

OPENING OF NEW ELECTION POLLING STATIONS: THE EFFECT ON TURNOUT AND DIASPORA VOTING PATTERNS

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Abstract. Opening of additional polling stations in foreign countries has been brought forward as a method to raise the turnout of diaspora voters in Latvian parliamentary election, and the number of polling stations abroad during last four elections has almost doubled. In this article, the author tests the argument that the increase in the sheer number of polling stations and the expansion of territorial coverage is an election parameter in foreign countries with the potential to raise the election turnout. In sharp contrast to a popular argument and the academic debate, the results of the Latvian data analysis show that opening of new polling stations did not meet the intended goal and cannot be regarded as an effective method for raising the diaspora voter turnout; the means must be sought in other factors of election organisation and voter behaviour. To compare data of voter behaviour in foreign countries in four separate parliamentary elections and to determine tendencies in diaspora voting patterns, the deviation of the elections outcome in foreign countries from the general national results are analysed by the help of calculation model that uses the Voting Outcome Coefficient. The article outlines that the third and fourth wave of emigration have introduced a new tendency of extreme stratification in the results between the Latvian Association of Regions (2014), KPV LV (2018) and the rest of the political parties. The article also analyses the deviation of the elections outcome in the new polling stations from the vote share in particular foreign countries by the help of Polling Station Coefficient, and concludes that in the 13th Saeima election, all newly opened polling stations were beneficial for KPV LV as results in all of them were proportionally even better than the list's overall results in a particular country.

Keywords: parliamentary elections, diaspora, turnout, polling stations.

JEL code: C51, D72.

Introduction

The low number of polling stations in foreign countries as well as generally poor territorial coverage are considered as predominant factors for the low turnout of the Latvian diaspora in parliamentary election. Therefore, opening of additional polling stations abroad has been brought forward as a method to raise the turnout (Riteniece, K., 2014). In parallel to the recent - third and fourth - waves of emigration, which started in 2008 and 2013 respectively, the number of polling stations in foreign countries has almost doubled: from 64 polling stations in the 10th Saeima election in 2010 (Central Election Commission, 2010a) to 121 polling station in the 13th Saeima election 2018 (Central Election Commission, 2018a).

In this article, the author provides analysis on the issue of opening new polling stations in foreign countries as a method to raise the turnout of diaspora voters, as well as the deviation of votes cast for election lists when compared to overall results in particular country and the deviation of votes cast specifically in the new polling stations with the objective of characterising and determining tendencies of diaspora voting behaviour.

The selected time period corresponds to the third and fourth wave of emigration and therefore covers four elections – the 10th Saeima election in 2010, the early parliamentary election after dismissal of 10th Saeima in 2011, the 12th Saeima election in 2014 and the 13th Saeima election in 2018. With the third emigration wave, Europe became the main destination point, and it is estimated that, during this period, 160 thousand people left Latvia, and of these more than 120 thousand moved to European Union countries (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2020; PMLP, 2018). In 2020, the size of the Latvian diaspora population is estimated in a wide range from 204 thousand up to 506 thousand people in total depending on the data source, methodology and definition of the diaspora (Hazans, 2020). In their policy planning

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documents, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers uses data where the Latvian diaspora numbers around 373 thousand people (Par planu darbam ..., 2021). The lack of precise data concerning the actual size of the Latvian diaspora in the era of dynamic regional and global mobility, as well as the existence of differing calculation methodologies, which emphasize the theoretical debate about the problematics of estimation of the content and size of the diaspora, are two issues within the purview of the research conducted, and the case of Norway, which is described in this article, illustrates it, in particular. In this research, the data sources about the size of diaspora are mixed. The Eurostat data is used as a basis for calculation, but where not available – the data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia (PMLP) is utilised. Combining the fact that Europe is the prime destination of the third and fourth emigration wave and the data about the largest Latvian diasporas in the world (Eurostat, 2020), four countries have been selected for case studies – United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, and Norway.

