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**SOCIAL DEMOCRACY WITHOUT THE PEOPLE?
CASE STUDY OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE (SLD)
/NEW LEFT (NL)**

Bartosz M. RYDLIŃSKI, PhD

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Poland
b.rydlinski@uksw.edu.pl

Abstract: *This article addresses the issue of the departure of the popular class from Polish social democracy and the simultaneous takeover by the right-wing populist. Analyzing the electoral results of the SLD and the PiS after 2005, we can see this phenomenon both in the context of electoral geography and in-depth opinion polls. The article also analyzes the apparent dichotomy between contemporary center-left voters and the ruling party in Poland in the dimension of attitudes to socio-economic and cultural issues, which may indicate a permanent loss of trust for the Polish center-left among representatives of the peasant and working class.*

Keywords: social democracy, popular class, populism, PiS, SLD.

1. Introduction

Since losing power in 2005, the Polish center-left has remained a second-league political formation at best. In addition, it found itself out of parliament in 2015-2019 due to a series of erroneous electoral decisions. Four years ago, it returned to the Polish Sejm with the third result and the best result in the absolute number of votes since 2001. This article aims to indicate the scale and political significance of Polish Social Democracy's split with the so-called "popular class" which is one of the main reservoirs of votes for the populist right in the guise of PiS (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, Law and Justice). The author's thesis is that through the political-symbolic abandonment of this class, the SLD (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, Democratic Left

Alliance) and now the NL (*Nowa Lewica*, New Left) paved not only the way for PiS's triple seizure of power but also influenced the creation of an illiberal reality in Poland, which severely influence Polish relations with the European Union. Based on the method of electoral geography and quantitative and qualitative public opinion surveys, the author will indicate the spatial, symbolic, and axiological dimensions of the analyzed phenomenon. The analysis will additionally show cleavages that influence the level of electoral popularity of the Left and PiS, which creates a division between their voters and which could play a role in the social democratic attempt to win over popular voters.

2. Peasant, working, or popular class?

For our study, the author will use Pierre Bourdieu's class theory (Bourdieu, 1984), popularized in Poland by Przemysław Sadura and Maciej Gdula (Gdula and Sadura, 2012). I will treat the popular class as a typical snapshot of the peasant and working classes. Groups that are basically in decline in the realities of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The discussion of the center-left's relationship with the popular class has a historical and symbolic character since workers and peasants have always been a natural representation group for socialists. It is not without reason that the traditional slogan of the left is "Workers of the world, unite!". The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, globalization, and the "exodus" of industrial jobs outside Europe (including those outside the former Eastern Bloc countries) led to a visible decline in the importance of manual labor (Klein, 2002). In parallel with the decline in the prestige of industrial occupations in post-socialist countries, we have witnessed the birth of a new emerging middle class (Gdula *et al.*, 2014). Entrepreneurial, resourceful individuals who were the transformation winners quickly gained a hegemonic role in Polish popular culture. Children coming from the peasant and working classes extremely promptly began the process of rejecting their class origins. As a result, as early as the 1990s, the popular class became, in a sense, an orphan, which was quickly taken over by the post-communist left, namely the SLD.

The position of the popular class at the beginning of Poland's road to democracy and capitalism was, in a sense, the result of two betrayals by Solidarity (*Solidarność*) and the PZPR (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, Polish United Workers' Party). On the one hand, the ten-million-strong trade union introduced Poland to one of the most radically neoliberal versions of the free market economy, which cost nearly three million people their jobs after three years of shock therapy firmed by the then finance minister of the right-wing Leszek Balcerowicz government (Kowalik, 2009; Ost, 2005). On the other hand, the communist left, declaring itself the avant-garde of the peasant and working classes, repeatedly used violence against anti-system labor movements during the People's Republic of Poland, culminating in the imposition of Martial Law in front of General Wojciech Jaruzelski's regime on December 13, 1981. However, the fact that Polish social democracy remained in opposition to the governments of Mazowiecki, Bielecki, Olszewski, Pawlak, and Suchocka helped it win the support of a popular class sorely tested by free-market reforms. We could see this in the SLD's election slogans. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, the center-left marched under the rather populist slogan "It can't go on like this!" while two years later, it slightly modified its message to "It doesn't have to go on like this!" (Woliński, 2002). Also, in Poland's landmark center-left presidential campaign in 1995, which broke the hegemony of the post-Solidarity right for nearly a decade, the then social democratic leader Aleksander Kwasniewski did not shy away from popular class and anti-establishment language. In his famous election clip to the rhythm of disco polo music popular in the Polish countryside, he said: "The media do not support me. The Church has repeatedly said anything but me. Special initiatives have even been created to put people off me. There are Warsaw salons, which also do everything possible to prevent me from winning. The people want to elect me; the people want to elect me!" (Chwedoruk and Rydliński, 2017, p. 195). However, the electoral successes of the Polish center-left turned out to be the source of its severe defeat. Its structural origins and far-reaching consequences are discussed in this article.

3. New Third Way as a deadly path for the center-left?

The Polish center-left has not escaped similar mistakes made by the British Labor Party, the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, Social Democratic Party of Germany), or the MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt, Hungarian Socialist Party). All parties celebrated electoral triumphs in the early 21st century because they believed they could combine neoliberal governing practices with a progressive narrative and paid a huge price for doing so (Rae, 2003). In the case of the SLD, the cost was so enormous that since 2001 the center-left has not only been unable to win parliamentary or presidential elections but still haven't achieved even a 15% level of public support. One of the critical phenomena we have seen over the years is the almost complete capture of the popular class vote by the illiberal right, whose primary representative is the PiS. The chart below shows the scales of macro changes in electoral support between the SLD and PiS. The author intentionally chose the results of the 2001, 2005, and 2019 elections to the Sejm to highlight the analyzed phenomenon.

