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2022-01-02

Kazlauskaite , R & Salmela , M 2022 , ' Mediated emotions : shame and pride in Polish right-wing media coverage of the 2019 European Parliament elections ' , Innovation (Abingdon) , vol. 35 , no. 1 , pp. 130-149 . <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2021.1952551>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/341711>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2021.1952551>

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To cite this article: Rūta Kazlauskaitė & Mikko Salmela (2022) Mediated emotions: shame and pride in Polish right-wing media coverage of the 2019 European Parliament elections, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 35:1, 130-149, DOI: [10.1080/13511610.2021.1952551](https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2021.1952551)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2021.1952551>



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Published online: 09 Jul 2021.



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Mediated emotions: shame and pride in Polish right-wing media coverage of the 2019 European Parliament elections

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(Received 29 June 2020; final version received 18 June 2021)

This paper proposes that the emotion of shame is key to understanding the appeal of Poland's ruling populist right-wing party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or PiS). PiS employs shame in its strategy of emotion regulation in mediated party communication in pro-government media outlets. We suggest that there are two pillars of shame that underpin support for PiS: (1) the collective shame that originates from the perceived cultural inferiority of Poland in relation to the West/Europe, and (2) the individual shame of failing to achieve material prosperity in the context of the post-communist economic transformation. We examine how shame and pride have been instrumentalised in the coverage of the 2019 European Parliament elections by the right-wing media outlet *wPolityce.pl*. The paper demonstrates how *wPolityce.pl* consistently invoked both economic and cultural shame and highlighted the antagonism between PiS and the opposition by identifying the latter with a 'pedagogy of shame.'

Keywords: shame; pride; Law and Justice; Poland; right-wing populism

Introduction

The 2015 parliamentary victory of the right-wing populist¹ Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS)² party has inaugurated unprecedented levels of polarisation in Poland. The majority PiS government initiated controversial reforms of the Constitutional Tribunal and the judiciary system, education, the governance of the public service media, historical memory policy and the abortion law, which exposed deep divisions within Polish society and sparked mass protests (Fomina 2019). The animosity between pro- and anti-PiS camps is likewise reflected in the country's media landscape. The high levels of partisanship can be observed in both public and private media outlets and are symptomatic of the long-standing entanglement of political and media elites in Poland (Dzięciołowski 2017). The majority of Polish media outlets position themselves clearly in favour of or against the governmental agenda (Głowacki and Kuś 2019). The close ties between politicians and journalists in Poland created favourable conditions for the ruling party to exert its influence on

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

the information flows and use public and private media outlets for promotion of a narrative of the ‘good change’ – a term that has served as one of the main slogans of PiS.

The focus of the paper is two-fold. First, we make an argument that a significant factor that may help explain the support for Poland’s ruling party, PiS, is its particular strategy of emotion regulation enabled by mediated party communication in pro-government media outlets. The emotionally-charged rhetoric resonates with voters’ experiences and concerns and appeals to deep-seated and historically embedded cultural and economic cleavages in the country. An emotion that has been largely overlooked in literature seeking to explain the role of emotions in support for right-wing populism is shame (Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018). This is in part due to the fact that shame is not an easy emotion to detect and measure, as previous research has shown, as it requires alternative methodologies for detecting the repression of this painful emotion (e.g. Marx 2019).

Shame is a painful emotion as it implies a failure of the self in a fundamental sense in living up to a core personal value that is often shared with others (Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012; Salmela 2019). Phenomenologically, shame is an emotion of the worthless, the paralyzed, and the ineffective, and it involves a heightened awareness of others’ (presumed) critical evaluation of the self (Tangney and Dearing 2003). Accordingly, shame is a stigmatised emotion in Western cultures where it is framed as a deviant, despised, and socially undesirable emotion and therefore inexpressible emotion that is associated with weakness, inferiority, defeat, low status and other unenviable attributes of the self (Lewis 1995; Walker 2014). Due to these negative implications on the self, we are motivated to avoid and repress shame.

Both shame and pride are *self-conscious* emotions in the sense that the target of emotional appraisal is the self who experiences the emotion. When one feels ashamed or proud, one paradigmatically feels ashamed or proud of oneself. However, both shame and pride also take group-based forms in which the subject of emotion identifies with a group or social collective in feeling the emotion. Group-based emotions can be felt either alone, or together with other group members, and in the latter case they can also be called collective emotions. In these cases, the subject is ashamed of a failure or degradation of one’s group, or proud of an achievement or success of one’s group, such as one’s family, favourite sports team, political party, religious community, or nation (Smith, Seger, and Mackie 2007). Whether group-based or collective, the phenomenology of these emotions is similar to their private forms: painful in shame and pleasant in pride. Therefore, we are motivated to avoid, repress, or take distance from group-based or collective shame and to experience group-based or collective pride.

One way of regulating shame involves a reinterpretation of a shame-inducing event by identifying an agent who is blamed for wrongfully shaming the subject of emotion; either by lacking authority for evaluating the subject or his or her group as having failed, or by having actively contributed to the shameful failure. Either way, this reinterpretation of the situation allows a transformation of shame into righteous anger towards the purportedly shaming agent. The claim for moral superiority conceptually involved in anger and resistance to the perceived wrong also warrant the emotion of pride, typically expressed as a ‘restoration of pride’ when there is an underlying, possibly repressed shame involved. Such shame-infused pride may, especially in group-based and collective forms, take hubristic forms in being insensitive, excessive, or arrogant towards relevant others whom such expressions of pride seek to antagonise (Pettigrove and Parsons 2012; Salmela and von Scheve 2017; Sullivan and Day 2019). These dynamic relationships between shame, pride, and anger can be seen in the emotion regulation strategies employed by populist rhetoric as well.³

Our theoretical framework of emotion regulation comes from Gross (2014) who distinguishes between *antecedent-focus* and *response-focused* emotion regulation strategies,

the former consisting of situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, and cognitive change, suppression being the only strategy of the latter kind. Media outlets, journalists and political actors may engage in both antecedent-focused and response-focused regulation of the emotions of the public, depending on whether these actors seek to modify the emotions of the public by means of reappraisals that may change the type of felt emotion from shame into anger or pride. Alternatively, they may regulate emotions by reinforcing the suppression of individual emotions and providing targets of anger, thus contributing to the emotional mechanism of *ressentiment* identified by Salmela and von Scheve (2017). In what follows, we do not explicitly analyse the type of emotion regulation involved in each case we discuss. However, we return to the types of emotion regulation in populist rhetoric and their role in the *ressentiment* mechanism in the conclusions of this article.

