SOCIAL DEMOCRACY WITH (OUT) PEOPLE:

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL AND EXPANSION OF THE POLISH LEFT





Methodological note

Analytical approach:

- 1. Supply-demand analysis:
- Electoral manifestos
- General public attitudes and preferences regarding chosen policy issues

- 2. Non-programmatic factors:
- Voter motivations and tactics (voter flows, voter decisions)
- Perception of the left-wing formations in Poland (image, credibility, leadership potential)

Methods:

- Surveys carried out by IBRIS in November 2023 and August 2024 (!)
- Desk research on existing sources on the general electorate and voter behaviours in Poland

Research questions

Research questions:

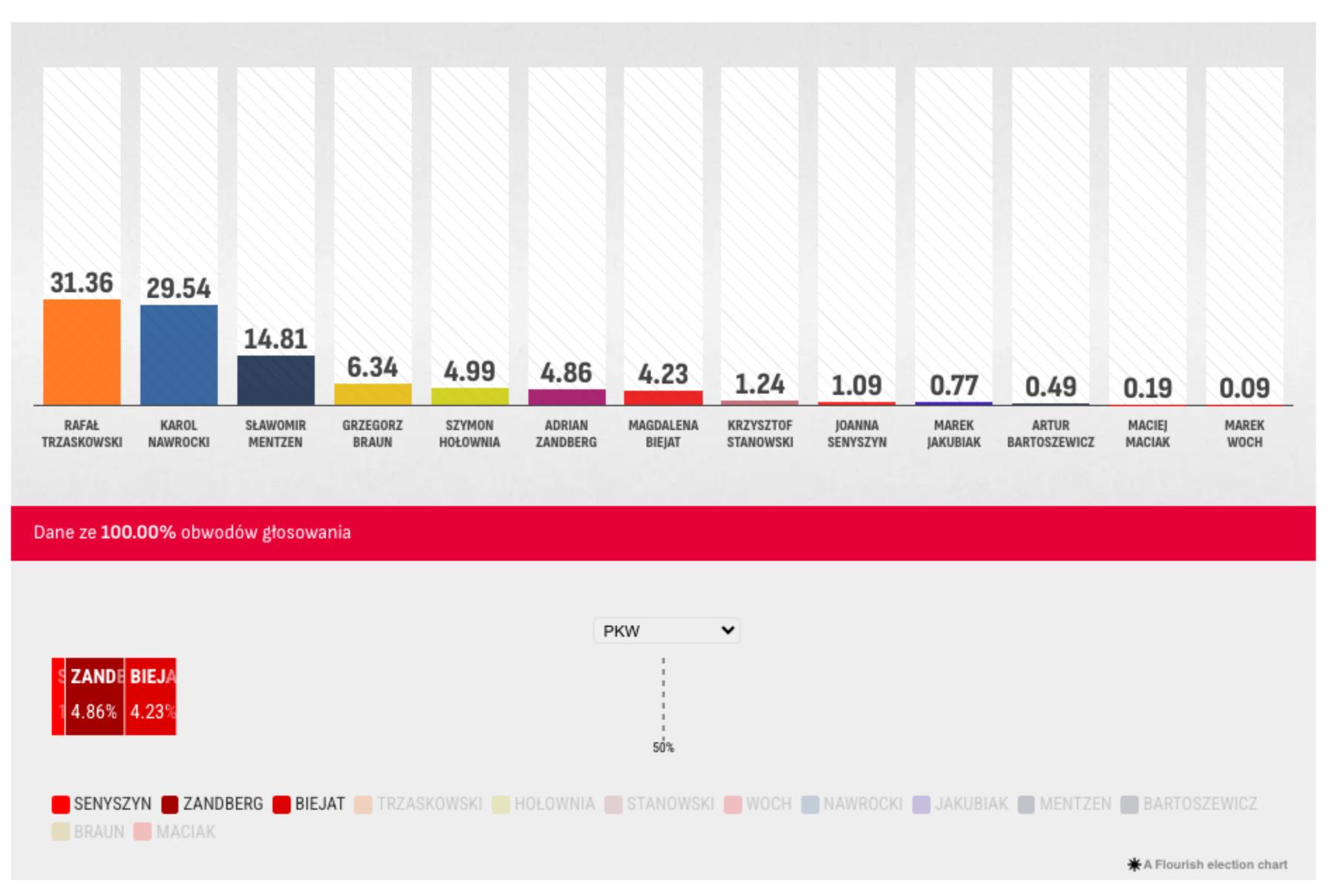
- 1. What was the background and causes of the previous successes and failures of the Polish left?
- 2. What is the current electoral programme of the left, and how does this relate to the opinions of left-wing voters and the broader electorate?
- 3. How may the left form a new social alliance that could challenge the right-wing dominance in Poland?
- 4. Which political areas and combination of topics should the Polish left concentrate on when devising a new political strategy of survival and expansion?

