

ARTUR LIPIŃSKI

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland



Information Sources Shared on Facebook and Networking by Populist Leaders and Populist Parties in Poland¹

National-conservative Law and Justice Party (*PiS*) is seen as quite open to the innovative use of social media. Moreover, the government led by *PiS* is aiming at regulating social media in a dual way – on the one hand to prevent blocking by social media platforms, on the other hand to allow intervention and blocking by authorities. Regarding our findings, not surprisingly, the preferred source of information for both *PiS* and *Confederation* (*Konfederacja*) were digital sources. TV was the least often linked media outlet for *PiS* and radio for *Confederation*, respectively. All the linked media were national or with mixed origin, there were no links to European/supranational media. The overwhelming majority of links were websites and social media accounts of *Confederation* and *PiS*, their individual politicians or YouTube materials produced by these two groupings. Left and liberal media were systematically ignored when around 10% were common to both profiles, including FaceBook (FB). These were mostly mainstream media of diverse type (news websites, YouTube, radio, TV) and left, centre and centre-right ideological leanings. The political orientation of the shared sources reflected the inclination of populist parties and their coalitions to promote right wing discourses. *PiS* as a large party oriented towards the centre represents centre-right and *Confederation* represents radical right. The references to the media classified as centre-right constituted 96% of *PiS* sample and 66% of *Confederation* sample.

The network analysis showed that both parties were embedded in two almost separate bubbles which are linked together by a very limited set of sources. They stayed in reciprocal relations mostly with their own separated structures, organizations, politicians or FB discussion groups.

Keywords: Facebook, PiS, Confederation, populism, network analysis, media, Poland

The study is focused on information sources shared on Facebook (FB) and their networking by selected populist leaders and populist parties in Poland in two periods in 2020. The two politically relevant selected populist actors are: Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, hereafter: *PiS*) and Confederation (*Konfederacja*) party. The *PiS* constitutes an example of populist right-wing party, with national-conservative core ideology (Kessel 2015) and as such is

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representing a radical antiliberal critique of the political status quo before coming to power (Stanley and Cześniak 2019). The 2018 Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey (POPPA) dataset shows that *PiS* reached 9.20 magnitude of populism on a 10 points scale (the key discursive indicators: Manichean, indivisible, general will, people centrism and anti elitism)², while *Confederation* has not been included yet into populist indices, being established in early 2019. Some emerging studies suggest that its electoral manifesto – as different from electoral rhetoric – made it less populist than the *Civic Coalition* (*CO, Koalicja Obywatelska*) or Polish Coalition (*Koalicja Polska*) (Germano 2020). Although populism as a feature of political discourse was particularly salient during *PiS* victorious 2015 electoral campaign to the Polish parliament (Jaskiernia 2017), populist discursive strategies were employed already in the 2005 electoral campaign (Pienkos 2006) and with the lapse of time it gradually became more prominent in the party manifestos and speeches of its leader Jarosław Kaczyński and other party members. For example, there is heavy reliance on historical discourse that seeks to promote a Manichean, dichotomy and totalizing re-definition of the categories of victim, hero and perpetrator (Cadier and Szulecki 2020).

In the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections and in the subsequent general elections later that year, *PiS* and its minor coalition partners (the *United Right*)³ secured a dominant position (45.4% of votes, and 43.59% of votes with 235 seats, accordingly). This was due to a campaign filled with homophobic slogans and criticisms of ‘gender ideology’, assisted by generous social spending framed as a people-oriented ‘revolution of dignity’, ultimately representing itself as being effective and delivering party (Górecki, Plescia and Żerkowska-Balas 2020). Fundamentally, Polish politics remains dominated by the metapolitical question of who has the moral right to govern Poland (Bill and Stanley 2002). In that sense, putting aside populist aspects of rhetoric, “*PiS*’s project of building a new state supported by the Catholic Church is not based on populism, but on conservative moralism, with the goal to cleanse Polish society of the legacies of the (communism)” (Ryzak 2020, n.p.).

Therefore, it is not that surprising that another important result of the October 2019 general elections was the relative success of *Confederation*, a radical right-wing grouping founded at the beginning of 2019 on the eve of an electoral campaign for the European and national parliaments, with 11 seats won in the latter (6.81% of votes). *The Confederation* took the shape of the right-wing coalition consisting mainly of conservatives and libertarians from the *KORWIN* party and radical right *National Movement*. The party promotes homophobic, pro-life, Euro-rejectionist and nationalist views articulated together with the radically free market ideology (Szczerbiak 2020). The party showed its ability to surpass *PiS* from the right flank and succeeded in forcing *PiS* to radicalize its message. *PiS* in its attempts to eradicate all the possible actors on its right side of the political spectrum resorts to radical discourse without any direct references to *Confederation* and at the same time uses ideologically friendly public and private media for direct attacks on the political grouping. On the other hand, *PiS* is one of the most criticized parties by *Confederation* which strives to undermine *PiS* right-wing

² <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/8NEL7B/RMH4MI&version=2.0>

³ United Right is a conservative political alliance in Poland between *PiS*, United Poland and the Agreement.

identity and collect support from the groups of *PiS* supporters disappointed with the policies of the incumbents.