Table 1. Support for the electoral committee of the SLD in the parliamentary elections

voivodeship	2001	2005	2019
dolnośląskie	47,25 %	13,04 %	14,73 %
kujawsko-pomorskie	48,91 %	15,21 %	15,00 %
lubelskie	34,40 %	8,20 %	7,32 %
lubuskie	51,54 %	16,18 %	15,61 %
łódzkie	44,75 %	13,39 %	14,34 %
małopolskie	30,07 %	7,11 %	8,38 %
mazowieckie	34,97 %	9,56 %	10,78 %
opolskie	38,84 %	10,39 %	11,74 %
podkarpackie	31,37 %	8,25 %	6,31 %
podlaskie	37,91 %	12,31 %	9,09 %

pomorskie	35,55 %	10,13 %	12,97 %
śląskie	46,24 %	12,48 %	13,99 %
świętokrzyskie	45,08 %	12,33 %	9,95 %
warmińsko-mazurskie	47,53 %	13,15 %	12,75 %
wielkopolskie	46,26 %	13,09 %	14,56 %
zachodniopomorskie	49,29 %	14,35 %	15,34 %

These statistics are compiled from the following sources: (“Wybory 2005. Komitet Wyborczy Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Election 2005. Electoral Committee of the Democratic Left Alliance),” n.d.; “Wybory Parlamentarne 2001. Koalicyjny Komitet Wyborczy Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - Unia Pracy (Parliamentary elections 2001. coalition election committee Alliance of Democratic Left - Labor Union),” n.d.; “Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP. KOMITET WYBORCZY SOJUSZ LEWICY DEMOKRATYCZNEJ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. ELECTORAL COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE),” n.d.)

Table 2. Support for the electoral committee of the PiS in the parliamentary elections

voivodeship	2001	2005	2019
dolnośląskie	7,84 %	24,22 %	39,20 %
kujawsko-pomorskie	7,19 %	23,69 %	35,55 %
lubelskie	7,58 %	23,32 %	57,44 %
lubuskie	5,66 %	22,84 %	34,30 %
łódzkie	7,41 %	23,09 %	46,30 %
małopolskie	12,63 %	37,93 %	63,59 %
mazowieckie	15,01 %	27,62 %	45,89 %
opolskie	5,33 %	20,53 %	37,64 %
podkarpackie	8,57 %	35,99 %	62,87 %

podlaskie	11,51 %	28,46 %	52,04 %
pomorskie	12,52 %	26,29 %	34,26 %
śląskie	9,58 %	29,48 %	42,23 %
świętokrzyskie	6,73 %	23,26 %	55,18 %
warmińsko-mazurskie	7,18 %	22,22 %	39,84 %
wielkopolskie	6,71 %	24,80 %	37,68 %
zachodniopomorskie	6,56 %	21,78 %	35,97 %

These statistics are compiled from the following sources: (“Wybory 2005. Komitet Wyborczy Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Election 2005. Law and Justice Election Committee),” n.d.; “Wybory Parlamentarne 2001. Komitet Wyborczy ‘Prawo i Sprawiedliwość’ (Parliamentary elections 2001. election committee Law and Justice),” n.d.; “Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP | KOMITET WYBORCZY PRAWO I SPRAWIEDLIWOŚĆ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland | ELECTION COMMITTEE LAW AND JUSTICE),” n.d.)

In this overview, we can see four crucial political macro trends that have occurred in Poland over the past two decades:

- The fundamental decline in the electoral importance of the SLD in each voivodeship between 2001 and 2005,
- The jump in support for PiS between 2001 and 2005 and their hegemonization of the Polish political landscape in 2019,
- Sustained support for the SLD committee in each voivodeship in comparative terms of the 2005 and 2019 elections, with apparent overrepresentation in western Poland,
- The identical electoral strongholds of PiS in southeastern Poland in the 2001, 2005, and 2019 elections.

For a better understanding of the sustained trends in support for the SLD and the PiS in the various regions over the years analyzed, one can certainly use the concept of cleavage by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). One of them concerns the

result in elections in those constituencies where the People's Armed Forces were stationed during the period of real socialism and where there was sizeable industrial investment after the end of World War II. As the armed forces of socialist Poland were being prepared for a possible confrontation with NATO troops, their concentration took place in western Poland, where to this day, Polish social democracy not only wins double-digit electoral results but also where it co-governs in voivodeship and local governments. Similarly, we can see the high support for PiS in those electoral districts where the anti-communist opposition, especially its more conservative and Catholic part, was strong.

For our analysis, however, the key aspect seems to be the socio-economic aspect of the cleavages and, more precisely, the departure of the popular class from the SLD towards PiS. This phenomenon mainly occurred during the 2005 elections, when mass support for the Polish center-left did not evaporate much as find its way out to other political parties. According to the CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center), in 2005, the party preferences of those with leftist views were distributed as follows:

Table 3. Party preferences among those declaring leftist views (2005)

SLD	25 %
Partia Demokratyczna	1 %
PSL	6 %
PO	7 %
Samoobrona	9 %
PiS	12 %
LPR	3 %
Hard to say	18 %

Source: (“Elektorat lewicy od roku 2005 - Komunikat z badań (The electorate of the left since 2005 - Research release),” n.d.)

