



# **NEW CLIMATE NEGATIONISM**

how populism in Poland influences  
our thinking about climate change

# NEW CLIMATE NEGATIONISM. HOW POPULISM IN POLAND INFLUENCES OUR THINKING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

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# INTRODUCTION

Like the rest of the world, Europe has firmly entered the era of populism. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the total number of votes cast for populist parties in Europe alone doubled.<sup>1</sup> In many countries, populist parties have gained parliamentary representation or entered the government, influencing key political decisions. Support for right-wing factions is growing particularly rapidly. This is primarily driven by new EU countries such as Hungary and Poland, but similar forces have also gained power elsewhere. Right-wing populist Donald Trump became the President of the world's most influential country in the world, while British populists influenced the British people's decision on Brexit.

Among other common similarities, right-wing populists search for support by appealing to internal and external threats and alleging global "conspiracies" that supposedly undermine the national interest of the society they seek to represent. Consequently, their main adversaries are various international agreements and organizations creating supranational policies. Climate change is a global issue, and thus, any serious attempt to combat it takes the form of an international agreement. Therefore, European Union projects (such as the European Green Deal (EGD), *i.e.* a set of policies by the European Commission aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2050) or international agreements (such as the Paris Agreement, which commits signatories to submit scenarios for greenhouse gas emission reduction based on the methodology adopted by the IPCC<sup>2</sup>) become the primary targets of attack by right-wing populist movements.

Two years ago, the British think tank Counterpoint issued a warning that conflicts similar to the "yellow vest" protests in France, which mobilize the public against the goals of green transformation, could erupt in many European countries.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, the collection of texts presented at that time demonstrated the potential specificities of such mobilizations in individual countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Italy, France and Poland.

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1 J. Pakulski, "Populizm jako forma przywództwa politycznego", in: *Studia socjologiczno-polityczne. Seria Nowa*, 1(12)/2020, p. 10.

2 "The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change" – a scientific and intergovernmental advisory body established in 1988 at the request of United Nations members, by two United Nations organizations: the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme.

3 "Green Wedge? Mapping Dissent Against Climate Policy in Europe", Counterpoint 2021.

Research conducted at that time in Poland by the Field of Dialogue Foundation (Fundacja Pole Dialogu) revealed that mining regions facing energy transition could become protest centres in our country.<sup>4</sup> This hypothesis is supported not only by the findings of new research conducted by the Field of Dialogue Foundation on behalf of the European Climate Foundation (ECF), as presented below, but also by the recent escalation of the situation in Turów, where a conflict portrayed by Law and Justice as a clash between Poland and Europe unfolded<sup>5</sup>

This policy paper aims to expose the mechanism of instrumentalization of attacks on the European Union's climate policy – primarily in the context of the parliamentary elections in Poland scheduled for autumn 2023. We will demonstrate that right-wing populists in Poland have changed their strategy and are no longer attempting to deny the phenomenon of global warming. Instead, they focus on promoting narratives that delay the adoption of emission-reduction solutions. One of their main objectives is to undermine the European community's decisions regarding climate neutrality and the instruments designed to achieve this goal. Law and Justice, the Confederation, and Sovereign Poland, unable to directly attack the European Union and support Polesxit due to the pro-European attitudes of Polish society, choose indirect and selective actions that target primarily climate policies.

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4 A. Dańkowska, P. Sadura "Przespana rewolucja. Sytuacja społeczna w regionie bełchatowskim u progu transformacji energetycznej", Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej Warsaw 2021.

5 It was first a dispute between the Polish owner and the Czech side regarding inadequate protection of Czech border communities from the consequences of mining operations, which, due to the passivity of the Polish side, was referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union by the Czech side. Now, there is a dispute between the Polish Energy Group (PGE) and the government with the Provincial Administrative Court in Warsaw, which issued a ruling to suspend the execution of the environmental decision, which is a crucial document necessary to extend the mining concession until 2044.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In January 2023, CBOS conducted a survey using a mixed method approach (CAPI/CAWI/CATI) on a representative nationwide sample consisting of 1034 individuals. The sample selection was random and based on the nationwide database of PESEL numbers. Additionally, CBOS conducted a supplementary booster sample of 1090 individuals, which was randomly drawn from mining regions. The survey questionnaire used in the study was developed based on previous desk research and qualitative studies. The final version of the questionnaire was prepared after consultations with experts and a pilot study conducted by the research centre.

Qualitative research encompassed an analysis of pro- and anti-climate narratives disseminated online in mining regions and the rest of the country, as well as 12 focus groups conducted in May 2023 in the Mazovian and Silesian voivodeships (representing regions with high intensity of anti-climate narratives). Focus groups encompassed primarily centre-left opposition voters, who, according to survey data, are susceptible to narratives delaying energy transformation and voters of the Confederation, divided into groups showing and not showing concern for climate issues.

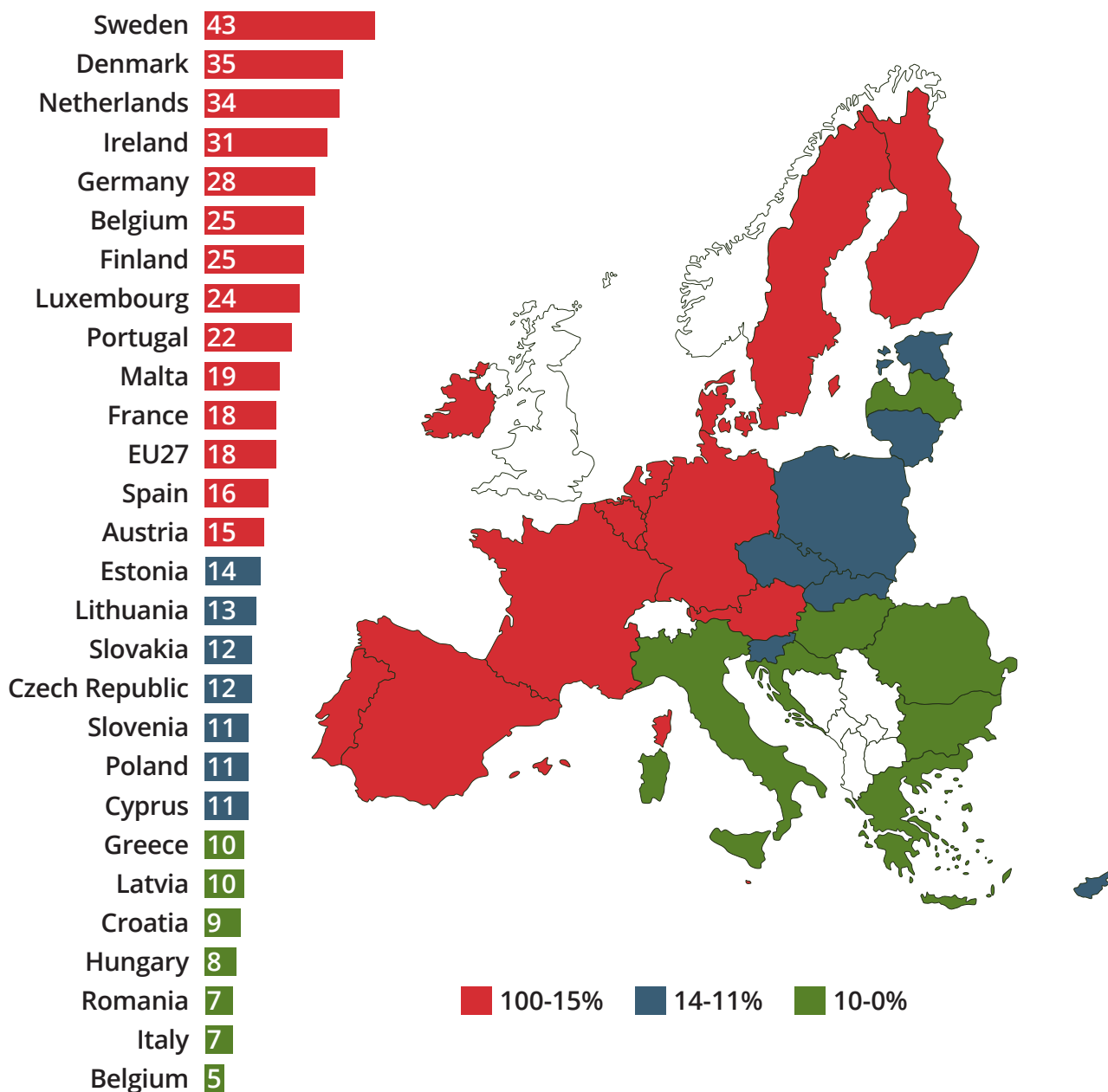
## HOW ARE POLES CONCERNED ABOUT THE CLIMATE

