

The course of competition and political consequences of the municipal elections in Rzeszów in 2014

Przebieg rywalizacji
i konsekwencje polityczne
wyborów samorządowych w Rzeszowie w 2014 roku

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the process of the competition and the consequences of local elections of 2014 in Rzeszów with particular reference to direct election for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów and elections for the city council of Rzeszów, deliberately ignoring the Subcarpathian Regional Assembly elections. The following hypotheses were verified: 1) the strong position of the city political leader, Tomasz Ferenc, is a proof of a weak powerbase of political parties in Rzeszów; 2) strong position of the left-wing committee in the city council mirrors the support for the incumbent mayor. In order to verify the said hypotheses, four research questions were used: 1. Where did the strong position of the Mayor of Rzeszów as the city politi-

Abstrakt

Celem postawionym w artykule było przedstawienie przebiegu rywalizacji i konsekwencji politycznych wyborów samorządowych w Rzeszowie w 2014 roku ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wyborów bezpośrednich na prezydenta miasta oraz wyborów do rady miasta Rzeszowa z całym pominięciem wyborów do sejmiku województwa podkarpackiego. Weryfikacji poddano następujące hipotezy badawcze: 1) silna pozycja lidera miejskiego Tadeusza Ferenc stanowi o słabości zaplecza partii politycznych w Rzeszowie; 2) silna pozycja lewicowego komitetu w radzie miasta stanowi odzwierciedlenie poparcia dla urzędującego prezydenta. Do weryfikacji przywołanych hipotez posłużono się czterema pytaniami badawczymi: 1. Z czego wynikała

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cal leader come from?; 2. What was the cause of weakness of other candidates running for the post of the mayor of the city?; 3. Were the local electoral committees that had no label of any political parties more attractive for a potential voter than political party committees?; 4. In what way did local structures of political parties and undeclared subjects reach potential voters?

Key words: political competition, local government elections, Rzeszów, election campaign

silna pozycja prezydenta Rzeszowa jako lidera miejskiego?; 2. Z czego wynikała słabość kandydatów ubiegających się o urząd prezydenta miasta?; 3. Czy lokalne komitety wyborcze pozbawione etykiety partyjnej były atrakcyjniejsze dla potencjalnego wyborcy aniżeli komitety partii politycznych?; 4. W jaki sposób miejskie struktury partii politycznych i podmiotów niepartyjnych docierały do potencjalnych wyborców?

Słowa kluczowe: rywalizacja polityczna, wybory samorządowe, Rzeszów, kampania wyborcza

Introduction

The analysed example of local elections of 2014 seems to be interesting because of at least a few reasons resulting from the formal-legal nature, as well as local models of electoral behaviours. In the first aspect, it is necessary to pay attention to the electoral calendar, or in other words to the comprehensive perspective on elections that took place in Poland in years 2014—2015. Such cyclicity of elections started with the elections to the European Parliament (25 May 2014), local elections (16 and 30 November 2014), two rounds of voting in presidential election (10 and 24 May 2015), and ended with parliamentary elections (25 October 2015), the result of which, diametrically changed the previous layout of the political scene. The change included the absolute majority in parliament for Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), lack of left-wing parties in the parliament, and the appearance of new political subjects representing an alternative to existing parties and parliamentary groupings.¹

Another aspect resultant from the formal-legal nature was the change of previous rules of carrying out local elections, which in accordance with the electoral law binding since 2011, introduced the single-member constituencies operating in gminas (municipalities) that have over 20 thousand inhabitants, excluding city councils without powiat rights.² In previous local elections the single-member

¹ D. SZCZEPAŃSKI: “Upartyjnienie versus personalizacja jako czynniki determinujące zachowania wyborcze w krajowych elekcjach w 2015 roku.” *Preferencje polityczne* 2016, no. 12, pp. 73—88.

² The Act of 5 January 2011 — *Election Code (Journal of Laws, 2011, no. 21, item 112 as amended).*

constituencies operated only in elections to city councils that had under 20 thousand inhabitants. Introduction of such a solution enabled local electoral committees to participate in political competition without the need to pass the required election threshold in the scale of the whole gmina. On the other hand, the disadvantage of this solution was too low voter turnout and, therefore, the difficulty to obtain contingent by smaller electoral committees in situations when a stronger political rival, as the winner, “took it all.” The result of that was that potential voters did not decide to vote knowing that their candidate simply did not have any chances against a stronger rival.

If we were to accept that local elections were a “periodic process of deciding through voting of the whole local and regional community on what policy would be executed on the local and regional level, and choosing from the candidates the ones who are to hold particular elective positions or local posts,” then a prime feature of the election, different from the other national and European elections, was (and still is) the integration of the whole local community.³ The voting alone was a way to show not only the activity of citizens, but also a common way to express one’s adhesion to a specific community, which also provided a possibility to form a civil identity and served as an expression of the influence of individuals on the final shape of the governing body in their direct surroundings.⁴

The second reason of the interest in the local elections of 2014 were local voting behaviour patterns,⁵ which resulted from the disparity of electoral preferences of inhabitants of Rzeszów, which greatly differed from behaviour patterns of local community inhabiting Podkarpackie Voivodeship.⁶ They were

³ R. TKACZ: “Wybory samorządowe w województwie opolskim w 2010 i w 2014 r. — analiza porównawcza wybranych wątków.” *Pogranicze. Polish Borderlands Studies* 2015, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 135.