In general, the campaign for the 2019 general elections was a somewhat peculiar one, as the parties seem to have mostly focused on increasing voters' turnout rather than competing with each other (Kozłowska 2019). International observers reported on the media bias and intolerant rhetoric in the campaign (ODIHR 2019). This trend has been noticed in many indices of freedom and democracy⁴ and is to large extent triggered by the breadth and significance of changes in the media system. Indeed, the institutional aspects of the media system in Poland have changed since *PiS* came to power in 2015. It's important to note however that the party strengthened certain tendencies already present in the Polish media system. A system that resembled a polarized pluralist model, characterized by political parallelism, high level of politicization of public media by the government and political parties and commentary-oriented journalism with the clear ideological divisions between various media outlets (Dobek-Ostrowska 2012). Moreover, the political control over media had significantly increased with the amendments of the media law which transformed public media into the mouthpiece of the government. In late 2020, *PiS* adopted an amendment which allowed to terminate the contracts of the members of management and supervisory boards of the Polish Television and the Polish Radio. Already in 2016, the Parliament created a new state organ, National Media Council which took a lot of the constitutional prerogatives of National Broadcasting Council (*KRRiTV*). In the years that followed one could observe the increasing partisanship of public television and radio. The imbalance of the public service media affects also the visibility of political actors. Consequently, there is a significant difference in the amount of time in the public media devoted to *PiS* in comparison to other political actors. For example, according to the research conducted by *KRRiT PiS* was afforded 59 percent of airtime and opposition *CO* only 16 percent (mk 2016). Another study conducted before 2019 elections confirmed extreme imbalance of public television in respect of fairness ("almost complete lack of criticism towards *PiS* and complete negation of the opposition"). In the flagship news bulletin of *TVP* pro-government opinions were represented three times more often than other opinions (Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie 2019). The same results were brought by the close monitoring of *TVP* before the 2020 presidential elections (Kozielski 2020). Further, more than two hundred employees of public broadcasters were fired and exchanged for employees charged with the task to produce support for the government and depreciate the opposition and other actors opposing the incumbents and their policies.

All the above-mentioned changes which led to the actual public media capture by the government of the *United Right* contributed to the radical polarization of the media system. Although Poland still has a diverse media landscape, political changes also affected private broadcasters. First, a number of private media (particularly the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Electoral Newspaper*) with the biggest circulation and influential TV channel *TVN* were consistently attacked by state media and *PiS* officials quoted in their programmes. Secondly, state-owned companies ceased to buy advertisements in critical media. At the same time the advertising revenues improved significantly the situation of right-wing publication. For example, two liberal journals

⁴ Including Freedom House which since 2020 classifies Poland as semi-consolidated democracy.

Newsweek and *Polityka*, experienced a fall in their advertisements revenues by 7.9 percent and 14.6 percent, respectively, between June 2015 and June 2016. At the same time, advertisement revenues rose at right wing weeklies *Do Rzeczy* (14.4 percent) and *wSieci* (38.5 percent) (Goczał 2016). In other words, revenues were reallocated to the media loyal to the ruling party. Thirdly, the access to the information became more difficult, journalists have reported troubles with collecting the information as politicians and institutions controlled by them limited access to sources of information for the critical media using favourable public service media or social media instead (Chapman 2017). Ultimately, in December 2020 Orlen, a state-controlled energy company announced the acquisition of a media company *Polska Press* with more than 20 regional dailies, 120 weekly magazines and 500 online portals across the country (Czuchnowski 2021). Importantly, the incumbent party occasionally expressed its will to control the online sphere claiming that companies such as FB are limiting the freedom of speech, as we discuss further.

The Polish media landscape

The media in Poland have become deeply polarised due to the media policy of *PiS* party supporting institutionally and financially pro-government media and attacking critical media with a wide range of means, including article 212 of criminal code – under which journalists can be sent to prison for defamation. Media reform seems to be one of the efforts to “repolonise” and “deconcentrate” the media market (IPI 2021). In the social media field, the Ministry of Justice has published a draft act on freedom of speech on social media platforms in February 2021. The draft act envisages establishment of the so-called Freedom of Speech Council, which would safeguard the constitutional freedom of expression on social networking sites as understood by the Government. The Ministry of Digital Affairs and FB signed an agreement on the appeal procedure against content blocked on the website in 2018. The draft act also provides that if a website blocks an account or deletes a certain entry, even though its content does not violate/infringe upon the law, the user will be able to lodge a complaint with the service provider. Simultaneously, the government is working on legislation aimed at exerting control over online content and allowing the government to intervene in removing such content or blocking access to such websites (Gad-Nowak and Wnukowski 2021). Moreover, a group of right-wing activists affiliated with the *PiS*-friendly weekly *Gazeta Polska* has launched a local version of FB called *Albicla*. The founders mentioned a concern over the dominance of US social media companies and their impact on free speech as reasons for their move (Inotai and Ciobanu 2021).

