

Old Empires, Modern State: Legacies of Partitions on Voting Behaviour in the 2023 Polish Parliamentary Elections

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Abstract: *The legacies of former partitions are still visible in today's Poland in the economy, society and politics. Our article integrates the historical and geographical perspective into the study of electoral behaviour in Poland. We conduct a geographical description of electoral results in the 2023 parliamentary elections and determine how economic and cultural attributes related to different paths of development associated with the former partitions are reflected in the apparent spatial differences. We distinguish between direct and indirect influence. It is indirect when differences in economic development (e.g. changes in agrarian structures) or cultural transformations (e.g. secularisation) resulting from former policies are reflected in different electoral choices. The influence is direct if belonging to a former empire determines electoral behaviour regardless of the economic and cultural determinants of the vote. We found that the influence concerns primarily the former Russian and Austrian regions. The analysis is conducted at the county (powiat) level.*

Keywords: *2023 elections in Poland, Central Europe, historical legacies, party politics, spatial analysis*

Introduction

The legacies of former partitions are still visible in today's Poland in the economy (Bukowski et al. 2017), society (Barkowski 2004) and politics (Krzemiński 2009). Detecting the shape of former empires in the contemporary spatial

patterns of development is also a common interpretative trope for experts, journalists and the general public. The geographical distribution of votes does indeed resemble the borders of the Russian, Prussian and Austrian empires before World War I. Our article is an attempt to integrate the historical and geographical perspective into the study of electoral behaviour in Poland. We want to start with the geographical description of electoral results in 2023 parliamentary elections and determine how economic and cultural attributes related to different paths of development are reflected in the apparent spatial differences.

The influence of the former partitions may be direct or indirect. It is indirect when differences in economic development (e.g. changes in agrarian structures) or cultural transformations (e.g. secularisation) resulting from former policies are reflected in different electoral choices. The influence is direct if belonging to a former empire determines electoral behaviour regardless of the economic and cultural determinants of the vote.

The paper starts with the overview of relevant studies of the legacies of partitions and electoral behaviour. Second, our methodology and the approach to the data analysis are presented. Third, we present the results. We map the vote in the 2023 elections from the geographical perspective; we determine whether the region (i.e. belonging to the former partition) is a factor in the election result; and lastly, we perform multivariate analysis to determine the importance of economic factors (earnings, unemployment) and cultural ones (religious practice) on election results. We treat cities (towns with county status) as separate entities. In our model, the city is both a cultural and economic category, as city dwellers are different in economic terms, but also because urban areas produce a distinct cultural milieu (Castells 1983; Florida 2005). We control for this factor. The analysis is conducted on the level of the county (powiat).

Historical legacies and voting behaviour

Historical heritage and its impact on the spatial diversity of voting behaviour is a research field that attracts the attention of scientists around the world (Sunilraj & Heath 2017, Berman & Nugent. 2019, Katchanowsky 2006). However, the influence of historical legacies turns out to be the strongest and most lasting (or the most studied) in Europe. There is significant research on the influence of historical regions on political preferences in Poland, Romania, Spain, Great Britain and Ukraine (Haydukiewicz 2011). Findings have shown a lasting durability of the influence of the historical past on the spatial differentiation of election results in Spain, Romania, Ukraine and Poland (Haydukiewicz 2011). The communist past is also important (Pop-Eleches 2007; Roper & Fesnic 2003). In this context, Poland, a country with a complicated history and dynamic political changes, offers a unique case for analysing this phenomenon.

In Poland, there have been many attempts to describe and study the influence of historical factors on the spatial diversity of electoral behaviour (Georgica 1995, Zarycki 1996, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007, Raciborski 1997, Kowalski 2000, 2003, 2004, Kowalski & Śleszyński 2000, Bartkowski 2003, Skwierzyński 2008). These works can be classified by two approaches to the spatial differentiation of voting behaviour: historical-cultural and socio-economic (Zarycki 1997). According to the first approach, the differentiation of political preferences is caused by the partition of Poland, or the division into four civilisation zones, also separating the lands incorporated to Poland after World War II, while the second approach refers to the current socio-economic differentiation of these territorial units (Zarycki 1997).

According to the first approach, the key element shaping voting behaviour is awareness and identification with a specific socio-civilisational pattern characteristic of a given region. Factors such as financial situation, social position, age, level of education or place of residence also play a role, but are less important (Turek 2012: 453). Most researchers in this group believe that the partitions had the greatest importance for shaping regional political structures, production methods and dominant cultural patterns (Kowalski 2000, Kavetsky 2010, Zarycki 2015,). In their opinion, the adaptation of the population to the patterns and legislation applicable in individual partitions (which occurred throughout the XIX and early XX century, i.e. the period of the industrial and national revolution and the development of capitalism) influenced the differentiation of social capital and civic activity in the regions (Hryniewicz & Jałowiecki, 1997). According to Jacek Raciborski (1997: 158), ‘in each partition, different patterns of political culture and different dominant ideological and political orientations were formed, and this process was conditioned by the policy of the empires towards the Polish population in the annexed areas, as well as the nature and method of organizing the state, as well as the level of its economic and cultural development.’

However, some scholars believe that the changes that took place in Poland in 1940–1947 are crucial for today’s voting behaviour (Turek 2012). This was the period of the mass migration, which led to lasting changes in the areas subject to resettlement (Greater Poland, the northern and western territories, parts of Pomerania). The resettlement is closely related to weak social bonds and the lack of roots and, consequently, the development of an individualistic society, as opposed to a communitarian society in lands not subject to migration. During this period, economic and political changes overlapped with demographic changes. Another important factor in these regions was the existence of the state agricultural sector, where employees had access to education, mass media and political information channels that influenced their political views. At the same time, people working on their own farms maintained greater independence and stability of views.

