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Electoral Manipulation in Liberal Democracies

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Introduction

This is a book about elections. It is about what they meant for liberal democracy at its inception, what they represent today, and what they could become in the near future. It also explores how free and fair elections have become the institutional foundation of liberal democracies. First of all, however, it addresses the significant threat to these democracies when they cease to be an effective mechanism for what is referred to as the “citizen’s ability to get rid of scoundrels” (Powell, 2000). Their potential outcome becomes the legitimization of actions that undermine democratic principles (Wojtasik, 2022). Such a democratic breakdown through elections is even more dangerous because it is a deceptive process. It is not as clear and spectacular as undemocratic changes resulting from revolutions or coups. The symbolical preservation of democratic institutions allows autocrats to erode their foundations. Even though citizens can still vote, the elected authorities change the rules of the political system to work against their political opponents (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

What is the underlying assumption of my analyses and conclusions drawn is the increasing functional inadequacy of elections in the context of social changes occurring in the early decades of the 21st century, especially the revolution in political communication. Thus, the main research question posed in this book is: Are contemporary elections a fair procedure for generating political representation? The answer to this question will be obtained through the verification of the conditions for the fairness of elections, which are located on

three levels: procedural, communicative, and supervisory. Contemporary democratic assumptions about electoral procedures stem from principles established over two centuries ago and are applied in almost the same form today (Nohlen, 2005). At the same time, Western societies have transformed into post-industrial structures based on weakening post-political bonds, with a tendency towards depoliticizing social attitudes (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). Even the foundations of liberal democracy have started to be questioned in places where its principles were originally established (Lévy, 2007).

The processes of depoliticization in democratic societies lead to the weakening of the connections between voters and political parties and are a factor in reducing voter participation (Evans & Tilley, 2012). During the birth and flourishing of liberal democracies, it was fair elections that were made an essential distinction, serving as the minimum criterion which differentiated this type of democracy from its historical predecessors (Dahl, 1995; Schumpeter, 1995). For a number of other scholars, elections were the most effective means of seeking and creating socially necessary compromises (Lijphart, 1999; Mair, 2014; Sartori, 1987). In the democratic process, they represent the culminating point in emphasizing differences and channelling political conflicts, followed by the stage of seeking consensus that enables effective governance until the next election (Przeworski, 2018). This is based on the principle of the universality of elections, which enables the political inclusion of broad segments of society, and the political representation elected as a result gains democratic legitimacy to act on behalf of the community. In the presented framework, liberal democracy can be defined as the institutionalized way of peacefully managing political conflicts through fair elections. In this case, elections are an essential, cyclical instrument for adapting the political sphere to changes occurring in the social space.

However, the electoral mechanism of socio-political adaptation is currently losing its systemic efficiency. What is the main reason for this are changes in political communication, which turn electoral competitors into political enemies (Bartlett, 2019), emphasizing and solidifying the tribal nature of political identities based on mass communication, as anticipated by Marshall McLuhan (1964). This is a reverse process to what occurred between American parties in the 19th century when fierce and uncompromising enemies transformed into mutually respecting elites that regularly changed in power, becoming the foundation of U.S. democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Contemporary electoral competition has become a mechanism for generating divisions which go far beyond the current dimension of politics. This is also the case when winning elections can serve as an alibi to abandon attempts at consensus-based politics and respecting the demands of minorities in favour of imposing the will, often not of the majority of the society but merely an electoral one. The majority is usually socially imagined because winning an election or obtaining over 50% of mandates does not necessarily mean over half of the votes, and almost never indicates the support of the majority of eligible voters. This is still about a certain majority, not all citizens. Populist appeals to the will of the nation, people, or sovereign will never be more than populism itself (Müller, 2016) because the collage of the political structure of contemporary societies revealed in the act of voting practically denies the existence of a universal will of the whole. The mosaic nature of democracy, as prophesied by Alvin Toffler (Toffler, 1991), is no longer a future but a present reality, where political identities become fluid, changeable, and generally impermanent. Political actors, through the manipulative instrumentalization of the electoral process, are increasingly skilful at exploiting this state for their specific interests.

Nevertheless, it would be naive to believe that politicians did not attempt to instrumentalize the electoral process earlier. While trust

is the foundation of elections (as well as changes in electoral competition rules) and requires competitors to respect established rules, the procedural and functional variability of elections has been (and still is) a favourable circumstance for building subject-specific advantages. Electoral manipulations in the context presented, unlike fraud and forgery, do not break the law; they intentionally change the previous perspectives of candidates and parties, placing the integrity of the entire electoral process at least in question. They are often ethically questionable or even unethical, but they are not subject to legal penalties. Their practical impact on the electoral process can involve individual or combined influences on: (1) voter mobilization, through attempts to decrease or increase voter turnout. Since the level of turnout does not have a neutral impact on election results (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988), actions that alter it can have a general or selective character (targeting specific segments of the electorate); (2) voter decisions about support or withdrawal of support, through actions that lead to the solidification or change of beliefs. The creation of normative and communicative tools allows for the potential influence on voter decisions (Norris, 2004); (3) the rules of resolution, by determining how voting results are translated into election outcomes. The same voting result can lead to polar different election outcomes, depending on the adopted method of transforming votes into seats (Cox, 1997).

Politicians are well aware that detailed solutions concerning the course of various stages of the electoral process can favour specific parties or candidates. They also understand that by establishing specific rules, they can increase or decrease someone's chances in the elections, sometimes placing the actual autonomy of choice in the realm of social illusions (Flis, 2014). This type of manipulation, referred to as institutional manipulation in this book, emerged with an understanding of the possible consequences of decisions made for the organization, conduct, and supervision of the electoral process. One of the oldest

examples of institutional manipulation is the law to change the division of the state into electoral districts, approved by Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry in 1812 (hence the term *gerrymandering*). Its aim was to secure victory for the Democrats in state legislature elections. They ultimately won 29 seats with 50,164 votes, while the Federalists received only 11 seats in the state legislature, even though they were voted for by 51,766 citizens (Haman, 2003).

Over two centuries of experience related to the use of the institutional dimension of elections make it increasingly possible to predict the consequences of introduced solutions. This still tempts modifications of electoral rules that would comprehensively change the competitive position of electoral competitors. This temptation is not unique to political parties and politicians who wish to depart from democratic principles. An example of this can be the *For the People Act*, proposed as one of the first initiatives by President Joe Biden. The presented bill included, among other things, the introduction of an automatic voter registration system, a guaranteed two-week early voting period, and the option to vote by mail. The draft act also included regulations to increase the transparency of campaign financing, rules for defining electoral district boundaries, and the establishment of Election Day (traditionally a Tuesday) as a federal holiday (Weiser et al., 2021). Without determining the extent to which the proposed changes stem from a diagnosis of problems in the American political system, it should be pointed out that all the proposals would potentially strengthen the position of the Democratic Party and its candidates compared to their Republican rivals.

Institutional manipulations, although they interfere with the electoral process and can change election results, do not pose a mortal threat to the axiological foundations of liberal democracy. This is due to their most significant characteristics, such as transparency, adaptability, and reversibility. Institutional manipulations are transparent

because they arise in a decision-making process accessible to the public, where it is possible to identify their creators and assess their likely consequences for electoral competitors. Thanks to transparency, their effects are adaptable for electoral competitors, who can adjust their strategies and actions to changing conditions of competition for voters' support, even though such adaptations may not fully mitigate the negative consequences of the changes. Lastly, they are reversible, because if the need arises, there is a procedural path to return to previous solutions or introduce entirely new ones, altering the scope of intentionally applied manipulations.

In contrast to institutional manipulations, the communicative form of manipulation is a more potent factor in delegitimizing elections as an institution of democratic political regimes. This was determined by the revolution in political communication that took place in the early decades of the 21st century, simultaneously triggering the emergence of new forms of political participation (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Previously, communicative manipulations were also used by politicians, but the potential scope of their impact was significantly smaller. Propaganda actions related to political marketing faced the barrier of weak individualization of political messages, and election campaigns had a highly generalized character. This state of affairs was caused by two main reasons. The first was the limited responsiveness of traditional media – newspapers, radio, or television. Technically, they were and still are (despite the gradual migration of their content to the Internet) incapable of associating an individualized message with a specific voter. The second reason was the limited ability to determine the attributes of individual voters – not only their socio-demographic characteristics but also their preferences, choices, or habits. Both of these obstacles began to disappear with the development and widespread use of the Internet. For example, a study conducted in the last decade (2011–2021) in the United States showed that the average daily

media use time increased by 20%. However, the key to understanding the phenomenon of this increase is its structure – traditional media significantly declined, while online media gained rapidly. According to the research results, the share of print media decreased by half, television by almost 25%, and radio stations by 19%. On the other hand, the time spent using stationary Internet-connected devices increased by 25%, while mobile devices saw a whopping increase of 460% (Ali, 2021). Based on these data, it is clear that the Internet enables individualized and effective political communication. Voters themselves, through their activity on the Internet, began to provide the information necessary for electioneering, profiling, and targeting such communication.

As politicians recognized the potential arising from communicative manipulations, three synergizing phenomena have emerged. The first is the gradual shift of political communication to the Internet (especially social media), through which politicians can communicate with voters more quickly and effectively. The second is the progressive extension of the time of electoral communication beyond the actual election campaign period, meaning continuous efforts to shape attitudes and, consequently, voter decisions. The electoral process, with its inherent communicative focus on influencing voter behaviour, has increasingly moved beyond the legally defined campaign regime and now encompasses the entire period between elections. The third phenomenon is the demassification of electoral communication, making the vast majority of politicians not only have profiles on social media but also actively and effectively use them. The actual monopoly of political parties and their leaders in political communication has thus been broken, undoubtedly weakening party dominance and creating new patterns of intra-party competition among candidates (Passarelli, 2020).

What is important, modern communicative manipulations based on social media lack the essential attributes of their institutional form.

Therefore, they are significantly more threatening to elections as an institution that constitutes a democratic political regime and generates political consensus in terms of the division between the ruling party and the opposition. Firstly, they are often non-transparent to the public. They can mimic regular information rather than political messages, be created using unverifiable (usually anonymous or false) sources or be outright false and misleading. Secondly, as a result of these manipulations, competing political entities do not have straightforward means to implement adaptive strategies to counter their effects, mainly because of the multitude of sources of political communication and the lack of comprehensive control options. At least, they cannot do so to the same extent as in the case of institutional manipulations or traditional forms of communicative manipulation carried out through print, radio, and television. Finally, they are not reversible in the sense that there is no way to restore the state before their interference with the competition between political entities. Their application permanently changes the existing contextual arrangement because there is no real starting point, no scope of change, and no tools that could effectively mitigate their effects.

In order for communicative manipulations conducted over the Internet to be effective, it is crucial to link actions with an understanding of human psychology and emotional factors and the ability to neurobiologically stimulate voters (Sapolsky, 2021). Data about each user that can be obtained from the Internet (particularly from social media) make it possible to personalize the messages they receive and identify potentially effective influence tools. Research conducted by psychologists and neurobiologists enables the precise determination of stimuli that have the potential to trigger the desired response (Wylie, 2020). Irrespective of whether such research focuses on the so-called Big Five or Dark Triad models (Nai, 2019), or relates to political beliefs (Schulz et al., 2020), or attitudes and values (Caprara et al., 2006), the insights

derived from them help to profile voters who are potential targets for manipulation. If we add the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to the manipulation process, it should be indicated that voters are becoming increasingly vulnerable in the face of the sophistication of online persuasive tools used against them. However, the same artificial intelligence can help in detecting such manipulations (Yankoski et al., 2020).

The described process of the deepening imbalance between those who are elected and those who vote is further compounded by another phenomenon at the intersection of psychology and communication, related to the emergence of the Internet and the increased opportunities for independent information acquisition. The growth of the internet has made it possible to gather information from various sources in a relatively inexpensive and easy way, which should result in increased knowledge and social competence, including in the area of political decision-making. However, practice has proven otherwise – users create their own individually tailored information environment by selecting content they are familiar with, choosing trusted sources, and deciding with whom they interact on social media. In this way, on the one hand, they obtain a set of information they consider the most interesting and credible. On the other hand, such subjective selection can be (and often is) highly biased, excluding information that contradicts their existing beliefs. As a result, the information environments they create are tailored to their needs and worldview and function as so-called echo chambers, where they encounter content and individuals that confirm their beliefs (Matuszewski, 2018). And since artificial intelligence algorithms used by the creators of social media can suggest attractive and expected content to users based on their prior activity, the same mechanism has been adopted by politicians seeking potential advantages in the electoral arena (Bartlett, 2019), creating space for a new type of communicative manipulation. This effect was further reinforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted human

mobility and necessitated the increased use of the Internet for various activities, including those related to elections and politics (Landman & Splendore, 2020).

The current revolution in political communication brings about another negative consequence for democratic states and societies. This is the possibility of effective interference in the electoral process by foreign states interested in the victory of specific political forces and in increasing existing political conflicts. Such states, while pursuing their goals, can introduce false information or compromising evidence against politicians into the communication space. They can also stimulate voters on the Internet to actively engage in political conflicts, leading to increased political polarization (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021). These actions focus citizens on positions that highlight differences, with the intention of permanently reducing trust in both sides of the conflict and in the entire political system. The revealed Russia's influence on intensifying conflicts surrounding Brexit in the United Kingdom, or generating conflicts between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump supporters during the presidential election campaign, as exposed by whistle-blowers such as Cambridge Analytica, seems to be just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to such subversive activities (Kaiser, 2020; Wylie, 2020).

The subject of these considerations does not allow us to make an authoritative decision on whether we are currently dealing only with a crisis of liberal democracy or with its ultimate end. It also does not get us closer to answering whether the socio-political system we have been experiencing for about two centuries, with its current shape developed in the second half of the 20th century, is just an ephemeral phase in the political history of humanity, as some see it (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Migalski, 2020b), or whether it is just another paroxysm, adapting the democratic paradigm to a new social reality (Diamond, 2015). However, it defines perhaps the most important problem

of contemporary democracies, associated with the crisis of elections as an institution that should functionally channel political conflicts and legitimize political representation. In part, this also results from the different role that politicians themselves attribute to elections today. Originally, winning elections provided an opportunity to govern and implement one's political visions and programme. Since the second half of the 20th century, governance has increasingly become a means primarily focused on renewing the mandate of power (Downs, 1957). Decisions are made, at least in part, not so much in the interest of society, but with a focus on maintaining power. Politicians have also realized that the communicative form of electoral manipulation is an effective tool not only for winning but, above all, for retaining power. The advantages of incumbents in this area are extensively described by political scientists (Avis et al., 2017; Henderson et al., 2018; Meirowitz, 2008; Prior, 2006).

In these volatile social and political conditions, the democratic imponderables have remained unchanged. The electoral part of the democratic political regime is still based on solutions that were designed for societies from before the Internet age, and it implicitly assumes some balance between voters and the entities competing in elections and vying for their votes. However, parties have become political enterprises, making use of the latest research on shaping attitudes and political decisions and utilizing state-of-the-art marketing tools. They have gained much broader access to detailed data characterizing specific voters. The traces that a voter leaves in the virtual space (especially on social media) not only make it possible to profile them as the recipients of political communication but also to create an effective strategy to reach and influence their final decisions at the ballot box. The position of the voter in the electoral market has not deteriorated so much in comparison to the late 20th century, but in practice, it has started to feature a constant reduction in the instruments of their

decision-making subjectivity. It is still the citizen who holds the ballot (even when voting through the Internet, using a voting machine, etc.), but instead of being persuaded by participants in the electoral race, they can increasingly be programmed by them. Currently, they may be gradually reduced to the role of a politically utilitarian application, providing the semblance of democracy and the appearance of legitimacy.

The issues presented in this book are part of a broader context of the negative consequences of technological development for democracy as a political and social system. Some of these consequences are already visible from today's perspective and are related to the shrinking functional domain of the state as the creator and regulator of social relations. These include the redefinition of the concept of leadership, including political leadership, using digital technologies, and the transformation of decision-making processes towards the fulfilment of populist visions of politics. Additionally, in the near future, with the creation of a globally managed and universally accessible network of satellite Internet, most countries will lose the functional ability to regulate and control its use, including in the realm of political communication. What poses another threat to contemporary democracies is the increasing economic inequality resulting from the emergence of cryptocurrencies that operate beyond the scope of state and central bank regulation (Bartlett, 2019). We are only beginning to realize some of these threats, especially those related to tokenization, the use of big data, and the development of artificial intelligence. Its algorithms, ability to self-learn, and potential use in decision-making processes will pose fundamental challenges to democracy in the near future (O'Neil, 2017).

CHAPTER ONE

The theory of electoral manipulation

1.1. Introduction

Some researchers refer to the first two decades of the 21st century as a period of democratic retreat (Diamond, 2008), democratic recession (Diamond, 2015; Levitsky & Way, 2015), or even the third wave of autocratization (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019).¹ The latter statement is an obvious reference to Samuel Huntington's concept of the waves of democratization and democratic recession (1993). Unlike the assumptions that marked the previous waves of democratic backsliding, which often involved the establishment of authoritarian regimes through conflict (e.g., revolutions, coups, or wars), contemporary departure from the principles of liberal democracy mostly occurs peacefully. Democratic deviations, institutional deconsolidation, or the regression of political liberalism do not necessarily entail overt violations of constitutional principles but can gradually undermine democratic institutions (Przeworski, 2019). In this case, the mechanism of democratic recession involves the erosion of democratic principles while

¹ Based on the findings of Lührmann and Lindberg (2019), the process of autocratization is defined here as a departure from democratic principles towards non-democratic regimes, essentially the opposite of democratization. Autocracy itself is described as a regime that practices exclusionary and monopolistic politics, with political authorities becoming more arbitrary and repressive (Cassani & Tomini, 2018).

preserving the rules of political competition (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2015). Therefore, the system resulting from it is referred to as electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2006), and the states that implement it are called electoral autocracies (Bunce & Wolchik, 2006). They differ from liberal and electoral democracies in the actual restrictions on freedom and the fairness of elections rather than just the fact of holding elections.

Contemporary electoral autocracies do not resemble classical 20th-century authoritarian regimes. While maintaining basic electoral procedures (or creating their semblance), they deviate from democratic norms compared to liberal democracies, most often through the violation of principles of the separation and balance of powers, the personal and centralized concentration of executive power, the subordination of other forms of authority to the executive, or the agencification of public institutions and media (Bermeo, 2016). Some researchers describe this type of political system as multiparty autocracy (Wahman, Teorell & Hadenius, 2013). In such systems, elections become a tool for legitimizing rule (rather than governance), serving as the most legitimate means of attaining and maintaining power (Levitsky & Way, 2020). Political objectives are often achieved through non-electoral methods, and in such cases, elections are a means of obtaining democratic legitimacy for later non-democratic actions. Iza Ding and Dan Slater (2021) use the term “democratic decoupling” to describe the growing disconnection between the quality of elections and other components of liberal democracy eroded by elected representatives. The legitimization mechanism of universal elections is thus an attractive form of legitimization for political forces which, after winning elections by breaking democratic principles, can refer to the will of the voters (operationalized subjectively, e.g., in the form of the people’s will or sovereignty) as an axiological explanation for the basis of their actions (Mudde, 2004).

This does not mean, however, that the principles of political representation, rules for conducting elections, and the course of election campaigns in still-functioning liberal democracies are not subject to pressure. They are often under particular pressures and the instrumental use of mechanisms to influence the shape and course of electoral competition. Even in the case of formally fair elections, attempts are often made to intentionally influence the outcome and, therefore, the shape of political representation. As a result, the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions and procedures may not only begin in the electoral process but also affect factors indirectly related to it. This is because, in contemporary democracies, competition for voter support, while still one of the main dimensions of political rivalry (Antoszewski, 2004b), has changed its basic function. Instead of being a mechanism that ensures mutual influence between the rulers and citizens, elites and the masses (Heywood, 2015), it increasingly becomes a factor in consciously excluding losers and their voters from politics, which is particularly evident in the case of populist parties, which claim legal and moral “exclusivity of representation” (Müller, 2016). The post-election policies implemented by those in power have a highly deterministic character, with a preference for political agency over seeking compromise with opposition forces. Elections cease to be a functional mechanism for adapting the political system to naturally occurring social and political changes. Instead, they are increasingly becoming a divisive factor, which generates conflicts and leads to the breakdown of the political community.

This is primarily due to the fact that the contemporary means of influencing the results of the electoral process can go far beyond the framework of the elections themselves. The electoral process *sensu largo* encompasses all actions aimed at generating electoral support, even those taken outside the official election campaign. The latter has system-defined functions and is additionally confined within a specific

time regime. However, communication between electoral competitors and voters, especially in the era of social media, is ongoing and occurs throughout the entire inter-election period. Extending from one election to the next, it not only involves the activity of politicians but also decisions stemming from the mandate to govern. While in classical democratic rules, the goal of electoral victory should be the ability to implement a proposed political program, contemporary political decisions are often largely subordinated to gaining or renewing the mandate to hold power. Politicians seek to win elections to seize power, but once they have done it, they often make decisions with a short-term perspective of renewing their mandate to govern rather than pursuing long-term plans. Instead of carrying out “pro publico bono” policies, they implement “pro domo sua” strategies. The consequences of this mechanism, posing a threat to the democratic legitimacy of the electoral process and the authorities elected through it, can influence citizens’ opinions about the state of democracy and the level of trust in the rules and institutions of the political system (Pal, 2017). All of this raises the question of whether contemporary political competition, by marginalizing the significance of classical parliamentary and government arenas, has been dominated by its electoral dimension. An affirmative answer to this question, which is one of the assumed research hypotheses, prompts reflection on the relationship between the dominance of the electoral aspect in political competition and the observed manifestations of autocratization processes in democratic regimes, which also exhibit a characteristic feature of a specific sequentialism. Within this framework, mass-media and non-governmental organizations are first neutralized, which is followed by actions that increase political polarization through the stigmatization of opponents and the dissemination of fake information. It is only at the end that elections, which have lost their accountability function, are featured (Hellmeier et al., 2021).

In the analysis of the issue of autocratization processes in democratic regimes, one must consider a significant methodological challenge, namely the difficulty in defining the boundary where democratic democracies end. This problem can be studied from two basic perspectives. The first focuses on the consequences of governance after elections, where democratically elected authorities instrumentally limit public debate and subordinate independent institutions of the political system. This process is accurately defined by Marlies Glasius (2018), who describes it as the models of action which sabotage the accountability of a political actor to the people or their representatives by controlling them through information concealment, spreading disinformation, and silencing public opinion. The other perspective concerns the acceptable scale of electoral manipulation, indicating the point beyond which democratic principles are no longer respected. In this case, especially in the era of online communication, it is difficult to systematically establish such a point.

1.2. The instrumentalization of the electoral process

The contemporary regression of liberal democracies that we observe today (e.g., Cassani & Tomini, 2018; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), has shifted the focus of the most current electoral research to the analysis of electoral competition from the perspective of its fairness in (e.g., Donno, 2013; Edgell et al., 2018). What is the most crucial aspect in evaluating whether elections are fair are the conditions under which parties and candidates compete. The democratic ideal is a state in which the conditions for all participants in electoral competition are the same, but achieving this is only possible to a limited extent. This primarily depends on the varying levels of resources available to the competitors and their potential to utilize them. In the context presented, the practical understanding of electoral fairness for the entities

competing in them implies, on the one hand, an equal chance of electoral success and, on the other hand, an equal influence on shaping electoral rules. However, since differing levels of resources can determine electoral success or failure, political decision-makers may be tempted to manipulate the electoral process in a way that its elements acted *in favorem* to them. In such circumstances, the electoral process becomes instrumentalized for the benefit of specific entities, departing from democratic ideals of freedom, equality, and fairness. Elections become unfair because, although democracy dictates the formal equality of opportunity, the practical dimension differentiates the conditions of competition. Apart from the issue of the different resources possessed by competing entities, this will also stem from factors such as the nature of their institutional roots or their ability to affect the decision-making process that directly concerns them.

Research on the instrumentalization of the electoral competition process aligns with socially and politically relevant political science analyses that are more concerned with issues related to delegitimizing mechanisms in liberal democracies (Bishop & Hoeffler, 2016). Earlier research in this area focused on electoral fraud and manipulation in non-democratic states (Levitsky & Way, 2002; Schedler, 2002), particularly within regimes described as “competitive authoritarianism.” Currently, the emphasis is shifting towards examining not just the adherence to the principles of fair elections in liberal democracies, but also the mechanisms through which legal influence is wielded to differentially impact the positions of competing entities in elections (Simpser, 2013; Ham, 2015). This shift arises from the increasing pressure to determine the electoral competition, manifested by political forces’ subordination of their competencies, resources, and positions in the political system to the process of influencing the election outcome. While, in the classical understanding of democratic representation, elections serve as a means to achieve political goals, the electoral

determinism perspective sees them as the ultimate source of political subjectivity.

Since the establishment of the classic principles of free and fair elections, significant changes have occurred both in the campaign reality of conducting elections and in the functions assigned to the procedures for obtaining political representation (Żukowski, 2015). One systemic effect of these changes is the instrumentalization of electoral competition, which, instead of focusing on selecting the best possible political representation or fulfilling the functions expected of the political system, subordinates elections to the individualized interests of politicians and parties. This is one of the reasons why contemporary elections, by raising doubts among voters about the fairness of the electoral process, are increasingly losing their legitimizing function (see, e.g., Donno, 2013; Norris, 2004, 2015; Simpser, 2013). As mentioned earlier, this happens in connection with a particular approach to the principles and rules of free and fair elections. The fundamental mechanism of this particular approach is the triumph of the deterministic dimension of democratic procedures, which, instead of prioritizing consensus and the common good, give precedence to the mechanical outcomes of electoral decisions – the division between winners and losers. As a result, actors in political competition resort to legally permissible but ethically questionable means of exerting particular influence on the course of electoral competition. Such actions do not contribute to the construction and solidification of democratic values among citizens (Hartvigsen, 2008), and their impact on the political system is delegitimizing, potentially causing voter frustration and strengthening populist tendencies and attitudes (Norris, 2015).

The delegitimizing impact of general elections can be placed in the broader context of the processes of deconsolidation in contemporary democracies. Research on liberal democracies in this area began in the 1970s when scholars noticed significant tensions, often arising

from systemic sources (Sartori, 2005). These tensions stemmed from the inadequate adaptation of classical democratic tools to the structural changes taking place in societies, social communication, and the mechanisms of political competition. Deconsolidation is most often understood as a continuous and multi-layered separation of the functional aspects of democracy from the actual political practice. For the purposes of this book, we must identify the electoral inspirations and sources of the deconsolidation process in contemporary democracies. In the context mentioned, five significant reasons for deconsolidation can be identified. The first of them refers to changing patterns of political competition, particularly at the electoral level. The essence of contemporary politics has shifted from values and ideology to efficiency and political pragmatism. Electoral programmes have lost their original role as a catalogue of promised actions after taking power and have become more tools of political marketing. This can lead to political disintegration, as elections no longer serve as a unifying factor between voters and the political system (Linz & Valenzuela, 1994). Another reason for democratic deconsolidation is the fact that the principles of the modern economic system deviate from its original rules, derived from the industrial structure of democratic societies. The classic concepts of left and right, along with their economic designations, have blurred, and many voters (at least a significant portion of them) have lost their ideological anchors (Wojtasik, 2015). As a result, economic interests now prevail over social interests, reducing the political agency of citizens in favour of the redistributive function of the state and supranational economic structures, limiting the holistic impact of the electoral process. For example, the fiscal domain of states is often constrained by the scale of global corporate activity, making it challenging to effectively tax activities conducted within their jurisdictions (Reich, 2008). What is the third cause of deconsolidation is the crisis of political representation principles,

which can be traced back to the weakening of traditional socio-political divisions and increased volatility in political attitudes, leading to the rise of populism and populist attitudes (Taggart, 2004). This, in turn, weakens the bonds between voters and political parties and political institutions (Turska-Kawa, 2015). The fourth mechanism of deconsolidation is revealed in the transformations in party systems (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), which include key changes in the rules of competition between political parties, such as the fading of traditional binary categorizations in party competition or the increasing significance of the personalization of politics. In the former case, classic political divisions (e.g., liberalism – conservatism) have been blurred or replaced by apolitical political formulas, such as the new populism.² This is a result of the exhaustion of traditional socio-political divisions and the unleashing of voter group volatility (Turska-Kawa, 2015).

² Among researchers, there is no consensus on whether populism can be classified as a type of political ideology. Some scholars refer to it as an ideology (Mudde et al., 2013) which opposes dominant social values (Canovan, 1999) and posits that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004). Ben Stanley (2008) refers to populism as a thin-ideological concept. On the other hand, some scholars view populism as a reaction to a crisis of political representation (Taggart, 2004) or as the implementation of policies supported by a significant portion of the population (Dornbusch & Edwards, 1989). Jan Werner Müller (2016) describes populism as a shadow of representative democracy. In contrast to the traditional ideological explanation of populism (Krastev, 2011), the new populism is characterized as a worldview that helps individuals understand the complexity of the surrounding world through functional simplifications (Revelli, 2019). Unlike the ideological understanding of populism, presenting it in a worldview context detaches it from traditional left and right references. The source of the new populism is related to the personalization of political competition or the tendency to replace the role of traditional political institutions with new ones that better respond to the need for direct and immediate actions demanded by such movements (Wojtasik et al., 2021).

The personalization of politics, also known as the personalization of political preferences (Peszyński, 2012), weakens party identifications and leads to increased political polarization, the extremely high levels of which threaten the foundations of democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). What is the fifth potential cause of deconsolidation is the diminishing influence of voters on the process of government formation, primarily because parliamentary elections are increasingly inconclusive, meaning they do not generate definitive outcomes. This can lead to multi-layered distortion of the original electoral verdict.³ Firstly, to form a government, parties with limited voter support may be included in coalitions. Secondly, parties with substantial voter support may be isolated by other groups. Finally, the election winner may be eliminated from the government. All of this points to the contemporary relevance of the contractual parliamentary model as a mechanism for correcting the will of the voters (Żukiewicz, 2020). These electoral sources of democratic deconsolidation are characteristic of well-established democracies. In the case of “young democracies,” there is at least one more factor – the weak institutionalization of political parties and party systems. Its most significant consequence is the instability of electoral competition patterns, which can lead to increased susceptibility to electoral manipulations.

The processes of democratic deconsolidation occur on two fundamental levels, with electoral processes as the systemic link between them. The first level is the institutional dimension, which becomes less stable and predictable, and democratic procedures become less repetitive (Karvonen, 2010). This can lead to increased institutional

³ Another example of a possible distortion of the will of the voters is the formation of a so-called surrogate government, where a person who is not the leader of the party and is susceptible to behind-the-scenes control assumes the position of prime minister. For more details see: Zuba (2020).

instability in the political sphere and reduced effectiveness in the exercise of power by the governing authorities (Conradt, 2006). The second level is the social dimension, where the connections between citizens and the political sphere, as well as between voters and their political representatives, weaken (Stubager, 2008). As a result, citizens tend to show less respect for existing standards and behavioural patterns, and voters exhibit greater electoral volatility (Turska-Kawa, 2015). The delegitimizing impact of elections can manifest itself in two main directions. The first of them involves the questioning of the legitimacy of the electoral procedure itself, as well as its outcomes, such as the alternation of power. The other one concerns the political legitimacy of the representation obtained through elections, which may be perceived by some voters as lacking a moral mandate to govern.

The existing body of literature does not provide convincing evidence to suggest that the sources of delegitimizing mechanisms in elections have an endogenous nature associated with specific constitutional arrangements. Most scholars agree with the perspective of universal effects of adopted solutions, regardless of their local context (Birch, 1984). This is related to the somewhat mechanical implementation of the principles of fair elections in liberal democracies, built upon many years of experience in this regard. However, it seems that the role of contextual factors is becoming increasingly noticeable, especially in extensive comparative studies. They indicate possible sources of the delegitimizing role of elections in situations marked by instability in electoral rules (frequent and particularly motivated changes), institutional advantages of politicians holding elected offices in courting voter support, or a high level of disruptions (such as fake news) in political communication (see, for example, Ham, 2015; Hyde & Marinov, 2012; Gehlbach & Simpson, 2015).

The undoubted crisis of contemporary liberal democracies has complex origins. Those that revolve around universal suffrage strike at

the fundamental institution of democracy and escape simple analyses from election observer reports (Kelley & Kolev, 2010). Even meeting the criteria for free and fair elections is not a *sine qua non* condition for describing them as fair. All elections in democratic countries are monitored by independent international and domestic organizations. Their findings serve as the basis for in-depth analyses that refer to the principles of free and fair elections (Lindberg, 2006; Munck, 2009). However, these analyses very often do not take into account the issue of actual electoral manipulation. The modern toolkit for manipulation eludes the classic tools used to analyse the fairness of elections, which focus more on the procedural dimension than the practical one. This is because the procedural dimension is more quantifiable, making potential manipulative actions easier to decipher. In contrast, the practical dimension is determined by the specific possibilities of influencing the electoral process, including the behaviours and decisions of the competing entities in the elections and the implementation of their multifaceted strategies.

1.3. The structuring of electoral competition

What is the primary subject of electoral competition is the rivalry among the entities participating in elections: candidates, social movements, and political parties vying for voter support. As mentioned earlier, the analysed mechanism of certain democratic regimes shifting towards autocratic models, known as electoral autocracies, may indicate the increased significance of electoral competition in comparison to other arenas. In such cases, winning elections and subsequently assuming power, often while citing the will of the sovereign, enables the introduction of undemocratic adjustments to the functioning of the political system. Such a process links the achievement of broader political objectives to the attainment of necessary election results and,

consequently, the assumption or retention of power. In this context, elections can not only serve as a mechanism for acquiring political relevance but can also act as a barrier to undemocratic tendencies. Much depends on the electoral practice of competition and the consequences it entails, rather than rigid electoral rules.

The primary assumption of electoral competition is the rationality of the participating entities. It assumes that these entities undertake planned actions aimed at strategic goals defined as essential for organizational and political survival. Only their achievement enables them to pose more politically sophisticated challenges. To achieve these goals, entities in electoral competition implement various types of strategies. Among the most important are programme, electoral, marketing, communication, and personal strategies (Wojtasik, 2015b). However, all of these strategies must be market-oriented, assuming the efficient use of available resources. Their market-oriented nature involves intentional attempts to change the political environment, especially in the areas that political parties and candidates consider critical. From a broader perspective, it can be said that these strategies aim to improve their competitive position in the political market (*ibidem*). In the context of electoral competition, such strategies have two primary dimensions. The first dimension points to the voter as the factor determining the planning and logistics of electoral campaigns. In this context, the strategy involves the strategic analysis of voter behaviour and the division of the electorate into separate segments, each of which is targeted with tailored communication using dedicated communication channels. The other dimension relates to the conditions of electoral competition and involves the strategic allocation of available resources to places which guarantee their most efficient utilization.

Taking into consideration the above assumptions, concerning the relationship between competing entities in elections, the structuring of the electoral competition space can be presented in two

dimensions: executive and mandate. In the executive dimension, which relates to power, entities are divided into those who hold power (the ruling party) and those who aspire to that power (the opposition). Within this dimension, the relationship between the two sides of the political conflict is shaped, solidifying the reference framework of ruling versus opposition. The cyclical nature of elections means that the authorization granted earlier can be renewed if voters are satisfied with the policies in place or revoked as a sanction for failing to meet expectations (Antoszewski, 2004b). This process is not mechanical, and to some extent, entities with attributes of political relevance can decide to be one of the sides of the political dispute. This applies particularly to those who could be part of the ruling power structure (especially in a coalition government) but choose to be in the opposition. This decision can be based on objective or pragmatic considerations. The objective one is the inability to participate in power due to the lack of coalition potential. This happens when a party is internally divided, and entering the government could trigger disintegration processes. Pragmatic reasons result from a higher level of political subjectivity. The first real motivation for being in the opposition is the inability to realize one's intentions within the existing power structure. The differences between the ruling party and the other political actors can be significant enough to prevent long-term cooperation, or other factors may prevent such cooperation. These factors can include ideological issues when parties belong to opposing political families and the existing patterns of political competition in the system that may not generate consensual ways of exercising power, as well as personal conflicts among politicians. The second source of opposition is anti-system sentiment, understood here as a refusal to accept the functioning of the political system in its current form and the promotion of changes that, if they do not fall under the legal framework, at least do not fit within the political culture (Wojtasik, 2012a).

The binary structuring of the electoral competition space in the executive dimension, the ruling versus the opposition, clearly indicates that those in power have greater potential to shape the rules of competition. This conclusion stems from the ability to use governance tools to shape the competitive environment for voter support, as well as from the experience gained from previous election victories. The advantages of those in power can come from several sources. The first source is the benefits of holding power. The political capital that allowed them to gain a mandate in the previous elections may be increased by exercising power in line with the expectations of the society (Eggers & Spirling, 2015). The second source is greater social recognition associated with the actions taken in power, which naturally draw public attention to themselves. Opposition members must actively seek such interest to achieve a similar effect (which is usually not entirely achievable). The third source is the influence on the redistribution of the effects of power, which can be directed to the segments of the society likely to support the ruling party in the upcoming elections (Gelman & King, 1990). In the case of the opposition and its candidates, this potential is significantly smaller. Their actions, in addition to natural criticism of those in power and offering an alternative for voters, must focus on attempts to change the favourable contextual factors (e.g., selection rules), the socio-demographic profile of the supporting segments of the electorate, or efforts to create new alternative options for voters who have previously supported the ruling party.

In the mandate dimension, the structuring factor of the political competition space is the position held within the political system. In this context, the dividing line runs between those who hold a mandate from the previous elections (incumbents⁴) and those who as-

⁴ In the process of electoral competition, incumbents are people who currently hold a mandate and seek re-election.

pire to take it over (challengers or contenders). It is important to note that this factor not only influences individual political actors but also the entire structures of incumbents and challengers. Most researchers emphasize the advantage of incumbents (incumbency advantage) in political competition, identifying its sources in resources (Avis et al., 2017), media exposure (Meirowitz, 2008), or political experience (Fiva & Røhr, 2018). Polish studies also confirm the existence of competitive advantages for incumbents over challengers (Flis, 2018). Only under specific conditions can situations be identified in which challengers have an advantaged position (incumbency disadvantage) relative to incumbents (Klašnja, 2016).

The asymmetry in the incumbents-challengers dimension regarding the resources they possess and their ability to use them makes differences in the competitive position in the electoral market quite natural and common. As these differences can impact electoral prospects (and sometimes even election outcomes), some decision-makers may be tempted to differentiate the environment in which they compete for the votes of the electorate. The main goal of such differentiation would be better allocation of their own resources or the reduction of the electoral potential of political opponents, thus increasing their chances and/or limiting the prospects of competitors. In terms of resource utilization, the most apparent differentiation lies in the potential held by incumbents and contenders (Bernhardt & Ingberman, 1985; Bracco et al., 2013). Incumbents are usually in a privileged position due to the mandate they currently hold and the consequences it entails (Kukovič & Haček, 2013). Some scholars also point out the relationship between holding office and the re-election plan – an incumbent's actions during their term may be motivated by their participation in the next election (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2004; Trounstone, 2009). In such a situation, their current political activities are subordinated to the strategic goal of re-election. This often includes the deliberate

creation of rules for electoral competition and market positions, such as supporting legislative acts which allocate public funds to locations that are most favourable from an electoral interest perspective, known as “pork-barrel legislation” in the United States (Wiecech, 2016).

The situation where contenders gain an advantage is less common and less well-documented in the literature. In contrast to the privileged position of incumbents (who typically have the systemic sources of support), the factors favouring contenders are usually contextual and derived from the current state of affairs. Among the most important of them are fundamental changes in the party system, an increase in the electoral potential of competing challengers, and significant alterations in the existing electoral system (Eggers & Spirling, 2015). Changes in the party system, involving its openness to new actors (and the loss of positions by existing parties), may lead to a decrease in the potential of incumbents (Klašnja & Titiunik, 2017). An increase in the attractiveness (financial, political, or executive) of elected positions can be a factor in boosting the electoral potential of contenders. This might encourage candidates with higher political potential, for whom the previous proposition was unattractive, to participate in elections. Similarly, significant changes in the electoral system which practically alter the rules of political competition can greatly limit the advantages of incumbents associated with their experience in successful participation in elections under the previous rules (Ariga, 2015). Polish research on the potential of challengers suggests that the most important determinant of their electoral success prospects is the weakening of the incumbent’s position (Flis et al., 2018; Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2020a).

The presented two-dimensional distinction in the electoral competition space is the most useful in elections where a multi-person political representation is chosen, determining the shape of the executive. In the case of elections for monist bodies, there is a logical assignment

in the relationships of the governing-incumbent vs. opposition-contenders. However, in the case of elections for pluralistic bodies that do not directly shape the executive, the relationship incumbent-contender (contenders) can be directly considered.⁵ In the case of elections for pluralistic bodies with competence in creating the executive, the following relationships between the relationship to power and the position of electoral competition entities in the political system are possible: (a) governing-incumbent; (b) governing-contender; (c) opposition-incumbent; (d) opposition-contender. In the first case, there is a straightforward relationship in which a candidate holds a mandate and runs on behalf of the entity holding the executive power. The government-contender formula indicates the candidacy in the elections of a candidate from the governing party who does not hold a mandate. The third case shows the candidacy of a representative of the opposition who holds a mandate, while the fourth case concerns an opposition candidate without a mandate.

1.4. The instrumentalization of electoral uncertainty

Adam Przeworski (1991, p. 13) refers to democracy as a system of “organized uncertainty.” This term is based on the fundamental assumption of democratic electoral competition, where no one can be sure of victory before the elections. Unlike autocracies where the result is certain before the vote and the rules of the elections are uncertain, in liberal democracies, the rules of the electoral process are known, but the outcome is unknown (Migalski, 2020a). Democratic elections are

⁵ Examples of such bodies include the second chambers of parliaments that do not participate in the process of appointing executive authorities (e.g., the Polish Senate) or have a different nature (e.g., representations of territorial communities).

a procedure that structures the uncertainty of translating individual preferences into political representation. They also indirectly contribute to the division between those in power and the opposition, although the relationship between electoral support and prospects for participating in the government is not as obvious as a function of the election result, especially in multiparty systems. The mechanisms for creating both electoral and cabinet coalitions in consolidated democracies can introduce a political correction to the will of the voters (Armstrong & Duch, 2010; Golder, 2006). In consolidated democracies, situations where the winning party does not form a government are relatively rare, but cases where the candidate with the most votes does not receive a mandate occur more frequently. However, they do not violate democratic principles. In the case of political parties, these outcomes result from the post-election system of relationships between them and the patterns of government formation. In personalized elections, such corrections are made through the influence of the electoral system rules. In both of these cases, democratic principles are preserved by ensuring political choice uncertainty, and politicians and voters know in advance the mechanisms that determine the distribution of mandates (Schofield, 2007).

On a side note, it should be added that there are situations where, despite the lack (or significant limitation) of political uncertainty in the choice of representation, the generation of political representation satisfies the principles of fair elections, and the obtained mandates have democratic legitimacy. This happens when it is impossible to hold actual elections due to the participation of only one candidate. Formally, there are two possible situations. In the first, known in the literature as uncontested elections, elections take place as a plebiscite, which often leads to voter frustration and either their absence from the polls or a significant increase in the number of invalidated votes (Lindell, 2017). However, there remains an element of uncertainty since it is

not uncommon for such a single candidate to fail to obtain the required legal support. In the other situation, referred to as uncontested seats, the correct nomination and registration of a candidate alone determines their receipt of a mandate. It is precisely in this case, with a mandate obtained in accordance with democratic rules, that one can speak of quasi-electoral uncertainty, which exists until the candidate's nomination is correctly submitted (Sharman, 2003).

Since the level of electoral uncertainty affects the prospects of political actors competing in elections, it is also a fundamental mechanism that enables electoral manipulation. This happens because of the ability to instrumentally influence the level of uncertainty in the entire electoral process and its individual components (Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974; Strom, 1975). Therefore, political uncertainty is considered a general phenomenon in liberal democracies, and electoral uncertainty is a specific form of political uncertainty. In the case of the former, its components include the uncertainty of the electoral process and the uncertainty of the electoral outcome. The level of electoral uncertainty is the subject of a game between political actors, who are interested in shaping its impact on electoral processes. It is both an attribute of the choices made and the object of choice. Therefore, in electoral competition processes, it is considered both a strong independent variable and a key dependent variable (Schedler, 2013). Electoral uncertainty can affect issues such as the election outcome itself, voter turnout, or the final decisions made by voters. Researchers indicate two main sources of electoral uncertainty (Fowler & Smirnov, 2009). The first source of uncertainty is related to the uncertainty surrounding voter behaviour and the motivations that determine their decisions about participation in elections and choosing a specific party or candidate. In this case, the number of factors influencing voter decisions, their character, and the subjective gradation of individual voter motivations make it possible to speak of individualized uncertainty in the decision

of each voter and uncertainty in whole segments of the electoral market. The other source of uncertainty regarding the election outcome arises from the assumption that voters do not have effective tools to assess the positions of candidates and political parties in the electoral competition space. Furthermore, the perception of this position may not be accurate. This is due to the activities carried out by political actors competing in elections, which “blur” the electoral message to increase the likelihood of gaining higher electoral support or at least discouraging potential voters of their political opponents. In this case, decisions may be made on the basis of imaginations and beliefs rather than rational analysis (Westholm, 1997). Consequently, they can be shaped based on manipulative instruments.

Changes in electoral uncertainty are a fundamental parameter moderating the course of the electoral process, and, thus, the subject of particular competition between political forces, the interest of which is to increase or decrease its level. Through these changes, they can improve their competitive position in the electoral market or worsen the position of their rivals. The basic components of electoral uncertainty are communication and institutional issues (Schedler, 2013), which also determine its types: communication and institutional. They usually remain closely interdependent, acting synergistically on entities interested in manipulating the process. What is the primary assumption of the communication component is the positive relationship between the pluralism of available information and the rationality of the choice made with their participation. Therefore, the temporal field of influence of changes in the level of electoral uncertainty is the present because it shapes the image of reality on which voters can base their decisions. Political forces, operating in the conditions of limiting the influence of the information component, focus on shaping the environment which enables the intentional selection of messages to create expected attitudes and make choices in the conditions

of imperfect access to information. In the opposite principles, when increasing the influence of the information component is the goal, electoral competition entities can be marked by generating two types of strategies. The first of them makes it possible to manage the level of recipients' perception, media competition in search of information, and reaching voters, thus ensuring them free access to information. The other strategy involves providing recipients with information aimed at creating information chaos, calculated to disorient voters or even mislead them. The assumption of this strategy is to conclude that an individual is able to absorb and logically analyse a limited amount of information.

The institutional component, unlike the communication dimension, focuses on the future, making the design of the normative system a subject of action in such a way that it enables the impact on the level of institutional uncertainty (increase or decrease, depending on intentions). In seeking sources of limiting the influence of institutional uncertainty, one can identify reactions that can serve as protection against the increase of uncertainty and the creation and articulation of expectations regarding its reduction. What is a classic mechanism for limiting institutional uncertainty are specific changes in the rules of political competition at the electoral level, which, in their assumptions, limit the chances of the entities they are directed against. As a result, they can increase the prospects of the entities which introduce changes. For example, changes in the electoral system are a consequence of the existing balance of political forces in the parliament and government. The potential of political parties can lead them to promote institutional patterns and procedures that give them a chance to consolidate or increase their relative strength (Colomer, 2016). In this case, articulating the need to reduce uncertainty may refer, for example, to the demands for replacing a proportional system with a majority system, which generally promotes larger political groups, or introducing

statutory electoral thresholds that force at least some voters to use strategic voting (and among some political parties, consolidation actions). Protective reactions to institutional threats can also stem from the identification of negative consequences of high levels of political uncertainty. An example of such a mechanism may be the desire to limit the effective number of parties at the parliamentary level, seen as a panacea for the high instability of governments generated by elections (Wojtasik, 2012a). Reverse strategies, based on attempts to increase the level of institutional uncertainty, refer to the need to change the existing system of dependencies, especially to increase the likelihood of alternation in power. An increase in institutional uncertainty will, in most cases, work against incumbents, increasing the chances of their political rivals. Another institutional factor that can increase uncertainty is the limitation of formal control over the creation and operation of electoral competition entities, including procedural requirements for participating in elections. A classic factor in increasing uncertainty here will be the limitation or complete abolition of public funding for party activities, the presence of which promotes highly institutionalized political parties (Migalski et al., 2006).

The fundamental relationships between the factors of electoral uncertainty are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types and functions of electoral uncertainty

	Reducing uncertainty	Increasing uncertainty
Communication uncertainty	– shaping beliefs based on limited information – making strategic choices in the conditions of imperfect access to information	– creating information pluralism and increasing the efficiency of the flow of information, ensuring free access to it – managing the increase of the recipients' perception – communication strategies which create the rivalry of media in the search and provision of information

Table 1

	Reducing uncertainty	Increasing uncertainty
Institutional uncertainty	– creating expectations for a shift in the nature of political rivalry to a less confrontational one – protective reactions to institutional threats (e.g., reducing the instability of power structures)	– managing the process of increasing access to the political market through the elimination of formal barriers for weaker competing entities – promoting institutional rules affecting the increase in the level of uncertainty

Source: The author's own study based on: A. Schedler (2013, p. 22).

In general terms, changes in the level of electoral uncertainty have a directional vector of impact, oriented towards the incumbents or the opposition. Those primarily interested in limiting the level of uncertainty are incumbents and entities who seek to maintain the stability of the existing political order. This is because as they were able to generate support in previous elections that granted them a mandate, the assumption of the durability and repeatability of electoral behaviour patterns will work in their favour (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2002). Restricting the influence of communication and institutional determinants of electoral uncertainty is the main mechanism for increasing the competitive advantage of incumbents. Reverse strategies, based on attempts to increase the level of institutional uncertainty, are driven by the need to change the existing system of dependencies, particularly with regard to the possibility of a change in power. An increase in institutional uncertainty will, in most cases, work against incumbents, making it more likely for their political rivals to gain electoral potential. Therefore, contenders should be interested in opening up the electoral market more broadly, both institutionally

(in terms of electoral competition patterns) and communicatively (increasing information pluralism and the level of personalization of political communication), as well as enhancing the cognitive abilities of voters (Pasek, 2011). The most effective mechanism for increasing the level of electoral uncertainty is to limit control over the creation and operation of electoral competition entities, including formal requirements for participating in elections. An example of this could be the elimination or reduction of the existing threshold clauses (electoral thresholds, electoral deposits, etc.). The model of campaign financing is a factor that has an ambiguous impact on the level of electoral uncertainty. Although its influence is highly context-specific, in general terms, limiting the resources allocated to elections can increase the level of electoral uncertainty. This happens when formal rules prevent entities with financial advantages (often incumbents) from using them.

Changes in the level of electoral uncertainty can either strengthen or weaken the market position of political parties. As previously mentioned, incumbents generally favour reducing the level of uncertainty because it minimizes the risks associated with their actions and solidifies the conditions under which they won the last election. For them, it results in a more efficient allocation of their resources in the electoral market. It also appeals to the motivations of different voter groups – in neutral conditions, the voters of incumbents are usually more motivated to vote because they are stimulated by the known reward of having their favoured party in power. Therefore, incumbents are interested in increasing the level of uncertainty only when there is a real threat of losing their mandate (Le Borgne & Lockwood, 2000). In the context of communication uncertainty, decision-makers can, on the one hand, influence the communication environment by selectively affecting the chances of the subjects interested in a particular outcome. They can deliberately withhold full information, restrict

access to it, and differentiate the scope of available information for various stakeholders (Wojtasik, 2015b). On the other hand, especially in the era of social media, both the ruling party and the opposition can significantly increase communication uncertainty for specific segments of the electorate, and sometimes even individual voters. Experiences related to the activities of companies specializing in targeting political communication clearly indicate that what is the most significant threat today is not just the overall change in the level of communication uncertainty but the instrumental fragmentation of its level for individual voters, facilitated by the use of the Internet. As Christopher Wylie (2020), one of the managers of Cambridge Analytica, pointed out, “This means that a single action in cyberspace can manifest itself in countless physical locations, and that an action taken in one place can have consequences somewhere else entirely.” The widespread use of social media by people means that politicians know more about voters than the voters know about themselves and use this knowledge for their own purposes (Migalski & Kaczmarzyk, 2020).

1.5. The methodological dimension of the study of electoral manipulation

Social development has led contemporary liberal democracies to have a more complex structure of political power and, as a result, a greater degree of complexity in formal decision-making procedures as compared to their predecessors. This is the result of the development of democracy as a holistic concept, aiming to encompass, regulate, and control a wide range of ongoing social processes. The functional assumption of democracy as a system of universal values is the implementation of these principles across a broad spectrum of social activities. One of these areas includes the sphere of formal rules for

political representation and making authoritative decisions. Elections are a procedure that functionally combines both of these aspects. On the one hand, they provide indirect citizen participation in governance (through decisions made by their chosen representatives), and on the other hand, they serve as a legitimizing factor for democratically elected authorities. Andrew Heywood (2015) observes: “Elections are like a two-way road, ensuring mutual influence between those in power and citizens and between the elites and the masses.” The undeniable social attractiveness of elections (especially in an inclusive dimension) as a democratic procedure means that they are the focal point of public interest. This holds true not only during voting or election campaigns but also in the period between elections. During this time, they serve as potential future points of political change and set the direction for the actions of politicians and political parties.

In practice, in a liberal democracy, without harming democracy itself, elections cannot be permanently replaced by another equally functional procedure for deciding on the shape of political representation. The socially inclusive nature of elections means that every voter can feel the power of their vote, and every elected representative can feel accountable to their voters or, more broadly, to the entire society. However, the internal reference systems of political systems in democratic states generate a multitude of specific solutions, making the currently used electoral procedures not only very complex but also extremely diverse in terms of these solutions. This diversity arises from the existence of a lot of components of the electoral process that directly influence the organization of elections and their ultimate outcome. Importantly, the form of these solutions and their subsequent modifications result from decisions made by politicians and parties, the competing entities in elections, based on regulations they themselves introduced. All of this means that elements of the electoral process can and often are the subject of particular decisions aimed at

instrumentally influencing the prospects and chances of those competing in elections.

Given the above, every democratic decision regarding the way legislative or executive powers are delegated may carry the temptation of intentionally diversifying the level of empowerment and the political prospects of decision-makers. This can lead to an increase in the influence of some decision-making centres at the expense of others, and the effects of the decisions made may be instrumentalized, reflecting the intentions of the promoters of such manipulations. The social and political attractiveness of elections arises from the possibility of achieving political representation through the means accepted by both voters and politicians, with international approval from the democratic community. Along with the pluralistic nature of decision-making, elections provide social legitimacy for the elected authorities and the emerging effects of governance (Schubert et al., 2015). Beyond influencing the shape of the elected authorities and, consequently, their future decisions, it is precisely the legitimizing dimension of elections that constitutes the main temptation for manipulating the course and outcome of elections.

The phenomena of manipulative influence on the electoral process are referred to as electoral misconduct, electoral malpractice, or electoral malfeasance (Birch, 2007). However, there is no consensus on whether to attribute legal or unlawful characteristics to these phenomena or on the possible consequences they have on elections. It should be pointed out that some researchers consider them illegal actions, while others view them as ethically unacceptable or morally ambiguous but not in violation of democratic principles. This calls for a more precise taxonomy and definition. In the context presented in this book, unlike electoral fraud and manipulation (which are prosecuted under the law), the focus is on electoral manipulations that are legal actions. These manipulations fall within the broad democratic

principles and are not subject to criminal prosecution, nor can they challenge the electoral outcome (Alvarez et al., 2009). However, they are ethically questionable and undermine the axiological foundations of liberal democracies, leading to a decrease in citizens' trust in democratic institutions. As a result, voters may lose some of their sense of agency and potential influence on politics. Systemically, they reduce the legitimacy granted to representatives and authorities elected through elections. In general terms, the use of electoral manipulation by politicians is part of a broader process of delegitimizing contemporary political systems, observed in most consolidated democracies since the second half of the 20th century (Morlino, 2009).

Electoral manipulations, according to the goal of their initiators, intentionally differentiate the potential uses of electoral competition entities. Political parties, electoral coalitions, candidates, and political elites seek to maximize their post-election influence by using procedures and taking actions that are favourable to them (and/or unfavourable to their opponents) with a view to the possible voting outcome by citizens. The ability to carry out these manipulations is thus a subject of competition among entities which want to exert particular influence on the final election results. Taking into consideration the fact that different types of actions within manipulations may entail different types of effects, the ability to instrumentally influence the election outcome can also be determined by the manipulative actions of other entities. In such cases, the activity may arise from the need to counteract the possible consequences of manipulative manoeuvres by political opponents.

Not every influence in the institutional and communicative spheres of the electoral process will have manipulative intentions. However, the concept of electoral manipulation is often unjustifiably extended to other phenomena (e.g., Harvey, 2016). Electoral manipulations should be defined by the presence of four distinctive characteristics. The first

is the nature of the actions – they are organized and intentionally aimed at benefiting their initiators. Therefore, the process of detecting manipulations should not be considered solely from the perspective of their outcome, as it may, for example, be inconsistent with the initiators' intentions, or estimating its effectiveness may not be possible (e.g., in the case of most communicative manipulations – one can only speculate about their effectiveness or lack thereof). The second feature is legality. Such actions do not violate the existing legal norms (although they are often ethically questionable) or they take place in unregulated areas, such as issues of misinformation in election campaigns (Jerit & Zhao, 2020). For these reasons, actions like fraud, forgery, or electoral corruption, which are subject to penalization or criminalization to varying degrees in different countries, are not included in this category. Another essential characteristic of electoral manipulations is their reducing function for the integrity of the electoral process. Their application allows some electoral competition entities to gain unjustified advantages, while the competitive position of others is deliberately weakened. Finally, they have clearly defined potential beneficiaries and/or victims. As early as in the planning stage, it is known who should benefit or lose from their implementation. The last, although not necessary, but most often occurring feature of electoral manipulations is the desire to hide them from the public opinion by the manipulating entities. In this last dimension, Andreas Schedler (2013) observes that the legitimacy cost of instrumentalizing the electoral process (for its initiators) is a function of its effectiveness and the social visibility of manipulative intentions.

At least some electoral manipulations are often wrongly equated with electoral engineering, which adapts the possible effects of the electoral process to the expected functions assigned to the political system. An institutional way of understanding the concept of electoral engineering emphasizes a moderating factor in the behaviour of

citizens, politicians, and political parties through intentional changes in the electoral process. Theories associated with institutionalism stress the creative function of electoral engineering, while modernization theories focus on the adaptive mechanism of the political processes to changes in the social sphere (Norris, 2004). This is because, unlike instrumentally understood electoral manipulations, not all institutionalized forms of influencing electoral outcomes are aimed at the particular maximization of the effects achievable through voting (Tsebelis, 1990). These actions are often motivated positively, such as securing political representation through elections that protect the interests of politically significant minorities that would otherwise be marginalized in normal circumstances. In this case, we can speak of systemic reasons for applying electoral engineering. This effect is achieved when it is a way to fulfil in the best possible way the functions of elections from the perspective of their democratic determinants. This can happen, for example, in societies with a high degree of ethnic or religious heterogeneity (Reilly, 2001). However, this does not mean that, considering democratic principles, one can arbitrarily shape the rules for political representation. In this context, Arend Lijphart (1990) points out the moral limitations of electoral engineering, within which “changes to the electoral system should not serve particular interests.”

