



UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH

Elections to local government in Poland

Marta Obrębska

INPiDz

INSTYTUT NAUK POLITYCZNYCH
I DZIENNIKARSTWA
UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI W KATOWICACH

An extremely short history of elections in Poland

- the elections to Sejm in Łęczyca (called First Sejm) in 1182.
- since the Sejm of 1493 Polish kings were obliged to call regular Sejms and regional elections (sejmiks) every two years.
- the first modern and free elections in XX century were held in 1919.
- after the Second World War, Poland fell into the Soviet sphere of influence
- no elections until the groundbreaking elections of 1989, marking the fall of communism, were free.

Background to modern local government elections

- 1990
- 27 May 1990
- 1999
- 2002

The Administrative Division of Poland

tier	Legislative body	Executive body
voivodeship	sejmik	board
powiat	powiat council	board
gmina (municipality)	gmina council	wojt mayor city president

Introduction to local government electoral law in Poland

PRIOR TO 2011

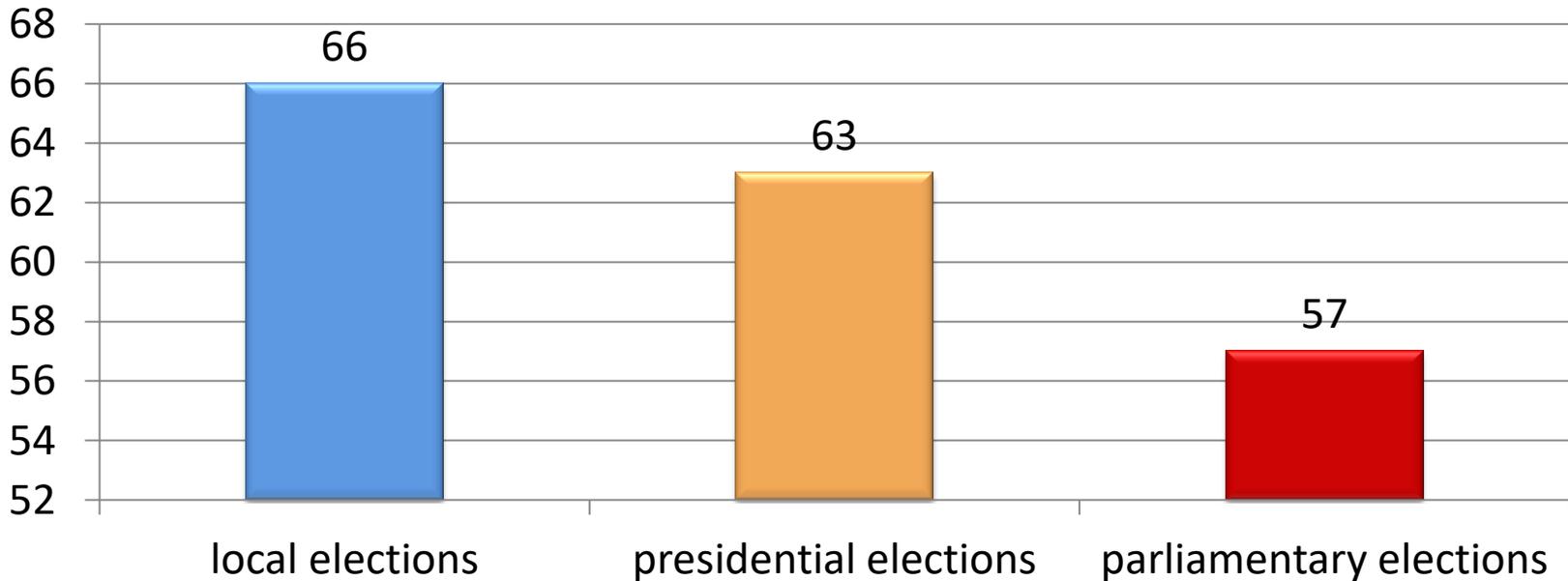
- a) the Act on Presidential Election (27 September 1990),
- b) the Act on Elections of Municipal, County and Provincial Authorities (16 July 1998),
- c) the Act on Elections to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland and to the Senate of the Republic of Poland (12 April 2001),
- d) the Act on Direct Elections of the Head of Commune, the Major and the President of a City (20 June 2002),
- e) the Act on Elections to the European Parliament (23 January 2004).

2011 - Electoral Code

- The existing legal rules have been changed many times since 2011
- Before a validation of the Electoral Code in 1 August 2011 its content was amended five times
- Up until 31 December 2014 it was amended for the sixth time
- 2015 – more changes
- 2018 – next substantial changes

