

# Migrants' Political Participation and Representation in Poland: What Do Political Parties Have to Offer?

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## Abstract

Since 2018, Poland has been a net migration country, yet public debates on migrants and migration remain scarce and have been defined by a reactionary nature. This article, adopting a political opportunity structure perspective, focuses on political parties as the main actors shaping opportunities and constraints for migrant political participation and representation in Polish society. Based on a qualitative content analysis of party manifestos and parliamentary debates, and using the deductive thematic analysis framework, this study analysed three types of arguments parties have adopted regarding the admission of migrants. The findings revealed that Polish political parties, failing to see non-voting migrants as promising electoral targets, have weaponised the migrant issue and used it as an element of the partisan battle to attack opponents, especially during the election campaign period, instead of stimulating migrants' political participation and offering them channels for representation.

## Keywords

migrant participation and representation; opportunity structure; Poland; political parties

## 1. Introduction

In terms of ethnicity, language, and religion, Poland is one of Europe's most homogeneous countries. After the extermination of the Jewish community by Nazi Germans, and following the westward shift of Poland's borders in 1945, the proportion of ethnic minorities in Poland's total population plummeted from 30–35% down to just a few percent (Olejnik, 2003, pp. 63–64; Szczepański, 2020, pp. 164–165). After World War II, Poland, a country behind the Iron Curtain, was also relatively closed off to international migration. It was no

sooner than the beginning of the 1990s when it opened to migration flows. However, over 20 years, it has become a country of much higher emigration than immigration (Fassmann & Münz, 2000). Many Poles have emigrated to Western countries looking for better job opportunities, with the process accelerating with the Polish accession to the EU in 2004 (Black et al., 2010). At the same time, the immigration policy in Poland has been restrictive and subordinated primarily to the labour market. To legally work, migrants must obtain a work permit before crossing the Polish border. This was not easy in the initial post-transition period (Iglicka & Gmaj, 2015, p. 16). Still, as time went on, the process became less complicated, which was the Polish government's response to a rising dependency ratio and a labour market facing worker shortages (Republic of Poland, 2021).

In 2018, Poland became a country of net migration (Fihel & Okólski, 2020). According to Statistics Poland (2020), the number of immigrants rose from around 100,000 in 2011 (approximately 0.26% of the Polish population) to more than 2 million in 2019 (approximately 5% of the population). The country has started to attract migrants, mainly from post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Georgia, and from Asian countries such as India, China, and the Philippines (Fihel & Okólski, 2020; Republic of Poland, 2023). In the years between 2016 and 2022, it is estimated that Poland was the leading EU country in terms of the number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals, outstripping all major European net immigration countries (Eurostat, 2023; Okólski, 2021, p. 162).

Poland's transformation from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration was further accelerated by two events that happened just across Poland's eastern border. First, the 2020 fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus caused an influx of Belarusians, including political oppositionists, against Lukashenko's government. According to Eurostat (2023), in 2020–2022, more than 467,000 first permits were issued to Belarussians. The second event was Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In 2022–2023, an estimated 2.4–2.7 million Ukrainians were living in Poland (Pacewicz, 2023), which includes the estimated 1.3–1.5 million Ukrainian migrants who arrived immediately before the outbreak of the war (Duszczuk et al., 2023). During this period, Poland also faced the organised smuggling of migrants into the EU by the Belarusian regime. This procedure started in the late summer of 2021. On the initiative of Lukashenko, migrants, mainly from the Middle East and Africa, were transported to Belarus and then pushed towards the EU border to cross it and go to Western Europe. The Polish government reacted by closing most of the border crossings it shared with Belarus, establishing a state of emergency in the eastern part of the country and building a barrier on the Polish-Belarusian border (Sobczak, 2022).

