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THE LANDSCAPE OF POLITICAL BIAS IN POLISH RADIO AND TELEVISION DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN 2023

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Abstract

This article evaluates the extent of bias in selected Polish media outlets. It presents the findings of research conducted on political bias within Polish television and radio stations during the period leading up to the 2023 parliamentary elections. The study includes a content analysis of the three most popular Polish television news programs—TVP’s *Wiadomości*, Polsat’s *Wydarzenia* and TVN’s *Fakty*—and the news services of four radio stations—RMF FM, Radio Zet, Polish Radio (1st Program) and Radio TOK FM. All broadcasts were analysed in the month preceding election day (15 October 2023). The collected data were used to calculate visibility, exposure and overtone indicators for each participating electoral committee. These indicators were then utilised to compute the Media Political Bias Index, which enables the comparison of bias levels across different media outlets and within the same outlet at different times. The results of this index enable the identification of which news programs were the most and the least biased. The findings provide

insights into the political bias landscape of television and radio stations in Poland during the specified electoral period, positioning each media outlet on a scale of political bias. The study confirms the research hypotheses, demonstrating that public media exhibited higher levels of bias compared to commercial media, both in television and radio formats. Additionally, among commercial media, those that extensively covered the election campaign showed greater bias, while those that addressed campaign topics less frequently displayed lower levels of bias.

Keywords

political bias, election campaign, television news programs, radio news services, Media Political Bias Index, content analysis

Introduction

Regardless of the dynamic changes occurring in the political and media environment (Maguś 2018; Kułaga, Czepiec-Veltzé 2022; Klepka 2023b), the essence of contemporary democracy still lies in elections, particularly parliamentary ones, where voters' decisions result from their knowledge about the achievements and political offerings of the entities participating in electoral competition. For many years, both political scientists and media scholars have argued that this knowledge primarily comes from the media (Mutz 1998; Bennett, Entman 2001; Shehata, Strömbäck 2014; Maguś 2016; Klepka 2018). According to a 2023 survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center, television was cited as the primary source of information about domestic and global events by 49% of respondents, followed by radio at 6%, with only 37% indicating the internet as their primary information source (CBOS 2023, 2).

Despite the growing interest in the internet as a channel for political communication, there are compelling reasons to continue thoroughly examining traditional media outlets. This is primarily because television, radio and, subsequently, print media, despite the increasing role of new media, remain the main sources of information about political phenomena. Moreover, a significant portion of content available on the internet, which enjoys popularity, originates from the websites of television news services and web portals of traditional media (Couldry 2012, 15–16; Kruikemeier et al. 2018, 221–224). The enduring role of traditional media is also supported by empirical research results, which assess the potential impact on the knowledge and awareness of voters about politics and social issues as higher in the case of traditional media and lower in relation to new media (Beckers et al. 2021, 254–269; Peterson 2021, 358–359).

Given the above considerations, the issues of objectivity, impartiality, and bias in television and radio broadcasts are at the forefront of concerns important for the functioning of democratic states and societies. The influence of traditional media bias becomes particularly significant during election campaigns (Andina-Diaz, 2009), a period when the public's attention is concentrated on political messages concerning parties and candidates (Druckman 2005). Comparative studies of media bias during election campaigns often analyse multiple countries or focus on individual case studies (Lengauer, Johann 2013; Cushion, Lewis 2017). This article adopts the latter approach, focusing on Poland. It aims to construct a “bias landscape” or ranking of major Polish media outlets during a crucial phase of the parliamentary election campaign. This approach enables the identification of media outlets with varying levels of bias and facilitates analysis of potential relationships between the outlets and the degree of their bias.

The article is structured into five sections. The first serves as the introduction. The second section addresses the theoretical framework and outlines the hypotheses. The third section details the methodology, while the fourth presents the research findings. The final section offers a discussion of the results, along with conclusions and a summary.

Theoretical background

The political bias of the media is a multifaceted and multidimensional structure. While the concepts of objectivity and neutrality are intuitively straightforward, bias is more challenging to define and operationalise. Entman (2007, 163) aptly argues that media bias remains one of the most under-theorised concepts in media studies. Conversely, the diversity of concepts, approaches, definitions and methods of operationalisation necessitates that nearly every empirical study begins by clearly defining what constitutes media bias (Klepka 2019).

In the most general sense, as McQuail (2010, 355) points out, bias is the opposite of objectivity. The core of media bias lies in shaping coverage to intentionally favour or disfavour a person, entity or topic. These actions, often carried out to align with the objectives of media corporations, frequently go unnoticed by the general public (Shoemaker, Reese 2013).

The authors of this paper focused on the political dimensions of bias view it as any form of preferential or unequal treatment, where certain political or social positions—such as pro- and anti-abortion stances or political parties—are favoured in media coverage (Lee 2005). Schiffer's (2006) definition points to the systematic favouritism of one party or ideology resulting from the intentional or unconscious prejudice of reporters, editors or organisations. The intentions of media broadcasters are also pointed out by Entman (2007), according to whom media bias is related to the presentation of news that does not provide balanced treatment to both sides of a political conflict, but also the motivations and attitudes of journalists who create media content. On the other hand, Lichter (2017) equates bias with a distortion of political reality in the media, favouritism or one-sidedness in the portrayal of controversies and confining the coverage to the position of a chosen party.

Asp (2007) offers a more case-specific definition, suggesting that political bias in the media involves presenting political actors in a manner that either favours or demeans them. This relates to the portrayal of their image and the framing of issues in a way that highlights aspects aligned with the actor's personal worldview and priorities. Such bias is reflected in how issues, phenomena and contexts are emphasised or downplayed in media reports. Similarly, Puglisi and Snyder (2015) propose a definition that includes a catalog of examples, associating political bias with the media's tendency to favour biased coverage of politics. This may include preferential treatment for the ruling government, a specific political party, or a particular ideology—such as liberal or conservative views. Additionally, bias may arise in favour of the interests of industries or companies that are significant advertisers or owners of the media outlet, or to cater to audiences deemed most valuable to advertisers.