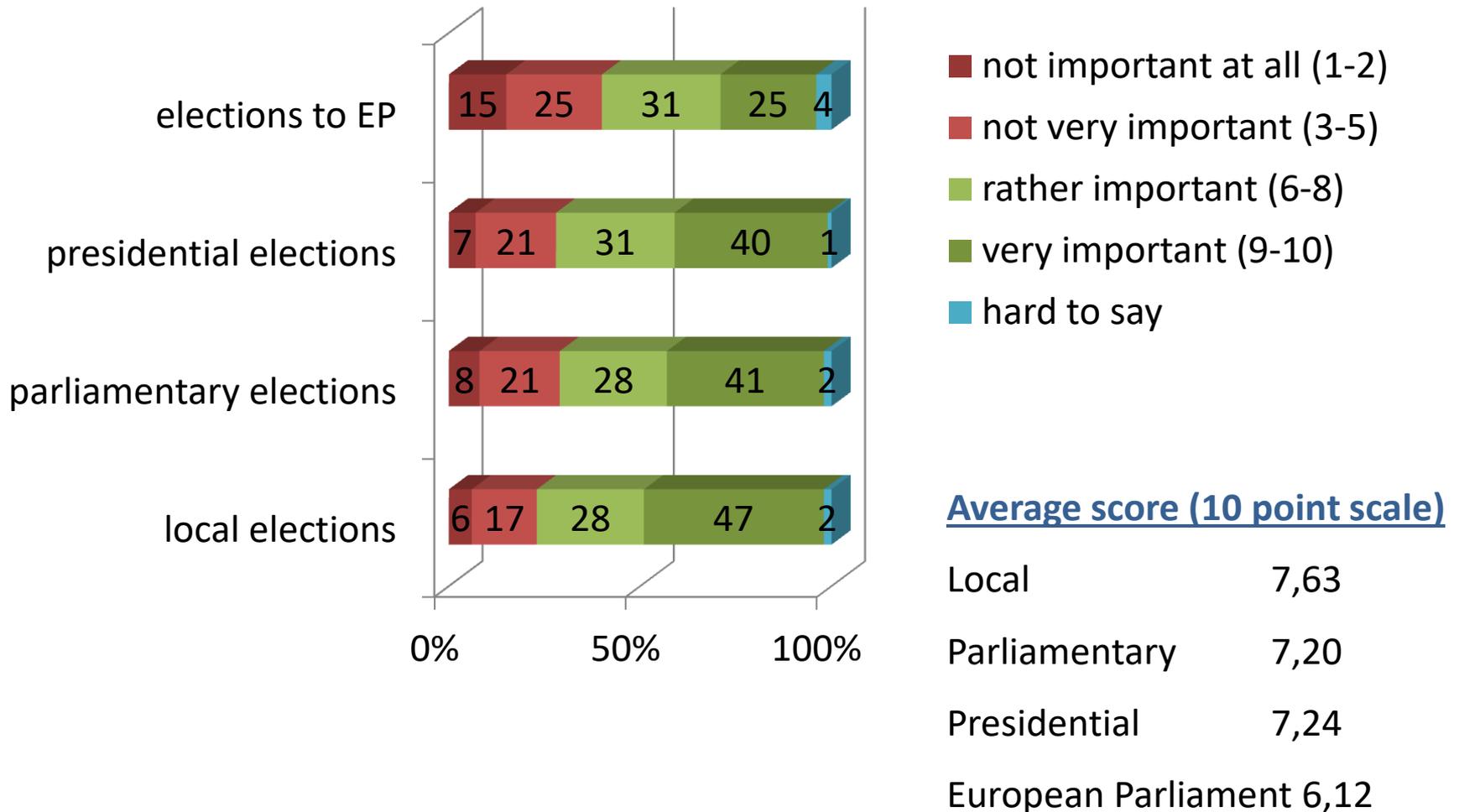
Local elections as most important

**Which elections are the most important?
CBOS research (%)**



Such research results can be traced back to 2009

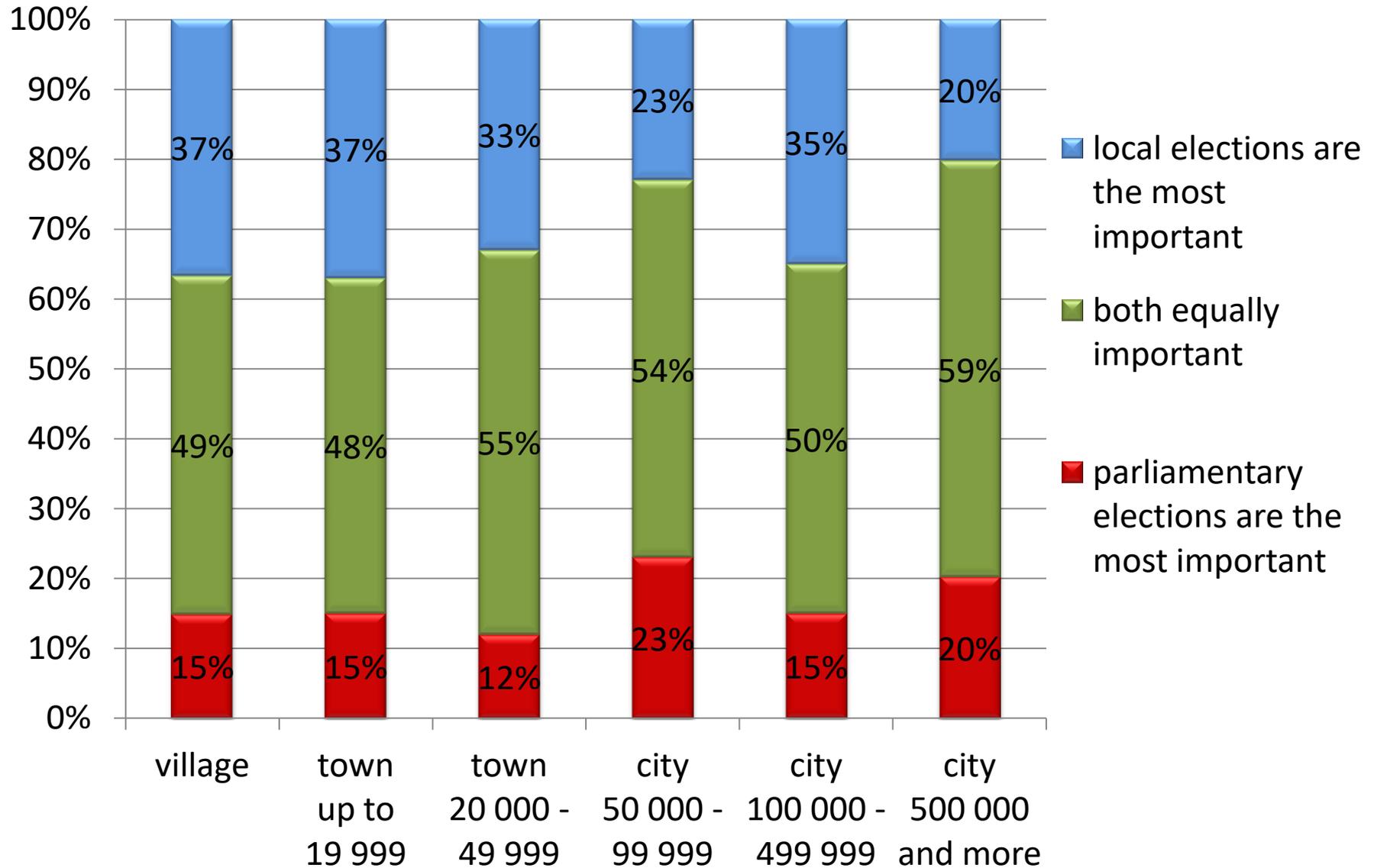
How important are for people like you following elections:



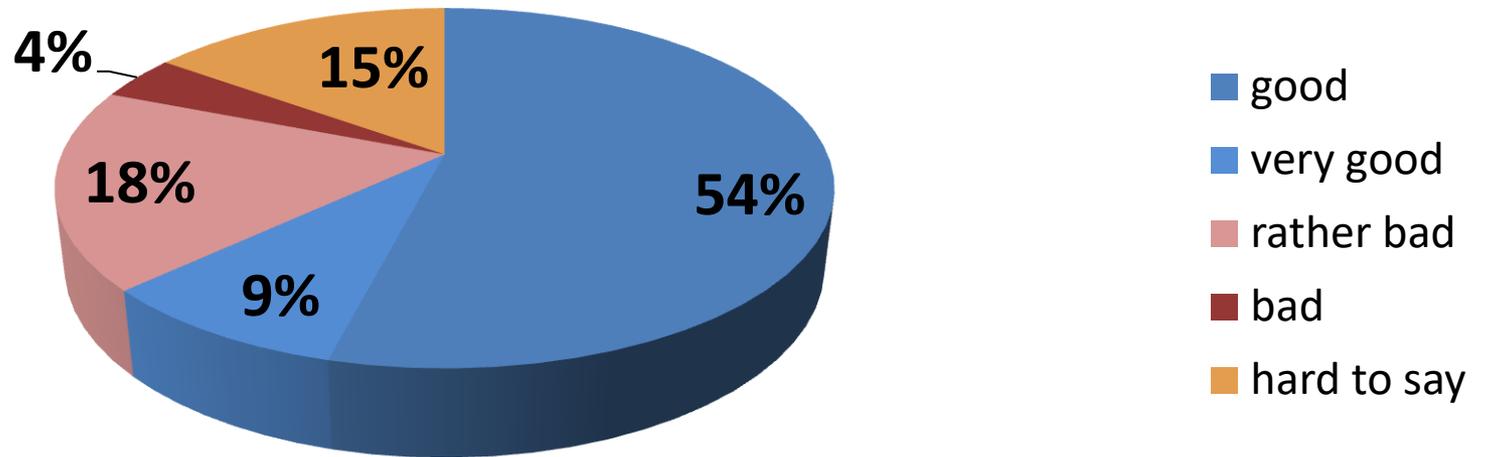
How important for people like you are:

	1998	2018	
presidential elections	7,75	7,24	↓
parliamentary elections	7,43	7,20	↓
local elections	7,29	7,63	↑
	% of answers „very important“ (9-10)		
presidential elections	52	40	↓
parliamentary elections	45	41	↓
local elections	45	47	↑

