

***Polish Voters 2005:
Volatility at Its Extreme or a Brave New World of Stabilization***

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I Introduction

Polish voters do not get a good press. Both journalists and the academia stress electoral behaviour instability in Poland or rather a peculiar stability. Parliamentary elections have never returned incumbents as victors, governing parties happen not to pass the electoral threshold, volatility rate is the highest in the region. Moreover, the subsequent elections took place according to the same electoral law only once. The result is an unstable party system, parties which are weakly rooted in the electorate, disorganized parliament, hardly predictable politics. On the other hand, there is a striking regularity in Polish electoral behaviour. The major competition is between post-communist and post-Solidarity blocks whose core electorates are rather stable. This brought Bakke and Sitter to the assessment that “despite low organizational stability on the right, Poland’s blocs have perhaps been the most stable in the region, and coalition-building has been driven by questions about how to deal with the communist past.” (Bakke, Sitter 2005: 248).

This article summarizes first the research on electoral behaviour in Poland referring to three key theories explaining conspicuous instability and underlying continuities in the Polish elections 1990-2001. Having sketched this background I analyze last parliamentary elections arguing that in the light of the three theories the 2005 elections were dissimilar to the last decade developments. Whereas they do prove an immanent instability in Polish voters’ behaviour they suggest a substantial change in terms of the alleged dominating post-communist vs. post-Solidarity cleavage. Namely, in 2005 in the context of the demise of the post-communist party the principal competition between two post-Solidarity parties was organized around socio-economic issues. Therefore, for the first time after 1989 structural characteristics of the voters seemed to play an important role and the attitude towards the past was marginalized as a mobilizing issue.

Before I start a methodological reservation has to be made. Most of conclusions concerning Polish voters in the period 1993-2001 are based on national electoral surveys data (or comparable broadly designed surveys) but 2005 discussion draws from public opinion polls, especially exit polls. Their reliability may be obviously questioned; alas Polish General Electoral Survey results were not available at the time of writing this article.

II Polish voters 1990-2001

1. Unimportant structural differentiation

If there is anything uncontroversial about Polish elections after 1989 it is a conclusion that structural characteristics have played a marginal role in the electoral behaviour. It did not come as a surprise that after a half-century long communist policy of destructurization parties could not be well rooted in established social groups. It was a deliberate attempt to eradicate or at least invalidate all social differences that were not manageable by the communist state. No doubt then, that the early post-communist society was characterized by “an unprecedented degree of social destructuring, volatility and fluidity.” (Mair 1998: 178). Therefore, new electorates did not follow, non-existent, structured sets of partisan preferences but they were rather open for conquest and welcoming partisan entrepreneurs offers.

Nevertheless, it was widely awaited that when the newly marketized societies would start to differentiate economically and socially, new party allegiances would arise soon. This generally did not happen in Poland. The growth of social distances and their reconfiguration into new hierarchies was striking but it was not reflected in the electoral behaviour.

It is quite symptomatic that summarizing results of an early survey conducted during the campaign before the first free parliamentary elections (1991) its author concluded: “Socio-demographic factors play certain role in the explanation of individuals’ positions on the

[political orientations] scales. [emphasis added].” (Raciborski 1997: 192). Raciborski calls it “natural” and “expected” despite the acknowledged deconstructurization of late communism and speaks about a “strong tendency to crystallize ideological orientations along axes defined, among others, by status differences.” (203). In the light of later surveys the result obtained by Raciborski may be put down to the fact that he examined not electorates but reconstructed ideological orientations. More than a half of each orientation representatives were unlikely voters. No doubt then that in the conclusions to his book the author says that the usefulness of the “social-structural paradigm” for the explanation of the election results is low (265).

The latter opinion was confirmed by the surveys conducted after 1995 and 2000 presidential as well as 1997 and 2001 parliamentary elections. In the case of Wałęsa vs. Kwaśniewski 1995 competition, very close and mobilizing contest (the highest turnout after 1989) characteristics like the income or unemployed status did not correlate with voting for any of the two candidates. There was rather a weak correlation of the place of residence (Beta coefficient -0.105), education (-0.101), age (-0.096) and gender (-0.078) in the case of Kwaśniewski and education (0.105) in the case of Wałęsa. Nevertheless, what did distinguish the two electorates was the religiosity factor: Kwaśniewski -0.214 and Wałęsa 0.232 (Jasiewicz 2002: 83).

Similarly, regression analysis showed that neither the income, nor the unemployment or education did not differentiate the electorates of the two major parties (the Democratic Left Alliance - SLD and the Solidarity Electoral Action - AWS) in 1997 elections. Out of structural variables it was only the place of residence and education for the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and education for the Freedom Union that correlated with the voting for respective parties. It was the religiosity again that explained voting for the AWS, the SLD but also for the smaller right-wing ROP and left-wing Labor Union most.

There was also no relationship between a declared left/right identity and structural characteristics of the individual. Several surveys analyzed by Szawiel showed that in the period 1992-2001 only minor differences could be noticed and most Poles seen as members of structurally singled out categories clung to the center (average self-placement on the left-right 1-10 scale fluctuated between 5,06 in 2001 and 6,25 in 1997). What did mean in the self-placement was the religiosity and the attitude toward the *ancien regime* expressed by the membership in the communist party (PZPR) or Solidarity (Grabowska, Szawiel 2001: 228-230; Szawiel 2002: 185-187).

