

ELECTORAL LISTS AS A GATEKEEPER IN THE REGIONAL POLITICAL ELITES RECRUITMENT

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ABSTRACT: The aim of the article is to present an empirical contribution towards the research on the recruitment of political elites. It seeks to determine patterns by which candidates' lists were composed in the 2010 regional assemblies election. It is descriptive and exploratory in nature and based on a case study containing a qualitative analysis of biographies of candidates that ran for seats. The scope of the research includes four national political parties: Civic Platform (PO), Law and Justice (PiS), Polish People's Party (PSL) and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD).

KEYWORDS: political elites, recruitment, regional elections, electoral list, biographies of candidates.

One of the recurring issues in research on political elites is a clear definition of their boundaries and specifying the way in which they are self-sustained or fall into decline (Parry 2005: 2). Both these aspects are mutually dependent and can be explained, among other ways, by referring to the elite recruitment process. In the elitist paradigm democratic character of a given political system is not necessarily determined by size or social composition of the political elite, but also, and perhaps primarily, by how that elite is recruited (Nagle 1992: 487–488). This element performs crucial structure-building, stabilizing, regulatory and

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legitimizing functions both for the elite itself and the political system at large. Most of all, since the elite recruitment process includes assignment to specific elite positions, it amounts to a form of distributing political power and influence (Seligman 1964: 612).

The importance of this research question and its vital consequence for the social and political practice are highlighted superbly by the words of Lester G. Seligman (1964: 612): “The elite recruitment pattern both reflects and affects the society. As a dependent variable it expresses the value system of society and its degree of consistency and contradictions, the degree and type of representativeness of the system, the basis of social stratification and its articulation with the political system, and the structure and change in political roles. As a factor which affects change, or as an independent variable, elite recruitment patterns determine avenues for political participation and status, influence the kind of policies that will be enacted, accelerate or retard changes, affect the distribution of status and prestige, and influence the stability of the system”.

As we intend to add our empirical contribution to the research on political elites, we present a case study based on qualitative analysis of biographies of the candidates who ran for seats in the 2010 regional assemblies election. The aim of the analysis is to determine patterns by which candidates’ lists were composed. The scope of our research includes four national political parties: Civic Platform (PO), Law and Justice (PiS), Polish People’s Party (PSL) and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD).

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Literature on the subject describes three main criteria by which elites can be distinguished:

- institutional – the elite consists of individuals who occupy strategically important posts within the state’s structure;
- reputational – the elite includes people who are considered by public opinion as having significant influence on decisions made by the authorities;
- decisional – the elite is composed of people who actually make or substantially influence political decisions (Sokół, Żmigrodzki 2003: 456).

In this article, we shall adopt the first of the above-mentioned methods. Its use is exemplified in, among others, Anthony Giddens’s (1974: 4) definition of the elite, which he describes as “individuals that occupy formally defined positions

of legitimate authority over organizations or social institutions”. Furthermore, following Robert. D. Putnam (1976: 14), we shall specify political elite as “restricted to persons who are at the top of the pyramid or pyramids of political (...) power”. According to Giddens (1974: 4), recruitment to the elite position is, next to the organization / structure of elite groups and distribution of (“effective”) power as exercised by those in elite positions, one of the three aspects involved in the study of elites¹. It embraces two processes: (1) the transformation from non-political roles to eligibility for influential political roles, and (2) the assignment and selection of people for specific political roles. It includes both eligibility for elite status and further selection or assignment to specific elite positions.

When analysing the process of recruitment to elite positions, we shall refer to two basic research perspectives offered by scholars:

- stratificational – in which the analysis of the elites is focused on their members’ position in the social structure, their internal cohesion (referring to both social ties and common goals) as well as their common consciousness (the sense of belonging). In this approach, integration and isolation are two traits that characterize the elites (Sokół, Żmigrodzki 2003: 456). It can also be reflective of Meisel’s (1958: 4) three “Cs” (consciousness, cohesion, conspiracy) that are the elite’s constitutive features. The social stratification-based approach, as it refers to recruitment of the elite, means looking for correlation between peoples’ social background and their political behaviours. Hence the focus on social status and education as key factors that determine “eligibility” for recruitment and affect the the elite’s cohesion. Although this approach is a very limited tool for predicting elite’s attitudes and policies (i.e. allegiance to family does not necessarily withstand allegiance to a principle), it can illuminate the very different styles of recruitment to the elite position which can occur within a single society (Parry 2005: 87, 89);
- institutional – whereby political organizations and institutions are the focal points of interest (Sokół, Żmigrodzki 2003: 456). In the recruitment process, institutional factors constitute variables which structure the choices of political actors. Olivier Nay discerns three types of institutional variables: the rules of the voting system, the organisational features

