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## **Four Dimensions of Center-Periphery Conflict in the Polish Electoral Geography**

**Published in:** Tatiana Klonowicz, Grażyna Wieczorkowska (eds.) (2002) *Social Change. Adaptation and Resistance*. Warsaw: Warsaw University – Institute for Social Studies. pp. 19-38.

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### **Introduction**

The notion of "center vs. periphery" (or core-periphery) has a long tradition of being applied in geo-political analysis. Its universal nature enables it to be applied to a wide variety of aspects of spatial and other phenomena. The notion is also a very useful starting point for reflections on the spatial and non-spatial dependencies in diverse societal structures.

In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate how different meanings of the "center-periphery" notion can be used to interpret four dimensions of the Polish political scene. At the same time, the paper is meant as a general presentation of Polish electoral geography in recent times.

Firstly, allow me to summarize the chapter's main points. I wish to present the four dimensions of the Polish electoral geography and prove how they may be interpreted as center-periphery structures. The first two dimensions are the main axes of political discord, the third is the ethnic dimension to politics and the fourth is the voter turnout dimension. I will attempt to demonstrate how a different aspect of the center-periphery structure can be applied to each of these dimensions.

The chapter is based on the classic Rokkan--Lipset (1967) theory of political cleavages in Europe. As we know, the theory argues that the main cleavages can be linked to national and industrial revolutions. According to this theory, national revolutions have produced the classic center-periphery conflict between dominant and peripheral cultures as well as the church-government conflict. The industrial revolution gave birth to rural-urban and class cleavages. There has been much debate about whether the Rokkan-Lipset system could be applied to the newly democratized countries of Central and Eastern Europe. I believe that it remains a useful theoretical tool in the analysis of cleavage systems in this region. However, it ought to be employed with caution rather than automatically superimposed on local political systems; due attention should be given to its deficiencies and limitations. First of all, not all cleavages envisaged by Lipset and Rokkan have emerged as politically-relevant conflicts in all of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Since, as a rule, national revolutions and, especially, the industrial revolution were much milder and assumed different forms in these countries than in the West, they correspondingly did not always produce conflicts of comparable magnitude. Secondly, the peripheral status of most of these countries should be taken into account. In the case of Central

and Eastern Europe, the center-periphery cultural conflict may be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is the classic conflict between the central culture of the modern nation-state and its peripheries. The second interpretation regards the weaker states as peripheries of a central, dominant country.

By considering this double applicability of the classic cultural center-periphery cleavage, we get the first two dimensions for discussion. The third notion of the center-periphery cleavage adopted in this paper is economic in nature. I will consider the rural-urban cleavage as an economic form of the center--periphery axis. The fourth and final way of understanding the center-periphery conflict is through voter turnout analysis, used as a method of measuring the level of "mobilization of the peripheries." I will start by discussing the two main dimensions of Polish electoral geography, interpreted from the point of view of the center-periphery notion.

### **The two main cleavages of Polish electoral geography**

The geography of Polish electoral history appears to have a remarkably stable and clear two-dimensional structure. It is fully compatible with the general structure of the Polish political scene, as shown by general-population and political-elite surveys conducted by political scientists .

Although the two main dimensions of electoral geography are easily discernible, their interpretation is difficult. The examination of the cleavage structure adopted in this chapter is based on an ecological analysis. Factor analysis has been used in the examination of electoral results at the lowest administrative level of "commune," the smallest administrative and political unit of the country. Such a methodology achieved two important effects. Firstly, it revealed the unexpected stability of the two main political cleavages the country's relatively young political system. High stability in voting behavior among regions, present despite considerable shifts in the political scene, has already been described in the literature (Johnston, 1983). However, its occurrence in Poland, a "new democracy" without a fully-stabilized political system, was not obviously foreseeable. Secondly, it enabled the establishment of a clear link between political sociology and political geography in the analysis of the country's political scene. The factor analysis of electoral results permitted the demonstration and analysis of not only the geographic dimension of the main cleavages but also of the configuration of the parties that define them.

My analysis of the ecological data is similar to Tworzecki's calculation methodology. However, my calculations are based on much more detailed election results, broken down by Poland's 2460 communes. The factor analysis was performed separately for two recent elections: the presidential election of 1995 and the 1997 parliamentary election. The variables were the votes obtained by the major parties or presidential candidates, whereas the communes represented the cases. A two-dimensional outcome was achieved in each of the elections under analysis. Earlier calculations by various authors usually provided a very similar two-dimensional solution irrespective of the election and level of aggregation. Maps that show factor scores for each commune show the geography of the two cleavages. The first and second cleavage maps were almost identical for both elections .

Since the stability of Polish electoral geography is so high and because this paper deals with general, persistent structures of Polish electoral geography and not with the minute electoral-support variations in particular elections, I include only one map of each cleavage. Maps (Figures 1 and 2) show the results of the factor analysis

of the 1997 parliamentary election. As for the structure of factor loadings (i.e. the position of parties and candidates along particular cleavages), the results of the latest presidential and parliamentary elections are provided in Tables 1 and 2, which show the factor-loading structure (factor matrix) for both dimensions. As we can see, there is a very similar two-dimensional solution in both cases.

**Table 1. Result of the factor analysis of the results of the 1995 Presidential elections in the commune breakdown (Varimax rotation, n = 2468)**

	Presidential elections 1995	
	Factor loadings	
	I	II
	urban-rural	left-right
W. Pawlak	-0.835	0.075
J. Kuroń	0.820	0.349
T. Zieliński	0.804	0.281
J. Korwin-Mikke	0.773	0.002
H. Gronkiewicz-Waltz	0.758	-0.314
A. Kwaśniewski	0.068	0.951
L. Wałęsa	0.209	-0.908
J. Olszewski	-0.158	-0.561
% variance explained	41.2	28.9
cumul.		70.1

**Table 2. Result of the factor analysis of the results of the 1997 Parliamentary elections in the commune breakdown (Varimax rotation, n = 2468)**  
**Parliamentary elections 1997**

	Factor loadings	
	I	II
	left-right	urban-rural
AWS	-0.847	0.307
SLD	0.830	0.281
UP	0.655	0.131
ROP	-0.348	-0.132
PSL	0.051	-0.884
UW	0.182	0.762
UPR	0.154	0.582
% variance	32.3	23.9
cumul.	56.2	

