

**ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION
OF POLES RESIDING ABROAD IN NATIONAL
AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS.
THE ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND FACTORS
INFLUENCING THE ATTENDANCE***

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ABSTRACT: The article presents the phenomenon of external voting: participation of citizens residing abroad in elections that take place in country of origin. Author offers the comparative analysis of data from parliamentary and presidential elections over last two decades (1990–2011) and elections to European Parliament (2004–2014) that took place in Poland. The noticeable increase in number of votes from abroad is the result of the growing stock of Poles residing abroad since Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, the legal and institutional changes towards simplifying voting procedures, but also the consequence of the fact that emigration of Poles became an issue of media interest and target group for political parties during the electoral campaigns.

KEYWORDS: external voting, electoral participation, Polish diaspora, national and European Parliament elections

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INTRODUCTION

In most European countries, citizens residing abroad have the right to vote in national elections. Moreover, governments facilitate the access to procedure of voting abroad in order to strengthen emigrants' engagement in national affairs. In Poland, any citizen who is of age has a right to vote in parliamentary and presidential elections and in referendums, can vote abroad, whether he or she lives there permanently or is there only temporarily. The parliamentary and presidential elections that have taken place in Poland since 2004 have featured a previously unknown attendance among the Poles living abroad. Although their actual impact on the results is negligible, the emigrants' votes are significant symbolically and play a role in political rhetoric.

The aim of this article is to analyse the dynamics in the number of votes cast by Poles residing abroad in national elections over the last two decades, particularly the elections that have taken place after the Poland's accession to the EU which resulted in mass emigration, the so-called post-accession wave. With the accession, Poles became citizens of the EU and were granted the right of free movement and of employment in other member states. The emigration of Poles after 2004 is unparalleled not only because of its magnitude, dynamics and directions of the outflow, but also because of its character, which was very unlike the previous post-war waves. It was a mass outflow of unexpected dynamics, unforeseen by both Polish authorities and society, and the receiving countries.

The author endeavours to determine the causes and conditions of the observed dynamics in electoral mobilisation among the Polish citizens residing abroad in recent years. The text is divided into five sections. In the first one, the concept of external voting and comparative overview of voting procedures are presented, as well as pros and cons of granting voting rights in national elections to citizens residing abroad. The next sections contain an analysis of the electoral participation of the Polish diaspora (meaning Polish citizens living abroad) in national (presidential and parliamentary) elections over the last twenty years (1990–2011), and in European Parliament elections (2004, 2009 and 2014). Major trends, voting results from abroad and their distribution, as well as political profile of Polish population abroad are also discussed. The last section of the article is devoted to an analysis of the role of different factors influencing the level of attendance and its noticeable increase in time period after 2004. Among others, the focus is put on impact of simplified legal procedures, the engagement of media and political parties.

A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF EXTERNAL VOTING LEGISLATION AND DEBATE AROUND IT

The external voting (granting passive and active voting rights in national elections to citizens living abroad) is a very complex phenomenon that poses considerable challenges. Most states have a very active policy towards their diasporas and help strengthen their ties with the home country. One of the most important things a state can do to keep the emigrants interested in the situation of their home country is to give them suffrage in national elections.

There are many pros and cons of external voting (Bauböck 2007; Lafleur 2011; Rubio-Marin 2006). One of the most important of these arguments is the basic tenet of democracy: extending suffrage to citizens living abroad is the fullest realisation of the principle of universality of elections; it is also the basic democratic right of any citizen that cannot be taken away from him or her even if he or she temporarily or permanently lives abroad. Opponents of the idea point out that people living abroad are not directly subject to the legal and political system of the home country and usually do not pay its taxes, and thus should not have the right to decide who should form the government. Another argument against giving voting rights to citizens living abroad is that, since they are non-residents, they cannot be fully aware of its political situation and of the candidates, and therefore their choices are often random. However, in the Internet and mass media era, this argument seems weak at best.

The scope of voting rights and ways of voting accessible for citizens residing abroad vary from country to country. The national voting systems differ considerably, e.g. in case of types of elections, voting procedures, eligibility criteria and registration systems. The existing provisions for external voting depend on history, tradition of law, political culture and electoral system design, but also on political pragmatism. The political elite's opinion on granting suffrage to citizens living abroad may depend on the impact their votes can have on the results of national elections. If it is merely symbolic – as is the case in Poland – the right is not controversial. However, if emigrants participate in huge numbers and their votes can have a significant impact on the final result, and especially if their population is made up of influential members of the opposition (e.g. the case of Venezuela), the question of voting rights for non-resident citizens may become the subject of passionate political struggle.