Indeed, online sources and television are the most important sources of news locally. There is a growing importance of social media as a dominant source of information which enjoyed a steady increase from 84% in 2015 to 87% in 2020. Television as a source of news occupies second position as it dropped from 81% in 2015 to 75% in 2020. Interestingly there was a steep increase of social media as a source of information from 52% in 2015 to 66% in 2020. The smartphone became more important than computers in respect of devices used for accessing news for the first time. As to the online media, internet user penetration rate increased from 2015 to 2020. The rate of people with access to the internet increased and reached 84.9 percent in 2019 with

the largest group of internet users aged 16 to 44 (Statista 2020). Importantly for our study, there were 19 million social media users in Poland in January 2020 and this group increased by 7.8% between April 2019 and January 2020. The social media penetration was at the level of 50% in January 2020 (Kemp 2020). Moreover, the most popular and engaging social media platform for Poland is FB. Also, it overtakes other types of social media and messaging platforms in respect of news consumption.

Table 1: Social Media Consumption in Poland

Rank Brand	For News	For All
1. Facebook	65% (+4)	83%
2. YouTube	36% (-3)	75%
3. Facebook Messenger	24% (+2)	73%
4. Instagram	12% (+3)	34%
5. Twitter	11% (+1)	21%
6. WhatsApp	10% (+1)	31%

Source: Reuters 2020

Interestingly, trust in news has declined by three percent since 2019 and remains at the level of 46%. It seems that the growing belief of the radical bias of the public media pushes people towards private media or online media. These sources score higher in terms of trust than the public service broadcaster *TVP* perceived as a mouthpiece of the government. Despite significant advertisement revenues from state-controlled companies, conservative media are failing to increase audience or trust (Makarenko 2020). It does not mean however, that conservative media are not trusted at all or their trust stays at the very low level. The polarization of the media system entails rather the strong division between those trusting and not trusting the specific media outlets. „*Gazeta Polska*”, right wing weekly explicitly supporting the government provides a very interesting example of this polarization with 43% of trusting respondents and 31% not trusting its reporting (Reuters 2020).

The above-mentioned trends in media consumption, political parallelism of the media system and growing polarization are perfectly reflected in the behaviour of two parties under scrutiny. First, *PiS* was able to skilfully use social media yet during the 2015 parliamentary and presidential campaign and change the image of the traditional, conservative and technologically backward party. The success in the social media was the result of the deliberate strategy to credit the online campaign to the “zealous team of *PiS* supporters in their 20s” (Chapman 2017). *PiS* was more active, able to mobilize more supporters and produce more activity on its social media profiles than the biggest oppositional party, liberal *CO* (Chapman 2017; Chapman and Cienski 2015). In the subsequent years the media strategies were two-pronged. On the one hand *PiS* directed its messages to the older groups of the electorate through public media generously financed from the budget, on the other, it targeted the younger voters through the messages and

paid advertisements in social media (Wanat 2019; Mierzyńska 2019). Paradoxically, the radical pro-*PiS* bias of public media which led to silencing any information about *Confederation* or strong attacks on the grouping from all pro-*PiS* media strengthened the credentials of the party as the excluded and real anti-establishment force persecuted by the elites. Moreover, it pushed the party to focus its communication strategy on social media. Accordingly, in terms of the level of interactivity and fans on FB *Confederation* is one of the most prominent political forces in social media. Its profile is liked by 476,000 fans, outdoing bigger and much more politically relevant *PiS* (287,000) or *Civic Platform* (251,000). It should be noted that contrary to the 2019 EP election campaign when the party promoted anti-Semitic and homophobic messages, the party significantly moderated its discourse before the October 2019 parliamentary elections and 2020 presidential elections (Sitnicka 2019). While the election-related campaign was harsh, monitoring of FB pages of politicians, parties, traditional media, and influencers did not reveal any posts which would contain problematic speech or disinformation. Political parties used FB mainly to mobilize their voters (Lech et al. 2019). Interestingly, while political parties did not use microtargeting techniques at large scale in 2019 general elections, at the same time, widely-defined audiences paired with small ad budgets might suggest that there was a role of FB algorithms in optimising political ad delivery (Iwańska et al. 2019).

As mentioned, the aim of this article is to analyse the type and other aspects of media links shared by FB profiles of these two populist actors. The sample covers four periods, three standard periods adopted for the analysis of other cases of this special issue plus an additional period preceding 2019 parliamentary elections (13 September 2019-13 October). Before doing so, some overview of previous research in related areas is useful.

Research Review

This review is focused primarily on the communication aspects of populism on social media. Stepinska, Lipinski, Piontek and Hess (2020) summarized that most of the Polish scholarship on populism published between 1990 and 2015 might be categorized as either theoretical considerations on populism or thoughts as to why certain political parties or leaders in Poland should be categorized as populist. One of the few such studies was the analysis of the content of electoral programs and parliamentary reports conducted by Przyłecki (2012), who examined the electoral platforms of major political parties as well as selected statements made by politicians during debates in the lower house of the Polish parliament. Since that time, local studies about populist actors have been predominantly focused on communications aspects, while less attention has been focused on relations between the media and populism, or on the effects of populist political communication on citizens. For example, Klupal (2019) found that Polish parties mostly used their FB as a channel informing about other party activities, rather than as a tool to mobilize their supporters in the 2011 and 2015 general election campaign in Poland. Interestingly, five days of FB monitoring before 2015 elections suggested that traditional parties, including the two dominant ones, *PiS* and *PO*, were the ones with the highest FB activity while the challengers clearly did not put as much effort into this campaign channel. Finally, the parties used FB as an infor-

