NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ

Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series, No. 60 (2023): 47-59
http://doi.org/10.12775/bgss-2023-0015

BULLETIN OF GEOGRAPHY. SOCIO–ECONOMIC SERIES

journal homepages:
https://apcz.umk.pl/BGSS/index
https://www.bulletinofgeography.umk.pl/

Polish electoral space after 2001 against the background of rivalry between the two main actors of the political scene

Igor Kavetskyy

University of Szczecin, Institute of Spatial Management and Socio-Economic Geography, ul. Mickiewicza 64, 71-101 Szczecin, Poland e-mail: igor.kavetskyy@usz.edu.pl, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3516-5484

How to cite:
Kavetskyy I. (2023). Polish electoral space after 2001 against the background of rivalry between the two main actors of the political scene. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 60(60): 47-59. DOI: http://doi.org/10.12775/bgss-2023-0015

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to specify the main patterns – and identify the basic determinants – of the formation of the Polish electoral space after 2001, with particular emphasis on factors of a geographical nature, against the background of the rivalry between the two main actors of the political scene, i.e., Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) and Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). Using spatial econometric tools, it was found that the PO–PiS oligopoly on the Polish political party market results in increasing spatial clustering and geographical polarisation of voters of both parties in the form of urban–rural heterogeneity and east–west divergence. These phenomena are explained by processes of alignment and convergence of individuals' views according to the logic of localised entrenchment of dominant opinions and consolidation of preferences within historically shaped regional arrangements according to the path dependency principle.

Article details:
Received: 03 October 2022
Revised: 21 March 2023
Accepted: 17 May 2023

Key words:
voting preferences, geographic polarisation, localised entrenchment, path dependency, spatial analysis, Poland

Contents:

1. Introduction

A characteristic feature of the current political scene in Poland is the clear domination and fierce rivalry between two genetically related political parties, Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) and Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). Both were formed within the period preceding the parliamentary elections of 2001 as a new post-solidarity alternative to the post-communist parties. Although both formations initially declared their readiness to form a government coalition, over time, their relationship took the form of an all-out confrontation that continues to this day. Gradually, basic dividing lines also emerged, which in the 2005 election campaign were referred to as a clash between liberal Poland and solidarity Poland.

The main programme demands of both parties are perpetually being changed with the aim of increasing electoral gains (Jaskiernia, 2017). In PO's case, this is an evolution from centre-right (liberal-conservative) positions to the liberal centre or even centre-left (social-liberalism). The national-conservative PiS is moving even further to the right, evolving from a centre-right party into an ultra-right one, reaching for the rhetoric of Euroscepticism and right-wing populism. Over time, PO is somewhat rejecting its economic liberalism, becoming a party with a liberal worldview. PiS increasingly presents economic attitudes typical of socialist parties while reinforcing its conservative worldview. Wielgosz (2019) describes these two political visions, which are a mixture of different ideologies, as liberal pragmatism and conservative solidarity, respectively. He also stresses that the logic of rivalry between PO and PiS has given the Polish political party market the character of an oligopoly marginalising other actors and creating a polarised political system dividing voters into two antagonistic camps.

Based on the assumption that political decision-making is a spatialised process, depending on the location of the voter in a specific geographical context (Agnew, 1996), the discussed political conflict can be expected to be reflected in the growing spatial polarisation of supporters and opponents of both parties. This results from natural processes of alignment and convergence of views of individuals operating under conditions of intersecting interpersonal networks, primarily within the micro-geography of everyday lives. Among these processes, Johnston et al. (2004) identify social interaction, neighbourhood selection, neighbourhood emulation, environmental observation, and party mobilisation. These processes are not mutually exclusive but, occurring in different combinations, lead to an effect described by Wing and Walker (2010) as localised entrenchment of values held by the ideological majority within a particular local community.

Each such community is, on the one hand, a context for its members but, on the other hand, it functions in a broader context created by a territorial collectivity of a higher order (Zarycki, 2002). These regional–local connections result in a certain consolidation of views at a higher level, within whose boundaries the experiences unique to each place merge with the structures of national socio-political divisions. The role of regional context is particularly heightened when there are different historical experiences of different parts of the country (Katchanovski, 2006). Critical turns in the history of a given nation, such as the collapse of statehood and territorial partitions or unification in new historical realities and often in a different spatial shape, set fundamental directions in the perception and evaluation of the surrounding reality. The path dependence thus formed, being a contingent and place-specific outcome and event sequence (Martin & Sunley, 2006), seems to provide a good platform for understanding regional patterns of political orientations. In this regard, the habitual model of path dependence has great potential (Sarigil, 2015), deriving continuity and path maintenance from largely insentient, dispositional habituation and appreciating the role of traditions, customs and conventions that shape political life in various ways.

The above-mentioned mechanisms linking socio-political structures and processes with geographical space are, of course, of a universal nature, and the political cleavages objectively existing in democratic societies result in natural spatial differentiation of political behaviour. This applies in full to Poland as well. Summarising previous research in the field of electoral geography of the country, Rykiel (2011) and Matykowski (2018) emphasise the discourse that dominates in the scientific literature – that of capturing Polish socio-political realities in terms of two antagonistic axes – economic (the interests axis) and axiological (the values axis). These axes are identified by Zarycki (2000), under certain conditions, with conflicts between primary and secondary economies and between centre and periphery derived from the ground-breaking Lipset–Rokkan theory of political cleavages. Both axes have gained a clear spatial projection, pitting etatistically oriented rural areas against liberal cities and conurbations, and right-wing south-eastern areas against north-western left-wing areas. Studies focusing on selected elections from the

last decade (e.g., Grabowski, 2019; Lasoń & Torój, 2019; Marcinkiewicz, 2018) suggest some disruption of this pattern due to the *de facto* replacement of four competing political options by two powerful antagonists.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to specify the relevant regularities and to indicate the most important determinants of the formation of the Polish electoral space after 2001 against the background of the rivalry between PO and PiS. The hypothesis adopted assumes that the formation of a polarised political system results in increasing geographical polarisation of the electoral preferences of Poles. This is primarily due to the process of local entrenchment, whereby a variety of social forces amplify individuals' propensity to vote according to the preferences of the ideological majority. At the same time, given the historical heritage of different parts of Poland, some consolidation of such clusters within broader regional arrangements according to the path dependency principle should be expected.