The worldwide comparative survey related to external voting was conducted by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and the Federal

Electoral Institute of Mexico. It covered 213 countries and depending territories all over the world. According to collected data, external voting is allowed currently by 115 countries and depending territories, including 28 from Africa, 16 from both Americas, 41 from Europe, 30 from Asia and Oceania (*Voting from abroad...* 2007: 12–13). Only three European countries (Cyprus, Malta and Slovakia) do not include any form of external voting in their electoral legislation. It is worth to notice that there are more than one of voting procedure. Among European countries that allow their citizens living abroad to vote just eight permit only the traditional procedure of voting, in which one must case a ballot in person. Most of the countries have implemented other ways of voting – by post, via Internet or by proxy. The simpler methods are designed to encourage citizens to vote and therefore increase voter turnout. Simplification of voting procedures is particularly important in case of citizens living abroad who are usually dispersed throughout the receiving country and far polling stations, which are circumstances discouraging their participation.

THE LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF EXTERNAL VOTING IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN POLAND

The Polish Electoral Code (*Kodeks wyborczy*) does not require residence for voting in parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as in referendums. Poles are entitled to cast votes from abroad, whether he or she lives there permanently or is there only temporarily, provided that his or her name is on the list of voters abroad¹. To get on the list, one has to register in advance (three days before election day at the latest) at an appropriate consulate. In the past, a voter had to appear there in person. Today the consul registers voters based on an oral, written, telephone, wire, fax or e-mail application. The electronic system of registration was used for the first time in presidential elections of 2010. Moreover, Polish citizens, while voting in polling stations abroad, need to have a valid Polish passport (or a Polish ID when voting in the EU country) (Electoral Code 2011, article 35). The list of the polling stations is set up by

¹ Polish citizens residing abroad are also eligible to run as candidates in national elections (parliamentary and presidential, according to Electoral Code 2011, article 11), however, in practice, to conduct a campaign and to gain voters' support in the native country is particularly difficult from abroad (Korzec, Pudzianowska 2013: 4).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in consultation with State Election Commission) and determines their location.

Poles residing abroad can cast votes from abroad in national elections by voting in person or by correspondence. The 2011 election was the first one when it was possible to vote by post. To do it, a citizen had to register to vote at the closest consulate in the receiving country. The consulate would then send him or her a ballot by post. The voter had to fill it in and send it back to the consulate, where it was opened in the presence of a committee on election day and added to all the other votes cast at the consulate. The 2011 election showed this form of voting was not very popular among Polish citizens living abroad; only 16,440 people voted by post.

In the parliamentary elections, electoral constituencies abroad are part of the electoral constituency Warsaw 1. This system is called “assimilated representation”, when the votes cast abroad are assimilated in one voting district in the country (Korzec, Pudzianowska 2013: 11). It means that all people who vote abroad cast their votes for the candidates from one constituency and have therefore little impact on the general result, for their ballots are aggregated to those cast in Warsaw. Their votes have therefore a purely symbolic meaning rather than any real impact. However, in presidential elections, where votes are cast for specific candidates, those cast abroad have a real value. In the 1990 and 1995 presidential elections, citizens residing abroad could only participate in the first round. This law was later changed and, as of the year 2000, Polish citizens abroad could vote in both rounds of all elections.

THE PARTICIPATION OF POLES RESIDING ABROAD IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1990–2011

In the years 1990–2011, there were seven parliamentary and five presidential elections in Poland. The statistics on the electoral participation of Poles residing abroad are presented in table 1. Since 2005, there has been a notable increase in the number of those entitled to vote (i.e. registered at polling stations outside Poland) and voting abroad. In the parliamentary election of 2007 and the presidential election three years later, the number of votes cast was significantly higher than in previous elections in Poland as well as abroad. The highest number of votes was recorded in 2010 presidential elections (203 thousand), even though

votes cast abroad constitute around 1% of all votes cast in any Polish national election.

In the 2011 parliamentary elections, the number of votes cast decreased to 119 thousand. This represents a decrease of 30 thousand (or 20%) compared to the 2007 parliamentary election, and by 84 thousand (or 42%) compared to the 2010 presidential election. At the same time, however, the highest turnout was noted (85%, when the average turnout in elections in years 1990–2010 was 74%). A voter turnout, however, is not a reliable indicator in analysing the dynamics of electoral participation of Poles abroad. It is important to note that voter turnout is the ratio of those who registered to vote abroad (and not all those residing abroad at the moment) to those who really voted abroad. Therefore, voter turnout, as a stand-alone statistic, does not prove much, except that those who went to the effort to register themselves before elections generally cast a ballot.

