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Micropolitical behaviour: The case of Polish parliamentary elections of 1991

by

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The paper presents a study of results of the first free parliamentary elections in Poland since World War II for a commune being a quarter of Warsaw, the capital of Poland. First, the general background is outlined of the situation in which elections were carried out. Then, some remarks are forwarded on the results of parliamentary elections in the whole of Poland. Subsequent section is devoted to characterization of the urban commune for which the study here presented was performed and to the aggregate election results for this commune. Results of the study, contained in a separate section, are followed by the conclusions from the results. The main analytic tool of the study was cluster analysis applied to election results for 68 election precincts in the commune. In this manner characteristic profiles of results could be obtained in connection with the location and urban character of the precincts.

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the member of communal council of the quarter in question, M.Gielecki, for providing the data which served as the basis of the study.

1. The political background

1.1. The political elites

Owing to communist rule Poland had had no opportunity of free parliamentary elections since the World War II until the collapse of this quasi-totalitarian régime in 1989–1990. One of the outcomes of the changes was the possibility of organizing free parliamentary elections and therefore of establishing the first post-war truly legitimate parliament.

Façade changes, though, had been much quicker than the possibilities of systemic adjustment of the political, economic and social spheres. This, in particular, applies in an obvious way to the official political scene on the one hand and to the public perception of politics and political directions on the other.

It can be said that there are two main sources of the present political elites in Poland (as is, anyway, the case also in other post-communist countries): the previous political establishment and the previous opposition forces.

A large portion of the present-day politicians who originated from the previous system came simply through the channel of the Communist Party. This party apparently turned into a social-democratic one (or more than one), but its members and leaders do of course, primarily come directly from the marxist-leninist bureaucratic source. Note that situation like this one exists in all the post-communist countries (meaning that there has been no dissolution of the communist parties and their successors, for which some politicians from the opposition called).

Some other members of the previous establishment succeeded in placing themselves in other parties, either successors of the ones that semi-existed (i.e. existed officially but had no influence whatsoever) under the communist rule or of the newly formed ones. It must be admitted, though, that there is no high-ranking official of the old régime that would be a leading figure in any of the new parties in Poland.

Those who came from the old régime have certainly this advantage that they know better the still dominating bureaucracy on all the levels of administration, and are capable of functioning much more efficiently with the assistance of this sort of “old boys network”, which is clearly motivated by the interest in preservation of as much of the bureaucratic rule as possible. On the other hand, the old elite have appropriated an important portion of the “available” part of economy in the form of joint stock companies organized around larger — or

even smaller — enterprises or other businesses, whose organization was much easier for them than for any other average citizen of the country.

The new, post-communist social democratic party is relatively coherent internally and has quite clear political and ideological image. This political group had, of course, its problems in terms of internal arguments and external public pressure, yet amplified by some politicians, but it acted quite effectively in overcoming of these difficulties. Perhaps the feeling of being under siege increased the internal coherence.

On the other hand there has been in Poland, unlike any other communist — or “real-socialist” — country, quite a high number of people involved in anti-communist oppositional activities. More important groups of oppositionists, which are of importance for the present political situation, emerged in the early 1970s. With time, there have been more and more of them and their political image started to diversify. The period of spontaneous changes of 1980–1981 and the movement of Solidarity trade union somewhat blurred the emerging differences, mainly because almost all of these oppositional groups supported or entered Solidarity wishing both to help in the overthrow of the communist rule and to gain some of the victorious glory. This concealment of political images and at the same time close cooperation of various political directions within the Solidarity movement lasted until approximately 1986–1987, and to a large degree disappeared after these new elites started to participate in execution of power, that is — in 1990–1991. Thus, although, as some say “all these are parties of the same parlour”, meaning their common or close work in the past or even partly common origins, there exists nowadays a variety of parties issued either entirely or partly from the Solidarity movement.

