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## Competitive Strategies of Political Parties in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie Region

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Bożena Wroniszewska-Drabek<sup>1</sup>, Agnieszka Szostak<sup>2</sup>,  
Izabela Sztangret<sup>3</sup> \*

### **Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The main aim of the study was to analyze the results of local elections from 1990 to 2018 in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region to define the electoral specificity of the region and examine the electoral competition of political parties at the local level.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** To verify the hypotheses, methods of literature analysis and criticism as well as statistical methods were used.

**Findings:** The analysis of local election results in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie from 2002 to 2018 allows us to conclude about the specific political power layout in this region. Since 2002, the political scene has been changing. Local groupings have gained strength. In cities with county rights (Sosnowiec and Dąbrowa Górnicza), as well as in Będzin and Czeladź, political parties such as the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and Civic Platform (PO) have played a significant role. In 2018, the Law and Justice party (PiS) also gained significance. The left-wing party has undoubtedly been successful in the elections to the Będzin County Council for years. Although the results of this party in recent years (in cities with county rights) have not brought victory, compared to the election results in the Silesian Voivodeship and the whole country, it must be stated that the level of support for left-wing parties has remained relatively high in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region. The Democratic Left Alliance in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie has consistently achieved good election results, regardless of whether it was the dominant party nationwide, a strong opposition, or even when it was in a marginal crisis.

**Practical Implications:** Zagłębie Dąbrowskie exhibits specific electoral preferences that do not always reflect national trends. For political strategists, this means the need to adapt national electoral strategies to local realities. Political parties must take into account that results in Zagłębie may differ from results in other parts of the Silesian Voivodeship or the country.

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<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Institute of Management and Quality Sciences, Humanitas University, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0003-4330-0874, e-mail: [bozena.wroniszewska@humanitas.edu.pl](mailto:bozena.wroniszewska@humanitas.edu.pl);

<sup>2</sup>MA, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Silesia, Poland, e-mail: [agnieszka.szostak@akademiaslaska.pl](mailto:agnieszka.szostak@akademiaslaska.pl);

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Faculty of Management, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland, e-mail: [izabela.sztangret@ue.katowice.pl](mailto:izabela.sztangret@ue.katowice.pl);

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**Originality/Value:** *There have been no previous studies on political competition in local elections in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region.*

**Keywords:** *Local politics, political parties, Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, strategy, competition, local elections, local groupings, Silesian Voivodeship.*

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## **1. Introduction**

At the end of the 1990s, Marek Barański developed the concept regarding the specificity of the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region. He analyzed the results of local elections in the region from 1990 to 1998. The territorial scope of Zagłębie Dąbrowskie included cities and municipalities of a narrowly defined industrial region formed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Seeking regional identity, the author raised one of the most important issues of contemporary regional studies, namely the issue of the region (Zagłębie Dąbrowskie) as an object of study in the category of a tool for action (electoral process).

Marek Barański's position seemed interesting enough that we decided to follow the results of local elections in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie from 2002 to 2018 to demonstrate the political specificity of this region, considering the competitive strategies of political parties. Analyzing the scientific literature and journalism on the local politics of Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, we noticed certain features that significantly influenced the formation of the political scene in this region.

The consequence of the consistently good election results achieved by the Democratic Left Alliance was undoubtedly the factors that permanently determined this process, namely the historical, economic, and geographical factors. Generally speaking, the rich history of the region allowed for shaping the local political scene, whose left-wing character testifies to the distinctiveness of this place.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the economic crisis shaped two trends in the Polish labor movement. The first was represented, among others, by the Polish Socialist Party, whose organizations were established in Zawiercie, Sosnowiec, and

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Dąbrowa Górnicza. After 1906, most members of PPS in Zagłębie joined the ranks of PPS-Left (a split in the PPS party).

Party members continued their revolutionary activities until 1918. In November 1918, most Polish lands, including Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, were liberated.

In December 1918, the PPS and the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) united to form the Communist Workers' Party of Poland. In the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) also carried out clandestine activities during this time. In the early 1940s, it operated throughout the Katowice Regency. An important task carried out by the PPR was the formation of armed units to fight the occupier, initially named the People's Guard of the PPR.

They later transformed into the People's Army. By the end of 1945, the PPR in the Silesian Voivodeship was the largest organization in the country and mainly comprised workers. However, the unification of the Polish labor movement led to the destruction of the PPR and the establishment of PZPR hegemony. A single-party system emerged, led by Edward Gierek in the 1970s.

The geographical factor played a fundamental role in the development of the historical factor (features indicative of the left-wing character of the region). Geologically, the basin is part of the Wyżyna Śląska, located on the northeastern edge of the coal basin. The region also has significant limestone and dolomite deposits from the Triassic period. These lie within the Brynica, Biała Przemsa, Garb Woźnicki, and Wyżyna Krakowska ranges.

The oldest coal mine was established in Psary in 1789 near the Strzyżowice border. In the 19th century, the region also saw the development of the Czeladź mine at Piaski, Reden, Ksawery, Hieronim, Ludwika in Sielec, Fanny, Szarlota near Radocha, Kazimierz, Juliusz, etc. Currently, none of the mines in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region are operational. Most were closed in the 1980s and 1990s.

The last one, KWK Kazimierz-Juliusz, was closed in 2016. The last ton of coal was extracted on May 29, 2015. Today, the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region is home to many economic giants. In 2015-2017 and 2019, the Katowice Special Economic Zone was recognized as the best economic zone in Europe. According to the report by the Institute for Market Economy Research, the Silesian Voivodeship is the most industrialized and urbanized region in Poland.

