
ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA DISCOURSE SURROUNDING THE 2021 POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER CRISIS¹

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Abstract

The paper analyses media narratives in Polish newspapers, magazines and media websites about the refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. The study uses methods from corpus linguistics. The aim of the research was to test the accuracy of the assumption that there are two parallel narratives in the discourse, one based on security and emphasising the danger posed by the migrants, and the other recognising them as victims and showing empathy towards them. The study found that the discourse is rather polarised, with most publications subscribing to only one narrative and borrowing very little from the other.

Key words: *Polish-Belarusian border crisis, media language, corpus discourse analysis, refugees.*

When observing the media, it becomes clear that various publications use different language to describe the same event. This was particularly evident during the 2021 border crisis in Poland, which began when the Belarusian regime began sending Middle Eastern migrants to the Polish border. The migrants became trapped in the forests near the border, with the Polish Border Guard preventing them from crossing into Poland and the Belarusian authorities refusing to allow them to return to their country of origin. Due to the complexity of the situation, two dominant narratives emerged. One narrative focused on the security threats to the Polish border, while the other focused on the tragic situation of the migrants.

The crisis can be traced back to the presidential election in Belarus held on the 9th of August 2020. According to official Belarusian sources, President Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in office since 1994, was re-elected with 81.04 % of the votes. However, this result was not recognized by the leaders of the EU member states. It is believed that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the main opposition candidate, received more votes than the announced 10 % [Tóka 2021: 230]. The EU imposed sanctions on the Belarusian government due to the manipulated elections, imprisonment of Tsikhanouskaya, and brutal repression of protests [EP, 26.11.2020].

In response to the sanctions, Lukashenko threatened to flood Europe with drugs and immigrants. Belarus, finding itself in an economic crisis, would no longer be able to prevent them from entering EU territories [The Week 28.05.2021]. From May to June 2021, the Lithuanian and Latvian Border Guards observed a significant increase in illegal border crossings, which reached its peak in July and August 2021 [Dudzińska 2021]. Subsequently, the crisis spread to the Polish-Belarusian border. Belarusian agencies conducted operations in countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, manipulating people into travelling to Belarus by marketing it as an easy way to migrate to the EU, primarily to Germany. They have also increased the number of flights connecting the Middle East to Belarus. According to

reports, the planes were full on the way to Minsk but empty on the return journey. According to sources [InfoSecurity24 26.08.2021; Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej 2021], the migrants were transported to the border, where they were stripped of their personal documents and ordered to breach the fence.

Between August and November 2021, Polish institutions reported approximately 40,000 attempts at illegal border crossings. The migrants were used as a tool by the Belarusian state, posing a threat to Poland through mass uncontrolled migration. Although mass uncontrolled migration posed a threat to Poland, it is important to acknowledge that the migrants were victims of a humanitarian crisis. The Belarusian government prevented the migrants from returning to their country of origin, while the Polish Guard denied them entry into Polish territory. As a result, humanitarian aid and the media faced difficulties accessing the migrants from either the Belarusian or Polish side due to the Polish government's introduction of a state of emergency in the regions bordering Belarus [Wawrzusiszyn 2022, 57].

Despite media restrictions, the crisis became a prominent topic, resulting in numerous publications. Due to its controversial nature, there were significant differences in its presentation. While some media focused on the threats to Poland that the crisis had brought, others emphasised the critical situation of the migrants who were stuck on the border. Our research team hypothesised that there were two opposing narratives about the crisis in the Polish media. One narrative focused on the security threats resulting from the crisis, while the other focused on the humanity of the refugees. To test the hypothesis, we applied corpus linguistics methods.

Academics from various fields have published papers on the Polish-Belarusian border crisis, offering a wide range of perspectives. Specialists in national security and international relations have analysed the crisis as a hybrid threat and a component of broader hybrid warfare [Filipec 2021; Baziur 2022; Berzins 2022; Olbrycht 2022; Wawrzusiszyn 2022]. In his paper, Janko Bekić [2022] draws a comparison between the Polish-Belarusian border crisis and the Greek-Turkish crisis of 2020. Olesia Tkachuk (2022) highlights the absence of EU migration policies that address the instrumental use of a large influx of migrants by third-party states.

Authors specialising in law commonly focus on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. Krzysztof Jurek [2022] presents the legal issues faced by humanitarian aid agencies. Other scholars acknowledge Poland's nonconformity with the already established EU migration policies and the EU's tacit approval of the member states'

actions [Bodnar Grzelak 2023; Grześkowiak 2022]. Klaus and Szulecka (2022) conducted a comparison of Polish migration policies towards Middle Eastern migrants at the Belarusian border and the policies towards the 2022 migration from Ukraine and Belarus. They diagnosed that the difference in policies was based on discrimination based on ethnicity. Anthropologist Agnieszka Halemba (2022) described the challenges faced by humanitarian aid agencies and their strategies for navigating them.

