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## **Elections to the European Parliament in 2019 on Billboards – about the Outdoor Election Advertisement. Based on the Example of the City of Lublin**

**Summary:** Election committees, which have used outdoor advertisements during the campaign to the European Parliament in 2019, have copied ideas from previous campaigns, including the one to the local authorities in 2018. Again, the idea of a nationwide campaign containing negative advertisements against the candidates from the Law and Justice election lists has been used. The same types of the advertisement have been used and the same people have supported candidates in the advertisement authority-type. The thing which distinguished the outdoor advertisement run during the campaign before the elections to the European Parliament from the advertisement used in the campaign to the local authorities was election slogans.

**Keywords:** elections to the European Parliament 2019, European Parliament, political communication, outdoor advertisement, election advertisement.

### **Eurowybory 2019 na billboardach czyli rzecz o zewnętrznej reklamie wyborczej. Na przykładzie miasta Lublin**

**Streszczenie:** Komitety wyborcze, które w Lublinie wykorzystały reklamę zewnętrzną w kampanii przed wyborami do Parlamentu Europejskiego w 2019 roku, powieliły pomysły z kampanii poprzednich, w tym samorządowej z 2018 roku. Ponownie wykorzystano pomysł na ogólnopolską kampanię zawierającą reklamy negatywne, skierowane przeciwko kandydatom z list PiS, zastosowano te same typy reklamy, te same osoby wspierały kandydatów w reklamie typu świadectwo. Tym, co w praktyce odróżniało reklamę outdoorową prowadzoną podczas kampanii przed wyborami do Europarlamentu od reklamy zastosowanej w kampanii samorządowej były hasła wyborcze.

**Słowa kluczowe:** eurowybory 2019, Parlament Europejski, komunikowanie polityczne, reklama zewnętrzna, reklama wyborcza.

## Евро-выборы 2019 на билбордах или дело о наружной предвыборной рекламе. На примере города Люблина

**Аннотация:** Избирательные комитеты, которые в Люблине использовали наружную рекламу в кампании перед выборами в Европейский парламент в 2019 году, дублировали идеи из предыдущих кампаний, включая той в местные органы власти с 2018 года. Снова использовалась идея общенациональной кампании, содержащей негативную рекламу, направленную против кандидатов из списков Право и Справедливость, те же виды рекламы, те же люди поддерживали кандидатов в рекламе типа «сертификат». На практике то, что отличало наружную рекламу, проводимую во время кампании перед европейскими выборами, от рекламы, используемой в кампании местного самоуправления, это были предвыборные лозунги.

**Ключевые слова:** Евровыборы 2019, Европарламент, политическая коммуникация, наружная реклама, предвыборная реклама.

### 1. Introduction

Faces of politicians and their slogans on large-format panels are an undeniable sign of elections approaching. The necessity of competing against the opponents in order to obtain the mandate forces the candidates to utilise the whole spectrum of communication means used in politics. Outdoor political advertising is undoubtedly of great importance amongst them. It allows for the message to reach even the recipient who is not invested in politics. This is especially vital given the average voter turnout in Poland.

The participation of Polish people in the European Parliament elections in the first three occurrences did not exceed the quarter of potentially eligible voters and amounted to 20.87% in 2004, 24.53% in 2009 and 23.83% in 2014 respectively. However, this shifted dramatically during the European elections of 2019<sup>1</sup> where 45.68% of eligible Poles casted the ballot<sup>2</sup>.

Up until this moment, the lower percentages were justified by marginal relevance of the European elections while their importance only recognised within the domain of Public Relations<sup>3</sup>. Research results referenced by Waldemar Wojtasik seem to prove it. The aforementioned research was carried out as a part of the Political Preferences 2009 project (representative sample N=1086) in which only 2,5% of respondents defined the European Parliament elections as the most crucial. Wojtasik assumed the results of the survey, the aim of which was to rank the elections in Poland according to respondents' subjective opinion on their importance and, which ultimately concluded that 70% of those asked considered European Parliament elections as the least important. Moreover, Wojtasik underlined that considering the European Parliament elections as the least important could be a consequence of the lack of awareness for

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<sup>1</sup> The study of causes of this shift is not the focus of this article and should be discussed in a separate, dedicated work.

