

*Why do Politicians Need Television Debates?
A Content Analysis of Polish Debates*

KEY WORDS

televised campaign debates, election campaign, functional theory of political discourse, contents analysis

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study discussed in the article was to recognise the content and form of televised campaign debates in Poland in the years 1995–2010. Their content analysis concentrated on verbal message elements of politicians and journalists participating in debates in the context of functional theory of political discourse. In the light of the study, political candidates focus on a positive presentation of their election offer, treating debates primarily as a form of advertising. Politicians' appeals refer to matters of policy and character to a similar degree. Their policy statements consist of pragmatic messages, referring to current issues in a superficial form, and in statements on personal issues, what dominates are political competences. Debates turn out to be a highly contextualized form of political communication.

The fact that in 2011, for the first time in the history of Polish elections, the subject of television debates between the leaders of the most important parties, and more precisely, the deliberations if, under which rules, where, and when would they take place, dominated for a long time in the television reports of the campaign seems to confirm not only the growing popularity of the debates but also the growing expectations of journalist and a large part of the electorate¹ about this pseudo-event². That the journalists are interested in the debates is derived, on one hand, from their conviction about the attractiveness of a dramatic,

¹ Judging by the size of the audience: in 1995, according to the CBOS polls, 72 % of respondents watched both debates, and 88% at least one of them (source: CBOS BS/215/190/95, *Debaty prezydenckie jako reklama polityczna* [Presidential debates as political advertising], December 1995); in 2007, the debates between Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk, and between Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Donald Tusk attracted 9.127 million and 10.061 million viewers, respectively (source: AGB Nielsen Media Research); in a 2010 CBOS questionnaire, 53% respondents declared having watched at least one debate (Jarosław Kaczyński vs. Bronisław Komorowski), 33% watched both debates conducted between the 1st and 2nd round (source: CBOS BS/107/2010, *Nieagresywna, ale mało rzeczowa – ocena kampanii przed wyborami prezydenckimi* [Non-aggressive, but hardly to-the-point – assessment of the campaign before the presidential elections], July 2010).

² We shall treat debates as a kind of pseudo-event, according to the understanding of the term by its author, Daniel Boorstin, see D. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, New York 1961, pp. 11–12.

personalised show; on the other hand, from the hopes, which belong part of the liberal model of journalism, for the improvement of the quality of information about the political electoral offers. The hopes, which are based on the studies of the debates in the view of the normative theories of democracy and the theory of the influence of the media (with the preeminent role of the *agenda setting* concept and the uses and gratifications approach)³. The debates reflect global homogenising changes in electoral campaigns⁴, while the observed worldwide tendencies of political communication (such as the growing personalisation of electoral strategies and personalisation of the campaign coverage), the strengthening of the role of the leader in managing political parties, and the aspirations of the media to play an independent role in the electoral campaign are strong arguments for their continuation and spread in democratic countries⁵.

Regardless of the global transformations in political communication and the expectations of Poles, including the media pressure, the television debates between the leaders of the two largest parties during the 2011 campaign did not take place. It happened so due to the will of a part of the political elites, which can be seen as a confirmation of the instrumental (in the sense of electoral efficiency) attitude of the politicians to the debates. It depends mainly on them if the debates will take place⁶, it is they who decide on their formal shape, and finally, it is they who decide on their appearance. It is worth thus to undertake the analysis of the behaviour of politicians in debates while seeking answer to the question in the title. The validity of the attempt to scientifically investigate the debates at the level of countrywide elections ensues also from their important role in the electoral communication in Poland, since the debates had a significant effect on the results of the elections at least twice – in 1995 and 2007⁷.

³ In the summary of the review of studies on debates, Mitchell S. McKinney and Diana B. Carlin conclude: “debates, in some form, will remain a permanent part of presidential elections and of elections at all levels. We feel that campaign debates are likely to continue because, as the voluminous research has shown, debates do matter—they have many useful effects for citizens, for democracy, and for the electoral process”; M.S. McKinney, D.B. Carlin, “Political Campaign Debates”, in: *Handbook of Political Communication Research*, ed. by L.L. Kaid, London 2004, p. 228.

⁴ F. Plasser, G. Plasser, *Global Political Campaigning. A Worldwide Analysis of Campaign Professionals and Their Practices*, Westport CT 2002, p. 345.

⁵ Even in such stable (also in the sense of electoral procedure) democracies as the United Kingdom, television debates are becoming an important part of the campaigns (they were held for the first time during the parliamentary campaign in 2010 with the participation of the leaders of the three largest parties); cf. por. K. Zuba, “Pierwsze telewizyjne debaty wyborcze w Wielkiej Brytanii” [First televised electoral debates in the United Kingdom], *Studia Medioznawcze* [Media Studies] 2011, No. 3, pp. 59–71.

⁶ The United States are an exception to this, to some extent. The debates there, which are held regularly during the presidential elections since 1976 have grown so much into the political culture that the candidates find it much harder to refuse an invitation than in other countries.

⁷ See K. Pankowski, “Wpływ debat telewizyjnych na preferencje i zachowania wyborcze” [Influence of television debates on the electoral preferences and behaviour], in: *Prognozy i wybory – polska demokracja '95*

The presented study of the debates from the parliamentary and presidential elections held in 1995–2010 belongs to a current of content analyses embedded in the tradition of socio- psychological and rhetorical research oriented to the recognition of the content of messages and the intentions of senders. The theoretical basis of the analysis is the functional theory of political discourse, developed from the rational choice theory, according to which through the debates the politicians strive to distinguish themselves from and prove their political advantage over their rival, while the electorate, on the basis of the messages of the campaign (such as voices in the debates) perform the comparison and choice of the politician who, from their perspective (of the elements which are important for them) seems more appropriate or is found to be a lesser evil⁸.

This paper aims at identifying the verbal behaviour of Polish politicians in the debates. The basic questions concern the way, taken as the function of political discourse, in which the politicians formulate their appeals: whether they see the debate mainly as an opportunity to present the advantages of their own, their party, or policies, or rather they focus on criticising their political adversaries, and what are the predominant themes of what they say; the relation of policy and personal content seems to be the most important. The authors attempted to synthetically describe the phenomenon of the debates in Poland, present their common features and demonstrate the differences in their content and in the appeals of the participating politicians⁹.

Method

The basic notions of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the subject and form of the debates are derived from the functional approach to the analysis of political discourse and the conception of the framing of media messages. In order to diagnose the verbal behaviour of politicians, basic elements of the classification of political discourse, which had been developed by a team led by William L. Benoit, were employed. According to this

[Prognoses and elections: Polish democracy 1995], ed. by L. Kolarska-Bobińska, R. Markowski, Warszawa 1997, pp. 147–166 and: M. Kolczyński, M. Mazur, *Broń masowego wrażenia* [Weapon of mass impression], Warszawa 2009, pp. 73–88.

⁸ See *Campaign 2000. A Functional Analysis of Presidential Campaign Discourse*, auth. W.L. Benoit and oth., Lanham, Md. 2003, pp. 1 f.

⁹ We agree with the opinions which emphasise the lack of synthetic approach and sketchiness of the existing scientific papers on the Polish debates. See A. Budzyńska-Daca, “Idea debaty a reguły interakcji w formatach polskich telewizyjnych debat przedwyborczych” [Idea of debate and the rules of interaction in the formats of the Polish electoral debates on television], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2012, No. 1, pp. 45–58.

classification, the politicians realise one of the three functions, acclaims, attacks, or defences, by what they say in the debate¹⁰.

