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**TO SHOW, BUT NOT TO DISCLOSE.  
THE WILLINGNESS OF POLISH POLITICAL PARTIES  
TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION ON THEIR STRUCTURES**

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**ORCID** no. 0000-0003-1004-1802**e-mail:** skrabacz@gmail.com**Abstract**

Constituting the key element of a democratic system, political parties are among entities obliged by the Polish legislator to comply with the principle of disclosure by providing public information. The main objective of this paper is to determine the level of Polish political parties' disclosure, understood here as their willingness to disclose information on their own structures. It seems that the practice of disclosing such basic organizational data may constitute a specific measure of Polish political parties' respect for the idea of disclosure. The subject matter of the conducted research was particular parties' sites in the Public Information Bulletin as well as their official websites. An attempt was made to acquire data concerning party structures by way of direct contact with particular parties' organizational units – questionnaires were sent to both central and regional/district organizational units. In order to acquire a wider perspective, the research also included data provided by the Central Statistical Office concerning political parties' organizational structures and election manifestos. The conducted analysis was summarized in the form of a ranking of the examined political parties based on a proposed political party disclosure index. This attempt to measure disclosure on the basis of data on internal structures provided by parties themselves is of a preliminary character which, nevertheless, makes it possible to capture the general properties of the phenomenon under analysis. Among the examined parties, it is PSL, SLD, and PO that, to an acceptable degree, follow the principle of disclosure in the analysed scope (indexes at the level of 60%-80% of the maximum value). Four other parties, i.e. N, Wolność, Razem, and Kukiz'15, are on the edge of the zone making it possible to regard their disclosure as sufficient (indexes at the level of around 50% of the maximum value). In the case of PiS, whose index does not reach 20% of the maximum value, it should be concluded that this party implements the principle of disclosure at a minimum level. The ranking did not show relationships between parties' willingness towards providing information and their sizes or positions on the political scene (parliamentary parties vs. extra-parliamentary parties).

**Keywords:** political parties, structures, transparency, disclosure, access to information**Introduction**

In a democratic state under the rule of law, the principle of disclosure is obvious and generally accepted. It appears as a guarantee for the exercise of some fundamental rights

and a condition for maintaining democratic governance. It is even claimed that the right of access to information and the exercise of this right can be regarded as a measure of the maturity of a democracy (Dylus 2013, 22–37). Research on democracy focuses on political parties as the key element of a democratic system. Being “not only a construct present in deliberations on the process of distributing political power but also a social phenomenon” (Herbut 2002, 7), parties embody the processes and structures of a democratic state. Thus it seems that disclosure should appear naturally in reflections on these particular entities. The most frequent context for analysis of political parties’ disclosure is their finances (Bidziński 2011; Nassmacher 2006, 450–455), although disclosure is also referred to in reflections on the functioning of parties as organizations, particularly in terms of intra-party democracy (Carty 2013, 24–25; *Van Biezen, Romée Piccio* 2013, 28–41).

In the Polish Political Parties Act, the category of disclosure appears three times: with respect to the structures and operating principles of political parties (The Act 1997, Chapter 2, Article 8), with respect to the party register and the content of parties’ statutes (Chapter 3, Article 18), and with respect to the sources of financing for party entities (Chapter 4, Article 23a). As has already been mentioned, financial issues constitute the most frequently used pretext for debates about the disclosure of political parties. Nevertheless, this paper will focus on a less explored thread, namely the issue of the disclosure of the structures of Polish political parties. It seems that the practice of disclosing such basic organizational data may constitute a specific measure of Polish political parties’ respect for the idea of disclosure.

Disclosure belongs to a group of notions which are frequently used, but rarely defined. This category is most often referred to intuitively and sometimes it is the objective of conducted research that calls for its more precise definition (Piskorz-Ryń 2013, 42). In the dictionary, disclosure is described as “doing something in a transparent manner, generally visible, the absence of secrecy, not hiding something, general availability; honesty, openness” (Doroszewski 1996). In this paper, disclosure will be understood as free access to public information. As A. Piskorz-Ryń notes, “in the literature of other states, such notions as ‘openness’ or more frequently ‘transparency’ are used to refer to and describe the values (processes) connected with the access of citizens and other entities to information on the functioning of public authorities. In Poland, the doctrine favours the use of the term ‘disclosure’ (ibid. 42). In this context, transparency constitutes a specific assurance that conveyed information is comprehensible and complete. As the experiences of institutions controlling the implementation of the principle of disclosure show that it is justifiable to examine disclosure jointly with transparency (NIK 2016, 6), the research presented in this paper explored both these categories.

