

Fear as a tool of the electoral narration of the conservative-populist right wing in Poland

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Abstract

In 2015, the right-wing alliance known as the Zjednoczona Prawica (United Right), whose main member is the conservative Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) party, enjoyed two spectacular victories in Poland's presidential and parliamentary elections. For eight consecutive years, the United Right has ruled, violating the rule of law, restricting the independence of the judiciary and the application of human rights, distancing Poland from European democratic standards. Fear management was an effective tool not only during the election campaigns, but also during the parliamentary term, which successfully mobilised the electorate and a part of Polish society susceptible to a narrative based on the creation of forces threatening Poland's sovereignty, national identity and the security of the state and citizens. Fear has been caused by migrants, especially those from outside the European cultural circle, the LGBT community, and Poland's closest neighbour and most important economic partner, Germany. In conditions of so-called cultural trauma, a reaction to profound socio-cultural changes, this strategy was extremely effective, leading to the extreme polarisation of Polish society, and ensured support to maintain the power gained in 2015. In this article, the authors provide examples of fear management, placing them in a broader theoretical context, by referring to statements made by leading right-wing politicians, as well as messages in the public media, which in 2016 were taken over by the conservative-populist right and became a de facto party propaganda channel.

Key words: populism, Poland, fear in political narration, Law and Justice, hate speech

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen an unprecedented proliferation of leaders, social movements and political parties resorting to populist slogans and strategies in highly developed societies in Europe and North America. In many countries, populist movements and parties have achieved unexpected electoral success, gaining access to government positions even in well-established liberal democracies. In the case of young democracies in Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Poland, conservative-populist parties even dominated the political scene, undermining the social consensus on the liberal-democratic principles of the organisation of public institutions as a condition for their membership of the European Union, formed in the processes of the third wave of democratisation. This unexpected wave of populist movements, closely following the previous wave of liberal 'new' social movements (minority rights, feminist, green), presents researchers with an analytical and theoretical challenge: how to describe and explain these contestative mobilisations and the electoral successes of political parties referring to populism in their rhetoric.

Populism, at its most basic level, is a political idea or attitude that emphasises the power and importance of 'ordinary people' in opposition to the 'elite' (Mudde, 2004). This dichotomy between 'the people' and the 'corrupt elite' is often considered to be at the core of the phenomenon of populism, which transcends rigid ideological frameworks. It is a flexible and adoptable formula that can combine with other ideologies to form distinct political phenomena (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Therefore, populism is an ambiguous term that escapes uncontested definitions because it is not an ideology or a political regime and cannot be attributed to a

specific programme content. Rather, it is a specific form of collective action aimed at mobilising supporters and seizing power or maintaining it. As a certain 'way of doing politics', it can take different forms depending on circumstances and locations (Urbinati, 2019).

It is therefore a very characteristic and always possible form of structuring political life (Laclau, 2005). This is not a pathology haunting democratic regimes, but rather a phenomenon development of which is linked to a kind of *Zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004, p. 542). There are many populisms and what passes for populism is a function of place and time. It is therefore an ambiguous term in the sense that its meaning is usually determined by a specific historical and social context. Just as there is no common ideology that could help to define populism, there is no defined group that includes the 'people' and no common identification of the 'establishment' (Müller, 2016). Since references to 'the people' and 'the elite' do not define populism, what defines it is rather the conflict between the two. Thus, it is the nature of the demands that defines the clash between the 'people' and the 'establishment'. Populist parties often function as warning signs of political crisis. Populist movements are most successful at times when people perceive the dominant political norms and procedures - maintained and defended by the establishment - as being at odds with their own hopes, fears and concerns. Populists articulate these concerns and mould them into policies that pit the 'people' against the 'elite'.

Due to the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon of populism, much of the contemporary research on this phenomenon focuses on its communicative nature and attempts to identify it as a form or style of political communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). From this research perspective, populism is understood more as a communication strategy that relies on simplicity, directness and comprehensibility of the message (political address) (Taggart, 2000). Because of its ability to engage people and generate interest and debate, populism is increasingly considered an effective communication strategy used to gain attention and achieve electoral success (Engesser et al., 2017).

The widespread adoption of populist rhetoric by political actors has contributed to its integration into 'old' communication strategies, as well as the increasing use of emotions to arouse interest and 'win' the minds and hearts of citizens (Redlawsk, 2006). Contemporary political communication is increasingly becoming 'populist' through mechanisms of simplification, appealing to emotions, especially fear, enthusiasm or discontent, and using highly emotional, slogan-based, tabloid-style language (Mazzoleni, 2014).

Key to the populist style of political communication include theatricalisation (dramatisation), emotionalisation, personalisation, an anti-establishment stance and simplification of the message. The occurrence of these elements in political communication is becoming more and more common, not only among populist movements and parties, as they fit into the logic of operation of modern media (Bos, 2011).

2. Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the article

In this article, the authors undertake an analysis of the phenomenon of contemporary Polish populism and the electoral success of the right-wing conservative Law and Justice party from 2015 to 2023. They draw attention to the role of emotion and appeals to fear in the political address of Poland's right-wing populist parties. In doing so, they emphasise that right-wing populism is a kind of traditionalist-conservative reaction to rapidly advancing socio-political change. They assume that contemporary populism, both on the left and the right, can be understood by situating it in the context of global civilisational change at the macro level and in the context of a

country's socio-cultural specificity at the mezzo level. Therefore, by the analysis of the way emotions such as 'anger' and 'fear' are used in Polish political discourse, the article places it in the context of the trauma of social change and in the context of Polish culture and collective memory.

