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Teflon power elite? Why do the political scandals disclosed by the media (not) always mobilize Polish public opinion?

Introduction

During over three decades of the functioning of the Third Republic of Poland, one could often observe cabinet crises caused by the disclosure by the media of political scandals. The result of unmasking the results of journalistic investigations in most cases were turning points within the ruling elite, which led to the self-dissolution of the Sejm, the collapse of governments, or the resignation of specific politicians¹. In this aspect, Poland resembled developed democracies where the politicians are responsible for their actions. This state of affairs changed dramatically in 2015, when the elections resulted in the formation of a parliamentary majority based on the parties forming the United Right (UR). The newly created political system found the support of its policy and individual actions in the person of the President of the Republic of Poland, coming from the same milieu. The consistent implementation of the program made it possible to maintain a high level of public support, and thus to win the next parliamentary and presidential elections. In the period under discussion, many scandals were disclosed by the media, relatively more than in the case of any former govern-

¹ W. Adamczyk, *Journalistic investigations and cabinet crises in the Third Polish Republic (selected examples)*, „Przegląd Politologiczny” 2018, nr 3.

ment camp after 1989. Contrary to the experiences in such situations, however, of the previous Polish governing teams, the illegal activities of the ruling political elite and its specific representatives, unmasked by journalists, did not have similar effects. Due to the extremely high level of resistance to political crises of the current government, observed in this regard, this power elite was referred to as “Teflon”. This term should be regarded as accurate, because none of the previous political camps ruling Poland has developed to such a degree a lack of susceptibility to publicly made accusations of high gravity.

The aim of the article is to indicate the reasons for this state of affairs. In the author’s opinion, the high degree of resistance of the United Right to crises does not only result from the social nature of the rulers’ policy, but it should be treated as a resultant of several other factors that only *in gremio* produce such an effect. The list of selected, most spectacular political scandals in recent years shows their growing number. This disturbing trend may therefore mean a high level of deprivatization of the power elite, resulting from a negligible risk of being held accountable for their actions. The research dates are years 2015–2020. The first of them is related to the victory of the UR in the parliamentary elections and Andrzej Duda in the presidential elections, while the choice of the last date is dictated, on the one hand, by the president’s renewed victory in the elections, consolidating the existing system of power, and on the other hand, by the need to keep a distance from the current politics. The subject of the author’s research indicated above was discussed on selected examples of political scandals concerning three governments – one headed by Beata Szydło and two headed by Mateusz Morawiecki. In the study of this issue, the microsystem analysis and the decision-making method were used. The first one shows the connection between the activity of investigative journalists or – more broadly – the media, and the activity of the decision-making centers of the political system, and the scale of potential influence on the rulers’ conduct. The decision-making method was used in the analysis of the processes related to making key decisions (in the case of the surveyed governments mainly personal) caused by investigative publications². The term “Teflon power elite” is used in scientific analyzes and journalistic studies to describe the pathological behavior of government representatives who, despite this, do not bear negative consequences for their actions. The literature on the subject points to such cases all over the world, regardless of the level of

² A. Chodubski, *Wstęp do badań politologicznych*, Gdańsk 1996, pp. 75–81.

democracy (Chemin³; Gehring, Kauffeldt, Vadlamannati⁴; McDonald, Croco, Turitto⁵; Michaelowa, Panda, Martin⁶; Sierakowski⁷).

Investigative journalism and public opinion

According to Karl Popper, public opinion is powerful enough to overthrow governments, even undemocratic ones⁸. This means that human communities can effectively react on a macro scale to global and individual political actions. These reactions may express approval or disapproval of political decisions, activities undertaken, or their omissions, and thus affect the quality of the policy⁹. The public opinion formed in this way is to a large extent the result of providing society with information about the state of *res publica*. As Giovanni Sartori aptly noted, mass media play a central role in the formation of public opinion today, because “from the point of view of (...) the audience, the world is the message of the media”¹⁰. On the other hand, investigative publications revealing cases of breaking the law by representatives of government institutions, unknown to the public, are of key importance in the intensification of citizens’ interest in the affairs of the state and in mobilizing recipients to react to improper behavior of the politicians. Many years of observations of journalistic practice and the consequences of journalistic investigations in many countries of the world have made it possible to determine both the potential and real effects of such exposures. The classic muckraking model and its variants prove that the result of revealing the facts about the actions of politicians

³ M. Chemin, *Welfare effects of criminal politicians: A discontinuity-based approach*, „Journal of Law and Economics” 2012, 55(3).

