

Is there a “populist” ruling elite? Insights from Poland

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Abstract

On the basis of a prosopographical study of Polish members of government, and secondary literature on Polish politics, we offer insights and hypotheses into the state and development of Polish elites over 30 years after the fall of communism. Focusing on the governments formed by the PiS (Law and Justice) and PO (Civic Platform) parties from 2005 onwards, we show a growing professionalization of Polish political elites. The comparison between PiS and PO ministers reveal more commonalities than differences. However, the data show that careers of members of the PiS elites are relatively stronger tied to the state (field of bureaucracy), while career paths of their political opponents are closer linked to politics, business and academia. Last but not least, the comparison reveals that female ministers from the PiS elite are more likely to have their career background associated with public administration and local politics, while in the case of their political opponents - it is national politics and academia. A more general outcome of our research invites to consider multipositionality as a key feature of Polish elites and a structuring factor of the Polish field of power.

I. Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing interest in authoritarian, illiberal or populist shifts in Central Europe, mainly in Hungary and Poland. Populists would have more supporters among the less educated, provincial and elderly voters. In short, they would be supported by the “losers” of the post-communist transformations. At the same time, it is often assumed that the liberal camp enjoys broader support among the elites. One can assume that this could translate into the social characteristics of politicians from both camps. However, besides the best-known figures, we know little about the sociological background of the political elite in power in Budapest and Warsaw over 30 years after the fall of communism.

A few examples, such as Piotr Gliński (professor of sociology, currently Minister of Culture) and Mateusz Morawiecki (currently Prime Minister, previously a chairman of one of Poland’s main banks) indicate that parts of the intelligentsia and business elite actually take part in Law and Justice (PiS) governments. Nonetheless, the success of such political parties has been seldom addressed from a sociology of elites’ perspective. This paper aims at contributing to filling this gap, by addressing a classic question in political science: who governs?

Using a prosopography of Polish ministers and drawing on the theoretical framework of field sociology (Bourdieu, 1996; Georgakakis and Rowell, 2013), this paper puts members of governments led by PiS in perspective, comparing their profiles to those of their main opponents, i.e., members of Civic Platform (PO) governments. The two parties have interchangeably played a dominating role in Polish politics since 2005 - a year which can be seen as a symbolic end to the dominance of the earlier cleavage between the “postcommunist” and “post-Solidarity” camps (Grabowska, 2004). The new structural cleavage within the political field has been described as a cleavage between “liberal” and “conservative camps (Szczerbiak, 2007). Arguing that at the heart of the new cleavage actually lies the issue of attitudes towards the Western hegemony and its influence on Polish political and cultural life, Zarycki interpreted it as a line separating “pro-” and “anti-central” (or “core”) camps (Zarycki 2011).

On the basis of a prosopographical study of Polish members of government, and secondary literature on Polish politics, we offer insights and hypotheses concerning the state and development of CEE political elites over 30 years after the fall of communism. In this paper, we focus on issues such as the professionalization of the Polish political elite, its sociological characteristics as well as career trajectories, comparing the “POPiS” sample with data covering previous governments, available in the literature.

Data and Methods

We have created a prosopographical database comprising biographical data that we have collected in the years 2020-2021 for all 135 members of Polish governments from 2005 to 2020, i.e., 80 PiS ministers (2005-2007 and 2015-onwards) and 55 PO ministers (2007-2015). Our database thus comprises all members of the following governments: Marcinkiewicz (PiS; 2005-2006), Kaczyński (PiS, Samoobrona RP, LPR; 2006-2007), Tusk 1 (PO, PSL; 2007-2011), Tusk 2 (PO, PSL; 2011-2014), Kopacz (PO, PSL; 2014-15), Szydło (PiS, Polska Razem/Porozumienie, Solidarna Polska; 2015-17), Morawiecki 1 (PiS, Porozumienie, Solidarna Polska; 2017-2019), Morawiecki 2 (PiS, Porozumienie, Solidarna Polska; since 2019).

Ministers who have served more than one ministerial post in PO/PiS governments have been recorded only once – at the moment of their first ministerial post. This rule does not apply to the three ministers who served in both PO and PiS governments¹.

At this stage of our research biographical data have been collected mostly via online encyclopedias (Wikipedia, Encyklopedia Solidarności), in some cases supplemented by press archives, biographical dictionaries, as well as official websites.

Data related to basic sociological indicators (age, sex, education) and career paths (occupation(s), political career) have been re-coded for analytical purposes.

II. Literature review: What have we learned about the Polish political elite from the sociology of elites in the context of the post-1989 transformation(s)?

The literature interested in CEE political elites is relatively robust as significant changes, encompassing transformations of political and economic systems – often perceived as driven by elites – resulted in an increased interest in elite studies concerning this region.

The body of literature published in the years immediately after 1989 – which can be seen as comprising a “first wave” of research – included studies published solely by Polish authors (for a detailed description see Wasilewski, 1997) as well as in the frame of international cooperation (for a detailed account see Bozóki, 2002). As to the latter, perhaps the most important scientific endeavor was an international comparative research project headed by Ivan Szelényi and Don

¹ Jaroslaw Gowin (Minister of Justice, 2011–2013; Minister of Science and Higher Education, 2015-2020; Minister of Economic Development, Labour and Technology, since 2020), Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska (Minister of Labour and Social Policy, 2007; Minister of National Education; 2013-2015) and Radoslaw Sikorski (Minister of National Defence, 2005-2007; Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2007-2014).

