

## RESEARCH NOTE

# Pre-Electoral Trends and Electoral Outcomes: A Polindex Survey Analysis of Luxembourg's 2023 Elections

Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier\*

### Abstract

*The Political Observatory (Polindex) is a multi-annual sociopolitical study conducted by the Chair of Legislative Studies at the University of Luxembourg. It aims to assess the sociopolitical state of the Grand Duchy in comparison with other European democracies (Germany, France, Italy and the UK). In the spring of 2023, for the first wave of Polindex, we surveyed 1,500 people (1,000 Luxembourgish citizens and 500 foreign residents) who answered a questionnaire comprising approximately 80 questions. The rationale behind the random selection of the participants was to observe Luxembourg's demographic characteristics. In addition, the random selection took place in a proportional manner by using the demographic characteristics such as age, gender and region of residence. The data collected through surveying were coded and processed in SPSS Statistics. This descriptive analysis based*

*on the processed data focuses on the citizens' cohort and introduces the sociopolitical context for Luxembourg's national elections, which took place on 8 October 2023, followed by a demonstration of some key findings of Polindex 2023 that provide a basis for the analysis of electoral dynamics. The article elaborates on the election results in light of these findings, providing a deeper understanding of shifting voting preferences compared to previous elections.*

### 1 Luxembourgish Elections of 2023: The Sociopolitical Context

The year 2023 marked as the year of the last parliamentary elections in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg gave floor to the most important opposition party, the Christian Social People's Party ('CSV'), for forming a new government. The new coalition of the Christian Social People's Party and the Democratic Party represents a new period of Luxembourgish politics after ten years of coalition government by the Greens, the Democrats and the Socialists. To understand the elections of October 2023 (Elections, 2023) and their place in Luxembourg's consociational democracy (Dumont et al., 2022;

\* Agnes Darabos, Postdoctoral researcher, FHSE, University of Luxembourg, Research Chair of Legislative Studies. Nadim Farhat, Postdoctoral researcher, FHSE, University of Luxembourg, Research Chair of Legislative Studies. Philippe Poirier, Head of the Chair of Legislative Studies, FHSE, University of Luxembourg, Research Chair of Legislative Studies

Poirier, 2011), a set of questions need to be addressed. The primary issue to examine is the unique composition of a three-party coalition government of the Liberal DP, the Socialist LSAP and the Greens (Déi Gréng) preceding the elections, marking the longest period without the traditionally dominant Christian Socials (CSV) since World War II (Dumont & Kies, 2023). Despite the CSV remaining the largest political party in 2013 and 2018 (and with the most votes received in national elections), they did not partake in government formation. Consequently, the determination among CSV voters, as well as the party's leaders, members, executives and representatives, to regain a role in the government arose. Given that the electoral system permits both voting for entire party lists and for individual candidates from one or different parties ('panachage'), the CSV had a vested interest in encouraging traditional voters and those aligning themselves more closely with the Christian Socials to adopt a common electoral strategy optimising the chances of CSV candidates. Indeed, this is reflected in the vast inclination of CSV voters to favour party list voting over 'panachage', as outlined by the Polindex 2023 survey.

A second noteworthy aspect is that the legislative elections were preceded by local elections in June 2023. The municipal elections revealed the advantage of the liberal DP, to a lesser extent the CSV and the Socialists LSAP in all municipalities utilising the same proportional list system as the legislative elections, applicable in municipalities with more than 3,000 inhabitants. The only party of the governing coalition that showed regression was the Greens (Déi Gréng). In preceding local elec-

tions, the Greens consistently outperformed their results in subsequent legislative elections. Hence, municipal elections proved traditionally to be their stronghold. Yet, the outcomes in June 2023 held significant implications: if the Greens faced substantial setbacks in specific municipalities, it could potentially forecast their decline during the general elections. Furthermore, during the communal elections and irrespective of the polling method in force in the commune, there was a slight increase in support for the ADR and the Pirates, which is noteworthy as these parties, unlike the Greens, traditionally faced a disadvantage in Luxembourgish municipal elections (Fick, 2023).

A third important aspect of the parliamentary elections in Luxembourg is the impact of rising energy and basic food costs. This is influenced by inflation related to the conflict in Ukraine and a national crisis in the real estate sector, affecting the construction of offices and new housing, as well as escalating purchase and rental prices. These economic challenges, notably concerning energy, housing and the cost of living, prompted substantial questions about Luxembourg's current and future economic trajectory (Sinner, 2023).

A crucial fourth factor is the adoption of a new constitution in July 2023. This constitution, ratified twice by the Chamber of Deputies through a broad coalition, including the Greens, Liberals, Socialists and the Christian Socials (with some reform elements supported by the Pirates, the conservative ADR and the leftist Déi Lénk), concluded a prolonged period of constitutional reform initiated in 2004. It also marked the resolution of the 2015 constitutional reform referenda, which had

been unsuccessful for the governing three-party coalition (de Jonge & Petry, 2021). The new constitution, enjoying widespread support, particularly on issues like Luxembourgish identity and language, the superiority of European law, and the reform of the monarchy and the Grand Duke's powers, also revealed divisions among political parties (Darabos, 2023). The conclusion of the constitutional reform cycle, along with the cessation of debates on the identity and the functioning of Luxembourg's democracy, liberated the electorate. Subsequently, voters and political parties could shift their focus to more immediate and practical concerns.