The frame of the media message should then be interpreted as the focus of the senders on a certain aspect and attributes of political reality¹¹. It has been assumed that politicians focus in a debate on one of the three sets of elements of reality, which were defined as thematic frame: policy personal, and axiological. The category of frames is a result of the search for a way to increase the accuracy of analysis by reading the overt content and the content hidden in more formally developed fragments of the statement, but also more coherent and thus more in accordance with the intention of the speaker. It is also an attempt to limit the scope of the problem of inseparability and illogicality in thematic categorisations, which limit the observation unit to a single problem thread¹².

The research sample was deliberate in nature. Two debates were chosen from each campaign in which they were held¹³. The unit of analysis was a debate, and the unit of

¹⁰ See the Polish studies on the debates in this trend: M. Piasecki, "Wyborcze debaty telewizyjne w Polsce. Funkcjonalna analiza dyskursu politycznego" [Electoral television debates in Poland. Functional analysis of political discourse], in: *Studia empiryczne nad komunikowaniem politycznym w Polsce* [Empirical studies in political communication in Poland], ed. by B. Dobek-Ostrowska, K. Majdecka, Wrocław 2011, pp. 123–152; *idem*, "Televised Electoral Debates in Poland: Pursuing the American Model. (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Suntec Singapore International Convention & Exhibition Centre, Suntec City, 22–25 June 2010.); *idem*, "Prezydenckie debaty telewizyjne w USA w 2008 r. Analiza zawartości" [Presidential television debates in the USA in 2008. Content analysis], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2009, No. 2, pp. 63–81; P. Dudek, S. Partacz, "Functional Theory of Political Discourse. Televised Debates during the Parliamentary Campaign in 2007 in Poland", *Central European Journal of Communication* Vol. 2 (2009), No. 2, pp. 367–379.

¹¹ Interpretation frame is a polysemous term, most often used in the studies on media messages to describe them in the context of the prevalent aspects (or predominating perspective) of the related reality or the structure of the message (see the integrated model of frame analysis developed by Tomasz Olczak in: *idem*, *Politrozrywka i popperswazja. Reklama telewizyjna w polskich kampaniach wyborczych XXI wieku* [Polit-entertainment and pop-persuasion. Television commercials in the Polish electoral campaigns of the 21st century], Warszawa 2009, pp. 241–242). According to the framing theory, the way the reality is presented on both levels (of the content and structure of the message) has an effect on the receptive interpretation (see: S. Iyengar, J. McGrady, *Środki masowego przekazu i perswazja polityczna* [Mass media and political persuasion], in: *Perswazja. Perspektywa psychologiczna* [Persuasion: Psychological insights and perspectives], ed. by T.C. Brock, M.C. Green, Kraków 2007, pp. 303 ff.; and M. McCombs, *Ustanawianie agendy. Media masowe i opinia publiczna* [Setting the agenda: the mass media and public opinion], Kraków 2008, pp.103 ff.) Among Polish studies using this conception, it is worth to notice the research of Ewa Nowak and Rafał Riedl, whose subject were television information programmes: *idem*, "Agenda setting, priming, framing – TV news in Poland during election campaigns 2005 and 2007. Comparative analysis", *Central European Journal of Communication* Vol. 3 (2010), No. 2, pp. 367–379.

¹² Compare the methodological approach: M. Piasecki, *Wyborcze debaty...*, pp. 124–125.

¹³ The subject of analysis consisted of six debates from presidential elections (held between the first and the second round of the elections) and two debates from parliamentary elections, which are coded in the paper as follows: 1995 (1) – debate between A. Kwaśniewski and L. Wałęsa on 12 September 1995; 1995 (2) – debate between A. Kwaśniewski and L. Wałęsa on 15 November 1995; 2005 (1) – debate between L. Kaczyńskiego and D. Tusk on 20 October 2005; 2005 (2) – debate between L. Kaczyński and D. Tusk on 21 October 2005; 2007 (1) – debate between J. Kaczyński and D. Tusk on 12 October 2007; 2007 (2) – debate between A. Kwaśniewski and D. Tusk on 12 October 2007; 2010 (1) – debate between J. Kaczyński and B. Komorowski on 27 June 2010; 2010 (2) – debate between J. Kaczyński and B. Komorowski on 30 June 2010. In the studied period, eleven debates of this type were held in Poland. In the analysis two debates from 2005 and one from 2007 were omitted.

observation was a sequence, a continuous utterance of one politician in a specific thematic frame, through which the sender realised a specific function of political discourse. Longer texts within the same thematic frame which had the same function were divided into sequences in the situation when the sender himself made the distinction between the discussed themes by using such expressions as “another question is that” (Pol. *inną kwestią jest natomiast*), “secondly” (Pol. *po drugie*), “it should be added further” (Pol. *ponadto należy dodać*), etc.

978 sequences were identified in the analysed debates and coded based on the categorisation key. By the criterion of the political discourse function, the sequences were classified into one of the three categories: acclaim – presentation of a politician or party in favourable light in a specific frame; attack – presentation of one’s political adversaries in bad light in a specific frame; defence – statements in a specific frame which respond to an attack expressed earlier in the debate.

According to the criterion of thematic frame, the policy frame related to statements on the subject of problems or political programmes, the personal frame was reduced to characterising politicians or parties in a personal aspect, and in the axiological frame sequences were coded, in which the central theme were political values or ideologies.

The sequences in the policy frame were also coded by the criterion of time reference of the statement. Three categories were identified: 1) past – pertains to problems and policies which are of historical nature; 2) present – speaks of problems and policies with which the politicians can deal at present; 3) future – problems and plans which may be the objects of the politicians’ activities in future. The criterion of the form of expression also produced three categories: 1) problems – indication and description of political problems; 2) policy slogans – general description and indication of political programme; 3) policy proposals – detailed presentation of the elements of political programme.

Discourse fragments in the personal frame were classified taking into consideration the criterion of the type of characteristics of a politician or party, using the following categories: 1) professional competences; 2) personal characteristics. In the case where both types of these characteristics were present in one sequence, double categorisation was used. The expressions in the axiological frame, with regard to the form of the statement, were placed in one of two categories: 1) political values (when the sender did not openly indicate any ideological system; and 2) political ideologies (when the sender openly indicated an ideological system).

In addition, the questions of the journalists ($n = 113$) were coded according to the thematic frame, as were the questions of the politicians ($n = 49$), which the latter could ask, according to the specified rules in four of eight debates.

The frequency with which the categories defined in the key appear in the sequences. The results are presented as percentage or numerical distribution of categories at the level of debates and appeals of their participants. The basis of assessment of the changes in the content of debates in view of the chosen categories in the studied period was the comparison of their frequency in each debate.

Functions of the statements of the politicians

The politicians treated the debates above all as an opportunity to create a positive image of their own electoral offer. By and large, the debates were dominated by acclams, although the criticism of the competition also appeared as an important function of the messages (Chart 1). Only a little more than every 10th sequence expressed an answer to an attack formulated during the debate. Although the defence in individual debates was always the least employed function of expression, it is possible to notice some diversity in the proportion of acclams and attacks. The value of these categories is inversely proportional but only in two debates there were more attacks than acclams.

