

Maria Winclawska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland)

Anna Pacześniak

Wrocław University (Poland)

Members of Polish Political Parties in the Process of Inter-Electoral Campaigning

Abstract: The character and role of membership in political parties have been varied in time (van Haute, 2011; Scarrow, 2015; Gauja, 2017), just as the parties themselves, their organizations and functions in political systems (e.g. Duverger, 1976; Kirkheimer, 1966; Mair, Katz, 1997; Katz, Mair, 2009). There are researchers suggesting that the importance of members for political parties and in campaigning has declined substantially. But does it mean that they have become irrelevant in this aspect?

In the paper we look at the process of inter-electoral campaigning from the perspective of the rank-and-files of Polish political parties. There are three research questions in this article: (1) Do the rank-and-file members of Polish political parties see the functions of modern political parties in the aspect of permanent communication? (2) Do they engage in the parties' inter-electoral campaigns? (3) Do the assessments of party functions and performances, or the view about the role of the grassroots, correlate with the members' engagement in the campaigns of the parties?

The data analyzed in the paper were taken from the research conducted in the project „Political parties and their social environment. An Analysis of the Organization and Communications Activities of Polish Political Parties”¹. The analysis is based on the quantitative data (PAPI and CAWI) of the members of six Polish political parties (n=2,488).

Key words: *members of political parties, functions of the party, inter-electoral campaigning*

¹ Project „Political Parties and Their Social Environment. An Analysis of the Organization and Communications Activities of Polish Political Parties”, funded by the Polish National Science Centre (no 2015/18/E/HS6/00763). Research team: Anna Pacześniak, Maria Winclawska, Barbara Brodzińska-Mirowska, Michał Jacuński.

Introduction

Party membership and party members have been for some time the subject of many research projects. It has been observed that the “era of mass party – if it ever truly existed – is long over” (Young, 2013, p. 65). The declining numbers of party members (e.g. van Haute, 2011; van Biezen, Mair, Poguntke, 2012; Gauja, 2017; van Haute, Gauja, Paulis, Sierens, 2017), increasing dissatisfaction with political parties in the mass public (Mair, 2007, p. 1), relatively low engagement into party work by ordinary members (Heidar, 2014; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2016), are only few examples which are named as the indicators of the political parties decline. Not only scholars, but also parties discern these phenomena and undertake some steps to address the new circumstances, for example, they open for multi-speed membership (Scarrow, 2015).

Many scholars have also noticed (e.g. Mair, Katz, 1997), that the political campaigns or even more broadly: political communication processes, transformed from labour-intensive, in which a lot of people, including ordinary members, were engaged, into capital-intensive, in which the professional marketing and PR companies are responsible for developing and running the whole communication process of the political party. It is believed that within this model of communication, role of the members becomes marginal since “campaigns have outgrown the institutional limitations of political parties, requiring a role for campaign professionals to fill this increasing gap” (Farrell, Kolodny, Medvic, 2001, p. 11). We do observe profound changes of the members’ role in political parties as well as the deep changes in the process of political communication such as the need of political parties for sustaining communicational process between parties and their electorates also in the inter-electoral period. This permanent communication can be defined as “continuous communication with the environment on current political, economic, and social issues, with regard to political goals of the party and its politicians” (Brodzińska-Mirowska, 2013, p. 131).

However, we would like to challenge the assumption that the role of the rank-and-files in political communication and political campaigns must be marginal. We put forward a thesis that the more party members believe in the importance of party representative functions and the better they assess their parties in fulfilling these functions, the more they are prone to engage in the political campaigns (both electoral and inter-electoral ones).

The article develops as follows. First, we review the developments in the literature on the position of members in political parties in Central European countries, and the specificity of the modern political campaigns. Next, we state our research questions, put forward a hypothesis and explain the methodology. Then, we present the empirical analyses of six Polish political parties, and finally, we conclude and summarize the article.

State of Arts

What distinguishes political parties in Central European countries is the scarceness of the membership base. Peter Kopecký wrote in 1995 that state subsidies would replace the need for members in the Czech parties, and that not the rank-and-files but the media would play an increasingly prominent role in the electoral mobilization (Kopecký, 1995). In other political parties of the region, building a strong party organization has not been considered as a main task of the organizations either. The party leadership and party elites, occupied with parliamentary affairs and state transformation, were often convinced that substantial electoral support could be generated rather *via* special media tactics, than by a large membership base.