Political parties have been assigned to the group of entities obliged by the legislator to make public information generally available (The Act 2001). The availability referred to in the Act applies to, among other things, information on how entities listed in the Act are organized. Therefore, taking into consideration the role and functions of political parties in public life, and consequently regarding access to information on such entities as important, the author attempted to diagnose the level of disclosure of Polish political parties understood precisely as their willingness to provide information on their internal structures and organization (the number of local units, the number of members, etc.). It is fully justifiable to ask the question about parties’ practices in providing such data constituting basic information characterizing a party organization. This question acquires additional

justification in problems indicated by researchers specializing in this subject (Sobolewska-Myślik et al. 2010, 21).

The main objective of this paper is to determine the level of Polish political parties' disclosure understood here as their readiness to disclose information on their own structures. The aforementioned assumption and the adopted methodology determine the structure of the paper, which consists of the following elements:

- an analysis of information published by parties on the sites of the Public Information Bulletin and their own websites;
- an analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey;
- a description of the data of the Central Statistical Office;
- a reflection on the position of disclosure in parties' programme policy papers.

All these threads will be synthesized in the conclusions, which will make it possible to develop a disclosure index of Polish political parties. The value of the index is determined by adding up scores assigned in the three categories (Tables 1–3), which are of equal importance (the maximum of 6 points in each category; the maximum score of 18 points). Assigning the same weight to all three components is a simplification, but weighting the particular factors precisely would require the application of more sophisticated methods. This attempt to measure the level of parties' disclosure on the basis of data on internal structures provided by parties themselves is of a preliminary character which, nevertheless, makes it possible to capture the general properties of the phenomenon under analysis.

## Data and methods

The research covered those parties which, in the last two parliamentary elections held in 2011 and 2015, obtained more than 3% of the votes cast and which are still active (Ruch Palikota is not included because its successor, Twój Ruch, has a wider formula). Adopting such a threshold made it possible to include both parliamentary parties (it was decided not to exclude the association Kukiz'15 from the research; formally, it is not a political party, but in the functional approach, it is), and those which had failed to exceed the electoral threshold and remained outside the parliament, but acquired the right to receive subsidies from the state budget. The research covered the following parties: Kukiz'15, Modern (Nowoczesna, N), Together Party (Partia Razem, Razem), Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO), Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD), Liberty Janusz Korwin-Mikke (Wolność; previously: KORWiN: Koalicja Odnowy Rzeczypospolitej Wolność i Nadzieja).

The degree of the disclosure and transparency of the structures of the political parties was determined on the basis of an analysis of the parties' respective sites in the Public Information Bulletin, their official websites as well as data acquired from the questionnaire survey.

For the purposes of this paper, the examination of the parties' sites in the Public Information Bulletin takes into consideration two categories of information: contact details which, in practice, are directly related to information on party structures (contact with particular organizational units) as well as notices concerning the rules of providing public information. It should be acknowledged that the presence of such data satisfies the criterion of the usefulness of presented information because using such information, one can

acquire data on party structures or require that they are provided with such data. In the case of the websites, the subject matter of the analysis was contact details presented by the particular parties. Analysing information on party structures available at both Internet sources, the author took into consideration the following qualitative features of presented information:

- availability (information is easily available, legible, comprehensible),
- completeness (information includes all necessary and updated elements).

The examination of the parties' willingness to provide information on their structures was also obtained in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the party headquarters and to their top level organizational units. In the case of five parties, the top level was a regional level (PO – 17, N – 17, PSL – 16, SLD – 16, Wolność – 15), while two parties received the questionnaire at their district levels (Kukiz'15 – 38, Razem – 31). A special situation occurred in the case of PiS, which is the only party to provide contact details for each district's party structures coordinator. Taking this fact into consideration, the author decided to send the questionnaire to all such coordinators (the five party structures coordinators deal with 41 districts; one coordinator is responsible for districts from 3–4 provinces. One of the coordinators also performs the function of Party Structures Department Manager). Altogether 8 questionnaires were sent to party units at central levels and 155 questionnaires to party units at regional / district levels. On the basis of the analysis of the contact details provided by the parties, the author chose electronic mail, which made it possible to use the uniform method of contacting the parties (the addresses were acquired from the parties' official websites; in each case the questionnaire was made available online (as a link included in an email) and also as an attachment to an email (a file in the doc. format).

The questionnaire for the central party units consisted of 6 questions, and that for the regional / district party units had 7 questions. The questions concerned such basic issues as the name of the party (an organizational unit), the number of lower level organizational units, the number of members, the number of members paying fees, the existence of a youth organization and its membership. In view of the research objective, what was important was the very fact of particular respondents' answering the questions and sending information rather than particular data provided by them (Table 2). An important factor was also the time of providing answers as the research consisted of the following three stages:

Stage I: 9 July 2018 – the first request;

Stage II: 22 July 2018 – the renewed request;

Stage III: 6 August 2018 – the request for access to public information.