The Katowice Special Economic Zone includes cities in the region such as Sosnowiec, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Siewierz, and Sławków. Besides the factors permanently determining the political scene and those indicating the distinctiveness of the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, it is worth taking a closer look at the analysis of local election results from 1990 to 2024.

The Democratic Left Alliance's success (nationwide) is considered the parliamentary elections of September 19, 1993. At that time, the Democratic Left Alliance won 171 out of 460 seats in the Sejm. The second place was taken by the Polish People's Party (132 out of 460 seats). After the victorious elections, a center-left government coalition was formed, whose activities and the involvement of its members led to victory in the 1994 local elections.

In total, the Democratic Left Alliance won 85 seats in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region. At the provincial and national levels, it gained an advantage mainly in urban constituencies, while in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, it achieved success in both multi-member and single-member constituencies. In the 1998 local elections, the Democratic Left Alliance achieved another victory, winning 107 seats in the region.

The analysis of local election results in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region from 1990 to 2018 reveals a specific political power layout in this region. The elections in these years were mainly won by local groupings. The highest support was obtained in 2014 (64.7%) and in 2018 (68%). Local committees were mainly formed in urban and urban-rural municipalities, while in cities with county rights and in Będzin and Czeladź, the tendency to politicize local governments persisted.

In the analyzed region, among political parties, the best position over the last 25 years was successively held by the Democratic Left Alliance, the Civic Platform, and the Law and Justice party. In the local elections from 1990 to 2024 in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, we observed the functioning model of 2+1, where the number 2 represents two dominant competing parties and the number 1 – a party of lesser significance.

In the case of local elections from 2002 to 2024, we observed the competition between SLD-PO+PiS. The Democratic Left Alliance repeatedly achieved good election results in these years. The party (SLD) undoubtedly achieved success in the elections to the Będzin County Council.

A fundamental feature constituting the political identity of the region is also the level of residents' participation in political life. In the region, voter turnout remains consistently low. From 1990 to 1998, voter activity in local elections averaged 39.09%. The highest turnout was recorded in Sławków (46.20%) and in Siewierz (52.88%), and in cities with county rights as in Dąbrowa Górnicza (26.99%) and in Sosnowiec (34.41%).

In the case of local elections from 2002 to 2024, voter turnout increased (also nationwide) and remained at the level of 48.26% in the region. The highest voter activity was recorded in 2018 (average: 53.8%) and in 2024 – in the Będzin County (50.59%).

## 2. Comparative Analysis of Election Results: 1990-1998

Local elections from 1990 to 1998 were held successively: on May 27, 1990, June 19, 1994, and October 11, 1998. In 1990 and 1994, they were held in accordance with the provisions of the Act of March 8, 1990 – the Electoral Law to Municipal Councils (Journal of Laws No. 16, item 96, as amended). The 1998 elections were conducted based on the Act of July 16, 1998 – the Electoral Law to Municipal Councils, County Councils, and Voivodeship Assemblies (Journal of Laws No. 95, item 602).

In the first of these electoral ordinances, the power of voters' votes in single-member and multi-member constituencies was the same. In 1998, the rules were changed. The power of voters' votes was greater in the majority system. This year also saw the first elections to county councils, including the Będzin County Council.

From 1990 to 1998, in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region (i.e., in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Czeladź, Psary, Bobrowniki, Sławków, Mierzęcice, Siewierz, and Wojkowice), a total of 843 councilors were elected to 10 councils (excluding the Wojkowice municipality, which belonged to Będzin in 1990).

The number of constituencies decreased from 165 in 1990 and 177 in 1994 to 76 in 1998. According to the Act of July 16, 1998, electoral constituencies for municipal councils were established in accordance with the territorial division, establishing uniform representation norms. These were calculated by dividing the number of residents of the municipality by the number of elected councilors (Zduńska, 2011).

The most seats were awarded from 1990 to 1998 to councils in: Sosnowiec (50), Dąbrowa Górnicza (45), and Będzin (38). Voter turnout from 1990 to 1998 averaged 39.09% in the region. The highest turnout was recorded in Bobrowniki in 1990 (52.80%), in Sławków in 1994 (46.20%), and in Siewierz in 1998 (52.88%), while the lowest was in Czeladź (26.19%) in 1994, in Sosnowiec in 1990 (34.41%), and Dąbrowa Górnicza (26.99%) in 1994, and in Sosnowiec (36.23%) in 1998.

Low voter turnout was characteristic mainly for cities with county rights. In rural and urban-rural municipalities, residents' electoral activity often exceeded 50%. Therefore, it should be reiterated that the larger the municipality, the lower the turnout.

**Table 1.** Electoral landscape in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region in 1990-1998.

Year	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Councilors	Voter Turnout
1990	165	273	39,23
1994	177	285	33,44
1998	76	285	44,62
	418	843	39,09

1990	Bobrowniki (52,80)	Sosnowiec (34,41)	
1994	Sławków (46,20)	Czeladź (26,19)	
1998	Siewierz (52,80)	Sosnowiec (36,29)	

*Source:* Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 1990-1998.

Local elections in 1990 ended with the success of candidates originating from civic committees and groups. In the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, civic committees received 43.95%. Compared to the results from the Katowice Voivodeship, the difference between the results achieved by civic committees and citizen group committees in the region was slight.

At the voivodeship level, it was 41% for civic committees and 39% for citizen group committees. Notable in the Katowice Voivodeship was the result of the Polish People's Party at 5.6%. In the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, support for this party was minimal. Here, the Polish People's Party received only 0.1% of the votes, similar to the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland.

In the local elections held in 1994 and 1998 in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, the phenomenon of increased politicization of elections was noticeable. This region recorded the highest results for the Democratic Left Alliance party. The party achieved a particular success in the 1998 elections.