1.2. The political spectrum and its perception

It is often held, not only by the Western, but also by Polish observers, that the number of political parties in Poland is so high that it might even be too high for formation of the stable long term political system and policies. Such statements, while in fact detrimental themselves for formation of such stable systems and policies by creation of negative pressures, do also omit several important aspects of the situation, which must be taken into account when trying to analyse and shape the political system.

One of these aspects is lack of possibilities for formation of true political and ideological image of the society under the communist rule. Thus, this image,

as represented by the elites, had to be shaped either during the underground fight with the previous régime or in the very short periods of official functioning (15 months of 1980–1981 and the period of 1989–1990). As mentioned before, political differentiation of groups issued from or related to the Solidarity movement has been to a large degree suppressed by the necessity of cooperation and common action.

On the other hand it is obvious that taking of ideological and political models for political movements and parties from the Western democracies or from the Polish past is a risky endeavour in the situation of entirely different conditions of post-communist countries. It is true that some parties try to present themselves as continuators of the main streams of Polish politics from before the World War II (e.g. of the Polish Socialist Party, having social democratic but also patriotic character or of National Democracy, a very wide and important stream of the pre-war Polish politics), or as the counterparts of the large Western European parties or political directions (e.g. many groups subscribing to social democratic character, or some parties claiming their Christian Democratic parentage), but these elements or motivations seem to be, justly, of secondary significance.

Thus, there has been simply no place nor time to form a sound ideological and political basis for the political system of Poland. Such a basis must grow out of concrete social and economic ground, which is so much in change nowadays, and although the elites should also design the projects for the future, these projects are something more difficult to put together in the given situation than some observers in the West might judge (a couple of spiteful remarks at this point could be in place concerning the kinds of projects for the future which were already implanted by the Western theoretic political thought in some Eastern countries).

The authors' view of the present Polish political scene is shown in a simplified way in Fig.1. For comparison, Fig.2 presents another image of the same scene, quoted after one of the most popular Polish journals, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, related most closely to UD, the issue of August 29th, 1991, i.e. two months before the elections here considered.

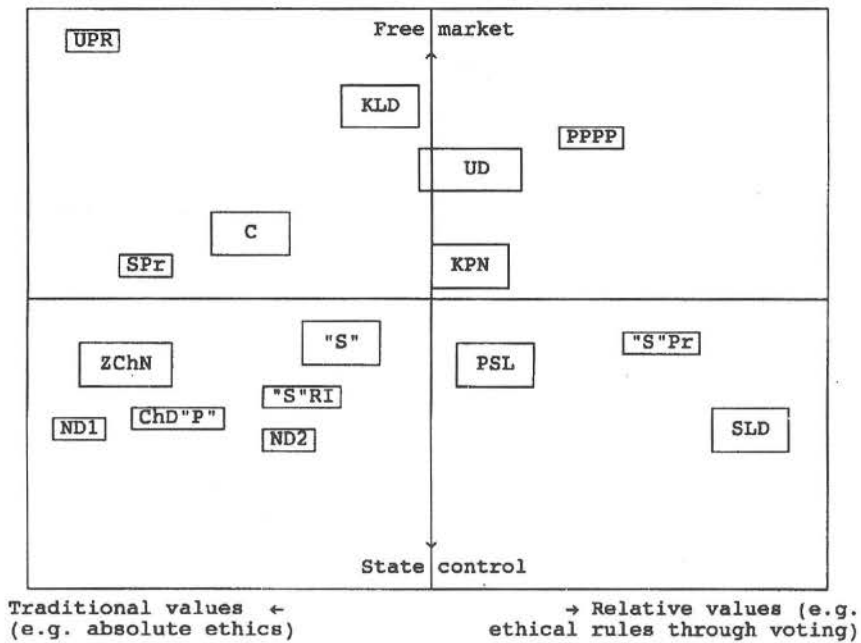


Figure 1. A view of Polish political scene as perceived by the authors. The scene is simplified but its fundamental features preserved.

