

Political Incivility in the Parliamentary, Electoral and Media Arena

Crossing Boundaries

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5 Contested democracy and the rise of archaic derogatory language in the Polish Parliament

Agnieszka Kwiatkowska

Introduction: incivility in the language of politics

Incivility in political communication is not just a matter of aesthetics. The quality of political discourse, including the level of aggression, negativity, and hostility in language, has negative consequences at the level of political elites and voters, leading to the reduced efficiency of parliament, the exacerbation of conflicts between parties and among their supporters, and the political alienation of citizens. Uncivil rhetoric leads to: increased polarization, difficulties in reaching a compromise, and the perception of political opponents as enemies actively seeking to harm us instead of people with different political views (Jamieson, 2001; Maisel, 2012; Wolf, Strachan and Shea, 2012).

The existing rules of conduct in parliamentary debate are intended to alleviate competition and allow the construction of public policies despite divergent ideological positions. Meanwhile, language based on the slander and denigration of the opponent strengthens political polarization. Verbal aggression in politics creates the impression of a ubiquitous conflict in which neutral positions cannot be taken. Excessive emotionality in parliamentary debate at the expense of fact-based discussion is also unfavorable in terms of the efficiency of state policies; it replaces substantive discourse with shallow quarrelling. Research conducted on the work of the US Congress has shown that the number of invectives used in a parliamentary debate is positively correlated with the ineffectiveness of work: the longer time required to reach consensus and the lower number of decisions (Jamieson, 2001).

The language of political debate influences the style of public communication in general. It impacts accepted norms of interpersonal interactions, as people take up the linguistic habits of the political elites with whom they interact through the media (Bralczyk, 2003, p. 8). Moreover, Kalmoe's (2014) study has shown that the infusion of political language with aggression increases support for acts of political violence among voters disposed to aggressive behavior. In addition, extremist rhetoric in politics, if used extensively over a long period of time, has the effect of turning people away from politics, causing cynical interpretation of the political world, as well as

a decrease in political efficacy and affiliation. These factors result in lower political participation in the long run (Fridkin and Kenney, 2004).

The growing incivility of language results in the increasing usage of words with high negative emotional intensity and connotations that dominate over denotations (Bralczyk, 2016). The use of words that are extremely negative and emotionally charged to describe everyday political events leads to the degradation of their meaning. Participants and recipients of political debate become accustomed to the worst epithets, which inspires further brutalization of language. As a consequence of overuse, uncivil language has ceased to describe only shocking, long-lasting historical events, and has undergone devaluation; recipients have thereby become immune to derogatory and inflammatory comments which no longer fulfill their punitive function.

When politicians of all affiliations accuse each other of treason and betrayal, this leads to the social de-legitimization of the whole elite. Based on experimental research on the US Senate elections, Fridkin and Kenney (2004) found that negative messages from competing candidates are effective as a political tool when they focus on substantive issues and refer to proposed policies rather than the candidates themselves. However, when negative messages are formulated in a too extreme form and focus on non-essential aspects, they discredit both sides participating in the campaign: the attacker and the attacked.

The rise of uncivil language in politics is an international phenomenon. By examining US Congress speeches, Uslaner (1993) notes that the crisis in civility, which undermined traditional norms of acceptable behaviors in parliamentary debate such as courtesy and tactfulness, began as early as the 1970s and 1980s. It reflected increased party polarization following the United States involvement in the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. The radicalization of the language of politics has also been observed in many other countries (Semetko and Schoenbach, 2003; Ilie, 2004; Spary, 2010; Bates et al, 2014; Murphy, 2014).

Empirical research on the social acceptance of political behaviors that overstep cultural norms is carried out primarily in times of intensified political competition during electoral campaigns. The results of the research regarding the effectiveness of such behaviors are inconclusive. Fridkin and Kenney (2004), reviewing literature on the effectiveness of negative campaigns, show that, according to the results of most studies, extremely negative elements attract the recipient's attention, increasing their interest in the speaker, and subject of discussion as well as their emotional engagement in politics; and this increased attraction occurs at the expense of the speaker's competitors. However, they note a number of studies showing no effect of negative campaigns. Meta-analyses conducted by Lau, Sigelman, Heldman and Babbitt (1999) and Lau, Sigelman and Rovner (2007) covering research on the impact of negative campaigns on candidate ratings, indicate that negative campaigns are no more effective than positive ones. Later works by Krupnikov (2011; 2012), meanwhile, suggest that the impact of negative

campaigns occurs both at the level of candidate choice and at the level of political demobilization, but only when certain conditions regarding the chronology of the decision-making process and the specific forms of the campaign are met.