Table 1. Self-placement on the left-right (1-10) scale

Category	1992	1993	1994	1995a	1995b	1997	2001
Unskilled laborer	5.78	6.05	5.34	5.86	5.90	5.77	5.43
Intelligentsia	5.88	5.63	5.78	5.93	5.92	*	*
Owners	6.23	6.42	6.15	6.43	6.48	*	*
Farmers	6.10	5.80	5.71	6.16	6.41	6.17	5.16
Managers	*	*	*	*	*	5.48	5.52
PZPR member	*	5.14	*	4.65	*	4.64	3.76
Solidarity member	*	5.91	*	6.47	*	6.67	5.92
Regular religious practices	6.70	6.64	6.33	6.99	7.34	7.73	6.68
Non-practicing religion	5.52	5.30	5.13	5.49	5.28	5.24	4.61

Source: adapted from Szawiel 2002: 186-187; Grabowska, Szawiel 2001: 230-231.

Even though the data in the table 1 shows continuity of the weak influence of structural and strong identity-based characteristics on the left-right scale some changes may

be noticed in 2000 and 2001 elections. In the marginal categories appeared meaningful deviations from the decade-long established patterns. The analysis of correlations at the individual level showed that for the first time after 1989 the income almost linearly positively correlated with voting for Andrzej Olechowski in 2000 presidential elections (0,085) as well as the Civic Platform (PO) in 2001 (0.104) and negatively with voting for the Self-Defense (-0.085) and the League of Polish Families (LPR) in 2001 (-0.079). All the three parties (and Olechowski as well) represented a deliberate attempt to escape the main field of the 1990s competition (post-communist left vs. post-Solidarity right; see below) and address a niche electorate for whom economy was maybe not the most important but definitely more involving than the conflicts of the first decade of democracy in Poland (Grabowska 2002: 129-145).

2. Identity: post-communist cleavage

Weak correlations between a position in the social structure and voting behavior, especially if compared to factors like the religiosity made researchers to turn to the party identification paradigm (Bartolini, Mair 1990). Most interesting version of this approach represents Grabowska and her post-communist cleavage theory (Grabowska 2004).

Drawing on Lipset and Rokkan she argues that the experience of communism and its collapse was comparable to the classic European revolutions in its cleavage-making capacity (Lipset, Rokkan 1967). A half-century socialization on the one hand and a highly engaging experience of the resistance against communism resulted in forming two clear-cut identities: one of them characterized those who supported the communist rule and the other its opponents. The 1989 elections, though only partly free, became a referendum for or against communists and gave an organizational framework for the emerging cleavage. Being anti-communist meant support for the Solidarity candidates, being pro-government meant voting for the PZPR and its allies. This was the founding election for the Polish democracy, a junction point that made two identities to crystallize. Therefore, the major conflict observable on the political scene of the 1990s – post-communists vs. post-Solidarity concerned not only a day-to-day party politics but it was deeply rooted in the electorates' identities.

There are several indicators supporting this thesis. The 1989 vote was a fairly good predictor of the electoral choice in 2001. 47% of those who admitted that they had voted for the Solidarity in 1989 voted post-Solidarity parties in 2001 (as opposed to 28% for the SLD) and 82% of 1989 pro-government voters voted for the SLD in 2001 (and only 1% for the post-Solidarity parties in 2001). In 2000 presidential elections Kwaśniewski gathered 93% of the 1989 pro-government voters (but also 51% of the Solidarity voters). It is worth stressing that this correlation rather increased than decreased as time went by. Whereas only one fourth of those voting for the PZPR and its allies voted for Cimoszewicz in 1990, Kwaśniewski won 90% of their votes in 1995 and 93% five years later. Similarly, 65% of the pro-government electorate voted for the SLD in 1991 but it was 75% in 1997 and 83% in 2001 (Grabowska 2004: 168-169).

This tendency did not necessarily apply to the post-Solidarity voters. The obvious reason was an organizational implosion of the Solidarity movement and the disorientation of voters. Nevertheless, post-Solidarity candidates succeeded to collect 44% of the 1989 Solidarity voters in the first tier of 1995 elections, 53% in the 1997 Sejm elections, 37% in the 2000 presidential elections and 47% in the 2001 parliamentary vote (Grabowska 2004: 166-169). Despite this, on the individual level, if we include only the previous voting record (and the religiosity) into the regression equation the probability of voting for the AWS in 1997 for stable post-Solidarity voters is 0.95. It is 0.93 for SLD voters in 1997 (relationship to the Church and the region of residence included) and 0.97 in 2001.

These results show that electorates-parties relationships are multifaceted even in the party identification paradigm. Identities are most important but electorates happen to switch between blocks and are open for seductive voices of electoral entrepreneurs (Sartori 1990: 179). Party leaders fish for votes mostly on their own cleavage side but those more creative happen to be successful in convincing even representatives of the enemy side. Nevertheless, it is well argued, that the two blocks or “lanes” of electoral behavior developed in post-1989 Poland. The post-communists succeeded in preserving a vast majority of the *ancien regime* supporters offering to them a coherent post-communist identity. Post-Solidarity parties lost almost a half of the initial pool of votes due to intra-block conflicts but at the same time they were able to keep an identity distinct from post-communists and third parties like the PSL or the Self-Defense.

