Populist Discourse in the Polish Media

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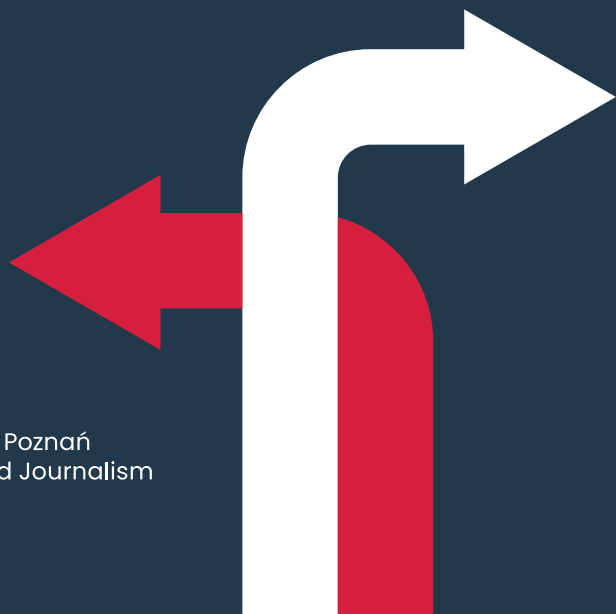
4. What Populism is About?
Topics in Populist Discourse in Print Media

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Introduction

According to the concept of populism as a thin ideology, the general structure of populist political narration can be augmented with hard ideology referring to permanent sets of values or topics (Stanley, 2008). Hence, one area of research in populist political communication is the analysis of issues or events that, when covered or discussed, trigger the use of populist discourse (Esser et al., 2019).

For the purpose of this study, we are using a heuristic model to analyse populist political communication (Reinemann et al., 2017, pp. 21–23). The model includes four key elements at three levels of social analysis: (1) Structural and situational context at the macro-level; (2) Parties, movements, and their representatives at the meso-level; (3) Journalistic and social media at the meso-level; (4) Individual citizens at the micro-level (Reinemann et al., 2017, p. 21). In this chapter, we will focus on structural and situational context at the macro-level. The contextual factors include relatively stable features such as characteristics of political and media systems, or a political and journalistic culture, as well as historical experience, ethnic issues, and previous international relations (Urbinati, 2013), while situational factors are related to real-world political, social, economic, or cultural events, issues, challenges, and phenomena (Reinemann et al., 2017, p. 21).

Some situational factors that can influence the presence of populist discourse in media coverage are indicated by the results of research investigating the conditions which facilitate the emergence of populist actors, such as deteriorating economic conditions, unemployment, and modernization (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2016; Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017; Rico and Anduiza, 2019). Certain studies also show that a rise of populism may be triggered by an increased sense of threat posed by migrants (Scheepers et al., 2002; Koopmans and Muis, 2009). However, a longitudinal study on media coverage of immigration (Esser et al., 2019) revealed no convincing empirical evidence for a direct relation between increased populism in news stories on immigration and immigration-related real world trends or growing public concerns about immigration. But, as the authors claim, "this does not mean that the events and concerns of the population do not play a role, but rather that they are not the main explanatory factors for how much populism there is in media reports" (Esser et al., 2019, p. 137).

Another factor that could explain the presence of populist discourse in media coverage is the occurrence of electoral campaigns (Manucci and Weber, 2017). The claim

that mainstream parties are "imitating" populist parties, particularly those of the populist radical right, has been around for a long time. Empirical studies, however, provide little corroborating evidence. For example, M. Rooduijn, S.L. de Lange and W. van der Brug (2012) concluded in their comparative research that the programs of mainstream parties in Western European countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) have not become more populist in recent years (see: Hameleers et al., 2017). They found no evidence that mainstream parties change their programs when confronted with electoral losses or successful populist challengers. Similar conclusions were reached by scholars in the Baltic countries, specifically with regards to parties in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They found that populism is stronger in the "policy" dimension than in "identity formation" among mainstream parties (Jakobson et al., 2012; Heinze, 2017).

Still, some studies found evidence to suggest that there is some spillover effect on either economy (Schumacher and Van Kersbergen, 2016) or migration issues (Meijers, 2017). Furthermore, all political actors competing in elections share an interest in strengthening their influence on the society they belong to in order to gain electoral support. Hence, many political actors have a tendency to focus on valence issues (such as corruption, jobs, economy, or crime) that are usually "owned" by the populist parties and presented in a negative way (Curini, 2018) during the election period. Therefore, mainstream political parties do tend to use populist communication style and content during election campaigns (Plasser and Ulram, 2003; Mudde, 2004; Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016; Aalberg et al., 2017; Stępińska and Adamczewska, 2017).

Previous research in various countries has made it possible to create a specific map of topics with high populist potential (see Figure 4.1). The aim of the analysis of the content of news media, presented in the later part of this section, will be to develop a map of the

Figure 4.1. 'Populist potential' of topics in media discourse
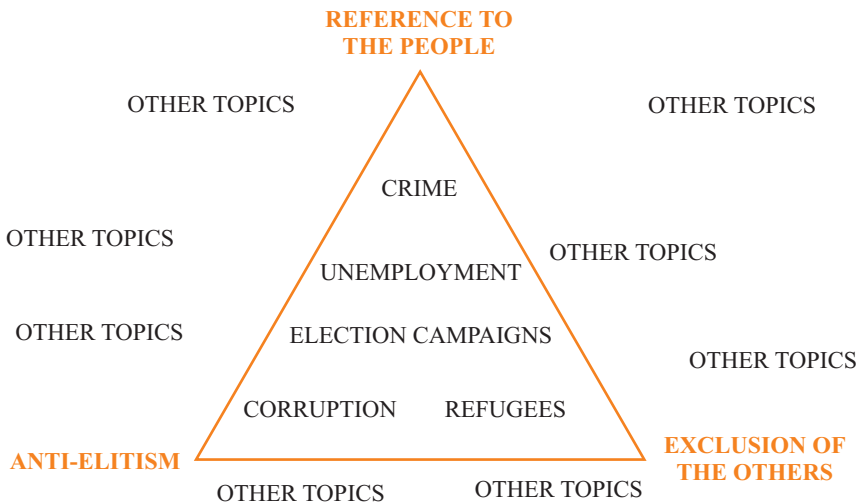
Source: Own elaboration based on Scheepers, 2002; Fieschi and Heywood, 2004; Taggart, 2004; Laycock, 2005; Koopmans and Muis, 2009; Kriesi, 2014; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2016; Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017; Manucci and Weber, 2017; Curini, 2017; Podobnik et al., 2017; Stavrakakis, 2017; The EEAG Report, 2017; Rico and Anduiza, 2019.

