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Radical Mind, New Identity? Results From a Survey of the Youngest Voters on the Eve of 2023 Parliamentary Elections in Poland

Abstract: Paper offers a snapshot of the political preferences of youngest voters in Poland on the eve of parliamentary elections 2023, explaining it through prism of theory of socialisation and historical legacy. The study is based on the results of an empirical survey conducted in spring 2023 in two regions: Podkarpackie and Lubuskie. The results showed that the plurality (49%) of prospective first-time voters back the radical right-wing Confederation (Konfederacja). Its supporters were more numerous in Podkarpackie (53.2%) than in Lubuskie (42.5%) and more men (67.8%) than women (25.4%) declared support for Confederation. The gap between the Confederation and its nearest contender, Civic Platform/Civic Coalition (Platforma Obywatelska/Koalicja Obywatelska – PO/KO), was immense, with PO/KO receiving the support of just 13.3% of prospective youngest voters. The potential voter share of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) was even lower (7.8%). In this paper, we provide the characteristics of voters of each party by including ideological beliefs, civic activity and other demographic characteristics. We also provide an interpretation of the differences between the political preferences of youngest voters and the whole population, and the reasons for such a radical shift.

Key words: youngest voters, Poland, political preferences

1. Introduction

The results of the parliamentary election held on 15 October 2023 were surprising primarily due to the high voter turnout. This observation applies to all groups of voters. Most astonishing, however, was the fact that the youngest voters were mobilized strongly for the first time since 1989. Among 18–29-year-olds, as many as 70.9% of eligible voters went to the polls (turnout was 73.9% for all eligible voters). The plurality of young voters (27.9%) supported the Civic Coalition (KO). The next most popular parties were the Third Way (17.9%), the Confederation (17.8%), the New Left (17.4%), Law and Justice (14.4%) and the Electoral Committee Bezpartyjni Samorządowcy (3.5%). Ipsos, an opinion research agency, collected these data via a late poll (exit poll and the

official results from 90% of the surveyed electoral commissions) undertaken on the day of the elections (TVN24, 2023).

Having compared these results to the political preferences of the whole population, we contend that the age of voters appeared to be a significant determinant of electoral behaviour. This observation also applies to previous elections. However, an alternative explanation of Polish political preferences is the historical divide between the country's east and west, especially since a group of scholars have deemed the partitions of Poland (completed in 1795 and in effect until the restoration of Polish sovereignty in 1918) to be a key determinant of electoral behaviour (Fleming, 2006, pp. 100–102; Gagatęk, Kotnarowski, 2017, pp. 139; Zagórski, Markowski, 2021; Zarycki, 2015, pp. 113; Zarycki, Nowak, 2000, pp. 345). Considering the differences in electorate behaviour patterns in eastern and western Poland, we decided to test if these differences are also reflected in the political preferences of youngest voters.

The decision to focus on this particular group was based on the premise that youngest voters are likely to be sincere (purely programmatic), as they have not yet had direct, personal links or benefits arising from the support given to any party. However, an alternative (or additional) interpretation of youngest voters' political preferences might be related to the political orientation of their environment. Therefore, we decided to conduct surveys in two regions, different in this respect, as voters in Lubuskie were more likely to support left-liberal parties and in Podkarpackie, right-wing and conservative parties. In so doing, we sought to determine whether socialisation has affected young people's political orientation. It bears repeating that political socialisation is a process that involves not only families, schools and community organisations but also young people themselves (peers), which is critical to the interpretation since the political preferences of youngest voters are not simply inherited from their parents. Hence, parents can be considered but one of the agents in the socialisation of young people, a multifaceted process that, apart from top-down logics, also includes peer-to-peer influence.

The disconnect between younger and older voters was already identified by Juan Linz in his analysis of West Germany after the Second World War. Linz found that compared to older generations of workers, working-class youth in Germany in the 1950s were more likely to vote for the Christian Democrats, even if the default choice of their group was social democracy (Linz, 1967, pp. 286).

The relevance of youngest voters lies also in the fact that these are the newest cohort entitled to participate in elections, and thus, their participation (or lack thereof) in political processes (and the form that participation takes) may, in some cases, contribute to an overall change in the dynamics of political and party systems (Ford, Jennings, 2020). This issue is discussed, for example, in view of possible and actual processes of radicalizing youth and young adults (Frissen, 2021). The structure of the article will be as follows. In the next part, we will present our hypotheses, referring to the discussion in the literature on political preferences and their determinants (sincere voting, socialisation and social capital). Consecutive sections of the paper describe the research method, present the results, discuss our contribution with reference to the research questions and present conclusions.

2. Socialisation, social capital and electoral behaviour

Discussion of the political preferences of youngest voters in Poland might include various determinants depending on the research perspective that is employed. While designing our survey, we recognized the east–west divide in Poland as one of the essential features affecting the political preferences of Polish youngest voters. This assumption was justified by previous research and electoral results, confirming the split between the more traditionally oriented electorate in eastern Poland and the more liberal one in the west of the country. Furthermore, there is evidence that younger generations in Central and Eastern Europe have been indirectly affected by the previous communist regimes, which is to say they learned passivity (Voicu, Tufiș, 2013, pp. 204).

Having established that the Polish electorate is divided in the way depicted above, we acknowledged this difference as one of the most relevant determinants of youngest voters' political preferences. The next step in our research design was following; we decided to theorize on socialisation, social capital, and voting behaviour to build research questions and formulate hypotheses, assuming that all of these factors contribute significantly and almost equally to the interpretation of youngest voters' political preferences. At the same time, we considered that the numerous works on the dissimilarity of eastern and western Poland documenting the differences in the values adhered to by the inhabitants of the two regions and, above all, the different patterns of electoral behaviour, entitle us to take it as an axiom that the invariability of these attitudes and behaviours is the result of the socialisation process. Thus, we refer to the article by Wenzel, Żerkowska-Balas, and Matusiak (2024, pp. 215–216), suggesting that a direct effect of the Partitions was the formation of a distinct social awareness in individual regions; it constitutes a determinant of electoral behaviour independent of economic or cultural conditions.

Regarding socialisation, as Gordon and Taft (2011, p. 1500) have noted, scholars have regarded families for many years as the only (or at least the *principal*) actors responsible for shaping the political orientations of young people. However, it is also very often emphasized in the literature that schools, community-based organisations and peers also play critical roles in the process of socialisation (Howard, 2003, p. 158; McIntosh, Youniss, 2010, p. 34).

