



Communicating Values in Political Campaigns: An Analysis of Polish Candidates' Rhetoric in the 2024 European Parliament Elections

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ABSTRACT

This article is grounded in the hypothesis that political communication is fundamentally shaped by values. Whether acknowledged or not, individuals are consistently situated within a framework of values. The central research questions for this study relate to the purpose, development, and communicative functions of values. To address these, we conduct an analysis of the philosophical and communicative dimensions of values in the pre-election messages for the 2024 European Parliament elections in Poland, focusing on leading representatives (from Lesser Poland) of the major Polish political parties.

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Introduction

All politicians strive for the well-being of their citizens, legitimising themselves with truth and freedom, and seeking to ensure a life for all of peace and prosperity. They promise development, progress and justice, appealing to love and the sacred in doing so. If they do not speak about these values directly, they indirectly refer to them with rhetorical figures in language, or through symbols in their campaign imagery. In contrast, their substantive message tends to hit on injustice, misery, neglect of the good, loss of trust, lies or scams. The closer we get to the election campaign, the richer this messaging becomes.

Due to the complexity of the topic, this study is interdisciplinary. The paper takes a polytollingistic (Reisigl, 2011) approach, juxtaposed by philosophy and media studies. Specifically, we set the context of communicative analysis in philosophy. We first clarify the concept of values, and further examine whether politicians genuinely uphold the values they reference in their discourse. Then, we analyse the images they present in an attempt to show the political use of the symbols applied as they seek to appeal to the minds of the voters. Finally, we conduct a linguistic analysis of politicians' pre-election statements, aiming to identify the values embedded in the language they use.

What should be emphasized in the political discourse studied here is the fact that politicians today are communicating with their voters in an ever more digital format: "Digi-

tal technology has transformed the electoral processes across the world" (Dad&Khan, 2023). The authors express their conviction that communicating political content on social media is an unquestionable response to a very dynamically changing reality, which opens democratic discourse to new possibilities – in the context of election campaigns, giving a chance for smaller, unaffiliated politicians to exist. This article covers only large political groups in Poland, but analysis of their social media accounts has allowed the authors to verify the varying ways they employ to communicate their values. The authors note that social media plays a key role in the political communication of values, offering a unique platform where candidates, parties, and movements can formulate their policies to engage with and mobilize citizens. Unlike traditional media, social media facilitates direct and interactive communication, allowing political actors to establish emotional connections with voters by emphasizing shared beliefs and ideals.

What Are "Values", and Are They Really Present in Politics?

The political struggle for power, and the vote of the electorate in discursive terms, revolves around the ability to present a compelling vision of the world and to persuade others to embrace it. To do so, they use a variety of communication and persuasive tools, ranging from substantive to discrediting their political opponents. The ability to use these in combination with political

marketing fosters popularity. Thus, it is clear that politics, especially in the media age, is not only about the content of the message. This has already been noted by the Sophists. However, it should be remembered that the purpose of the Sophists' practical conclusions was not to establish objective norms, grounded in objective truth (Reale, 2008), the ancient teachers wanted to teach how to hold public office, wield power and convince communities of their views.

However, no matter what type of political message it is, what form it takes, or what its actual purpose is, it always carries a message that refers to some vision of good, be it material, economic, cultural, or social. After all, the political space is the space of human affairs, the space of human encounters. For this reason, it is also the space of an agathological horizon (Tischner, 1998), in which it is always about the cause of the concrete human being and about their quality of life. Thus, it simultaneously functions as a space for hierarchizing reality – a space of values. It must be recognized that political communication, which involves managing and prioritizing the realities of people's lives, is inherently communication based on values (Bednarska, 2020); it is communication in which the cause of the people is at stake, in which politicians compete for a better vision of the world, in which they juggle important and more important issues – in the end, referring to values either willingly or unwillingly. However, the question we wish to address in this article is what these values represent in the political game.

Are they a struggle for truth, goodness and justice, or are they in fact just a sophistic endeavour? The dispute between Socrates, and then Plato, and the Sophists was a dispute not only about truth, but about values in general. This is what wisdom was for Socrates: an awareness of the existence of values, of general, universal, eternal entities, founding the quality of the world. For the Sophists, neither truth nor values had the dimension and status of being absolute, but were thought of as relative. Therefore, the goal of rhetoric, of public debate for Socrates, was truth. For the Sophists, on the other hand, the goal was to convince their opponent(s) of their rationale, no matter the truth or the form it takes.