When defining political bias in the media, it is seldom acknowledged that bias can be gradable. Eberl, Wagner and Boomgaarden (2017) provide a valuable perspective by conceptualising media bias as the degree to which a candidate's coverage in a particular media outlet is more favourable or unfavourable compared to the coverage of other can-

didates within the same outlet, as well as the coverage of that candidate across all other media outlets.

The definitions mentioned above share common elements across various approaches. Most frequently, they highlight the issue of a lack of objectivity, neutrality or balance in media coverage. Some concepts also suggest the existence of a benchmark or reference point, such as the amount of time devoted to a particular topic or political party, or the ability to compare how much attention is given to an issue or politician across different media outlets. Additionally, several definitions emphasise that bias, whether in the form of exalting or diminishing someone's qualities, should not be incidental or sporadic but rather relatively consistent over time. A distinct issue with these definitions pertains to the question of intentionality. Some definitions assert that media bias is intentional, while many do not address this aspect. Schiffer (2006, 24) offers a perspective that bias can arise from both intentional and unintentional actions. Intentional bias involves media creators deliberately crafting biased messages, often driven by specific choices or motivations, such as serving the interests of media owners, corporations or politicians. Conversely, unintentional bias may result from subconscious or systemic influences. Additionally, some definitions consider the audience's perspective. Shoemaker and Reese (2013, 161) argue that bias often goes unnoticed by the audience, while Puglisi and Snyder (2015, 648) suggest that bias is deliberately designed to appeal to audiences deemed most valuable to advertisers.

The diversity of approaches to the concept of media bias largely stems from the specific aspects that researchers prioritise based on their empirical studies. Systematic literature reviews conducted by various theorists reveal a broad spectrum of bias types and forms, categorised by different relevant criteria (Rodrigo-Ginés et al. 2024). Commonly used taxonomies include categories such as the author's intent, the context and the manifestation of bias. A review of empirical research on political media bias highlights several key research areas: identifying political bias and its determinants (Schulz, Zeh 2005), measuring bias (Castro 2021), analysing broadcasters' intentions, examining the impact of biased messages on audiences (Barnidge et al., 2020) and performing statistical analyses to explain data relationships among multiple variables. Therefore, this analysis falls within the domains of identifying and measuring political media bias.

To detect bias in traditional media, researchers typically utilise several dimensions or elements identifiable in empirical studies (Hopmann et al. 2012). Drawing from various definitions and analytical findings (D'Alessio, Allen 2000), this analysis adopts Klepka's (2021, 79) concept of political bias, which defines it as the manipulation of media content to favour or disadvantage a particular political concept, politician or party. This bias manifests through (1) differential media access, or media visibility; (2) emphasis on the presentation of specific topics or individuals, or exposure; and (3) overtones, which involve commending or criticising particular parties or political solutions.

The primary challenge in media bias research is quantifying the strength of bias across different media outlets. Most attempts to address this challenge have been made by researchers in the USA (Groseclose, Milyo 2005; Covert, Washburn 2007; Entman 2007; Dunham 2013). However, these methods often do not account for the specific characteristics of European media landscapes, including public media and multi-party systems. In Europe, German researchers have proposed an intriguing approach with the Index

of Political Coverage (PCI), designed to measure media positions relative to the political spectrum (Dewenter et al. 2020).

The PCI assesses media bias by analysing the overtones of coverage related to Germany's two major parties: CDU/CSU and SPD. Media content is rated on a three-point scale: -1 for negative coverage, 0 for neutral coverage, and +1 for favourable coverage. The index is calculated by averaging these ratings and comparing the results for the CDU/CSU and SPD. The index ranges from -1 to 1, where a lower value indicates greater bias towards the SPD and a higher value signifies more favourable coverage of the CDU/CSU. This measure allows for a nuanced evaluation of how different media outlets present Germany's leading political parties.

In our study of political bias in Polish media, we employed the Media Political Bias Index. This measure is designed to reflect the multi-partisanship characteristic of European political systems, including the Polish political landscape (Klepka 2021). It enables the comparison of media outlet bias using a single, standardised metric. According to the adopted conceptualisation of bias, it consists of three components, i.e. visibility, exposure and overtones of materials devoted to participants in the electoral contest. Each component of such understood bias can be quantitatively expressed as an indicator, the value of which can be calculated based on the results of content analysis of previously selected data according to precise criteria for various broadcasts or channels (see Table 1). Data for the electoral committee with the highest media visibility indicator are crucial. In the proposed approach, the Media Political Bias Index (MPBI) takes the value $0,3 \cdot Vi \max(Vi) + 0,1 \cdot Ei \max(Ei) + 0,6 \cdot |Oi \max(Oi)|$. In this equation, the overtone indicator value is utilised in absolute terms because the magnitude of deviation from zero holds significance, rather than the specific direction of the deviation. The MPBI itself also allows assessing how biased a medium is, although it does not specify the direction. The strength assigned to each component of the index may always raise doubts and discussions among other researchers; however, this does not diminish the value of the index resulting from the application of the same research procedure for all analysed media (Bhattacharjee 2012, 50).

Table 1. Construction of Media Visibility, Exposure and Overtone Indicators

Indicator (Abbreviation)	Value Range	Calculation Method
Media Visibility (Vi)	0, 1	$\frac{\text{visibility of a given committee (number of news items)}}{\text{total visibility of all committees (number of news items)}}$
Media Exposure (Ei)	0, 1	$\frac{\text{exposure of a given committee (first in the news)}}{\text{total exposure of all committees (news items)}}$
Media Overtone (Oi)	-1, 1	$\frac{\text{sum of news items with positive overtone for the committee}}{\text{total news items concerning the committee}} - \frac{\text{sum of news items with negative overtone for the committee}}{\text{total news items concerning the committee}}$

Source: own study.

The aim of this paper is to analyse and compare the extent of political bias in the most popular Polish television and radio channels. The period preceding the parliamentary election campaign in 2023 was deemed the most appropriate for this study, as it is a time

when the intentions and interests of media broadcasters and political actors likely had the strongest influence on the content of media messages. Two hypotheses were formulated for the study, and their verification was facilitated by the research process:

- H1: Public media were more biased than commercial media, in both television and radio;
- H2: Media outlets that paid more attention to the election campaign were more biased, while those that rarely referred to campaign topics were less biased.

