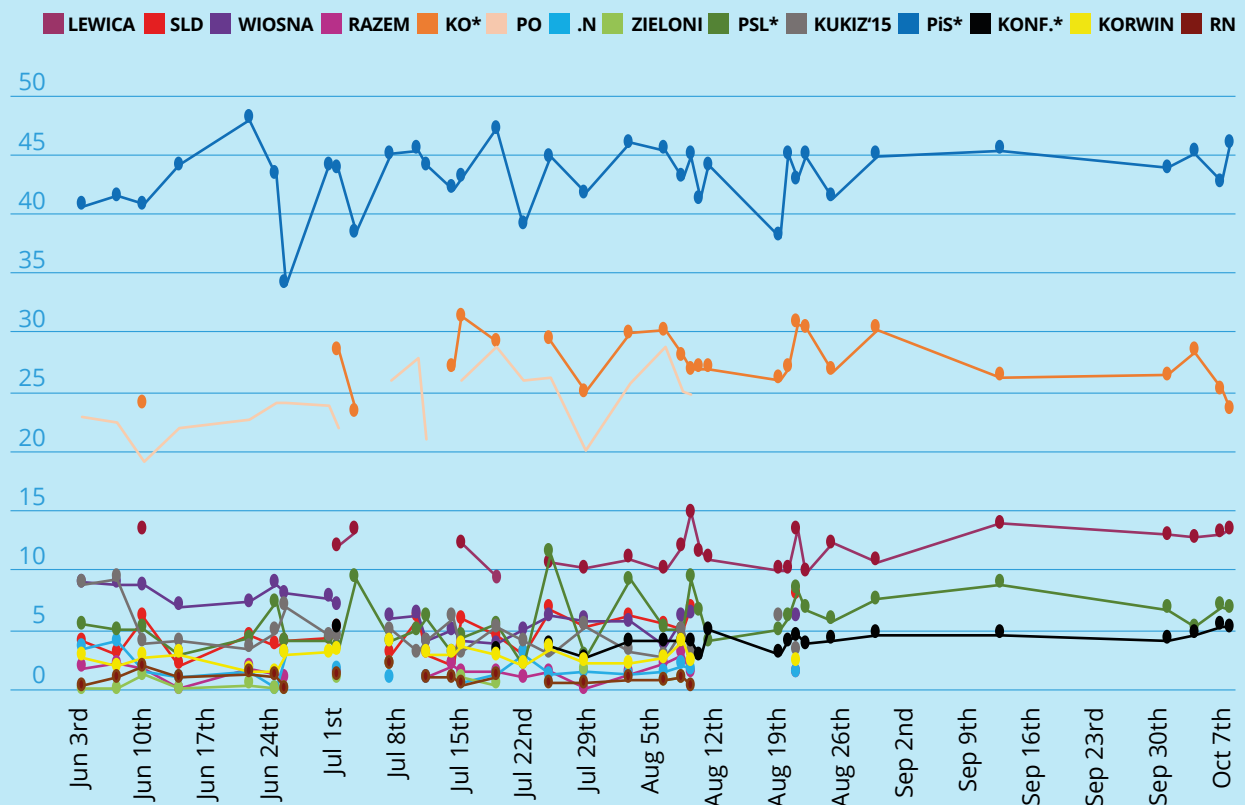
However, the campaign remained dull for the most part. This stands in a sharp contrast to the previous elections, in which the fight was fierce and the last two weeks of the campaign particularly polarising after PiS had decided to mobilise their voters with an anti-refugee agenda. This year the competition was mostly over by early October. The parties doubled down on turnout mobilisation of their voter bases and engaged in weak trench warfare from their occupied positions. Even the electoral debates held the week before the elections did not change much. Since it seemed unlikely to defeat PiS, the opposition had focused on alternative goals. KO and the Left aimed at gaining as many votes as possible having been predicted to become the second and third forces in parliament respectively, PSL and Konfederacja simply fought for passing the 5 % threshold. PiS, being safely in the winner's seat, fought against the demobilising effect of their polling advantage, which – given enough of their voters did not go to the booths - could cost them the parliamentary majority. This resulted in a somewhat peculiar campaign, as the parties seem to have mostly fought against their own electorate's apathy rather than competing with each other.