The political competition resembled that which took place at the national level during the parliamentary elections in 1993, when the Democratic Left Alliance gained 20.41% support. The high result was also achieved by the Freedom Union. In Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, this result reached 3.15% in 1998 and 5.5% in the Silesian Voivodeship, while in the parliamentary elections across Poland, it was 13.37%.

At the national level, the Polish People's Party also had a stable position, especially in rural municipalities. In Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, however, the situation of the PSL was somewhat different. Here, the party's result cannot be described as satisfactory – it was only 0.2%. In the elections held on October 11, 1998, the result of the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) is also noteworthy.

Nationwide, the party achieved a victory in the parliamentary elections in 1993, with 33.83% support. In the Silesian Voivodeship, it also achieved a good result. However, the party achieved weak election results in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie. In the analyzed region, it received only 4.5% of the votes. The main opponents of political parties were civic groups' committees and independent candidates. In the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, these committees received 72.1% of the votes in the second election after the transition.

In the 1998 elections, support for them decreased by 12% in favor of an increase in votes for the Democratic Left Alliance. The specificity of the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie

region was also confirmed by the elections of mayors and heads of municipalities. In the local elections of 1990, the leaders of the analyzed cities and municipalities mainly represented civic committees.

For example, in Dąbrowa Górnicza, the function of city president was held until 1996 by Henryk Zaguła from the Dąbrowa Civic Committee, and in Sosnowiec, by Piotr Juda and Zdzisław Klepacz from the "Civic Committee and MKK NSZZ 'Solidarity'". From 1996, the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region in the elections of mayors and heads of municipalities distinguished itself (especially in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Sosnowiec, Będzin, and Czeladź) by the election of candidates from the Democratic Left Alliance.

In Czeladź, since 1994, the function of mayor was held by Zygmunt Machnik and Kazimierz Jakóbczyk from this party. Similarly in Będzin, from 1998 to 2002, the city president was Krzysztof Komór and Antoni Marcinkiewicz from the SLD. Halina Mentel from the Self-Government Forum briefly held this office.

In Dąbrowa Górnicza, until 2002, the office of president was held by Marek Dul and Marek Lipczyk (from the SLD), and in Sosnowiec, by Michał Czarski, also a member of the Democratic Left Alliance.

In the elections held by the board for the office of mayors and heads of municipalities in rural and urban-rural municipalities of the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, as in the elections to councils, independent candidates and candidates from civic groups participated.

In these municipalities, the mayors and heads of municipalities were elected for two terms, while in Mierzęcice, the function of head of municipality was held for three terms by Stanisław Paks as a candidate from the civic group KWW "Strażak". The re-election of councilors (in the local elections from 1990 to 1998) in 1990 ranged from 10 to 25%. The highest percentage of re-elected councilors was recorded in Sławków from 1990 to 1998.

Particular attention should be paid to the years 1994 and 1998. In 1994, in Sosnowiec, Mierzęcice, and Sławków, the re-election of councilors concerned over 50% of the council's composition. It was similar in 1998. In this election, the highest re-election of councilors was recorded in Będzin (66%), followed by Sosnowiec (60%), Czeladź (57%), and Mierzęcice (50%).

The phenomenon of re-election in local elections is not negative. It ensures the continuity of local politics. The influence of political parties on the shape of local democracy remains significant. The re-election of a candidate is a sign of trust and recognition from voters. It also indicates strong ties between residents and their representatives.

In summary, the comparative thread of local elections in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie from 1990 to 1998 should be stated that the significant factor determining the specificity of local elections in this region compared to the Katowice/Silesian Voivodeship and the parliamentary elections of 1993 and 1997 was the constant presence of the Democratic Left Alliance in power. In the local elections of 1994 and 1998, the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region confirmed this specificity conditioned by the activity of the left-wing party.

This was particularly visible in cities with county rights. An exception was the elections of 1990 when civic committees achieved electoral success across the country, including the Katowice Voivodeship and the analyzed region.

It is also worth emphasizing the significance of the Confederation of Independent Poland, which achieved a result of 0.40% in the voivodeship and 5.77% nationwide, while in the Zagłębie region – 1.5%.

**Table 2.** Re-election of Council Members in the Dąbrowa Basin Region from 1990 to 1998 (in percentages)

Municipalities	1990	1994	1998
Dąbrowa Górnicza	11,00	42,00	57,00
Sosnowiec	14,00	60,00	60,00
Będzin	8,50	55,00	66,00
Czeladź	7,00	39,00	57,00
Siewierz	18,00	27,00	45,00
Psary	18,00	36,00	36,00
Mierzęcice	25,00	55,00	50,00
Bobrowniki	2,80	45,00	27,00
Sławków	45,00	61,00	38,00
Wojkowice	-	40,00	54,00

*Source:* Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 1990-1998.

### 3. Comparative Analysis of Local Election Results from 2002-2018

In the local elections from 2002 to 2018 in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, a total of 932 councilors were elected. The Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region then covered a total of 455 electoral districts. The number of districts increased in 2014 when single-member electoral districts were introduced in local elections.

The average voter turnout from 2002 to 2018 was 48.36%. This indicator increased compared to previous elections (especially in 2002, 2006, and 2014).



**Table 3.** Electoral Landscape in the Dąbrowski Basin Region from 2002 to 2018

Election Year	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Councilors	Voter Turnout
2002	69	187	44,62
2006	67	187	43,73
2010	68	187	50,35
2014	144	187	48,81
2018	107	184	53,8
Total	455	932	48,26

**Source:** Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 2002-2018.

In the local elections from 2002 to 2018 in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, the main winners were local groupings. The highest support was obtained in 2014 (64.7%) and in 2018 (68%). Local committees were mainly formed in urban and urban-rural municipalities. Here, in 2018, representatives of civic groups sat in the council.