Treiman entitled “Social Stratification in Eastern Europe After 1989” (1993-94), which engaged a significant number of scholars from the region.

Given, the gravity of changes, largely driven by elites, it is not surprising that this first wave of research was mainly aimed at finding answers to politically relevant questions. The changes in the region were often compared to political transitions towards democracy in different regions of the world, especially in Spain and Latin America (O’Donnell, Schmitter 1986; Schmitter 1995). Importantly, most of this research was characterized by a strong normative engagement – which manifested itself in the search for indicators of democratization, including elites’ behaviors (Dobry, 2000).

In this context, in relation to international research projects one can point at two basic areas of interest. First, Higley, together with collaborators, analyzed changes in CEE from the point of view of his earlier insight into the role of elite settlements as a driver of social changes (Burton and Higley, 1987). In frame of this approach the focus of research was placed on the elites’ role in the regime changes, and in particular on the intersection of the characteristics of elites (such as differentiation and unity) and stability of the newly democratized regimes. For Higley and Dogan the Polish and Hungarian cases of “negotiated” transformations illustrated phenomena of elite unity in diversity, characteristic of Western democracies (Dogan and Higley, 1998; Higley and Lengyel, 2000). Not surprisingly it was the latter which most often served as a point of reference also in other attempts to assess chances for the consolidation of “young democracies” in Eastern Europe.

The second key research area concerned the composition of the new elites, in particular in the context of a balance between rupture and continuity between the old and the new regime. This topic was of particular interest to Ivan Szelenyi (and his team), who conceptualized it as a “reproduction vs. circulation” dilemma. In order to analyze and describe the changes in social positioning of particular parts of the elites, this group of researchers employed Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, seeking to identify the types of capitals (economic, cultural, social, political) elites rely on (Bourdieu 1983). In this context the research was aimed at analyzing the issue of “an exchange of assets determining the type of capital dominating in the old system, into the assets determining the type of capital dominating in the new one.” (Wasilewski, 1997, 24).

In relation to the political elites, at the more general level, the project established that political fields in CEE countries – in particular in Poland and Hungary – underwent relatively deep transformation in terms of elites reproduction and circulation (Szelenyi, Szelenyi, 1995; Fodor, E., Wnuk-Lipinski, E. & Yershova, 1995). Comparison between Poland, Hungary and Russia, showed that the deepest circulation of political elites occurred in Poland². While both in Poland and Hungary intellectuals (cultural capital-based elites) played a significant role, the Polish political class, in the period immediately after 1989, encompassed the highest percent of white- or blue-collar working class actors. That was interpreted as a reflection of the importance of the political role played by the “Solidarity” movement (Fodor, E., Wnuk-Lipinski, E. & Yershova 1995).

² The study was conducted before the 1993 elections in Poland which brought to power the post-communist camp.

On the other hand, as pointed by Wasilewski: 1. “The Polish new political elite (understood as the persons occupying the leading posts in legislature, state administration and political parties after 1989) does not differ from the central communist nomenklatura (persons occupying these posts before 1989) as regards sex (women are still in low proportion – though a bit higher than before – about 11-12 per cent), and education level (nearly all representatives of the old and new elites are university graduates).” He also noticed:

2. “The differences in social origin are noticeable, but not too great: there are a little more representatives of intelligentsia families among the new elite, but the proportion of persons coming from peasant and workers families is still high.”

3. “Significant differences can be noticed in the age (the new elite is ten years younger on the average: it is a visible sign of the generational aspect of the revolution), the Communist Party membership (approximately 80 percent of the old elite, and 30 percent of the new one were party members), Solidarity membership (in the years 1980-1981 about one half of the new elite, 26 and less than 10 percent of the old one were Solidarity members), and Catholic faith (1/2 of the old elite and 75 percent of the new one are churchgoers, though similar proportions of both groups - about 90 percent - declare being brought up in Catholic tradition).” (Wasilewski 1997, pp. 26-27).

Another important research applying the Bourdieusian conceptual framework was conducted by Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi, and Eleanor R. Townsley (1998). The US-based sociologists argued that the systemic transformation in CEE brought a gradual decrease in the importance of political capital and an increase of the role of economic and cultural capitals. In the case of Poland and Hungary, it was the later one that should be seen as a key asset within the political field. This observation can be seen as confirming the thesis about the particularly important role played by the intelligentsia in CEE countries (Zarycki, 2009).

The governmental elite – which is of main interest for this paper – received much less attention so far. This topic was taken up by Raciborski (Raciborski, 2007; Raciborski, 2006), who analyzed the sociological composition as well as the career paths leading into the Polish governmental elite of the two subsequent governments formed by post-Solidarity (Jerzy Buzek, 1997–2001) and post-communist (Leszek Miller, 2001–2004) elites. His research showed significant differences in terms of political experience between ministers forming the two surveyed governments, in favor of the latter.

