






DILEMMAS OF POLITICAL PARALLELISM: POLISH WEEKLY OPINION MAGAZINES IN THE FACE OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS OF 2015

DYLEMATY PARALELIZMU POLITYCZNEGO. POLSKIE
TYGODNIKI OPINII WOBEC KRYZYSU MIGRACYJNEGO
W 2015 ROKU

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— ABSTRACT —

Within the article activity of media broadcasters during the migration crisis of 2015 has been analysed – the crisis whose peak coincided with the period of political campaign preceding the parliamentary elections in Poland. In this context, strong emphasis on issues related to the migration crisis, which had become one of the leading themes of the parliamentary campaign, could have been expected in Polish press market, especially taking into consideration strong political affiliations of weekly opinion magazines existing in the said market at the time. In the presented article, 207 issues of the following opinion weeklies have been analysed: “Newsweek”, “Polityka”, “wSieci” and “Do Rzeczy”, in order to determine the media importance of migration-related themes and of the level of political parallelism of the studied media (political/axiological or party

— ABSTRAKT —

W niniejszym artykule poddano analizie aktywność nadawców medialnych w trakcie trwania kryzysu migracyjnego w 2015 roku, którego apogeum przypadało na okres kampanii poprzedzającej wybory parlamentarne w Polsce. W tym kontekście, przy silnych afiliacjach politycznych tygodników opinii działających na polskim rynku prasy, można było oczekiwać silnej ekspozycji problematyki związanej z kryzysem migracyjnym, który stał się jednym z wiodących tematów w kampanii parlamentarnej. W niniejszym opracowaniu poddano analizie 207 wydań następujących tygodników opinii: „Newsweek”, „Polityka”, „wSieci” oraz „Do Rzeczy” – w celu określenia medialnej rangi tematyki migracyjnej oraz stopnia i charakteru paralelizmu politycznego badanych mediów (politycznego/aksjologicznego lub partyjnego profilowania przekazów

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profiling of media releases). The study used the content analysis method with reference to the concept of framing.

Keywords: migration crisis; mediatisation of politics; political parallelism; political bias; thematic framework

medialnych). W badaniach wykorzystano metodę analizy zawartości, z odwołaniem do koncepcji framingu.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys migracyjny; mediatyzacja polityki; paralelizm polityczny; stronniczość polityczna; ramy tematyczne

INTRODUCTION

The migration crisis of 2015 can be analysed from different research perspectives and this work focuses on the analysis of the manner/scheme in which Polish media reported on the events revolving around migrants/refugees. The intensification of migration in Europe coincided with a peculiar stage of political rivalry in Poland. The year 2015 was the year of both presidential and parliamentary elections, hence highly controversial social issues¹ regarding mass migration movements constituted (nearly automatically) the basis for an acrimonious pre-election debate – a debate willingly joined by Polish media broadcasters. The analysis of media broadcasters' activity allows for the determination of the degree and nature of political parallelism of individual media (political, axiological or party profiling of media releases), including the weekly opinion magazines with definite political and party affiliations.

The dynamics of migration crisis contributed to the fact that 2015 became the year of great challenges and threats connected with subsequent waves of refugees from the countries of Middle East and North Africa (MENA), but also economic immigrants from the same area of the globe, both for Poland and for other European states (Danahar, 2014). When searching for the main reasons behind the migration-refugee crisis of 2015, the fact that this migration pressure started increasing with the intensification of the Arab Spring wave in the area of MENA and with negative consequences thereof is well worth emphasising. The act of self-immolation of Bouazizi in Tunisia, which initiated the wave of social discontent in the country, later to spread subsequently to Egypt (Lipa, 2016) and other states of Maghreb and Mashriq, led to the situation in which local

¹ In fact, the potential relocation (“relocation threat”) of migrants/refugees to Poland may be discussed here – the description of the crisis as “phantom” (Demczuk, 2020, p. 335) may be considered truly relevant.

residents – not only suffering from poverty, but also enslaved politically for long periods under authoritarian regimes – started demanding both decent working and living conditions and wider civil liberties (Brennan, 2015; Amin, 2016). The success of the Arab Spring in MENA region both in political and social sphere was dependent, however, on complicated intrastate conditions (Esposito, Sonn, & Voll, 2016). The only state where the society truly benefited from the Spring was Tunisia (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015). Sadly, the fall of Libyan regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi or attempts to abolish the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad (Lesch, 2013) implied the outburst of military conflicts inside these countries and the appearance of the phenomenon of *proxy wars*, during which on one side, the United States (at the global level) and Saudi Arabia (at the regional level) and on the other side, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran accordingly, would support their favourites (Mabon, 2018; Kaldor, 2014).

