

Łukasz Kubisz-Muła

THE CHARACTER OF THE POLISH LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS – POLYTONALITY

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Abstract

Contemporary Polish local and regional elections serve the purpose of electing the government on the level of a municipality, county, and the voivodeship, and therefore represent a particular type of elections which could be referred to as polytonal. A unique quality of polytonal elections is the fact that the separate elections for each of the levels of local/regional government that take place on a single day are quite distinctive in terms of the behaviour of voters, politicians, political parties, and other organisations participating in the elections. As a consequence, we can indeed observe differences in the results of the elections on the level of municipality, county, and voivodeship.

Keywords: local elections, regional elections, political parties, independent committees

Introduction – polytonal local and regional elections

Contemporary Polish local and regional elections are a combination of a number of elections conducted simultaneously – 1) elections for municipal councils; 2) elections for county councils (although such elections do not take place in so-called towns with county rights); 3) elections for voivodeship¹ councils; and 4) elections for presidents/mayors of towns and villages (for the purpose of this study, the latter shall be referred to as mayors). Such a system is used to elect Polish local/regional governments on a few levels, namely, on the level of the municipality (the municipality council, president/mayors), county (county council), and voivodeship (voivodeship council), and, due to its specificity, the system can be, referred to as **polytonal elections**.

According to the author of the article, the term polytonal elections ought to be understood as *elections to various representative bodies which take place on the same day (hereinafter called the sub-elections), which differ in the behaviour of the political actors (voters, politicians, electoral committees, political parties) as well as in the reason for such behaviours, which, in turn, leads to different results in the particular sub-elections*.

The term polytonality originally means the simultaneous setting of two (bitonality) or more different tonalities (Chodkowski 1995, 702) in one piece of music. Up to now, the term polytonality has been used only in the music theory. However, the aforementioned notion can be utilised by social scientists to express the nature of some social phenomena.

¹ “Voivodeship” is a term coined to call Polish province. The whole country is divided into 16 voivodeships.

In this context, the term polytonality will describe the character of some coordinated social processes, the similar components (elements) of which, despite appearances, have less or more different determinants and consequences.

The term polytonality seems to reflect the specificity of the Polish local and regional elections best; as each of the abovementioned sub-elections has a distinctive character – a different tonality (which accounts for the polytonality mentioned earlier). As a result, the results of each of the sub-elections for local/regional governments in Poland differ from one another and we cannot assume the existence of a single uniform political scene, but many, depending on the level of the local/regional government.

The specificity of Polish local and regional elections appears to facilitate two particular voting patterns – incomplete voting and incoherent voting (both of which have been discussed further in this article) and decisions of the voters who represent the abovementioned two patterns seem to give the elections a peculiar local/regional character.

Nevertheless, we should highlight the fact that incomplete and incoherent voting are not to be perceived as a consequence of the polytonality of the local and regional elections, as polytonality does not constitute the cause of the indicated voting patterns. As it shall be pointed out, the reasons for incomplete and incoherent participation are different – one of them being disappointment with political parties.

Incomplete and incoherent voting does not seem to be an indication of the polytonality either. What is to be considered such an indication, however, is the differences between the particular sub-elections, for instance, in terms of the motives of voters' decisions or the party dependency of the political scene. As point out, we can consider elections to be polytonal as long as their components (i.e., sub-elections) are governed by different set of rules. Therefore, the phenomena of incomplete and incoherent voting cannot be considered a manifestation of the diversity.

Nonetheless, we may venture to claim that the polytonality of elections facilitates incomplete and incoherent voting, as such voting patterns can distinctively be observed only in polytonal elections. Along with the increase in the number of sub-elections of a distinctive character – sub-elections with more or fewer political actors deriving from political parties or more personalised, etc., the chance of a part of voters deciding not to participate in some of the sub-elections or voting in an incoherent manner also rises.

Empirical data

Data obtained from the following sources has been used in order to characterise the phenomenon of the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections: the National Electoral Commission, the national public opinion polls conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), as well as the results of exit-poll research which was carried out during the local and regional election in 2006 in Bielsko-Biała, a town with approximately 180,000 inhabitants (pursuant to electoral law, there are no county council elections in Bielsko-Biała).

The sampling method used for the purpose of selecting the group of respondents for *exit-poll* research was systematic sampling (every fourth adult person coming out of the

polling station participated in the survey). The starting point as well as the polling stations (16 out of 91 District Electoral Committees) had been previously selected (using simple sampling). The pollsters and coordinators had worked together since the opening until the closing of the polling stations. This allowed the empirical data of 1,769 surveys to be collected.²

As can be observed, the data used present various levels of detail and is characterised by different temporal as well as geographical perspectives.

Smaller scale research, such as the aforementioned *exit-poll* from Bielsko-Biała, gives a good chance to describe the nuances of the behaviour of voters, politicians, and other political actors involved in the process of electing the government. Therefore, research carried out in a particular town (or county) seems to have a long tradition and has been familiar to the classics of social science. The following canonical research ought to be pointed out above all: the study of Harold F. Gosnell and Charles E. Merriam conducted in Chicago and the research of Paul F. Lazarsfeld et al. carried out in Erie County on a few dozen thousand inhabitants and in Elmira (Berelson 1954; Gosnell and Merriam 1923; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944).