Public media is often perceived as more biased than commercial media due to the influence of political appointments and funding mechanisms. The fact that key positions in public media organisations, their financing rules, accountability structures and operational models are often determined by politicians—typically from the ruling parties—suggests a tendency for public media to favour those currently in power or experience conflicts of loyalty. This dynamic is evident even in traditionally independent institutions like the BBC in the UK, where the director-general is appointed by the prime minister (Dragomir, Horowitz 2021). In countries with a history of non-democratic regimes, policymakers recognise that citizens place significant trust in public media (Moehler, Singh 2011). In many Central and Eastern European countries, there is a pattern of replacing public media personnel and decision-making bodies with individuals aligned with current political leaders immediately after elections (Hanretty 2011). Numerous studies on Polish public media underscore a notable dependence on those in power, which leads to biased political coverage (Klepka 2017, 2023a; Nowak-Teter 2021).

The second hypothesis addresses two concurrent trends in news media (Klepka 2023b). On one hand, media outlets are increasingly polarised as audiences gravitate towards content that reinforces their existing beliefs, which can lead to a decline in objectivity and contribute to the phenomenon of media market “Foxification” (Goidel et al. 2021; Cushion, Lewis 2009). This trend reflects how media companies strategically benefit from political engagement and the pursuit of partisan audiences. Conversely, there is also a segment of the audience seeking media that avoids political content, favouring entertainment, music and light news presented in a cheerful and entertaining manner (Andersen 2019; Magin 2019). This trend suggests that media outlets focusing on political competition and election-related material are likely to exhibit higher levels of bias compared to those that minimise their political coverage. The variation in bias strength can be attributed to strategic decisions made by media companies, which may either align with a political stance or adopt a depoliticised approach to their content.

Data and methods

To provide a comprehensive overview of bias in various traditional media in Poland, it was necessary to select relevant television and radio channels, followed by representative programs where the bias of each medium would manifest. Simultaneously, to provide a comprehensive overview of all television and radio stations, it was essential to utilise viewership and listenership data. This approach enabled the selection of media outlets that, by virtue of their extensive audience reach, could potentially exert a significant influence.

In the case of television stations on the Polish market in 2023, there were three major media groups: the public broadcaster The Polish Television (Telewizja Polska S. A.) and the

two commercial broadcasters Polsat (Polsat Plus Group) and TVN (TVN Warner Bros. Discovery). Each of these broadcasters offered both general-interest and news channels. The highest viewership was enjoyed by the main evening news programs' broadcast on the most popular general-interest channel of each media group. Viewership data (see Table 2) allowed for the selection of one news service with the highest viewership ratings in TVP, Polsat and TVN, namely the programs *Wiadomości*, *Wydarzenia*, and *Fakty*, respectively.

Table 2. Viewership Ratings of Evening Television News Programs in September and October 2023

Title and broadcast time	September 2023	October 2023
<i>Wiadomości</i> TVP1 19.30	2,405,987	2,796,037
<i>Fakty</i> TVN 19.00	2,223,482	2,704,817
<i>Wydarzenia</i> Polsat 18.50	1,413,076	1,769,736
<i>Panorama</i> TVP2 18.00	1,205,823	1,562,216

Source: own study based on Nielsen Audience Measurement data for the portal wirtualnemedi.pl.

The selection of radio stations was more challenging, as Poland has several national and local public radio stations, as well as many commercial broadcasters. The same criteria used for selecting television stations and the influence index were employed to choose the relevant radio stations. Radio listenership research in Poland is conducted by the Radio Research Committee (Komitet Badań Radiowych). Listenership data are provided as a percentage, representing the share of listening time for each station. This parameter equals the proportion of total listening time for a station relative to the total listening time for all surveyed stations, indicating what percentage of overall radio listening time was dedicated to a particular station. The proportion of listening time can be computed for a 24-hour cycle or any specified timeframe. The available data cover two quarters, including September and October 2023 (see Table 3). Additionally, the influence index data for September and October 2023, sourced from the Institute of Media Monitoring (Instytutu Monitorowania Mediów), were used as a supplementary criterion (see Table 4). The influence index represents the number of citations of a radio station in other media. Based on these data, it was determined that VOX FM, despite having a similar listenership ranking to Radio TOK FM, is not present in the influence rankings due to its musical nature. Based on the cited data, four stations with the highest listenership and influence indices were selected for the study: RMF FM, Radio Zet, Jedyńka – the First Program of Polish Radio and Radio TOK FM.

In the context of radio, it became necessary to resolve the choice of programs or airtime slots that should be the subject of analysis. Preliminary research revealed significant diversity in the program offerings of the four different broadcasters selected for comparison. Therefore, selecting a program that would be broadcast in a similar format and at a similar time across all analysed stations proved challenging. Radio news bulletins, which were consistently broadcasted across all stations, demonstrated a relatively uniform structure, duration and frequency, rendering them relatively repeatable and comparable. The selection of the hour during which the news bulletins would be analysed also posed difficulties. Morning programs were selected for consideration due to the presence of the largest cohort of editors, journalists and reporters working in radio during this time. Nevertheless,

pilot studies conducted at different times revealed that radio programming in the morning largely recapitulates the content aired in the evening, with morning news bulletins often serving as a summary of the previous day. Furthermore, each station aired interviews at varying times during the morning, leading to notably shorter durations for news bulletins. However, patterns of bias and saturation with election-related content within each station were comparable regardless of the broadcast time of the news bulletin. Henceforth, the decision was made to analyse evening news programs. At 8:00 PM, all radio stations broadcasted a comprehensive edition of the news bulletin summarising the entire day, which was considered representative of the entire station and suitable for comparisons with other programs.

