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Voter Turnout during Local Elections in Poland and Ukraine

When speaking how active are voters in elections the term *frekwencja* (frequency) is used in Poland. The expression "election frequency" has appeared recently. This word (lat. *frequentia* - multitude, crowd) indicates attendance, an average number of viewers, students, visitors.¹ In Poland the term "*frekwencja*" is used to denote the number of people who actively participate in elections in comparison to the total number of people who are eligible to participate.

This term has been also introduced into Ukrainian terminology. Specifically Yu.Shveda in his article "Sociology of the electoral behavior" believes that *frekwencja* indicates the scope of political participation of voters and is one of the quantitative indicators of changes in electoral behavior.²

An important factor that influences the level of electoral activity is a change of political system. According to K. Skarżyńska, proportional system as well as the positive image of public institutions contribute to the high activity, and that, from a subjective point of view, improves the voters' perception of the importance of elections. The decline in voter turnout can be explained by poor identification of parties, their political programs obscurity as well as party system instability. High turnout may be expected in the elections that could lead to significant changes in the political system. The attention also should be paid to the individual characteristics of voters having an effect on the level of turnout: wealth, education or belonging to national minority (they are less active in terms of electoral participation, unless the minority for some reasons is mobilized). As for the age groups, there is a certain group, characterized by relatively low participation in the elections. These are young people who have just reached the age which grants a right to participate in elections. Civic engagement also plays an important role. People belonging to public organizations, associations and societies, vote more frequently than those, who are not active in this respect.³

The local elections, which took place on May 27, 1990, became the first local elections in the last 40 years. We can assume that the majority of voters at the time

¹ *Комлев Н. Г. Словарь иностранных слов [Электронный ресурс] / Н. Г. Комлев. – М. : Эксмо, 2006. – 672 с. – Режим доступа : <http://www.inslov.ru/html-komlev/ffrekvenci8.html>.*

² *Шведа Ю. Соціологія електоральної поведінки [Електронний ресурс] / Ю. Шведа. – Режим доступу : http://westukr.itgo.com/shveda_cpd_conf_07_1.html.*

³ *Studia nad wyborami Polska 2005–2006 / [pod red. J. Raciborskiego]. – Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, 2008. – S.122.*

were not aware of the local government significance. This included both those, who took part in the vote, and those, who did not come to the polls. 26,925,267 citizens had a right to vote on May 27, 1990 and 11,380,629 citizens participated in the vote. The electoral turnout was 42.27%.⁴

The main reasons for coming to polling stations were: hope to elect better candidates for the positions of deputies, a wish to participate in free election and to contribute to the elimination of partocracy. Other reasons include conformism and “just in case” participation in the vote.⁵

Consequently, voter absenteeism arose from disenchantment with politicians in power or lack of interest in politics in general. Along with disappointed, disillusioned and politically indifferent people, those ones who mistrusted the function of local government did not participate in elections as well.⁶

In the elections of 1990 in Poland, 533,537 residents of Warsaw took part in the voting process in the Polish capital. It should be noted that voter turnout in Warsaw (42.3%) was almost the same as throughout the country (42.27%). The lowest voter turnout in the first local elections was in Skierniewice (34.48%) and Łódź Voivodeships, the highest - in Bielsko (53.46%) and Novosandetsk Voivodeships (51.1%).

It is not inconceivable that that city size as well as the system of single-member and multi-member districts adopted for cities of different sizes, influenced to some extent voter turnout levels. For the whole country, in city council elections the voter turnout was higher and amounted to 44.38% in towns with populations of less than 40 thousand (single-member districts), at the same time in multi-member districts in cities with more than 40 thousand residents only 40.28% voters came to the polls.⁷

To sum up, there are several major reasons for the low electoral participation in the first local elections that took place on May 27, 1990: tense political atmosphere, difficult economic situation, boring electoral campaign which failed to interest voters.

The next local elections were held on June 19, 1994. These were the first elections in Poland, held when the gmina (commune) council's tenure ended. Amid constant change of the group leaders, “gmina” government was an element to stabilize political life. At the time, voters were already familiar with the way the government functions at the local level.