Electoral manipulations, as a subject of political science research, can be placed within various research contexts. Some important research categories include their effectiveness, the necessary resources for conducting them (Gorton, 2016), or their impact on various elements of the political system (Wojtasik, 2018a). They can also be studied in terms of their influence on the nature of political competition (Wojtasik, 2015b), mechanisms for creating or avoiding political responsibility (Wojtasik, 2018b), or the resilience of individual entities against manipulative actions directed at them (Wojtasik, 2017). In this

last context, entities involved in electoral competition must perceive the risk of manipulation as an impetus for adopting adaptive strategies to manage the cyclic threat within the electoral process (Schedler, 2013). For the analyses conducted in this book, it will be crucial to examine electoral manipulations in three approaches: (1) object-oriented, (2) subject-oriented, and (3) periodic. This is determined by the specific areas of influence that indicate the potential fields of manipulative actions by entities involved in electoral competition.

In the object-oriented approach (1), electoral manipulations are aimed at producing two types of effects: social and procedural. The distinctive factor in this approach is the object of manipulation. In the first case, manipulations are targeted at the voter, with the aim of influencing changes in their behaviour, and sometimes their attitudes. When it comes to behaviours, the goal is to achieve a short-term effect of directed participation or induce a decision to abstain from voting, which will be caused by external stimuli. Regarding the stimulation of voter turnout, it is important to combine it with casting a vote in line with the expectations generated by the manipulating entities. Manipulative actions aimed at changing a voter's attitude are less common. This is associated with the more short-term rather than long-term nature of manipulations, which are typically aimed at achieving a short-term effect at the ballot box. However, it should not be assumed from the outset that initiatives designed to have a short-term effect will not be extended for a lasting correction of voters' political attitudes (Vogel & Wanke, 2016). The procedural effects of electoral manipulations, although indirectly related to voters and their behaviour at the ballot box (e.g., by inducing strategic voting effects), refer to the subsequent stage of the electoral process – translating the voting outcome into the shape of political representation obtained as a result of the election. In this context, manipulative actions imply possible interference with the rules of selection and other regulations that directly and

indirectly determine the course of the electoral process. Their nature arises from the need to apply formal mechanisms to translate electoral support into obtained political representation. The more such mechanisms exist, the more potential there is for manipulation in the system. This is due to the possibility of instrumentally moderating the individual stages of the seat allocation process.

The manipulative impact on election outcomes in the subject-oriented aspect (2) refers to the potential effects. The first is the influence on the ruling party-opposition dichotomy. The main systemic references in this regard include the possibility of power alternation and the unevenly distributed potential for using electoral manipulation (giving advantages to incumbents). The second effect of implementing electoral manipulation in the subject-oriented context may be the desire to differentiate the electoral potential of competing entities. In this case, the essence is to identify the potential beneficiaries and victims and take nuanced actions towards their electoral potential.⁶ The last effect of the subject-oriented aspect is to reduce the electoral chances of some entities. This is achieved by reducing their electoral potential, which is done by limiting the use of their resources or levelling their competitive advantages. The latter results from comparing individual capabilities to influence the shape of electoral rivalry and deliberately limiting them in the case of some entities competing in elections.

The presented framework in the subject-oriented aspect might suggest that electoral manipulations have a similar potential to influence both incumbents and opposition parties. However, this would be an inaccurate conclusion because incumbents have greater opportunities to employ manipulative actions. In practice, only under conditions

⁶ A. Schedler points out that a well-executed electoral manipulation allows one to “have your cake and eat it too” (retain power and submit to the judgment of the voters) (Schedler, 2013).

of an unstable majority is there a higher probability of manipulative potential for opposition forces. The better prospects for incumbents in this regard stem from the strong normative component of holding power. The desire to win elections often leads participants in electoral competition to use their positions and resources in ways that violate the principles of electoral fair play (Frank & Coma, 2017). In reality, situations where normative changes can be used to manipulate against incumbents are exceptional. Beyond the circumstances of the lack of a stable majority, this can happen in three cases. The first case involves the opposition gaining a majority necessary to make changes. This could be possible if the incumbents succumbed to political disintegration, even though they still formally held the mandate to govern. The described situation could be particularly likely in the pre-election period when opposition parties could attract some of the politicians and activists from the ruling party to their side. The second scenario assumes a conscious decision by the incumbents to increase the electoral potential of their political opponents, for example, by creating mechanisms that allow previously unrepresented minorities to have political representation. When considering such changes in pragmatic terms, it is difficult to find signs of manipulating electoral conditions; rather, one can speak of the adaptive dimension of the techniques of electoral engineering used. In practice, the manipulative goal of such actions might be to dilute the support of political opponents by increasing the electoral prospects of entities that have been on the margins of political life, and the potential voters of whom strategically preferred to support entities with a chance of holding mandates. The last dimension of how the opposition can benefit from normative changes presupposes an increase in its potential due to a miscalculation by the incumbents who introduced new regulations, hoping for a different effect than an increase in the electoral potential of their political opponents. As indicated by Radosław Markowski (2010), the decisions

regarding the choice of specific solutions are determined by two factors: (1) the extent of knowledge (or lack thereof) about the mechanical and psychological effects of their actions, and (2) very accurate knowledge of the consequences of specific solutions and the strength of individual political parties. The number of variables affecting the final election outcome is so vast in this case that it is easy to make a mistake when estimating the effects of the introduced solutions.

The last theoretical aspect of electoral manipulation is its (3) periodic dimension. It assumes the differentiation of the effects achievable through elections over time, which is related to the long-term nature of the electoral process and the cyclical nature of elections. The electoral process in liberal democracies is aimed at ensuring both representativeness and the political stability of representation. Thus, it assumes a periodic planning of actions related to elections from the date of their announcement, through the day (or days) of voting, to the moment of validating (or not) the choice made. The time regime plays a stabilizing role – political actors can define and plan the various stages of electoral activity. Of course, in relatively rare cases, there may be modifications to the electoral calendar. The first is the shortening of the term of an institution, which results in the need for early elections. Another scenario, which accelerates the election date, is the vacancy of office by the incumbent, which may be related to their resignation, death, or impeachment. The third scenario, which delays the election date, involves the declaration of a state of emergency (e.g., martial law or a state of natural disaster), indicating the impossibility of holding elections within the assumed timeframe while maintaining democratic principles. In this regard, the stability of democratic processes requires the existence of regulations specifying the possible date for a new election in conditions such as those mentioned, e.g., the appearance of an epidemic or a terrorist attack with a large number of victims.

In the periodic dimension, electoral manipulations should be considered taking into account the intended scope of their impact by the initiators. In this context, two types can be distinguished: ad hoc (contextual) and long-term (strategic) manipulations. The ad hoc ones are a response to the need to change the current state of electoral competition, and their intended impact is most often calculated only for the nearest election (which does not mean, however, that their effects will not persist in the long run). Their essence is to change the competitive position of the entities participating in the elections in the short term. The aim of long-term manipulations, on the other hand, is to influence the foundations of the electoral process. When designing them, the goal is to introduce a new (or change an existing) electoral competition context that will provide strategically targeted advantages in the long run. For the fairness of elections (and more broadly, the entire electoral competition), long-term manipulations are much more dangerous than those conducted on an ad hoc basis, which leads some researchers to refer to them as authoritarian innovations. They may lead to the reduction or elimination of the possibility of fulfilling the accountability function of elections and thus cause the sabotage of the idea of political responsibility (Curato & Fossati, 2020). In practice, the use of legal mechanisms existing in democratic political regimes to achieve undemocratic goals can lead to the entrenchment of party monopolies, and, as a result, the withering of democracy (Varol, 2014).

Technically speaking, the time context of elections separates the potential effects of manipulative actions into two periods: before the vote and after its conclusion.⁷ These effects, as they are located in the future (which is associated with the need to anticipate their consequences), re-

⁷ In the subject-oriented approach, we can also distinguish the effects of manipulative actions in the time context as being carried out before a subject enters electoral competition and after their entry.

quire prior planning and implementation, and the final result may only be observed after some time. The specific programmability of manipulative actions indicates that most expected effects can be achieved before the vote and will relate to shaping the voting behaviour of citizens. In the post-voting period, manipulative techniques must be based on influencing the impact of systemic factors that transpose electoral support into the resulting political representation. Within this period, manipulative actions can be planned with the use of previous patterns of systemic principles' influence on election outcomes, relying on the repetition of analogies from the past. The theoretical aspects of electoral manipulation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Theoretical approaches to defining electoral manipulations

	Theoretical approach	The effects of manipulation	The subject of manipulation
Electoral manipulations	Object-oriented	social	voter
		procedural	election rules
	Subject-oriented	the ruling party	change of the electoral potential
		opposition	change of the electoral potential
	Periodic	before the vote	electoral behaviours
		after the vote	principles of creating representation

Source: The author's own study.

1.6. The structure of the electoral process

As already indicated, the possibility of conducting manipulative actions in relation to elections is based on the intentional influence on the course of the electoral process, the shape of which is determined

by democratic principles. These principles establish the necessary conditions to meet to consider the election to be line with democratic principles. Schedler (2002), when writing about elections, analyses the democracy of the electoral process from the perspective of its seven segments. He defines formal requirements regarding electoral procedures and assumes the necessity of their combined fulfilment for maintaining the chain of democratic choice. If any link in such a chain is broken by fraud or deception, the integrity of the electoral process is compromised. In such cases, the representation obtained through the elections cannot be considered fully adhering to democratic principles. Therefore, the disruption of the democratic chain constitutes an unauthorized interference in the process of forming political representation, and the elected authorities chosen in this way lack democratic legitimacy. Additionally, such undemocratic adjustments may result in the final election outcome being different from what would have been achieved under intact principles.

The biggest advantage of Schedler's concept is that it identifies those areas of the electoral process that can not only be sensitive to the violations of democratic principles but can also serve as potential fields for electoral manipulation. Since an undemocratic adjustment leads to the questioning of democratic legitimacy, it is logical that actions in these areas may also be motivated by manipulative intentions which, fundamentally, do not challenge democratic principles. Within these imponderables, basic principles are not violated because the changes are consistent with the logic of free and fair elections, but they are motivated by the particular intentions of electoral competitors.

Schedler's idea of the "chain of democratic choice" can be adapted to examine electoral manipulations, and it identifies several sensitive areas to manipulative actions (Schedler, 2002). These areas include: (1) Voters' empowerment: This involves the active role of citizens in shaping political processes through their collective voting decisions.

It assumes an active role for citizens in shaping political processes through jointly made electoral decisions. The consequence of voters' decisions must be the genuine legitimization of those chosen to make authoritative decisions. The essence of electoral empowerment lies in the subject of the choice being made, and potential manipulations leading to uncertainty can originate from two areas. The first involves the deliberate restriction of the number of offices derived from elections, especially in cases where their competencies are equated with positions subject to appointment (e.g., parliamentarians having the status of lifelong mandate holders due to previously held positions). The second threat may arise from limiting the authoritative competencies of elected bodies by reducing the scope of their exclusive jurisdiction; (2) The political freedom of alternatives. It stipulates that electoral competitors must have the freedom to create a political offering for voters. Any forms of political concession or actions that restrict the supply of political offerings should not limit the axiom of free choice. The limitation of electoral uncertainty is based on intentional influence over the arena of electoral competition by restricting access to it or by disintegrating the communities against which manipulations are carried out. Limiting access to the arena of electoral competition can occur through the creation of formal barriers (organizational, financial, temporal, etc.) that prevent or significantly reduce the political potential of certain entities. Regulatory measures (e.g., the absence of threshold clauses) that increase the level of internal competition among its components and reduce the potential for protest against natural political rivals (in this case, those in power) can be factors in the disorganization of the opposition; (3) The pluralism of information. At every stage of the electoral process, citizens must have unrestricted access to information about existing electoral alternatives. This requires the functioning of multiple information sources that can freely shape their messaging. Information pluralism is of

fundamental importance in the process of forming political preferences, which determines the need to provide all political entities with equal conditions for presenting their offerings and the existence of alternative channels of information, in addition to official ones. Manipulative constraints on competition in electoral communication occur, for example, due to granting political messaging concessions to the opposition by media dependent on those in power, limiting access to media through the elimination of low-cost opportunities to present a programmatic appeal (e.g., free electoral materials in electronic media), and through low financial limits on political activities, making it difficult or impossible to effectively create electoral messages; (4) Electoral inclusion. The existing formal and customary rules must empower all adults equally. Electoral inclusion provides citizens with the tools to exercise their political subjectivity. It can be undermined at its core by actions aimed at controlling the composition of the electorate and shaping it in a way that increases or decreases the electoral prospects of specific entities. Formal exclusions can affect social groups or territories (e.g., those in conflict zones); (5) Electoral insulation. Voters must be equipped with the freedom to identify and express their political preferences. The act of voting should ensure the freedom to make choices without undue external pressure and without revealing the direction of individual preferences allocation. The primary focus of insulation is to ensure unencumbered expression of voters' preferences so that elections can genuinely reflect the political declarations. It can be disrupted through criminal activities such as voter intimidation or vote-buying (electoral corruption) or formal means like excessive formal requirements and/or impediments in the voting process; (6) Integrity. Both the electoral system in use and the voting procedures must ensure the neutrality in determining the election results. The strength of each voter's voice should meet the criterion of material adequacy. Electoral integrity relates to the fundamental principles of free and

fair elections. Among the procedural requirements for fair elections, one can point to legal regulation of the electoral procedure, equality in treating the participating entities in the electoral competition, and the freedom to register in the electoral roll (Goodwin-Gill, 2006); (7) The ultimacy of resolution. Elections that end without systemic consequences are undemocratic. The winners must be able to assume power, govern, and pursue their objectives in accordance with the systemic delegations, and in the event of the ruling party's defeat, alternation of power is possible or necessary. When considering the consequences of elections in terms of the ultimacy of electoral resolution, it is essential to examine their effects both in formal and practical terms. In formal terms, it is crucial to enable the alternation of power when the opposition wins, while adhering to the procedures and deadlines provided by law. In practical terms, the emphasis is on allowing those who win the elections to exercise their governing competencies after taking office.

If any area of the electoral process is subjected to undemocratic influence, it results in what Schedler (2002) refers to as “the breaking of the chain of democratic choice.” This represents a disruption in the network of connections between its links. The fundamental determinants of democracy assume the possibility of making choices in the conditions of freedom, equality, and political pluralism, offering citizens an effective process for creating power within a community of free and equal citizens. This is feasible when the boundary principles of individual links in the chain of democratic choice are respected, and they also define the fields of electoral resolution change and, thus, possible electoral manipulation. These manipulations are based on altering the level of electoral uncertainty in a way that instrumentalizes electoral processes, privileging certain actors at the expense of others (Schedler, 2013).

Limitations in applying the concept of the chain of democratic choice to the study of electoral manipulation arise from its low detection value regarding the communicative aspect of electoral manipulation. Changes in political communication, especially those that occurred with the proliferation of social media, have created new opportunities for reaching voters and subjecting them to effective persuasive influence. However, it is difficult to propose an alternative tool in this context, as the manipulative basis of actions taken in the sphere of communication with voters is their lack of transparency. These actions are often not only hidden from voters but also feign different goals than the ones they truly pursue or attribute false authors. This does not mean that this problem is unsolvable. However, it requires much deeper cooperation between institutions regulating elections or even more broadly, the entire sphere of politics, and the owners of social media platforms (Aral & Eckles, 2019).

1.7. The areas of electoral manipulation

While the generalized goal of electoral manipulation is the intentional influence on the election outcome, its achievement is linked to the specific effects of actions taken by electoral participants or on their behalf. In practice, the effects of manipulative actions can be presented in three primary areas: (1) the formation of political representation, (2) the opportunities for electoral participants to utilize resources, and (3) shaping the determinants of voter behaviour.⁸ Obviously, manip-

⁸ In a different context, the areas of manipulation can be presented as pre-election (carried out between election campaigns), election-related (during election campaigns), and post-election (after voting, but unlike pre-election manipulation, these relate to the conducted elections, such as the intentional refusal to accept a gained mandate or resigning from it shortly after taking office).

ulative actions are often a combination of various tools which operate in multiple areas, and their use leads to the differentiation of perspectives of political parties and candidates participating in elections. However, this kind of essentialist approach will allow me to link specific tools used in electoral manipulation with potential areas of their impact in the subsequent part of this chapter. For the clarity of the further discussion, it is essential to adopt one more assumption. Just as the boundaries between the presented areas of the effects of manipulation are not always entirely clear (especially between the formation of political representation and shaping voter behaviour determinants), single tools used in the manipulation process can yield results in more than one area. This approach also enables conducting further analyses within two fundamental models. In the first model, which follows the top-down scheme, actions taken by political decision-makers are examined. These decision-makers use available tools to try to influence changes in the electoral potential of participants in the elections. In contrast, the bottom-up model evaluates the effectiveness of electoral manipulation tools from the perspective of their potential impact on the election outcome, particularly concerning the intentions behind the manipulation.

The first area where the effects of manipulative actions manifest themselves, which is the shaping of political representation, is relatively the most straightforward layer of the impact of manipulative tools. This is first of all due to the relatively simple and historically established relationships between the influence of adopted solutions and the resulting shape of political representation. Years of democratic experience with the use of various determinants of the electoral process enable the practical anticipation of the shape of representation obtained as a result. This, in turn, provides a basis for rational expectations of the consequences of introduced changes in this respect.

In practice, the effects of manipulative actions can refer to two basic mechanisms – direct and indirect.

In the direct mechanism, the goal of manipulation is to influence voter participation as a whole or selectively target the specific segments of the electorate. In the case of a general impact on voter turnout, it refers to the potential increase or decrease in the number of voters compared to its baseline value (i.e., the number that would be achieved without the actions taken). The other dimension involves selectively influencing voters by mobilizing or demobilizing distinct segments of the electorate. In both dimensions, the essence of manipulation revolves around actions aimed at encouraging or discouraging voters from casting their votes. The logical basis for assessing the effectiveness of manipulative actions in this case is both the overall voter turnout and its structure (understood as the participation rate of the specific segments of the electorate in the overall voting outcome). In terms of the overall level of voter turnout, manipulative possibilities arise from the fact that the scale of participation in elections is not neutral for their outcomes (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988), and there is a certain natural level of participation in a particular election (Kaempfer & Lowenberg, 1993). In the broadest assumptions, lower turnout may favour incumbents and the renewal of their mandate to govern, while higher turnout may reward the proponents of political change. This is based on the assumption that a higher turnout may result from greater mobilization of voters who support the incumbents, as they may incur tangible losses in the event of a change in power (while opposition voters, until their preferred candidates assume power, may only expect potential benefits). What is more, the voters who have already supported the incumbents may rely on the heuristic of previous choices, indirectly building their electoral capital (Shugart et al., 2005). What is more important (in terms of efficiency), for the manipulation potential is the structure of individuals participating in elections and actions

taken to mobilize or demobilize the specific segments of the electorate. Their potential effectiveness results from the preferences of specific groups of voters for non-random allocation of their support among naturally defined candidates and parties.

The indirect mechanism for influencing the formation of political representation involves the use of moderators, which translate the voting results into specific election outcomes. Its logical assumption is that the same voting outcome can lead to different electoral consequences, with the procedural elements of political representation having a significant influence on this. This finding can be tempting for the political forces which may wish to change the existing rules, hoping to gain above-standard benefits. Importantly, unlike actions that directly affect the voting results, where the final effect is more uncertain and, thus, more difficult to estimate, the consequences of these indirect mechanisms can usually be estimated with a much higher probability. This is due, for example, to the possibility of invoking mathematical relationships between the quantifiable mechanisms of seat allocation systems or previous experiences in this area. Of course, there can never be certainty about the effects of these manipulative actions, but their historical consequences justify the expectations of their effectiveness. The impact of the indirect mechanism on the shape of the obtained political representation can be presented on two levels: the general and the individual. On the general level, one can consider the general consequences of using different types of electoral systems. Through their deliberate selection, it is possible to intentionally influence the outcomes of the election (Wojtasik, 2012a). One of these consequences is representativeness.⁹ On the individual level, it is changes

⁹ Arend Lijphart, among other significant consequences of applying an electoral system, lists ensuring accountability, equality, and participation (Lijphart, 1991).

in the components of the electoral process that can affect the shape of the political representation obtained through elections that are potential influencing factors. These changes are most often determined by the size of electoral districts, the electoral formula, and the rights granted to voters (Antoszewski, 2001). The general structure of manipulation in the area of forming political representation is illustrated in Figure 1.

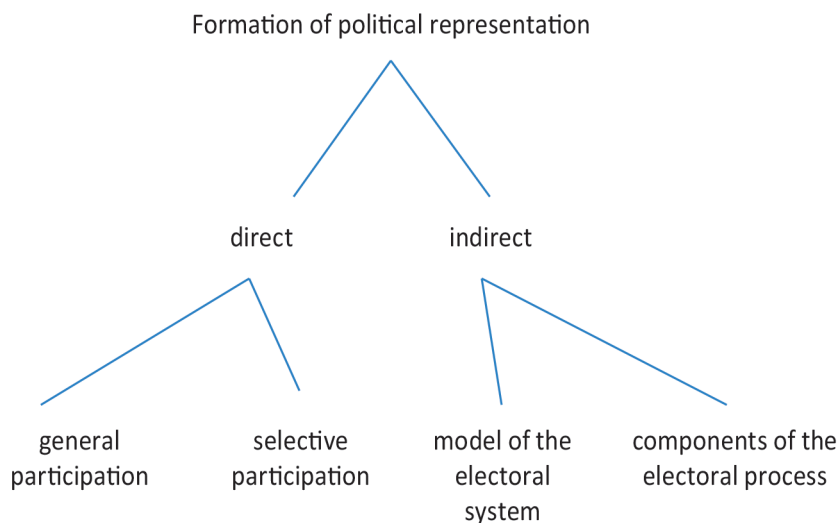


Figure 1. Manipulations in the area of the formation of political representation

Source: The author's own study.

The second area – differentiating the use of resources by political entities competing in elections – assumes that the aim of electoral manipulation is to create a set of relationships in which, although the formal conditions of competition are equal, they will effectively promote some groups or candidates at the expense of others. In democratic regimes, this often involves referring to the general category of “free

and fair elections,” characterized by ensuring impartiality in electoral procedures along with ensuring equal conditions for all political competitors to participate in elections (Elklit & Svensson, 1997). These are formal requirements, as in practice, it cannot be assumed that all the existing rules will neutrally affect the competitive position of those participating in elections. For obvious reasons, democracy as a social system, to some extent based on market-based solutions, enables differentiation in the resources possessed by political entities competing in elections, as long as it does not distort the competition itself or its outcomes. Manipulative actions in this regard will concern the differentiation of the potential utilization of these resources.

In the case of resources, the factor that should guarantee equal electoral opportunities in a democratic political regime is competitiveness. As a general principle of elections, it indicates the existence of regulations that define the rules of competing for support, which should be equal for all participating entities. In theory, competitiveness is achieved by fulfilling at least three conditions, which include: (1) ensuring the universal participation of adult citizens in elections; (2) guaranteeing the fairness of elections through procedures such as secret balloting, the independence of vote-counting bodies, and the prevention of electoral fraud, violence, and intimidation; (3) providing structured framework for competing parties and candidates, which will enable voters to make choices among competitive political visions and programmes (Weiner & Özbudun, 1987, p. 393). Candidates and political parties are guaranteed the same basic conditions for promoting their programmes, ideas, or funding activities. In practical terms, this means ensuring identical legal and economic conditions in which they will compete. Factors that ensure competitiveness here include strict regulations on election financing, defining maximum spending limits, and sources of income, as well as rules that ensure fair access to the media and their use.

The nature of the influence of resource utilization on the electoral competitiveness of specific political entities has an organizing value that allows us to distinguish two types of effects. The first, affirmative, increases the electoral potential by letting manipulating entities utilize mechanisms that enable more efficient allocation of their resources in the electoral market and/or provide access to new, previously unavailable resources. The beneficiaries of affirmative actions include both individual candidates participating in elections and political parties or electoral coalitions. The other type of influence, counter-affirmative, reduces electoral prospects by creating the conditions of unequal access to the electoral market and limiting the potential use of available resources. In extreme cases, counter-affirmative actions can deprive political entities of the resources they already possess. Hence, electoral counter-affirmation leads to some parties or candidates having limited potential and, consequently, reducing their impact on the electoral market. Unequal access to the electoral market can be of a potential or real nature, differentiating the chances at the stage of creating competition rules and preparations for participation in elections. It should be pointed out that this division is dynamic – solutions that are advantageous for some parties, when used by others, may reduce their electoral prospects (Wojtasik, 2018a).

In the case of the resource area of electoral manipulation, like in other areas, we are talking about a situation where the shape of the electoral process rules (or the direction of their change) results from the current political calculation of some of the political entities. This concerns the forces that influence the establishment of new principles. This division often situates these actions along the lines of the governing party and the opposition, simultaneously indicating potential beneficiaries and those harmed by manipulative actions. Clearly, it is the ruling party that can have a stronger impact on the rules governing resource utilization. In the case of the opposition, such actions are more difficult to

design and implement. From a technical point of view, the influence on resource utilization can operate in two opposing directions. The first is to increase the resource utilization opportunities for political entities expected to improve their electoral results. This is achieved through facilitation in gathering resources and their subsequent effective allocation in the electoral market. In the other case, the goal of manipulation is to limit the potential of political opponents so that they have a more challenging process of resource acquisition, and the resources they possess cannot be used efficiently (see Figure 2).

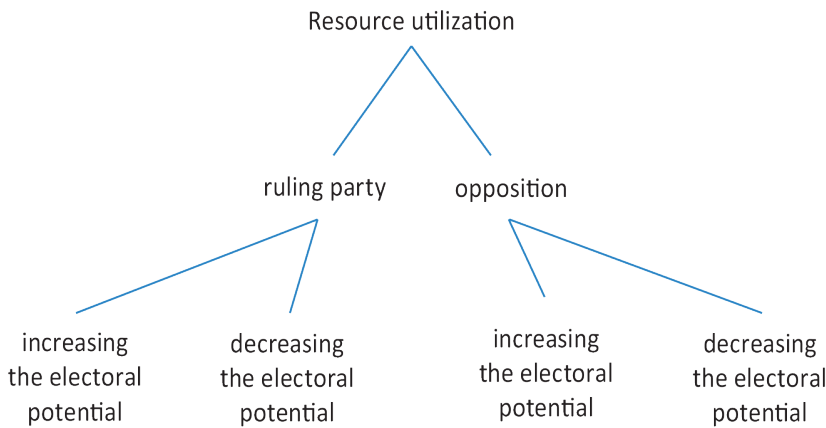


Figure 2. Manipulations in the area of resource utilization

Source: The author's own study.

The last area of potential manipulation is the shaping of voters' behaviour. This area includes factors that determine the decisions and attitudes adopted during the democratic electoral process. Its primary mechanism is the ability to correct behaviours based on external stimuli intentionally provided by entities conducting manipulation.

In this case, manipulative actions modify the classical framework of electoral competition centred around ideas, programmes, parties, or specific politicians. They can, of course, be based on the existing political reality, but their goal is to solidify or change the way voters perceive it, focusing on providing stimuli that will trigger the desired response at the ballot box. What is the essence of manipulation in this respect is not merely the influence on voter behaviours (because this can occur through legal and democratically sanctioned channels), but rather the use of tools that either create a constructed image of reality in the perception of voters or cause them to make decisions based on false premises. Of course, one could argue that any action aimed at changing voter behaviour carries a manipulative element. In this case, however, it is about instrumental influence, specifically calculated to modify the existing structure of political preferences, which would be obtained in unmanipulated elections.

Manipulative actions which directly affect voter behaviour can be divided into three main groups: communicative, economic, and substitutional (see Diagram 3). The manipulative potential of the communicative aspect of influencing voter behaviour has gained significance with the proliferation of political communication, particularly in the era of mass communication and social media. The use of communicative tools for electoral manipulation can have two effects. The first will be imbalance in media access, meaning the strength of some parties or candidates will be greater. This can be caused by factors such as the incumbent's position and potential influence over public media, preferences for media access for large entities, or public funding for political activities. Consequently, by strengthening their media messages, they can more effectively shape attitudes and influence voters' decisions. The other effect directly assumes the differentiation of influencing opportunities due to the existence of media that, while seemingly independent, covertly present the positions

of a chosen political option. The processes of such political agencification of the media were further intensified in the first decades of the 21st century with the development of electronic communication, which significantly increased the ability to create their own communication channels (official and affiliated) by entities competing in elections.

Economic factors shaping voter attitudes intentionally differentiate the possibilities of acquiring and using material resources by political entities competing for power. Manipulative actions in this regard will focus on two main areas. The first area involves unjustified differentiation in the ability to obtain material resources for electoral activities. This mechanism may particularly affect less institutionalized political groups or those that are just beginning their activities. The other area involves limitations on the use of economic potential. Through deliberate limitations on the amount of funds allocated for electoral activities, these actions enable better exposure among voters for those entities that are more deeply rooted in social consciousness.

In the case of substitutive references, their influence involves creating conditions for political competition that enable changing the election outcome to something different from the expected result under non-manipulated conditions. The possibility of achieving the desired effect of manipulation in this respect is most strongly related to the relationships between competing entities, which determine two types of manipulative actions. The first type involves introducing an agency entity (candidate, party, electoral committee) into the political competition, which serves the goals of another entity. Typically, its task is to attract some of the voters from other parties or candidates (dilution of support) or to mislead voters and create confusion among them (e.g., through a deceptively similar name or the same name and surname). The second type of manipulative actions with a systemic basis

involves the participation of a candidate in the elections who, if they win, does not intend to take the mandate. Typically, in such a situation, if the rules of the electoral system allow it, the mandate goes to the next candidate in line with the best result.

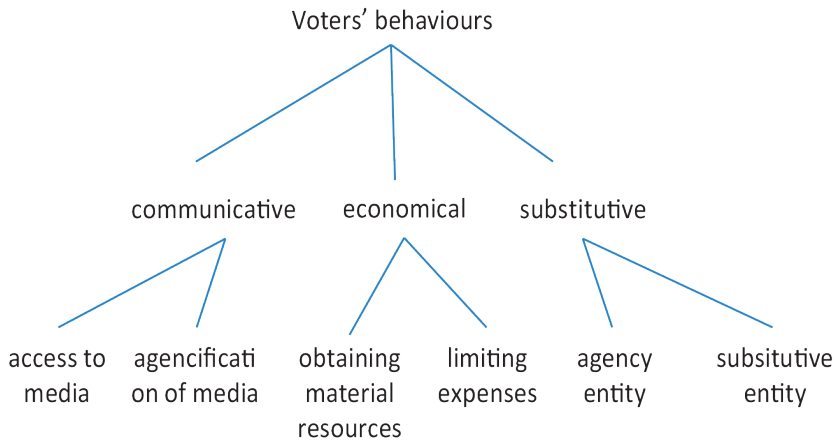


Figure 3. Manipulations in the area of voters' behaviour

Source: The author's own study.

1.8. The dimensions of electoral manipulation

The presented assumptions about the influence of the level of electoral uncertainty on free and fair elections and the identification of the main areas of manipulative actions allow me to propose a general categorization of those dimensions of the electoral process that have manipulative potential. These dimensions define the subject of impact on the electoral process, taking as a basis the manipulation tools available to entities wishing to influence the final election outcome. However, while in Schedler's concept of the democratic chain of choice, the basis for the division is democratic principles, in the case of

the following identified planes of electoral manipulation, what is their foundation for distinction are the components of the electoral process, resulting only indirectly from the segments of the democratic chain of choice. It is the changes made within these components through specific tools that can have an impact on manipulative influence on the election outcome. Nevertheless, by using the model proposed by Schedler, the primary manipulative mechanism is the influence on the level of electoral uncertainty. Changes in this mechanism can differentiate the perspectives of entities competing in the elections, which is a sufficient premise for taking effective manipulative actions.

The classification of the dimensions of the electoral process, the changes of which can directionally influence the course and outcome of elections, enables the examination of their manipulative potential and the assignment of specific tools designed for this purpose (Figure 4). These tools are used by entities competing in elections to maximize their prospects or limit the chances of their opponents. The identified dimensions also delineate those planes of electoral competition that are particularly susceptible to manipulative actions. Within the presented assumptions, seven dimensions of potential instrumental influence on the final election outcome can be defined: (1) temporal, (2) participatory, (3) material, (4) communication, (5) deputational, (6) systemic, (7) alternational (Wojtasik, 2014a). The presented taxonomy is based on identifying those dimensions of the electoral process that are subject to shaping by entities competing in elections, and therefore are the subject of the electoral game. The factors of such influence are the tools, i.e., the elements the application of which changes the shape of competitive relationships in the various dimensions of electoral competition. Importantly, the use of a specific tool does not always determine its impact on only one dimension of electoral manipulation. It may happen that a single tool can affect multiple areas of potential manipulation.

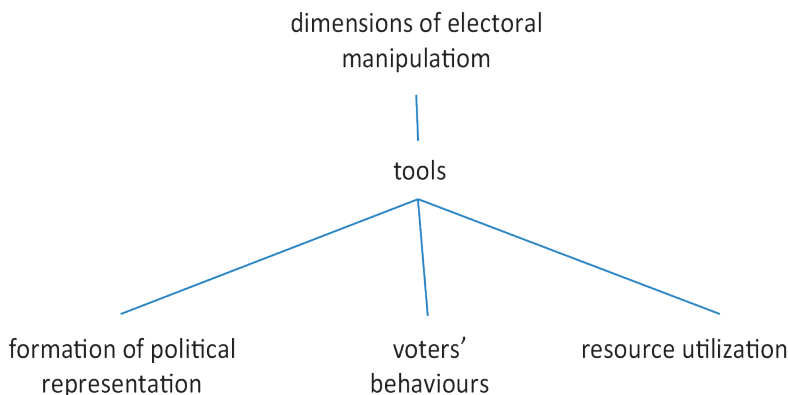


Figure 4. Manipulations in the electoral process – the functional approach

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.1. Temporal dimension

What is one of the fundamental contexts of holding elections is their exclusivity. This means that they are confined within a specific time regime, during which successive stages resulting from a functional cause-and-effect sequence take place. They should lead to an electoral decision that is not questioned either in terms of the procedures applied or the results obtained. However, it is difficult to speak of a universalized scheme of such a sequence, which is due to three basic premises: (1) elections are held for various institutions within the political system, which determines their procedural distinctiveness; (2) the components of the electoral procedure are treated differently in individual countries; (3) the regulatory regime is understood differently – in some cases, there is a very high level of calibration of the solutions applied, while in others, a lot of issues are left to customs, practice, and common sense. Nevertheless, when looking for the common denominator for solutions in democratic countries, they can be

presented using a scheme that illustrates the course of elections in relation to the time regime (Figure 5).

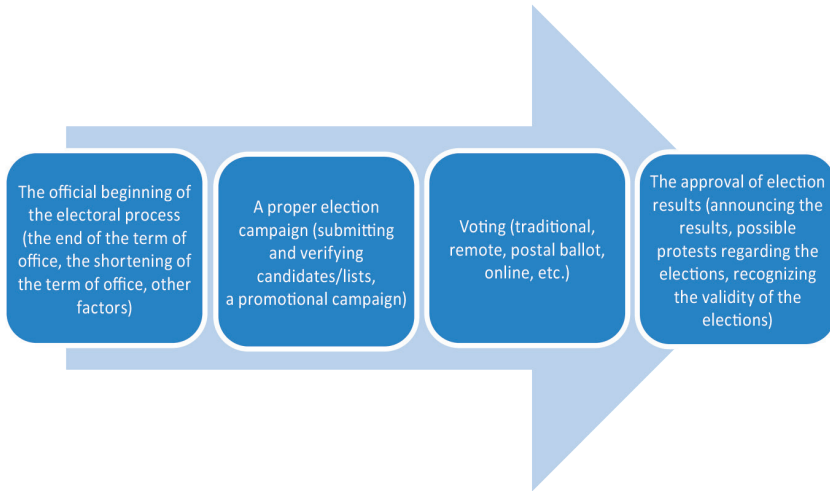


Figure 5. The electoral process in the temporal approach

Source: The author's own study.

Some political and election researchers *a priori* assume that electoral processes are phenomena of a permanent nature, in which the election day is also the first day of a new election campaign (Farrell, 1996). Such an assumption allows us to distinguish between two meanings of the concept of the electoral process: narrow, where it is confined within specific time framework, and broad, where manipulative actions are not assigned to this framework. Accepting such a distinction requires a particular process of controlling electoral procedures, especially those actions that take place outside the official election calendar. In this perspective, all decisions made by participants in the electoral competition and their political agents fit into a pattern of actions aimed at future elections. There is no doubt that an increasingly mediatized

political sphere and the redefinition of the character of political communication in modern election campaigns are factors which enhance the adequacy of the standpoint indicating the permanence of electoral processes. The shift from generalized messaging to messages directed at specific segments of the electorate (often even individual voters) increases the role of electronic media, which effectively provide continuous information. Additionally, the contemporary nature of social communication reduces the mediating role of the media – very often, political competition entities create and use direct political communication channels with voters (especially social media). In this way, everything that used to constitute objective information can now serve the purpose of shaping attitudes and opinions, feeding the source of electoral decisions. In such conditions, it is difficult to categorically distinguish between actions and information that result from current political activity and those that are communication aimed at achieving an electoral effect, even in the distant future. In a number of cases, it is even impossible to do so because they may fulfil both abovementioned functional delegations at the same time.

Another important aspect which indicates the permanence of the electoral process is the period during which changes to the election rules are possible. The need for stability in electoral rules is driven by at least two premises. The first is the principle of proper legislation, which requires that any changes to the law should be introduced within an appropriate time frame, to some extent protecting the established regulations from current political interests. The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, in Articles 4 and 5 of the Interpretative Declaration on the Stability of the Electoral Law,¹⁰ recommends that significant changes to the electoral law (especially regarding the electoral

¹⁰ Venice Commission's Interpretative Declaration on the Stability of the Electoral Law (CDL-AD(2005)043).

system, the delimitation of electoral districts, and membership in election commissions) should be made at least 12 months before elections. The second premise relates to ensuring equal principles of electoral competition. Stability (and, consequently, early knowledge of the rules) of the electoral law is the foundation for the planning of campaign activities by political parties and candidates throughout the various stages of the electoral process. Changing election rules shortly before an election can cause (and usually does cause) a change in strategies by the entities participating in the election. This, in turn, can lead to the presumption that the new regulations take into account the interests of the entities implementing them or may be aimed against their political adversaries.

The specific nature of the temporal mechanism of electoral manipulation stems from embedding the electoral process in time and the possibilities associated with intentionally shaping the course of electoral competition by influencing its various stages. Time, in this case, is the determinant and a dependent variable based on the existing normative conditions. These conditions can be shaped by both objective and instrumental factors. Among the objective sources, we can identify factors such as the complexity of candidate nomination procedures, mechanisms for verifying nominations, the nominal duration of the election campaign, the method of vote counting, and the verification of voting results. Instrumental factors include the interests of individual entities in electoral competition, their political strength, and determination in shaping particularly conditioned rules, as well as the presumed manipulative effectiveness of the introduced solutions (from the initiators' perspective). Among the most important tools for manipulating the temporal dimension of the electoral process are: (1) voting duration, defined as the period during which voting is allowed; (2) the accessibility of polling stations, which is determined by their opening hours and any breaks in their operation; (3) the election

day(s): which can fall on a workday or a holiday; (4) seasonal timing, which involves weather conditions and economic income and expenditure cycles; (5) limits of the term of office, which define the duration of office and indirectly, the timing of elections; (6) the period for submitting election protests, during which the process and election results can be challenged; (7) the duration of the election campaign, when electoral competition entities can conduct electoral activities.

The relationships between these tools and areas of manipulation in the temporal dimension are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The areas and tools of the temporal dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Temporal	formation of political representation	– voting duration – opening hours of polling station – election day/s – season of the year – limits of the term of office – period for submitting election protests
	resource utilization	– period for submitting election protests – limits of the term of office – duration of the election campaign
	voters' behaviours	– voting duration – duration of the election campaign

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.2. Participatory dimension

One of the main goals of electoral procedures is to ensure universal participation for citizens (Figure 6). Universality as a principle of elections entails collective participation which is not subject to subjective exclusions, except for those resulting from other democratic principles. The contemporary democratic rules include four basic limitations

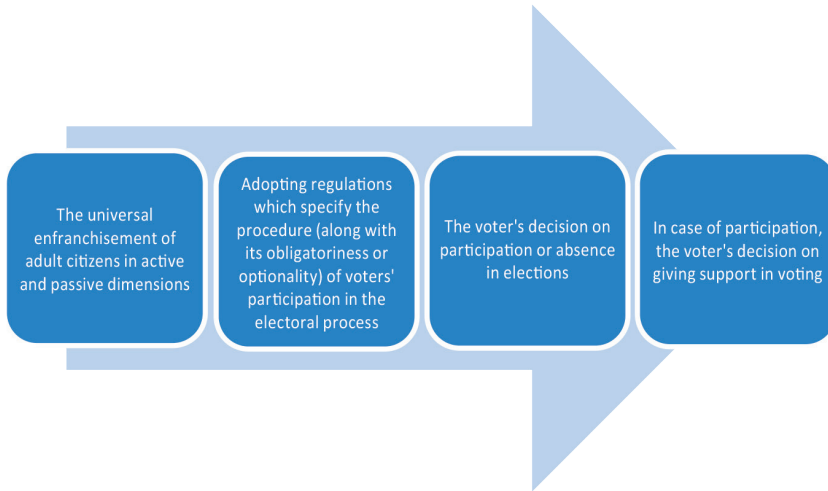


Figure 6. The electoral process in the participatory approach

Source: The author's own study.

to universality: age, the loss of public rights, the loss of voting rights, and domicile. Historically, there have been more such electoral thresholds (Wojtasik, 2012a). A competitive interpretation sees electoral thresholds not as formal restrictions on individual voting rights, but as requirements that must be met to gain the privilege of holding public office and voting rights (Birnir, 2006, p. 48). The dogmatic understanding of the universality principle can lead to an extreme expansion of the circle of individuals with the right to vote. This way of thinking has led to the evolution of voting rights in democratic systems, involving the elimination and reduction of electoral thresholds while maintaining the stability of democratic procedures (Ławniczak, 2006). This process is often accompanied by the creation of the most convenient conditions for universal participation in elections, such as allowing postal voting, electronic voting, or voting by proxy. Thus, one must distinguish between ensuring the fulfilment of democratic principles and the introduction of procedures that facilitate the voting

process. The former are one of the *sine qua non* conditions for considering the entire system as democratic, while the latter primarily serve technical functions, enabling the universal participation of citizens in the voting process.

The ubiquity of elections enables citizens to participate in the process of shaping political power. One of the problems in contemporary democracies is the declining participation in political activities, leading to a decrease in voter turnout. In consolidated democracies, this decline has been observable since the early 1980s, although the trend varies in different countries (Antoszewski, 2009). A significant portion of citizens, despite having institutionalized opportunities to influence political processes, shows little interest in participating actively and mostly restricts their political activity to passive observation (Turska-Kawa, 2015). Among the factors that can influence voter turnout, the following are often pointed out: (1) economic conditions (both individual and societal, especially an individual's financial status and future prospects); (2) group norms and the political climate (whether they encourage or discourage, depending on an individual's group affiliation and the current political situation); (3) political institutions (their effectiveness and how well they reflect public opinion); (4) technical conditions (access to information, distance to polling stations, etc.) (Żukowski, 2010b). For most citizens, the only active form of political participation is the opportunity to cast their vote in elections. As Andrzej Antoszewski (2009) indicates, there are many normative arguments in favour of a close relationship between political participation and the quality of democracy. However, there is no convincing empirical evidence indicating negative consequences of low voter turnout. It cannot be said that states with high voter turnout are "more democratic" than those with lower participation rates. Low turnout may stem from disappointment with political parties or a general lack of trust in the political class, but it can also be the result of a positive

assessment of all parties (or a significant majority) by voters, who consider them equally prepared to govern (Wojtasik, 2012a).

The principle of universal participation in elections assumes that citizens have the right (or, in the systems where voting is mandatory, the obligation) to actively participate in shaping their political representation. At the same time, it presupposes the possibility of absenteeism, which can be caused by factors independent of the voter or by a conscious decision not to participate in the voting process. Therefore, aside from rather theoretical cases (or those occurring in very small electoral units) of 100% level of citizens' participation in elections,¹¹ there is a range of different levels of electoral participation, measured by voter turnout. As we observe its variation, competing parties in elections may want to shape the scale of participation in a way that is advantageous or at least neutral for them. In principle, there are no clear indicators of what level of voter turnout is beneficial for specific parties or candidates. However, the assumption that the rules of elections can be influenced by those in power (or another majority capable of shaping them) means that especially within the realm of the government and the opposition, intentional attempts to influence voter turnout should be sought. The optimization of this level to achieve the desired effects is associated with the relationship between potential changes in power and the electoral mobilization of the opposition. In this logic, those in power should not be interested in increasing the overall level of voter participation, as one of the most potent motivators for social action is opposition to something or someone.

¹¹ It is also possible for voter turnout to exceed 100%, which is typically caused by voting in a particular area by non-resident individuals. This situation often occurs during periods of mass migration, such as holidays, in locations that are destinations for such travel (tourist resorts, religious pilgrimage sites, etc.).

On the other hand, supporters of the ruling party are typically more loyal, disciplined, and have evidence of their effectiveness in the form of previous elections. Since previous elections led to the takeover (or retention) of power by their political favourites, they see a connection between casting their vote and the reward in the form of power for their political representatives.

Intentionally influencing voter turnout is justified because the level of voter turnout is not indifferent to the competing electoral entities in two main scenarios: (1) correlational and (2) discrepancy. In the correlational case, you can identify political parties and candidates whose support is correlated with the level of voters' participation (positively or negatively). Research on voter attitudes and behaviours reveals that citizens are exposed to different stimuli and motivators that can influence their decision to participate or abstain from voting in varying ways (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2010). The voter's political attitude, which is defined as a relatively stable and consistent individual stance toward the political system and its components, as manifested in political behaviour, also plays a role here. Only the influence of such a political attitude can be considered a creationist factor for individualized voting behaviour. Voting behaviour can be defined in three fundamental approaches. In the narrowest sense, it is equated with either participation or absence from voting. The decision-making approach refers to the sources of decisions made by voters regarding both their participation in elections and the direction of their individual support. In the broadest conception, voting behaviours are seen as individual or collective forms of participation in the selection of individuals or political parties for the positions of power (Wróbel, 2000). The main drawback of the correlational approach is its lack of generality, as it requires the specification of the relationship between voter turnout and support for individual parties or candidates. What may be a factor in increasing voter turnout and support for specific groups in

one political system (or even in individual elections) can create a fundamentally different cause-and-effect pattern in other circumstances, determining abstention attitudes.

In contrast to the correlational model, the discrepancy case is much more straightforward in terms of connections. Its essence lies in the division of competing entities in elections into those in power and those in opposition (or incumbents and challengers), and the linkage of voter turnout to support for these entities. Social mobilization resulting in above-average voter turnout can be caused by two main reasons. The first reason is opposition to those in power and/or the effects of their decisions, which takes an active form of protest expressed at the ballot box. The other reason relates to the emergence of a new political movement responding to the demand for political representation in new axiological or pragmatic issue areas. Research on systematic references to the emergence of new political movements among the primary determinants of this phenomenon points to changes in the socio-economic situation (Hino, 2012) and changes in the electoral system and the model of political party financing (Tavits, 2006). An important factor in the differentiation of new entities in electoral competition is the change in the operating rules of the party system resulting from the exhaustion of previous patterns of competition between parties or the emergence of new references. Among these, the most commonly cited factors are normative issues, the dynamics of social divisions and tensions, and the influence of the existing political entities seeking to change previous patterns of political competition (Keman, 2020).

The participatory dimension is instrumental in influencing voter turnout with the aim of using it strategically to differentiate the chances of participating entities in elections. Among the factors that are relevant to the level of citizens' participation in voting in this context, the following can be mentioned: the perspective of the distribution of

power as a result of elections, uncertainty about the final outcome and the associated competitiveness, as well as media interest (Wojtasik, 2012a). Other important determinants include political polarization, the model of political leadership, and the personal characteristics of voters (Turska-Kawa, 2011). The prospect of power distribution as a result of elections is a motivating factor for voters. The absence of such a premise (currently occurring only to some extent, e.g., in European Parliament elections) can lead voters to calculate and conclude that participation in elections brings them no clear benefits (Mattila, 2003). High competitiveness in elections is a motivating factor for voters, especially when there is an element of uncertainty about the final outcome. This results from increased citizen interest, intensive campaign work, and media activity (Wojtasik, 2012a). The latter also stimulates the transfer of electoral debates to social media, creating additional public interest. Political polarization, understood as the diversity of public opinions on the most important issues (especially axiological ones), can contribute to increased voter participation (Siavelis, 2006). The model of political leadership, especially the mechanisms of its electoral legitimization, can be a direct factor motivating voters to cast their ballots. This is particularly the case when candidates representing different types of leadership, such as democratic and authoritarian, run in elections, fulfilling different societal expectations. The personality dimension of individuals, as a significant factor in shaping political preferences, can influence the expression of social behaviours, including political and voting behaviours (Turska-Kawa, 2011). Different personality types may respond to different stimuli, especially since emotional attitude is the initial reaction to political actors shaping their image (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2003).

As mentioned before, manipulations that manifest themselves as an influence on voter turnout do not have a straightforward cause-and-effect pattern. Their intentional impact will not provide

the unequivocal evidence of positive or negative consequences. However, this does not mean that entities in electoral competition do not incorporate pro- or anti-turnout actions into their strategies. It is essential that we distinguish these actions from typical campaign activities aimed at mobilizing their own electorate and demobilizing political opponents. The latter fall within the scope of traditionally understood electoral competition.

When seeking the most important mechanisms for intentionally influencing voter turnout, the following can be identified: (1) pro-turnout campaigns, which can particularly mobilize specific segments of the electorate; (2) changes in the age at which one gains the active right to vote – lowering or raising the voting age; (3) artificial migration movements which increase the number of eligible voters in an electoral district. This often occurs in elections where the electoral districts are quite small, and a relatively low number of votes can determine the outcome; (4) voting by citizens residing outside the country; (5) differentiation of the social and material costs associated with technical accessibility to the polling station, such as the average distance from one's place of residence to the polling station or the transportation options available to reach it; (6) presenting elections as a civic duty; (7) penalization of the act of voting. The areas and tools of the participatory dimension of electoral manipulation are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The areas and tools of the participatory dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Participatory	formation of political representation	– pro-turnout campaigns – changes in the age at which one gains the active right to vote – artificial migration movements

Dimension	Areas	Tools
		– voting by citizens residing outside the country – differentiation of the social and material costs of voting – presenting elections in the context of a civic duty – penalization of the electoral act
	resource utilization	– artificial migration movements – voting by citizens residing outside the country – differentiation of the social and material costs of voting – presenting elections in the context of a civic duty
	voters' behaviours	– differentiation of the social and material costs of voting – presenting elections in the context of a civic duty – penalization of the electoral act

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.3. Material dimension

The manipulative nature of the material dimension is the result of the differentiation of resources among participants in electoral competition, particularly those related to the financing of politics in general and election campaigns in particular (see Figure 7). Politics, like any sphere of social activity, requires resources for its implementation. While relatively simple activities may require nothing more than commitment and personal effort, at a higher level, having material resources becomes essential. It is not, of course, that material wealth determines the outcome of elections, but having the necessary resources in this regard aids in achieving the set goals. This is even more pronounced in larger election areas and in highly professionalized political spheres. Local elections in a small town will require significantly smaller financial investments than the same elections conducted in

a large city. National elections, which cover the entire country, typically require even more significant financial backing, often involving professional entities responsible for various aspects of the election campaign, such as advertising agencies, media outlets, production companies, and logistical support providers.

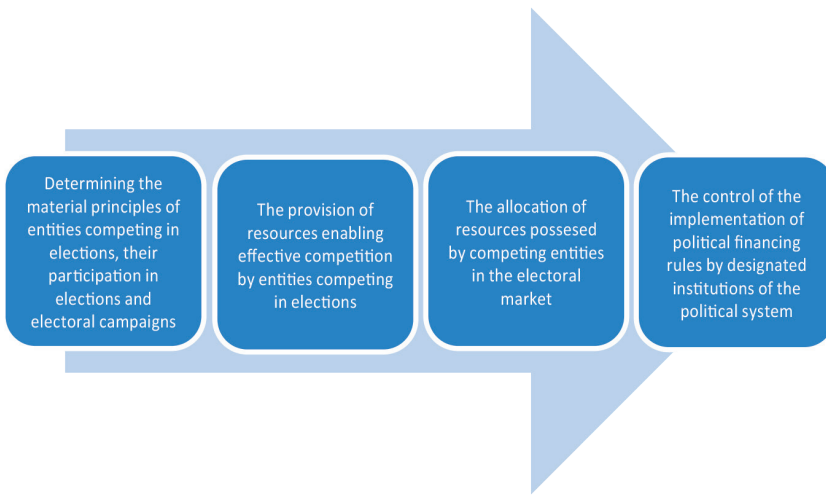


Figure 7. The electoral process in the material approach

Source: The author's own study.

Every election is a process that takes place within a specific economic context. It arises from the need for entities competing in elections to utilize specific resources, at least some of which are conditioned materially. The mere possession of resources is not tantamount to the ability to effectively use them, as other resources (e.g., human resources) are often necessary to mobilize them. These assumptions enable the differentiation of three types of resources held by entities competing in elections: (1) primary, (2) secondary, and (3) outcome resources. Primary resources include leaders, the ideological-programme system, members, and the way the internal structure is organized. Secondary

resources encompass material and informational means. Outcome resources include the political party's brand, political image, and voter loyalty (see: Gorynia, 2000).

Primary resources are essential for organizational survival and the initiation of the electoral institutionalization process of a political party. Their characteristic feature is that they may not be strongly related to electoral competition processes in practice. Instead, they serve the organizational function of the political party, which is a logical consequence of the party's role as an institution within the political system (Migalski et al., 2006). This conclusion arises from three primary considerations. Firstly, it assumes that the organization of a political party is a derivative of the existing legal conditions, particularly detailed regulations concerning the functioning of political parties. Secondly, the party's mode of operation is to a significant extent the result of the structural model it represents. To some extent, this may be the effect of conscious decisions by party activists who adapt their way of operating to their primary resources. The last of the discussed compositional aspects draws attention to the adaptation of the party's structure to the existing constraints, with the most important being the patterns of political competition within the political system and the socially expected model of party leadership. As can be observed, the main organizational goal is to interconnect resources in such a way as to optimize the effects of party operation while simultaneously creating a unique identity in the market of party offers. In such framework of relationships, issues related to ideology and membership are subordinated to the achievement of the intended goals for the functioning of the party organization.

Secondary resources enable actions of a competitive nature with respect to other entities and adaptability to the political system. These resources primarily have a material character. They include property resources, marked by their liquid nature. They allow for the financing

of political activities by providing the opportunity to acquire services or products necessary for functioning and achieving political goals. In addition to financing the operation of a political organization, the most significant allocation of material resources is directed towards participating in elections and financing campaign-related activities. The mediatization of politics and the increasing market-oriented nature of electoral competition mean that material resources are beginning to play a dominant role in elections, indirectly influencing the possibility of using other resources (Samples, 2008). The second type of secondary resources consists of informational factors. They are related to the communication functions performed by parties, especially the possession of communication channels (both internal and external). Internal organizational communication in the case of political parties must primarily consider the structural aspect and the functionality of the organization itself. External communication is focused on informing about ongoing activities and generating societal interest and support for projects and programs. Information resources in this case encompass the existing communication channels and information repositories established within the party, which serve the purpose of political activities.

Outcome resources, also known as generated resources, are the outcome of utilizing the first two types and enable a permanent presence in the party system. Their character primarily allows them to be treated as electoral tools used to achieve both short-term and long-term electoral strategies. They form the basis of the emotional orientation of voters in the electoral market, connecting belief systems and values with the offerings of electoral entities. Resulting resources are examples of abstractions that adapt societal perceptions to the realities of political life. For instance, a brand enables a political party to create its value and significance in the eyes of potential voters. Political parties aiming for long-term electoral success should be rooted

in the public consciousness. They must be recognizable as identifiers of certain ideas and have a known ethos, tradition, and experiences for voters (Turska-Kawa, 2013). A brand is a distinctive, iconic image, a recognizable element that carries a multitude of connotative meanings serving as a directional guide for voters in electoral competition (Turska-Kawa, 2015). The political image is also a generated resource, representing a message that reduces the costs incurred by voters in participating in the election campaign (Lupu, 2013). The third type of resulting resources is voter loyalty, which is based on basic psychological needs regulating an individual's relationship with their social environment. Linking loyalty to the satisfaction of needs means that the psychological costs of severing relationships based on loyalty are very high, providing political parties with a tool for shaping electoral attitudes on an emotional level (Turska-Kawa, 2015).

The process of the mediatization of politics and the necessity of reaching ever smaller segments of the electorate require having the appropriate resources that facilitate the presentation of a political offer. Thus, if material factors to some extent determine the electoral prospects of political parties, they can be the subject of manipulative actions aimed at instrumentally diversifying the conditions of operation. Among the most important manipulative tools in the material dimension, the following can be identified: (1) the way of financing political parties, often closely linked to the results they achieve in elections. What is a significant area for manipulation here is the ability to determine the rules for financing political parties from public funds (with restrictions on obtaining funds from other sources), which can drastically differentiate the conditions of political competition. The public financing model in the political sphere tends to solidify the positions of those parties that can benefit from it; (2) the financing of electoral campaigns, with particular emphasis on determining the sources of funding and campaign spending limits (LeDuc et al., 2002). Limiting

the possible sources of funding for campaign activities and relatively low levels of allowable campaign expenses can be a factor in reducing the electoral chances of opposition parties. This is due to the natural tendency for the governing party to have greater presence in the media, which can be counteracted by opposition actions during the election campaign, provided they have the necessary resources; (3) the possibility of funding certain activities by external entities that are not subject to state supervision in this regard or in situations where the legal system allows such actions; (4) the ability of those in power to use the attributes of their authority to indirectly finance electoral campaigns. This includes participating in state ceremonies and social events which positively influence their image, as well as using subordinate institutions to pursue specific interests. Table 5 presents the areas and tools of material electoral manipulation.

Table 5. The areas and tools of the material dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Material	formation of political representation	– way of financing political parties – possibility of funding electoral activities by external entities – ability of those in power to use the attributes of their authority to indirectly finance electoral campaigns
	resource utilization	– possibility of funding electoral activities by external entities – ability of those in power to use the attributes of their authority to indirectly finance electoral campaigns
	voters' behaviours	– way of financing political parties – way of financing electoral campaigns – possibility of funding electoral activities by external entities – ability of those in power to use the attributes of their authority to indirectly finance electoral campaigns

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.4. Communication dimension

Some researchers consider elections as a driving force for democracy because they generate public debate and enable the effective functioning of civil society. Through the inclusion of citizens and the state, as well as the presence of free and pluralistic media, the political communication process is facilitated (Heywood, 2015). Elections are perceived as a channel of political communication that allows political actors to mutually influence each other. They enable parties to establish communication links between voters and the government, and the very conduct of elections is a factor that allows makes a change in power possible (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995).