Table 3. Radio Listenership in Poland in the Third and Fourth Quarters of 2023

Station	Third Quarter (including September 2023)	Fourth Quarter (including October 2023)
RMF FM	29,10%	29,20%
Radio ZET	14,10%	13,90%
Jedynka – The First Programme of Polish Radio	5,40%	5,20%
Radio TOK FM	2,90%	3,20%
Radio VOX FM	3,30%	3,40%
Antyradio	2,70%	2,40%
Trójka – The Third Programme of Polish Radio	1,90%	1,80%

Source: own study based on data from the Radio Research Committee (<https://badaniaradiowe.pl>)

Table 4. Influence of Radio Stations in Poland in September and October 2023

Station	September 2023	October 2023
RMF FM	3383	4414
Radio ZET	2872	3655
Jedynka – The First Programme of Polish Radio	757	1212
Radio TOK FM	505	741
Polskie Radio 24	477	625
Trójka – The Third Programme of Polish Radio	270	379
Radio Plus	185	294

Source: own study based on data from the Institute of Media Monitoring (www.imm.com.pl).

It is worth noting that the selection of the media chosen for bias analysis provided an opportunity to compare influential media outlets with high audience interest ratings, as well as those representing different types of broadcasters, varying station characteristics

and different capital origins (see Table 5). The study results could capture regularities concerning the characteristics of a given medium and the extent of its bias.

Table 5. Selected Characteristics of Analysed Radio and Television Stations

Station	Broadcaster Type	Station Theme	Owner
TVP 1	Public	General	Domestic
Polsat	Commercial	General	Domestic
TVN	Commercial	General	Foreign
RMF FM	Commercial	General	Foreign
Radio ZET	Commercial	General	Mixed
Jedynka – 1 PR	Public	General	Domestic
Radio TOK FM	Commercial	News	Domestic

Source: own study.

The primary method employed in the study was manual content analysis (Krippendorff 2004; Benoit 2011; Idzik, Klepka 2019). The initial research tool employed was a categorisation key, which was subsequently utilised to develop an analytical framework comprising indicators and an index, based on the collective findings. Analysis was conducted on thirty editions of news broadcasts from seven selected television and radio stations aired between September 15 and October 14, 2023. The unit of analysis was individual pieces of information or news items. The research procedure consisted of several stages, ultimately allowing for the determination of the scale of political bias of each of the examined television and radio stations.

The first stage of the study involved evaluating each news item from each broadcast in terms of its relevance to the parliamentary election campaign. At this stage, the percentage of the number and duration of news items related to the elections was determined. Only those news items that directly addressed the election campaign or its participants through clear and explicit references were qualified for further analysis. In the second stage of the study, each news item was assessed to determine which election committees were mentioned in it, which committee was presented first in the news item and then the overtone of the news item towards each committee mentioned was determined. News items were classified as favourable, unfavourable, neutral or ambivalent if they contained both critical elements and elements that positively evaluated the electoral participant. The results regarding visibility, exposure and overtone were then summed up for each committee in each broadcast. The third stage involved calculating three indicators for each election participant in each broadcast, and the fourth stage involved calculating an index for each television and radio station.

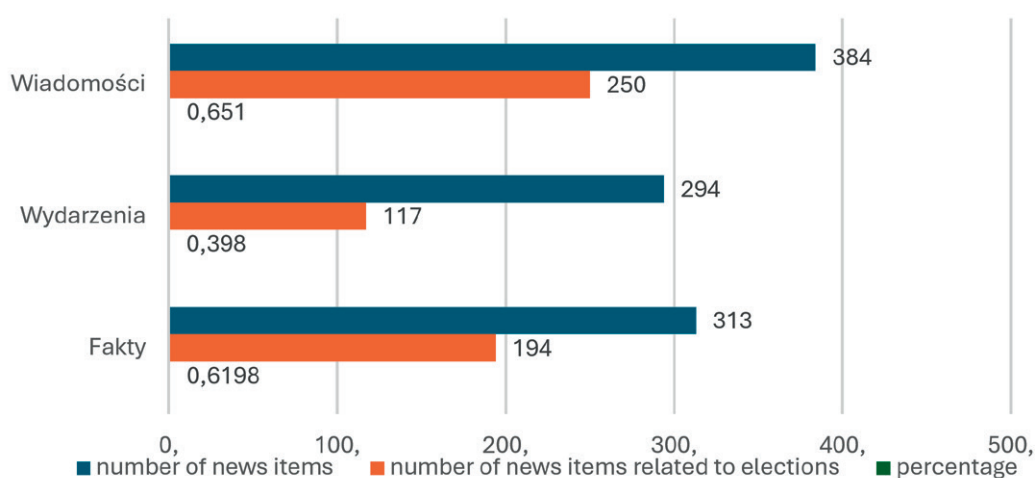
Evaluating the overtone of media material is undoubtedly more methodologically challenging and labour-intensive, as it relies heavily on the researcher's judgment. To address this, automated detection methods for overtone analysis are increasingly being employed, with advancements in computer science facilitating sentiment analysis of large media

corpora (Hamborg 2023; Spinde et al. 2024). However, these automated approaches often struggle with recognising context, irony and ambiguity in the material. In this study, a manual analysis approach was utilised. Each piece of media material was evaluated independently by two researchers, achieving identical results 92% of the time. The final results were based on the average score of both coders, ensuring consistency and reliability in the assessment.