The fact that the reaction of the European Union to one of the largest challenges and threats for the safety and stability of its member states was initially unproportional in relation to the increasing challenge needs to be acknowledged (Wojtaszczyk & Szymańska, 2017). The policies of individual EU states (Germany in particular) towards the refugees from MENA region were not characterised by common sense and long-term plan but rather by emotions (compassion increasing with new reports of deaths of refugees travelling to Europe, especially on the Mediterranean Sea), fear of culture clash², but also sense of guilt for improper and exploitative policy practised for decades by numerous states (especially former colonial states) in relation to these societies.

The most controversial decision in this matter, which triggered objections and bitterness in numerous EU states, was the decision of German Chancellor Angela Merkel of September 6, 2015, on suspension of certain regulations regarding border control – the so-called Dublin III regulation. Interestingly enough, this decision, supposedly taken in the name of Christian values as it has been emphasised by Merkel herself, those values which constitute the moral and ideological foundation of existence of this organisation in order to prevent an even greater humanitarian disaster and to save human lives, this very decision

² Muslims who had been staying in European countries for many years were not willing to assimilate or integrate, and their coexistence with Western societies was accompanied by the process of widely understood ghettoization supporting radicalisation and extremisms, which transformed into membership in structures of terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda or the so-called Islamic State and into activities of the so-called ‘lone wolves’.

became the reason for widespread and deep divisions and political dissonances among the EU states (Szczepanikova & Van Criekinge, 2018). The basic political problem testing the internal solidarity of the EU arose from the necessity of accepting responsibility for the refugee and migration crisis by all EU states (Maldini & Takahashi, 2017). The core of this problem was constituted by the issue of relocation of those arriving from MENA region to all member states, even those uninterested in this fact (like Poland or Hungary), those who could not benefit from it in any form, and which were simply apprehensive of political consequences (loss of social support and subsequent loss in elections) and also of consequences in the area of national security (increase in crime rate, growing unemployment rate, ghettoization, or finally Jihad terrorist attacks – the scenario observed in France, Germany or Belgium) (Bendel, 2017).

The petrification of the bipolar distribution of forces in Polish political market constituted one of the key factors influencing the transformation process and the development of Polish media system, and in particular of the information and opinion-generating media. Observation of operating practice of a considerable proportion of media (above all the so-called traditional media: television and the press; but more and more frequently also main online news portals), which propagate social and political content, hints at the conclusion that the strength of connection between the leading political parties (the Law and Justice, the Civic Platform) and individual media companies is growing gradually. The subsystem of digital media also adopted the model form of media and party parallelism in its development process (Hallin & Mancini, 2007; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2010; Hess & Mazur, 2012, Kolczyński, 2017). Hence, it is even more justifiable to assume that in complex social and political context determined by the migration crisis and election campaigns the key research issue is to define the level of political bias of media and above all (1) identification of criteria of selection, exposure (positioning) of media materials, and (2) identification of typical premises (of political, axiological or commercial nature) for selection of a specific option of depicting and interpretation of events occurring in the social space by a given broadcaster (Bennett, 2004; Michalczyk, 2013; Kolczyński, 2007; Klepka, 2021).