We propose that there are two key types of shame that may underlie support for the populist right in Poland: (1) the collective shame that originates from the perceived cultural inferiority of Poland in relation to the West/Europe, and (2) the individual shame of failing to succeed or achieve material prosperity in the context of the post-communist transformation of the economy and the new neoliberal order.

Secondly, we examine how the emotion of shame has been instrumentalised in the mediated party rhetoric preceding the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections. Thus, our empirical analysis focuses on the role of the media in facilitating and performing the right-wing populist strategy of emotion regulation rather than the emotions of PiS supporters *per se*. Since 2019 has been a year of double – European and national – elections in Poland, this generated a context in which PiS could utilise feelings of shame and inferiority in relation to Europe as well as in the domestic sphere in its electoral campaign. Focusing on the aforementioned two types of shame, we trace how a right-wing private media outlet – *wPolityce.pl* – reproduced the emotionalised rhetoric of PiS during its European Parliament electoral campaign between February and May 2019.

According to Salmela and von Scheve (2017), whose hypotheses inform our approach to the Polish case, there are two social psychological mechanisms that could explain the rise of the populist right.⁴ The first mechanism relates to how negative emotions such as fear or insecurity, insofar as individuals accept responsibility or blame for those fears or insecurities, are transformed through repressed shame into anger and hatred towards out-groups: those perceived as ‘enemies’ and typically represented by such groups as elites, immigrants or the ‘mainstream’ media. The second mechanism operates by means of emotional distancing from identities that inflict shame or other negative emotions and the promotion of stable, ascriptive social identities such as nationality, religion or traditional gender roles. Shame is pervasive in the Polish context, suggesting its potentially important, if little understood, role in mobilising the support of the electorates (Czapliński 2017; Törnquist-Plewa 2002; Bilewicz 2016a; Gosk, Kuziak, and Paczoska 2019).

The role of the media is particularly salient in disseminating the emotionalised message of right-wing populists (Mazzoleni 2008; Muis and Scholte 2013; Krämer 2014). As Wahl-Jorgensen (2019, 9) observes, the articulation of emotion in news media contributes to an emergence of shared repertoires of emotion, which serve to both establish and challenge emotional regimes. News media provide that crucial vehicle for the expression, articulation and eliciting of emotions in the public realm. They enable emotionally significant interactions and a shared emotional repertoire between people that may not otherwise be able to connect and interact (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019). This repertoire defines how people should feel about themselves and others, the in-group and the out-group, and can explain why they should feel this way. Bos and

Brants (2014) suggest to distinguish between two varieties of media populism: the media being receptive to populism and journalists being populists themselves. While the former is an outcome of the changes in the media market, the latter pattern of relationship between the media and populism reflects the populist attitudes of journalists.

The highly polarised Polish media environment falls into the latter category of media populism. TVP, the Polish public broadcaster, acts as the government's mouthpiece by actively promoting the ruling party's message and electoral campaigns as well as voicing unrelenting criticism directed at the opposition parties. Conservative private media outlets, such as *wSieci*, *wPolityce.pl* or *DoRzeczy*, are likewise outspoken in their support of the government. Many of these outlets are owned by individuals or organisations, which are close to PiS politicians (Głowacki and Kuś 2019, 107). The highly emotionalised narratives diffused through them reflect the 'journalism of identity,' which fixes the audiences into a particular mindset and value stance (Dzięciołowski 2017). Changes in the governance of the public service media along with the rise of the private right-wing media outlets and the criticism of the government by the liberal, left-wing media outlets has resulted in the culture of 'media tribes,' which frame their content with the principle aim of undermining the opposing political group, perceived as an 'enemy' (Głowacki and Kuś 2019). The media polarisation also applies to the audiences which live in their own media bubbles and distrust the opposing side's sources of information (Fomina 2019).

The allusiveness of the stories and narratives that characterise the content of right-wing media help to understand how mediated emotions become integrated by their audience (Polletta 2006; Polletta and Callahan 2017). On the one hand, the mediated emotions may resonate with the readers' or viewers' own previous experiences and their associated feelings, rendering the content recognisable and impactful (Hochschild 2016). In this case, populist rhetoric contributes to the regulation of pre-existing negative emotions and channels them to target the perceived 'enemies' of the self, as informed by populist groups (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017; Nguyen, Salmela, and von Scheve 2021). On the other hand, emotionalised media narratives, through their allusiveness or capacity to link in people's minds with other persuasive stories encountered elsewhere in offline and online communication, may actively cause, shape and reinforce particular emotional responses (Polletta and Callahan 2017). Readers or viewers may feel that the stories offered by right-wing media outlets represent the experiences and feelings of the people with whom they can identify, of people 'like me' (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2004). They may feel an affinity with the sentiments and political attitudes expressed and integrate them as their own. In other words, the populist rhetoric can employ the already existing negative emotions, but it may likewise actively cause and shape the emotional landscape of the electorate (Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange 2016; Busby, Gubler, and Hawkins 2019; Marx 2019; Nguyen 2019), such as through a mediated electoral campaign. In what follows, we discuss what we refer to as the two 'pillars of shame' – the collective cultural shame and the individual economic shame – and how they figure in the Polish context.

Collective cultural shame

This first pillar of shame, due to the perceived socio-cultural inferiority of Poland in relation to the West/Europe, often manifests in several distinct but interrelated contexts that highlight the dimension of value conflicts in contemporary politics (Pytlas 2015). The collective cultural shame needs to be interpreted against a tenacious and historically

embedded narrative about a contradictory position of Poland towards Europe and European values, where Poland has sought to be part of Europe, defined itself as and yearned to be recognised as European, but, due to factors of a geohistorical nature, has remained on the periphery of, or has been repeatedly betrayed and rejected by, Europe (Törnquist-Plewa 2002; Pytlas 2015). For example, the elites of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were convinced that Europe would ensure a continued existence of their state, but the first partition of Poland-Lithuania in 1772 by Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg Empire revealed that the state was vulnerable, on the periphery and disregarded by the West (Törnquist-Plewa 2002, 218). In the age of Enlightenment, Europe and the West became synonymous with ‘civilisation,’ as Polish gentry began to identify Europe with the ‘civilised West,’ in contrast to the uncivilised East (Wolff 1994; Törnquist-Plewa 2002). However, the attempts to Europeanise Poland by the Polish Enlightenment elites and make it resemble Western Europe met some resistance from the local gentry, who feared that the Western model would destroy Poland’s unique traditions and values (Törnquist-Plewa 2002, 219). However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Poles equated Europe with civilisation and modernisation and aspired to imitate Western European models (Törnquist-Plewa 2002).

