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Maciej HARTLIŃSKI 

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

maciej.hartlinski@uwm.edu.pl

THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF POPULIST PARTY LEADERS IN POLAND

ABSTRACT

The article is the first attempt at describing and comparing leaders of four most important populist groupings in Poland: Samoobrona, PiS, LPR, Kukiz'15. It makes three primary contributions to the literature of the subject. In its theoretical aspect, it shows that the literature concerning the analysed issue is still at the stage of being developed. When it comes to the analysis of data, it was found that populist party leaders played an important political role in Poland. In the case of Samoobrona, PiS and Kukiz'15 they played a key role in the process of origination of their parties, while in PiS they still hold a very strong intra-party position.

Keywords: populism, party leaders, political parties, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Extending their knowledge about populist leaders seems to be one of the essential challenges that researchers of modern politics face. Determining the relationship between populism, leaders and political parties constitutes a key to better understanding of political processes which take place in a growing number of countries. Populist parties are a constant element in a number of party systems in the world. This applies to post-communist states as well as stable democracies. In many cases these parties gain more and more importance and become leading political powers, which in turn leads to their leaders playing important roles on the political scene. This assumes the form of them becoming central figures in their parties, but also holding important positions in the state politics, often becoming members of governments, prime ministers or presidents.

One of the factors which are often mentioned when defining populism are charismatic leaders who pose as the voice of common citizens whose interests are not represented by political elites. Such leaders claim they are able to encourage a wide group of citizens to act in order to introduce radical reforms¹.

Thus it seems valid to analyse political processes addressing the issue of populist political leaders. They play significant roles in national as well as international politics because they often originate from mainstream parties, not only from radical circles functioning on the margins of political life². Moreover, conjoining the issues related to populism and political parties makes it possible to comprehend both phenomena better³, and if the analysis additionally encompasses party leaders, a broader picture can be painted. This is because leaders not only play a prominent role in their parties, but are also influential when it comes to shaping modern democracy, which is in the literature of the subject referred to as “populist democracy”⁴, or “leader democracy”⁵.

The article constitutes the first attempt at analysis which focuses on leaders of populist parties in Poland, as so far researchers have not paid much attention to leaders of such groupings. Literature on the subject of populism in Poland has shown a number of worthwhile aspects of the functioning of populist parties, especially their origin and evolution after 1989⁶. What is more, the research has addressed responses to the

¹ C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, “Populism and Political Leadership”, in R.A.W. Rhodes, P. 't Hart (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, Oxford 2014, pp. 376-388.

² J. de Beus, “Populist Leadership”, in J. Kane, H. Patapan, P. 't Hart (eds), *Dispersed Democratic Leadership: Origins, Dynamics and Implications*, Oxford 2009, pp. 83-103.

³ K.M. Roberts, “Populism and Political Parties”, in C.R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford 2017, p. 287-304.

⁴ P. Mair, “Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy”, in Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Basingstoke 2002, pp. 81-89.

⁵ J. Pakulski, A. Körösenyi, *Toward Leader Democracy*, London 2021.

⁶ K. Jasiewicz, “The New Populism in Poland: The Usual Suspects?”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2008), pp. 7-25; R. Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*, London–New York 2010; S. Van Kessel, *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents or Discontent?*, London 2015;

growing significance of this type of parties⁷, electoral behaviours⁸, or presented public discourse⁹.

The main aim of the article is to analyse the public activity of populist party leaders in Poland. Special attention is paid to their role in the origination of such parties and their participation in holding public positions. The role and significance in the title refers to the precise determination of intra-party position, investigation of election results, as well as the process of election and delegation by parties to key state functions. The considerations presented are from the perspective of individual political groups as well as the political system as a whole.

The research problem focuses on the leaders of populist groups in terms of several aspects. The most important research aspect is the intra-party position of the party leader, in particular the prerogatives related to nominating other members to key positions in the party, as well as the participation and supervision by the leader of other party organs. This will help to identify the role and significance of the leader within party bodies. The second aspect examined is the role of the leader in the emergence of populist parties, and the scope of his or her impact on their formation. In other words, an attempt is made to determine whether it is the leader, and his or her popularity that serves as a trigger and origin in the process of formation of such parties. The third issue investigated is the political activity reflected in election results and holding particular positions within the state administration. The paper analyses to what extent the leaders of populist parties influence public life and which positions within the state administration are occupied by their representatives.

F.C. Bértoa, S. Guerra, "Earthquake or Hurricane? The Rise and Fall of Populist Parties in Poland", in S. Wolinetz, A. Zaslove (eds), *Absorbing the Blow? Populist Parties and Their Impact on Party Systems*, Colchester 2016; D. Kasprowicz, A. Hess, "Populism in Poland – Between Demagoguery and Demophilia", *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, no. 2 (2017), pp. 201-214; B. Stanley, M. Cześnik, "Populism in Poland", in D. Stockemer (ed.), *Populism Around the World: A Comparative Perspective*, Cham 2019, pp. 67-87; M. Hartliński, "Twins in Power. Jarosław Kaczyński and Lech Kaczyński as Leaders of Law and Justice", *Polish Political Science Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2019), pp. 96-106; B. Kosowska-Gąstoł, K. Sobolewska-Myslik, "Do Entrepreneurial Parties Make any Difference for Polish Politics? The Case of the Palikot Movement and Kukiz'15", *Athenaeum*, vol. 63, no. 3 (2019), pp. 92-116; eadem, "New Parties in the Polish Party System 2011-2018: The Palikot Movement, Kukiz'15 and the Modern Party of Ryszard Petru as Genuinely New Parties?", *Central European Journal of Politics*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2019), pp. 6-29; B. Pytlaś, "Party Organisation of PiS in Poland: Between Electoral Rhetoric and Absolutist Practice", *Politics and Governance*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2021), pp. 340-353.