The process of 1989 voters transformation into electorates with the distinct identities may be deciphered from the right-left self-placement changes. Whereas in 1993 the difference between the self-placement of former PZPR members and those who did not belong to the communist party was 0.72 point on the 1-10 point scale (both clung to the center), in 1995 it was 1.59, in 1997 1.58 and in 2001 1.51. Between 1993 and 2001 an average ex-PZPR follower moved sharply to the left (by 1.38 points) and became a true left-winger at least in his/her declarations (3.76). A similar phenomenon took place on the right where the difference between the 1981 members of Solidarity and non-members rose from 0.21 in 1993 to 0.72 in 1997. This tendency was curbed by the 2001 SLD landslide which moved the median voter to the left. The difference between the post-communists and the rest of voters is even more distinctive if the former are defined as the 1989 pro-government voters. They differed in 1995 from those who did not vote for the PZPR in 1989 by 2.3 points, in 1997 by 2.1 and by 2.01 in 2001 (Szawiel 2002: 188-190).

These left-right identities translated into the support for respective parties. Self-placement of the SLD voters fluctuated from 3.52 in 1991 to 3.21 in 1995 and 3.3 in 2001 and the correlation between left-wing identity and voting for SLD was extremely strong (e.g. in 1997 the Beta coefficient was -0.59 as compared to religiosity -0.17 , the next most correlated) (Szawiel 2002: 197; Szawiel 1999: 144). The post-Solidarity parties voters placed themselves on the left-right scale at 6.16-7.01 in 1991 (five different parties included), 6.90-7.99 in 1995 (13 parties included) and 6.88-7.65 in 2001 (five parties) (Szawiel 2002: 197). The correlation between being a right-winger and choosing a post-Solidarity party was almost as strong as in the mirror case of SLD (in 1997 the Beta coefficient was -0.49 as compared to religiosity -0.15 , again the next most correlated) (Szawiel 1999: 145).

Since the basis for the post-communist cleavage was the communist past: being for or against the communist regime economic issues did not differentiate electorates. The issues that did divide both parties and voters could be pigeonholed as ideological. They were integrated into the dominant post-communist cleavage since they either concerned the past or religion. As the struggle against the Catholic Church and religion was a declared priority of communists till the late 1970s it was understandable that the pro-government voters were socialized into a distrust for the Church and religion and for the opposition the Church was a safe heaven and the locus of allegiance. No doubt than, that on the abortion issue the SLD voters in 1997 chose 1.52 and AWS voters 5.12 (where 0 is “only woman decides” and 10 is “banned without exceptions”). As far as the Church influence on the public sphere is concerned the SLD 1997 voters chose 0.8 and the AWS 4.31 (where 0 is “strict separation” and 10 “major influence”). The same question asked in 2001 returned 1.11 for the SLD, 1.81 for the PSL, 2.12 for the Law and Justice (PiS), 2.3 for the Self-Defense, 2.37 for the PO, 5.23 for the LPR. Similarly divisive was the issue of de-communization *i.e.* whether members of the communist nomenklatura should have the same rights to serve as public officials (grade 0) or they should be banned from public offices (grade 10). The results were 3.68 for the SLD,

5.0 for the PSL, 5.35 for the Self-Defense, 6.18 for the PiS and the PO, 6.63 for the LPR. Just for the sake of comparison the issue of social services (full provision by the state vs. “people should take care of themselves”): the 1997 SLD voters 2.38, the AWS voters 2.11, the Freedom Union (UW) 3.71 (extreme) and the 2001 SLD voters 1.79, the LPR voters 1.46, the Self-Defense voters 1.96, the PiS voters 2.13, the PO voters 2.62, the UW voters 2.66 (again extreme) (Szawiel 2002: 203-204; Markowski 2002: 160, 172-173).

The post-communist cleavage theory is most convincing explanation of post-1989 Polish electoral behavior. It explains well what filled the vacuum the communist destructurization left and why the ideological difference were that divisive. On the other hand if one discerns a massive swing between the two blocks in 1997, 2001 and 2005 she has to admit that the theory promises more than it can deliver.

3. Regional political culture

A conspicuous regional differentiation in voting behavior had already been noticed in the 1989 partly-free elections. Żukowski based on official results, the only available at that time, made an ecological analysis suggesting that the region of residence played a major role in the support for the Solidarity and PZPR candidates (Żukowski 1991: 9-16). It was explainable in terms of historical, pre-war, traditions, religiosity (pro-Solidarity areas had a higher ratio of priests *per capita* and more intensive religious practices and vice versa), communist party penetration (measured as ratio of the party members to the whole population), traditions of the anti-communist resistance (measured as voter abstention, voting against party recommendations, ratio of the Solidarity members to all employed) (Bartkowski 2003: 315-316). These hypotheses were supported by newer and more extensive research stemming from political culture and neoinstitutionalist paradigms as well as survey data.

They hint that there can be singled three distinctive voting regions out. Galicia (the part of Poland that belonged to the Habsburg empire before 1918) consistently supported Solidarity and post-Solidarity right-wing parties. In 1989 93.3% of voters rejected here the only-for-communists national list and the most popular Solidarity candidate in the free elections for Senate received 78.1% of votes. In the second tiers of presidential elections Wałęsa got in Galicia 83.2% in 1990 and 64.8% in 1995. The AWS result in 1997 elections in Galicia was 50.1% as opposed to 13.1% for the SLD (Bartkowski 2003: 316, 322). Moreover, factor analyses proved that there is a correlation on individual level between Galicia residence and voting for the right and non-voting for the SLD. It was valid for the 1995 presidential elections (vote for Wałęsa), the 1997 Sejm elections, the 2000 presidential elections (vote for Krzaklewski) (Grabowska 2002: 121; Jasiewicz 2002: 87; Jasiewicz 1999: 161).