INFOBOX – Coalitions and cooperations in the 2019 general elections

<i>Abbr.</i>	<i>Polish name</i>	<i>English name</i>	<i>Participating parties and organisations</i>
PiS	<i>runs as PiS</i>	-	Law and Justice, minor partners: Porozumienie Jarosława Gowina, United Poland
KO	Koalicja Obywatelska	Civic Coalition	Civic Platform, .N, Inicjatywa Polska (Barbara Nowacka's organisation), Zieloni (Greens)
Lewica	Lewica	The Left	Democratic Left Alliance, Wiosna and Razem
PSL-K'15	Koalicka Polska	Polish Coalition	Polish Peasants' Party and Kukiz'15
Konf., Konfederacja	Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość	Confederation Freedom and Independence	KORWiN, National Movement, other nationalist and far-right organisations

Source: Polish National Electoral Commission / own preparation

Fig 5: Voting preferences over time, surveys from June, 3rd to Oct, 11th, 2019 (in %)



Source: ewybory.eu / own representation. For the days with multiple surveys conducted, a mean value for the day is calculated.

A closer look at the programmes reveals that the issue of migration was given little to no attention, despite the fact that they were quite detailed and – in the case of *Law and Justice* and *Civic Coalition* – lengthy. Neither the *Left* nor the *Civic Coalition* mention the issue even once. *The Peasants' Party* refers to it only by listing unprecedented mass migrations among potential climate change negative outcomes. It does not, however, propose any migration policy as such or provide a general position of the party towards migration. On the other hand, both parties on the right, i.e. *Law and Justice* and *Konfederacja*, refer to migration several times in their programmes. It appears important to them to represent an anti-immigration force. Both parties underline their continued disapproval of EU migration policies since 2015 and stress their rejection of any future relocation programmes or border opening plans. They both address a need for repatriation programmes and incentives for Poles abroad, especially those in the UK, for remigration. The differences are mostly in the details: while *PiS* deals with migration mostly in a chapter on international and EU politics, *Konfederacja* lists its stance on migration among matters of national security. In a way, the issue of migration functions as an identity marker for the right-wing parties, their focus being a general philosophy behind their migration attitudes – and reminding their voters that they intend to keep these attitudes in the future.

INFOBOX – Main issues and themes used in the campaign (selection)

PiS

Slogan: „Polski model państwa dobrobytu“ (“Polish model of a welfare state”)

Programme:

Continuation or expansion of programmes started in 2015-2019, listed in the so-called Kaczyński's Five:

- child benefits (so-called 500+) also for the first child
- another one-time pension bonus in 2020 (1100 zł before tax, about 250 €), and two more in 2021
- cut of personal income tax for people under 26
- lowering of personal income tax rate from 18 % to 17 % and raising the ceiling on deductible expenses
- restoration of bus route networks in rural areas

New programmes (selection):

- significant and rapid increase of minimum wage (from current 2250 zł to 4000 zł (220 € and 920 €, respectively) by the end of 2023)
- further reforms of the judiciary system, in particular abolition of legal immunity of judges and state prosecutors in criminal cases
- reforms of the press law and regulations on the journalist profession

KO

Slogan: „Twoja Polska”, „Lepsza Polska dla wszystkich” (“Your Poland”, “A better Poland for all”)

Programme (selection):

- restoring judicial autonomy and effective functioning of the courts, initiatives to strengthen the rule of law for the future and reverse unconstitutional changes to the law made since 2015 (“The Restoration of Democracy Act”), separating the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Minister of Justice posts, judiciary reforms that restore the rule of law and increase efficiency of the courts, introduction of transparent promotion rules in the judicial professions
- restoring full media freedom, including public media
- restoring the state of the army and diplomatic corps, restoring a good image of Poland internationally
- introduction of civil unions (for both homo- and heterosexuals)
- reproduction rights: restoring public financing of IVF procedures, a right to anaesthesia during childbirth, guaranteed access to prenatal screening and improvement of the perinatal care standards, sexual education in schools and reimbursed contraception, restoring non-prescription availability of emergency contraception. No liberalisation of abortion law
- equal pay and pension for men and women, gender balancing of managerial positions in public institutions and state-owned enterprises, introducing a two-month paternal leave, expanding pre-school care
- strengthening financial and formal independence of local governments

The Left

Slogan: „Łączy nas przyszłość” (“The future joins us together”)

Programme (selection):

- health system reforms – introduction of care insurance, expansion of geriatric care, increase of health spending to 7 % of GDP, public financing of IVF, expansion of fully reimbursed prescription drugs
- tackling climate change (incl. closing coal mines and increasing renewable energy, anti-smog and anti-pollution policies)
- restoring the rule of law, systemic support for the independence of the media
- labour rights (increase of minimum wage to 2700 zł monthly and 15 zł per hour, limits on zero-hour contracts, equal pay for equal work principle, gender balance in supervisory boards, compulsory labour representation in stock companies)
- marriage equality and civil unions for all
- reproduction rights: liberalisation of access to abortion, science-based and compulsory sexual education in schools, full reimbursement of contraception
- family: improvement in alimony collectability, reforms of the child allowance with limits for the richest families, expansion of public and free-of-charge pre-school care

