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# A Study of the Impact of Unemployment on Local Elections: The Case of Poland

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is trying to analyse the impact of the unemployment on the voting behaviour in local elections. The study concerns election district no 34 in Poland, which consists of nine counties. So, the distribution of votes to campaign committees in the elections to the regional assembly in 2014 against the background of the unemployment rate were the subjects of the empirical study. For this purpose, the Mann–Whitney U test was applied in order to examine the significance of the unemployment rate on the voting behaviour in the counties of this election district.

## KEYWORDS

*Unemployment; Voting behaviour; Local elections.*

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## 1. Introduction

The determinants of voting behaviours (models and theories of explaining electoral decisions) can be divided into different methodological approaches and criteria. In this field three main concepts might be distinguished, such as: party identification, sociological and rational choice theory (Zarycki 1997). According to the party identification, the voter has the permanent political identity, often inherited in the family. However, there may be periodic disturbances of preferred electoral trends, arising from extraordinary situations. Nevertheless, they are usually short-term alterations. The permanent loosening of party identification may be due to general changes in the social structure.

In the sociological model, the attention of a particular voter is transferred to the group with particular social characteristics. Thus, electoral preferences may be determined by a position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, there is a significant influence of the media on the process of shaping electoral attitudes, including the inconsistency of electoral decisions with the social position. Hence, in the face of unexpected electoral changes, it pays attentions to the function of psychological variables apart from sociological traditions making much of distalnon-political factors (Aiba 2003).

In turn, in the rational choice theory, voters systematically compare and judge the benefits of reaching a particular political option. Hence, they are aimed to reach specific goals. In the process of the voting they take

into consideration: ideological schemes, suggestions of the authorities or opinion leaders (various organizations) as well as opinions which are shaped in the various media. The voter is also analysing and assessing the material situation and the determinants, including the electoral programs or the effects of the policy pursued by the public authorities. Thus, this concept underlines the crucial role of the information access. However, the informative power of the campaign might be constrained due to the interest and the attention of the voters. Therefore, the increased political noise level of the election period might disproportionately excite the interest of the politically informed and attentive (Matthews 2010).

Therefore, it establishes a direct analogy between consumers and voters and between enterprises and political parties. So, the voters seek to maximize the utility of their voting behaviour as well as the parties act to maximize the electoral gains. This concept is based on three fundamental premises (Antunes 2010):

- 1) all decisions of voters and political parties are rational and aimed at a maximization of action's utility;
  - 2) a democratic political system implies a level of consistency that supports predictions concerning the consequences of decisions made by voters and political parties;
  - 3) the democratic system assumes a level of uncertainty, sufficiently important to allow different options.
- Apart from the above concepts of voting behaviour there might be distinguished some others, such as (Dolińska 2009):
- thematic vote, which underlines the connection of the topics discussed in the election campaign with electoral behaviour. The voter does not apply the same measurement to the assessment of the environment or the achievements of the parties in the context of the topics of the campaign. If the party claims that the subject is crucial, then the voters will take them into account more than the other parties;
  - economic choice, in which the voter calculates pros and cons of the potential election. Therefore, these opinions are usually formed in a short time. This process is often determined by the statements of the trusted people, experts etc.;
  - dominant ideology, where the ruling party gains an advantage in the elections, because it may shape the information/topics, the possibility of reducing certain deficiencies or the atmosphere in the present and future socio-economic situation;
  - electoral context, which describes electoral behaviour in the various electoral acts. Hence, not all elections are treated by voters in the same way.

So, if the elections for different representative bodies are conducted at the same time, the voter distributes his votes and undertakes various choices as well as the electoral votes might be diffused to the various groups;

- political marketing as an implementation of marketing tools and concepts to understand, respond to, involve and communicate with the political market in order to achieve the major goal – win enough votes in the elections (Lees-Marshment 2017). In this approach a crucial issue is a segmentation of voters. It includes diverse characteristics which might be grouped into two general categories: demographic and psychographic (Cwalina, Falkowski, Newman 2015).

In the marketing concept some issues, which determine the voting behaviour, are distinguished, such as (Dolińska 2009):

- problems, political activities and electoral issues that are aimed at specific groups of voters;
- social imagery, to identify a typical party or candidate voter;
- feelings, as a perceiving the candidate in an emotional way, within some criteria;

- image of the candidate, his perception and credibility;
- current events in the campaign;
- personal issues of the candidate;
- epistemic (cognitive) problems, determined by the opinions of people who are credible to the candidate's electorate, or openness to new developments on the political scene.

Some studies explain the impact of psychological factors on electoral behavior. It is shown that the voters can support candidates in whom they find similarity in terms of the personality (Marciniak 2013).