⁴ K. Gehring, F. T. Kauffeldt, K. C. Vadlamannati, *Crime, incentives and political effort: Evidence from India*, „European Journal of Political Economy” 2019, 59(C).

⁵ J. McDonald, S. E. Croco, C. Turitto, *Teflon Don or Politics as Usual? An Examination of Foreign Policy Flip-Flops in the Age of Trump*, „The Journal of Politics” April 2019, Vol. 81, No. 2.

⁶ K. Michaelowa, S. Panda, N. Martin, *The Teflon effect of political power: When criminal charges do not stick*, Center for Comparative and International Studies (CIS), December 2019 Working Paper No. 103.

⁷ S. Sierakowski, *Teflon Populism*, „Project Syndicate” 19.06.2019 [<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/poland-law-and-justice-immune-to-scandals-by-slawomir-sierakowski-2019-06> access: 5.08.2021].

⁸ K. R. Popper, *Opinia publiczna w świetle zasad liberalizmu*, „Studia Polityczne” 1994, nr 3, p. 12.

⁹ S. Kuśmierski, *Świadomość społeczna, opinia publiczna, propaganda*, Warszawa 1980.

¹⁰ G. Sartori, *Teoria demokracji*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 117–124.

and officials breaking the regulations and violating the standards does not have to be immediate and severe sanctions¹¹.

Informal control over institutions of power, inextricably linked with the publicity of cases of pathology serve to increase the transparency of the area of behind-the-scenes activities of political elites, which have a significant impact on the quality of life of citizens and observance of the standards of a democratic state of law. Their effectiveness may depend on preventing degenerated politicians and officials from taking extra-legal actions in order to achieve particular gains. Journalistic unmaskings are used to stimulate public opinion to put pressure on the institutions of power. The effect of such actions may be, for example, legislative or personal changes. This proves the important role of the mass communication system in the political decision-making system¹². In practice, monitoring the classified activities of political elites between elections is the only effective means of informal control of the government, which, by making a certain area of its actions confidential, is guided by the desire to hide unlawful behavior from the public and, at the same time, fear of possible sanctions¹³.

Disclosing political scandals also impacts vital resources such as reputation and trust. A scandalous image of politics, presented by investigative journalists, should lead first to social disapproval, and then to the imposition of sanctions. The effects of journalistic investigations, attracting attention and mobilizing public opinion, should trigger an interrelated chain of events: put pressure on the institutional elements of the political system, trigger political initiatives, and, consequently, decisions aimed at restoring the desired state of equilibrium. Public opinion understood in this way becomes a catalyst for the expected and necessary reforms¹⁴. The effects of journalistic investigations in the public sphere, which have been observed for decades, are primarily specific reactions of public figures to problems disclosed and publicized by the mass media. They often

¹¹ H. L. Molotch, D. L. Protes, M. T. Gordon, *The Media-Policy Connection: Ecologies of News*, [in:] *Political Communication Research: Approaches, Studies and Assessments*, Vol. II, D. Paletz (ed.), Norwood 1996, pp. 44–50; M. Feldstein, *A Muckraking Model: Investigative Reporting Cycles in American History*, „The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics” 2006; W. Adamczyk, *Dziennikarstwo śledcze a kryzysy polityczne*, w: red. A. M. Zarychta, Ł. Donaj, M. Kosiarz, A. Barański, *Media a polityka*, WSSM Łódź 2007.

