

SPATIAL DIFFERENCES IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR AMONG INHABITANTS OF RURAL POLAND, AS EXEMPLIFIED BY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE PERIOD 1993-2007

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Spatial differences in voting behaviour among inhabitants of rural Poland, as exemplified by parliamentary elections in the period 1993-2007

Freedom to elect political representation was one of the clearest manifestations of the transformations taking place in the Eastern Bloc countries. The transformations alluded to favour a diversification of voting behaviour along the lines of profession, group in society and whether a person was a country-dweller or an inhabitant of an urban area. For its part, the work described here was focused on the last issue, seeking to diagnose what spatial differences there might be to voting behaviour, between one rural area of Poland and another. Beyond that, were it to prove possible to note differences, a further aim was to look for changes over the period since democracy was reinstated in public life and an economy given over to the market philosophy was created, and to indicate the dynamics and directions characteristic of any such change.

Key words: parliamentary elections, voting behaviour, political parties, rural areas, Poland

INTRODUCTION

The fall of the “Iron Curtain” was a trigger for economic, political and cultural transformations in the old Eastern Bloc countries, the efforts culminating in the successful NATO and EU accessions. After protracted enslavement under the communist system and its main proponent, the USSR, the societies in this part of the Continent finally regained their freedom and were at liberty to decide their own destinies. The democratisation process was inevitably a very dynamic one, characterised by a veritable avalanche of new businesses, NGOs and political parties, as well as by a rapid reawakening of administrative activity at local and regional levels. While the precise forms these phenomena took varied from one post-Soviet country to another, the common denominator was “freedom”.

Freedom to elect political representation was one of the clearest manifestations of the transformations taking place. However, the first period of these saw the CEECs virtually choked by over-imbibing on political freedom. A host of small political parties appeared, but these were often lacking in programmes, and led by people keen to make political (and even economic) capital as rapidly as possible. Happily, society’s political maturity grew over time, and there was some rationalisation of the political choices being made, with the political scene becoming more and more legible as a result.

The social and economic transformations favoured diversification of voting behaviour along the lines of profession, group in society and whether a person was a country-dweller or an inhabitant of an urban area.

For its part, the work described here was focused on the last issue, seeking to diagnose whatever spatial differences there might be in the voting behaviour, between one rural area of Poland and another aim was to look for changes over the period since democracy was reinstated in public life and an economy given over to the market philosophy, and to indicate the dynamics and directions characteristic of any such changes. The authors were especially keen to assess the “permanence” (or fickleness) of the political choices country-dwelling Poles were making, and to look for distinct spatial variation in voting preferences, as these might relate to history and differences in the ways rural areas had been administered and utilised in the past.

With the above aims in mind, the work concentrated on the results of parliament elections in the period 1993-2007. Significantly, this meant that the first sets of democratic parliamentary elections in the newly free Poland (i.e. those held in 1989 and 1991) were excluded from the research. In the former (1989) case, the exclusion was deemed justified in recognition of the not-fully-democratic nature of the poll. In the case of the 1991 elections, in turn, it was considered that too great a fragmentation of the political scene was then occurring to make comparison possible.

THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Interest in the factors and rules underpinning voting behaviour first really began to be expressed in the 1940s, and as time passed it was possible to note crystallisation where both approach and methods were concerned – in the sociological, psychological and economic directions (Dalton and Wittenberg 1993, Holbrook 1996 and Cwalina 2003).

The sociological approach analyses voter behaviour from the perspective of the place the individual occupies within social structures. In this sense, decisions at election time are deemed to be determined by such factors as gender, age, education, affiliation to given ethnic groups, etc.

The psychological approach in turn emphasises individuals’ predispositions to identify with given political complexions. What is involved here is a positive emotional involvement, engagement of affiliation with a given party and the candidates it fields (Campbell et al. 1960 and Converse 1964).

Finally, the primary axiom of the economic paradigm is an assumption that the individual extends his or her support to that political option that will bring (or at least is expected to bring) the greatest benefit to him/her. The behaviour of the citizen as regards the political sphere is thus deemed to be rational (Downs 1957).

It was criticism of each individual paradigm for the analysis of voting behaviour that led to the construction of models. Use of these has allowed for a fuller and better understanding of voters’ attitudes, at the same time providing an important source of information for political marketing. Electoral geography, with its injection of knowledge on how space influences voting behaviour, is also included here (Johnson 1988, Huckfeldt et al. 1995, Agnew 1996 and Bartkowski 1999).

The first years of freedom in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) saw a dramatic growth in numbers of political parties and in the public's interest in politics in general. A great deal of hope was attached to, and invested in elections, the first to parliament drawing turnouts of 64% in Poland (1989), 65% in Hungary (1990) and close to 90% in the former Czechoslovakia (also 1990). However, it was not long before things "cooled off", with turnouts in successive elections to parliament being ever lower. In Poland, for example, the average turnout for the years 1990-2005 was of just 46%. There were also decisive changes in voter preferences.

Work by M. Howard (2002) makes clear how both interest in politics and engagement in political activity are at much lower levels among the citizens of the CEECs than in Western European societies. Likewise, voting behaviour in this part of Europe has its own specific, even idiosyncratic, features when set against that to be noted in the western part of the continent. In the view of Roberts (2008), the countries embarking upon the transformation from authoritarian regimes with central economic planning to democratic systems based around the market economy displayed voter preferences that were more about politics than economics. This fact was shown in the election results for these countries, in which the pedigree and type of party was of much greater significance in the early years of freedom than either the proposals they were making as regards the economy, or even their actual achievements (Powers and Cox 1997).