The collected information will be compared to data presented by the Central Statistical Office, which every other year asks political parties questions concerning, among other things, their organizational structures.

### **Can everything be found on the Internet? – the Public Information Bulletin and websites**

In diagnosing the disclosure of information concerning political parties, one should take into consideration the presentation of such content in a generally available format making

it possible to use the obtained data directly or to acquire information on how to access required data. In this respect, the obvious subject matter of research is political parties' sites in the Public Information Bulletin and their own official websites. Both these places should be regarded as basic sources of providing information on political parties, including their organizational structures. What will be of key importance for the purposes of this analysis is not only the availability of particular content but also the manner of its presentation (clarity, completeness).

The legislator obliged political parties to maintain their sites in the Public Information Bulletin (The Act 2001). The entities which maintain their sites in this domain should publish, among other things, information on their legal status, objectives, competences, as well as organizational structure, including their bodies and persons performing particular functions (Public Information Bulletin, websites).

The Public Information Bulletin's "List of entities" in the category of "Political parties" contains 8 entries: Modern, PO, Polish Pirates' Party, PSL, PiS, SLD, Democratic Party and Green Party 2004 (Public Information Bulletin, websites). Thus Freedom, Together and, for obvious reasons, Kukiz'15 are not included there. However, the party Together has its site in the Public Information Bulletin, although it is not connected with the Bulletin's main site. In the case of PiS, the address given on the Bulletin's site leads to the old version of the party's website; hence, in this respect, the available information is not up-to-date – PiS's new website is not connected with the Bulletin's main site. The analysis covered all available and active websites of the following parties: PiS, PO, N, PSL, SLD, Together.

A special note about the manner of acquiring access to public information is placed on the respective websites of PiS, PO, N, and SLD. There appears a standard message that "public information which is not presented in the Public Information Bulletin is made available on request". There is also a request form (the most often in the PDF format) as well as an address to which any request should be sent. All parties provide their postal addresses; only SLD gives an email address – requests can be sent to the party's spokesperson. The bulletins of PSL and Together contain no clues as to the possibility of acquiring access to public information.

All examined bulletins contain complete contact details concerning party headquarters; however, contact details of regional / district organizational units were presented less frequently. Besides contact details, PiS presents only a list of names of presidents of 41 district boards, while Modern and Together do not give any particulars of lower level organizational units at all. Complete information is included in the bulletins of PO and PSL. Besides contact details for central party authorities, both parties presented a clear and complete list of contact details for all regions (a postal address, telephone number, email, website, the name of a chairperson / president).

Among all party sites in the Public Information Bulletin, only the site of PO meets the aforementioned criteria of availability and completeness: the site is correctly connected to the Bulletin's main site; it contains complete contact details for both the party headquarters and its regional structures; it also contains a note on the manner of acquiring access to broader information. In the other cases, the identified deficiencies make it difficult to obtain relevant data to a small degree (PiS – a link from the Bulletin to the old version of the party's site) or to a considerable degree (Together – the site is not connected to the



Bulletin at all; it does not contain a note on access to information; it contains only contact details for the party's central authorities).

On the parties' websites, which, because of their both physical and mental availability, are frequently the first place where people look for information on a particular party, information on organizational structures are presented in the form of a list of contact details. It is such lists of contact details that allows the user to try to identify the structure of a particular party. Such a solution appears to be quite natural and functional. Lists of contact details usually concern the largest local units, i.e. the regional level, and if a particular party structure does not have this level, then a list of districts appears. The weakness of the applied solution consists first of all in the incompleteness of presented data.

In examining the websites of the parties under analysis (all of them have their own website), the author paid special attention to the two issues. Firstly, the place or availability of information on organizational structures: how long (how many clicks) it takes to move from the main site to contact details; to what extent the access path to such details is intuitive (whether required information is to be found in foreseeable locations – "Contact", "Party structures"); whether information is presented collectively (a list of details on one page). Secondly, completeness: to what extent presented data is standardized (an identical set of information); whether presented data is detailed enough; whether the main site offers access to regional / district sites offering further more detailed information (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The political parties' official websites – data on organizational structures (Y – yes, N – no)

	Access path (number of clicks)	Direction – keyword	Collective presentation of data	Standardized contact de- tails	Email – regional / district	Website – regional / district
PiS	4	Structures	Y – districts	N	Y	N
PO	4	Regional	N	N	Y	Y
Kukiz'15	1	Authorities	Y – branches	Y	Y (exclusively)	N
N	3	Structures	N	N	Y	Y
PSL	1	Contact	Y – regions	Y	Y	Y
SLD	2	Contact	Y – regions	Y	Y	Y
Freedom	2	Structures	Y – regions	Y	Y (exclusively)	N
Total	2	Contact	N	N	Y (mainly)	N

Source: The author's own work on the basis of the parties' official websites.

