

Selected forms of political activity of Polish women during system transformation

One of the main form of political activity is participation of the citizens in electoral rivalry. In democratic countries this participation is of significant importance due to basic election rules by which the governing authorities are selected (universality, equality, directness and secrecy). None the less, there are exceptions (exclusions) to any of those rules – chiefly to universality and equality, as well as census suffrage. An example of this is gaining the right of women to vote on the same terms as men.

Many democratic states used to exclude women from suffrage for a long time. The change came as late as in the 20th century with Scandinavian countries paving the way for women who were granted the right to vote by the First World War. A very special period for elimination of restrictions on women's participation in politics was the interwar period (1918–1939). During that time, women in most of the European countries were given the right to vote. After the Second World War the universal right to vote for women became a standard of the procedural minimum of democracy.¹ Even though women were now entitled to vote, gender equality in politics did not become a reality. All around the world, women have not been very active in elections, both by their own decisions and due to numerous circumstances beyond their control. Some of the reasons behind this low activity of women in the field are cultural conditions (stereotypes and diverse expectations that are stamped on both genders) and institutional conditions (for instance intra-party mechanisms that make it harder for women to appear on the ballot in favorable positions).²

Although in Poland full suffrage was given for women relatively early (1919), not much has changed as far as their presence in politics. It seems that the cultural conditions have been mostly to blame, with the institutional ones prevailing since 1989.

A serious debate on women taking part in Polish politics took place in 2010, just before elections to local government bodies. One of the propositions that was put forward were party reservations for female candidates.

The subject of the present analysis is women's activity in the political rivalry on three governmental levels: central (the Sejm of the Republic of Poland), regional (provincial assemblies), and local (commune councils, district councils, commune and village heads elections). All the elections are based on the democratic systems

¹ A. Antoszewski, *Systemy wyborcze*, in: A. Antoszewski, R. Herbut, *Systemy polityczne współczesnej Europy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 201.

² M. Fuszara, *Kobiety w samorządach lokalnych*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2011, p. 4.

principles. However, they differ in electoral formulas, participants and the forms of rivalry. Those conditions, deeply rooted in political science, are of great interests to the researchers.

Legislative gender equality in Polish politics

Present Constitution of the Republic of Poland³ guarantees equality of all the citizens. Specifically, Article 33 guarantees gender equality in private, social and economic life, as well as in *politics*. (emphasis by the present author). Citizens are granted equal rights with regard to education, employment and promotion, equal compensation for work of similar value, social security, holding offices and receiving public honors and decorations.

Polish Electoral Law⁴ does not **impose** any limits on women's participation in elections. What is more, the Law, which was shaped during the above mentioned debates, specifies there must be no less than 35 per cent of women (or men) on the ballot in any elections to commune councils, district councils, provincial assemblies and the Sejm.

As we can see, existing **law merely provides the conditions** for the increase in the women's political activity and it does not guarantee the success in elections. Indeed, it is the voters who decide about the fate of candidates, even though one cannot deny the importance of intra-party mechanism in selecting and promoting candidates for the ballots.

Women's electoral activity in regional self-government offices

Local self-government elections were the first to introduce full rivalry. The 1990 election included 2376 commune offices and 51,692 councilors. Since the system transformation there have been 6 elections (1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010). However, during that time the law has changed a great deal with the most significant innovations being, as follows:

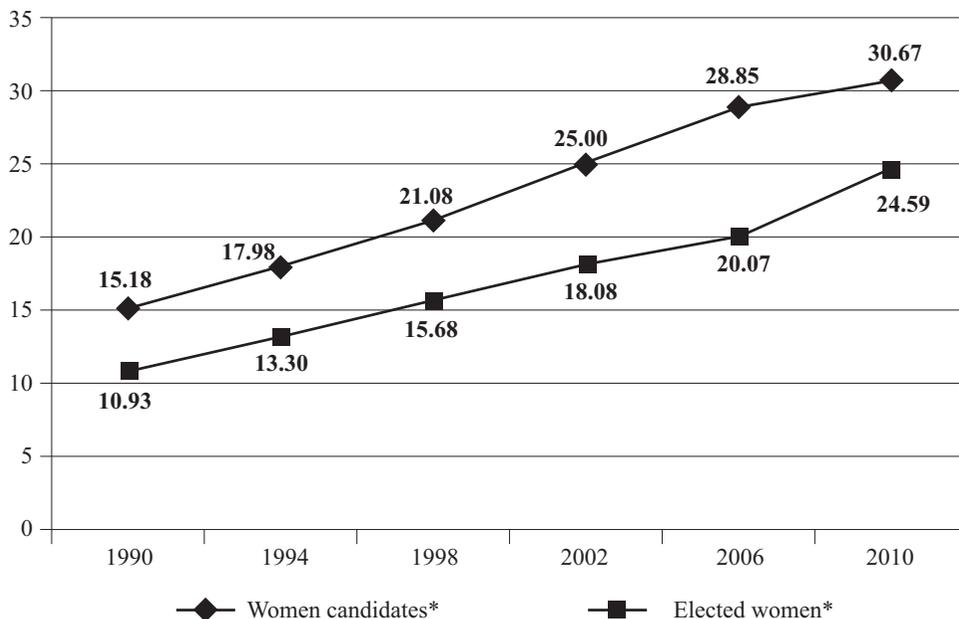
- extending the scope of self-government – both districts and provinces came under this umbrella in 1998, effectively, enlarging the number of councilors;
- enlarging the number of communes with elections according to proportional representation (1998);
- decreasing the number of councilors on all levels by 17,000 (2002);
- introducing direct election for commune heads and mayors (2002);
- elimination of the proportional representation system in elections of the commune councils (with the exclusion of independent cities; 2014).

³ *Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997*, Journal of Laws, no 78, item 483, as amended.

⁴ The Act of January 5, 2011, *Electoral Law*, Journal of Laws, no 21, item 112, as amended.

Polish electoral system is quite complicated, though, and the election to various representative bodies are made by different sets of rules. Thus, each election needs to be analyzed separately.

Graph. 1. Women in local self-government elections in 1990–2010



* Number/percentage of women candidates and elected women in commune councils elections (1990–2010), district councils elections (1990–2010), commune heads and mayor elections (2002–2010).

Source: Own calculations based on Polish National Electoral Committee and the book *Kobiety w Polsce*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2007.

The analysis shows that the number of women who take part in electoral rivalry on all the levels of self-government, as well as those who succeed in taking representative offices as councilors and commune heads (mayors), is increasing. From 1990 to 2020 the percentage of those women doubled. However, it is still 10% of difference between the number of women who are candidates and the women who hold seats. As various studies show, an underrepresented group (women do belong to this category) needs to hold at least 30% of seats to be successful⁵ and women have still not attained this level of representation in any self-government bodies. What is interesting, except for the mayoral elections, there is no substantial differences as far as women's activity on various self-government levels is concerned.

⁵ R. Dahlerup, *The Story of the Theory of Critical Mass*, "Politics and Gender" 2006, vol. 2, no 4, p. 511–522 (in: *Kandydatki w wyborach samorządowych w 2010 roku*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych (The Institute of Public Affairs), p. 4.

Table 1

Women's electoral activity in regional self-government offices (%)

Self-government body	Women candidates					
	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Gmina councils	15.1	17.9	21.0	25.1	29.0	32.0
Councils of city in cities with powiat status	–	–	23.7	29.9	30.6	32.8
Councils of powiat	–	–	20.0	23.9	27.1	28.6
Voivodship regional councils	–	–	19.7	28.1	27.3	29.8
Village Mayors, Mayors, Presidents of cities	–	–	–	10.4	11.9	13.8

Source: *Women in Poland*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2007, p. 234–236, State Election Commission, www.pkw.gov.pl (2.10.2011).

(Translator's note. Statistical Office terms explanation: *Gmina councils* – Commune Council, *Councils of city in cities with powiat status* – Independent City Councils, *Councils of powiat* – District Councils, *Voivodship regional councils* – Provincial Assemblies; *Village Mayors, Mayors, Presidents of cities* – Commune Heads and Mayors.)

The elections that took place in the independent cities have seen the largest number of women hopeful for council and assembly seats. Most of those cities, now equal to districts, are the ones with over 100,000 residents or the ones which were the capitals of provinces before the administrative changes in 1998. M. Fuszara indicates that some of the incentives for greater activity of women are higher education, the recognition of gender equality rights, and general social and political activity.⁶ District councils are the bodies with the lowest women's activity.

The activity of women in the lowest level body, i.e., commune councils, is consistently increasing. However, the results in two types of communes differ, with urban communes having the most active women and the rural communes having the least active ones. Their activity in elections for higher levels of self-government, namely provincial assemblies, is only slightly lower.

Mayoral (commune heads) elections differ considerably from the above since the women are outnumbered by two to one with no clear cut distinction between the three types of communes: urban, rural and urban-rural ones.