Given the nature of the research problem, it was decided to use the methods of spatial econometrics, which so far have not found wider application in Polish electoral research.

2. Materials and methods

The primary source datset is the results of voting for PO and PiS in six consecutive elections (in 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019) to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. Information comes from the official website of the National Electoral Commission. Data are presented in the form of electoral support indicators in the 380 second-level administrative units (314 powiats and 66 cities with powiat rights).

The second set of empirical data are the typical sociodemographic and socio-economic variables (see Table 4) seen as putative determinants of voting decisions. In fact, six identical sets were prepared, adapted to the specific years when the elections were held. These data are mainly derived from the current records of Statistics Poland. The exceptions are information on educational structure, family situation, and sources of maintenance of households obtained in the 2002 and 2011 censuses. In turn, data on the religious activity of Poles come from the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics.

The last set of data is of dummy variables that identify the presumed specificity of different parts of Poland, which has been shaped by a distinct historical heritage. The generally known division into four conventional regions referring to former political borders, i.e., Austrian Poland, Russian Poland, Prussian Poland, and Recovered Territories, is used.

The paper uses spatial econometric tools, in particular the testing of global and local spatial autocorrelation and estimating of spatial regression models, following the suggestions of Anselin & Rey (2014). Moran's *I* statistic was adopted as a measure of spatial autocorrelation, which is estimated from a spatial weights matrix based on the mutual distance of analytical units. The neighbourhood of each unit was defined as a radius of 50 km, assuming that this is the space of the most intense social interaction resulting from the daily commute.

The research procedure first assesses the scale and extent of spatial clustering of electoral support for both parties with univariate Moran's *I* for individual moments. Then, using a bivariate Moran's *I* for space–time correlation, the relationship between support for a particular party in a specific location at a given moment with the corresponding support in the neighbourhood environment in earlier elections is estimated. This allows for cautious inferences about the possible diffusion of electoral support over time and the stability of spatial clusters. Finally, the third approach to spatial autocorrelation analysis refers to mutual competition between the two actors. In this case, using the bivariate Moran's *I,* the results of one party in particular units are assessed against the average support for the other party in neighbouring units in the same election.

The estimation of spatial regression models aims to identify the basic determinants of electoral support, considering the spatial interactions that occur. The choice of an appropriate spatial econometric strategy (spatial lag model *versus* spatial error model) was made by suggesting the results of the Lagrange multiplier test. The evaluation of the goodness of fit of the models was based on the use of information criteria.

As independent variables identifying the demographic and socio-economic factors, principal components were used. This procedure was employed because the original selected variables demonstrated a high level of mutual correlation and could thus not meet the formal requirements of regression analysis. The validity of using principal component analysis (PCA) with the given original variables and the decision to choose the optimal number of components were assessed based on suggestions of Jackson (2005). Interpretation of principal components was based on the determination coefficients between the original variables and the gained components. To obtain a clearer structure, the principal components

were subjected to *quartimax* rotation. As far as the geographical variables are concerned, according to the requirements of regression with dummy variables, a reference category had to be specified, which is Russian Poland.

3. Results

3.1. Spatial clustering of electoral support

The development and strengthening process of the role of PO and PiS on the Polish political scene after 2001 is presented in Table 1. This is accompanied by a significant evolution in spatial dimension, as shown in Fig. 1 and 2.

The picture of support for PO systematically shows larger cities and agglomerations as the main reservoirs of its followers. A characteristic element of the evolution of PO's influences is its consolidation in the western and northern parts of the country, where a vast massif of high support is forming, taking the form of a crescent stretching across historical Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories. In turn, the area of the central-eastern and, in time, also the south-eastern parts of the country, generally not extending beyond Russian and Austrian Poland, is consistently a region of relatively low popularity. Within it, urban centres are particularly visible as foci of high support surrounded by areas of weak PO influences.

The space of support for PiS is characterised by a far greater transformation. At the beginning of the analysed period, the distribution of areas of increased influences of this party coincides with the picture for PO, gravitating largely to urban centres. After 2007, the party's electoral base becomes more rural, forming a huge massif of high support in the south-eastern and eastern parts of the country, within Austrian and Russian Poland, while most urban areas are transformed into enclaves of relatively greater restraint. The inverse of the situation described for PO can be seen here. The same is true for areas of low support, which have formed a vast region covering the entire Recovered Territories and Prussian Poland – areas with significant PO support.

The trend towards spatial clustering of support for both parties is confirmed by the results of the spatial autocorrelation analysis (Tables 2 and 3). The univariate global Moran's *I* is positive in all cases and takes relatively high values, especially for PiS after 2007. Based on the bivariate global Moran's *I* for space–time correlation, the much greater stability of the level of spatial concentration of PO's influence and the high variability of the spatial clustering picture in the case of PiS should be found.

