Who's to Blame? Elites and Enemies in Political Party Manifestos – The Case of Poland (2001–2023)[1]

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Abstract

This article examines the actors subjected to criticism by Polish political parties between 2001 and 2023. It also assesses whether a relationship existed between the degree of anti-elitism or enemy discreditation in party manifestos and a party's position within the political system or its ideological orientation. Elites were conceptualized as actors occupying a vertical relationship with 'the people', whereas enemies were characterized by a horizontal opposition. Five types of elites were identified: political, international, state, symbolic, and economic. Similarly, enemies were classified into five categories: geographical, legal, political, economic, and cultural. The article drew inspiration from the populism studies, particularly in its conceptualization of anti-elitism and the construction of enemies per se. Moreover, proposed was an approach that treated anti-elitism and enemy construction not as binary attributes, but as variable and gradable dimensions that could evolve over time—even within the same political parties—and were not exclusive to parties typically labelled as populist. The findings show that, in their manifestos, Polish parties devote significantly more attention to criticizing elites than to identifying enemies. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that the specific types of targeted elites and enemies are shaped by distinct dynamics: some are primarily conditioned by a party's position within the political system, whereas others stem chiefly from its ideological or economic profile.

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1. Introduction

Political parties do not only appeal to voters through promises of social benefits or visions of a better state, but also by assigning blame for any existing unfavourable conditions. This blame is typically directed either at the elites—portrayed as those who have shaped or now control the system from their influential and well-paid positions—or enemies, often described as 'others' or 'outsiders'. These groups are held responsible for the absence of decent jobs, long queues for medical care, public insecurity, and the poor quality of public services. The primary objective of this article is to examine whom political parties identify as responsible for these and other negative circumstances.

The first key question is whether the blame is more frequently directed at elites—positioned above 'the people'—or at enemies located alongside them (**Q1**). As Bobba and McDonnell (2016) have demonstrated in their analysis of Italian populist parties, Forza Italia's messaging contained significantly more anti-elitist rhetoric than did that of the Northern League, which, conversely, focused more heavily on excluding 'others' or 'enemies' from the notion of 'the people'.

This leads us to three foundational concepts in the study of populism: the people, the elite, and the enemy. Their appearance here is not accidental. This article draws substantially on the literature about populism, particularly approaches that conceptualize it as a gradable and measurable phenomenon—most notably Aslanidis (2018), Breyer (2023), Woods (2014), Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011), Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug (2014). The perspective adopted here also aligns closely with views that frame populism as a political communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or a political strategy (Weyland, 2017), rather than as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde, 2004).

That said, the concept of 'the people' is not the main analytical focus of this article. Instead, the primary focus lies on the subsequent question: which elites and which enemies were subject to discreditation (**Q2**)? And ultimately, what types of political parties engage in such rhetoric? Is there a relationship between the critique of elites or the identification of enemies and factors such as a party's position within the political system, its orientation along the economic or GAL–TAN axes, or the degree of its political extremism (**Q3**)?

In the American context, for example, Democrats tend to criticize business elites, while Republicans more frequently target federal political elites (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). Similarly, Maurer and Diehl (2020), in their analysis of presidential candidates' Twitter communication in France and the United States, found that right-wing candidates more often criticized political elites, whereas left-wing candidates focused their criticism on economic ones. Ernst et al. (2017) showed that the level of populism—including both anti-elitism and the identification of 'enemies'—is higher in extreme parties than in centrist ones. Ostiguy and Casullo (2017) indicated that left-wing populism

primarily focuses on the wealthy. In the context of the present article, this corresponds to exclusion along the economic axis. Conversely, right-wing populism tends to target immigrants or members of national minorities and might reflect exclusion along the cultural axis (Green/Alternative/Libertarian vs. Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist).

Once we have established the types of parties that adopt this rhetoric, it becomes equally important to identify which specific Polish parties criticize elites and designate enemies more frequently than others (**Q4**). This raises an interesting issue: does the emphasis on pointing out enemies and condemning elites primarily characterize political actors commonly labeled as populist (Breeze, 2019; Wojczewski, 2020) or radical (Cervi, Tejedor, & Villar, 2023), or might it be associated with additional characteristics of these parties?

Poland represents an interesting case study, given its complex political trajectory. After four decades under Soviet influence, Poland has been a member of the European Union since 2004. Throughout this period, strong anti-elite rhetoric and the construction of enemies, combined with the self-presentation as representatives of 'the people', have been employed by both large and small parties, those in power as well as those in opposition, and across various party families. In the Polish context, several parties have been classified as populist by scholars, most notably Self-Defence (Marczewska-Rytko, 1998; Drelich, 2012), the League of Polish Families (Nalewajko, 2004; Moroska, 2010), the Kukiz'15 movement (Kasprowicz & Hess, 2017; Wrześniewska-Pietrzak & Kołodziejczak, 2018), and Law and Justice (Przyłęcki, 2012; Dzwończyk, 2015). While the first three cases tend to generate little disagreement, it is worth noting that some scholars challenge the classification of Law and Justice as a distinctly populist party (Lewandowski, 2021; Gdula, 2018). After the 1989 transition, new elites gradually emerged, providing critics with new targets—those associated with both the new democratic order and the ancien régime. The shift from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist one caused severe disruptions for millions of workers, leaving many of them unemployed and driving some into poverty as state-owned enterprises were shut down. This historical specificity is essential, as the meanings assigned to the categories of 'elite' and 'enemy' are deeply rooted in the historical, social, political, and ideological contexts in which political parties operate (Nalewajko, 2013; Vaughan & Heft, 2023; Canovan, 1999).