⁴ W. WOJTASIK: “Systemowa specyfika wyborów samorządowych w Polsce.” *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych* 2013, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 53 ff.

⁵ The voting behaviour, according to Jacek Raciborski, should be understood as “the totality of citizens’ behaviours manifested in connection with the electoral process.” J. RACIBORSKI: *Polskie wybory: zachowania wyborcze społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1989—1995*. Warszawa 1997, p. 11.

⁶ For more information see: D. SZCZEPAŃSKI: “Subcarpathian Voivodship on the Electoral Map of Poland (1989—2014).” *Political Preferences* 2015, no. 11, pp. 173—186; H. KOTARSKI: “Zachowania wyborcze mieszkańców Podkarpacia w latach 1991—2001.” In: *Społeczeństwo Podkarpacia w badaniach rzeszowskiego ośrodka socjologicznego*. Ed. M. MALIKOWSKI. Rzeszów 2008, pp. 69—83; K. MALICKI: “Specyfika zachowań wyborczych mieszkańców Podkarpacia.” In: *Społeczeństwo Podkarpacia w badaniach rzeszowskiego ośrodka socjologicznego*. Ed. M. MALIKOWSKI. Rzeszów 2008, pp. 84—92. On the specifics of the local elections in other Polish cities for more details see: P. HAYN: “Polityczne aspekty wyborów samorządowych w Rzeszowie w kampanii 2006 roku.” *Rocznik Samorządowy* 2012, vol. 1, pp. 77—93; IDEM: “Wybory samorządowe w Rzeszowie w 2010 roku — specyfika i uwarunkowania.” *Annales UMCS Sectio K* 2011, vol. XVIII, pp. 91—104; M. CICHOSZ: “Wrocławska scena

connected with the re-election of Tadeusz Ferenc, a politician of Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD), for his fourth term as the Mayor of Rzeszów. The disparity mentioned above also involved the city council, to which once again the winner was the left-wing Komitet Wyborczy Wyborców Tadeusza Ferenc *Rozwój Rzeszowa*. Taking into consideration only those two aspects, it is worth to ponder on the reason why in the voivodeship identified as a “right-wing’s bastion,” the left-wing mayor and his committee achieved such a great electoral success.⁷

The article uses Polish names of political parties and electoral committees.

The competition during the Mayor of Rzeszów election

As it was pointed out in the introduction, the capital of Subcarpathia differed from the whole voivodeship in terms of electoral behaviours. It was connected with the re-election of T. Ferenc, who has been the Mayor of Rzeszów since 2002. It is important to note that his predecessors were connected with right-wing politics. In the years 1983—1990 the position was held by Zdzisław Banat, who belonged to Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe (ZChN), which was established in October 1989; in 1990—1999 the position of the Mayor of Rzeszów was held by Mieczysław Janowski, an adherent of Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (AWS), who was elected a member of the Polish Senate in 1997. His successor was Andrzej Szlachta, who was first associated with AWS, and after the decomposition of the grouping, he joined PiS. He held the post of the mayor in the years 1999—2002.

During the local elections of 2002—2014 only once — in 2002 — there were two rounds of voting, in which a member of the right-wing faced a member of

polityczna przed wyborami 2010 roku.” *Studia Politologiczne* vol. 20, pp. 178—193; *Wybory do sejmików województw w 2006 roku*. Eds. R. ALBERSKI, M. CICHOSZ, Ł. TOMCZAK. Wrocław 2010 (passim); *Rywalizacja o prezydenturę w miastach Dolnego Śląska*. Eds. D. SKRZYPIŃSKI. Wrocław 2012 (passim); *Gra o regiony: wybory do sejmików województw w 2010 r.* Eds. R. ALBERSKI, M. CICHOSZ, K. KOBIELSKA. Wrocław 2013 (passim).

⁷ In accordance with the established terminology, “right-wing bastion” was used to define a particular electoral district “because of its inhabitants’ political preferences. Those preferences are characterized by a relative permanency of political beliefs and values, which can be reflected by favouring particular political parties. Because of that a particular grouping dominates the bastion, the election outcome of which visibly differs from the average obtained in other districts.” P. MAJ: “Województwa podkarpackie i zachodniopomorskie: ‘Bastiony peryferyjne’ Prawa i Sprawiedliwości i Platformy Obywatelskiej RP (2005—2010).” In: *Region i regionalizm w socjologii i politologii*. Eds. A. PAWŁOWSKA, Z. RYKIEL. Rzeszów 2012, p. 197.

the left-wing, and in the other three cases the final outcome was decided by the absolute majority of votes. The details are presented in Table 1. In practice it meant that even the most substantive right-wing candidates were unable to beat the left-wing politician. A direct consequence of such state of affairs was that local leaders of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) in 2010 and of Platforma Obywatelska (PO) in 2014 decided to stop putting up their own candidates for the mayor elections, and they decided to support T. Ferenc, at the same time strengthening his position as the city's leader.⁸

From the formal point of view, local elections were announced with the President of the Council of Ministers Donald Tusk's ordinance of 20 August 2014 about ordering elections for city councils, powiat councils, voivodeship sejmiks (councils), and Warsaw city councils, as well as vogts (wójt), burgomasters (burmistrz) and mayors elections.⁹ The date was set to Sunday, 16 November 2014.