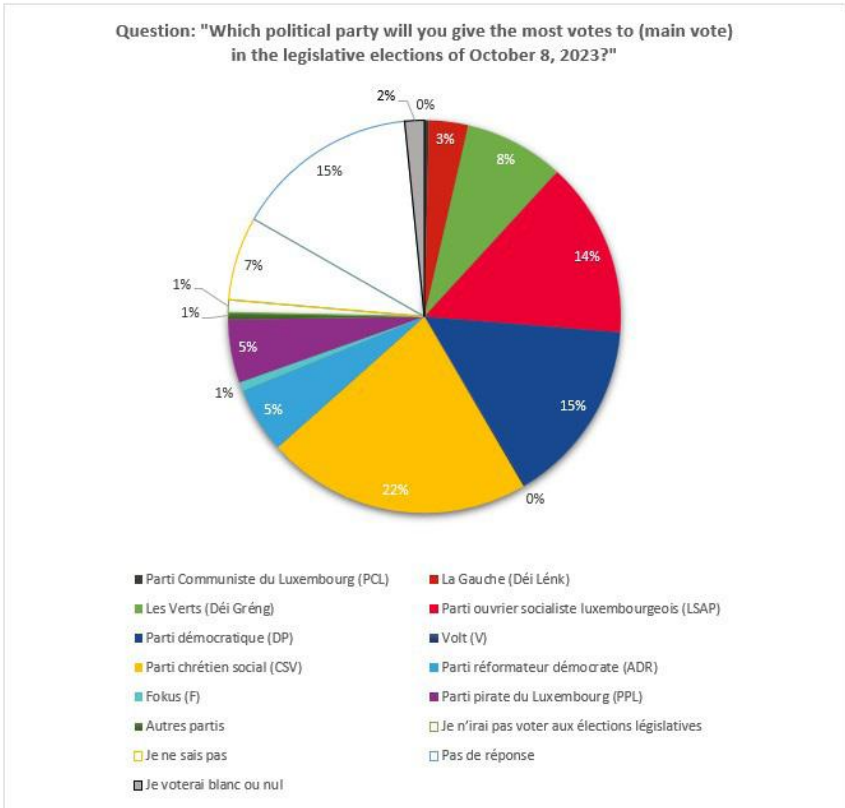
## 2 Social Structures and Party Benefits

Polindex 2023, the first wave of a multi-annual sociopolitical study conducted by the Chair of Legislative Studies of the University of Luxembourg, asked participants about their political preferences regarding the 2023 parliamentary elections (Figure 1). The study observed that the three most popular parties of 2018 (the socialist LSAP, the liberal DP and the Christian Social CSV) appeared to hold stable positions but with potential extra votes for the socialist LSAP and for smaller parties which have not held a ministerial function before, such as Piraten. As Figure 1 shows, the study outlined a loss of votes for the Green Party (Déi Gréng). In comparison, Figure 2 shows the official results of the parliamentary elections of 2023. The comparison confirms the findings of our survey: CSV proved to be the most popular option among the electorate followed by the Democrats and the Socialists, head-to-head.

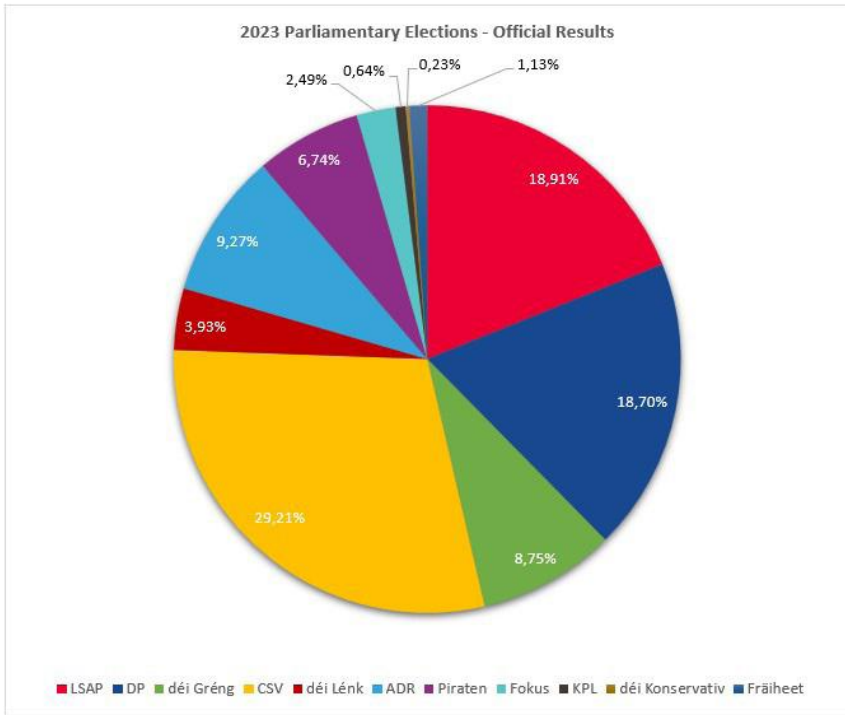
The survey's prediction of the loss of voters of the Green Party also gained confirmations by the election results. The hesitant answers in our study ('I don't know' and 'no answer') were proportionally distributed among the parties which managed to gain seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier

**Figure 1** Voting Preference Trends in Polindex 2023 Study



**Figure 2** *Vote Shares of Luxembourgish Parties in the 2023 Parliamentary Elections (Elections, 2023)*



The survey showed that CSV was the most preferred party (22%) among citizens, followed by LSAP and DP, head-to-head (15% preference for each). However, a remarkable segment of the electorate appeared to be hesitant regarding their vote, especially in the South and in Luxembourg City, and the groups of society with lower educational levels (48% of the citizens with only primary education did not choose their party of preference).

The study observed that the partisan voters of the parties of the outgoing government are those who would also cast the most divided votes (including both intra- and inter-list voting). It is the voters of the Democratic Party who showed the most tendency

for ‘panachage’ for candidates of other parties. Conversely, the partisan voters of the parties which were in opposition would predominantly apply entire list voting which reveals the role of conviction-based voting (aligned with the values of the individuals) and voting for institutional considerations (the wish for their party of preference to be a member of the future government and/or parliament with more deputies). Our study showed that the voters of smaller parties, such as the ADR or Déi Lénk, preferred list voting the most. Regionally speaking, it was in the Centre constituency where the willingness of inter-list voting (choosing candidates from other lists) appeared to be strongest.

Polindex 2023 outlined that the three major parties of the previous national elections (CSV, LSAP, DP) would win the most votes on 8 October 2023 due to their overrepresentation in certain social categories. The social structure/voting intentions ratio provided these parties with stability with relatively minor losses or gains.

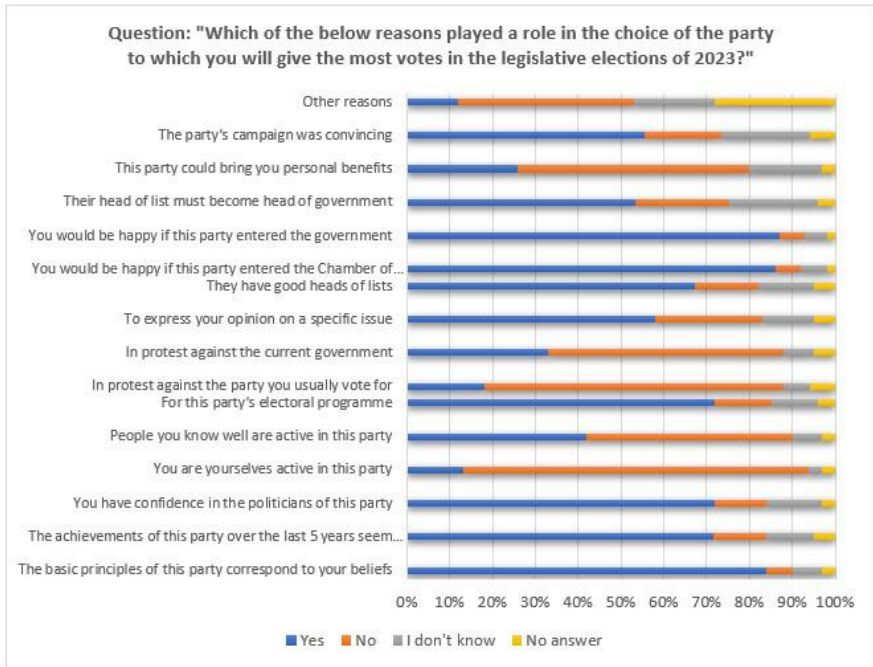
A series of descriptive statistical analysis of our coded data outlined the advantage of different political parties in different groups of society. Based on the Polindex 2023, we see that preference for the three major parties (DP, LSAP and CSV) was present in each age group. Data showed that the Socialist LSAP, one of the parties of the outgoing governing coalition, was the party which held the most positive perceptions in all the age groups of society and attracted the most voters in the South (the largest constituency). In comparison, the Democratic Party, another ex- and current coalition member, appeared to be the most popular among the highest income earners, a group of Luxembourgish society in constant growth. In addition, data showed that the Centre constituency is the DP's main fortress as well as that the party had a solid popularity among Luxembourgers abroad. The CSV's key advantages appeared in cohorts which are most critical about the economic dynamics in the country and the outgoing government's capacity to stop inflation and maintain the purchase power, most importantly, those in the 45 to 54 years age group. Additionally, the latter party, CSV, appeared to be popular in all income categories and overrepresented among voters with secondary-level education and below.