What are values? Let us not succumb to the illusion that they are norms from which we choose, so that, by our own efforts, we can shape the world. Indeed, this is a fairly common perception today, one which is as popular as it is harmful, leading to a dangerously subjective view of the world. In the essence of values there is a directly opposite logic: it is not people who shape them, but they which shape people. Values guide and refine the world. Simply stating what they are is insufficient, as any descriptions or definitions fall short of capturing the essence of their existence. The most critical issue lies in understanding the context of values, to grasp their metaphysical nature and uncover their true role in the real world. In this case, that world is politics. Thus, the task is to identify values in political communication and assess their actual or postulated status. Are they a discovery of

truth, as per Socrates, or a political tool, as per the Sophists?

By seeing the values in the reality in which we live, we are able to say where the values lay. "Descriptions can be multiplied, they can be made more and more dramatic, more concrete, but one thing will keep repeating: the human world contains something that is good, something that is bad, and something that is better, worse, worst. Our world is, to some unspecified extent, a hierarchically ordered world. Things, objects, people are arranged for us in it according to a more or less permanent hierarchical order. We do not know exactly what is evil and what is good; we cannot draw a precise line between one and the other, but we are nevertheless unable to escape some kind of hierarchy" (Tischner, 2002). As in Plato's cave metaphor, the sun shines; there is a goodness that we all desire and towards which we move. It is a light, an authentic good. In the cave, however, the light of fire burns, an imitation of real light, and it enables the shadows of real being to be (Platon, *trans.* 2018). For Plato, one of the greatest philosophers in history, politics appears as an appealing world, albeit an inaccessible one due to corruption and disorder (Coplestone, 1998). Did Plato himself recognise the impossibility of values in political life?

We are now faced with the need to acknowledge that the world of politics is one of persuasion, posturing, power agitation, tactics and argumentative dexterity. And yet it is a world that is still human and built on people, one which seems to work for the

people, and thus it cannot exist as a separate entity from values. What then is the situation of values in the world of politics? Are there any? What are they? As Hans Joas, a sociologist who addresses the topic of values, notes, they now play a large role in political rhetoric, if only to deny a political opponent's moral qualities or to emphasize how trustworthy one's own government is (Joas, 2009). Therefore, it is useful to look at what the political campaign seems to convey about the candidates' personalities and personal values, analyzing which issues have been focused on and which have been overlooked (Soto de la Cruz *et al.*, 2023)

In order to illustrate the imaginary and linguistic way in which politicians use values as a bargaining tool in the European Parliament elections, their social media activity was analysed prior to the European Parliament elections in 2024.

The Imaginarium of Values in Politics

Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, in his *Philosophy of Images*, describes the imaginary realm of politics as follows: "The ethical issue concerning the individual's relationship with themselves is inseparably linked to the political issue, which concerns the mutual relations between people in a broadly understood society. The sphere of social and political life is a particularly instructive example of the place occupied by the imaginary in collective life. (...) Images thus constantly intermingle with normative discourse and influence both common beliefs and actions. (...) Imag-

es contribute to the creation of community bonds, to the formation of the identity of a group united by the rule of law, especially in the form of national identification, as well as to the legitimization of the very figure of power” (Wunenburger, 2011).

Cicero and Epictetus wrote about the use of images in the political game. Rhetoricians mainly focused on the ability of images to build pathos, that is, emotional impact. At that time, language was the most accessible code, and, as a result, the recommendations of rhetoric teachers focused on crafting language that shaped mental images. Moreover, they recommended using images to reconstruct imaginaries as a more effective means of convincing others of one’s views. This gave rise to visual narratives that persuaded others of a particular way of seeing the world or the speaker themselves. Values were linked to these narratives as a channel of communication with the audience, as an element of speech utilizing their preferential thinking, based on the implication that “if the speaker/presenter represents my values, then they are worth listening to, and what they say is correct.” This mechanism renders values a rhetorical construct, a form of bargaining currency. Their connection to a particular candidate can be assessed by comparing their actions with media representations. However, this assumption requires separate research.