To generate and to sustain this electoral support, political parties must maintain constant relations with their electorates which is the steady communication process. In the modern times this process, also in Eastern and Central Europe, becomes professionalized. It requires the parties to develop a strategic management approach to communication, both during the electoral campaigns and in the inter-electoral period, for example, by coordinating the communicational process and its strategies between different faces of party organization. The parties can reach their voters and sympathizers by several means of communication: by the mass media, either traditional or on the Internet, or more directly, when parties' officials or party candidates for public offices meet with the public during open meetings, demonstrations, etc.

There are studies in political science which analyse different dimensions of membership. Most of the scholars, however, investigated the Western political parties and their members (Hirschfield, Swanson, Blank, 1962; Stern, Tarrow, Williams, 1971; Cayrol, 1975; Reif, Cayrol, Niedermayer, 1980; Seyed, Whiteley 2002; Heidar, 2014; Hansen, 2002; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2016). In Central and Eastern Europe there was considerably little interest in the research on party membership. First of all, because, since membership figures are not high, and the parties do not treat their members as an important political resource or asset, there was a little need to analyze them and a little interest in such a research. Secondly, because studying party members is difficult in this part of Europe, since the parties are usually reluctant to cooperate in this matter (Skrabacz, 2018). Even assessing the number of party members is a challenge for the researchers.

One of the few publications including the study of the position of members in the organizational structures of Central European political parties is the book by Margaret Tavits (2013). Her research on party organization in post-communist democracies claims that the organizational strength of party is defined *inter alia* by membership size and activism (Tavits, 2013, p. 7). Some other examples of membership research in Poland include the studies of Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel on party congress delegates (Grabowska, Szawiel, 1993, 2001; Grabowska, 2004), Katarzyna Sobolewska-Myślik, Beata Kosowska-Gąstoł and Piotr Borowiec book on party structures, including research on members (2010), Anna Pacześniak and Jean-Michel De Waele volume on the middle party

level elites (2011), Maria Winclawska and Barbara Brodzińska-Mirowska study on the party grassroots (2016). Recently an edited volume was published on party members in the EU neighbouring countries (Ghergina, Iancu, Soare, 2018). We decided to add to these analyses the perspective of the members of the Polish political parties and their participation in the inter-electoral campaigns of their organizations.

Research Objectives, Data and Methodology

We would like to challenge the assumption that the role of the rank-and-files in political communication and political campaigns must be marginal. We want to show that they have a potential and willingness to take an active part in the campaigns of their parties and to keep in touch with the electorate. What is more, we claim that not only scholars, but also political parties (their leaders and elite) underappreciate the (potential) role of the party members in permanent communication process between the parties and the electorates.

In this paper we based our analysis on the data that come from the research conducted in the project „Political Parties and Their Social Environment. An Analysis of the Organization and Communications Activities of Polish Political Parties”. The parties we researched are: Law and Justice², the Civic Platform, the Modern, the Polish People’s Party, the Democratic Left Alliance, and the Party Together. All of them get the subsidy from the state’s budget, because of getting in the parliamentary elections 2015 at least 3% of votes or 6% if the party was a part of a coalition. Four of the analyzed parties are parliamentary, and two last are extra-parliamentary ones.

The analysis is based on the quantitative data of the members of six Polish political parties (n=2,488³). The questionnaires were filled in by the party members either on-line or during party congresses and meetings of the rank-and-files (paper-based survey) in the period 2016–2017. The survey was conducted with the standardized questionnaire on a convenient sample.

Polish Party’ Members in the Permanent Campaign

Members of the researched political parties describe the phenomenon of inter-electoral campaign, though are a bit skeptical about how well their parties perform in this aspect. They also see their role in the process. They are intercessors between the party and its voters and sympathizers (between 65% in the Law and Justice and 95% in the Party Together believe

² In which the process of collecting the members’ surveys is still underway, so because of the small number of already returned questionnaires the results for this party have to be taken with reservations.