2. 'Elites' and 'Enemies'

Political competition in Poland initially centred on the rivalry between post-communist and post-Solidarity elites. Over time, however, entirely new political parties—unconnected to this historical divide—entered the arena and began competing for electoral support. This development suggests that the types of elites subjected to criticism vary across political actors and time.

The term *elite* is often used imprecisely. It typically refers to individuals perceived as exceptional or influential—those whose decisions shape broader society. This includes groups such as the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, senior bureaucrats, military leaders, intellectuals, artists, athletes, and political figures (Żyromski, 2007). Mills (1956) has defined the 'power elite' as those occupying top positions in the social hierarchy: politicians, high-ranking state officials, military commanders, major shareholders, and corporate executives. Similarly, Moore (1979) has understood elites as individuals who exert influence over the political process.

In this article a broad definition of elites is adopted, recognizing their presence across multiple spheres of social life—including business, law, media, culture, education, and the military (Dye, 1983), as well as politics, religion, the civil service, and labour unions (Giddens, 1972). This approach also brings into focus the notion of *symbolic elites*—those involved in legitimizing decisions and shaping public narratives. These include opinion leaders such as editors, filmmakers, authors, textbook writers, intellectuals, the clergy, and business leaders. While symbolic elites may not hold direct political power, they exert considerable indirect influence by structuring public discourse: determining which topics receive attention, which are marginalized, and which are excluded entirely. They possess symbolic power, enabling them to highlight issues that often remain invisible to the general public (van Dijk, 1993; Bourdieu, 1992; Lasch, 1995). Symbolic elites construct entire symbolic universes—interpretive frameworks that shape the public understanding of reality. These frameworks may simplify or distort complex phenomena in order to make them more accessible to broad audiences. Different symbolic universes interpret the actions and motivations of social actors in diverse, often incompatible ways (Churska, 2005; Krupa & Jezierski, 2024).

Any discussion of elites in recent times must necessarily engage with the literature on populism, as elites are invariably defined in relation to *the people*, to whom political appeals are directed. Populism draws a sharp moral dichotomy between a virtuous, morally pure 'people' and a corrupt elite. This division is vertical in nature: the elite is positioned above and in opposition to the 'people' (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Yet the nature of the elite being denounced depends largely on how the 'people' are imagined.

Conceptions of elites—and the labels used to describe them—vary significantly depending on the historical, geographical, and socio-economic contexts. What constitutes 'the elite' in the United States differs markedly from Venezuela or Poland. Like populism itself, elite critique is highly adaptive and context-dependent–chameleon-like in nature (Taggart, 2000). As Mangset, Engelstad, Teigen, and Gulbrandsen (2019) have demonstrated, there are many types of elites, and different populist movements target different ones. They distinguish between political, intermediate, economic, and cultural elites. Jagers and Walgrave (2007) have identified political, media, state, and economic elites.

The construction of the 'people' necessarily involves drawing boundaries–delineating who belongs and who does not. This process produces antagonistic social divisions and a discursive construction of the enemy (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2005). The enemy may take the form of global forces (e.g., antisemitic conspiracy theories) or specific minority groups, such as immigrants (Ostiguy, 2017). However, the enemy should not always be understood as a marginal or small group. It may consist of large populations marked by different racial backgrounds, sexual orientations, religious affiliations, or political views considered unacceptable (Hameleers & de Vreese, 2020). In this sense, the enemy is defined through exclusion—as a perceived threat to the prosperity and identity of 'our' people. Crucially, the relationship between the people and the enemy is *horizontal* (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), as opposed to the vertical relationship between the people and elites. As with elites, the specific nature of the enemy is shaped by the political, social, and cultural context in which it is constructed.

3. Methods

Political party manifestos were selected as the subject of analysis because they constitute one of the primary instruments through which parties articulate their official positions on central political issues. While these documents are not necessarily widely read by the general electorate, they serve as a crucial source for comparative research and discourse analysis (di Cocco & Monechi, 2022). Manifestos lay out the policy goals, party pledges to pursue if elected, thereby offering insight into its intended governance agenda. Although such texts are often dense and not easily accessible to the average voter, their content is frequently disseminated, interpreted, and popularized by the media, which plays a significant role in shaping public understanding (Harmel, 2018).