Equally, as time passed, voters' attention even in this region became ever more focused on the economic situation, to the point where it ultimately became the most important factor accounting for the choices made (Roberts 2008).

It is not hard to anticipate – or in the event to note in practice – how the elections of the transition period could be characterised by a clear political division into fans of – on the one hand – the new parties predicated on freedom (which had previously been illegal and had had to confine themselves to underground activity), and those that were the "post-communist" successors of the old regime. Such conclusions were arrived at by Stockes (2001), Jackson et al. (2005) in their work, as well as by many others studying this issue.

In the view of Tucker (2006), the political pedigree of parties and a country's economic situation have been closely interlinked factors where voting behaviour has been concerned. New parties gained greater support for so long as a country's economic situation was favourable, only to lose it to the post-communists as and when things became worse. This reflects voter recognition that the "new" parties in the CEECs were behind economic transformation and the pursuit of reform, while parties of "the old system" gained back greater and greater support as the resulting economic situation tended to worsen. This was how 1994 elections in Hungary brought victory to the post-communists, as a reflection of the fact that the reforming government had lost popularity with the public precisely because reforms were tough, *inter alia* demanding losses of privileges enjoyed previously, as well as widespread unemployment (Kovac and Dingsdale 1998). The only island of success for the parties previously in power were those areas in which dynamic economic growth had been liberated, mostly because considerable amounts of foreign investment had successfully been attracted.

A very similar situation applied in Poland, where the coalition of parties arising out of the “freedom movement” that had governed in the years 1997-2001 were ousted by the “post-communist” groupings when the former’s reforms were seen to have been less than effective.

Voting behaviour in Poland does display marked regional differences, however, which are in general put down to a mixture of historical and socio-economic conditioning factors (Florczyk and Żukowski 1990, Raciborski 1997, Zarycki 1997, Kowalski 2002, 2003 and 2004 and Bartkowski 2003). A surprisingly important role here has been assigned to whether a given region of the country had spent the 123-year period of European history (1795-1918) in the parts of the old country partitioned off by the Russians, Prussians or Austrians. Beyond that there was the matter of the rate of unemployment, the general economic situation and the level of educational attainment of inhabitants. The relative significances of these factors are themselves seen to vary from region to region and with the passage of time.

The rural-urban aspect to voting preferences has long been noticeable (Garber and Bjorglund 1992, Koulov 1995, Jurkynas 2005, Downs and Miller 2006). B. Koulov (1995) demonstrated significant differences in voter sympathies in Bulgaria, between large cities on the one hand, and small towns and villages on the other. However, these were more conditioned by demographic and social factors (in particular age structure and level of education) than by economic conditions (living standards, access to services and levels of income). In this regard it emerged that urban-rural economic differences had been reined in under communism to such an extent that they did not represent a significant factor in voting preferences. Differences in voting behaviour were also visible in Romania (Downs and Miller 2006), and in Lithuania (Jurkynas 2005), in which rural areas were characterised by relatively greater support for the former communists.

In general terms, voting behaviour of rural residents can be thought of as more conservative than that of city-dwellers. According to Kovac and Dingsdale (1998), the Hungarian countryside is a highly conservative entity into which new ideas infiltrate only slowly. The idea that voters in rural areas are conservative is also confirmed by research done in other countries (Secor 2001, Johnson 2002 and Shelley 2002).

METHODS

The research detailed here made use of materials from Poland’s State Electoral Commission (*Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza*) in respect of the parliamentary elections taking place in 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005 and 2007. Analyses were performed in relation to the Polish gmina, as the local level unit of administration. Confinement of the work to the election behaviour of country-dwellers necessitated a process identifying those gminas that could be said to represent rural areas in the country. Of the four delimitation criteria applied to that end, two derived from OECD methodology (OECD 2009), i.e. a density of population below 150 people/km² plus a figure for urban population in the area below 50%. The two other criteria took account of the administrative statuses of the gminas, those officially classed as urban or urban-rural being excluded, along with those

that are in the immediate vicinity of the capitals of poviats (Poland's county-level units of administration). The main aim here was thus to separate out those areas genuinely representative of the Polish countryside, without any more distinct impact being exerted by the proximity or presence of larger towns or cities. Application of the cited criteria led to the delimitation of a rural element to the country taking in some 1,624 gminas, accounting for c. 68% of Poland's entire area and being home to 28.8% of its population overall.

A quite serious research problem was posed by the far-reaching fragmentation of the Polish political scene – a phenomenon especially manifested in the 1990s. As time has passed, there has been an inevitable process of absorption and merger by which a few key parties have gained ever-greater significance and become larger. As a consequence, comparison of the results obtained at successive elections is only possible at all if a classification based around political groupings and complexions is arrived at.

In fact, the nature of Polish political life in the 1990s was such as to nurture the shaping of four main political options spread out along axes of either an ideological or a socio-economic nature. The main opposing political options – of right and left – form the “values axis”, with the conflicts along it being primarily ideological in nature. Work by J. Raciborski (1997) makes it clear that one of the main indicators of a left-wing political complexion would be support for state interventionism and secularity of the state. The right in contrast turns to such values as patriotism, private ownership, Catholicism and the family.

The second axis (of interests) comprises the elitarians often dubbed “liberals” (if in fact incorrectly in any of the meanings this word conveys in either English or Polish), against the “peasant” option. Where these two poles of interest come into conflict it is much more in relation to socio-economic premises than values or ideologies. To put it bluntly, these two groups in society have markedly different economic interests. A consequence of this emphasis is that the two can at least occasionally find a common cause of a “higher” nature. Not surprisingly, the elitarians draw their support primarily from the cities, and the “peasant” option from among the rural inhabitants.