⁷ B. Stanley, "Confrontation by Default and Confrontation by Design: Strategic and Institutional Responses to Poland's Populist Coalition Government", *Democratization*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2016), pp. 263-282.

⁸ Idem, "A New Populist Divide? Correspondences of Supply and Demand in the 2015 Polish Parliamentary Elections", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2019), pp. 17-43.

⁹ P. Przyłęcki, *Populizm w polskiej polityce. Analiza dyskursu polityki*, Warszawa 2012; A. Gwiazda, "Right-Wing Populism and Feminist Politics: The Case of Law and Justice in Poland", *International Political Science Review*, vol. 42, no. 5 (2021), pp. 580-595; M.M. Fijał, "'Poland in Europe, Europe for Poland' National Populist Narratives on the Example of Kukiz'15", in J. Sondel-Cedarmas, F. Berti (eds), *The Right-Wing Critique of Europe Nationalist, Sovereignist and Right-Wing Populist Attitudes to the EU*, London 2022, pp. 115-127.

The author formulates two research hypotheses to the aforementioned research problems. The first one assumes that populist party leaders possess significant intra-party prerogatives, which give their position a special importance within the party. The second hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that populist party leaders play an increasingly important role in public life in the context of the election process, as well as hold key state positions. On the basis of the results of verification of both hypotheses, the role and significance of populist leaders and parties in Polish political landscape over the last 30 years will be determined.

The key focus of the research are the leaders of populist parties in Poland. The considerations presented are based on information from the analysis of the literature on the subject. After a critical analysis of the issue which political groupings in Poland are populist in nature, the following four entities were selected for analysis: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (also PiS, Law and Justice), Samoobrona (Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland), Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families) and Kukiz'15. These political groups were active in different periods and currently have different status. However, a careful collective analysis of all of them allows for a comprehensive insight into the role and significance of populist leaders and political groups in Poland after 1989.

The article combines qualitative content analysis requiring the collection of primary data from party statutes and desk research for collecting secondary data, such as results of elections from the database of the National Electoral Commission.

The article is divided into five sections. In line with generally accepted standards, there is an introduction signalling the main axis of discourse. Then, in the theoretical part, issues related to analysis of relationships between party leaders, their parties and populism are addressed. In the subsequent steps the position of party leaders in populist parties is presented along their role in the origination of such groupings, as well as their political activity as seen from the perspective of public positions they hold and their participation in general elections. The presented analysis is concluded with findings concerning the Polish case study.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF POPULIST PARTY LEADERS

It is difficult to unambiguously anchor theoretical research into populist party leaders as there are very few studies, both theoretical as well as case studies, which directly address this topic. The following paragraphs will hence determine some common points between populism, political parties and leaders.

The number of theoretical and empirical studies on the topic of populism has been growing in the recent years, yet this does not mean that there is no more scope for expanding the knowledge concerning this issue¹⁰. In a broader synthetic approach, these are populist party leaders who are one of the least identified research subjects. There are

¹⁰ C.R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism...*

no direct references to this issue in key publications. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* contains a chapter on relationships between populism and political parties, while *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership* has entries on populism and political leadership. One can thus deem that there is a point of reference for theoretical assumptions and justifying the choice of research scope. As the authors of the above chapters remark, populism should not be analysed in separation from the topic of populist parties¹¹, and in many cases charismatic leaders of particular groupings become essential when defining populism¹². However, it is important to bear in mind one reservation, namely that not always should a charismatic leader be seen as a populist leader, as the latter feature cannot be automatically attributed¹³.

It is often argued that populist party leaders are more important to their parties than it is in the case of leaders of other parties¹⁴. Populist parties need leaders more than other parties as they are poorly institutionalized organizationally due to their characteristics and have limited programme contents. In many cases they also present anti-party rhetoric, which is not conducive to building solid and strong party structures.

It has also been observed that populist party leaders are distinct, and such politicians draw citizens' attention more easily as they can read and express social discontent effectively¹⁵. Such figures become of key importance as a result of their skills of articulating citizens' needs and of winning over voters in a competent manner. Because in its essence populism is based on negating the old order and attempting to establish a new

¹¹ K.M. Roberts, "Populism and Political Parties"..., pp. 287-304.

¹² C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, "Populism and Political Leadership"..., pp. 376-388.

¹³ W. van der Brug, A. Mughan, "Charisma, Leader Effects and Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties", *Party Politics*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2007), pp. 29-51; R.R. Barr, "Populists, Outsiders and Anti-establishment Politics", *Party Politics*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2009), pp. 29-48; D. McDonnell, "Populist Leaders and Coterie Charisma", *Political Studies*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2015), pp. 719-733; T.S. Pappas, "Are Populist Leaders 'Charismatic'? The Evidence from Europe", *Constellations*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2016), pp. 378-390; L. Viviani "A Political Sociology of Populism and Leadership", *Società Mutamento Politica*, vol. 8, no. 15 (2017), pp. 279-303.

