

Mixed-Member Electoral System for Poland. Prospective Models and their Political Consequences

The mixed-member electoral system represents a combination of elements characteristic of classic proportional representation systems and majority systems. For some, this combination is referred to as "the best of both worlds". Therefore, it is not surprising that many politicians perceived this type of electoral system as a panacea for the imperfections of the political system functioning in a given country. Therefore, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, in the hope of improving the political system, many countries decided to launch the reform of the electoral law, consisting in introducing a mixed-member electoral system for the needs of parliamentary elections. This group consists of countries with many years of democratic experience (e.g. New Zealand, Italy, Japan), as well as those that have only recently emerged from the communist regime (e.g. Hungary).

The discussion on the possibility of adopting a mixed-member electoral system did not bypass Poland. Starting from 1989, various political parties and the politicians representing them, almost continuously submit the postulate for a mixed-member electoral system for the purposes of selecting members of the Polish Sejm. This proposal has been submitted by Law and Justice (2004, 2006, 2015), Civic Platform (2007, 2015), Polish Coalition (2019), as well as smaller political parties, e.g. Palikot Support Movement (2011). Certainly, this postulate will also return during subsequent parliamentary campaigns.

The mixed-member electoral system is an extremely complicated construction, never before employed in the conditions of the Polish political system. Therefore, it should be expected that its adaptation will cause significant changes in the functioning of the broadly understood political system. These changes will include, in particular, the electoral behaviour of the electorate, political parties and candidates, and as a consequence will not remain indifferent to the final outcome of elections to the Sejm, shape of party system, and government formation process.

Despite the extensive literature on mixed-member electoral systems, we still have a fragmentary picture of the problem. Being aware of the difficulties in comparing such a variety of electoral solutions, it is possible to check what are the effects of specific decisions determining the final construction of the system used in given countries. The second important problem is the initial format of the political scene - the main axes of division, existing party identities and the prior transformations of the political system. In particular, the problem of the impact of the entire concept as well as individual solutions on the territorial aspect of choices, needs to be developed. This is particularly important in the context of the possible introduction of such a system in Poland, where ideological and territorial divisions form a very specific pattern. Furthermore, the vast majority of work focuses primarily on summarizing the previous experience in using mixed-member electoral systems, omitting the prognostic aspect. This is mainly due to the fact that political science has not yet developed the habit of conducting some kind of ex-ante assessments of the proposed political solutions (including, in particular, those regarding electoral law). This also results in a limited number of works that attempted to prepare a theoretical model of anticipated consequences of electoral reforms even before they were introduced.

Given the above, there is a need to conduct a study that sets two main goals: 1. the analysis of mixed-member electoral systems employed (now and in the past) in other countries and their consequences for the functioning of the broadly understood political system; 2. the description, based on the experience of countries employing a mixed-member electoral system of a model of the potential consequences of the implementation of this new and complicated institution to elect members of the Polish Sejm.

The analysis will cover mixed-member electoral systems employed to elect members of parliaments (in the case of bicameral parliaments, their lower chambers) at both national and regional levels. Therefore, the group of countries covered by the study will include: Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Bolivia and the Republic of South Korea. In turn, at the regional level, mixed-member electoral systems used to elect members of the legislatures of Scotland, Wales, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria will be examined.