

SELF-GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS AND THE MESSAGE OF THEIR PRESS RELEASES. THE ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENTS OF THE POLISH MAIN WEEKLIES OF OPINION DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF 2018

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Abstract

The subject of the article is the media image of the local government elections of 2018, which allows to draw representative opinions of the media elites' representatives and showing the mainstreams of the political dispute, which appeared during the election campaign. The research covered the most important opinion weeklies in Poland, i.e.: "Newsweek", "Polityka", "Wprost", "Gazeta Polska", "Do Rzeczy", "Sieci". The articles on electoral and self-government topics were analyzed.

Keywords: local government elections 2018, mass media, weeklies, local government, public discourse

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Introduction

The self-government elections held in 2018 were the first practical verification of the governing Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) party's policy since the 2015 election year. The heated political disputes were a sign of increased activity of both the opposition and supporters of PiS. This sign proved to be correct, as evidenced by the turnout of 54.90 percent, which was the highest among all of the self-government elections to date (48.83% in the second round of election – National Electoral Commission [PKW] data)¹.

From the very beginning with the so-called pre-election campaign, it had been clear that the 2018 self-government elections had become a high-stakes competition, where victory was to be claimed on a national scale, not only in individual local governments. As the media remarked: “Parties treat this year's self-government elections as a sort of first innings, which will culminate in the 2020 presidential election” (Olczyk, Miziołek 2018, p. 22-25). Jarosław Flis, a sociologist, stated directly: “self-government elections and national politics are a closed system” (Flis 2018, p. 14).

The current paper concerns the media coverage of the 2018 self-government elections. A decision was made to examine the most important (mainstream) opinion weeklies in Poland on the assumption that they would present and regularly cover the main trends of political debate during the election campaign. The examined analytical articles

¹ Turnout in self-government elections in Poland based on National Electoral Commission (PKW) data: self-government elections 1990 – 42.27%, 1994 – 33.78%, 1998 – 45.45%, 2002 – 44.23% (35.02% in the second round), 2006 – 45.99% (39.69% in the second round), 2010 – 47.32% (35.31% in the second round), 2014 – 47.40% (39.97% in the second round), 2018 – 54.90% (48.83% in the second round). The average turnout in self-government elections in Poland after 1989 is lower than the turnout in parliamentary and presidential elections. On average, the turnout for self-government elections amounted to 45.17%, compared to 49.39% in the parliamentary and 57.39% in the presidential elections. Own elaboration based on National Electoral Commission (PKW) reports and Wikipedia data: <https://pkw.gov.pl/>; https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frekwencja_wyborcza [4.08.2019].

and election forecasts were published by journalists close to the election date, that is, with full awareness of their imminent confirmation during the election. The majority of opinion weeklies publish journalistic articles which convey the opinions of individual authors and editors. Generally speaking, journalistic texts differ from informational ones in that they contain the author's opinion and commentary regarding the issue at hand. "Press release essentially states facts, recreates the course of events, while journalism evaluates these facts, and reveals their meaning through the author's subjective perspective" (Ranke 2017, p. 20; cf. Kula 2013). The study focused mainly on the depictions of self-government elections by the weeklies, and their opinions concerning the political struggle itself, as well as the political leadership and mechanisms involved in the campaigning processes by individual political parties and committees.

The basic procedure applied prior to the analysis was the selection and accurate definition of the research material. A major challenge was the fact that the subject matter concerned a dynamically evolving process, occurring simultaneously in various areas and contexts. It is pertinent to highlight several areas which could have affected both the perception of self-government elections by the citizens and the way journalists described the political struggle:

- the general ideological and historical context of the political debate in our country;
- the specific nature of self-government elections in comparison with other elections;
- political commitment and editorial policy of the individual media outlets;
- a wide variety of the so-called fields of exploitation of journalistic activities, namely, the modified online versions of newspaper articles and individual participation of journalists in outside discussions.

The analysis covered six weekly magazines, examined over the period of eight months; from early April to early December 2018. The following magazines were analyzed: “Do Rzeczy”, “Gazeta Polska”, “Newsweek”, “Polityka”, “Sieci” and “Wprost”. Between 34 and 36 issues of each magazine were examined (weekly magazines have differing release schedules). In total, exactly 209 weekly issues were analyzed.