### 3 Understanding Voting Preferences: Motivations in Context

When asked about specific motivations based on which citizens decide which party they will vote for in the national elections of October 2023, the questionnaire offered a list of reasons of both 'institutional' and 'conviction-based' types. Among answers of institutional character, the questionnaire offered, for instance, the satisfaction if a party gets elected to the government and/or the parliament. Among the 'conviction-based' options, the questionnaire listed more value-based reasons, such as personal alignment with the values that the party represents, programmes of the party and having trust in the candidates of the party.

Several motivations in both categories received a positive answer from the respondents (Figure 3). The two main motivations, both of institutional nature, were personal satisfaction if the given political party gets elected to the Chamber of Deputies and the government. The third, fourth and fifth most popular options were based on personal convictions and alignment with the values of the party and its electoral programme and the trust in the party's candidates. Findings also showed that personal proximity to the political parties (e.g. personally being active in the party or knowing persons active in the party) was not at the forefront of electoral preference formulation.

**Figure 3** Motivations for Voting in the 2023 Elections



The survey asked participant citizens about a set of possible reasons for choosing their preferred political party (Figure 3). Our findings outlined the electoral advantage of the three major parties of the elections of 2018: CSV, LSAP and DP. All these parties were backed by both institutional and conviction-based voting motivations. Findings by age groups confirm the above general observation, providing a second advantage for the three most popular parties of the elections of 2018.

Preference for the CSV based on institutional considerations was found to be more prominent among men than among women. Findings also showed that the Democratic Party enjoyed a further conviction-based advantage among the groups of citizens with the

highest educational levels and the highest revenue.

Regarding age groups, the two youngest groups were the most likely to view politics from a materialist perspective and were the most sensitive to a successful electoral campaign. These two age groups showed the highest level of consideration of personal gains and interest as well as of preference for the selected party to become a member of the Chamber of Deputies.

Further considering social structures, Polindex 2023 observed the following: (1) Concerns about the deterioration in the Luxembourgish economy were strongly expressed by all income categories. (2) None of the electoral groups considered the current economic situation similar or better than the past year by a majority. (3) The elector-

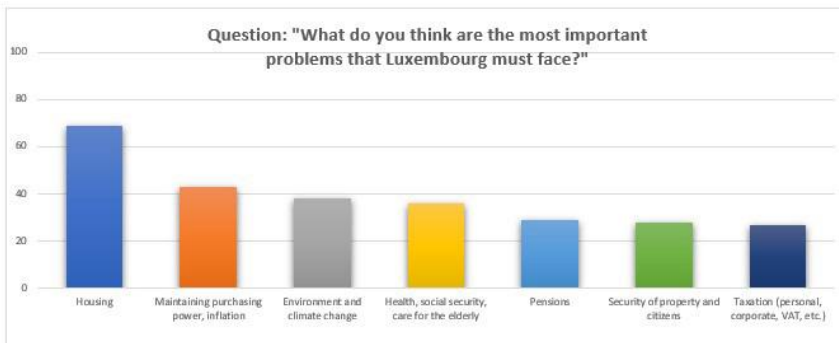
Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier

ate in the Centre was much less distrustful than in the South. (4) A striking 44% of the lower middle class felt distrustful towards politics. (5) Proportionally, it was the 45- to 54-year-old voters who assessed the economic situation most negatively. (6) Nearly 30% of voters in the South and the North as well as 25% in the East assessed the economic situation 'much worse'. (7) Women were less satisfied with the economic situation. These economic concerns provided a benefit to all opposition parties of the outgoing parliament.

According to the citizens (Figure 4), the three most urgent issues that

Luxembourg is facing (in the following order) are housing (69%), maintaining purchasing power/ inflation (43%), and environment and climate change (38%). While housing and purchasing power were considered prominent struggles by all age groups, environmental questions engage the most citizens in the 65+, the 55-64 and the 18-24 age groups. Furthermore, the seven most important challenges further included health, social security, care for the elderly, pensions, the security and well-being of citizens, and taxation.

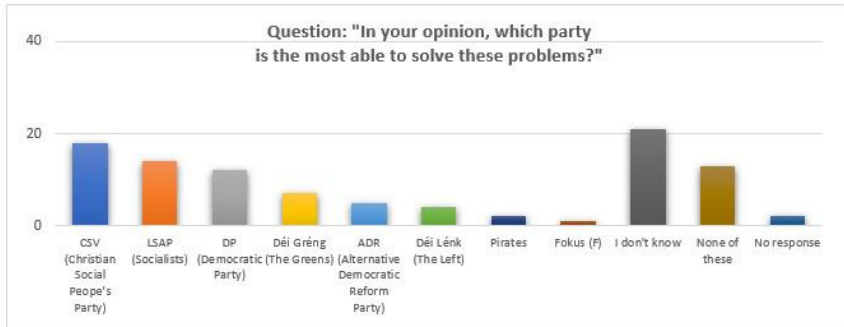
**Figure 4** *The Most Urging Problems in Luxembourg According to the Citizens*



The survey asked Luxembourgish citizens which party they believe could solve the above issues the country currently has to face. According to the respondents, none of the political parties appeared to be able to tackle the three most important challenges in 2023 (Figure 5).



