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The Attitudes of the University of Warsaw Students towards Selected Nationalistic and Fascistic Symbols in Public Sphere

Abstract

The use of symbols in politics is an important topic that is subject of many research projects. From the viewpoint of political science, man creates various signs to which certain values and meanings are attributed. The article describes the results of a survey of the University of Warsaw students' opinions concerning the presence of selected nationalistic and fascistising symbols in the public sphere. It also presents the current state of research concerning in politics, research questions, the formulated hypotheses and the research methods used. The article also describes selected symbols used by national, nationalistic and fascistic organisations. The article also outlines how the symbols associated with the extreme right are perceived by the young people in Poland and what significance it could have in the context of the current political trends. The author underlines the importance of public opinion polls concerning nationalistic and fascistising symbols, especially in the context of the growing wave of nationalism and the extreme right in Europe. The survey, carried out in 2021-2022, revealed

that the majority of the respondents negatively appraised the selected nationalistic and fascistising symbols, such as the black sun, the falanga or the Celtic cross. At the same time, some respondents found it difficult to identify individual symbols, which point to the need for more educations as regards the history and ideologies associated with those symbols. The conclusions drawn from the survey indicate the need for more education and greater sensitivity to those issues among young people, who are the future of our society.

Keywords
symbol, symbol in politics, nationalism in Poland, semiotics, fascism, social surveys, strategy

Introduction

In recent years, Poland has been a state where a phenomenon linked with the expansion of nationalist and extreme right movements in public space could be observed. As an example, one could mention the 2020 March *Katowice is the city of nationalism*,[1] the accusations of promoting hate speech and fascism[2] by the participants in the march *German crimes unsettled* under the celebrations of the 76th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising[3] or the anti-Semitic march in Kalisz.[4] All those events were organised by small groups from politically marginal milieus os radical nationalists such as, among others: Młodzież Wszechpolska [All-Poland Youth], Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (ONR) [National Radical Camp], Ruch Narodowy [National Movement], Autonomiczni nacjonaliści [Autonomous Nationalists], sympatycy Wojciecha Olszańskiego [Wojciech Olszński's sympathisers] or Stowarzyszenie Marsz Niepodległości [Independence March Association]. Despite, it would seem, low agency of the above-mentioned groups, their presence on the Polish political arena seems to be well established, and sometimes even makes its way to the main discourse.

The aim of the article is to present and discuss the results of a survey concerning the level of knowledge and opinions of Polish students as regards the symbols used in the public space by the extreme right milieus. This effort is aimed at both describing a certain phenomenon as well as utilising the survey results in practice.

1. A. Kazimierczuk, *Marsz narodowców. „Katowice miastem nacjonalizmu"*, https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art8872421-marsz-narodowcow-katowice-miastem-nacjonalizmu, (access 18.07.2021).

2. Ł. Starzewski, *Jak ściga się propagowanie i pochwalanie faszyzmu. Prokuratura Krajowa w końcu ujawniła RPO statystyki za 2020 r.*, https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/jak-sciga-sie-propagowanie-i-pochwalanie-faszyzmu-prokuratura-krajowa-w-koncu-ujawnila-rpo, (access 20.10.2021).

3. M. Mazzini, *"Tęczowa zaraza". 1 sierpnia narodowcy znów nieśli nienawiść*, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1966086,1,teczowa-zaraza-

The article formulates the following research question: What is the attitude of the University of Warsaw students to the nationalistic symbols or symbols referring to fascistising contents or organisations that are encountered in public space or on the Internet? In connection with those specific issues, several hypotheses were put forward in the research, namely: The majority of the UoW students value judge the researched symbols; According to the UoW students there are more of the researched symbols present on the Internet than in public space. The negative attitude of the UoW students is greater towards the symbols which are more recognisable.

The basic research method was a quantitative study un the form of an online interview. The results of the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) have been analysed and synthesised in this article. The research involving the University of Warsaw students or other groups of young people may constitute a suitable point of departure for comprehending the phenomenon of growing popularity of the extreme right-wing groupings in Poland and elsewhere in the world. The focus on young people enhances the possibilities of the predictive function of science since it is exactly this group of voters and members of future ruling elites that will have a decisive influence on the political landscape in their respective states.

The theoretical background and outline of the present status of the research

It is hard to imagine human civilization without symbols. They have accompanied man since time immemorial in all conceivable aspects of life. Just like language, they are an indispensable part of human life, social interaction and all forms of communication. Owing to their universal presence and interdisciplinary nature, symbols have been a subject of interest for many thinkers, philosophers, scholars or journalists. After Władysław Kopaliński, the initial dictionary definition of a symbol may be adopted, namely that a symbol is: "an object or sign replacing, representing, denoting, reminiscing (by convention, mental association) a notion, an act, or an object; especially, a material object that represents something invisible; (...)."[5]

It is worth emphasising how broadly the notion that is of interest to us may be interpreted. A symbol is not merely an object; it is definitely closer to an instrument. This is exactly the point of view that underlies this analysis. It should be noted that the notion of a symbol is in this article defined in a concrete, narrowed down meaning, as it has been done by Radosław Walczak. Therefore, in this paper a symbol will be understood as: "a material creation whose meaning for its holder exceeds the sum total of the physical characteristics of this object. It may be interpreted by the people surround-

1-sierpnia-narodowcy-znow-niesli-nienawisc.read, (access 01.08.2020).