The tendency to politicize local governments persisted in cities with county rights: in Dąbrowa Górnicza and Sosnowiec, as well as in Będzin and Czeladź. In the analyzed region, the best result among political parties over the years was achieved by the Democratic Left Alliance and the Civic Platform. The record result for the Democratic Left Alliance occurred in 2002. The party then obtained 41.78%.

This result confirmed the left-wing character of the region, considering that nationwide the party received 24.65%, and in the Silesian Voivodeship – 25.78%. Since 2006, the significance of the Democratic Left Alliance has declined both nationwide and in the region. The result of the 2005 parliamentary elections and a weak election campaign caused the party to be perceived by society as ideologically bankrupt and corrupt.

A significant portion of the left-wing electorate decided to direct their vote towards the Civic Platform, which achieved victory in this region since the 2006 local elections. An exception was the 2018 local elections. In that year, the Democratic Left Alliance took first place (12.2%), followed by the Law and Justice party (12%). The Civic Platform received just over 7%. This is a significant drop from previous elections. Recall that in 2014 (in terms of mandates), 14.97% voted for the Civic Platform in the region, and in 2010 – 24.59%.

Since 2018, the significance of the Law and Justice party in the region has been growing. From a small result in 2010 – 3.74%, the party gained 21.5% more in 2014, and in 2018 (from 2010) – 8.26% more. Since 2018, the mandates in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region have been divided between local groupings, the Democratic Left Alliance, and the Law and Justice party.

The comparison of election results in the region with the results from the Silesian Voivodeship and the country perfectly illustrates the diversity of the choices of the inhabitants of Zagłębie. When nationwide and in the Silesian Voivodeship in 2018, the Law and Justice party won (respectively 34.13% and 32.11%), in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, the party received 12% and took second place after the Democratic Left Alliance (12.2%).

The specificity is also seen in the votes cast for the Civic Platform. In 2014, support for the Civic Platform in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region decreased by about 10%. Similarly, the Democratic Left Alliance received 6% fewer votes than in the 2010 local elections. In the elections to the Będzin County Council from 2002 to 2018, the Democratic Left Alliance won.

An exception was the 2010 elections. Then, the Civic Platform obtained 44.44%. The highest support for the Democratic Left Alliance was in 2002. The party then received 51.95%. Since 2006, the left-wing party has remained at the same level. In the elections to the Będzin County Council in 2018, the Law and Justice party and the local grouping KWW Wspólnie dla Powiatu Będzińskiego played a significant role. The political party and the local grouping received, respectively, 21.11% and 25.67%.

**Table 4.** Results of the Będzin County Council Elections from 2002 to 2018 (in percent)

Year	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Party					
SLD	51,85	26,62	26,62	26,62	26,54
PO	-	25,92	44,44	22,22	-
PIS	-	18,51	7,40	25,92	21,11
Samoobrona RP	3,70	-	-	-	-
AWS	-	-	-	-	-
UW	-	-	-	-	-
KWW Komitet Rozwoju Zagłębia	25,92	18,51	18,51	18,51	8,55
KWW Platforma Prawa i Obywateli	18,51	-	-	-	-
Przymierze Społeczne	-	-	-	-	-
KWW Inicjatywa Samorządowa	-	-	-	3,70	-
KWW Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Będzina	-	-	-	-	-
KWW Niezależna Wspólnota Samorządowa	-	7,40	-	-	-
KWW Kukiz'15	-	-	-	-	6,19

KWW Wspólnie dla Powiatu Będzińskiego	-	-	-	-	25,67
KWW Marcin Lazar	-	-	-	-	11,93

*Source: Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 2002-2018. \*The results do not add up to 100 percent.*

The best way to demonstrate the specificity of the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region is to compare the election results to the Będzin County Council with the neighboring counties: Zawiercie and Tarnowskie Góry. In the elections to the Zawiercie County Council, the Democratic Left Alliance maintained a high level of support in 2002 and 2006.

In these years, the party held the first position in the Zawiercie County Council. Since 2010, similar to the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, the Civic Platform has gained significance. In 2010, it received 23.17%, and in 2014 – 19.15%. In 2014, support for the Polish People's Party also increased significantly. The party gained 11.44% from 2010 (in 2014). However, it lost in 2018 to the benefit of the Law and Justice party and local groupings. In the Będzin County, support for this party in elections to the county council was minimal – around 1%.

In Zawiercie, KWW Niezależna Alternatywa Wyborcza also received significant support. This committee participated in the county council elections since 2002. Its highest support was in 2006 (27.80%), then in 2010 (22.11%) and in 2014 (22.87%). In 2018, KWW Niezależna Alternatywa Wyborcza did not participate in the elections. A new committee (with a similar name) KWW Alternatywa Wyborców Ziemi Zawierciańskiej (10.78%) appeared. KWW "Zdrowy powiat – zdrowa gmina" also achieved a very good result – 17.77%.