- lowering the retirement age, raising minimum pensions, widow's pension
- improvement of the conditions in schools: smaller class sizes, medical and dental care in schools and pre-schools, publicly financed breakfast and lunch for children in schools and pre-schools,
- separation of Church and state, ending religious education in schools
- taxes: increasing tax progression and collectability, increasing deductible expenses, simplifying inheritance and donation taxes, lowering VAT to 21 %

PSL+ K'15

Slogan: „Łączymy Polaków” (“We unite the Poles”)

Programme (selection):

- family: reducing weekly working hours for parents of children under 10, free public transport for children, guaranteeing part-time employment for 2 years after childbirth, increasing number of pre-school care institutions
- pensions: lowering retirement age by one year per child born with four children entitling to minimum pension, freeing pensions from tax and social payments, lowering pension age, restoring preferential agrarian pension scheme
- incentives for young people to stay in rural areas (e.g. by ground donation or preferential renting)
- employment incentives for young people after all types of schools
- financial incentives for modernisation of house heating systems.
- schools – reducing class sizes, providing warm meals for all students regardless of income, five English lessons a week starting in 1st grade
- health system: Gradual increase of health premiums from current 6.5 % GDP to 9 %, linking remuneration of nurses to that of physicians (a stable ratio of 60 %)
- strengthening financial and formal independence of local governments

Konfederacja

Slogan: „Polska dla Ciebie” (“Poland for you”)

Programme (selection):

- Sovereign state with strong army and own currency
- Full ban on abortion
- Protection of children from ‘homo-propaganda’
- Rejection of ungrounded material claims by (pre-war) Jews
- Restoration of death penalty
- Limiting public bureaucracy
- A parental right to choose what children are being taught at school
- Freeing pensions from income tax
- Social insurance schemes on purely voluntary basis
- Removal of minimal pension regulations

Source: own preparation based on electoral programmes of the presented parties and public claims of the party members in the media.

It is striking how fast the issue of immigration, non-European in particular, disappeared from the Polish public discourse. It dominated media and politics between 2015 and 2016, and was a major subject in the 2015 electoral campaign. It then slowly disappeared from front pages and political speeches alike. During 2017 and 2018 the issue was given less and less attention. *PiS* last attempted to mobilise voters with fear of immigrants before the local elections of October 2018. However, using an extremely agitating video spot backfired, as it was widely criticized in the media as ordinary manipulation (e.g. Strzałkowski 2018) and reported by the Polish ombudsman to the public prosecutor for representing a potential hate crime (RPO 2018). Immigration has not even been key to the European elections earlier this year, despite being perceived a predominantly European matter (cf. Chmelar and Kozłowska (2019: 60). Nonetheless, it may easily resurface, provided the circumstances change. There are still two parties that tie their identity to the rejection of immigration – one of them being the main political force in the country. Thus, it is safe to assume that the issue will arise again if it becomes politically expedient to bring it back into the spotlight.

For the time being, however, the issue of migration is hardly present in the public discourse, and absent from the electoral campaign. It is not listed among issues considered most important for the elections by voters, either (Fig. 6). Instead, the results of two opinion polls – one for the conservative *Rzeczpospolita* daily and the other for the liberal TV network TVN – show that the dire state of the health system is considered problem No. 1 in the upcoming elections. Both polls found that similar issues were relevant to voters, including, climate change, social transfers and programs, education, and high prices. Migration was not considered important. Similarly, migration did not come up as a major concern in the results of a study conducted by OKO.press, a fact-checking portal. Rather, issues such as climate change (38 %), gender and LGBT issues (24 %), EU withdrawal (19 %), failure of the health system (19 %), strengthening of nationalistic movements (19%), aging society (17 %), political polarisation (16 %), Russia (15 %), and economic crises (14 %) were listed (Pacewicz 2019). This poll also confirmed the divide between men and women, especially within younger demographics (Fig. 7). Women are much more concerned about climate change, the health system, relations with the EU, and the rise of nationalism. Men, on the other hand, fear the ‘gender ideology’ and LGBT activism, the demographic crisis and Russia, and somewhat less, climate change. This goes hand in hand with earlier findings, which show that women tend to position themselves at the centre and left of the centre, while men stand predominantly to the right of it. This contributes to the already deep lines of conflict in Polish society.

