

## **Elections to the local self-government in Poland.**

### **Twenty years of experience in the subregion of Ciechanow**

The issue of elections constitutes fundamental problem in political science analysis. Owing to the research into this question political scientists are capable of explaining and prognosticating political processes. These studies result from the impulse to explicate the basic problem of the modern political science analysis as they might indicate conditions determining causes and results of the decisions made by the voters influencing the system of a country.

Periodic elections are typical of modern democratic state. Once the elections meet democratic standards the state may be deemed a democratic one. It is worth to remember that the first democratic elections in Poland after 1989 on 27<sup>th</sup> May were local government elections. However, this political event has been often depreciated in Poland. What is more, a capable self- government together with democratic elections are considered to be the cornerstone of an efficient state. Owing to the fact that various remits are devolved to the local self –government it plays a vital role in the state. Being separate from the state on the country level the local self government gives people opportunities to exert influence on the process of making decisions which directly apply their situation. It is performed by the elected bodies ruling on behalf of people inhabiting the given territory.

The objective of the study is the analysis of the local self-government elections in the subregion of Ciechanow. The pivotal issue is comparing the conclusions to the local self-government elections on the country level. The study covers the period from the first local self- government elections in 1990 to the latest elections which were held in 2010.

The analysis pertains to the all tiers of local self-government. The analysis of the years 1990-1994 concerns the elections to the commune councils whereas the examination of the period from 1998 to 2010 concerns the commune councils, the county councils as well as voivodship councils. The scrutiny of the elections for the head of the commune (wojt), mayor and president of the city addresses the period starting from 2002. There have been examined the elections in the towns which belong to the both categories; urban municipalities and urban –rural municipalities. Consequently, majority election system and proportional representation system have been addressed in the examination.

The study also relates to the most important events occurring in the years 1990-2010 such as the reform of administration in 1998, passing local authorities elections ordinance to

the commune councils, county councils and voivodship councils in 1998 as well as alteration in elections of the head of the commune (wojt), mayor and president of the city passed in 2002. The first chapter begins theoretical analysis of the issue of local self-government. It delineates the stages of forming local self-government in Poland from the II Republic. Also disappearance of local self- government in People's Republic of Poland is described. Next it passes to the problem of restoration of local self-government after 1989. Moreover, examination of the rebuilding of local self-government in changing conditions is connected with showing its role in the state.

The second chapter addresses the shape of the election system to local self-government in Poland. Thus, the types, formulae as well as electoral adjectives functioning in the electoral law in Poland are described. Another issue which is analyzed is the electoral ordinance to the commune councils, county councils and local government assemblies at the voivodship level as well as the statute regulating direct elections of the head of the commune (wojt), mayor and president of the city.

The third chapter concerned the analysis of the elections for regulatory authorities and executive authorities of the subregion of Ciechanow. The garnered empirical data were classified in four subsections dealing with four elected bodies in three tier local government in Poland (commune-commune council and the wojt of the commune, mayor, president of the city; county – county council; voivodship – local government assembly at the voivodship level). The third chapter is an attempt to answer the following research questions: Does the number of appointed candidates affect the level of voter turnout?; Does the increase of women in the election lists lead to greater number of women in the elected bodies? What share in rivalry for the voters and won mandates do fall to local committees in relation to the committees of the parties on the country level? In what degree does the electoral system deform the will of voters in local self-government elections? How much rivalry is there in the elections for local self – government? How many committees among those participating in the elections have obtained posts in the bodies to which there have been appointed candidates?

The last chapter is a synthesis and was devoted to comparing the results of the local self-government elections in the subregion of Ciechanow with the elections on the country level. The acquired results permit to compare the similarities and differences among the units of the analyzed territory and presenting them in the background of the Polish nationwide results. Showing the profile of the results of the elections within the examined territory and collating them with the results on the country level will allow to show the character of the elections in the local community and document its comportment. Hence it requires collating

the obtained results on the level of the town (communes) in the subregion of Ciechanow with the results of these towns (communes) within the county as a whole as well as referring to the results of the elections to the local government assembly at the voivodship level.

Considering the issue of local self-government after restoring independence in Poland one discerns problems owing to the partition of the country. The groundbreaking moment is considered to be passing March Constitution in 1921 and subsequently reuniting statute in 1933. The temporary development of local self-government in the interwar Poland was inhibited by II World War and the political system existing in the People's Republic of Poland. As a result, the independence of local government entities was abolished and in its place a hierarchically organized system of National Councils was introduced.

The process of restoring of local self-government at the turn of the nineties took advantage of the system and social transformations of that period. The reconstruction drew upon traditions from the interwar Poland as well as experiences of the countries from Western Europe. The major transformation took place in 1998 when three – tier division of local self-government was implemented which introduced the second level of self government and restored local government in voivodships (regions).