When immigration to Poland was still relatively limited, political parties had a constrained interest in the issue. There was limited public debate and scant media attention. This fostered a restricted, technocratic, and non-politicized formulation of migration policies (Łodziński & Szonert, 2016, p. 22). Limited attention was devoted to integrating migrants into Polish society. The situation changed in 2015, not so much because of the increasing number of migrants but because Poland had to react to the European Commission's proposal for a relocation mechanism for migrants arriving in southern Europe en route to other EU member states. The coincidence in timing with the parliamentary election campaign in Poland resulted in the topic of migration being politicised, and it subsequently drew significant media attention. There has been a dramatic shift from practically no immigration-related debates to the proliferation of anti-immigrant rhetoric rooted in discrimination, particularly against asylum seekers arriving in Europe (Krzyżanowski, 2018). Thus, 2015 is considered a pivotal year for public discourse on migration in Poland (Klepański et al., 2023, p. 489). In the

following years, Poland was directly confronted with the Belarusian crisis of 2021 and the Ukrainian crisis of 2022. The attitudes of Polish political parties towards both crises were drastically different.

While other articles in this thematic issue analyse the factors influencing migrants' participation in the electoral process in the country of origin (Finn & Ramaciotti, 2024; Gherghina & Basarabă, 2024), we focus on opportunities for migrant participation and representation in the host country, precisely on the types of arguments adopted by Polish political parties towards the admission of immigrants. The aim was to answer the question: How do the parties' positions create favourable or unfavourable conditions for the representation and participation of immigrants in politics?

This article begins by discussing the rationale for adopting the political opportunity structure model as an analytical paradigm. Next, the research design is presented, emphasising the case selection, method for analysis, and data sources, and the analysed political parties are also briefly introduced. The four parliamentary parties' positions towards migrants are then analysed to determine to what extent they create opportunities for migrants and to what extent, by shaping and framing the discourse, they impose barriers to integration.

## 2. Political Parties as Actors Shaping the Political Opportunity Structure

Migrants' opportunities for political participation and representation depend on their characteristics (e.g., level of education, previous experiences from their country of origin, willingness to engage in the public sphere, degree of networking, and involvement in migrant associations) and the political system of the host country. Formal legal arrangements, mechanisms and available channels for participation, integration policies, and public discourse on migration constitute the political opportunity structure (i.e., the determinants of the social group's activities that can facilitate or block political engagement). As early as the 1970s, Eisinger (1973), in analysing political protests directed towards urban institutions, noted that the inclusiveness of a political system favours political activism. This concept has been developed by subsequent researchers (e.g., Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1992; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004), and while it originally referred to the nation-state and the activism of its citizens, particularly those engaging in social and protest movements, over time it has also been applied to the context of immigrants' participation and representation.

The application of the political opportunity structure model when analysing migrant participation and representation focuses on the role of the political system and its actors, mainly political parties. Political parties not only potentiate migrants' collective engagement (Bloemraad, 2006); they also co-create the political-institutional system, shape and control the operation of state institutions, participate in decision-making processes, and influence the direction and content of the political narrative on migration (Koopmans, 2004; Koopmans & Statham, 2000). Therefore, it is not only the systemic environment but also the discursive opportunity structure that affects the representation and participation of migrants. For instance, the stronger the anti-immigrant sentiment and socio-political divisions in public discourse, the greater the reluctance of immigrants to become politically active (Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999).

Politicians project public perceptions of social problems, control debates on these issues, and offer solutions to legitimise their actions (van Dijk, 2000b, p. 17). Furthermore, political parties attempt to frame the agenda,

giving it the discursive character most appropriate from a party's point of view (Weinar, 2006, p. 51; Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). Thus, they not only seek to promote issues that are convenient for them, but they also highlight particular aspects of these issues to give them a certain value and meaning (Rafałowski, 2023, p. 23). For example, the party discourse on migrants may leverage arguments focusing on the economic benefits or hazards of migrants' presence, especially in relation to the welfare system, to promote certain values and norms (e.g., human rights, solidarity, and empathy). However, they may also rely on stereotypes and even evoke prejudice against strangers to promote their exclusion in the name of defending national identity.