Considering the sum of support for PiS and Self-Defence (*Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland), the two populist groups that, together with the LPR (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, League of Polish Families), formed the 2006 majority government, we can pose the thesis that especially the rural and small-town sections of the popular class were taken over before these extreme groups. Knowing that during the 2007 elections, the PiS entirely consumed the support of its government coalition partners, we can conclude that Jarosław Kaczyński's party has also fully taken over those popular class voters who once voted for the Andrzej Lepper's¹ and Roman Giertych's² factions.

After the PiS lost the 2007 elections, there followed a period of neoliberal and Christian Democratic rule by the PO (*Platforma Obywatelska*, Civic Platform) and PSL (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, Polish People's Party) coalition. PiS, at the time, contested Prime Minister Donald Tusk's free-market policies using social arguments, defending the welfare state (Kim, 2021). Together with trade unions gathered in the NSZZ "Solidarność" (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity"), PiS politicians took part in labor protests against the policy of privatization, cuts in social investment, and vociferously opposed raising the retirement age. An identical strategy was followed by the SLD, which, together with the class-based trade unions affiliated with the OPZZ (*Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych*, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions), took part in labor demonstrations and voted against liberal changes in labor laws. In the case of the Polish center-left, this action not only had the character of a desire to regain the trust of the popular class but also a form of "social democratization" of political practice after the New Third Way practice of government in 2001-2005.

4. PiS' illiberal and welfare state revolution of 2015 (and 2019)

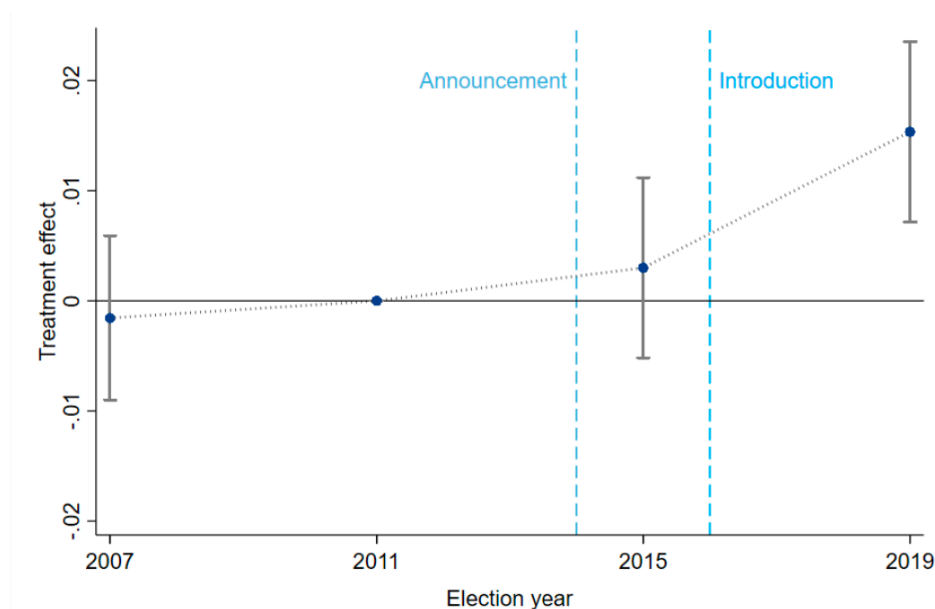
After losing consecutive parliamentary elections in 2011, PiS moved away from a simple anti-liberal and anti-elitist strategy, giving the stable party support. They have tried to move

¹ Leader of the agrarian-populist Self-Defence party, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland in 2006-2007 in Jarosław Kaczyński's government.

² Leader of far-right, anti-EU League of Polish Families party, Deputy Prime Minister of Poland in 2006-2007 in Jarosław Kaczyński's government.

beyond their traditional right-wing, conservative, and religious voter base. The PiS added a visible social-welfarist (Kim, 2021) agenda to its natural message of fighting against the arrangements, invisible networks of secret service connections, business, and politics. Criticism of the state's weaknesses, inefficient public services, deepening inequality, and the weak labor market was apt and correct in this sense, as the neoliberal practices of Donald Tusk's government exacerbated socio-economical inequalities. In the 2015 parliamentary election campaign, PiS announced a series of pro-social reforms. It was lowering the retirement age, establishing an hourly minimum wage, raising the minimum wage, and introducing the 500 plus program. The last announcement represented a kind of revolution. The promise to pay PLN 500 every month for the second and each subsequent child for millions of people was an electoral "game changer" in the 2015 elections. As the results of Jan Gromadzki, Katarzyna Salach, and Michal Brzezinski show, the child benefit program significantly impacted the PiS' victory in 2015 and - after updating the payment of the cash benefit starting with the first child - in 2019.

Figure 1. Event-study coefficients from the regression of voting for PiS on the interaction between child benefit amount and election year



Source: (Gromadzki *et al.*, 2022, p. 97).

The 500 plus program, the lowering of the retirement age, the radical increase in the minimum wage, and the establishment of an hourly minimum wage influenced not only the economic empowerment of the popular class but also the political development of the aspiring middle class living outside the big cities (Gdula, 2017). In this sense, the results of the 2019 elections show that Jaroslaw Kaczynski's party, through its socio-economic policies, has gone far beyond the traditional group of people disadvantaged by the effects of the neoliberal transformation and globalization processes. However, we can put forward the thesis that the effectiveness of the government of Beata Szydło and Mateusz Marowiecki in this field has allowed PiS to neutralize electoral losses related to PiS's attack on the division of power, the judiciary and the rule of law.

