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Selected Pro-Turnout Initiatives of Province Self-Governments on the Example of the Second Round of Presidential Elections in Poland in 2020

Keywords: elections, turnout, local government, government, election campaign

Słowa kluczowe: wybory, frekwencja, samorząd terytorialny, rząd, kampania wyborcza

Abstract

The presidential election campaign in Poland in 2020 was unique due to the epidemic caused by SARS-CoV-2. A high level of attendance during the presidential election, influenced by the pro-turnout initiatives, was achieved. The article analyzes selected activities aimed at achieving a high level of attendance, the beneficiaries of which were local governments.

Streszczenie

Wybrane inicjatywy profrekwencyjne samorządów wojewódzkich na przykładzie drugiej tury wyborów prezydenckich w Polsce w 2020 r.

Prezydencka kampania wyborcza w Polsce w 2020 r. charakteryzowała się wyjątkową specyfiką ze względu na epidemię spowodowaną wirusem SARS-CoV-2. W trakcie wyborów prezydenckich osiągnięto wysoki poziom frekwencji, wpływ na taki wynik wywarły podejmowane inicjatywy profrekwencyjne. W artykule zostały przeanalizowane

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wybrane działania zmierzające do osiągnięcia wysokiego poziomu frekwencji, których beneficjentami były samorządy gminne.

I. Introduction

The presidential elections in Poland in 2020 were held in a tense atmosphere heated by the COVID-19 disease epidemic. According to the Art. 128 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the election of the President of the Republic of Poland is ordered by the Speaker of the Sejm not earlier than 100 days before the end of the term of office and not later than 75 days before its expiry². The vote was originally intended to take place on 10 May, but as a result of political disputes and the chaos caused by the epidemic, it was not possible to hold the elections on that date. One of the causes of the conflict was the conduct of the electoral campaign, because candidates running for the office of President could not conduct it in the traditional way due to numerous restrictions related to the ban on assemblies and the need to maintain social distance. In April, the Polish Parliament adopted a law on postal voting, but the limited time and imprecise regulations made it impossible to prepare and conduct elections in this form in a reliable manner. Representatives of many circles, including constitutionalists, the Ombudsman Adam Bodnar, doctors and the candidates themselves, who were running for the office of President, appealed for postponement of the election³.

In the communiqué of May 7, the National Electoral Commission (org. *Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza* – PKW) stated that it has taken all the steps concerning the implementation of the elections, which were ordered by the Speaker of the Polish Parliament as of 10 May 2020, resulting from the provisions of law. Representatives of the Polish Electoral Commission informed

² W. Skrzydło, *Ustrój polityczny RP w świetle Konstytucji z 1997 r.*, Warsaw 2009, p. 153; J. Marszałek-Kawa, D. Plecka (eds.), *Dictionary of Political Knowledge*, Toruń 2019.

³ J. Nizinkiewicz, *Lekarze i eksperci przeciwko politykom PiS*, <https://www.rp.pl/Covid-19/200429314-Lekarze-i-eksperti-przeciwko-politykom-PiS.html> (4.08.2020).

that the regulations in force suspended the Commission's powers concerning, among others, determining the specimen of ballot papers and managing their printing, which resulted in the impossibility of holding elections on 10 May 2020. It was announced that the election silence would not apply, while polling stations would remain closed⁴. On the election day, the PKW adopted a resolution on stating that it is impossible to vote for candidates in the election of the President of the Republic of Poland. The resolution indicated that it was impossible to vote for candidates due to their lack⁵. Eventually, no new president was elected on May 10, but Elżbieta Witek, the Speaker of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, ordered a new election for June 28⁶. Politicians from the government blamed opposition politicians and local government officials for the failure to hold elections⁷. Representatives of the opposition have called for the introduction of a state of natural disaster, which would lead to the postponement of the date of the elections until a further date when the conduct of the elections would not pose a health risk to citizens⁸. The law prohibits the organization of elections during the state of emergency and 90 days after its end. An exception is made for local government elections in an area where a state of emergency has not been declared⁹.

