

Impact of the intra-party democracy on political parties' reactions to the electoral defeats – a case study of the selected political groupings in Poland¹

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Abstract

An electoral defeat usually marks a significant turning point in the life of political parties. It is often the beginning of the changes taking place within them (Harmel, Janda 1994; Gauja 2016: p. 50–51). Existing research suggest that the desire to improve the electoral outcome is the main argument for reform within political parties (Janda 1990; Harmel et al. 1995). This article looks at a relationship between the reactions of political parties to electoral defeat and one factor found to be important in this respect – i.e. the level of intra-party democracy (IPD) analysed at the organisational level. The study uses the IPD measurement model developed by Benjamin von dem Berge and his team (see: von dem Berge et al. 2013). The article provides the analysis of the level of intra-party democracy of the selected four Polish political parties (on the basis of their statutes) continuously present on the Polish political scene after 2001 and its impact on changes within political groupings after electoral defeats. The author examined the statutes of the *Law and Justice* (PiS), the *Civic Platform* (PO), the *Polish People's Party* (PSL) and the *Democratic Left Alliance* (SLD). These parties suffered defeats either in the 2011 or 2015 elections. The main research problem is to determine how the level of IPD of the examined parties influences their reactions after electoral defeats. The research hypothesis is: political parties with a higher level of IPD should change under the influence of electoral defeats more than parties with a lower level of this indicator. The study used also the methodology of data analysis (party's statutes and other documents) and 21 structured in-depth interviews with representatives of party elites. Based on the results, the index of change after defeat in political parties is created.

Keywords: intra-party democracy, electoral defeat, changes, political parties, Poland

Wpływ demokracji wewnątrzpartyjnej na reakcje partii politycznych na porażki wyborcze – studium przypadku wybranych ugrupowań politycznych w Polsce

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Streszczenie

Porażka wyborcza zwykle stanowi istotny punkt zwrotny w życiu partii politycznych. Często jest początkiem zachodzących w nich zmian (Harmel, Janda 1994; Gauja 2016: s. 50–51). Z dotychczasowych badań wynika, że chęć poprawy wyniku wyborczego stanowi główny argument reform wewnątrz partii (Janda 1990; Harmel et al. 1995). W artykule poszukuje się zależności między reakcjami partii politycznych na porażkę wyborczą oraz jednym czynnikiem, uznanym za istotny pod tym względem – tj. poziomem demokracji wewnątrzpartyjnej (ang. *intra-party democracy*, IPD) analizowanym w płaszczyźnie organizacyjnej. W badaniu wykorzystany zostanie model pomiaru IPD autorstwa Benjamina von dem Berge i jego zespołu (zob.: von dem Berge et al. 2013). Artykuł zawiera analizę poziomu demokracji wewnątrzpartyjnej wybranych czterech polskich partii politycznych (na podstawie ich statutów) nieprzerwanie obecnych na polskiej scenie politycznej po 2001 r. oraz wpływu IPD na zmiany wewnątrz ugrupowań politycznych po porażkach wyborczych. Autorka analizuje statuty *Prawa i Sprawiedliwości* (PiS), *Platformy Obywatelskiej* (PO), *Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego* (PSL) i *Sojuszu Lewicy Demokratycznej* (SLD). Wybrane partie odniosły porażki albo w wyborach w 2011 r. albo w 2015 r. Głównym problemem badawczym jest ustalenie w jaki sposób poziom IPD badanych partii wpływa na ich reakcje po odniesionych porażkach wyborczych. Autorka stawia następującą hipotezę: partie polityczne o wyższym poziomie IPD powinny zmieniać się pod wpływem porażki wyborczej bardziej niż partie o niższym poziomie tego wskaźnika. W badaniu wykorzystano metodologię analizy treści (statutów wybranych partii politycznych) oraz przeprowadzono 21 ustrukturalizowanych wywiadów pogłębionych z przedstawicielami elit partyjnych. W rezultacie powstał indeks zmian po porażce w partiach politycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: demokracja wewnątrzpartyjna, porażka wyborcza, zmiany, partia polityczna, Polska

Political parties are the basic and central links of modern representative democracies connecting the public and political institutions in the decision-making process in the state. Studying and describing the life cycle of political parties, researchers have found that there are frequent changes (especially of a structural and organisational nature) and more or less successes and failures on the political scene, including electoral defeats. There is no doubt that electoral defeat is very often the beginning of reforms taking place in political groupings (Harmel, Janda 1994; Gauja 2016: p. 50–51). There is a consensus that the desire to improve the electoral outcome is the main argument for changes within political parties (Janda 1990; Harmel et al. 1995).

