



How the democratic opposition defeated the populists in power in 2023 Polish Elections

Dr Jacek Kucharczyk

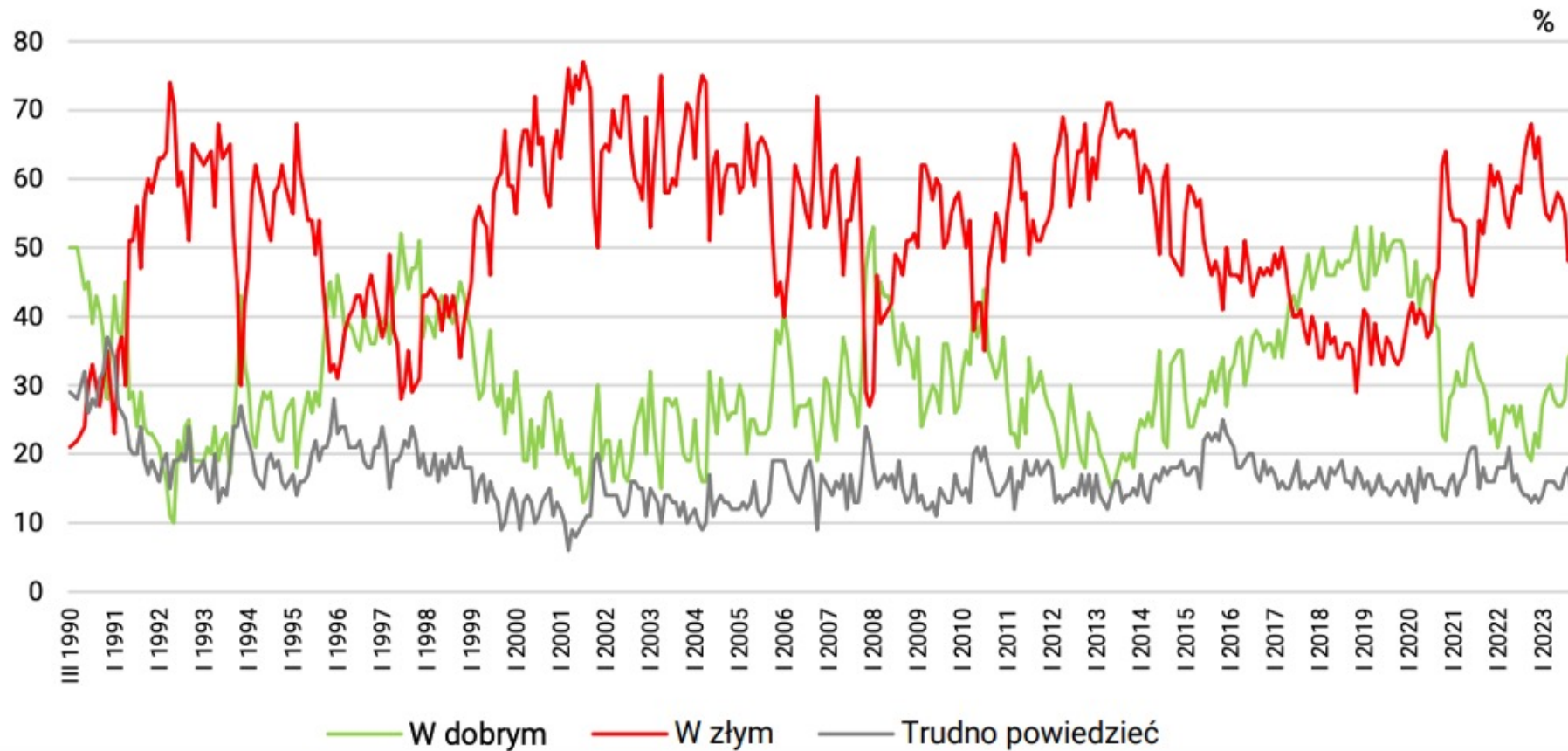


Key points:

- The public mood
- The playing field (electoral system, state resources public media, church and violence)
- The campaign narratives
- Opposition's strategies
- The role of civil society
- The results (Sejm, Senate, Referendum)
- Old vs young
- Women's vote



Public mood: generally speaking, would you say that the country is going in the right or in the wrong direction?