The 2001–2023 timeframe chosen for this analysis includes the political rise of Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO), whose first participation in parliamentary elections occurred in 2001. These elections marked the final moment in which the cleavage between post-Solidarity and post-Communist parties—an axis that had shaped Polish politics throughout the first sixteen years of the post-transition period—retained decisive relevance (Grabowska, 2004). Beginning in 2005, Law and Justice (PiS) and Civic Platform (PO) alternated in governing or co-governing the country, entrenching their dominance and reconfiguring political competition around the divide between 'Solidary Poland' and 'Liberal Poland' (Obacz, 2018). From the point at which this new axis gained political salience, every subsequent electoral cycle produced presidents and prime ministers who were either members of these parties or individuals appointed by them, further consolidating their institutional authority. The most recent parliamentary elections were held in 2023 offer the latest available set

of party manifestos, making them an essential reference point for examining current political narratives and priorities.

To address the research questions, a triangulation of methods was applied. The primary method was qualitative content analysis, used to identify negative references to 'elites' and 'enemies' in party manifestos. This was supplemented by quantitative techniques, including quantitative content analysis and statistical testing. Specifically, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed to compare whether two independent groups differed significantly in terms of the frequency or intensity of such references. In addition, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between selected variables.

The sample selection was purposive and based on three criteria: (1) the party or coalition surpassed the threshold of at least 3% of valid votes cast in parliamentary elections, (2) achieved this between 2001 and 2023, and (3) published a sufficiently extensive electoral manifesto to enable reliable content analysis. The analysis included 42 political party manifestos.

Of the analysed documents, 28 were published by parties that consistently met the funding threshold across all elections since 2001, despite occasional changes in their names. These included the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the Polish People's Party (PSL), Civic Platform (PO), and Law and Justice (PiS). The remaining manifestos belonged to formations such as Solidarity of the Right Electoral Action (*AWS Prawicy*), the Freedom Union (UW), the League of Polish Families (LPR), Self-Defense (*Samoobrona*), Polish Socialdemocracy (SDPL), the Palikot Movement (*Ruch Palikota*), Modern (*Nowoczesna*), Kukiz'15, Together (*Razem*), KORWiN, Confederation (*Konfederacja*), and Poland 2050 (*Polska 2050*). In total, the corpus amounted to approximately 4.9 million characters. The complete set of electoral manifestos analyzed in this study is presented in the Appendix.

The dataset included 10 manifestos from governing parties and 32 from opposition parties, and accordingly covered 32 manifestos from parties represented in parliament and 10 from extra-parliamentary parties.

This study uses expert evaluations of political party positions on both the economic left–right axis and the GAL–TAN axis (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002). Party placements on these axes were drawn from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey data spanning 1999–2019 (Jolly et al., 2022), as well as a special 2023 edition (Hooghe et al., 2024). In cases where parties ran as part of coalitions, scores were calculated as the average of the constituent parties' values. Both indices are scaled from 0 (representing the economic left or GAL pole) to 10 (economic right or TAN pole), with results rounded to two decimal places. Extremity on the scales was defined as the distance from the centre point—thus, for instance, a score of 4 (left) and 6 (right) are considered equally distant from the midpoint of 5, and therefore equally 'extreme'.

References to the 'elites' were necessarily negative, encompassing elements of blame, criticism, or discreditation. The 'elites' can be impersonal in nature

(e.g., the political system). Five types of elites were distinguished: political (politicians, political parties), economic (either in general or referring to specific economic entities or industries), international (international institutions, the elites of other countries), state (specific state bodies, bureaucratic elites, judicial elites, military elites), and symbolic (intellectuals, the media, clerical elites).

The 'enemy' or 'others' also can take an impersonal form (e.g. LGBT ideology). Only statements that included criticism, blame, discreditation, or the exclusion of these 'enemies' or 'others' from the people were considered. The enemy was classified into five categories: geographical (e.g., foreigners, immigrants, refugees, the international community, the West, Germany, Russia), legal (those who do not obey the law, such as hooligans, criminals, perpetrators of violence), political (e.g., voters of other parties, broadly defined late-communist nomenklatura), economic (e.g., wealthy individuals, entrepreneurs, professional corporations, interest groups, lobbyists, business cartels, tax fraud schemes, union activists), and cultural (e.g., Islam, Muslims, Catholicism, Catholics, LGBT ideology, gays, Islamophobia, oikophobia, discriminators, sexual minorities).

It should be noted that when discussing the identification of the enemy or anti-elitism, we are referring to concepts that are gradable, as argued by Vaughan and Heft (2023). The codebook itself was adapted from the work edited by Agnieszka Stępińska and Artur Lipiński (2020). For the purposes of this study, several modifications were introduced to better reflect the specific context of Polish political party manifestos.

The unit of analysis was the 'quasi-sentence', defined as a segment of text ending in a full stop, question mark, or exclamation point, irrespective of grammatical completeness. When a relevant term appeared within a quasi-sentence, the corresponding code was applied. Each quasi-sentence could receive multiple codes or none at all, meaning that between 0 and N codes could be assigned. The coding scheme was binary (0 or 1), rather than scalar. Each quasi-sentence was interpreted in its broader textual context. When a coded quasi-sentence was immediately followed by another that expanded upon or clarified the same theme, the latter was also coded. The final result for each category–'elites' and 'enemies'– was calculated by dividing the number of characters in coded quasi-sentences by the total number of characters in the manifesto. Manual coding was carried out using MAXQDA 2024. The data were exported to Excel and processed using SPSS.