¹ The positional perspective was also adopted in H. Laswell’s distributional interpretation, J. Burnham’s economic approach, by E. Suleiman in his account of French society or G. Sartori in his stratificational concept (Nocoń 2004: 68).

of political activity, as well as non-codified norms and criteria which orient the perceptions and beliefs of the political groups involved in the selection process. Indeed, while legal norms or internal party regulations are crucial elements of research done on the elite recruitment process, the third dimension of institutional variables – that is, social rules, cultural values, clusters of beliefs, long-term political practices, informal conventions followed by political actors – is rarely highlighted in scientific publications (Nay 2001: 151).

METHODOLOGY

In our opinion, composing the lists of candidates in elections is one of the crucial stages of the recruitment process, used as a tool for gatekeeping access to the elite. A thorough research of this stage requires combining the two perspectives described above. This can be done by analysing political careers of candidates that run in regional elections. If we examine their biographies, we can not only draw conclusions from their social attributes (such as age, gender, social background, family's participation in politics, formal education, profession), but also – as Giddens (1974: 4) suggested – identify recruitment channels (formal and informal) and determine to what extent certain “progress paths” are open or closed for new participants. Institutional and neoinstitutional rules constitute a framework of incentives and limitations that affect one's decision on whether to run for political posts. This framework also determines how individuals perceive their chances, define their aspirations and choose strategies (Schlesinger 1966, after Nay 2001: 153). However, these are not the only factors that shape a candidates' decision, since such individuals always filter information about the existing rules through the lens of their own system of values, attitudes and beliefs.

We have chosen regional elections as a basis for our analysis for several reasons. Most of all, regional elections in Poland are considered to be of secondary importance. Thus, leaders of political parties rarely take part in them, which leaves more space for other competitors. Secondly, these elections are characterized by bigger numbers of candidates (which is easily explained by the bigger number of seats to be filled). Under these circumstances, composing the lists of candidates becomes a certain test of a party's numerical strength and membership quality. Therefore, it can be expected that parties will open up their recruitment channels for more political debutants and /or people from outside

the party itself. In a sense, it is in these elections that major political parties can (albeit do not have to) reduce barriers limiting access to the market for other entities (like social organisations or voters' groups) and non-party candidates. At the same time, regional elections, as opposed to local elections, are dominated by large, national parties – a fact that is reflected in the numbers of registered candidates' lists as well as in the numbers of seats in regional assemblies that are occupied by major parties' representatives (see: Table 1).

Table 1. 2010 assemblies election – statistical data

Type of data:	2010
Overall number of candidates' lists registered for the assemblies election	48
Lists registered by political parties	15
Lists registered by coalitions of parties	1
Lists registered by organisations	6
Lists registered by formal voters' committees	26
Overall number of lists from which candidates won seats in regional assemblies	9
including: political parties	4
social organisations	2
voters' committees	3
% of seats in regional assemblies won by political parties	96,4%
% of seats in regional assemblies won by social organisations	1,6%
% of seats in regional assemblies won by voters' committees	2,0%

Source: Cichosz 2013: 314, 321.

Such a broad involvement of national political parties in regional elections allows researchers to observe the preliminary stage of the national-level elite recruitment process. This is so because more and more frequently, Polish politicians' careers begin with their debut in local or regional elections. After they successfully enter the scene (by garnering substantial support in local or regional elections), they are permitted by the parties' decision-making bodies to run for seats in the most important political competition – that is, national parliamentary elections.

Questions that we considered important are related to:

- granting new competitors and people from outside parties access to candidates' lists; more specifically, we have examined whether national

political parties open up their lists in regional assemblies elections for debutants, or prefer to fill them with more experienced pretenders; furthermore, we have asked if parties allow candidatures of people from outside, or if they rely solely on their membership ranks; in other words – whether the elite recruitment process is mostly internal or external in character;

- the nature of resources and skills that allow candidates' to enter into the ranks of the political elite;
- identification of patterns and regularities in recruitment that can illustrate typical political careers on the regional level.