Although data and analysis about election results in polling stations abroad is available for each election, the analysis about diaspora voting behaviour specifically in newly opened polling stations has not been provided so far. In this article, the proportion of such votes in comparative relation to the overall results in United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, and Norway, is analysed.

Hypothesis No. 1 of the research: opening of new polling stations in foreign countries in Latvian parliamentary elections as a method to raise the turnout has not been effective.

Hypothesis No. 2 of the research: in the new polling stations in foreign countries in Latvian parliamentary elections, the distribution of votes cast for particular election lists is disproportional to overall results in a particular country.

The aim of the research is to identify whether opening of new polling stations in foreign countries in Latvian parliamentary elections raise the turnout of diaspora voters, and to find out whether the distribution of votes cast for the lists of candidates in the new polling stations is proportional to overall election results in a particular country.

Research tasks: 1) to analyse Latvian parliamentary election results in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and Norway since 2010; 2) to test the correlation between the increase of the number of polling stations and election turnout in these countries; 3) to calculate the deviation of votes cast for election lists from overall results in particular country in the new opened polling stations; 4) to analyse whether there are differences in the voting pattern in the new polling stations in regard to overall election results in a particular country.

Research methods: statistical and election data analysis, data comparison, synthesis for selecting and grouping the election data and statistical data, case studies, empirical research, literature review. Information and data were derived from various sources: the Central Election Commission, Eurostat, PMLP, the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, analytical reports, publications and research related to the themes of elections and diaspora.

The novelty of the research is: 1) to test the argument that the increase in the sheer number as well as the territorial coverage of polling stations is an election parameter in foreign countries with the potential to raise the election turnout of the Latvian diaspora; 2) to calculate the proportional differences from the overall results in a particular country for election lists in the new polling stations and to determine the specific voting pattern in the new polling stations.

Research results and discussion

1. The size of the diaspora, the number of polling stations, and their correlation to the voter turnout

The most dramatic increase in the size of Latvia's diaspora can be observed in the United Kingdom, where the size of the Latvia's diaspora has risen almost 10 times: from 10 thousand people in 2010 to 118 thousand people in 2018. In Ireland, in the selected time period the diaspora remained constant in size with around 22 thousand people. In Germany, the diaspora increased from 13 thousand people in 2010 to 34 thousand people in 2018. In Norway, the size of Latvia's diaspora increased from 3 thousand people in 2010 to 11 thousand people in 2018 (Table 1). The number of polling stations in these countries has increased as follows: from 3 to 19 in United Kingdom, from 1 to 4 in Ireland, from 1 to 9 in Germany and from 1 to 4 in Norway (Table 1). Although it does not correspond proportionally to the growth of the size of the diaspora, the geographical coverage or "the net" of polling stations has been improved over the years. This aspect has a theoretical potential of increasing the voter turnout in elections, and this argument has been used in Latvia in public discourse (Riteniece, K., 2014), as well as in academic sources in theoretical discussions about the methods and means of increasing the voter turnout (Brady et al., 2011).

Table 1

Changes in the size of the diaspora and the number of polling stations in Latvian parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and Norway (2010-2018)

Year	Country	Size of diaspora	Number of voters	Number of polling stations
2010	United Kingdom	9 835*	5 839	3
	Ireland	21 815	2 166	1
	Germany	12 699	4 535	1
	Norway	2 757	246	1
2011	United Kingdom	16 739	10 059	7
	Ireland	21 296	4 001	2
	Germany	7 184	5 303	5
	Norway	4 878	545	1
2014	United Kingdom	90 279	27 759	15
	Ireland	15 696*	10 337	4
	Germany	26 600	8 090	7
	Norway	9 424	1 166	2
2018	United Kingdom	118 452	51 500	19
	Ireland	21 070	14 021	4
	Germany	34 123	14 060	9
	Norway	11 118	2 756	4