A good illustration of the coevolution of PO and PiS influence is provided by the results of estimating the spatial autocorrelation between the support for one party in a given location and support for the other in neighbouring units in the same election. Global Moran's *I* exhibits low positive values in 2001 and 2005, confirming the partial convergence of the two parties' support profiles. Since 2007, these values have become negative. Moreover, these negative values have been growing greater over

Table 1. PO and PiS results against the background of other political actors in successive elections to the Sejm

Parties	Percentage of votes					
	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
Law and Justice	9.50	**26.99**	32.11	29.89	**37.58**	**43.59**
Civic Platform[a]	12.68	24.14	**41.51**	**39.18**	24.09	27.40
Democratic Left Alliance[b]	**41.04**	11.31	13.15	8.24	7.55	12.56
Polish People's Party	8.98	6.96	8.91	8.36	5.13	8.55
Self-Defence	10.20	11.41	1.53	-	-	-
League of Polish Families	7.87	7.97	1.30	-	-	-
Palikot's Movement	-	-	-	10.02	-	-
Kukiz'15	-	-	-	-	8.81	-
Ryszard Petru's Modern	-	-	-	-	7.60	-
Confederation	-	-	-	-	-	6.81
Other	9.73	11.22	1.49	4.31	9.24	1.09

Notes: [a]in 2019 - as part of the Civic Coalition; [b]in 2001 - in a coalition with the Labour Union, in 2007 - in the Left and Democrats coalition, in 2015 - as part of the United Left coalition
Source: own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission

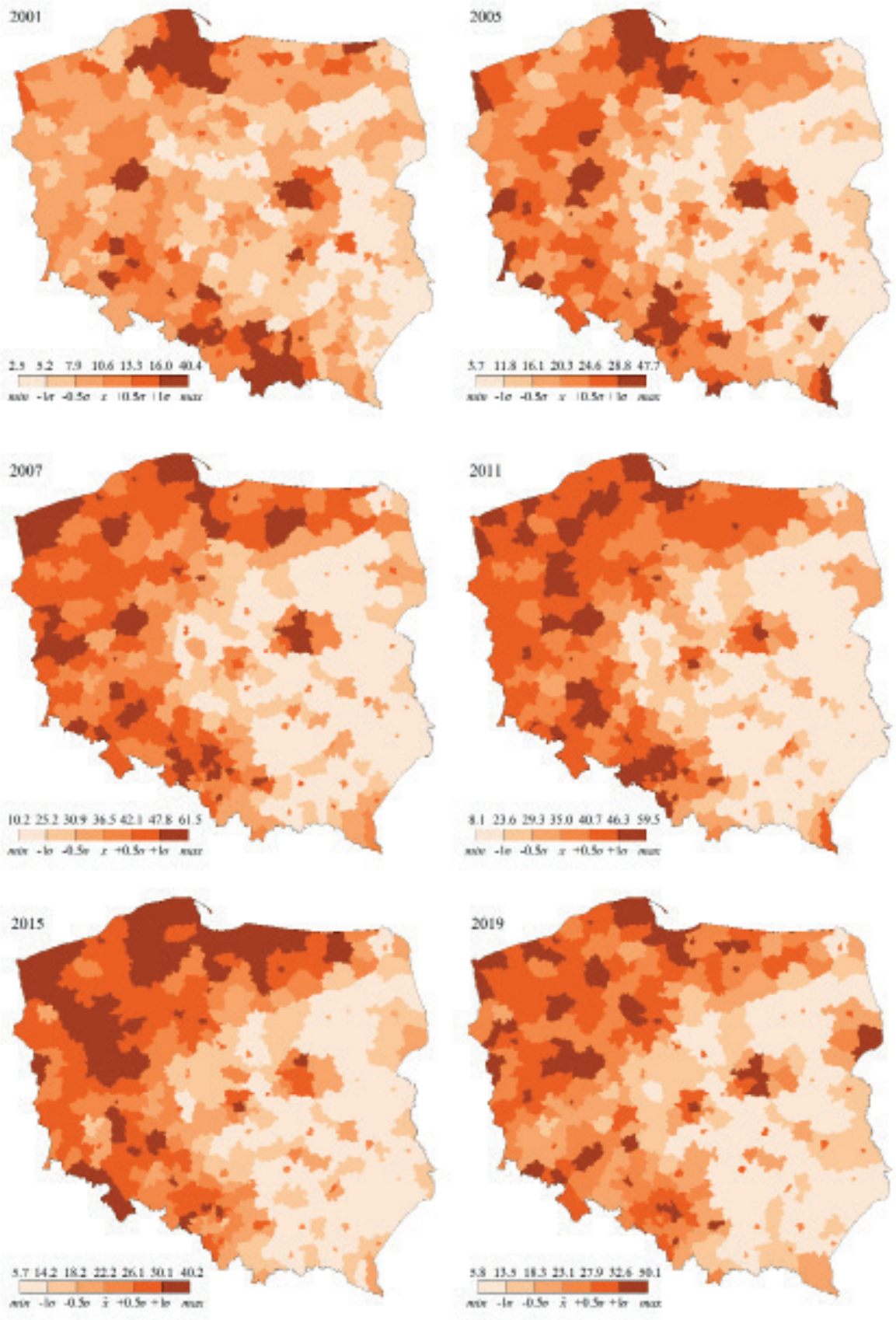

Fig. 1. Spatial diversity of the electoral support for PO in successive elections
Source: own elaboration