4. M. Zaborowska, *Antysemicki marsz w Kaliszu. Jest zawiadomienie do prokuratury dot. niedopełnienia obowiązków*, https://www.rmf24.pl/fakty/polska/news-antysemicki-marsz-w-kaliszu-jest-zawiadomienie-do-prokuratur,nId,5656023#crp_state=1, (access 19.11.2021).

5. W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych z almanachem – symbol*, Rytm 2007, pp. 551–552.

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ing the holder as a confirmation of belonging to a certain group or an evidence that its user has been equipped with certain social or personal qualities."[6] However, one more significant distinction needs to be made, since in light of the research carried out by Walczak the scope of the definition had to be narrowed down to: "a material creation". The scholar who conducted similar research concerning the perception of people using various symbols for image-related reasons[7] needed to restrict a symbol to a specific object owing to the absence of distinction into a material (public) space and virtual space. Can the graphic used as an element of someone's profile on social media or any given form of representation or use of the researched symbol online be called a material creation? For the needs of this article it will be appropriate to define a symbol as a material or virtual creation whose meaning for its user exceeds the sum total of the physical properties of that object, while it may signal to the user's surroundings the confirmation of their belonging to a certain group or constitute an evidence that its user has been equipped with certain social and personal qualities

According to Michał M. Bukowski, a political symbol means words, phrases or other verbal and nonverbal signs the use of which in the political discourse has been intended by the user to evoke specific responses of the addressee.[8] It is also worth adding after Bukowski that with respect to form a symbol sends the addressee from *signified* to *signifier* - concept and reference,[9] thanks to which a symbol may be treated as a kind of a bridge between material and nonmaterial contents. It should neither be forgotten that the social and political content is the key for the occurrence and functioning of a given political symbol.[10] That is why placing selected signs in a cultural, social and cultural content will allow for their in-depth analysis and verification of their knowledge by the University of Warsaw students.

Symbols are investigated in the area of most of the humanities and social sciences, and even specialised disciplines have emerged for this purpose. Semiotics is divided into several categories. We may deal with very specialised, more narrow semiotics, e.g. in linguistics or logic. There is also semiotics of a more interdisciplinary nature, which is described as a set of analytical techniques for the analysis of sign phenomena.[11] This academic discipline may be recognised as broad and continually developing. For the needs of this article and the research, I shall limit myself to broader semiotics of an interdisciplinary nature. This discipline is also used in marketing research, e.g. the semiotic analysis of the message of the content of outdoor advertising carried out by Krzysztof Kubiak.[12] This is worth mentioning since visual advertising is a similar communication tool that uses a certain socially accepted code,[13] like a symbol within the meaning of this paper. Its interdisciplinary nature

6. R. Walczak, *Percepcja wizerunku polityka rozszerzonego za pomocą społecznie akceptowalnych symboli*, in: *Mity symbole i rytuały we współczesnej polityce, szkice z antropologii polityki*, ed. B. Szklarski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar 2015, pp. 168–175.

7. Ibidem, p. 170.

8. M.M. Bukowski, *Czynniki różnicujące symbole polityczne – perspektywa globalna*, in: *Mity symbole i rytuały we współczesnej polityce, szkice z antropologii polityki*, ed. B. Szklarski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar 2015, pp. 127–138.

9. Ibidem, p. 127.

10. Ibidem, p. 128.

11. K. Machtyl, *Od znaku do interpretacji: o hermeneutycznej próbie poszerzenia granic semiotyki: na przykładzie pojęcia symbolu*, "Studia Kulturoznawcze", 2013, 1 (3), pp. 29–43.

12. K. Kubiak, *Reklama outdoorowa – semiotyczna analiza przekazu*, in: *Reklama wizualna*, eds. A. Wiśniewska, A. Frontczak, Wyższa Szkoła Promocji 2013, pp. 10–23.

13. Ibidem, pp. 10–11.

brings semiotics closer to politology, which is also an academic discipline combining contents of all social sciences. Reference to the semiotic accomplishments will strengthen the definition of a symbol adopted in the article, though in view of the problem discussed in this paper as well as having restricted symbols merely to the form of a nonverbal sign, any reflections in the area of the communications theory will be omitted.

The main research problem, namely what is the attitude of the University of Warsaw students to the nationalistic symbols or symbols referring to fascistising contents or organisations that are encountered in public space, requires one more clarification as to the underlying reasons for picking up the adequate signs belonging to the selected specific group. The context and the substantiation for using the term "fascistising" are explained by Stanley G. Payne's typology.[14] A symbol which is specified with the adjective *nationalistic* will be the sign used by political groups, movements or organisations describing themselves as nationalist, i.e. such whose members (as members of a given nation, in this case the Polish nation) put first the national identity and undertake actions aimed at seeking or maintaining self-determination for their nation.[15] In this case, three nationalistic symbols have been selected for the research, namely: the Sword of King Bolesław I the Brave (Illustration 1), the cross of the National Armed Forces (Illustration 2) and the Falanga (Illustration 3).