³ The data set that we gathered is unrepresentative for the whole population of the party members in the researched parties, because we could only use the convenience sampling. What is more the variables do not have normal distribution, so we cannot use parametric tests to analyse it.

they fulfil this role). However, at the same time, they are divided on the issue how much the grassroots are responsible for the party image on the ground. A great majority of members of the Law and Justice, the Polish Peoples Party and the Party Together believe that they create the party image on the ground. The members of other researched organizations (the Civic Platform, the Democratic Left Alliance and the Modern) are more skeptical about it. About half of them agree on their important role in this aspect, a quarter do not have an opinion and the last quarter believe that they do not influence the parties' image on the ground.

Following the statement of Kosiara-Pedersen that party members legitimize opinions or enhance the image of the party with their mere presence, we asked the respondents from Polish political parties, with what regularity, if ever, they take part in the events organized by their parties, such as: attending public meetings with party representatives or taking part in demonstrations, manifestations in their own town or in the capital city⁴. The majority participates regularly in the party events organized in their own communities: meetings with party leaders and participating in manifestations. Only 19% on average take part on regular basis in the manifestations that take place in the capital city (from 12,8% in the Democratic Left Alliance up to 23,5% in the Modern). However, what is worth noting, 82% of all respondents from research parties have at least once taken part in a political demonstration, which is a substantial number, compared to about 13% of general public⁵.

No modern political campaign can be run without the use of Internet. So, we asked the members if and how they use the Internet to talk about politics and to send political messages. Members of all the researched parties use the Internet extensively in that aspect. Almost 80% send or post political information on social media, and not many less comment politics on the Internet. Well over 50% in addition publish political information on their own webpages or profiles and send e-mails to their friends with political messages. As many as 34% have also used hashtags.

From a simple description of the data we can see that the members of the researched organizations are aware of the importance of permanent campaign and are engaged in the communication process of their parties. They have the potential to work for the organizations and they want to do so. They are willing to do conventional party work, by legitimizing the organization and involve into the work-intensive and time-consuming activities, such as attending public meetings organized by the parties or taking part in demonstrations, both locally

⁴ We realize that these variables do not cover all the types of activities the members can undertake on behalf of their parties in the permanent campaign, however these are the variables we have in our project, and taking into consideration the context of profound division between the parties and popularity of demonstrating ones support of the party and its politics by manifesting pro or against government, in Poland right now, we think that these variables can indicate the engagement of the members in the permanent campaign in the sense that Pederson describes it.

⁵ The number comes from the CATI interview with the general public conducted as a part of our researched project on the population of 1006 respondents.

and in Warsaw. On the basis of these variables and regularity of engagement in these activities we calculated an index of traditional engagement in the inter-electoral campaign⁶. We also calculated an index of engagement in the Internet campaign. The second one was calculated on the basis of variables on the members' involvement outreaching the wider public on the Internet. The index includes such variables as: sending information about the party to friends on social media, commenting the political events and current affairs on the Internet, sending e-mails to friends with political contents, publishing political information on one's own social profiles or webpages, and using hashtags. The members are engaged in permanent campaign, in both traditional and Internet dimensions of it, what is shown in the figures below.