On their websites, all parties placed contact details for not only their central authorities but also regional / district authorities. The access paths are different in terms of both length and direction. They are usually intuitive and required information can be reached by selecting the tab "Contact" or "Party structures" on the main site. There are larger differences in the lengths of the access paths. The shortest one is reduced to just one click (PSL, Kukiz'15), while the longest one requires four clicks (PiS, PO).

A half of the parties under analysis offer an additional manner of reaching data concerning their structures. Selecting the options "Join PiS" / "Membership" (PO) / "Join us" (N) / "Join us" (PSL), one can access comprehensive sets of regional / district contact details.

Those interested can check the address of an organizational unit relevant for their place of residence in order to get in touch with a selected party. In most cases, this option shortens the path leading to information on party structures (with the exception of the PSL website, where the path cannot be reduced to just one click). If it is believed that builders of a particular website assumed that information on organizational structures was searched for mainly by those interested in party membership, such a solution can be regarded as favourable for information availability and usefulness. In this context, it should be noted that SLD, Together and Freedom have reduced their respective membership procedures to filling in an online declaration, thus facilitating the joining of a particular party without combining a membership path with a presentation of party structures (becoming familiar with the outlay of local units requires a separate search of a given website).

In the case of PO, N and Together, there is no comprehensive list of contact details for regional / district units available within the range of their respective websites. Such a presentation of contact details would facilitate their comprehensive examination as it would be easier to move between particular units. In the case of the parties which are still in the process of building their structures (Together, Freedom, or the association Kukiz'15), their lists of contact details contain obvious gaps.

Although Kukiz'15, PSL, SLD, and Freedom provide standardized, template-based information, such information is complete in the case of only two parties (Table 1). The user of the websites of Kukiz'15 and Freedom is provided with email addresses only; thus, the acquired standardization is the consequence of information minimalism. The most extensive sets of standardized contact details for regional organizational units are presented by PSL and SLD – one page contains a list of all regional units and their complete particulars: telephone numbers (SLD – a half of the regions), fax numbers (PSL only), postal addresses, email addresses, and website addresses.

As far as the parties' preferred form of contact is concerned, electronic mail prevails. All parties provide complete sets of email addresses of their regional / district structures (there are just a few missing addresses, e.g. three email addresses were missing from the list of the 41 PiS districts, although selecting particular organizational units, the user can obtain a personalized email address, e.g. that of a district secretary).

More detailed data on organizational structures can be obtained by reading the websites of individual units. A half of the parties under analysis, PO, N, PSL and SLD, provide their central websites with links to regional ones. In the case of PSL, the addresses of the 4 regions (Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Łódzkie, Małopolskie, Śląskie) redirect the user to the party's main websites, and one site does not exist at the given address (Lubelskie). The absence of links to the sites of lower-level units on a given party's main website does not indicate that such sites do not exist; however, within the context of access to aggregated and thus more useful and complete information, it appears to be serious negligence. Nevertheless, it seems that the aforementioned deficiencies (in all relevant aspects) should be perceived as manifestations of carelessness rather than unwillingness to make information available.

### **“I would like to request” – the questionnaire**

In view of the fact that the scope of information on party structures made available on the Internet should be regarded as limited, the author attempted to obtain this type of information by way of direct contact with particular organizational units of the parties

under analysis. Questionnaires were sent to both party headquarters and regional / district branches.

The addressees responded to 6 out of 8 questionnaires sent to party headquarters (Table 2). It should be noted however, that the majority of them (4) answered the questions included in the questionnaire at stage III, i.e. after receiving a request under the public information access procedure (such requests included the legal basis, i.e. Article 2 Paragraph 1 of the Public Information Access Act of 6 September 2001 and Article 8 of the Political Parties Act concerning the disclosure of parties' organizational structures). In this group, at stage II there was one refusal to provide required information – the National Board Office of Kukiz'15 declared, "We are not able to grant your request for a mundane reason. We are not a political party, but an association". It should be emphasized, however, that the two earlier requests had referred to a "grouping", and not to a "political party", which had not prevented Kukiz'15 from ignoring the received requests. The party headquarters of PiS and PO failed to respond to any of the sent messages.