Results

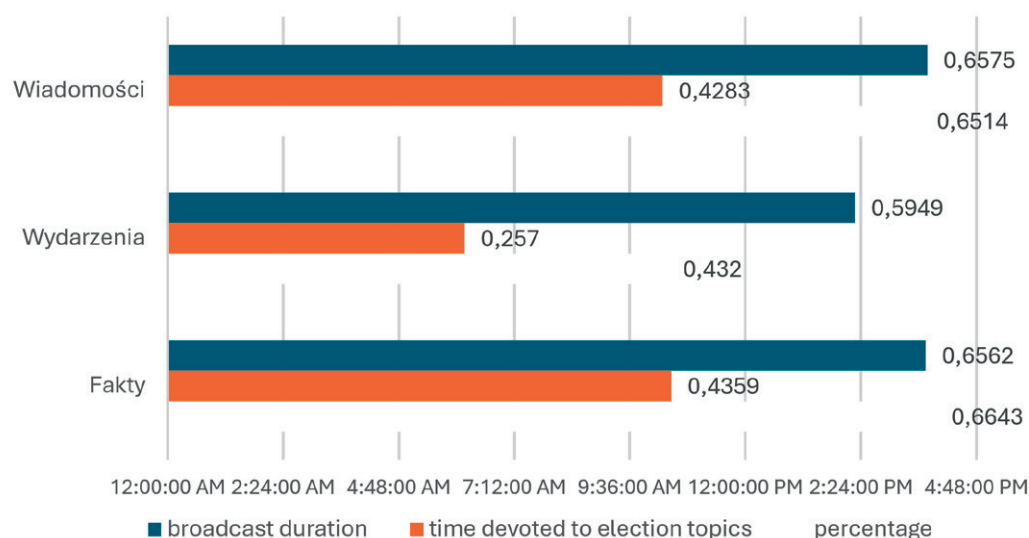
Directly comparing the results of content analysis between television and radio stations may only be partially justified. Therefore, the study results were compiled separately for each media group, with a subsequent collective comparative analysis. Analysis of news item structures in television broadcasts revealed that two programs allocated a relatively similar proportion of news items to the parliamentary election campaign (see Chart 1). Specifically, in the case of *Wiadomości* and *Fakty*, it was observed that a significant portion of the news items, exceeding 60% of all items in the broadcast, focused on the election campaign. In contrast, *Wydarzenia* dedicated less than 40% of its news items to campaign-related topics.

Chart 1. Number of news items devoted to the election campaign compared to the total number of news items



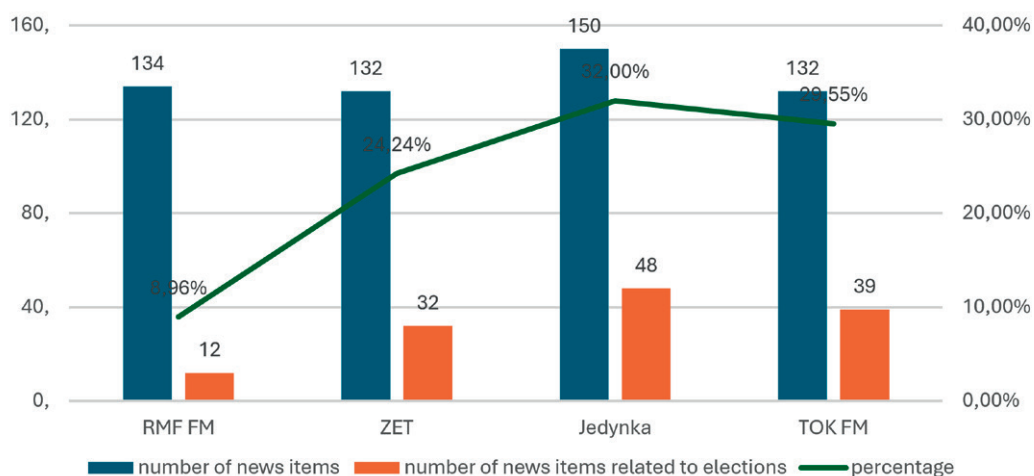
Source: own study.

The number of news items largely corresponded to the proportion of time allocated to the election campaign within the total broadcast duration. In *Wiadomości* and *Fakty* this percentage exceeded 60%, whereas in *Wydarzenia* it stood slightly lower at just over 43% (see Chart 2). This variation suggests a greater focus on election-related subjects in TVP and TVN broadcasts, contrasting with the depoliticisation apparent in Polsat television broadcasts. During the critical period preceding the parliamentary elections, Polsat directed attention towards topics unrelated to the ongoing election campaign in Poland.

Chart 2. The share of time allocated to news related to the election campaign in the total duration of news broadcasts

Source: own study.

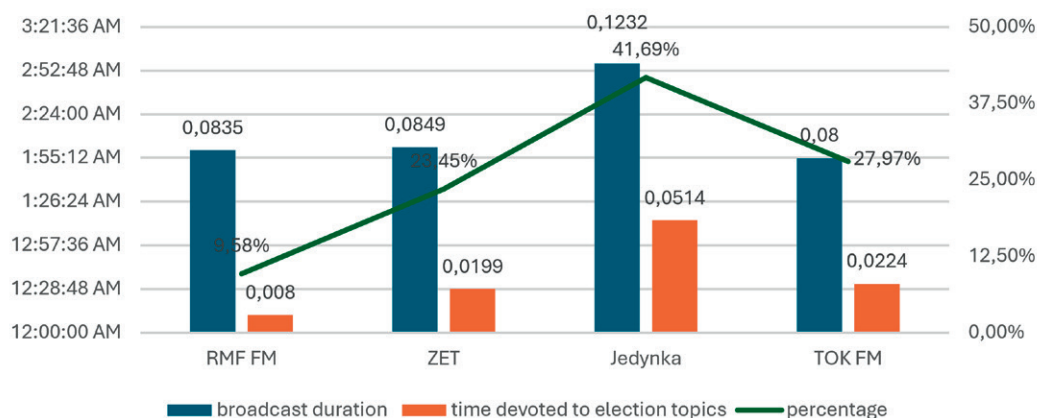
In the case of radio, the analysis of the share of news related to the election campaign in individual news broadcasts allowed us to conclude that public broadcaster services were the most involved in reporting on the parliamentary election campaign (see Chart 3). Jedyńska dedicated 32% of its news coverage to this topic in the last month before the elections, slightly less was observed for TOK FM with over 29%, followed by Radio Zet with 24%, and the least coverage was provided by RMF Radio. The most influential and frequently selected radio station by listeners during the surveyed period allocated only 9% of its news coverage to reporting on the parliamentary election campaign.

Chart 3. Share of the number of news items dedicated to the election campaign in the total number of news items

Source: own study.

