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# The weaknesses of majority voting systems. A voice in the discussion on the proposed changes in the Polish voting system

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**Abstract:** The proposal to introduce a majority voting system has become one of the most crucial elements of rivalry in the Polish presidential campaign of 2015. It was accompanied by an accusation that the proportional voting system seemingly affects the political life in Poland, making it more and more party-dependant. The aim of the present article is to refute the above accusation and present the weaknesses of the majority voting systems, based on British political system. Comparative, historical and analytical methods will be used in order to substantiate the thesis of the article, i.e. that political parties' influence will not be reduced due to the introduction of the majority voting system. Moreover, the article will also discuss the reasons behind and consequences of using the proportional voting system in Poland, in the light of the so called "crisis of democracy".

**Keywords:** general election, opinion polls, electoral systems, British electoral system, proportional representation, elections in Poland, crisis of democracy.

## Introduction

The proposal to introduce a majority voting system has become one of the most crucial elements of rivalry in the Polish presidential campaign of 2015. When it turned out that Paweł Kukiz, a famous musician, but also a candidate with no real political experience, achieved third place in the abovementioned elections, a political debate has started with the aim of discussing his platform. One of his key postulates was the introduction of single-member constituencies in the Sejm elections as a solution to the rule of parties and a limiting factor in gaining access to political power. Bronisław Komorowski, who was the president of Poland back then, suggested holding a referendum to find out if the nation really wanted to change the voting system. The referendum took place on 6th September 2015, but neither the voting calendar nor the political situation of that time encouraged a substantial debate on the subject. The present article aims at presenting the weaknesses of Mr. Kukiz's proposal, based on the example of Great Britain, where a majority voting system has been used for hundreds of years in the elections to the House of Commons.

Studies on voting systems are conducted within numerous academic disciplines. In political studies this issue may be considered from a plethora of standpoints, i.e. political-legal doctrines, history, contemporary political systems, as well as methods of converting votes to seats and their influence on party systems. Studies on voting deformations understood as a lack of clear proportions between the number of votes and the number of acquired seats are crucial in the assessment of contemporary democracy<sup>1</sup>. It is the above problem of disproportionateness that is arguably considered as the biggest weakness of majority voting systems. A good example of this fact is the discrepancy between polls and not so much the voting results but the distribution of seats in the House of Commons and, in

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<sup>1</sup> *Wpływ deformacji wyborczych na systemy polityczne*, ed. J. Iwanek, Toruń 2014, p. 5.

consequence, the duality of the party system on the electoral and parliamentary levels.

The aim of the article is to present the weaknesses of majority voting systems and to analyse the claim formulated during the presidential campaign concerning the influence of proportional voting system on the political life in Poland. Comparative, historical and analytical methods will be used in order to substantiate the thesis of the article, i.e. that political parties' influence will not be reduced due to the introduction of the majority voting system. Moreover, the article will also discuss the reasons behind and consequences of using the proportional voting system in Poland, in the light of the so called "crisis of democracy".

### **The British electoral system and its consequences**

The general election has been always accompanied by a series of queries and reflections, both during the election campaign, and after the announcement of their results, which have become a pretext to raise and, in turn, attempt to answer the question about the discrepancy between the poll and the general election results. Why does a party ultimately lose their seats in the House of Commons, when they were leading in the opinion polls only a month before? Does the public participate in elections? What happens to the votes and why are there such vast disproportions in transposing them into the number of seats? Answers to the above questions should be sought in several fields of knowledge on the British political system, e.g. the electoral and party systems, tradition and political culture.

The centuries-old evolution of legislation as well as constitutional practice have shaped the British election law to its current state. The electoral system is based on the first-past-the-post formula, which means that there can be only one winner for each constituency – the candidate that received the most votes<sup>2</sup>. It does not necessarily signify

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<sup>2</sup> According to Dieter Nohlen, the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system is a classic majority system, in which the candidate who receives the most votes is declared the

that the winning candidate received the support of the majority of eligible voters or even the actual voters. In 2005, only 219 MPs (i.e. about 1/3 of the total number of MPs) won by the majority of votes (i.e. over 50%) in their respective constituencies, with the lowest support amounting to 31,4% received by the Labour Party candidate of the Ochil and South Perthshire constituency. The abovementioned regulations may arguably lead to uncommon situations, such as during the 1983 election, in which the Labour Party obtained 27,6% votes and won 209 seats, but the Liberal Party obtained 25,4% votes and 23 seats<sup>3</sup>.

