

# When Talk Doesn't Walk: Increasing Accessibility of Polling Stations in Polish General Elections 2023

Jarosław Flis<sup>1</sup>, Jakub Krupa<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This article examines the impact of the January 2023 amendment to the Electoral Code on voter turnout and the electoral performance of the ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS). The analysis focuses on one specific aspect of the reform, namely the expansion in the number of polling stations. This change affected primarily rural municipalities. We investigated whether the amendment led to a measurable increase in voter turnout, and if so, whether the initiator of the reform benefited electorally from this increase, or whether the efforts proved counterproductive.

**Keywords:** voter turnout, polling stations, electoral law.

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## Introduction

On October 15, 2023, Poland held parliamentary elections under newly amended electoral regulations introduced less than a year earlier. During its 71st session on January 26, 2023, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland passed reforms to the Electoral Code aimed explicitly at increasing voter turnout. Among the key changes were an expansion in the number of polling stations and the provision of free public transportation for voters. These measures coincided with a record-high turnout of 74.38%. However, attributing this outcome solely to legal amendments would be overly simplistic. Other dynamics, such as widespread dissatisfaction with the incumbent government, likely played a significant role.

The second term of the Law and Justice government (2019–2023) was the time of numerous crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, internal coalition instability, the Belarus–Poland border standoff, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its ripple effects, escalating tensions with the European Union (including the suspension of EU funds over rule-of-law concerns), and mass protests following the tightening of abortion laws by the Constitutional Tribunal.

We sought to assess whether the legal reforms introduced by the government had a measurable impact on voter turnout. Specifically, we examined whether differences emerged between municipalities that established new electoral commissions and those that did not (Q1). Moreover, we investigated whether support for the political initiators of the reform increased in municipalities where authorities introduced new commissions (Q2).

## Background

The 2023 amendment to the Electoral Code introduced substantial changes to the structure of precincts and the distribution of polling districts. Notably, it reduced the population threshold required to establish a polling station and mandated, in a quasi-obligatory manner, the creation of polling sites in localities with more than 200 residents, assuming a suitable venue was available. The overarching goal was to expand the number of polling stations and enhance physical accessibility for voters. Before the reform, Poland had over 25,000 permanent polling districts (excluding foreign and special districts), each serving between 500 and 4,000 residents, which is a range that the amendment left unchanged.

Beyond expanding polling infrastructure, the reforms introduced measures to facilitate participation among voters with disabilities and those aged 60 and above, especially in areas lacking public transport. These provisions were clearly tailored to older, rural demographics rather than the electorate at large (Buczowski, 2023). The reform also included measures to increase transparency, such as standardized voter registration and adjustments to the legal framework of electoral administration (Pyrzyńska, 2024).

Nevertheless, the amendment left unaddressed several long-standing structural issues frequently cited by scholars, political parties, civil society organizations, and media outlets. These include the absence of demographic rebalancing in seat allocation across constituencies and the controversial consolidation of overseas votes into a single suburban Warsaw district,

which is a practice that undermines the principle of equal suffrage (Cześnik *et al.*, 2022; Flis & Krupa, 2023).

The selective nature of the changes introduced led to opposition from both rival political parties and media outlets critical of the ruling party. Opponents of this reform, primarily members of opposition parties, argued that Law and Justice would establish very small polling stations near churches, where no more than 30 people would vote (Jaźwiński, 2023). They claimed that the reform did not aim at increasing turnout, but rather at improving the electoral prospects of the ruling party, which was trailing in the polls (Małecki, 2023).

However, the emotionally charged public debate surrounding the reforms does not necessarily imply that either the hopes of the initiators or the fears of their opponents were grounded in actual social dynamics. Consequently, we sought to verify the event's framing and description. Nevertheless, the primary focus of our analysis remains the mechanism through which these changes influenced voter turnout.

## Voter turnout

The foundational model for explaining voting behavior originates from an equation by Anthony Downs (1957) based on the rational choice model of *homo economicus*. This perspective conceptualizes voting as a transactional act, occurring when the expected benefits of participation outweigh the associated costs, such as time spent and the effort required to reach a polling station.

Andre Blais (2007) identifies three main approaches in the study of voter turnout. The first is descriptive and emphasizes the fact that turnout levels vary significantly across countries and electoral contexts. Numerous comparative compilations demonstrate that participation is neither constant nor universal, but contingent on temporal and spatial factors.

The second approach involves comparative analyses based on aggregated data at a high level of generality. These studies examine entire societies to identify structural factors contributing to variation in turnout, particularly institutional arrangements. As Blais notes, such factors include compulsory voting laws, the type of electoral system, the perceived importance of the election, and the ease of voting.

The third approach focuses on the individual level, adopting the perspective of the individual voter. This research aims to explain why individuals choose to vote or abstain, often by analyzing demographic characteristics such as age, education, gender, place of residence, and income.