It is interesting to note how both the right-wing and elitarian options have arisen by evolutionary divergence from a common stock in the shape of the 1980s opposition movement. This leaves them contrasting with the left-wing and peasant orientations, which both in fact predate communism but are still rooted in the communist era, on account of their having been able to operate without interruption in the People's Republic of Poland.

The linkages referred to above are in themselves sufficient to account for the complexions of successive ruling coalitions, which were generally right-wing / elitarian or left-wing/peasant in makeup. The inter-relationships between pairs of antagonists can be presented symbolically by reference to the two axes they form (Fig. 1 and Tab. 1).

Irrespective of the nature of the conditioning encouraging Poles into different political sympathies, the existence of four model political options in Poland is a matter of fact, and one that also involves and differentiates to a marked degree – the country's rural areas. This regularity was in fact found to apply to such an extent that heartlands or strongholds for the left, right and peasant op-

tions could be identified, and even some in which the elitarian option exerts its influence.

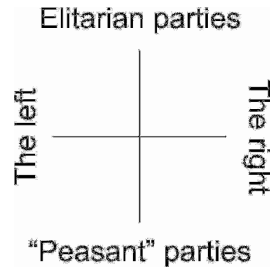


Fig. 1. Main axis of political divisions in Poland

Tab. 1. Political parties contesting parliamentary elections in the period 1993-2007 in line with the four fundamental political orientations identified

Election year	The left	The right	“Peasant” parties	Elitarian parties
1993	SLD, UP, PUP	KW Ojczyzna, PC, KdR, S, KPN	PSL, Samoobrona, PL, X	UD, KLD, PPPP, BBWR, UPR, NOT
1997	SLD, UP, KPEiR	AWS, ROP, PDP, KPEiR RP, PWN	PSL, Samoobrona	UPRz, UW
2001	SLD-UP, PPS	PiS, LPR, AWSP, Alternatywa, PWN	PSL, Samoobrona	PO, UW, UPR, PUG
2005	SLD, SDPi, PPP	PiS, LPR, RP, PPN, IRP, Centrum, GiP, DO	PSL, Samoobrona	PO, PD, PJKM
2007	Lewica i Demokraci, PPP, PK	PiS, LPR	PSL, Samoobrona, SP	PO

AWS – Akcja Wyborcza “Solidarność” (“Solidarity” Electoral Action), AWSP – Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność Prawicy, BBWR – Bezpartyjny Blok Wspierania Reform, DO – Dom Ojczysty, GiP – Polska Konfederacja – Godność i Praca, IRP – Inicjatywa RP, KdR – Koalicja dla Rzeczypospolitej (Coalition for the Republic), KLD – Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny (Liberal Democratic Congress), KPEiR – Krajowa Partia Emerytów i Rencistów (Pensioners’ Party), KPEiR RP – Krajowe Porozumienie Emerytów i Rencistów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Pensioners’ Party), KPN – Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej (Confederation for an Independent Poland), *Lewica i Demokraci* (Left and Democrats), LPR – Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families), NOT – Naczelna Organizacja Techniczna, PC – Porozumienie Centrum (Centre Understanding), PD – Partia Demokratyczna, PiS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law & Justice), PJKM – Platforma Janusza Korwin-Mikke, PK – Partia Kobiet (Women’s Party), PL – Porozumienie Ludowe, PO – Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform), PPN – Polska Partia Narodowa (Polish National Party), PPP – Polska Partia Pracy (Polish Labour Party), PPPP – Polska Partia Przyjaciół Piwa (Beerlovers’ Party), PPS – Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party), PSL – Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasants’ Party), PUG – Polska Unia Gospodarcza, PUP – Polska Unia Pracujących, PWN – Polska Wspólnota Narodowa, ROP – Ruch Odbudowy Polski (Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland), RP – Ruch Patriotyczny, S – NSZZ Solidarność (Solidarity trade union), *Samoobrona* (“Self Defence”), SDPi – Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polski, SLD – Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance), SP – Samoobrona Polska (Polish “Self Defence”), UD – Unia Demokratyczna (Democratic Union), UP – Unia Pracy (Labour Union), UPR – Unia Polityki Realnej (Real Policy Union), UPRz – Unia Prawicy Rzeczypospolitej (Union of the Republic’s Right), UW – Unia Wolności (Freedom Union).

Names are given in English, where these have become widely enough used in Poland and abroad to constitute recognisably “official” versions.

Thus, the results for rural areas in the five consecutive parliamentary elections taking place in the years 1993-2007 were compiled in a synthesised form by applying the formula:

$$x = \text{Max} \left\{ E = \sum_{i=1}^5 E_i; W = \sum_{i=1}^5 W_i; D = \sum_{i=1}^5 D_i; P = \sum_{i=1}^5 P_i \right\},$$

where x is the victorious political option, E is the number of votes cast for the elitarian option, W is the number of votes cast for the left, D is the number of votes cast for the peasant option, P is the number of votes cast for the right, i is the number of the consecutive election.

ANALYSIS

Post-1989 parliamentary elections

The first “partially” free and democratic elections to the Polish parliament were called in 1989. The term “partially” applies in line with the fact that the provisions of the “Round Table” Agreement¹ were still in place, and by virtue of them, the ruling communist party (i.e. the Polish United Workers Party or *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*) was guaranteed 65% of the seats in the lower house, the Sejm². Thus, the first entirely free parliamentary elections had to wait until 1991. Numerous parties and groupings that sought to take advantage of the democratic system being introduced then competed for seats. However, at this point a relatively unified “Solidarity” camp was able to prevail over what were at that point small-scale groupings representing various political options, not least *Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny* and the Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*), as well as *Solidarność* itself. Some former-opposition groupings (notably the Confederation for an Independent Poland – *Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej* and Union of Real Policy – *Unia Polityki Realnej*) had even at this stage determined to distance themselves from their Solidarity counterparts, while entirely new groupings – of an enigmatic or eccentric nature – also came into being, most famously the *Polska Partia Przyjaciół Piwa* (Beerlovers’ Party) and *Partia X* of Stanisław “Stan” Tymiński.

