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Spatial patterns of electoral support in the 2023 Polish general election

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: This article focuses on identifying the spatial patterns of electoral support for the main political actors, and searching for adequate determinants that explain this distribution of support, based on the results of the 2023 general election in Poland.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: Is there a relationship between the basic morphological features of the voting space in Poland and the hierarchy of the settlement structure, along with the arrangement of regions associated with the country's historical and political heritage? The methods used in the study include analysis of descriptive statistics, estimation of spatial autocorrelation, discriminant analysis, and cartographic methods.

PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The research process involves a two-stage procedure: 1) identifying a general picture of spatial variation in electoral support for selected groupings, and basic clustering patterns of electoral support; and 2) estimating links between the observed patterns of support and their presumed determinants; that is, the country's settlement hierarchy and historical-political divisions.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The spatial variability of the support indicators is characterised by a distinctive territorial distribution, based on the units of the settlement system and the boundaries of former historical divisions. The nature of this linkage indicates the changing layout of the voting space, associated with the increasing polarisation of citizens' political preferences.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS:
The current pattern of urban-rural differentiation is related to the different preferences of metropolitan (over 20,000 inhabitants) and rural or small-town (up to 20,000 inhabitants) communities. The east-west heterogeneity of Poland's voting space is increasing due to similarities of preferences among the inhabitants of former Austrian and Russian Poland, on the one hand, and Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories, on the other.

Keywords:
    Poland, general election, electoral support, spatial patterns

INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Polish parliamentary election will go down in history for many different reasons. First and foremost, the highest-ever voter turnout, which exceeded 74% of eligible voters. Second, the unprecedented mobilisation of young voters (aged 18–29), whose participation reached almost 70%. Third, the extremely intense election campaign that preceded the very act of voting. Fourth, the symbolic defeat of the hitherto ruling political option, which, despite winning the largest number of votes, lost its majority in parliament and was forced to move to the opposition benches. However, it was also marked by a specific spatial distribution of voting results. This showed, on the one hand, the continuation of previously observed trends, but on the other, the clarification of entirely new elements.

The analysis of voting results is one of the traditional research areas of electoral geography, an interdisciplinary field that brings together the scientific explorations of geographers, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and others. Its areas of interest include the analysis of spatial variations in electoral participation and the political preferences of residents, the identification of the spatial determinants of citizens' electoral decision-making and formation, the delimitation of electoral district boundaries, and the estimation of their impact on electoral outcomes (cf. Taylor and Johnston, 1979). This paper focuses on the first of these aspects, in particular the assessment of the spatial patterns of electoral support for selected political actors and the search for adequate determinants of the distribution of this support in territorial detail.

When speaking of spatial voting patterns, one has in mind a specific voting space's morphology, revealed in various types of ordering relations that reflect the basic structures of political reality (Kavetskyy, 2010). Therefore, we can speak, for example, of an increased concentration of supporters of a given political option in a certain territory, a convergence of areas of high support for parties representing different ideological currents, or a temporal change in the territorial range of the intensive impact of a chosen political force. It is also possible to point to more complex correlations, such as the permanent domination of a political grouping in places containing concentrations of specific professional groups or national minorities, or the overlapping of areas of above-average support for a certain electoral option with the boundaries of specific historical-cultural regions.

The current investigation focuses on two fundamental determinants, indicated as important in previous studies on the electoral geography of Poland (Kavetskyy, 2010; Kowalski, 2000; Matykowski, 2018; Zarycki, 1997). First, the relationship of the basic morphological features between the voting spaces with urban-rural differentiation or, more generally, with the hierarchy of the country's settlement structure. Second, the relationship between the territorial distribution of support and the layout of certain spatial wholes of a historical-cultural nature; that is, regions related to Poland's historical-political heritage. Zarycki (2000) identifies these two grounds of Polish political-spatial division with the conflicts between primary and secondary economies and between the centre and peripheries, deriving this from Lipset-Rokkan's groundbreaking theory of political cleavages. He emphasises their fundamental character, which brings the socio-political situation in Poland closer to the patterns typical of developed European democracies.

