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Thoughts of the Youth on Education. Students of The Maria Grzegorzewska University Towards Selected Party Postulates

Młodzi o edukacji.
Studenci Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej
w Warszawie wobec wybranych
postulatów partyjnych

ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of research conducted among the students of The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. The research was carried out using a copyright questionnaire. The study included 506 full-time students in the fields of education and special education. The aim of the study was to investigate the students' opinions on some of the demands of the party in the programs of political forces taking part in the parliamentary elections in 2015. The author presents the percentage distribution of support for the proposals concerning, among others, method of financing education, privatization of education, enhance the function of care in schools or resignation of testing high school. The results show that in the majority of issues exists among students relative consensus as to the validity or groundlessness of the party demands. Students speak for the possible participation

KEY WORDS

students, education, politics, election programs, postulates party

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studenci, edukacja, polityka, programy wyborcze, postulaty partyjne

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Case reports

Raporty z badań



of the public sector in education. They are in favor of free education in kindergarten, medical and dental care of adolescents and children in the kindergarten and school, free textbooks, breakfasts and dinners. They strongly oppose the abolition of compulsory education. The study may indicate allegiance of students to democratic values as freedom (e.g. the right to decent and safe education), equality (equal protection of rights, equal opportunities) and justice (equal access to educational institutions).

ABSTRAKT

W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badań własnych przeprowadzonych wśród studentów Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej w Warszawie za pomocą autorskiego kwestionariusza ankiety. Badaniem objęto 506 studentów studiów dziennych na kierunkach pedagogika i pedagogika specjalna. Celem badania było poznanie opinii studentów na temat niektórych postulatów partyjnych, zawartych w programach politycznych partii startujących w wyborach parlamentarnych w 2015 roku. Autor przedstawił procentowy rozkład poparcia dla propozycji dotyczących m.in. sposobu finansowania edukacji, prywatyzacji szkolnictwa, zwiększenia funkcji opiekuńczych w szkołach czy też rezygnacji z testów na maturze. Wyniki badań pokazują, że w większości kwestii istnieje wśród studentów względny konsens co do słuszności lub bezpodstawności partyjnych postulatów. Studenci wypowiadają się za możliwie największym udziałem sektora publicznego w edukacji, są zwolennikami bezpłatnej edukacji w przedszkolu, objęciem dzieci i młodzieży opieką lekarską i stomatologiczną w przedszkolu i szkole, bezpłatnymi podręcznikami, śniadaniem oraz obiadami. Zdecydowanie sprzeciwiają się zniesieniu obowiązku edukacji. Badania mogą świadczyć o przywiązaniu studentów do wartości demokratycznych, takich jak wolność (np. prawo do godnej i bezpiecznej edukacji), równość (jednakowa ochrona praw, jednakowe możliwości) i sprawiedliwość (jednakowy dostęp do instytucji edukacyjnych).

Introduction

The electoral period usually favors debates and discussions on various social issues and it was no different in 2015, when parliamentary elections were held in Poland. Some of the demands presented in the election programs concerned, traditionally, education, and the

process of schooling in particular. In that context, there were various proposals for repair, reconstruction, reform of the education system.

The vast majority of the population seems to be interested in the education system often due to vested interests in terms of their family or social concern. After all, education refers to some extent to all children and grandchildren, friends, acquaintances or even friends of friends. It is always the case that someone you know attends some school, is thinking about choosing a particular high school or secondary school or choose to study. These decisions, in an era in which a diploma from a good school is a sort of “authentication” and “passport” to a better life, reflection on possible alternatives and the consequences of the decisions is taken into consideration. It seems to be almost a universally acknowledged thing today that “in societies that suffer from a phenomenon called ‘diploma disease’ (...) and in which the degree is almost a guarantee of professional and material success, education (or simply: the quality of the diploma) is often crucial in determining the processes of stratification”.¹ The road to success, which is to get the best possible education (diploma), should be preceded by a thorough analysis of the potential opportunities and benefits of choosing a particular direction whilst of course taking into account one’s interests and aptitudes. Young people who have just made a choice of studies or are on the eve of making that choice, most likely take on a sensible approach when designing their educational path, which may well determine their fate and professional life. It can therefore be assumed that students are a group which is interested in the quality and state of Polish education to some extent at least. Pedagogy students observe its state in particular, as they are likely to associate their professional future with the sphere of education. Currently, they participate in lectures and discussions on the shape of education and the desired system changes; they aim to practice and gain valuable experience, which is to bring profit after graduation. They also have vivid memories of secondary schools, which they’d left relatively recently and still participate in the system of public education, which they can now view through the prism of pedagogical knowledge acquired at the university.