In this context, the first research question posed in this paper is as follows:

Q1. Will young voters replicate voting preferences and voting motivations of the general population, characteristic for their respective regions of socialisation?

In order to answer this question, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Young voters will replicate the voting patterns dominant in the region in which they grew up/were subjected to socialisation. The majority of young people from western Poland will declare support for liberal, free-market, and progressive worldview parties, and the majority of young people from eastern Poland will declare their willingness to vote for parties that are conservative in worldview issues and pro-social in economic terms.

Considering the multifaceted nature of socialisation, we enriched our study by examining the role of sincere voting in the case under study. Research on youngest voters can be considered an attempt to understand the mechanism by which sincere voters make electoral decisions (Lanoue, Bowler, 1998; Myatt, 2015). The assumption that young-

est voters can be deemed sincere stems from the fact that their electoral choices are not determined by any benefits or losses from previous decisions. It would also imply that childhood socialisation cannot be regarded as something that shapes humans for their whole lives (see Howard, 2003, p. 30). Hence, an alternative hypothesis explaining youngest voters' political preferences might be related to the influence of peers whereby other young people act as agents in the socialisation process (Erik et al., 2009, p. 28; Gordon, Taft, 2011, p. 1518; Neundorf, Smets, 2015; Ohme et al., 2018, pp. 3256–3257) and additionally a generational gap might be seen, stemming from intergenerational antagonism (Campos, Martins, 2023, p. 7).

In consequence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Young voters, when making electoral decisions, will be guided by ideological factors consistent with their dominant regional socialisation models. Hence, the most important voting rationale for the youth of western Poland will be liberal, progressive, and free market values, while the dominant voting rationale for the youth of eastern Poland will be national, conservative, and interventionist values.

Being aware that answering the question of whether youngest voters are sincere or strategic might not be straightforward, we attempt to test the significance of another variable possibly affecting political preferences. For the purposes of this paper, we decided to select one related to political participation, namely civic engagement (social capital). Traditional sociological approaches have analysed social capital as either (a) an individual asset and/or (b) a feature of communities or even nations (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Sierocińska, 2011). The very relationship between social capital and democracy and democratisation has been the subject of numerous studies (Cleary, Stokes, 2009; Newton, 2016; Putnam, Leonardi, Nonetti, 1993). The prevailing view is that high levels of social capital are conducive to democracy (Putnam, Leonardi, Nonetti, 1993), although some scholars have argued that civil society (which we see in this article as emanating from high levels of social capital) has also contributed, in some cases, to the decline of democracy (Berman, 1997, p. 402; Riley, 2019, pp. 100–101).

In the Polish case, this issue seems particularly relevant in the context of the actions of the Law and Justice government, which in 2015 initiated a process of dismantling democratic institutions (Levitsky, Ziblatt, 2018, p. 147; Markowski, 2019, p. 111; Sadowski, 2018, pp. 17–19). These measures triggered protests from the public. This dissatisfaction reached a climax in October 2020 after the Constitutional Court's ruling that the law allowing for the termination of pregnancy in situations of serious and irreversible damage to the foetus was unconstitutional (Blackington, 2024, p. 3; Platek, 2024, p. 131). The protests organised at that time across Poland were attended by a significant number of citizens, including a relatively large group of young people. According to a survey conducted by the Centre for Public Opinion Research in November 2020, 8% of respondents took part in the protests (respondents were exclusively over 18 years of age). If one were to estimate the number of participants in the protests on this basis, it would mean that 2,500,000 people took part in the protests across Poland. This figure does not include minors (CBOS – Public Opinion Research Center, 2020).

In an operational sense, in this study, a high level of social capital manifested by involvement in community activities or civic organisations is equated with a relatively high level of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. The focus of our analysis

concerns formalized types of social capital (formal networks), primarily capital derived from social organisations (i.e., membership in and support for political parties and their youth wings, as well as civic associations and NGOs). However, somewhat less formal indicators were also considered, such as contacting politicians through various channels, wearing symbols with political overtones, signing petitions, participating in public demonstrations and boycotting products.

Specificity of young adults in terms of their social capital and its relationship to political behaviour remains a separate issue. Some researchers have suggested that the relationship between social capital and political participation for young adults is not entirely clear (Teney, Hanquinet, 2012). Studies of social capital in Poland conducted in recent years show that the youngest age group (16–24) is not among the groups with the highest social capital as measured by formal participation in various types of organisations. That being said, this group ranks quite high in terms of some forms of activity related to social capital, such as the use of new technologies for “participation in manifestations, demonstrations or actions in support of which information has been received via e-mail, social networks, instant messaging” (GUS – Statistics Poland, 2020, pp. 145–147).

Considering all the above, we propose a following second research question:

Q2. Are young people’s political preferences related to their involvement in community activities?

It is followed by the hypothesis that:

H3. Young voters who engage in social activities are more likely to support opposition parties during 2023 parliamentary elections.

Having identified these research questions and hypotheses, we now present our research method in the following part of this paper.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Regional characteristics and differences in social, economic and historical background

The surveys this paper is based on were conducted in the Polish regions of Lubuskie and Podkarpackie. We selected these regions since they differ markedly in social, political, cultural, historical and economic terms. Moreover, they are located in different parts of the country. The Podkarpackie voivodeship occupies the southeastern Poland and borders with Slovakia and Ukraine. Lubuskie, in contrast, is located in the westernmost part of Poland on the border with Germany.

Explaining the differences between the two regions, however, requires a little more discussion. The Podkarpackie voivodeship was part of the territory annexed by the Russian and Austria-Hungarian empires during the partitions of Poland in the late 18th century. Both partitions were considered unfavourable in terms of social and economic development. However, the Austro-Hungarian partition guaranteed the Poles living there more social and political freedom than other partitions. In geographical terms, Podkarpackie formed part of the core territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (until

1795) and Poland in the inter-war period (1918–1939). In contrast, Lubuskie voivodeship has a very different historical heritage, only partially incorporated into Polish lands and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Much of Lubuskie comprises former German lands ceded to Poland after the Second World War. Such diverse historical legacies are of great importance, considering that most Poles in the Lubuskie region are descendants of relocatees who were resettled from areas incorporated into the Soviet Union after the Second World War. The population of the Podkarpackie region did not experience such resettlement. Since then, social reproduction and, as a result, the patterns of political socialisation have varied in both regions.