It is worth looking at the absolute numbers, as well, but one must remember about the legislative changes in the last 20 years with the most important of them being enlarging the number of communes in 1998, decreasing the number of councilors in 2002, and introducing direct election for commune heads and mayors (2002). Thus, the only fair comparison can be made between 1990 and 1994, as well as 2006 and 2010 elections.

Table 2

Women's electoral activity in regional self-government offices (number of people) in 1990–2010

1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
22,194	32,889	57,966	77,637	79,987	80,331

Source: *Women in Poland*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2007, p. 237–239, State Election Commission, www.pkw.gov.pl (2.10.2011).

⁶ M. Fuszara, *Kobiety w samorządach...*, op. cit., p. 5.

There were over 22 thousand women candidates in the first democratic elections, that is commune councils elections. Women participated mostly in smaller electoral districts of up to 40 thousand residents with plurality voting system and single-winner voting. It should not come as a surprise – 95% of all the communes used to fall in this category. 1994 election, with no voting system changes, saw profound boost in women's participation,⁷ and despite very low turnover, more women won their seats as councilors. There were also over 10 thousand more female candidates.

A dramatic expansion in the women's electoral activity in 1998 was a result of extending the scope of self-government which from now on included districts and provinces. Owing to this, the number of councilors was enlarged from 51,987 to 63,767. In addition to this, proportional representation in commune council elections was adopted. Due to the way the seat allocation is calculated, with system giving the preference to a party, not to an individual candidate, the electoral committees pushed to place as many candidates on the ballots as possible (there could be twice as many candidates then seats in a district). As a consequence, over 25 thousand more women candidates took part in the elections, which is more than all the women who were candidates in the first elections to commune councils in 1990.

Even though a revised Electoral Law diminished the number of council seats in 2002, it did not discourage women from participating in politics. However, it was the first time when commune heads and mayors were directly elected and there were over 1,000 women competitors for those seats.

Last two self-government elections, in 2006 and 2010, did not bring such dramatic changes in women's activity. Indeed, one could observe a regression in provincial assemblies and independent cities, even though before 2010 election, an extensive campaign encouraging the participation of women in elections was launched with the aim of setting standards for party reservations for female candidates.⁸ As Chart 2 shows, the effort failed – only 344 more women took part in the electoral rivalry to all the self-government bodies. This was the worst result in the 20-year long transitional period.

Although it was not common for electoral committees to have included a word "woman" (or "women") in their names, during 2010 election over 20 of them did contain a reference to the gender in question. Some of them were: "A Woman can, too" (Bodzechów Commune Council), "Goraja-Ka Women's Association" (Goraj Commune Council), "Country Women" (Ozorków Commune Council), "Women for the Commune" (Łambinowice Commune Council, Wierzbice Commune Council), "Time for Women" (Szczawin Kościelny Commune Council), "Women Together" (Słupca Commune Council, Żarnowiec Commune Council), "Commune Women" (Jordanów Śląski Commune Council), "Active Women" (Trzyciąż Commune Council), "It's us now – The Women" (Gronowo Elbląskie Commune Council), "Women of the Kobierzyce Commune" (Kobierzyce Commune Council), "Self-governing Women" (Rutka-Tartak Commune Council), "Creative Women" (Dąbrowa Białostocka

⁷ There also was an increase in the number of councilor seats (by 295).

⁸ *Kandydatki w wyborach...*, op. cit., p. 3.

Town Council), “Women and the Self-government” (Garwolin Commune Council), “Women’s Voters Committee” (Zabłudów Town Council), “Women’s Time” (Mściwojów Commune Council), “Łańcut Women Board” (Łańcut Town Council), “Women’s Local Initiative” (Wąwolnica Commune Council), “Societies of Active Women” (Bircza Commune Council), “Time for Women – Time for Teresin” (Teresin Commune Council), “Association of Country Women” (Zduńska Wola Commune Council) and “Active Women Academy” (Toszek Town Council).

All of the above committees took part in elections to the smallest communes (up to 20 thousand residents) where the plurality voting system is used. Moreover, most of them were initiatives of private individuals (only a dozen or so signatures were required to have their committees registered) and only two of them were formal bodies (associations). The committee which won the largest number of seats, namely six of them, was “Łańcut Women Board”. A peculiar fact was that “Women Together” Committee from Żarnowiec consisted of 6 people and 3 of them were men.