Background: the left in Poland

- We use the term "left" to describe the broader or prospective left-wing movement, from the centre to the radical left, that exists in Poland (Lewica, Razem, Wiosna, etc)
- The word "Lewica" (Left) is deployed to refer to the current left-wing alliance, under the same name
- Decline of the left over time: from 41,04 % and 216 MPs in 2001 to 8,61% and 26 MPs in 2023.

Year	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
Party/ Coalition	SLD	SLD	SLD	SLD	SLD	Left and Democrats	SLD	United Left	SLD	New Left
% Vote	11.99	20.41	27.13	41.04	11.31	13.15	8.24	8.00	12.56	8,61
Number of Votes	1 344 820	2 815 169	3 551 224	5 342 519	1 335 257	2 122 981	1 184 303	1 147 102	2 319 946	1 859 018
Number of MPs	60	171	164	216	55	53	27	0	49	26
Party/ Coelition	Solidarity Labour	Labour Union	Labour Union	•	Social Democracy Poland		Palikot Movt	Party Razem		
% Vote	2.06	7.28	4.74		3.89		10.02	4		
Number of Votes	230 975	1 005 004	620 611		459 380		1 439 490	550 349		
Number of MPs	4	41	0		0		40	0		
Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left	Total Left
% Vote	14.05	27.69	31.87	41.04	15,2	13.15	18.26	11	12.56	8.61
Number of Votes	1 575 795	3 820 173	4 171 835	5 342 519	1 794 637	2 122 981	2 623 793	1 697 451	2 319 946	1 859 018
Number of MPs	64	212	164	216	55	53	67	0	49	26

2025 presidential election



- 3 left-wing candidates
- Aggregated result: 10,18%
- Partially overlapping electorates, new sections of electorate mobilised (Zandberg appealing to young people 20%)
- Left-wing voters: educated, younger, women, urban, western Poland
- Source: <u>ewybory.pl</u>

Who are left-wing voters?

- Medium/large cities: west and north
- Decline in rural areas and farmers from 2001 - 2008
- Gender balanced but growing women voters in 2023
- Higher educated and white collar
- Relatively well off
- Shift from older to younger voters

Table 2. Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of left-wing voters as a percentage of total electorate.

		2010	2012	2024
General		11%	8%	7%
Gender	Male	12%	8%	7%
	Female	10%	7%	6%
Age	18-24	6%	4%	7%
	25-34	17%	5%	7%
	35-44	12%	7%	9%
	45-54	9%	9%	8%
	55-64	14%	9%	5%
	65 and more	8%	8%	4%
Place of residence	Rural areas	8%	5%	5%
	Town up to 19,000	13%	7%	4%
	City 20,000-99,000	10%	10%	8%
	City 100,000-499,000	16%	11%	5%
	City 500,000 and more	14%	5%	12%
Education	Elementary	8%	5%	12%
	Vocational	9%	8%	4%
	Secondary	11%	8%	3%
	Higher	17%	8%	10%
Income	Below 500 PLN/1,999 PLN	7%	7%	8%
	501-750 PLN/2000-2,999 PLN	10%	5%	3%
	751-1,000 PLN/3000-3,999 PLN	12%	7%	7%
	1,001-1,500/4,000-4,999 PLN	17%	9%	6%
	1,501 PLN/5,000 PLN and higher	11%	8%	8%

Sources: CBOS, BS/102/2010, July 2010; CBOS, BS/80/2012, June 2012; CBOS, NR 1/2024, January 2024.

Voter Flows

Table 3. Voter flows from the left to major political parties in Poland.