topics covered by the media which were accompanied by statements containing elements of populist discourse. This analysis will be preceded by a presentation of contextual and situational factors surrounding populist political communication in Poland.

Contextual Factors Surrounding Populist Political Communication in Poland

In studying populist political communication in Poland it is important to recognize the ethnic and religious homogeneity of its population (95% declaring Polish nationality [GUS, 2016a] and nearly 92% Roman Catholicism [GUS, 2018]), strong memory of World War II, the period of enforced communism in the post-war history of Poland, and complicated relations with neighboring countries (especially Russia and Germany), which results in a strong sense of national identity. These factors, constituting an important point of reference for political debate, were the rationale behind P. Przyłęcki's (2012) inclusion of a negative attitude towards Germany, anti-communism, and references to tradition, history, and religion as specific indicators of Polish populism (Przyłęcki, 2012, pp. 119–120). In our codebook we also include a negative attitude towards Russia (see chapter 1).

Another important factor in the study of populist political communication is the specificity of the political and party system in Poland. Since 2005 we have seen a clear strengthening of two major parties on the political scene: Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform, hereafter PO) and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, hereafter PiS), placing many other political actors (such as Samoobrona, Ruch Palikota, Kukiz '15, Wiosna, and others) in clear opposition to "those who have already been in power," i.e. mainly the aforementioned PO and PiS. Their absence from power structures combined with programs intended to help and empower the "ordinary man" (pro-social programs, direct democracy) seem to exacerbate the anti-elitist attitude of many actors on the Polish political scene.

The Polish political scene is also decidedly right-wing. Conservative parties have not only been holding power in Poland since 2005, but have also fully dominated the Polish parliament (between 2015 and 2019 there was no institutional representative of the traditionally understood left-wing worldview). This naturally introduces ideological and narrative elements characteristic of right-wing populism into the discourse (national and xenophobic elements, racism, anti-Semitism, arguments against minority groups).

A. Lipiński and A. Stępińska (2019) identified several other factors that have created a political, social, and cultural 'reservoir' to be exploited by far-right political parties, such as (1) voter volatility, (2) socio-economic conditions, and (3) voters' opinions regarding the incumbent government. For example, they discuss a low level of consistency in voter behavior resulting in a high level of volatility and a low level of party loyalty: features that have been observed among Polish voters since the 1990s (see also Cześnik, 2009; 2010). They also claim that Polish voters express their distrust and disappointment as soon as possible, very rarely giving those who are in power an opportunity to further their agendas. Not surprisingly, though, some political parties change their labels quite frequently and eagerly adopt their politics to current social expectations and needs, hoping for a new chance (more about that in: Antoszewski and Herbut, 1999; Markowski, 2010).

Furthermore, A. Lipiński and A. Stępińska (2019) noticed that worsening economic conditions increase dissatisfaction with an incumbent government which may create a 'propitious context' for populist political parties. In fact, the perceived deterioration of the economic situation may enhance pro-populist attitudes among the voters. Despite the fact that a socioeconomic situation in Poland in 2015 was remarkably healthy (in view of the data provided by Główny Urząd Statystyczny [*Central Statistical Office of Poland*, GUS, 2016b; 2016c]), one third of Polish people (35%) were dissatisfied with their economic situation (CBOS, 2015).

Situational Factors Surrounding Populist Political Communication in Poland

In addition to more general social, political, and cultural features of the Polish public sphere, some particular events may act as triggers for the use of populist discourse in the media coverage of politics. It is also worth pointing out that the analyzed research material comes from the years 2015–2017 and covers the period of two election campaigns: the presidential campaign in May 2015 and the parliamentary campaign in autumn 2015. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that elections became one of the leading topics in the analyzed material, alongside national politics and party relations (with the keywords being the names of political parties and the names of politicians – see chapter 1).

The basic question is, therefore, what events were presented by the Polish media in reports on the activity of Polish political actors, especially during the election campaign, and which of these events contributed to the presence of elements of populist discourse in the reported statements. Compiling a review of the events to which the media and public opinion devoted their attention in the years 2015–2017 allowed us to make a preliminary separation of the events in national politics with a significant 'populist potential'.

These included: (1) a government program *Rodzina 500 plus* (*Family 500 plus*): 500 PLN of financial support per child for families with two or more children; (2) "Black protest" against governmental plans to harshen the laws on abortion; (3) changes in the laws concerning the judiciary system; (4) changes in the educational system (dismantling of junior high-schools; layoffs of teachers); (5) changes in the media laws (leading to politicization of the public media in Poland); and (6) changes in the environmental laws (permission to cut down the trees).

The issues intensively discussed by the media and politicians at the time also included: the role of the referendum in the decision-making system (due to electoral calls made by populist political organization Kukiz'15 and its leader Paweł Kukiz), lowering the retirement age, relief for entrepreneurs, tax-free allowance, conversion of mortgage loans in Swiss francs into zlotys, and protection of agricultural land. The next part of the chapter will present a detailed analysis of the presence of topics related to these events in the printed press and the saturation of reports with the elements of populist discourse.

