

# Law and Justice (PiS) might be re-elected to office in Poland

Corinne Deloy

Analysis

In Poland, the elections succeed one another, and their outcomes are similar. On 13th October next 30 million Poles will renew the members of both houses of Parliament (460 MPs and 100 Senators), as announced by the President of the Republic Andrzej Duda (independent, former PiS member) on 6th August last.

Many suggest that the upcoming election will be a clash of civilisation. However, Poles do not seem to want to change their governing team. The opposition forces vainly promise not to give up or not to amend the various social measures taken by the PiS over the last four years, voters do not seem really motivated to turn towards another party, or they are not really convinced of the need in this context to change those governing them, since the PiS remains the most credible in the social area than any of its adversaries.

The PiS, which exercises a strong grip over the media that have been turned, in the opinion of some, into propaganda tools, has already succeeded in setting the main themes of the electoral campaign: social benefits and the policies which should be adopted regarding LGBT people, who the party does not hesitate to define as the "enemy", an expression which it already successfully employed to designate refugees from Syria and Ethiopia during the parliamentary campaign on 25th October 2015. "The LGBT community is a threat to the nation's identity and the Polish State," declared the leader of the PiS, Jaroslaw Kaczynski in April last.

According to a poll undertaken on 6th and 7th September last by IBRiS, the PiS is due to win 42.4% of the vote

on 13th October, ahead of the Civic Coalition (KO), which brings together Civic Platform (PO) and Modern (Nowoczesna) 22.7%; Lewica (The Left), a coalition of several parties on the left including the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), Wiosna and Razem is due to win, 13.1%; the Polish Coalition, which brings together the People's Party (PSL) and Kukiz'15, 5.6%.

However, the electoral campaign might still change the situation. One thing is certain however: the PiS must be careful not to believe that its victory is already guaranteed, and it must not ignore its rivals. "I am not going to hide from you that I would like this campaign to be as short as possible," indicated the head of State Andrzej Duda, adding, "Poles want the political disputes to end as quickly as possible. They are natural during the electoral campaign, but people do not like it."

## Law and Justice: the conservative revolution

Over the last four years, the PiS, aided by the good economic situation (GDP growth of an average 4% per year since 2015), has deployed a vast, generous social aid programme. It honoured its 2015 campaign promises by introducing a month's allocation of 500 zlotys (125€), called the 500+, paid to each child in families with the lowest income, and as of the second child in families with an average wage (5,000 zlotys, 1,300€). In the upcoming elections this measure has been extended to all children. The government has also allocated a 13th month of retirement pension, reduced income tax from 18 to 17% and increased social aid

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paid to the handicapped and farmers. Moreover, since 1st August last workers under 26 no longer pay any income tax, a measure taken to counter the exodus of young Poles, which has been a major problem in Poland.

For the next four years PiS is promising to increase the minimum wage from 2,250 zlotys to 3,000 by 2020. This is due to rise to 4,000 zlotys by the end of the mandate in 2023. The 13th month of retirement pension will be renewed, and people with the lowest pensions will receive a 14th month. The minimum pension will be increased, likewise aid received by farmers. Finally, the outgoing Prime Minister declared that special funds of 456 million € will be created for education and another for healthcare.

The social security system is not as developed in Poland as it is in Western Europe. Jaroslaw Kaczynski maintains that he wants to build the "Polish version of the Welfare State". The PiS is therefore undertaking a policy that mixes social redistribution and conservatism, repeating that its only goal is that each Pole can benefit from the transition. Many Poles are grateful to it and the disdain shown by many opposition members to the PiS simply consolidates the grip of the latter over its electorate.

The PiS, which is extremely conservative, notably attracts rural voters, those who are not highly qualified or wealthy. This electorate forms the majority in Poland, where only 30% of the population lives in large towns. The party is notably conservative regarding societal issues. It has made the right to abortion more difficult and stands as a rampart against LGBT people, in which it sees a threat against Catholic family values, i.e. according to the PiS, Polish identity.

It has also pushed through several reforms which have damaged the independence of the legal system, causing the EU to trigger article 7 of the EU treaty against Warsaw in December 2017, a first in the Union. However, this procedure does not seem to have weakened the PiS, which has also promised to continue its reform in the event of victory on 13th October.

