

Explaining the rapid increase in turnout during the 2019 European Parliamentary Elections in Poland: the role of religiosity.

In the election to European Parliament in 2019 in Poland unprecedented voter turnout increase was observed. Participation in this election increased from around 24% in the year 2009 and around 25% in 2014 to almost 47% in the year 2019. Almost doubled voter turnout raises questions about underlying factors of such a phenomenon.

The goal of the project is to shed some light on this unusual phenomenon in the context of the religiosity of Polish citizens and the dispute around the role of the Catholic Church in public life, which was highly intensified during the electoral campaign in 2019.

Not much is known about how participation in religious rituals connects to participation in the political sphere. There exists general scientific agreement, that people, who participate more often in the church activities, and describe themselves as more religious, also tend to have higher involvement in public life - simply they vote more often. Despite such evidence, still a little is known about the magnitude and underlying factors hidden underneath this relationship. The context of unprecedented turnout growth, and intensification of the religiously-connected topics in the time of electoral campaign create the unique setting which may allow to shed more light on said relationship.

The project aims at answering questions such: “Does positive relationship between religiosity and political participation weakens, increases or stays equal in the context of the spike of voter turnout?”, “Do more religious people, who already displayed higher political participation, under the incentive of the controversial dispute around Catholic Church mobilised more compared to the rest of society?”, and even maybe “Did one of the parties of the dispute around the role of Catholic Church in public life benefited politically from the intensification of this topic prior to the election?”.

In order to answer such and other similar questions, the project assumes the following analysis: First, the investigation of press articles and the level of public interest in the topics connected to Catholic Church during the electoral campaign prior to the European Parliamentary Elections in 2019. From the archives of multiple press portals there will be selected and quantitatively measured articles connected with religious themes, which allows to quantitatively measure the intensification of religiously-connected topics during the electoral campaign compared to others. Preliminary research confirms that such intensification indeed took place, however the magnitude, and consequences of such increased intensity of religiously-connected articles are still unknown.

Second, in order to measure how the religious Polish citizens mobilised in comparison to the rest of the society, the project plans to use econometric methods comparing the electoral participation data with the data describing participation in catholic religious rituals. Such analysis should be able to answer the question if huge turnout increases were stronger in the group connected to Catholic church, or in the group without such connection. It is very interesting that the potential outcome of such an effect is still unknown. It may be that more political mobilization was manifested by the group of believers, or on the contrary, the higher turnout was manifested by those not connected to Catholic Church, it is also possible that the mobilisation was similar. Every potential outcome is highly valuable in the meaning of understanding of deep factors behind the decisions of citizens in democratic society.