



Public broadcasting in Europe

Poland – political instrumentalization, structural weaknesses, and the challenges of genuine reform

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I. Introduction: Political and Social Context of Public Service Broadcasting in Poland

The position of public media established during the communist Polish People's Republic (1944–1989) for years linked the ruling party with the control of the media realm and their content. In the countries that emerged after the collapse of the communist bloc in 1989–1991, a necessary transition toward democratic understanding of public media took place, but with a differing results. Poland, attempting to distance itself from the communist past, began to adopt the so-called hybrid-liberal model, which

resulted in the process of strong commercialization, translating into the tabloidization of media content¹. This also allowed for the development of external media market pluralism, rich in commercial stations. However, subsequent years also exposed the growing politicization of the media, a lack of transparency, and the nexus between political, business, and media elites. One of the most significant manifestations of this process, which came to light, was the Rywin affair² – a corruption scandal involving politics and media representatives. The ultimate turn toward the politicized media model became increasingly evident in Poland after 2015.

¹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Polski system medialny. Trzy dekady po upadku komunizmu: dynamika procesu zmian na tle Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, w: *Polski system medialny w procesie zmian*. Tom 2, ed. J. Kępa-Mętrak, P. Ciszek, Kielce 2022.

² The Rywin affair – a corruption scandal named after Polish film producer Lew Rywin, who in 2002 was accused of arranging a \$17.5 million bribe to influence a new media law, allegedly on behalf of the then prime minister's Leszek Miller political circle.

The years 2015–2023 in Poland, associated with the political propaganda and media “re-Polonization” strategy³ of the PiS-led⁴ government, left their mark on the image of the public broadcaster in the country and undermined its status as an independent public medium. The consolidation of the control over public service broadcasting, breached its statutory obligations of operation within the public interest, and instead became a propaganda tube for the ruling party⁵. Significant managerial and editorial changes in the public media structures (including the establishment of the National Media Council, pol. Rada Mediów Narodowych⁶) combined with a constant undermining of alternative media sources resulted in highly biased media messaging, discrediting political opponents and portraying any form of opposition as “agents” of foreign, malicious forces⁷. This set of state capture of the public media resulted in a drastic decline in public trust in this institution and its credibility (see. Graph 1).

The most visible consequences of these actions occurred during the 2023 parliamentary campaign, when the public

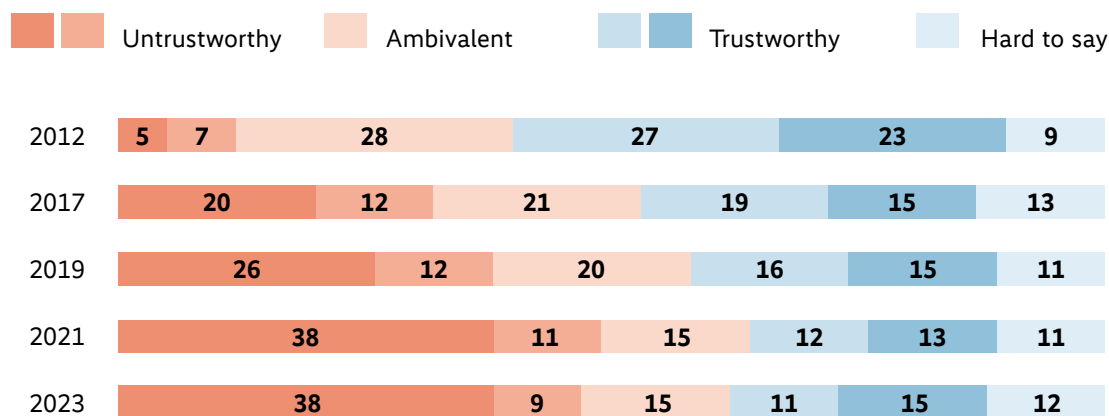
media repeatedly violated the Broadcasting Act, which requires the programs of the public broadcaster to be “pluralistic, impartial and well-balanced”. As indicated by the ODIHR report for the Polish parliamentary elections, during the electoral campaign PiS-led government coverage on TVP1 and TVP2 was limited but overwhelmingly positive, often echoing referendum themes and campaign messages. By contrast, opposition party Civic Platform received far more airtime, most of it sharply negative⁸.

For the new KO-led coalition⁹ government, establish after 2023 Parliamentary elections, restoration of the impartiality of public media was one of the main electoral promises. However, this proved challenging, primarily due to the previous government’s politically motivated management of the state-owned media companies, and support of the PiS endorsed President Andrzej Duda, who opposed any changes to the public media. This led the new government to take a series of actions that went beyond standard procedures, the legality and transparency of which are questioned¹⁰. Ultimately, Telewizja Polska (TVP), Polish Radio, and

Assessment of the credibility of news and current affairs programs on public television between 2012 and 2023.

Graph 1

Question: How do you assess the credibility of news and current affairs programmes broadcast on public television? %



Data and graph based on: *Postrzeganie mediów No 132/2023*, CBOS, October 2023. https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2023/K_132_23.PDF [Accessed 11.09.2025].

³ Media „re-Polonization” strategy (pol. Strategia repolonizacji mediów) was a political project and electoral promise of the United Right government (2015–2023) assuming the limitation of the participation of foreign companies in the media market, primarily targeting Polish private media that opposed the government and establishing the hegemony of the public broadcaster.