The British majority electoral system is arguably the most crucial factor in creating a polarized political scene<sup>4</sup>. The Parliament was first established in the 18th century. At that time it comprised of only two factions, the Whigs and the Tories who had different views on the king and the monarchy itself. The acceptance of a majority voting formula corresponded to this division and strengthened it. What is also worth mentioning is the fact that in two-party systems a particular relation between the electoral and the party system takes place depending on the geographical location of a given political preference. According to Maurice Duverger's comparison of the American and the British party systems, the tendency to develop a two-party system is caused by the majority voting system. It leads to a situation in which several parties may coexist in a given country as long as they compete in pairs with each other in each constituency. Parties may compensate for their lack of seats in the House of Commons during regional elections and, in consequence, lesser

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winner. Beside the absolute majority system, this typology also allows for an alternative vote (AV) system, in which voters may select alternative preferences, thus eliminating the need for a second round of elections. This system has been presented to the British voters in a 2011 referendum, but has not been adopted. See more on electoral systems, in: D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze i system partyjny. O teorii systemów wyborczych*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 163–173.

<sup>3</sup> J. Blondel, R. Sinnott, P. Svensson, *People and Parliament in the European Union. Participation, Democracy and Legitimacy*, Oxford 1998, pp. 55–57.

<sup>4</sup> D.J. Derbyshire, I. Derbyshire, *Political systems of the world*, Oxford 1996, p. 103.

parties may exist in national parliaments at a sub-national level, as in some areas they have higher support than in others. These parties may be autonomous or regional, in spite of not being represented at the central level<sup>5</sup>.

On the British political scene of the years 1992–2015, the balance of power was determined by a couple of parties which enjoyed continued representation in the House of Commons. The two alternately dominating players were the Conservative and the Labour Parties, with Liberal Democrats taking the third place. There were the following national parties: the Scottish National, the Welsh Plaid Cymru, the Irish Sinn Fein, as well as several lesser parties with single MPs. The table below analyses the results of elections to the House of Commons, by comparing the number of seats obtained by individual parties to the percentage of the votes cast.

**Fig. 1.** The results of elections to the House of Commons in years 1992–2015

Party	1992		1997		2001		2005		2010		2015	
	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes
Labour	271	34.4	418	43.2	412	42	355	35.2	258	29	232	30.4
Conservative	335	41.8	165	30.7	166	32.7	198	32.4	305	36.1	330	36.8
Liberal Democrats	20	17.8	46	16.8	52	18.8	62	22	57	23	8	7.9
Scottish National	3	1.9	6	2.0	5	1.8	6	1.5	6	1.7	56	4.7
Plaid Cymru	4	0.5	4	0.5	4	0.8	3	0.6	3	0.6	3	0.6
Democratic Unionist	3	0.3	2	0.3	5	0.7	9	0.9	8	0.6	8	0.6

<sup>5</sup> M. Duverger, *Political parties. Their organization and activity in the modern state*, New York 1967, pp. 382–383.

Party	1992		1997		2001		2005		2010		2015	
	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes	seats	% votes
Ulster Unionist	9	0.8	10	0.8	6	0.8	1	0.5	0	0.3	2	0.4
Sinn Fein	0	0.2	2	0.4	4	0.7	5	0.6	5	0.6	4	0.6
Social Democratic & Labour Party	4	0.5	3	0.6	3	0.6	3	0.5	3	0.4	3	0.3
Other	1		2		1		3		1		3	
Speaker	1	0.1	1	0.1	1	0.1	1	0.1	1	0.1	1	0.1
Turnout	77.3		71.5		59.4		61.4		65.1		66.2	

Source: Own elaboration based on documents available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) & [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk), accessed on 16.10.2015.

The first election in the chosen time period was accompanied by anxiety, as some speculated that a hung parliament might be established, the last parliament of this type having been elected in 1974, when the Conservatives won the election, but received insufficient seats to form a majority in the House of Commons. As a result of this, the Conservatives decided to form a minority government, but the parliament had no confidence in it, which led to a new election won by the Labour Party. The situation could have been resolved by forming a coalition, although such measures are traditionally avoided by the British politicians (the last coalition government ruled in the early 20th century). Both of the abovementioned scenarios predicted in 1992 were thus less beneficial than a single-party majority government which required the support of the majority of voters, but this was not the case for any of the parties until the election day.