Polish society is not a European leader in climate consciousness but **falls into the intermediate category, positioned between the "concerned" Northern Europe and the "carefree" European South**. Comparative research has shown that only 11% of respondents in Poland perceive climate change as the most serious problem threatening the world, compared to the EU average of 18% and the maximum values observed in countries such as Sweden (43%), Denmark (35%), and the Netherlands (34%).<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1)

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6 Source: [Special Eurobarometer 513: Climate Change, Fieldwork: March – April 2021, Detailed report on Poland](#).

Figure 1. Climate concerns: Poland in comparison to Europe. The biggest problem facing the world is: (% of indications on climate change)

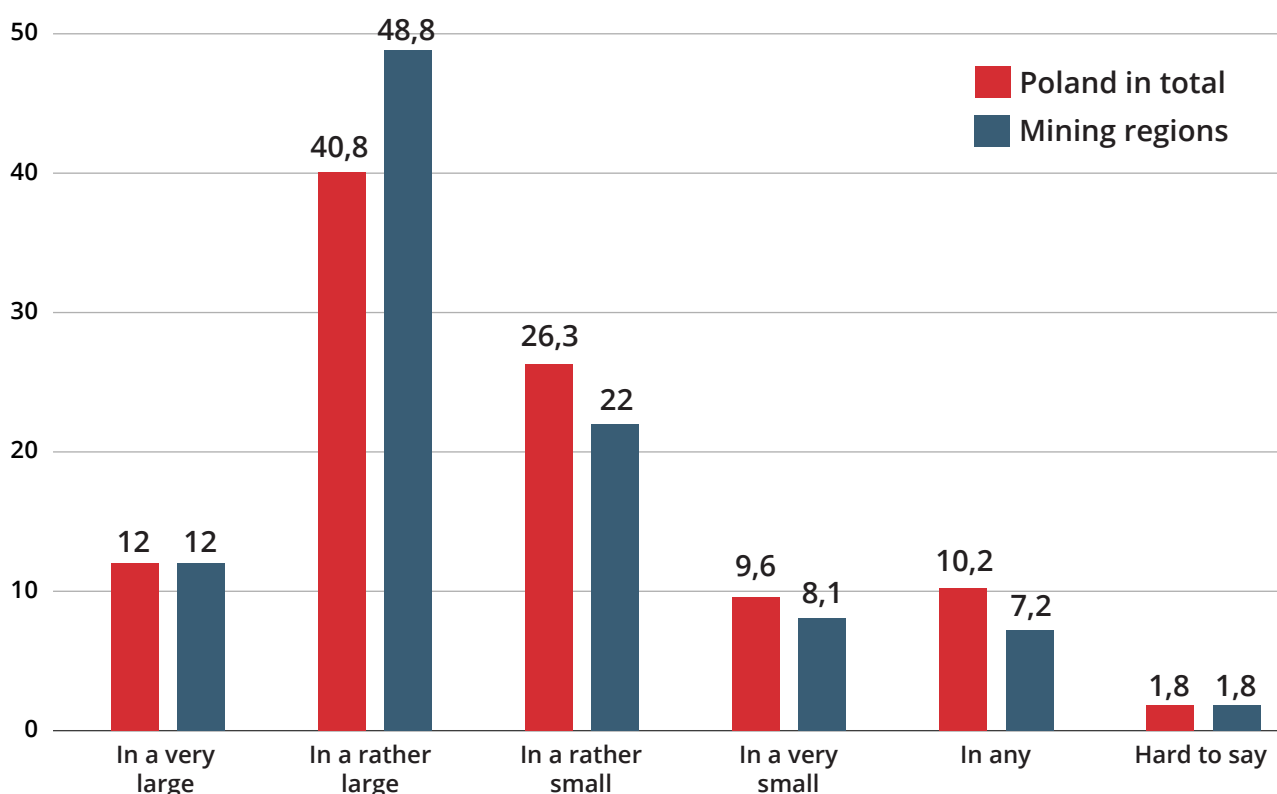


[Data link](#); Source: Eurobarometer Special 513: 10. The situation appears better when considering the dynamics of attitudes. **Over the past twelve years, our perception of climate issues has evolved and the percentage of those considering climate change as one of the greatest threats to contemporary civilization has increased in Poland from 15% to 26%** (cf. CBOS 2021).

In our survey conducted by CBOS in 2023, over half of the Polish society declared concerns about climate change, with 12% of individuals expressing a **very high level** of

concern and 40% indicating **a fairly high level** (Figure 2). The groups with **low or no concerns** are relatively small (around 10% each). Interestingly, worries about climate change were significantly higher in mining regions.