Table 1. Votes cast abroad in parliamentary and presidential elections in Poland (1990–2011)

Elections	Number of persons registered to vote	Number of voters	Number of polling stations abroad	Turnout (%) ^b
1990 Presidential	143,586	113,251	177	78.9
1991 Parliamentary	57,648	40,834	156	70.8
1993 Parliamentary	57,870	41,918	117	72.4
1995 Presidential ^a	79,896	67,683	127	84.7
1997 Parliamentary	53,848	44,561	144	82.7
2000 Presidential ^a	69,625	57,649	167	82.7
2001 Parliamentary	41,817	26,749	165	64.08
2005 Parliamentary	49,840	35,611	161	71.59
2005 Presidential ^a	80,071	48,179	162	60.19
2007 Parliamentary	190,637	148,946	205	78.13
2010 Presidential ^a	277,016	203,477	263	73.50
2011 Parliamentary	139,415	119,678	268	85.84

Source: State Election Commission Database

- a) The results of the presidential elections are presented for the first round (the election of 1995) and for the second round (the elections of 2000, 2005 and 2010).
- b) Turnout refers to the ratio of the number of persons eligible to vote (registered to vote) to the number of votes cast abroad during an election.

In 2007, the number of people who voted abroad was six times higher than in 2005. In the 2010 presidential election, the increase over 2005 was four-fold. Most votes were cast in the UK, Ireland, the US and Germany. Around 75% of all votes from abroad were cast in these countries (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of votes cast abroad in national elections in selected countries (2005–2011)

	2005 Parliamentary	2005 Presidentiala	2007 Parliamentary	2010 Presidentiala	2011 Parliamentary
UK	2,431	3,318	36,296	43,979	31,107
Ireland	883	1,577	13,952	14,449	7,298
US	5,578	9,337	28,073	37,005	21,491
Germany	4,199	5,731	14,591	21,449	11,933
All votes from abroad	35,611	48,179	148,946	203,477	119,678

Source: State Election Commission Database

a) The results of the presidential elections are presented for the second round.

The most dynamic increase in participation abroad was noted between the presidential elections of 2005 and 2010. In the second round of the 2010 election, over four times more votes were cast than in the previous one (48,179 in 2005 vs. 203,477 in 2010). In 2010, compared to 2005, 13 times as many Poles voted in the UK, nine times as many in Ireland, almost five times as many in the US, and four times as many in Germany. A similarly high increase was also noted in other receiving countries of the post-accession emigration: in Norway the increase was eleven-fold (396 in 2005 vs. 4,564 in 2010), in Spain – six-fold (995 in 2005 vs. 5,793 in 2010), and two-fold in Italy (2,424 in 2005 vs. 4,882 in 2010).

Despite the dynamic increase in votes cast abroad during a national election, it is important to note that, given the overall number of Poles officially living abroad, their electoral participation is not very high. When we compare the estimates of the Central Statistics Office (GUS) regarding the overall number of Poles living abroad (emigrants or people staying temporarily abroad for more than two months) with the number of votes cast abroad in national elections, we can see that in 2005 only 3.3% of emigrants actually voted, in 2007–6.5%, and in the presidential election of 2010–10.8%. In 2010, one in ten Poles living

in the UK and in Ireland voted, whereas in Germany the number was only one in twenty.

In parliamentary elections of 2011 slight decrease in number of votes from abroad was recorded. It was caused by a wave of return migration and subsequent decline in the number of Poles residing abroad, but also by the fact that in the 2011 election, politicians did not focus on emigration and the situation of Poles living abroad in electoral campaigns as they had in the past².

After 2004 many changes have been implemented in the organisation of elections to encourage would-be voters and to facilitate voting for citizens living abroad. The number of electoral constituencies abroad has been increased, voter registration has been simplified, and the option to vote by post has been implemented. In the 2005 election and later, a record number of polling stations was established abroad. In the recent election of 2011, there were 268 of them, especially in the countries where the number of Poles has been traditionally high and in those where it had increased in the post-accession period (see Table 3). Between the 2005 and 2010 presidential elections, the number of polling stations in the UK increased from 3 to 41 (and to 43 in 2011), in Ireland from 1 to 11 (and 16 in 2011), in Germany from 5 to 12 (11 in 2011), and in the US from 15 to 28 (27 in 2011). New stations were also established in countries where the number of voters had never been high but which became destination countries of the post-accession wave of emigration. Compared to 2005, there was an increase in the number of polling stations in 2010: from one to three in Italy, from one to four in Norway, and from three to eleven in Spain (the numbers did not change in 2011).