The newly-formed Liberal Democrats party made a relatively favourable impression in the 1992 campaign. Poll results were followed by a series of questions to the Lib Dems about how they would

react to the formation of a multi-party minority government, since they held the status of the only effective third party in the United Kingdom and gave ample hope of a turning point that could restore the importance of third parties since their isolation after World War II<sup>6</sup>. Polls indicated that Liberal Democrats received about 15% support at the beginning of the campaign, which increased to 22–23% in its course. The possibility of a minority government forced Liberal Democrats to declare their attitude towards the two dominant parties, the *equidistance* which meant that both the Labour Party and the Conservatives could count on the third party's support, but in return the dominant party would have to introduce an electoral reform – proportional representation in the elections to the House of Commons<sup>7</sup>.

In the end, the Conservatives managed to win enough seats to form an independent majority government. The abovementioned experience made it clear that before the end of the election it was difficult to predict how the Liberal Democrats would use the gap between the Conservatives and the Labour Party, since, if a single-party majority cannot be formed, the need of supporting either party with Lib Dems seats cannot be immediately identified and relying on poll results may be jeopardous<sup>8</sup>.

After the election concluded, the Labour Party discerned the necessity to change their political direction and, in turn, allied with the Liberal Democrats. While the Liberals practiced the so called *fundamental opposition* to the conservative government, which, following the subsequent election, changed to *constructive opposition* to the Labour Party<sup>9</sup>, the clear winners in 1997, as shown by both the poll and the general election results; the Labour Party's rule continued for the next fourteen years.

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<sup>6</sup> J. Stevenson, *Third Party Politics since 1945. Liberals, Alliance and Liberal Democrats*, Oxford 1993, pp. 115–116.

<sup>7</sup> *Campaign guide 1997: election 97*, BBC Political Research Unit, London 1997, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> P. Joyce, *Realignment of the left?: a history of the relationship between the Liberal Democrat and Labour Parties*, Basingstoke 1999, pp. 288–289.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ingle, *The British party system*, London 2008, p. 139.

In the period between 1997 and 2005, there were the following correlations between poll results and general election results. During the campaign, about 30% of voters supported the Conservatives, about 50% wanted to vote for the Labour Party, and between 10 and 19% chose the Liberal Democrats. The results of the election to the House of Commons were the following: Conservatives – 31% of votes, Labour Party – 44%, Liberal Democrats – 17%. The 2001 polls suggested 30% support for the Conservatives, 50% for the Labour Party, and 13–20% for the Liberal Democrats. The same year's elections resulted in 33% votes for the Conservatives, 42% for the Labour and 18.8% for the Lib Dems. In the 2005 campaign, the Conservatives had more than 30% votes, the Labour Party about 40%, and the Liberal Democrats above 20%. The election resulted in 33% support for the Conservatives, 36% for the LP, and 22.6% for the Lib Dems<sup>10</sup>. It is worth noting that in the abovementioned period, the poll results were more or less reflected in the general elections. However, what bears significance is the disproportion between the support for Liberal Democrats as expressed in poll/election results and the actual number of seats they had in the parliament, which amounted to 7–10%. The subsequent campaign widened this rift even more.

In 2010, Nick Clegg, the Liberal Democrats' leader, was called the *dark horse* of the electoral campaign, as the Libs were winning the polls three weeks before the general election (after the TV-broadcast debate featuring three party leaders, the support divided as follows: 43% for the Lib Dems, 26% for the Conservatives, and 20% for the Labour Party<sup>11</sup>) and according to some assessments, they were supposed to decide upon the composition of the hung parliament. The election results were different, however – a single-party majority was impossible and the Liberal Democrats entered a coalition gov-

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2609&view=wide>, accessed on 20.04.2012.

<sup>11</sup> J. Chapman, *Kingmaker Clegg wins the TV war of words – and moves Britain even closer to a hung parliament*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/election/article-1266285/Leaders-debate-Historic-Brown-Cameron-Clegg-lock-horns.html>, accessed on 20.04.2015.



ernment, but they still became the big losers on 6th May, 2010. Compared with the 2005 election, they lost 5 seats, while simultaneously acquiring higher support of 23%. It is clear to see that the 23% support was not reflected in 23% seats in the parliament (23% of 650 is 150). This is a consequence of the majority voting system which, according to M. Duverger, causes a deformation of the citizens' electoral preferences. Firstly, there takes place a mechanical effect of the electoral law which means that all participating parties will be permanently underrepresented, except the two dominating parties. Secondly, there occurs a psychological effect of the electoral law, by which the electors are inclined to cast their votes on the strongest parties for fear of wasting them<sup>12</sup>.