Our study followed the second approach described by Blais, employing a natural experiment enabled by the implementation of new rules for the designation of voting precincts. Moreover, we incorporated elements of the third approach, i.e., voter differentiation, by including variables such as urbanization and historical divisions as controls.

Polling place accessibility is a well-documented, albeit modest, determinant of turnout. Drawing on Danish data, Bhatti (2012) found that individuals residing 5 km from a polling station were around 10 percentage points less likely to vote than those living adjacent to one. Tomkins *et al.* (2023) and Rowangould *et al.* (2024) reported similar results. They observed that even a one-minute increase in driving time could reduce voting likelihood by up to 2 percent-

age points. In the Polish context, Kowalski and Roźniata (2016) confirmed the significance of physical access to polling stations, while Alipour and Lindlacher (2025) demonstrated that relocating a polling site could decrease turnout by 0.5–0.6 percentage points.

This was not the government's first foray into voter mobilization. For instance, during the 2020 presidential election, the PiS-led government launched an initiative promising new fire trucks to rural municipalities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants that achieved the highest turnout. As Gulczyński and Cześnik (2024) observe, similar campaigns had been conducted earlier, such as Poznań's 2019 pledge to host a public concert if turnout surpassed that of Warsaw. However, the 2020 initiative was more clearly aligned with pork-barrel politics and aimed to bolster support for incumbent President Andrzej Duda (Evans, 2011).

We may explain the heightened attention paid by the ruling party during the 2019–2023 parliamentary term to rural voters in two ways. From a public interest and social integration standpoint, rural areas warrant special attention due to historically lower turnout levels compared to urban centers (Cześnik, 2007). Admittedly, the issue becomes more complex when considering local elections, as turnout patterns tend to reverse in such contexts (Gendźwiłł, 2020; Flis, 2022). This suggests that factors beyond just the physical accessibility of polling stations drive differences in turnout between urban and rural areas.

A second justification lies in the distribution of political support: Law and Justice has consistently enjoyed its strongest backing in rural areas, particularly in the southeastern regions of the country (Flis, 2014, pp. 130–139).

Targeting voter groups that feel politically alienated may yield substantial electoral advantages. This is exemplified by the case of Hungary, where extending voting rights to the Hungarian minority in neighboring countries has produced significant political benefits (Tanács-Mandák & Horváth, 2025).

Another mobilization strategy employed in 2023 involved scheduling a national referendum to coincide with the parliamentary election. The referendum's questions were widely viewed as designed to galvanize conservative, Eurosceptic, and anti-PO/PSL voters, i.e., supporters of PiS or the far-right Confederation party (Krupa, 2025). Together with a broader upward trend in parliamentary turnout since 2011 (Cichosz, Michalczyk-Wliziło, & Podolak, 2023), these factors created a conducive environment for record participation.

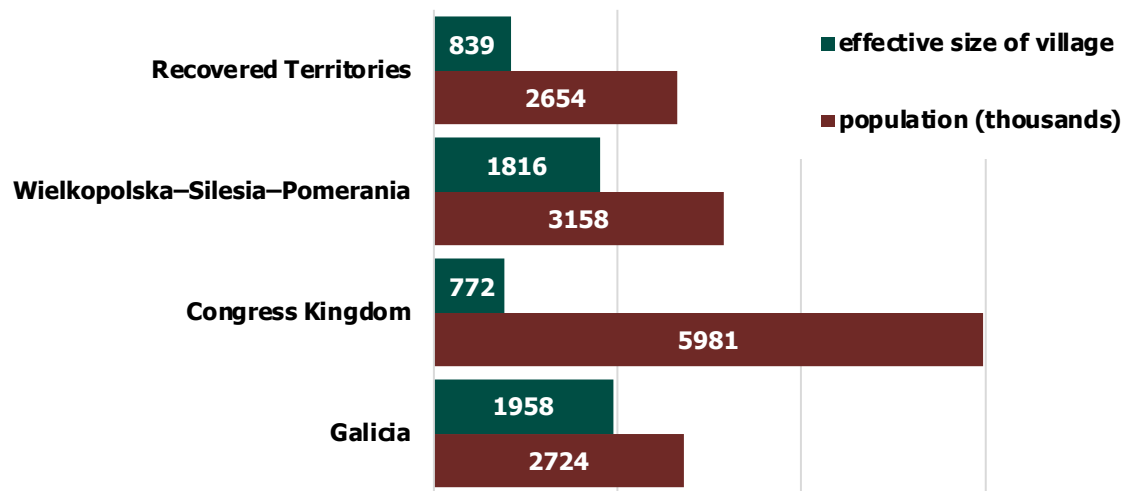
## Reform outcomes

Proponents of the 2023 Electoral Code revision anticipated the creation of approximately 6,000 new polling stations. This was particularly surprising given that, according to data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), there were approximately 10,000 localities with fewer than 200 inhabitants that did not have a polling station. In the subsequent analyses, this theoretically maximum number of potentially possible polling stations served as a reference point, referred to as the “expected” value. However, according to data from the National Electoral Commission (PKW), authorities established only 3,336 additional stations in rural areas, just over half the projected number and one-third of the theoretically expected. The reasons behind this shortfall remain uncertain. While there is no evidence of deliberate obstruction by electoral authorities, two plausible explanations stand out: (1) logistical challenges, such

as the unavailability of appropriate venues, and (2) reluctance from local authorities who may have believed existing arrangements sufficiently served community needs (Flis, 2023).