	PiS	PO	Lewica	Korwin/ Konfederacja	Palikot/ Kukiz/TD	PSL	N/v
Lewica 2007-2011	4	18	38	X	8	9	23
Lewica 2011-2015	18	6	55	0	6	9	6
Lewica 2019-2023	0	3	56	1	1	X	6

Sources: CBOS, BS/151/2011, November 2011; CBOS, NR 166/2015, December 2015; CBOS, NR 100/2023, August, 2023.

Table 4. Alternative voting decisions and negative electorate of the left-wing voters.

	Electoral alternatives for left-wing voters (If I had a second vote, I would cast it for)							Negative electorate (I would never vote for)					
	PiS	P0	Korwin/ Konfede- racja	Palikot/ Kukiz/ TD/ Samo- obrona	PSL	N/v	PiS	P0	Korwin/ Konfede- racja	Palikot/ Kukiz/ TD/ Samo- obrona	PSL	N/v	
Lewica 2001	6	21	X	2	22	36	7	22	X	19	2	5	
Lewica 2007	0	40	2	0	10	31	71	0	9	88	6	0	
Lewica 2011	7	37	X	5	16	27	73	14	6	14	8	5	
Lewica 2017	6	25	2	8	2	28	72	9	36	34	11	6	
Lewica 2019	1	52	4	Х	12	31	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Lewica 2023	0	21	9	26	9	32	82	15	45	18+29	16	4	

Sources: CBOS, BS/85/2001, June 2001; CBOS, BS/25/2007, February 2007; CBOS, BS/78/2011, June 2011; CBOS, 38/2017, April 2017; CBOS, NR 123/2019, October 2019; CBOS, NR 32/2023, March 2023.

Results: does the supply meet the demand?

Manifesto:

Left-wing voters:

- Hold progressive opinions on "cultural" issues
- Also support for classical social democratic economic policies

General electorate:

- Sensibility towards certain aspects of *Lewica*'s manifesto correlating stronger with urban residence and higher education attainment.
- Proposals on developing a modern welfare state are more accepted in society than the worldview agenda, energy transition to renewable energy sources and EU integration.

Image:

- Positive,"warm", a party with a "human touch",
- · Fragmented, cannibalising the already very narrow electorate.
- The economic message of the left not getting through to the electorate only perceived as party promoting cultural issues
- The left in Poland lacks an identity: because of the multipolar structure of Lewica and lack of leadership identity

Credibility: The left-wing electorate in Poland is disciplined and value-driven, but there is a discrepancy between the views of some voters on specific policy issues and their political decisions (not voting according to convictions). The disappointment in the electoral performance of *Lewica* may lead to tactical voting for other parties, despite support for left-wing policies.

Room for a New Social Alliance?

Figure 1. Overall support for core social-democratic positions in key electorates and non-voters in the 2023 parliamentary election: welfare state; protection of workers' rights; progressive taxation; secular state; unconditional access to abortion; and same-sex partnerships.



Source: IBRIS survey August 2024.

Conclusions: survival (1)

To survive the current political cycle, the Polish left must reinvent its public image, in terms of thematic focus, narratives, visibility and organisation:

- Keep a **comprehensive manifesto** embracing diverse policies, yet prioritising those of particular importance to the left-wing identity and resonating with the majority of voters: provision of social services; the protection of workers' rights; and a secular state.
- Bring the existing social agenda into the spotlight and move away from dominating worldview issues, not abandoning them but framing equality and the protection of human rights as a foundation of a modern welfare state.
- Solve the **problem of vague and fragmented leadership** to unite the movement and make it more credible to the general population.
- Take a stronger and more political stance in the Tusk government so as not to be cannibalised by bigger coalition partners. If it is unable to achieve this, then it should consider whether it is worth continuing to function as part of this government.

Conclusions: expansion (2)

To expand, the Polish left has to make a decision on which strategy to follow:

- Short-term strategies include swinging the voters of political rivals more liberal electorate of the KO or more conservative voters of PiS.
- Long-term investment in expanding the electorate would mean striking a new social alliance by developing narratives and programmes highlighting the common socio-economic interests of the majority of society (i.e., working people, their dependents and those reliant upon social benefits), simultaneously integrating worldview positions resulting from left-wing principles of equality and inclusion. These should not only refer to the rights of minorities but also bridge different generations of left-wing voters, sharing similar values despite diverging life experiences and living circumstances.