The authors try to show why conservative-populist parties choose these and not other social issues, making them a source of political mobilisation for their supporters. They also explain the sources of fears, anxieties and aspirations of the electorate of right-wing parties as a defensive response to the socio-political changes taking place. They analyse how the political agenda of the Polish conservative-populist right wing, which has dominated the Polish political scene in recent years, is constructed. What characteristic motifs does it refer to in its political appeal and what role does the appeal to fear play in it as a basic emotion for political mobilisation and electoral success. In doing so, authors try to explain the rhetorical effectiveness of this type of appeal.

H1. Vulnerability to emotional appeal referring to fear is the result of a phenomenon known as social change trauma. When faced with the trauma of cultural change, levels of fear and insecurity increase, and political parties exploit this in their electoral appeal;

H2. The new socio-political divisions shaped by civilisational changes are causing a reconstruction of the political appeal of political parties and the politicisation of new challenges and threats;

H3. The exploitation of the fear of migrants and the loss of sovereignty has become one of the central elements of the electoral appeal of the Polish conservative-populist right providing it with strong public support.

2.2. Methods and source material

Populism and the role of emotions in political appeal constitute a topical research problem, important for the development of political theory and for understanding of the nature and mechanisms that guide politics in its most diverse aspects. The need to explore emotions - and their interaction with cognitive processes and socio-political activity - has become apparent to most researchers. However, it is difficult to find a theory that adequately links individually experienced emotions (micro level) with collective behaviour and political mobilisation (macro level). Therefore, due to theoretical difficulties, populism and emotion are framed in this paper in a somewhat reductionist way, rather as a certain form of rhetoric, political discourse or a specific political communication strategy. Analysis of emotion as discourse - that is, as a tool for active shaping of the interpretation of social reality - helps to go beyond strictly psychological or cognitive models, as it includes the study of the functions of emotional signs - especially emotional speech - that influence the creation or reproduction of social identities and relationships (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990).

Treating populism mainly as a specific strategy of political communication and considering it in terms of discourse, the authors reconstruct the political appeal of conservative-populist parties on the basis of election manifestos and selected statements by politicians. Additionally, in their content analysis, they focus on a specific case of the use of fear in the context of Polish culture and politics. The source material consists of statements made by leaders of the conservative-populist right in Poland over the last decade, including Jarosław Kaczyński, as well as messages present in the public media, which from 2015 to 2023 performed a propaganda function, having become a tool of the information policy of the United Right. We take selected statements or propaganda material as exemplification. Using qualitative analysis, we want to zoom in on the content from which emerges a vision of reality based on fear and negative portrayal of political opponents.

3. The trauma of social change and the 'culture of fear'

The basis of human behaviour is always empirical, i.e., it is something that can be described by observing situations in the real world and not just through theory or introspection. The foundations of human behaviour stem from concrete situations, i.e., they can only be understood through empirical observation, engagement and scientific investigation (Bourdieu, 1990). Therefore, an analysis of the contemporary successes of populist movements should be rooted in exposition of the social foundations of populism. Usage of emotions like fear as a method of influence is more likely when it is already ingrained in society and creates so-called culture of fear (Robin, 2003). 'Culture of fear' creates an atmosphere of anxiety and opens up opportunities for policy actors who, using the 'politics of fear', take into account current fears and threats, deciding which ones are valuable to them and deserve political attention (Yates, 2003). In a 'culture of fear', politicians and pressure groups use and abuse collective fears for their political gain, especially to win elections (Glassner, 2004).

The rise of populism in recent decades (especially the popularity of the populist right) is usually attributed to the economic and cultural effects of globalisation, as well as the spread of post-materialist values, creating in some groups a sense of threat to their well-being, lifestyle or way of thinking (Barbeito, 2020). The view that support for right-wing populist parties is a direct result of fear of profound social change is widespread among journalists, experts and academics. It is often assumed that these fears are triggered by perceptions of the risks associated with migration, terrorism, economic uncertainty or a combination of these. These threats, sometimes real and sometimes imaginary, become tools in the hands of the elites. Conservative-populist parties fuel anxiety, especially among authoritarian-minded citizens, by portraying cultural, economic and political change as an existential threat (Halikiopoulou, 2012) (Kriesi et al., 2006) (van der Brug & Fennema, 2007).

The globalising world is the perfect breeding ground for flourishing or even explosion of emotions. Deep social change¹ creates uncertainty and confronts the question of identity. In an ever-changing world, this issue becomes highly relevant. Identity is closely linked to self-confidence, and self-confidence - or the lack of it - evokes emotions, especially emotions such as fear, hope and humiliation (Moisi, 2012). Processes of social and individual identity reconstruction are associated with a shift away from key institutions and collective identifications created in the processes of modern society formation. Contemporary socio-political change is related to some of the most important areas of our existence, as it concerns the functioning of the political institutions, i.e., the state, especially its sovereignty, as well as the collective and individual identity. This is linked to two processes concerning the institutional and identity dimensions of our social life. Firstly, with the reconstruction of the form of state created in the modern era, which was the centralised nation-state. In its place, new forms are beginning to emerge, created by a complex web of interactions between nation states, co-national and supranational institutions, regional and local governments and even NGOs. Secondly, with the reconstruction of the forms of identification produced in the modern era, referred to as national identity, in favour of the construction of a hybrid identity linked to the fact that human societies are becoming more complex, heterogeneous, multicultural.

¹ The technological revolution and the associated intensification of globalisation processes led in the 1990s to the questioning of previous forms of social life organisation. Today's organisation of our societies is influenced by three macro-level factors: transnationality (the removal of political-administrative barriers), globalisation (the globalisation of the range of people's perception and action), and multicontactivity (the possibility of multi-contact and multi-interaction). These three elements are causing the erosion of modern socio-political institutions and, at the same time, a certain helplessness related to the fact that we do not know what to replace them with.