The immigration crisis in Europe, which coincided to a large extent with the parliamentary election campaign in 2015, was also important for determining the pres-

ence of elements of populist discourse in the media. It became an important topic of this campaign, polarizing the political scene into the right-wing, clearly opposed to admitting immigrants, and the liberals with an ambiguous attitude toward immigration. Earlier studies (Esser et al., 2019, pp. 130–132) showed that in 2016–2017 the Polish newspapers did not pay much attention to this topic, but when they did, the large part of the reports contained elements of populist discourse. It is worth noting that in the analyzed period (2015–2017) the issue of refugees was only one of the aspects of the phenomenon of immigration – another was the massive economic migration from Ukraine resulting from facilitated access to the Polish labour market and the economic and political crisis back home.

Another important factor was the tense relations between Poland and the European Union, covering such issues as: conflict over the Constitutional Tribunal, controversial changes in the public media introduced by the PiS government, and the elections for President of the European Council: Donald Tusk (a former prime minister from PO) won these elections despite strong opposition from the PiS government). While the EU blamed the PiS government for illiberal and non-democratic policy, the PiS government argued it was only fighting for greater autonomy within the European Union and strengthening of state sovereignty (so-called "not-on-our-knees-anymore" policy) and blamed the EU for interfering into the domestic issues of a sovereign state. As P. Przyłęcki (2012) noted earlier, PiS has been using an anti-European narrative for years, accusing EU authorities of lacking democratic mandate and imposing costly bureaucracy. In 2016, an additional impulse to discuss the condition of the EU was the referendum in the United Kingdom on leaving the EU (*Brexit*).

Finally, it is worth noting an event which did not take place in the analyzed period but left its mark on Polish contemporary politics, namely the crash of the Polish Tu-154M aircraft in Smolensk (Russia) on 10 April 2010, killing the Polish presidential couple and many prominent national politicians and military personnel. Although this issue could be classified as 'historical', it still constitutes a significant element in the current political dispute over the causes and culprits. Numerous conspiracy theories, the diplomatic dispute between Poland and Russia over the plane wreck which has not yet been handed over, the ongoing court proceedings, and the conflict over responsibility for this event are some of the main axes of the political dispute between the PO and the PiS parties. Since 2010, this topic has been mentioned on every occasion and it was therefore possible to assume that during the election campaigns in 2015, the subject of the disaster would generate a significant number of statements containing elements of populist discourse, especially anti-elitism and constructing 'the other' ('out-groups').

The Study

We will try to draw a thematic map of Polish populist discourse in 2015–2017 by answering the following detailed research questions: (1) What were the most frequently discussed topics in the collected information materials? (2) What topics were most frequently discussed in materials that contained at least one element

of populist discourse, i.e. reference to 'the people', anti-elitism, or exclusion of 'out-groups'? (3) Which topics were accompanied by a specific type of populism identified by J. Jagers and S. Walgrave (2007), i.e. *empty*, *anti-elitist*, *excluding*, or *complete populism*? (4) Which topics were accompanied by additional, specifically Polish populist strategies? (5) What were the similarities and differences between the various media organizations?

The codebook contained a list of the following 21 general categories: (1) Domestic politics; (2) International politics; (3) Military and defense; (4) National security; (5) Economy; (6) Labour-industrial relations; (7) Business, trade, industry; (8) Transport; (9) Health and social work; (10) Population; (11) Education; (12) Media and communication; (13) Housing; (14) Environment; (15) Energy; (16) Science and technology; (17) Social relations; (18) Accidents and disasters; (19) Culture; (20) Official ceremonies; (21) Religion. Within these categories, specific topics were distinguished. Each article that contained a reference to Polish political actors was subject to coding in terms of topics, regardless of whether it contained at least one element of populist discourse or not.

The topics were assigned to the whole article, not to individual statements, so the unit of analysis in this chapter is a single article (not a statement, as in chapters 2 and 3. For each material analyzed, the encoder could use up to three codes to define detailed topics. They were assigned to the general topics only at a later stage of analysis (the categories were indicated by the first digit of the code).

The next part of this chapter will show the incidence of particular topics in press materials devoted to political entities, and then examine the presence of indicators of populist discourse in articles devoted to specific topics in individual newspapers.

Findings

Topics in Political News

Due to the specific nature of the research sample, it is not surprising that the most frequently discussed general topic in the materials devoted to Polish political actors was domestic politics. It dominated over the remaining categories, with nearly 60% of codes being assigned to this category, at 1.3 topics per article (i.e. one article concerned more than one specific topic within the category of domestic politics).[1]

The second most common general topic was international politics, although it constituted less than 8% of all coded topics (i.e. 17% of the articles referring to at least one Polish political actor). Other relatively frequent general topics included economy (10% of articles), culture (9% of articles), and media and communication (8% of articles) (see Table 4.1; other general topics were present in less than 4% of articles).

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[1] Calculations of percentage occurrence of particular detailed topics in relation to the total number of coded topics (N=4,465) sum up to 100, while calculations based on the number of articles (N=2,081) do not sum up to 100 due to the fact that each article could be assigned up to 3 codes specifying detailed topics.

**Table 4.1. General categories of materials containing reference
to Polish political actors**

Categories	n	Frequency per topic (N=4566)	Frequency per article (N=2081)
Domestic politics	2684	0.58	1.30
International politics	362	0.08	0.17
Economy	209	0.05	0.10
Culture	198	0.04	0.09
Media and communication	169	0.04	0.08
Social relations	126	0.03	0.06
National security	122	0.03	0.06
Business, trade, industry	109	0.02	0.05
Population	91	0.02	0.04
Ceremonies	90	0.02	0.04
Other		<0.02	<0.04

Source: Own elaboration.