The subject of this article's analysis is selected aspects of the intra-party democracy in four Polish political parties that were defeated in the 2011 or 2015 elections. The way, which political parties are functioning, is largely influenced by the form and nature of democracy in the state. In modern democracies, political parties are the main source of candidate recruitment, as well as the interest aggregation, and they also perform a representational function that links voters to the state (Hazan, Rahat 2010; Poguntke 2000; Lawson 1988; Sartori 1976). The political parties are the main actors in elections. They organise the selection of leaders and the process of selecting candidates for elections at different levels of power within the party, state and local government, as well as the recruitment of future members of parliaments (Norris, Lovenduski 1995). They develop political programmes,

manifestos that are presented to voters in election campaigns (Scarrow et al. 2002). And, most importantly, they are a key element in voters' decisions when deciding who to vote for. However, political parties are important not only during campaigns. They are also the key players in the democratic system between elections.

The process of crystallisation of societies' political behaviour began with the spread of democratic mechanisms in political and party systems in the Central and Eastern European countries. The transitional period was followed by a consolidation of party systems. There was the beginning of the stabilisation of political processes in these countries, similar to the mature Western democracies, as well as the internal mechanisms of political parties (Antoszewski 2009). Political parties in Central and Eastern Europe are also facing the decline of party membership and "presidentialization of politics". In the recent years political parties of the region have responded by proactively increasing the role of their members and activists in the selection of leaders and in the policymaking process. Democratic dimensions (such as: participation, competition, representation and responsiveness) require bi-dimensional presence: inside political parties – intraparty sphere and between political parties, i.e. interparty arena. There is no doubt that the inter-party arena (i.e. what happens between political parties and what happens within political parties) have a significant influence on each other. How the political and party system functions in the state affects how political parties operate, the nature of the mechanisms within them.

According to the public opinion polls, more than 30 years after the beginning of the systemic transformation in 1989 Poles have strengthened their belief in the superiority of the democratic order over other systems, which is illustrated by the support for the democratic form of government considered to be the best. Such belief was expressed by 52% of Polish citizens in 1992, and as much as 73% in 2020 (CBOS 2020). What happens on a macro scale, at the level of the state, has its impact on what we deal with on a micro scale, e.g. in political groupings.

The existing research demonstrates that the desire to improve election results is the main argument for reforms within political parties. This article reflects on some of the correlations related to reactions to electoral defeat within political parties and the factors that matter. It appears that the level of intra-party democracy (IPD) can have a significant impact on what happens within a political grouping, and in particular on any changes undertaken after electoral defeat. The main aim of this article is to examine whether the level of IPD of the four examined Polish political parties affects their reactions after electoral defeats. Therefore, do the adopted democratic mechanisms and the level of democracy inside these important political structures, which political parties are for the state, influence the decisions made in the moment of crisis after electoral defeat? And if they do, what is the relationship between them?

Theoretical framework, hypothesis and research questions

To be able to answer the fundamental questions of this analysis, it is necessary to define the concepts of the intra-party democracy and electoral defeat. The main scholar

