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Voter Turnout Stability—Evidence from Poland

Abstract: One of the most fundamental issues in studies on voter turnout is its stability. The more stable citizens' attitudes and behaviours, the healthier and more predictable the democratic system. Knowledge why voting is stable/unstable helps to understand the whole puzzle of voter turnout. Thus the main purpose of this paper is to analyze the issue of voter turnout stability in a very specific context of Polish parliamentary and presidential elections of 2005, when citizens were called to the polling stations three times every two weeks. Polish National Election Study panel dataset gives a unique opportunity to examine this issue in a more in-depth manner. The main finding of the paper is that many Polish citizens are rather unstable, both in long-term and short-term perspective. And although majority of the electorate still behaves in a stable manner, the number of unstable citizens is quite high, and, what is even more alarming, it tends to increase, which can imply serious challenges to democratic system.

Keywords: voter turnout stability; voting behaviour; elections

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to study stability of voter turnout. Why is it important? The shortest and most naïve (though not untrue) answer would be: because it is good for democracy. Such a notion however needs some theoretical and empirical support. Indeed, two important arguments supporting this notion can be put forward.

First argument is very general. Stability is, by and large, considered as desirable in both theory of democracy and political science (e.g. Sartori 1965; Huntington 1968; Weber 1968; Lipset 1973; Dahl 1989). It has been often argued that it is important in any political system, because it brings about predictability (and even despots and dictators prefer stability over instability). In democracy it is especially important, because it preserves democratic rule (which is widely perceived as better than any other system of government) and inhibits democracy breakdown. There is solid and convincing empirical evidence that instability (including instability of voter turnout) can lead to fatal outcomes, including failures of democratic regime (Weimar Republic is the most often described case—c.f. Lipset 1973: 149–152).

Second argument is of more specific character and pertains directly to stability of voter turnout. Stability of voting behaviour alleviates formation of party system, which is crucial for (modern) democracy. Instability of voting behaviour might, on the other hand, impede this process. If citizens are unstable, political parties cannot get embedded in society, their programs and programmatic profiles are vague and con-

sequently socio-political cleavages cannot develop. This in turn might have an impact on patterns of electoral competition—it might become chaotic and unpredictable. Outcomes of such elections can be a real threat to democracy.

Not always however stability of voter turnout is good for democracy. Sometimes it can be even dysfunctional. If voter turnout is low, its stability can be a challenge to democracy. Low voter turnout is usually unequal (which means that it is biased against the poorer, less educated etc.—c.f. Lijphart 1997[1]), and thus systematically disadvantages lower social strata, because unequal voter turnout means unequal representation and unequal political influence (this notion is strongly based on an assumption that in contemporary democracies voting is the only vehicle of exercising political influence). Stability in such situation implies stable, long-lasting exclusion of certain social groups from the most fundamental democratic procedure.

But despite these specific situations stability of voter turnout is desired: in general, the more stable citizens' attitudes and behaviours, the healthier and more predictable the democratic system. Instability on the other hand can be a serious challenge to democracy. Therefore studying stability, including stability of voting behaviour and voter turnout, is crucial not only for scientific purposes. Knowledge on why voter turnout is stable/unstable helps to understand better democratic politics. It is particularly important in democratizing countries, where democratic rule is still fragile and vulnerable to collapse.

What do we know about stability of voter turnout? First of all, it can be examined from two perspectives: macro-level and micro-level. In general, changes in voter turnout are due to: (i) transitions at micro level (from voting to non-voting and vice versa); (ii) changes at macro level (changes within electorate). In this paper we refer only to micro-level stability, studying transitions from voting to non-voting and vice versa.

At least since the very first empirical studies on voting we know that people tend to vote in a quite stable manner (Campbell et. al. 1960: 93). Classical Columbia School studies (Erie County, Elmira) show that citizens are rarely willing to change their political likes and dislikes. The same is true for political behaviour—the way citizens behave is relatively reluctant to change. Some scholars relate this fact to citizens' ignorance about political issues. Lazarsfeld and Berelson (1944, 1954) argue that ordinary citizens are usually very ignorant about politics. This notion is totally at odds with normative models of democracy, which predict citizens' competence in understanding politics: 'The democratic citizen is expected to be well-informed about political affairs. He is supposed to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences are. By such standards the voter falls short' (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, McPhee 1954: 308). This lack of interest and knowledge implies relative stability of citizens' behaviours and attitudes towards politics, though causal relationship between ignorance about politics and stability of political attitudes and behaviours is not unambiguous. However, it is plausible to argue that ignorance and lack of interest in

[1] Analyses based on Polish data show a very similar picture (c.f. Markowski 1992; Markowski 1993; Raciborski 1997; Przybysz 2004).

politics strengthens stability: citizens (rational individuals), for the sake of saving time and resources, get used to certain behaviours and afterwards do not change them or change them relatively seldom.