Notations [* denotes post-Solidarity parties]:

- * C: Centrum (fluctuates between liberals and christian democrats)
- ChD "P": ex "Pax" — post-communist christian democrats
- * KLD: liberals (ex-prime minister J.K.Bielecki)
- KPN: independence party
- ND1: national democrats — traditional nationalistic party
- ND2: national democrats — "pagan" nationalist party
- PPPP: Polish Party of Friends of Beer
- PSL: peasants' party with a post-communist legacy
- * "S": political representation of "Solidarity"
- SLD: post-communist social democrats
- SPr: traditional christian democrats
- * "S"Pr: new social democrats
- * "S"RI: peasants' Solidarity party
- * UD: Democratic Union (includes christian democrats, liberals and social democrats)
- UPR: radical economic liberals
- * ZChN: Christian National Party

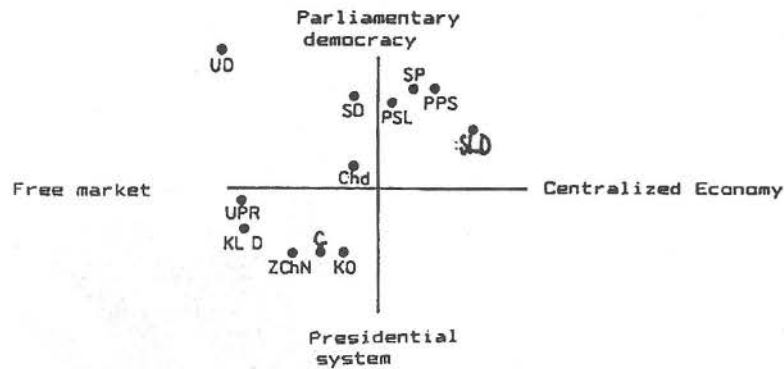


Figure 2. The perception of positions of particular political parties in Poland according to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 29th, 1991, after Mercik.

The other aspect of the allegedly too wide spectrum of Polish political scene is the perception and the attitude of the wide public. A man in the street must find him/herself in the spectrum offered. In turbulent times people want to find “their” political representatives rather than huge party oligarchs who make them vote simply in order to avoid the only other possibility. Thus, the process of formation of political groups and ideologies among the elites is parallel to the public search for the proper political representatives and resulting rejection of many, or even all of the available as the improper ones. Note that in the post-communist countries the greatest shares of respective populations participated in the elections just at the beginning of the communist collapse, when, however, communists took large amounts of votes (with exception of Poland) in the situation of completely unprepared opposition and the public.

There have been and are quite high public expectations from the quasi-revolutionary process that has been set in motion, and the fact that these expectations are not being realized quickly enough adds in many portions of post-communist societies to the rejection phenomenon mentioned before, and to the relative popularity of post-communist political parties. Likewise, this adds to the nervousness of the political elites, pressed both from the bottom and from the outside.

All this said, let us return to one point only slightly touched before, concerning the political and the ideological aspects of the development in course. It is true that in the turmoil and under the pressures, not to mention the personal anonomosities, Polish political elites went over to strictly political manoeuvres

and fights neglecting to some extent the stage of building of practical ideologies, which could be presented in the form of coherent and concise programs for the society and economy. The effort which went, after all, into construction of such practical ideologies is not clearly perceived, because the resulting programs are too general, insufficiently publicized, usually insufficiently coherent and changing over time. While such reproaches could easily be addressed to any political system in the world, and actually some of them are at least partly justified by the facts of life (like e.g. changeability of programs in rapidly changing circumstances), it must also be said that societies subject to such changes need stable images and representatives in order not to get lost and not to turn to the streets and stones. The law of "requisite variety", as formulated by Ashby and used by Beer is fully applicable to this case. That is why it is not so that there are too many parties in Poland. It may only be true that there are not enough parties with well formulated, clear, coherent and stable programs.

2. Parliamentary elections of 1991 in Poland: global results

2.1. The results

We will now give the global results of elections for the whole of Poland for the parties shown in Fig.1 (with exception of just one party — German Minority, which is added here, and whose ideological image, other than national-ethnic, is even more uncertain than for the other parties), and in Section 2.2. some comments will be forwarded, concerning mainly spatial distribution of election results. Note that the results given here and the comments presented, as well as the numerical exercise illustrated further on, all of them concern elections to the (formally) lower house of the parliament (Sejm or Diet), the higher (formally) chamber (Senate), having much lesser importance, being excluded from our considerations.