Another distinctive voting region were so called Regained Lands *i.e.* northern and western areas which Poland received after World War II as a compensation for eastern territories annexed to the Soviet Union. Due to their specific socio-economic composition as well as characteristic cultural tradition the Regained Lands were a communist and post-communist stronghold. They did not reject the national list in 1989 (only 25.3% voters did), they did not vote for Wałęsa in 1990 as readily as the rest of Poland (62% in favour), they voted for Kwaśniewski in 1995 (64%) and for SLD in 1997 (30.8%) (Bartkowski 2003: 322). This simple and elegant picture is disrupted by a few factors intervening since the late 1990s. First, there was either no statistical correlation between the Regained Lands residence and voting for the left or it was weak. Second, these were also areas where populist “third parties” (Stan Tymiński and his party in 1990-1991 and Self-Defense later on) might count on votes and competed successfully with SLD (Żukowski 1991a). Third, Andrzej Olechowski received here a decent share of votes in 2000 and in 2001 there was a very strong correlation between voting for PO and the Regained Lands residence. Moreover, in the EU accession referendum

these areas voted for the EU most enthusiastically (Grabowska 2002: 135; Markowski, Tucker 2005).

A similar pattern of voting behavior showed areas that were under Prussian rule before 1918 composed of rather dissimilar historical regions of Wielkopolska and Pomerania. Voters from this region behaved similarly to the residents of the Regained Lands in 1989, 1990, 1995, 1997 and 2001. The difficulty with putting Wielkopolska-Pomerania and the Regained Lands under the same rubric is however methodological. In many surveys the region is divided at least into two parts since Pomerania shows much stronger pro-Solidarity affiliations (especially areas immediately around Gdańsk). Even worse, there are surveys which use contemporary administrative borders for respondents categorization which is acceptable but blurs the distinctions between Wielkopolska and the Regained Lands as the administrative units often combine parts of both (Bartkowski 2003: 317-327).

The least distinctive out of the major voting regions is the former Russian province Polish Kingdom (established after the 1815 Vienna Congress and called in Polish Kongresówka). The breakdown of votes here is most similar to the all-Polish results with a slightly better showing of the SLD and the PSL. The latter however may be a result of a smaller urbanization which is the best predictor of the PSL vote.

A region of residence appears also in regression equations when individual level correlations are analyzed. Galicia residence constantly correlates with voting for the post-Solidarity right and former Prussian lands residence correlated positively with voting for the SLD in 1997 and negatively with voting for the AWS in 1997. In 2001 it was Kongresówka residence that correlated positively with the SLD support and negatively with the Self-Defense and the Regained Lands correlated with voting for the PO (Grabowska 2002: 120-129).

The thesis on the pre-1918 political culture durability expressed in the regional differences is based on the ecological analyses. It is confirmed however by the research of so called border effect *i.e.* a comparison of pairs of communes/wards that were on two sides of the pre-1918 or pre-war state borders (Bartkowski 330). Bartkowski's study shows a stable difference between electoral behaviors of the three major electoral regions. In the case of Wielkopolska-Pomerania vs. Kongresówka and Wielkopolska-Pomerania vs. Regained Lands it applies mostly to the turnout which is systematically higher in Wielkopolska-Pomerania (by 1.76-7.37 percentage points). Since all these regions rather preferred the post-communists than the post-Solidarity right party preferences do not differentiate border communes (Bartkowski 2003: 327-334).

The border effect in this respect is most visible if Galicia and Kongresówka are compared. There are abrupt changes in neighboring communes in the support for the SLD (1990-1997), the Solidarity/AWS (1990-1997), Lech Wałęsa (1990 and 1995) and Marian Krzaklewski (2000). Perhaps a most telling example is a tiny commune of Kocmyrzów-Luborzyca off Kraków. Three out of its ten wards were part of Galicia and in the 1990s the turnout there was higher by 7.8% on average, Lech Wałęsa received 13.8% votes more on average, in 1997 AWS got two times more votes there than in Kongresówka wards (Bartkowski 2003: 334).

The theory on deep pre-1918 roots of the Polish voting behavior is elegant and tempting. The individual level analyses show however that it may be accepted only with some reservations. Political culture of the pre-1918 regions does exist but obviously it acts in conjunction with other factors. The most important of them is religiosity. Galicia is generally the most religious part of Poland and the Regained Lands the least and from the European comparisons we know well that the religion is in many countries the single most important predictor of voting behavior (Knutson 2004). It would be spurious to deliberate which factor, religion or regional political culture, was more important as they go together. The individual

level analyses show however that if they do not the regional pattern is not that distinctive. (Grabowska 2002: 120-129).

The three above described approaches to the explanation of the Polish voting behavior suggested astounding stability below the surface of permanent party brands and electorate volatility. Poles voted along the major post-communists left vs. post-Solidarity right cleavage that was organized around the pre-1989 identities and correlated with the religiosity and region of residence. Structural characteristics of voters and economic voting played a negligible role. This story is coherent and well-argued but unfortunately does not explain why such big fluctuations have taken place during recent two parliamentary elections.