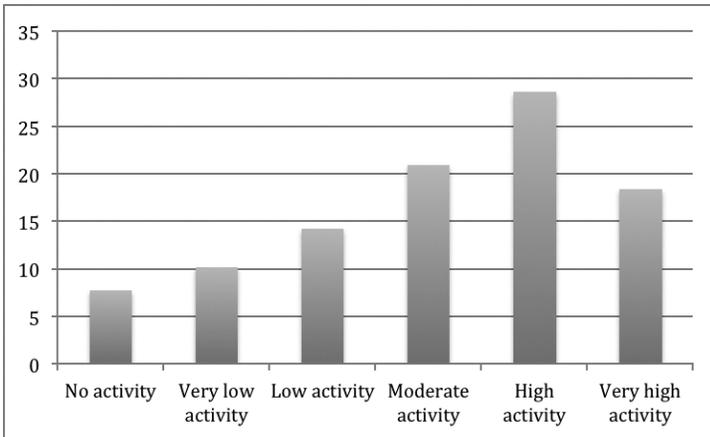


Fig. 1. Members' engagement in the "traditional permanent campaign" index

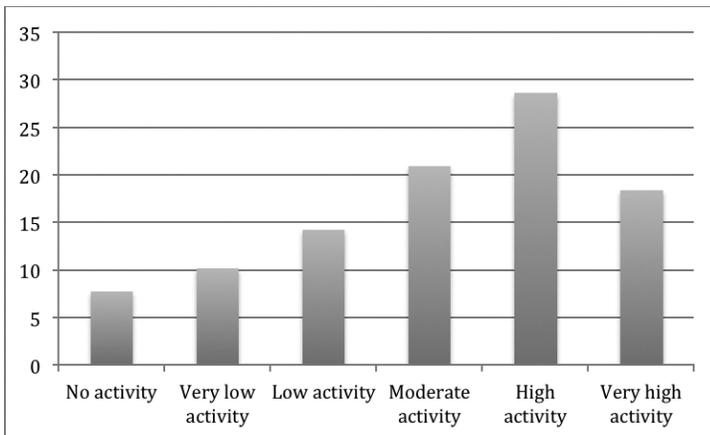


Fig. 2. Members' engagement in the "Internet permanent campaign" index

⁶ We realize that the variables used in the index do not satisfy the requirements of the traditional campaign activities, since the catalogue of the members' possibilities of engagement is broader, however

It is predictable that these two indexes correlate with each other, the more a person is engaged in one type of activity the more he or she is engaged also in the other one⁷. We can also see that those respondents who spend more time on party work are more engaged in permanent campaigns⁸.

Our next step was to establish if any variables correspond to the higher or lower engagement of the members in the permanent campaign. We started with the chosen sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, length of being a party member, and issue whether the respondent's job is connected somehow to politics. It turns out that both gender and age are statistically significant in the Internet activities of the members. Women engage on the Internet a bit more than men⁹. And the younger cohorts engage more than the older ones¹⁰. At the same time there is no statistically significant difference between men and women¹¹ in engaging in the traditional permanent campaign, and a next to nothing value (however statistically significant) of correlation coefficient between age cohorts¹². Statistically significant seemed to be the length of being the party member, however, when controlled for age, it turned out to be a spurious correlation. A reverse trend is observed with the last of the sociodemographic variables checked which turned out to be statistically significant, that is the connection of the respondent's job to politics. Here it turns out that those whose job is connected to politics (who are either elected politicians, officials nominated to public sector by their parties, MPs or party assistants or clerks), engage in traditional inter-electoral campaigns activities more, than those who work outside politics¹³. However, this correlation is not observable for the Internet permanent campaign¹⁴.

We assumed that the belief of the members about the importance of the representative roles of the party and how they perceive their parties in this aspect would correlate with

these are the only variables we have in our questionnaires that we can use, since our research was not design specifically to research the 'traditional' members' activities.

⁷ All the tests that are carried out in this paper are non-parametric, because of the character of the sample and data, which do not fulfil conditions for parametric tests, for example do not have normal distribution. $\chi^2 = 340,126$, $df 45$, $p < 0,01$; Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient 0,263 (2-tailed), $p < 0,01$.

⁸ Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient for the traditional campaign is 0,364, $p < 0,01$; for the Internet 0,338, $p < 0,01$.

⁹ Analysis with the rank test U Mann-Whitney shows, that the differences between the groups are statistically significant, $U = 420241,500$; $p < 0,05$. The variable was controlled by age of the respondent.

¹⁰ Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient is -0,229; $p < 0,01$.

¹¹ Analysis with the rank test U Mann-Whitney, $U = 466866,000$; $p = 0,086$.

¹² Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient is -0,032; $p < 0,05$.

¹³ Analysis with the rank test U Mann-Whitney shows, that the differences between the groups are statistically significant, $U = 399059,500$; $p < 0,01$.