The greatest official surprise in the results of elections was the place of the post-communist SLD. This means, though, that the communists have preserved their direct electorate connected with previous membership in the Party and related organizations, and partly with the already emerging view that "it was better under the communists" (represented mainly by the older people, but also by the portions of various social groups, excepting, perhaps, the young ones).

	Party	% of valid d votes	number of seats in parliament
1.	UD (Democratic Union)	12.31	62
2.	SLD (Alliance of Democratic Left)	11.98	60
3.	ZChN (Christian-National Union)	8.73	49
4.	PSL (Polish People's Party)	8.67	48
5.	KPN (Confederation of Independent Poland)	7.50	46
6.	C (Citizens' League "Center")	8.71	44
7.	KLD (Liberal-Democratic Congress)	7.48	37
8.	"S"RI (People's League)	5.46	28
9.	"S" (Solidarity)	5.05	27
10.	PPPP (Polish Party of Friends of Beer)	3.27	16
11.	German Minority	1.17	7
12.	ChD (ChD"P" + SPr)	2.36	5
13.	"S"Pr (Solidarity of Labour)	2.05	4
	...		
16.	UPR (Union of Real Policy)	2.25	3
-.	ND1 and ND2	0.11	-
	Subtotals	87.10	436 (94.8%)

Table 1. Results of elections to Sejm for the whole of Poland

A relatively important success of the previously marginal Christian-national ZChN is to a large extent due to the half-hearted support given by the Catholic Church as a whole and the full support given by some members of the clergy. Another winner in this atomized Parliament is the sternly, but not chauvinistically national, but also slightly leftist KPN, whose main force resides in the fact that they have never been (and are still not) related to any sort of establishment and that they present a persistent oppositionary image. In fact, at the time of this writing KPN seems to emerge as an even more important force in the future elections.

2.2. The spatial distribution

The spatial breakdown of the election results, which is of primary interest here, is indeed very hard to grasp. There are, namely, at least three levels of breakdown which have to be distinguished.

Thus, on the level of voivodships (provinces), altogether 49 of them (hence 800 thousand inhabitants on the average), the situation was as follows: if we consider the number of votes for the candidates of every party in each voivodship and determine in this manner the "winner" in each voivodship then the greatest number — by far — of voivodships were "won" by the post-communist SLD, followed by the politically centrally placed UD. Other parties were far behind. There was, however, a very significant pattern to this phenomenon. The post-communist party did usually "win" in the northern and western voivodships, while in the central, southern and eastern voivodships a mosaic of other parties would win, including those that finally got very low numbers of seats in the Parliament. This spatial setting is very well correlated with the results of the turning-point elections of June 1989, in which Solidarity had the highest wins in just the southern and eastern voivodships, where rural and small town communities are well established and where the influence of the Church is the highest.

The question which now arises is: given that the distribution of votes for the communists is at the level of voivodships more advantageous than the aggregate result, what is the situation at the lower level — is this kind of uneven distribution repeated or even getting deeper, or not? It must be noted at this point that there were numerous voices before the elections (and one of the authors of the present papers was of the same opinion) that the majority elections would virtually eliminate post-communists from the Parliament. The results presented at the aggregate level and the distribution of votes on the level of voivodships seem to falsify such a proposition.

Let us note at this point only that the extreme majority elections in conditions of maximum proportionality would have to be carried out in the precincts of about 80 thousand inhabitants, corresponding to 60 thousand potential voters on the average.

Another interesting point is the validation of the statement that the slightly leading center-center-left UD was primarily collecting votes in urban precincts, and losing importantly to parties considered more "to the right" in the provincial areas.