Raciborski also argued about a relatively open recruitment to the government elite in Poland (due to a relative weakness of the party system), which manifested itself in the promotion to government positions of low-level politicians or “outsiders” from non-political spheres of the social space (Raciborski 2007)³. As to the career paths, the study argued that the two most frequent ones included high-party posts and parliamentary mandates. They were followed by the academic-expert paths. On the other hand, access into the government elites from positions within economic, media or cultural elites were found relatively infrequent.

³ Semenova (2018) makes similar observations in a chapter dedicated to CEE countries’ members of government.

III. Post-Solidarity elites: from antipolitics towards professionalization

III.1. Professionalization

The specific nature of the democratic opposition movements in some of the Eastern block's countries, which adopted slogans of 'antipolitics' and envisioned their role as representatives of a "civil society" (Ost, 1990), as well as the profound changes within political elites in CEE countries related to the 1989 transformations, inspired scholars to inquire into the level of professionalization of political elite in CEE, interpreted as an indicator of regime consolidation and a validation (or refutation) of the classical elites theories (Best, 2007).

In this context, the comparison of our dataset with previous research on government members in Poland, shows a growing political professionalization, measured as an increase in political experience prior to taking a ministerial post.

First, we can observe a growing level of governmental experience prior to taking a ministerial post among members of the "POPiS" political (ministerial) elite, in comparison to some previous cabinets. In particular, comparison with data gathered by Raciborski (2007) – concerning the two subsequent governments of Buzek and Miller, in power between 1997 and 2005 – shows a decrease of the percentage of government members without previous governmental experience (table 1). The share of ministers without previous governmental experience among the "POPiS" elite is significantly lower not only in comparison with the Buzek cabinet – which was formed by the post-Solidarity elite - but also in comparison with all ministers from the years 1997-2005. This bigger sample includes ministers from post-communist elites – which generally were characterized by a higher political experience.

As our data concerns governmental experience prior to appointment to either a PO or PiS government, it shows that "POPiS" ministers were for a significant part recruited from the ranks of the post-Solidarity governments from the 1990s, including the Buzek government, which was formed by both conservative (AWS) and liberal (UW) parties of the post-Solidarity camp.

Table 1: Share of cabinets ministers without previous governmental experience (%)

Cabinets/PM	No. of cabinet members without government experience	Share
Buzek	30	71,4
Miller	13	41,9
Total Buzek and Miller	43	58,9
Total PO PiS	71	52,6

Secondly, our thesis about a growing professionalization of political elites in Poland can be backed by comparison with previous ministers in terms of their parliamentary experience (table 2). While almost 55% of ministers from 1997-2005 lacked parliamentary experience, in the case of the “PO PiS” elite this share is 39,3%.

Table 2: Comparison of cabinet ministers’ parliamentary experience

cabinet/PM	No. of cabinet members without parliamentary experience	%
Buzek	26	62,0
Miller	14	45,1
Buzek+Miller	40	54,8
PO PiS (from 2005)	53	39,3

Table 3 presents more detailed data concerning the political experience of ministers prior to taking a ministerial post. Besides involvement in the national and local politics, it also presents data related to experience as a “political aid” (advisor, member of political staff, parliamentary assistant, etc.) as well as “ministerial staff” (assistant/advisor to a member of executive - both within the Council of Ministers and the Presidential administration).

Table 3: Political experience of cabinet ministers (2005-2019) prior to taking a ministerial post (%)

Never elected before (national and local)	%		
Total POPiS	32,6		
Ever in Parliament	%		
Total POPiS	60,7		
No. of Sejm mandates	% '0'	% '1'	% '2+'
Total POPiS	46,7	10,4	43,0
Local pol. position before	% yes		
Total POPiS	41,5		
Minister's staff before	% yes		
Total POPiS	54,8		
Political aid before	% yes		
Total POPiS	20,7		

Such results confirm a broader trend towards the professionalization of Polish politics that has already been observed by other scholars, who have pointed at political parties and local political positions as the main recruitment pools for the Polish political elite since the early 2000s (Paczeński, Jacuński and De Waele, 2012; Heurtaux 2017).

Our biographical analysis confirms earlier findings from the 1990s regarding the relatively high level of education among Polish ministers. Among the "POPiS" elite only 2 ministers (1,5%) lack higher education, over 16% hold a PhD and over 14% are tenured professors. The two last shares are lower than the average for Buzek and Miller governments as especially the first of these two included a high number of professors.

Table 4: Comparison of education level of cabinet ministers (%)

cabinet/PM	MA	PhD	tenured professor	without higher education
Buzek	50,0	19,0	28,6	2,4
Miller	61,3	19,4	19,4	0
Buzek+Miller	54,1	18,9	24,3	1,4
POPiS	68,1	16,3	14,1	1,5

In terms of gender balance comparison with data related to the Buzek and Miller governments shows a significant increase in the number of women among Polish ministers – from 14,2% to 23,0%⁴. The difference in the proportion of women is more impressive when we compare data concerning ministers with those concerning the whole political class in the mid 1990s, when women accounted for around 10-12% of members of the Polish political class (Wasilewski, 1997; Fodor et al., 1995). Nevertheless, their proportion does not exceed a quarter of the total population of ministers and is inferior to the current share of women sitting in the Polish Parliament (28%)⁵.