Examples of coded fragments:

- A 'quasi-sentence' assigned a single code (discrediting the 'cultural enemies'), results in the sum of its characters being multiplied by 1: 'Obronimy szkoły przed inwazją samozwańczych "seksedukatorów" i propagandystów ruchu LGBT.' = 89 characters x 1 = 89. [*We will defend schools against the invasion of self-proclaimed 'sex educators' and LGBT movement propagandists.*]

- A 'quasi-sentence' assigned two codes (discrediting 'political elites' and 'geographical enemies') results in the sum of its characters being multiplied by 2: 'Władza w Polsce nie może należeć do partyjnych oligarchii, nie może też należeć do obcych rządów, do międzynarodowych korporacji, ani zagranicznych mediów.' = 155 characters x 2 = 310. [*Political power in Poland should not be controlled by party elites, foreign governments, global corporations, or international media outlets.*]

4. Results

Figure 1:
Average Percentage of Elites and Enemies in Polish Political Party Manifestos by Election Year
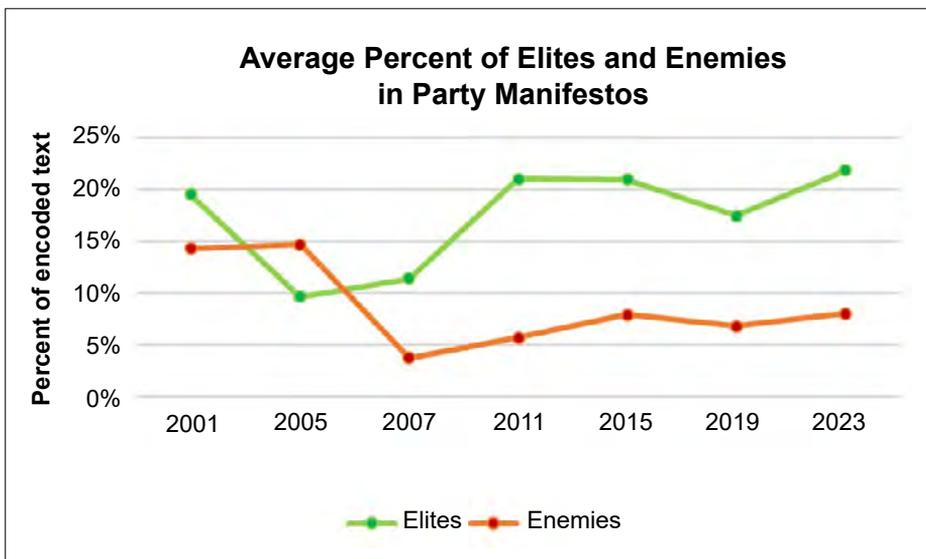
Source: The author.

As shown in Figure 1, in six out of seven electoral cycles, the average share of content dedicated to 'elites' in party manifestos exceeds that devoted to 'enemies.' Across most election years, elite-focused criticism accounts for approximately 18–22% of the total programme content, while references to enemies consistently remain lower, typically ranging from 5% to 7%. Particularly striking is the sharp decline in enemy-related rhetoric following the 2005 elections. In the subsequent cycles—2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2023—mentions of 'enemies' never returned to the levels observed in 2001 or 2005. These findings suggest that political blame is more often attributed to elites (**Q1**). Equally noteworthy is the abrupt rise in

anti-elitism between 2007 and 2011, which remained elevated in 2015. This trajectory is puzzling: in 2007, despite low level of anti-elitism, a major alternation of power occurred (PiS lost office to PO, which formed a coalition with PSL). By contrast, in 2011, elite criticism intensified sharply, yet no power change followed. Only in 2015—when this heightened level of criticism persisted—alternation occurred, with the PO-PSL coalition being replaced by a PiS government.

