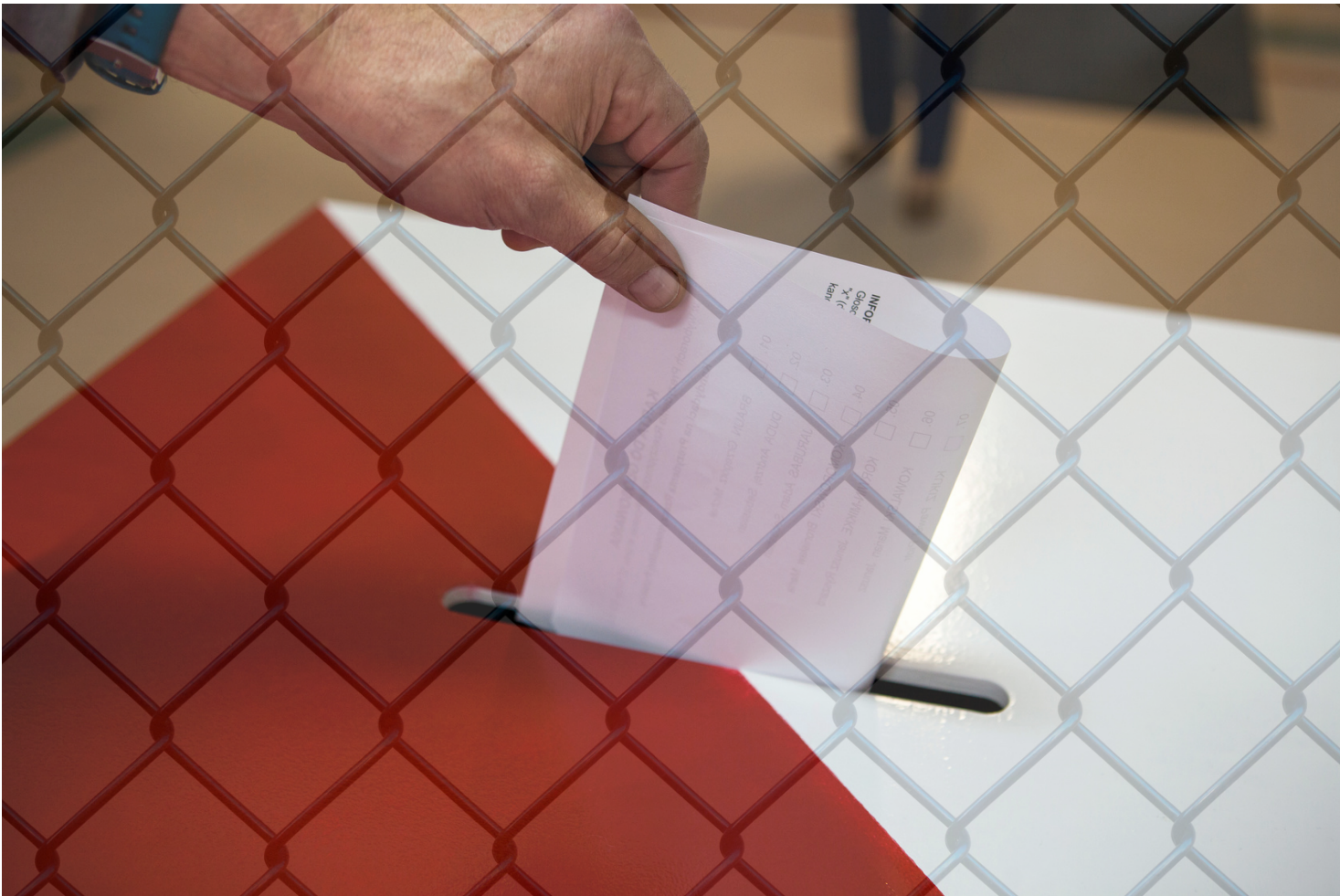


Social media monitoring during the 2023 Polish election



Immigration as a threat to national security and identity

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I. Introduction & Methodology

The following report is part of a social media monitoring research project prepared as part of the [Digital Challenges Group](#), a platform for cooperation among non-governmental organizations in Poland established in 2020. The monitoring was conducted during the first three quarters of 2023 and aimed to cover the period preceding the electoral campaign for parliamentary elections in Poland (October 15, 2023) and the entire election campaign. The monitoring was carried out on the social media platform Facebook using the tool known as Crowdtangle. The research concept and methodology were prepared with the International Republican Institute in the framework of [the Beacon Project](#). The monitoring covered anti-immigrant narratives (against migrants coming to Poland from non-European countries).