Efficient local self-government cannot be achieved without democratic process of forming its bodies. In local self-government elections in Poland two election formulae are employed depending on the municipality. These are majority election system used in electing commune councilors in localities under 20 000 inhabitants and for the post of wojt (mayor, president of the city) as well as proportional election system employed in other communes, counties and voivodships. The fact that the elections are universal, equal, direct and conducted by universal ballot guarantee that the elections are democratic and permit choosing representatives for the elected bodies. All these legal regulations are stated in the election ordinances.

Due to the fact that the election ordinance is sometimes changed permit one to draw a conclusion that it is a significant tool in shaping local politics especially for the political force which possesses parliamentary majority. Evidently the shape of the election ordinance has an impact upon the results of elections. The implemented amendments changing the mode of distribution of seats or introducing in 2006 the procedure of grouping lists seem to prove that conclusion.

A new electoral ordinance to the councils of communes, counties and voivodships was passed and the election was held according to the ordinance. This bill, though after numerous alterations, was in force until 2010 when it was the basis of the elections for the local self-

government for the last time. The most important alterations in the ordination in the years between 1998 and 2010 included: changing the category of entities qualifying for majority election system from the municipalities of 40 000 inhabitants to 20 000 inhabitants, modification of the dimension of the constituencies from single-seat constituencies to single and multi- seat constituencies, changing the mode of distribution of seats effected on the basis of the modified Saint-Lague method to d'Hondt method, introducing electoral threshold (5%) on all tiers of the self- government, diminishing the number of councilors, implementing the procedure of "grouping lists", acquiring electoral rights by the citizens of European Union who are not Polish citizens. The analysis of the modifications in the election ordinance gives rise to the conclusion that local self-government elections have been politicized. In its present form the system favors political parties and at the same time depreciates participation of local organizations or civic initiatives.

The implementation of a new statute about direct election of wojt, mayor and president of the city introduces a new quality to local self-government. It the sole legal document that regulates those elections since the constitution does not raise that question. Introducing direct election strengthened the position of wojt (mayor, president of the city) as a democratic body (earlier he or she presided over collegial board) in relation to the council. It also increased the status of the position and facilitated decision making process. Thanks to the direct election at the commune level there are also closer ties between a voter and a person being chosen. However these closer ties are not preserved in the executive bodies of other levels of local government – in counties and in voivodships.

The obtained data from the elections to the commune councils in the subregion of Ciechanow show that the lowest voter turnout was in 1994 (32%) and the highest in 2010 (51,11%) (Table 3.1). As far as the invalid votes are concerned it might be observed that the lowest percentage of such votes occurs in majority election system. In the entities where originally majority election system was in use there was low level of invalid votes whereas after introducing proportional election system the number of invalid votes increased (Table 3.2). The same regularity may be noted in the number of candidates per one mandate. In the entities where the formula of proportional election system was employed the number of invalid votes is higher in comparison to localities where majority election system was in use (Table 3.10). However, the higher number of appointed candidates in election lists might be noted what directly translates into the higher number of candidates per one mandate.

The augmented number of candidates, nonetheless, does not translate directly into raised voter turnout. On this level an increased number of wins by the local committees might

be reported. In 2002 the local committees in 3 towns obtained the majority in the council whereas in 2006 there were 4 committees which achieved such a result. It was observed that despite introducing 5% voter threshold (2006) in three entities out of four in which elections are performed according to proportional election system there was an increase in the general number of persons represented in the council.

The dominant position in the examined entities occupies Ciechanow. It is due to the fact that in terms of the number of registered lists of candidates, the number of committees (as well as participation of the committees of political parties or coalitions of political parties) and the number of appointed candidates (the average number of candidates per one mandate) the obtained data are higher in comparison to other municipalities.

Focusing attention on the problem of participation of women in elections to commune councils it might be observed that their number has systematically increased (Table 3.12). However it does not translate directly into the higher number of mandates obtained by the women. The average number of women receiving mandates has never exceeded 20% (Table 3.13). There are however cases (Plonsk 2006) when women possess 42% of mandates in the councils.

The study has not revealed the relationship between the employed election system and participation of women in the mandates allotment. It depends mainly on the studied entity. It rarely depends on the used formula.

The calculated rate of proportionality in the towns of the subregion of Ciechanow moderately deforms the will of voters. The most substantial deformations, which proves the rule, was observed in the municipality where the majority election system was in use.

Considering the issue of direct election of wojt, mayor, president of the city it was observed that voter turnout (Table 3.19) in the run-off diminishes by 10% and the percentage of invalid votes (Table 3.21) is at the same time the lowest among all studied elections. Generalizing one may assert that the winner of the first round of voting is also a winner in the run-off (the exception Ciechanow 2002). It was also noted that a mayor (president of the city) who holds office always seeks re-election.