In the literature on the subject, these divisions are usually framed in terms of two antagonistic spatial-political axes: liberal cities and agglomerations are contrasted with statist rural areas, while right-wing south-eastern areas are set against left-wing north-western areas. Several related terms capture the dual character of the Polish political scene and, at the same time, the national electoral space: 1) the axis of interests and axis of values distinguished by Żukowski (1996) as two complementary dimensions based on different visions

of the economy (liberal vs social) and the social teaching of the Church (secular vs Catholic); 2) Markowski's (1997) conception of a two-dimensional political space divided along economic and socio-cultural lines (populism vs liberalism, secular libertarian cosmopolitanism vs religious authoritarian nationalism); and 3) as proposed by Kavetskyy (2010), the economic dimension created by liberal and people's parties, along with the axiological dimension created by traditionalist and cosmopolitan groupings.

Regardless of the accuracy of the nomenclature used, it is important to emphasise the relative permanence of four ideological options located in these dimensions: liberal, people's, right-wing and left-wing, to which the multiplicity of actors operating on the rather volatile and fragmented Polish political scene is usually reduced. As Kowalski (2018) shows, each of these options is characterised by a high spatial stability and the permanent core areas, basically the same since year 1991. However, this does not imply invariability of the influence intensity. A fundamental change occurs in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, when the political scene has been dominated by the two main actors, i.e. Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS) representing the liberal and right-wing camps respectively. As a result of this change, left's sphere of influence shrinks in favour of the liberals, and to some extent right-wing option takes over the territories previously influenced mainly by the people's groupings. In this context, Wielgosz (2019) even speaks of the emergence of a PO-PiS oligopoly on the Polish political party market. This structure effectively marginalises other actors and creates a polarised political system dividing voters into two antagonistic camps. In the spatial dimension, this is accompanied by a geographical polarisation of both parties' voters in the form of urban-rural heterogeneity and east-west divergence (Grabowski, 2019; Kavetskyy, 2023; Lasoń & Torój, 2019; Marcinkiewicz, 2018; Zarycki, 2015).

Assuming that the aforementioned two dimensions of the country's spatial-political differentiation retain their validity, it seems relevant to ask to what extent their influence on spatial patterns of electoral support remains strong in the face of new socio-political trends and the specific circumstances of the 2023 parliamentary elections. Therefore, the study aims not only to identify the overall picture of spatial variation in electoral support for selected groupings, but

also to estimate how these two fundamental divisions continue to shape Polish electoral space.

RESEARCH METHODS AND TOOLS

The material used for this study is the voting results for the electoral lists of the five political groupings that crossed the applicable thresholds in the elections to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on 15 October 2023, aggregated at the level of 2,477 municipal units: Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS), Civic Coalition (*Koalicja Obywatelska* – KO), Third Way (*Trzecia Droga* – TD), New Left (*Nowa Lewica* – NL), and Confederation Liberty and Independence (*Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość* – KWiN). The sole focus on the elections to the lower house of the Polish parliament is due to the obvious greater importance of this body in the public power system. More importantly, these elections far better reflect the distribution of political preferences since they require the selection of a candidate from a specific party list. The relevant information is publicly available and comes from the official website of the State Electoral Commission.

The research process has two stages. The first aims to identify the general picture of spatial differentiation of electoral support for the selected groupings. The chosen measure of support is the percentage of valid votes cast for each grouping in relation to the total number of eligible voters. This is a more reliable measure than the traditional indicator of support calculated in relation to the number of valid votes because it considers the size of voter turnout, which is in itself an important determinant of election results. At this stage, traditional descriptive statistics are used to capture the variability of the results, along with support cartograms constructed using quintile ranges to allow a visual exploration of the vote distribution for individual political forces.

A spatial autocorrelation analysis is also applied, enabling a clearer assessment of the intensity and extent of spatial clustering of electoral support values for the analysed parties, based on information revealed by global and local autocorrelation indices. Spatial autocorrelation is a correlation between values of the same variable (in this case, electoral support) measured at different points in space. It occurs

when the presence of the analysed phenomenon in one spatial unit increases or decreases the probability of that phenomenon occurring in neighbouring units. The fact that statistically significant autocorrelation exists means spatial clustering of variable's similar values (high or low) into groups and homogeneity of spatial structures, i.e. similarity of geographically closer areas (Kossowski, 2018). We can then speak of natural areas of high or low support for a given political grouping, as well as special cases where a unit with a high value of support is neighbouring units with a low value and vice versa.