**Figure 2. Climate Concerns in Poland (%)**



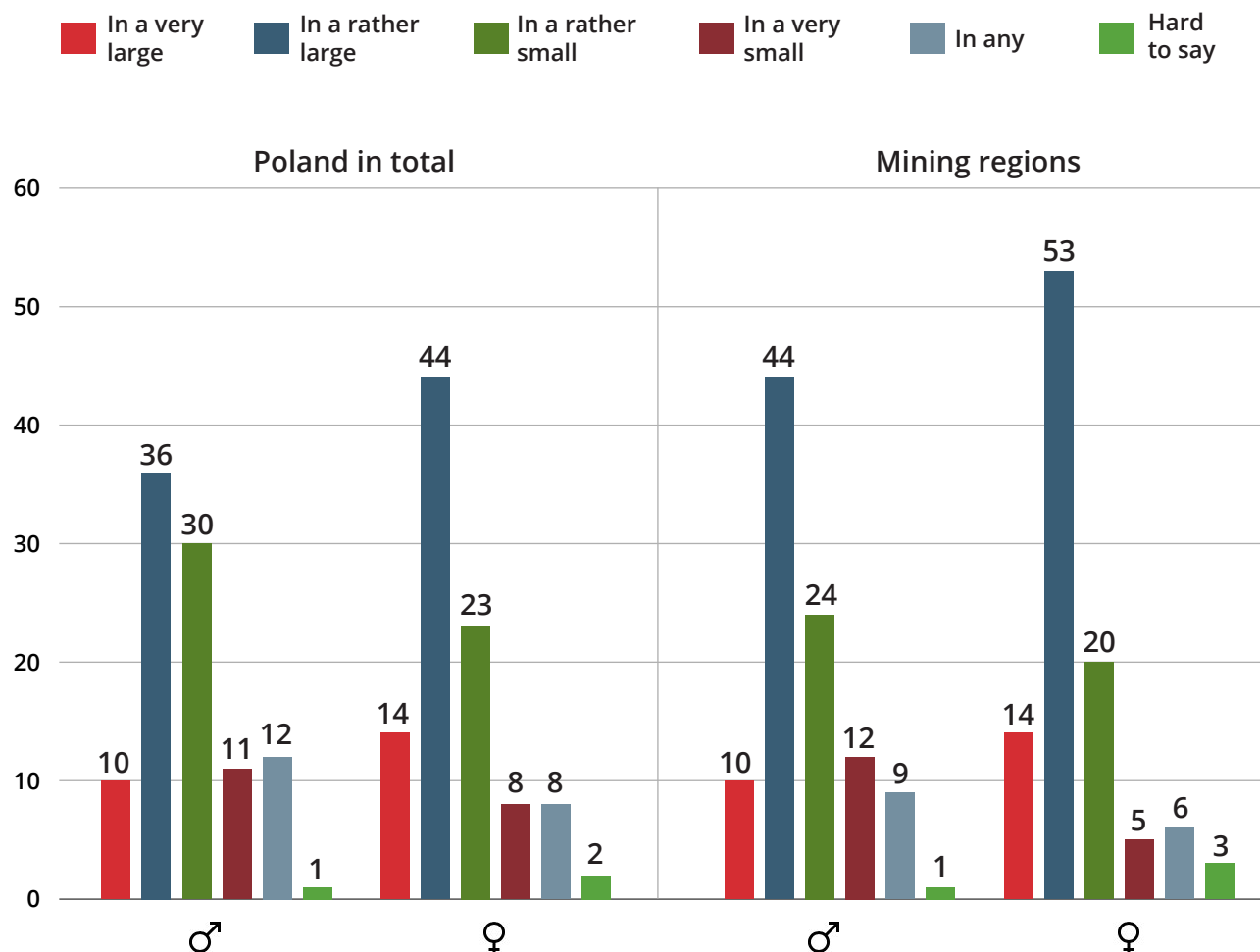
[Data link](#); Source: CBOS survey for Field of Dialogue Foundation weighted data, own elaboration.

We will return to the differences between the opinion of the entire Polish population and the residents of mining regions. For now, let us note that **climate concern is not gender-neutral**. Both at the overall population level and in mining regions, **women have expressed greater concerns (by about 8–9 percentage points) about climate change compared to men** (Figure 4). A similar effect has been observed in previous studies (Whitmarsh 2011; Poortinga *et al.* 2019) and is often explained by differences in the socialization of women and men. This roughly means that compared to men, **women tend to be more oriented towards the common good, more concerned about the fate of other people and other species, and more empathetic. Another source of these differences is attributed to the "gender-**



**ing of social inequalities".** In plain terms, in most societies, women are poorer than men, which makes them a more vulnerable group to the impacts of climate change. They worry more because they know that climate change will affect them primarily.

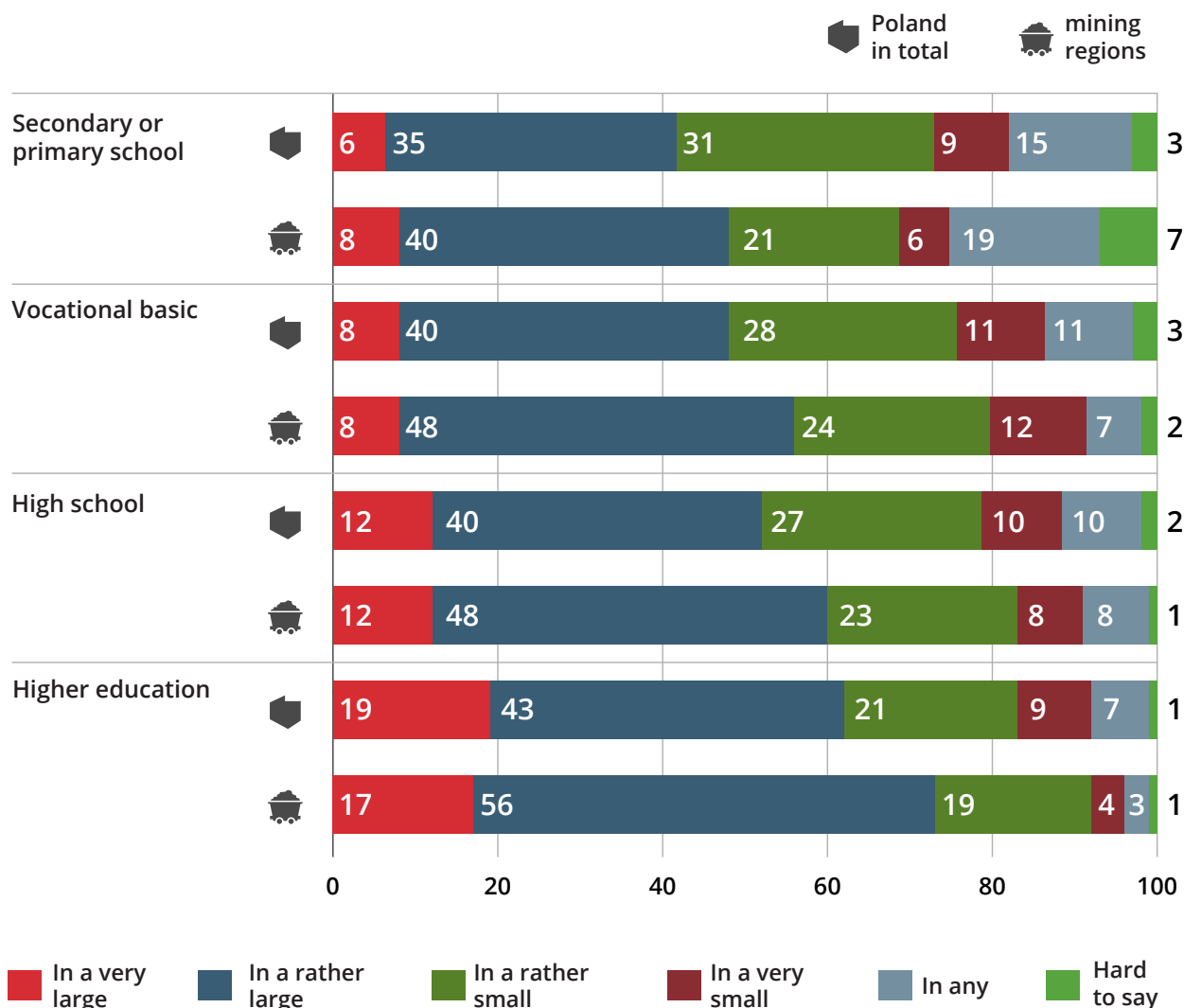
**Figure 3. Climate Concerns by Gender (%)**



[Data link](#); Source: ECF 2023 survey, weighted data, own elaboration.