There is less research covering the use of uncivil and hostile language in parliamentary discourse. Works in this category mainly concern the US Congress (Uslaner, 2000; Dodd and Schraufnagel, 2012; Wolf, Strachan and Shea, 2012) and the UK Parliament (Harris, 2001; Jamieson, 2001; Ilie, 2004; Bates et al, 2014; Murphy, 2014). There are also a few, mostly qualitative and with a limited time scale, studies that deal with this issue in relation to the Central and Eastern European countries, including the Polish Sejm (Kamińska-Szmaj, 2001; Laskowska, 2004; Batko-Tokarz, 2008; Piniarski, 2011; Polkowska, 2015). Meanwhile, new democracies lack the long-standing tradition of political culture that creates a framework of what is acceptable in political discourse. As a consequence, utilizing uncivil political language by an MP is less often interpreted as a violation of social norms, both by voters and by political opponents. The low level of political knowledge among elites and voters, resulting from limited democratic experience (Turgeon and Luskin, 2009), also contributes to favoring symbolic issues, referred to as easy issues, covering primarily national identity and moral attitudes, over hard issues, demanding political sophistication and covering details of public policies (Carmines and Stimson, 1986). The symbolic and identity issues are, in turn, susceptible to conflict and political rhetoric based on negative emotions and stigmatization of the opponent.

The language of politics, which functions both as a means of communication and a tool of competition at the state level, is particularly susceptible to extremism. The wide coverage of political discourse by traditional and new social media allows uncivil speeches to quickly spread in society (Sobieraj and Berry, 2011). The simple, expressive, and radical language seems easier to understand and mobilizes politically larger masses of voters than complex discussions about policy details. In addition, aggressive attacks and humiliation of the opponent fuel anti-elitist attitudes. What's more, the media, in pursuit of larger audiences, are more eager to focus on the emotional (especially negative) aspects of parliamentary debate, rather than on substantive elements that are tedious to the majority of the audience.

The clear boundaries between civil and uncivil political discourse are highly subjective, relative, context-dependent, and changeable over time. Thus, there are many different definitions of political incivility, but the most important for the purpose of this study are two features of uncivil language discussed in the literature. The first concerns the hostile, disrespectful, and non-contributive character of uncivil language as discussed by Brooks and Geer (2007, p. 5), who emphasize that 'incivility requires (...) adding inflammatory comments that add little in the way of substance to the discussion' and Coe, Kenski and Rains (2014, p. 660), for whom incivility constitutes 'features of discussion that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone

toward the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics.’ Uncivil speeches express hostility, contempt, or condemnation towards another person or a group of people, presenting their deeds, ideas, and characteristics in an exaggerated, extremely negative way.

The second feature concerns the purpose for which incivility is used in political discourse. We perceive incivility, after Herbst (2010, p. 6), as a contextualized, strategic political tool, and we state that the purpose of aggressive, uncivil language is to give the impression that an opponent is, for fundamental reasons, unworthy of exercising political functions, participating in a political process or even forming part of a political community. This understanding moves incivility beyond the concept of impoliteness towards intolerance (Laden, 2019) and discrimination as it serves an exclusionary function. Ultimately then, incivility is defined here as non-substantial, disrespectful, derogatory, and inflammatory comments which aim to exclude an opponent from a democratic discourse, process, or community.

The conspiracy of the elites and the illusory democracy frame

In this chapter, I focus on a specific sub-genre of uncivil language steadily arising in Polish politics, characterized by a set of distinct features: words that sound archaic and are rarely used in common Polish, are pompous, have extreme negative emotional content, and deliver absolute moral judgments on events, persons, or behaviors. This specific language refers back in time to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth period (1569-1795), when the country became one of the largest and most powerful kingdoms in Europe and then lost independence, was partitioned and vanished as a state. This historically-inspired manner of speech was re-invented in mainstream Polish historical fiction during the long dependence period (1795-1918) as a tool for preserving national identity.

The same kind of language, archaic, and grandiloquent, based on clear distinction between right and wrong, praising the national heroes and expressing moral condemnation of national traitors, has been functioning from the beginning of the Polish democratic transition. Its renaissance after the democratic transition was related to the dispute over Polish identity after the fall of communism and the place of the country in Europe, including issues of transitional justice, national and religious identity, and belonging to international structures. The language stylized on the language of former Polish nobility was particularly tempting for the political parties whose programs appealed to the historical importance of Poland in Europe and its great role in the future, with a notion of national and ethnic superiority, and universal morality. The propagators of this language variety were initially right-wing parties (Kowalski and Tulli, 2003), mainly those which were unsatisfied with the process of political transition in Poland that was negotiated, self-limiting, and gentle towards the previous political elite (Staniszkis, 1999), as well as with the further history of the country.