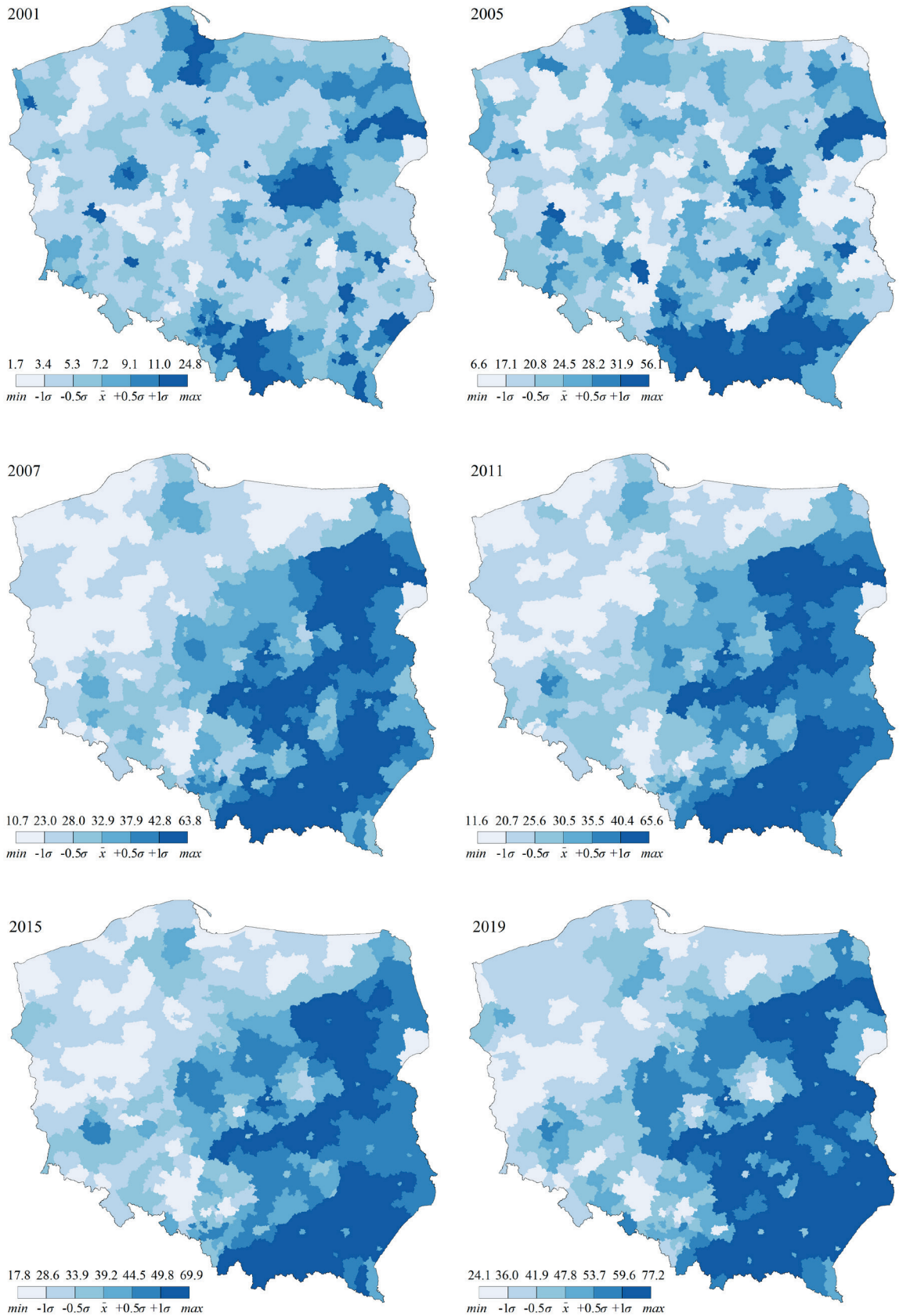

Fig. 2. Spatial diversity of the electoral support for PiS in successsive elections
Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Global Moran's *I* statistics for the distribution of support for PO in successive elections

2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
0.5218				
0.5125	**0.5888**			
0.5274	0.6155	**0.6518**		
0.4881	0.6045	0.6445	**0.6879**	
0.4682	0.5452	0.5763	0.5863	**0.5517**

Notes: values on the diagonal - univariate Moran's *I*, other values - bivariate Moran's *I* for space-time correlation; all values are significant at the $p < 0.0001$ level.
Source: own elaboration

Table 3. Global Moran's *I* statistics for the distribution of support for PiS in successive elections

	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
2001	**0.3907**					
2005	0.2909	**0.4006**				
2007	0.2139	0.3629	**0.7028**			
2011	0.1854	0.3518	0.7050	**0.7329**		
2015	0.1687	0.3372	0.6983	0.7190	**0.7124**	
2019	0.0772	0.2487	0.6304	0.6482	0.6525	**0.6273**