**Figure 5** *Public Perception of Political Parties' Ability to Tackle Challenges*



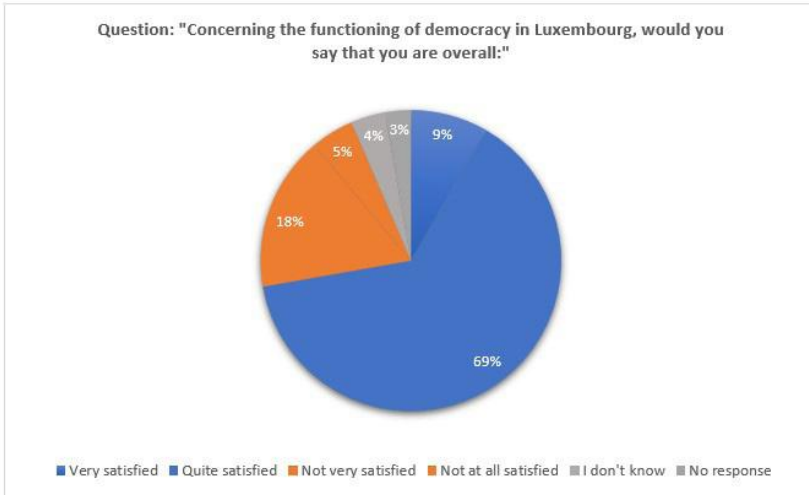
The above chart shows the highest (but overall, not dominant) preference for the CSV, followed by LSAP and DP. However, a large segment (36%) did not have a clear view of the question or believed that none of these parties were able to solve the primary challenges in the country.

#### 4 Feelings about Politics: Overall Satisfaction with Democracy Accompanied by Distrust in Politics

Polindex 2023 survey asked citizens about their satisfaction with democracy (Figure 6) as well as their primary feelings about politics (Figure 7). Findings confirm that democracy is solid in Luxembourg compared to neighbouring countries, as 70% of respondents were very or quite satisfied with the functioning of democracy. Comparison with the ELECT 2018 post-electoral survey and ballot analysis showed a 14% drop in satisfaction.

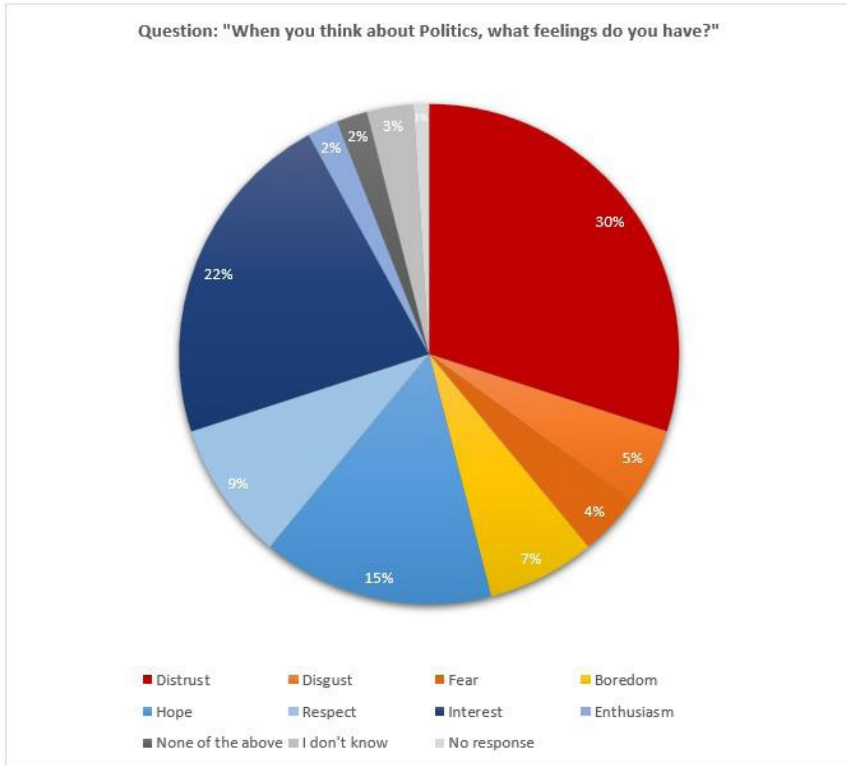
Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier

**Figure 6** *Satisfaction with Democracy in Luxembourg*



Along with the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland, confidence in Luxembourg’s democracy remains the highest on average in Europe (EVS, 2010, 2022). It is crucial to note, however, that the dominant feeling about politics is distrust, while the second and third most important sentiments are interest and hope. While distrust characterised most groups in our analysis, the level of interest and/or hope differed remarkably in the specific groups of the electorate (Figure 7).