mation channel (Štetka, Surowiec, Mazák 2018). Similarly, a study by Batorski & Grzywińska (2018) found that only a small fraction of FB users was active in public political discussions that took place on political pages of FB (structural dimension) in 2013 and 2015. However, the level of engagement depended on the political events taking place within the public sphere offline, and whether there was an electoral campaign or not. Parties and politicians that were visible in traditional media were also attracting active fans in social media (representational dimension). Nonetheless, non-parliamentary groups had more active fans than would result only from their popularity in mainstream media. Finally, the online public on FB was fragmented and clustered into homogenous political groups (interactional dimension), thus supporting the hypothesis of ‘echo chambers’ (Sawicka 2019).

Moreover, more recent publications on populism in Poland offer not only empirical evidence on the presence of a populist style in messages disseminated by political actors, but also an insight into the media’s role in fostering populism (Stepinska 2020). Among the conditions strengthening the populist actors one can point at inconsistency of voting behavior and lack of partisan links with political parties, and a consequent availability of the electorate for new political parties, the ideological incoherence and anti-political attitudes (Lipinski and Stepinska 2019). Moreover, there are some facilitating factors at the level of media system. First, a strong position of the tabloid newspaper *Fakt* in the Polish media market provides favourable conditions for disseminating messages including indicators of populist style. Second, a strong polarization of the political scene alongside a high level of political parallelism of the Polish media system. Third, a journalistic culture that highly values interventionism and a critical attitude towards those in power provides a space for not only covering populist statements by the media, but also originating such messages by journalists themselves (Stepinska, Lipiński, Piontek, Hess 2020, p.211).

Finally, it is interesting to note that the politician with the biggest FB user engagement in Poland in November 2020 was Rafał Trzaskowski (Mayor of Warsaw, 2019 presidential candidate with support of opposition parties) with 157 thousand total engagement. Following Trzaskowski were Robert Biedroń (LGBT activist who has been serving as a Member of the European Parliament since 2019) and Szymon Hołownia (journalist, television personality, writer, publicist, politician and humanitarian activist).⁵

Analytical Part 1: Sources Shared by Populist Leaders

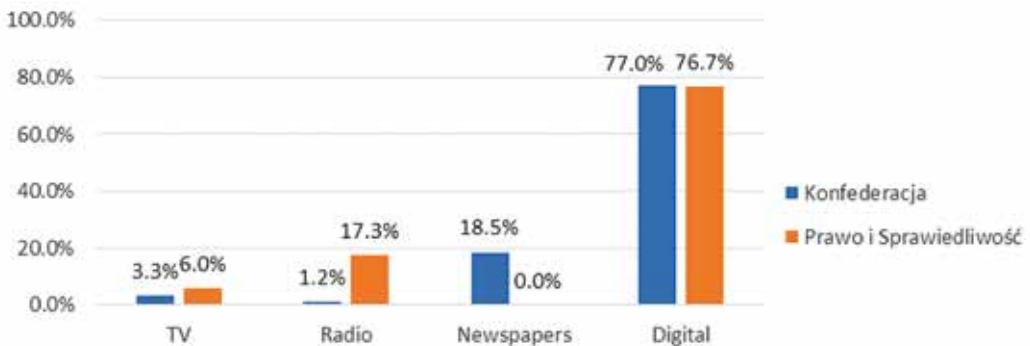
In this part we study the types of media sources that seem to be by and large preferred by populists. We focused on the source type, whether it is registered or not, whether it is public or commercial, and the level of transparency in its ownership. We attempted to figure out what type of media sources seemed to be preferred as well as ignored by populists. The analysis was carried out on FB data downloaded using the CrowdTangle app developed by FB (Mancuso et al., 2020; Marincea, 2020).

⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1036942/most-engaging-politicians-facebook-poland/>

Classification of sources shared by populist groupings

As regards the type of media sources, the analysis of the media links posted on FB allows detecting very clear tendencies. In both cases, the preferred source of information were digital sources which were used at the same level by *PiS* and *Confederation* (77%). The rest of the sources were relatively marginal in comparison to digital sources. Even though the links to these media were relatively insignificant one can still discern a few differences between the analysed profiles. First, TV was the least often linked media outlet for *PiS* and radio for *Confederation*, respectively. However, *Confederation* used quite often newspapers' links while *PiS* relied on radio sources. Apparently, *PiS* decided to follow a two-pronged strategy, targeting the older segments of the electorate through radio and younger cohorts through social media. Secondly, *PiS* did not post any links to newspapers despite the number of print media explicitly supporting the party, with its politicians having an important voice in these media either as permanent authors or in the role of interviewees. Thirdly, *PiS*'s profile was relatively the most diversified in respect of the media types. It posted links to almost types of the media, whenever there was any information on the grouping or its leaders involved or information or whenever the information was in line with the party agenda. It was in line with the recent literature on media and populism emphasizing the affirmative usage of traditional media to support its own agenda despite the frequently radical criticism of the mainstream media (Haller and Holt 2019). Finally, all the linked media were national or mixed, there were no links to European/supranational media.