The increased number of polling stations abroad has certainly made voting easier for Poles living abroad, which resulted in more external votes. However, the 2007 election showed that many stations abroad were not prepared for the increased turnout. In the most popular polling station in Poland (Warsaw), 2054 ballots were cast in 2007. In the same election, the station Chicago 4 issued over twice as many ballots (5,781), as did the station London 3 (5,397). Others (London 1 and 2, Dublin 1 and 2, Cologne in Germany) issued over 4 thousand

² Interesting phenomenon of elections of 2011 was electoral strategy of one of the main political parties – PSL (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*). Among PSL candidates in Warsaw constituency were representatives of Polish diaspora organizations. The strategy that Poles abroad support them in elections turned out to be an utter defeat: the top candidate on the list, Władysław Kozakiewicz, representing Polish diaspora in Germany, gained 605 votes (0.5%), and PSL gained 1,858 votes from abroad (1.5%).

Table 3. Number of polling stations abroad in national elections in selected countries (2001–2011)

	2000 Presidential	2005 Parlia- mentary	2005 Presidential	2007 Parlia- mentary	2010 Presidential	2011 Parlia- mentary
the UK	2	3	3	20	41	43
Ireland	1	1	1	4	11	16
the US	21	14	15	21	28	27
Germany	6	5	5	6	12	11
Italy	2	3	3	3	3	3
Norway	1	1	1	2	4	4
Spain	2	3	3	7	11	11
All polling stations abroad	167	161	162	205	263	268

Source: State Election Commission Database.

ballots each. The dynamism of the increase is particularly visible in the results of the parliamentary and presidential elections in the UK and Ireland since 2005. In 2005, a little over 3 thousand people voted for president. In the following years, the number soared to 36 thousand in 2007 and over 43 thousand in 2010. A similarly significant increase was observed in Ireland, where 883 people voted in 2005 and 14 thousand people in 2007, in the US, with 5.5 thousand voters in 2005 vs. 28 thousand in 2007 and in Germany, where the number of voters increased three-fold (from 4 thousand to over 14 thousand voters) (see Table 3).

THE POLITICAL PROFILE OF POLES RESIDING ABROAD IN THE LIGHT OF ELECTION RESULTS

In the last decade, the dominant divide of the Polish political scene has been shaped by the main two parties: the centrist-liberal Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO), and the conservative-right wing Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). In the 2005 and the 2010 presidential elections, the leaders of the two parties competed in the second round. In both cases the right-wing candidate representing PiS (Lech Kaczyński in 2005 and Jarosław Kaczyński in 2010) gained 70% of votes in the US and 71 & 72% in Canada.

Meanwhile, liberal-centrist candidates from PO (Donald Tusk in 2005 and Bronisław Komorowski in 2010) gained 71 & 72% of votes in the UK and 82 & 83% in Ireland, respectively. Map 1 presents the distribution of votes in the presidential election.

A similar distribution has emerged in the parliamentary elections. Centrist and left-wing parties are most popular in the receiving countries of the post-accession emigration, whereas members of the Polish diaspora of the Americas vote traditionally for right-wing parties. This tendency was confirmed by the results of the 2007 parliamentary election: the centrist-liberal PO gained 74.5% of support in the UK and 77.3% in Ireland (as well as 62.7% in Germany and 54.87% in France), whereas the right-wing PiS got 66.14% of votes in the US and 67.12% in Canada. The distribution did not change much in 2011: the PO kept its high result in the UK (57%), in Ireland (55%), in Germany (57%), and in France (51%), whereas PiS gained support of 67% of Poles living in the US and Canada.

The noticeable increase in number of Poles voting abroad in national elections after 2004 cannot be explained as a direct consequence of the post-accession wave, i.e. more Poles living abroad, and of its fluid character, because the growth of voters also occurred in countries where the number of Poles did not increase, or even where it decreased (as is the case in the US and Canada). It can therefore be hypothesised that it was a polarisation of the Polish diaspora, as encouraged by politicians, that mobilised the 'new' post-accession diaspora and caught the interest of the 'older' waves of emigration, mainly in the US and other American countries, causing them to vote as well.

