Pillarized Networks in a Polarized Civil Society: A Structure of Far-Right Networks in Poland

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Abstract

The goal of this exploratory article is to examine the specifics and networks within and between conservative organizations at the local, regional, and national levels in Poland. By investigating these connections in 2016 using social network analysis and interviews, we contribute to a better understanding of the growth and structure of these groups, which created the base for right-wing organizations as well as led to the success of right-wing parties in Poland and vice versa. We expect to find that the majority of far-right organization networks is vertically structured, linking those organizations at the local level with national organizations; those at the top sustain them financially and offer popularity, access to politics, and other opportunities. However, although right-wing organizations care more about the linkages with their national counterparts, we expect to find that those few local organizations that form links with like-minded local organizations emphasize grassroots activities unrelated to participation in political party activities and are less radical and more civil in their behavior and attitudes.

Keywords: conservative civil society; far-right organizations; networks; uncivil society; Poland

Introduction

Political and cultural cleavages in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) reinforce each other: conservative values promoted by far-right organizations are on rise; they are also supported by right-wing governments, which in turn get stronger because of the conservative civil society (Molnar 2016; Bluh and Varga 2019; Bustikova 2019; Kotwas and Kubik 2019; Guasti and Bustikova 2020). [1] On the other hand, organizations promoting democracy, human rights, women, LGBT, and environmentalists began to feel alienated by the political elites (Piotrowski 2020; Petrova and Pospieszna 2021; Pospieszna and Pietrzyk-Reeves 2021). Something to which Kotwas and Kubik (2019, 437) refer to as the "cultural-political feedback loop" contributed to the polarization of society and the sociopolitical division between conservative and liberal civil society. Poland serves as a prime example here.

In our study we explore the networks within and between conservative organizations at various levels to provide a better evidence of whether right-wing civil society has a "pillarized" structure (Ekiert 2020, 1)—that is, whether it is forming a segregated group of vertically connected organizations at the local, regional, and national levels. The concept of pillarization advocated by Ekiert (2020) has been strongly linked to the phenomenon of cultural polarization between liberal and conservative camps of the civil society in Poland, which has political consequences. The first camp would like to see Poland in the family of liberal democratic countries upholding Western

norms and values (Fomina 2019, 126–27; see also Cooley and Ron 2002; Mendelson and Glenn 2002; Sundstrom 2005; McMahon 2017). Strong rejection of the ideology and illiberal politics of a right-wing government, populism, and nationalism unite the "liberal" camp of society associated with liberal and center-oriented political parties. The second camp wants to defend traditional national values, including religious ones due to Poland's long tradition as a Christian nation, and ideologically refer to anticommunism. The camp of "patriots," however, is favored by the right-wing government (Marczewski 2018), and when right-wing populists got into the parliament, the liberal pillar was deprived of resources and public funds, which were redirected to conservative organizations. The main consequence of such a process has been the *reetatization* of one of the pillars, which means, in the Polish case, the strengthening of vertical ties between the nationalist parties and political organizations between the national level and the sector of local organizations they support.

We believe that knowledge about the supply side might allow inferences about the strength and perhaps also level of radicalization of right-wing mobilization. Right-wing organizations are not new and often have a longer presence than many liberal organizations in the region. An interesting puzzle is why some of these organizations choose to take a more radical form and some remain to cultivate conservative values in a more moderate manner, being active only at a local level. We believe that *the nature of their networks* may play an important role in determining the characteristics of right-wing organizations and their overall capacity to mobilize, and it also give us some insights about this segment of civil society which still is underresearched. Specifically, we attempt to answer the following questions: What kind of network ties exist between right-wing organizations in Poland? Are networks between right-wing organizations only vertically structured (linkages between local, regional and national organizations), or are they also horizontally structured (with like-minded local organizations)? Or, how does the type of networks structure (vertical vs. horizontal) may influence the activity of local right-wing organizations?

Our study also contributes to a better understanding of civil society in Poland, which for a long time has been associated with liberal organizations promoting Western norms and values (Podemski 2014). Civil society in Poland does not represent and advocate one clear set of norms and values but rather the whole spectrum of values and cultural or moral norms that mobilizes civic engagement including conservative values (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017). Whereas there are abundant studies on liberal civil society, NGOs, and their networks (Pospieszna and Pietrzyk-Reeves 2021), including transnational networks and collective actions (Petrova and Tarrow 2007), there are only a few exploring conservative organizations and their networks, especially empirically (Suchanow 2020). We endeavor to fill this gap by means of social network analysis (SNA) as well as 10 in-depth interviews with selected local conservative organizations.

The social network analysis (N = 155) conducted using Facebook's likes in 2016 among right-wing organizations demonstrated that the densest links are vertical, imitating pillarized structure; however, our analysis also demonstrated that at the local level there was a cluster (community) of organizations that formed stronger (denser) horizontal ties instead of vertical ones. In order to deepen our knowledge about the only community identified, we reached out to these organizations with semistructured interviews to examine the extent to which they focus on politics and how much on other activities—for example, social/cultural activities in a given local society. We also consider what their values are, why they find it important to form networks predominantly with local and/or national organizations, and finally what the main characteristics of their activities are. The interviews were anonymous according to the Ethical Committee protocol. All interviews were conducted in confidence, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement).