Figure 1: Types of sources

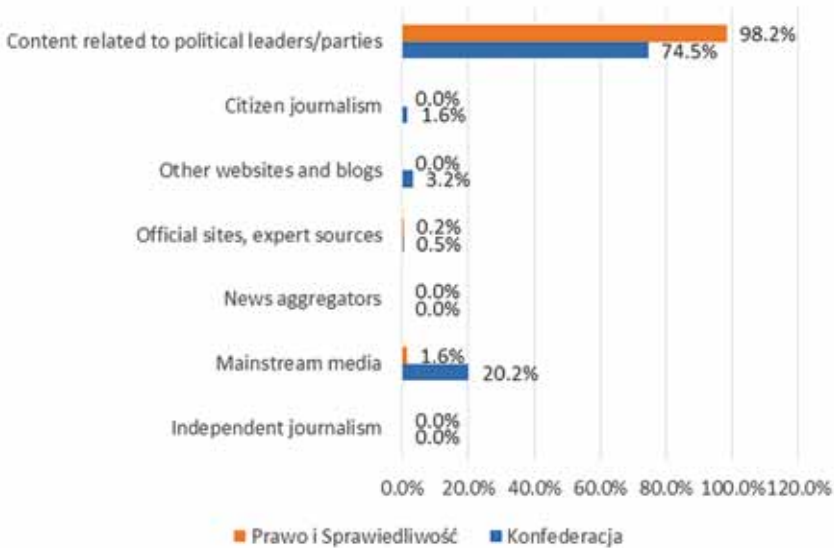


Source: Own compilation

The analysis of the types of digital sources revealed very clear patterns. Virtually none of the profiles shared official or expert sources. Only in case of *Confederation* the website devoted entirely to economic issues was linked once. *Confederation* was also more willing to post links to news websites more frequently (20%) in comparison to *PiS* (2%). It included mainstream news websites like *natemat.pl* or *wp.pl*. Moreover, *Confederation* incidentally posted links to other websites which were opinion websites or blogs promoting radical right views or being in line with Russian propaganda like *konserwatyzm.pl* or *kresy.pl* or citizen journalism (for example,

radical right *medianarodowe.pl*). However, the overwhelming majority of links were websites and social media accounts of *Confederation* and *PiS*, their individual politicians or YouTube materials produced by these two groupings (75% and 98%, respectively). It is clear that the social media and websites of these two groupings create separate bubbles which mutually reinforce their messages inside and support each other.

Figure 2. Types of digital sources



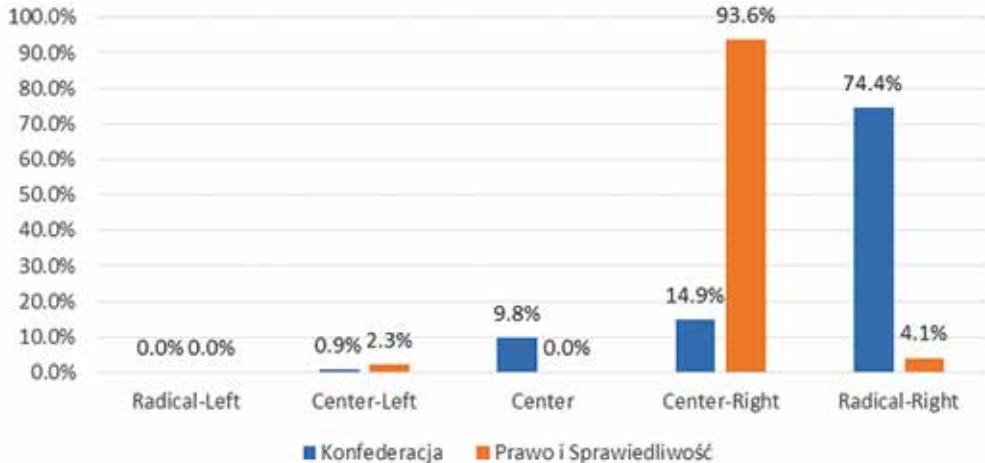
Source: Own compilation

Among the media which were systematically ignored and very rarely linked to were left and liberal media representing the mainstream of the public debate like newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, weekly *Polityka* or TV channel *TVN*. Interestingly, it is the *Confederation* that introduced more variety of media types on its profile, rather than *PiS*, strongly focused on its own social media environment. Current research notices frequently traditional, non-interactive usage of social media by populists (for example: Grill 2016, 92; Waisbord, Amado 2017, 1337). Virtual lack of links to citizen journalism or blogs in the Polish sample provides additional contribution to these findings.

The political orientation of the shared sources reflects the inclination of populist parties and their coalitions to promote right wing discourses (Figure 3). Moreover, it reflects the ideological difference between *PiS* and *Confederation*, where *PiS* as a large party oriented towards centre represents centre right and *Confederation* represents radical right. One has to remember however that both parties, but *PiS* in particular, in order to capture the support of specific segments of the electorate strategically shifted between centre and the margins on the ideological field. In general, however, the references to the media classified as centre right constitute 94% of *PiS* sample and 15% of *Confederation* sample. (but 74 % for radical right) One can find more ideological

diversity and some sources which can't be classified on the left-right axis on *Confederation* profile. For example, *Confederation* posted links to the centre-left media (2%), centre (8%), centre right (15%), whereas PiS did so only to centre left (2%) and incidentally to the radical right (*wpolityce.pl* – website supporting *PiS* with very radical, Eurosceptic, anti-gender, ideological leanings).