Observed stability of voter turnout leads some scholars to yet stronger notions. According to some of them casting a ballot is a habit (cf. Plutzer 2002; Franklin 2004), formed in a long process of political socialization, during which citizens learn to participate or to abstain: 'Turnout appears to be stable because, for most people, the habit of voting is established relatively early in their adult lives. Those who find reason to vote in one of the first elections at which they are eligible generally continue to vote in subsequent elections, even less important ones. On the other hand, those who find no reason to vote in their first few elections generally continue not to vote in subsequent elections, even more important ones' (Franklin 2004: 12). The process lasts years: 'It takes about three elections for people to become established in the habit of voting or non-voting' (Franklin 2003: 5). But once a habit is established, it is reluctant to change. However, habits are not identical: habit of voting seems to be stronger than habit of non-voting. Transitions (Plutzer 2002) from non-voting to voting are more frequent than transitions from voting to non-voting. Among others this is the very reason why turnout in older cohorts is higher.

This theoretical proposition has meaningful implications. Habitual nature of voting can help to understand better the whole paradox of voter turnout. Many empirical studies show that in fact voting is a habit (cf. Plutzer 2002; Franklin 2004). Unfortunately, these studies refer mostly to well-established democracies. As far as stability of voter turnout in new democracies is concerned, we know much less. It seems indispensable then to examine thoroughly this issue.

Thus, on the basis of the above-mentioned theoretical arguments, two main research questions of this paper can be put forward[2]. First is of rather descriptive genre: are Polish citizens stable as far as voter turnout is concerned? Second is more analytical: what are the correlates and/or determinants of instability of voter turnout in Poland?

Data and Research Design

In empirical analyses below Polish National Election Study (PNES) data are used.It is a research project affiliated with the Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, which covers most important national-level electoral events in Poland. PNES collaborates with the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The data are available in public domain[3].

In general, the best data for investigating voting behaviour come from post-election studies, run just after elections. In those studies estimates of elections' results

[2] It must be emphasised that this paper does not attempt to discuss other important aspects of voter turnout. The so-called paradox of voter turnout (c.f. Kanazawa 1998; Franklin 2004; Górecki 2006) is too complex to be comprehensively discussed in a journal article. For this reason our research question and research design must be modest—to discuss only one aspect of voter turnout, i.e. its stability.

[3] The data can be found at the Polish Social Data Archive website (www.ads.org.pl).

are the most accurate (closest to official results), both as far as voter turnout and party (candidate) vote are concerned—the impact of short memory span of respondents is minimised (though not entirely overcome). Data collected in other projects, which do not study voting behaviour in post-election periods (i.e. World Value Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey Programme), suffer from huge incorrectness of data collected and yield estimations of voting behaviour that are (often) at odds with official results of elections under investigation. Consequently, empirical study of voting behaviour should—if at all possible—make use of post-election data.

In this particular paper I first of all use PNES 2005 data. In this year parliamentary and presidential elections overlapped. Parliamentary election was held on September 25th, first round of presidential election was held two weeks later (9th October) and second round of presidential election was held yet another two weeks later (23rd October). This very specific context, when citizens were called to the polling stations three times every two weeks, permits thorough investigation of voter turnout stability. Usually, in 'normal' contexts, it is more difficult to study this phenomenon. Standard research tools (i.e. surveys), are not sufficient, primarily due to short memory span of respondents. Usually, people do not remember what was the main reason of voting or abstaining in the election four years ago. For some of them it is even difficult to remember whether they at all participated in the election or not. Moreover, many respondents in an interview situation want to be perceived as coherent (stable)—thus they 'adjust' their previous behaviours to their present ones. This very fact is especially important for studies on voter turnout stability, because it underestimates the number of unstable citizens (those who are unstable lie and present themselves as stable). Panel data give a unique opportunity to examine this issue in a more in-depth manner: in our case respondents had to vote three times every two weeks, and were interviewed about it shortly after the election (the first wave fieldwork was conducted just after parliamentary election, and the second wave fieldwork was conducted shortly after the second round of presidential election). Thus the impact of short memory span of respondents is minimized and data on voter turnout are less biased.