¹⁴ P. Taggart, "New Populist Parties in Western Europe", *West European Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1995), pp. 34-51; idem, *Populism*, Buckingham 2000; K. Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2001), pp. 1-22; C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge 2007; D. Albertazzi, D. McDonnell, "Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre", in iidem (eds), *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, New York 2008, pp. 1-11; A. Zaslove, "Here to Stay? Populism as a New Party Type", *European Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2008), pp. 319-336; T. Pauwels, "Measuring Populism: a Quantitative Text Analysis of Party Literature in Belgium", *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2011), p. 97-117; D. McDonnell, "Populist Leaders...", pp. 719-733; M. Kubát, M. Hartliński, "Party Leaders in the Czech Populist Parties and Movements", *Polish Political Science Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2019), pp. 107-119; M. Hartliński, M. Kubát, "Leaders of Parties or Parties of Leaders? The Position of Party Leaders and Models of Their Selection on the Example of Poland and the Czech Republic", in A. Kasińska-Metryka, T. Gajewski (eds), *The Future of Political Leadership in the Digital Age: Neo-Leadership, Image and Influence*, Abingdon 2021, pp. 124-139.

¹⁵ C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, "Populism and Political Leadership"..., pp. 376-388.

order on the political scene, it provides opportunities for creating new leaders and political parties which stand behind them¹⁶.

This leads to a situation in which charismatic leaders become foundations determining the strength of their parties, and this happens independently of their geographical location. They are an important element especially in South American and Asian countries, yet they also function successfully in stable party systems in Western Europe¹⁷.

Directing his attention towards Central and Eastern Europe, Stanley notices that "an analysis of the electoral strength of these parties shows that in most countries of the region non-populist parties remained dominant both electorally and in terms of government formation. There was no general rise in populism over the period, but significant country-level variation"¹⁸. Poland is definitely a country in which populist parties played an important role. They participated in government formation on a number of occasions, their leaders became prime ministers, while their candidates won presidential elections.

Bértoa and Guerra remark that the effect of populist parties on the Polish party system has been visible in a few aspects: competition, polarization, fragmentation and volatility¹⁹. These parties contributed to changing intra-party competition and competition between social and liberal Poland. This in turn led to an increased ideological polarization as well as instability of voters' preferences. Moreover, Stanley notices that gradually increasing social support and winning over power in the case of populist parties are related to changes in the party system and more broadly, in the political system. However, the response of the remaining political actors to the increased impact of populist parties left a lot to be desired and brought a serious lesson to be taken on board²⁰.

Stanley and Cześnik point out that the division of modern populist groupings in Poland indicates that we deal with both "radical populism" as well as "centrist populism"²¹. The former is represented by PiS, a party which addresses centre-rightist voters, yet it aims at total transformation of the political system and replacing the current elites with new politicians. Initially, however, this party belonged to the mainstream and evolved into a populist party. The latter trend is attributed to Kukiz'15, which does not follow any clear ideological declarations and does not have a radical plan to change the political system.

Undertaking research into the role of populist party leaders in the Polish case corresponds to the current academic discourse and allows one to extend the knowledge on

¹⁶ K.M. Roberts, "Populism and Political Parties"..., p. 287-304.

¹⁷ P. Taggart, "New Populist Parties...", pp. 34-51; K. Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept...", pp. 1-22; K. Mizuno, P. Phongpaichit (eds), *Populism in Asia*, Singapore 2009; J. de Beus, "Populist Leadership"..., pp. 83-103.

¹⁸ B. Stanley, "Populism in Central and Eastern Europe", in C.R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*..., pp. 140-160.

¹⁹ F.C. Bértoa, S. Guerra, "Earthquake or Hurricane?...", pp. 223-250.

²⁰ B. Stanley, "Confrontation by Default...", pp. 263-282.

²¹ B. Stanley, M. Cześnik, "Populism in Poland"..., pp. 67-87.

the issue with new research findings. The analysis concerns leaders of four groupings: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Samoobrona), Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) and Kukiz'15. Selecting these groupings was dictated by two premises. On the one hand, they are believed to be populist by some scholars, yet they are not unanimous as to which groupings are populist (Table 1). Taking into account the discrepancies among the analyses performed so far, it was decided to consider all four groupings. On the other hand, the attention will be focused on those which are relevant from the election-oriented perspective.

Table 1. Populist parties in Poland

	PiS	Samoobrona	LPR	Kukiz'15
Bértoa	NO	YES	YES	YES
Stanley	YES	YES	YES	YES
Van Kessel	YES	YES	NO	–

The first step, that is identifying populist parties, was taken on the basis of the research undertaken so far. The main aim of this article, which is identifying the role of populist party leaders in Poland, ought to be preceded with presenting three aspects and additional research questions. For a more in-depth analysis, it is essential to establish to what extent populist party leaders influenced the origination of their parties, what intra-party position they occupy, and what public positions they have held.

THE LEADER'S POSITION IN THE STRUCTURE OF A POPULIST PARTY

Analyzing the position of party leaders in populist parties is the first and essential step in this study, as this will make it possible to show the formal range of their power in a comparative perspective. It is worth mentioning at the beginning that statutes of particular parties differ considerably when it comes to their length and the clarity of particular regulations. The statute of PiS is comprehensive and precisely presents the relationships between particular bodies in the party²². The content of LPR's statute is less extensive, but also contains all the basic elements characteristic of this type of documents²³. In turn, the statutes of Samoobrona²⁴ and K'15²⁵ are sketchy and do not al-

²² Statute of Law and Justice. Consolidated text as amended by Resolution No. 13 / VI / 2021 of the 6th PiS Congress of July 3, 2021.

²³ Statute of the League of Polish Families from 2001.

²⁴ Statute of Self-Defence from 1999.

²⁵ The statute of the political party K'15. Status as of July 1, 2021. Annex to Resolution No. 6 of the General Meeting of Members of the K'15 party of June 16, 2021 on the amendment to the Statute of the K'15 party.

low one to clearly outline the structure of the parties. Moreover, as it has been changed a number of times, its regulations have been questioned by the body registering Polish political parties due to supposed lack of democratic principles.

