
ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY IN POLAND

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The paper focuses in the first place on the questions of electoral geography in Poland. In particular it concentrates on the author's suggestions concerning the spatial differences of voting preferences in the period of 1989-1997. After the year 1989, when the first free elections in Poland took place after fifty years of communist rule, there were two presidential elections held, four parliamentary elections, two elections of local authorities and two referendums. Owing to the spatial dimension of these elections their results can be used to analyse the spatial differentiation of Polish society. This paper analyses the election results in 49 voivodships. Owing to the large population and the culturally dualistic character of the Katowice voivodship this unit has been divided into two parts for easier analysis.

TURNOUT

Turnout is regionally differentiated. (*Figures 1, 2*) The highest turnout is characteristic for the regions of Poznań, Cracow, Rzeszów and Gdańsk, while the lowest turnout is observed in Central Poland with the exception of the agglomerations of Warsaw and Łódź. It is probably no coincidence that the regions with the highest turnout had been part of the Prussian and Austro-Hungarian sectors during the 19th century partitions of Poland. (*Figure 3.*) The lowest turnout on the other hand is observed in regions which at that time belonged to Russia (Kingdom of Poland). Low turnout is also recorded in the western and northern parts of Poland (with post-war Polish settlement): Lower Silesia, Western Pomerania, Mazuria.

POLITICAL ORIENTATION

In general there are four political options represented in Poland by various parties. Those are the conservative, the socialist, the peasant and the liberal options.

The partly free elections of 1989 were in fact a plebiscite. This plebiscite, however, had a spatial aspect. The candidates representing the Solidarity movement received the majority of votes in former Galicia and in large cities, whereas the ex-communists were especially successful in the western parts of Poland with the exception of large cities. (*Figure 4*) Similar regularities characterised the following elections, including those of 1997. This phenomenon can be described as spatial polarisation between left-