¹ A. Gromkowska-Melosik, T. Gmerek, *Problemy nierówności społecznych w teorii i praktyce edukacyjnej*, Kraków 2008, p. 18.



Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to investigate the relation of students of the The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. The subject-to selected educational demands of parties competing in the elections. These demands were visible in the election programs (generally available and presented by electoral committees).² I chose them arbitrarily. Some appeared at least in a few electoral programs—may be referred to as bipartisan consensus, others were unique and aroused numerous controversies. Some of them concerned specific issues while others were characterized by a high level of generality.

Research tools

In this article, I shall present the results of the study using a proprietary questionnaire consisting of 16 questions (of varying complexity) and 4 demographic questions. This questionnaire has allowed, among other things, the attitude of students regarding chosen demands of a party and their views on some controversial topics which were popular enough to trigger disputes in the election campaign to be examined.³ In the main part of the article I shall present the distribution of answers to the first question in the questionnaire, consisting of 11 claims (identical with the demands of the party—they are quoted and transferred from

² All programs of the electoral committees were present on the Internet (in the period 07.11.2015–20.11.2015). In constructing the questionnaire and the selection of specific demands, I used the following documents:

1. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014*
2. Platforma Obywatelska: *Polska przyszłości. Program Platformy Obywatelskiej RP 2015*
3. Nowoczesna: *Nowa Polska teraz. Kierunki programu*
4. Kukiz'15: *Strategia zmiany. Potrafisz Polsko!*
5. Zjednoczona Lewica: *Program wyborczy*
6. Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe: *Deklaracja wyborcza PSL. Wybory parlamentarne 2015*
7. Koalicja Odnowy Rzeczypospolitej Wolność i Nadzieja: *Dumna, Bogata Polska. Program partii KORWiN*
8. Partia Razem: *Razem inna polityka jest możliwa. Program wyborczy.*

³ In this article I look only at the attitude of students towards specific party offers. Students' opinions on controversial topics will be described in another article.

the electoral programs, without revealing the committee that signed the particular postulate). Respondents could refer to these demands of the party on a five-point Likert scale, which helps discover the degree of acceptance or lack of consent on the quoted assertion.

Selection and conduct of the study

The group selection was random. Whole (exercise) groups, rather than individuals, were selected. This sort of selection was conducted mainly for organizational reasons. During the process of selection, I made sure that it was representative for both directions, which is why people for each year of study were involved. The survey was conducted only among full-time students at the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences; I omitted PhD students and part-time studies. The research was conducted personally, after obtaining the consent of conducting the exercise. Immediately before the test, all participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study.

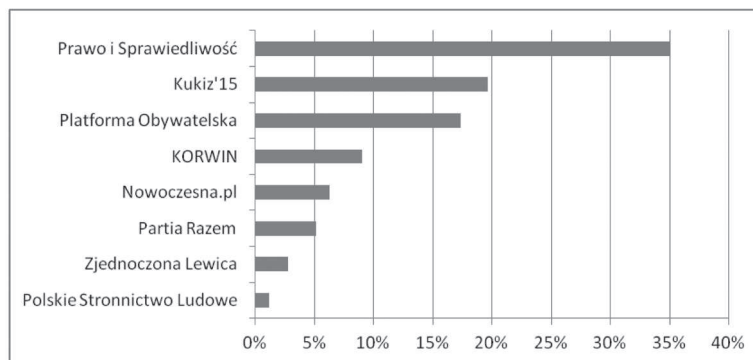
The survey was conducted in The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw in the time period from December 2015 to February 2016 and so it took place in a relatively short period of time after the parliamentary elections, which may indicate the topicality of the issues raised in the questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed in 27 exercise groups + (the study was conducted in at least two groups for each year of undergraduates and graduates, which gave at least 10 groups on one field of study). The questionnaire was completed by 506 people, of which 53.6% were students of General Pedagogy and 44.4%—students of Special Pedagogy.