Yet, the representativeness of such research appears to be limited solely to the town in which the survey or other form of research has been conducted. Therefore, it does not seem possible to disregard the limitations imposed by the data gathered in such a manner. It appears that there is no town that could be considered “a country in a nutshell” – each municipality and region is characterised by its own distinctive history, social and economic structure, and frequently also varied political culture. All these factors amount to the fact that maps illustrating voter turnout and support for particular political parties show considerable differentiation as well as towns and regions with their distinctive *genius loci*.

Owing to that, one cannot exclude national polls, as they provide essential information on voters' behaviour. An unquestionable advantage of such research is its representativeness in view of the whole population, even if it is to be obtained at the cost of adopting a less thorough approach. Although national polls are not capable of capturing all the nuances of voters' behaviour, they seem to provide the most important information which relates to the whole population and not merely a part of it. A further advantage of the national polls used for this article, which were carried out by the CBOS, is the fact that they are cyclical, which allows for voters' behaviour in local and regional elections to be described in a wider temporal perspective.

As mentioned earlier, this study also draws on the data from the National Electoral Commission, most of which concerns all 2,479 municipalities of the Republic of Poland in various election years. Nonetheless, the general nature of some of the data from the National Electoral Commission (particularly from the local and regional elections in 1998 and 2002) seems to hinder its thorough analysis – as it is not possible without costly preliminary research of the election records from each municipality separately. Therefore, data from different election years or a random sample of 1,029 municipalities from the

² I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Aneta Bąk, PhD, for her support in running the exit-poll project as well as the students of the University of Bielsko-Biała for their selfless help in realising it.

territory of Poland have been used in order to present the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections, depending on the availability of the empirical data.

Such a compilation of the abovementioned empirical data obtained from the National Electoral Commission, CBOS, and local research seems sufficient in order to analyse the specificity of Polish local and regional elections announced in the title.

Polytonality of Polish local and regional elections regarding voters' behaviour

The polytonality of Polish local and regional elections is a fact whose incontrovertibility appears to be supported by further national polls. Data from CBOS clearly shows the diversity of voters' motivation in particular local sub-elections.

As declared, the "candidate" is the prevailing reason for voters in all local and regional sub-elections. Yet, this factor seems to have the most potent influence in elections for the office of president/mayors, and the lowest in the sub-elections for voivodeship councils. However, the opposite tendency can be observed regarding the party provenance of the candidate – the higher the level of local and regional government, the bigger the voting motivation party affiliation is (detailed information included in Table 1).

Table 1. Voting motives in each type of local and regional elections according to the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS)

Did you cast your vote in the election for above all based on the candidate or the political party that supported the candidate?	sub-elections for municipality council	I round of sub-elections for mayors/ president	sub-elections for county council	sub-elections for voivodeship council	χ^2 recalculated data from CBOS
	Local and regional government election in 1998				
The candidate above all	62%	In 1998 there were no direct elections for mayors/ president	52%	42%	$\chi^2=66.11$; $df=6$ $p<0.05$
The political party that above all supported the candidate	20%		29%	38%	
The candidate and political party that supported the candidate equally	16%		17%	17%	
Difficult to say	2%		2%	3%	
Total	100% (n=645)		100% (n=541)	100% (n=637)	
	Local and regional government election in 2002				
The candidate above all	76%	Lack of comparable data	66%*	56%	$\chi^2=91.09$; $df=6$ $p<0.05$
The political party that above all supported the candidate	12%		19%*	26%	

The candidate and political party that supported the candidate equally	11%		12%*	12%	
Difficult to say	1%		2%*	6%	
Total	100% (n=559)		100%* (n=490)	100% (n=555)	
	Local and regional government election in 2006				
The candidate above all	77%	83%	67%	57%	$\chi^2=130.09; df=6$ $p<0.05$
The political party that above all supported the candidate	11%	6%	17%	22%	
The candidate and political party that supported the candidate equally	11%	9%	12%	14%	
Difficult to say	1%	2%	4%	7%	
Total	100% (n=567)	100% (n=566)	100% (n=540)	100% (n=566)	
	Local and regional government election in 2010				
The candidate above all	73%	80%	63%	52%	$\chi^2=141.60; df=6$ $p<0.05$
The political party that above all supported the candidate	11%	8%	18%	27%	
The candidate and political party that supported the candidate equally	15%	10%	15%	15%	
Difficult to say	1%	2%	4%	6%	
Total	100% (n=538)	100% (n=541)	100% (n=511)	100% (n=546)	

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), Reports: BS/162/162/98; BS/217/2002; BS/5/2007; BS/171/2010

* According to reports of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS)

The data obtained from national polls also reveals that the particular local and regional sub-elections appear to differ in terms of crystallisation of the voters' decision. It seems that the higher the level of local/regional government, the more difficult it is for voters to decide who to cast their vote for.