Naturally, the traditions of the former camp that had remained in power for so long were fostered to a greater or lesser extent in the parties called *Stronnictwo Demokratyczne*, *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* (the Democratic Left Alliance) and the venerable *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (Polish Peasant Party).

The 1991 elections brought victory for parties of the right (which took 43.4% of the vote), as well as the elitarian option (25.6%). The left was supported by as small (or large) a proportion of those who turned out to vote as 20.1%, while the PSL peasant option polled 9.2%.

¹ The “Round Table” (*Okrągły Stół*) name not surprisingly relates to the large table at which representatives of the Polish government (hence mainly members of the Polish United Workers Party) met the Opposition (mainly Solidarity trade union representatives). The talks convened with a view to achieving reform of the economy and state policy took place between February 6th and April 5th 1989, and as many as 452 different individuals participated.

² The Polish Parliament consists of lower and upper houses known respectively as the Sejm and Senat.

However, the success of the right and elitarians was frittered away quite rapidly by splits into small parties. Furthermore, the turnout in the first truly free elections was somewhat shameful 43.2%, though in fact this would not be bettered greatly in subsequent elections (Dudek 1997 and Kowalski 2000).

The 1993 parliamentary elections. The premature ending of the parliamentary term by the calling of new elections as soon as in 1993 reflected the sheer impossibility of shoring up a stable coalition in an increasingly fragmented Sejm. Lacking a majority, the governments of neither Jan Olszewski of *Porozumienia Centrum* nor Hanna Suchocka of *Unia Demokratyczna* proved able to act as they had promised the voters, and as they would have wished to (Dudek 1997).

Nevertheless, by the time Election Day dawned, the Polish political scene had become both clarified and stabilised as compared with its 1991 predecessor. Ironically perhaps, this was particularly clear on the left, which had given rise to just two main groupings, namely the Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*), as now enriched by a number of hitherto separate groupings, plus the Labour Union (*Unia Pracy*) – again a consequence of unification among smaller previously-existing parties. The left-wing option in a wider sense could also be said to have comprised a couple of other parties, most notably the combative “Self Defence” (*Samobrona*) plus Mr Tymiński’s *Partia X*. What were no longer to be found were the old plethora of small local committees and circles adhering to leftist ideology.

In contrast, the right in the broadest sense of the term faced the elections as divided as it had two years previously, the only advance being the disappearance of some very small local and regional groupings. The elitarian option was also very much split, the voters still facing a choice between the Freedom Union (*Unia Demokratyczna*), the Liberal-Democratic Congress (*Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny*) or the Real Policy Union (*Unia Polityki Realnej*). Largely clear-cut as hitherto was the peasant option offered by *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*.

In the event, the parties of the left were able to garner 33.6% of votes cast, the peasants as much as 15.4% of the vote. With respectively 32.4 and 17.8% of the vote, the right and elitarian options as broadly conceived were both markedly down on their previous results. To a significant degree this represented disparate trends for turnout, which was up where the left prevailed, and down in the traditional heartlands of the right (Dudek 1997, Kowalski 2000). The results in rural areas confirmed a very high level of re-entrenched support for the peasant option, which received some 47.7% of all votes cast in the countryside.

With the heady days of 1989 already more of a memory, the 1993 elections could be seen to reflect to some extent at least the much-earlier history of the Polish lands, from the point of view of the different administrations these had come under during the 19th century and before. Long influenced by Russia, central and eastern parts of Poland came out strongly in favour of the peasant option, whose support exceeded 50% of votes cast in many areas. The south (once under Austrian rule) showed the clearest right-wing sympathies, even in what were poor elections for the right in relative terms, while the left was seen to have heartlands in the north-west and north, where the State Farms had held

sway until being slated for closure more or less overnight in 1991. By the time of the 1993 elections, state-run agriculture had undergone almost complete liquidation, and there was considerable resentment towards post-Solidarity parties. Country-dwellers opting for the left and peasant options were counting on much-needed social assistance and support. While the elitarian option could be said to have a certain presence in the west, it was above all clear now that this was a big-city affair, mainly attracting interest in Warsaw, Kraków, Gdańsk, Szczecin and Wrocław.

First and foremost, these were results showing how relatively unpopular Solidarity groupings had managed to become as few as four years into the democratic transition it had ushered in, not only in Poland but also to a significant extent in Eastern Europe as a whole. Significant chunks of Polish society had in fact gone back over to groupings deriving from and associated with a former system supposedly consigned once and for all to history, and to a surprisingly significant extent it was country-dwellers that had led the charge, people in many rural areas casting as many as 65% of their votes for the left-wing and peasant parties that were thus empowered to form the new government.

The 1997 parliamentary elections. It was at this point that a see-saw effect not unknown around the world began to make itself felt in Polish politics. While the 1993 elections had sent the ruling elitarians and right-wing politicians packing, so those of 1997 spelt downfall (once again, as one might put it) for the left and the peasants. To be fair, this was not solely a matter of a wild swinging of electors' preferences, since the right had learnt its lesson to some extent, several of its groupings having come together in the name of an electoral coalition. These were thus the first elections at which the latter camp was largely consolidated, thanks first and foremost to the emergence of *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność* (Solidarity Electoral Action).

It can further be suggested that, chastened by the way in which its relative apathy the last time had let the left in, the right-wing electorate mobilised much more fully in 1997, sufficiently disquieted as it was by the potential for the left to be returned for yet another term in office.