## **Cleavages defined by the political profiles of the main parties and candidates**

The first cleavage in the 1997 parliamentary election was defined by the opposition between the post-Communist SLD (Democratic Left Alliance) and post-Solidarity AWS ("Solidarity" Electoral Action). In the 1995 presidential election, the main candidates in this, the political conflict dimension, were Aleksander Kwasniewski, the former SLD leader, and Lech Wałęsa, the former Solidarity leader. The cleavage, which I will analyze here as a dimension of electoral geography, is also a major conflict on the Polish political scene. In the language of Polish political discourse, it is usually called the "Right-Left conflict," where the Left refers to the former Communists (SLD), and the Right is associated with the anti-Communist post-Solidarity camp (presently dominated by the AWS). The rift is variously called "religious authoritarian nationalists vs. secular liberal cosmopolitans" (Markowski, 1997), "symbolic right vs. symbolic left" (Tworzecki, 1996), or just "axis of values" (Żukowski, 1996).

The second cleavage, one referring to the 1997 parliamentary election, can be seen as a "rural-urban" axis, since it is based on the conflict between the rural Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and the urban intelligentsia concentrated in the Freedom Union (UW). In the 1995 presidential election, these parties were represented respectively by Waldemar Pawlak, leader of PSL, and Jacek Kurori, a well-known liberal intellectual. Among labels assigned to this cleavage, there were: "economic populism vs. market liberalism" (Markowski, 1997), "agrarian populism vs. urban market liberalism" (Tworzecki, 1996), or simply "axis of interests" (Żukowski, 1996).

In this context, one should also mention an interpretation proposed by Kitschelt (1995). Although he also uses a two-dimensional model of the Polish political scene, he has located his axes at a 45-degree angle in relation to the polarity described above. In fact, he labels the two main cleavages as "religious-capitalist vs. secular socialist" and "left-authoritarian vs. right-libertarian."

## **Geography of the two main political cleavages**

Let me now turn to the geographic dimension of the cleavages presented above. Maps (Fig. 1 and 2) show images of the first and second factor scores obtained through the calculations described above. When discussing the geographies of the two cleavages, I will focus on the historical heritage left by the partition of Poland among three empires in the late 18th century and the changes to Polish borders after the Second World War. As most studies indicate, these factors played a fundamental role in shaping the modern electoral geography of the country.

Let us recall that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had been carved apart by Austria, Prussia and Russia and ceased to exist altogether after the third and final partition of 1795. However, stable borders between the three empires were established only at the Vienna Congress in 1815. The borders would remain stable for exactly one century — until the First World War. Ever since Poland's re-unification in 1918, the three historical regions constitute the fundamental structure of Polish social and political geography. We should bear in mind that the crucial social and economic processes of the 19th century (including the industrial revolution and appearance of the modern nation-state) took a completely different form in each of these three imperial regions. Some even consider that they used to belong to different civilization zones (for example, the Huntington thesis).

The year 1945 was another crucial moment in the formation of today's electoral map of Poland. The western Polish border was moved westward to the Oder-Neisse (Odra-Nysa) line and the native German population was expelled. The new western territories, including Pomerania (Pomorze) and Silesia (Śląsk), and the southern part of what had been East Prussia (Warmia i Mazury) were settled by Poles who either had been expelled from what had been Poland's Eastern regions (which were newly annexed by the Soviet Union) or came from central Poland. Thus, a new social region was created in much of western and southern Poland. Today, it is the fourth historical sector of Poland.

### ***The Left-Right cleavage on the map***

The map of the Right-Left cleavage (Figure 1) reveals many interesting traits and is richly featured. With relation to the 19th century historical heritage, the imprint of the former Austro-Hungarian zone is very clear. The region, also known as "Galicja," forms a cohesive spatial unit in this dimension. It is dominated by dark shadings corresponding to high positive values of factor scores, which in this case represent the Right (anti--Communist/cultural traditionalist) option. The highest intensity of the Right option is found in the Tatra Mountains and the southern foothill region (Podhale). Highlanders are the most religious and conservative group in Poland. Their support for Lech Wałęsa in the presidential elections of 1990 and 1995 was almost unanimous. Another region characterized by a high rate of support for the Right is Podlasie, located in north-eastern Poland. The population of this conservative, Catholic area has been historically known for its high proportion of "petty gentry;" this tradition is often seen as the reason behind the region's political climate. The third Polish conservative area is Kaszuby. All these regions are characterized by their populations' high religious activity and stability ("rootedness"). In other words, most of their inhabitants were born where they still reside and their families are strongly tied to the area. The population-stability index shows the lowest values in the western, formerly German, part of Poland, where the majority of current inhabitants were born elsewhere. Other predominately Right-voting regions ("cultural traditionalists") include Upper Silesia and certain areas of the former Russian partition zone as, for example, the Warsaw outskirts.

Formerly Germanic areas occupy the most prominent places among the main Left-voting regions. Pomerania (Pomorze), with the exceptions of Kaszuby and the Polish part of former East Prussia in northern Poland (Warmia and Mazury), are the main strongholds of the Left. However, these are not where support for former Communists reaches its highest level. This occurs in north-eastern Poland, east of the Podlasie region and on the border with Belarus — an area dominated by the Orthodox minority, which provided quasi-unanimous support to the SLD and SLD candidates in the presidential and parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, since the Orthodox population is small (estimated at about 300,000), it does not play an important role in Polish politics. I will discuss these issues in detail in the next part of the paper, in an analysis of the ethnic dimension of the Polish electoral demographics.

### ***The rural-urban cleavage on the map***

The map of this cleavage (Figure 2) also shows some interesting features. The darker shadings correspond to higher factor-score values, approaching in this case the "urban/liberal" (or right-libertarian) option. What we see here mimics the political

borders of 19th century Russia, as shown on Figure 3. The imprint of the partition is clearly visible. The former Russian partition zone is definitely the most important stronghold of the anti-liberal, peasant option. On the white surface of the former Congress Kingdom, we see only occasional dark spots of large and middle-size cities. Warsaw and Lodz, a city that developed in the 19th century mainly due to its proximity to the Prussian border, are the greatest dark patches in this region. One may notice that the strong contrast between large cities with a liberal electorate and the countryside dominated by the anti-liberal option is also very typical for the Russian electoral landscape (Kolossov, 1997).