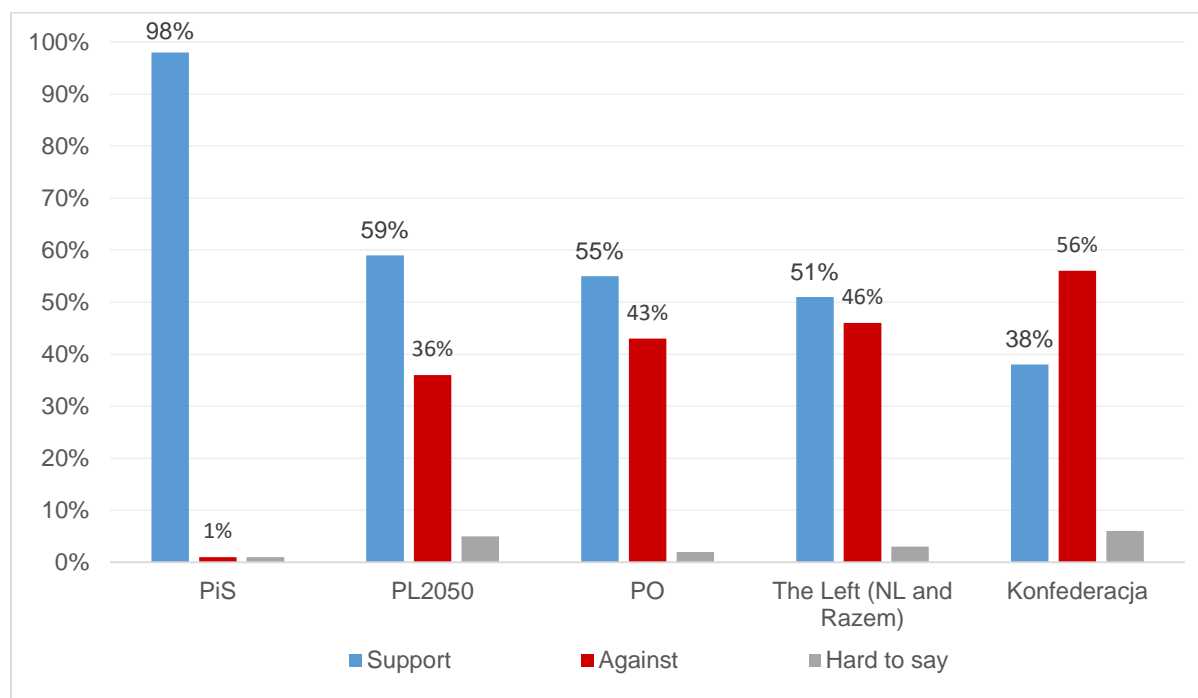
When analyzing PiS's support in 2019, it is worth noting the party's high and stable support in those provinces where the cultural-religious factor may not have played an essential role in the electoral process. PiS in the voivodeships: dolnośląskie, lubuskie, łódzkie, mazowieckie, zachodniopomorskie achieved high and very high support even though the so-called *dominantes* in these parts of Poland were among the lower ones in the entire country. In these provinces, except for the larger cities, there are no industrial centers, and agriculture is dominant. At the same time, on the so-called "Western Wall," as well in mazowieckie voivodeship many people are migrant workers in the European Union, particularly in Germany. Thus, we can put forward the thesis that PiS has gained popularity precisely among the popular class, which, in an era of substantial political polarization, PiS vs. Anti-PiS for socio-economic reasons, has sided with the right-wing anti-liberals and welfarist populists.

5. Center-left of liberal voters?

Parallel to the process of PiS's takeover of the popular class elections over the past two decades, there has been an apparent "liberalization" of Polish social democracy voters. This phenomenon has occurred despite a significant shift away from the practice of the New Third Way and increasingly strong cooperation with trade unions. The Left's voters, against the

background of other parties of the so-called "Democratic Opposition," are most reluctant to support PiS's flagship 500 plus project.

Figure 2. Support for 500 plus program according to voters of political parties in Poland



Source: ("CBOS: Program Rodzina 500 plus po pięciu latach funkcjonowania (CBOS: Family 500 plus program after five years of operation)," n.d.)