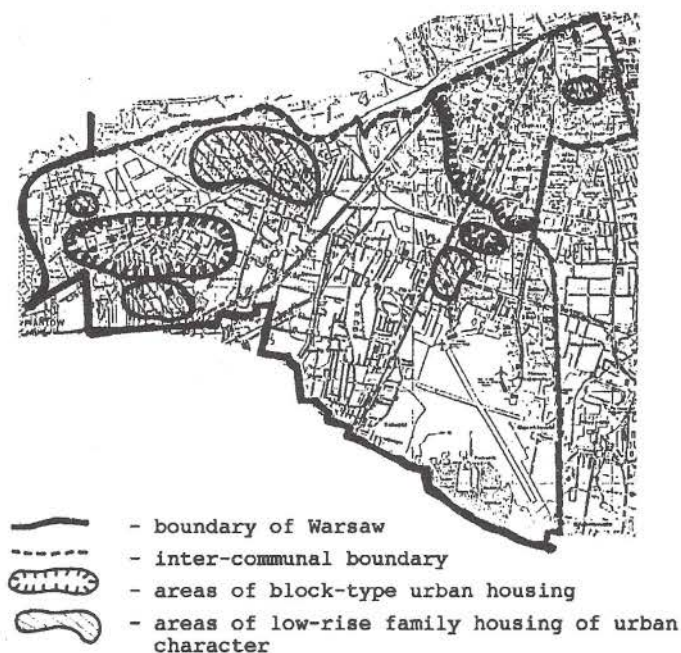


Figure 3. The spatial outline of the commune in question

3. Elections in an urban commune of Warsaw

3.1. The commune and the global election results

The commune considered is one of seven communes constituting Warsaw. It can be portrayed (see Fig.3) as a segment of a circle, with the outer border being the border of the capital city of Warsaw, the inner border being the border with the Downtown commune, and the lateral borders being borders with adjoining communes of similar shape.

As can be easily seen the inner part of the commune has a distinct urban downtown character, and it occupies a minor part of the commune. There are some other areas within the commune of a clear urban character, either with block or with low-rise family housing. Large portions of the commune are, however, occupied by semi-rural or industrial areas.

Population reaches 200 thousand, which would mean 2 or at most 3 seats in the Parliament in the extreme case of majority elections, mentioned before.

Voting was carried out in 68 precincts, into which the commune was divided.

	Party	% votes in the whole of Poland	% votes in the commune analysed	ratio of communal to national results (1)
1.	UD (Democratic Union)	12.31	17.0	1.21
2.	SLD (Alliance of Democratic Left)	11.98	13.8	1.01
3.	ZChN (Christian-National Union)	8.73	8.9	0.90
4.	PSL (Polish People's Party)	8.67	1.9	0.19
5.	KPN (Confed. of Indept. Poland)	7.50	4.6	0.54
6.	C (Citizens' League "Center")	8.71	13.8	1.38
7.	KLD (Liberal-Democratic Congress)	7.48	16.5	1.94
8.	"S" (Solidarity)	5.05	1.8	0.31
9.	PPPP (Friends of Beer)	3.27	3.8	1.01
10.	"S"Pr (Solidarity of Labour)	2.05	4.7	2.01
	Totals	75.75	86.8	1.14

(1): this ratio takes into account the difference in the totals between the national and the communal data

Table 2. Votes for the candidates of particular leading parties in the commune analysed and in the whole of Poland

Table 2 illustrates the summary election results in the commune as compared to those for the whole of Poland, in numbers of votes for the candidates of the leading parties.

It is not difficult to notice that the difference of the results for the commune as compared with the whole of Poland are not really dramatic. The biggest parties, excepting, of course, PSL as the farmers' party by definition, did not win or lose out much here. Some exceptions are: KPN as a relative loser (0.54 of the national average) and KLD as a relative winner (1.94 of the national average).

The results for the commune as a whole do neither disprove nor confirm the proposition forwarded with respect to the post-communist SLD party, that its force lies in concentration of votes in particular locations, seen well at the voivodship level. Since Warsaw was not the voivodship where SLD gained or lost a lot, the almost ideally average record of this party in the commune in question leaves a margin for further analysis.