⁴ From November 16, 2015 to December 13, 2023, Poland was governed by the United Right (pol. Zjednoczona Prawica) coalition, which consisted of the two largest right-wing parties: Law and Justice (pol. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) and Sovereign Poland (pol. Suwerenna Polska, formerly Solidarna Polska).

⁵ See: *Media Freedom Report 2022*, Civil Liberties Union for Europe, Berlin 2022, Germany.

⁶ National Media Council (pol. Rada Mediów Narodowych) established in 2016 by the PiS-led government is a collegial body responsible, among others, for appointing and dismissing management boards, supervisory boards, and program councils of the public media state companies.

⁷ See: *Poland. Freedom of Expression and Belief, Freedom House 2022*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/freedom-world/2022> [Accessed 11.09.2025].

⁸ ODIHR. *Republic of Poland. Parliamentary Elections 15 October 2023. Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*, Warsaw 2024: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/poland/548260> [Accessed 11.09.2025].

⁹ The “KO-led coalition” term is based on the October 15 Coalition formed after the parliamentary election 2023 including (at that time): KO (pol. Koalicja Obywatelska, KO), Poland 2050 (pol. Polska 2050), Polish People’s Party (pol. Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe) and New Left (pol. Nowa Lewica).

¹⁰ *Stanowisko Helsińskiej Fundacji Praw Człowieka w sprawie zmian w mediach publicznych, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights*, Warsaw 2023, <https://hfhr.pl/aktualnosci/stanowisko-hfpc-ws-zmian-w-mediach-publicznych> [Accessed: 11.09.2025]

the Polish Press Agency state companies were placed into the state of liquidation, which is questioned due to its lack of clear connection with economic aspects. The process of regaining control over public media in Poland was finalized by the re-appointment of positions on the National Media Council, established under the PiS-led government in 2016, by the Civic Coalition-friendly representatives. This maintained the political connection of public broadcasters with the ruling political party, without resolving the far-reaching politicization of the management structures of television companies. Additionally, although the current ruling coalition emphasizes that the abolition of the National Media Council should be part of the new media law, no action has been taken to date (September 2025) to achieve this. Taking into account the result of the 2025 presidential elections, which won Karol Nawrocki – a right-wing candidate unfavorable to the government – the law changing the state and situation of public media might not be passed in the form envisioned by the ruling government.

II. Systematic Analysis of the Public Broadcasting Services in Poland

1. Public Media: Legal Foundations and Modes of Operation

The operations of public service broadcasting in Poland are regulated by various provisions, including the Constitution¹¹, the Broadcasting Act (pol. ustawa o radiofonii i telewizji)¹², and the National Media Council Act (pol. ustawa o Radzie Mediów Narodowych)¹³. As per the Broadcasting Act, the public broadcaster in Poland is composed from entities that should operate in the public interest and fulfill a social mission by providing information; make cultural and artistic assets accessible; facilitate the use of education, sports, and scientific achievements; promote civic education; provide entertainment; and support national audiovisual production. Public service broadcasting in Poland includes Polish Television (TVP, pol. Telewizja Polska S.A.) and Polish Radio (pol. Polskie Radio S.A.) state companies as well as regional stations of Polish Radio. The constitutional body safeguarding freedom of speech, the right to information, and the public interest in radio and television broadcasting is the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT)¹⁴. However, since 2016, another institution operates in this regard in the country – the National Media Council, which has assumed some of the powers of the

KRRiT and is responsible for, among others, appointing and dismissing the governing bodies of public radio and television companies. Moreover, since December 2023, all the public media state companies are put into the state of liquidation. Even though this situation has been going on for over 20 months now (as of September 2025), these companies are still being co-financed from the state budget and the liquidation process has not been lifted (more on this in the III. Chapter).

2. Financing Public Media: Mechanisms, Challenges, and Prospects

The basis for financing public media in Poland is the radio and television license fee. Since April 2005, the License Fee Act¹⁵ has been in effect that ensures that collected fees will be transferred to enable public radio and television broadcasting entities to fulfill their public mission. The National Broadcasting Council decides annually on the fee level. However, this system, for many years now, is declared ineffective for several reasons. First, Polish Post (pol. Poczta Polska) is responsible for collecting fees, and also oversees compliance with the obligation to register receivers and pay the subscription fee. Polish Post does not perform these services pro publico bono, but for an agreed-upon fee. Therefore, the media receives only a fraction of the collected subscription fees¹⁶. What is most problematic, however, is that effectiveness in the fees collection in Poland has been at a very low level for years. A 2025 report from the KRRiT shows that only about 38,8% of households (4.5 million) have registered their receivers and 32,1% of eligible to pay households and businesses (0.7 million) had paid their license fees by the end of 2024¹⁷. According to the KRRiT forecast, subscription revenues in 2025 will be even lower than in 2024 and will amount to EUR 142 million. Furthermore, additional inspections to enforce fee collection are often ineffective – not only are there too few inspectors, but there is no obligation to let them into home or apartment. As the report points out: “a huge challenge for broadcasters is the lack of financial stability, which places public media in a dilemma: mission or commercialism, and prevents them from being impartial and fulfilling the function of social control and independence from political influence. Furthermore, strong competition in the media market in Poland puts public media under constant pressure to compete for audiences.”¹⁸ Although the 2020 amendment to the Broadcasting Act expanded the list of

11 Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r., Dz. U. z 1997 r. Nr 78, poz. 483.