The Moran's I statistic is used as a measure of spatial autocorrelation, which is estimated based on a matrix of spatial weights formed on the criterion of the mutual distance of the analytical units. Therefore, the neighbourhood of each municipality is defined as a radius of 30 km, assuming this to be the space of the most intense social interaction, primarily considering the extent of daily commuting. The statistical significance of the Moran's I coefficient is verified using a permutation test at pseudo $p < 0.05$. The Moran's I statistic is interpreted as suggested by Anselin and Rey (2014) and Grekousis (2020), taking into account its application in electoral studies (e.g. Cutts and Webber, 2010; Maškarinec, 2017; Shin & Agnew, 2007; Tapiador & Mezo, 2009).

The second stage involves estimating the links between the observed patterns of support and their presumed determinants; that is, the country's settlement hierarchy and historical-political divisions. A six-element classification of municipalities is adopted according to population: under 5,000 inhabitants, 5,000–10,000 inhabitants, 10,000–20,000 inhabitants, 20,000–50,000 inhabitants, 50,000–100,000 inhabitants, and over 100,000 inhabitants. For historical-political regionalisation, the study uses the generally known division into four conventional regions according to former political borders: 1) Austrian Poland, the former Austrian partition encompassing the lands within the boundaries of the former Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, along with Cieszyn Silesia, which was then part of Austrian Silesia; 2) Russian Poland, the former Russian partition encompassing the area of the former Congress Kingdom along with the Bialystok region that was directly incorporated into the Russian Empire; 3) Prussian Poland, the former Prussian partition overlapping with the territories taken away from Germany in 1919 under the provisions of the

Treaty of Versailles; and 4) the Recovered Territories (also known as the Western and Northern Territories), the areas that were placed under Polish jurisdiction under the provisions of the 1945 Potsdam Conference.

The second stage aims to check the correspondence between the actual assignment of municipalities to the respective classification groups and the variations in the support values for the political groupings under study. In the case classification procedure, discriminant analysis is used to ascertain whether and to what extent the support variables distinguish (discriminate) between the adopted classification groups. The relevant procedure is based on the general suggestions of Stanisz (2007), taking into account applications in the social sciences (Radkiewicz, 2010).

RESULTS

## Spatial variation of electoral support

Thanks to the choices made by Poles in 2023, 5 of the 12 groupings running in the elections exceeded the required electoral thresholds; together, they won the support of 70.4% of eligible voters (Tab. 1). The analysis of the basic descriptive statistics for the variables depicting levels of support in the municipal cross-section clearly indicates a rather high spatial variability of preferences (Fig. 1). The magnitude of the coefficient of variation exceeds 20% in all cases; its highest values are for NL (46.7%) and KO (52.5%). This is also shown by the extreme magnitudes (minimum and maximum levels of support), which differ by at least several multiples; for NL and KO, the differences are 27.2 and 28.5 times, respectively.

Tab. 1. Electoral support for parliamentary groups

|	Electoral support in % in relation to:	
Grouping	total valid votes	eligible voters
PiS	35.38	25.87
KO	30.70	22.45
TD	14.40	10.53
NL	8.61	6.29
KWiN	7.16	5.24
Total	96.25	70.39

