



**The birth of a bi-polar party system or a
referendum on a polarising government?
The October 2007 Polish parliamentary
election**

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SEI Working Paper No 100

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First published in January 2008
by the **Sussex European Institute**
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Abstract

This paper argues that the 2007 Polish parliamentary election is best understood as a plebiscite on the polarising right-wing Law and Justice party-led government and its controversial 'Fourth Republic' political project. The liberal-conservative Civic Platform opposition won because it was able to persuade Poles that voting for them was the most effective way of removing this government from office. The election also indicates that the 'post-communist divide' that dominated and provided a structural order to the Polish political scene during the 1990s is passing into history and certainly means a more consolidated Polish party system. However, Poland still has very high levels of electoral volatility and low electoral turnout, together with low levels of party institutionalisation and extremely weak links between parties and their supporters. This means that it is too early to say whether the election also marks the emergence of a stable Polish party system based on a new bi-polar divide between two big centre-right groupings, with the confinement of the left to the status of a minor actor.

The birth of a bi-polar party system or a referendum on a polarising government? The October 2007 Polish parliamentary election

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In October 2007 Poles held a parliamentary election two years ahead of schedule, following the break up of a controversial and turbulent coalition government led by the right-wing Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: PiS). In the event, although the two main parties were evenly matched for most of the election campaign, and Law and Justice increased both its share of the votes and parliamentary representation, the governing party finished well behind the opposition liberal-conservative Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska: PO) on a relatively high turnout. With the collapse in support for, and exclusion from parliament of, the Law and Justice party's radical coalition partners, the agrarian Self-Defence (Samoobrona) and the clerical-nationalist League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin: LPR), the 2007 election has produced a much more consolidated Polish party system. Together with the continued marginalisation of the centre-left, this has led some commentators to speculate that the election marks the birth of a bi-polar party system in which two large centre-right blocs provide both the core of the government and the main opposition and dominate the political scene for the foreseeable future.

This paper examines the 2007 Polish parliamentary election campaign and its possible significance for the future development of the Polish party system. It begins by looking at the background and context to the election, surveying the main developments in the Polish party system in the 2005-7 parliament. Section two examines the short but intensive six-week election campaign before section three moves on to analyse the results briefly. Finally, section four looks at what, if any, lessons can be drawn from this election about the long-term trajectory of Polish politics, particularly whether new divisions are emerging within the Polish party system.

The paper argues that the 2007 Polish parliamentary election is best understood as a plebiscite on a polarising government and that Civic Platform won because it was able to persuade Poles that voting for them was the most effective way of removing it. The election also indicates that the 'post-communist divide' that dominated and provided a structural order to the Polish political scene during the 1990s is passing into history and certainly means a more consolidated Polish party system. However, Poland still has very high levels of electoral volatility and low electoral turnout, suggesting that most Poles still cannot locate themselves in the party system and that the electorate remains an 'open' one. Together with low levels of party institutionalisation and the extremely weak nature of the links between parties and their supporters, this makes it far too early to say whether we are seeing the emergence of a stable Polish party system based on a new bi-polar divide between two big centre-right groupings with the confinement of the left to the status of a minor actor.

Polish party development in the 2005-7 parliament

The previous September 2005 parliamentary election was a bi-polar contest between two centre-right, socially conservative parties emerging from the Solidarity tradition, Law and Justice¹ and the more liberal Civic Platform,² following a collapse in support for the governing communist successor Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej: SLD).³ In spite of policy differences, especially on the economy, the two parties had worked together in the 2001-5 parliament and were widely expected to form a coalition after the election, with the prime minister being the leader of whichever of the two won the most seats. However, although Law and Justice finished narrowly ahead, its leader Jarosław Kaczyński declined the premiership, fearing that concerns about twins holding the two highest elected state offices would damage the chances of his twin brother, Lech, in the presidential election that was held immediately after the parliamentary poll. Instead, the party nominated the more consensual Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, who was not part of its top leadership, as prime minister. One month later, Lech Kaczyński defeated Civic Platform leader Donald Tusk in the presidential election. The Law and Justice party's victories in both of these elections owed much to their success in framing them as a choice between Civic Platform's 'liberal' economic policies and their apparently more 'social' or 'solidaristic' approach. In fact, Civic Platform and Mr Tusk actually achieved the best results by a liberal party and presidential candidate in any post-1989 Polish election; albeit, in large part, because of the party's successful efforts to re-profile itself as more socially conservative and 'patriotic' during the previous four years.⁴

The bitterness of the prolonged election campaign soured relations between the two parties and, following the breakdown of coalition negotiations, Law and Justice formed a minority government and Civic Platform became the main opposition party. As the Law and Justice caucus in the Sejm, the more powerful lower house of the

¹ The Law and Justice party was formed in April 2001 by Jarosław Kaczyński to capitalise on the popularity of his twin brother, Lech, during his brief stint as justice minister towards the end of the 1997-2001 parliament. Law and Justice finished fourth in the 2001 election but when Lech Kaczyński became the first ever directly elected mayor of Warsaw in October 2002, the party used this as a springboard for its successful 2005 parliamentary and presidential election campaigns.

² Civic Platform was formed in January 2001 to capitalise on former finance and foreign minister Andrzej Olechowski's relative success as an independent liberal-conservative candidate in the 2000 presidential election. The liberal Donald Tusk became Civic Platform's sole leader in June 2003, the party having been previously led by a triumvirate that included Mr Tusk and Mr Olechowski.

³ The Democratic Left Alliance was formed at the beginning of the 1990s as an electoral coalition comprising various parties and groupings clustered around Social Democracy of the Polish Republic (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: SdRP), the direct organisational successor to the Polish communist party. It won the 1993 parliamentary election and was the main government party between 1993-97 but lost the 1997 election to Solidarity Electoral Action (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność: AWS). In June 1999 it was transformed into a single, unitary party and won the 2001 parliamentary election easily in coalition with the smaller Labour Union (Unia Pracy: UP), although falling just short of a parliamentary majority. However, the party then suffered a massive slump in support to finish fourth in the 2005 parliamentary election. For more on the 2005 elections, see: Radosław Markowski, 'The Polish Elections of 2005: Pure Chaos or a Restructuring of the Party System?' *West European Politics*, Vol.29 No.4 (2006), pp.814-832; Frances Millard, 'Poland's politics and the travails of transition after 2001,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.58 No.7 (2006), pp.1007-1031; and Aleks Szczerbiak, "'Social Poland Defeats "Liberal Poland"?: The September-October 2005 Polish Parliamentary and Presidential Elections,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transitional Politics*, Vol.23 No.2 (2007), pp.203-232.

⁴ See: Witold Gadomski, 'Widzę szansę dla Platformy', 4 November 2005 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/kraj/2029020,34314,3001707.html> (Accessed 6 November 2005).

Polish parliament, comprised only 155 deputies, well short of the 231 required for a majority, the new government had to look to smaller parties to secure support for its programme. Initially, it sought a parliamentary majority by signing a so-called 'stabilisation pact' at the beginning of 2006 with two radical parties: Self-Defence party⁵ and the League of Polish Families.⁶ However, Law and Justice soon came to the conclusion that the stabilisation pact was an unreliable basis of support for the government and, following an unsuccessful attempt to dissolve parliament, the three parties signed a more formal coalition agreement at the beginning of May 2006. As a consequence, the controversial Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families leaders, Andrzej Lepper and Roman Giertych, joined the government as deputy prime ministers.

Mr Marcinkiewicz came from the Law and Justice party's more liberal and pragmatic wing and was clearly at odds ideologically with the two radical parties, so bringing them into government placed further strains on his already uneasy relationship with Jarosław Kaczyński. Although Mr Marcinkiewicz ran the day-to-day business of government he lacked any power base within the party, of which Mr Kaczyński remained the unquestioned leader and most important political strategist. Nonetheless, Mr Marcinkiewicz quickly carved out a niche and became Poland's most popular politician by portraying himself as a hard working and independent-minded prime minister above the political fray.⁷ In July 2006, clearly unhappy about the way that Mr Marcinkiewicz was emerging as a strong political figure in his own right, Mr Kaczyński decided to remove him and take over the job of prime minister himself.⁸

Although the Law and Justice leader hoped that a formal coalition agreement would provide his party with a more stable parliamentary majority, the government was always a fractious one. Both smaller coalition partners knew that, ultimately, their political future depended upon their ability to differentiate themselves from Law and Justice. This led to continued instability, with Law and Justice having to use the threat of an early election continuously as a disciplinary device against its coalition partners; who, opinion polls suggested, would struggle to secure representation in a new parliament.⁹ In fact, the coalition almost collapsed in September 2006 when Self-

⁵ Self-Defence was set up in the early 1990s as both a political party and farmers' union by Andrzej Lepper, one of the most controversial figures in Polish politics who first came to prominence as leader of radical farmers' protests against debt foreclosures. Mr Lepper returned to front line politics during farmers' blockades at the beginning of 1999 and surprised observers when Self-Defence emerged as the third largest party in the 2001 parliamentary election. The party held on to its share of the vote in the 2005 parliamentary election, while Mr Lepper finished a strong third in the presidential election scoring an impressive 15% of the vote.

⁶ The League of Polish Families was formed in the run up to the 2001 parliamentary election as a coalition of various right-wing and clerical-nationalist parties. However, it was registered and contested the election as just one party (in order to be eligible for the lower 5% threshold for parliamentary representation) and was re-organised subsequently as a single, unitary party. The League held on to its share of the vote in 2005.

⁷ See, for example: Igor Zalewski, 'Premier dobrego Wrażenia,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 December 2005; Mariusz Janicki, 'IV RP czy IV PR?' *Polityka*, 7 January 2006; Jarosław Murawski, 'Do tańca i różańca,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 January 2006; and Janina Paradowska, 'Studniówka Marcinkiewicza,' *Polityka*, 11 February 2006.

