Rafał Piotr PARADOWSKI

Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa
ORCID: 0000-0001-6267-2652

Anti-Ukrainian Discourse in Poland as a Tool of Polarisation and Delegitimation. An Analysis of Political Communication on Twitter

Abstract: This article examines the political functions of anti-Ukrainian discourse in the Polish digital sphere, with a focus on Twitter/X activity following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The study is based on a corpus of 64,897 tweets and a methodology combining internet data processing techniques, the "thick big data" approach, and critical discourse analysis. It identifies dominant narratives, enemy representations, and rhetorical strategies. The findings indicate that anti-Ukrainian content is not spontaneous, but forms part of an ideologically driven strategy and a tool of political mobilisation. This discourse is marked by high emotional intensity, polarising rhetoric, the delegitimation of political elites, and the instrumental use of historical memory. Its primary function is to consolidate anti-system communities, reinforce exclusion-based political identities, and undermine trust in public institutions. The article contributes to research on digital political communication, populist rhetoric, and mechanisms of polarisation under conditions of social tension and geopolitical destabilisation.

Key words: anti-Ukrainian discourse, political mobilisation, digital political communication, polarisation, enemy construction

Introduction

The military conflict triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has not only reshaped regional geopolitics, but also catalysed profound social and political changes in neighbouring countries. Poland experienced a rapid influx of refugees, intensifying debates on migration, security, and Polish–Ukrainian relations. In this context, anti-Ukrainian discourse emerged in the Polish online space – particularly on Twitter (X) – affecting public sentiment and attracting academic interest.

This discourse has drawn on pre-existing social tensions and anxieties. Studies among Polish respondents have highlighted widespread resentment towards Ukrainian refugees, especially concerns over access to public services and perceived economic privileges (Łuczaj, 2024; Sadura & Sierakowski, 2022). These fears have been further reinforced by historical narratives and national trauma – particularly those invoking the Volhynian massacre – which legitimise anti-Ukrainian rhetoric through collective memory. As Trosiak (2021) notes, traumatic events such as forced resettlements and ethnic violence are not only remembered, but can be politically instrumentalised to frame intergroup relations and fuel antagonistic discourse. Though less visible than in other Central European countries (Wenzel, Stasiuk-Krajewska, 2023), such narratives remain persistent.

Importantly, social media platforms – particularly Twitter – play a crucial role in shaping public discourse during periods of crisis. The platform's open architecture, real-time dynamics, and low barriers to entry have made it a central venue for expressing

political sentiment, circulating ideological content, and forming polarised user communities (Caulfield et al., 2023; Turska-Kawa, Stępień-Lampa, 2023). Although used by only a minority of Polish citizens – 18% (Tresignie et al., 2022), Twitter serves as a discursive amplifier due to the presence of journalists, politicians, and activists.

Previous studies have shown that anti-Ukrainian propaganda is deeply embedded in broader disinformation strategies pursued by both state and non-state actors (Chmielewska, 2023; Łukasik-Turecka, 2024). As noted by Jankowiak (2022) and Turska-Kawa, Stępień-Lampa (2023), such content often involves conspiracy-driven narratives, portraying refugees as destabilising agents, the migration crisis as a Western manipulation, or Ukraine as secretly exerting control over Polish political and economic life. The aim of these narratives goes beyond shaping perceptions of Ukrainians – they seek to exacerbate internal divisions and weaken societal resilience across allied countries (Alieva et al., 2022; Lai et al., 2024).

Tymińska (2023) observed a marked increase in such rhetoric after the full-scale invasion, particularly around claims of economic injustice and alleged privileges granted to Ukrainians. Historical motifs also feature prominently in the discourse – especially references to nationalism and the Volhynian massacre – which, according to Łuczaj (2024), form a core thematic cluster alongside issues of national security, geopolitics, and symbolic conflict.

This discourse is also politically instrumentalised. As noted by Łuczaj (2024), politicians from Konfederacja, right-wing commentators, and niche online communities have contributed to what he terms "anti-Ukrainisation discourse." Similar instrumental uses have been observed in Hungary, Slovakia, and Moldova, where historical grievances are mobilised to discredit pro-Western policies (Tkáčová, 2025; Urbán et al., 2023; Zadorożna, Butuc, 2024). Survey evidence situates Poland as comparatively resilient to pro-Kremlin claims, Czechia intermediate, and Slovakia the most susceptible, while beliefs about refugee "privileges" are widespread across all three publics (Wenzel, Stasiuk-Krajewska, 2023). At the media-system level, Hungarian public service media have mainstreamed several false frames since 2022, illustrating how official broadcasters can normalise disinformation (Urbán et al., 2023). In Slovakia, qualitative analysis maps a stable repertoire – from anti-EU "dictatorship" and anti-Americanism to the demonisation of Ukraine and justificatory frames for Russia (Tkáčová, 2025). Beyond the Visegrád area, a Poland–Moldova comparison shows shared operational features – elite-splitting themes, anti-Western distrust, emotional mobilisation, and platform-centred diffusion – underscoring the portability of these scripts (Zadorożna, Butuc, 2024).

