

## **Influence of Former Political Borders on Election Results in Poland**

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Lack of authentic elections in Poland during the communist period after Second World War prevented researches in a field of electoral geography. This situation has totally changed after 1989 when, following the democratization of political life, the real election in Poland as well as the researches in that field, have become possible (Kowalski 2000, 2003, Rykiel 2004, Sobczynski 2000, Zarycki 1997, 2003, Zukowski 2003).

Starting from the first democratic election in pre-war Poland in 1989, up to the most recent one in 2005, one can easily notice very specific geographic variation in the support for different political parties. This variation, which proved to be very persistent, is clearly related to the course of former state borders from the partition period in the 19th century and in the interwar period. It is also affected by distribution of national, ethnic and religious minorities (Kowalski 2000, 2003, Szul 2003).

This paper analyzes spatial diversification of electoral preferences using the example of three elections:

- the second round of 1995 presidential election between Kwasniewski and Walesa;
- the EU referendum in 2003;
- the second round of 2005 presidential election between Kaczynski and Tusk;

Those elections were characterized by very even results, which have clearly and characteristically divided Polish society. Despite the fact, that in those analyzed elections the final choice was made between different options – the Left versus the Right, pro-European versus anti-European and conservative versus liberal respectively, the vote distribution was much the same in every case. Through the last several years most of the inhabitants from the individual regions is voting in the same way. The boundary of the electoral preferences usually do not cross the historical regions, but invariably cover former political borders. In the individual elections the voters from the former Austrian, Russian and Prussian annexed territories exhibit different electoral preferences, which also differ from that in the territories incorporated into Poland after Second World War. Although this borders were marked out almost 200 years ago and in political sense they have not existed for several dozen years (in some parts for almost 90 years), they still constitute permanent culture, social and mental

borders that obviously reflect the electoral preferences, which results in a characteristic ‘crack’ of Poland in each next elections.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> round of presidential elections in 1995, between Kwasniewski and Walesa was the most competitive elections in Poland after 1990 and the most spectacular electoral battle between leftist and rightist options. It brought the surprising defeat of Walesa (the legend of the ‘Solidarity’ movement) and clear electoral division of Poland (fig. 1).

