

An electoral defeat is an inevitable part of every political career for both individual as well as collective political actors, rating parties among the latter. Sometimes a defeat might be so destructive that it can cause to disappear from the political arena. However, on the other hand, it might be the factor stimulating transformation, e.g. adoption of a new strategy or program renewal, improved internal communication and communication with voters, which will lead to electoral success in the future.

The main purpose of this project is to identify factors affecting the nature, depth, scope and results of political parties' adaptation following parliamentary electoral loss. In this context, the object of scrutiny will be the impact of the objective variables, such as the party's development phase, pre-defeat political status of the group (whether it was a ruling, co-ruling or opposition party), as well as the influence of subjective variables, i.e. the perception and interpretation of the reasons for the electoral defeat by the party decision-making bodies. The combination of theoretical findings, results of qualitative research that will be carried out on the parties in Poland, Great Britain and Belgium. and quantitative research on the parties in the EU Member States, Switzerland and Norway, will create a catalogue of dependencies and correlations, describing the changes taking place in political parties after electoral defeat. The execution of the project will contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of the functioning of the European political parties in the context of their adaptation to the impulses flowing from the social environment (understood as granting or refusing support in general elections).

The existing research on electoral defeats was usually focused on searching for the causes of an unfavourable election results and was limited either to political parties from one national party system, or even to one party, or even to its field organization. More often, attention is paid to the analysis of the reasons that led the party to an unfavourable election result (e.g. non-adaptation of the program offer to the needs of the electorate, inappropriate design of electoral lists, marketing errors in the election campaign, poor leadership, insufficient involvement of activists). We treat electoral defeat not as the result of previous actions or omissions, but as a beginning, a catalyst for the process of change in the political party. An electoral defeat results in numerous consequences for the party organization, its political program, leadership, parliamentarians, members, associates and supporters. To a greater or lesser extent it changes the balance of power between factions, it can even lead to secession. A defeat is often an instrument of a new ordering of internal relations, it is a factor triggering the inner-party circulation of the elites, starting with the dismissal of the current leader (or stopping at that). A change of leader usually destabilizes the existing system of relations within the party, may cause not only a change in the way of managing the political party, but also triggers new program concepts.

There is a lack of cross-sectional deepened studies on the impact of election defeats on political parties that would go beyond the case studies and allow the formulation of conclusions and regularities verifiable in recurring situations and circumstances. The project has the ambition to fill this gap.

A new research element is broadening the perspective on volitional-consciousness factors, by linking intra-party changes with the subjective perception of changes taking place in its environment by party decision-makers. This is due to the assumption that the party - to take "corrective" actions - must not only objectively lose the election, but must also have a subjective sense of failure.

The proposed research will be based on two categories of sources: the existing sources and the primary data. The existing data apart from the academic literature includes documents compiled by political parties (as report and post-electoral analysis, political manifestos, electoral programmes). The research team will also conduct in-depth individual interviews with party representatives from decision-making bodies and parliamentarians of the Polish, British and Belgian political parties who suffered electoral defeat in the last or penultimate general election. As the verifier of the effectiveness of adaptive strategies adopted by political parties will be treated the results of the forthcoming general elections in which the examined political parties will take part.