This part of the article summarises visual analyses of the social media profiles of leading party politicians running for the European Parliament: Konfederacja Wolność i

Niepodległość (Confederation Liberty and Independence party), Konrad Berkowicz; Trzecia Droga (Third Way party), Adam Jarubas; Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition party), Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz; Lewica (Left party), Andrzej Szejna; and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice party), Beata Szydło.

The study aims to answer the questions: what values do politicians most often visualize so as to negotiate support, and does the content of individual candidates differ in the values they present?

The research process considered the images created by the politicians that visualise values so as to negotiate support. The image here is understood as a representation composed of all its elements, as a phenomenon. The material basis of the image is a digital representation. The analyses focus on individual images and their comparison both by the criterion of a given politician, and by comparing all. The research material comes from three digital platforms: Facebook, Instagram and X (previous Twitter).

The conclusions are as follows:

1. Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość (Confederation Liberty and Independence party): Konrad Berkowicz

On Konrad Berkowicz’s profile, there are images – films and photographs – showing soldiers on the Polish-Belarusian border, which clearly aim to evoke a sense of threat to the homeland. The candidate refers to the values of the homeland and freedom, and seeks to convince the electorate that choosing Berkowicz guarantees the protection of the

country. In this context, images with elements of the Polish flag emphasize patriotism as the main value.



Fig. 1.



Fig.2.

There are also images on the candidate's profile where Berkowicz is trying cream

cakes, standing in the market square in Wadowice. This refers to the figure of John Paul II, indicating an appeal to religious values and thus to the electorate who identify with this value.

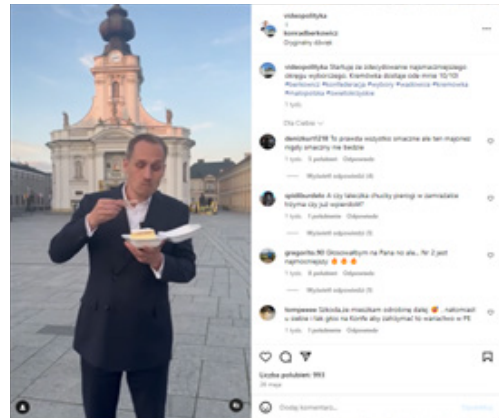


Fig. 3.

Another image in the set of imaginaries shows the intertwined hands of Berkowicz, his wife and child, referring to the value of family.



Fig. 4.

In most images, Berkowicz appears alone, making gestures of strength and victory; oth-

er figures in the images are usually distant. These are images of struggle, distance, and building the position of a leader.

2. Trzecia Droga (Third Way party): Adam Jarubas

Adam Jarubas creates contrasting images to those built by Berkowicz. The posts mainly contain images of collective heroes, gestures of handshakes, and smiles. These are photographs from meetings where there is usually a large group of people. However, the candidate is photographed from a distance, and thus is rarely shown in the foreground. Jarubas walks in a crowd of miners, expressing the value of tradition and identity; he is at a folk fest promoting the value of locality, small settlements. A series of similar images visualise the values of community, understanding, and family. The framed figures usually stand close to each other, in natural positions. Images show him as an “ordinary person,” living and valuing day-to-day affairs, and symbolising the candidate as “one of the crowd,” demonstrating the value of working for the community. Interestingly, Jarubas often posts photos on his profiles where the participants of the meetings are in the foreground, and he himself appears in the background.

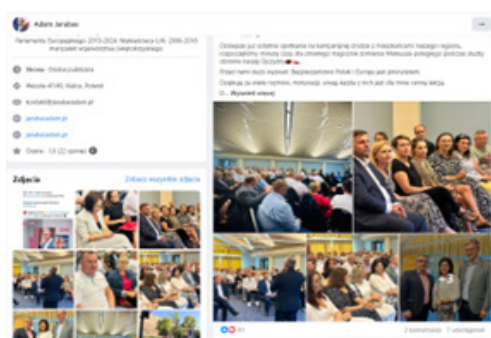


Fig. 5.