The study involved mostly undergraduate students (58.7%). As many as 97.7% of the respondents were born between 1990 and 1996, i.e. during the test they fit into the age group 19–25 years. With further analysis, independent variables were also considered in the questionnaire. These include, besides the above-mentioned (faculty, degree: Bachelor's and second degree, the age of the respondents), also the level of interest in politics and—in the case of the analysis results for the title of this article—the support given to a particular party during elections. Because of the small number of men participating in the study, the analysis did not take into account the variable of gender (the vast majority of respondents—95.4% were women).

Presenting the results

Almost 40% of students (exactly 36.6%) admitted that they had not participated in the elections. In turn, more than 10% of the respondents refused to identify their favorite. Every second respondent (50.2%)⁴ declared their participation in the elections, by pointing to a specific election committee but one should bear in mind that declared participation in elections is usually higher than actual participation.⁵ The figure below shows the percentage distribution of APS students' support for electoral committees taking part in parliamentary elections

Figure 1.
Support for the electoral committees taking part in elections to the Polish Sejm in 2015 (N = 506)



Source: self-prepared.

Below I present the results of my own research, which are the main subject of this article. For the purpose of a clearer and more easily readable presentation, 11 points were listed. Each of them is entitled in accordance with the content of the postulate as stated in the election program and at the same time corresponds to the assertion present in the questionnaire.

⁴ Attitude towards democracy, politics and views of respondents in comparison to other results and general social trends are described broadly in another publication.

⁵ Cf. CBOS, *Kto zamierza głosować 10 maja? Determinanty uczestnictwa w wyborach*, Warszawa 2015, p. 1.

1. The Polish state should withdraw from the running and financing activities in the field of education

The flagship postulate of the KORWiN party—an expression of extreme neo-liberal approach to education—met with only the marginal support of APS students. Only 5.6% of students agreed with this postulate (including 2.6% who strongly agreed). Nearly 90% did not endorse the proposal for a total privatization of education and the cessation of funding educational activities from public money—including more than 60% strongly opposed to such a solution.

Nine percent of students (23 persons) declared their support for the party of Janusz Korwin-Mikke. Among them, only 4 people (representing 17%) tended to agree with this postulate. None of the supporters of the party did not give full acceptance for the idea. Whatever the party preference, the support for the withdrawal of the state from running and financing activities in the area of education is very low. The vast majority of students are in favor of funding education from the state budget.

2. Abolish the obligation of education

The questionnaire contains yet another postulate taken from the election program of the KORWiN party, standing on the position that the mandatory nature of education contributes to lowering the level of teaching and the devaluation of the real education. (Speech e.g. On the promotion of the students do not meet certain requirements for the next year in connection with the mandatory school age.) The KORWiN party appears to be the only one in Poland representing such extremely liberal views on education. Also in the case of the vast majority of claims—this time almost 95% of respondents expressed a lack of acceptance. Among voters, there were three most popular parties (PiS Kukiz'15, PO), more than 74% strongly opposed to the idea of abolishing education. Also, voters for the KORWiN party once again emphatically rejected the postulate of political formation. Only 8.6% of its supporters endorse the idea presented by the party. Just as in the previous theorem, the subjects regardless of party preference, direction or degree studies strongly reject the demand for the abolition of education.



3. Stop the privatization of schools

A left-wing party by the name of Razem indicates the need to stop and reduce the privatization of schools. The distribution of answers to this question is much more uniform—there is no room, as in the case of the previous claims, for a far-reaching unanimity among the students. Almost every fourth person tested does not agree with the proposal of Razem, while 45% accept the idea. Almost 30% do not have their own opinion on the matter. By far the strongest support for this postulate is expressed by the supporters of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—including 33% that strongly agree with it. In no other party does the percentage of supporters of departure from the privatization of schools exceed 20%. The greatest opposition to stopping privatization exists among the Kukiz voters (40% disagree with this postulate).

4. Stop the liquidation of schools

Another postulate of the Razem party meets with high acceptance of students. Nearly 75% of respondents did not agree with the liquidation of schools (and 50% strongly disagree). Supporters of all the most popular parties subscribe to this postulate. Only a marginal percentage of respondents remain strongly opposed (6% of respondents strongly disagree). On the other hand, 7.6% tend to disagree. The survey results indicate a strong belief in public about the need to halt the liquidation of schools.

