

## Social Media Monitoring – Presidential Election Campaign Poland, 28 June and 12 July 2020

### *Preliminary Report*

#### 1. Introduction

On June 3, 2020 the Speaker of the *Sejm* (lower house of Parliament) ordered the second election of President of the Republic of Poland in the year 2020 to be scheduled for June 28, marking the beginning of the election campaign. Eleven candidates run for the position and none of them received more than 50% of votes during the I round, which resulted in a II round of voting on July 12, with those two candidates, who received the highest number of votes during the first round.

This June 28 presidential election followed the first Presidential election of 2020 which was scheduled for May 10. Due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic a large scope of restrictions of civil rights was imposed during the campaign and in-depth changes to the electoral law were introduced, which led to an election day with no-voting and an election that de facto did not take place.

All candidates who were registered for the first election could take part in the second one with no additional requirements, while new candidates were obliged to register following the procedure established in the Election Code. One candidate, M. Kidawa-Błońska, has been replaced by a new candidate, R. Trzaskowski, and the second new candidate, W. Witkowski, has also been registered.

Monitoring of the campaign on Facebook (FB) during the second presidential election has been conducted between June 10 (the candidate registration deadline), and July 12 (II round voting day) and focused on three different groups of FB profiles, including all 11 presidential candidates, 14 media outlets and 13 potential disinformation outlets (later referred to as *fringe*). The selected accounts reflect a wide spectrum of opinions expressed in Poland, while creating an opportunity to identify what kind of content is promoted by the so called 'fringe' outlets, that have been known to be potential sources of disinformation or *fake news*.

The results of the monitoring of the second election included in this report are presented, wherever we deemed it justified, in the context of the results of our monitoring of the previous electoral campaign, ahead of the first election.

#### 2. Highlights

- ✓ The second election, scheduled for June 28, was characterized by high activity of candidates on Facebook, similarly to what has been observed during the first election.
- ✓ The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has not been a dominating issue during this campaign and was largely replaced by election related matters or matters not related to any election issue.
- ✓ R. Trzaskowski significantly enlarged his group of followers during this election campaign (three times), while all other mainstream candidates, with slight exception of K. Bosak, were merely able to preserve their following. Despite increasing the number of posts 8 times during the second election, A. Duda did not manage to significantly increase his number of followers on Facebook.
- ✓ The general tone of the campaign presented by candidates was neutral or positive and the issue of *Discreditation of political opponents* played an insignificant role in their campaign. This issue has been more present in posts coming from the 'fringe' sub-group of outlets (in over 6% of analysed posts) than in posts made by candidates or by media (around 2%)..
- ✓ Despite the fact that fringe outlets have been quite active during the campaign period, they did not focus that much on the election - the share of issues labelled as "none of the other category" was high from the start and grew even larger ahead of the election, potentially pointing to a general lack of interest in election-related matters among these particular outlets.
- ✓ The continuous grow of followers for R.Trzaskowski and a significantly smaller growth for A. Duda raise questions as to the impact the unequal playing field for old and new candidates (those who registered only for the second election) and a shortened campaigning period had on the election result.

### 3. Key Findings and Figures

For the observation of the second presidential election, 33.400 posts have been selected for qualitative assessment.<sup>1</sup> As expected, the pandemic was not a dominant narrative during this election in contrary to what has been observed during the first election.<sup>2</sup> Over 38% of analysed posts were about elections as such and only less than 8% about COVID19. Interestingly, over 25% of posts were about issues classified in the *none of the above category (noac)*. Such issues were not covered by our predefined narratives or topics, and were not related to any election matter. (Figure 1)