We find that those conservative local organizations that form stronger horizontal links with other local like-minded organizations are grassroots driven, independent financially and organizationally, and less likely to search for contacts with organizations at the national level. We assume that having weaker ties with large national organizations and being far from national deprive them of their radicalism in their actions and strategies. They are mainly oriented toward local issues, but

because of their ability to cultivate and disseminate conservative norms and values they are important in mobilizing people and empowering other right-wing organizations operating at the national level, thus becoming suppliers of the right-wing populism.

The article is organized as follows. First, we review the literature on current political (right- vs. left-wing) and cultural (conservatives vs. liberals) divisions; democratic backsliding; and polarization, pillarization, and civil society, including the concept of uncivil society. We also present a brief history of right-wing organizations and the possible factors that contributed to their growth. Then we present the results of SNA demonstrating the structure of networks of right-wing organizations and finally the results of interviews conducted among local organizations that according to SNA create a community of organizations. The final section concludes.

Pillarization, Polarization and the Rebirth of Right-Wing Organizations in Poland

Poland was perceived to be a success story of post-1989 democratization. However, three decades after the fall of communism in 1989, it was experiencing the rise of right-wing populism strongly linked to nationalism and/or conservatism, similar to other countries in the region (Wodak 2015; Hanley and Vachudova 2018; Mudde 2007). In Poland, conservatism and nationalism are two populist discursive strategies that are used to justify the governmental actions seeking a greater concentration of political power (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 1; Magyar and Madlovics 2020). Nationalism as a discursive instrument is used to weaken the influence of the European Union (EU) on Poland and to neutralize any leverage the EU might have (for example, rejecting community efforts to tie the budget to the rule of law), justifying it as a threat that is violating national values, interests, and sovereignty. The logical consequence of this reasoning is that the political elites in power decide what is a national interest that should be protected and who the enemies who should be eliminated are. According to the current Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) government, conservative values, which derive from national or religious culture, need to be protected, and this rhetoric is used in the governmental propaganda (for example, public media).[2]

Right-wing populism in Poland contributed to the revival of conservative organizations whose agenda focuses on preserving traditional values—for example, the model of family opposing gender parity, same-sex marriage, or adoption of children by same-sex couples. As scholars suggest, it is not the state that plays the decisive role in recasting nationalism but "civic actors, far-right political groups and their media outlets backed by a vigorous industry that has turned nationalist identity politics into a profitable business" (Molnár 2016, 170; see also Kasprowicz 2015). Indeed, in Poland right-wing political parties solicit support from the actors who help defend the status quo and oppose the LGBT+ movement, forging cooperation and establishing ties with similar organizations from Russia, Christian fundamentalists from the United States, and other external organizations (Guasti and Bustikova 2020, 241; Korolczuk 2020), as well as the national right-wing parties and populist authorities in power. Liberal organizations, however, often supported by the EU and Western donors, continue promoting democracy, human rights, women, LGBT+, and environmentalists and are beginning to feel alienated by the political elites (Piotrowski 2020; Petrova and Pospieszna 2021; Pospieszna and Pietrzyk-Reeves 2021).

In fact, as a consequence of this cultural shift and a growing cleavage over conservative versus liberal moral values, right-wing populism has begun to triumph, contributing to the emergence of two opposite strands of civil society: liberal and conservative; in other words, we observe pillarization of civil society (Ekiert 2020). The social polarization has contributed to this pillarization because it has reinforced the cleavages, which also has consequences in the political domain. The support of conservative civil society for antiliberal and anti-European policies facilitated further mobilization of far-right parties (Enyedi 2020). These parties receive support from conservative social networks or "cultural entrepreneurs" that perceive the emancipation of women, reproductive

freedom, and equal rights for LGBT+ citizens as a threat (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Płatek and Płucienniczak 2016; Grzebalska and Pető 2018; Ekiert 2019; Kotwas and Kubik 2019, 442).

What do we know about conservative organizations in Poland that today have strong links with far right-wing organizations? One important feature that distinguishes them is that they have a long tradition in Poland (Dąbrowska 2019; Jasiewicz 2019) that date back to when Poland was partitioned between Prussia, Russia, and Austro-Hungary for 123 years. History and how it is constructed in local/regional or national memory represents a powerful factor in right and far-right mobilization and normalization. It is often strengthened by governmental actions through delegated agencies such as the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) or the Pilecki Institute who—together with the actions of various ministries—promote a conservative vision of history and nationalist historical figures and introduce new public holidays such as Day of Remembrance of "Cursed Soldiers" (*Żołnierze Wyklęci*, a term coined in 1990s to generally describe the post-WWII anticommunist underground guerillas) established in 2011 by the Polish Parliament (Kończal 2020). The Independence March was initiated in 2009 as grassroots commemorations by the far right of the Polish Independence Day and has gained momentum and visibility since 2011 after antifascist organizations attempted to block the event. Popular and big right-wing organizations that exist today, such as "All-Polish Youth" (*Młodzież Wszechpolska* [MW]) as well as National Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* [ONR]), with an ideology and propaganda of a nationalistic concept developed by Roman Dmowski—that is, an "ethnically homogeneous" state and Polishness associated with Catholicism, tradition, and history (Rudnicki 2018).

Undoubtedly, there is a good political opportunity for these right-wing organizations to grow, survive, and form alliances with political parties (Ekiert, Kubik, and Wenzel 2017; Greskovits 2017; Płatek and Płucienniczak 2017; Ślarzyński 2017). They have achieved spectacular successes in the recent years using their time to introduce changes that under the former government were not possible. In fact, in the past these right-wing organizations were marginalized and often described from the perspective of youth or subcultural studies with the most common examples of the skinhead, pan-Slavic, or neo-Nazi movements (Tomasiewicz 2007, 2018; Kornak 2009; Pankowski 2010). However, these movements after the regime change in 1989 were becoming more and more institutionalized and, over the years, more and more politicized, seeking opportunities in mainstream politics.