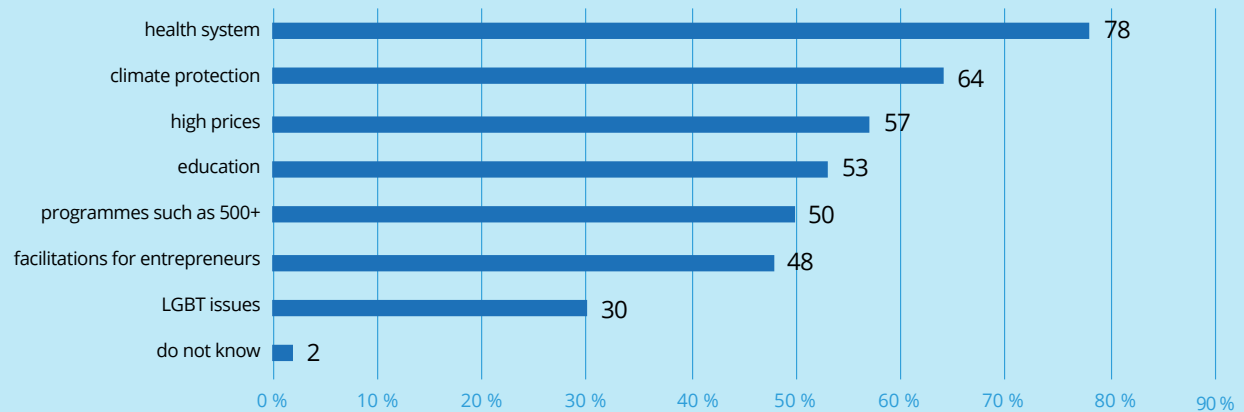
Particularly, the concerns expressed by men are worth noting. The image of the stereotypical refugee, who in the Polish discourse is predominantly portrayed as a young and strong man from a Muslim or Arab country, has lost saliency in the past year. Yet, the fear of the unknown is still present. It was simply transferred to different ‘others’ that may seem threatening to traditional masculinity, that is homosexuals and emancipated women. The right happily picked up sexual minorities and the ‘gender ideology’ as their new object for fear mongering, as they were not ready to give up on the mobilising power of fear (cf. Wodak 2015). ‘Gender ideology’, a phrase used widely in Poland, is a flexible term usually associated with such issues as abortion rights, sexual education, reproductive technologies as well as feminism and LGBT activism (Szulc 2019). Although *Law and Justice* has long been associated with traditional ‘family values,’ and anti-feminist and anti-LGBT rhetoric, this specific targeting of LGBT and gender activism is new. Two events in February triggered this new agenda: the signing of a declaration to fight LGBT discrimination by Warsaw mayor Rafał Trzaskowski, who belongs to *PO*, and well-known gay activist Robert Biedroń’s announcement to return to national politics with his newly founded party *Wiosna*. An anti-gender discourse is rather convenient for the right, and the populist right in particular, as it strengthens their claim of the “*moral division between the colonized, marginalized people and corrupt, cunning elites*” (Korolczuk 2019). With it, they are able to create the image of a group of liberals, feminists and other ‘genderists’ as ‘them,’ and frame them as an influential and dangerous elitist group with an international agenda and opaque connections that needs to be stopped (ibidem).

Furthermore, making the LGBT community the main fear figure of the right has two advantages over migrants and refugees. First, the issue is much more salient. For example, pride parades, known in Poland as ‘equality parades,’ do not only attract more participants and more media coverage every year (e.g. in Warsaw from a few hundred people in 2001 to estimated 50-80 thousand in 2019), but they also keep expanding to new cities, reaching a record of 24 parades in 2019, including the conservative bastions of the Eastern towns of Lublin, Rzeszów, and Białystok (Kopceć 2019). Fear mongering against sexual minorities and their allies is therefore much more effective, as they – as opposed to refugees – are actually visible in Poland. Second, the issue is far more polarising than immigration, with the latter attracting predominantly negative attitudes throughout the political spectrum as is established above. According to the recent Special Eurobarometer, 49 % of Poles believe that LGBT people should have the same rights as everyone else, while 45 % reject this notion (European Commission 2019b). Similarly, 45 % accept same-sex marriage in Europe, with 50 % opposing it. However, the dynam-

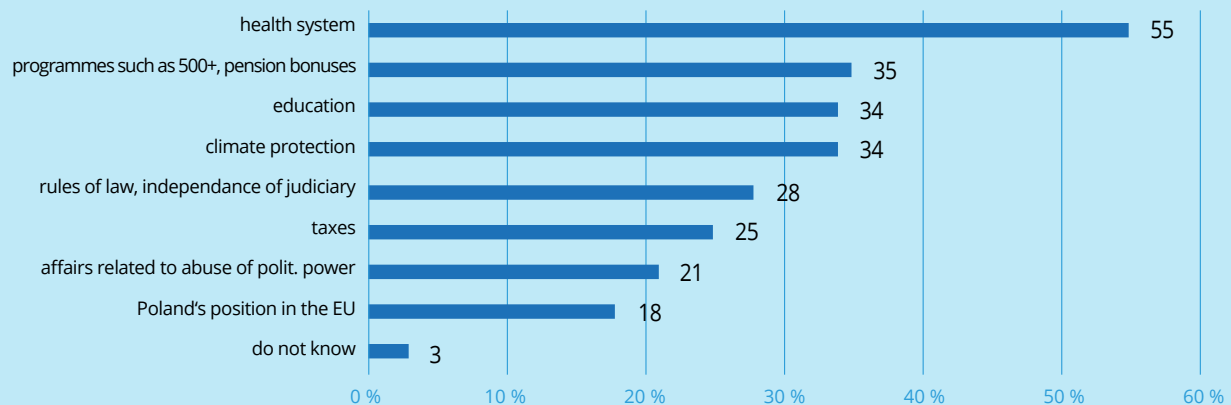
ics are in favour of tolerance, as the same study found that since 2015 acceptance of LGBT people in Poland increased significantly, by 12 % for equal rights and 17 % for same-sex marriage. In this context, the concern of every fourth Pole about 'gender and LGBT activism' (see the abovementioned OKO.press study) becomes explainable. As such, it is a perfect subject for political mobilisation.