A qualitative analysis of the content of these weekly magazines, including editorials and original texts as well as cover art, was performed. The adopted method, critical discourse analysis (cf. Lisowska-Magdziarz 2006; Mautner 2011), assumes (postulates) the objectivity of the researcher, describing only the surface-level content of press releases with a systemic approach, taking into account the quantitative proportions (cf. Lisowska-Magdziarz 2006; Wodak, Krzyżanowski 2011).

Methodological clarity is additionally guaranteed by the description of coding guidelines for the entirety of the data set. These were based on the dominant themes, namely, the most prominent topics mentioned in the analyzed periodicals during the period of data collection (it was assumed that main themes are the coding guidelines). In general, according to Karolina Szczepaniak: “Broadly defined content analysis (as coherent, systemic and analytical reading / perception of messages) is an indispensable element of most sociological research” (Szczepaniak 2012, p. 84). Its common use can be attributed to the growing interest of researchers in public discourse (cf. Podemski 2013; Kowalczyk 2017). To quote Krzysztof Podemski:

“Public communication/discourse in Poland is becoming increasingly popular among researchers. The number of publications analyzing the internal public discourse after 1989 is increasing, especially of those concerned with current affairs. Mainstream journals are the most frequently used research material. Usually, articles from a particular period (months, years) are chosen for analysis. Weekly opinion

magazines are often used for this purpose, as are journalistic television programs” (Podemski 2013, p. 60-61).

Why is releasing weekly opinion magazines still relevant? As noticed by Gerlinde Mautner:

“(…) print media, at least those with high circulation, as well as exclusive and professional publishing are, to a large extent, reflections of the main societal trend (or one of many, given the nature of pluralistic societies). The largest daily newspapers and weeklies are the most appropriate sources of information concerning the dominant discourse. However, they rarely cover social outliers and dissidents. Another, closely related argument which serves as a confirmation of their value for social research is their impact. The paradigm of discourse analysis dictates that the entirety of the discourse is both socially constituted and plays a constitutive role. Undoubtedly, this dialectic is particularly important in the case of mass media including print media. Distribution amongst large groups of recipients amplifies the constitutive effect of the discourse, that is, the power to shape widely shared views on reality” (Mautner 2011, p. 54).

Qualitative discourse analysis is used in numerous scientific studies (cf. Barabasz 2009; Kawka 2014; Ranke 2017; Ossowski, Piontek 2014; Polkowska 2016; Trutkowski 1999; Zielińska 2013). Noteworthy examples include, for instance, a publication by Xymena Bukowska and Barbara Markowska (2013) on the language of hostility in press releases released at the turn of 2007, or the book by Czyżewski, Kowalski and Piotrowski (1997) titled: *Ritual chaos. A Study of Public Discourse (Rytualny Chaos. Studium dyskursu publicznego)*. Marek Czyżewski writes in the introduction:

“Thus, to illustrate, an intensive, qualitative study using methods of an interpretative discourse analysis of a single, carefully selected program, may turn out to be no less cognitively fruitful than a quantitative analysis

of a thousand questionnaires or millions of telemetric data sets, although probably in a different way” (Czyżewski 1997, p. 9).

Globalization and the Issue of Scale

The profound changes that have been introduced in Poland since the Round Table Agreement coincided with historically unprecedented processes of globalization. Since the invention and spread of the Internet, reality has drastically changed². The most characteristic feature of this new era is its immediate globality namely, the possibility to communicate with the whole world in a single moment, only a mouse click away. This potential has created a new dichotomy, local – global, which makes everyone the inhabitants of their respective communes, and the whole world simultaneously. As Marshall McLuhan wrote, albeit about television, yet as if in anticipation of the Internet-driven future – we live in a “global village” (McLuhan 2017, p. 87).

When analyzing contemporary organizations and social behaviors, it is important to consider the concept of scale, on which different values, including size, intensity, prevalence or scope can be compared³. Awareness of scale differences might prove useful especially when describing self-government issues, which are intrinsically dependent on territory and scale. It is principally identified with a local community, bound together by the interest of the neighborhood, and largely integrated by information specific only to a given environment.

² The invention of the Internet dates back to the early 1990s (in 1991 CERN scientists developed the WWW standard), https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historia_Internetu [4.08.2019].

³ A scale is a structured set of values of a given size. According to an ancient Greek saying, there are two types of stairs: one with large steps for the gods, and one with small steps for mortals. The term was derived from one of the peaks in of the Greek Olympus called Scale, meaning stairs or steps. The disambiguation page on Polish Wikipedia lists nearly forty distinctions of the concept of scale used in music, psychology, medicine, chemistry, physics, geography, metrology, statistics and others, <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skala> [4.08.2019].