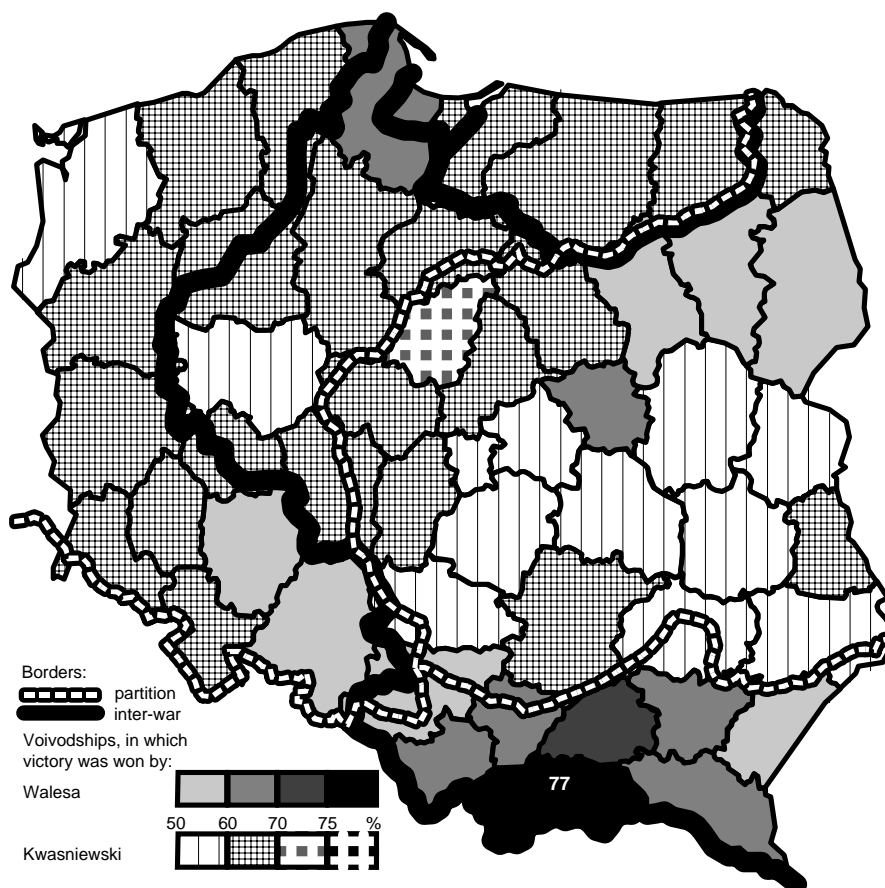


Fig. 1. Results of the second round of 1995 presidential election between Kwasniewski and Walesa

Walesa has won outright victory in the former Austrian annexed territory (Galicia) and in his home city of Gdansk, furthermore, although less markedly, he won in industrialized regions of southern Poland and also in north-eastern part of Mazovia (fig. 1). A substantial victory in Galicia was caused by democratic sympathies of inhabitants (noticeable in all elections also in the interwar period), their patriotism, autochthonism and conservatism as its consequence, attachment to tradition, land, strong local relations and the very strong influence

of the Catholic Church. The combination of those elements led Walesa to the victory. Largely it was a consequence of Austrian rules in Galicia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among others due political, linguistic and cultural autonomy and also Habsburgs' support for the Catholic Church. The north-eastern Mazovia is also the most numerous concentrations of lesser nobility descendants, who inherited traditional patriotic and democratic attitude (Kowalski 2000, Sobczynski 1993, 1996).

Kwasniewski had decidedly won in the territories incorporated into Poland after Second World War ('regained territories'), especially in Pomerania and in former East Prussia, but also in the Prussian annexed territory and – only in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of elections – in the most part of Russian annexed territory which is central and East Poland (fig. 1). The 'regained territories' inhabitants distinctly differ from inhabitants of Austrian and Russian annexed territory as to their origins and socio-professional structure, and those differences cause the domination of leftist political views. It is the population, which after Second World War has been uprooted from territories of today's West Ukraine and Belarus, and majority of them are living here only from two or three generations, which largely explains the lack of tradition, regionalism and the weak influences of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the local countryside looks much different, dominated by large state rural farms that employ agrarian wage-labour. Although today this population is living in West Poland, in terms of origins it is related to former East territories, which causes vital differences in culture, traditions and customs (Kowalski 2000, 2003, Szul 2003). Large part of this population reminisce communist period with nostalgia, as a time of relative stabilization and social safety and also, which is very important, associate this period with their own social and financial promotion. However the decisive factor for the elections results was Kwasniewski's victory in former Russian annexed territory, where the large part of especially indigent and poorly educated population, was disappointed with economic changes introduced a few years earlier, which reduced their standard of living. For this population the economic factors were more important than history and policy. Moreover voters of defeated candidates in the 1<sup>st</sup> round have usually given their votes to Kwasniewski in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round.

Kwasniewski received 51.7% votes, whereas Walesa got 48.3%. Voting participation amounted to 68.2% and was the highest since the fall of the communist system in Poland.

During the EU referendum, in June 2003, once again the voting tendencies were clearly reflecting the former political divisions (fig. 2). The most anti-union votes were among inhabitants of central and East Poland that is the former Russian annexed territory. All administrative districts where the population was against joining the EU are located in this

region of Poland, especially in its eastern part. That was caused among others by large participation of rural population, which is attached to the land, tradition, catholic religion, that is very conservative, full of anxiety and mistrust towards changes and the ‘others’ (‘strangers’). Moreover the inhabitants of this region, especially in its eastern section, have in majority rightist views, and some rightist parties before referendum were against Poland’s access into EU. Furthermore, the ultra-catholic broadcasting station ‘Radio Maria’, very influential among the rural population, pointedly urged to vote against the accession.