On the other extreme of the economic axis, besides the large urban centers, we find the northern and western part of Poland, mainly the regions under German rule until 1945 or those under Prussian rule before 1915. On average, the electorate in these areas is much more liberal and the internal contrast between urban centers and the countryside is not as dramatic as in the former Russian partition zone. There are two main reasons for this. The first one is that peasants represented a much smaller proportion of the population in the former Prussian and German parts of the partitioned Poland. The second reason is that these regions do not have a tradition of a strong ideological or interest-based conflict between landholders and peasants, characteristic of the Austrian and Russian partition zones. This situation is mainly a result of the nature of the Prussian land reform in the 19th century. Land reforms conducted in Russia and Austria were not only less rational but were never fully implemented. As we can see from the map, the Austro-Hungarian sector, although predominately peasant to this day, has average scores for the rural-urban factor. Some of the reasons for this phenomenon will be discussed below.

### **Historical stereotypes**

The significance the historical partitioning and annexation of German areas still have on the country's electoral geography was not fully appreciated until 1989, after the first quasi-democratic parliamentary election. Since then, the issue of the partition heritage is present in the media and in the academic discourse whenever there is a debate over the interpretation of election results. One could even say that the media is creating or rekindling a kind of new regional identity. The awareness of belonging to a particular historical region had been decreasing during the Communist period, since it held little importance for social life in a centralized Communist state. Since 1989, with the help of the media, people have been rediscovering their regional identity and their mental maps of other regions are also acquiring a political dimension based on historical explanations. The problem with forming such mental maps and historical explanations is that, most often, they have a stereotypical character and lack systematic evidence. Moreover, their content depends largely on the political bias of those who form them.

The best examples of contradictory stereotyping refer to the populations of the formerly Austrian-occupied Galicja and ex-German Western and Northern Lands. Since they are the main strongholds of, respectively, the Left and the Right, the perception of what they are like varies dramatically depending on one's own political sympathies. On one hand, Galicja has a reputation of being the "best" part of Poland, with the most-developed structures of a civic society and an excellent historical record (Majcherek, 1995). This includes the heritage from the democratization of Austrian politics through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Galicja was the first Polish

region to exercise the right to vote in competitive elections and its Polish population enjoyed a flourishing political life, particularly exemplified by a strong peasant movement. Galicja was also the only region under the partitions where Polish culture could develop and be freely fostered. These historical factors are linked to such modern phenomena as the massive Galician support for the anti-Communist opposition, the success of Solidarity in the region and its high rate of voter turnout. When viewed from the same perspective, the Western and Northern Lands are the "worst" region in Poland. Their population lacks not only the democratic tradition of the 19th century but any tradition at all, except the heritage of the Communist era, which is usually seen as a negative factor. Agriculture played a much less important role in the economy of the Western and Northern Lands than in Galicja. Most people employed in agriculture in these formerly German territories were not "peasants" (a term with a better connotation in Polish than in English) but rather workers on state farms (PGRs) — Polish equivalents of a kolkhoz — which are viewed as breeding grounds for the worst possible work habits. Moreover, most of these state farms went bankrupt soon after 1989 and the region now suffers from high structural unemployment.

From the standpoint of the other side of the Left-Right conflict, these regions are stereotyped in the opposite way. Austrian Galicja has a reputation as Poland's second most backward region, scoring only slightly better than the former Russian sector. Its partition heritage is remembered for its negative rather than positive influence. The negatives include a low level of industrialization, rural overpopulation and tensions between the peasantry and conservative landholding gentry. Such a viewpoint considers the region's high religiosity as one of its worst traits. All negative stereotypes associated with rural Polish Catholicism are ascribed to the region's population. They include clericalism, intolerance, authoritarian propensities, moral dogmatism, and all other vices of religious conservatism. The Western and Northern Lands are viewed from that perspective as the most progressive, free of religious superstitions. The lack of strong historical traditions in the region is viewed as an asset rather than a deficiency. There, the genetic and cultural commingling has created a kind of Polish melting pot, resulting in a population that is much more creative than in the rest of the country, more willing to take risks and more future-oriented than the backward-looking Galicja burdened with its parochial traditions (Gorzelać and Jałowicki, 1997). In this light, the inhabitants of the Western and Northern Lands are best prepared for Poland joining the European Union thanks to their acceptance of a secular state, proximity to Western Europe and optimism.

There are much fewer discrepancies in stereotypes held of the two remaining historical regions of Poland. Most people consider the Russian zone as having the worst heritage, both economically and socially. The stereotype supposes that this zone is encumbered by a past featuring a corrupt state administration, lawlessness — subordination of the legal system to political, usually anti-Polish, interests — a poor education system, absence of democratic institutions and a repression of Polish culture. The anti-Polish political persecution that this area once suffered is also sometimes seen as having been, paradoxically, conducive to the development of the greatest masterpieces of Polish literature. In fact, most of the greatest 19th century Polish writers and poets came from the Russian-occupied zone. In the economic sphere, the image is just as bad. It includes urban underdevelopment, backward agriculture, bad land reforms and lacking infrastructure (lowest density of railroads, sewage systems and so forth).

Popular opinion of the zone once occupied by Prussia is much brighter, although not at all perfect. It includes the highest level of all types of infrastructure, both technical and social (for example, its elementary-school system), efficient administration and very reasonable and effective land reform. However, it is often noted that the Prussian government followed an anti-Polish policy, in both the cultural and the economic sphere.

Finally, in order to use objective data to counter the stereotypes that attribute how present-day politics is played out in the regions to their historical heritage, I would like to draw attention to a statistical analysis of the social and economic correlates. These calculations firmly confirm the rural-urban nature of the economic cleavage (Zarycki, 1997; Zarycki and Nowak, 2000). Moreover, it is a cleavage between more and less affluent regions, in other words — between the poorer rural areas and richer urban centers. We also see a function of migration from the countryside to the town, as well as a considerably higher birthrate in rural areas. Another peculiar socio-economic trait of Poland is the relative industrial concentration in urban centers.