¹² H. M. Kepplinger, *W kierunku systemowej teorii komunikowania politycznego*, [w:] red. B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Media masowe w systemach demokratycznych. Teoretyczne problemy i praktyczny wymiar komunikowania politycznego*, Wrocław 2003, p. 79.

¹³ J. Blumler, M. Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication*, London-New York 1995, pp. 27–29.

¹⁴ H. L. Molotch, D. L. Protes, M. T. Gordon, *The Media-Policy Connection: Ecologies of News*, op. cit. pp. 44–50.

provoke a debate and a search for solutions, which may be sanctions imposed by political decision-makers on specific persons or entities responsible for the alleged behavior that violates the law, or, more broadly, changes of a legislative, administrative, or control nature¹⁵. Thus, in some simplification, it can be said that mass communication changes politics, because mass media have causative and causal roles in relation to the political system¹⁶.

The subject of the author's inquiries is the phenomenon of the current ruling elite, which has been observed for six years, which, despite the disclosure of relatively many scandals, maintains high public support, verified both in elections and in public opinion polls. This is a new experience in the history of the Third Polish Republic, because the previously ruling Polish political camps were not able to deal with publicly publicized scandals involving their politicians in such an effective and long-lasting manner. The reasons for this resistance to crises cannot be explained only by the social nature of the consistently pursued policy, which, in the opinion of critics of this authority, has been called "political bribery", burdening the state budget more and more every year. Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński characterized this type of economic determinism in politics as follows: "The conviction that the key to shaping political attitudes lies in the sphere of living conditions has become the ideological basis for the emergence and functioning of a large number of political groups, mainly with an authoritarian or even – totalitarian. Moreover, groups of this type, especially in the conditions of the economic crisis, gained significant public support, especially among the lower classes, and played a dominant role in some countries"¹⁷. The same author, however, pointed to the need for an in-depth explanation of political processes resulting in sustained social support, taking into account also axiological and structural determinism that affect social attitudes. Sharing the view expressed above, the most spectacular political scandals of the current government and their consequences, disclosed by the media, will be presented. At the same time, it should be noted that the author does not share the opinions expressed by representatives of the opposition political groups, who often consider any questionable behavior as a political scandal (such statements are available on

¹⁵ B. Baybars-Hawks, *The Impact of Investigative Journalism on Public Opinion and Policy-making*, Proc. 1st Int. Hawaii Conference on Arts and Humanities, Hawaii 2003; J. B. Thompson, *Political Scandal. Power and Visibility in the Media Age*, Polity Press 2000, p. 114.

¹⁶ W. Schulz, *Komunikacja polityczna. Koncepcje teoretyczne i wyniki badań empirycznych na temat mediów masowych w polityce*, Kraków 2006, p. 14; T. Meyer, L. Hinchman, *Media Democracy. How the Media Colonize Politics*, Cambridge 2004, p. XV.

¹⁷ E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Standard życia a zachowania wyborcze*, „Studia Polityczne” 1992, nr 1(1), pp. 7–8.

websites, for example, 100aferpis.pl). This is because a definitional verification of such events should be adopted. According to John B. Thompson, an event that violates certain values, norms, and moral principles known to the public is considered a scandal. Non-participants in these events criticize these actions or events and may feel offended because of that violation. Expressing disapproval of these events is accompanied by public denunciation and condemnation, which in turn may destroy the reputation of individuals responsible for them¹⁸.

The scandals of Beata Szydło's government

The first to be formed after the 2015 elections was the UR government with Beata Szydło as prime minister. This mission, which lasted little more than two years, indicated the main goals of the political attack of formations in power (the judiciary, prosecutor's office, the Constitutional Tribunal) and the goals of state policy (the social nature of activities and independence from European Union institutions). At that time, the rulers faced several serious crises related to scandals exposed by the media (Table 1).

Table no. 1. Consequences of scandals in Beata Szydło's government.