During the 2000s, the far right became active in mainstream politics and this was the first real opportunity for right-wing organizations to become more visible to the broader public. During 2005–2007, *Liga Polskich Rodzin* participated in the ruling coalition (Płatek and Płucienniczak 2017) and was present in the parliament. Both PiS coalition partners shared exclusionist and homogenizing visions of a Polish nation and together with PiS exploited populist slogans and narratives on the political scene (Jasiewicz 2008). The development of right-wing and conservative spheres of the Polish politics that attracted numerous people from neo-fascist groups was essential to the entire process. These groups became partners of the mainstream organizations, and their activists later began to make careers in politics and state agencies. This coincides with the failures of the far right in numerous elections (presidential, parliamentary), in which it usually received less than 1% of votes when trying to run on their own, as the *Polska Wspólnota Narodowa* or *Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski* did. This made the far right look for other ways to influence the political system; as a result, the far right decided to run for elections from other electoral lists rather than their own.

An important political opportunity emerged for the right-wing organizations in early 2010s and more specifically the elections in 2015 and 2019 that brought PiS back to power, with two right-wing coalition partners—Agreement (*Porozumienie*), more neoliberal and market-oriented, and Solidary Poland (*Solidarna Polska*), even more radical on domestic and external issues, the EU in particular. Also, certain media outlets like *The Polish Gazette* (*Gazeta Polska*), a weekly that publishes articles with conservative to far-right sympathies, are supportive of PiS and their editors and journalists often appeared in PiS-controlled public media. The newspaper helped to mobilize voter turnout for PiS in 2015 (Ślarzyński 2015, 2018). Other extreme right parties became

empowered and increased in popularity, which helped them to meet an electoral threshold and eventually get seats in the parliament, such as Confederation (*Konfederacja*), where they are considered partners in government formation and included in policy making. The members of Parliament (MPs) of *Konfederacja* often support nationalist activists or initiatives and introduce them to the mainstream. Other formations contributed to the success of the new nationalist, even more conservative movements, such as the electoral movement Kukiz'15, whose five MPs were associated with the Nationalist Movement (*Ruch Narodowy*) and later joined *Konfederacja*. As the result of these opportunities, some actors became agents contributing to resilience of populist parties that occupy mainstream positions in politics at the national level as either ruling parties or parties gaining electorate and overall vote shares. We believe that the close relations between main right-wing organizations and the political parties listed above might have influenced the structure of networks of right-wing organizations.

It is believed that the conservative fraction of civil society has the tendency to radicalize and move toward "uncivil society." At the core of the definition of uncivil society is the use of—or the will to use—violence (Whitehead 1997; Kopecký and Mudde 2003; Piotrowski 2009), and thus it is considered an enemy of the standards and norms of democracy (Pedahzur and Weinberg 2016). Uncivil behavior of organizations can take the form of demonizing LGBT+ people; raising the level of xenophobia, misogyny, and/or homophobia; and frequent targeting of immigrants and refugees as unwanted "others." Such attitudes can also manifest in the form of exclusivism as well as through a fundamentalist version of Roman Catholicism (Stanley 2016; Krzyżanowski 2018). Uncivil society is used by the right-wing political parties to advance their goals. The governing elites' acceptance of radical nationalism—for example, through praise of far-right marches as expressions of patriotism—contributes to further radicalization or, more precisely, to the introduction of right-wing radicalism to the mainstream. Over time these organizations began to benefit from improved access to funding and felt empowered to mobilize (Ślarzyński 2017).

In addition to political opportunities created since 2016, new forms of communication technologies have been contributing to the political participation, revival, and networking of right-wing organizations. Digital media affect the dynamics of mobilization for protest events, recruitment of new supporters, and coordination of actions (Bennett 2003; Earl and Kimport 2011; Earl et al. 2013). It is widely accepted that most social movements protests of the current decade were born in the online world (Anduiza, Gallego, and Cantijoch 2010; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). Some scholars see social media as having a profound influence on the shape of contemporary movements, sometimes arguing that social media are diluting true activism (Earl and Kimport 2011; Harlow and Guo 2014). More literature focuses on individual online participation in movements, whereas the group level of online organizations and their networks has received less attention.

Studies on radical-right activism also have proven that digital platforms are highly important for the growing far-right movement and now constitute important arenas for the dissemination of racist and extremist messages, as well as community building, recruitment, and mobilization (Wahlström and Törnberg 2019). As has been shown by Pauwels and Schils (2016), Internet discussion forums provide an arena for the production of narratives that legitimize political violence; they can be strong indicators of an individual's exposure to extremist content and reinforce the predisposition to commit acts of politically motivated violence. At the same time, in the entire corpus of texts on offline–online relations in the radical-right social movement, relatively little is said about the group level of participation, the structure of relations between online organizations, and how their communication is reflected on the streets.

What is particularly important in the context of this article is that there is little systematic knowledge about the structure of far-right civil society in Poland and whether there are strong grassroots connections among the various groups or whether they are tightly integrated into national organizations.

Networks of Right-Wing Organizations in Poland

Given the opportunities that emerged in mainstream politics as well as the observed revival of the right-wing organizations, in 2016, we collected data on the contacts of the Polish far right on the social media platform Facebook, as it was one of the most popular social media platforms in Poland.[3] The data set is based on mutual likes (pages liked) of far-right organizations on Facebook. We assume that the likes reflect the structure of relationships between the organizations.