12 Ustawa z dnia 29 grudnia 1992 r. o radiofonii i telewizji, Dz.U. 1993 nr 7 poz. 34.

13 Ustawa z dnia 22 czerwca 2016 r. o Radzie Mediów Narodowych, Dz.U. 2016 poz. 929.

14 National Broadcasting Council – pol. Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiT).

15 Ustawa z dnia 21 kwietnia 2005 r. o opłatach abonamentowych, Dz.U. 2005 nr 85 poz. 728.

16 P. Maślak-Stępnikowska, *Finansowanie Mediów Publicznych*, Instytut Zamenhofa 2024, <https://zamenhof.pl/2024/06/18/finansowanie-mediow-publicznych/> [Accessed 13.09.2025].

17 *Sprawozdanie KRRiT z działalności w 2024 roku*, KRRiT 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/krrit/sprawozdania-i-informacja-z-dzialalnosci-w-2024-roku> [Accessed: 13.09.2025].

18 *Informacja o podstawowych problemach radiofonii i telewizji w 2024 roku*, KRRiT, <https://www.gov.pl/web/krrit/sprawozdania-i-informacja-z-dzialalnosci-w-2024-roku> [Accessed: 13.09.2025].

funding sources for public broadcasters to include subsidies from the state budget, this is still not a guaranteed form, but rather an optional one. It is also subject to political pressure, as was evident in the presidential blockade of EUR 705 thousand funding for public media in 2023 (more on this in Chapter III). What is more, since August 8, 2025 Poland is obliged to implement the EU European Media Freedom Act, EMFA resolution. The EMFA puts in place a new set of rules to protect media pluralism and independence in the EU ensuring that media – public and private – can operate more easily across borders in the EU internal market, without political pressure. The new media law announced in August 2025 by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage is expected to include, among other things, the abolition of license fees and the provision of a stable source of financing for public media, however the chances of it being signed by the president are low¹⁹.

3. Public Media and Society: Reception, Trust, and Audience Dynamics

In July 2025 Reporters without Borders published a report revealing the survey on the level of political pressure to the

public media, where Poland was categorized as the “extreme” case, alongside Hungary and Malta (see. Graph 2). Poland also ranked 3 out of 27 EU countries in terms of governmental influence over the editorial boards of public service/state media outlets.

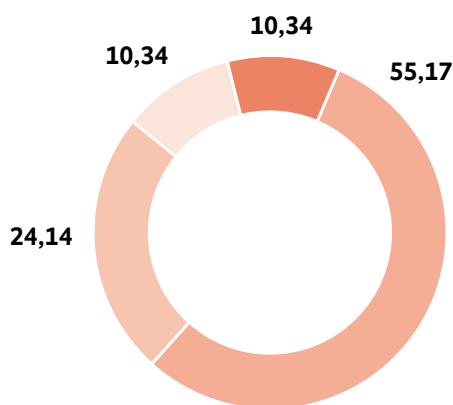
There is no doubt that political events surrounding public media, especially during the PiS-led government, have contributed to a significant decline in trust in the media news in Poland. Although trust indicators have increased from record lows in 2024 – the moment of power change in the country and culmination of the dispute over public media – still half of the population does not put faith in the independence and truthfulness of information provided in the media (see Graph 3). If we look only at the public broadcaster, trust in the TVP News television channel (main news channel of the public broadcaster) does not exceed 35%.

Low trust and the long-standing crisis of public media in the country also affect viewership. In July 2025, for the first time in history, TV Republika, a conservative and far-right private television station, became the number one TV station in viewership, achieving a 6.81% share. Main public broadcaster TVP1 fell to second place with 6.80%, a 21.1%

Graph 2

Pressure on the public media among EU countries

Is there any pressure (of any kind: political, economic, etc.) on public service media in your country?



More than half of the RSF survey respondents (16 out of 29) believe there is high pressure on the public media in their country (Greece, Italy, Spain, Czechia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Cyprus, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Lithuania, Finland, United Kingdom).

For over half of the respondents (16 out of 29, or 55.17 percent), the pressure exerted was political in nature, such as interference in governance, or changes in general management (Greece, Italy, Hungary, Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Portugal, Austria, Croatia, Netherlands, Lithuania, France, United Kingdom).

- Extreme – 10.34% (3) – Hungary, Malta, Poland
- High pressure – 10.34% (3) – Greece, Italy, Spain, Czechia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Cyprus, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Austria, Croatia, Lithuania, Finland, United Kingdom
- Low pressure – 24.14% (7) – Romania, Germany, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, France
- No pressure – 55.17% (16) – Ireland, Denmark, Luxembourg