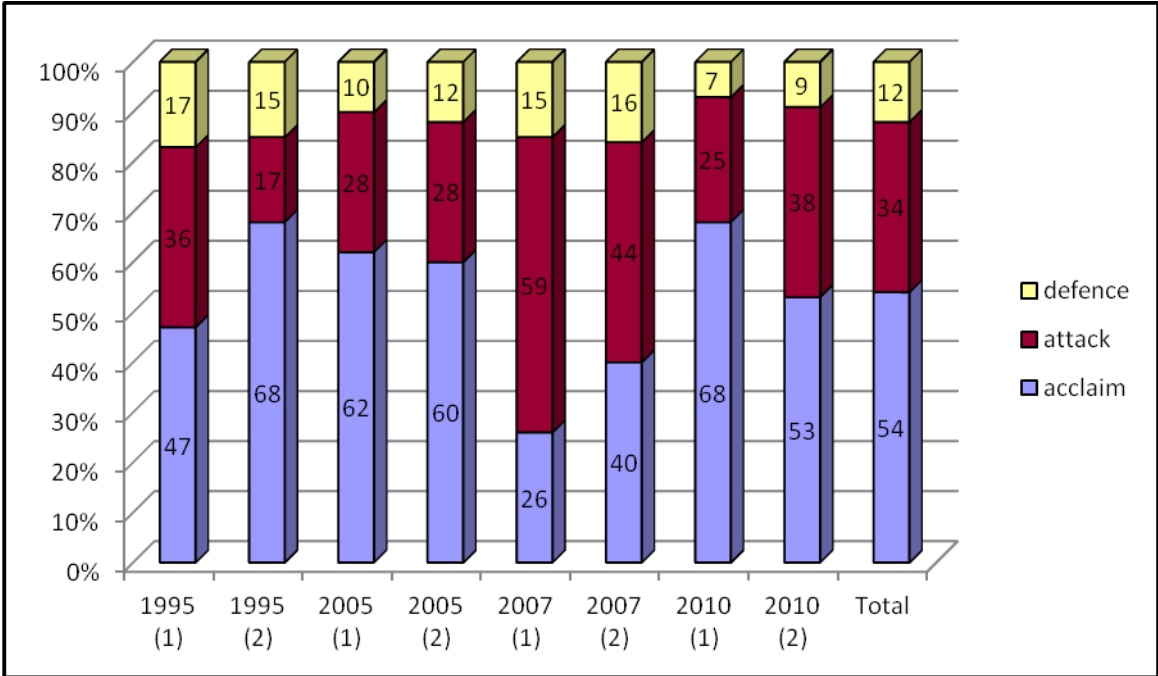


Chart 1. Functions of political discourse per debate (percentage)

Source: All tables and charts were prepared by the authors on the basis of the authors' own research.

In four cases, the appeals of the politicians were oriented at the criticism of their political adversaries: Tusk in both debates in 2007, Kaczyński in the debate in 2007, and Wałęsa in the first debate in 1995 (Table 1).

Table 1. Functions of the political discourse in the appeals of the politicians (figures)*

Functions of political discourse	1995 (1)		1995 (2)		2005 (1)		2005 (2)		2007 (1)		2007 (2)		2010 (1)		2010 (2)	
	W	K	W	K	T	LK	T	LK	JK	T	T	K	BK	JK	BK	JK
Praise	20	28	53	42	44	41	45	25	19	8	25	27	44	33	41	32
Attack	28	8	11	13	24	14	19	14	23	37	41	15	16	13	31	22
Defence	7	10	7	13	2	12	1	13	11	4	6	15	2	6	6	7

* W – Lech Wałęsa, K – Aleksander Kwaśniewski, T – Donald Tusk, LK – Lech Kaczyński, JK – Jarosław Kaczyński, BK – Bronisław Komorowski.

It is useful in explaining the differences in the rhetoric of the politicians if one takes into consideration the context of the elections, especially the electoral strategies of the politicians. Donald Tusk, in the debate with Jarosław Kaczyński, was building his own position on the political market in the usual way, in the view of campaign communication, by criticising the politician in the office. Taking advantage of the climate unfavourable for the Prime Minister and his Cabinet (the worst rating of a government after 1989 in CBOS polls), he persuaded the electorate to support a change of power, attacked raising current questions: the realisation of election promises from 2005, such as the construction of 3 million new flats, failures of the government in building the motorways, the negative image of the Cabinet abroad, which was supposed to stem from its incompetence and inefficiency, the coalition with the Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (Pol. *Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej – Samoobrona*) and the League of Polish Families (Pol. *Liga Polskich Rodzin – LPR*), the fiasco of the “cheap state” policy (Pol. *tanie państwo*). Showing resolve and self-confidence, Tusk tried also to improve his image by adding leadership skills, which the electorate could only rarely have seen in him before. Kaczyński defended by attacking. He tried to make Tusk appear as a socially insensitive liberal¹⁴; assigned to him the responsibility for hundreds of thousands lost jobs and the increase in unemployment, as the results of the reforms of Bielecki’s government and the actions of Balcerowicz, criticised Tusk’s supposed

¹⁴ Jarosław Kaczyński in the debate with Donald Tusk: “You want to strike at the Polish farmers. For you always wanted to strike at the weaker. All your policy was striking at the weaker and giving to the stronger. This is your philosophy, this is the philosophy of liberalism. I even like you, that you are so consistent, that you are so consistently liberal. But it is a horrible idea.”

Germanophile tendencies visible in his support for the German property claims. Considering the 2005 campaign of Law and Justice (Pol. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS*), in which he focused on the image division into solidary Poland and liberal Poland, Kaczyński proved thus his rhetorical consistency and coherence.

In the debate with Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the leader of the then largest opposition party also presented a confrontational attitude, which most likely flowed from a plan to attract some of the previous electorate of left-wing formations to the Civic Platform (Pol. *Platforma Obywatelska – PO*). The polls of the political market seemed to confirm the validity of such actions¹⁵. Tusk spoke negatively about Kwaśniewski's communist past, blunders of left-wing governments under the president's patronage (especially the mistakes in social and economic policy and the business-political corruption scandals). He also pointed out the contradictions in the policy positions of the politicians from the Left and Democrats (Pol. *Lewica i Demokraci – LiD*) coalition, such as their attitudes to the war in Iraq, flat tax, leadership in the LiD, abortion, euthanasia, and the state–Church relations. Kwaśniewski, contrary to Kaczyński, chose positive self-presentation. He attacked quite rarely¹⁶, which was not surprising if one considered his previous image of a consensual politician who was at ease in his capacity of mitigating political conflicts. It was this very attitude which allowed him to distinguish himself from Wałęsa in 1995, when the President focused, in the first debate, on attacking his opponent¹⁷.

While examining the function of defence in debates, it is difficult to predict its frequency on the basis of the number of attacks (e.g., comparing the second 1995 debate and the debate Tusk vs. Kaczyński from 2007). In terms of numbers (the appeals of the politicians contain 329 attacking expressions and 122 defensive ones), which somewhat diminishes the scale of criticism in the debates, since it does not take into account the aggressive questions of the journalists on behalf of the politicians (1995 debates) and the questions of the politicians themselves, the vast majority of attacks did not receive a direct answer, which may have been a result of their accuracy, first and foremost, and the lack of appropriate counter-arguments, or the attacked may have been convinced of the absurdity, little consequence, or groundlessness of the allegations. Regardless of the causes, the politicians avoided answering criticism, which

¹⁵ M. Kolczyński, M. Mazur, *Broń...*, p. 25.

¹⁶ Asking, among others, about the taxes in Ireland and the plan to denationalise hospitals, and labelling the leader of the PO as a “declared liberal”.

¹⁷ This is how Lech Wałęsa defined his tactic in that debate: “I wanted to knock Kwaśniewski out. And I made a mistake, because the meeting was badly hosted and I didn't have time to lay a punch. Or maybe it wasn't necessary to knock him out? I know that it filled the educated people with distaste. I concur, it was un-president-like. But there's no helping it when a man is nervous.” For *Rzeczpospolita*”, 14.11.1995.

did not agree with the dialogue. In this sense, the usefulness of the attacks for improving the orientation of the voters in the electoral offers, proposed by Katarzyna Buczak-Sawczyńska, must raise some doubts¹⁸. What seems likely is the hypothesis that attacking politicians are not as much interested in exchanging arguments, as in presenting negative information about their political adversaries. The point is not to engage in a dispute in the form of dialogue but to send to the audience of the debates certain signals, usually determined using strategic analysis, in order to discredit the adversary.