The experiences of WWII disturbed the European consciousness of the Poles, who felt betrayed by Europe and the West and left behind the Iron Curtain to their own fate (Törnquist-Plewa 2002). In the aftermath of the fall of communism in 1989, the Polish elite formulated a slogan about Poland’s ‘return to Europe,’ but the increased contact with the West soon revealed to the Poles their backwardness and provincialism as well as the prejudice of Western Europeans against Poles and other Eastern Europeans, which contributed to the sense of inferiority (Törnquist-Plewa 2002; Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012). Furthermore, the idea of the West/Europe in Polish national discourse repeatedly oscillated between the West/Europe as a model of civilisation and culture to aspire to, and also as a threat that could weaken the unique national Polish culture, customs and Catholic values (Törnquist-Plewa 2002; Pytlas 2015). The repercussions of these deep-seated sentiments play a significant role in contemporary Polish politics.

In addition, the historical past plays a crucial role in contemporary discussions about whether Poland belongs to the ‘progressive West’, which accepts its negative history or the ‘backwards East’, which denies or downplays it. The experiences of the Holocaust in particular have been at the forefront of discussions about collective shame and guilt (Bilewicz 2016a). PiS has managed to successfully tap into this source of shame by repeatedly calling to end the ‘pedagogy of shame’ inflicted on the Poles by liberals and progressives in Poland and abroad. For example, when speaking on the occasion of the 99th anniversary of independence of Poland in 2017, the leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński declared: ‘We reject the politics of pedagogy of shame. We are going in the direction of Poland, which will be able to tell that it is an independent and proud country.’ (wPolityce 2017). The term ‘pedagogy of shame’ has been a recurrent trope in the rhetoric of PiS and refers to criticisms directed at Polish history, particularly in relation to the history of WWII and the participation of Poles in the Holocaust. The political will aimed at opposing the ‘pedagogy of shame’ sought to silence the debates about past wrongdoings perpetrated by members of the Polish nation against Jews as well as other ethnic minorities, and to replace them with an emphasis on Polish pride and heroism. Political rhetoric in this case serves as a strategy for downregulating unpleasant collective emotions that are particularly painful to those with high levels of identification with the nation (Bilewicz 2016a, 2016b). Yet the fact that the narrative of Polish pride associates with reduced empathy for the Jews suggests that this pride is defensive and hubristic, and

thus still influenced by underlying collective shame (Sullivan and Day 2019). Among other strategies used for downregulating unpleasant emotions such as shame and guilt in response to a negative past, Bilewicz (2016a, 2016b) lists a focus on the positive historical ingroup behaviour, historical censorship and silencing, victimhood competition (in this case, between Jews and Poles in terms of their historical trauma), morality shifting and questioning the source of the negative narrative, all of which can be observed in the Polish context.

After its electoral victory in 2015, the PiS government initiated a new national politics of history that aimed at downplaying Polish participation in the Holocaust by emphasizing the role of ethnic Poles as victims and heroes in World War II, and to defend the 'good name' of Poland and the Poles (Hackmann 2018). This strategic move in the national politics of history counteracts empathy and compassion for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, which, according to the Polish philosopher Andrzej Leder (2019, 41) is one of the symptoms of denial of shame felt in relation to experiences of the Holocaust. Representatives of PiS, including, for example, the Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, have stated that Poland's suffering during WWII and its aftermath remains unacknowledged by the West (Wroński and Kondzińska 2019). The new politics of history also manifested in the conflict around the exhibitions and leadership of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk (Peters 2016; Snyder 2016), as well as the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, which both counter the official vision of Polish history and have been publicly attacked by the PiS government. When the first director of the Museum of the Second World War was dismissed by the Polish Minister of Culture, the new appointee refocused the exhibition on the theme of Polish martyrology and heroism (Hackmann 2018). The legal battle over the leadership of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews ended by its former director Dariusz Stola withdrawing his candidacy for reappointment.⁵

A cultural rift also emerged in the debates on LGBTQIA+ rights, abortion and Church-state relations (Pytlas 2015), causing intense political polarisation between left-liberal and conservative-national factions of Polish society. In these debates, the right-wing parties framed the West/Europe as liberal, 'immoral' forces that sought to undermine traditional Catholic values and Polish national identity, alluding to historical experiences of the political annihilation of Poland or state treason against Poland (de Lange and Guerra 2009; Pytlas 2015). Hence, the religious dimension of polarisation reaffirmed the historical narrative of unjust suffering and the struggle for the preservation of distinct Polish culture and traditions.

Against this context, the warnings of liberals and progressives in Poland about the diminishing role of Poland in Europe following the election of PiS only further contributed to the simultaneous sense of cultural inferiority and moral righteousness in relation to the West/Europe, and aided PiS in mobilising voters. In the same vein, PiS employed the critique directed at Poland by EU institutions for failing to uphold the European values in order to transform the collective shame and feelings of inferiority into anger towards the EU and national opposition elites, liberal Polish and global media, and immigrants and refugees. Countering the shame about 'what the West will think about us', PiS offered pride-infused rhetoric that underlined national honour and heroism and encouraged Poles to 'get up off their knees' (wPolityce.pl 2016). The effectiveness of this rhetoric in mobilising voters can be seen as an indication of underlying repressed shame that requires a compensatory rhetoric that celebrates Poland's greatness, boosts national self-esteem and reaffirms the narrative of victimisation and unjust suffering (see also Pettigrove and Parsons 2012).

Individual economic shame

The second pillar of shame that drives support for the populist right in Poland is individual economic shame, as in the shame of a failure to succeed and achieve material prosperity in the context of the post-communist transformation of Polish society. While other negative emotions besides shame such as anxiety, sadness, guilt, or anger may also correlate with perceived economic deprivation, shame is nevertheless prevalent among these emotions insofar as individuals accept responsibility or blame for their inferior economic situation. This kind of responsibility attribution is promoted by the neoliberal economic policy that was adopted in Poland after the post-communist transformation.