Volatility between the blocks in 2001 oscillated in the region 20% (depending on the blocks definition) (Markowski, Czeńnik 2002: 25-27; Czeńnik, Markowski 2004: 39-45; Bartolini, Mair 1990: 41-42) and in 2005 it was more than 30% (depending on the blocks definition). Survey data showed that whereas in 1997 more than 86% of the 1993 right-wing voters voted for the AWS or ROP only 47% of the 1997 right-wing voters were loyal in 2001. Moreover, 32% of the AWS voters chose the SLD in 2001 (Markowski, Czeńnik 2002: 38-47). Similarly, according to exit-polls the SLD managed to convince only 43% of its 2001 voters in 2005 elections and 30% of its previous electorate preferred PiS, PO or LPR (*Rzeczpospolita* 26 September 2005). This means that either the cleavage has thawed or the theory explains less than it promises. Anyway, in order to understand the 2005 electoral change we need to dig deeper.

III 2005 elections: (un)expected earthquake

The 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections were an expected surprise. The opinion polls were foretelling a gigantic drop in the SLD votes and a near-absolute majority result of two major post-Solidarity parties but the final outcome of the electoral marathon still came as a surprise.

Table 2 Results of parliamentary elections 2005 and 2001

Party	2005 elections votes		2001 elections votes	
	percentage	number	percentage	number
PiS	26.99	3,185,714	9.50	1,236,787
PO	24.14	2,849,259	12.68	1,651,099
Self-Defense	11.41	1,347,355	10.20	1,327,074
SLD	11.31	1,335,257	41.04	5,342,519
LPR	7.97	940,762	7.87	1,025,148
PSL	6.96	821,656	8.98	1,168,659
SdPI	3.89	459,380	n/a	n/a
PD (Freedom Union in 2001)	2.45	289,272	3.10	404,074

Source: State Electoral Commission site www.pkw.gov.pl

The results were unusual by several measures. First, the decline in votes of the ruling party was four-fold which was perhaps comparable to the rump AWS results in 2001 but still it was the worst result of the SLD ever. Second, despite the left degeneration it was the mainstream right who took the advantage and not two populist parties building their position on the critique of the entire establishment. Third, the pendulum went right very far giving a comfortable majority to the expected right-wing coalition. Fourth, the winner turned out to be the PiS even though the Civic Platform led in the opinion polls during the whole campaign.

Fifth, parliamentary and presidential elections returned the same winner: the Law and Justice and Lech Kaczyński, one of its twin leaders. It destroyed not only an SLD strategy behind turning 2005 elections into a marathon but also created an unusual situation conducive to the two-headed executive cooperation.

1. Social structure matters

A brief look at the structural characteristics of the electorates showed even more peculiarities. Whereas the PiS followed the long-established, described above pattern of the weak relationship between voting behavior and social structure position, the PO strengthened the 2000 and 2001 trend and became a party of the better-off. The PiS caught its electorate in all social categories equally, resembling both the SLD and the AWS of their hay days. The Civic Platform however was greatly over-represented among well-educated, metropolitan and younger voters. It beat the PiS in the category of voters with a BA degree or higher 36% to 26% and lost in the village inhabitants category 15% to 23 to the PiS and even the Self-Defence. The latter party was a mirror image of the PO. Its supporters lived in villages and small towns and were uneducated (among people with the primary education the Self-Defense won 24% and among people with a degree 4%). The rump SLD became a party of the older, urban and fairly well-educated voters. In the oldest age group (60+) the SLD lost only to the PiS winning 17% votes. An elderly electorate has also got the LPR but their voters have mostly the primary or vocational education and live in villages. The PSL remained a village party but even in its bastion it arrived as the fourth losing even to the Civic Platform (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 27 September 2005).

These structural characteristics prompt a few explanations of the radically atypical result of the 2005 elections and suggest a major change in the electoral behavior. In order to understand them we have to avail ourselves of pre-election public opinion surveys and ecological analysis since they supplement the modest exit poll data. Having said this one needs to remind that this is a virtue of necessity and there is a methodological gap between the theories presented in the first part of this article and the speculations hither from.

2. Cleavage thaws, SLD sinks

The post-communist cleavage theory was already called into question after the 2001 elections (Markowski 2002: 38-39, 47). A huge swing between blocks meant that either the cleavage had been losing its power or it explained only the truly committed voters behavior. These reservations were strengthened in 2005. Even though the PiS and the PO ran on a strongly anti-communist, anti-SLD and clearly right-wing ticket 15% of the 2001 SLD voters chose the PO and 13% the PiS. It was only 9% who voted for the Polish Social Democracy (SdPI) which was created as a post-communist but not corrupted alternative for the SLD electorate (*Rzeczpospolita* 26 September 2006). We do not know the previous voting record of the disloyal SLD voters but we may assume that they were the ones attracted in 2001. But this means that there is a huge group of the electorate (10-15%) switching from the right to the left and back not paying attention to the alleged cleavage. Moreover, even if we add the SLD and the SdPI results, take into consideration those SLD voters who have switched to the PSL (4%) or followed a few post-communist politicians and chose the Democratic Party (3%) it is still much less than the 1997 SLD result. The party allegiance then among the post-communist voters is weaker than one could expect based on the cleavage thesis.

Those who stayed with the SLD are the true-red from the pages of Grabowska's books. They were most probably nomenklatura members themselves (they are older than average, with average and higher than average income and better educated) and if asked "Why are you going to vote for the SLD" they answer most often: "I've always supported

them” (this is a good reason only for the SLD and PSL electorates), “They performed well” and “Because of political roots” (again, SLD voters share it with the PSL) (Motywacje wyborcze 2005: 3).