It is difficult, in the context of the research, to judge the topics of the attacks. The total number of attack in the policy and personal frames is similar (Chart 2). Axiological subjects were discussed critically the least often of all. In five debates policy-related attacks predominated, personal accusations in two.

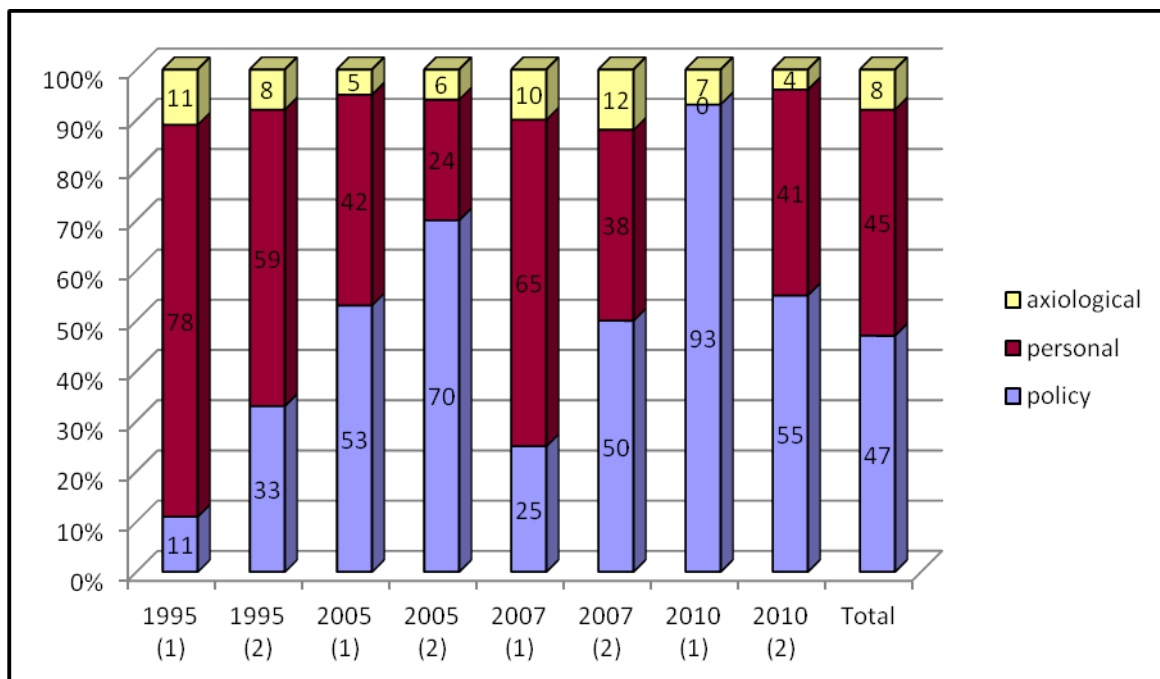


Chart 2. Thematic frames in the “attack” category per debate (percentage)

It has to be said, regarding the predominance of personal attacks, that the first meeting between Wałęsa and Kwaśniewski on television was quite unique in nature, since the president many times adduced the supposed weaknesses of the leader of the left, pertaining to his political competences and character (Table 2). In the case of the second debate of 1995,

¹⁸ K. Buczak-Sawczyńska, “Retoryczne strategie ataku i obrony jako elementy dialogu w debatach prezydenckich” [Rhetorical strategies of attack and defence as elements of dialogue in presidential debates], *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* [Press studies notebooks] 1999, No. 1/2, p. 99.

which contained a much smaller number of attacks, both candidates phrased a similar number of aggressive expressions in the personal frame. It was similar in the debate Kaczyński vs. Tusk: both politicians were responsible for the high frequency of critical statements of personal nature.

Table 2. Thematic frames in the “attack” category in the politicians’ appeals (figures)*

Frame	1995 (1)		1995 (2)		2005 (1)		2005 (2)		2007 (1)		2007 (2)		2010 (1)		2010 (2)		
	W	K	W	K	T	LK	T	LK	JK	T	T	K	BK	JK	BK	J K	
Policy	2	2	2	6	12	8	15	8	2	1	3	21	7	15	12	17	12
Personal	23	5	7	7	10	6	4	4	17	2	2	15	6	0	0	14	8
Axiological	3	1	2	0	2	0	0	2	4	2	5	2	1	1	0	2	

*W – Lech Wałęsa, K – Aleksander Kwaśniewski, T – Donald Tusk, LK – Lech Kaczyński, JK – Jarosław Kaczyński, BK – Bronisław Komorowski.

The rules of the debates set by the leaders’ staffs did not have significant influence on the differences in the functions of expressions at the level of debates and politicians’ appeals, even if one takes into consideration the special rules of the 1995 and 2007 debates (Table 3). In the debates of the president and the leader of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Pol. *Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej – SdRP*), the journalists who asked the questions on behalf of the politicians attacked showing far-reaching bias. Whereas, in the 2007 debates, the politicians were able to ask each other the greatest number of questions (33 in total), all of which were meant to show the adversary in bad light.

Table 3. Basic rules of the debates 1995–2010

Rules of the debates	Debates							
	1995 (1)	1995 (2)	2005 (1)	2005 (2)	2007 (1)	2007 (2)	2010 (1)	2010 (2)
Questions asked by journalists on behalf of the participants (different for each one) and by the moderator (the same for both disputants)	X	X						
Questions asked by journalists-moderators* (the same for both disputants)				X	X	X	X	X

Questions asked by journalists (different for each disputant)			X					
Questions asked by politicians with the opportunity for riposte			X	X	X	X		
Journalists-moderators talk to the family members of the politicians for introduction to the debate				X				
Speaking time limit for politicians (min)	2	2	1	1	1,5	1,5	2	2
Division into thematic segments	X	X		X	X	X	X	X

*In the second 2005 debate and the debates in 2007 the journalists asked the questions and at the same time played the role of moderators in the discussion between the candidates.

Thematic frames of expressions

Overall, it can be judged that the debates are a format dominated by policy discussion (Chart 3), even though personal matters were also a significant theme of the expressions (almost 40%). The ideological references comprise only a margin of the debate.

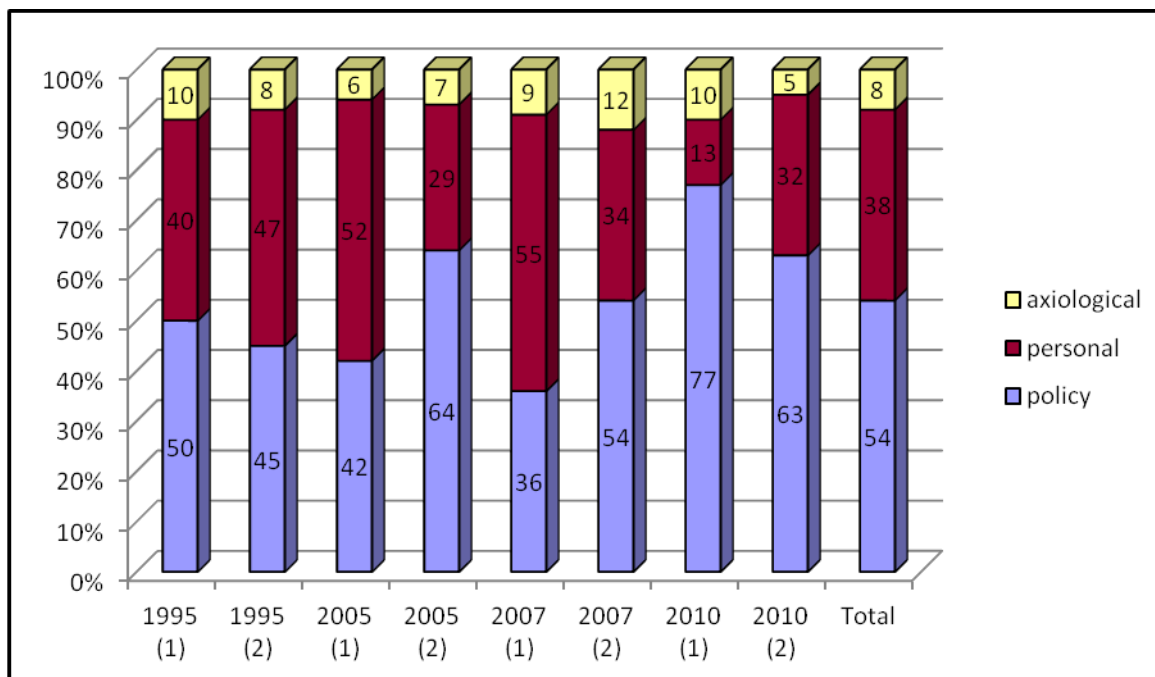


Chart 3. Thematic frames in debates (percentage)