The identity reconstruction that is taking place thus becomes the object of a 'cultural trauma', accompanied by deep emotions. The term 'cultural trauma' refers to an intrusive and overwhelming event that is considered to undermine or weaken one of several fundamental components of culture or even 'culture as a whole'. Here, culture is defined as the system of elements (values, norms, beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, etc.) that constitute the group's meaning system. It refers to the breakdown of a system of meanings, threatening collective identity (Smelser, 2004, p. 37-38).

The key actors in the processes of cultural trauma are meaning-makers. These groups seek to impose their interpretations on wider groups. In doing so, they seek to construct a compelling narrative about the meaning and significance of the event. The aim of such an action is not necessarily to establish the veracity of an event, but rather to shape the collective imagination in a way facilitating public identification with the imposed narrative. The social actors shaping these narratives are both constrained and aided by their own communication skills, as well as their social location and access to material and symbolic resources (Alexander, 2004).

Rapid social change and the growing importance of the 'post-ideological' dispute around values and lifestyles make contemporary politics as much, if not more, related to the identity and culture as it is about the allocation of material resources. It therefore concerns competition regarding the ways in which political problems are presented or narrated, and not simply a struggle over the distribution of resources, as was represented in the 'classical' Lasswellian vision of politics ('who gets what, when and how'). Of course, the two are not separate and easy to distinguish analytically, but the point is nevertheless to emphasise that politics is also a 'battle' of visions/ideas in which participants attempt to control the 'representation of the world' by appealing to deeply held values and beliefs rather than simply invoking objective 'self-interest'.

The social changes taking place are often treated and presented by political actors (especially those appealing to traditionalist/conservative values) as threats to the existing order. They evoke emotions such as anxiety and fear of the coming changes in social life. They therefore generate opposition, and many conservative-populist social movements and parties consolidate around what Manuel Castells referred to as the 'identity of resistance', making it a source of political mobilisation. Whereas in 20th-century Europe, violence and conflict stemmed mainly from class divisions (which were often linked to other types of cultural identity), in 21st century Europe, violence and conflict can stem from divisions related to the problem of how we define our identity.

4. Fear in the political appeal of Polish populist-conservative parties

Given the nature of contemporary social change, fear seems to be one of the most frequently used elements in the emotional appeal of European populist-conservative parties. An example of such a political strategy can be found in Poland's largest political party: Law and Justice, which held power from 2005 to 2007 and from 2015 to 2023, and remains to this day the party with the highest electoral support. Originally, Law and Justice was a political project built on the wave of popularity gained by Lech Kaczyński (brother of Law and Justice leader Jarosław, later President of Poland) during his tenure as Minister of Justice and Prosecutor General in 2000-2001. Law and Justice built its programme agenda around fighting the corruption and crime² using the populist punitivism characteristic of Polish society (Zalewski, 2009, p. 23-29). It was also characteristic of Law and Justice to create its image and political programme around the juxtaposition of 'ordinary people' against the 'liberal/corrupt

² This was linked to a series of corruption scandals during the post-communist Social Democracy government in Poland, when the current MEP Leszek Miller was Prime Minister of the country. One of the Law and Justice election demands at the time was the establishment of a special institution to deal with corruption - the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau.

elite', typical of populist movements, by offering a programme of social transfers targeting poorer sections of the population, which became a permanent feature of Law and Justice's policy once in government.

The gradual escalation of the conflict among the political elite, as well as the exacerbation of social divisions, caused the Law and Justice party to turn towards ethno-populism and an appeal to fear and creation of the image of the Law and Justice as the only party able to ensure the security of Poles. Since the 2015 election campaigns, Law and Justice has constructed its electoral appeal by appealing to slogans of defending the 'own group' against internal and external threats. This type of political appeal was seen as an effective way to strengthen and mobilise one's electoral base. Security threats were identified primarily as loss of sovereignty and identity. Ethno-populism and building the electoral appeal around the loss of sovereignty³ and national identity are not specific just to Poland and on a European scale this is a fairly common practice of right-wing populist parties. However, in the case of Poland, the appeal to ethno-populism and fear had its own local specificity, the context of which can only be understood in the context of Polish culture (Lewandowski & Polakowski, 2023). Law and Justice's electoral appeal was built around three areas: (1) fears of losing national sovereignty to the German-dominated European Union, (2) fears of refugees and illegal migrants, (3) fears of LGBT movements. All of these elements were used in electoral rhetoric during the parliamentary and presidential campaigns, sometimes weaving together in quite unexpected constructs.

4.1. The European Union and Germany in the narrative of the populist right wing

The anti-German nature of the Law and Justice party's electoral appeal is linked to the functioning of the Polish cultural phenomenon known as 'German syndrome'. It is defined as a specific sensitivity of Polish society towards Germans, expressed in the private and public sphere in attitudes and behaviours that are the product of the experience of many generations of Poles. It encompasses both the memory of the wrongs and suffering experienced in the past, as well as the respect for Germany's economic and civilisational power, often turning into an inferiority complex (Sakson, 1993). By its very nature, anti-Germanism was a factor integrating Polish society on the basis of shared experiences, a common desire to take revenge and obtain reparation for the wrongs suffered.