However, which information and issues are local and which are supra-local, national or global? Are local issues still within the administrative boundaries of local government? It seems that with the development of modern civilization, the answers to these questions are changing. As a side-note, the Americans say that reforming the administration is an *unfinishable business*. Zygmunt Bauman also stressed that: “[...] today’s institutions of democratic, political and ethical control, territorially limited and land-linked as they are, do not fit into the supraterritorial capital and trade as well as global finance associated with freely moving capital” (Bauman 2007, p. 21).

According to Anthony Giddens, we live in late modernity, which means that we are split between the local environment and the global world: “Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global” (Giddens 2012, p. 251). Similarly, Manuel Castells, taking a different, global perspective, stated: “The social structure is global, but most of people’s experiences remain local, both territorially and culturally” (Castells 2013, p. 37). Zygmunt Bauman saw globalization as a reduction in various distances: “This incredible sense of »world fulfillment« is commonly referred to as »globalization«. At lightning fast transmission (including trigger signals), the almost simultaneously occurring causes and effects reduce even the greatest distances, ultimately invalidating this distinction. Despite all practical ideas and goals, we all live in close, or even intimate vicinities today” (Bauman 2007, p. 18). Thus, we are suspended on a scale between that which is local for us and that which is global for everyone.

Our perspective shifts occasionally, from a local to a more global one. According to Giddens, this is the dialectic of the local and global, or “the oppositional interplay between local involvements and globalizing tendencies” (Giddens 2012, term glossary).

The creation and development of electronic media greatly influenced print media. Although the following analysis only covers texts in

physical weekly magazines, journalists have often referred therein to television and Internet content. This is evidenced by the fact that in each of the weekly magazines, there are sections devoted to websites, social media, memes, etc. The journalists themselves, despite being employed by the print periodicals, often participated in online discussions on websites and forums. In such cases, the following disclaimer was used: “The article expresses the author’s opinion and does not reflect the position of the editorial office”.

Anthony Giddens stated: “(...) from early on, electronic communication has been vital to the development of mass printed media” (Giddens 2012, p. 42). However, the real revolution came with the introduction of the Internet. Manuel Castells referred to the new online media reality as “(...) the rise of what I call mass self-communication, decisively increasing the autonomy of communicating subjects vis-à-vis communication corporations, as the users become both senders and receivers of messages” (Castells 2013, p. 16).

Maciej Gdula expressed similar notions: “Today, communication has undergone a profound transformation due to the development of the Internet. It is not just that the internet has absorbed part of the audience while the old media have continued in the usual fashion, though in a reduced scale. The Internet has rebuilt the old media in its own fashion” (Gdula 2017, pp. 5-6).

Old media, such as the press, radio and television, cannot exist without the Internet, from which they draw, at the very least, their inspiration. For example, television stations broadcast video game shows and newspapers publish Internet memes. The interactivity of the Internet makes it sometimes difficult to distinguish news from news-related comments. As Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz stated:

“Thanks to the virtual reality experience, embodiment and cyborgization connected with the so-called new media, the postmodern understanding of media reality fluctuates between two interpretations. On the one hand,

radical statements appear concerning the annihilation/simulacration of reality and its swallowing up by the media – as Baudrillard claims, we live in an era without consequences and in a theory without consequences, a world where reality simply does not exist anymore. On the other hand, there is visible the conviction that we have entered a new epistemological paradigm and a new form of culture – cyberculture or, more broadly, technological culture” (Lisowska-Magdziarz 2013, p. 38).

Barbara Markowska, in her analysis of the language of hostility in Polish public discourse, also noted that:

“A slight, almost imperceptible shift in emphasis is based on the fact that conflict is becoming increasingly hyperreal (using Baudrillard’s category), which means that it is difficult to decide unequivocally whether there are **separate** political/moral options, or rather visions of the world, clashing under the smokescreen of discourse” (Markowska 2013, p. 136).

Jean Baudrillard summarized this notion as follows:

“Abstraction today is no longer a map, doppelganger, mirror or concept. The simulation does not concern any territory, reference entity or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1997, p. 176).