The policy character of self-promotion is the result of, first and foremost, the conviction of the politicians that such messages are more efficient. The formal division of the debates into thematic segments, which in Poland usually follows the scheme of economy, foreign policy, social affairs is also not without effect, as is the attitude of the journalists. What is interesting is the fact that both the politicians and journalists were oriented to policy

subjects in their questions to a similar extent (see Chart 4). Out of 49 questions asked by the politicians, only 4 pertained to personal characteristics, while, in the case of journalists, there were 25 questions in the personal frame in the total of 113.

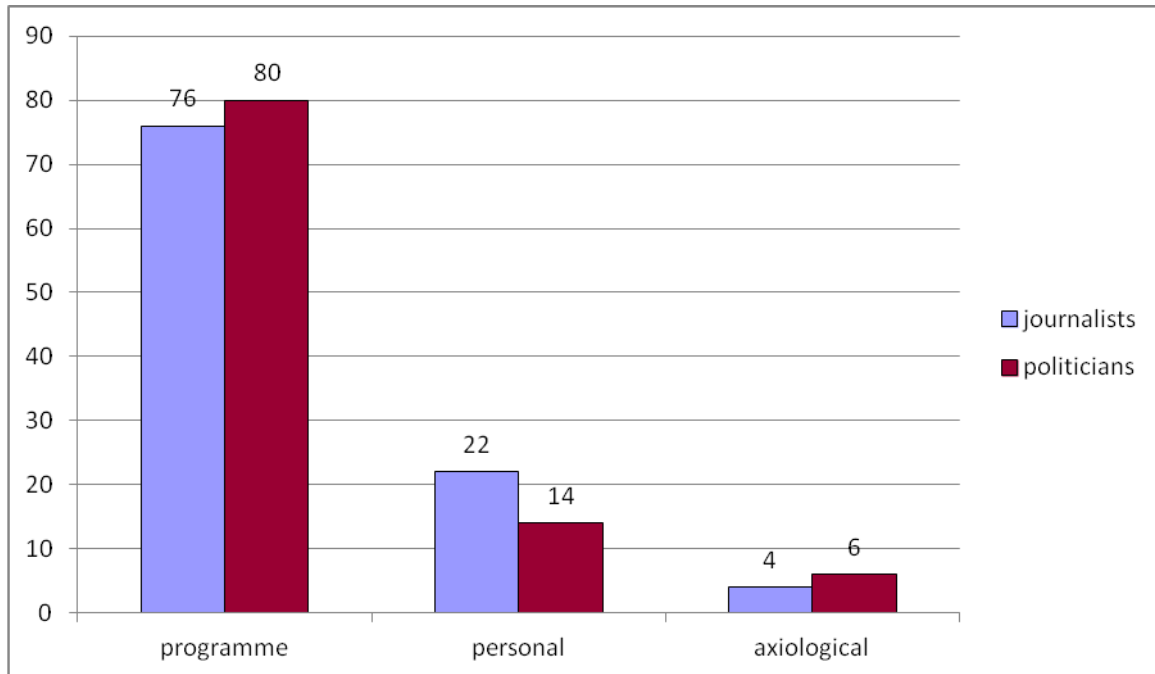


Chart 4. Questions asked by journalists and politicians in the debates according to thematic frame (percentage)

Analysing the content of the questions in individual debates, it has to be stated that they may have significantly influenced the thematic frames of the politicians' expressions in some of them: in the first debates of 1995 and 2005 because of the relatively high frequency of questions in the personal frame, and in the debates of 2010 and the second 2005 debate, because the policy questions monopolised these debates (Chart 5). In the latter debate, however, the policy orientation of the journalists was disturbed by its beginning, the conversation held with the wives and children of the candidates, which directed the attention of the viewers to personal elements, the privacy of the politicians.

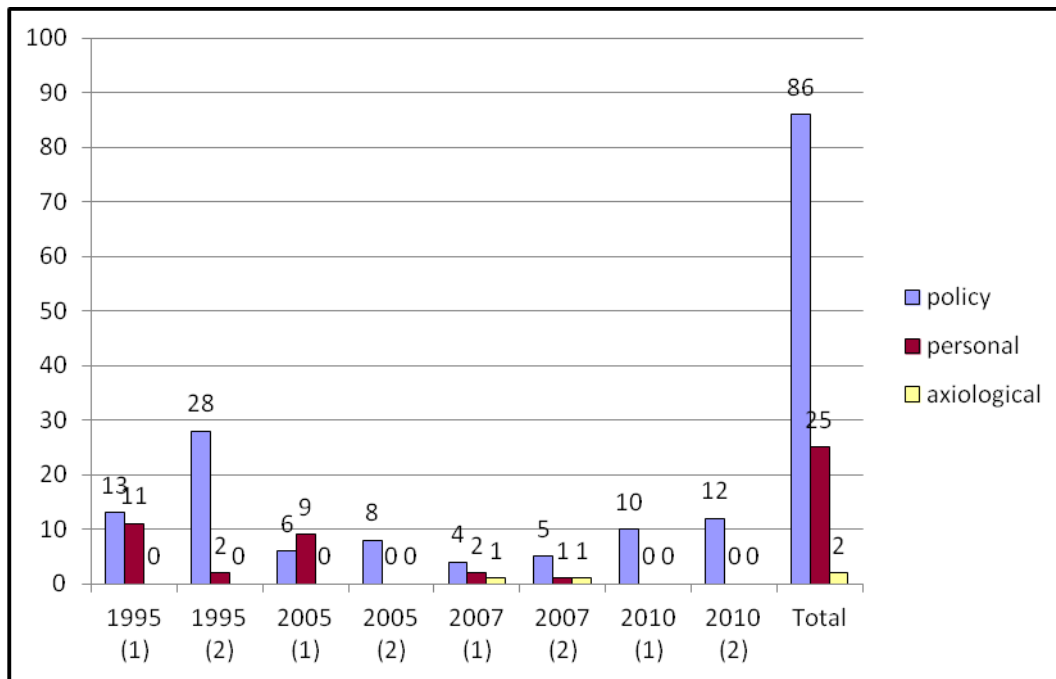


Chart 5. The journalists' questions by the criterion of thematic frames (figures)

The politicians talked in the policy frame with a similar frequency in all debates. There are, however, large differences in the proportion of expressions in the personal frame in three debates. This subject was touched upon most frequently by Wałęsa in the first debate, Tusk in the debate with Kwaśniewski, and Komorowski in the second debate. In only one studied debate (Tusk vs. Kaczyński in 2007) the personal matters significantly (by a margin of more than 10%) prevailed over policy matters, to which the leader of PO contributed the most (Table 4).