Previous research (Tworzecki 2019) demonstrates that from the 2000s PiS invented and popularised a discourse that set the beneficiaries of the post-1989 transformation against those who experienced a decline in their economic wellbeing and social esteem. This discourse has thrived despite the fact that the Polish economy has been growing at a rate significantly higher than the EU average. The phenomenon of the Polish ‘economic miracle’ has been accompanied by fast-growing levels of inequality. The introduction of a new economic system meant that the government cut public spending and sought to attract foreign investment by relaxing labour regulations, offering tax breaks and providing other economic incentives. As data from the latest report by World Inequality Lab suggests, Poland was among the least unequal countries on the continent in the 1980s, but by 2017 it became the most unequal country in Europe in terms of the top 10% income share (Blanchet, Chancel, and Gethin 2019, 174). In 2014, 17% of the Polish population was at risk of poverty after social transfers (Statistics Poland 2016, 176). Without social transfers, 43,7% would be at risk of poverty (Statistics Poland 2016). PiS purposefully directed its message to conservative and economically hard-pressed voters, and it upheld this electoral campaigning approach before the 2019 dual elections of the European and national parliaments.

In February 2019, PiS kick-started its EP electoral campaign by announcing a pledge to extend welfare programmes and calling for a ‘Poland for all and not for the few.’ Kaczyński emphasised the need for equality rather than privileges for well-situated groups, reinforcing the established ‘liberalism vs. solidarism’ discourse, according to which PiS positioned itself as the defender of the losers of the transition to a market economy, whereas the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO), the largest opposition party, represented the interests of the winners of the post-1989 transformation. In its new campaign, PiS committed to making the child benefit (known as 500+) universal for all children, which was previously available for only every second and subsequent child; removing income tax for young people until 26 years of age; paying an additional monthly pension payment in a year – i.e. a 13th payment – for the retired; and boosting public bus services in rural and small urban areas.

Right-wing media played a key role in disseminating the message of this double electoral campaign strategy. By exposing their audience to the rhetoric of PiS, pro-government media outlets participated in building a particular ‘emotional regime’ (Reddy 2001) that promised to alleviate PiS supporters of their collective and individual shame and supply feelings of pride, hope and security.

Data and method

In what follows, we analysed selected articles from one of the most popular Polish right-wing, pro-government media outlets, *wPolityce.pl*. A news and commentary website,

wPolityce.pl was established in 2010 by the journalist brothers Jacek and Michał Karnowski. The content of the website focuses on the coverage of political news and is connected to the print weekly *Sieci* and online news channel *wPolsce.pl*, which started its satellite broadcasts in 2017. According to a March 2018 survey, *wPolityce.pl* was the most popular right-wing news website in Poland, garnering over 1.2 million individual users, who spent 35 min on the website per visit on average (wirtualmedia.pl 2018). In March 2019, an analogous survey showed that the ranking of *wPolityce.pl* had slightly dropped in terms of the number of individual users, but it still featured amongst the top three most popular right-wing news websites in Poland, with an even higher number of 1.4 million of individual users, the second-largest number of individual views and the highest duration of time – 32 min – spent on the website on average (wirtualmedia.pl 2019).

The final dataset was chosen from 1,532 articles collected between February 1 and May 26 2019⁶ that mentioned the term ‘European elections.’⁷ For each month, the dataset was compiled of most liked and most commented articles. The number of articles included into the dataset was determined by the number of articles with 1000 or more likes per each month. We ranked the articles in terms of the number of likes and comments they received and selected 25% of the most liked articles as well as the same number of the most commented articles per each month. The slight variations in the monthly dataset size were due to the overlaps between most liked and most commented articles. Figure 1 below indicates the structure of the dataset, consisting of the total number of articles that mention the EP elections in each month, the number of articles with 1000 or more likes, and the number of articles included in the final analysis.

The articles were coded openly with Atlas.ti, focusing on issues that elicit strong controversy and debates in Polish society (e.g. democracy, difficult history, sex education, paedophilia in the Catholic Church, etc.) and their related emotions, judgments and values. Codes were typically applied to paragraph-long passages of text. This initial analysis yielded 960 codes in total. Subsequently, we identified the most popular codes for each month (e.g. criticism of PiS, Poland vs. Europe/West, dignity, pride, national elections, social welfare, family, LGBT, teachers’ strike, history, paedophilia, etc.) and focused the qualitative analysis on these codes and their related article sections, following the approach of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The aim of this approach was to identify the main polarising topics that defined the discussion in the run-up to the EP elections in *wPolityce.pl* content. These polarising themes were then analysed in terms of our theoretical framework. The qualitative approach to content analysis was chosen after an initial reading of the material, when we became aware that shame, in particular, was often not mentioned explicitly and had to be teased out of the material, with the help of contextual knowledge of Polish society and history as well as the chosen theoretical framework. The following sections reveal how we have interpreted the occurrence of such explicit and implicit emotive expressions and present the results of the analysis per each month, between February 2019 and May 2019.

February 2019: addressing the two pillars of shame

In February, *wPolityce.pl* devoted a lot of attention to disputing the criticism directed at the ruling party, aiming to downplay or mock the opinions of the opposition voices. The largest opposition party, Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, or PO), as the main contender to PiS and leader of the European Coalition grouping of five parties in the EP elections, received most of the ridicule and criticism in the articles. Although all of the articles included in the analysis deal with the EP elections, it is evident that the

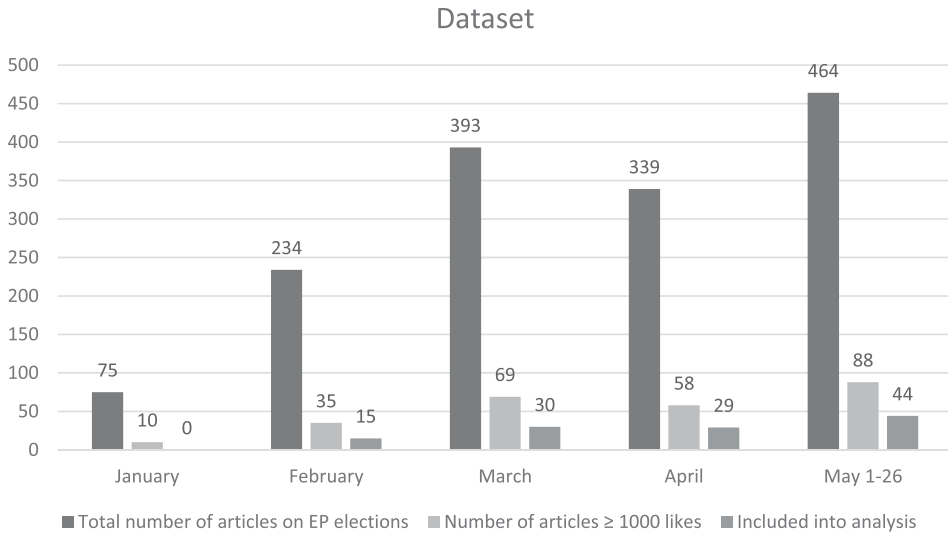


Figure 1. The structure of the dataset.

media content in the electoral campaign was simultaneously, if not primarily, targeted to the national parliamentary elections in the autumn of 2019.