Topics related to domestic politics require a closer look. As predicted, the analyzed materials focused on elections (31% of all analyzed articles concerned the presidential or parliamentary elections held in 2015). The analysis showed that the other most frequently reported topics were statements and activities of specific politicians (26% of articles), the executive branch (17% of articles), and inter-party relations (14%) (see Table 4.2; other detailed topics were present in less than 3% of articles).

**Table 4.2. Detailed topics in materials in the 'domestic politics' category with references
to Polish political actors**

Detailed topics	n	Frequency per domestic politics topic (N=2684)	Frequency per article (N=2081)
Elections	652	0.24	0.31
Statements and activity of individual politicians	544	0.20	0.26
Activities of the executive branch	350	0.13	0.17
Inter-party relations	289	0.11	0.14
Other (domestic politics)	166	0.06	0.08
Activities of the legislature	136	0.05	0.06
Intra-party relations	126	0.05	0.06
Public opinion and public opinion polls	101	0.04	0.05
Abuse of political power and corruption	72	0.03	0.03
Issues regulated by the constitution	57	0.02	0.03
Other		<0.02	<0.03

Source: Own elaboration.

Apart from the motifs concerning various aspects of domestic policy, detailed topics intensively covered in the media in 2015–2017 included the activities of foreign politicians (4% of articles), the activities of international political organizations (4% of articles), and aviation disasters (3% of articles). Other topics were mentioned even

more rarely, with the group of topics present in 2% of the materials including journalism and media, diplomatic negotiations and agreements, immigration, and international tensions. These data confirm previous observations of the relatively high degree of attention paid by the media to the activities undertaken by the European Union in the analyzed period and to the aviation disaster in 2010.

A comparative analysis of the content of individual newspapers showed a similarly high level of interest in national politics, ranging from 0.89 per article in *Nasz Dziennik* to 1.7 in *Fakt*. Differences in the attention paid by different media outlets to individual topics are particularly evident in areas such as economy, media, social relations, and health. The right-wing weekly *Do Rzeczy* was distinguished by a high percentage of articles on international politics (38% of the articles refer to this subject), the media (16%), and national security (13%). Another right-wing weekly, *W Sieci*, and the centre-right daily, *Rzeczpospolita*, also published a relatively high number of materials on international affairs (24% and 22% of their articles, respectively). *Rzeczpospolita* also focused on economy (19% of articles).

In turn, two liberally oriented weekly magazines, *Polityka* and *Newsweek*, devoted more attention than other newspapers to cultural events in which Polish politicians were involved (19% and 11%, respectively). Interestingly, two weekly magazines representing completely different political orientations, the right-wing weekly *Do Rzeczy* and the left-wing (liberal) weekly *Polityka*, devoted similar attention to the subject of social relations (16% and 15%, respectively). On the other hand, health and social service issues were most often mentioned in the tabloid *Fakt* (11%).

In terms of detailed topics, interesting similarities and differences can also be observed between two newspapers representing completely different political orientations, i.e. the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the Catholic-nationalist *Nasz Dziennik*. What linked the two newspapers was the fact that immigration was one of the five most frequently discussed topics. What significantly differentiated them was the relatively high percentage of articles devoted to constitutional and media issues in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (articles criticizing the activities of the Law and Justice government in the judiciary and public media), while one of the most frequently discussed topics by *Nasz Dziennik* was abortion (in the context of proposals to tighten the abortion ban and protests against them, the so-called 'black marches').

Populist Discourse and Topics in the News

The next step in the analysis was to identify the topics that appeared most frequently in articles containing statements with at least one element of populist discourse (N=1,498). There was a total of 3,255 instances of the detailed topics being used in the studied articles. The juxtaposition of the most frequently reported general topics also emphasizes the clear dominance of national politics, with more than one topic belonging to this category (1.4) per article. The second most frequently discussed general topic was international politics, comprising 17% of the articles. It should be emphasized that the authors of the analyzed newspapers frequently raised issues related to economy (10% of articles), media and communication (7%), and culture (6%). Other thematic areas were less frequent (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. General topics discussed in materials containing at least
one indicator of populist discourse**

General topic	n	Frequency per article (N=1498)
Domestic politics	2054	1.40
International politics	257	0.17
Economy	147	0.10
Media and communication	109	0.07
Culture	89	0.06
Population	68	0.04
National security	66	0.04
Other		<0.04

Source: Own elaboration.

The data in Table 4.3 show that the most frequently (over 4%) reported topics in materials containing statements with at least one element of populist discourse were almost the same as in the entire sample of articles concerning Polish political actors (see Table 4.1) except for official ceremonies, business/trade/industry, and social relations. Similar conclusions can be drawn for the most frequently reported detailed topics: in this case, the list of topics in Table 4.4 is almost identical to the list in Table 4.2. This phenomenon can be explained, inter alia, by the high percentage of articles devoted to Polish political actors containing at least one element of populist discourse (72%, see chapter 2).

**Table 4.4. Detailed topics discussed in materials from the 'domestic politics'
category containing at least one indicator of populist discourse**

Detailed topics	n	Frequency per article (N=1498)
Elections	542	0.36
Statements and activities of individual politicians	395	0.26
Activities of the executive branch	278	0.18
Inter-party relations	213	0.14
Other (domestic politics)	126	0.08
Activities of the legislature	90	0.06
Inner-party relations	90	0.06
Public opinion and public opinion polls	75	0.05
Abuse of political power and corruption	62	0.04
Issues regulated by the constitution	43	0.03
Other		<0.03

Source: Own elaboration.

As in the case of the entire sample (i.e. all articles containing references to Polish political actors), so too in the case of materials containing statements with at least one

element of populist discourse we could observe some similarities and differences between media organizations.