The first issue to be discussed is a basic one, that is how the leader is selected in a given party. In PiS and LPR he is selected as a one-person body of the party, while in Samoobrona and K'15 the leader is a chairman of a collective body, that is the Chairman of the National Council (Samoobrona) or Chariman of the National Board (K'15). Leaders of the presented parties become members of all central power bodies in their parties due to the position they occupy (Table 2). Moreover, party leaders are not restricted to passive participation in these bodies, as the statutes of their parties grant them the right to convoke or lead key bodies of intra-party power (Table 3).

The chairman of PiS does not only govern the authorities of the party, but also the parliamentary club of the party. This gives him the opportunity of influencing both the internal activity of the party as well as its representatives in the parliament²⁶. In Samoobrona, the party leader does not have any formal prerogatives to impact convoking or leading the Congress. Yet he convokes the National Council of the party and leads the work of the Presidium of the National Council, which grants him a relatively important position²⁷. In this aspect the situation is similar in LPR, as its leader controls the work of the party's General Board and convokes the Presidium of the General Board²⁸.

One of the main prerogatives of party leaders, one which determines the formal range of their power, consists in the privilege to select their own associates. Shaping the human resources policy of the party is an influential tool in leading a party. Leaders of the analysed parties have a variable degree of influence on making motions to appoint particular people to certain posts in their parties (Table 4). Similarly to the previously presented criteria, the Chairman of PiS has here more power than other leaders, as he controls appointing party members to all important positions. One can state that he practically determines the whole of the personal make-up of the party governing bodies. In turn the LPR and K'15 leaders do not have any formal competences that would allow him to shape his circle of associates. In Samoobrona the situation is quite interesting in this aspect of the leader's importance, as according to the statute of the party, it does not feature any bodies typical of other parties, such as deputy chairman, treasurer, secretary, etc. On the one hand, this leads to lack of any possibility of shaping personnel policy of the party. On the other hand, however, this allows the leader to enjoy total freedom in conducting his intra-party activity, as it is not limited by competences of other bodies.

²⁶ Statute of Law and Justice, art. 15.

²⁷ Statute of Self-Defence, art. 12.

²⁸ Statute of the League of Polish Families, art. 40, 42.

Table 2. The leader's membership in other bodies of the party

	PiS	Samoobrona	LPR	K'15
Congress	YES	YES	YES	YES
National Council	–	YES	–	–
Political Council	YES	–	YES	–
Political Committee	YES	–	–	–
General Board	–	–	YES	–
General Board's Bureau	–	–	YES	–
National Council's Bureau	–	YES	–	–

Table 3. The leader's competences in comparison with other bodies of the party

	PiS	Samoobrona	LPR	K'15
Congress	Convoke	NON	NON	NON
National Council	–	Convoke	–	–
Political Council	Lead	–	NON	–
Political Committee	Lead	–	–	–
General Board	–	–	Lead	–
General Board's Bureau	–	–	Convoke	–
National Council's Bureau	–	Lead	–	–

Table 4. The leader's competences as to making motions to appoint party members to various posts in the party

	PiS	S	LPR	K'15
Vice-president	YES	–	NO	–
Treasurer	YES	–	–	–
Secretary of Political Council	YES	–	–	–
Disciplinary Spokesman	YES	–	–	–
Chairman of the Executive Committee	YES	–	–	–
Chairman and members of the Ethic Committee	YES	–	–	–
Secretary of Political Committee	YES	–	–	–
Spokesman	YES	–	–	–
Secretary of General Board	–	–	NO	–
Treasurer of General Board	–	–	NO	–

The undertaken analysis allows one to state that the leader of PiS enjoys a very strong position in the structure of his party. Automatic membership in all most important party bodies, prerogatives to lead their work, as well as other numerous powers concerning appointing party members to particular positions all confirm the proposed thesis. The leader of Samoobrona is a member of the most important party bodies, as well as having a chance to influence their activity. However, lack of other statute-governed positions in the party engenders automatically lack of chances of selecting potential candidates to occupy them. The position of the leader of LPR seems to be weaker. He is a member of other party authorities, yet does not have any competences to indicate candidates or independently designate party members to hold particular positions in the party.

Having in mind the above conclusions, one can say that the leader of PiS is decidedly most strongly based in the structure of the party. The position of the leader of Samoobrona is weaker in this respect. He possesses certain competences, while the imprecise statute of the party in conjunction with his strong personal position allows him to shape the activity of the party and its internal distribution of power quite freely. When it comes to the position in the party, the leader of LPR seems to be the weakest, as his statutory power does not allow him to enjoy full freedom, while the precise statute limits his activities. The leader of Kukiz'15 does not have any prerogatives in relation to the other party bodies, nor is he identified as an independent organ of the political party. In addition, he does not have any competences. The party lacks any statutory regulations concerning the party leader.