None of the above committees decided to enter into council elections. Some of the reasons could be the use of proportional representation, larger number of signatures required to register a list (150), and the requirement of placing at least 5 candidates (they were elections to commune councils in communes of over 20 thousand residents, elections to district councils, independent cities and provincial assemblies). Never the less, in 2006 elections there was a single committee which fought for both town and district council seats. It was “Women in the Self-government”, an electoral committee from Kępno which was established as a spin-off of the two-year old association, “The Smile”. The committee registered 3 lists: in two electoral districts for the Kępno Town Council and in one electoral district for the Kępno District Council. All 27 candidates were women and their slogan was “Kępno Commune – the home for our families”. The candidates claimed that registration of their committee was not “the expression of feminism or the need to govern”. It was “solely the manifestation of the need to introduce the feminine way of thinking into public life – the way of thinking represented by half of the society”. They saw their advantages in trust, ease of establishing relationships, the will to help and heightened sensitivity to others’ problems. They declared that what they had succeeded with in the association, would be realized in the self-government. Some of their proposals included: establishing the Culture Center, organizing extracurricular activities, improving urban amenity, installing CCTV cameras in schools and across the city, as well as segregated cycle facilities, building gyms and swimming pools, engaging the elderly in more active lives, and setting up the crisis management center. Eventually, the committee won only two seats in the town council.⁹ Four years later, in 2010, the “Women in the Self-government” committee did not participate in the election. A new committee, “The Activists Near You”, was registered in its place, which included men candidates, as a minority though. Despite that, it was not as successful as before and won just one seat in the whole commune.

⁹ A. Ptak, *Rywalizacja polityczna w samorządach lokalnych. Studium wybranych gmin*, Poznań–Kalisz 2011, p. 82 and 104.

Women and the results of elections to self-government bodies

Under-representation of women in local government is not the result of system changes which started in 1990. Even when political powers were not distributed according to free elections, women would not take part eagerly in politics. J. Bartkowski argues that before 1990 the participation of women was dependent on current changes and goals of the top-down political system. He indicates the correlation between strengthening control measures by the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party and the number of women engaged in local politics. One could notice, for instance, that women were especially promoted in the 1970s: in 1978 there were over 25% of women-councilors. In 1988 after the last election to the National Council, the number of women dropped to 21.9%.¹⁰

Fully democratic 1990 election saw a radical decline in women's presence in politics due to an open rivalry and the lack of rules governing the distribution of female candidates on the party lists and in local representative bodies. Women held a little over 10% of seats in communes.

Table 3

The percentage of women successful in local elections

Self-government body	Women candidates					
	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Gmina councils	10.9	13.3	15.7	17.8	21.3	25.4
Councils of city in cities with powiat status	–	–	19.9	17.4	21.6	24.0
Councils of powiat	–	–	14.9	15.9	16.6	17.8
Voivodship regional councils	–	–	10.9	14.3	17.6	22.6
Village Mayors, Mayors, Presidents of cities	–	–	–	6.8	8.2	8.3

Source: *Women in Poland*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2007, p. 237–239, State Election Commission, www.pkw.gov.pl (2.10.2011).

However, subsequent elections show that there are more and more women who win their seats in councils and assemblies and in 2010 the percentage nearly reached that of 1978. Women are the most successful at the lowest self-government level. At the beginning of the 1990s most of the women who won their seats came from urban communes (16.5%), followed by urban-rural communes (11.1%), and rural ones (9.2%), but 2010 election was the most successful for candidates from the smallest communes.

The situation seems to be much better when one looks at the absolute numbers. After the election in 1990, 5652 women held their council seats. Then the numbers were **steadily** growing and they more than doubled (11,510) in 2010.

An opposite phenomenon can be observed in mayoral elections (including commune heads). In 2002 there were 165 women office holders. By next election, in 2006, the numbers of mayors (commune heads) increased to 204, but it dropped to 144 in

¹⁰ J. Bartkowski, *Lokalne elity władzy w Polsce w latach 1966–1995*, Warszawa 1996, p. 78–79.