Figure 3. Political orientation of sources



Source: Own compilation

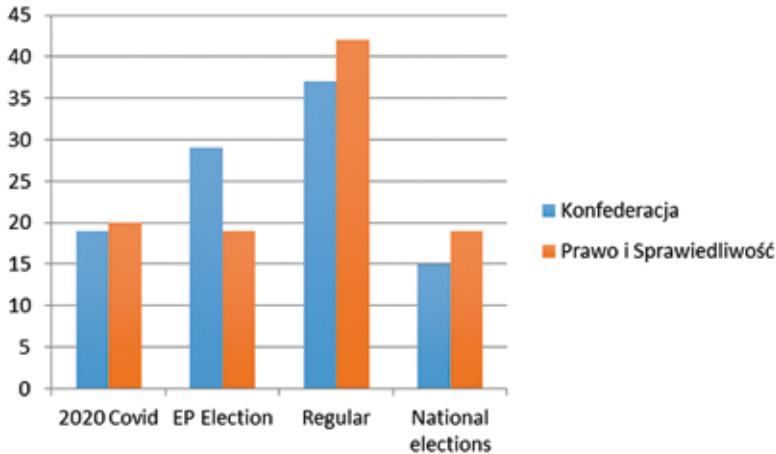
Next, we studied differences between the different populist leaders/parties in their media preferences. In particular, we were interested to learn to what extent did they draw on the same media sources and/or share sources connected with each other's profile/party.

The analyzed profiles referred to a total number of 60 sources. Around 10% (7 sources) were common to both profiles, including FB. These were mostly mainstream media of diverse types (news websites, YouTube, radio, TV) and left, centre and centre right ideological leanings. The most important difference between two profiles is the number of unique sources, 17 for *PiS* and 36 for *Confederation* confirming again the bigger differentiation of the radical right's profile. Secondly, a significant number of the unique sources referred to by *PiS* profile is constituted by public media supporting the party. Thirdly, *Confederation* referred to the radical right-wing media which were not mentioned by *PiS*, but also to a number of websites focused on economic issues. That reflects not only radical right but also neoliberal ideological agenda of one of the groups constituting *Confederation*.

The analysis of the distribution of the links to the media across four sampled periods does not reveal significant differences among them (Figure 4). Contrary to the expectation the number of sources in the regular period was higher than in the electoral period. The difference is relatively moderate in *Confederation* and more visible in case of *PiS*. As regards *Confederation*, the sources posted during the regular period constituted 37% of all the sources whereas in the national election period and COVID-19 pandemic period 15% and 19% respectively. The numbers were

higher (29%) in the EP elections period. These figures were even more differentiated across analyzed periods in case of *PiS*. Here, the number of posted sources in the regular period is twice as high (42%) as from the other three periods.

Figure 4: Distribution of sources across sampled periods

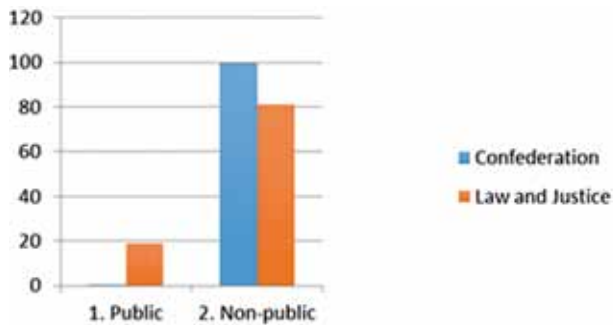


Source: Own compilation

In the majority of cases, both profiles used non-public sources. There is however, a difference between *PiS* and *Confederation* profiles. As regards *PiS*, links to public media constituted 20% of all the links whereas in case of *Confederation* its accounts were only for 0,4%. As mentioned before, subjugation of the public media by *PiS* led to their extreme bias towards the governing party. Consequently, public media were particularly important for *PiS*, providing the favourable space to promote its agenda and systematically criticizing or silencing the opponents. Accordingly, the reluctance of *Confederation* towards public media resulted from their negative representation or, most frequently, complete silencing. Another reason for the high presence of non-public media is the domination of digital sources, mainly FB accounts of individuals, parties or discussion groups.