⁸ See: Janina Paradowska, 'Pierwszy na pierwszego,' *Polityka*, 15 February 2006.

⁹ See, for example: Dominik Uhlig and Wojciech Szacki, 'Koalicja szkodzi mniejszym,' 14 November 2006 at <http://gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,2724215.html> (Accessed 14 November 2006).

Defence was expelled briefly from the government following Mr Lepper's continual acts of disloyalty and increasingly vocal criticisms, prompted by fears that Law and Justice was making significant inroads into his party's core rural electorate. However, Self-Defence was invited back after three weeks when Law and Justice failed to construct an alternative parliamentary majority with the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe: PSL),¹⁰ a rival agrarian party. A scandal that emerged at the beginning of December 2006, when Self-Defence party leaders were accused of forcing women to have sexual relationships with them in exchange for party jobs, placed further strains upon the coalition.

The fact that Civic Platform emerged as the main opposition party to the Law and Justice-led government, meant that the political scene continued to be dominated by these two parties, with opinion polls suggesting, and the autumn 2006 local elections appearing to confirm, that they were fairly evenly balanced in terms of their popular support.¹¹ The Law and Justice party's ability, unlike governing parties in the two previous parliaments, to both remain organisationally intact and retain a firm hold on a significant portion of the electorate, was remarkable given the government's frequent political crises. The party's success was due partly due to strong economic growth and falling unemployment, together with the fact that it failed to introduce any radical social or economic reforms that might have produced negative short-term electoral consequences. However, more fundamentally, the Law and Justice-led government focused relentlessly on its core election promises of fighting crime and corruption and introducing reforms that it claimed would restore probity in public life. Thus the party retained a loyal core of supporters prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt as long as it appeared to be delivering on its programme of moral and political renewal aimed at creating a 'Fourth Republic'.¹²

Another reason why support for the Law and Justice party held up relatively well was Civic Platform's inability to capitalise fully on the government's difficulties. Civic Platform chose a deliberate strategy of selective rather than outright parliamentary opposition, partly in order to pre-empt attacks from Law and Justice that it was blocking efforts to fight corruption and reform the state, but also because it actually shared many of the ruling party's criticisms of how institutions of post-1989 Poland had functioned.¹³ This meant supporting key elements of the government's legislative programme in parliament, including: establishing a new anti-corruption bureau (Centralne Biuro Antykorupcyjne: CBA), reforming the military intelligence services, and extending the scope of lustration (vetting individuals for their links with the communist-era security services). This was also part of the party's broader political strategy of positioning itself as a liberal-conservative alternative to the Law and Justice party for centre-right voters and rebuffing attempts by Mr Kaczynski to portray it as a straightforward 'liberal' party and thereby detach its more conservative

¹⁰ The Peasant Party was formed in 1990 as the organisational successor to the former communist satellite United Peasant Party (Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe: ZSL). It was the junior coalition partner in Democratic Left Alliance-led governments between 1993-97 (with its leader Waldemar Pawlak premier from October 1993-February 1995) and 2001-3. The party's share of the vote had been in steady decline since 1993 and most commentators were surprised when it crossed the 5% threshold to secure parliamentary representation in 2005.

¹¹ See: Piotr Smiłowicz, 'Porażka Samoobrony, klęska LPR,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 14 November 2006.

¹² See, for example: Anna Materska-Sosnowska, 'Karty w rękach PiS,' *Newsweek*, 16 September 2007; and Jarosław Makowski, 'Skazani na PiS,' *Newsweek*, 16 September 2007.

¹³ See, for example: Agnieszka Rybak, 'Drugi PiS, bez Bliźniaków,' *Polityka*, 4 March 2006.

supporters who would be alienated if the party was aligned too closely with the discredited centre-left.¹⁴ However, by criticising the government for its ineffectiveness and centralising tendencies, while failing to set out a clear and distinctive alternative, the party also sent out very confusing signals to the electorate, coming across as opportunistic and vague. Consequently, while Civic Platform reaped some short-term rewards from being the main opposition to a polarising government, and often polled ahead of the Law and Justice party, it never opened up a significant lead and its high ratings were based on little enthusiasm.¹⁵

However, the centre-left was also unable to take advantage of the potential political opening created by the government's continued problems and Civic Platform's relative weakness and only experienced a modest revival in 2005-7. In the run up to the autumn 2006 local elections a new centre-left electoral alliance of four parties called the 'Left and Democrats' (Lewica i Demokraci: LiD) was formed, anchored by the Democratic Left Alliance but also comprising the Democrats (Demokraci), a small liberal party that included well-known figures from the Solidarity-led governments of the 1990s.¹⁶ However, although the centre-left's decline in support appeared to have bottomed out so that by the time that the 2007 election was called it had emerged as the 'third force' in Polish politics, it was still well behind the two main centre-right parties in the polls. This was partly because the centre-left's hopes of reaping the electoral rewards from emerging as the moderate opposition to the widely expected Civic Platform-Law and Justice coalition government were scuppered when Mr

¹⁴ See, for example: Jarosław Gowin, 'Rynek z religią, tradycja z edukacją,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 April 2006; Michał Karnowski, 'Prawdziwie kusząca oferta,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 June 2006; Jacek Rostowski, 'Odrodzenie Platformy,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 20 June 2006; Janusz Lewandowski, 'Platforma Obywatelska: liberałowie i konserwatyści przeciw jakobinom,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 May 2007; and Jacek Rostowski, 'Upadek wielkiego stratega,' 25 October 2007 at <http://www.gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75515,4610310.html> (Accessed 29 October 2007). Interestingly, even as late as August 2007 a Civic Platform-Law and Justice coalition was still the first choice of a substantial number of voters. See: Piotr Pacewicz, 'Sondaż "Gazety": Koalicje, jakich chcemy,' 13 August 2007 at <http://www.gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,4384548.html> (Accessed 16 August 2007).

¹⁵ For a selection of critiques of Civic Platform's opposition strategy from a range of different perspectives see, for example: Janusz A. Majcherek, 'Opozycyjny marazm,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 13 June 2006; Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska, 'Sukces uykający uwadze,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 June 2006; Mirosława Grabowska, 'Więcej tego samego,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 15-16 July 2006; Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władysław, 'Partia NIE-PiS', *Polityka*, 28 October 2006; Janusz A. Majcherek, 'Zmarnowany rok opozycji,' 31 October 2006 at <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/wyborcza/2029020,34474,3710893.html> (Accessed 1 November 2006); Witold Gadowski, 'PO na sukces musi zapracować,' 9 December 2006 (Accessed 12 December 2006); and Igor Zalewski, 'Gdzie są tamci liberałowie,' 10 April 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Default.aspx?TabId&BackToCategory=3&ShowArticleId=392989> (Accessed 16 April 2007). Cf: Janina Paradowska, 'Opozycja na pozycji,' *Polityka*, 20 January 2007; and Igor Janke, 'Platforma przycisnęła PiS do muru,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 29 May 2007.

¹⁶ See: 'Centrolewica wreszcie razem,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 4 September 2006. The Democrats emerged from the Freedom Union (Unia Wolności: UW), a party formed in April 1995 through a merger of two 'post-Solidarity' liberal-centrist parties, the Democratic Union (Unia Demokratyczna: UD) and the Liberal Democratic Congress (Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczna: KLD) that, between them, supplied three of Poland's first four post-1989 premiers: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki and Hanna Suchocka. Freedom Union was Solidarity Electoral Action's junior coalition partner in 1997-2000 but failed to secure re-election to parliament in 2001 following a split when Mr Tusk led most of his liberal supporters out of the party to form Civic Platform. The Freedom Union re-packaged itself as the Democrats at the beginning of 2005 but once again failed to cross the 5% threshold for parliamentary representation.

Tusk's party went into opposition in 2005. Consequently, much of the anti-government vote tended to orientate towards Civic Platform as the main opposition party and, therefore, most effective way of removing the Law and Justice from office.¹⁷

The crisis that led to the break up of the coalition and parliamentary dissolution began in July 2007 when Mr Kaczyński sacked Mr Lepper from the posts of deputy prime minister and agriculture minister. This followed allegations that Mr Lepper was a suspect in a sting operation being conducted by the central anti-corruption bureau centred on an alleged bribe to re-classify agricultural land in Poland's lake district as property for commercial development; allegations that Mr Lepper denied vigorously. Although Mr Kaczyński would probably have preferred the parliament to run its full four-year term, when these allegations emerged the political costs of continued association with Mr Lepper became too high. The Law and Justice leader tried initially to keep the coalition together, but a government that excluded the Self-Defence leader never really had any chance of survival and efforts to broker a peace over the summer proved impossible. An attempt to create a new parliamentary majority by persuading enough Self-Defence deputies to defect and join Law and Justice, the League of Polish Families and other smaller parliamentary groupings and independents (fearful of losing their seats) foundered when the two junior coalition partners formed an electoral coalition called the 'League and Self-Defence' (Liga i Samoobrona: LiS) that, they claimed, would be the precursor to a new party. Although the new coalition only lasted a few weeks, in the short term it emboldened the two parties by making them more confident of crossing the 5% threshold for parliamentary representation in an early election, and therefore less willing to compromise on Mr Kaczyński's terms. When, in apparent breach of the coalition agreement, the prime minister rejected the Self-Defence nominee to replace Mr Lepper as agriculture minister and instead appointed Law and Justice deputy Wojciech Mojzeszowicz, who had resigned from Self-Defence in the previous parliament after a fierce clash with its leader, Mr Lepper's party formally declared an end to the coalition.