According to the Statistical Office in Rzeszów (Statistical Office in Rzeszów, n.d.), the population of the Podkarpackie voivodeship is 2,079,098 (May 2023). The population of the Lubuskie region is less than half this at 979,979 inhabitants in December 2022, according to the Statistical Office in Zielona Góra (Statistical Office in Zielona Góra, n.d.). Differences can also be found in population density. Podkarpackie has 117 people per square kilometre, compared to 70 in Lubuskie; the population density of Podkarpackie is thus almost 70% greater than Lubuskie.

Differences are also evident in the socio-economic potential of both regions, manifested in the following indicators in 2021:

- average salaries in the Lubuskie region are higher (6,431.09 PLN monthly, around 1,485.57 Euro) than in Podkarpackie (5,884.73 PLN, 1,359.40 Euro);
- the unemployment rate is much lower in Lubuskie (4.3%) than in Podkarpackie (8.6%);
- the participation rate measured according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) methodology totalled 53.7% in Lubuskie and 50.3% in Podkarpackie;
- the Gini index in the Lubuskie region in 2021 was slightly higher (0.252) than in Podkarpackie (0.244);
- the number of foundations and non-governmental organisations in Lubuskie was slightly higher (42–43 per 10,000 residents) than in Podkarpackie (37–39 per 10,000 residents);
- the risk of poverty in Lubuskie was 13% compared to 17% in Podkarpackie;
- the number of Sunday mass attendants (“dominantes”) in Lubuskie was much lower (30% of the population) than in Podkarpackie (60%).

However, from our perspective, one of the most significant features was differences in political preferences in both regions. In this respect, a clear distinction could be found. While PiS voters were largely concentrated in Podkarpackie, the electorate in Lubuskie was more likely to support PO/KO or to split its preferences between these two parties. Detailed information is presented in Table 1 below.

As the data presented in Table 1 shows, four parties were the most successful electorally from 2001 to 2019: the SLD, PiS, the PSL and PO/KO. In Podkarpackie, which is divided into two electoral districts (22nd and 23rd), PiS has been the most voted party. Support for PiS in both constituencies grew significantly from 2001 to 2019, and the increase was much higher than for other parties. In Lubuskie, on the other hand, the electorate was much more divided between PiS and PO/KO. The latter dominated in the 2007 and 2011 elections, while PiS managed to tie with PO/KO in 2015 and reach a marginal win in 2019. Thus, it can be said that voters in Podkarpackie have been much more

Table 1

Results of selected parties in parliamentary elections, 2001–2023 (% of valid votes)

		Years of Elections																							
		2001			2005			2007			2011			2015			2019			2023					
Region	P*	L	P1	P2	L	P1	P2	L	P1	P2	L	P1	P2	L	P1	P2	L	P1	P2	L	P1	P2	L		
Dist	22/23	8	22	23	8	22	23	8	22	23	8	22	23	8	22	23	8	22	23	8	22	23	8		
SLD	31.4	51.5	9.2	7.3	16.2	8.8	9.2	17.6	6.2	5.6	10.3	4.6	4.4	10.0	6.0	6.6	15.6	4.5	4.9	9.3					
PiS	8.6	5.7	33.8	38.2	22.8	48.4	44.2	22.5	44.7	48.0	21.7	53.5	56.1	28.3	63.4	62.4	34.3	54.7	51.6	27.8					
PSL	14.7	7.5	9.6	10.2	7.9	11.2	13.0	8.4	12.7	10.5	7.7	7.3	4.7	5.1	7.9	7.8	11.6	13.8**	12.4**	15.1**					
PO/KO	8.1	9.8	15.4	16.3	24.2	27.8	29.3	47.1	25.3	24.5	44.8	15.8	13.1	28.1	15.9	14.4	31.3	15.9	17.7	37.7					
Konf	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6.8	8.3	7.2	8.6	9.5	6.5					

*Note: During the 2001 parliamentary elections, the Polish Electoral Commission decided not to divide Podkarpackie into two sub-electoral districts. However, the sub-divisions have appeared regularly since 2005 and are coded as districts 22 (P1) and 23 (P2). Lubuskie is coded as district 8 (L).

**Note: In the 2023 parliamentary elections, the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) established a coalition with the Hołownia 2050 party, forming the Third Way.

List of abbreviations:

SLD – Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (United Left)

PiS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)

PSL – Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party)

PO/KO – Platforma Obywatelska/Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Platform/Civic Coalition)

Konf – Konfederacja: Wolność i Niepodległość (Confederation: Freedom and Independence)

Source: Polish Electoral Commission (www.pkw.gov.pl).

consistent in terms of party preferences, demonstrating a strong commitment to voting for PiS. In Lubuskie, the swing effect has appeared to be strong, with a large part of the electorate shifting towards PiS in the 2015 and 2019 elections.

The difference in voting preferences between both regions was even more visible in 2020 presidential elections: Podkarpackie strongly supported the right-wing candidate Andrzej Duda (who took 71% of the vote), while Lubuskie strongly supported the left-centre candidate Rafał Trzaskowski (60%) (National Electoral Commission, n.d.). This dichotomy is illustrated by the Figure 1, that is presented below.

Figure 1. Support for Andrzej Duda and Rafał Trzaskowski in 2nd round of 2020 presidential elections



Source: National Electoral Commission.

With the characteristics of both regions at our disposal, we will present the sampling method of our study in the next section of this article.

3.2. Sampling

To test our hypothesis stating that youngest voters' attitudes do not vary from the rest of the electorate, we conducted a survey study among high school students ($N = 1,432$), mostly 18–19 years old, in two politically distinctive regions of Poland, namely Podkarpackie ($N = 891$) and Lubuskie ($N = 541$).

The data was collected via an auditorium survey. Each student was informed about the survey's aim and content and that they could withdraw their participation at any stage. Students were asked to fill in the questionnaire during the lecture period (after official approval from the directors and teachers was obtained), and the pollster collected these after a clear signal from the respondents that they wished to submit a completed questionnaire.

The source for selection of units for the study was the list of 'Wykaz szkół i placówek oświatowych według województw [List of schools and educational institutions by voivodeship]' (Informatyczne Centrum Edukacji i Nauki (ICEiN), n.d.). The list contains information about schools, kindergartens and other educational institutions for children and youth in Poland in all regions (voivodeships). Considering the research problem, a selection was made by extracting from the database only those schools attended by young adults with active voting rights. As a result, in the end, we decided to select only those institutions with matriculation classes in the case of secondary schools and fourth forms in the case of technical schools.