A further issue here was a sensible enough instinctive concern for balance in the state, the Presidency of Poland having in the meantime gone to Aleksander Kwaśniewski, a product of the Democratic Left Alliance, though now in some sense at least "above" party politics.

In summary then, it was in the traditionally right-wing areas that the turnout in comparison with 1993 rose most markedly. Yet this could not in fact stop the left from improving its result nationally to no less than 34.1% of the vote, even if the mobilisation of the right brought it back up to as many as 42.5%. As must be evident, this effect was primarily achieved at the expense of the elitarian option (down to 15.4% support) and especially a yo-yoing peasant option, which this time took just 7.3% of the vote.

Analysis of the situation in rural areas specifically reveals a more marked exemplification of the above trends to the point of the polarisation of electoral preferences. With the right polling 44.4% and the left 27.9%, it was clearly the two remaining options that had found themselves squeezed. However, notwithstanding its loss of support, the peasant option remained a strong political force

in rural areas where it unsurprisingly took more than twice as large a share of the votes cast as in the cities.

Again unsurprisingly, the above overall result was a reflection of a much more complicated scenario from region to region, with ongoing polarisation of selections made. Eastern and (to some extent) central parts of Poland were now more clearly than ever areas of support for the right, while the left had continued to advance in the west and north. What was thus being emphasised here was the division between those rural areas in which small farms had always held sway, and those of a quite different nature that were still reeling from the abrupt end put to the State Farms and nationalised agriculture.

The 2001 parliamentary elections. Dissatisfaction with the ruling right made itself felt in 2001 with a swing away from that option once more and towards the left. A coalition comprising the Democratic Left Alliance and the Labour Union won the day, on the strength of record 41.6% support for the left. In comparison, the right could manage just 23.4% of votes cast this time (worse than 1993 and a disaster in comparison with 1997), while the peasant option had resurged to an impressive 19.2%. The elitarian option showed the greatest constancy, being stuck on 15.8% support very close to its 1997 figure. The compromising of the parties that had previously headed up the right-wing and elitarian options was sufficient to induce a further convulsive remodelling of this part of the political scene. Arising out of the right were two new groupings destined for important future roles, namely Law & Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) and the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*); while the elitarian camp gave rise to another key party in the shape of the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*).

Rural areas again served to magnify and further emphasise the trends nationally, the peasant and left-wing groupings together achieving almost 70% support among the votes cast! While the peasants surged back in the centre and east, the left had made yet further strides in the north and west. Overall then, the spatial distribution was not dissimilar to that noted at the 1993 elections except for the fact that the heartlands for the left were becoming more clear-cut than ever. Against this background, the region seen to be adhering most firmly to its long-established traditions was the south-east (Małopolska), in which country-dwellers continued to opt for the post-Solidarity camp, and most especially for its right-wing emanations.

The 2005 parliamentary elections. A further reversal of mood characterised the next elections to be called in 2005. Dissatisfaction reared its head again – this time with four years of rule by the left that had ended with nothing short of a compromising of the leadership, and the result was again a major redrawing of the political map of Poland. In fact, we may speak of a shift in the main axis of political conflict from left v. right through to centre v. right. Though it would have been hard to anticipate on the basis of the trend up to and including the 2001 elections, the left-wing option was this time marginalised entirely (with overall support at a paltry 13.4%, and only 11.4% in rural areas). There was a rise in the significance of the right-wing parties (above all Law & Justice with 38.1% of the vote, as well as the elitarian Civic Platform, scoring 28.7%). In rural areas, the right obtained 34.7% support, while the peasant option was as

often the frontrunner, but this time with a massive 37.4% of the vote. In fact, the peasant parties enjoyed a clear victory in rural parts of the centre and east, while the right was – again – to the fore in the Małopolska region of the south, as well as – this time – in Podlasie in the north-east. In turn, in what had been its western and northern strongholds, the leftist option entirely lost its significance in favour of the right and the elitarians.

The 2007 parliamentary elections. The collapse of the minority Law & Justice (PiS) government made it necessary for early elections to be called yet again. These led to a reinforcement of the new axis of political conflict. Dissatisfaction with the radical PiS regime led opponents to focus around Civic Platform (PO), as the most important elitarian grouping. Over the country as a whole, PO picked up no fewer than 41.5% of the votes cast, this being sufficient to ensure its electoral success. The situation was much less clear-cut in rural areas, however, the elitarian option only gaining 26.7% of the vote, this result being just slightly better than that obtained by the peasant option. The rightist option was the clear winner in rural areas attracting 39.7% of votes. Law & Justice in fact did better than ever in rural areas, in essence taking all of the support afforded to parties of the radical right, and even drawing off some support from the peasant option. Overall then, the state of affairs for the right was only slightly worse than at the previous election (34.6% of votes cast).

These most recent elections reinforced the bipolar political set up founded upon the elitarian/right-wing axis, this only being strengthened by a certain tendency for the right to incline itself in the peasant direction. The left and peasant options were of course not entirely expunged from the political scene and indeed it was not unusual for their parliamentarians to exert a disproportionate influence through their holding of the balance of power.

The enhanced conflict between the elitarian and right-wing options (notwithstanding their common origins and earlier capacity to work together to at least some degree) also had its impact on the political map of rural areas. As was noted briefly above, a radicalisation in Law & Justice was enough for it to win over the old peasant-supporting electorate in areas of the centre and east. On the minus side, the same phenomenon sent some more moderate right-wing voters fleeing from PiS to the elitarian Civic Platform. The right thus strengthened its hold on rural areas of eastern and central Poland, while the elitarians once so firmly associated with the cities managed to achieve a hitherto-unthinkable level of success in other areas of the Polish countryside.