**Another factor influencing the level of concern regarding climate change is education** (also observed in the literature), *i.e.* the higher the education, the higher the level of climate change concerns (Figure 5). Among those with higher education, twice as many individuals express a very high level of concern about climate change compared to those with medium education (19% versus 12%). This is more than twice the proportion observed among vocational school graduates (8%).

**Figure 4. Climate Concerns by Education Level (%)**



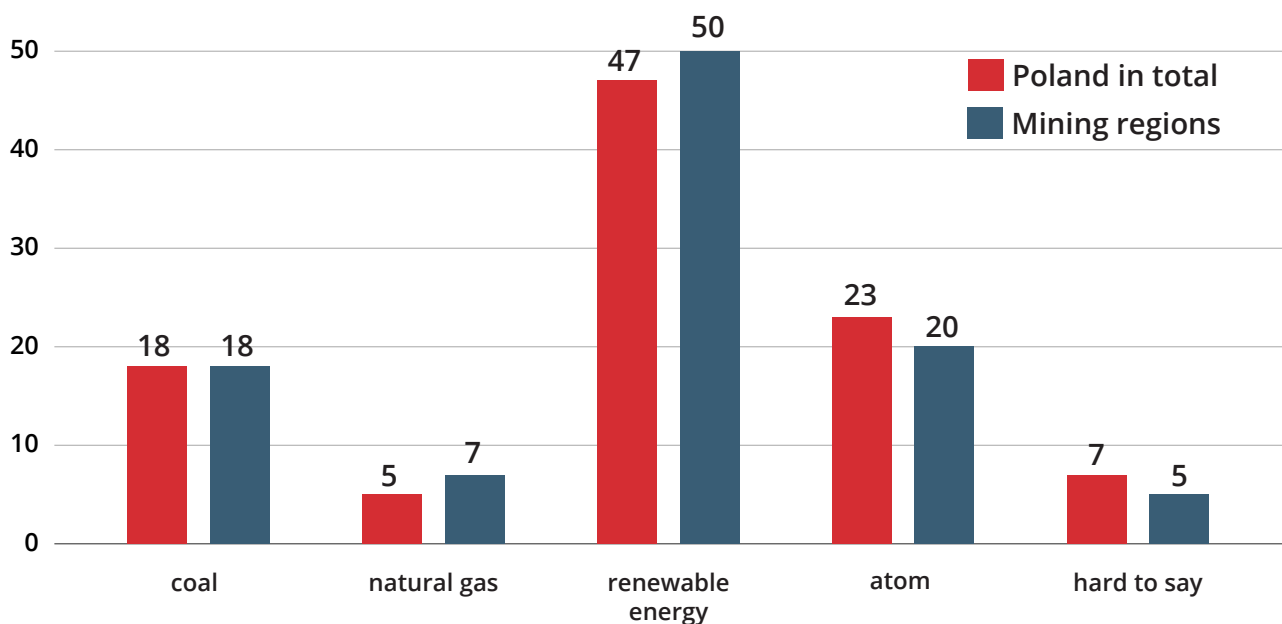
[Data link](#); Source: CBOS survey for Field of Dialogue Foundation 2023, weighted data, own elaboration.

The relationship between concerns and education is even stronger in mining regions. **Residing in mining regions strongly amplifies the influence of education on attitudes towards climate change.** Why? We will revisit this aspect in the further part of the text.

# POLES HAVE BECOME FANS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES

Not only are we concerned about the climate, but we also know the main source of the problem and how to improve the situation. Poles appear to be supporters of energy transformation, not only at the household level. In our study, we asked respondents what sources should constitute the foundation of Polish energy (choices: 1) coal, 2) natural gas, 3) renewable energy sources (RES), 4) nuclear energy). **Generally, Poles believe that Polish energy sources should primarily be renewable energy sources (47% of responses). Next was nuclear energy (23%). Less than one-fifth of Poles (18%) would like Polish energy to continue relying on coal.** Finally, a few individuals (5%) indicated natural gas. This time, the responses in mining regions were similar to the national ones (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. The Preferred Foundation of the Polish Energy System (%)**