In terms of political capital, female ministers appear systematically less experienced than their male counterparts: they have been less often elected (38,7% vs 30,8%), have less often sat in Parliament (54,8% vs 62,5%) and when it was the case, they have less often been seating for two or more parliamentary terms.

Table 5: Share of female ministers (%)

cabinet/PM	male	female
Buzek+Miller	85,8	14,2
total POPiS	77,0	23,0

⁴ According to a sample analyzed by Semenova (2018), consisting of ministers without previous political experience participating in governments in power in 1991-2001, the share of women was 17%.

⁵ <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/242/35>.

The “POPiS” governmental elite does not significantly differ from the Buzek and Miller governments in terms of age. While the mean age for Buzek ministers was 46,1 against 48,2 for Miller’s, the mean age for the “POPiS” sample is 49,7.

III.2. Multipositionality

In our case the coding of ministers’ previous occupations has been challenging. As professional politicians are often reluctant to acknowledge politics as a job or occupation, they would often put forward another occupation in official biographies, even though they have been living “off” politics, to put it like Max Weber, for most of their professional life. Following the criteria used by political scientists in a recent book devoted to the sociology of French members of parliament, we decided to code the “most significant” occupation, defined as the occupation in which an individual has spent most of his time (in years) throughout his life path (Boelaert et al., 2017).

The table below, presenting the six most popular fields of activity, shows that the political, the bureaucratic and the academic fields are on the top of the table.

Table 6: Previous (“most significant”) occupation of the members of PiS and PO governments (%)

Social fields/sectors	Total POPiS
Politics (national and local level)	39,2
Bureaucratic field	19,6
Academia	15,6
Private sector/business	11,0
Media	4,4

While the criterium of the “most significant occupation” that we have used might be helpful, it is far from satisfactory. Given the high turnover in political and administrative positions in Poland and the great circulation of elites from one sector to another, already emphasized in the case of the Polish intelligentsia (Zarycki et al., 2017), we have complemented our data with indicators of multipositionality. In his famous article, Luc Boltanski coined multipositionality as a social resource permitting some ubiquity, which is a distinctive feature of members of the elite

(Boltanski, 1973). Multipositionality results in the blurring of frontiers between fields that are commonly considered as separate (politics, academia, public vs private sectors, etc.).

Concretely, we have identified, on the basis of the biographical data we had previously collected, six sectors or “fields” of activity in which the individuals under study had been working or evolving throughout their careers: the political field, the private (or business) sector, the public sector (or state administration), the academic field, the media field and the field of NGOs. For each individual, we have coded the fields in which he or she had been evolving throughout his/her career, no matter for how long. We have only considered activities that could be counted as an employment or the fulfillment of certain responsibilities. Hence, when it comes to NGOs for example, simple membership in a given association was not counted unless it was accompanied with specific responsibilities (like member of an advisory board or directorate, for instance). Even if such positions can be assumed for free, our point here is to identify the various social spaces in which people have been able to hold responsibilities and accumulate social capital. This permits to account for the “ubiquity” of elites, i.e., their ability to evolve in various social spaces at the same time or throughout their careers. Below we provide a few examples to illustrate how we proceeded.

Antoni Jaszczak (born in 1946), minister of infrastructures in the PiS-led Marcinkiewicz government (2006), was trained as an economist. Since 1996, he has worked in his own firm in economic consultancy. His “most significant occupation” before being appointed as minister was therefore coded as “private sector”. However, Jaszczak has also been evolving in other fields before he reached the government. Between 2001 and 2005, he was a local administrator in the Regional Office of the Gdansk voivodeship, where he served as director of the department of regional development. A doctor in economics, he was also a lecturer in several schools of higher education. Last but not least, he was no stranger to the political field, since he had been since 1964 a member of the United People’s Party (ZSL) and then of its successor party, the Polish People’s Party (PSL). He was even a candidate in the 2002 legislative election, before joining *Samoobrona* (Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland), PiS’s junior coalition partner in the PiS-led government. Hence, next to the private/business sector, Jaszczak has been coded as “multipositionned” in the political, academic and bureaucratic fields.

Zbigniew Derdziuk is a good example of public/private multipositionality. Born in 1962, he served as minister without portfolio in Donald’s Tusk (PO) government between 2007 and 2009. A public administrator (most significant occupation), he had been working for the Polish public television channel *Telewizja Polska* since the early 1990s. He also was involved in politics, mainly as a political advisor in the Parliament and in the Prime minister’s chancellery, where he served twice as a State secretary (1998-1999, Buzek government) and 2005 (Marcinkiewicz) government. The position of State secretary is in itself of a hybrid nature, as it is both an administrative position (head of state administration) and a political position (vice-minister). He also worked as a local chief administrator in the city of Warsaw before being appointed as minister in the Tusk government. After he left the government, he came back to the banking sector, where he had been working for a while in between occupations in the public sector. He served again as a civil servant between 2009 and 2015, as director of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), before moving back

again to the banking sector. Derdziuk has been coded as “multipositionned” in the political, business and bureaucratic fields.