Similarly, in the case of radio, the number of news items also reflected the share of time devoted to the election campaign in the overall duration of the broadcasts (see Chart 4).

Chart 4. Share of time dedicated to election campaign news in the total duration of news broadcasts



Source: own study.

Clear deviation appeared only in the case of The First Program of Polish Radio (Jedynka), where 32% of the news were dedicated to the election campaign, while almost 42% of the news broadcast time. These results were largely due to the specificity of the last edition of the news service of Jedynka before the electoral silence, which lasted over half an hour. Rather than the news, it contained an interview with Jarosław Kaczyński and a message from Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. There was some difficulty and doubt about how to code this specific formula. However, the speeches of PiS politicians were broadcast in the format of news, thus they were coded as such. It is worth noting that the presentation of the politicians' statements belonging to one of the electoral committees was announced and presented in such a way that it seemed to be editorial material rather than one of the parties participating in the parliamentary elections.

In the further part of the study, calculations of indicators of visibility, exposure and media overtone were made in relation to each electoral committee participating in the parliamentary election in 2023 (see Table 6). Firstly, the indicators make it clear that in all news broadcasts, the two main electoral committees—United Right (Zjednoczona Prawica) and Civic Coalition (KO)—were most visible, but the scale of this concentration differed. RMF radio listeners basically had no way to find out that, apart from the two main participants, anyone else was taking part in the elections. In the case of television, it was clear that the concentration on the two main electoral participants was highest in *Wiadomości*, where over 80% of the news were devoted to these two committees. The concentration on the two largest committees in Radio ZET and Jedynka was relatively similar in scale. In TVN's *Fakty*, this percentage was lower, just below 60%. In Polsat's *Wydarzenia* and TOK FM's news services, the lowest reference rate to the two main committees was recorded. Similarly, it was clear that viewers of Polsat and listeners of TOK FM had the greatest chance of obtaining information about less popular electoral committees. The perspective of *Wiadomości* was limited to indicating the competition between the two main participants in the electoral race. There were few references to the Third Way (Trzecia Droga)

committee in few news broadcasts. Finally, almost no information about other electoral committees, while in RMF radio, other committees, as already indicated, did not appear at all.

Table 6. Indicators of media visibility (Vi), media exposure (Ei), and media overtone (Oi) calculated for the analysed informational broadcasts

Broadcasters	Indicators	ZP/PiS (Zjednoczona Prawica / Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – United Right / Law and Justice)	KO (Koalicja Obywatelska – Civic Coalition)	Confederation (Konfederacja)	Third Way (Trzecia Droga)	Left and Together (Lewica i Razem)	Nonpartisan Local Government Activists (BS)
TVP	Vi	0,46	0,38	0,02	0,08	0,04	0,02
	Ei	0,54	0,42	0,00	0,04	0,00	0,00
	Oi	0,95	-1,00	-0,18	-0,75	-0,60	0,00
TVN	Vi	0,31	0,28	0,06	0,17	0,17	0,01
	Ei	0,55	0,30	0,03	0,05	0,10	0,00
	Oi	-0,92	0,34	-0,65	0,18	0,18	0,00
Polsat	Vi	0,26	0,24	0,10	0,19	0,18	0,03
	Ei	0,65	0,23	0,02	0,08	0,00	0,00
	Oi	-0,17	0,02	0,05	0,01	0,01	0,00
RMF FM	Vi	0,29	0,71	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
	Ei	0,20	0,80	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
	Oi	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
ZET	Vi	0,41	0,30	0,05	0,11	0,11	0,02
	Ei	0,45	0,41	0,00	0,14	0,00	0,00
	Oi	-0,65	0,21	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Jedynka – 1 PR	Vi	0,42	0,24	0,08	0,12	0,10	0,04
	Ei	0,73	0,11	0,02	0,07	0,02	0,05
	Oi	0,82	-0,50	0,00	-0,10	0,00	0,00
TOK FM	Vi	0,27	0,30	0,09	0,12	0,15	0,07
	Ei	0,48	0,37	0,00	0,00	0,11	0,04
	Oi	-0,12	0,15	0,00	0,00	0,10	0,00

Source: own study.

In the case of exposure, the two main participants in the electoral competition also enjoyed the highest indicators and, most often, news items started with them. Regarding exposure on television, there was not much variation among the news programs. In *Wydarzenia*, news items most frequently began with ZP/PiS. In other analysed programs, however, this electoral committee was also most often mentioned first in the news, although slightly less frequently. In all television news programs, KO received the second-highest result in terms of exposure. In *Wiadomości*, only the Third Way could count on the news starting with a mention of this committee. Greater variation occurred in *Wydarzenia* where, besides the Third Way, the Confederation (Konfederacja) was mentioned first in the news at least once. The greatest diversity was observed in *Fakty*. In this program, apart from the Nonpartisan Local Government Activists (Bezpartyjni Samorządowcy), each committee was mentioned at the beginning of the news at least once.

Slightly different patterns of exposure of electoral committees were noted in the case of radio stations. Distinctive results were observed in the RMF radio services, where the vast majority of news items started with information about KO and Program 1 of the Polish Radio, where news items most frequently began with ZP/PiS. The scale of exposure of the two most popular participants in the election in ZET and TOK FM radio was comparable. Other electoral committees were rarely mentioned first in the news, with the Third Way in Radio ZET and the Left and Together (Lewica I Razem) in TOK FM being mentioned as the first in at least every tenth news item.

The most significant differences between programs were observed in terms of the overtone. In the case of television, *Wiadomości* TVP and *Fakty* TVN, as well as in the case of radio services in Jedyńka and Radio ZET, most strongly valued both main participants in the electoral competition. Concerning television and radio stations, it is worth noting a characteristic regularity. While *Wiadomości* favoured ZP/PiS while simultaneously criticising KO, the overtone of the two main rivals was only to some extent reversed in the TVN broadcast. In *Fakty*, ZP/PiS obtained a very high indicator of negative connotation, but KO rated positively and achieved a significantly lower score than ZP/PiS in *Wiadomości*. The lower amplitude between the two main committees participating in the elections allows us to indicate that TVP and TVN programs with great determination negatively valued KO and ZP/PiS, respectively, but *Fakty* did not evaluate KO as positively as *Wiadomości* did ZP/PiS. Similarly, in Radio ZET, the aversion to ZP/PiS was higher than in the Jedyńka broadcast to KO, but in Radio ZET, KO could not count on as many positive evaluations as ZP/PiS could in the public broadcaster's broadcasts.