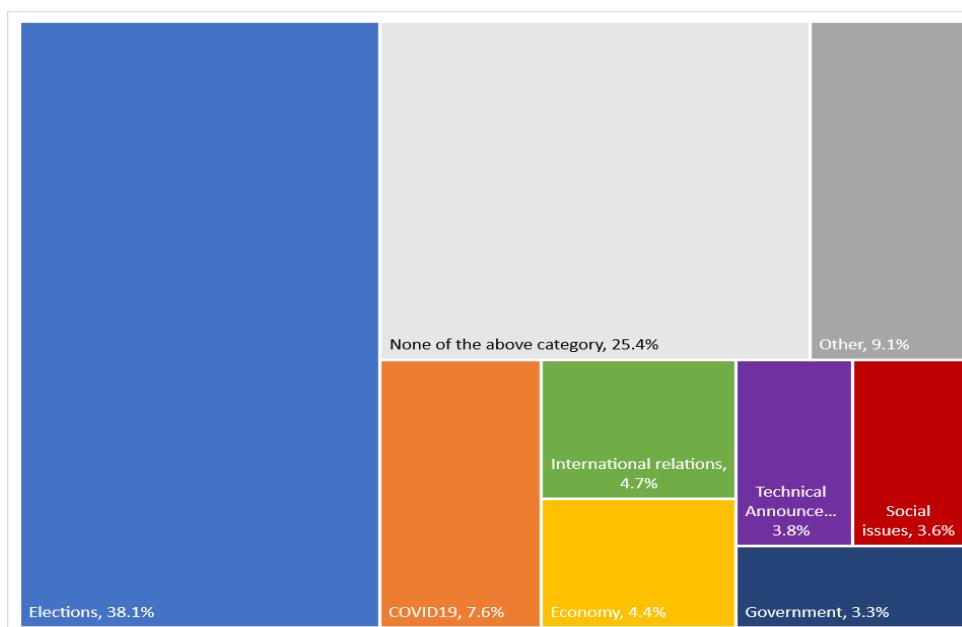


Figure 1: Share of meta-narratives among all groups (10–28 June)

Candidates have been predominantly focused on election issues – these were the main subject of 67% of all their posts (Figure 2) and the share of posts including election matters grew from 61% to over 71% throughout the analysed period. Also, neither COVID19 nor *noac* issues were of significant importance for candidates (they were mentioned in 1,9% and 3,8% of posts respectively), but instead, the economy, as well as technical announcements were mentioned in 6,2% and 10,4% of posts.

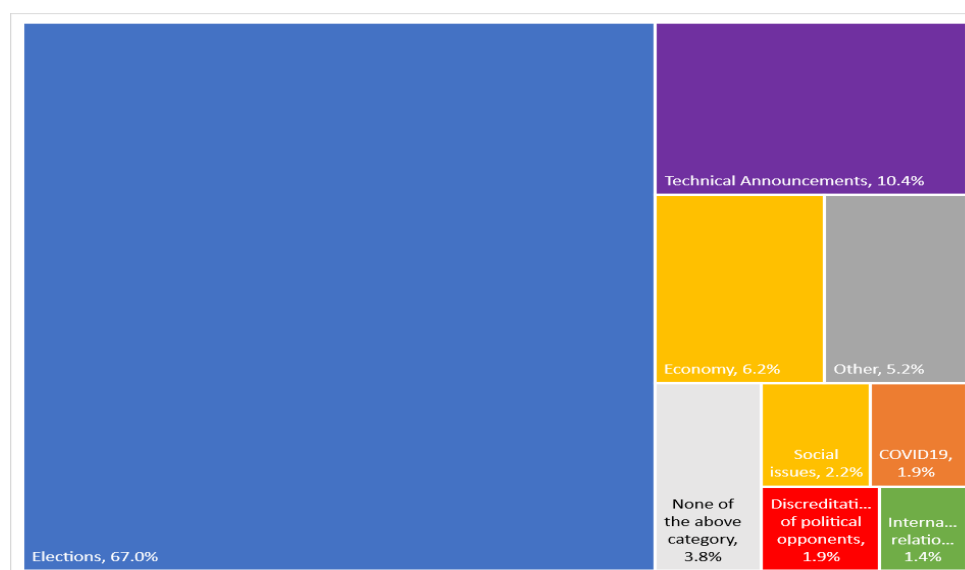


Figure 2: Share of meta-narratives among candidates (10–28 June)

<sup>1</sup> Qualitative analysis in this preliminary report is based on data collected until June 28.

<sup>2</sup> More information about the results of the monitoring of the first election can be found in our report available at: [http://odpowiedzialnapolityka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SMM\\_Poland\\_shortreport\\_finalfinal-1.pdf](http://odpowiedzialnapolityka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SMM_Poland_shortreport_finalfinal-1.pdf)

In the media subgroup, which represents nearly 60% of the total number of posts, *noac* issues stand for 34%, while election matters for less than 30% of all posts. However, the share of election issues has increased significantly throughout the assessed period, from 23% to almost 35% and became the dominant subject in the media ahead of the election day. (Figure 3)