In terms of emotional regulation in *wPolityce.pl* content, the discussion on the EP elections in February was divided into two main themes: (1) the new extended social welfare provisions promised by PiS, named by the Polish media outlets as ‘the five of Kaczyński,’ which targeted the individual shame felt by economically hard-pressed voters and sought to restore their dignity, and (2) the defence of traditional Polish culture and values against the perceived onslaught of the ‘immoral’ Western/European values, embodied by the demands of the LGBT community.

As Jarosław Kaczyński’s speech during a party congress in February illustrated, the two themes of discussion and the corresponding two pillars of shame – economic and cultural – were introduced as matters of equality and freedom:

Poland for all or only for a few? This question has many aspects. The most important are two issues: equality and freedom. Equality is, first of all, equality before law, equality of opportunities, so as to be able to live in a dignified way. [...] The second issue is freedom, which is being questioned. There are those, who want to take away our freedom of opinions, freedom of speech, conscience, religion, who announce that democracy will be abolished in Poland [...] (D57).

Declaring that the economic and cultural pride of Poles was at stake, PiS presented itself as the party that could be trusted to protect the nation from feelings of humiliation and inferiority that often go together with shame. The economic development combined with an extended welfare programme was a key strategy proposed by PiS for restoring the dignity of Poles. As Kaczyński put it: ‘it is important to restore dignity, equality as well as freedom. Freedom has an aspect, which is located in the pocket. We, taking these realities into consideration, will fill these pockets’ (D57).

In the rhetoric of PiS, Europe and the West remained a model that Poland should follow, but in a limited sense. Aspirations towards Europe were restricted to the economic development of Poland and excluded any taking onboard of European culture and/or European

values. The Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, succinctly summarised the stance of PiS towards Europe: 'For us, Europeanness is first of all the wealth in our wallets and low unemployment. Europe and Europeanness need to fulfil the material aspirations of Poles' (D62). However, when it came to culture, religion and tradition, PiS distinguished itself from the West/Europe, which it perceived as a potential threat to Polish customs and values. In these circumstances, PiS positioned itself as a guardian of local culture and Christian values that are in need of defence not only in Poland, but also in Europe:

Poles want equality and want freedom. These are values rooted in our culture, whose foundation is Christianity. Our civilisation grew out of Christianity. This civilisation is the most benevolent to a human being. To describe shortly the idea of the politics of good change, it is the defence of what emerges from our culture, tradition and civilisation (D57).

The narrative of PiS recurrently used the trope of the 'good change,' starting from its 2015 electoral campaign. The 2019 electoral campaign likewise employed the story of the 'good change' by opposing the period of moral disintegration and poverty when opposition parties formed the government (2007-2014), to the period of prosperity and development during the PiS rule. Dignity became a keyword in this narrative of change and development, as Deputy Prime Minister Beata Szydło's speech illustrated:

Priority for us will be a dignified life of Polish families. [...] Let's remember how it used to be. Lack of jobs, low earnings, dramatic choices for pensioners. Convolution of the state, abolition of institutions and train connections – this was the summary of eight years of rule by PO and PSL. They left this kind of Poland. [...] Young people did not have jobs, went abroad. Today they are returning, have a job, some can even choose among several offers (D57).

The plight of the humiliated, the alienated and the poor became one of the key topics at the PiS party congress, emphasizing how the extended welfare programme 500+ would further improve the lives of Poles:

The symbol is the Programme 500+. It returned dignity to Polish families, gave new opportunities. [...] I will never forget a conversation with a mother of four, who told that she could finally buy a fridge. She was telling that in winter, they managed to get by, but in summer, it was impossible. [...] Today we are fulfilling the expectations of single mothers, all parents, who spoke in different meetings and wrote letters, asking to extend the Programme 500+ to all. (D57)

PiS placed the main focus on presenting itself as the party that takes care of the people who struggle to make ends meet, such as families, young people and pensioners.

March 2019: A shift to the cultural cleavage between Poland and the west

The discussion on the EP elections shifted in March from economic to cultural cleavages. Attention became focused on (1) LGBT issues and the sex education of schoolchildren, which, in turn, highlighted (2) the engrained value conflicts and cultural cleavage between Poland and the West/Europe, effectively employed in the rhetoric of PiS for the mobilisation of conservative voters.

LGBT issues emerged as an important subject in March and were used in the electoral campaign of PiS. The Mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, and representatives of LGBT organisations signed the LGBT+ Declaration, in which they pledged to combat discrimination, in February 2019. However, the issue rose to media's attention when the leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, picked on the LGBT+ declaration in the party congress, claiming

that the LGBT+ Declaration was ‘an attack on family’ and was meant to ‘sexualise children.’ Kaczyński utilised the LGBT+ Declaration to further entrench the image of PiS as the protector of family, children, and traditional values: ‘We want to say it clearly. We say ‘no’! And especially when it comes to children. Hands off of our children!’ (D32).

The conflict over LGBT rights was introduced in *wPolityce.pl* content as a symptom of the decline of Western civilisation as well as proof of a cultural cleavage existing between Poland and the West/Europe. Historian and MEP Wojciech Roszkowski from PiS drew the conclusion that Poland should not imitate the West and that the West no longer represented a model to aspire to:

Sexualisation of children, undermining of people’s sex identity, destruction of family is the beginning of the end of civilisation. [...] We live in a world of false consciousness, for we are persuaded that the West is something wonderful, beautiful, for which we should strive, but this West has already largely crumbled. If we have to defend the West, then we must completely divert our gaze and not to look at LGBT, at sexualisation of children in schools or at parades of different kind of dissenters, who talk about tolerance, but at the bottom of things they are aggressive and demand special privileges for themselves. [...] Hence, this West, which we would like to defend, is somewhere else completely (D41).