	Scandals	Consequences of scandals
Beata Szydło` government 16.11.2015–11.12.2017	The SKOK scandal	4 billion 336 million from BFG for depositors of 13 bankrupt unions
	The scandal with the tender for Caracale	No personal consequences
	Billboard scandal	The dismissal of two officials from the Prime Minister's Office
	The „second wages” scandal	Reimbursement of collected amounts to charity
	The scandal with breaking the rule of law	No personal consequences
	The Bartłomiej Misiewicz scandal	Resignation, detention by the CBA 5-month arrest

Source: author's own study.

The worst public reception was experienced by the SKOK scandal (due to the size of the costs affecting depositors and the ties between credit unions and

¹⁸ J. Thompson, *Scandal and Social Theory*, [w:] *Media Scandals. Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace*, J. Lull and S. Hinerman (eds.), New York 1997, p. 39.

prominent politicians in the power camp), and the scandal with „second wages” (due to the disclosure of additional forms of remuneration of people in power and very badly received by a significant part of the public opinion, the statement by B. Szydło „they simply deserved this money”) and the scandals concerning violations of the rule of law, which initiated the dismantling of the justice system (the Prime Minister’s failure to publish the rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal with the simultaneous – unprecedented – appointment of three new judges in place of those awaiting the swearing-in of the President of the Republic of Poland previously elected by the Sejm). The disapproval of these actions was expressed, inter alia, in activity of social opposition, which was reflected in spontaneous manifestations in the state.

The scandals of Mateusz Morawiecki’s governments

Much more serious scandals were revealed by the media during the three-year mission of the two governments led by Mateusz Morawiecki (Table 2).

Table no. 2. Consequences of scandals in Mateusz Morawiecki` two governments.

	Afery	Konsekwencje afer
First Mateusz Morawiecki` government 11.12.2017–15.11.2019 and Second Mateusz Morawiecki` government from 15.11.2019	KNF scandal	The dismissal of Marek Chrzanowski (chairman of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority)
	the „Glapiński` little angels” scandal	No personal consequences, amendment to the act on disclosure of salaries at the NBP
	GetBack scandal	2.5 billion PLN losses for over 9,000 buyers of the company’s bonds
	Srebrna` scandal	No personal consequences
	scandal of the flights of the Speaker of the Sejm Marek Kuchciński	The dismissal of the Speaker of the Sejm
	Stanisław Karczewski scandal	No personal consequences Control Chief Labor Inspectorate
	the “troll farm” scandal in the Ministry of Justice	Resignation of the deputy minister Łukasz Piebiak

	Marian Banaś scandal	No personal consequences
	scandal with the presidential „envelope” elections	Minimum 68 million PLN losses due to printed and unused ballots
	“sanitary masks” scandal	No personal consequences 5 million PLN spent on the purchase of masks without a certificate of suitability for use
	scandal with respirators	No personal consequences The State Treasury has not yet recovered EUR 15.6 million (EUR 12 million is a prepayment not returned to the Ministry of Health and EUR 3.6 million in terms of contractual penalties)

Source: author's own study.

The scandals mentioned above were of a different nature:

a. financial: the „Glapiński` little angels” scandal (disclosed by the media, the very high salary of two close women associates of the President of the NBP, none of whom had an economic education and did not perform highly responsible analyzes in the field of state finances), the GetBack scandal, the scandal with the presidential „envelope” elections (the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland decided to print voting cards without a legal basis, which, according to various estimates, exposed the Treasury to the amount of PLN 68 to even 133 million), the “sanitary masks” scandal and the scandal with respirators;