**Table 5.** Results of the Elections to the Council of Zawiercie County in the years 2002-2018 (in percent)

	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Party/ Committee					
SLD	32,59	22,66	19,45	12,95	10,77
PO	-	20,47	23,17	19,15	17,78
PIS	-	-	11,08	12,83	23,75
Samoobrona RP	11,26	10,67	-	-	-
AWS	-	-	-	-	-
UW	-	-	-	-	-
KWW Niezależna Alternatywa Wyborcza	12,28	27,80	22,11	22,87	-
PSL	10,87	-	11,32	22,76	11,93
KWW PO Stronie Obywateli	10,59	-	-	-	-

LPR	7,59	-	-	-	-
KWW Porozumienie Samorządowe Jesteśmy Razem	18,38	-	-	-	-
KWW Można Uczciwie	-	-	9,41	-	-
KWW Prawo i Samorządność	-	-	12,54	-	-
Przymierze Społeczne	-	-	-	-	-
KWW „Zdrowy powiat-zdrowa gmina”	-	-	-	-	17,77
KWW Konarski – Zawierciańska Odnowa	-	-	-	-	7,22
KWW Niezależna Alternatywa Wyborców Ziemi Zawierciańskiej	-	-	-	-	10,78

*Source: Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 2002-2018. \*The results do not add up to 100 percent.*

The comparison of local election results for the Tarnowskie Góry County Council and the Będzin County Council from 2002 to 2018 also confirms the specificity of the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region. This specificity concerns the high support for left-wing groupings, mainly the Democratic Left Alliance.

In the elections to the Tarnowskie Góry County Council, the Democratic Left Alliance did not enjoy as much support as in the elections in the Będzin and Zawiercie counties.

In the last local elections of 2018, it did not receive any support, and in 2014, it received just over 3%. In the 2006 elections, the Tarnowskie Góry County was won by the Civic Platform. The second position was taken by the Law and Justice party (16.82%), followed by KWW Przymierze Śląskie (15.31%) and KWW Inicjatywy Obywatelskiej Powiatu Tarnogórskiego (15.99%).

In the next election, the Inicjatywa Obywatelska Powiatu Tarnogórskiego achieved electoral success, receiving (26.87%), and the second place (gaining support) went to the Civic Platform (26.03%). The Law and Justice party lost (5.17%) in 2010.

The last two elections (2014 and 2018) show that local groupings have gained significance in the county. The elections brought victory to the Inicjatywa Obywatelska (in 2014 – 26.95% and in 2018 – 27.25%). In the second place is the Law and Justice party (respectively: 20.72% and 23.06%).

The election results to municipal and county councils also confirm the partisan nature of the elections for the office of president in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region. In cities with county rights (Sosnowiec and Dąbrowa Górnicza) and in Będzin, this office is held by people associated with political parties. In other rural and urban-rural municipalities, residents vote for non-party candidates. In Dąbrowa Górnicza (since 2006) and in Sosnowiec, the office of president has been held by members of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Civic Platform.

**Table 6.** Results of Elections to the Tarnowskie Góry County Council in the years 2002-2018 (in percentages)

	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Party/Committee					
SLD	14,81	-	6,77	3,69	-
PO	-	18,95	26,03	18,81	17,01
PIS	-	16,82	11,65	20,72	23,06
KWW Przymierze Śląskie	9,54	15,31	-	-	5,14
AWS	-	-	-	-	-
Centrum Samorządowe	-	-	-	-	-
Forum Samorządowe Ziemi Tarnogórskiej	16,23	-	-	-	-
KWW Prawo-Rodzina-Samorządność	15,10	-	-	-	-
Ruch Patriotyczny Ojczyzna	-	-	-	-	-
Przymierze Społeczne	10,98	-	11,67	-	-
KWW Inicjatywa Społeczna Wspólnota Samorządowa (Inicjatywa Obywatelska)	14,34	-	-	26,95	27,25
KWW Przymierze Społeczne	-	14,41	-	-	-
KWW Inicjatywy Obywatelskiej Powiatu Tarnogórskiego	12,48	15,99	26,87	-	-
KWW Tarnogórskie Porozumienie Samorządowe	-	9,68	-	-	-
KWW Przyjazny Samorząd	-	-	17,02	14,90	-
RAŚ	-	-	-	11,60	-

KWW Kukiz'15	-	-	-	-	4,21
KWW Solidarnie dla samorządu	-	-	-	-	6,84
KW Przyjazny Samorząd Powiatu Tarnogórskiego	-	-	-	-	6,73
KW Nasz Samorząd	-	-	-	-	9,76

*Source:* Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 2002-2018. \*The results do not add up to 100 percent.

Exceptions were the 2002, 2014, and 2018 local elections. In 2002, in Dąbrowa Górnicza, this office was taken by Jerzy Talkowski from the Friends of Dąbrowa Górnicza Block. The analysis of election results (especially in 2002) shows that the offices of mayors and presidents were mainly held by candidates representing local groupings. Similarly, it was in 2014 and 2018 in Sosnowiec. In these years, the office of city president was taken by the candidate from the Civic Platform – Arkadiusz Chęciński.

Local elections from 2002 to 2018 indicate that a significant advantage in the elections for the office of mayor and president was previous office-holding experience. The 2018 local elections deserve special attention. In the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region, changes in the position of mayor and president occurred only in Dąbrowa Górnicza and Bobrowniki.

In Bobrowniki, the office was taken by Małgorzata Bednarek, who had served as deputy mayor since 2016 (Bobrowniki 2024). Until 2018, the office was held by Arkadiusz Ziemia, who in 2016 was sentenced by a final verdict of the Katowice District Court (Staying in Power with a Court Judgment 2024).

In Dąbrowa Górnicza, Zbigniew Podraza announced his resignation from running in the presidential elections and endorsed Marcin Bazylak. Marcin Bazylak served as deputy president of Dąbrowa Górnicza since 2016 (Marcin Bazylak 2024). In Będzin, the office of president has been held since 2010 by Łukasz Komoniewski from the Democratic Left Alliance. The re-election also took place in Czeladź, Siewierz, Psary, Mierzęcice, Wojkowice, and Sławków. Many changes will be brought by the local elections of 2023.

The Act of January 11, 2018, amending certain laws to increase citizen participation in the process of electing, functioning, and controlling certain public bodies, extended the term of office to 5 years (Act of January 11, 2018, 2024). At the same time, the amending act introduced term limits to the Electoral Code. According to the new regulations, a person/candidate who has been elected twice previously cannot run for the office of mayor, mayor, or city president.