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 1. Selected descriptive statistics for indicators of support for parliamentary groups
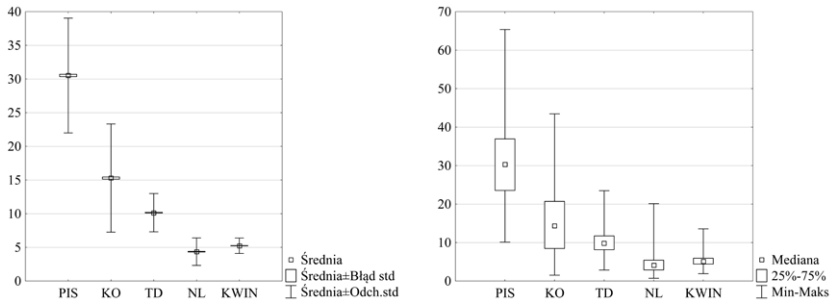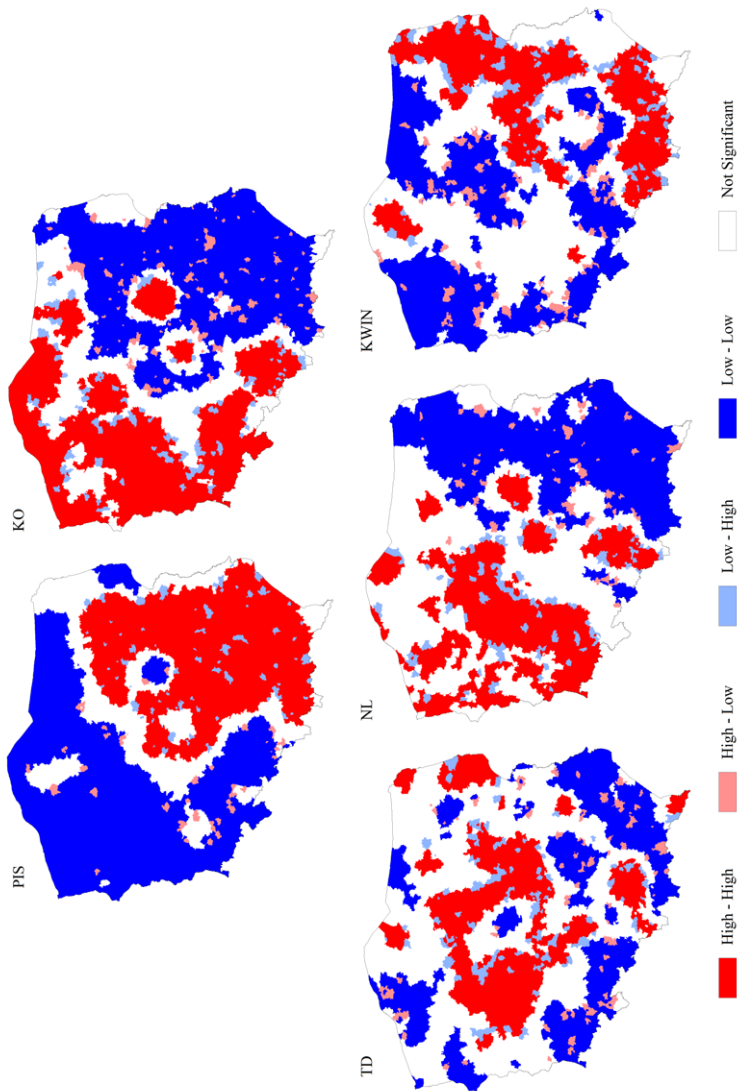