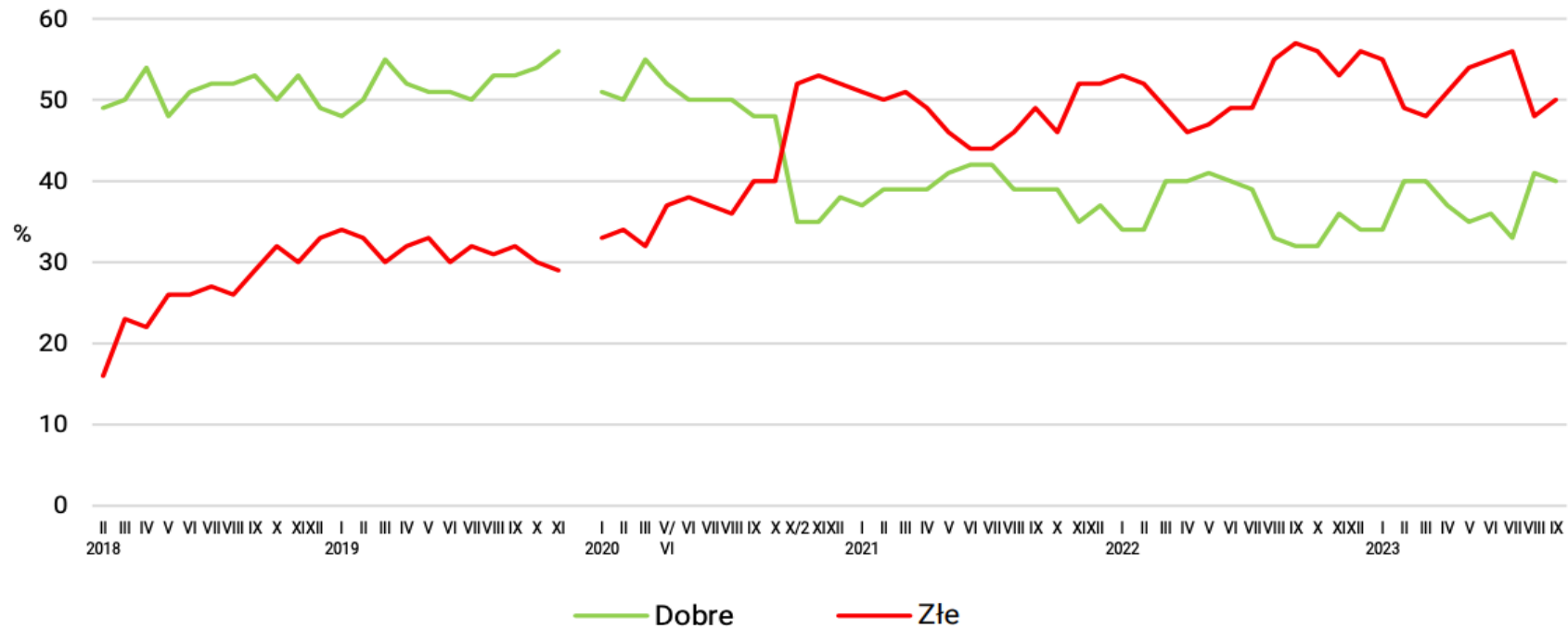




Morawiecki's government ratings

CBOS

RYS. 2. Oceny wyników działalności rządu





The causes of public discontent

- Costs of living crisis
- Democratic backsliding and restrictions on civic rights, especially reproductive rights
- Stagnating salaries in public sector (teachers, civil service, nurses etc)
- Deterioration of public services (esp. healthcare, but also access to justice)
- Cronyism and corruption
- Government spending focused on its electorate (senior citizens, rural areas), neglecting young people and professionals
- Attacks against the EU, xenophobia and fuelling of nationalism, conflicts with other nations
- Political violence used or encouraged by the government



The (tilted) playing field

- The electoral administration largely under government's political control
- Unfair assignation of mandates to electoral districts
- Public media turned into party mouthpiece, demonizing opposition as serving foreign and minority interests
- Opposition politicians and activists were under surveillance (Pegasus)
- Administrative resources used for political campaigning
- State-controlled companies could spend freely on political advertising because of the referendum organized on the election day
- Independent private media attacked with SLAPPs and deprived of government advertising
- Generous funding of GONGOs and defunding of genuine civil society organizations
- Support of the Catholic church



Campaign narratives

- Both sides said the stakes of these elections were unusually high: national independence vs democracy.
- Democratic opposition: the elections are the chance to change the authoritarian government through democratic means. If re-elected, PiS would crush the resistance of the judges and subjugate the remaining independent media, academia and civil society.
- PiS: If we lose, Poland will lose independence, surrendering its interests to those of Berlin and Brussels
- The high emotions translated themselves into record high electoral turnout



Opposition strategies

- Tap into public mood and exploit the causes of discontent
- NO single opposition list but the three democratic groupings clearly declared that they would seek to form a coalition government and they would not enter a coalition with PiS
- Focus on government corruption and cronyism
- Speaking of restoring democracy but also offering a broad program for different social groups
- Organizing large protests marches on democracy but also reproductive rights
- Disarm PiS discourse on migration and security
- Not falling into patriotism versus cosmopolitanism trap



The role of civil society

- Protests and petitions against democratic backsliding and civic rights restrictions
- Educating the public about the threats to electoral integrity, organizing different election monitoring actions, including independent exit poll
- Campaigning for oppositional unity (electoral lists and programme)
- Pro-turnout campaigns focused on women and the youth
- Reaching out to international civil society, media and institutions