	<i>Parties</i>	<i>% of votes</i>	<i>number of precincts "won"</i>
1.	UD (Democratic Union)	17.0	27
2.	SLD (Alliance of Democratic Left)	13.8	8
3.	ZChN (Christian-National Union)	8.9	1
4.	PSL (Polish People's Party)	1.9	—
5.	KPN (Confed. of Indept. Poland)	4.6	—
6.	C (Citizens' League "Center")	13.8	9
7.	KLD (Liberal-Democratic Congress)	16.5	23
8.	"S" (Solidarity)	1.8	—
9.	PPPP (Friends of Beer)	3.8	—

Table 3. Numbers of precincts where particular parties got the highest number of votes for their candidates (numbers of precincts where particular parties "won" in the sense of the highest numbers of votes)

3.2. The spatial breakdown of results

In the first step of analysis we will look at the number of precincts within the commune in which particular parties got the highest number of votes for their candidates, as compared to total shares of votes in the commune.

The contents of Table 3 is quite indicative of the resulting "threshold level" for winning in the precincts. Of course, this has no bearing whatsoever on the results of the elections. It indicates, though, two important things. First is that this level of consideration introduces yet another kind of spatial distribution of votes. Second is that the flat distribution of seats in the Parliament does not seem to result from wide disparity of votes within such places like this urban-suburban commune, but from a wide disparity of votes among such spatial units as this commune, both along regional diversification and along the urban — rural axis. It might seem that if the results of the elections to the Parliament had the character of those for this commune, a stable majority would be relatively easy to shape.

It is possible to make an experiment illustrating possible outcome of Parliamentary elections for the same voting assuming the extreme majority election, i.e. the one in which the commune analysed would have to be divided into 2 or at most 3 parts (provided the divisions would be made according to the boundaries of communes). This experiment is easy insofar as there is a distinct gradient of

voting results along the precinct numbers, these numbers roughly growing from the downtown towards the outer edge of the commune, as illustrated in Table 4.

	Parties	<i>Indices of precincts accounted for</i>						
		10	20	30	40	50	60	68
		<i>cumulative vote shares/"won" precinct shares</i>						
1.	UD	23.6/80	21.0/70	19.9/67	19.3/63	18.5/54	17.6/45	17.0/40
2.	SLD	14.4/10	15.6/25	15.8/20	15.8/18	15.1/16	14.2/13	13.8/12
3.	ZChN	7.0/0	8.0/0	8.1/0	8.4/0	8.6/0	9.0/1	8.9/1
4.	PSL	1.5/0	1.6/0	1.7/0	1.7/0	1.7/0	1.8/0	1.9/0
5.	KPN	3.3/0	3.7/0	3.9/0	3.9/0	4.1/0	4.4/0	4.6/0
6.	C	12.9/0	12.2/0	12.4/0	12.7/3	13.0/6	13.3/8	13.9/13
7.	KLD	16.8/10	15.9/5	16.0/13	15.8/15	16.3/24	16.4/31	16.5/34
8.	"S"	1.2/0	1.4/0	1.5/0	1.5/0	1.5/0	1.7/0	1.8/0
9.	PPPP	2.7/0	3.2/0	3.3/0	3.4/0	3.5/0	3.8/0	3.8/0

Table 4. Cumulative shares of votes and numbers of precincts "won" by particular parties

Then, Tables 5 and 6 show the data from the elections analysed for two plausible hypothetical divisions of the commune into 2 and 3 contiguous election precincts which could be used in the extreme majority elections. The divisions themselves are shown in Figs. 4 and 5. Thus, in one case there would be two MPs elected: one from UD and the other from KLD, while in the second case: two MPs from UD and one from KLD.