The first step in the data collection procedure was to identify the names of the main far-right organizations well known to experts and journalists as organizations characterized by populist national ideology, numerous anti-immigrant and chauvinistic communications, and protests against the LGBT+ community. Having a list of five major Polish far-right organizations (All-Polish Youth–MW, National Radical Camp–ONR, National Movement–RN, Autonomous Nationalists–AN, and National Rebirth of Poland–NOP), we initiated the procedure of snowballing until the range of available actors was reached. The procedure was repeated starting with each new emerging actor identified as a far-right organization. This resulted in a single network component reflecting the organizations' relationships based on mutual liking of each other's Facebook accounts.[4]

We distinguished three levels in the created network:

1) Organizations operating at the national level—the largest organizations of the extreme right, with which we started the snowballing procedure.
2) Regional organizations—organizations which are regional chapters of national organizations. These organizations are embedded in regions of the country that are equivalent to voivodeships or historical provinces of Poland.
3) Local organizations—organizations connected with the previous two types of organizations, but who do not have their formal counterparts at the regional or national levels.[5]

For reasons of visibility and the need to reduce the network size, we have excluded local chapters of national far-right organizations. Only local organizations that were not formal branches of national organizations remained in the network component. These organizations can be called grassroots, especially because they took their name from the place from which they originated: National Myszków (*Narodowy Myszków*), Patriots from Kluczbork (*Kluczborscy Patrioci*), and alike.

Below we present three network graphs depicting the three levels of relationships between organizations. Eighteen actors representing national organizations are visible in Figure 1. This component is divided into two clusters (communities). They represent two groups of the Polish far right. On the right, the largest nationalist organizations such as ONR, NOP, MW, and RN are linked to where smaller groups, *Narodowy Świt* (National Dawn), *Nacjonaliści RP* (Nationalists RP), *Związek Jaszczurczy* (Lizard Union), and *Białe Orły* (White Eagles) are situated. The second cluster is populated by organizations of a neo-Nazi profile, including Autonomous Nationalists, groups belonging to the so-called Third Position, and neopagan organizations. One such organization, Niklot, is the strongest broker between the nationalist's cluster and the neo-Nazi's community.

The second level (Figure 2) of the network is composed of regional organizations. There are 59 organizations of this type. It should be noted that this level mirrors the structure of the network of national organizations. As in the previous case, there are two subgroups here, a larger group of nationalists on the left and neo-Nazi organizations in the smaller community.

Here, the strongest brokers between the two clusters are organizations from the Podkarpacie region. This is the region dubbed as the "bastion of PiS" (Law and Justice). The ruling party Law and Justice won the majority of votes in Podkarpacie in the 2015 parliamentary elections. It is also here that the strongest support was given to Andrzej Duda in the 2020 presidential election for a second term, and the far-right candidate Grzegorz Braun came third in the election for mayor of the city of
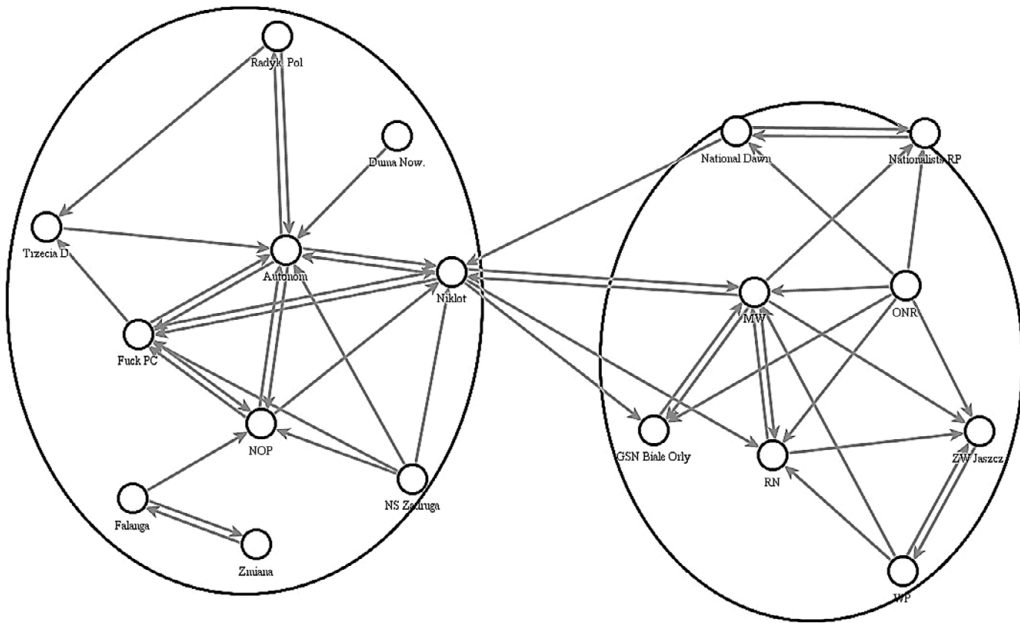
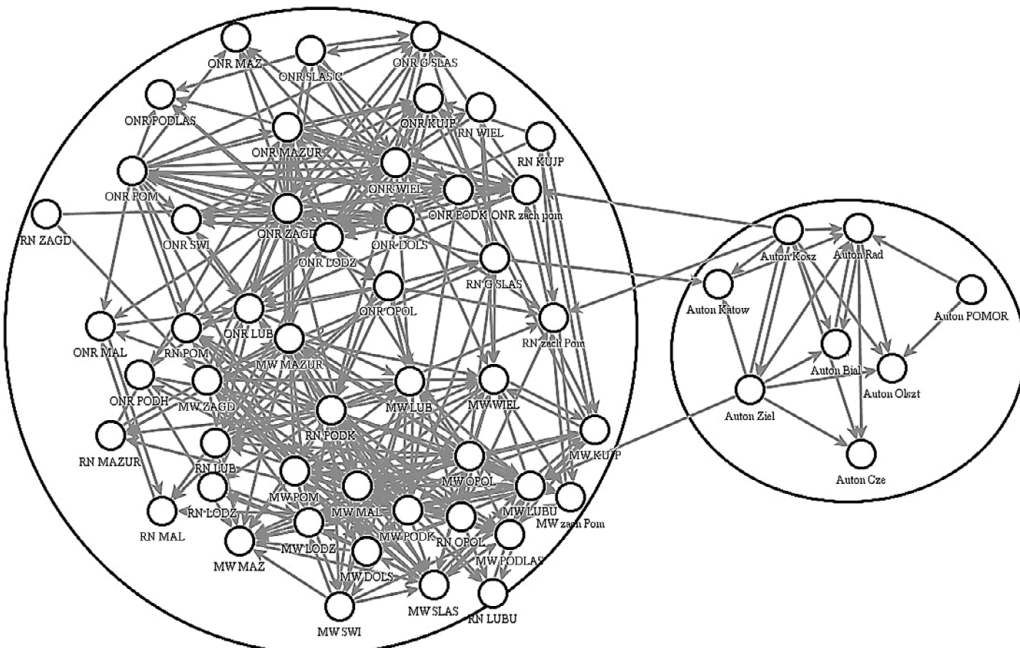**Figure 1.** Network of national organizations.