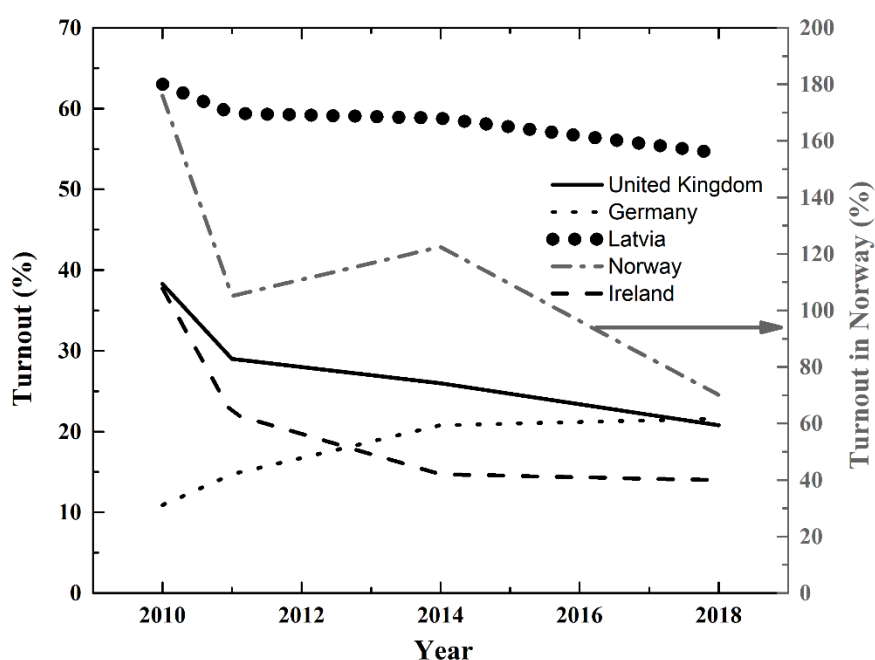
* PMLP data

Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a, 2011a, 2014a, 2018a; Eurostat 2020; PMLP 2010, 2014, 2017, 2018.

Nevertheless, the analysis shows that growth in the number of polling stations and the extension of territorial coverage of the polling stations in foreign countries, which might improve the accessibility to the elections, lower the individual costs of political participation and therefore lead to higher voter turnout, has

actually not resulted in increasing participation in elections. The absolute number of citizens participating in elections, in the context of the fast-growing size of diaspora, of course, has risen, but the proportion of votes cast has, in sharp contrast to expectations (Riteniece, K., 2014), decreased; the single exception is Germany (Fig. 1). In Germany, the voter turnout has constantly increased, starting at an exceptionally low rate of 10.9 % in 2010 and reaching 21.6 % in 2018, which nevertheless cannot be regarded as a high indicator of participation.

Analysis reveals a problem with the Norway data which must be addressed separately and features the problematics of availability of precise data about the size of the diaspora in the context of dynamic mobility of workforce. The voter turnout in this country is estimated 176 % in 2010, 105 % in 2011, 123 % in 2014 and 70 % in 2018 (Fig. 1). Such results indicate that, in Norway, the actual number of individuals in the diaspora and persons entitled to vote is much bigger than officially estimated. Among the possible reasons are transnational or "fluid" lifestyles (Hazans, 2020), ambiguous definitions of the "diaspora" (Hazans, 2013; Goldmanis, 2015), as well as the possibility to live and work in Norway up to 3 months in a year without registering with police. The data shows that the combination of afore-mentioned factors, which encumber and cloud the estimation of the size of the actual diaspora and actual number of Latvian citizens abroad on the day of parliamentary elections, is especially visible and prominent in the case of Norway, and this tendency is not confined to one year (Fig. 1). All the same, there is no positive correlation that can be determined between the number of polling stations and voter turnout in the case of Norway.



Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a, 2011a, 2014a, 2018a.