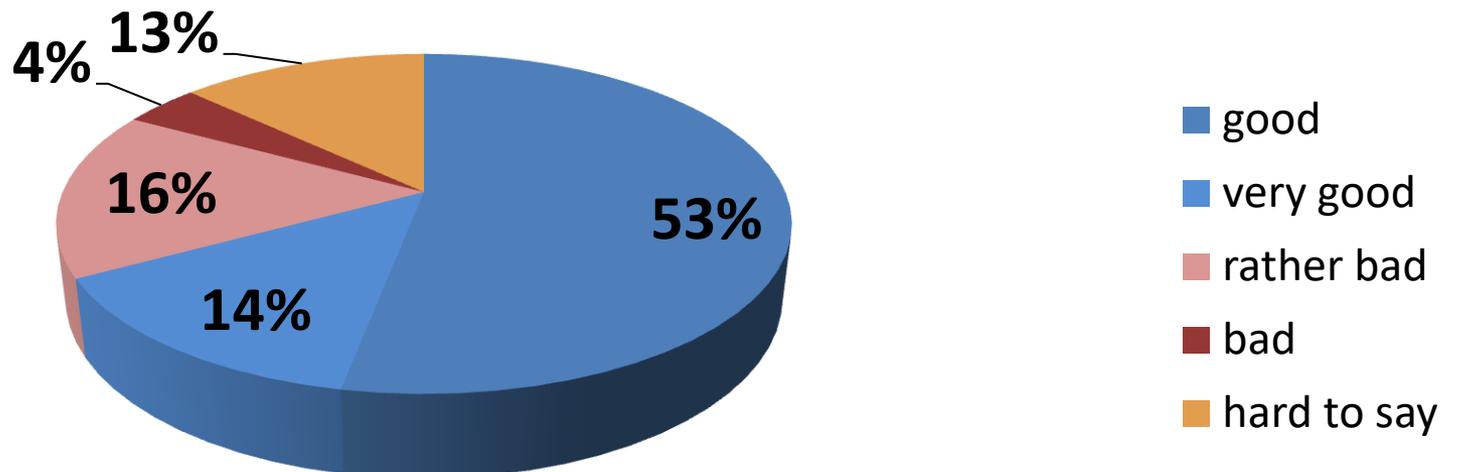
Local vs parliamentary elections



effectiveness of council's work



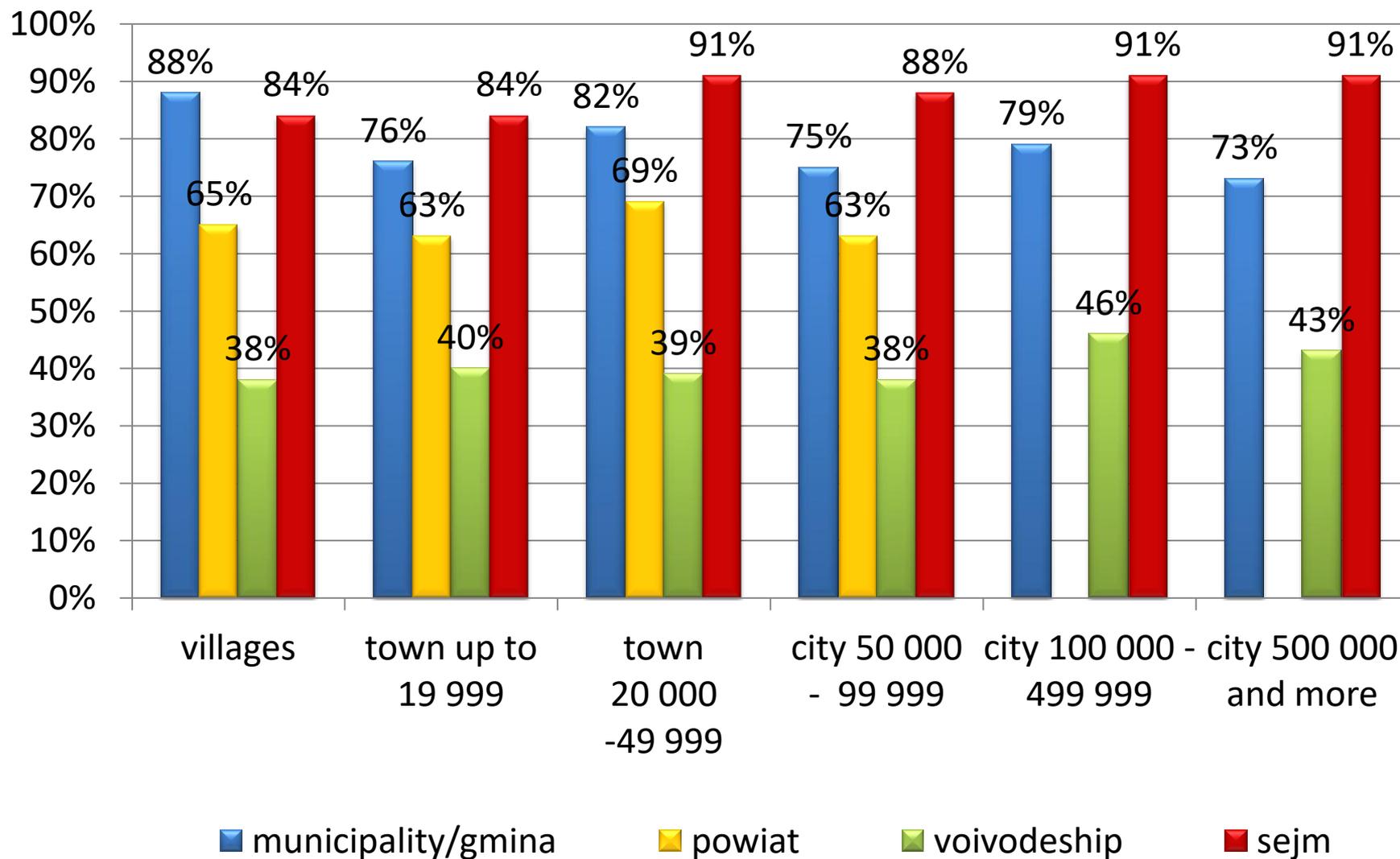
effectiveness of wojt/mayor/president's work



Changes in attitudes

I'm interested in decisions made by:	YES		NO		HARD TO SAY	
	2014	2018	2014	2018	2014	2018
municipality (gmina)	70%	78%	28%	21%	2%	1%
powiat	40%	65%	52%	32%	4%	3%
voivodeship	27%	40%	69%	56%	3%	4%
Sejm, central government, president	76%	87%	23%	11%	2%	2%

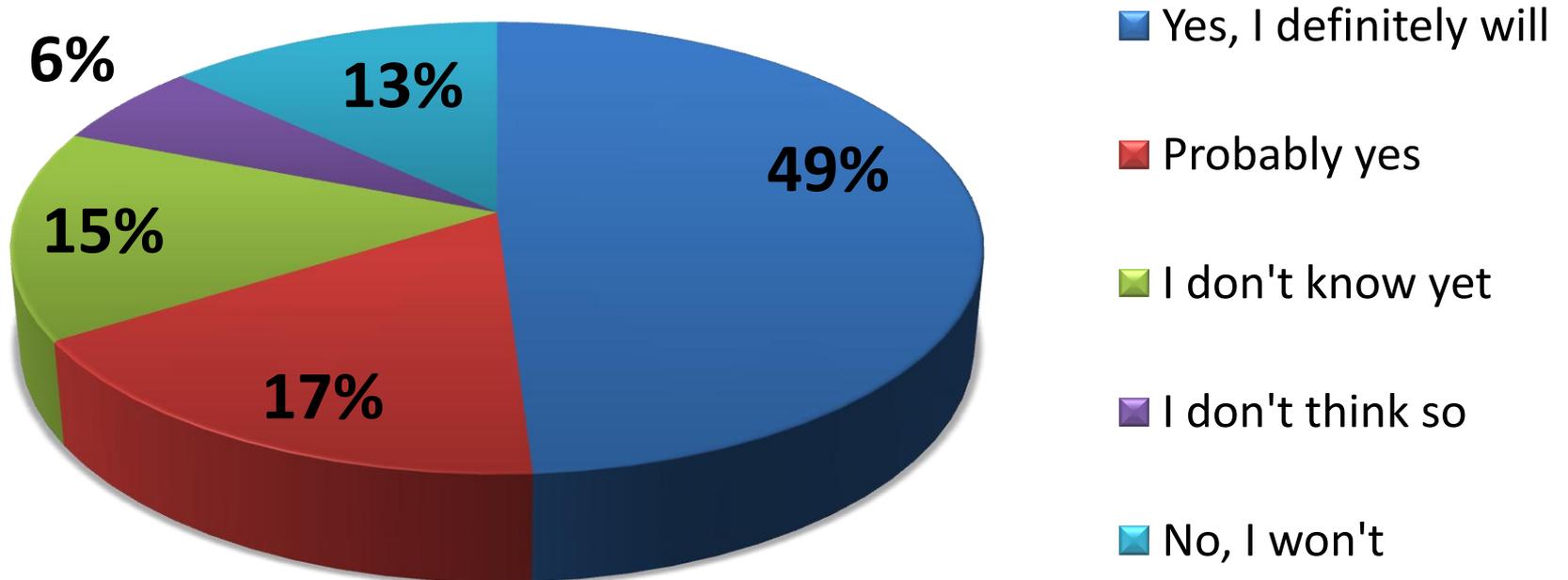
% of respondents declaring interest in decisions taken by:



- Not only the importance of local elections scores higher
- Also readiness to participate is higher

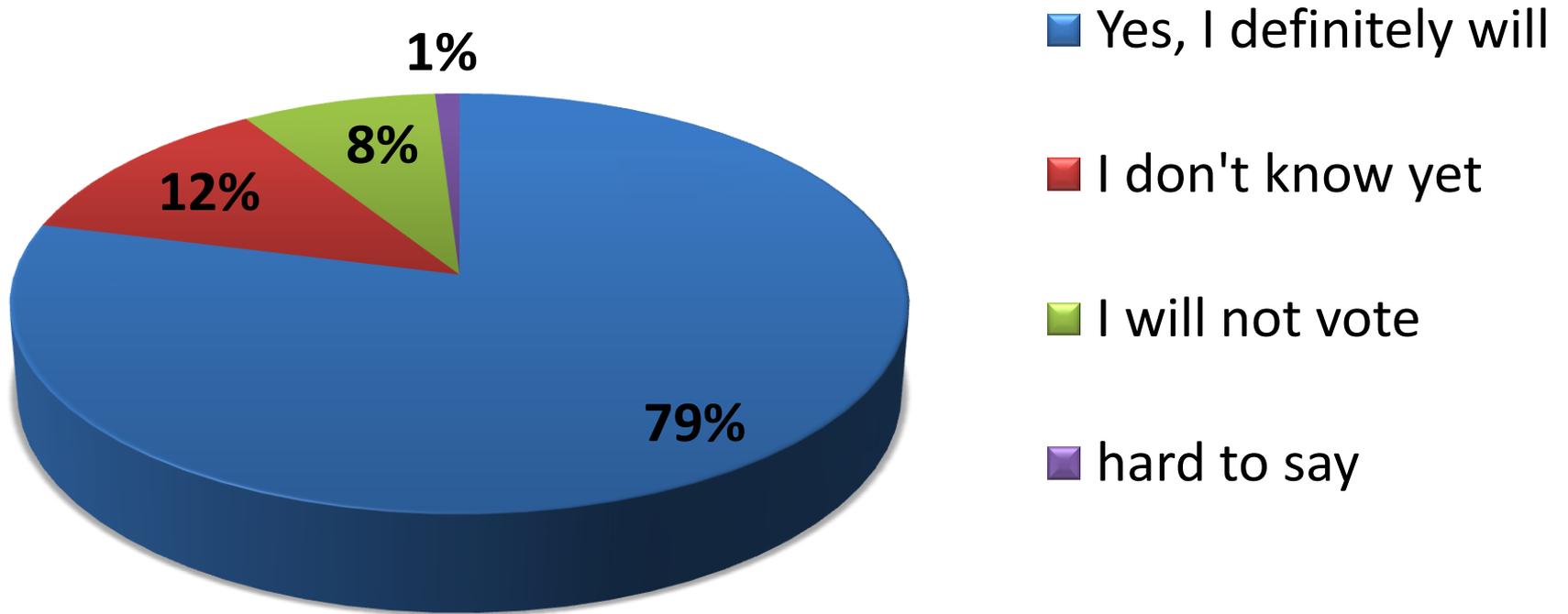
Elections 2014

Are you going to vote in local elections?