Media discourse surrounding the border crisis was the subject of several publications. Marta Jas-Koziarkiewicz [2023] conducted a frame analysis of the public TV station TVP, inspired by Erving Goffman. Monika Koźdoń-Dębecka [2023] also used a similar framework to compare the agendas of three mainstream TV stations. Nylec [2023] employed frame analysis to compare two journals, namely 'Sieci' and 'Przegląd'. In her work, Tymińska (2022) analysed hate speech in online discourse, with a particular focus on Twitter. The authors of the study conducted a statistical analysis of the main Polish news websites, with a focus on the portrayal of migrants [Karolina Bloch et al., 2022].

Based on the literature reviewed, there appears to be a research gap in the broader media discourse. The previous works examined only a few specific news sources, which limited the ability to draw more general conclusions about the discourse. Thanks to the methods of corpus linguistics (Conrad 2002; Baker 2006; Baker McEnery 2015; Biber 2007; Gray Biber 2011), we were able to consider a significantly larger number of news sources, gaining a better understanding of the media discourse surrounding this issue.

METHODOLOGY

In our analysis of press, journals, and internet news sources (hereafter referred to as 'publications'), we used techniques from corpus linguistics. Our aim was to analyze media narratives by examining the keywords used in articles about the Polish-Belarusian border crisis by the most influential Polish publications.

The initial stage of the research involved creating a specialized corpus of texts from the selected publications. We chose 17 publications based on their influence, as determined by the Institute of Media Monitoring [IMM 2021] ranking from October 2021². To access articles from each publication, we used the Google search engine

² The study only considered press and internet news websites, as well as weekly and bi-weekly magazines. Television and radio were excluded due to their lack of written text, as the focus of the research was on written language. Monthly and bi-monthly magazines were

and entered a search prompt such as 'granica białoruska site:wp.pl' (meaning 'Belarusian border site:wp.pl') for each publication. Only emotionally neutral words were used to refer strictly to the location, avoiding bias. To ensure that only articles related to the topic were collected, a custom date range was set. As the exact beginning date of the crisis is unclear, the data collection began on 01.01.2021 to ensure that none of the earliest articles on the subject were omitted. The date range ended on 23.02.2022, one day before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This enabled us to exclude articles that were not relevant to the subject under examination, such as those related to the war, including the Belarusian engagement in the invasion or the wave of Ukrainian war refugees. In total, we collected 1441 articles, containing a total of 1,136,373 words (Chart 1).

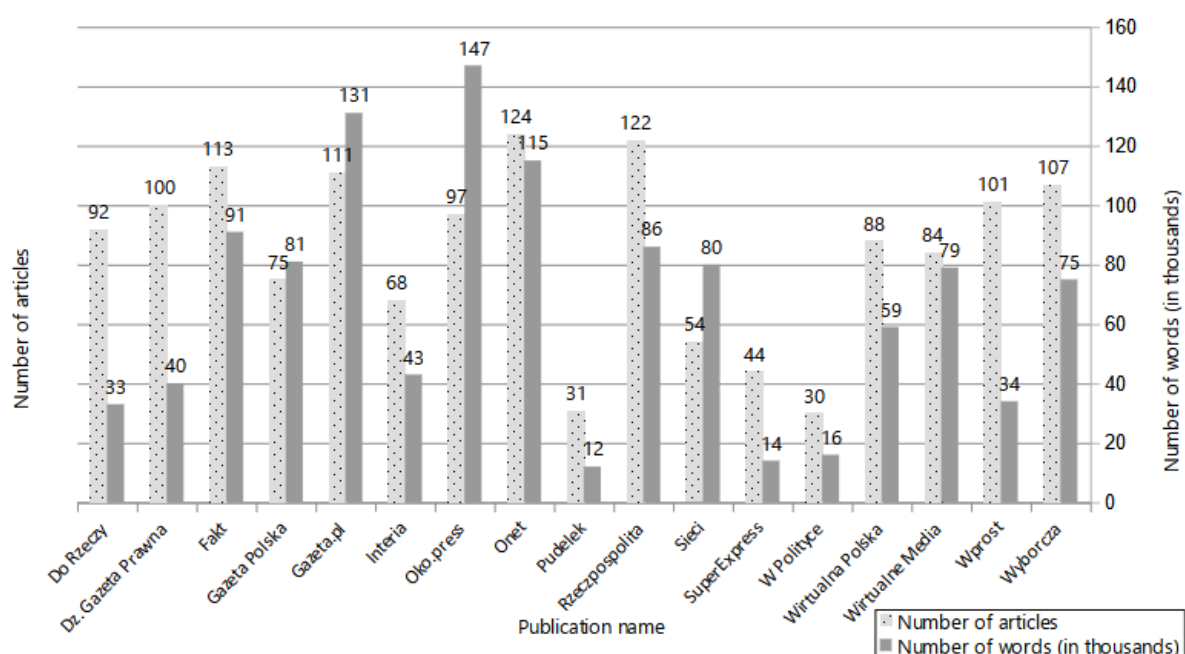


Chart 1. The number of articles and words of each publication (own elaboration)

The articles were then lemmatised to facilitate the analysis of the collected data³. This process was conducted thanks to a neural network model for the “SpaCy” Python library. Unfortunately, the model’s accuracy is estimated at about 94 %

also excluded as they were deemed less influential overall and did not provide a sufficient corpus for the research.