Notes: see Table 2
Source: own elaboration

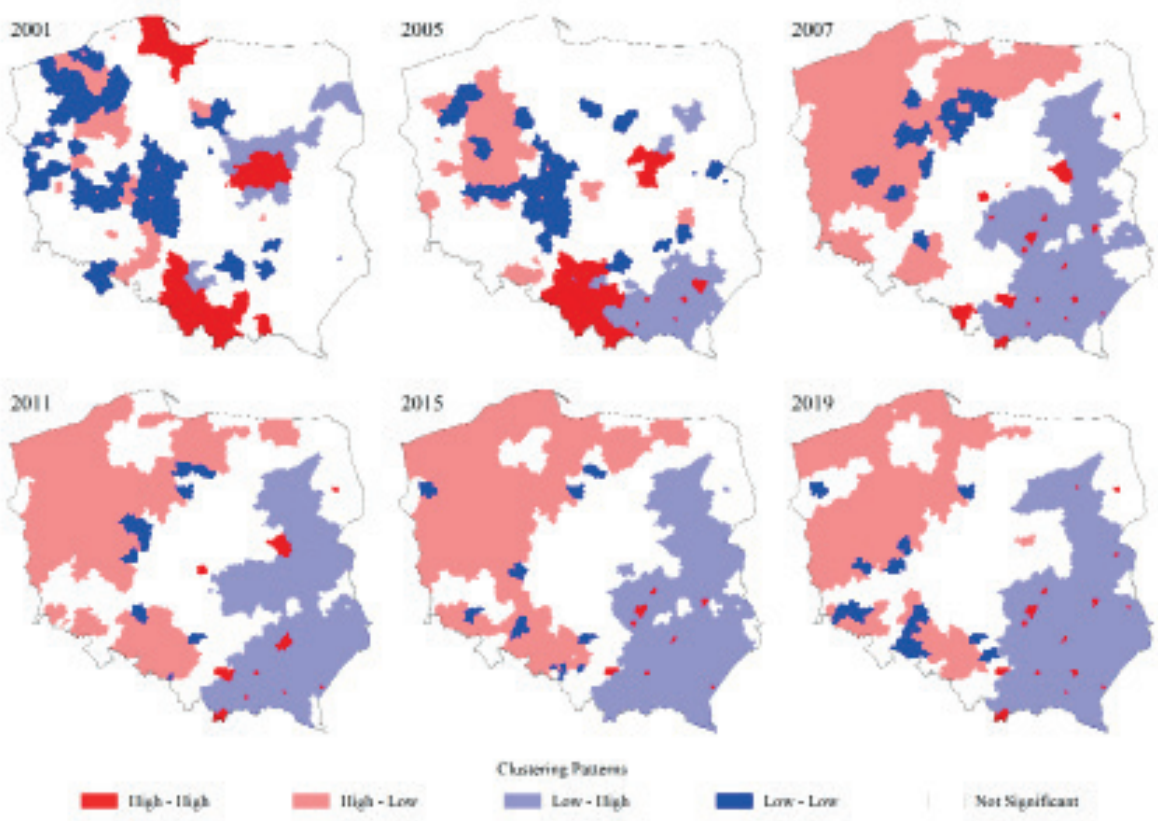

Fig. 3. LISA cluster maps for the distribution of support for PO *vs.* support for PiS in successive elections
Source: own elaboration

time, indicating a growing exclusion of the areas of high or low support for both parties. The above situation is illustrated more vividly by the bivariate local Moran's *I* maps (Fig. 3). In the last four cases, a polarised spatial pattern is clearly visible.

The regularities presented above may result from many different premises. It seems natural to assume that they are related to the social base of support for both parties, i.e. the socio-spatial diversity of the country. Therefore, let us first look at the basic features of this differentiation based on PCA results.

3.2. Socio-spatial structures

A preliminary assessment of the PCA results showed that it made sense to leave only the first four principal components in each of the time series. The abandonment of the subsequent ones was dictated by their negligible usefulness for the purposes of this study: a very low percentage of explained variance, usually secondary identity, and little or no correlation with the variables of electoral support. The selected components explain a total 72.0–73.8% of the variance of the original variables. It is characteristic that their identity shows great stability, each time revealing the same social divisions with their respective spatial mapping. In view of the high degree of similarity, only the results for 2019 are illustrated (Table 4, Fig. 4).

The first principal component is dual in nature and abounds in the number of strong associations with the original variables. Despite the diversity of these variables, it seems reasonable to interpret them as sets characterising urban and rural communities, respectively. It is clearly visible in the spatial distribution of the values of this component.

The largest contributions to the second component values are consistently recorded for the variables describing population growth and migration inflows, on the one hand, and the percentage of the people living from non-earned sources, on the other. This allows us to conventionally define this component as "prosperity-failure". Its spatial mapping generally indicates suburban areas as prosperous and typical problem areas as declining.

The identity of the third component is simple. It reflects the differentiation of the level of industrialisation, as indicated by the strong association with the percentage of employment in industry and the percentage of people with vocational education. The spatial picture of this component is also characteristic, showing in general the western regions of the country as highly industrialised and the eastern regions as characterised by low industrialisation.

The last component is created by two variables (percentage of partnerships and level of religiosity) that are associated with it in opposite directions. The nature of these variables allows for an interpretation of the component in terms of "liberalism–traditionalism". The spatial projection of the component value indicates a strong association with historical divisions, with the Recovered Territories at the liberal pole and Austrian Poland as a hotbed of traditionalism.

The comparison of the spatial mapping of the basic dimensions of the social space with the previously presented differentiation of the results of voting for PO and PiS undoubtedly suggests some connection. To make it more precise, we will use regression modelling.

3.3. Determinants of electoral support

The results of the estimation of the spatial regression models are summarised in Tables 5 and 6. The spatial autoregressive parameter is positive and significant (Rho = 0.4–0.7, $p<0.001$), and its magnitude suggests that the spatial clustering of electoral support is accompanied by substantial endogenous effects, even after sociodemographic and contextual influences are controlled. This is econometric evidence in support of the local entrenchment thesis, i.e. the operation at fine spatial scales of social processes pushing individuals voters' views into closer alignment with the ideological preferences of their geographically proximate majority.

As regards the links between voter preferences and the main structural divisions, the results indicate the systematic importance of the "urbanity–rurality" dimension (PC1) as the basic determinant of the vote for both parties. At the same time, whereas in 2001 and 2005 the success of both parties was favoured by features associated with the urban pole, in subsequent elections they remain valid only for PO, while higher support for PiS should be associated with variables characterising rural communities. The situation is reversed in the case of the "liberalism–traditionalism" component (PC4). In the first two elections, both parties could count on support in traditionalist regions, but in later years only PiS maintains its importance here, while PO gains in areas valuing a more liberal lifestyle. The "prosperity–failure" dimension (PC2) is a more important determinant of support for PO, revealing its higher chances in prosperous areas. For PiS, its influence changes from a similar direction in the first two elections to the