In *Do Rzeczy*, *Newsweek*, *Rzeczpospolita,* and *W Sieci*, the second most frequently presented general issue after domestic politics was international politics (present in between 20% and 51% of articles published in the papers). In turn, in the articles published in *Fakt*, *Gazeta Wyborcza,* and *Nasz Dziennik*, the other most popular general topic was economy (from 7% to 16% of articles). It should be noted that economy often appeared in *Rzeczpospolita* as well (17% of the materials published in this journal). *Polityka*, on the other hand, was particularly focused on culture (13% of the articles).

It is also worth recognizing that the authors of materials containing at least one element of populist discourse in *Do Rzeczy* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* often addressed issues related to media and communication (19% and 9%, respectively). In addition, a relatively common general topic in *Fakt* (10%) and *Nasz Dziennik* (7%) was health and social services, while the journalists of *Do Rzeczy* and *Polityka* often wrote about social relations (17% and 10%, respectively).

Differences were also evident in how often certain newspapers covered specific topics outside of national politics. In this case, discussion of the activity of specific foreign politicians dominated in *Do Rzeczy* and *Newsweek* and was also clearly present in the weekly *W Sieci*. *Newsweek* often wrote about aviation disasters. Moreover, the authors of materials published in *Nasz Dziennik* and *W Sieci*, i.e. two clearly right-wing, conservative newspapers, reported on international political organizations more often than journalists from other media outlets. In turn, *Gazeta Wyborcza* articles relatively frequently focused on journalism and media, while *Fakt* journalists preferred to write about social policy. The content of *Rzeczpospolita* could be distinguished by the frequency of articles about taxes.

Separation of the most frequently discussed topics in the materials published in the studied newspapers was the starting point for deeper analysis of the presence of particular elements of populist discourse and particular types of populism in these articles.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 present the most frequently reported topics in articles containing at least one element of populist discourse. For each of these topics, we established how often they were accompanied by references to 'the people', critical attitude towards 'the elite' or 'out-groups', or whether a certain type of populism was present: empty populism (only referring to 'the people'), anti-elitist populism (reference to 'the people' combined with criticism of 'the elite'), excluding populism (reference to 'the people' combined with exclusion of out-groups), or complete populism (reference to 'the people' with criticism of 'the elite' and exclusion of 'out-groups'). The data in both tables show the percentage of references to a given topic that were accompanied by statements containing a single element or a combination of elements of populist discourse.

The highest presence of empty populism among articles about national politics (see Table 4.5) was observed in articles discussing the activities of legislators (11% of all references to this subject contained references to 'the people') and opinion polls (9%). In turn, indicators of anti-elitist populism were seen most frequently in articles about constitutional issues (70%), elections (54%), and the parliament's activities (54%). Indicators of excluding populism were practically absent, while indicators of complete populism were present most frequently in articles covering inter-party relations (7%)

and activities of the national government (7%). Interestingly, for some topics criticism of 'the elite' without reference to 'the people' was more frequent than the presence of anti-elitist populism (e.g. intra-party relations, corruption, or political actors' statements and performance), while in other cases it was the opposite – anti-elitist populism was more frequent than elite criticism itself. This was the case with issues regulated by the constitution, elections, opinion polls, and the activities of legislators.

Table 4.5. Indicators of populist discourse in articles containing the most frequent topics from the 'domestic politics' category

Detailed topics	N	People (Empty populism)	Elite	Out-groups	Anti-elitist populism	Excluding populism	Complete populism
Elections	542	0.07	0.36	0.003	0.54	0.002	0.01
Statements and activities of individual politicians	395	0.03	0.51	0.01	0.38	0.005	0.04
Activities of the executive branch	278	0.01	0.49	0.01	0.37	0.007	0.07
Inter-party relations	213	0.009	0.48	0.0	0.42	0.0	0.05
Activities of legislators	126	0.11	0.33	0.0	0.54	0.0	0.05
Inter-party relations	90	0.0	0.61	0.0	0.24	0.0	0.07
Public opinion and public opinion polls	75	0.09	0.31	0.03	0.45	0.01	0.04
Abuse of political power, corruption	62	0.03	0.56	0.0	0.37	0.0	0.03
Issues regulated by the constitution	43	0.04	0.23	0.0	0.70	0.0	0.02

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysis of the content of media messages concerning the most popular topics apart from national policy (see Table 4.6) showed a higher frequency of critical statements towards elites than anti-elitist populism (the exception being immigration). At the same time, it is worth noting that the presence of most of the individual elements of populist discourse – and their juxtapositions representing specific types of populism – were significantly lower than in the case of topics concerning national policy.

Table 4.6. Elements of the populist discourse in materials containing the most frequent topics outside the 'domestic politics' category

Detailed topics	N	People (Empty populism)	Elite	Out-groups	Anti-elitist populism	Excluding populism	Complete populism
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Activities of foreign politicians	69	0.01	0.55	0.01	0.34	0.0	0.04
Activities of international political organizations	63	0.05	0.51	0.0	0.24	0.0	0.09
Plane crash	47	0.02	0.47	0.0	0.45	0.0	0.02
Journalism and media	42	0.02	0.43	0.02	0.40	0.0	0.09
Immigration	39	0.03	0.10	0.18	0.10	0.10	0.15

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Diplomatic negotiations and agreements	34	0.03	0.59	0.0	0.29	0.0	0.03
International tensions and conflicts	29	0.14	0.45	0.0	0.31	0.0	0.10
State of the economy	26	0.04	0.46	0.0	0.42	0.0	0.04
National defense policy	25	0.04	0.56	0.0	0.32	0.0	0.0

Source: Own elaboration.

However, it is worth noting that the highest rates of critical attitude toward elites were recorded in articles regarding diplomatic negotiations (59%), national defense policy (56%), foreign politicians (55%), and international political organizations (51%). On the other hand, relatively high rates of anti-elitist populism were recorded in materials related to the plane crash (45%), the state of the economy (42%), and foreign politicians (34%).

Populist Discourse and Topics in Media Outlets

One of our research questions (RQ5) concerned the differences and similarities between individual newspapers regarding the types of populism found in materials on various topics.