Mr Kaczyński responded by firing all the remaining ministers from the two smaller parties and also declaring the coalition to be over. Although this still left him in office as head of a minority government, he sensed that the continual political bargaining needed to secure parliamentary majorities would soon erode the Law and Justice party's credibility and support. Another important consideration here was probably the decision, in early August, of the State Election Commission to reject party's annual financial statement (together with that of the Democratic Left Alliance) because it had accepted funds from foreigners and institutions in 2006 as a result of which it was set to lose over 65 million zloties in budget subsidies over the next three years, unless the parliamentary term came to an end.¹⁸ In the event, Mr Kaczyński

¹⁷ See: Rafał Kalukin, 'Lewica w poszukiwaniu miejsca i elektoratu,' 14 November 2005 at <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/kraj/2029020,34314,3012848.html> (Accessed 14 November 2005)

¹⁸ See: Agnieszka Sopińska and Bernadeta Waszkielewicz, 'Kłopoty finansowe PiS i SLD,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 4-5 August 2007. The decision was actually over-turned subsequently by the supreme court (although not in the case of the Democratic Left Alliance) but only after the election had been called so Law and Justice could not have been aware of this when making its calculations as to whether or not to call a snap poll. See: Eliza Olczyk, 'PiS obroniło swoją dotację,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 October 1997.

gambled on an early election and - with Law and Justice, Civic Platform, the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish Peasant Party all voting solidly in favour - the Sejm voted by 377 votes to 54 for a dissolution, easily securing the two-thirds majority of 307 votes needed to cut short the parliamentary term.

The Campaign

For most of the campaign opinion polls suggested that the two centre-right parties were running neck-and-neck. Indeed, until the final week it was actually Law and Justice that had set the terms of the debate.¹⁹ Mr Kaczyński made his government's fight against corruption the focal point of the party's professional and highly effective campaign, hammering home his message that his was the only party committed to fighting the 'układ' or network of politicians, business leaders and members of the former communist security services that, they argued, had exerted such a baleful influence on political and economic life in post-1989 Poland.²⁰ This appeared to make sense from an electoral strategic point of view, as law and order and corruption seemed to be the issues on which the government had the highest levels of public approval. For example, an August-September 2007 CBOS survey found that 40% of respondents said that the government's record of fighting corruption was good, 30% that it was adequate and only 20% that it was poor.²¹ Similarly, 40% said that the government's record on public safety issues was good, 34% that it was adequate and only 19% that it was poor.²² As a secondary campaign theme, Law and Justice also claimed credit for strong economic growth and falling unemployment.²³ Again this appeared to make sense given that, for example, an August-September CBOS 2007 survey found that 30% of respondents felt that the government's economic record was good, 42% that it was adequate and only 21% that it was poor.²⁴ Moreover, Law and Justice was able to overshadow the defection of a number of important political figures associated with the party to Civic Platform, such as former defence minister Radosław Sikorski (who resigned from the government in February 2007 following a

¹⁹ See, for example: Marek Migalski, 'Społeczeństwo nie wstydzi się już PiS,' 5 September 1997 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=59128> (Accessed 12 September 2007); and Konrad Ciesońkiewicz, 'Lekcja wyborczego profesjonalizmu,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 October 2007.

²⁰ See, for example: Jarosław Kaczyński, 'Nie obiecujemy cudów – obiecujemy konkrety,' 8 October 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=63180> (Accessed 9 October 2007). For good analyses of the politics of the 'układ' see: Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władyka, 'Układ,' *Polityka*, 1 April 2006; Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński, 'W sieci układu,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 22-23 April 2006; and Rafał Matja, 'Układ w Polsce cały czas istnieje,' 9 July 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=51870> (Accessed 13 July 2007).

²¹ See: CBOS, *Szczegółowe oceny działalności rządu*, (Warsaw: CBOS, September 2007), p.3. 9% did not know.

²² See: *Ibid*, p.2. 7% did not know. However, the evidence on this was mixed. For example, an August 2007 TNS-OBOP survey found that 37% of respondents thought that the level of corruption had actually increased under the Law and Justice-led government, 39% felt that it had stayed the same and only 16% felt that it had been reduced (8% did not know). Similarly, 33% thought that the country was less just, 40% that there had been no change in this respect and only 16% felt that it was more just (11% did not know). See: TNS/OBOP, *Spór o ocenę Polski za rządów Prawa i Sprawiedliwości*, (Warsaw: TNS OBOP, September 2007), p.2. A September 2007 TNS-OBOP survey also found that 87% of respondents felt that corruption was still common in Poland; although that number had fallen from 94% in August 2005 and those who felt that it was 'very common' fell from 67% to 42%. See: TNS OBOP, *Korupcja: zmiana w latach 2005-2007*, (Warsaw: TNS-OBOP October 2007) p.2.

²³ See, for example: 'Premier: To najlepsze lata Polski od wielu dekad,' 25 August 1997 at <http://gospodarka.gazeta.pl/gospodarka/2029020,33181,44337884.html> (Accessed 27 August 2007).

²⁴ See: CBOS, *Szczegółowe oceny działalności rządu*, p.2. 6% did not know.

clash with Mr Kaczyński), by persuading Nelly Rokita - the wife of Jan Rokita, one of Civic Platform's best know leaders and its candidate for prime minister in 2005 - to run on the Law and Justice ticket in the Warsaw constituency. This prompted Mr Rokita, one of the most important members of Civic Platform's conservative wing, to stand down as an election candidate.²⁵

The weakness of the Law and Justice party's strategy was that it was based on polarising the campaign around support for or opposition to the outgoing government. However, opinion polls had shown consistently that, although the party retained a loyal core electorate, Mr Kaczyński's administration always had more opponents than supporters. For example, CBOS surveys conducted between August 2006-October 2007 found that the number of respondents who considered themselves government supporters ranged from 24-31% and opponents from 36-48%.²⁶ The numbers who evaluated the Kaczyński government positively ranged from 23-33% and the number who evaluated it negatively from 39-63%.²⁷ Similarly, TNS-OBOP surveys conducted between August 2006-September 2007 found that the number of respondents who evaluated the Kaczyński government positively ranged from 17%-26%, while the number who evaluated it negatively was between 67-74%.²⁸ The number who evaluated prime minister Kaczyński's performance positively ranged from 20-30% while the number who evaluated him negatively ranged from 49%-69%.²⁹

This meant that while the Law and Justice campaign was extremely successful at consolidating and mobilising the government's supporters, as the party absorbed most of its former coalition partners' vote, there was a ceiling above which it was always going to be difficult for it to rise. For example, an August-September 2007 CBOS survey found that while 22% of Law and Justice voters would support Civic Platform as their second preference, only 8% of Civic Platform voters felt the same about Mr Kaczyński's party.³⁰ The same survey also found a substantial increase in the number of voters who said that they would never vote for Law and Justice from only 9% in May 2005 to 34% in 2007.³¹ However, in spite of this, for most of the campaign Civic Platform struggled to convey an effective message that could persuade this extremely disparate group of voters united only in their dislike of the Kaczyński government to vote for them.³²

²⁵ A September 2007 GfK Polonia poll conducted for 'Rzeczpospolita' found that 56% of respondents felt that Mr Rokita's resignation would weaken Civic Platform while only 22% thought that would strengthen it (14% did not know, 8% said it would have no impact). See: Dorota Kołakowska, 'Misja Gowina po odejściu Rokity,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 September 2007. Cf: Jacek Kucharczyk, 'Spychanie Platformy na mieliznę,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 September 2007.

²⁶ See: CBOS, *Stosunek do rządu*, (Warsaw: CBOS, July 2007), p.2; and CBOS, *Notowania rządu Jarosława Kaczyńskiego pod koniec jego działalności*, (Warsaw: CBOS, October 2007), p.1. The number who were indifferent ranged from 19-31% and the number of don't knows between 3-5%.

²⁷ See: CBOS, *Stosunek do rządu*, p.3; and CBOS, *Notowania rządu Jarosława Kaczyńskiego pod koniec jego działalności*, p.3. The number of don't knows ranged from 11%-34%.

²⁸ See: TNS-OBOP, *Spoleczne oceny rządu, premiera i prezydenta we wrześniu 2007 r.*, (Warsaw: TNS-OBOP, September 2007), p.3. The number of don't knows ranged from 7-11%.

²⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p.5. The number of don't knows ranged from 9-17%, if one excludes the 30% figure for his first month in office (August 2006).

³⁰ See: CBOS, *Siła preferencji politycznych, alternatywy wyborcze i elektoraty negatywne*, (Warsaw: CBOS, September 2007), p.6.

³¹ See: *Ibid.*, p.10.

³² See, for example: Marek Migalski, 'Pięć grzechów głównych Platformy,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 9 October 2007; and Janina Paradowska, 'Tusku! Tusku!' *Polityka*, 13 October 2007.

The turning point was a strong performance by Mr Tusk in a debate with a surprisingly lacklustre Mr Kaczyński, held nine days before the election and watched by millions of Poles on prime time TV.³³ The Kaczyński-Tusk debate shattered the prime minister's image of invincibility and allowed Mr Tusk to re-invent himself as a dynamic and effective leader.³⁴ The Civic Platform leader followed up his victory over the prime minister when, in another (somewhat more evenly matched) TV debate held three days later with former President and the centre-left's candidate for prime minister Aleksander Kwaśniewski, he made a powerful pitch for all anti-Law and Justice voters to rally around his party as the most effective way of defeating Mr Kaczyński.³⁵ Following the TV debates, the dynamics of the campaign changed as Civic Platform finally found a convincing theme around which it could unite this diverse group of voters and squeeze the centre-left. The party made bold pledges that, by adopting the 'Irish model' and abandoning excessive regulations, it could bring about an 'economic miracle' that would pay for improved public services and infrastructure. Moving away from an open espousal of economic liberalism, it also tried to exploit the dis-satisfaction of public sector workers with the Law and Justice-led government, by promising better salaries for doctors, nurses and teachers. All of this would, the party argued, prevent Poles from being forced to work abroad in order to improve their standard of living. Civic Platform tried thereby to transcend the 'liberal versus social-solidaristic Poland' dichotomy that had cost it victory in the 2005 election by arguing that the party supported a 'liberal economic policy and a solidaristic social policy', as Mr Tusk put it in his debate with the Law and Justice leader.³⁶

Law and Justice could not develop an effective response to this and an attempt during the final week to shift the campaign back on to its strongest issue, corruption, ended up back-firing on the party. Earlier in the campaign, the central anti-corruption bureau,

³³ See: 'Komentary są zgodni: debatę wygrał Tusk,' 13 October 2007 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/wybory2007/2029020,85057,4574786.html> (Accessed 16 October 2007); and 'Sondaże: Miażdżące zwycięstwo Tuska,' 15 October 2007 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/wybory2007/2029020,85057,4574526.html> (Accessed 16 October 2007). For an interesting analysis, see: Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska, 'Sztucki prostackie, ale skuteczne,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 October 2007. Mr Kaczyński acknowledged subsequently that he made a mistake in agreeing to the debate. See: Jarosław Kaczyński, 'Tych wyborów i tak byśmy nie wygrali,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 October 2007.