Interestingly, there are numerous parallels in the way refugees and members of the LGBT community are framed as public enemies by the right. Sitnicka (2019) mentions four elements that are used equally in the attacks towards the two groups: they both 1) pose a threat (especially towards children), 2) go against national identity, Polish traditions, or the teachings of the Catholic Church, 3) jeopardize Polish sovereignty

Fig. 6: Opinion polls: which issues should be the main topic of the upcoming electoral campaign? (in %)

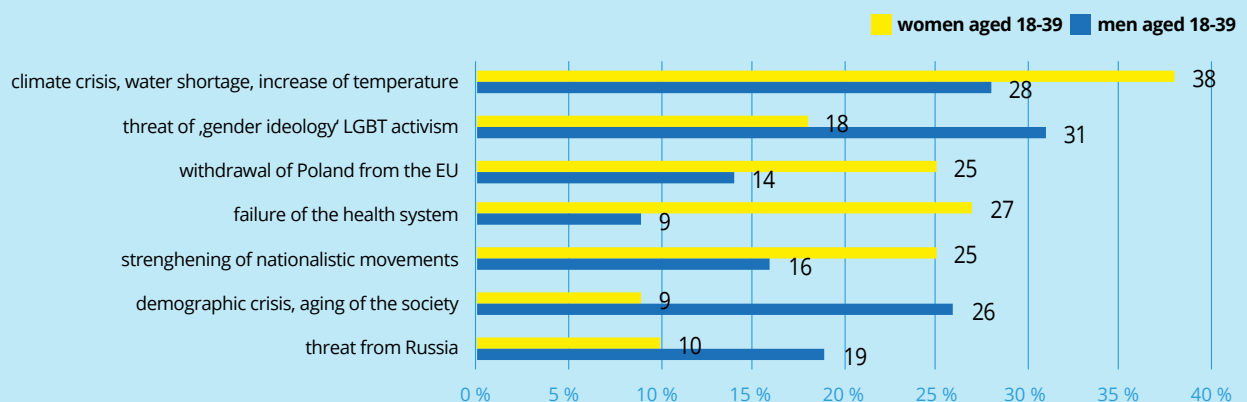


Source: IBRIS for Rzeczpospolita, 9-10. August 2019, representative sample, respondents could pick any number of answers



Source: Kantar for Fakty TVN, 12-13. August 2019, representative sample, respondents could pick up to three answers

Fig. 7: Opinion polls: which issues should be the main topic of the upcoming electoral campaign? (in %)



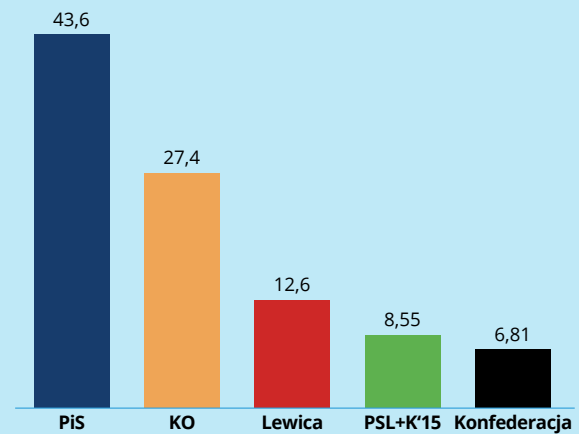
Source: IBSOS for OKO.press, 26-29. August 2019, representative sample, respondents could pick up to two answers

Fig 8: Political cartoon. Caption reads: "Immigrants take our jobs, Jews rob us, and gays abuse us sexually!".



Source: The drawing circulated on Twitter and Facebook. Despite thorough research we were not able to clarify its copyright. We appreciate any relevant indications.

Fig 9: Electoral results 2019: Sejm.



