

**EVELINA KRISTANOVA, RAFAŁ HABIELSKI, MAŁGORZATA SUCH-PYRGIEL (EDS.) (2024). POLITICS AND THE MEDIA IN POLAND FROM THE 19TH TO THE 21ST CENTURIES. SELECTED ISSUES. BRILL, LEIDEN/BOSTON, 324 PP. ISBN: 9789004687998**

The book, “Politics and the Media in Poland from the 19th to the 21st Centuries. Selected Issues”, edited by Evelina Kristanova, Rafał Habielski, and Małgorzata Such-Pyrgiel, is not just a collection of case studies examining the relationship between media and politics. This volume is like a time-traveling machine. The book transports us back to the lively streets of Lviv in 1840, to Katowice in 1923, after the Silesian uprisings and the region’s reintegration into Poland following decades of partitions, and then moves us to Kraków in March 1945, when *Tygodnik Powszechny* was established weeks before the end of World War II. Once you open its pages, you are immersed in the vivid history of Polish media and society, and it’s a truly engaging and enlightening read.

The contributors to this unique monograph include historians, media scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and researchers of language and cultural studies. Different sections of the book concentrate on various types of both traditional and modern media, starting with the press, through books, radio, to the Internet and social media. It’s a truly interdisciplinary perspective. The volume comprises fifteen chapters that illustrate the relationship of politics and various forms of media in Poland across different periods. The texts are organized chronologically, focusing on the most significant events in Polish society.

The book explores and examines the connections between the media and politics in Poland from the 19th to the 21st centuries. It begins by illustrating the immense challenges faced by a nation deprived of its statehood in the 19th century and concludes with a contemporary analysis of fake news spreading online and gender stereotypes in media coverage of the 2020 presidential campaign.

The first chapter discusses the challenges faced by the press in the mid-19th century, and the second takes us to interwar Poland. The third chapter focuses on one of the most important opinion weeklies in Poland after 1945, and this chapter begins a series of case studies examining the struggle of the media in the Polish People’s Republic (PRL), which are presented in the subsequent

six chapters. These chapters explore the tensions between the media and censorship from the early days of communist rule to its final years. Six later chapters are dedicated to media in the 21st century, discussing the role of journalists and new media in covering contemporary issues. The authors take readers on a fascinating journey through different epochs, illuminating the struggles faced by Polish society, journalists, and editors as they navigated political, economic, cultural, and societal challenges. These issues are vividly contextualized in Rafał Habielski's comprehensive foreword, which provides a rich historical background.

The book begins with an excellent chapter by Katarzyna Drąg, who explores the history of the Galician press in the 19th century. She describes its challenges through the example of *Dziennik Mód Paryskich*, a periodical that successfully combined fashion, literature, and patriotism to foster political awareness. This was an extraordinary achievement given the constraints of the time and circumstances. Published in Lviv from 1840 to 1848, *The Parisian Fashion Daily* was created and edited by individuals who made every effort to preserve national identity, "at a time when Poland did not exist on the map of Europe" (p. 7).

The second chapter focuses on the interwar period, with Rafał Śpiewak discussing the challenges of that politically tense era. He examines the Catholic weekly newspaper *Gość Niedzielny*, which was founded in 1923 to raise awareness of religious and socio-political issues affecting the Church and society in Poland during a turbulent time between the two World Wars. The text explores the role that *Gość Niedzielny* played until 1939 in educating its readers and boosting morale. It provides a fresh and engaging perspective that may be valuable not only for historians of the press but also for scholars studying the history of the Catholic Church and its activities a hundred years ago.

Małgorzata Strzelecka provides an analysis of how the oldest still-published opinion weekly in Poland, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, established in 1945, navigated censorship during the early years of communist rule. In her study, she examines archival issues of the magazine from 1945 to 1953, along with collections of documents stored in the National Archives, including minutes, accounts, and reports that detail censorial interventions. The chapter focuses on the challenges faced by the Catholic socio-cultural weekly, which was subjected to stringent censorship. It explores how the magazine engaged in a strategic "game" with censors to preserve its integrity.

Building on this theme of ideological opposition, the next chapter, titled "Mythologizing the Enemy in Polish Communist Propaganda in the Years 1949–1954," by Rafał Opulski, examines how the Polish communist regime created and propagated myths about internal and external enemies to consolidate power. The subsequent chapters explore different aspects of censorship

and resistance. Cecylia Kuta describes the functioning of PAX, a Catholic publishing house in communist Poland, while Evelina Kristanova analyzes the religious broadcasts of Reverend Tadeusz Kirschke for Radio Free Europe, which was renowned for its opposition to the communist regime. The following chapter, again focusing on censorship, is written by Joanna Hobot-Marcinek, who discusses the compromises that editors and editors-in-chief had to accept to avoid bans from censors, which could target individual issues or entire newspapers. Dariusz Jarosz explores the book policy of the ruling party in the final years of the Polish People's Republic.

The *Annus Mirabilis* of 1989 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Polish history, starting with the Round Table Discussions and Agreements, which influenced the development of the media during the period of political transformation, as described by Anna Szwed-Walczak in her chapter dedicated to the first legal postwar magazine of the national radical camp.

The third section of the volume takes us into the 21st century, comprising six chapters that analyze contemporary issues at the intersection of politics and the media. Dominika Popielec recalls investigative journalists who uncovered pathological mechanisms within the political world and examines contemporary investigative reporting from the perspective of the image crisis faced by politicians, offering an interesting research perspective. The text by Ewa Jurga-Wosik and Inga Oleksiuk focuses on the Reliability and Objectivity of Journalists from the lens of the citizens' right to information. Rafał Leśniczak describes the relationship between politics and religious web portals, which actively participate in political debates. Monika Kaczmarek-Śliwińska examines the spread of fake news on social media and its influence on politics. The 2020 presidential campaign of Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska became the subject of two separate studies presented in the volume: one by Weronika Świerczyńska-Głównia, Jan Wiczorek, and Tomasz Walkowiak, who focused on media coverage of the candidate's campaign, and another by Monika Wawer, who analyzed gender stereotypes in media discourse around the female candidate in the 2020 presidential elections.

This collection explores numerous subjects related to the interplay between media and politics in Poland, spanning from historical developments in the 19th century to contemporary issues of media integrity and social influence. It offers an examination of the evolution of Polish media through different political regimes, describing key challenges, resistance strategies, and the changing role of journalists over time. With its interdisciplinary approach and diverse perspectives, the book provides valuable insights into how media has shaped, and has been shaped by, societal and political forces across centuries.

This volume offers a captivating journey through Poland's media history. Whether you are a historian, media scholar, or simply curious about the

dynamic relationship between politics and the media, this book provides unique material and thought-provoking reflections. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of media in the 19th century, during the interwar period, across Europe, and throughout communist rule. In an era where the media shape perceptions of the world and influence political decisions that impact the future of society, understanding its historical evolution is more vital than ever.

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