Previous research, which concentrated primarily on Western Europe, has shown that political parties are the main actors responsible for politicising public debates on migration (e.g., Gattinara, 2016; van der Brug et al., 2015), regardless of the number of migrants in the hosting country. More often, following the issue-ownership theory (Stier et al., 2017), right-wing parties, and radical-right parties in particular, have made migration central to their political discourse to bring the topic into public debate more frequently, and they have done so more willingly than other parties (Davis & Deole, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Rydgren, 2008). In their discourse, they often securitise the topic both economically (Heidenreich et al., 2020) and physically (Gattinara, 2016) and use it to introduce a highly restrictive and monocultural approach to migration policies (van Heerden et al., 2014). Representatives of these parties also regard migrants as a threat to national identity, values, norms, and even the political cohesion of their countries (Burscher et al., 2015; Yerly, 2022).

Western European left-wing parties, except for those on the extreme left (Heidenreich et al., 2020; Kopyciok & Silver, 2021), have generally adopted a more moderate position on migration. They have looked for different narratives regarding migration, adopting a framework of social justice and (in)equality often underlying humanitarian aspects of migration. They have also exhibited a higher level of coherence when it comes to migration issues than their main political rivals (Carvalho & Ruedin, 2020). However, in the late 2010s and early 2020s, many of them, in response to the social expectations of the voters in their countries (Bröning, 2018), tightened their position on migration issues and introduced new policies based more on reducing the numbers of immigrants, especially asylum seekers, and posing limits to the social support they receive. Examples of such changes are the Danish Social Democrats' programme *Just and Realist: An Immigration Policy that Unites Denmark* (Malm & The Zetkin Collective, 2021, pp. 163–164), the Swedish Social Democrat policy *A Safe Migration Policy for New Time* (Cameron, 2018), or the policy stances of the German or Austrian social democratic parties (Bröning, 2018).

Drawing on the existing body of literature on political parties' discourses on migration, this work identified the gaps that need to be addressed. First, the existing analysis has mainly focused on Western countries, where the problem of migration has been present and relevant in politics for many years, mainly because they see a larger number of migrants. Analysis focused on Central and Eastern Europe is rarer (Krzyżanowski, 2020) as these countries have only recently become host countries. Second, extreme parties' discourse on migrants is more regularly addressed than mainstream political actors' discourse (Carvalho & Ruedin, 2020; Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). This is mainly because the extreme parties more often have a strong stance on immigration, and following salience theory (Budge et al., 1987), devote more space and attention to these issues than the parties with less restrictive positions. Third, parties' positions on immigration are a vital component of new political fractures that do not always overlap, with the left–right divide (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2012; Ruedin & Morales, 2019, p. 310). Furthermore, a continuum can be drawn, where political parties can be placed

closer either to a liberal and pro-immigration or to a restrictive and anti-immigration position, bearing in mind that immigration and integration policy can bring a diverse set of sometimes conflicting issues. They can be structured into the following approaches: utility-oriented, identity-oriented, and liberal universal (Gherghina et al., 2022, pp. 489–490). These approaches serve as the analytical framework of this article and will be used to examine political opportunity structures using the example of political parties from Poland.

### 3. Case Selection, Data, and Methods of Analysis

This research focused on the comparison of the four Polish political parties that together cover the entire ideological spectrum: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice; PiS), the Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform; PO), Nowa Lewica (New Left; NL), and Konfederacja (Confederation). Although there are other parties in the Polish party system, these four have the most distinctive positions on migration issues. PiS and PO are the two parties that have dominated the political scene and, since 2005, have alternated in power. In the 2023 parliamentary election campaigns, the two smaller parliamentary parties, the far-right Konfederacja and NL, whose narratives on migrants are radically different from each other, were positioned as potential junior partners of a government coalition for the two largest parties: Konfederacja for PiS and the NL for PO.