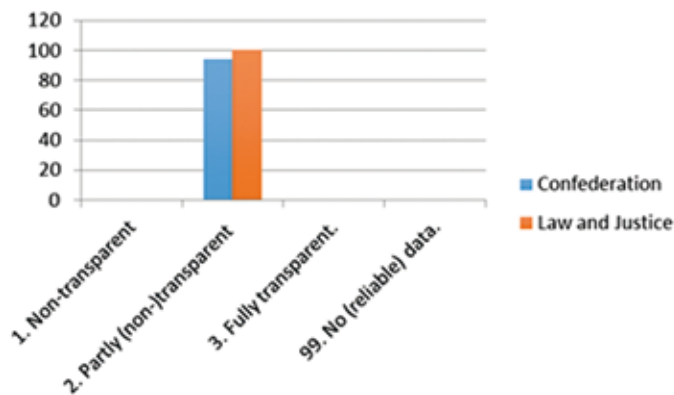
As far as the transparency of ownership is concerned, Polish situation represents partly non-transparent case. According to Klimkiewicz (2017: 8), this situation results from two factors. First, changes in the media ownership are fast and continuous. Second, there is no aggregating register which would provide complete data about media ownership in one place. Accordingly, additional effort is needed to collect relevant information. In the analyzed case in the *PiS* the entire sample represents only partially transparent information on the ownership of the specific media outlet. In case of *Confederation* it was 94 %, as there were some media outlets which are non-transparent or there is no reliable data. For example, there is no reliable data on some extreme right websites promoting anti-Semitic, xenophobic, homophobic, and most recently anti-vaccination messages (for example: *narodowcy* or *Media narodowe*).

Figure 5: Ownership



Source: Own compilation

Figure 6: Transparency of ownership



Source: Own compilation

The procedures of registration in Poland are quite strict. According to the article 20 of the Press Law there are only two formats (newspapers and magazines) which are required to register in court. Nevertheless, Polish courts frequently assume that online outlets fulfilling criteria stipulated in the Press Law should automatically be classified as newspapers or magazines and registered. Consequently, as there is no official register, the coding of the analyzed sample was based on the assumption that besides social media the rest of the media outlets linked to by two populist profiles under analysis are registered. Accordingly, 27% of *PiS* and 28% of *Confederation* were seen as registered and 73% and 72% non-registered for the respective political actors. In the case of *Confederation* there are some marginal cases where the information is difficult to obtain.



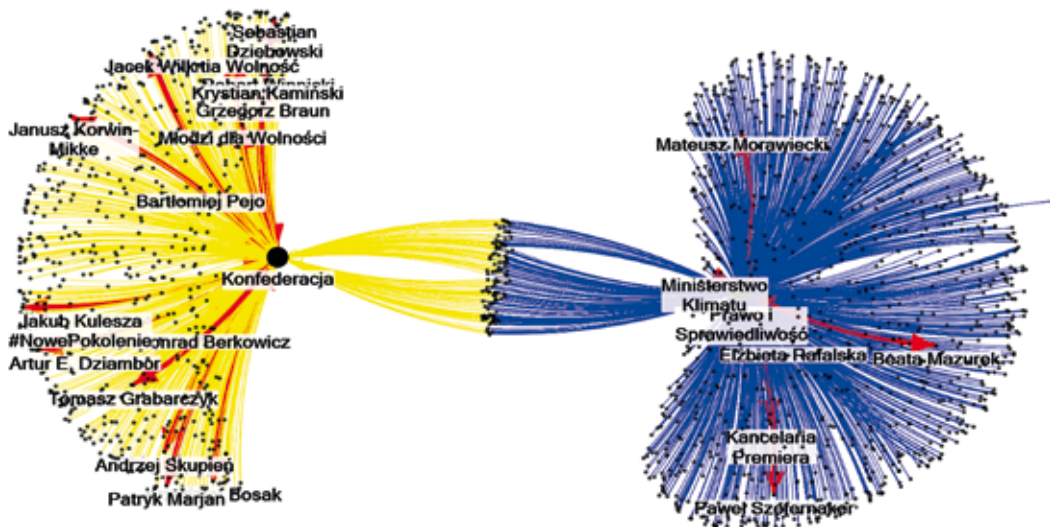
Source: Own compilation

Analytical Part 2: Network analysis of sources that share populist leaders' posts

We examined here several aspects. First, whether there were disproportions between the two networks (ex. one much bigger than other). Second, network reciprocity – the degree of interconnection between different pages. Third, the degree of centrality, meaning of overlap between the two networks. Finally, we were interested to learn what pages were the connectors between the two, and if there was reciprocal sharing.

A disproportion was found between the two profiles in terms of network reciprocity which reflects the relevance, structure of political organization and social embeddedness of the two political actors under consideration. Moreover, both parties were embedded in two almost separate bubbles which are linked together by a very limited set of sources being shared by and shared mutually by two profiles. They stay in reciprocal relations mostly with their own separated structures, organizations, politicians or FB discussion groups. In the period under consideration 143 pages shared *Confederation* profile and 277 shared *PiS* profile. The discrepancy between profiles is even bigger in terms of the number of posts sharing *PiS* profile, with 1963 posts for *Confederation* and 5784 posts for *PiS*. In both cases the type of FB pages sharing two actors profiles were profiles of the local branches of party organization from specific geographical locations (for example: *PiS Piekary Śląskie*, *PiS, Piotrków Trybunalski*), local branches of the organizations constituting *Confederation* (*Ruch Narodowy Starachowice*, *Wolność Kłobuck*), youth organizations (*Młodzi dla Wolności*, *Forum Młododych PiS Konin*), party politicians (Beata Mazurek, Janusz Korwin-Mikke) or even public institutions (Ministry of Health /*Ministerstwo Zdrowia*) or public media (*TVP*) in case of *PiS*. Importantly, among the accounts sharing *Confederation's* posts were extreme right profiles of individuals (S. Michalkiewicz) or discussion groups (*Polska to MY Rdzenni Polacy nigdy goście !!*, *Nie dla obcej dominacji w Polsce*, *Polonizacja*, *Polscy patrioci*, *Polska a nie Polin*) confirming, disseminating and articulating with other ideological elements the radical agenda of this grouping.