literature analysing political parties from organisational perspective often focuses on the concepts of the intra-party democracy and organisational or decision-making democratisation (Scarrow 1999, 2005; Scarrow 2015; p. 86; Cross, Katz 2013; Hazan, Rahat 2010; von dem Berge et. al. 2013; Scarrow et al. 2017; Bolin et al. 2017; Chmaj et al. 2011; Sobolewska-Myślik 2007, 2011, 2014; Sobolewska-Myślik et al. 2016). Two main elements seem to have gained in importance in recent years for the contemporary political parties. Firstly, members and their position in political parties has become more important. For almost 30 years there has been a decline in membership and a crisis of political parties in this area (van Biezen, Poguntke 2014; Scarrow 2017). As a result, political parties have been forced to change the way they engage with their members. Parties and members are still important to each other and need each other even in the changing circumstances (Scarrow 2015; p. 156; Gauja 2016; Young 2013; p. 68; Wincławska et. al. 2021; Jacuński et. al. 2021). Secondly, the role of political leaders has increased (i.e. has become more dominant) within political parties. The process towards candidate-centred politics (Wattenberg 1991), places leaders as key actors (among others in the electoral game) in modern democracies and has been described more broadly as "personalization" (Musella, Webb 2015; Rahat, Kenig 2018) and "presidentialization" of politics (Poguntke, Webb 2005). Therefore, the transformations that have taken place in the Western political parties in recent decades have entailed organisational changes that, among other things, have strengthened leaders at the expense of intermediate organisational levels within parties, reinforced their autonomy, and emphasised their role on the political stage as the "faces" of these groupings. These changes took place in connection with the growing role of leaders in the parties.

For this reason, in addition to the electorate, there is a greater influence of the party leaders themselves on the intra-party decision-making process. Among other important changes taking place within political groupings are rule modifications that strengthen the leader's position, his autonomy in proposing party programmes, the attempt to bypass the lower organisational levels of political parties or the institutionalisation of direct elections for party positions or candidates in general elections. The latter is a part of the recent trend to spread direct democracy methods within IPD – more widely used in political parties in the Western countries rather than in the Central and Eastern Europe (von dem Berge, Obert 2018). It represents an attempt to create a direct chain between two elements important to the modern political parties: their members (or even the electorate) and the party elites. It is an attempt to reconnect voters with their representatives.

There is no single agreed definition of what it means for a party to be intrinsically democratic. Will it be understood as participation, inclusiveness, representation, centralisation, accountability, or will the process and manner of decision-making be relevant here? Intra-party democracy (IPD) can be understood as "both about the distribution of power and influence within a party, and within the broader society" (Cross, Katz 2013; p. 6). IPD refers to the level, methods of operation and organisation of parties, including: the selection of candidates, which is crucial for political parties (Hazan, Rahat 2010); the organisation and position of members within the party, their participation in the decision-

making process within the party structure. Within political parties, internal democracy contributes to the development of citizens' political competences and/or leads to the election of better representatives, which in turn ensures a better quality of policy-making by political parties, the formulation of political/election programmes that better meet the expectations of members and supporters.

The intra-party democracy can be understood quite generally, and in this case it refers to the implementation of a minimum set of democratic norms in political party organisation. In the model case, in internally democratic party, decisions and actions should be formed from the "bottom-up", and the distribution of power within the party "should be marked by dispersion at different levels, bodies and individuals rather than by concentration in one organ" (Čular 2004: p. 34). Within a democratic party, decision-making should take into account the interests of individual members, diverse backgrounds, and different opinions expressed, articulated at the level of party bodies. The inclusiveness and decentralisation are extremely important in the analysis of IPD. Their implementation in the structure and decision-making processes allows parties to involve many and, thus, realise one of the basic elements of democracy, which is responsibility and accountability for action (Scarrows 2005: p. 6).

The IPD model, which became the basis for the coding scheme and a tool for measuring the level of democracy within political parties, was developed by Benjamin von dem Berge, Thomas Poguntke, Peter Obert and Diana Tipei, who considered the most relevant elements of structure and processes within political parties. These researchers distinguished three dimensions of the IPD concept (von dem Berge et. al. 2013: p.7):

- 1) rights of members, including membership rules, rights of minorities, i.e. women, representation of ethnic minorities, etc.;
- 2) organisational structures (party organisational levels);
- 3) political decision-making processes, including:
 - a) recruitment, i.e. personnel decisions:
 - selection for positions within the party, e.g.: election of the party leader, election of members of party central bodies such as the executive committee, etc.;
 - selection/nomination of candidates in elections to public office;
 - procedures, such as applicable voting rules, in the selection of candidates for party positions and in general elections;
 - b) programmatic issues, including influencing political manifestos or deciding on coalition formation.

For a party to be considered internally democratic in terms of both structure and decisions, the conditions of inclusiveness (representation), decentralisation, taking into account the methods of representative democracy and even direct democracy in their operation, should be fulfilled.