Figure 2. Network of regional organizations.

Rzeszow in 2019. The network analysis proves that this is also a point of contact between activists of nationalist organizations and more radical neo-Nazi activists.

Finally, the third level (Figure 3) contains the grassroots organizations that are of most interest to us. It contains 78 actors and the density of the whole component is low, as it is only 0.05, which
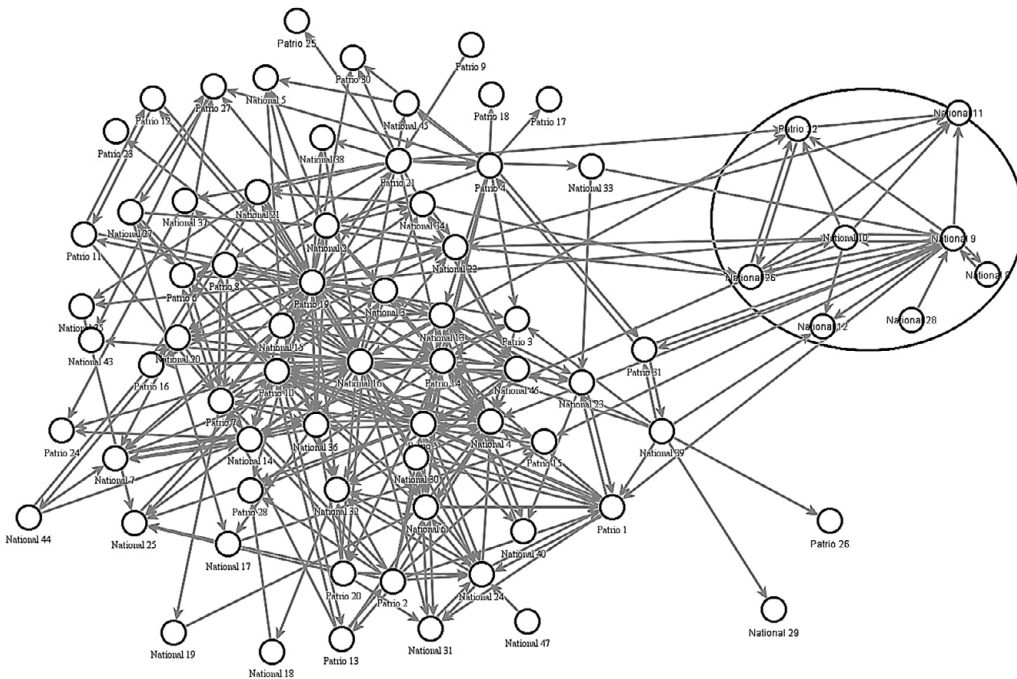
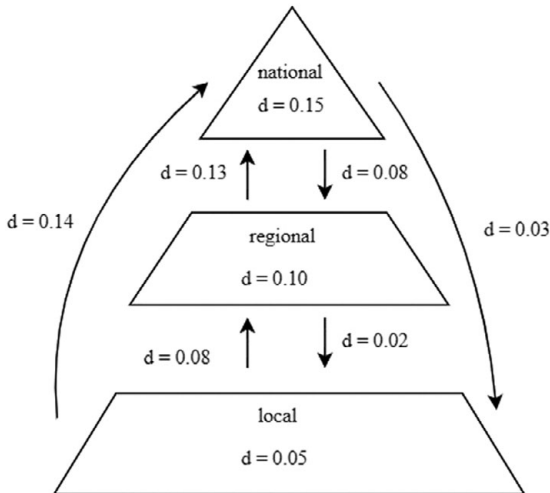**Figure 3.** Network of local organizations.