³⁴ See, for example: Piotr Semka, 'Kampania ostatniej prostej,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 October 2007. A June 2007 GfK Polonia survey for 'Rzeczpospolita' found that 59% of voters felt that Mr Tusk was not an asset for his party (16% 'definitely not') compared with only 42% who felt that he was (12% that he 'definitely was'); 9% did not know. See: Małgorzata Subotić, 'Donald Tusk zerka w strone Kaczyńskich i Rokity,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 June 2007. An October 2007 GfK Polonia survey for 'Rzeczpospolita' also found that only 39% of respondents expected Mr Tusk to win the debate with Mr Kaczyński compared with 44% who expected the Law and Justice leader to emerge victorious; 17% did not know. See: Agnieszka Sopińska and Bernadeta Waszkielewicz, 'Tusk celuje w dwie debaty,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 5 October 2007.

³⁵ See: Bernadeta Waszkielewicz and Anna Gielewska, 'Walka o antypisowski elektorat,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 16 October 2007.

³⁶ See: Eliza Olczyk and Agnieszka Sopińska, 'Ostre i decydujące starcie liderów,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 13-14 October 2007. For good analyses of Civic Platform's retreat from open economic liberalism, see: Michał Karnowski, 'PO nauczyła się wygrać,' 22 October 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=64913> (Accessed 22 October 2007); and Piotr Zaremba, 'Osobisty sukces Tuska,' 22 October 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=64911> (Accessed 22 October 2007).

which was headed by a former Law and Justice parliamentary deputy Mariusz Kamiński, had arrested Beata Sawicka, a little known Civic Platform deputy, in a sting operation while accepting a bribe in exchange for promising to fix a public auction for real estate on an attractive vacation spot on the Baltic coast. Ms Sawicka was thrown out of the party immediately but then, during the last week of the campaign, Mr Kamiński held a sensational press conference, broadcast live and re-broadcast on prime time TV, where he laid out publicly the case against Ms Sawicka, showing hidden camera footage of her taking the bribe.³⁷ Although Mr Kamiński claimed that the arrest and subsequent press conference were un-related to the election campaign, Law and Justice clearly hoped to use the 'Sawicka affair' as a symbol of the party fulfilling its promises to fight corruption at the same time as discrediting Civic Platform as being part of the problem. Moreover, among the quotations from Ms Sawicka selected by Mr Kamiński was mention of the possibility of cashing in on the privatisation of hospitals which prompted Law and Justice to attempt to use the Sawicka affair to link the issues of corruption and health service commercialisation. The party ran a campaign advert showing the ECG line of a patient waiting for an ambulance flattening out as they failed to provide the phone operator with their payment details - thereby claiming that Civic Platform planned to privatise hospitals and (implicitly) emergency services; a claim that Mr Tusk's party denied vigorously.³⁸

However, rather than helping Law and Justice to re-gain the initiative, the whole affair appeared to confirm the opposition's claims that the party was using the anti-corruption drive to intimidate its political opponents and gain an advantage in the election, particularly when Ms Sawicka held an emotional press conference the next day during which she broke down in tears.³⁹ For example, a TNS OBOP poll for the 'Dziennik' newspaper, found that 45% of respondents felt that the anti-corruption bureau's press conference was 'part of a dirty campaign' and only 31% that it was motivated by 'the citizens' right to know the truth'.⁴⁰ A GfK Polonia poll for 'Rzeczpospolita' conducted just after the election also found that 61% of respondents felt that the anti-corruption bureau had been politicised and was engaged mainly in finding compromising material on the Law and Justice party's political opponents (33% felt this strongly), while only 31% disagreed with this proposition (10% strongly).⁴¹

³⁷ See: Cezary Gmyz, 'Grupa posłanki Sawickiej,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 October 2007.

³⁸ See, for example: 'Nasi przeciwnicy chcą prywatyzować szpitale i zlikwidować CBA,' 18 October 2007 at <http://www.pis.org.pl/article.php?id=10386> (Accessed 22 October 2007).

³⁹ See, for example: Cezary Gmyz, 'Burza po taśmach Sawickiej,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 October 2007. For an analysis of how the 'Sawicki affair' damaged the Law and Justice party, see: Igor Janke, 'Przegraną PiS przypieczętowała posłanka Sawicka,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 October 2007. For contrasting views on whether the Law and Justice party and the central anti-corruption bureau acted properly in this case, see: Igor Janke, 'CBA zagrało dla Kaczyńskich,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 October 2007; and Bronisław Wildstein, 'Wszyscy wykorszystują sprawę Sawickiej,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 October 2007.

⁴⁰ See: 'Polacy nie wierzą w czyste intencje CBA,' at 17 October 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=64475> (Accessed 18 October 2007). 24% did not know.

⁴¹ See: 'Polacy nie chcą likwidacji CBA – wolą by włączono je w inne struktury,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 27-28 October 2007. 8% did not know.

Results

In the event, as **Table 1** shows, Civic Platform won a clear victory with 41.51% of the votes and 209 (out of 460) seats in the Sejm. Although Law and Justice increased both its share of the votes and parliamentary representation, it finished well behind Civic Platform with only 32.11% of the vote and 166 seats. Given that the two main parties had been evenly matched for most of the campaign, the scale of Civic Platform's victory came as a surprise to most commentators. Nonetheless, in spite of its impressive victory, Civic Platform fell short of the 231 seats required for a parliamentary majority in the Sejm and had to form a coalition government with the Peasant Party. In spite of concerns that becoming prime minister could damage his 2010 presidential election chances, Mr Tusk agreed to head up the government, while Peasant Party leader Waldemar Pawlak became his deputy.

Table 1: September 2007 Parliamentary election results to the Sejm

	Votes	%	2005 (%)	Change (%)	Seats
Civic Platform	6 701 010	41.51	24.14	+20.97	209
Law and Justice	5 183 477	32.11	26.99	+5.12	166
Left and Democrats	2 122 988	13.15	17.74*	-4.59	53
Polish Peasant Party	1 437 638	8.91	6.96	+1.95	31
Self-Defence	247 335	1.53	11.41	-9.88	
League of Polish Families	209 171	1.30	7.97	-6.67	

Source: Polish State Electoral Commission (<http://www.pkw.gov.pl/>)

*Combined vote for Democratic Left Alliance (11.31%), Polish Social Democracy-Labour Union (3.98%) and the Democrats (2.45%).

As expected, the Left and Democrats emerged as the third largest grouping with 13.15% of the votes and 53 seats. However, this was a disappointing result given that it was less than the total combined vote for these parties in the 2005 election and fewer than the 55 seats that the Democratic Left Alliance won on its own. This was in large part because, as noted above, most anti-Law and Justice voters tended to opt for Civic Platform as the most effective of removing Mr Kaczyński's party from office.⁴² Moreover, Mr Kwaśniewski, who was the most popular figure on the centre-left and should have been its greatest electoral asset,⁴³ also proved something of a mixed blessing. Although he performed competently in televised debates with Mr Kaczyński and Mr Tusk, he also appeared to be drunk while trying to make speeches on two other occasions during the campaign.⁴⁴ For example, an October 2007 CBOS poll

⁴² See: Jacek Wódz, 'Nie ma lewicy, jest kasta i wygoda,' *Newsweek*, 25 November 2007.

⁴³ For example, a March 2007 GfK Polonia poll for 'Rzeczpospolita' found that 51% of respondents thought that Mr Kwaśniewski's return to the Polish political scene would be beneficial (17% 'definitely' so) and only 39% thought that it would not (20% 'definitely' not). See: 'Kwaśniewski mile widziany,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 March 2007.

⁴⁴ For good analyses of Kwaśniewski's shortcomings during the election campaign see, for example: Ireneusz Krzemiński, 'Zmurszały, choć polakierowany Kwaśniewski,' 18 October 2007 at <http://www.dziennik.pl/Load.aspx?TabId=2097lsnf=p&f=64455> (Accessed 18 October 2007); and Rafał Matja, 'Koniec Kwaśniewskiego,' 27 October 2007 at

found a sharp drop in the level of trust for Mr Kwaśniewski during the course of the campaign from 57% in September 2007 to only 44% in October.⁴⁵ However, while it is easy to focus on the Left and Democrats' organisational, programmatic and strategic weaknesses,⁴⁶ the grouping always had to grapple with more fundamental problems. The centre-left, and Democratic Left Alliance in particular, were still too closely associated with the political elites that had been discredited following numerous sleaze and corruption allegations that emerged during the 2001-5 parliament when the party was in government to offer voters an attractive alternative.⁴⁷ For example, although an August-September 2007 CBOS survey found that although the number of voters who said that they would never vote for the centre-left had fallen since May 2005 (when 48% said this about the Democratic Left Alliance), the number still remained relatively high at 28%.⁴⁸

Civic Platform's coalition partner in the new government, the Peasant Party, came fourth with 8.91% of the votes and 31 seats. The Peasant Party had been in coalition with the Democratic Left Alliance in 1993-97 and 2001-3 but almost failed to cross the threshold for parliamentary representation at the 2005 election. However, the party reversed its decline this time and appeared to win back the support of many of the rural voters that it lost to Self-Defence in the two previous elections by presenting itself as a pragmatic and calming influence on the political scene.⁴⁹ All the other political groupings failed to cross the 5% threshold; including the Law and Justice party's two former coalition partners, Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families,⁵⁰ whose support collapsed to only 1.53% and 1.3% of the electorate respectively.⁵¹ Exit poll data showed that 43.9% of 2005 League of Polish Families voters and 26.8% of Self-Defence voters switched to the Law and Justice party in 2007.⁵²

http://www.dziennik.pl/dziennik/europa/atricle69600/Koniec_Kwasniewskiego.html (Accessed 28 November 2007).