It is crucial to recognize that despite Poland's formal status as a unitary state, significant internal diversity persists. This is particularly evident in the variation of village sizes across historical regions (Flis & Krupa 2023) and the differing average effective village sizes, as illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Effective village size and population across historical regions



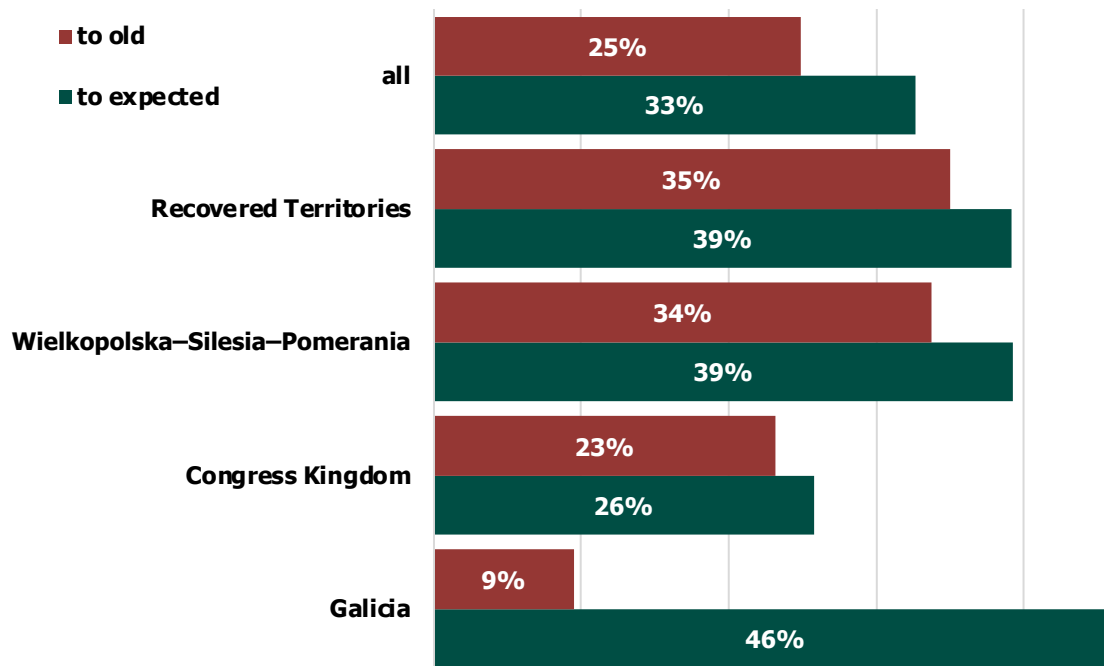
Note: sourced from Statistics Poland.

Thus, one might have anticipated a marked regional disparity in the establishment of new polling stations. Flis (2023) showed that there were striking disparities in the implementation of this new provision introduced by the amendment to the electoral code. For example, in Senate District No. 40 (Wołomin), the number of newly established polling stations amounted to only 11 percent of the initially expected number. By contrast, in Senate District No. 64 (Gdynia), the number of new polling stations reached 92 percent of the expected figure (Flis, 2023, pp. 8–11).

Apparently, these differences did not result solely from the different settlement networks but from the approach of the enforcers of the new law, namely the district election commissioners. Indeed, they took decisions independently, in each of the units, generally corresponding to one senatorial constituency. The individual accounts of the key participants in the process, i.e., the mayors, indicate the varying flexibility of the district commissioners towards the demands of the local authorities, passing on to them the suggestions of the inhabitants. In particular, these suggestions concerned leaving the existing location of polling stations where these were located in schools close to churches, but were to be moved to volunteer fire stations. Commentators saw this as an unnecessary encroachment on existing custom, i.e., combining participation in elections with attendance at Sunday mass.

Indeed, the geographic distribution proved highly uneven: in some regions, the number of new stations fell well below expectations, whereas in others the increase almost exactly matched initial projections of initiators. Figure 2 depicts this pattern.