THE LEADER AS A FOUNDATION FOR THE ORIGIN OF A POPULIST PARTY

Political parties in Poland which are termed populist originated in various ways²⁹. Each of them came into being in a different moment in history and in different circumstances. The only common denominator, albeit an important one in the context of the

²⁹ A. Krok-Paszkowska, "Samoobrona: The Polish Self-Defence Movement", in P. Kopecky, C. Mudde (eds), *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe*, London 2003, pp. 114-133; J. Kucharczyk, O. Wysocka, "Poland", in G. Mesežnikov, O. Gyárfášová, D. Smilov (eds), *Populist Politics and Liberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe*, Bratislava 2008, pp. 71-100; S.L. de Lange, S. Guerra, "The League of Polish Families between East and West, Past and Present", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2009), pp. 527-549; A. Moroska, K. Zuba, "Two Faces of Polish Populism. The Causes of the Success and Fall of Self Defence and the League of Polish Families", *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2010), pp. 123-148; B. Kosowska-Gąstoł, K. Sobolewska-Mysłik, "New Political Entrepreneurs in Poland", *Czech Journal of Political Science*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2017), pp. 137-157; K. Zuba, "From Fringe to Fringe: the Shift From the Clericalist League of Polish Families to the Anticlericalist Palikot Movement 2001-2015", *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2017), pp. 87-105; K. Jasiecki, "'Conservative Modernization' and the Rise of Law and Justice in Poland", in K. Bluhm, M. Varga (eds), *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*, London 2018, pp. 130-153; B. Kosowska-Gąstoł, K. Sobolewska-Mysłik, "New Parties in the Polish Party System...", pp. 6-29; A. Lipiński, A. Stępińska, "Polish Right-Wing Populism in the

present analysis, is the leader, who is the main initiator of the origin and functioning of three out of four (Samooobrona, PiS, Kukiz'15) presented groupings.

Since the very beginning Andrzej Lepper played the most important role in Samooobrona. His activity started in line with the 1991 protests of farmers who were not able to pay off their loans. Then, on 10 January 1992, Związek Zawodowy Rolnictwa "Samooobrona" (the Agricultural Trade Unions "Self-Defence") was registered, and subsequently Lepper was chosen to become the party chairman. As a consequence of growing protests and the will to strengthen their political position, the activists made a decision to create a political party, which in turn was registered on 12 June 1992 under the name Przymierze "Samooobrona" ("Self-Defence" Alliance), while on 17 January 2001 it changed the name, to become Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland. As the main figure in the organisation, Lepper enjoyed an unquestioned authority among the party members since its very beginning. In no election for the chairman's position did he have any opponent, gaining the support of the Congress delegates in 99-100%. Thus one can state that Samooobrona as a party was fully based on Lepper's leadership.

One of the main foundations of establishing Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in 2001 was the popularity of Lech Kaczyński, who was then the Minister of Justice. Because the party was founded by twin brothers Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński, it is difficult to clearly state which of them played a more important role over time. What can certainly be indicated is, however, that the genesis of the party is inseparably bound to the unquestionable leadership of the two (L. Kaczyński 2001-2003; J. Kaczyński, 2003-present). After President L. Kaczyński's death in 2010, the leadership of the party has been naturally attributed to J. Kaczyński. No one has ever become his opponent in elections for the position of the party's chairman. The only change at this position occurred when Jarosław replaced Lech, who was elected president of Warsaw.

Kukiz'15 also originated following the popularity of its leader, Paweł Kukiz. A rock band leader, it was not political activity that he had been known for. However, in the years preceding his joining the political scene, he supported various politicians during their electoral campaigns. During the presidential elections of 2005, he was a member of the honorary committee supporting Donald Tusk, before parliamentary elections of 2007 supporting Civic Platform. In the subsequent years, his views shifted to the right, and he declared support for Marek Jurek, a right-wing candidate for President of the Republic of Poland in 2010. The first symptom of his individual electoral activity was becoming a member of the regional assembly of Lower Silesia Province in 2014. His political career is based on the image of a political outsider who tries to express the will of the people. It was a breakthrough step for him to stand in presidential elections of 2015. Unexpectedly, his result was relatively good, with 20.8% of votes, which gave him the third position in the electoral run. His next step was to establish an electoral committee of voters Kukiz'15 in order for its candidates to stand in parliamentary elections of 2015. Having succeeded in the elections, in which the committee took 8.81%

of votes and received 42 places in the parliament, Kukiz established an association. In line with his declaration, his grouping is against “particracy” and believes other political parties to be a negative element of political life. That is why his grouping does not aim to evolve into a classic political party. Kukiz later changed his mind and formed a political party, which was registered as K’15 on 31 July 2020.

Among all the presented populist groupings in Poland only LPR was not established on the basis of the popularity of its leader. The party originated in 2001, having its roots in the milieu of Stronnictwo Narodowo-Demokratyczne (the National-Democratic Party) and Stronnictwo Narodowe (the National Party). Establishing the party was related to common ideological declarations, not an attempt to focus public support on a popular leader.

That is why it is legitimate to state that in the case of three out of four populist parties in Poland, the party leader was the main initiator of the party origin. What is more, he was the main link bringing together all party members, while his declarations and views were equated with those of the party. Pursuant to this, one can propose a thesis that the genesis and evolution of populist groupings in Poland are based on leaders and they originated following their leaders’ popularity.

Hence, the first research hypothesis was not corroborated. Leaders of populist parties do not have numerous competences granted to them by the party statute. Only the leader of PiS has extensive prerogatives, precisely described by the statute. In the remaining parties under review, the official position of the leader is weak and negligible.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF POPULIST PARTIES AND THEIR LEADERS

Analysing individual political pathways of the leaders more thoroughly, apart from their role in establishing populist groupings, one can decidedly state that they have left a clear mark on Polish politics. They held the most important positions in the country, such as President of the Republic of Poland or Prime Minister. They were government members, deputy speakers of the Sejm or won seat in regional assemblies of provinces (Table 5).

In five out of seven cases, populist parties were not their first choice. Apart from Kukiz and L. Kaczyński, all of them had before been members of other parties. In fact, only Kukiz can be seen as a person who has never belonged to any political party. He is the only leader who entered politics on the national level without experience and straight away became successful. Although L. Kaczyński formally was not a member of Porozumienie Centrum (Centre Agreement), he played a key role in establishing this party together with his brother, and he also stood in elections representing this party.