**Figure 7** *Feelings about Politics among Luxembourgish Citizens*



In addition, cross-tabulating the data outlined a high level of distrust in the North and the South compared to the Centre and Luxembourg City. More than a third of voters in the North were distrustful of politics. Voters in this constituency were also among the most critical of issues presented by the survey. Regarding the composition of feelings by gender/sex, findings showed that women were more suspicious, less interested and less hopeful, but more respectful about politics than men were. Regarding the level of monthly income, we concluded that the group with the highest income level (6,001 to 8,000 euros per month) displayed more interest in politics than distrust in pol-

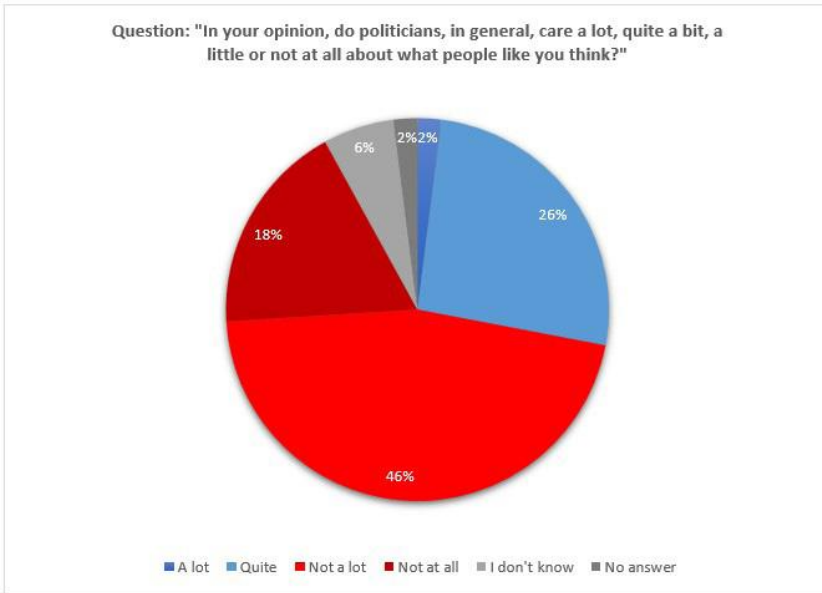
itics. It was also the segment of the electorate (by revenue) which was the most hopeful.

As shown by Polindex 2023, an emerging challenge for democracy in Luxembourg is the growing public perception of a distance between the interests and opinions of the people and their political representatives. The majority of voters believe that politicians are not truly preoccupied with what people think (Figure 8). This result was outlined in all the different partisan electorates. We asked participants whether they feel that their opinion matters to political decision-makers: a striking 64% of citizen respondents expressed that they do not quite or at all

Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier

believe that their representatives care about what people think.

**Figure 8** *Public Perception of Politicians' Concern for Citizens' Opinions*



Our study included questions regarding democracy in general. As much as 80.3% of citizens agreed that “even though democracy can have its problems, it is still better than any other form of government”, while 75.5% agreed that “the democratic regime is irreplaceable, it is the best possible system”. As much as 80.3% agreed with the idea that “it is important to vote because it is through elections that we can change things”. However, only 54.4% agreed that “the political system in Luxembourg allows people to have a say in what the government does”. This means that more than one-third of the citizens feel that their voice does not count in terms of the actions of the political decision-makers.

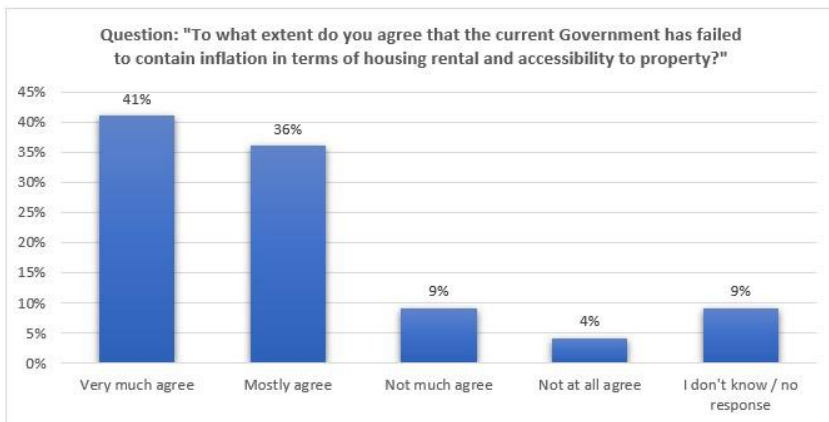
## 5 Approval of the Outgoing Government

The outgoing government received an overall positive assessment in our study (with an average of 5 to 6 on a scale of 1 to 10). However, the findings show a decline compared to 2018 (by 1.6 points). The outgoing government holds in majority a positive perception among the electorate in most age groups. The group with the lowest level of approval are voters between the age of 45 and 54 years. Furthermore, in our study, the latter group showed the highest tendency to vote in protest to the actual government and was the most critical about the economic situation and one of the two groups where distrust about politics went above 50%.