However, the data are not perfect. Some respondents do not tell the truth while asked about their voting behaviour, even if interviewed just after election. Overreporting of voter turnout in post-electoral surveys is a widely known phenomenon (Abramson, Aldrich 1982; Silver, Anderson, Abramson 1986; Wright 1993; Karp, Brockington 2005). We are unable to validate this information. Polish electoral law does not permit such validation—in Poland voter registers are inaccessible for political analysts. Thus we are unable to check whether those who said they had voted, had actually cast a ballot.

Nevertheless, as we are primarily interested in investigating stability of turnout, we do ignore this limitation of the data. It is plausible to assume that the bias observed is not random: people do not lie in random manner. On the contrary, the bias is systematic. It is so for two reasons. Firstly, many citizens do not want to confess to non-voting—voter abstention is perceived as socially improper behaviour. Secondly, citizens do not want to be perceived as incoherent—they are not likely to confess to unstable behaviour. Therefore our empirical test becomes very conservative. If we

find any instability in voter turnout, despite respondents' will to remain 'coherent good citizens' (who vote, and do it in a stable manner), it will be a strong evidence that voting is not a habit, or at least that it is not a habit for everyone in Poland.

Table 1

Comparison of PNES and Official Estimates of Voter Turnout

Parliamentary election	PNES	Official
1997	57.2%	47.9%
2001	58.5%	46.2%
2005	51.8%	40.6%

Source: PNES 1997, 2001, 2005; National Electoral Commission.

Table 1 reports the comparison of PNES and official estimates of voter turnout in the last three parliamentary elections in Poland (1997, 2001, 2005). Quite intriguing is the fact that the gap (overreporting bias) between PNES and official estimates of voter turnout has remained relatively stable, though levels of turnout have varied. The difference has oscillated between 10–12%.

It needs to be noted here that some researchers propose an alternative explanation of the observed phenomenon. They claim that the discrepancy between the official data on turnout and the declared participation is not a result of the respondents' dishonesty, but of imperfect survey tools. Such research, both in Poland and elsewhere in the world, suffers from decreasing response rate. Drawn samples are realized only in 50–70%[4]. It is possible, or even probable, that people 'excluded' from surveys are at the same time the ones who vote less frequently[5]. Their smaller number in a sample results in higher turnout, assessed for the society (electorate) as a whole.

In the specific context of 2005 elections we can talk of two types of voter turnout stability. Firstly, long-term stability of voter turnout can be distinguished (due to data limitations only parliamentary elections can be studied). Secondly, short-term stability of voter turnout can be distinguished. As far as long-term stability is concerned stable voters are defined as those respondents who claim that they behaved similarly in both parliamentary elections they were asked about: either they voted in both elections, or they abstained in both elections. As far as short-term stability is concerned stable voters are defined as those respondents who claim that they behaved similarly in all three elections (parliamentary election and two rounds of presidential elections) they were asked about. In both instances voter turnout stability is measured as proportion of stable citizens to all citizens.

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[4] In case of the Polish National Election Study response rates equal: 1997—71.4%; 2001—55.4%; 2005 (I wave)—55.9%.

[5] I would like to thank participants of the conference 'Contextual Effects in Electoral Behaviour' (European University Institute, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Florence, 1st December 2006), especially Jeffrey Karp, for their remarks and suggestions regarding this issue.

Descriptive Statistics

Now we turn to the main question of the paper. Are Polish citizens stable as far as voting (and non-voting) is concerned? How many citizens transit between elections from voting to non-voting and vice versa? In order to answer these and alike questions we must first of all examine the relationship between voting in successive elections.