Four leaders were politically active already at the beginning of the 1980s. Lepper as the only one among them belonged to PZPR (the Polish United Workers’ Party). In turn, the Kaczyński brothers and Kotlinowski were members of the NSZZ Solidarność (Independent Self-governing Labour Union “Solidarity”). They were thus conscious of political divisions, they were part of democratic opposition and had participated in political life many years before the breakthrough of 1989.

Table 5. Public posts held by populist party leaders in Poland

Political party	Leader	Previous party	President	Government	Member of Parliament	Local government	Other
Samoobrona	Lepper	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza		Deputy Prime Minister (2006-2007) Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (2006-2007)	MP (2001-2005; 2005-2007) Deputy Speaker of the Sejm (2001; 2005-2006)	Regional Assembly (1998-2001)	
	L. Kaczyński	No	President of the Republic of Poland (2005-2010)	Minister of Justice (2000-2001)	Senator (1989-1991) MP (1991-1993)	The Mayor of the City of Warsaw (2002-2005)	President of the Supreme Audit Office (1992-1995)
LPR	J. Kaczyński	Porozumienie Centrum		Prime Minister (2006-2007) Deputy Prime Minister (2020-)	Senator (1989-1991) MP (1991-1993; 1997-)		
	Kotlinowski	Stronnictwo Narodowe			MP (2001-2005; 2005-2007) Deputy Speaker of the Sejm (2005-2006)		Judge at the Constitutional Court (2006-2015)
	Giertych	Stronnictwo Narodowe; Stronnictwo Narodowo--Demokratyczne		Deputy Prime Minister (2006-2007) Minister of National Education (2006-2007)	MP (2001-2005; 2005-2007)		
K'15	Balazak	Stronnictwo Narodowe			MP (2005-2007)	Regional Assembly (2002-2005)	
	Kukiz	No			MP (2015-)	Regional Assembly (2014-2015)	

It is worth emphasizing that populist party leaders held the most important posts in the country. L. Kaczyński was President of the Republic of Poland (2005-2010), while J. Kaczyński was Prime Minister (2006-2007). There was a period in Poland's history in which two most important public posts were held not only by representatives of the same populist party, but also by twin brothers.

All populist party leaders managed to win a place in the parliament. Although both previous as well as subsequent attempts resulted in their failure, in the years 2001-2007 populist groupings enjoyed considerable support. In this period all the current leaders took a seat in the Sejm. J. Kaczyński is most experienced in this respect as he became an MP in 1989 and has held his seat till this day, with only one break in the years 1993-1997. Together with L. Kaczyński, he is an example of a person who has spent all his adult life bound to politics.

Interestingly, Lepper, Bałażak and Kukiz had their first successful run in the elections to win a seat in the regional assembly. This suggests that such a career pathway, starting from lower rungs in the political ladder, also seems reasonable and can lead to subsequent success at higher levels of state administration.

Switching from the individual to the party-oriented perspective, it can be observed that the activity of the analysed populist groupings commenced in 1992 in line with the establishment of Samoobrona. In 2019, all four groupings formally still exist, yet only PiS and Kukiz'15 are in fact active and make a real impact on the political scene in Poland. Samoobrona and LPR neither managed to meet the organizational requirements which conditioned formal registration of lists of candidates in Sejm elections in 2015 nor are visible in public debate. Thus it appears that they are weak when it comes to their organizational potential, which means they are not relevant in elections and are on the margins of Polish political life.

Populist parties in Poland enjoyed the most fruitful period in their electoral activity in the years 2001-2007, when three of them had their representatives in the Sejm (Table 6), and their results in elections to the Sejm and the European Parliament increased (Figure 1). Social support and active functioning of the three political parties show that year 2005 has so far been a peak of populist parties' activity in Poland.

The 2015 and 2019 parliamentary elections confirmed that populist groupings have a potential to win electoral support of their voters³⁰. The electoral victory of PiS

³⁰ Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 23 września 1993 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 19 września 1993 r. (M.P. 1993 nr 50 poz. 470); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 26 września 2001 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 23 września 2001 r. (Dz.U. 2001 nr 109 poz. 1186); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 15 czerwca 2004 r. o wynikach wyborów posłów do Parlamentu Europejskiego przeprowadzonych w dniu 13 czerwca 2004 r. (Dz.U. 2004 nr 137 poz. 1460); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 27 września 2005 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 25 września 2005 r. (Dz.U. 2005 nr 195 poz. 1626); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 23 października 2007 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 21 października 2007 r. (Dz.U. 2007 nr 198 poz. 1438); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 8 czerwca 2009 r. o wynikach wyborów posłów do Parlamentu Europejskiego

brought about the opportunity for this party to form a government without the need for support of other parties, which occurred for the first time since 1989. Additionally, the fact that Kukiz'15 was established and introduced its representatives into the Sejm also confirms the prosperity of populist groupings in Poland.