Fig. 1. Title. Diaspora voter turnout (2010-2018)

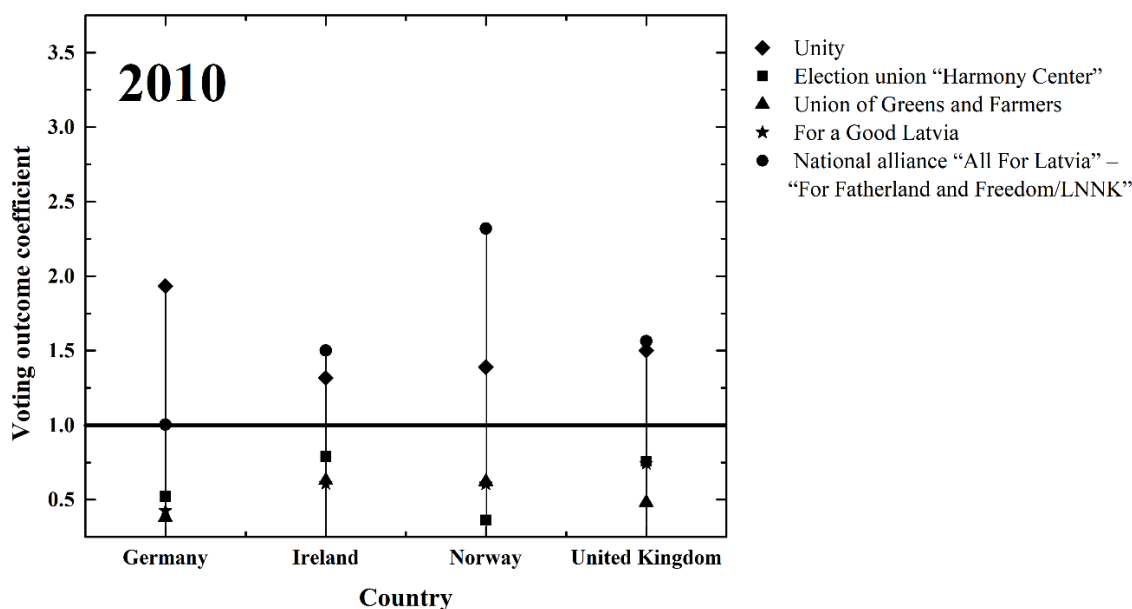
Although voter turnout in the diaspora decreases (except for the case of Germany) and a negative correlation can be observed, the opening of new polling stations cannot be regarded as the cause of this tendency, of course. The reason for low turnout in the diaspora, most likely, is the same as observed nationally – overall political apathy and a general decrease of voter turnout. Moreover, the "profile" of parliamentary elections within the diaspora is clearly regarded as insufficiently attractive and relevant. In comparison, in the so-called Language Referendum of 2012 (the referendum on the Draft Law "Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia", that provided for adding the condition about Russian as the second official language in Latvia), the overall turnout in foreign countries was 72.71 %

(Central Election Commission, 2012), and in United Kingdom and Ireland voters travelled long distances to polling stations and even stood in line up to 4 hours to cast their votes (Jauns.lv, 2012), which clearly indicates the difference in the perception of voters in the case of different events.

Therefore, the argument that opening of new polling stations as a key election parameter in foreign countries increases the political participation and diaspora turnout, is not supported by the data. This method generally has not been effective in reaching the goal of increased turnout, and a positive correlation can be observed only in one single foreign country (Germany). From the point of view of democratic principles, the opening of additional polling stations in foreign countries and expansion of the net of polling stations supports the idea of "moving closer to citizens". Nevertheless, the methods to reach the aim of higher voter turnout must be sought in other factors of election organisation and voter behaviour.

2. The voting behaviour of the diaspora in foreign countries

Election data shows that diaspora voting behaviour differs from general national results, and these differences change over years, thus building specific voting behaviour patterns and tendencies. To determine the deviation of the elections outcome in foreign countries from the general national results, the Voting Outcome Coefficient was introduced in the research. This calculation model shows the proportion by which election outcomes differ from the national outcome for all elected lists of candidates and allows for the comparison between four parliamentary elections and in four countries. The point of reference '1' indicates the national election result for a particular list of candidates, while deviation below or above this point is the proportion of the difference in the voting outcome in a particular country for a particular list of candidates. The model allows for the comparison of the data proportionally and the determination of tendencies in diaspora voting patterns.