Secondary schools were selected from a database containing all educational establishments. Then, only those with fourth or fifth grades in the 2022/2023 school year were selected. An additional weighting of schools was made so that the study would proportionally increase the chances of schools with more students being included in the sample at the expense of those with fewer students. The basis for the weighting was the number of classes (student groups) in a particular establishment. If a particular school had, for example, six student groups, then that school was given a weight of 6, which meant that, compared to a school with two student groups, with a weight of 2, it was three times more likely to be in the sample than the other school. This strategy was adopted to create our sampling frame, and it is worth adding that a separate draw was made for each region (for the draw and the assumed sample size, see Table 2).

Table 2

The characteristics of the population and the sample

	Target population			Assumed sample		
	number of schools	number of students	number of classes	number of schools	number of students	number of classes
Lubuskie	164	7,323	260	37	1,100	127
Podkarpackie	212	17,227	312	52	1,500	192

Source: Own elaboration.

The list of selected schools and the expected number of questionnaires were sent to a professional research company, which was responsible for carrying out the fieldwork. The company's staff received the school addresses, with information about the number

of questionnaires we expected to receive from each school and the number of classes to be surveyed. In the end, we obtained questionnaires from 22 schools in the Lubuskie voivodship and 31 schools in Podkarpackie.

The mode of sampling was closely related to the research method, based on auditory interviews. This method guaranteed students would complete the questionnaire since its length might have discouraged respondents from answering all questions. Besides, this method was low-cost and guaranteed the collection of a large amount of research material in a relatively short time and with limited resources.

The questionnaire was composed of four groups of problems:

- 1) *ideological preferences (15 items)*,
- 2) *civic activity (4 items)*,
- 3) *voting preferences (11 options: 10 parties + Other)*,
- 4) *socio-demographic features: gender ($N(\text{Female}) = 630$; $N(\text{Male}) = 802$), place of residence ($N(\text{City}) = 689$; $N(\text{Rural}) = 743$) and religiosity (complete descriptive statistics summary see: Table 3 and Table 4: Appendix I).*

Having explored the dataset, we discovered that there were five parties with notable levels of political support: Confederation ($n = 704$; 49%), PiS ($n = 112$; 7.8%), PO/KO ($n = 191$; 13%), Polska 2050 Szymona Hołowni (without the PSL) ($n = 140$; 9.8%) and New Left ($n = 127$; 8.9%). We also noted some share of 'Other' ($n = 158$; 11%) party voters, and for analytical purposes, we included them in the predictive analysis, although they had been combined, but no separate modelling was made for 'Other', as we were interested in studying support for specific parties.

In order to verify our hypotheses, we applied analysis of proportions, in the form of contingency tables, and we conducted five mixed binomial logistic regression models, with one model for each party. By using analysis of proportion, we have been able to explore if the expected level of support for specific parties overlapped with empirical data gathered during the study and, by employing binomial logistic mixed regression models, we have been able to control ideological preferences by region. Since the data was gathered in two distinct parts of Poland, and by assuming they would generate significant differences in coefficient scores, by holding the region as a random factor included in each model intercept, we obtained information about the impact (measured by ICC score) of the region variable over the variance of each model. After calculating the models fit statistics, and by calculating odds ratios for predictors, we found in each model clear and straightforward information about the change of probabilities of voting for one out of five parties. Having utilized mixed logistic regression models, we could also examine whether the same variables, controlled by region, played a significant part in support for all parties and what were the exceptional and specific predictors involved in determining the status of each party (for a complete summary, see Table 5: Appendix II).

4. Results

Concerning the results of the descriptive statistics (see Table 4: Appendix I), one of the most visible features is the disproportionate distribution of potential voter support among youngest voters. The most-favoured party was Confederation ($n = 704$; 49%),

which gathered almost as much support as all the other parties combined ($n = 728$; 51%), including 'Other'. It means that half of young people supported Confederation and another half of youngest voters were distributed between the left, right and centre parties. It also means that a large portion of this group sympathizes with radical right-wing parties.

In all mixed regression models, we obtained a satisfactory ($p < .001$) model fit (see Table 5: Appendix II) and when exploring general trends, we found a series of significant associations between specific opinions or social characteristics and party preferences. Out of all the considered predictors, the most relevant for party preferences were attitudes towards taxation, abortion, LGBTQ+ issues, the economy, the role of government in the economy, the European Union (EU), national values, social capital, immigration and religious practices (for a summary see Figure 1). We also identified gender as a very significant predictor.

Regarding regional impact on main associations between party preferences and predictors, due to insignificant ICC score, we found this determinant irrelevant (see Appendix II: Table 5).

The odds of youngest voters voting for the most popular party (Confederation) increased significantly among respondents who were more free-market, pro-abortion, anti-LGBTQ+, and those convinced that economic growth should be a priority, even at the expense of the natural environment. Odds for Confederation increased also among supporters convinced that: the poor should not be supported at the expense of the wealthy; EU should not influence Polish politics to the extent it does (as they believe that the EU is untrustworthy). They also voiced opposition toward immigrants from Europe and antagonism towards wearing any political badges and taking part in public demonstrations. It is worth emphasizing that men had higher odds of voting for Confederation than women.

The odds of voting for PiS were significantly higher for respondents opposed to abortion, those believing the rich should pay higher taxes to support the poor, supporting ecology over economy, anti-free market, convinced that political decisions should be informed by religious premises, as well as those emphasizing national values and regularly attending church, and especially women.