Analyses regarding the influence of the partition division or the division into four civilisation zones to explain voting behaviour in Poland have a long tradition. The analysis of the 1989 elections revealed regional differences and their presence was confirmed in later years (for review see: Kowalski & Śleszyński 2018). Analyses from 1989 to 2002 (Turek 2012) indicate the existence of a bipolar political division, referring to the ‘axis of values’ (Żukowski 1998), i.e. the division into post-communist and post-Solidarity values, reflected by left-wing and right-wing identification, related to the different historical fate of Polish lands during the partitions and after the war. This is coupled with the level of religiosity among the inhabitants of particular areas and the influence of the Church (Kowalski 2000). As a result, regions such as the new territories, Greater Poland, Warmia, Masuria, the industrialised parts of the former Russian partition, as well as areas inhabited by national and religious minorities, were left-wing oriented, while Galicia (former Austrian partition), and most of the Russian partition supported right-wing parties (Kowalski 2003, Dzieliński 2009, Turek 2012, Kowalski & Śleszyński 2018).

The elections in 2005 and subsequent votes continued these patterns only to some extent. The strength of influence and the axes of division changed. Until that date, the competition was between right-wing and left-wing groups representing the value axis. Since 2005, interests have become relevant: economic issues have become an important determinant of voting (Krzemiński 2009). In 2007, a transformation of the political scene took place, consisting of the marginalisation of left-wing groups and the strengthening of the liberal parties (Dzieliński 2009). Law and Justice (PiS) strengthened among the rural electorate, while the Civic Platform (PO) gained some of the votes of liberal and leftist parties. The Polish People’s Party (PSL) kept the support of farmers from the Russian partition, but it also gained voters in cities (Dzieliński 2009, Kowalski & Śleszyński 2018). At the same time, the value axis changes: the post-communist and post-Solidarity camps were replaced by the liberal and conservative-national camps, respectively (Kaczorowska 2006).

The maps of support for the two largest parties still reflected the civilisation zones (except for 2015, when the overall high support for PiS blurred the boundaries of the partitions). However, the voting pattern of large cities, which had previously supported right-wing parties, changed. After 2005, liberal and left-wing groups began to win in cities, promising modernisation (Dzieliński 2009). As Turek (2012: 456) wrote, ‘as long as the left was synonymous with stagnation and defence of the status quo, the metropolitan electorate was in the same camp with the right-wing and provincial countryside, which cherished the memory of the “good old days”, i.e. an independent state and connection with Western (Latin) civilization, which emphasized its attachment to the Catholic Church. The paradigm of the “Solidarity” movement emphasized the importance of unity, the alliance of the peasant with the worker and the intelligentsia, in the

name of national goals.' The end of the post-communist cleavage (Grabowska 2004) contributed to the breakdown of the city-village alliance.

The dominance of the axis of economic interests results in the explanation of voting behaviour by the personal social and economic situation, which affects cultural differences (Grabowski 2018, Bartkowski 2003, Zarycki 1997, Bartkowski 2003, Jasiewicz 2009). Empirical analyses of the impact of economic factors on the spatial distribution of party support are relatively rare. This type of study is most often conducted at the individual level (for Poland see: Grzelak 2002, Markowski et al. 2015, Sroka 2015, Jasiewicz 2022). The few works devoted to elections concern the impact of unemployment (e.g. Hajder 2012, Grabowski 2018) or the income in the territorial unit (e.g. Pierzgalski 2012, 2015). They confirm the influence of economic factors at the level of territorial units on electoral preferences. Most empirical analyses are attempts to reconcile (or disentangle) these two approaches. In most cases, they show that voting behaviour can be explained by reference to a historical factor, but they also reflect the current socio-economic situation (Kabath 2002, Kowalski 2000, 2003, 2004, Krzemiński 2009, Grabowski 2018).

Our article on the 2023 parliamentary elections is a part of the literature aimed at determining which of the factors described above – history or contemporary economic and cultural conditions – is key to explaining support for the party at the county level. We want to establish the durability of the historical legacies.

Methodology

Our research model assumes that long-term legacies in historical development result in differences in attitudes and worldviews and, consequently, in voting patterns in regions of Poland defined by different paths of development. The partitions of Poland occurred at the turn of the XIX century and policies of the three empires had a lasting effect on social consciousness. This concerns economic development (industrial revolution, urbanisation), cultural change (e.g. the pace of literacy, the scope of education), and political development (type of regime, political culture).

The influence of partitions may be either direct or indirect. The indirect influence is exerted via differences in economic development between different regions (urbanisation, earnings) or by cultural change (e.g. secularisation). We assume that there is also a direct influence: there exists a continuity of social consciousness in different regions, which results in differences between regions regardless of economic or cultural factors; that even when economic and cultural factors are controlled for, the voting patterns are different. We test these propositions in the article.

Social consciousness develops in a 'process involving increasing awareness of social historical context, the ability to think abstractly about time and place,

and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand individual experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations' (Ammentorp 2007: 39). As an effect, it affects – consciously or not – every aspect of one's being. Marilyn Mandala Schlitz and co-authors present the typology of five levels of social consciousness: embedded, self-reflexive, engaged, collaborative and resonant, which differ as far as the degree of awareness and involvement of the individual are concerned (Schlitz et al. 2010: 22–23). We assume that the effect of partitions belongs to the embedded level, 'where consciousness is shaped without conscious awareness by social, cultural, and biological factors and which is a kind of presocial consciousness' (Schlitz et al. 2010: 22).

Our approach is sociological. It assumes that institutional continuity (cultural and economic) is important for the development of society and is expressed in political behaviour. Therefore, historically shaped social norms, values, attitudes and political attitudes related to the partitions are significant to this day, as they largely structure the diversification of social capital and thus civic activity (Jałowiecki & Hryniewicz 1997). To test our assumption, we need to determine where this continuity takes place. There were two cut-off points in continuity throughout recent history. First, during the partition period, the Poland-Lithuanian state was divided between three empires (Prussia, Russia and Austria) and since then, the population in these three parts has developed in different political, economic and cultural systems. The period defining the first discontinuity lasted from 1772 (first partition) to 1815, i.e. until the Congress of Vienna. The borders established in 1815 lasted until World War I. The borders of the second Polish state between 1918 and 1939 in the areas covering present-day Poland (i.e. excluding the areas now in Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania) largely reflected the borders from before the first partition, and this is where we test the 'theory of partitions'. It has to be borne in mind that continuity in social development was limited by several important factors: the Holocaust (Jews constituted a significant proportion of the population, especially in urban areas of the Russian partition), post-war migration within Poland and resettlement or expulsion of German and Ukrainian minorities. The second point of discontinuity was after World War II. In 1945, German areas were incorporated into Poland, the local population was expelled, and the areas were populated by settlers. These areas are separate in our analysis, as continuity did not exist.¹