5. Free breakfast and lunch for each child in school and kindergarten

The proposal contained in the Zjednoczona Lewica program, the notion that children should not be kept hungry and malnourished at school is something strongly supported by students. More than 85% rather agree or strongly agree with the postulate of Zjednoczona Lewica. Fewer than 10% of respondents rejected the leftist demand.

The proposal is supported by most voters of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (71% strongly agree). The weakest, though not at all considerable, support was achieved among voters of Kukiz (50% strongly support

and 25% rather supported). Like the previous postulates, there is almost complete unanimity among respondents as to the validity of the introduction of free meals for children in schools and kindergartens.

6. Medical care and dental care in schools and kindergartens

Another demand put forward by several formations at the same time has even more support: the Zjednoczona Lewica, Razem, Nowoczesna.pl, as well as the winning and now ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. It is worth mentioning that Platforma Obywatelska also pointed to the need to improve the function of caretaking in school. Compliance in this regard occurs among the political parties and students participating in the study. Over 90% of respondents were in favor of the restoration of dental and medical care. 70% strongly agree with this idea. Regardless of political affiliation, almost all unanimously support this demand.

7. The introduction of free textbooks in primary and secondary schools

A thought offered by Razem and the Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, enjoys very high support students. More than 85% accept the proposed solution (50% strongly agree). Less than every tenth student disagrees with the proposal to introduce free textbooks. The smallest percentage of supporters among the voters of Kukiz (46%) and the KORWiN party (26%).

8. Pre-school education should be as equally accessible and free as education in primary school

Yet another idea—this time placed in the election program by Zjednoczona Lewica—enjoys the support of more than 90% of students (more than 2/3 of respondents strongly agree). Only 6% think to the contrary and does not speak for a free pre-school education. Voters of all political affiliations equally agree with this postulate.



9. Cancel the test system during the “maturity exam”

In its program, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość announced their departure from the test system during final examinations. In the light of this research, the proposal is seen as questionable. While in the case of previously described demands, you can talk about a relatively high level of consensus among respondents, in this case we find very different answers. More than 45% reject this idea (definitely or moderately). Slightly fewer (40.6%) of respondents agree with the proposal of PiS. Less than 15% have no opinion on this subject. Interestingly, the distribution of responses among voters PiS remains almost the same as among the respondents.

10. Disposing of the six-grader test

PiS promised the abolition of the test system; a similar position was presented by Platforma Obywatelska, which advocated the need to cancel the six-grader test entirely. This idea belongs to the demands that strongly divide respondents. Almost half of them (48.5%) reject the proposal, while 36.6% welcomes the idea of liquidation of tests for six-graders. 62.8% of the voters of Platforma Obywatelska agrees with the idea. Among the supporters of PiS, the percentage of people signing up under the demand of liquidation of the six-grader test is 49.5%.

11. The behavioral assessment will have far-reaching consequences; It will be included in the average grade, and it being too low will prevent promotion to the next grade

The postulate submitted by Prawo i Sprawiedliwość raises doubts among students and meets with great scepticism. Only 36% support the growing importance of the evaluation of education. In turn, more than half of the students (51.3%) expressed their disapproval. Among the supporters of PiS, the party presenting this idea, the percentage of followers is even lower than among all respondents and was 32.5%, while only 6.7% objected strongly.

The following diagram shows the distribution of the level of acceptance of ideas on education, which in the study took the form of theorems.