Publications such as “Money.pl”, “BusinessInsider.pl” and “Przegląd Sportowy” were omitted because their main foci are not social issues or security, but economics and sports. “Wspólnota.pl” and other regional publications were also omitted as their reach is limited to specific regions.

³ Lemmatisation is the process of reducing words to their root form. See A. Gillis, 2023.

correctly lemmatised words. Some mistakes were manually corrected whenever they affected the keywords. The collected articles were lemmatised using a neural network model from the 'SpaCy' Python library to aid analysis. Despite an estimated 94 % accuracy rate, some errors were manually corrected when they impacted the keywords.

The second step involved identifying the keywords that differentiate each publication from the others. We created corpora for each selected publication and a unified reference corpus for all 1441 articles. For each word in the reference corpus, we calculated the expected frequency of occurrence. We then tested the observed frequency of all the words in the publication's corpora. If a word's observed frequency was significantly higher than the expected frequency in the reference corpus, it was considered a keyword in this publication. Conversely, if a word's observed frequency was close to or lower than the frequency in the reference corpus, it was not identified as a keyword [Anthony 2023:1]. AntConc [Anthony 2022] was used to identify keywords, a computer program designed for corpus analysis. Grammatical words that carry no meaning (such as 'and', 'but', 'however', etc.) were excluded, as well as keywords that appeared in only one or two articles, as they were not representative of the publication as a whole. The context of each keyword was checked using the KWIC (Keywords in Context) option provided by the same program to determine which narrative it supported.

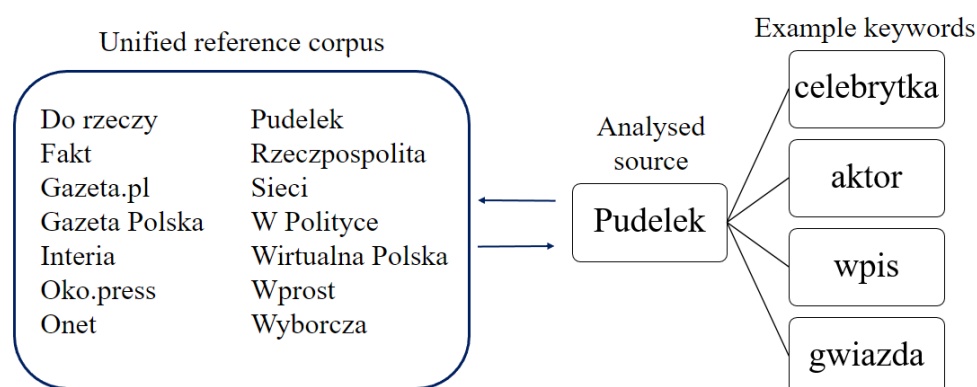


Figure 1. Process of comparing corpora to extract keywords (own elaboration)

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA DISCOURSE REGARDING MIGRANTS AT THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER

The study identified two parallel narratives regarding the refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. One narrative emphasised the severity of the threats posed by the actions of the Belarusian authorities and the fear of migrants (referred

to as the security-based narrative), while the other focused on the plight of people stranded in the border forests (referred to as the human rights-based narrative). To determine if a division by narrative type occurred, we analysed the keywords in each publication, considering their context. This analysis helped identify which words were used more frequently in one publication than others and their intended referent.

The publications that best represent the security-based narrative are 'Do Rzeczy' and 'Gazeta Polska'. Upon analysing the keywords used in 'Do Rzeczy', it becomes clear that the word 'illegal' mainly refers to immigrants crossing the border or entering Poland. The most frequent collocations with the word 'illegal' are *'to cross'*, *'attempt'*, *'to record'* (*the border guard recorded 195 illegal attempts of crossing the border*), *'immigrant'* and *'immigration'*. This use implies that the actions of migrants are dangerous because they are illegal, which may create uncertainty in the reader. Similarly, the term 'territory' may seem insignificant, but when used in phrases such as *'attempts to invade the territory of Poland'*, *'violating the territory of a sovereign state'*, or *'illegally entering the territory of Poland'*, it highlights the danger that the crisis poses to Poland and the inviolability of its borders.