The peaceful transition from the Communist system to democracy in Poland was based on successful negotiations between the government and opposition concerning the scope and pace of system change. After a massive wave of workers' strikes in 1988, the Communist party officials were forced to legalize the previously outlawed Solidarity movement and to negotiate the extent of change of the political system with opposition leaders. During two months of debates and negotiations – known as the Polish Round Table Talks – between 6th February and 5th April 1989, over 700 participants discussed key spheres of regime design and public policy. However, not all opposition leaders decided to join or were invited to the talks.

From the outset, the opposition was divided over how to hold accountable the former Communist elites and special forces without provoking the aggression of the Soviet Union, and how to prevent them from participating in the political life of the country in the future. For the radical right-wing camp, the agreement between the Communist party and democratic opposition was interpreted as a political plot constructed by the government, aimed at fragmentation of the opposition camp in order to guarantee the impunity of the Communist leaders for their past actions. The Polish government in exile (1989) called the agreement as the 'negation of democracy.'

Therefore, for the small part of the political elite, the Round Table Talks became a symbol of national betrayal. The new democratic regime was treated as the mere illusion of democracy. In this narrative, most of the democratically elected authorities (partially democratically in 1989 and fully democratically in 1991) were connected with Communist ex-politicians and special services agents, and true democracy will come only when they are removed from power and held accountable for their deeds. Similarly, those opposition activists who accepted the negotiations and the compromise arrangements between the democratic opposition forces and the Communist party, have become traitors themselves in the eyes of their more radical and unwilling to compromise colleagues. In this vision, their treason or naivety sealed the actual victory of the Communists.

This division within the opposition elite took effect after the Communist successor party lost nearly all social support during the 2000s and the first half of 2010s, mostly as a result of corruption scandals, falling from 41.0% support in the 2001 election, to 11.3% in 2005 and finally no parliamentary representation in 2015. Consequently, the conflict within the political elite was reframed as the former allies within democratic opposition forces became main political enemies.

The two major players that emerged after the downfall of the post-Communist party were the Law and Justice (PiS), and the Civic Platform (PO) parties. The former managed to build a narrative about the country being secretly ruled by the all-powerful 'system' (*układ*) consisting of coteries of former security agents, post-communist and liberal politicians, and business and criminal environments. The narrative stated that the Polish state was 'in ruin' and in need of urgent renewal of the country

elite through more thorough de-communization. The conflict became even stronger after the 2010 Smoleńsk presidential plane catastrophe, in which the Polish president and Law and Justice party co-founder Lech Kaczyński was killed among 96 Polish officials and others on board. The narrative then was expanded with various conspiracy theories and accusations against the then-ruling Civic Platform party over their responsibility for the crash, or even supposed assassination, and became an important element of Polish political competition (Cześnik, 2014).

To those politicians who perceived the Polish transition exclusively as a secret conspiracy between the Communists and part of the opposition, the fight for democracy has never been over. Poland, even as a democratic state, remains under the rule of its enemies, still a dependent country. The secret service agents influence the most important decisions, and the illusion of democracy restrains people from rioting. In the same vein, Poland's accession to the European Union was interpreted as a continuation of political dependence: 'exchange from the rule of Moscow to the rule of Brussels.' The crash of two radically different visions of Polish history has resulted in the increasing use of archaic, derogatory language.

Methodology and data sources

The research for this chapter was conducted on the full corpus of plenary debates in the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament (Sejm, www.sejm.gov.pl) in the years 1991-2019 covering eight parliamentary terms (a total of around 135 million words in 324719 speeches). The corpus of speeches was scraped from the website of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland (<http://www.sejm.gov.pl>), linked to the metadata available on the site, and the data collected was cleaned and cross validated to exclude errors. The raw texts of the speeches were processed with morphological analysis in order to transform each word into the basic grammatical form. The purpose of lemmatization was to reduce the number of unique vocabulary items and make it possible to track multiple forms of the word together. For lemmatization, Morfologik software, version 2.0.1 was used, which is a dictionary of inflected forms of the Polish language providing software for word stemming (Miłkowski, 2018).

The data set was collated with socio-demographic data of MPs, including age, gender, education, parliamentary experience, votes received in last parliamentary elections, political affiliation, and membership in the government or opposition party. At the level of parties, several party characteristics were added from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow, 2018) (composition of governments) and the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al, 2019) (percentage of votes gained by each party, number of seats by each party, party family, and three dimensions describing party ideology). All analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2017) version 3.4.2 in R Studio (RStudio Team, 2016) version 1.1.383.