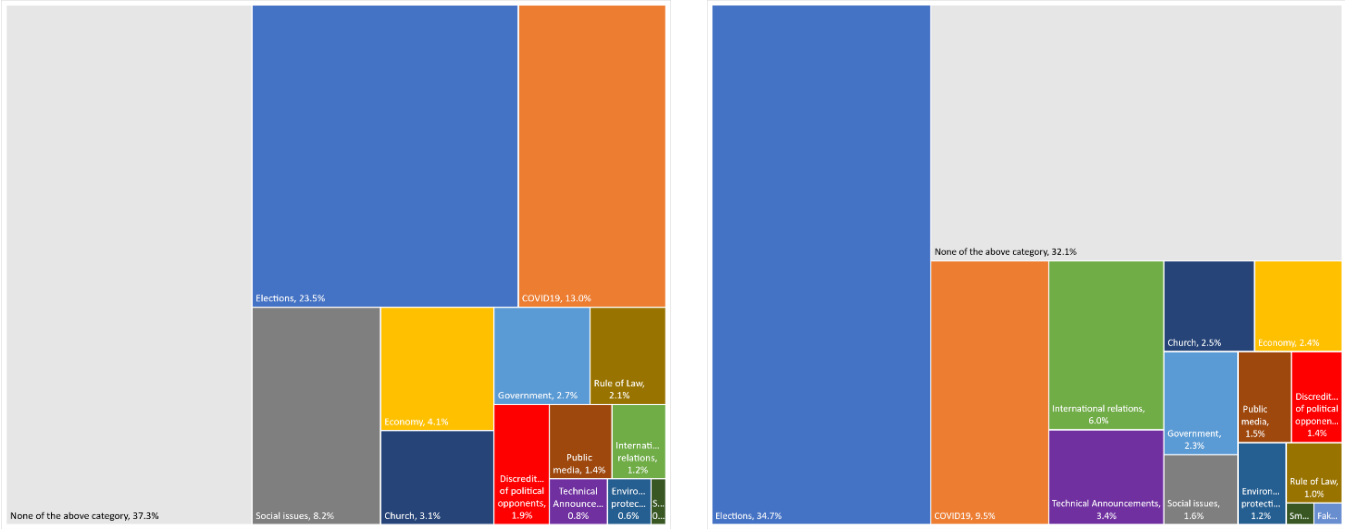


Figure 3: Share of meta-narratives among media 10–15 and 24-27 June

The 'fringe' outlets subgroup, representing some 35% of the total number of posts, focused mainly on *noac* (29%) and election (28%) issues. Interestingly, during the last three days before election day (June 28), share of *noac* issues increased significantly, to over 37%. 'Fringe' outlets have also focused on *International Relations* the most from all three sub-groups – 8% of posts were dedicated to this issue while in general it was mentioned in less than 5% of posts.

SARS-CoV-2 pandemic remained significant subject in media subgroup, over 10%, while it was insignificant among candidates – it was mentioned in less than 2% of posts. Share of this issues also decreased closer to election day. *Discreditation of political opponents* issue had the highest share in posts of 'fringe' outlets subgroup, with over 6%, while the lowest among candidates - less than 2%.

**Candidates**

The list of candidates for the second election has been changed – one candidate, M. Kidawa-Błońska withdrawn and two new candidates, R. Trzaskowski and W. Witkowski were registered. In order to capture the emergence of R. Trzaskowski as a candidate, we looked at data for the entire monitoring period (first and second election - March 26 until July 12).