In addition, Polindex 2023 concluded that the higher the level of education, the stronger the support for the current government. Regarding the approval of the government by monthly income available to the household, the study observed that those with an income of 6,000 euros per month and above were the most positive about the actions of the outgoing government. By electoral constituency, the Luxembourg City and the Centre appeared to be the

main fortresses of the outgoing government. However, when we asked citizens regarding the management of inflation in relation to housing, responses revealed weakened the position of the outgoing government, with 77% of voters believing that it has failed to develop effective reforms in this field (Figure 9). We assess that this has had a significant influence on the outcome of the 2023 national elections.

**Figure 9** *The Current Government's Performance on Housing Rental and Accessibility*



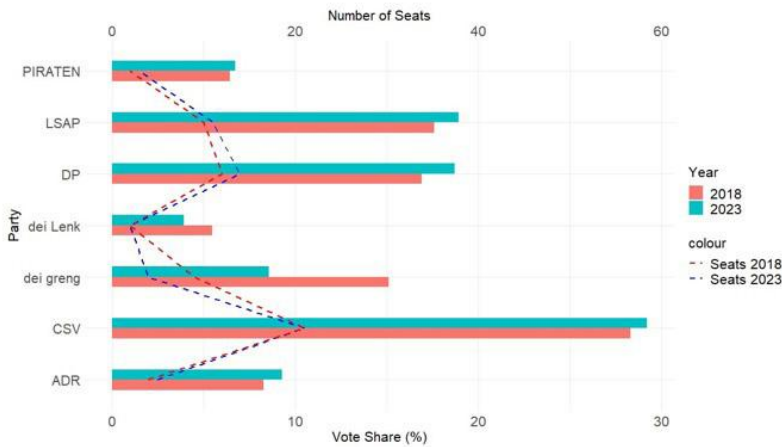
## 6 Electoral Dynamics and Party Success in Luxembourg's 2023 Elections

As in the 2018 elections, the Christian Social People's Party (CSV) emerged again as the frontrunner, ahead of the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP), with 18.91%, and the Liberals of the Democratic Party (DP) securing 18.70% of the votes. Although the Liberals and Socialists increased their vote shares compared to 2018, the under-performance of the Greens, who ob-

tained only 8.5% of the votes, prevented the incumbent coalition government from securing a majority. Indeed, the former three-party coalition of Socialists, Liberals and Greens, with 29 seats, fell short of the majority needed in the 60-seat Chamber of Deputies (Figure 10).

Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier

**Figure 10** Evolution of Vote Shares and Seats: 2018 versus 2013



After two legislatures spent in opposition, the CSV was eager to return to power. Earlier this year, the municipal elections foreshadowed the outcome of national elections, by enabling the CSV to secure first place in the 56 largest cities of the Grand Duchy (Deloy, 2023). The same dynamic is visible in the regional breakdown of the legislative results showing that CSV has come out on top in the great majority of the country's municipalities (see Table). Consequently, the Christian Socials maintained consistent strength across all four constituencies, with a particularly strong presence in the North where they garnered over 33% of the votes.

The wide support gathered by the CSV across the country reflects its capacity to appeal to a diverse spectrum of voters, including those who appreciate traditional values and prioritise economic stability and social cohesion. Its sociological base, which resonates with the party's centrist social principles, can be found in both the middle-class and upper-middle-class voting

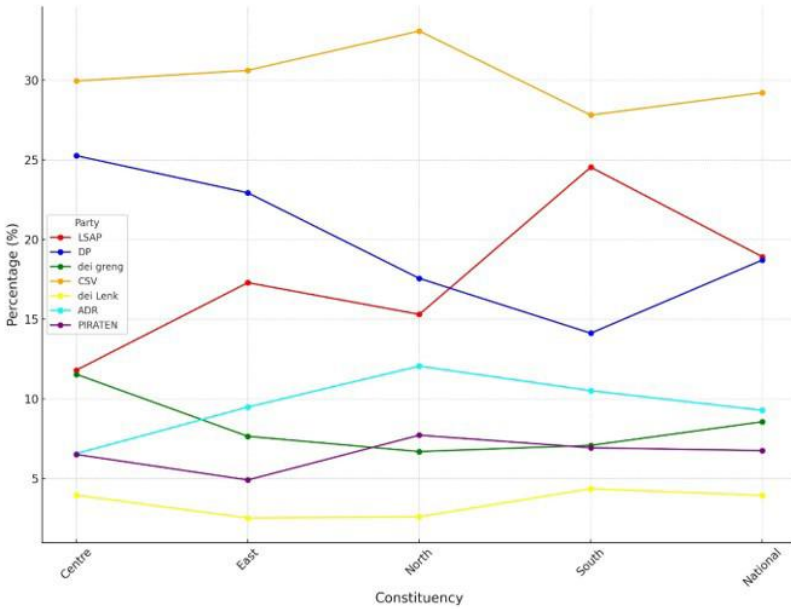
populations (Luxtoday, 2023a, 2023b). Older voters are drawn to the party's defence of social security and health-care, which are critical issues to this demographic. Regionally, the CSV has also managed to craft a social Christian discourse, which aligns with the traditional values of voters in the North and Centre regions, while emphasising topics related to housing and quality of life, which are of great importance to voters of the denser urban population of the South (Delano, 2023).