The shape of the first sign refers to the semi-mythical coronation sword of first Polish rulers. The Sword of King Bolesław I the Brave was designed and used by the nationalistic milieus during the interwar period. It is nowadays used by, among others, the National Radical Camp or the All-Poland Youth. The latter of those organisations uses the Sword of King Bolesław I the Brave in its logo and in its promotional materials.[16] The use of this symbol by football fans at matches has been banned by Football Against Racism in Europe.[17]

On the other hand, the sign of the National Armed Forces was created during World War II and belonged to one of the Polish clandestine military organisations fighting against the Nazi occupiers. The cross represents the Polish national emblem with the Sword of King Bolesław I the Brave behind the eagle, which may be recognised by the characteristic hilt and cross guard. The symbols is associated with the controversial public discussion regarding the charges of crimes committed by members of the organisation during World War II and immediately after the its end, as well as the possible collaboration with the Third Reich.[18] Also because of its extreme right origins, the NAF has been frequently accused of anti-Semitic attitudes within its ranks.[19] At present, the cross is exten-

14. S.G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, Taylor & Francis e-Library 2003, https://www.scribd.com/doc/234364642/A-History-of-Fascism-1914-1945-pdf#, (access 14.11.2021).

15. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Nationalism*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/, (access 26.02.2021).

16. *Młodzież Wszechpolska*, https://mw.org.pl/, (access 14.11.2021).

17. D. Uhlig, *Na Euro mieczyk Chrobrego zakazany jak swastyka*, https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,5319418,na-euro-mieczyk-chrobrego-zakazany-jak-swastyka.html, (access 17.06.2008).

18. M. Kozubal, *Kontrowersje wokół rocznicy utworzenia brygady NSZ*, https://www.rp.pl/historia/art1188721-kontrowersje-wokol-rocznicy-utworzenia-brygady-nsz, (access 10.08.2021).

19. S. Pawlina, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, wojsko skrajnej prawicy*, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1722052,1,narodowe-sily-zbrojne-wojsko-skrajnej-prawicy.read, (access 03.10.2020).

sively used commercially in the form of imprints on patriotic clothes, scarfs, etc. Nowadays, it is used by nationalistic groupings, veterans, sympathisers and historical reconstructors.

The falanga was created in the early 1930s as a response to the ban on using the Sword of King Bolesław I the Brave introduced by the government. The sign represents a characteristically drawn schematic arm wielding a sword. Usually it is depicted against a green or black background. Nowadays, it is the official symbol of the National Radical Camp and the National Revival of Poland. The falanga is also one of the most commonly used nationalist symbols in Poland. The use of this symbol by football fans at matches has been banned by Football Against Racism in Europe.[20]

A symbol denoted as *fascistising* will be a sign used by political groups, movements and organisations which - according to Stanley G. Payne's typology - may be classified as being in the spectrum of attributes of fascism.[21] This spectrum includes the organisations and movements whose identity may be described with the following attributes: demagogy, populism, anti-liberalism, anti-communism, statism, authoritarianism, specific fascist symbolism or opposition to the international capital , which we would now termed anti-globalism.[22] Using such a broad formula is justified as it is hard to find nowadays in Europe and in Poland any neo-Nazi or fascistic party or legal organisation. From the legal and political point of view, such groups should not have existed in other than history textbook spaces. Alas, there are many informal associations or milieus which exploit and invoke in their messages outlawed political currents and use their symbols. An example may be the National Revival of Poland party, which despite its lawfulness has in its programme a sufficient number of features corresponding with the above quoted Payne's typology (anti-globalism, anti-liberalism, anti-communism, populism or finally calling for *a national revolution in the world*,[23] which is a reference to the programme of Italian philosopher Julius Evola,[24] who was the thinker of the esoteric extreme right in the first half of the 20th century. At the same time, in this case we deal with a grouping, which despite being close to the fascistic contents cannot be named as such. The reason being, *inter alia*, that in such a situation an adequate court verdict is required. Similar is the situation of the National Radical Camp. In its verdict of 17 February 2021, the Supreme Court found that the movement could be called a fascistic organisation.[25] However, this information does not resolve the problem which has arisen since the existence of parties or groupings of a fascistic character is barred not only in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland,[26] but also in the Polish Penal Code.[27] This means that the official existence of such groupings is not possible, at least from the legal point of view. For the above reasons, in the research the term "fascistising" has been used, which does not definitively denotes the

20. *Monitoring discriminatory signs and symbols at UEFA Euro 2016*, Raport Fare network, fourth updated version, May 2016, in: https://www.farenet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fare-Signs-and-Symbols-Guide.pdf, (access 26.02.2021).

21. S.G. Payne, *A History of Fascism...*, op. cit., pp. 6–7.

22. Ibidem, p. 7.

23. A. Gmurczyk, *Deklaracja Trzeciej Pozycji*, https://www.nop.org.pl/deklaracja-trzeciej-pozycji/, (access 17.11.2021).