The visible cleavage may be due to the region of origin of emigrants and therefore the history of their clusters. Polish emigrants in America come predominantly from Eastern and Southern Poland, from traditionally conservative and nationalist regions (the Sub-Carpathian region in the South-East of the country has been the traditional source of emigrants to the Americas). The post-accession wave consists of young people living in the era of open borders and fluid mobility, unburdened by history, appreciative of Poland's accession to the EU, and supporting liberal economic reforms and socio-political changes in their home country. Ideological divides, relating to values, identities and history, are geographically and demographically entrenched in Polish society and are echoed in cleavages present in the diaspora, which in turn have been purposefully exploited by politicians from the main parties and by presidential candidates in their campaigns in order to mobilise their electorates in Poland and abroad.

THE PARTICIPATION OF POLES RESIDING ABROAD IN ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SINCE 2004

Polish citizens residing abroad are able to cast votes in European Parliament elections (EP elections) just like in parliamentary and presidential elections. After Poland's accession to the EU, Polish citizens participated in elections to European Parliament three times: in 2004, 2009 and 2014. Poles residing in EU country have one of two options: to vote for Polish candidates registered in Poland, or to vote for candidates from the country of residence.

In 2014 EP election, there were 174 polling stations operated in 86 countries. The most popular ones were located in the main cities in Western Europe and the US, where Poles are concentrated. The top five cities include London (in 5 polling stations 3,281 persons were registered to vote), Chicago (4 polling stations – 2,656 registered voters), Brussels (2 polling stations – 2,472 registered voters), Paris (2 polling stations – 1,704 registered voters), and New York (2 polling stations – 1,186 registered voters). Moreover, among registered voters 6,001 persons declared willing to vote by mail ballot (postal voting), and among them 4,745 persons sent back their votes by post. The general data on participation of Poles in EP elections abroad since 2004 are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Votes cast abroad in EP elections since 2004

Elections to EP	Number of persons registered to vote	Number of valid votes	Number of polling stations abroad	Turnout (%) ^a
2004	26,792	14,237	165	54.6
2009	25,921	19,031	189	74.4
2014	36,375	29,829	174	87.7

Source: State Election Commission Database

a) Turnout refers to the ratio of the number of persons eligible to vote (registered to vote) to the number of votes cast abroad during an election.

Taking into account the distribution of votes, two political parties gained 61.97% of all votes from abroad (PO – 32.95%, PiS – 29.02%). Similarly to the national elections, PO won in most of European countries, as well as in Asia, Africa, South America and Australia, whereas PiS gained the highest support in

the US and Canada. Unexpectedly, the third place was taken by the far rightist party – New Right (Nowa Prawica – Janusza Korwin-Mikke), which gained 15.01% of votes from abroad, and the highest support in the UK, Ireland and Iceland. The detailed voting results of political parties are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Political parties' distribution of votes from abroad in EP election of 2014 in Poland

	Political party	Number of votes	Result in%
1.	PO (Platforma Obywatelska)	9,828	32.95
2.	PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)	8,655	29.02
3.	Nowa Prawica – Janusza Korwin-Mikke	4,476	15.01
4.	Europa Plus – Twój Ruch	1,255	7.51
5.	SLD-UP	2,241	4.21
6.	Ruch Narodowy	1,036	3.47
7.	Polska Razem Jarosława Gowina	920	3.08
8.	Partia Zieloni	694	2.33
9.	Solidarna Polska Zbigniewa Ziobro	463	1.55
10.	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe	261	0.87
	Together	29,829	100

Source: State Election Commission Database.

The voters from abroad are included in constituency Warsaw I – the largest one in Poland, where the number of valid votes in EP elections of 2014 amounted 777,613. It means that votes from abroad constituted 3.8% of all valid votes cast in this constituency. It confirms that in practice the impact of votes from abroad on general election results is very minor. The estimated costs of organization of PE elections abroad reached 488,000 PLN in 2009 and 978,000 PLN in 2014³, which means that the cost of one vote from abroad was respectively 25 PLN and 32 PLN.

³ Information obtained from the Press Office of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DYNAMICS OF ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF POLES RESIDING ABROAD AFTER 2004

Among the factors influencing the dynamics of electoral participation of Poles residing abroad the most important one is post-accession migration and increase of number of Polish citizens in EU countries after 2004. The role of legal and institutional procedures, as well as the process of organization of elections, which was modified and became more friendly to voters (online registration system and significant increase in number of polling stations abroad), were also significant. Additionally, another factor requires to be mentioned: the fact that post-accession migration became an issue of special interest of media and public opinion, and Poles abroad turned out to be an important target group for political parties during electoral campaigns.