Against this background, the results of the media's political bias index in *Wydarzenia* and the radio services of TOK FM and RMF FM are particularly noteworthy. In the broadcasts of these stations, a clear proximity to neutrality is seen. Although the overtone indicator in Polsat slightly deviated from 0 for ZP/PiS, it was close to zero for the other electoral committees. In RMF radio, no news was recorded that would value any of the electoral committees in any way. On the other hand, news bulletin of TOK FM slightly positively valued the KO and The Left and Together, and negatively ZP/PiS. However, the indicators were significantly lower here than in the news bulletin of Jedyńka.

Patterns of the overtone of electoral committees in broadcasts by public and commercial media also allowed for the recognition of another regularity. In the case of TVP1 and Jedyńka, apart from the already mentioned ZP/PiS, virtually all mentioned entities participating in the elections were positioned negatively by the public media broadcasts.

However, in the case of TVN, only the Confederation, like ZP/PiS, was presented negatively, and in Radio ZET and TOK FM, only ZP/PiS, while all other groups were presented relatively positively, close to neutrality.

The presented indicators allowed for the calculation of the Media Political Bias Index for each station. It assumes values from 0 to 1. Calculations are provided below.

$$\text{MPBI} = 0,3 \cdot V_i \max(V_i) + 0,1 \cdot E_i \max(V_i) + 0,6 \cdot |O_i \max(V_i)|$$

TV broadcasters:

$$\text{MPBI TVP} = 0,3 \cdot 0,46 + 0,1 \cdot 0,54 + 0,6 \cdot 0,95 = \mathbf{0,76}$$

$$\text{MPBI TVN} = 0,3 \cdot 0,31 + 0,1 \cdot 0,55 + 0,6 \cdot 0,92 = \mathbf{0,70}$$

$$\text{MPBI Polsat} = 0,3 \cdot 0,26 + 0,1 \cdot 0,65 + 0,6 \cdot 0,17 = \mathbf{0,25}$$

Radio stations:

$$\text{MPBI RMF} = 0,3 \cdot 0,71 + 0,1 \cdot 0,80 + 0,6 \cdot 0,00 = \mathbf{0,29}$$

$$\text{MPBI ZET} = 0,3 \cdot 0,41 + 0,1 \cdot 0,45 + 0,6 \cdot 0,65 = \mathbf{0,56}$$

$$\text{MPBI Jedyńka} = 0,3 \cdot 0,42 + 0,1 \cdot 0,73 + 0,6 \cdot 0,82 = \mathbf{0,69}$$

$$\text{MPBI TOK FM} = 0,3 \cdot 0,30 + 0,1 \cdot 0,37 + 0,6 \cdot 0,15 = \mathbf{0,22}$$

Among the analysed television news broadcasts, the highest political bias index was obtained by *Wiadomości* with a score of 0.76, followed closely by *Fakty* with a slightly lower score of 0.70. The least biased turned out to be the news broadcast of Polsat TV, with an index of 0.25. In the group of radio news services, the highest political bias index was achieved by Radio Jedyńka, with a score of 0.69, followed by Radio Zet, which was slightly less biased with an index of 0.56. On the other end of the spectrum were Radio TOK FM with an index of 0.22 and RMF FM with a score of 0.29. The public radio news service turned out to be the most biased, with Radio ZET serving as a kind of counterbalance to it. Radio TOK FM, being an informational radio station focusing on politics and elections, proved to be the least biased. Second place as the least biased station was occupied by RMF FM, which devoted very little attention to the elections.

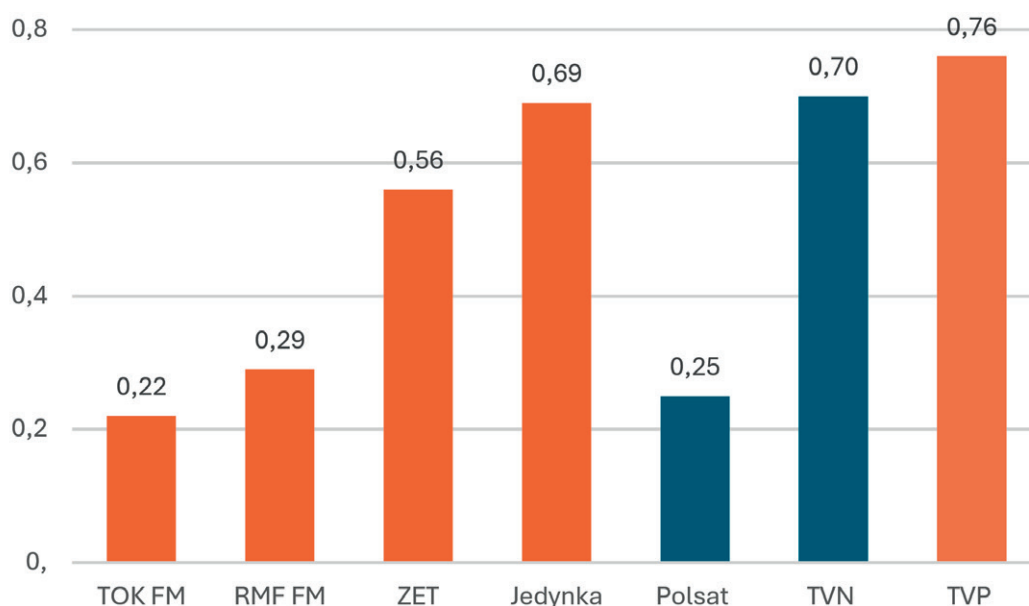
Conclusions

The analysis of the presented results should be preceded by a reminder of the assumption that the research sample in the form of main evening television and radio news broadcasts was representative of the political bias of TVP, TVN, Polsat, RMF FM, Radio Zet, Polskie Radio and TOK FM respectively. This assumption requires further in-depth research. However, preliminary pilot analyses demonstrate the existence of similar patterns of bias in other broadcasts, and even in other channels belonging to media groups in the case of television. It is very difficult to find any counterarguments that could prove that the monthly tendencies in reporting the activities of electoral committees during the 2023 election campaign did not reflect the characteristic way of informing by the station about the actors appearing on the Polish political scene during the period under review.