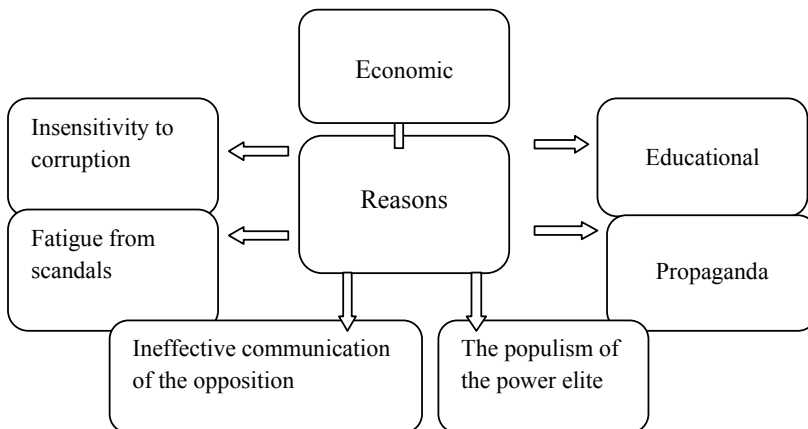
b. related to the abuse of power: the KNF scandal (a corruption proposal submitted by the chairman of the Polish Financial Supervision Authority to the owner of a private bank), the Srebrna` scandal (discontinuation of proceedings by the prosecutor’s office regarding an alleged bribe transferred by an Austrian businessman to a member of the Srebrna Company, which was to be mediated by the President of Law and Justice, MP Jarosław Kaczyński – in this case, he was also supposed to intervene to the Prosecutor General-Minister of Justice), the scandal of the flights of the Speaker of the Sejm Marek Kuchciński and other prominent politicians of the UR and their families (many of these flights did not have the required HEAD status), and „the troll farm” scandal in the Ministry of Justice (a hate scandal aimed at a part of the judiciary environment opposing

the intention of UR` politicians to control the judiciary – senior officials of the Ministry of Justice were involved in this case);

c. moral nature: the Marian Banaś scandal (former Minister of Finance, and earlier also the head of the National Revenue Administration and the Customs Service, after assuming the position of the President of the Supreme Audit Office, he was indicated in the journalistic materials as the owner of a tenement house in Krakow where a representative of the „underworld” ran an escort agency and maintained constant contact with M. Banaś), the Stanisław Karczewski scandal (as deputy speaker of the Senate, S. Karczewski in 2009–2015, based on a civil and legal contract, earned PLN 400,000 on duty at the hospital, despite the fact that he was then on unpaid leave. The case outraged public opinion also because, during the strike of resident doctors, S. Karczewski encouraged them to “work for an idea”).

Subsequent scandals revealed by investigative journalists were described by politicians of opposition groups as the end of the rule of the United Right. As it was argued, the scale of the abuses was to lead to a radical reduction in public support and, as a consequence, the loss of legitimacy to continue exercising power. Contrary to these announcements, the ruling political camp in Poland survived the above-mentioned crises, won the next elections, and continued to rule. There are at least several reasons for such resistance to public accusations, which have not been observed in recent years (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The reasons for the lack of decline in public support for the rule of the United Right



Source: author's own study.

Economic reasons. The policy conducted by the government camp is to a large extent based on social transfers (the 500+ program, the thirteenth retirement pension, layettes for pupils), which have become the hallmark of the UR. The beneficiaries of these activities are to a large extent the poorer sections of society. The transfer of funds in the pre-election period (the thirteenth pensions) was to ensure the victories of the rulers. The nature of these transfers is evidenced by the fact that they did not meet either the demographic goal (the announced increase in the fertility rate of Polish families) or the economic goal, which was to permanently extract a large number of Polish citizens from poverty¹⁹. The rulers also took care of high salaries for judges elected to the new chambers of the Supreme Court and awards for officials. The opposition hailed this policy of clientelism as the “themselves for own “ program, which could also be observed when money from the Government Fund for Local Investments was distributed according to the party’s key.

Educational reasons. The low level of civic education in Polish society was a great help for the rulers²⁰. This is evidenced by, for example, insufficient knowledge of the institutions essential for the system of the rule of law (the Constitutional Tribunal, the National Council of the Judiciary, the Supreme Court) and the key principles in the rule of law (legality, rule of law, separation of powers, independence of courts, independence of judges). Poles gained knowledge on these issues along with the implementation of subsequent UR plans. Little was known among the citizens of the issues concerning the essence of many scandals – the rule of law, the activities of the so-called trolls in the Ministry of Justice²¹. In this situation, the lack of awareness of the consequences of the scandals for the average citizen worked to the benefit of the ruling elite, which presented themselves as “restoring the dignity of Poles”, “destroying old agreements”, and causing Poland to finally “stand up from its knees” in its relations with the European Union.