Characteristics of the electoral preferences shown by country-dwellers

The overall results from five consecutive general elections held in Poland in the years 1993-2007 make it clear how disparate the different parts of the Polish countryside have actually been (Fig. 2). Central and eastern Poland contained the peasant option's heartland support (often standing at over 50% of votes cast). The right in turn found rural adherents in parts of the south-east and north-east, as well as in the immediate vicinities of Gdańsk and Warsaw. In contrast, the left prevailed most clearly in the west and north-west.

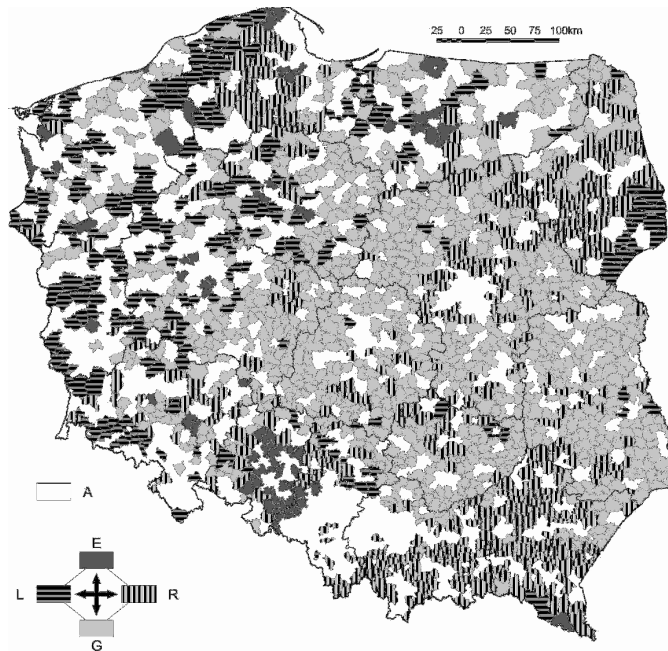


Fig. 2. The preferences shown by country-dwellers in parliamentary elections of the 1993-2007 period

L – The left, R – The right, E – Elitarian, G – “Peasant”, A – urban communes

It is worth emphasising the very marked support for the left-wing option present in the eastern borderland part of Podlasie, in which there is a prevalence of Orthodox Church worshippers. It is probable that the left is perceived there as an antidote to the nationalist-Catholic vision of the social order put forward by the right-wing and peasant-orientated parties (Kowalski 1998).

The preferences shown by the inhabitants of rural areas differ markedly from those manifested by city-dwellers. Villages offer much stronger support to peasant parties, with the three other political options doing much worse as a result. However, the parliamentary elections of both 1997 and 2007 also saw strong support extended to the various right-wing parties. The elitist option is the least popular one for country people, only faring half as well in rural areas as in towns and cities. Nevertheless, there is a trend for the support gained by this option to grow in one election after another, this being associated with a steadily declining interest being shown in both the peasant and left-wing parties (Fig. 3). The aforementioned growth of interest in parties of the right is also a characteristic feature of more recent years.

There are interesting conclusions to be drawn from the analysis of variability in electoral preferences (Fig. 4). There are regions in which the rural populace has markedly crystallised political views (to the point of conservatism), this being manifested in steady support for one or other of the options. Durability of preferences is more a feature of the countryside in the centre and east than in the north and west, however. This leaves the west in general demonstrating the

greatest proneness to swings in support, and it may be concluded that these people are most influenced by economic considerations. This could be said to contrast to the prevalent importance of ideology among rural inhabitants of eastern Poland.

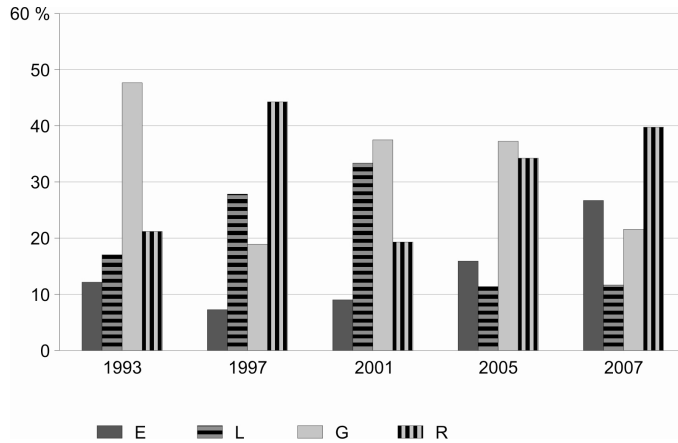


Fig. 3. Election results achieved by the 4 main political options in rural areas, 1993-2007 inclusive

L – The left, R – The right, E – Elitarian, G – “Peasant”

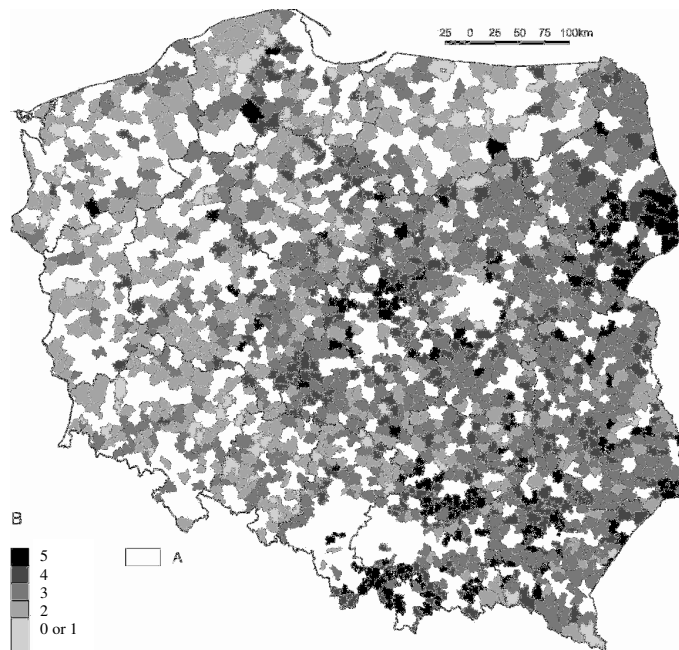


Fig. 4. The number of victories for given political options in successive elections of 1993-2007

A – urban communes, B – rural communes

What conditions the electoral preferences shown by rural inhabitants?