Due to the specific, local and regional nature of self-government elections, it is difficult for editors to create a coherent and alluring nationwide message addressed to the general public and composed of self-government content. Usually, then, self-government information is relayed by national media only if it can be presented as a generalized political dispute. An example of this practice can be found in the report entitled *Pre-election monitoring of journalistic television programs (Monitoring wyborczy telewizyjnych programów publicystycznych. Wybory samorządowe 2014. Raport podsumowujący. Część ogólnopolska 2014)*, which was commissioned by the National Broadcasting Council (Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji – KRRiT)

after the 2014 self-government elections. This issue is not new (cf. Oniszczyk 2011). In May 1998, Michał Kulesza, who, as the Government Plenipotentiary for Constitutional Reforms sent an official complaint to the National Broadcasting Council against public television, which, in his opinion, failed to inform about the implemented self-government reforms (Kulesza 2008, p. 260).

The media's approach to self-government issues results from the scope of their reception. Since nationwide publications are addressed to a non-local audience, the topics must be generalized. Perhaps local events seem uninteresting to mainstream journalists, as they are not quite sensational. This is what Pierre Bourdieu said about the choice of topics by journalists: "The monotonous, drab daily life in the inner city doesn't say anything to anybody and doesn't interest anybody, least of all journalists" (Bourdieu 2011, p. 46).

Worth mentioning is also his opinion on opportunism, namely, that journalists are prone to depend on advertisers and the audience, in this case on large media outlets and readers nationwide. "But, like the political and economic fields, and much more than the scientific, artistic, literary, or legal fields, the journalistic field is permanently subject to trial by market, whether directly, through advertisers, or indirectly, through audience ratings" (Bourdieu 2011, p. 107). The scope of individual publications thus influences the selection of topics and, consequently, removes local issues, as they are too difficult to generalize.

Nationwide Weekly Magazines of Opinion on the Press Market

What makes the weekly magazines of opinion listed in the previous section unique is the fact that they have numerous editorial offices and their journalists broach a wide range of topics, ranging from politics, social, economic and sporting issues to tourism and lifestyle. Their circulation in Poland amounts to tens of thousands of copies sold each week.

Recalling Paul Lazarsfeld's theory of two-step flow of communication, it can be assumed that the readers of opinion weeklies act as the leaders of opinion, disseminating its content further to their friends and people they exchange ideas with. Thus, journalistic theses presumably reach a greater number of recipients than the circulation or volume of magazine purchases would indicate (cf. Baran, Davis 2007; Esparcia, Smolak-Lozano 2012).

Within the framework of intersubjective relations, certain categories of individuals appear – the so-called opinion leaders, who act as intermediaries between the media and people. This fact contributes to the creation of a two-step flow according to the following schema: media → opinion leaders → individual entities (Esparcia, Smolak-Lozano 2012, p. 189).

Thus, these three aspects – editorial prowess, general subject matter and wide public reach, also through high circulation – make it possible to define a publication as a weekly magazine of opinion. The Wirtualnemedial.pl portal lists the following publications as weekly magazines: “Gość Niedzielny”, “Polityka”, “Newsweek Polska”, “Sieci”, “Do Rzeczy”, “Gazeta Polska”, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, “Wprost”, “Przegląd” and “Fakty i Mity”. Sales of individual publications in 2017-2018 ranged from over 15 thousand to over 130 thousand copies (Kurdupski 2018). Each weekly magazine is about 100 pages long and includes from 20 to 25 editorial articles.

These mainstream magazines have their own clearly defined political and ideological lines. Thus, among others, there are Catholic, conservative, liberal, left-wing, liberal weeklies. Their profile is sometimes defined at the beginning by the editorial staff themselves, informing the readers about the contents.

For example, in 2018 the “Sieci” magazine described itself in the heading as “The largest conservative opinion weekly in Poland”. However, the description is “verified” by readers and by competing

publications. Jan Wróbel from “Wprost” describes some of the (right-wing) magazines as identity politics media and writes: “We are suffocated by the myth of identity politics media that we consume because they are good at pitting people against one another, not because they broaden our horizons. Identity media activists usually fail to see that their outlets are guilty of exactly that” (Wróbel 2018, p. 14). Piotr Skwieciński describes “Polityka” and “Newsweek” as liberal media. Describing Robert Biedroń’s actions, which, according to the author, may be detrimental to the Civic Coalition (Koalicja Obywatelska – KO), he noticed that: “The liberal media are afraid of this effect (with TVN, »Newsweek« and »Polityka« at the forefront) [...]” (Skwieciński 2018, p. 35). The majority of studies analyzing contemporary press releases are predominantly concerned with Polish liberal and conservative weeklies (cf. Polkowska 2016).