Table 2

Stability of Voter Turnout in Poland in Years 1993–2005

Turnout 1997	Turnout 1993		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	51.0%	9.0%	60.0%
No	16.3%	23.7%	40.0%
Total	67.3%	32.7%	100.0%
Turnout 2001	Turnout 1997		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	54.4%	5.9%	60.3%
No	21.9%	17.8%	39.7%
Total	76.3%	23.7%	100.0%
Turnout 2005	Turnout 2001		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	46.6%	6.9%	53.5%
No	25.9%	20.6%	46.5%
Total	72.5%	27.5%	100.0%

Source: PNES 1997, 2001, 2005. Note: Chi-square tests statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2 reports results of such a simple bivariate analysis of voter turnout stability in years 1993–2005. Total percents are reported; in this way we are able to estimate the proportion of citizens who (claim they) behaved in stable manner. According to the PNES data (1997, 2001 and 2005 editions[6]) majority of Polish citizens was stable in the period studied, as far as voting/abstaining is concerned. However, the number of those who were unstable was not insignificant, and, what is even more important, it was increasing: in 1997 election 25.3% of respondents reported unstable behaviour; in 2001 election 27.8% of respondents reported unstable behaviour; in 2005 election 32.8% of respondents reported unstable behaviour.

The relationship between voting in two consecutive elections (i.e. stability of voter turnout) can be analysed in a different way. Simple bivariate logistic regression assesses the impact of voting in the first election under scrutiny on (probability of) voting in the second election under scrutiny. Table 3 reports results of this analysis. In all three models voter turnout (in time 2 election) is modelled as a function of participating (or abstaining) in time 1 election. Comparing coefficients across three simple bivariate logistic regression models helps to further demonstrate that the

[6] In each analysis only those eligible to vote in both elections were included.

relationship between two variables under scrutiny had been weakening in years 1993–2005, which indirectly means that instability of voter turnout had been increasing in this period. As hypothesised, in all three models voting in time 1 election has a positive influence on voting in time 2 election (increases probability of voting). However, the coefficients for 1997 election are bigger than coefficients for 2001 election and coefficients for 2005 election. The same pertains to the model fit: Nagelkerke R-square is highest for 1997 election. It all means that instability of voter turnout in years 1993–2005 was increasing.

Table 3

Logistic Regression Models Predicting Voter Turnout

	B	Standard error	Exp(B)	Nagelkerke R^2
Turnout 1993 on Turnout 1997	2.11*	0.12	8.25	0.26
Turnout 1997 on Turnout 2001	2.00*	0.14	7.41	0.20
Turnout 2001 on Turnout 2005	1.67*	0.11	5.32	0.16

* $p < 0.001$

Source: PNES 1997, 2001, 2005.

The next table 4 reports voter turnout stability in 2005 elections. Again relationships between voter turnout in consecutive elections are reported; and again total percents—estimates of the number of stable and unstable voters—are shown. The results are similar to those presented earlier, which means that patterns of long-term stability of voter turnout and short-term stability of voter turnout are similar. Stability between parliamentary election and first round of presidential election is 75.2%. Stability between parliamentary election and second round of presidential election is 72.7%, while stability between first and second round of presidential election reaches 87.1%. Not surprisingly we find more stability between two rounds of presidential election than between parliamentary election and either round of presidential election. It is in fact plausible to expect citizens to be more stable between similar elections, and more volatile between elections of different type.

Table 5 reports results of a different analysis of voter turnout stability in 2005 elections. In all three models voter turnout (in a given election) is modelled as a function of voter turnout in preceding election. In this way, the impact of voting in parliamentary election on probability of voting in presidential election (both rounds) is assessed; also the impact of voting in the first round of presidential election on probability of voting in the second round of presidential election is assessed. Comparing coefficients across three simple bivariate logistic regression models helps to demonstrate how stable were Polish citizens in 2005 elections. As hypothesised, in all three models voting in earlier election significantly increases probability of voting in subsequent election. Especially strong relationship we observe between electoral participation in two rounds of presidential election (though two other relationships are also strong).

Table 6 presents results of voter turnout stability in 2005, analysed in yet another manner. A simple four values index is constructed. It measures how often a respondent participated in elections in 2005. The results are very similar to those presented in

Table 4

Stability of Voter Turnout in 2005 Elections

Parliamentary	Presidential 1		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	50.7%	3.0%	53.7%
No	21.8%	24.5%	46.3%
Total	72.5%	27.5%	100.0%
Parliamentary	Presidential 2		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	47.4%	6.2%	53.6%
No	21.1%	25.3%	46.4%
Total	68.5%	31.5%	100.0%
Presidential 1	Presidential 2		
	Yes	No	Total
Yes	63.7%	8.4%	72.1%
No	4.5%	23.4%	27.9%
Total	68.2%	31.8%	100.0%

Source: PNES 2005. Note: Chi-square tests statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 5