Figure 1. The number of votes cast for populist groupings in general elections (%)

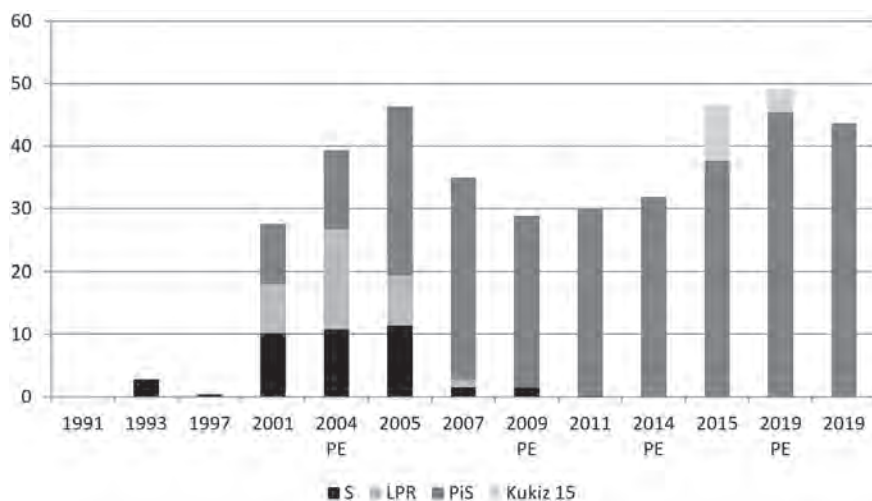


Table 6. The number of seats won by populist parties in the Sejm elections

	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
PiS				44	155	166	157	235	235
Samoobrona		0	0	53	56	0	0		
LPR				38	34	0			
Kukiz'15								42	
Total	0	0	0	135	245	166	157	277	235

przeprowadzonych w dniu 7 czerwca 2009 r. (Dz.U. 2009 nr 88 poz. 729); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 11 października 2011 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 9 października 2011 r. (Dz.U. 2011 nr 218 poz. 1294); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 26 maja 2014 r. o wynikach wyborów posłów do Parlamentu Europejskiego przeprowadzonych w dniu 25 maja 2014 r. (Dz.U. 2014 poz. 692); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 27 października 2015 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 25 października 2015 r. (Dz.U. 2015 poz. 1731); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 27 maja 2019 r. o wynikach wyborów posłów do Parlamentu Europejskiego przeprowadzonych w dniu 26 maja 2019 r. (Dz.U. 2019 poz. 989); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 14 października 2019 r. o wynikach wyborów do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej przeprowadzonych w dniu 13 października 2019 r. (Dz.U. 2019 poz. 1955).

As a result of parliamentary elections, populist parties have formed the Polish government five times – two times in the 2005-2007 term and at least two times in the 2015-2023 term. It is worth recalling that cooperation in the coalition government in the years 2006-2007 had a stormy conclusion and preterm elections had to be held.

At its first attempt, after the victorious parliamentary elections of 2005, PiS failed to form a coalition government with PO, and it was forced to form a minority government instead. As a consequence of parliamentary crisis related to the budget bill in February 2006, the leaders of three parties: Jarosław Kaczyński (PiS), Roman Giertych (LPR) and Andrzej Lepper (Samoobrona RP) signed the so called stability pact, which was to make it possible to establish a minority government. On 27 April 2006, PiS signed a coalition agreement with Samoobrona and MPs gathered in Narodowe Koło Parlamentarne (National Parliamentary Circle). The next week saw LPR joining the coalition on 5 May 2006. Thanks to such a solution, it was possible to secure a parliamentary majority. As a consequence, this can be seen as the beginning of the process leading to forming the second government in which populist parties participated. The second government formed by populist parties was constituted after a speech by Jarosław Kaczyński on 19 July 2006. Then the government formed by three populist groupings was granted a vote of confidence in the Polish Sejm. However, as a result of numerous conflicts, mainly in the relationships between PiS and Samoobrona, the Sejm decided on 7 September 2007 to shorten its term. Thereby Jarosław Kaczyński requested a dissolution of his government on 5 November 2007, which ended the rule of PiS. The third government with populist parties was formed in 2015, when PiS won the elections, having achieved a result which allowed the party to have a parliamentary majority on its own, and Beata Szydło became prime minister (2015-2017). During the same term, PiS decided to reconstruct the government and Mateusz Morawiecki became new prime minister (2017-), which allows one to qualify his government as the fifth one created by populist parties.

All the four prime ministers coming from populist parties represented PiS. Among them, only J. Kaczyński was the party leader. The remaining prime ministers were not the most important politicians of the party. One can say that these were unexpected candidates as they had not been recognizable for the public before becoming prime ministers. The tactics of not proposing party leaders as candidates for the position of prime minister is not typical only of populist parties, as it is characteristic of Polish politics in general.

Another sign of electoral activity is competing for the highest post in the state administration. Starting from 1995, populist parties as well as their leaders have taken active part in presidential elections. Individually, Lepper was the most active among them. However, these were PiS candidates who succeeded three times, winning elections and taking the top position in the country. In the case of Kukiz, his result in presidential elections contributed to his grouping appearing on the political scene³¹.

³¹ Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 7 listopada 1995 r. o wynikach głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zarządzonych na dzień 5 listopada 1995 r. (Dz.U. 1995 nr 126 poz. 604); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 9 października

Table 7. Support for populist parties' candidates in elections for President of the Republic of Poland

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Lepper		1,32	3,05	15,11	1,28		
L. Kaczyński				33,10 – I round			
				54,04 – II round			
J. Kaczyński					36,46 – I round		
					46,99 – II round		
Duda						34,76 – I round	43,50 – I round
						51,55 – II round	51,30 – II round
Kukiz						20,80	

Andrzej Lepper took part in 4 presidential elections, achieving the highest result in 2005, when he was third with 15.1% of votes. In the remaining cases, he did not win any considerable support (1995 – 1.3%; 2000 – 3.1%; 2010 – 1.3%). Judging by the number of votes he received, it could be said that he was not successful standing in these elections. However, systematic participation in political life allowed him to maintain his relationship with voters and keep the media interest.