Therefore, changes will be necessary in: Będzin, Siewierz, Psary, and Mierzęcice. The term starting in 2018 is the first term counted towards the limit introduced to the Electoral Code (Changes in the Term Limits 2024).

**Table 7.** Election Results for Mayors and Presidents in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie Region from 2002 to 2018

Municipalities	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Dąbrowa Górnicza	Talkowski Jerzy (KWW)	Podraza Zbigniew (SLD)	Podraza Zbigniew (SLD)	Podraza Zbigniew (SLD)	Marcin Bazylak (SLD)
Sosnowiec	Górski Kazimierz (SLD)	Górski Kazimierz (SLD)	Górski Kazimierz (SLD)	Chęciński Arkadiusz (PO)	Chęciński Arkadiusz (PO)
Będzin	Baran Radosław (KWW)	Baran Radosław (PO)	Komoniewski Łukasz (SLD)	Komoniewski Łukasz (KWW)	Komoniewski Łukasz (SLD)
Czeladź	Mrozowski Marek (KWW)	Mrozowski Marek (PO)	Kosmala Teresa (KWW)	Szaleniec Zbigniew (KWW)	Szaleniec Zbigniew (KWW)
Siewierz	Mruk Andrzej (KWW)	Banaś Zdzisław (KWW)	Banaś Zdzisław (SLD)	Banaś Zdzisław (KWW)	Banaś Zdzisław (KWW)
Psary	Kozieł Marian (SLD)	Kozieł Marian (KWW)	Sadłoń Tomasz (KWW)	Sadłoń Tomasz (KWW)	Sadłoń Tomasz (KWW)
Mierzęcice	Paks Stanisław (KWW)	Kobiałka Krzysztof (KWW)	Podlejski Grzegorz (KWW)	Podlejski Grzegorz (KWW)	Podlejski Grzegorz (KWW)
Bobrowniki	Kozieł Jerzy (KWW)	Rabsztyń Mirosław (KWW)	Ziamba Arkadiusz (KWW)	Ziamba Arkadiusz (KWW)	Bednarek Małgorzata (KWW)
Sławków	Goraj Stanisław (KWW)	Reczko Małgorzata (KWW)	Goraj Stanisław (KWW)	Adamczyk Rafał (KWW)	Adamczyk Rafał (KWW)
Wojkowice	Cembrzyński Andrzej (KWW)	Cembrzyński Andrzej (KWW)	Kwiecień Witold (KWW)	Szczerba Tomasz (KWW)	Szczerba Tomasz (KWW)

**Source:** Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 2002-2018.

The analysis of local election results in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie from 2002 to 2018 allows for the conclusion of a specific political power layout in this region. Since 2002, the political scene has been changing. Local groupings have gained strength. In cities with county rights (Sosnowiec and Dąbrowa Górnicza) and in Będzin and Czeladź, political parties such as the Democratic Left Alliance and the Civic Platform play a significant role.

In 2018, the Law and Justice party also gained significance. The left-wing party has undoubtedly been successful in the elections to the Będzin County Council for years. Although the results of this party in recent years (in cities with county rights) have not brought victory, compared to the election results in the Silesian Voivodeship and the whole country, it must be stated that the level of support for left-wing parties has remained relatively high in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie region.

The Democratic Left Alliance in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie has consistently achieved good election results, regardless of whether it was the dominant party nationwide, a strong opposition, or even when it was in a marginal crisis. The political situation in the country (since 2002) creates a distance and increases the distrust of the inhabitants of the region towards political parties.

The votes cast by the inhabitants of cities on political parties do not indicate a clear identification with any party. Votes from 2002 to 2018 moved between local groupings and two political parties (1+2), where 1 is local groupings and 2 is (Democratic Left Alliance and Civic Platform). In 2018, the Civic Platform was replaced by the Law and Justice party.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion on Competitive Strategies of Political Parties in the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie Region**

Local elections, as part of the democracy axis, should be viewed in three basic dimensions. The first dimension concerns voters, the second – political actors, and the third – the mass media. Looking at each of these elements allows for attention to be drawn to the direction of voting behavior. Many researchers compare this phenomenon to the ability to ride a bike.

As Wojciech Cwalina and Andrzej Falkowski write: "it's much easier to do than to explain". One thing is certain – there is one key dilemma for the voter: to vote for those currently in power or to make a significant change? This question, of course, raises many controversies among researchers of voting behavior because there are various variants of stability and change. Through the prism of these two phenomena, one can assess the significance of the electoral system for shaping voting preferences.

The analysis of the connections between the Democratic Left Alliance's election results and various conditions requires the use of appropriate computational methods. The authors of the article, in this part, draw attention to the significance of the SLD, PO, and PiS parties as well as local groupings.

This results from the political constellation defined by the rule 2+1, where the number 2 represents two dominant competing parties (SLD-PO), and the number 1 represents a party of lesser significance – PiS.



To complete the research, the authors decided to also analyze local groupings. The impact on the results is influenced by both constant and random variables, and data collection is repeated over time. Determining and recording variables in research on an event or process means deciding on the aspect under which we will examine them. The variables adopted in the research set the direction and define their goal. According to Tadeusz Pilch, a variable is "a logical set of values, an empirical property of the research subject that can have at least two values" (Pilch 2008).

Stefan Nowak claims that "a variable only specifies the aspect under which we are interested in analyzing the objects and phenomena, specifying their possible properties, states, or events they undergo, and what types of relationships we will consider between the objects under the given aspect" (Pilch 2008). Fixed characteristics constitute only the criterion of belonging to a specific statistical group. In the analysis of such data, it is necessary to use linear models with mixed effects (Biecek 2011).