In the political appeal of the Law and Justice party, anti-Germanism is mainly used in the form of fear of Poland losing its sovereignty and being dominated by an economically and politically stronger Germany. This motif has been present in the political rhetoric of the Law and Justice party since the 2005 presidential campaign,⁴ when Law and Justice politician Jacek Kurski⁵ said publicly that: 'serious sources in

³ The category 'sovereignty' has a special meaning in Polish culture. Between 1772 and 1795, as a result of the so-called Partitions of Poland, it lost its statehood and its former territory was divided between Prussia, Austria and Russia. During the period of the formation of modern nations, Poland was deprived of its statehood. Insurrection attempts against the three partitioning powers were unsuccessful. Modern national identity was therefore built around the programme of regaining sovereignty and the memory of the uprisings and the sacrifices made by Polish society in fighting for freedom. The category of 'sovereignty' is one of the key myths that make up modern Polish national identity.

⁴ In the 2005 presidential campaign, the main contenders were Donald Tusk, representing the liberal Civic Platform, and Lech Kaczyński, representing the conservative Law and Justice Party. The election was won in the second round by Lech Kaczyński who received 54.04% of votes.

⁵ Jacek Kurski was appointed president of TVP public broadcaster in January 2016, after the Law and Justice won the parliamentary elections.

Pomerania say that Tusk's grandfather volunteered for the Wehrmacht'.⁶ Tusk's grandfather's forced service in the Wehrmacht⁷ was to be the basis for accusing the presidential candidate of pro-German views. A coherent political message has been built around anti-Germanism in order to create an image of rivalry between the 'pro-Polish camp' represented by the Law and Justice party and the 'pro-German camp' represented by the Civic Platform (Poland's largest opposition party) and Donald Tusk. The President of the Law and Justice party Jaroslaw Kaczynski repeatedly said at pre-election meetings that 'in Poland we have a Polish party, i.e., we have the United Right, and we have a German party'.⁸ About Donald Tusk, leader of the opposition, he said that 'He was pro-German, pro-German and once again pro-German. 'Für Deutschalnd', meaning 'for Germany'. - these words were very often repeated by him'. In December 2023, during a parliamentary debate on the formation of a coalition government headed by Donald Tusk, Jaroslaw Kaczynski in parliament said, 'I don't know who your grandparents were, but I know one thing: you are a German agent, simply a German agent'. The Law and Justice electional rhetoric consistently built up an image of Germany as a threat to Polish sovereignty across all dimensions: political, economic and military. During the 2023 election campaign, Jaroslaw Kaczynski said that 'at least until 1915, the dominant political vision in Germany is that of Mittleuropa, according to which 'Poland is to be small, weak and subordinate to Germany (...)'. 'This concept is still at the heart of the German political class today'. Very characteristic was the statement of the Law and Justice president at an election meeting where he suggested that Germany poses a military threat to Poland: 'when we said we would seriously arm ourselves, the Germans immediately announced that they would too (...) I don't know whether Germany wants to arm itself against Russia or against us, but in any case it will arm itself'.⁹

What is important, in the Law and Justice programme, anti-Germanism played the same role that criticism of the European Union plays among European conservative-populist parties. Opinion polls conducted in Poland indicate that pro-European attitudes are definitely dominant among Polish voters (Cichocki, 2011). Thus, open expression of Euroscepticism is not a successful strategy. Euroscepticism therefore needs to be explicit in more covert forms. This is why Jarosław Kaczyński said at pre-election meetings that 'Brussels is an executive body, but decisions are made in Berlin'¹⁰ and that we do not agree with the European Union turning into a supposedly federal state, but in fact centralised under German leadership. (...) We did not regain our independence to lose it and fall from under one boot to another. (...) 'and this German boot, because it's going to be a German boot, not an European boot, can be very heavy indeed.¹¹

The main communication tool used by politicians of the conservative-populist right who ruled in 2015-2023 to communicate with the electorate was the public media, which, once the ruling populists took control, became part of the party propaganda system. The European Union was portrayed in the public media as an international

⁶ Available at <https://www.angora.com.pl/spis.php?y=2005&w=43> (Accessed 10 January 2024).

⁷ During the Second World War, many inhabitants of Kashubia and Silesia were forcibly conscripted to serve in the German army.

⁸ Available at <https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/artykul/3054371-jaroslaw-kaczynski-jest-wybor-miedzy-polska-partia-czyli-zjednoczona-prawica-i-partia-niemiecka> (Accessed 10 January 2024); <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art37310741-jaroslaw-kaczynski-jest-partia-polska-czyli-zjednoczona-prawica-i-partia-niemiecka-czyli-opoz>

⁹ Available at <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art36479031-kaczynski-nie-wiem-czy-niemcy-chca-sie-zbroic-przeciw-rosji-czy-przeciw-nam> (Accessed 10 January 2024).

¹⁰ Available at <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/jaroslaw-kaczynski-zmiany-traktatow-probali-widaczi-panstwa-niektorzy-europoslowie> (Accessed 10 January 2024).

¹¹ Available at <https://regiony.tvp.pl/64097486/prezes-pis-my-nie-po-to-odzyskiwalismy-niepodleglosc-by-ja-stracic> (Accessed 10 January 2024).

organisation pursuing strategic German policy goals and weakening Polish state sovereignty. This was mainly related to the negative assessment of the changes in the Polish legal system by the European Union bodies, as said changes in fact undermined the rule of law, which is one of the fundamental values of the EU. The European Union or its institutions were portrayed in newsflashes as a force hostile to Poland, interfering with Polish national interests and applying double moral and legal standards (Sprawozdanie stanu ochrony języka polskiego 2016-2017, 2017). Usually, the rhetoric against the European Union appeared in a rather veiled form, but sometimes it took a direct and expressive form, as in the case of Krystyna Pawłowicz, who, while a member of the Polish Sejm, called the European flag a 'rag' and then, in an interview, compared the European Union itself to a rag. According to Pawłowicz, now a judge at the Constitutional Court, the European Union is a being that takes over the competences of nation states and its aim is to liquidate nation states and the sovereignty of Poland as a member state. In the same interview, she stated that the European Union is an enemy of the Catholic Church because 'nobody fights the Church like the EU leftists', while she associates the EU flag with something 'very bad, sinister, dirty'.¹²