Firstly, tags were prepared (in Polish) based on how immigrants are portrayed in the public space, such as #immigrant; #middle_east; #Africa, and on the values or emotions invoked by individuals speaking out on immigration issues, such as #islamization; #immigration; #help; #social_welfare; #criminality. In total, over one hundred pairs of tags were prepared and all of them were adjusted to include different derivations specific to the Polish language.

Subsequently, based on the prepared tags, Crowdtangle selected posts from the nine months of 2023. For analysis, the top 100 that enjoyed the highest number of interactions were chosen from each 3-month period based on their reach and interactions achieved. The focus of the analysis was to evaluate whether a particular post contained a message that was neutral, supportive (positive), or hostile (negative) towards immigrants (e.g., a message opposing or supporting the acceptance of migrants into Poland). Official social media profiles of all political parties participating in the election campaign and their leaders were analyzed, as well as profiles of influential political actors (institutions, individual officials) and public media. A separate category consisted of so-called "questionable actors," which included accounts that most often conceal their identity, capable of reaching large audiences, and whose potential connections with a particular political option are not always clearly established solely by verifying the content they publish. Such accounts are also often involved in spreading disinformation. In addition, the analysis also included accounts beyond those from pre-selected groups to better identify regularities and penetration of hostile messaging between different groups and in general conversation on Facebook.

Considering the unique political situation arising from Russia's war against Ukraine, in this case, content related to refugees and economic migrants from Ukraine was excluded from the analysis.

II. Immigrants as a threat - narrative outline

This research aimed to determine the scale and nature of the use of the content concerning individuals arriving in Poland and Europe from non-European countries (mainly African and Asian countries). An attempt was made to answer whether immigrants and immigration were exploited in election campaigns to mobilize support for specific political parties. The issue of immigration is often securitized, and framed in the context of threats to national security, culture, and values (Christian, Polish, and European). Additionally, migrants are portrayed as an economic threat to the local job market. Therefore, the goal was to examine how the theme of immigration echoed these narrative elements during the election campaign and whether other components contributing to the overall anti-immigrant discourse emerged. The focus was on immigration from countries outside of Europe. In the public debate in Poland, these countries are often defined as a broad category of Muslim, Asian, or African countries.

The analysis focused on posts from Facebook (via the Crowdtangle tool) during the first three quarters (nine months) of 2023. The top 100 posts with greatest interaction and results containing messages related to immigrants were considered. In the first quarter, within the top 100 results, the majority of posts (41) were supportive towards immigrants, while hostile posts numbered 29, and neutral ones amounted to 30. In the second quarter, the proportions changed significantly: 79 posts were of anti-immigrant messaging, 16 were positive about immigrants, and 3 were neutral. The third quarter continued the trend from the second, with 74 anti-immigrants posts, 6 pro-immigrants, and 20 neutral (see Table 1).

Table 1. Anti-immigrant narrative. Number of posts supportive, hostile, and neutral towards immigrants in quarters 1-3 2023 (top 100 results).

Attribution	Quarter 1	Attribution	Quarter 2	Attribution	Quarter 3
Hostile	29	Hostile	79	Hostile	74
Neutral	26	Neutral	3	Neutral	20
Supportive	41	Supportive	16	Supportive	6
Total	100		100		100

The highest number of anti-immigrant posts was published on the account of the Law and Justice (PIS) party – the ruling party till October 15th 2023 – (14% of all posts supporting the narrative). In second place was the Confederation (Konfederacja) account (13%); then the account of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Prime Minister of Poland (9%); National Movement (a part of the Confederation) (5%), and Polish Television Program 3 (regional branch in Szczecin, 4%). Other accounts included those of individual politicians from the United Right ruling coalition (Law and Justice & Sovereign Poland) accounts of other right-wing political parties or private accounts publishing content promoting conservative values or more or less openly supporting the ruling coalition. Details are provided in the table 2 below.