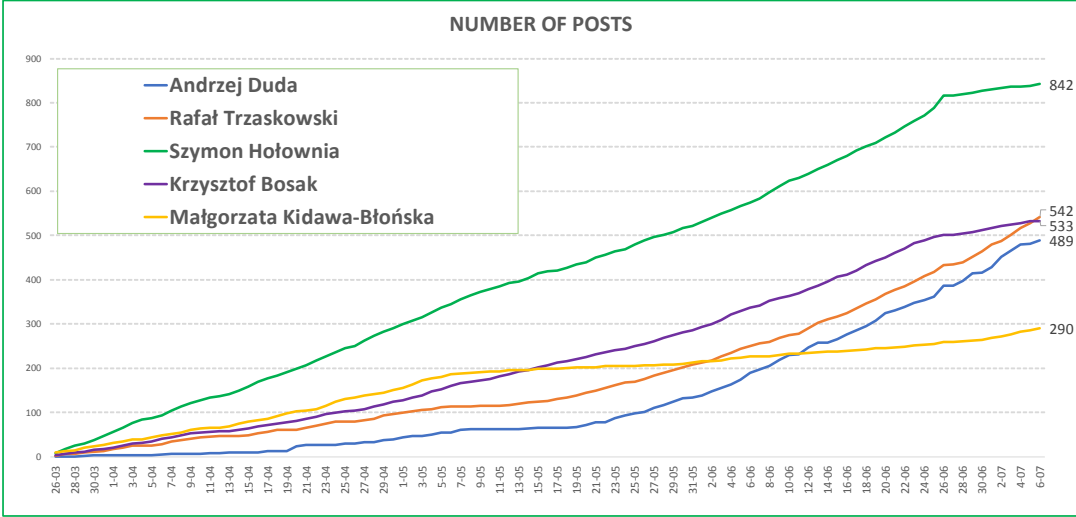


Figure 4: Number of posts - selected candidates - entire monitoring period

The most active candidate was K. Bosak, with 1.318 posts, standing for 23% of all candidates' posts, and S. Hołownia, with 868 posts (15% of candidates' posts). Despite only entering the race after the first election and becoming an official candidate on June 10, R. Trzaskowski made 722 posts<sup>3</sup>, nearly 13% of the total number of posts, and more than the incumbent, A. Duda, and many other candidates did during the entire monitoring period.(Figure 4)

Differences between the number of candidates' posts and the spreading factor<sup>4</sup> show if FB was an important and efficient tool to communicate with candidates' followers. Comparing changes in the number of likes per post for candidates over the whole period one can observe how important of a tool FB was for R. Trzaskowski during the second election, and how insignificant it was for, i.e., A. Duda, also in the period between the first and second round. (Figure 5A & 5B)