¹⁴ Analysis with the rank test U Mann-Whitney shows, that the differences between the groups are not statistically significant, $U = 421594,00$; $p = 0,314$.

their engagement. We expected that if they see the greater role of representative functions of the parties in general and would assess their party better in this aspect they would be prone to engage more in both traditional and Internet permanent campaign. The same assumption we expected to be true in regard to appreciation of the role of the members in political parties. The results of the statistical tests are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Correlations between the belief of the party members about: representative function of the parties, role of the rank-and-files, and the performance in representative functions of their parties with the members' engagement in traditional and Internet political permanent campaigns

	Traditional campaign	Internet campaign
Role of the party in inter-electoral campaigns		
Encouraging people to engage in public life	0,115**	0,107**
Explaining and communicating to voters, members and sympathizers decisions made by party	0,135**	0,096**
Communicating permanently and passing the knowledge on political, social and legal issues	0,132**	0,099**
Building trust in political institutions and public organizations	0,097**	0,067**
Assessment of the party performance in permanent campaign		
Encouraging people to engage in public life	0,085**	0,059*
Explaining and communicating to voters, members and sympathizers decisions made by party	0,083**	0,056*
Communicating permanently and passing the knowledge on political, social and legal issues	0,080**	0,107**
Building trust in political institutions and public organizations	0,139**	0,082**
Appreciation of the role of the rank-and-files in the party		
The party needs members, because they are the source of information about the views and problems of ordinary people	0,068**	0,051**
Members can act as intermediary agents between the party and its voters and sympathizers	0,075**	0,107**
Rank-and files influence the image of the party on the local level	0,226**	0,188**

Analysis with the Kendall's tau_b correlation coefficient

**Correlation is significant, $p < 0,01$; (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant, $p < 0,05$; (2-tailed).

All of the correlations are statistically significant however they are mostly weak or very weak. They are a bit stronger in the first analysed category of variables that is the belief of members about the representative functions of the party. So, the more the members are convinced that the party should play the role in encouraging people to take part in public life and keep in touch with the public on regular basis, the more they engage themselves in such activities. Much weaker is the relation between the assessment of the performance

of the members' party in the permanent campaign and their engagement, except in one case, that is "building trust in political institutions and public organizations" and engaging into traditional campaign. Also, the convictions about the role of rank-and-files correlate weakly with the members' engagement except of the belief that the rank-and files influence the image of the party on the local level. This is the strongest correlation of all that were analyzed, both in the aspect of the traditional and the Internet campaigns.

Conclusions

Being a member of political parity is not very popular in modern times, and it is even less popular in Central and Eastern Europe, so the parties from the region usually do not have an extensive membership base. However, there are some people who decide to join political parties, and they represent an asset for political organizations, what have been shown by different researchers in Western Europe (as Scarrow, 1996; Whiteley, Seyd, Billingham, 2006; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2016) or in Poland (Winclawska, Brodzińska-Mirowska, 2016). We argue that investigating them and learning about their opinions, beliefs, convictions, expectations, and behaviour constitute an element of insights for the study of party politics, and also party's self-knowledge. This knowledge enables a party to strategically use its own resources or to canalise its potential, maintain support, win elections, or at least to survive after an electoral defeat (Pacześniak, 2018). This is why we aimed to see whether members of the Polish political parties understand the role of the inter-electoral campaigns, engage into them, and whether their assessment of party performance in the representative functions or of the grassroots' role correlate with the members' engagement in the inter-electoral campaigns of the parties.

On the basis of our research we established that those people, who decide to join a party on grassroots level, are convinced that the parties should play their traditional representative roles (including such tasks as socialization and mobilization of the electorates), and that the parties should be intermediaries between the citizens and the government. Many of the researched rank-and-files would like to perform these functions and many of them already do so. We could see correlations between the beliefs in the representative functions of the party and the appreciation of the grassroots roles from one side, and the engagement in the party inter-electoral campaign from another side.

References

- Biezen, I. van, Mair, P., & Poguntke, T. (2012). "Going, going, ... gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe". *European Journal of Political Research*, 51, pp. 24–56.
- Brodzińska-Mirowska, B. (2013). *Marketing międzywyborczy w teorii i praktyce. Przypadek Platformy Obywatelskiej*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.