24. J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, transl. G. Stucco, Inner Traditions International 1995.

25. D. Sitnicka, *Sąd Najwyższy: można nazywać ONR organizacją faszystowską. "Sami na siebie ukręcili ten bicz"*, https://oko.press/sad-najwyzszy-moz-na-nazywac-onr-organizacja-faszys-towska-sami-na-siebie-ukrecili-ten-bicz/, (access 26.02.2021).

26. Artykuł 13 Konstytucji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r., Dz.U. 1997 nr 78 poz. 483, [Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997, Journal of Laws 1997, No. 78, item 483].

27. Artykuł 256 Kodeksu karnego z dnia 6 czerwca 1997r., Dz.U. 1997 nr 88 poz. 553, [Article 256 of the Penal Code of 6 June 1997, Journal of Laws 1997, No. 88, item 553].

selected symbols as fascistic, but as signs that are in the spectrum of the attributes of fascism. Those symbols originate from the fascist or Nazi symbolic traditions or are used by members of groups or milieus drawing on the fascist contents. Hence, I selected three fascistising symbols for my research, namely: Celtic cross (illustration 4), black sun (illustration 5) and toporzeł (illustration 6).

The first sign is the form of a solar cross of pre-Christian origins. In many variants this symbol is universally used nowadays by numerous milieus (*inter alia*, Neopagans, nationalists, national minorities, skinhead movements, etc.). A cross with a circular ring around its axis is also one of the most frequently encountered symbols used by neo-Nazi and racist groups (e.g. white pride movements). In Germany, it is illegal to use this symbol because it is exploited by neo-fascistic organisations in order to market their presence, mainly in the streets. Despite its negative connotations and how the Celtic cross is used for the promotion of racism in other European countries, in Poland this symbol can be used without any significant risk of legal sanctions because it has been entered in the register of political parties as the symbol of the National Revival of Poland.[28] This sign may be spotted as a graffiti on buildings in many Polish cities. The use of this symbol by football fans at matches has been banned by Football Against Racism in Europe.[29]

The black sun is a Nazi solar symbol of obscure origins. It is unknown whether the original arrangement of the sign included twelve *Sig* runes or three swastikas; in the opinion of certain researchers the symbol could not have referred to the sun but to the Arthurian legends (e.g. Knights of the Round Table).[30] Thanks to negligible recognisability, limited knowledge and no broader use during World War II or by the fascistising parties, the symbol is nowadays very popular with neo-Nazi groups. It is not generally penalised. It can been seen at the parades of so-called *autonomous nationalists* and other radical right-wing groups and has been used by, *inter alia*, by the Ukrainian Azov Brigade. At present, it is being popularised online in the form of mems and is not subject to any broader censorship. The use of this symbol by football fans at matches has been banned by Football Against Racism in Europe.[31]

The toporzeł is a sign designed by Stanisław Szukalski in 1935 as a proposition for a new emblem of the Second Republic of Poland.[32] Graphically, it is a combination of a schematic depiction of a two-edged axe and an eagle. The symbol has been used historically and nowadays by the milieus which draw on the activities of the pre-war Zadruga (e.g. "Niklot" Association for Tradition and Culture)[33], or by nationalistic neo-pagan groups. The use of this symbol by football fans at matches has been banned by Football Against Racism in Europe.[34]

28. Ł. Starzewski, *Policja: "krzyż celtycki" to prawny symbol NOP. Dochodzenie ws. marszu pamięci "żołnierzy wyklętych" w Hajnówce umorzone*, https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/policja-krzyz-celtycki-prawny-symbol-nop-dochodzenie-ws-marszu-pamieci-zolnierzy-wykletych-umorzone, (access 01.10.2018).

29. *Monitoring discriminatory signs...*, op. cit.

30. R.R. Sala, *Krytyczny słownik mitów i symboli nazizmu*, Wydawnictwo "Sic!" 2006, p. 225.

31. *Monitoring discriminatory signs...*, op. cit.

32. NSZ Zadruga Podlasie, *Toporzeł – nasz symbol, nasze godło*, http://ns-zadruga-podlasie.blogspot.com/2015/03/, (access 27.03.2021).

33. *Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Tradycji i Kultury "Niklot"*, http://www.niklot.org.pl/, (access 26.11.2021).

34. *Monitoring discriminatory signs...*, op. cit.

Selected nationalistic and fascistic symbols:

Illustration 1: Sword of Bolesław I the Brave, https://wszystkiesymbole.pl/mieczyk-chrobrego/ (access: 14.11.2021).

Illustration 2: Polish National Armed Forces cross, https://naszemiasto.pl/narodowe-sily-zbrojne-zolnierze-wykleci-to-uprawniona-nazwa/ar/c1-4514852 (access: 09.02.2014).

Illustration 3: Falange, https://wszystkiesymbole.pl/falanga/ (access: 14.11.2021).