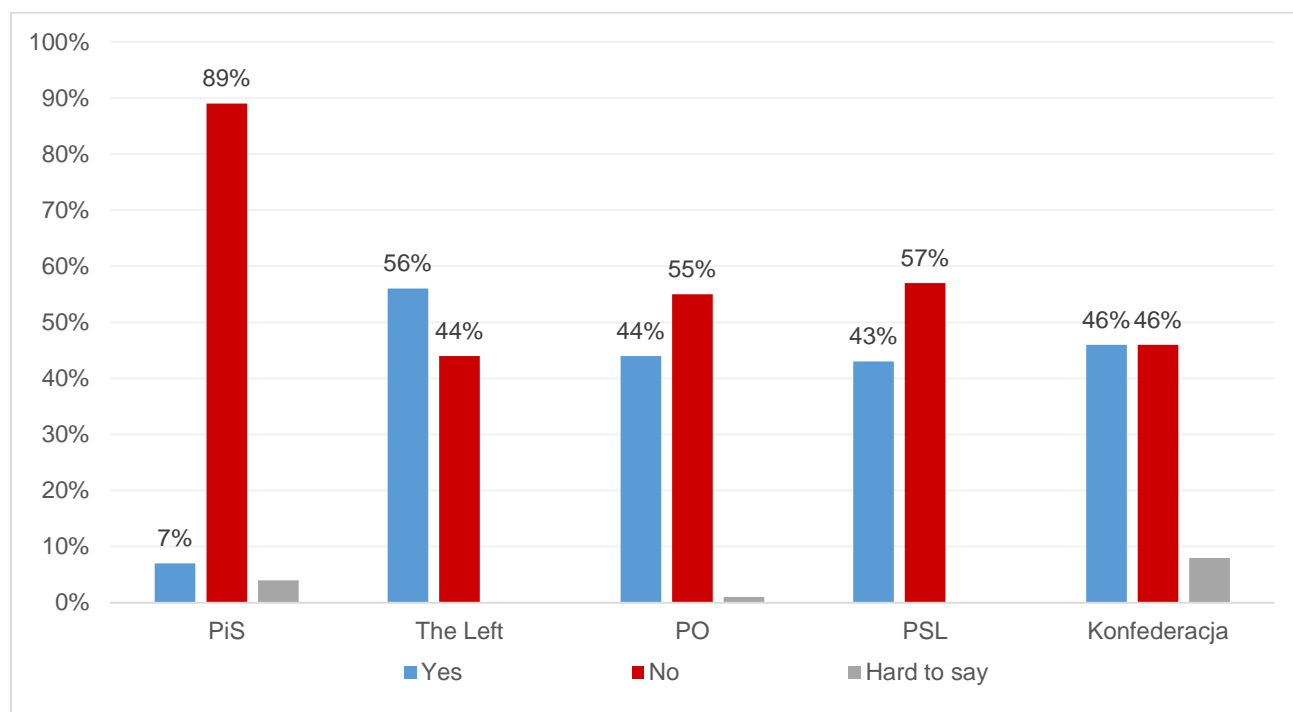
We can see that, with the exception of the libertarian party Konfederacja, Voters of the Left in Poland are the most skeptical of the 500 plus program. This attitude can be explained in various ways regarding the important anti-PiS component among center-left voters (in every age group)³ and the class structure of center-left voters in Poland. In addition, the Polish center-left has the most significant number of voters in those age groups (students/students and retirees)

³ As Sadura and Sierakowski note in their research: "The electorate of the Left is strongly anti-PiS. 80% of the 'core' voters of the Left parties believe that PiS is a threat to Poland and should be democratically removed from power as soon as possible (for comparison: 68% of the core PO/N electorate and 58% of the Left's reserve electorate believe so)" (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2019, p. 33).

who are not beneficiaries of the program, so there is another non-ideological argument against the discussed solution.

Other surveys, too, indicate an even higher level of skepticism among social democracy voters in Poland toward the child benefit program introduced by the PiS government. In May 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic lockdown, left-wing voters were the most likely to want the program curtailed.

Figure 3. Should the government reduce payments from the 500 plus program due to the effects of the epidemic? Answers in the electorate



Source: (Szymczak, n.d.)

To further illustrate the dichotomy between Law and Justice (PiS) and SLD (Left) voters, it is worth looking at their socioeconomic profile based on exit and late polls from the 2019 parliamentary elections.

Table 4. Distribution of votes by professional groups in the 2019 Sejm elections (Ipsos exit and late poll)

Profession	Component of the SLD voters	Component of the PiS voters
Company owner / co-owner	12,1 %	29,5 %
Director / manager / specialist	15,3 %	26,6 %
Administrative or service assistant	13,3 %	38,5 %
Farmer	3,5 %	67,4 %
Worker	6,9 %	57,9 %
Pupil/student	23,4 %	22,3 %
Unemployed person	7,6 %	55,6 %
Pensioner	10,3 %	56,8 %
Other	11,9 %	42,1 %

Source: (Kopeć and Pawłowska, n.d.)

On the above chart, besides visible differences due to the vast disparity in electoral support between the SLD and PiS, we can see even colossal differences in the key groups for our analysis. PiS had a visible advantage over social democracy among workers, farmers, unemployed, and pensioners. These groups are the core of the popular class, in which, as can be seen, PiS even holds a hegemonic position, winning more than half of the votes among all electoral committees in 2019. On the other hand, those who voted for the center-left during the 2019 parliamentary elections were primarily people in managerial positions, public administration, and local government employees, students, or pupils. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the Left is mainly voted for by representatives of the middle class, local elites, and people who are not members of disadvantaged groups.

