

CEC

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

LAW AND JUSTICE WIN SWEEPING ELECTORAL VICTORY

Exit polls show the opposition Law and Justice (PiS) winning a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections with 38% of the vote and obtaining an absolute majority in Parliament.

The ruling Civic Platform (PO) party came in second with 24%, whilst the Kukiz movement achieved 9%. Bringing up the rear in terms of voting was the United Left alliance and Modern Poland, both with 7.5%. However, the United Left's 7.5% spells disaster for them, since as a coalition they needed to breach an 8% threshold to enter parliament. The Polish Peasant Party (PSL) seems to have squeezed into parliament, whilst the libertarian KORWIN party are balancing on the 5% electoral threshold. If neither PSL nor the United Left obtain seats in parliament, this will be the first time since 1989 that the Polish Parliament has been free of any parties who can trace their lineage to the communist period.

The current projections for seat numbers indicate that PiS will obtain an overall majority and will not need a coalition partner in order to form a government. The final official results from the State Electoral Commission due on Tuesday may yet change matters, not only for the smaller parties but also for PiS and PO: passing the electoral threshold or gaining an extra percentage point will have a major impact on the number of seats redistributed in parliament, increasing the possible political permutations in the new Parliament. As of Monday morning these projections are as follows:

Law and Justice (PiS): 232

Civic Platform (PO): 137

Kukiz: 42

Modern Poland: 30

Polish Peasant Party (PSL): 18

Law and Justice may thus achieve what many thought impossible under Poland's complex proportional representation electoral system – obtaining an overall majority in parliament and obviating the need for a coalition altogether. If so, it will make the process of creating the next government much more quicker than usual. The Constitution allows the President up to 30 days to call a session of parliament and appointment of a new government, the time usually being used for complex coalition negotiations. This time things may move much more quickly.

Even without an overall majority on its own, PiS will be able to form a government if it gets the support of Kukiz, bringing such a coalition well above the 230 seats necessary for a government to be created in the first round of parliamentary voting. Kukiz is on record as saying that if he comes to agreement with PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski over key issues such a constitutional and voting reform he will support PiS in parliament (although not necessarily actually joining it in government).

The alternative scenario of PO managing to gain the support of all remaining parties to form a government is arithmetically and politically almost impossible. Such a government would be fraught by policy differences and held together only by anti-PiS sentiment. In addition, with PiS controlling the Presidency and in all likelihood the Senate, such a coalition would need not just an overall majority but a 3/5 one, in order to overturn Presidential vetoes and Senate amendments and be able to pass legislation effectively.

Not only is the result a huge victory for PiS and its leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski, vindicating an election strategy that saw the party promoting a more centrist image, but it is a major defeat for the Civic Platform party. Their 24% vote is not the meltdown some were expecting, but still represents a significant defeat for its leader Ewa Kopacz, who will now likely face an internal power struggle to succeed her as leader and, as a consequence, lead to a further weakening of the party.


The PO vote, combined with the relatively small percentage of votes for the other parties, leaves the political scene beyond PiS in total disarray. It seems that the United Left, with 7.5%, lost crucial votes at the final hurdle from the radical leftist Razem (“Together”) party. Their failure to enter parliament means an end to the post-1989 political lineage of the former Polish communist party. The Kukiz vote allows the maverick rock star into parliament, but it is unlikely that his party will be able to exert any real systemic influence. It remains to be seen if the PSL, the PO’s hitherto coalition partner in Government, will enter parliament and what the impact of their meagre result will be on the party’s leadership by Janusz Piechocinski. Ryszard Petru and his Modern Poland movement, which ran on an openly pro-free market ticket, managed to enter parliament but their weak result underlines the lack of social traction for economic liberalism in Poland today. If the libertarian KORWIN movement enters parliament, it will offer an opportunity for some amusing gadfly politics but little else.

The State Electoral Commission still needs to add up the real votes and announce the final numbers and parliamentary seat distribution probably on Tuesday. But it is Jaroslaw Kaczynski and PiS who are now masters of the political landscape. Regardless of whether Law and Justice obtain an absolute majority or not, Poland has experienced a political earthquake that has little precedent and which will have major policy implications both home and abroad...

CEC Government Relations is the leading political communications consultancy in Central Europe, providing strategic political and media intelligence, monitoring and analysis for Western multinationals in the region. Key expertise includes the defence, energy, environment, IT, financial and extractive industry sectors. CEC also has experience in media management, local government, and third-party mobilisation as an integral part of its communications activities. The Warsaw office works closely with other CEC offices in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as its partner agencies in other European Union countries.

Marek Matraszek, Chairman, can be contacted on:

 e-mail mm@cecgr.com

 mobile **+48601-336040**