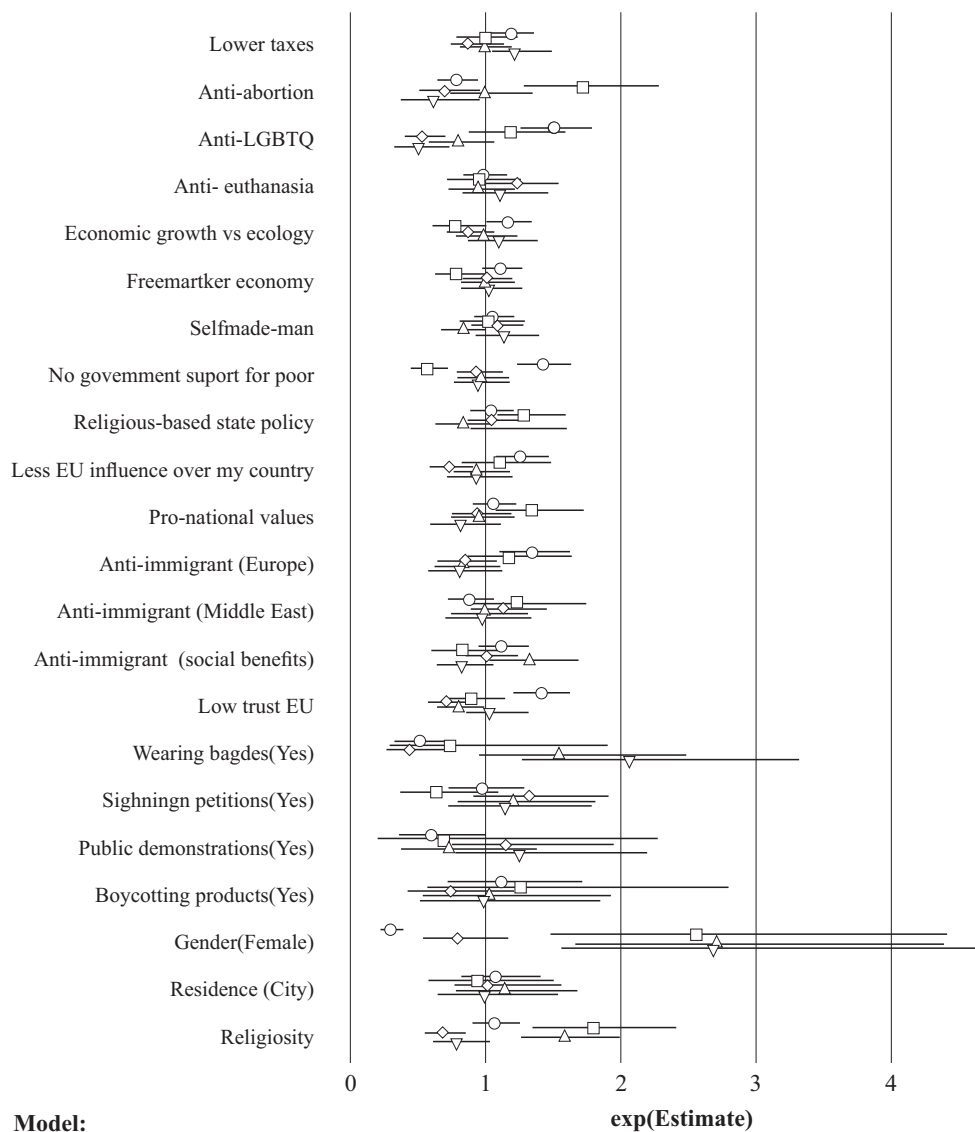
The chance of voting for PO/KO was significantly higher among pro-abortion, pro-LGBTQ+ respondents and those more trustworthy toward EU and supporting a larger role for the EU in Polish politics. Such odds were also higher among respondents who were reluctant in wearing political badges and took part in religious practices less often.

The odds of voting for the Hołownia 2050 party were significantly greater among respondents who expressed support toward receiving equal social benefits for immigrants, were especially women and reported often participation in religious practices.

Among potential youngest voters, the odds of voting New Left increased significantly among respondents who are pro-abortion and LGBTQ+ rights more often are women and reported wearing political symbols.

When it comes to association of party preferences and social capital, we discovered (see: Table 4: Appendix I) that all electorate groups noted various levels of civil participation (with regard to its individual components), with one notable exception of PiS supporters, who consistently noted the lowest levels in all noted forms of participation. Social capital proved the most significant for shaping appeal toward Confederation, KO,

Figure 2. Party preferences and beliefs of Polish Youth – Mixed Logistic Regression Model (Odds Ratios and 95% CI)



Model:

—○— Confederation —□— Law & Justice —◇— Civic Coalition —△— Poland 2050 —▽— New Left

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: The continuous scales (taxation, abortion, LBGQTQ, priority to economy, national – and EU – policy issues, civil activity and religiosity) are organized according to theoretical model proposed by Kitchelt (1992, pp. 22–23), who distinguish two main dimensions of party competition in Poland: 1) libertarian-cosmopolitan-free market and authoritarian-particularistic-redistribution. Thus, scores more to the left are suggesting the former and more to the right, the latter.

and New Left parties, although increasing chances for support were noted only toward New Left.

5. Discussion

Based on the results of the frequency distribution of support (see Table 4, Appendix I), and taking into account the non-significant index (ICC) of influence (see Table 6, Appendix II), of the random variable in the form of region, for individual party preferences, we can reject the first hypothesis (H1). The predicted dominance of PiS in Podkarpackie and the KO in Lubuskie, was not confirmed, and the favourite of the youngest voters, in both regions, turned out to be the party of the radical right, i.e., Confederation. This result suggests that microstructural socialisation processes, embedded in family groups (Gordon, Taft, 2011, p. 1500) involving the reproduction of a specific social consciousness (Wenzel, Żerkowska-Balas, Matusiak, 2024, pp. 215–216), and more broadly, voting patterns, seem to have limited or different effects. This suggests that in the context of the region's historical heritage, both its importance for the formation of individual identity, and supposed influence on the mobilisation for specific collective action, may not be understood by the youngest electorate (18–19 year olds, born after 2000), who may in fact be experiencing the phenomenon of post-memory generation (Hirsch, 1997).

As a result of the influence of primary socialisation processes (knowledge passed on by parents) and secondary socialisation processes (knowledge passed on at school), it may be assumed that young generations are able to recall, more or less accurately, the most important historical events which have shaped their region, state, nation, or society. However, although young people are able to recall facts and events that were crucial in determining their present day, they may not feel a strong emotional connection to the past. It sounds somewhat trivial, but the situation of their parents and grandparents in this context was different, because the past was for them not only a collection of facts, but also of experiences, marked by the traumas of the communist period, or the euphoria and hopes of the democratic transition period. This may be the key to understanding why young people's knowledge of the past is marginal in shaping their beliefs and choices regarding the political sphere.