It should also be emphasized that the electoral preferences of individuals and, consequently, electoral behavior are not fully autonomous. They may be some relationships result from family ties, loyalty, friendship, sense of duty, and even compassion (Annusewicz 2013).

## **2. Unemployment as an Economic Determinant of the Voting Behavior**

Numerous studies analyse the correlation between the economic situation or management of the country or region and the voting behaviour. Simultaneously, there is no consensus as to whether or not economic conditions actually affect election results (Levernier 1992). A. Leigh claims that Australian voters reward good economic management, but appear to regard the parties as equally capable of governing in every economic situation (2005). L. R. Arriola searched that in 2005 in Ethiopia economic and other sociodemographic factors played a part in determining party choice at the district level (2008). A. T Akarca and A. Tansel revealed that Turkish voters are found to take government's economic results into account, whereas not look back beyond one year. Moreover, they consider the major incumbent party liable for both economic growth and inflation but minor incumbent parties, only for inflation. Simultaneously, they appear to vote strategically during the elections, particularly in the local and the parliamentary, to diffuse power (2006). In turn, J-E. de Neve indicates that the US median voter tends to advance a more liberal policy agenda during the good economic times and turns more conservative when the economic situation deteriorates (2014). Other researches underline that a support for the political left falls during the periods of high unemployment (Markussen 2008).

Simultaneously, some researchers underline, as it was mentioned, the variations between socio-economic issues and voting behaviours in view of the level of the elections. In Canada, a significant differentiation between federal and provincial elections in this field was revealed. It was indicated that levels of subjective class voting were higher in provincial elections than in federal ones. Moreover, this relationship was meaningfully strengthened when some determinants, such as: occupation, income and education were added to the model (McGrane 2007).

Furthermore, there are some researches which analyses the relationships between the voting behaviour and the unemployment. K. K. Charles, M. Stephens Jr argues that voters' labour market activity affects voting through two possible mechanisms: by changing the logistical costs associated with those actions; or by changing people's exposure to political information by virtue of alterations in their leisure time (2011). In turn, M. B. Incantalupo, analysing the national elections in the USA, exposed that job loss near the Election Day significantly affects the possibility of turning out to vote, controlling for various other issues that associate with political activity. The direction of this effect is positive in contexts marked by high and increasing unemployment, while negative in low-unemployment contexts. Furthermore, it is driven by involuntary job, not by leisure time. Therefore, the unemployment favour political mobilization (Incantalupo 2015). Moreover, diverse groups react disparately to economic situation. There is a notion that younger, low-income voters who prefer left-wing parties appear sensitive to high levels or an increase of unemployment. Furthermore, Swedes and Canadians seem particularly concerned with the unemployment rate. Whereas Germans accept higher joblessness if the inflation rate is maintaining on the low level (Andrain, Apter 1995). In any case, in the theory

of economics it is underlined that voters might be sensitive both to an unemployment and to an inflation (Lessmann 1987). However, G. H. Kramer and S. Lepper found that numerous economic indicators had a mixed effect on voting behaviour (Natchez 2017).

In Poland, from the beginning of the economic and political transformation, it is seen a growing importance of the economic issues in the process of voting behaviour. Simultaneously, it contributed to the polarization of views, in which some people expect a welfare state economy, but the other think differently (Hajdar 2012). K. Hajdar revealed that in Poland during the parliamentary elections the party results did not strongly correlate with the level of the unemployment (2012). However, some other issues and their interactions should be included. In turn, J. Hausner and A. Sokołowski found the influence of an unemployment on the election results between 1993 and 2001 in Poland. This determinant strengthened left-wing parties, while right-wing ones were weakened (2002). Furthermore, A. Turska-Kawa studied that in Poland economic determinant are more important for the people who vote for the biggest parties (Law and Justice, Civic Platform), and less significant for local electoral committees, which could appeal to a quality of life (2015). Whereas K. Tybuchowska-Hartlińska indicates that in Poland regardless of any criterion (electorate of the party or ideological view) about three fourth of the voters declare taking into account the economic situation of the country (2013).

### 3. Voting Behaviour in Local Elections in the Election District No 34 in Poland Against the Background of the Unemployment

In Poland, election district no 34 is situated in the Warmia and Mazury voivodeship. It consists of city with the county status Elbląg and other eight counties: Braniewo County, Działdowo County, Elbląg County, Iława County, Nowe Miasto County, Ostróda County, Bartoszyce County and Lidzbark County. In 2014 in the elections to the regional assembly the majority of the votes were distributed among four nationwide campaign committees: Polish People's Party (PSL), Civic Platform (PO), Law and Justice (PiS) and Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). In these counties, the local committees did not receive more than 10% of votes together (table 1). In 2014, within these counties the highest unemployment rate was in Braniewo County, where Polish People's Party (PSL) received the largest portion of votes (46,52%). In turn, in 2014 in County Iława, in which was the lowest unemployment rate in this district, Polish People's Party also obtained the largest support - 48,64% of the votes. Simultaneously, this party (PSL) won in the most of the counties of the analysed election district (table 1).