Logistic Regression Models Predicting Voter Turnout in 2005

	B	Standard error	Exp(B)	Nagelkerke R^2
Parliamentary Turnout on Presidential Turnout (first round)	2.94*	0.19	18.92	0.38
Parliamentary Turnout on Presidential Turnout (second round)	2.21*	0.15	9.13	0.28
Presidential Turnout (first round) on Presidential Turnout (second round)	3.70*	0.19	40.46	0.54

* $p < 0.001$

Source: PNES 2005.

previous tables. The group of stable respondents constitutes 67.7% of the population. Majority of the group (47%) constitute stable voters. The rest (20.7%) are stable non-voters. The remaining 32.3% transit between elections from voting to non-voting or vice versa. On the basis of this measure a three-categories nominal variable (value 3—stable voters; values 2 or 1—unstable voters; value 0—stable non-voters), used in analyses that follow, is constructed.

Is stability of voter turnout in Poland exceptional? How stable (electorally) are other democratic citizenries? Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES[7]) re-

[7] The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is a collaborative program of research among election study teams from around the world. Participating countries include a common module of survey questions in their post-election studies. The resulting data are deposited along with voting, demographic, district and macro variables. The studies are then merged into a single, free, public dataset for use in comparative study and cross-level analysis (www.cses.org).

Table 6

Index of Voter Turnout in 2005 Elections

Index of voter turnout	N	%
0	241	20.7
1	125	10.7
2	251	21.6
3	546	47.0
Total	1163	100.0

Source: PNES 2005.

search project provides data relevant for such comparison (module 2 of CSES is the only comparative study that asks questions about both voting in last and previous elections, which are indispensible to examine stability of voting at micro-level).

Table 7

Voter Turnout Stability in Comparative Perspective (Poland vs. other CSES countries)

	Stable (voters + non-voters)	Unstable
CSES (without Poland)	83.2% (46845)	16.8% (9466)
Poland	72.2% (992)	27.8% (382)

Source: CSES module 2. Note: Chi-square test statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

In table 7 comparison of voter turnout stability in Poland and other countries surveyed in CSES module 2 is presented. Poland is considerably different—while mean voter turnout stability in CSES countries equals 83.2%, in Poland it is 72.2% (the difference is statistically significant). Moreover, Poland is the less stable country in the whole sample (38 countries were surveyed in CSES module 2—see Appendix).

Table 8

Voter Turnout Stability in Comparative Perspective (Poland vs. post-communist countries)

	Stable (voters + non-voters)	Unstable
Poland	72.2% (992)	27.8% (382)
Albania	76.2% (1136)	23.8% (355)
Bulgaria	76.8% (1203)	23.2% (364)
Czech Republic	84.1% (1022)	15.9% (193)
Hungary	81.4% (1273)	18.6% (290)
Romania	76.9% (1102)	23.1% (331)
Russia	80.8% (1222)	19.2% (291)
Slovenia	83.5% (1193)	16.5% (235)

Source: CSES module 2. Note: Chi-square test statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 8 shows comparison of stability in Poland and other Central-Eastern Europe post-communist countries (surveyed in CSES2): Poland stands out as the least stable citizenry, though Albania, Bulgaria and Romania are only slightly better. If we compare Poland with other new democracies (in established democracies citizens are

more stable, so there is no sense to compare Poland with this group of countries—see Appendix), the picture is quite the same (table 9): Poland is significantly less stable (as far as voter turnout stability is concerned) than other new democracies (the exception being Hong Kong and Mexico, where stability is relatively low, but still higher than in Poland).

Table 9

Voter Turnout Stability in Comparative Perspective (Poland vs. other new democracies)

Country	Stable (voters + non-voters)	Unstable
Poland	72.2% (992)	27.8% (382)
Mexico	74.0% (1155)	26.0% (406)
Hong Kong	74.1% (1080)	25.9% (377)
Philippines	79.8% (1245)	20.2% (315)
Chile	79.9% (1245)	20.1% (313)
Korea (South)	80.1% (1236)	19.9% (308)
Peru	80.5% (1183)	19.5% (287)
Brazil	84.5% (1164)	15.5% (214)
Taiwan (2001)	85.2% (1237)	14.8% (215)
Taiwan (2004)	89.4% (1231)	10.6% (146)

Source: CSES module 2. Note: Chi-square test statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

These results demonstrate that Poland is quite unique as far as voter turnout stability is concerned. Polish citizens are more electorally volatile than members of any other democratic citizenry (surveyed in CSES module 2). Thus there is no doubt that more research addressing this issue is needed—a plausible explanation of Polish 'exceptionality' of voter turnout stability is indispensable. But these results also corroborate the decision to study stability of voter turnout in Poland—here, more than anywhere else, in-depth scrutiny of the whole phenomenon is a must.

