

Expectations from the government of Law and Justice (PiS)

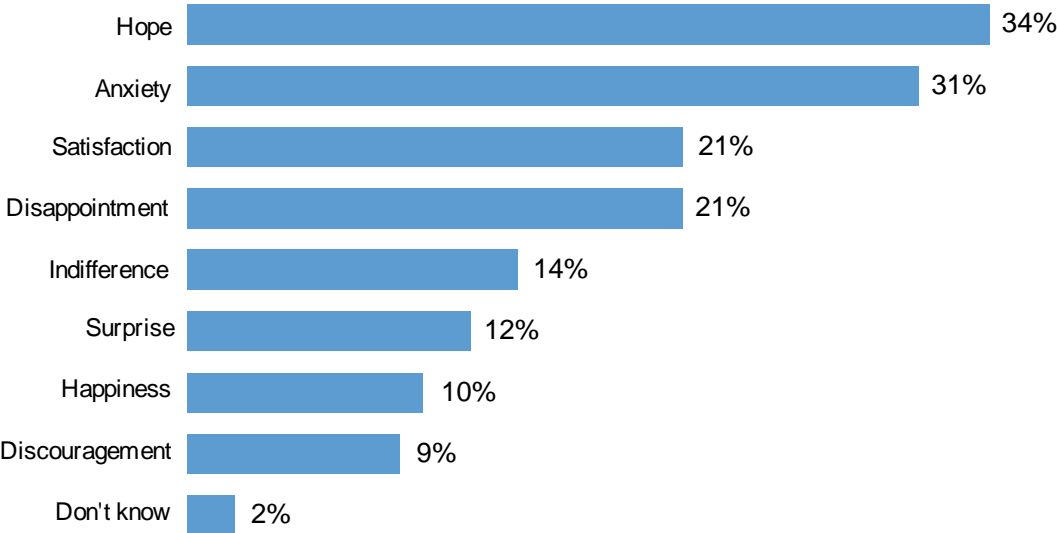
For the first time since 1989, a single party won the majority of seats in Sejm and Senate, which enabled it to single-handedly form the government. Considering its earlier victory in the presidential elections, it has full responsibility for the state.

Reactions to the result of parliamentary elections were ambivalent. Happiness, satisfaction and hope were only slightly more common than negative feelings such as disappointment, discouragement and anxiety. The two dominant emotions, i.e. hope and anxiety, indicate the necessity for change while at the same time showing fear about the balance of this change, whether it will bring more benefits or losses. Both types of reactions differentiate the society in cultural and stratificational dimension. Hope is shared to the greatest extent by religious people, residents of rural areas, respondents with low education living in relatively bad material conditions. Anxiety is most commonly shared by the non-believers, residents of the biggest cities, respondents with higher education and highest income.

Law and Justice made a lot of specific pledges before presidential and parliamentary elections. Therefore, it hardly comes as a surprise that almost a fifth (19%) of respondents

formulating expectations from the government of Beata Szydło in an answer to an open-ended question generally mention fulfilling pre-election promises.

What was your emotional reaction to the result of October elections to Sejm and Senate?



Up to two answers possible

As regards socio-economic issues, the primary concern is creating new jobs and reducing unemployment (15%). It is connected with the demand that economic emigration should be reduced and Poles working abroad should be encouraged to return to Poland (3%). Among the other expectations related to employment were the reduction of the scope of civil law contracts and, in general, improvement of employment conditions (2%). In the context of labour market and emigration respondents frequently drew attention to the situation of young people and the need to create for them better prospects for life and work in Poland (7%).

A large proportion of responses were related to the expected changes in the pension system, first of all to the return to previous retirement age as promised during campaign (60 years for women, 65 years for men) or to linking retirement age with total lifetime number of years in employment (7% in total).

A large number of expectations concerned the improvement of the economic situation in Poland, support for investment and entrepreneurs. Moreover, respondents demanded a tax

decrease, an increase in tax-free income, as promised before elections, and a reduction in VAT (2%).