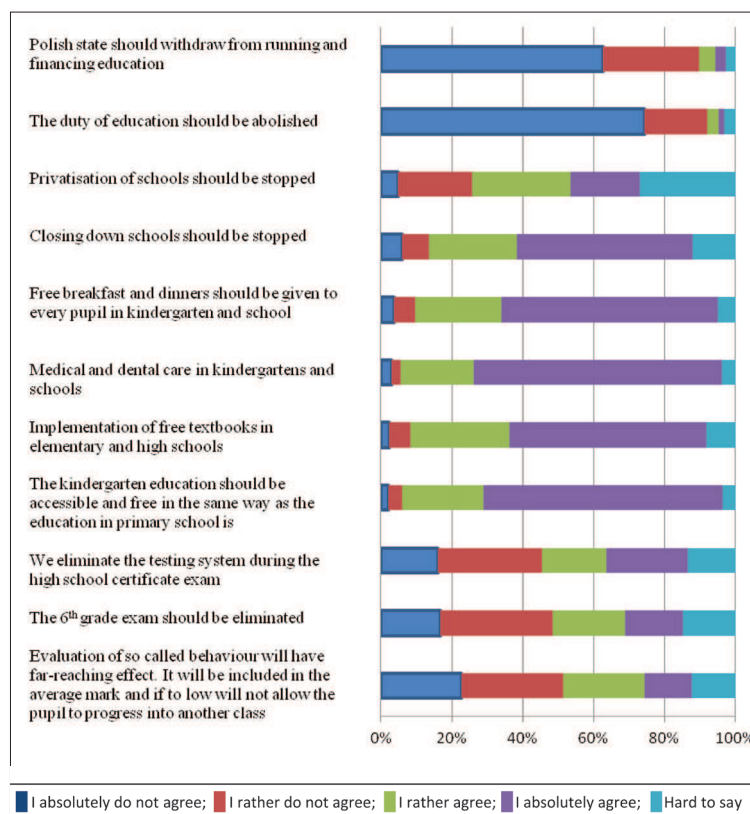


Figure 2. The distribution of the level of acceptance of the demands of the party (N = 506)

Source: self-prepared

Some reflections in the context of the test results

The results of the survey were conducted among the students of The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. They show that when it comes to most issues, there is a relative consensus as to the validity or groundlessness of the party demands. Out of the 11 claims, there was a consensus in 7. It turns out that the students speak for the possible participation of the public sector in education. Over 90% are



supporters of free education in kindergarten. A similar percentage of people believe that schools should provide medical care and dental care. More than 80% are in favor of free textbooks in primary and secondary schools and free breakfasts and lunches for each student and preschooler. The idea of abolishing education is seen as unacceptable by the surveyed students (in the case of this proposal, there is the greatest unanimity—92% disagree with the postulate to abolish education). If you also take into account the marginal percentage of people who agree to the withdrawal of the state from running and financing activities in the field of education, a picture emerges of students upholding the principles of the welfare state, which allows for the creation of a just social order, guaranteeing secure and democratic education system Poland. Students expect that the state will provide free education from an early age, and at the same time that school will largely pursue protective functions, involving even providing medical care and meals. Therefore demands identified with the left-wing option met with the greatest approval. However, the parties of the left-wing do not enjoy significant support among students. It should be emphasized that most of these demands are not subject to stormy debate within the political environment regardless of their identity, as students agree with the necessity of active participation of public institutions in the education system, not questioning the role of the State in ensuring the best possible conditions for education to every citizen. The party which enjoys the greatest support amongst students—Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, supports the demands for which there is cross-party consensus, and perhaps it is now their loudest advocate in the public space. Besides, regardless of party preference, there is a general consensus on the obligation of equal opportunities or performing care functions by the school. Only the KORWiN party was openly opposed to the financing of education and support for socially disadvantaged children. Paradoxically, the approach to education of this group of voters participating in the study was no different from the position of the respondents. There was a lot of controversy over the idea of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, to attribute greater importance to the assessment of education. It would have far-reaching consequences, including the need to repeat a year if the assessment was failed. This is a very conservative postulate, giving great priority to the treatment of discipline and obedience, and it did

not gain approval among students. The divergence of views between them and the ruling party posting this aspect in its program, a demand which is actually consistent with the party's ideology, does not affect, however, the party preferences of APS students, among which PiS remains the group with the largest group of supporters.

M.J. Szymanski draws attention to two types of factors that may prevent the carrying out of educational reforms. The first is the lack of understanding among politicians and the people responsible for the shape of education or the importance of education in the process of modernization of the country. Today it is widely known that the "expansion of education entails many consequences. Responds to the needs of social, economic and political factors therefore create new conditions for the economy and socio-political life."⁶ In short, in modern societies, it is the best investment in the broader development of the country. Lack of conviction regarding the need to invest in education prevents, according to Szymanski, the introduction and implementation of changes in education.