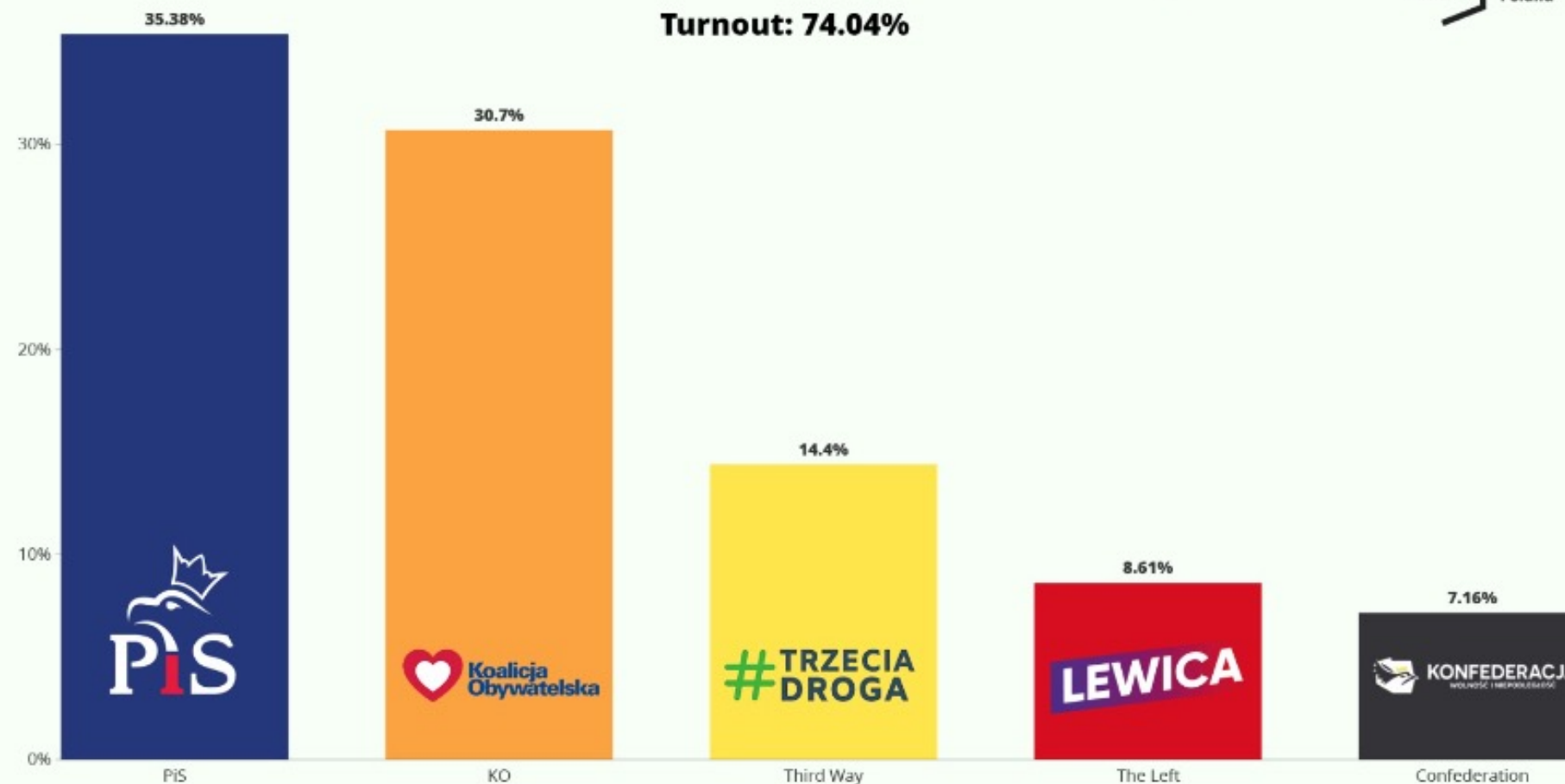




Official results from 2023 Polish parliamentary election



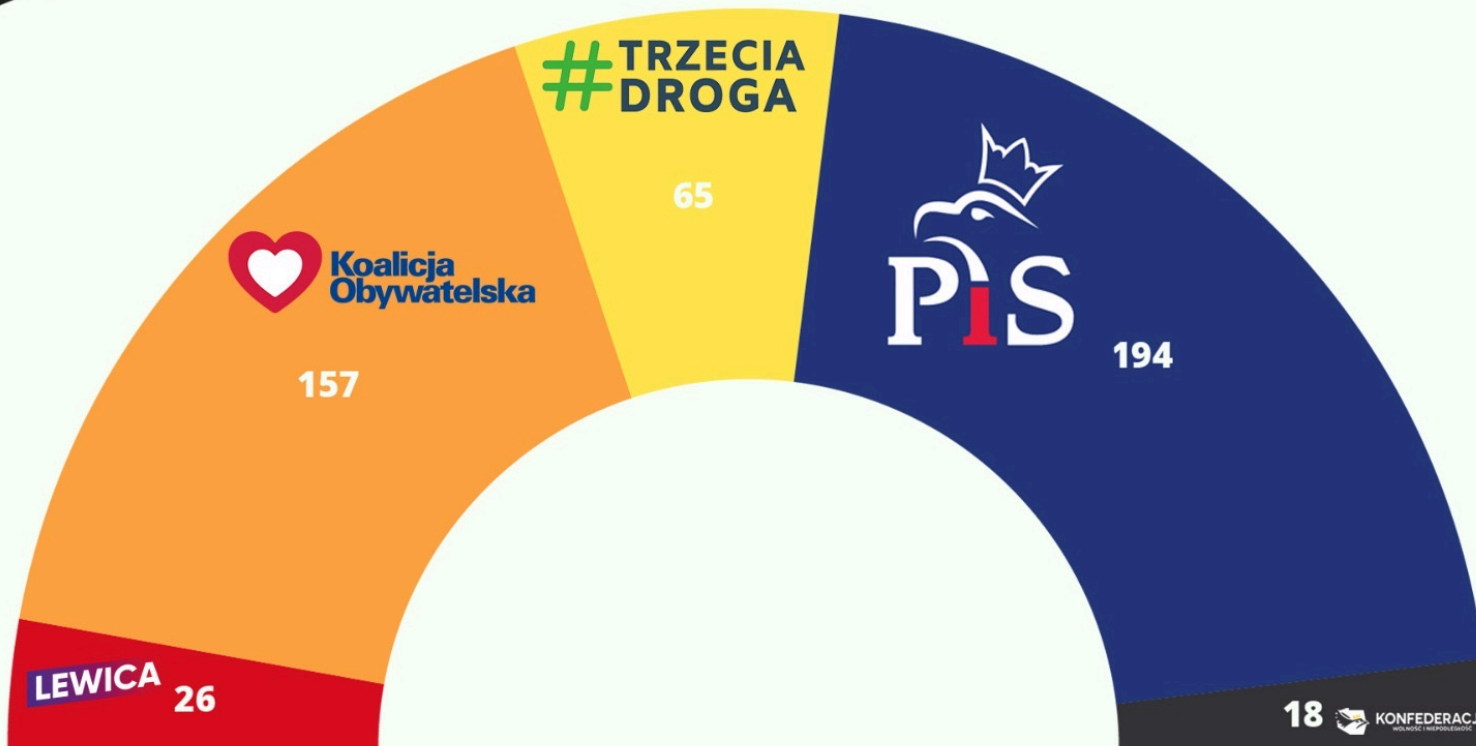