The study presented in the current paper included only those weekly opinion magazine press articles which:

- discussed the self-government campaign and elections,
- were published in one of the six selected opinion weeklies,
- were published during the 2018 self-government election campaign.

Only the editorial texts, and sometimes the columns, were analyzed. Press releases were not considered because they often cited the Internet or other media sources.

Topics related to the self-government appeared in 63% of all analyzed issues. Statistically, in this period, “Polityka” (79% of its issues) and “Newsweek” (43% of its issues) wrote about governments the most. Fourteen covers (out of 209) were self-government related, that is, announced the self-government article as the main topic of the issue. (see the adjacent figure 1).

According to the methodological recommendations for qualitative content analysis, “[...] textual analysis should pay attention to

nonverbal elements of the message. The key parameters are the visual elements, page layout, frames, text insertions, font size and typeface [...]” (Mautner 2011, p. 70). The covers of weekly magazines which announced the self-government articles as the most important ones in the issue were structured similarly.

Figure 1. Selected covers of weekly magazines



Most often, the cover included the “face” of the election along with an expressive slogan announcing the main thesis, elaborated in the middle of the issue. For example: *Jaki’s Deal* (Układ Jakiego), *They Will Rule* (*Oni będą rządzić*), *The Fall of Robert Biedroń* (*Upadek Roberta*

Biedronia) or *The Man Who Lost His Face* (*O człowieku, który stracił twarz*).

The second group of cover headlines are calls motivating readers to vote in the elections: *Now or Never* (*Teraz albo nigdy*), *Time to Vote* (*Czas na głos*). Finally, the third group concerned the evaluation of election results: *Overtime* (*Teraz dogrywka*), *A Possible Breakthrough?* (*Czy to przełom?*), *Law and Justice Succeeds After All* (*A jednak sukces PiS*), and *We Are In For a War Now* (*Dopiero teraz będzie wojna*).

Importantly, none of the magazines describing the self-government elections in 2018 published a text indicating the difference or the unique nature of self-government elections in comparison to other elections. In fact, only one text analyzing the difference between the current elections and the previous, 2014 self-government elections was published.

In "Polityka" Piotr Pytlakowski described, among other things, the new self-government laws and the preparation of electoral committees to organize the elections, focusing in particular on the financial aspect. He wrote: "In 2014, self-government elections cost PLN 238 million. In 2018, expenditures of approx. PLN 635 million are planned. This is an increase of almost PLN 400 million. Alas, generous is the hand that feeds us" (Pytlakowski 2018, p. 26-28).

By analyzing the articles describing the political struggle in connection with self-government elections, it is possible to indicate clear thematic dominants:

- Articles concerning the rivalry of political circles in general, for which self-government elections were only one stage (one of the battles) in the so-called four elections (self-government, European Parliament, parliamentary, and presidential elections) appeared most frequently.
- The main candidates running for office in Warsaw, Patryk Jaki and Rafał Trzaskowski, received the most attention. Marginally

less attention was paid to Robert Biedroń, the incumbent president of Słupsk.

- Only four cities attracted the interest of nationwide publicists, namely: Warsaw, Gdańsk, Cracow and Wrocław.
- Other persons were presented individually (e.g., the interview with Czesław Renkiewicz, the incumbent president of Suwałki, Matura 2018, p. 56-57), interview with Jerzy Murzyn, the long-term mayor of Bodzechów (Ćwieluch 2018, p. 34-36), along with reports of political disputes from various localities (e.g. Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Leszczyńska 2018, p. 30-32) or in Nysa (Omachel 2018, p. 33-35).
- Only one article was devoted to the specificity of the 2018 self-government elections in comparison to the previous elections of 2014 (Pytlakowski 2018, p. 26-28).
- No article describing the specificity of self-government elections in comparison to other elections in the country was published.
- Finally, it could be observed that evaluating the election results proved difficult for all magazines. This was due to the natural publishing cycle of print media, but also the fact that exit polls predicted results which ultimately proved inaccurate.

Articles discussing the rivalries in political circles, for which self-government elections were only one stage (one of the battles) in the four elections, were the most common. Out of 209 analyzed issues, general articles concerning the nation-wide campaign were included in 93 of them (some issues included more than one article on the subject).

“And so: it begins!” – wrote Jerzy Baczyński in “Polityka” (34) in the article titled *Two years of elections (Dwa lata wyborów)*.