4.2. Conservative-populist right on migrants and refugees

Fear-mongering related to refugees and migration¹³ combined with criticism of European migration policy was also an important component of political rhetoric of Law and Justice party. Fear of migrants became a permanent part of the political appeal of conservative-populist parties in Poland with the 'migration crisis' in August 2015, which simultaneously overlapped with the election campaign (presidential and parliamentary) in Poland, making the migrant issue one of the core elements of political discussions. During the 2015 election campaign, at a meeting in Maków Mazowiecki, the leader of the Law and Justice party, when asked about the refugee relocation programme, stated in relation to migrants that 'these are issues related to various dangers in this sphere. After all, there are already signs of the emergence of very dangerous diseases long unseen in Europe: cholera on the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna, all sorts of parasites, protozoa, which are not dangerous in the bodies of these people, can be dangerous here. This does not mean to discriminate against someone.... But it needs to be checked'.¹⁴ Since then, the issue of the threat to the country's security posed by illegal migrants has become one of the primary tools used in the political appeal of the Law and Justice party and the creation of an image of the party as the only political force able to protect citizens from the aforementioned threats. Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration in the Law and Justice government, Mariusz Błaszczak stated directly that 'If it had not been for the change of power in 2015, if it had not been for Law and Justice winning the elections, today

¹² Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvFc1ybRjW0> (Accessed 01 February 2024).

¹³ Conservative attitudes in Poland are also characterised by the conviction that mass influx of people from countries outside European civilisation results in an increased threat to the identity of that civilisation. It is argued that Muslim communities with no inclination to assimilate have overrun vast enclaves where Sharia law applies. These are therefore areas taken out of state jurisdiction where the state has de facto lost sovereignty. Muslim immigrants in Western European countries do not submit to the assimilation process. Instead, they form so-called 'parallel communities' in which they live in isolation from the society of their country of residence, but at its expense, cultivating religious, legal and customary traditions transferred from their countries of origin, which very often do not conform to European models of civilisation. This results in conflicts and threats to security (Wilczyński, 2016, pp. 56-57).

¹⁴ 'Kaczyński o uchodźcach: cholera, dezynteria, pasożyty!', se.pl (14 October 2015), available at http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polityka/kaczynski-o-uchodzcach-cholera-dezynteriapasozyty_703198.html (Accessed 02 December 2023).

we would have thousands of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa who are called refugees. I am responsible for the security of Poland and I will not jeopardise the security of Poland and Poles in the name of the ideology of multiculturalism, to which Civic Platform politicians and a large part of Western European politicians are loyal'.¹⁵

Significantly, with the so-called migration crisis and Angela Merkel's 'herzlich willkommen' policy, it became characteristic of the appeal of the Polish conservative-populist right to present European migration policy in political discourse as a post-colonial practice of the countries of 'old Europe'. Prominent politicians representing the ruling camp have repeatedly linked the European Union's migration policy with a threat to Polish sovereignty. Patryk Jaki, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice and then MEP, said: 'Every year, the European Commission will be able to use its tools to collect up to several million migrants - such as those from Lampedusa - and distribute them to Poland. Illegal, strong men from a different culture that often treats women as subhuman. They want to turn our safe Poland into the kind of hell we know from films from France (...) European bureaucrats want to share problems for which they themselves are responsible. They let millions of migrants into Europe without checking. Then these large groups set fire to cities, terrorised, raped and killed. See Sweden. And today they accuse Poland of alleged wrongdoings'.¹⁶ This was the attitude with which the Law and Justice Party's electoral appeal was built, and during e.g., the pre-election debate in 2023, the following statements were made by Mateusz Morawiecki, the Prime Minister in the Law and Justice government: 'The facts are that it was I who presented a tough veto against illegal immigration at the European Council meeting and there, at the Council, I also learned that Donald Tusk had been promised a position. What for? For an agreement to take in illegal immigrants if he came to power. Tusk's party in the Union is already adopting a migration pact, going forward with it (...) We will defend Poles against rape, against cars being set on fire, as in Paris, as in Stockholm. Law and Justice is a guarantee of security'.¹⁷

An interesting motif of populist and anti-immigrant political appeal in Poland is the creation of fear of migrants in the context of sexual crime. In the Polish public space, migrants have often been portrayed as dangerous sex offenders, posing a threat to Polish women. This motif was constantly used in the political appeal and election campaign of the Law and Justice party, and intensified with the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, which became another channel for migrants from Asia and Africa to Western Europe. The Polish authorities have imposed a state of emergency in the border area, restricting the work of independent media journalists and humanitarian workers and volunteers. At the time, border services, police officers and soldiers were committing actions criticised by activists of human rights organisations as well as the Polish ombudsman. The authorities argued that this was the price of protecting the borders of Poland and the European Union as well as the security of citizens, highlighting a different approach to the migration issue than that represented by the left-wing and liberal parties. During a parliamentary debate on 17 August 2023, Minister of Education Przemysław Czarnek said: 'it was your party in Europe, managed for so many years by Tusk, that led, together with Merkel, to a catastrophe that can no longer be undone (...) France and Belgium, almost 30 rapes per hundred thousand inhabitants. Germany 11 rapes, Poland - only two! - said the minister. -

¹⁵ Available at <https://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/m-blaszczak-gdyby-pis-wygralo-wyborow-mielibysmy-tysiace-imigrantow/> (Accessed 16 February 2024).