In 2015, the market positioning of Polish weekly opinion magazines in relation to political entities occurred in extremely complicated contextual conditions. Among factors of crucial influence on the functioning of media the most prominent were: (1) two subsequent election campaigns (the presidential elections of May 10 and 24, and the parliamentary elections of October 25) held in face of changing distribution of forces in Polish political scene – after

several years of dominance of the Civic Platform, the opinion poll results for the Law and Justice improved considerably, which suggested a more balanced rivalry in elections (with the growing outlook and cultural polarisation among potential voters); (2) conflict in Ukraine (particularly in the context of actions initiated by Russia towards Ukraine); and finally (3) increasing migration crisis (involving real possibility of influx of a large amount of migrants into European countries, including Poland). The last two groups of conditioning factors obviously placed the widely understood issues of Polish security in the centre of attention (both of the participants of political rivalry and of media broadcasters).

The peculiar commercial conditions existing in Polish publishing market in the segment of weekly opinion magazines should not be overlooked; faced with the continuing trend of relatively low level of readership for periodic magazines of this type, the intensification of competition between opinion journals presenting a similar editorial lines such as “*Polityka*”/“*Newsweek*” on the one hand, and “*wSieci*”/“*DoRzeczy*”/“*Gazeta Polska*” on the other, was clearly visible.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The main objective of conducted research was the identification of the concepts of reporting on the problem issues connected with the migration crisis assumed by Polish weekly opinion magazines and the relations with the political and party affiliations of selected media broadcasters. The analysis of campaigns proceeding both the presidential (10/24.05.2015) and parliamentary (25.10.2015) elections justified the conclusion that the issue of refugees/migrants from North Africa and Middle East constituted a highly discussed theme of these election campaigns (Czornik, 2017) and, in consequence, one of the basic criteria for market positioning of individual subjects of political rivalry. Hence, taking into consideration strong political affiliations of opinion weeklies existing in Polish media market, the strong exposure of themes related to migration crisis were to be expected – particularly during the parliamentary campaign in course of which we could observe the peak wave of migration activity in 2015. The assumption was made that the manner of presentation of the migration crisis – including its origins and potential consequences – shall depend strongly and be truly diversified due to political (in axiological sphere) or party connection of individual opinion weeklies’ publishers (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

In the hereby paper, 207³ issues of the following weekly opinion magazines published in 2015 have been analysed: “Newsweek Polska”, “Polityka”, “wSieci”, and “Do Rzeczy”; the basic criterion of selection of these journals were their sales results achieved in that year⁴. The research relied on the method of content analysis (main research method; qualitative and quantitative analysis, with author’s categorisation key), with reference to the concept of framing (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2012).

Moreover, the complex character of functioning of opinion-shaping media should be emphasised as they attempted to include contents difficult to absorb (due to limited information resources of their recipients) into their releases regarding the reasons, course and potential consequences of the migration crisis in the context of political rivalry in Poland. Therefore, even greater importance should be attached to the ability of broadcasting proper interpretation frames, enhancing the reception of transmitted contents (specific reception templates). Hence, the necessity of precise determination and description of (1) adopted selection methods as well as exposure of information constituting the foundation for the published press releases, and of (2) assumed concept of interpretation of events and phenomena occurring in the social space (Scheufele, 2000).

RESULTS

Throughout the year 2015, the studied weeklies have published the total of 366 releases devoted to the migration crisis, and the peak of the media interest was observed in the period directly preceding the parliamentary election in October (120 releases in September). Greater exposure of the migration theme was visible in weeklies connected axiologically with the right wing of Polish political scene: “wSieci” published 134 press releases (74 pieces in both September and October), while “Do Rzeczy” published 97 releases (37 in September and October)⁵.

³ “Newsweek Polska”, “wSieci”, “Do Rzeczy” – 52 issues each, “Polityka” – 51 (one double issue).

⁴ Average sales of opinion weeklies in 2015 according to data of the Association for Press Distribution Control: “Newsweek Polska” (average sales: 120,576), “Polityka” (118,949), “wSieci” (76,134), “Do Rzeczy” (55,265) (Kołacz & Sędek, 2016).