The predictor of a region's position along the Left-Right rift is the population-stability index. It is defined as the proportion of native-born population still living in a given region. Another important tool used in placing communes on the Left-Right axis is the proportion of private farmland in total arable land until 1989. We can also see that people who reside in the Right-voting areas live longer and, hence, these areas have a considerably higher proportion of pensioners. As we have already mentioned, religiosity is higher in these areas, which may be a reason for their lower divorce rate and higher concentration of Catholic priests. On the other hand, leftist voting habits are statistically related to higher unemployment, especially joblessness due to the bankruptcy of state-owned farms, which are concentrated in the formerly German regions.

## **The interpretation of cleavages**

### ***The Left-Right dimension as the center-periphery cleavage***

As suggested above, I will also interpret the Left-Right cleavage as a reflection of the center-periphery axis in an international, geopolitical dimension. This requires looking at Poland in a larger context, i.e. as an outer periphery of the Soviet Union for a half-century. Polish political life can be then seen as concentrated around the conflict between those accepting the Soviet domination (or, more generally, the peripheral status of the country) and those contesting it. We can also speak here about a divide between the soft-liners co-operating with the center (Moscow) and the hard-liners challenging the power center. It should be noted that the Soviet Union did not impose its Russian-language based central culture on Poland. However, a Polish version of the Soviet culture was developed and used for the country's political and cultural unification along Soviet lines. This program sparked the resistance of Polish traditionalists who did not accept Soviet domination. They supported and were supported by the Catholic Church, creating a situation similar to that existing in some other parts of Europe. In this respect, Ireland is the most similar to Poland. The major cleavage in Irish political life was caused by British domination, and is comparable to the Polish Left-Right axis. In Ireland as in Poland, there is an alliance between the

Catholic Church and the traditional, or "peripheral," Option. Thus, the Polish AWS and SLD can be compared to the Irish Fine Gael and Fiana Fail.

We can see that in both Poland and Ireland there is a deep-rooted connection between the Catholic Church and the peripheral option and that both nations feature the highest proportion of actively religious citizens in Europe. The strong relationship between religiosity and the Right is reflected in the geography of the support for the Right. As already noted, the Polish regions that are most staunchly anti-Communist are at the same time most the active as concerns practicing their Catholicism. From the geopolitical point of view, these traditionalist regions were, until recently, peripheral areas in the context of the broader Soviet sphere in Europe.

Of course, Poland can no longer be considered a part of the Soviet Empire since 1989, although it has not lost its peripheral status. The post-1989 transformation can be interpreted as a shift of the dominating political center from East to West. However, despite this change, Polish politics appears to be still "frozen" in the conflict of the Communist era. The attitude towards the West (for example, on the issue of European integration) is only slowly gaining importance; it is still more important to Polish voters which candidate is post-Communist and which anti-Communist than whether he or she is for or against integration with the European Union.

### ***The rural-urban dimension as the economic center-periphery cleavage***

The Polish rural-urban dimension clearly corresponds to the Lipset-Rokkan category of urban-rural cleavage as a product of the industrial revolution. Of course, one needs to remember that both the urban and the rural camp represent quite distinctive social groups in Poland. The rural option is almost exclusively represented by petty peasants, a social group specific to Poland (the only Communist country where the attempts at nationalization of private farms failed). The urban electorate is led by the intelligentsia, which exists as a separate social stratum only in Central and Eastern Europe. However, as the above-mentioned statistics show, the cleavage represents a clear opposition between rural and urban areas and, moreover, between agricultural economic interests on one side and urban interests on the other. As I have mentioned above, I believe that the rural-urban divide may be considered a form of "center-periphery" conflict in the economic dimension. The spread of industrialization can be considered equivalent to the spread of the centrally-imposed culture of the dominating nation-state. Adopting such a perspective enables the researcher to identify a new dimension in the center --periphery conflict. We can observe that the "centrality" in this sense is defined, to a large extent, by the size of the urban centers. In a larger, international, industrial and economic context, we notice that the economic center for Poland, when seen as a peripheral country, has been firmly located in Western Europe for a long time. The maps referred to above show that the western part of Poland is much more urban than its eastern one. This confirms the well-known historical fact that Polish urbanization and, later, industrialization spread eastward from the West. Let us recall that most Polish towns were established according to German laws and that a large proportion of the urban population of pre-modern Poland was German. Although the largest part of Poland was occupied by Russia during the partition period. Western Europe remained the engine of economic development. As mentioned, the city of Łódź provides the best example of this phenomenon. It was established from scratch in the 19th century at a village located

near the Prussian border. Its location on the Russian side of the border provided access to Russian markets, but the key to the development of the city's industry lay in German capital and technology. A broader reason for why it happened this way was that Russia itself was an economic periphery of Western Europe. Hence, developments in the Russian partition zone followed the same logic of dependence on the Western center. Of course, the Communist era represented a period of Poland's relative isolation from the Western economic center. However, by 1945, the basic structure of the Polish social and economic geography was already formed. Despite their efforts to change the Polish society and economy, Communist planners did not manage, in their 45 years of power, to eliminate the historical economic heritage of several centuries.

### *The ethnic dimension of Polish politics as the center-periphery cleavage*

Although the "international dependence" aspect of the center-periphery conflict seems to be the best interpretation of the main cleavages in Polish politics and electoral geography, it is also possible to discern another dimension in electoral geography — an internal center-periphery conflict. Allow me to consider the standard Polish culture to be the central, dominant culture of the country. Then, all regions that have kept their cultural particularities, such as Podhale, Kaszuby and Upper Silesia, can be regarded as peripheral since the central culture did not manage to overwhelm, destroy or replace all their traditions. However, even in Kaszuby, where the dialect differs the most from standard Polish and is even regarded by some as a separate language, the issue of political and cultural autonomy does not exist and there is no open resistance against the center. Upper Silesia is the only exception, but here, in addition to regional specificity, Germany played an important role in influencing the development of the region's complicated identity. This issue will be discussed below. In general, this perspective sees the largest towns as centers dominated by the standard culture.

