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*Political parallelism of Polish weeklies of opinion on the example
of the dispute about Lech Walesa in 2008*

KEY WORDS

political parallelism, pluralism of media system, weekly of opinion

ABSTRACT

The case chosen for analysis shows a clear relation between the arguments raised by political actors on their internet homepages and those presented by journalists in the three main Polish weeklies of opinion. However, it was not a full parallelism because the clear division between the accusation and the defense, as seen in the arguments of the political actors, was mitigated or made sharper in the journalists' publications.

In spring 2008, popular became accusations against Lech Walesa for his alleged agent activity, which resulted in politicians and journalists developing their own opinions on the issue. The article is based on the hypothesis of parallelism between opinions of politicians and journalists. The term political parallelism is used after Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini. Research materials for the article is the content of Internet web sites of different parties represented in Sejm and RP President's web page between April 1, 2008 and September 30, 2008 as well as the content of publications by three main weeklies of opinion ("Polityka", "Newsweek" and "Wprost") from the same time period. Content analysis was the research method.

The term political parallelism

Those who remember communist Poland times may associate political parallelism with journalism strictly controlled by party authorities. In modern day, according to Hallin and Mancini, parallelism is not an evaluative term. Authors point to two aspects of political parallelism, or to be more precise, media-party parallelism:

- degree to which media system structure is similar to political system structure,
- degree to which political orientations are reflected in published content.

Hallin and Mancini delineate five elements of political parallelism: 1) organizational ties between political parties and media, 2) media people's tendency to be active in the sphere of politics, 3) journalist and media people political orientations, 4) media recipient bias, 5) journalists considering themselves neutral reporters which results in low level of political parallelism, or as those influencing public opinion¹.

Political parallelism is not a precise term. It combines hard elements such as political and media systems (making up political and media organizations) with soft ones such as orientation, mood or political attitudes. It can then be broken down into institutional and opinionated parts.

Hallin and Mancini additionally introduced the term media pluralism. It illustrates two ways of presenting in media the diversity of political affiliations and orientations in society. External pluralism is pluralism on the level of media system in which there are numerous media organizations (publishers, broadcasters, editors) presenting different political options, each one characterized by high political parallelism. Internal pluralism is achieved on media organization level, attempting to avoid connections with political parties, maintaining neutrality and presenting various political opinions. Media organizations in which present is internal pluralism are characterized by low level of political parallelism².

In societies organized according to rules of liberal democracy co-exist various media organizations, those characterized by internal pluralism and those which are part of a media system with external pluralism. The first can be named centrist media (mainstream) and the latter –biased media³.

Somewhat ambiguous is the above mentioned element number 5 of parallelism. Reporting about select events, their interpretation and assessment are all aspects of the same journalist activity. Since Max Weber's times, it is a known fact that conscious choice of materials for publication is possible only when one has some notion about their sense⁴. For the purposes of this article we can, therefore, omit point 5 as an element of political parallelism.

¹ D.C. Hallin, P. Mancini, *Systemy medialne. Trzy modele mediów i polityki w ujęciu porównawczym*, Kraków 2007, p. 26–29.

² Ibidem, p. 29–30.

³ For more see W. Furman, *Dominacja czy porozumienie? Związki między dziennikarstwem a public relations*, Rzeszów 2009, p. 95–96.

⁴ M. Weber, *Obiektywność poznania w naukach społecznych*, [in:] *Klasyczne teorie socjologiczne. Wybór tekstów*, ed. by P. Śpiewak, Warszawa 2006, p. 160.

Point number 4 is obvious, while points number 1, 2 and 3 were further examined by Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch who suggested five levels of *media partisanship*, which is a term similar to political-media parallelism. The levels begin with direct media organization management by its owner, next is absolute loyalty to the political subject, then – customary support for the political subject, occasional support and finally – full media organization political neutrality⁵.

The issue

The issue discussed in this article initiated outside the sphere of politics and mass media. It all started with an announcement about the publishing of a book on the life of Lech Walesa, a former RP president⁶, written by two historians from IPN. IPN, as we know, is responsible for gathering of documents, materials, conducting investigations and educational activity⁷. Even though the issue was taken up in academic circles, further discussion took place predominantly between politicians and journalists. The first goal of the paper is to reconstruct the president's and the main political parties' (represented in Sejm) stances on the issue. Secondly, these opinions are compared to publications on the subject in the three key weeklies of opinion. The analysis encompasses a period of time between April 1st and September 30th, 2008 during which there was a most heated debate over Walesa's past. It began with an announcement about the publishing of the book and ended on the 25th anniversary of Walesa winning the Peace Nobel Prize.