It is by far the easiest for voters to make a decision in the sub-elections for president/mayors, in which case voters are faced with single candidate tickets as well as the smallest number of candidates. The most difficult decision, however, turns out to be the one connected to sub-elections for the voivodeship council, which is thoroughly presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Difficulties regarding the voting decision in particular local and regional elections according to the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) in 2006 and 2010

Was it generally easy or difficult to make a decision for whom to cast your vote in the elections for:	Sub-elections for county council	Sub-elections For mayors/ president (I round)	Sub-elections for county council	Sub-elections for voivodeship council	χ^2 recalculated data from CBOS
		Local and regional government election in 2006			
Easy	83%*	89%	71%	58%*	$\chi^2=175.44$; df=6 p<0.05
Difficult	16%*	10%	24%	38%*	
Difficult to say	2%*	1%	5%	5%*	
Total	100%* (n=567)	100% (n=566)	100% (n=557)	100%	
		Local and regional government election in 2010			
Easy	79%	89%	67%	59%	$\chi^2=151,24$; df=6 p<0.05
Difficult	20%	10%	30%	39%	
Difficult to say	1%	1%	3%	2%	
Total	100% (n=546)	100% (n=546)	100% (n=511)	100% (n=546)	

Source: Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), Reports: BS/217/2002; BS/5/2007; BS/171/2010.

* According to reports of the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS).

The results of the *exit-poll* conducted in Bielsko-Biała indicate that the polytonal nature of Polish local and regional elections may manifest also itself in aspects other than those described above.

First, a different number of voters choose candidates at random. Although the phenomenon of choosing the candidate randomly is marginal, we can still observe significant differences between particular local/regional government sub-elections in this respect ($\chi^2=45.43$; $df=2$ $p<0.05$). In case of the sub-elections for the municipality council, the random choice of candidates was indicated by 0.86% of the voters, in the sub-elections for president – 0.34%, and in the sub-elections for the voivodeship council – 2.57% (as mentioned earlier, there are no elections for the county council in Bielsko-Biała).

In the light of such results, as well as the aforementioned regularities in voting motivation and crystallisation of the voting decision, we can claim that the further the level of the local/regional government is from the voters, the more difficult it is for them to cast their votes for a particular person.

Second, the data from the *exit-poll* in Bielsko-Biała points out the substantial differences between the sub-elections for the municipality council and the voivodeship council regarding the correct identification of candidates with their electoral committees

($\chi^2=48.65$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$).³ In the case of the sub-elections for the municipality council, 47.70% of voters were able to correctly identify the candidates and their committees, whereas a much smaller percentage of 39.19% was observed in the sub-elections for the voivodeship council.⁴

The aforementioned mistakes in identifying candidates seem to point to the confusion of voters. It stems out to a large extent from strategies of political actors who participate in Polish local and regional elections. Among such strategies we could observe the following, among others: members of political parties running from independent electoral committees and independent candidates from party-dependent committees; representing competing committees by politicians from the same political party; supporting a few candidates by political parties as well as running of candidates with the same surnames.

Table 3. Invalid votes in particular local and regional government sub-elections in 2002, 2006, and 2010

Type of local and regional government sub-elections	Local and regional government elections 2002		Local and regional government elections 2006		Local and regional government elections 2010	
	Percentage of invalid votes	Number of invalid votes	Percentage of invalid votes	Number of invalid votes	Percentage of invalid votes	Number of invalid votes
Sub-elections for municipality council	4.18%	544,146	3.81%	550,712	3.61%	517,927
Sub-elections for president/mayors (I round)	2.23%	290,871	1.91%	265,259	1.66%	240,447
Sub-elections for county council	8.59%	822,271	8.30%	799,407	8.18%	841,976
Sub-elections for voivodeship council	14.43%	1,883,220	12.70%	1,759,530	12.06%	1,744,609

Source: The National Electoral Commission

³ A correct answer was defined as the correct identification of a candidate and their committee (or political party) as well as the proper assigning of the person to the elections. If a voter correctly identified the name of a given candidate and their committee but claimed that the candidate took part in the elections for the voivodeship council instead of the municipality council (or vice versa), such an answer was classified as incorrect. An answer was also considered incorrect when a respondent provided only the committee or only the name of the candidate.

⁴ Due to the high level of personalisation of the elections for president (which manifests itself among others in the fact that the electoral committees are named in such a manner that they include the candidate's name), questions serving the purpose of diagnosing the correctness of the candidate identification in this sub-elections were abandoned at the stage of designing the *exit-poll*.

What is more, the data collected from the *exit-poll* show that the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections may also manifest itself in the diverse relation between socio-demographic factors and voting preferences in the particular local and regional sub-elections. For instance, in the sub-elections for president, we could observe significant dependency of voting preferences on the sex of voters ($\chi^2=4.37$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$) and autochthony ($\chi^2=16.84$; $df=5$ $p<0.05$), whereas these factors did not determine voters' preferences in other sub-elections for local/regional government.