Source: National Electoral Commission / own representation

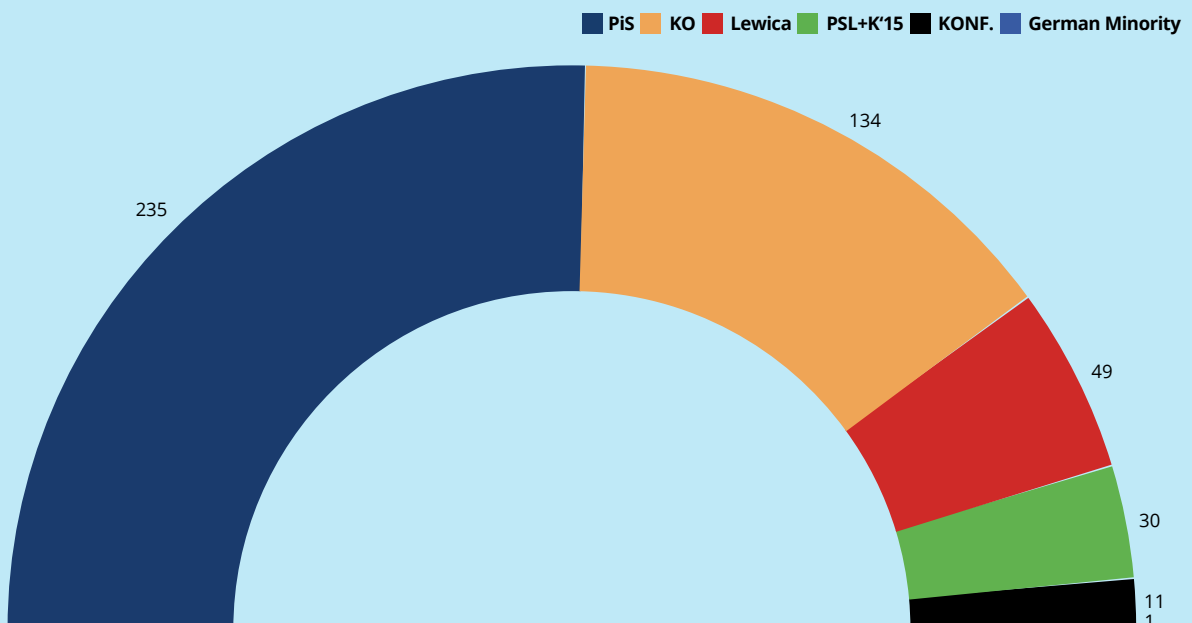
(the EU tries to force both upon Poland), and 4) cost resources that should rather be spent on other, 'real' needs. LGBT rights being portrayed as something foreign, which is imposed on Poland is a particularly recurring feature, e.g. in this infamous quote by Jarosław Kaczyński during a gathering in Włocławek: "These ideologies, philosophies, all of this is imported, these are not internal Polish mechanisms. They are a threat to Polish identity, to our nation, to its existence and thus to the Polish state." (cf. Davies 2019). However, this tactic has been used in the past, as the right once made similar claims about the Jewish community. This connection to anti-Semitism has been emphasized by political cartoonists (Fig. 8) and social activists. For example, Piotr Godzisz of Lambda, an LGBT organisation, observed:

"In the last campaign, the big threat was Muslim migrant. At other times, the enemy is the Jews. Now it's our turn" (ibidem). In a sense, assumptions about the Jew, the refugee, and the homosexual cause a triad of xenophobic fears in the Polish right, as each represents a variant of the 'other' – even if today, anti-Semitism is unacceptable everywhere except on the most extreme margins of the far-right.

4. THE ELECTORAL RESULT

PiS, as expected, was the clear winner of the election to the Sejm, securing 43.59 % of the votes (Fig. 8) and an absolute majority of seats (Fig. 9). Despite their victory, PiS had hoped for a higher percentage of votes, as many polls pre-

Fig 10: Seats distribution: Sejm.



Source: National Electoral Commission / own representation

dicted they would see up to 48 %. Jarosław Kaczyński even expressed dissatisfaction in his victory speech maintaining that “we did well, but we deserve more”. *KO* came second with 27.40 %, followed by the *Left* (12.56 %), *PSL* (8.55%), and *Konfederacja* (6.81 %). Both *PSL* and *Konfederacja* passed the 5 % electoral threshold. *PiS* also won the *Senat* vote with 44 %. However, due to the distribution of votes, it failed to secure a majority in many constituencies. As a result, *PiS* lost control of the upper house by a narrow margin (49 to 51).

The recent trend of high voter turnout continues, after a record-high in local elections in October in 2018 and in the European elections in May 2019. In this election, voter turnout reached 61.16 %, which is the highest turnout in general elections since 1989 (when it reached 62.7 %), and the third highest voter turnout in elections in Poland since 1989 in general. Thus, Polish democracy, whose rule of law has come under fundamental threat, is improving in terms of participation rates.