For the purposes set before the study, a selection of speeches containing words classified as archaic derogatory language and related to the idea of betrayal, shame, or scandal was automatically selected from the full corpus of parliamentary speeches. I expanded the sub-corpus to contain words expressing strongly negative emotional attitudes, similar in meaning to the above, including: disgrace, infamy, ridicule, shame, villainy, dishonor, scandal, scoundrel, wickedness, treachery, treason, betrayal, and more (see Annex 1). The words were collected using SłowoSiec (PLWORDNET) online resource, which is the largest relational lexical-semantic dictionary of the Polish language. It shows a network of various relations between words and it groups words into synsets (sets of synonyms) (Maziarz et al, 2016). Finally, 15410 speeches with 24200 occurrences of key words were selected, covering all possible grammatical forms derived from the searchable cores or their specific extensions narrowing the search area to the desired thematic scope.

In the following sections, I analyze the increase over time in archaic derogatory vocabulary usage in Polish parliamentary debates during terms I-VIII, covering 28 years after the transition from the communist system to democracy. First, I describe how frequently the MPs speak about disgrace, dishonor, and shame in parliament and I associate fluctuations in the use of this type of uncivil language with key political events in Poland. Second, I examine how the use of archaic, derogatory language is related to the key axes of political competition in Poland and the government-opposition relationship. In addition to party-level variables, I also explore which socio-demographic traits of the MPs can be used as individual-level predictors of usage of archaic derogatory language.

The rise of archaic derogatory language

The collected data confirm that in parliamentary speeches the usage of archaic derogatory language increased over time. During the last term (2015-2019) it reached the highest level ever, both when raw words frequencies are measured, and when they are normalized to the total amount of words in a given parliamentary debate. The usage of this form of uncivil language is unevenly distributed over time (Figure 5.1) and its density reflects the timing of major national crises and conflicts.

Initially, the year 1992 was marked by a high level of archaic derogatory language as a culmination of the conflict over the *lustration* of the political elite: the disclosure of former informants of the communist secret services among government and civil service officials. The escalation of events in 1992 was caused by the adoption of the resolution by the Sejm on 28 May 1992 ordering the Minister of Internal Affairs to ‘provide full information on state officials,’ including the president, ministers, higher officials in public administration, deputies and senators, judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, who collaborated with the UB (Security Office) and SB (Security Service) during the period 1945-1990 (Sejm RP, 1992).

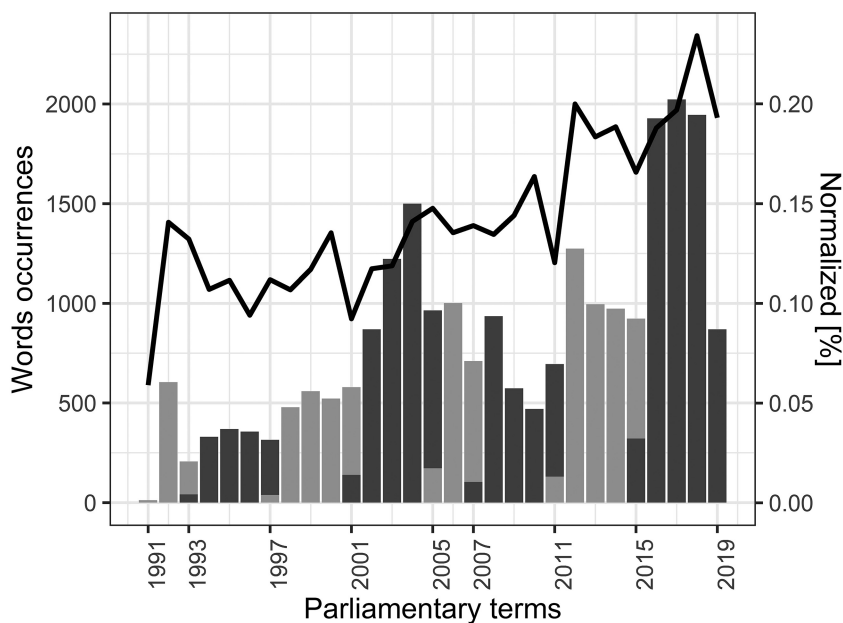


Figure 5.1 Use of archaic derogatory vocabulary in parliamentary speeches in the years 1991-2019.

Source: own calculations. Raw data (bar graph) and data normalized to the total amount of words in parliamentary debates in individual years (line graph). The parliamentary terms are shown in alternating shades.

As a consequence, despite critical legal opinions regarding the compliance of the resolution with the Constitution, the Minister of Internal Affairs presented a list of names, including the president, Marshal of the Sejm, 64 government officials, and many members of parliament. However, the list was unverified and contained not only the names of genuine secret agents, but also of individuals registered as such, including unaware informants, witnesses and victims of Security Service activities. Publication of the list, preceded by a conflict as to the legality and rationality of its disclosure, led to the collapse of the right-wing Olszewski government, and sparked conflicts and accusations within the post-Solidarity camp that have continued ever since. The divisions within the former anti-communist opposition, and its political fragmentation, led to its defeat in the next parliamentary election.