Table 4. Loading matrix for the first four principal components in 2019

Variables	PC1	PC2	PC3	PC4
female (%)	**0.917**	-0.130	-0.097	-0.032
age 18–29 (%)	**-0.935**	0.040	-0.053	-0.084
age 30–39 (%)	0.492	0.547	0.137	-0.094
age 40–49 (%)	0.397	0.518	0.107	0.193
age 50–59 (%)	-0.370	-0.535	0.128	0.096
age 60+ (%)	0.591	-0.687	-0.193	0.126
population change (%)	0.090	**0.905**	0.068	-0.166
migration inflows (persons per 1,000 inhabitants)	0.357	**0.740**	-0.186	0.185
migration outflows (persons per 1,000 inhabitants)	0.359	-0.109	-0.513	0.389
urbanisation (%)	**0.888**	-0.206	0.036	0.108
population density (people per km^2)	**0.779**	-0.055	-0.217	-0.101
primary education (%)	**-0.896**	-0.177	-0.193	0.178
secondary education (%)	**0.861**	-0.056	-0.146	-0.081
tertiary education (%)	**0.863**	0.226	-0.340	-0.163
vocational education (%)	-0.460	0.070	**0.731**	-0.039
single parents (%)	0.645	-0.294	-0.279	0.403
large families (%)	**-0.850**	0.085	-0.191	-0.286
partnerships (%)	0.415	0.065	0.102	**0.789**
dominicantes (%)	-0.421	0.026	-0.012	**-0.747**
employment in industry (%)	0.324	0.146	**0.782**	0.145
employment in agriculture (%)	**-0.845**	-0.185	-0.367	-0.221
employment in market services (%)	**0.785**	0.335	-0.051	0.138
unemployment (%)	-0.416	-0.345	-0.412	0.184
maintenance from self-employment (%)	0.479	0.638	-0.014	0.089
maintenance from wage-earning employment (%)	0.614	0.488	0.522	0.014
maintenance from employment in agriculture (%)	**-0.742**	-0.152	-0.439	-0.162
maintenance from non-earned sources (%)	-0.045	**-0.857**	-0.142	-0.128
incomes of local budgets (PLN *per capita*)	**0.720**	0.286	-0.316	-0.067
monthly gross wages and salaries (PLN)	0.603	0.144	-0.010	-0.041
Latent root	11.896	4.750	2.784	1.984
Percent variance	41.02	16.38	9.60	6.84
Cumulative percent	41.02	57.40	67.00	73.84

Source: own elaboration

opposite direction in the last election. The impact of the industrialisation dimension (PC3) was found to be statistically insignificant in most cases.

The results also confirm the independent influence of historical specificity of different parts of Poland on electoral outcomes, which in the case of PO means several times higher support in the Recovered Territories and Prussian Poland compared to the percentage of votes received in the Russian Partition and several times lower support in the case of PiS. In Austrian Poland, PO's results are only marginally higher than in Russian Poland, while in the case of PiS the observed differences are usually not statistically significant.

4. Summary and discussion

The results obtained allow us to speak of two complementary patterns of spatial differentiation of support for the analysed parties: urban–rural heterogeneity and east–west divergence. At the beginning of the period under study, the first was in fact a universal determinant of the geography of influences of both parties, whose main support was provided by urban and metropolitan communities better situated in terms of social status and wealth level. Apart from this, only two larger clusters of increased support were discernible, taking shape within Gdansk Pomerania and Małopolska, i.e., the regions most faithful to the Solidarity traditions.

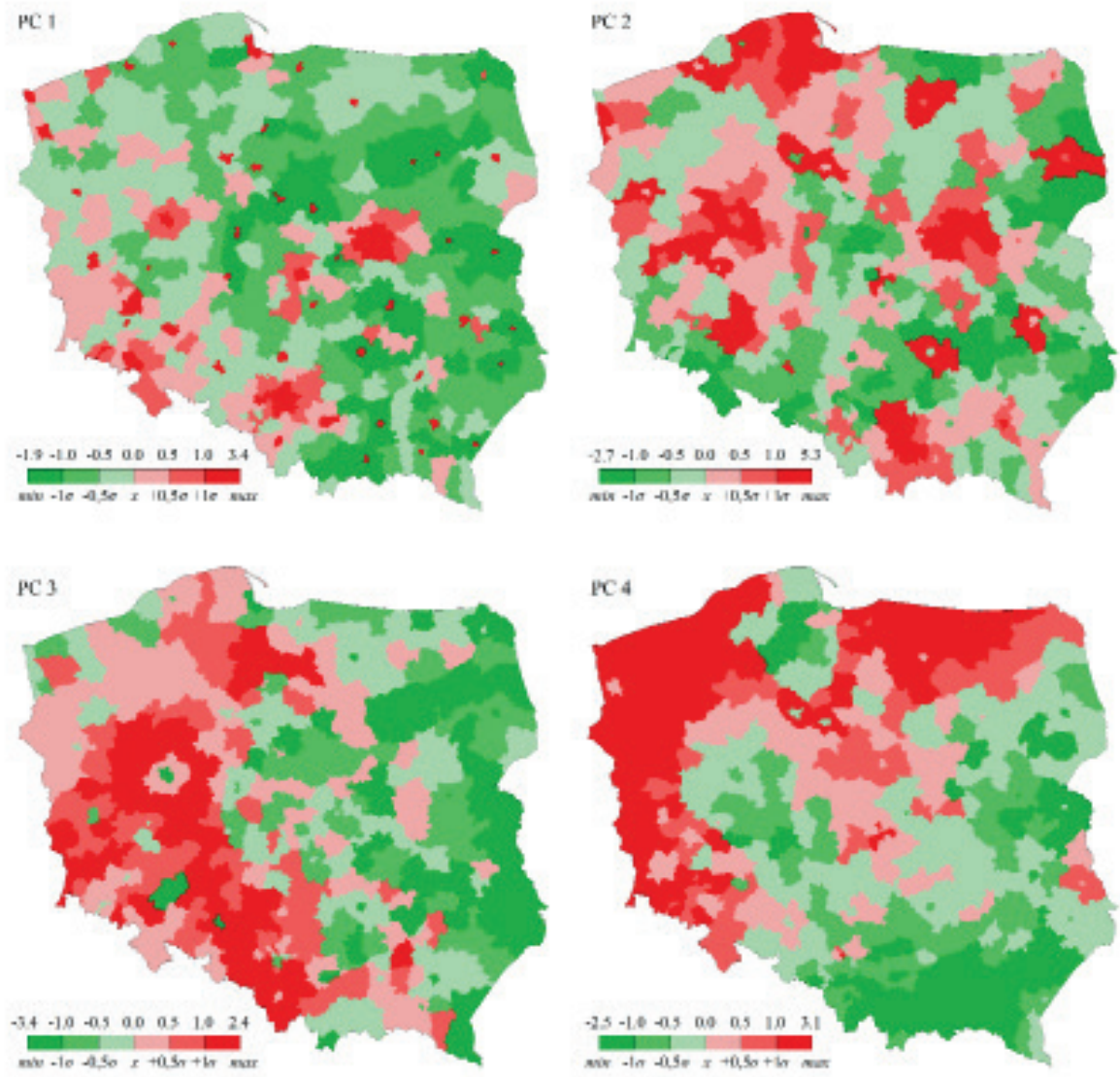

Fig. 4. Socio-spatial structures in 2019 in light of the PCA results
Source: own elaboration