<sup>2</sup> *Wybory do Parlamentu Europejskiego 2019*, <https://wybory.gov.pl/pe2019/pl/frekwencja/pl>, accessed on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> W. Wojtasik, *Specyfika rywalizacji politycznej w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego*, "De Doctrina Europea", 2010, 7, p. 21. See also: K. Leszczyńska, *Udział obywateli w wyborach i referendach w Polsce po 1989 roku*, "Eastern Review", 2018, vol. 7, p. 60.

this type of elections in the collective social consciousness due to the fact that at the time of the survey, in 2009, there had been only two occurrences<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, after the two following elections, the marginal relevance of European Parliament elections to Polish people was still highlighted<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, Krystyna Leszczyńska indicated a possible correlation between the awareness of the European Parliament's importance in the structures of the European Union and the actual turnout. This aforementioned lack of awareness is supposed to translate into the voters' participation level<sup>6</sup>.

Regardless of the level of recognition for the role of the European Parliament in the structures of the EU, and also of the level of public engagement to acquire and broaden their knowledge on the topic, some political messages reach the voters without any special effort from their side. This is especially valuable in cases of those citizens who are not interested in gaining any knowledge on the subject discussed in this article; a message could reach them involuntarily during e.g. a daily commute. Obviously we talk here about political outdoor advertising, namely billboards, posters and banners which become street "decorations" in towns and cities from the very beginning of each formal campaign.

Even though during these few months these messages are forced to compete for viewers' attention against an abundant number of other outdoor advertisements of different commercial products, and they lead to a satiety of visual stimuli<sup>7</sup>, or even to a visual pollution of cities<sup>8</sup>, thanks to its brief messages this form, could reach even those potential voters who are not interested in politics.

The aim of this article is to analyse the types of the political advertisements used in the outdoors, namely billboards, banners and posters, as well as the analysis of colours appearing in the billboards campaign which occurred before the European Parliament elections in 2019. The research focuses on the period of the formal election campaign and the research field is the city of Lublin.

## 2. The essence of the outdoor

Outdoor – the oldest existing form of advertising usually takes form of billboards, banners or posters<sup>9</sup>. It also constitutes one of the most popular means of advertising which allows for a high frequency of contact with the advertising campaign<sup>10</sup>. Many advertisers consider it a primary means of conveying information due its multiple advan-

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<sup>4</sup> W. Wojtasik, *Specyfika rywalizacji...*, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> K. Leszczyńska, *Udział obywateli...*, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> E. Witek, *Komunikacja wizualna. Nowoczesne narzędzia*, Wydawnictwo Astrum, Wrocław 2014, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> T. Nawrocki, *Miasta nasze a w nich... Refleksje o wpływie reklamy zewnętrznej na miejską ikonografię*, „Acta Universitatis Lodzianis Folia Sociologica”, 2011, vol. 36, p. 123. [http://dSPACE.uni.lodz.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/316/121\\_nawrocki120\\_nawrockiFolia%20Sociologica%2036.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://dSPACE.uni.lodz.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/316/121_nawrocki120_nawrockiFolia%20Sociologica%2036.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), accessed on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> A. Kołomycew highlights not to associate the outdoor simply with a poster or a billboard. She underlines that “the external carriers are becoming an important part of the municipal architecture, sort of a ‘municipal furniture’. As an example, she references advertisements placed on benches or waste bins. See: A. Kołomycew, *Outdoor jako forma komunikacji wizualnej*, (in:) *Współczesne media. Status, aksjologia, funkcjonowanie*, vol. 1, I. Hofman, D. Kępa-Figura (Eds.), Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2009, p. 479.

<sup>10</sup> E. Witek, *Komunikacja wizualna...*, p. 40.

tages such as: high coverage, long-term effect and a relatively low cost as well as the fact that using simple messages and symbols can lead to an efficient brand creation<sup>11</sup>. The most valuable benefit of this medium is the possibility of 'geographical selection'. This feature allows the outdoor advertising to achieve goals impossible to reach by other means<sup>12</sup>.

Despite the strict limitations regarding the content, a somewhat superficial reception and a low demographical selection<sup>13</sup>, billboards are considered a popular and reliable medium of communication. The reason for this is that a message included in the advertising could also reach voters during the period of the pre-election silence, as this law does not apply to outdoor advertising<sup>14</sup> put in place during the time of the campaign. This is a great advantage of this medium.

