

Psychological characteristics of party electorates

Parliamentary elections held in Poland in October were a catalyst for a change on the political scene. On the political supply side, new programs and personalities emerged. Their origin owes to exhaustion with the government of the coalition of Civic Platform and Polish Peasant Party (PO-PSL), which led to a surprisingly good result of Paweł Kukiz in the first round of the May presidential elections. Two recently formed groupings managed to have their candidates elected to the Sejm: Modern party (Nowoczesna - Ryszard Petru) and the movement Kukiz'15. Moreover, three more parties are in parliament: Law and Justice (PiS), PO and PSL. Who are the people voting for groupings represented in the new parliament, what differentiates them, what psychological attributes and attitudes characterise them?

The analysis centres on the following psychological phenomena: optimism-pessimism, reflected in evaluations and attitudes related to the situation in the country and personal matters; openness to change: conservatism – innovativeness, reflected in the attitude to changes around the world and willingness to introduce them; willingness to cooperate, which consists in belief in the possibility of non-antagonistic interpersonal relations and is based on trust in other people; paranoid political thinking, which is reflected in conviction that there are hidden forces ruling the world and in belief in the so-called conspiracy theory

of history; authoritarianism, which is a conviction that interpersonal relations are hierarchically structured, in a belief in effectiveness of force and necessity to subordinate to authority; anomie, understood as the experience of a loss of sense, being lost in the social world, and in uncertainty about its values and rules; political alienation, which is a feeling of exclusion from the political domain, lack of influence and distrust in mechanisms of power and political elites. The strength of these psychological attitudes was studied with scales constructed on the basis of questionnaire items. The use of scales allows for showing the results as composite indicators.

Voters of PiS are characterised by high levels of political paranoia: they are particularly prone to thinking about politics in terms of a conspiracy of hidden forces. Moreover, they are marked by strong authoritarianism. The PiS electorate is resilient to change. It also lags behind most other groups of voters in readiness to cooperate with other people. It is pessimistic to a less than average extent. Levels of anomie and political alienation are in this electorate similar to the average.

Supporters of PO, the party in government until recently, are characterised by relatively low level of political alienation. They are optimistic to a level above average. Among different electorates they are marked by relatively low tendency to perceive politics as a conspiracy of unknown forces. Anomie and distance to politics (alienation) appear to a low degree. They are more trusting than average and display stronger readiness to cooperate. Their level of openness to change is similar to the average.

The strongest characteristic of the electorate of Kukiz'15 is high openness to change. It is accompanied by above-average willingness to cooperate with others. Supporters of this electoral committee are marked by significantly higher pessimism than other groups. Innovativeness and readiness to cooperate combined with strong pessimism signify strong potential for rebellion in this group of voters. They are also distinguished by a tendency to think about politics in categories of conspiracy of backstage forces. Sympathisers of Kukiz'15 have relatively high level of anomie and political alienation, but low level of authoritarianism.

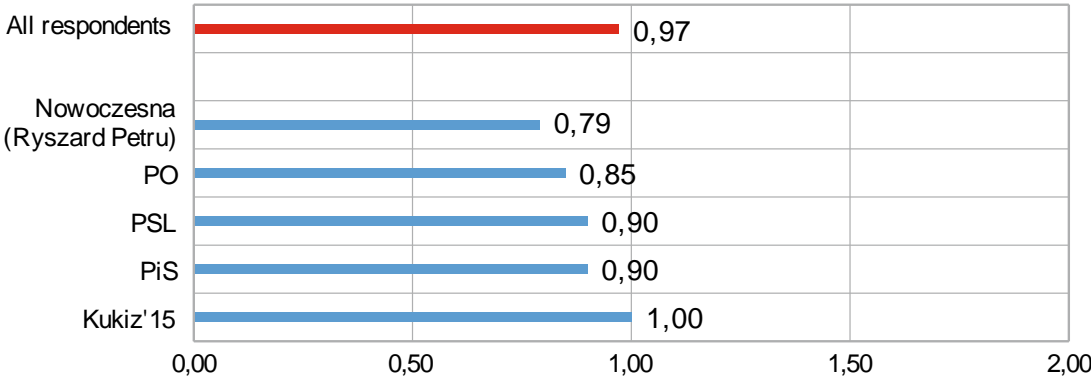
For supporters of Nowoczesna (Ryszard Petru), most indicators reach levels signalling highest satisfaction among electorates. Sympathisers of this party show highest level of optimism and willingness to cooperate. They have lowest tendency to think about politics as backstage power play. Authoritarianism and anomie are weakest among them. As regards political subjectivity they are second to PO voters, but also display low levels of political alienation. They are moderately open to changes.

PSL supporters are marked by below-average pessimism. Moreover, they are differentiated by strong innovativeness, openness to change. Their willingness to cooperate is similar to the national average, but lower than in other electorates. They are characterized by exceptionally high authoritarianism. The other indicators have values similar to those recorded among the society as a whole.