	Parties	<i>Numbers of precincts "won"</i>	
		<i>before precinct no.38</i>	<i>after precinct no.38</i>
1.	UD	25	2
2.	SLD	6	2
3.	ZChN	—	1
	...	—	—
6.	C	1	8
7.	KLD	6	17

Table 5. Numbers of precincts "won" in division of the commune into two contiguous parts (see Fig.4)

3.3. Cluster analysis

In order to gain a deeper insight into the spatial structure of election results within the commune cluster analysis of precinct results was performed. The method used was developed by the same authors. It provides suboptimal partitions of the set of objects analysed (the set of precincts) into the subsets (clusters) of those which are possibly similar (similar election results within various precincts), while placing in various subsets (clusters) those which are possibly dissimilar (differing election results within precincts).

The cluster analysis method was applied to election results for precincts within the commune in several data configurations. The analyses differed by addition to vote shares of particular parties of a variety of attributes, like location within the commune, character of buildings (large blocks, urban low-rise family houses, suburban dispersed housing, rural farming dwellings etc.), number of voters within the precincts or population within the precincts. Note that in no case contiguity of resulting precinct clusters was assumed or forced, although in these calculations where location within the commune or — though to a lower degree — the character of buildings were accounted for, contiguity could naturally result.

Since this paper is not meant to have a technical nature, we shall only give the ultimate results in terms of spatial outline of the clusters of precincts obtained in six various calculations, presented in Figs.6 a-f.

It can easily be seen that the results show a surprising degree of coincidence regarding some features (e.g. distinct general division into three segments of the commune, namely the “downtown” or “big city” part, the “suburban industrial and bedroom” part and the “intermediate” part, which in fact can be regarded as the “rural turned freshly urban” part).

Another important feature of the results is that there is a surprisingly high degree of spatial contiguity of the results obtained, even in these calculations in which the contiguity enhancing factors were not accounted for.

4. Some conclusions

The analysis of election results indicates existence of an important gradient of electorate preferences along the urban-suburban-rural axis. This gradient is best seen in the decrease along the axis mentioned of the shares of votes for such a "big city" party as UD and the increase of votes for such parties as ZChN and C. In general, there is a tendency of loss of votes of UD, which is very strongly dominating in the downtown areas, to the advantage of a number of other parties, whose shares would increase with the distance from the "big city" areas. In addition, there is local competition of UD with the post-communist SLD and liberal KLD, whose shares would first increase and then decrease in the outward direction, without, however, a very stable pattern.

On the basis of observations from the general results of elections in Poland it can be proposed that the trends observed in the commune analysed could be extrapolated over a bigger "length" of the urban-to-rural axis, taking into account various aspects of this "distance", like, for instance, the degree of collectivization of rural areas, which is higher in the northern and western parts of the country, and which is strongly correlated with the urbanization of rural areas. Thus, while the center-center-left UD would take high shares of votes in big cities, partly along with KLD, it was losing in less well off urban areas to PO"C" and SLD (to the latter also in places where the "old" electorate was better organized and concentrated), as well as to ZChN and KPN. This differentiation increased as "urban" turned into "suburban", and then as "suburban" turned into "rural" it would decrease again to the advantage of farmer parties. Therefrom the spatial setting for the country as a whole.

Thus, no nation-wide political force emerged from these elections, but the political image obtained had quite obvious regularities. It remains still open at the time of this writing whether the leaders of the main parties in the Parliament would be able to draw positive conclusions from this image and expand their electorate, thus forming political forces of national dimensions.

	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Numbers of precincts "won"</i>		
		<i>precincts 1÷18, 31 and 32</i>	<i>precincts 19÷44 without 31 and 32</i>	<i>precincts 45 to 68</i>
1.	UD	14	13	—
2.	SLD	4	4	—
3.	ZChN	—	—	1
	...	—	—	—
6.	C	—	1	8
7.	KLD	2	6	15

Table 6. Numbers of precincts "won" in division of the commune into three contiguous parts (see Fig.5)