⁴ *Sprawozdanie z działalności Generalnego Komisarza Wyborczego i terenowych organów wyborczych za okres od 19 marca 1990 roku do 27 listopada 1993 roku // Samorząd Terytorialny. Miesięcznik. – 1994. – № 1–2. – S. 5.*

⁵ *Elekcja samorządowa: maj 1990. Raport z badania wyborów do rad gmin w Polsce, wykonany dla Zespołu Badań Europy Wschodniej // Samorząd Terytorialny. Miesięcznik. – 1994. – № 1–2. – S. 36.*

⁶ *Władza i społeczności lokalne a reforma samorządowa w Polsce / [pod red. P. Dobrowolskiego, S. Wróbla. – Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1995. – S.73.*

⁷ *Siemiński W. Partycypacja mieszkańców w zarządzaniu / Waldemar Siemiński // Samorząd Terytorialny. Miesięcznik. – 1994. – № 4 (40). – S. 27.*

The right to vote in the election of 1994 was granted to 27,621,841 voters. And there were 9,329,776 voters who cast ballots in the election. The voter turnout was of 33.78% and that was significantly lower than in the previous local elections. There were 181,900 candidates, out of which 51,926 deputies were elected.⁸

As in the previous local elections, people from village and small- town were more likely to vote. The electoral turnout there was 38.25% and in the smallest gminas (up to 5,000 people) it was about 45%. In 32 gminas, the electoral turnout exceeded 50%. On average, 28.05% of voters came to the polls in multi-member districts. As for the cities, the highest turnout was registered in Sopot – 44%, Rzeszow – 36% and Gdynia – 34%, the lowest rate was seen in Walbrzych and Bytom – 21%, as well as in Zabrze – 18%. According to the research, better-educated people were more active in voting (56%) than those with lower educational levels (29%). Once again, young people aged 18-30 years had no interest in local elections (together they made up 24%, with learner and student turnout of 15%).⁹

Due to the low electoral turnout, the difference between the numbers of votes obtained by the candidates was often minimal. In single-member districts, the support from the nearest neighbors and family could have been crucial for a future deputy. Low turnout can be also associated with the reduction in number of seats in some gminas. The reason for very low electoral turnout in local elections on June 19, 1994, as well as in the previous local elections, was in the weak electoral campaign.

With local government reform and the formation of governments at the levels of powiat and voivodeship, it became necessary to adopt a new election law. On July 16, 1998, the Seim passed the Law "Regulations on elections to gmina councils, powiat councils and voivodeship sejmiks." The legislation sealed majority (in gminas with up to 20 thousand inhabitants) and proportional system (in gminas numbering more than 20 thousand residents, as well as for elections to powiat councils and voivodeship sejmiks).

46% of voters attended the polls in the next local elections on October 11, 1998. The electoral turnout was the following: 1) in elections to voivodeship sejmiks, 28,546,385 Poles had a right to vote and 12,946,455 out of them took part in the vote; the turnout was 45,35%; 2) in powiat council elections, there were 19,859,256 citizens with a positive right to vote, 9,485,117 of them took part in the vote representing 47.76%; 3) in gmina council elections, 28,196,149 Poles had their right to vote and 12,816,962 voters took part in the vote, representing 45.46%. There were elected 52,379 deputies to gmina councils (out of 208 095 candidates), 10,290 deputies were elected to powiat councils (of 56,829 deputies) and 855 members were

⁸ *Iudices Electionis Custodes (Sędziowie Kustoszami Wyborów). Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza / [pod red. F. Rymarza]. – Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krajowego Biura Wyborczego, 2007. – S 302 .*

⁹ *Piasecki A. K. Władza w samorządzie terytorialnym III RP: teoria i praktyka kadencji 1990–2002 / Andrzej K. Piasecki. – Zielona Góra; Łódź : Wydawnictwo «Tęcza», 2002. – 159-160 s.*

elected to voivodeship sejmiks (out of 7,426 candidates).¹⁰ In single-member districts, where one candidate was nominated , 1662 deputies got their seats without elections.