Turnout: 74.04%



Source: PKW

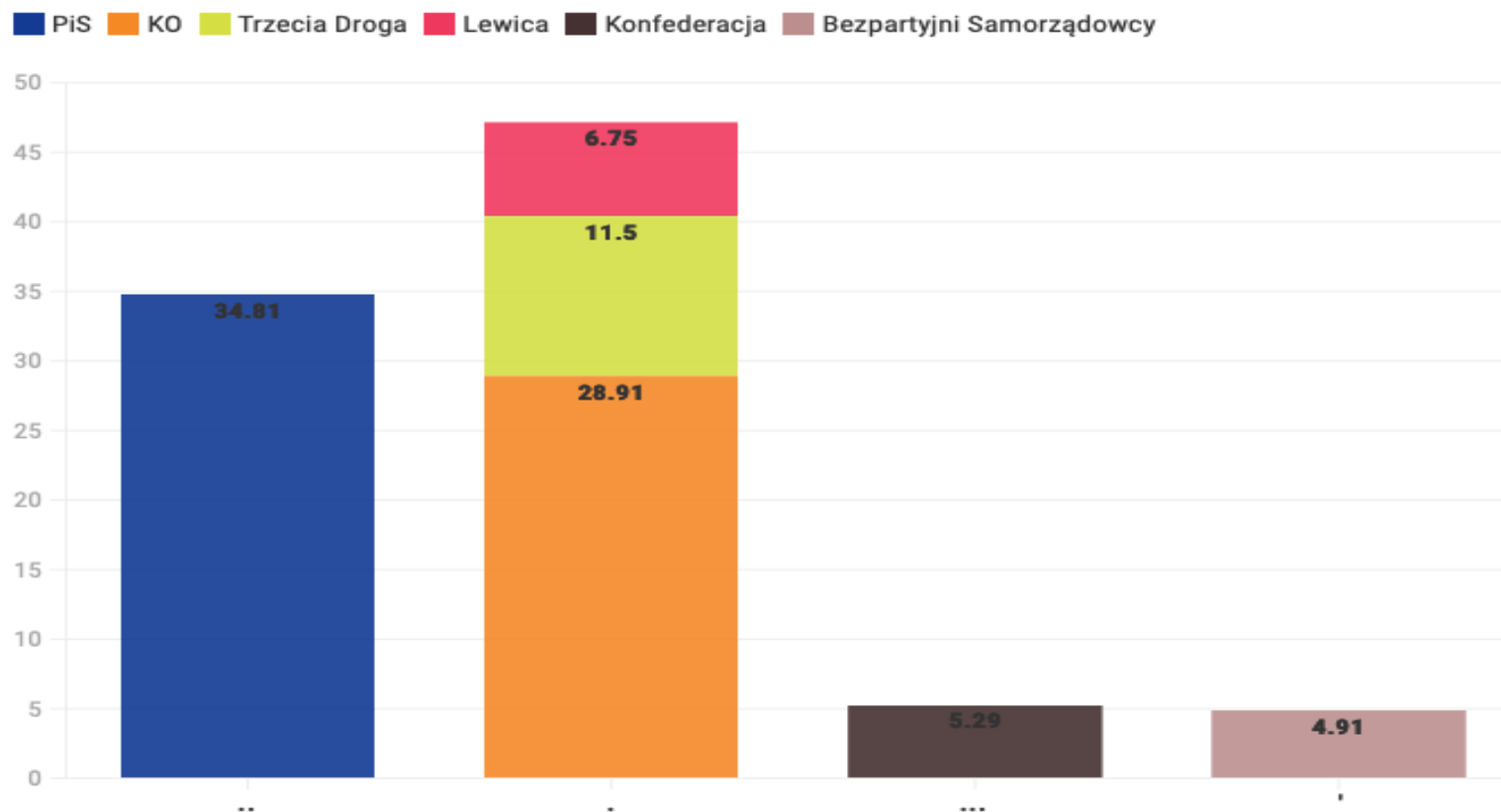


Distribution of seats in the Sejm, the lower house