In the tabloid *Fakt empty populism* that dominated in materials about topics such as referendum and opinion polling, actions of specific foreign politicians, and statements on international policy, as well as budget and health policies. More than half of the references to these issues were accompanied by references to 'the people' in the examined articles. *Empty populism* was also present during discussions of issues related to national policy (activities of legislative authorities, elections, and statements and activities of specific politicians). Significantly, *empty populism* was also present in statements in articles on the Smoleńsk plane crash. *Anti-elitist populism* was clearly present in materials regarding Polish politics and economy, in particular in materials showing economic indicators, data on the labour market and employment, as well as tax scales.

The liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which was critical of the political actors that came to power as a result of the elections in 2015, i.e. PiS and its presidential candidate Andrzej Duda, was characterized by a high presence (50% and more) of *anti-elitist populism* in materials devoted to national politics – mainly the activities of executive authorities (i.e. the government and the president) and issues regulated by the constitution, as well as military and economic activities (especially in the areas of the labour market and employment). *Empty populism* appeared in this press title mainly in materials devoted to inter-party relations, the economic situation in Poland, health policy, and public holidays and ceremonies.

On the other hand, *Nasz Dziennik*, a Catholic-nationalist daily, sympathetic to or even directly supporting PiS, was distinguished by a relatively low incidence of indicators of *anti-elitist populism* in materials devoted to executive and legislative power (about 30%). At the same time, high rates of this type of populism (50%) were record-

ed in materials devoted to the referendum, abuse of power and corruption, and the vote of no confidence in the government. Due to the political orientation of *Nasz Dziennik*, the critique focused on specific political actors (opposition and not the ruling elite). By the same logic we can explain the presence of indicators of *anti-elitist populism* in materials devoted to the national defense policy, peaceful demonstrations (against the PiS government), and strikes. *Empty populism*, i.e. references only to 'the people', could be found mainly in articles referring to the issue of educational reform in the statements of individual politicians. In turn, *complete populism*, combining references to 'the people', anti-elitism, and exclusion of 'out-groups', was detected in articles covering immigration and gender issues.

Rzeczpospolita, which can be described as moderately right-wing, was characterized by high rates of *anti-elitist populism* in materials discussing various aspects of national politics (60% to 90% of references to specific topics belonging to this thematic category included indicators of anti-elitist populism), international politics, and economy and health. Much less frequently we detected *empty populism*, e.g. in materials about public opinion (45.5%), activities of international political organizations (30%), diplomatic visits, diplomatic negotiations and agreements, economic and legal issues, business activities, and immigration and emigration (25% to 60%).

Among the analyzed weeklies, the centre-left *Polityka* was distinguished by a relatively high presence of *complete populism* in materials devoted to the activities of executive bodies: almost 69% of references to the actions taken by the government and president were accompanied by statements containing references to 'the people', a critical attitude towards 'the elite', and exclusion of 'out-groups'. In turn, there was a moderate level of *anti-elitist populism* (about 25–33%) in materials concerning the activity of the legislature, inter-party relations, and statements or activities of individual politicians, as well as international politics. References to 'the people' alone could be found in *Polityka* mainly in texts on budget, economic activity, and social policy. Given the liberal orientation of the weekly, it is not surprising that there was a high presence of *anti-elitist populism* (which in this case refers *de facto* to the ruling elite, i.e. PiS) in materials on social relations, in particular in articles on gender, class, and family issues. It was also the only press title in which populist discourse often appeared in articles on environmental protection.

Newsweek weekly was characterized by a moderate presence of *anti-elitist populism* in materials concerning the activities of the legislative and executive authorities and a relatively high presence in materials on elections, referendums, the airplane crash, and television. In addition, indicators of empty populism appeared in texts on emigration, culture (literature and poetry, painting and sculpture, awards and distinctions), and ceremonies (state, national, religious and anniversary events).

As shown in chapter 2, the right-wing weekly *Do Rzeczy* was characterized by high rates of *anti-elitist* and complete populism. Analysis showed that both these types of populism were present mainly in materials devoted to national politics (at least half contained indicators of *anti-elitist populism*), while indicators of full populism were present in about 10–20% of these materials. Similar observations can be made in the case of articles on international politics: 50% of references to the activities of foreign political parties, promises of aid and international cooperation, and wars between states contained indicators of *anti-elitist populism*, and 20% of references to the

activities of international political organizations and international tensions contained indicators of complete populism. It is also worth noting the presence of indicators of *excluding populism* in materials on immigration, police activity, employment, and social policy (33% to 50%).

Also, the second conservative weekly, the right-wing *W Sieci*, was characterized by relatively high rates of *anti-elitist populism* (see chapter 2). Analysis of the issues discussed in the materials published in the magazine shows that in the case of as many as 23 specific topics within the scope of 10 general categories (national policy, international policy, military and defense, national security, economy, social relations, transport, health and social care, population, media, and the environment), over 50% of references included indicators of *anti-elitist populism*. The presence of indicators of in articles on immigration (20%) and *excluding populism* in articles on immigration (20%) and ethnic relations (20%) should also be noted.

Specifically Polish Indicators of Populist Discourse and Topics

One of the aims of the study was to determine which topics in the press materials were accompanied by the aforementioned specifically Polish populist strategies: (1) *Euroscepticism / anti-Europeanism;* (2) *negative attitude towards Germany*; (3) *anti-communism*; (4) *social justice*; (5) *welfare state*; (6) *reference to religion*; (7) *reference to tradition and history*; (8) *criticism of the Third Polish Republic*; (9) *the Fourth Polish Republic*; (10) *critique of liberalism*; (11) *intervention in the free market* (Przyłęcki, 2012); (12) *negative attitude towards Russia*; (13) *negation of political correctness*; (14) *constructing a crisis perspective* (see chapter 1). It is worth noting that the presence of these strategies was recorded only when at least one element of populist discourse was present in a given material (references to 'the people', criticism of 'the elite', and/or exclusion of 'out-groups').