## A divided opposition

### Civic Platform

The Polish opposition is extremely divided. The various players which make it up have however tried to come together, aware that only union will be able to bring down the PiS, and that the d'Hondt system in force for the distribution of seats in the Diet, the lower house of parliament, fosters the biggest parties (or coalitions). This is why, in the European elections on 26th May last, the opposition united within one European Coalition (KO). This brought together the Civic Platform (PO) the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the People's Party (PSL) and Modern (Nowoczesna).

The European election should logically have fostered this group of parties rallying within this bloc, which stood as pro-European and pro-democratic, but the European Coalition was beaten. The PiS won 45.38% of the vote on 26th May, i.e. "the highest result ever won by a party in elections post 1989" according to the very words of Jaroslaw Kaczynski; 38.47% of the vote went to the opposition. Wiosna (Spring), the left-wing party founded by Robert Biedron, which refused to join the European Coalition won 6.6% of the vote. Turnout was relatively high (45.68%), and this should have favoured the opposition.

Undoubtedly the coalition was too divided. The alliance of the Civic Platform (PO), a party founded by anti-Communist supporters and the post-Communist party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), did not convince people. Finally, the parties did not always play the game, with some showing their reticence to campaign for the candidates from other parties.

Due to the result of the European election and the ensuing divisions, the PO announced the end of the European Coalition on 18th July last. At the same time the SLD declared that it would form a new alliance called Lewica (The Left), with, amongst others, Wiosna and Razem (which means "Together").

PO joined forces with Modern, a liberal party founded in 2015 by World Bank economist Ryszard Petru,

to create the Civic Coalition (KO) in view of these parliamentary elections.

The PO, led by Grzegorz Schetyna, has never overcome the departure of Donald Tusk in 2014 for the presidency of the European Council. It wrongly believed that Polish society would liberalise faster than it has done. Its discourse especially therefore addresses the wealthiest, most urbanised and qualified citizens, i.e. a minority of the population.

However, PO is promising not to undo the various social measures undertaken by the PiS over the last four years: "what has been given cannot be taken back," declared Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska, the party's candidate for the post of Prime Minister.

The PO which has chosen the slogan "lower taxes, higher wages" offers to reduce social charges that weigh on wages to 35% (50% at present) and to grant a tax-free bonus of 500 zlotys to those who receive the minimum wage. It also hopes to make profits reinvested by entrepreneurs in their businesses tax-free. Although it does not want to undo the social measures the PO hopes to review the laws it deems anti-democratic and anti-constitutional adopted by the PiS, notably those regarding the legal system. It wants to bring in what it is calling "an act to renew democracy".

The PO is also experiencing a problem of image and leadership. Indeed, it is headed by Grzegorz Schetyna, a subtle political strategist who is cruelly lacking in charisma. The party also chose Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska, the Vice-President of Parliament, as its candidate for Prime Minister. "Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska is not a very controversial personality who might attract more votes than Grzegorz Schetyna. The PO will not come first in the election, but the sum of the votes might prove decisive for each of the two sides, centrist on one side and nationalist conservative on the other," maintains Anna Materska-Sosnowska, a political expert. Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska, the lead

candidate in Warsaw says that she wants to "change politics so that politicians stop spreading hate."

### The Left (Lewica)

After the dissolution of the European Coalition, the SLD formed a coalition called Lewica with Wiosna, Razem, the Socialist Party (PPS), the Labour Union (UP) and several feminist and secular organisations.

Amongst other things this coalition hopes to increase the minimum wage (up to 2,700 zlotys/month), introduce a "citizen's pension", enable access by all to medicines by reducing their cost, build one million apartments, enable better nursery access, devote 7% of the GDP to the healthcare sector, abolish religious education in school, create a secular State and legalise abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy.

It remains to be seen whether this coalition is truly coherent or whether it is an opportunist assembly. It is difficult for the left to make its voice heard, whilst the PiS occupies the social field and that the poorest populations are also the eldest and the most conservative. It would be good if Lewica enabled the return of the Polish left into parliament, from which it has been absent for the last four years. If it fails, the future of this political family might be comprised.

Robert Biedron, the founder of Wiosna (Spring), a left wing party, who is against the clergy, is feminist and a defender of LGBT rights, has not relinquished his seat as an MEP during the electoral campaign, as he previously promised, and he joined the Left Coalition, whilst he had announced that Wiosna would run alone in the elections.

The former mayor of Slupsk (northern Poland) qualifies his party as progressive and wants to distance it from the PO and the PiS by developing an alternative policy from those adopted by these two parties. Robert Biedron is fighting for an increase in the minimum salary and retirement pension, the end of the use

of coal by 2035, the separation of the State and the Church, the right to abortion, minority rights and same sex marriage.