From the practical point of view the interest in the political competition for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów became stronger, especially in urban and voivodeship structures of PiS, which at the beginning of March 2013, so a year and a half before local elections, started looking for candidates that would be able to defeat the incumbent mayor, T. Ferenc. In the lobby of the party two names of potential PiS politicians appeared. They were Stanisław Ożóg, a member of Polish Parliament during V, VI and VII parliamentary terms, and Jerzy Cypryś, an alderman. Both of them declared that if they got party's official nomination, they would not refuse to participate in elections.¹⁰ Eventually, on 23 July 2014 Komitet Polityczny (Political Committee) of PiS decided to nominate Andrzej Szlachta, former Mayor of Rzeszów in the years 1999—2002, an alderman (2002—2005), and a member of Polish Parliament (since 2005). At the same time, he was the first officially put up candidate in the competition for the post of the city mayor.

Other candidates who applied for the elections were: T. Ferenc, Krzysztof Prendecki, and Marta Niewczas. In the case of the incumbent mayor, the decision about his participation in the political competition was made much earlier, however, only with the official beginning of the electoral campaign it was made

⁸ A. NIJANDER-DUDZIŃSKA: "Rola lidera miejskiego w kształtowaniu samorządowej areny wyborczej Rzeszowa w 2006 roku." In: *Władza i polityka lokalna: polskie wybory samorządowe 2006*. Ed. A. WOLEK. Kraków-Nowy Sącz 2008, p. 83 ff.; A. NIJANDER-DUDZIŃSKA: "Kariera polityczna w kontekście różnych kryteriów przywództwa we władzach miejskich." *Acta Politica. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego* 2015, no. 33, p. 78.

⁹ Rozporządzenie Prezesa Rady Ministrów z dnia 20 sierpnia 2014 r. w sprawie zarządzenia wyborów do rad gmin, rad powiatów, sejmików województw i rad dzielnic m.st. Warszawy oraz wyborów wójtów, burmistrzów i prezydentów miast. *Journal of Laws* 2014, item 1134.

¹⁰ K. JAMRÓG: "Stanisław Ożóg będzie kandydatem PiS na prezydenta Rzeszowa? Niewykluczone." Available online: <http://www.nowiny24.pl/wiadomosci/rzeszow/art/6183979,stanislaw-ozog-bedzie-kandydatem-pis-na-prezydenta-rzeszowa-niewykluczone,id,t.html> (accessed: 20.11.2016).

Table 1

Elections for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów in the years 2002—2010

Year of elections	Full name of the candidate (in the order: surname, first name)	Electoral committee	First round of voting		Second round of voting	
			no. of votes received	per cent of votes	no. of votes received	per cent of votes
2002	Chara Janusz	KW Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej	995	2.07		
	Dzierżak Elżbieta	KW Liga Polskich Rodzin	4,021	8.35		
	Ferenc Tadeusz	Koalicyjny KW Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej — Unia Pracy	21,383	44.39	23,121	51.63
	Maślanka Jerzy	KW <i>Nasz Dom-Rzeszów</i>	2,332	4.84		
	Rusin Władysław	KWW do Rady Miasta i na Prezydenta — Władysława Rusina — <i>Rzeszowianie</i>	1,311	2.72		
	Szlachta Andrzej	KW Rzeszowskie Porozumienie Prawicy	11,573	24.02	21,662	48.37
	Tomaka Jan	Koalicyjny KW Platforma Obywatelska — Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	3,150	6.54		
	Walat Wiesław	KW <i>Spoleczne Forum Rzeszowa</i>	3,406	7.07		
2006	Ferenc Tadeusz	KWW Tadeusza Ferenc <i>Rozwój Rzeszowa</i>	48,131	76.59		
	Hady Marian	KW Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	11,556	18.39		
	Poręba Marek	KW Platforma Obywatelska RP	2,047	3.26		
	Rylski Andrzej	KW Liga Polskich Rodzin	1,109	1.76		
2010	Cypryś Jerzy	KW Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	23,695	34.86		
	Dec Andrzej	KW Platforma Obywatelska RP	5,157	7.59		
	Ferenc Tadeusz	KWW Tadeusza Ferenc <i>Rozwój Rzeszowa</i>	36,190	53.25		
	Maślanka Jerzy	KW <i>Nasz Dom-Rzeszów</i>	1,043	1.53		
	Walat Wiesław	KWW <i>Rzeszowianie Razem</i>	1,880	2.77		

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (the National Election Commission).

public. The politician publicly declared that he would not run an electoral campaign because his ongoing obligations did not allow it.¹¹ It was in a way following the rule that the lack of electoral campaign is also a campaign.

The third official candidate for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów was Krzysztof Prendecki, a sociologist working at Rzeszów University of Technology. He became popular in the city mostly because of his frequent appearing as a columnist of *Gazeta Codzienna Nowiny*, where he commented on the current socio-political situation in Rzeszów, as well as in the whole Subcarpathian Voivodeship. He declared non-partisanship, and he was nominated by Kongres Nowej Prawicy in Rzeszów. He presented his readiness to participate in elections as an alternative for the incumbent mayor and a right person to implement practical actions to change the city, including limiting the number of ubiquitous shopping malls.