In light of these dynamics, this study investigates anti-Ukrainian discourse in the Polish digital sphere, with particular focus on political communication on Twitter/X. It addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant topics and motifs within anti-Ukrainian discourse?
2. How is the image of enemy – Ukraine and Ukrainians – constructed and disseminated?
3. In what ways is anti-Ukrainian discourse employed in political communication, and what consequences may arise from its use?

This analysis is guided by three assumptions:

 – The discourse reacts to both real-time events and deep historical frames;
 – It serves identity-building functions through exclusion and enemy construction;
 – It acts as a tool of political mobilisation, especially in far-right online ecosystems.

Research Design

The study draws on a corpus of publicly available tweets and associated metadata – such as user identifiers, message types, timestamps, and engagement indicators – to analyse anti-Ukrainian content within digital political communication. Data were collected using the Twitter Academic API via Postman (Tornes, 2021). Twitter was chosen for its open structure and political relevance. Similar datasets have informed prior studies on elections, polarisation, and social mobilisation (Ganczewski, Jemielniak, 2022; Paradowski, 2021).

Fig. 1. General structure of the database

Hashtag	First tweet	Last tweet	n	%
#nieidźmynatęwojnę	2022-10-17	2023-05-02	373	0.2
#stopamerykanizacjipolski	2022-08-26	2023-05-01	2,693	1.4
#stopukrainizacjipolski	2022-01-04	2023-05-03	137,137	72.0
#tonienaszawojna	2022-01-19	2023-05-03	43,098	22.6
#wolynpamietamy	2022-01-05	2023-05-03	7,110	3.7
TOTAL			**190,411**	**100.0**

Source: Own study.

The initial database comprised 190,411 tweets published between January 2022 and early May 2023, retrieved via the Twitter Academic API on 4 May 2023. Identification of anti-Ukrainian discourse was based on two main criteria: (a) elevated user engagement following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and (b) semantic reference to the conflict or to Ukrainian individuals or groups. Relevant hashtags were first identified through exploratory searches using Twitter's internal interface, including manual browsing of tweets, engagement trails, and platform-generated recommendations. This initial mapping was then cross-validated using the online Trends Tool from Indiana University (Davis et al., 2016), which confirmed the prominence of selected items over time. Five main hashtags – including diacritic-free variants – were used as filtering anchors. The most frequent of these were #stopukrainizacjipolski ("stop the Ukrainisation of Poland", 72.0%) and #tonienaszawojna ("this is not our war", 22.6%). After removing duplicates and retweets, the cleaned dataset contained 64,897 unique entries: 11,721 original tweets, 40,397 replies, and 12,779 quote tweets. Among the 5,329 unique users, a sample of 14 high-volume accounts (responsible for over 20% of tweets) was examined using Botometer (Sayyadiharikandeh et al., 2020), confirming they were not generated by bots.

To map the discursive strategies and political valence of the data, multiple analytical subsets were created (Figure 2). These were designed to capture both volumetric properties (e.g. hashtag distributions, mention frequency) and qualitative dimensions (stance,

affect, rhetorical strategy). One supplementary dataset – comprising replies to opinion leaders – was retrieved separately to investigate dialogical patterns.

Quantitative analyses were performed in Excel (e.g., frequencies, timestamps, interaction metrics), while qualitative coding followed the principles of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2000; Wodak, Meyer, 2016). Hashtag and mention networks were explored using KWIC Concordance (Tsukamoto, 2020). The study applied a "thick big data" model (Ganczewski, Jemielniak, 2022; Jemielniak, 2018), which integrates high-volume extraction with deep, interpretive coding of socially resonant content.

All qualitative analyses were supported by generative artificial intelligence (ChatGPT 4-turbo), used iteratively for coding and categorisation. The model analysed selected data subsets, proposed thematic labels, performed test coding, and submitted outputs for researcher evaluation. Final coding was completed with genAI assistance and manual verification. All outputs reflect a human – AI collaboration. While genAI aided data structuring and meaning exploration, all final decisions were researcher-driven. The procedure ensured transparency and replicability. Details of AI-assisted classifications are presented in subsequent analytic sections.

Visual materials were treated as integral to each post's meaning (identity signalling, affective cues, symbolic framing). Images were examined alongside the accompanying text but were not coded as an independent dataset, and no separate visual taxonomy or computer-vision procedures were applied. Where available, visuals informed stance and rhetoric assignments without overriding textual evidence. A practical constraint was media attrition: several high-engagement tweets had been deleted by the time of data collection, leaving only their text and non-functional media links in the dataset.