We can also notice an interesting paradox that concerns the formerly German "Western and Northern Lands." In the traditional model, the territory acquired most recently is usually the slowest in the process of national mobilization (accepting the central culture). The classical example Burghardt (1964) described is Burgenland, acquired by Austria after World War One. In Poland, the situation is the opposite. The Western and Northern Lands are a part of Poland where the standard Polish culture absolutely dominates (except for the German-populated region of Opole Silesia) and where regional cultural peculiarities are minimal. The reason behind this is, of course, the ethnic mix of the local population. Newcomers to the region were not only chosen on the basis of their identification with the Polish culture, but also geographically mixed and dispersed to such an extent that they were practically unable to retain any native traditions (except at a family or very small group level). In effect, the new communities did not have any regional alternative to the standard Polish culture. Thus, the Western and Northern Lands, although physically distant from Warsaw and, historically, the youngest regions of the modern Polish state, appear today to be among the most culturally and politically "central" areas of Poland. We should also mention that the high support for the Left in these formerly German areas can be explained by the fact that, during the period of the region's cultural integration, the central cultural model promoted by the state was Polish, albeit based on the Soviet

model. Thus, Catholicism is not as important to most locals' sense of Polish identity as it is to those living in the conservative areas of eastern Poland.

The weak Polish regionalism, with the sole exception of Upper Silesia, has not translated itself into political movements. Therefore, there is no separate regionalist dimension to the voting habits of the country. What is present, however, is the ethnic dimension. Although the issue of minorities is rather marginal politically given their small numbers in relation to Poland's overall population, it provides, as in most other countries, a very interesting object for the study of center-periphery relations. What follows is a presentation of the two main ethnic minorities living in Poland in any significant territorial concentrations.

Ethnic Germans, concentrated mainly in Upper Silesia, are the most important minority in Poland. The second largest minority is the Orthodox population in the Bialystok region, usually identified as the Belarussian minority. The German minority in Poland is estimated at about 600,000 (approximately 1.5% of the total population), while the Orthodox (Belarussian) minority — at about 200,000. The regions of concentration of the national minorities can be regarded as classical peripheries, which have resisted the process of the creation of a modern Polish nation-state. However, they did not produce any separate political cleavage based on their status. Such cleavages are typical to countries with considerable ethnic minorities and are usually based on conflicts over the definition of citizenship (ethnic vs. universal). Undoubtedly, the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939) experienced strong political conflict over the definition of citizenship. The conflict was very well expressed in the differences of programs of the two main political leaders of that period — Jozef Pilsudski and Roman Dmowski. Pilsudski advocated the idea of a Federal State of Central Europe (in the tradition of the pre-1795, multi-ethnic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) and opted for a universal definition of citizenship. In contrast, Dmowski supported the development of a strong Polish nation-state and believed in the assimilation of ethnic minorities, which were quite numerous at that time (large populations of Jews, Ukrainians, Germans and others). Moreover, Dmowski saw the Catholic Church as the fundamental instrument in the program of cultural unification of the weak Polish state.

The conflict over citizenship was made moot after the Second World War. The Nazi occupants had already exterminated the majority of the Jewish population and ethnic Germans were deported from land assigned to Poland. Some Ukrainians were deported to the Soviet Union, others resettled or were resettled in Poland's new Western and Northern Lands. In addition, the eastern border of the state was reshaped in such a way that most ethnically non-Polish territory formerly belonging to Poland ended up in the Soviet Union.

Communist Poland not only appeared to be almost totally homogenous but also denied the existence of ethnic minorities, and especially refused them their own political representation. It should be noted that the Communists accomplished, to a considerable extent, Dmowski's program of building a nation-state, including the country's cultural and political homogenization. The main difference was, of course, the substitution of the Communist Party and its ideology for the Catholic Church as the central unifying institution. One of the effects of this policy was the absence of any official statistics concerning the country's ethnic composition. All citizens of Communist Poland were presumed to be Poles. The real ethnic composition of the country can be openly discussed only since 1989. However, even today, data concerning ethnic groups are based on estimates.

### *The German minority*

Thus, one of the surprises of the transformation was the "emergence" of the German minority in Opole Silesia. The case of Opole Silesians is sometimes seen as an example of "ethnic inversion." The Slavic population of Opole Silesia was allowed to remain in Poland after 1945 (and was not expelled like the other inhabitants of the region considered to be German) due to its presumed Polish ethnicity/nationality. In fact, many Silesians, who often spoke their own dialect of Polish, had felt themselves to be distinct and dissimilar from Germans while living for centuries in Austria, Prussia and Germany. Another important element contributing to the maintenance of a separate Silesian identity was the Catholic religion, which contrasted with predominantly Protestant Prussia. Thus, relative self-identification with the notion of Poland was not based on a conscious identification with the Polish state itself, but rather on cultural factors (mainly language and religion), which contrasted with the standard Prussian and, later, German culture. After the annexation of Silesia by Poland, Opole Silesians, even Polish-speaking ones, experienced yet another dissimilarity, this time between their culture and the standard Polish one. Although most Silesians spoke a dialect of Polish, it was quite distant from standard Polish. The lack of higher social strata among and of Silesians, which remained mainly a peasant population, caused serious social problems. As earlier in the German context, an attempt to advance socially required one to abandon his or her Silesian identity in Poland after 1945. Silesia experienced an influx of Poles from other regions, who practically monopolized higher local posts. Cultural tension between the native Silesian and the immigrant Polish population is a phenomenon characteristic of the whole of Upper Silesia, of which Opole Silesia is a part.

Today, we can speak of three main orientations among native-born Silesians. The first one is Silesians who identify themselves as Poles. The second group comprises Silesians who consider themselves to belong to a Silesian regional Polish minority, or even to a national minority culturally distinct from Poles and Germans. Some of this group support political organizations such as the Movement for the Autonomy of Silesia or have been behind the failed attempt to officially register the "Association of Persons of Silesian Nationality." The "Silesian Silesians" i.e. autonomists, are, however, mainly concentrated in a part of Upper Silesia that belonged to Poland even before 1939. During the inter-war period, this region was declared an autonomous Silesian voivodship (region) and even had its own regional parliament. The third orientation is represented by Silesian Germans, who choose to identify themselves with the German state and culture — the central culture dominating the Opole Silesia region until 1945. As former citizens of the Third Reich or their descendants, the German constitution gives them the right to a German passport, which, undoubtedly, influences their choice of national identity. Some Polish analysts consider that the selection of the German option by a considerable proportion of Opole Silesians is based purely on economic grounds. This is certainly a problem. A German passport provides several privileges, which were particularly valuable during the Communist era. They include visa-free travel (not so important anymore) and access to the German (and EU) labor market, German social security benefits, etc. However, the cultural aspects of the issue seem to play an even more important role. For numerous Silesians, contacts with the standard Polish culture, settlers from central and eastern Poland and the Polish Communist state amounted to a negative experience that paradoxically bolstered the Germanness of their identity.