Illustration 4: Celtic cross, https://iconape.com/krzyz-celtycki-logo-logo-icon-svg-png.html (access: 14.11.2021).
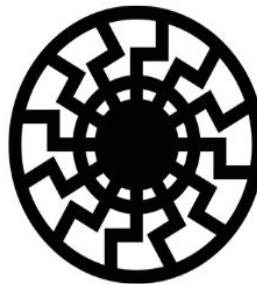
Illustration 5: Black sun, https://wszystkiesymbole.pl/czarne-slonce/ (access: 14.11.2021).

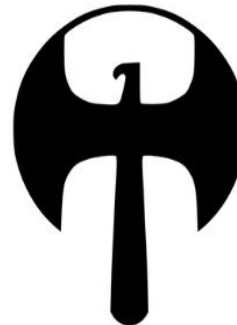Illustration 6: Toporzeł, https://wszystkiesymbole.pl/toporzel/ (access: 14.11.2021).

Source: Own work.

Researching the nationalist and fascistising symbols through analysing the attitude of the University of Warsaw students to those signs is a currently much needed undertaking. A semiotic analysis of selected symbols and verification what emotions are aroused by the signs laden with political and ideological contexts, which have their connotations and place both in history and in culture, may allow to discern a piece of the political reality around us. Such research is of special values in that it compare the opinions of young people with those of commentators and journalists. Thus, it will be possible to ask the students whether they share the fears that are present in the texts and opinions of certain commentators warning against *fascisistization*[35] of social and political life in Poland. Or perhaps the interviewees will reveal different opinions, perhaps the number of presented symbols will prove to be minimal and therefore posing no greater threat, marginal or imperceptible?

The choice of the above listed symbols was conditioned primarily by the commonness of their presence in public space. Radical right-wing organisations have an extremely broad assortment

35. A. Gmiterek-Zabłocka, J. Leociak, *"Polska brunatnieje" - mówi ekspert, który tematyką zagłady zajmuje się od wielu, wielu lat*, Twój Problem – Moja sprawa, https://audycje.tokfm.pl/podcast/108268,-Polska-brunatnieje-mowi-ekspert-ktory-tematyka-zaglady-zajmuje-sie-od-wielu-wielu-lat, (access 03.07.2021).

of symbols and signs that they can use, depending on their sympathy with other groupings, ideological current, etc. A presentation of the most radical symptoms, neo-Nazi signs or others used by extremist groups would render the research pointless with a view to marginal or no recognisability. For this reason, selected were the symbols which may be considered frequently used and visible at mass event or public gatherings (such as e.g. the 11 November Independence March), as graffiti in urban space, as clothing accessories (e.g. pins, badges, T-shirt imprints, etc.) and on the Internet (e.g. in the form of posts, graphics, mems, etc.). All of the researched symbols made their presence at the Independence March in 2021,[36] which was the largest and most recent event of that type at the time of carrying out the survey. For the abovementioned reasons, the selected signs stand – in my opinion – the greatest opportunity to be present in the awareness of the surveyed group – students, as they could and can encounter them not only during the celebrations of the national holiday as its participants, but also as onlookers standing in the vicinity of a rally or any other public gathering. The interviewee could also observe them during more prosaic encounters when using social media or even riding on public transport to the university.

Methodology

The survey was conducted as a Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI). In order to acquire the research materials, a selected group of respondents – students of various faculties of the University of Warsaw – was asked to fill an online questionnaire to verify the hypotheses that had been put forward and answer the research questions asked in the first chapter. Apart from the survey per se, a pilot survey was prepared to verify the formula and effectiveness of the main survey questionnaire form. The main tool used was Google Forms software.[37] The application serves for formulating and carrying out surveys in a respondent friendly online formula.

Description of the research sample

The survey took six months – from 5 December 2021 to 21 May 2022. That period may be divided into two phases: the pilot survey and the gathering of responses to the questionnaire queries as such. The pilot survey lasted from 5 to 7 December 2021, whereas the proper part of the survey from 9 January to 21 May 2022. During the first stage, the questionnaire was filled by 11 respondents, whereas in the second, longer one – 89 others. All in all, 100 University of Warsaw students took part in the survey (N = 100).

36. K. Korzeniowska, D. Uhlig, *Marsz Niepodległości. Jak zrozumieć wieloznaczne symbole skrajnej prawicy [IN-FOGRAFIKA]*, https://biqdata.wyborcza.pl/biqdata/7,159116,27781781,marsz-niepodleglosci-wieloznac-zne-symbole-skrajnej-prawicy.html, (access 09.11.2021).

37. *Google Forms software*, https://www.google.pl/intl/pl/forms/about/, (access 09.11.2021).

Basing on the fiche data it is possible to give a more detailed description of the interviewees. The questionnaire was filled by 50 women (50% of respondents), 45 men (45% of respondents) and 5 non-binary persons (5% of respondents). The age of the students was in the 19-28 bracket. The average age of the respondents was 21.29 years. The most numerous age group was formed by 20- and 21-year-olds (51%); the next most numerous group included students who at the time of taking part in the survey were under 21 year of age (35%). The youngest respondents at the age of 18 and 19 were the least numerous group (14%).

