

Agnieszka Kasińska-Metryka

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Agnieszka Kasińska-Metryka

The Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MARKETING CONDITIONS OF ELECTORAL ACTIVITY OF WOMEN

*A woman is like a tea bag,
you can not tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water*
(Nancy Reagan)

Abstract:

The purpose of the article was to show the problem of female electoral activity in Poland. This subject fits into a current debate on the participation of women in political systems and its limitations. There are many obstacles that prevent women from political participation and their influence is still rather symbolic than real. The source of this situation is also historical and social. Moreover, young democracies are at greater risk of “marketing pathology” because their institutional mechanisms are not built on the foundations of civil society. The perception of politics differs among men and women, but this is mainly due to exogenous factors. Political marketing as a set of tools in the same range can affect men and women, although the differences appear at the level of self-creation of image, choice of strategy and the style of ruling after winning an election.

Key words:

women electoral activity, political marketing, Polish political system, stereotypes, psychological conditions of electoral activity, political participation

Electoral activity of women is a subject that fits into a current debate on the participation of women in political systems and its limitations. Much attention has been paid to create mechanisms which are to help women enter the political arena, while some are also trying to find solutions in the system which would allow the power of women to be not only symbolic but also real. Political activity

is still a key behavioural component in the political sphere, but equally important is the political involvement – a notion which is slightly neglected. These categories are mutually interdependent, because the aspect of function (behavioural) should be supported by an intellectual aspect (cognitive-emotional). According to the theories of political psychology, activity shall be considered as a narrower concept, while the involvement as broader concept which includes, among others, interest in politics, the daily tracking of the news, frequent discussions about politics, and recognition that politics is very important in life, also membership or activity in a political party [Skarżyńska 2005].

In this article, both of the above areas have been referred to in order to analyse the psychological and marketing conditions of electoral activity of women. In the existing literature the outlined problems are present in the works of Krystyna Skarżyńska, Janusz Reykowski, Andrzej Falkowski, Wojciech Cwalina, and also in touched upon by Andrzej Antoszewski. As the last author mentions – “what we call the political consequences of the electoral system can either mean mechanical effects, being a direct result of the application of specific institutional arrangements or psychological effects, determining the behavior those participating in” [Antoszewski 2013: 327].

Following the above observation, it has been decided to examine the nature of incentives that influence the behaviour of specific groups such as women. Political marketing and psychology of politics use and refer to the same mechanisms of an individual's behaviour, which in terms of the market are referred to as consumer behaviour. Despite the convergence of politics with the area of economic activity, there is a peculiar characteristic of the former, which makes an individual both a reasonable client and an irrational voter. Two main hypotheses have been adopted to be verified by partial questions. The first of these involves the belief that there are no differences in the mechanisms of political marketing interaction on voters as per their gender. It is not the tools used that differentiate electoral activity but stereotypes concerning the role of men and women in politics, because they act as a filter and ultimately determine the choice of a male or female candidate in the struggle for power.

The second hypothesis refers to the question of whether the brain structure, in terms of a man and a woman, is so crucial that it may have an impact on the perception of politics, and consequently, on the political involvement or its lack thereof. In the literature of bio-politics this notion is relatively common, however, no consensus has been reached by the researchers. The latest research in neurobiology helps come to the conclusion that the differences that exist do not affect the thinking concerning politics and forming of the opinions.

The level of the brain structure is the lowest level of analysis and, therefore, this consideration should be started from it. The scientifically-proven

differences in the brain structure of men and women relate primarily to the density, circuit diagram, and the size of the neurons. There are also differences in the lateralisation of speech and spatial skills, but they are not as crucial as the individual variables (independent of sex). The subtle differences in brain structure between men and women, analysed with more advanced methods, have not given answers as yet to how those anatomical differences are reflected in concrete actions, yet they have allowed us to verify the stereotypical role of women in political life [Kasińska-Metryka 2012].

It is worth mentioning that in the past it was claimed that men were standing on a higher level of evolution and they only were predestined for activities of a political nature. The differences in the brain structure were also exaggerated (in particular due to its size) and for these reasons the woman was marginalised on the outskirts of society. Subsequent studies have shown that the male brain was usually larger and heavier than the female brain, but the relative weight (weight of the brain relative to body weight) is almost the same. It was also found that the male brain might have fewer nerve cells in some places on its surface, but we can also encounter results of studies which show the direct opposite. Furthermore, it was found that the brains of men, in spite of being larger, are prone to a faster shrinking process. From the period of maturity to the age of forty men lose their nerve tissue at a rate almost three times higher than women. Concluding the level of brain biology, it is clear that brains have “sex,” but they are more alike than different.