**Table 2.** The number of responses received in the questionnaire survey from the political parties

	Central level				Regional / district level			
	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Total	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Total
PiS	–	–	–	0	–	–	–	0
PO	–	–	–	0	3	1	2	6
Kukiz'15	–	–	1	1	1	2	2	5
N	–	–	1	1	–	1	3	4
PSL	1	–	–	1	–	2	3	5
SLD	–	1	–	1	1	1	4	6
Freedom	–	–	1	1	1	–	2	3
Total	–	–	1	1	4	4	9	17
Grand total	1	1	4	6	10	11	25	46

Source: the author's own work on the basis of the questionnaire survey.

The question about membership fees turned out to be the most embarrassing. PSL did not respond to this question and Modern stated that membership fees were collected at the level of party circles, and therefore, the National Office "did not have such data". Together declared that 90% of its members paid membership fees; SLD answered that it had 26,000 fee-paying members (77%), and Freedom confirmed the ideal state – all members (659 people) paid their fees on a regular basis.

The party organizational units at the regional / district level received 155 questionnaires. 30% of them were filled in and returned to the author. The largest number of entities (25) responded to the questionnaire at stage III, i.e. more than a half (54.3%) of those entities which participated in the survey did it stimulated by a request for access to public information. At the earlier stages 21.7% (stage I) and 23.9% (stage II) of the entities from this group answered the questions included in the questionnaire (Table 2).



As it has been mentioned before, not all reactions of the party units consisted in filling in the questionnaire (Table 3). Almost 40% of responses (18) contained a refusal to provide information. The most frequently used justification was the statement that a given unit was not authorized to provide information of that type. It was almost always accompanied by a suggestion that the request should be addressed to the party's central authorities. Such a sequence of events was recorded in the case of 15 requests. The remaining three responses comprised an email refusing to provide information (without any reference to party headquarters); a tick in the "not applicable" box in the questionnaire; an email informing that the request had been forwarded to another person in the unit (no further reaction).

The only party in which no unit (more precisely: no party structures coordinator) responded in any manner to the questionnaire was PiS. Together responded the most frequently (over 50% of its units filled in the questionnaire), but it was this party that refused to answer particular questions the most often (17 times) – in 11 cases the author was informed that the party headquarters were authorized to provide data on party structures. It is difficult not to accept the validity of such a response (it is a party as an organization that has the status of a legal entity), but simultaneously it should be noted that 6 units provided required information without making any reservations.

**Table 3.** The number of acquired responses, including the sending of requested data

	Number of questions	Acquired responses		Sending of data			
		Total	%	Yes		No	
				number	%	number	%
PiS	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
PO	17	6	35.3	4	23.5	2	11.8
Kukiz'15	38	5	13.2	3	7.9	2	5.3
N	17	4	23.5	3	17.6	1	5.9
PSL	16	5	31.3	4	25	1	6.25
SLD	16	6	37.5	5	31.3	1	6.25
Freedom	15	3	20	3	20	0	0
Total	31	17	54.8	6	19.4	11	35.5
Grand total	155	46	29.7	28	18	18	11.6

Source: the author's own work on the basis of the questionnaire survey.

In percentage terms, the most responses were received from SLD units (31.3%), PSL units (25%) and PO units (23.5%). While PiS organizational units were consistent in refusing to react to the questionnaire at both the central and local levels, the picture is more diversified in the case of PO: the party headquarters did not respond to the questionnaire, but its local organizational units were relatively active in both answering the questions and providing the requested information.

Summarizing the obtained data, one may say that Together and SLD, both extra-parliamentary parties, turned out to be the leaders in both "positive" rankings of those units

which filled in the questionnaire and provided the requested data, respectively. SLD is also in the second place among the parties which reacted to the submitted request. PO also appears in both rankings, twice in the third place. The other parliamentary party which relatively frequently provided the requested data is PLS (25% of the cases).

### **The obligation of absolute confidentiality – the Central Statistical Office**

Every other year since 2012 the Central Statistical Office has conducted a survey of political parties. Form SOF-3 “A report on the activities of political parties” is sent to all registered political groupings. Information is collected on the basis of the obligation to provide statistical data provided for in the Public Statistics Act (The Act 1995, Article 30 Paragraph 3) and the regulation of the Council of Ministers on the public statistics research programme for a given year (The Regulation 2015).

In both its preliminary part and notes placed at the end, the form contains a guarantee of confidentiality. The Office ensures that, “data are protected by confidentiality and will not be disclosed to anybody” (GUS 2016, 1), and additionally explains that such confidentiality “imposes an obligation of absolute confidence on the public statistical service and unprecedentedly prohibits it from disclosing individual documents making it possible to identify persons, organizations, institutions or other organizational units” (ibid. 6). This reference to “an obligation of absolute confidence” is very important in the context of disclosure, i.e. the key notion in this analysis. Acknowledging the standardized character of such provisions accompanying the collection of any data by the Central Statistical Office, one should try to demonstrate how such provisos influence parties’ willingness to make their data available (a request submitted under the public information access procedure also has a statutory basis but – obviously – does not guarantee confidentiality). Although the identification of particular entities is not possible, the Office’s differentiation between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties makes it possible to formulate general comments on tendencies observed in these groups.