The overwhelming majority of the respondents live in the cities of over 500 thou. inhabitants (69%). The least represented are medium-sized towns 50 thou. to 500 thou. inhabitants (5% and 6%), whereas smaller localities, that is villages and town up to 50 thou. inhabitants came in second and third (9% and 11% respectively). The above data correspond with the group the survey was dedicated to, that is the stereotype image of a student, who is a young adult[38] living in or in the vicinity of large urban centres, where universities are located.

Another interesting variable describing the research sample was the line of study according to the classification of scientific domains and disciplines in Poland after 2018.[39] The most numerous group were representatives of social sciences (58%), followed by students of the humanities (21%) and those studying exact sciences (17%). It should be also noted that four students decided not to answer this question, that is in the results there is a variable: *no response* (4%).

The last significant variables in the fiche were the views of the respondents and the question about voting in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Due to the fact that during the last parliamentary elections almost one-half of the students (45%) was not yet eligible to vote, did not vote or otherwise gave no answer, it was decided to focus on declarative political views of the respondents. In the course of elaborating the results, responses on the Likert scale were codes in such a way so that ultimately centrist, rightist and leftist views were presented. The largest number of interviewed students declared leftist views (44%), closely followed by the representation of centrists (39%), with the respondents declaring themselves as having the rightist world outlook at the end (17%). These results are reflected in the research on political views of young Poles, according to which the leftist world outlook is most popular with the youngest electorate.[40]

38. Central Statistical Office, *Polska w liczbach 2022*, https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/inne-opracowania/inne-opracowania-zbiorcze/polska-w-liczbach-2022,14,15.html, (access 30.05.2022).

39. Biuro Obsługi Badań UW, *Klasyfikacja dziedzin i dyscyplin naukowych w Polsce*, http://bob.uw.edu.pl/klasyfikacja-dziedzin-i-dyscyplin-naukowych-w-polsce/, (access 10.03.2022).

40. CBOS, *Zainteresowanie polityką i poglądy polityczne młodych Polaków na tle ogółu badanych*, Research report no. 16/2021, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_016_21.PDF, (access 10.03.2022).

The pilot survey

Before carrying out the main survey, a control group comprising 11 students was prepared. This was aimed at verifying the effectiveness and transparency of the main research tool that had been prepared. Randomly selected respondents belonged to the main survey group – they were students of the University of Warsaw. The difference between the control and the research group was a form distributed to 11 persons after they had filled the main questionnaire The pilot survey comprised sic questions concerning the degree of comprehension, length, attractiveness of and potential reservations concerning the questionnaire. With a view to the type of questions, the pilot survey tool may be divided into two parts. The first one, comprising closed questions the respondents were obliged to answer, and the second one, comprising non-mandatory open questions.

Given a homogeneity and positiveness of the results it was possible to conclude the first, closed stage of collecting the filled questionnaires. The next step involved implementation of the earlier assumed plan to disseminate the questionnaire on student social media. The main aim was to collect as many responses as possible in the time available for carrying out the survey.

The basic research tool

The second, main stage of the research consisted in carrying a survey among the University of Warsaw students. The respondents filled the questionnaire anonymously. The name of the survey on the questionnaire form was: "The analysis of selected political and historical symbols in public space". The research tool was made up of ten compound main questions and a fiche. The order in which the selected symbols were presented was identical as in the illustrations found earlier in the article. In the first six questions each symbol was presented separately. In the following sections the selected signs were shown in groups, according to the classification adopted in the study and the division into nationalistic and fascistising symbols. Thus, in questions no. 7 and 8 the first three symbols mentioned above are shown, ehreas in questions no. 9 and 10 – the second group of signs. The first six questions had the same form. That section served first of all to verify the knowledge of the students as regards each of the symbols therein. Additionally, the questions examined the respondents' associations with subsequent signs. Each section comprised a graphic representing one of the six symbols and the following question: "Do you recognise the symbol shown in this picture?" The response could be affirmative or negative. This part of the sections was also supplemented with the following ques-

tion: "What is your emotional attitude to this symbol? (What sensation does it arouse?),", the aim of which was to acquire material in order to verify the hypothesis: "The University of Warsaw students value judge the researched symbols." The responses fit into the Likert scale supplemented with the following options" "Do not know", "Hard to say", which at the further stage of processing the acquired research material were coded as: "No answer".

If a respondent answered the first question in the affirmative, that they recognised the symbol represented in the picture, they acquired access to the second half of the section – questions 1 to 6. This part was marked, respectively: "Question 1. 2, 2. 2", etc. The coded section included three additional open questions: "Do you know which organisations or groups have created it? If so, write down which", "Do you know which organisations or groups use it nowadays? If you do, write down which" and "what are your associations with this symbol? (Optional question)." That section served to verify in-depth the knowledge of the students as regards the history and present use of the researched symbols. The last question in this section, in turn, served to acquire a thorough answer to the hypothesis as to how did the UoW students value judge those signs. The responses such as: "Do not know" or no answer in the third questions were coded or interpreted as: "No answer". If the respondent marked that they did not recognise the symport shown in the picture, they were referred to the following question, leaving out the section with questions verifying in-depth the student's knowledge concerning the selected symbols.