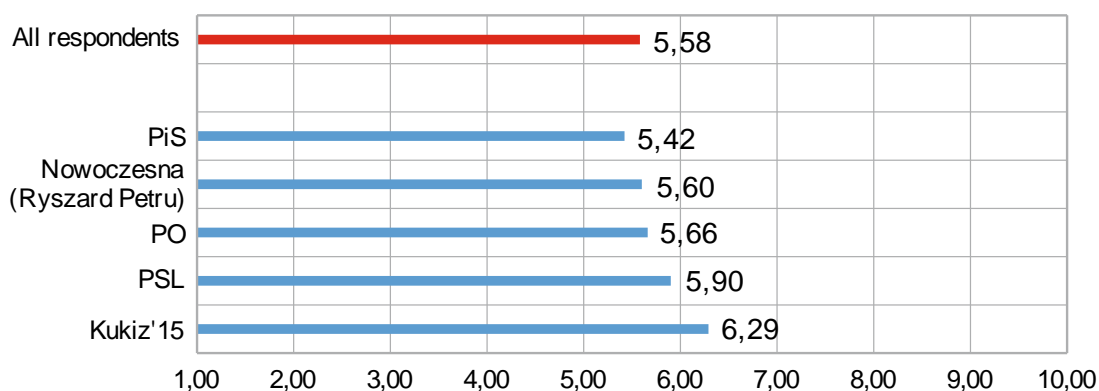
Levels of well-being and attitudes of electorates are related to their socio-demographic profiles. The good psychological state of the supporters of Nowoczesna (Ryszard Petru) is explained by the fact that they are best educated, live in good material conditions and have relatively high position in the social hierarchy. On the other end there is the PiS electorate, which contains a relatively high number of people with low socio-economic status and many seniors. These groups are, in general, in worse conditions. Voters of Kukiz'15 are, in their majority, young and open to change.

Indicators

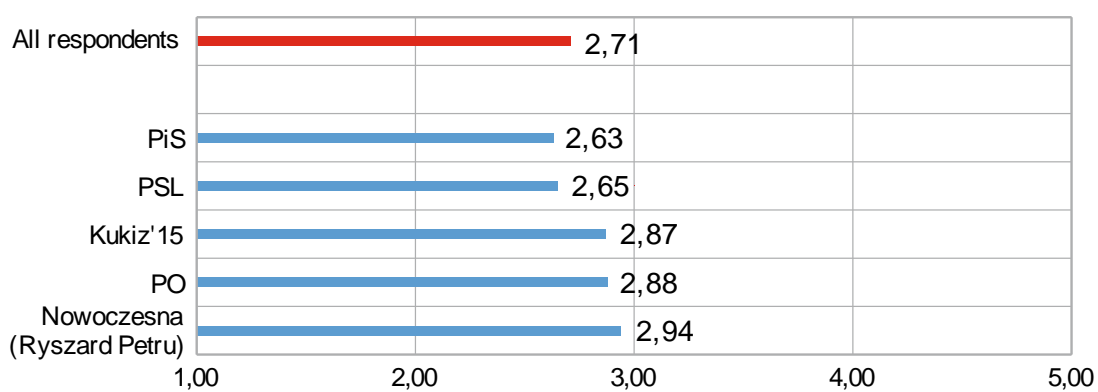
optimism-pessimism on a scale from 0 (highest optimism) to 2 (highest pessimism)



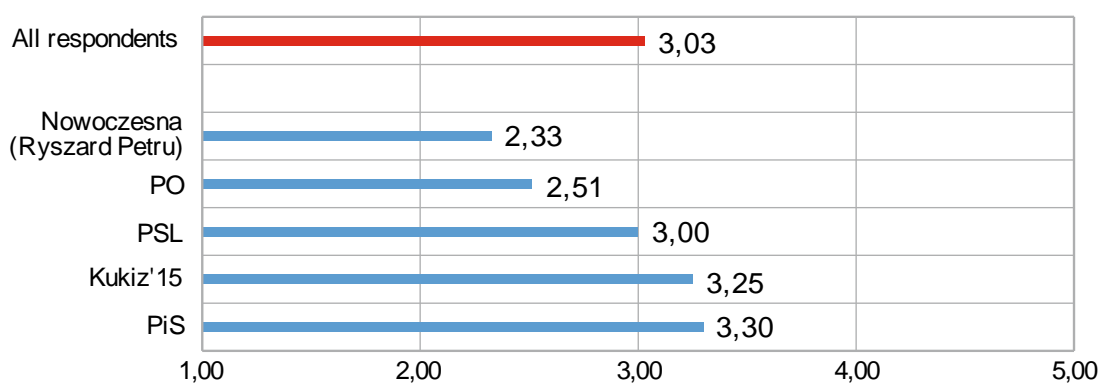
openness to change on a scale from 1 (conservatism) to 10 (innovativeness)