Fig. 2. Analytical Subsets Used in the Study

ID	Name	Base Dataset	Selected Data	Selection Procedure	Analytical Purpose
1	2	3	4	5	6
A	Raw dataset	Full corpus	190,411 tweets	Collected via Twitter Academic API (01.2022–05.2023). Retweets retained for temporal analysis.	Temporal dynamics; monthly trend reconstruction; hashtag emergence timing.
B	Cleaned dataset	A	64,897 tweets	Retweets and duplicates removed; 14 most active accounts screened with Botometer.	Base dataset for CDA, emotion/rhetoric mapping, and stratified sampling.
C	Hashtag subset	A	84 hashtags (99,273 occurrences)	All hashtags extracted; 84 types selected using frequency threshold $\geq$ 0.1% from initial 116,300 hashtags.	Thematic classification; motif alignment; co-occurrence matrix construction.
D	High-engagement tweets	B	101 tweets	Top-liked tweets (= 25.13% of all likes); manually classified by stance.	Basis for rhetorical, emotional, and representational coding.
E	Anti-Ukrainian tweets	D	90 tweets	Only tweets with anti-Ukrainian stance selected for deep coding.	Typology of enemy images, rhetorical strategies, and two-level affective annotation (dominant + secondary).

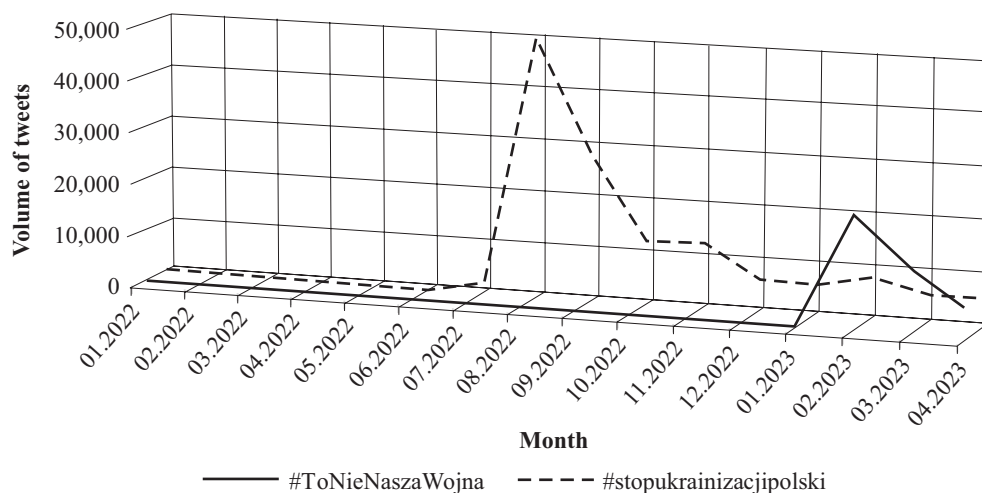| 1	2	3	4	5	6
F	Mentions of political actors	B	25,069 mentions (of 36 user accounts)	All user mentions (n = 82,354) extracted; 43 most-mentioned accounts selected using ≥ 0.3% frequency threshold; 7 accounts excluded due to deletion/inactivity.	Actor salience; elite visibility; polarisation of symbolic authority (anti-elite vs. pro-national frames).
G	Tweets tagging politicians	B	119 tweets (70 PiS / 49 Konfederacja)	Top-liked tweets tagging politicians (up to 10 per user); grouped by party affiliation.	Public attitudes toward elites; contrastive framing (delegitimisation vs. affirmation).
H	Anti-government tweets	E	23 tweets	Explicit anti-government framing coded within Subset E.	Discursive strategies of delegitimisation and symbolic mobilisation.
I	Replies to influencers	Independent set	44 replies	Replies collected to 10 most-liked influencer tweets; 94 replies retrieved (27.08.2024.); 44 top-liked selected using median threshold (≥ 43 likes).	Audience alignment and resistance; dialogic functions; ideological positioning.

Source: Own study.

Temporal and Thematic Dynamics of the Discourse

This section examines the evolution of anti-Ukrainian discourse over time and the dominant thematic motifs reflected in the analysed corpus. Using metadata from the subset C, the analysis identifies temporal surges, hashtag co-occurrences, and symbolic anchors shaping ideological boundaries. Thematic classification of hashtags was supported by genAI, which proposed initial categories later validated by the researcher. The final classification achieved a 52% exact match with human coding and 61% flexible equivalence. Misclassifications were typically related to niche ideological terms or the use of irony.