Table 4. Thematic frames in the politicians' appeals (figures)

Frame	1995 (1)		1995 (2)		2005 (1)		2005 (2)		2007 (1)		2007 (2)		2010 (1)		2010 (2)	
	W	K	W	K	T	LK	T	LK	JK	T	T	K	BK	JK	BK	JK
Policy	26	25	33	30	28	30	40	35	22	15	35	35	47	41	47	41
Personal	27	13	33	33	39	32	21	13	26	30	29	15	10	5	29	15
Axiological	2	8	5	5	3	5	4	4	5	4	8	7	5	6	2	5

*In the second 2005 debate and the debates in 2007 the journalists asked the questions and at the same time played the role of moderators in the discussion between the candidates.

What is important for the identification of the nature of the policy discussion, is to inquire into the form of these expressions. The politicians preferred to deliberate over political

issues (Chart 6). Pointing out and defining these problems, they suggested only their own policy agenda, sketching it only in very general terms (implicit policy). The appeals qualified to the remaining two categories left no room for doubt what the intentions of the politician were (explicit policy). However, the viewers received a relatively full information (as far as it is possible in a short speech) concerning political plans only in the case of detailed proposals. What is characteristic for the Polish debates is the upward trend in the category of policy proposals, which seems independent from the type of elections (parliamentary or presidential).

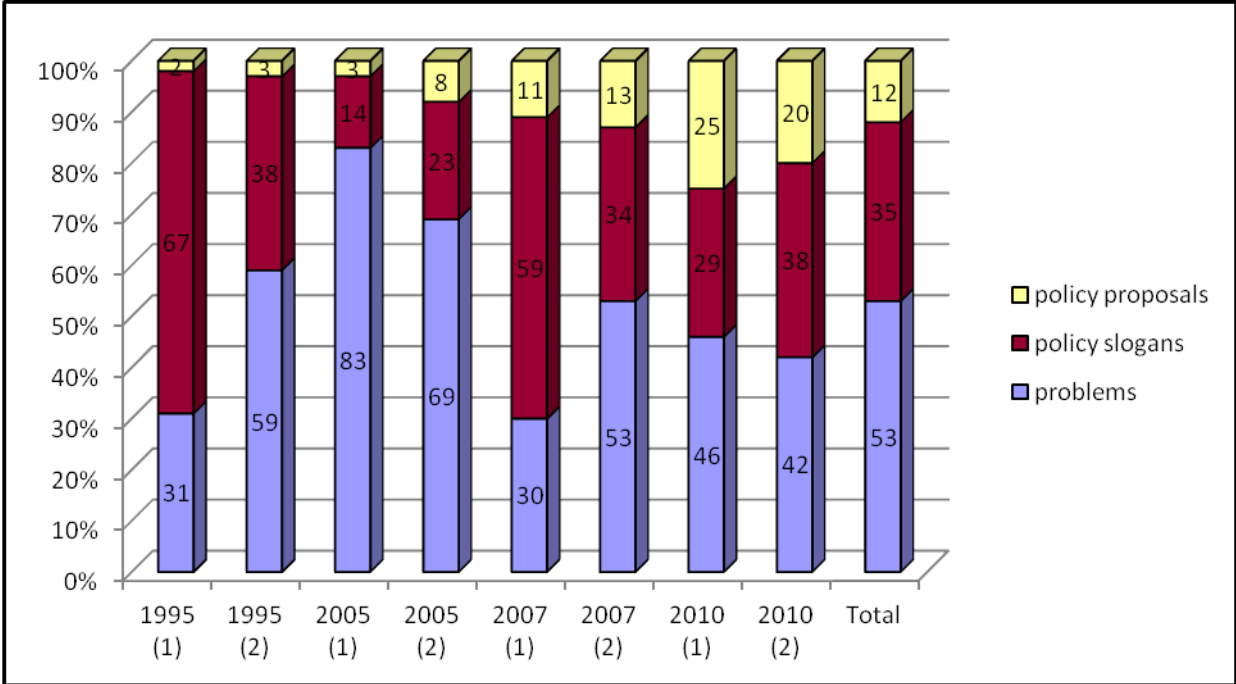


Chart 6. Forms of expression in the policy frame per debate (percentage)

The appeals of the politicians in debates do not differ in this aspect. Compared to earlier debates, in those of 2010, the verbal behaviour of both candidates was characterised by a high level of detailed policy statements.

The form of policy appeals is a product of several factors, among which the professionalism of politicians and journalists has to be singled out. The professional approach to the debates by the former appears twofold. On one hand, in the ability to present a clear message of the campaign, which will represent the mobilisation potential. The brevity and superficiality of messages, which use simple cognitive schemas and the persuasive force of symbols, are subordinated to image creation, which predominates in “professionally”

prepared campaigns of today¹⁹. On the other hand, professionalism is based on content-related background, on working out thoroughly the items of the policy which are fundamental in regard of the aims of the politician/party, also for the purpose of proving to the voters the difference between similar aims of the runners and better present oneself in the interaction with journalists. The professionalism of the latter in the debates can be reduced to formulating questions which are important to the voters, relate to significant political issues, and are interesting (attractive) at the same time. Looking for the explanation of the special character of the 2010 debates, it is also necessary to set down two special circumstances, namely the social climate of the elections held in the wake of the Smoleńsk disaster, which might have promoted deliberations about policy in a positive tone (which was visible most in the first debate), as well as the fact that only in these debates the questions were asked exclusively by journalists, formally not connected to the candidates.

Investigating the time references of the policy sequences, it is possible to show that the politicians most often discussed the issues of the future and the present, and only in the televised meeting of the leaders of PO and PiS in 2007, there were more sequences about the past (Chart 7).

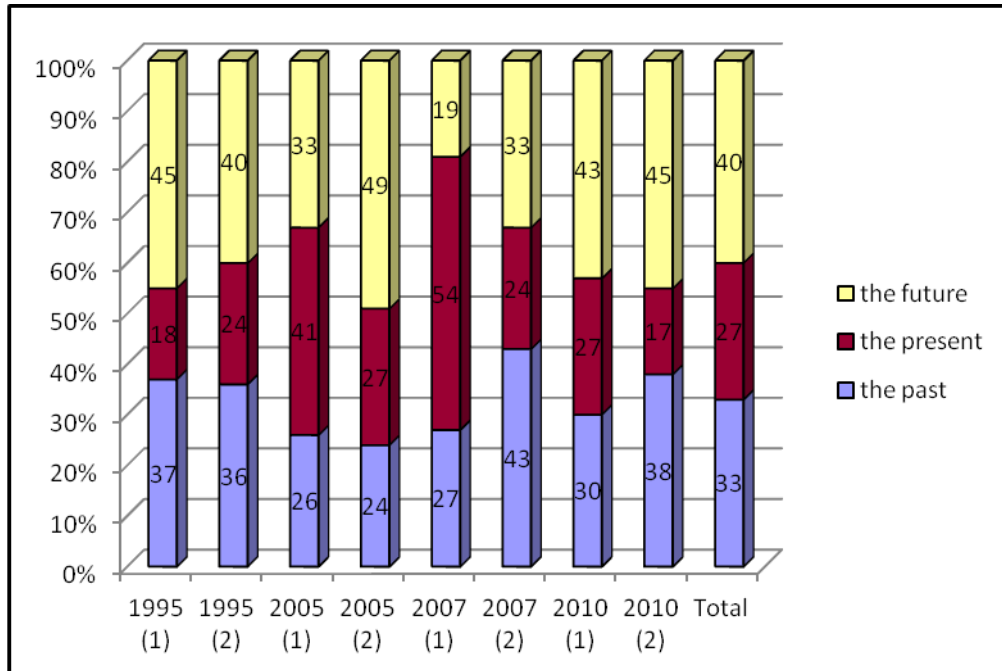


Chart 7. Time references of the speeches in the policy frame per debate (percentage)

¹⁹ Mariusz Kolczyński, while considering the determinants of the effectiveness of electoral campaigns, is right to recall the opinion of Ron Faucheux, long-time editor of *Campaign & Elections*, that the lack of clear message in the campaign diminishes the chances of political success to a much greater degree than a badly chosen candidate. See M. Kolczyński, *Strategie komunikowania politycznego* [Strategies of political communicating], Katowice 2007, p. 207.