On the other hand, M. Niewczas informed about her participation in the city mayor election on 16 September 2014, during a press conference called especially to announce her candidacy. She was officially supported by Kongres Kobiet (Women's Congress). It is also worth to mention that M. Niewczas was the leader of Subcarpathian structures of Twój Ruch (TR), before that she was undeclared. She was also a city councilor in the years 2002–2014 and four-time traditional karate champion. On the occasion of local elections, she created an electoral committee *Aktywny Rzeszów*.

The primal part of the competition was generally limited to a few areas: (1) activity in the social media and the mass media; (2) individual run of electoral campaign with the simultaneous support of various political structures; and (3) participation in public debates. In the first area it is important to take into consideration the creation of official Facebook profiles of the candidates running for the post of the city mayor. It involved T. Ferenc, who was described as: “an awesome Mayor of Rzeszów, splendid manager, a proper host, visionary, realist, an outstanding individual,”¹² and M. Niewczas, actively supported by TR structures (through their official and private Facebook profiles), as well as K. Prendecki, whose majority of Facebook posts had KNP logo. In the case of A. Szlachta there was no noted activity on any social networks. The activity in the mass media was limited to presenting their own vision of governing, potential changes that could be introduced in the case of future victory, sometimes criticism of political opponents, which escalated together with the development of the electoral campaign. Its beneficiary was the incumbent Mayor of Rzeszów trying for re-election, and the criticism came from A. Szlachta and K. Prendecki.

¹¹ “Tadeusz Ferenc ogłasza swój udział w wyborach.” Available online: <http://www.radio.rzeszow.pl/informacje/30782/tadeusz-ferenc-oglasza-swoj-start-w-wyborach> (accessed: 21.11.2016).

¹² “Tadeusz Ferenc — rewelacyjny Prezydent Rzeszowa — Prezydentem RP.” Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/TadeuszFerencRewelacyjnyPrezydentRzeszowa/> (accessed: 23.11.2016).

Among the accusations aimed at T. Ferenc were: too rapid growth of city's and its inhabitants' debts, too many shopping malls belonging to only one investor, or wasting public money on the mayor and his colleagues' trips to the biggest European and non-European countries in order to look for modern architectural solutions. T. Ferenc did not respond to any of the mentioned accusations.

The second aspect connected with the political competition was the individual run of the electoral campaign with the support of various political structures. As it was already mentioned, T. Ferenc at the very beginning declared that he would not run an electoral campaign in order to properly govern the city. In reality this "lack of electoral campaign" was an electoral strategy, which, as it later turned out, brought the desired result. He participated in elections from his own electoral committee called Komitet Wyborczy Wyborców Tadeusza Ferencza *Rozwój Rzeszowa*.

The situation was slightly different for A. Szlachta and other candidates. The PiS politician gave numerous interviews to the press, in which he highlighted his achievements from the time he was the Mayor of Rzeszów, and pointed to development plans for the city, which included creating a fast tram line and educational trail of world's church miniatures in Papieski park as investments to be made in the case of his re-election. Those actions brought quick reaction from local journalists publishing *Echo Rzeszowa*, who sympathized with T. Ferenc, and who pointed out in detail that investments he declared to be his achievements, in fact were started by his predecessor, M. Janowski, and completed by T. Ferenc. The acknowledged achievement of A. Szlachta, ironically, was the construction of a walkway in the part of Rzeszów where his estate was situated.¹³

K. Predecki's and M. Niewczas's ways of running their electoral campaigns were completely different from each other. While the KNP candidate appeared apathetic and stagnated, limiting himself to hold two press conferences, M. Niewczas stood out positively in this field.

The electoral campaign of M. Niewczas was an example of ambitious and active work in order to gain wide support for her own vision of governing the city. It mostly came from the conviction that 12 years of work experience in the local government, as well as successful observation of T. Ferenc's activity since 2002, resulted in gaining by M. Niewczas necessary skills, knowledge, and qualifications to continue doing what T. Ferenc has begun. Because of that fact, M. Niewczas declared that her direct objective was to become "first *prezydenta* of Rzeszów."¹⁴ The claim was connected with the terminology used

¹³ R. MAŁEK: "Taka kampania to wstyd dla Rzeszowa." *Echo Rzeszowa* 2014, no. 12, p. 1.

¹⁴ A. GERNAND: "Marta Niewczas: Chcę być prezydentą!" Available online: http://rzeszow.wyborcza.pl/rzeszow/1,34962,16656459,Marta_Niewczas___Chce_byc_prezydenta_.html (accessed: 26.11.2016).

at that time by the leaders of TR and participants of Kongres Kobiet, who instead of formal names used for female ministers, used a gender-specific form *ministra*.