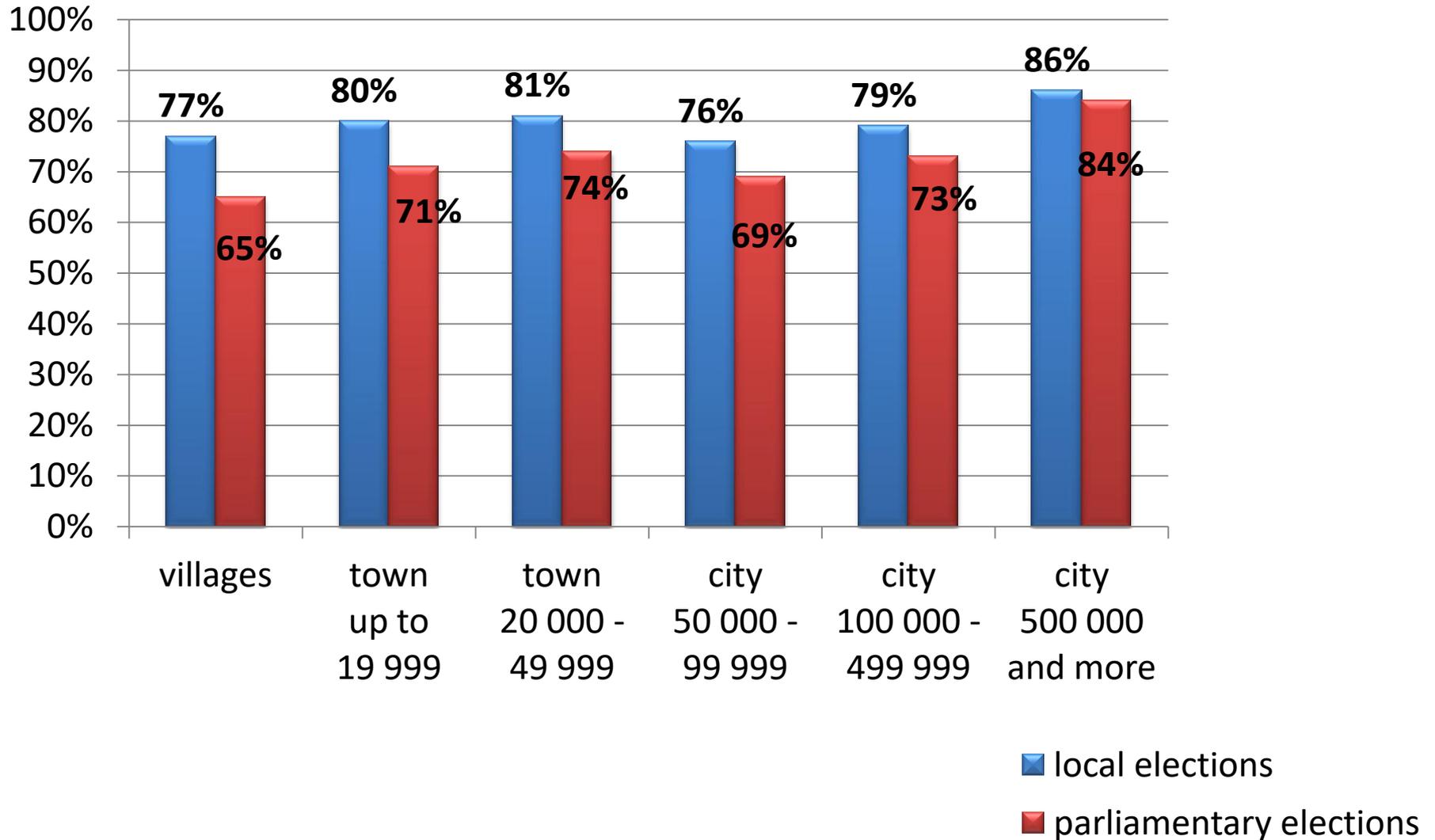


Elections 2018

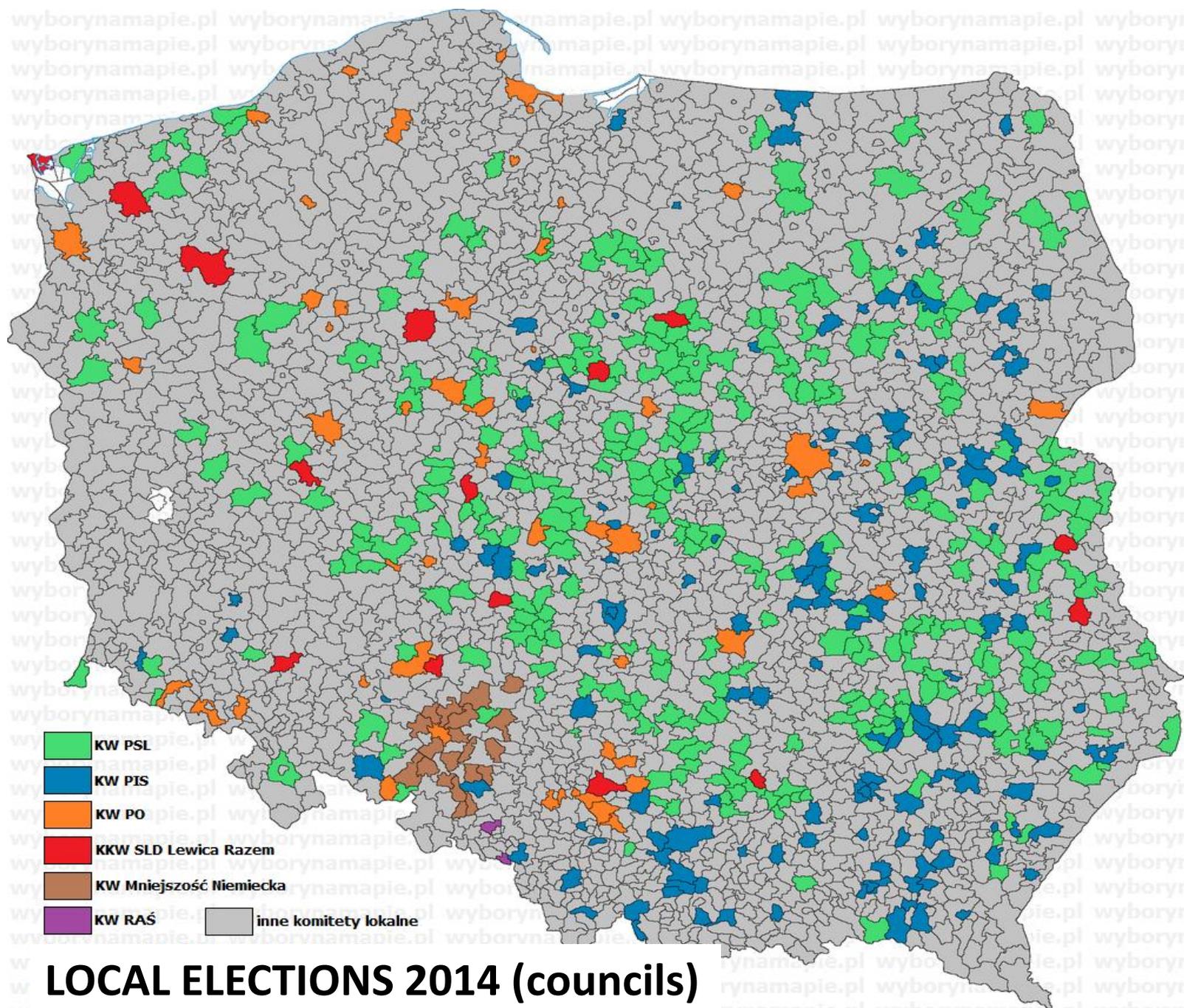
Will you vote in local elections?



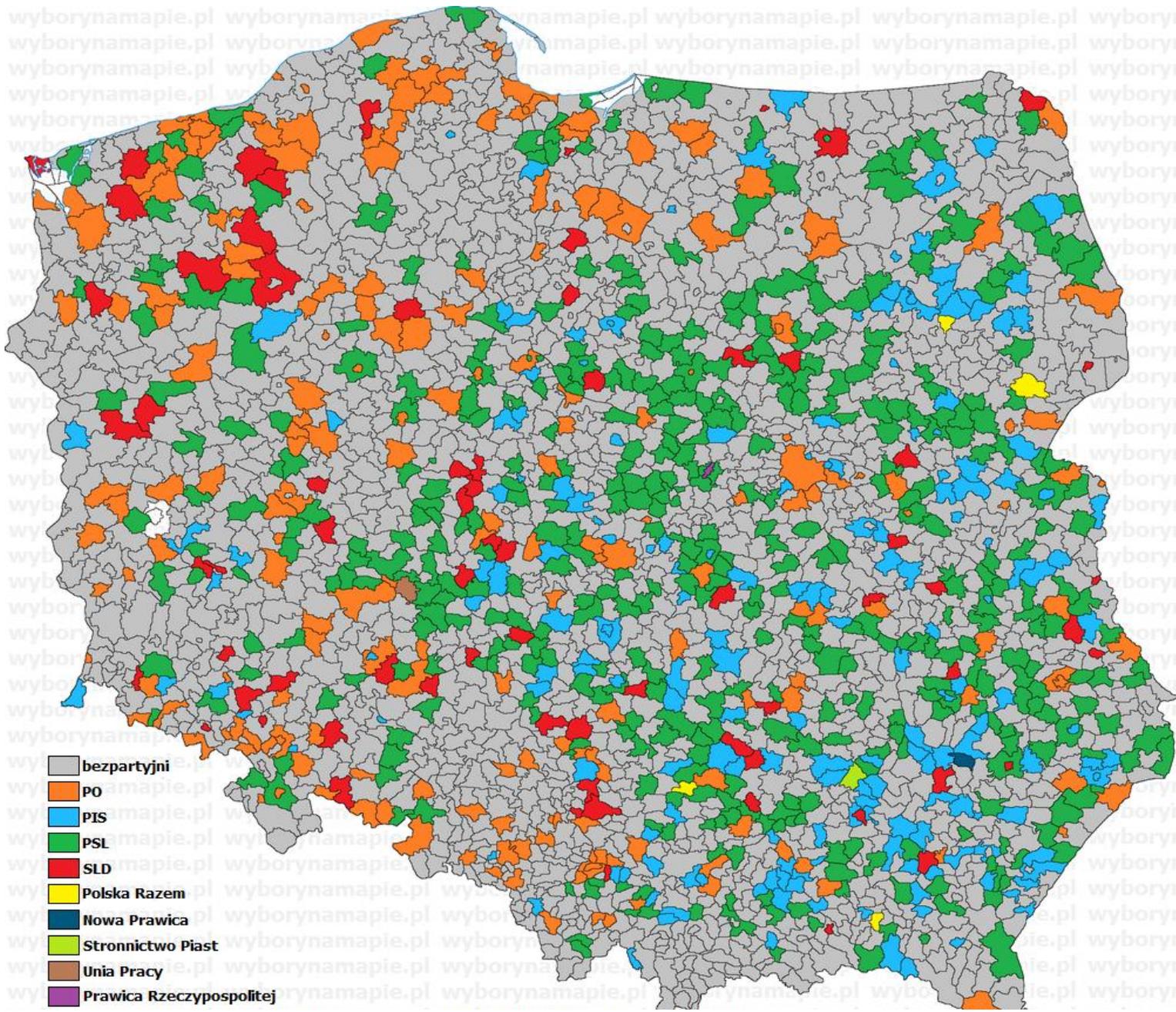
Will you take part in the next elections?