After its initial intensity in 1992, there was a decline in derogatory language and a period of relative calm during the 1993-1997 parliamentary term under the post-communist SLD-PSL government coalition. Subsequently, there was a steady growth in derogatory language, especially during the final

period of Polish accession to the European Union. In the years 2002-2005 there was a dramatic increase in the number of speeches using pompous and uncivil vocabulary, reaching a peak in 2004 (the accession year).

Membership of the European Union was perceived by the majority of the political elite and society as the restoration of Poland's place among integrated European democracies, offering guarantees of economic development, and military security. However, there also existed a strong opposition to EU membership for both cultural and economic reasons. Many right-wing politicians argued that the EU would bring Poland the destruction of Christian values and the secularization of the country, the decay of national culture, and economic subordination to more affluent countries. The enthusiasts of joining the Union were attributed with evil intentions and accused of treason or corruption:

'This is treason, ladies and gentlemen. Let us be aware of the fact that after 1989 in Poland power was taken by sellers and traitors who set themselves the goal of destroying the Polish state and enslaving the Polish nation. This is the disgrace and betrayal of the Polish *raison d'être* ... This betrayal cannot be explained, the betrayal must be condemned. (...) The future generation of Polish men and women will curse and imprecate us for the monstrous and shameful betrayal by Brussels residents.' (Jankowski, 2003).

After Poland's accession to the European Union, the mood in the Sejm calmed down for several years, until the Smolensk catastrophe. The accident became the cause of ongoing conflict in Polish politics between the two largest political parties: PiS and PO. The right-wing politicians placed the blame on the Prime Minister (heading the PO-PSL cabinet) and Russian authorities. Since then, the Smolensk catastrophe has become one of the main axes of the political dispute in Poland.

The greatest increase in incivility, observed since 2016, has been witnessed in the aftermath of anti-democratic reforms introduced by the PiS government. The law subordinating judicial power to the government met with a violent reaction from the opposition and was denounced as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court on 16 January 2018 (soon this institution was dismantled as well); it triggered legal action initiated by the European Commission for Poland's infringement of EU law.

Determinants of use of the archaic derogatory language

Overall, uncivil vocabulary has been used mostly by right-wing parliamentary clubs. During the first increase in the use of extreme vocabulary, taking place in 1992 in the polarized and fragmented 1st term of Sejm (1991-1993), it was a large group of small, radically right-wing parties

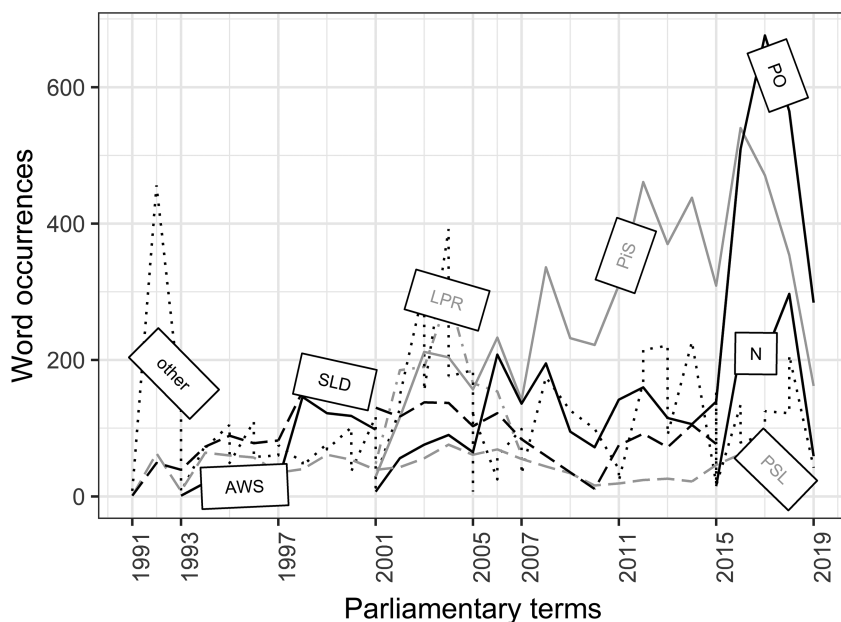


Figure 5.2 Usage of archaic derogatory vocabulary in parliamentary speeches in the years 1991-2019 by parliamentary parties.

Source: own calculations. Data after removal of interruption voices from the set. Individually listed only the largest political parties.