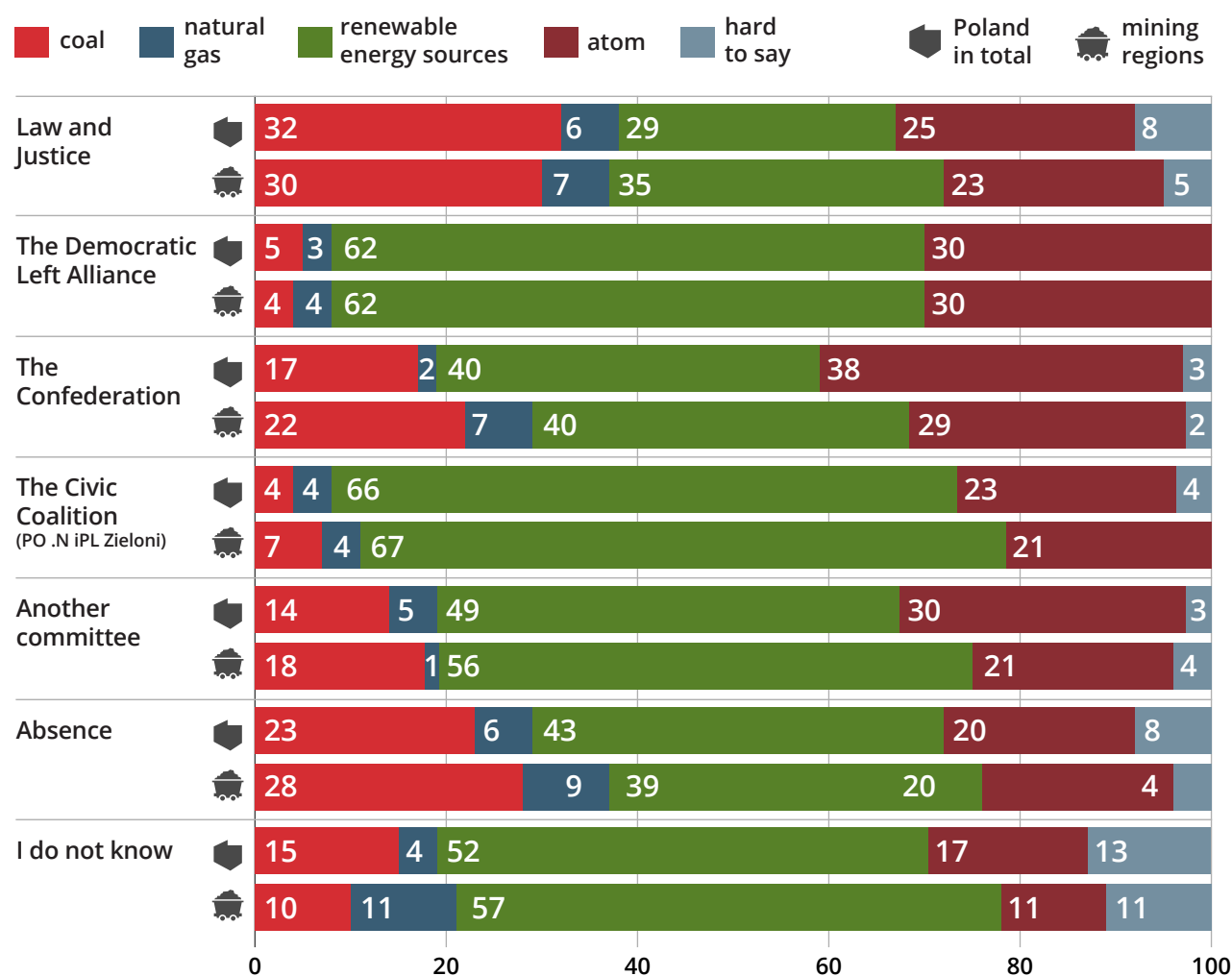


[Data link](#); Source: CBOS survey for Field of Dialogue Foundation 2023, weighted data, own elaboration.

However, choosing the energy source on which the national energy sector should rely is a complex matter. Among other things, it depends on the availability and accessibility of various energy sources, cost, energy security, environmental impact, and tech-

nological progress. Making such a decision requires technical knowledge and time for updates, which is why people often resort to simplifications (known as "cognitive heuristics"), basing their choices on political party positions. Therefore, we analyzed preferred energy sources within the electorates of each party. The attitudes turned out to be diverse. **The electorate of Civic Coalition (KO) was most supportive of renewable energy sources (RES) (66%), followed by the Left (Democratic Left Alliance/ Lewica) (62%), and to a lesser extent, Law and Justice (29%).** We found the most pro-nuclear attitudes within the electorates of the Confederation (38% of responses) and the Left (30%). Coal was mainly supported by Law and Justice voters (32%), and to a lesser extent, the Confederation (17%). (At first glance), no electorate considered coal to be a cause worth dying for.

**Figure 6. Preferred Energy Source in the Polish Energy Sector (%)**



[Data link](#); Source: ECF 2023 survey, weighted data, own elaboration.

# WAITING FOR CHINA: PRO-CLIMATE, NEGATIONIST, AND... DELAYING NARRATIVES

In our understanding, **anti-climate narratives refer to ways of presenting climate change characterized by denial or scepticism towards the scientific consensus on climate change.** They downplay the problem's significance, its impacts on people, and/or the urgent need for coordinated global actions to mitigate or limit further negative human influence on the climate. **Delaying narratives accept the fact of climate change but question the form or timing of specific actions aimed at emission reduction** (e.g. carrying out energy transformation or implementing certain climate policies).

Anti-climate and delaying narratives influence social understanding of climate change, individual attitudes in everyday life, and the actions of political parties, and consequently, the actions of governments and international institutions. Therefore, understanding the power of narratives, their dissemination in society, and their role in shaping public discourse is crucial to effectively counter them.

The main hypothesis underlying the study was that as a result of an unprepared energy transformation, mining regions may become breeding grounds for anti-climate populism, which will infect other regions of the country with such attitudes. By anti-climate populism, we refer to the phenomenon of incorporating various anti-climate narratives – including hard denialism but primarily the so-called "delaying narratives" targeting climate policy and energy transformation – into a broader persuasive strategy of populists with an anti-pluralistic, anti-elitist, and anti-European Union character. In the survey study, we asked respondents to what extent they agreed with the eleven presented narratives.

## **Pro-climate narratives (accepting human impact on climate change and the need to counteract them)**

- The main cause of climate change is human activity.
- The actions of ordinary people can mitigate global climate change.

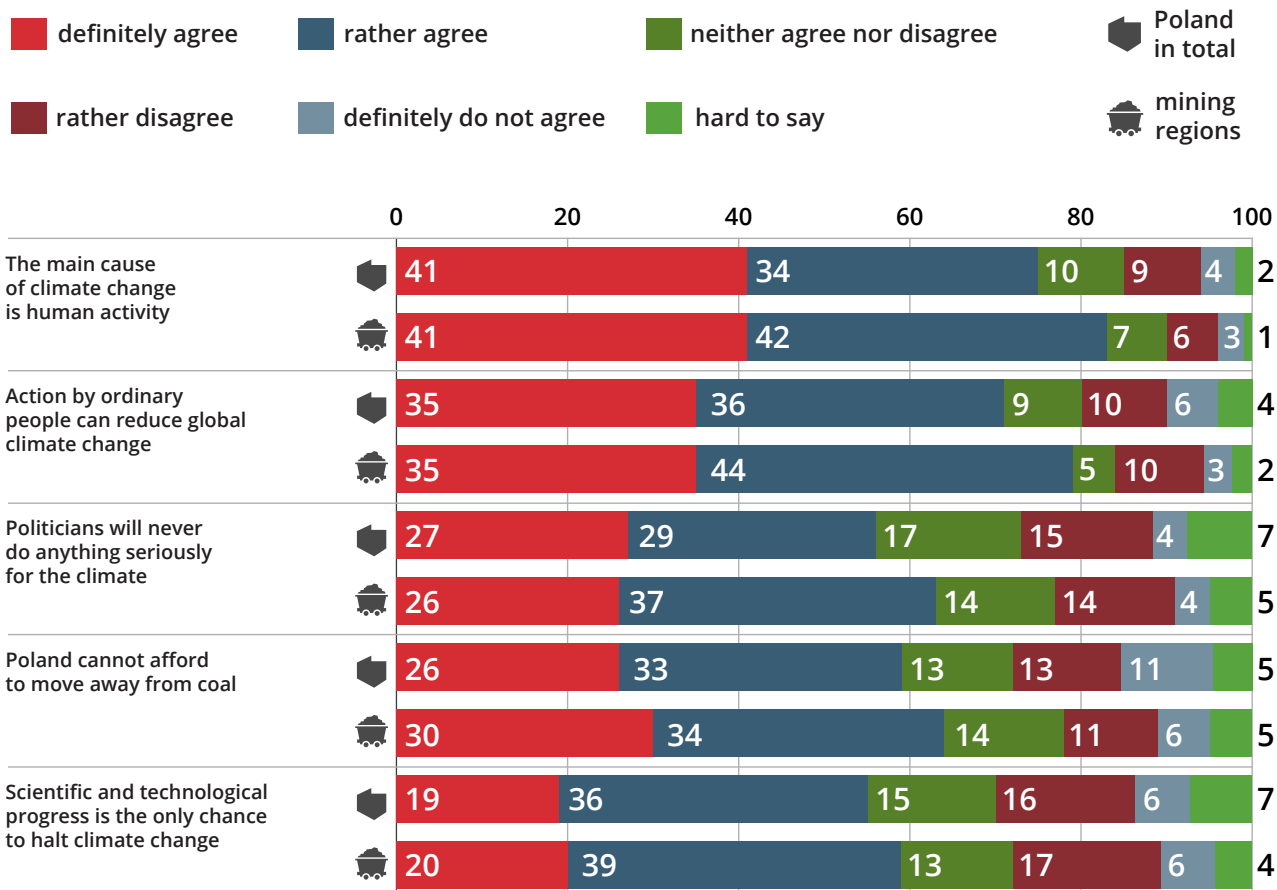
## Delaying narratives (accepting the fact of climate change but questioning energy transformation or other climate policies):