For the purpose of the analysis, we divided Poland into four separate areas: 1. the former Prussian partition, in Poland after WWI; 2. the former Russian partition, in Poland after WWI; 3. the former Austrian partition, in Poland after WWI; 4. The new territories, i.e. the areas incorporated into Poland in 1945. The boundaries between partition areas are those determined at the Congress of

1 Maps are based on: Tazbir 2004; Pyzik & Szulc 2003.

Vienna in 1815. There are several cases when the pre-partition boundaries and pre-WWII northern and western borders of Poland do not match. Their classification must be resolved based on substantive considerations. We consider the continuity of social development (stability in population) to be the salient factor, so we classified these areas based on their pre-WWII status. The most important cases are: 1. Warmia (Ermland), which was incorporated into Prussia in 1772 but was not a part of pre-war Poland, thus we classified it as incorporated after 1945; 2. Parts of Upper Silesia were a part of Prussia with a distinct population and formed an autonomous region in Poland in the interwar period. We classified it as a part of the Prussian partition based on the 19th century Prussian institutional legacy and pre-war Polish statehood.

Our analysis is conducted at the level of powiat (county), a self-government level. All data is aggregated on the level of the county. Their borders do not always coincide with the historical borders, but they constitute an approximation in some cases. Border counties were assigned to the areas where most of their territories were located. The detailed procedures of data gathering are described in the appendix.

The aggregate level of data carries the risk of making an ecological error that may occur when conclusions about individuals are formulated on the basis of aggregated data. When analysing the impact of partition on voting patterns and public awareness, it is important to remember that conclusions drawn from county-level data may not accurately reflect individual behaviour or attitudes.

The analysis is three-stage. First, we present the geographical distribution of party results in 2023 parliamentary (Sejm) elections. Second, we verify whether the votes for the five electoral committees which are represented in the new Sejm differ by region. Third, we test our hypotheses about direct and indirect influence of partitions. The dependent variables are votes for parties. The independent variables are measures of economic development (earnings and unemployment), urbanisation (whether the county is a city, *miasto na prawach powiatu*) and religious practice, which is indicated by research as the key cultural factor determining voting behaviour. Following existing literature and recent research (Sześciło et al. 2021; Flis & Swianiewicz 2021; Swianiewicz & Flis 2022), we take into account clientelist relations between the Law and Justice government and selected regions. Government funds are directed towards regions with high support for the governing party, which presumably has an impact on election results. The measures used are financial aid provided by the state for important social reasons and revenue of the local government.

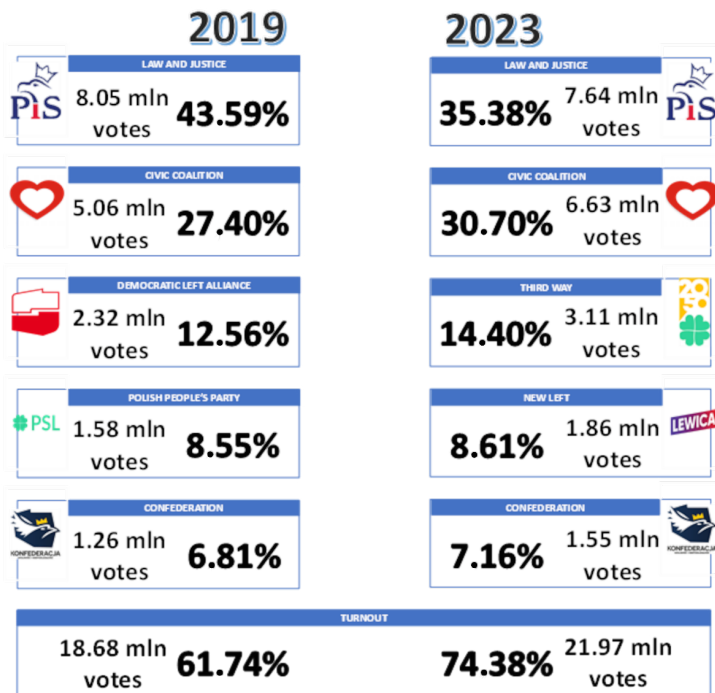
The 'partition theory' is tested by introducing the dummy variables indicting one of the four groups based on history and by interacting the partition variables with other variables of interest to disentangle their effects. In the article, we propose two competing hypotheses about the influence of economic and cultural factors and historical legacy on political preferences.

Results

Overview: The results of 2023 parliamentary elections

As a result of the 2023 parliamentary elections, five electoral committees entered Parliament. They are, in order of the electoral result: 1. Law and Justice (PiS), which is a right-wing group in government since 2015; 2. Civic Coalition (KO), a centrist and liberal coalition of four parties – Civic Platform (PO, in government between 2007 and 2015), Modern Party (Nowoczesna), Initiative for Poland (IdP) and the Green Party; 3. The Third Way, a coalition of the Polish People’s Party (also known as the Polish Peasant Party, a junior partner in the 2007 to 2015 governments) and Szymon Hołownia’s Poland 2050; 4. The New Left, formed after the dissolution of the Alliance of the Democratic Left; and 5. Confederation, a far-right party.² All these electoral committees included representatives of other small groups on their lists.

