

# PRECIOUS VOTES

Poland's most recent parliamentary elections, which took place in October, highlighted the importance of your vote. These elections also showed us how the voting day becomes a holiday of democracy when we decide to go out and vote, and we see other people doing the same. Our votes add up to shape voter turnout statistics and give the elections their ultimate meaning. Below are a handful of facts regarding the October elections.

## Raw Numbers

The pro-democracy groups, combined, received a total of 8,958,824 votes. These groups are as follows: the Civic Coalition; the Democratic Left Alliance, which is now referred to as The Left, in conjunction with coalition partners known as the Spring party and the Together party; and the Polish People's Party, referred to by its Polish acronym PSL, with Kukiz '15 as its junior coalition partner.

On the other hand, when we count the votes cast for the two para-democratic forces -- i.e., the Law and Justice party and the Confederation -- they have won 9,308,888 votes in total, of which the Law and Justice party by itself (often referred to by its Polish language acronym, PiS) received 8,051,935 votes.

Very importantly, voter turnout soared to new heights. As many as 18,678,457 people cast valid votes in this year's parliamentary elections. When divided by the number of eligible voters (30,253,556 persons), we can see that voter participation surged to 61.74%. This was the highest voter turnout since the 1989 breakthrough elections, which ended communism in Poland.

## Most New Voters Supported Non-PiS Candidates

As we could see with our own eyes on the day of elections and as multiple surveys confirmed later, many people who did not vote in prior elections came out to vote this time. Finally! But you may ask, what effect did it have on the overall results?

As it turned out, among more than 8 million votes cast for the Law and Justice party, only 9% of them -- specifically, 754 thousand votes -- came from persons who did not participate in earlier elections. By contrast, this new voter ratio was astonishingly higher among those who supported the Left and the Confederation, with new voters accounting for 33% and 41% of all votes cast for these two political groups, respectively. In absolute numbers, the Left attracted 755 thousand new voters and the Confederation gained 514 thousand. Meanwhile, the Civic Coalition won 884 thousand votes from people who did not vote in the 2015 parliamentary elections.

According to Dr. Andrzej Machowski, a psychologist specializing in psychometrics -- whose analysis was published in "Gazeta Wyborcza," a major Polish daily newspaper -- for the pro-democracy opposition as a whole, meaning for the Civic Coalition, the Left, and the PSL counted together, the new voter ratio has increased by 13.2 percentage points, whereas for the PiS party, the new voter ratio dropped by as much as 24.8 percentage points.

What if voter turnout were even higher in these elections? For example, if the above new voter turnout differentials applied to a hypotheti-

cal voter turnout of 70%, then the Civic Coalition, the Left, and the PSL, combined, would have received a total of 49.79% of the votes while the PiS would have won 41.15% -- with 7.86% of ballots going to the Confederation.

All this illustrates the point that each vote is crucially important. Political commentators have used various flowery expressions to describe these election results: the PiS has hit a ceiling; the Civic Coalition has fallen into a state of lethargy; the PSL has come back to life; and, finally, the Left has caught wind in its sails.

Machowski makes another interesting observation, by comparing parliamentary election results from 2015 and 2019: namely, when compared to all other parties, the PiS has done a far better job wooing voters from other parties while retaining its own past voters. What does it mean? Well over 1.5 million voters who supported other parties in 2015 have defected from those parties and switched to the PiS in 2019. This gave the PiS more than 10% more votes than it had received in 2015.

On the other hand, notes Machowski, a higher voter turnout does not seem to serve the PiS well. Almost 60% of new voters came out to vote... against PiS. In other words, a higher voter turnout reduces the ruling party's share of votes cast.

## Let's Fantasize a Little

Another interesting numerical outcome of the latest elections is that two smaller parties that have been voted into power under the PiS umbrella have won more lower-house seats than in previous elections, thereby gaining relatively bigger clo-

ut within the PiS-led coalition. One of these parties is Solidarna Polska led by Zbigniew Ziobro, who currently serves as the minister of justice. The second is Porozumienie of Jarosław Gowin, who currently serves in the dual role of deputy prime minister and the minister of science and university education. Each of these smaller parties now has 18 deputies in the Sejm, the lower house of the parliament. This distribution of parliamentary mandates is a result of voter turnout, voter preferences and the election law of course. Ziobro and Gowin are happy with these election results. As Civic Platform politician Radosław Sikorski noted, this newly increased clout could tempt Ziobro with an opportunity to create a parliamentary caucus of his own, as an

alternative to PiS. If such a splinter group were to join forces with the Confederation, the two of them could form a Polish equivalent of Jobbik (a far-right party in Hungary). In another potential upset, Gowin could decide to take his 18 parliamentary mandates out of the PiS parliamentary caucus and join the opposition, which could end the PiS party's hold on power. Theoretically speaking, if Gowin were to make this move, he could even vie for a top position in national politics -- e.g., the prime ministership.

All in all, fellow Citizens, voter participation has a future!

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#### Bibliography

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