Table 2. Number of posts promoting anti-immigrant attitudes according to the author. The table displays only accounts that have published more than 1 post during the analyzed period (quarters 1-3, 2023).

Number of posts hostile toward immigrants according to the author

Facebook account	Sum of Post
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	26
Konfederacja	23
Mateusz Morawiecki	17
Ruch Narodowy	9
TVP3 Szczecin	7
Jacek Ozdoba	6
Michał Woś	5
Anna Krupka	4
Grzegorz Braun	4
Ośrodek Monitorowania Antypolonizmu	4
Patryk Jaki	4
Suwerenna Polska	4
Adam Andruszkiewicz	3
Michał Wójcik	3
Nowa Nadzieja	3
Raz prozą, raz rymem - walczymy z propagandowym reżimem	3
Tomasz Jamka - członek Zarządu Województwa Świętokrzyskiego	3
Zbigniew Ziobro	3
Anka Polska	2
Krzysztof Kamiński	2
Krzysztof Tułuj - Poseł na Sejm RP	2
Marcin Romanowski	2
Maria Kurowska	2
Młodzież Wszechpolska	2
Popieramy Premiera Mateusza Morawieckiego	2
Robert Winnicki	2
Sebastian Kaleta	2
tp.info	2
Zbigniew Stonoga	2
Total	153

However when considering the number of interactions the posts enjoyed, the hierarchy of accounts publishing content against immigrants looks somewhat different. In first place with a result of 114,000 interactions is the account of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki; in second place is the Confederation account (63,000 interactions); in third place is TVP3 Szczecin's account (55,000); then the PIS account (43,000) and Patryk Jaki's (Sovereign Poland) account (28,000). Details are shown in the chart on page 4.



An example of the Law and Justice (PiS) use of immigration messaging: *“PiS government will defend Polish borders, families, sovereignty, and security. NO for the forced relocation of immigrants”*



An example of the Confederation (National Movement) use of immigration messaging: *France is burning after the shooting of a member of immigrant gang. NO for the massive immigration done by the Law and Justice government.*



An example of the Koalicja Obywatelska use of immigration messaging: *Does the EU want forced relocation of refugees? It is a lie. There is no such idea!*