Proponents of IPD usually emphasise that democratically organised political parties "select more capable and appealing leaders, [...] have more responsive policies, and, as a result, [can] enjoy greater electoral success" (Scarrows 2005: p. 3). Moreover, by introducing and extending democratic procedures, such parties can

reinforce democratic culture throughout their environment, including the state level. However, IPD is not a remedy for all the frailties of political groupings and for all possible contingencies, because "some procedures are better suited to some circumstances than to others" (Scarrow 2005: p. 3). It is worth noting here that not all political parties in mature democracies use the intra-party democracy mechanisms. IPD has "the apparent potential to promote a "virtuous circle"² linking ordinary citizens to government, benefiting the parties that adopt it³, and more generally contributing to the stability and legitimacy of democracies in which groups compete for power" (Scarrow 2005: p. 3). It is clear that IPD is a highly contested, somewhat controversial concept. "As parties entrenched in civil society, they require wide enough channels through which to gain the support of the electorate. As parties in government, they need centralization of power and resources to be effective players in the decision-making process." (Karasimeonov 2005: p. 96; von dem Berge et al. 2013: p. 2). Although there are also those who point out that an excess of the intra-party democracy can lead to dilatory decision-making or ineffective political groupings (Cross, Katz 2013). Thus, we should recognise that IPD is not a clear-cut and one-dimensional concept.

Moreover, as William P. Cross and Richard S. Katz acknowledge, it seems that party status is important for adopting a particular level of IPD. Opposition groupings, unburdened by the challenges of day-to-day governance and agreement with a possible coalition partner, find it easier to involve their non-parliamentary members in decision-making and the development of political programmes. These parties are freed (sometimes temporarily) from making difficult decisions, often quickly, regarding the necessary compromises or complicated shaping of state policy. In turn, the governing parties also face an important "democratic dilemma" as to whether they should represent the views of their members, activists, voters, or all citizens. For these groupings, the issue becomes more complex and complicated (Cross, Katz 2013: p. 9).

The concept of electoral defeat remains to be clarified. There is no doubt that this issue, too, is an ambiguous category, and it may raise many controversies. This category has been already explained extensively (Paczeński et al. 2020: p. 64; Paczeński, Bachryj-Krzywaźnia 2019: p. 125–126), so the author will pay attention to the issue central to this article. Electoral defeats should be considered in three dimensions:

- 1) loss of votes (decline in voter support),
- 2) reduction in parliamentary representation (i.e. number of seats),
- 3) change in the status of a political party in relation to the executive (change from ruling party to opposition party).

For parties that have governed or co-governed until now, the electoral defeat means no representation in the cabinet and no possibility of influencing state policy. And in the case of the opposition parties, the defeat will be registered if they maintain their status as opposition parties and, what is more, there is a further loss of support in the elections (a drop in the number of votes) and of the seats in parliament.

² in other words, a positive development path.

³ i.e. intra-party democracy.

It seems, therefore, that the high level of intra-party democracy will induce political parties to make changes in structure, programme, replacement of political elites or leader. Political responsibility and the inevitable accounting for defeat may indicate definitely stronger determination and courage to undertake reforms within the party. On the other hand, party elites (who want to stay in power in the party) will be reluctant to change, which will result in their position in the groupings being shaken.

However, some research demonstrated that sometimes parties tend to counteract their pre-election shifts, and do so particularly reluctantly after losing (see: Margalit et al. 2021). The extent of these ideological shifts is more limited in parties with larger electorates voting for party leaders. Moreover, that parties are less likely to run with a centrist platform after losing. According to the analysis done by Margalit and team in particular, moving away from the centre is associated with a higher probability of returning to power.

Taking the above-mentioned issues into account, the following **hypothesis** can be put forward: political parties with a higher level of intra-party democracy change more after losing elections (make deeper changes) than parties with a lower level of this indicator. The verification of the presented hypothesis is facilitated by the following **research questions**:

- What is the level of democracy inside the selected Polish political parties?
- What reactions to the electoral defeats occur among the Polish political parties?
- Is there a relationship between the level of internal party democracy and reactions to the electoral defeats?