What is most common form of political communication are various political programmes and their immediate electoral versions, although the processes of the professionalization and mediatization of politics significantly influence the formulation of such programme offers, which can be understood as products of political marketing (Kolczyński, 2007). Parties and candidates create political programmes that appeal to the represented value system and its translation into the realm of ideological abstractions. This is done on two main levels. The first involves translating the general principles and values represented by parties into specific political action demands. This communicates the anticipated direction of decisions once they gain the authority to govern. The second level, which partly relates to the creative role of parties, involves the social dissemination of the programme to gain members and supporters based on its provisions and generate electoral support (Migalski et al., 2006). The communication structure of the electoral process is presented in Figure 8.

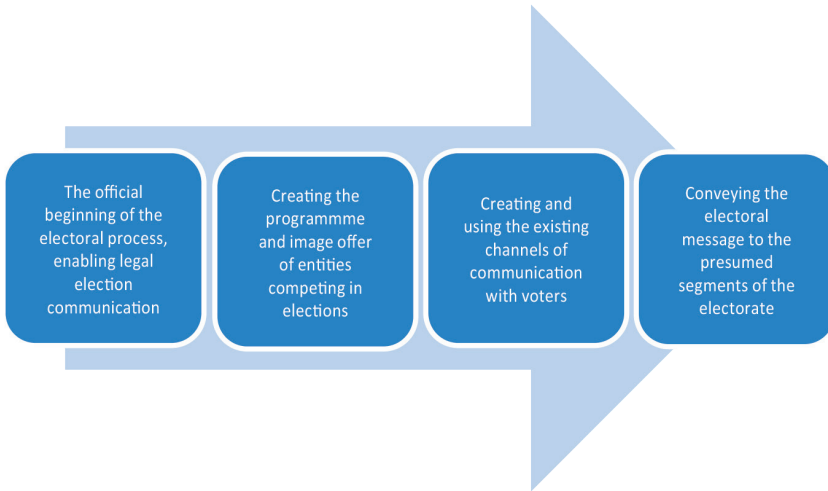


Figure 8. The electoral process in the communication approach

Source: The author's own study.

The manipulative nature of the communication dimension of elections refers to the way of influencing voters and electoral competition entities, with the field of impact being the information space, and its object being the influence on the media and its consequences for their activities within the communicative function of elections (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2013). This does not mean, of course, that all election-related activities have a manipulative potential. The detailed catalogue of principles for labelling elections as fair is very broad, and it includes conditions located on three levels: procedural, communicative, and control-related (Declaration on the Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, 1994). Among the communicative requirements are: (1) equal access of parties and candidates to mass media; (2) the absence of the possibility of government influence on the official media message; (3) unbiased reporting of the campaign and elections by the media; (4) the freedom

of communication between election participants and voters (Goodwin-Gill, 2006). The systematic classification of communicative conditions for fair elections allows us to explore manipulative practices primarily in the actions of those in power, which have an impact on normative and material regulations for the use of media in the electoral campaign. However, this does not mean that contenders do not have the opportunity to influence in this regard. Their potential has been significantly increased in the era of social media and the possibility of replacing traditional channels of political communication.

Ensuring equal access to public communication media should have both a formal and material dimension. The formal dimension must be based on the existing legal provisions, particularly the absence of a political factor (or its possible minimization) in the activities of mass media. This aspect is particularly important for public media that are funded and/or controlled by state institutions. In the absence of formal restrictions on political influence on public media, there may be a temptation to format content in a way that represents the position of the current ruling party or to limit access to media for opposition representatives (Poell & van Dijck, 2014). The formal aspect of media accessibility for politicians is also related to the existence of ethical codes which describe the standards of behaviour for both editorial teams and individual types of journalists (e.g., economic or political journalists). The material dimension of equal access to public communication media by electoral competitors is a lot more challenging to ensure, as it is directly related to the varying levels of resources available to those participating in elections. This encompasses both material resources and the internal competencies for creating political messages through the media. The latter can help mitigate differences in material resources, as when used appropriately, they enable more effective communication with voters.

The demand for the absence of government influence on the official media message has an ideal dimension as the role of the government in shaping information policy remains natural. Therefore, its content relates more to the study of non-substantive mechanisms of government influence on the content and methods of conveying political messages through the media. Several mechanisms that can allow those in power to influence the official media message can be identified. These include, among others: (1) appointing people indirectly or directly nominated by political parties for key positions in public media; (2) creating messages presenting the government's position by people who formally represent independent institutions (e.g., central banks, state statistical offices, constitutional tribunals) but perform their functions with the support of political forces; (3) financing media through state institutions (state-owned enterprises, government agencies, etc.) in the form of paid advertisements, commercials, or sponsored content. Filling key positions in public media by political parties is based on three mutually inclusive criteria: formal, substantive, and political. The formal criterion is met when the appointed person meets certain (usually normative) conditions. The substantive criterion is fulfilled when the appointed person possesses the qualities and skills expected for the position. The political condition involves meeting the conditions set by the political party (Migalski et al., 2006). Especially the latter factor can influence the media message presented. A similar mechanism to the one presented can also occur when people who formally represent independent institutions create messages. Here, the informal condition for holding the position may also be alignment with political promoters. Informal influence on the media message can also be obtained through economic pressure associated with the allocation of marketing funds from government agencies or state-owned enterprises in specific media outlets. Additionally, it may

also occur when the media's ownership structure is connected to those in power.

The condition for unrestricted reporting on the course of an electoral campaign assumes the existence of pluralistic media, which are provided with the tools for handling election-related content. These tools include materials from political parties, unlimited access to politicians, the ability to organize debates between candidates, the freedom to publish information and opinions in the media, and protection against political pressures on the presentation of electoral competition. It may seem that these are fundamental issues, and their implementation should not pose any problem within the democratic electoral process. However, while there is significant social control over media freedom during election periods at the level of national campaigns and mainstream media, the problem becomes more complex at the regional and local levels. At the regional and local levels, the level of journalistic independence can decrease due to economic pressure. Even though central media are subject to specific social control processes, and their economic independence has stronger foundations, their local counterparts are often directly influenced by decisions made by local politicians. This can lead to the conscious limitation of journalistic freedom of expression by politically motivated local media owners or those managing them on their behalf. Such informal pressure is often more effective than formal directives issued by editorial heads, which, if made public, could also face public criticism.

The freedom of communication between election participants and voters can be ensured both directly and through the media. In the first case, it involves the possibility of carrying out election campaigns that ensure unrestricted access for politicians to voters and vice versa. Of course, certain regulations must be introduced in this area to prevent the anarchization of social behaviour, but these regulations should not undermine the foundations of political freedoms. Just as election

meetings cannot be held in some places (usually public buildings, schools, and sometimes places of worship), there are also limitations on politicians' ability to conduct election campaigns. In this latter case, the aim is to provide peace to citizens who do not want political agitation, or to address situations where there is a fear of overwhelming them (which could result in an increase in their political disorientation or alienation). The second factor in ensuring the freedom of communication between politicians and voters relates to the media as an intermediary. It should allow political entities to reach voters using various types of media. While the contemporary diversification of political communication promotes such freedom, the issue of public media remains a concern, as they are indirectly or directly influenced by politicians, which creates a temptation to raise barriers and prevent political opponents from communicating with voters. The public character of such media determines the involvement of state authorities in their organization, management, and control processes. The influence of the government on public media varies in different countries, but three models can be identified: (1) minimalist, which occurs in countries where the content of commercial media is not regulated, and public media funding is relatively low; (2) task-oriented, where commercial media are required to produce programmes that fulfil the state's identity functions, and public media funding is at a moderate level; (3) interventionist, in which intervention in content is justified by the public interest, and public funding is at a high level (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009). In practice, the tasks assigned to public media and the extent of their public funding determine the prospects of political interference and influence on the content of the message being formulated. However, it appears that the importance of public media is decreasing in consolidated democracies, which may reduce the risk of such negative phenomena.

Among the most important tools of electoral manipulation in the sphere of communication, we can identify: (1) the use of financial resources, which is related to the financial resources possessed, particularly in terms of political parties' ability to create and distribute their own information. The gradual loss of significance by traditional media forces the need to use new forms of media and create their own channels for external communication; (2) creating institutional facilitations in providing easier access to media for parties that exceed a certain electoral threshold, such as free airtime in public media or free broadcast time during the election campaign. This mechanism can contribute to limiting competition and cartelizing the party system (with drastically different concessions granted to various parties); (3) the governing party's political influence on public media, related to the supervisory and managerial functions carried out in public media, which can lead to the reduction in the pluralism of public media during elections; (4) the political agencification of the media. As a result, on the basis of dominant views, some media become informally attributed to specific political parties; (5) the politicization of local media, particularly local newspapers and municipal websites. Local governments can influence the content presented the media operating in their region through the intentional distribution of financial resources; (6) restrictions on reaching voters by way of introducing bans on political advertising in mass media or restrictions on the use of specific mediums (e.g., billboards).

The areas and tools of the electoral communication manipulation are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. The areas and tools of the communication dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Communication	formation of political representation	– bans on political advertising in mass media and/or restrictions on the use of specific mediums
	resource utilization	– utilizing resources with regard to the ability to create and distribute own information – creating institutional facilitations in providing access to media for parties that exceed an electoral threshold – the governing party's political influence on public media, related to its supervisory and managerial functions – the politicization of local media – bans on political advertising in mass media and/or restrictions on the use of specific mediums
	voters' behaviours	– the governing party's political influence on public media, related to its supervisory and managerial functions – the political agencification of the media – the politicization of local media – bans on political advertising in mass media and/or restrictions on the use of specific mediums

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.5. Deputational dimension

Fair elections help achieve values that constitute liberal democracy and empirically serve to create procedures implementing the principle of democratic representation (Wojtasik, 2013). They are referred to as the pillars of democracy, consolidating the decisions of those in power with the demands of citizens, political parties, interest groups, and

social movements. They also form the basic mechanism for verifying the accountability of the ruling authorities for their policies and actions (Courtney, 2011). The cyclical opportunity for the electoral verification of the ruling authorities is a necessary condition in democracy, but merely conducting competitive elections is not a sufficient factor to ensure the proper representation of voters. To achieve this, the transparency and accountability of power are also required, as well as strong competition between political parties and their periodic turnover in the ruling-opposition dimension. Respect for personal freedoms and political rights is necessary, too, as is the guarantee of rights for minorities. To ensure broad participation, the efficient functioning of civil society, which brings together citizens and the state, and free and pluralistic media that enable political communication are also necessary (LeDuc et al., 2002). The indicated (but not exhaustive) list of essential conditions for achieving proper political representation is also a diagnosis of areas vulnerable to electoral manipulation in the parliamentary dimension (Figure 9).

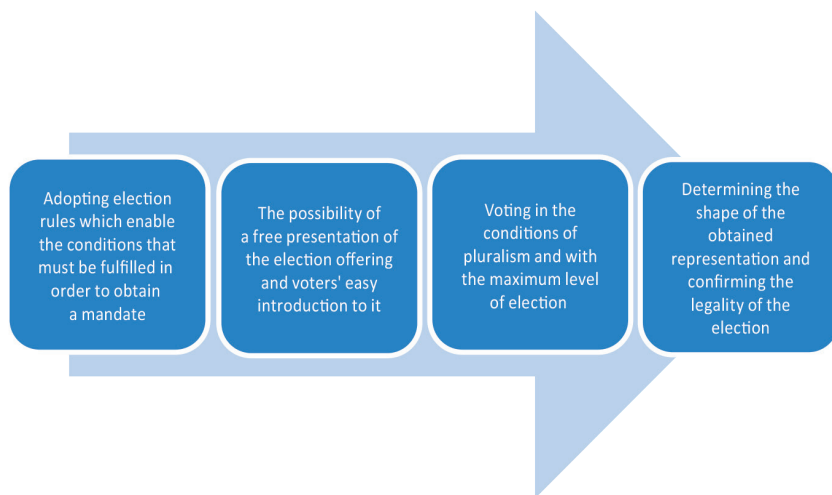


Figure 9. The electoral process in the deputational approach

Source: The author's own study.

Elections are thus a mechanism not only for shaping political authorities but also for ensuring political representation for all citizens. Detailed election rules specify the procedures that condition the purpose of holding them, the mechanisms that determine the composition of the elected bodies, and the level of determinism in the relationships between the various entities participating in electoral competition. These rules can also influence who gets elected and, conversely, effectively hinder others from gaining a mandate. Rein Taagepera (1998) indicates that in the electoral rules of countries undergoing democratization processes, there are specific consequences that may not be present in the states with a long tradition of democracy. Such distinct characteristics are more common in the countries that had previously had liberal-democratic regimes (across the entire territory or in part) and are returning to democratic standards after a period of authoritarianism (or statelessness). When seeking factors to legitimize the change, they generally adopted solutions that promote a high degree of representativeness, resulting in the choice of proportional formulas. The motivation for their use may also be the desire to avoid excessive polarization between two opposing camps: “us” and “them.” Such an approach may also be a result of the particular orientation of the main political forces, which, having no knowledge of the structure of electoral support (e.g., due to the lack of reference to previous, representative elections), adopt proportional solutions as a way to reduce the risk of the electoral system negatively affecting their support, especially in terms of obtaining mandates (Taagepera, 1998).

The pursuit of ensuring balanced political representation as part of the systemic goal of reflecting the social structure can, in consequence, lead to the adoption of solutions that distort citizens’ actual electoral preferences. In classical democratic principles, election results reflect the conflictual nature of the social structure, enabling political representation by adhering to the socio-structural paradigm, in which there

is a connection between an individual's position in the social structure, their interests, and political representation. The functional basis for this lies in socio-political divisions (cleavages) (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

In contemporary liberal democracies, there is a process of heterogenization of model classes and strata. Therefore, there is a temptation to seek other categories of fair representation, as exemplified by gender parity provisions in electoral systems or quota models for creating electoral lists. Apart from territorial representation (which is also functionally challenged, e.g., through the existence of systems that treat the entire country as a single electoral district), any other method of intervening to compensate for the participation of a particular social group (e.g., national or regional) can be perceived as manipulation, even if noble intentions are behind it, such as affirmative gerrymandering (Pierzgałski, 2015; Żukowski, 2003).

The problem of the structure of political representation obtained through elections can be examined using empirical tools that explore the more substantive nature of the phenomenon rather than its structural aspects. However, these tools can be helpful in evaluating whether the division of mandates or the structure of the executive branch achieved through elections accurately reflects societal preferences. The level of representational congruence achieved through elections is a function of the existing alternatives that voters prefer when casting their votes and their final aggregated shape (Wojtasik, 2014b). The first of these tools is the statistically median voter (Powell, 2000). The position of this voter on the left-right political spectrum is the option preferred more frequently than others by the majority of people. The concept of the statistically median voter is related to the statistically average citizen, as it is based on the assumption of universal suffrage in contemporary democracies. In this sense, the position of the statistically median voter among all eligible voters better demonstrates

representational congruence than their position within the subset of actual voters. The second tool examines representational congruence by measuring the distance between the average citizen and those in power. The greater the distance, the lower the congruence; conversely, the smaller the distance, the higher the congruence (Powell, 2000). When studying the distance from those in power, two fundamental measures can be adopted. The first is the distance from the chosen legislative institution, which may be the parliament or another legislative body (e.g., at the regional level). The other is the distance from the average citizen to the parties forming the government or the elected head of state (the personified institution of executive power) (Wojtasik, 2012a).

What is an important factor in achieving fair political representation through elections is the level of voter turnout, which quantitatively determines the potential for speaking about the representativeness of the obtained political representation composition.¹² Most international studies indicate that a high level of electoral disproportionality reduces voter turnout, which is fundamentally in line with the assumption that the lack of proportionality in translating voter support into seats diminishes the sense of efficacy among some voters and leads to absentee behaviour (Karp & Banducci, 2008). “Low voter turnout can undermine the legitimacy of the system on the one hand and lead to its lack of representativeness on the other” (McManus-Czubińska & Miller, 2004). However, there are also views according to which citizens

¹² Andrzej Antoszewski identifies the following criteria for the representativeness of the party system: (1) voter turnout; (2) the percentage of votes cast for parties that did not enter parliament; (3) the level of what is known as “forced electoral volatility;” (4) the number of changes in the political structure of parliament that occur during a parliamentary term. It can be observed that all these elements are directly or indirectly related to the consequences of elections. For more details see: Antoszewski (2004a).

displaying indifference to the election results have a social duty not to participate in voting because their votes would distort the final image of the elections (Kryszewski, 2004). Nevertheless, these claims seem to remain in the realm of speculation since there are limited practical opportunities to empirically verify them in specific cases.

Attempts to instrumentally influence the shape of the obtained representation do not always have manipulative motives, although they should be approached with caution due to the fact that they are identified. Even in cases where pro-democratic motivations are emphasized, they can conceal underlying intentions. The most common manipulative tools in the realm of representation include: (1) the use of elements of the electoral system leading to the disproportionality of election outcomes. The need for the easier formation of a stable government is often cited here as the systemic intention; (2) electoral privilege for certain social groups or granting special status to selected territories. Such actions may be motivated by a desire to reduce differences which hinder or prevent some social groups from obtaining real political representation; (3) nominating candidates for participation who, in the event of electoral success, do not intend to assume the obtained mandate. In this case, the motivation is to use the electoral potential of popular people with above-average electoral support; (4) allocating seats in representative bodies to people who do not run for election, recognizing their merits or special political position; (5) the indirect formula of elections which assumes the presence of a moderating factor for preferences revealed in elections.

The table below illustrates the areas and tools of electoral manipulation in the deputational dimension.

Table 7. The areas and tools of the deputational dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Deputational	formation of political representation	– the use of the electoral system leading to the disproportionality of election outcomes – electoral privilege for certain social groups or granting special status to selected territories – nominating candidates for participation who, in the event of electoral success, do not intend to assume the obtained mandate – allocating seats in representative bodies to people who do not run for election – indirect election formula
	resource utilization	– electoral privilege for certain social groups or granting special status to selected territories – nominating candidates for participation who, in the event of electoral success, do not intend to assume the obtained mandate
	voters' behaviours	– the use of the electoral system leading to the disproportionality of election outcomes – nominating candidates for participation who, in the event of electoral success, do not intend to assume the obtained mandate

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.6. Procedural dimension

The influence of the procedural dimension stems from the ability to shape the procedures of the electoral process, the technical rules of selection, and the principles of participation in elections (see: Figure 10). It is determined through the prism of the components of the applied system for selecting political representation, their interrelationships, and the consequences for the final election outcome. Researchers

of electoral procedures have not developed a consistent position regarding their significance, consequences, and the degree of influence. Some attribute exceptional importance to them (especially the electoral system) and emphasize their significant impact on governance, the constitutional model of the state, or voter behaviour. In this approach, elections become the fundamental functional mechanism for shaping the political landscape in a state, often reducing the electoral system itself to an instrument of political manipulation (Sartori, 1968). Others treat the electoral procedures applied as a dependent variable, associating the nature of the political system more strongly with political tradition, social structure, economic development, and the level of political culture rather than with the adopted electoral formula (Lijphart, 1994).

As mentioned earlier, the principles that allow elections to be called fair are located on three planes: the procedural, communication, and control layers. Among the procedural requirements, the following are mentioned: (1) the transparency of the electoral process; (2) the legal regulation of the electoral procedure, guaranteeing the exclusivity of the electoral decision; (3) the equal treatment of entities participating in electoral competition; (4) the freedom to be included in the electoral register; (5) adherence to the electoral calendar provisions; (6) the secrecy of the vote (Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, 1994). Electoral systems themselves are perceived as one of the most susceptible elements to manipulation (Lijphart, 1994), and changes introduced in them are often aimed at maximizing the effects achievable through elections (Tsebelis, 1990). As Peter Harris and Ben Reilly (1998) point out, “The choice of an electoral system can effectively determine who is elected and which party gains power. Even with the same number of votes for a party, one system can lead to a majority and one-party rule, while another may require the formation of coalitions.” It should be stressed, however, that the regulations concerning

the character and mode of carrying out elections result from the interests of the political forces that pass them. Douglass C. North (1990) observes that electoral institutions, in terms of formal rules, are created to serve the interests of those who had the strongest bargaining power when new rules were adopted. The observations mentioned above clearly indicate that the components of the selection procedure are the most fundamental tools of political manipulation, but, thanks to this, their mechanisms and potential effects are widely known. Therefore, even in cases of apparent manipulative motives behind the choice of specific procedures, they are not a basis for questioning the legality of the electoral process by an independent body.

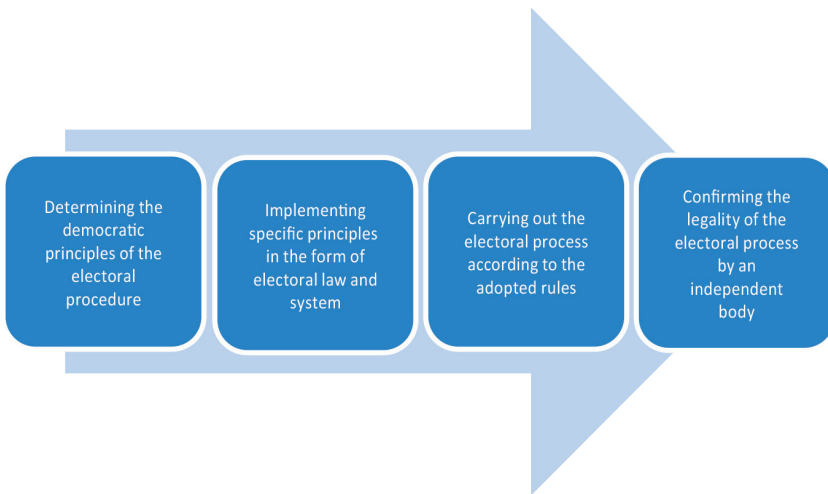


Figure 10. The electoral process in the procedural approach

Source: The author's own study.

Electoral systems differ from each other on the basis of the electoral formula they employ. This is a rule (or set of rules) that determines which candidate is elected in a given district and how the number of

votes received by a party is converted into the number of seats it receives, hence clearly differentiating electoral systems (Sokół, 2007). It should be pointed out that scholars express various doubts regarding the conceptual framework related to electoral formulas and electoral systems (Lijphart, 1987). Some suggest the possibility of considering the term “electoral formula” as a synonym for the “voting system,” thus referring to majoritarian, proportional, and mixed (quasi-proportional) voting systems. Similarly, the “proportional formula” or “majoritarian formula” are synonyms for “proportional elections” and “majoritarian elections” (Sokół, 2007). Regardless of the adopted way of defining the electoral system, each of them leads to a certain degree of distortion of voters’ will, indicating the potential for manipulation. To determine the consequences of the operation of different electoral systems in this regard, various measurement methods can be used, but the most effective approach involves their combined application. In this respect, Andrzej Antoszewski proposes referring to proportionality coefficients, effective party number reduction, and the “breakthrough point.”¹³ He distinguishes the following: (1) relatively proportional systems, reflecting the structure of voters’ preferences (marked by a high proportionality coefficient above 95%, a low “breakthrough point” up to 10%, and a low coefficient of effective party number

¹³ The proportionality coefficient is the sum of the differences between the percentage of votes obtained and the percentage of seats won by individual parties, divided by 2, and subtracted from 100. The effective party reduction coefficient is calculated by dividing the difference between the effective number of parties at the electoral level and the effective number of parties at the parliamentary level by the effective number of parties at the electoral level, and then multiplying this result by 100. The “breakthrough point” represents the threshold of support below which parties are underrepresented (the percentage of seats they obtain is lower than the percentage of votes obtained). For more details see: Antoszewski (2001).

reduction ranging from 0 to 10); (2) distorting systems, causing the effect of moderate disproportionality (a proportionality coefficient value between 80 and 95%), marked by an average effective party number reduction coefficient (ranging from 10 to 20) and an average “breakthrough point” value (ranging from 10 to 25%); (3) discriminatory systems, particularly marked by a high “breakthrough point” value above 25%, a high coefficient of effective party number reduction above 25, and low proportionality (below 80%) (Antoszewski, 2001).

Among the components of the electoral system, researchers most frequently distinguish the parameters of the electoral district, voters’ rights during the ballot, and the electoral formula (Gallagher & Mitchell, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2008). However, one must also consider other factors that influence the final voting results (Chmaj & Skrzydło, 2011). Among the most frequently raised elements, other than the electoral formula, are electoral thresholds (statutory and natural), the models of candidate lists, and procedures aimed at increasing voter participation. The concept of the size of an electoral district can be considered from the perspective of the area it encompasses, the population that resides in it (associated with the number of eligible voters), and the number of seats to be distributed during the elections. “The shape and boundaries of districts are related to the socio-economic structure of the voters in a given district. Electoral districts are distinguished taking into account geographical and demographic factors, such as the size of the electorate. District borders often coincide with the borders of administrative-political units, or special boundaries are created by a specific legislative or executive body. The shape and borders of districts can be subject to manipulation to privilege a specific group of voters at the expense of another” (Żukowski, 1997). A number of conducted studies seem to confirm that the number of seats allocated in an electoral district is one of the fundamental factors that can influence the disproportionality of electoral systems, thus affecting

the degree of distortion of citizens' will expressed in elections (Markowski, 2010). Some researchers even see the size of electoral districts as the decisive factor affecting the proportionality of election outcomes (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989).¹⁴ However, conclusions from many other studies urge caution in holding such a straightforward belief in the relationship between proportionality and the size of electoral districts (e.g., Benoit, 2000; Michalak, 2016a; Pilet et al., 2012). Striving to guarantee a stable government majority through elections is easier in the case of smaller districts, which channel the distribution of seats towards the largest parties. This effect is particularly evident in single-member districts, and with a greater number of seats, it is possible to use instruments (such as electoral thresholds, methods of converting votes into seats favoring parties with greater electoral support) to counteract excessive factionalism (Skotnicki, 2010). The shape of an electoral district is equally controversial as the size of the district when assessing its significance. Variables taken into consideration include the geographical shape of the district and its internal structure, conditioned by the possibility of delineating smaller units of division. Through the intentional division of the territory into districts, one can effectively control the course of elections and maximize the number of obtained seats.

The structure of the vote is another element of the electoral system. It pertains to voters' rights when casting their vote. The solutions adopted in specific electoral laws regulate the extent to which citizens can express their preferences on the day of the election. The format of

¹⁴ As A. Żukowski points out, "Until the late 1980s, Douglas Rae's thesis that the electoral formula affects the proportionality of elections, while the size of electoral districts does not, was in force. Rein Taagepera and Mathew Soberg Shugart, based on their research, have shown that the size of electoral districts is the 'decisive factor' influencing the proportionality of election results" (Żukowski, 2010a).

candidate lists and the structure of voting can significantly increase or decrease the influence of the electorate on the choice of a candidate. In the case of voting for electoral lists, the character of these lists is of fundamental importance. They can take three forms: (1) closed lists, (2) open lists, and (3) free lists (Nohlen, 2004). The form of the electoral list has a significant impact on the decision-making autonomy of the voter. Closed lists mean that people can only vote for the competing parties without the possibility of highlighting the personal aspect of the elections. Open lists grant voters the authority to select a candidate (or candidates) from the options presented by political parties. With free lists, election participants have the freedom to use their vote as they choose, for example, by ranking candidates or splitting the power of their vote. General relationships between the forms of candidate lists and voting methods are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. The relationship between the forms of electoral lists and voting methods

Form of the electoral list	Voting method
Closed list The fixed order of candidates on the list	The voter has one vote and selects the entire list.
Open list The possibility of changing the order of candidates on the list by casting preferential votes or creating a new order	The voter has a preferential vote or at least two votes (one for the list, another for the candidate), or a number of votes correlated with the number of representatives to be elected. They can also cast multiple votes for one candidate (cumulation).
Free list The free possibility of making changes both within the list and between lists	The voter has multiple votes and the option to create “their” list based on proposals outlined by competing political entities (known as panachageing).

Source: The author’s own study based on: Nohlen (2004).

The most important procedural factors which can be subject to electoral manipulation include: (1) the choice of a specific electoral system, since it is possible to achieve representation which reflects neither the social structure nor the actual distribution of votes in elections (Norris, 1997); (2) the determination and changes of electoral district boundaries. This includes phenomena like gerrymandering (the partisan division of electoral districts) and malapportionment (differences in the size of districts and representation norms), as well as the instrumental determination of the size of electoral districts in proportional representation elections (Lijphart, 1994); (3) the construction of electoral lists, particularly closed lists. As it is parties that establish the order of candidates (voters cannot change this order), closed lists increase candidates' dependence on political parties, giving parties the ability to plan the composition of factions. The order on such lists is determined by party authorities, which has been criticized for diminishing voters' ability to have full control over the selection of a particular candidate for a legislative body. It limits intra-party competition for the electorate's votes and makes the functioning of the party dependent on its leader or a small group of its most important politicians (Sokół, 2007); (4) the methods of converting votes into seats. Despite some controversy, most researchers agree that their intentional use can favour certain parties at the expense of others (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989); (5) electoral thresholds, which, when used deliberately, can be a tool for limiting political competition (Lijphart, 1990).

The areas and tools of the procedural dimension of electoral manipulation are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. The areas and tools of the procedural dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Procedural	formation of political representation	– the choice of a specific electoral system – determining and changing the boundaries of electoral districts – the methods of converting votes into seats – electoral thresholds used
	resource utilization	– the constructions of electoral lists – electoral thresholds used
	voters' behaviours	– the choice of a specific electoral system – the constructions of electoral lists – electoral thresholds used

Source: The author's own study.

1.8.7. Alternational dimension

The manipulative assumption of the alternation level is to limit the electoral chances of political opponents by either increasing (for the opposition) or decreasing (for the incumbents) the prospects of a change in the election results regarding the entity in power. If the main function of elections is considered to be the creation of power, in the majority of cases, the alternative is the choice between the incumbents (or their successors) and the challengers. What is the logical complement of this dichotomous division is the internal structuring of both these camps (where possible) by specifying their components. These components are often created by more than one competing entity in the elections, especially on the side of the opposition. As far as incumbents are concerned, if the elections concern a single-person body, the obvious consequence is the monistic character of the incumbent (assuming their candidacy in the elections). If the elections concern a multi-person body, it is possible and often the case that a coalition of political

groups governing together, takes part in the elections as separate and competing entities. Naturally, despite the agreement at the executive level, they may be competitors in the elections. This only does not happen when those forming the executive for electoral purposes reach an agreement on joint participation in the elections, creating an electoral coalition. On the opposition side, the number of contenders may inherently be higher, but this does not mean that it always is. It often happens that elections have an approval rather than a selective character. This is the case when the opposition does not nominate its candidate against the incumbent seeking re-election. Such a stance may be motivated by the lack of realistic chances of electoral success or sometimes the lack of institutionalized opposition capable of engaging in electoral activities, especially in relatively small administrative structures, such as at the local level. The electoral process in the alternation level is presented in Figure 11.

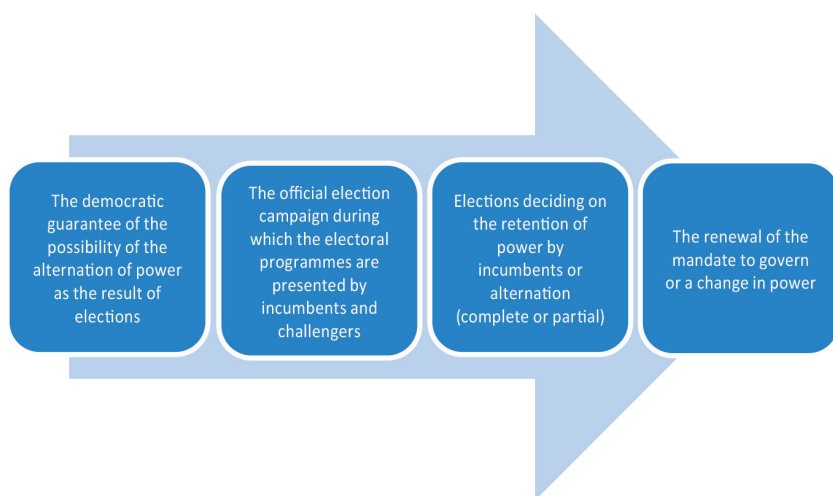


Figure 11. The electoral process in the alternational approach

Source: The author's own study.

The alternational dimension of electoral manipulation, like most others, is marked by its asymmetry – the ruling party has a greater potential to use it than opposition forces. This is due to both their attributes of power (influence on shaping normative solutions, making authoritative decisions within the political system, and affecting the media) and the natural advantage gained from the focus of the society on those in power. Therefore, they can directly influence the rules of electoral competition as well as its course, by determining the creation of a normative and societal environment favourable to them, creating solutions that can positively shape voters' attitudes, and delivering messages effectively to those interested. All this can affect limiting the prospects of the alternation of power, but, as it appears, does not guarantee the ruling party's continued dominance. The impact of the alternational dimension on political opposition is first of all expressed through limiting the ability to utilize their electoral potential or the need to use it in a way that reduces its effectiveness. While electoral competition between the ruling party and the opposition is relatively clear for those in power, opposition parties have an additional, internal dimension to consider. In addition to competing against the ruling party, they must also consider the internal rivalry among entities vying for power. As a result, those in power (and, to a lesser extent, the opposition) may be interested in the disintegration of opposition forces, with the goal of having their opponents focus on internal rivalries, especially in a system of seat allocation favouring larger parties. This does not mean, however, that the opposition does not have electoral manipulation tools that would limit the ruling party's electoral prospects. The most important tool is the ability to field candidates or groups whose goal is to mislead voters and split their support.

In addition to the cases described above, in some circumstances, the entity in power may choose not to engage in electoral competition. This specifically refers to the same political entity or candidate who

competed in a previous election. The factors determining this decision can be either objective (external) or instrumental (internal). The objective factors are based on influences coming from outside the parties or candidates, largely independent of the electoral competition entities. This occurs especially when (1) there are limitations on the number of terms of office served, (2) the office is vacated, or (3) when those in power experience political disintegration. The first two circumstances are personalized, while the third is related to the institutional character of electoral competition. Term limitations apply to the length of holding elected offices, often motivated by the need to prevent political power from becoming too concentrated. These rules can also serve to address the potential asymmetry in electoral competition mentioned earlier, with those in power having tools to compete more effectively for voters' support. Thus, term limits can be considered a mechanism for levelling the electoral playing field. Vacating the office can be the result of random events (death, severe illness) and political ones, associated with the possibility of terminating a mandate or removing someone from office through administrative decisions (impeachment) or voters' decisions (recall). It should be noted that especially in the case of expiring mandates, there may be legal grounds for re-election. The third case, which has an institutional character, stresses the functional breakdown of the political entity in power. This can happen for organizational reasons (the departure or death of a leader, an inefficient structure, etc.) or political ones (for example, achieving the main political demand in the case of a single-issue party).

The other group of determinants that lead to those in power not participating in electoral competition are instrumental factors. These are typically based on the autonomous decisions of a political decision-maker, and they are not grounded in the abovementioned objective factors, which stem from external constraints. Instead, these internal instrumental factors are determined by the politician or

the political entity they support. These institutional determinants are often encountered when those in power negatively assess their electoral prospects and, to improve them, undergo a form of rebranding. This can take three primary forms. In the first form, the incumbent designates their successor, providing support or formal endorsement in the elections. In doing so, they become, to some degree, a political patron, putting their authority and electoral potential on the line to support the successor. As one can see, this process is based on a personal relationship, although other factors connecting the candidates are possible. The second form involves providing support from the political entity to a “substitute candidate,” who steps in for a politician losing popularity. This loss of popularity can result from accumulating negative information and opinions about the politician or simply voters’ fatigue, which can grow over the duration of the politician’s term. To avoid reducing their own electoral prospects, the party offers support to a person whose electoral prospects appear better than those of the incumbent. The third form relates to creating a new political entity which is to a large degree based on the political predecessor. When the institutional continuity of such a group is broken, organizational, personal, and ideological ties can still be maintained. All these cases generally occur within the phenomenon of electoral substitution, in which the entity resigning (or being forced to resign) from running in the elections establishes, designates, or has a natural successor.

The concept of “electoral substitution” involves a relationship between the departing politician and the new candidate taking their place. While the institutional framework of elections and the potential transfer of power ensures the uninterrupted functioning of the political system, these connections can guarantee the continuity of political representation of citizens (in the case of a substitute candidate’s victory) or a change in representation when the opposition wins. Of course, this is a bit of an oversimplification, as one cannot expect the exact

same voters to support the incumbent and then the substitute candidate. However, the mechanism described carries a certain manipulative potential driven by the opportunities provided by exercising power. This manipulative potential is linked to the exclusive resources that allow the earlier promotion of such a candidate or group outside the official election campaign calendar, bypassing strict election campaign financing regulations. On a personal level, this can involve the intentional exposure of such a candidate in the social sphere. They may be appointed to a position that facilitates the creation of a political image and increases public recognition. They can create social activities by participating in social initiatives on behalf of the ruling party, capturing citizens' interest and media attention. They can also benefit from the media coverage controlled by those in power. On an institutional level, when a political party undergoes political rebranding, the manipulative practice is not as obvious as in the case of a personal replacement. The new party may, for instance, informally use the organizational resources of the old party, be promoted at events organized by it, or engage in high-profile social projects instead of its predecessor.

Functional relationships between the incumbent and their potential successor can have an institutional, personal, or ideological character, often being a mixture of these elements. Institutional relationships prevail when there are organizational dependencies between entities. We observe this phenomenon quite frequently in local elections, when political party representatives, wishing to distance themselves from party associations, become affiliated with local committees, even though they previously ran with the formal support of political parties. Personal substitution takes place when the candidate in the election changes, but the political label under which they run remains the same. Irrespective of whether this is due to term limits or other reasons, the essence of the matter here is the legitimacy provided to the new candidate by the political entity. The ideological case

is related to continuity achieved through representing the same ideological background or a segment of the electorate, which lacks a stable form of electoral institutionalization. Due to the absence of such institutionalization, these formal relationships with a candidate are often more implicit than explicitly established.

Ideological relationships, from the perspective of electoral manipulation, are interesting for another reason: the motivation to engage in political activity can be different from the classic predictions associated with political involvement. By treating ideology as a set of ideas and expectations about the surrounding reality, people and social groups can focus on goals which are difficult to directly associate with political connotations. The relationships between members of such groups can go beyond social standards, assuming, for example, a paternalistic or even submissive character. In such cases, electoral substitution may take an apparent form because the new candidate will be permanently subject to the decisions of the entity which decided on their candidacy. Hence, if they are elected, it is difficult to speak of the fulfilment of the democratic principle of political representation, even though the rules of democratic elections would be maintained. However, if the submissive relationship described here does not exist, motivations for electoral success can still differ from the classic (dominant) ones. These motivations may include the need to express opposition to someone or something, familiarize citizens with non-political issues that do not exist in public discourse, or change an element of social reality that would be impossible without gaining power.

The prospect of the potential loss of power can be both a motivating factor for the incumbents to take actions that positively determine their electoral chances and a factor that challengers may use to make it more difficult for the ruling party to engage in electoral competition. However, the pretenders' possibilities, especially considering their practical lack of influence on normative solutions, are significantly

smaller. In general, manipulative influence on the dimension of alternation in the election results can be achieved through four types of actions: (1) intentionally creating a political reality image among voters which has no basis in reality or the interpretation of which does not rely on true premises; (2) creating artificial electoral alternatives to mislead the voter and/or lead to the dispersion of support for specific parties or candidates; (3) instrumental changes in the electoral law or other normative acts which are designed to prevent the holding of elections; (4) limiting the number of terms of office to prevent re-election. The presented overview may not exhaust the catalogue of manipulative tools in the field of the alternation of power, especially since they usually do not occur as single activities. They are generally associated with other campaign activities, the coordination of which is intended to achieve the desired effect on the election day. Taking into consideration the potential of the available resources, it can be assumed that the incumbents typically have more extensive possibilities and use them to conduct simultaneously related campaign activities, including manipulative ones. The areas and tools of the alternation dimension of electoral manipulation are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. The areas and tools of the alternational dimension of electoral manipulation

Dimension	Areas	Tools
Alternational	formation of political representation	– creating artificial electoral alternatives – instrumental changes in the electoral law or other normative acts – limiting the number of terms of office to prevent re-election
	resource utilization	– creating artificial electoral alternatives – instrumental changes in the electoral law or other normative acts

Dimension	Areas	Tools
		– limiting the number of terms of office to prevent re-election
	voters' behaviours	– intentionally creating a political reality image – instrumental changes in the electoral law or other normative acts

Source: The author's own study.

* * *

Within democratic standards, entities involved in electoral competition have multiple opportunities to instrumentally influence the outcomes of elections. The increasing level of electoral determinism in the contemporary liberal democracies has made electoral manipulations more common, with techniques becoming increasingly sophisticated. The marketization of the electoral arena means that political parties and candidates receive support from professional entities with competencies which go far beyond the traditional skills of election participants (Kolczyński, 2014). The proliferation of electoral manipulation techniques stems from the simultaneous occurrence of three phenomena in terms of time and procedure. Firstly, the growing complexity of the electoral process, particularly in its long-term sense, provides more opportunities for these manipulations to occur. Secondly, changes in political communication have created new areas susceptible to manipulation. It is manipulations via social media, in particular, that pose the most serious threat to the integrity of elections due to their specific characteristics such as a lack of transparency, limited adaptability to their effects, and irreversibility. Thirdly, the latest knowledge in communication and psychology has been used

for carrying out these manipulations. Owing to the dynamic progress in understanding human personality and its mobilization-adaptation mechanisms, the perception, behaviour, and attitudes of voters can be more effectively influenced.

The described manipulative actions are often ethically questionable, since they try to affect the integrity of the electoral process, understood in a non-normative sense as the fairness of rules and the equality of opportunities. Many times, especially in terms of resource utilization, electoral manipulations involve attempts to influence the election outcome on the edge of legality and democratic principles. This is why it is crucial that they are detected by the authorities responsible for monitoring the legality of actions and the fairness of elections, as well as specialized civil organizations. The knowledge of the applied manipulation techniques allows the subjects targeted and the bodies tasked with safeguarding the fairness of electoral competition to counteract them. What is more, the observation of the consequences of manipulation techniques used by political parties and candidates should lead to adjustments in normative solutions regarding the organization and conduct of elections. The ongoing adaptation to changing conditions should guide the planning of the shape and course of the electoral process. However, this adaptation may encounter resistance from those entities which may lose competitive advantages as a result of these changes. Most often, these are the incumbents who hold power and, thus, have an influence on constructing the rules of the electoral game.

Combating electoral manipulations is like “chasing the rabbit,” i.e., a pursuit in which, despite the efforts invested, the rabbit is never ultimately caught. The temptation to bend the rules and exploit one’s advantages during elections will always be stronger than the sense of impropriety in the determinism of one’s actions. The market-oriented nature of the electoral game and the prospect of gaining or losing a mandate leads to ignoring values such as the common good and

seeking consensus instead of confrontation. At the same time, changes in the social environment, new communication tools, or even more sophisticated psychological techniques for exerting influence give rise to increasingly novel forms of electoral manipulation. The examples and descriptions in the following chapters merely record past manipulations, with little hope of presenting all the newer ones, particularly those that are still waiting to be decoded.

CHAPTER TWO

Institutional manipulations

2.1. Introduction

The mechanisms described in the first chapter which change the level of electoral uncertainty, through their essential components, determine two fundamental types of electoral manipulation: institutional and communicative. This distinction is based on historical experiences, the subject of manipulative influence, and potential areas that manipulative change may concern. In the subjective aspect, manipulations affect both dimensions of electoral competition by the possibility of shaping its rules and the course of the electoral communication process. The described areas of manipulation have a universal character and in both cases apply to the emergence of political representation, the differentiation of the potential of resources used, as well as the shaping of voters' attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, the construction of this chapter, as well as the next one concerning communicative manipulations, will be based on identifying and discussing potential manipulative effects precisely in the mentioned areas. The function of institutional electoral manipulations is to have a particular influence on the rules and course of the electoral process, as well as converting the results of the vote into its outcome in the form of acquired mandates, which will reward the promoters of manipulative actions. One should remember that not every interference in the formal dimension of the electoral process (similarly to the communicative

dimension) will be considered a manipulative action.¹ Everything depends on the intentions of the entities making normative corrections. Sometimes, changes result from systemic motivations aimed at adapting the functioning of the political sphere to changing external conditions. This may occur, for example, when the parliament, due to a high degree of factionalization, has lost the ability to generate stable, majority governments. In such a situation, a correction that strengthens larger political groups, despite clearly defined beneficiaries, should not be treated as a manipulative action because it is motivated by systemic reasons rather than instrumental ones. An example of such action was the change in the electoral system before the 1993 elections for the Polish Sejm, which aimed to rationalize the political structure of the lower chamber of the parliament by reducing the number of political parties. As a result of the changes introduced, six groups obtained seats compared to 29 in the previous election of 1991 (Wojtasik, 2012a).

While communication manipulations first of all affect the mobilization or demobilization of the entire electorate or its individual segments, institutional manipulations primarily influence the way political representation is generated and the potential for utilizing resources

¹ The identification of electoral manipulations and their impact on the integrity of the electoral process, primarily due to the dynamics and changes in electoral competition, still lacks universally accepted research methodology. This is evident in the challenges researchers face in the largest project analysing electoral integrity on a global scale in the second decade of the 21st century. According to their findings, elections in some American states were less fair than in countries like Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, or Rwanda, and in Bulgaria and Romania, they were more manipulated than in North Korea and Cuba (The Electoral Integrity Project, 2021), which is not accurate. The methodology proposed in this book for detecting electoral manipulations involves identifying areas where such actions could be carried out and then examining specific cases in their normative and communicative context, as the same action in different reference framework may be classified differently.

by competing actors in elections. The institutional form of manipulation affects changes in the normative environment of electoral competition, making the focus of the influence the design of procedural solutions which allows privileging some electoral actors at the expense of others (Żukowski, 2006), or using the existing regulations in a particular way. Competing actors may seek to shape the course of the electoral process and the rules for electoral decision-making to work in favour of their own ideas, the effective use of their resources, or the more efficient conduct of election campaigns. Sometimes, as in the case of the backup procedure for the election of the President of the United States by the House of Representatives (increasing the electoral potential of less populous states, which more often favour the Republican Party) (Wiciech, 2016), a great deal of foresight is required in shaping possible instruments for manipulation. Due to their procedural dimension, the use of institutional manipulations requires knowledge, skill, and the ability to anticipate potential consequences. This difficulty also stems from a higher degree of transparency (compared to communication manipulations) – the public opinion and political rivals are usually able to quickly identify both the manipulative motivation and its possible effect. Therefore, the latter may implement adaptive strategies to counteract the anticipated consequences of manipulation.

The influence of institutional electoral manipulations can be created through several basic types of actions, with the primary one being the adjustment of the rules of the electoral process to one's political potential. This requires a strategic initiative that enables the identification of available resources and the allocation of these resources in a way that maximizes efficiency as compared to competitors. Another possible action within institutional manipulations is the management of the parameters of the electoral market, such as its size, competitiveness, or openness (Boix, 2010). What can be an effective manipulative mechanism in this sphere is the introduction of a moderating factor,

such as an electoral college, which translates the voting outcome into the shape of the institution making the final choice. In this case, both the composition of the elected electoral college and its decision can contribute to correcting the will of the voters as revealed in the act of voting. In relatively rare situations, the disproportionality of the electoral process can lead to the negation of the voting result (understood as the aggregated number of votes) in the form of a different allocation of mandates. An example of such a phenomenon is the results of the 1951 British House of Commons election, in which the Conservative Party won 321 seats with the support of 48% of voters, while the Labour Party, with 48.8% of the votes, only obtained 295 seats. The reverse situation occurred in the 1974 elections, in which the Tories received 37.8% of the votes, resulting in 297 seats, and 37.2% of the votes for the Labour Party led to 301 seats (Urbaniak, 2015). Another common direction of institutional manipulation is the differentiation of opportunities to raise and use financial resources, which are often favoured by the incumbents through applied restrictions and limits, as those on power usually have greater recognition and political capital (van Erkel & Thijssen, 2016).

Both in the case of communication manipulations (the potential of which for use is somewhat more evenly distributed between the ruling party and the opposition, although it is not necessarily symmetrical) and institutional manipulations, there is an advantage in their application by the governing majority. For the opposition and challengers, the institutional dimension of electoral manipulation can primarily impact them by limiting the possibility of effectively utilizing their electoral potential or requiring its use in a way that reduces the attainable utility. While electoral competition on the ruling party-contenders level is relatively clear for those in power, in the case of the opposition, there may be an additional, internal dimension. In addition to competing with the ruling party (which, even in a multiparty cabinet

situation, is often more internally coherent), the opposition must also consider the internal competitiveness within entities seeking to take power. Therefore, those in power may be interested in structuring the electoral competition landscape in a way that encourages their opponents to compete among themselves. However, this does not mean that challengers do not have institutional manipulation tools that would favour limiting the electoral prospects of the governing party. The most important of these seems to be the ability to participate in elections of candidates or groups whose primary goal is to disintegrate the support for the incumbents (Ariga, 2015).

2.2. Manipulations of the electoral system

2.2.1. The architecture of the electoral system

The ability to instrumentally influence the normative rules of electoral competition is characteristic of entities that have the capacity to shape these rules, which most often refers to those in power.² This stems from the political potential they have to make changes and from pragmatic calculations, where these entities do not want the solutions they introduce to support their political opponents. The changes to Hungary's electoral code in 2020 regarding the registration of electoral lists are an example of regulations that the ruling party adopted against the opposition. To register a national list, parties must nominate candidates in at least 71 (previously 27) out of the 106 single-member districts and in at least 14 (previously 9) out of the 19 counties, which clearly

² Relatively short periods may occur when the actual power is wielded by a different entity than the one with the potential to legislate and change the law. This happens when the existing majority disintegrates (e.g., through the secession of some politicians or the division of a party), and the previously established executive structure continues to function until the next elections.

indicates a preference for the strongest party – the ruling Fidesz party (Freedom House, 2021). Rafał Glajcar (2016) points out that the creation and modification of the rules of the electoral system are closely linked to parliamentary arithmetic. Of course, there may be a situation where the inspiration for introducing these changes comes from outside (from the opposition and is intended to work in its favour) and is not identified by the ruling party as a potential threat. However, the likelihood of such an event is relatively small. What is a greater threat to those in power here is the time perspective, in which new regulations, calculated based on current conditions, can have a completely different impact over time. As regards the potential for manipulation in relation to the differences between majority and proportional election formulas, one can refer to the study findings of Sarah Birch, who, in the case of 24 countries, demonstrated that majority elections conducted in single-member districts are more vulnerable to manipulation than those conducted in a proportional formula. Two main factors determine this. The first is the greater deterministic nature of majority elections (since there can only be one winner) because candidates can gain more through manipulation in such elections in comparison to proportional ones. Secondly, such manipulations are more effective because the number of votes needed to change the outcome is usually smaller than in proportional elections (Birch, 2007).

The decision on the choice of an electoral system has significant potential for manipulation. In this context, there is a clear subjective connection – it is the ruling party or another majority capable of designing and implementing electoral rules that can introduce solutions which benefit themselves or target their political opponents (increasing their chances). As Wojciech Sokół (2016) points out: “In political practice, electoral systems most often change when a party or a coalition of parties support a new solution which increases the number of seats they hold and has the decision-making power to put it into effect. Electoral

systems, on the other hand, will not change when a party or coalition with the ability to change the electoral system assess that the new solution will not allow it to obtain more seats compared to the existing state of affairs. The supporters of stable political rules may often perceive such a situation in terms of political manipulation.” An example of changes to the entire architecture of the electoral system that were driven by party interests is the Italian electoral law from 2005. It was passed with the votes of right-wing parties and served their interests, emphasizing the proportionality of the electoral formula and establishing a mechanism for a majority premium, which was intended to provide the winner with an advantage and, consequently, stability in a majority government. This premium helped them to obtain additional mandates, securing 54% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies – 24 more than the majority (Bokszczanin, 2016). On the other hand, the elections to the British House of Commons are an example of electoral system stability driven by party interests. Despite substantive reasons resulting from social changes and demands for over a century to introduce a proportional system, the stability of patterns of the alteration of power between the two largest political parties fundamentally limits the potential for change and solidifies the shape of the party system based on the dominance of the Tories and the Labour Party (Urbaniak, 2015).

Therefore, the establishment of electoral rules is not independent but results from the existing pragmatic or instrumental conditions. Among the pragmatic determinants, we can mention history, democratic tradition, social structure, the openness of the economic system, and the current regime model (Persson & Tabellini, 2005). These factors also affect the direction of changes in the electoral law in the context of adaptation to changing systemic conditions. The most important instrumental determinants in this regard are the expectations of political decision-makers and prioritizing one of two representation

goals: creating a majority or reflecting the structure of the electorate (Nohlen, 2005). Radosław Markowski (2010) indicates: “A historical overview shows that the electoral system model is seldom the result of a well-planned, rational decision. It is usually a derivative of the interactive influence of the strength of different political orientations within the country, the specific characteristics of social structure, especially the existence of ethnic minorities, the institutional traditions of the state, and external factors – the diffusion of foreign patterns or even the imposition of political institutions by more powerful neighbours or victorious parties (as was done to Japan and Germany after World War II).” The instrumental choice of an electoral system by political decision-makers means that the organization of the electoral competition arena stems from the expectations of the entities making such a choice. An example of this was the electoral reform in Moldova in 2017. It introduced a mixed electoral system for the parliament, explicitly supporting the two largest parties at the time – the ruling Democratic Party of Moldova and the opposition pro-Russian Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova. The changes faced widespread criticism from both other political forces and the international community (Peru & Dorogan, 2018), and after two years, proportional solutions were reinstated.

Some scholars go as far as to perceive the choice of an electoral system as a fundamental decision to resolve the conflict between the competitive definitions of democracy (Katz, 1997). Such a claim may seem too far-reaching in its conclusions, but it shows the possible political consequences that come with the decision to choose a specific electoral system. This process can be illustrated by the polarized change in the way the French National Assembly was elected, which took place in 1985. The shift from France’s political tradition of a majoritarian system to a proportional one (with a 5% electoral threshold) was motivated by the desire of the left-wing government in power at the time to

retain political influence. As indicated by Łukasz Jakubiak, taking actions aimed at limiting the influence of competing political forces had the characteristics of classic “juggling” with the electoral system. As a result of the new regulations, the right-wing won the 1986 elections, but the impact of the proportional electoral mechanism deprived them of the traditional electoral overrepresentation enjoyed by the winner of the previous elections (they only had two more seats than the majority required for governing). As could be predicted, one of the primary directions of legislative changes after right-wing parties came to power was a return to majoritarian solutions, which were reinstated in the same year (Jakubiak, 2016).

The essence of manipulative influence through the choice of an electoral system is first of all related to the potential to influence voters’ behaviour and the conversion of the voting result into the outcome of elections, understood as the allocation of seats. The intentional shaping of voters’ behaviour through the introduced electoral arrangements operates on two levels. The first one involves the influence on the overall level of participation in the election, measured by voter turnout. Building on the assumption made in this book that the size of turnout is not neutral for the election outcome, entities with influence over the electoral system will choose solutions which benefit them, aiming to stimulate or demobilize citizens’ participation. The other level assumes the possibility of selectively influencing specific segments of the electorate and stimulating them to participate in the elections or, conversely, discouraging them from doing so.

The rules of the electoral system can influence voter turnout on three fundamental levels: the choice of the electoral formula, the complexity of the voting procedure, and the tools that encourage the casting of so-called insignificant votes. In the first case, the overriding decision concerns choosing between proportional mechanisms and a majority formula or a system that combines both. The latter option,

resulting in the so-called multi-level electoral system, is also conducive to other possible manipulations. This pertains to the possibility of “double candidature” and specific safeguards for politicians who can win a seat at one level even if they lose at another. The 1998 Bundestag elections in Germany can serve as an example here. The incumbent Chancellor Helmut Kohl lost in a single-member district but obtained a seat from a closed party list (Jarentowski, 2016). The second level, related to the complexity of the voting procedure, can be a discouraging factor for citizens’ participation in elections, particularly when rapid changes are introduced in the way votes are cast, leading to voter confusion. The third factor emphasizes the impact of procedures that allow voters to cast ballots that do not affect the allocation of seats. This mechanism satisfies the social need for participation in elections (sometimes seen as a civic duty) and, apart from increasing voter turnout, generally does not have any bearing on the distribution of seats.

The first significant determinant that can influence voter turnout is the choice between a majority and a proportional electoral formula. The electoral formula is a rule or a set of rules determining which candidate is elected and how the number of votes received by electoral competitors is converted into the number of seats won (Sokół, 2016). Cross-national studies show that the average voter turnout is higher in proportional systems than in majority systems (Lijphart, 1999). Several factors can contribute to this, including focusing electoral competition on candidates with the best chances of success and the prospects of political representation for minority groups (ethnic, national, religious, etc.). What is an important element that can indirectly lead to lower turnout in majority-based elections is the higher level of disproportionality, especially in those countries where citizens are unwilling to vote strategically (Sokół, 2016).

Focusing electoral competition on candidates with the best chances of success is especially important in majority-based elections and can be a demobilizing factor for the supporters of options which realistic prospects of winning. In such cases, their response may be strategic voting or a conscious decision to abstain from voting. The latter is particularly likely in “safe” constituencies, where a representative of one political option (not necessarily the same candidate) has been winning for years (Urbaniak, 2016). In strategic voting, the supporters of candidates with little chance of winning move their vote, without negatively affecting the voter turnout, from their first-choice candidate to one with real chances of gaining a mandate (Karvonen, 2004). However, when they do not choose strategic voting (and do not want to vote for a candidate with no chances of obtaining a seat), they join the group of non-voters. The opposite effect can be seen in a proportional system (with a relatively large number of seats to be filled in a constituency), which can serve as a mobilizing factor for voters. This happens when candidates from smaller parties have a chance to gain a seat. To make this possible, the natural threshold for entry into the parliament needs to be lowered, which is favoured by the proportional formula.

What is another mechanism of the electoral system which can influence voter turnout is the complexity of the voting procedure, related to the structure of the ballot and the possibility of cumulative voting (combining elections for various bodies, often using different procedures, such as local elections in Poland). Electoral procedures regulate the extent to which voters can express their preferences since the form of electoral lists and the structure of voting can significantly increase or decrease the electorate’s influence on the selection of candidates. This requires citizens to have the necessary civic competence in this regard, acquired through social socialization (Plecka et al., 2013). Wojciech Sokół, while dividing the methods of voting according to specific systemic regulations, identified the following popular

methods: (1) casting a single vote for a candidate in a single-member district; (2) casting a single vote for a candidate in a multi-member district; (3) casting as many votes as there are representatives to be elected in the electoral district; (4) casting votes for multiple candidates, where the number is smaller than the number of seats; (5) distributing votes among multiple candidates or casting them for a single candidate (cumulation); (6) casting an alternative vote by creating a ranked list; (7) casting a single vote for a party list or a coalition of political parties; (8) indicating both a party list and one candidate on that list; (9) indicating both a party list and multiple candidates on that list; (10) indicating a party list and candidates from that list with the possibility of supporting a candidate (or candidates) from another list (mixing); (11) casting the first single vote for a candidate and the second vote for a party list (two-vote system) (Sokół, 2007). Cumulative voting occurs when citizens have the opportunity to cast votes in elections for different institutions of political representation. It can be particularly challenging when a variety of electoral systems apply, leading to voters' confusion and potential demobilization. In such cases, the social costs (electoral socialization) may outweigh the potential benefit of participating in the election. What could serve as an example of such an impact are local elections in Poland, where potential voters can choose commune heads or city mayors and presidents (absolute majority formula), municipal councillors (relative majority or proportional formula in electoral districts), county councillors (proportional formula), and voivodeship councillors (proportional formula). All these electoral procedures are conducted simultaneously in the same place and time (Wojtasik, 2012a).