Strong support for the Confederation may be an expression of a specific peer socialisation (Howard, 2003, p. 158; McIntosh, Youniss, 2010, p. 34), characterised (Twenge, Campbell, Freeman, 2012, p. 1060) by a lack of a strong sense of community and, in this case, by the commitment to radical values, a lack of interest in helping others, and low social engagement. A low sense of community implies a loosening of social ties between individuals and thus an instrumentalisation and economisation of social relations that fit strongly with the Confederation's capitalist-libertarian programmatic narrative, which emphasises the central role of the individual and the cult of individualism, comprising moral, cultural, and economic freedom. A natural extension of this is the lack of a strategic focus on helping others, since, according to this specific libertarianism, the individual is alone responsible for the decisions he or she makes and should bear the consequences of his or her actions alone, and any redistributive programmes are consequently stigmatised by the Confederation as counter-productive or harmful (and as also confirmed by the attitude of those more likely to vote for Confederation on redistributive issues: see Table 5: Appendix II). As a consequence, limited social activity is a direct consequence of this – as the collectively understood moral duty to help becomes, in this libertarian perspective, an inappropriate systemic necessity or, more in line with the views of the

party in question, an expression of caprice and philanthropy. All of the above-mentioned mechanisms create very good conditions for various conflicts and blockages in the generational transmission of values, thus making the probability of the disappearance of socio-economic reproduction and the outbreak of generational and world-view conflicts more real.

The unambiguous verification of the second hypothesis (H2) proved to be much more complex, due to the lack of a significant effect (low ICC) of the region variable on moderating voter preferences and the strongly marked dominance of the Confederation as the most attractive electoral option. Yet, the data we have collected, on close analysis, may give some indication that the hypothesis adopted is (at least partly) true. The starting point here is the scale of support for the second most popular choice in both analysed regions, which in the case of Lubuskie was clearly the KO, and in the case of Podkarpackie, with a very minimal percentage advantage, PiS. Then, further exploration of the attitudes that potentially mobilised young people to indicate support for a given option, in the case of the KO were unambiguously consistent liberal-progressive attitudes, and in the case of PiS, conservative-national-redistributive attitudes. Thus, if one considers both cases of young party electorates as representative, the accepted hypothesis of the effective socialisation of voters into supporting specific party options is confirmed in this respect, and the socialisation effect itself appears to be real.

However, this does not change the fact that both parties which were the winners of the 2023 parliamentary elections in the analysed regions (KO in Lubuskie, PiS in Podkarpackie) enjoyed, in both cases, much lower support than the Confederation. A factor influencing this may definitely be the programmatic specificity of the Confederation, which fits in with the free-market and partly libertarian sentiments attractive to the youngest voters in the west of Poland and the conservative, nationalist, anti-EU, and anti-immigrant sentiments of the east of the country. This made the Confederation, in the opinion of the youngest voters, an attractive competitor to the KO in Lubuskie, and PiS in Podkarpackie.

In the case of the third hypothesis (H3), focusing on the significant impact of social capital, in the form of civic activism, on the construction of voting preferences, the data seems to confirm our assumptions about the relationship between civic activism and left-wing youth voting preferences. Support for every party except PiS (i.e., in practice all opposition parties) was associated with some form of civic engagement (See Appendix 1, Table 4). These varied for supporters of different parties but overall were always significantly higher than for PiS. Possible explanations for this are: firstly, a higher motivation for opposition party supporters to express their opposition than for ruling party supporters to express their support; secondly, a possible general lower propensity of PiS supporters to be socially active.

6. Conclusions

Based on the analysed data and proposed discussion, we may answer our first research question and verify our first hypothesis. Our findings demonstrate that young people do not replicate voting preferences of the general populations, taking into account their respective

regions of socialisation. This is particularly evident in the case of support for the radical right represented by the Confederation, which, while gaining 7.16% of the vote overall, at the same time received support of 17.8% among voters aged 18–29 – while in our survey as many as 49% of 18–19 year-olds expressed an intention to vote for this party. Divergence, although not on as large a scale as in the case of the Confederation, was also observed in the case of other parties. The observed divergence in voting preferences between the youngest voters and the other cohorts, both at the national and regional levels, is, in our view, evidence of an increased role of peer socialisation at the expense of both family socialisation and that resulting from regional differences. Regional differences in the voting preferences of the youngest voters, while apparent, are nevertheless considerably smaller than for older groups of voters in the regions concerned and their populations as a whole. This may suggest that some trends observed are nationwide in nature.

The relationship between political preferences and the nature of socialisation, influenced by historical and geographical factors, requires further research. This conclusion can be drawn based on the results of this project – the geographical distribution of preferences among young supporters of KO and PiS reflected patterns characteristic of the entire population. In the case of the Confederation, this mechanism of “inheritance” of electoral preferences did not manifest. In our opinion, this is due to the freshness effect (this party has not governed so far) and the skilful combination in its programme offer of elements of liberal permissiveness with conservative traditionalism. Such a strategy broke the rigid framework of historical and regional heritage.

In relation to the second research question, we can state that there is a certain connection between the level of social capital among young voters and their political preferences – young supporters of the then opposition parties were more active than their pro-government counterparts.

All of the above obviously raise the question of the sources of these phenomena. Among other things, they may have to do with similar patterns of use of traditional and digital (including social) media, in respect of which the study did not show significant regional differences. However, this is only one possible factor and the whole issue requires further research, both quantitative and qualitative. This also shows the need for further research on the youngest voters, as other studies do not include this age cohort as a separate unit of analysis.

This article contributes to the ongoing debate about young voters in Poland, focusing on a specific age group that is not distinguished in Polish surveys; it is treated as part of the 18–24 or even 18–29 age group. Therefore, similar conclusions are drawn about people at different stages of their lives. Two of our hypotheses (the first and second) were negatively verified. It can thus be assumed that the influence of historical heritage on political socialisation in the entire population is still visible, but in the case of younger voters, it loses its significance. Further studies are required to investigate the radicalisation observed among the youngest voters. It is difficult to exclude that this phenomenon may be an infatuation with a new group, as has already been observed in Poland with such different parties as the Palikot Movement or Kukiz'15. However, the rise in popularity of far-right parties in other European countries allows for the formulation of the thesis that this time a more serious generational change is taking place. This, however, requires further studies.