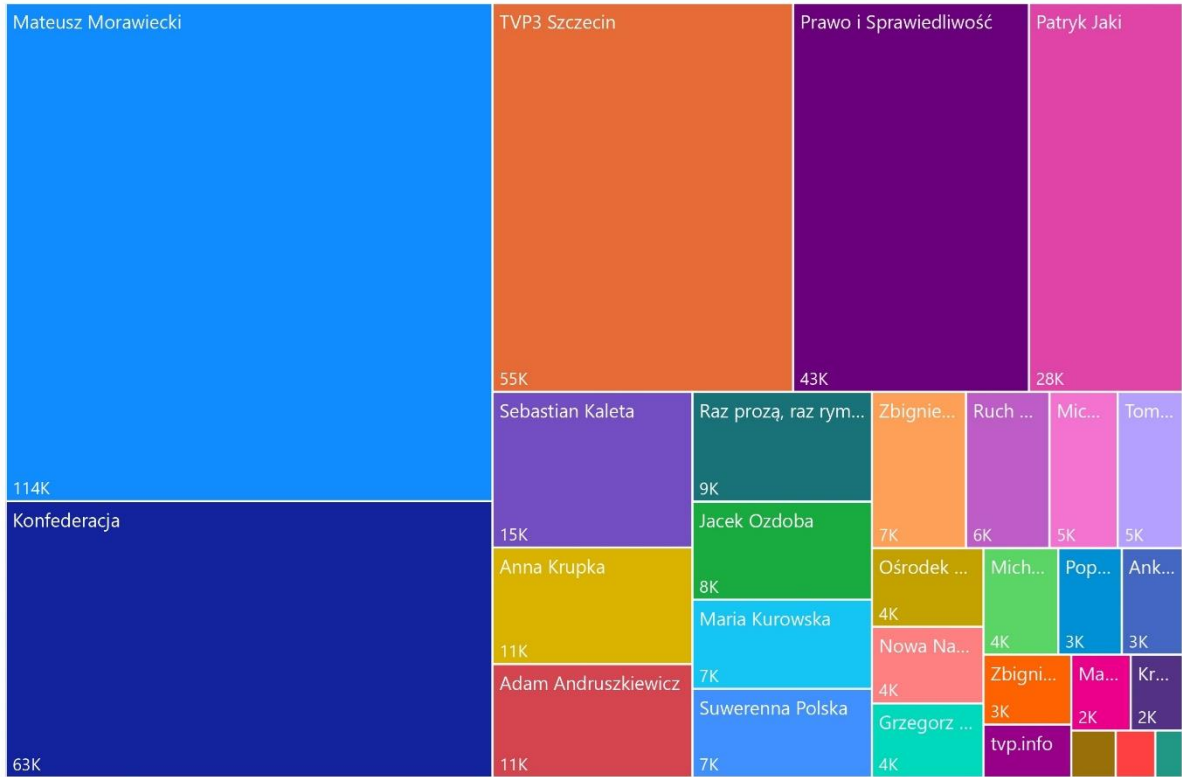


An example of the Polish Television (TVP) use of immigration messaging: *The attack on Europe is ongoing, Europe's borders are not safe and the safety of the inhabitants of our continent is at risk - Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said in Brussels*

See more examples of the content published in the attachment to the report.

Chart 1. Total number of interactions from all posts promoting the anti-immigrant attitudes generated by a given account on Facebook (quarters 1-3, 2023).

Total number of interactions from all posts hostile toward immigrants generated by a given account on Facebook (quarters 1-3, 2023)



On the other hand, the number of posts supporting pro-immigration attitudes was generally lower during the study period (except in the first quarter) and amounted to 63. The highest number of posts in this category was published by the Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviors. The dilemmas related to the classification of these posts can be found in Part III of the report.

Other accounts supportive of immigrants, including private accounts, generally opposed the government's policy of the United Right. Another example of this type is the account of a group of activists supporting immigrants crossing into Poland on the Polish-Belarusian border¹ (Granica Group); or accounts of international organizations (Amnesty International). Accounts of opposition political parties are attention-grabbing and absent. Individual posts were published on the accounts of individual politicians (Andrzej Halicki, Rafał Trzaskowski, Janina Ochojska). Details are provided in the table below.

¹ In 2021, Belarus has started the process of pushing immigrants to cross the EU border (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia) causing the security crisis for all countries involved. Prior to that the immigrants were brought to Belarus in a state-orchestrated process of sending people from Asia and Africa into the EU. The aim was to destabilize security situation within the EU. As a response Poland has strengthened the border with Belarus by building the fence alongside the border. Belarus continues causing crisis situation on the borderland till today. Some immigrants died during finding the way to the EU through the woods and quagmires at the borderland sparking a society-dividing debate in Poland regarding the state's response to the crisis.

Table 3. Number of posts supportive toward immigrants according to the author.

Number of posts supportive toward immigrants according to the author

Facebook account	Sum of Post
Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i Ksenofobicznych	36
Doniesienia z putinowskiej Polski	3
Grupa Granica	3
Daniel Petryczkiewicz	2
Konrad Dulkowski	2
Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej	2
Amnesty International Polska	1
Andrzej Halicki	1
Arte	1
Białowieska Akcja Humanitarna	1
Janka Ochojska	1
Kompas Anny Saranieckiej	1
Kupuj odpowiedzialnie	1
Mariusz Szczygieł	1
NEVER AGAIN Association - Stowarzyszenie NIGDY WIĘCEJ	1
OKO.press	1
Onet Wiadomości	1
Rafał Trzaskowski	1
Służby w akcji	1
Stowarzyszenie im. Tadeusza Regera - pismo Równość	1
TV Polska	1
Total	63

Also, in the case of the total number of interactions, the Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviors account ranked first (77% of all interactions), followed by accounts such as Granica Group, Andrzej Halicki, Janina Ochojska, and Arte TV.