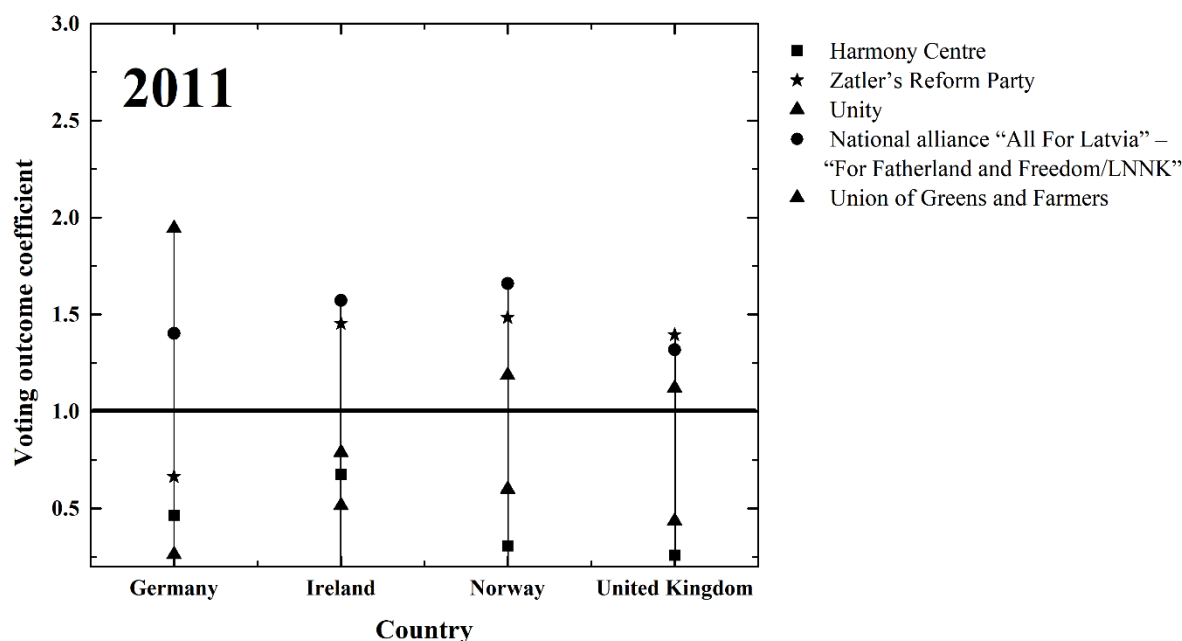


Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a, 2011a, 2014a, 2018a.

Fig. 2. Voting Outcome Coefficient in foreign countries (2010)

Data from the 10th Saeima election shows that two electoral lists had proportionally better election results – Unity and the National alliance, while three remaining (elected) lists reached much lower results in diaspora voting than was witnessed altogether nationally (Fig. 2). The Union of Greens and Farmers and Harmony Center (which has participated in other elections with slightly different names of electoral lists,