“After the Prime Minister announced the date of self-government elections [...], an official election campaign has been launched, which will last almost two years. This will still be the same campaign, although there will be four formal elections along the way. A popularity contest in

doses, the question being: Law and Justice or not? Let us reiterate – the stake in these quadruple elections is not merely the natural and expected change of the governing party, but democracy itself” (Baczyński 2018, p. 6).

Witold Gadowski expressed similar notions in “Gazeta Polska”:

“The self-government elections will be the first important vote in three years, which will show the real scale of support for the Good Change government and for their opponents from the Civic Platform [Platforma Obywatelska – PO]. These elections will also decide several other issues, such as the future of the most pro-Russian party in Poland – the Polish People’s Party [Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL]. Rivalry in large cities will be extremely heated. We shall see whether Law and Justice will be able to convince voters from the communities associated with the Civic Platform and the Democratic Left Alliance [Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD] (Gadowski 2018, p. 36-37).

In the self-government elections of 2018, the rivals quickly determined that the local government assemblies would be at stake. However, during the course of the campaign, winning the vote in large cities became increasingly important. Therefore, journalists could evaluate the election results on two planes: local government assemblies and cities. Kamila Baranowska from “Do Rzeczy” spoke to Adam Bielan, Deputy Speaker of the Senate, co-author of several Law and Justice election campaigns. “What’s at stake in this election?” – asked the journalist. Bielan answered:

“On the one hand, there’s an »elections quadrathlon« waiting for us. We will move from one campaign to another and every result will inevitably have an impact on the beginning of the campaign before the next election. On the other hand, we are aware of the enormous power of the regional assemblies in Poland. They are the ones who distribute the EU funds. They can positively impact the development of individual regions, but at the same time, they are an excellent tool for personal networking.

Therefore, a change at this level of self-government is highly desirable”
(Baranowska 2018, p. 24-26).

Anna Gielewska and Artur Grabek from “Wprost” speculated on the strategy adopted by the Law and Justice party for the elections. “[...] it is the regional assemblies, not the cities, that the Law and Justice party aims for. The reason is simple: assemblies mean money” (Gielewska, Grabek 2018, p. 32-36).

In “Polityka” Wojciech Szacki contemplated the political plan of Law and Justice for the next few years, including the assembly elections.

“The Law and Justice party wants to remove the Polish People’s Party as an independent political force during the self-government elections. The Polish People’s Party, at the moment, is in co-ruling in 15 voivodships. However, they have the strongest position in these voivodeships that are targeted by Law and Justice. They have the highest support, the strongest structures there, and the activists there are employed in companies and institutions subordinate to the voivodeship marshals. The success of the Law and Justice plan would mean the collapse of prominent Polish People Party politicians, including the two deputy leaders: Adam Struzik (Mazowsze Marshal) and Adam Jarubas (Świętokrzyskie Marshal). Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, the head of the party, would probably not survive this disaster either. Hundreds of self-government officials would lose their jobs” (Szacki 2018, p. 21-23).

The Polish People’s Party responded in “Wprost”. Anna Gielewska, in the article *From The Forest to The Jungle (Wracam z lasu do dżungli)* talks with Stanisław Żelichowski, who represented the Polish People’s Party in the parliament for 30 years.

“When you look at Poland from an outside perspective, the first thing you see is our central government, divided and quarreling. That many things can nevertheless be accomplished, however, is thanks to the self-governments. In fact, this (the self-government) reform was the only relatively successful one. However, as self-governments become more

political, the struggle moves to a lower level. (...) Many self-government officials today realize that if Law and Justice takes over the regional assemblies, it will be the same” (Gielewska 2018, 35, pp. 26-28).

Eventually, the Law and Justice party won the elections regional assemblies nationwide, winning 254 seats, while the Civic Coalition won 194 seats. The Polish People’s Party received 70 seats, the Nonpartisan Local Government Activists (Bezpartyjni Samorządowcy – BS) – 15, and the Democratic Left Alliance–Lewica Razem coalition (SLD–Lewica Razem) – 11. In addition, the following committees have also won seats in the regional assemblies: German Minority (Mniejszość Niemiecka) – 5, Dutkiewicz for Lower Silesia Electoral Committee (KWW Z Dutkiewiczem dla Dolnego Śląska) – 2, Bogdan Wenta’s Świętokrzyskie Project Electoral Committee (KWW Projekt Świętokrzyskie Bogdana Wenty) – 1 (“Gazeta Prawna” 2018).