The choice of the German identity, which enjoys considerable prestige in Poland, can furthermore be construed as an individual solution to the problem of the low social ranking of the Silesian culture in Poland.

Upper Silesia can be seen as a cultural borderland where the Polish and German central cultures meet and compete for the same population. The region has always been a periphery, not fully nationalized by either the German state or by its Polish successor. In fact, Silesians are forced to choose between the two central cultures. The regional Silesian identity, as it is argued for example by Rykiel (1995), will probably soon cease to exist as a valid national option. It seems that the majority of those not fully "nationalized" by the Polish or German central cultures will choose the more attractive German option, which would be a confirmation of Poland's peripheral status in relation to Germany.

The popularity of the German option in today's Silesia is best measured by election results, given the absence of official data concerning nationality/ethnicity. Candidates from the German-minority lists received about 70 thousand votes (17.5% in the old Opole voivodeship) in the last parliamentary election of 1997. They have two representatives in the lower house of parliament and 13 out of 30 seats in the regional parliament of the newly established Opole voivodeship.

### ***The Orthodox-Belarussian minority***

The case of the Belarussian minority in the Biatystok region is equally interesting from the center-periphery point of view. Belarussian territory, like Silesia, can be seen as a cultural and political borderland between Poland and another powerful state — Russia. Both have been competing to nationalize the local population since the 19th century. The population of the Polish section of the ethnically Belarussian territory has a rather unclear, complex identity. The most common label for the region by the Polish media and academic discourse is the "Belarussian minority region," but this is controversial. The ethnic identity of the population inhabiting the region is mixed, with the main basis for a Belarussian self-identification being one's belonging to the Orthodox Church. As recent surveys show, about 60% of the area's Orthodox population declare Polish ethnicity, while about 30% claim Belarussian (Sadowski, 1995). Practically no Catholics consider themselves to be Belarussian. The proportion of Orthodox Christians who declare their Polish identity has been steadily growing for a long time. At the same time, some have converted to Catholicism or become non-religious.

Theoretically, Belarussians could have strong reasons for a separate national identity. Although being distinct religiously (Orthodoxy vs. Catholicism) and linguistically from the vast majority of Poles, Belarussians appear to have much less of a national identity than the Silesian German minority. On the level of political behavior, it seems that the group has almost completely lost its identity. Support for candidates from exclusively Belarussian electoral lists among both ethnic Belarussians and individuals of the Orthodox faith is usually very low during parliamentary elections and insufficient to elect Belarussian candidates to parliament. Surprisingly for many, the Orthodox region votes almost unanimously for candidates of the post-Communist Social Democrats (SLD). The proportion of the Orthodox region's support for the Social Democrats is the highest in the country, attaining 90% in some communes. Since the SLD is clearly a national Polish party, we can conclude that the Orthodox minority is fully accepting of their position in Polish statehood and

has lost its own separate ethnic political identity. Nevertheless, such a conclusion may prove too strong. The unprecedented electoral cohesion in the Orthodox region may be interpreted as a specific case of "hidden peripherality." "Normal" political behavior would imply some diversity of support among different national parties. The almost absolute uniformity of the voting behavior is a clear sign of the region's special character.

In explaining this phenomenon, I would like to point out the fact that the Orthodox zone borders directly on the strongly Catholic and conservative Polish region of Podlasie. There is a long history of tensions between the two populations. During World War Two, they supported different sides of the conflict. Poles from Podlasie supported the anti-Communist Home Army (AK) and later the anti-Communist guerrillas. At the same time, the Orthodox population supported the Soviets and later the Polish Communists. The two communities carry negative stereotypes of each other to this day. The Podlasie Poles see the Orthodox population as Communist collaborators and traitors to the Polish state, while the Orthodox population sees the Podlasie population as nationalistic and Catholic fundamentalists. Both sides occasionally recall wartime events to justify the negative image of the other side. Among the reasons that pushed the Orthodox population toward the Communists, one may mention its frustrating experience in inter-war Poland. Orthodox Belarussians and Ukrainians, despite being citizens of Poland, were usually treated as second-class citizens, had a very difficult time establishing careers in the public service and were under strong pressure to Polonize themselves. During the Communist period, a person's support of and membership in the Communist Party provided important social and economic privileges, which were particularly attractive to people relegated to the lowest ranks in the social hierarchy in inter-war Poland.

Today, the Orthodox support of the totally secular post-Communist Social Democrats (SLD) can be seen as a form of a symbolic separation from their Catholic neighbors. To conservative Catholic Poles, who view Catholicism as a central component to Polish national identity, a vote cast for the SLD may be even interpreted as a rejection of one's Polish national identity. The political choice of the Orthodox community can be probably interpreted as a third way between exclusively Polish or Belarussian affiliation. On one hand, support for the SLD constitutes a clear separation from the traditional, conservative definition of the essence of Polishness. On the other, it implies a disinclination towards a political manifestation of Belarussian identity while still manifesting the group's uniqueness through its near-unity in voting behavior. It may be also seen as an unconscious but strong form of protecting the Belarussian collective identity.

Belarussians have suffered from low social prestige, especially in relation to the neighboring Russian and Polish cultures. It is an old phenomenon, originating mainly from the absence of a Belarussian highly-cultured and educated class. In this respect, Belarussian problems are similar to Silesian ones. However, while Silesians are able to turn to the German culture for more prestige, the weakness of the Belarussian state does not provide such an option for Belarussians. Even the inhabitants of Belarus often assume Russian identity to get around their low prestige as a nation. To Polish Belarussians, however, the Russian option is not a valid choice. Thus, we can conclude that the Biatystok region, while formally almost fully integrated with the Polish political culture, remains a cultural periphery in the deeper sense of political identity.