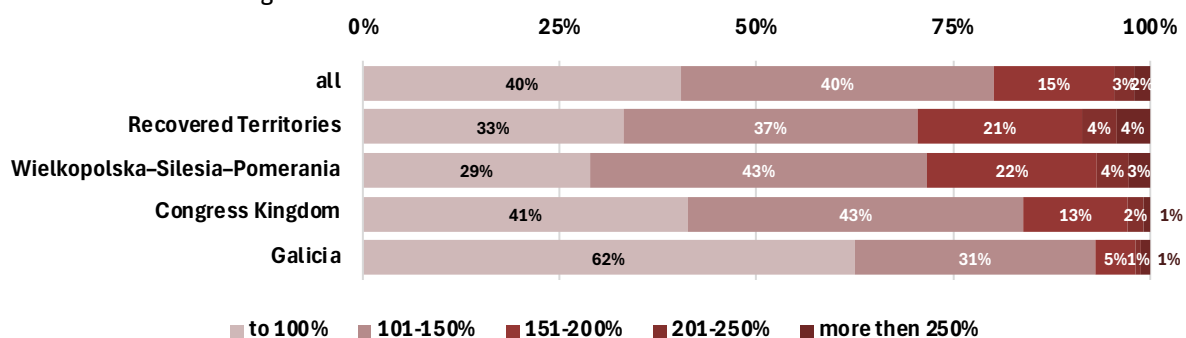
FIGURE 2. Newly established polling stations across historical regions



Note: sourced from the National Electoral Commission.

Figure 2 presents results for Poland as a whole and its historical regions: Galicia, the Recovered Territories, the Congress Kingdom, and a combined area referred to as Wielkopolska-Silesia-Pomerania. Noteworthy, we can largely explain the magnitude of the phenomenon observed in the former region of Galicia, as depicted in the figure, by its historical settlement patterns and administrative structure. Notably, this region recorded the highest proportion in the country of localities with more than 200 residents that previously lacked a polling station but were assigned one under the new regulations. Figure 3 shows a percentage-based representation of this distribution.

FIGURE 3. Proportion of municipalities with different shares of newly established polling stations across historical regions



Note: sourced from the National Electoral Commission.

Figure 3 clearly highlights Galicia as a particularly distinct region, exhibiting the highest percentage of cases where no change occurred, that is, no new polling stations were estab-

lished, compared to other regions and the national average. Moreover, in over 90% of cases in this region where a change did occur, it amounted to less than a 50% increase.

## Data and methods

The considerable variation in the actual implementation of the new law provided a unique opportunity to assess the reform's effectiveness. Since the extent of changes in the polling station network does not follow a straightforward pattern in relation to urbanization or historical regional divisions, we could treat it as an independent factor in the analysis of both voter turnout and changes in support for Law and Justice (PiS).

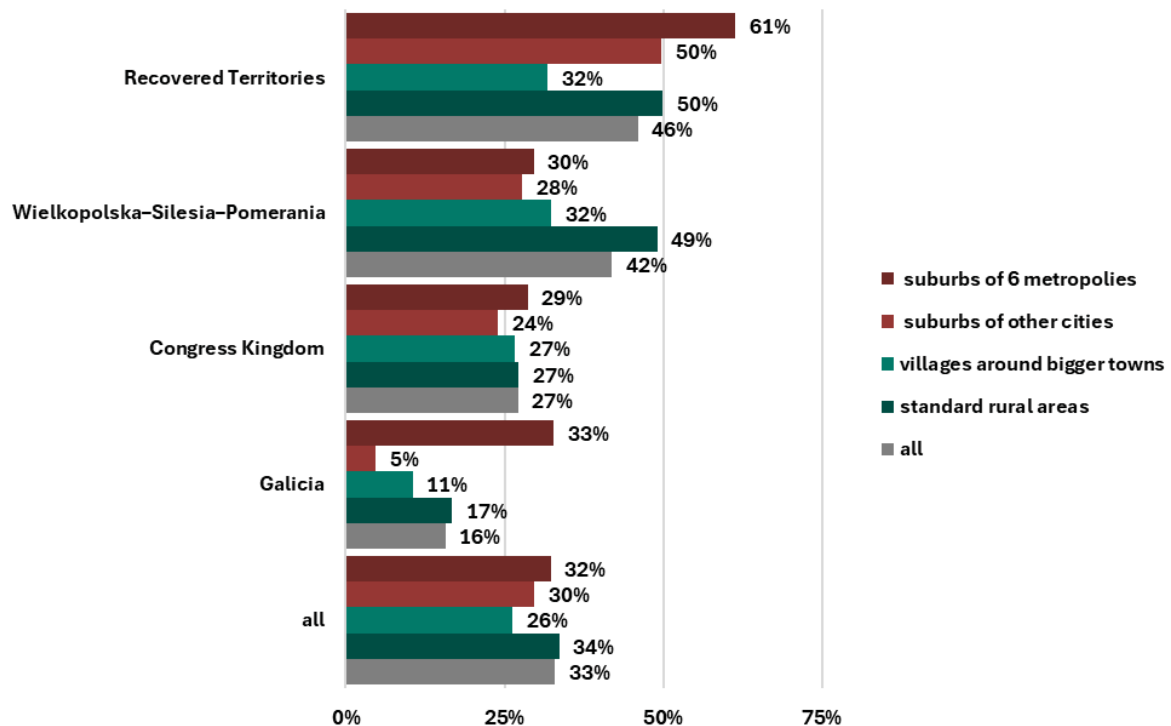
In our main research, we relied on voting results at the municipal level and a comparison of turnout in the 2019 and 2023 parliamentary elections. Poland's municipal division was relatively stable. The authorities neither abolished nor created any municipalities between the 2019 and 2023 elections. Unlike the division into municipalities, the division into precincts tends to undergo regular, noticeable changes. This is the case even when there is no additional impetus in the form of a change in the rules for designating precincts. This is due to demographic changes. Although such changes are not widespread, they make it extremely difficult to conduct analyses at the precincts' level. Due to the scale of the phenomenon, matching newly created precincts to the previous distribution would be a labor-intensive activity. However, analyses at the level of municipalities provide a chance to compare around 2,000 cases, which seems a sufficient basis for drawing quantitative conclusions.