Many respondents mentioned expectations concerning the improvement of material living conditions (9%), pay rise (10%) and increase in pensions and disability benefits (7%). It is interesting to note that demands related to wage increase and improvement in the standard of living were formulated less frequently than eight years ago, when Donald Tusk formed his first cabinet. Presently more stress was put on the need for the state to support families: in this context respondents mentioned the promise of 500 PLN for a child, stressed the need to support families with many children and demanded free crèches and kindergartens (5% in total). A quite lot of answers (4%) concerned better social policy, welfare benefits and the improvement of the situation of the poorest.

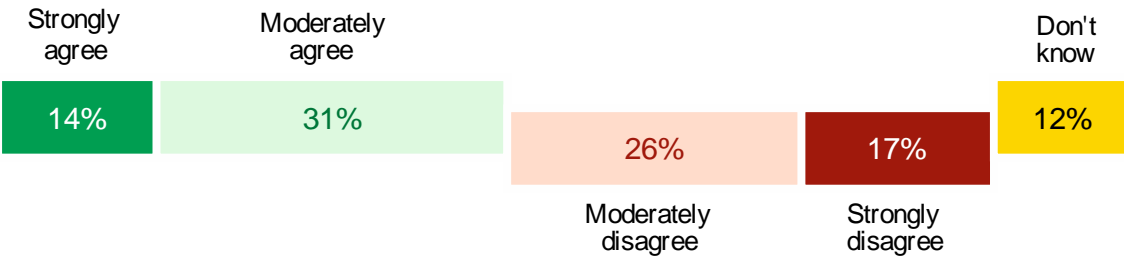
Expectations related to other spheres of social life focused mostly on healthcare. There were multiple voices calling for better availability of medical services: easier access to specialist physicians, reducing waiting time (7%). Moreover, respondents mentioned changes in the system of education, hoped for improvement in the quality of schooling, supported the PiS plan to abolish middle schools (gimnazjum) and return to the pre-reform age of starting school (2% in total).

A sizeable part of responses concerned foreign policy, including international security (7% in total). Expectations in this sphere were very different, sometimes contradictory, and reflected hopes and fears related to the expected PiS moves. First, there were demands for wise foreign policy, good representation of Poland abroad, improvement of position and image of Poland. Respondents, on the one hand, talked about the need to defend Polish interests in the EU and on the international scene and supported greater independence from the EU, but on the other hand stressed the need for good cooperation within the EU and with Poland's neighbours. There were visible concerns about confrontational attitude in international relations and provoking conflicts, and fear of war with Russia was explicitly stated. A few voices mentioned the refusal to accept refugees and the need to improve Poland's safety.

A large proportion of responses concerned public life and the methods of governing. In this group the directly and indirectly voiced concerns about PiS government were the most common. There was general hope for good government, competence and effectiveness and a focus on genuine issues (5%). Some respondents appealed for morality in politics: honesty, transparency, prevailing state over party interest (5%). Others mentioned the concepts forming the party name: justice (5%) and law (2%). There were repeated calls for peace, stabilization, avoidance of radical change (4%), warnings not to waste the achievements (2%). Respondents relatively often voiced their hope that the new government would listen to the people and their appeals and would not be arrogant (4%). Some people demanded consensus, stressed the need to avoid conflicts and maintain good cooperation both within the authorities and between the government and opposition or appealed to the government to avoid divisions within the society (3% in total). Concerns were reflected in demands for the observance of civil rights, tolerance for different views and preserving democracy (2%).

The evaluation of the situation in which full power is in the hands of one political camp is ambiguous and depends largely on political views. According to 45% of respondents it is good for Poland, while a slightly smaller group (43%) consider it bad.

Do you agree that it is good for Poland that Law and Justice has the majority in the Sejm and Senate and that government and president are from the same political camp?



More information about this topic can be found in CBOS reports in Polish: "Between Hope and Fear – the Reactions on Results of Parliamentary Election", and "Expectations for the New Government", November 2015. Fieldwork for national sample: November 2015, N=951. The random address sample is representative for adult population of Poland.