The third potential manipulation factor related to the electoral system that can influence voter turnout relates to voting procedures which do not formally affect the allocation of seats. The manipulative potential in this area is particularly associated with the opportunity

for the ruling party to channel social discontent through voting that does not negatively affect the election results from their perspective. This assumption contradicts the purpose of elections, which is to reflect public support for political actors. Democratic elections are based on a causal mechanism where each vote has its significance, influencing the course of electoral participation. In the described case, participation in the election does not impact the election results, understood as the level of support received or the number of seats. This effect can be achieved by including the option “None of the above” (NOTA) or treating votes without preferences as “blank.” The intention of these solutions is to grant voters the right to participate in the election without affecting the outcome.³ However, political parties can also instrumentally exploit these mechanisms. For example, in Spain, the treatment of blank votes, and their influence when using the D’Hondt method for allocating seats, positively affects the electoral prospects of major political groups, leading to an increase in the disproportionality of the resulting political representation (Sułkowski, 2016).

The potential impact of the manipulation mechanism using the NOTA category assumes that the votes of those voters who would have likely supported opposition parties without this option would be

³ There is a possibility that the NOTA (None of the Above) category could influence the election results. This occurs when these votes are considered as equally important (so-called “NOTA with teeth”) as those cast for specific entities. This may imply certain problems in the area of election results, including situations where NOTA wins the elections with an absolute or relative majority of votes or prevents a candidate from achieving the required majority of votes. However, the political practice of countries employing NOTA shows that detailed electoral law provisions effectively eliminate such risks. The only country where the NOTA category can formally “win” elections is Colombia. In such cases, elections are held again, but candidates who were rejected by voters in the previous election cannot participate (Ujhelyi et al., 2020).

shifted to NOTA. Since these voters were willing to cast their votes, knowing that it would not matter, it can be expected that in the absence of this option, they would be likely to vote against the incumbent government rather than against the opposition. This hypothesis was confirmed in the research carried out by Attila Ambrus, Ben Greiner, and Anita Zednik (2019). They showed that the introduction of NOTA first of all benefits the incumbents in both real elections in the United States and Austria and in experimental studies.

As a curious manipulative example, political parties with names referring to these categories have been formed. For instance, in the United Kingdom, a party called “None of The Above” (NOTA) took part in elections. There was also a candidate who changed his name for elections from Eric Mutch to “Zero None of The Above.” One NOTA (None of the Above) party has actually achieved electoral success. This happened in the parliamentary elections in Serbia in 2012 when the party *Ниједан од понуђених одговора* (None of the Offered Answers) participated, receiving 22,905 votes and winning one seat (Rzążewski et al., 2014).

Among the countries using the “None of the Above” (NOTA) or protest vote option in elections, two groups can be distinguished. In the first group, which includes countries like India, Colombia, or certain U.S. states (e.g., Nevada), NOTA is formally present on the ballot papers (or voting machines) as a specific choice for voters to mark. In this case, such a vote can be unambiguously classified as an expression of protest or a decision to abstain from indicating one’s electoral preferences. In the second group, which includes countries such as Brazil, France, Italy, Sweden, or Spain, blank votes are treated as protest votes. This means that when voters do not indicate their preferences, their ballots are interpreted as intentionally abstaining from choosing a candidate, which does not affect the actual election results. However, this interpretation does not rule out the possibility that a blank vote

might have been cast unintentionally, for instance, accidentally due to a voter's oversight (Ambrus et al., 2019). Chiara Superti's study findings (2015) contradict the statements presented, as she demonstrated that in the context of protest, voters more often cast invalid votes than blank votes, based on experiences from elections in Spain and Italy.

The inclusion of the "None of the Above" (NOTA) option in voting can be attributed to three main factors. The first one is to enable voters to express their dissatisfaction with the available set of candidates or more broadly, with the state of the political discourse and the shape of the political establishment. The second factor may be the creation of a voting option for those citizens who lack sufficient information about the candidates and do not want to influence the election results but, as part of their civic duty, feel obliged to cast a valid vote. The third factor may be related to the legal necessity of including the NOTA option in voting, especially when electronic voting is used. In 2013, the Supreme Court of India ruled that electronic voting deprives voters of the ability to reject all candidates without relinquishing their voting rights. Since this ruling, all voting options must include the NOTA category (Ujhelyi et al., 2020). The procedure itself takes several common forms. The first is "white votes," which are considered invalid but provide an opportunity for citizens who wish to participate in the election (or are compelled to vote due to mandatory voting). In the second case, they are treated as "blank votes," meaning they are valid but have no practical impact on the election results. Their only systemic effect is to increase voter turnout. Finally, there is the category "AA" (against all), which represents a form of negative expression by voters (cf. Waszak, 2012). This category existed, for example, in the Russian Duma elections until 2003 (McAllister & White, 2008), and it was also applied in Ukraine. In the latter country, during the second round of the 2010 presidential elections, no candidate managed to secure an absolute majority of votes, which was the consequence of implementing

NOTA. However, the 4.36% of votes cast against all had no systemic significance because only a simple majority was required (Miedzińska, 2015).

2.2.2. The transposition of voting results into seat allocation

The methods used in proportional systems for translating votes into seats are one of the most frequently employed tools for differentiating the electoral prospects of political parties. The ability to influence this aspect of the electoral system makes specific solutions a battleground for competitors in the election. In total, at least several dozen seat allocation methods are used (and even more when considering various modifications originally proposed) (see Herron et al., 2018). Their manipulative impact can be summarized in determining which electoral competitors they favour and which they are bad for. This distinction can be made by presenting the effects of using the two most popular methods: Victor D'Hondt (also known, especially in the United States, as the Thomas Jefferson method) and André Sainte-Laguë (also known in the United States as the Daniel Webster method).

The D'Hondt method aids parties with larger electoral support, allowing them to achieve a significant degree of overrepresentation in comparison to smaller groups. The occurrence of such a mechanism (and especially the strength of its impact) depends on multiple factors, with the most significant being the size of the electoral district and the number of political parties (Flis et al., 2020). On the contrary, when the Sainte-Laguë method is used to convert votes into mandates, depending on the variant applied (increasing or decreasing the first divisor relative to the base value of 1), larger seat gains for small or medium-sized parties are favoured (Sokół, 2016).

Despite some controversies, particularly regarding their real effectiveness in the conditions of significant fluctuations in electoral

support, most researchers agree that intentional changes to these methods can work in favour of certain parties at the expense of others (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989). The mentioned controversies are also based on the view that seat allocation methods have no influence on the nature of electoral competition, and their impact becomes visible only when the voting is concluded and the votes are counted. However, this is not true because electoral competitors adjust their strategies to the normative dimension of elections (Wojtasik, 2015b). It must be emphasized that parties can modify their electoral strategies in response to changes in the method, especially with respect to the construction of electoral lists. Intentional changes to seat allocation methods can stem from two fundamental premises: systemic and instrumental. The systemic premise allows these changes to achieve the highest level of utility from the perspective of the political system. It links the election outcome to its most efficient implementation in fulfilling the functions of the political system. On the one hand, this may involve the need to ensure a stable executive power structure (i.e., focusing support on the strongest groups), and on the other hand, translating electoral preferences as neutrally as possible into the shape of the achieved political representation. The functional empowerment of political parties can also be important here, especially when the legislator assigns them a significant systemic role. This situation, for example, occurs in Norway, where political parties can indicate a group of privileged candidates on the electoral list. This preference concerns candidates vying for seats at the top positions of electoral lists. Candidates whose names on the ballot are highlighted by the political party receive a bonus in the form of adding 25% of the total votes cast for the list. In local elections, depending on the number of seats, the party can provide additional support to a specific number of candidates: for the election of 11–23 councillors, a maximum of four candidates; for the election of 25–54 councillors, six candidates; and in the case

of 55 or more councillors, no more than ten candidates. When allocating seats, the preferred candidates of the party are considered first, and then those who received votes by name (Kuć-Czajkowska & Wasil, 2020).

The instrumental premise assumes the adoption of solutions aimed at shifting the allocation of seats in favour of specific groups. An example of such a mechanism was *scorporo*, which was used in Italy in 1995. Its purpose was to ensure parliamentary representation for smaller parties. The relatively complex algorithm involved subtracting from the number of votes obtained by the party list the number of votes obtained by the second candidate increased by one vote. In practice, this meant the minimum number of votes required to win in the college. However, this difference could not be less than 25% of the votes, because if it was the case, the number of votes obtained by such a candidate was accepted (Salamon, 2013). Larger parties quickly adapted to the new conditions and, through the use of a specific type of electoral list (known as *liste civette*), learned to mitigate the negative effects of *scorporo* (Bokszczanin, 2016). A similar additional compensatory instrument can be found in the elections to the Norwegian Parliament, where 19 (out of 169) so-called compensatory seats are allocated. These mandates go to the party lists that received the highest number of votes in the electoral district, which were not converted into seats according to the modified Sainte-Laguë method (Grzybowski, 2016). In Germany, in the case of the mixed electoral system for the Bundestag, the compensatory solution aims to balance the possible negative effect of disproportionality resulting from the allocation of so-called “excess mandates” in constituencies. To balance their effect, a proportionate reduction in the number of seats from national lists that would have gone to parties with such mandates is made according to the original rules for distributing seats among the lists (Božek, 2016). All the above-mentioned examples of vote-to-seat

transposition mechanisms, irrespective of the motivations for their use, privilege some parties at the expense of others, and often, even before the elections, it can be identified which ones will benefit and which ones will lose.

In the case of changes in the system of seat allocation driven by specific motives, one can assume an increase in the number of mandates for the entities manipulating the system, a decrease in the number of seats obtained by the parties targeted by these changes, or a combined occurrence of both effects. The latter occurs somewhat automatically, as a change in the number of seats in one part of the system results in the opposite effect in another area. However, the success of achieving a synergistic effect from changing the seat allocation method depends on the competence of the manipulators, which ultimately defines the parties gaining and losing seats. In Poland, changes introducing new methods for converting votes into mandates can be observed with motivations related to both systemic and instrumental premises. An example of the systemic premise can be seen in the 1991 parliamentary elections, where a modified Hare-Niemeyer method (favouring medium and smaller parties) was applied for seat allocation in electoral districts to ensure a high level of proportionality in the chosen representation. A similar systemic premise can be found in the subsequent 1993 parliamentary elections, in which the change in the method of converting votes into seats to the D'Hondt method (along with the introduction of electoral thresholds) was aimed at increasing the likelihood of generating a stable governing majority, favouring larger parties. What was the typical use of the instrumental premise were changes to the electoral law before the 2001 elections in Poland. They concerned the size of electoral districts, the method of converting votes into seats, and the abolition of the nationwide list (Glajcar, 2016). Parties with low polling support (but still holding a parliamentary majority capable of making changes) and opposed

to the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD – *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*) decided to weaken the consequences of the expected victory of the left by changing from the D'Hondt method to a modified version of the Sainte-Laguë method. Along with an increase in the size of electoral districts (electing from seven to 19 members of parliament in each district), this achieved the desired outcome of only 216 SLD seats in the Sejm (compared to around 240 parliamentary seats in the original version of the arrangements). As a result of these changes, the SLD lost the possibility of obtaining an absolute majority in the Sejm and the prospect of independently forming a government. Shortly after the elections, after taking power with the support of the growing Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*) party in the polls, the SLD reinstated the D'Hondt formula as the method of converting votes into seats. The change was based on a current calculation and a desire to return to the favourable solutions for the SLD that were in place at the time (Kamiński & Nalepa, 2004). As a result, in the next parliamentary election in 2005, when the SLD's popularity plummeted, the change worked against its proponents, increasing the overrepresentation of seats obtained by the victorious Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS) and the Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska* – PO), while reducing the SLD's already weak performance in terms of the number of seats won (Wojtasik, 2012). A similar attempt at manipulation was the change in the electoral system in Italy in 1953, involving the introduction of a majority bonus for coalitions that would achieve support from over half of the voters. Apart from introducing a mechanism to ensure a stable governing majority, the temporary political goal of Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi was to consolidate centrist forces and marginalize the extreme right. None of the expected effects were achieved, and the system was changed back after a single application (Bokszczanin, 2016). Opposite intentions, aiming to protect against the excessive concentration of parliamentary representation and, in

principle, to support smaller parties, are embedded in the rules for the election to the Chamber of Deputies in Mexico. Out of its 500 deputies, 200 are elected using a proportional representation system, and the rest in single-member electoral districts under a majority system. However, in the final allocation of seats, no party can receive more than 8% above the number of seats they would receive under a proportional system, nor more than 60% of all seats in parliament (Rzążewski et al., 2014).

2.2.3. Managing the parameters of electoral districts

In connection with the methods used for allocating seats to parties in elections, a significant factor for potential manipulation of the electoral system is the ability to moderate electoral districts. The reforms of the electoral system often involve simultaneous changes in the parameters of electoral districts, seat allocation methods, and other electoral regulations. An example of such changes can be seen in the electoral system reform in the Czech Republic in the years 2000–2002, initiated by the major parties (the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Civic Democratic Party) aiming to strengthen their positions. The essence of these changes included switching from the Hagenbach-Bischoff method to the D'Hondt method for seat allocation and increasing the number of electoral districts from eight to 35 (thus reducing their size). Additionally, this reform involved raising the electoral thresholds for coalitions and linking them to the number of entities forming the coalition. The final shape of the reform, as determined after the intervention of the Constitutional Court, did not discriminate against small parties to the same extent as the original proposal, but undoubtedly still strengthened the major parties (Sokół, 2016).

An electoral district is a unit of electoral administration in which, through voting, the selection of individuals for a particular role or

position is carried out. A traditionally structured electoral district can be described with the use of four parameters: the number of seats filled in the district (district size), the number of residents or voters (district population), its territorial boundaries (district shape), and the structure measured by the number of levels at which elections take place. In addition to geographical and demographic references, the concept of an electoral district includes information about the number of seats to be allocated during elections.

The size of the electoral district allows us to distinguish between solutions with single-member and multi-member electoral districts. In a single-member district, the mandate is obtained by the winner. Among the second group, one can distinguish districts ranging from two to several hundred seats when all representatives are elected in a single district covering the entire country. In the case of multi-member districts, Dieter Nohlen (2005) proposes dividing them into small districts (two to five seats to be filled), medium-sized (six to nine seats), and large districts (10 or more seats). The general principle in analysing the size of an electoral district assumes that with an increase in the number of distributed seats, the proportionality of the obtained political representation increases, which, consequently, more accurately reflects the electoral preferences of society. Thus, relatively small electoral districts will be of interest to the largest political parties, which can, in such a case, gain overrepresentation bonuses in terms of actual support. On the other hand, a study by Jarosław Flis and Bartłomiej Michalak (2019), who described manipulations with the size of electoral districts as “minimal,” has proven that drawing such a straightforward relationship can be deceptive – reducing the size of districts will not always directly contribute to additional seats for the largest groups. What is a factor conducive to possible manipulations in this area are the methods of distributing seats, which may disregard the primary function of districts in this regard. A good example of this

is the Netherlands, where the territorial division into electoral districts has secondary importance in comparison to the seat allocation procedure taking place at the national level.

Another parameter of the electoral district – its population – relates to the number of residents or voters inhabiting the territory that constitutes an electoral administrative unit and should ensure the implementation of the principle of equality. As a formal condition of democratic elections, it can be considered in two fundamental aspects: formal and material. The formal dimension assumes that all eligible voters have the same number of votes at their disposal. Their use of this entitlement and the strategy they adopt for voting depend on whether, when they have more than one vote, they will use this privilege, utilizing the full pool, or whether, based on individual motivations, they will choose another option. The demand for material equality assumes that all citizens' votes have the same weight. It is difficult to ensure the implementation of this principle in some types of elections due to the impossibility of dividing the territory where voting takes place in such a way that a similar number of voters corresponds to each seat. In the case of material equality, it is particularly important to provide solutions within the permissible range of the existing uniform representation standard (or electoral quota). This term refers to the average number of voters per seat in elections (or in an electoral district). Discriminatory solutions in this sphere can be observed in the differences in elections to the British House of Commons, as observed, for instance, in 2010 when the largest electoral district (Isle of Wight) had nearly 110,000 voters, while the smallest (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) had only around 22,000. In practical terms, considering the territorial dimension, apart from the system in which the entire country serves as a single electoral district, there is often no real possibility of ensuring that the number of voters per seat is the same. This is due to the need to respect territorial, ethnic, or administrative boundaries

when delineating electoral districts. In the case of the last scenario, Jarosław Sułkowski (2016) indicates the powers of the Spanish Congress of Deputies in defining the territorial division of the country. What is a potential area of manipulation here is the normative connection between the boundaries of electoral districts and the boundaries of provinces, which, for those in the majority, may present a temptation for politically motivated changes of provincial borders.

The most common form of manipulation with reference to the population of electoral districts is malapportionment. Its manipulative potential stems from the actual inability to ensure the material equality of votes. An example of this is the electoral system used in Poland in 1922. It intentionally informally divided districts into western and eastern ones with the aim of varying the number of residents per seat (in western districts, an average of 69,797 residents per parliamentary seat, and in eastern districts – 86,946). The motive behind this action was to weaken the electoral potential of national minorities mainly residing in the eastern territories of the Republic of Poland in comparison to the more ethnically homogeneous western part of the country. The impact of this mechanism as a potential factor for electoral manipulation can also be illustrated using the example of Spain, where the territorial division (provinces, which also serve as electoral districts) due to differences in population favours the conservative People's Party in elections (Sułkowski, 2016). As mentioned earlier, although theoretically it is possible (and is practically implemented, for instance, when the entire country serves as a single electoral district), the principle that the strength of votes should be approximately equal, not exactly the same, is most often adopted. The division into electoral districts should guarantee the preservation of a minimal acceptable level of material equality, and the electoral formula must ensure the basic effect of translating the voters' will into the shape of the chosen representation (Sułkowski, 2016). The rapidly changing demographic

structure of electoral districts requires constant adjustments, and this mechanism is sometimes permanently incorporated into electoral regulations. For example, in Norway, the redistribution of seats among districts is updated every eight years (Grzybowski, 2016). Optional solutions in this regard apply in the United Kingdom, where specialized electoral administration bodies (The Boundary Commission) propose changes every 8–12 years based on the analysis of population migration movements. However, the implementation of these changes requires approval by both houses of parliament in the form of a regulation to the law (Urbaniak, 2016).

The third parameter of an electoral district that can be subject to electoral manipulation is its shape, which can be considered in external and internal dimensions. In the external one, the shape of the district is determined by the administrative boundaries of the elections, often differentiating variables such as the number of seats, the number of voters, specific candidates, or the personal dimension of electoral lists from the surrounding areas. This external dimension involves the delimitation of the district's boundaries to influence electoral outcomes. In the internal dimension, differentiation is based on the character of the administrative division within the district's territory or demographic factors related to the social characteristics of voters. This internal dimension involves the manipulation of boundaries within the district to achieve a desired political outcome.

Gerrymandering is the most common technique of electoral manipulation concerning the shape of electoral districts. It involves dividing a territory into electoral districts in a way that benefits one political group or candidate at the expense of others. It takes into consideration the geographical distribution of electoral support and the possibilities that intentional drawing of district boundaries can offer combined with the method of election. There are three fundamental techniques of gerrymandering: packing, cracking, and stacking (Engstrom, 2013).

In order to manipulate the outcome of elections regarding the correction of electoral district boundaries, it is essential to have knowledge of the geographical distribution of electoral support. In the case of a political disadvantage, one can create districts with a larger number of voters per seat (values above the uniform representation norm), while in favourable districts, the size can be reduced. An example of such an action is the change introduced by the Republicans after taking control of the state legislature in Texas in 2002. They altered the boundaries of electoral districts that had been established two years earlier based on the national census. The change involved placing Latino and African American voters in districts marked by a significant Republican advantage, limiting their influence on seat allocation, at the same time altering the structure of districts where the competition was more evenly balanced (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). As a result of this manoeuvre, 21 Republican congressmen were elected in the 2004 election, six more than in the previous one (Wiecech, 2016). What is a mechanism that facilitates gerrymandering is the significant variation in the sizes of electoral districts. The presence of such disparities may indicate that this is a tool commonly used, particularly in Polish local elections, especially in municipal council elections. The general principle in this case is to organize electoral districts in a way that minimizes differences in population. However, in nearly half of Polish communes, the largest electoral district is more than twice the size of the smallest one (Flis & Stolicki, 2015). Spain also exhibits variations in the sizes of electoral districts, with the smallest district (Soria) having approximately 65 times fewer residents than the capital province of Madrid (Sułkowski, 2016).

The fourth parameter that can be subject to electoral manipulation is the number of levels of electoral districts. From the perspective of the distribution of seats, a kind of pyramid is created, with a lot of electoral districts at the base (usually at the local or regional level),

where only a portion of the seats is allocated. The rest undergo allocation processes at a higher level, and sometimes even at multiple levels (Flis & Stolicki, 2015). All of this means that the administrative division into electoral districts may be less important for the election outcome than a method of seat allocation. Multi-level electoral district structures can occur in both proportional representation elections, as seen in the parliamentary elections in Austria (Schakel & Dandoy, 2014), and in mixed systems. For example, a similar situation exists in the proportional part of the elections to the German Bundestag (Dinas & Foos, 2017). The manipulative potential of multi-level seat allocation first of all relates to the possibility of instrumentally directing their distribution at higher levels. In a positive dimension, such adjustment can reduce the disproportionality of representation achieved in lower-level districts. As an instrument for institutional electoral manipulation, it can serve to strengthen the positions of the strongest political parties by establishing more exclusive entry thresholds or methods of seat allocation that work in their favour. For instance, the “nation-wide list” system used in Poland in parliamentary elections until 1997 served to strengthen the mandates of the strongest political groups. This system established an additional electoral threshold (7% as opposed to 5%), strengthening the electoral gains of the strongest parties (Michalak, 2016b). Although this mechanism undoubtedly reinforced the largest parties, its impact on the disproportionality of the election result, with less than 15% of seats allocated this way, remained limited (Glajcar, 2016).

2.2.4. Statutory electoral thresholds

The pursuit of reflect the shape of the social structure within the framework of achieved political representation is one of the determinants guiding the creation of assumptions for the rules of electoral

competition. Proportionality prioritizes the fulfilment of the principle of adequate representation over the formation of a stable majority capable of governing in the long term. However, elections that meet the demand for fair representation can also lead to the emergence of representative bodies which mirror social references, while proportional systems can ensure a stable and as homogeneous as possible majority. Therefore, one must be cautious in making generalizations about the proportional effects of specific solutions, considering them only as possible guidelines for the shape of the resulting representation. On the one hand, Stein Rokkan (2009) pointed out that proportional systems were first applied in those Western European countries which were marked by a high level of ethnic heterogeneity. On the other hand, the popularity of proportional representation was to some extent driven by democratization processes which, by enabling the election of representatives from new (rapidly growing) social groups, created the need to safeguard the interests of political parties representing traditional forces. The effects of proportional representation could ensure at least partial protection of the interests of groups previously in power (Lijphart, 1991).

Every electoral system, while serving a moderating function in translating voter support into political representation, to some extent distorts the will of the voters. Apart from factors determining the parameters of electoral districts, the second widely used way to instrumentally influence the effects of elections in terms of the determinants of the electoral system is through electoral thresholds. Their impact can be twofold: direct, by reducing the number of parties participating in the allocation of seats, and indirect, by affecting both voters and parties. In this case, voters should take into account the perspective of a party's ability to cross the threshold in their decisions, while the parties themselves must consider this aspect when preparing their inter-party competition strategies (Grzybowski, 2016).

In the latter case, the essence of manipulation can involve introducing, eliminating, or modifying thresholds (if they existed previously) to instrumentally adapt them to the expected (from the manipulators' point of view) effects of the change. In this situation, the manipulative mechanism once again gives an advantage to those actors who have a direct influence on the enactment and modification of electoral laws (Wojtasik, 2018a).

From a normative point of view, two types of electoral thresholds can be identified: universal and special. Universal thresholds affect all types of electoral competition unless the electoral system rules indicate subject or object exclusions. Examples of their application can be seen in most elections conducted under a proportional representation model and typically concern political parties (e.g., 3% in Montenegro and Italy; 3.25% in Israel; 4% in Slovenia and Sweden; 5% in Armenia, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, New Zealand, Romania, Serbia, and Hungary; 10% in Turkey). In the majority of countries, the size of universal electoral thresholds falls within the range of 3% to 5%. A specific type of these thresholds is used in France in the second round of elections to the National Assembly, where a majority system is applied. To win a seat in the first round, an absolute majority of votes is required with at least 25% turnout. If this condition is not met, the second round includes candidates who received the support of at least 12.5% of eligible voters in the first vote (this threshold was gradually increased from 5% in 1958, 10% from the 1966 elections, to the current value adopted in 1976). Therefore, it can be concluded that the legislator's intention in this case was to influence the concentration of the party system and the importance of the largest political groups. This is indicated by the increasing percentage of electoral districts in which only two candidates participate in the second vote (Jakubiak, 2016).

The catalogue of special thresholds includes entities which, due to their status or nature, are subject to different levels of thresholds. Their

increase compared to the base values typically applies to electoral coalitions, for example: 5% in Albania; 7% in Armenia; 8–11% in Czechia (after the electoral reform mandated by a Constitutional Court ruling in 2021,⁴ the highest threshold of 20% for four or more parties was eliminated and the remaining thresholds were adjusted to 8% for two parties, 11% for three parties, and more); from 8% to 11% in Romania (the thresholds vary from 8% for two parties, 9% for three parties, and 10% for four parties and more); in Hungary, there's a 10% threshold for coalitions of two parties and a 15% threshold for coalitions of three or more parties. Reduced (or eliminated) electoral thresholds often apply to national, ethnic, or religious minority groups. Such solutions are in place in countries like Croatia, Poland, Germany, and Serbia. Sometimes, political parties in special territorial areas are exempt from crossing the electoral threshold, such as Ceuta and Melilla in Spain or the Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige in Italy. Another way to neutralize the selective impact of the electoral threshold is the possibility of suspending its application when parties win seats directly in first-past-the-post elections. This is seen in mixed elections for the German Bundestag, where winning three seats in the majority part of the vote allows a party to participate in the proportional representation segment. A similar solution applies in New Zealand's House of Representatives, where winning just one seat is enough (Nawrocka & Skwarek, 2017). Another type of special thresholds involves suspending the need to exceed the universal threshold at the national level when achieving significant support at the regional level.

⁴ The extremely high threshold for four parties was introduced in the Czech Republic in 2000 through the votes of the two largest parties, the ODS and the ČSSD. They did this in an attempt to counter the operation of the threatening "Four-Party Coalition" (*Čtyřkoalice*). As a result of this action, among other factors, the coalition of four parties that had been functioning since 1998 disintegrated.

Examples include regulations in Romania and Sweden. In Romanian elections for the Chamber of Deputies, a party does not have to exceed the national electoral threshold to participate in seat distribution; it is sufficient for the party to have support exceeding 20% in four out of 43 districts. In Sweden, winning a district seat with over 12% support allows a party to gain representation without crossing the 4% universal threshold at the national level.

The effects of manipulating electoral thresholds can be considered in two primary contexts. The first is related to preventing the entities against which such actions are taken from gaining political representation. In the most extreme cases, the results of manipulation can exclude not only political parties but also the possibility of political representation for minorities (national, ethnic, or religious). The operation of such corrective procedures has been the subject of research by the European Court of Human Rights to assess the compatibility of the existing solutions with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights. This includes thresholds in elections to the European Parliament in France and Italy, a 6% threshold in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands (or a 30% threshold on one of the islands within the Community) or a 5% threshold in parliamentary elections in Latvia. In all of the above cases, complaints were rejected (Krzywoń, 2016). The second context in which the effects of manipulating electoral thresholds can be considered is the integration or disintegration of political opponents. In the case of integration, a possible benefit for those in power is the subadditivity of new groups or coalitions – their combined support may be lower than the sum of support for individual entities, and their share in the allocation of seats may be smaller. The effect of the integration of opposition can be achieved by introducing electoral thresholds or increasing their level, as a result of which particularly small groups, wanting a chance to win seats, may pragmatically seek political partners to form diverse

coalition arrangements (Stelmach, 2017). The opposite effect can be achieved by eliminating or lowering the threshold. Such action may be motivated by a desire to disrupt the internal cohesion of political opponents by increasing the chance of success for relatively small groups. Additionally, the prospect of independently obtaining mandates can be a strong incentive for party leaders focused on preserving their own identity even at the cost of reducing their chances of winning seats.

One of the effects of the relative reduction in the weight of electoral support for political opponents can also be a decrease in their potential in the process of winning seats, especially when they do not have the opportunity to form broad electoral alliances. In this case, a possible determinant for manipulators may be the super-additivity of larger coalitions, the impact of which can be strengthened by using a combination of electoral thresholds, blocking party lists, and winner-takes-all bonuses. An example of such a solution was the regulations that defined the conditions for the allocation of seats in the Italian Senate in the electoral system of 2005. In this system, three electoral thresholds were established: 20% for electoral coalitions, 18% for parties running independently, and 3% for parties within blocs. However, it was not just the establishment of very high thresholds that led to a departure from a more proportional distribution of seats. It was the formula that automatically awarded the winning bloc in a given region (regardless of the number of votes received) at least a number of Senate seats equivalent to winning half of the electoral support from voters (Bokszczanin, 2016).

In the practical dimension, electoral thresholds are a mechanism which influences the number of relevant parties in the party system. Their impact can have two main implications for political parties. Firstly, electoral thresholds can reduce parliamentary representation for smaller groups, especially when the thresholds are established at a relatively high level. If these smaller parties do not adapt their

strategies to the changed conditions, despite gaining a certain level of voter support, they may be excluded from the seat allocation process. An example of this is seen in the Polish parliamentary elections after 1993, which illustrates the adaptation process of political parties to relatively high electoral thresholds. This is evident in the decreasing percentage of votes cast for parties that did not participate in seat allocation, excluding the results of the 2015 elections. In cases where there are no electoral thresholds or they are set at a relatively low level, it can lead to a high degree of factionalization in the party system. The consequence of such a reference point is usually a high degree of party fragmentation and a high effective number of parties both at the electoral and parliamentary levels. An example of this impact can be observed in the 1991 elections in Poland, where the absence of electoral thresholds resulted in the presence of 29 electoral committees in the Sejm and an effective number of parties at the parliamentary level (ENPP) of 10.45 (Wojtasik, 2012a). The mechanism of low electoral thresholds can be conducive to ruling parties aiming to fragment the opposition since there is no systemic motivation for the latter to form broader political alliances. Setting electoral thresholds at a high level will also benefit the largest political groups, as they will receive a seat allocation bonus from parties unable to surpass the distribution threshold. This may lead dominant forces to determine the threshold level in a way that makes electoral defeats for smaller players more likely and may even demotivate some of them from participating in elections. An example of such instrumental use of a high electoral threshold is seen in Turkey, where the threshold is set at 10% and is introduced against the Kurdish minority (to prevent Kurds from having independent party representation in the country's parliament). The issue of Turkey was also the subject of a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights, which found no violation of Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, recognizing the national

authorities' wide margin of discretion in determining the rules of elections, especially regarding the systemic functions attributed to them (Krzywoń, 2016).

When estimating the manipulative potential of electoral thresholds, one must consider another aspect that can create a disparity between their formally defined level and their actual impact. This is often referred to as the "natural threshold," which represents the actual level of support required to participate in the allocation of seats. A potential area for manipulation in this dimension is the introduction of an additional moderator which effectively determines the required level of support for seat allocation. It is often the size of the electoral district that is such a moderator. The combination of these two factors can lead to a highly discriminatory impact of the electoral system. For example, in Poland, with the 5% threshold in parliamentary elections, the reduction of the number of seats allocated in electoral districts to an average of about four would mean that a party would need to receive over 15% of the vote within a single district to participate in the allocation of seats (Gendźwiłł et al., 2018). This demonstrates how the size and configuration of electoral districts can significantly affect the practical operation of electoral thresholds and create variations in their impact on different parties or regions (Gendźwiłł et al., 2018).

2.2.5. Indirect electoral system

One of the pillars of modern democracy is the direct nature of the electoral act, understood in two ways: as the directness of elections and the directness of voting. The principle of the directness of elections assumes that representatives are elected as a result of people's individualized decisions, without the involvement of an intermediary. The principle of the directness of voting, on the other hand, refers to the requirement of personal voting and is driven by the strictly

personalized nature of political rights (including the right to vote), which should not be delegated to a proxy (Chmaj & Skrzydło, 2011). Directness, therefore, implies single-stage elections – in contrast to indirect elections in which the choice is moderated by an additional level. Such an intermediate body can take the form of various electoral colleges, with their delegations having either a free or an imperative character. In the first case, electors do not have to follow the revealed preferences of the voters in their decisions; they decide on the basis of their individual preferences. In the case of an imperative mandate, the elector is bound to their voters and should act in accordance with their instructions. Failure to meet the conditions arising from the voters' may result in the delegation of the elector's powers being revoked or even in their removal from the position they hold (Wojtasik, 2012a).

The existence of an indirect electoral formula usually results from two premises. The first is tradition, rooted in the historical model of ethnic or territorial representation. The second premise is pragmatic and concerns ensuring greater control over the distribution of power. This is precisely the reason for the indirect method of electing the first President of the French Fifth Republic, who, under the constitution of 1958, held two roles: President of France and President of the French Community. The manipulative mechanism of this election was designed to offset the advantage of the number of voters living in overseas territories (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) over residents of the metropolitan area. As a result, the created electoral college consisted of over 80,000 representatives, of which just under 4,000 represented overseas territories. As a consequence of this understanding of electoral control (or rather manipulation), Charles de Gaulle, who was elected the first President of the Fifth Republic, received 62,000 electoral votes, accounting for 78.5% support (Jakubiak, 2016).

Therefore, the indirect method of electing political representatives departs from the directness of the electoral act. This is not a violation

of democratic imponderabilia, provided that this action is not driven by a desire to politically correct the will of the voters. The indirect model of selection entrusts the fundamental choice to narrow elites (usually party elites), which may not correspond to the interests of all voters and can have a conservative effect on political parties, specifically solidifying the political party scene. An example of this was the elections in Norway to the Storting until 1903. Deputies were elected by assemblies of citizens with the right to vote, with a distinction between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, one seat in the electoral assembly was allotted for every 50 eligible citizens, while in rural areas (where the majority of eligible voters resided), it was one seat for every 100 (Grzybowski, 2016).

The indirect formula for electing political representation is often a result of constitutional provisions or political tradition. This typically takes place when the composition of a representative body is intended to reflect local and regional representation, a concept often referred to as the idea of territorial self-government. An interesting example of how the composition of such a body is created is the Senate in France, where most members are elected in departments. The rest represent the so-called Overseas France and French citizens living outside the country. Senators are elected by nearly 150,000 electors who are members of various territorial bodies. The composition of the electoral colleges is not determined directly by all eligible citizens but is largely derived from the composition of local and higher-level bodies, especially municipal councils (Jakubiak, 2016b). In this case, one cannot argue that the political representation obtained was chosen in line with the principle of universal suffrage; rather, it represents a departure from it.

Some obvious areas of electoral manipulation in this regard can include issues related to the lack of alignment between the actual election results and the shape of the representation. This can happen for

a few fundamental reasons: (1) when the division into electoral districts does not adequately reflect a uniform standard of representation. In this case, an intentional division into “over-represented” and “under-represented” districts can work in favour of those who decide on their shape; (2) when the boundaries of electoral districts result from historical or political (rather than objective) factors. It is here that classic gerrymandering can have its manipulative effects; (3) when the election formula involves strong discrimination against the losers. This is most likely when the “winner-takes-all” principle is applied. All of these possibilities can have different determinants than the intention to manipulate election results, especially when they are based on tradition and historical conditions.

In the case of the indirect electoral formula, there is another risk of manipulating the election results. It is based on the possibility of not respecting the will of the voters who have entrusted their elector with their trust. The probability of this happening increases in the case of non-imperative support, although the very choice of the elector already indicates the expected direction of the final vote. In addition to the possible volition of the elector, which arises from their own initiative, there is also the influence of external factors. The period between the elector receiving their mandate and the final vote by the electoral college is significant. It provides a time frame for taking actions that could influence the elector’s decision. While such actions do not directly affect the electors’ choice, they have manipulative potential in terms of the final outcome of the election.

The various factors described in the electoral process can distort the election results, even in the net sense. What is an example of this are the presidential elections in the United States, which are held under the indirect electoral formula with members of the Electoral College being appointed based on the decisions of state legislatures. Electors, despite the existence of sanctions for voting against the will of

the voters in some states (such as fines or legal penalties), have practical freedom in deciding to support a specific candidate. When an elector votes contrary to the delegation given to them by the voters, they are referred to as a “faithless elector,” irrespective of whether their vote results from political calculation or is due to a mistake. Nevertheless, there have been exceptions where an elector voted against the voters’ will. Moreover, in history, there has never been a single case where such a vote determined the outcome of the presidential election. A more significant issue concerning the U.S. Electoral College is the occasional discrepancy between the level of support expressed in the popular vote for electors of individual candidates and the final number of electoral votes they receive, which practically decides the election of the president. This issue is related to how the electoral votes are allocated among different states. It is based on the representation of each state’s representatives in Congress, and the allocation of votes for Senate members is not based on the population of the state. Additionally, the District of Columbia has three electoral votes. As a result of this allocation method, there have been several instances where a candidate who received fewer votes in the popular vote won more electoral votes. Interestingly, in each of these cases (elections in 1876, 1888, 2000, 2016), the president-elect belonged to the Republican Party. Therefore, if we consider the Electoral College (especially its method of establishment) as a potential tool for electoral manipulation, Republicans benefit due to their increased support in less populated states.

The U.S. Electoral College system leads to another type of manipulation, which is the practical differentiation in the weight of voters’ voices in individual states. This relates to the particular significance of the votes cast for the winning candidate in so-called swing states. These are the states where the most intense campaign efforts are focused because they effectively determine who will become the president. It is issues important in these states that are the subject of the most heated

debates. As Bernard-Henri Lévy noted (2007), “Taking the elections hostage in this way is an abuse by the minority of states that impose their issues and problems on the entire country. However, following in Tocqueville’s footsteps, one can also see it as a fortunate antidote to the »tyranny of the majority«.”

Primary elections are a mechanism that combines the indirect method of selection with a multi-stage approach. In the traditional sense, they introduce a moderating factor into the possibility of selection, either by deciding on the eligibility of candidates to participate in elections or by providing formal support for a candidate as a representative of a particular body, most commonly a political party. Such a decisive or recommending forum, similar to the party authorities that approve the personal composition of electoral lists, serves a selective function. However, its political role can be much greater because they offer the opportunity to generate programme debates among candidates and channel intra-organizational conflicts in a functional way. It is much rarer that primary elections are a universal procedure aimed at identifying candidates (usually two) who will compete in the final contest. An example of such primaries are the open primaries in the U.S. states of California and Washington, which are used to select the two candidates who will participate in the decisive vote in the Senate or House of Representatives elections (Wiecech, 2016).

2.2.6. The construction of electoral lists

The character of the electoral lists used can be a factor differentiating the electoral prospects of both political parties and individual candidates. This is because the form of electoral lists can be a determinant of the strategies of political parties and is essential for the subjectivity of both candidates and voters in the voting process. The essence of

electoral manipulation in this case is based on two main, post-election candidate selection mechanisms.

The first mechanism, through the decision-making empowerment of party leaders (most often), reduces the importance of voters (electorate) in favour of a narrow decision-making group known as the selectorate (Fernandes et al., 2020). It is the selectorate, through its influence on the composition of the electoral list, that determines the prospects of individual candidates. The second mechanism is based on the potential impact of a normative factor on the shape of electoral lists, usually in the form of formal regulations, most commonly quotas and gender parity requirements conditioning the presence of candidates based on gender. In the case of this factor, views and jurisprudence have evolved over the past decades, moving away from claims of its discriminatory nature. However, it should be noted that four decades ago, the Constitutional Council in France questioned the law introducing electoral quotas, arguing that it interfered too deeply with the rules of electoral competition (Szymanek, 2016b). On the other hand, some contemporary solutions that favour the election of women have a quasi-discriminatory nature. For example, in elections in Uganda, one woman is elected by the entire electorate in each of the 112 districts. Similarly, in Morocco, there are special nationwide lists of female candidates, elected only by women (Kryszeń, 2016).

The shape of electoral lists is influenced by institutional and political factors. Institutional factors are related to the existing legal regulations and determine the normative dimension of their impact, which is different for each form of electoral list and significantly affects the relationships between voters and candidates and between candidates and parties. Political factors are associated with specific goals set by parties and candidates and the strategies they use to achieve these goals (Put et al., 2020). Electoral lists can take one of three forms: closed lists, open (semi-open) lists, and free lists. Their influence on

the subjectivity of political parties in the process of creating electoral lists is determined by their types. Closed lists are marked by the fact that citizens can only vote for the list itself because it is the parties that establish the order of candidates (voters cannot change this order). Closed lists increase the dependence of candidates on political parties but give parties greater control over the composition of their factions. The order on such lists is determined from the top down by the party authorities. However, this mechanism can be criticized as it does not provide voters with full control over the selection of specific candidates for the representative body, leading to claims of being undemocratic in certain situations. For example, the Italian Constitutional Court in 2013 ruled that such regulations did not allow voters to express their preferences and declared them unconstitutional (Bokszczanin, 2016). In cases where voters feel their influence is limited due to the nature of closed lists, some may choose to abstain from voting. What is more, such lists effectively limit intra-party competition for votes and make the functioning of the party dependent on its leader or a narrow group of its most important politicians. The use of closed lists can, therefore, reward parties with strong, internally consolidated electorates, especially when strong party leadership is the binding factor.

Taking into consideration the form of electoral lists, potential manipulative strategies related to their shaping in the objective dimension are based on two main types of interactions. The first is the change in the subjectivity of political parties (its reduction or increase), implemented by the scope of possible interference in the process of creating the final shape of such lists. The rights of political parties in this respect stem directly from the solutions adopted in the electoral system. The other type of manipulative strategy involves influencing the voter's competence in terms of the strength of their decision-making in the act of voting. Marginal solutions in this regard range from the possibility of expressing only the acceptance or rejection of the presented list

(closed lists), through limited interference with the presented personal proposals, to creating one's own list of personal preferences based on candidates proposed by parties (so called "panachageing") (Nohlen, 2005). The possibility of gaining a systematic advantage on the basis of the position on the list can undermine the equal chances of candidates and some researchers consider it to be a violation of the democratic principle of fair play (Koppell & Steen, 2004). What is a typical example of using closed lists are the elections in Spain to the Congress of Deputies, where voting for a party list (rather than an individual candidate) provides strong control over the composition of the parliamentary faction because the order on the list determines the priority of obtaining a mandate (Sułkowski, 2016). Interesting solutions regarding the competence of the voter are found in Norway. In municipal elections, while maintaining the upper limit of the number of seats, voters can add candidates from other lists in a specially marked place on the ballot. In Norwegian parliamentary elections, voters can change the order on the electoral list by adding numbers in front of the names indicating the preferred order of candidates. Such a change, "forced" by the voter's interference in the order on the list, is taken into account only when at least half of the voters supporting such a list make changes to the order of a specific candidacy (Grzybowski, 2016). The regulations for elections in Switzerland to the National Council are an example of creating a personal list: voters can support all candidates from one party, strike out selected candidates from the party list and replace them with candidates from other parties, or create their own list from scratch (Jarentowski, 2016).

In influencing the subjectivity of political parties in the creation of electoral lists, it is important to consider the potential moderation of this process by another factor related to the electoral system – electoral thresholds. With a sufficiently high threshold, smaller political parties may be inclined to form electoral coalitions. The coalition model

of creating electoral lists can have a different impact on the prospects of electoral success of candidates compared to traditional party lists. This may be related to the mechanism of creating such coalitions and their electoral lists (Golder, 2006; Shin, 2018), as well as voters' decisions influenced by previous experiences (Armstrong & Duch, 2010; Tillman, 2015). Under the conditions of participation in elections of coalition entities, patterns of party competition are modified, as well as the mechanisms for creating electoral lists (Ibenskas, 2018). The formation of the shape of a coalition electoral list involves two stages. In the first stage, the quotas for the number of seats are distributed among the entities forming the coalition. In the second stage, specific positions on the list are assigned to individual entities. The personal shape of the electoral list is the result of the dominant political factors at the time of its creation. Among the most important determinants here are the political position of the candidates, the strategy of the political party's leadership, and the geographical aspect of the electoral district (André et al., 2017, pp. 589–600). The level of decision-making complexity is thus determined by the interests of the entities forming the coalition and the political position of politicians within their parent organizations (Schädel et al., 2016). List-blocking is a mechanism that can protect political parties from potentially negative consequences of creating coalition electoral lists. It may have positive effects in terms of gaining mandates without the prospect of marginalizing smaller entities forming electoral coalitions. However, as indicated by the Norwegian experiences in attempts to reform the system of electing members of the Storting, list-blocking can be an interfering factor in the representative system, distorting both the actual shape of the party system and the political preferences of citizens (Grzybowski, 2016).

What is the example of a solution supporting list-blocking were the regulations adopted in Italy in the 2005 electoral law for the elections to the Chamber of Deputies. They established three thresholds.

The first, set at 10%, aimed to encourage parties to build broad electoral alliances. The second, at 4%, applied to parties running independently in the elections. Failing to reach this threshold eliminated the entity from receiving seats. The last threshold, set at 2%, indicated the minimum level of support necessary for participation within a coalition (Bokszczanin, 2016). Polish experiences with list-blocking can be traced back to the elections to the Legislative Sejm in 1919 (Buzek, 1922), the 1991 parliamentary elections, and the 2006 local elections (Raciborski & Ochremiak, 2006; Rakowski, 2007). In these elections, solutions were introduced that, on the one hand, allowed the entire coalition to achieve a better result than individual entities running separately, and on the other hand, enabled small parties, which might find it difficult to cross the electoral threshold individually, to participate in the allocation of seats. List-blocking itself is seen not only as a potential manipulation instrument but also as a mechanism which compromises the material dimension of the principle of equal elections (Rulka, 2009).

The manipulative character of changes in the decision-making potential of voters when voting for electoral lists results from the possibility of shaping solutions within the electoral system that allow candidates to compete more effectively for voters' support. This happens when decision-making competences shift from political parties to voters, moving from closed lists towards open lists. Additionally, such solutions also influence the behaviour of voters, who may weaken their party motivations (party vote) in favour of personalized motivations (personal vote) (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). Open lists can stimulate voters motivated by the personalization of the electoral act and less ideologically connected to political parties. In this case, the informational and decision-making costs are crucial. For instance, in lists with preferential voting, voters often have to make two decisions: one regarding support for a specific list and another about indicating their preferred

candidate, often from a pool of several dozen candidates. Higher social voting costs (requiring voter engagement and making a personal decision) can lead some voters to base their choice on trust in the ranking of candidates proposed by a political party (provided there is no legal requirement for an alphabetical order on the list) (Söderlund et al., 2021). In the described scenario, they may prefer candidates from the top positions, in line with the intentions of the entity submitting the list (Spierings & Jacobs, 2014). This can also be a form of manipulation carried out by a political party through the influence of preferential votes on individual candidates' chances (Däubler & Hix, 2018). By gaining such preferential votes, candidates can win the intraparty competition for voters' support (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Passarelli, 2020). The observed relationship between a candidate's position on the list and the results achieved, known as the "order effect" (Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015), allows political parties to support their preferred candidates, which can also be seen as a form of manipulation (Söderlund et al., 2021).⁵ Another manipulative mechanism can be found in the elections for the President of Uruguay before 1996, in which parties did not nominate individual candidates but the lists of candidates from which voters indicated their preferred individual. The winning party was the one the candidates of

⁵ Researchers analysing preferential voting have reached no consensus on whether the so-called order effect is a real or apparent dependency (cf. Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Koppell & Steen, 2004; Selb & Lutz, 2015; van Erkel & Thijssen, 2016). In the latter case, the mechanism would stem from the fact that the order proposed by parties on the list reflects the level of electoral potential of individual candidates, which is confirmed by the voting. In the context of the 2019 European Parliament elections, Flis, Matuszewski, and Wojtasik's research demonstrated that this dependency is real, and political parties can manipulate candidates' prospects by placing them in specific positions on the list.

which received the most votes in total, and the president was the one who received the largest number of votes among them (Jarentowski, 2016).

2.3. Temporal manipulations

2.3.1. The electoral calendar

Despite the fact that politicians' actions related to advocating for their programmes and ideas can be unrestricted and permanent in democracies, there are certain electoral procedures that have administratively decreed durations. This is guided by several systemic assumptions, with the most important are those pertaining to regulatory, competitive, and control matters. Regulatory assumptions systematize a number of official electoral activities on a normative basis, enabling the establishment of the framework that political parties and candidates fill with the content of their campaign activities. The existence of a regulatory sphere allows the political system to define the functions that lie ahead of the electoral campaign itself and indicates the role that competing entities have to play in it. The competitive dimension establishes identical frameworks for their actions, both in terms of obligations and rights. This is particularly important in terms of ensuring equal opportunities and it also guides campaign activity towards areas which will not be in competition with other institutions of the political system. Based on the existence of supervisory delegations, state institutions have the ability to verify whether, during the campaign, all parties adhere to the existing rules and, in justified cases, they can take preventive or interventionist actions. As regards preventive actions, their educational function is of particular significance, enabling the clarification of the existing rules of the democratic political representation system. In cases where intervention in the activities of

electoral competitors becomes necessary, state institutions must rectify irregularities to ensure the stability of the electoral processes and the fairness of the competition.

Time, both in terms of the specific election date and the periods for carrying out individual stages of the electoral process, is not neutral for political parties and candidates. As Alastair Smith (2004) indicates, “[...] party leaders [...] may want to organize elections when the timing is right for them,” which is related to the concept of *electoral momentum* (Butler, 2009). It assumes that electoral competitors can influence the prospects of shaping voters’ behaviour in time (Tang & Lee, 2018). Based on this, they can use the available resources to maximize the outcome for the party or individual candidate by choosing the most suitable election date.

The potential for manipulation related to the influence on the official electoral calendar stems from three premises. The first is to place the date of specific elections within the electoral cycle consciously and deliberately, positioning it between the dates of other elections. The second possibility enables the instrumental management of the various stages of the electoral calendar and of their duration, which can differentiate the prospects of those running for office. It is especially entities with the power to establish legal rules that can have considerable manipulative opportunities by flexibly linking the successive stages of the official election campaign. The third premise arises when the incumbents, due to specific external circumstances, can hold elections at the time that is most favourable for them.

The possibility of manipulating the placement of election dates within the existing electoral cycle is supported by the fact that contemporary democracies are marked by an increasing number of general elections. This is due to both the growing instability of political systems and the gradual empowerment of new social groups in the electoral process. The instability of political systems, which mainly

stems from changes in the social structure and the subsequent erosion of the traditional patterns of relationships between various segments of the electorate and their natural political representation, leads to more frequent early elections, increasing their overall number (Smith, 2004). The broader empowerment of the electorate results in the emergence of new levels of electoral competition (e.g., the supranational level in the European Parliament elections) or a deeper exploration of existing ones. In the latter case, possible reasons for the described increase in the number of elections can be found in decentralization processes, leading to the broader empowerment of local communities (Cain et al., 2003).

The increasing number of elections taking place in political systems enables some degree of their strategic positioning in a non-random sequence (e.g., the European Parliament elections are held simultaneously in all member states, and national politicians have no control over the timing). To make this possible, it is necessary for the actors who wish to manipulate the election dates to have a certain level of agency. This agency can arise from the ability to change the original election date and decree a more favourable time from their perspective. A new election date can be determined in two main ways. The first involves the spontaneous shortening of the term of office (e.g., through self-dissolution or the resignation of the incumbent). The other method requires a change in the existing law, leading to the expiration of the term of office and the necessity of holding new elections, for example, in the case of a constitutional amendment.

The temporal relationships between different types of elections can be presented in two general approaches. In the first, the specific nature of the European Parliament elections in relation to national parliamentary ones is important. From this perspective, the European elections as less significant, often referred to as “second-order elections” (Schakel & Dandoy, 2014; Wojtasik, 2010). Due to their temporal

connection with national parliamentary elections, several models describing the mutual relationships between these elections can be identified (Gabel, 2000). In the situations where elections take place concurrently with national elections or shortly afterward, the results tend to be similar. Voters replicate their preferences, and political parties may not place significant emphasis on these elections. In this model, the European elections are influenced by the dynamics of recent national elections. In another scenario, if the European elections occur within a year after the national elections, there is a greater likelihood of replicating the results within the similar framework. When the European elections follow the national ones closely, they often mirror the preceding national election outcomes. Increasing the time gap between the national and European elections can increase the chances of opposition parties to make substantial gains in the European Parliament. The distance in time allows voters to express their preferences differently, and it creates an opportunity for opposition parties to benefit. Yet another pattern emerges when national elections take place at least a year and a half before the European ones. In this case, the potential for the ruling party to face defeat increases. The European elections serve as a harbinger of domestic election results. When national elections are held within a year of the European elections, there is a likelihood of repeating the results. In such cases, European Parliament elections often serve as an indicator of domestic election outcomes. As the time gap between the European elections and subsequent national ones lengthens, the correlation between these events becomes weaker. This suggests that manipulation related to the timing of elections would first of all involve national elections, as the timing of the European elections is predetermined.

When the European elections take place parallelly with national elections or shortly afterwards, the election results tend to converge. Voters replicate their preferences, and political parties do not attach

necessary importance to them. Another model describes the scenario where the European elections occur no more than a year after the national ones, which is conducive to repeating their outcomes within the general framework. An increased time gap between the European elections and the preceding national elections increases the chances of opposition parties of multiplying their seat gains in the European Parliament. Such a situation took place in Poland in 2004, when the ruling Democratic Left Alliance (SLD – *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*) party lost not only to the Civic Platform (PO – *Platforma Obywatelska*) and the Law and Justice (PiS – *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*), but also to the League of Polish Families (LPR – *Liga Polskich Rodzin*) and the Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*) in the European elections. Yet another situation arises when national elections occur at least one and a half years before the European ones, which increases the likelihood of a defeat for the ruling parties. The last pattern involves holding national elections no more than a year after the European ones, implying the probability of replicating the results. In such cases, the European elections serve as a precursor to domestic election outcomes. This scenario occurred, for example, in Poland in 2019, where the PiS secured a double victory. As the time gap between the European elections and subsequent national elections lengthens, the correlation between these events weakens (Wojtasik, 2012a). Taking into account that the timing of the European elections is predetermined, potential manipulations related to setting non-random election sequences primarily concern national elections.

The second type of relationship points to the connections between presidential and parliamentary elections. In this context, the final outcome of presidential elections is seen as a derivative of changes in support for individual political parties within the party system. The validity of such an approach may be justified by the mentioned connection between individuals holding office and their political background, as

well as the existence of a bonus mechanism for the winner of parliamentary elections, observed in post-election surveys. In Poland, since 1990, if presidential elections took place approximately a year before parliamentary ones, the group politically related to the newly elected head of state would emerge as the winners of the parliamentary election. They were considered winners in the sense that they had direct involvement in forming the governments. In 1991, they were the forces of the wide post-Solidarity camp. A year earlier they had propelled Lech Wałęsa to victory, even if forces associated with the Democratic Union (UD – *Unia Demokratyczna*) had initially supported Tadeusz Mazowiecki's candidacy. In 2001, the SLD won the elections and formed a government afterward. A year earlier, Aleksander Kwaśniewski had secured an unequivocal first-round victory in the presidential election. In 2005, when elections took place almost simultaneously (although it should be noted that the presidential election was held after the parliamentary elections), the PiS emerged victorious, and Lech Kaczyński was elected. This mechanism repeated itself in 2015, with Andrzej Duda becoming the president, and the PiS winning the autumn elections. On the other hand, when parliamentary elections were held more than a year after presidential elections, the victory in the former went to parties from the opposite camp rather than those associated with the incumbent president. This happened in 1993 when the SLD triumphed during Wałęsa's presidency, in 1997 when the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS – *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność*) won while Kwaśniewski was president, and during the 2007 parliamentary elections when the PO secured a victory during Kaczyński's presidency (Wojtasik, 2011). The regularities presented here do not apply to the 2011 parliamentary elections, which were held 16 months after the election of Bronisław Komorowski as the president. However, it must be remembered that, due to the tragic death of President Lech

Kaczyński, the presidential election had a unique character (Wojtasik, 2012a).

The flexibility of the electoral calendar, both in terms of the duration of various stages of the electoral process and the obligations and rights assigned to election participants, makes it possible to manage these stages instrumentally. This means that it is possible to intentionally adopt shorter or longer periods for collecting the signatures of support, fundraising, printing and distributing campaign materials, observing the electoral silence, or running advertisements in the mass media. In general, based on the presumption that incumbents have more resources available for their election campaign, it is justifiable to say that a shorter campaign period should favour them. That was probably why the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR – *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*) wanted to make it more challenging for the Solidarity opposition to reach the public with their message and scheduled the contract elections for June 4, 1989, shortly after the signing of the agreements in Magdalenka. Similarly, the Spanish regulation, which sets the official campaign period at only 15 days, a relatively short period, may indicate an intention to support parties with the greatest mobilization capabilities to make the most of their resources (Sułkowski, 2016). However, due to the multiple variables that can influence election outcomes, these actions can only bring the intentional differentiation of electoral chances in the desired direction if conducted properly. In consolidated democracies with well-established political parties and party systems, the chances for such manipulative actions are relatively low, especially when elections are held within the scheduled electoral cycle. Some potential for manipulation can be revealed when election dates are determined outside the regular term limits, especially if some parties were caught off guard by the dynamics of such a process and were unprepared for the elections.

It is a relatively rare case that incumbents, due to specific circumstances (the power to call new elections, shortening of the term of office, resignation from office, or changes in the political system architecture) can set the election date at the most convenient time for themselves (Smith, 2003). Until recently, a prominent example of this was the practical power of the British Prime Minister (formally vested in the Queen, acting on his/her advice) to dissolve Parliament at any time during its five-year term of office. In practice, the term of the House of Commons rarely lasted the full five years because prime ministers sought to use this power to hold elections at the most convenient times for themselves (Urbaniak, 2016). Since the changes initiated in 2010 through an agreement between the Tories and the Liberal Democrats, the first chamber of the British Parliament has a fixed, five-year term, which can only be shortened in two cases: by a resolution of the House adopted by a majority of 2/3 of the total number of members or in a situation where a new cabinet, enjoying its support, cannot be formed (Wiecech, 2013). The president of Sri Lanka's powers are an example of the authority to partially shape the election date. The president is elected for a six-year term, but after four years, he/she can shorten the time in office and initiate the election procedure. Apart from structural factors, motivations for such decisions can be influenced by particular interests, such as the prospects of re-election. Such a decision was made on November 23, 2009, by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, whose six-year term was set to expire in 2011. As a result of the vote held on January 26, 2010, the mandate of the incumbent president was renewed (Uyangoda, 2011).