Figure 1
Election turnout, 1989

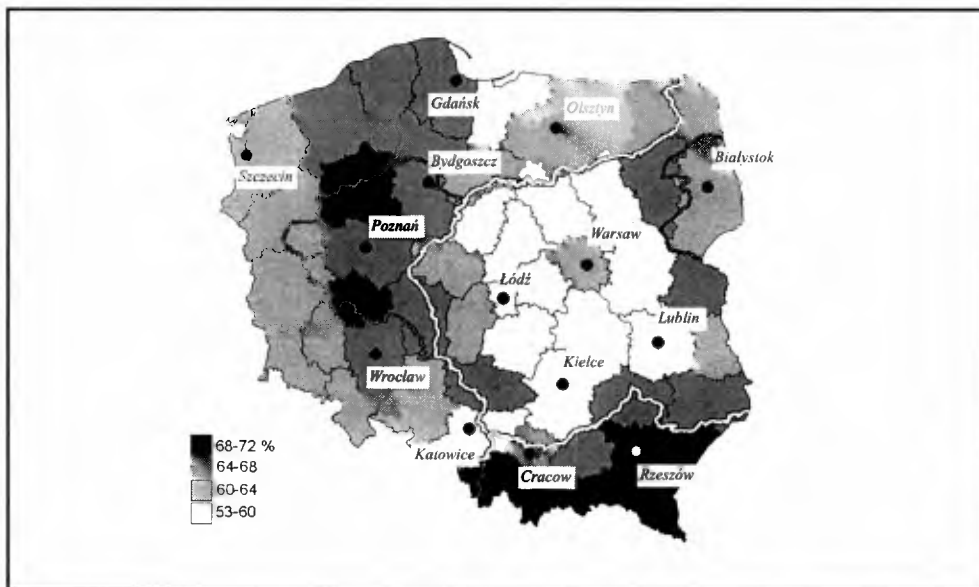


Figure 2
Election turnout, 1997

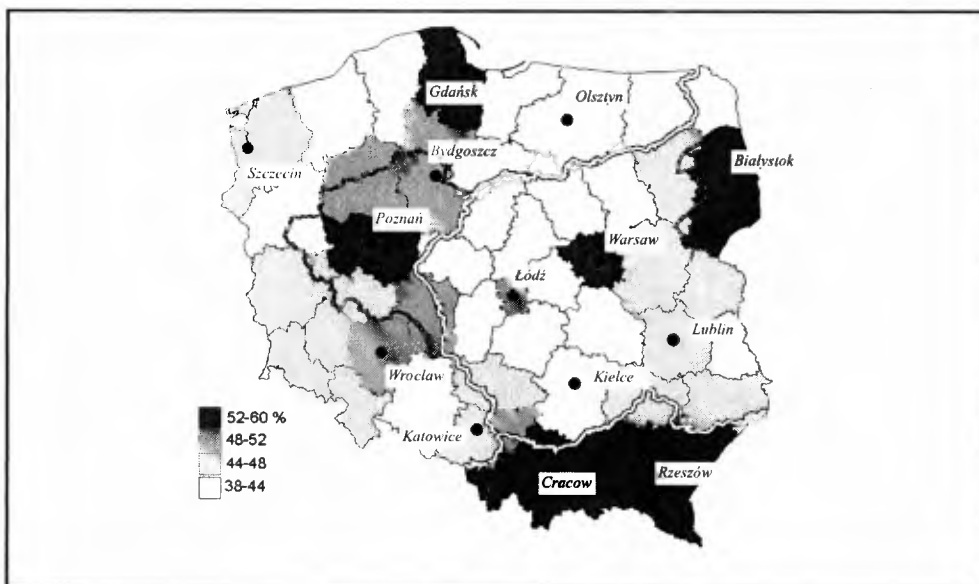


Figure 3
*Partition of the present Polish territory in the
 19th century*



wing parties and the Solidarity movement. In the first half of the 1990s this polarisation was inconsiderable, due to the fact that socialist ideas lost their support during the communist rule. On the other hand, the case of Tymiński (the populist “man from nowhere” who achieved second place in the presidential elections of 1990) indicates that Polish society of that time needed an alternative to patriotic, conservative and liberal ideas supported by the Solidarity movement.

The elections of 1993 were revolutionary due to the new electoral law which introduced the 5% limit. Owing to the political break-up of Solidarity and the difficulties of the eco-

nomic transformation the ex-communists won, taking 20% of all votes (they were undoubtedly supported by a large part of the former Tymiński electorate). The greatest success, however, experienced by the ex-communists were the presidential elections of 1995 when their candidate Aleksander Kwaśniewski succeeded in defeating the former president Lech Wałęsa in the second round and became state president.

Since that time the political preferences of the Poles have crystallised; also from the spatial, geographical point of view. Therefore we can assume that at present the conservative (Solidarity, right wing) options are supported by approximately 40% of society; liberal options (Union of Freedom, Union of Real Policy) have 10-15% adherents; socialist options are supported by 30-35% of all voters (*Table 1*), while the peasant options (Polish Peasant Party) find support of 10-15% of society.

GEOGRAPHICAL VIEWPOINT

Analysing the spatial differentiation of the election results, it appears that the conservative options are in the first place supported in the south-eastern parts of the country, in large agglomerations and in some borderland areas. In particular this is clearly visible on the maps which show voting results in the communes (*gmina*; *Figure 5*). Liberal options find support in large cities and in the western part of the country. Socialist options on the other hand have adherents in Western, Northern and Central

Table 1
Electoral results of the Left, 1990-1997 (%)

Year	Ex-communists	Labour Union	Party of Retired	Self-defence (Samoobrona)	Tymiński's Party	Others	Left-wing parties	Turnout
1989	–	–	–	–	–	–	25.00	62.0
1990	9.21	–	–	–	23.10	–	32.31	60.6
1991	11.99	2.72	–	–	0.47	–	15.18	43.2
1993	20.41	7.28	–	2.78	2.74	–	33.21	52.1
1995	35.11	3.53	–	1.32	–	0.22	40.18	64.7
1997	27.13	4.74	2.18	0.08	–	0.02	34.15	48.0