The adoption of the LGBT+ Declaration was also instrumentalised by PiS in order to attack the European Coalition and its apparent lack of a coherent electoral programme in the run-up to the EP elections. PiS party member Arkadiusz Mularczyk pondered in an article on *wPolityce.pl* as to ‘whether the adoption of children by homosexuals is an official programme of the European Coalition’ (D46). Similarly, the First Deputy Minister of Justice, Patryk Jaki, asserted:

Poles have a choice. Either they will choose the European Coalition and money for LGBT, or the United Right. If they choose the United Right, then the resources will be directed to the traditional Polish family, to the development of its ability, to the fight against poverty and to the growth of the economic power of the Polish state. [...] We will never agree that such principles would be introduced in Poland like in the West, where boys are dressed up as girls (D22).

PiS appropriated the LGBT+ Declaration in its electoral campaign as a symbol of the onslaught of the apparently immoral, perverse Western values and customs that threaten the integrity of Polish cultural identity and its moral foundations. Simultaneously, it linked these Western values and customs to the European Coalition, effectively presenting the pro-European political camp as anti-Polish.

By contrast, the European Coalition, as depicted in *wPolityce.pl* content, attempted to reframe the ‘Poland vs. West’ cultural cleavage for its own benefit by transforming it into an ‘East vs. West’ issue. For example, one of the members of the European Coalition and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, criticised Kaczyński:

The chairman (Kaczyński – R.K.) promised that there will be Budapest in Warsaw and he is keeping to his words. The Constitutional Tribunal is already factionalised, public media are taken over, our rule of law is questioned. Mr Chairman, after Minsk, there is Moscow, not Brussels. Let’s revert from this path. To the West, not the East! (D73).

A former Prime Minister and a member of Civic Platform, Ewa Kopacz, framed the ‘East vs. West’ divide in term of women’s rights, linking the West to normalcy and the East to shameful backwardness and fanaticism:

The measure of distance, which separates us from normalcy, from Europe, [...] is that when one speaks about women in Poland, their rights, their place in society, we have to start from obvious things, from fundamental postulates, which are already settled in the Western world and in Europe and which are not even controversial aside from a handful of fanatics (D48).

Echoing the same dichotomy, Grzegorz Schetyna, leader of PO, asked his voters to think as to whether ‘the future of Poland is Western Europe, whether we are in favour of the Western order or in favour of chaos and lack of democracy’ (D49).

The criticism of PiS and its politics by the opposition could be instrumentalised by the ruling party as proof of the ongoing ‘pedagogy of shame.’ The antagonism was useful to PiS, boosting its image as the party that aims to protect the Polish nation from feelings of inferiority and insecurity. This role was further amplified by the LGBT+ debate. PiS rhetoric identified the LGBT+ community and the opposition leaders protecting it as the ‘enemies’ of traditional Polish culture and values. Since the latter represent the main source of positive, stable, pride-inducing ascriptive identities in the PiS narrative, the LGBT+ community and its cause could be easily made the targets of anger and hatred. Following Salmela and von Scheve’s argument (2017), identification of such ‘enemies’ of Polish cultural identity could further serve in transforming negative self-focused emotions of insecurity or inferiority through repressed shame into anger and hatred towards the ‘Other.’ The campaign directed against the LGBT+ community could assist in redirecting the negative emotions away from the self.

April 2019: A battle over naming the sources of shame and pride

The discussion on the EP elections in April in *wPolityce.pl* content brought forward (1) the topic of teachers’ protests, and, in conjunction with them, (2) a new appraisal, this time by opposition party leaders, of the need to restore the dignity and pride of Poles in both the domestic and the international sphere. Simultaneously, this rhetoric manoeuvre was accompanied by (3) a reframing of the ‘East vs. West’ dichotomy by the opposition leaders, who sought to associate the West with pride and the East, represented by PiS, with shame. Finally, (4) ‘Polexit’ emerged in the discourse of the opposition, presenting PiS as a threat to Poland’s EU membership.

The nationwide spread of protests of teachers demanding higher pay, which started in March, drew attention in April to the shortcomings of the PiS government and elicited a defensive reaction from the party, as it sought to delegitimise teachers’ demands as part of the electoral campaign orchestrated by the opposition (D100). Opposition leaders, on the other hand, called for ‘dignified work for teachers in all Europe’ as well as a ‘dignified salary’ for other public sector professions and pensioners (Robert Biedroń, Wiosna) (D80 and D103), invited PiS to ‘treat teachers in a dignified way’ (Grzegorz Schetyna, PO) (D84), pledged to win the European elections as ‘a commitment to the proud history of the Polish Republic and European civilisation’ (Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, PSL) (D79), promised to ‘restore a dignified place for Poland in the EU’ (Krzysztof Hetman, PSL) (D79), and identified the discourse of dignity in the rhetoric of PiS as ‘arrogance and contempt for people who think differently’ (Katarzyna Lubnauer, Nowoczesna) (D79). The opposition used the opportunity presented by the teachers’ strike in order to appropriate the keywords of ‘dignity’ and ‘pride’ from the campaign rhetoric of PiS.

One of the members of the European Coalition, Janusz Lewandowski, spoke explicitly using the vocabulary of shame and pride:

In 2019, Poles will stop feeling ashamed of those who govern Poland. They have oppressed us to such an extent that we – a partner of Germany and France, are a shame to Romania. [...] The joint orchestra [European Coalition – R.K.] will play so as to recover the pride in our country (D79).

In his speech, the feelings of shame and pride were linked, respectively, to the opposition of the East and the West, where the East represented shameful backwardness, poverty, lack of democracy and corruption, and the West stood for prosperity, democracy and the rule of law. This represents one of the variants of the ‘pedagogy of shame’ that PiS discourse addresses and seeks to defend Poland from. The aim of the European Coalition, in this context, was to make Poland more like the desired model of the West, embodied in such Western European countries as Germany and France. Repeatedly, the members of the European Coalition highlighted what distinguished their political grouping from PiS. The electoral choice was set for voters as a mutually exclusive verdict: ‘either strong and affluent Poland in the EU or Poland drifting to the East’, ‘either a team of great pride or a team of complexes’, and ‘either a part of the West or a part of Russia’ (D79).