The presented research results demonstrate that the most popular television and radio stations in Poland during the parliamentary election campaign in 2023 had varied levels of political bias (see Chart 5). It was possible to positively verify Hypothesis 1, according to which public media were more biased than commercial media, both in the case of television and radio. Among all the media surveyed, TVP achieved the highest level of bias.

Similarly, among all the radio stations surveyed, the public radio channel achieved the highest level of bias. This allows for a critical conclusion regarding Polish public media. The presented research results demonstrate that they did not fulfil the assumptions guiding such media to provide balanced and unbiased information to their audience.

Chart 5. Results of the Media Political Bias Index for Investigated Television and Radio Stations



Source: own study.

In relation to public media, the presented results confirm findings from other studies conducted on public television. However, new insights can also be added. The scale of bias and the fact that the majority of news concerning the ruling party portrayed it positively, while news about other election participants were depicted in a negative light, allows for conclusions about the existence of the same mechanisms in public radio as those observed in public television since 2015. Jedynka – The First Programme of Polish Radio dedicated the most space to the electoral campaign, treating it not as a subject of political reporting, but as a form of propaganda for the ruling party, and to a lesser extent as a campaign of antipathy and criticism towards KO, the main opponent of the ruling formation. Similar tactics to those in TVP's *Wiadomości* were also employed in radio services, where lengthy, uncritical interviews were given to the leader of ZP/PiS, Kaczyński and Prime Minister Morawiecki.

Characteristic similarities in terms of bias patterns were demonstrated by TVN and Radio ZET. Both were the most biased commercial stations among those analysed, with their scores only slightly lower than the indices of the respective public radio and television. Similarly, both dedicated only slightly less time and news coverage to the election campaign than public media. Moreover, both TVN and Radio ZET acted as a counterbalance to public media, especially in terms of the overtone of news coverage. Each station based its message on criticism of the ruling party, but without clearly supporting any opposition party. These stations represented the opposite pole to public media, which cannot, under any circumstances, be considered a justification for biased coverage by public broadcast-

ers. It should be noted that the roles assigned to public and commercial media are entirely different and, therefore, the bias of any commercial medium cannot be used as a pretext for creating biased content in public media broadcasts.

A kind of counterbalance to the polarised media, namely TVP, Polish Radio, TVN, and Radio ZET, were Polsat, RMF FM, and Radio TOK FM. The relative neutrality of Polsat and RMF FM was largely due to their infrequent coverage of electoral issues. Depoliticisation can be observed in Polsat and Radio RMF FM, which largely reflect the idea of providing information, albeit rarely about elections and the electoral campaign. Of note is RMF FM's coverage of the election campaign, where less than 10% of news items and less than 10% of total airtime were dedicated to campaign issues, undoubtedly indicating the depoliticisation of this radio station. Its news coverage was limited to mentioning only the main electoral committees. The comparison of these results with data indicating that it was the most listened-to radio station, with listenership twice as high as that of the second-ranked Radio ZET, and the highest level of influence, seems surprising. If the station that provided the least information about elections can achieve the status of the most listened-to, it can be concluded that radio listeners do not need or seek materials on politics or elections.

The results of the study provided only partial support for Hypothesis 2, which posited that media outlets that focused more on the election campaign would exhibit higher levels of bias, whereas those that addressed campaign issues less frequently would show lower levels of bias. The existence of a relationship between engagement in covering the election campaign and the level of bias remained evident in the case of Polsat. Regarding radio stations, radio TOK FM devoted significant attention to the election campaign, while RMF FM paid little attention, and in both cases, a low level of bias was recorded. Radio ZET, which is only slightly less biased than the public station Polskie Radio Jedyńka, devoted an average amount of attention to the election campaign.

Particular attention should be paid to the results of the index and indicators of Radio TOK FM. As an informative radio station focused on presenting facts without music or entertainment programs, it was expected to focus heavily on the ongoing election campaign. The services of this radio station were characterised by a low level of bias, minimal criticism of the ruling party, rare presentation of positive aspects of KO, absence of voices assessing any other electoral committee (besides ZP/PiS and KO), and relatively frequent coverage of the campaigns of all electoral competitors. As an informative radio, the study results allowed for an assessment of its message as the most neutral.

In summarising the study, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations inherent in any research procedure and methodological approach, which are also applicable here. The study operates under the assumption, characteristic of realism, that the media's role is to reflect reality and aims to assess how effectively the media represent the complex and multidimensional political landscape. However, the media often construct social reality rather than merely reflecting it. Additionally, the study assumes that typical viewers will perceive media messages similarly to the researchers. This assumption is idealistic and overlooks the fact that many audiences engage with media content in a fragmented and incidental manner, rather than in a systematic and holistic way. The average viewer's level of knowledge, interest in electoral topics, and attention to the content may result in a perception of media coverage that differs significantly from the interpretation intended by the researchers.

Other limitations should also be noted, which can serve as a starting point for further research into media bias. The results presented were based on the assumption that the obtained results based on news services were representative of the political bias of the analysed media. This assumption requires further, in-depth research, although preliminary analyses have shown the existence of similar bias patterns in other broadcasts aired by these stations. Further research is also needed to assess whether index results for different media, i.e., radio and television, can be directly compared with each other. Finally, changes that occurred in Polish public media after the parliamentary elections in 2023 open new research opportunities for evaluating media bias after the changes and for comparative analysis of the scale of bias in public media before and after them. The local and European elections in 2024 and the presidential elections in 2025 provide an opportunity to search for further regularities regarding the political bias of Polish media.

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