Figure 1: Results of elections to Sejm in 2019 and 2023



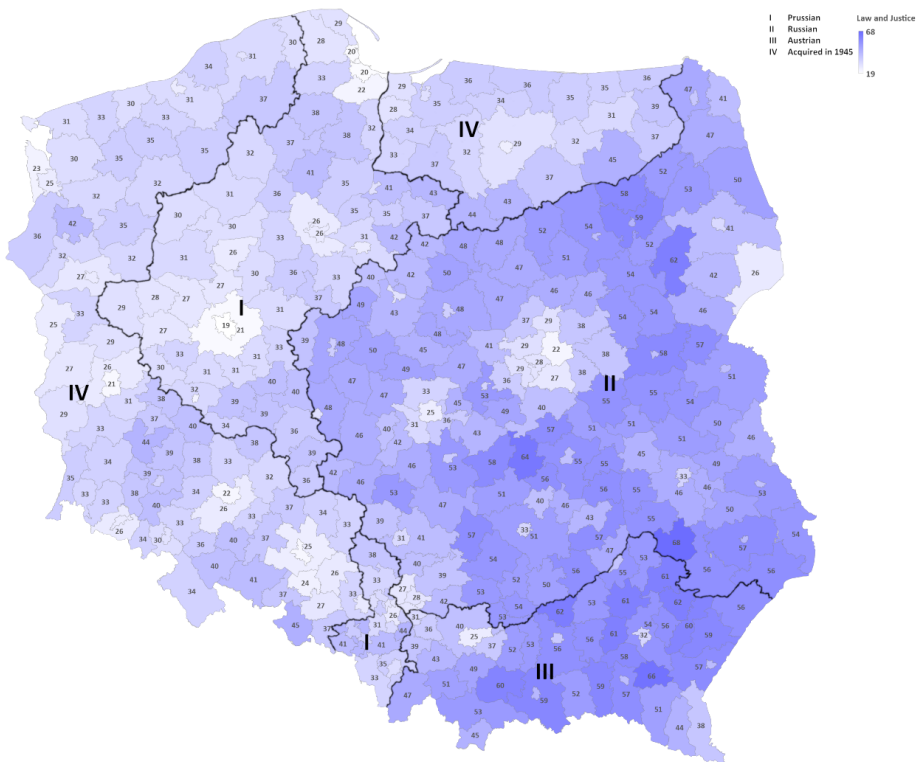
Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission)

² Party positions on a variety of issues are explored by the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) project <access online https://v-dem.net/vparty_dash>. Positions of party electorates on salient socio-economic issues are analysed by CBOS (Roguska 2021).

Regional differences in election results

Civic Coalition (KO) gained significantly more support in the areas of the former Prussian partition and in the lands that were not within the borders of Poland before 1939 (formerly a part of the Kingdom of Prussia/the German Empire). Support of KO is clearly greater in the most urbanised and industrialised centres. This tendency is visible in all the areas we have identified. The differences between urban areas and land counties are relatively smaller in the former Prussian partition and in the lands incorporated after 1945. This is in contrast to the clearly marked difference in the areas of the former Russian and Austrian partitions between the visible strong support for KO in urban centres and the relatively weak support in rural areas.

Figure 2: Vote for Law and Justice (PiS) in 2023 on the county level

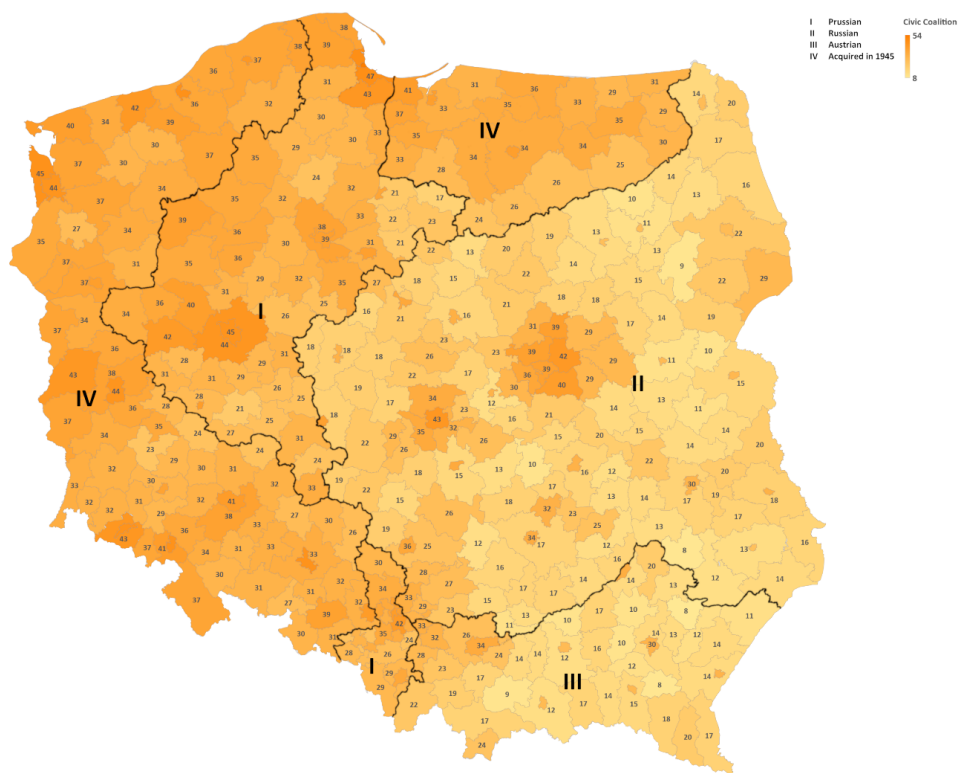


Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission)

The geographical distribution of support for PiS is a mirror image of the vote for KO. Voters expressed the strongest support for PiS in rural areas in the former Russian and Austrian partitions. However, regardless of region, PiS has the least support for PiS in urban centres.

The map of support for the New Left shows a relatively weak correlation with the borders of the areas we designated. The trend seems to be meridional: the further west, the greater the support for NL – subject to small relative differences. The results closer to the eastern border fluctuate around 4% support, and closer to the western border around 6%. Against this background, the NL support in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie (former Russian partition, a coal and steel centre) stands out. NL obtained the highest result there, clearly different from the rest of the country.