⁴⁵ See: CBOS, *Zaufanie do polityków w trakcie kampanii wyborczej*, (Warsaw: CBOS, October 2007), p.4.

⁴⁶ See, for example: Cezary Łazarewicz, 'Ten trzeci,' *Polityka*, 29 September 2007; and Piotr Śmiłowicz and Andrzej Stankiewicz, 'Arka Kwaśniewskiego,' *Newsweek*, 7 October 2007.

⁴⁷ See, for example: Witold Gadomski, 'Duch lewicy,' 5 June 2007 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75515,4202027.html> (Accessed 6 June 2007); and Marek Migalski, 'Paradoksy Aleksandra Kwaśniewskiego,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 August 2007.

⁴⁸ See: CBOS, *Siła preferencji politycznych, alternatywy wyborcze i elektoraty negatywne*, p.10.

⁴⁹ See, for example: 'Pawlak: PSL przywróci pokój w polskiej polityce,' 8 September 2007 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/wybory2007/2029020,85057,4471382.html> (Accessed 12 September 2007); and Krystyna Naszkowska, 'Wieś woli Pawlaka od Kaczyńskiego,' 22 September 2007 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,4510555.html> (25 September 2007).

⁵⁰ The League contested the election in an electoral alliance with the Right-wing of the Republic (Prawica Rzeczypospolitej: PR) party, a small Catholic-conservative breakaway from Law and Justice led by former Sejm speaker Marek Jurek, and (bizarrely given the League's interventionist economic policies) with the radical free market Union of Real Politics (Unia Polityki Realnej: UPR) as the League of the Right-wing of the Republic (Liga Prawicy Rzeczypospolitej, which also had the Polish acronym 'LPR'). See: Tomasz P. Terlikowski, 'Giertych, Jurek, Korwin-Mikke – trzech panów w wyborczej desperacji,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 September 2007.

⁵¹ For good analyses of the weakness of these two parties' campaigns, see: Tomasz P. Terlikowski, 'Andrzej Lepper przeszedł do historii,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 October 2007; and Rafał Ziemkiewicz, 'Prawica z LPR zepchnięta na margines,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 October 2007.

⁵² See: Piotr Pacewicz, 'Skąd się wzięło tyle wyborców?' 24 October 2007 at <http://serwis.gazeta.pl/wybory2007/2029020,85407,46067185.html> (Accessed 29 October 2007).

As **Table 2** shows, at 53.9%, turnout was the highest of any of the six parliamentary elections held since 1989. This relatively large mobilisation - particularly among young, urban voters - was felt to have helped Civic Platform.⁵³ For example, exit poll data revealed that turnout in large cities - who, as **Table 3** shows, voted for Civic Platform overwhelmingly - was 62.9%, while turnout among rural voters, who tended to support Law and Justice, was only 42.6%. Similarly, 52.4% of 18-24 year olds, most of whom also supported Mr Tusk's party, turned out to vote compared with only 45.1% of voters who were over 60, who backed Law and Justice.⁵⁴ Consequently, although Law and Justice actually increased its total vote by two million, exit poll data shows that it was only able to mobilise 1,859,000 new voters compared to the 2,532,000 who voted for Civic Platform.⁵⁵

Table 2: Turnout in post-1989 Polish elections (%)

	Presidential	Parliamentary
1990	60.6(1) 53.4(2)	
1991		43.2
1993		52.1
1995	64.7(1) 68.2(2)	
1997		47.9
2000	61.1	
2001		46.2
2005	49.7(1) 51.0(2)	40.6
2007		53.9

Source: *Rzeczpospolita*, 14 June 2004; and Polish State Electoral Commission (<http://www.pkw.gov.pl/>)

⁵³ Law and Justice party leaders and strategists certainly felt this. See: Agnieszka Sopińska, 'PiS: jak przegraliśmy to co można było wygrać,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 23 October 2007; and Jarosław Kaczyński, 'Tych wyborów i tak byśmy nie wygrali,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 26 October 2007.

⁵⁴ The exit poll was conducted for Polish state TV's election night special by TNS-OBOP.

⁵⁵ See: Pacewicz, 'Skąd się wzięło tyle wyborców?'

Table 3: Voting profile of party supporters in the October 2007 Polish parliamentary election (%)

	Civic Platform	Law and Justice	Left and Democrats	Polish Peasant Party
Place				
Villages	31.2	38.5	8.9	15.0
-50,000	45.8	30.0	12.9	7.0
51-200,000	48.4	27.4	15.9	4.3
201-500,000	52.5	27.2	14.4	2.8
500,000+	57.1	25.6	11.7	2.5
Education				
Basic	27.4	44.0	9.2	10.5
Vocational	31.3	41.0	10.7	10.1
Middle	44.2	30.9	12.8	7.9
Higher	55.1	23.2	12.7	6.0
Age				
18-19	55.2	24.7	8.7	6.0
20-24	50.7	22.0	10.4	5.9
25-39	51.6	25.7	11.1	7.5
40-59	40.4	33.9	11.9	9.3
60+	30.0	41.6	16.3	6.8
Sex				
Male	42.6	31.4	12.6	8.2
Female	45.8	31.1	11.7	7.5
Average	41.51	32.11	13.15	8.91

Source: PBS exit poll data published in Andrzej Stankiewicz, 'Pospolite Ruszenie,' *Newsweek*, 28 October 2007.

The long-term trajectory of Polish politics

So what, if any, conclusions can we draw from this election about the long-term trajectory of Polish politics, particularly about whether new divisions are emerging within the party system? During the 1990s, in spite of the high levels of electoral volatility and party instability that characterised the Polish party system, there was an apparent underlying structural order based on clear and relatively stable dimensions of left-right competition. Most voters could locate themselves on a left-right divide and this ideological self-placement was strongly linked to voting behaviour and party preferences.⁵⁶ However, the dominant axis of left-right competition in Poland was a

⁵⁶ See Krzysztof Pankowski. 'Lewicowość-prawicowość: deklaracje polityczne Polaków 1990-1997' in Lena Kolarska-Bobińska and Radosław Markowski (eds.), *Prognozy i wybory. Polska Demokracja '95* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1997), pp.69-108; Tadeusz Szawiel. 'Zróźnicowanie lewicowo-

historical-cultural one: framed by a combination of attitudes towards the communist past and moral-cultural issues, particularly the role of the Catholic Church in public life, and closely linked to levels of religiosity measured by regularity of church attendance. As Grabowska argued in her influential monograph, the May-June 1989 'semi-free' elections, in which the Solidarity-led democratic opposition scored a decisive victory over candidates supported by the communist regime, represented a 'founding election' that carved out the two sides of what she terms the 'post-communist' political divide that dominated post-1989 Polish electoral and party politics.⁵⁷ On one side of this divide, the 'left' was identified primarily with: a more positive attitude towards the communist past, liberal social values, secularism and opposition to a significant public role for the Church. On the other side, the 'right' was associated with: anti-communism and support for the Solidarity movement, conservative social values, high levels of religiosity and a significant role for the Church in public life.⁵⁸ Socio-economic class and attitudes towards related issues such as the distribution of wealth, role of the state in the economy, and levels of taxation and public expenditure - the main determinants of the left-right divide in most established Western democracies - represented very much a secondary axis in the Polish party system. This 'post-communist divide' dominated Polish politics throughout the 1990s and - for a brief period in the run up to, and immediately after, the 1997 parliamentary election - even appeared to be mapping on to the Polish party system with the emergence of a bi-polar divide between the Democratic Left Alliance and the centre-right Solidarity Electoral Action conglomerate.⁵⁹

Since the end of the 1990s, the 'post-communist divide' has been crumbling and the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, in particular, raised serious questions as to whether it was giving way to a new era of political divisions based on a different set of socio-demographic and issue alignments. In particular, the 'post-Solidarity versus ex-communist' conflict appeared increasingly anachronistic and irrelevant; exemplified by fact that support for the communist successor Democratic Left Alliance, representing one side of the 'post-communist divide', slumped to its lowest level in any post-1989 election and both main parties in the parliamentary election and presidential candidates emerged from the same, post-Solidarity tradition and shared a broadly conservative orientation in terms of moral-cultural issues. Attitudes towards socio-economic issues also appeared to emerge as a dominant campaign theme, particularly during the final stages of the elections, exemplified by the

prawicowe i jego korelaty,' in Radosław Markowski (ed.), *Wybory Parlamentarne 1997: System partyjny, postawy polityczne, zachowanie wyborcze* (Warsaw: ISP: PAN, 1999), pp.111-148; Tadeusz Szawiel. 'Podział lewica-prawica w polityce oraz w szerszym kontekście kulturowym.' in Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel (eds.). *Budowanie demokracji: Podziały społeczne, partie polityczne i społeczeństwo obywatelskie w postkomunistycznej Polsce* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001), pp.216-266; Tadeusz Szawiel. 'Podział na lewicę i prawicę w Polsce po 1989 roku – jego sens i trwałość.' in Radosław Markowski (ed.), *System Partyjny i Zachowanie Wyborcze: Dekada Polskich Doświadczeń* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2002), pp.178-216.

⁵⁷ See: Mirosława Grabowska. *Podział postkomunistyczny: Społeczne podstawy polityki w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2004).

