The spatial voting model and the 2007 elections

The article presents the main assumptions of the spatial voting model and, subsequently, verifies its predictions on the basis of the behaviour of the Polish electorate in 2007 (the PGSW 2007 study). The spatial voting models assume that the voter selects the party with programme they find closest to themselves. This makes it possible to predict which of the parties they will select and how they will behave if the offer does not include the one they would like to vote for. In effect, the support that each of the parties should obtain from among the entire voting population may be arrived at. The model explains the parties’ popularity by comparing their programmes to the position held by the median, or middle-of-the-road, voter.

In its empirical section, the article verifies the two main assertions of the spatial theory of voting. They are confirmed; the voters chose the parties with the programmes they find closest to themselves and the proximity hierarchy of the parties is, to a large degree, convergent with the results of elections. An assessment of a party’s chances of obtaining a good result in the elections is, however, an intervening factor. If a party with a programme the voters find close to their hearts has inferior electoral chances, the issue of strategic voting and transferring the vote in favour of the parties with better chances of winning comes into play. The impact on the voter behaviour of the party’s line on the main political issues is also analysed in the article. In the case of such issues as privatisation, some voters were encouraged by the party programmes, while others were discouraged. As far as the Law and Justice (PiS) party and the de-communisation issue is concerned, what is observed is mainly a voter-repellent effect. In the final part of the article, the position of the ‘median’, or middle-of-the-road voter and the party lines were compared. The result indicates that, while in many cases, PiS was close to the voters, as far as its programme is concerned, it was perceived at the same time as an extremist party. It is, however, voter competence which limits the extent to which the spatial voting model may be applied. The share of the voters capable of using it to select the party they find close to themselves amounts to around 60% of those who were surveyed.