Figure 3: Vote for Civic Coalition (KO) in 2023 on the county level

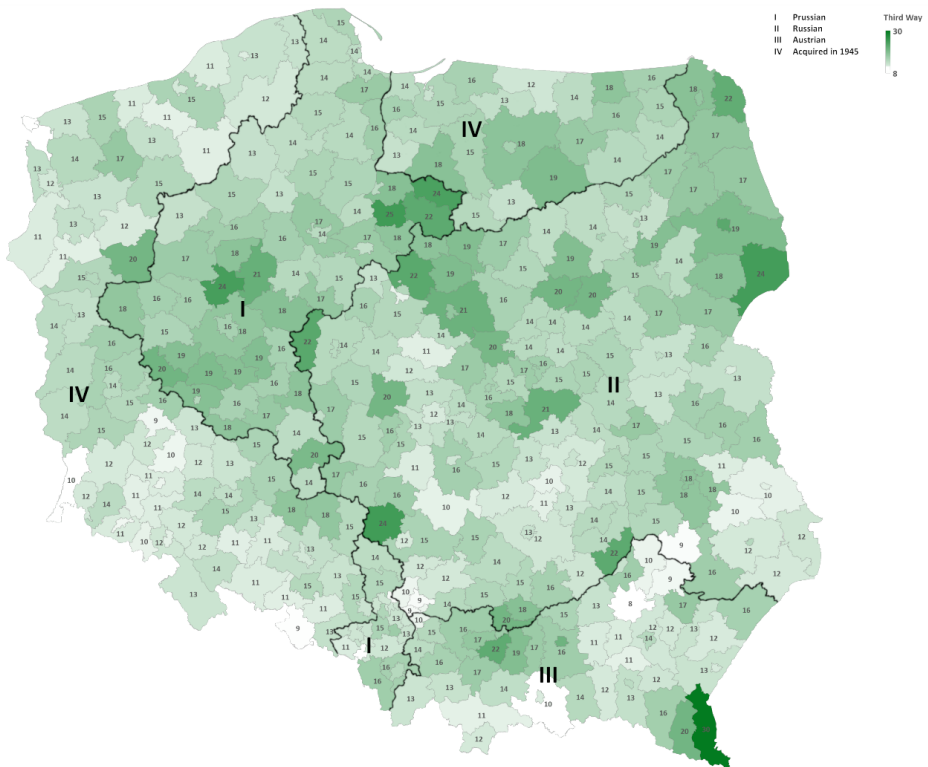


Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission)

The electoral results of the Third Way do not show regionalisation consistent with our assumptions. Also, the traditionally accepted division into geographical regions or the administrative division of the country, or the rural-urban axis, do not provide clear grounds for trying to explain such a distribution of votes for the Third Way.

Support for the Confederation shows strong regionalisation. The Confederation achieved its best results in the north-east and south-east Poland, i.e. close to the border with Ukraine and Belarus. Such results may be related to the geopolitical situation and the proximity of the war in Ukraine.

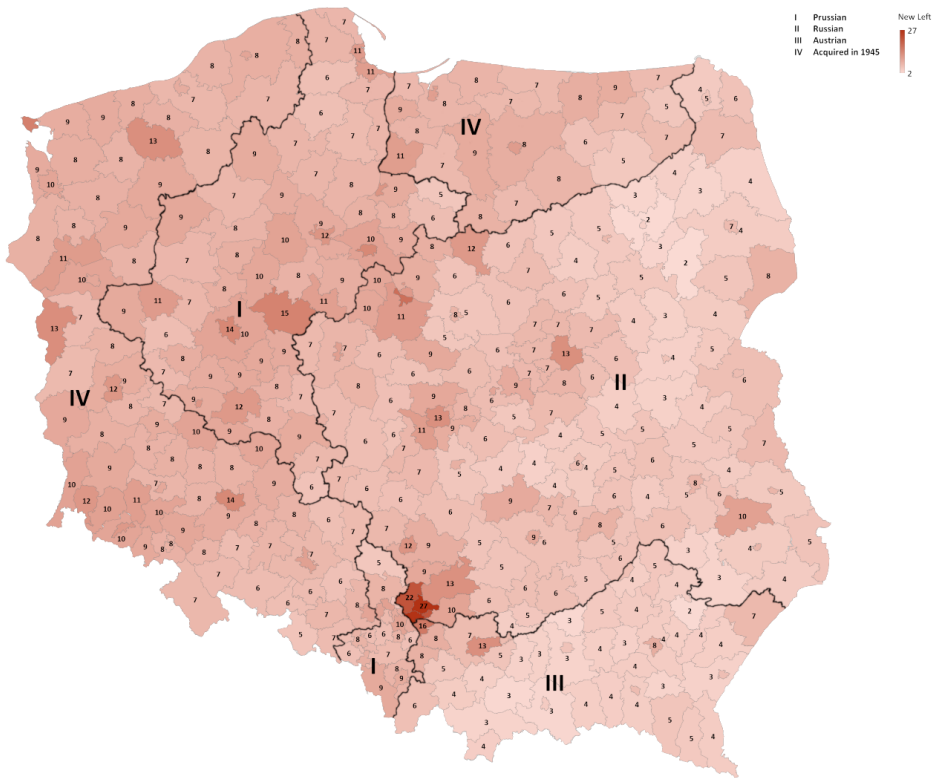
Figure 4: Vote for the Third Way in 2023 on the county level



Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission)

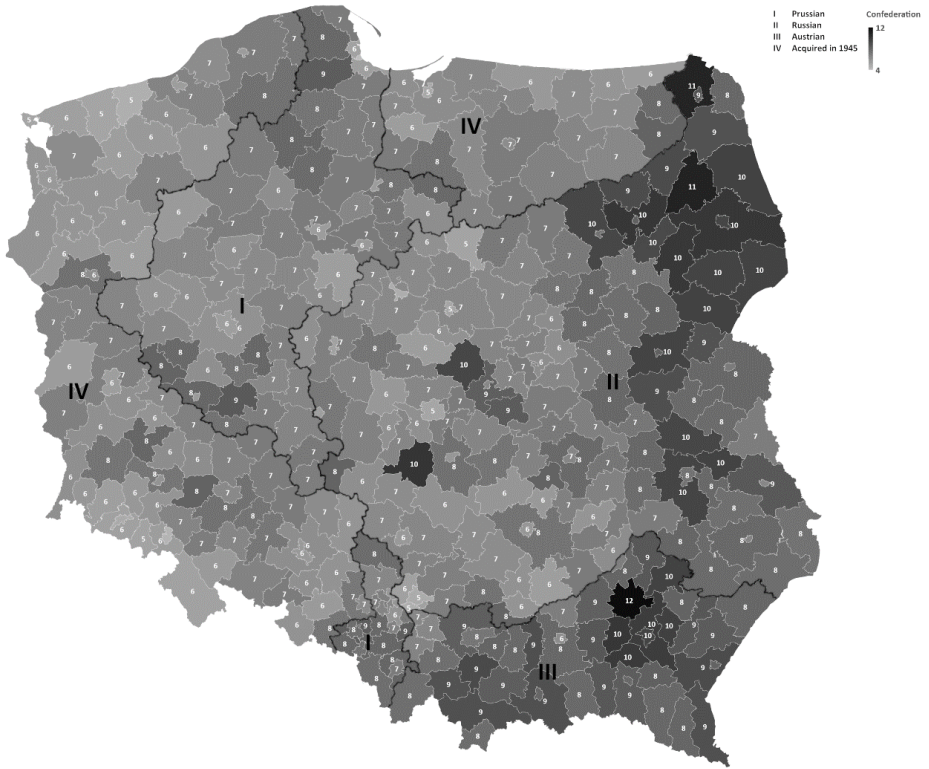
Comparison of means of the results obtained by individual electoral committees confirms the significance of regional differentiation for party support. The strongholds of PiS and Confederation are in the former Russian and Austrian partitions, and PiS has relatively weak support in the former Prussian area and in the new territories in the North and West. On the other hand, KO and the New Left have relatively high support in the former Prussian area and in the new territories and low support in the former Russian and Austrian parts. The support for the Third Way is relatively evenly distributed. The differences in turnout are low and only significant in the former Prussian part (high) and in the new territories