Figure 4 shows total votes for candidates from ethnic-minority lists in the 1997 parliamentary election. Votes for German-minority candidates are shown for the

Silesia region and former East Prussia while votes for the "Slavic National Minority Association — The Orthodox" are shown for north-eastern and eastern Poland. If the population of ethnic minorities in Poland were considerably higher, the structure presented on the map could be interpreted as a potential third dimension of the Polish political scene — the conflict over national identity and patrimony.

### *The voter turnout dimension as a center-periphery cleavage*

I will now present the fourth and final dimension to an understanding of the center--periphery structure in the Polish electorate as a whole. Let me reiterate that, according to the well-known Rokkan (1970) approach, voter turnout can be understood as a measure of the "mobilization of peripheries" — their integration into national politics. Thus, in this section, I will define the peripherality of the regions as a function of their voter turnout. In other words, the lower the voter turnout in the region, the more peripheral it will be considered.

Let us look at the map of the voter turnout in 1997 parliamentary elections (Figure 5) from this point of view. As it is easy to notice, the geographic structure of the voter participation is strongly related to the historical heritage. The region with the highest voter turnout in the country clearly demarcates the historical boundaries of the former Prussian zone. Some stereotypical explanations link the high turnout in the Prussian zone with "Prussian discipline." However, as the hard data show, this "discipline" can be more properly seen as an effect of formal education. The best predictor of voter participation in Poland is completion of at least elementary education. It is precisely the formerly Prussian zone that, to date, has had the highest elementary education rate in the country. We notice that, paradoxically, while building its own nation-state structures, Prussia helped to build a social structure that serves the Polish state to this day. In other words, the Prussians succeeded in mobilizing the region's population into forming part of the structure of a modern, democratic state, irrespective of its members' nationality. In reference to this issue, some observers point out that the voter turnout level in the region was one of the highest in Poland also during the Communist period, when participation in elections meant giving support to the ruling Communists. In contrast, the former Austrian zone, which is now quite active during elections, was until 1989 the region with the lowest voter turnout in the country. Such behavior was clearly a sign of traditionalist, anti-Communist sentiments. Similarly, the former Russian zone has always had a low voter turnout, although larger urban centers remain an exception to the rule. Undoubtedly, Russia was least successful in mobilizing its citizens into participating in the construction of a modern state. Peasants living in the former Russian zone remain the least politically-mobilized group in Polish society. Their resistance to social change (for example, collectivization undertaken by the Communists or current efforts to rationalize the structure of Polish agriculture) can be interpreted as a sign of their alienation from any state-supported or state structures, which they perceive as foreign.

Let us now turn to the area with the lowest voter turnout in the whole of Poland. It is located in the Opole Silesia region, where the German minority is concentrated. This seems to confirm Rokkan's approach to voter turnout as an indicator of the "buying into" of one's nation-state citizenship. We should note, however, that the low voter turnout in the area is not only related to the passivity of

the local Germans, but, most of all, it is caused by the fact that a large number of registered voters either permanently live in or frequently visit Germany.

Finally, I should point out that major urban centers usually have the highest voter turnout in the country. Thus, we can say that their "centrality" is confirmed by the turnout analysis.

## **Summary**

The four proposed interpretations of the main structures of Polish electoral geography are summarized in Table 3. As we can see, the first two of the four center-periphery interpretations assume its international character. In these cases, the dominating centers are (or were) located outside Poland and the relation to them was the crucial factor in the formation of these cleavages. The two other interpretations assume the domestic character of the center-periphery conflict, where the capital and major cities assume the role of the centers.

The above table features three categories of regions for each interpretation. First, the regions that assume the most central functions in a given dimension, second the most peripheral regions and finally the regions having an intermediate position in a given dimension. It seems that Poland is a particularly interesting object of an analysis from the center-periphery perspective. It is not simply a country that has been permanently subjugated or dominated by a more powerful neighbor for at least last two centuries. More interestingly than that, it has been annexed and/or dependent on several powerful neighbors, often at the same time. The partition period (1795-1915) is the best example of a situation whereby Polish territory became the periphery of three empires. More recently, Poland, like the other former Communist countries, has experienced an important shift in its dominating center. After becoming independent from Moscow, Poland appears to have become peripheral to the West. The country's politics, as well as its regional structure, are slowly transforming themselves as a result of this fundamental change. However, it is too early to predict how the Polish political scene and political geography will look when its relations with the Western center become the predominant political issue as a nation.

**Table 3. Dimensions of the Polish political space defined as the different aspects of the centre-periphery conflict**

	<b>Centres</b>	<b>Intermediate regions</b>	<b>Peripheries</b>
<b>Dimension of the Soviet political domination (the Left-Right cleavage)</b>	Moscow	Left-voting regions	Right-voting, conservative regions
<b>Dimension of the economic domination of the West (the rural-urban cleavage)</b>	Western Europe (European core)	major Polish cities Western part of the country	rural areas, mainly in the Eastern part of Poland (especially the former Russian sector)
<b>Dimension of the internal Centre-Periphery cleavage (pattern of support for ethnic and regional minorities)</b>	Warsaw and other major towns, also to the large extend former German Territories	regions of strong regional identification, e.g. Podhale and Kaszuby	(ethnic) German part of the Opole Silesia and to the large extend Orthodox part of the Bialystok region
<b>Political mobilisation dimension (turnout pattern)</b>	Towns, former Prussian and Austrian sectors of Poland	regions of the average turnout (e.g. former German territories)	(ethnic) German part of the Opole Silesia and considerable part of the former Russian sector