Figure 2:
Weighted Average Percentage of Elites in Polish Political Party Manifestos by Election Year
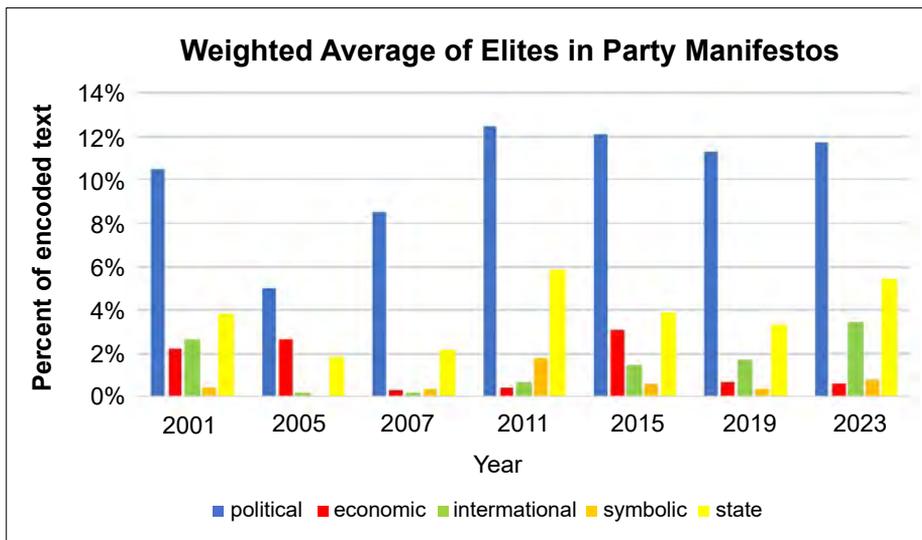
Source: The author.

As shown in Figure 2, *political elites* consistently constitute the most frequently criticized category across all the elections from 2001 to 2023. Criticism of *state elites* also features prominently throughout the period. While *economic* and *international elites* are targeted more sporadically, their presence is nevertheless clearly visible in certain years. By contrast, *symbolic elites* remain largely marginal in the discourse—at no point exceeding 2% of programmatic content, with their highest share recorded in 2011 (**Q2**). The next section examines which parties are more likely to direct criticism at elites, taking into account their position within the political system.

Table 1:
Mann–Whitney U Test Results for 'Elites' and Their Subtypes

Grouping variable: Government vs. Opposition Party						
Category	**Elites**	**Political elites**	**Economic Elites**	**International Elites**	**Symbolic elites**	**State Elites**
Mann–Whitney U test	30.000	30.000	73.000	143.000	117.000	88.000
Test statistic	-3.840	-3.839	-2.573	-0.519	-1.333	-2.127
p-value	**<0.001**	**<0.001**	**0.010**	0.603	0.183	**0.033**
Grouping variable: Parliamentary vs. Non-parliamentary Party						
Category	**Elites**	**Political elites**	**Economic Elites**	**International Elites**	**Symbolic Elites**	**State Elites**
Mann–Whitney U test	65.000	84.000	92.000	143.000	152.000	106.000
Test statistic	-2.806	-2.244	-2.011	-0.519	-0.248	-1.595
p-value	**0.005**	**0.025**	**0.044**	0.603	0.804	0.111

Source: The author.

As shown in Table 1, several statistically significant patterns can be identified. First, *elite criticism* varies depending on a party's position within the political system: opposition and non-parliamentary parties tend to criticize elites more frequently than governing and parliamentary parties. Second, when comparing governing and opposition parties, statistically significant differences are evident in the criticism of *political*, *economic*, and *state elites*, with opposition parties engaging in such criticism more often. Third, in the comparison between parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties, significant variation is observed in the frequency of criticism directed at *political* and *economic elites* (**Q3**).

Table 2:
Pearson's Correlation Results for Economic and GAL-TAN Axis

Category		**Economic axis**	**Economic extreme**	**GAL-TAN axis**	**GAL-TAN extreme**
Elites	r	0.179	**.331***	0.166	**.340***
	p-value	0.257	**0.032**	0.294	**0.028**
Political Elites	r	0.097	0.206	0.062	0.261
	p-value	0.540	0.190	0.694	0.096
Economic Elites	r	-0.046	**.545****	0.045	0.171
	p-value	0.771	**<0.001**	0.776	0.279
International Elites	r	0.172	**.394****	**.437****	**.391***
	p-value	0.276	**0.010**	**0.004**	**0.010**
Symbolic Elites	r	-0.020	-0.210	-0.142	0.133
	p-value	0.901	0.182	0.371	0.402
State Elites	r	**.352***	0.133	0.088	0.170
	p-value	**0.022**	0.401	0.580	0.281

Source: The author.

As illustrated in Table 2, several interesting and statistically significant correlations can be observed. First, there is a clear relationship between elite criticism and a party's ideological extremity on both the economic and GAL–TAN axes, with the strength and significance of the correlations being notably similar across both dimensions. Second, a strong and non-random correlation is evident between criticism of *economic elites* and economic extremity—parties at the far ends of the economic spectrum are more likely to express such criticism. Third, criticism of *international elites* is correlated both with economic extremity and with party positioning on the GAL–TAN axis: TAN-oriented parties are more prone to criticizing *international elites* than GAL-oriented ones, and this tendency increases with ideological extremity on the GAL–TAN scale. Fourth, criticism of *state elites* is associated with a party's position on the economic axis, with right-leaning parties showing a greater propensity to target this type of elite (**Q3**). To explore this further, Table 3 highlights party manifestos in which elite criticism exceeded by more than two standard deviations (SD).