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 2. Spatial variability of support for parliamentary groupings (%)
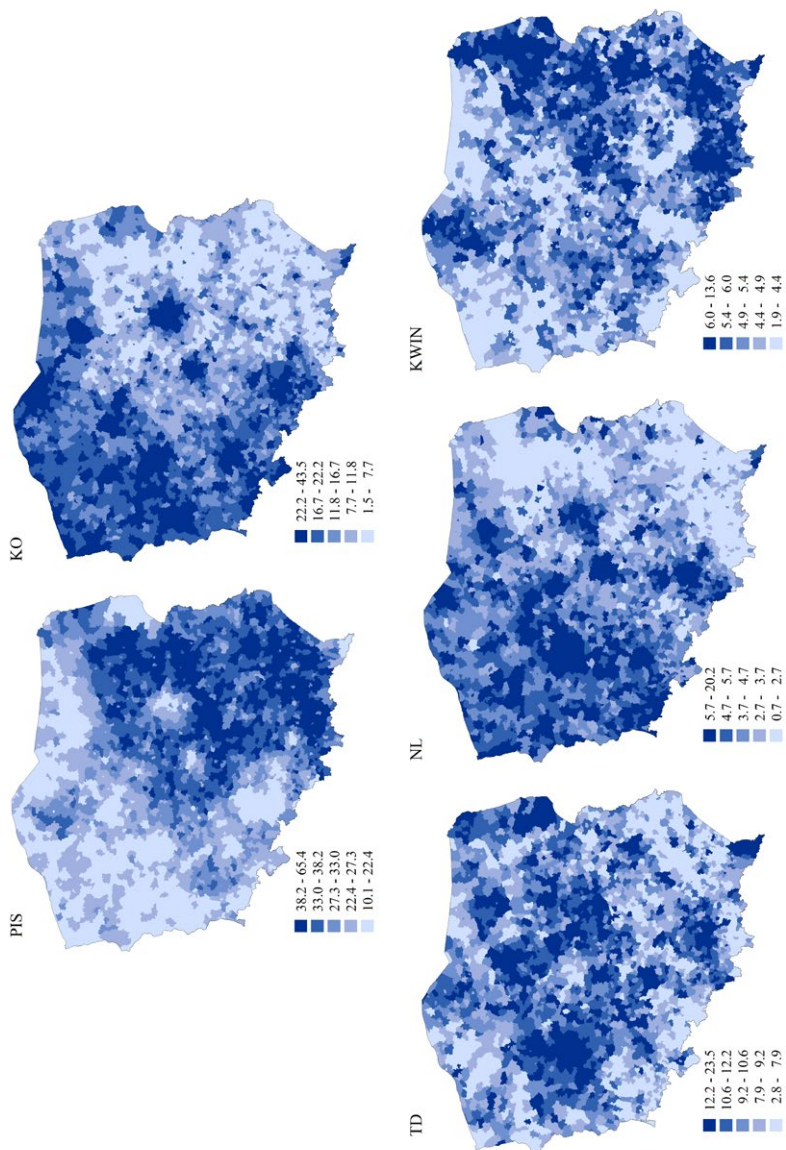
Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 3. Spatial clustering of support for parliamentary groups

Source: own elaboration.

It should be noted that the spatial variability of the support indicators is generally characterised by a distinctive territorial distribution of the corresponding values (Fig. 2). As can easily be seen, in the case

of the two largest groupings, i.e., PiS and KO, there is a rather high spatial concentration of support, and the corresponding images are to some extent mirroring. This becomes quite clear on two complementary levels. The first corresponds to the country's urban-rural differentiation, leaving areas of larger cities and metropolitan areas on the KO's side, while rural and small-town areas on the PiS's side. The second, somewhat more subtle, which can conventionally be described as east-west, refers to the course of Poland's historical borders. In this case, the areas of increased support for PiS gravitate to the former Austrian and Russian Poland, while the analogous areas of PO correspond clearly to the areas of Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories. Support for the other groupings is less suggestive. However, at a certain level of generalisation, there are unmistakable similarities in the distributions of votes cast for NL and KO; similarly for KWiN and PiS. A rather specific area of support is held by the TD, which demonstrates a pattern that is difficult to clearly define. However, it is possible to note a significantly higher concentration of this grouping's supporters in most large urban centres.

These concentrative tendencies in the distribution of support are fully confirmed by spatial autocorrelation analysis. The global values of Moran's I coefficient are positive and relatively high for PiS and KO (0.71 and 0.61, respectively), slightly lower (0.52) for NL, and lower still for KWiN (0.45) and TD (0.38). This means that in all cases, there is a more or less pronounced tendency to spatial clustering of municipal units with similar levels of support for particular groupings. The characteristics of this clustering are revealed by the cartographic image of Moran's local I statistics (Fig. 3).

Therefore, we can plainly see that any area with a concentration of municipalities with high support for PiS (High-High situation – municipalities with high support surrounded by other municipalities with high support) will also be an area of low KO popularity (Low-Low situation – municipalities with low support surrounded by similar municipalities). Figure 3 shows a huge massif of PiS support in the central and south-eastern parts of the country, with prominent urban enclaves demonstrating the opposite values (High-Low and Low-High situations – municipalities with high support for a particular party surrounded by municipalities with low support, or vice versa). The most significant of these are the Warsaw and Lodz agglomerations.

Only a narrow crescent-shaped transition space separates this massif from the area, stretching to the north, west, and south-west, that forms the space of high KO performance and, at the same time, the lowest backing for PiS. Isolated enclaves of opposing values can also be distinguished here, associated with rural areas. The picture of the concentration of support for the other groupings is much more fragmented, showing more areas where the concentrations of supporters or opponents are statistically insignificant.