As an example of electoral turnout in 1998 one can analyze voter participation in elections that were held in Lubusz voivodeship. The highest turnout in elections to the sejmik of Lubuskie voivodeship was recorded in the district #3 - 50,90% (Slubice, Sulecinski, Miedzyrzecki powiats) while the lowest level was registered in the district #1 - 40,00% (Gorzow Wielkopolski). In the elections to the powiat councils the highest turnout was observed in Sulecinski powiat - 57.40%, and the lowest one was in Zarski powiat - 44.74%. In the elections to the councils of towns and gminas in the districts (with a population of more than 20 thousand) the highest level of participation was recorded in Wschowa - 47.44% and the lowest one - in in Lubsko - 38.36%. In city and gmina council elections, the voter turnout of over 60% was observed in Brzeźnica Kzheshynah, Lubniewice , Lęknica, Pshchev (districts with population less than 20,000).The lowest electoral participation (40%) was in Lubiszyn and Santok.¹¹

Factor that had a decisive impact on participation in local elections, was local community pre-election campaigns. A positive example is Sulęcín and Wschow, where active work on the creation of powiats was carried out in 1998. In Sulęcín this process succeed, while in Wschowa, it took 4 years the idea to be implemented. However, the campaign, which had been conducted in these cities for a few months, influenced the society, and this influence was later reflected in high electoral turnout. In those places, where they were unable to form powiats, the level of public engagement was lower and the electoral turnout was also low.

Everyone stressed the low voter turnout in 1998, indicating a need to stimulate interest in local elections. Low voter turnout showed the lack of incentive to be interested in the results of local elections. This was determined by political, economic, social and other factors.

The local elections, which were held in 2002, were somewhat different from the previous ones. For the first time, direct elections of wojts, mayors, presidents of cities were introduced in the electoral system. However, despite the forecasts and political leaders assessment who believed that due to the introduction of direct elections of burgomasters, wojts and presidents of cities the electoral activity would increase significantly, there were only 44.23% of voters in the first round of the 2002 elections and in the second round it was 35.02% .

¹⁰ *Iudices Electionis Custodes (Sędziowie Kustoszami Wyborów). Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza / [pod red. F. Rymarza]. – Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krajowego Biura Wyborczego, 2007. – S 302 .*

¹¹ *Piasecki A. K. Wybory samorządowe z 1998 roku na przykładzie woj. Lubuskiego: doświadczenia i porady / Andrzej Konrad Piasecki // Samorząd Terytorialny. Miesięcznik. – 2002. – № 4 (136). – Kwiecień. – S. 14.*

The highest voter turnout in the 2002 elections was in Podkarpackie voivodeship - 51.3%, and the lowest in Slaski - 39.9%.¹²

In the debate over the low electoral turnout, apart from alarm statements, warnings from authorities and public opinion, there were also expert commentaries justifying and even supporting such kind of behaviour. A. Osiatyński, an expert in the areas of constitutional law, considered the abstentionism to be the most rational response of a citizen to the level and shortcomings of a political class. Scientist and publicist M. Krul explains his refusal to vote in the following way: "I will not participate in the elections, as the current political scene just does not deserve it. The whole campaign is a pure scandal. It consists of demagoguery and promises. This is a manifestation of sudden disregard of public interest. Therefore, the society should stop taking into account the interests of politicians".¹³ Prof. Jerzy Jedlicki, historian, shares the position, having noted that "social apathy towards democratic polity and the state, grows rather than decrease and goes into a phase of total disgust with almost everything associated with public sphere."¹⁴

Many observers linked the low electoral turnout with the preparation of the European integration referendum. One should note that the referendum was held on June 7-8, 2003 and the voter turnout was of 58.85%. Although in our opinion, this is not the reason that could excuse the absenteeism phenomenon in the 2002 local elections.

Deputy J. Pyetera believes that multi-member districts system is one of the reasons why voters become unwilling to participate in elections. There are some voters in multi-member districts who, just a week after voting, do not even remember a name of a person they voted for, and do not know why they have chosen the list. Therefore, the deputy proposes to substitute the proportional system with the majoritarian one. A single-member district is an informed choice and ability to control the deputy you vote for.¹⁵

A. Hoschynskyy explains the low attendance of polling stations by the following reasons: sense of insignificance of the voter role, disenchantment with the situation in the country, disappointment with politician's statements and actions, lack of interest in politics; thoughts that the election result was not important to the future of the state.¹⁶

As it was mentioned above, in 2002, along with elections to the councils of gmina, powiat and voivodeship, for the first time there were held the direct elections

¹² Wróbel S. *Winniki wyborów samorządowych do Sejmiku Województwa Śląskiego w 2002 roku* / S. Wróbel, M. Jasikowska. // *Stydia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis. T. 1* – Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005. – S. 109.