To answer the above questions, we have focused on analysing the composition of candidates' lists, and particularly (albeit not exclusively) on the criteria by which four major Polish parties (Civic Platform, Law and Justice, Polish People's Party and the Democratic Left Alliance) chose their candidates for the top three places on each list registered in the regional election. Narrowing down our focus to the lists' top places is dictated by the prevailing behaviours of voters, who tend to support the highest-ranked candidates. Statistical data we have collected on the 2010 regional election indicates that candidates heading the lists won over 50% of all seats, and if we take into account candidates from the top three places, the proportion goes up to over 80% (see: Table 2). It is clear, then, that the place on the list largely determines the candidate's chances for being elected, and therefore, for entering the ranks of regional political elites.

Table 2. Correlation between places on candidates' lists and numbers of seats won in the 2010 regional assemblies election

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Other, lower place	The last place
Number of seats won	295	111	57	31	25	3	8	11	20
% of all available seats	52,6	19,8	10,2	5,5	4,4	0,5	1,4	2,0	3,6

Source: Cichosz 2013: 322.

For our analysis we have created a typology encompassing four basic types of political careers. The criteria we have used are as follows:

- experience in local, regional, national and European-level politics, measured by time a given individual has spent holding seats in representative

bodies such as county or regional assemblies, as well as national Parliament and European Parliament;

- membership in a given political party.

As a result, the four “clean-cut” types of political careers refer to:

- 1) “old stagers” – experienced politicians recruited internally (those who had been aligned with a given formation before the 2010 election);
- 2) “transfers” – experienced politicians recruited externally (those who had changed their party affiliation and in 2010 were “first-timers” in the ranks of a given party’s candidates);
- 3) “rising stars” – political debutants recruited internally (members of a given party or its youth organisations);
- 4) “the incentivized” – political debutants recruited externally from a given party’s milieu (like social organisations being stakeholders of the party, celebrities, opinion leaders; see: Figure 1).

	experienced	debutants
internal recruitment	“old-stagers”	“rising stars”
external recruitment	“transfers”	“the incentivized”

Figure 1. Types of political career

In order to determine the types of career preferred by Polish political parties more specifically, we have devised additional criteria. In the case of experienced candidates, these criteria refer to details of given politicians’ careers – in which representative bodies (regional or national) they had previously held seats and when they held them (whether in 2010 they were active politicians or returning to the political scene). Furthermore, we have discerned a group of people who decided to run at the same time for seats in regional assemblies and for offices of mayors or borough presidents (a situation that is allowed by the Polish political system).

In the case of debutants, we have also devised additional criteria, focusing on their social and professional experience:

- professional experience – what was their profession and whether they had any experience as civil servants (be it in local-, regional- or national-level administration);
- participation in civil society organisations;
- their families’ participation in politics.

We hope these additional criteria will allow us to pinpoint where political parties prefer to look for their potential candidates, as well as what resources and qualities enable these individuals to break through barriers limiting access to the political representation market. When determining these resources and qualities, we have broadened the scope of our research to encompass also candidates who won seats in regional assemblies even though they were ranked 4th or lower on their respective lists. Based on the data we have obtained, we shall attempt to find recruitment patterns.

Data on which this article is based was collected during research on the 2010 regional assemblies election, conducted by a team of scholars representing nearly all academic departments of political sciences in Poland. Resulting from the research are case studies that picture the course of the election campaign and results recorded in 16 voivodeships. The data was complemented with information taken from official websites of Polish political parties and their candidates, as well as from press articles and biographies of regional politicians published on the Internet.

ANALYSIS RESULTS

In regional elections, major Polish political parties rely rather on well-known, established names (those we have termed “old stagers”) than on debutants. They put premium on experience gained at all levels of politics – from local and regional self-government bodies to the national/ European Parliament. Parties that go through a period of declining support (in this case, for example SLD) seem particularly keen on reaching for once prominent political figures (former deputies to the Sejm or Senat, ministers in the Government) who lost their positions and would like to rebuild their status working in regional self-government bodies.

Particularly interesting are those cases where some individuals simultaneously ran for seats in their regional assembly and for offices of mayors or borough presidents. Our partial analysis that encompasses only mayors’ elections in capital cities of all 16 voivodeships², points out that four major political parties decided to use this approach in the case of 19 candidates. In three of those cases, “double”

² Although there are 16 voivodeships in Poland, there are 18 cities that hold the status of capitals. That is so because two voivodeships, i.e. kujawsko-pomorskie and lubuskie, have “double” capital cities. In case of kujawsko-pomorskie, the city of Bydgoszcz is a seat of the voivode, while Toruń acts as a seat of the regional assembly and the marshal’s office. In lubuskie, the situation is similar, with Zielona Góra and Gorzów sharing the status of the capital city.