(collectively marked as 'other' in Figure 5.2) that was mainly responsible for the radicalization of the language: the Real Politics Union (UPR), the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), Solidarity Workers' Union (NSZZS), Movement for the Republic (RdR), and the Christian-National Union (ZChN).

Similarly, during the next peak of intensity around 2004, the group most often resorting to accusations of treason and betrayal were the right-wing parties: the Catholic-National Movement (RKN), League of Polish families (LPR), Law and Justice (PiS), and Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP). In the following term, the three latter parties formed a government coalition, when in 2006 the Law and Justice (PiS) minority government was joined by SRP and the LPR. Subsequently, PiS became the party most often using uncivil rhetoric and retained this position until 2015. Since 2016, marked by the constitutional crisis, we have observed the radicalization of both smaller parliamentary clubs (primarily the Modern (N)) and the unprecedented radicalization of the centrist Civic Platform (PO) language.

Analyzing the dynamics of government-opposition relations, archaic derogatory vocabulary is a rhetorical tool used primarily by opposition parties. Figure 5.3a shows that, while in the first decade of democracy there

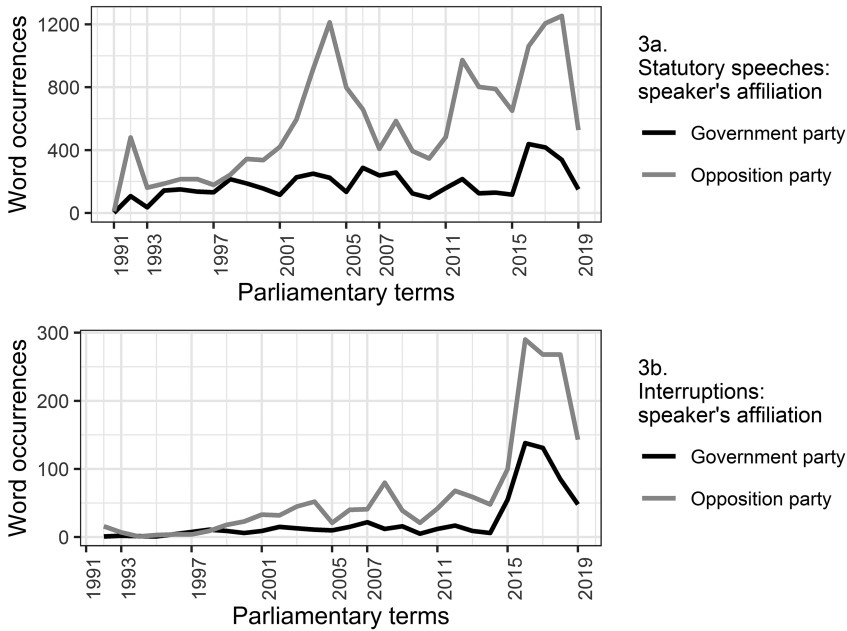


Figure 5.3 Usage of archaic derogatory vocabulary in parliamentary speeches by government and opposition MPs in the years 1991-2019 divided into statutory speeches (a) and interruptions (b).

Source: own calculations.

was no difference between these two types of parties, since then, the opposition parties prevailed and were responsible for the peak intensity of that rhetoric that occurred during the V and VII-VIII terms. This finding is in line with previous research on the use of negative language used by government and opposition parties (Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2010; Walter, Van der Brug and Van Praag, 2014).

The year 2015, which marked the start of the constitutional crisis, brought another interesting phenomenon: a sharp increase in the usage of uncivil language among the parliamentary audience, for example in non-statutory interruptions of speeches by voices from the floor (Figure 5.3b). In parliamentary terms 1–7, the percentage of uncivil interruptions of speeches accounted for just 6% of all occurrences of archaic derogatory language. However, during the 7th term, the percentage of interruptions increased to 21% of all occurrences and it was the opposition parties that were over twice as susceptible to have their speeches interrupted with uncivil comments (as most interruptions in parliamentary transcripts are not assigned to a specific person, we can only assume that they were authored mostly by MPs from government parties).

Finally, we model the number of uses of archaic derogatory language (dependent variable) using five regression models with socio-demographic variables (gender, age, education) and political variables (parliamentary experience – the number of previous parliamentary terms served as MP, the number of votes received in last parliamentary elections) as predictors at the individual level. Additionally, at the party level, several variables were added, including: party status (in government or in opposition) from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow, 2018); percentage of votes gained in last parliamentary election, number of MPs in parliament, party family, and key characteristics of party ideology: positions on economic issues (state – market), on socio-cultural issues (progressive – conservative) and towards European integration (anti – pro) from the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al, 2019). The negative binomial regression was used to estimate the net effects of the variables (Table 5.1).