The mechanical factor leads to the following situation – as long as a third party competes with two large parties, it will remain weak, as the system functions to its disadvantage. However, if the third party manages to defeat a dominant party, the latter will take its place. If there are three competing parties in the standard majority system, the voters will soon realize that they will start wasting their votes if they continue supporting the third, smaller party. Thus, there takes place a psychological effect, by which the voters stop supporting their favoured party and instead they start casting votes on the *lesser evil* to ensure that the party they oppose does not succeed. Such behaviour is harmful to the third party and, as long as it remains the weakest party, it shall be underrepresented in the parliament<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Duverger, *Political parties...*, p. 226.

<sup>13</sup> Those who criticized this way of thinking pointed out that the thesis was developed in the 1950s, the years of *frozen* party systems in Western Europe, and was not always justified in the coming decades. Peter Mair, among others, raised a question on the relevance of the *freezing law* and concluded that such discussion (i.e. how and why party systems *freeze*) is irrelevant to the times in which a different discussion should follow, i.e. whether or not the parties still remain *frozen*. See P. Mair, *Party system change. Approaches and interpretations*, Oxford 1997, pp. 4–5. It has also been argued that the thesis did not account, among other things, for votes being *intercepted* by newly-formed parties, and it omitted the fact that when coalitions are being considered, voting on smaller parties may enable them to enter the government. See *Współczesne partie i systemy partyjne. Zagadnienia teorii*

A curious political situation transpired during the 2015 general election. During the election to the European Parliament that had taken place the previous year, the United Kingdom Independence Party gained much popularity and subsequently won the election, acquiring 24 MEPs. Following the referendum concerning the independence of Scotland (September 2014), it may have been expected that the Scottish National Party would rise in popularity and, after a rather unsuccessful Cons-Lib Dems coalition between 2010 and 2015, the support for Lib Dems would decline. Practically all public opinion surveys confirmed these trends. This was even reflected in the voting results, but the number of seats acquired by individual parties was surprising. With 3.881.099 votes UKIP achieved third place in the election, but this gave them only a single seat. Lib Dems attained fourth place as far as the number of votes (2.415.862) was concerned and this translated into 8 seats, whereas the Scottish National Party got 1.454.436 votes and a total of 56 seats in the House of Commons<sup>14</sup>.

Apart from the effects of the electoral law discussed by Duverger, electoral geography, i.e. the way in which constituencies are determined, is also important. On numerous occasions Great Britain experienced the so called 'bias' on the grounds of geographical dis-

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*i praktyki politycznej*, ed. W. Sokół, M. Żmigrodzki, Lublin 2005, pp. 159–160. The British *freezing* lasted, however, until the 1990s, which means that Duverger's thesis is well-founded in this case.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/election/2015/results>, accessed on 15.09.2015. In the 2011 referendum citizens rejected the need of changing the British voting system, but in spite of this, the abovementioned disproportion of voting results constantly raises voices suggesting that such a change is essential. Ex. A. Renwick, *Is the Future of Electoral Reform Local?*, "The Political Quarterly" 2014, Vol. 85, No. 3, pp. 368–372. The simulation of voting results in a proportional system, is a good example, in which the Conservatives would have won 75 fewer seats but would still have been the largest party in the Commons; Labour too would have taken fewer seats; the SNP's dramatic increase in seats of 50 would have been curtailed to 25; but UKIP, the Lib Dems and the Greens would have fared much better. With 83 seats, UKIP would have been a force to be reckoned with in the House of Commons. See *Election 2015: What difference would proportional representation have made?*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/election-2015-32601281>, accessed on 15.09.2015.

proportion of electorate, among other things<sup>15</sup>. An analysis of the relation between votes cast and seats won in the House of Commons shows a noticeably high level of disproportion. The United Kingdom's proportionality index amounts to 85, which indicates that election results are being deformed in this discriminating system that does not reflect the voters' electoral preferences and causes a notable underrepresentation of smaller parties<sup>16</sup>, as shown by Fig.2. It contains 2015 general election results in random constituencies of large cities in individual countries of the United Kingdom. Analysing this data we must remember that the Conservative Party's supporters indeed have a more suburban background (supporters of the Labours, on the other hand, come from large cities centres – like Central Manchester). Additionally, in strong national centres nationalistic tendencies are more noticeable (e.g. the staggering dominance of Sinn Fein in Belfast or Scottish National Party in Edinburgh)<sup>17</sup>. However, the idea was to picture exemplary differences in election results between the first and the second candidate, e.g. a 4.1% difference in Wales or 5.9% difference in Scotland, where the *winner takes all* principle meant that the runner-up would get no seat. It can be seen