Table 3:
Party Manifestos in Which Elite Criticism Exceeded by more than 2 SD

Category	Year	Party Name	Content in Manifesto	Average Content in Manifestos
Elites	2015	Kukiz'15	0.5078	0.1767
	2023	Confederation	0.4952	
Political Elites	2015	Law and Justice	0.2855	0.1021
	2015	Kukiz'15	0.2845	
Economic Elites	2015	Together	0.1217	0.0166
International Elites	2001	League of Polish Families	0.1626	0.0150
	2023	Confederation	0.1768	
Symbolic Elites	2011	Palikot Movement	0.0741	0.0059
State Elites	2011	Palikot Movement	0.1455	0.0372
	2023	Confederation	0.1144	

Source: The author.

As illustrated in Table 3, the threshold of two standard deviations was exceeded once by the League of Polish Families in 2001, twice by the Palikot Movement in 2011, once by Law and Justice in 2015, once by Together in 2015, twice by Kukiz'15 in 2015, and three times by Confederation in 2023 (**Q4**). Importantly, all of these manifestos were published by parties that were in opposition at the time of publication. Furthermore, six out of the ten cases involved non-parliamentary parties that were either newly established or relatively new to the political landscape. Only one instance—Law and Justice in 2015—concerned a party from the political mainstream. Notably, this party went on to form the government following the 2015 parliamentary elections.

Figure 3:
Weighted Average Percentage of Enemies in Polish Political Party Manifestos by Election Year
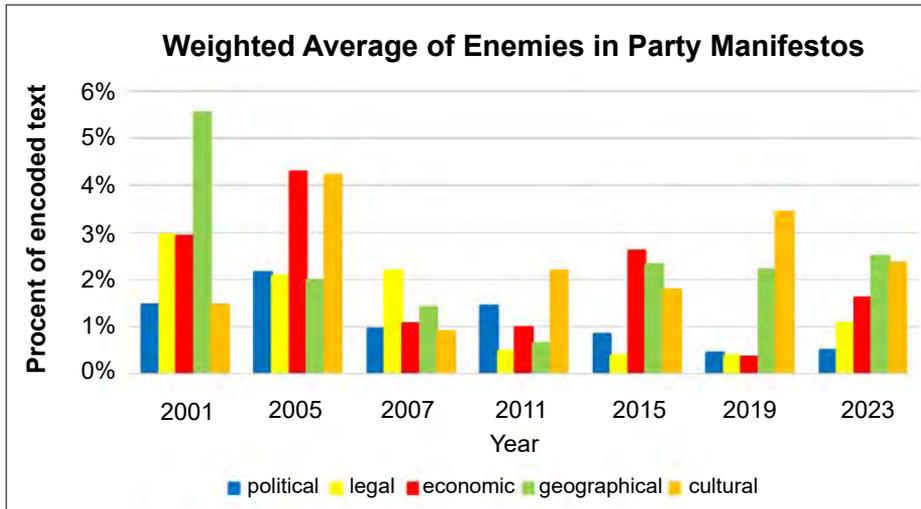
Source: The author.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the distribution of 'enemy' types is notably more varied, with no single dominant category, unlike the case of the 'elites'. In 2001, the dominant *enemy* is *geographical*; in 2005 – *economic*; in 2007 – *legal*; in 2011 – *cultural*; in 2015 – again *economic*; in 2019 – *cultural*; and in 2023 – once more *geographical*. Notably, the only type of 'enemy' that never becomes dominant across the observed periods is a *political* one (**Q2**). The results are especially thought-provoking, as they demonstrate the diverse and complex contexts that shaped the formulation of party electoral programs.

Table 4:
Mann–Whitney U Test Results for 'Enemies' and Their Subtypes

Grouping Variable: Government vs. Opposition Party						
Category	**Enemies**	**Political Enemies**	**Legal Enemies**	**Economic Enemies**	**Geographical Enemies**	**Cultural Enemies**
Mann–Whitney U test	76.000	108.500	152.000	113.000	149.000	102.500
Test statistic	-2.481	-1.550	-0.237	-1.389	-0.326	-1.699
p-value	**0.013**	0.121	0.812	0.165	0.745	0.089
Grouping Variable: Parliamentary vs. Non-parliamentary Party						
Category	**Enemies**	**Political Enemies**	**Legal Enemies**	**Economic Enemies**	**Geographical Enemies**	**Cultural Enemies**
Mann–Whitney U test	84.000	142.000	103.000	120.000	157.000	127.000
Test statistic	-2.244	-0.542	-1.692	-1.182	-0.089	-0.975
p-value	**0.025**	0.588	0.091	0.237	0.929	0.330

Source: The author.

Table 4 reveals only two statistically significant findings. Differences between governing and opposition parties, as well as between parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties, appear only when all *enemy* types are considered collectively. This suggests that a party's position within the political system affects how frequently *enemies* are referenced, but not which specific types are emphasized (**Q3**).