Research methodology and selection of cases

This article presents the analysis of the level of intra-party democracy of selected Polish political parties (on the basis of their statutes) continuously functioning on the Polish political scene since 2001, and their influence on changes within political groupings after electoral defeats. The author of this article analyses the statutes of the four political parties, namely: the *Law and Justice* (pl. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS), the *Civic Platform* (pl. *Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), the *Polish People's Party* (pl. *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL), and the *Democratic Left Alliance* (pl. *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*, SLD), i.e. groupings which are formally political parties within the meaning of the Act on Political Parties of 27 June 1997. These parties experienced electoral defeats (PiS in 2011, while SLD, PO and PSL – in 2015), which took place not long after the adoption of the new statutes. After the 2011 elections the *Law and Justice*, and in 2015 – SLD remained opposition parties, both experiencing losses in their support levels. Moreover, in the case of SLD, the party did not receive any seat in the Sejm and for the first time ever found itself in the group of extra-parliamentary opposition parties. The other two – PO and PSL – received far fewer votes and seats in 2015, which resulted in losing their status as ruling parties and moving to the opposition.

The author analysed and coded the statutes of the above-mentioned four political parties, the last ones that were adopted before the electoral defeat of each party. Party

documents, especially statutes, are the primary objects of study when analysing IPD (Katz, Mair 1992; Norris 2006). Appropriate coding of data contained in the statutes of political parties can help to identify the course of processes within political parties (Rapley 2013: p. 43). The coding model of intra-party democracy created by Benjamin von dem Berge, Thomas Poguntke, Peter Obert and Diana Tipei (see: von dem Berge et al. 2013: p. 17–30) has been applied in this research. According to it, IPD can take maximum values from -1 (undemocratic) to +1 (democratic). The more the IPD index approaches the value of 1, the more democratic solutions are found in the party statute.

In this article, other sources (both secondary and primary sources, produced for the purpose of the text) were also used to analyse the changes introduced after the defeats. This includes data obtained during the implementation of the grant *Electoral defeat as the catalyst for change in the European political parties* funded by the National Science Centre, Poland (no. 2017/27/B/HS5/00537).

Table 1: Selected Polish political parties analysed in this article

	Party name (English/Polish)	Party acronym	Status of the political party before the defeat	Year of defeat	The latest party statute adopted before the electoral defeat
1.	<i>Law and Justice</i> (pl. <i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i>)	PiS	opposition	2011	26.09.2009
2.	<i>Democratic Left Alliance</i> (pl. <i>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej</i>)	SLD	opposition	2015	28.04.2012
3.	<i>Civic Platform</i> (pl. <i>Platforma Obywatelska</i>)	PO	in government	2015	23.11.2013
4.	Polish People's Party (pl. <i>Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe</i>)	PSL	in government	2015	17.11.2012

Source: Author's compilation.

In addition, the author characterised the changes that occurred in the organisational structure of indicated political parties after their electoral defeat. In order to verify what occurred inside the political parties between 2018 and 2021, 21 structured in-depth interviews were prepared and conducted according to IDI methodology (see: Kvale 2012: p. 123–124). The interviews were conducted with the high ranked members of each of the analysed parties, including e.g.: members of the Parliament, members of the European Parliament, as well as some party elites representatives. Each of the IDI lasted at least 40 minutes, the questions were open, providing the respondent with the freedom to answer and engage in free associations. In order to objectivise the source material, expert questionnaires on changes in political parties were also conducted with academics (Dix 1992) and specialists in the functioning of political parties in Poland. On the basis of research results, the index of change (IPC) after defeat in political parties was created. The change can occur in different dimensions of their functioning: (1) change of leadership; (2)

party decomposition; (3) change of power balance in the party; (4) programme changes; (5) structural changes. Referring to this five dimensions each expert's answer was estimated either 0, 1 or 2 points (see: Paczeński et al. 2020: p. 69–70). Therefore, the index of party change can range (oscillate within) from the smallest value of 0 (which would indicate that no changes were undertaken in the party after the defeat), to the maximum value of 2 (which would mean, in this case, that the parties changed in the maximum, deep way, in all five analysed dimensions). Of course, the peculiar limitations of this method must be borne in mind (see: Mair 2001; Budge 2000). It is acknowledged that expert respondents give answers according to their knowledge and subjective assessment. However, despite this, expert surveys have been recognised as a research technique (Whitfield et al. 2007). The expert survey questionnaire was composed of 9 main questions and additional 4 detailing questions concerned the reactions of political parties to electoral defeat.