The polytonality of voting behaviour in Polish local and regional elections seems to be corroborated not only by the data gathered from poll research (polls carried out by the CBOS and *exit-poll* from Bielsko-Biała) but also the hard data obtained from the National Electoral Committee regarding the number of invalid votes in particular local and regional government sub-elections. Regardless of whether we consider an invalid vote to be the consequence of the confusion of the voter or the lack of their voting decision, it seems undeniable that particular local and regional government sub-elections differ in terms of both the number and percentage of invalid votes. The biggest number of such votes can be observed in the sub-elections for voivodeship councils, whereas the smallest seems to characterise the sub-elections for president/mayors, and is presented in Table 3.

Polytonality of Polish local and regional elections regarding strategies of political parties

As mentioned earlier, the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections can be observed not only in voting behaviour but also in diverse strategies of the subjects running for office in local and regional governments. The best example of the polytonal nature of the elections for local and regional government in this respect appears to be the characterisation of the particular sub-elections from the point of view of the involvement of committees of political parties.

Two types of committees have been identified for the purpose of this study: a) committees of political parties (which include electoral committees of political parties as well as the coalition committees of political parties), and b) independent committees (including electoral committees of voters and committees of organisations).

Such a strategy, however, is far from being flawless. First, it does not take into consideration the party provenance of the officially independent committees. Second, it seems to disregard the internal diversity of independent committees. Third, we should also take into account the fact that, at least in the Polish reality, the party provenance of a committee does not exclude the fact that candidates who are not related to a given party may appear on its tickets – political parties appear to have mastered, and use them to their own benefit, independent candidates who are greatly esteemed in their own circles. Such candidates provide political parties with votes and yet they hold positions on the tickets remote enough to give only a slight chance of getting elected. A transaction of this sort offers both sides exactly what they expect – the political party receives votes and the candidate a chance to become known more widely as well as experience, etc.

Nevertheless, it ought to be pointed out that the usefulness of the typology of electoral committees does not depend solely on its correctness. Even a logically correct, disjunctive, and in-depth classification could at times appear useless for the purpose of research. Detailed typologies seem to work well in the case of research on a smaller scale, for instance a single town/village or a few selected counties. They do not, however, turn out to be of much use for large-scale research which utilises existing data.

Studying the involvement of Polish political parties in local and regional government sub-elections, one must face the challenge of adopting the best possible indicator of this involvement. Such an indicator cannot possibly be the number of party committees, as the committees with party provenance often have a national range, whilst the vast majority of independent committees are single-municipality or even single-candidate. Owing to this, it seems that we shall always have fewer committees of political parties than those which are independent despite the fact that the candidates from the party committees can significantly outnumber those from the independent committees. Similarly, the number of lists of candidates also does not seem to be a suitable indicator (the lists are presented in every municipality by the committees). Apart from the fact that there are no tickets in sub-elections for president/mayors, the tickets in sub-elections for municipality, county, and voivodeship councils can include various numbers of candidates (there can even be tickets which contain only one name). Due to the abovementioned reasons, any results obtained in such a manner as well as in the course of analysing the number of electoral committees would not produce credible conclusions. Therefore, the number of candidates from the committees appears to be the only effective indicator of the involvement of political party involvement in local and regional elections.

Analysis of data from the National Electoral Commission shows a diversity of the levels of the involvement of political parties in particular local and regional government sub-elections.

In sub-elections for municipality councils as well as sub-elections for president/mayors, political parties enter fewer candidates than independent committees. Yet, in case of the sub-election for county and voivodeship councils, the situation seems reversed – the majority of candidates running for a seat are party-affiliated candidates (Table 4 presents detailed data).

It seems essential, however, to make the following remark at this point. The nature of the data from the National Electoral Commission regarding the local and regional elections in 2010 allowed for further analysis, which revealed that the size of the town/village does indeed affect the involvement of the political party in sub-elections for municipality councils as well as sub-elections for president/mayors. While the party-affiliated candidates in municipalities of up to 20,000 inhabitants amounted to 28.74% of all candidates for municipality councils and 26.17% of all candidates for president/mayors, in the case of bigger towns they constituted a significantly greater percentage, amounting to 47.51% and 45.81%, respectively. Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that party-affiliated candidates are the minority in this sub-election.

Table 4. Percentage and number of party-affiliated and independent candidates in particular local and regional government sub-elections in 2006 and 2010

Year of local and regional government elections	Candidates from party committees				
	Sub-elections for municipality councils	Sub-elections for president/mayors	Sub-elections for county councils	Sub-elections for voivodeship councils	Total in all sub-elections
2006	38.19% (75,700)	31.71% (2,609)	55.82% (38,029)	88.07% (8,227)	43.87% (124,565)
2010	37.26% (67,317)	30.08% (2,339)	57.01% (34,956)	84.70% (7,542)	43.36% (112,154)

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the National Electoral Commission

The extent to which political parties are involved in local and regional elections first and foremost depends on parties' structural development, although additional factors should also not be neglected. These include, among others: electoral law (particularly the conditions governing the list registration and approving independent committees), the level of trust that a given political party has, and political culture (the values and goals associated with political activity as well as the expected level of participation of average citizens in politics).