The populism of the power elite. The rulers decided to implement their policy by dividing Poles into “better and worse sorts.” This was achieved by the

¹⁹ W. Szacki, *Teflonowy Kaczyński. Nic mu nie szkodzi, nic nie przywiera*, TVN24 5.10.2019 [https://tvn24.pl/magazyn-tvn24/teflonowy-kaczynski-nic-mu-nie-szkodzi-nic-nie-przywiera,238,4101, access: 5.10.2019].

²⁰ P. Zagórski, *Sympatia do lotrów. Dlaczego poparcie dla PiS nie spada*, „OKO.press” 27.01.2019 [https://oko.press/sympatia-do-lotrow-dlaczego-poparcie-dla-pis-nie-spada/, access: 29.01.2019].

²¹ B. Goczał, *Afera hejterska nie zachwieje poparciem dla PiS, wyborcy nie przywiązują do niej tak dużej wagi (opinie)*, „Wirtualne Media” 27.08.2019 [https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artukul/afery-hejterska-ministerstwo-sprawiedliwosci-nie-zachwieje-poparciem-dla-pis-wyborcy-nie-przywiazuja-do-niej-tak-duzej-wago-opinie, access: 27.08.2019].

dishonor of other social and professional groups (“liberal lemmings”, teachers, doctor-residents, academics, judges) and EU institutions, which, according to prominent politicians, imposed on the Polish nation in “foreign languages”, what kind of political system we should have in Poland and how Polish affairs should be conducted. Such behavior led to a division into “patriots” and “non-patriots”. Discrediting the protesting citizens (KOD), the opposition, and minorities (homolobby) and setting them against “real Poles” was presented as part of the struggle for Poland to regain sovereignty.

Propaganda reasons. Both public media, TVP S.A. and PR S.A., have become an important element of the policy pursued, as well as pro-government commercial and social media, generously subsidized by state-owned companies. The propaganda activities they undertook were characterized by a one-dimensional narrative of the situation in the country and in Europe, which made it difficult for the recipients of these messages to become acquainted with facts and different opinions. In return, the public media in their news programs “papered-over” the scandals with the participation of the rulers, with created reports about the alleged scandals of opposition politicians. The widespread ignorance of disinformation techniques in the society favored succumbing to the one-sided propaganda of the pro-government media. The belief in a “good change”, strengthened in this way, petrified the existing system of power.

Ineffective communication of the opposition. Opposition parties have not developed a permanent and effective method of stigmatizing illegal or wasteful activities of the ruling camp²². For example, the legal nihilism of the UR, which led to the negation of the legal *acquis* of its predecessors, and even to questioning the judgments of the Constitutional Tribunal. The lack of a well-thought-out and consistent narrative of events, chaos in reactive actions and the inability to conduct effective strategic actions meant that – colloquially speaking – the opposition was usually “one step” behind the rulers. Commercial media supporting the opponents of “good change” also did not do the job. On the one hand, investigative publications fit in with the control function of the press, which was an important element that created a counterbalance to the narrative known from pro-government media. On the other hand, however, the political correctness of the independent media in relation to the ruling camp was conducive to the information policy of the UR present in the government-owned television and public radio. At the same time, it was accompanied by a redefinition of the

²² J. Liberski, *Zastanawiasz się, dlaczego poparcie dla PiS jest nie do ruszenia? Oto powody*, „naTemat” 16.09.2019 [<https://natemat.pl/284625,dlaczego-pis-owi-nie-spada-poparcie-w-sondazach-oto-powody>], access: 23.09.2019].

concept of journalism in accordance with the principle expressed by J. Kaczyński at the election meeting: “to support us and not to disturb us”.