In this context, the second general observation concerning “POPiS” ministers relates to the high level of their multi-positionality. Overall, only 2 ministers (1,48%) have had their career path restricted to a single field, while 12 (8,9%) – to as many as five or six different social fields. Almost 68% of them have been active in three of four different social fields. Among the social fields most often “visited” by the group of actors under scrutiny, the political and bureaucratic fields play the most important role in providing resources to future ministers. These two are followed by the fields of business and academia. Around a fifth of all ministers have also been active in the fields of NGOs and media.

The fact that contrary to table 7 (measuring multipositionality), the table 6 (measuring single key occupation) lists academia “more often” than business may be interpreted as showing that among the studied population, academic careers are more stable (longer lasting) than careers in business and offer therefore a greater protection from the vicissitudes of political competition.

An illustrative example of a multipositioned career trajectory is **Jadwiga Emilewicz** (born in 1974) – serving as a minister of entrepreneurship and technology in the first government of Mateusz Morawiecki (2018-2019). Despite a relatively young age (44 when nominated to a first ministerial post), prior to entering Morawiecki’s government Emilewicz worked in public administration (as a secretary of state and a director of museum), NGOs (cooperating with The Centre for Political Thought in Kraków), academia (as a lecturer in Tischner European University), as well as in the political field (for example as a head of a party’s regional structures).

Table 7: Share of ministers active in different social fields (%)

Social fields/sectors	Total POPiS
Politics	95,6
Bureaucratic field	78,5
Private sector/business	54,8
Academia	42,7
NGOs	23,0
Media	20,7

III.3 Political outsiders

Although, as shown above, one can observe a gradual professionalization among Polish ministers, still a significant number of them can be described as “political amateurs” – persons who have never won an election prior to taking a ministerial post. “Political amateurs” constitute over a third of all ministers (32,6%).

The analysis of career trajectories, with a focus on the most important field of professional activity prior to taking a ministerial post, shows that the most important reservoir for political amateurs among the “POPiS” elite is public administration, followed by academia and the private/business sector. Table 8 shows that for “political amateurs” these three social fields serve as the most important field of professional career significantly more frequently, in comparison with the whole sample.

Table 8: Comparison of the most important fields of professional activity between “political amateurs” and the whole sample of ministers

	Public administration	Academia	Private sector/business
% of political amateurs (total POPiS)	34,1	25,0	22,7
	Public administration	Academia	Private sector/business
% of all ministers (total POPiS)	19,3	15,6	11,1

In order to better understand the sociological background of “political amateurs” one can compare them to the whole sample in terms of their multi-positionality (table 9). The comparison shows that fields of public administration, private/business sector and academia are more frequently “visited” by “political amateurs.”

Interestingly there are no significant differences when it comes to the field of NGOs and media, which contradicts the intuitive expectation that “political amateurs” may be more frequently engaged in those fields. Despite the fact that the studied group includes people who have never won an election, a vast majority of them (83,4%) at some point of their career prior to taking a

ministerial post have been active in the political field, for example as political advisors and/or as candidates in a national election.

Table 9: Comparison of multipositionality between “political amateurs” and the whole sample of ministers

	Total POPiS	Political amateurs
Politics	95,6	86,4
Bureaucratic field	78,5	97,7
Private sector/business	54,8	61,4
Academia	43,0	54,5
NGOs	23,0	22,7
Media	20,7	20,5

Overall, the data presented above indicate that the fields of public administration, private/business sector and academia constitute the most important “reservoirs” for “political amateurs” among ministers. Thus, with the obvious exception of the political field, there are no significant differences in this regard between “political amateurs” and the whole group of ministers.

IV. Looking for differences and commonalities between the “liberal” and the “conservative” ruling elite

To what extent are PiS and PO ministers similar and different? Our database provides mixed answers. First, in terms of political capital, there are only slight differences between PiS and PO ministers. Both PiS and PO governments gather a political elite with around one third of ministers that has never been elected before appointment, be it at a local, national or European levels. Around 60% of both PiS and PO ministers have been members of a Parliament (Polish or European) before appointment, in most cases (half of them) in the Polish Lower House (*Sejm*). There are no significant differences in terms of parliamentary experience neither (see table 10). Hence, the

relative professionalization of the Polish political elite that we have noticed in the previous section of this paper appears to be widely shared between both the “liberal” and the “conservative” camps.

Table 10: Political experience of the members of PiS and PO governments

	PiS	PO	Total POPiS
Never elected before	31,3%	34,5%	32,6%
Member of Parliament before	61,3%	60,0%	60,7%
Sejm before	53,8%	52,7%	53,3%
Local position before	41,3%	41,8%	41,5%

Table 11: Number of mandates to the *Sejm* (lower house of the Polish Parliament) of the members of PiS and PO governments

Number of Sejm before	PiS	PO	Total
0	46,3%	47,3%	46,7%
1	11,3%	9,1%	10,4%
2+	42,5%	43,6%	43,0%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

However, there are slight differences between PiS and PO ministers when it comes to the dynamics of political careers. PO ministers are younger than PiS ministers at each stage of their careers, be it at the moment of their first political position (elective position or position of political aid), at their first political mandate or at the time they reach the government for the first time (table 12). Besides, PiS ministers have been more often members of a minister’s staff or political aids (table 13), a result that indicates a proximity to the political field.