Figure 5: Vote for the New Left in 2023 on the county level



Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission)

Figure 6: Vote for the Confederation in 2023 on the county level



Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission)

Table 1: Turnout and party vote in regions. Electoral results in 2023

| | Turnout | PiS | KO | Third Way | New Left | Confederation |
|-----------------------|---------|-------|-------|-----------|----------|---------------|
| Total | 71.43 | 39.64 | 27.06 | 14.65 | 7.39 | 7.25 |
| Prussian partition | 73.34 | 32.71 | 32.40 | 15.56 | 8.50 | 7.06 |
| Russian partition | 72.17 | 45.41 | 21.29 | 15.14 | 6.76 | 7.48 |
| Austrian partition | 71.07 | 49.93 | 18.57 | 14.21 | 4.96 | 8.58 |
| Land acquired in 1945 | 69.06 | 32.85 | 34.36 | 13.45 | 8.43 | 6.50 |

Source: Authors (based on the data from National Electoral Commission). Data in %. Shaded cells: independent-samples test of equality of means significant at $p < 0,01$ or lower. Reference value: mean for the other categories in the column.

Determinants of party vote

The multiple regression models are constructed to explain the sources of support for the five electoral committees at the county level. The dependent variable is the percentage of votes given for a party in a county.

The independent variables in all models are economic factors (mean earnings, registered unemployment), religious practice (attendance at Sunday religious service) and urban character (whether the county is a city). Urban populations are distinct from rural both in economic terms (higher proportion of employees in white-collar jobs) and in cultural terms not captured by the other variables.

Model 1 tests the hypothesis on the clientelist sources of support: the independent variables include the per capita state subsidy and per capita revenue.

Model 2 introduces the three variables denoting one of the three partitions; where the current boundaries of the county overlap the former partition boundaries, the location of the county capital was selected as the determinant. This model tests the 'theory of partitions'.

Finally, model 3 contains economic and cultural variables with the variable denoting a county in the new territories, to determine the voting specificity of these areas with historical discontinuity.

Model 1 indicates that there is a strong influence of both economic and cultural factors in the vote for the two biggest political groupings, PiS and KO. These two are a mirror reflection of one another in terms of territorial distribution of votes. PiS support is concentrated in areas with high unemployment, with high levels of religious practice, outside of the cities. Support for KO is strongest in cities, in areas with low unemployment and in counties with low levels of religious practice. These factors exert independent influence. The hypothesis about clientelist party support is borne out: higher subsidies per capita are associated with greater support for PiS, the Third Way and Confederation and lower support for KO and the New Left. Wealthy (high-revenue) counties tend to vote KO.

NL is strongest in cities and in areas with low religiosity and the Confederation vote is largest outside of the cities, in areas with a high proportion of churchgoers. Thus, the support for the New Left is somewhat similar geographically to the KO strongholds, but without the economic dimension, as the level of unemployment is not a significant predictor. The support for Confederation is concentrated geographically in the areas where PiS is strong, but unemployment is not a significant predictor.³ The Third Way is a coalition of two different

3 This does not mean that the electorates of KO and New Left or PiS and Confederation have a similar socio-demographic structure. Research on the individual level (Kesler 2023) indicates that gender and age are important predictors of support for NL and Confederation. Both parties are disproportionately supported by young voters, men declaring the vote for Confederation more often than women. On the other hand, PiS supporters are disproportionately old, with pensioners a core constituency.

Table 2: Regression models. Dependent variable: Party vote

| | PiS | KO | Third Way | New Left | Confederation |
|--|--------|--------|-----------|----------|---------------|
| | Beta | | | | |
| Model 1 | | | | | |
| Earnings (PL=100) | -0.150 | 0.000 | -0.036 | 0.010 | 0.062 |
| Registered unemployment (PL=100) | 0.219 | -0.130 | -0.222 | -0.035 | -0.066 |
| City (town with county rights) | 0.285 | 0.341 | -0.292 | -0.046 | 0.569 |
| Religious participation (Dominicantes) | 0.498 | -0.506 | 0.061 | -0.500 | 0.557 |
| County revenues per capita | -0.506 | 0.621 | 0.84 | 0.368 | -0.824 |
| County subsidies per capita | 0.263 | -0.318 | 0.188 | -0.145 | 0.148 |
| R sq | 0.569 | 0.519 | 0.094 | 0.438 | 0.400 |
| Model 2 | | | | | |
| Earnings (PL=100) | -0.134 | 0.130 | -0.051 | 0.079 | -0.015 |
| Registered unemployment (PL=100) | 0.200 | -0.138 | -0.102 | -0.022 | -0.076 |
| City (town with county rights) | -0.243 | 0.308 | -0.247 | 0.322 | -0.263 |
| Religious participation (Dominicantes) | 0.323 | -0.335 | 0.028 | -0.533 | 0.413 |
| Prussian partition | -0.005 | -0.076 | 0.291 | 0.089 | 0.100 |
| Russian partition | 0.470 | -0.545 | 0.264 | -0.098 | 0.252 |
| Austrian partition | 0.244 | -0.243 | 0.064 | 0.063 | 0.214 |
| R sq | 0.709 | 0.734 | 0.140 | 0.451 | 0.408 |
| Model 3 | | | | | |
| Earnings (PL=100) | -0.084 | 0.083 | -0.061 | 0.059 | 0.000 |
| Registered unemployment (PL=100) | 0.309 | -0.240 | -0.124 | -0.065 | -0.043 |
| City (town with county rights) | -0.258 | 0.325 | -0.249 | 0.332 | -0.264 |
| Religious participation (Dominicantes) | 0.367 | -0.337 | -0.070 | -0.481 | 0.473 |
| Land acquired in 1945 | -0.277 | 0.358 | -0.280 | 0.031 | -0.183 |
| R sq | 0.587 | 0.621 | 0.129 | 0.424 | 0.396 |

