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Title: The Determinants of Electoral Volatility - recenzja

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Citation style: Stelmach Katarzyna. (2015). The Determinants of Electoral Volatility - recenzja. "Polish Political Science Yearbook" (2015, vol. 44, s. 310-315), doi 10.15804/ppsy2015023



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The Determinants of Electoral Volatility
[review of the book *Determinanty chwiejności wyborczej*]

The last presidential elections gave rise numerous questions and doubts – particularly in the scientific and media environments – regarding the conditions for electoral behaviours in Poles, as signalled by the results achieved by particular candidates. The media discourse abounded in more or less definite statements regarding voter turnout data for particular population groups, the destabilization of the electorate's political preferences and the phenomenon of the transfer of votes in between the supporters of particular candidates, both in the historical approach and in the course of the election campaign. The intensity and temperature of these discussions were indicative of the fact how poorly this area is penetrated empirically.

The answers to such essential questions for this time are provided by the latest publication by Dr. Agnieszka Turska-Kawa, titled *Determinanty chwiejności wyborczej* [The determinants of electoral volatility], published by the Silesian University in Katowice. The reviewed publication is a multi-layer study of electoral instability and an extensive compendium of knowledge on its determinants. The publication contextualizes the volatility phenomenon in reference to various issues regarding the political and party system, emphasizing research- and literature-based reflection on systemic, social, psychological and economic determinants to changes in the relations of political party supporters (particularly the younger ones) and political leaders.

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Such a thorough political science analysis of the electoral volatility phenomenon is possible when adopting an original yet fully justified and solid research methodology combining the historical method (i.e. examination of the genesis of phenomena and accumulation of vast genetic material to formulate scientific laws) and the comparative method assuming behavioural analysis (with a psychological and sociological background allowing for creating a full presentation of the individual dimension of politics as the activity of individuals set in various social structures), statistical analysis (allowing for referring the accumulated research results to the systemic and social context) and systemic analysis (focused on the structure of cognitive models), as well as assuming the successive approximation method (the search for similarities and shared features among repeating phenomena) (p. 15). Such extensive methodology set the ground for adequate and profound examination of the problem and defence of research hypotheses stating that electoral volatility is generated by the following groups of factors: systemic, social, psychological and economic, with varying stability and significance for the level of electoral volatility, interfering with one another, which introduces an additional dimension of the analysis.

The monograph is the aftermath of an earlier conceptual work by Agnieszka

Turska-Kawa, analysing the political standpoints and behaviours of Poles. It is also a continuation of the current scientific achievements of Dr. Turska-Kawa, a recognized researcher, a book author and a lecturer at the Silesian University in Katowice. Her field of research focuses on political psychology, political marketing and interpersonal communication, with particular emphasis on the psychological conditions for electoral behaviours and the psychological aspects of mass communication. The author is the coordinator of the research project "Political Preferences. Standpoints – Identifications – Behaviours", the editor-in-chief of the scientific magazine "Political Preferences" and the President of the Section of Electoral Research at the Polish Political Science Association. She also studies political involvement and participation processes as part of numerous research initiatives. At this moment, her research interests focus on the problem of the conditions of electoral behaviours, the effect of which is not only the subject publication, but also a series of earlier articles in scientific magazines and non-serial publications.

Determinany chwiejności wyborczej, divided into five chapters, is actually divided into four substantive parts corresponding to considerations on particular groups of volatility factors (chapters: 2 – "System conditions for electoral volatility", 3 – "Social conditions for electoral

volatility”, 4 – “Psychological conditions for electoral volatility”, 5 – “Economic conditions for electoral volatility”), all of which embrace chapter 1 “Electoral volatility in a theoretical approach”, as well as the ending, which serves as a comparative conclusion of the relations that take place among the determinants, in reference to the concept and categories adopted in the theoretical part of the publication.

The introduction and chapter 1 of the reviewed book contains primarily the main assumptions of the author, serving as the basis for further optionalization of the problem of electoral volatility as a “measurement of change in the voters’ electoral behaviours at various levels of political representation” (p. 9), observed in the context of allocation of a single electoral vote, as well as in the context of transformation of the structure of party systems. Turska-Kawa synthetically approaches the determinations of the doctrine, referring to the works of Romain Lachat, Allan Sikk, Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair, as well as Andrzej Antoszewski (p. 270). Following Romain Lachat (cf. Lachat, 2004), the author distinguishes i. a. inter-election volatility and campaign volatility; following Stefano Bartolino and Peter Mair (cf. Bartolini, Mair, 2007) – systemic volatility, which measures changes in the acceptance of all entities in a given party system in a summary approach (in the electoral activity – passivity plane),

block – between blocks of groups with similar program structure or as part of a so-called party family, as well as party volatility, examining changes in vote allocations of citizens in a time period, usually measured in successive elections (pp. 31–34). Referring to various levels of analysis, Turska-Kawa described the mechanism of calculating and the possibility of applying particular indicators of electoral volatility measurement, including the most familiar one, the so-called Pedersen index.