The term 'attempt' is often used to describe security-related incidents such as *an attempted illegal incursion*, *a mass incursion*, *crossing* or *charging the border*. Another keyword used in this context is 'provocation', which refers to the actions of Belarusian services at the border. It is important to note that this term may not necessarily indicate fear on the part of immigrants, but rather emphasises the fear of possible actions from the Belarusian side. This is evident in contexts such as: *provocation by the Belarusian services*, *provocation by the Belarusian regime* or *by the Lukashenko regime*.

The keywords in 'Gazeta Polska' (Figure 3) suggest a security-based narrative. The top-ranking words include *Putin*, *Russian*, and *operation*. The word 'operation' appears in the contexts of *hybrid operation*, *military operation*, *disinformation operation*, and *operation 'sluice'*⁴. These keywords indicate hostile forces and their actions aimed at breaching Poland's security. 'Gazeta Polska' refers to internal enemies using keywords such as *'opposition'*, *'total'*, *'Tusk'*, and *'platform'*. These words all relate to the then ruling party, Law and Justice⁵ (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), and its main rival party, Civic Platform⁶ (Platforma Obywatelska), and its leader,

⁴ See Baziur 2022.

⁵ Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) is the ruling party since 2016. See: <https://pis.org.pl/>

⁶ Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) is the main opposition party since 2016. See: <https://platforma.org/o-nas>

Donald Tusk. The use of terms such as *'total opposition'* indicates a hostile attitude towards the mentioned actors. Other terms require context. For example, *Tusk and Lukashenko attacked simultaneously. The Civic Platform was willing to jeopardise Polish security in the name of its interests. TVN⁷ and PO (Civic Platform) gave Moscow the green light.* Another example of the keywords that appeared in the articles from 'Gazeta Polska' is *'front'*. This term refers to the border itself, portraying it as a battleground, or to the *'Warsaw front'* (front warszawski), which is an umbrella term for the liberal movements, the opposition party PO, and their voters.

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	białoruski	Belarusian
2	nielegalny	Illegal
3	granica	a border
4	polski	Polish
5	żołnierz	a soldier
6	Wąsik	(surname)
7	terytorium	territory
8	pas	a strip
9	wiceminister	vice minister
10	funkcjonariusz	an officer
11	poinformować	to inform
12	próba	an attempt
13	służba	service
14	graniczna	border (adjective)
15	prowokacja	a provocation
16	stwierdzić	to state
17	imigrant	an immigrant
18	przekroczyć	to cross
19	przekazać	to inform, to convey
20	minister	a minister

Figure 2. Keywords in 'Do Rzeczy' in order by keyness (own elaboration)

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	Putin	Putin
2	rosyjski	Russian
3	operacja	operation
4	Rosja	Russia
5	wojna	a war
6	totalny	total
7	opozycja	opposition
8	NATO	NATO
9	atak	an attack
10	Moskwa	Moscow
11	państwo	a state
12	Tusk	(surname)
13	Kreml	the Kremlin
14	KGB	The KGB
15	element	an element
16	platforma	a platform
17	hybrydowy	hybrid
18	armia	an army
19	front	a front
20	prowokacja	a provocation

Figure 3. Keywords in 'Gazeta Polska' in order by keyness (own elaboration)

The most exemplary instances of the human rights-based narrative are found in 'Oko.press' and 'Gazeta Wyborcza'. According to the study, *'human'* was the most frequently used keyword in 'Oko.press' (Figure 4). A detailed analysis of its usage revealed that this particular keyword primarily pertains to refugees who are in

⁷ TVN is a popular polish TV station owned by Warner Bros. Discovery. See at: <https://tvn.pl/o-nas>

extreme distress, on the brink of survival, frightened, hungry, victims of violence, and in dire need of assistance. The frequent use of this word underscores the migrants' humanity. Another term high on the list is 'activist'. Depending on the context, it can refer to someone who is *trying to help, being arrested, or raising awareness.* The term is frequently used in narratives that describe individuals at the border who require assistance. Activists who attempt to provide this assistance are often highlighted. Other relevant keywords include *Iraqi, right (human rights; rights to asylum; to protection; to apply for refugee status), convention (Geneva Convention; Human Rights Convention; Convention of the rights of the child)* and *asylum (they ask for asylum in Poland; in Germany; in EU countries).* In "Oko.press", as in "Gazeta Polska", we can notice the mentions of enemies. In this case the enemies are designated by the key word *pogranicznik (a border guard)*, referring to the people who, according to the contexts: *do not allow refugees to return to Minsk; do not allow food to be given to refugees; are very brutal; beat; shoot with plastic cartridges; intimidate; and deport.* It is worth noting that these words refer to both Polish and Belarusian border guards.