Chart 2. Total number of interactions from all posts promoting positive attitudes toward immigrants generated by a given account on Facebook (quarters 1-3, 2023).

Total number of interactions from all posts supportive toward immigrants generated by a given account on Facebook (quarters 1-3, 2023)



III. Qualitative Results of the Analysis

1. Anti-immigrant discourse in Poland

In the first quarter of 2023, the anti-immigrant narratives mainly came from circles associated with the Confederation party, particularly the National Movement. The messages from this group emphasized opposition to the United Right government, highlighting the number of work permits issued to foreigners by the Polish government in recent years (with a rising trend). The narrative underscored that immigrants come mainly from Muslim and African countries, which is not necessarily true according to the official state statistics. According to data from the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, in 2022 Poland issued a total of 365,490 work permits for foreigners, of which 23.28% were Ukrainians and 11.39% were citizens of India. From countries where Islam is the dominant religion, most individuals arrived from Uzbekistan (9.13% of all permits); Turkey (6.84%); Bangladesh (3.7%); Turkmenistan (3.26%); Indonesia (2.74%). All African countries included in the list had results below 1%. The confederation had utilized the messaging based on fear and threats (e.g. by showing pictures or videos of drastic scenes from other EU countries). They also framed the theme as a threat for Poland's national culture and tradition.

The anti-immigrant narratives also appeared in the first quarter on non-political accounts promoting conservative values. This communication focused on providing examples of crimes committed by foreigners in Western European countries (primarily in Sweden), discrediting the immigration policies in those countries, and supporting a strategy of not allowing foreigners into Europe.

A significant percentage of posts (41%) portraying immigrants positively in the first quarter was disrupted by the substantial activity of the Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i Ksenofobicznych (Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviors). These posts were classified as supporting immigration (or less frequently as neutral) because they presented the Center's actions against those spreading false or manipulated information about immigrants. One notable example was the information about the interrogation order for the CEO of TVP (Poland's main public television broadcaster) Jacek Kurski, Minister of National Defense Mariusz Błaszczak, and Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration Mariusz Kamiński for disseminating a TVP material about an alleged cow rape by an immigrant trying to enter Poland from Belarus. The Center's posts were classified as supporting the immigrants because they essentially contained information about manipulations and abuses used in the messaging, indirectly suggesting that immigrants are exploited to create a narrative of threat to Polish society and the state. However, these posts did not portray individuals of different origins positively or highlight the complexity of the situation resulting from mass migration to Europe. It is worth noting that there were very few posts showing the complexity of the migration issue or presenting the comprehensive effects of the influx of foreigners into Europe during the studied period.

In the second and third quarters of 2023, there was a clear reversal in the ratio of positive and negative messaging in favor of the latter (posts promoting anti-immigrant attitudes). This change was related to the development of the election campaign for the Sejm and Senate and specific events that occurred during this period. The most significant international event in this context was the EU negotiations on the adoption of a new Migration and Asylum Pact and the political agreement on its main pillars adopted in June 2023. This narrative also appeared in the context of a nationwide referendum held on the day of parliamentary elections (October 15th, 2023), initiated by the Polish government and containing a question related to the elimination/maintenance of the wall on the Polish-Belarusian border (the referendum turned out to be non-binding due to too low turnout).

Two political forces openly opposed the adoption of the Pact: Law and Justice and the Confederation. In their communications, both focused on the issue of relocating immigrants between EU countries, presenting it as a mandatory mechanism from which Poland and other countries opposed to accepting immigrants in the EU would have no possibility of opting out. Other elements of the proposed Pact were essentially not addressed in the Facebook communication.