Research results and their analysis

Using the coding model of von dem Berge et al. (2013), it found out that among the examined political parties, the SLD party was the most internally democratic in the analysed period, just before the defeat. Lower levels of IPD were recorded by PO and PSL. The least democratic internally before its defeat was PiS (see *Table 2*).

The political parties examined in this article – except for PiS – changed their leader after experiencing electoral defeat. Three of them immediately. In PO, it also coincided with the party's electoral calendar. All parties saw changes in the balance of power within party structures. After the defeats, politicians other than those who had stood in the shadows so far, and who had a rather moderate influence on the party, came to the fore. This usually entailed significant changes in the balance of power and the influence of intra-party factions on the party.

Table 2: Changes within the political parties, IPD index and Index of party change (IPC) after electoral defeat (in details) for the four Polish political parties (PiS, SLD, PO, PSL)

Political party	Date of adoption of last statute before the defeat	IPD Index	Change of leadership	Party's decomposition	Change of power balance	Pro-gramme changes	Structural changes	Index of party change (IPC) after electoral defeat*
PiS	2009	0.06451613	0	2	2	2	0	1.20
SLD	2012	0.29437826	2	2	2	2	1	1.80
PO	2013	0.23913043	2	0	2	0	1	1.00
PSL	2012	0.25000000	2	0	2	0	1	1.00

Source: Authors' calculations using coding scheme of IPD by: von dem Berge et al. 2013.

* Index of party change (IPC) – from: Paczeński et al. 2020: p.72.

The *Law and Justice* party suffered its second consecutive defeat in the 2011 parliamentary elections and once again remained an opposition party with parliamentary representation. Compared to its previous result in 2007, four years later it lost 888,461 votes (only 4,295,016 were cast for it, a drop of 2.22%) and 9 seats (gaining 157 parliamentary seats, against 166 in 2007). The last statute before these elections was adopted at the PiS Congress in 2009. However, it introduced significant changes compared to the 2003 document. Not only was the rather strong position of the party leader maintained, but his power was further strengthened, by adding some significant changes (e.g. article 19.2.), or by indicating that it is the president who is the highest executive authority (article 15.1). In addition, it was indicated that it is the party president who has the power to determine the tasks and competences of the vice-presidents, the chairman of the executive committee and the treasurer. Even before 2009, the high level of dominance of the party leader, resulting from the statute, was noticeable, but so was his actual role in the grouping and his influence on the party. As interviewees from the *Law and Justice* indicated, in 2011 the position of the leader of the Law and Justice party not only in the 2009 statute, but also in practice became even stronger compared to that in the earlier document (from 2003). Virtually all matters important for the party were subject to the decision of Kaczyński and the headquarters (in-depth interview PiS_4). Before the 2011 elections, the level of internal party democracy was at its lowest level - in comparison with other parties - at 0.06451613.

PiS was the only political party surveyed not to dismiss its president, Jarosław Kaczyński, after its second consecutive defeat in the 2011 parliamentary elections, because, as one interviewee stated: "there is only one leader in PiS. There was no discussion here. [...] The result did not shake it" (in-depth interview PiS_1). Others emphasised that the president "had strong opposition in the party after the lost elections" (PiS_4); "rather, no one questioned Jarosław Kaczyński's leadership at all, and it was beyond discussion" (PiS_5). The events of 2010 and the plane crash in Smolensk, which resulted in the death of the President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, who was associated with PiS, as well as many of the party's key politicians, had a certain impact on PiS's result in the election and on the events that followed (in-depth interviews PiS_1, PiS_3). The party did not reform its structure either. Instead, its political programme was significantly modified. Deep changes also occurred in the internal balance of power within the party, as confirmed by PiS politicians themselves (in-depth interview PiS_4; see *Table 2*). This was connected with the departure of several important members and, at the same time, MPs from PiS (led by Zbigniew Ziobro and Jacek Kurski) and the establishment of the party *Solidarna Polska*, which was mentioned by the PiS politicians interviewed (PiS_1, PiS_2).