Even more light is shed on the SLD electorate by a massive change in the positions it takes on focal political issues. Whereas in 2001 the SLD voters strongly opposed a flat rate for the income tax (a flagship issue of Polish liberals raised by the Freedom Union and wholeheartedly supported by the PO leaders) in 2005 they were most convinced liberals (the Democratic Party excluding). The ratio of flat rate enthusiasts to progressive tax followers was 11:82 in 2001 and 25:63 (in percentage points). The SdPI electorate stance was similar and located both to the right of the Civic Platform if you consider the progressive taxation a part of a leftist credo. An analogous pattern may be noticed when the issue “the state or citizens themselves should take care of social services provision” is concerned. In 2001 the SLD electorate was the most statist together with the Self-Defence and the PSL (92:5 ratio). In 2005 it was relatively as liberal as the Civic Platform (79:14 ratio) with the stable median voter preferences. When asked how to fight the crime a 2001 SLD voter answered exactly like the PiS: “you have to be tough” and in 2005 he/she was the most lenient among all electorates (the two results are not wholly comparable however, since the 2001 question included the death penalty as an example of tough policy and in the case of 2005 it was a restriction of citizen rights) (Potencjalne elektoraty 2005: 16-17).

However, if one takes the median SLD voter and not the breakdown of self-placement on the issue scales the changes are less spectacular which seems to suggest that the internal differentiation of the SLD electorate is vast and it is not the economy that keeps the SLD together. An argument in favor of this thesis is that the SLD is the party with the biggest gap between voters self-placement and their assessment of the party position on the issues scales. It is almost two points on a 7-point scale in the case of privatization, almost 1.5 when social services provision is concerned and one point when the flat rate tax. As one may expect the SLD voters are most coherent when it comes to the involvement of the Church in politics (93:2) and the opposition against the decomunization, though 32% of the SLD voters supports the *Berfusverbot* for the former nomenklatura. The above analysis suggests that the SLD lost its “social” electorate to whom it owed its successes after 1993. “Social” voters perceived SLD as the defender against the “predatory capitalism” and they were disappointed and outraged by the Miller and Belka governments. Those who stayed loyal were former nomenklatura members, with middle to high social positions today. They may have relatively liberal economic and ideological views or just the opposite (e.g. all SLD voters dislike privatization) but they stick to the SLD because of its post-communist identity and not because of its allegiance to any ideology.

3. Semantic revolution and its beneficiaries

Once we established why SLD lost we can move on to the question why two right-wing parties were major beneficiaries of the SLD decline. The enormous exodus of the SLD voters was caused not only by breaking populist promises of the 2001 campaign but first of all by the disclosure of numerous corruption affairs in which post-communist officials were involved. Internal divisions in the party made it unable to react swiftly. Hence SLD ties with the organized crime, criminal activities of Prime Minister’s and President’s associates, secret services political involvement *etc. etc.* were examined by parliamentary investigation committees and the media for months. This painful process of the hidden fabric of political and economic life unveiling was called by Rafał Matyja a semantic revolution (Matyja 2006). Thanks to the investigators’ activities the familiar facts received new meanings. What used to be praised as the unquestionable achievement of the new democracy turned out to be a useful tool of illegitimate private or partisan interests (e.g. the electronic media regulation).

Journalists who willingly supported “the unquestionable achievements doctrine” started to criticize not only the rulers but also the rules. The mindset for this criticism was delivered by the two right-wing parties: the PiS and the PO. The former had a long record of the post-1989 order contestation as an oligarchic post-communism tied by a net of informal rules. The Civic Platform endorsed this anti-post-communist *credo* but added its specialties: the EU as a benchmark for the governing group and neoliberal economic analyses (Wolek 2006: 212-217).

The electoral campaign which began with the fall of Miller’s government in May 2004 started as a far-reaching contestation of the post-1989 order. In early 2005 it had four versions: anti-post-communist and anti-oligarchic represented by the PiS, anti-post-communist libertarian represented by the PO, socially populist anti-establishment represented by the Self-Defense and populist-nationalist of the LPR. By summer 2005 it was clear however that the “semantic revolution” had already been successful. The SLD splitted into two and both sides were striving to cover up post-communists’ tracks, president Kwaśniewski’s public image badly suffered and the post-communists did not manage to procure a new face for themselves, none of the major media openly supported post-communists, SLD and SdPi voting preferences fluctuated around the electoral threshold. The final blow to the post-communists gave one of their leaders Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz who was convinced to run in the presidential elections but after poor showings in the polls and a few media attacks resigned in mid-September. The post-communist vs. anti-post-communist cleavage ceased to have a major importance for the electoral decisions of all voters but the SLD loyalists.

This new situation changed the whole lineup of parties in the campaign. It was pointless to criticize the SLD or the SdPi who struggled to survive and the two populist parties lost their arguments as the viable alternative emerged from within the establishment. Both the Self-Defense and the LPR remained niche parties for the rural uneducated poor and old very religious nationalists respectively. The main power game was to be played between the PO and the PiS leading in the polls.