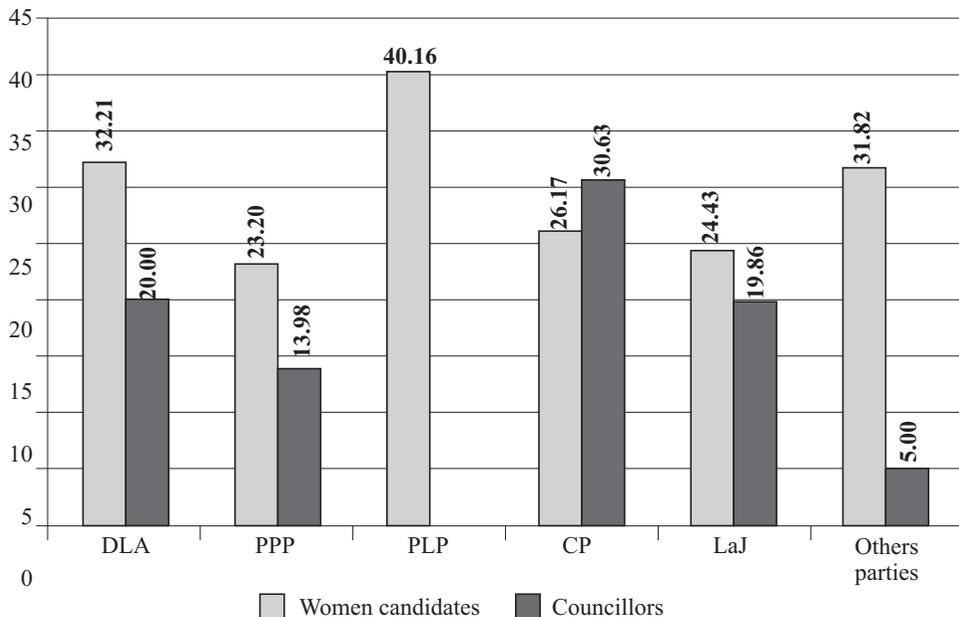
2010. In consequence, the present situation is similar to 1978 when there were 217 female commune heads which made 9.1% of all the top office holders.¹¹

Provincial representative bodies are not known for including women either. A research of the Institute of Public Affairs indicated that half of the executive boards of provincial assemblies has never had a female member. Only two boards had 2 female members with the rest having merely a single member. Lubusz Province has been the only one where the Province Marshal office (the president of the executive board) has been held by a woman, Elżbieta Polak. She has an extensive self-government experience and is broadly educated. Other members of the board are men.

Women electoral participation against party lists

Last election of 2010 was interesting due to the methods of constructing party lists and loudly heralded efforts to promote the presence of women on the ballot. The most important data come from provincial assemblies which are the most party-driven bodies of all and whose seats are mostly allocated amongst the parties represented in the Parliament.

Graph 2. The percentage of women candidates to provincial assemblies in 2010



DLA – Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej); PPP – Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronictwo Ludowe); PLP – Polish Labor Party (Polska Partia Pracy); CP – Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska); LaJ – Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość).

Source: State Election Commission, www.pkw.gov.pl (2.10.2011).

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 79.

The party which registered the largest number of women candidates was Polish Labor Party (40.16%) and Polish People's Party came last (23.20%). However, the absolute numbers of women on the ballots were quite different: Democratic Left Alliance had 333 women candidates, Civic Platform – 291, Law and Justice – 268, Polish People's Party – 258, Polish Labor Party – 253. The most successful were women from the Civic Platform which won 30% of all the seats – that is, there are 68 of the party's female members in 16 provincial assemblies. The results of other parties were nothing short of disappointing: only 19.86% of women (i.e. 28 councilors) from Law and Justice lists got their seats, 20% (17 councilors) came from Democratic Left Alliance, and 13.98% (13 councilors) from Polish People's Party. Since Polish Labor Party did not take part in distributing the seats in provincial assemblies no women from the party won her seat.

The success of the women from Civic Platform is clearly seen on all the levels of self-government. Never the less, the lower the government level, the better outcome for the Polish People's Party. For instance, in communes of up to 20 thousand residents over 20% of councilors are women from Polish People's Party lists. In spite of this, it is difficult to describe both political activity and the results of voting for women on the lowest, local level since many of the initiatives reported as local groups by the electoral office are *de facto* political parties in disguise.

The success of the Civic Platform does not seem to be as huge when we look at absolute figures. Across the country and on all the government levels, Civic Platform won 1232 seats for women, Polish People's Party – 1116, Law and Justice – 871, Democratic Left Alliance – 383. This leaves us with 7764 seats (68.31%) which are held by women from outside of party lists. Some of them may be women who are active in their parties but decided to run for the office from local committees. This Appears to be true especially in the smallest communes.