**Party or non-party Polish local
government?**



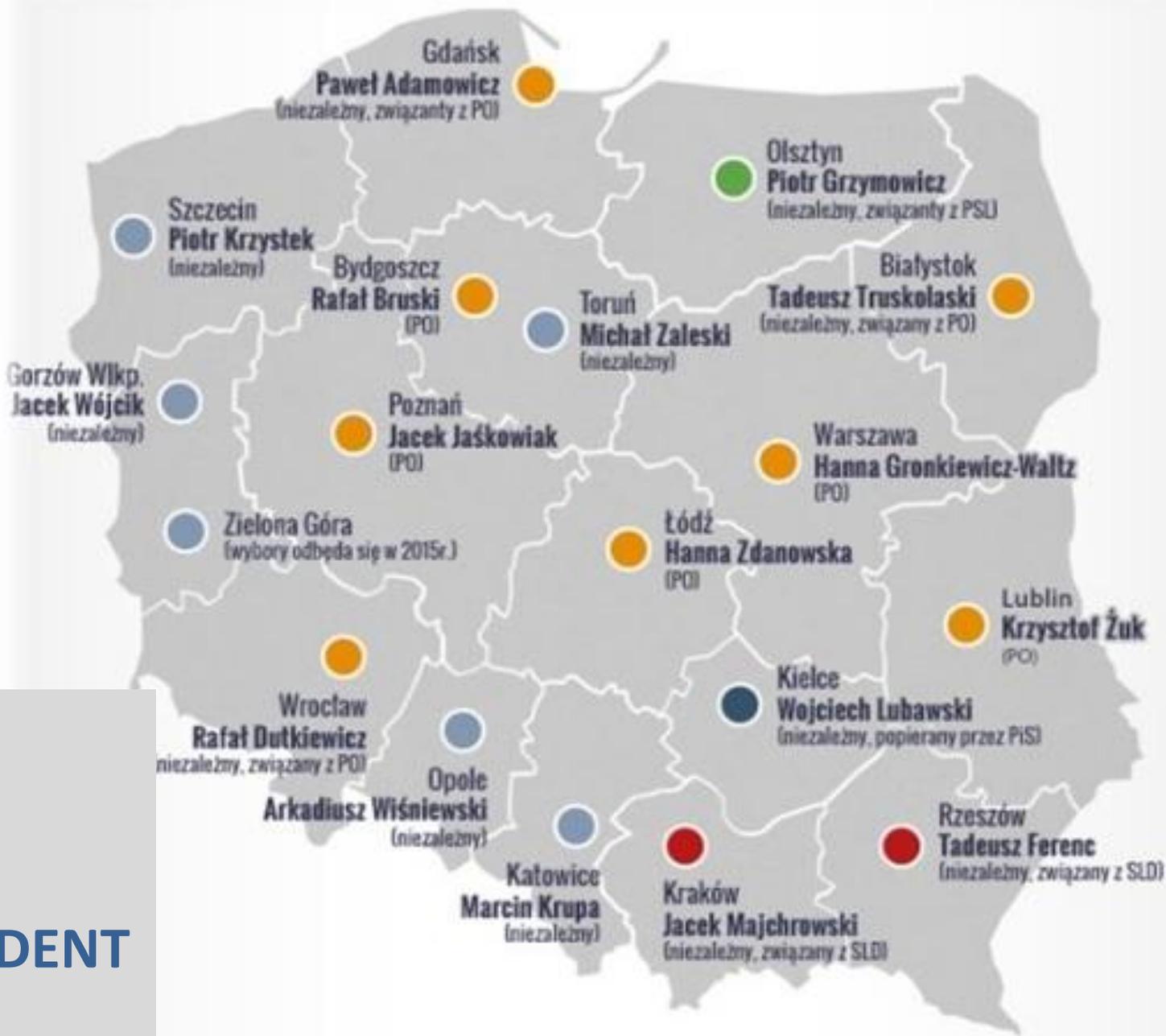
LOCAL ELECTIONS 2014 (councils)



LOCAL ELECTIONS 2014 (wojt, mayor, city president)

LOCAL ELECTIONS 2014

Main cities and their presidents



8 PO

2 SLD

1 PIS

6 INDEPENDENT

1 PSL

Invalid votes - statistics

wojt, mayor, city presidents:

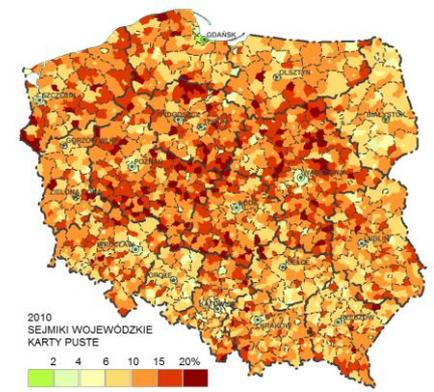
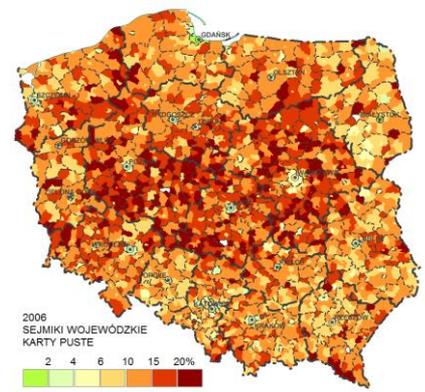
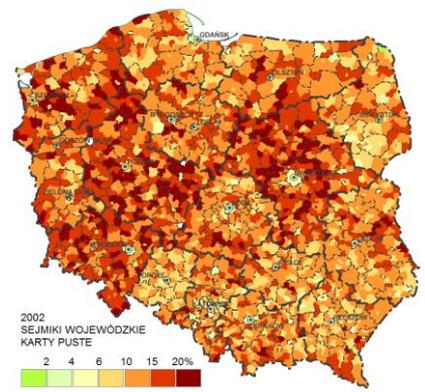
I round 2,12%

II round 1,24%

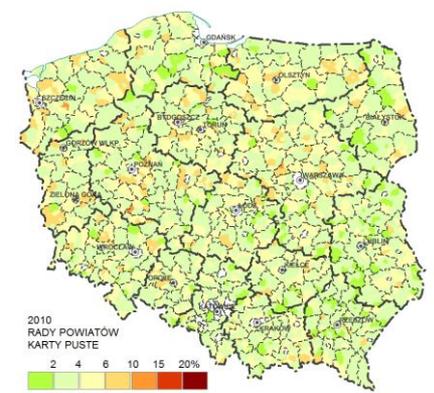
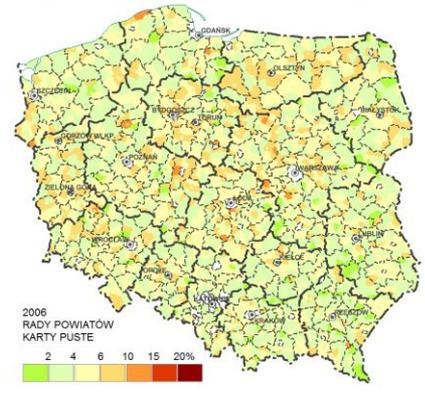
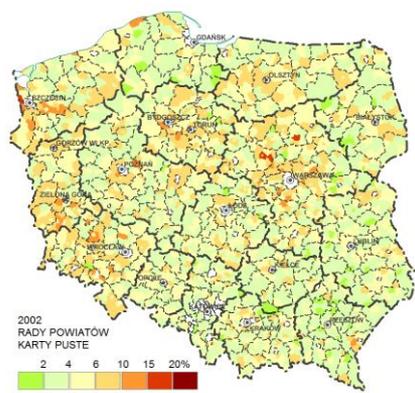
- Gmina councils and cities with powiat rights 5,23 %
- Powiat councils 16,67 %
- Voivodeship councils 17,47 %

INVALID VOTES – EMPTY VOTING CARDS IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