Table 12: Mean age of the members of PiS and PO governments at different steps of their political career

MEAN AGE 1st gvt posit° PO	39,9
MEAN AGE 1st gvt posit° PiS	46,3
MEAN AGE 1st pol mandate PO	40,8
MEAN AGE 1st pol mandate PiS	46,1
MEAN AGE 1st pol posit° PO	41,7
MEAN AGE 1st pol posit° PiS	46,3

Table 13: Experiences of the members of PiS and PO governments in positions of political aids

	PiS	PO	Total POPiS
Minister's staff before	56,3%	52,7%	54,8%
Political aid before	23,8%	16,4%	20,7%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Second, there are genuine differences between PiS and PO ministers regarding occupation, which we treat as an indicator of the regions of the social space from which ministers are recruited. Table 14 presents the minister's occupation before they were appointed to the government for the first time. Using the definition of the "most significant occupation" provided above, politics appear to be the most significant occupation of only a minority of Polish ministers before they reach the government, with a genuine difference between PO ministers, who have been more often living "off" politics (43,6%) than PiS ministers (28,8%). The latter, however, are almost twice more often coming from public administration (23,8% against 12,7%). Finally, PO ministers are more often

recruited among scholars (21,8%) than their PiS counterparts. This invites to consider that beyond the fact that in both cases, ministers hold a significant political capital, PO ministers are more often professionals in politics than PiS ministers, who appear to be more closely associated with the state and public sector (including the case of ministers who have been working in education before). Interestingly, PiS ministers are also more often coming from the world of business and from the private sector, while one could have intuitively thought that this could be a feature of the “liberal”, “pro-business” PO.

Table 14: Previous (“most significant”) occupation of the members of PiS and PO governments

Occupation before	PiS	PO	Total POPiS
academia	11,3%	21,8%	15,6%
business	5,0%	3,6%	4,4%
education	5,0%	1,8%	3,7%
healthcare	3,8%	1,8%	3,0%
lawyer	3,8%	0,0%	2,2%
local politics	3,8%	5,5%	4,4%
media	2,5%	7,3%	4,4%
politics	28,8%	43,6%	34,8%
private sector	7,5%	0,0%	4,4%
professional sport	3,8%	1,8%	3,0%
bureaucratic field	23,8%	12,7%	19,3%
trade union	1,3%	0,0%	0,7%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Besides differences in terms of occupation, there is an important cleavage between PiS and PO female ministers. While women ministers represent a minority of the population under study (31 female, 19 among PiS ministers and 12 among PO ministers), they hold different resources from one camp to another.

As it has been already pointed, female ministers appear systematically less politically experienced than their male counterparts. However, as far as political capital is concerned, the gap between male and female ministers appears bigger in the case of PiS ministers than in the case of PO ministers. PiS female ministers are not only less experienced than men ministers, but they are also less experienced than PO female ministers: 42,1% have never been elected, against 33,3% of PO female ministers, who have been more often members of Parliament (66,7%) than male ministers (table 16). PO female ministers enjoy also a greater parliamentary experience than their PiS counterparts (table 17). However, PiS female ministers's political capital is of a different nature, as they have more often been hired as political aids or members of ministerial staffs than their PO counterparts. One could assume that these differences result, at least partly, from different political cultures between the "liberal" and "conservative" camps when it comes to the role of women in society, the "traditional" model of family generally advocated by conservatives being less favorable to women's political careers.

Table 15: Political experience of female members of PiS and PO governments

	Never elected before	Members of Parliament	Ministerial staff before	Political aid before
female	38,7%	54,8%	45,2%	25,8%
PiS	42,1%	47,4%	47,4%	31,6%
PO	33,3%	66,7%	41,7%	16,7%
male	30,8%	62,5%	57,7%	19,2%
PiS	27,9%	65,6%	59,0%	21,3%
PO	34,9%	58,1%	55,8%	16,3%

Total	32,6%	60,7%	54,8%	20,7%
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Table 16: Number of mandates to the *Sejm* (lower house of the Polish Parliament) of female members of PiS and PO governments

Number of Sejm before	0	1	2+
female	54,8%	12,9%	32,3%
PiS	57,9%	15,8%	26,3%
PO	50,0%	8,3%	41,7%
male	44,2%	9,6%	46,2%
PiS	42,6%	9,8%	47,5%
PO	46,5%	9,3%	44,2%
Total	46,7%	10,4%	43,0%

A closer look at their sociological and career background suggests that, while among PO female ministers - which are on average slightly older than PiS female ministers (51,5 vs. 49,1) - there are more professional politicians and well-established scholars, among PiS female ministers there are more lower-range civil servants as well as local politicians.

PiS female ministers are coming twice more often from the education sector and three times more often from public administration, while PO female ministers are more often recruited from the political field, business and academia. PO female ministers also seem to enjoy a greater social status: one fourth of them are university professors, against 15,8% of PiS female ministers (table 18).

A few examples illustrate this, with PO female ministers more often positioned in the upper regions of the social space, while PiS female ministers are more often from a middle-class background.