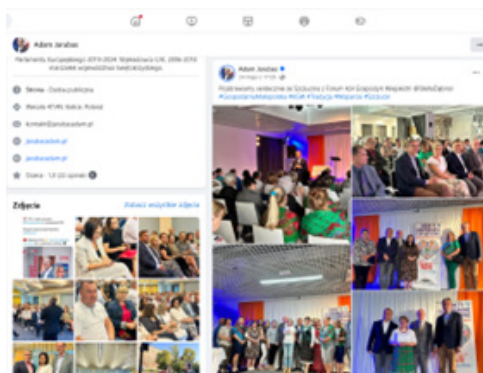


Fig. 6.

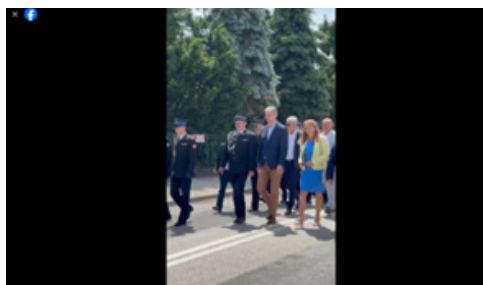


Fig. 7.

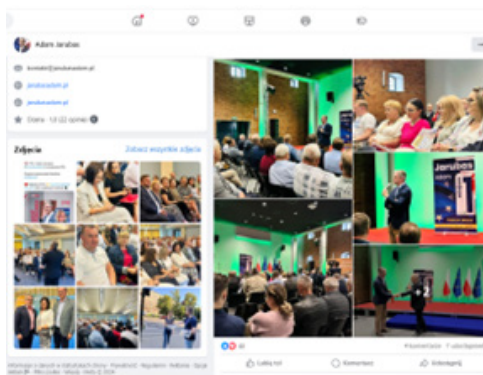


Fig. 8.

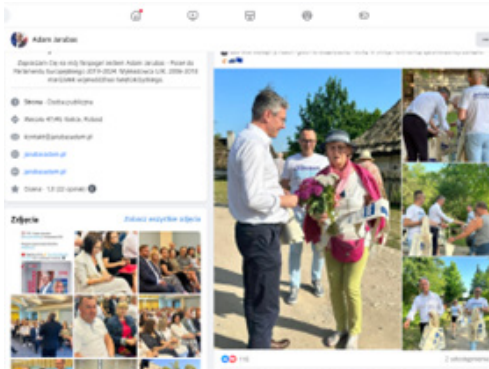


Fig. 9.

3. Koalicja Obywatelska (Civic Coalition party): Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz

Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz creates his imaginary somewhat differently. Three main images convey the values with which the candidate identifies or, conversely, through which he seeks to convince the audience to support his candidacy. This is an image in a double frame, i.e., two figures – a priest in a cassock and Sienkiewicz, who are slightly turned towards each other. The photo documents a visit to the Diocesan Museum in Sandomierz. This image portrays the value of faith, and appeals to those among the electorate supporting the Catholic Church.



Fig. 10.

Another image shows the candidate sitting on the steps of the

Meanwhile, an image of a visit to an art gallery emphasizes its value.

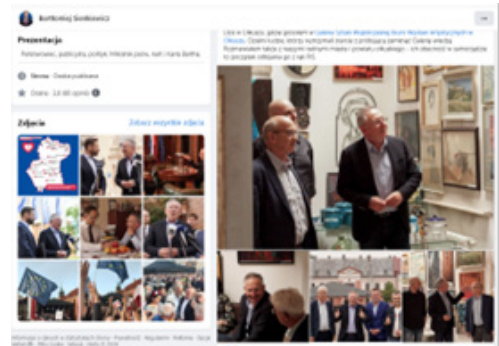


Fig. 11.

4. Lewica (Left party): Andrzej Szejna

Andrzej Szejna often showcases young people, a family with a child, a residential block, a father with a child planting a tree, and, interestingly, like Berkowicz, tasting a cream cake in the market square in Wadowice. The values on which he bases his message are family, concern for young people and their future, care for nature, and safety and tradition.

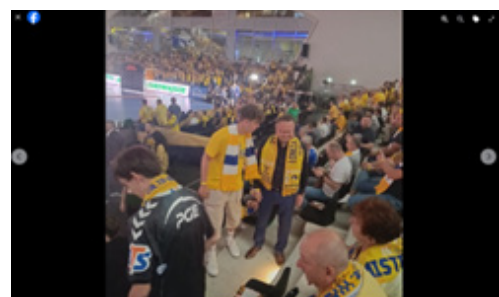


Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.