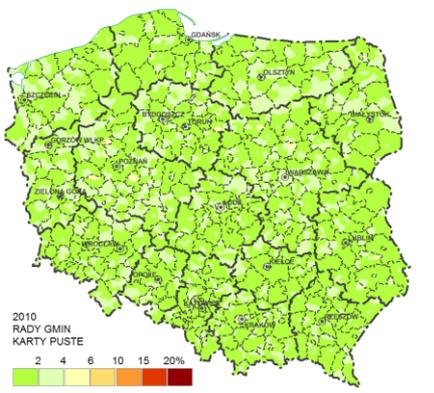
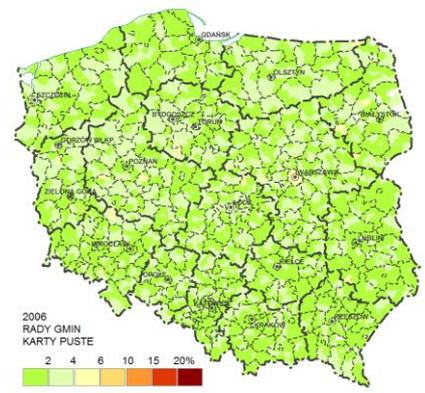
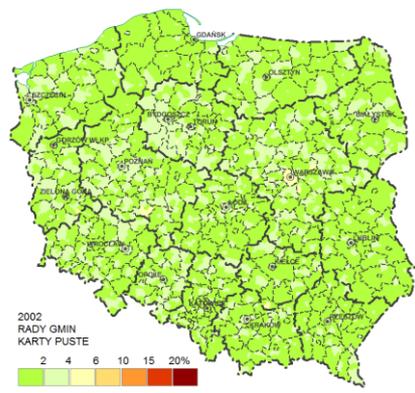
SEJMIKI OF
VOIVODOSHIPS



POWIAT

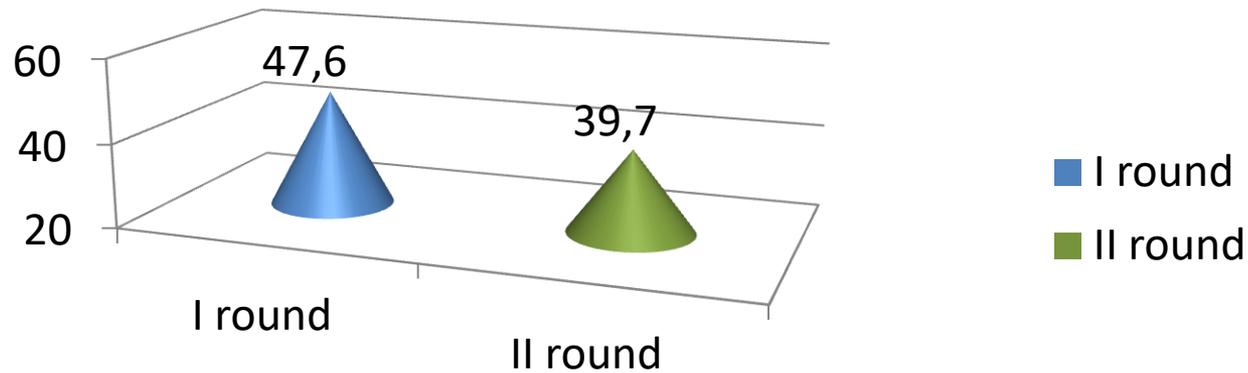
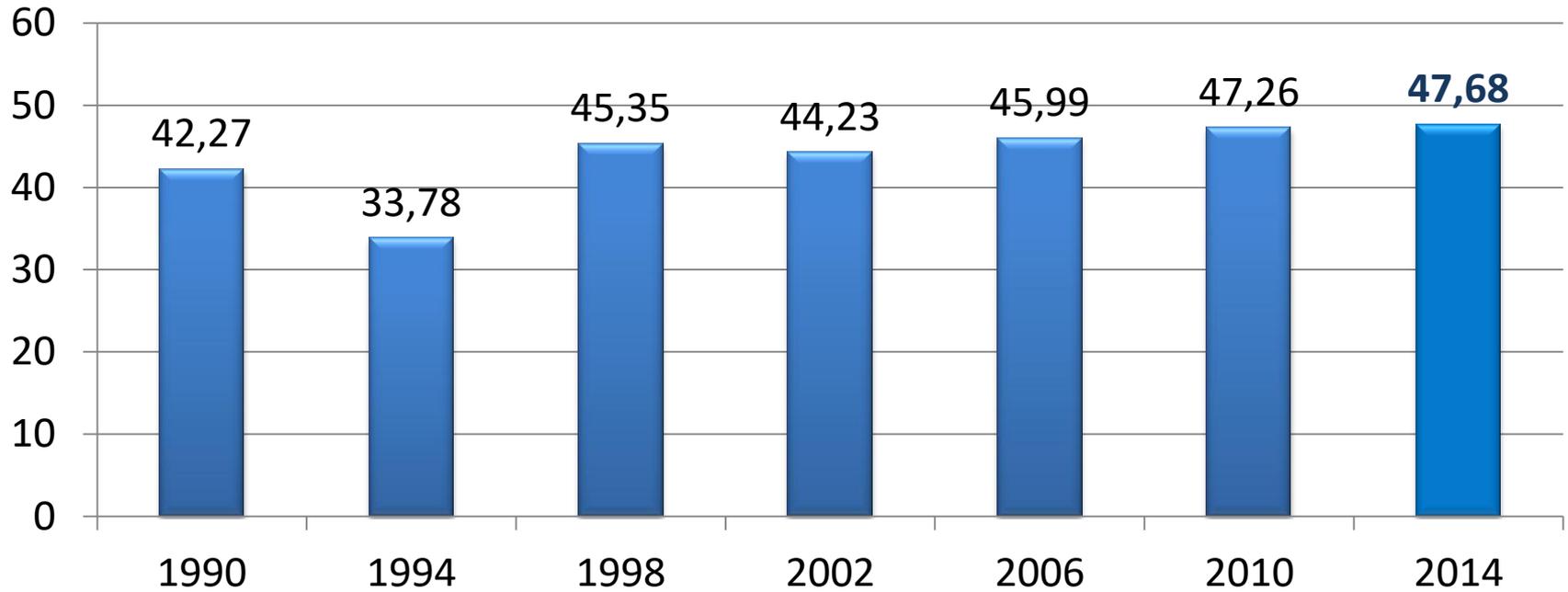