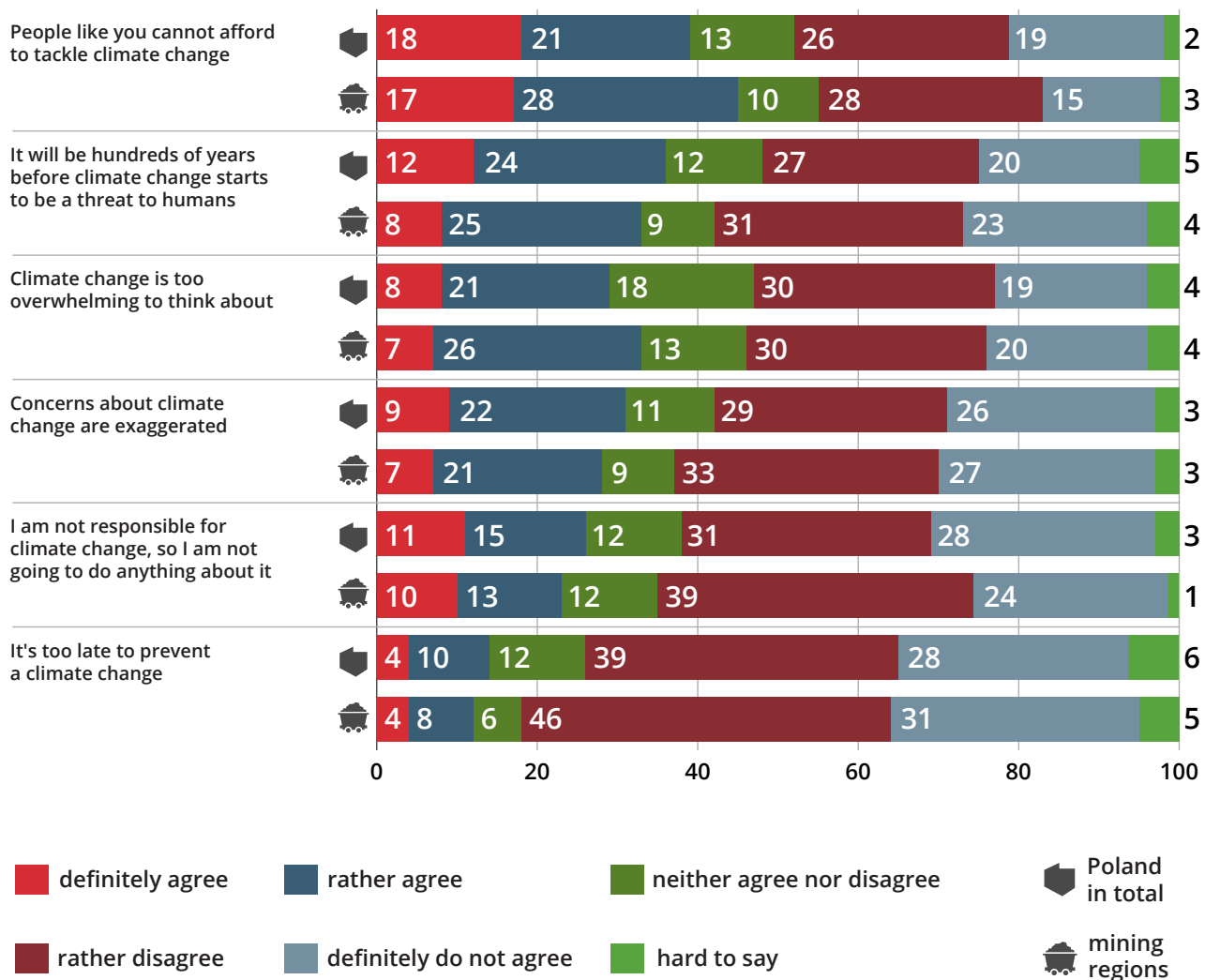
- Poland cannot afford to transition away from coal.
- Politicians will never do anything substantial for the climate.
- People like you cannot afford to mitigate climate change.
- Scientific and technological progress is the only chance to halt climate change.

## Negationist or escapist narratives:

- It will take hundreds of years before climate change becomes a threat to humans.
- Concerns related to climate change are exaggerated.
- Climate change is too overwhelming to think about.
- It is already too late to prevent a climate catastrophe.
- I am not responsible for climate change, so I do not intend to do anything about it.

## The Dissemination of Pro- and Anti-climate Narratives (%)





[Data link](#); Source: CBOS survey for Field of Dialogue Foundation 2023, weighted data, own elaboration.

The popularity (or unpopularity) of pro-climate and anti-climate narratives has a nationwide character and the differences between the general population of Poland and residents of mining regions may not be large, but significant. **The study confirmed the hypothesis of polarization in the region (i.e. greater acceptance among their inhabitants for both pro-climate and anti-climate narratives) and demonstrated the crucial importance of delaying narratives.** The overwhelming majority of respondents in Poland, as well as in mining regions, accept that human activity is the main cause of climate change (thus also accepting the fact of these changes). There are even more individuals holding this view in mining regions. The same situation applies to the belief that the actions of ordinary people can mitigate global climate change.

Furthermore, **Poles reject climate denial theories** that claim concerns are exaggerated, it will take centuries to feel the effects of climate change, or **escapist theories** suggesting it is too late and nothing can be done or that it is not our fault or problem. People in mining regions reject these views more frequently than in the rest of the country, which may seem like good news.

**However, by rejecting climate negationism of the "Stone Age" and accepting the anthropogenic nature of climate change, the majority of Poles adopt key delaying narratives**, including the belief that Poland cannot afford to transition away from coal, politicians will never do anything substantial for the climate, and scientific and technological progress is the only chance to escape the trap. Importantly, in every case, there are noticeably more supporters of these views among residents of mining regions than in the rest of the country.

To summarize, compared to the rest of the country, in mining regions, more people believe that the climate is changing negatively due to human activities and those who reject climate policies, including energy transformation. Is it a contradiction? Only seemingly. **Today, people are not divided into those who "believe" or "do not believe" in climate change. The politically significant division is between those who understand that prevention can only be achieved through international and national regulations and those who believe it can be avoided.** The line of demarcation leaves hard denialists ("it was already warm", "blame it on volcanoes", "the warmer the better") and soft denialists ("maybe we can install filters on chimneys?", "maybe we can wait for China?", "maybe it will not be that bad?", "Let's sort the garbage and see what happens") on the same side. Supporters of rapid decarbonization are left isolated. Why is this more evident in mining regions?