Hashtag frequency varied across time. Two labels – #wolynpamietamy ("we remember Volhynia") and #stopukrainizacjipolski – had been present before the February 2022 invasion, but their volume increased thirtyfold in March 2022. The first major spike in activity occurred in July 2022, peaking in August and September (50,832 and 28,296 tweets, respectively), followed by a second surge in February and March 2023 (30,963 and 19,293 tweets). The appearance of new hashtags – #stopamerykanizacjipolski ("stop the Americanisation of Poland") in August 2022 and #nieidźmynatęwojnę ("let's not go to this war") in late autumn – contributed to this wave, although their cumulative volume remained modest.
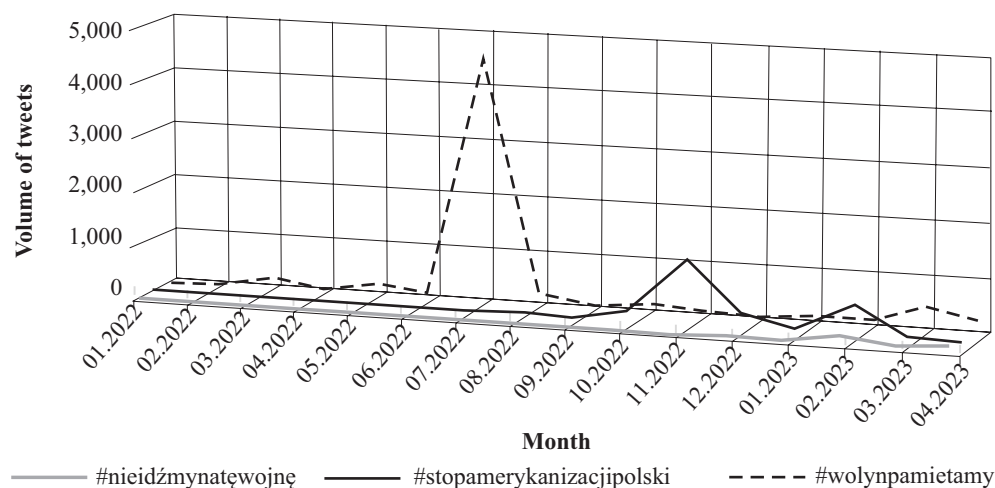
The use of #wolynpamietamy ("we remember Volyn") peaked in July 2022, coinciding with the anniversary of the Volhynian massacre. In contrast, #tonienaszawojna ("this is not our war") surged in February 2023 (22,092 tweets, up from 477 in January), amplifying scepticism toward military support for Ukraine – particularly in the context of the planned spring counteroffensive. From that point onward, it became one of the dominant labels in the discourse. The dynamics of #stopukrainizacjipolski followed a strategic trajectory: after peaking between August and November 2022 (12,049–50,535 tweets

Fig. 3. Tweets' timeline. Part 1

Source: own study.

Fig. 4. Tweets' timeline. Part 2

Source: own study.

per month), its use declined sharply. This suggests instrumental deployment in shaping sentiment as initial humanitarian solidarity diminished.

To reconstruct the dominant thematic motifs, we analysed the internal structure and co-occurrence of the most frequent hashtags. The selected labels (n = 84) reflect core ideological anchors within the discourse and serve as indicators of stance, identity signalling, and community boundaries. Two clusters dominated: hashtags expressing hostility toward refugees (67%) and those rejecting military engagement in Ukraine (10.8%). The most prominent was #stopukrainizacjipolski, accompanied by various variants such as #stopbanderyzacjipolski or #ukronazis, all conveying strong negative sentiment.

Fig. 5. Thematic Classification of Hashtags

Category	Examples of Hashtags (n)	%
Anti-Ukrainian	#stopukrainizacjipolski (58532), #stoptheukrainizationofpoland (4018), #sto-pukrainizationofpoland (1813), #stopbanderyzacjipolski (631), #ukronazis (370)	67.00
Anti-war	#tonienaszawojna (8995), #toniejestnaszawojna (524), #nienaszawojna (405), #polskiruchantywojenny (387), #nieumieramzabachmut (221)	10.77
Military	#ukraina (1045), #ukraine (629), #russia (610), #ukrainerussiawar (498), #wojna (410)	5.77
Informational	#wieszwiecej (1181), #wieszwięcej (819), #polska (594), #inflacja (542)	5.00
Domestic politics	#wybory2023 (976), #pis (539), #pistolewactwo (475), #dobryrzadnatrudneczasy (405)	4.56
Volhynian massacre	#wolynpamietamy (857), #wołyńpamiętamy (659), #wołyń (509), #ounupa (162), #nazi (160)	2.72
Nationalist	#rodacykamraci (999), #kamraci (277), #lewactwotogłupota (214), #żebypolsk-abyłapolska (211), #stopjudaizacjipolski (177)	2.31
Anti-American	#stopamerykanizacjipolski (1032)	1.04
Miscellaneous	#art (201), #żyjęwpolsce (176), #standwithukraine (143)	0.52
Anti-vaccine	#covid19 (197), #stopsegregacjisanitarnej (113)	0.31

Source: Own study.

The anti-war theme, led by #tonienaszawojna, typically rejected support for Ukraine rather than promoting pacifism per se. Its instrumental character is underscored by co-occurrence with #stopukrainizacjipolski in over one-quarter of cases, while other pacifist labels were marginal. This alignment suggests that anti-war discourse in this context often functioned as a rhetorical extension of anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

Fig. 6. Hashtag Co-Occurrences

Primary Hashtag	Top Co-occurring Hashtag	Co-occurrence (%)
#stopukrainizacjipolski	#tonienaszawojna	4.25
#tonienaszawojna	#stopukrainizacjipolski	26.63
#polskiruchantywojenny	#tonienaszawojna	93.04
#stopamerykanizacjipolski	#stopukrainizacjipolski	41.99
#rodacykamraci	#stopukrainizacjipolski	95.19
#wołyń(…) / #wolyn(…)	#stopukrainizacjipolski	20.49

Source: Own study.