Empirical Analyses

Now we turn to the second question we aim to address in this paper: what are the correlates and/or determinants of voter turnout stability in Poland? Who are stable citizens, who are unstable citizens? Are those unstable anyhow similar to stable non-voters? Or maybe are they more similar to stable voters? The problem in this analysis is that the group of stable citizens is not homogeneous. Stable non-voters and stable voters are very different. Thus unstable voters must be separately compared with stable non-voters and stable voters. Otherwise internal variance, existing within the group of stable citizens, would bias the results and make comparison irrelevant. As the dependent variable is of nominal character and at the same time has more than two categories, multinomial logistic regression is the most appropriate technique of statistical analysis to be used.

Firstly, effects of socio-demographic variables must be investigated. In this way we can assess (potential) socio-demographic differences between stable and unstable citizens. Following socio-demographics are included in the model: gender, age,

education (dummy—higher education), income (dummy—higher quartile of household income), church attendance (dummy—regular, once per week or more often), children (whether one has children or not), marital status (single vs. married or in a couple), place of residence (urban vs. rural), job (whether one works or not), supervisor (whether one is a supervisor or not), self-employed (whether one is self-employed or not). Table 10 reports results of this analysis.

The likelihood ratio test is statistically significant, so we can conclude that the model is outperforming the null model (in which all the parameter coefficients are 0). Nagelkerke R-square equals 0.133. Seven variables do have statistically significant effect on dependent variable. It means that stable and unstable citizens differ as far as age, education, income, church attendance, marital status, having a job and being a supervisor are concerned.

Table 10

Socio-demographic Determinants of Voter Turnout Stability

Effect	Exp(B) Stable non-voters	Exp(B) Stable voters
Gender	0.783	1.094
Education	0.467*	1.196
Income	0.516*	1.096
Church attendance	0.542**	1.837***
Place of residence	1.036	1.074
Marital status	0.833	1.370*
Supervisor	0.632	1.513*
Children	0.887	0.849
Job	1.054	1.578*
Self-employed	0.851	0.860
Age	1.001	1.017**
Reference category: Unstable voters		
Nagelkerke R-square	0.133	
−2 Log Likelihood	1934.937***	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Source: PNES 2005.

The table also summarizes the effect of each predictor. Exp(B) parameters, which show the odds ratio (of falling into category discussed versus reference category) corresponding to a one unit change in independent variable, are presented. Three variables differentiate between stable non-voters and unstable voters. Firstly, stable non-voters are on average worse educated than unstable voters: citizens with higher education are more than two times less likely to be stable non-voters than unstable voters. Secondly, stable non-voters are on average poorer than unstable voters. Income has a similar effect on dependent variable: richer citizens (those with high per capita household income—highest quartile) are almost two times less likely to be stable non-voters than unstable voters. And thirdly, stable non-voters are on average less religious than unstable voters; regular church-goers are almost two times less likely to be stable non-voters than unstable voters.

To the extent that differences between unstable voters and stable voters are concerned, five variables can be pointed out. Firstly, the two groups are different as far as age is concerned: the odds that an older individual is a stable voter increases 2% over that of a younger individual with each year of age. Secondly, the two groups differ in terms of church attendance: regular church-goers are almost 84% more likely to be stable voters than non-regular church-goers. Thirdly, the two groups differ in terms of marital status: married (or living in a couple) are almost 37% more likely to be stable voters than singles (including widows, widowers and divorced). Fourthly, the two groups are different as far as 'supervision' is concerned: people who supervise others' work are more than 50% more likely to be stable voters than other citizens. And fifthly, the two groups differ in terms of work status: people who work are 57% more likely to be stable voters than unemployed.