¹⁶ Available at <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/664512-jaki-tusk-i-kosiniak-kamysz-chca-zmienic-polske-w-pieklo> (Accessed 10 December 2023).

¹⁷ Available at <https://oko.press/co-mowili-kandydaci-w-tvp-zapis-debaty-wyborczej> (Accessed 10 December 2023).

Where does this come from? From your absurd policy (...) The ladies of the left, the activists, should be ashamed of themselves. Hands off Polish women. Polish women are safe in Poland because there are no illegal immigrants, no absurd policies. In Poland, women are respected in Christian culture. And you disregard the threat and want them to be raped, like in France, Belgium or Germany. Poles will tell you "no!" because they will be against the forced relocation of migrants'.¹⁸

During a pre-election meeting also Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stated that the migration policy of the opposition parties is a threat to the safety of Polish women: 'Dear ladies, our wonderful mothers, wives, sisters, mothers, daughters. They, that is the opposition, want to give you women hell (...) who mainly comes here, who storms the borders here? They are usually young Muslim immigrants, uprooted from their communities. They are used to a completely different culture, a different social interaction, to violence. Very often to violence against women (...) see the situation in France, in Germany, in Sweden. These city suburbs, looted shops, rape, robbery, murder, not being able to leave home after dusk because gangs of young Muslim immigrants are prowling'.¹⁹

In 2021, the then Ministers of National Defence and of the Interior and Administration, Mateusz Błaszczak and Mateusz Kamiński, held a press conference at which content allegedly found on the phone of a detained migrant was presented, indicating his links to terrorists and pornographic images with children and animals, which allegedly suggested that migrants arriving in Poland and the European Union were sexually disturbed people and a serious threat.²⁰

4.3. The LGBT Scare

The last area around which the 'politics of fear' was built in Poland between 2015 and 2023 was the LGBT community, treated in the opinion of conservative publicists as a threat to European civilisation²¹. The issue of the LGBT community was particularly exposed during Andrzej Duda's second presidential campaign in 2020, when the election staff decided to tactically focus the political dispute around the worldview-civilisational dispute by creating the image of an 'LGBT ideology' threatening the civilisational foundations of Poland and Europe. One of the elements of the election campaign became the signing of the programme declaration 'Family Charter', which is a set of promises concerning family-related spheres. It included subsections on 'defending the institution of marriage' and 'protecting children from LGBT ideology'. The first stipulates that marriage is 'a union between a man and a woman' and the second on 'prohibiting the promotion of LGBT ideology in public institutions'.

¹⁸

Available

at

<https://sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/wypowiedz.xsp?posiedzenie=81&dzien=2&wyp=002> (Accessed 16 February 2024).

¹⁹ Available at <https://natemat.pl/508453,morawiecki-w-katowicach-straszyl-pieklem-kobiet-gwalty-morderstwa> (Accessed 11 December 2023).

²⁰ Available at <https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,27623673,konferencja-kaminskiego-i-blaszczaka-z-zoofilskim-i-pedofilskim.html> (Accessed 20 January 2024).

²¹ According to Prof. Wojciech Roszkowski, one of the right wing historians and ideologists, sexualisation of children, undermining the gender identity, and attacks against the family is the beginning of the end of civilisation. He wrote in his book that e.g.: "It would seem that the simple truth that man is born of the union of a man and a woman, and therefore that the existence of a family is a prerequisite for human civilisation, cannot be denied. Nowadays, however, nothing is obvious or certain. At least for some of the people who have gone astray and are trying to lead others there. The family has become a victim of the tyranny of the moment, but also a favourite target for attacks by sexually labile people, erotomaniacs, homosexuals of both sexes, feminists and adherents of gender ideology." [W. Roszkowski, *Roztrzaskane lustro. Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej* (Kraków: Biały Kruk, 2019)].

A notable part of this area of political rhetoric, has been created by the public statements of the Minister of National Education, who argued that the so-called 'LGBT ideology' is 'an emanation of Marxism and Bolshevism and is an antisocial and anti-family movement',²² and publicly stated that 'there is no doubt that all this LGBT ideology growing out of neo-Marxism (and this out of Marxism), comes from the same root as Hitler's German National Socialism, which is responsible for all the evils of the Second World War. In an interview on a TV programme he also stated: Let's defend the family against this kind of corruption, depravity, absolutely immoral behaviour, let's defend us against LGBT ideology and let's stop listening to these idiocies about some human rights or some equality. These people are not equal to normal people and let's stop this discussion (...). Let's stop discussing these abominations of LGBT, homosexuality, bisexuality, love parades. Let us defend the family, because failure to defend the family leads to what you see. We don't want phenomena like 12-year-olds declaring themselves lesbians. (...) We recognise the problem of a small handful of people. (...) It's not about persecuting someone, it's about keeping it within the boundaries of common sense, not making boys dress up as girls in kindergartens and vice versa. We do not want our civilisation to be blown up by madmen, people who have been - figuratively speaking - possessed. We want to be governed by people who are guided by common sense and the principles that created this civilisation'.²³

Interestingly, in the case of the area related to changing mores, in the political rhetoric of the Law and Justice Party, fear was combined with another, this time positive emotion - pride. For in the view of conservative politicians, Poland was the 'last bastion' protecting Europe's civilisational values. One leading conservative publicist reflected this attitude in the words: 'Poland is the largest country in Europe where an effective revolution in morals has failed to take place. It is the last, and certainly the biggest bastion of the old Western civilisation, not yet subjected to the brainwashing of feminism, genderism, multiculturalism and anti-racism. The last major country where freedom of speech prevails (...). A rare place where Islam, gay marriage can be openly and publicly criticised, and abortion can be called for what it really is'.²⁴ From this perspective, Poland is not only Europe, but what is more, it is the REAL Europe, and Polish society is the 'guardian' of the traditional values that the 'old Europe', flooded by migrants, is losing. Fear in this case is combined with pride.