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify two methodological points. First, in the subsequent analyses, we included only those municipalities classified as rural in the databases of the National Electoral Commission (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza), excluding urban municipalities and the urban parts of urban-rural municipalities. As identifying which polling stations are "new" and which are "pre-existing" after the amendment to the electoral code is highly complex, we used the following indicator: the percentage increase in the number of polling stations at the municipal level compared to those that existed previously. This percentage of newly established polling stations within a municipality constituted the key explanatory variable used to assess changes in voter turnout and support for the Law and Justice party.

We also grouped municipalities according to the urbanization typology proposed by Śleszyński (Śleszyński & Komornicki, 2016; Śleszyński *et al.*, 2021), distinguishing four categories: (1) 6 metropolises with suburban areas, (2) other cities with suburban areas, (3) bigger towns and urbanized villages, and (4) small towns and rural areas. For our analysis, only the rural parts of this typology were relevant. Therefore, within this four-part division of Poland, we reclassified the categories as follows: (1) rural municipalities constituting the suburbs of the six metropolises, (2) suburbs of other cities, (3) villages in municipalities with bigger towns and urbanized villages, and (4) standard rural areas. We then examined the average increase in the number of polling stations across Poland's historical regions, taking this urbanization classification into account (Figure 4). Following preliminary analyses, we found that municipalities located near metropolitan areas exhibited changes in voter turnout likely driven by demographic shifts and new settlement patterns. We observed a similar pattern in

the changes to the polling station network. Consequently, we excluded these municipalities from the analysis.

**FIGURE 4.** Newly established polling stations as a percentage of the expected across historical regions and categories of rural areas



Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

Preliminary analyses showed that changes in turnout in Galicia followed different patterns than in the rest of the country. These differences were due to more than just the smaller scale of changes in the number of polling stations in this part of the country.

Our analysis ultimately comprised four models, organized into two pairs following a consistent structure. In each pair, one model focused on 1,632 rural municipalities (excluding metropolitan areas and municipalities in Galicia), while the other focused on 275 rural municipalities in Galicia (also excluding metropolitan suburbs). We designed one pair of models to explain changes in voter turnout, while the other addressed changes in support for the party that initiated the new regulations. In the basic model, we included historical divisions in the form of dummy variables. We took the Congress Kingdom as the base category.

In the model, we also included previous turnout in the form of the percentage of eligible voters who did not participate. The increase in voter turnout is not unlimited; hence, it was important to account for the potential number of voters who may have been persuaded to participate. Crucially, this variable showed no noticeable correlation with the increase in the number of polling stations in a municipality.

We also considered changes in the number of eligible voters, calculated as a percentage of their previous number. The change in the number of eligible voters may have resulted from standard demographic processes, but it could also reflect a phenomenon whereby citizens registered to vote in their actual place of residence or obtained certificates allowing them to

vote outside their official place of registration. In the models analyzing changes in support for Law and Justice (PiS), we included baseline support levels as a control variable.

## Turnout changes

As Table 1 shows, the overall increase in voter turnout in rural municipalities amounted to 14%. However, depending on the region of the country and the level of urbanization, this effect ranged from 11% to 16%. Undoubtedly, the variation in changes in turnout was significantly smaller than the variation in the effects of the new regulations concerning polling precincts.

**TABLE 1.** Increase in voter turnout by rural area category across historical regions

	Suburbs of 6 metropolies	Suburbs of other cities	Villages around bigger towns	Standard rural areas	All
Recovered Territories	15%	15%	16%	16%	16%
Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania	13%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Congress Kingdom	13%	14%	14%	14%	14%
Galicia	13%	11%	12%	12%	12%
all	13%	14%	14%	14%	14%

Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

The linear regression model presented in Table 2 includes the following variables: Polling Station Change, Nonvoters 2019 (the percentage of individuals who did not vote in the previous parliamentary election), Voter Eligibility Change, Recovered Territories, and a regional classification including Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania, with the Congress Kingdom serving as the reference category. The model explains almost 30% of the variance in the increase in turnout at the municipal level.