⁵⁸ See: Krzysztof Jasiewicz, 'Portfel czy różaniec? Wzory zachowań wyborczych Polaków w latach 1995-2001' in Radosław Markowski (ed.), *System Partyjny i Zachowanie Wyborcze: Dekada Polskich Doświadczeń* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2002), pp.75-100; and Mirosława Grabowska, 'Religijność i kościół a polityka w III Rzeczypospolitej' in Radosław Markowski (ed.), *System Partyjny i Zachowanie Wyborcze: Dekada Polskich Doświadczeń* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2002), pp.100-146.

⁵⁹ See, for example: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Interests and Values: Polish Parties and their Electorates,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 51 No 8 (1999), pp.1401-1432.

apparent conflict between ‘social-solidaristic’ and ‘liberal’ visions of Poland represented by Law and Justice and Civic Platform. Detailed statistical analysis of the 2005 party electorates also suggested that the left-right socio-economic divide was becoming an increasingly significant factor in determining voting behaviour.⁶⁰

So what was the evidence from the 2007 parliamentary election? Did it mark another nail in the coffin of the ‘post-communist divide’? Are we seeing the consolidation and stabilisation of Polish politics and the party system around a new bi-polar axis based on the division between the two big centre-right parties, Civic Platform and Law and Justice? And will this provide a basis for structuring the Polish political scene in the longer-term?

Firstly, this election certainly appeared to provide further evidence that the old divisions that dominated Polish politics in the 1990s were passing into history. Once again, attitudes towards the communist past and the historic ‘ex-communist versus post-Solidarity’ divide hardly featured at all in the campaign. This was not surprising. Not only did the two main parties, as in 2005, emerge from the Solidarity tradition, but even the Democratic Left Alliance managed to finally transcend the ‘historic divide’ by joining forces with the Democrats, a party that contained many well known figures from the Solidarity movement. At one stage it appeared that the communist past might have a higher profile in the 2007 campaign when the issue of lustration surfaced briefly in mid-September as the Institute of National Memory (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: IPN) began publishing the names of public figures who were registered as being collaborators with, or were spied upon by, the former communist secret police before 1989. However, although the first group of names of those spied upon included the President, prime minister and speakers of both houses of parliament, the issue blew over quickly when it was decided not to include the names of any other parliamentary candidates because the Institute did not want to appear to be influencing the election outcome.⁶¹

Moral-cultural issues also played very little role in the election campaign, other than on the margins. For sure, Law and Justice tried to pitch itself as the most pro-Church party⁶² and the clerical-nationalist broadcaster Radio Maryja, which was extremely influential with Poland’s ‘religious right’ electorate, once again mobilised its supporters to vote for the party.⁶³ Civic Platform tried to finesse this by attempting to counter-mobilise Radio Maryja’s opponents: featuring a notorious recording of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the station’s proprietor, in one of its campaign broadcasts criticising President Kaczynski’s wife for her contacts with feminist organisations and

⁶⁰ See: Markowski, ‘The Polish Elections of 2005’, pp.827-9.

⁶¹ See: Ewa Siedlicka, ‘IPN publikuje swoje katalogi,’ 26 September 2007 at <http://gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,4520959.html> (Viewed on 26 September 2007).

⁶² See, for example: Agnieszka Sopińska and Ewa K. Czaczkowska, ‘PiS zabiega o wsparcie biskupów,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 September 2007.

⁶³ See, for example: Jacek Hołub, ‘Kampania wyborcza PiS w Radiu Maryja,’ 23 September 2007 at <http://miasta.gazetapl/torun/2029020,35582,4514186.html> (Accessed 12 October 2007); and Eliza Olczyk, ‘PiS: jesteśmy ładni, a PO brzydka,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 9 October 2007. The Radio Maryja media empire also included the Trwam (“I persist”) TV station and the ‘Nasz Dziennik’ (“Our Daily”) daily newspaper. Krzemiński has estimated, on the basis of 2001 data, that Radio Maryja listeners comprised up to 15% of the electorate, and frequent listeners 9%. See: Ireneusz Krzemiński, ‘Wybór fundamentalny,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 October 2005.

calling her a witch; implying that Law and Justice was so desperate to retain the Catholic broadcaster's support that it was even prepared to endure these kind of insults on the First Lady.⁶⁴ Civic Platform also tried to associate itself with more 'liberal' members of the Episcopate, such as influential Archbishop of Kraków and former private secretary to John Paul II Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, who agreed to meet Mr Tusk during the final week of the campaign.⁶⁵ However, this was very much a minor theme in the main party campaigns and, as in 2005, the Church hierarchy did not play an active role nor take any official stance in the election.⁶⁶

Secondly, when one examines some of the standard measures used in comparative party politics, this election certainly provides evidence of the consolidation and (relative) stabilisation of the Polish party system. As **Table 4** shows, only four parties and electoral alliances were elected to the new Sejm, the smallest number in any post-1989 election and down from twenty nine in 1991, six in 1993, five in 1997, and six in 2001 and 2005. Moreover, these four parties have now been represented continuously in the Sejm since 2001, so the last two Polish elections have seen no 'new entrants' into the party system. Civic Platform and Law and Justice also consolidated their position as the two largest parties as the 2007 poll saw them obtaining the highest-ever combined share of the vote by the two main parties in any post-1989 election. This figure has increased from 51.13% in 2005 to 73.62% in 2007; the previous record being when Solidarity Electoral Action and the Democratic Left Alliance won 60.96% of the votes in 1997. Similarly, the share of seats won by the two largest parties increased from 62.6% in 2005 to a record 81.52% in 2007.

⁶⁴ See; 'Ojciec Rydzyk w spocie PO,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 15-16 September 2007.

⁶⁵ See: Wojciech Załuska, 'Premiera wspiera brat prezydent, Tusk jedzie do Dziwisa,' 19 October 2007 at <http://gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75478,4591520.html> (Accessed 22 October 2007).

⁶⁶ For interesting, critical analyses of the Catholic Church's role in the 2007 election, see: Tomasz P. Terlikowski, 'Kościół w szponach polityki,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 9 October 2007; and Tomasz P. Terlikowski, 'Kościół wciągnięty w partyjną wojenkę,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 October 2007. Cf: Robert Nęcak, 'Syndrom niewiedzy,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 6 November 2007. Considerations of how strong the link between religiosity and party bases of support was in the 2007 election must await more detailed statistical analysis of voting behaviour not available to the author at the time of writing; although, interestingly, a January 2007 CBOS survey found that support for the Law and Justice party had hardened among those attending Church services more than once a week since 2005, no doubt reflecting the party's almost complete absorption of the 'religious right' electorate. See: CBOS, *Poczucie reprezentatywności partii politycznych*, (Warsaw: CBOS, February 2007), p.9.

Table 4: Party fragmentation in post-1989 Poland

	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005	2007
Number of parties elected to the Sejm	29	6	5	6	6	4
Share of votes won by two largest parties (%)	24.31	35.81	60.96	53.72	51.13	73.62
Share of seats won by two largest parties (%)	25.52	65.87	79.35	61.09	62.60	81.52

Source: Radosław Markowski and Mikołaj Cześniak, 'Polski system partyjny: dekada zmian instytucjonalnych i ich konsekwencje,' in Radosław Markowski (ed.), *System Partyjny i Zachowanie Wyborcze: Dekada Polskich Doświadczeń* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2002), pp.17-47(p.20); and author's calculations.

Thirdly, an important additional factor encouraging party system consolidation and stabilisation is the state party funding regime which has expanded progressively and becoming increasingly important to Polish parties since 1989.⁶⁷ In particular, the role of state party funding in Poland was transformed by amendments to the party and election laws in 2001 that increased both the level and scope of election refunds and state subventions substantially for parties than won more than 3% of the votes. For example, following the 2007 election, Civic Platform will obtain 38 million zloties per annum in subventions, Law and Justice 35.5 million, the parties comprising the Left and Democrats 21.5 million (13.5 million of which will go to the Democratic Left Alliance) and the Peasant Party 14 million.⁶⁸ At the same time, the 2001 law also prevents parties from obtaining funding from any other sources except: membership subscriptions, small individual donations (not exceeding fifteen times the level of the minimum wage), wills, bequests, and interest on savings. Parties are forbidden to engage in business activity, derive income from office rental, sell party bulletins, organise public collections and sell 'bricks' (a form of anonymous campaign donation), or obtain money from foreigners or individuals not living in Poland. This has made state party funding the main source of income for a number of parties which - at a time when Polish political campaigning has been increasingly professionalised, and therefore more costly⁶⁹ - clearly favours 'insiders' and makes it increasingly difficult for new entrants to break into the party 'cartel'; arguably explaining why none have done so since 2001.⁷⁰

So the 2007 election certainly provided evidence of party system consolidation and stabilisation. This prompted some analysts to question assumptions that left-right divisions reflecting West European models would structure Polish party competition.

⁶⁷ For more on the evolution of Polish state party funding see: Marcin Walecki, *Money and Politics in Poland* (Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2005); and Aleks Szczerbiak, 'State Party Funding and Patronage in Post-1989 Poland', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol.22 No.3 (2006), pp. 298-319.

⁶⁸ See: Eliza Olczyk, 'Dostali się do Sejmu, teraz podzielą się pieniędzmi,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 9 November 2007.

⁶⁹ See, for example: Agnieszka Sopińska and Bernadeta Waszkielewicz, 'Kampania wyborcza na bankowy kredyt,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 29-30 September 2007; and Magdalena Lemańska, 'Kampania tania niesłuchanie,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 29 October 2007.

⁷⁰ See, for example: Paweł Śpiewak, 'Partie niczym kartele,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 16-17 December 2006.