Table 5:
Pearson's Correlation Results for Economic and GAL-TAN Axis

Category		Economic axis	Economic extreme	GAL-TAN axis	GAL-TAN extreme
Enemies	r	0.037	**.523****	0.130	0.265
	p-value	0.817	**<0.001**	0.413	0.090
Political Enemies	r	-0.099	-0.282	-0.001	0.195
	p-value	0.534	0.071	0.996	0.216
Legal Enemies	r	-0.042	0.023	0.139	0.052
	p-value	0.792	0.884	0.381	0.746
Economic Enemies	r	**-.377***	0.287	-0.077	0.109
	p-value	**0.014**	0.066	0.627	0.490
Geographical Enemies	r	-0.200	0.287	**.494****	**.377***
	p-value	0.203	0.065	**0.001**	**0.014**
Cultural Enemies	r	-0.160	-0.001	-0.248	0.162
	p-value	0.312	0.995	0.113	0.306

Source: The author.

As shown in Table 5, several statistically significant and noteworthy correlations emerge. First, there is a strong and non-random correlation between the frequency of *enemy* references and a party's extremity on the economic axis. Second, when it comes to *economic enemies*, the position on the economic axis matters—parties on the left are more likely to identify *economic enemies*. Third, in the case of *geographical enemies*, there is a strong and significant correlation between such references and a party's side on the GAL–TAN axis—parties on the TAN side are more inclined to point to *geographical enemies*. Additionally, for *geographical enemies*, party extremity on the GAL–TAN axis is also a significant factor (**Q3**). To explore this further, Table 6 highlights party manifestos in which enemies criticism exceeded by more than two standard deviations (SD).

Table 6:
Party Manifestos in Which Enemy Discreditation Exceeded by more than 2 SD

Category	Year	Party Name	Content in Manifesto	Average Content in Manifestos
Enemies	2001	Law and Justice	0.2514	0.0963
	2001	League of Polish Families	0.2874	
	2005	Democratic Left Alliance	0.2534	
	2005	Self-Defense	0.3380	
Political Enemies	2001	Law and Justice	0.0596	0.0114
	2005	Democratic Left Alliance	0.0994	
Legal Enemies	2001	Law and Justice	0.0703	0.0138
	2005	Law and Justice	0.0677	
	2007	Law and Justice	0.0528	
Economic Enemies	2005	Self-Defense	0.1839	0.0914
	2015	Together	0.1328	
Geographical Enemies	2001	League of Polish Families	0.2707	0.0253
Cultural Enemies	2005	Democratic Left Alliance	0.1402	0.0238
	2005	Self-Defense	0.0965	
	2019	Democratic Left Alliance / Left	0.0836	

Source: The author.

As shown in Table 6, the threshold of two standard deviations was exceeded on five occasions by Law and Justice (three times in 2001, once in 2005, and once in 2007), four times by the Democratic Left Alliance (three times in 2005 and once in 2019), three times by Self-Defense in 2005, twice by the League of Polish Families in 2001, and once by Together in 2015 (**Q4**). As can be observed, for many of these parties, these were the first elections in which they ran under their own label. What is particularly striking is that two of the programmes that surpassed the two-standard-deviation threshold belonged to governing parties at the time—specifically, the Democratic Left Alliance in 2005 and Law and Justice in 2007. This finding is especially noteworthy, as no comparable case was observed in relation to anti-elitism, as previously demonstrated in Table 3.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings suggest that political manifestos tend to target elites more frequently than enemies, which is, to some extent, understandable. Given that party manifestos are designed to appeal to voters, particularly in the case of catch-all parties, it is often more strategic to avoid explicitly designating parts of the electorate as 'enemies'—whether these are supporters of competing parties, individuals identifying with movements such as LGBT, or people who do not practice the

dominant religion. Such labelling excludes these groups from the category of 'us', thereby increasing the risk of losing their electoral support. Although 'enemies' may be defined in impersonal terms, as discussed earlier, they are often framed in a personal way, referring to individuals who may be voters of these parties. Such framing risks alienating potential supporters by excluding them from the 'people'. The predominant target of elite-related criticism is the *political elite*.

The intensity of anti-elitism is significantly influenced by a party's position within the political system: opposition parties are more inclined to criticize elites than those in government, and non-parliamentary parties do so more frequently than their parliamentary counterparts. This would partially support the findings of Bobba and McDonnell (2016). Additionally, extremity on both the economic and GAL–TAN axes is positively correlated with elite criticism. This finding is also supported by the study conducted by Ernst et al. (2017), although their research focused on populism, within which anti-elitism was defined as one of the three core components of populism. This does not necessarily mean that every opposition party exhibits a higher level of anti-elitism in its manifesto than every party in government.

Specifically, criticism of *international elites* is associated with economic extremity, GAL–TAN positioning (with greater intensity on the TAN side), and GAL–TAN extremity. Interestingly, criticism of *political elites* is statistically significant only with respect to a party's systemic position (oppositional) and parliamentary status (non-parliamentary). In the case of *state elites*, the key variables are systemic position (opposition) and placement on the economic axis (right side). For *economic elites*, the relevant factors are systemic position (opposition), parliamentary absence, and economic extremity. These results only partially confirm previous findings by Bonikowski and Gidron (2016), Oliver and Rahn (2016), and Maurer and Diehl (2020).