Another contemporary example of a similar power to choose the election date is the competence of the President of France. After consulting the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the parliamentary chambers, the President can dissolve the National Assembly. The elections are held between the 20th and 40th day after dissolution

(Bożym, 2016). These matters are regulated by Article 12 of the French constitution. This aim of this action is to select the most convenient election date from the President's perspective. This solution is particularly important from the constitutional perspective as it can be seen as a procedure ensuring the head of state's majority representation in the National Assembly. In the context presented, it can be interpreted as a mechanism of electoral manipulation aimed at gaining political advantages. Of course, the occurrence of such an effect is not mechanical and depends on the election results, which can be of two kinds. In the first case, a majority effect occurs, leading to a politically homogeneous configuration of the President's executive and the parliamentary majority in the French parliament. In the other case, cohabitation is the outcome of the election, with a politically divided executive (Jakubiak, 2016).

Both in the case of elections taking place within the constitutional term and those outside the planned date, we can observe the mechanism known as the "rally 'round the flag" effect. It can occur in situations of deep crisis which pose a threat to the fundamental functioning of the state. Such crises might result from armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters, for example. As a consequence, there is a temporary increase in support for the incumbents (Mueller, 1970), and this has two main sources. The first source, related to the communication dimension, is the focus of public attention on the incumbents and their actions aimed at preventing the crisis's effects. Naturally, these actions emphasize the incumbents' intentions with regard defence and restoring order (Baker & Oneal, 2001). The second, and more crucial source from an institutional perspective, is the reduced potential for the criticism of the incumbents' actions by the opposition. This reduction occurs due to the necessity of cooperation between the opposition and the incumbents to counter the sources of the crisis. Consequently, the level of polarization, measured by

the government-opposition conflict, decreases. Some representatives of the opposition may begin to collaborate directly with the incumbents, and voters who were previously opposed to the incumbents or neutral may start to support them (Baum, 2002). Examples of changes in public support for politicians during deep crises can be illustrated by the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, which caused President Franklin D. Roosevelt's approval rating to increase from 72% to 84%, or the Cuban Missile Crisis, which led to a rise in public support for President John F. Kennedy from 61% to 76%. The "rally 'round the flag" effect was even more pronounced after the September 11, 2001 attacks when approval for President George W. Bush's actions increased from 51% to 90% (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003).

The manipulative potential of the "rally 'round the flag" effect in elections mainly relates to the connection between the election date and the possibility of positive political effects for the incumbents. Such a connection can occur in three contexts. The first of them is the random coincidence between the election date and the crisis as it is usually difficult to predict the latter. In such a situation, the incumbents can expect an unexpected boost in support. The second context the specific game of those in power who, seeing the potential advantages of the crisis, change the election date (such an action must be legally permissible, and, of course, it requires the necessary political potential). In the last case, a previously set election date serves as a pretext for the incumbents to provoke a crisis, with the potential outcome being the "rally 'round the flag" effect (Tir, 2010).

In the context of the accidental connection between the election date and the potential positive effects of a crisis, we can examine the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In practice, even in countries where the incumbents did not enjoy high public support at the beginning of 2020, a "rally 'round the flag" effect occurred in the spring. This is in line with the hypothesis that the strength of

this effect is inversely proportional to the level of pre-crisis support (Chapman & Reiter, 2004). In Italy, the country most severely affected by the first wave of the pandemic in Europe, the approval ratings of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte increased by 27 percentage points to 71%. Similarly, in Austria, where Chancellor Sebastian Kurz's approval rose to 77%, an increase of 33 percentage points. In the Netherlands, Prime Minister Mark Rutte saw a 30-percentage-point increase, reaching a 75% approval rate. In Denmark, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's approval rating rose by 40 percentage points to 79%. In Germany, support for Chancellor Angela Merkel, which was already high, surged by another 11 percentage points to 79%. In the case of Emmanuel Macron, whose approval ratings were below 30%, polls in March 2020 showed an increase to 59%. The only leader of a major Western country not significantly affected by the "rally 'round the flag" effect in the presented scale was US President Donald Trump. While the aforementioned leaders reached peak approval ratings of around 70%, his ratings remained around 45%, showing no significant difference from the pre-pandemic state. This might be related to the consistently high level of mistrust in him among Americans since the beginning of his presidency. It could also reflect the widespread criticism of his handling of the epidemic, which he initially downplayed. Later, for example, he suggested focusing on research into the effectiveness of disinfectants (Erlanger, 2020).

In the context of the "rally 'round the flag" effect, let us look at the places where elections took place despite the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of April 2020, most scheduled elections in liberal democracies had been postponed. In practice, elections (except for supplementary elections, etc.) were held in only four countries (the first round of municipal elections in France, postal voting in Bavaria and the Canton

of Geneva, and parliamentary elections in South Korea).⁶ In Poland, the presidential election scheduled for May 10 could not take place, even though it was officially planned to be held with a 100% postal voting format due to COVID-19. Excluding local elections (France, Bavaria, and the Canton of Geneva), where their specific nature makes it difficult to study the “rally ‘round the flag” effect, further analysis will focus on elections in South Korea and Poland.

In South Korea, the elections for the National Assembly were held on April 15th, in the form of both direct and postal voting (for people with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and prisoners). Gallup Korea’s polls showed an increase in the popularity of the ruling coalition Democratic Party/Platform Party, rising from 41% in February 2020 to 50% one week before the elections (Gallup, 2020). During the same period, support for President Moon Jae-in, who also belonged to the Democratic Party, increased by 16 percentage points to reach 57%. In the end, the ruling coalition received 49.91% of the votes, resulting in an increase in the number of its parliament members to 180 (59 more than in the previous elections). This was also the highest result since the restoration of democracy in South Korea in 1987. Interestingly, despite the pandemic, the elections saw high voter turnout, with 66.2% of eligible voters participating. This marked the highest attendance in National Assembly elections since 1992. The data show that the fact that parliamentary elections were held during the pandemic had a positive effect for the ruling party in South Korea.

Poland’s ruling party PiS, along with incumbent President Andrzej Duda, aimed to use a similar mechanism in the presidential elections

⁶ During the COVID-19 pandemic, by the end of April 2020, supplementary elections had been held in Poland for local government units. However, due to their local character (only 34 competitive acts of elections across the entire country), they have been excluded from the analysis.

scheduled for May 10, 2020. Also in this case, an indirect effect of the pandemic resulted in a “rally ‘round the flag” effect concerning the incumbent president who sought re-election. In the initial phase of the pre-election campaign (January-February 2020), his popularity showed a slight decline, dropping from 44% in January to 41% at the beginning of March. In April, the incumbent president’s ratings reached 47.6%, and shortly before the originally planned election date, it exceeded 52.9% (IBRiS, 2020). All of this meant that despite calls from experts and the opposition to postpone the elections until after the pandemic, the ruling party was determined to hold the vote on May 10. They were aware that postponing the electoral *momentum* by using the “rally ‘round the flag effect” would limit President Duda’s prospects for re-election. Thus, taking into account forecasts of the peak of the pandemic around the election date, the government amended the anti-COVID legislation to change the voting format to 100% postal (along with a series of additional organizational modifications, further complicating the electoral process). However, the introduction of these changes shortly before the voting date effectively prevented the preparation of the electoral infrastructure, and, as a result, the election was not held. Duda was unable to capitalize on the “rally ‘round the flag” effect. Ultimately, with declining support, he managed to win by a narrow margin in the second round of elections held in the traditional format in July 2020 (Tatarczyk & Wojtasik, 2023).

2.3.2. Term limits

What is the characteristic feature of democratic regimes is the predetermined length of the mandate obtained through universal elections. Such regulations refer to the cyclical nature of electoral decisions and are also called the principle of incumbency or the periodicity of elections. These regulations condition the democratic character

of elections through the necessity of regularly repeating them within a timeframe defined by legal or, more rarely, customary rules. On the one hand, incumbency is a fundamental mechanism that affects the possibility of re-election, making it one of the goals of political activity (Kypriotis, 2013). On the other hand, it creates real conditions for the alternation of power and the building and rebuilding of voters' trust (Linz & Valenzuela). Therefore, it is an instrument that allows the political system to adapt to changing social and political conditions. The term of office, as the period of holding office, serves three main functions: it determines the period during which an elected body is in office, specifies the date for the next election, and sets the electoral calendar, describing the timing of the various stages of the electoral procedure. The predetermined length of the term of office is designed to systematize the electoral competition process by defining the stages of activity for the entities vying for voter support. While modern liberal democracies are marked by the constant stimulation of voters by politicians, this activity occurs unevenly over time. It is just before the election, especially those with strategic importance, that campaign activities intensify. This has rational justification not only in terms of pragmatism and efficiency but also within the normative framework of carrying out electoral campaigns. To reduce the potential for manipulation of the timing of elections, political decision-makers are limited in their decision-making according to instrumentally understood strategic goals, such as increasing public support or the expected effects of governance, although especially in the latter case, they focus their actions on the possibility of holding elections at the expected time.

While the term regulations, in their intentions, set the time frame for holding office, they still allow certain adjustments in this regard. In exceptional cases, it is possible to extend or shorten the term of office or the period for which a particular body has been elected by the voters. This may stem from important external circumstances, leading

to the necessity of holding elections at a different time than originally scheduled. Shortening the term of office usually occurs as a result of random events, such as death, the expiration of a mandate (e.g., due to a court conviction), or resignation, or due to political circumstances. Political reasons for early elections usually include the inability to perform the functions for which the body was elected (primarily the inability to form a government capable of exercising power or the decision to self-dissolve), a removal from office (as a result of the successful implementation of impeachment), or recall by the voters (as a result of the successful use of the recall procedure). It is political reasons for shortening the term that have the greatest potential for manipulation. This is because, as a consequence of them, it is possible to schedule a date for elections that can be favourable for the promoters of the proposed changes. This is related to the previously mentioned concept of *electoral momentum*, rationally linking the actions of electoral competition entities to the potentially best time for holding elections (Butler, 2009). Interestingly, both the ruling party and the opposition can be the beneficiaries of early elections. In the case of shortening the term of office, especially the decision to self-dissolve, greater chances should be attributed to those who have an influence on making such a decision. Their political calculations can be based on the assessment of current prospects in this respect, which, of course, does not determine the ultimate success. For example, the PiS party, which initiated the shortening of the parliament's term in 2007, lost power as a result of early parliamentary elections. The initiation of impeachment or recall procedures gives better prospects to those who start them (of course, if they succeed and lead to early elections). This is due to the fact that the procedures can be conducted at the most strategically convenient moment, but also because of the political stigma that may affect the forces supporting the removed or recalled politicians.

It is quite rare that the term of office is extended, and, to adhere to democratic principles, such cases must be based on significant grounds. These grounds may include war, external threats, internal unrest, and natural disasters, resulting in the impossibility of holding elections across the entire territory or in its part, or ensuring their democratic conduct (Żukowski, 2005). Delaying the nominal election date can be part of electoral manipulation, especially when the governing party faces possible loss of power. Of course, for this to happen, there must be legal circumstances, which, at least partly, depend on the interpretation of decision-making bodies. An example of such actions may be the introduction of a state of emergency (e.g., martial law or a state of natural disaster) across the entire (or part of) territory, which includes the limitation of civil rights. In such a situation, holding the electoral process with its necessary elements is impossible. Another possible electoral manipulation is the exclusion of part of the territory from elections, the effectiveness of which is related to the regional diversification of support. If decision-makers have identified particularly high support for their opponents in specific regions, they may consider excluding that area from the election. The first elections held in 1919 in Poland after regaining independence could serve as an example here. They were not held at a single time and in some areas did not take place at all. In the dominant area, the elections were held on January 26, 1919, while in the Białystok and Bielsko districts, they took place on June 15, 1919, and in the Pomeranian Voivodeship – on May 2, 1920. Voting was not held in three counties in the Białystok voivodeship located east of the Curzon Line (Grodno, Volkovysk, and Białowieża), part of the Lviv Voivodeship (Brzozów, Strzyżów, Krośno, Rzeszów, Kolbuszowa, Tarnobrzeg, Nisko, Łańcut, Przeworsk, Jarosław, Bircza, Przemyśl, and Sanok), as well as part of the Poznań Voivodeship (Buzek, 1922). The majority of the areas where elections were not held were inhabited by a significant percentage of national

minorities, which may indicate the reasons for not holding elections other than those related to the specific nature of creating a new state (Wojtasik, 2019). On the one hand, the likelihood of such action increases when the mentioned diversification of support has a religious or ethnic character, which affects the way the residents of these areas vote. On the other hand, in some cases, such exclusions of areas from elections are necessary. This happens, for example, when part of a country's territory is an arena of military conflict, as evidenced by the eastern territories of Ukraine occupied by the separatist forces supported by Russia. However, in 2020, the Ukrainian authorities used the tense situation on the front line to cancel local elections (and extend the terms of office of incumbent officials) in some local communities (including two major cities – Lysychansk and Severodonetsk, with a total population of over 200,000) located in a relatively safe zone, outside the area of military operations. The motivation to call off the elections in this area was the high support for the pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life bloc, with weak ratings for the pro-presidential party of the incumbent President Volodymyr Zelensky – Servant of the People (Andrusieczko, 2020).

2.3.3. The period for nominating candidates and submitting electoral protests

The time for collecting and presenting signatures for candidacies or electoral lists can be divided into a period of collecting signatures and a stage of their verification. The relatively shorter duration of the first of these, with a longer verification period, increases the level of institutional uncertainty, which can particularly favour the entities currently in power. To a lesser extent, one can instrumentally influence the process of fundraising for the electoral campaign. This is related to possible prior preparations in this regard, especially when elections

are held within the time frame specified by the electoral regulations. The role of the fundraising period for the campaign as a differentiating factor in electoral chances is reduced when campaign spending limits are set from above, especially if they are established at a relatively low level. What can be an important instrument of electoral manipulation are the time frames for using official campaign materials such as leaflets, posters, or campaign commercials. In this case, by limiting the time of their distribution, the regulatory factor could contribute to increasing the electoral chances of the ruling parties, which may benefit from media coverage while in power. In such conditions, it is very difficult to determine the boundaries between the informational functions of the media and the deliberate creation of campaign messages. The manipulative significance of this factor is limited in contemporary times, primarily due to the development of online communication, which politicians use for campaign activities and for the creation of their political image. In practice, they can conduct (and most often do) campaign or image-related activities even outside the official campaign message period (Joathan & Lilleker, 2020).

Elections, as a procedure for selecting the political representation of society, are subject to the process of monitoring the accuracy of the voting process. One of its elements is the possibility of filing an electoral protest by citizens, their representatives, or other authorized authorities. An electoral protest is the fundamental and common instrument which enables the judicial oversight of the correctness and validity of elections, ensuring a sense of justice. It can involve challenging the validity of elections across the entire area where they were held, the validity in individual electoral districts, or the validity of the election of a specific individual. The example of the 2016 presidential elections in Austria illustrates that the possibility of declaring elections invalid is not limited to countries with problems in their democratic institutions. In the second round of the Austrian presidential elections,

some irregularities in the counting of postal votes were found. After the traditional votes were counted, the right-wing candidate Norbert Hofer had a lead of about 150,000 votes, but after the postal votes were included, he lost by over 30,000 votes. Following the filed protest, the Austrian Constitutional Court invalidated the result and ordered a rerun of the second round, in which the independent candidate supported by the Greens, Alexander Van der Bellen, won by a margin of about 350,000 votes (Niezależna.pl, 2016).

The essence of electoral protests is to implement the principle of judicial oversight of the electoral process initiated at the request of an authorized entity. The ability to use electoral protests as a tool for social control over elections presumes the legality of the voting process, which contributes to an increase in trust in the state regarding the shape of the political representation obtained, corresponding to the will expressed in the act of voting (Rakowska, 2010). In addition to that, electoral protests, as an institution of the legal system, serve a preventive function which can act as a deterrent to entities interested in illegal interference with the ongoing electoral procedures. However, in situations with a high level of conflict between competing entities in the elections, the described procedure can be used as a tool for political destabilization. An example of such action is the accusation of competitors of election fraud and malpractice. Shortly before the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, Donald Trump wrote on Twitter: “Of course, there is large-scale voter fraud happening on and before Election Day” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). After his defeat in 2020, he made his messages even stronger, repeatedly publicly stating that he had a “stolen victory.” Sometimes, electoral protests are deliberately instrumentally used to cause political destabilization or reduce the legitimacy of representatives chosen by way of elections. The challenge to the results of the 2019 Indonesian presidential elections, led by right-wing conservative Prabowo Subianto,

triggered political destabilization with tragic consequences (eight protesters killed, hundreds injured). He questioned the victory of the incumbent president, Joko Widodo, and organized massive protests in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, using the Internet as a platform (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

Another example of actions aimed at reducing electoral legitimacy was the submission of 593,000 electoral protests questioning the validity of Aleksander Kwaśniewski's election as the president of Poland in 1995 (Wojtasik, 2011). The large number of protests raises the question of when electoral manipulations encounter social resistance and when they are tolerated. Some researchers point to the cognitive integrity of manipulations, understood as the level at which voters perceive them as not harmful to democratic principles. If the level of cognitive integration is high, there are minimal chances of mobilizing the electorate and effectively working for electoral reforms (Ong, 2018). Svitlana Chernykh examined the motivations for political parties to submit electoral protests in Central and Eastern Europe from 1990 to 2009. Her study shows that parties use them as a means to assert their rights through legal channels, as well as a tool to combat political competitors. In the latter case, by questioning election results, rather than putting emphasis on the legal process of filing protests, they focus on rejecting the election results and fomenting social protests. Such actions are more likely to be taken if the rules governing the conduct and validation of elections have been changed shortly before the elections (Chernykh, 2014).

The recognition of the validity of conducted elections from the perspective of the right to file electoral protests requires a systemic combination of somewhat conflicting functional delegations. One of them is the need for the immediate acknowledgment of the legality of the elections, a decision that is of significant importance for democratic stability and citizens' trust in the state. As a result, the alternation of power

or the renewal of the incumbent's investiture becomes possible. Another is the need to ensure social control over electoral procedures by allowing the expression of doubts and their legal assessment. Electoral manipulations, which can concern the practice of submitting electoral protests, are based on two premises. One of them refers to procedural issues, which, in their assumptions, are meant to be a deterrent for eligible entities to exercise their right to file a complaint. They may unnecessarily and unjustifiably complicate the appeal procedure, imposing disproportionately high requirements on complainants for the filing of an electoral protest effective. Examples of such solutions may include: the requirement for the personal submission of the complaint at a location distant from the complainant's place of residence, high court fees which must be paid to initiate proceedings, or the requirement to use legal counsel. The other potential factor limiting the prospect of using the institution of an electoral protest may be the requirement for the collective submission of complaints in this respect.

The second premise, which is the determination of the possible time for filing and considering electoral protests, entails significantly greater manipulative prospects. The fundamental importance of the time allocated for submitting electoral complaints is related to enabling citizens to engage in the social control of elections that will be effective on the one hand and will not disrupt the method of choosing political representatives on the other. In this case, the main mechanism of potential manipulation is based on the possibility of establishing the period for filing electoral complaints in such a way that it restricts or prevents their effective use by interested parties. This arises from the limited ability to identify irregularities in the conducted elections and the established deadline for reporting them. It should be pointed out that not only nominally specified time for filing electoral protests is essential. The existing electoral systems, due to the complexity of the rules for allocating mandates, set different times for announcing

election results. The situation will look different in the case of a majority formula and the allocation of mandates at the district level, and differently in the case of proportional representation elections and the distribution of mandates at the general (e.g., nationwide) level. The first possibility assumes that the time between the end of voting and the announcement of the results can be significantly shorter than in the second example. This fact can be particularly important, especially when the complainant has to present or indicate evidence on which they base their protest. What is a factor that often limits the possibilities of the effective assertion of rights through an electoral protest is the non-appealability of judgments in electoral protest cases. The lack of the ability to appeal against the decision of the authority reviewing the complaint (as well as the non-litigious nature of its consideration) may indicate a certain manipulative potential, although it may also be influenced by the need for the prompt announcement of the validity of the elections.

2.3.4. The length of the voting procedure

The length of the voting process is an element that can be subject to institutional manipulation. It directly affects voter turnout in elections because voting carries certain social costs for its participants, and one of them is the time they need to dedicate to it. The general principle in this case assumes that citizens' attendance in elections is proportional to the length of the voting period. The longer the period, the greater the chance that people will find time to cast their votes. However, this relationship is not linear because otherwise, the voting procedure could be established long enough ensure the fullest possible participation. Looking at it from the opposite perspective, it can be said that too short a voting time will limit the ability of all those who would like to vote but are less determined or are objectively prevented from doing

so. Therefore, political actors who could benefit from lower turnout may aim to limit the length of the voting process. The potential beneficiaries of such actions include the incumbents, whose voters are usually more disciplined, and parties and candidates with strong ideological support, especially on ethnic or religious grounds. The latter is due to the fact that voters with strong ideological motivation perceive the sphere of elections as a mechanism for shaping social reality, providing exposure to the value system they adhere to (Treier & Hillygus, 2009).

Taking into account the duration of the voting process, we can generally speak of either single-day or multi-day voting. In the first case, voting takes place within one day, defined here as a full 24-hour period. The election authorities determine the hours during which effective voting can take place, thereby rationalizing the potential voters' activity. It is also important to specify whether the opportunity for voting is continuous (e.g., polling stations remain open continuously) or if there are predefined breaks. The occurrence of such breaks can significantly impact the voter turnout. Multi-day voting is intended to encourage broader participation in elections by allowing those who wish to vote but, for reasons beyond their control, cannot do so on a single day. Quite frequently, multi-day voting is a result of a long-standing tradition, driven by the need to reach the polling station. Not so long ago (in liberal democracies) and even today (in countries with limited communication infrastructure or those where real distances between population centres are relatively large), the motivation for implementing multi-day voting was and is to provide the technical opportunity for casting votes.

We should also mention another aspect of the length of the voting process, referring to early voting, which involves the ability to cast a vote by post, electronically, or through a proxy. The first of these voting methods, in particular, necessitates a voting period that is not too

short, in practice, preventing citizens from casting their votes. This is because voters must have the opportunity to obtain (in various forms) a voting card, fill it out, and send it to the correct address. The whole process does not necessarily require that actual voting takes place over multiple days. Early voting can take the form of a pre-election procedure conducted in a traditional manner but extended over a longer period for technical reasons. However, it is certainly a factor that can positively impact voter turnout by allowing those voters (e.g., the elderly, disabled, or ill) who might not have the opportunity to vote traditionally (Wagner & Lichteblau, 2020). This mechanism is particularly important in electoral procedures where achieving a specific turnout threshold is necessary for the validity of the voting results.

Voting by post, particularly in the case of elections held in the United States, is significant and controversial, although specific arrangements vary by state. In over half of the states, all eligible voters can use this form of voting, while twenty states have restrictions for certain people (e.g., disabled or seriously ill voters). In three states (Colorado, Oregon, and Washington), postal voting is the only form of participation in elections (Wieciech, 2016). In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the American mail-in voting system became the subject of criticism from Donald Trump's camp, who saw it as a mechanism for electoral fraud. In a formal manner, he tried to invalidate some of the votes cast by post, by appealing to state courts to order the cessation of their counting. In some cases, he was partly successful, as in Pennsylvania. In this instance, conservative Supreme Court judge Samuel Alito ruled to segregate the ballots that arrived after November 3 (ultimately, these votes were counted) (Dziennik Gazeta Prawna, 2020). After Joe Biden's victory, Republican-initiated efforts to change election laws began in 43 state legislatures. Under the pretext of protecting the electoral process from fraud, the aim of these changes was to either limit the possibility of postal voting or make it more difficult

for the representatives of ethnic minorities to vote. For example, in Georgia, laws were passed to increase identification requirements for mail-in voters, reduce the number of drop boxes for ballots, increase the legislative oversight of elections, and restrict the use of provisional ballots (used when there are doubts about an individual's eligibility to vote, such as due to a lack of identification documents) (Czarnecki, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the length of voting, another significant parameter affecting citizens' ability to cast their votes is the opening hours of polling stations. In practice, this parameter represents a compromise between creating the most convenient conditions for people to vote and the practicality of the election process, as well as ensuring the safety of the individuals responsible for conducting the elections. Similar to the length of the voting process, the core idea of democratic participation in elections is to ensure the widest possible voter turnout. This can be achieved by establishing opening hours for polling stations during periods when citizens are the most active and have the opportunity to vote. This depends on both daily and longer periods of activity.

In addition to ensuring the possibility of participating in voting, another important factor influencing the opening hours of polling stations is the technical considerations of the voting process. They are related to the potential working hours of election commission members (regulated by legal provisions), issues regarding the security of the ballots and ballot boxes, and the mechanisms for counting partial election results. This last aspect depends on whether the votes are counted on-site or if they are transported to designated locations for the counting procedure.

What is another important factor affecting the duration of the voting procedure is the possibility of breaks in voting. In this regard, polling stations can be divided into those operating continuously or

the ones closing periodically. The latter solution may be based on objective factors (e.g., in countries with hot climates, voting may pause during the hottest hours), social considerations (traditions of taking breaks or siestas during early afternoon hours when temperatures are the highest), or procedural requirements (mandating a break after a specific duration of operation).

2.3.5. Election day

Alongside the length of the voting procedure, also the day (or days) on which elections are held is of crucial importance. Here, the fundamental functional delegation of democratic political representation emphasizes the need to ensure the broadest possible citizen participation in elections. This prompts the search for solutions that enable the highest voter turnout. However, as previously indicated, high voter turnout is not neutral and can influence election results. Therefore, it may provide an opportunity for the instrumental manipulation of election outcomes, aiming to set the election day to potentially benefit one political entity over others. The manipulative potential of a specific election day can be considered in two main contexts. The first is the selection of a day based on the established political tradition that has been legally mandated. The U.S. presidential elections are an example as they always take place on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. This choice of day originated from the early days of American democracy, where due to the significant distances to polling stations, the authorities wanted to avoid making citizens choose between voting and participating in Sunday religious practices (Laidler & Turek, 2016). The other factor influencing the success of manipulative actions is the decision to hold elections on a weekday or a holiday. The latter circumstance offers the broadest potential for adopting solutions intentionally differentiating the chances of election participants.

This is because holding elections on a holiday, typically a day off work for most voters, raises the expectation of higher voter participation (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2010).

What is the essence of the decision regarding the conduct of elections on a weekday or a day off from work is the possibility of differentiating the social costs of voter participation incurred by individual citizens. On a weekday, for people who are active professionally and in caregiving, the costs of taking part in the election may turn out to be too high, and despite their willingness to participate, they will make a conscious decision to abstain. Therefore, to ensure universal participation in elections, solutions should be adopted to eliminate as many obstacles as possible that deter citizens from going to the polls. From a participatory perspective, the preferred solution is to conduct elections on a day off. This way, voters who work or have other commitments on weekdays will be able to take part in them.

The manipulative potential of determining the voting day makes it possible for parties interested in limiting participation in elections to opt for solutions indicating the justification of holding elections on workdays. In such cases, they can expect that the less mobilized part of the electorate will not make the effort to cast their votes. In addition to the expected decrease in turnout, these solutions can limit the possibility of linking voting to other social activities, which are more commonly carried out on days off. A classic example of such a connection is the establishment of the date of elections on a day dedicated to practicing religious rituals. While researchers into social motivations have not reached a clear consensus regarding the impact of religion on electoral expression, most studies confirm a correlation between the two phenomena (Wojtasik, 2012b, pp. 159–174). On the one hand, there is a view emphasizing the significant role of the religious factor in motivating electoral activity (Putnam, 2000), the connection between religious axiology and social values (Leege & Kellstedt, 1993), and

the socializing functions of religious institutions (Greenberg, 2000). A study by Marc Musick and John Wilson (2007) demonstrates that religion can be a motivational factor for social activity, determining the issues of engagement and the ways it is manifested. On the other hand, there is an opposing viewpoint emphasizing the possibility of reducing the level of social activity through religious activity (Skocpol & Fiorina, 2004), the competitiveness of citizens' trust in their own religious group at the expense of general social capital (Uslaner, 2000), or even the reduction of the role of religious activity in the knowledge and social competence of citizens (Scheufele et al., 2003).

The presented conditions can lead to the coincidence of both discussed activities, especially since one of the fundamental components of political identity can be the religious dimension (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2020). Therefore, political parties whose programme appeals include religious references as a significant element may want to combine these two issues, hoping for a synergy effect – participation in religious rituals and the instrumental direction of voting in elections. To implement their strategy, they may consider linking the voting day to religious holidays. In the opposite situation, there are entities whose voters have weak ties to religiosity, or there is no connection between religious attitudes and political preferences in their case. To limit the electoral prospects of their opponents, these entities may want to hold the vote on a day not associated with widespread participation in religious practices (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2014).

2.3.6. Season of the year

The demand for enabling universal participation in elections is related to various cycles in social life that can either encourage or hinder participation. These cycles result from external natural conditions and can influence people's living conditions, determining their social

functioning through the sequences of actions and effects, such as agricultural activities. In the context of the determinism of natural phenomena, any manifestations of social activity can be reduced in situations where life, social order, or economic security are threatened. This is due to the hierarchy of basic values (Schwartz et al., 2010), where the emphasis is placed on satisfying needs related to health, safety, and quality of life (Federico et al., 2012). In such a structured value space, for most citizens, political activity and participation in elections are not typically at the top of the hierarchy of social needs. It is only after the satisfaction of basic needs that individuals can freely engage in political processes, including potential participation in elections. Thus, a conscious decision to vote and the potential allocation of one's vote should require the ability to analyse and reflect, free from the pressure of external events which influence the voter's current reasoning. Examples of events that limit the freedom to make voting decisions, not only technically but also psychologically, include natural disasters, epidemics, or wars. In such conditions, a voter's perception is subjected to the pressure of external factors, often preventing rational reasoning or directing the decisions made, including voting decisions. The "rally 'round the flag" effect is an example of such a direction. When considering these conditions, it should be pointed out that the determinants related to the seasons of the year can be examined in geographical, climatic, and economic dimensions.

The geographic aspect raises the issue of the length of the day, understood here as the time when it is bright, and one does not need to use sources of light other than natural sunlight (at least outside of buildings). Citizens' social activity is primarily related to daylight hours, which do not create barriers, especially when it comes to reaching a polling station. It would be logical to organize elections during periods when the days are relatively long, and the nights are short. During such times, voters have more time to reach a polling place and

vote during the daytime when it is bright outside. The manipulative potential of the geographic dimension increases as we move away from the equator. This is related to the increasing differences in the daily division into day and night, leading to phenomena like “polar days” and “white nights” (above 57° latitude north and south), where there is no astronomical night and its counterpart, the polar night. Due to the distribution of the population, the significance of the geographic dimension of the seasons is a lot greater in the northern hemisphere, where many countries have inhabited areas not only in temperate zones but also in polar regions (such as the Sami people in Scandinavia, Northern peoples in Russia, indigenous populations in northern Canada, and the residents of Alaska).

The climatic dimension refers to the occurrence of cyclic weather phenomena that can influence the prospects of participation in elections. These weather phenomena can be divided into three types: temperature-related, phenological, and rainy. In the case of temperature-related phenomena, it refers to periods of high or low temperatures that can pose a barrier to ensuring universal participation. Climate change observed in recent decades has shifted the occurrence of these temperature extremes to areas that previously had a temperate climate with relatively small differences between average and extreme temperatures. Scheduling elections during periods of particularly high or low temperatures can impact voter turnout and, consequently, the final election results. The context of regularly occurring winds and their consequences is particularly significant in the subtropical zone. This is where violent hurricanes (the Atlantic Ocean and the eastern Pacific), typhoons (the western Pacific), and cyclones (the south-eastern Indian Ocean and the south-western Pacific) occur. Their destructive impact can lead to natural disasters that make it impossible to conduct elections.

The subtropical zone also experiences periodic air movements that bring about long periods of rainy or dry seasons, indicating the potential impact of rainfall on elections. Monsoons, which are winds that periodically change direction from land to sea or vice versa, have a similar effect. The summer monsoon, in particular, bringing rainy weather over land, can influence the intentional planning of election dates, especially since it often coincides with intensive agricultural work. Monsoons cover densely populated areas of the world, including South and East Asia, Central America, and the Gulf of Guinea. Taking this into account, a lot of countries choose to hold elections during the dry winter monsoon, for example, in Bangladesh, elections are usually held in December and January, or during the inter-monsoon periods, as seen in India and Sri Lanka.

The economic aspect of the timing of elections is connected with the cyclical nature of economic processes, especially in the sphere of agricultural activities, though not only. Research on the impact of elections on the economy, particularly on government economic policies, is highly popular and has a long history. The best-known example is the study of the existence of a presidential cycle in the U.S. stock markets and its influence on the monetary policy of the Federal Reserve Board – the American equivalent of a central bank (Grier, 1987). The economic dimension of the time of elections can be examined in two key contexts – participation and sentiments. In the first case, what may be an obstacle to widespread participation is the date of elections coinciding with periods when people are heavily busy, especially in agriculture. Intensive agricultural work can involve entire families, making it difficult for them to participate in voting. The second aspect refers to the impact of the economic cycle on public sentiment. It is associated with the possibility of economic voting, in which voters reward or punish their representatives based on their evaluation of their own economic situation. Especially during an economic

crisis or income decline, voters may have a negative motivation to critically assess the ruling authorities or their representatives (Wojtasik, 2013b). An example of such influence is the reluctance of the Polish People's Party (PSL) to conduct elections in Poland during the spring, despite the rationality of such a solution related to budgetary procedures at both the central and local levels. Representatives of the PSL, fearing poorer social sentiments during the spring (linked to the income specifics of agricultural activities) and increased involvement of rural populations in agricultural work, were able to oppose the ideas to move elections to this time of the year at various points. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was suspected of similar instrumental intentions when he postponed the date of early elections for the president of Rzeszow (justifying it with the pandemic threat) from early May to June 13, 2021. Some opposition politicians accused him of having specific interests, as the potential second round of elections would take place during the holiday season, when members of the more mobile part of the electorate (according to polls favourable to the opposition candidate) are often away (Woźnicki, 2021).

2.4. Manipulations differentiating the resources of entities competing in elections

2.4.1. Privileging selected social groups or territories

In specific socio-political conditions, there is institutionalized pressure to intensify the political importance of selected social groups or territories. The most common motivations for such actions include the special social status (often of ethnic, national, or religious nature) enjoyed by certain voter segments or the particular significance (political or economic) of distinguished areas. The rights of national minorities are the subject of a number of agreements and documents adopted by

international institutions, including the Council of Europe, the UN, and the OSCE, which emphasize non-discriminatory practices. In addition to anti-discrimination declarations, the so-called Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities from 1999 on the effective participation of national minorities in public life. They outline specific actions aimed at guaranteeing equal electoral opportunities for minorities. These actions include, for example, single-member electoral districts (in the case of territorial concentration), the use of preferential or alternative voting in a proportional electoral system, lowering electoral thresholds for committees representing minorities, and the preferential delineation of electoral district boundaries (Nawrocka & Skwarek, 2017). The existence of a special representative body for national or ethnic groups is sometimes a solution to ensure their self-determination. An example is the Saami Parliament, representing the indigenous inhabitants of northern Norway (and also geographically of Sweden, Finland, and Russia) in Lapland. Elections to this body are held every four years, on the same day as the Storting elections. All voluntarily registered people declaring affiliation with this ethnic group and Saami people who are citizens of other Nordic countries and reside in Norway are eligible to vote. Saami individuals who are not citizens of any Nordic country can apply for voter registration in Sametinget if they have been residing in the Kingdom of Norway for three years preceding the election date (Grzybowski, 2016). However, it should be indicated that, especially in the case of multi-ethnic states, the applied solutions (promoting an ethnic voting model) may be a factor increasing the level of political polarization (Reilly, 2001).

Actions facilitating political representation for minorities are usually driven by positive motivations arising from attempts to compensate for demographic or political weaknesses. However, one cannot exclude manipulative inspirations that may result in instrumental influence

on election outcomes. The latter, by privileging certain voter groups, can reduce the power of others, ultimately leading to the disproportionate result of elections. In the case of minorities, this effect is explained by the need to apply a mechanism to protect minority groups from the dictate of the majority by creating the possibility of articulating their interests (Uziębło, 2010). Another motivation is the socially significant role of a particular group, most commonly involving ethnically related groups or members of religious communities. The solutions applied in local elections in Norway are an example of regulations which grant special privileges to representatives of ethnically related nations. In these elections, all foreigners who have legally resided in the country for at least three years can vote. Citizens of other Nordic countries—Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland—can participate in the elections without meeting this requirement, provided they register as permanent residents of Norway by June 30 of the election year (Grzybowski, 2016). A similar solution for religious groups is found in Cyprus, where Maronites, followers of the Apostolic Armenian Church, and Catholics have the right to have one representative in the House of Representatives with full rights limited only by the inability to vote (Varnava, 2010).

The potential manipulative mechanism in the area of privileging can adopt three main forms. The first pertains to the creation of special electoral districts subject to different regulations than the remaining part of the territory. Examples include special districts for the Maori population in New Zealand, representatives of the Italian and Hungarian minorities in Slovenia, or a special electoral district for minorities in Croatia. A member of the Maori community can declare a preference to vote in a specially created personal district instead of a traditional territorial one (Michalak, 2016b). In the elections to the National Assembly of Slovenia, special two electoral districts are established, each choosing one representative for the Italian and

Hungarian minorities (minority representatives are not subject to the 4% threshold). A different solution was adopted in the elections to the Croatian Assembly, where one nationwide district for minorities with eight mandates was established (Nawrocka & Skwarek, 2017).

The second way of privileging subjectively identifies the possible beneficiaries of modified regulations, to whom less restrictive requirements are applied (exceeding them enables the acquisition of political relevance) or seeks to increase their significance. An interesting example of manipulation in the first case is the Polish approach to parliamentary elections, where committees of national minorities do not have to exceed the 5% electoral threshold nationwide to participate in the allocation of seats. However, due to the necessity of concentrating support for minorities in a limited territory, from the very beginning simulations showed that the sole beneficiaries would be representatives of the German minority in Poland, and other minority groups such as Belarusians, Lithuanians, or Ukrainians, due to their size and dispersion, would not benefit from them. An example of ensuring an important political role for a specific social group was the existence of the so-called “peasant paragraph” in the Norwegian constitution from 1859 to 1952. According to this provision, at least 2/3 of mandates were allocated in non-urbanized districts, where the rural population constituted a majority. This solution aimed to protect the interests of the rural electorate threatened with marginalization by more active and better-educated deputies from Norwegian cities (Grzybowski, 2016).

The third method of privileging minorities involves establishing the boundaries of constituencies in such a way as to ensure political representation for minorities by guaranteeing territorial representation in the areas predominantly inhabited by them. An example could be the elections to the Canadian House of Commons, where electoral districts mostly populated by indigenous people (Nunavut, Northwest

Territories, and Yukon), despite having a small population compared to other constituencies, are guaranteed one seat each.

The creation of electoral districts with different regulations than the general ones may be dictated by the desire to implement so-called affirmative gerrymandering, aimed at creating electoral districts which ensure representation for minorities (Żukowski, 2003). This is related to the democratic intention to reconstruct the social structure not only quantitatively but also subjectively. In the latter case, ethnic minorities are politically empowered in a special way. In some countries, their privileged position is associated with the legal guarantees of obtaining seats in elections. As shown before, New Zealand has guaranteed the right to parliamentary representation for the Maori minority. To this end, four special extensive electoral districts were established alongside standard, smaller ones. Members of the Maori minority have the right to vote in both types of districts, depending on their choice (Żukowski, 1997). Another solution is included in the electoral laws of the Hungarian National Assembly, which allow representatives of national minorities to win a mandate with the support of 1/4 of party list votes. Those who fail to meet this requirement can delegate their spokesperson to the parliament. In the case of Armenia, representatives of four minorities (Yazidis, Russians, Assyrians, and Kurds) are guaranteed one seat each in the National Assembly, but they run from nationwide party lists. The regulations in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies are even more liberal as they practically ensure one representative for each minority which has a representative in the National Minorities Council (Nawrocka & Skwarek, 2017). The presented regulations and other similar ones, if effectively implemented, can be a factor weakening the political power of voters other than members of minorities and, in some cases, deprive them of political representation that they could expect under standard legal conditions.

The subjective identification of social groups which may benefit from changes in the electoral law, particularly with regard to reducing formal requirements among their recipients, usually involves national and ethnic minorities. They are often exempted from the need to exceed the electoral threshold, or this barrier is lowered for them. Apart from the classic manipulation potential arising from favouring a part of society over the rest, the presented solutions may refer to specific regulations, such as defining the requirements to register an electoral committee for national minorities. In Poland, for example, the Silesian minority finds it difficult to be recognized as a national minority, which, if sanctioned in this way, could participate in parliamentary elections without the obligation to surpass the five-percent electoral threshold.

Sometimes, one can suspect counterintuitive manipulative intentions in solutions which, despite formally offering certain possibilities, restrict the electoral subjectivation of specific social groups. Spain provides an example of the lack of regulations concerning the broad granting of voting rights to foreigners. Article 23 of the constitution limits electoral rights (both active and passive) to Spaniards, with the exception that foreign residents from countries where Spanish citizens benefit from complementary solutions can participate in municipal elections (Sułkowski, 2016). In the case of the described regulations, two types of legislative motivations can be identified: positive and negative. As far as the positive motivation is concerned, especially in a situation where citizens move more freely between countries due to increasing social mobility, there is a growing interest in settling in economically or qualitatively attractive countries. Spain undoubtedly falls into this category. To maintain social cohesion, it would be advisable to extend voting rights to foreign residents. However, a potential negative motivation can also be seen, driven by the desire to limit

the political potential of a growing group of foreigners. One cannot exclude such a manipulative mechanism in Spain.

2.4.2. Voting outside the country

Enabling citizens residing outside the country to vote is a specific form of potential electoral manipulation associated with migratory movements. The instrument itself is in line with the demand for broad electoral participation, although detailed solutions in this regard can constitute factors that intentionally differentiate electoral chances. This may be the case particularly in countries with a diasporic character, where a significant part of citizens lives outside the administrative borders of the state. For example, in Ireland, there is a possibility of voting from abroad, but it is only permissible for diplomats and military personnel performing their duties outside the country (Lesińska, 2014).

As regards voting abroad, there are two basic models of the possibility of casting votes. The first involves creating a separate electoral district or districts dedicated exclusively to voters outside the country. Examples of such solutions include elections to the Croatian Assembly (three seats) or the Romanian Chamber of Deputies (6 seats) and Senate (2 seats) (Nawrocka & Skwarek, 2017). In the other model, votes from abroad are combined with those cast in the country (usually in one selected district) (Bauböck, 2006). Generally, in just over half of the world's countries and dependent territories where universal elections are held (115 out of 213), citizens can cast their votes from abroad (Table 11).

Table 11. Countries the citizens of which can participate in national elections while staying abroad

Region	Countries
Africa	Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde Islands, Chad, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Zimbabwe.
North and South America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Falkland Islands, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, United States of America, Venezuela
Asia	Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Oman, Philippines, Singapore, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Yemen
Europe	Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Gibraltar, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom
Pacific region	Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Republic of Vanuatu

Source: based on Lesińska (2014, p. 9).

Possible manipulations with regard to voting outside the country can be divided into two kinds. The first refers to the decision on whether to allow such a form of electoral participation. If political decision-makers believe that people living abroad can significantly influence the election results negatively (from their perspective), they have the option of excluding this form of voting from the established regulations. However, if such voting is in place and there are no legal possibilities to abandon it, entities interested in weakening the voting power of those abroad may limit such influence by creating formal

and material barriers in the voting process. In the reverse situation, when simulating the results of voting outside the country is advantageous for them, they may introduce such a solution into electoral regulations. If voting abroad is allowed, the organization of elections is the subject of possible manipulation – whether separate, extraterritorial electoral districts are created, or votes are cast on lists in a district established within the country's territory. As Magdalena Lesińska points out, adopting one of the above solutions is really important for the influence of voters casting their votes abroad on the overall election results. In the first case, a certain number of electoral districts are established abroad, and thus, the number of seats allocated to foreign voters. This solution guarantees that the diaspora has its representatives in the national parliament, even if it is a symbolic representation. In the second case, when all votes cast abroad are added to one electoral district, their real impact on the overall election results is a lot smaller. Yet they are still aggregated and added to one specific district, so they can affect the distribution of votes and the final election result in that particular district. This solution may, however, raise objections from the native voters of that district, as votes from abroad may influence the selection of candidates who were not necessarily supported by the inhabitants of that district (Lesińska, 2014). The second solution applies to Polish parliamentary elections, where foreign votes are added to the Warsaw district, but their overall number does not significantly influence the final election result. There is also a third possible solution, in which votes cast abroad are assigned to electoral districts indicated by voters during the registration process.⁷ However,

⁷ This solution is relatively rare due to logistics and material issues associated with preparing and sending a specific number of appropriate lists to specific electoral commissions. For more details see: Lesińska (2014).

due to the dilution of votes, its manipulative potential is, in practice, very limited.

The second potential form of manipulation in the discussed context refers to limiting the universality of elections through subjective exclusions from the possibility of voting, as in the abovementioned example of Ireland. Each such exclusion may result from actions aimed at influencing the election outcome in a particular way, reducing the chances of some and increasing the prospects of other entities in electoral competition. In such a situation, what is the democratic ideal is the use of the same criteria as in the case of voting within the country's territory. The first possible subjective limitation on voting abroad involves identifying a narrow group of people performing their professional duties outside the country (e.g., officials of international organizations, diplomatic corps, students, military personnel, employees of state-owned companies based abroad, people temporarily residing abroad), excluding citizens permanently residing in other countries. Considering the contemporary mobility of people, economic globalization, and increasingly fewer barriers to movement, it is difficult to find logical justification for these solutions, except for political interests. The other limitation in this sphere is related to the duration of stay abroad. Regulations in this respect assume that after a specified period of permanent residence abroad, the active voting rights are lost. This period varies significantly among different countries; for example, in Germany, it is 25 years, in the United Kingdom – 15, in Australia – 6, in Canada – 5, in New Zealand – 3 (Lesińska, 2014). In Norway, the law distinguishes between individuals temporarily residing abroad, who can vote (after registration) at diplomatic missions, and those who have been abroad for more than ten years. The latter (except for diplomatic service personnel and their families) also need to register in advance (Grzybowski, 2016).

2.4.3. Voting outside the place of residence

A specific form of manipulation in the participatory dimension is the possibility of triggering artificial migration movements which intentionally increase the number of eligible voters in a specific electoral district. This is possible when citizens' rights to vote can be transferred between constituencies upon their request, especially in the context of voting outside their place of residence. The greatest manipulative potential lies in elections where districts are quite small, and a relatively low number of votes can determine electoral victory or winning a mandate. Artificial migration movements are connected with the possibilities resulting from the need to ensure universal participation, particularly making it possible for temporarily residing citizens to vote (Michalak, 2010). This provides an opportunity to cause non-random population displacements, with the sole purpose of affecting the voting outcome. Thus, voters are treated instrumentally, and they are often aware of the manipulation to which they are subjected. They may agree to it for ideological reasons or they have particular motivations. Among the latter, benefits expected after the elections or a sense of agency attributed to their actions can be indicated. It is the particular motivations of voters that explain the voting of over ten thousand residents of a part of Transnistria in the presidential elections in Moldova in 2016. With the aid of the separatist authorities, voters were transported by buses to polling stations in the areas under the control of the Moldovan government, and they widely voted for the pro-Russian candidate Igor Dodon (Pieńkowski, 2017).

Regulations which allow voting outside one's place of residence typically involve two procedures. One of them involves delivering ballots or certificates allowing voting outside of one's place of living in advance. The voter must bring them to the polling station on election day. This is possible when the voter completes the required administrative

procedures at the relevant institution. The other procedure concerns the possibility of being added to the voter list in a specific district by submitting a certificate from the original electoral district or a declaration, which results in removal from the list at the original polling station. Both procedures differ in the level of requirements imposed on voters, but the first one provides greater manipulative opportunities by setting lower formal requirements. In extreme cases, it can become the basis for electoral fraud, as shown by the 2004 elections in Ukraine, during which the “carousel voting” scheme was observed. This was possible thanks to issuing the unproportionate number of certificates allowing people to vote outside their place of residence. The authorities at that time organized transportation to ferry voters between electoral districts. This led to the problem of an inadequate number of people voting in specific locations in relation to those eligible to vote (Bodziany et al., 2015).

The actual possibility of electoral manipulation through artificial migration movements can be illustrated with a few examples. The first involves the intentional movement of groups of voters between electoral districts to support specific parties or candidates. As mentioned before, the effectiveness of such manipulation depends on the size of the constituency – the larger the number of voters, the more challenging it is to achieve a significant effect. The second example relates to voting in which the main determinants are ethnic or religious motivations. In this case, voters may deliberately move to districts where the representatives of their ethnic group or religion have a greater chance of electoral success. The third option of using artificial migration movements for manipulation refers to voting in districts where the election outcome seems difficult to determine. Redirecting support there from districts where the chances of success are merely illusory can ensure victory.

The local elections in the commune of Tarłów in 2014 were an example of electoral manipulation using artificial migration movements. In the first round, the incumbent commune head, Leszek Walczyk, won with 1,408 votes, but he did not receive over 50% of the support. His main competitor, Lech Wąsik, obtained 1,366 votes. In the second round, the difference between the candidates was even smaller, and Walczyk won by six votes – 1,641 to 1,635. However, it was observed that between the rounds, 43 individuals were registered in Tarłów and added to the voters' list, which was subjected to legal investigation. In its course, it was found that these actions violated the law and involved individuals who had never lived in the commune. As a result of the legal proceedings, the prosecutor suspended Walczyk from his duties in 2017, and in 2019, the court sentenced him to one year of imprisonment, in suspension for three years, and imposed a three-year ban on holding public and local government positions. However, this did not help Wąsik in any way, as in the subsequent elections in 2018, he lost to Walczyk's deputy, Tomasz Kamiński. This is one of the few cases where the occurrence of such manipulation was proven in a legal context (Walczak, 2019).

2.4.4. The differentiation of social and material costs of participation in voting

In the participatory context, potential electoral manipulations may involve activities aimed at influencing the diversity of costs (social and material) associated with casting a vote in elections. Political decision-makers have the ability to determine the technical accessibility of polling stations, taking into account factors such as the average distance from a voter's home to the polling place or the transportation options available. Two fundamental premises can be distinguished in the area of possible electoral manipulations here. The first is the varied

population density of the electoral area. It determines the physical distance to a polling station, typically being smaller in more densely urbanized areas and larger in rural areas. Assuming that the distance from a voter's place of living to the polling place can affect the probability of casting a vote, to achieve equal opportunity the comparable saturation of polling stations would have to be ensured, not in nominal terms (e.g., per unit area or population density) but in a realistic sense (based on an algorithm using the average distance from a voter's home to the polling station). The second premise is geographical and is based on the varied topography of the area where elections are held. Even with identical nominal distances, the terrain's characteristics can change the prospects of reaching a polling station. The social costs of voting may differ for a voter in an easily accessible area with a well-developed transportation network compared to someone living in a less accessible area with natural transportation barriers. In the latter case, the probability of voting may be lower.

Manipulative possibilities based on the differentiation of social costs of participation in voting involve taking advantage of territorial differences in electoral support. Their basic source can be social differences, the scope of which determines the political orientation of voting, also in the regional context. In terms of theory, such a model is based on the paradigm in which social affiliations affect political choices (Karvonen & Kuhnle, 2003). In this context, differences in support for individual parties or candidates may first of all result from voters' ethnic, religious, or cultural predispositions. If there are clusters of voters marked by homogeneity in terms of political attitudes (often also social characteristics), at the same time different from the surrounding areas, they can become the target of manipulation. This occurs especially when political decision-makers aim to weaken the strength of their votes. Then, they can organize the voting system in a way that discourages at least some citizens from making the effort to cast their

votes. However, for such a manipulation to be effective, some boundary conditions must be met. They include the division of mandates in a unit larger than the manipulated area (or the existence of a compensatory system, making the number of allocated mandates dependent on the level of turnout in a given electoral district) and the absence of instruments that enable voting outside the polling station.

In the latter case, in addition to unconventional voting methods, what is an interesting tool that can facilitate participation in voting is the so-called “wandering ballot box.” It consists in delivering a ballot box to the citizen’s place of living, allowing them to cast their vote there. This solution is used, among other places, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Russia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine (Musiał-Karg, 2011). In the case of Norway, Marian Grzybowski (2016) uses the term “mobile ballot box,” which is intended for voters unable to personally go to the polling station. One can use this voting method if they report such a need to electoral authorities so that a list of individuals to whom representatives of the electoral commission should go can be prepared in advance. The most commonly applied principle involves several commission members participating in the collection of votes (e.g., a minimum of two in Slovakia), who, with electoral materials and the ballot box, go to the voter on the day of the elections (Och, 2014). In Poland, such a procedure is limited to specific closed voting precincts (hospitals and social care institutions), where voting is carried out using a so-called auxiliary ballot box (Zbieranek, 2011). Although it seems that the main reason for using a wandering ballot box is the desire to enable participation in voting for individuals who are ill or disabled, it can also be a factor facilitating voting in hard-to-reach or poorly connected areas. However, the use of the mobile ballot box procedure itself can also serve electoral manipulations, especially in two situations. Firstly, when this solution is intentionally supported in areas where a party or candidate has

above-average support. In such cases, the probability of gaining additional votes (beyond the number that can be achieved in the regular mode) significantly increases. Secondly, the manipulative mechanism assumes a significantly higher level of support in the group covered by the mobile ballot box procedure, typically the oldest and sickest voters. A mechanism similar to the wandering ballot box is the establishment of closed voting precincts, e.g., in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, or police and military units. It sometimes raises controversy, especially when one of the entities obtains full support from voters in such a precinct. This situation occurred in the 2020 presidential elections in Poland when Andrzej Duda received 100% support from voters in 36 closed precincts. The 720 votes obtained in this way did not have a significant impact in practice, given the perspective of over 20 million voters in the second round of elections (National Electoral Commission, 2020).

Opponents of the use of the wandering ballot box bring up two main objections against it. Firstly, it is a highly complex instrument, difficult to apply by electoral services, which significantly increases the costs of conducting elections. Secondly, and more importantly from the perspective of possible electoral manipulations, moving the voting process outside the polling station may contribute to generating electoral support by entities that can influence the attitudes of citizens who choose to vote in this way. As people declaring the willingness to participate in voting, they may become the target of intensified election campaigns and informal pressure exerted by political parties and individual candidates. They may also feel pressure associated with visits from election officials, potentially perceived as representatives of the incumbent authorities. Such a situation occurs in remote areas of eastern and northern Russia (including Yakutia, Chukotka, Kamchatka, Sakhalin). In extreme cases, wandering ballot boxes become tools for electoral fraud, as was the case in the presidential elections in

Ukraine in 2004. The wandering ballot box was then used by supporters of Viktor Yanukovich for the repeated casting of votes by the same people (Zbieranek, 2005).

2.4.5. The method of financing political parties

What is one of the types of secondary resources are material resources, which serve, among other things, to ensure the organizational survival of political parties and carry out activities that are the subject of their vital interests, such as participation in elections. One of the key challenges faced by institutions designing the shape of the party system and overseeing political parties is the issue of their financing methods. Whether the financing of political parties is regulated under general legislation (e.g., the law on political parties) or special legislation (e.g., a special law on political financing), it should include provisions that: (1) are clearly and unambiguously formulated; (2) do not contain internally contradictory regulations; (3) avoid contradictions between acts regulating the financing of national, regional, and local parties; (4) avoid contradictions between provisions regulating the financing of national and regional election campaigns; (5) cover such basic issues as traditional sources of financing, private donations, public subsidies for political party purposes, financing electoral campaigns; (6) cover issues related to the disclosure, reporting, monitoring, and enforcement of financial information of political parties; (7) are published and made available in a way that allows easy access to them (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2002). The fulfilment of these conditions should ensure that the regulations created are objective, clear, transparent, and publicly understandable.

Ensuring transparent and equal rules of the material context of the functioning of all entities involved in electoral competition is a democratic ideal, the realization of which encounters a number of

difficulties. From a practical point of view, the demand for material equality in electoral participation is never literally fulfilled. Social environmental factors also hinder its implementation, as it is often difficult to separate the material dimension of a party's activity as an organization from its individual members (or supporters). An example of political activity raising doubts about financing in Poland was Rafał Trzaskowski's project "*Campus Polska Przyszłości*" (Campus Poland of the Future), formally unrelated to his political activities as the mayor of Warsaw and one of the leaders of the Civic Platform party. The week-long meeting of over a thousand people was financed, among others, by foreign organizations associated with German and American political parties – the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Robert Schuman Institute, and the International Republican Institute (Socha, 2021).

Another problem related to political activity financing is civic engagement. Party supporters may use private funds (which are beyond the control of regulatory authorities) to participate in political life, indirectly benefiting the organization they are members or followers of. The most common examples of such activities today are private websites or online profiles of individuals associated with parties. Although formally independent, these entities engage in activities that align with various forms of political agitation, which is particularly evident during election campaigns. This is evidenced by the inclusion of content within them that has been prepared by party organizations to present their positions (known as message multiplication). Joel Penney (2017) refers to this phenomenon as citizen marketing, seeing it as a factor intensifying and multiplying the messages of political organizations, allowing them to have a broader influence on creating the political landscape.

Financing political activity from private sources can be a factor which differentiates electoral chances. From the point of view of possible electoral manipulations, the link between the political strength

represented by individual parties (manifesting itself in their influence on the decision-making process) and the electoral outcome is important in this process. Private entities, which may be interested in specific legal solutions, will obviously support those parties that will be able to introduce the expected changes after the elections (or counter-act them if they are unfavourable from the donors' perspective). Thus, the private financing of political parties (especially without effective control) will lead to the concentration of funding on the strongest entities, limiting the chances of those without significant financial backing. Restrictions imposed to prevent electoral manipulations in this area can have a very wide spectrum – from excluding certain entities from the catalogue of donors to very specific solutions, such as prohibiting the use of tax-exempt funds in bank accounts (as it could be a form of the hidden financing of political parties).

The public financing of political parties can have two basic forms: direct and indirect. In the first case, it can be in the form of a subsidy or grant, the awarding (and often the amount) of which depends on fulfilling certain conditions (usually winning a certain level of support in elections). A type of direct funding for political parties is the allocation of public funds for the execution of specific tasks, such as research, programme dissemination, or expertise. It often happens that political parties use these funds contrary to their original purpose. An example of such an action was the organization of the congress titled “New State, New Constitution” by Solidarna Polska (Solidarity Poland) on June 30, 2013, in Krakow, in which 1,200 members and supporters of the party participated. However, documents from the European Parliament indicate that during this time, a climate conference took place, for which a faction of the European party Europe of Nations and Freedom allocated 40,000 euros. After a report by a group of deputies about the possibility of committing a crime, the prosecutor's office initiated legal proceedings in this matter (Cieśla, 2016).

The indirect form assumes the possibility of using certain infrastructure necessary for carrying functions assigned to political parties free of charge. This infrastructure may include parliamentary technical facilities (offices, cars), free business travel, or free airtime on public media for presenting political positions (Migalski et al., 2006). As regards the manipulative potential of solutions involving the public financing of political parties, specific regulations are important because – if they are improperly formulated – they may have similar consequences as the case of the concentration of private funding by focusing only on entities with influence (or the prospect of influence) on decision-making processes. Therefore, the legislators' intention is key, as they can introduce solutions that benefit only the largest political parties, somewhat repeating the possible negative effects of private funding (Wojtasik, 2012). Such a solution can be a tool for possible electoral manipulation because it not only does not level the playing field for different entities but actually favours those parties that can draw from the budgetary funds.