As far as the candidates running for this office is concerned it was observed that apart from mayors (president of the city) running for office in most cases there was a complete exchange of candidates appointed by electoral committees. Focusing attention on participation of women in the elections for executive bodies in the municipalities one can perceive their minor participation. Out of 67 candidates running for election there were 12 women and in 2006 there were not any women running for election. In the years 2002-2006 none of the

women candidates succeeded in passing to the second round of voting and the percentage of votes never exceeded 10% (the exception Ciechanow 13,2%). In 2010 the situation changed: in four out of five towns the women who ran for the executive body managed to pass to the second round of voting but they did not win in these elections.

The elections for the one-man executive body in the analyzed municipalities were characterized by a low level of rivalry. Such data may indicate that one of the candidates possesses considerable capability to win the majority of votes but not enough to win in the first round of voting.

It turned out that the elections to county councils in the studied towns were marked by higher percentage of invalid votes in comparison to the elections to the commune councils (Table 3.27). The number of candidates standing for elections augmented what was reflected in the number of candidates per one mandate (Table 3.33; 3.34). The participation of party committees increased in relation to electoral committees and organizational committees. In two entities the majority of mandates were obtained by local electoral committees whereas in another entities the majority of votes was acquired by party committees (coalition of political parties). As far as the participation of women in the elections to the county councils is concerned it was observed that there was a growing number of women on the electoral county lists but at the same time the number of mandates obtained by them in the electoral districts decreased (Table 3.35).

The analysis of the elections to the voivodship councils in the selected towns of the Mazowieckie Voivodship has indicated that at this level there is the highest percentage of invalid votes in comparison to the elections to other bodies. It has to be noted that the rate of participation of the party committees in these types of elections has been rising. The analysis of the elections to the voivodship council has shown that the most substantial percentage of votes is gained by the same political groupings (in 1998 in the three entities won SLD, and in the other two the winner was AWS, in 2002 SLD-UP, and in the years 2006 and 2010 – PSL)

It might be also perceived that there is a low level of rivalry in the aforementioned elections. Investigating the data referring to the elections to the five county councils of the subregion of Ciechanow it is observed that voter turnout of these elections preponderates the voter turnout of the communal elections. However the percentage of invalid votes significantly increases.

It is also noticed that the number of appointed lists of candidates rise, though the lowest level was observed in 2002. It translates directly into the number of appointed candidates and contemporaneously into higher number of candidates per one mandate.

Despite the difference in the number of appointed committees the number of councilors has stabilized. In the years 2002-2006 in four county councils the number of councilors did not change and solely in one (Zuromin county) it augmented. In the elections to the Mazowieckie Voivodship council the number of councilors oscillates. In only one case (Zuromin 1998) the majority of the mandates in the county council was obtained by local committee while in other cases the majority in the council was acquired by electoral committees of political parties or coalitions of political parties. Since 2002 there was perceived increased support for PSL which received the majority of the mandates in three county councils and in 2006 the majority was acquired in all five councils. Taking into consideration the extent of women's participation in the elections to the bodies of the middle level of local self-government it is observed that their participation rises on electoral lists but at the same time diminishes their number holding an office of county councilors. Solely in the elections to the Mazowieckie Voivodship council together with the increased number of women on the electoral lists goes their increased number as councilors.

Local self-government elections in the years 1990-2006 were always held after parliamentary elections (Table 4.15). Therefore it might be claimed that the results of the elections to the Sejm and Senat have an impact on the results of local self-government elections. It is usually the case that a political grouping which wins the majority in parliament chambers usually obtains the highest percentage of votes in the councils nationwide. It also turns out that the smaller the body of the local self-government the looser the ties with political parties and there are greater chances for the local political groupings to win a mandate. Focusing on the percentage of invalid votes in the local self-government elections on the national level there is a rule saying that the higher the level of local self-government the higher percentage of invalid votes. The lowest percentage of invalid votes is reported in the elections to the commune councils in communes where live under 20 000 inhabitants while the highest percentage is reported in the elections to the voivodship councils.

Focusing on the problem of participation of women in the self-government elections on the country level one may observe a rise in the number of women on the lists which however does not translate into the number of women who win a mandate (Figure 4.7). It is noticed a diminishing participation of women in elected bodies what is indicated by growing disproportion between the number of women on the lists and their number in the councils in the consecutive elections.

The analyzed results permit to some degree corroborate research hypothesis. Local self-government elections in the subregion of Ciechanow are really characterized by diversity

in the towns but taking into account the sub-region of Ciechanów as a whole the results differ from the country tendency in some rates exceeding or depressing the country average.