Another factor of the impeding reform is the lack of "social consensus on many matters concerning the broad guidelines and specific decisions concerning education. Although it would seem that the main problems and challenges of education should be settled 'beyond boundaries', and yet—as you know—party interests often outweigh the merits of the case."⁷ The results of the acceptance level for the selected demands clearly indicate that for some ideas there is broad consensus between the political parties and the studied members of the student community of APS. Some of these demands are fixed and do not seem to be neither negotiable nor abolishable (e.g. Free public education). Other party ideas are not likely to be realized in the near future, because, as politicians proclaim, they lack financial resources. You can always consider alternative projects to invest in budgetary resources, in terms of increasing the efficiency of the invested capital. For example, it raises a reasonable doubt regarding the effectiveness of the notorious and controversial program of support for Polish families "500+". Many experts, but also no small part of

⁶ M.J. Szymański, *Edukacyjne problemy współczesności*, Kraków – Warszawa 2014, p. 183.

⁷ Ibidem.



the public, believe that a much more effective form of family support would ensure that all children have access to free meals and medical care in educational institutions. However, the results of the survey allow us to presume that a high percentage of Poles with the full approval would accept alternatives to the current concept of family support advocated by the present government.

Basically, a review of the results of the study raises some questions that emerged as both in the context of civic education, and training programs for future educators, there is co-responsibility for its shape and the education of young generations:

(1) Are the students at all familiar with the programs of political parties for which they vote? Or perhaps it is not programs or ideas that play a key role in voting, but rather the popularity of politicians, their image or the pillars of support in pre-election polls?

(2) Do students support the parties in accordance with their rational self-interest? Perhaps in the near future, many of them will be bound professionally with the education system, and their children will attend kindergartens and schools. Perhaps they are guided by individual benefits (e.g. job opportunities) or social values (e.g. the quality of education)? In principle, both approaches are not at all contradictory and need not be mutually exclusive.

(3) What is the role of individual party positions on specific issues of education in the context of the decision of voters to support a particular option or not. Do visions of the party, for example the funding mechanisms for education, textbooks, school reading lists or principles of assessment of behavior are an important element to be taken into consideration when deciding during an election? Do students ever decide to vote based on the specific demands of the party (including in relation to education)? What role does education have in their individual rankings?

Conclusion

The studies relate to only a few aspects of the education system, but they are still very important from the point of view of the public interest and the prospects of modernization of education for the needs of the modern state. They allow us to conclude that there are problems and issues which drive the students of pedagogy to a very

high level of cohesion and unanimity. The majority of students, regardless of political preferences or the level of interest in politics, share the same beliefs. Some of the key educational issues did not appear among them in any of the controversial research, which may indicate commitment of students to such democratic values as freedom (e.g. The right to decent and safe education), equality (equal protection of rights, equal opportunities) and justice (equal access to educational institutions).

The study allowed us to capture some of the prevailing views on some important issues among students, while not exhausting the broad and complex issues involving the education system. It is hard to imagine that the views of the public, including teachers and future teachers—for whom work and competence depends largely on the real and daily functioning of education at all levels—may have been omitted or ignored in the process of designing education and possible reforms. Undoubtedly, pedagogy students are not representative of the general public and their opinions may differ significantly from the opinion of the general public. The results, however, reflect their mood and attitude to a few selected issues of education, and more importantly, allow to notice certain trends and decisive consent or negation of some ideas.

B. Śliwowski reflects on how “the constant war, the political games that run from predecessors, and soon the strengthened opposition to the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opponents—you can build anything in terms of the common good?”⁸ His reflections in this context are far from optimistic: “You cannot, because education is the trump card just for party-related and trade-related struggles in the sphere of social engineering, in which either there can be something that the competitors spoil, outplay them (...) or force to pursue after coming to power, something that is contrary to their ideology.”⁹ Polish voters have repeatedly experienced the reality that promises presented during elections, for various reasons, are not realized. Pre-election promises too often turn out to be “pie in the sky”. They gain the support of voters rather than aiming for the general good.

⁸ R. Nowakowska-Siuta, B. Śliwowski, *Racjonalność procesu kształcenia. Studium z polityki oświatowej i pedagogiki porównawczej*, Kraków 2015, p. 226.

⁹ Ibidem.



The support posts of the survey determine the direction of policy. Unpopular solutions translate into a decline in public acceptance. Short-term support is growing when politicians “sense” moods in the society and are able to drift in the direction expected. The more important task is to transfer the public in accordance to its preference for the shape of education, as it was loud and clear.

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