Poland while peasant options are supported mainly in the central part of the country. The spatial differentiation of political preferences, as mentioned above, in some way ties in with the regional differences caused by the partition of Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Liberal options usually find support in big cities, especially, however, in Western Poland which belonged to Prussia. (Figure 6) Conservative parties are mostly supported in former Galicia and in some present and former borderlands. (Figure 7) Peasant options are strongly supported in the former Russian sector (Kingdom of Poland; Figure 8). Left-wing options are supported in regions which at that time belonged to Prussia, as well as in the western part of the Russian sector (with the exception of borderlands with Polish ethnic groups of specific culture; Figure 9).

THE ORIGIN OF REGIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

Regional differentiation can be explained by conditions of political, economic, cultural and social life, going back to the 19th century partition of Poland. We can also observe a large differentiation between cities and peripheries. This is the main non-historical factor. Considerable social and economic changes in the 19th century, which created the present national status of the Polish society, had strongly influenced the character of regional societies. In the former Prussia and in the western part of the Kingdom of Poland the so-called Prussian way to capitalism became dominant. This implied large agricultural ownership with farm workers (rural working class), which dominated over the individual landholders. In the western part of the former Kingdom of Poland there were also big industrial centres with a high concentration of working class. In my opinion this is the cause of the present strong socialist influences.

Figure 4
Results of the Solidarity movement, 1989

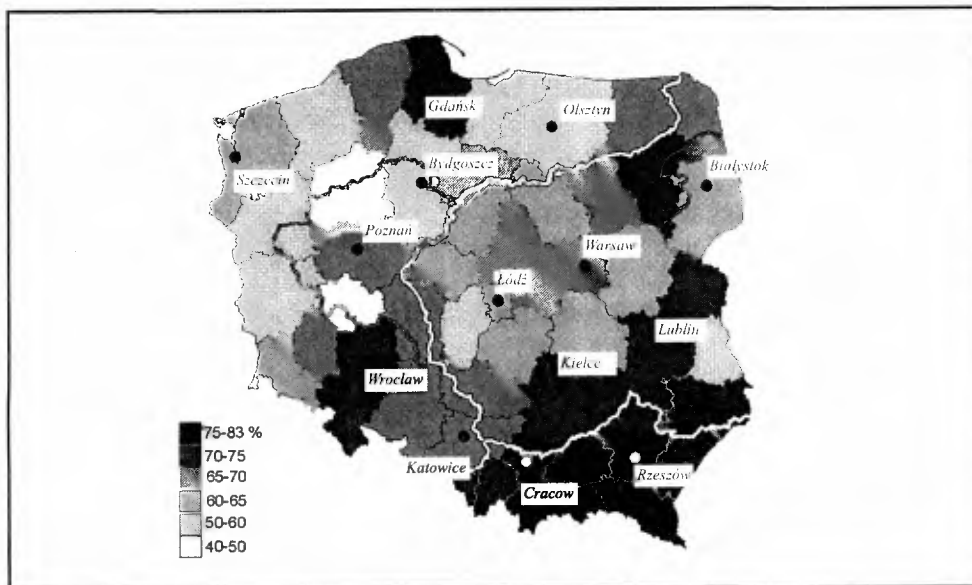
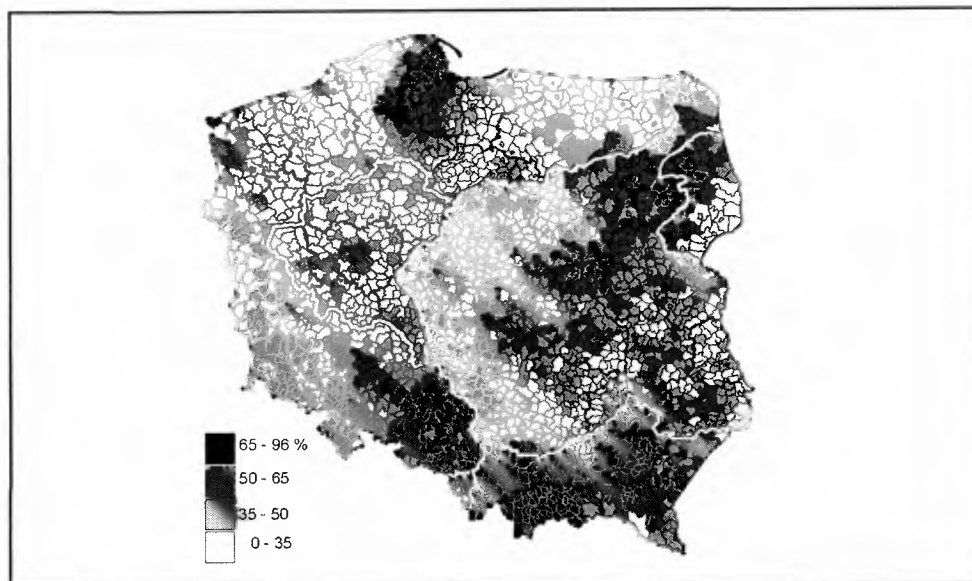