⁵ It is worth mentioning that also in subsequent years opinion weeklies associated with the right wing of Polish political scene continued to strongly exploit the migration theme: 2016 – 101 releases by “wSieci”, 98 – “Do Rzeczy” (in total more than 60% of all materials published

Table 1. Monthly Frequency of Publication of Releases Devoted to Migration Crisis of 2015 in Polish Opinion Weeklies (01.2015–12.2015)

	“Newsweek”	“Polityka”	“wSieci”	“Do Rzeczy”	Total
01.2015	6	7	11	12	36
02.2015	1	5	2	7	15
03.2015	3	2	3	3	11
04.2015	2	6	4	2	14
05.2015	0	1	2	4	7
06.2015	1	4	3	6	14
07.2015	1	8	3	2	14
08.2015	7	3	2	4	16
09.2015	18	20	54	28	120
10.2015	3	12	20	9	44
11.2015	9	8	19	12	48
12.2015	1	7	11	8	27
Total	52	83	134	97	366

Source: Authors’ own research.

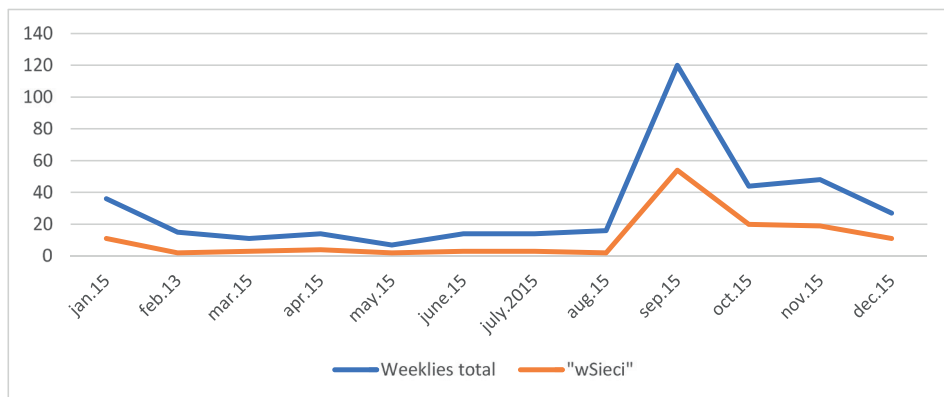
Undoubtedly, the fact that in spite of the increasing crisis, the migration theme played only a marginal role in the presidential election deserves our attention. The decisive poll advantage of Bronisław Komorowski in the first stage of the campaign resulted not only in the relatively low interest of opinion weeklies in this rivalry (Kolczyński, 2017), but also in resignation from search for issues that would differentiate the election offers of candidates.

The considerable growth of exposure of the migration crisis theme in September 2015 resulted from exogenous factors, the most prominent of them being the accumulation of crisis with the resulting solutions at the level of the EU regarding the issue of acceptance and location/relocation of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. In the group of internal conditions, we need to list the significant change of attitude of Poles towards the proposed solutions related to the migration movement; results of studies conducted by CBOS (Centre of Public Opinion Studies) reflect the occurring transformation of attitudes towards

by the studied journals), 2017 – 112 materials in “wSieci”, 87 – “Do Rzeczy” (60%), 2018 – 136 releases in “wSieci”, 70 – “Do Rzeczy” (81%).

refugees really well: in May 2015, 21% of the respondents were against accepting refugees, in August the same group grew to 38%. More than half of the respondents (52%) assessed the mechanism of so-called relocation of refugees negatively (CBOS, 2015). In this social context (in fact, the pre-election context), the issue of exploitation of the migration theme in the process of placement of the election offer by majority of election committees fighting for support was obvious. Above all, the approach to the migration crisis (and proposed solutions thereof) became one of key spheres of election competition between the Civic Platform and the Law and Justice – competition resulting in considerable media response in opinion weeklies sharing the values represented by these political parties. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the finish of the campaign preceding the parliamentary elections, which overlapped with the period of increase of the potential threat of immigrant influx to Poland, led to the creation of a specific wave of political communication (Wolfsfeld, 2000, pp. 226–229)⁶.

The publishers of studied opinion weeklies adopted differentiating concepts of positioning of texts dealing with the migration theme. In case of “Polityka” and “Newsweek”, considerably large level of attention to appropriate introduction of materials included in subsequent issues may be observed: 35% of texts in “Polityka” and 26% of texts published by “Newsweek” were signalled by: main feature



Picture 1. Election Effect of Communication Wave

Source: Authors' own research.