The present author's studies of seven South Greater Poland communes show that women were successful in the communes with passive parties which previously had not achieved a winning vote. As much as 75.86% of the commune councilors who held the office from 2006 to 2010 came from local lists and in two of the communes women constituted over 30% of all the councilors. The situation in two communes which were dominated by parties led to mere 10% of women office holders.¹²

Villages – a forgotten area of women's activity

Studies on the engagement of women in politics focus on central and provincial government as well as on the largest cities, as those are areas affected by the Electoral Law amendments regarding institutionalized reservations for female candidates. In the present author's opinion, too little weight is attached to promoting the women's activity in rural areas, despite the availability of an EU program, Leader.

Total number of villages which form the smallest administrative units across the country is 40,464. Statistical studies indicate that the women's activity in villages is

¹² A. Ptak, *Rywalizacja polityczna...*, op. cit., p. 127.

much higher than on the previously analyzed levels of government. On the average, women comprise over 30% of village heads.

Table 4

Activity of women as village heads in 2010

Province	Village heads	Women village heads	
		Number	%
Lower Silesian	2,305	870	37.74
Kuyavian-Pomeranian	2,255	670	29.71
Lublin	3,711	1,014	27.32
Lubusz	1,018	374	36.74
Łódź	3,489	1,090	31.24
Lesser Poland	1,921	517	26.91
Masovian	7,319	2,302	31.45
Opole	1,032	391	37.89
Subcarpathian	1,552	269	17.33
Podlaskie	3,294	646	19.61
Pomerania	1,588	566	35.64
Silesian	1,065	358	33.62
Świętokrzyskie	2,131	668	31.35
Warmian-Masurian	2,253	805	35.73
Greater Poland	3,851	913	23.71
West Pomeranian	1,680	707	42.08
Poland	40,464	12,160	30.05

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of the Regions – Poland*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 2007, p. 37.

As we can see there is a great territorial diversity in the distribution of the office among women. The provinces with the highest number of female office holders were: West Pomeranian (42.08%), Opole (37.89%), Lower Silesian (37.74%), Lubusz (36.74%), Warmian-Masurian (35.73%) and Pomeranian (35.64%). On the opposite side of the spectrum there were Subcarpathian (17.33%), Podlaskie (19.61%), Greater Poland (23.71%) and Lesser Poland (26.91%). The reasons behind those differences require further qualitative research.

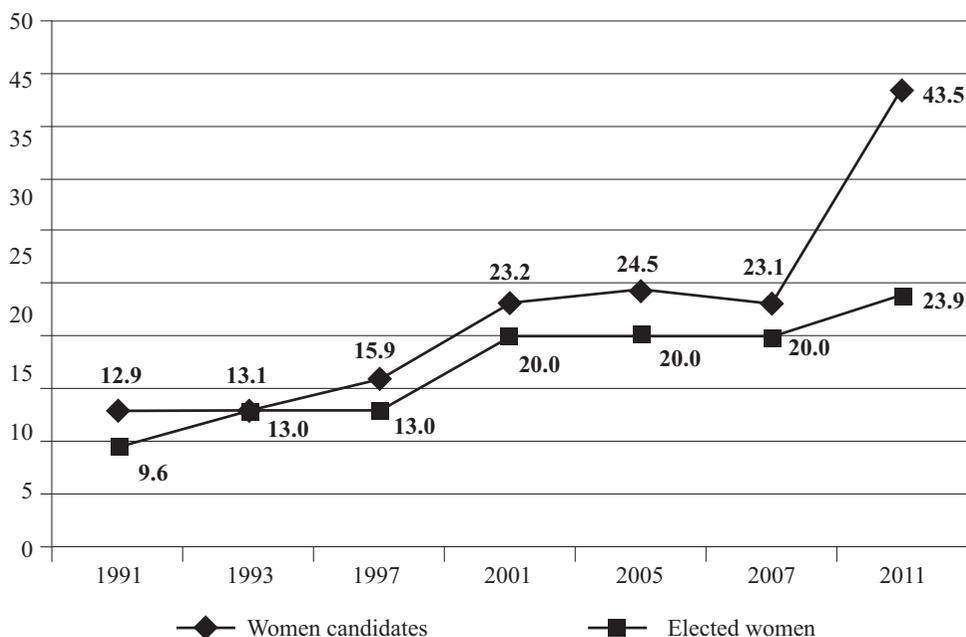
All in all, it comes as a surprise that there is such a strong female representation of village heads. Elections, by all means modern and democratic, are organized by communal self-governments; they are secret, direct and do not limit the number of candidates who are chosen by eligible voters. Notwithstanding, neither Commune Self-government Act nor Electoral Code contain any legal provisions securing the presence of women on the ballots.