At the level of the politicians' appeals, the differences can be observed in only one (the first 1995) debate. Aleksander Kwaśniewski clearly oriented his expressions to the future, which was concurrent with the main line of the electoral strategy he realised (according to the slogan "Let's choose the future", Pol. *Wybierzmy przyszłość*). The President, in turn, referred more often to the past, explaining his decisions to answer the criticism and emphasising his achievements, among other things.

Table 5. Time references of the expressions in the policy frame in the politicians' appeals

	1995 (1)		1995 (2)		2005 (1)		2005 (2)		2007 (1)		2007 (2)		2010 (1)		2010 (2)	
	W	K	W	K	T	LK	T	LK	JK	T	T	K	BK	JK	BK	JK
The Past	13	6	11	12	6	9	10	8	6	4	15	15	11	15	17	16
The Present	8	1	9	6	12	12	8	12	12	8	9	8	15	9	10	5
The Future	5	18	13	12	10	9	22	15	4	3	11	12	21	17	20	20

*W – Lech Wałęsa, K – Aleksander Kwaśniewski, T – Donald Tusk, LK – Lech Kaczyński, JK – Jarosław Kaczyński, BK – Bronisław Komorowski.

Thanks to the analysis of the subjects touched upon within the policy frame in the debates, it was found that at the forefront there are the issues related to the economy and economics, as well as various current questions (the "others" category). The discussed questions refer to the problems, events, of discussions being held in public during the campaign. For example, while discussing the "others" category, the following can be pointed out as particularly important: in the first debate, the theme of reckoning with the People's Republic of Poland (Pol. *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa – PRL*), such as decommunisation and lustration; in the first meeting of Tusk and Lech Kaczyński, the discussion on Andrzej Lepper's accession to the office of the Deputy Marshal of the Sejm; in the debate between the leader of PO and the Prime Minister, the question of the post-election coalition of PO and PiS, and finally, in 2010, the problem of explaining the causes of the Smoleńsk disaster.

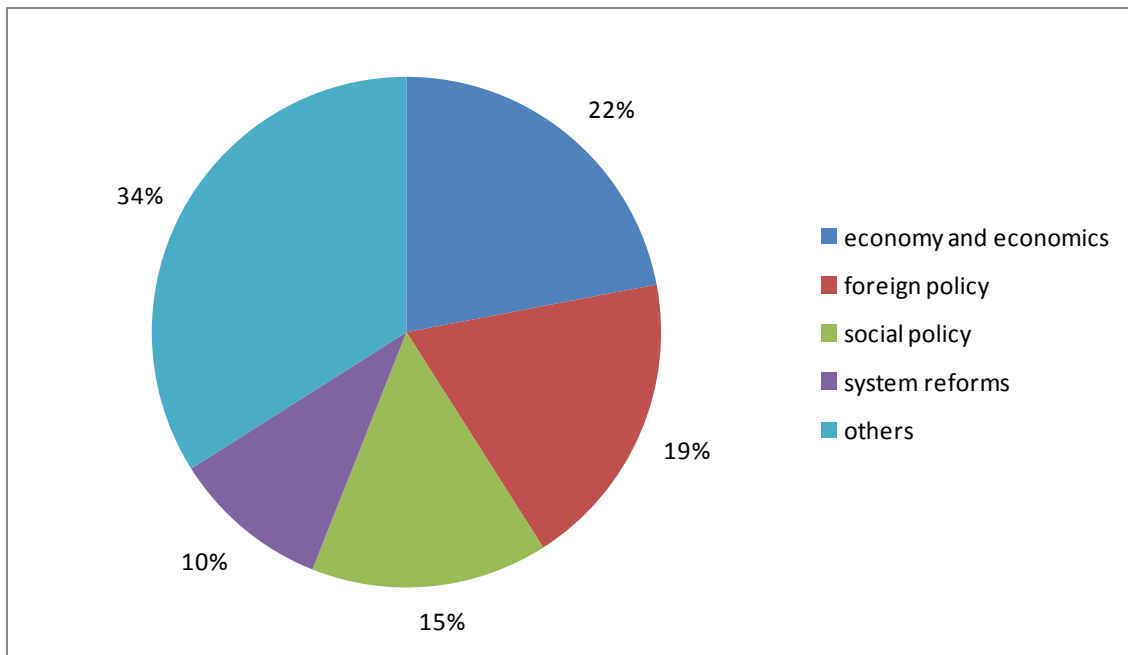


Chart 8. Subject themes of the speeches in the policy frame in debates (totals, percentages)

No larger differences have been found in the type of subjects touched upon by the politicians in debates, which may suggest that the inclusion of specific subjects into the debate, either by the journalists or the politicians, usually caused that both parties referred to them. The appeals in the personal frame pertained, above all, to the political competence (Chart 9), which most often included knowledge (indicated 60 times) and political responsibility (58 times). Honesty was the most often indicated personal trait (52 times).

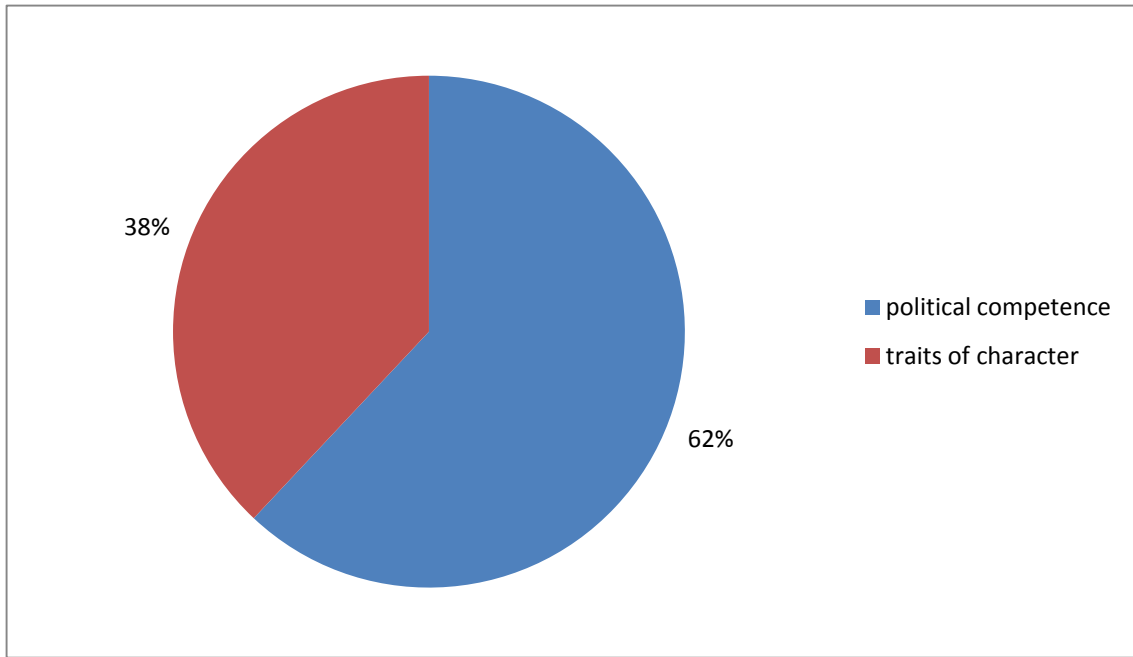


Chart 9. Expressions in the personal frame by the type of trait (sequence total, percentages)

Only in two debates the personal traits were discussed more often than, or as often as, political competence (Chart 10).