Fatigue from scandals. The numerous scandals of the rulers publicized by the commercial media and the opposition spread to a large part of the public opinion and did not arouse the emotions needed to put pressure on the rulers over time²³. This situation is not something new, because a similar phenomenon could be observed in the USA at the end of the “golden age of journalism” in the middle of the second decade of the 20th century²⁴. The subsequent scandals of rulers, announced from time to time by the opposition, aimed at “sinking” the government, did not lead to the collapse of the ruling camp. For the electorate of the UR, it proved the weakness of the charges, and for the voters of the opposition groups, it became a symbol of the ineffectiveness of their parliamentary representation. At the same time, some of the political scandals publicized by investigative journalists confirmed the results of research on the effects of reportage investigations. It turned out that in relation to the aforementioned scandals, it was possible to observe various variations of the classical muckraking model, including the following variants:

a. “unnoticed” unmasking (no reaction of the pro-government media to the revealed facts and comments of politicians from the ruling camp, changes in public opinion);

b. insignificant opinion (too weak public reaction to investigative material);

c. symbolic political actions (apparent changes in the policy of the authorities or state institutions, aimed at calming the public opinion)²⁵.

Insensitivity to corruption. As a result of the above-mentioned reasons, a large part of the society lost sensitivity to the pathological behavior of the political elite. While in the case of the previously ruling coalitions in Poland, the media reports on corrupt behavior, nepotism, and the abuse of power for particular interests constituted the beginning of the end of degenerate politicians or the collapse of governments, in relation to the UR, similar accusations did not result in the loss of support necessary to govern²⁶. This is well illustrated

²³ R. Mańka, *Dlaczego afery nie osłabiają popularności PiS*, Fundacja Inicjatywy Bezpieczeństwo-Rozwój-Energia 16.08.2019 [<https://fibre.org.pl/2019/08/16/dlaczego-afery-nie-oslabiaja-popularnosc-pis/>; access: 28.08.2019].

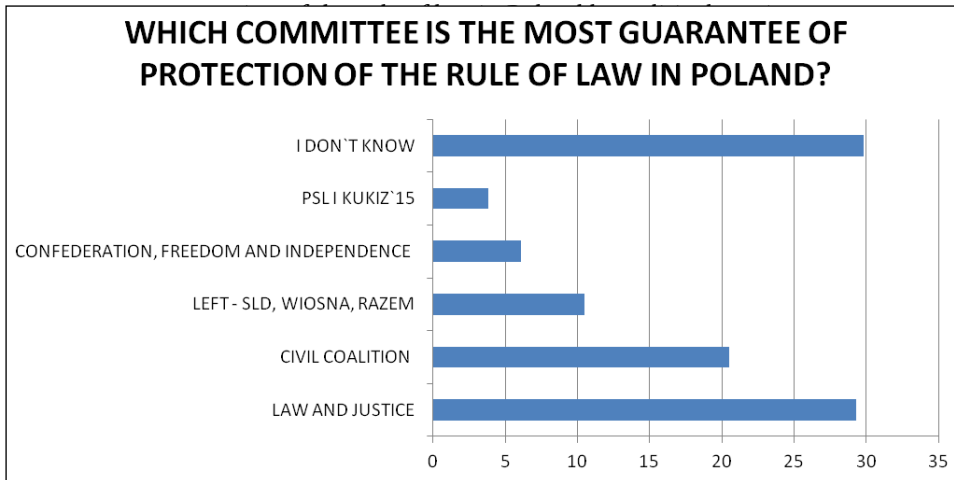
²⁴ W. Adamczyk, *Ujawnianie korupcji i nadużyć władzy w działalności amerykańskich muckrakerów*, w: red. M. Palczewski, M. Worsowicz, *Dziennikarstwo śledcze. Teoria i praktyka w Polsce, Europie i Stanach Zjednoczonych*, WSHE Łódź 2006.

²⁵ W. Adamczyk, *Dziennikarstwo śledcze a kryzysy polityczne*, op. cit.