¹³ Piasecki A. K. *Władza w samorządzie terytorialnym III RP: teoria i praktyka kadencji 1990–2002* / Andrzej K. Piasecki. – Zielona Góra; Łódź : Wydawnictwo «Tęcza», 2002. – S. 171.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Pitera J. *Jednomandatowe okręgi* / Julia Pitera // *Wspólnota*. – 2000. – № 39. – 23 września. – S. 10.

¹⁶ Piasecki A. K. *Władza w samorządzie terytorialnym III RP: teoria i praktyka kadencji 1990–2002* / Andrzej K. Piasecki. – Zielona Góra; Łódź : Wydawnictwo «Tęcza», 2002. – S. 171.

of mayors / burgomasters, vjts and presidents of cities/. In this election, 13,081,594 persons voted in the first round out of 29,572,225 those who were eligible to vote. Thus, the electoral turnout was of 44.24%. In the mentioned elections, 2478 heads of small towns and villages, burgomasters and presidents of cities were elected, with 10,371 candidates nominated.¹⁷

It should be noted that in those elections in which one person was to be elected directly, the level of participation was higher; in some places, it reached 50%. The highest turnout was recorded in Aleksandrów gmina, Lodz voivodeship - 78.03%.¹⁸

In 2002, the second round of local elections was held on November 10 in 48.5% of the communes. In the second round out of 2,404 candidates there were to be elected 1202 mayors (vjts, burgomasters and presidents of cities); 7,240,326 voters out of 20,674,292 persons who had the right to vote came to the polling stations. Thus, the election turnout was 35.02% (49% - voting for vjts, 38% - burgmastres, 29% - presidents).¹⁹

One can even determine the following factors that influenced the low level of voter participation: method of voting, frequency of elections, geographical factors and the period of elections. Regarding the method of voting, it primarily takes into account the number of persons you need to elect (in local elections more than one representative must be elected). For example, residents of cities-powiats (cities counties) received three ballots to vote in order to elect the city council, sejmik voivjdeship and president of the city. Residents of other gminas received four ballots according to which they elected gmina and powiate councils,voivodeship sejmyk as well as burgomaster or president. Voting for too many people could negatively affect the electoral activity. Sociologists point out the correlation between the number of elections and electoral participation level. The oftener voters go to the polls, the lower electoral activity is. During the period of 2000-2002 there could have taken place this phenomenon that reduced level of voter participation in the local elections in 2002. In fact, there were the presidential elections in 2000, the Parliament elections in 2002 and local elections - in 2002.Unfavorable weather could serve as an additional factor for non-voting, both during the campaign and on an election day, as it often rains in autumn.²⁰

To sum up, the reasons for the low electoral turnout in the 2002 elections are: public indifference, the economic crisis, alienation of the elite, political

¹⁷ *Iudices Electionis Custodes (Sędziowie Kustoszami Wyborów). Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza / [pod red. F. Rymarza]. – Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krajowego Biura Wyborczego, 2007. – S 303.*

¹⁸ *Lipiński A. W. Lokalna kampania samorządowa z 2002 roku / Andrzej W. Lipiński // Samorząd Terytorialny. Miesięcznik. – 2005. – № 5 (173). – Maj. – Rok II. – S. 21.*

¹⁹ *Piasecki A. K. Władza w samorządzie terytorialnym III RP: teoria i praktyka kadencji 1990–2002 / Andrzej K. Piasecki. – Zielona Góra; Łódź : Wydawnictwo «Tęcza», 2002. – S. 176.*

²⁰ *Wróbel S. Winniki wyborów samorządowych do Sejmiku Wojewódstwa Śląskiego w 2002 roku / S. Wróbel, M. Jasikowska. // Stydia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis. T. 1 – Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005. – S. 107–108.*

corruption. Other factors, such as lack of knowledge about self-government, bad weather, etc. were of minor importance.