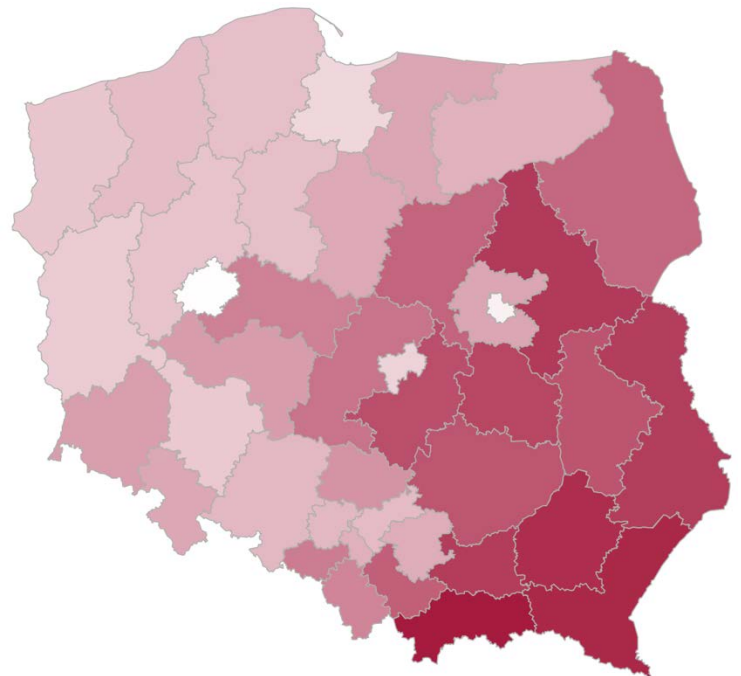
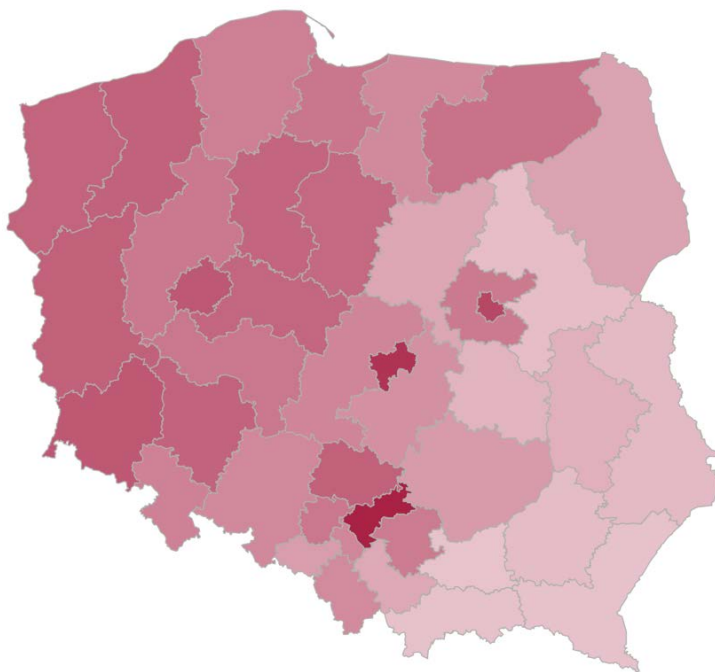
Geographically, too, we can see a significant difference in support for the SLD and PiS. Leaving aside the difference in the electoral outcome in 2019 of the center-left (12,56%) and the national-conservative right (43,59%), we can see an almost dichotomous split. The SLD is over-represented in western Poland, Silesia, and large urban centers, while the PiS "strongholds" are the southeastern voivodeships.

Map 2.

Support for the SLD in the 2019 parliamentary elections

Map 3.

Support for the PiS in the 2019 parliamentary elections



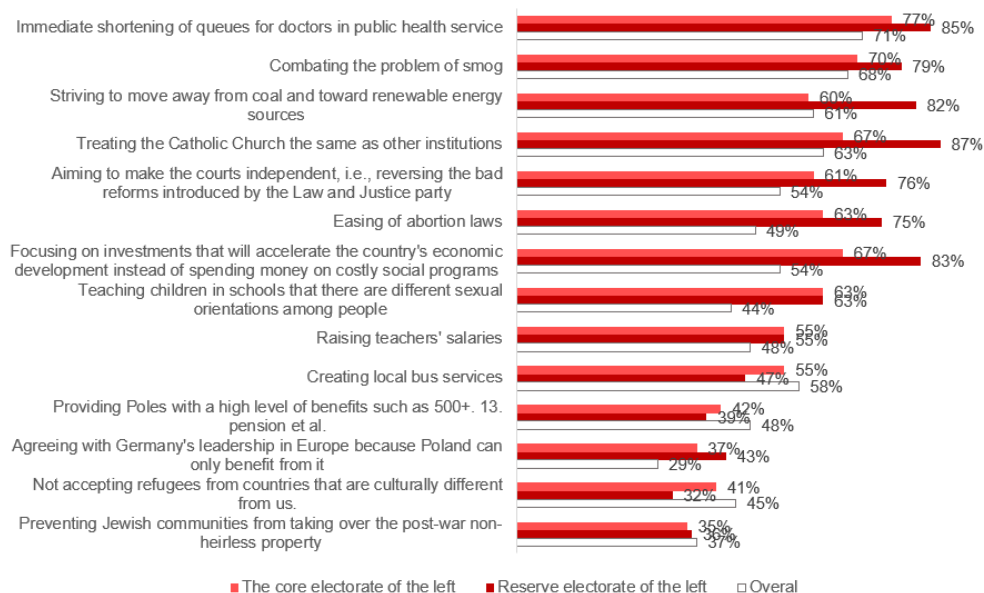
Source: (“Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP | KOMITET WYBORCZY PRAWO I SPRAWIEDLIWOŚĆ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland | ELECTION COMMITTEE LAW AND JUSTICE),” n.d.; “Wyniki wyborów 2019 do Sejmu RP. KOMITET WYBORCZY SOJUSZ LEWICY DEMOKRATYCZNEJ (Results of elections 2019 to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. ELECTORAL COMMITTEE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT ALLIANCE),” n.d.)