For SLD, the defeat in 2015 was all the more painful, because the party not only lost votes and seats, but also the status of the parliamentary grouping. SLD ran in the elections as a part of the coalition *Electoral Committee "United Left"* (pl. *Zjednoczona Lewica*) together with four other political parties: the *Your Movement* (pl. *Twój Ruch*), the *Polish Socialist Party* (pl. *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*), the *Labour Union* (pl. *Unia Pracy*), and the *Green Party* (pl. *Zieloni*), they received 1,147,102 votes (7.55%). The electoral threshold for

party coalitions was 8%. The scale of the failure came as a huge surprise to the politicians of this grouping, as they themselves admit (in-depth interview SLD_2). It is interesting that not long after the defeat, already at the SLD Convention on 12 December 2015, an important decision was made to introduce direct election of the party chairman (in 2012 this possibility already existed, but it was not the only one). It was also quickly changed, as early as 23 January 2016. At that time, the so-called "barons" – the heads of the party's regional (provincial) structures – had a strong position in the party. Maintaining the optional election by the congress was an additional strengthening of this level of the party. At the same time, the leader's position was further weakened in the following year after the elections by depriving him of the actual, informal influence on the nomination of candidates in the presidential elections and by completely transferring *expressis verbis* the right to give support to the candidate for President of the Republic of Poland to the SLD National Convention (Article 24 of the SLD Statute of 2016). But this was also the result of the SLD's unsuccessful presidential campaigns and elections, preceding the parliamentary elections and the support for the criticised, non-party affiliated candidate (Magdalena Ogórek). The SLD agree that this was also one of the reasons for their poor result in the parliamentary elections (in-depth interviews SLD_1, SLD_2). It should be emphasised that the SLD's statute of 2012 introduced some of the most democratic rules for the functioning of the party among all Polish political parties analysed in this research. The IPD Index of the *Democratic Left Alliance* (SLD), according to the 2012 statute in force at the time, reached 0.29437826. It should be emphasised that the SLD made the deepest change amongst all the political parties analysed. It changed significantly in terms of leadership – there was a change of the leader (Leszek Miller was replaced on that position by Włodzimierz Czarzasty). This change was also connected with a change in the power of the most influential politicians and factions in the party. Some of them even left the party (in-depth interview SLD_2). In addition, the party significantly modified its programme, as well as made some adjustments to its structure, although these were less extensive than the changes in the dimensions mentioned above.

The 2015 elections brought the PO 3,661,474 votes (24.09%) and only 138 seats, as well as a change in status from ruling party to the largest opposition party in parliament. The PO lost 15.09% of the vote and 69 parliamentary seats. After eight years in government, the party's politicians expected such result (in-depth interview PO_1). The reaction to the defeat was a change of party leader. Ewa Kopacz resigned from her post. A year before the election, she replaced Donald Tusk as the leader of the PO. The change after the defeat in 2015 take place immediately, and it also coincided with the intra-party elections for the position of leader, which took place in accordance with statutory deadlines. As a result of a vote among party members, in which 52% of eligible PO activists took part, she was replaced as the party leader by Grzegorz Schetyna, who received as much as 91% support. He represented the faction opposing E. Kopacz. As a result, there was a significant change of forces within the party. The factions that had previously argued with the previous leadership of the PO received a strong influence on power in the party, which was also emphasised by politicians from this group in interviews (in-depth inter-

views PO_1, PO_3). However, no changes were made in the political programme and there was no decomposition of the party. In addition, minor changes were made in the party's structure. The PO recorded the lowest index of total changes after the election defeat among the groupings analysed. The level of intra-party democracy according to the PO statute adopted by the National Convention two years before the elections, i.e. on 23 November 2013, was then not very high, at only 0.23913043.