Figure 5
Lech Wałęsa's results in the communes, 1995



The conservative opinion is dominant in Galicia with its traditional individual small agricultural ownership. It is also due to the fact that this region belonged to the conservative Habsburg Monarchy and inside this state enjoyed wide national autonomy. This characteristic was very strong and has survived the recent industrialisation. Conservative character is also shared by regional ethnic groups in present and former borderlands. These groups are similar to the Hungarian ethnic group, the *székely*, whose nature was formed by borderland conditions, and through contacts with different, often antagonistic groups. They are a deeply patriotic and religious people. In Polish territory there are such ethnic groups as the Silesians, Kashubians and Highlanders (*góral*). Also notable is the group of Mazovian small gentry (yeomanry) with its traditions originating in the Middle Ages. (*Figure 3*)

In the case of the Kingdom of Poland a very specific feature is the large number of rural population in opposite to the big agglomerations (Warsaw, Łódź). The social and spatial differentiation in this region is the strongest. It was the land where economic life was freer in the 19th century, whereas political and cultural life was under Russian control. From 1866 to 1905 there were no Polish national institutions, no Polish administration, no official political life. The level of education was very low. This is the main reason why the election turnout in this region is very low.

There were also strong influences of revolutionary movements in industrial centres such as Łódź and Sosnowiec. This is also the reason for the rather strong position of the left-wing parties in this region, especially in its western parts. This is also the cause of the influence of the peasant's party since national solidarity was weak in comparison with Galicia. Society was more independent there than in other regions of Poland. The Russians could rule but they could not change the more developed Polish society. This is the cause of the greatest social differentiation of this region. It is also the cause of local concentrations of conservative voters in areas where conditions were suitable for the emergence of national solidarity. An example is the Mazovian group of yeomanry. The special features of this region are considerable influences on the peasant political option, on the large differentiation between towns and countryside, as well as the very low turnout.

The liberal option in Poland is the strongest in large cities, especially in the western, former Prussian part of Poland. It is due to the more advanced capitalist transformation and urbanisation.

A specific group of voters are the national and religious minorities. Owing to their minority positions in Polish and Catholic society they have an inclination to vote for the Left. A case in point is the Orthodox minorities in the Białystok region (*Figure 10*), although there are also Ukrainian, and Lithuanian ethnic groups, as well as Protestant and Greek Catholic religious groups. Their presence shapes the specific character of the Polish borderlands.