Despite legal doubts and the epidemics, presidential elections were held on June 28. In the first round, none of the candidates won an absolute majority of votes, so on July 12, the second round of elections took place, in which competed the current President – Andrzej Duda, supported by the

⁴ *Komunikat Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 7 maja 2020 roku*, <https://pkw.gov.pl/aktualnosci/wyjasnienia-stanowiska-komunikaty/komunikat-panstwowej-komisji-wyborczej-z-dnia-7-maja-2020-roku> (4.08.2020).

⁵ Resolution No. 129/2020 of the state election commission of 10 May 2020.

⁶ P. Białczyk, *Kiedy wybory prezydenckie? Marszałek Sejmu Elżbieta Witek wyznaczyła nową datę*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kiedy-wybory-prezydenckie-marszalek-sejmu-elzbieta-witek-wyznaczyla-nowa-date-6517200613443201a> (4.08.2020).

⁷ K. Kołodziejczyk, *Wybory 2020. Dlaczego nie odbędą się 10 maja? Michał Dworczyk wskazuje winnych*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wybory-2020-dlaczego-nie-odbeda-sie-10-maja-michal-dworczyk-wskazuje-winnych-6507844639909505a> (4.08.2020).

⁸ *Opozycja oczekuje wprowadzenia w Polsce stanu klęski żywiołowej. Grabiec: To obowiązek rządu*, <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/494301-opozycja-chce-wprowadzenia-stanu-klaski-zywiołowej> (4.08.2020).

⁹ K. Eckhardt, *Stan nadzwyczajny jako instytucja polskiego prawa konstytucyjnego*, *Przemyśl-Rzeszów* 2012, p. 252.

United Right (Zjednoczona Prawica), and Rafał Trzaskowski, supported by the Civic Coalition (Koalicja Obywatelska). Ultimately, as a result of the elections, A. Duda was re-elected. During the election campaign, local government officials undertook a number of voter turnout initiatives, which direct aim was to encourage as many citizens as possible to actively participate in the elections.

One of the aims of the paper is to verify the research hypothesis, which assumes that within the framework of the selected voter turnout initiatives the communes awarded for the best result achieved a higher level of turnout than the result obtained in the whole country. In order to verify the hypothesis, the following research questions are formulated: 1) was the turnout in the winning communes higher than in the provinces in which they are located?; 2) which candidate won in most of the analyzed communes? For the purposes of the research, a comparative method was used, which made it possible to analyze differences and similarities in the initiatives undertaken and the behavior of voters¹⁰.

II. Preventive Actions

Initiatives aimed at increasing citizens' participation in elections are not a new phenomenon. Actions aimed at activating voters have for many years been taken by political parties, state authorities, local authorities, PKW, NGOs and voters. In some countries, citizens have been encouraged to participate in the elections through cash lotteries, for example in Norway and Bulgaria. However, such practices are the cause of much controversy¹¹.

The presidential elections scheduled for 28 June 2020 have caused much emotion in society. The Ministry of the Interior and Administration organized the Battle of the Carts action addressed to communes with up to 20 thousand inhabitants. As a part of the action after the first round of the election, the Ministry handed over 16 fire engines to the communes with the best turnout

¹⁰ A.J. Chodubski, *Wstęp do badań politologicznych*, Gdańsk 2004, pp. 125–126.

¹¹ P. Jakubowski, *Kampania profrekwencyjna podczas kampanii parlamentarnej w 2011 roku*, [in:] *Wybory 2011, Organizacja – przebieg – efekty*, eds. M. Jeziński, W. Peszyński, A. Seklecka, W. Szewczak, Toruń 2013, p. 167.