²⁶ G. Makowski, *Dlaczego Afera KNF nie (za)szkodzi PiS-owi*, „Newsweek” 18.12.2018 [<https://www.newsweek.pl/opinie/dlaczego-afera-knf-nie-zaszkodzi-pis-owi/p5mtf9>, access: 20.12.2018].

by the results of a survey conducted in September 2019 by IBRiS. Despite the publicized scandals, actions of the authorities violating the rule of law, and proceedings initiated in this matter by the European Union Court of Justice, it is the parties of the United Right that have been recognized by the big part of the public as the most important guarantor of compliance with the law in Poland.

Figure 2. Results of the IBRiS survey for Interia on the level of guarantees of the



Source: The survey for Interia was carried out on September 28–29, 2019, by telephone, standardized computer-assisted questionnaire (CATI) interviews on a representative sample of 1,100 people.

Conclusions

As a consequence, the reception of scandals, instead of causing outrage at this type of anomalies in the activities of the authorities (combined with the accumulation of scandals, their unprecedented frequency), led to a situation where stigmatized behavior of politicians (being a deviation from the rules adopted in the state of law), became the norm. Coupled with the compensation mechanism used as an alibi: “They stole too, but gave nothing. PiS steals but gives” this created an undesirable, from the point of view of effective public opinion, image of an opportunist citizen who approves of social disorganization with all its consequences. The “Teflon” nature of UR is the result of all the reasons presented above. It is undoubtedly a phenomenon of Polish politics in the last three decades. It proves the limited agency of public opinion in effectively reacting to the pathologies of the authorities – similarly to the causal link, treated as unconditional, between

the scandals publicized by investigative journalists and the serious political changes caused by them. This rare resistance to political crises may also be the beginning of research into effective ways of counteracting the occurrence of such a phenomenon in the future.

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Summary: The aim of the article is to indicate the causes of a new phenomenon in Polish domestic politics, namely the “Teflon” power elite. This term denotes the resistance of the groups making up the United Right camp to scandalous accusations made publicly by the media, that are unprecedented on such a scale. The scandals resulting from journalistic investigations, unlike in the times of previous ruling teams in Poland, did not cause a clear decline in the support of the current ruling elite, let alone its collapse. The article presents the definition of a political scandal. Moreover, the author discusses the reasons for the unflagging popularity of the current government, including: economic, propaganda and educational issues, the ruling populism, the opposition’s communication inefficiency, society’s fatigue with scandals and citizens’ lack of sensitivity to the manifestations of the pathology of the government institutions. In the study of this issue, the microsystem analysis and the decision-making method were used.

Keywords: public opinion, political scandals, investigative journalism, “Teflon` power”

Teflonowa elita władzy? Dlaczego ujawnione przez media afery rządzących (nie)zawsze mobilizują polską opinię publiczną?

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest wskazanie przyczyn nowego zjawiska w polskiej polityce wewnętrznej, a mianowicie „teflonowej” elity władzy. Określenie to oznacza niespotykaną wcześniej na taką skalę odporność ugrupowań tworzących obóz Zjednoczonej Prawicy na stawiane publicznie przez media aferalne zarzuty. Skandale będące efektem dziennikarskich śledztw, inaczej niż działało się to w czasach poprzednich ekip rządzących w Polsce, nie wywołały wyraźnego spadku poparcia obecnej elity władzy ani tym bardziej jej upadku. W artykule przedstawiono definicję skandalu politycznego. Autor omówił przyczyny niesłabnącej popularności obecnej władzy, do których zaliczył: kwestie ekonomiczne, propagandowe, edukacyjne, populizm rządzących, nieudolność komunikacyjną opozycji, zmęczenie społeczeństwa aferami oraz brak wrażliwości obywateli na przejawy patologii instytucji władzy. W badaniach wykorzystano metody analizy mikrosystemowej i podejmowania decyzji.

Słowa kluczowe: opinia publiczna, skandale polityczne, dziennikarstwo śledcze, „teflonowa” władza