Next table (table 11) presents results from similar analysis (multinomial logistic regression), where independent variables are not only socio-demographics, but also political characteristics. As our aim is not only to assess socio-demographic differences between stable and unstable voters, but also political differences between them, we include in analysis six variables that could have an effect on dependent variable[8]: party identification (dummy), politicisation ('who governs matter'), left-right self-placement, satisfaction with democracy, interest in politics and perception of programmatic differences between parties competing in the election. Seven socio-demographics, which earlier appeared to have a statistically significant effect on dependent variable, are also included in the model as control variables. Nagelkerke R-square equals 0.226, and the likelihood ratio test is statistically significant. Eight variables do have statistically significant effect on dependent variable, which means that stable and unstable citizens differ as far as age, church attendance, politicisation, left-right self-placement, satisfaction with democracy, interest in politics, perception of programmatic differences between parties and party identification are concerned.

According to the data analysed four variables differentiate significantly between stable non-voters and unstable voters. Firstly, stable non-voters are on average less religious than unstable voters; regular church-goers are more than two times less likely to be stable non-voters than unstable voters. Secondly, stable non-voters care less than unstable voters about who governs. Thirdly, stable non-voters are on average less than unstable voters interested in politics. And fourthly, their party identification is on average much lower (almost two times lower) than among unstable voters.

As far as differences between unstable voters and stable voters are concerned, six variables can be mentioned. Firstly, the two groups differ in terms of church attendance: regular church-goers are 72% more likely to be stable voters than non-regular

[8] Earlier studies on voter turnout stability suggest that these variables should have an impact on dependent variable (i.e. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, McPhee 1954; Downs 1957; Campbell et. al. 1960; Verba, Nie 1972; Nagel, McNulty 1996; Dreyer Lassen 2005; Prior 2005). It is plausible to assume that voter turnout stability should be a function of party identification, politicisation, satisfaction with democracy, interest in politics, perception of programmatic differences between parties competing in the election and left-right self-placement. However, selection of the variables included in the model was determined not only by theoretical and empirical reasons, but also by pragmatic rationales (availability of the data). Some variables we would like to include were not available.

Table 11

Socio-demographic and Political Determinants of Voter Turnout Stability

Effect	Exp(B) Stable non-voters	Exp(B) Stable voters
Education	0.541	1.068
Income	0.872	1.242
Church attendance	0.476**	1.719**
Marital status	0.835	1.105
Supervisor	0.660	1.200
Job	0.961	1.189
Age	1.002	1.016**
Politicisation	1.181*	1.009
Left-Right self-placement	0.987	1.081*
Satisfaction with democracy	1.332	0.713**
Programmatic differences	1.016	0.777*
Interest in politics	1.434*	0.881
PID	0.624*	1.524*
Reference category: Unstable voters		
Nagelkerke R-square	0.226	
−2 Log Likelihood	1480.807***	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Source: PNES 2005.

church-goers. Secondly, the two groups are different as far as age is concerned: the odds that an older individual is a stable voter increases 2% over that of a younger individual with each year of age. Thirdly, the two groups differ in terms of left-right self-placement: right-wing ideology increases probability of being stable voter. Fourthly, the two groups are different as far as satisfaction with democracy is concerned: citizens who are satisfied with the way democracy works in Poland are more likely to be stable voters than citizens who are not satisfied. Fifthly, stable voters perceive more differences between parties competing in elections than unstable voters. And sixthly, stable voters' party identification is significantly higher.

Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to discuss the issue of voter turnout stability in Poland. In the specific context of last 2005 elections we find that Polish electorate is rather unstable, both in long-term and short-term perspective. Hence our major finding is that Polish citizens relatively often transit from voting to non-voting and vice versa, either between elections, which are held every four years, or between elections that are two weeks one after another. Though majority of the electorate is stable (some 50% of stable voters + some 15–20% of stable non-voters), the number of unstable citizens is quite high, and, what is even more alarming, it tends to increase.

It must be emphasized that our empirical test is very strong, very conservative—even though people tend to be coherent and want to be perceived as good citizens

(which means that some of them do not tell the truth while asked about their past voting behaviour), relatively many of them confess either to non-voting or to instability of voting behaviour. This fact further strengthens our findings and supports plausibility of our conclusions.

Comparative analyses show that in fact Polish citizenry is exceptional as far as voter turnout stability is concerned. On the whole, Poland stands out as the most unstable country surveyed in Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. In light of this finding it is obvious that further analysis of voter turnout stability in Poland, assessing origins of the exceptionality observed, is a must.