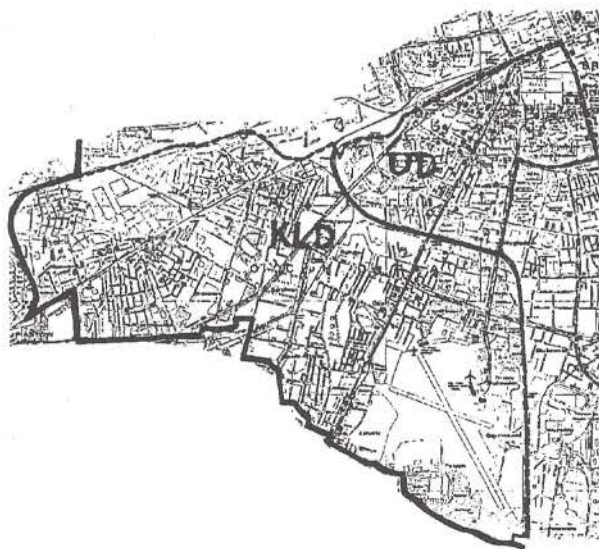


Figure 4. Division of the commune into two large precincts with the "winning" parties



Figure 5. Division of the commune into three large precincts with the “winning” parties



Figure 6a. Partition of precincts according to vote shares for particular parties, numbers of voters, location of precincts and character of housing



Figure 6b. Partition of precincts according to vote shares for particular parties, shares of voters, location of precincts and character of housing



Figure 6c. Partition of precincts according to vote shares for particular parties, population numbers and location of precincts

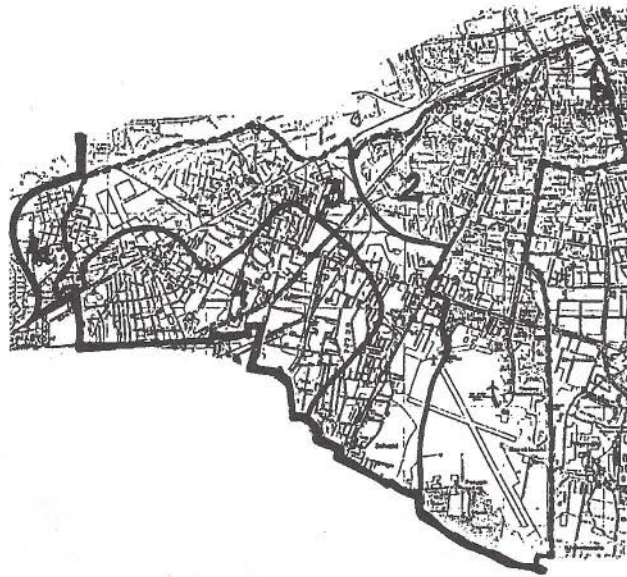


Figure 6d. Partition of precincts according to vote shares for particular parties, population shares and location of precincts



Figure 6e. Partition of precincts according to vote shares for particular parties and population shares

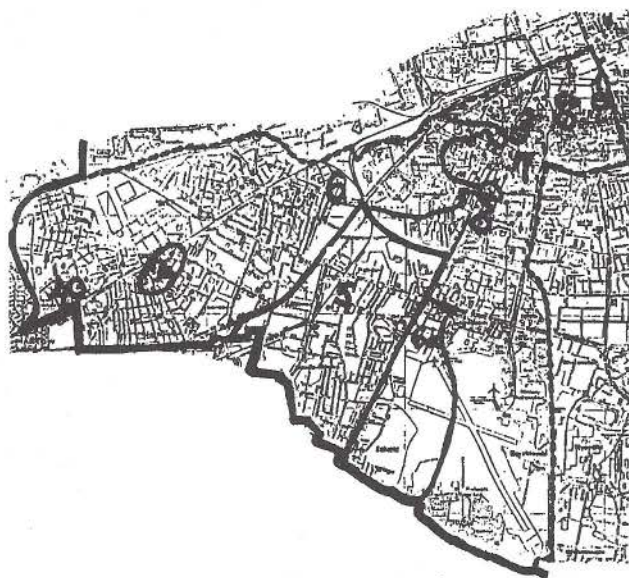


Figure 6f. Partition of precincts according to vote shares for particular parties and population shares