**TABLE 2.** Linear regression model for the Recovered Territories, the Congress Kingdom, and Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Pr(> t )
Intercept	-1.3291	1.3005		-1.0220	0.307
<b>Polling Station Change</b>	<b>0.0118</b>	<b>0.0011</b>	<b>0.2343</b>	<b>10.7666</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Nonvoters 2019	0.1572	0.0087	0.4480	18.0111	0.000
Voter Eligibility Change	0.0873	0.0114	0.1841	7.6769	0.000
Recovered Territories	0.4515	0.1249	0.0870	3.6157	0.000
Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania	0.1488	0.1272	0.0264	1.1700	0.242
N	1632				
R-squared	0.299				
Adj. R-squared	0.297				

Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

As shown in the regression model above, several noteworthy findings emerged. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, the densification of polling stations led to only a

modest increase in turnout – approximately 1.2 percentage points for a 100% increase in the number of polling stations. Unsurprisingly, turnout increased more in areas where the initial levels were lower. However, we may interpret the positive correlation between the change in the number of voters in a municipality and the change in turnout as indicating that voters who change their place of residence or vote outside their place of residence tend to vote more frequently than other residents, both in the municipalities they moved to and those they moved from. However, this interpretation appears to contradict the findings of studies such as Squire, Wolfinger and Glass (1987) and Highton (2000), which associate higher mobility with lower voter turnout.

Only one of the historical divisions proved to be significant (excluding Galicia, where the situation was qualitatively different), namely, the Recovered Territories, where we observed a noticeably higher increase in turnout. It is plausible that additional social forces present during the 2023 election exerted a stronger influence in this part of the country, where the rural population tends to be less settled than in other regions.

We now turn to Model 2, which we estimated for Galicia. The rows of the table present variables analogous to those used in Model 1, Polling Station Change, Nonvoters 2019, and Voter Eligibility Change. However, Model 2 performs considerably worse, explaining only 0.5% of the variance in the change in voter turnout at the municipal level ( $R^2 = 0.005$ ).

**TABLE 3.** Linear regression model for Galicia

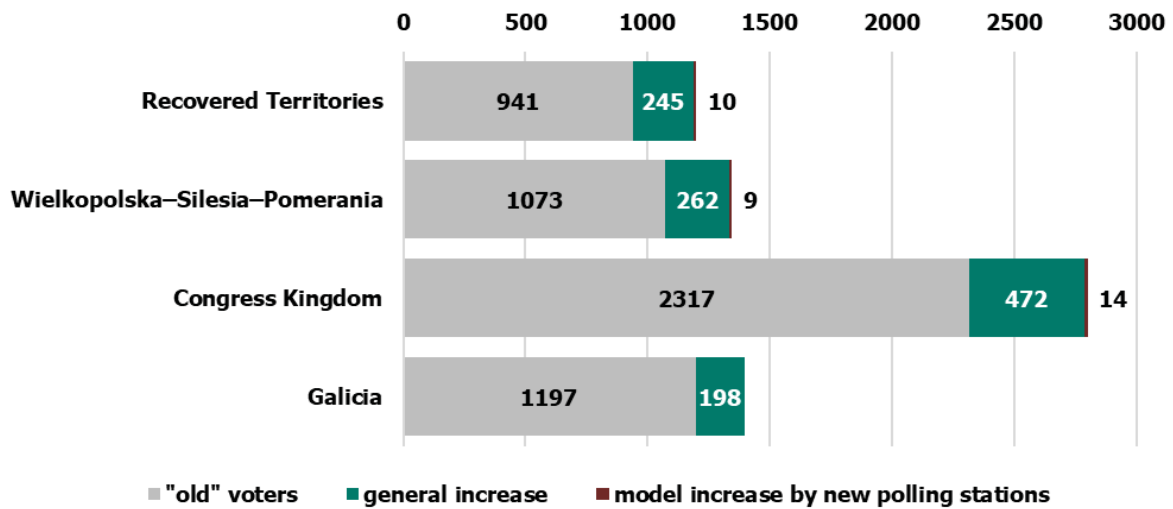
Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Pr(> t )
Intercept	5.9275	5.2672		1.1254	0.261
<b>Polling Station Change</b>	<b>0.0004</b>	<b>0.0042</b>	<b>0.0065</b>	<b>0.1040</b>	<b>0.917</b>
Nonvoters 2019	0.0508	0.0256	0.1373	1.9844	0.048
Voter Eligibility Change	0.0356	0.0484	0.0493	0.7363	0.462
N	275				
R-squared	0.018				
Adj. R-squared	0.005				

Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

The situation in rural Galician municipalities differs from the rest of the country not only in that the increase in the number of polling stations was not correlated, even minimally, with the increase in turnout. We did not observe any such correlation with the change in the number of eligible voters either. Furthermore, the share of previously non-voting individuals from 2019 had a significantly smaller effect on changes in turnout four years later than elsewhere in the country. Consequently, the overall model explains only half a percent of the variance in turnout increases in this region. This issue is intriguing and warrants further analysis.