Figure 4. Interorganizational densities.

means that only 5% of the connections are active. Even though we cannot compare the density between levels because density is a function of network size—the smaller the level, the higher the density—we expected that local organizations would have stronger ties to each other and be composed of numerous smaller local communities. We found that this level tended to be focused on "liking" national organizations (see Figure 4) than their neighbors in other localities.

Figure 4 shows that far-right organizations are pillarized forming local–regional–national connections. The links from local to national organizations are the densest in the whole component.

National organizations give likes back only by a small percentage. We expect that organizations at the national level rely on local organizations because they secure an electorate for political parties they support. However, it is open for interpretation why grassroots organizations are focused on national organizations to this extent. This may be a reflection of the popularity of these organizations in the media and not necessarily the real contacts these groups have with each other. Simply put, local activists may know national organizations from the mass media, but grassroots organizations do not appear in the media, as previous studies prove (Płatek and Płucienniczak 2017). In terms of the relationship between the local and regional levels, grassroots activists no longer exhibit such a strong affinity for organizations known at the national level. On the other hand, the relationship of regional activists with their counterparts at the national level is relatively strong and again suggests a one-sided vertical relationship.

We decided to look closer at one of the subgroups of the local right-wing organizations because the algorithm distinguished just one extremely dense community, composed of organizations located in the Lubelskie voivodeship in southeast Poland. We expected that this community of organizations might be more interested in local affairs than in issues at the national level and therefore are less into mainstream politics. We chose to further investigate through interviews conducted with these organizations.

Why Horizontal Connections? Insights from Local Right-Wing Organizations

The social network analysis conducted in the previous section allowed us to reconstruct the network of right-wing organizations. We have found the pillarized nature of links, and this might be because local right-wing organizations in Poland are driven financially and organizationally by national organizations. However, we found a cluster of local organizations that is an exception because these organizations form strong horizontal ties, and this guided our further analysis that was directed at deepening our understanding of how the networks could have shaped the nature of right-wing organizations in Poland. We expect to find that the identified cluster of local organizations that form stronger horizonal ties with like-minded organizations from other communes and with other members of the local community might care less about issues at the national level (and thus mainstream politics) and emphasize grassroots activities unrelated to participation in political party activities. We also might anticipate these organizations to be less radical in their behavior and attitudes, thus more civil.

We have found that all of these organizations have been locally driven, and when it comes to their size, they are rather small, not exceeding 20–30 members, and began as small informal groups that evolved into officially registered nongovernmental organizations. They were all formed at the same time on the wave of several events building the ideological ground for right-wing activism, such as the aforementioned Day of Remembrance of "Cursed Soldiers" and Independence Marches taking place annually in Warsaw.

The new opportunities to commemorate events and figures in Polish history gave an impetus to some citizens to manifest their pride in Poland's history within the framework of martyrdom and to speak up about the "true version of history" (Interview 1). Thus, the initiators of group formation were enthusiasts of history, like-minded friends, mostly young men, knowing each other from school, neighborhood, or stadium. Some felt empowered by either volunteering or attending the Independence March and wanted to cultivate nationalistic values locally. Others felt disappointed after their economic emigration to the West—in particular different norms, culture, and lack of Christian values—and came back homesick to build a "stronger Poland" (Interview 2 and Interview 4).

The common element of the activities of local, right-wing organizations was the sense of the mission to popularize "forgotten history" and biographies of "Cursed Soldiers" who fought against the communists (Interview 3), as well as to promote patriotism in general. To achieve these goals, activists focused mostly on organizing historical ceremonies, marches, sporting

events to honor soldiers, lectures with historians and writers, and patriotic film screenings, as well as lobbying local authorities to build new monuments, rename streets and public places in order to commemorate important historical events and figures, etc. Historical events that these organizations consider to be important to promote and to spread awareness about refer to the tragic moments in Polish history, in particular Hitler's and Stalin's invasions of Poland on September 1 and 17, 1939, the Warsaw Uprising (1944), massacres of Poles in Volhynia (1943–1945), and the introduction of martial law (1981). All these events are marked by the existence of enemies—Nazis, Soviets, Ukrainians, and communists—which the members of organizations demonize, instead glorifying the sacrifice of victims.

The commemoration of the abovementioned historical events helps these organizations to strengthen an ideological foundation captured in the motto "God, Honor, Fatherland" that was a national symbol of Poland during the interwar period; it was placed on the banners of the armed forces and later appropriated by the far right and nationalists. It has been frequently mentioned during the interviews that right-wing activists perceive this motto as an embodiment of Polishness and justify their activities in its name to defend and promote the values that this slogan underlines. The activists often demonstrate their attachment to Catholic values by organizing holy masses in the memory of Cursed Soldiers or veterans of the Warsaw Uprising. "Honor" from the motto means, for the right-wing activists, opposing and quietly advocating against the present enemies of Poland—that is, political elites, who are seen as the direct "heirs of the communists" (Interview 2); the European Union (Interview 5), perceived as the oppressor; refugees; and "the LGBT ideology" (Interview 7), seen as a symbol of liberal values and immorality that came from the West. In opposition, the right-wing activists highlight the traditional values, which according to them are embodied in the role of the family as the basic social unit. Finally, organizations attach a great role to "Fatherland," which for them means promotion of patriotism in the form of spreading national ideas established at the beginning of the 20th century, commemorating history, supporting families in need, or taking care of the environment. Therefore, organizations' names often contain the word or phrase "national" or "patriotic" in addition to a geographical location that identifies the organization from among others of the same type.