Małgorzata Omilanowska (born in 1960) is a professor at the University of Gdansk and at the Polish Academy of Sciences. A specialist of Arts history, she was appointed to the ministry of Culture in the Tusk government, initially as under-secretary of state (in 2012), then as minister of Culture (2014-2015). **Lena Kolarska-Bobińska** (born in 1947) presents a similar trajectory: professor of sociology at the University of Warsaw and at the Polish Academy of Sciences, she was an advisor to two presidents of the Polish Republic (Lech Walesa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski). After having been elected as Member of the European Parliament (2009), she served as minister of Science and Higher Education in the Tusk and Kopacz governments (2013-2015). In contrast, **Marlena Mała** (born in 1964) is a teacher who was first involved in local politics (local councillor from 2002 onwards) and local administration (head of the education department in a municipal office, appointed as vice-voivode in 2016) before being appointed as Minister of Family in the Morawiecki government (2019 onwards). Similarly, **Małgorzata Jarosińska-Jedynak** (minister of regional policy in the Morawiecki government, 2019-2020), was previously employed in local (municipal then regional) administrations as a specialist of EU funds.

Table 17: PiS and PO female ministers in comparison

indicator	PiS female ministers	PO female ministers
average age when minister in POPiS gov.	49,1	51,5
average age when 1st political position	39,8	42,8
not a member of political party	36,8%	16,6%
main occupation: politics	5,3 %	25 %
main occupation: public administration	41,6%	8,3%
main occupation: academia	26,3%	41,7%
percentage of professors	15,8%	25%

V. Multipositionality as a key feature of Polish elites

Taking into account multipositionality permits us to deepen our comparison of PiS and PO ministers. Table 19 shows that almost all members of Polish governments have been involved, to a lesser or greater extent, in politics (93,8% in the case of PiS ministers, 98,2% for PO ministers), at least as candidates in a national election. It also reveals differences between both parties that partly echo our observations from section IV. Indeed, PiS ministers have a greater experience of state administration and more broadly of the public sector (87,5% vs 65,5%) than PO ministers).

PO ministers, on the contrary, have been more often evolving in politics, in academia and in the private/business sector. However, there is no difference between the two parties as regards the extent of that multipositionality: the average PO minister has been evolving in 3 different sectors throughout his career, against 3,25 for the average PiS minister.

It is important to note that we adopted a broad understanding of the private sector: public companies, banks and agencies dealing with trade and economy (like state agencies in charge of regional economic development) have been coded as “private”. This choice was motivated by the porosity of the frontiers between public and private sectors, especially in the case of top positions that are occupied by members of our database, who very often move from one sector to another throughout their careers. Take for example Piotr Woźniak, minister of Economy in the Marcinkiewicz and Kaczynski governments (2005-2007): born in 1956, he worked as a civil servant in the ministries of Agriculture and Industry in the 1990s, was an advisor to Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek (1997-2000) before becoming the vice-chairman of the Polish Oil Mining and Gas Extraction S.A.(PGNiG) company.

The same goes for top positions in the state administration that are often filled by appointment and therefore, depend on who is in power. Scholars have already emphasized the institutional dimension of political clientelism in Poland, since senior positions in the administration (like those of directors generals) are subject to politicization, which in bourdieusian terms refers to the weak autonomy of the bureaucratic field vis-à-vis the political field (Majcherkiewicz and Gadowska, 2005). Take for example the case of ambassadors, who in the Polish case are not necessarily coming from the state administration of the ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 1989, many highest members of the diplomatic corps have been recruited among scholars, for instance. The same goes for secretaries and (to a lesser degree) undersecretary of states. Hence, our data illustrate the fact that many top positions in the Polish state administrations are assumed by people who are not full time civil servants. Rather, serving in state administration is just a step in a career that implies “traveling” from one sector to another within the broader field of power.

“Private” positions can also be tightly linked to the world of politics. The firm Srebna provides a good example of a “political business”: specialized in edition and advertisement, it was founded in 1995 as an emanation of the Solidarity Press Foundation, headed by Jaroslaw Kaczyński. It edited several right-wing outlets and newspapers and provided jobs to political friends: next to Kaczynski himself, at least three PiS ministers have worked for Srebna at some point: Mariusz Kamiński, Krzysztof Tchórzewski and Wojciech Jasiński.

Table 18: Multipositionality of PiS and PO members of governments

Multipositionality	PiS	PO	Total
Political field	93,8%	98,2%	95,6%

Private sector/business	52,5%	58,2%	54,8%
Bureaucratic field	87,5%	65,5%	78,5%
Academic field	38,8%	49,1%	43,0%
Media field	20,0%	21,8%	20,7%
NGOs	25,0%	20,0%	23,0%

Looking at multipositionality we also note genuine differences in terms of gender. First, women are slightly less “multipositionned” than their men counterparts (2,8 positions for the average female minister, regardless of the political party). Besides, female ministers are definitely less present in the private/business sector (three times less often than men) and more often in public/state administration; especially PiS female ministers who have all been at some point working in the public sector. PO female ministers have often been working in the media, in academia and in the political field.