Instead, drawing analogies with the USA and Ireland, they predicted that the Polish party system might settle into a pattern of bi-polar competition between the two major centre-right parties, Civic Platform and Law and Justice, representing liberal-conservative and conservative-national blocs. These would provide both the core of the government and the main opposition, with the social democratic centre-left relegated to the status of, at best, a marginal third force.⁷¹ The ‘social-solidaristic’ Law and Justice party would, it was argued, absorb the electoral constituencies likely to be supportive of left-wing socio-economic policies. At the same time, with many of the concerns about excessive Church influence on Poland around which the secular left mobilised in the early 1990s having receded, the social base for a liberal cultural left was felt to be too narrow to sustain a major party in a socially and culturally conservative country like Poland.⁷²

However, while the 2007 election certainly provided strong evidence that both the old ‘post-communist divide’ was passing in to history and of apparent party system consolidation and stabilisation, one should be extremely cautious about drawing too firm conclusions about the future trajectory of Polish politics from this election. In particular, it is certainly far too early to say: what is replacing these old divisions, what the social and ideological bases are of the new divisions that are emerging, and whether we are seeing the emergence of a stable party system based on this new bi-polar divide. Indeed, other evidence suggests that the Polish political scene remains fluid and unstable.

Firstly, levels of electoral volatility are still very high in Poland compared to other European countries.⁷³ Although the level of aggregate electoral volatility calculated according to the so-called ‘Pedersen index’ fell from 38.39% in 2005 (and a massive 49.3% in 2001 when both governing parties actually failed to cross the thresholds for parliamentary representation!) to ‘only’ 24.94% in 2007,⁷⁴ this is still extra-ordinarily high in comparative European terms and, for example, far exceeds the 8.4% registered in West European elections between 1960-89.⁷⁵ Moreover, these aggregate volatility figures of changes in party vote shares could mask even higher levels of individual level electoral volatility: the number of actual voters who switched parties.

⁷¹ See, for example: Bronisław Wildstein, ‘LiD jest skazana na rolę trzeciej partii,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 October 2007; Tomasz Żukowski, ‘Demokraci i republikanie po polsku,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 October 2007; Paweł Śpiewak, ‘Lewica, prawica, gra: Polska scena polityczna po wyborach,’ 17 November 2007 at http://www.dziennik.pl/dziennik/europa/article73606/Lewica_prawica_gra.html (Accessed 28 November 2007); and Piotr Zaremba, ‘Przyczajona lewica czeka na swój czas’, 22 December 2007 at http://www.dziennik.pl/opinie/article100413/Przyczajona_lewica_czeka_na_swoj_czas.html (Accessed 1 January 2008).

⁷² For earlier versions of this argument, see: Igor Janke, ‘Polska bez lewicy?’ 25 April 2006 at <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/wyborcza/2029020,34474,3301309.html> (Accessed 25 April 2006); and Michał Karnowski, ‘Prawdziwie kusząca oferta,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 19 June 2006. Cf: Kinga Dunin, ‘Bez lewicy ani rusz,’ 13 May 2006 at <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/wyborcza/2029020,34474,3339331.html> (Accessed 15 May 2006).

⁷³ See, for example: Radosław Markowski, ‘Polak zdradza za kotarą,’ *Polityka*, 1 September 2007.

⁷⁴ Figures for 2001 and 2005 are from: Markowski, ‘The Polish Elections of 2005’, p.815. The 2007 figure is based on the author’s calculations.

⁷⁵ See: Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.182

Markowski found that individual level volatility in the 2005 election was actually 62.64% and that in no post-1989 election has it ever fallen below 55.94%.⁷⁶

Secondly, for sure, as **Table 2** shows, 2007 saw a substantial increase in election turnout from only 40.6% in 2005 to 53.9%, a post-1989 high for a Polish parliamentary election. This was probably due to the polarised nature of the electoral contest: comparative studies show that closeness of the race is the key driver in determining differences in the levels of electoral turnout within countries.⁷⁷ Moreover, as **Table 2** also shows, the turnout in post-1989 Polish presidential elections has always been significantly higher than for parliamentary elections (even when they were not closely contested as in 2000) so the increasingly personalised nature of Polish election contests – in this case due, in large part, thanks to the importance of the TV debates in party campaigning – was also likely to have encouraged higher turnout. Nonetheless, at only 53.9% turnout in Polish parliamentary elections remains incredibly low by European standards. For example, Jungerstam-Mulders' survey of parliamentary election turnout in the eight post-communist states that joined the EU in 2004 found an average of 64.9% in the elections held in 1994-2003, while the figure for the fifteen 'older' member states over the same period was 76.5%.⁷⁸ This, together with the continuing high levels of electoral volatility, suggests that most Poles still cannot locate themselves properly in the Polish party system and that the Polish electorate remains 'open' and potentially available.

Thirdly, one of the main factors accounting for why the Polish electorate remains so relatively 'open' and fluid, is that Polish parties appear to have extremely weak links with their voters. This can be observed in a number of ways. According to comparative data produced by Mair and van Biezen, Poland had the lowest level of party membership at the end of the 1990s among the twenty countries surveyed, at only 1.15% as a percentage of the electorate (326,500) compared with the average of 5%.⁷⁹ Similarly, according to the 1999-2000 European Values Survey party membership in Poland was the lowest in Europe standing at only 0.7% of the population.⁸⁰ Low membership levels stemmed both from the fact that Polish parties have made few attempts to develop organic links with and 'encapsulate' their supporters, but also because Poles have extremely negative attitudes towards parties so that even if party strategists actively sought to recruit substantially more members their prospects for success would be slim.⁸¹ For example, Eurobarometer data from autumn 2006 showed that only 7% of Poles expressed trust in political parties, the

⁷⁶ See: Markowski, 'The Polish Elections of 2005,' p.815. Firmer judgements on the level of individual level volatility in 2007 must await statistical analysis of election survey data, not available to the author at the time of writing, although it is likely to be extremely high once again.

⁷⁷ See: Mark N. Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷⁸ See: Susanne Jungerstam-Mulders, 'Parties and Party Systems in Post-Communist EU Member states: Comparative Aspects,' in Susanne Jungerstam-Mulders (ed.) *Post-Communist EU Member States: Parties and Party Systems* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp.1-22 (p.14).

⁷⁹ See: Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen, 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies,' *Party Politics*, Vol.7 No.1 (2001), pp.5-21 (p.9).

⁸⁰ See: Loek Halman, *The European Values Survey: A Third Wave* at http://spitswww.uvt.nl/web/fsw/evs/documents/EVS_SourceBook.pdf, 2001 (Accessed 29 September 2004).

⁸¹ See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'The new Polish parties as membership organizations,' *Contemporary Politics*, Vol 7 No 1 (2001), pp.57-69.

lowest of any EU member state and compared with an average of 17%.⁸² Moreover, survey evidence also suggests that levels of party identification in Poland have actually fallen in recent years. An April 2007 CBOS survey found that the number of respondents who said that there was a political party that they felt close to had fallen from 57% in March 1998 to only 33%. At the same time, the number who said that there was no party that they identified with at all increased from 27% to 54%.⁸³ These low levels of institutionalisation and weak nature of the links with their supporters, therefore, makes the parties themselves very unstable, thereby increasing the possibility of further re-alignments within the Polish party system.

Fourthly, for sure the Polish state party funding regime does discriminate in favour of existing parties. However, this does not mean that there is no scope at all for new entrants to emerge, particularly those that originate within existing parliamentary parties. These enjoy automatic access to 'indirect' state party funding in the form of the wide range of resources available to individual parliamentarians - notably the salaries, expenses and material resources provided the by the Sejm and Senate Chancelleries to help them perform their parliamentary duties, at both national and constituency level. These are, in many ways, as important to Polish parties as the election refunds and subventions paid directly to the party central offices.⁸⁴ Indeed, in one sense, the prospect of state party funding may have actually reduced barriers to party system entry in Poland as newly formed parties with high opinion poll ratings could take out bank loans using the prospect of the election refunds and subventions that will be paid to them in the future as collateral. On the other hand, parties that break the funding rules or fail to submit accurate annual financial statements or accounts of their election expenses face reductions in their refunds and donations. A good election result is, therefore, no guarantee in itself of future financial security and even the parties within the current parliament cannot feel completely comfortable about their continued access to state funding. In the 2001-5 parliament, for example, the Peasant Party lost its entire subventions, and Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families had proportions of there's deducted by the State Election Commission, to due irregularities in party accounts.⁸⁵ As noted above, had an early parliamentary election not been held in 2007 then the Democratic Left Alliance would have lost its entire subvention for the remainder of 2005-9 parliament; as would Law and Justice had its appeal against the State Electoral Commission not been successful.

So, all this makes the Polish party system very brittle and vulnerable to further shocks and possible party re-alignments. What, then, are the likely sources of structural weakness within the party system that could lead to possible party re-alignment? In the short to medium-term, the most likely source of re-configuration within the Polish party system is actually on the centre-right where a new political grouping could be formed comprising disillusioned Civic Platform, Law and Justice and non-aligned conservatives, coalescing around figures such as Mr Rokita and Mr Markinkiewicz, (who remains extremely popular); perhaps using an autumn 2010 presidential bid as a

⁸² See: European Commission, *Eurobarometr 66. Raport Krajowy: Polska*. (Brussels: European Commission, 1996), p.9.

⁸³ See: CBOS, *Partie bliźsze i dalsze – identyfikacje partyjne Polaków*, (Warsaw: CBOS, May 2007), p.2.

⁸⁴ See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Testing Party Models in East-Central Europe: Local Party Organization in Post-communist Poland,' *Party Politics*, Vol.5 No.4 (1999), pp.525-537.

⁸⁵ See: Szczerbiak, 'State Party Funding and Patronage in Post-1989 Poland', pp.304-7.

springboard.⁸⁶ Given that electoral defeat often triggers centrifugal forces within parties, in the short term the most obvious source of political defections is likely to be the Law and Justice party. However, in the longer-term it may – ironically - actually be Civic Platform that is the more vulnerable to implosion, particularly if the new government begins to encounter serious difficulties and the party loses popular support.