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	człowiek	human
2	aktywista	an activist
3	ja	me
4	las	a forest
5	pogranicznik	a border guard
6	Irakijczyk	Iraqi
7	prawo	a right (to sth)
8	rodzina	a family
9	push (back)	push (back)
10	telefon	a telephone
11	migrantka	a migrant (fem.)
12	woda	water
13	kontakt	contact
14	Chrzanowska	(surname)
15	azyl	an asylum
16	konwencja	a convention
17	karetka	an ambulance
18	ubiegać się	to apply
19	osoba	a person
20	ośrodek	center

Figure 4. Keywords in "Oko.press" in order by keyness (own elaboration)

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	Al	Al (arabic name comp.)
2	Sterczewski	(surname)
3	żubr	a bison
4	protest	a protest
5	Bydgoszcz	(city name)
6	mur	a wall
7	budowa	construction
8	puszcza	a forest
9	autostrada	a highway
10	komenda	a (police) station
11	Kurdystan	Kurdistan
12	brat	a brother
13	zwierzę	an animal
14	droga	a road
15	Kretkowska	(surname)
16	uchodźca	a refugee
17	Podlaskie	Podlaskie Voivodeship
18	plot	a fence
19	śląski	Silesian
20	ogrodzenie	a fence

Figure 5. Keywords in "Gazeta Wyborcza" in order by keyness (own elaboration)

The keyword list for 'Gazeta Wyborcza' (Figure 5) demonstrates the newspaper's focus on a human rights-based narrative, as was the case in previous editions. The first word on the list is 'Al', which is a component of names such as *Al-Hasan*, *Al-Ensi*, *Al-Jaf* or *Al-Bawah*, used in the articles as names of migrants. The use of specific names rather than group terms, such as refugees or migrants, suggests a more personal approach to the individuals trapped at the border and aligns with a human rights-based narrative.

The second keyword on the list, '*bison*', is interestingly not related to refugees but rather to empathy towards animals. It pertains to two bison that became entangled in a barrier at the border and died. Only 'Gazeta Wyborcza' highlighted this aspect of the border crisis by including the *bison* and *animal* among its keywords. "Gazeta Wyborcza" is notable for its extensive coverage of the protests that occurred throughout Poland regarding the refugees. Therefore, the word '*protest*' and the names of cities such as *Bydgoszcz* are frequently mentioned.

Both 'Do Rzeczy' and 'Gazeta Polska' present a security-based narrative, focusing on the perceived dangers associated with migrants. The articles portray both migrants and Belarusians as enemies, creating the impression of a conflict between Poles and foreign forces. Additionally, the opposition is depicted as traitors serving the interests of the enemy. "Oko.press" and "Gazeta Wyborcza" focused solely on the humanitarian aspect, which was absent in previously analysed security-oriented publications. However, they did not address the international conflict between EU states and Belarus, despite Belarus being responsible for creating the crisis. The portrayal of the ruling party and Polish government agencies as the main culprits for not ensuring human rights and denying humanitarian aid to migrants is a subjective evaluation and lacks objectivity. The crisis should be treated as an international issue rather than an internal affair between the ruling party and the opposition.

One of the publications, 'Gazeta.pl' (Figure 6), appeared to represent a human rights-based narrative. However, upon closer inspection, it became clear that the keywords suggesting this, such as *violence* (on the border), *to appeal*, *humanitarian corridor*, *help*, *threat* (of escalation), *international protection*, all came from the same excerpt of text attached to the end of most articles. It was an appeal written by a nonprofit organisation Grupa Granica⁸, which was heavily involved in spreading

⁸ "Grupa Granica" is a social movement opposing the response of the government to the events taking place in the Polish-Belarusian border region. See at: <https://hfhr.pl/o-nas/sieci-wspolpracy/grupa-granica>

awareness about the migrant crisis. Once we removed the contents of the appeal from the corpus to investigate the language used in the articles, the keywords became different (Figure 7.).

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	przemoc	violence
2	granica	a border
3	migrować	to migrate
4	apel	an appeal
5	utworzyć	to create
6	prześladowanie	persecution
7	apelować	to appeal
8	korytarz	a corridor
9	ochrona	protection
10	nacisk	pressure
11	eskalacja	escalation
12	zdrowie	health
13	sytuacja	a situation
14	humanitarny	humanitarian
15	destabilizacja	destabilisation
16	osoba	a person
17	groźba	a threat
18	zapewnić	to ensure
19	oblicze	face (in face of)
20	główny	main

Figure 6. Keywords in “Gazeta.pl” in order without the by keyness (own elaboration)

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	Białoruś	Belarus
2	granica	a border
3	budowa	construction
4	plot	a fence
5	kilometr	kilometer
6	Usnierz	Usnierz Górny (village name)
7	gmina	a municipality
8	Bieszczadzki	Bieszczady (mountain range, adj.)
9	euro	euro
10	uchodźca	a refugee
11	straż	a guard
12	graniczny	border (adj.)
13	koszt	cost
14	żołnierz	a soldier
15	lekarz	a doctor
16	firma	a company
17	przeczytać	to read
18	Frontex	(agency)
19	drut	a wire
20	białoruski	Belarusian