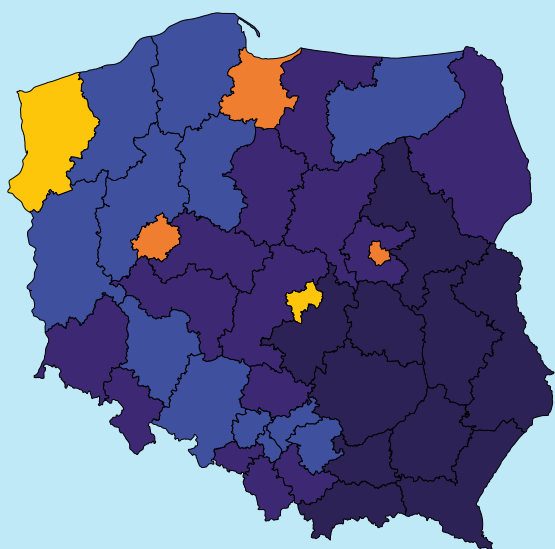
There were no surprises in the regional distribution of party support. The geographical differences that were present in earlier elections resurfaced once again: the North-West and big cities in the East tend to vote along progressive and liberal lines, the South-East tend to vote conservative (Fig. 10). However, this time the differences were less pronounced for the *Sejm* vote, as *PiS* won, albeit narrowly, in many constituencies that thus far had been rather progressive. *PiS* won in 36 out of 41 constituencies. The North-West/South-East divide was also visible in the *Senat* vote (Fig. 11).

The patterns in voting behaviour generally matched past elections, although the youngest group of voters (ages 18-29) showed interesting results: not only did *PiS* gain

26.2 % of their votes, but the far-right *Konfederacja* received 20.2 %, which is almost thrice the result that was seen in the general population. The *Left* gained 17.7 % within this group, which is 5 % higher than in the general population (all data from the exit poll by IPSOS). Young voters clearly reject the *PiS-PO* duopoly and they are more radical in their political leanings, picking *Konfederacja*, if they lean to the right, and the *Left*, if they are more progressive. Generally, *PiS* attracted the majority of older and less educated (elementary and vocational training) voters. Although, *PiS* clearly monopolised the support of the less educated Poles, no one seems to have a clear advantage in the higher education segment, which is divided between *PiS*, *KO*, and the *Left*, who gained the most of their support in this demographic group. Surprisingly, there were only minor gender differences in voting preferences: women tended to vote for *KO* somewhat more often than men, and men chose *Konfederacja* almost twice as often as women. Moreover, there were only minor gender disparities in the electoral bases of the remaining parties. However, there was a clear difference in results between cities and the countryside: *PiS* won in villages (56.2 %) and small towns (population below 50,000: 41.7 %, population between 51,000 and 200,000: 38.3 %). Cities, on the other hand, were a domain of *KO* (population between 201,000 and 500,000: 39.3 %, population above 500,000: 41.1 %). Moreover, the larger the town, the more people voted for the *Left* (albeit it always remained in 3rd place) as well as for *Konfederacja*. The countryside also remains the stronghold of *PSL*. *PiS* managed to keep most of their 2015 voters (90 %), while *KO*, the *Left* and *PSL* kept around 70 % of theirs. The former supporter base of *Kukiz'15* disintegrated, picking *PiS*, *PSL*, and *Konfederacja* in equal parts instead (ibidem).

Fig 11: Regional distribution of support (Sejm), by constituencies

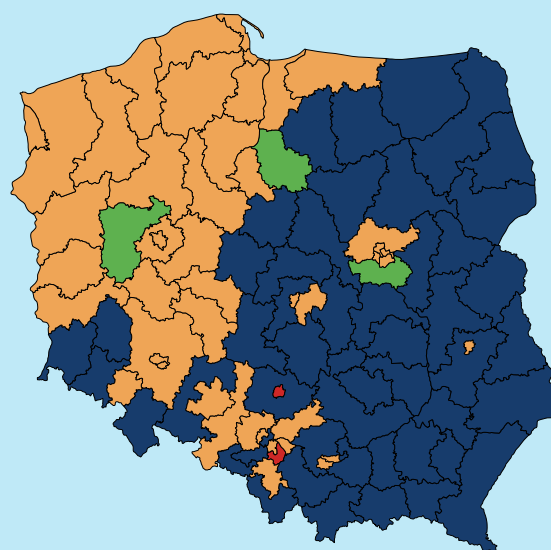
PiS won with at least 55 % 40-55 % less than 40 %
 KO won with more than 40 % less than 40 %



Source: PKW. / own representation

Fig 12: Regional distribution of support (Senat), by constituencies

PiS KO PSL SLD



Source: Source: Visualisation by OKO.press, data from National Electoral Commission / own representation

5. OUTLOOK

In 2019, Polish citizens decided to keep *Law and Justice* in power. The party managed to maintain an absolute majority of seats in the *Sejm* (by a margin of 4). It is unlikely there will be major change in the structure of the future government, as *PiS* does not need to seek coalition partners. A small restructuring of the cabinet is likely, but it is unlikely that there will be huge changes to their existing plan of action. This also means a continuation of policies that resulted in conflicts with the EU in recent years, i.e. the continuation of the disputed changes to the judiciary system. Moreover, there is also concern that *PiS* might target independent media.