SPATIAL DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT

In light of the descriptive statistics, the average electoral support for each grouping seems to be derived to the population size of each municipality (Tab. 2). This is particularly evident for PiS, where we observe decreasing values of support as the number of inhabitants increases; for KO and NL, the trend is reversed. In the case of KWiN, the matter is less clear cut, although from the 10,000–20,000 group upwards, support for the party decreases similarly to that of PiS. No trend is observed for TD, which receives fairly equal support in all size classes. However, the discriminant analysis does not satisfactorily confirm the link between the amount of support for each political option and the size of the municipality. Although the classification function with the participation of all electoral variables correctly identifies 43.0% of cases, the highest correspondence is obtained in the class of 5,000–10,000 residents (66.2%). In the 50,000–100,000 category, no case is classified according to the actual state.

Tab. 2. Electoral support for parliamentary groups by size of municipalities

Size of the community	Electoral support in %				
	PIS	KO	TD	NL	KWIN
less than 5,000 inhabitants	33.0	11.5	10.0	3.7	5.1
5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants	31.6	13.4	9.9	4.0	5.3
10,000 to 20,000 inhabitants	29.3	17.4	10.6	4.7	5.5
20,000 to 50,000 inhabitants	25.4	23.8	10.8	5.7	5.2
50,000 to100,000 inhabitants	24.4	25.6	9.6	6.5	5.0
over 100,000 inhabitants	21.0	28.5	10.5	8.4	4.8

Source: own elaboration.

The evaluation of various classification options shows that the highest consistency in reflecting the observed variation can be obtained by using two size classes of municipalities – that is, under or over 20,000 inhabitants – with a classification function considering only three variables, identifying support for PiS, KO, and NL. The percentage of correctly classified cases now increases to 87.7%. The first class has significantly higher accordance than the second (95.4% compared to 40.2%).

Even at the stage of compiling averages, significant differences are evident between Russian and Austrian Poland on the one hand, and Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories on the other (Tab. 3). In the first two regions, PiS is definitely in front, and, to a lesser extent, KWiN, while, in the latter two, the leaders are KO and NL. Again, the outlier is TD, which records minimally higher support within Russian and Prussian Poland.

Tab. 3. Electoral support for parliamentary groups by historical region

Region	Electoral support in %				
	PIS	KO	TD	NL	KWIN
Austrian Poland	36.9	11.1	9.5	3.1	6.0
Russian Poland	34.8	11.7	10.5	4.0	5.4
Prussian Poland	25.4	20.2	11.5	5.5	5.3
Recovered Territories	22.4	21.0	9.1	5.1	4.5

Source: own elaboration.

This is fully confirmed by discriminant analysis. The corresponding classification function with all electoral variables correctly identifies 64.6% of cases. However, there are significant differences between the regions in the level of correspondence between the assigned and actual classification affiliation: 83.2% for Russian Poland and 81.5% for the Recovered Territories, but only 21.4% for Prussian Poland and 14.4% for Austrian Poland. Cases associated with Prussian Poland are most often recognised as the Recovered Territories, while municipalities belonging to Austrian Poland are recognised as Russian Poland.

This indicates that the spatial variation in electoral support is better captured not with reference to the four historical regions, but to their aggregates, conventionally referred to as East and West. The overall accuracy of observation assignment in this situation rises to

85.1%, with a fairly similar representation in both cases: 87.5% correct indications for the East and 81.6% for the West.

A more precise picture of the spatial differentiation of support for the analysed political groupings emerges in a cross-sectional approach, which considers aggregated historical regions and municipality sizes collectively (Tab. 4). It is easy to see that PiS records the best results in rural and small-town areas, both in the eastern and western parts of the country, with the former clearly pronounced. In the case of KO, the picture of support is completely reversed: the highest support is observed in urban areas, both in the West and East, but with a clear preference for the Western part. A very similar picture is characteristic of the NL, of course including a significantly lower intensity of support. As far as the TD is concerned, better results are marked in the cities than in rural and small-town areas. At the same time, the party performs relatively better in the East than in the West. In the case of KWiN, the size of the municipalities does not seem to differentiate support. However, there is a noticeable advantage for the East over the West.