candidates won both a seat in a regional assembly and the office of mayor, and decided to give up the former position in order to take the latter. Such strategy was broadly employed by the Polish People's Party – out of its 10 candidates for mayors in voivodeship capitals, 9 simultaneously ran for seats in regional assemblies. However, none of them were successful. It is worth noting that similar practices were also used by smaller committees. Candidates' list of R. Dutkiewicz's (Mayor of Wrocław) Electoral Committee, that was only registered in the dolnośląskie voivodeship, included three acting mayors (respectively, of Wrocław, Jelenia Góra and Lubin) who at the same time were running for re-election, one candidate for the office of mayor (Wałbrzych) and five candidates for borough presidents who were also hoping to be re-elected. As it turned out, such a move proved effective, since the Committee's candidates won nine seats in the regional assembly. R. Dutkiewicz himself garnered enough votes to place three people (in a 7-member constituency) from his list in the assembly. This kind of strategy is a way to popularize the candidate's name and the list itself (since direct elections usually draw more media attention) or to save money (by running one campaign instead of two separate ones). It can also be seen as "plan B" – in case a candidate for the office of mayor fails to win it, they still hold a chance to get a seat on the assembly. If they are successful in both elections, they give up the position on the assembly and take the office of mayor.

Deputies to Parliament are also welcome by political parties as top-ranked candidates on the lists. However, very few acting deputies decide to run for seats in regional assemblies (in the 2010 election there were two such cases). They are more willing to participate in direct elections and run for the office of mayor or president³. A notable exception to that rule came from former SLD deputies, who took part in the 2010 election in substantially bigger numbers.

Other "stars" meant to garner votes are member of well-known politicians' families. For instance, among its candidates in lubuskie voivodeship, PO registered K. Marcinkiewicz's brother. In łódzkie voivodeship, SLD placed W. Olejniczak's brother, while PiS put forward M. Rosiak's widow. In pomorskie voivodeship, PiS registered sister of A. Gwiazda (who back in the days of People's Republic of Poland was a renowned member of the anti-communist opposition) and A. Kurska, mother of J. Kurski, a well-known PiS politician. Even though such family-based candidatures are usually positioned second or third (rather

³ After the 2010 election, no less than 12 acting deputies to the Parliament gave up their seats when they were elected mayors or presidents.

than on top of the list), they still hold good chances of being successful. A case in point: C. Olejniczak (brother of W. Olejniczak, former SLD leader), a political debutant ranked second on the SLD list, garnered higher support than another, experienced left-wing politician and consequently became the only SLD candidate in his constituency to win a seat on the regional assembly.

It is worth highlighting that top positions on candidates' lists are normally reserved for members of a given party, and possibly for its close supporters (approximately 80% of all candidates). It is very rare that parties choose "fresh transfers" (people who shortly before the election change their political affiliation) to lead their lists. We have observed that it is only possible if a party enjoys relatively low support in a given region (like for instance PO in the podkarpackie voivodeship, where they placed former PiS member on top of their list, or PSL in dolnośląskie voivodeship, where they chose a former Self-Defence politician to be their top-ranked candidate).

Debutants are quite likely to lead a candidates' lists (in 2010 such was the case with approximately 1/3 of all lists), especially when they are experienced public servants or local self-government officials- for example, the function of the voivode or deputy voivode is a good starting point for a further political career. Holding managerial positions in state agencies is also a desirable attribute for potential candidates. Moreover, even if such first-time candidates are unsuccessful, they can usually count on being appointed for a fairly high level position in public administration.

The situation of celebrities, famous athletes or artists is different. They do participate in regional elections, but very seldom as top-ranked candidates. In most cases, they hold positions toward the end of their list. Still, that does not prevent them from winning seats on regional assemblies. For example, a famous former sportswoman, E. Ryś-Ferens, was elected a deputy to the mazowieckie voivodeship assembly even though she held last place on PSL's list. Another celebrated athlete, J. Marczułajtis, was also successful despite being ranked 10th on PO's list in the małopolskie voivodeship, while M. Wojciechowska, a TV journalist and adventurer, won a seat after being positioned as the next to last PiS candidate in her region.

There were some interesting cases when a top candidate failed to earn a seat on the assembly, while a lower-ranked pretender succeeded. We believe that such situation is a clear signal for party leadership (which acts as a gatekeeper) that preferences they exhibit while composing lists differ from their voters' expectations. If we take all regions into account, there were 21 such cases in the

2010 election, with SLD and PSL as the most frequently afflicted parties (nine cases each). It can be inferred that the SLD leadership attempted a strategy of refreshing the party's ranks by replacing its elder, distinguished politicians with young, rising activists. The experienced party members also got their share of places on the lists, but not necessarily as leading candidates. Yet, the electorate chose to support the more familiar, distinguished names: former deputies to Parliament, ministers in the government and voivodes who enjoyed their biggest political successes back in the 1990s.