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<sup>15</sup> M. Domagała, *Bias, czyli deformacje brytyjskiego systemu wyborczego*, [in:] *Wpływ deformacji wyborczych na systemy polityczne*, ed. J. Iwanek, Toruń 2014, p. 58 & 65.

<sup>16</sup> The deformation of the election results is defined by the situation where some parties are overrepresented (i.e. they acquire more seats than the percentage of the actual votes cast on them), and some are underrepresented.

<sup>17</sup> L. Kownacki points out to the fact that the country is divided into constituencies in such a way so that an individual consistency comprises of a certain coherent majority and scattered minorities. These minorities will not be represented unless they form a separate constituency, in which case they may be represented by a certain number of seats. Let us consider, for example, an English city with 160 thousand voters and four single-member constituencies can be divided by two diagonal lines. This way every constituency will constitute a conservative majority and a labour force minority, the latter of which will never be represented. If, however, one of the constituencies was formed in the city centre, and the remaining three would be allocated on the outskirts, the labourites could win one seat. See L. Kownacki, *Demokratyczne ustroje państwowe*, London 1952, [as cited in:] *Współczesne partie i systemy partyjne...*, p. 173.

that the chosen electoral law leads to a deformation of the election's result. However, all laws lead to such deformations, whatever the voting form or the number and size of the constituencies, as they cannot represent all the voters and there will always be a group of voters whose choices will not be reflected by the number of seats in the parliament.

**Fig. 2.** A breakdown of votes in randomly selected constituencies (2015 election to the House of Commons)

<b>England:</b> <b>Central Manchester – voter turnout: 52.7%</b>	<b>Wales:</b> <b>Northern Cardiff – voter turnout: 76.1%</b>
Labour, Lucy Powell, 61.3% Conservative, Xingang Wang, 13.5% UKIP, Myles Power, 11.1% Green Party, Kieran Turner-Dave, 8.5% Liberal Democrat, John Reid, 4.1% Pirate Party, Loz Kaye, 0.8% TUSC, Alex Davidson, 0.6% Communist League, John Davies, 0.2%	Conservative, Craig Williams, 42.4% Labour, Mari Williams, 38.3% UKIP, Ethan Wilkinson, 7.7% Plaid Cymru, Elin Walker Jones, 4.5% Liberal Democrat, Elizabeth Clark, 3.8% Green Party, Ruth Osner, 2.5% Christian Party, Jeff Green, 0.6% Alter Change, Shaun Jenkins, 0.2%
<b>Scotland:</b> <b>Western Edinburgh – voter turnout: 76.5%</b>	<b>Northern Ireland:</b> <b>Western Belfast – voter turnout: 56.4%</b>
Scottish National Party, Michelle Thomson, 39.0% Liberal Democrat, Mike Crockett, 33.1% Conservative, Lindsay Paterson, 12.3% Labour, Cammy Day, 11.7% Green Party, Pat Black, 2.1% UKIP, George Inglis, 1.9%	Sinn Fein, Paul Maskey, 54.2% People Before Profit, Gerry Carroll, 19.2% Social Dem. & Labour Party, Alex Attwood, 9.8% Dem. Unionist Party, Frank McCoubrey, 7.8% Ulster Unionist Party, Bill Manwaring, 3.1% UKIP, Brian Higginson, 2.2% Alliance Party, Gerard Catney, 1.8% Workers Party, John Lowry, 1.7% Conservative, Paul Shea, 0.1%

Source: Own elaboration based on [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk) and [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), accessed on 15.09.2015.

The British voting system belongs to the group of systems with a high index of deformation. It is chiefly expressed by disproportion as regards two components: the methods of converting votes to seats and the way of determining the shape and size of constituencies.