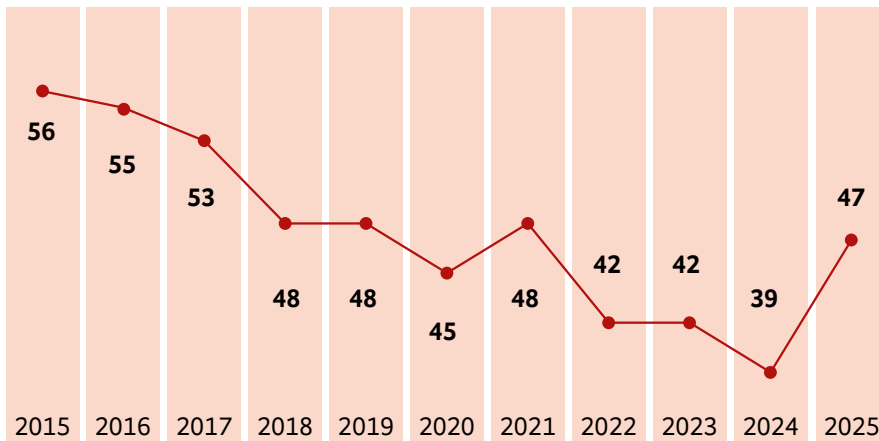
Source: Pressure on public media. A decisive test for European democracies, Reporters without Borders 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-publishes-new-report-protect-europe-s-public-media> [Accessed: 13.09.2025].

19 Ustawa medialna wysłana, ale prezydent jej nie podpisze. “Szanse równe zero”, Press [online: 4.09.2025] https://www.press.pl/tresc/89178,ustawa-medialna-wyslana-ale-prezydent-jej-nie-podpisze-_-szanse-rowne-zero_ [Accessed: 14.09.2025].

Overall trust score in news in Poland

Graph 3

Change over time 2015–2025



V. Makarenko, *Poland. Digital News Report 2025*, The Reuters Institute 2025, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2025/poland> [Accessed 13.09.2025].

drop compared to last year. The drastic drop in viewership did not only concern TVP1 but most public television channels including TVP Info, which recorded shocking decline of over 70% in viewers²⁰. This raises a number of questions

The bias of public media broadcaster has become one of the key criticisms of the country's information landscape. Fake news thrives in a society that is losing trust in traditional sources of information, which in turn deepens

regarding both public funding for public media and the subscription fee, given the increasingly low viewing figures. Particularly disturbing in this respect are trends regarding media consumption by young Poles. As report of the Institute of Public Affairs from 2024 shows, young Poles use social media, including Facebook, YouTube and Instagram as their primary source of information (see: Graph 4). Public television or radio are one of the rarest medium used to gain information about the public affairs. Combined with falling audience figures overall, it appears that public media are reaching less and less sections of society.

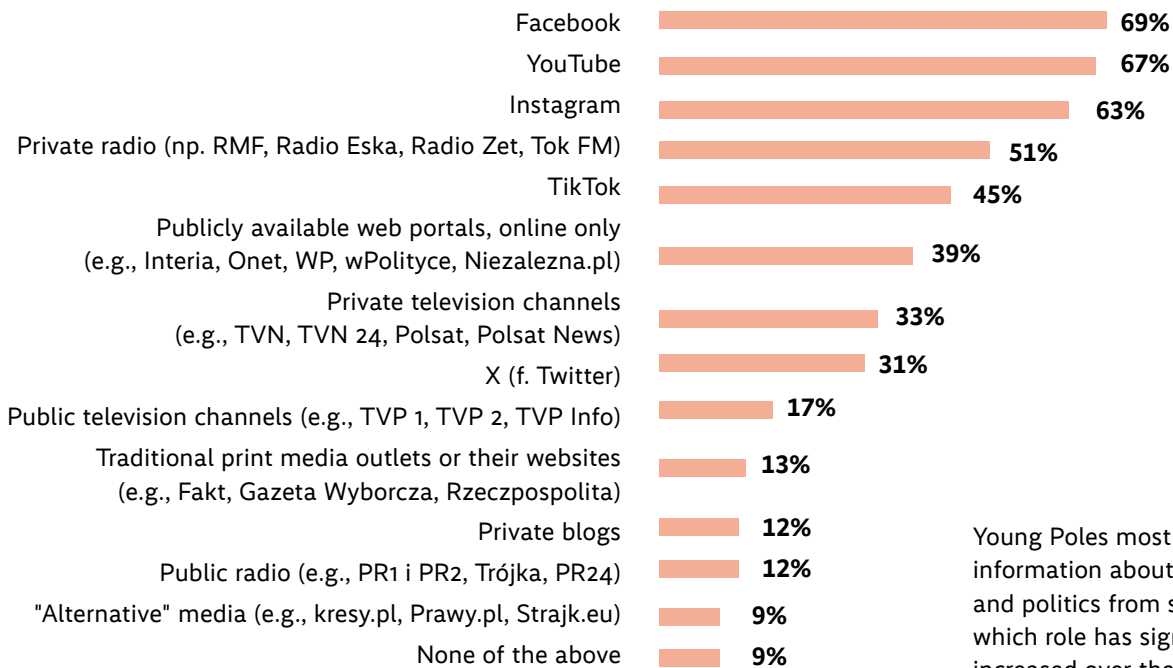
The weakening of public media often means an increase in the use of alternative sources of information, especially among social media channels.

Information sources for young Poles aged 16–29, September 2024

Graph 4

How frequently do you use the following sources of information about society and politics?

Answers: very+rather regularly



Young Poles most often obtain information about public affairs and politics from social media, which role has significantly increased over the years.