Not only does the data presented above prove the polytonality of local and regional elections but it also seems to indicate the stability of such a phenomenon. It can be observed that the patterns of voting motivation, the easiness of making a decision, and the percentage of invalid votes do not appear to change over time in the case of particular local and regional elections (as described in the previous subsection). Moreover, the tendencies regarding the percentage and number of the candidates entered by political parties and independent committees also seem stable.

Polytonality of Polish local and regional elections regarding election results

It seems unquestionable that various voting motivations in particular local and regional government sub-elections as well as different strategies of involvement of political parties in such sub-elections influence the results of elections at the level of municipalities, counties, and voivodeship councils.

Such polytonality of local and regional elections in view of their results can easily be illustrated by comparing the votes and seats received by party committees and independent committees.

The analysis shows that political parties obtain fewer seats in sub-elections for municipality councils and sub-elections for president/mayors, although in sub-elections for county and voivodeship councils they seem to receive the majority of seats. Table 5 presents detailed data.

The analysis of data from the 2010 election indicates that this is to be the foremost consequence of the fact that the majority of Polish municipalities (2,152, i.e., 86.81%) are those of less than 20,000 inhabitants. Only 23.33% of seats in such municipalities were won by political parties. In the case of municipalities of more than 20,000 inhabitants, political parties have already managed to obtain the majority of seats (52.08%). It does not, however, have a significant influence on the total result.

Table 5. Percentage and number of seats obtained by political parties and independent committees, in particular local and regional government sub-elections in 2006 and 2010

	Sub-elections for municipality councils		Sub-elections for president/ mayors		Sub-elections for county councils		Sub-elections for voivodeship councils	
	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010	2006	2010
Candidates of political parties	26.55% 10,604	28.86% 11,531	18.24% 452	19.08% 473	57.87% 3,637	61.94% 3,896	98.57% 553	96.43% 541
Candidates of independent committees	73.45% 29,341	71.14% 28,427	81.76% 2,026	80.92% 2,006	42.13% 2,647	38.06% 2,394	1.43% 8	3.57% 20
Total	100% 39,945	100% 39,958	100% 2,478	100% 2,479	100% 6,284	100% 6,290	100% 561	100% 561

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the National Electoral Commission

Naturally, similar regularities can also be observed if we analyse the percentage of votes that were won by political parties in particular local and regional government sub-elections in 2010 (see: Table 6).

Table 6. Percentage and number of seats obtained by political parties and independent committees, in particular local and regional government sub-elections in 2010

	Sub-elections for municipality councils	Sub-elections for president/ mayors		Sub-elections for county councils	Sub-elections for voivodeship councils
		I round	II round		
Candidates of political parties	40.42% 7,580,169	38.47% 3,218,316	40.16% 1,032,159	62.01% 5,864,790	92.62% 11,782,964
Candidates of independent committees	59.58% 11,174,317	61.53% 5,147,416	59.84% 1,537,965	37.99% 3,592,478	7.38% 938,412
Total	100% 18,754,486	100% 8,365,732	100% 2,570,124	100% 9,457,268	100% 12,721,376

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the National Electoral Commission

It could also be pointed out that the analysis of data from local and regional elections in 2010 shows that the results of political parties in Polish local and regional elections are determined most strongly by the ratio of party-affiliated candidates to the overall number of candidates from the committees of the political parties – namely, the more candidates from the committees of political parties, the better the results they get. The abovementioned pattern can be observed in the case of all local and regional government sub-elections, both regarding the percentage of the obtained votes and/or the seats they allowed to receive.

Significantly less influence on the result of the political party can be observed with respect to the size of the town – that is to say, the bigger the town, the better the results of the parties.

The least effect on such results is produced by voter turnout. Turnout, however, does influence the results in the case of sub-elections for voivodeship and county councils. It appears that at the level of voivodeship and county, higher turnout seems to favour political parties. In the case of other local and regional government sub-elections, the influence of turnout is practically non-existent. Table 7 presents detailed results of statistical analyses.

It also seems worth emphasising that the factors shown in Table 6 also seem contributory to illustrating the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections in terms of the factors determining their results.

Table 7. Influence of the size of municipality/county/voivodeship, voter turnout, and the ratio of party-affiliated candidates, on the percentage of votes and the ratio of seats obtained by the committees of political parties in local and regional elections in 2010.