Historical trauma was also used as a vector for anti-Ukrainian messaging. Although hashtags referencing the Volhynian massacre appeared less frequently, they were deliberately embedded within broader antagonistic frames. Among the 639 users who posted Volhynia-related content, 94 also used #stopukrainizacjipolski, indicating an effort to fuse historical grievance with contemporary rejection. Narratives critical of Western influence were likewise ideologically aligned: nearly half of the tweets tagged #stopamerykanizacjipolski co-occurred with anti-Ukrainian hashtags. A similar pattern applied to the label #rodacykamraci, a far-right identity marker that appeared almost exclusively in anti-Ukrainian contexts. Although quantitatively marginal, a subset of tweets referenced conspiracy themes – including narratives about U.S. military interests, global Jewish elites, or symbolic colonisation. These messages amplified the

affective charge of the discourse and contributed to a wider ecosystem of distrust and symbolic polarisation.

Framing the Enemy: Representations, Rhetoric and Emotion

This section examines the ways in which Ukraine and Ukrainians were symbolically constructed as enemies in the analysed discourse. The analysis draws on a high-engagement subset of 90 tweets classified as anti-Ukrainian (subset E), selected from a broader set of the top 101 posts with the greatest visibility (subset D). Stereotypical representations were classified into six primary categories (plus a residual "undefined" group), reflecting recurring enemy images in the discourse. Rhetorical strategies were grouped into six functional types and an "undefined" class. Emotional tone was coded using a dual-layer annotation scheme: each tweet was assigned both a dominant and a secondary affect, based on a predefined taxonomy of ten emotional categories. The AI provided initial classifications for each layer, which were revised and confirmed by the researcher. Agreement rates reached 88.8% for image types, 72.2% for rhetorical strategies, and between 53.3% and 77.8% for emotions.

Stance classification revealed a marked asymmetry. Of the 101 tweets, 90 were clearly anti-Ukrainian, 8 pro-Ukrainian, and 3 indeterminate. Interestingly, only 9 tweets referred to Russia (8 critical, 1 supportive), and 88 of the 90 anti-Ukrainian tweets omitted any mention of it. This suggests that antagonism was constructed largely independently of geopolitical alignment, reflecting symbolic boundaries internal to the Polish cultural and ideological field.

Fig. 7. Type of Representation of Ukraine/Ukrainians

Type of representation	Tweets [n]	Likes [n]	Description
Historical aggressor	9	12,478	Ukraine as the heir to crimes (UPA, Volhynia massacre, Bandera legacy)
Economic parasite	10	12,045	Financial burden, social abuse, unfair trade
Political manipulator	5	6,918	Influence on the Polish government, media control, betrayal by political elites
War faker	4	5,810	Illegitimate use of refugee status
Cultural threat	3	4,691	Linguistic, symbolic, and educational expansion; displacement of Polishness
False brother	3	4,350	Emphasising disloyalty while pretending to share a common fate
Undefined	56	79,849	Insufficient data to assign a clear type
TOTAL	**90**	**126,141**	

Source: Own study.

Stereotypical representations followed recurring discursive patterns. The most frequent portrayals framed Ukrainians as historical aggressors (26.9% of likes), invoking crimes such as the Volhynia massacre to morally justify contemporary antagonism. The economic parasite trope (26.0%) depicted Ukrainians as beneficiaries of Polish social services or financial aid. Other types included: political manipulators (15.0%), presented as covert influencers of domestic elites; war fakers (12.5%), accused of exploiting refugee status under false pretences; cultural threats (10.1%), signalling symbolic displace-

ment; and false brothers (9.3%), suggesting betrayal under the guise of kinship. A large share (62%) could not be conclusively categorised, yet often conveyed implicit hostility.

Fig. 8. Rhetorical Strategies

Type of strategy	Tweets [n]	Likes [n]	Description
Polarisation	23	33,731	Construction of a strong "us–them" divide (e.g., Poles vs. authorities, Ukrainians, media)
Intimidation	17	23,369	Narratives highlighting military, geopolitical, or existential threats to Poles
Blame reversal	16	19,474	Ukrainians portrayed as beneficiaries at the expense of Poles; Poles as victims
Grassrooting	14	18,909	Apparent detachment: presenting oneself as a source of civic observation and factual insight
Undefined	14	19,485	Posts lacking distinct rhetorical devices
Demonisation	6	11,173	Ukrainians (or Ukraine) depicted as evil, morally or culturally degenerate; often dehumanising
TOTAL	90	126,141	

Source: Own study.

Rhetorically, six strategies structured antagonism. The most resonant was polarisation (26.7% of likes), which constructed a binary between "true Poles" and Ukrainian or elite actors. Intimidation tactics (18.5%) emphasised existential threats – conscription, military danger, or collapse of public services – linked to support for Ukraine. Blame reversal (15.4%) framed Poles as victims of Ukrainian privilege, appealing to moral outrage. Grassrooting (15.0%) simulated civic authenticity, presenting users as neutral observers. Demonisation (8.9%) dehumanised Ukrainians using moral or cultural defilement motifs. Finally, undefined strategies (15.4%) lacked clear rhetorical devices but relied on affective markers.