### The Polish Coalition

During the European elections the People's Party (PSL) lost its electorate, notably to the benefit of the PiS. It therefore questioned its participation in an alliance with other parties, which it deems in the majority to be on the left, in the election on 13th October. "It will be the left or us. The PO has to tell us clearly whether it wants to build a moderate, centrist coalition with us or whether it wants to build a left-wing coalition," indicated the PSL's President Wladyslaw Kamysz. The PSL finally chose to join forces with Kukiz'15, a populist party created in 2015 by Pavel Kukiz. The latter notably hopes to do away with political parties and reform the electoral system.

### The Polish Political System

The Polish Parliament is bicameral: the Diet (Sejm), the lower house comprises 460 MPs, and the Senate (Senat), the upper house 100 members. The two chambers can meet in the National Assembly (Zgromadzenie Narodowe) on three occasions only: when the President of the Republic is sworn in, if the latter is under trial before the State court or when the head of State is unable to exercise power on health grounds.

Elections take place in Poland every 4 four years. With the exception of lists representing the national minorities any political party has to win at least 5% of the vote cast to be represented in the Diet (8% for a coalition).

For the Diet Poland is divided into 41 constituencies which each elect between 7 and 20 MPs. The parties and groups comprising at least 15 citizens are allowed to put forward lists in the elections. The lists must receive the support of at least 5000 voters in the constituencies where they are running. The electoral law obliges

35% of the candidates on these lists to be women.

The Senators are elected by direct universal suffrage in a majority one round vote in a first past the post system. Each constituency elects one Senator. Candidates running for a Senator's post must have the support of at least 3,000 voters in their constituency.

The minimum age to be elected MP is 21 and 30 for a Senator. Candidates cannot run for both the Diet and the Senate.

5 political parties are represented in the Diet (Sejm):

- Law and Justice (PiS), a conservative party to which outgoing Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki belongs, founded on 13th June 2001. Led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, it has 235 seats and 61 Senators;
- Civic Platform (PO), created in March 2001, led by Grzegorz Schetyna, has 138 seats in the Diet and 32 in the Senate;
- the People's Party (PSL), a centrist, agrarian party chaired by Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz. The oldest political party in Poland (it was founded in 1895), it has 38 seats and 1 Senator;
- Kukiz'15, a populist party created in 2015 by Pavel Kukiz, a rock singer, actor and unfortunate candidate in the presidential election on 10th and 24th May 2015 (he won 20.80% of the vote in the first round). Kukiz'15 has 42 seats in the Diet;
- .Modern (Nowoczesna), a liberal party founded in 2015 by World Bank economist Ryszard Petru, led by Katarzyna Lubnauer, has 28 seats.

The German minority has 1 seat and 4 Senators who are independent.

The Poles elect their President by direct universal suffrage every 5 years. Andrzej Duda was elected on 24th May 2015 with 51.55% of the vote, pulling ahead of the outgoing head of State, Bronislaw Komorowski (PO) (48.45%).

**Reminder of the parliamentary election results 25th October 2015 in Poland**

Diet

Turnout: 50.92%

Political parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
<b>Law and Justice (PiS)</b>	5 711 687	37.58	235
<b>Civic Platform (PO)</b>	3 661 474	24.09	138
<b>Kukiz'15</b>	1 339 094	8.81	42
<b>Modern (Nowoczesna)</b>	1 155 370	7.60	28
<b>United Left</b>	1 147 102	7.55	0
<b>People's Party (PSL)</b>	779 875	5.13	16
<b>KORWiN</b>	722 999	4.76	0
<b>Razem (Together)</b>	550 349	3.62	0
<b>German Minority</b>	27 530	0.18	1
<b>Others</b>	105 191	0.69	0

Source : [https://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349\\_Wyniki\\_Sejm](https://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349_Wyniki_Sejm)

Senate

Turnout: 50.91%

Political parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats
<b>Law and Justice (PiS)</b>	5 993 433	39.99	61
<b>Platform Civic (PO)</b>	4 323 789	28.85	34
<b>People's Party (PSL)</b>	1 109 675	7.40	1
<b>Others</b>	3 561 189	23.76	4

Source : [https://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/351\\_Wyniki\\_Senat](https://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/351_Wyniki_Senat)

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