With the growth of both parties and the accompanying evolution towards mutual opposition, a polarised geographic arrangement is emerging and strengthening, which can only conventionally be called east–west, as it is in fact associated with the spatial concentration of PO's electorate in the north-western and western regions of Poland, and of PiS's voters in the south-eastern and eastern parts of the country. At the same time, the nature of urban–rural differentiation is changing, this time by locating urban areas on the PO side and rural and small-town areas on the PiS side.

In this way, there is a steady and strengthening tendency to spatial clustering of support for both political projects. Undoubtedly, this can be linked to the process of local entrenchment, which was emphatically confirmed by the results of the econometric modelling. Unfortunately, operating with aggregated data cannot bring us any closer to identifying the specific social mechanisms that give rise to these spatial trends (Johnston et al., 2004; Wing & Walker, 2010). Certainly, the factor of geographically targeted party mobilisation plays a huge role in this, looking at the marketing strategies used by both parties and the forms of

Table 5. Results of the estimation of the spatial regression models of support for PO

Specification	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
Constant	2.348****	9.150****	19.946****	15.926****	7.911****	10.915****
PC1	1.656****	4.520****	6.601****	5.676****	3.302****	5.536****
PC2	0.680****	1.358****	1.401****	0.966****	0.203	0.927****
PC3	-0.293	0.134	0.481*	0.499*	0.111	-0.439*
PC4	-1.033****	-0.966***	0.533*	1.720****	1.247****	2.082****
Austrian Poland	0.532	1.662**	2.160***	4.123****	1.583***	2.786***
Prussian Poland	1.912****	3.020****	4.710****	6.134****	3.782****	5.787****
Recovered Territories	1.669***	3.760****	6.496****	5.819****	3.226****	3.013****
Rho	0.687****	0.455****	0.368****	0.447****	0.560****	0.426****
R-squared	0.698	0.767	0.876	0.868	0.844	0.847
AIC	1,945.92	2,176.91	2,144.61	2,177.31	1,975.85	2,100.09
BIC	1,981.36	2,212.35	2,180.04	2,212.75	2,011.29	2,135.53
logLik	-963.96	-1,079.45	-1,063.30	-1,079.66	-978.93	-1,041.04

Notes: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01, **** p < 0.001
Source: own elaboration

Table 6. Results of the estimation of the spatial regression models of support for PiS

Specification	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
Constant	3.228****	15.471****	10.822****	11.183****	15.378****	25.647****
PC1	1.963****	2.861****	-2.140****	-2.144****	-3.436****	-6.046****
PC2	0.633****	1.538****	0.736***	0.440*	0.135	-0.917****
PC3	-0.590****	1.200****	0.499	0.108	-0.025	0.165
PC4	-0.609****	-0.341	-1.491****	-1.723****	-1.851****	-2.710****
Austrian Poland	1.109***	5.557****	-0.118	1.084	1.066	-0.817
Prussian Poland	-0.200	-2.606***	-3.392****	-3.652****	-3.462****	-4.859****
Recovered Territories	-0.467	-3.493****	-2.558***	-2.091**	-2.110**	-2.733****
Rho	0.550****	0.399****	0.711****	0.669****	0.635****	0.501****
R-squared	0.668	0.552	0.754	0.784	0.809	0.858
AIC	1,707.70	2,314.86	2,333.99	2,272.80	2,280.01	2,236.62
BIC	1,743.13	2,350.29	2,369.43	2,308.24	2,315.45	2,272.06
logLik	-844.85	-1,148.43	-1,157.99	-1,127.40	-1,131.01	-1,109.31

Notes: see Table 5
Source: own elaboration

narrative adapted to them. Unfortunately, without undertaking meticulous inquiries at the level of individual voters, the answer remains in the realm of conjecture.

The question of regional consolidation of preferences seems much clearer. The regression models explicitly show an independent influence of regional variables on the results of both parties, suggesting, moreover, a kind of affinity between the contexts of Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories as PO's sphere of influences on the one hand, and Austrian and Russian Poland as PiS's domain on the other. Therefore, there are no grounds to question the influence of historical and cultural conditions on the structure of political preferences, as Rykiel (2011) does. However, the proper interpretation of this factor remains an ambiguous issue: whether the sources of the observed differences should be found in the historically shaped civilisational differences of particular regions (Kowalski, 2003), in regional political cultures (Bartkowski, 2003) or specific regional modes of production (Kavetskyy, 2010), or in the regional distribution of different types of social capital (Zarycki, 2015).

Regardless of the interpretation adopted, it should be stated that the historical fate of different parts of Poland is not indifferent to the formation of contemporary social structures and processes. Past divisions and their consequences related to

functioning under different political and economic conditions remain deeply rooted determinants of development processes, in line with the path dependency principle (Churski et al., 2020). Without prejudging the direct link between the events of the 19th century and the current situation, one cannot dismiss the tangible manifestations of the partition legacy in the form of interregional differences in the level of industrialisation, in the provision of technical infrastructure, and ultimately in the level of development achieved. Perhaps the presumed historical legacy in the sociocultural sphere should not be underestimated either, linking after Bartkowski (2003) and Zarycki (2015) the specificity of Prussian Poland and the Recovered Territories with economic pragmatism and openness of worldview and the personality of Austrian Poland and Russian Poland with the primacy of national and Catholic values and community traditions. When viewed in this way, the prevailing political sympathies seem more understandable.