Tab. 4. Electoral support for parliamentary groups by aggregated regions and size of municipalities

Region / size of the community	Electoral support in %				
	PiS	KO	TD	NL	KWiN
West / over 20,000 inhabitants	21.4	27.5	10.4	6.6	4.8
West / less than 20,000 inhabitants	24.0	19.2	9.9	5.0	4.8
East / over 20,000 inhabitants	28.4	21.3	10.9	5.6	5.5
East / less than 20,000 inhabitants	36.2	10.4	10.2	3.5	5.6

Source: own elaboration.

The relatively good accuracy of the presented approach is confirmed by discriminant analysis. The applicable classification function correctly identifies more than 75% of cases. The correspondence between the assigned and actual classification affiliation is particularly high for the options East / less than 20,000 inhabitants – 89.6% and West / less than 20,000 inhabitants – 74.8%. The other two options are much less discriminated: 41.2% for West / over 20,000 inhabitants and only 10.4% for East / over 20,000 inhabitants.

DISCUSSION

The disparities between the urban and rural electorates have traditionally been framed in terms of the differing socio-professional structures and economic interests of urban and rural residents (Zarycki, 1997). In particular, it is about the disadvantaged position of the agricultural economy compared to the industrialised cities. Therefore, agricultural producers tend to favour regulations in the form of tariffs and duties protecting their position in the market, whereas the interests of urban entrepreneurs lie in supporting freer trade (Zarycki, 1997). However, given contemporary socio-economic and civilisational transformations, the cultural connotations, related to the respective value systems that differentiate urban and rustic culture, seem far more important. Cities are places where cultural norms are more often and more openly contested, while rural areas show far greater trust in traditional norms and institutions (Marcinkiewicz, 2018). Hence the opposition of liberal urban communities to traditionalist rural communities.

Most of the five main groupings have clearly taken sides in this conflict; KO and NL on the urban side, and PiS and, to a lesser extent, KWiN on the rural side. As for TD, the present research indicates its neutral position, even though one of the coalition partners is the Polish People's Party, which is often associated with the defence of rural communities. Voters apparently viewed the TD coalition through the prism of the universal message of the other partner, Szymon Holownia's Poland 2050.

Although it seems highly likely that voter support did vary according to the population size of municipalities, the results of the present study do not confirm this beyond doubt. It appears that the average values of support (see Tab. 1) obscure the real picture, which ultimately boils down to differences between municipalities with fewer than 20,000 residents and those with more than 20,000. In reality, then, we are dealing not with an urban-rural differentiation, but with an opposition between metropolitan and rural or small-town communities. An earlier study of a similar type, conducted by Kavetskyy (2003) on the results of the 2001 parliamentary elections using one-way ANOVA, indicated clear distinctions between cities of different size classes in terms of support for the political groups

surveyed. The only similarities were between rural areas and cities with a population of less than 2,000. Without more detailed inquiries in this regard, it can only be conjectured whether these differences represent a significant shift in the urban-rural boundary in terms of electoral behaviour, or are simply due to the use of different survey tools.

The problem of the relationship between voting behaviour and the historical affiliation of different parts of Poland to different socio-political systems is very frequently addressed in the literature (Bartkowski, 2003; Grabowski, 2019; Jańczak, 2015; Jasiewicz, 2009; Kavetskyy, 2010; Kowalski, 2003; Turek, 2012; Zarycki, 2007, 2015). As Kavetskyy (2023) notes, researchers tend to argue not over the presence of such a link but over the specific mechanisms behind it, asking whether the observed dissimilarities originate in the historically shaped civilisational differences of regions, regional political cultures, specific regional modes of production, levels of population incumbency in different parts of the country, or the regional distribution of different types of social capital.

Therefore, it should be stated that, independently of the interpretation adopted, these historical divisions and their consequences in terms of different political and economic conditions remain deeply rooted determinants of development processes, according to the principle of path dependence (Churski et al., 2020). The different state affiliations of each part of today's Poland during the period of fundamental transformations related to the formation of universal national consciousness and the construction of modern states (the National Revolution), and the emergence of large-scale factory industry and modern industrial civilisation (the Industrial Revolution), created and perpetuated significant interregional dissimilarities. These dissimilarities now reflect the different degrees of advancement of the above processes in the various partitioned states.