A key role in determining the frequency of usage of archaic derogatory language is played by political variables. Of particular importance is the political affiliation of the MP. Members of the Christian democratic, conservative and liberal parties are nearly twice as likely to use archaic derogatory language as MPs of social-democratic parties, while MPs of regional parties are the least prone to doing so. A conservative socio-cultural stance, negative attitude towards the European Union, and, to a much lesser extent, pro-market economic are factors that increase the frequency of using this language variation, as indicated by the parameter estimates. These results are in harmony with the described narrative about the illusory democracy and the betrayal of the political elites.

All models confirm the increase of archaic derogatory language over time. In each subsequent term, the use of archaic derogatory words increases by approximately 20%. There is a significant difference between opposition and government parties, with government parties nearly twice less likely to use archaic derogatory language. Other political variables turned out to be statistically significant as well. The total number of party votes from the last parliamentary elections is negatively correlated with the tendency to use archaic derogatory language, and the size of the party in parliament is positively correlated, although the effect size is smaller.

On the individual level, the number of votes gained in the preceding parliamentary election and previous parliamentary experience were the most important predictors. MPs with high public support and extensive previous parliamentary experience much more frequently used inflammatory comments with archaic derogatory language. The number of words used increases by approximately 10% for each additional 10,000 votes in elections and for each additional term of parliamentary experience. None of the socio-demographic variables included in the model (age, gender, education) turned out to be a significant predictor.

Table 5.1 Determinants of use of archaic derogatory language

Dependent variable: Number of archaic derogatory words (MP/term)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Term	0.178*** (0.015)		0.195*** (0.019)		0.198*** (0.021)
Gender (male)	0.109 (0.077)		0.113 (0.073)		0.123 (0.073)
Age	-0.003 (0.003)		-0.002 (0.003)		-0.001 (0.003)
Education	-0.066 (0.087)		0.118 (0.083)		0.131 (0.084)
Number of votes of the MP in the election	0.071*** (0.014)		0.100*** (0.013)		0.097*** (0.013)
Parliamentary experience	0.085** (0.030)		0.105*** (0.028)		0.134*** (0.028)
Government party			-0.700*** (0.068)	0.773*** (0.074)	-0.770*** (0.073)
% of votes of the party in the election			-0.087*** (0.012)	-0.056*** (0.013)	-0.117*** (0.014)
Number of MPs of the party			0.012*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.015*** (0.002)
Economy (State-Market)		-0.012* (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.014* (0.006)	-0.0004 (0.006)
Society (Progressive- Conservative)		0.014*** (0.003)	0.018*** (0.004)	0.016** (0.005)	0.016*** (0.005)
European Integration (Anti-Pro)		-0.091*** (0.011)	-0.043*** (0.013)	-0.040** (0.015)	-0.006 (0.014)
Family: Liberal				0.806*** (0.109)	0.330** (0.114)
Family: Christian democratic				0.547*** (0.141)	0.876*** (0.146)
Family: Conservative				0.759*** (0.133)	0.399** (0.137)
Family: Nationalist				-0.645* (0.266)	-0.345 (0.284)
Family: Agrarian				0.143 (0.115)	-0.078 (0.119)
Family: Ethnic/ regional				-2.211*** (0.641)	-2.081** (0.699)
Family: Special issue				0.463 (0.258)	0.166 (0.257)
Constant	0.503 (0.307)	1.253*** (0.048)	0.431 (0.298)	1.382*** (0.109)	0.331 (0.317)
Observations	3,426	3,658	3,413	3,642	3,413
-2LL	-7,862.041	-8,302.081	-7,635.858	-8,137.238	-7,605.218
theta	0.362*** (0.011)	0.346*** (0.010)	0.431*** (0.014)	0.384*** (0.012)	0.442*** (0.014)
AIC	15,738	16,612	15,297	16,302	15,250

Statistical significance: *** < 0.001, ** < 0.01, * < 0.05.

Source: own calculations. Note: Parameter estimates are negative binomial regression coefficients (standard errors in brackets). Each regression coefficient represents the predicted difference in the log of expected counts for a one unit change in the predictor variable, given the other predictor variables are held constant. Reference category for the party family: social-democratic parties. Data after removal of interruptions.

Conclusion

The archaic derogatory language, pompous, negative, and delivering absolute moral judgment, referring to the period of political splendor of the country, was reintroduced after the fall of Communism by those right-wing parties who disagreed with the negotiated form of democratic transition and the further development of Poland. Following the definition of incivility used in this article, the aim of this non-substantial, disrespectful, inflammatory variety of language was to label political opponents as morally unable to hold a political position and, as a consequence, exclude them from the decision-making process.