Regular elections to local self-government took place on November 12, 2006. In May 2004 Poland joined the European Union. It were the first local elections after Poland joined the EU. In Poland presidents and burgmastes of 107 cities and towns, as well as deputies and heads of powiat and voivodeship administrations were elected.

Prior to the elections and on the Election Day itself politicians and clerics urged the people to turn out to vote. Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp noted that the essence of any democracy is freedom of choice, that's why everyone should take part in the election process. According to K. Martsinkyevych, who was the temporary acting president (mayor) of Warsaw and in 2006 was the "Law and Justice" candidate for the president of the capital of Poland, local elections were very important, and the fact that burgomasters and presidents of cities were elected directly, increased the electoral turnout: "The greater frequency is, the greater part will take democracy in government administration. For the state, it is very useful. It would be nice if attendance was high".²¹ Another candidate for the president of Warsaw, H. Gronkiewicz-Waltz also noticed that participation was the most important aspect of local elections, as citizens had the greatest impact on local authorities. A. Lepper, Vice Prime Minister, leader of Self-Defense, said that participation in elections - was not simply a duty: "This vote is both a privilege, as we have our Poland independent, and, on the other hand, a duty. We elect self-government organs at every level and we need to vote in well. And the higher turnout we have, the better evaluated candidate is".²² Former chairman of the Democratic Left Alliance W. Olejniczak emphasized that the purpose of elections was to evaluate the achievements of certain self-government officials and give a chance to others. Also, in his opinion, an important indicator of the public mood was the turnout: "Let us see how high the frequency will be. If it is low, this will mean that politicians have done a lot to turn citizen against participation in public life".²³

Despite the fact that sociologists predicted a high level of voter turnout (at least 60% of Poles with the right to vote were expected at the polling stations), less than a half out of 30 million Poles voted.

In the elections to sejmiks of voivodeships in 2006 out of 30,241,185 Poles who had the right to vote, 13,884,295 Poles took part in the voting - and the turnout was of 45.91%. In the elections to powiat councils 20,095,699 citizens had the active right to vote, and 9,651,927 of them took part in the elections, which is equaled to

²¹ *Політики і священики закликали до участі у виборах [Електронний ресурс] // Polskie Radio Esperanto. – Режим доступу : <http://www2.polskieradio.pl/eo/dokument.aspx?iid=44479>.*

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ *Ibidem.*

48.03%. In the elections to the councils of gminas 29,879,803 Poles had the right, 13,743,671 voters took part in the vote, i.e. 46 %.²⁴

On November 12, 2006, the elections of mayors were held along with the elections to the councils of gminas, powiats and voivodeship sejmiks. Out of 30,240,882 voters in the elections of woyts (burgomaster, presidents of cities) 13,883,806 people took part. The electoral turnout was 45.91%.²⁵

The constant change of gmina heads was no longer a sign of Polish self-government. In the elections of 2006 the majority of elected in the first round woyts and burgomasters started their next term. In 75 largest cities the percentage of presidents who were elected in the first round was high and reached almost 45%, that was three times higher than the rate of the 2002 elections.²⁶

The second round of elections was held on November 26, 2006 in the cities, where no candidate had managed to gain more than 50% of votes in the first round. In 2006, the second round was organized in 33% of gminas, including the capital city - Warsaw. 827 woyts, burgomasters and city presidents had to be elected out of 1,654 candidates. 5,812,667 voters out of 14,643,543 those who had the right to vote took part in the second round. The electoral turnout was 39.69%. It should be noted that elections in Poland, as well as in other countries, suffered from a systematic decline in activity in the second round.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the participation in the local election process in 2006 was higher than in the previous parliamentary elections. Obviously, an aggravation of political wrangling had influenced this. The study also shows that unlike the previous elections, voter participation was higher in cities, rather than in small towns. The widespread belief that local elections were important influenced the electoral turnout. Advertising in mass media also had certain effect on participation in electoral process; it encouraged voters to participate actively in the elections.