What is important, the author considers electoral volatility without evaluating the phenomenon: in result, volatility not only constitutes a threat to the level of stability of the party system, but also an essential element of the “vitality” of the political scene and a factor in the adaptation of the party system to changing external conditions (pp. 24–25). Considering the causes of electoral volatility (such as reduction of clarity of traditional social divisions, intensified cognitive mobilization, increased personalization and de-ideologization of politics and trivialization of the act of voting) (pp. 23–24), the author also refers to the level of consolidation of democracy, claiming on the one hand the marginal effect of the length of duration of democracy, and the significance of a specific moment and the social-historical context of its creation for the level of electoral volatility in a given state on the other hand.

In the further part of the book, the author considers the aforementioned four groups of conditions, which essentially generate electoral volatility. The first group includes systemic factors and institutional framework for the political system, such as: political regime, the political system, the party system format and political polarization. What is interesting, particularly in the current political context, the author undertakes analysis in sub-chapters regarding compulsory voting and voting incentives, new parties in the system, forced volatility and electoral manipulation as a determinant of the *volatility* phenomenon.

The second group comprises social factors, among which the most outstanding ones are related to: socio-political divisions, affiliation in social groups, actions aiming at raising the voter turnout and the role of democracy 2.0. The most valuable analyses from the point of view of political practice assume the effect of pre-election polls, particular types of political and party leadership and voter age.

The next chapter is an extensive reflection on the psychological factors of electoral volatility, consisting analyses in axiology, civic competences, party identification and electoral volatility. Deriving from her vast psychological knowledge, the author points to a specific psychological contract between the voter and the politicians and indicates the consequences of its breach or termination. She also

raises the question of the use of political brands and negative election campaigns to respectively maintain or undermine electoral loyalty.

In chapter five, Turska-Kawa performs an analysis of the economic conditions for electoral volatility basing on the theory of rational choice and in reference to retrospective and prospective voting. This part of the book is concluded by an interesting study of the effect of New Politics assumptions (environmental aspects in the place of economic aspects in an electoral appeal) on the anticipated electoral volatility in various time perspectives.

“The indicated groups of conditions do not constitute separate, autonomous collection, but mutually interact with one another, entering into various relations. Furthermore, the intensity of interaction of particular groups of conditions is a foundation for the development of successive ones (...)” (p. 269). In the conclusion, the author attributes the fundamental role to psychological determinants, a part of which are innate, and another part – shaped at early stages of the individual’s life. Compatible with the psychological group is the group of social conditions, related to the processes of setting an individual within a social structure and building a bond. The psycho-social platform is the basis for the activation of economic determinants; in turn, systemic factors constitute an external

interaction system for the individual. What is important, compared to other factors, psychological and economic variables (considering the effect of mass media), constitute relatively permanent grounds for decisions made by voters (pp. 270–272).

The existing studies of the electoral volatility phenomenon usually assume the form of diagnosis of the present state, performed on the basis of indicators within a specific socio-political context. One of the unquestionable assets of the book is the dynamic and complex comparative approach allowing for performing an analysis of the phenomenon in a context that exceeds the framework of a single country or a single election.

The value of the book is also reinforced by its very strong theoretical stance. The researcher refers to more than 700 items in her bibliography, among which the majority has been used and applied to various extents for the purposes of volatility analysis. Another advantage of the publication is the interesting, thought-out, meticulously and reliably applied research technology. Particular parts of the monograph were created on the basis of the awareness of difficulties related to the measurement of volatility and its interpretation, such as: difficulties in measuring the level of electoral volatility in the process of party divisions and fusions, short-term coalitions or changes

in coalition layouts in successive election periods, difficulties in the development of parallel party systems – both national and regional; shortage of analyses concerning changes in the quantity of seats received by parties as a result of support received; the necessary simplification related to analysis at aggregated level; individual political entities, among which the allocation of electoral votes takes place, not considered by volatility indexes, as well as changes in electorate structure; the sensitivity of indexes to short-term changes in the support of various parties (pp. 51–58). A combination of empirical results and statistical analyses with a thorough analysis of their sources and conditions creates a research scheme which can be further used, including for creative adaptation in the cognition of electoral behaviours.

As exemplified by recent Polish elections, focusing on the aspect of electoral volatility appears to be a justified and accurate idea. The book reviewed is an essential and valuable item, which has provided a significant impact on the Polish political science literature. It is surely a publication to be recommended to students, commentators and electorate behaviour researchers; it is also a valuable study from the point of view of practitioners – politicians fighting for the allocation of political sympathies and loyalty for their groups.

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