5. Emotional appeal: the 'politics of fear' in contemporary populism

Emotions accompany us in the thought process, in action, they are part of narrative, introspection, retrospection, self-analysis, self-definition, manipulation, creation, creative processes, vocabularies of motives used to rationalise actions. The spectrum of revelations of emotion as a material factor in people's actions is very wide. Emotions are important mainly because they drive people to act. They influence the decisions they make and direct activities. Human rationality and, more generally, decision-making depend on emotions. Without emotions, individuals are unable to assign value or 'utility' to alternative possibilities. Their socio-political importance stems from the fact that, on the one hand, they connect people to each other and produce 'commitment to large social and cultural structures' (thus, they have the importance of motivating collective action and bonding social structures). On the other hand, no less important is another property of emotions, which is that they 'can

²² Available at <https://bialykruk.pl/wydarzenia/przemyslaw-czarnek-ideologia-lgbt-jest-ruchem-aspolecznym-i-antyrodzynnym-a-biernosc-wobec-zla-jest-zlem-samym-w-sobie> (Accessed 10 December 2023).

²³ Available at <https://oko.press/czarnek-o-lgbt-studio-polska> (Accessed 16 Feb. 2024).

²⁴ Available at <http://www.ewydanie.dorzeczy.pl/index.php?act=mprasa&sub=article&id=14802> (Accessed 16 February 2024).

also separate people from each other, push them to tear apart social structures and undermine cultural traditions' (Turner & Stets, 2005).

Emotions are a result of evaluating a situation. Every relevant fact is evaluated from the point of view of social and personal norms, and this evaluation determines human behaviour and reactions to events. This evaluation can also arouse different emotions, ranging from positive ones, such as happiness joy, etc., as well as negative ones, such as anger, shame, fear. A wide variety of 'politically relevant' emotions are analysed in the literature. The most common emotions are the negative ones of fear, anger and sadness, and the positive ones of hope, enthusiasm and optimism. Appealing to emotions, or in other words 'emotional appeal', is a rhetorical tool used by politicians, media discourse, and opinion leaders to influence or build public opinion. As a rhetorical device, it is a means of influencing the addressee in order to impose a particular point of view and direct action (Brader et al., 2011).

Analyses of the role of the 'politics of fear' have a long tradition in the social sciences. For example, members of the Frankfurt School had already recognised the role of 'fear' and 'threat' in building support for the Nazi movement in Germany (Adorno et al., 1950). Today, the problem of the 'politics of fear' has returned to mainstream consideration with the electoral successes of populist parties, and especially with the surprise victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election. Analysing the phenomenon of Donald Trump's popularity, it has been pointed out that it is fear that has contributed to his popularity (at least in part) because existential fears give rise to a longing for order and predictability, prioritise simplistic concepts and explanations, and give a significant advantage to those leaders who offer what psychologists refer to as 'cognitive closure' (Kruglanski, 2015).

Analysing events such as Donald Trump's election victory or the Brexit referendum campaign, researchers point out that a characteristic element of contemporary populist communication strategies is the emotionalisation of the message and the appeal to negative emotions in order to arouse interest, concern and political mobilisation of voters. 'Emotional appeal', seems to be a more effective strategy for eliciting audience's responses than mere populist 'ideology' built on appealing to 'the people' as a counter to 'the elites'. Indeed, populism is based on negative emotions.²⁵ It includes a particular way of perceiving and describing the world, as well as a particular type of political imagination associated with them (Müller, 2016).

The dominant role in the populist emotional appeal is played by 'anger' and 'fear'. Referring to 'anger' mainly involves accusing someone or something of causing injustice or harm. Anger is usually triggered by perceived injustice, insult, unequal treatment or betrayal towards group members (Haidt, 2003). 'Anger' is an effective mean of political mobilization because it creates a sense of 'moral outrage'. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that anger is not only motivational, making voters more active, but it also limits openness to a wider spectrum of information by fostering reliance on stereotypes and mental shortcuts (Barder, 2008).

Fear, on the other hand, involves a general (imagined) threat to someone's well-being (Steenbegen & Ellis, 2006). Thus, fear is a reaction to a threat or perception of threat or danger (Barder, 2005). In doing so, researchers distinguish between anxiety, which is associated with indefinite, ambiguous threats, while fear is associated with concrete, specific threats (Barder & Marcus, 2013). This means that anxiety can be linked to

²⁵ Populism has always been strongly linked to emotion. The 'classic' emotional appeal of populist movements appealed primarily to 'anger', as it was directed to 'the people' in counterpoint to 'the elites'. The attack on the elites was based on anti-elitism and anti-establishmentarianism and was based on emphasising the distance between 'us' and 'them'. 'Us' were in this case ordinary citizens and 'them' represents the common enemy personified by the dominant elite (Canovan, 1980).

macro-level processes of social change, while fear is a concretisation of this anxiety and can take different forms. A big part of politics is getting people to think about socio-political issues as part of a group. Politicians must demonstrate that they (or their party) are best suited to address a particular issue. Once this is established, making people fear the issue can cause them to seek a solution by joining the ranks of the group perceived to be the most knowledgeable. Campaigns also use fear to draw votes away from political opponents. This strategy may include factual or misleading statements about the limitations of the opposing candidate or claims that a victory of an opposition in the election will lead to disaster. Discussing risk or inducing fear is effective in changing intentions and behaviour, especially when the behaviour provides a solution to the risk. 'Fear tactics' is a very effective tool. Fear can be used to drive votes towards a particular candidate or party, and ongoing research has confirmed that messages containing 'fear' are almost twice as effective as messages without fear (Tannenbaum et al., 2015). The perception of fear makes citizens more willing to question their previous habits and become more open to persuasion. Fear-driven voters are less likely to rely on entrenched beliefs, such as party identification or ideology, and instead place more weight on current assessments of specific policy issues or candidates (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015).