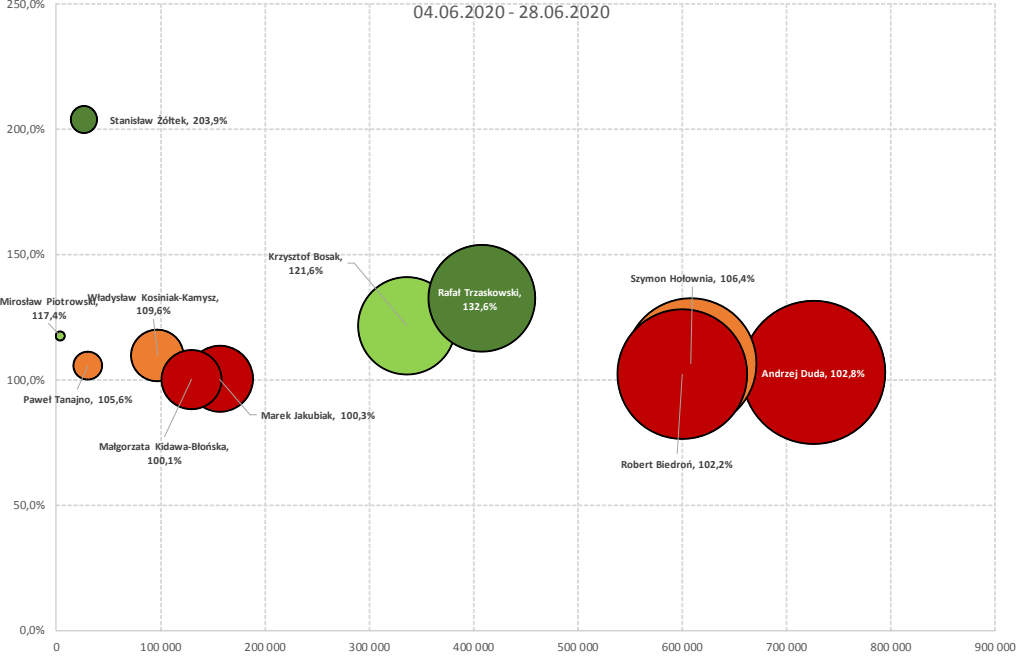


Figure 5A: Spreading factor for candidates - June 4 - June 28

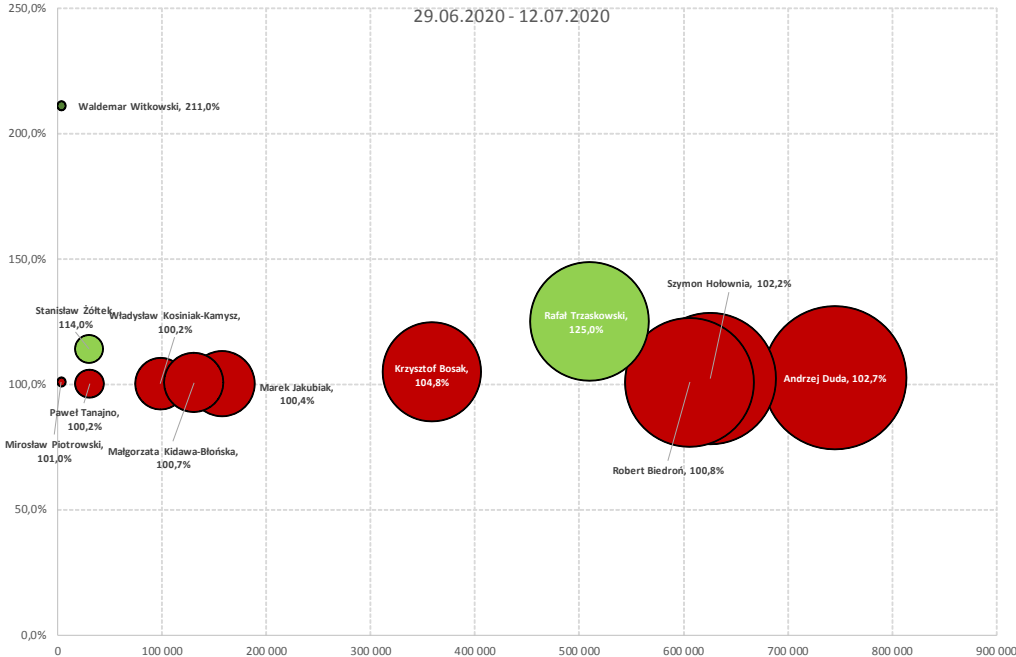


Figure 5B: Spreading factor for candidates - June 28 - July 12

<sup>3</sup> K. Bosak and R. Trzaskowski are the two candidates who have two separate but independently active FB accounts: private one and one of their election committee - we have analysed them separately, and later combined them in some charts.  
<sup>4</sup> Spreading factor reflects changes in number of likes at posting at the beginning and at the end of observation period.

The above graphs, and quantitative data, show that R. Trzaskowski increased his group of followers by almost 200%, from 174.195 to 501.839, while A. Duda by only 11%, from 674,198 to 745.168. S. Hołownia and K. Bosak also increased their number of followers by 117% and 110% respectively. Similarly, during the first election, before May 10, S. Hołownia and K. Bosak achieved the highest growth in the number of followers. However, only K. Bosak managed to sustain this growing trend during the second election, with a 40% increase in the number of followers. S. Hołownia, who has had the most dynamic growth rate during the first election (90% increase in the number of followers), did not manage to maintain this trend during the second election, achieving a mere 14% increase.

Presented data shows that Facebook has played important, and effective, role for some candidates (namely R. Trzaskowski, S. Hołownia, K. Bosak) while it was unimportant or ineffective for others, like A. Duda or R. Biedroń. The successful use of Facebook can be measured not only by the number of posts (A. Duda had the highest number of posts during the second election - eight times more than during the first election, however, R. Trzaskowski, S. Hołownia or K. Bosak were also among the most active in this respect), but also a candidate’s ability to draw the reader’s attention and provoke his/her reaction. R. Trzaskowski had the highest number of average likes per post, 8.333, while the second S. Hołownia only 6.329 and the incumbent A. Duda 5.402. While analysing the success of a candidate’s campaign on FB we also looked at the impact of a candidate’s posts which can be observed via the *range/reposting index*. R. Trzaskowski’s posts are on average more reposted than those of his main opponent, A. Duda. (Figure 6)