Multiple regression results						
Dependent variable	Sub-elections for municipality councils (sample of municipalities)					
	Percentage of votes obtained	R ² =0.90 P<0.05	size beta=0.09	turnout beta=-0.01*	ratio beta=0.93	n=1029
	Percentage of votes obtained (excluding analysis of municipalities where none or all candidates represented party committees)	R ² =0.87 P<0.05	size beta=0.11	turnout beta=-0.01*	ratio beta=0.93	n=911
	Ratio of seats obtained	R ² =0.70 P<0.05	size beta=0.12	turnout beta=-0.03*	ratio beta=0.80	n=1029
	Percentage of seats obtained (excluding analysis of municipalities where none or all candidates represented party committees)	R ² =0.65 P<0.05	size beta=0.13	turnout beta=-0.04*	ratio beta=0.77	n=911
	Sub-elections for president/mayors (sample of municipalities) – I round of elections					
	Percentage of votes obtained	R ² =0.77 P<0.05	size beta=0.01*	turnout beta=-0.01*	ratio beta=0.88	n=1029

Percentage of votes obtained (excluding analysis of municipalities where none or all candidates represented party committees)	R ² =0.37 P<0.05	size beta=0.05*	turnout beta=-0.02*	ratio beta=0.60	n=548
Sub-elections for county councils (all counties)					
Percentage of votes obtained	R ² =0.84	size beta=0.08	turnout beta=0.07	ratio beta=0.91	N=314
Ratio of seats obtained	R ² =0.64	size beta=0.15	turnout beta=0.10	ratio beta=0.77	N=314
Sub-elections for voivodeship councils (all voivodeships)					
Percentage of votes obtained	R ² =0.61	size beta=0.22	turnout beta=0.24	ratio beta=0.76	N=16
Ratio of seats obtained	R ² =0.38	size beta=0.25	turnout beta=0.39	ratio beta=0.44	N=16

Source: Author's research;

*statistically irrelevant

Incomplete voting in polytonal local and regional elections

As signalled in the introduction, the polytonality of local and regional government elections favours the existence of a particular pattern of voter participation, which could be referred to as **incomplete voting**.

*Incomplete voting consists of the fact that a given voter does not participate in all local and regional government sub-elections which take place on a given day.*⁵

The opposite of incomplete voting is **complete voting**, which consists of *participating in all local and regional government sub-elections which take place on a given day.*⁶

The results of the *exit-poll* survey in Bielsko-Biała indicate that voters who vote incompletely constitute approximately 10% of all voters, and the local and regional government sub-election neglected most frequently is the sub-election for the voivodeship council. The aforementioned statistical data obtained from the National Electoral Commission also seems to prove the legitimacy of such a claim regarding the number of invalid votes in particular local and regional government sub-elections (see: Table 3).

Voters who vote completely and incompletely differ in terms of such socio-demographic characteristics as education, occupation, and age. Voters that have primary or vocational education, blue- or grey-collar workers (i.e., workers who work both manually and intellectually), as well as younger voters tend to vote incompletely (See: Table 8).

⁵ The reservation that such a situation concerns a single day seems of utmost importance. It must be pointed out that the electoral law assumes holding the second round of elections for commune administrator, mayor, or president. Voters who participated in the first round (regardless of whether it was full or incomplete participation) do not have to vote again. Such a voting pattern is known as fragmentary voting.

⁶ We can also distinguish exhaustive voting which is characterised by a voter's participation in all of the sub-elections of the first round as well as the potential second round of the local government elections.

Moreover, incomplete participation also seems to be a consequence of the fact that such voters possess less knowledge about the local and regional government ($F[1;1752]=11,12$ $p<0,05$), assessed through an index by means of a set of questions about the number of municipal councillors as well as some institutions under the town authorities.⁷

Table 8. Socio-demographic profile of complete and incomplete voters

	complete voters		incomplete voters		χ^2
	%	N	%	N	
Sex					
female	51.39%	775	50.00%	87	n.s.
male	48.61%	733	50.00%	87	
Education					$\chi^2=10.56$; $df=2$ $p<0.05$
primary and vocational	16.77%	262	26.37%	48	
secondary and post-secondary	48.85%	763	45.06%	82	
higher	34.38%	537	28.57%	52	
Total	100%	1,562	100%	182	
Occupation					$\chi^2=22.20$; $df=4$ $p<0.05$
unemployed	4.47%	70	4.37%	8	
blue- or grey-collar worker	17.56%	275	27.32%	50	
white-collar worker	33.72%	528	26.78%	49	
pensioner	32.18%	504	22.40%	41	
pupil/student	12.07%	189	19.13%	35	
Total	100%	1,566	100%	183	
Age groups					$\chi^2=17,13$; $df=2$ $p<0,05$
born before 1940	11.53%	180	12.02%	22	
born between 1940 and 1971	59.07%	922	44.26%	81	
born after 1971	29.40%	459	43.72%	80	
Total	100%	1,561	100%	183	

Source: *exit-poll* 2006, Bielsko-Biała. The analysis did not take into account data shortages.

The types of voters participating in local and regional elections also differ in terms of voting motivation in the case of elections for the municipality and voivodeship councils. Voters who vote incompletely rarely declare to be driven in municipality council elections by a candidate's affiliation with a given political party. A more frequent motivation seems to be the candidate's political programme. The later tendency also appears to be present in voivodeship council elections. Table 9 presents detailed data.

What is more, voters who vote incompletely participate in parliamentary elections to a much lesser extent than complete voters, although they are more frequently autochthons.

Such observations suggest that at least a part of voters who vote incompletely are attracted to voting in local and regional elections by certain local issues and/or a sense of identification with their place of birth. If it were not for the abovementioned determinants, such voters would not probably participate in the elections.