Fig. 9. Emotions in the Discourse

Category	Dominant (n)	Secondary (n)	Total (%)	Description
Opposition / Disagreement	31	17	30.77	Active disagreement, resistance, contestation of the dominant discourse
Anger	12	17	18.59	Frustration, outrage, verbal aggression
Moral contempt / Disgust	12	6	11.54	Condemnation, moral superiority, disdain
Fear / Anxiety	9	5	8.97	Concerns about safety, future, political consequences
Envy / Inequality	9	4	8.33	Sense of injustice, social resentment, jealousy of privilege
Sarcasm / Irony	0	13	8.33	Ridicule, mockery, ironic distancing
National pride / Patriotism	8	2	6.41	Affirmation of national identity, Polishness, community
Undefined	5	nd	3.21	Unclear or non-specific emotional content
Hatred / Extreme hostility	4	0	2.56	Vulgarities, dehumanisation, aggression
Grief / Sadness / Disappointment	0	2	1.28	Loss, nostalgia, disillusionment
TOTAL	90	66	100.00	

Source: Own study.

The emotional tone was similarly stratified. Dominant affects included opposition (30.8%), anger (18.6%), and moral contempt (11.5%). These were supplemented by fear/anxiety (9.0%), envy/inequality (8.3%), sarcasm (8.3%), national pride (6.4%), and isolated cases of hatred (2.6%) and grief (1.3%). The affective landscape revealed a discourse deeply rooted in defiance, marginalisation, and emotional mobilisation. High-resonance tweets often derived their impact from emotionally charged, symbolic frames rather than complex argumentation.

Even tweets without explicit labels contributed to a broader discursive logic of exclusion and rejection, often by discouraging solidarity or undermining public support for aid to Ukrainians. Collectively, these elements constructed a hostile symbolic environment in which Ukrainians were depicted as morally inferior, economically parasitic, politically manipulative, and culturally invasive. This antagonistic imagery operated not in isolation, but in tandem with rhetorical and affective mechanisms that reinforced identity boundaries and justified exclusion. The strategic use of genAI streamlined the classification process but remained embedded within a human interpretive framework, ensuring analytical rigour and transparency.

In high-engagement posts, visuals typically reinforced rather than extended the textual message. Recurring motifs included protest-style posters echoing key hashtags, maps and crossed-out Ukrainian flags, and meme-like photos suggesting Ukrainian prosperity in Poland (e.g., luxury cars with UA plates or shop signage). Pro-Ukrainian replies often used satirical edits of ultranationalist electoral posters modified with Cyrillic script or Russian symbols to mock alleged sympathies. Rarely, decontextualised historical photographs referring to the Volhynia massacre appeared; these were marginal in volume. Read alongside text, such images acted as identity signals and affective cues rather than independent conveyors of new meanings.

Political Instrumentalisation

The anti-Ukrainian discourse on Polish Twitter/X was not only a site of symbolic contestation but also a vehicle for political mobilisation. Its content strategically targeted institutional actors, mobilised anti-establishment sentiment, and elevated nationalist counter-elites.

Analysis of 25,069 user mentions (subset F) revealed that the most referenced accounts belonged to nationalist influencers, politicians from the ruling party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), and the far-right Konfederacja. Despite their frequent mention, ruling party politicians showed no reactive engagement, suggesting that they were primarily targets of criticism. In contrast, Konfederacja figures, notably @grzegorzbraun_ and @koronypolskiej, were more engaged and received predominantly supportive mentions. This asymmetry illustrates the discourse's dual function: it attacked the governing elite while simultaneously legitimising anti-system actors as defenders of national interest.

o assess this dynamic, 119 top-liked tweets referencing politicians were analysed (subset G). The stances of tweets were pre-classified by genAI into three categories: favourable, critical, or neutral. The outputs were then manually reviewed. Only one discrepancy emerged between human and AI classifications, confirming high alignment

and supporting procedural reliability. Of 70 tweets addressing Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, 95.7% were critical – often framed as accusations of betrayal, foreign subservience, or neglect of Polish citizens. Conversely, 79.6% of the 49 tweets involving Konfederacja were supportive, portraying the party as aligned with national authenticity and resistance to globalist or Ukrainian influence.

Fig. 10. Most Frequently Mentioned Users and Their Activity

Category	No. of mentioned users	No. of mentions	Responsive activity of mentioned users	No. of users showing responsive activity
Nationalist activists	12	5,521	861	12 (of 12)
Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	8	9,785	0	0 (of 8)
Konfederacja	6	5,058	162	4 (of 6)
Media	6	2,830	6	2 (of 6)
Anonymous profiles	3	1,163	38	3 (of 3)
Ukrainian authorities	1	712	0	0 (of 1)
TOTAL	**36**	**25,069**	**1,067**	**21 (of 36)**

Note: "Responsive activity of mentioned users" refers to the number of tweets and retweets published by the mentioned accounts that included one or more of the analysed hashtags.
Source: Own study.

TA qualitative review of tweets supporting Konfederacja revealed traces of internal differentiation within the party's elite. Some users endorsed ultranationalist figures for their strongly anti-Ukrainian positions, while also expressing dissatisfaction with the more restrained stance of other representatives. Although anecdotal and not systematically coded, these signals suggest that antagonistic discourse may have served as a tool of symbolic distinction within far-right communities.