of Poland's parliament



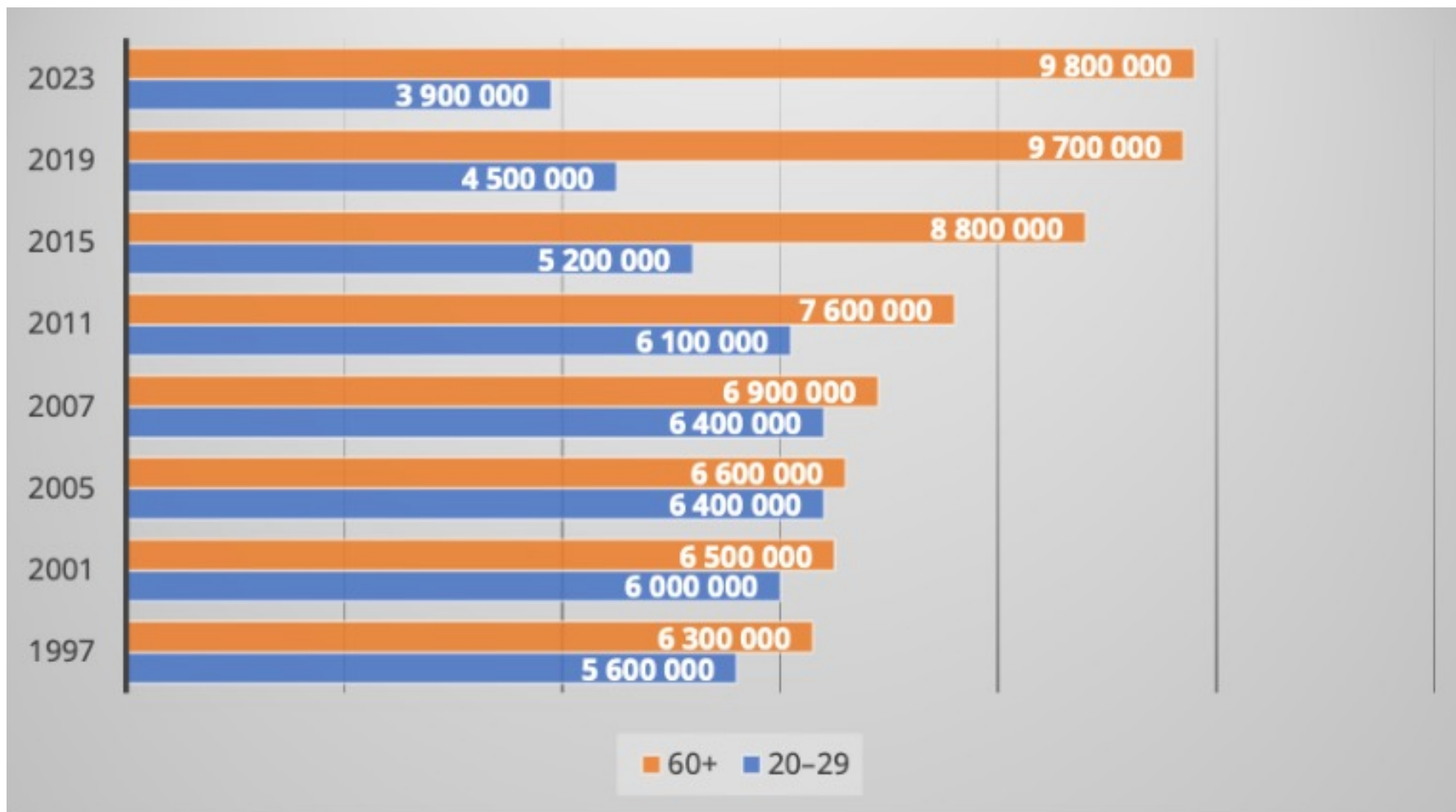


2023 election results for the Senate (percentage of votes cast)