The campaign of M. Niewczas was mostly about numerous meetings with the inhabitants of Rzeszów, distributing flyers by herself, and putting up her own posters. She was supported by members of her own committee and city and voivodeship structures of TR, who often made public appearances calling for support for their candidate. However, it is important to note the fact that for M. Niewczas the participation in the election for the post of the mayor of Rzeszów was a real fight for survival on the local political scene. It was caused for example by the fact that before the election to the European Parliament in 2014, M. Niewczas left the aldermen circle supporting T. Ferenc, which led to her marginalization in the city council, and later she involved herself in the political project called Europa Plus Twój Ruch, which at the country and Podkarpackie Voivodeship level turned out to be a failure.¹⁵ Because of that the competition for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów was especially high profile among the three most visible candidates, namely: T. Ferenc, A. Szlachta, and M. Niewczas. However, the main axis of the competition was between the incumbent mayor and the PiS politician, which was caused by political base of both candidates. In the case of T. Ferenc it was three times as big as that of his PiS rival's, since the former was supported by: SLD, PO, PSL, and a great part of inhabitants who assessed the transformation of the city during T. Ferenc's tenure positively. It also seems that in the case of the last mentioned aspect, the party divisions played a lesser role than visual changes that appeared in the city since 2002.¹⁶

The last aspect that influenced the course of the electoral campaign were three public debates organized by the employees of the Department of Political Science at the University of Rzeszów, editorial office of *Gazeta Codzienna Nowiny*, and TV Rzeszów. In every debate the participants were asked about their vision of governing, pros and cons of their rivals, and, in the case of the last two debates, they had to reply to questions from the Internet users. According to the assessments that appeared after each consecutive debate, T. Ferenc's advantage over his rivals was significant.¹⁷

¹⁵ P. MAJ: "Specyfika podkarpackiego okręgu nr 9 w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego w 2014 roku." *Polityka i Społeczeństwo* 2015, no. 1, pp. 58—70.

¹⁶ For more see: A. NIJANDER-DUDZIŃSKA: "Wokół lidera miejskiego. Samorząd Rzeszowa w latach 2006—2010." In: *Rzeszów w XX-leciu III RP*. Eds. M. MALIKOWSKI. Rzeszów 2012, pp. 69—86.

¹⁷ "Kandydaci na prezydenta Rzeszowa podsumowują debatę w Nowinach." <http://www.nowiny24.pl/archiwum/art/5790659,kandydaci-na-prezydenta-rzeszowa-podsumowuja-debate-w-nowinach-wideo,id,t.html> (accessed: 28.11.2016); B. BARTMAN, M. MENDYCKI, K. KUCHAR: "Kampania wyborcza na finiszu. Bitwa na spoty i debaty." Available online: <https://rzeszow.tvp.pl/22286702/kampania-wyborcza-na-finiszu-bitwa-na-spoty-i-debaty> (accessed: 28.11.2016).

In elections held on 16 November 2015 the incumbent mayor T. Ferenc was re-elected, outclassing his political rivals and getting almost three times as many votes as his rival from PiS. The details are presented in Table 2. It is also important to note that K. Predecki, who was “invisible” in the mass media, got almost 2.5 times better result than M. Niewczas, who was well-known in the city. It showed that regardless of the level of involvement and activity undertaken during the electoral campaign, one could speak about the change in electoral preferences of the inhabitants of Rzeszów. While assessing the electoral result obtained by T. Ferenc, it is necessary to acknowledge the truth of the claim that electoral preferences of the inhabitants of Rzeszów differ from the ones present everywhere else in the voivodeship.

Table 2

The results of the direct election for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów in 2014

No. on the voting ballot	Full name of the candidate	Electoral committee	No. of votes received	Per cent of votes
1	Ferenc Tadeusz	KWW Tadeusza Ferenc <i>Rozwój Rzeszowa</i>	43,704	66.30
2	Niewczas Marta	KWW Marty Niewczas <i>Aktywne Rzeszów</i>	2,191	3.59
3	Predecki Krzysztof	KW Nowa Prawica — Janusza Korwin-Mikke	5,223	8.07
4	Szlachta Andrzej	KW Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	14,789	22.44

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza. (National Electoral Commission of Poland).

Political competition during city council elections in Rzeszów

Together with the campaigns run by the candidates competing for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów, electoral committees trying to obtain their own representation in the council of Rzeszów, where until 2014 the majority was in the hands of politicians from left-wing Komitet Wyborczy Wyborców Tadeusza Ferenc *Rozwój Rzeszowa*, joined the political rivalry. This phenomenon was interesting because previous political make-up and the structure of the leadership of the council were dominated by the post-Solidarity side. In the years 1990—1994 the city council consisted of 42 aldermen from civic committees and 3 representing above-mentioned left wing, namely Społeczne Porozumienie Wyborcze committee. During the next term in years 1994—1998 there was a visible strengthen-

ing of the left wing. Nonetheless, 19 mandates belonged to representatives of Porozumienie Samorządowe Centroprawicy, 11 to Rzeszowska Liga Miejska, 11 to SLD, 4 to Unia Demokratyczna/Unia Wolności (UD/UW), and 1 to Porozumienie na Rzecz Zdrowia i Sportu. Also typical for that time was the shift of Polish-nationwide divisions of post-Solidarity right wing from national to local level. The term of 1998—2002 was almost completely dominated by 26 aldermen from AWS, 16 from SLD, and 3 from UW. On the other hand, in years 2002—2006 the marginalization of the right wing was clearly visible. The council constituted of 10 aldermen from SLD, 6 from the coalition of PO-PiS committee, 4 from Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR), 4 from Rzeszowskie Porozumienie Prawicy and 1 from *Nasz Dom-Rzeszów* committee. The latter term of the city council was characterized by growing support for left-wing committee. In 2010 there was a partial reversal of the described electoral tendency, which was mainly connected with the growth of social support for politicians from PiS. At that time the council consisted of 11 aldermen from *Rozwój Rzeszowa* committee, 9 from PiS, and 5 from PO.¹⁸