S. Horonziak, F. Pazderski, *Młodzi w Europie Środkowej 2024: Polska*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych 2025, <https://www.isp.org.pl/pl/publikacje/mlodzi-w-europie-srodkowej-2024-wyniki-badania-w-polsce> [Accessed: 13.09.2025].

²⁰ See: *Sprawozdanie KRRiT z działalności...*

polarization. According to the 2025 Spring Eurobarometer, almost 80% of Poles believes that they frequently encounter disinformation²¹. The deterioration of a public broadcaster often means the weakening of a reliable source of information and fertile ground for prevalence of less reliable sources.

4. Digitalisation and digital competition

Technological evolution and digitalization introduced a profound change in the way we consume media today. This also influenced the models of commercialization of public media, which began to compete with their private counterparts. Out of necessity, the Polish public broadcaster also had to adapt to these changes.

In 2010, as a subpage of tvp.pl, the “TVP VOD” service, sharing video on demand content, was launched (although such services had existed on the public broadcaster’s site to a limited extent since 2007). In 2023, TVP VOD was additionally

integrated with TVP Stream, the previous service enabling watching live television. Although TVP VOD’s market share is not marginal, it does not outperform the largest foreign video on demand service providers. As of April 2025, Netflix took the first place in Poland in terms of the number of users (9.75 million), the average time spent on the platform (5 hours 55 minutes) and the share of time spent using it (over 45%). After it followed MAX, Disney+ and Canal+ online. TVP VOD placed fifth in the ranking with 2,55 million users, average watch time 3 hours 59 mins and a 7,94% share²². However, TVP VOD is not lagging behind in all areas. In August 2025, the TVP VOD mobile app recorded the highest average watch time per user. With a watch time of 6 hours and 7 minutes, it surpassed services like Netflix and Player²³. This application however, despite having 2.86 million users, cannot compare to the dominant ones on the market (see Graph 5). For this reason, TVP also has its own accounts, among others, on TikTok (396.1K followers @tvp) and Instagram (572K followers @tvp.info), although their reach can hardly be considered a success.

Table 1

Mediapanel Survey Results: Raking of Top Internet Apps: July 2025

| Media channel | Użytkownicy (Real Users) | Zasięg (internet) | ATS | Audyt |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------|
| Aplikacja Google | 25 297 110 | 85,12% | 1h 37m 17s | nie |
| Aplikacja Facebook | 21 994 416 | 74,00% | 16h 55m 26s | nie |
| Aplikacja Messenger | 20 875 644 | 70,24% | 7h 20m 30s | nie |
| Aplikacja Youtube | 19 314 126 | 64,99% | 18h 46m 23s | nie |
| Aplikacja Mapy Google | 19 169 784 | 64,50% | 3h 1m 19s | nie |
| Aplikacja Gmail | 18 669 366 | 62,82% | 31m 53s | nie |
| Aplikacja WhatsApp Messenger | 17 626 248 | 59,31% | 4h 6m 12s | nie |
| Aplikacja Temu: Shop Like a Billionaire | 14 209 992 | 47,81% | 1h 0m 3s | nie |
| Aplikacja Wiadomości (Google Inc.) | 13 741 812 | 46,24% | 1h 33m 45s | nie |
| Aplikacja Instagram | 11 768 490 | 39,60% | 8h 40m 40s | nie |
| Aplikacja TikTok | 11 533 266 | 38,81% | 1d 3h 27m 10s | nie |
| Aplikacja Zdjęcia Google | 10 813 014 | 36,38% | 50m 23s | nie |
| Aplikacja Biedronka | 10 699 128 | 36,00% | 32m 54s | nie |
| Aplikacja Allegro | 8 803 890 | 29,62% | 1h 54m 20s | tak |
| Aplikacja Dysk Google | 8 626 014 | 29,02% | 10m 41s | nie |
| Aplikacja Spotify Music | 8 373 456 | 28,17% | 1h 16m 10s | nie |
| Aplikacja Inpost Mobile | 8 346 402 | 28,08% | 10m 26s | nie |
| Aplikacja Żappka | 8 145 036 | 27,41% | 12m 30s | nie |
| Aplikacja Lidl Plus | 7 940 592 | 26,72% | 17m 7s | nie |
| Aplikacja OLX.pl | 7 933 950 | 26,70% | 1h 11m 43s | nie |

²¹ Standard Eurobarometer 103 – Spring 2025, Dataset AP, https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s3372_103_3_std103_eng?locale=en [Accessed: 14.09.2025].

²² Największy serwis VoD w Polsce: Netflix, Max czy Disney+? Są najnowsze dane! HDTV.pl, <https://hdvtpolska.com/najwiekszy-serwis-vod-netflix-max-disney-plus-rank-ing-platformy-polska/> [Accessed 26.09.2025].

²³ Wzrost zainteresowania TVP VOD i kanałami w streamingu, TVP.info, <https://www.tvp.info/89063096/telewizja-polska-rosnie-w-segmencie-online-sa-nowe-dane> [Accessed: 26.09.2025].