⁷ The index could range from 0 to 7, where 7 indicated the greatest knowledge about the local government. The index average of knowledge about the local government assessed in such a manner in case of incomplete voting was 3.09 (standard deviation = 1.87).

Table 9. Participation in parliamentary elections; autochthony and selected voting motives of complete and incomplete voters

	complete voters		incomplete voters		χ^2
	%	N	%	N	
Motive of party membership in elections for municipality council					
yes	43.25%	679	33.94%	56	$\chi^2=5.30$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	56.75%	891	66.06%	109	
Total	100%	1,570	100%	165	
Motive of political programme in elections for municipality council					
yes	32.61%	512	42.42%	70	$\chi^2=6.45$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	67.39%	1,058	57.58%	95	
Total	100%	1,570	100%	165	
Motive of political programme in elections for the voivodeship council					
yes	28.34%	445	40.29%	56	$\chi^2=8.79$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	71.66%	1,125	59.71%	83	
Total	100%	1,570	100%	139	
Participation in parliamentary elections in 2005					
yes	92.63%	107	83.93%	141	$\chi^2=15.00$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	7.37%	1,344	16.07%	27	
Total	100%	1,451	100%	168	
Autochthony					
yes	59.15%	928	68.31%	125	$\chi^2=5.73$; $df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	40.85%	641	31.69%	58	
Total	100%	1,569	100%	183	

Source: *exit-poll* 2006, Bielsko-Biała. The analysis did not take into account data shortages.

Incoherent voting in polytonal local and regional elections

Another, distinct voting pattern which seems to be favoured by the polytonality of local and regional elections is **incoherent voting**.

Incoherent voting manifests itself by the fact that a voter gives his or her votes in different sub-elections to the representatives of various committees. The opposite of incoherent voting is **coherent voting**, which characterises those voters who give all their votes in different sub-elections to candidates belonging to the same committee.

Exit-poll research indicates that incoherent voters constitute over a half of all the voters surveyed in the analysed town/village (58.66%). National polls also seem to prove the existence of incoherent voting. The poll conducted by CBOS shows that 46% of Polish voters gave their votes in local and regional elections in 1998 incoherently, and the extent of such phenomenon was greatly affected by the size of the voters' town/village. According to CBOS, 28% of the voters voted incoherently in the largest Polish cities (which does

not include Bielsko-Biała), while in smaller towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants and villages such votes constituted 56% and 63% respectively (CBOS 1998).

It ought to be pointed out that the possibility of voting for the same committee in all sub-elections is frequently limited by an insufficient number of alternatives. In such circumstances, citizens are not always able to choose candidates from the same committees (even if they wanted to). For instance, in 2006, voters from Bielsko-Biała could choose from 12 electoral committees in the election for the voivodeship council, ten committees in the sub-election for the municipality council, and eight in the sub-election for the president.

Statistical analysis of the data from the *exit-poll* carried out in Bielsko-Biała does not indicate any diversity between coherent and incoherent voters in terms of socio-demographics. Nevertheless, they appear to differ significantly with regard to the level of voters' relationship with the candidates in the election, voting motivations (such as personal relationship with the candidate; a candidate's party affiliation and his or her achievements), and the level of participation in parliamentary elections. Table 10 presents detailed data.

Table 10. Selected voting motivations in local and regional elections as well as participation in parliamentary elections of coherent and incoherent voters

	coherent voters		incoherent voters		χ^2
	%	N	%	N	
Personal relationship with candidate(s)					
yes	50.08%	308	65.37%	570	$\chi^2=34.85; df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	49.92%	307	34.63%	302	
Total	100%	615	100%	872	
Motive of personal relationship in elections for municipality council					
yes	9.97%	61	22.64%	197	$\chi^2=40.15; df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	90.03%	551	77.36%	673	
Total	100%	612	100%	870	
Motive of personal relationship in elections for voivodeship council					
yes	6.87%	41	12.86%	111	$\chi^2=13.59; df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	93.13%	556	87.14%	752	
Total	100%	597	100%	863	
Motive of personal relationship in elections for president					
yes	6.24%	38	10.79%	94	$\chi^2=9.14; df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	93.76%	571	89.21%	777	
Total	100%	609	100%	871	
Motive of political affiliation elections for municipality council					
yes	57.03%	349	35.63%	310	$\chi^2=66.59; df=1$ $p<0.05$
no	42.97%	263	64.37%	560	
Total	100%	612	100%	870	

Motive of political affiliation in elections for voivodeship council	68.17%	407	52.61%	454	$\chi^2=35.34; df=1$ $p<0.05$
yes	31.83%	190	47.39%	409	
no	100%	597	100%	863	
Total					
Motive of political affiliation in elections for president	28.90%	176	17.57%	153	$\chi^2=26.63; df=1$ $p<0.05$
yes	71.10%	433	82.43%	718	
no	100%	609	100%	871	
Total					
Motive of candidate's achievements in elections for municipality council					$\chi^2=14.06; df=1$ $p<0.05$
yes	30.39%	186	39.89%	347	
no	69.61%	426	60.11%	523	
Total	100%	612	100%	870	
Motive of candidate's achievements in elections for voivodeship council					$\chi^2=5.25; df=1$ $p<0.05$
yes	15.24%	91	19.93%	172	
no	84.76%	506	80.07%	691	
Total	100%	597	100%	863	
Participation in parliamentary elections in 2005	95.17%	571	90.48%	751	$\chi^2=10.95; df=1$ $p<0.05$
yes	4.83%	29	9.52%	79	
no	100%	600	100%	830	
Total					

Source: *exit-poll* 2006, Bielsko-Biała. The analysis did not take into account data shortages.