⁶ Analysis of the percentage of publication space within the whole issues of opinion weeklies demonstrates a very similar changeability in time distribution; analogically, in this case the special position of “wSieci” needs to be emphasised – the percentage of materials devoted to migration crisis and its social consequences reached the level of nearly twenty percent.

of the text on the cover with a photo, feature on the cover (without a photo), or feature on the first page of the magazine.

The weekly entitled “wSieci” seldom used features of materials to be published in subsequent issues (6% of texts), still in the period directly preceding parliamentary elections three September issues of this magazine stand out (issues 37 to 39). Covers of these issues include features of materials which exploit radical, political message typical for propaganda. Undoubtedly, the mere contents of these features clearly define the attitude of the editorial team not only to the migration crisis itself, but also to main political parties⁷. The contents of their releases were enhanced by appropriately prepared illustrations placed on the covers of the magazine, which clearly visualised the consequence of acceptance of refugees/migrants by Poland. The use of aggressive symbolics definitely attracts attention: in No. 37 the reference to the famous photograph from the beginning of German invasion in Poland in 1939, in No. 38 Ewa Kopacz presented as Sahid woman with quite primitive reference to the potential terrorist threat, No. 39 – the cover photo presents Jarosław Kaczyński and Victor Orbán – this symbolic reference to hussars was definitely much more subtle than those in the previous numbers of this magazine.

Due to the specific character of these journals definite domination of publications in the form of an article (report, accounts) was observed – the leader in this scope was “Polityka”. Additionally, the specifics of edition preferred by individual weeklies was also visible:

- very large number of opinion columns in weeklies sympathising with the right wing of the political scene; in “wSieci”, this journalist genre was used for more than half of texts (54%) (in “Do Rzeczy”, the percentage of opinion columns was definitely lower at the level of 25.7% and not much different from the standards of “Polityka” and “Newsweek),
- interviews were being published relatively frequently, “Newsweek” tended to use this form most often (28.3%) and the only exception here was “Polityka”.

Surprisingly, editors used the editorial page to refer to the migration theme to a very limited extent – this trend is particularly visible in case of “Polityka”, which

⁷ The mere contents of these features clearly define the attitude of the editorial team to the migration crisis and main political parties: *THEY ARE COMING! Germans Are Imposing a Suicidal Plan – Tusk and Kopacz Give In* (No. 37), *Ewa Kopacz Shall Create HELL FOR US AT BERLIN'S ORDER* (No. 38), *Orban and Kaczyński THEY WILL DEFEND EUROPE against the Leftist Madness and Islamists* (No. 39).

used this journalist format to comment on other issues related to the ongoing election campaign (Kolczyński, 2017).

The contents analysis of materials related to the theme of migration crisis allowed for identification of five main themes:

- 1) development of migration crisis,
- 2) influence of migration processes on the selected European states,
- 3) image/picture of refugees/migrants,
- 4) Islam/religion,
- 5) Islam terrorism.

Table 2. Amount of References in Studied Texts Devoted to Migration Crisis in 2015 Published by Weeklies “Do Rzeczy” and “wSieci” (01.2015–12.2015)

Main theme of publication	“Newsweek”	“Polityka”	“wSieci”	“Do Rzeczy”
Development of migration crisis	16	35	68	34
Consequences of immigrants influx	25	27	69	45
Image/picture of migrants	8	11	41	7
Islam/religion	5	6	14	38
Islam terrorism	18	22	29	14

Source: Authors’ own research.

The analysis of detailed threads in each of the listed themes has proven to be truly interesting. In the description of the development of the migration crisis, publications devoted to reasons of the mass migration movement tend to dominate. Moreover, considerable differences in the method of depicting of these issues by the studied weeklies are well worth mentioning. “Polityka” and “Newsweek” hint at two groups of stimuli triggering the migration process, namely: escaping war or repressions (this motive was discussed in 36 publications of “Polityka” and 26 of “Newsweek”), and search for better living conditions/economic stimuli (24 materials of “Polityka” and 13 of “Newsweek”). “Do Rzeczy” mentioned war or repressions-related factors in 17 publications, however, nearly as frequently the same magazine suggested that migration movement should be treated as organised expansion of Islam and Muslim society – exploiting in many cases language filled with negative emotions in order to create the dichotomous division of “us” versus “them” (Galtung, 2006). The most extreme presentation of this theme was proposed by magazine “wSieci” – in majority of publications (36 releases) the cultural, religious and demographic expansion was being depicted

and considerably less frequently reasons connected with the military conflict were mentioned (17 releases)⁸.