The three most popular weeklies of opinion were chosen for the analysis, assuming that they are moderate, as a result of which their articles can be placed in the mainstream of media publications. This means that the weeklies should be characterized by a low level of political parallelism as well as internal parallelism. The research was carried out in order to verify the following hypotheses:

- low level of political parallelism
- publications are characterized by internal parallelism
- since political parallelism and media parallelism are gradable characteristics, the weeklies may differ from each other in: a) level of parallelism, b) types of pluralism.

⁵ J.G. Blumler, M. Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, London–New York 2006, p. 65.

⁶ P. Cenckiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa. Przyczynek do biografii*, Warszawa 2008.

⁷ Resolution from December 18, 1998 on IPN – Committee on Fighting Crime against the Polish Nation, www.ipn.gov.pl.

Defence	-	-	12	1	2	3	3	-	21
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Source: By author, based on party and the President's Web sites

Table 2 content shows a distinct dichotomous division. There were no neutral stances. The President and PiS made accusations against Walesa while the governing coalition parties (PO and PSL) as well as LiD (PD, SdPI, SLD) defended him. The only party which did not take sides in this argument was UP.

The totals (30 against, 21 for) were calculated based on statements found on web sites. It should be noted that in two cases the same statement was noted twice. This regards Lech Kaczynski's interview for "Dziennik" from July 1, 2008 (it was found both on the President's and PiS' web sites) and a draft of a resolution proposed by PD and SdPI (present on both parties' sites) expressing their concern for IPN activity. If we count each of the above as one, then the total ratio would be 29:20.

Table 2 content includes statements from websites which means that they are party authorized opinions for the media as well as a few drafts of resolutions. More specific content is included in Table 3.

Table 3. Abridged politician statements on Walesa

Accusation	Demence
In 1980s, he was the symbol of "Solidarity" but that is history	He is the symbol of "Solidarity", a Nobel Prize laureate
He was an SB agent and he betrayed his friends	He was not a saint but it was impossible to be one in those times
As president, he was subject to the influence of former SB and WSI	There is no evidence that he was subject to the influence of former SB and WSI
The verdict in his vetting case was based on incomplete documentation	The court decision is final and binding, he was exonerated by court of cooperation accusations
The book is an outcome of reliable research and shows an uneasy truth	The book is biased and serves current politics

Source: By author, based on party and the President's Web sites.

Both blocks of statements show strong connections to political myths of III and IV RP⁸. The III RP myth begins with Round Table talks and agreements as a result of which a velvet revolution took place with effective changes. It was a rare time in our history of national consensus, so different from numerous earlier great sacrifices and uprising disasters. It showed a nation's wisdom, lead by a charismatic leader supported by expert knowledge. Changes took effect despite opposition from reactionary circles of nationalists, fanatics, religion and vetting fundamentalists.

IV RP myth considers the Round Table a betrayal by elites by handing over power back to the communists or people influenced by them. It is a justification for extensive vetting and general de-communisation in order to put an end to weak governing, rule by mafia, corrupt politician impunity, servility toward our allies and marginalization of Poland in the EU. Jan Olszewski's government was to be a new beginning but it was short lived and followed by the return of rule by incompetent, immoral and inimical to Polish nation forces. "Solidarity" ideals were betrayed by liberals who ruled based on egotism and taking advantage of the weak, in complete contrary to patriotism and Catholicism. Good forces have to fight the 'system' and those who are part of it are against vetting and de-communisation.

Walesa is an integral part of both of the above myths. In the first, he is the symbol of heroic fight, then victory achieved by agreement with a powerful and deceitful opponent and the head of a country in the difficult early days of building its new order. There is understanding of his possible earlier made mistakes. In the second myth, he is the symbol of betrayal and disaster. Once president, he had a chance to make things right but he continued in his own ways, for which he received condemnation. There is no hope for him now, regardless of his old merits and achievements⁹.

Both of the myths illustrate well the phenomenon which Ireneusz Krzemiński called the basic division between national-Catholic and liberal-European Poland¹⁰. Both the myths, which is typical, ignore the scale of problems and external conditions of change, real difficulties of transformation and unforeseen or undesired results of decisions made.

⁸ *Mity, symbole i rytuały we współczesnej polityce. Szkice z antropologii polityki*, ed. by B. Szklarski, Warszawa 2008, part 2: *Mitologia polityki*, p. 55–112.

⁹ Interesting is what Václav Havel said about Milan Kundera accusations, "If there were no books by Kundera, the world would be worse off but Kundera would be a lot better off." (V. Havel, *Havel o sprawie Kundery*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 30.10.2008, p. 24).

¹⁰ I. Krzemiński, *Zawiść i niemoc*, "Dziennik" 30.08.2008, suppl. "Europa" p. 5–6.