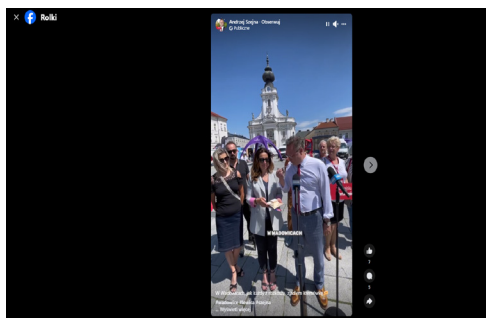


Fig. 16.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.

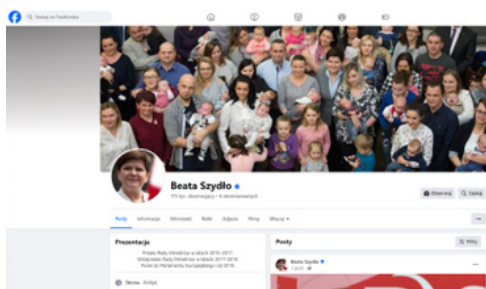


Fig. 17.

5. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice party): Beata Szydło

In the candidate's imaginaries, the colours white and red appear, referring to patriotic values. Szydło mainly creates images of a collective of women of different ages, with her positioned in the foreground. Other characters in her short films always stand behind her. In such visual representations, the value of women and their voice in political life is visible, alongside images of solidarity, community, and understanding.

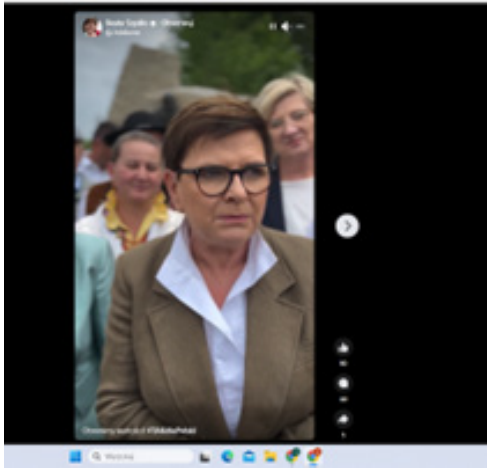


Fig. 18.



Fig. 20.

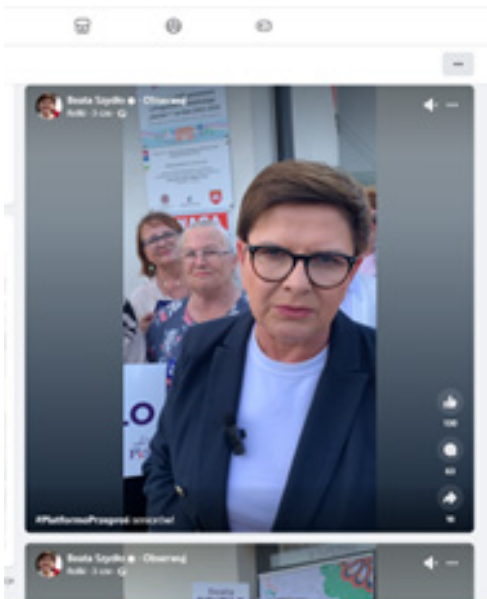


Fig. 19

In summary, each of the studied politicians builds their own imaginaries based on their preferred values, or uses these values as a persuasive tool to gain the support of a specific group of voters. In this perspective, values transform into a form of bargaining currency.

The Language of Values and Politicians

Social media facilitates the creation of virtual communities, in which shared values strengthen a sense of belonging. By addressing the concerns of specific groups, from environmentalists to civil rights activists, politicians can tailor their campaigns to the identities of the voters. This strategy not only attracts supporters, but also mobilizes them

to act in accordance with those values (cf. Castells, 2012).