The defeat suffered by the fourth of the analysed parties – the PSL – may not have been as severe as that of the SLD, but the fate of maintaining any parliamentary representation was at stake until the end. The *People's Party* only slightly exceeded the 5% minimum threshold for political parties. This was the party's worst result in parliamentary elections ever. The PSL received 779,875 votes, a mere 5.13%, and 16 seats (down by 12 parliamentary seats and 3.23% of the vote on the previous election). The PSL reacted to the defeat immediately and decisively – by changing its leader. As a result of the urgent decision taken by the party's General Council and under significant pressure from the party elite (as admitted by one of the interviewees, PSL_2), burdened by the defeat of Janusz Piechociński (as emphasised by another of the interviewed party politicians, PSL_1) already on 7 November 2015⁴ was replaced by Władysław Kosiniak Kamysz. Also in 2015, supporters of the former party leader were ousted from power in the party. Consequently, as in the PO, there was a change of forces. However, well-known politicians maintained their influence in the party. It is worth remembering that in this party its traditional leadership retains its dominant role (Tomczak 2013: p. 103). This is reflected in the rather low level of the index of intra-party democracy, which is only 0.25. The PSL did not change its programme, and the structural changes introduced after the elections were clearly of a shallower, less radical nature compared to the changes in the balance of power within the party (although the politicians interviewed perceived them, PSL_1). No significant politicians or political factions left the party.

Conclusions and discussion

The research results answered all three research questions and indicated that each of the parties that experienced a defeat made changes. All parties made changes in terms of power balance. Three of them (PO, PSL and SLD) changed their leaders and made slight changes in their structures. Two parties (PiS and SLD) noted the departure of important politicians from their ranks and made significant changes in their programmes. The highest level of reform after the defeats was observed in the two opposition parties (SLD and PiS). The smallest changes took place in PO and PSL (half-hearted, so to say, as deep in only two of the five dimensions and in one moderate, and none in the others), which after the 2015 elections lost their position as ruling parties and moved to the opposition. These results confirm the already proven rule that opposition parties are definitely more willing to change than previously ruling parties (Margalit et al. 2021). The

⁴ almost immediately, as early as the 13th day after the parliamentary elections.

answer to the question about the level of democracy within the surveyed Polish political parties in the period 2011–2015 indicates that they were not parties with a high IPD index. In the researched parties it ranged from the lowest in PiS (0.06451613) to the highest in SLD (0.29437826).

However, the analysis of the correlation of the level of intra-party democracy with the depth of changes introduced in the selected four Polish political parties does not give a clear verification of the hypothesis posed in this article. In three of the four groupings (PO, PSL, and SLD) there is a relationship indicated in the hypothesis: political parties with a higher level of intra-party democracy changed more after losing elections (made deeper changes, as evidenced by the level of the index of party change) than parties with a lower level of this index. Among the analysed parties, the opposition SLD, with the highest IPD, introduced the deepest changes, with an IPC of 1.80, and the smallest – 1.00 – were the PO and PSL (two parties in government until its defeat) with the lowest level of the index of IPD among the three indicated here. However, this regularity was not confirmed in the case of PiS. Here, the level of intra-party democracy is the lowest, but the corrective actions taken after the defeat in the parliamentary elections of 2011 should be assessed as quite deep, as evidenced by the high value of the index of party change – 1.20 (second among all analysed parties). Therefore, it should be concluded that the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this article was only partially confirmed. Thus, there must be additional variables that affect the making of changes in political parties. And these may be, for example, human factors, consisting in interpretation and occurring phenomena or suggestive narration of party elites (including the leader himself), which may inspire changes. This is because they impose assessments, according to which actions are then taken within political parties. In the party *Law and Justice*, the party chairman enjoys very strong powers and can significantly influence the situation within the party.

The aim of the research set out in this text has been fully achieved. However, it should be noted that the indicated research problem requires taking into account also a qualitative analysis, apart from indicating quantitative dependencies in explaining the relationship. For example, to explain and understand the case of the party *Law and Justice*, the party leader was not dismissed from his office after the electoral defeat, because his strong position in the party was important, as well as the events of a year ago and the Polish presidential plane's crash in Smolensk. The framework of this study does not allow for such detailed analysis, but it may become a starting point for further studies.

In subsequent studies it would also be worthwhile to examine how the level of intra-party democracy changed after the electoral defeats and the corrective measures taken. This study could equally be extended to other political parties from the Central Eastern Europe to make possible the indication of the regularities between the level of intra-party democracy and reactions to defeats in parties in this region, or more broadly to include also parties from the Western European countries in such studies. Such a broad comparative analysis could reveal the prevalence of certain correlations.

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