The electoral geography and professional profile of center-left voters in Poland indicate the relatively liberal nature of the social democracy electorate. In 2019, Przemysław Sadura and Sławomir Sierakowski conducted focus and quantitative surveys of the voters of PiS, PO, the left (SLD, Wiosna, and Razem), and PSL. Based on these, two groups were estimated: core and reserve voters. For the center-left, the results were as follows:

- core electorate - 8%
- reserve electorate - 12%
- total (support ceiling) - 20%

In their study, Sadura and Sierakowski surveyed "metropolitan liberals of the middle generation and small-town millennials and young people. Both groups were dominated by the middle class working in the public sector, although the Warsaw group also had its fair share of people employed in private companies" (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2019, p. 33). The ideological-axiological profile of Polish leftists can be seen in the chart relating to their programmatic priorities.

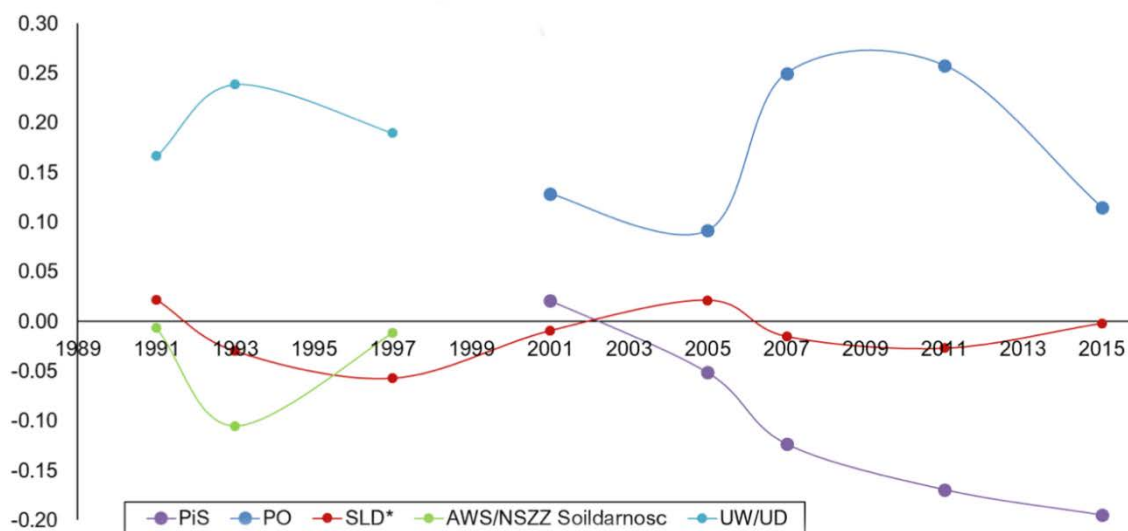
Figure 2. Preferences of program postulates of the left-wing electorate in comparison with total respondents



Source: (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2019, p. 34).

The above results clearly indicate the predominance of liberal, human rights-oriented, and secular worldview content over issues typical of social democracy, such as good public services or decent public sector wages. Sadura and Sierakowski conducted another study two years later, consisting of three stages: a survey, individual in-depth interviews, and focus groups. They confirmed two main profiles of social democracy voters. Namely, the elderly and poor, who do not believe in the effectiveness of the PiS-led state yet want a welfare state, and younger and affluent center-left voters, who want a "minimum state." As Sadura and Sierakowski weigh in, "the first group is repelled by leftist views on LGBT+ and anticlericalism, and the second by excessive social spending and redistribution." (Sadura and Sierakowski, 2021, p. 29). This division may be one of the main challenges to the future of Polish social democracy.

Figure 4. Difference between % vote share for Polish political parties among top 10% and bottom 90% income voters



Source: (Lindner *et al.*, 2020, p. 36).

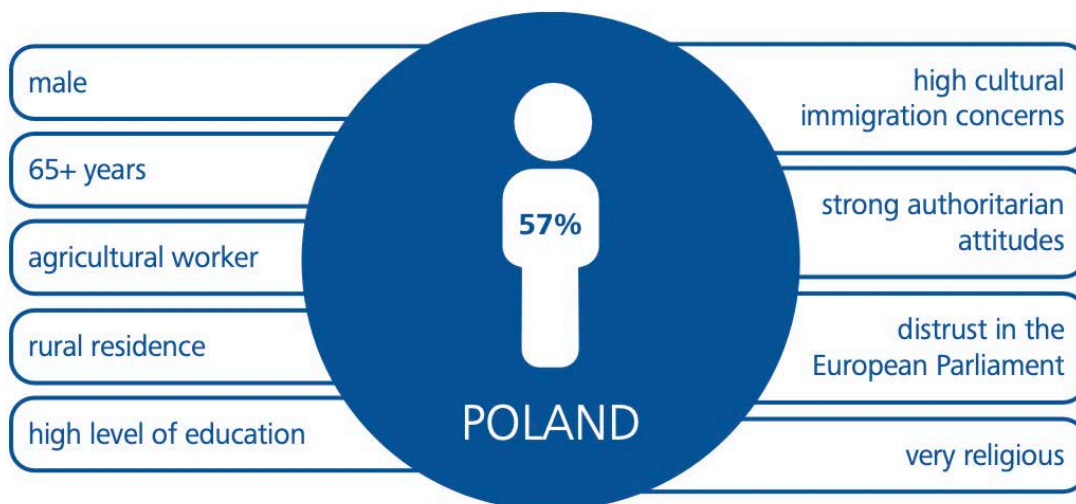
A somewhat different perspective on the differences in the characteristics of SLD and Law and Justice voters over the years is thrown up by research conducted by Attila Lindner, Filip Novokmet, Thomas Piketty, and Tomasz Zawisza. We can see from them that from the

very beginning of its existence on the Polish political scene, SLD had a somewhat balanced profile of its voters, where almost equally poorer and more prosperous people voted for the Polish social democracy. The opposite trend, however, is observed in the case of PiS. In its first election in 2001, the Kaczynski brothers' party had an overrepresentation of voters with higher incomes, only to continually have poorer voters than those in the top 10% of income since 2005. Thus, we can put forward a thesis that the presented survey results confirm my thesis about the outflow of the popular class from the SLD to the Law and Justice party, with the Polish center-left party still having poorer voters than, for example, the liberal PO.