## THE ENIGMA OF MINING REGIONS

In Poland, the Law and Justice government utilized the delaying narrative as a tool to combat both domestic political opposition and the European Union. We may express this narrative as opposed to the imposition of "bad solutions" for real problems by European (primarily German) elites and treacherous domestic elites (the opposition). Consequently, "bad solutions" undermine Poland's economic and political sovereignty.



**The potential for populist exploitation of climate issues in Poland primarily stems mainly from the negative relationship towards the EU and Germany and is part of the ideological and political struggle waged by Law and Justice, as well as the Confederation and even more radical forces.** Mining regions have been the main battleground, where the issues seemed more relevant and fitting.

The greater concern about climate change in mining regions could be the result of various factors (economic, environmental, health, and cultural). The issue of climate change may be more significant for residents of mining regions due to their greater awareness of its effects (e.g. the impact of the coal industry on the environment and health). On the other hand, opposition to EU climate policy and energy transformation could arise from concerns about preserving livelihoods and regional identity.

**Focus groups conducted in the Silesian Voivodeship and Mazovian Voivodeship did not indicate that a greater inclination to embrace delaying narratives regarding transformation in mining regions was due to the trauma caused by the "first transformation" of mining,** which involved the closure of many mines, job reductions in the mining sector and related industries, worsening working conditions, and social and economic decline in many communities in mining regions (including Bytom, among other areas included in the study). **Generally, respondents evaluated positively the restructuring of the mining sector and the transformations in the region.**

Our research on the circulation of delaying narratives and climate change denial has also shown that mining regions have a higher intensity of such narratives compared to the rest of the country. These narratives often revolve around conspiracy theories involving Germany, which plots with the EU and/or Russia to take over Polish coal or make us dependent on electricity supplies from renewable energy sources or technologies for its production. Mining regions witness many informational activities promoting a return to coal (e.g. emphasizing the abundance of energy resources such as coal, oil, and gas in Poland while criticizing RES and nuclear energy). **In our view, mining regions have become a kind of battleground for the narrative war. The activities of actors dealing with climate issues resulted in the public opinion on climate change and energy transformation in mining regions being significantly more polarized than in the rest of the country, and climate issues have a greater mobilization potential for both supporters and opponents of EU climate policy.**

**The populist right-wing is winning this war, as evidenced by the statistically higher level of the anti-climate populism index in mining regions.** We created this index by combining seven of the most popular delaying transformation narratives in Poland. In addition to the narratives mentioned earlier (e.g. Poland cannot afford to transition away from coal), we included those frequently encountered online (calling for a departure from coal is the EU's plan to deprive Poland of its sovereignty; The aim of EU anti-coal policy is to cause the collapse of Polish mines and their takeover by Germany).

Interestingly, it turns out that the source of **this higher index is not a greater radicalization of right-wing supporters** (the anti-climate populism index for Confederation and Law and Justice electorates in mining regions is the same as in the rest of the country). **The difference is visible in the higher anti-climate populism index among Civic Platform voters and especially Left voters.** In other words, thanks to intense campaigns about anti-Polish conspiracies by EU and German elites, the result is not so much the hardening of climate policy opposition among climate denialists, but rather the softening of the position among proponents of climate policy.

Thus, the influence of education on attitudes towards climate change is growing in mining regions. **Individuals with higher levels of education, who have greater ecological awareness and better information-gathering skills in mining regions,** are more resilient to misinformation and aware of the real consequences of climate change and the effectiveness of various methods to counter it. Less educated individuals become more susceptible to unprecedented misinformation.

**Our analysis indicates that the most active groups in disseminating such content, such as the Obywatelski Komitet Obrony Polskich Zasobów Naturalnych OKOPZN (Citizens' Committee for the Defence of Polish Natural Resources), are not only associated with populist right-wing politicians (Confederation, Kukiz, Solidarna Polska), but also with Russian and Belarusian influences.** In our research, we discovered the next organizations and initiatives spreading anti-climate disinformation on the Internet. Politicians from the far-right engaged personally in pro-Russian propaganda, also concerning Poland's and the EU's energy and climate policy. Members of the Confederation repeatedly spoke out against sanctions imposed on Russia, driven by the economic interest of Poles. In Confederation, Grzegorz Braun was the main advocate for lifting sanctions and he collaborated on this issue with the German AfD, among others. The Parliamentary Team associated with OKOPZN, dealing with underground coal gasification, included individuals such

as Jarosław Sachajko – a politician oriented towards Lukashenko and the Kremlin, and a former leader of the Poland-Belarus Association, which continues the tradition of the Polish-Soviet Friendship Society. Within the OKOPZN and cooperating Rafał Piech, the leader of anti-COVID movements and the president of Siemianowice Śląskie, there are many individuals and institutions openly representing pro-Kremlin orientations. For example, the Institute of Internet and Social Media Research reported that 90% of the identified accounts spreading pro-Russian propaganda on social media had previously published disinformation materials about the Covid-19 pandemic. These accounts openly supported the Confederation and other far-right organizations (e.g. the so-called "Comrades" movement). **However, while the connections between the groups of interest and their high activity in areas undergoing energy transformation appear concerning, it does not justify the claim that the anti-climate campaign in Poland is externally controlled. It is our populism and our problem.**

## **PARTIES, CLIMATE, ELECTIONS**

In the context of upcoming elections, our study shows that no one is inherently immune to the nonsense surrounding climate change and the policies aimed at addressing it. Every region and electorate has anti-climate slogans they want to hear. **The higher susceptibility to delaying narratives in mining regions seems to stem from greater exposure to misinformation and higher politicization of climate issues.** In line with Polish specificity, the theory of a German conspiracy generates the most support for delaying narratives. **We may observe vulnerability to manipulation among individuals with lower educational levels who rely on the internet for information but are less accustomed to it (lack of source verification habit) and among the opposition electorate aged 45 and above.**

Focus group research revealed that **many participants had "faith" that climate change is a serious global challenge but at the same time lacked basic knowledge about the mechanisms contributing to global warming.** Respondents in mining regions expressed suspicion towards the intentions of certain Western partners. This was accompanied by a tendency to embrace positive narratives suggesting alternative solutions to CO2 emissions without transitioning away from coal (technological

progress in new methods of emission-free coal combustion; advancements in mining techniques resulting in potential cost reductions in Polish coal extraction). Moreover, respondents tended to overestimate the reserves of Polish coal too optimistically.