It comes as no surprise that the negative information campaign against the EU, the desire to contest all major decisions taken within the EU, and the aversion towards European integration (Euroscepticism/anti-Europeanism) could be found in materials devoted to international politics, especially those concerning the activities of international political organizations, i.e. the EU (44% of all materials concerning this topic). It is worth noting that this strategy appeared most frequently in materials published by the right-wing weekly magazines *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci* (60% of all articles containing this strategy came from these two newspapers). Similar observations can be made with regard to the negative attitude towards Germany, which is reflected by references to World War II and/or alleged German property claims in the previously German areas in western and northern Poland: one third of materials on diplomatic negotiations contained this strategy and once again the two right-wing media organizations were at the forefront.

In the case of negative attitude towards Russia, i.e. the use of discourse consisting in spreading fear by referring to historic and current relations, we are again finding this strategy mainly in materials concerning international politics, but this time especially in reports on diplomatic negotiations and agreements, promises of cooperation or aid, war between states, and international tensions and misunderstandings. As in the case

of the previous two, this strategy was mainly present in the *W Sieci* weekly (30%) and also in the centre-left weekly *Polityka* (30%).

Apart from articles on international politics, Euroscepticism/anti-Europeanism could also be found in the right-wing press texts devoted to economic activity and legal regulations defining such activity, immigration, media regulation, and environmental protection – i.e. precisely those areas in which EU bodies raised objections to the activities undertaken by the Polish government in the years covered by the study (i.e. 2015–2017). In turn, a negative attitude towards Germany could be found in articles about transport, immigration, and the media, while a negative attitude towards Russia was present most frequently in articles on national ceremonies and anniversary ceremonies. The negative attitude towards Germany presented in the right-wing press should in this case be interpreted as connected to Germany's involvement in the contemporary European debate regarding the activities of the Polish authorities (refusal to accept refugees and politicization of the Polish electronic media). However, a negative attitude towards Russia appeared in statements in materials on historical events (World War II and a post-war period).

Three other specifically Polish indicators of populist discourse: anti-communism, critique of the Third Polish Republic (expressed in critical statements about the period after 1989; the point of departure for building the Fourth Republic), and the Fourth Polish Republic (i.e. the idea of building a new social, political, and economic order, either in opposition to the Third Polish Republic or as an independent idea) mainly accompanied articles on national politics, and in particular texts on the activities of interest groups, intra-party and inter-party relations, political nominations, judicial decisions, and abuses of power. Particularly visible was the co-existence of critique of the Third Polish Republic and the Fourth Polish Republic in materials concerning issues regulated by the constitution (12% and 14%, respectively) and inter-party relations (13% and 6%, respectively). Therefore, it can be concluded that these strategies were used by the authors of statements reported by the media primarily to define and attack political opponents and to define their own political identity based on the construction of 'us' *versus* 'them'.

At the same time, one can find such indicators as *social justice* (social differences presented as a result of unequal distribution of capital, unfair behaviors of groups that own the means of production, poor versus rich, calls for a new social order based on equal access to goods)*, welfare state* (calls for an increase in budget deficits to improve quality of life, especially among the poorest; promises to increase spending on social, educational, housing, and health initiatives, etc.), *critique of liberalism* (liberal democracy presented as an example of a state hostile to the poor and ruled by corrupt neoliberal political elites alienated from society), and *intervention in the free market* (negation of free market democratic institutions; critique of the free market; advocating an increase in the role of the state in the economy; market regulation). All of aforementioned indicators were most frequently present in articles on economy (including employment and GDP), policy and employment in industry, business, the healthcare system and social service, and social relations (around 10% in many topics).

Finally, we noticed that *references to tradition and history* (events, symbols, memory, historical policy) and *references to religion* (reference to Christian/Catholic val-

ues; references to persons important in the Catholic Church – including pope John Paul II) were used in different contexts. References to tradition and history were relatively frequent in articles on constitutional issues, lobbying, and corruption, as well as on international politics including the activities of international political organizations, the activities of foreign politicians and parties, and political, military and cultural statements. References to religion, on the other hand, were present mostly in articles on abortion, terrorism, immigration, family relations, minority – majority relations, national ceremonies, and anniversary ceremonies.

Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 2 demonstrated the frequency with which newspaper articles about Polish political actors included statements containing elements of populist discourse, and chapter 3 provided insight into who the main sources of such statements were. In this chapter, we focused on the topics of articles in which populist statements were reported by the media. In particular, we wanted to identify the subjects of materials containing at least one indicator of populist discourse, i.e. reference to 'the people', anti-elitism, and/or exclusion of 'out-groups', or were accompanied by a specific type of populism identified by J. Jagers and S. Walgrave (2007), i.e. *empty*, *anti-elitist*, *excluding*, or *complete populism*. Separately, we wanted to identify the incidence of specifically Polish populist strategies in materials concerning various thematic areas and containing at least one of the aforementioned indicators of populist discourse.

The results of our analysis foster several conclusions. First of all, in media coverage of Polish political actors, the majority of attention in the years 2015–2017 was paid to the choices, statements, and activities of specific politicians, activities of the legislative and executive authorities, as well as relations between parties and within parties. In about half of the cases where the presence of these topics were discussed, they were accompanied by either pure critique of 'the elite' or indicators of anti-elitist populism, i.e. references to 'the people' coupled with a critical attitude towards 'the elite'.

Thus, the media image of Polish politics was characterized by the use of a conflict framework and strong polarization. It was also accompanied by a negative assessment of national politics by politicians and/or journalists. Other types of populism were much less frequent.