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Radykalny umysł, nowa tożsamość? Wyniki badania najmłodszych wyborców w przededniu wyborów parlamentarnych w 2023 r. w Polsce

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia obraz preferencji politycznych najmłodszych wyborców w Polsce tuż przed wyborami parlamentarnymi w 2023 roku, analizując je przez pryzmat teorii socjalizacji i dziedzictwa historycznego. Badanie opiera się na wynikach empirycznej ankiety przeprowadzonej wiosną 2023 roku w dwóch regionach: podkarpackim i lubuskim. Wyniki pokazały, że największa grupa (49%) potencjalnych pierwszorazowych wyborców popiera radykalnie prawicową Konfederację. Jej zwolennicy byli liczniejsi na Podkarpaciu (53,2%) niż w Lubuskiem (42,5%), a także wśród mężczyzn (67,8%) niż kobiet (25,4%). Przewaga Konfederacji nad jej najbliższym konkurentem – Platformą Obywatelską/Koalicją Obywatelską (PO/KO) – była ogromna, ponieważ PO/KO uzyskała poparcie jedynie 13,3% potencjalnych najmłodszych wyborców. Potencjalne poparcie dla Prawa i Sprawiedliwości (PiS) było jeszcze niższe i wyniosło 7,8%. W artykule przedstawiamy charakterystykę wyborców każdej z partii, uwzględniając przekonania ideologiczne, aktywność obywatelską oraz inne cechy demograficzne. Próbuje również zinterpretować różnice między preferencjami politycznymi najmłodszych wyborców a całej populacji oraz przyczyny tak radykalnego przesunięcia.

Słowa kluczowe: najmłodsi wyborcy, Polska, preferencje polityczne

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Appendix I

Table 3

Descriptive statistics by party preferences – continuous variables (Median, IQR)

	Overall	Other	Confederation	Law and Justice	Civic Platform/Coalition	Poland 2050 Szymon Holownia	New Left	K-W ANOVA test p-value
N	1432	158	704	112	191	140	127	
Small Taxes	9.00 (7.00–11.00)	8.00 (6.00–11.00)	10.00 (8.00–11.00)	9.00 (7.00–11.00)	8.72 (6.00–11.00)	9.00 (7.75–11.00)	9.00 (7.00–11.00)	<.001
Anti-abortion	1.00 (1.00–5.00)	1.00 (1.00–3.80)	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	6.00 (4.00–11.00)	1.00 (1.00–2.00)	1.00 (1.00–3.00)	1.00 (1.00–1.00)	<.001
Anti-LGBTQ	3.00 (1.00–7.00)	1.00 (1.00–5.00)	6.00 (2.00–11.00)	6.00 (4.00–10.00)	1.00 (1.00–3.00)	1.00 (1.00–4.00)	1.00 (1.00–1.00)	<.001
Anti-euthanasia	4.00 (1.00–6.00)	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	5.00 (1.00–6.00)	6.00 (4.80–11.00)	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	3.00 (1.00–5.00)	<.001
Economic growth over ecology	4.00 (2.00–6.00)	4.00 (2.00–6.00)	5.00 (3.00–6.25)	4.00 (3.00–6.00)	3.00 (1.50–6.00)	3.50 (2.00–6.00)	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	<.001
Free market economy	6.00 (6.00–9.00)	6.00 (5.25–8.00)	7.00 (6.00–10.00)	6.00 (5.00–8.00)	6.00 (6.00–8.00)	6.00 (6.00–8.25)	6.00 (6.00–9.00)	<.001
Self-made man	6.00 (3.00–10.00)	5.00 (3.00–8.00)	7.00 (4.00–10.00)	4.50 (3.00–9.00)	6.00 (4.00–9.00)	4.00 (3.00–7.30)	5.00 (3.00–10.00)	<.001
No government support for poor	6.00 (5.00–10.00)	6.00 (4.00–7.80)	7.00 (6.00–11.00)	5.00 (3.00–6.00)	6.00 (5.00–9.00)	6.00 (5.00–9.00)	6.00 (4.50–8.50)	<.001
Religious-based state policy	1.00 (1.00–4.00)	1.00 (1.00–2.00)	1.00 (1.00–4.00)	6.00 (1.00–6.00)	1.00 (1.00–2.00)	1.00 (1.00–2.00)	1.00 (1.00–1.00)	<.001
Less EU influence over my country	6.00 (5.00–9.00)	6.00 (4.00–6.00)	8.00 (6.00–11.00)	7.00 (6.00–11.00)	6.00 (3.00–6.00)	6.00 (4.00–7.00)	6.00 (3.00–6.00)	<.001
Pro-national values	4.00 (1.00–6.00)	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	5.00 (2.00–7.00)	6.00 (4.00–8.00)	3.00 (1.00–4.00)	2.00 (1.00–5.00)	1.00 (1.00–4.00)	<.001
Anti-immigrant (Europe)	6.00 (4.00–10.00)	6.00 (3.30–7.00)	8.00 (6.00–11.00)	8.00 (6.00–11.00)	5.00 (3.00–7.00)	5.00 (4.00–7.30)	5.00 (3.00–6.00)	<.001
Anti-immigrant (Middle East)	6.00 (5.00–10.00)	6.00 (4.00–8.00)	8.00 (6.00–11.00)	8.00 (6.00–11.00)	6.00 (4.00–8.00)	6.00 (4.00–9.00)	5.00 (3.00–6.00)	<.001
Social benefits for countrymen compared to immigrants	7.00 (6.00–11.00)	6.00 (5.00–9.00)	9.00 (6.00–11.00)	7.00 (6.00–11.00)	6.00 (5.00–9.00)	7.00 (5.00–11.00)	6.00 (4.00–8.00)	<.001
No trust to EU	5.00 (2.00–7.00)	4.00 (2.00–5.00)	5.00 (4.00–8.00)	5.00 (3.00–7.00)	3.00 (1.00–5.00)	3.30 (2.00–5.00)	4.00 (2.00–5.00)	<.001
Religiosity	3.00 (1.00–6.00)	2.00 (1.00–4.00)	3.00 (2.00–6.00)	6.00 (5.00–6.00)	2.00 (1.00–3.00)	3.00 (2.00–6.00)	2.00 (1.00–3.00)	<.001

Table 4

Descriptive statistics by party preferences – discrete variables (N%)

	Overall	Other	Confedera- tion	Law and Justice	Civic Platform/ Coalition	Poland 2050 Szymon Hołownia	New Left	Total	Chi ² test p-value
N	1432	11%	49.2%	7.8%	13.3%	9.8%	8.9%	100%	<.001
Region									
Lubuskie	38%	13.1%	42.5%	4.1%	20.3%	10.9%	9.1%	100%	
Podkarpackie	62%	9.8%	53.2%	10.1%	9.1%	9.1%	8.8%	100%	
	100%								
Wearing political badges (Yes)	15.8%	18.1%	19.0%	2.7%	15.0%	19.5%	25.7%	100%	<.001
Sighning petitions (Yes)	35.5%	11.1%	39.1%	4.7%	16.7%	13.8%	13.9%	100%	<.001
Public demonstration (Yes)	9.6%	15.3%	32.1%	2.9%	19.7%	10.9%	19.0%	100%	<.001
Boycotting products (Yes)	11.0%	10.8%	49.0%	7.0%	14.0%	8.9%	10.2%	100%	<.001
Sex									
Male	56%	7.0%	67.8%	7.2%	10.7%	4.1%	3.1%	100%	
Female	44%	16.2%	25.4%	8.6%	16.7%	17.0%	16.2%	100%	<.001
	100%								
Place of residence									
Rural	48.1%	11.8%	51.0%	9.8%	10.8%	9.3%	7.3%	100%	
City	51.9%	10.2%	47.2%	5.7%	16.1%	10.3%	10.6%	100%	<.001
	100%								