In the survey, we employed framing of energy transformation by presenting possible contexts such as war with Russia and the need for independence, high inflation and the necessity to seek new energy sources, intensifying climate change, and the need for acceleration. The results indicate that **the crisis narrative regarding the threat of war with Russia and the danger of exacerbating energy resource deficits related to embargoes and the EU's policies towards Russia and Russia's policies towards Poland led to the adoption of a sovereignty-oriented strategy. In this narrative, coal remains our strategic energy resource, and the development of renewable energy sources should accompany coal extraction and combustion rather than replace it.**

The sovereignty narrative indicates that Poland cannot afford to be dependent on electricity imports regardless of the direction of such dependence. **At the same time, respondents showed greater willingness to support policies aiming for climate neutrality when such a program took on the characteristics of routine policy** (not sudden commands and prohibitions but a consistent program of changes). Among the crisis narratives, inflation and the necessity to reduce energy prices prove to be a safer strategy than the anti-Russian framework. **Respondents were also more inclined to support energy transformation when it was presented as an investment (higher energy prices now for future cost reduction) and in terms of individual benefits from the implementation of climate policy.**

An interesting finding from focus group research concerned the green electorate of the Confederation party. According to CBOS surveys (2023a), **more than one in four Confederation voters (28%) support Poland achieving climate neutrality by 2050 or earlier. The percentage of Confederation voters expecting a faster path to climate neutrality within two years increased by 50%** (CBOS 2021b). Consequently, the Confederation electorate has become less anti-climate compared to the Law and Justice electorate. Although Confederation promotes a very conservative, xenophobic, sexist, and anti-climate narrative, less than half of their voters choose them for those reasons. The rest are driven by a dislike for Law and Justice, Civic Platform, or both parties and concern for their interests (primarily lower taxes). Among these voters, many hold pro-climate positions. **They are slightly older (25–38 years old),**

modern individuals who work remotely and travel frequently. They speak about women's rights, tolerance towards LGBT individuals, concern for the quality of life and public services, and sustainable development. They are attracted to the Confederation party by its program of tax cuts and departure from social transfer programs, and their dislike for other political parties. The European Union is highly valued by them, and they cannot imagine leaving it. While the Confederation's anti-climate and anti-ecological stance poses a problem for them, it does not currently discourage their support for the party. They hope for a correction in the Confederation's program in key areas important to them.

## SUMMARY

**Our research revealed the mechanism by which climate issues (specifically climate policies such as energy transformation) became tools in the hands of populists and anti-EU groups for polarizing and mobilizing voters.** Actors wove key narratives, such as those concerning Polish energy sovereignty, using typical elements of populist imagination. These narratives underline that defending Polish coal is not that much about defending stable but traditional and domestic energy sources. Therefore, they not only disregard the impact of burning fossil fuels on the rise of global temperature but also the depletion and high cost of extracting Polish coal. **Framing the economy's reliance on coal in terms of energy self-sufficiency and national sovereignty leads to energy transformation being portrayed as imposed by external actors and serving their interests.** The dynamics of the discourse around Turów demonstrates that this tendency can outweigh economic interests.

**Narratives emphasizing threats (such as Russian resource games, economic concerns regarding rising energy prices, or climate-related acceleration of climate change) contribute to the acceptance of narratives that delay necessary changes. In each of these scenarios, our participants tended to revert to the traditional resource of coal ("when in doubt, turn to coal").** We also observed a tendency to succumb to techno-optimistic narratives, which believe that new technical solutions will be developed in the future, allowing continued use of coal without urgency. Accepting the climate threat while rejecting systemic solutions like decarbonization leads, at best, to individualistic proposals (such as education and waste segregation).

Survey and focus group research showed that the most effective language for presenting climate policy is that of investment and individual benefits. At the same time, building resilience against deliberate misinformation requires campaigns focused on providing factual knowledge rather than instilling fear of climate change. In other words, the appropriate and effective response to anti-climate populism is not pro-climate populism, but rather climate-focused anti-populism.

The slow but positive evolution of Poles' attitudes towards climate change and policies aimed at combating it may be abruptly interrupted due to the intensification of disinformation campaigns spread, among others, by the circles of populist right-wing. **The anti-European right, the one "looking towards Russia" and the one advocating for "waiting for China," weakens the acceptance of Polish society for key elements of the EU's strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Populist climate games can have quite real and catastrophic consequences for voters and all of us. Concern for the short-term political interest of these groups jeopardizes the coherence of pro-climate actions of the EU, and above all, it may prolong the energy transformation process in Poland, which is against our national interest.** The processes described in the report require a reasonable and thoughtful response from progressive and pro-climate circles.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. MONITORING DISINFORMATION

Our research showed that **regions facing energy transformation have become a kind of experimental ground for forces interested in spreading disinformation.** Ongoing work on EU climate policy, energy transformation, as well as upcoming parliamentary elections and next year's European Parliament elections, may lead to even greater intensification of disinformation. **The dynamics of its spread and the coordination of propaganda efforts should be systematically monitored, and monitoring should be sensitive to the content and strategies identified in the above report.**

## 2. DEBUNKING

Conducting dialogue or deliberations on the future of Poland's energy requires **solutions that allow for the identification and exposure of narratives based on untrue or unverified information.** It is necessary to implement a program like "Myth Busters: monitoring, evaluation, and response", which would involve society-accepted authorities, opinion leaders, and experts. Actions should aim to discredit key narratives (e.g. "Poland: the Kuwait of Europe") and "experts" (e.g. by exposing their ties to the coal lobby, Russia, etc.).

## 3. DISSEMINATION OF RAPID CLIMATE KNOWLEDGE

**We need the production of "rapid" knowledge about climate catastrophe and energy transformation.** Knowledge about these two areas should also be promoted in a simplified form and adapted to new information channels (not only YouTube and Twitter but also Instagram and TikTok). This knowledge must be as "common-sense" as the narratives of the Confederation leaders. It is worth encouraging "authorities" (scientists/actors/internet influencers/celebrities) popular among specific groups to cooperate.

#### 4. ANCHORING OF PRO-CLIMATE BELIEFS

At the same time, a comprehensive educational program is needed to disseminate deeper knowledge about the mechanisms of climate change and ways to counteract it that would allow for anchoring the elements of rapid knowledge in a holistic model. The aim is for people to "know about" rather than "believe in" climate change and climate policy. It would be helpful to create reliable but not perceived as mainstream, liberal, or leftist sources of information about climate change and EU policy goals.

#### 5. GREENING POPULISTS

Actions that can be taken towards the group of green voters in the Confederation and other right-wing forces (e.g. Law and Justice) do not necessarily have to aim at "winning them back" for the democratic opposition. Effectiveness may lie in describing this group in a way that **influences the agenda of the Confederation and other right-wing forces (possible correction of some of their most anti-climate demands)**.

#### 6. PREBUNKING

The most crucial action that should be taken before the elections to the European Parliament is **designing, piloting, and implementing an informational campaign serving as a kind of vaccine against climate disinformation**. Knowledge about the key elements of disinformation campaigns allows for the creation of a narrative that can reach potential audiences before the right wing and immunize them against climate disinformation (prebunking, *i.e.* informing about possible disinformation and presenting content that may be used to disinform, instead of less effective debunking aimed at reclaiming those already affected by disinformation). European Parliament elections are particularly significant as they usually mobilize radical and populist forces to a much greater extent than regular parliamentary elections (see the results of Brexit supporters in elections in the United Kingdom). **The anti-disinformation campaign should quickly cover the entire country and be primarily targeted towards opposition supporters and individuals currently relatively favourable to transformation. It has the potential to immunize against inevitable exposure to anti-climate disinformation spread by populist right-wing forces.**





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The Field of Dialogue Foundation was established in 2011. Today, it is one of the most experienced organisations dedicated to the development of public participation in Poland.

We endeavour to involve local communities in decision-making processes in municipalities and institutions, realize public consultations, citizen assemblies and juries, create spaces for conversations despite differences, and conduct social research on timely topics.