For sure, there are some reasons to expect why, in the short term at least, a Civic Platform-Peasant Party coalition would bring some stability to the Polish political scene.⁸⁷ The two parties fought the 2006 local elections as an electoral bloc and worked together successfully in running twelve of Poland's sixteen regional councils. The Peasant Party was always primarily an office-seeking party with a clearly defined core electorate and its main priorities being to secure state appointments for its supporters and 'delivering' for the agricultural sector and rural communities, making it a fairly pragmatic negotiating partner and narrowing the field of potential policy conflicts. Moreover, as **Table 3** shows, the fact that, unlike previous Polish coalitions, the two parties had rather different core electoral constituencies, with the Civic Platform primarily an urban party, also meant that they would not be competing directly for the same voters. However, the new government's longer-term prospects appear more uncertain. Civic Platform mobilised a very broad coalition of voters with somewhat different expectations united only in their dislike of the outgoing government and, as noted above, in order to make itself electable the party also made very bold pledges. So it entered office with both a disparate base of electoral support and very high expectations that would be extremely difficult for it to fulfil.⁸⁸ Moreover, the Peasant Party's previous record in government suggests that it could be a difficult and unpredictable coalition partner.⁸⁹ This is particularly true when the party is defending the privileges of its core rural-agricultural constituency, although experience suggests that it could also use other issues to differentiate itself from the main governing party when the coalitions of which it is a member began to lose popular support. Moreover, in the Law and Justice party, the new government faces a sizeable and relentlessly hostile parliamentary opposition backed by the President. Since his election in 2005, Lech Kaczyński has been a 'partisan President', engaging actively to support the party interests of Law and Justice, and is likely to intervene in political disputes to undermine the Civic Platform-Peasant Party government.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ For example, a GfK Polonia for 'Rzeczpospolita' published in February 2007 found that 28% of voters would support such a hypothetical party compared with 26% who would vote for Civic Platform and 18% for Law and Justice. See: 'Nowa partia mogłaby wygrać', *Rzeczpospolita*, 3-4 February 2007.

⁸⁷ See, for example: Krystyna Naszkowska, 'PSL się ustatkowało,' 30 October 2007 at <http://gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75515,4624105.html> (Viewed on 31 October 2007).

⁸⁸ See: Rafał A. Ziemkiewicz, 'Czy Tuskwowi się uda?' *Rzeczpospolita*, 27-28 October 2007.

⁸⁹ See: Marek Migalski, 'Nowy Pawlak, stare PSL,' *Rzeczpospolita*, 25 October 2007.

⁹⁰ For good analyses see, for example: Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władyka, 'W cieniu wielkiego brata,' *Polityka*, 8 April 2006; and Janina Paradowska, 'Rok nie wyrok,' *Polityka*, 4 November 2006. The President's constitutional powers are very limited but he can frustrate the new government, particularly through his ability to veto legislation that requires a 60% majority (276 votes) in parliament to be over-turned. Although Law and Justice does not have enough parliamentary votes on its own to form a 'blocking minority', Civic Platform and the Peasant Party only have 240 seats between them, so require the support of the Left and Democrats to over-turn a presidential veto. This cannot be taken for granted given that the centre-left is looking to differentiate itself from the new government in order to revive its electoral fortunes.

At the same time, the long-term, future cohesion of both Civic Platform and Law and Justice depends on their ability to frame broad, integrative ideological narratives. Such narratives play a crucial role in holding together, and providing a sustainable basis for the development of, durable, diverse and heterogeneous political formations, especially when they encounter periods of political crisis. They thereby help to frame political action, give cohesion and identity to political organisations, and socialise incoming leadership elites.⁹¹ However, there are reasons for questioning whether such narratives exist in the case of both of these parties and – surprisingly, given the scale of its electoral success - this is (arguably) particularly true in the case of Civic Platform. For sure, both parties have, to some extent, attempted to develop more complex ideological narratives centring on the nature of post-communist transformation. Although it faces a difficult challenge of coping with electoral defeat and party renewal, and however distorted and cynical its critics might argue that it is, Law and Justice has attempted to develop a powerful and coherent conservative-national project of moral and political renewal based on the creation of a ‘Fourth Republic’.⁹² Civic Platform, by contrast, has relatively weak ideological underpinnings. For sure, it has attempted to espouse a modernising form of pro-market, right-wing liberalism incorporating a moderate form of social conservatism.⁹³ However, more recently, and particularly during the 2007 election, it seems self-consciously to have functioned more as a ‘catch-all’ party of opposition to conservative nationalism, downplaying its economic liberalism to ‘borrow’ many potential centre-left voters prepared to vote for it as the most effective way of removing the Law and Justice party from office.

Moreover, although the 2007 result suggests that any process of renewal is likely to take much longer than many anticipated it is also far too early to write off the Polish centre-left as a potentially significant electoral force, particularly given the plebiscitary nature of this election as, in effect, a referendum on a controversial and polarising government, rather than a positive mobilisation for the liberal-conservative right. For example, an August-September 2007 CBOS survey found that there was clearly a sizeable number of voters floating between the centre-left and Civic Platform, with as many as 47% of Left and Democrats voters saying said that they vote for Mr Tusk’s party as their second preference and 26% of Civic Platform voters putting the Left and Democrats as their second choice.⁹⁴ Consequently, it was not surprising when, as exit poll data shows, in the event 38.5% of those voters who supported the parties that comprised the Left and Democrats in 2005 actually switched to Civic Platform in 2007.⁹⁵ With Civic Platform having ‘borrowed’ a substantial number of potential centre-left voters anxious to remove the Law and Justice party from office at almost any cost and prepared to vote for a liberal-conservative party to achieve this objective, this election may have simply been a ‘one off’. Civic Platform could find it

⁹¹ See: Sean Hanley, Aleks Szczerbiak, Tim Haughton and Brigid Fowler, ‘Sticking Together: Explaining Comparative Centre-Right Party Success in Post-communist Central and Eastern Europe,’ *Party Politics* (forthcoming).

⁹² See, for example: Michał Karnowski, ‘Zmiana reguł, nie tylko władzy,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 January 2006.

⁹³ See, for example: Lewandowski, ‘Platforma Obywatelska’.

⁹⁴ See: CBOS, *Siła preferencji politycznych, alternatywy wyborcze i elektoraty negatywne*, p.6.

⁹⁵ See: Pacewicz, ‘Skąd się wzięło tyle wyborców?’

extremely difficult to hold on to and ‘absorb’ these voters in the long run.⁹⁶ Moreover, notwithstanding the relatively high levels of socio-cultural conservatism among Poles, there is every chance that moral-cultural issues could re-surface as a major line of political divisions within Polish politics, particularly given that the potential influence of the Church on public life remains a source of concern for many voters, even practising Catholics. It is also far from inconceivable that the centre-left could re-capture the votes of less well-off socio-economic constituencies.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Although the Law and Justice party increased both its share of the votes and parliamentary representation, it finished well behind Civic Platform in the snap 2007 parliamentary election. The scale of the latter’s victory, on a relatively high turnout, came as a surprise as the two main parties were evenly matched for most of the campaign. The election is best understood as a plebiscite on a polarising and controversial government. Civic Platform, therefore, won because it was able to persuade Poles that voting for it was the most effective way of removing a government that most of them opposed. However, although it won the election decisively, Civic Platform fell short of an overall majority and had to form a coalition government with the Peasant Party.

As far as the long-term trajectory of Polish politics is concerned, the 2007 election indicates that the ‘post-communist divide’ that dominated and provided a structural order to the Polish political scene during the 1990s is passing into history. The election result certainly means a more consolidated Polish party system with the smallest number of parties elected to the Sejm and the two largest parties winning the largest combined share of the vote in any post-1989 election. At the same, the Polish state party funding regime seems to have re-inforced the position of the existing party ‘cartel’ and blocked the emergence of any new entrants into the party system since 2001. With the collapse in support for the radical parties and continued marginalisation of the centre-left, the 2007 election appears to have confirmed the electoral hegemony of the Polish centre-right, raising the possibility that the Polish party system may now polarise around the two big centre-right groupings with the confinement of the left to the status of a minor actor in Polish politics.

However, in spite of this, Polish politics are still in flux and it is far too early to say whether we are seeing the emergence of a stable party system based on this new bipolar divide. In comparative European terms, Poland still has very high levels of electoral volatility and very low electoral turnout, suggesting that most Poles still cannot locate themselves in the party system and that the electorate remains an ‘open’ one. Together with low levels of party institutionalisation and the extremely weak nature of the links between parties and their supporters, which means that Polish parties are unstable constructs, this makes further party re-alignments a distinct possibility. In the short to medium-term, the most likely source of re-configuration

⁹⁶ See: Jacek Raciborski, ‘Dogrywka ciekawsza od meczu,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 October 2007; Janusz Czapiński, ‘Wyborcy PiS zostali w domu,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 23 October 2007; and Magdalena Środa, ‘Koniec politycznego barbażyństwa,’ *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 October 2007.

⁹⁷ See: Środa, ‘Koniec politycznego barbażyństwa’; and Tomasz Lis, ‘Lewicowe eldorado,’ 17 December 2007 at <http://gazetawyborcza.pl/gazetawyborcza/2029020,75515,4768429.html> (Accessed 1 January 2008).

within the Polish party system is actually on the centre-right where a new political grouping could be formed comprising disillusioned Civic Platform, Law and Justice and non-aligned conservatives. Ironically, it is Civic Platform that might prove to be the most vulnerable given that it is likely to face a difficult time in government and lacks the kind of integrative ideological narrative needed to hold it together during periods of political crisis. It is also far too early to write off the Polish left as a significant electoral force. Civic Platform may have 'borrowed' a substantial number of potential centre-left voters at this election who were anxious to remove the Law and Justice party from office at almost any cost and, given that it remains, in essence, a centre-right, liberal-conservative party, it will find it difficult to hold on to and 'absorb' these voters in the long run.

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