2.4.6. The post-election distribution of seats in representative bodies

The history of parliamentary democracy is marked with the gradual acquisition of political subjectivity by representatives of estates and classes that had not been institutionally involved in the processes of power creation and governance. Originally, it was only the representatives of royal families and those associated with them, such as patricians, who had the opportunity to participate in decision-making and ruling bodies, which stemmed from a birth-related census. This tradition, as well as the periods of coexistence of both forms of representation (democratic and estate-based), gave rise to the phenomenon of the post-electoral allocation of seats in representative bodies.

Nowadays, it is relatively rare and is determined by important pragmatic considerations rather than historical reasons.

In election practice, the manipulation potential of obtaining seats through non-electoral means is determined by two factors. The first is the mode of appointing individuals to such positions – whether it is the result of the unconstrained will of the political entity or if the possibility of holding a mandate arises from substantive criteria after meeting certain boundary conditions. In the former case, the manipulative potential is undoubtedly stronger, although there may also be such possibilities in the latter scenario. The second factor relates to the scope of subjectivity attributed to the mandate holder who did not come from an election in the area of competence assigned to them. This may indicate two potential properties of such a mandate – either comprehensive, in the case of the same subjectivity as elected representatives, or limited, when the legislator assigns only specific powers to it.

A classic example of a representative body the members of which do not come from elections is the British House of Lords. It combines elements of tradition and the continuation of monarchical power with a system of state and political representation. On the one hand, its members include the highest representatives of the Anglican Church (serving as peers during their religious duties), and on the other hand, those who hold their positions by birth right (hereditary peers) and those appointed by the monarch upon the advice of the prime minister, serving for life (among whom are former prime ministers and speakers of the House of Commons). Therefore, despite the fact that members of the House of Lords do not originate from an electoral process, they can, to some extent, balance the political power of the House of Commons through their functions such as the right to propose bills, review legislation, and periodically suspend it through a veto.

The lifetime senators in Italy are another example of the functioning of politicians in a political representation institution the mandate

of which does not come from election. They were introduced into the political system by the provisions of the constitution in 1949, which defined two types of lifetime senator mandates – *ex officio* and appointed. The first applies to former presidents of the state, while the other involves individuals whom the sitting president can appoint, up to a maximum of five.⁸ Although the maximum number of appointments of lifetime senators should not disturb the political composition of the chamber, one can imagine a situation in which these five votes, even in a body of over three hundred, may play a crucial role in specific votes (Violini, 2014).

2.4.7. Compulsory voting

The introduction of obligatory voting can be a factor contributing to potential electoral manipulation. It involves penalizing the electoral act by imposing sanctions on those who choose not to vote. The fundamental aim of such measures is to force citizens to participate in the electoral process, which raises doubts in terms of democratic values. Since electoral support is an act of free and unrestrained will, compelling people to participate can be seen as systemic oppression, which stands in contradiction to democratic principles. Within these principles, citizens should decide on their involvement in social processes based on their individual needs, interests, or the pursuit of their goals. Any form of institutional interference with the political expression of citizens (beyond obvious regulations serving order and concerning social relations) can be interpreted as an attempt to manipulate political

⁸ The practice of Italian political life has given rise to two interpretations of this provision. In the original one, the maximum number of all lifetime senators sitting in the Senate was five. In the 1980s, a broadened interpretation prevailed, according to which each President of Italy could appoint five lifetime senators. Currently, the original interpretation has been restored.

preferences and choices. This does not necessarily mean that every measure penalizing an electoral act stems from a desire for specific political entities to gain benefits. It should be assumed that this is not true in the vast majority of cases and that compulsory voting is driven by systemic or social reasons. However, one has to look into even the slightest probability of manipulative motivations.

As mentioned earlier, the non-manipulative introduction of compulsory voting may be motivated by systemic or social issues. The main systemic reason for its implementation lies in the legitimizing functions of elections, which seem to gain additional significance in contemporary times. This is not only due to the gradual decline in voter turnout observed since the second half of the 20th century (Antoszewski, 2009) but also because of the increasing number of elections in individual countries. Russell J. Dalton and Mark Gray (2003) compared electoral cycles from the second half of the 20th century in 18 Western democracies and found that the average number of elections held in the periods examined more than doubled (only Denmark and the United States saw a decrease). Among the most important possible reasons for this growth, one can indicate the processes of decentralization, resulting in the electoral empowerment of local communities and increased political instability, which may lead to early elections where the political system includes such a solution. In the case of countries that are members of the European Union, the European Parliament elections constitute an obvious factor contributing to the increase in the number of elections (Wojtasik, 2012a). From the social perspective, all these factors mean that citizens are involved in the electoral process much more frequently than before (Glajcar, 2010), which can lead to boredom and disillusionment with electoral participation or even cause confusion in political matters. Consequently, the desire and need to participate in elections may decrease, resulting in the gradual political alienation of broader segments of the population. Forced

electoral participation, in this case, becomes a tool (without assessing its actual effectiveness) of political inclusion, directing citizens' interests towards social issues through participation in elections.

In some cases, the compulsion of voting may lead to the distortion of citizens' true preferences and, consequently, to benefits for parties and candidates gaining from increased voter turnout. Therefore, the decision to introduce mandatory participation in voting can be analysed in the context of potential manipulation, with the presumed effect of getting an advantage in the electoral market by the promoters of such a change. The subject of manipulation in this case is a group of voters who, if not for compulsory voting, would choose not to participate in the elections. It is thus important to identify the electoral preferences of these people and the influence they might have on the final election outcome compared to the situation where they would not participate. If the distribution of support in this group were the same (or similar) to that among the participating voters, the manipulative effect would not occur (or its impact would be limited). However, it should be assumed that the political characteristics of this group may significantly differ from those who regularly vote. In general, two types of relationships are possible in this case. The first assumes that forcing individuals who would not voluntarily go to the polls strengthens the ruling party. What would be an absentee mechanism in this case is general satisfaction with the policy direction, which does not serve as a stimulus for voting, understood as an expression of the need for change. It seems that mechanisms of compulsory voting in some Latin American countries refer to this example. In Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil, citizens abstaining from voting cannot run for representative office. Other sanctions include restrictions on employment in the public sector (in Argentina, non-voters cannot do so for three years) or employment at all (in Bolivia, for 90 days after the elections). In Brazil, access to public education is blocked, and tax refunds cannot be obtained

(Więckowska, 2016). The second relationship assumes the absence of people excluded from the political community, who do not find anyone that they would be willing to support at the ballot box. In such a case, it should be expected that their votes would strengthen the opponents of the government.

Manipulative mechanisms related to the introduction of compulsory voting can also refer to its selectivity, understood as subjective exclusions from its applicability or the abovementioned possibilities of abstaining from specific voting (categories such as “NOTA” and “AA”). Various social groups are excluded from the obligation to vote. These are usually older people (e.g., in Luxembourg above the age of 75, in Peru and Cyprus – 70, and in Ecuador – 65), illiterate individuals, or those permanently residing at a considerable distance from the polling station (Więckowska, 2016).

2.4.8. Censuses and other limitations on the universality of elections

What is one of the fundamental democratic principles of elections is their universality. It means collective participation that is not subject to subjective exclusions other than those resulting from democratic rules. All citizens, irrespective of gender, race, language, income, wealth, profession, status, class, education, religion, or political beliefs, should have the right to vote and be elected. Certain necessary conditions, such as a specific age, citizenship, domicile requirement, mental competence, and the possession of full civil rights and legal capacity, do not conflict with the universality principle. Increasing the universality of the electoral act was one of the original processes of broadening political empowerment. Traditional norms and customs restricting the eligible people to participate in elections were the main obstacles here. Former limitations on participation (census) were based on distinctions related to social origin, economic status, gender, age, race,

or religion. An indigenous example of such restrictions on the right to vote during the Second Polish Republic was Article 2 of the electoral law for the Senate, which excluded “military personnel on active duty” from the voting group (Buzek, 1922). Jarosław Szymanek goes as far as to call electoral censuses the antonyms of democratic election (Szymanek, 2016a), which were gradually abolished with the progress of the democratization process. However, there are opinions that electoral censuses are not so much formal restrictions on citizens’ voting rights as requirements that must be met to obtain the privilege of holding public office and exercising the right to vote (Grabowska & Grabowski, 2006). An extremely dogmatic definition of the universality principle, in an ideally maximalist version, can lead to the extreme expansion of the circle of entities granted the right to vote. This way of thinking has resulted in the evolution of the electoral law in democratic systems, eliminating some censuses and restricting others (Ławniczak, 2006). This ensured an increasing possibility of participation in elections, leading to the current democratic consensus in this dimension (Wojtasik, 2012a).

Today, democratic rules most commonly include four basic universality census criteria: age, the possession of public rights, the possession of voting rights, and domicile. Age restrictions arise from criteria applied in both passive and active voting rights, based on the need to ensure an adequate level of social and intellectual maturity for both voters and candidates. The restriction or deprivation of public rights is related to the application of a penalty model for unlawful acts and is most often imposed as an additional punishment alongside the appropriate sentence. Legal incapacitation is a specific kind of limitation, applied to people deemed incapable of reflecting on the consequences of their actions. The restriction of public rights may result in the lack of electoral subjectivity, while in the case of deprivation of public rights and legal incapacitation, the most common effect is the loss of both

eligibility and the ability to vote. Domicile, on the other hand, is a restriction based on the place of birth or residence (Wojtasik, 2012a).

Changes in the age of active voting rights pose an interesting yet difficult to study manipulative potential. The scope of these changes usually involves lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote, although there have been instances of the opposite practices, such as during the Second Polish Republic (Wojtasik, 2019). It was particularly at the early stages of the development of elections as a political representation procedure, the age of eligibility to vote was established at a relatively high level compared to the contemporary political reality. For example, in 1814 in France, the voting age was set at 30 years (Szymanek, 2016a). The demographic segmentation of the electorate, which makes it possible to show the relationship between the age of voters and their political choices, constitutes the logical basis for expectations regarding the directional influence of changes in the voting age (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2006). In this case, it concerns the youngest group of voters, in which the permissible voting age can be freely determined without deviating from democratic principles. The most common age of eligibility for acquiring active voting rights is 18 years (Davidson, 2014). However, long after World War II, in most democratic countries, this threshold was set at 21 years, and it only began to gradually decrease from the 1970s. The reasons for this situation can be the fact that increasingly younger generations reach maturity, partly owing to socio-economic changes in Western societies. Nowadays, various solutions exist in this sphere. On the one hand, the active voting rights for the Italian Senate are acquired only at the age of 25, while on the other hand, 16-year-olds can vote in Austria, Estonia, Brazil, Cuba, and Nicaragua. In Germany, the parliaments of five states have decided to lower the voting age to 16, and the same solution has been in effect since 2007 in municipal and cantonal elections in the Swiss canton of Glarus. People of this age can also vote in local government

elections in Israel (Waszak & Zbieranek, 2010). 17-year-olds can vote in Indonesia, East Timor, and Sudan (Szymanek, 2016b). In Norway, the reduction in the voting age is related to the nature of the elections and applies to regional and local elections – the voting age is 17 for district councils and 16 for municipal councils (Grzybowski, 2016).

Lowering the age of eligibility for acquiring active voting rights as a subject of potential manipulation is linked to expanding the catalogue of voters who are particularly susceptible to manipulation and the tactics of political marketing specialists. Very often, underage voters remain strongly influenced by their parents, peer reference groups, or social media. These factors can determine their political choices. It is also indicated that the demand for reducing the age threshold to 16 is ideologically marked, and its implementation signifies increased support for the most radical political groups. The Austrian parliamentary elections in 2008 revealed that a significant portion of voters in the 16–18 age range voted for far-right parties (Waszak & Zbieranek, 2010). The radical political attitudes of young people, reflected in their voting decisions, may stem from a preference for the unconventional forms of political participation (Skarżyńska, 2002). Hence, it can be assumed that such a form of participation may translate into greater susceptibility to stimuli generated by electoral competitors interested in changing the election outcome by allowing young citizens to vote.

Raising the age of eligibility for political participation can have two aspects. The first one, which seems to have lower manipulative potential, involves raising the threshold for candidacy in elections. A higher age requirement for passive voting rights is often motivated by the need to ensure the maturity necessary for holding office and its dignity. On the one hand, one can imagine intentionally raising this age limit to instrumentally eliminate a specific candidate from the electoral competition, but this is a theoretical possibility rather

than a realistic prospect. This is due to the general nature of electoral law solutions in this respect. On the other hand, there may be a combination of exclusionary measures which could make such intentional exclusions more likely. Apart from age, another example of additional regulation in this regard is the limitation of the eligibility to run for the Storting to people who have lived in Norway for at least ten years before the elections (Grzybowski, 2016). Such and similar measures, particularly in the era of global voter mobility, may increase the manipulative potential in the discussed area.

The situation looks different with the second potential manipulative action – raising the age limit for active voting rights, which can restrict the scope of universal participation by excluding the youngest citizens from the voting population. Such an action could be taken if different voting preferences were diagnosed in this group than those of the decision-makers. This is possible first of all in the situation of the aforementioned overrepresentation of extreme attitudes among the youngest voters. Examples of such changes in domestic electoral regulations were the electoral laws for the Polish Sejm and Senate adopted on July 8, 1935. The May coup and the subsequent authoritarianization of political life in the Second Polish Republic left their mark on the adopted solutions (Kacperski, 2011). The number of people deprived of voting rights was radically increased by raising the age threshold (to 24 for the Sejm and 30 for the Senate) and expanding the catalogue of other disqualifying circumstances for active voting rights (Powel, 2013). Just raising the age threshold from 21 to 24 for the Sejm elections resulted in the loss of active voting rights for about 10% of those entitled under the previously applicable regulations. In the case of the Senate elections, due to other exclusions (including the educational threshold, the requirement of having an order or state badge, or serving on municipal councils and the councils of public utility associations), active voting rights were granted to only

2% of those who would be eligible to vote under the previous regulations (Woźnicki, 2014).

As regards the principle of universality, another factor that may be significant for election results can be seen in the United States of America. In the American electoral tradition, disenfranchising convicted individuals is a practice, although the detailed solutions originate from regulations adopted at the level of individual states. Restrictions may cover a broad spectrum of people, from all convicted individuals to those serving a prison sentence or on parole, to those who are only under probation or parole supervision. Only in two states (Maine and Vermont) are convicted individuals not subject to any restrictions (Wiciech, 2016). The potential manipulative aspect of this situation stems from two specific features. Firstly, the scale – the United States of America has the highest percentage of convicted and imprisoned people among all democratic countries. It is estimated that over six million people are disenfranchised due to this reason, constituting about 2.5% of the eligible voters. Secondly, a significant characteristic of convicted individuals in the context of elections is their racial composition – over half of them belong to ethnic minorities, especially African Americans and Latinos, accounting for just under 20% of the U.S. population (Cai, 2020). Studies on the ethnic dimension of voting in the American society reveal that members of ethnic minorities predominantly vote for the Democratic Party (Bobo, 2017). The non-theoretical nature of the problem is evident from the example of the 2000 presidential elections, where George W. Bush secured victory by obtaining the decisive electoral votes in Florida by a margin of 537 votes. Given the fact that his rival, Al Gore of the Democratic Party, could have counted on the majority of votes from convicted individuals, he would likely have become the new occupant of the White House. Even if only those with convictions who had completed their sentences and were not under probation or parole supervision were

allowed to vote, the Democratic candidate could have won by a margin of about 30,000 votes (Wieciech, 2016).⁹

What is a relatively recent issue concerning the universality of elections and potential manipulation attempts in the United States is voter identification. The source of this problem was the lack of clear regulations regarding how voters' identities should be determined at the polling stations, traditionally relying on oral statements. Since 2005, most states have either enacted laws specifying methods of voter identification or have been working on such projects in state legislatures. Regulations requiring the presentation of identification documents (often with photos) to cast a vote disproportionately affect members of ethnic minorities and those with the lowest incomes, as they are more likely to have no such documentation. Credible studies reveal that the lack of identification documents is more than twice as common among African Americans compared to the white population, and requirements for such documents are more often introduced in the states which have the highest minority percentages and are governed by the Republicans (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). For example, in Texas, during the electoral law reform before the 2016 elections, the option was introduced to identify voters by a commission based on their firearm permits (more

⁹ There were actually a lot more doubts about the Florida vote in 2000. This included questioning votes cast for Al Gore using faulty voting machines, which incompletely (though not necessarily dubiously) recorded votes for the Democratic candidate, especially in districts that, due to their socio-demographic structure, could have been favourable to him (Sapolsky, 2021). What is more, there were controversies surrounding aspects such as the ballot design, which could mislead Gore's voters, and the rules for absentee voting (Elhauge, 2001). The documentary film *537 Votes* (2020), directed by Billy Corben, focuses on controversies, including the procedure for counting votes in Miami-Dade County and interventions by the United States Supreme Court in this process.

common among Republican voters), while the use of student IDs for identification was not allowed (Czarnecki, 2021).

2.4.9. Election deposits

The imposition of high electoral deposits, also known as election bonds or cash deposits, can be another tool used to limit the competitiveness of elections, and thus conduct electoral manipulations (Żukowski, 2011). In contrast to electoral fees, which are required in some countries during candidate registration and serve as non-refundable administrative fees, the principle of electoral deposits is that they can be fully or partially refunded. The essential goal behind the idea of requiring candidates or political parties to invest financial resources is to restrict the possibility of candidacy by entities the primary aim of which is not to win a mandate and who have motivations beyond the electoral sphere. A domestic example in this regard is Kazimierz Piotrowicz, who, when running for the presidency in 1995, used free airtime to advertise what he claimed to be therapeutic insoles for shoes.

Excessively high electoral deposits, especially in relation to the wealth level of the population, can serve as a tool for the elimination of political competitors. This is particularly evident in developing countries or those characterized by the deficit of democracy, such as some Sub-Saharan African countries (e.g., Sudan and Senegal) and Central Asian countries (e.g., Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan) (Żukowski, 2011). What is a factor that undoubtedly contributes to limiting electoral competition is the prospect of regaining the entire or part of the deposit, usually linked to winning a seat or achieving a certain level of support at the national or electoral district level. Simon Hug (2000) identified high electoral deposits as one of the significant determinants of the emergence and electoral success of new political parties.

Although electoral deposits exist also in mature democracies, their undemocratic function is characteristic of countries which face problems with democratic procedures. For instance, in the Russian State Duma elections until 2010, a system of very high electoral deposits applied to parties not represented in parliament. These deposits amounted to over a million euros, and they were forfeited if a party did not achieve at least 4% support (Rzążewski et al., 2014). In 2016, the South African National Freedom Party filed a complaint about the requirement to pay an electoral deposit, indicating the impossibility of ensuring systemic competitiveness in elections. The electoral court did not support these objections and considered the payment of the deposit as a condition for registering party lists (Dube, 2020). In India, however, relatively high electoral deposits serve as a systemic factor protecting against an excessive number of candidates participating in elections, an issue the country has grappled with in the past. An excessively large number of candidates in relation to the perceptual and analytical capabilities of voters introduces chaos and is a factor hindering the rationality of choice (Bhattacharya & Mitra, 2014).

* * *

Institutional forms of electoral manipulation differentiate electoral perspectives on normative grounds. Their impact is typically well-documented in history, although their long-term effects are often visible only in retrospect. As mechanisms deviating from the idea of fair elections, institutional manipulations are less threatening than their communicative version, mainly owing to greater transparency. Manipulative intentions are usually evident during the design and implementation of new solutions. This makes it possible to identify the potential beneficiaries and possible victims of the new arrangements. The transparency of institutional manipulations enables the latter to

introduce adaptive strategies, providing at least a chance to mitigate some of the negative consequences.

Conducting manipulative actions on the institutional level requires having the appropriate political potential, skills, and the ability to anticipate long-term implications beyond just the upcoming election. Moreover, due to the numerous variables influencing the electoral process, the outcome of manipulations can deviate significantly from the initiators' expectations. There have been situations where the effect was contrary to the intended one. Therefore, the long-term effectiveness of institutional manipulation is often questioned because once changed, solutions may become subject to further modifications promoted by other political forces. The easy reversibility of adopted solutions, first of all requiring adequate political potential, turns electoral rules into a subject of a game between political parties.

In contrast to communicative manipulations, their institutional varieties create, to some extent, a closed catalogue of possible solutions, resulting from the more effective verifiability of respecting the principles of free and fair elections. With a very large number of detailed solutions regarding the nature and course of the electoral process, the same actions can obviously yield polarized results. Thus, when attempting to detect and study the potential effects of institutional manipulation, the context of the place and time must always be taken into account. Something that may be a particularly motivated change in the rules of electoral competition, giving a competitive advantage to some entities at the expense of others in one system, could be a mechanism for adapting the political system to changing external conditions in another reference system.

The experience drawn from over two centuries of democratic practice makes it possible not only to deliberately introduce individual instruments conducive to such actions but also connect a great many dimensions of their impact. Such multi-vector projects of manipulative

actions have a chance to produce a synergy effect – even if the outcome of individual initiatives is slight, their sum may achieve the desired result. An example of such a project was the initiative launched at the beginning of the term of U.S. President Joe Biden. Recognizing the problem of Republican-imposed restrictions on the electoral participation of natural segments of society supporting Democrats, he sought to push through the Congress a comprehensive reform concerning voting rules, campaign financing, and the delineation of electoral districts, which were proposed in the For the People Act. The proposed Democratic bill included the introduction of an automatic voter registration system, a guaranteed two-week early voting period, and the option to vote by post. The project included regulations to expand transparency in financing an electoral campaign and a ban on manipulating the boundaries of electoral districts. Moreover, Election Day, traditionally the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, would be a federal public holiday (Burza, 2021). However, due to the complexities of the U.S. legislative process, the Republicans managed to block the proposal in the Senate, claiming that the proposed solutions threatened the integrity of the elections. In reality, they were defending their political interest, as all elements of the package endorsed by Biden clearly favoured Democrats in the American electoral arena. Therefore, as can be seen, even in the oldest and most (until recently, it seemed) stable liberal democracies, under the guise of combating electoral process pathologies, the desire to influence the process of instrumentally shaping the rules of electoral competition may intensify (Weiser et al., 2021).

CHAPTER THREE

Communication manipulations

3.1. Introduction

Communication manipulations assume the possibility of influencing voters and entities of electoral competition in the area of information, with the instrumental impact on media and political communication as the main axis (Wojtasik, 2019a). As indicated by Piotr Uziębło (2016), the role of various media in a campaign can determine the success or failure of certain political groups. This does not mean that all activities related to electoral communication are manipulative, but nearly each of them can be intentionally used for such practices. Taking into consideration the context of the shift towards a more deterministic model of electoral competition in the age of network communication, especially the first two mentioned conditions may be subject to ethical relativization.

Communication manipulations, although their history may be as long as that of institutional ones, have been experiencing their true renaissance in the last two decades. This is due to entirely new possibilities of their impact, associated with the emergence of several previously absent phenomena. The first is the rapid acceleration of the use of the Internet and new media (especially social media), as well as Internet communicators as tools for social communication, which facilitate politicians' communication with voters. Thanks to them, the development of algorithmic targeting of electoral message recipients is

possible, enabling the autonomation of network political communication from the previous mainstream of election campaigns (Pomerantsev, 2019). Instead of one large election campaign, thousands or even millions of micro-campaigns are carried out in an integrated manner, managed to a significant extent by artificial intelligence. This is part of a broader trend in which a lot of decisions on socially significant issues, such as the establishment of public policies, the assessment of creditworthiness, or the deployment of police patrols, are entrusted to algorithmic analysis and artificial intelligence (O'Neil, 2017). The network also makes it possible to create some unconventional forms of political participation, triggering a much deeper type of engagement than just the often-ritualistic participation in voting (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Researchers widely agree that thanks to the use of big data and micro-targeting, the 2008 US presidential elections were already decided on the Internet. The increasingly rapid transition to the most effective forms of electoral communication on the network was due not only to the increasing prevalence of the Internet use but especially to the possibility of aggregating vast data sets for campaign purposes (Issenberg, 2012). Owing to the then-implemented "getting out every vote" strategy, Barack Obama defeated Republican John McCain (Rzążewski et al., 2014), and the online image of the Democratic candidate during the campaign evoked positive emotions, not only because Obama was much younger and more familiar with technological novelties but primarily because he was presented as the leader that the majority of voters believed the United States needed (Wylie, 2020).

Another aspect conducive to the development of a new type of communication manipulations is related to the processes of political personalization. Focusing on the personal aspect of election campaigns allows competing entities not only to nuance the created messages in terms of individual social expectations (as in the mentioned example of Obama) but also to send them (most effectively using the Internet)

to individual voters. Finally, the rapid development based on aggregating vast data sets used for carrying out election marketing is also crucial. These methods can increasingly effectively diagnose voters' needs and, with the involvement of artificial intelligence, create the impressions expected by them. Through network tools, they can reach voters' awareness.

Actions aimed at manipulating the course of the electoral process can have either one of two components: institutional or communicative, or both combined. In the case of communicative manipulations, the presence of an institutional component makes it possible to distinguish two types: conventional and networked. The conventional type requires creating an appropriate procedural context that connects the electoral competitor with voters through a unifying factor. In the vast majority of cases, this stems from the need for intermediation in communication through an infrastructural element – a specialized medium capable of creating and effectively conveying election-related messages. Therefore, the mechanism of this primary type of communicative manipulation is based on two characteristic types of interactions: the creation of generalized messages and their nonspecialized distribution among the general public. Based on this, the processes of mobilizing or demobilizing voters are conducted at a very general level of calibration (adaptation to the recipient) of election communication. These premises suggest that conventional manipulative practices can be more frequently observed in the actions of the incumbents, who influence normative and material regulations regarding the use of media in election campaigns and have the necessary resources to apply them. In this case, the challengers are more likely to adapt to the existing institutional conditions than shape them themselves.

Contemporary changes in political communication, especially the decreasing role of traditional media and their replacement by direct (or semi-direct) communication channels, have also led to the creation

of another type of communicative manipulation – networked manipulations carried out through the Internet. Their specific character no longer requires the possession of communication infrastructure in the form of access to traditional media but focuses on direct communication through the network (or semi-direct, using specialized platforms, especially social media). Thanks to the mechanisms of detailed targeting and segmentation of the electorate, a significantly higher level of calibration of political communication can be achieved compared to conventional communicative manipulations. This has solved the problem that was defined in the early 21st century in the following illustrative way: How to speak to the religious souls of North Carolina without cutting ties with the secularists of Minnesota? How to advocate for positive discrimination among the black masses in Arkansas without making it too audible in Washington, where Asians are hostile to such discrimination? How to win over 5,000 Cubans who will decide everything in Florida without giving the impression in Iowa, a state 90% inhabited by whites, that one is bowing down to Latinos? How to simultaneously address unemployment in Ohio and prosperity in New Hampshire? How, when you are Kerry, to secure Jewish votes in Cleveland without causing panic among the Arabs in Detroit? How, when you are Bush, to promise a constitutional amendment on gay marriage (a fundamental issue in Oklahoma) without finally scaring off the last Republican gays (numerous in Pennsylvania)? How, in the same Pennsylvania, to appease the doves of Philadelphia without discouraging the hawks in the rest of the state? (Lévy, 2007).

The knowledge of the psychological profile of voters and the ability to reach them through the Internet lead to the creation of personalized messages for specific people. The processes of electoral mobilization or demobilization have a lot more selective character than conventional communication manipulations. However, the possibility and success of this new type of manipulations were largely determined by another

factor. Traditional communication manipulations are strongly limited by the existing regulations and procedures, allowing a certain degree of effective control over political communication and preventing ethically questionable (often deceptive) practices. The network type of communication manipulation can often occur independently of the institutional component, and it is this change that is essential for the effectiveness of actions taken directly on the Internet, including those using social media. On account of its nature, mode of operation, and inherent anonymity of communicators, network communication cannot be regulated (and controlled) to the same extent as similar actions outside the virtual space. Ora Reuter and David Szakonyi (2021) argue that the effectiveness of manipulation to a large degree depends on the belief of the majority of voters in the fairness of elections. As long as such a conviction can be maintained, the field is open for the widespread use of communication manipulations.

3.2. Conventional communication manipulations

3.2.1. Shaping public opinion

The intentional creation of the image of political reality among voters

The image of politics, politicians, and the determinants shaping political reality is subject to creation by various entities. The contemporary nature of this process is the effect of changes in political communication, especially the emergence of permanent electoral communication. Since the 1970s, we have witnessed the considerable expansion of activities characteristic of electoral communication beyond the official campaign calendar, leading to its permanency (Joathan & Lilleker, 2020). This stems from the market-oriented nature of political competition, where voters' decisions influence the creation of the system of relations between those in power and the opposition, and

the determinants lie beyond the election campaign period. The rational examination of the election effect shows that citizens have the opportunity to express their views on the direction and character of political processes that will occur after the elections. In this context, it is important to determine the premises based on which they lend their support to specific candidates or political groups. Generally, these assumptions can be divided into two types: internal (assuming a direct relationship between the voter and the political sphere) and external (indicating the existence of an intermediary factor between the voter and politics). Internal premises are based on the connection between the values and beliefs expressed by voters and the direction of their voting. Three types can be distinguished: (1) opinion-based; (2) affiliation-based; and (3) resource exchange-based (Żukowski, 1997). Opinion-based premises are based on the voter's analysis of party programmes. Voters reveal their political beliefs, expressing support for the political party's programme while simultaneously expecting the fulfilment of the promises contained in it (Antoszewski, 2004). Factors referring to affiliation are the expressions of the social and party identification of voters with a political party and the role of party organizations in creating institutional voter identification. Long-term research, such as the American National Election Studies conducted in the second half of the 20th century, revealed that party identification was the most stable attitude connecting people to the political sphere. However, contemporary studies show the weakening of such ties in favour of personalized relationships (Turska-Kawa, 2015). The electoral exchange of resources is an indication of strong, personal connections between the voter and the candidate. It reduces programme or party factors (although it does not exclude their influence), emphasizing the transactional nature of personal relationships where subjectivity serves to satisfy political needs (Karvonen, 2010).

While internal determinants subjectify the voter in making decisions at the ballot box, the external premises of voting for political parties or specific candidates assume the influence of a moderating factor. It is the media and their growing role associated with changes in contemporary political communication. The processes of mediatization of politics (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014) significantly affect the formulation of political offer for voters, understood as a product of political marketing which directly impacts the specific decisions of individual voters (Kolczyński, 2007). On the one hand, as in the case of ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, the authorities, under the guise of fighting misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic, introduce the manipulative differentiation of the free expression of political views in the media sphere. On the other hand, the specific character of the influence of traditional media forces the government of this post-Yugoslav republic to defend against the disinformation policy employed by Serbian Television (RTRS), the Serbian News Agency (SRNA), or the Sputnik Srbija agency, the disinformation activities of which increase, especially in the pre-election period (Jusić et al., 2021). A similar situation takes place in Kenya, but here, the role of external disinformation media is played by those intentionally established by political parties. Examples include projects created by the ruling Jubilee Party (JP) with names deceptively similar to respected media outlets, such as CNN1 (cnnchannel1.com) or “Foreign Policy Journal” (fp-news.com), which were established to spread false news during the 2017 elections, allowing the JP to distance itself from it (Mutahi, 2020).

Susan C. Stokes (1999) indicates yet another dimension of electoral communication manipulations aimed at moulding the image of political reality. She stresses that political parties and candidates may not reveal their true views and intentions during the election campaign, calculating the potential gains and losses associated with them.

This serves as an introduction to electoral manipulation involving the non-disclosure of actual intentions to voters or even presenting false plans and intentions that one does not even intend to implement after the elections. Such actions can be considered a form of election obstruction, but their nature does not qualify them as prohibited acts subject to penalties. The potential punishment can only be meted out by voters, and only in the next election. Interestingly, in the cited reality, there is no asymmetry between the ruling party and the pretenders – both sides can create electoral illusions, promote content convenient for themselves, or intentionally mislead voters. It must be remembered, however, that the opposition cannot use the state machinery for these purposes, while the ruling party has the necessary resources and procedures, as seen, for example, in Croatia. In this country, using EU funds, grants were awarded in 2020 for tasks related to content creation in electronic media, providing support to extremely conservative online portals. The anti-EU and Islamophobic portal *dnnevno.hr* can serve as an example here (Car & Ravbar, 2021).

However, having influence over the media message formulated for the public, rather than just engaging in disinformation, helps to increase effectiveness in manipulation in this regard. In this aspect, the discussed asymmetry can be noticed – it is the ruling party (in the vast majority of cases) that can have a broader impact on the media and the messages they convey. It is sometimes achieved with the use of budgetary funds, as seen in the intentional creation of content regarding the activities of the Polish Ministry of Justice. Under the pretext of an informational campaign about changes in the judicial system, the institution allocated funds to the *wp.pl* portal to promote its actions, influencing the shape of the presented content (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Another example of a similar strategy was the publication of photos of the Law and Justice (PiS) candidates participating in the 2019 parliamentary elections, along with an appeal for their support, on

the official website of State Forests (*Lasy Państwowe*, a public institution). The candidates were dressed in uniforms resembling forestry service uniforms (even though they were not associated with them), and the poster was accompanied by the slogan: “They defended, defend, and will defend Polish State Forests” (Świtka, 2019). In the described campaign, this was not a one-time use of State Forests. Another PiS candidate, Jarosław Zieliński, placed his campaign banners on their premises (Olender, 2019). For opposition parties, what is a favourable circumstance for formulating socially attractive media messages is an event (e.g., an economic crisis, a natural disaster, a terrorist attack) that forces the ruling party to take unpopular actions. The COVID-19 pandemic and its social repercussions undoubtedly provided such an opportunity. Politically and electorally, it was most often exploited by extreme and populist parties which questioned the goals and methods of combating the virus, as exemplified by the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). It was the only German parliamentary party which systematically politicized the pandemic in an instrumental way. This provided an opportunity not only to criticize the government and blame it for the negative socio-economic situation but also to actively support often illegal and violent social protests (Wondreys & Mudde, 2020).

Today, parallel to the abovementioned process of the mediatization of politics, we observe a phenomenon of decentralization in social communication, and thus in political communication as well. As it might seem, this could be a factor in neutralizing the institutional advantage of the ruling party, especially through the dispersion of communication sources and the ability to send a message to the increasingly smaller segments of the electoral market (sometimes even to individual citizens). It can be assumed that, to some extent, this is actually happening, but the dominant role of the governing party in political communication is still maintained. This is because they

possess institutional resources and direct influence on the media, which can provide an obvious advantage in competition with opposition forces. They also have a greater influence on creating the political agenda, in a way imposing the political discourse on public opinion (and the media). The activity of the ruling party in this regard can be focused on two aspects. The first is the creation of a negative image of political opponents. The public perception of opposition parties and politicians can be shaped through the media, which can be pressured by the governing party in various ways to treat political rivals unfairly or even be biased in reporting and commenting on politics. The second level of creating an unrealistic image of the political sphere through the media is the subjective representation of the ruling party by interpreting its actions inconsistently with the facts. This often involves focusing on only the presumed achievements of the government, presenting its clear failures as successes, or ignoring undeniable blunders. The developed and public media system in the media market with a significant position in the media market is a factor conducive to such actions. A typical example of such influence in Poland was the presentation by Prime Minister Beata Szydło and public television, as well as media sympathetic to PiS, of the voting result on the candidacy of Donald Tusk (former Polish Prime Minister) for the President of the European Council. Despite Poland being the only country voting against the candidacy (the other 27 EU countries supported it), the then-Prime Minister and media sympathetic to her portrayed this as a victory for Polish foreign policy (Kalisz, 2019).

Negative campaign

What characterizes contemporary election campaigns is the increasing saturation of negative content and the intensive use of tools aimed at discrediting political opponents (Karwat, 2007; Lau et al., 2007). These processes are reinforced by the phenomenon of personalizing

the programme offer, putting image issues at the heart of discourse. The negative image of the opponent commonly becomes an integral component of the offers of competing entities in elections (Turska-Kawa, 2014). There is no doubt that negative campaigning, focusing on the real or presumed unfavourable political characteristics of rivals, is a manipulative factor in the dimension of electoral communication. Its basic principle is to provide information with an interpretative context which will make voters adopt a critical attitude towards the subjects of such actions. The effectiveness of negative campaigns depends on a variety of factors. Researchers recognize its greater efficiency in two-party systems and in situations where elections are held on the basis of a majority formula, which results from different patterns of electoral competition generated between parties and candidates (Ridout & Walter, 2015). What is a real problem associated with the impact of negative campaigns is the hyperbolizing role of the media in shaping and presenting voters' opinions, undoubtedly contributing to the increase in political polarization (Nyhuis et al., 2021). An example of such influence was observed in Argentina in 2018 during the campaign for the legalization of abortion, in which the main political parties and prominent politicians were involved. The Argentinian society was strongly polarized between groups supporting broader abortion legalization and those opposing it. Fabricated stories reported, for instance, legal abortion (which was already allowed in cases resulting from rape), in which the foetus would wait for death in the hospital ten hours after the procedure. Such misinformation led to the verbal and physical harassment of people involved on both sides of the dispute, including journalists and the judge who allowed legal abortion (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Similar disinformation, with features of negative campaigning and originating from an anonymous source on Facebook, was spread among the Australian society in the electoral campaign before the parliamentary elections in 2019. It was rumoured

that the Labour Party wanted to introduce a “death tax” (an inheritance tax of 40%). Although this information was quickly denied, it continued to spread through paid advertisements, evidently harming Australian Labour members (Carson et al., 2021).

In the case of negative campaigns, two types of actions can be distinguished: legal, sometimes ethically questionable but being the subject of acceptable electoral rivalry, and criminalized actions which violate existing legal provisions. The focus of the presented investigations is on the former, so it is important to make a distinction within them between real information, which constitutes indisputable facts, and the interpretations based on them. As it seems from the contemporary perspective, determined by the shift of political communication to the Internet and the possibilities this process provides for reaching voters directly, a greater manipulative potential should be attributed to interpretative contexts. Political parties appear to recognize this fact, as exemplified by the hiring of political consultant Tal Silberstein by the Social Democratic Party of Austria. His sole task was to create content aimed at discrediting opposition parties and their candidates in elections. Even after his arrest in August 2017, former colleagues continued the negative campaign against party rivals, especially the Austrian People’s Party and the Freedom Party of Austria, impersonating their activists and generating anti-Semitic and racist content (Eberl et al., 2017). However, this does not mean that traditional media do not engage in similar activities, attempting to present false or distorted interpretations with respect to individual candidates or entire political formations. An example of this is the action taken by TVP (Polish Public Television) against Rafał Trzaskowski during the 2020 election campaign, which the presidential candidate summarized as follows: “From my experience, I know very well how many people believe in these manipulations. [...] A large part of voters was convinced that,

for example, I am from Krakow or that I am 170 cm tall, because TVP provided such information” (gazeta.pl, 2020c).

The most important manipulative goal of negative election campaigns is to influence the mobilization of voters. This can manifest itself in three principal dimensions: (1) discouraging voters from supporting the subject targeted by the negative campaign; (2) creating an interpretative context for comparisons, resulting in the manipulating entity gaining additional support; (3) polarizing the attitudes of voters, aiming to strengthen support for the sender of the negative message (Lau et al., 2007, pp. 1176–1209). One must point to the ambiguity of the effectiveness of such actions, as they may often be counter-productive. Firstly, they may not bring about any changes in the electoral landscape, for example, when the manipulated subject turns out to be unimportant to voters. Secondly, an attack using negative campaigning may evoke sympathy towards the targeted entity. Thirdly, another entity, not involved in manipulation, may benefit from a negative campaign, as exemplified by the increase in support for Andrzej Olechowski in the presidential election campaign in 2000. This rise is partly attributed to the negative campaign carried out by Marian Krzaklewski’s team against Aleksander Kwaśniewski (Szczerciak, 2001). Lastly, when the perpetrator of such an attack is revealed, voters may turn against them. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš experienced such a situation. In 2017, he commissioned the publication of articles disparaging his political competitors in the newspaper “*Mladá fronta Dnes*,” which he was the owner of. Following the disclosure of this information, the approval ratings of his party (ANO – Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) and public trust in Babiš himself decreased, as confirmed by subsequent polls (Lorenz & Formánková, 2020).

Segmentation pro-turnout campaigns

Pro-turnout activities can be a significant factor instrumentally influencing election results. This is done by directing pro-turnout initiatives towards electoral segments that serve as a support base for specific political forces or by using such campaigns to indirectly promote particular political forces and politicians. What is of particular interest, in contrast to the classical mechanism assuming a positive correlation between increased voter turnout and enhanced electoral prospects for opposition forces (Matsusaka & Palda, 1999), there may also be a reverse relationship here. The ruling party, having necessary resources, can take measures to mobilize specific segments of the electorate where they can generate additional support for themselves. The segmentation of the electoral market is a tool enabling the identification of voters who may be the target of implemented pro-turnout actions.

A pragmatic understanding of the concept of electoral market segmentation assumes the possibility of structuring it in such a way that relatively homogeneous parts which can be the subject of effective manipulation are identified. Among the classical criteria for segmentation outlined by Marzena Cichosz (2002) are: (1) geographical; (2) demographic; (3) sociological; (4) psychological; (5) behavioural. Although contemporary developments have weakened the discussed dependencies (not only due to the disintegration of the classical structure of industrial society but also as a result of changes in political communication), connections between individual elements of social structure and their political representation can still be indicated. The modern “thawing” of the shape of party systems (and thus the emergence of new patterns of political competition) may lead to the diffusion of historical voter segments and new structures may emerge in their place (Wojtasik, 2012a). In complex social and political conditions, transformations in patterns of electoral competition occur, and the social

structure takes on new forms, making it possible to selectively influence the mobilization for participation in elections (Wojtasik, 2014a).

In a positive dimension, pro-turnout actions, on the one hand, are designed to influence the enhancement of the functionality of democratic procedures, i.e., the overall quality of democracy. On the other hand, there are opinions that citizens for whom election results are indifferent have a social obligation not to participate in voting, as their votes might distort the true picture of the elections (Kryszeń, 2004). Among the factors with a stimulative value in determining the significance of elections and influencing the level of voter turnout are the resulting distribution of power, uncertainty about the final outcome and competitiveness associated with it, as well as media interest (Cześnik, 2007). This last element is particularly evident with reference to the ways of reporting on the election campaign (Kolczyński, 2010). Since the impact of the voter turnout level is not neutral to the election results, at least some of pro-attendance actions are accompanied by the accusation that manipulation is the real reason behind them. These are often initiatives where voters are rewarded for participating in elections in a material way, clearly associated with the granting of benefits by the ruling authorities. In extreme cases, participation in elections is linked to the possibility of purchasing cheaper food products (Russia) or receiving discounts on fuel and restaurant meals (India). Slightly more subtle ways of promoting participation in elections involved the possibility of winning consumer goods in an election lottery—this was the case in Norway during the local elections in 1995 or in Bulgaria in 2005 (Uziębło, 2016). In the latter case, the lottery registration system (via the website, SMS, or phone registration) rewarded voters with access to electronic communication means, mainly young people and urban residents, among whom the ruling National Movement Simeon II saw its potential voters. In this case, the probable manipulative motivation was negatively assessed by both

the Bulgarian Supreme Administrative Court and the Council of Europe (Więckowska, 2016). A similar initiative was proposed by the authorities of the U.S. state of Arizona in 2006. In the prepared project, they planned to distribute a million dollars among all those who voted in elections or primaries. However, this proposal was not well-received by voters, who rejected it in a referendum (ibid).

Manipulative pro-turnout activities based on various types of voter segmentation can be illustrated by initiatives that emerged in the 2020 presidential elections in Poland. The campaign teams of the two main candidates undertook actions aimed at generating increased support among those groups of voters which intended to endorse one of them. Andrzej Duda received assistance from the government, specifically the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, which introduced the initiative called the “Battle for fire trucks.” The goal was to give fire trucks as a prize to the communes in which the highest voter turnout would be achieved. The manipulative mechanism in this case involved limiting the competition to towns with up to 20,000 inhabitants. This was based on empirically confirmed observations from previous elections, indicating that in such towns, the incumbent president (as well as his party, the PiS) tends to obtain relatively high support. The pro-turnout action was expected to generate additional votes for the incumbent. The organizers of the “Battle for fire trucks” were so satisfied with the effects that they decided to repeat it in the second round of elections, expanding its scope from 16 to 49 vehicles, covering the administrative structure of 49 historical voivodeships compared to the present 16 regions.

In response to the actions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration the initiative called “*Festiwal Frekwencja*” (Eng. “Festival of Turnout”) was launched. It involved rewarding residents of the city with the highest turnout by organizing a free music festival featuring stars of Polish popular music (Tatarczyk, Wojtasik, 2023).

The manipulative dimension in this case involved limiting potential beneficiaries to cities with a population above 50,000 (thus mostly supporting Rafał Trzaskowski) and directing the communication to a younger group of voters (the natural audience for the proposed musical form) (Going, 2020).

The government initiative to reward with fire trucks did bring the expected benefit for Andrzej Duda. In the communes covered by the pro-turnout action, nearly half of the eligible voters, i.e., 13.22 million people, lived as of the election day. In addition, their residents participate in elections less frequently than those in larger cities. What is particularly important, in the smallest communes during the first round of the 2020 elections, Andrzej Duda won with support exceeding 50% (4.33 million votes), while Rafał Trzaskowski received only 1.74 million votes. In contrast, in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, Trzaskowski won with 2.3 million votes, and Duda received only 1.77 million votes (Kopeć, Dudzik, 2020). Considering these two facts (lower turnout and greater support for Duda), it comes as no surprise that pro-turnout actions intensified before the second round of elections, with an increased pool of fire trucks to be won, now totalling 49. The positive impact of the fire truck action on Andrzej Duda's electoral result was investigated by Krzysztof Krakowski (2020). He analysed the results of the first round of presidential elections and compared them with the results from the first round in 2015. In the communes covered by the government's action, support for Duda increased by 14 per cent, while in the remaining areas, it increased by only 8 per cent (with an overall increase in support by 13 percentage points). The difference in voter turnout is even more striking. In communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants, turnout increased by 17 per cent, while in the others, it rose by only 8 per cent (Krakowski, 2020).

Another initiative aimed at increasing turnout in a specific segment of the electorate was the action of the Metropolia Warsaw (Eng.

Warsaw Metropolis, association (bringing together the capital and 31 suburban communes), which announced that it would allocate 50,000 zloty to the commune with the highest turnout. The goal of the initiative was to mobilize voters in the areas where the President of Warsaw could expect increased support. The manipulative context of the entire undertaking is indicated by the fact that Michał Olszewski, who simultaneously held the position of deputy to Trzaskowski in the Warsaw City Hall, was the chairman of Metropolia Warsaw (Zubik, 2020).

On July 11, 2020, a day before the second round of the elections and during the electoral silence period, the Government Security Centre (*Rządowe Centrum Bezpieczeństwa* – RCB), a government agency responsible for monitoring threats and warning the population through notifications sent to mobile phones, engaged in a specific form of activity. Until that moment, RCB's messages had focused on warnings about dangerous weather phenomena (precipitation, winds, frost, etc.). Now, all mobile phone owners received the following information: "The first round of presidential elections on Sunday, 12.07. People aged 60 and over, pregnant women, and disabled persons will be able to vote in polling stations without having to queue." The mere fact of using the RCB system to inform about the voting process raised doubts among security experts, as the public opinion did not perceive the system to serve such purposes. It should also be pointed out that the message omitted individuals with children under three years old who are legally entitled to vote without queuing. The RCB's activity could be explained by the demographic structure of voters revealed in exit poll studies during the first round of elections. Due to the COVID-19 threat, a relatively high absenteeism was noted among the oldest voters, and it was precisely in this group that support for Andrzej Duda was significantly higher than among the younger electorate. Hence, the independent Electoral Observatory considered the distribution of the message as a form of agitation in favour of one of the candidates (Obserwatorium

Wyborcze, 2020). This can also be analysed in the context of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's earlier statement: "I am happy that we are increasingly less afraid of this virus, this epidemic. This is a good approach because it is in retreat. Now there is no need to be afraid of it. We should go to the elections in crowds on July 12. Everyone, especially seniors, do not be afraid, let's go to the elections" (Jędrysik, 2020). It must be added, in light of Prime Minister Morawiecki's statement, that a few weeks after the second round of the elections in Poland, a new wave of the epidemic occurred, marked by record daily numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths.

The initiative carried out during the European Parliament elections in 2009 is another example of manipulative actions in the field of pro-turnout campaigns in Poland. The European elections are characterized by significantly lower (although steadily increasing) turnout compared to other general elections in Poland. Thus, they are an effective target for pro-turnout activities. In the described elections, the President of Bydgoszcz, Konstanty Dombrowicz, engaged in actions encouraging voters to participate. Using his image and name on posters and billboards, he urged people to vote in the European elections. All of this took place when his son, bearing the same name, was a candidate from the Civic Platform (PO) party. Additionally, the address of Dombrowicz's existing private website redirected to the website of his son-candidate. These facts drew the attention of the Stefan Batory Foundation, which, in its post-election report, clearly pointed out the manipulative nature of the actions taken by the President of Bydgoszcz (Adamik-Szysiak, 2014).

Another pro-turnout campaign that could influence the election outcome was the initiative endorsed by non-governmental organizations and civic groups before the parliamentary elections in 2007. One of the slogans of this campaign was: "Change the country. Go to the elections." It raised objections from the-then ruling Law and

Justice (PiS) party, which assessed that its message was evidently political, not only urging people to vote but also instructing them on how to vote. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the party seeking to renew its mandate to govern, believed that the defeat of his party was caused, among other things, by the dissemination (even during the electoral silence “under the guise” of a pro-turnout campaign) of a call to vote against his government. He said: “If it were ‘Go to the elections,’ that would be okay, but ‘Change Poland’ was a suggestion that the government should be changed. We lost because of a massive campaign organized against us” (as quoted by: Adamik-Szysiak, 2014). Before the parliamentary elections in 2019, a number of segmentation pro-turnout campaigns moved to the Internet. An example of such manipulation is the “How to vote” campaign organized on Facebook. The target audience was women aged 18–25, studying, and living outside their hometowns. The advertisement contained a link to instructions on how to register to vote outside their place of residence. It was accompanied by photos of Jarosław Kaczyński, Rev. Tadeusz Rydzyk, and Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski, along with the slogan: “Don’t let old grandpas choose your future.” The advertisement was seen by over 50,000 women (Panoptykon, 2020).

What can be a specific form of manipulative pro-turnout action is the positioning of elections in the context of civic duty. This is a form of social pressure exerted on citizens to increase their participation in the electoral process, unlike the penalization of the act of voting (in the form of compulsory voting) – having a non-normative character. Its logical justification lies in the democratic need for universal electoral participation and the positive consequences it brings. Among the most important of these, one can indicate an increase in interest in public affairs, raising civic political competence, and the stronger legitimacy of power resulting from widespread participation in voting. A study conducted among American voters in the state of Michigan,

involving almost 200,000 respondents, showed that depending on the degree of social pressure (including presenting elections as a civic duty), voter turnout can increase by 2 to 8 percentage points (Gerber et al., 2008).

The advantages of higher voter turnout can be a manipulative argument used by political entities which, using the concept of civic duty, aim to mobilize only certain segments of the electorate. Research allows us to identify the candidates and parties that benefit from broader electoral participation reinforced by social pressure (and, conversely, those that may be interested in lower turnout). For example, in Poland, more religious people are relatively more inclined to consider voting as a civic duty. 85% of those who practice their religion several times a week view it as a civic duty, compared to only 60% of those who do not practice at all (CBOS, 2013). This indicates a preference for presenting elections in terms of civic duty among parties that appeal to religious values in their programmes. In a similar context, encouraging people to vote by appealing to the category of civic duty as a pro-turnout action may be more favourable to the ruling party than to the opposition. It creates motivation first of all among pro-system voters, for whom a certain type of social order may be associated with the stability and predictability of political system mechanisms, and, thus, continuity in power. It is unlikely that an appeal to fulfil civic duty will resonate strongly with anti-system or opposition-leaning voters. In the latter case, it could only be effective if directed against political forces violating the principles of the democratic order. Then, such an appeal could be a mobilizing factor to remove from power politicians deviating from democratic norms.

The civic duty to participate in voting appeals to the social need for a person to influence the political sphere, but sometimes it also involves controversial arguments that have no real social relevance. An example of the latter (perhaps even emotional blackmail) could be

the assertion that non-voters do not have the moral right to criticize the authorities elected in the elections in which they did not participate. Therefore, one must be aware that even an effective pro-turnout campaign appealing to civic duty can distort the actual preferences of voters and lead to a premium for parties and candidates benefiting from increased participation. Here, the mechanism involves the separation of the true intentions of the promoters of pro-turnout actions (expressed concern about the level of participation in elections) from the achieved effect of increased participation only in certain segments of the electorate.

Creating artificial electoral alternatives

One aspect of the alternate dimension of electoral manipulation refers to the mechanisms of creating entities participating in elections and creating the artificial layers of electoral competition. The concept of artificial entities relates to election participants who, without clear and instrumental inspiration from other entities taking part in elections, would become a part of the campaign peloton. Among the most significant expected effects of such actions, one can indicate the dispersion of votes among a lot of entities to weaken the electoral outcome of the main opponent and to mislead voters. As can be seen, unlike the intentional shaping of the political image, the manipulative potential of both the ruling party and the opposition is largely equivalent here. If we were to identify any elements of an advantage of the ruling party over the opposition in this respect, they will be related to influencing the normative dimension of electoral competition. Those in power may have the ability to shape the “rules of the game” in a way that limits the activities of the opposition.

In the case of the goal of dispersing votes among multiple entities, a factor of electoral manipulation may be the creation or an incentive to create a greater number of participants in elections so that citizens’

votes can disintegrate among many options. The described mechanism, although applicable by both the ruling party and the opposition, may be more easily directed against challengers. This is because it is more difficult to create a non-oppositional alternative to the ruling party than to create opposition entities in public awareness. In practice, the biggest challenge for the ruling party may be politicians (and parties) who form new entities based on part of the political environment associated with the existing authority. Such inspired secessionists can weaken the cohesion of the ruling party and take away some of the support necessary for the renewal of its mandate. The mechanism of dispersing support is easier to use in the case of the opposition, which can be disintegrated in this way or lose some of its support because of the use of new formulas. An interesting example of such action was the emergence in 1997 on the Polish political scene of the National Agreement of Retirees and Pensioners of the Republic of Poland (KPEiR RP – *Krajowa Porozumienie Emerytów i Rencistów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*), a formation with a name deceptively similar to the existing National Party of Pensioners and Retirees (KPEiR – *Krajowa Partia Emerytów i Rencistów*) established in 1994. The goal of the establishment of the KPEiR RP, initiated by politicians from the Confederation of Independent Poland – Patriotic Camp, (*Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej – Obóz Patriotyczny*) was to dilute the support for the KPEiR, which was cooperating with the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and had over 5% in polls before the 1997 elections. In the end, both parties did not exceed the electoral threshold in the parliamentary elections: the KPEiR received 2.18%, and the KPEiR RP received 1.63% of the votes (Glajcar et al., 2017).

Another important goal of creating artificial electoral alternatives is to mislead voters, especially those less politically engaged. The main manipulative mechanisms in this regard involve the candidacy of individuals with the same or very similar names as the main contenders

and the participation of political parties in elections with deceptively similar names or acronyms. In the first of the mentioned cases, the system is practically defenceless against the manipulative mechanism because candidates can have the same or similar names, and this cannot be considered a discriminatory factor. An example of such action was the Senate elections in Poland in 2019 in district No. 88. Three candidates were competing for the Senate seat: Adam Szejnfeld from the Civic Coalition (KO – *Koalicja Obywatelska*), supported by senator Mieczysław Augustyn, who was retiring from political activity, Jolanta Turczynowicz-Kieryłło from the PiS, and Jan Augustyn from the “I, Citizen of the Republic of Poland” (*Ja Obywatel RP*) coalition. It can be assumed that the last candidate was deliberately nominated to disperse support for the Civic Coalition candidate. This is evidenced by the fact that the candidate, referred to in the media as a “phantom,” did not run an election campaign, did not organize any meetings with voters, and did not respond to attempts to contact him by journalists (Stochaj, 2019). Ultimately, he did not garner sufficient voter support (17.53%), and Szejnfeld became the senator. There is a similar, though not as vivid, example from Kraków, where years earlier the PiS four nominated Marek Lasota for the presidential elections. His surname was deceptively similar to the name of the former President of Kraków and the PO member of parliament, Józef Lassota (Serafin, 2014). Even earlier, in 2002, in the presidential elections in Katowice, Grzegorz Uszok, a politically unknown resident of Tychy, stood against the incumbent president Piotr Uszok. However, he failed to thwart the incumbent’s re-election plans (Cieśllicki, 2002). A more bizarre case occurred during the local elections in St. Petersburg in 2021. The opposition party Yabloko’s councillor Borys Wiszniewski was contended by two counter-candidates, who not only ran with the same name and surname but were also deceptively similar in appearance. They were Viktor Bykov and Alexei Shmyelov, associated

with the authorities. Shortly before the elections they changed their names and surnames; they also visually resembled the original Borys Wiszniewski (grew beards, had similar hairstyles, etc.). The chairwoman of the Central Election Commission, Ella Pamfilova, described this manoeuvre as “shameful and outrageous,” but added that such action is not against the law, and both could run (gazeta.pl, 2021).

Similar names, especially similar abbreviations of the names of electoral committees, used in the media and campaign materials, can become a matter of interest for both electoral control authorities and institutions overseeing political parties. Within the law, they can prevent the use of names that, either accidentally or intentionally, create the risk of misleading voters. The relevant Polish authorities in this respect are the District Court in Warsaw, responsible for the registration process of political parties, and the State Electoral Commission. An example of their intervention was the necessity to change the name originally used by politicians of the Democratic Party (*Partia Demokratyczna*) in 2005 to: Democratic Party – democrats.pl because the name had been previously registered by politicians of the League of Polish Families (LPR – *Liga Polskich Rodzin*), among others (Glajcar et al., 2017). Similar regulations to those in Poland exist in many countries, including Norway, where a party’s name cannot too closely resemble the names of existing groups or, through deceptively similar elements, mislead. This requirement applies to both formations operating at the overall Norwegian level and the parliament of the ethnic minority of the Sami people (Grzybowski, 2016).

The participation of candidates who do not intend to assume the obtained mandate

In the proportional electoral formula, apart from choosing between competing political formations, the indication of a specific candidate is an important aspect of potential preference. This enables not only

the political but also personal aspect of the choice to gain significance. Its role is in the possible weakening of political (party) motivations within a person's electoral decision-making and in increasing the role of the relational dimension, referring to personalized connections between the voter and the candidate. Based on personal connections, it is possible to generate support that could not be achieved solely within the political factor. This relationship can lead political entities to be tempted to nominate candidates in elections who are expected to obtain high support for the entire electoral list but without the prospect of holding a mandate. They participate in elections as a kind of "work-horses" for the electoral lists they represent.

The evident electoral manipulation described in this case aims to mislead the voter about the actual intentions of the candidate and the political group he or she represents. The voter may think that the candidate's success in gaining a mandate would be the choice of utmost utility, ensuring the safeguarding of his or her political and social interests. At the same time, it will allow the political party to achieve the prospect of a remarkable growth of its support with the possibility of securing additional mandates, which would not be achievable without such an action. The substitutability within the electoral list is a normative mechanism enabling the execution of manipulative procedures. After obtaining support that ensures obtaining a mandate, the chosen candidate may choose not to assume it or resign shortly after accepting it (usually after taking the oath or pledging). In both cases, the next person in line on the electoral list, originally not entitled to participation in the distribution of seats, is designated to fill the vacancy.