It is clear how the spatial differentiation characterising post-1989 general election results in Poland can be related to the Empires into which Polish lands found themselves partitioned from the late 18th through to the early 20th centuries (Florczyk and Żukowski 1990, Żukowski 1993, Zarycki 1997 and 2002, Raciborski 1997, Kowalski 2000, Węclawowicz 2002 and Bartkowski 2003). The Austrian sector once known as Galicia displays both a high turnout and sustained support for the right, while the area that was once the Russian-run Kingdom of Poland mostly has low turnouts and steady support for the peasant option. That leaves the formerly Prussian part in which turnouts are high and the left has a heartland, as well as the elitarian option to some extent. Not dissimilar to the latter are the formerly-German so-called Western Lands that became Polish after World War II, in which turnouts are low, support for the left is strong, and the elitarians have also been gaining some support. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the historical and cultural factors going back 60 years or more, or even into previous centuries, now make themselves felt much more markedly in rural areas than in the cities – where support for the elitarian option is consistently high irrespective of location in Poland.

The characteristic depiction of Partition-related differences in electoral behaviour at times shows departures from the more general trends. This is particularly true of micro-regions displaying markedly separate cultural identities. Identifiable within the area that was Prussian pre-1918 are places inhabited by Kashubia people and Silesians. In turn, the formerly Russian part of the Polish lands includes an area inhabited by adherents to the Russian Orthodox faith. Finally, the formerly-Austrian part of Poland once known as Galicia is renowned in general for its right-wing mentality, albeit with this finding particularly marked expression in those limited mountainous areas in which the “Highland” culture prevails (Zarycki 1997, Kowalski 2000 and Bartkowski 2003).

Thus the affinities characterising (if at the time unwillingly) the different parts of Poland developing separately over the period 1815-1918 have left their mark in different cultural features, these being further fine-tuned by the existence of distinct regional cultures. Galicia has its entrenched society of conservative thinkers who never ceased to uphold the traditions of private ownership. Prussian state socialism in turn left its indelible mark on the Western Lands. The later (post-War) expulsion of Germans from part of that area was followed by its settlement by people from the old Polish east (today parts of Ukraine and Belarus), these inevitably coming under the strongest influence of People’s Poland, which was after all responsible for their resettlement and which went on to create nearly all available jobs there via the State Farms and cooperatives. Elements of this left-wing way of thinking therefore took root and they remain in place to this day. Finally, what was once the Kingdom of Poland retains a society that is under-industrialised now, as it was when the Tsar was in charge. That peasant-supporting society is ideologically conservative, but by no means as much so as the southern upland region once administered as Austrian Galicia (Kowalski 2000).

There are obviously secondary factors moulding people’s preferences alongside the core differences more directly reflecting historical and cultural factors.

The current socio-economic situation the electorate finds itself in, not least as regards land ownership, is clearly significant. In the west and north, people had long become accustomed to working together in large numbers on farms covering huge areas. While the names of these farms may have changed after World War II (to *Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne* or State Farms), the principles regarding the hiring of labour were maintained. The 1993 closedown of the State Farms left a large group of workers facing the choice of work on whatever agricultural enterprises might emerge in the private sector, or else (much more often) unemployment. Of all the victims of Poland's economic transformation, these were the people who suffered most, and who blamed the insensitivity of the elitarians and right for what they had been forced to go through. They not unnaturally turned to left-wing groupings in their search for the chance of a better life, or at least for open-ended welfare support.

In the rest of the country there is and has been a marked prevalence of individual-scale agriculture and private ownership. The largest shares of the population associated with this kind of small-scale agriculture are present in the central and eastern parts of the country (Bański and Stola 2002 and Bański 2007) and it is here that prevailing support for the peasant parties is present. Rural inhabitants anticipate that this political option will keep up the privileges that farmers enjoy as regards taxation, protection of markets and direct support. In south-eastern Poland, the association with individual-level agriculture is not as strong, though private ownership of land and dwellings is more widespread here than in other areas of the country. It is also for this reason that the right enjoys relatively its highest level of support here.

The trends where election behaviour is concerned are shaped by a large number of other factors, among these the level of education and level of economic activation. The better-educated residents of the countryside are more inclined to opt for the elitarians or peasants (Tab. 2), while country-dwellers in areas of high rural unemployment display a preference for the left. In contrast, people of post-productive age pursuing a traditional lifestyle show a marked preference for the peasant option and spurn the elitarians almost entirely.

Tab. 2. The influence of selected diagnostic features on preferences manifested by country people in parliamentary elections of 1993-2007 inclusive (correlation coefficients)

Characteristic	Elitarian	Right	Peasant	Left
Share of population aged 19 and over with secondary or higher education	0.39	0.11	-0.36	0.19
Registered rate of unemployment	-0.03	-0.12	0.05	0.23
Share of the population of post-productive age	-0.60	-0.04	0.40	-0.12

The historic-cultural and socio-economic conditioning referred to has impacted upon electoral preferences and election behaviour in rural areas in a persistent way. Nevertheless, the situation of the given time or moment also has its marked impact in changing preferences from one election to another. Above all, the economic situation a the country or a given region has found itself in has

more than once had a much greater impact on the support for (or rejection of) a given option than have all other factors taken together.