- Cayrol, R. (1975). « L'univers politique des militants socialistes : une enquête sur les orientations, courants et tendances du Parti socialiste », *Revue française de science politique*, 1, pp. 23–52.
- Duverger, M. (1976). *Les partis politiques*. Paris: A. Colin.
- Farrell, D.M., Kolodny, R., & Medvic, S. (2001). "Parties and Campaign Professionals in a Digital Age: Political Consultants in the United States and Their Counterparts Overseas". *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6(4), pp. 11–30.
- Gauja, A., & van Haute E. (2015). *Party Members and Activists*. New York: Routledge.
- Gauja, A. (2017). *Party Reform: The Causes, Challenges and Consequences of Organizational Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ghergina S., Iancu A., & Soare S. (2018), *Party Members and Their Importance in No-EU Countries*, Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Grabowska, M., & Szawiel T. (1993). *Anatomia elit politycznych. Partie polityczne w postkomunistycznej Polsce 1991–1993*. Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Grabowska, M., & Szawiel, T. (eds.) (2001). *Budowanie demokracji*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Grabowska, M. (2004). *Podział postkomunistyczny. Społeczne podstawy polityki w Polsce po 1989 roku*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Scholar.
- Hansen, B. (2002). *Party Activism in Denmark*. Aarhus: Politica.
- Haute, E. van (ed.) (2011). *Party Membership in Europe: Exploration into the anthills of party politics*. Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.
- Haute, E. van, Gauja, A., Paulis, E., & Sierens V. (2017). "Assessing Party Membership Figures: The MAPP Dataset", *European Political Science*.
- Heidar, K. (2014). "Little boxes on the hillside' Do all party members look the same?". Paper presented at the workshop 'Contemporary Meanings of Party Membership' at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops 2014, 10–15 April 2014, Universidad de Salamanca. Retrieved from: <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/dd524f9c-96a4-4da9-8950-88e5f5adb62.pdf> (access: July 23, 2018).
- Hirschfield, S., Swanson B. E., & Blank B. D. (1962). "A profile of political activists in Manhattan". *Western Political Quarterly*, 15(3), pp. 489–506.
- Katz, R., & Mair P. (2009). "The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement". *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(4), pp. 753–766.
- Kirkheimer, O. (1966). "The Transformation of West European Party Systems". In: LaPalombara, J., & Weiner, M. (eds.). *Political Parties and Political Development* (pp. 177–200). Princeton–New York: Princeton University Press.
- Kopecký, P. (1995). "Developing Party Organizations in East-Central Europe", *Party Politics*, I(4): 515–534.
- Kosiara-Pedersen, K. (2016). "Varieties of Party Membership". Paper presented at the 24th World Congress of Political Science, pp. 1–25.
- Mair, P., & Katz R. (1997). "Party Organizations and Party Systems". In: Mair, P. (ed.). *Party System Change. Approaches and Interpretations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mair, P. (2007). "The challenge to party government, *EUI Working Papers*, 9(7).
- Paczeński, A., & De Waele, J.-M. (2011). *Ludzie partii - idealisci czy pragmatycy? Kadry partyjne w świetle badań empirycznych*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Scholar.
- Paczeński, A. (ed.) (2018). *Anatomia porażki wyborczej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe.
- Reif, K., Cayrol R., & Niedermayer, O. (1980). "National political parties' middle-level elites and European integration". *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), pp. 91–112.
- Scarrow, S. (1996). *Parties and their Members*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Scarrow, S. (2015). *Beyond Party Members. Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Seyd, P., & Whiteley P. (2002). *New Labour's Grassroots. The Transformation of the Labour Party Membership*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan.
- Skrabacz E. (2018). "To show, but to disclose. The willingness of Polish Political Parties to disclose information on their structures". *Polish Political Science Review*, 6(1), pp. 5–21.
- Sobolewska-Myślik, K., Kosowska-Gąstoł, B., & Borowiec, P. (2010). *Struktury organizacyjne polskich partii politycznych*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ.
- Stern, A.J., Tarrow, S., & Williams, M.F. (1971). "Factions and opinion groups in European mass parties". *Comparative Politics*, 3(4), pp. 529–559.
- Tavits, M. (2013). *Post-Communist Democracies and Party Organization*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Whiteley P., Seyd P., & Billinghamurst A. (2006), *Third Force Politics. Liberal Democrats at the Grassroots*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Winclawska, M., & Brodzińska-Mirowska, B. (2016). *Niewykorzystane szanse? Polskie partie polityczne w działaniu*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK.
- Young, L. (2013). "Party Members and Intra-Party Democracy". In: Cross, W., & Katz, R. *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy* (pp. 65–80). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Authors

Maria Winclawska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Contact detail: mariawin@umk.pl <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3222-0572>

Anna Pacześniak

Wrocław University

Contact detail: anna.paczesniak@uwr.edu.pl <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4782-4432>