Based on the parameters of all the above models, we calculated the number of additional votes for each municipality, the appearance of which corresponded to the modelled effect of increasing the number of polling stations. Figure 5 shows this calculation.

FIGURE 5. Voters mobilized as a result of the introduced changes (thousands)



Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

The total effect of the changes is 33,000 new votes, compared to almost 1.2 million voters who additionally appeared at the ballot box in rural areas unrelated to the increase in the number of voting stations.

Such a visualisation makes it clear how marginal the effect of the changes introduced at such a cost was, from a purely organisational point of view, including the emotional and political debate. Of course, we cannot rule out that the very idea of change contributed to an overall greater mobilisation and activation of rural communities. However, this is a topic for separate research.

## Political gains

The final step of the analysis was to see whether the increase in the number of voting stations has increased support for the initiators, the Law and Justice Party. In the study area, PiS won more than 3 million votes in 2019, of which more than 800,000 in Galicia. Overall, this support decreased, even if only slightly, by more than 18,000 votes. However, against the backdrop of a significant increase in turnout, this meant that the percentage of support fell significantly, from 57 per cent to 46 per cent. The biggest decline occurred in Galicia, both in terms of numbers (over 30,000 fewer votes) and percentage (-12). On the other hand, in the Recovered Territories, there was a slight increase in the number of votes (an additional 12,000), which also meant a drop in percentage support (from 44 to 36). Table 4 presents changes in support for the Law and Justice party, calculated as the percentage of eligible voters supporting the party, in rural areas across different parts of the country. We can hardly describe these changes as spectacular. Interestingly, variation in support was more pronounced across different types of rural areas than across historically distinct regions. This suggests a growing importance of urbanization-based divisions over historical ones, which had shaped Polish political life over previous decades (Żukowski, 2003).

**TABLE 4.** Change of Law and Justice party in rural areas as a percentage of Eligible Voters

	Suburbs of 6 metropolies	Suburbs of other cities	Villages around bigger towns	Standard rural areas	All
Recovered Territories	-2.75%	-0.52%	0.83%	2.01%	1.20%
Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania	-2.69%	-0.36%	-0.84%	1.21%	-0.20%
Congress Kingdom	-2.78%	-1.90%	-0.03%	1.82%	0.80%
Galicia	-2.54%	-3.52%	-1.14%	0.01%	-0.71%
all	-2.76%	-1.53%	-0.34%	1.40%	0.33%

Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

We now turn to the next model, which focused on support for the initiator of these changes, namely the Law and Justice party. Table 5 presents the following variables: Polling Station Increase, Voter Eligibility Change, Recovered Territories, and Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania. The dependent variable in Table 5 is the change in support for Law and Justice, measured as a percentage of eligible voters. As in the previous model, we excluded Galicia and municipalities located near metropolitan areas (U1). This model explained 26 percent of the variation in support for Law and Justice.

**TABLE 5.** Linear regression model: the change in support for PiS for the Recovered Territories, the Congress Kingdom, and Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Pr(> t )
Intercept	24.3007	1.0476		23.1975	0.000
<b>Polling Station Increase</b>	<b>0.0110</b>	<b>0.0011</b>	<b>0.2164</b>	<b>9.7216</b>	<b>0.000</b>
PiS19 Eligible Voters	-0.0830	0.0083	-0.3041	-9.9701	0.000
Voter Eligibility Change	-0.2076	0.0106	-0.4332	-19.5227	0.000
Recovered Territories	-1.1641	0.1603	-0.2221	-7.2605	0.000
Wielkopolska–Silesia–Pomerania	-1.4990	0.1585	-0.2629	-9.4593	0.000
N	1632				
R-squared	0.261				
Adj. R-squared	0.259				

Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

Although changes in support for PiS were statistically significantly related to changes in the number of polling stations in a municipality, the magnitude of this relationship was marginal. Model estimates indicated that a twofold increase in the number of polling stations corresponded to a 1-percentage-point increase in support for PiS. We found much stronger associations with prior levels of support, changes in the number of voters, and even historical regional differences.

We now turn to Model 4, which we estimated for the Galicia region. We present it in Table 6 below. The variables included were analogous to those in Model 3: Polling Station Increase, PiS19 Eligible Voters, and Voter Eligibility Change. The dependent variable in Table 6 was again the change in support for Law and Justice (PiS), measured as a percentage of eligible voters. As before, we excluded municipalities located near metropolitan areas (U1). Model 4 explains 33% of the variation in support for Law and Justice ( $R^2 = 0.33$ ).