What is apparent is the similarity between the myths and earlier observations by Leszek Kołakowski, first published in 1975, “Should we go toward Europe in order to educate ourselves, learn democratic ideals, read Voltaire, renounce God, worship money, acquire trading skills or should we rather base on root national tradition, folk wisdom and spiritual rebirth, and instead of counting on market power of money, read Gospel, appeal to natural, family and tribe ties, love the Earth like peasants do and be humble to God? It is an unsolvable dilemma as there is a little bit of good and bad in both”¹¹.

Journalist activity

Abridged politician statements on Walesa from Table 3 were applied to create a categorization key, used as a tool to analyse journalist publications. They were numbered from 1 to 10. It means a strict analysis of journalist content, limited to arguments used by politicians.

Collectives result of this analysis are presented in Table 4. Generally, the number of arguments used is greater than the number of publications as usually within the same article employed were more than arguments.

In each of the researched weeklies, there was one article on the Walesa issue not directly tied to politician arguments. In “Polityka”, it was Sławomir Mizerski’s ironic feature article ridiculing political quarrels. In “Newsweek Polska”, Violetta Ozminkowski wrote about an arrogant Walesa who first agreed to take the polygraph test, then changed his mind and also offended the journalist during an interview. In “Wprost”, Jan Piński stated that one of the signatories of the letter in defence of Walesa was previously an SB agent. All three of the above articles were taken into account in the total number of publications in Table 4 but since they did not include politician arguments, they were not taken into consideration.

Table 4. Number of arguments in journalist articles in reference to politician arguments

Content	“Polityka”	“Newsweek Polska”	“Wprost”	Total
Number of publications	10	7	9	26
He was a symbol but that is past	0	0	0	0

¹¹ L. Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań*, Kraków 2006, p. 440.

He was an agent and he betrayed his friends	0	1	4	5
As president he was influenced by SB	0	0	1	1
Vetting court verdict is questionable	0	0	2	2
The book is reliable	0	1	2	3
Total accusation arguments	0	2	9	11
He is a heroic symbol of “Solidarity”	4	2	0	6
He was not a saint and he is allowed to make mistakes	5	3	0	8
As president, he was not influenced by SB	2	1	0	3
He was exonerated by court of accusations	2	0	0	2
The book is biased	5	3	0	8
Total defence arguments	18	9	0	27

Source: By author

The first hypothesis, assuming a low level of parallelism as far as publications referring to politician arguments, has been undermined. Two weeklies were characterized by high parallelism – “Polityka” defended Walesa and “Wprost” accused him. A somewhat lower level of parallelism was noted in “Newsweek Polska”, although out of seven texts, five defended Walesa, one was on a different subject (his arrogance) and one cited accusation arguments.

The second hypothesis was also challenged. Two weeklies were characterized by media system external pluralism and only one displayed internal pluralism, even though the proportion of texts for and against was far from even, at 5:1. It can be noted that this ratio was in tune with the present public opinion¹².

The only hypothesis which was verified was the third one, assuming different levels of parallelism and pluralism among the weeklies. Although “Polityka” defended Walesa, it also distanced itself from the debate by including an ironic feature ridiculing the entire debate. “Wprost”, on the other hand, attacked not only Walesa but also his defender, defying the signatory’s credibility. Only “Newsweek” attempted to remain more neutral, by pointing out Walesa’s difficult personality.

High parallelism by “Wprost” is confirmed by the fact that it was the only one out of the three weeklies which invited those directly involved in the debate to write. Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk were the authors of three out of nine articles, however the content of all three texts was synonymous.

¹² Regarding the theory that Walesa was a long time and conscious SB agent acting to harm his friends and colleagues, 9% of surveyed agree and 53% do not agree (*Polacy o Lechu Wałęsie i jego przeszłości. Komunikat z badań*, CBOS, Warszawa, July 2008, BS/120/2008).

Conclusions

Media-party parallelism has proved to be a useful tool of analysis. Despite a lack of institutional ties between the politicians and weeklies chosen for the research, shown was a strong connection between arguments made by parties and the President and the content of articles published. It was not full parallelism since the dichotomous division into accusation and defence apparent in politician arguments was toned down various ways by journalists of two out of three articles and was sharpened by one (article questioning the credibility of one of Walesa's defenders). It was not then just simple reiterating of politician arguments but rather toning them down or exacerbating them. Instead of talking about parallelism between politicians and publishers, we can say that there is fluctuation in all three weeklies (chart 1) in reference to what goes on in politics.