Source: Authors (based on their own calculations). Shaded cells: Beta coefficient significant at $p < 0.01$ or lower.

entities, the Polish People's Party and Poland 2050. In structural terms, it is a rural grouping, with support outside of the cities. The Third Way is the only grouping whose support is not influenced by the relative religiosity of the area. Model 1 has the lowest predictive power in case of this coalition.

Model 2 has higher explanatory power than Model 1 in all cases, which indicates not only indirect (via economic development and secularisation), but also direct influence of partition legacies. Being a former Russian or Austrian area has an independent influence on the support for both PiS and KO. PiS is stronger in these areas and KO is weaker, when other factors are controlled for. The influence of Prussian partition is insignificant, indicating a lack of a significant difference between former Prussian lands and the area not included from the analysis in these models, i.e. the new territories. Confederation, like PiS, is relatively stronger in the former Russian and Austrian areas.

Model 3 tests the importance of the legacies of post-war population transfers. The new territories are a stronghold of KO, while PiS, the Third Way and Confederation have relatively less support in the counties located in the northern and western Poland.

Finally, we check the relative importance of the economy (variables relating to wealth and unemployment), culture (variables measuring the level of religiosity) or historical region. For this purpose, we have performed an interaction analysis (Table 3).

First, wages and unemployment affect political preferences regardless of the historical region, but their impact is significant only in the case of voting for PiS and KO. The wealth of the county decreases and religiosity increases the level of support for PiS. This relationship is inverse for KO.

Moreover, there is no single pattern of relationships between interacting variables: the influence and relationships between variables are different for different partitions and different parties. In the Russian partition, only the interaction between the Russian partition and the frequency of religious participation is statistically significant. It shows that in religious districts in the Russian partition the tendency to vote for PiS and Confederation is higher, while the propensity to vote for KO and the New Left is lower. In the Austrian partition, significant interactions concern remuneration: higher remuneration reduces the chances of support for PiS, and it increases the scores of the Third Way and the New Left. The interaction between the Austrian partition and the regularity of religious practices and their impact on voting for the Confederation is also significant. Although the relationship is negative, it only flattens out the very strong positive impact of the interacting variables. In the Prussian partition, the influence of economy, culture and history are independent of each other. Only the frequency of religious practices in this partition increases support for the New Left, but, as in the case of support for the Confederation in the Austrian partition, this only has a mitigating effect on the strong negative impact of religiosity.

Table 3: Regression models with interactions. Dependent variable: Party vote

| | PiS | KO | Third Way | New Left | Confederation |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------|----------|---------------|
| | Beta | | | | |
| Model 4 | | | | | |
| Earnings (PL=100) | -0.101 | 0.096 | -0.066 | 0.087 | -0.058 |
| Registered unemployment (PL=100) | 0.170 | -0.112 | -0.065 | -0.016 | -0.077 |
| City (town with county rights) | -0.258 | 0.321 | -0.246 | 0.333 | -0.273 |
| Religious participation | 0.185 | -0.224 | -0.023 | -0.347 | 0.181 |
| Russian partition | 0.314 | -0.502 | -0.029 | 0.667 | -1.065 |
| Austrian partition | 0.366 | -0.342 | 0.102 | -0.091 | 0.401 |
| Prussian partition | 0.022 | -0.098 | 0.312 | 0.047 | 0.153 |
| Earnings*Russian partition | -0.273 | 0.300 | 0.199 | -0.210 | 0.616 |
| Rel. participation*Russian partition | 0.452 | -0.357 | 0.223 | -0.673 | 0.867 |
| Unemployment*Russian partition | 0.051 | -0.046 | -0.120 | 0.030 | -0.056 |
| R sq | 0.723 | 0.744 | 0.146 | 0.466 | 0.444 |
| Model 5 | | | | | |
| Earnings (PL=100) | -0.104 | 0.126 | -0.119 | 0.050 | -0.010 |
| Registered unemployment (PL=100) | 0.196 | -0.123 | -0.135 | -0.014 | -0.117 |
| City (town with county rights) | -0.233 | 0.304 | -0.266 | 0.311 | -0.256 |
| Religious participation | 0.356 | -0.379 | -0.009 | -0.586 | 0.520 |
| Russian partition | 0.460 | -0.531 | 0.274 | -0.082 | 0.217 |
| Austrian partition | 1.632 | -0.729 | -2.873 | -1.427 | 1.148 |
| Prussian partition | -0.014 | -0.061 | 0.290 | 0.104 | 0.063 |
| Earnings*Austrian partition | -1.052 | 0.269 | 2.250 | 1.068 | -0.460 |
| Rel. participation*Austrian partition | -0.351 | 0.300 | 0.544 | 0.468 | -0.700 |
| Unemployment*Austrian partition | -0.028 | -0.045 | 0.230 | 0.015 | 0.141 |
| R sq | 0.722 | 0.738 | 0.187 | 0.464 | 0.429 |

| Model 6 | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Earnings (PL=100) | -0.130 | 0.107 | -0.023 | 0.082 | 0.016 |
| Registered unemployment (PL=100) | 0.210 | -0.144 | -0.109 | -0.035 | -0.062 |
| City (town with county rights) | -0.248 | 0.303 | -0.236 | 0.339 | -0.254 |
| Religious participation | 0.343 | -0.366 | 0.059 | -0.577 | 0.440 |
| Russian partition | 0.463 | -0.536 | 0.255 | -0.083 | 0.244 |
| Austrian partition | 0.228 | -0.220 | 0.043 | 0.100 | 0.195 |
| Prussian partition | 0.379 | -0.950 | 1.138 | -0.458 | 1.095 |
| Earnings*Prussian partition | -0.072 | 0.511 | -0.614 | -0.107 | -0.668 |
| Rel. participation*Prussian partition | -0.261 | 0.350 | -0.292 | 0.576 | -0.291 |
| Unemployment*Prussian partition | -0.069 | 0.033 | 0.049 | 0.110 | -0.058 |
| R sq | 0.712 | 0.740 | 0.148 | 0.444 | 0.414 |