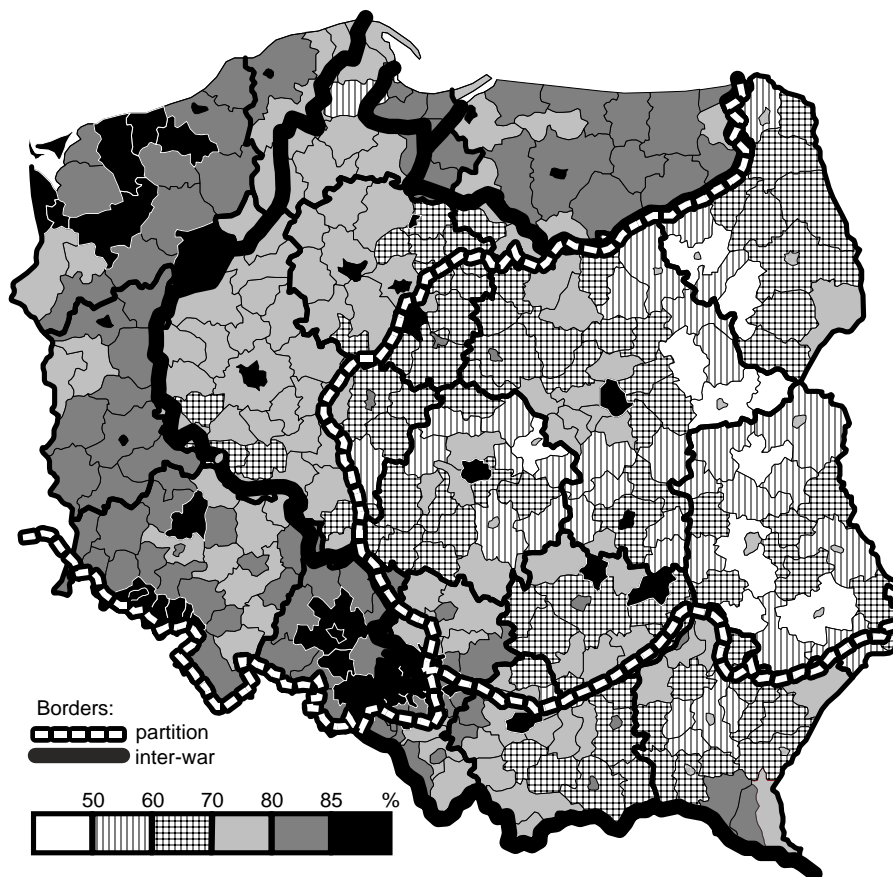


Fig. 2. Results of the EU referendum in 2003

Opposite to this, the support for EU accession was considerably larger in former Austria-occupied territories (Galicia) and, even more markedly, in former Prussian sector of partitioned Poland. This can be explained in terms of positive experiences – especially economic – of contacts with West Europe, among others with Germany and Austria. Of certain importance here was also much lesser influence of the Catholic Church on the territory of former protestant Prussia.

However the most striking result of referendum was strong support for EU accession voiced by the inhabitants of West and North Poland, that is 'regained territories', where about 85% of the electorate have voted for EU integration (fig. 2). The inhabitants of Silesia, Pomerania, and former East Prussia turned out to be the most pro-union part of Poland's society. These are much differentiated regions – both rich and poor, industrialized and typically rural, that border upon Germany and the Czech Republic, but also upon Russia. What they have in common is total population replacement after Second World War. Consequently, the inhabitants are all immigrants: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations after the shift. Migrations that took place 60 earlier represented for those people enormous changes, which brought about social and financial promotion. The inhabitants of those regions are definitely more open to changes, less conservative and more receptive than in other regions of Poland, which was reflected in the results of the EU referendum (Zakowski 2003). Furthermore, among the inhabitants of West and North Poland, sympathizers of leftist and liberal parties predominate and those groups univocally voted for the integration.