Mediapanel Survey Results: Raking of Domains Across All Devices: July 2025

| Media channel | Użytkownicy(Real Users) | Zasięg(internet) | ATS | Audyt |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------|-------|
| google.com | 27 251 154 | 91,69% | 1h 59m 28s | nie |
| youtube.com | 19 801 098 | 66,62% | 8h 34m 26s | nie |
| facebook.com | 17 207 478 | 57,90% | 3h 28m 42s | nie |
| interia.pl | 16 252 650 | 54,68% | 47m 53s | tak |
| onet.pl | 16 086 114 | 54,12% | 1h 29m 36s | nie |
| allegro.pl | 15 004 926 | 50,49% | 54m 18s | tak |
| wp.pl | 14 420 268 | 48,52% | 1h 18m 14s | nie |
| temu.com | 12 466 872 | 41,95% | 15m 24s | nie |
| mediaexpert.pl | 12 183 048 | 40,99% | 6m 56s | nie |
| wikipedia.org | 11 364 462 | 38,24% | 10m 55s | nie |
| olx.pl | 10 298 016 | 34,65% | 50m 35s | tak |
| ceneo.pl | 9 992 970 | 33,62% | 2m 37s | nie |
| gazeta.pl | 9 503 892 | 31,98% | 18m 1s | tak |
| weather.com | 9 296 532 | 31,28% | 2m 16s | nie |
| tvn24.pl | 9 185 724 | 30,91% | 19m 26s | tak |
| fakt.pl | 8 645 616 | 29,09% | 17m 34s | tak |
| instagram.com | 8 598 312 | 28,93% | 20m 49s | nie |
| o2.pl | 7 629 228 | 25,67% | 21m 47s | nie |
| filmweb.pl | 7 242 048 | 24,37% | 6m 51s | tak |
| businessinsider.com.pl | 7 048 134 | 23,71% | 9m 9s | tak |

Wyniki badania Mediapanel za lipiec 2025 – internet, Mediapanel, <https://media-panel.pl/aktualnosci/wyniki-badania-mediapanel-za-lipiec-2025-internet/> [Accessed: 26.09.2025].

Telewizja Polska public company also has multiple web portals, including the main portal Tvp.pl and additional services such as information portal Tvp.info. However, the public broadcaster's domains are not even among the top 20 most popular portals in Poland and are outranked by other private media and online web portals.

Looking solely at the news portals ranking, Tvp.info ranks third in Poland with 2,56 million users after private television portals Tvn24.pl (10,4 million users) and Polsatnews.pl (5,85 million users). Tvrepublika.pl is right behind it with 1.1 million users²⁴.

Another important element of the Polish public broadcaster's digitalization process is the development and implementation of the Digital Audio Broadcasting Plus (DAB+) technology. This involves the gradual digitization of the airwaves that allow for the transmission of radio signals in the form of data, offering improved sound quality, additional information, and the ability to broadcast multiple stations on a single frequency. By December 2024, total

DAB+ coverage in Poland had reached 87.9% of the population and 75% of the territory²⁵. Polish Radio is a pioneer in digital broadcasting, as all its programs are currently broadcast digitally.

The process of digitization requires new methods and solutions to attract audiences in the age of artificial intelligence, social media, and streaming platforms. Public broadcasters must therefore balance ways of reaching new audiences, such as young people who don't need traditional radio and television. At the same time, their public mission cannot be overshadowed by consumer demands. As the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) cautioned in a recent report, "the future of public media depends largely on adapting technology and creating programming that aligns with audience expectations and habits"²⁶. However, the current structure of public broadcasting in Poland and the significant challenges associated with its politicization and unstable financing largely prevent this goal from being achieved satisfactorily.

²⁴ M. Niedbalski, *Tvn24.pl umocnił się na pozycji lidera portali telewizyjnych stacji informacyjnych*, Press, https://www.press.pl/tresc/87843,tnv24_pl-umocnil-sie-na-pozycji-lidera-portali-telewizyjnych-stacji-informacyjnych [Accessed: 26.09.2025].

²⁵ *Poland*, WorldDab, <https://www.worlddab.org/countries/poland> [Accessed: 26.09.2025].

²⁶ *Informacja o podstawowych problemach...*, p. 14.

III. Political changes to the public service broadcasting bodies

One of the most significant challenges confronting the Polish public broadcaster is its profound politicization and structural dependence on the ruling political formation. This condition arises not only from inadequately formulated legal provisions, but also from successive reforms that have gradually eroded statutory safeguards of independence. The weakening of the broadcaster cannot, however, be attributed to isolated incidents; rather, it represents the outcome of a long-term process of institutional decline. Analyzing the trajectory of this deterioration demonstrates that restoring the autonomy of public service media cannot be accomplished through a single legislative intervention. Instead, it necessitates a comprehensive set of systemic reforms aimed at restructuring the interdependent network of institutions and regulatory mechanisms responsible for the governance of the broadcaster.