We further find that stability of voter turnout is significantly associated with both socio-demographic characteristics and political variables. Unstable citizens are different in this regard both from stable non-voters and stable voters. But the observed patterns of difference are dissimilar, i.e. unstable citizens differ from stable non-voters in a different way than they differ from stable voters (which is understandable since there are huge differences between the two categories as far as both socio-demographic and political variables are concerned). Thus the second major finding of the study is that unstable citizens are different (in terms of many socio-demographic and political variables) from both stable non-voters and stable voters; additionally, we show how different the groups under scrutiny are.

Unstable citizens differ from stable non-voters in terms of social status (education and income) and religiosity. On average, they are poorer, worse educated and less religious. They are also less politicised, less interested in politics. In contrast, stable voters differ from unstable citizens in terms of religiosity and age (as far as socio-demographics are concerned): on average they are older and more religious. Furthermore, they are more satisfied with democracy, more rightist, more politically sophisticated (able to perceive more differences between parties competing in elections); they also have higher party identification.

Altogether, our analyses suggest that unstable citizens are more similar to stable non-voters than to stable voters: there are more differences between stable voters and unstable voters (than between stable non-voters and unstable voters), and they are bigger. It is then plausible to assume that if unstable citizens' behaviour ever becomes stable, they will be more likely to become stable non-voters than stable voters. It is an important finding so far as (potential) electoral mobilisation of unstable citizens is concerned. If they are more similar to stable non-voters, it will be more difficult to bring them to the polls and turn them into stable voters than it is often suggested. This means that many projects, programmes, and policies, which aim at mobilising unstable citizens, will fail, or at least have many problems in achieving their goals.

Finally, it must be noted that our analyses, though as thorough as they could be, are of preliminary character. There is no doubt that more research is needed. This future research must refer to a broader empirical base. It must be enriched both 'synchronically' and 'diachronically', i.e. the data must be developed in terms of cases included and time covered. Furthermore, a more thorough analysis of voter turnout stability would require more sophisticated research design and more differentiated research techniques to be employed.

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Appendix

Table A1

Voter Turnout Stability in Comparative Perspective

Country	Stable (voter + non-voters)	Unstable
Poland 2001	72,20% (992)	27,80% (382)
Mexico 2003	74,00% (1155)	26,00% (406)
Hong Kong 2004	74,10% (1080)	25,90% (377)
France 2002	75,90% (1157)	24,10% (368)
Albania 2005	76,20% (1136)	23,80% (355)
Bulgaria 2001	76,80% (1203)	23,20% (364)
Romania 2004	76,90% (1102)	23,10% (331)
Israel 2003	79,40% (1244)	20,60% (323)
Philippines 2004	79,80% (1245)	20,20% (315)
Chile 2005	79,90% (1245)	20,10% (313)
Korea 2004	80,10% (1236)	19,90% (308)
Ireland 2002	80,30% (1206)	19,70% (296)
Peru 2006	80,50% (1183)	19,50% (287)
USA 2004	80,60% (1251)	19,40% (301)
Russia 2004	80,80% (1222)	19,20% (291)
Norway 2001	81,30% (1211)	18,70% (278)
Hungary 2002	81,40% (273)	18,60% (290)
New Zealand 2002	81,50% (1180)	18,50% (268)
Iceland 2003	82,50% (1214)	17,50% (258)
Slovenia 2004	83,50% (1193)	16,50% (235)
Spain 2004	84,00% (1269)	16,00% (242)
Czech Republic 2002	84,10% (1022)	15,90% (193)
Brazil 2002	84,50% (1164)	15,50% (214)
UK 2005	84,90% (1290)	15,10% (230)
Taiwan 2001	85,20% (1237)	14,80% (215)
Portugal 2005	85,30% (1235)	14,70% (212)
Finland 2003	85,70% (1221)	14,30% (204)
Portugal 2002	86,30% (1263)	13,70% (200)
Switzerland 2003	86,80% (1247)	13,20% (190)
Germany 2002	88,10% (1378)	11,90% (186)
Germany (East) 2002	88,10% (1324)	11,90% (178)
Japan 2004	88,40% (1268)	11,60% (167)
Sweden 2002	88,50% (1289)	11,50% (167)
Taiwan 2004	89,40% (1231)	10,60% (146)
Netherlands 2002	92,80% (1386)	7,20% (108)
Australia 2004	94,30% (1357)	5,70% (82)
Denmark 2001	94,60% (1404)	5,40% (80)
Belgium 2003	94,90% (1169)	5,10% (63)

Source: CSES module 2.

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