It is worth emphasizing that the specific language of the Internet also results from its globality and general accessibility. All linguistic signs and symbols are connected to the sender or recipient of the utterance. Through these, it is possible to address various aspects of language use, such as issuing commands, conveying information, or creating an impression. This area of language research is the domain of pragmatics, which analyses the relationships between the implications of speech in extra-linguistic realities, and the very organization and functions of language.

Thinking in the media and politics, from a theoretical standpoint, reflects the evaluation of the world through its interdisciplinarity. This is particularly evident in the expressiveness of language, which resonates with the emotive thinking of modern individuals, expressed through their spontaneity and an increasingly expansive "audience." Politicians have moved their election campaigns to social media for a number of reasons, including the advantages of broad reach and accessibility, direct communication, and engagement and interactions. It seems that the purpose and later the effect of politicians' statements is copyright social division focused axiologically around values presented by a specific political faction. It is thus unsurprising that politicians use it in their official statements from the entire range of linguistic functions. Language is an important aspect, as it is through language that all values can be expressed. Elected politicians frequently

declare various types of values, yet it often appears that they either conceal their true beliefs behind these values, or, at times, attempt to showcase them.

Adam Jarubas, a politician from the Third Way party (Trzecia Droga), has an interesting presentation of his election demands, of course in the form of language. In his Facebook posts, he usually refers to events he has previously participated in, meetings that have already taken place, and conversations he has already had. He briefly summarizes what was most important during these events, thus writing about the values that are most important to him. For instance (June 3): "Do you want a safer Poland in a strong Europe, or a lonely Poland in a divided Europe? A very good discussion with the residents. Thank you, City of Kęty, for the meeting!" (<https://www.facebook.com/jarubasadam>). As we can see, the highlighted value here is safety. In another post (June 1), Jarubas writes: "It promises to be an interesting weekend with a folk twist. We will be in Etnotygiel Kielce, where there will be ethnic and folk music, but also plenty of other attractions for folklore fans and children. Folk culture and our heritage should be passed on from generation to generation" – this time he draws attention to heritage, tradition and the succession of generations as values of inheritance and transmission of important content. What is remarkable about the words that Adam Jarubas communicates on his social media is not that he speaks directly about values, but rather that he seeks to highlight a hidden value – solidarity. His consistent use

of the plural form underscores his alignment with his voters and reinforces the idea that he represents everyone, speaking not solely on his own behalf, but as a collective voice.

Konrad Berkowicz (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość/Confederation Liberty and Independence party), adopted a completely different tactic for presenting his views and postulating his values. Using X (formerly Twitter), his statements tend to be characterized by two qualities: he usually writes not so much on his own behalf, but presenting the views of his party, and most often puts his demands not directly as desiderata, but as responses to the statements of other politicians. For example (June 4): “The Conference proposes something you [responds to Third Way party] do not want to hear, i.e. that Poland’s subjectivity in the EU arena, the sovereignty of member states, rejecting the EU’s dictates, defending our veto, and withdrawing all harmful directives, especially the Green Deal, are beyond you.” (<https://x.com/KonradBerkowicz>). Berkowicz highlights the value of the country’s sovereignty, and emphasizes the essence of the state’s subjectivity and the need to maintain its independence. Another time (June 3), he refers to politicians from the Left party, writing: “You have nothing to do with freedom”, which draws attention, paradoxically, though denial, that it is freedom that is his postulated value.

Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz (Civic Coalition party) wrote on his Facebook profile (May 31), regarding the situation of the media: “I am very proud that on public radio stations and television you can hear voices of

criticism towards the government. This is a measure of the independence of the media: that they do not kowtow to the authorities, they are not the government’s propaganda mouthpiece which only they can criticize.” (<http://www.facebook.com/SienkiewiczB/>). Sienkiewicz wrote this to spotlight the value of independence, especially regarding the media. We can therefore conclude that Sienkiewicz postulates and, in a sense, announces, through social media, that freedom and independence are values that should be cared for and fought for. Sienkiewicz’s voters may therefore assume that these are the values that guide this politician.

A relatively linguistically inactive politician on social media platforms is the candidate from the Left party, Andrzej Szejna (<https://twitter.com/AndrzejSzejna>) who does not publish many posts on X, and whose Facebook profile is private, so his published posts cannot be viewed. What we can see in his statements on X are mainly photos of himself in meetings with various people. In this part of article, we focus on the linguistic side, so we will not comment on non-verbal language.