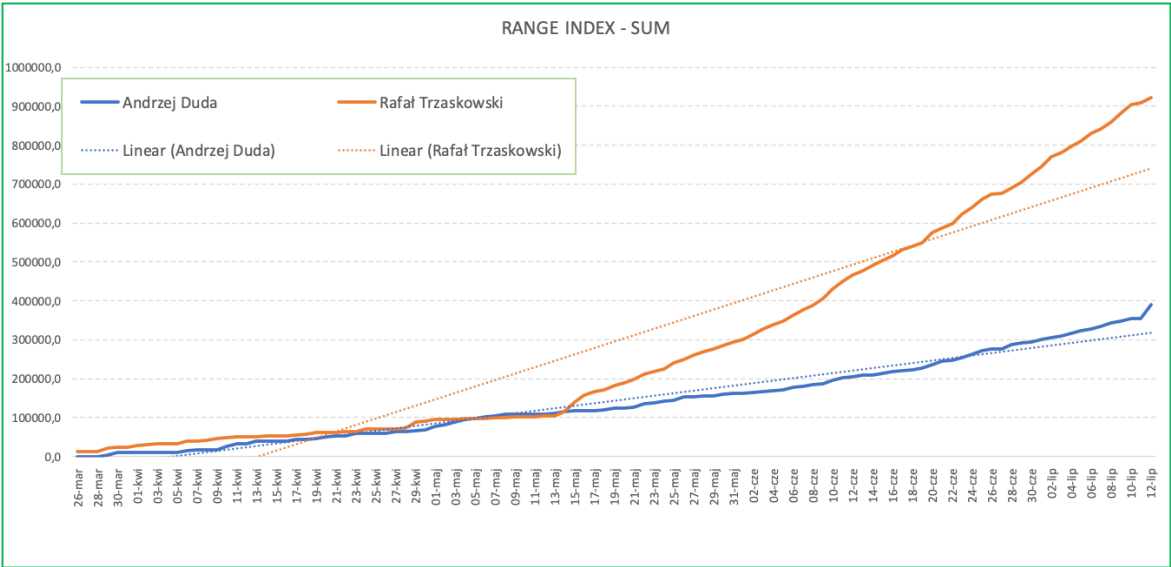


Figure 6: Range Index (R. Trzaskowski vs A. Duda)<sup>5</sup>

Despite his much more active presence on FB during the second election, A. Duda did not succeed in increasing his number of followers. On the other hand, a very significant grow in the number of R. Trzaskowski followers could have had a positive impact on his results, both in the I round, as in the II round. The presented data not only reflect the candidate’s campaign strategy but it may also suggest his/her capability to access public media, especially TVP. A. Duda’s much more active presence on FB had little or no impact on his number of followers, which may indicate that his electorate stays, in general, outside of social media and he can reach them via different channels or that he has reached a certain level of support that cannot be significantly increased. Other candidates’ activity on FB, especially R. Trzaskowski’s, shows that they have identified this social media platform as one of the most efficient channels of communication with their target groups or the only available (due to the role TVP and Polish Radio were playing in this campaign).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>This chart shows the cumulative range index - the range index shows the number of reposts which translates into a page’s growth potential.

<sup>6</sup> Monitoring other social media as well as traditional media would be necessary for a more comprehensive analysis. order to have a more comprehensive analysis.

Nevertheless, even such a significant advantage gained by some candidates during their campaign on FB - increasing the number of their followers threefold - did not fully reflect their popularity among voters as can be seen via the election results from the I and II round. One can pose the question, however, if making the campaign so much shorter for new candidates, like R. Trzaskowski, did not have a negative impact on the results? Looking at the dynamic of follower growth, one can only wonder whether the election results would have been different if the terms for campaigning were equal for both candidates.

The tone of candidates' posts was predominantly neutral or positive (Figure 7), which suggests that Polish voters might be tired with negativity. In this case, a negative tone also means disagreement with a certain issue – such situation can be seen with M. Kidawa-Błońska who did not accept the way the first election was meant to be conducted and expressed her negative opinion on this subject.