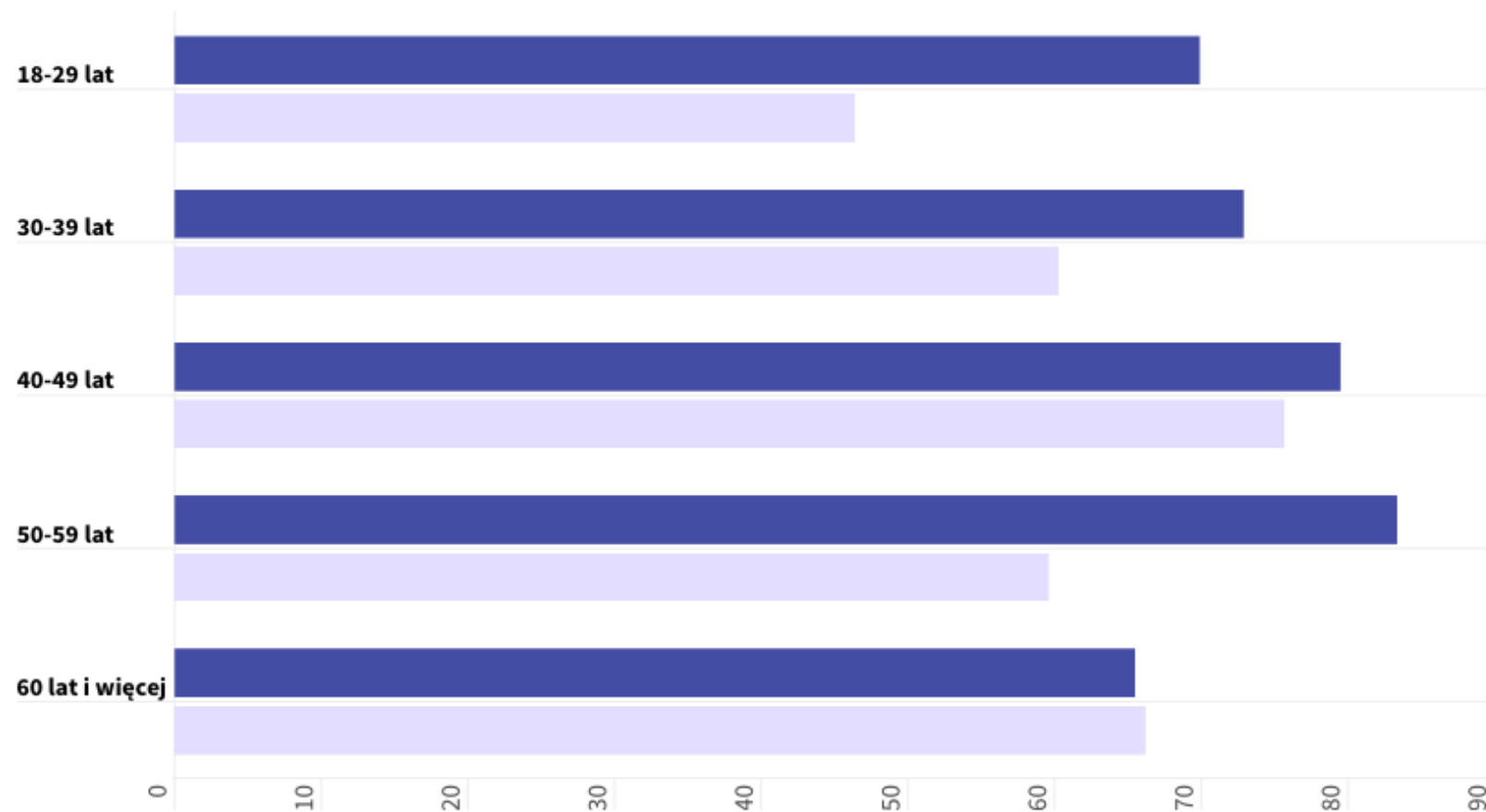


Demography – proportion of younger and older voters





Electoral turnout among different age groups in 2019 and 2023

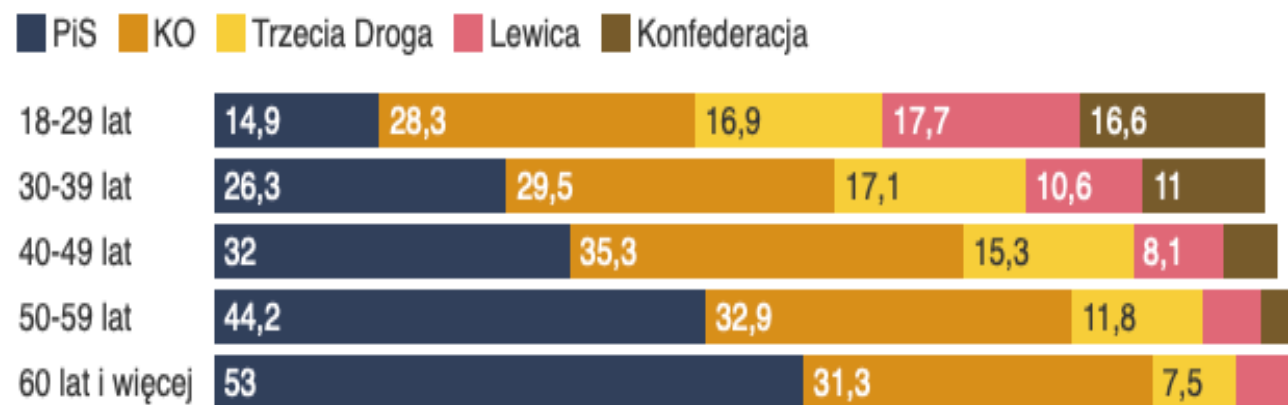


Źródło: Ipsos dla TVN24, badanie exit poll



Voting results by age

Wybory 2023. Jak głosowali wyborcy w różnym wieku



Uwzględniliśmy tylko partie, które przekroczyły próg wyborczy

Wykres: Danuta Pawłowska, BIQdata.wyborcza.pl • Źródło: IPSOS, badanie exit poll dla TVN24