As the Polindex survey indicates, there is a current trend showing a societal inclination towards materialism, with concerns primarily centred on purchasing power, housing and inflation. This shift likely influenced voter preferences, favouring parties deemed strong in economic management. The CSV, closely aligning with national average income levels, may have been perceived as effectively addressing these material concerns. These materialistic considerations might also explain the electoral outcomes for the second and third largest parties in parliament.

The DP experienced a success in the 2023 elections, moving from 12 to 14 seats. The additional seats were gained in the South and in the Centre where the DP has its stronghold. In the Centre, where the capital is located, a substantial number of urban voters from the middle-class and upper-middle-class populations are sensitive to the DP's vision for economic growth and support for the private sector. This pro-business orientation lends credence to the economic competencies of the DP and aligns well with the elector-

ate's rising concerns about purchasing power and housing problems. In addition, the outgoing Prime Minister, Xavier Bettel, who led the campaign, is the most popular politician in the country, bolstering the DP's position. While Bettel's popularity may have aided the DP's performance, it was not sufficient to counterbalance the overall losses of the coalition (Politico, 2023). However, the strong showing of the Liberals allowed them to claim both an electoral victory and participation in the new government coalition.

**Figure 11** Luxembourg Legislative Election 2023 – Performance by Constituency



The third largest party, the LSAP, maintained its presence all over the country. It had a strong performance in the South, which can be explained by the demographics and urban density in the constituency. These aspects often bring concerns about affordable housing, public transport and social services. LSAP's historical focus on social welfare

and supporting workers resonates in these densely populated areas where the concentration of working-class voters and public sector employees is high.

While the Greens/Déi Gréng (LV-DG) were considered the winners of the 2018 elections, they were deemed the losers of the 2023 elections. Across all districts, they experienced a decrease in

votes and lost in total of five seats. As indicated by Polindex, more immediate social and economic concerns were mounting among voters right before the elections. The shifting priorities of voters towards materialistic values created challenges for the Greens in balancing their environmental priorities with these concerns. This chasm very likely impacted the overall chances of the Greens.

The three main parties – the Christian Social Party (CSV), the Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP) and the Democratic Party (DP) – collectively have a higher seat count than in the last legislative elections of October 2018. However, the total seat count of these governing parties could not reach back to the level of representation they had earlier in the decade.

As their decline could not yet be reversed, other smaller and more populist parties maintained a certain level of radicality in the system. The far-right and Eurosceptic ADR (Alternative Democratic Reform Party), focusing on national identity and migration, increased its national vote share and gained votes in the North and South, becoming the country's fourth most relevant party ahead of the Greens. The growing sentiment of distrust within political parties may have benefited the ADR, appealing to voters seeking alternatives to mainstream politics. On the opposite side of the political spectrum and with a focus on income equality and anti-capitalist policies, though experiencing a slight decrease in votes, Déi Lénk maintained its overall representation.

Finally, a political party known for advocating digital rights, such as internet freedom, civil liberties and transparency in governance, the Piraten (Pi-

rate Party) slightly increased its national vote share. Its success in the North district, characterised by a mix of urban and rural areas, shows that the progressive agenda on digital rights has gained a foothold in sections of the population beyond traditional urban, tech-savvy voters.

## 7 Conclusion

This research note has analysed the October 2023 elections in light of the Polindex survey, highlighting the key sociopolitical trends that shaped the main electoral outcomes. These led to a swift government formation that has reverted to a classic coalition, reconstituting a two-party government with a senior and a junior party. This return to a more conventional configuration is attributed to the resurgence of the CSV, which had been the dominant political force for 90% of the period since 1945.

The government agreement, disclosed in late November 2023, primarily focuses on economic guidelines, such as the internationalisation of Luxembourg's economy and a tax reform aiming at bolstering purchasing power and stimulating domestic economic growth, addressing thereby some of the primary concerns expressed by the electorate (Chronicle, 2023).

The pairing of Prime Minister Luc Frieden, who led the CSV's election list, with former Prime Minister Xavier Bettel, now serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs, reflects a balanced blend of political experience and economic expertise. This arrangement also anticipates the European elections and the subsequent redistribution of key roles within the European Union. Indeed, historical precedents, such as Gaston Thorn and



Jacques Santer transitioning from prime ministers to presidents of the European Commission, underscore the impact of strategic government formation on European appointments. Overall, the establishment of this government and its initial policy orientations indicate a response to the electoral mandate, particularly the economic concerns highlighted by voters. Should the recent historical patterns be observed, this governing coalition also sets the stage for Luxembourg to demonstrate soon again its unique capacity, alongside Belgium, to launch political careers onto the European stage.

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Agnes Darabos, Nadim Farhat & Philippe Poirier

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