Source: Authors (based on their own calculations). Shaded cells: Beta coefficient significant at $p < 0.01$ or lower

Summing up, as regards the support for PiS and KO, economics and religion are of key importance, but the influence of these variables is strengthened by belonging to the Russian and, to a lesser extent, Austrian partition. Support for other parties is explained by a combination of culture (religiosity) and historical traditions.

Discussion

First, let us briefly summarise the results. The analyses on the county level confirm the earlier individual-level observations about the voting behaviour of Polish citizens. Cultural factors play a crucial role in determining party choices. In our study, religiosity, as measured by participation in Sunday service, was a significant determinant of vote for all major parties except for the Third Way. It forms a crucial axis which determines the propensity to vote. KO and NL are relatively strong in areas with low levels of mass attendance, while PiS and Confederation are relatively strong in religious areas.

Structural factors also play a role in determining the propensity to vote for one of the main parties. Areas with high unemployment yield strong PiS results, while the counties with a better labour market tend to vote KO. Differences in earnings have a more limited impact, partly because variance in unemployment rate is much higher than the variance in earnings. KO is disproportionately

strong in cities, while PiS support is concentrated outside of them. Counties with high levels of state subsidies yield significantly higher vote results for PiS, Third Way and Confederation and lower scores for KO and the New Left. Higher revenues are associated with a high vote for KO.

Economic development and secularisation are indirect indicators of the legacies of partitions. However, there is also a direct effect, i.e. the regions have clearly different voting patterns even when other factors are controlled for. The former Austrian and Russian partitions display different voting patterns than the Prussian part and the new territories. There is an east-west axis in terms of electoral behaviour. The former Russian and Austrian partitions are areas of particularly strong support for PiS. Of course, this is the net result: on the aggregate, KO was able to achieve very good results in economically developed cities, especially Warsaw and Kraków. The structural factors such as high earnings and low unemployment favour this party and are stronger than the partition effect.

Our research leaves several questions unanswered. First, the 'theory of partitions' does not explain the similarities between the former Russian and Austrian areas. These two regions were, in the 19th century, parts of very different empires in terms of economic and political development. The Austrian partition was characterised by relative liberalism and national autonomy, and even a privileged status for Poles, as opposed to the increasingly authoritarian Russian regime (Kieniewicz 1970: 306 ff.; Davies 1997: 829). Future explanation should probably search for reasons of similarity in voting behaviour in economic underdevelopment and conservation of premodern socio-economic structures, especially agrarian.

Likewise, the Prussian areas and the new territories show far-reaching similarities: KO and the New Left are overrepresented there and PiS is relatively weak. In terms of pre-war historical legacies, these regions have few similarities. Their commonality can hypothetically be explained by post-war economic development and population exchange. This is an area for future investigation.

In our approach, cities are assumed to be different from the rural and semi-rural areas in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Following Castels (1983) and Florida (2005), they may be viewed as the locus of both economic and social progress. By implication, they are populated by the elites. Let us consider the reverse side: representation of the underprivileged regions, i.e. populations outside of the big urban centres. This dimension is a significant factor in voting behaviour. Three groupings are significantly stronger outside of the big cities: PiS, the Third Way and Confederation. Two of them, i.e. PiS and Confederation, are also relatively strong in areas with strong religious participation. The Third Way, on the other hand, is an outlier in our analysis. It is a strong force outside of the cities, but its support does not depend on the strength of the Catholic Church. It transcends the axes of partition legacies: unlike PiS and Confederation, it is relatively strong both in the former Prussian and Russian

partition. The Third Way is a coalition of two different political parties: The Polish People's Party has solid structures in the countryside, while Poland 2050 is a new party without clear areas of strength. The last elections prove that this coalition was able to build support across the cultural divide (religiosity) and across legacies determined by the partitions. If we were to interpret its results further, it is clear that PSL is the more institutionalised component of the coalition. Our other county-level analyses (results not shown here) indicate that areas of support of the Third Way are locations with strong PSL results in earlier parliamentary elections. Moreover, the PSL legacy influence is reflected in the government building process, in which the Third Way is in coalition with the two former partners of PSL, i.e. the Civic Coalition (2008–2015 cabinets) and the Left (1994–1998 and 2001–2003).

Last but not least, it is difficult to separate the influence of economics, culture and historical factors. In most cases, support for particular parties is the result of all these factors. Even in the case of PiS and KO, for which economic variables are particularly important, belonging to the Russian or Austrian partition only strengthens their impact. The results of our study confirm the 'partition theory' as indirect influence (the persistence of historical area as a determinant of the vote), i.e. are consistent with the assumption about the historical roots of contemporary economic and cultural differences.

Appendix: Data sources

Voting results were obtained from the National Electoral Commission. Data are available online: <https://wybory.gov.pl/sejmsenat2023/en> [Access: 9. 11. 2023].

Data on unemployment, earnings, revenue of local government units and financial aid provided by the state for important social reasons were obtained from Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical office. Data are available online: <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/bdl/start> [Access: 9. 11. 2023].

Data on religious participation were prepared by the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics. The analysis used the indicator *Dominicantes*. It is the percentage of obliged Catholics taking part in the Holy Mass on the day of data collection, which was 26 Sept. 2021. The published data were on the level of diocese. For data harmonisation we attributed the diocese averages to individual counties within the dioceses. In case of county boundaries overlapping the diocese boundaries, we selected the location of the county capital to attribute the score to the county. Warsaw belongs to 2 dioceses: we selected data for the Warsaw diocese (on the left bank of the river Vistula) to attribute the score, as most Warsaw residents live within it. Source: ISKK 2022.

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