## **Polish electoral system and its critics**

Free elections were one of the most important stages for post-communist states in achieving true democracy. Most states in Central-Eastern Europe adopted numerous variants of the proportional system, although a mixed system is also present. Matthijs Bogaards claims that when peace agreements specify the electoral system for national parliamentary elections, this always involves PR and that PR mostly worked as intended, securing peace through an inclusive parliament and, less often, government, though the lack of success in consolidating democracy is worrying<sup>18</sup>. Studies made on the countries from Eastern Europe during their transitions to democracy indicate that electoral system design was at least partially motivated by partisan interests and nowhere else has the dynamic of change in electoral institutions and party systems been observed as rapidly or as frequently as in post-communist Eastern Europe<sup>19</sup>. Poland also experienced an instability of solutions that aimed at regulating the organisation of elections in the period of transformation of the political system and the subsequent consolidation of democracy. Electoral reforms were accompanied by vehement disputes resulting from conflicts of interests between stronger and weaker political parties. Frequent rule changes favoured neither the stabilization of electoral strategies of Polish political parties nor the behaviour of voters<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> M. Bogaards, *The Choice for Proportional Representation: Electoral System Design in Peace Agreements*, "Civil Wars" 2013, Vol. 15, No. S1, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> K. Bennoit, J. Hayden, *Institutional Change and Persistence: The Evolution of Poland's Electoral System, 1989–2001*, "The Journal of Politics" 2004, Vol. 66, No. 2, p. 397.

<sup>20</sup> W. Sokół, *Geneza i ewolucja systemów wyborczych w państwach Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej*, Lublin 2007, pp. 261–262.

In the Polish case it has been argued that Polish decision makers were specifically motivated by a desire to select institutions they thought would enhance the general welfare. But in the same time, their motivations were selfishly instrumental<sup>21</sup>.

The current voting system in the Sejm elections is a proportional one, based on the d'Hondt method, whereas a relative majority system is used in the elections to the Senate<sup>22</sup>. Studies on the voting system's influence in the Sejm elections on the level of deformation in political representation show that it does not have a discriminatory character. However, its function is to moderate the shape of the acquired representation, especially in the context of tasks given to the political system<sup>23</sup>. This promotes, among others, an open-list electoral system, ensuring that the power of party organizations is considerably reduced without having to sacrifice proportional electoral rules<sup>24</sup>.

The basic accusation that Mr. Kukiz and his followers make against Polish democracy is party-based politics and the unfamiliarity of voters with the MPs<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, in proportional systems the party, not the individual candidate, is the legal body that is guaranteed proportional representation. The voter has a limited capability of expressing his political preferences. In consequence, the connection between the voters and the candidate chosen from the

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<sup>21</sup> K. Bennoit, J. Hayden, *Institutional Change...*, p. 399.

<sup>22</sup> Ustawa z dnia 5 stycznia 2011 r. Kodeks wyborczy, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20110210112>, accessed on 15.09.2015.

<sup>23</sup> W. Wojtasik, *Deformacje czy dyskryminacyjność systemu wyborczego w Polsce*, [in:] *Wpływ deformacji wyborczych na systemy polityczne*, ed. J. Iwanek, Toruń 2014, p. 167.

<sup>24</sup> E.J. Hollander, *Democratic Transition and Electoral Choice: The Legacy of One-Party Rule in Hungary and Poland*, "Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences" 2013, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> *Can you name the surnames of all MPs from your constituency? If not all, then maybe at least two or three? The vast majority of Poles cannot and arguably do not even care. Is it really acceptable that most of the MPs are people unknown to the society at large? It is a simple consequence of the current proportional voting system.* See <https://ruchkukiza.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Strategia-Zmiany-Kukiz151.pdf>, accessed on 19.10.2015.

party's list is insufficient. Proportional systems also favour fragmentation of the party system and political instability of rule. However, these systems enable the representation of various political views in governing bodies, thus the composition of these bodies reflects real political preferences of a society. Moreover, proportional voting systems allow small and new parties easier access to seats in the parliament and facilitate the possibility of independent politicians running for seats as well<sup>26</sup>. In countries that are still forming their democratic system, in which the party system has not yet been fully fledged, proportional systems foster evolutionary changes and stimulate society's interest in the functioning of democratic mechanisms<sup>27</sup>.