However, losing the upper house to the opposition means that it will become harder for *PiS* to continue unchallenged with their reforms. Although, the *Senat* does not have full blocking powers over the law proposals voted in by the *Sejm*, it can nonetheless stall and delay the legislative process and vote in amendments to the proposed laws. It can propose new laws, too, – even if their passing depends on support in the *Sejm*, which may prove hard with it being further dominated by *PiS*. Nonetheless, despite the limited powers of the *Senat*, winning it over still counts as a major victory for the opposition. Their strategy of coordinating candidacies and mutual support for one another's candidates proved successful. If they repeat this in the upcoming spring presidential election and agree on a common candidate, they may repeat this victory. With the presidential office in the hands of the opposition, it will gain even more powers, as the president has the right to veto new bills.

It is not only the *Senat* that gets a new face. Although the same party stays in power, the composition of the new *Sejm* will differ from the old one. The *Left* returns to the *Sejm* with 48 representatives, many of whom are first-time parliamentarians. The far-right made it into parliament as well with 11 MPs. This means that after *Sejm* had been dominated by right and centre-right parties for four years, with these elections more plurality returned to Polish politics. This also holds true within the opposition itself: the parties of the newly elected *Sejm* not only differ from *PiS* but also – in some cases significantly – from each other. Therefore, they will likely criticise the ruling party from different perspectives and for different activities. *KO* will probably continue to focus on criticising social programmes and the weakening of the constitutional order. The *Left*, on the contrary, will likely welcome social redistribution. However, it will focus on condemning infringements of civil liberties and minority rights, as well as on protecting the principles of secularism and separation of church and state. The presence of *Konfederacja* in the *Sejm* means that *PiS* will get opposition to the right and will cease to be the only political force claiming the rejection of sexual minorities, migrants, or reproductive rights. Since *Konfederacja's* economic ideology is libertarian, it is likely to criticise too

much state interference in the economy, statism and excessive social programmes on the one hand, and too little rejection of the EU and other international obligations on the other hand. These considerations will probably make it much harder for *PiS* to ignore criticism, and to remain immune to most of it. One more, and less positive, outcome of the increased plurality is possible, too: *PiS* may start to be perceived as a more moderate party due to the increased presence of opinions and attitudes even further to the right than theirs. Alternatively, they may further radicalise in order to avoid being outflanked from the right.

As long as no new immigration or refugee crisis emerges, it is unlikely that there will be many changes to the way Poland handles its migration matters today. The ruling party will remain opposed to immigration in declarations, in particular to that from the Middle East. In practice, it will continue to quietly allow for easy access to the labour market for migrants from Ukraine and Central Asian countries. The electoral results also mean that Poland will remain a tough partner for the EU, focused on national interests and national sovereignty, and not at all on European solutions to humanitarian crises or a common European immigration policy. Another escalation of the conflict in the Middle East after the recent withdrawal of the USA from Syria may bring a new wave of asylum seekers or even trigger new terrorist activities by ISIS fighters who escape from increasingly understaffed and erratic Kurdish prisons. As a result, Poland will be even more inclined to continue or escalate its antagonistic politics towards the EU and its Member States.

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PROFILE

In recent years in particular the topic of migration has led to new political polarisations in the societies of Europe. The political and social challenges associated with this development are not yet foreseeable. There is a need for studies which explore the relationship between migration and democracy.

The Mercator Forum for Migration and Democracy (MIDEM) asks about the impact of migration on democratic institutions, policies and cultures and looks into political decision making processes in the field of migration policies - in individual countries and in a comparative view of Europe. A spotlight is put on the relation between migration and populism.

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IMPRINT

ISSN 2570-0707

Editor:

Prof. Dr. Hans Vorländer, Director
Mercator Forum Migration and Democracy (MIDEM)

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Editorial Staff:

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Katja Solbrig

Design:

Vollblut GmbH & Co. KG

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This report is based on the cooperation between MIDEM and the European University Institute (EUI).

MIDEM is a research centre of Technische Universität Dresden (TUD) in cooperation with the University of Duisburg-Essen, funded by Stiftung Mercator.