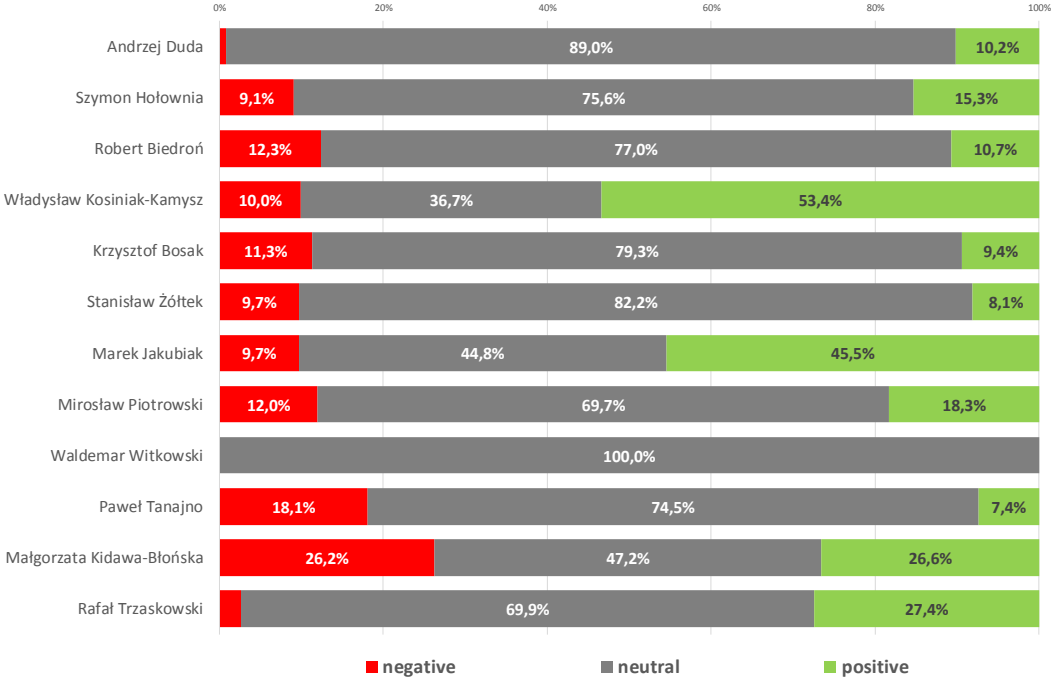


Figure 7: tone of candidates' posts

**Media and 'fringe' outlets**

Mainstream media and 'fringe' outlets have been, in general, much more active on FB than candidates. (Figure 8)

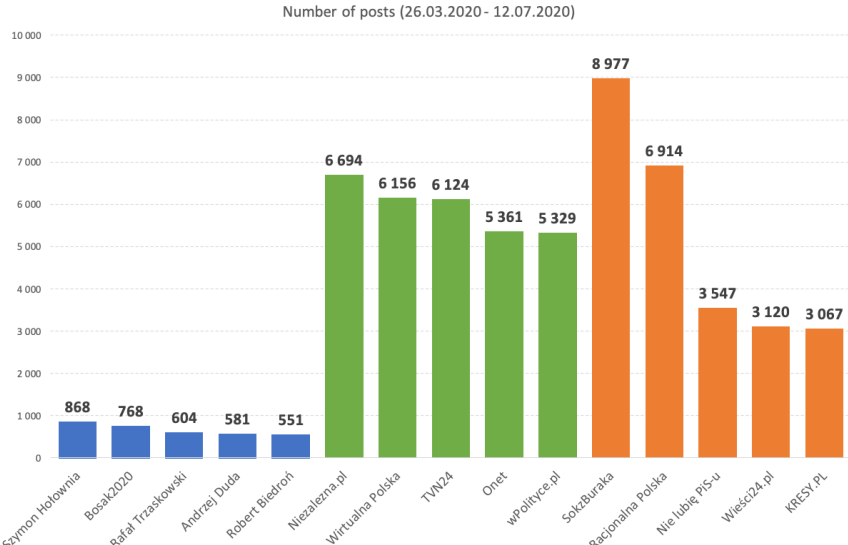


Figure 8: Number of posts in three sub-groups (candidates, media, 'fringe')

However, it seems that this activity does not have a real impact on the addressees. If we compare the average number of likes per post or *range index* the highest results was achieved by candidates. (Figure 9)