Single-member constituencies are the proposed solution to the issues in Polish politics. They guarantee an ethical renewal and restoration of standards in politics<sup>28</sup>. By analogy, the weaknesses of proportional systems will become strengths of majority systems and vice versa. This means that in majority systems personal popularity translates into a candidate's individual result, which fosters personal connection between candidates and voters. However, this situation might have other consequences. In constituencies in which a given party is absolutely dominating opposing parties will be discouraged from taking part in the elections (safe seats in Great Britain). Majority voting systems aim at composing winning majorities for parties on the national level, which translates into higher stability of the political system and the uninhibited ability for the

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<sup>26</sup> This was especially evidenced by the fact that in the 2015 parliamentary elections Mr. Kukiz's electoral committee attained 8,81% votes and 42 seats. Considering the fact that he did not win in any of the constituencies, he would not have acquired any seat at all, if a majority system was in place. Data from the Polish National Election Commission: [http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/355\\_Wyniki\\_Sejm\\_XLS](http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/355_Wyniki_Sejm_XLS), accessed on 30.11.2015.

<sup>27</sup> More B. Banaszak, *Zalety i wady wyborczego systemu proporcjonalnego*, Toruń 2008, p. 16–17; B. Michalak, A. Sokala, *Leksykon prawa wyborczego i systemów wyborczych*, Warszawa 2010, p. 109–111; D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze i system partyjny*, Warszawa 2004, p. 133 & 140–142.

<sup>28</sup> <https://ruchkukiza.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Strategia-Zmiany-Kukiz151.pdf>, accessed on 19.10.2015.

winning party to realise their platform<sup>29</sup>. However, as Dieter Nohlen points out, in the case of majority rule, candidacies are arbitrated by a specific committee of a party operating in the area of a given constituency. Answering the question of an MP's level of independence of their party in individual voting systems, Nohlen states that it depends on the overall notion of representation as well as specific functions of the party in the political system<sup>30</sup>. What is more, Great Britain had some situations in which unknown candidates won the elections only through their political affiliation (many politicians from the Scottish National Party). Apart from that, it is evident that out of all independent candidates, only one, if any, of them manages to win a seat.

## **Crisis of democracy**

The evolution of democracy in the second half of the 20th century led to the so called crisis of democracy, i.e. a declining interest of society in politics, dwindling turnout for the elections and the lack of connection between those governing and those governed (mainly due to the change from direct to representative democracy). This crisis is of a global scale and it affects not only developed democracies, but also those in the process of transformation, regardless of them using proportional or majority voting systems. Britain is regarded as a country seemingly gripped by an 'anti-politics' mood. Compared with half a century ago, fewer people engage with formal political processes, whether by voting or by joining political parties, while surveys suggest that mistrust and cynicism towards politicians and political institutions have become deeply ingrained. Various explanations for the apparent malaise have been proposed, including: declining levels of partisanship and parties' diminished power to mobilise voters; citizens' limited abilities to comprehend the nature

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<sup>29</sup> Mor: B. Michalak, A. Sokala, *Leksykon prawa wyborczego...*, p. 163–164; D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze...*, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> D. Nohlen, *Prawo wyborcze...*, p. 135.



of modern politics; the performance of recent governments; high-profile lapses in politicians' conduct, such as the 2009 MPs' expenses scandal; and elitist political processes that exclude citizens from decision making<sup>31</sup>.

Skeptics maintain that the decline of political parties is evident in their decreasing importance in democratic governance and downward trends in public support for them<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, this explains exceptionally well the development of e-democracy and the corresponding rise in political participation of citizens. In the context of the currently discussed issue, it is worth noting that even such a symptomatic phenomenon as the decline in turnout takes place less frequently in proportional systems than majority systems. A common explanation for this advantage is that PR systems motivate more citizens to vote because fewer votes are wasted. In addition, PR systems often produce more parties, which can lead to greater choice and possibly greater competition. Parties will contact more voters where the extra votes are more likely to produce extra seats. On the other hand, PR rules may mean that mobilisation efforts are less efficient than under plurality or 'winner-take-all' rules. In plurality systems, a small change in votes in a competitive district has the potential to affect the outcome of the race. Moreover, in systems with only two parties, voters may be faced with a choice between two catch-all parties that appear to offer very little difference between them. When there are greater differences between parties, electoral outcomes are likely to be more meaningful and citizens may as a result be more engaged in the process<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> N. Allen, S. Birch, *Process Preferences and British Public Opinion: Citizens' Judgements about Government in an Era of Anti-politics*, "Political Studies" 2015, Vol. 63, p. 390.

<sup>32</sup> H.D. Clarke, M.C. Stewart, *The decline of parties in the minds of citizens*, "Annual Review of Political Science" 1998, Vol. 1, p. 357–358.

