

A POLITICAL TURNING POINT – DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN POLAND

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Abstract. *The article was to present the determinants, the process and the consequences of parliamentary elections in Poland, which took place in 2015. In the article, the campaign's performance was analyzed, as well as different tactics used by the political parties, and the results that their tactics have brought. Some of the reasons of defeat were identified and the analysis of the electoral success of the previous opposition party as well as new parties on the political scene in Poland were provided.*

Key words: *Poland, parliamentary elections, opposition, political parties.*

As a result of electoral processes that took place in the past year, the political situation in Poland has completely changed. Both presidential and parliamentary elections were held at that time, as a result of which the then president and the ruling party lost their power. In this article the determinants of the most recent parliamentary elections will be presented, as well as the campaign process, and the voting results that have led to a new stage in the contemporary political history of Poland.

Taking into consideration the determinants and the dynamics of the electoral processes, one can assume that 2015 was a special year for a system transformation process in Poland. As a result of different processes two kinds of elections were held, presidential and parliamentary ones. As a consequence of first round of voting, on 10th May 2015, two candidates were chosen for the second round, the then President, Bronisław Komorowski, and the candidate of the opposition party, Law and Justice, Andrzej Duda [1]. In the second ballot, the representative of the opposition pulled off a surprise victory by gaining 51,55% of votes [2] and on 6th August 2015 was sworn in as Poland's new President [3].

The defeat suffered by the President Komorowski was a big surprise due to the fact that a few months earlier the pre-election polls showed a significant advantage for him over his competitors. Some of them even indicated that the President may win the elections in the first round. Therefore, the presidential elections were a very important factor, indicating public opinion before the parliamentary elections set for fall [4].

Electoral campaign

Under the Polish constitution adopted in 1997, the parliament consists of two houses (the Sejm and Senate), elected for four-year terms, and the elections are being managed by the Polish President [5]. The outgoing President, Komorowski, on 17th July 2015 announced that the date of parliamentary elections would be set for 25th October 2015. The elections were the seventh elections to the Sejm and Senate after the transformation process started in Poland [6].

Lasting a couple of months, the electoral campaign was very fierce, and the two biggest parties, Civic Platform and Law and Justice, tried to polarize it by attacking one another. This tactics resulted from the electoral law, which – in the case of a small number of parties elected to the Sejm, during the allocation of seats paid the bonus to the parties with the greatest support.

For Civic Platform, the elections were a huge challenge to keep their authority. The Party came to power in 2007, after defeating Law and Justice in pre-elections. Their success was repeated also in 2011, when – for the first time in history, the groups in power managed to maintain their status. Over the next few years, the party lost its support, which came as a result of not implementing their campaign promises. One of the important factors was also the fact that the government raised the retirement age and changed the rules of pension funds, of which there had been no mention during the electoral campaign.

A major crisis for the ruling party was also an eavesdropping scandal, in which ministers and top officials were involved. It revealed incorrectness and alterations among the ruling party, which significantly influenced the number of its supporters. A very important moment occurred when the former Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, was chosen as the President of the European Council, as a result of which Civic Platform encountered a serious leadership crisis. During his leadership, Tusk was an undisputed leader, and as a consequence of his departure from the party, its leaders again began to compete among themselves for positions of power and leadership. Tusk decided to entrust his close associate, Ewa Kopacz, with the responsibility of being a leader and the Prime Minister. This decision, however, was not accepted by some of the influential members of the party, who questioned her leadership [7].

In the meantime, the ruling party kept losing its support, what worked in favor of their biggest opponent, Law and Justice. Subsequent surveys showed that the number of its supporters had been constantly growing and the party has a big chance to come to power. As it was already mentioned above, an important moment was during the presidential election, which confirmed the probability of winning by the opposition.

During its campaign, Law and Justice fiercely attacked Civic Platform and Polish People's Party. The ruling party was reproached for not using development opportunities that arose for Poland after joining European Union. They emphasized lack of implementation of campaign promises, ineffective fight with unemployment, and lack of improvement in living conditions of citizens. It was stressed that, as a result of this kind of policy, millions of citizens have left Poland, and the country does nothing to stop these negative tendencies from happening.

Law and Justice also used proven and effective tactics from the presidential campaign. The campaign, as led by this party, was very dynamic and its representatives made a lot of promises directed towards improving citizens' lives. The most important of them include a program called «500+» created to provide financial help for families with children, and the project that allows to withdraw amendments proposed by Civic Platform and reduce the retirement age.