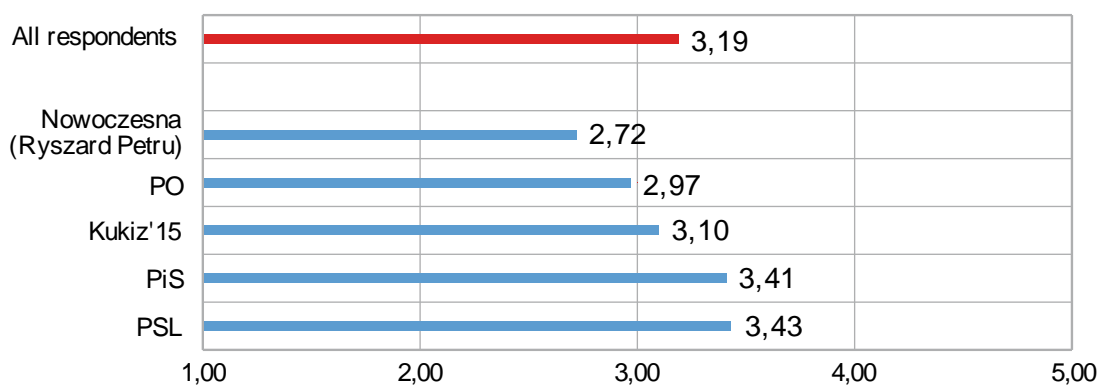
willingness to cooperate on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high)



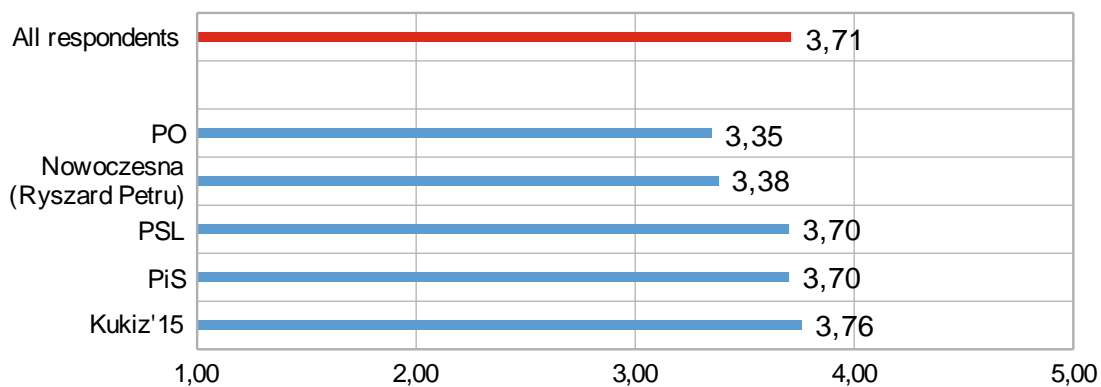
paranoid political thinking on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high)



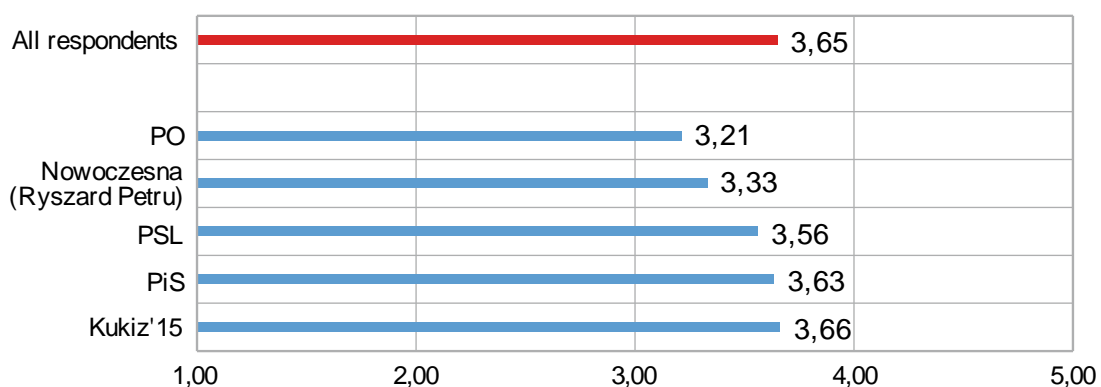
authoritarianism on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high)



anomie on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high)



political alienation on a scale from 1 (civic subjectivity) to 5 (political alienation)



More information about this topic can be found in CBOS report in Polish: "Psychological Profiles of Party Electorates", October 2015. Fieldwork for national sample: August (N=1040) and September 2015 (N=972). The random address sample is representative for adult population of Poland.