This study chose to analyse Poland and Polish political parties for several reasons. First, Poland is a country in transition from an emigration state to an immigration state. As a representative case for Central Europe, Poland is appropriate for the analysis of the process of familiarising society with cultural diversity and integrating the topic of migrant policy into the public agenda and the practical actions of political parties. Second, due to external circumstances, such as pressure on the border from Belarus instigated by Lukashenka and the war in Ukraine, migrants in large groups were entering Poland, causing the issue of migration to become palpable and topical in the public sphere, exactly as in other countries in the region. Third, this study chose to concentrate on the positions of political parties because they are crucial actors in the parliamentary-cabinet system and are “the primary vehicles for integrating interests and formulating policy” (Tavits, 2013, p. 2).

To compare the parties’ stances on migration issues, party discourse from 2019 to 2023, when migration issues became the most salient, was analysed. The primary sources for the thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017) were the parliamentary speeches from the plenary debates devoted to migration issues and the party manifestos from the 2023 general elections.

Parliamentary debates, which can be seen as “a formal gathering of a group of elected representatives, members of various political parties, engaging in a discussion about what collective action or policy to undertake concerning an issue of public concern” (van Dijk, 2000a, p. 53), are a forum for communication with citizens, enabling public articulation of social interests. Though the Polish Sejm may be categorised as a “working parliament,” in which much of the parliamentary work is delegated to committees (Auel & Raunio, 2014, p. 13), the plenary debates, during which MPs present their parties’ positions in a formalised manner, are designed to influence public opinion, especially as they can be watched in real-time and are also recorded and transcribed.

All four parliamentary debates devoted entirely to migration that took place in the period 2019–2023 were analysed. All debates were attended by representatives of the four parties but not on an equal basis. First,

this was because each debate was related to government proposals (Office of the Sejm, 2022), government information (Office of the Sejm, 2021, 2023b), or resolutions proposed by the ruling PiS party (Office of the Sejm, 2023a). This automatically gave PiS more time and space to present the party's position, as parliamentary debates involved not only MPs but also members of the government. Second, parliamentary clubs have different numbers of members (see Table 1). Those who have more seats have more time to deliver their positions. PiS and PO had the largest clubs and NL and Konfederacja had much smaller ones in the period analysed; this was reflected in the frequency with which their MPs spoke. A total of 229 speeches were analysed. Every time a member of the party was given voice by the Sejm's marshal and took part in the debate, it was considered a speech, regardless of how long it was. Some lasted a few minutes, while others, by the Sejm's rules, were limited to 30 seconds. Speeches were assessed for certain themes and attitudes towards migrants, so the length of the speech was not relevant.

The second source of data for the party thematic analysis was the electoral manifestos prepared for the 2023 parliamentary election. Party manifestos "are unique in being the only authoritative party policy statement approved by an official convention or congress" (Klingemann et al., 2006, p. xvi). They signal a party's position on issues the organisation has adopted to compete for votes (Ruedin & Morales, 2019, p. 304) and clarify which issues and policies are important to which parties. They may also be seen as declarations of "party identity and philosophy" (Ray, 2007, p. 17). Finally, what is also important from the research perspective is that the analysis of such manifestos sheds light on inter-party competition and inter-party relations (Odmalm, 2019), and they are a convenient and sufficiently valid source for analysis, since they are available in most cases and their context can be studied retrospectively (Ruedin & Morales, 2019, p. 304).

However, in Poland, it is becoming increasingly common for political parties to refrain from preparing comprehensive and wide-ranging manifestos on the assumption that in the age of the mediatisation of public debate, manifestos have lost much of their communication potential, especially concerning voters. Some do not prepare such documents at all, publishing before the election only programme theses (as PO did in 2023), while others await the move of political rivals (as in the hawk-dove game), to learn the agenda of their competitors first to be able to respond in kind. Such a situation occurred during the 2023 parliamentary campaign, where the two biggest rivals, PiS and PO, presented their election documents just over a month before election day, and they did so not only on the same day (9 September) but even at the same hour.