It was quite paradoxical because their electorates were fairly similar. First of all, they were mobilized by the semantic revolution. If asked why voting for the favorite party both the PO and PiS supporters answered “they are honest, not corrupted, trustworthy”. Half of the two parties voters chose this answer and in the whole sample it was only 38% (Motywacje wyborcze 2005: 3). Structurally however, PO 2001 voters were younger, better educated and more wealthy. On the individual analysis level Civic Platform was the only electorate to show correlation between income, age and education. An interesting survey of PO and PiS voters lifestyles showed that the former more often eat out, make use of private healthcare institutions, live in a house and not a flat and dream about a SUV (O wyborcach PO i PiS 2005).

Nevertheless, the views of the two parties voters were not dissimilar. Measured as the self-placement on a 10-grade scale they showed on the flat rate tax issue (negative vs. positive) 3.82 for the PO and 3.28 for the PiS (median Polish voter 2.96), the privatization issue (fast vs. slow and restricted) 5.83 for the PO and 6.15 for the PiS (median 7.02), the social services provision issue (state vs. citizens themselves) 2.56 for the PO and 1.78 for the PiS (median 1.80), the unemployment issues (the most important task for government vs. there are more important) 2.65 for the PO and 1.52 for the PiS (median 1.78), the nomenklatura issue (ban vs. equal rights) 3.79 for the PO and 3.77 for the PiS (median 5.17), the Church involvement in politics (negative vs. positive) 2.46 for the PO and 2.68 for the PiS (median 2.21). Generally, the two electorates were very similar as far as non-economic issues were concerned and fairly close on the economic issues with the PO taking a more liberal stance but the distance between them only occasionally exceeded one point. The only serious

difference was the issue of European integration and Polish participation in globalization processes. The PiS electorate was highly skeptical about both and the PO enthusiastic. Therefore the distance rose above one point with PiS closer to the median voter as in the case of majority issues presented (Poglądy elektoratów 2001: 2-9, 12-16).

A survey carried out a month before 2005 elections showed that this tendency was strengthened. The PO and the PiS were still two closest electorates but the PO took positions very far from the median voter being the most radical on the economic issues, next to the Democratic Party whose electorate however was very small in the sample and rump SLD. The opposite was true about the PiS: it moved to the center being “the party of median voter”. These dissimilarities are very noticeable when the breakdown of the opinions is under consideration: flat rate tax supporters constitute 23% of the PO voters and 17% of the PiS, those in favor of state provision of social services form a vast majority in the PiS (83% i.e. more than in any left-wing party) and a 3/4 majority in the PO, those who find the unemployment beneficial for the economy make 32% of the PO voters and 24% of the PiS. The differences between the parties should not be exaggerated but the PiS seemed to be an offer for moderate voters and PO looked like a radical niche party (Potencjalne elektoraty 2005: 16-20).

However, if one analyses the left-right self-placement of the electorates and the assessment of the parties positions it is the reverse. Almost equal shares of the Civic Platform supporters declare being on the right (39%) and in the center (42%) whereas 54% of the PiS voters describe themselves as the right-wingers and only 23% as centrist with a fairly high portion of the undecided (15%). The general PiS public image is even more unequivocal. 61% of the sample classifies the PiS as the right (in 2001 it was 44%) and only 8% as the center (15% in 2001). PO moved in the same direction but not that explicitly: 44% of voters take the PO to be on the right (38% in 2001) and 17% in the center (19% previously). General public perceived then two right-wing parties out of which PiS was seen as the true-blue and the PO as a little bit less consequently right-wing. This perception was coherent with the self-description of the PiS voters and rather at variance with the PO voters. They wanted to see themselves in the center and most of them were (the median PO voter was much closer to the PiS voter than it might appear from the breakdown analysis) but an essential share of libertarian radicals prevented them from moving to the center (Pogoda 2006: 3-7).

It seemed that the PiS leadership built its strategy for the final stage of parliamentary campaign on a reasoning similar to the presented above. They were sure of the convinced right-wingers and decided to move to the center and hunt for votes in the PO's den and among the undecided voters disappointed by the SLD. The PiS quieted the anti-communist rhetoric and announced a new cleavage “solidary vs. liberal Poland”. The Kaczynski brothers party declared to be the party of a common man and indeed it started to be one as the structural characteristics of their electorate showed. As the main contest was between two right-wing parties voters were supplied with a tool to distinguish them: the PO was the party of the elite and the PiS was to be the party for all. This turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The PO tried to react to the PiS strategy (the PO chairman made a few populist statements) but it was too late and too unconvincing. The PiS won over the PO in all social categories except for those with the highest income, best education, living in the biggest cities and the youngest age group. The PiS even defeated the Self-Defense and the PSL in villages and the LPR in the category of regular churchgoers (*i. e.* practicing once a week, however in the group of the most religious the LPR won) and with the SLD and the LPR in the oldest age group (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 27 September 2005). All these people could had voted for the SLD in 2001 but were attracted by a viable right-wing alternative, despite the post-communist cleavage.

Such results questioned to certain extent also the third established explanation of the Polish voting behavior – culturally rooted regional differences. Again, the trend had already

started in 2001. At that time the Civic Platform was winning a substantial share of votes in the Regained Lands which supposed to be a stronghold of populism. Indeed, they used to be a reservoir of votes for subsequent “third parties” from Stan Tymiński in 1990 till the Self-Defense in 2001. A regression analysis showed however that there was a correlation between living in the Regained Lands and voting for the PO. Further, in 2003 referendum on Poland’s accession to the EU the Regained Lands were most Euro-enthusiastic which harmonized with the PO stance. On the other hand, Euro-enthusiasm was not exactly what one would expect from the unemployed *ex-kolkhoz* workers. There appeared immediately psychological and culturalist explanations of this phenomenon (closeness to the Western border and the experience of German tourist-shoppers make people open-minded vs. uprooted anomic individuals prefer alleged economic advantages to the national sovereignty) but a simpler explanation was at hand (Markowski, Tucker 2005; Grabowska 2002).