Aside from shame and pride, the emotion of fear cropped up in *wPolityce.pl* content that dealt with speeches of the opposition leaders, who argued that PiS was driving Poland into the path of Great Britain by encouraging Eurosceptic sentiments that could eventually lead to ‘Polexit’. The European Coalition employed this danger in the same polarising manner, by presenting itself as a political power that would secure a strong position for Poland in the EU in accordance with Poland’s interests, in contrast to PiS, which was said to be in alliance with Eurosceptic political actors such as Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini and the Brexit campaign (D79).

May 2019: back to the cultural cleavage

The media campaign in *wPolityce.pl* content in May returned to the issue of a cultural cleavage separating Poland and the West/Europe, centred around (1) the revelations of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, and (2) the restitution of Jewish property seized during or after WWII.

The paedophilia scandal in the Catholic Church was stirred by the online release of the documentary ‘Just Don’t Tell Anyone’ by Tomasz Sekielski, which depicts victims confronting the clergymen who assaulted them. Although the main focus of the film is on the victims and their experiences, it likewise shows how Church authorities remained silent when faced with the problem of child sexual abuse. The response of PiS to these revelations had more or less followed the entrenched narrative about liberal forces seeking to undermine traditional Polish culture, identity and Catholic values, identifying the Church with Poland and presenting the Church as the victim of unfair accusations. Jarosław Kaczyński reaffirmed that ‘whoever raises their hand against the Church, wants to destroy it, he raises the hand against Poland. [...] We should defend the Church, this is also a patriotic obligation’ (D109). However, two weeks later the rhetoric of Kaczyński changed slightly, when he condemned paedophilia while simultaneously attempting to deflect the focus off the Church and present child sexual abuse as an issue that is present more generally in society as a whole:

We are mostly Catholics and we support the Church, but this does not surely mean that we want to tolerate any kind of a pathology in the Church. [...] I want to say it explicitly: PiS is ready to support a commission, which will investigate the cases of paedophilia, but not only in the Church, but in all areas (D131).

Even when admitting the guilt of the Church, Kaczyński presented the Church as a foundation of the Polish identity under attack by unjust accusations from the liberal opposition.

This narrative of self-victimisation carried on into discussions on the restitution of Jewish property lost during WWII. The issue became a feature of the electoral campaign after the US government passed the Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act of 2017, or Act 447, which required the U.S. Department of State to provide a report to Congress on the progress of the countries that signed a declaration in 2009 on the restitution of assets seized during or following WWII. The 2009 Terezin Declaration included provisions to give formerly Jewish-owned property with no heirs to Holocaust survivors in need of financial help or to support education on the subject. PiS quickly instrumentalised the situation to boost its image as the defender of Polish dignity and victimhood during the war, threatened by Act 447. As Kaczyński underlined:

German crimes are assigned to us, a role during the World War II, which is completely opposite from the role we played. We were the first ones, who went to fight with guns in our hands, and they try to make the allies of Hitler out of us. They try to claim that Poland has some kind of financial obligations in relation to the World War II. [...] They should pay to us. Some countries on the western side of Polish borders should pay to us, even more than a billion dollars. We are not guilty to anyone (D109).

Kaczyński reframed the issue as a case of Polish victimhood under attack by a narrative that highlighted shameful Polish anti-Semitism, downplaying the experiences of Holocaust victims. This could be identified as a clear instance of a strategy of downregulating negative emotions of shame and guilt by means of victimhood competition (Bilewicz 2016a, 2016b). Voters were encouraged to choose PiS as ‘the only true guarantee that we will not pay, that we will not pay enormous financial damages and, what is more important, great damages of dignity. The payment would mean nothing else as admittance that we were the allies of Hitler’ (D139).

In a more direct reference to the EU and Western countries, Kaczyński’s speeches reverberated the old narrative of shameful Eastern inferiority vis-à-vis the West and the need to restore the well-deserved pride of Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe: ‘Countries, which until now agreed to their second-order status, even certain forms of discrimination⁸, these new countries are ceasing to agree to this’ (D143). The reborn pride of the ‘second order,’ formerly inferior and discriminated Poland was employed by PiS to rhetorically ‘defend ourselves against the offence, which we call the “cultural offence,” and to be able to retain in Poland that which is our tradition, what we believe to be normalcy and, lastly, all that makes up our freedom’ (D143). The West and the opposition were, on the other hand, constructed as forces that claimed that ‘Polishness is abnormal’ and prefer people with no national identity, replaced instead by a consumerist identity (D135). The rhetoric of Kaczyński instrumentalised the feelings of Eastern/Polish inadequacy in relation to the West by downregulating them with defensive emotional regulation strategies aimed at emphasizing Polish national pride and self-worth.

Conclusion

Our article shows how a news media outlet functions as a vehicle for political mobilisation through the articulation and eliciting of shared emotional repertoires in the public realm. *wPolityce.pl* disseminates the emotionally-charged rhetoric of PiS, which builds on

historically-embedded narratives of pride and shame as well as alludes to the contemporary humiliating experiences of economic hardship among voters. By reinterpreting these emotions in the contemporary polarising context, *wPolityce.pl* contributes to the electoral success of the populist right.

The impact of the mediated rhetoric of PiS may be explained by its capacity to regulate negative self-focused emotions via the instrumentalisation of deep-seated collective and/or individual inferiority and shame, and transform them into anger directed outwards at the opposition elites, the West, Europe and the EU, as well as the LGBT+ community. An important part of this strategy is a lack of direct references to individual economic shame that contributes to the suppression of this emotion. In other words, economic shame is spoken about, via an emphasis on the needs of the poor, families or pensioners, but it is never explicitly named, which allows instrumentalizing the feelings of shame and regulating them. This is achieved by redirecting attention to the collective cultural shame, foregrounding the opposition voices, identifying the ‘enemy’ outgroups for the outlet of negative emotions and defining the PiS-approved sources of pride and dignity.

In these ways, the PiS rhetoric functions as a part of the resentment mechanism identified by Salmela and von Scheve (2017) by tapping into individual shame in a way in which this emotion is not mentioned explicitly as well as by contributing to its repression by providing targets of anger blamed for various wrongs. A reinterpretation of individual economic shame as collective cultural shame is an interesting form of reappraisal that does not change the type of emotion but rather modifies the context and content of the emotion in a way that facilitates a further reappraisal in which collective shame is transformed into collective anger at the various outgroups, on the one hand, and collective pride in the traditional Polish identity and culture, on the other. This example of a two-staged reappraisal shows that mediated emotion regulation may take more complex forms than suggested by Gross in his theoretical model.