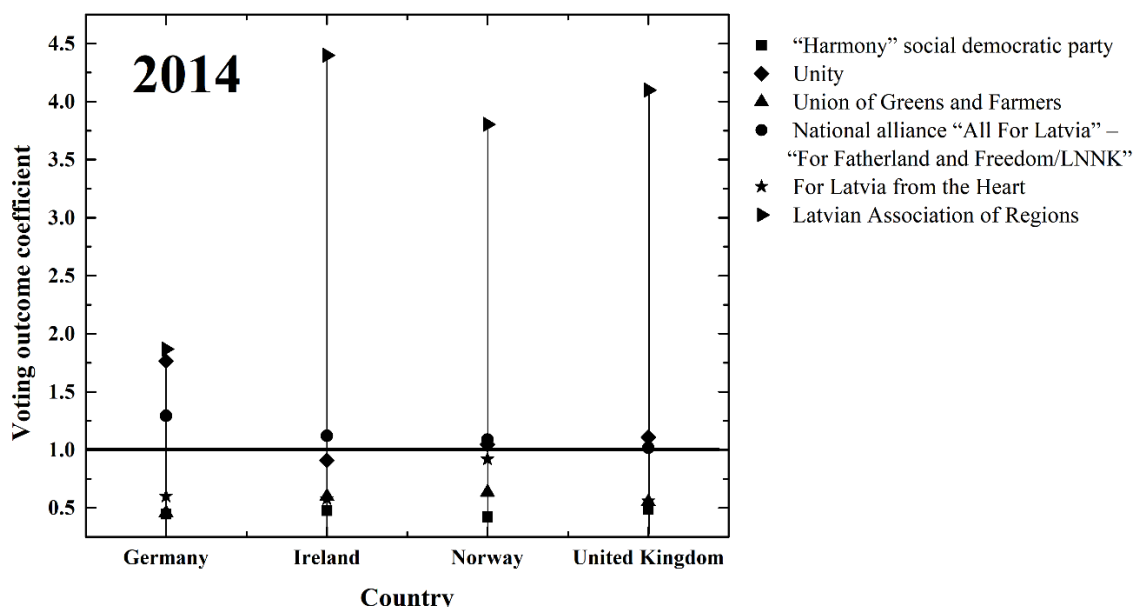
but all include the word "Harmony"), both have been re-elected also in all subsequent elections, but have maintained this tendency of having a low Voting Outcome Coefficient in the diaspora (Fig. 3-5).



Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a, 2011a, 2014a, 2018a.

Fig. 3. Voting Outcome Coefficient in foreign countries (2011)

The data of the 11th Saeima election indicates the previous tendency of higher Voting Outcome Coefficients for the Unity and National alliance (Fig. 3). With this election begins the tendency for Unity to lose the electorate in Ireland: the coefficient falls from 1.3 in 2010 to 0.8 and 0.9 in 2011 and 2014 respectively, till reaching the lowest point of 0.4 in 2018 (Fig. 2-5).