Women in parliamentary elections

In the analyzed period there were seven elections to the parliament (in 1991, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, and 2011). Basically, 460 members of parliament (representa-

tives) are elected by universal ballot in multi-member districts using proportional representation. Although Electoral Law evolved, none of the amendments had as profound impact as the changes to the regional and local elections. However, the following things were changed: the method of calculating votes in the districts, winding-up of the so-called national list, introducing election threshold, and the correction to the size of the districts.¹³ In the author's opinion the above changes had no influence on the representation of women in the parliament.

Graph 3. Women in Polish parliamentary elections in 1991–2011



Source: own calculations based on the data from the State Election Commission, www.pkw.gov.pl, 2.10.2011) and the Central Statistical Office publication, *Women in Poland*, Warsaw 2007.

Similarly to the self-government elections, there is a steady increase in the women's participation in the electoral competition for legislative seats. Except for the latest 2011 election, when parties were obliged to follow the quota system for women on the ballots, the largest number of women candidates on the lists was in 2001 and it reached over 23% – a substantial increase from 15.9% in the previous election of 1997. In absolute numbers, it equaled over 700 more women. Subsequent elections continued the upward trend.

Election of October 9th, 2011 were the most remarkable owing to the introduction of the law making it mandatory for the parties to designate at least 35% of the places on the ballot to women candidates. As early as during submitting the parties' lists, the number

¹³ More on this in A. Stelmach, *Zmiany prawa wyborczego w Polsce a legitymizacja władzy*, in: *Prawo wyborcze i wybory. Doświadczenia dwudziestu lat procesów demokratycznych w Polsce*, A. Stelmach (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe WNPiD UAM, Poznań 2010, p. 9–20.

of women therein was impressive and amounted to 43.5%, in contrast to 23.1% in 2007. Thus, the quota set forth under the Electoral Law was exceeded by 8%. Of course, it begs the question whether “the excess” was due to the gender equality campaign or due to conscious actions taken by the parties playing it secure, in case a female candidate stepped down before a list could be registered (the list would not meet the requirements of the Article 211 of the Electoral Law).

Table 5

Women on the countrywide party lists in 2007–2011 (%)

Parties and electoral committees	2005	2007	2011
Civic Platform	20.96	21.10	43.39
Law and Justice	21.50	19.17	39.85
Democratic Left Alliance	27.63	22.16	44.36
Polish People’s Party	19.65	18.15	41.66
Self-defence Party	22.82	23.98	–
League of Polish Families	19.45	20.38	–
Palikot’s Movement	–	–	44.53
Average of all the committees	24.51	23.08	43.50

Source: State Election Commission.

As we can see, never had there been more than 35% of women on the ballots before the women’s reservations on the party lists went into effect in 2011. In 2007 the least number of women candidates came from Polish People’s Party, Law and Justice and the League of Polish Families. All three parties may be considered conservative, especially in terms of their attitude towards family and religion. The situation looked completely different on the lists of the left-wing parties and Self-defence Party. The diversity and the distribution of women on the lists had been very similar in 2005 elections.

None the less, the representation of women in the national legislature is far more important than their general political activity. It is encouraging that the number of women in the parliament is growing, even though they have never won more than 30% of seats.

Table 6

Women representatives in parliamentary groups in 2005–2007.
Data from the beginning of the term