CONCLUSIONS

The elections to the Polish Sejm observed since 1991 have been characterised by a marked spatial variation in the support extended to the different political options. Among the latter, it is possible to identify the right-wing and elitarian forces first and foremost arising out of the 1980s opposition movement, as well as the peasant and left-wing options based around circles in general associated with the old power structures present under communism.

The options referred to form two axes of division, namely an ideological one into left and right and a socioeconomic one into peasant and elitarian mentalities. Support from rural areas in the 5 parliamentary elections studied (of 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005 and 2007) focused on the peasant option, and only to a more limited extent on either right or left. There is a markedly weaker backing for the elitarian option in rural areas.

Overall, it is inhabitants of eastern and central Poland that show preferences for the peasant option, whose manifestos in theory and activity in practice offer support and protection to the small-scale farmer. In turn, in the south, and in some parts of northern Poland like the Podlasie and Kashubia regions, there is a marked support for the right, something that has its roots in a strong influence of the Catholic Church and a long tradition of private ownership. Finally, the rural areas in the west of Poland first and foremost back the left, this being a reflection of the major economic significance the nationalised sector was able to obtain there in the post-War period up to 1993 (i.e. the time of the instant closure of State Farms operating since the 1940s), as well as the particularly unfavourable social and economic processes that have accompanied this and other aspects of the economic transformation.

Where the fine-tune conditioning of electoral choices is concerned, an element of key importance is the socio-occupational profile of the population, as well as historical and cultural aspects in the broadest sense. It is thus clear that differences characterising these factors have been in place for even centuries now. The period of the Partitions of Poland in the 18th century and beyond had a major impact, for example, since the parts of Poland encompassed by the Russian, Prussian and Austrian Empires handled the socio-economic changes associated with the shift from agrarianism to industrialisation in quite different ways. A more recent factor of major importance entailed the post-War shift in the location of Poland's borders and attendant movements of population, as well as changes in the ownership system.

Generalising on the basis of the analyses carried out to date, we may say that regions with traditions of private ownership – above all individual farm or farmstead ownership – will mostly support the peasant or right-wing options, while areas with a well-established tradition of small-scale ownership extending beyond agriculture will be inclined to back the right. That leaves areas until recently characterised by the prevalent public/socialist ownership, which show a clear preference for the left-wing option.

More generally, the complex history of Poland can be seen to have brought about a quite marked diversification of Polish society from the civilisational point of view (Bański 2008). As in the case of Ukraine (Huntington 1997), sympathy for the right may be linked with Western civilisational influences, while support for the left may reflect stronger influences from the East (Kowalski 2003).

However, the electoral habits of certain regional groups creating “islands” of distinct behaviour do tend to muddy the picture when it comes to producing an unequivocal assessment of the influence of different kinds of conditioning on preferences displayed. The research carried out nevertheless shows a clear linkage between the different kinds of conditioning referred to, as well as a stronger influence of that conditioning in rural areas than in the towns and cities. Traditional forms of ownership (including individual farm ownership) favour the retention of traditional forms of social structure, these in turn sustaining cultural traditionalism. In turn, the marked economic transformation characteristic for Prussian industrialisation had effects that were only strengthened by the nationalised agriculture under the People’s Republic of Poland, the result being an erosion of traditional folk culture in the countryside.

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PRIESTOROVÉ ROZDIELY VO VOLEBNOM SPRÁVANÍ OBYVATEĽOV POĽSKÉHO VIDIEKA NA PRÍKLADE PARLAMENTNÝCH VOLIEB

Približne pred dvadsiatimi rokmi nastúpili krajiny východného bloku cestu k hospodárskym, politickým a kultúrnym zmenám. Jednou z významných čŕt tohto procesu bola demokratizácia politického života spojená s obnovením slobodných volieb. Výskum sa v tejto súvislosti pokúsil zistiť priestorové rozdiely vo volebnom správaní vidieka po celom Poľsku a stanoviť dynamiku a smery všetkých súvisiacich zmien, kto-ré sa odohrali v rokoch 1993-2007.

Na základe získaných výsledkov autori poukazujú na významnú priestorovú diferenciáciu volebných preferencií vidieka, ktoré podľa nich odzrkadľujú históriu aj rôzne spôsoby spravovania predmetných oblastí.

Všetky skupiny, ktoré sa zúčastnili volieb, sú charakterizované na základe delenia do štyroch kategórií s jednou ideologickou a druhou sociálno-ekonomickou osou. Pravicové sily a elita sa v prvom rade odvodzujú z opozičného hnutia osemdesiatych rokov minulého storočia, kým dnešná ľavica a roľníci voliči zostávajú na pozíciách kruhov kedysi spojených s komunistickým systémom.

Ďalším pozoruhodným zistením je, že volebné správanie je transparentnejšie na vidieku ako v mestách a metropolách. Tu sú kľúčovými determinantami sociálno-ekonomické profily v kombinácii s čímisi, čo autori označujú ako historicko-kultúrne faktory.

Na základe výsledkov je možné s určitou mierou zovšeobecnenia konštatovať, že regióny s nenarušenými tradíciami v súkromnom vlastníctve podporujú pravicovú a roľnícku voľbu a obyvateľstvo oblastí, kde donedávna dominovalo znárodnené vlastníctvo, volia ľavicu.