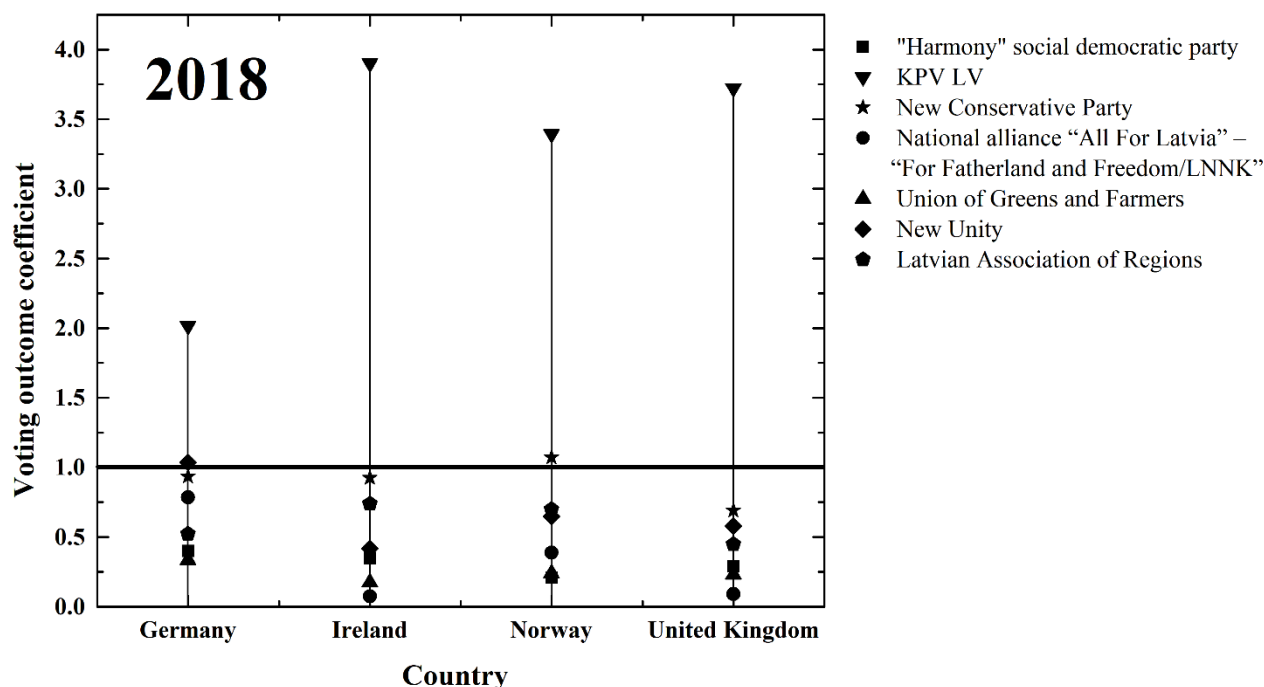


Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a, 2011a, 2014a, 2018a.

Fig. 4. Voting Outcome Coefficient in foreign countries (2014)

The data of the 12th Saeima election presents two new tendencies. First, one newcomer – the list "Latvian Association of Regions" - achieves an exceptionally high Voting Outcome Coefficient. If, in the previous elections, the lists with better results in foreign countries fluctuated in the coefficient value range

between 1 and 2, then the Latvian Association of Regions in 2014 reached the coefficient value of 1.9 in Germany, 3.8 in Norway, 4.1 in United Kingdom and the high value of 4.4 in Ireland (Fig. 4). Second, the curve of the coefficient of Unity and the National Alliance strongly flattens, and both lists lose their profile as parties for which the diaspora votes intensively.



Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a, 2011a, 2014a, 2018a.

Fig. 5. Voting Outcome Coefficient in foreign countries (2018)

The previously observed tendencies continue growing in the 13th Saeima election. It must be noted, that Mr. Artuss Kaimins, the leader of the Latvian Association of Regions in 12th Saeima elections, together with some other like-minded left the party and established a new party "KPV LV", which continued the tendency of achieving remarkably high Voting Outcome Coefficients in foreign countries in 2018 (Fig. 5). It must be noted that the electoral list "The Latvian Association of Regions" which participated in the 13th Saeima election cannot be regarded as the same as the one which participated in the 12th Saeima elections because of fundamental change in leadership, personalities and programmatic goals, although the name of the list remained the same. Because of this peculiarity, the Latvian Association of Regions has been included in the illustration of the 13th Saeima election data, although it did not get any seats in the parliament. This tendency deepens in the next election even more (Fig. 5).

The data from the 13th Saeima election shows extreme stratification in the results between KPV LV and the rest of the political parties. It shows visibly higher proportional results for KPV LV in the diaspora, and, in Ireland, the Voting Outcome Coefficient is almost four times bigger than the national results, and predominantly lower results in the group of other electoral lists which secured the seats in the parliament. The New Unity and the National Alliance lost their profile of "diaspora parties", while, at the same time, KPV consolidated the profile reached by the Latvian Association of Regions in the previous election.

3. The voting behaviour of the diaspora in the new polling stations in foreign countries

The calculation of Voting Outcome Coefficient indicates a tendency of disproportionately high results for the Latvian Association of Regions (in 2014) and KPV LV (in 2018) compared to the national results, the research analysed the voting pattern in the new polling stations for both parties against overall election

results in a particular country. To determine the data deviation in particular polling station against the overall voter support in particular country, the Polling Station Coefficient was introduced in the research. The point of reference "1" indicates the election result for KPV LV in a particular foreign country, while deviation below or above this point – represents the proportion of difference in the voting outcome in a particular polling station.