This article analyses two traditional party manifestos: a 302-page electoral manifesto by PiS and a 116-page one full of photographs, infographics, and bullet points by Konfederacja. Instead of a typical manifesto, NL produced a 110-page document (the *Raport o stanie państwa*) that offered a critical assessment of the PiS government and political recommendations for the future; this document was also studied. In the case of PO,

**Table 1.** Overview of the parties included in the analysis.

Party	Ideological profile	Status in the analysis period (2019–2023)	Size of parliamentary representation in 2023
PiS	National conservative	Governmental	227
PO	Liberal	Opposition	129
NL	Social democratic	Opposition	42
Konfederacja	Nationalist	Opposition	11

Source: Authors' elaboration based on data from the Sejm website (<https://sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/kluby.xsp>).

a 32-page document published in the form of policy propositions—the *100 konkretów na pierwsze dni rządu* (in English: *100 Program Proposals for the First 100 Days of Government*)—was also analysed.

Sources were analysed qualitatively. First, the analysis reconstructed the definition of the situation (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1920/1922) on migrants and migration presented by parties. This study presumed that parties defined the situation through the prism of their ideology, the norms and values they advocated and the strategies they believed would bring them the greatest advantage in the forthcoming elections. The second step was to reconstruct the type of approach to migration and look for predefined dominant arguments in the parties' discourses. The approaches distinguished were inspired by Gherghina et al. (2022, pp. 489–490) and fall into three categories: (a) utility-oriented, which stems from rational choice theory and values the economic, political, and demographic needs of the immigration country; (b) identity-oriented, in which values are perceived as the basis for the functioning of the community of the immigration country; and (c) liberal-universal, which promotes norms and universal human rights. Utilitarian justification of immigration is often filtered by the dynamics of national politics, the foreign policy agenda, or the structure of opportunities at the domestic level. Identity-based explanations emphasise political, cultural, and religious issues, pointing in the context of immigrants, to the need to foster the spiritual, national, and cultural protection of the native community and to strengthen the constitutive identity of the state. Finally, the liberal-universal approach refers to democratic values, international norms, and cultural openness to universal rights to which all people are entitled, and the repertoire of arguments refers to general moral principles, including equality and non-discrimination. The adopted study perspective enabled the use of an adapted version of a checklist method of analysis (Ruedin & Morales, 2019, p. 306) within the deductive thematic analysis framework (Nowell et al., 2017), in which the manifestos and the debates were analysed according to the predefined categories. Then, they were coded and classified into the three above-mentioned sections.

#### 4. Positions of Polish Political Parties on the Migrant Issue

Public debate on migration in Poland takes place rarely and ad hoc, as a response or consequence of specific, usually external processes, such as the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, when the EU planned to introduce quotas for the relocation of migrants between member states (Dahl, 2019, pp. 214–215). This was followed closely by Lukashenko's smuggling of migrants into the EU across the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia (Slunkin, 2021) and millions of refugees seeking safety in neighbouring countries overnight as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The reactionary nature of the Polish debates on migration is primarily reflected in the content of parliamentary debates, which focused on current issues and in which political parties were forced by circumstances beyond their control to present their positions, regardless of whether they had developed a coherent approach and consistent argumentation. However, given that the party manifestos devoted little space to migration issues, even though this could be considered the optimal place to present arguments in a structured and comprehensive manner, parliamentary debates provide more insight into the stances of Polish political parties on migration and migrants.

The analysis of the parliamentary debates and electoral manifestos revealed differences and similarities between the Polish political parties in terms of the type of argument regarding migrants and migration, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The typology of parties' stances on migrants and migration.

Type of argument	Liberal-universal oriented	Utility-oriented	Identity-oriented
PiS	Yes, but limited to Ukrainian migrants	Yes	Yes
PO	Yes	Yes	Yes, but limited
NL	Yes	Yes	No
Konfederacja	No	No	Yes

First, all analysed parties except Konfederacja were sympathetic to the migrants from Ukraine. The liberal-universal approach was adopted, with the parties emphasising the moral principle of helping those in need. PiS MP Maciej Wąsik said during the debate:

It is our duty to make the migrants, composed mainly of old people, women, and children, feel safe in Poland, to give them refuge in our country, just as we have so many times in our history found refuge when misfortune befell us. (Office of the Sejm, 2022)

The PO and NL thus adopted a similar position, also acknowledging the Poles, self-governments, and volunteers for their “openness, great heart, and heroism in helping Ukrainian women and children” (PO MP Marzena Okła-Drewnowicz as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2022) and “interpersonal solidarity” (NL MP Adrian Zandberg as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2022). Only Konfederacja took a different stance based on the “enormous costs” of the Ukrainian “settlement operation in Poland” (Konfederacja MP Robert Winnicki as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2022).