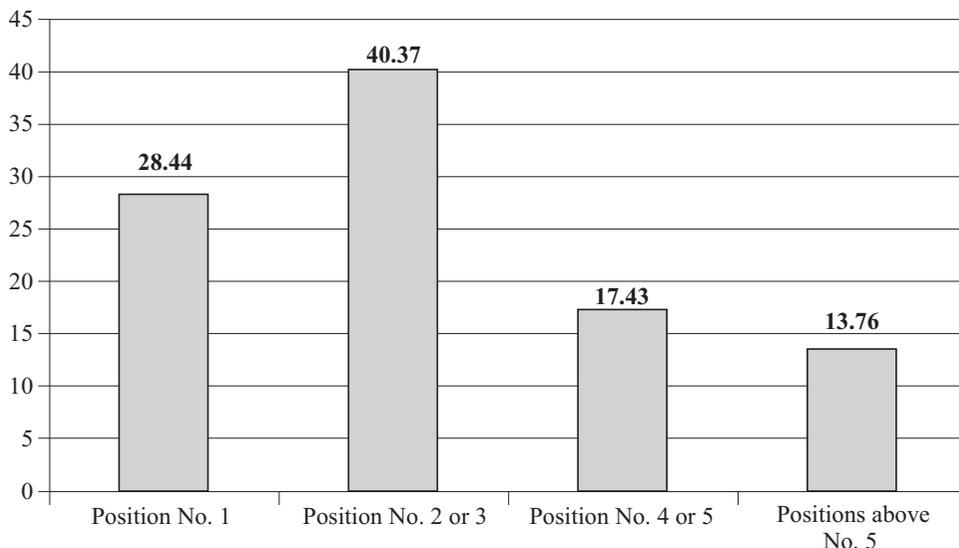
Parliamentary group	2005		2007		2011	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Civic Platform	33	24.81	48	22.97	72	34.78
Law and Justice	29	19.20	34	20.48	27	17.20
Democratic Left Alliance	11	20.00	11	20.75	4	14.81
Polish People’s Party	1	4.00	1	3.23	2	7.14
Self-defence Party	15	26.78	–	–	–	–
League of Polish Families	5	14.70	–	–	–	–
Palikot’s Movement	–	–	–	–	5	12.50
Average of all the committees	–	21.52	–	20.43	–	23.91

Source: Own calculations based on the data from the Sejm Chancellery, www.sejm.gov.pl.

In fact, mandatory reservations for women candidates have not changed much as the presence of women in the parliament has grown only by 3%. We can formulate a thesis, then, that the election result is determined by the position on a given candidate on the ballot, rather than by the quota system. Indeed, the studies show it is the first-place candidate on a ballot who has the biggest chance of winning the seat and, as the recent elections have shown, only around 20% of such candidates were women. Since the distribution of the candidates on the lists depends wholly on the decisions of party leaders, it will not be hard to argue that what we face is the institutional barrier held by party leaders denying women from occupying favorable places.

When comparing the parties, Civic Platform achieved the best result with 34% of women who won their seat. The party followed its self-imposed mechanism which reserved at least one place for a woman candidate in the first three lines on the ballot. The outcome made history with the highest percentage of women representatives per party since the beginning of the system transformation. The second party with high representation of women in the parliament is Law and Justice (17.20%). What comes as a surprise, the left-wing parties, which have been vocal proponents of gender equality and women's activity (both in Poland and in Europe), did not bring many women into the parliament themselves: Democratic Left Alliance has almost 15% of women representatives, while Palikot's Movement only 12.5%.

Graph 4. Women candidates position on the party lists in 2011 parliamentary election (%)



Source: Own calculations based on the data from State Election Commission.

Data collected in the Figure 4 show that 70% of the present women representatives usually held some of the first three places on the party lists.

Women have not been represented well in the offices of the Sejm. For example, the first female Marshall of the Sejm was only recently appointed following this year's

election. Up to then the office was held only by men. The Deputy Marshal office was not often held by women either – from 1991 to 2011 only three of them held the title.

During the previous term (6th Term of Office, 2007–2011), before introducing the 35% quota for women on the party lists, women presided over 3 permanent parliamentary committees. Thus, they comprised 11.54% of all the representatives appointed to chair the 26 committees. Even the head of the Social and Family Policy Committee, whose one of the tasks was gender equality, was a man – fortunately, the three deputy heads were women. Generally, just 20 deputy heads, per 90 possible posts were women (22.22%). As much as 12 committees had no female representation at all (46.15%).¹⁴ During the present, 6th Term of Office, which was started in 2011, there are ... women chairing the committees with ... women serving as deputy heads.

The study shown in this chapter permits the following synthetic conclusions:

1. The percentage of women who take part in electoral rivalry, as well as those who succeed in winning the office on all the levels of self-government, is increasing.

2. An underrepresented group needs to hold at least 30% of seats (offices) to be successful and women have still not attained this level of representation in any self-government bodies.

3. Women are most active locally, but only in elections to self-government bodies (councils and assemblies) and as village heads.

4. Race for the executive offices, be it direct (commune heads and mayors) or indirect (the executive board of the provincial assembly and marshals) dramatically limits the presence of women, as well as inhibits the officeholder's performance.

5. An extensive campaign encouraging the participation of women in 2010 self-government elections failed. Women still have not reached 30% of representation in the local bodies.

6. Legislative amendments which reserved 35% of the places on the ballots for women brought no noticeable changes. The current presence of women in the parliament has grown only by 3%.

¹⁴ Own calculations based on the data from the Sejm Chancellery, www.sejm.gov.pl. Data at the end of the term.