The second part of the questionnaire, that is questions from 7 to 10 concerned the occurrence of given symbols. The contents of sections 7 and 9, as well as 8 and 10 were the same. The sole distinction were the changing groups of graphics – nationalistic or fascistic symbols. The above mentioned division of that section concerned the distinction of the space in which the symbols did occur. In this manner, sections 7 and 9 concerned the actual occurrence of given symbols in public space, whereas questions 8 and 10 – in virtual reality. Having reached the issues concerning the occurrence of specific symbols in reality, the respondent was asked whether they encountered them in public space, how often, and how they value judge the occurrence of those symbols. "1. Do you encounter the above symbols in public space? (E.g. as graffiti in the streets, on clothes, during marches and other event). If you encounter only some of them, write down in an open answer the number or numbers of those symbols." "2. How often do you encounter the above symbols in public space?" "3. What is your emotional attitude to the occurrence of those symbols in public space?" Only the first question was an open one, thanks to which the students could specify in detail what signs they actually saw. The

subsequent elements of the section were based on the Likert scale. Sections 8 and 10 differed – as it has been mentioned earlier – by the type of space involved. Those questions were more specific since they concerned the occurrence of the selected symbols only on the Internet. The structure of questions in sections 8 and 9 was identical save for the above described change, as in the case of two preceding groups of questions. In this case, the respondent dealt with the following contents:

"1. Do you encounter the above symbols on the Internet? (Eg. on social media, in posts, as mems, etc.). If you encounter only some of them, write down in an open answer the number or numbers of those symbols."

"2. How often do you encounter the above symbols on the Internet?"

"3. What is your emotional attitude to the occurrence of those symbols on the Internet?"

After the responses had been collected, the data were analysed with the use of statistical tests and the maximum error of the estimate. In order to verify interdependencies between the selected variables Person's chi-square and Cramer's V tests were applied to the constructed cross tables, and the maximum standard error of the estimate was calculated, which amounted to 10%. All calculations, tables, results and annexes are found in files of the research project under which the survey was carried out.[41]

41. M. Tkaczyk, *Stosunek studentów Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego do wybranych symboli nacjonalistycznych oraz faszyzujących w przestrzeni publicznej*, 2022, https://apd.uw.edu.pl/diplomas/212064/, (access 06.07.2022).

Results

One half of the signs was recognised by the majority of the respondents. The most popular symbol was the falanga (as much as 74% recognisability). On the other extreme was the toporzeł (recognisability at the level of 25%). Interesting is the result of the National Armed Forces (NSZ), the recognition of which could have seemed poor, given not only Poland's historical policy but also the high school curriculum. The subject of the NSZ was included in the general curricula of both the 3rd and the 4th educational level. The division into educational levels from before the 2017 educational system reform was selected for this comparison purposefully, since it was the very system the interviewees had been educated in. Therefore, it may be concluded that the history teaching programme and the historical policy of the state could not be fully successful considering that it concerned the knowledge of one of the main Polish clandestine organisation during the times of World War II. The responses to the in-depth questions verifying the students' knowledge of the selected symbols were

aggregated to the binary form ("I know", "I do not know"). The respondents recognised some of the selected symbols, though the majority of interviewees has only partial knowledge of them, if at all any. It should also be emphasized that the students had the greatest knowledge about the falanga, which after a comparison with other variables confirms that the falanga is one of the most recognisable nationalistic symbols in Poland.

Another set of collected data defines the emotional attitude to the selected symbols. The responses were aggregated from the original form based on the Likert scale in order to get a more transparent triad – "positive", "negative", "no answer". The first important observation is the fact that the majority of the respondents value judges all of the presented signs. In no case the number of students who did not given an answer exceeded the number of those who chose the option of value judging the symbols covered by the questionnaire. This phenomenon confirms one of the hypotheses that have been put forward. Of interest in also the arising information that the level of knowledge about the symbols does not coincide with the degree of value attached thereto. The only similarity may be observed when comparing the degree of symbol recognisability, but this parallelism is based only on the trend plane. An interesting conclusion arises therefrom that some of the students value judge the symbols without having any knowledge about them, and in some cases – not even recognising them.

During the analysis of the results attention is also drawn to the fact that the majority of symbols are not judged negatively. In this case, most negative points went to the falanga (76%) and the Celtic cross (66%). It is possible that the associations with radicalism, nationalism and violence had an impact on the above shape of the results. Attention is also drawn to the issue of the NSZ sign. It is the only case when the majority of the respondents valued the symbol positively (38%) rather than negatively. Perhaps its special positioning by Poland's historical policy and educational system had an impact on this phenomenon. This result may be also interpreted otherwise, namely that as compared with the symbols of more radical origins or contents the students approvingly valued the NSZ sign due to its significance in the patriotic context.

After the chi-square tests had been run it turned out that there the views of the students corresponded with their value judgments of the signs. Out of six tests, only one did not reveal any statistical significance. It happened for symbol no. 5 – the black sun, though in this case no interdependence may be an effect of poor recognisability and knowledge of this symbol, the confirmation of

which is found in the earlier paragraphs of this chapter. The students' gender as well as their lines of study had no statistically significant impact on their attitudes.