Further analysis focused on 23 tweets containing both anti-Ukrainian and anti-government content (subset H). These posts often employed moral delegitimisation. The most frequent strategy was polarisation (n = 10), portraying the government as aligned with foreign interests and opposed to "true Poles" – often using contemptuous language and evoking anger or sarcasm. Blame reversal (n = 6) framed authorities as enabling Ukrainian abuses or neglecting Polish citizens, expressing systemic injustice and moral outrage. Less common strategies included intimidation (n = 4), evoking visions of collapse; grassrooting (n = 2), framing users as civic resisters; and demonisation (n = 1), depicting elites as morally corrupt. Though rare, the latter two amplified radical sentiments. In total, their engagement pattern – marked by low reply rates – suggests a rhetorical posture oriented more toward symbolic mobilisation than deliberative interaction.

The study also explored replies to ideological influencers. To this end, a separate sample of replies was collected in response to the most visible anti-Ukrainian tweets authored by prominent nationalist users (subset I). From this corpus, 44 top-liked replies were selected for close reading and affective analysis. Only a minority (13.6%) of these replies supported the original anti-Ukrainian or conspiratorial message. The overwhelming majority expressed disagreement, correction, or ironic dissent, suggesting that – despite the visibility and amplification of anti-Ukrainian narratives – their

resonance among broader audiences was limited. Notably, supportive replies typically originated from accounts with far-right ideological profiles, as determined through combined human coding and genAI-assisted analysis of user bios, affiliations, and post history.

Together, these patterns show that anti-Ukrainian discourse served to sharpen partisan divides and legitimise symbolic resistance to political and media elites. Its emotional register and selective amplification by influential users point to a broader strategy of ideological consolidation rather than mass persuasion.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that during the analysed period – approximately from early 2022 to mid-2023 – anti-Ukrainian discourse on Polish Twitter/X functioned as a highly structured and ideologically motivated phenomenon. Rather than emerging spontaneously, it reflected a deliberate form of antagonistic communication that targeted both an externalised other – Ukrainians – and internal political institutions. This dual logic of exclusion suggests that the discourse functions as a tool for negative identity mobilisation, echoing observations by Turska-Kawa and Stępień-Lampa (2023) regarding the emotional logic of populist contestation.

Dominant narratives in this timeframe presented Ukrainians as morally and economically illegitimate: historical aggressors, social parasites, or ungrateful political manipulators. These representations were embedded in affectively charged rhetoric – especially polarisation, intimidation, and blame reversal – and accompanied by emotional appeals such as anger, moral contempt, and fear. As such, the discourse did not merely reflect social resentment but actively shaped oppositional identities through symbolic boundary construction and moral distancing.

The data also demonstrate that these antagonistic motifs were often instrumentalised for political purposes. Tweets combining anti-Ukrainian content with domestic critique frequently targeted the ruling party at that time (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), accusing it of betrayal or complicity, while figures affiliated with the nationalist Konfederacja were framed as defenders of national integrity. This aligns with Tymińska's (2023) findings on the selective construction of enemies as a resource in political rivalry. It also resonates with Sierakowski and Sadura's (2022) work on the mobilisation of anxieties regarding social justice and aid distribution. Perceived injustices in refugee support and the symbolic invocation of historical trauma – especially the Volhynia massacre – were used to legitimise antagonism (Łuczaj, 2024).

These patterns reveal a tripartite symbolic function of the discourse. First, it exploited latent fears concerning welfare, sovereignty, and security. Second, it delegitimised political elites and public institutions active during that period. Third, it consolidated in-group identity along affective and ideological lines rooted in resentment and exclusion. The net effect was to reinforce polarisation and erode the deliberative dimension of political communication.

Importantly, the resonance of these narratives appeared asymmetrical. Although anti-Ukrainian content gained high visibility and engagement within ideological niches, re-

ply analysis revealed limited approval outside these circles. This indicates a gap between algorithmic amplification and broader audience endorsement – a dynamic characteristic of polarised digital environments.

In sum, the anti-Ukrainian discourse observed on Polish Twitter/X in 2022–2023 served as an affect-driven vehicle for political polarisation and symbolic boundary maintenance. It reflected a broader convergence between populist antagonism, identity politics, and the affordances of social media. While its prevalence was tied to a specific political moment – namely the tenure of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – it signals a communicative logic that may persist beyond individual electoral cycles, especially in digitally mediated populist ecosystems.