A noteworthy observation concerns which parties display significantly higher levels of elite criticism. Many of these instances involve parties participating in their first election cycle: in 2001, the League of Polish Families (*international elites*); in 2011, the Palikot Movement (*symbolic* and *state elites*); in 2015, Together (*economic elites*); and in 2015, Kukiz'15 (elites in general and *political elites*). This pattern suggests a possible relationship between party novelty and heightened elite criticism. Indeed, in 6 of the 10 cases that surpassed the two-standard-deviation threshold, the parties were electoral newcomers.

It is also important to note—though this may not be immediately evident from quantitative analysis—that governing parties can engage in elite criticism in their manifestos, which may initially seem paradoxical, given that these parties themselves constitute part of the elite. Such criticism can be directed at *political elites* from previous administrations, as well as at other types of elites outside the current political sphere, including certain *state elites*, such as judicial authorities, or *symbolic elites*, including intellectuals and journalists.

The key explanatory variables 'enemy' references are systemic position (opposition), lack of parliamentary representation, and economic extremity. For *economic enemies*, the only statistically significant factor is a party's position on the left of the economic spectrum. In the case of *geographical enemies*, both TAN side placement and extremity on the GAL–TAN axis are significant. These findings support the observations made by Ostiguy and Casullo (2017).

Unlike anti-elitism, enemies criticism does not show a consistent association with party novelty. Although some new parties—such as Law and Justice in 2001 (enemies in general, *political*, and *legal enemies*), the League of Polish Families in 2001 (enemies in general and *geographical enemies*), and Together in 2015 (*economic enemies*)—fit this profile, only 6 of the 15 cases exceeding the two-standard-deviation threshold involved first-time electoral participants. This suggests that while party novelty may be a key driver of anti-elitism, its link to pointing out enemies is less robust.

Although existing studies have addressed the portrayal of threats and adversaries—whether in the form of elites or other groups—they have typically focused on specific populist (Breeze, 2019; Wojczewski, 2020) or radical parties (Cervi, Tejedor, & Villar, 2023). In contrast, this study conceptualizes both anti-elitism and enemy designation as gradable phenomena, and, most importantly, as potentially present in the programmes of any political party, regardless of whether it is classified as populist.

This study has certain limitations. The analysis is confined to Poland, which is a large democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, between 2001 and 2023. And though the textual corpus analysed was substantial, future comparative research involving neighbouring countries with similar political systems, socio-economic challenges, and post-communist trajectories could offer valuable additional insights. It should also be emphasized that only the content of party manifestos was analyzed. The study did not take into account whether the parties intended to implement the programmes, nor did it consider their statements in parliament or during election campaigns.

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Appendix: Manifestos examined in the article

Year of manifesto	Party Name and/or Coalition Name	Number of signs
2001	Democratic Left Alliance - Labour Union (SLD-UP)	66 656
2001	Civic Platform (PO)	91 953
2001	Law and Justice (PiS)	98 219
2001	Polish People's Party (PSL)	118 509
2001	League of Polish Families	8 719
2001	Solidarity of the Right Electoral Action (AWSP)	17 350
2001	Freedom Union (UW)	87 664
2005	Law and Justice (PiS)	31 406
2005	Civic Platform (PO)	91 547
2005	Self-Defence (Samoobrona)	20 770
2005	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	18 673
2005	League of Polish Families (LPR)	23 148
2005	Polish People's Party (PSL)	22 401
2005	Social Democracy of Poland (SLD)	14 805
2007	Civic Platform (PO)	161 476
2007	Law and Justice (PiS)	107 246
2007	Left and Democrats (LiD)	135 625
2007	Polish People's Party (PSL)	57 920
2011	Civic Platform (PO)	157 723
2011	Law and Justice (PiS)	680 832
2011	Palikot's Movement (Ruch Palikota)	25 008
2011	Polish People's Party (PSL)	26 567
2011	Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	346 670
2014/15	Law and Justice (PiS)	459 092
2015	Civic Platform (PO)	149 114
2015	Kukiz'15	50 115
2015/16	Modern (Nowoczesna)	112 041
2015	Polish People's Party (PSL)	40 316
2015	Democratic Left Alliance / United Left (SLD/ZLeW)	68 716
2015	KORWiN	74 944
2015	Together (Razem)	73 131
2019	Law and Justice / United Right (PiS/ZP)	454 871
2019	Civic Platform / Civic Coalition (PO/KO)	116 686
2019	Left (Lewica)	17 372
2019	Polish People's Party / Polish Coalition (PSL)	53 619

Year of manifesto	Party Name and/or Coalition Name	Number of signs
2019	Confederation (Konfederacja)	14 475
2023	Law and Justice / United Right (PiS)	464 060
2023	Civic Platform / Civic Coalition (PO/KO)	19 676
2023	Poland 2050 (Polska 2050)	42 905
2023	Polish People's Party (PSL)	81 913
2023	Confederation (Konfederacja)	129 239
2023	New Left (Nowa Lewica)	74 600