Parallel to the battle for the local government assemblies, a battle for large cities took place. For most of the campaign, the struggle of political forces to claim the cities was relayed through the example of Warsaw and the rivalry between Rafał Trzaskowski and Patryk Jaki. Mariusz Janicki from “Polityka” put it this way: “The Trzaskowski – Jaki rivalry is presented in sociological terms as a »class rivalry«, a purely Warsaw-based clash between a crafty man of the people and a pompous representative of the elites” (Janicki 2018, p. 21-23). Rafał Trzaskowski defeated Patryk Jaki in the first round of the election, other candidates were irrelevant.

During the election campaign, many journalists focused on Robert Biedroń, who appeared as a beacon of hope for left wing politics. Some journalists did not believe in his causative power. Nevertheless, he was a popular subject in the press. They waited for his decision to run in self-government elections and speculated about him creating a new party.

In the meantime, pedophilia and mobbing scandals arose in Słupsk's municipal offices. President Biedroń was often the journalistic center of attention. Łukasz Warzecha in "Do Rzeczy" (37) titled his column: *The Twilight of the Full-time Homosexual (Zmierzch etatowego homoseksualisty)* (Warzecha 2018, p. 11). Cezary Michalski from "Newsweek" titled his article: *Biedroń Dives Headfirst (Biedroń skacze na główkę)* (Michalski 2018, p. 28-29). Wojciech Wybranowski from "Do Rzeczy" – *The Biedroń Balloon (Biedroniowy balonik)* (Wybranowski 2018, p. 10).

Robert Biedroń officially decided not to run for mayor in Słupsk on September 3 (Biedroń 2018). He designated Krystyna Danilecka-Wojewódzka, his deputy, as his successor. She eventually won the election. Biedroń himself was elected a councilor of Słupsk, but he resigned from his seat before long, a month after the election (Noch 2018).

The interpretation of election results in opinion weeklies was made in relation to the interests of the biggest political players. Their successes and failures were evaluated by the publicists of the nationwide press.

"As it was easily predicted, all or most of the major political players announced their successes in self-government elections" – Paweł Lisicki (2018, p. 3) stated in "Do Rzeczy". Jerzy Baczyński and Mariusz Janicki from "Polityka" in their article *The Losing Winners* stated that: "Although, as is usual in self-government elections, the main parties announced their successes, one thing is clear: the triumphant march of Law and Justice towards dominance has been halted. It might have been the first time that the winners' faces were those of discontent" (Baczyński, Janicki 2018, p. 8-9).

The journalists of the opinion weeklies evaluated the election results mainly in relation to the two rival political camps, that is, supporters of Law and Justice and their opponents, the so-called anti-Law and

Justice. The distinctive excerpts from the texts of leading journalists are worth mentioning:

- Konrad Kołodziejcki from "Sieci": "Law and Justice won the self-government elections" (Kołodziejcki 2018, p. 32).
- Jacek and Michał Karnowski from "Sieci": "No party has ever been as successful as Law and Justice" (Karnowski, Karnowski 2018, p. 23).
- Kamila Baranowska from "Do Rzeczy": "Law and Justice won the elections at the local assemblies stage" (Baranowska 2018a, p. 29).
- Piotr Semka from "Do Rzeczy": "The self-government elections were a draw, though favoring Law and Justice" (Semka 2018, p. 20).
- Cezary Michalski from "Newsweek": "What have the self-government elections taught us? That Law and Justice, even if they won, lost their struggle for a different Poland" (Michalski 2018a, p. 24).
- Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władyka from "Polityka" (45): "Law and Justice tasted even more bitter defeat in the second round than in the first." (Janicki, Władyka 2018, p. 18).
- Jerzy Baczyński and Mariusz Janicki from "Polityka": "[...] the triumphant march of Law and Justice towards dominance has been halted" (Baczyński, Janicki 2018, p. 8).
- Tomasz Lis from "Newsweek": "The self-government elections were a lost battle for Law and Justice" (Lis 2018, p. 3).

In 2018, journalistic descriptions were dominated by rivalry between the opposing camps, where supporters and opponents of the Law and Justice party stood against one another.

Conclusion

The conclusion contains only those findings which can be formulated on the basis of the journalistic content concerning the 2018 elections,

written in weekly opinion magazines during the period of analysis in the current study. Referring to general knowledge and a broader media context, it is possible, for example, to describe the characteristic and unique nature of the main political forces and their attitudes towards self-governments. Discernable differences between the antagonists concerning the future of Poland thus arise. Law and Justice propose a centralized government, the Civic Platform offers major decentralization, and The Polish People's Party – the idea of little homelands. However, no such descriptions appear in the press texts published in the analyzed weekly magazines (sic!).