Lack of female political activity and involvement does not therefore derive from brain biology but from other sources, among which are:

- historical and systemic conditions ((including late-attained rights to vote, the low level of political culture)
- political socialisation processes aimed mainly at boys
- intra-group mechanisms (eg. lack of solidarity among women versus solidarity among men – politicians)
- unequal division of labour (housework) among men and women
- stereotypical perception of the role of women in politics [Fiske 1998: 357-411]¹.

The fact of the historical conditions of both physical activity and political involvement is obvious and it would bear repeating the truism that the late-attained right to vote slowed down women’s way not only to the polls, but also to the *summit of power*. Non-democratic systems inhibited possibilities of participation for both women and men however, it should be stressed that the fight for freedom often pushed women to the second row. Systemic changes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have taken place since the late

¹ One of the existing typologies by S.T. Fiske [Gilbert D. T., Fiske S. T., Lindzey G, 1998].

80's proved the existence of regularity – where real power was appearing the number of women as representatives was decreasing. The analysis of data on women in parliaments before and after the transformation shows that in Poland, the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania, the phenomenon looked similar [Matland, Montgomery 2004] i.e., the number of women in parliaments drastically decreased. It should be also noted that the building of the „myth of freedom” was based on the commemoration of men and their achievements, and women's role was marginalised, and with time ignored.

The traditional model of the family, the lack of well-developed standards of participatory democracy, unequal share of household chores between men and women, as well as the lack of mechanisms of mutual support among women contributed significantly to the consolidation of the opinion that “politics is the domain of men”. Here, it should be noted that in the case of Poland the above opinion has significantly changed over the past twenty years. The number of women who share this belief has decreased by 50% (the number of men who share this view has also decreases, but much slower). Ziemowit Jacek Pietraś presented an interesting diagnosis of the reasons for the lower participation of women in politics. He combined the conditions, which according to him derive from the brain structure and imposed social role. „Men – Pietraś said – think more logically and analytically while women are more *emotional and holistic – they synthesise all of the problems based not on logic but on intuition.*” [Pietraś 1998: 307]. He also notices that in the social relations men are “ladder builders” (they define their place in the hierarchy) and women are “great weavers” (seeking a good atmosphere and interpersonal relations in the group). In the political world therefore, men notice the struggle for power, status and influence, and the women a zone of cooperation and coordination [Pietraś 1998: 308].

The afore-mentioned explanation may be taken into account during the analysis of the lack political activity, however it does not fully explain the character of mechanisms responsible for decision taking while voting. Indeed, if women represent a conciliatory style of action in public life, why do they cast their votes for offensive candidates, who lead political struggles? What conclusively influences the elective decision election - political declarations or the way in which the candidate gets the message to the electorate, including women? In fact, it is a question of form and content influence. Women striving to build a good atmosphere, and happy (using a wider choice of words) to express their emotional states, appreciate in male politicians their interpersonal skills. Communication skills are a component of the image, and therefore the external image of a political entity - the candidate or a party. Is the political image perceived and evaluated differently by women and men, and if so, what are its elements and what is their extent? To what extent does electoral communication

(advertising, direct marketing, political public relations) influence the voters' decisions? Is gender a factor differentiating the impact? The above questions narrow the focus of analysis to the effects of marketing and thus integrate themselves into the broader debate on the role of political marketing in the development of modern democracy

Supporters of marketing practices emphasise the communicative aspect of the methods and practices applied, whilst opponents often reduce marketing to modern propaganda. Without going into the unveiling of the above problem, it should be stated that marketing treated as a philosophy of action, and also as a set of tools, can be used to achieve both positive and negative objectives. Young democracies are at greater risk of "marketing pathology," as they have not solidified institutional mechanisms and have not built the foundations of civil society. The growing political awareness, acquired experience, conducting of political discourse – they make the public resistant to influence of power centres based on a "populist marketing." Is Poland at this stage of systemic experience? Are women more or less susceptible to the effects of marketing?

All the above questions require sound answers based on psychological research. Analysis of the forms of women's activity who have managed to come to power proves that they engage in so-called soft areas of politics, such as social welfare, health, education, etc. Therefore, it strengthens the stereotype that issues such as national security or the defense are somehow "associated" with men. Wojciech Cwalina and Andrzej Falkowski [2005: 216] also pay attention to the fact that, according to the existing opinion, women who get into parliament begin to sympathise with feminist views and thus become the representatives of their gender, not all voters. The latter opinion may, however, raise the question whether the same mechanism operates in Poland? Analysis of the political scene provides evidence that there exists a problem in female politicians' lack of solidarity rather than "fake feminism". Women who enter the decision-making bodies often adopt a masculine style of ruling, and prefer to be surrounded by men as their subordinates.

It is interesting that, as per opinion polls in Poland, almost half of the respondents (47 percent) believes that more women than are currently should serve important functions in the political life of the country, and less than a third of respondents (30 percent.) claims that the number of men and women in politics is just the way it should be [www.cbos.pl]. Although a relatively large number of respondents (17 percent) declare that gender politics does not matter, it is difficult to challenge the existence of gender stereotypes in the preferences during election.