A very active politician on social media is the candidate from the Law and Justice party, Beata Szydło, who publishes several statements every day both on X and on Facebook, in which she directly or indirectly communicates her values. The way Beata Szydło draws attention to the content that is important to her is interesting. Her statements contain relatively few words, but they are concentrated in clear and short statements. For example: “We should put the *new green deal* right in

the trash!” (May 27); “On June 9, let’s choose a good future for Poles!” (May 31); “On June 9, let’s vote to defend our values!” (June 2) (<https://www.facebook.com/BeataSzydlo>). In these three sample messages, we see completely different linguistic forms, and in them, we can discern different values. A *good future* is an assurance of the need to take care of young people and ensure their well-being. The call to *our values* is a postulate in which Beata Szydło does not explicitly state what values she is talking about, but the recipient can assume that they are those shared by the Law and Justice party. However, in a statement regarding the *Green Deal*, the politician shows what she believes in through denial. For Beata Szydło, the *Green Deal* is an anti-value, something bad; a diversion from prosperity.

It must be said that it is very interesting that politicians use social media and linguistic messages in such different ways: writing longer statements, short statements, describing the beliefs of their party or their own, or integrating their demands with social expectations. It turns out that all these methods are good for expressing and promoting elements of life that are important to all voters, such as: freedom, independence, security, tradition, and prosperity. Regardless of what party a politician comes from, and regardless of the communication style he or she chooses, the effect of these statements is similar, as it is a linguistic form of conveying imponderables. Although, as political scientists rightly point out: “the con-

flict between political groups representing various environments society and their often conflicting interests is an important element of everyday life in a democratic country” (Golec, 2002), it turns out that when looking for values in the statements of the most popular politicians in the Małopolska and Świętokrzyskie regions before the European Parliament elections, the language of values they present is not polarized at all.

“A challenge in researching the discourse of politics in media practices comes in trying to answer the question of where the discourse ends and self-creation begins in the textual, communicative and verbal agency of politicians in terms of the typology itself, functionality or range of values” (Soczyński&Urzędowska, 2023). The question we leave open here is whether the values that politicians of different parties postulate, in such a coherent way on social media, are only their political creation, or whether they express (through language) their true beliefs.

Conclusions

The authors conducted a study on the use and significance of values in political communication, with a focus on election campaign statements made by candidates for the 2024 European Parliament elections in Poland. An interdisciplinary approach, combining philosophy, media studies, and linguistics, established that values are a central yet complex element of political discourse. Politicians commonly incorporate values into their communication, either con-

sciously or unconsciously. While some use values as authentic expressions of belief, others use them strategically as rhetorical tools to adapt to voter sentiment. The candidates studied used different approaches in their visual and linguistic communication. For example, Konrad Berkowicz focused on patriotism and sovereignty through images of a military presence and national symbols. Adam Jarubas, on the other hand, repeatedly emphasized community, tradition, and inclusiveness through collective and regional images. Beata Szydło, on the other hand, emphasized patriotism and family values through concise, direct statements. These differences underscore the versatility of values in appealing to different constituencies.

Values are also used to polarize political audiences. While values serve as a universal language across the political spectrum, their interpretation and presentation differ, reflecting party ideologies. This duality illustrates the potential of values to unite or polarize public opinion, depending on the narrative constructed by political actors.

The authors also note the obvious (and effective) shift by politicians to social media platforms, which has significantly shaped the way values are communicated. The immediacy and accessibility of platforms such as Facebook and X enable a targeted communication of values, enhancing both reach and emotional resonance with voters. "The landscape of political discourse has undergone a substantial shift due to the pervasive influence of social media, reshaping interactions and engagement among politicians, governments, and individuals" (Khan *et al.*, 2023).

However, a critical research question posed by the authors remains unanswered: do politicians truly embody the values they promote, or are these merely performative tools in their quest for support? This ambiguity highlights the need for further research on the correspondence between political rhetoric and action.

The results of the analysis confirm that values are not merely abstract ideals, but dynamic elements shaping political discourse and voter engagement. However, their effectiveness and ethical application depend on the authenticity and coherence with which they are integrated into political communication. Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of how values influence electoral outcomes and social cohesion.

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