Without wanting to prejudge the direct connections between 19th-century events and the contemporary situation, it is impossible to dismiss the tangible manifestations of the partition legacy in the form of interregional differences in levels of industrialisation, provision of technical infrastructure, size structure of farms, and ultimately the level of development achieved. Perhaps, then, the implicit historical legacy in the socio-cultural sphere should not be downplayed either;

assuming, as Bartkowski (2003) and Zarycki (2015) have mentioned, that successful reforms in the Prussian sector fostered not only the progressive modernisation of the region, but also the formation of entrepreneurial attitudes, civic responsibility, and open-mindedness. Equally, democratic traditions in the Austrian partition fostered the development of Polish national identity, high moral standards, and strong community ties, despite the fact that economically, it was one of the poorest and most peripheral parts of the Habsburg Empire. In contrast, the policies and authoritarianism of the Russian government led to huge differences between large metropolises and rural areas, but also, through opposition, promoted the hardening of the Polish national spirit and the propagation of Polish culture or folk traditions. The Recovered Territories contain a young post-migration community, shaped by confrontations between groups arriving from various parts of the country, on top of this under the prevailing communist ideology, which resulting in the breaking of traditional social ties and the rapid moral modernisation of the settlers. The community formed from this is characterised by significantly higher levels of secularism, liberalism but also social atomisation compared to the communities living in the areas of the three partitions (Bartkowski, 2003; Churski et al., 2020).

The present research confirms the blurring of the boundaries between Russian and Austrian Poland, and also those between Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories. Polarisation persists between the western part of Poland, which is under the overwhelming influence of PO and NL, and the eastern part dominated by PiS and KWiN. We can probably understand this division by linking the peculiarities of Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories with historically formed economic and cultural liberalism, and the personalities of Austrian and Russian Poland with the primacy of national and Catholic values and community traditions. Only large cities and agglomerations fall outside this pattern; regardless of their location in the national space, they tend to demonstrate secular and liberal attitudes that are more consistent with the preferences of the western regions. This electoral universalism of urban areas, however, is not absolute, but is attenuated by a more or less pronounced bias toward the dominant trend throughout the region.

CONCLUSION

Researchers on the spatial differentiation of voting in Poland usually emphasise two basic phenomena: fundamental socioeconomic conditions, exemplified by urban-rural differentiation, and the national historical and cultural legacy, associated with old socio-political divisions. Through all the enormous changes that have taken place on the national political scene in the democratic era, these remain perennial reference points in Polish electoral geography. Therefore, the morphology of the electoral space is largely constant, despite the changes in the political structures and processes underlying the formation of this picture. In this context, the political-spatial divisions emerging from the analysis of the 2023 parliamentary elections can only be directly compared with the last few elections, when the Polish political scene has been dominated by the two current leading groupings.

The research confirms that the basic spatial patterns of electoral support for the main political actors, shaped in the middle of the 21st century's first decade still retain their significance. Although the relationship between the main morphological features of the electoral space and the hierarchy of the settlement structure in greater details is not clear, similarities in policy preferences among two size groups should be emphasised: municipalities with populations under and over 20,000. A contrast between big-city preferences, associated with liberal along with left-wing groups, and rural or small-town communities, which are more open to right-wing electoral programmes, therefore persists.

As for socio-political boundaries, the four historical regions, reflected in the voting space of early parliamentary elections in Poland, have gradually been replaced by east-west heterogeneity. The present research confirms a drawing together of the preferences of the inhabitants of former Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories, where liberal and left-wing groupings gain more support. Meanwhile, right-wing groupings have consolidated their place in the voting space of former Austrian and Russian Poland. Thus, the concept of two antagonistic spatial-political axes has somewhat lost its meaning. We now have a polarised arrangement of two overlapping planes, in which the western regions and metropolitan areas favour a liberal-left vision of Poland, while the eastern regions and rural or small-town areas favour traditionalist and right-wing groupings.

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