Part of the interview guide referred to cooperation and linkages with other organizations. We find that organizations at the local level from the extracted community do not look up to national organizations and are more interested in horizonal linkages. As expected, we found that this cluster is preoccupied with the idea of locality and all the activities have been directed to local beneficiaries and concerned local historical figures or events. The local organizations found it important to limit their activities to grassroot initiatives and to form ties with like-minded organizations in the region that are also locally organized and focused. Because of their location in the east part of Poland, they often identified "their own cursed soldiers" (Interview 2) describing guerillas who operated in the region, and "their own, traditional beliefs and values" that in their opinion differed from the Western parts of Poland (Interview 6). Cooperation between local groups was based on a shared vision of history, heroes, patriotism, and similar political views; as one of the patriots stated, "There were almost no differences between us" (Interview 6). Members usually got to know each other during events they held locally and later maintained regular contacts due to ideological ties and personal friendships. The cooperation was usually informal and consisted of increasing attendance at marches, celebrations, sports competitions, and concerts organized by other organizations, as well as of sharing information and valuable contacts. The organizations cooperate not only with local like-minded organizations but also with other organizations (cultural, social, and other local associations) and members of the local community, such as the Farmer's Wives' Association, local sports clubs, Catholic priests, schools, social welfare centers, firemen, musicians, local authorities, businessmen, and ordinary people.

The analyzed local communities choose to form stronger horizontal ties (communities) with other organizations and other members of the local community, as they care less about issues at the national level (and thus mainstream politics) and emphasize grassroots activities unrelated to participation in political party activities. In general, the cooperation with local, patriotic groups has been more frequent, stronger, and more consistent than with bigger, nationwide organizations such as All-Polish Youth or National Radical Camp operating at the regional or national levels. One reason for the rather loose ties with these big right-wing organizations is that the interviewed local cluster did not want to be dependent on these organizations' resources, including structural, ideological, and financial ones, in the first place. As stated by interviewees, "We did not want to take orders from above" or "to beg for money" (Interview 2 and Interview 8) and "ask for alms like left-wing groups" (Interview 1). The fact of being self-sufficient was repeatedly emphasized using the example of the lack of funding from large organizations and the state. Local organizations were proud to be almost fully self-financed and to receive some support from the local community, small business, or sometimes local authorities.

A second reason mentioned was that local organizations did not search for popularity, access to politics, and other opportunities. Groups working on a small scale had clearly stated that they have fewer benefits from this type of network than from local connections. However, whereas joint offline activities of local organizations with national ones are rare, an online activity demonstrates a greater sense of belonging and similarity between organizations. Online networking creates an opportunity for both types of organizations to share posts about events and to have access to a bigger fan base on Facebook. This confirms research findings on social movement mobilization mediated by digital technologies mentioned earlier, where social media is perceived as a tool to mobilize and disseminate information. Unlike traditional mobilization explanations, in which people must make intentional decisions, Facebook creates a stream of information that encourages the local organizations to share news and posts.

Interestingly, some local activists have demonstrated disapproval or even derision toward some of the activities taken by organizations at the national level. The interviewees referred to negative experiences with national organizations, such as the recruitment attempts, conflicts, and unclear intentions toward them, which in the opinion of the interviewees stem from the closeness of national organizations to politics and an overall radicalization of views. It was often expressed during the interviews that the local organizations stay away from the activities involving right-wing activists who are the closest to National Movement or Confederation, such as collecting signatures and sharing information, as well as using its infrastructure and contacts.

Local right-wing organizations of the identified cluster clearly distance themselves from politics and seek to achieve this by focusing on historical issues, anchoring in local affairs. We have also found these organizations to be deradicalized in their behavior and attitudes because they do not resort to violence or hate speech and do not activate "against" but rather "in favor of." However, at the same time we are aware of two facts. First, they chose to focus on historical issues because they fit into Poland's historical policy that has been especially embraced in the last few years, with highly funded institutions such as the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) or the Pilecki Institute. Both—together with the actions of the Ministries of Culture or Education and Science—promote a conservative vision of history and nationalist historical figures and at times also provide working places for far-right activists. In recent years, further opportunities opened for far-right activism with the establishment of the government-controlled Patriotic Fund or Institute of Nationalist Thought, which provide grants for right-wing groups. Second, they are still right-wing organizations that do share values, objectives, and practices with other organizations, thus creating a solid ground for far-right narratives in the public sphere. More specifically, even if they do not conduct political activity per se and are not interested in politics, they are still important and influential actors because they are effective in creating and diffusing values/norms and thus building a potentially strong conservative electorate without which right-wing political parties could not be sustained.

Conclusion

The new political and cultural circumstances that have emerged in Poland since 2015 call for the greater investigation of the conservative strand of society that has received very limited interest in the scholarly literature. The literature abounds with studies of liberal organizations in the region; this concentration resulted in the failure to acknowledge that the civil society in Poland, but also in other CEE countries, is more diverse, encompassing various forms of participation as well as various types of organizations. The value dimension seems to be overlooked in not only research on civil society but also the organizational networks between civil society organizations. Thus, we chose to contribute to filling the gap by studying the structure of far-right civil society in Poland and whether there are grassroots connections among the various groups or whether they are tightly integrated into national organizations.