1. Weakening the role of the National Broadcasting Council

The constitutional body safeguarding freedom of speech, the right to information and the public interest in radio and television broadcasting is the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT). Its members are appointed as follows: two members are appointed by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, one member is appointed by the Senate of the Republic of Poland, and two members are appointed by the President of the Republic of Poland. Their terms are six years. This composition is intended to reduce the possibility of concentration of power of one political option, however achieving a politicized composition is quite simple in the case of a government with the support of the president, as was the case during the PiS-led coalition rule. It is worth noting, however, that after 2015, the constitutional position of this body was significantly weakened and some of its most important competences were transferred to the National Media Council. In 2015, the PiS-led government pushed through a law stripping the KRRiT of its influence over the composition of the management and supervisory boards of public media companies (TVP and Polish Radio), as well as over the content of these companies' statutes and transferring this competence to the Minister of the State Treasury. The scope of discretion in exercising the powers granted to the KRRiT by the Constitution was therefore significantly limited, and the institution was deprived of its crucial functions, resulting in the lack of ability to fulfill its constitutional mission. This was confirmed by the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal of 13 December

2016, which stated that depriving the KRRiT—a body established under the Constitution of the Republic of Poland—of its role in appointing and dismissing the governing bodies of public radio and television companies was unconstitutional²⁷. Although the Constitutional Tribunal ordered the restoration of the constitutional order, the judgment was not implemented. In June 2016, the PiS-led government passed a new law on the National Media Council²⁸, deeming the law challenged by the Tribunal lost its binding force in this case.

2. National Media Council as a new decisive power

The Act on the National Media Council, established a new body—the National Media Council—and granted it authority over the appointment and dismissal of members of public radio and television bodies and the Polish Press Agency. Theoretically, the Council assumed these powers from the minister responsible for the State Treasury, but in reality, these are the original powers of the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT). The composition of the new body introduced into the public media system has been questionable from the outset²⁹, as its composition is directly dependent on the parliamentary majority. The Council consists of five members, three of whom are elected by the Sejm and two members are appointed by the President of the Republic of Poland, on the basis of candidates nominated by the opposition camps, provided, however, that if all opposition clubs refrain from nominating their representatives to the new body, the president may appoint the members independently. Moreover, unlike the composition of the KRRiT, a member of the National Media Council may be a politician and simultaneously hold a parliamentary or senatorial mandate. The National Media Council quickly became a supportive body for the government, appointing new boards of public media companies, which quickly redirected the public broadcaster's activities toward biased and propaganda-driven messages. The Commissioner for Human Rights³⁰ has repeatedly intervened in the matter of public media, emphasizing that public media in Poland fail to maintain the pluralism, impartiality, balance, and independence of coverage that they were supposed to guarantee by law. He also cited independent analyses from various research centers, including the Polish Language Council, which in one report indicated that "TVP News does not convey objective information to citizens, but its own vision of the events discussed. [...] The linguistic and communication practices in the News tickers are often manipulative – the broadcaster's persuasive influence on the audience is hidden and pursues the broadcaster's particular goals, without considering the broadly understood and inclusive

²⁷ See: *Wyrok Trybunału Konstytucyjnego z dnia 13 grudnia 2016 r. sygn. akt K 13/16*, Dz.U. 2016 poz. 2210, Sejm RP.

²⁸ *Ustawa z dnia 22 czerwca 2016 r. o Radzie Mediów Narodowych...*

²⁹ See: L. Jaskuła, *Problemy w wykonywaniu zadań przez Krajową Radę Radiofonii i Telewizji w kontekście utworzenia Rady Mediów Narodowych*, *Studia Prawnoustrojowe* 58/2022.

³⁰ *Sytuacja w mediach publicznych. Ponowna odpowiedź MKiDN*, Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich 2024, <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-media-publiczne-sytuacja-potrzebna-nowelizacja-mkidn-ponowne-odpowiedz> [Accessed: 13.09.2025].

concept of the common good.”³¹ This situation has led to a significant decline in public trust in the public media and has set a dangerous precedent for disrupting the balance of political and civic forces in the country, tilting support from public funds towards the ruling camp. This advantage was particularly felt during the 2023 parliamentary elections, when public media were openly used to support the ruling camp’s election campaign. ODIHR’s analysis indicated that “The political reporting of the main public media (TVP1, TVP2, TVP Info, Jedynka) often presented socio-political events in a manipulative and distorted manner promoting the ruling party, the government, and its policies. It conversely and consistently attacked the main opposition KO and its leader, and rarely mentioned other contesting parties, further deepening the political polarization in society.”³² After KO-led coalition won the parliamentary elections in 2023, they immediately announced that they would take steps to restore the independence of public media in the country, however, to date, no changes to the law regarding the both institutions have been introduced.

3. The state of liquidation of the Polish public broadcasting companies

On December 19, 2023, the Sejm, now having a majority of KO-led coalition votes, adopted a resolution on “restoring legal order and the impartiality and reliability of public media and the Polish Press Agency”³³. This resolution sparked a series of protests by PiS MPs and journalists associated with the previous ruling camp. On the same day, back then Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, citing the Commercial Companies Code, dismissed the authorities of public media, including TVP, by-passing the National Media Council, which was staffed at that time by members associated with the previous ruling camp. Although the Commercial Companies Code grants the owners of companies (in this case, the State Treasury) the possibility to dismiss the Management Boards and the respective Supervisory Boards, the conclusion allowing the application of the Commercial Code in this case was not reconcilable with the systemic interpretation derived from the general model of public radio and television. The position recognizing the competence of a government representative to dismiss and appoint members of the bodies managing the activities of public radio and television companies raised doubts among constitutionalists and special-