Apart from former political borders and political sympathies – the differentiation of the referendum results depended on urbanization level (especially in large cities some 85-90% citizens voted for EU integration), as well as distribution of national minorities, for example Belorussians in Podlasie and Germans in Opole region (fig. 2). In expectation of some advantages, the minorities predominantly voted for the accession.

The final referendum results were 77% for accession, 23% against it, and the participation reached 59%. Such a remarkable superiority of integration supporters is largely a result of markedly lower voting participation in the regions where the union-opponents prevailed.

All elections in Poland after 1989 were dominated by conflict between leftist versus rightist options, which largely depend on historical rather than ideological factors (Kowalski 2003). Presidential elections in 2005 were the first ones in which the main division was between liberal and conservative option and the main candidates were descended from anti-communism opposition. It was caused by a drastic decline in popularity of leftist wing after their rules in 2001-2005 and also by withdrawing the leftist candidate before elections.

Kaczynski, the conservative candidate, strongly supported by catholic media, have decisively won in the regions of former Austrian (Galicia) and Russian annexed territories, especially in the countryside (fig. 3). Characteristically, he achieved the largest support in those regions, where the opposition against Poland's accession to EU in the referendum held two years earlier was the strongest (fig. 2, 3). The population of Galicia and Mazovia (especially its eastern section) is characterized by strong attachment to tradition as well as

patriotic and religious values, and that is the reason why Kaczynski, who proclaim conservative, national and – first of all - social slogans achieved here substantial superiority. Of great importance here was also the support of the Catholic Church for Kaczynski, additionally enhanced by sharp criticism of the church towards liberal ideas proclaimed by his opponent. The victory in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round in central Poland and in the eastern part of former Prussian annexed territory, guaranteed Kaczynski the support of other candidates that were eliminated in the 1<sup>st</sup> round and appealed to their electors for voting in favour of anti-liberal Kaczynski (Kublik 2005).

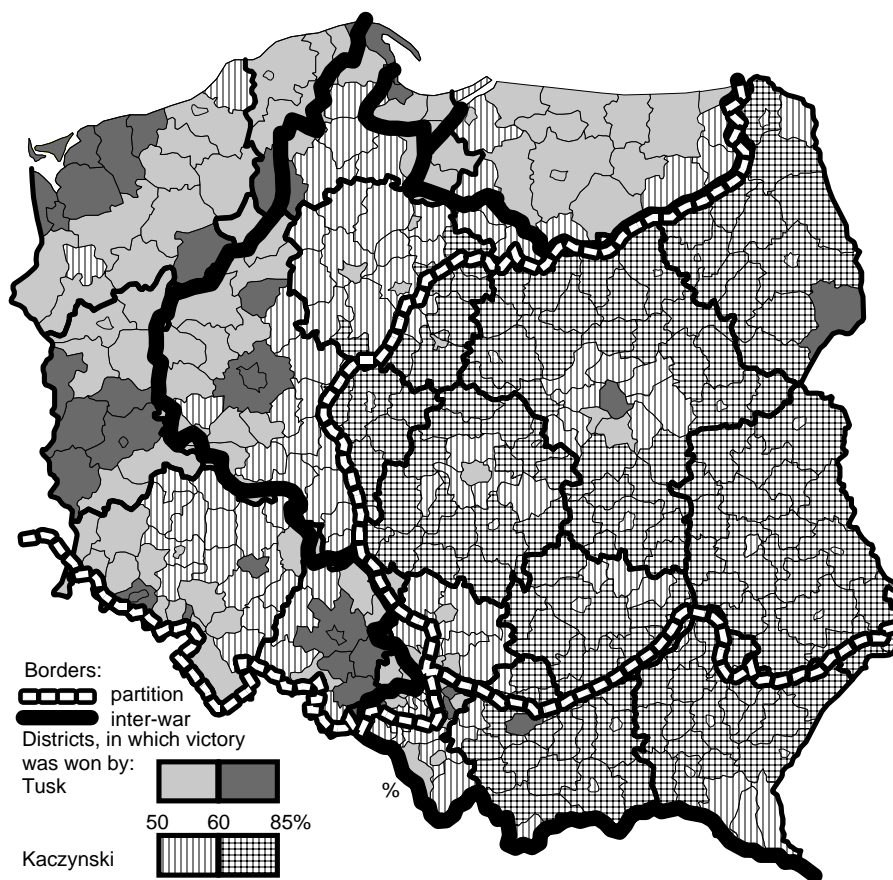


Fig. 3. Results of the second round of 2005 presidential election between Kaczynski and Tusk