As in the case of presidential elections, during the parliamentary campaign Law and Justice did not present its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, as a candidate for prime minister. This role was secured by mostly unknown politician, Beata Szydło. She was the one chosen as a leader of Andrzej Duda's victorious campaign, and her success was a significant factor in making this decision by the party. It meant that during the electoral campaign the fight was led between Civic Platform's leader, Ewa Kopacz, and the Law and Justice's candidate, Beata Szydło [8].

In a campaign dominated by two biggest parties, smaller teams also tried to be noticed. The co-ruling party, Polish People's Party, in the polls kept receiving support at the electoral threshold level, therefore its entry into the parliament was very uncertain. A similar crisis had been experienced by parties holding a left-wing viewpoint. The polls showed a very low level of support for two parties in the previous parliament, which referred to the left-wing electorate: Palikot's Movement and Democratic Left Alliance. Therefore, their leaders decided to form a coalition and run together in the elections. This solution was supposed to increase their chances of getting 8% support designed for coalitions and entering into the parliament.

An important element during the campaign was also the fact that two completely new political forces have emerged in the country: Kukiz'15 and Ryszard Petru's Modern. The first one has been created based on the success that a Polish singer, Paweł Kukiz, had gained during the presidential elections. He received huge support, reaching 20,8%, and based on that, he decided to take part in parliamentary elections and create a new political party [9].

Election results

After a few months of long and fierce electoral campaign, in accordance with the decision of President Komorowski, the elections to the Sejm and Senate were held on 25th October 2015. About 30,6 million Poles were eligible to vote, yet the voter turnout was 50,92% [10]. 7 858 candidates fought for 460 seats in the Sejm, who were nominated by 17 electoral committees [11]. In the case of the Senate, which consists of 100 senators, it was 423 candidates [12].

According to data published by National Electoral Commission, the parliamentary elections won Law and Justice, whereas the second place was taken by Civic Platform. Into the parliament also entered: Kukiz'15, Modern and Polish People's Party. The accurate data on the election results is presented in the table below.

Table 1.

The results of the parliamentary elections in Poland on 25th October 2015 (a list of parliamentary groups)

Electoral Committee	Number of Votes	Number of Mandates	Vote percentage
Law and Justice	5 711 687	235	37.58
Civic Platform	3 661 474	138	24.09
Kukiz'15	1 339 094	42	8.81
Ryszard Petru's Modern	1 155 370	28	7.60
Polish People's Party	779 875	16	5.13
German Minority [13].	27 530	1	0.18

Source: Prepared based on: Wyniki wyborów do Sejmu RP, http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349_Wyniki_Sejm.

The above election results can be considered as fairly surprising and an important moment in the process of system transformation. For the first time in the modern history of Poland has occurred a situation, when the election indicated a clear majority for a single party. Law and Justice will govern independently, without the need to form a parliamentary coalition with another party. That means having complete power but also complete responsibility for the situation in the country. This is especially relevant when realizing that the current President, Andrzej Duda, comes from within this political group. It should also be mentioned that Law and Justice gained a vast majority during the elections to the Senate, receiving 61 mandates [14]. It means that the new organs of government of Poland represent one political party and should closely cooperate with each other on the implementation of promises given during the electoral campaign, lack of which would be hard to explain using political circumstances.

Electoral loss for the ruling party

As a consequence of the elections, the previous ruling parties in Poland, that is Civic Platform and Polish People's Party, suffered defeat and went into opposition. It is worth mentioning that Civic Platform gained over 24% of votes, what may be considered as a relatively good result after 8 years of governance. This kind of support also shows that Civic Platform will become the biggest oppositional faction in the parliament. Going into opposition after two tenures of being in government means, however, that the party is going to encounter a lot of challenges.