(1 vehicle per province)¹². Before the second round of elections, another edition of the action was announced, this time the Ministry of Interior and Administration handed over 49 fire engines (1 engine per province according to the administrative division valid until the end of 1998). The action was widely commented in the media. It was received with enthusiasm in many circles, however, there were also critical opinions on the subject.

Table 1. Selected Turnout Initiatives Organized by Province Self-Governments Covering the Second Round of Elections

Organizer	Award	Commune with the highest attendance (voter turnout in Poland 68,18%)	Result of the candidate with a higher result in round two of the elections
Self-government of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian province	20 000 PLN for the organization of a cultural event	Toruń – 70,91% Brodnica – 65,35% Ciechocinek – 75,18% Solec Kujawski – 67,88% Osielsko – 80,85% Voter turnout in the province (65,31%)	R. Trzaskowski – 63,11% R. Trzaskowski – 54,44% R. Trzaskowski – 53,85% R. Trzaskowski – 61,34% R. Trzaskowski – 70,27%
Self-government of the Lublin province	20 000 PLN to retrofit common rooms, playgrounds and squares	Rossosz – 81,24% Urszulín Włodawski – 72,54% Wilkołaz – 73,90% Chrzanów – 82,96% Voter turnout in the province (66,06%)	A. Duda – 71,98% A. Duda – 70,85% A. Duda – 82,47% A. Duda – 94,36%
Self-government of the Podlaskie province	50 000 PLN for the retrofitting and modernization of common rooms	Rudka – 82,35% Voter turnout in the province (64,33%)	A. Duda – 80,92%

Source: Own study based on Internet sources¹³.

¹² MSWiA sfinansuje wozy strażackie dla gmin o najwyższej frekwencji wyborczej, <https://www.gov.pl/web/uw-podlaski/mswia-sfinansuje-wozy-strazackie-dla-gmin-o-najwyzszej-frekwencji-wyborczej> (4.08.2020).

¹³ <http://zambrowiaci.pl/info/marszalek-podsumowal-wyniki-pucharu-gmin> (4.08.2020); <https://www.bydgoszcz.com/wiadomosci/4960,wyloniono-miasta-ktore-otrzymaja-nagrody-za-frekwencje-na-wyborach> (4.08.2020); <https://wybory.gov.pl/prezydent20200628/pl/>

Before the first and second rounds of the presidential elections of 2020, many profound profanity initiatives were launched all over Poland, initiated by local government officials. The scale of such undertakings was undoubtedly the largest in history, despite numerous difficulties related to the organization of elections during the epidemic. Some local governments informed about the organized actions and encouraged to participate in the elections on the official websites of the offices.

The turnout initiatives indicated in the table were addressed to all types of communes, and in some cases detailed criteria were defined concerning, among other things, the population of the communes that could take part in the action. The Kuyavian-Pomeranian local government organized the action in several categories: rural communes, rural-urban communes, other cities, capitals of urban districts, and the largest cities of the region (the so-called presidential cities). In the case of this initiative, support was addressed to all types of communes, while the winners were selected based on the results of the second round. The turnout in the two awarded communes, i.e. Brodnica and Solec Kujawski, was lower than in the whole country. The funds obtained in the amount of 20000 PLN could be used by the communes to organize a cultural event¹⁴. In all communes awarded by the province self-government, a higher score was achieved by R. Trzaskowski.

Within the framework of the pro-frequency initiative organized by the local government of the Lubelskie Province, 12 communes were awarded, while the action was addressed to rural, urban-rural and urban communes of up to 20 thousand inhabitants. For the needs of the action, a division into 4 sub-regions was made, in which 3 communes with the best turnout in the second round of elections were awarded. The communes with the highest scores in the awarded sub-regions received 50000 PLN each to retrofit common rooms, squares and playgrounds. In all communes with the highest score within the defined territorial division, the turnout was higher than the general score ob-

frekwencja/2/Koniec/pl (4.08.2020); <https://www.lubelskie.pl/aktualnosci/wyniki-konkursu-aktywna-lubelska-wies> (4.08.2020).