6. Conclusions

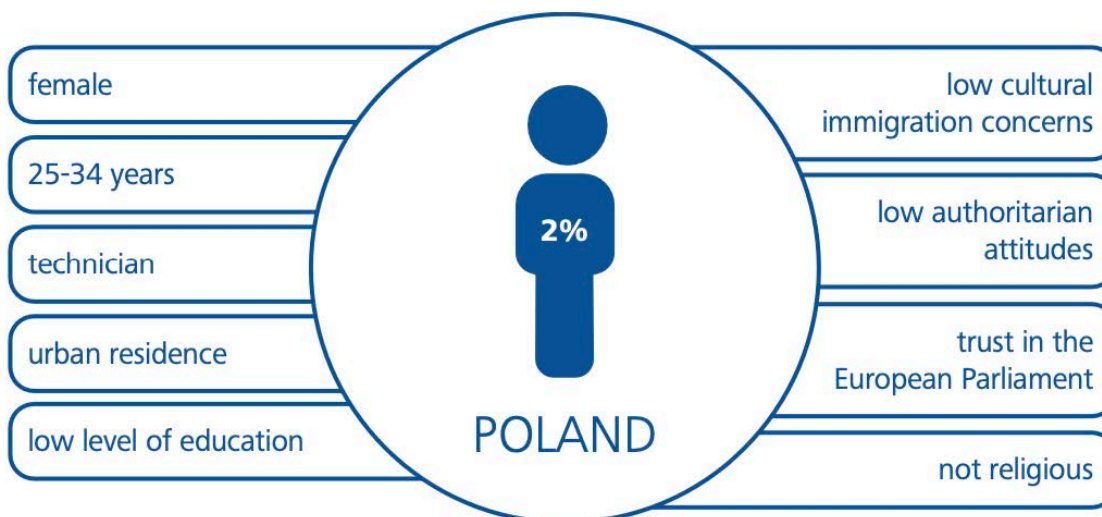
The history of changes in support of the Polish center-left after 2001 captures the drama of change typical of many social democratic parties in Europe. They went from total political hegemony to falling into the electoral second and third leagues, falling out and returning to parliament with the third result and the highest number of absolute votes since 2001. The SLD at the time lost the battle for the trust of those people who had lost in the two overlapping processes: systemic transformation and neoliberal globalization. It was unable to successfully wrestle the support of the representatives of the popular class, taken over and empowered by the PiS in 2005, 2015, and 2019. The Polish center-left, unlike the populist radical right, cannot boast of introducing massive cash transfers for Polish families, a radical increase in the minimum wage, or the establishment of a 13 and 14 pension. However, social democracy in Poland today is a significant and credible political force advocating women's rights, LGBT+ people, and the actual separation of the state from the Church. The profile of left-wing voters is very similar to the group least likely to vote for right-wing populists.

Figure 5. Who is the most likely right-wing populist party voter?



Source: (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2022, p. 132).

Figure 6. Who is the least likely right-wing populist party voter?



Source: (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2022, p. 132).

The Left also has different and not necessarily economically inclined groups of voters with common interests. It has a strongly social-democratic-statist political program and quite free-market voters, whose aversion to the PiS, xenophobia, moral conservatism, and the Catholic Church is their hallmark. Despite this, like the NL and Razem (Left Together), which have been in one parliamentary faction since 2019, they keep their ideological priorities and strategy of action the same. It can be argued that Polish social democracy remains in clear welfare-state positions, not thanks to, but despite, the socioeconomic profile of its voters. It is not so much the axiological character of the Polish center-left but precisely the characteristics of PiS's popular class voters that pose the most significant challenge to NL today. This is because they place themselves at the opposite pole from the already existing electoral base of the center-left. In other words, globalist progressives and localist conservatives are pushing each other away. However, Polish Social Democracy realizes that the struggle to regain at least some of the trust of the popular class is vital to it from both an electoral and symbolic point of view. In the summer of 2022, Left MPs embarked on a multi-week tour of county Poland where they emphasized social issues (Przyborska, n.d.). In an era of inflation and high prices, NL and Razem are trying to bounce back some of the elderly popular class voters by promoting a widow's pension project, assuming an addition of 50% of a deceased spouse's pension benefit (Turecki, n.d.). In addition, the Left is publicizing unfulfilled PiS' promises in combating public transport exclusion or building state-run rental housing. Programs that were supposed to serve poorer people living outside Poland's main development centers.

The departure of the working and peasant class from the center-left to the radical right has a pan-European dimension. In recent years, sister parties of the NL in the Czech Republic and Hungary have also moved from election-winning to marginal forces to marginal groupings. Therefore, similar analyses of the center-left from these countries could indicate whether the Polish case study is isolated or whether it is a regularity in Central European countries that the moment social democracy leaves the popular class, we begin to witness its permanent withering away.

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