

Polish regional elections point to growing political instability

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The Polish regional elections, which included elections to the regional assemblies and mayoral races in major cities, resulted in a setback for both the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) and the opposition bloc “Civic Coalition” (Koalicja Obywatelska).

With about 53 percent, voter participation was the its highest in any regional election since 1989.

After a campaign that heavily promoted Polish nationalism and anti-German sentiments, PiS won 32.3 percent of the votes to regional assemblies. This is significantly higher than in the regional elections four years ago, when PiS won only 26.9 percent. However, it fell far short of the expected 40 percent. It also represented a loss of over 5 percent of votes compared to the parliamentary elections of 2015 when the ruling party scored 37.6 percent and won a majority in the parliament. With a similar outcome in the upcoming 2019 parliamentary elections, PiS would be unable to maintain its parliamentary majority, despite widespread distrust and hatred of the opposition.

The opposition bloc Koalicja Obywatelska (KO), which included the former ruling PO, the most openly pro-business Nowoczesna (Modern) and the pseudo-left Razem (Together), received only 26.7 percent of the votes to the regional assemblies. This compares to 26.29 percent that the PO received on its own in the elections four years ago. Before Sunday’s election, the PO had held a majority in 15 out of the country’s 16 provincial governments.

The election result is an indication of a broad alienation of masses of working people from the so-called liberal opposition to the PiS government and the protest movement it has led in 2015-2016, which has focused almost exclusively on advocating a stronger orientation toward the European Union and Germany.

The right-wing peasant party PSL was the only party

that made significant gains and received about 17 percent of the votes, most of them in rural regions. (Some 40 percent of Poland’s 38 million inhabitants live in the countryside.) It is expected that through alliances with the PSL, the liberal opposition will be able to maintain control over most regional assemblies.

KO candidates won the mayoral races in most major cities, including Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław and Poznań. The most important mayoral race was in Warsaw, the capital city, which has been the center of the opposition-led protest movement of 2015-2016, which was dominated by sections of the country’s ruling and upper middle class that are concerned about PiS’s foreign policy and see its anti-democratic policies as an infringement upon their own ability to direct Poland’s politics. The KO candidate, Rafał Trzaskowski, who is a former official of PO-led governments and a close ally of the former EU council president Donald Tusk, ran on an aggressively pro-EU platform and won in the first round with over 50 percent of the votes.

In Łódź, the KO’s candidate, Hanna Zdanowska, also won in the first round with over 70 percent of the votes.

Contributing to what has been generally interpreted as an electoral setback for PiS was an audiotape scandal involving Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. In the tapes from 2013, which were released only a few weeks before the election by *Onet.pl*, Morawiecki, who was then the head of the Polish branch of Santander Bank, made openly anti-Semitic remarks, complaining about “greedy” and rich “Americans, Jews, Germans, Englishmen, and Swiss” who run hedge funds. The tapes also show Morawiecki’s close and long-standing ties to leading PiS politicians.

Similar tapes, all of which were recorded at an elite Warsaw Restaurant, were part of a corruption scandal that helped bring down the PO government in 2015.

Morawiecki, who was named prime minister last December, also provoked a scandal in February when he claimed that there were “Jewish collaborators” in the Holocaust.

Under PiS, the Polish government has become one of the most right-wing in all of Europe. Anti-semitism, virulent racism and extreme militarism are promoted on an official level and throughout the government-controlled media. Earlier this year, government passed a law, outlawing writings about the involvement of Polish far-right nationalists and anti-Semites in the Holocaust (see: “Polish government seeks to criminalize mention of Polish crimes during the Holocaust”) PiS has also de facto created an authoritarian regime and a massive, paramilitary army.

of far-right forces that is under the direct control of the fascistic defense minister Antoni Macierewicz.

However, while the election results indicate that there is growing opposition to the promotion of far-right nationalism, anti-Semitism, and militarism under PiS, the KO did its best not to appeal to this opposition. None of these issues were even mentioned in its election program. Instead, the KO presented a program of vague phrases about “freedom, equality, dignity and solidarity” and stressed the significance of decentralization and greater powers for the local governments. All of this was combined with a few hollow promises about investments in local infrastructure and social welfare programs.

The pseudo-left Razem (Together), which is in an alliance with the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 of Yanis Varoufakis, joined the Coalition with the aim of providing the widely hated liberal opposition with a left-wing cover. Completely glossing over both the right-wing record of PO and Nowoczesna (a party created by a former World Bank economist) and the question of Poland’s foreign policy orientation, which lies at the heart of much of the current conflict between the opposition and the government, Barbara Nowacka from Razem said in an interview with the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*: “The [electoral] defeat of PiS is the basis for reconstructing democracy in Poland. And this is the basis for creating a just state and one that takes care of the weakest, and helps them to function in a dignified manner in society.”

This line is fraudulent, reactionary and dangerous. Not only did the social austerity under the PO

contribute mightily to the rise of PiS. More than that, on all the most fundamental questions for the working class—the question of war and austerity—the divisions between PO and PiS are of a tactical, not a fundamental nature.

Under both the PO and PiS, the Polish ruling class has worked to transform Poland into a stronghold for NATO’s war preparations against Russia. PiS’s efforts to erect a full-blown authoritarian state are primarily aimed at preparing for war and a violent suppression of working class opposition.

In yet another indicator of the advanced stage of war preparations, the Polish President Andrzej Duda declared in an interview this month that a possible permanent US military base in Poland was effectively a done deal. In late September, a spokesman for Duda announced that Warsaw will spend some \$2 billion to build infrastructure for American soldiers in Poland, including “housing, educational facilities, medical facilities.”

The liberal opposition does not oppose these war preparations. However, in contrast to PiS, the PO advocates a military build-up in alliance with the EU and especially Germany, whereas PiS fears German hegemony in Europe and seeks to build a US-supported alliance of far-right regimes throughout Eastern Europe that would be directed against both Russia and Germany. The rapidly growing tensions between US imperialism and the EU, and particularly German imperialism, have dramatically exacerbated these conflicts in Poland’s ruling elites, which have been historically torn over the question of what imperialist power they should align themselves with.

The situation in Poland is a sharp expression of the dangers and political dead-end facing workers in Europe within the framework of the existing bourgeois political establishment. The only way to prepare it for the fight against the far-right and the danger of war is the fight for an independent socialist program and the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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