In summary, the greatest impact on the spatial differentiation of political preferences have been the 19th and 20th century partitions of Poland. The second important factor is the differences between countryside and towns (especially big metropolises).

Figure 6
Liberal option results, 1997

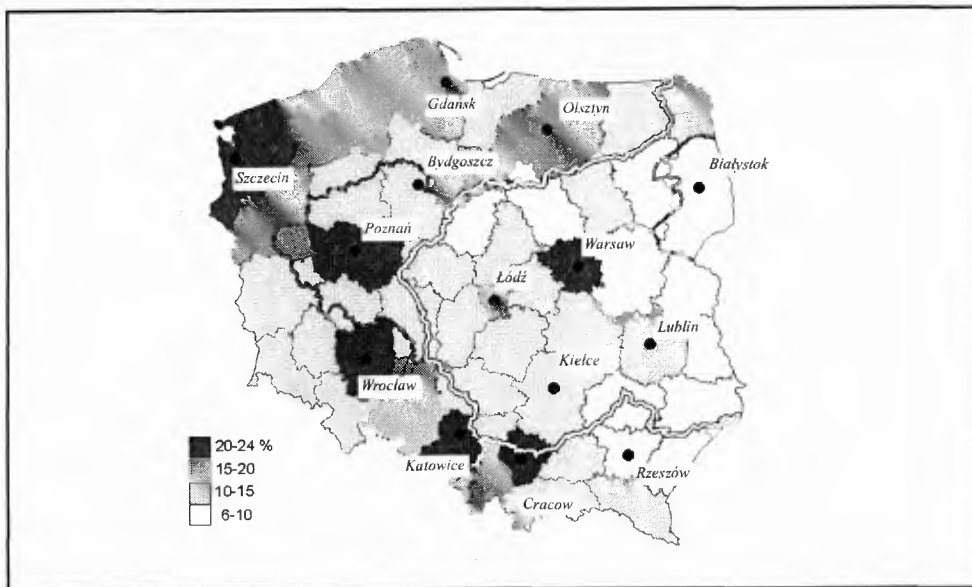