The percentage of women on electoral lists

Odsetek kobiet na listach wyborczych

do Sejmu w 2023 roku

49,6%

Nowa
Lewica

47,8%

KO

41,2%

Trzecia
Droga

40,4%

PiS

39,9%

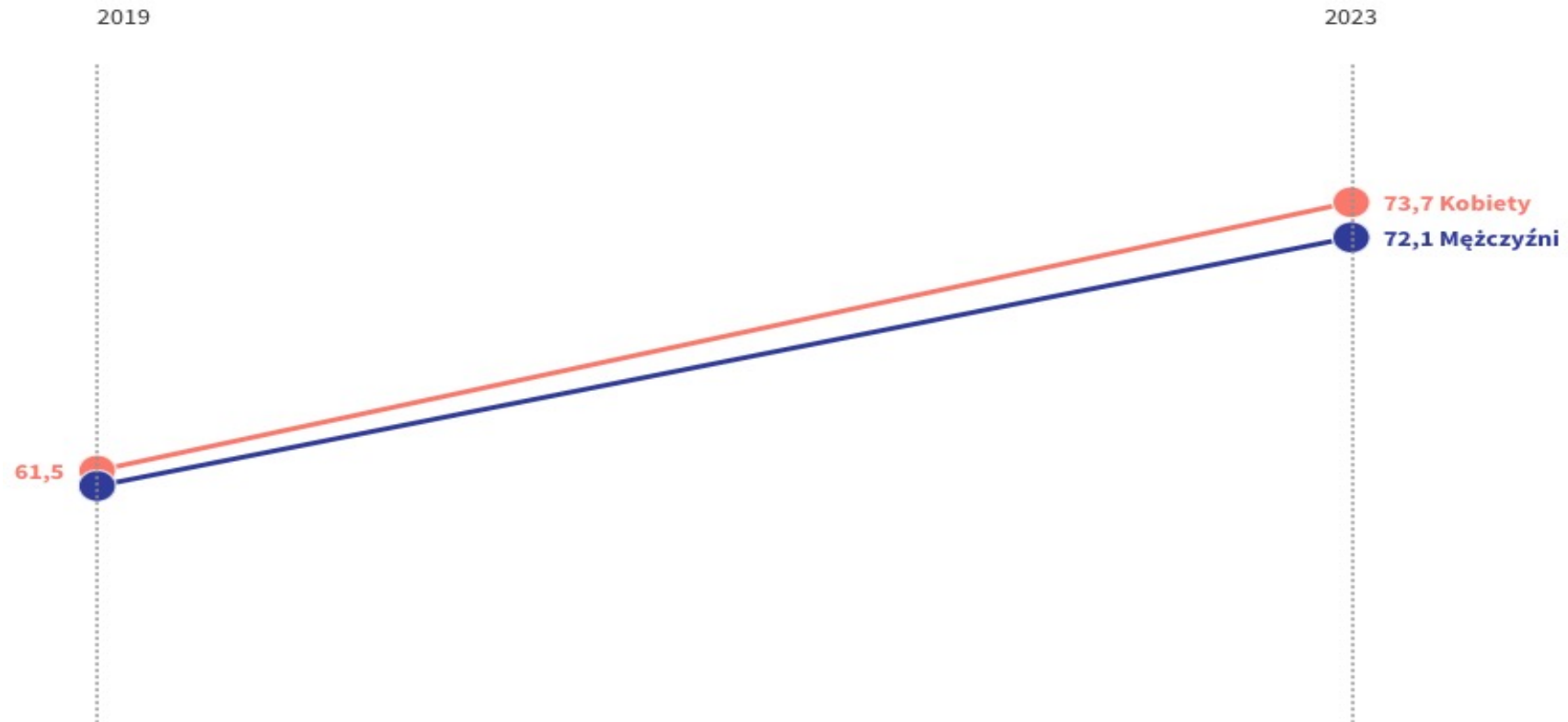