The presented data concern all three reporting cycles completed in the years 2012, 2014 and 2016 (Table 4). During this period there was an increase in the numbers of both registered parties (although the year 2014 witnessed a clear decrease in this category) and those parties which were active political organizations (the status of activities is determined on the basis of information provided in form SOF-3 as well as information on parties which have filed financial statements with the State Electoral Commission acquired from the National Electoral Office. However, there was a decrease in the number of parties submitting form SOF-3: 2012 – 83.6% of active parties, 2016 – 73.6%. Analysing the groups of parties highlighted in the report, one can conclude that the problem concerns mainly smaller parties represented in local governments only or not present in any structures of authority at all. The changes observed in the group of parliamentary parties are connected mainly with the post-election transformation of the parliamentary landscape (the Sejm’s 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> terms of office). It should be noted, however, that this group appears to be disciplined in terms of its reporting obligations.

**Table 4.** The data provided by political parties in the surveys of the Central Statistical Office in the years 2012–2016

	2012	2014	2016
The number of parties entered in the register of political parties	82	73	86
Political parties conducting factual activities	67	69	72
Political parties which have filled in form SOF-3	56	54	53
– parties represented in the Polish parliament	6	7	11
– parties represented in local governments only	15	14	12
– other parties	35	33	30
Number of members (thousand)	291.9	298.1	250.8
– parties represented in the Polish parliament	243.3	238.8	177.1
– parties represented in local governments only	38.7	43.1	54.3
– other parties	9.9	16.2	19.3
Parties whose members have paid membership fees (%)	25.8	16.9	21.0
– parties represented in the Polish parliament	26.9	18.6	16.0
– parties represented in local governments only	17.8	4.0	32.2
– other parties	31.3	26.6	36.8
Parties declaring having youth organizations	10	14	16
– parties represented in the Polish parliament	6	6	6
– parties represented in local governments only	1	3	6
– other parties	3	5	4

Source: Materials of the Central Statistical Office

The report of the Central Statistical Office consists of six sections (I. The party's activities and mode of operation; II. The party's organizational structure, members, persons working voluntarily and other persons providing free-of-charge services for the benefit of the party; III. Persons working under employment relationships or civil law agreements; IV. The party's revenues and costs; V. The party's assets and capital expenditures; VI. The conditions of conducting the party's activities). In view of the scope of questions which the parties were asked to answer as part of the research, this analysis will focus on the three types of data included in section II, which concerns primarily organizational structures (Table 4). The information acquired by the Central Statistical Office allows one to observe the following regularities:

- Membership in political parties: In 2016 active political parties declared jointly 250.800 members, i.e. 16% fewer than in 2014. In 2016 the largest number of members (71% of all declared members) belonged to parties represented in the parliament, which constituted just 20% of active parties. It should be noted simultaneously that this is the only group of parties which experienced a serious deterioration of

their membership base (by 27.2%) during the examined four years' period. The other groups recorded a systematic increase in the number of members.

- Payment of membership fees: In 2012 membership fees were paid by every fourth party member; in 2016 – by every fifth one. In the years 2012–2016 there occurred clear changes in the number of party members paying membership fees in the groups of parties under analysis. Each of the groups recorded significant changes, but they were negative only in the case of parties represented in the parliament – an 11% decrease in the number of fee-paying members.
- Youth organizations: In the reporting period the number of parties declaring having youth organizations rose from 10 to 16. It was mainly the effect of changes taking place in the group of parties present in local governments: an increase from 1 to 6. Despite the visible change in the number of parliamentary parties, the number of entities declaring having youth organizations did not change (while the number of parliamentary parties rose from 6 to 11, the number of youth organizations (6) remained unchanged).

As it has already been mentioned, the possibility of drawing conclusions from aggregated data is rather limited, but it can be stated without doubts that the tendencies concerning the numbers of political parties as well as their fee-paying members – first of all with respect to the parties present in the parliament – are alarming. Thus, it seems correct to suppose that the shrinking membership base and also the group of members honouring their financial obligations to their parties may be one of the reasons why the parliamentary parties are unwilling to make this type of data available to the general public.