Figure 7. Keywords in “Gazeta.pl” appeal in order by keyness (own elaboration)

The new keywords were mostly focused on the border wall that the Polish government was constructing: *construction, fence, kilometre (illegal 150-kilometre barbed wire on the Polish border; The wall has reached a length of 180 kilometres etc.), euro (construction is expected to cost around 7.5 million euro; 620 thousand euro per kilometre), cost (The cost of the wall will be over one billion zlotys; journalists tried to ask Morawiecki about the cost of the fence), company (The fence will be built by a company whose chairman is a Law and Justice activist; The first company will build a 105km barrier and the second 80km) and wire (the construction of the razor wire fence started; the first barbed wire fence is already in place)*. This may be a critique of the government's fiscal decisions, but it does not focus on the refugees themselves.

There are also other keywords that more align with the human rights-based narrative such as *doctor* which mostly refers to Doctors without Borders⁹ who: *had been continually trying to gain access to the prohibited zone since October; are withdrawing from the Polish-Belarusian border*. Another word that, when used in contexts, suggests a human rights-based narrative is *Usnarz*, referring to the village of Usnarz Górny, located near the border, where a group of around 50 migrants was camping. It appeared in contexts such as: *the tragedy of the Usnarz refugees and the cold-heartedness of the Polish authorities; Usnarz is only a small part [of the crisis]; in the case of Usnarz refugees, the humanitarian aspect is more important*.

The word *refugee* also appeared as a keyword. It was mostly used in the contexts that suggest a human rights-based narrative, for example, citing protesters who demanded: *the Polish Red Cross's implementation of comprehensive humanitarian assistance to refugees; locating and identifying refugees missing in Poland*. It also addressed the actions of the border guards: *border guards push refugees to the Belarusian side; border guards who do not let refugees through and do not allow them [the activists] to deliver food, among other things, have been joined by the military*. An interesting addition is a quote better suited to the security-based narrative: *residents spoke of their fear of a large number of refugees*.

The publication has a human rights-based narrative, particularly evident in the appeal by Grupa Granica. However, the majority of the keywords from the articles, excluding the appeal, focus on criticizing the government and the construction of border fences rather than raising awareness about the plight of the migrants.

Another major publication, 'Onet', also takes a human rights-based approach, as does Gazeta.pl. They use keywords such as 'zone', 'terrain', 'state of emergency', and 'journalist' in sentences condemning the media ban in the closed zone near the border. The term 'zone' is also used to describe the experiences of people living in the area (zone): *As residents of the state of emergency zone and aid organisations say – we will never know this number. Five migrant bodies are already buried in Podlasie; [...] the zone starts a few kilometres away. Monday's funeral for Ahmad will be the first such ceremony here; or Together with friends who also live in the zone, they formed an informal group to help people wandering in the surrounding woods*. Using those keywords, 'Onet' seems to subscribe to the human rights-based narrative. However, the word 'Lukashenko' also appears as a keyword in the following contexts: *[...] Lukashenko, who put everything on the line and has already*

⁹ Doctors Without Borders is an international organisation providing medical humanitarian aid. See at <https://lekarze-bez-granic.pl/o-nas/kim-jestesmy/>

clearly gone into open conflict with the West; By creating an artificial migration route, cynically using migrants, Lukashenko is trying to destabilise Poland, Lithuania and Latvia; It is an artificial crisis that Putin and Lukashenko have prepared for the EU. According to 'Onet', the Belarusian regime and Lukashenko were seen as the main cause of the humanitarian crisis, while 'Oko.press' and 'Gazeta Wyborcza' mostly attribute the blame to the Polish government. This perspective sets 'Onet' apart from other human rights-oriented publications.

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	Szudziałowo	(village name)
2	Łukaszewko	Lukashenko
3	strażniczka	a guard (fem.)
4	posterunek	a [guard] post
5	strefa	a zone
6	Kuźnica	(village name)
7	samochód	a car
8	placówka	an outpost
9	Podlaskie	(voivodeship)
10	policjant	a policeman
11	patrol	a patrol
12	migrant	a migrant
13	graniczny	border (adj.)
14	województwo	voivodeship
15	teren	terrain
16	wyjątkowy	emergency [state]
17	mijać	to pass/ to cross
18	dziennikarz	a journalist
19	rzecznik	spokesman
20	stan	a state (of emergency)

Figure 8. Keywords in “Onet” in order by *keyness* (own elaboration)

The tabloids 'Fakt' and 'Pudelek', in contrast to 'Gazeta.pl' and 'Onet', do not conform to the narratives outlined in the study. Their keywords (Figure 9, Figure 10) are dominated by the names of celebrities who are in some way involved in the events. Barbara Kurdej-Szatan's name appears particularly frequently, as internet users and the media heavily discussed her viral post criticising the border guards. Well-known names in Polish show business, such as *Stuhr*, *Warnke*, and *Ostaszewska*, were mentioned as keywords. Other frequently used keywords related to show business included *celebrity*, *actress*, and *star*, as well as words related to

social media such as *entry* or *Twitter*. The tabloids had noticeably fewer articles about the border crisis overall.