Law and Justice additionally used historical arguments, pointing to 2015 as the first moment when the Polish government opposed the EU migration policy in the context of the then migration crisis, thereby defending Poland from external threats. In PIS's narrative, the anti-German thread was also utilized, identifying Angela Merkel as the author of the "open doors" policy towards immigrants, which, according to PIS, failed and only brought turmoil to the EU. Law and Justice also framed the theme as an international issue and showed their stance as common with V4 countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia).

Both politicians and state TV used communication based on the "us-them" dichotomy. Immigrants were portrayed as outsiders, threatening Polish culture. Messages, photos, and videos showing dramatic scenes from France during the riots in June and July 2023, related to migration law reform (including deportation issues), strengthened this narrative. The aim of juxtaposing messages opposing relocation with information about riots (or other dramatic events in other EU countries) was to discredit the migration policy in those countries and present themselves - the United Right government - as those who better identify threats and countermeasures.

In both PIS and the Confederation narratives, there were no positive elements regarding immigrants. Only sporadically (on the PIS side) were indications of a willingness to assist countries facing socio-economic difficulties without agreeing to the migration of people to Europe.

In the second quarter, the Confederation and PIS narratives were similar, but it does not mean that these two political parties supported each other. On the contrary, both groups conducted separate communications without indicating mutual similarity in this dimension. This situation developed in the third quarter. PIS maintained a high intensity in using the anti-immigrant narrative (to the same extent as in quarter 2). In contrast, the Confederation gradually reduced the use of this narrative in favor of an anti-Ukrainian (anti-refugee) narrative. This change was related to the unfolding Polish-Ukrainian dispute concerning the import (and transit) of grain from Ukraine, which was supposed to be further transited through Poland to target markets worldwide but often ended up in the Polish market, contributing to a decline in Polish grain prices and causing losses for Polish producers. Additionally, some of the grain from Ukraine was of low quality and not intended for the food industry (so-called technical grain). The dispute over grain erupted in 2022 and continued in 2023.

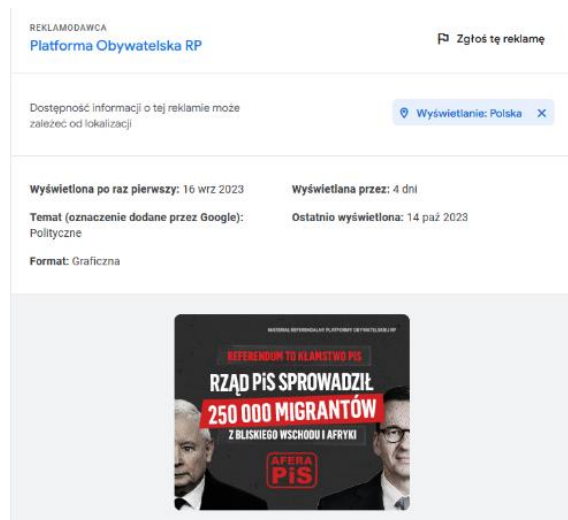
The Confederation used the grain dispute to attack the government, focusing solely on an anti-refugee messaging directed at Ukrainians. This situation changed when in the summer of 2023, the affair related to selling visas to citizens of Asian and African countries came to light, involving high-level officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a result, information reached the public that during the United Right government, over 100,000 visas might have been sold to citizens of other countries in this way under the corruption scheme².

² As a result of the scandal and internal proceedings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, several high officials lost their jobs, including the deputy minister of foreign affairs. Cooperation with three companies that provided services related to processing visa applications in various countries was also terminated. See more:

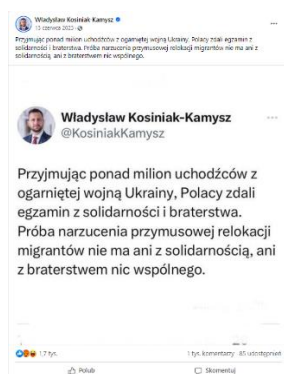
<https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art39387061-afera-wizowa-kolejne-dymisje-w-msz>

Against this background, the Confederation changed its use of the anti-immigrant narratives, emphasizing the discrepancy arising from PIS's declared anti-immigrant stance and the scandal that allowed a large number of citizens from foreign countries to enter Poland. Criticism of PIS became the main axis of the Confederation's communication in this regard, which does not mean that the narrative regarding immigrants itself was softened.