Table 2

Polling station coefficients for KPV LV in 13th Saeima election (2018)

Country	Poll.st. status	Polling station	Vote cast in the polling station (%)	Polling Station Coefficient
Ireland	New	Balbrigen	63.5	1.1
		Waterford	64.6	1.2
	Old	Limerick	62.6	1.1
		Dublin	46.1	0.8
United Kingdom	New	Burton	68.4	1.3
		Liverpool	70.0	1.3
		London (2)	26.5	0.5
		Margate	69.8	1.3
	Semi-new	Manchester	46.5	0.9
		Guernsey	50.0	0.9
		Birmingham	59.1	1.1
		Boston	68.8	1.3
		Bristol	51.1	1.0
		Derby	52.2	1.0
	Old	Edinburgh	41.0	0.8
		Mansfield	63.5	1.2
		Newry	65.4	1.2
		Peterborough	71.2	1.3
		London	23.7	0.4
		Bredford	62.1	1.2
		Straumeni	64.6	1.2
Norway	New	Kristiansand	53.5	1.1
		Alesund	51.4	1.1
	Semi-new	Bergen	46.4	1.0
	Old	Oslo	47.9	1.0
Germany	New	Munster	46.6	1.6
		Freiburg	34.2	1.2
	Semi-new	Bremen	35.9	1.3
		Kunzelsau	31.2	1.1
	Old	Dusseldorf	36.1	1.3
		Frankfurt am Main	27.8	1.0
		Hamburg	20.4	0.7
		Munich	21.9	0.8

Source: author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2018a, 2018b.

The data from 2018 shows that, in the new polling stations, the tendency of stratification of the results between KPV LV and the rest of the electoral lists is even stronger than in 2014. If in the old and the so-called semi-new (established in the previous elections) polling stations the Polling Station Coefficients are mixed, then in all the new polling stations the coefficients for KPV LV are higher than 1 (with only one exception – the second polling station in London) (Table 2).

In the 12th Saeima elections, when the tendency of election data stratification in foreign countries against national results was milder than in the 13th Saeima election, the Polling Station Coefficient for the Latvian Association of Regions was also less pronounced than for KPV LV in the 13th Saeima elections. In 8 of 13 newly opened polling stations, the results were higher than the results in the particular country (author's calculations on the basis of the Central Election Commission data, author's calculations based on Central Election Commission 2010a,b, 2011a,b, 2014a,b, 2018a,b). Nevertheless, in those polling stations where the coefficient was lower than 1, the deviation was not very strong and was close to the results in the particular foreign country – from 0.7 up to 0.9.

In the diaspora, voters voted disproportionately more for the Latvian Association of Regions (in 2014) and KPV LV (in 2018), which can be regarded as the same political force. This tendency of disproportionate voting is even stronger in all newly opened polling stations in the foreign countries observed (the Polling Station Coefficient in all of them is high).

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

- 1) Hypothesis No. 1 is proved: opening of new polling stations in foreign countries in the last four Latvian parliamentary elections cannot be regarded as an effective method for raising the turnout.
- 2) In 2018, the stratification of the election results (the Voting Outcome Coefficients) between KPV LV and the rest of lists became extreme. Proportionally, there are visibly higher results for KPV LV, and predominantly lower results in the whole group of other electoral lists.
- 3) Hypothesis No. 2 is proved: the newly opened polling stations were beneficial for the Latvian Association of Regions (in 2014) and KPV LV (in 2018). In 2018, all new polling stations, with only one exception, gave KPV LV proportionally better election results than in the foreign countries examined (the Polling Station Coefficient in all new polling stations was higher than 1).
- 4) To raise the voter turnout in foreign countries, the author recommends allowing voters in foreign countries to choose among all five constituencies instead of the present regulation which establishes that the Riga constituency also includes the electorate residing outside of Latvia. Strengthening of voters' regional identity can also have a positive impact on strengthening the diaspora's ties with Latvia, and on promoting democracy and voter turnout.

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