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	Kurdej	(surname)
2	lat	years
3	Szatan	(surname)
4	aktorka	an actress
5	Basia	(name)
6	wpis	an entry
7	Stuhr	(surname)
8	Emil	(name)
9	poinformować	to inform
10	Twitter	Twitter
11	Kaszuba	(surname)
12	aktor	an actor
13	wulgarny	vulgar
14	Ayrin	(name)
15	Michałow	(town name)
16	Kraków	(city name)
17	wolontariusz	a volunteer
18	prezydent	a president
19	serce	a heart
20	grób	a grave

Figure 9. Keywords in “Fakt” in order by *keyness* (own elaboration)

	Keywords in Polish	English translation
1	Kurdej	(surname)
2	Szatan	(surname)
3	Barbara	(name)
4	koncert	a concert
5	celebrytka	a celebrity (fem.)
6	Ostaszewska	(surname)
7	Stuhr	(surname)
8	zobaczyć	to see
9	TVP	(tv station)
10	podcast	a podcast
11	aktorka	an actress
12	Warnke	(surname)
13	wpis	an entry
14	Małgorzata	(name)
15	Katarzyna	(name)
16	postanowić	to decide
17	gwiazda	a star
18	Boładź	(surname)
19	Olga	(name)
20	aktor	an actor

Figure 10. Keywords in “Pudelek” in order by *keyness* (own elaboration)

Additionally, we decided to investigate how often the word *refugee* (*uchodźca*) was used in the analysed writings compared to the word *immigrant* (*imigrant*) or *migrant* (*migrant*). According to the “Great Dictionary of the Polish Language” (WSJP 2014), the term *uchodźca* (refugee) means “someone who leaves his or her own country for fear of being persecuted there for various political or religious reasons, or losing his or her life or health, e.g. due to warfare”.

Additionally, an investigation was conducted to compare the frequency of the words '*refugee*' (*uchodźca*) to '*immigrant*' (*imigrant*) or '*migrant*' (*migrant*) in the analysed writings. According to the 'Great Dictionary of the Polish Language' (WSJP 2014), the term '*uchodźca*' (refugee) refers to 'someone who leaves their own country due to fear of persecution for political or religious reasons, or due to the risk of losing their life or health, for example, due to warfare'. The terms '*migrant*' and '*immigrant*' are more neutral as they do not specify the reason for the change of residence.

However, in the context of the border situation, using these terms more frequently than '*refugee*' may suggest a reduction in their rights to apply for asylum or refugee status, which would align with a security-based narrative. Conversely, using '*refugee*' more often may indicate a human rights-based narrative. The Antconc programme counted the number of occurrences of the word '*refugee*' and divided it by the total number of occurrences of '*refugee*', '*immigrant*', and '*migrant*' to determine the proportion of times '*refugee*' was used to refer to migrants (Figure 2). It is worth noting that all publications used these terms interchangeably, possibly to avoid repetition. However, the repeated use of one word over another may indicate that the author made a deliberate choice to follow a particular narrative.