In turn, similar situations recorded by PSL can be attributed to a different cause – party members, who in most cases held leading positions on the lists, proved less appealing to the voters than externally recruited local leaders (respected doctors, entrepreneurs or activists representing PSL's stakeholders), who were ranked lower.

Other instances when lower-ranked candidates were able to overcome barriers protecting access to the political representation market can be linked to the advantage of a recognizable surname. That is so because one's popularity does not necessarily have to be derived from one's political achievements – it can also be 'borrowed' by virtue of having the same surname as a well-known political figure. Such was the case of Janusz Buzek, PO candidate ranked 12th, who managed to win a seat on the regional assembly in the śląskie voivodeship after he garnered 10% of votes obtained by all PO candidates in that region.

Another potentially beneficial strategy for candidates positioned 4th or lower on their lists is to resort to specialization and occupy a narrow, often geographically-defined, niche. This proved successful in the case of M. Orliński (PSL candidate ranked 10th in the mazowieckie voivodeship), B. Romaniuk (PiS candidate ranked 8th in the podkarpackie voivodeship, who won 34,7% of all votes in his constituency) or J. Ciółkowski (PiS candidate, also ranked 8th, who was supported overwhelmingly by inhabitants of the city of Lesko). The same refers to specialists who launch political careers on the basis of their earlier work for social organizations being stakeholders to particular political parties.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of biographies of candidates registered in the 2010 regional assemblies election by four major Polish political formations indicates that top positions on these lists are usually occupied by internally recruited politicians with

experience in local and regional self-government bodies or national Parliament. When examining careers of these top-ranked candidates, one can group them into several categories:

- acting deputies to regional assemblies who run for re-election;
- local or sub-local politicians looking toward ‘promotion’;
- ‘big names,’ acting deputies to the Parliament;
- ‘dying stars,’ once prominent politicians whose careers broke as a result of, for example, declining support for their formation.

Internally recruited debutants also find their way into the top places on candidates’ lists. In this group, one can distinguish:

- ‘experts’ – most of all, experienced public servants;
- ‘courtiers’ – party members whose main advantage lies in their close ties to regional party leaders.

It is worth noting that increasingly often the same people represent their parties in elections to different representative bodies or offices. Voters find the same names on candidates’ lists in parliamentary, regional assemblies, borough councils or European Parliament elections. Indeed, this phenomenon is becoming so common as to “take epidemic proportions”, in the words of Janina Kowalik (2013: 258). It is worth mentioning here because the practice of filling the lists with names of popular leaders is undoubtedly beneficial for parties, but not necessarily honest toward the electorate.

Externally recruited candidates are rare guests on the leading positions of parties’ lists. It may happen as a result of a deal made with stakeholders, or – in the case of “fresh transfers” – if a given politician is highly recognizable, while the party which he/she joins commands low support in a given constituency. As far as motivation to change political affiliation goes, there are several frequent reasons. Firstly, individuals make such a move if they find themselves at variance with their parent milieu. Secondly, they may do it if they struggle with breaking through from local to regional politics. Finally, they might have been left “politically homeless” if their former party had disappeared from the scene in the meantime.

Political debutants previously unaffiliated with any formation, whom we may term “the incentivized” ones, enjoy better chances of being handed top places on candidates’ lists of major Polish parties. In their case, the decisive factor is popularity they had gained locally/regionally, prestige associated with their profession, or achievements in community service. They are often likely to win competition for the electorate’s support with “core” party members, as was exemplified by PSL candidates.

A very important issue here regards the recruitment patterns and the role of party gatekeepers. Unquestionably, this role is held by regional party leaders who, in case of the largest political formations, are also deputies to Parliament. Sometimes, several prominent individuals operating in the same region compete for the position of gatekeepers. Then, the final composition of candidates' lists is a result of rivalry between them and indicates the balance of influence they wield in their party. Significant differences in the way lists of the same formation are composed in different regions indicate that formal mechanisms are sometimes less important than informal factors. This was also confirmed in the research done by K. Sobolewska-Myślik and her associates (see Sobolewska-Myślik, Kosowska-Gąstoł, Borowiec 2010: 160–169). However, the question of their exact nature cannot be answered without further, in-depth research, perhaps with the use of social network analysis.

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