Throughout its mediated electoral campaign, PiS also promoted a strong national identity, traditional values and customs, and religious beliefs, which provide stable, ascriptive, pride-infused social identities to its supporters. The focus on positive emotions, such as dignity and pride could be regarded as one more form of emotion regulation that allows political entrepreneurs to address shame without necessarily naming the emotion. Expressions referring to *restoration* of dignity or pride in particular implicitly attribute shame or humiliation to the present condition. Therefore, research that seeks to disclose the impact of shame in the emotional mechanisms underpinning support for the populist right should seek to identify such proxy terms and topics that permit identifying the functioning of shame in mediated populist mobilisation. While the role of shame has been typically neglected in literature which seeks to explain right-wing populist mobilisation, we sought to highlight how right-wing media outlets mobilise support for right-wing populist movements by strategically invoking the emotions of shame and pride. Insofar as similar sources of shame exist in other societies, analogous means of regulating this emotion (e.g. mediated rhetoric of restoration of dignity or pride) may be used by right-wing populist politicians elsewhere (e.g. in the United Kingdom in relation to the Brexit vote), which, however, remains to be established in further research.

In light of this dynamic, high levels of polarisation in Polish society and politics are favourable to the ruling party’s strategy of mobilisation and emotion regulation. PiS can use the accusations and criticisms by the opposition elites to boost its own image as the guardian of Polish dignity and pride. The media outlet further amplified this image of the ruling party by highlighting the antagonism between PiS and the opposition. The extensive attention given to animosity between the ruling party and

the opposition by *wPolityce.pl* reveals the strategic role played by the right-wing media outlets in enacting the emotional regime of the right-wing populists. *wPolityce.pl* consistently emphasised how the opposition used the term ‘shame’ explicitly in order to criticise PiS and its politics, to which PiS could then respond by rejecting this criticism as just one more example of ‘pedagogy of shame’ that then served to contribute to the public image of PiS as the party that aims to protect Poles from the negative emotions of shame and guilt.

The same dynamic could be observed in how *wPolityce.pl* introduced the attempts of the opposition to seize control of feelings of shame and pride in their communication. The opposition tried to challenge the rhetoric of PiS and reframe the sources of shame and pride for Poles by transmuting the ‘West vs. Poland’ dichotomy into a ‘West vs. East’ issue. In *wPolityce.pl* narrative, the opposition linked PiS to the feelings of shame and the East, representing backwardness, lack of democracy and corruption, juxtaposing it to the West, which stood for prosperity, democracy and the rule of law. In effect, this was characterised in PiS discourse as a ‘pedagogy of shame’ that could be instrumentalised for emotion regulation. What becomes evident in our analysis is that the media played a salient role in circulating a repertoire of emotionalised messages that define the feeling rules (Hochschild 1979) for the in-group of PiS supporters.

Some limitations of the present study should be noted. Our data cannot demonstrate what PiS supporters actually feel, i.e. if they do feel any kind of inferiority or shame that can be then transformed, via mediated rhetoric, into anger, resentment and pride. However, what the empirical analysis does demonstrate is how the media outlet participates in the performance of the right-wing populist strategy of emotion regulation that shows affinities with the mechanisms described by Salmela and von Scheve (2017, 2018). We hypothesise, moreover, that the mediated rhetoric of PiS not only helped in coping with already existing negative emotions among the party’s electorate by providing targets for the outlet of anger and alleviating shame, but actually caused and/or reinforced these negative feelings among the party supporters as well as provided explanations for why they feel this way. Further research should explore whether such a relationship exists between the media performance of emotion regulation and the emotional landscape of PiS supporters.

Funding

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland under Grant 320275. Mikko Salmela’s work in the year 2020 was also supported by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant agreement no. 832940.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no competing interests.

Notes

1. Mudde (2007) identifies nativism, authoritarianism and populism as the core features that distinguish populist right-wing parties. Nativism holds that ‘states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state’ (Mudde 2007, 22). Authoritarianism is defined as ‘the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely’ (Mudde 2007, 23). Finally, populism ‘considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”’ (Mudde 2007, 23).

2. Pankowski (2010, 152–153) notes that although PiS was founded in 2001 as a mainstream centre-right party, by the mid-2000s, however, it fully embraced radical right populist features with strong nationalist and authoritarian tendencies. PiS ‘positioned itself as an anti-systemic force seeking radical change rather than maintaining democratic stability’ (Pankowski 2010, 153). In its rhetoric, PiS expressed a strongly traditionalised understanding of Polish identity, linking Polishness to Roman Catholicism; an opposition to the Western way of life and values; an endorsement of strengthening the executive branch of government; and a historical policy, driven by the aim to assert a heroic narrative of Polish history (Pankowski 2010).
3. The term ‘populist rhetoric’ is used in this article pragmatically in terms of the addresser i.e. populist party or media.
4. The analytic framework of Salmela and von Scheve (2017) is, to the authors’ knowledge, the only one that seeks to explain the support for right-wing populism in terms of repressed shame. Therefore, it offers itself as a natural analytic framework for the Polish case in which we can identify shame irrespective of this framework. Of the two ‘pillars’ of shame in the Polish case, individual economic shame, and collective cultural shame, Salmela and von Scheve (2017) focus on the former. However, there is evidence on similar dynamics regarding group-based and collective shame (Pettigrove and Parsons 2012; Sullivan and Day 2019). We therefore apply the Salmela and von Scheve framework as our heuristic approach to both types of shame in the Polish case.
5. At the time of writing this article, Dariusz Stola, the incumbent director of the museum, received the approval of the panel appointed to evaluate the candidates for the position, but the Minister of Culture refused to confirm his appointment. The impasse has dragged on for nearly a year. In the most recent turn of events, Stola announced he was willing to give up his legal position as the director of the museum.
6. The time frame encompasses the period starting from the beginning of the electoral campaign of PiS in early February 2019 until the EP elections on 26 May 2019.
7. The term was general and inclusive, allowing us to retrieve a wide range of content dealing with the European elections.
8. One of such forms of discrimination was an inferior quality of products sold in Poland compared to those sold in the West.

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