In summary, it should be concluded that the Polish electoral space is still structured according to the two basic patterns mentioned in the introduction, opposing urban and rural systems on the one hand and the west half of the country against the east part on the other. However, their character has changed fundamentally. Whereas previously there were four separate political options at the extremes of the respective axes, differentiating the electoral preferences of Poles and thus toning down social tensions, currently both axes are dominated by the same political camps, which strongly polarises political attitudes and exacerbates the conflict situation.

5. Final remarks

The dynamics of the Polish political scene observed after the 2019 parliamentary elections indicate a further intensification of the PO–PiS conflict, which generates the media and voter interest desired by both parties and maintains high support for the oligopoly. The radicalisation of the PiS ideological stance and the resulting discontent among certain social groups, as well as the further scandals involving the ruling party, have been accompanied by a decisive acceleration of PO's activities. The most visible manifestation of this was the return of Donald Tusk to Polish politics and the information campaign undertaken to promote PO's position as the only alternative to PiS in the 2023 parliamentary elections. In this way, PO is trying to make up for the losses resulting from the activation of the other opposition groups and the emergence of a new mainstream political party after the 2020 presidential election, Szymon Holownia's Poland 2050. In this situation, despite PiS's continuing high ratings, the outcome of future elections seems highly uncertain, especially given the low level of voter turnout among Poles. However, it is difficult to expect radical changes in the configuration of the electoral space in the country. Certainly, the typical spatial structures shaped over the last two decades will be recreated.

References

Agnew, J. (1996). Mapping politics: how context counts in electoral geography. *Political Geography*, 15(2): 129–146. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298(95)00076-3.

Anselin, L. & Rey, S.J. (2014). Modern spatial econometrics in practice: A guide to GeoDa, GeoDaSpace and PySAL. GeoDa Press LLC.

Bartkowski, J. (2003). Tradycja i polityka: Wpływ tradycji kulturowych polskich regionów na współczesne zachowania społeczne i polityczne (Tradition and politics: The influence of the cultural traditions of Polish regions on contemporary social and political behaviour – in Polish). Warszawa: Żak.

Churski, P., Konecka-Szydłowska, B., Herodowicz, T. & Perdał, R. (2020). Does history matter? Development differences in Poland. In J. Bański (Ed.). Dilemmas of Regional and Local Development, 185–205, London: Routledge. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429433863.

Grabowski, W. (2019). Determinants of voting results in Poland in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Analysis of spatial differences. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 52(4): 331–342. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.10.006.

Jackson, J.E. (2005). A User's Guide to Principal Components. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Jaskiernia, J. (2017). The development of the Polish party system: A perspective of the parliamentary elections results. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 46(2): 227–246. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2017214.

Johnston, R., Jones, K., Sarker, R., Propper, K., Burgess, S. & Bolsterb, A. (2004). Party support and the neighbourhood effect: spatial polarisation of the British electorate, 1991–2001. *Political Geography*, 23(4): 367–402. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2003.12.008.

Katchanovski, I. (2006). Cleft countries: Regional political divisions and cultures in post-Soviet Ukraine and Moldova. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag.

Kavetskyy, I. (2010). Przestrzeń wyborcza Polski i Ukrainy: Ujęcie porównawcze (Electoral space of Poland and Ukraine: A comparative perspective – in Polish). Szczecin: WNUS.

Kowalski, M. (2003) Polaryzacja zachowań wyborczych w Polsce jako rezultat cywilizacyjnego rozdarcia kraju (Polarisation of electoral behaviour in Poland as a result of civilisational fragmentation of the country – in Polish). In: M. Kowalski (Ed.). Przestrzeń wyborcza Polski, 11-48. Warszawa: IGiPZ PAN.

Lasoń, A. & Torój, A. (2019). Anti-liberal, anti-establishment or constituency-driven? Spatial econometric analysis of polish parliamentary election results in 2015. *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 26(2): 199–236. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18778/1231-1952.26.2.10.

Marcinkiewicz, K. (2018). The economy or an urban–rural divide? Explaining spatial patterns of voting behaviour in Poland. *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures*, 32(4): 693–719. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417739955.

Martin, R. & Sunley, P. (2006). Path dependence and regional economic evolution. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 6(4): 395–437. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbl012.

Matykowski, R. (2018). Koncepcje i metody w polskich badaniach przestrzenno-elektoralnych (Concepts and methods in Polish spatial electoral research – in Polish). Studia KPZK PAN, 183: 149–171.

Rykiel, Z. (2011). Polish electoral geography and its methods. *Przestrzeń Społeczna* (Social Space - in Polish), 1(1): 17–48.

Sarigil, Z. (2015). Showing the path to path dependence: the habitual path. *European Political Science Review*, 7(2): 221–242. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773914000198.

Wielgosz, Ł. (2019). Wojna polsko-polska. Zarządzanie oligopolem politycznym przez Platformę Obywatelską oraz Prawo i Sprawiedliwość w latach 2001–2015 (The Polish-Polish War. Management of the political oligopoly by Civic Platform and Law and Justice in 2001-2015 – in Polish). Katowice: WUŚ.

Wing, I.S. & Walker, J.L. (2010). The geographic dimensions of electoral polarization in the 2004 U.S. presidential vote. In A. Páez, J. Gallo, R.N. Buliung, & S. Dall'erba (Eds.). *Progress in Spatial Analysis: Methods and Applications*, 253–285, Berlin: Springer-Verlag. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-03326-1_13.

Zarycki, T. (2000). Politics in the periphery: Political cleavages in Poland interpreted in their historical and international context. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52(5), 851–873. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/713663091.

Zarycki, T. (2015) The electoral geography of Poland: between stable spatial structures and their changing interpretations. *Erdkunde*, 69(2): 107–124. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2015.02.02.

Zarycki, T. (2002). Region jako kontekst zachowań politycznych (Region as a context for political behaviour – in Polish). Warszawa: Scholar.