Other opposition politicians, other than the Confederation, arguably opted to avoid the issue of immigrants (more on this below) and were not the authors of posts supporting these narratives. An exception can be made for a post from the account of the leader of the Political Polish People's Party (PSL), Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, which also concerned opposition to the relocation mechanism of immigrants in EU countries.



An example of a paid ad by the Civic Platform, the PIS government brought 250,000 migrants from the Middle East and Africa.



An example of the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe) messaging on immigration: *By hosting over 1 million refugees from Ukraine, Poles passed the test in solidarity and brotherhood. An attempt to impose forced relocation [on EU Member States – MM] does not have anything in common with solidarity and brotherhood.*



An example of Law and Justice messaging on immigration: *Lampedusa. Thousands of illegal immigrants whose [Donald] Tusk wants to bring to Poland under the forced relocation scheme.*



An example of the change in focus regarding the immigration/refugees issues by the Confederation: *No social support for Ukrainians. Law and Justice government is looting Polish society by taxes and social spending for Ukrainians.*

See more examples of the content published in the attachment to the report.

2. Pro-immigrant discourse

As noted above, the number of posts opposing the anti-immigration narrative was generally much lower than the number of supporting posts. To partially explain this situation, one could hypothesize that opposition parties recognized the lack of broader social support for immigrants in Polish society and, considering that statements supporting immigration to Poland could contribute to a worse election result, chose a strategy of silence on the issue. Accounts of major opposition parties were not found in the monitoring results. An exception is the accounts of individual politicians such as Warsaw mayor Rafał Trzaskowski or MEP Janina Ochojska, who published posts opposing the anti-immigration narratives, especially during the political negotiations of the Migration and Asylum Pact.

In the case of the Warsaw mayor, the content of the message was in line with the logic of the election campaign and criticism of the ruling camp, focusing on defending the solutions proposed in the Migration and Asylum Pact. Janina Ochojska's post, on the other hand, is an example of drawing attention to the situation of immigrants trying to enter Poland from Belarusian territory, criticizing the Polish authorities and Border Guard for inadequate actions in terms of protecting the life and health of immigrants.

The aforementioned visa-selling scandal involving the high-rank officials of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided an opportunity for the opposition to criticize the government. However, this was done in a way that did not allow attributing a given political option to a potential openness to accepting immigrants. In other words, the government was criticized without referring to the migration crisis but rather to dysfunctional and corrupted representatives of the ruling camp.



An example of the use of visa scandal to criticize Law and Justice government by an opposition politician: *The largest corruption scandal in the history of Poland. It occurs that everyone could have bought Polish visa. Who owns it now? Terrorists? Criminals?*



An example of messaging on immigrants by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki: *In 2015 Law and Justice opposed to forced relocation mechanism. We defended Poland from danger against which Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński had warned.*

See more examples of the content published in the attachment to the report.

IV. Summary and conclusions

The following conclusions regarding the anti-immigration narrative during the election campaign for the Sejm and Senate in Poland emerge from the above analysis:

- The anti-immigration narratives appeared in each quarter of the year studied (Q1-Q3) with varying intensity. It was relatively less present in the first quarter, and its intensity increased in the second and third quarters, related to the developing election campaign and current political events (negotiations regarding the Migration and Asylum Pact; visa scandal in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
- Most of the anti-immigration content occurred in the second and third quarters. It was spread primarily by the official accounts of two right-wing political parties—the ruling Law and Justice and Sovereign Poland (forming the ruling coalition United Right) and the opposition Confederation. Individual politicians' accounts from these groups were also active, especially Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, MEP of Sovereign Poland Patryk Jaki, and Confederation MP Grzegorz Braun. The narrative was also supported by, among others, Polish Television (Program Three, regional branch in Szczecin). Anonymous or non-private accounts were less active.
- The response of opposition parties other than the right-wing Confederation to these narratives was negligible. Opposition to these narratives in most cases boiled down to defending the solutions proposed in the Migration and Asylum Pact.
- Politicians from major political parties likely recognized that the topic of immigration and influx of immigrants to Poland and Europe did not enjoy broad social support and tailored their election strategies and online communication accordingly. Right-wing and conservative parties used this issue to mobilize their electorate by emphasizing the threats arising from immigration. Other opposition parties chose a strategy of silence on the issue or criticized the government's actions (without openly expressing a position on immigration).

- After the Sejm and Senate campaign, Poland will soon enter two more election cycles—local elections and European Parliament elections. It can be expected that the issue of immigrants will also appear in the 2024 election campaigns, especially in the case of European elections in late spring 2024. The issue of immigration is currently dominated by the discourse of right-wing and conservative parties. Other political parties did not develop a political and communicative strategy in this regard during the 2023 campaign. In the broader perspective of Polish society, this may create the impression that only right-wing parties have a clearly defined standpoint on this issue and can shape policy in this area.
- Monitoring has shown that the communication strategies employed had more in common with manipulating the message (e.g., data) than with disinformation involving the deliberate circulation of false information. The communicated messages were likely directed primarily toward the so-called committed voters, who already support a particular political group. The prevailing political polarization means that voters of this profile are less inclined to deconstruct messages created by the political party they support, and therefore their tendency to ignore, for example, data manipulation, may be higher.

V. Recommendations

1. For Researchers

- Monitoring has revealed certain trends related to the development of discourse surrounding immigration to Poland (e.g., the dominance of discourse promoted by right-wing and conservative circles). Further research in this area should consider the continued development of these trends and aim to confirm or refute them, while simultaneously expanding the scope of analysis (to include other social media platforms). A particularly significant period in this regard will be the European Parliament election campaign period. An additional asset for analysis would be to adopt a similar analytical method in several European Union countries to compare results

2. For institutions/ individuals working in the field of combating information manipulation and disinformation

- One should consider the potential increase in the use of information/data manipulation by the majority of political actors, which may receive greater and silent social approval due to growing political polarization. Preventive actions against the spread of misinformation should be adjusted to changing circumstances. They should include, for example, a greater impact on political actors by condemning improper practices and drawing attention to the problem for as many social groups as possible. It can translate into educational initiatives (formal and informal) for various social groups (e.g. youth), especially during the period of electoral campaigns.

3. For donors (individual and institutional)

- There is a visible need for institutions interested in financing projects utilizing social media monitoring to ensure the sustainability of actions and a long-term perspective for the initiatives undertaken (e.g. financing research for the two/ three electoral cycles to identify long-term trends and changes)
- The segmentation of the media space (social bubbles) causes that actions aimed at a broad (undefined) audience (e.g., the society of a given country) to be less effective than actions directed towards a specific audience group (e.g., high school students) and specifically

located individuals (e.g., residing outside major cities in a given country). More focus should be placed on the latter and be supported by donors accordingly.

- The new quality should be the promotion and financing of cooperation between analytically specialized institutions (think tanks) and non-governmental organizations focused on interventions among specific target groups (e.g., students, teachers, seniors). This would enable actions to be based to a greater extent on current expert knowledge, and analytical reports to be tailored to specific activities such as educational or informational initiatives.
4. For institutions/ individuals interested in fostering quality public debate
- A deeper reflection should be focused on how to create actions aimed at making the voters of a particular political party ready to critically examine the messages created by "their" political parties, especially when they resort to manipulation. Reporting irregularities, for example, by specialized fact-checking organizations, are interpreted in terms of political struggle and are therefore ineffective. A greater emphasis on promoting values such as honesty and integrity in constructing messages seems necessary.

Appendix

Examples of social media content according to the author as they appear in the report - [download them by clicking here](#).