As Markowski and Tucker noticed even though the Euro-enthusiasm was the highest in the poviats with the highest unemployment rate, the unemployed themselves were not that eager to vote for the EU membership (or to vote at all in fact) (Markowski, Tucker 2005: 427-428). If we collate this observation with the social characteristics of the PO the solution of the enigma will be simple. It is the local elite who votes for the PO (and the EU) in the Regained Lands as the most convincing alternative to “the populist consensus” surrounding them. Since they are more likely to vote than the populist electorate the PO can win there though less numerous in absolute terms. In other parts of Poland the populist appeal is less attractive therefore elites have other viable alternatives. Apart from this, non-elites are more likely to vote, especially in Galicia and Silesia, and the elite relative share in the voting result is smaller.

Other regional explanations hold in 2005 elections. It was a PiS landslide in Galicia where the Kaczynski’s party won over the PO 36:22 per cent and the League of Polish Families was the third there. The decline of the SLD enabled the Self-Defense to be the primary alternative to the right in weakly urbanized parts of Wielkopolska and Pomerania (they won over the PiS in constituencies of Konin and Koszalin and the SLD support there was well below 10%) but also in central-eastern part of Poland. In Kongresówka the Self-Defense was the second party with the support of 19% of voters and in most eastern poviats they were even winning (Chełm constituency the Self-Defense - 23% and the PiS - 18%).

4. Leadership factor

There is a final factor contributing to the unexpected results of the 2005 Sejm elections which falls outside sophisticated theories as it is mostly contingent. The parliamentary elections were held two weeks before the presidential elections and the global tendency to the personalization of democratic politics became most apparent in the Polish case. A kind of “leadership factor” is then responsible for an unknown share of the electoral change.

The fall 2005 electoral marathon was deliberately designed by the SLD and president Kwaśniewski as a means for the postcommunist electoral chances enhancement and the minimization of the right victory. As the SLD was compromised, a fairly non-partisan postcommunist presidential candidate was to present a more attractive face of the postcommunist block and offer “an equilibrium” against the right taking over the Sejm and government. Therefore, parliamentary elections were called by president Kwaśniewski comfortably close to but before presidential vote. This project misfired after the Cimoszewicz’s resignation and it actually strengthened a general conviction that the real competition was to be between two right-wing parties.

The subsequent PiS vs. PO contest followed however the designed three-tier pattern. The parliamentary elections were considered by both parties as a part of or even only a prelude to the decisive presidential fight. Since Lech Kaczyński was the most important

resource for the PiS its image dominated the PiS campaign already in the spring and the PO's answer was a Donald Tusk's image campaign. Moreover, both parties played the Sejm-President equilibrium/strong executive argument. The PiS, whose main slogan was "Strong president. Honest Poland", turned out to be eventually more convincing in this respect. Kaczyński persuaded 89% of the PiS voters and 15% of the PO voters that a coherent executive is more important than "equilibrium" (Kochanowicz 2006). It is however perfectly justifiable to argue that there was perhaps also a feedback between a decision to vote for Kaczyński and swinging to the PiS two weeks earlier. Since the nature of the presidential contest is fishing for votes everywhere Kaczyński might bring to the PiS several "unexpected" voters. The breakdown of his supporters from the second tier confirmed that "a common man" party/candidate strategy proved successful. Kaczyński attracted 86% of the LPR voters, 82% of the Self-Defense, 69% of the PSL and even a quarter of the SLD and SdPI voters. We cannot discover how many potential voters of these parties had already changed their minds before the parliamentary elections and switched to the PiS as a party of second but more reasonable (thanks to Kaczyński) choice but we may suspect that they were numerous.

5. Conclusions

The 2005 elections brought into question three major established explanations of the Polish electoral behavior. They showed that the structural differentiation of the votes begun to be important also in Poland. It still applies only to the marginal groups (the best off and the worst off, to simplify) but as politicians proved to be more vigilant than the researchers introducing solidary vs. liberal Poland issue, this approach to the explanation the seems to be promising. The recent elections also questioned the explanatory power of the post-communists vs. post-Solidarity cleavage. It may be contingent that the compromised SLD lost the lion's share of its voters and they may possibly be regained. Poor showings of the renovated SLD as an opposition party, the disappearance of the SdPI and the deepening of the divisions between the PO and the PiS suggest that the post-communist weakness may last. The regional patterns of voting behavior were also partly invalidated. Whereas Galicia is still the stronghold of the right in other established electoral regions structural factors seem to play more important role than the alleged deep political culture.

All the three novel developments have grains of durability. An emotional post-electoral conflict between the two right-wing victors may consolidate new patterns of behavior. After the elections the PiS has used a social rhetoric even more frequently than in the campaign and the PO has decided to be a tough opposition. This makes the invented solidary vs. liberal Poland "cleavage" to reproduce and limits the basis for the SLD appeal. What prevents a rational author from announcing a brave world of a new stabilization is the most stable characteristic of the Polish electoral behavior: volatility. Polish voters remained volatile and the 2005 elections changed here nothing. Therefore, any long-term prediction would not be a scientific bravery but a bravado.

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