The SNA of links in social media allowed us to reconstruct the network of right-wing organizations. As suggested by the literature (Ekiert 2020), we found the pillarized nature of civil right-wing civil society that forms vertical type of networks consisting of local–regional–national links in Poland. We believe that this structure might be shaped by the fact that many right-wing local and regional organizations are driven financially and organizationally by national organizations. Most organizations at the local level might look up to the national level and are less likely to form horizonal links because national organizations sustain and nourish them and offer other opportunities (popularity, access to politics, etc.). Organizations at the national level, in turn, may rely on local organizations because they secure an electorate for political parties they support and provide them with popularity and "base."

We were able to closely study a cluster of local right-wing organizations that form stronger horizontal links, thus demonstrating distinct features from the majority of local right-wing organizations that form stronger vertical links. The SNA guided our further study directed at deepening our understanding of how the networks could have shaped the nature of right-wing organizations in Poland. The semistructured interviews allowed us to see better to what extent the online networks (and activism) relate to offline links. To date, empirical studies on online organizational communication have produced mixed results. Therefore, our study combined an analysis of the far right's online network of contacts and interviews conducted in the field with activists of movement organizations selected on the basis of the network structure. Our interviews confirmed that the connections and the importance of network and structures for participation are related to offline reality.

Specifically, through interviews we have found that the identified cluster of local right-wing organizations in 2016 indeed exists today, and the local organizations are related. In other words, the SNA shows that right-wing organizations form such a pillar; nevertheless, there is a cluster in Lubelskie voivodship that stands out because it networks very strongly horizontally, and the interviews confirm that indeed online links exist also offline. We were able to learn that these organizations care more about the links with like-minded local or regional organizations than with national organizations.

Our expectations regarding their activity and nature have also been supported. These organizations, in contrast to other local organizations that form strong vertical linkages, chose to limit their activity to grassroots initiatives with other similar organizations in the region or locally based organizations and do not search for political allies. They show no inclination toward radicalization and distance themselves from those local right-wing organizations that care more about the connections with national organizations, which have tendencies to become more radical in their behavior.

However, we treat the political neutrality of the studied cluster of local right-wing organizations with caution. The values, norms, and patterns of civic engagement are influenced by the local political culture, which in turn is formed through interactions of citizens with organizations. Thus, even if these organizations work locally, they still provide an ideological fuel to right-wing populist

organizations, especially those close to the government, which allows the right-wing parties in power to be well prepared ideologically. Thus, indirectly these organizations also are deepening the process of democratic backsliding, contributing to the right-wing populists' increasing concentration of political power.

Notes

1 Following Minkenberg ([2000](), 174–75), we define radical right groups as those characterized by "a political ideology, the core element of which is a myth of a homogeneous nation, a romantic and populist ultranationalism which is directed against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of individualism and universalism." The contemporary far right is not interested in returning to predemocratic regimes such as monarchy or feudalism, and opts for government by the people but in terms of ethnocracy instead of democracy.

2 From a formal perspective the current parliamentary majority and the government are formed by the United Right (*Zjednoczona Prawica*) coalition formed by Solidarity Poland (*Solidarna Polska*) and Law and Justice, with two right-wing coalition partners—Agreement (*Porozumienie*), more neoliberal and market-oriented, that left the coalition in 2021, and Solidary Poland (*Solidarna Polska*), even more radical on domestic and external issues, the EU in particular, but because of the bigger popularity and popular support of the Law and Justice, the government is associated with PiS and such name exists in public discourse, therefore we adapt it as well.

3 The year 2016 was a crucial year for online activities for the radical right in Poland, as there was a big action in fall of 2016 of deleting profiles and fan pages connected to the far right in Poland, against which there was even a petition to the Polish government to contest this action. In this respect, the networks that developed until 2016 seem to be more "organic" as some groups never reestablished their online profiles post-2016 or could not do so, as some names of groups were cyber-squatted by leftist or antifascist activists.

4 A network is a set of nodes and a set of ties between nodes; this means that it is possible to have a network that is made up of several collections of nodes, where no connections exist between nodes on different collections. In the formal language of network analysis these collections are called components. In social network theory, social relationships are viewed in terms of nodes and ties. Nodes are the individual actors (in our case organizations of the radical right) within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. Throughout the text, we also use the words "links," "connections," and "ties" interchangeably. Our network is one mode (which means it reflects ties between actors where links are likes given to each other), directed (which means that ties have their direction, for example, *All Polish Youth* likes *Nationalists RP* but not vice versa) and binomial (contains only information about the existence or absence of a relationship) graph consisting of 155 nodes (density = 0.069; number of ties = 1,656; average degree = 10.6; SD = 0.254). The Newman–Girvan (Girvan and Newman [2002]()) algorithm, offered by UCInet package, was used to identify cohesive subgroups at each network level separately. This is an algorithm that allows you to identify clusters in the components of the network, thus identifying hidden communities. We also use the words "cluster" and "community" interchangeably.

5 "Network density" describes the portion of the *potential* links in a network to the portion *actual* ties. Thus, strong horizontal ties are defined as ties that are dense within community at the distinguished level while they are less dense at the border of this community with the rest of the network. Vertical ties are those links between the distinguished levels of the network (vertical relation).

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Interviews with Grassroots Organizations (Lubelskie voivodship)

Interview 1: September 7, 2021
Interview 2: September 8, 2021
Interview 3: September 9, 2021
Interview 4: September 10, 2021
Interview 5: September 21, 2021
Interview 6: September 23, 2021
Interview 7: September 23, 2021
Interview 8: October 2, 2021