¹⁴ B. Krzemińska, *Nagrody dla lokalnych społeczności za frekwencję przy urnach*, <https://www.kujawsko-pomorskie.pl/biuro-prasowe/informacje-prasowe/36013-nagrody-dla-lokalnych-spolesznosci-za-frekwencje-przy-urnach-2> (4.08.2020).

tained in Poland, while in local governments with the best results, A. Duda received more support¹⁵.

The local government of the Podlaskie Province organized a pro-frequency initiative, which was called the Commune Cup. As part of the action, 10 communes with the highest voter turnout were awarded: they received 50000 PLN. The best result was obtained by Rudka Commune, 82.35% of people entitled to vote took part in the elections, while in the second round a higher result was obtained by A. Duda. In all awarded communes the turnout exceeded 70%, while only in Supraśl Commune, which was one of 10 awarded communes the higher score was achieved by R. Trzaskowski. It should be noted that the results in the analyzed communes reflect the election results in the scale of provinces in which they are located.

The local governments' undertaking of so many pro-attendance initiatives was undoubtedly influenced by the activities carried out by the Ministry of Interior and Administration as part of the Battle of Carriages, which mobilized the local governments to implement their own ideas aimed at improving voter turnout. Local politicians tried to mobilize voters as much as possible – such actions were not frequent in previous years. In many cases, voters consider that their votes do not mean much, indicate a lack of interest in politics and treat the lack of participation as a form of protest¹⁶. The bottom-up initiatives have repeatedly been addressed to all types of communes, as opposed to the action carried out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. Projects targeted in this way allowed for the involvement of citizens regardless of their place of residence. In 2015, during the second round of the presidential election, the turnout was 55.34%¹⁷. In 2020, however, it was much higher, 68.18% of those entitled to vote voted. The pro-frequency initiatives taken were a factor which additionally mobilised voters to take part in the elections.

¹⁵ Wyniki konkursu „Aktywna lubelska wieś”, <https://www.lubelskie.pl/aktualnosci/wyniki-konkursu-aktywna-lubelska-wies> (4.08.2020).

¹⁶ M. Musiał-Karg, *Metody zwiększania frekwencji wyborczej. Polska a doświadczenia innych państw*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne” 2011, No. 2(2), p. 86.

¹⁷ Wybory Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2015, https://prezydent2015.pkw.gov.pl/325_Ponowne_glosowanie.html (4.08.2020).

III. Summary

In result of the analysis, it should be stated that the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the article cannot be verified positively, due to the fact that in two cases the awarded communes obtained a lower turnout than on a national scale. In the remaining cases, the communes received higher turnout than 68.18%. A significant problem is the lack of involvement of citizens in the electoral process, which was the reason why the local government officials took numerous actions to encourage them to participate in the election. Undoubtedly, high turnout is important, but it is necessary to think about defining the boundary connected with mobilizing for participation in the elections. The right to vote is a privilege and a civic duty which is not enjoyed by all citizens, while the state and local government are trying, through material prizes, to encourage voters to participate actively in elections. Here, too, there are doubts about the politicization of the action and the agitation of public funds. Undoubtedly, the funds granted within the framework of the campaign will contribute to the good of local communities, but their distribution may be based on other criteria that focus on current needs.

Answering the first research questions, it should be stated that in all the analyzed communes, the turnout was higher than in the provinces in which they are located. It is also worth pointing out, according with the second research question, that both candidates achieved a better result in 5 communes, while A. Duda won by gaining a bigger vote, in the Chrzanów Commune 94.36% of voters supported him.

Undoubtedly, the actions taken by local authorities have contributed to increasing voter turnout and thus to activating voters in the electoral process. It is worth considering, however, to what extent such actions will be taken in the next electoral elections and with what effect. These questions, however, require much broader analysis and more in-depth research.

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