### **The importance of disclosure – political parties' programmes**

Political parties are not only economical with openness in providing information on their internal structures but also rarely refer to the concept of disclosure in their policy papers (the presented data do not constitute a comprehensive analysis, but rather a quantitative compilation of key words used in selected election campaign manifestos). "Transparency" is used more frequently; this word appeared 57 times in the election programmes of the parties under analysis (Table 5). The category of "disclosure" was mentioned twice less frequently (28 times), while "clarity" was referred to just 16 times. Nevertheless, the differences among the programmes of a given party in successive election campaigns as well as among the particular parties appear to be accidental. Searching for a broader perspective for comparisons in the election programmes presented in 2001 also does not result in the discovery of any clear differences or trends. PSL is one of the parties which sporadically include the aforementioned notions in their election programmes, failing to convey any concrete and meaningful message based on them (the word "transparency" is used once in a legal context, while "clarity" concerns the food market). The election programmes of Together and Kukiz'15 are quite similar in this respect. PiS is one of these parties which use these concepts more frequently in their programmes (transparency: 2011 – 14, 2015 – 11). They are used in a strongly "distributed" manner, i.e. they are not included in the centre of any concrete proposals but rather placed randomly in such contexts as public finances, legislation, pharmaceutical policy, pre-school education, the state's defence system).

It should be noted, however, that being the party which uses the aforementioned categories the most often, PiS is simultaneously this party which did not provide the author with any information on its organizational structures at any stage of the questionnaire survey. Therefore, there occurs a clear dissonance between this party's willingness to refer to the principle of disclosure and transparency and its readiness to disclose information about itself.

**Table 5.** Disclosure (D), clarity (C), transparency (T) in the parties' election programmes.

	Parliamentary parties (7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> terms of office)						Extra-parliamentary parties		Grand total
	PiS	PO	Kukiz'15	N	PSL	SLD/ZL	KORWiN	Total	
2001	D – 8 C – 0 T – 2	D – 4 C – 0 T – 3	X	X	D – 0 C – 0 T – 0	D – 1 C – 0 T – 5	X	X	D – 13 C – 0 T – 10
2011	D – 5 C – 3 T – 14	D – 0 C – 0 T – 6	X	X	D – 0 C – 0 T – 1	D – 3 C – 4 T – 11	X	X	D – 8 C – 7 T – 32
2015	D – 4 C – 6 T – 11	D – 0 C – 0 T – 3	D – 4 C – 1 T – 7	D – 1 C – 1 T – 0	D – 0 C – 1 T – 2	D – 2 C – 0 T – 0	D – 7 C – 0 T – 0	D – 2 C – 0 T – 2	D – 20 C – 9 T – 25
Total	D – 17 C – 9 T – 27	D – 4 C – 0 T – 12	D – 4 C – 1 T – 7	D – 1 C – 1 T – 0	D – 0 C – 1 T – 3	D – 6 C – 4 T – 16	D – 7 C – 0 T – 0	D – 2 C – 0 T – 2	D – 41 C – 16 T – 67

Source: The author's own work on the basis of the parties' election programmes presented in the years 2001, 2011, and 2015.

The general conclusion which could be drawn in a possibly reliable manner has to be limited to the statement that irrespective of their positions on the political scene, the parties under analysis refer to the categories of disclosure and transparency rather sporadically and coincidentally. The statements containing these notions are not followed by any concrete and comprehensive ideas. This is not changed by the fact that disclosure and transparency are the most often associated with public finances (they were used in this context 11 and 20 times respectively in the examined election programmes) and with the activities of the public administration (6 and 5 times respectively). These are the only relatively significant accumulations, which, however, do not suffice to diagnose reliably the parties' attitudes towards the concept of disclosure.

## Conclusions

The knowledge of internal structures constitutes a part of basic data on political parties. Using a common sense approach, one cannot perceive it as confidential information because it comprises in fact basic and organizational information on entities which fulfil special functions in public life. The legislator also adopted this point of view, including political parties among entities obliged to provide public information. There are differences



in the practical implementation of the idea of disclosure with respect to information on political parties' structures, which is reflected in the results of the observations presented in this paper.

On the basis of the acquired data, it is possible to conclude that political parties are characterized by a low level of willingness to respond to requests for information. This applies primarily to the regional / district level of party organizations – 70% of the contacted entities did not respond to the sent requests (at the central level, two out of eight parties did not react to the requests for information). The parties do not show openness to contact with the outside world. The low level of responsiveness may result from the parties' general attitude manifesting itself in both unwillingness to answer requests and poorly developed and frequently incomplete contact details available on the Internet (The Public Information Bulletin and the parties' own websites). It seems that the neglect and deficiencies diagnosed in this area reflect the parties' willingness towards creating hermetic groups.