Second, the definition of the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and the EU relocation mechanism was much more nuanced. PiS adopted the attitude that migration policy should be subordinated only to Polish internal interests and decisions (PiS MP Grzegorz Lorek as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b; PiS, 2023, p. 165). PiS, on the one hand, does not support EU solidarity with countries that face migrant crises (PiS, 2023, p. 155), but on the other, it does not want direct EU support in protecting the border by, for example, a greater Frontex presence. Furthermore, the party divides migrants from outside the EU, mainly from Africa and Asia, into “legal migrants” who came to Poland to “work hard and earn legally for their families” (PiS MP Henryk Kowalczyk as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b) and the “illegal wave of migrants” (PiS PM Mateusz Morawiecki as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b), who are portrayed as young and aggressive men, mostly “Muslims, who we [PiS] do not want” (PiS MP Janusz Kowalski as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023a). The first group came to Poland because of “the improved economic situation under PiS government, when [the country] has gone from being a labour pool for its richer neighbours to being an attractive destination for economic migration” (PiS, 2023, p. 156). This utility-oriented approach is limited to addressing the employment needs of the Polish market, as the migrants “are needed by entrepreneurs such as builders, farmers, food producers, and many others,” but they are only “seasonal and contract workers who are given visas for contracts of limited duration and then leave” (PiS MP Maria Kurowska as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b).

The second group of immigrants identified by PiS as the “intruders” (PiS MP Joanna Borowiak as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2021) is either already imposed on Poland through “the Belarusian hybrid attack on the



Polish border” (PiS, 2023, p. 113) or could be imposed by the EU according to the relocation mechanism (PiS, 2023, p. 165). To describe these groups of migrants, PiS uses an identity-oriented narrative designed to induce insecurity. According to party representatives, the aim of these migrants “is to change Europe culturally...to destroy, to rape the existing European structures” (Morawiecki as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023a). These migrants are also seen as posing a physical threat to the security of Polish citizens. As PiS MP Kurowska said, if Poland accepted such migrants, “there would be riots...robberies of normal Poles...piles of burning cars” (as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b) as “in Western Europe, where the open-door policy has led to acts of terror” (PiS MP Mariusz Błaszczak as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2021).

Several threads can be distinguished in situations defined by the PO. The party has adopted a utility-oriented approach in recognising the growing number of migrants from various countries and sees this process as natural on the one hand (people are looking for a better life and see Poland as a country that can provide that) and beneficial for the Polish economy and demographics on the other. However, at the same time, PO has stressed the importance of border controls. In its proposal for the 2023 parliamentary elections, the party declared, for example, that it “will close the migrant smugglers’ route from the Middle East through Belarus to Poland and on to the EU” (Koalicja Obywatelska, 2023), but in contrast to PiS, the party underlined the indispensability of the cooperation on migration policies with the EU. For example, in its electoral document, the party declared that it “will provide EU funding for the defence of the Polish border with Belarus” (Koalicja Obywatelska, 2023).

A separate thread in the PO’s narrative, which featured prominently in the campaign ahead of the 2023 parliamentary elections, is Muslim immigration and the PiS government’s policy towards them. PO pointed out that PiS opened the door wide for Muslim immigrants by issuing them a significant number of work permits and visas. At the same time, PO pointed out that PiS harshly criticised the EU’s compulsory solidarity mechanism, repressing migrants on the border with Belarus, claiming that they are potential terrorists acting against Poland’s security and using the pictures from the Paris riots (2022–2023) or the Italian Lampedusa crisis (2023) as an illustration of what could happen in Poland in the future. PO argued that, instead, the duty of the government is to support “the migrants in learning the Polish language and getting to know Polish culture” (PO MP Mirosława Nykiel as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b) and “providing the migrants with integration policies and services like legal advice and health care for example” (PO MP Paweł Kowal as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b).