One of them is a matter of the leadership in this party. The responsibility for electoral loss fell on former Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz, whose leadership has been questioned. She lost the competition for the position of the head of party's faction in parliament with former Deputy Minister, Sławomir Neumann [15]. As a result of this defeat, Ewa Kopacz resigned from participating in the leadership elections to Civic Platform. In a later stage, from the competition for this position resigned also former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense, Tomasz Siemoniak, and former Justice Minister, Borys Budka. These decisions meant that the only candidate for this position was former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grzegorz Schetyna. Choosing him as a leader of Civic Platform was supposed to end discussions about leadership and ensure that from now on, the party will focus on preventing further lack of support in the public opinion polls. First of all, former ruling party has to once again find its political identity by being in the opposition, and define its mission, to retain its position as a leader of the opposition. It is not going to be an easy task, due to the fact that Modern has become a strong competitor, whose support has been constantly growing during the past couple of weeks.

Analyzing the election results, it is also worth mentioning what happened to the second of the previously ruling parties – Polish People's Party. The support for the party was shown in the polls as within the limits of the electoral threshold, but its leaders kept assuring that the party will enter the parliament. They emphasized that the polls usually underestimate the party's capability of winning, and that it already happened many times in the past during the previous elections.

Eventually, Polish People's Party gained a little over 5% and therefore could place only 16 members into the parliament. This number was the worst one for the party since 1989. Even its leader and simultaneously Minister of Economy, Janusz Piechociński, lost in the elections and did not manage to enter the parliament. Therefore he took the responsibility for his electoral defeat and resigned from the leadership position. For a new leader of Polish People's Party, on 7th November 2015, was chosen a former Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz [16].

The politician took the lead in a very difficult time. Therefore, he announced changes in the way the party works, accepting young politicians as candidates to join the party, and being wide open for cooperation with other environments. He also admitted that his goal is to lead Polish People's Party on the road to success for the next elections [17]. Achieving this goal, however, will be extremely difficult. Currently, the party has been going through a very serious crisis that will not be easily overcome, especially after losing the electorate, which in the past elections mostly voted for the victorious party, Law and Justice.

Weakness of the left-wing parties

The analyzed elections will go down in history also due to the defeat of the left-wing parties, which for the first time did not manage to enter into the parliament. Therefore, currently, there is no political party in the parliament referring to the left-wing electorate. This situation is a result of many mistakes made during the recent times by the left-wing leaders, their fragmentation and the conflict [18].

After a spectacular victory in the parliamentary elections in 2001, Democratic Left Alliance had been gradually losing social support. It was a result of many crises and political scandals, in which the representatives of the highest authorities were involved. The party lost its power in 2005 and suffered severe defeat. The crisis that has started could not be overcome to this day, even though so many attempts have been made by the leaders to help the situation.

One of them was the initiative to run together with Your Movement, led by Janusz Palikot, in the last elections. The party entered into the parliament in 2011 as Palikot's Movement, and referred to the left-wing, anticlerical electorate. During its tenure, it changed its name for Your

Movement, but, as a result of many tactical errors, they gradually lost their supporters. As a consequence, despite mutual dislike, Janusz Palikot and Leszek Miller decided to form an electoral coalition together. It was made up of two parties represented by them: Democratic Left Alliance and Your Movement, as well as a couple of other left-wing parties: Polish Socialist Party, Labour United and The Greens [19].

As already mentioned, the faces representing the biggest parties in the campaign were women's: Ewa Kopacz from Civic Platform, and Beata Szydło from Law and Justice. Similar tactic was used by The United Left, whose representative was Barbara Nowacka. This move, however, did not bring the desired effect, since the United Left did not cross the required for coalitions threshold of 8%. Therefore, for the first time since 1989, in the Polish parliament there is no political party, which would directly refer to the left-wing electorate. Analyzing The United Left's campaign one can indicate a few reasons of their defeat. First of all, the decision to create the coalition and to run together was made at the late stage of the campaign, and therefore it was really difficult to obtain the optimal media and image effect of this decision. Running together in the elections was also perceived as a desperate move to maintain their power, no matter how different their political views and how big the personal conflicts between the leaders were. Formal union of the left-wings did not include all the parties relating to such program. One of the parties, called Together, stole a significant number of votes from The United Left at the finish stage. A couple of days before the elections, during the nationally televised debate, the leader, Adrian Zandberg presented himself very well, and in the next couple of days the party that up until now was mostly unknown, started attracting media attention. Despite the growing society's interest in the party, it did not manage to cross the electoral threshold. The party Together gained 3,62% and did not enter into the parliament [20]. Taking into consideration a significant increase in support for this group in the last couple of days before the elections, one can assume that it took The United Left's votes, and that was a decisive factor as it comes to not crossing the electoral threshold by the coalition.