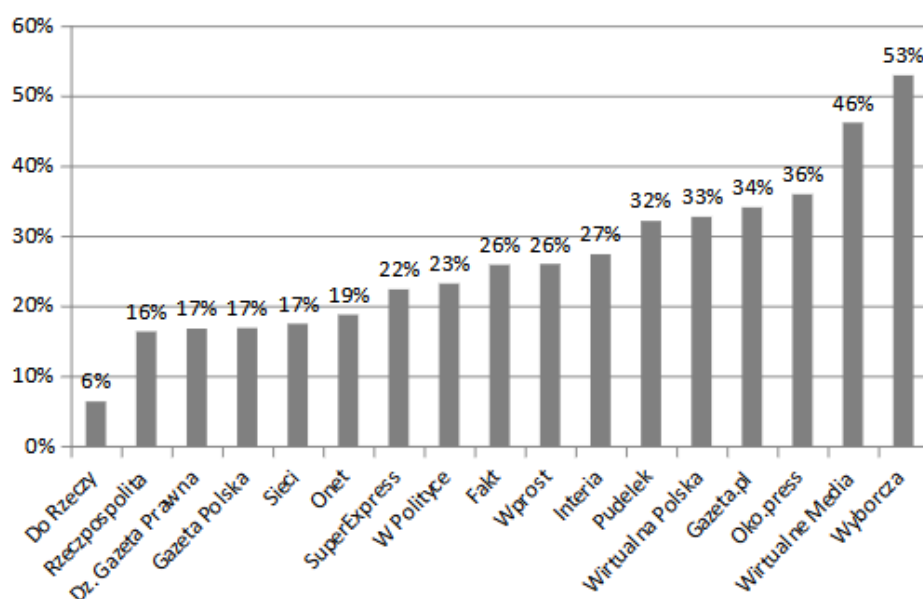


Figure 2. The usage of the word *refugee* (uchodźca) compared to *migrant* (migrant) and *immigrant* (imigrant). (own elaboration)

The chart above presents data that corresponds to the results of the keyword analysis. The publications previously assigned to the security-based narrative, namely '*Gazeta Polska*' and '*Do Rzeczy*', used the word '*refugee*' less frequently. Conversely, the publications assigned to the human rights-based narrative, namely '*Oko.press*' and '*Gazeta Wyborcza*', used it more frequently. Tabloids, as shown in the corpus analysis, are positioned in the middle of the scale on the graph. One exception is the publication '*Wirtualne Media*', which appears to use the word '*refugee*' frequently. This exception may be due to the fact that this publication discussed migrants the least, with words referring to migrants making up only 0.15 % of all words in the publication. This is in comparison to the second to last publication '*Gazeta Polska*' with 0.39 % and the first publication '*Rzeczpospolita*'

with 1.25 %. The remaining publications partially lean towards one narrative or the other, but to varying degrees of intensity.

In summary, our analysis of 17 publications revealed that 6 favoured a security-based narrative and 6 favoured a human rights-based narrative. However, there were variations in the degree to which each publication adhered to their chosen narrative. Some were highly committed, using keywords that closely aligned with their narrative, while others were more flexible. Additionally, 5 publications did not fit into either narrative, mostly consisting of tabloids that focused on celebrity gossip related to the border crisis.

The publications 'Do Rzeczy', 'Gazeta Polska', 'Dziennik Gazeta Prawna', 'Sieci', 'W Polityce' and 'Rzeczpospolita' focused on a security-based narrative, with keywords suggesting that migration posed a significant threat. They portrayed the crisis as a conflict between Poles and foreign forces, and any opposition to the government's policies was deemed against the interest of the state and treated as treason. Those publications rarely discussed human rights violations and humanitarian aid, as the narrative allowed very little room for such topics.

However, 'Oko.press' and 'Gazeta Wyborcza' presented an opposing narrative, focusing solely on the humanitarian crisis, portraying the ruling party and government as the sole culprits responsible for the crisis. This narrative overlooks the international conflict between EU states and Belarus, as well as the human trafficking conducted by the Belarusian regime, thus reducing the conflict to an internal affair. Although only two publications committed to this narrative to an extreme degree, others, such as 'Onet', 'Gazeta.pl', 'Wprost', and 'Wirtualna Polska', leaned towards it to a lesser extent. There was very little overlap between the two narratives in all the publications. Only in the case of 'Onet' were the keywords suggestive of a full picture of the situation being taken into account. Both human rights violations were mentioned, and the blame for initiating the crisis was put on the Belarusian regime.

CONCLUSIONS

The study confirmed the hypothesis that there are two conflicting narratives about the migrant crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border in the Polish media. The discourse surrounding the crisis was polarised. Six out of 17 publications strongly supported a security-based narrative, condemning Belarus and highlighting the threat of mass migration. On the other hand, two publications supported an opposing, human rights-based narrative that focused solely on the humanitarian crisis of the migrants, for which the Polish government was blamed. Four other

publications leaned towards this narrative, but to a lesser degree. The remaining five publications did not lean towards either narrative. However, these were mostly tabloids focused on celebrity gossip and sensationalism. Based on the extent to which publications subscribed to one of the narratives, we conclude that the security-based narrative had a stronger representation in the most influential media.

There was minimal overlap between the two narratives. None of the publications focused on security issues and simultaneously considered the humanitarian aspect important enough to reflect it in their keywords. The migrants were mainly portrayed as enemies in all of the security-oriented publications, while only slight similarities were found in the human rights-oriented publications. Most publications did not acknowledge the Belarusian involvement in creating the crisis, except for 'Onet'.

This lack of overlap shows that most publications choose to omit certain aspects of the crisis and focus the blame on specific actors. Security-oriented publications blame the Belarusian government and Lukashenko, seemingly omitting the questionable actions of the Polish authorities. However, many publications focused on human rights fail to acknowledge the involvement of Belarus, instead placing all blame on the Polish government. This indicates a significant politicisation of the issue, which negatively impacts the quality of media coverage.

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