A major part of local elections of 2014 was preceded by two important events that took place in the capital of the voivodeship, first local and the second nationwide, and they greatly dominated the course of the political competition in Rzeszów and Subcarpathia. The local aspect was connected with by-election to the senate held on 8 September 2013 in district no. 55, which covered 5 powiats (dębicki, kolbuszowski, mielecki, ropczycko-sędziszowski, and strzyżowski) because of the expiration of the senatorial mandate belonging to Władysław Ortyl, elected for the post of the Marshal of Podkarpackie Voivodeship. In this competition, the senatorial mandate went to Zdzisław Pupa from PiS.¹⁹ The result of the election was not controversial because it mirrored political preferences in the voivodeship. However, in this aspect the important thing is that there was a full mobilization of voivodeship structures of political parties and their electorate. At that time, divisions on the left, as well as on the right side of the local political scene became especially visible, mainly between PiS and Solidarna Polska Zbigniewa Ziobro (SPZZ), and between politicians from SLD who were in the *Rozwój Rzeszowa* electoral committee and TR with *Aktywny Rzeszów* committee of M. Niewczas, who were competing for votes of the same electorate. The divisions mentioned above were mostly connected with numerous personal attacks and differences between the parties and committees.

¹⁸ B. KOTARBA: *Walka polityczna na forum Rady Miasta Rzeszowa w latach 2002—2010*. Rzeszów 2011, pp. 92—111; IDEM: “Władze miasta i ich działalność. Rzeszów i jego prezydenci w rankingach.” In: *Dzieje Rzeszowa*. T. 5: *Rzeszów w latach 1989—2015*. Ed. W. BONUSIAK. Rzeszów 2017 (in print).

¹⁹ For more detailed information see: D. SZCZEPAŃSKI: “Wybory uzupełniające do Senatu na Podkarpaciu w 2013 roku.” *Polityka i Społeczeństwo* 2014, no. 2, pp. 37—48

Finally, the Polish-nationwide aspect was connected with the elections to the European Parliament held in May 2014 that in the capital of Subcarpathia, as well as in the whole voivodeship, brought PiS the victory, which was strengthened with 2 mandates from the region for Tomasz Poręba and Stanisław Ożóg. The third mandate went to Elżbieta Łukacijewska from PO.²⁰ Both elections led to mobilization of the structures of the candidates' own parties and electoral committees, as well as their electorates.

While concentrating on the local elections of 2014 in Rzeszów, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the will to compete for a mandate in the 25-member city council in the early stages of the electoral campaign was expressed by 6 electoral committees (KWs). Those were: KW PiS, KW PO, KWW Tadeusza Ferenca *Rozwój Rzeszowa*, KW Nowa Prawica — Janusza Korwin-Mikke, KWW Marty Niewczas *Aktywny Rzeszów* and KWW Lista Bezpartyjna Mieszkańców Rzeszowa.²¹ The last of the mentioned electoral committees was created by the previous leader of TR structures in Rzeszów, Grzegorz Tereszkiwicz, who on 4 September 2014, following the national TR management's decision, was expelled from the party for creating a separate electoral committee, which at the same time disabled TK from the possibility to obtain representation for the committee they approved at the central level. In TK ranks, G. Tereszkiwicz's behaviour was assessed as acting against the party's interest.²² In the end, the Lista Bezpartyjna Mieszkańców Rzeszowa committee registered 7 candidates in 1 of 4 electoral districts. However, formally the committee did not participate in the elections.

While assessing the course of the political competition in local elections, it is necessary to notice that it was concentrated on the media representation of the candidates running for the mandate, and on the presentation of their visions concerning development of Rzeszów. The message sent by PiS committee was mainly a display of the party's will to obtain the majority in the city council and least 13 mandates. The slogan that they used was "Rzeszów — czas na zmiany" (Rzeszów — it's time for changes). The possibility to achieve the goal was seen in a wide coalition with the representatives of NSZZ Solidarność, SPZZ, Prawica Rzeczypospolitej (PRz) and Polska Razem (PR), who ended up featuring on PiS electoral lists. Aside from that, the party's ranks bet on promoting young people who only knew the problems of their own generation. According to

²⁰ P. MAJ: *Podkarpacie na tle ogólnopolskich wyborów do Parlamentu Europejskiego w 2014 roku*. Rzeszów 2015, passim.

²¹ J. KWIATKOWSKI: "6 komitetów w wyborach do Rady Miasta Rzeszowa." Available online: http://www.biznistryl.pl/biznes/polityka-i-biznes/2450_6-komitetow-w-wyborach-dorady-miasta-rzeszowa.html (accessed: 29.11.2016).

²² "Grzegorz Tereszkiwicz wyrzucony z Twojego Ruchu." Available online: <http://gospodarkapodkarpacka.pl/news/view/8990/grzegorz-tereszkiewicz-wyrzucony-z-twojego-ruchu> (accessed: 29.11.2016).