In the heated period of the self-government campaign, almost no reference was made to the significant amendment of the self-government legislation, which was highly relevant to the elections. Namely, the Self-government Act, which was adopted on 11 January 2018, introduced several important changes, including extending the office term for self-governments to 5 years, introducing a limit of two terms, increasing the authority of councilors, and changing some provisions of the electoral law. Citizens also received the right to initiative and the participatory budget became mandatory (Ustawa o zmianie niektórych ustaw w celu zwiększenia udziału obywateli w procesie wybierania, funkcjonowania i kontrolowania niektórych organów publicznych 2018). Worse still, journalists made rookie mistakes by writing about the upcoming four-year term for self-governments (Michalski 2018, p. 28-19).

The 2018 self-government elections can be considered a breakthrough in some respects. For the first time, the struggle for self-government was considered political in the general opinion, as expressed in the weekly magazines. Until then, self-government leaders were not regarded as politicians, only as keepers of their small homelands, while real politics

was somewhere far away – in Warsaw, in the Polish Parliament or in the European Parliament⁴.

Edwin Bendyk wrote in “Polityka”:

“For Poles, self-government elections are more important than parliamentary or presidential elections. However, this year’s vote will be especially important. The state of Polish democracy depends on its results” (Bendyk 2018, p. 8).

Marcin Makowski asked in “Do Rzeczy”:

“Are we, in a month’s time, facing the most important self-government elections in the history of the Third Republic of Poland? [...] Or maybe their »uniqueness« can be attributed to the transfer of national politics to the regional level?” (Makowski 2018, p. 26).

Stanisław Janecki wrote in “Sieci”:

“The elections of October 21 and November 4, 2018 were the least local of all self-government elections held in the Third Republic of Poland to this day, which also influenced the results, especially in the second round” (Janecki 2018, p. 38).

Jan Śpiewak, who also ran for mayor of Warsaw, noted in “Wprost”:

“I came third when running for mayor of Warsaw. Although this is a good result, it leaves a very bitter aftertaste. 85% of votes in the election had gone to Law and Justice and Civic Platform representatives. Neither I, nor many others, managed to convince the citizens of Warsaw that there is an alternative to the continuation of the 12-year rule of the Civic Platform or Law and Justice” (Śpiewak 2018, p. 20).

Rafał Kalukin in “Polityka” wrote:

“This year, for the first time to such a degree, local elections have adopted the logic of major politics. As a sequential element of a broader process. This is, of course, caused by the radicalism of the »Good Change«, which did not leave any room for even the smallest compromise. Self-governance – pragmatic politics devoid of ideology,

⁴ See, for example: Łącznik Zielonogórski 2015; Radio Kraków.pl 2018; Głównzewski 2017; Koszalinifo.pl 2018.

relatively unaffected by propaganda – has become hostage to the central conflict of this campaign. At least at levels visible for the nationwide public. Local topics were therefore mostly used by both rival camps as raw material for polarizing narratives” (Kalukin 2018, p. 13).

Eliza Olczyk summarizes the issue in “Wprost”:

“In this year’s local government election campaign, party leaders admitted for the first time: self-government is also politics! (...) After the campaign, one thought comes to mind – for the first time, politicians openly admitted that self-government is as much an element of the political scene as the parliament, the government or the presidential office. In the past, candidates in self-government elections had a tendency to pretend that local politics had little in common with the central politics” (Olczyk 2018, 42, p. 22).

The mainstream weekly magazines described the political camps as opponents competing for authority. No articles analyzing program disparities between the parties in the context of self-governments were written. Self-government elections were not characterized as specific in contrast to, for example, parliamentary elections. In the vast majority of cases, the subject matter of journalistic articles was concerned with the profits and losses of party assets as a result of electoral decisions. Weekly magazines devoted much attention to the main protagonists of the political rivalry. It seems that this may be due to the tabloidization of media coverage. Political groups are represented in the press, on television and on the Internet by their leaders.

The 2018 self-government elections were the most important and the first confrontation of political forces since 2015, when the Law and Justice party seized authority at the national level. According to many publicists, the 2018 clash of Law and Justice supporters and their opponents ended in a draw, which leads to the conclusion that the local government elections were merely one part of the Polish electoral

quadrathlon: self-government (2018), European Parliament (2019), Polish Parliament and Senate (2019), and Presidential elections (2020).

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