The table above illustrates that voters who participate incoherently tend to be acquainted with the candidates and declare more frequently that it is indeed the personal relationship with the candidate and/or their achievements that determines their voting decision, and that they participate in parliamentary elections more rarely.

An additional observation which seems extremely interesting is the fact that incoherent voters support independent committees far more eagerly in the elections for municipality council ($\chi^2=216.33; df=1 p<0.05$) – 38.98% of incoherent voters and only 5.24% of coherent voters supported independent committees in elections for the municipality council.

They abovementioned observations suggest that coherent voters are citizens who can be referred to as disciplined or the strong electorate of political parties; whereas incoherent voters are a group that political parties can rely on less.

Conclusion

The peculiar, polytonal character of Polish local and regional elections manifests itself in a variety of aspects and can be illustrated in various ways. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the work by Jarosław Flis, who has perfectly described the nature of Polish local and regional elections using the example of elections for voivodeship councils and elections for presidents/mayors of towns and villages in municipalities of Lesser Poland Voivodeship (especially in the context of candidates' party affiliation) (Flis 2011).

As proved, the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections facilitates particular voting patterns, namely incomplete and incoherent voting, and voters who represent such types of voting have an influence on reducing the party-dependency of the local/regional government. There seem to be a few reasons for this.

First, voters who participate incompletely and incoherently are frequently citizens who do not take part in parliamentary elections, yet they do decide to participate in local and regional government elections.

Second, incoherent voters are more rarely motivated by the party-affiliation of the candidates and more often by the personal relationship with and the achievements of the candidates running for office in the local/regional government. Nevertheless, they prefer to support independent committees in sub-elections for municipality council, which can be clearly observed compared to the weak support of coherent voters for such committees.

Third, incomplete voters declare more frequently that they are motivated to participate in elections by the candidate's programme, which brings local and regional elections close to issue voting (although we should not forget that they are also characterised by limited knowledge about local issues).

Therefore, the categories of voters seem to distance Polish local and regional elections from political parties. Naturally, one could debate whether it is necessary for the government at the local/regional level to be better. In this respect, research devoted to this issue appears to be ambivalent, if not chaotic, about the role of independent politicians at the level of local/regional government.

According to supporters of eliminating party-dependency, councillors, presidents, mayors, and commune administrators from independent committees can solve local issues more effectively, as they are closer to constituents and are free from conflicts between parties (Wasilewski 2008). It can be observed that the presence of independent politicians in elections, and consequently in local/regional government, significantly enhances democracy at the local/regional government level through limiting corruption, rejuvenating citizens' interest in politics, and increasing electoral participation (Brancati 2008; Holtmann, Gohlert, Krappidel and Reiser 2008). Nevertheless, on some occasions, the very same scholars who emphasise the positive role of independent candidates appear to claim that independent politicians may to a greater extent be focused on gaining personal benefits, more frequently represent the extremes of the political scene, and have influence on the destabilisation of decision-making processes (Brancati 2008; Holtmann, Gohlert, Krappidel and Reiser 2008).

Irrespective of the adopted point of view on political parties (be it admiration, or incrimination, as the supporters of independent committees would like), the polytonality of Polish local and regional elections has an impact on local/regional governing. The behavioural diversity of voters and political parties in specific local and regional government sub-elections, results in their various results.

Political parties practically monopolise the sub-elections for voivodeship councils and dominate the sub-elections for county councils. However, in the case of municipality sub-elections, they generally seem to lose to independent committees. Such a phenomenon may lead to "incompatibility of authority" at various levels of government. Although

the structure of Polish local/regional government generally does not assume the hierarchisation of the relations between municipalities, counties, and voivodeships, in practice we can sometimes observe the necessity for cooperation between different levels of local/regional government. Different line-up of parties in voivodeship councils, counties, and municipalities frequently hinders such cooperation, and in some cases may even exclude it.

This results in obvious tension in practising so-called local democracy. The fact of opening the electoral market to multiple initiatives independent of political parties (especially separated from parties which have a seat in the parliament) as well as initiatives diversified in terms of sub-elections, has an undisputed influence on broadening voters' possibilities, which allow them to concentrate more on the local/regional specificity. Thus, on the one hand, democracy seems to be "closer" to citizens; while on the other, however, it may occur at the cost of the effectiveness of local/regional government.

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