Read against the regional literature outlined in the Introduction, our Polish Twitter/X patterns align with – but are not identical to – neighbouring cases. First, the asymmetry between high visibility within ideological niches and limited wider endorsement fits survey baselines showing that acceptance of pro-Kremlin claims is a minority position in Central Europe, with Poland comparatively resilient. Beliefs about refugee "privileges" are, however, widespread across the region, which helps explain the salience of welfare and fairness frames in the dataset. Second, the centrality of polarisation, intimidation and blame-reversal in our sample echoes narrative repertoires identified in Slovakia (anti-EU "dictatorship", anti-Americanism, demonisation of Ukraine, justificatory frames for Russia), indicating a shared argumentative toolkit adapted to national contexts. Third, while dissemination in Poland largely relied on ideologically segmented networks, the Hungarian case shows how similar frames can be normalised when public service media act as primary vectors (e.g., shifting from "Ukraine provoked the war" to "EU sanctions caused the crisis"), underscoring the role of media-system structure in determining reach beyond niches. Finally, open comparison with Moldova suggests transnational operational commonalities – elite-splitting, anti-Western distrust, emotional mobilisation and platform-centred diffusion – consistent with the instrumental logics observed here. Taken together, these correspondences support the claim that the Polish case follows a regional communicative logic of antagonism with nationally specific ceilings of resonance shaped by public attitudes and media institutions.

Limitations and Future Research

This study, while comprehensive in its scope and methodological triangulation, is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the dataset was limited to posts on Twitter/X, excluding platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, or YouTube, which may host different dynamics and user demographics. Secondly, the temporal scope of the dataset was constrained by the discontinuation of the Twitter Academic API in May 2023, which marked the end of official access to historical tweet data for academic researchers. While the data covers a key period following the outbreak of war, subsequent shifts in discourse could not be tracked using the same methodology. Thirdly, the method of filtering based on hashtags may have excluded latent forms of anti-Ukrainian discourse circulating without semantic tags – particularly content that is less visible or not concentrated into dense, structured clusters.

Moreover, some analytical subsets – particularly those involving emotional classification or the co-occurrence of rhetorical strategies – were based on relatively small samples (e.g., 90 tweets). These analyses should therefore be treated as exploratory and not suitable for broad statistical generalisation. Nonetheless, the use of the thick big data approach – selecting tweets with the highest levels of user interaction – ensured that each case had high social visibility. All qualitative samples were chosen with reference to the structure of the full dataset, supporting their validity as exemplars of dominant discursive patterns.

Finally, while generative artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) played a key role in supporting qualitative classification, its use introduced both analytical advantages and notable methodological limitations. The model aided taxonomy construction, proposed preliminary annotations, and performed test codings that were subsequently reviewed and verified by the researcher. However, its effectiveness varied considerably across tasks. The lowest performance was observed in hashtag annotation: short, context-poor linguistic forms, combined with the model's limited familiarity with niche Polish terms, irony-based neologisms, or recent geopolitical references, frequently led to misclassifications. This reflects broader constraints of LLMs trained on incomplete or outdated data, particularly when applied to dynamic, language-specific political discourse.

By contrast, genAI performed well in detecting stance toward political actors (favourable / critical / neutral), showing near-perfect agreement with human coding. The model also achieved high alignment in identifying representational image types (88.8%) and moderate accuracy for rhetorical strategies (72.2%). Its weakest performance was recorded in the emotional dimension: short-form posts often lacked explicit affective markers, which resulted in lower agreement scores (ranging from 53.3% to 77.8%, depending on the metric). These divergences underline the need to pair automated assistance with human interpretation when material is ambiguous or affect-laden. To that end, subsequent work should implement systematic benchmarking against multiple coders, trial alternative model architectures, and supply models with refreshed contextual knowledge, alongside preregistered protocols and transparent replication files.

Building on these enhancements, the empirical agenda ought to widen beyond a single platform by combining cross-platform traces with multimodal evidence (text–image–video) and following discourse evolution longitudinally. Comparative designs across national settings can further clarify how anti-Ukrainian narratives diffuse transnationally and dovetail with broader disinformation strategies, while reception-focused analyses – tracking uptake, counter-speech, and moderation encounters – will help distinguish niche amplification from wider public resonance.

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Antyukraiński dyskurs w Polsce jako narzędzie polaryzacji i delegitymizacji. Analiza komunikacji politycznej na Twitterze

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje funkcje polityczne dyskursu antyukraińskiego w polskiej sferze cyfrowej, koncentrując się na platformie Twitter/X po rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę w 2022 roku. Badanie oparto na korpusie 64 897 tweetów oraz metodologii wykorzystującej techniki przetwarzania danych internetowych, podejście „thick big data" oraz krytyczną analizę dyskursu. Zidentyfikowano dominujące narracje, sposoby konstruowania wizerunku wroga oraz strategie retoryczne. Wyniki wskazują, że treści antyukraińskie nie mają charakteru spontanicznego, lecz stanowią element strategii ideologicznej i narzędzia mobilizacji politycznej. Dyskurs ten cechuje się wysokim ładunkiem emocjonalnym, retoryką polaryzacji i delegitymizacji elit politycznych oraz instrumentalnym odwołaniem do pamięci historycznej. Jego funkcją jest konsolidacja środowisk antysystemowych, wzmacnianie tożsamości politycznych opartych na wykluczeniu oraz podważanie zaufania do instytucji publicznych. Artykuł wnosi wkład w badania nad cyfrową komunikacją polityczną, retoryką populistyczną oraz mechanizmami polaryzacji w warunkach napięć społecznych i destabilizacji geopolitycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs antyukraiński, mobilizacja polityczna, cyfrowa komunikacja polityczna, polaryzacja, konstruowanie wroga