### 3. Outdoor political advertising on the streets of Lublin

From the beginning of the self-government elections campaign from 2014, outdoor advertising related to elections which are addressed to inhabitants of Lublin usually take form of billboards, banners or posters placed either inside bus-stop shelters or printed out on special constructions and located on green strip between traffic lanes. Essentially, small format posters, very popular until now usually hanging off the street light poles, energy poles or sideroad barriers, are no longer used. This is a result of the resolution from February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014 adopted by the Lublin City councillors raising 10-fold the price for placing an election poster and equally the fine for hanging an unauthorised poster on the side of a public road which falls under the jurisdiction of the Mayor of Lublin<sup>15</sup>.

The Lublin outdoor campaign in the spring of 2019 was dominated by billboards although the notification boards plastered with posters and lawns crammed with banners suggest that the less expensive forms of outdoor advertisement also proved highly popular. As one of the most favourite means of contact with the voter, it revealed different types of advertising in this particular campaign.

If we assume the criteria of the relative pressure on the candidates funding the advertisement or their opponents, it allows us to differentiate two basic types of political advertisements: positive-focusing on the positive features, achievements of the advertisement sponsor, and negative-focusing on the criticism towards the political opponent<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> A. Grzegorzczak, *Reklama*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2010, pp. 95-96.

<sup>13</sup> B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2007, p. 389.

<sup>14</sup> K. Fichnová, Ł. Wojciechowski, P. Mikuláš, *Fotografia w kampanii politycznej – cele a rzeczywistość. Przykład parlamentarnej kampanii wyborczej na Słowacji w 2010 r.*, "Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia de Cultura", 2012, vol. III, p. 38, <http://studiadecultura.up.krakow.pl/article/view/1559/1350>

<sup>15</sup> *Uchwała nr 966/XXXVIII/2014 Rady Miasta Lublin z dnia 13 lutego 2014 r. zmieniająca uchwałę nr 393/XIX/2012 Rady Miasta Lublin z dnia 29 marca 2012 r. w sprawie wysokości opłat za zajęcie pasa drogowego dróg publicznych, których zarządcą jest Prezydent Miasta Lublin na terenie Miasta Lublin*, [https://bip.lublin.eu/gfx/bip/userfiles/\\_public/import/rada-miasta-lublin-vii-kaden/sesje-rm-lublin/uchwaly-rm-lublin/vi-kadencja-rady-miasta-lubli/sesja-nr-xxxviii-z-dnia-13-02/uchwala-nr-966xxxviii2014-rady/91236\\_966\\_xxxviii\\_2014.pdf](https://bip.lublin.eu/gfx/bip/userfiles/_public/import/rada-miasta-lublin-vii-kaden/sesje-rm-lublin/uchwaly-rm-lublin/vi-kadencja-rady-miasta-lubli/sesja-nr-xxxviii-z-dnia-13-02/uchwala-nr-966xxxviii2014-rady/91236_966_xxxviii_2014.pdf), accessed September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> See, W. Cwalina, *Polityczna reklama negatywna*, (in:) *Marketing polityczny w poszukiwaniu strategii wyborczego sukcesu*, M. Jeziński (Ed.), Dom Wydawniczy DUET, Toruń 2004, pp. 114-115.

In the Polish as well as foreign literature on the subject, there is a lot of focus on the phenomenon of the negative political advertising, including elections related. It is often portrayed in a context of its detrimental impact and yet it is also shown from the angle of its motivating and dynamic-inducing featuring in the political discourse<sup>17</sup>.

The results of the 1980s research referenced by Wojciech Cwalina, the focus of which was a negative billboard campaign, should persuade us to exercise caution or even refrain from utilising negative advertising in election campaigns altogether. Even though, there were some kind of negative reactions towards the targeted politicians, they only occurred among supporters of the person who funded this message, and by doing so it only reinforced the existing preferences. On the other hand, what could be recognised is an opposite reaction expressed by supporters of the politician targeted by the campaign. As highlighted by Cwalina, in general, there was a discernible decline in the opinion polls for the sponsor of the negative advertisement which allows the author to state that what occurred in this case was in fact a rebound effect<sup>18</sup>.

Despite the researchers highlighting the aforementioned effect, there are also those who point to some positive aspects of the negative advertising. According to Kamil Fil, in spite of discussions on the role of the negative campaigning in the context of democracy quality and concentrating on the detrimental impact on the voters, before taking the decision and casting the ballot, it is necessary for all necessary information to be accessible, from both negative and positive campaigns.