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# Figures

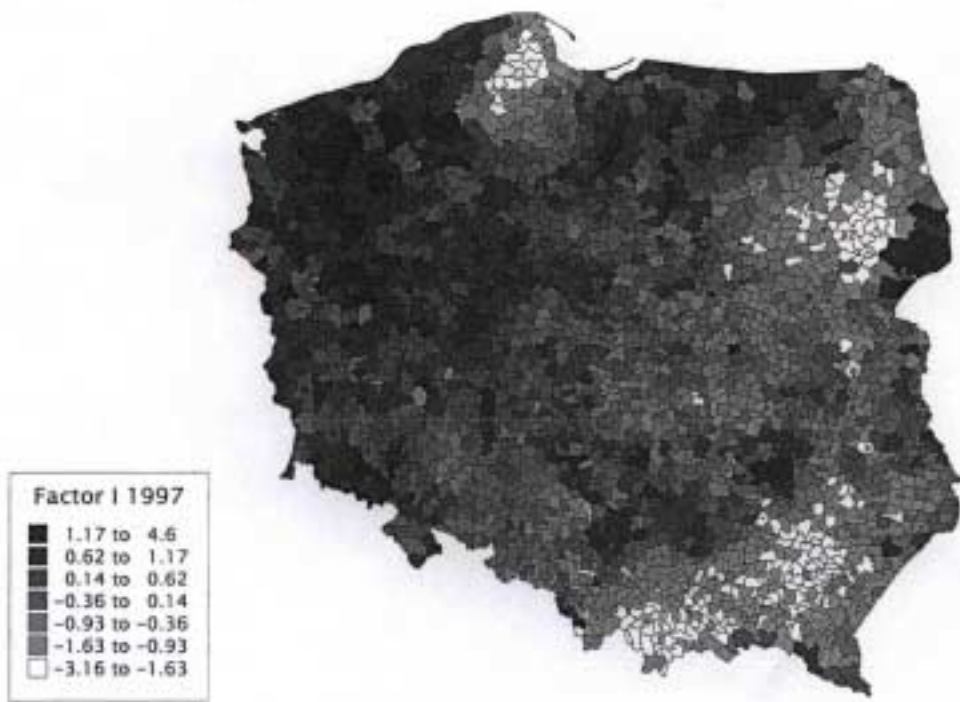


fig. 1

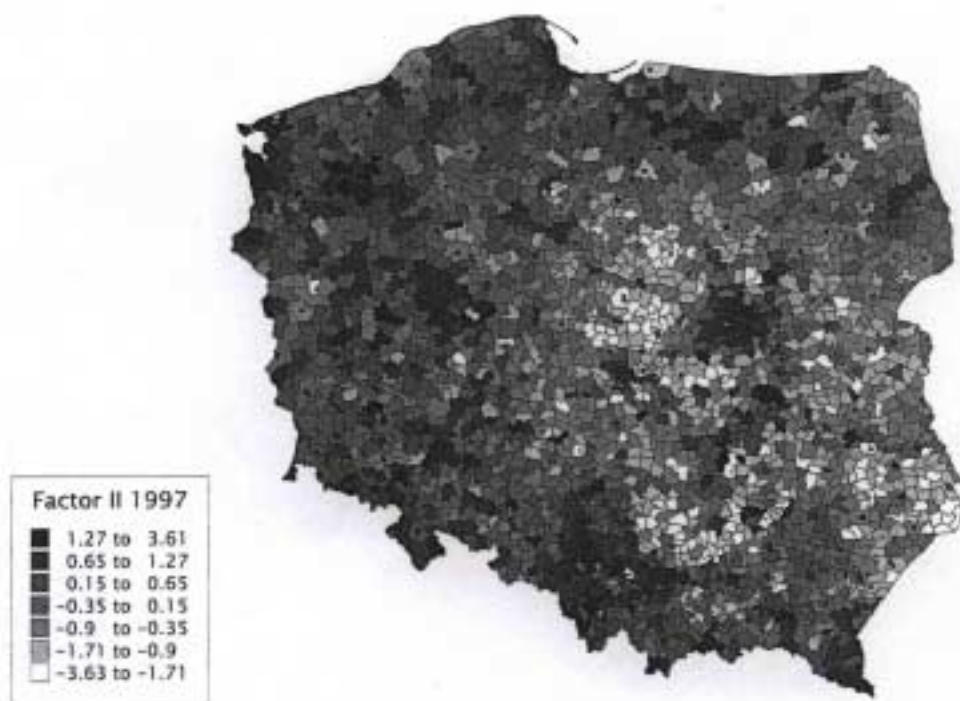


fig. 2



fig. 3

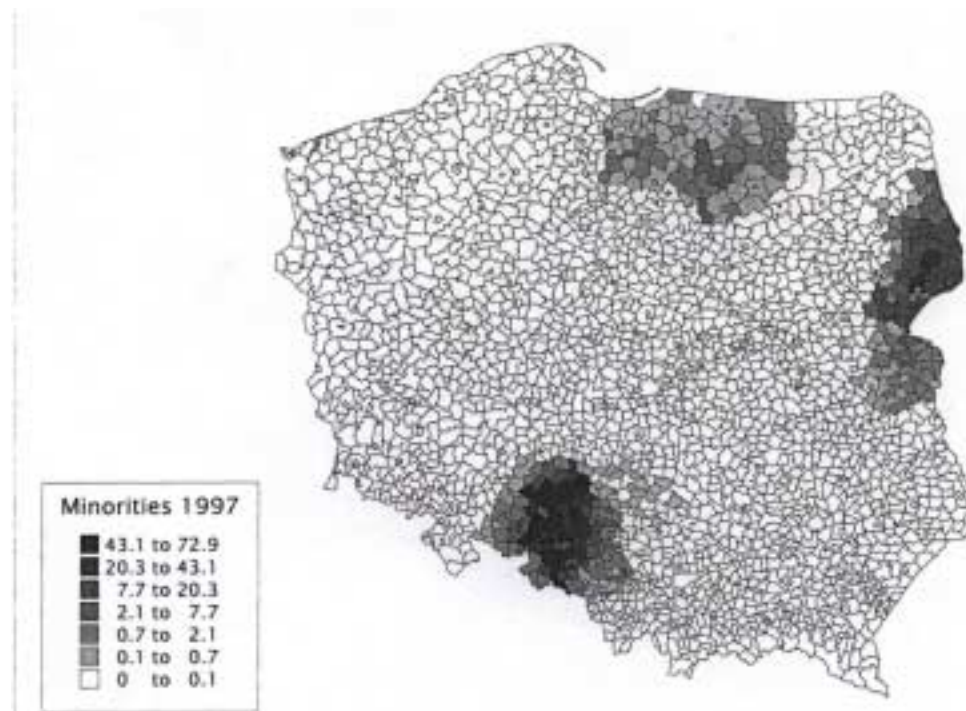


fig. 4

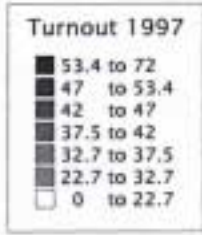


fig. 5