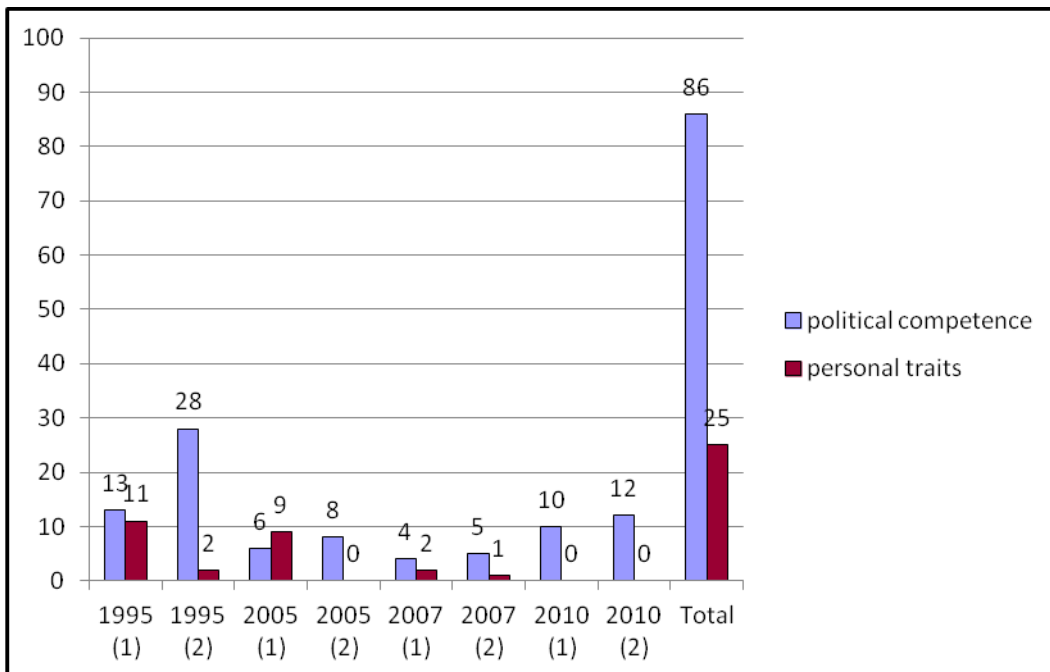


Chart 10. Expressions in the personal frame by the type of trait (figures)

The position of ideological questions may be seen as a confirmation of the pragmatic nature of the competition in Polish campaigns. Even in the case of a dispute between the representatives of two historically different political blocks in 1995 (the conflict between the post-communist and post-Solidarity camps), the ideological differences were not raised significantly more often. Low value of this category is characteristic for the appeals of all politicians in the debates. They most often referred to specific political values, rather isolated, and not joined together into a cohesive system of values. In all debates, a definite system of values was referred to only twenty times (Chart 11).

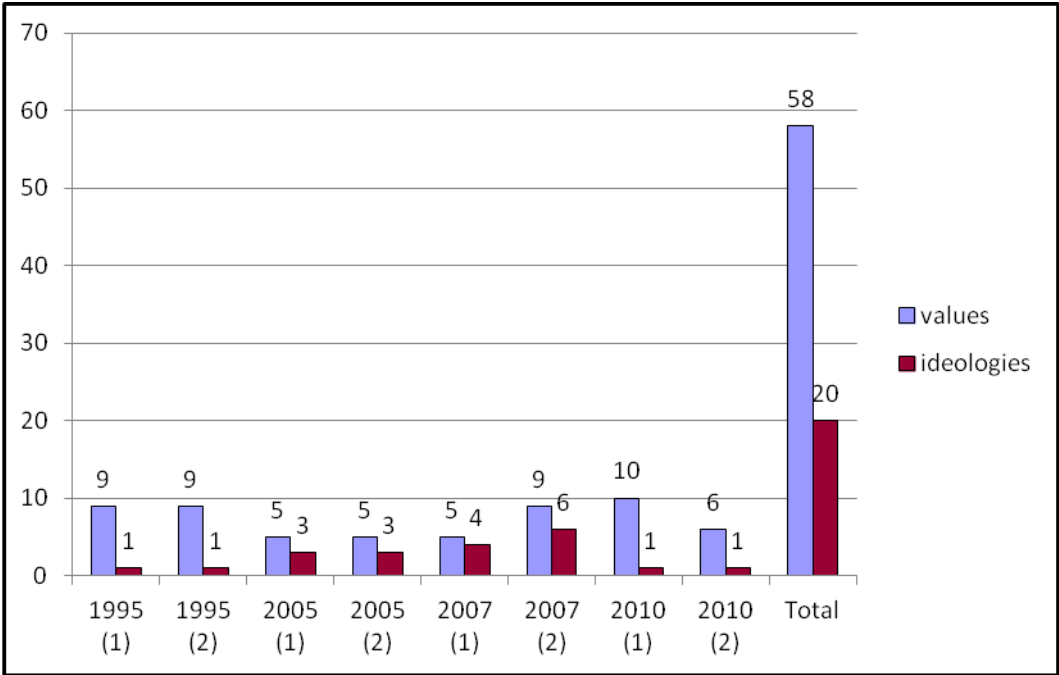


Chart 11. Form of expression in the axiological frame per debate (figures)

Conclusion

After the results of the research have been summed up, it can be said that, in the view of the functional conception of political discourse, the Polish politicians focused in the debates on presenting to the audience positive information about their own electoral offers. Attacks prevailed over acclaims only in the parliamentary debates. The participants only reluctantly decided to exchange arguments, which may be reflected in the proportion of attacks and defences. The defence category at the level of a debate did not exceed the value of 20% of all sequences. In addition, the frequency of defences did not always grow with the increased frequency of attacks.

The debates served as specific channels of advertisement for the candidates in this sense, that through the answers and questions they sent previously designed messages to the audience, both in terms of their preferred subjects (when they initiated them) and when they touched upon the threads included in the thematic agenda by their adversary or the journalists. The electoral offers most often took the form of pragmatic positions and slogans. Policy expressions on the recurrent subjects of the electoral campaign prevailed, enforced to some extent by the thematic segmentation of the debates and current disputes and events. When the personal matters were discussed, political competences held a significant position. The trend to privatise the image in debates was not confirmed. Ideological references were rare, more in the form of caricature labelling of the adversary (Kwaśniewski's communism and post-communism and Tusk's liberalism) than significant difference in the doctrine. The objects of the attacks, usually in like proportions, were policy and personal matters. The tendency to change the content of debates in the content of analysed issues was not observed. The exception here is the increase in the significance of detailed policy proposals but, because of a small number of statements of this kind, any conclusions on this subject should be drawn with caution.

Having discussed the causes of the differences between debates and appeals of the disputants, in the context of basic categories, one has to stress the important role of election strategies of the candidates and small influence of the rules of debates. Politicians, who direct their actions according to the rules of rationality and predictability, strive to work out an optimal model of shaping voting behaviour. They make effort so that the debates do not deviate from the main message of the campaign but efficiently contribute to the creation of their image. Simultaneously, it is worth remarking that the treatment of debates as strategic tools gives rise to tendencies which are contradictory to some extent. On one hand, because of the contextual variability of the environment, individual debates may differ in the aspect of the discourse functions and form of expression. On the other hand, however, because the politicians want to subscribe to the political culture which prefers positive appeals, policy thematic frames, and appeals which are suggestive and persuasively attractive but substantially shallow, the strategic aims determine some repeatability of the format. In the context of the function of debates and the appeals of the politicians, the rules of the debates had no significant influence on the differences between debates. The important role of the journalists cannot be passed over, however, if only for the fact of their participation in the debates. Their influence on the agenda of discussed subjects and the form of the politicians' expression is not to be denied.