Generalized linear mixed models cover a wide range of models, from simple linear regression models to complex multi-level models for long-term observation data that do not have a normal distribution. In the calculations carried out, data from municipalities were considered as a random component of the analyzed models. The variability associated with the municipality results from the existence of various factors characteristic of it, influencing voting results.

Many of these factors, which could have been noticed in some way, were not measured. It is also necessary to remember the existence of many other difficult-to-notice parameters whose influence on the election results could be significant. In this work, the modeled parameter is the fraction of votes received by the SLD, PO, PiS, and local groupings relative to the number of all valid votes cast.

An important property of such a parameter is the limitation of its values to the range from 0 to 1. The same limitation applies to voter turnout values. This property of certain variables can make it difficult to study relationships between parameters. Therefore, the appropriate variables  $x$  were transformed using the logit function:

$$\text{logit}(x) = \ln \frac{x}{1-x}$$

The use of this relationship is impossible if the number of votes is 0. To avoid this problem, 1 was added to the number of votes cast. This data modification will only slightly affect the calculation results without causing significant changes in the conclusions drawn. The calculations were performed in the R language environment (R Core Team, 2017) using the functions of the lme4 package (Bates, 2015).

To assess the impact of a given parameter on the fraction of votes  $x_s$ ,  $x_p$ ,  $x_i$ ,  $x_u$  received by SLD [ $x_s$ ], PO [ $x_p$ ], PiS [ $x_i$ ], and local groupings [ $x_u$ ], a series of appropriate relationships were analyzed. The values of structural parameters and

their standard errors allowed for the assessment of trend changes in  $x_s$ ,  $x_p$ ,  $x_i$ ,  $x_u$  along with changes in the value of the considered parameter. The obtained information characterizes the entire region, forming an effective description of it.

The calculation results allowed for the formulation of the following conclusions regarding the impact of parameters on the fraction of votes received by the Democratic Left Alliance:

- ✓ Time (represented by the variable 'year') –  $x_s$  decreases, support for SLD decreases
- ✓ Turnout (represented by the variable 'turnout') –  $x_s$  decreases
- ✓ Number of constituencies in the municipality (represented by the variable 'nconstituencies') –  $x_s$  decreases
- ✓ Number of councilors (represented by the variable 'ncouncilors') –  $x_s$  increases.

For the Civic Platform, the impact of parameters on the fraction of votes is as follows:

- ✓ Time (represented by the variable 'year') –  $x_p$  increases, support for PO increases
- ✓ Turnout (represented by the variable 'turnout') – no impact of the parameter on the fraction, with a slight downward trend
- ✓ Number of constituencies in the municipality (represented by the variable 'nconstituencies') – no impact of the parameter on the fraction
- ✓ Number of councilors (represented by the variable 'ncouncilors') –  $x_p$  increases.

The impact of parameters on the fraction of votes received by the Law and Justice party:

- ✓ Time (represented by the variable 'year') –  $x_i$  increases, support for PiS increases,
- ✓ Turnout (represented by the variable 'turnout') – no impact of the parameter on the fraction,
- ✓ Number of constituencies in the municipality (represented by the variable 'nconstituencies') – no impact of the parameter on the fraction,
- ✓ Number of councilors (represented by the variable 'ncouncilors') –  $x_i$  increases.

Under all these assumptions, the impact of parameters on the fraction of votes received by local groupings is as follows:

- ✓ Time (represented by the variable 'year') –  $x_u$  increases, support for local groupings increases,
- ✓ Turnout (represented by the variable 'turnout') –  $x_u$  increases,

- ✓ Number of constituencies in the municipality (represented by the variable ‘nconstituencies’) – no impact of the parameter on the fraction, with a slight upward trend,
- ✓ Number of councilors (represented by the variable ‘ncouncilors’) – xu decreases.

**Table 8.** *The Impact of Parameters on the Share of Votes Received by SLD, PO, PiS, and Local Groups*

Party/Committee	SLD	PO	PiS	Number of Councilors
Election Year (Time)	-	+	+	+
Voter Turnout	-	- 0	0	+
Number of Districts in Municipality	-	0	0	+ 0
Number of Councilors	+	+	+	-

*Source:* Own elaboration.

The standard way to calculate the impact of parameters in the R language environment was to determine the values: time, turnout, number of constituencies in the municipality, and number of councilors as one sum. The number of valid votes cast for each party and local groupings was divided by all valid votes cast in the region. For Table 8:

+ means an increase in the fraction of votes for the party/grouping along with an increase in the value of the parameter;  
 - a decrease in the fraction of votes for the party/grouping along with a decrease in the value of the parameter;  
 0 indicates no impact of the parameter on the fraction. Added + or - indicates a certain trend, but unlikely.

## 5. Distribution of Votes Cast for Parties and Groupings in the Period 2002-2018

To present the distribution of the relative number of votes obtained by the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), Civic Platform (PO), and local groups throughout the examined electoral period and across all municipalities, curves generated using a kernel density estimator were utilized.

This is a type of non-parametric estimator designed to determine the density distribution of a random variable based on the sample obtained, i.e., the values that the examined variable has assumed during previous measurements (Kulczyk, 2007). The solid line corresponds to the curve describing the distribution of votes obtained by SLD, the dashed line describes the votes cast for PO, and the dotted line represents the distribution of votes cast for local groups.

A significant similarity in the distribution of votes between SLD and PO can be observed. These parties most often received a relatively small number of votes. However, under certain circumstances, this number increased, falling within the range of 20-40%. A different kind of vote distribution characterizes those cast for local groups.