From the very beginning of its activity, PiS has had candidates in presidential elections. These were Lech Kaczyński (2005), Jarosław Kaczyński (2010) and Andrzej

2000 r. o wynikach głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zarządzonych na dzień 8 października 2000 r. (Dz.U. 2000 nr 85 poz. 952); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 10 października 2005 r. o wynikach głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zarządzonych na dzień 9 października 2005 r. (Dz.U. 2005 nr 200 poz. 1647); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 24 października 2005 r. o wynikach ponownego głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Dz.U. 2005 nr 208 poz. 1739); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 21 czerwca 2010 r. o wynikach głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zarządzonych na dzień 20 czerwca 2010 r. (Dz.U. 2010 nr 113 poz. 746); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 5 lipca 2010 r. o wynikach ponownego głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Dz.U. 2010 nr 122 poz. 828); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z 11 maja 2015 r. o wynikach głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zarządzonych na dzień 10 maja 2015 r. (Dz.U. 2015 poz. 650); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 25 maja 2015 r. o wynikach ponownego głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Dz.U. 2015 poz. 725); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 30 czerwca 2020 r. o wynikach głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zarządzonych na dzień 28 czerwca 2020 r. (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 1163); Obwieszczenie Państwowej Komisji Wyborczej z dnia 13 lipca 2020 r. o wynikach ponownego głosowania i wyniku wyborów Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Dz.U. 2020 poz. 1238).

Duda (2015, 2020). In the first and third case, standing in the election was concluded with success, that is taking the position of President of the Republic of Poland. One can thus state that candidates of a political party labelled as populist have so far become Polish President three times.

As a presidential candidate in 2015, Kukiz unexpectedly achieved a very good result, taking the third place in the presidential run with 20.8%. This success unmistakably contributed to his further political activity and him building a wider political movement.

Leaders of LPR as well as other politicians of this party have never taken part in presidential elections. In 2005, LPR announced that Maciej Giertych would be its candidate, yet ultimately he resigned from standing in presidential elections. In 2010, 2015 and 2020 the party did not declare that their candidates would participate in presidential elections.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that the second research hypothesis was corroborated. It is evident that leaders of political parties play an increasingly important role in public life in the context of the election process, as well as in institutional terms, holding important positions within the state administration. They systematically win significant support in parliamentary elections. They form governments with party leaders holding positions of prime minister and ministers. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that candidates successfully compete for the office of the President of the Republic of Poland.

CONCLUSIONS

A review of the literature on the subject of relationships between populism, political parties and their leaders shows that this aspect has not been yet thoroughly investigated. The analysis of the title issue proved that theoretical foundations for the research into populist party leaders are sparse and require constant development. The author hopes that the present study will prove useful in extending knowledge on the presented issue and will become instrumental in determining premises for further theoretical and practical analyses.

The examples of PiS and Samoobrona show that populist parties provide an opportunity for their leader to have a strong position. Both leaders enjoy freedom and have considerable chances of shaping the intra-party life. Yet in PiS, the statutory position of the leader is related to numerous prerogatives laid down in the extensive and detailed statute. In the case of Samoobrona, the situation is quite the opposite, as its statute is short and imprecise. It grants some powers to the leader, yet on the other hand there are no other significant bodies that could have impact on the intra-party activity, which does not compensate for the leader's range of power, in fact giving him total freedom.

Populist groupings in Poland, with the exception of LPR, originated thanks to the popularity and activity of their leaders. Both Samoobrona as well as PiS and Kukiz'15 attribute their genesis to the political activity and will to intensify political undertakings

of Lepper, Kaczyński and Kukiz. It is also worth mentioning that in the case of these groupings, no real changes in leadership occurred. In this sense, they can be said to be parties governed by bossism.

Leaders of populist parties in Poland have so far played an important role in public life. PiS is a proof that a populist party, its leaders and candidates can become constant elements in political life of a country and can occupy the highest public posts for many years. Leaders of Samoobrona and LPR also held important public positions at the time of their prosperity, yet it can be assumed that their participation in public life has been periodical. The same conclusion seems to be likely when one analyses the position of Kukiz'15 on the political scene at present.

The greatest differences can be seen when analysing particular populist party leaders in Poland. The course of their careers, life and political experience, public image and behaviours show that they are dramatically different politicians. It would be difficult to find some common denominator for Lepper, Kaczyński, Giertych and Kukiz, as these politicians are truly diverse political figures.

Subsequent research initiatives will be able to point out how much the conclusions proposed here are convergent with those that can be drawn for other countries, including post-communist ones in Central and Eastern Europe and stable democracies. It seems justified to continue and intensify empirical comparative studies on populist party leaders referring to new examples in order to gain a broader perspective for further conclusions. It would be advisable to compare the leaders of populist parties with those of non-populist parties, through an in-depth analysis of intra-party positions or electoral competition. Such analysis would be extremely valuable both in the context of the Polish political landscape, as well as in the international comparative approach.

To conclude, it can be observed that the leaders of populist parties differ in terms of each of the analysed aspects, similarly to the leaders of non-populist parties. The juxtaposition populist leaders vs non-populist leaders, therefore, does not seem appropriate in terms of analysing intra-party or electoral position. However, when considering the former as a whole, it can be concluded that they are gaining importance in Polish public life. The presented considerations are only a small step towards a better understanding of the issue of populist leaders and parties.

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Maciej HARTLIŃSKI, PhD, associate professor at the Institute of Political Science, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. His research focuses on political parties and political leadership. Head of the project Party Leaders Database (party-leaders.eu). In 2013 he launched the „Political Leadership” research group of the Polish Political Science Association. He was in charge of and participated in a considerable number of international research projects on party leadership. He has held visiting positions at University of Oxford, Indiana University – Bloomington, Ghent University and many other European universities.