The most frequent consequence of migration crisis/influx of refugees mentioned in all publications was (variously interpreted) weakening of cooperation and trust among the states of the European Union (“Polityka” – 8 publications, “Newsweek” – 14, “wSieci” – 32, “Do Rzeczy” – 18). Both “Polityka” and “Newsweek” emphasised more strongly the threat in the form of increase of European nationalisms and growth of the role of political parties propagating this type of approach (respectively: 13 and 15 releases). The attention of magazines connected axiologically with the right wing of the political scene was directed to the danger of the so-called reversed discrimination (18 publications in “wSieci” and 7 in “Do Rzeczy”). The weekly entitled “wSieci” emphasised really strongly the possibility of increase in crime rate and the threat to the citizen’s sense of security (27 releases).

The image of refugees/migrants created by the analysed weeklies was highly coloured by emotions – in total as many as 272 publications played on positive, neutral or negative emotions of readers (using properly selected, at times simply drastic, expressions and phrases⁹).

Table 3. Number of Publications Creating Emotionally Charged Image of Migrants

Emotional charge of publications	“Polityka”	“Newsweek”	“wSieci”	“Do Rzeczy”
Positive/neutral	54	32	14	48
Negative	6	7	84	27

Source: Authors’ own research.

⁸ Four publications presented wrong decisions of Angela Merkel as the main reason of intensification of migration crisis (“invitation of refugees to Europe”).

⁹ Examples of frequently used expressions include: wave of refugees, storm of unwanted individuals, immigration cyclone, human tsunami, dirty river of people from nowhere, invasion of poverty, Asian-African hordes, crime-loving fanatics, etc.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of obtained results leads to the conclusion that the potential effect of publications included in the studied opinion weekly magazines is limited to further consolidation of already existing attitudes towards important social and political issues (particularly in case of “wSieci”, “Do Rzeczy”, and “Newsweek”). Hence, from the perspective of the leading entities involved in political competition, Polish opinion weeklies allow for exposure of values compatible with the views of the so-called hardened voters, with doubtful persuasive potential.

The analysis of data hints at correlation between the media agenda of “wSieci” and “Do Rzeczy” and political agenda of the Law and Justice party¹⁰, particularly regarding the issue of negative consequences of mass immigration. The before-mentioned weeklies intentionally consolidated the message included in the election offer of the Law and Justice by skilfully manipulating the emotional attitude of their audience. Undoubtedly, the migration crisis provided an opportunity to exploit emotions effectively (in case of the negative ones) to clearly position the political offer of the Law and Justice in relation to their competitors, thus creating appropriate emotional frames for this offer that corresponded with expectations of their potential voters. Skilful fear management (Cywiński, Katner, & Ziółkowski, 2017) has considerably stimulated high mobilisation in the segments of voters supporting the party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, but also contributed to the realisation of the strategy for broadening support in those segments of electorate which share the outlook on the crisis and its potential consequences.

In this context, fundamental importance should be assigned to publications displaying social consequences (the actual ones, with reference to the practice of Western European countries, or those predicted, with reference to Polish situation) of acceptance of immigrants, conveniently reinforced by materials presenting the image of refugees and depicting terrorist threats and advancing process of Islamisation of European states.

Paradoxically, the amount of negative emotions generated by media in relation to the migration crisis highlighted the advantages of the image of Law and Justice, namely: respect for traditional values (“European Christian heritage”) and care for safety of Polish citizens.

¹⁰ It may be concluded that the position of the Law and Justice regarding the issue of refugees/migrants was clearly presented by Jarosław Kaczyński during the Sejm debate devoted to the problem of the migration crisis (16.09.2015).

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