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Poland

At stake in the Polish elections: preserving democracy

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Two weeks before the parliamentary elections, between 600,000 and one million people opposed to the populist conservative government of the Law and Justice party (PiS) demonstrated in Warsaw on 1 October.

This mobilization came after massive feminist demonstrations for abortion rights since 2022 and following a demonstration of several hundred thousand against "high living costs, fraud and lies, in favour of democracy, free elections and the EU" at the beginning of June. The polls, which had previously predicted that the PiS would win on 15 October, are now beginning to indicate that, even with the support of the far right (the Confederation, which is also falling in the polls), it could lose its parliamentary majority after eight years in power.

PiS's family-oriented and xenophobic policies

When it came to power in 2015, the PiS adopted a number of social measures that broke with the ultra-liberal policies of the Civic Platform (PO) governments: in 2016, a law introducing a family allowance of 500 zlotys per child (compared with a minimum wage of 2,000 zlotys), initially with wage limits for a single child, then from 2019, for each child, as well as the annulment in 2016 of the 2012 law increasing the retirement age to 67, returning to 60 for women and 65 for men. In its election campaign, PiS recalls these measures and promises to increase the family allowance to 800 zlotys (174 euros) next year, hoping to buy popular votes once again.

But PiS governments have not only further restricted women's rights, but also taken xenophobic and homophobic measures, subjugated the judiciary to the executive, turned the public media into propaganda organs, destroyed education and developed police repression. Its election campaign claims that Donald Tusk (leader of the Civic Coalition around PO) is a puppet of "German enemies", Russia and the European Union, announces an end to the rights of exiled Ukrainians and claims that the Liberals are going to invade the country with "thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa". A referendum was imposed at the same time as the elections, with four questions that echo his chauvinist, anti-immigration election campaign. A challenge to the rule of law...

A weak opposition and an invisible alternative to capitalism

Against the PiS, the democratic opposition is fielding three lists: the Civic Coalition, the Third Voice (neoliberal centrists and the agrarian PSL party) and the Left, an alliance of social liberals of Stalinist origin who have merged with the pro-LGBTQ+ and anti-clerical Wiosna (Spring) party and the anti-liberal Razem (Together) party.

Tusk is running a campaign in defence of freedom, has ruled out opponents of abortion rights as candidates and has announced that he wants to govern with the left and centre. He has even gone so far as to call for an immediate increase in family allowances (although his group did not vote for this in 2016). He no longer hesitates to mobilise the masses. But has he understood that the reactionary PiS governments are the result of the ultra-liberal policies pursued by the PO governments?

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The very idea of an alternative to capitalism does not appear. And, apart from in the speeches of the Left coalition, there is no mention of the 16 million workers.

In the words of Magdalena Biejat, outgoing senator of the most left-wing party in the democratic opposition, Razem: "Do we want to accept that the government will be built by the PiS and the Confederation, who are going to organise for us a hell even worse than the one we have already endured, or do we want this government to be built with the left so that the concerns of ordinary citizens can finally be taken into account? A very limited vision of society..."

The choice on 15 October is therefore between an increasingly dictatorial state and the preservation of a liberal democracy.

13 October 2023

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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