The effectiveness of this manipulative procedure is primarily determined by the social perception of such an "artificial" candidate. For it to be successful, such a candidate must be perceived worthy of being voted for by society. Among the most important of the required

characteristics, electoral capital and social recognizability can be highlighted (Cheibub & Sin, 2020, pp. 70–95). In the first case, what is the factor generating electoral support is the presumption that, having the appropriate stock of professional experience, the candidate will prove competent in the new position. Such a professional determinant makes the choice more rational in social awareness, especially when the candidate is also backed by previous electoral and professional successes. Social recognizability can be a function of previous professional and social activities, but it can also come from other areas. In an extreme case, one can speak of celebrities, i.e., people who “are known for being known.” In both described cases, their political promoters aim at electoral potential, thus generating support for the outcome of the entire electoral list, which would not exist without the mentioned intentional actions.

The designation of candidates who do not intend to take up mandates on electoral lists is observed in all elections in Poland, except for the European elections (most likely due to the material attractiveness of the seat, as politicians are reluctant to resign from it). The evident example of such actions was noted during the parliamentary elections in 2011, where the Polish People’s Party (PSL – *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*), fearing a poor result after four years of co-governance with the Civic Platform (PO), nominated popular local government officials in two electoral districts – the voivodeship marshals of Świętokrzyskie (Adam Jarubas) and Lubusz (Krzysztof Hetman). Both of them won the elections, and both, shortly after that, resigned from taking up their mandates. In the case of Hetman, the situation was particularly bizarre because the next candidate on the list, Henryk Smolarz, also refused to take up the mandate as he did not want to lose his position in the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS – *Kasa Rolniczego Ubezpieczenia Społecznego*) (Majewski, 2011).

3.2.2. Politicians' influence on the media

The political influence of the party in power on public media

The existence of public media is a characteristic feature of a lot of modern democratic countries. These institutions (usually in the form of radio and television broadcasters) are designed to fulfil the information functions of the state in the areas of education, socialization, and shaping expected social attitudes. They have a mass character, which means the ability to communicate publicly at a distance, to multiple recipients, and in a short time (McQuail, 2010). The public nature of such media determines the engagement of state authorities in their organization, management, and scrutiny processes. The influence of power on public media varies in different countries, but three main models can be distinguished: (1) minimalist – exists in countries where the content of public media is not regulated, and their funding is at a relatively low level; (2) task-oriented – in which public media have the obligation to produce programmes fulfilling the identity functions of the state, and the financing of public media is at a moderate level; (3) interventionist – in which intervention in content is justified by the public interest, and public funding is at a high level (Jakubowicz, 2007). In practice, it is the tasks assigned to public media and the extent of their funding from the state budget that determine the prospects of politicians' intervention and their influence on the content of the conveyed message. Examples of such attempts can be observed, for instance, in the case of the former Vice Chancellor of Austria and the leader of the Freedom Party of Austria, Heinz-Christian Strache, who in 2017 stated that the partially government-controlled public broadcaster (ORF) needs the "optimization" of its goals, which was clearly interpreted as an attempt to exert political pressure on the media (Stubenvoll & Matthes, 2021). A less subtle approach was taken by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who created a quasi-public

capital-media system based on the funding by the government and state-owned companies of media acquired by the state or managed by activists friendly to the ruling Fidesz party. This was done through the consolidation of 476 media outlets (newspapers, radio, Internet services) under the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA). Independent studies reveal that half of the revenues generated by media consolidated in the KESMA come from government advertising, clearly indicating a clientelist relationship between them and the authorities. From the manipulative point of view, such a system of dependency ensures the creation and dissemination of a message favourable to the ruling government in Hungary (Nolan, 2019). A slightly different solution, but carrying similar consequences, could be observed in Poland, where PKN Orlen, a company with a dominant share of the state treasury, took over the media group Polska Press, the owner of, among others, 20 newspapers and 120 regional weekly magazines, as well as around 500 online portals (Stawiany, 2021). After the acquisition, the next step was the replacement of editors-in-chief with people known for their work in media sympathetic to the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party (Drabik, 2021a).

The political influence of the ruling authorities on public media is mainly associated with the intensification of two phenomena. The first of these is the mediatization of politics. This is an element of a broader process of mediatization, within which the essence of contemporary social changes lies in the transformations of social communication in a broader context and the increased role of mass media in a narrower context. Mediatization processes impact almost all areas of social life, making the media a dominant entity that shapes the character of social relations (Piontek, 2011). This also occurs in the field of politics, where the media, as an intermediary in communication between politicians and voters, quickly reduce the effectiveness (and consequently, the need) for direct communication in this dimension.

Politicians, recognizing the phenomenon of the mediatization of politics, seek to influence the content presented in media outlets that depend on them, at least indirectly. What could be an example of this is the coordination of the formula of presenting Sigrid Kaag, the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the coalition government in the Netherlands, representing the D66 party, on the public broadcaster VPRO. The material broadcast a few weeks before the parliamentary elections in 2021 contained agreed-upon conversation topics and was consulted with D66 politicians before airing. It should be noted that at that time, the Director-General of VPRO was Lennart van der Meulen, who had been the heads of D66 election campaigns for eight years (virtu-alnmedia.pl, 2021a).

Another phenomenon which strongly affects the need for the rulers to influence public media (but certainly not limited to them) is so-called framing, defined as a way of perceiving social reality and promoting it among the widest audience possible (Fisher, 1997). Framing itself is not usually a manipulation tool, but by narrowing the cognitive perspective, it can highlight those aspects which are intended to aid the expected reception of transmitted information. This occurs through the impact of communication on three levels: cognitive, discursive, and interpretive (Scheufele, 1999). On the first level, presented information contains a memory pattern, facilitating its easy absorption by the audience. Within the discursive level, ways of understanding events are created, with communicative reference groups playing a significant role (in the case of politics: political parties, experts, and journalists). The interpretive level includes the effect of the existence of an interpretive frame which gives the message the desired tone from the sender and the expected way of understanding by the recipient. As the result of framing in election campaigns, we observe a departure from providing information and facts in favour of presenting ready-made interpretations designed to secure electoral support for political

principals. In the case of the presidential elections in Poland in 2020, even the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT – *Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji*), dominated by people nominated by the Law and Justice (PiS) party, recognized the bias of public television in reporting on the election campaign. In a statement, the chairman of the KRRiT stated: “[...] in the opinion of the KRRiT, in the context of the then election campaign, such situations may be the basis for the allegations of unequal treatment of both candidates and supporting political groups” (quoted in: Kublik, 2020). The political selection of individuals sitting on regulatory and oversight bodies ensures that they will never be free from the accusations of bias. In 2016, the government of Alexis Tsipras in Greece held auctions to allocate television licences, officially supervised by the independent Radio and Television Council. However, critics accused the government of having particular motivations to change the media landscape in its favour by supporting media friendly to it in the licensing process (Bantimaroudis & Maniou, 2020). The undeniable influence of institutions regulating the broadcasting market was also seen in Poland in the case of the prolonged delay in the consideration by the KRRiT of the application to renew the licence for the TVN24 news channel in 2021. This issue became the subject of criticism not only from opposition politicians but also from the ombudsman, who stated: “[this issue – author’s note] raises serious doubts about respecting the rights of the applicant and the fair and efficient functioning of the Council as a constitutional body” (wirtualnemedi.pl, 2021b). It seems that Marek Mazur most accurately described the sources of bias in public media. He sees them in conditions related to ownership status, the attitude of the ruling party, and the professionalism of journalists. In the described dimensions, he demonstrated the clear bias of the flagship news channel TVP Katowice during the election campaign before the local elections in 2018. It should be interpreted in propaganda terms, as its intentional goal

was to promote the interests of the PiS. This was done without a clear declaration of political involvement, while maintaining the appearance of objectivity in election coverage (Mazur, 2019).

Both the processes of the mediatization of politics and the possibilities offered by framing as a tool for carrying out activities in election campaigns increase politicians' interest in the manipulative use of public media. In a relatively simple way, they help to gain an advantage in terms of access to voters and their political indoctrination through instrumentally selected content, ways of interpreting it, and the intensity of the message. This can be illustrated by the presence of politicians in public media programs in the pre-election period, for example, in September 2019, before the parliamentary elections in Poland. The total airtime for politicians from the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party on the main news channel of public television (TVP Info) was more than twice as long as for the representatives of all other parties combined. The ratio was similar in absolute terms—out of the total number of 2,222 appearances by all politicians, politicians from PiS appeared 1,177 times (gazeta.pl, 2019). A similar situation occurred in the presidential elections conducted in early summer 2020. For example, in May (the originally planned month of the elections), Andrzej Duda was exposed on TVP Info for over 17 hours, while all other candidates received just over six hours of airtime on the channel (gazeta.pl, 2020b). The actions of public television during the presidential campaign were criticized by the OSCE mission, which issued the following statement after the first round of elections: “In the period leading up to the elections, the public broadcaster became a campaign tool for the incumbent president, and some media messages clearly had a xenophobic and anti-Semitic undertone” (OSCE, 2020).

Political parties without access to public media must focus on communication through other channels, which makes it more challenging and expensive for them to conduct campaigns. Manipulative actions

do not necessarily have to take the form of a brutal interference in content and its presentation. They can be performed much more subtly through fulfilling the mission of public media, carrying out tasks related to building social awareness, or promoting political attitudes that align with the axiological system of one of the political rivals. The manipulative mechanism may involve here promoting attitudes that are an emanation of basic socio-political divisions, such as centre-periphery (in the Polish context: European values vs. national values) or state-church (secularization vs. clericalization) (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2017).

Certainly, communication manipulations carried out by public media can also have a significantly less subtle character. This often occurs when the level of political culture in the society makes the unhindered use of such methods possible, and some political forces demonstrate an extreme level of determination to achieve electoral goals. There are so many examples of such actions in the Polish party system that they can be considered pervasive. This happens at the level of nominating politicians both for managerial positions in public media and for institutions tasked with overseeing them. In the former case, the presidents of Polish public television have included people such as Robert Kwiatkowski (SLD), Ryszard Miazek (PSL), Juliusz Braun (UW), and Jacek Kurski (PiS), all of whom are politically affiliated with specific political groups or even members of those groups. The issue of the political personalization of institutions overseeing public media looks similar. In the case of the National Broadcasting Council or the National Media Council, people such as Marek Jurek (ZChN – *Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe*, National Christian Union), Danuta Waniek (SLD), Elżbieta Kruk, Joanna Lichocka, and Krzysztof Czabański (all from the PiS) have been involved. While to some extent the mentioned personnel choices can be understood because there is a political tradition of appointing politicians to these bodies in Poland, it is difficult not to

view the appointment of active politicians to the Programme Council of the Polish Press Agency (PAP – *Polska Agencja Prasowa*) in the context of manipulative influence on the media. Members of this council include members of parliament from the PiS: Barbara Bartuś, Mirosława Stachowiak-Różecka, and Robert Telus (onet.pl, 2021).

The political agencization of the media

Contemporary democracy as a mechanism of political power is marked by an ongoing process of dispersing centres of authority. This occurs in the case of both moving away from the classical separation of powers and a kind of outsourcing of some functions traditionally performed by the classical institutions of the political system. In scholarly literature, this process is called “agencification,” originally referring to the transfer of regulatory powers from the structures of the executive branch towards quasi-independent government agencies (Herbut, 2014). Its current understanding extends to other spheres of governing activity, including the media, in which the entire process is often referred to as “agencization.” The political agencization of the media is a process similar to the previously described influence of politicians on public media, but it refers to commercial or social media. Whether politically forced or not, they take a stance (explicit or more veiled) on one side of political disputes, presenting views and positions which result from political feedback. As a result, they cease to produce and deliver objective information and begin to generate content shaped in the form of statements presenting a politically specific vision of socio-political relations. In their activities, they start to resemble party media, implementing an established programme and ideological line, rather than institutions focused on using objective facts. Extensive American studies indicate two additional negative consequences of the political agencization of the media. The first, primarily due to the evaluative nature of the provided information, is an increase in

political polarization. The other, somewhat less obvious, is a decline in social trust in mainstream media, which may be perceived through from the perspective of not taking a clear position on key issues to voters (Guess et al., 2021).

The political agencization of the media can have several sources (Moynihan, 2006). The most significant one is the material dimension of the functioning of the media, especially commercial ones, where they need to generate revenue to cover their operating costs. Political affiliation, particularly with the ruling camp, can facilitate this process by gaining streams of financing which would be otherwise unavailable or limited in access. Such mercantile motivation makes, for example, American media easy tools for politicians to exploit, which is reflected in their responsiveness to various lobbying groups and a tendency towards self-censorship (Lévy, 2007). This observation is typical not only of American media; in Poland, after the outbreak of the scandal involving the financial statements of PKN Orlen's CEO, Daniel Obajtek, Polsat television, owned by one of the wealthiest Poles Zygmunt Solorz-Żak, reported on this matter in a rather cursory manner. In contrast, the online platform "Wprost," which heavily relies on advertisements placed by state-owned companies, did not mention this fact at all (Drabik, 2021b).

What is another aspect of the material dimension of the functioning of the media are the creative capabilities of the ruling authorities, which can be directed against disobedient media. This can happen, for example, through the tax system, which may impose special levies on specific entities in the media sphere, or by placing government advertisements only in the media favourable to those in power. The latter factor, along with the takeover of independent media by businessmen allied with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, has become one of the mechanisms for gaining effective control over the media narrative in Hungary by politicians from the ruling Fidesz party (Bátorfy

& Urbán, 2020). Deconcentration or scrutiny measures can also be factors in the political subordination of commercial media.

The second important source of the agencization process is the binary schematization of the political sphere, wherein there is pressure to assign media to one side of a political dispute. It is easier to find an audience for one's messages by stressing (and sometimes sharpening) the presented ideological positions, also due to their easier reception. Nuancing the message, requiring greater cognitive motivation (and often greater competence) from the recipients, can discourage less savvy consumers of information.

Finally, the third source of media agencization can be ideological motivations, where the goals of media and political entities with regard to policy implementation may converge. In this case, a symbiotic relationship may exist, where politicians see the media as an instrument of their actions, and the media, by providing their communication channels, implement a strategy of influence on the expected direction of political processes. An example of the latter interaction can be the ideological identification of the Fox News television station in the United States with the Republican vision of the world. The 2008 election campaign was a breakthrough in this regard: the media portrayed the Democratic Party candidate, Barack Obama, as a Marxist, a person with anti-American tendencies, and a covert Muslim associated with terrorists (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

The manipulative potential of the political agencification of the media can be exploited on two basic levels: the multiplication and objectivizing ones.¹ The multiplication level differentiates the communication

¹ In practice, there is yet another dimension of the manipulative use of the agencization of the media. In this dimension, media agents of individual countries operate, pursuing their national interests. Among such media outlets are, for example, RT (formerly Russia Today), Al Jazeera, or France24.

capabilities of electoral competition entities in such a way that parties with their own media agents seek to multiply their message using their potential. This effect can be achieved by using media inaccessible to other entities or consciously bypassing normative constraints in the formulated electoral message. Although such an advantage does not ensure electoral success (which depends on a significantly larger number of variables), it can be a factor that increases the prospects of achieving a good result. A good example illustrating this process was the involvement of Bloomberg TV, owned by the American billionaire and 2020 presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg, in his electoral campaign (Ridout et al., 2021). On the objectivizing level, manipulative aspects refer to the possibility of formulating a message that will follow party directives and will appear impartial in the eyes of voters. This is due to the lack of formal connections between the party and its media agent and hiding informal connections from the public carefully. In such a situation, the media may invoke social interests or represent non-political entities, such as social organizations, religious groups, or trade unions, in its activities. The objectivizing level was often used by the wealthiest Mexican, Carlos Slim, who supported allied politicians in elections through his media (Osorno, 2019).

The political agencization of the media is a phenomenon with an exceptional degrading potential for electoral processes. This stems from the fact that contemporary media have a distinct advantage over the audience in terms of the ability to verify the truthfulness of the delivered content. The amount of available information in the media space is considerably larger than just a few decades ago, making

They have manipulative potential in the electoral dimension, but a different subject of manipulation (the state, not political parties) determined its omission in the mainstream of the presented considerations. For more information, see, for example, Lipman (2009).

potential voters more susceptible to making decisions based on unverified information that may turn out to be false. As Frank Luntz indicates (2007), considering the vast amount of information an average person must deal with, with the right language, word, phrase, or argumentation, politicians can safely achieve their goals. Those who have an impact on the news can make the audience change opinions on any topic. This is particularly evident in the case of major media (big media effects), which are primarily oriented toward meeting the needs of their advertisers (as it determines their existence) rather than informing the general public. This gives the media enormous creative possibilities by appealing to the audience they want to reach, including advertisers (McChesney, 2016). Political entities are also such advertisers, influencing not only the content of the message but also its interpretation and delivery to the intended target audience. The United States is a notable example of media agencification, where since Donald Trump's victory in 2016, there has been a clear assignment of major media to political sides and the positions they represent (Groeling, 2008).

The politicization of local media

The described political agencization of the media is implemented on various levels (national, regional, and local), but, particularly at the local level, another phenomenon with a high potential for manipulative influence on electoral strategies comes into play. It is the politicization of local media, with its main mechanism being their economic dependence on politicians. While media operating at the national level can reduce such dependence by raising funds from a broader range of commercial sources, the smallest ones are often indirectly or directly reliant on financial support from local authorities. This is due to the lack of attractiveness (or very low attractiveness) for major advertisers, who allocate their marketing budgets to large media

outlets capable of reaching their entire target audience (the economic dimension of the already mentioned big media effects). Thus, if there is a mechanism of such dependence, local media will be likely to adopt servile attitudes towards their sponsors.

Another mechanism of the politicization of local media is their ownership structure, with local authorities playing the role of owners. This is most often the case with local newspapers, online portals, or television stations that are intended to serve as sources of information for local communities. Their functioning is also the result of the fact that territorially limited jurisdiction makes it impossible for commercial media with such a character to exist, and local government media fill this gap. Their existence itself is not an issue in this case. However, the problem arises when the boundary between official information from local authorities and independent information or commentary becomes blurred. In the latter case, potential voters may not have sufficient competence to distinguish between the official stance of the authorities and unbiased reporting to citizens. An example of such electoral communication during the inter-campaign period was the placement of the image of MP Marcin Porzucek on posters promoting the Government Road Development Fund on the website of the Rogoźno commune in 2021. It was obvious that the commune medium was used for promotion by associating the allocated funds with the potential (though not real, as the funds were provided by the government) merits of the MP in obtaining them (Cylka, 2021).

The possibility of performing information functions by local media stems from their positioning in relation to the institutions of the political system operating at the local level. These relationships can take shape in three basic model approaches: (1) symbiotic, where relationships are based on a community of interests; (2) mediatic, based on the dominance of the media sphere over the political sphere; (3) political, determining the instrumental treatment of media by political

entities (Oniszczyk, 2011). The presented approaches show that in the latter case, where media are dependent on politicians, there is the greatest potential for instrumental influence on the content and form of communication. Thus, actions disturbing informational pluralism, which a condition for citizens to make effective political decisions from their perspective, become likely (Raboy et al., 2008). This effect is intensified by the limited number of the media interested in local affairs. On the other hand, a factor that can counteract the negative effects of the politicization of media at the local level is their deconcentration and polysensory nature (Turska-Kawa & Wojtasik, 2013). The reduction of material barriers to entry into the media market has led to a true revolution in access to local information in recent years, additionally strengthened by the assumption of some information functions by social media. However, a negative aspect of the latter is the lack of a clear separation between the fields of information and interpretation, which can affect the quality of formulated judgments and the accuracy of decisions made based on them. Therefore, it is difficult not to seek manipulative motivations, for example, in the case of the initiative of the City of Lublin, which decided to publish a free bulletin. With a circulation of 120,000 copies, it has been available to residents since 2021, and its content is created by the officials themselves and concerns city life. Surprise at the initiative was expressed, among others, by Krzysztof Jakubowski, the president of the Freedom Foundation, a watchdog organization the goal of which is to control authorities. As he stated: "I do not expect critical or analytical opinions there. [...] One can expect that such publications will promote the achievements of the city and its authorities" (Kolibabski, 2021).

The economic dependence of local media on politicians arises from the distributive role of the latter in financing information policies and their structure. The following types of funding for information policies

can be identified: media financing and content financing. The first one involves the ownership and, most often, financial involvement of local governments in media outlets. Local governments thus have a direct ability to influence the information conveyed by the media. This also refers to the distinction between the operation of local government media, which can actually limit competition in the media market, and the use of independent media for carrying out information policies. If political institutions at the local level own media outlets, they can both create content through them and influence how it is presented. In doing so, they do not have to use an independent intermediary in the form of private media, which, as a moderator, might be interested in objectifying information received from politicians or even influencing how such information is interpreted by the audience. As far as content financing is concerned, it refers to the process of paid placement of content in those media which meet the expectations of local governments. Besides obvious determinants such as reach and effectiveness, informal factors influencing the choice of content drivers can also be identified. One of these factors is the expected political stance regarding the attitude to the donor. This mechanism can induce servile behaviours in potential beneficiaries that meet politicians' expectations.

Limitations on the exposure of political advertisements

What can be an instrumental factor in limiting electoral competition are various prohibitions on carrying out campaign activities, especially in the media exposure of political advertisements. The basic manipulative dimension in this case is the ability to solidify the recognition of political entities in public awareness. The beneficiaries of such a process include parties and politicians with established brands and social recognition, thus typically candidates presenting a high level of electoral institutionalization. Through the ban on political advertisements, they can limit the prospects of generating electoral support

for new parties and unknown politicians, depriving them of one of the fundamental tools in the campaign battle. On the other hand, particularly expensive forms of political advertising (e.g., television campaign spots), due to their high financial costs, may be inaccessible to new entities, reducing the prospects of reaching broad voter groups. A Solomon-like solution to this situation could be to guarantee free airtime in electoral broadcasts to all competing entities in the elections.

Today, the issue of limiting the possibilities of electoral campaigning must be considered in the context of the emergence of new communication channels, the key features of which are the personalization of a message and the individualization of contact between communicating entities. These characteristics contribute to a decrease in the significance of mass communication, typical of old-style media, while the use of customized forms of communication, especially through the Internet, is on the rise. The differing financial commitment of entities using online media compared to the costs required for placing content on television, radio, or in printed press also plays a part in this case (Siapera, 2017). The new type of political communication may be somewhat less tied to financial resources. It can be implemented through organizational competence and activity of party members, election candidates, or volunteers. They can effectively seek support bypassing traditional media, especially in campaigns with a local dimension. Sometimes, this kind of activism is intentionally manufactured for campaign purposes, a phenomenon known as *astro-turfing* (Bartlett, 2019). The role of television, radio, or central newspapers increases in campaigns where the social distance between candidates and voters is relatively greater. However, this does not hinder the growing importance of the individualization of a message in these media as well.

Limiting the exposure of political advertisements has two fundamental dimensions: substantive and material. In the substantive one, the legislator regulates restrictions on the use of political advertising by specifying the media in which it cannot be placed or limiting the space for such materials. This may refer to a comprehensive ban on placing such advertisements on television, radio, or in printed press or specifying specific advertising media covered by this ban. An example of such regulation was the Polish Electoral Code, which prohibited the dissemination of paid election announcements on radio and television and the placement of graphic election materials on surfaces exceeding 4 square meters. These provisions were contested in the Constitutional Tribunal, which ultimately ruled² that they violated the freedom of expression and information dissemination (Jagielski, 2013). Examples of limitations on the amount of space for election materials can be found in Latin American countries. Such restrictions are used in the press in Costa Rica (maximum one page per day), Paraguay (maximum half a page per day), or Nicaragua (one-fifth of a page in each edition) (Uziębło, 2016). The material dimension involves financial limitations on the ability to place paid political advertisements. This may include limiting the overall campaign expenses for these purposes, indicating an upper limit on the aggregated funds allocated to them by parties and candidates. It may also decentralize the height of such a limit based on the number of candidates running in the elections or the maximum price of a single spot or billboard advertisement.

The described solutions regarding the prohibition or restriction of the exposure of political advertising indicate that such actions can serve both to limit electoral competition and to level the playing field between competing entities. This depends on the purpose of

² Judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal of July 20, 2011, file ref. no. K 9/11, OTK-A 2011, No. 6, item 61.

the adopted measures—whether it is the social rationalization of electoral rivalry or, conversely, the restriction of competition by promoting regulations which favour specific parties or candidates. In the latter case, the manipulative potential of such regulations stems from the instrumental motivations of the entities introducing them. These are usually the ruling parties (thus having influence on the course and outcomes of the legislative process), sometimes also supported by a strongly electorally institutionalized opposition. In the case of such support, the proposed solutions are directed against new political movements and lesser-known candidates in elections. Especially when there is a complete ban on a certain form of political advertising, these newcomers are restricted in their ability to reach voters with their message. In turn, the beneficiaries of such provisions take advantage of what is known as a “rent of position,” associated with the recognition in the minds of potential voters.

However, regulations are most often guided by an orderly purpose, aiming to ensure equal opportunities for competition. In such a situation, in addition to the prohibition of specific forms of political advertising, restrictions also apply to selected locations. Obviously, there should be no possibility of displaying election advertisements at the polling station. Voters should be provided with conditions for a decision free from any pressure, and the content shown there should only concern the technical aspects of voting, taking an objective form without elements suggesting support for a particular party or candidate (Uziębło, 2016). Similar regulations limit the possibility of conducting election campaigns in specific places. On the one hand, they indicate buildings under the jurisdiction of the administration, the use of which could naturally favour the governing party. On the other hand, they specify particular places that may not guarantee neutrality to all competing entities in the elections. These include places of religious worship or schools. In the case of the former, election campaigning is

done by the candidates themselves, to whom religious organizations provide places of worship for meetings with voters, and directly by clergy, during religious ceremonies and through the media. For example, before the second round of the 2020 presidential elections, Father Jerzy Rozmysłowski from the parish in Czeremno argued in pastoral announcements on the parish's website that supporting Andrzej Duda's path means choosing "God, the Church, tolerance for those with a different worldview, [...] the civilization of life, [...] the protection of human life from conception to natural death, and the protection and assistance of the sick and elderly." The incumbent president's opponent, Rafał Trzaskowski, represented a path that involves "promoting atheism, agnosticism, idolizing man, destroying Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, sowing hatred towards the pope, bishops, priests, and believers" (Kozłowski, 2020).

3.2.3. Financing political communication and electoral campaigns

Material aspects

Political communication in general, and electoral communication in particular, initially relied on direct contacts. It was only with time, especially with the widespread use of printing and the emergence of political subjectivity related to the social changes of the industrial revolution, that mechanisms for disseminating political positions and attitudes were developed. The broader reach of propaganda activities required an increase of the allocation of material resources and their more dynamic utilization, as well as the acquisition of funds for political activity. In the early stages of this activity, resources connected with the existing personnel background, dedication, and the work of members and supporters could be sufficient. However, the institutionalization of political activity necessitated the acquisition of working capital, easily convertible into goods or services essential for achieving

the desired effects. Travel, political campaigning, and propaganda materials required the necessary financial backing.³ Therefore, unlike political movements associated with traditional social strata (representatives of conservative, monarchist movements, or those associated with the contemporary establishment who had the backing of the political promoters, families, and higher classes), emerging political forces had to ensure mechanisms for their material survival.

However, it is only the possession of their own material resources that allows modern political parties to carry out effective political communication. Obviously, while there is a connection between material resources and the ability to conduct political and electoral campaigns, the amount of resources invested cannot be unambiguously linked with the effectiveness of the activities performed. As with any market-oriented activity, the ultimate determinant of effectiveness is the efficiency of the actions taken, not the amount of material resources used. If it were otherwise, the wealthiest entities that spend their resources most generously would always win elections. There is no doubt that appropriate financial backing makes it possible to carry out the plans that would not be possible to implement without it. In this case, a manipulative mechanism could be the restriction (or even the statutory ban) of external funding for electoral activities, for example, in the form of systematically established strict conditions, compliance with which is a prerequisite for obtaining a bank loan. This issue may particularly affect new or small entities in electoral competition. In 2020 in Poland, the Confederation's candidate in the presidential

³ To illustrate this issue, we should mention the example of the Bezdan operation that took place in 1908. During this event, Józef Piłsudski and a group of his supporters attacked a Russian mail train, managing to steal over 200,000 roubles. These funds were used to support the political activities of the Polish Socialist Party (Wrzosek, 2008).

elections, Krzysztof Bosak, faced this problem. The party applied for relatively modest campaign financing of PLN 600,000 but encountered refusals from many banks (*gazeta.pl*, 2020d). It is hard to assume that this was a result of the party's low creditworthiness, especially considering its successful parliamentary campaign in 2019, which resulted in obtaining 11 seats and being subsidized from the budget with an amount of almost PLN 7 million annually.

In the material setup of political activities, it is essential to combine available financial resources with the activity of members and supporters who perform unpaid volunteer work for the political party. Civic engagement in this area is particularly important when implementing diversified communication strategies, characteristic of the period of mediatization of politics. During their implementation, people can engage in dispersed actions in both the real world and the virtual space, which is becoming increasingly significant in electoral strategies. Sometimes, such individual activity is subject to the process of concentration and coordination by external entities, formally independent of political organizations but acting on their behalf. In the case of elections in India, this is one of the common ways of illegal political financing, as such coordinators and their activities are often funded by undisclosed sponsors of parties or individual politicians, masking their involvement as unrelated to politics (Chadha & Guha, 2016).

Nowadays, the material resources of political parties provide the opportunity to build new communication channels, which are not only a supplement to traditional forms of reaching voters but, in some segments of society, even a primary tool for gaining electoral support. In comparison to election campaigns from past years, this requires political parties wishing to conduct effective campaign activities within electoral competition to have significantly greater financial resources. A manipulative factor in this regard can be the intentional design of campaign financing, which differentiates campaign

activities, especially by certain political parties. This can happen for several reasons: (1) the lack of campaign spending limits; (2) the introduction of low campaign spending limits; (3) restrictions on sources of funding elections by political parties. The mentioned solutions, although directionally different in terms of effects, may lead to limiting the electoral prospects of some parties. The first possibility, assuming the abolition of spending limits within election campaign activities, can work in favour of parties well-established in the political system. They often have the necessary institutional base to generate finances. Small and new political parties may be disadvantaged in this case. In the case of limitations on campaign financing, the introduced solutions may favour socially and institutionally strongly rooted entities. In comparison to other parties, they do not have to carry out such intensive activities to achieve strategic goals or have tools to differentiate the electoral potential of their political opponents. The latter situation occurs when the incumbents can create special solutions tailored to their campaign and benefit from them. For example, in the local elections in Warsaw in 2018, the Municipal Bus Company (MZA – *Miejskie Zakłady Autobusowe*), which was under the control of the incumbent Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski, introduced an 80% discount on advertisements for candidates and political parties and did not disclose it to the public. As a result, members of Trzaskowski's party (as well as members of the SLD and two local committees) mostly took advantage of the opportunity to place ads in public transportation, paying only 73,000 PLN for ads worth over 300,000 PLN. Grzegorz Rogólski, a Civic Platform (PO) councillor and the head of the promotion and advertising department at the MZA, also benefited from the discounts, while the opposition Law and Justice (PiS) party and its candidate for president, Patryk Jaki, were unaware of the possibility of using preferential discounts (Wojtczuk, 2019).

Financing and supporting electoral communication by external entities

The multitude of areas of activity of political parties and candidates in the context of carrying out election campaigns, and above all, the impossibility of identifying all such cases within regulatory acts, means that at least some campaign activities may be conducted with the involvement of entities formally unrelated to electoral participants. These entities perform their activities in their own name and at their own risk but may unofficially finance a part of the planned and coordinated initiatives that support specific candidates or political groups. In assessing possible electoral manipulations, the sources of inspiration for these actions are of fundamental significance. In situations where they are initiated as a deliberate form of bypassing the existing legal provisions (such as financial limits or activities prohibited for entities competing in elections), they should be treated as a type of external interference in the electoral competition process. Such actions in Poland were pioneered by Henryk Stokłosa, whose companies organized election picnics with free beer and hot dogs, as well as a raffle (the main prize being a tractor) during the Senate elections in 1989. On the day of the elections, an airplane flew over Piła, dropping his election leaflets (Codogni, 2011). Another example of such action was the sending, a week before the first round of the presidential elections in 2020, of a letter by the Commission of the Episcopate of Poland for Missions to Polish missionaries abroad, who provide religious care to Polish communities living outside the country and who are eligible to vote. At the request of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, a letter from the government's plenipotentiary for Polonia and Poles abroad, undoubtedly with an electoral impact, urging participation in voting and emphasizing the need to make a civilizational choice, was sent by email (gazeta.pl, 2020a). One should be more cautious in assessing initiatives that indirectly support specific parties or sides of the political

dispute but are still part of the natural activities of the initiating entities. These entities can often leverage increased social interest during the campaign period to achieve their goals, consciously aligning themselves with the existing political discourse.

However, regardless of whether the actions of external entities are inspired or independent, they carry the potential for manipulation. They aim to create imbalance in the information space, where parties with stronger market exposure can derive greater benefits as compared to less active groups. Such imbalance can be permanent, indicating its systemic sources, or temporary, encompassing incidental actions. In the first case, it is assumed that a permanent and symbiotic relationship has been created (or has arisen spontaneously, which seems less likely) between specific political forces and entities acting on their behalf in the communication environment. To some extent, this mechanism repeats the pattern analysed in this chapter of the political agencization of the media. An example of such a controversial symbiotic relationship was the cooperation between Andrzej Duda's campaign headquarters and HyperCrew, a company specializing in microtargeting, in 2020. Shortly before the registration of the incumbent president's campaign committee, the company received one million PLN in funding from the National Centre for Research and Development, allocated for start-up activities. On its Facebook profile, HyperCrew announced that it was "beginning to work on a unique tool that will revolutionize the targeting of advertising campaigns. The combination of psychology, sociology, advertising, and artificial intelligence will enable even more effective reach to recipients. We are proud that we can create such an innovative project. We hope that you will see the results of our work soon" (Kacprzak, 2021). As can be seen, the funded project precisely concerned what the company was implementing on behalf of Duda's campaign headquarters.

The operational nature of ad hoc actions assumes that they are undertaken in connection with a need arising in the sphere of electoral competition. This necessity may be caused, for example, by the prospect of a loss, the emergence of new issues on the campaign agenda, or the desire to support specific candidates. The latter example may be particularly important when representatives of particular organizations or social groups take part in elections under a party banner. In such cases, they may organize themselves to ensure support, animate additional activities, and bear their financial costs. Examples of may include members of trade unions, religious groups, or various minority communities (e.g., national, ethnic, sexual), for whom the media exposure of their ideological positions during election campaigns is part of broader social activity. In the United States, which has some of the most liberal campaign financing regulations, thousands of institutions supporting party campaigns or individual candidates can be identified. Among the most active are non-profit organizations fighting for the right to bear arms (National Rifle Association of America), environmental protection (Sierra Club), or the rights of the African American minority (The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People). Formally, they do not get involved in electoral campaigning or directly support electoral competitors, but in practice, they attack and oppose candidates who do not share their views. In recent decades, the organization Black Girls CODE has been particularly active in this area, originally promoting the participation of black women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields and currently supporting their political and electoral aspirations (Jakubowski, 2015). In Poland, an example of a similar symbiosis is the cooperation between the PiS and the trade union “Solidarity,” the members of which collected signatures for Jarosław Kaczyński’s presidential candidacy in 2010 and participated in Andrzej Duda’s campaign in 2015 (organizing and financing transportation to

electoral meetings, among other activities). In the subsequent Duda's campaign in 2020, the KRUS (*Kasa Rolniczego Ubezpieczenia Społecznego* – Agricultural Social Insurance Fund) was used for electoral communication activities. In the promotion of the anti-crisis shield and the Food Ethics Code, it sent a letter from the incumbent president to over 1.3 million people with the following declaration: "Consistently, I support actions favouring farmers and serving the Polish countryside. I am convinced that a conducive legal and economic environment for agricultural activity, as well as good living and working conditions in rural areas, in the longer term, benefit all Poles" (Flis, 2020). Another party that often benefits from informal support from social organizations is the PSL. In its election campaigns in rural areas, it often relied on farmers' unions and agricultural producers, as well as the Volunteer Fire Department (of which Waldemar Pawlak, one of the party's leaders, was a long-time president). For example, in 2011, the election banner of Mieczysław Baszko, a PSL member and vice-marshal of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, was hung by firefighters with the use of a fire truck from the Tykocin Volunteer Fire Department (gazeta.pl, 2011).

In some normative solutions, campaign financing is not exclusively reserved for officially registered candidates or committees. Such regulations are even an invitation to initiate practices that, by bypassing proper campaign funding, may constitute a factor of manipulation in this respect. The United States is an example here as financial resources can be collected for a candidate's committee, for a party, and for Political Action Committees (PACs). The goal of the latter is to support candidates and their legislative initiatives. The activity and financing of PACs are regulated because they can receive amounts ranging from \$2,900 to \$5,000 from an individual citizen annually and spend the same amount on a single candidate's campaign in federal elections (FEC, 2021). A way to circumvent regulations regarding PACs is to

establish a company the activities of which, despite intentionally supporting politicians, is not subject to such limitations. The best example of this procedure seems to be the creation of Cambridge Analytica. Its launch was financed in 90% by conservative American billionaire Robert Mercer, who had previously supported the Republican Party and its candidates, and whose family was referred to as “billionaires who want to disrupt the existing order” (Kaiser, 2020). Since Mercer invested \$15 million in a private company, he did not have to report it as a political donation, as he would have to do in the case of PAC (Wylie, 2020). However, there are also SUPER PACs which do not fall under the mentioned limitations. It is owing to them, for example, that George Soros was able to allocate around \$27 million to support John Kerry’s campaign in 2004, even though, as a private individual, he was subject to a \$5,000 limit (Hasen, 2014).

The presented examples on the one hand illustrate the mechanism of indirectly supporting campaign activities, and on the other hand, reveal the scale of possible manipulations in this area. This also involves the intentional translation of the influence one has in the public domain into immediate political benefits. An example of such action was the use of the image of counter-terrorists and the Black Hawk police helicopter in an election spot by Marek Opiola, the chairman of the Sejm Committee on Special Services. The politician announced that the “material will be used in the current work of the Chairman of the Committee on Special Services,” which made it possible to produce the film with the participation of police equipment and officers. After the spot aired, due to protests from the Chief of Police, politicians, and public opinion, it was withdrawn from broadcasting (Długosz, 2019). In some cases, financial resources intended for other purposes have been clearly used for election campaigns. In Poland, such pathologies are particularly evident in the funds from the European Parliament allocated for social actions and the promotion of political activities.

For example, in Wrocław and surrounding communes, posters and billboards appeared with slogans such as “Thank you for the desire for change” and “Find me on Facebook,” signed by “Member of Parliament Czarnecki.” Ryszard Czarnecki, who was running for the European Parliament from the Greater Poland district, financed part of his upcoming parliamentary election campaign for his son Przemysław in this way. The entire campaign was funded with money from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the European Parliament (Jakubowski, 2015). Another example of such pathological activity was the operation of the “Perspektywa” foundation, created by members and sympathizers of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). Before the local elections in 2014, the foundation organized a social campaign in Sosnowiec called “True Sosnowiec,” showing positive changes in the city. There would be nothing controversial about it if it weren’t for the fact that the central figure in every billboard was the smiling president of the city, Kazimierz Górski, an SLD activist running for re-election (Wojtasik, 2019a).

The way of financing election campaigns

In contrast to the funding of political parties, which can be a factor in indirect electoral manipulation, legal regulations regarding campaign financing can directly impact the chances in the electoral competition. As indicated by Ingrid van Biezen (2003), since expensive election campaigns largely determine the election outcome, suspicions may arise that political influence can be bought. Therefore, it is important to find a functional compromise between enabling political parties to carry out an effective struggle for voters’ support and establishing rules for campaign financing which reduce (to some extent) inequalities in access to material resources used during elections. Just as participants in elections cannot be deprived of the ability to finance campaign activities, this sphere should not be left without regulations

and institutional control. If too far-reaching restrictions on campaign financing are introduced, the result may be the lack of opportunities to stimulate voters to cast their votes. In turn, in the case of ineffective regulation or control of campaign financing, pathological differences in the conditions of competing for voters' support may arise.

The negative consequences of campaign financing can be counteracted in two fundamental ways. The first involves monitoring the income side of the activities undertaken by parties to obtain financial resources. Apart from limiting the concentration of private influences on party policy, this approach can level the playing field for entities competing in elections. The other method is the restriction of the amounts that can be allocated to the whole campaign or its individual components. Legislators may establish limits on expenditures, such as those on television or outdoor advertising, and, in special cases, exclude certain expenses from financing from campaign funds. Currently, a common approach involves combining these actions, as what is a logical consequence of expenditure limitations is a restriction on raising financial resources. However, the theoretical set of such measures does not always enable fair competition in elections, as exemplified by Ghana. It is one of the few African countries classified as a free democracy (Freedom House, 2021). However, actual electoral competition there occurs between two major parties: the National Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). In addition to their strong institutionalization in the party system, their dominant position also stems from the fact that other parties have limited opportunities to acquire funds for political activities (due to low statutory limits on fundraising). Moreover, it is in the interest of the NPP and the NDC to maintain such a state of affairs (Gadjanova et al., 2019).

Limitations on raising funds for campaign activities can be introduced in two fundamental ways: (1) by establishing legal limits on the amounts of donations from individuals and/or legal entities;

(2) by implementing legal restrictions regarding donors or the nature of donations (van Biezen, 2003). As regards the influence on the amounts of donations, these restrictions may include specifying the maximum amount of funds that can be accepted from a single source and determining the overall sum of donations that can be collected for campaign purposes. Legislators may also set different contribution limits for various categories of donors. The most common limitations concerning donors exclude foreign entities (foreign individuals and companies, which may have motivations different from those arising from election outcomes) and entities financially connected to the government or local government sphere (the donations of which could result from political pressure). There seems to be a particular potential for political influence on public institutions as potential donors, which is associated with the possibility of using electoral manipulation. Above all, it is those in power who will have the necessary means in this regard and may also face pressure related to the utilization of these resources.

Establishing limits on campaign expenditures helps counteract excessive disparities between electoral rivals. This is, of course, true when setting a realistic limit; otherwise, it might be so high that, in practice, it does not serve as an egalitarian tool in electoral competition. In such a case, despite being apparently regulated, it could become a factor in electoral manipulation, acting in favour of entities with the biggest capabilities of fundraising during an election campaign. The establishment of a limit on campaign expenditures can have a general or specific character. The general limit refers to the total sum of all expenses and often depends on the type of election—for example, it may differ in presidential and parliamentary elections. In a particular context, such a limit may specify the amount for individual categories of expenditures, such as routine operational costs, consultancy costs, or advertising expenses (van Biezen, 2003).

The possibility of presenting electoral materials free of charge

The possibility of publishing electoral materials in traditional media free of charge is a solution used before the communication revolution that took place owing to the Internet and social media. This phenomenon most commonly applies to airtime in public media, which, as part of fulfilling its mission, serve the information function during election campaigns, and sometimes beyond. The latter solution is applied, for example, in the United Kingdom, where the possibility of broadcasting such programmes is determined by having seats in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom Parliament or the parliaments of Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales, as well as “being distinguished by a significant level of support in a series of recent elections” (Żurawski, 2015).

Free electoral broadcasts are criticized for at least two reasons. The first is the formal privileging of some political groups at the expense of others, as there is no functional algorithm ensuring access for all interested parties. Too much openness in this regard can either lead to a decline in the quality of political debate (by highlighting issues that are attractive for the media but not politically central to the elections) or even showing content that serves other purposes. Kazimierz Piotrowicz’s participation in the 1995 presidential elections in Poland, referred to in the second chapter, can be an example of the latter. The second reason for questioning the validity of free electoral broadcasts is the petrification of the existing political system through a natural preference for the largest political formations. This advantage is also evident in publicist programmes, where politicians participate between election campaigns. Representatives of parliamentary parties are naturally invited to them (with a particular preference for the biggest ones) (Strömbäck, 2007).

One of the most blatant manipulative solutions which concerns ensuring free airtime during election campaigns can be found in Spanish legislation. According to the current regulations, the division of airtime in public media is based on two discriminatory criteria: the percentage of electoral districts in which lists are registered and the level of support obtained in the last elections. As a result, for groups that have registered electoral lists in at least 75% of districts and obtained at least 20% support in the last election, 40 minutes of airtime per day is guaranteed. For those that obtained support between 5% and 20%, 30 minutes per day is allocated, 15 minutes per day for parties with support below 5%, and 10 minutes for those that did not participate in the last elections or were not able to gain parliamentary representation. For groups that failed to register lists of support in at least 75% of districts but received above 20% support in any autonomous community, 15 minutes of airtime per day is granted. The same amount is provided to groups of voters who registered lists in at least 17% of districts. In addition, the order of airing electoral broadcasts is determined by the support obtained in the previous elections (Sułkowski, 2016). The presented solutions clearly favour large parliamentary parties. While by tying the possibility of broadcasting electoral broadcasts to the percentage level of list registration in electoral districts structural order is ensured, linking airtime to the results of previous elections secures the interests of the biggest parliamentary groups.

As far as the possibility of free presentation of electoral materials is concerned, another important issue which differentiates the competitive position of political parties is the cost of preparing such materials. Generally, the media only provide free airtime, letting competing entities create specific content for presentation. The manipulative mechanism that can be intentionally exploited here either involves setting high technical requirements for materials accepted for broadcast or broadcasting materials that vary in quality. In the first case, it is

possible to create a material barrier for producing high-quality materials, which economically weaker entities may not be able to overcome. In the second case, the broadcast of low-quality electoral spots, compared to professionally prepared materials of political competitors, may contribute to the negative perception of less wealthy parties (Kuhn, 2017).

The indirect financing of election campaigns by authorities

Thanks to exercising governing functions and holding public offices, those in power occupy a privileged position in relation to the opposition. This enables both the social and media exposure of their images and the content of their political messages. While this situation must be accepted as a specific cost of organizing a system of the distribution of political power and governance in a democratic state, efforts should be made to limit its instrumental use by politicians. Taking advantage of the position and attributes of power to promote a party or individual politicians carries a significant manipulative potential in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of voters. This is directly connected with the material aspect of elections – certain actions taken as part as one's responsibilities related to holding an office may be funded with public money. Challenges do not have the same rights, and sometimes, opportunities. The main obstacle to regulating and controlling the electoral activities of those in office is the practical impossibility of separating the official and electoral spheres. A politician performing duties related to their office may indirectly benefit from elections. The real problem arises when their decisions and activities are mainly motivated by the expected gain of an advantage in electoral competition.

The problem of using the state office for electoral purposes can be studied from two perspectives. The first involves the application of tools and resources, under the guise of carrying out official duties, for the political promotion of a specific individual or party. Such actions,

although fundamentally unethical, are common at all levels of government. Even strong social control by independent media and watchdog organizations does not stop politicians from taking them. This may be due to a sense of impunity, as these actions are difficult to penalize, as well as from social approval stemming from a low level of civic political competence (Plecka et al., 2013). An example was an event organized by the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy, organized in the campaign before the 2020 presidential elections in Poland. During the event, Andrzej Duda signed an act on additional pension benefits. It took place in a sports arena in Żyrardów, in the presence of several hundred people, and had all the attributes of an election convention. Its organization cost almost 116 thousand zloty and was paid from the ministry's budget. In addition to its evident material dimension, it carried another electoral message, suggesting that retirees owed the additional benefit to the incumbent president (Łakomski, 2020)

The second dimension of using the office for electoral purposes is related to promoting people, parties, or views that may play a role in electoral decision-making. Incumbents take part in official ceremonies, are invited to the media to present their opinions and shape their political image and may also sit on various collective bodies. All of this is possible only because owing to the fact that they fulfil their functions. As a result, they gain an advantage over competitors within the framework of the electoral calendar, as gaining electoral support is not limited to the time of an official election campaign. While in office, they can, to a disproportionately greater extent than challengers, socially expose themselves, their views, or party affiliations in the period between campaigns.

The direct use of tools and resources available to politicians holding office has a very broad spectrum of impact. In practice, all attributes of power can be exploited for electoral purposes, which is why

it is important to regulate the possibility of using them as accurately as possible. The regulations of the Federal Election Commission in the United States, for example, determine the principles of reimbursing travel expenses for campaign-related visits. If official visits are also included in the travel plan, these costs should be divided between the campaign staff and the state budget in the appropriate proportion. These regulations apply, for example, to the trips of the U.S. president, where the cost of operating the presidential plane, Air Force One, is estimated at around \$180,000 per flight hour (Jakubowski, 2015). Similar concerns have been raised in Poland regarding the air trips of Prime Minister Donald Tusk to his hometown of Gdańsk, Prime Minister Beata Szydło to Kraków, or the Marshal of the Sejm Marek Kuchciński to Rzeszów. Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz was accused of holding government meetings outside Warsaw during the election campaign, which obviously incurred additional costs. The aim of such actions was to enhance the image of the ruling party by getting closer to voters in smaller towns. Another example of the illegal use of funds allocated for political activity concerns Member of the European Parliament Ryszard Czarnecki, whose financial statement was questioned by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). The case involved the reimbursement of official travel expenses, and, as a consequence, the European Parliament required the MEP to return approximately 100,000 euros (Hap, 2021). The same MEP, as a member of the delegation of the Polish Olympic Committee at the XXXII Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2021, conducted evident image-building communication on social media during that time.

The indirect promotion of politicians and parties in elections through the use of their office is considerably more ambiguous and difficult to detect. A lot of such behaviours depend on political culture, the ability to self-restrain, and the level of culture of politicians who should know what they must not do. However, the determinism

of electoral competition makes the temptation to use such tools often too great, and they become instruments of electoral manipulation. A glaring example of such action is the use of money from the Justice Fund, under the jurisdiction of the Polish Ministry of Justice, which is collected from fines and court settlements and should be granted to victims of crimes. After 2015, when Zbigniew Ziobro, a politician from *Solidarna Polska* (Solidarity Poland), became the Minister of Justice, the resources of the Fund gradually began to be allocated to activities related to the electoral activity of this party. The mechanism involved donating money for important social purposes in the electoral districts where politicians from *Solidarna Polska* were candidates, with their direct involvement and in the presence of media cameras reporting such events. In this way, Michał Woś, the Deputy Minister of Justice, handed over an ambulance to a hospital in Racibórz, and before the parliamentary elections in 2019, Marcin Warchoł, another Deputy Minister of Justice, provided financial support to the fire brigade in Podkarpacie (Klauziński, 2019). Two years later, the same politician, running in the by-election for the president of Rzeszów, generously allocated resources from the Justice Fund to Rzeszów hospitals (Chmiel, 2021). Such actions and similar ones became the subject of interest for the Supreme Audit Office, which in 2021 issued a critical report on the manner and purpose of spending funds from the Justice Fund, stating that the main beneficiaries were politicians rather than victims.

Actions related to promoting politicians through the use of their office are often carried out under the guise of various social campaigns. An example of this was a campaign promoting road safety, promoted by Adam Struzik, the Marshal of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship and a politician from the Polish People's Party (PSL). His face was placed on billboards encouraging people to wear reflective clothing, the purchase of which was financed by the voivodeship's local government. Similar

actions, utilizing the images of politicians, were taken by the ministers of agriculture and rural development in 2007 and 2012. Shortly before the parliamentary elections in 2007, Minister Wojciech Mojzesowicz sent letters to over a million farmers, contributors to the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS), informing them about the successes and plans of his ministry. In 2012, Minister Marek Sawicki appeared in commercials promoting the Rural Development Programme for the years 2007–2013, aired during prime time (during the UEFA European Football Championship). The cost of broadcasting the commercials was approximately two million zloty, paid by the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture (Wojtasik, 2019).

Campaigns like these do not necessarily have to directly promote specific politicians to contribute to the promotion of government actions. An example of this could be the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Poland's accession to the European Union. As their part, commercials entitled "10 Years of Light" were produced, broadcast shortly before the European Parliament elections. The cost of the entire campaign was approximately 7 million Polish zloty (1 million for production costs and 6 million for airtime), with 85% of the campaign budget coming from the EU funds (under the Cohesion Fund) (Jakubowski, 2015). The unambiguously campaign-oriented and manipulative nature of this promotional campaign is demonstrated by the fact that a week before its premiere, the office of the then Prime Minister Donald Tusk began circulating a recording on social media in which he sings a fragment of the song "Hey Jude" by The Beatles, along with the information that everything would be explained soon.

3.3. Network communication manipulations

3.3.1. Moderating network electoral discourse

After the inauguration of President Donald Trump on January 20, 2017, White House spokesperson, Sean Spicer, during his first press conference, repeatedly claimed that the interest in the ceremony was the highest in the history of the United States. This assertion was not supported by the numbers, which indicated that there were one-third more attendees during Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009. The next day, Kellyanne Conway, a presidential advisor, defended Spicer during a television programme, stating that he had presented "alternative facts" (Wight, 2018). The described event can be considered a symbolic moment in which the phenomenon of post-truth was established as a tool in political rivalry.⁴ It is not new in the realm of communication, but the form of describing reality has changed in recent years with the development of new media. Changes related to mass communication are conducive to both the intensification of the phenomenon itself and a certain systematic use of post-truth by politicians with the intention of achieving specific, particular goals (Pawełczyk & Jakubowski, 2017). Spicer's example illustrates another mechanism relevant to network political communication. In the Internet era, governments have finally lost their dominant position in creating, controlling, and accessing information, as well as, which is particularly important, in giving interpretations to facts. In this context, how

⁴ The development of the phenomenon of post-truth in the United States was depicted in the documentary "After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News" (2020), directed by Andrew Rossi. The film describes the mechanism of using such tools by politicians, starting from the Jade Helm manoeuvres in Bastrop County, Texas, and culminating in their actual explosion during Donald Trump's presidency.

a piece of information provided by the network will be decoded by an individual recipient is no longer primarily determined by the sender influencing the shape of the message but by the one who can impose their interpretation. Therefore, what is also an increasingly significant problem in contemporary political communication is the phenomenon of misinformation, involving the unintentional spread of false or unverified information (Jerit & Zhao, 2020), which can be used to carry out communication manipulations in elections.

The adaptation of post-truth to contemporary electoral discourse reveals the essence of the difference between conventional and network communication manipulations. It involves combining the possibilities offered by online communication with the knowledge of neurobiology, especially the skill of consciously stimulating voters using incentives that evoke expected emotional reactions, influencing changes in political attitudes. The network has made it possible for even the most socially alienated politician to reach a large number of potential voters at a low cost, which was simply impossible in the pre-Internet era. Thus, the network communication revolution, had to bring about drastic changes in the relationships between politicians and voters, involving an increase in the potential for instrumental influence on the latter. This regularity stems from two observations concerning political behaviour. Firstly, political orientation is usually cohesive and dependent on the adopted value system in the form of a set of ideological abstractions used for interpretation. Secondly, it typically is not directly related to specific political issues (Sapolsky, 2021). These two assumptions help support the hypothesis that a change in the voter's attitude toward specific political issues is a function of the evolution of their value system by replacing one set of ideological abstractions with another. Moreover, what is an effective mechanism for this substitution is the stimulation of the voter's consciousness (and in some cases, even

the subconscious) through network communication (Bruter & Harrison, 2017).

While the communication manipulation described at the beginning of this chapter, in the form of shaping the political reality by politicians, refers to the intentional influence on public opinion by creating a subjective impression, the communicative possibilities of the Internet make it possible to effectively programme changes in public opinion in a predetermined direction by shaping the interpretation framework of political discourse. Additionally, by appealing to psychology and neurobiology, it enables the effective stimulation. Not only can politicians and individuals acting on their behalf create “alternative facts,” but they can also use interpretations and communication channels with voters that make it difficult (or even impossible) to verify their truthfulness. In this case, it is no longer about simple framing, which can be a tool for conventional communication manipulations, but about creating complex (and often false) heuristics, which give the presented facts the desired interpretation from the perspective of the manipulating entities.

In 2002, the Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Daniel Kahneman for his fundamental research on analysing and making decisions in the conditions of uncertainty,⁵ synonymous with those characterizing political competition and voting in liberal democracies. The essence of his study was the empirical verification of whether different formulations of the same problem set “frames” which influence decision-making (Sapolsky, 2021, p. 493). For example, the decision to support a party in an election may be aided by the statement: “Party XYZ, with the support of 4.9% of voters, is close to exceeding

⁵ Kahneman conducted his research in collaboration with Amos Tversky, who did not have the opportunity to receive the Nobel Prize because the regulations do not allow posthumous awards (he passed away in 1996).

the electoral threshold,” while discouraging statements may include: “Party XYZ, with the support of 4.9% of voters, is below the electoral threshold.” Kahneman and Tversky’s findings formed the basis for the development of the priming concept as a way of influencing the interpretation of messages sent to recipients, although this area was also the subject of interest for other researchers, especially psychologists (Hasher & Zacks, 1979). Scholars initially approached priming in the processes of electoral competition from several perspectives, focusing, for example, on the influence of factors delivering information to voters (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) or the shape of messages (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994), rather than on the perceptual mechanisms of the recipient. This stemmed from the dominant role of traditional media in contacts with voters, as they largely determined what and in what form would be delivered to the recipient. Therefore, initial research focused on the primacy effect of presented news (Price et al., 1997) or the intensity of media exposure to politically relevant facts (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). In this classical approach, priming is defined as the effects of unconscious memory, within the framework of which prior exposure to specific stimuli determines, to some extent, the reaction to subsequent ones (Cesario, 2014). The fundamental assumption of the potential effectiveness of priming arises from the human capacity to register a large amount of information without conscious awareness. As one of the scientific directors of Cambridge Analytica noted, the hacker’s aim is to find and use the weak spot in the system. In psychological war, such weak points are weaknesses in thinking or reasoning. Trying to hack someone’s mind, we have to discover their cognitive distortions and then exploit them. In psychology, this phenomenon is referred to as “priming” (Wylie, 2020).

The advancement of the Internet has caused a true revolution in political communication. The possibility of continuous interaction between politicians and voters not only led electoral communication to

extend beyond the time framework of election campaigns but, above all, diminished the moderating role of traditional media. Press, radio, and television, which previously conducted the selection of delivered content and decided on its categorization in terms of importance (e.g., setting the order), began to be ignored by politicians. This happens in two main ways – either by creating their own media, partly competitive to traditional ones, or through direct communication with voters (and in the case of using social media, semi-direct). This evolution of the role of the media also influences the change in the nature of the priming process. Priming through the web will refer to the ability to shape unconscious memory over time by providing visual, semantic, and emotional stimuli, which are intended to influence the recipient's perception to elicit the desired reaction. Thus, it is more about the methodical programming of the voter's consciousness and sub-consciousness for making the expected decisions, which would not be possible without the involvement of the Internet.