In populist political strategies, 'fear' and 'anger' are the primary tools for arousing emotions and political mobilisation. Negative emotions are not the only ones that can be linked to populism, but they are dominant (Rico et al., 2017). Voting behaviour research suggests that it is 'anger' that is the primary motivation of populist party voters, resulting in the recognition of 'anger' rather than 'fear' as the primary emotional motivation (Vasilopoulos, et al., 2018) (Close & Haute, 2020). However, there is a very distinctive element that makes 'fear' the leitmotif of political appeal. This is the case with political parties/politicians that are in power. Government actors are far more likely to appeal to 'fear' rather than 'anger' (Friedrichs et al., 2022).

'The politics of fear' is a strategy that is particularly frequently used by conservative-populist parties, as the psychological links between a sense of threat and conservative, right-wing ideology can be reached. The experience of 'fear' and 'threat' motivates 'clinging' to the status quo and resisting social change, as the common basis for all the different elements of the conservative attitude syndrome is a generalised vulnerability to experiencing threat or anxiety in the face of uncertainty (Wilson, 1973, p. 259). It is assumed that there is a correspondence between the epistemological and existential needs of managing uncertainty and threat on the one hand, and the two core values of political conservatism, namely respect for tradition and hierarchy on the other. When confronted with an external world that seems dangerous and unpredictable, it is possible to find support in maintaining what is familiar and known (the status quo) and entrust one's fate to authority figures. From this perspective, the liberal concern for tolerance, progress, diversity and equality may seem irresponsible (Jost et al., 2003).

The widespread use of fear as a political communication tool by right-wing conservative parties is facilitated by a context of profound social change resulting in cultural trauma. In the contemporary populist political appeal, the appeal to fear associated with the fear of the 'other' and the loss of previous identity has begun to play a particular role. The process of 'excluding others' involves the creation of a political narrative based on the concept of 'dangerous others' (Mudde, 2004), which creates a common enemy in groups that are stigmatised as 'outsiders', 'others', and excluded from the community.²⁶ A permanent element of the electoral appeal of a large part of the conservative-populist movements has therefore become a firm opposition to the processes involved in the formation of hybrid, multi-cultural

²⁶ It is a new juxtaposition between 'us', as a homogeneous category, and 'them', being a threat to the community.

societies, in which there will be a multiplicity of identities to which a citizen can refer when constructing their self and defining their identity. Increasingly, political parties and politicians are building their political appeal on criticism of multiculturalist policies and on opposition to immigrants. The threat of an invasion of culturally alien immigrants who undermine traditional social values and are a source of crime, as well as the threat of terrorism, has increasing mobilising power.

6. Conclusion

The political appeal of the conservative-populist Law and Justice party involves several characteristic elements and is a combination of, firstly, anti-establishment and pro-social slogans, allowing for the creation of an image of a party which cares for the interests of 'simple people' in opposition to 'corrupt elites'; secondly, traditionalist-conservative slogans, which allow to build an image of a party that cares for the protection of Christian values threatened by contemporary moral changes, and acts as a defender of the sovereignty of the national community threatened by contemporary political transformations, and thirdly, anti-immigrant slogans, which allow to build an image of a party that cares for the safety of Poles by protecting them from crime and terrorism. This is a set of views very characteristic of contemporary populist conservatism, with these slogans being used in the context of the peculiarities of Polish culture, which means, among other things, presenting Germany as the main threat to the country's sovereignty, sexual violence against women posed by migrants as a threat to security of citizens, and social dominance of 'LGBT ideology' as a threat to civilisational identity.

In fact, since its electoral success Law and Justice achieved in 2015, 'fear' is constantly used in the electoral appeal of the ruling party, which tries in various ways to build a narrative of threat and to convince voters that the only political force capable of defending Poland against contemporary threats is Law and Justice. Characteristic here are the words uttered in the course of the electoral campaign in September 2023 by the Prime Minister of the Polish government, a member of the Law and Justice party and its main representative during the campaign: 'As long as the Law and Justice government is in power, Poland is like an impregnable fortress' (statement during a pre-election debate on public television); 'You have nothing to fear, as long as we are in power' (Morawiecki at an election rally in Kraśnik).²⁷ The emotionalisation of political appeal, the simplification of complex social issues and the theatricalisation of political communication has become an effective tool for the conservative right in Poland to build public support. In the conditions of 'cultural trauma' associated with processes of profound socio-cultural changes, the securitisation of selected political issues and their portrayal as 'critical' or even 'existential' threats bring electoral success by causing an excessive focus on selected issues. The issues that become securitised are not necessarily related to problems that are necessary for the objective survival of the state, but rather represent areas where political parties have been successful in constructing the issue as an existential problem.

²⁷ As a result of the October 2023 elections in Poland, Law and Justice lost its parliamentary majority, but remained the strongest political party in Poland with the highest public support. The loss of power was associated with the emergence of a coalition of widely divergent political parties (Christian Democratic, liberal, progressive), for which the only programmatic point of agreement was the desire to remove the populists from power and restore the existing social consensus. However, the Slovakian experience and the return of Robert Fico to power indicate that such coalitions do not necessarily produce lasting results.

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