**TABLE 6.** Linear regression model: The change in support for PiS in Galicia

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Pr(> t )
Intercept	45.5084	4.2059		10.8201	0.000
PiS19 Eligible Voters	-0.0676	0.0200	-0.1704	-3.3828	0.001
Polling Station Increase	0.0106	0.0040	0.1325	2.6448	0.009
Voter Eligibility Change	-0.4424	0.0432	-0.5080	-10.2298	0.000
N	275				
R-squared	0.339				
Adj. R-squared	0.331				

Note: own calculations based on the National Electoral Commission's data.

In terms of changes in support for PiS, the pattern observed in Galicia was largely similar to that in the rest of the country. While PiS did gain some additional voters in Galicia, based on the increase in the number of polling stations, the scale of this gain was minimal.

The increase in the number of polling stations resulted in a gain of approximately 33,000 votes for Law and Justice (PiS) in rural municipalities, excluding metropolitan-adjacent areas (U1). While this might appear to be a noteworthy outcome, we must view it in the context of over one million new voters who turned out in this part of the country. At most, we can note that such gains were some kind of offset to the losses suffered in general, but even so, only a trace.

Law and Justice's gain from the increase in the number of polling stations, which corresponds to the increase in the number of voters caused by the same factor, is worth finally weighing up against the scale and cost of this change. By creating over 3000 polling stations, each employing a minimum of five people, the party won 30,000 new voters. In simple terms, therefore, we can say that each person newly recruited to run an election resulted in the mobilisation of two (!) additional voters. Noteworthy, at the time, polling station crew members received a stipend of 700 PLN, with vice-chairpersons earning 800 PLN and chairpersons 900 PLN.

## Conclusions and discussion

The initiators of the amendment to the Electoral Code estimated that the changes would result in the creation of approximately 6,000 new polling stations. In the explanatory memorandum to the amendment, the legislator argued that bringing polling stations closer to voters was a citizen-oriented and pro-turnout measure intended to facilitate electoral participation (Druk nr 2897).

From a retrospective perspective, the initiative to increase the number of polling stations in rural areas appears misguided, and much of the public controversy it generated ultimately proved unwarranted. Possibly, this attempt to alter the Electoral Code just months before the election had the opposite effect to the intended one – voters may have perceived it as an abuse of power, which in turn further alienated them from the ruling party.

There is no evidence to suggest that Law and Justice succeeded in increasing its support through the introduction of new polling stations. On the contrary, there are indications that

the move may have mobilized voters supporting other political parties. While establishing a clear causal relationship remains difficult, one conclusion is clear: the electoral gains for Law and Justice resulting from the densification of polling stations were marginal and entirely disproportionate to the resources invested.

In theory, one could propose an alternative explanation for the motives of the reform's initiators when considering the potential effects of the introduced changes. The expansion of the polling station network in rural areas may have been intended as a general signal to the public, particularly within these areas, emphasizing special concern for rural residents. From this perspective, the goal was not merely to facilitate voting, but rather to intensify the urban–rural divide. Under such an interpretation, whether new polling stations were actually established in a given municipality would be of secondary importance. What mattered was the symbolic gesture that the government was paying particular attention to rural regions.

Verifying this hypothesis using available electoral behavior data is far more difficult than assessing the effect of a straightforward technical facilitation. Nevertheless, the fact that the overwhelming majority of newly activated voters in rural areas cast their ballots against the ruling party serves as an argument that, even if such a symbolic strategy had been intended, it failed to deliver the anticipated outcomes.

One possible explanation for why the legislative initiative did not yield the expected benefits may lie in a fundamental misjudgment. The ruling party, whose position at the local government level was relatively weak, appears to have assumed that municipal councillors, who had previously been responsible for determining the structure of the precinct network, were out of step with the actual preferences of rural residents. They believed that only central regulation could fulfill these unmet expectations. However, it seems that the existing location of polling stations did not, in fact, constitute an access barrier for rural voters. In this case, the results of our study offer further support for the principle of subsidiarity: attempts by central authorities to resolve problems that are effectively addressed at the local level do not produce significant positive outcomes.

In conclusion, one can argue that when introducing amendments to the electoral code, the legislator lacked a nuanced understanding of local conditions across different regions of the country. The reform appeared to be based on the assumption that Poland is a territorially and socially homogeneous state. The plan to establish 6,000 new polling stations had little real impact on voter turnout. In practice, authorities created only about half of the proposed stations. Moreover, they were not located in the areas that were strategically important to the Law and Justice. Consequently, neither the civic goal of increasing electoral participation nor the political aim of boosting support for the ruling party was achieved. These outcomes confirm the concerns we raised before the reform was implemented (Flis & Krupa, 2023). This case clearly demonstrates that wishful thinking, without evidence-based planning, does not solve structural problems in the electoral process. Once again, it has emerged that the mere willingness to manipulate electoral law in one's favour is far too little for such a move to be successful (Kaminski, 2002).

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