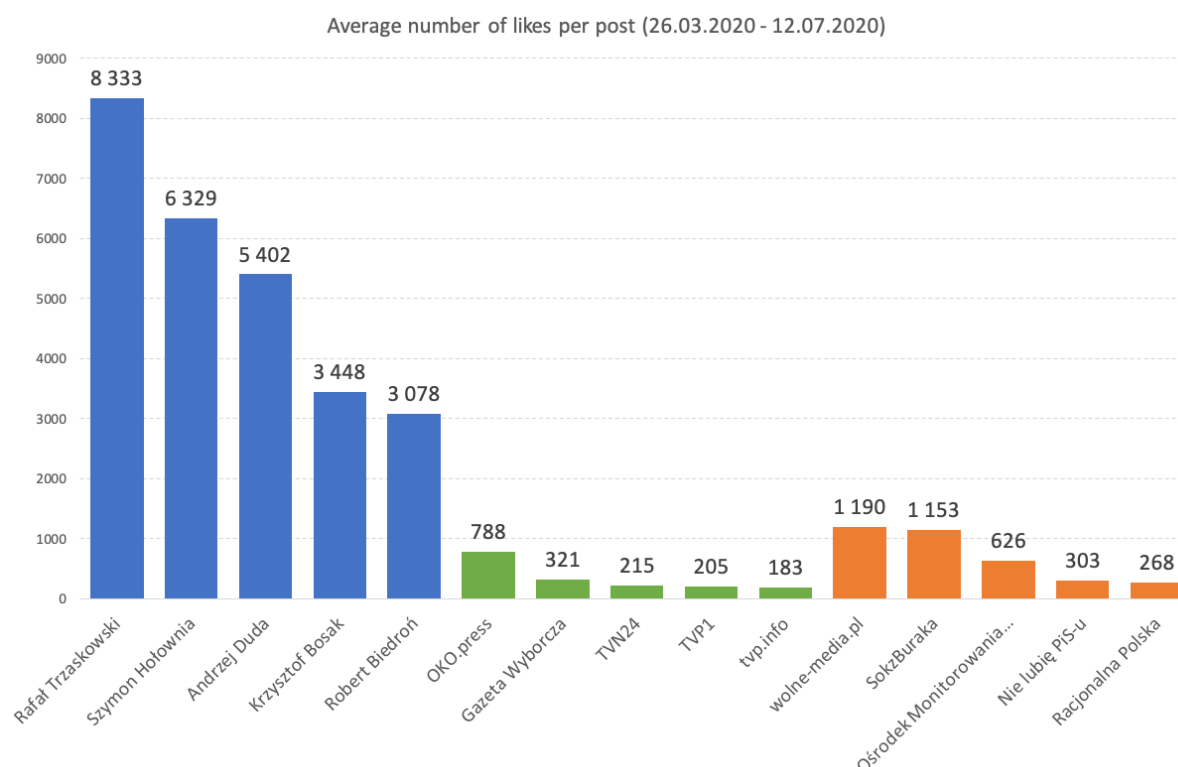


Figure 9: Average number of likes per post in three sub-groups (candidates, media, 'fringe')

In mainstream media, the topic of the church and its role in public life has been mentioned more frequently, in almost 3% of posts, while this issue was practically not present in 'fringe' outlets or among candidates.

The 'fringe' group, especially some pages like *Sok z Buraka* or *Racjonalna Polska*, are an example of how hyper-activity on FB does not directly translate into growth in the number of followers. Both outlets increased their 'bubbles' by only 2-3% throughout the whole monitoring period.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Methodology

The monitoring has been conducted between June 10, the candidate registration deadline and July 12, the voting day for the II round, and it has covered Facebook activity on profiles of all 11 presidential candidates, 17 mainstream media outlets and 18 'fringe' outlets identified as potentially disseminating disinformation and/or fake news. The 18 'fringe' outlets have been identified based on the knowledge of local experts and data from publicly available sources. The list of profiles monitored during the 'second' election has been reviewed based on the results of the observation of the first election (scheduled for May 10).

Posts have been analysed according to (i) quantitative factors – the time of posting, interactions, likes, shares, comments, reactions and other forms of engagement, in order to create a general data about each profile showing its activity and its potential impact on social media users, and (ii) qualitative assessment – analysing the actual content of each post and coding it according to a list of most significant and most important narratives and topics present in the public discourse in Poland during the campaign period (15 meta-narratives and 73 topics) and allocating a tone (positive, neutral, negative) to each post. Both, quantitative and qualitative, aspects have been analysed taking into account the advancement of the campaign, giving us an opportunity to monitor fluctuations in the

<sup>7</sup> Data does not allow to analyse the fluctuation of followers – how many of them left, how many new ones approached; also, much radical increase in number of followers of some candidates does not always mean they will stay with this candidate for longer, however, FB does not record those followers who stopped actively observe particular profile.

presence and importance of different narratives and topics across the time of campaign and for different profiles. Quantitative analysis covers data scraped during the whole period between the end of the first election, May 11, till July 12 – day of voting during the II round of the second election (63 days), while qualitative assessment covers a shorter period, starting on June 10, the last day for registration of candidates (33 days). Thus, our quantitative analysis covers the whole period of both presidential elections, from March 26.

Given the high volume of posts – 104.096 in total - we have applied a statistical sampling of posts of a given account. For [this preliminary report](#), qualitative analysis was completed with data as of June 28 (first round of voting), and quantitative analysis for the whole period of observation.

*The social media monitoring was carried out by the Political Accountability Foundation (Fundacja Odpowiedzialna Polityka) as part of the "Strengthening public diplomacy in Central Europe" project implemented by Globsec and financed by the National Endowment for Democracy.*