References to Polish political actors were relatively often accompanied by discussion of international politics, economy, culture, or media activity. It is also possible to identify certain detailed topics, which in the analyzed articles appeared much less frequently (i.e. in less than 2–3 percent of the articles), but were distinguished by a high presence of indicators of populist discourse and their specific combinations indicating particular types of populism. Table 4.7 presents a list of topics that were most often accompanied by particular types of populism (over 10% each for empty, excluding, and complete populism, and over 50% in the case of anti-elitist populism) regardless of the number of articles devoted to a given topic. Therefore, in some cases a given topic appeared only once or twice, and was still taken into account.

**Table 4.7. Topics accompanied by the highest presence of populism**

EMPTY POPULISM (>10%)	ANTI-ELITIST POPULISM (>50%)
Referendum	Activities of the legislature
Public opinion polls	Constitutional issues
Promises of cooperation or aid	Elections
Statements on the direction of international politics	Financing of political organizations
Employment	Promises of cooperation or aid
Budget	Wars between states
Economic-legal issues	Military activities
Trade unions	Attack, aggression
International business	Transport infrastructure/systems
Health policy	Buildings related to transport
Social policy	State of health care
Educational policy	Social policy
Newspapers	Poverty rate
Theatre	General population statistics
Movies	Magazines
Museums	InternetResidential loans
Awards	Land use planning
National ceremonies	Environmental hazards (e.g. pollution)
Religious ceremonies	Activity of environmental organizations
	Sexual relations
	Minority-majority relations
	Exhibitions
	Official political/governmental ceremonies
	National Holidays/ceremonies
EXCLUDING POPULISM (>10%)	COMPLETE POPULISM (>10%)
Referendum	Wars between states
Peaceful demonstrations	International tensions and disagreements
Police activities	Activities of international political organizations
Employment	Peaceful demonstrations
Social policy	Violence against children
Benefits (social policy)	Health policy
Immigration	Social policy
Minority-majority relations	Benefits (social policy)
Awards	Immigration
National ceremonies	Media and journalism
Religious ceremonies	Sexual relations
	Ethnic relations
	Family relations

Source: Own elaboration.

The list in Table 4.7 confirmed our assumptions about the 'populist potential' of events such as elections, protests and demonstrations, changes in public media law, the 2010 plane crash, and topics such as referendum, economy, social welfare, immigration, and relations with the EU and neighboring countries. Among the topics not accompanied by the expected high level of populist discourse was the planned education reform in 2015–2017. As a result, it became possible to develop a map that takes into account contextual and situational factors influencing the presence of the populist discourse in the Polish printed press in the analyzed period (2015–2017).

Secondly, the study confirmed earlier observations concerning the high level of parallelism in Polish newspapers: the political orientation of the analyzed newspapers influenced the presence of specific Polish populist strategies. Euroscepticism/ anti-Europeanism, negative attitude towards Germany, anti-communism, criticism of the Third Polish Republic, and the idea of the Fourth Polish Republic were found in right-wing oriented press materials devoted either to international or national politics. On the other hand, liberally (centre-left) oriented newspapers more often reported statements representing *anti-elitist populism* in materials devoted to gender, class, and social issues. The political orientation of a newspaper was also revealed by who was perceived as 'the elite' in the presented statements: the representatives of the government (i.e. PiS in the studied period), opposition parties, or the broadly understood Polish political scene. The first approach can be found primarily in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Polityka*, the second in right-wing newspapers: *Nasz Dziennik, Do Rzeczy, W Sieci*, and the third in the tabloid *Fakt.*

Figure 4.2. 'Populist potential' of topics in the media discourse in Poland (2015–2017)
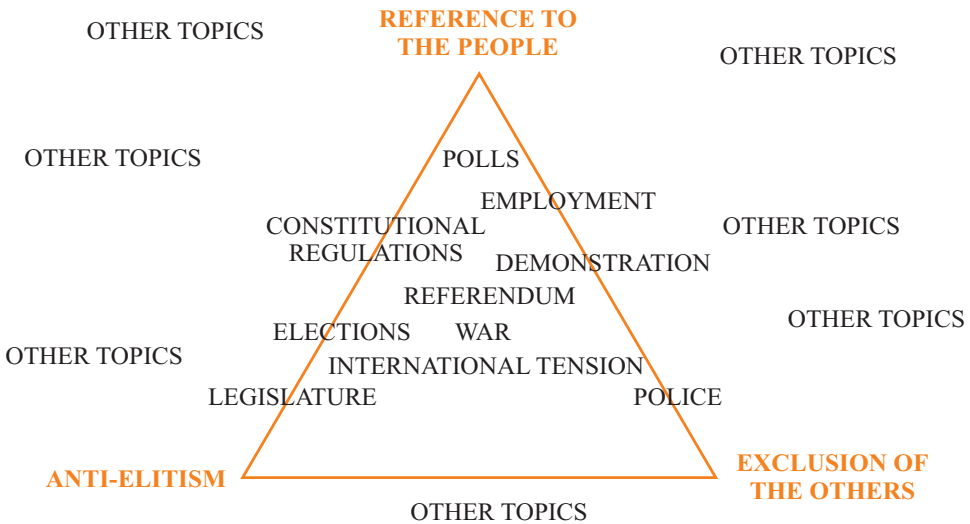
Source: Own elaboration based on the gathered data.

A similar observation can be made with regard to the presence of statements containing indicators of *excluding populism*. This type of populism was mainly present in materials concerning immigration, employment of immigrants, social benefits for immigrants, or in articles describing the proposal of the Kukiz'15 political organization to hold a national referendum regarding the admission of refugees to Poland. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results confirm earlier observations (Scheepers et al., 2002; Koopmans and Muis, 2009) on the 'populist potential' of refugee and immigration issues.

It should be emphasized, however, that the presented numerical data do not show the full picture of populist discourse. Quantitative analysis should be accompanied by qualitative analysis, which can be found in the chapter 10 of this volume, devoted to the construction of 'the other' in the discourse of the right-wing press.

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