Figure 7
Conservative option results, 1997

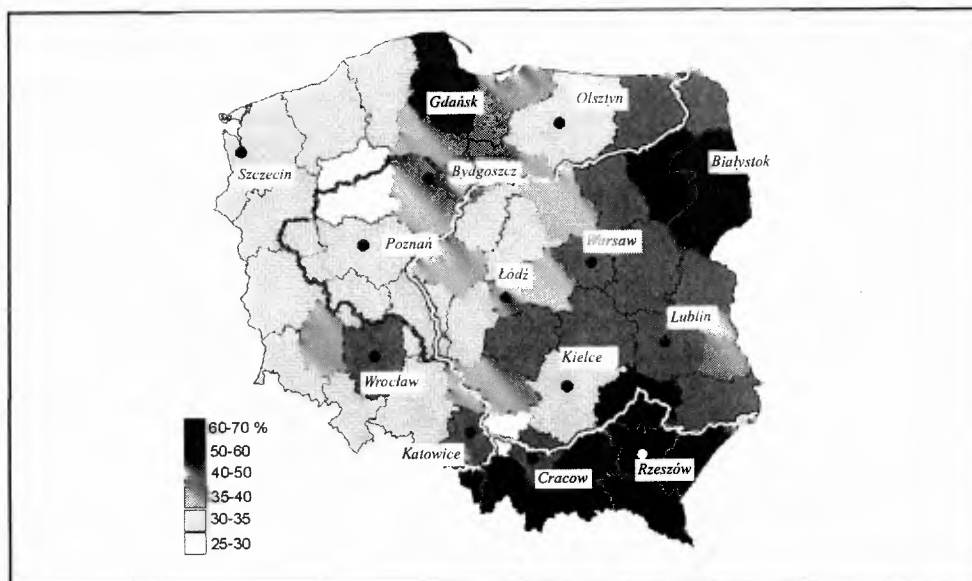


Figure 8
Peasant option results, 1997

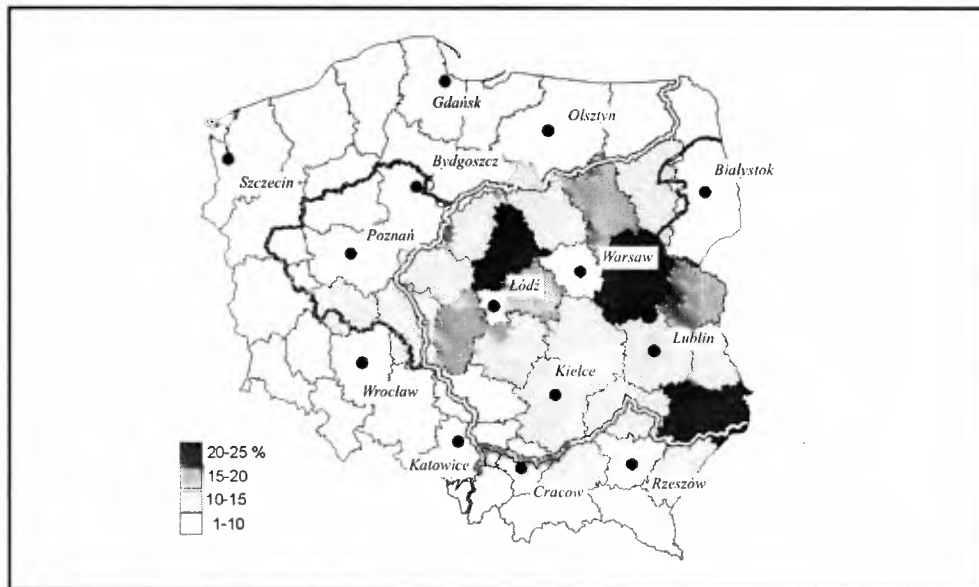


Figure 9
Left-wing option results, 1997

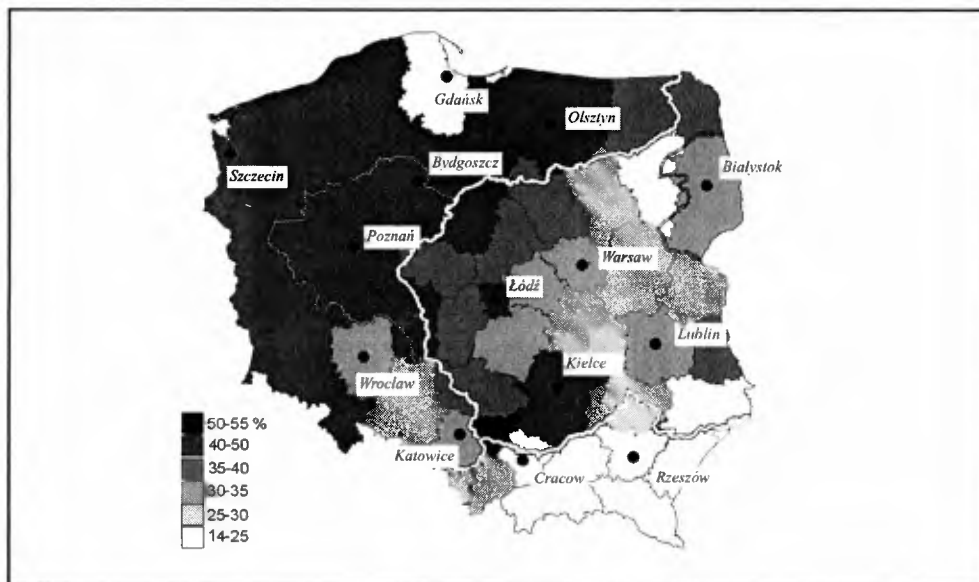


Figure 10
Cultural and electoral geography of Białystok voivodship

