Electoral participation and social structure in the light of the Polish National Election Study data.

How are the voters different from the non-voters?

This article aims to present the relationships between social stratification and electoral participation in Poland. In large, contemporary democracies, this relation is of fundamental importance to the accomplishment of one of the most basic values of democracy, namely equality. Only an equal electoral participation, ‘unbiased’ in its social and demographic aspects, can provide equal representation, which, in turn, is a sine qua non condition of the equal political influence of all social groups, strata and classes. Apart from this, positioning in a social structure determines the scale of the available resources necessary for any political participation, including electoral. The article describes the differences in electoral participation among groups defined in terms of the key socio-demographic variables determining the position of an individual in a social structure. The comparative analysis applied in the paper is aimed primarily at studying the stability/variability of the relationships in question. The analyses presented demonstrate convincingly that, in 2007, the relationships between the voting behaviour and socio-demographic variables are similar to those observed in 2005, 2001 and 1997. Electoral participation is shown to be related most strongly to gender, age, educational level and frequency of religious observances. Data from particular years provide a surprisingly similar picture and the impact of particular variables is much the same each time. This warrants a thesis that the distribution of electoral participation across the social structure is stable in Poland. The results obtained also indicate that the distribution patterns for electoral participation in the social structure observed in Poland highly resembles those noted in West European societies.