NL has consistently expressed solidarity with refugees, arguing that people fleeing war and political persecution should be helped, especially since Polish migrants have been welcomed by other countries many times in history. Therefore, Poland should reciprocate with the same approach. The party often portrays migrants as victims, especially those stuck on the border between Poland and Belarus (victims of Lukashenko’s regime) and Ukrainian war refugees (victims of Putin’s regime). NL MPs have also called for moving beyond the dispute between PiS and PO over who better defends Poland from illegal immigration and instead have highlighted the need for integration policies for people who come to Poland legally to help them find jobs, pay taxes, and offer social security contributions through access to housing, education, culture and the opportunity to gain professional credentials. NL MPs have pointed out that in the future, without these outsiders, it will be difficult to cope with the problems in the labour market (NL MP Waldemar Tomaszewski as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b). They also stressed:

Recruitment agencies operating in South America, Africa, Asia bring workers here who are not protected in the Polish labour market, who are exploited, who often live in undignified conditions. Often, there are even pathologies and cases of human trafficking; they work several hours a day for less than the prevailing minimum wage. (NL MP Katarzyna Kretkowska, as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023b)

NL has therefore reached for utilitarian and liberal-universal arguments rather than appealing to an identity-based approach. A similar approach is evident in the election manifestos of the NL. In the 2023 electoral manifesto (NL, 2023), there was no mention of the party's migration policy, as if the party felt that voters had already learned its position from the previous 2021 manifesto, where the party's priorities were defined using mainly utility-based argumentation. There, the party indicated that, due to the depopulation of the country, Poland should open up to newcomers, as this would ensure its security and prosperity (NL, 2021, p. 18). NL advocated the creation of a responsible and solidarity-based migration policy, the improvement of living conditions in refugee centres, the implementation of programmes to prepare migrants to start working in Poland, the provision of free access to health care for asylum seekers, support for entrepreneurs and institutions employing migrants and the introduction of programmes to help foreigners at the local government level, such as legal consultations and free Polish language classes.

Konfederacja has adopted a radically different perspective on migrants and migration. This party sees immigration as having only negative consequences for the nation and the state, whether immigrants are from a neighbouring war-torn country or more distant parts of the world. Konfederacja advocates a "responsible migration policy," understood as limiting the size of migration to "the numbers Poland can assimilate" and monitoring "migration flows" (Konfederacja, 2023). The party strongly opposes labour migration to Poland, the EU mechanism of refugee relocation, and the concept of multiculturalism. They claim that they represent the views of the Poles, who "seeing how societies in the West look like...how much crime is committed by immigrants, don't want that [to happen in Poland]" (Konfederacja MP Krystian Kamiński as cited in Office of the Sejm, 2023a).

Although Konfederacja recognises labour shortages in Poland, the party wants to solve them not by inviting immigrants but by supporting the return of Poles from emigration, repatriation programmes targeting Poles abroad, and internal migration. In their 2023 manifesto, there are only two mentions of migrants, both coloured by negative overtones. The first one appeared in the context of EU policy, which, according to the party, "forces the Poles to admit, against our will, thousands more immigrants or to pay multi-million penalties" (Konfederacja, 2023, p. 42). The second one called for a stop to illegal immigration, strengthening the borders' infrastructure, and the improvement of procedures for the detection and removal of illegal immigrants (p. 74).