The analysis of the collected responses also showed that the students who had declared extreme rightist views constituted an overwhelming percentage of those who had a positive attitude towards the researched symbols. In some cases, such as the toporzeł or the falanga, a positive attitude was shown exclusively by those who identified themselves with the right. It is worth noting case of the NSZ sign, which again came as a surprise. As many as 23% of the respondents declaring their view as leftist and 21% as centrist positively valued that symbol. The students declaring leftist or centrist views scored top results as having no opinion in three cases. Those declaring themselves as the right form a group of least undecided respondents. One should not forget either that this confirms the stereotype conjecture that leftist persons would least favourably view the selected symbols. This group is in the forefront in the line of responses coded as: *negative*.

The next discussed section of the results obtained are the issues contained in questions 7-10 concerning the occurrence of the symbols in public space with the distinction into virtual and factual reality. The interviewees much more often encounter nationalistic than fascistising symbols, and this takes place on the street rather than on the Internet. Another information is of special importance, since it changes one of the research hypotheses, one of the assumptions of which was that there was a greater number of the researched symbols on the Internet than on the street. It should be also underlines that according to the data the majority of the students do see and encounter the selected symbols in public space. Combining this with the earlier results, a conclusion may be formulated that despite the limited knowledge and partial recognition of the symbols associated with nationalistic and fascistic milieus, the UoW students encounter those symbols during their daily movements. Less often when they are using the Internet.

Discussion of the results

The paper presents at least a partial picture of the awareness of the University of Warsaw students, that is young citizens who in the forthcoming future will have the main influence of the shape of the political scene in Poland. It has been shown that the respondents were able to recognise the selected symbols, though the overwhelming majority of them had no knowledge what they were. The research confirmed a part of the assumed hypotheses, whereas others were modified. It was shown that the majority of the University of Warsaw students value judged the researched sym-

bols and, what is interesting, some of the respondents did it while having no knowledge about them or sometimes not even recognizing them. Such a perspective may be inspiring for further research concerning interdependencies between formulating evaluations and judgments on one hand and the amount of knowledge on a given subject on the other.

When analysing the material associated with verification of the hypothesis as to the more frequent occurrence of those symbols in virtual space rather than classically understood public space, very surprising results were obtained which forced a change of that view. According to the University of Warsaw Students students there are more of the researched symbols present on the Internet than in public space. The respondents clearly showed in their responses that they more frequently encountered the selected symbols on the street than on the Internet. There was also a visible trend that the signs from the group of the nationalistic ones (the sword of King Bolesław the Brave, the NSZ sign and the falanga) were more frequently encountered than those from the fascistic group. In this context, an optimistic conclusion may be drawn that the symbols close to or actually identified with the fascistic contents are encountered least frequently or not at all. In order not to fall into the trap of a single possible interpretational path it may be added that, on the other hand, rare occurrence of fascistising symbols on the Internet may prove the correctness of the phenomenon of the so-called "information bubble", i.e. the closed environment created by social media, in which the vast majority of the interactions we participate in and the information we receive are consistent with our views.[42] This would mean that the first look at the collected and above presented results may prove erroneously interpreted. Taking into account the contemporary virtual reality and the mechanisms underlying social media, it is not possible to draw the conclusions as to the scale of the occurrence of fascistising or fascist symbols in the Polish-language segments of the Internet on the basis of the research sample I gathered. Those issues require further research.

The negative attitude of the University of Warsaw students is greater towards the symbols which are most recognisable. This tendency overlaps the division adopted in the articles into nationalistic and fascistising symbols since one sign from each of the categories aroused the greatest negative attitude. The original position assumed that there is an interdependence between ideological connotations of given symbols and their evaluation. Ultimately, however, the relationship between recognisability of the signs and their evaluation proved to be stronger.

42. B. Malinowski, *Jak Facebook zamyka nas w bańce informacyjnej. Algorytm filtrujący newsfeed a zjawisko filter bubble*, "Zarządzanie mediami", 2016, 4 (1), p. 20. DOI: 10.4467/23540214ZM.15.002.5212

When the research, the results of which have been discussed above, was being carried out, the world changed. On 24 February 2022, with its invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation led to the outbreak of a war which, after the pandemic that had lasted two years, will and already does affect the economy, the international order and the lives of millions of people. History has provided us with sufficient examples that radical ideas and movements of any hue win over the greatest number of followers at moments of crisis. Meanwhile, as a result of the above mentioned tragic events, experts worldwide prophesise that the world is standing at the threshold of yet another serious economic recession.[43] The everyday realities do not takes away the hope that an analysis and further studies of radical right-wing milieus in Poland seem to be necessary not only for academic reasons, but also in order to be able to monitor them and enhance public opinion's awareness. It is also worth asking whether the threat of that type concern not only Poland or Eastern and Central Europe, but also any other state of the Western world.

43. P. Inman, *We face a global economic crisis. And no one knows what to do about it*, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jun/18/we-face-a-global-economic-crisis-and-no-one-knows-what-todo-about-it, (access 18.06.2022).

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