Sociologists predicted that in the local elections in 2010 one could expect an extraordinary high voter turnout. More than 70 percent of the surveyed Poles confirmed that they would participate in the elections while only 46 percent of citizens had taken part in the previous Polish elections to local authorities. However in 2010, only 47.32% of voters came to the polling stations. The highest electoral turnout was in Shvyentokzhysky voivodeship - 53.59%. Just over a half of voters went to the polls in Mazowiecki (50.96%) and Podkarpackie (50.75%) voivodeships. In Opolskie voivodeship the lowest electoral turnout was observed, which was only 40.99%.²⁷

²⁴ *Iudices Electionis Custodes (Sędziowie Kustoszami Wyborów). Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza / [pod red. F. Rymarza]. – Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Krajowego Biura Wyborczego, 2007. – S. 303.*

²⁵ *Ibidem. S.304.*

²⁶ *Swianiewicz P. Co zmieniły wybory? / Paweł Swianiewicz // Wspólnota. – 2006. – № 49. – S. 14.*

²⁷ *Wybory Samorządowe 2010. Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza [Elektronnyy resurs]. – Reżim dostępu : <http://wybory2010.pkw.gov.pl/att/1/pl/280000.html#tabs-1>.*

Last regular local elections took place in Poland on November 16, 2014; the main feature of these elections was the fact that they were held on the basis of the new Electoral Code, which had been adopted in 2011. Elections to 2825 councils were held. The electoral turnout in the first round was 47.40%. The second round of local elections took place on November 30 and was attended by 39, 97% of citizens.

Sociologist Jarosław Flis believes that the participation of citizens in elections process can be influenced by bad weather and level of income (those who earn more, more actively participate in voting). According to him, holding presidential elections together with local elections could be a factor to increase voter participation. Voters must believe that voting results can lead to some changes; they have to understand that their presence in elections is important.²⁸

Starting from 1990, regular elections to local authorities in the Republic of Poland were held seven times; the highest level of absenteeism during this period was in 1994 and reached 66.78%. There were no local elections in Poland when 50% of voters voted, and this fact can be rather baffling, as local governments in Poland have a broad range of powers. Absenteeism could be primarily explained by a weak election campaign. The socio-political and socio-economic situation in the country also left its impact on the low attendance. In general, the main reasons of electoral passivity included: disappointing results of policies pursued by the authorities; boring election campaigns; difficult economic situation; political apathy; disappointment caused by politicians actions and statements ; lack of decent candidates; lack of knowledge about local government and so on.

However, we can argue that in democratic, well-developed societies there can be also observed a downward trend in voter participation, which is explained, in particular, by the confidence of citizens «of tomorrow's day".

Generally there is a tendency of decline in the number of voting Poles. It should be noted that the average index of voter participation in the parliamentary elections in Poland is considerably lower to the corresponding figure in European countries, although it is slightly better than the average rate in the US. The trend of reduction in the number of voters is also inherent to the presidential elections, although the index is better compared to the parliamentary elections. The reason for low activity in the elections is primarily a disappointment in the political parties' activity in Poland.

The situation with a low electoral turnout in local elections in Poland is not an exception. Almost in every democratic state citizens participate in presidential and parliamentary elections more actively than in the elections for local authorities. This

²⁸ *Głos z kieszeni. Jak zwiększyć frekwencję w wyborach samorządowych [Електронний ресурс] . – Режим доступу : <http://samorząd.pap.pl/depesza/szablon.depesza/dep/144201/>*

can be also explained from the point of increasing interest to these elections from the media side.

The low turnout in both local elections in 1990 (42.27%) and parliamentary elections in 1991 (43.2%) was associated with the poor orientation of the citizens in programs of various parties in the initial period of systemic transformation in Poland. People, who didn't vote in the parliamentary elections in 1991, understood current problems but they neither saw the ways of implementing of many important issues and nor did they find obvious differences in the programs of certain parties.

There are different explanations and theories about the causes of the declining interest in taking part in democratic elections by Polish citizens. People are frustrated by the political system. In their opinion, politicians do not meet the basic criteria for the performance of social roles - they are not credible.