ists, especially in the light of previous judgments of the Constitutional Tribunal³⁴. When Piotr Zemła, the newly appointed head of TVP’s supervisory board, arrived at the television building, he was blocked by, among others, PiS MPs. The blockade of the TV station led, among other things, to the disappearance of the main news channel TVP Info from the air for the first time in the history. The method of implementing changes in the boards of public media companies was also questioned by President Andrzej Duda. Referring to the illegality of an attempt to take over the public media, he decided to veto the act implementing the budget act³⁵, questioning the financial resources allocated by the new government to public broadcaster. In response to this action, the Minister Sienkiewicz decided to put Telewizja Polska S.A., Polskie Radio S.A. and Polska Agencja Prasowa S.A. into liquidation to secure the continued operation of those companies³⁶. The liquidation state remains to this moment (September 2025) and the public media are operating with additional state funding. In the meantime, the composition of the National Media Council has been changed, and as of December 2024, its chairman is Wojciech Król, MP from the Civic Platform (KO). The new composition of the Council, having the majority of the current ruling party, officially repealed the resolution of the previous composition of the National Media Council, legitimizing the changes made earlier.

Although liquidation is a state that should end after any necessary actions have been taken to carry out the liquidation process, in 2025 public broadcasting services are operating under similar principles as before. In August 2025 Marta Cienkowska, The Minister of Culture and National Heritage, announced that a new media law is already prepared and it will, among other things, dissolve the National Media Council, reduce the number of public television channels, and introduce a new, more transparent and depoliticized method of electing public media management boards. After its introduction, the state of liquidation of public media is to be abolished. However, the adoption of this law depends not only on the ruling majority but also on the support for the changes of the new president of Poland – Karol Nawrocki, elected in 2025. There is also no certainty that the proposed changes will actually strengthen the guarantees of political independence for appointment process of both the KRRiT and the supervisory boards of public television and radio companies’ members. The new government’s actions to date have been aimed

31 *Sprawozdanie o stanie ochrony języka polskiego za lata 2016-2017*, Druk nr 3324, Rada Języka Polskiego 2019, <https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki8ka.nsf/0/C4B224C28DB-9367BC12583CB0032CA99/%24File/3324.pdf> [Accessed: 13.09.2025].

32 *Republic of Poland. Parliamentary Elections 15 October 2023. Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report*, ODIHR, Warsaw 2024: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/poland/548260> [Accessed 11.09.2025].

33 *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 19 grudnia 2023 r. w sprawie przywrócenia ładu prawnego oraz bezstronności i rzetelności mediów publicznych oraz Polskiej Agencji Prasowej*, M.P. 2023 poz. 1477, Sejm RP.

34 *Stanowisko Helsińskiej Fundacji Praw Człowieka w sprawie zmian w mediach publicznych*, Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka 2023, <https://hfpr.pl/aktualnosci/stanowisko-hfpc-ws-zmian-w-mediach-publicznych> [Accessed 13.09.2025].

35 In Polish law, the proper implementation of the budget requires the adoption of a so-called act implementing the budget act (pol. ustawa o budżetowa), which regulates, among other things, the allocation of funds to individual budget parts. While the president cannot block the budget act itself, the budget-related act is subject to veto like any other act.

36 *Komunikat Ministra Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego, Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego 2023*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kultura/komunikat-ministra-kultury-i-dziedzictwa-narodowego> [Accessed 13.09.2025].

more at “regaining” control over the public broadcaster than at actually restoring independence from the ruling political party.

IV. Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

Between 2015 and 2023, public media in Poland were subject to intense politicization and instrumentalization under the PiS-led government, which undermined their statutory obligations and eroded public trust. The establishment of the National Media Council and politically motivated managerial changes entrenched state capture, leading to biased coverage and violations of the Broadcasting Act. The 2023 parliamentary campaign highlighted the scale of partisanship, with the public broadcaster acting as a propaganda tool rather than a pluralistic medium. Although the new KO-led coalition pledged to restore impartiality, its actions have faced legal and political resistance, especially from the president and PiS-aligned institutions. Moreover, subsequent decisions made by the ruling coalition revealed its desire to free public media from the influence of the previous government rather than to introduce regulations making the public broadcaster independent from the political influence of any ruling party. The ongoing liquidation of state-owned media companies and contested governance reforms illustrate both the urgency and complexity of systemic change. Looking ahead, without a broad political consensus and a new media law, the independence and credibility of public service media in Poland remain uncertain.

Recommendations:

Since the main challenge facing public media in Poland is their lack of impartiality and dependence on political influence, changes should primarily aim to ensure the greatest possible independence, impartiality and professionalism of the public broadcaster.

- The procedure for selecting members of the management and supervisory boards of public broadcasting companies should limit the possibility of political influence and rules’ circumvention by focusing on the transparency of the set selection criteria and unbiased appeal process to limit political influence on the elected members.
- The National Media Council, as a body duplicating the existing National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) and being politicized, should be abolished. However, its abolition should be accompanied by changes implemented within the KRRiT itself.
- National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) should be depoliticized, primarily by changing the method of electing Council members, making it independent from ruling government.

- The state of liquidation of public media in Poland should be lifted while ensuring a stable source of financing, independent of political pressure and in accordance with the requirements of the European Media Freedom Act.
- Consideration should be given to transforming the country’s public media financing system. It would be advisable to allocate a fixed portion of the budget to the public media. At the same time, the viability of maintaining the television and radio license fee should be considered. While maintaining it, the fee collection system should be transformed and the public broadcaster’s mandate strengthened through regular reports on investments and innovations covered by the license fee.

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