To examine the significance of unemployment rate on the results of this voting, all counties of the election district no 34 have been divided into two groups:

- 1) the first group, in which the value of the analyzed variable was higher than the average in the whole district - high unemployment;
- 2) the second group, in which the value of the analyzed variable was lower than the average in the whole district - low unemployment.

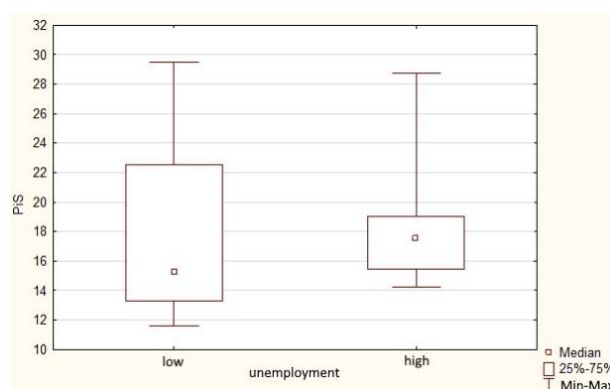
**Table 1.** Distribution of votes within campaign committees in the elections to the regional assembly in district no 34 in Poland in 2019 against the background of the unemployment rates (%)

County	Unemployment rate (%)	Distribution of votes to campaign committees (%)				
		Law and Justice (PiS)	Civic Platform (PO)	Polish People's Party (PSL)	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	Other
City of Elbląg	15.3	29.50	34.91	14.35	11.66	9.58

Braniewo County	29.0	15.42	19.01	46.52	11.95	7.10
Działdowo County	23.3	19.05	16.42	51.57	5.25	7.71
Elbląg County	26.0	17.52	32.39	33.16	8.90	8.02
Ława County	8.9	14.95	19.87	48.64	8.73	7.81
Nowe Miasto County	19.3	15.53	12.24	66.04	2.96	3.23
Ostróda County	20.4	11.62	24.65	46.98	9.40	7.36
Bartoszyce County	27.7	28.73	33.30	21.44	7.72	8.81
Lidzbark County	24.8	14.26	51.33	19.95	5.01	9.45

Then, a comparative analysis was conducted, whether or not the election results in a statistically significant way differed between two defined groups of the counties. The results were presented on the figures. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, it was verified whether or not differences in distributions of the results differed in a statistically significant way in both groups, i.e. with high and low unemployment.

Furthermore, in the manner described above, it was studied whether or not the defined groups differed in terms of percentage of votes casted for each campaign committee and the fact that the majority of votes casted for one party was higher than 2 percentage points over the votes casted for the other committee.



**Figure 1.** The percentage of votes casted for PIS in counties with low and high unemployment of election district no 34 in regional assembly elections in Poland in 2019

Hence, in case of the distributions of votes for PiS (sample statistic=0.61237, p value=0.555), PO (sample statistic=0.6134, p value=0.5427), PSL (sample statistic=0.6754, p value=0.54029) and SLD (sample statistic=0.12247, p value=0.987) in the counties of the election district no 34 in Poland during the elections to the regional assembly in 2014 the results of Mann-Whitney U tests showed that counties with high and low unemployment did not differ because of the votes casted for the analysed parties.

Moreover, the results of Mann-Whitney U test for the analysis of the advantage of the parties were as follows:

- advantage of PSL over PIS: sample statistic= 9.50, p value=0.9047;
  - advantage of PO over PIS: sample statistic=6.00, p value=0.4127;
  - advantage of PO over PIS: sample statistic=9.00, p value=0.9050.
- Therefore, in each case the differences were statistically insignificant.

#### 4. Conclusion

There are lots of researches which present the determinants of voting behaviour, including socio-economic issues, particularly an unemployment. Some of them indicate different impact of these factors and its strength. It depends on the country, the society or the level of the elections. In Poland there are also some analyses which

characterize interactions between the voting behaviour and the situation on the labour market. The scientists especially verify the influence of the unemployment rate.

In this paper it was not found an impact of the unemployment rate on the election results to the regional assembly in the election district no 34 in Poland in 2014. In most of the counties the largest portion of the votes received the Polish People's Party. It was both in the counties with the lowest and the highest unemployment rate. The unemployment rate also did not affect better performance of individual parties. Hence, there were other crucial determinant of the voting behaviour in this district. It should be mentioned that the four nationwide campaign committees received more than 90% of the votes. Hence, in 2019 local campaign committees did not play a significant role in the elections to the regional assembly there.

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