GMINA

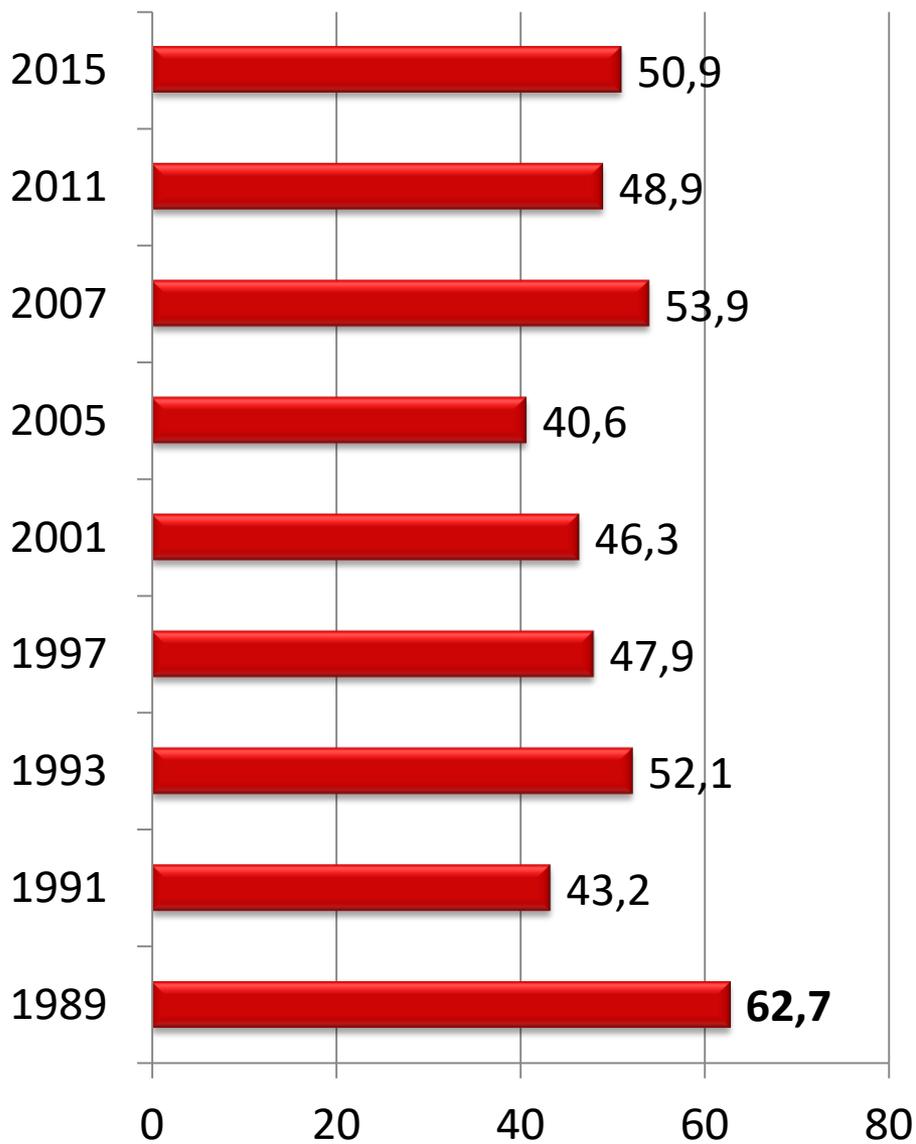




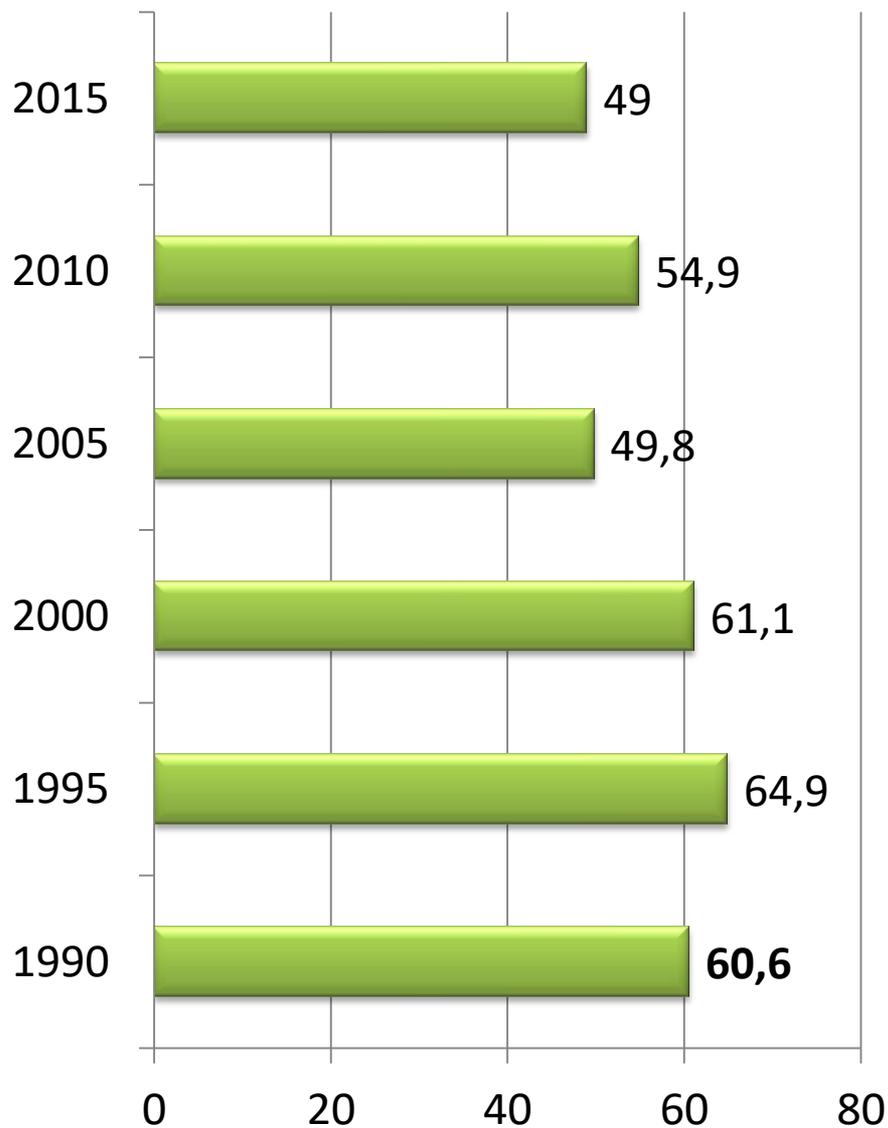
Voter turnout in Polish local elections (%)



Parliamentary elections



Presidential elections



Electoral system

- introduction of single-member districts, and majoritarian rule in council elections, increased the number of single independents, unaffiliated to any party or committee, and limited the presence of party candidates and councillors.
- the design of the electoral system used in the elections of local councils affects the position of national parties and their main competitors, local independent lists.

Changes in electoral law: 2015 and 2018

- Just one re-election for wojt, mayor, city president
- 5 year term
- SMD just for municipalities under 20 000
- Different definition of „x”
- Postal voting
- Live-feed or a recording on PKW website

- Changes to the functioning of the National Election Commission
- Changes to the functioning of the National Election Bureau

Just one re-election – is it a problem?

City / population size /status in voivodeship	City president	Number of times elected	Affiliation
Gdansk 461,000 Poland principal seaport Capital of Pomeranian V.	Pawel Adamowicz	Elected 1998 Re-elected 2002, 2006 (first round 61%), 2010, 2014	PO
Krakow 762,000 Capital of the Malopolskie V.	Jacek Majchrowski	Elected 2002 Re-elected 2006, 2010, 2012	Indep.
Rzeszow 185,000 Capital of the Podkarpackie V.	Tadeusz Ferenc	Elected 2002 Re-elected 2006 (77%), 2010 (53%), 2014 (66%)	SLD
Szczecin 407,000 Capital of the West Pomeranian V.	Piotr Krzystek	Elected 2006 Re-elected 2010, 2014	Indep.
Warsaw 1,754,000 Capital of Poland, Capital the Mazowieckie V.	Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz	Elected 2006 She is the first woman to hold this position. Re-elected 2010 (53,67%), 2014	PO
Wroclaw 634,000 Capital of the Lower Silesian V.	Rafal Dutkiewicz	Elected 2002 Re-elected 2006 (1st round 84,53%), 2010 (1st round 72%), 2014	Indep.

National Election Commission (PKW)

- **ROLE:** oversees the entire electoral process.
- Currently:
9 active or retired judges nominated by: the Constitutional Tribunal, the Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court (each nominates three members).
- **New law:**
7 members nominated by the Sejm
The Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Administrative Court nominate just one member each.
- The Supreme Court — which protested loudly against the politicization of judiciary in 2017 — would lose its representation in the PKW.

National Election Bureau (KBW)

- **ROLE:** provides administrative support for the PKW.
- Currently, the PKW selects the executive of the KBW.
- **New law:**
- PKW loses the freedom to independently choose the executive of the KBW.
- The president, the Sejm and the Senate nominate one candidate each. The PKW selects the executive from one of these three.
- Ultimately the choice goes to the government
- The same is with the nomination of commissioners (100)

Consequences of latest reforms



Batory foundation:

The changes in Electoral Code:

- carry a threat of making PKW and KBW a party dependent institutions
- undermine electoral rules and stability of elections
- change rules of rivalization in the eve of elections

Local Elections – Most Important, Still, Not Enough To Go and Vote

Great expectations vs Low turnout - possible reasons

The propensity of low frequency has lasted for decades

- a lack of appropriate civil education in terms of the electoral law
- a lack of civil engagement in local issues
- ‘the noise’ pertaining to the Electoral Code,

- Many amendments and high frequency of alteration of the Electoral Code do not prove its high quality.

- Result : misunderstandings and unwillingness to participate in elections. Their effect is low voter turnout and a large number of invalid votes.

Local Elections – Most Important, Still, Not Enough To Go and Vote

Tadeusz Mazowiecki ✨:

“Poland needs a citizen’s presence, which gives strength to the electoral process today and in the future.

Passivity and resignation, at times in history, have spelt the death knell of democracy”

the first Prime Minister of the first non-communist government which was elected in 1989 in Poland

