

Informal institutions, competitiveness of elections and economic outcomes - summary

1. Research project objectives/Research hypothesis

The proposed project aims at providing at least partial answer to the question about the impact that informal institutions (understood as social norms or common behavioural patterns) may have on voter turnout in local elections, competitiveness of these elections, and economic outcomes, with a particular attention paid to the issue of the distribution of economic resources. The planned research will look at these relationships using the local level data for Poland during the period of transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy. The analysis of the role of informal institutions will focus on the importance of secularisation process, which translates, among others, into the decreased religious attendance. Taking into account that many social norms are directly or indirectly derived from religion, changes in religious attendance, which were observed during the transition period, can provide a good approximation of the differences between municipalities as far as informal institutions are concerned.

The project aims at verifying the following research hypotheses: a) in municipalities in which the secularisation process during the transition period was more intense, currently the voter turnout in local elections is lower; b) in municipalities in which the secularisation process during the transition period was more intense, currently the competitiveness of elections is smaller; c) in municipalities in which the secularisation process during the transition period was more intense, currently the distribution of economic resources is more unequal.

2. Research project methodology

The proposed research will heavily draw on political economy theories. These theories allow us to argue that informal institutions, as well as their changes, may importantly affect the electoral behaviour of the citizens, the level of political competition and the distribution of political power. Further, these theories allow us to build the linkages between informal institutions and economic outcomes and the distribution of economic resources which are crucial for undertaking production processes. In order to better understand the causes and potential consequences of the secularisation process, the project will also draw on the achievements of the literature from sociology and political sciences.

The research hypotheses will be tested using econometric analysis. To do so, panel data techniques will be mostly employed. Data on (changes in) religious attendance will come from the Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church (ISKK). Data on elections and voter turnout will be taken from the National Electoral Commission (PKW). Data to illustrate various socio-economic characteristics at the municipality level will come from the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS). Finally, the distribution of economic resources will be measured with the distribution of agricultural land based on the data published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

3. Expected impact of the research project on the development of science

The presented project tries to contribute to the broader literature interested in the impact of institutions on economic and political outcomes. By focusing on issues which are relatively poorly understood (i.e. on the linkages between informal institutions, political participation, competitiveness of elections and economic outcomes), the planned research will attempt to complement the existing debates with the topics which have not been widely studied until now. In this way, the presented project should improve our understanding of the complex interactions between informal rules which structure individual behaviour, political outcomes and economic processes. The planned research will also fill the existing gap in the Polish economic literature in which the role of informal institutions in general, and the importance of religious attendance in particular, for economic and political outcomes has hardly arisen.