Konfederacja

43,8%

Ogółem



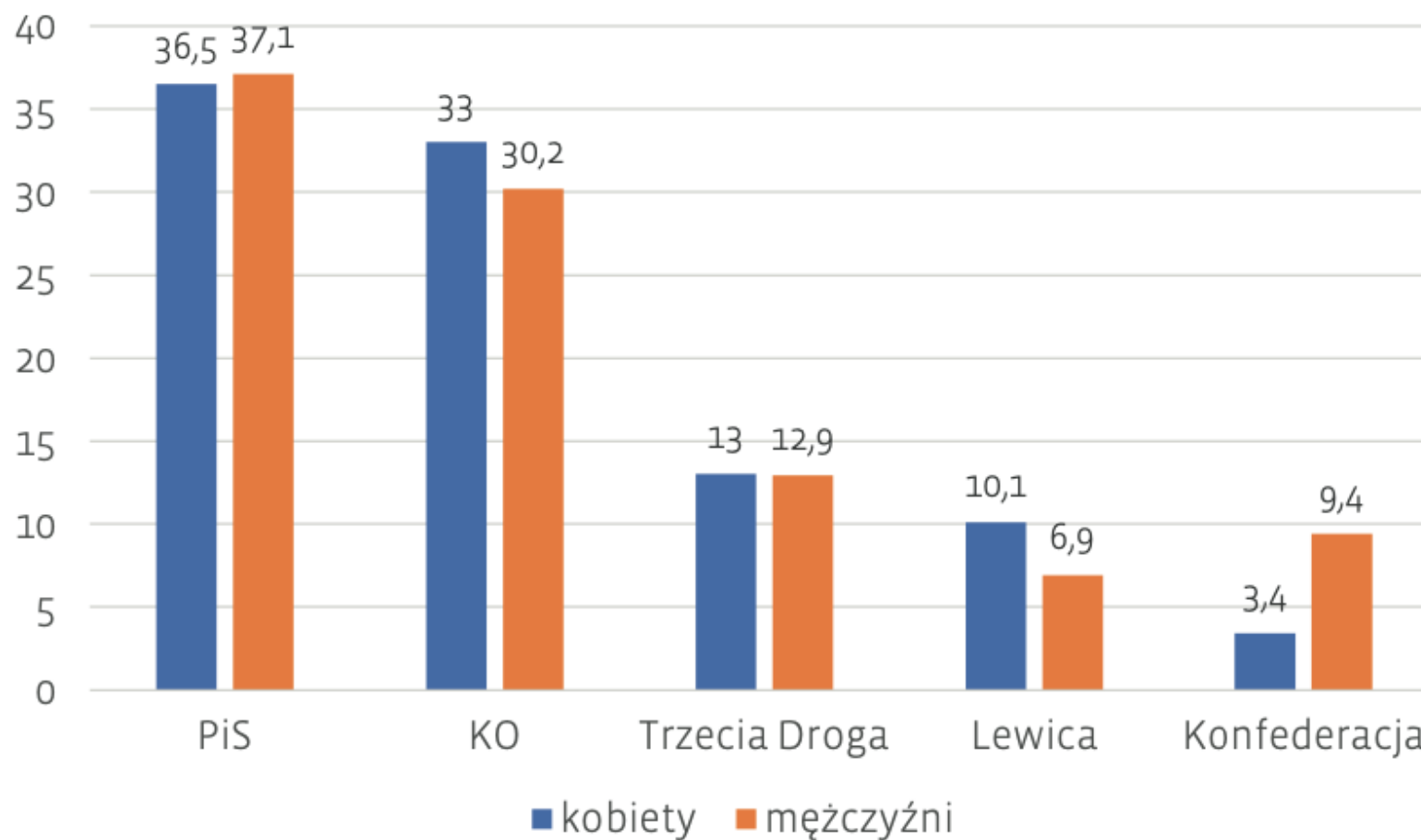
Electoral turnout of men and women in 2019 and 2023



Źródło: Ipsos dla TVN24, exit poll



How men and women voted in 2023





Thank you for your attention!