The potential effectiveness of priming in network communication has two sources: the ability to create a message which evokes expected neurobiological reactions in the recipient and micro-targeting, which involves individually tailoring the content of the message to the social profile of the recipient (as will be discussed further in this chapter). Assuming that the Internet makes it possible to reach even a single voter with a message specially prepared for them, it can be said that it enables the active adaptation of directed content. However, how do we know what content will produce the desired effect? The rapid development of neurobiology in recent decades, similar to the changes brought about by the creation and use of the Internet, has helped in this regard. New methods for diagnosing and imaging the activity of the brain (even in its smallest parts) have allowed science to link certain types of social (including political) activities to reactions occurring in the human nervous system (Freeman & Quiroga, 2012). In

other words, neurobiology provides insights into what reactions need to be triggered in the brain to make the occurrence of expected political behaviours more probable.

Network priming becomes more effective thanks to the use of heuristics in consciousness, as it is easier to modify the existing attitudes than to try to change them radically. Party spin doctors can diagnose the main characteristics of the potential electorate and tailor appropriate messages to them. A good example of such action was Donald Trump's use of the slogan "Make America Great Again" in the 2016 presidential campaign. Its possible appeal to unconscious memory was based on two events. The first was the use of a similar slogan (specifically "Let's Make America Great Again") in the legendary 1980 presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan, which quite unequivocally aimed to associate Trump with one of the most popular presidents in the history of the Republican Party (Morgan, 2019). The second was the use of the slogan in the subtitle of Trump's book "Time to Get Tough: Make America Great Again!," which may also indicate the politician's election plans at the time, concerning affiliation with the Republican Party (Trump, 2011). During the election campaign, the slogan was promoted on campaign materials and merchandise, and it was often repeated during rallies. Additionally, it was used to label posts on social media, becoming the main tool for the viral campaign of his supporters (Chatfield et al., 2017).

What is the most popular method of social segmentation in politics, including network priming, is the imposition of a narrative of division between "us" and "them," which may be determined by issues such as ethnicity, religion, or geography. Voting based on geographical division does not even require special manipulative efforts – the so-called friends and neighbours voting is an empirically proven phenomenon, although with varying degrees of impact, both in different types of elections and concerning different social references.

Generally, it is associated with the relationship between the place of candidacy and the place of residence of the candidate, creating a dichotomy of “us” and “them” (Górecki & Marsh, 2012; Johnston et al., 2016; Parker, 1982)

Priming can be a factor of both intensifying and weakening the impact of the division between “us” and “them.” According to Robert M. Sapolsky (2021), weakening this division means reducing antipathy toward strangers and/or lowering the perceived strength or significance of the contrasts between “us” and “them.” Strengthening the impact of this dichotomy can be facilitated by emphasizing differences, stressing group goals, or negative stereotyping. Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton (2009) show the strong influence of this division on generating populist attitudes that transform the category of “us” and “them” into a version with higher conflict potential, such as friend-enemy. Factors that can weaken the adverse consequences of this division (and thus should be subject to priming) include thinking about people as individuals, recognizing similarities, adopting another person’s perspective, having a friendly approach to divisions, diminishing differences resulting from hierarchy, or setting common goals (Sapolsky, 2021).

Network priming can be an effective tool for reinforcing ideological attitudes that align with voters’ system of values. In the context of elections, we also talk of inoculation, which refers to immunizing the target audience against arguments from the opposing side (Wylie, 2020). In an interesting research experiment that says a lot about the ideological way of perceiving reality, individuals with left-wing and right-wing views were asked to choose a concept that fits the word “arms,” which can mean both weapons and limbs in English. Among the possible responses, right-leaning people more often chose the word “weapons,” while left-leaning ones chose “legs” (Sapolsky, 2021). The obtained result suggests the potential perspectives for network priming based

on semantic relationships. Effective priming messages solidifying the views of right-wing voters should appeal to a sense of community and the values they adhere to, emphasizing their connection to tradition. These messages should also include the prospect of punishment for behaviour contradictory with expectations, reinforce responsibility for the community, and, by invoking fear, enhance the sense of threat. Left-wing voters, on the other hand, may be more susceptible to messages emphasizing individual autonomy, suggesting the need for change, and highlighting the prospective political goals (Wojtasik, 2013b).

An interesting way of creating network electoral manipulations with reference to shaping electoral discourse is the use of the concept of the Overton window, or rather the possibilities of instrumentalization of the process of shifting the boundaries of social discourse provided by the Internet. The Overton window model assumes placing an idea or concept in the public awareness in a way that is socially acceptable (within the window of possibilities or discourse) rather than through negotiations or agreements between politicians. This condition is derived directly from the mechanics of electoral competition – politicians tend to support ideas that increase the likelihood of gaining or renewing their mandate. They thus have a tendency to support ideas that fall within the political mainstream rather than those on the periphery of social interest. Therefore, the window of possibilities defines the field of discourse based on an analysis of which ideas are morally acceptable to society and which seem detached from socially accepted sensitivity. The Overton window model has a reactive character – it categorizes possibilities, taking into account the existing state, without specifying the conditions that must be met to place something in the field of discourse and make it socially acceptable (Beck, 2010). To some extent, in its premises, it resembles the Johari window model, which also does not formulate conditions for transitioning between

different segments of the “self” (Newstrom & Rubenfeld, 1983), or the concept of political opportunity structures, showing the conditions conducive to the social and electoral institutionalization of political parties and movements (Kitschelt, 1986).

The growth of the Internet, especially in terms of its use for political communication, has given the Overton concept a second life. Researchers and practitioners of social life have recognized it as an effective tool for conducting information warfare and implementing election strategies (Bobric, 2021). This is mainly due to the relatively easy shifting of new ideas and concepts into the discourse window through online communication. A good example illustrating this process is the transformation of the awareness of a significant part of Republican voters in the United States by conservative groups colloquially known as the alt-right. This was primarily achieved through two media outlets—traditional in the form of Fox News and the online platform Breitbart News,⁶ the editor of which was the later board member of Cambridge Analytica and advisor to President Donald Trump, Steve Bannon. It was particularly around Andrew Breitbart’s platform where a broad community of advocates for the concept of the new conservatism was gathered (who also constituted an effective channel for its dissemination in society). It was the idea to which Trump so successfully appealed to in the 2016 elections (Wylie, 2020).

The contemporary ease of promoting new ideas and concepts is the result of the prevalence of online communication and the ability to create content with the intention of active distribution, especially on social media and related communication platforms. The system of personally targeted advertising offered by Facebook and other social

⁶ In the abovementioned film “After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News,” this process was illustrated using the example of the online platform infowars.com.

media significantly aids this process. However, referring to the concept of the discourse window, political goals can manipulatively be achieved even without paying social media owners. The navigation and content search system, involving the use of keywords marked with #hashtags, i.e. kind of signposts for users, can serve this purpose. Since social media and web search engines (e.g., Google) generally (apart from exceptional situations or paid advertisements) display content based on popularity (generated traffic on the Internet), it is just a step away from manipulating this order using an automated system (most often bots) that replicate promoted content on the web, such as the mentioned hashtags. An example of using a hashtag and automated information distribution (judging by the scale, presumably with the involvement of bots) was the action of Andrzej Duda's campaign headquarters in the 2020 presidential elections. They created a film about his main opponent, Rafał Trzaskowski, and began distributing it online, marking it with #RafałNieKłam. In just over a day, over 36,000 messages were created on the web (primarily on Twitter), and the accounts of the top contributors generated over 200 pieces of information marked with this hashtag. During this time, the video was viewed over 1.2 million times on Facebook (Mierzyńska, 2020a). A similar action, although here Duda's headquarters was probably responsible for the inspiration rather than its final execution, was associated with the appearance the hashtag #MimoWszystkoDuda on the web before the second round of the same elections. It referred to the website with a film of the same title, in which previous Confederation and Krzysztof Bosak's voters encouraged support for Duda in the second round. The parliamentary Confederation club authorities distanced themselves from this idea, but due to its positioning on the Internet, it had a life of its own (Mierzyńska, 2020b).

Attempts to detect the use of the Overton window for electoral manipulation will encounter the problem of interpretation: to what

extent is the observed sequence of events the result of a strategic intent, and to what degree is it a random pattern. This particularly applies to significant axiological shifts that change previously existing social paradigms. Recently, such shifts have included issues such as climate change, abortion, or euthanasia. However, there are also events which exemplify attempts to politically exploit this tool. Perhaps the best-documented process of changing social awareness due to online manipulative influences was the campaign related to the British referendum on leaving the EU. Some researchers explicitly claim that supporters of leaving the EU, in order to convince the public to vote for Brexit, followed guidelines derived from the Overton concept (Morgan & Patomäki, 2017; Taylor, 2017). This could be facilitated not only by the involvement of both internal sides of the political dispute but also by the unequivocal support of the candidate for the President of the United States, Donald Trump, as well as the activities of Cambridge Analytica and entities linked to Russia operating online (Black et al., 2019).

In Poland, the political programme formulated by the Palikot Movement in 2011 is an example of using the discourse window in an electoral campaign. The programme strongly emphasized issues related to the rights of sexual minorities and advocated for the decriminalization of the possession and use of soft drugs. This exotic stance for Polish standards turned out to be a relatively effective tool for capturing public attention and gaining voters' support, which may be surprising, especially considering the feasibility of implementing the programme by this party (Wojtasik, 2012a). Although the Palikot Movement's demands were primarily aimed at capturing public attention and generating electoral support, it should be noted that a decade later, these slogans shifted towards the mainstream and are much more widely present and taken more seriously in public discourse than they were back then.

Mailing is another form of communication manipulation that has developed with the expansion of the Internet. On the one hand, it serves as an extension of tools for building relationships between politicians and voters, being an electronic substitute for the traditional delivery of campaign materials through conventional postal services. On the other hand, it makes it possible to reach voters in an automated way. While mailing itself is difficult to control normatively due to its operation in the virtual space, financial support as a form of electoral communication can be regulated. An example of such regulation is the way electronic mail is subsidized by the Spanish legislator, favouring the largest political groups. Lists that have obtained a number of seats in either chamber of parliament qualifying them to form a parliamentary club (15 in the Congress, 10 in the Senate) are eligible for funding at a rate of 0.22 euros per voter. This solution is similar to the one that privileges the largest Spanish parties in access to free election broadcasts (Sułkowski, 2016).

3.3.2. Internet disinformation

One of the negative consequences of the development of the Internet is the emergence of the possibility of easily misinforming recipients. Generally, four types of manipulative strategies involving the conscious misleading of voters can be distinguished. The first is pro-government or pro-party communication, which consists in using online propaganda to artificially reinforce messages supporting the state or a political party. The second type of strategy involves creating and disseminating news aimed at attacking the opposition or supporting campaigns of slander and defamation against political opponents. The third type of communication strategy is aimed at suppressing participation in political debate by discouraging, trolling, or harassing. By using negative and exclusionary language, manipulators engage in

more or less subtle harassment of opposition-oriented people to silence political resistance and influence the freedom of speech, for example, through self-censorship. Finally, the fourth manipulative strategy, intentionally hyperbolizing arguments, consists in promoting narratives that fuel divisions and increase political polarization. When applied externally (e.g., by foreign states), it is intended to generate difficult-to-resolve socio-political conflicts, while its internal motivation may be the mobilization or demobilization of selected segments of society (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

The cyclical studies carried out by the team from the University of Oxford, as part of the “Democracy & Technology” (DemTech) research project, show how common manipulations involving disinformation are. The project team prepares an annual report on public opinion manipulation on social media, treating this phenomenon as a critical threat to democracy. Within the established methodological framework, the global system of manipulation in social media is monitored. In 2020, the examination of the occurrence of disinformation and electoral manipulation in 81 countries revealed that social media platforms and Internet messengers play a crucial role in creating and sharing news, campaigns, and elections, as well as in political communication for almost two billion voters worldwide. Although network technologies have created many new opportunities for political participation, they have also initiated new challenges, as disinformation and state-sponsored trolling undermine human rights, worsen the quality of political news in circulation, and challenge the legitimacy of democratically elected governments. Public opinion manipulations are carried out by four basic types of entities: government agencies, political parties, private companies, and online communities and political influencers (DemTech, 2021).

Governments and their agencies are increasingly using social media to mould public opinion, also using disinformation strategies.

The category of government agencies includes ministries of communication or digitization, the army, police, and state-funded media, which have been exploited as tools for disseminating digital propaganda both at home and internationally. In 2020, DemTech found the evidence of the involvement of government agencies in 62 countries in propaganda activities that shape social attitudes. For example, as early as in 2016, the Bolivian Ministry of Communication set up a unit responsible for managing online content. The National Direction of Networks (NDN) aimed not only to increase the government's online presence but also to identify accounts and messages against which the organization directed its efforts. The NDN created profiles on Facebook to support the government and then trained young people to present a positive image of the government in social media discussions and support President Evo Morales during the 2019 elections (Bradshaw et al., 2021). In an even more direct manner, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro uses official social media profiles to attack, among others, unfavourable journalists, criticizing and insulting not only them but also his political rivals. This fate befell Patricia Campos Mello, who had reported irregularities in his election campaign, and Glenn Greenwald, who had described corrupt connections within the Bolsonaro family. What is more, journalists were also attacked and discredited on social media as part of coordinated actions conducted by troll farms upon the orders of Bolsonaro's campaign staff (Santini et al., 2021). The actions of the Colombian government had a common denominator with the examples from Bolivia and Brazil. of its strategic goals It made the coordination of manipulative actions on social media one of its strategic goals. La Liga Contra el Silencio, a Colombian media team specializing in investigative journalism, published a detailed report on a group consisting of state officials from various departments and other pro-government actors who, since September 2019, had engaged in propaganda and disinformation activities on the Internet (Bradshaw

et al., 2021). In 2018, the former Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili went a step further. Unable to deal with criticism of his actions towards NGOs, he decided to change the media discourse on the issue. Posting on Facebook, Kvirikashvili ensured an appropriate level of acceptance by purchasing likes from accounts registered in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Vietnam (Oravec & Holland, 2019).

Officials from the Polish Ministry of Justice performed another type of manipulative activity by organizing a troll farm to discredit lawyers and politicians criticizing changes in the judicial system on social media. Through these media, judges associated with the Ministry of Justice disseminated defamatory content about the representatives of the legal community. The actions were led by Deputy Minister Łukasz Piebiak, who, after his role was exposed, was forced to resign in August 2019 (Bush & Kurzynski, 2020). Another example of conscious disinformation and manipulation through the network involves Dariusz Matecki, a PiS (Law and Justice) councillor in Szczecin. He bought thematic groups on social media with lots of users, then changed their names (e.g., to “I vote for PiS,” “We firmly stand behind the PiS government,” or “I support Patryk Jaki,” etc.) and used them to create propaganda content (Trybuna Śląska, 2021). His name also appears in connection with the creation and dissemination of untrue content on the website Raportdnia.pl, which managed around 30 Facebook pages to attack politicians from the Civic Platform (PO), including Ewa Kopacz and Rafał Trzaskowski (Dembowski, 2019).

Parties and candidates in elections, due to the relatively low costs of reaching voters and the proven effectiveness of such communication, use the tools and techniques of digital propaganda during election campaigns. This makes social media a key element of electoral communication, owing to their reach and prevalence. In online communication, automated tools in the form of special applications generating artificial Internet traffic are often used to increase impact or hide

the real sponsors. An example of this was the widespread use of bots to attack opponents and spread disinformation by the two largest electoral coalitions – Frente para la Victoria and Cambiemos – in the parliamentary elections in Argentina in 2015 (Calvo & Aruguete, 2020).

Apart from disinformation and increasing political polarization, some political actors use the Internet to discourage participation in political life and question the political legitimacy of their opponents. For example, in 2013, the Egyptian Freedom and Justice Party, the political representation of the Muslim Brotherhood, posted on its Facebook profile pictures of children killed in Syria (blaming the Egyptian army and indirectly General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi) and claimed that the photos were from Egyptian street protests suppressed by the military (Lustiger-Thaler & Farro, 2016).

Another type of manipulation used by political parties is the generation of artificial discussions on their social media accounts. Sometimes they are conducted by specially hired profiles created by media agencies, and at other times, by accounts with false identities operated by party activists themselves. The latter case concerns, for example, the German party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). In 2019, the administrator of the party's official profile was caught in what is referred to as a false account error. It occurs when there is a failure to log out between accounts while engaging in a discussion with oneself. In the case of the AfD, the party praised its own post, even though the content suggested that someone else was commenting. Users noticed this mistake, and the comment was quickly deleted, which confirms that the page administrator probably forgot to switch to another profile while commenting on the post (Bradshaw et al., 2021). A network of fake social media accounts, some of which had an automated character, became active during the 2019 Israeli Knesset elections. They promoted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's campaign and, in an inappropriate manner, attacked his opponent, Benjamin Gantz.

While no direct link was found between the Likud party's campaign and the coordinated network of fake accounts spreading disinformation, politicians from the party, including the prime minister's son Yair Netanyahu, promoted such news and shared it with other users online (Roznai, 2020).

The DemTech report reveals the increase in the number of private companies involved in online political propaganda. Examples of individual accounts removed from social media platforms or even entire troll farms illustrate the scale of coordinated, ungenue behaviours and help identify the growing number of companies engaged in political communication aimed at disseminating manipulative information for material gains. The seriousness of this issue in consolidated democracies is demonstrated by the example of Geert Wilders, the founder and leader of the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. In order to expand his reach on social media (and create the impression of greater popularity online), he used fake accounts that followed his Twitter profile. In 2018, Twitter removed the fake accounts following him, as the result of which Wilders lost about 15% of his followers (around 150,000) (Silva & Proksch, 2021).

Researchers from DemTech found evidence in 48 countries that political parties and state agencies collaborate with private firms specializing in strategic communication, which offer online propaganda as a service. Lots of them indicate the Philippines as a country where online propaganda practiced by those in power has been exceptionally well-organized, especially since the victory in the presidential elections of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 (Sinpeng et al., 2020). Using public funds, he devised a media support system consisting of marketing agencies, paid influencers, and many, often fake, accounts and profiles on social media. The manipulative activity of his staff was divided geographically into four sections: Filipinos living abroad, residents of Luzon, Mindanao, and the Visayas islands. Each section created its own content,

taking into consideration the messages imposed by the central campaign headquarters (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). One of the agencies with troll farms supporting President Duterte is run by the media specialist Nica Gabunada, associated with him. The beginnings of their political closeness date back to the period when Duterte was the mayor of Davao, the hometown of both politicians. Evidence of the online activities of Gabunada's company included not only government contracts for various information activities online, but also large amounts it paid for political advertising during election campaigns, disclosed by the Facebook portal (Tapsell, 2021).

Bolivia during the presidency of Evo Morales was another country the authorities of which extensively used the services of external communication firms. There is evidence that the government hired the Mexican agency Neurona, which specializes in creating fake news and spreading black PR on the Internet. Neurona itself later admitted that it had worked on social media and communication strategies, including during Morales' presidential campaign. Another example is the government's hiring of the Espora agency to design a digital strategy and analyse the use of social media by influential individuals in Bolivia (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Similar agencies in Brazil acted somewhat differently during the 2018 presidential elections. The specific nature of the social media campaign at that time involved organizing support groups using the WhatsApp messenger, which also served to spread disinformation. Local companies, such as Yacows and AM4, were involved in this process, as well as the former vice president of Cambridge Analytica and advisor to Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, who supported Jair Bolsonaro's campaign (Mello, 2020).

There is also extensive cooperation in the area of network marketing between political parties and companies in Italy. Its characteristic feature is the personal connections between politicians and companies acting on their behalf. For example, two agencies owned by Giancarlo

and Davide Colono – Web365 and NextMediaWeb – managed a network of websites promoting nationalist and Islamophobic content, directly associated with the Northern League (LN). After the public exposure of these connections in 2017, LN politicians decentralized their structure, connecting their activities with Andrea Caroletti's company, Planet Share. The latter created a network of over a hundred websites which use conservative propaganda and interact with the Colono brothers' networks, while the Planet Share website was registered by the Web365 company. Andrea Caroletti himself also heads the non-commercial cultural association La Luce di Maria, which organizes pilgrimages and has a website and Facebook profile with over 1.4 million followers. Through his Facebook profile, Caroletti disseminates conservative and often anti-scientific content (such as conspiracy theories) provided by Web365 and Planet Share, with references to the activities and politicians of the LN. There is a similar situation with the Five Star Movement (M5S), which conducts network communication using the services of companies connected to its politicians. One of the founders of the Movement, Gianroberto Casaleggio, through his company Casaleggio Associati, controlled the portals Tze Tze and La Fucina. They directly promoted political content related to the activities of his party, formally without being directly associated with it. Other websites controlled by Casaleggio provided IP addresses, Google Analytics and AdSense identifiers leading to the blog of one of the leaders of the Movement, Beppe Grillo, and to the official M5S websites and social media profiles (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

Enrique Peña Nieto also used the services of communication firms when successfully running for the president of Mexico in 2012. As part of such cooperation, his campaign team installed spying software and manipulated social media to reinforce the campaign message. They employed over 30,000 Twitter bots (almost officially referred to as Peñabots), which were maintained for over a year and generated

an online agenda of topics favourable to the then-candidate, disseminated disinformation, and engaged in the political fight against his opponents (Natal, 2018).

What is a relatively new but already quite strong trend in the use of online communication manipulation is the cooperation between the entities carrying them out and civil society organizations, Internet subcultures, hackers, marginal movements, influencers, and volunteers who, driven by ideological motives, support a particular cause. In their case, it may be difficult to distinguish between instrumental inspiration for manipulation, often only unofficially sanctioned on normative grounds, and actions motivated, e.g., by the pursuit of private ideological goals or civic marketing (not arbitrarily inspired). An example of such external involvement in carrying out manipulative activities is Gastón Douek, known as the Troll Master in Argentina. He was responsible for online election campaigns for people such as Martín Lousteau, Sergio Massa, Juan Schiaretti, Gabriela Michetti, and Omar Perotti. During the prosecutor's investigation, he admitted that he had used both automated and human trolls for disinformation not only in Argentina but also in Mexican political campaigns, working for the Ecuadorian intelligence, and negotiating with Cambridge Analytica to involve the company in a disinformation campaign against Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

The Chinese authorities use social media in a somewhat different manner, but also for different purposes. In 2019, the Chinese government, aided by hackers, initiated an extensive disinformation campaign against democracy supporters in Hong Kong, utilizing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These media are blocked in China and, in this case, were used to spread disinformation, sow discord, and undermine the legitimacy of democratic activists in the former British colony, who were protesting against the limitation of freedom. In June 2020, Twitter suspended 23,750 accounts inspired

by the Chinese government, its agencies, and hired troll farms. Approximately 150,000 additional accounts were identified, designed to amplify and increase the volume of content generated by the primary accounts through further distribution in the network. Twitter's popularity also stemmed from the fact that protesters considered it to be a channel for communication among each other. Both primary and supporting accounts were involved in numerous manipulative and coordinated disinformation activities. Twitter accounts were mostly operated in Chinese and generated geopolitical interpretations favouring the Chinese Communist Party, while also disseminating misleading narratives about the political situation in Hong Kong. YouTube also removed 210 channels which were actively involved in disinformation about the protests (Bradshaw et al., 2021). A similar disinformation system, including attempts to interfere with the electoral process, has been China's long-standing strategy towards Taiwan, which, due to the Chinese threat, is believed to be the most cyber-threatened state in the world (Rajczyk, 2019).

Similarly to China, the Colombian government has also used the services of hackers. In 2016, Andrés Sepúlveda revealed that he had illegally gained access to confidential documents and coordinated over 30,000 fake Twitter accounts, engaging in trolling to promote disinformation and conduct a smear campaign against the Colombian opposition (Peñarredonda, 2018). The same hacker admitted to receiving \$600,000 for stealing campaign strategies from the opponents of Mexican presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto in 2012 (Velasquez Leiferman & Khrushcheva, 2019).

The Hungarian government, headed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, adopted a different strategy consisting in spreading disinformation through formally independent think tanks. These entities specialized in publicly criticizing the owners of social media, blaming them for discriminating against Fidesz and its candidates in elections.

An example of this is the activity of the portal magyarnemzet.hu, which criticized Facebook for, as it was described, becoming a political actor. Meanwhile, in April 2019, the think tank Századvég Foundation published a report questioning the principles of political correctness of this social media platform, which purportedly made Hungarian politicians and public figures “victims of censorship” (Guardian, 2019).

Yet another example of creating online electoral communication with the use of external entities was observed in Kenya after 2015, when the government began to lose social support. To rebuild it, the Jubilee Party initiated cooperation with a group of 36 bloggers who, on social media, created content that appeared to be objective but, in reality, echoed messages dictated by the politicians who paid them (Mutahi, 2020, pp. 31–49). Similar collaboration with local bloggers was established by politicians from the Malaysian Barisan Nasional in the early 21st century. The goal was to harass opposition politicians on social media, which was called “government cyber warfare” by the targeted people (Hopkins, 2014).

In Poland, there are a lot of companies specializing in election communication carried out via the Internet. One of the more active ones is Cat@Net, which offered its services to politicians from various parties. For example, in the 2019 European Parliament elections, it managed the online campaign of SLD politician Andrzej Szejna, involving at least 90 social media accounts (he denies this, claiming that these actions were performed free of charge by Cat@Net co-owner Krzysztof Krystowski) (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Cat@Net is also connected with a media network, including portals and related social media accounts (such as nczas.com) and the visual production agency SDM Pictures. It was also revealed that France Libre 24 (FL24), an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim disinformation portal targeting France, belongs to this network. The websites of Janusz Korwin-Mikke and nczas.com were among the top four distributors of FL24 content. The portal

is registered in Poland by 6S Media and shares the same IP address as portals run by another network company, 5S Media. Partners in the companies 3S, 5S, and 6S Media include Adam Gwiazda, Adam Wojtasiewicz (one of the owners of Cat@Net), Tomasz Sommer, and Krzysztof Szczawiński. Wojtasiewicz, Sommer, and Szczawiński are also board members of the “Najwyższy Czas” Foundation, an extremely right-wing weekly magazine associated with Korwin-Mikke and the Confederation, which disseminates anti-EU, anti-immigrant, and anti-Semitic content (Mierzyńska, 2020c).

To gain a comprehensive picture of manipulation, we should also examine two specific cases of online disinformation communication – in South Korea and India. They are unique enough to warrant a closer look at the instruments of Internet manipulation functioning there as the potential directions for the development of network disinformation practices. The exceptional nature of the South Korean case is determined by two references: geopolitical and historical. The mechanism of the first stems from the proximity of North Korea and the constant threat resulting from this fact (formally, these countries are in a state of war). The historical dimension is connected with the country’s political system – for almost the entire second half of the 20th century, South Korea was under military dictatorship, and to this day, due to geopolitical factors, the role of the army remains disproportionately large compared to other democratic countries. The National Intelligence Service, particularly its unit for psychological warfare, is a military institution coordinating activities related to online activity. It was originally established to conduct operations against the northern neighbour and its goal is to disseminate specific political narratives originating from government agencies, influencing public opinion saturated with North Korean propaganda. However, it also engages in current political actions, as exemplified by the presidential elections in 2012. Newly elected President Park Geun-hye was accused of using

intelligence and military services to secure her victory. A few days before the elections, agents from the psychological warfare unit flooded the Internet with comments from fake accounts supporting Park Geun-hye's candidacy and accusing the then main opposition candidate, Mun Jae-in, of pro-North Korean sympathies. News attacking union activists, opposition politicians, and other critics as left-wing supporters of North Korea were also published (Snyder, 2018). Former Defence Minister Kim Kwan-jin also used the ministerial cyber command team to carry out a smear campaign against opposition forces to Park Geun-hye, both on social media and through a military Internet news service called Point News. Furthermore, 470 members of the unit created fake social media accounts to attack liberal opposition politicians (Keller et al., 2020). In 2017, the South Korean Supreme Court sentenced the former director of the National Intelligence Service to four years in prison for interfering with election campaigns conducted between 2009 and 2013. The impeachment investigation of Park Geun-hye also revealed that both her administration and the previous president, Lee Myung-bak, were involved in inspiring disinformation and strategically manipulating public opinion during election campaigns and beyond (Kang, 2019).

The second specific case of creating a network disinformation communication concerns India, the world's largest electoral democracy. Despite doubts about whether the principles practiced there truly meet the definitional criteria of liberal democracies, we should indicate the fact that the country holds cyclical elections, which generate consequences characteristic of democracies. In a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state, with an additional caste-based social structure, facilitating the opportunity to vote for over 900 million voters is an extraordinary venture on a global scale. At the same time, it creates specific opportunities for manipulating the communicative aspects of elections to an extent unparalleled in any other country. In the Indian party system, two

formations dominate: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). Both parties have specialized units aimed at conducting propaganda activities online. They were established at the dawn of social media – for instance, the BJP formed its IT team as early as 2007. After winning the elections in 2014, the unit’s activities were redirected to undermine trust in journalists, critics of civil society, and the opponents of the Indian government’s anti-Islamic course (Vaidhyathan, 2018, p. 303). In 2021, it consisted of about three hundred employees who, in addition to regular political communication, implemented strategies to fuel ethnic differences, smear the Muslim minority, and present Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the last hope for Hindus. These actions vary in sophistication – from general, primitively automated criticism using bots and troll farms to highly personalized attacks on political opponents. They undoubtedly contribute to increased political polarization and, in general, the brutalization of social life, with women in politics being the biggest victims. Both parties also use the services of specialized political communication firms; for example, OMLogic Consulting worked for both the BJP and the INC, organizing communication with local influencers on YouTube and Instagram (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

What stresses the importance of India as an electoral market is the fact that Cambridge Analytica made this country one of its strategic focuses (Wylie, 2020). To illustrate this, it is enough to mention that Prime Minister Modi is the second most frequently observed politician on Twitter, just after Trump. The uniqueness of Indian elections arises not only from the size of the electorate but also from the vast territory of the country. Both major political forces recognized the logistical benefits of engaging in network political communication and built channels that also serve electoral manipulation. Their common feature is the automation of communication through the management of a large number of accounts on social media. What is a distinctive

feature of Indian network disinformation is the widespread use of so-called deepfake videos – films created with the use of artificial intelligence which deceptively depict a realistic image of a politician uttering certain words or engaging in specific actions. A lot of such productions emerged before the 2020 elections. In one video, the BJP leader Manoj Tiwari supposedly criticizes the Delhi government, while in another, the image of Chandrani Murmu, the youngest Indian parliamentarian, is allegedly used in a production of a pornographic nature (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

3.3.3. Behavioural microtargeting

The most important feature of contemporary election campaigns is the pursuit of delivering electoral messages to the smallest segments of the electorate, distinguished not only on the basis of sociodemographic characteristics but also with the use of psychological categories. Effective voter segmentation techniques have been employed for several decades (Cichosz & Skrzypiński, 2014), and the application of large databases has enabled the transfer of this process to the microtargeting level (Murray & Scime, 2010). Parallely, research on voter segmentation based on psychological characteristics, such as the represented value system, neuroticism, or susceptibility to fear (Shun Chiu et al., 2010), has developed, referred to as psychographics.⁷ However, it was the growth of Internet communication that enabled the successful integration of findings from these two research trends and their practical application in electoral communication projects. The effectiveness of actions carried out in this way is the result of two synergies. The first is the ability to segment Internet users a lot faster and more accurately.

⁷ Psychographics refers to the process of associating personality profiles (e.g., voters) with the existing aggregated information about them found in large datasets (Kaiser, 2020).

Thanks to legally collected data (e.g., cookie files), which are then aggregated into big data sets, it is possible to link specific voters with information gathered about them, including data related to online activity, shopping habits, or participation in specific discussions (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018). The second synergy arises from the ability to analyse the social contexts of people's actions on social media, such as likes, comments, or blocking specific content, and directing better-tailored messages to them (Madsen, 2019). The third potential benefit comes from the increased effectiveness of activities using political messages adapted to personality traits. It was already the controversial and widely criticized experiment conducted by Facebook that demonstrated that it is possible to "infect" people through the network with others' emotions (Kramer et al., 2014). The findings of other studies confirm that voters respond more strongly to political messages that match their personality traits (Zarouali et al., 2020). It seems that the effectiveness of behavioural microtargeting was best summarized by Alexander Nix, one of the founders of Cambridge Analytica and its CEO, when the company worked on campaigns such as Donald Trump's or the Brexit referendum. He claimed that psychographic targeting techniques combined with big data analysis help to understand the personalities of potential manipulated voters and effectively tailor the messages directed to them. Big data analytics enables, before the electoral communication process begins, not only to target individualized messages but also to determine what kind of messages to deliver and what they should be about. What is more, it helps identify which personality types, groups of people, or even individual voters should receive such a message (Nix, 2016).

It was the fall of Cambridge Analytica that allowed us to learn about behavioural microtargeting and psychographic methods of identifying potential voters, which could be used for manipulative procedures. However, this example highlights something more significant –

the need for reflection on how much the modern voter is losing their subjectivity and is becoming increasingly vulnerable to not only unethical but also frequently illegal actions. Over the past two decades, online electoral manipulations have gradually replaced traditional campaign tools based on demographic segmentation, public opinion research, generalized campaigns, and direct candidate-voter communication in the real world, not just the virtual one. This shift is associated with the growing effectiveness of big data analysis, enabling the creation of algorithms for the exploration of data and the detection of promising behavioural patterns in them. As Brittany Kaiser (2020) points out, in the digital era, data have become the “new oil,” and their collection is equivalent to a new arms race. The system of data retention and circulation relies on unclear connections between companies that possess and may utilize or share data (e.g., Alphabet – the owner of Google, Amazon, Facebook, or Twitter), entities involved in big data analysis for voter profiling, and marketing agencies which, on behalf of individual politicians or entire political parties, can make the electoral use of such data (Bartlett et al., 2018). An example of such random proliferation of data and their misuse was Cambridge Analytica’s utilization of the results prepared by Michał Kosinski’s algorithm. The algorithm, based on the likes of public Facebook pages, automatically predicted an individual’s personality traits within the Big Five model (McCrae & Costa, 2003). It could reliably predict certain personal characteristics, including age, gender, ethnic origin, political views, religious orientation, sexual orientation, intelligence level, sense of happiness, or substance use (Bachrach et al., 2012). Kosinski himself sees the benefits of his research in personalized network marketing, saying, “Personalized network marketing allows a politician to reach every voter with a message that interests them. It’s like a door-to-door campaign. Politicians used to ignore small groups of voters because they had no chance of reaching them. Today, thanks to the Internet, it pays

off for a politician to tailor a programme even to the smallest niches. [...] It serves democracy. The problem arises when only one side uses such tools. The first politician to use them was Obama. His campaign was praised, and no one said it was manipulation. When Trump's staff and the Brexit supporters used them eight years later, a scandal broke out. It's like looking for scapegoats" (Kosinski, 2020). In 2012, Barack Obama's staff also employed psychographic techniques for voter segmentation, dividing voters into thirty groups ranked by susceptibility to persuasion (Bartlett, 2019).

On account of the ethical concerns associated with behavioural microtargeting in electoral communication, the focus of the discussion here is on its potential effectiveness. With the saturation of the Internet access exceeding 90% in developed countries and over half of the voters using social media or web messengers as channels for electoral communication, it comes as no surprise that its influence is rapidly growing. Cambridge Analytica, established in 2013, emerged to meet this demand, specializing in a part of the previous activities of Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), a company involved in behavioural marketing and psychological warfare operations. SCL gained experience conducting operations against ISIS, in African countries, and in the Caribbean (Wylie, 2020). The operational method of Cambridge Analytica can be divided into five stages: (1) psychographic segmentation based on the existing databases; (2) the analysis of individuals within specific segments through the application of predictive algorithms; (3) defining places on the Internet to reach individual recipients as effectively as possible; (4) the preliminary assessment of effectiveness using the Ripon platform; (5) directed distribution of campaign materials along with assessing their impact, e.g., ad click-through rates (Kaiser, 2020).

Cambridge Analytica's serious involvement in the United States began with its assistance, albeit ineffective, to the Republican senator Ted

Cruz during the party primaries in 2016.⁸ After Cruz's withdrawal, the company cooperated with Donald Trump's campaign team, clearly focusing its profile on designing and implementing various online psychographic strategies (both Cruz's and Trump's campaigns were financed by the main shareholder of Cambridge Analytica, Robert Mercer). While operating in the United States, the company created a model based on over five thousand observations concerning almost 230 million Americans. Some information was obtained from legal sources, such as browsing histories, purchase and income records, voter lists, and information about owned vehicles. Other data were acquired through Facebook (e.g., using the Friends API interface, which allowed companies to install their own applications on Facebook, later discontinued due to privacy law violations⁹) (Kaiser, 2020), and through conducted telephone surveys. The main aim of data collection was to create universes, i.e., segments of the electorate that best defined Trump's target voter groups. Eight basic categories were generated to direct tailored advertisements on Facebook and other social media platforms. These categories included, for example, previously non-voting mothers concerned about their children's future, Middle Eastern men supporting the right to bear arms, or Latinos worried about national security issues. Specific social correlations were discovered; for instance, a preference for cars manufactured in the United States indicated a high likelihood of voting for Trump. In this way, 13.5 million voters in 16 swing states, considered undecided, were identified and could be persuaded to vote for the Republican candidate (Bartlett,

⁸ Earlier, still operating as the American branch of SCL, the company was involved in implementing several dozen state-level campaigns during the midterm elections (Kaiser, 2020).

⁹ In the end, Facebook was fined 5 billion dollars by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission for the illegal sharing of data with Cambridge Analytica, (Szostak, 2019).

2019). On the other hand, groups the activation of which would be unfavourable to Trump were also identified; for example, over 3.5 million African American voters were categorized as those who wanted to stay home on the election day, and efforts were made to reinforce this inclination (Dawson, 2021).

To effectively influence citizens through microtargeting, collaboration was established with the Canadian company AggregateIQ (AIQ) in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. AIQ possessed systems for the automated delivery of advertising messages on major social media platforms. Based on data and algorithms provided by Cambridge Analytica analysts, AIQ created the already mentioned platform for verifying the effectiveness of behavioural targeting called Ripon. This allowed Cambridge Analytica specialists to carry out voter segmentation, taking into account hundreds of psychometric and behavioural factors, and, subsequently, manipulate voters. This tactic included, among other things, identifying neurotic individuals or those prone to conspiracy thinking and deepening such tendencies with appropriately crafted propaganda messages (Wylie, 2020). For example, in a group of young women from North Carolina who exhibited above-average neuroticism, these actions led to a 30% increase in their concerns, thus influencing their electoral decisions. However, most importantly, as it practically closed the behavioural microtargeting system institutionally, Trump's campaign team received assistance from delegated employees of social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google (in contrast to Hillary Clinton's staff, which, for instance, rejected Facebook's help). Facebook specialists showed the campaign members how to effectively create "dark advertising" – the content visible only to profiles of precisely defined (targeted) recipients. In the end, Cambridge Analytica conducted over five thousand individual campaigns for Trump, encompassing up to ten thousand variations of each ad. These actions led to a measurable average increase in voter favourability towards

the winning candidate, which in the case of swing states could have been decisive for the final outcome (Kaiser, 2020).

In Poland, the mechanism of microtargeting in electoral communication gained significance after the successful presidential campaign of Andrzej Duda in 2015, where he unexpectedly defeated the incumbent Bronisław Komorowski seeking re-election. This success was made possible, among other factors, through modern segmentation techniques and behavioural microtargeting (Karpiński, 2018). In the subsequent campaign in 2020, the campaign team of the incumbent president employed techniques such as geographical microtargeting, relying on the friendly-neighbourly voting mechanism with the use of tools provided by the company HyperCrew (Klauziński et al., 2021). Taking advantage of the fact that during his term of office, Duda visited all Polish districts, advertisements were created specifically for each of them, featuring the incumbent either during visits to cities or against the backdrop of buildings characteristic to them. The graphics were adorned with slogans like “Thank you [the name of the city most often serving as the district’s capital],” aiming to create the impression of a special bond between the president and the residents. The ads were distributed through the Google Display Network (GDN) and social media platforms (brief.pl, 2020). An attempt to systematically examine microtargeting in the parliamentary elections in 2019 in Poland was conducted by the Panoptikon Foundation using a tool (a plugin connecting Facebook to an analytical platform) provided by the organization Who Targets Me, along with the analysis of data contained in Facebook’s ad library and its application programming interface. The conclusions from these studies, with the reservation of their selective nature, indicate that microtargeting was not a widespread manipulation technique in the elections under consideration (Panoptikon, 2020).

The involvement of Cambridge Analytica (as well as of AIQ and SCL) in the Brexit campaign revealed the presence of behavioural microtargeting during the 2016 referendum. At least four different groups advocating for the UK's departure from the EU (Vote Leave, BeLeave, Veterans for Britain, Democratic Unionist Party) used the services of AIQ for microtargeting the electorate and preparing targeted political advertisements (Cadwalladr, 2017). Cambridge Analytica initially collaborated with the Leave.EU group, which, thanks to personal connections with the UK Independence Party (UKIP), had a database which served as the basis for the initial segmentation modelling. This database was used to divide individuals favouring Brexit into four categories: enthusiastic activists, young reformers, disenchanted Tories, and those lagging behind (Kaiser, 2020). After the referendum, one of the leaders of the Leave movement, Dominic Cummings, confirmed this stating that they were the first British campaign to put almost all their money into digital communication, subsequently handing over some control to people who deal with topics like quantum information on a daily basis (Bartlett, 2019). Cummings himself estimates that during the Brexit campaign, they placed around a billion targeted ads online (Cadwalladr, 2017). Political communication activity based on microtargeting did not cease after the Brexit referendum. Before the 2019 parliamentary elections, Facebook removed 137 fake accounts, pages, and groups that exhibited coordinated activity within a network focused on the UK. These entities published information related to politically polarizing topics: immigration, the freedom of speech, racism, LGBT issues, or far-right politics. The leadership of the network could not be definitively attributed to anyone, although most evidence indicated Russia.

In the aftermath of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, it was disclosed that the company had operated on a global scale. In 2015, it was involved in Nigeria, where it was hired by a group of Nigerian

oil industry billionaires to conduct a campaign supporting President Goodluck Jonathan. The manipulative strategy primarily involved discouraging voters from the incumbent's moderate Muslim opponent, Muhammadu Buhari (in contrast to Jonathan, who was a Christian).¹⁰ A series of short, approximately one-minute videos were produced, emphasizing religious issues, such as the prospect of the introduction of Sharia law after Buhari's victory. Significantly, real scenes of murders and torture were used in their production, aiming to generate greater social polarization. The videos were disseminated through popular social media channels and the Google Ads system among the residents of provinces where the challenger had a clear advantage. However, the campaign proved ineffective, and Jonathan lost by a considerable margin of 2.5 million votes (Wylie, 2020). In Mexico, Cambridge Analytica signed contracts with local politicians (in the states of Mexico, Coahuila, and Nayarit) to prepare and implement psychographic strategies in the 2017 elections. One of these politicians was Alfredo del Mazo Maza, the governor of the State of Mexico, backed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Kaiser, who coordinated the company's activities in the country, confirmed that she had had meetings with representatives of the PRI regarding the 2018 presidential campaign. Although it was established during these meetings that closer collaboration would not take place, the PRI offered to pay a pre-determined fee to ensure that Cambridge Analytica would not cooperate with other political parties (Kaiser, 2020).

The case of the Bolivian party Unidad Demócrata provides another example of how microtargeting was used. Before the 2016 elections,

¹⁰ Brittany Kaiser, a consultant involved in the Nigerian campaign, indicates another main goal of the campaign – to activate supporters of Jonathan, especially through another medium, radio, due to the low Internet penetration rate in rural areas (Kaiser, 2020).

the party employed the services of the company IDEIA Big Data (confirmed by the company itself), utilizing techniques of psychological profiling. Furthermore, judging by the range of services presented in the company's portfolio and the tools it applies, one could assume a practical connection with Cambridge Analytica (Bradshaw et al., 2021). In Germany, since the 2017 elections, all major parties have been using microtargeting infrastructure provided by Facebook, even though the creation and use of complex voter profile databases are restricted due to the European and German regulations on personal data protection. Nevertheless, due to their effectiveness, such techniques are increasingly employed in elections, with most parties refusing (which should not be surprising from the market perspective) to disclose information about their data-based strategies (Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2018).

Behavioural microtargeting is subject to increasingly deep automation processes. Before the parliamentary elections in 2018, the Italian Northern League used an automated communication system called *La Bestia* to monitor messages appearing in the web. It also served to coordinate party communication on social media. The applied tool allowed the group to be the first to comment on messages, reinforce their meaning, polarize discussions, and force opponents to adopt reactive strategies. *La Bestia* also enabled the automatic publication of reports on social media activities. League volunteers used the application, for example, to automatically like or share posts from the party and its leader Matteo Salvini on social media (Bayer et al., 2019). In the case of the parliamentary elections in Pakistan in 2018, it was observed that bot platforms were created to automate posts to specific hashtags promoted by political parties on social media, aiming to increase their impact. Additionally, tools such as *TweetDeck* were used to automatically send a large number of tweets, including by the state authorities (Hussain et al., 2021). According to Rotem Gaza, an Israeli

political consultant working for various parties in the Knesset elections, some candidates, to increase the cost of running campaigns for their opponents, use software that artificially positions their rivals in Internet search engines. This way, Google's algorithm marks a word as more popular than it actually is, then burdens the competitor with the costs of non-existent advertising, thereby reducing their budget for the election campaign (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

* * *

Due to the lack of the actual possibility of counteracting network communication manipulations and controlling their scope, contemporary general elections in liberal democracies cease to be a functional procedure for generating democratic political representation. This is not only due to the direct effect of manipulation itself but also because of the society's questioning of the legitimacy of politicians elected through such a procedure.

Elections, as an institution in democratic systems, have their hardware and software. The hardware consists of principles which clearly define what must happen to recognize a democratic choice as fair, just, and decisive. The software refers to the ability to ensure the organization of elections so that the decisions made by voters would be free from pressure, misinformation, and manipulation. If someone gains a dominant influence on the electoral software (often undisclosed to public opinion), elections may neither be free nor fair (Bartlett, 2019). The emergence of new types of communication manipulation, based on the capabilities provided by the Internet, has enabled the individualization of processes related to voters' mobilization and demobilization. However, network communication manipulations carry much greater risks than just influencing voters' choices in individual elections. They are mechanisms which comprehensively distort

the processes shaping democracy. By making use of behavioural microtargeting, politicians can focus on issues that are of little significance to the broader group of citizens but carry a significant emotional impact for individual voters. Segmentation and microtargeting push aside topics of general interest for the society, which could contribute to building a sense of community among citizens. Instead, they favour political polarization and antagonize social attitudes (Vaidhyanathan, 2018).

Aiming to change the current state of affairs, it would be necessary to consider three types of actions. The first involves changing procedures and the electoral process itself to better identify and control communication manipulations, which, given the current state of knowledge and technological advancement, seems unlikely. The second is the implementation of tools preventing the occurrence of communication electoral manipulations, which also does not seem possible from today's perspective. The third, currently even more theoretical action, is to replace elections with another procedure for creating political representation of society.

Conclusions

The profound changes taking place in liberal democracies have a significant influence on the evolution of political systems observed in the first decades of the 21st century, particularly in the dimension of what researchers describe as a departure from the democratic pattern (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). The scope of unliberal adjustment in the political systems of contemporary democratic countries indicates that this may involve more than just a temporary regression, similar to those observed a few times before (Huntington, 1993). This would also deny the validity of the controversial idea of liberal democracy as a complete construct, crowning the ideological and political evolution of humanity (Fukuyama, 2017). This book does not resolve whether this is actually the case or whether democracy will eventually return to liberal paths. However, the reflections on the changes occurring in the electoral process in the first decades of the 21st century may serve as a basis for determining the potential consequences of undemocratic transformations.

What is the destructive factor for democracy in terms of politics is the ongoing erosion of the nation-state as an organized system built around the smallest possible compromise – the recognition by all parties of the dispute that elections are a way of managing political change and obtaining cyclical legitimacy in power (Schumpeter, 1995). Instead, political competition evolves into a struggle aimed at annihilating the opponent, denying them not only the right to exercise power but also the moral legitimacy to participate in politics. Jamie Bartlett,

analysing the impact of new technologies, puts forward bold thesis with regard to the long-term influence of network communication manipulation techniques on democracy. He argues that a new kind of politics may emerge, as microtargeting and psychography promise to transform politics into a behavioural science based on continuous stimulation rather than public debate. This seems likely because the more politics becomes a domain of analysis and stimuli, the more it distances itself from people and falls into the hands of those who “have a lot of data and a lot of money” (Bartlett, 2019).

In the social sphere, in relation to the classical structure of post-industrial societies (and earlier, industrial ones), we currently observe a trend of the atomization of traditional political identities based on permanent divisions. Electoral manipulations contribute to this by overtly influencing social alienation and increasing levels of political polarization through the individualization of political communication. This poses a threat to the continued existence of democracy (Svolik, 2019). Consequently, a phenomenon of political enmity emerges. Within this framework, party rivals transform into political enemies, who may be divided by ideological barricades but are first of all connected by actions aimed at defeating or even destroying electoral competitors. In such circumstances, the prospect of gaining power and/or securing oneself against its loss becomes both the goal and the instrument for shaping political reality.

In the economic domain, contemporary democratic states are losing the ability to effectively shape and control economic processes, thereby diminishing their agency potential. After all, one of their functions is the capacity for politically effective wealth redistribution. In terms of creation, this primarily involves the loss of a monopoly on actions related to monetary policy due to the emergence of a blockchain-based economic sphere which escapes state management and control. As regards control, we observe a growing inability to supervise a part of

the budget related to the practical inefficiency of taxing international corporations and global financial flows. The dynamically increasing level of government debt since the beginning of the 21st century, funded by issuing various debt instruments, is not coincidental, as it results, among other factors, from the shrinking possibilities of conducting effective fiscal policies (Antoniades & Griffith-Jones, 2018). This is one of the economic consequences of globalization, where shifting tax optimization to the international level practically hinders effective long-term creating and planning of state budget revenues.

With free media, fair elections, and an open Internet, liberal democracies are more vulnerable to external interference than autocracies, especially from other states seeking to pursue their international goals (Bartlett, 2019). Today's highly ineffective and illusory control over the distribution of content on the Internet will be further weakened with the global spread of communication satellite networks like Elon Musk's Starlink and others (although, on the other hand, it may significantly limit the prospects of systemic Internet censorship currently implemented by countries such as China, Iran, or Russia on their territories) (Vatandoost & Salehi, 2021). The process of weakening democratic principles may be intentionally reinforced from outside, for example, through cyber interventions by hostile states aiming to induce misinformation, chaos, and polarization within society. For example, in 2016, Russian intelligence agents used behavioural targeting to create content designed to increase polarization in the American society. They established online platforms dedicated to sensitive topics such as immigration, gun control, or the secession of Texas. They also created and moderated the Blacktivist group, the aim of which was to support campaigns against police brutality while undermining trust in state institutions. Scrutiny conducted by the U.S. administration forced Facebook to disclose that, in this one case alone, 470 pages and profiles redirected to misinformation sharing Internet Research

Agency, associated with the Russian special services. Paid advertisements (often paid in Russian roubles) reached over 126 million Americans, encouraging them to participate in actions supporting Donald Trump or protests against building mosques (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). The DemTech report indicates several dozen other interferences with electoral processes (including in Australia, the Netherlands, Germany, Nigeria, Venezuela, and Italy), carried out by Russian services in countries deemed crucial to that nation's vital interests (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Among other countries suspected of manipulation and disinformation on a global scale are Iran, China, North Korea, and Israel (Tenove, 2020). As can be observed, these are primarily states with undemocratic characteristics or those involved in conflicts with other countries.

The gradual loss of effectiveness of elections as a democratic tool for creating social legitimacy for political representation and wielding power does not solely result from an increase in the potential for manipulating voting outcomes. In the current shape of political communication, elections cease to be an effective instrument for channeling conflicts, after which a functional division into the ruling party and the opposition with systemically assigned roles should follow. The problem of the growing ineffectiveness of elections as an instrument of liberal democracies is also connected with the development of election manipulation techniques. Both their institutional and, above all, communicative forms are becoming increasingly effective, and this has several fundamental reasons. The first reason is the ability to gather and analyse vast datasets, enabling the creation of models and algorithms that increase the likelihood of effectively influencing the course of the electoral process and shaping the attitudes and behaviours of voters. The second reason is the personalization of politics and the related mediatization of elections, which transforms the character of political discourse from rational to increasingly emotion-driven. From

programme-ideological, it evolves towards image-related issues, as the new form ensures the greater efficiency of campaign activities (Wojtasik, 2019a). Finally, the shift of the main communication stream in politics to the Internet has provided politicians with an easier and cheaper way to reach voters with a personalized message. Its characteristic feature is the high level of calibration of delivered messages – their shape is most often adjusted to the task-defined profile of the recipient.

The recent changes in institutional manipulation have not been as profound as in the case of their communicative form. Politicians have perfected the effectiveness of their influence in specific situations rather than focusing on adopting new forms (since even if they found such, they were often the derivatives of already existing methods). After over two centuries of the development of liberal democracy, there was not much left to discover in this regard. New forms of institutional manipulation mainly emerged in response to the permanence of election campaigns, reflected in their increasingly extended duration beyond the official period of electoral agitation (Joathan & Lilleker, 2020). This process significantly accelerated in the era of electronic media and network communication. However, even with these changes, the institutional form of electoral manipulation is not as threatening to democratic principles as its communicative model, especially with respect to the use of the Internet and social media. Institutional manipulations are more easily recognizable, and effective countermeasures can be implemented using current adaptive strategies (Wojtasik, 2015b).

The widespread use of the Internet has provided politicians with the opportunity to create a new type of communicative manipulation. Unlike its conventional form, which relies on generalized communication through traditional media, online manipulations make it possible to effectively associate voters with the content that gets to them. Three factors underlie the effectiveness of this approach. Firstly,

the ubiquity of the Internet; in developed democracies, over 90% of households (often close to 100%) have access to broadband Internet (Correa et al., 2020). The second factor is the ability to gather information about users, mainly through the Web, enabling effective psychographic profiling. The third factor contributing to the effectiveness of online manipulation is the ability to reach individual users with targeted electoral messages. Communicative manipulations also entail key “digital threats,” such as arbitrary surveillance, the confidentiality of information, disinformation, and the narrowing of political freedom of expression, all constituting elements of a democracy crisis (Glasius & Michaelsen, 2018). As artificial intelligence is used as a tool to optimize the efficiency of such manipulations, some researchers are beginning to advocate for new regulations in this sphere. As indicated by Max Tegmark (2019), legal regulations need to be soon updated to keep pace with the development of artificial intelligence, raising difficult legal questions regarding privacy, responsibility, and regulation.

Shoshana Zuboff draws attention to the same issue, but from the economic perspective. All the traces people leave in the Web generate behavioural data about them. These data can be used to raise the quality of services offered, but they can also be traded or exchanged, serving manipulative purposes. This latter possibility is referred to as behavioural surplus, which, together with data analysis and engineering (data science), increasing computing power, algorithmic systems, and automated network communication platforms, has become the foundation of a system known as surveillance capitalism. In this system, companies like Google no longer delve into behavioural data only to improve the quality of services for users. Instead, they read users’ minds to tailor advertisements to their interests, deducing these interests from by-products – online behavioural traces or. This enables them to understand what a specific person is thinking, feeling, and doing at a particular time and place (Zuboff, 2020).

Communicative online manipulations, due to the specific nature of their impact, pose a significant threat to liberal democracies and no effective remedy for it has been found yet. In contrast to the institutional type, they are mostly invisible to the public at the time of their execution. Information about them is often only disclosed after elections by whistle-blowers, researchers, or social organizations. In addition, unlike the institutional model, their effects are usually irreversible, as they do not alter the institutional dimension of elections (which can be restored to its previous state) but rather change attitudes and behaviours, which are definitely more difficult to manipulate. Therefore, it seems that elections as an institution, relying not only on normative dimensions but also on a certain dose of social trust, are systematically vulnerable to this type of influence.

So far, attempts at self-regulation by social media platforms with regard to counteracting disinformation and online communication manipulations have proven ineffective. Explanations provided in 2018 by Facebook's majority shareholder Mark Zuckerberg during joint hearings before the U.S. Senate and the questioning of Alexander Nix before a committee of the British House of Commons demonstrated that online media are unable to effectively resist such manipulations. Moreover, it became evident that it is not in profitable for them as they earn on online traffic and associated paid advertisements. These events highlighted the actual power of social media, as exemplified by Twitter and Facebook blocking Donald Trump's official profiles following the Capitol riot by his supporters questioning the legitimacy of Joe Biden's election. This incident revealed another threat to the electoral communication process—the possibility of censoring politicians not only by the state but also by strictly private entities.

The undeniable crisis affecting elections as a democratic institution is just one of the factors that negatively impact political systems as the result of the advent of the Internet. However, from the perspective

of the early third decade of the 21st century, it seems that the depth of the problems facing contemporary democracies may suggest the evolution towards a new, possibly prevalent in the world, political system which will replace the current liberal model. The latter emerged from three interconnected layers: electoral competition and its institutional effect in the form of a pluralistic party system, a free market subject to varying degrees of state control (with the key principle of respecting property), and the political organization of society in the form of a nation-state (Wojtasik, 2012). All three areas are currently experiencing significant tensions that have systemic, rather than immediate, sources. Thus, it is important to observe their evolution, with particular attention to the changing role of elections. As pointed out by Adam Przeworski (2018), despite their imperfect nature, elections remain the least bad way of creating power. However, if the decline in their effectiveness as a tool for building fair political representation and consensus cannot be stopped, the crisis of democracy will deepen. It is difficult to imagine that they can be replaced with an equally functional and socially acceptable procedure. Without free and fair elections, it would be an entirely different kind of a political system.

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Abstract

The increasing inefficiency of elections as a tool of liberal democracies is linked to the development of techniques for electoral manipulation. In the Internet era, both their institutional and, above all, communicative forms are becoming more effective, which has several fundamental sources. Both their institutional and, above all, communicative forms are becoming increasingly effective, and this has several fundamental reasons. The first reason is the ability to gather and analyse vast datasets (big data), enabling the creation of models and algorithms that increase the likelihood of effectively influencing the course of the electoral process and shaping the attitudes and behaviours of voters. The second reason is the personalization of politics and the related mediatization of elections, which transforms the character of political discourse from rational to increasingly emotion-driven. From programme-ideological, it evolves towards image-related issues, as the new form ensures the greater efficiency of campaign activities. Finally, the shift of the main communication stream in politics to the Web has provided politicians with an easier and cheaper way to reach voters with a personalized message. Its characteristic feature is the high level of calibration of delivered messages – their shape is most often adjusted to the task-defined profile of the recipient thanks to psychographic profiling.

The undeniable crisis affecting elections as a democratic institution is just one of the factors that negatively impact political systems as the result of the advent of the Internet. However, from the perspective of the early third decade of the 21st century, it seems that the depth of the problems facing contemporary democracies may suggest the evolution

towards a new, possibly prevalent in the world, political system which will replace the current liberal model. The latter emerged from three interconnected layers: electoral competition and its institutional effect in the form of a pluralistic party system, a free market subject to varying degrees of state control (with the key principle of respecting property), and the political organization of society in the form of a nation-state (Wojtasik, 2012). All three areas are currently experiencing significant tensions that have systemic, rather than immediate, sources. Thus, it is important to observe their evolution, with particular attention to the changing role of elections. As pointed out by Adam Przeworski (2018), despite their imperfect nature, elections remain the least bad way of creating power. However, if the decline in their effectiveness as a tool for building fair political representation and consensus cannot be stopped, the crisis of democracy will deepen. It is difficult to imagine that they can be replaced with an equally functional and socially acceptable procedure. Without free and fair elections, it would be an entirely different kind of a political system.