In the academic literature, generally, there are two types of absenteeism defined: 1) as a result of deliberate refusal to participate in the vote, 2) for reasons that do not depend on voters (because of work, old age, sickness, disability, etc.).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the research on electoral participation was aimed at explaining the participation in elections and the monitoring of different social groups should be considered the most important discovery so far. The probability of the vote depends on the place an individual is in the social structure, i.e what is the voter's gender, age, level of education; where does the voter live; what is his/her degree of participation and collaboration with different organizations and political institutions. For example, in many countries participation of women is lower than men. This is due to the fact that they are not actively involved in politics, and men often occupy higher positions in the social structure compared with women. Polish researchers of the nineties showed that gender is not a differentiating factor in the voting processes in Poland. In elections, voter turnout rates for women is almost equal to voter turnout rates for men

Age of citizens is of an important value in the elections. Most empirical studies can show the connection between the age and voter turnout. The correlation between age and voting activity can be shown as follows: young people are less likely to participate in elections, the electoral participation is increasing among the middle age, as for the elderly group there is also a decrease in the amount of participants in elections. In many countries, there is a large percentage of young people who do not participate in elections. This phenomenon has been interpreted as the result of lack of interest politics and in the political life participation. The statistical data from different parts of the world show that participation in elections is to a great extent connected with the level of education. The higher education level is, the higher is level of participation in the election process. People's participation in different kinds of institutions, associations, religious communities also raises the possibility of participation in the elections.

There is an interesting research on the impact of place of dwelling on voting processes. The so-called environmental analysis of the voters' attendance in several elections in the nineties in Poland helped us to reveal different areas with high levels of voting and places where there is always a low turnout.

Academic literature includes three main groups of citizens with regard to participation in the election: the first group includes those citizens who regularly take part in the elections, the second group - citizens, voters who occasionally participate in elections when the electoral situation encourages them, and the third group - those who usually do not participate in elections.

The high turnout in local elections in Ukraine was recorded only when the elections to local authorities coincided in time with the parliamentary elections (75.6% - in 1994, 70.8% - in 1998, 69.3% - in 2002, 67.6% - in 2006).²⁹ In the 2010 local elections, the average turnout was only - 48.7%.

October 25, 2015 the local elections were held in Ukraine. The disappointment and disillusion of voters in local elections were caused by populist slogans and promises of politicians, and found its expression in a rather low turnout across the country - 46.62%. But the local elections candidates were displeased with the new law "On Local Elections", which abolished the right of the candidate to run for elections independently and forced them to run only from political parties (in many cases - to be in a so-called "political slavery"). The highest turnout was in the Ternopil region (56.50%) and the Lviv region (56.31%). The lowest - was recorded in the Donetsk region (31.65%) and Luhansk region (35.27%).

December 11, 2016 the first local elections were held in 13 regions: Vinnytsia, Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizzhia, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Poltava, Rivne, Ternopil, Kharkiv, Kherson, Chernivtsi and Chernihiv regions which were divided into 41 local communities. Out of these, three are urban, 13 - township and 25 - rural communities. The first elections of the heads to the local government caused a considerable turnout of voters. Regional elite participated actively in the process as well. In most areas the turnout in the election on December 11 was not less than the turnout for parliamentary elections in 2014.

There was set a record by the voters of Volyn, Vinnitsa and Rivne regions.

In Rivne region at that time, 61.25% of the voters came to the polls, although in October 2014, only 58.8% voted in the elections to the Rada /Council/. In Volyn region the difference in the number of voters compared to the situation that took place two years before was just statistical - 0.3% (65% in 2014 and 64.8% at this time). In Vinnytsia region, participation rate in elections to united territorial communities and local councils was 58.8% while in the 2014 elections - 57.69%.

²⁹ В ОПОРі порівняли явку на місцевих виборах у 2010 та 2015 роках – інфографіка «Український тиждень» [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://tyzhden.ua/News/149749>.

The least active were Chernivtsi and Kherson regions where 36% of voters came to the elections.³⁰

So, absenteeism is a problem not only for Ukraine, this trend can be seen in the political life of the Republic of Poland in the last 25 years as well. The electoral turnout in local elections has never reached the level of 50% of those who had a right to vote.

³⁰ *Вибори територіальних громад та битва за місцеві гроші [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <https://politeka.net/ua/383479-vybory-terytorialnykh-hromad-ta-bytva-za-mistsevi-hroshi/>*