The use of archaic derogatory rhetoric in parliament has been increasing since the democratic transition of 1989. In parallel to this continuous growth, it reached its maxima during key periods for the future of the country: during the initial years of democratic transition (1991-1993), when the shape of the future political, and economic system and the rules of holding accountable the former communist elites were discussed; during the fourth term of parliament (2001-2005) when the debate about the Polish accession to the European Union took place; and during the last two terms, after the Smolensk catastrophe up to the current constitutional crisis and democratic backsliding (2011-2019).

This variety of political language is characteristic of opposition parties. This was particularly visible during the period 2003-2005 (in the form of radical opposition to the left-wing, pro-European government of SLD, especially in the second half of the parliamentary term), 2012-2014 (primarily in the speeches of Law and Justice MPs directed against the PO government) and in the last two terms, as a protest of the majority of opposition parties against the two Law and Justice governments. Nearly 90% of the vocabulary from the analyzed collection were used in official speeches, but since 2016 we have observed a radical increase in their usage in the voices from the floor. This change particularly affected opposition parties: since 2016, interruption of speeches with uncivil comments from the floor has affected opposition parties over twice as often as the government parties.

The differences between MPs' use of uncivil language are mostly a consequence of their political affiliation. However, while initially the speeches employing accusations of treason or disgrace were authored primarily by radical right-wing parties, the usage of archaic, derogative vocabulary by MPs from centrist parties has increased greatly since 2015. Besides political affiliation, the usage of archaic derogatory language is moderated by other variables determining the political significance of individual MPs: their electoral support and parliamentary experience.

The overuse of words charged with high negative emotional intensity to describe the events in ordinary, everyday politics has led to the degradation of their significance. With the increase in the frequency of their use, words

like ‘shame,’ ‘disgrace,’ or ‘treason’ have ceased to describe only shocking, memorable historical events, and have widened their meaning to cover the regular political activity of opponents in parliament. It has also resulted in a departure from substantive discussion, which has begun to be conducted not on the basis of facts, but on emotions.

Moreover, using uncivil, extremist language has affected the perception of political opponents not as rivals with different views, but as enemies of the state and the nation, which must be eliminated by all means, including those beyond the repertoire of democratic tools. Thus, political discussions have ceased to allow for compromise in public policies, and have become an excuse to move away from democracy.

Annex 1. Occurrences of keywords in parliamentary debates 1991-2019

Table 5.2 Occurrences of keywords in parliamentary debates 1991-2019

<i>Word stem</i>	<i>English meaning</i>	<i>Number of speeches</i>	<i>Number of occurrences</i>
hańb hanieb	disgrace, disgraceful, disgraced	2285	3077
niesław	infamy, infamous, defamed	326	437
ośmiesz	ridicule, ridiculed, ridiculous	905	1061
wstyd	shame, ashamed, shameful	4713	6518
podł(y e ość) podle	despicable, despicableness	283	370
skandal	scandal, scandalous	4841	6247
łotr	scoundrel	26	33
niegodziw	wickedness, wicked	237	289
targowic	treason*, treasonous	167	234
awantur	affray	802	986
hucp chucp	chutzpah**	206	246
zdrad/zdrajc	betrayal, betrayed, traitor	1532	2138
warcho	rioter	167	335
upokorz upokarz	humiliate, humiliated, humiliating	788	928
nikczemn	villain, villainous	122	148
szubraw	rascal	28	34
pieniac	litigious	82	97
plugaw plugastw	vile	50	61
bezec	turpitude, turpitudinous	16	18
bezczes bezczes	defile, defiled, defiling	75	81
drań	bastard, bastardly	52	61
łajda	scoundrel	48	52
wichrzyciel	barrator	18	20
zniewag znieważ	insult, insults	393	729
Total		15410	24200

*The Targowica Confederation (1792-1993), which led to the partition of Poland, functions as a symbol of treason against the state.

**In the original Yiddish negative meaning (impudence).

***The total number of speeches is less than the sum of the occurrences of the individual words because some speeches contain more than one word from the list.

Source: own calculations.

Annex 2: Polish political parties referred to in the article

Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), Christian democratic; Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), nationalist; League of Polish Families (LPR), Christian democratic; Modern (N), liberal; Solidarity Workers' Union (NSZZS), workers' union; Center Agreement (PC), Christian democratic; Law and Justice (PiS), conservative; Civic Platform (PO), liberal; Polish People's Party (PSL), agrarian; Movement for the Republic (RdR), Christian democratic; Catholic-National Movement (RKN), Christian democratic; Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD), social-democratic; Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP), agrarian; Real Politics Union (UPR), liberal; Christian-National Union (ZChN), Christian democratic;

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