Positive advertising could be a powerful source allowing the candidates for presenting their achievements and accomplishments while the negative one could pose a risk of questioning them or verifying the promises made by an opponent<sup>19</sup>.

The negative political advertising appeared just at the very beginning of the analysed campaign period where the local billboard campaign overlapped with a national one.

It naturally concerns the posters targeting the candidates announced by the Law and Justice (PiS) electoral committee. They all included a photo of a particular candidate which was accompanied by a slogan: "Beware! He/she is leaving for Brussels. Let him/her be accountable for...." which would be followed by different statements such as "let her be accountable for defending thugs" (the then spokesperson for the Law and Justice party – Beata Mazurek) or "let her be accountable for what she's done to the kids" (the then minister of education Anna Zalewska) etc.

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. K. Fil, *Reklama negatywna a jakość demokracji – na przykładzie kampanii parlamentarnej z 2011 roku*, (in:) *Medialne reprezentacje kultury. Społeczeństwo-Polityka-Promocja*, A. Duda (Ed.), Wydawnictwo KUL, 2015, pp. 105-111; D. Piontek, *Mity reklamy politycznej*, (in:) *Kulturowe instrumentarium panowania*, R. Paradowski, P. Załęcki (Eds.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2002, pp. 157-170; A. Stępińska., *Skuteczność negatywnej reklamy politycznej*, (in:) *Kulturowe instrumentarium panowania*, R. Paradowski, P. Załęcki (Eds.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2002, pp. 185-198.

<sup>18</sup> W. Cwalina, *Polityczna reklama...*, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> K. Fil, *Reklama negatywna...*, p. 107.



Fig. 1 and 2. Negative political advertising targeting Beata Mazurek and Anna Zalewska  
Source: Author's personal archives.



Fig. 3 Negative political advertising targeting the then party in power  
Source: Author's personal archives.

This is a rerun of a strategy used by the opposition in the self-government campaigns from 2018 where billboards depicting Jarosław Kaczyński would appear under a common slogan “PiS took millions” followed by additional claims such as: “PiS took millions and yet everything is more expensive”, “PiS took millions, yet it wants to remain unpunished” or “PiS took millions, yet people cannot afford medicine” and “PiS took millions, yet there is no cheap housing available”. Hence, the billboard campaign started with a strong negative accent.

Among advertisements presenting positive features or accomplishments of a given sponsor, there was a customary form of advertisement which is the one of a personal testimony, a kind of recommendation that involves presenting a candidate and a known figure endorsing them. It uses a method called ‘irradiation’ which is essentially projecting the feelings from somebody well-known and respected onto a person less recognised but connected to the first one<sup>20</sup>. Since the popular posters with Wałęsa<sup>21</sup>, an advertisement based on an endorsement represents a permanent element of the public sphere during the time of the campaign.

During the research on this type of advertisement while running the Political Preferences 2014 project<sup>22</sup> (a representative sample of N=930), respondents were asked whether endorsements made by the party’s leader or another prominent politician recommending which candidate on the list to vote for, influence their choice, and if including a photograph showing a candidate posing with the party leader on the electoral poster could possibly, according to their opinion, help that candidate to obtain the mandate.

The research showed that the leader or another prominent politician recommending which candidate to vote for more often influences the choice among respondents who earlier defined their political views as right-wing rather than centre or even less frequently, left-wing. Similarly, again, the respondents who defined their political views as more conservative stated that a photograph of a candidate posing with a leader does indeed increase their chances in the election more often than the respondents of centre or left-wing viewpoints.

An advertisement based on testimony was also utilised during the European Parliament election campaigns in 2019. It was equally distinctive in terms of the billboard campaigns funded by Law and Justice electoral committee (KW PiS), as well as coalition electoral committee of the European Coalition (KKW KE) consisting of the following political parties: Civic Platform, Polish People’s Party, Left Democratic Alliance, Modern and the Greens. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of PiS posed for a photo with the first candidate on the list of KW PiS – Elżbieta Kruk – and by doing so gave her his blessing. Both Joanna Mucha and Włodzimierz Karpiński could count on the support of the mayor of Lublin – Krzysztof Żuk, as seen on the photographs below. It is important to highlight the fact that in the last couple of elections in the Lublin province, the most eminent candidates from the region were endorsed personally by Jarosław Kaczyński

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<sup>20</sup> S. Kuśmierski, *Reklama jest sztuką*, Warszawa, Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomiczna, 2000, pp. 155-156.