T. Poręba, they were supposed to ensure not only a boost of new projects in the city, but also bring new energy, dynamism and confidence in taking necessary initiatives in the council.²³ Among the prime postulates of the party, there was a plan to create Rzeszowskie Centrum Przedsiębiorczości (Rzeszów Centre for Entrepreneurship), which would aid a potential businessman in managing their own company, help to find an office, legal service and help in obtaining necessary funds for the company.

On the other hand, PO committee offered the first place on the electoral lists to those politicians who for years had been working in institutions of local self-government and were active members of the party. According to the announcements made before elections, in municipal structures of PO they hoped to obtain 7 mandates to the city council. The message of the committee was limited to presenting a short programme, which involved transport issues, including the plans to build a bridge and connections to the motorway. They also vaunted the fact of their creation of Rzeszowski Budżet Obywatelski (Rzeszów Civil Budget) and promised to ensure transparency in the matter of funding amateur and professional sports in the city. Another goal of PO was to create all-year skating rink and Rzeszowskie Centrum Komunikacji.²⁴

Out of all the participating committees, the position of the leader went to KW *Rozwój Rzeszowa*, mainly because of Tadeusz Ferenc, from which in the ending term 4 aldermen left in order to join a newly founded SLD aldermen club. Among numerous announcements that appeared in the media, the spokesperson for the club and for the electoral committee, Konrad Fijołek, claimed that his goal was to obtain 13 mandates in the city council, namely 2 more than in the previous term. The strength of the *Rozwój Rzeszowa* committee was not only its leader, but also previous and current aldermen, who were aware of local problems of Rzeszów inhabitants. Aside from that, the committee boasted that they had the greatest number of women on their lists, 24 in total, who, as it was assessed, could be the key to the victory. All in all, the goal was to get the majority in city council and the ability to make decisions independently.²⁵

During the local elections, Nowa Prawica — Janusza Korwin-Mikke was promoting the slogan: “Nowa prawica, nowy samorząd” (New right, New local government). The committee in mass media deprecated the importance of the

²³ “Młoda ekipa europośla PiS startuje w wyborach samorządowych.” <http://rzeszow-news.pl/30368/> (accessed 28.11.2016); “PiS idzie do roboty. Wierzy w zwycięstwo i 13 mandatów.” Available online: <http://rzeszow-news.pl/pis-idzie-roboty-wierzy-zwyciestwo-13-mandatow/> (accessed 28.11.2016).

²⁴ “PO przedstawiła kandydatów do rady miasta.” Available online: <http://rzeszow-news.pl/29435/> (accessed 28.11.2016).

²⁵ “Drużyna Ferenc. Kto kandyduje do Rady Miasta Rzeszowa?” <http://rzeszow-news.pl/druzyna-ferenca-kandyduje-rady-miasta-rzeszowa-listy/> (accessed 28.11.2016).

elections to the city council in favour of the elections to the voivodeship sejmiks, in which they planned to obtain at least 4 mandates.²⁶

The last committee, *Aktywny Rzeszów*, was promoting the leaders of their electoral lists, who were only women. As M. Niewczas said: “we bet on the fair sex. Our ‘number ones’ are intelligent, dedicated and beautiful.”²⁷ The principal part of the campaign was emphasizing that they had the support of Kongres Kobiet. Because of M. Niewczas’s sporty image, they promised a political competition based on the rules of fair play. The promotion of electoral lists was mainly conducted during multiple press conferences, interviews in local press and social media. The Internet tools served as a base for presenting the standpoints of almost all electoral committees, but it is worth to point out that *Aktywny Rzeszów* committee’s campaign was in terms of finance and media the most expensive one, and at the same time the most visible amongst the political entities competing for mandates to the city council.

In local elections of 16 November 2014 the greatest number of votes went to PiS committee, however after converting them to mandates, PiS got second place. As many as 11 mandates went to *Rozwój Reszowa* committee, 10 to PiS, and 4 to PO. The details are presented in Table 3. It is important to note that in spite of lack of electoral campaign, Nowa Prawica committee received over 1,000 votes more than the representatives of *Aktywny Rzeszów* committee. It meant, that not all leftist electoral committees in the city received relatively high social support.

Table 3

Election results to the Rzeszów city council in 2014

Name of the electoral committee	No. of put up candidates	No. of votes received	No. of mandates received
Komitet Wyborczy Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	50	23,435	10
Komitet Wyborczy Platforma Obywatelska	49	10,565	4
Komitet Wyborczy Nowa Prawica — Janusza Korwin-Mikke	28	3,124	—
Komitet Wyborczy Wyborców Tadeusza Ferency <i>Rozwój Reszowa</i>	50	23,252	11
Komitet Wyborczy Wyborców Marty Niewczas <i>Aktywny Rzeszów</i>	49	1,956	—

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on data from Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza.

²⁶ “KNP — sprzedać samorządowe spółki oraz Centrum Wystawienniczo-Kongresowe.” Available online: <http://gospodarkapodkarpacka.pl/news/view/9347/knp-sprzedac-samorzadowe-spolki-oraz-centrum-wystawienniczo-kongresowe> (accessed: 28.11.2016).