The political elites' efforts to politicize emigration and the diaspora became visible after the elections of 2005. For the first time, political parties have included emigration as an important issue in their electoral platforms and appealed directly to emigrants and their families. The importance of the emigration issue for public opinion and political elites was reflected in the media. Post-accession migration and the realities of Poles abroad and their family members remaining at home became a subject frequently present in the media; this interest evolved into widespread public and political discourse over the twin issues of emigration and diaspora.

Although post-accession emigration has become, ever since 2004, one of the main topics in the media, the discourse concerning emigration is very diverse (Richter 2012). The media focus on the negative impacts of mass emigration, such as loss of a young and talented generation (the 'lost generation' motif), the acceptance of low-skilled jobs by educated people ('brain waste') and the abandonment of children ('euro-orphans'). The topics that were particularly discussed in the early post-accession period included: reasons for emigrating, the nature of emigration, its consequences and the likelihood of return. The media portrayals of post-accession migration, as polarised as elsewhere, may be described as cosmopolitan vs. patriotic. The former claims that Poles are European citizens who are taking advantage of their right to free movement, whereas the latter emphasises that real Poles (the patriots) do not leave their homeland at a time of difficulty in its journey to dynamic growth.

The impact of votes from abroad on the overall result of elections is negligible, but symbolically extremely important. It is due to their propagandist value that, in order to encourage the emigrants to vote, political elites have started to appeal to them as a target audience in electoral campaigns. Poles living abroad became a separate target group, and emigration – considered as the situation faced by Polish citizens abroad and by their families who were left behind, as well as the impact of mass outflows on Poland's society and economy- became one of the key concerns in the platforms of political parties and presidential candidates. During the electoral campaigns, the negative effects of mass emigration on Polish families and households were discussed heatedly. The main message of the campaigns was addressed not only to emigrants themselves, but also to the families they had left behind. It was particularly obvious in the 2007 election, when right- and left-wing parties alike emphasised that it was the economy and the abandonment of reforms that forced young Poles to emigrate.

The 2010 campaign took place at a time of a return wave, when voters worried how to reintegrate the return migrants who decided to weather the crisis in the home country, in the domestic labour market. From the very beginning of the crisis, the media presented very colourfully the spectre of a sudden mass return of Poles, first from Iceland, then also from the UK and South European countries. Candidates and political parties tried to outdo each other by presenting support projects for the returning emigrants. In the run-up to elections, leaders of the political parties and presidential candidates visited the biggest centres of the diaspora with great regularity. Representatives of the centrist Civic Platform party visited the UK, where they met with young ex-pats, students and managers, and the leaders of the right side of the political spectrum wooed the Polish diaspora in America. The political elite, who politicised the very process of emigration and included it in electoral campaigns and political programmes, targeted particular segments of the Polish diaspora, referencing and therefore deepening the existing cleavages.

By emphasising the existing cleavages inside the Polish diaspora, political parties and presidential candidates strengthen the simplified distinction between the right-wing, conservative 'old' diaspora and the centrist, liberal, post-accession 'new' one in order to mobilize voters abroad during election campaigns. The effectiveness of such a strategy has been proven by the results of the elections and the visible divide in external voting trends. In the US and Canada, where the number of Poles did not increase, or even decreased, the number of voters reached previously unseen levels. It proves that Poles who had been inactive in earlier elections have started to take interest and vote.

SUMMARY

The analysis of the level of participation of Poles residing abroad in national elections reveals interesting dynamics in recent years. Few important causes of this phenomenon deserve to be pointed out here. First and foremost, the mass outflow of Poles after Poland joined the EU in 2004 gave rise to a dynamic increase of the number of Poles living abroad, and to the fact that the topic of emigration and emigrants became important to Polish society and political elites, which was reflected in political and media discourse.

The modifications in organization system of elections abroad, especially the simplified registration procedures enabling to register online, and increased number of polling stations abroad, particularly in the receiving countries of the newest wave of emigration, have certainly made voting easier and brought about more external votes.

The course of electoral campaigns was another important factor influencing the increase of level of interest in elections and number of votes cast from abroad. Since electoral campaign of 2005, and especially of 2007 and 2010, emigration and Poles abroad became one of the key issues in political programs and electoral campaigns. The message was addressed directly to emigrants, but the main target groups were their families left behind in the country.

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