The parties unwillingly provide data on their organizations and are particularly sensitive about their financial data (including membership fees). At the central level, the two largest parties, i.e. PiS in government and PO in opposition, ignored all requests for information, including that submitted under the public information access procedure. As a matter of fact, the procedure announced on the parties' respective websites provides for the submission of a formal request by regular mail, but both of them did not bother to respond and require that such a form of contact be maintained. The other parties (with the exception of the association Kukiz'15) provided the requested data, irrespective of the presence or absence of relevant instructions on access to public information on their websites. Nevertheless, the party headquarters reacted only to requests for information based on statutory regulations, thus acting under the threat of possible legal sanctions. It should be emphasized that only 3 parties (SLD, Freedom, Together) provided information on the number of fee-paying members. At the regional / district level, only 18% of party organizational units responded to the received requests for information (less than a half of them answered questions about membership fees). It should be stressed once more that the parties' local units indicated also an alternative method of obtaining required data (contact with the headquarters), which may be regarded as a form of dealing with the issue of access to information.

The conclusions above are of a descriptive character. A more precise summary of the obtained results will be possible thanks to the disclosure index of Polish political parties (Table 6) created by assigning scores to the data obtained from the examination of the parties' own websites and their sites in the Public Information Bulletin as well as the questionnaire survey (Tables 1–3). The maximum value of the index is 18 points, which would indicate the most open political party. None of the parties under analysis achieved this score. The first place in the ranking is held by PSL, with the disclosure index of 14.5; it is followed by SLD (13) and PO (11). The next four parties – N, Freedom, Together, Kukiz'15 – received scores at the level of a half of the maximum value of the index (8–9.25). PiS closes the ranking with the index of 3, clearly standing out from the other parties.

**Table 6.** The disclosure index of Polish political parties

Ranking	Party	Table 1	Table 2	Table 3	Index value
1.	PSL	5.5	4	5	14.5
2.	SLD	5	3	5	13
3.	PO	3	3	5	11
4.	N	3.25	2	4	9.25
5.	Freedom	4	2	3	9
	Total	2	2	5	9
7.	Kukiz'15	3.5	3	2	8.5
8.	PiS	3	0	0	3

Source: the author's own work on the basis of the questionnaire survey.

Thus it should be concluded that the first three parties in the ranking, PSL, SLD, PO (with their indexes at 60–80% of the maximum value), comply with the information disclosure principle to an acceptable degree. The parties in the subsequent places (4–7) and with the indexes at 50% of the maximum value (8–9.25), i.e. N, Freedom, Together, and Kukiz'15, are at the verge making it possible to regard their openness as sufficient. In the case of PiS, whose index does not reach 20% of the maximum value, it should be concluded that this party implements the principle of disclosure at a minimum level.

The ranking does not make it possible to draw valid conclusions on the importance of a party's size and position on the political scene in the context of its readiness to disclose information. Both PSL and PO are at the top of the ranking and are strongly anchored in the parliament, but they are very different in terms of size (the largest opposition party and the smallest one). The ranking is closed by PiS, at present the party in government.

It should be emphasized that the parties at the top of the rankings have strong local structures (although outside the parliament, SLD still declares to have as many as 33,632 members). The further places in the ranking are held by the parties with small numbers of members (with the exception of PiS). Poor local party structures can constitute an objective obstacle in the way of responding to requests or providing complete information. Simultaneously, the statistics of the Central Statistical Office show that it is the smaller, extra-parliamentary parties that are developing more dynamically (the growing membership base) and acquire dedicated and involved members, if the regular payment of membership fees is a measure of such dedication or involvement. Consequently these parties should be more expansive and open. However, the disclosure index does not confirm this regularity.

The ambiguous picture resulting from the conducted research does not make it possible to draw definitive conclusions about the reasons for the described practices of the political parties in the area of providing access to public information. A reliable diagnosis would require a more thorough analysis. In this context, it would seem appropriate to ask the question about the position of disclosure among the fundamental rules of a democratic state. One of them, the principle of a democratic state under the rule of law is derived from the principle of civil society which participates consciously in the life of the state. What is of key importance in this approach is the condition of citizens' knowledge of the

functioning of their state. And the level of such knowledge is related directly to the level of disclosure with respect to the actions of the public authorities. In the Polish constitutional practice such an unambiguous relation has not been established: the Constitutional Tribunal has never inferred the disclosure principle with respect to the actions of the public authorities from the principle of a democratic state under the rule of law (Piskorz-Ryń 2013, 45–46). Attention should also be paid to “the lack of the acceptance of the doctrine for recognizing the principle of disclosure as a constitutional principle” (ibid. 47). Therefore, looking for an explanation for the relatively limited importance of disclosure in the actions of political parties, one should conduct a thorough analysis of importance assigned to disclosure in both the legislator’s intentions and the society’s perception.

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