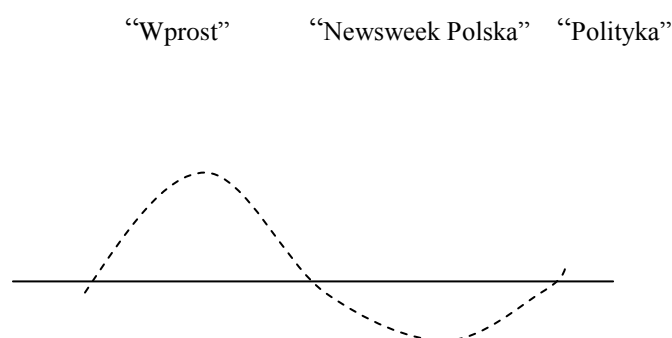


Chart. 1. Politician vs. editorial line

The term media organization internal pluralism has also proved to be constructive as another tool for the analysis. A heated debate favours a low level of internal pluralism and a high level of media system external pluralism. All of the researched weeklies showed a low level on internal pluralism but it was different in each case (chart 2). “Wprost” publications are on one vector, while “Newsweek Polska” – on two vectors, of various lengths, going opposite each other and a short one in a different direction (Walesa's difficult personality). Meanwhile, “Polityka” is on two vectors – one long one and one short one (ridiculing such political quarrels).

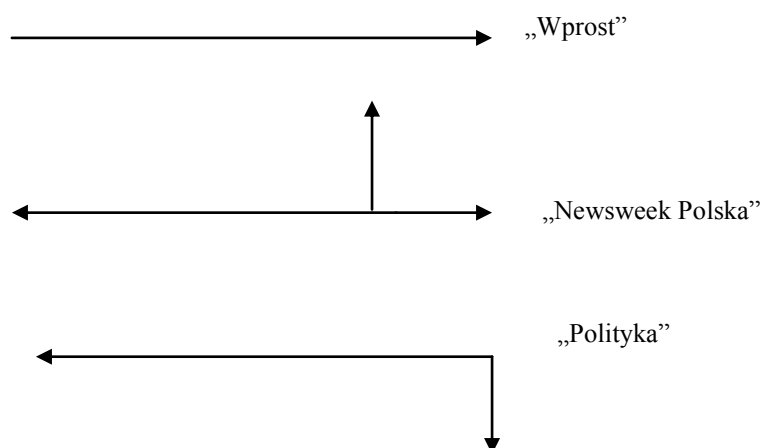


Chart 2. Internal pluralism, by weekly

Please note, the research¹³ was limited to only one issue taking place at a relatively short period of time, therefore, validity of results is limited. For more well grounded answers regarding political parallelism and pluralism of the chosen weeklies, more in-depth research would be necessary. However, such heated debates always lead to a polarization of stances, favourable to research.

¹³ Researched materials: 1) **“Polityka” 2008**: W. Władyka, *Legenda i recenzenci*, No. 22, p. 6; J. Żakowski, *Magiel z Bolkiem*, No. 24, p. 9; L. Stomma, *Bolek*, No. 25, p. 112; J. Paradowska, *Wymazać Wałęsę*, No. 26, p. 16; M. Zaremba, *BoLech*, No. 26, p. 12; K. Burnetko, W. Władyka, *Tajemnice Wałęsy*, No. 27, p. 16; P. Mizerski, *Niepokoje na Wybrzeżu*, No. 27, p. 4; J. Paradowska, *Nieuchwytny*, No. 33, p. 75; P.T. Kwiatkowski, J. Cieśla, *Dorabianie przeszłości*, No. 36, p. 92; L. Wałęsa, *Wygraliśmy resztką sił*, (interview by J. Paradowska), No. 39, p. 20; 2) **“Newsweek Polska” 2008**: T. Jastrun, *Pęknięcie*, No. 23, p. 112; M. Kobosko, *Co widać z Zachodu?*, No. 26, p. 2; P. Śmiłowicz, *Dorwać Wałęsę*, No. 26, p. 20; V. Ozminkowski, *Ten wywiad to pomyłka*, No. 27, p. 20; M. Safjan, *Dreyfus po polsku*, No. 27, p. 25; R.A. Ziemkiewicz, *Bolek to nie Dreyfus*, No. 28, p. 24; M. Safjan, *Zabić naszą dumę*, No. 29, p. 23; 3) **“Wprost” 2008**: P. Wieczorkiewicz, *Dworacy autorytetu*, No. 23, p. 81; J. Piński, *Policjant niepamięci*, No. 25, p. 78; P. Cenckiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, *Puzzle Bolka*, No. 26, p. 28; M. Cielemecki, *Gdybyś, Lechu, w mateczniku siedział...*, No. 26, p. 4; P. Cenckiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, *Żołnierze Wałęsy*, No. 27, p. 84; P. Wieczorkiewicz, *Prawda archiwów*, No. 27, p. 40; A. Scios, *Archipelag PRL*, No. 28, p. 37; P. Cenckiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, *Nie współpracowaliśmy z SB*, No. 28, p. 14; L. Szymanowski, *Tajemnica koperty*, No. 28, p. 34.