Moreover, the theory of sexual patterns shows that preferences for selecting a particular gender of a candidate are rather a predisposition, not a

momentary inclination. We attribute stereotyped characteristics to candidates of a specific gender which - according to voters, prove their political competence. In light of the research conducted in 30 countries by Williams and Best's, the content of the masculine stereotype consists of features such as: aggression, activity, authoritarianism, arrogance, self-control, courage, etc. However, the stereotype of femininity is based on assigning women's lack of ambition, warmth, sensitivity, gentleness, shyness, modesty, etc. Even from these few exemplary features that supposedly to describe women and men, we can observe that in politics, treated as a game of power, men seem to be for voters more predestined to take part in it, and in terms of image - more attractive

At the level of self-creation of that image, and then its management it is evident that male candidates try to expose their courage, ambition, determination, so they reinforce stereotypical characteristics. Women, on the other hand, tend to run away from the values assigned to them - that is, they play male roles. A woman presenting herself as gentle, kind, sensitive and warm would be likely to gain favour, but that would not have any correspondence to the number of voters. The so-called conditional value (i.e. one would vote for him / her, provided that he/she has a chance of winning) makes voters look for a candidate who, though not optimal, ensures that their voice is not "lost". With only one vote assigned, a voter does not want to take the risk and give it to an individual or a group which is at the bottom of popularity rankings.

In this way, you can explain such failure of the "Women's Party" which appeared in Poland in 2007. Its formation was preceded by a movement "Poland is a woman" and the manifesto published in the press. Founders of the Party declared its character to be beyond ideological and indicated a willingness to act on behalf of women. The same communication strategy was applied in commercial messages, out of which the most remembered was the billboard, where the founders of the party presented themselves without clothes, indicating thereby that they have "nothing to hide". In the parliamentary elections in 2007, the Women's Party recorded a list of candidates in only seven districts and did not exceed the threshold. Subsequent elections failed to improve the listings of the party that drifted towards the left-wing circles. In the presidential elections of 2010, the Women's Party supported Grzegorz Napieralski - in the second round it did not support any of the candidates. Prior to the parliamentary elections in 2011, the Women's Party again reached an agreement to start on behalf of SLD party (translator's note: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, Democratic Left Alliance), but none of the candidates received a mandate. The above state of affairs is proof of the under-representation of women in politics due to cultural barriers and the final belief that it is more cost-effective casting votes for male candidates and placing them on the top of the lists [Sekuła 2010: 86-87]. The

observed preferences and voting behaviour encompass a wide range of attitudes towards women in politics. As observed by Richard J. Crisp and Rhiannon N. Turner there exists a phenomenon of both hostile sexism and so called benevolent sexist attitudes that characterise the idealisation of women in their traditional roles in life. *“While these are positive stereotypes, they limit the entry of women to specific roles, providing justification for the social male domination”* [Crisp, Turner 2009: 182].

To summarise the above-mentioned considerations, based mainly on analysis of the Polish political scene in the past 25 years, we can draw the following conclusions:

1) Complex cultural, economic and structural determinants (level of professional activity of women and men) contribute to the stereotypical image of women as less predestined to perform political roles than men², especially in terms of leadership and management of so called strategic areas.

2) Women, who decide to compete in elections create their image based on the visibility of similar features as male candidates (determination, inspiration, courage, etc.), or with an emphasis on the attributes ascribed to women (kindness, gentleness, communication skills, etc.). In the latter case, even if they get into power structures, they usually do not have any real influence on decision-making, or they deal with areas „compatible” with the nature of women - education, welfare, health care. Women who are active in the areas ”reserved” for men are disavowed based not on actual achievements or lack thereof, but through the prism of gender criteria. (see Joanna Mucha as a Minister of Sport).

3) Political marketing tools are used in the same way for electoral competition for both women and men. Differences arise at the stage of building electoral strategy and in this respect we can say that women less often decide to launch a negative campaign or engage in more brutal activities than men.

4) Public-opinion polls in Poland confirm that politics is much more an area of concern for men than women. Women show little interest in politics which results in less political activity, expressed by the declared willingness to participate in the elections. Women are not different from men in the preferred type of election, i.e. presidential elections are the most popular regardless of gender. The difference, however, appears in the so-called certainty of voting – there are a majority of women in the undecided electorate (although the difference is of variable size depending on the type of election) [Kobiety i mężczyźni o różnych sprawach].

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² More on lack of female representatives in politics in EU in: [Wawrowski 2007].

range can affect men and women, although the differences appear at the level of self-creation of image, choice of strategy and the style of ruling after winning an election. These arguments relating to the psychological and marketing motives of political activity and involvement, only show certain trends, as the effectiveness of measures taken in politics by both men and women can be verified in relation to a particular place and time.

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