Figure 8: Facebook Populist Network in Poland



Source: Marincea, 2020

Network Centrality

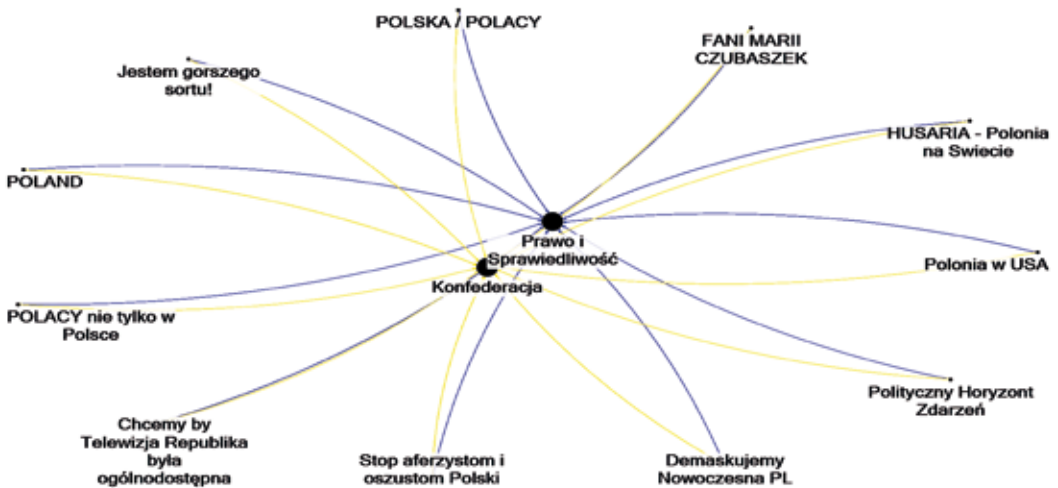
We examined here the number of FB pages that shared each of the two profiles at least 10 times. Further, we analyzed which were the main disseminators for each of the two (by biggest number of shares) and how equally or disproportionately they shared each of them. Finally, we examined these pages in terms of their type, ownership, registration, political orientation etc.

There were only 11 FB pages which shared both profiles under analysis in the periods under consideration. Interestingly, although *PiS* has more widespread network than *Confederation*, the FB pages shared by both parties were posting material from *Confederation* profiles almost twice as frequently as *PiS* posts (243 and 133). These FB pages are public or closed discussion and fan groups. At least four provide a platform for the Polish diaspora living abroad, which is explicitly stated in the name of one group (*Polonia w USA*). At least eight of them more or less frequently promote radical right agenda close to *Confederation*, expressing xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism, but also very strong Ukrainophobia what might indicate Russian influences emphasized by the analysts following radical right social media (Mierzyńska 2018). Interestingly, one of the pages is a fan page of Polish writer and satirist Maria Czubaszek, and another one (*Jestem gorszego sortu!*) provides a platform for disseminating oppositional, anti-*PiS* propaganda.

Table 2: Most central FB pages (shared at least 5 times each)

	POLAND
1.	Stop aferzystom i oszustom Polski
2.	Polonia w USA
3.	POLSKA / POLACY
4.	Jestem gorszego sortu!
5.	Chcemy by Telewizja Republika była ogólnodostępna
6.	Demaskujemy Nowoczesna PL
7.	HUSARIA – Polonia na Swiecie
8.	POLACY nie tylko w Polsce
9.	Polityczny Horyzont Zdarzeń
10.	FANI MARIII CZUBASZEK

Source: Marincea, 2020

Figure 9: Most central FB pages (shared at least 5 times each)

Source: Marincea, 2020

Conclusions

The two political profiles constitute separate spheres connected together through a very narrow number of FB pages. That reflects the polarized character of Polish public sphere and strong

divisions on the right side of the political spectrum. Despite radicalisation of *PiS* agenda and populist language of communication *PiS* network does not contain most radical or extremist pages. On the other hand, the much smaller and definitely less politically relevant *Confederation* uses all the opportunities to inform about its agenda and disseminate the messages about other media and groups disseminating its agenda. Secondly, in both cases, the preferred source of information were digital sources which were used at almost the same level by *PiS* and *Confederation*, but the latter one refers to the much more diversified sources than *PiS*. It might be explained by the fact that *Confederation* had to use every opportunity to present its messages, contrary to *PiS* which can always count on public media. Interestingly, in line with the tendencies in the Polish society, TV as a source does not constitute a very important part of the sample. Thirdly, references to citizen journalism were not important at all. Fourthly, two groupings were embedded in the network of the local branches of parties and party members mainly. In case of *Confederation* there is some leaning towards more spontaneous grassroots fan groups or FB discussion groups which share much more extreme content than the party itself. That allowed the party to move strategically from the radical position towards a more moderate stance, what was noticeable particularly well during the 2019 parliamentary elections.

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