The distribution of these votes is approximately uniform. The similarity in the distribution of votes cast for SLD and PO may indicate similar processes shaping the popularity of these groups among voters. Significant changes in support for these parties are also possible in certain electoral districts.

Comparing the vote distributions for these parties with the votes cast for local groups highlights the dominance of local groups in the region. Their support did not experience significant fluctuations, indicating their relatively stable position in the electoral districts.

The solid line corresponds to the curve describing the distribution of votes obtained by SLD, the dashed line describes the votes cast for PO, and the dotted line represents the distribution of votes cast for local groups. A significant similarity in the distribution of votes between SLD and PO can be observed. These parties most often received a relatively small number of votes.

However, under certain circumstances, this number increased, falling within the range of 20-40%. A different kind of vote distribution characterizes those cast for local groups. The distribution of these votes is approximately uniform. The similarity in the distribution of votes cast for SLD and PO may indicate similar processes shaping the popularity of these groups among voters.

Significant changes in support for these parties are also possible in certain electoral districts. Comparing the vote distributions for these parties with the votes cast for local groups highlights the dominance of local groups in the region.

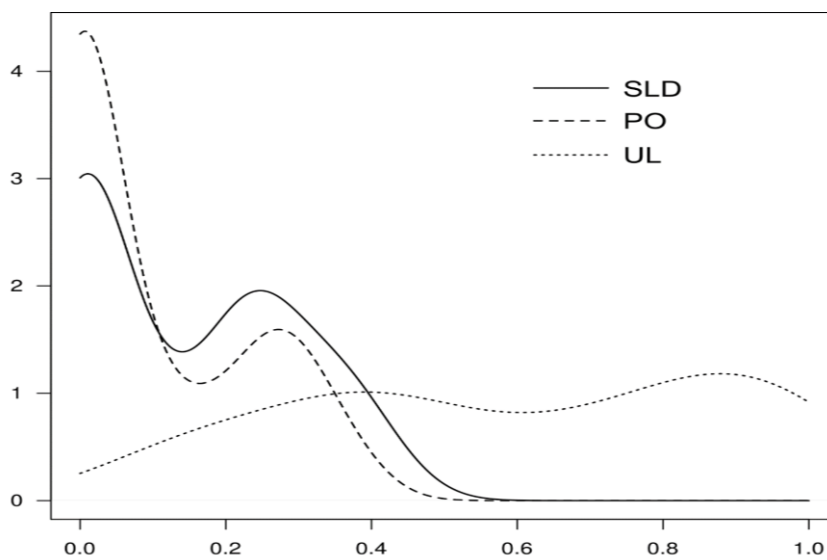
Their support did not experience significant fluctuations, indicating their relatively stable position in the electoral districts.

The solid line corresponds to the curve describing the distribution of votes received by the SLD (Democratic Left Alliance), the dashed line represents the votes cast for the PO (Civic Platform), and the dotted line represents the distribution of votes cast for local groups. A significant similarity can be observed between the vote distributions for SLD and PO. These parties most often received a relatively small number of votes.

However, in certain circumstances, this number increased, ranging between 20-40%. A different type of vote distribution characterizes those cast for local groups. The distribution of these votes is approximately uniform. The similarity in the vote distributions for SLD and PO may indicate similar processes shaping the popularity

of these groups among voters. Significant changes in support for these parties are also possible in certain electoral districts.

**Figure 1.** Distribution of votes cast for parties and groupings in the period 2002-2018



**Source:** Own elaboration based on data from the National Electoral Commission for the years 2002-2018.

Comparison of the vote distributions for the mentioned parties with the votes cast for local groups shows the dominance of local groups in the region. Their support did not experience strong fluctuations, indicating their relatively stable position in the electoral districts.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

Conclusions from the analysis of the election results for 2002-2018:

- ✓ The valid votes cast by voters in the local elections in 2002-2018 in the Dąbrowa Basin adversely affected the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). There was an increase in the fraction of votes for the Civic Platform (PO) and local groups. Between 2002-2018, SLD obtained relatively good results in cities with county rights and in Będzin, where voter turnout ranged between 23 and 42%. In rural and mixed rural-urban municipalities, turnout ranged from 37 to 58%, while the average voter turnout in the region was 46.87%.

- ✓ The average represented by the variable 'year' indicates an increase in the fraction of support for the Civic Platform and local groups. The Democratic Left Alliance achieved a high result only in 2002. The specificity of the local elections in 2002-2018 was, among other things, that they were dominated in the region by two dominant parties (SLD-PO).
- ✓ Regarding the number of districts in the municipality (in cities with county rights, rural, and mixed rural-urban municipalities), a decrease in the growth fraction of votes for the SLD was noted. The parameter did not affect the fraction for local groups, with a positive trend observed.
- ✓ The number of mandates obtained in the region by the SLD party in relation to all valid votes cast for the two dominant parties and local groups in the local elections in 2002-2018 was positive. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the case of PO. A decrease in the growth fraction of votes along with the decrease in the value of the parameter represents local groups.
- ✓ Special attention should be paid during the study of the influence of parameters on the fraction of votes obtained by SLD, PO, PIS, and local groups to the phenomenon indicating the specificity of the Dąbrowa Basin region. Analyzing statistically variables such as time, voter turnout, the number of districts in the municipality, and the number of councilors, the SLD party (except for the last variable) obtained a negative result. In the case of the obtained mandates in the region – positive.

A similar behavior was observed for PO and PiS, although here the variables voter turnout and the number of districts in the municipality did not affect the fraction. Interestingly, the result for local groups, where the sum of the first three variables was expressed positively, while the last one was negative.

This phenomenon proves that despite relatively high results of local groups in the region, the most mandates go to the SLD and PO parties. In recent years, also to PIS.

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