Table 19: Multipositionality of PiS and PO female members of governments

Multipositionality	Political field	Private sector/business	Public sector/state administration	Academia	Media	NGOs
female	93,5%	29,0%	87,1%	35,5%	9,7%	25,8%
PiS	89,5%	26,3%	100,0%	31,6%	5,3%	26,3%
PO	100,0%	33,3%	66,7%	41,7%	16,7%	25,0%
male	96,2%	62,5%	76,0%	45,2%	24,0%	22,1%
PiS	95,1%	60,7%	83,6%	41,0%	24,6%	24,6%
PO	97,7%	65,1%	65,1%	51,2%	23,3%	18,6%

Total	95,6%	54,8%	78,5%	43,0%	20,7%	23,0%
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Our approach to studying the group of ministers permits, via the reconstruction of the diversity of their professional careers, to embrace their characteristic feature (multipositionality) within the broader field of power. The notion of field of power itself is heuristic here as it allows us to take into account not only positions of political (institutional, formal) power, but also other positions of power (symbolic, social, economic, etc.). Even though the concept derives from Bourdieu's observation of the French society, it might be all the more useful for the study of postcommunist countries. While the former *nomenklatura* concept referred to a unified conception of the elite, where political capital was the key resource of the ruling elite, regardless of the sector (administrative, economic, cultural, ...) (Baucquet and Bocholier, 2006), the great multipositionality we observe in the case of ministers in the post-1989 Poland, requires to focus on the relations between several fields or sectors, for what the concept of field of power seems appropriate.

What can we learn about populism from our results? How would the “illiberal” turn relate to the sociology of elites?

“Populism”, “illiberalism” or the “authoritarian” turn in Poland should be analyzed also in terms of elite struggles: multipositionality implies a weak autonomy of certain fields (in the Polish case, especially the academic and bureaucratic fields) - which implies a stronger influence of the political field onto these social fields, populated by actors who at some point get involved in the political field.

As a consequence, elite mobility between different fields or sectors (public, private, administrative, political) depends not only on regulations but also on ruler's will (the *fait du prince*), i.e. nominations to a series of top positions including ambassadors, directors of administration, public agencies and companies, etc.

On the other hand, a certain proximity to a political party (which can be built from positions on the margins of the political field *per se*, like academia, media or NGOs) also favors mobility within the field of power. Hence, ‘multipositionality’ can function as a means to “appropriate” state resources in order to favor elite careers. In their study of Polish political scientists, Zarycki and Warczok point at “the multiplicity of intelligentsia roles” as “a specific network mechanism of social status construction based on the flexibility and multiplicity of sources of income and formal employment, as well as institutional fields of activity. These features guarantee (...) considerable autonomy and stability in peripheral conditions. In particular, it protects against both individual problems that a person dependent on a single job may have and, on a broader level, it protects against potential crises or even the collapse of particular institutions which, as we know, are often fragile in peripheral conditions.” (Zarycki and Warczok, p. 265).

It seems important therefore to insist on the structural dimension of our approach : the structure of the social space and the differentiation of social fields in Poland favor certain types of multipositionality and elite mobility (i.e. turnover in power and state positions) and, in the end, relatively weakly autonomous political and bureaucratic fields.

Thus, in a way, one could interpret the “authoritarian turn” that followed PiS’s return to power in 2015 and the party leaders’ will to build a “strong state” as an attempt at reasserting the value of political capital over other kinds of capitals and as an attempt to mobilize state resources in order to change the hierarchical order in other social fields, in favor of their (official and unofficial) supporters.

Conclusion

Our research into Polish ministerial elites using Bourdieu’s field theory, though still at its initial stage, allows for drawing several preliminary conclusions. The first conclusion concerns the evolution of the Polish political class over 30 years after the fall of communism. In particular, the analysis of the political experience of the “POPIS” ministers shows a growing professionalization of the political elites. Although occasionally we can still observe attempts to win public support by references to politics as a realm of civic activity (for example recent initiatives from two candidates at the last Polish presidential election, Szymon Hołownia and Rafał Trzaskowski), politics in Poland is made mostly by professionals.

Secondly, the comparison between PiS and PO ministers seems to reveal more commonalities than differences. One can observe slight differences related to the overall amount of political capital. Perhaps more significant is a difference in terms of previous government experience on the highest post - which seems to illustrate the stronger position of the liberal faction in the 1990s. Another significant difference between the two analyzed factions of the Polish political elite concerns their “sectors of origin,” be it the single most important field of professional activity (“occupation before”) or a composition in terms of multipositionality. Here, the data show that careers of members of the PiS elites are relatively stronger tied to the state (bureaucratic field), while career paths of their political opponents are closer linked to politics, business and academia.

Last but not least, the comparison has revealed interesting differences between female ministers. Female ministers from the PiS elite are more likely to have their career background associated with public administration and local politics, while in the case of their political opponents - it is national politics and academia. The latter enjoy a higher level of political capital (in terms of political experience).

A more general outcome of our research, as regards the way we look at recent changes in politics and policy, refers to our developments about the multipositionality of Polish elites within the field of power. Considering the structure of the Polish field of power invites to take into account the structural factors that lay behind the “authoritarian turn”, especially the common practice of political patronage in official appointments, that favored a kind of “spoil system” or even “political purges” in the bureaucratic and other fields. In this respect, the PiS’s peculiarity might rather rest

in the government's extensive uses of the spoil system - often justified by the party's rhetoric about the "stolen" revolution of 1989 and the "postcommunist establishment" that would have resulted from it - than in a radical change in terms of social recruitment of the power elite.

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