²⁷ “‘Aktywny Rzeszów’ zaprezentował swoje ‘jedyнки’. Postawił na kobiety.” Available online: <http://rzeszow-news.pl/29624/> (accessed: 28.11.2016).

Political consequences of the local elections

While analysing the area of local political scene, one can point out at least a few aspects of political consequences of local elections of 2014 in Rzeszów. The first one was connected with another strengthening of the position of the leader, T. Ferenc, and at the same time exposing the weaknesses of municipal structures of political parties and other committees, in which there was a visible lack of candidates who could pose a real challenge to the current Mayor of Rzeszów.

Secondly, PiS victory in the elections was clear, however, on purely formal level, the success was attained by *Rozwój Rzeszowa* committee. The consequence of this aspect of elections was a visible division of the left wing, which was expressed by separate participation in the elections of *Rozwój Rzeszowa* committee and TR which promoted M. Niewczas's *Aktywny Rzeszów* committee. The total number of votes cast in favour of left-wing committees, which amounted to 25,208, could have led not only to their bigger electoral success in the city, but also to obtaining majority in the council that was necessary to enable independent decision-making.

A separate category of political ramifications of the elections were the decisions made by T. Ferenc and the aldermen of the city. In 2015 Tadeusz Ferenc declared, once again, that he would try to obtain a mandate to the Senate. He expressed a similar initiative in 2007 and 2011 but was unsuccessful. Such an action was a cause of municipal movement Rzeszów Smart City that involved a declaration made by K. Fijołek from aldermen club *Rozwój Rzeszowa* about his will to run for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów if T. Ferenc becomes a senator.²⁸ Apart from that, the initiative was an answer to an academic-local government committee created by PiS, the goal of which was to “put an end to powerlessness during elections for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów, in which still, regardless of a large support in the voivodeship, a candidate from PiS is unable to break through and gets the result way below the expectations.”²⁹ For PiS it meant looking for candidates who had quite a big social support in Rzeszów, which would allow them to get the authority in the city hall, but for Rzeszów Smart City movement it meant promoting its leader. The actions mentioned above quickly led to the situation in which T. Ferenc publically “anointed” his successor. That person was Zdzisław Gawlik from PO, who did not express a will to participate in the competition

²⁸ Further on the subject, see D. SZCZEPAŃSKI: “Ruch miejski smart city na Podkarpaciu. Nowoczesna inicjatywa społeczna czy działalność partyjna pod zmienionym szyldem.” *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego Acta Politica* 2015, no. 33, pp. 109—125.

²⁹ “PiS powołał nowy komitet. Ma przyciągnąć młodych.” Available online: http://rzeszow.gazeta.pl/rzeszow/1,34962,17999537,PiS_powolal_nowy_komitet__Ma_przyciagnac_mlodych.html (accessed: 29.11.2016).

for the post of the Mayor of Rzeszów. In the end, faced with T. Ferenc's failure in the elections to Senate, the activity of the academic and self-government committee of PiS focused on the problems connected with promoting the idea of self-governing during multiple courses and lectures, while Rzeszów Smart City initiated a series of academic conferences concerned with the quality of cities in accordance with the "smart" concept together with the cooperation of the employees of the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Rzeszów.

Concluding remarks

The analysed example of municipal elections of 2014 in Rzeszów verified positively the research hypotheses stated at the beginning of the discussion. The first one that concerned strong position of the city leader proved that city structures of parties did not have at their disposal human resources that would comprise a potential threat for the incumbent mayor, which had direct effect on the weakness of political parties themselves as well as local electoral committees. Strong position of the mayor actually resulted from the very fact of holding the office continuously since 2002, as well as from rapidly changing city area and numerous investments that serve as an example of professional city management. Weakness of the candidates resulted mainly from two reasons. In case of PiS the high position of Andrzej Szlachta within his party did not translate into social support in Rzeszów, whereas in case of KNP it was due to appointing a candidate virtually unknown in the city. The second reason for weakness of the candidates was the incorrectly defined electoral strategy by M. Niewczas. Pointing to the "political heritage" of the then-current mayor in the situation when he was taking part in the elections was a miscalculated measure that exposed the candidate to be ridiculed.

The second hypothesis concerned the position of the leftist committee *Rozwój Rzeszowa* and that the popularity it enjoyed among the citizens had direct relation to the figure of T. Ferenc, which eventually translated into the obtained election result. In the second example one can formulate an additional hypothesis that refers to the decline of the *Rozwój Rzeszowa* committee in a situation when T. Ferenc announced his political retirement. One may notice then an ongoing process of marginalization of the leftist committee in favour of the support of the PiS committee. Referring to the question if local electoral committees without party label would be more attractive for a potential voter than committees of political parties it should be stated that they would be not, which was shown by the election result of PiS in elections to the city council. It should comprise a diagnosis for undertaking actions by local party committees to involve earlier

in the process of acquiring own electorate and developing own political base. Apart from traditional means of mass communication they should also consider social media used by young people.

Regarding the question of in what way the city structures of political parties and non-party entities reached potential voters, one should answer that these were mainly channels connected with local press, as well as numerous meetings with the leaders organized in the main market square of Rzeszów, as well as leaflets and electoral posters. An important communication channel was also the use of the previously mentioned social media, by means of which the citizens were informed about the planned actions as well as events being organized, that each time brought the crowds.

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