APPENDIX II

Table 5

**Party Preferences Among Polish Youth – Binomial Mixed Logistic Regression Summaries
(Odds Ratio, 95% CI)**

	Confedera- tion	Law & Justice	Civic Coa- lition	Poland 2050 Szymon Holownia	New Left
1	2	3	4	5	6
(Intercept)	1.80** (1.23, 2.64)	0.03*** (0.02, 0.04)	0.10*** (0.06, 0.16)	0.04*** (0.02, 0.07)	0.02*** (0.01, 0.04)
Lower taxes	1.18* (1.03, 1.35)	0.99 (0.79, 1.24)	0.87 (0.73, 1.03)	0.99 (0.81, 1.20)	1.20 (0.97, 1.50)
Anti-abortion	0.78** (0.64, 0.94)	1.71*** (1.28, 2.29)	0.70* (0.50, 0.97)	0.99 (0.72, 1.36)	0.61* (0.37, 1.00)
Anti-LGBTQ	1.50*** (1.26, 1.78)	1.18 (0.87, 1.59)	0.52*** (0.39, 0.69)	0.79 (0.57, 1.07)	0.50** (0.31, 0.79)
Anti-euthanasia	0.97 (0.82, 1.15)	0.95 (0.71, 1.26)	1.23 (0.98, 1.54)	0.94 (0.72, 1.21)	1.10 (0.82, 1.46)
Economic growth priority over ecology	1.16* (1.00, 1.34)	0.77* (0.60, 0.99)	0.87 (0.71, 1.06)	0.98 (0.78, 1.23)	1.09 (0.86, 1.38)
Free market economy	1.10 (0.96, 1.27)	0.78* (0.61, 0.99)	0.99 (0.83, 1.19)	1.00 (0.82, 1.22)	1.02 (0.82, 1.27)
Self-made man	1.05 (0.91, 1.21)	1.02 (0.80, 1.29)	1.07 (0.90, 1.28)	0.83 (0.68, 1.01)	1.13 (0.92, 1.40)
No government support for poor	1.41*** (1.22, 1.63)	0.56*** (0.44, 0.73)	0.94 (0.78, 1.13)	0.96 (0.78, 1.17)	0.95 (0.76, 1.17)
Religious-based state policy	1.03 (0.88, 1.21)	1.28* (1.03, 1.58)	1.04 (0.81, 1.33)	0.83 (0.63, 1.10)	1.13 (0.80, 1.60)
Less EU influence over my country	1.25** (1.07, 1.47)	1.10 (0.82, 1.48)	0.73** (0.59, 0.90)	0.93 (0.73, 1.17)	0.92 (0.71, 1.19)
Pro-national values	1.05 (0.90, 1.23)	1.34* (1.04, 1.72)	0.94 (0.74, 1.19)	0.94 (0.73, 1.21)	0.80 (0.58, 1.11)
Anti-immigrant (European)	1.33** (1.10, 1.62)	1.17 (0.83, 1.64)	0.83 (0.64, 1.08)	0.83 (0.62, 1.11)	0.80 (0.57, 1.13)
Anti-immigrant (Middle East)	0.87 (0.72, 1.06)	1.23 (0.87, 1.75)	1.13 (0.88, 1.45)	0.98 (0.74, 1.31)	0.97 (0.70, 1.33)
Less social benefits for immigrants when compared to countrymen	1.12 (0.94, 1.32)	0.82 (0.61, 1.12)	1.00 (0.80, 1.24)	1.31* (1.02, 1.68)	0.82 (0.63, 1.06)
I do not trust EU	1.40*** (1.20, 1.64)	0.89 (0.69, 1.15)	0.70** (0.56, 0.87)	0.80 (0.63, 1.01)	1.02 (0.80, 1.32)
Wearing Political Badges (Yes)	0.50** (0.32, 0.77)	0.73 (0.28, 1.90)	0.43*** (0.26, 0.71)	1.54 (0.95, 2.49)	2.05** (1.27, 3.32)
Sighning Petitions (Yes)	0.96 (0.72, 1.29)	0.63 (0.36, 1.09)	1.31 (0.90, 1.91)	1.19 (0.79, 1.80)	1.14 (0.72, 1.79)
Public demonstration (Yes)	0.60* (0.36, 0.99)	0.68 (0.20, 2.28)	1.15 (0.68, 1.95)	0.72 (0.38, 1.38)	1.24 (0.70, 2.19)
Boycotting products (Yes)	1.11 (0.71, 1.73)	1.25 (0.56, 2.79)	0.74 (0.42, 1.28)	1.01 (0.53, 1.92)	0.97 (0.51, 1.85)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender (F)	0.29***	2.56***	0.78	2.70***	2.68***
	(0.21, 0.39)	(1.48, 4.41)	(0.53, 1.16)	(1.66, 4.39)	(1.56, 4.61)
Place of residence (City)	1.07	0.93	1.10	1.14	0.99
	(0.82, 1.40)	(0.58, 1.51)	(0.77, 1.56)	(0.77, 1.68)	(0.64, 1.53)
Religiosity	1.06	1.80***	0.68***	1.58***	0.79
	(0.90, 1.25)	(1.34, 2.41)	(0.54, 0.85)	(1.25, 1.99)	(0.60, 1.02)
N	1432	1432	1432	1432	1432
N (Region)	2	2	2	2	2
ICC (Region)	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00
AIC	1485.97	605.42	977.91	847.92	717.19
BIC	1612.37	731.82	1104.31	974.32	843.60
R2 (fixed)	0.43	0.45	0.36	0.26	0.48
R2 (total)	0.44	0.45	0.36	0.27	0.48

All continuous predictors are mean-centered and scaled by 1 standard deviation. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$;

* $p < 0.05$.