New political powers

During the Polish public debate in recent years, it was indicated that a political scene is consolidated, and that it is going to be really difficult for new parties to exist on this scene. The last elections showed, however, that a significant change has been made and, as it was mentioned before, two new parties entered the parliament: Kukiz'15 and Ryszard Petru's Modern.

These are two, ideologically differing from each other formations, whose success can be assumed based on their leaders, Paweł Kukiz and Ryszard Petru, as well as their sharp criticism of the current situation in Poland. As it was already mentioned, Kukiz's Movement was created as a political project after its leader succeeded in the presidential elections, in which he took a third place. This achievement was a result of the strategy he then adopted, which also influenced the parliamentary campaign and let the party enter the parliament. Kukiz sharply criticized the previous ruling party, and blamed them for creating personal connections, corruption, and turning their back on citizens. Such rhetoric was supported mainly by young people, who – as it was shown in the surveys – formed the biggest group of supporters for this group. Kukiz'15 gained 8,81% of votes and entered into the parliament as a third political party [21].

The next new formation on the political scene in Poland is Modern. It was formed at the beginning of 2015 by an economist, Ryszard Petru, who emphasized that the group was created due to a great disappointment with Civic Platform [22]. Therefore, despite small ideological differences between them and the ruling party, Modern decided to lead their campaign by criticizing Civic Platform's performance. They kept attacking the government and blamed the party for not sticking to its reforms and lack of implementation of the electoral promises that the party made.

Their support oscillated within the threshold limits and therefore it was hard to predict whether the party will be able to cross it. Ultimately, it gained a 7,6% level of support and placed their representatives in the parliament [23].

The percentage that Kukiz'15 and Modern gained proved to be a huge success for the parties, since both of them are the formations that have only started their political career and have already been playing a big role in the political life of Poland. Both of them decided to use their leaders as the most important parts of their campaigns, and they both succeeded, what can be seen in their electoral results. Therefore both of them are facing a big challenge as they do not have any parliamentary experience, but at the same time it can be a chance for them to use this new opening on the political scene in Poland.

The presented analysis of the determinants and consequences of parliamentary elections in Poland in 2015 shows that they brought many surprising resolutions. They have led to a new turning point, that is ending a long-term governance structure of Civic Platform and Polish People's Party, which were the ruling parties for two tenures. As a result of obtaining parliamentary majority by a single party, a complete power was to be placed in the hands of Law and Justice. What was also relevant was the fact that the left-wing parties suffered a defeat, and for the first time after the political transformation in Poland are not represented in the parliament. The parliament is now made up of a couple of new political parties, what proves that the electorate is willing to support new political movements, which up until now have not participated in the governance. Taking into consideration the above processes and the electoral results, one can definitely assume that as it comes to politics, it was a turning point, and may be used as a new beginning in the process of system transformation in Poland, since 1989.

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ПОЛІТИЧНИЙ ПОВОРОТНИЙ ПУНКТ – ВИЗНАЧАЛЬНІ ЧИННИКИ ТА НАСЛІДКИ ПАРЛАМЕНТСЬКИХ ВИБОРІВ У ПОЛЬЩІ

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Анотація. Представлена стаття присвячена перебігові та результатам парламентських виборів у Польщі, які відбулися в 2015 р. У статті представлено аналіз виборчої кампанії і тактика окремих партій, а також отримані ними результати. Також з'ясовуються причини поразки окремих угруповань та аналізуються чинники успіху на виборах колишньої опозиції, а також нових угруповань на політичній сцені Польщі.

Key words: Польща, парламентські вибори, опозиція, політичні партії.

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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОВОРОТНЫЙ ПУНКТ – ОПРЕДЕЛЯЮЩИЕ ФАКТОРЫ И ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ ПАРЛАМЕНТСКИХ ВЫБОРОВ В ПОЛЬШЕ

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Аннотация. Представленная статья посвящена предпосылкам, особенностям и результатам парламентских выборов в Польше, состоявшихся в 2015 г. В статье представлен анализ избирательной кампании и тактики отдельных партий, а также полученные ими результаты. В статье также рассматриваются причины поражения отдельных группировок, а также проводится анализ успеха на выборах прежней оппозиционной партии и новых группировок на политической сцене Польши.

Ключевые слова: Польша, парламентские выборы, оппозиция, политические партии.