Tusk, the liberal candidate, won in all largest cities, in the western part of Prussian annexed territories and also in the most of territories incorporated into Poland after Second World War (fig. 3). Tusk’s victory in West and North Poland can be explained by lesser attachment to tradition, lack of so called ‘roots’ of inhabitants and weak Church influences.

That is the reason why the liberal slogans could receive here wider reception, which was also confirmed by the results of previous parliamentary elections (Kowalski 2000, Kublik 2005). However it seems that the traditional domination of leftist views here was a crucial factor. It can be argued that so distinct declaring of inhabitants from ‘regained territories’ for Tusk, was more voting against Kaczynski than voting for the Liberal Tusk. Also representatives of national and religious minorities (especially Orthodox Belorussians in Podlasie) were voting for Tusk because they have been afraid of Kaczynski’s national-catholic slogans. It was then a typical case of voting ‘against’.

Altogether Kaczynski received 54% of votes, Tusk 46%, with low voting participation of 51%. After 10 years, once again central Poland turned out to be the region that decided about victory in presidential elections – in 1995 post-communist Kwasniewski brought off victory there, and so did anti-communist Kaczynski in 2005. In both cases the successes should be ascribed to pro-social economic slogans heralded by those two politicians, rather than their political ideas, which were totally different.

In conclusion:

- The historical political divisions of the present-day territory of Poland strongly influence electoral behaviours of inhabitants. On the electoral map of Poland one can distinguish the areas that during the partition period were occupied by Russia, Austria and Prussia, as well as areas incorporated into Poland after Second World War. The political borders do not divide those lands from several dozen years, however mental borders turn out to be persistent and remain clearly visible and, although most of the inhabitants do not know the course of historical borders.
- The former borders and political divisions were visible during elections no matter what main politico-ideological options were clashing during voting – the Left versus the Right, pro and anti European, conservative versus liberal.
- The Catholic Church still has an important political role in Poland. It influence election results, which is especially visible among the most conservative, traditional and autochthonic population, particularly in the rural areas of Galicia, East Mazovia and Podlasie, which are former Austrian and Russian territories.
- The former political divisions influence also the differences in the voting participation – the highest is on the Prussian and Austrian annexed territories, the lowest on the former Russia-occupied areas. It is explained by long-lasting parliamentary traditions,

typical of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Austria and Prussia population, and also by a lack of such traditions among inhabitants of former tsarist Russia (Kowalski 2000, 2003).

- Ethnically and religiously, Poland is highly homogeneous country. However distribution of small national, ethnic and religious minorities is not without influence on election results. Minority communities generally vote for leftist and liberal groups, because in Polish reality rightist groups are univocally associated with Polish nation and Catholicism. The most typical example of these behaviours is the region of East Podlasie inhabited by Orthodox Belorussians, Cieszyn Silesia with Protestants and Opole region with German minority (Kowalski 2000).
- The factor that makes difference in electoral behaviour is urbanization. There are differences in voting patterns in urban areas (especially in large and medium-size cities) and in the countryside, inhabited by 40% of Poland population. It is mainly caused by lower education and living condition level of rural communities, stronger influence of the Catholic Church, much stronger attachment to national-catholic tradition, conservatism and distrust towards any changes.
- Historically conditioned regional differentiation, stemming from incorporation into foreign countries in the past, is manifested in election results, but also in economic development, infrastructure, wealth and education level. This is not, however, a specific characteristic of Poland. Similar phenomena can be observed, for instance, in Germany, Italy, Spain, Romania or Ukraine (Kowalski 2003, Szul 2003).

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