<sup>33</sup> J.A. Karp, *Electoral Systems, Party Mobilisation and Political Engagement*, "Australian Journal of Political Science" 2012, Vol. 47, No. 1, p. 72.

## Summary

The process of democratic evolution into the representative form was accompanied by the question of the output model of the representation rule as well as the voting system. Initially a majority system was used, as an alternative method was still unknown. It might seem that achieving a direct and simple connection between the society's will and the political and personal composition of a given state's governing body should be relatively easy. Unfortunately, every voting system deforms the will of the society. The differences between each of them come down to the extent and degree of the deformation<sup>34</sup>. It is undeniable that PR tends to produce more inclusive parliaments than first-past-the-post. In minimising the cost of entry into parliament, this system ensures fair representation of nearly all of the population in the decision-making process. However, the system's rules also result in a greater number of parties in parliament, and therefore a decrease in the chances that a single party will win an absolute majority of seats. Under such circumstances, governments are usually composed of coalitions of more than one party<sup>35</sup>.

The British voting system discriminates against smaller parties while at the same time favouring the two dominating parties in a way that does not reflect their actual support. The electorate of these parties is concentrated and shaped in such a way that about 70% of constituencies are reliable – they will surely cast their votes on either the Conservatives or the Labour Party – thus forming an artificial majority<sup>36</sup>. Due to the use of a relative majority system in

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<sup>34</sup> *Wpływ deformacji wyborczych na systemy polityczne...*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>35</sup> D. Bol, J.B. Pilet, P. Riera, *The international diffusion of electoral systems: The spread of mechanisms tempering proportional representation across Europe*, "European Journal of Political Research" 2015, Vol. 54, p. 385.

<sup>36</sup> What is more, the real electoral competition takes place in *marginal*, where the influence of the larger parties is not prominent enough to guarantee a seat. The term *marginal* is adequate also because of the number of such constituencies, as while in the years 1955–1970 their estimated number was around 160, presently it amounts to 80. In constituencies which decide upon the results of the elections, the decisive factor amounts to 1% of votes shifting from one party to another by the

single member constituencies, an effect of wasted votes is created. Not only the election results are deformed, but also the polls. The voting system leads to the creation of a non-representative government (oftentimes chosen by the minority, in the scale of the entire country, but thanks to victories in individual constituencies) which authorizes the ruling party to make decisions not necessarily accepted by the majority of citizens, as indicated by the breakdown of votes cast in the general elections.

Remembering both the advantages of the majority system (personalisation of elections, better contact of a candidate with their constituency) and the weaknesses of the proportional system (party fragmentation and the need of forming coalitions) it should be observed that just as the British majority system was selected not so much due to mathematical calculations, but historical factors, tradition and the pursuit of creating stable, single-party governments, the Polish proportional system is adequate, considering the fact that after experiencing a single-party system, the nation aimed at creating conditions for giving itself the broadest-possible access to political power. The accusation that Polish political life is party-dependant was justified. Nonetheless, in my opinion this situation is not a direct consequence of the voting system, but is related to the characteristics of contemporary democracy. This, however, is a topic for a separate article.

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voters' preferences. See W. Kręcisz, *Status prawny posła do Izby Gmin w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 53–55.

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## Słabości większościowych systemów wyborczych. Głos w dyskusji nad postulatem zmiany ordynacji wyborczej w Polsce

**Streszczenie:** Propozycja wprowadzenia większościowego systemu wyborczego stała się jednym z ważniejszych elementów walki wyborczej w wyborach prezydenckich w Polsce 2015 r. Towarzyszył jej zarzut co do wpływu proporcjonalnej ordynacji wyborczej na upartyjnienie życia politycznego w Polsce. Celem artykułu jest obalenie tego zarzutu i prezentacja słabości większościowych systemów wyborczych na podstawie doświadczeń brytyjskich. W artykule posłużono się metodą porównawczą, historyczną i analityczną, aby udowodnić słuszność tezy, że wpływ partii politycznych w systemie politycznym nie ulegnie zmniejszeniu po wprowadzeniu większościowej ordynacji wyborczej. Problem badawczy stanowią ponadto przyczyny i konsekwencje stosowania proporcjonalnej ordynacji wyborczej w Polsce w świetle tzw. kryzysu demokracji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wybory parlamentarne, badania opinii publicznej, brytyjski system wyborczy, ordynacja proporcjonalna, wybory w Polsce, kryzys demokracji.