<sup>21</sup> See more: A. Cherek, *Plakaty wyborcze kandydatów Komitetu Obywatelskiego z Lechem Wałęsą*, “Kra-kowskie Studia Małopolskie”, 2013, vol. 18, pp. 384-410.

<sup>22</sup> A. Łukasik-Turecka, *Poparcie kandydata przez lidera partii a decyzje wyborców. Badania elektoratu “Preferencje Polityczne”*, 2015, vol. 10, pp. 123-134.

while the candidates affiliated with the Civic Platform running in the election either on behalf of the Civic Coalition (self-government elections in 2018) or the European Coalition (European Parliament elections in 2019) were supported by a prominent mayor of Lublin, a member of the Civic Platform. The popularity of mayor, Krzysztof Żuk, who is currently serving his third term as a mayor, having won his office in the first round the last two times, seems to be a better endorsement to those candidates than the actual leadership of the Civic Platform.



Fig. 4,5 and 6. Personal endorsements. The form of recommendation advertising used by Joanna Mucha, Włodzimierz Karpiński and Elżbieta Kruk  
Source: Author's personal archives.

The majority of the electoral committees decided on presenting their candidates using a typical image campaign which was a dominating kind of outdoor advertising. The city streets featured posters including the first and last name of each candidate, their appearance, a logotype of their political affiliation, the position of the candidate on



the ballot number and a list number or sometimes even a specific position on that list, a slogan a specific colour palette.

A colour palette is one of the fundamental parts of the visual message which consists of a composition of different parts, such as its lighting and location<sup>23</sup>. Colours are the most easily recognisable elements of all visualisation components<sup>24</sup>. All the colours used in advertising have identification and functional qualities,<sup>25</sup> and therefore the analysis of colours used in campaigns is indispensable in their general analyses<sup>26</sup>.



<sup>23</sup> A. Kołomycew, *Outdoor jako...*, pp. 477-479.

<sup>24</sup> A. Kołomycew, *Outdoor jako...*, p. 478.

<sup>25</sup> A. Kołomycew, *Outdoor jako...*, p. 478.

<sup>26</sup> See M. Kaczmarek-Sliwińska, *Aspekty public relations w strategiach wyborczych kandydatów na urząd prezydenta USA w 2016 roku*, (in:) *Amerykańskie wybory prezydenckie w erze postprawdy. Aktorzy, strategie, konteksty*, J. Misiuna, M. Mołęda-Zdziech, S. Łubiarz (Eds.), Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie, Warsaw 2018, p. 287.



Fig. 7, 8, 9 and 10. Typical image campaign for candidates: Bożena Lisowska, Andrzej Stanisławek, Krzysztof Hetman and Magdalena Długosz  
Source: Author's personal archives.

The analysis of the same visual identification of each of the electoral committee allows us to indicate that as customary, the candidates used the colours of political parties forming the committees they were representing. Thus, the posters of candidates running on behalf of the KW PiS, were dominated by the colours associated with the

party: dark blue and red. As concluded by Marcin Fijolek, they bear a great ideological charge<sup>27</sup>. On the posters of candidates from this party, the national colours played a considerable role. Similarly, the posters of Left Together candidates incorporated their party colours i.e. red and white. The colour white dominated posters of most candidates from the European Coalition, although some of them decided to also integrate the EU colours in theirs. One candidate from the Polish People's Party chose such colours to use on his poster during the time of the European Parliament elections.

#### 4. Conclusions

A common denominator for the billboard campaigns of most electoral committees, who displayed posters and billboards in the city of Lublin, was recreating the ideas from previous campaigns, including the ones from the self-government elections in 2018. Using the same idea of a national negative advertising campaign targeting PiS candidates, as well as choosing the same types of advertising by the leading electoral committees, or even support of the same politicians endorsing candidates who are often known from previous elections, indicate that regardless of the elections, the ideas for an outdoor political campaign in Lublin are reused from one election to another. The only discernible changes are regarding the colour palette chosen for the posters (e.g. reference to official EU colours)

In essence, the only differentiation allowing for identifying the purpose of the elections remains the slogan shown on the poster.

Outdoor advertising is one of the most popular tools used in that domain. When it comes to the most often used forms such as billboards, banners and posters, they are used in a traditional manner, meaning that if something proved successful in the previous elections, it is better not to change that.

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