The analysis of the parliamentary debates and party manifestos showed that despite existing similarities in attitudes towards war migrants from Ukraine and a somewhat similar narrative, especially between PiS and PO, on the migration crisis caused by the Lukashenko regime, each of the political parties has a different position towards migration. Arguments based on the utility-oriented approach were used by all parties except Konfederacja. Identity-oriented argumentation is distinctive to the political right (i.e., PiS and Konfederacja) to a lesser extent than the centre-right PO, while it is absent in the narrative of the NL. Finally, the liberal universal-oriented perspective is absent from the discourse of the nationalist Konfederacja. In the

case of PiS, it is limited only to refugees from Ukraine, while PO and NL have used this type of argumentation more often and more broadly, both in manifestos and parliamentary debates. The content analysis thus revealed a continuum of approaches towards migrants, from the most hostile—represented by the Konfederacja, which is against any type of immigration—to the acceptance of migrants as temporary workers but the refusal of further integration measures, as represented by PiS. Then there is PO, which has an ambivalent attitude towards migrants. On the one hand, the party has acknowledged that Poland needs them. It pays attention to their working rights and the human rights of refugees, but on the other hand, it does not hesitate to use the subject of migration as a political weapon to hit political opponents, mainly PiS. PO has taken steps to empower political refugees from Lukashenko's scheme and war refugees from Ukraine by offering them space to articulate their interests by inviting them to political events, such as the annual Campus Poland dedicated to youth actively participating in socio-political life that allows them to discuss politics for more than a week with politicians, academics and people of culture. However, it has also reached for populist arguments aimed at stoking fear of the cultural otherness of migrants from Muslim countries, as it did during the electoral campaign in 2023. At the opposite end of the continuum of approaches towards migrants is the NL, the most inclusive and welcoming party, which has been shown to reach for pro-migrant arguments.

Polish political parties have divided migrants into several groups, and only in relation to one such group would some parties consider (and in the future rather than now) introducing mechanisms to enhance migrants' representation and participation. There is cross-party agreement, except for Konfederacja, that the "good" migrants are war refugees from Ukraine and political refugees from Belarus. In the rhetoric of the PiS and Konfederacja, the "bad" and unacceptable migrants are those whom Poland will allegedly have to accept under the EU's 2015 relocation principle or compulsory EU solidarity, as well as migrants from Middle Eastern and African countries sent to the Polish-Belarusian border by Lukashenko, against whom the PiS government is erecting barbed wire entanglements. There is also a third group, the so-called "invisible" migrants (Szaniszló, 2021), whose rights have been claimed by NL and for whom the Polish government issues work permits but does not implement any integration policies, acknowledging that once the demand for their labour is satisfied, the migrants will return home.

## 5. Conclusion

The topic of migrant representation and participation has so far been discussed and analysed mainly in the context of Western democracies, which have been the destination of migration for at least several decades. The situation is different in Central and Eastern Europe, which opened up for migration quite recently. This article shows that political parties in Poland treat the problem of political participation and the representation of migrants as an issue of little importance. They primarily use the topic of migration (but not the topic of migrants' participation and representation) to fight their opponents. Even more important in the context of this study is that these parties treat migrants as an "object" of their policy, which is usually developed ad hoc in response to external circumstances, rather than as a "subject." They also perceive migrants as too small and diverse a group to solicit their support, stimulate their political participation, and offer them regular and structured channels of representation. Therefore, this study concludes that the parties' positions at this stage of the socio-political debate generate somewhat unfavourable conditions for the representation and participation of migrants in politics and do not create structures of opportunity.

Further research on this issue in Central Europe could focus on several issues. First, remaining on the subject of political parties' positions on migrants, the topic could be developed by examining internal party discussions on migration. Thus, the research could analyse different dynamics, arguments, and ways of addressing migration and migrants' participation and political representation within the parties. Second, Groenendijk (2008, pp. 5–8) suggested that political parties leave the topic out of their agenda, as they are driven by a fear of public perceptions of it. It is important to assess whether this assumption is still valid. Furthermore, how have changing norms of migrant political engagement in different parts of the world (Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023, p. 2485) affected public opinion in the Central and Eastern European region? Finally, a closer look could be devoted to the demand side (i.e., migrants and their organisations) in terms of migrants' current engagement in the public sphere and their needs and expectations towards the hosting states and political parties.

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